

Frustrated Modernity

Kerewo Histories and Historical Consciousness, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This thesis takes Kerewo historical consciousness as the frame for an analysis of the ways in which reflections on the past are fundamentally informed by orientations towards the future. In particular, I draw on various representations of the historical event of the killing of missionary James Chalmers in 1901, and its consequences, to explore local conceptions of modernity as a moral state withheld from Kerewo in the absence of a reconciliation with their past. This particular historical episode occupies a central place in contemporary Kerewo understandings of their perceived marginality within the post-Independence state of Papua New Guinea, and more widely in the world system.

This marginality is manifest in Kerewo daily experience as a lack of services and infrastructure, despite the presence in the area of a multi-billion dollar resource extraction enterprise. The roots of this perceived lack of ‘modernity’ are sought in the colonial past, and articulated in moral terms through historical narratives. The colonial era emerges from these narratives as the period in which Kerewo were exposed to modernity in its ideological and material forms. Yet, the promises and expectation of an amelioration of life conditions engendered by several colonial discourses never materialised, leaving contemporary Kerewo people with a sense of frustrated modernity. It is the conflation of the colonial era with the idea of modernity that informs Kerewo historical consciousness, and thus it is by ritually addressing the colonial past that Kerewo people seek to transform the ‘frustrated modernity’ of the present into a better future.

What emerges from the analysis of the historical and ethnographic material that constitutes the core of this dissertation is that historical consciousness consists fundamentally of a social process – which emerges from the social labour of history-making – to apprehend present conditions through reflection on the past informed by competing orientations toward the future.

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Notes on Language and Orthography

The Kerewo language does not present particular phonetic challenges to a foreign speaker. The only exception is something similar to a glottal stop, indicated in the text by an apostrophe following the first vowel (i.e. *o'opo*).

Alongside the singular and plural, Kerewo language also distinguishes the dual and paucal. This distinction of grammatical numbers is signalled through morphemes, as in the following example: 1st person singular (*mo*); 1st person plural (*imo*); 1st person dual (*imeiti*); 1st person paucal (*imeibi*). To account for these grammatical numbers in a language that does not include such a distinction, I use the English corresponding plural person followed by (2) to indicate the dual, and by (pc) to indicate the paucal.

Given the multi-linguistic situation I encountered during my fieldwork at Kikori, and the politics entailed in the language shifts evident in the area, I use italics for Kerewo language, underlined text for Tok Pisin, and underlined and italicised text for *Police Motu*.

Introduction

My work with Kerewo people of the Kikori area in the Gulf Province of Papua New Guinea was initiated through an encounter with archival documents pertaining to the death, in 1901, of the two London Missionary Society (hereinafter LMS) missionaries, James Chalmers and Oliver Tomkins, at the hands of ‘Goaribari’ people.¹ Kerewo people have been associated with this iconic event in Papua New Guinea’s colonial history ever since. Yet the wealth of historical documentation for this event reveals a much richer history than is usually associated with the name ‘Goaribari’. Archival research on the records relating to Kerewo’s colonial past instilled in me a real eagerness to visit the Kikori area so as to learn the other side of the stories I knew only from texts. The archive filled some of the gaps in my knowledge about the intervening period between 1901 and the early 1990s, when Goaribari resurfaced in Papua New Guinean and Australian newspapers in connection with the multi-billion dollar extractive venture known as the ‘Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas Project’ (PNG LNG) run by a consortium headed by ExxonMobil.² Two pipelines transport the oil and gas extracted in the Highlands region down through the Kikori area to a maritime offshore terminal, from where it is shipped to a processing plant near Port Moresby, the country’s capital. These veins carrying the lymph of industrial capitalism run underground and underwater, leaving little material trace on the surface but profoundly impacting on the lives of Kikori peoples.

¹ Goaribari is the name of an island at the mouth of the Omati River (see fig. 1). Goaribari is a compound of Goare (the name of a village) and ‘point’ or ‘spot’ (*bari*) and, according to local exegesis, and results from a misunderstanding when a colonial officer pointed his finger in the vague direction of Goare village, asking for its name. This is one of many instances of linguistic misunderstanding that punctuate the history of European exploration in the region. Similarly the name of the main river in the area, the Kikori, is the result of the local name of the river – *Kiko turi* (lit. Kiko river) – and the morpheme *-ri* which indicates the copula. For a discussion of the subtleties of the ethno-linguistic category that the term ‘Kerewo’ encompasses see below, 60-61.

² Exxon Mobil runs the PNG LNG Project in co-venture with several other partners, including the local company Oil Search (listed here: <https://pnglng.com/About/Co-venturers>).

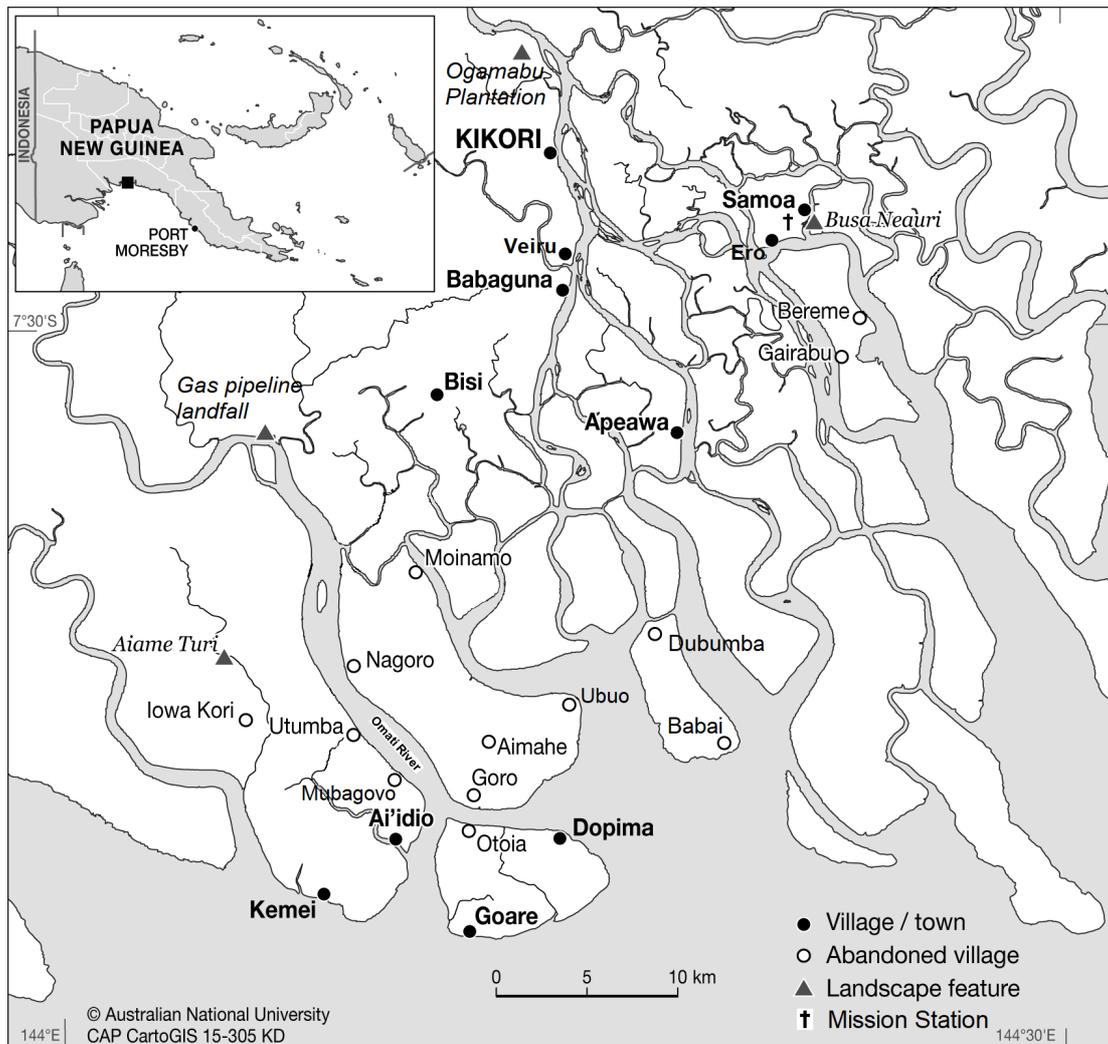


Figure 1: Map of Kikori area with distribution of Kerewo villages and other relevant sites.

Kikori Town was built in 1910 as the government station overseeing the newly formed Delta Division of the then Australian Territory of Papua.³ Today Kikori is the main town of the district by the same name in the Gulf Province.⁴ Once a significant

³ The Kikori area was initially part of the protectorate under the British Empire known as British New Guinea (1884), before this was handed over to a recently federated Australia which renamed it the Territory of Papua (1906). After World War II, Papua was amalgamated with its counterpart to the north, the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, also under Australian administration, and became the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1949. This territory was the political and territorial base for what became in 1975 Papua New Guinea.

⁴ Two administrative districts, Kerema and Kikori, compose the Gulf Province; each district is further sub-divided into Local Level Government (LLG) administrative sub-units. Kikori district comprises the following: Baimuru Rural, Ihu Rural, East Kikori Rural, and West Kikori Rural. My research was conducted at the latter two.

centre of colonial administration, it is now a rather marginal place in the independent state of Papua New Guinea. I arrived in Port Moresby in early 2013 still uncertain about how to get to Kikori. At the Australian National University (ANU) I was able to meet and talk with a few researchers who had been to Kikori, mainly in connection with social mapping surveys for the PNG LNG Project, and I was assured that the company could provide transportation to my chosen fieldsite; however, I was determined not to be associated with ExxonMobil and its activities.

Between the towns of Kerema (the provincial capital) and Kikori there is a vast tract of territory traversed by intricate riverine systems and swamps that prevent the construction of any road connecting these two centres. Travelling by land was not an option. In Kikori there is an airstrip, and I was told that flights reached it. After several enquiries with commercial airline companies, it seemed that this was no longer the case in 2013.⁵ Another option was to travel from Kerema by sea on a fibreglass boat (known locally as a ‘dinghy’) powered by outboard motors. I was heartily discouraged from undertaking such a risky journey on the open sea.

Defeated, I got in touch with the NGO Community Development Initiatives (CDI), largely funded by Oil Search Ltd. as part of the company’s ‘social responsibility’.⁶ The CDI personnel proposed that I register with them and thus be part of the Oil Search database, so they could arrange a flight from Port Moresby to Moro, a town in the Southern Highlands that functions as Oil Search’s operations base. From there a helicopter would take me south to Gobe camp, and a car would then take me on to yet another camp at Kopi, from which I could easily reach Kikori by car or riverine transport. Financial concerns added to my reluctance to be associated with the oil company, and I decided to fly to Moro with a regular airline, where CDI would provide me with accommodation, and I would try my luck with one of the trucks that I was told were run by Highlanders to transport produce for sale at the Kikori market. Finding a truck heading to Kikori proved challenging. Luckily some CDI members were due to travel to their Training Facility at Kikori and I was able to catch a ride with them.

⁵ In 2014 I was able to fly to Kikori with Sanga Airlines, on board a small aircraft; a costly option but a necessary one as I could not arrange my usual transportation; one of their aircraft crashed attempting to land and all flights have since been discontinued.

⁶ On Corporate Social Responsibility in Papua New Guinea see: Emma Gilberthorpe and Glenn Banks, ‘Development on Whose Terms?: CSR Discourse and Social Realities in Papua New Guinea’s Extractive Industries Sector’, *Resources Policy*, Corporate Social Responsibility in the Extractive Industries: Experiences from Developing Countries, 37, no. 2 (2012): 185–93; Benedict Y. Imbun, Fernanda Duarte, and Paul Smith, “‘You Are Not Our Only Child’: Neoliberalism, Food Security Issues and CSR Discourse in the Kutubu Oilfields of Papua New Guinea’, *Resources Policy* 43, Supplement C (2015): 40–49.

Along the road connecting Moro to Kikori our car stopped at several checkpoints, both to check if our papers were in order and to check, via radio, that the road was clear of the heavy machinery used for extractive operations. We waited a long time for lines of trucks to pass, escorted by pairs of ‘safety cars’, one at the head and the other at the end of the convoy. Clearly this road was hardly ‘public infrastructure’. The journey, which took almost ten hours, passed first along the serpentine road that cut across the mountains. Imposing cylindrical sections of the pipeline were lying along the track, behind fences. As we approached Kopi, the last Oil Search site before Kikori Town, the road showed signs of not having been maintained for a long time, and the vegetation was fast encroaching along its margins. We proceeded very slowly, and I was assured we were lucky that it had not been raining, as the road was often so muddy that drivers were forced to stop and struggle to free their vehicles. At night, with the intense darkness broken only by the car’s beams, we finally reached the gates of CDI’s Kikori camp.

Frustrated modernity at Kikori

James Clifford has rightly criticised the classic Malinowskian image of the castaway ethnographer ‘suddenly set down [...] alone on a tropical island’ for divorcing the ‘being there’ from the ‘getting there’, thus erasing the travel and the political economy that make the ethnographic enterprise possible.⁷ Recounting the difficulties encountered in reaching Kikori and the necessity to go through Oil Search’s channels not only addresses the ‘getting there’, but also conveys the paradoxes that such a political economy engenders for the Kerewo people amongst whom I carried out my ethnographic fieldwork. I registered those difficulties in my fieldnotes as nuisances, but over time I came to realise that the disused airstrip, the road stopping a few kilometres short of the town’s entrance, or the pitch dark nights in town, were all metonyms of the betrayed promises of modernity that my Kerewo interlocutors tried to make sense of. It is the sharp contrast between Kikori Town and its surrounding villages with Port Moresby or the giant camp at Moro that conjures up a story of marginality, made painfully visible by the concrete signs of modernity so close by and yet so out of reach for many people at Kikori.

⁷ The quote is from Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 4. On the divorce of ethnography and travel see especially James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25–25.

In her ethnography *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* Anna Tsing asks ‘Can one be simultaneously inside and outside the state? This is the dilemma of marginality’;⁸ the Kerewo people whom I met in my 15 months of fieldwork confronted this same dilemma. In this dissertation I argue that Kerewo people turn to a critical reflection on their colonial past in order to understand and act upon what they perceive as their marginality vis-à-vis the state and development processes. Colonialism, in Kikori as elsewhere, has registered in people’s historical consciousness as the period during which they were first exposed to modernity, in its ideological and material forms. The colonial encounter led to increasing expectations of new and better life conditions – articulated overwhelmingly in terms of Christianity by Kerewo; expectations that were subsequently frustrated in the post-Independence period by the socio-economic legacy of Australian colonialism which, with the complicity of national political elites, has conditioned and limited the range of possibilities for Papua New Guinea’s place in the global economy. It is the conflation of the colonial era with the idea of modernity that informs Kerewo historical consciousness, and thus it is by ritually addressing the colonial past that Kerewo people seek to transform the ‘frustrated modernity’ of the present into a better future.

The ‘event’ that encompasses the arrival in 1901 of the LMS missionary James Chalmers with his companions, their murder, and the ensuing punitive expeditions inflicted on Kerewo people by colonial officials, is the historical moment around which most of the men and women with whom I worked organise their understanding of their colonial history in relation to their present conditions. Development, it is said, has not reached Kikori yet because the actions of Kerewo ancestors brought about a curse (*mibo*) upon the area that blocks their path to modernity. My months spent at Kikori were punctuated by significant efforts to ritually address this frustrated modernity, in particular through preparations for a Peace and Reconciliation ceremony, which would put an end to the curse.

As I use it here, the notion of frustrated modernity refers to the complex set of aspirations and desires created by the discourse of modernity, desires that inevitably fail to materialise. I argue that frustrated modernity is what has driven recent Kerewo historical consciousness, enabling specific readings of their past and of the various constitutive relations that this past entertains with the present and the future. Before turning to the issue of historical consciousness, both the notions of ‘frustration’ and ‘modernity’ require further clarification.

⁸ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 27 (italics removed).

Frustration

The notion of frustrated modernity is an instance of ethnographic serendipity that struck me as I was writing up and reflecting on my fieldnotes. As I discovered only later, this notion has been deployed in literary criticism of Latin American literature to capture the perception of ‘the persistent economic underdevelopment and cultural subordination’ that followed colonisation by the Spanish empire.⁹ Yet it is James Ferguson’s ethnography *Expectations of Modernity* that is the point of reference for the notion of frustrated modernity.¹⁰ At the most immediate level the very idea of expectations entails the possibility of their frustration, but Ferguson’s argument also resonates with my experience in the field.

Ferguson’s ethnography begins with the premise that the discourse of modernity, which lies at the basis of much rhetoric about Zambia’s mining boom economy at the onset of independence in 1964, proved to be a myth; a concept that, Ferguson stresses, also implies a narrative that structures social meaning.¹¹ As Ferguson shows, copper mining in the Copperbelt region of what was then Northern Rhodesia transformed that part of the largely agrarian population which moved into mining towns into a proletariat. The mines and urban dwelling became the symbol of what modernity was meant to be, and the African workforce experienced this ‘modernity’ throughout the economic boom, until it came to an abrupt end with the falling price of copper in the 1970s and the harsh economic measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s to ‘adjust’ the nation’s debt.¹² The fulcrum of Ferguson’s ethnography is precisely the impact that this socio-economic decline had on the lives of the urban working class in the Copperbelt.

A striking parallel can be drawn between the case of the Copperbelt in the 1980s, and the situation in which Kerewo people were living in the mid-2010s. Ferguson notes that ‘The signs and symbols of modernity – within the reach of ordinary workers, for a few years – had been abruptly yanked away’; modernity ‘was not something to look forward to in an anticipated future but something to remember from a prosperous past’, and even that ‘modernity is the object of nostalgic reverie, and “backwardness” the anticipated (or dreaded) future’.¹³ These statements point to two important issues for my understanding of the case of Kerewo people: that modernity 1)

⁹ Crystal Chemris, ‘The Pilgrimage Topos and the Problem of Modernity: A Transatlantic View of Selected Hispanic Texts’, *Romance Studies* 26, no. 2 (2008): 137.

¹⁰ James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1999).

¹¹ Ferguson, 13–15.

¹² Ferguson, 1–6.

¹³ All quotes are from *ibid.*, 13.

had at a certain point been within reach, and 2) it has a deep relation with historical consciousness as a non-linear (or teleological) articulation of past, present, and future. If the mines played an iconic role in Copperbelt modernity, it is Christianity that performs this iconic function for most Kerewo whom I spoke with or listened to. It is in the colonial past, at the moment of encounter with the Christian modernity, that the roots of contemporary socio-economic marginality are sought. Protestant Christian theology, as this is locally configured, provides an image of a potential future of plenty, expressed through the idiom of ‘blessing’. The relationship between Christianity, modernity, and historical consciousness – as these are conceived and experienced by Kerewo people – is addressed throughout this dissertation;¹⁴ for the time being I want to dwell on the advantages of associating the concept of modernity with the sentiment of frustration.

In Melanesian scholarship, modernity has already been associated with another emotion; that of humiliation, as proposed by Marshall Sahlins.¹⁵ Sahlins has championed the idea that Indigenous people around the world have used the encounter with European colonial forces in order to enhance their specific cultural projects of social reproduction.¹⁶ Yet, so Sahlins’ argument goes, some agents of Western colonialism, especially missionaries, have managed over time to instil a sense of cultural debasement which has led eventually to a refusal of one’s own culture, and to an embrace of cultural practices associated with the West, thus making humiliation ‘a necessary stage in the process of modernization [...] for in order to desire the benefits of “progress,” its material wonders and comforts, all indigenous senses of worth, both the people's self-worth and the value of their objects have to be depreciated.’¹⁷

Joel Robbins has fruitfully engaged with and elaborated on Sahlins’ notion of cultural humiliation to account for Urapmin (West Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea) conversion to Christianity and cultural change.¹⁸ The value of Sahlins’ notion of humiliation has been thoroughly explored by the contributors to the volume *The*

¹⁴ Especially chapters 3, 4, and 7.

¹⁵ Marshall Sahlins, ‘China Reconstructing or Vice Versa: Humiliation as a Stage of Economy “Development,” with Comments on Cultural Diversity in the Modern “World System”’, in *Toward One World, Beyond All Barriers: The Seoul Olympiad Anniversary Conference*, ed. Koh Byong-Ik (Seoul: Seoul Olympic Sports Promotion Foundation, 1990), 78–96; Marshall Sahlins, ‘The Economics of Develop-Man in the Pacific’, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 21 (1992): 12–25.

¹⁶ See for instance Marshall Sahlins, ‘Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of “The World System”’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 1–51.

¹⁷ Sahlins, ‘The Economics of Develop-Man in the Pacific’, 23–24.

¹⁸ Joel Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 2004), 9–27; *passim*.

Making of Global and Local Modernities, who highlight its strengths and limitations when applied to Melanesian societies.¹⁹ As shown by some contributors, the model of humiliation-driven change is too simplistic; yet it has the merit of directing attention to the important role played by emotions in dialectical comparison of a community's own past with its present condition.

In the afterword to this volume, Robert Foster reflects on 'the emotional experience of Modernity in Melanesia', of which humiliation is only one possible configuration, and perceptively insists that under late capitalism's consumerism, 'development [...] never delivers what it promises: for in a world of merchandise beyond all means, every consumption decision becomes [...] a source of frustration', thus condemning 'the developed person to being a perpetually needy consumer'.²⁰ I will return to the issue of consumption in relation to the Papua New Guinea postcolonial state in the conclusions. For now it suffices to register that modernity can be experienced in emotional terms and, as Elfriede Hermann has shown with her research on Fijians of Banaban-descent, 'emotions are pivotal' for a conscious understanding of history.²¹

Modernity

In introducing the concept of frustrated modernity, I qualified the term 'modernity' as a discourse. In this I follow recent scholarship which has disputed the use of the concept of modernity either as a synonym for 'novelty' or as a given *a priori* configuration of defining characteristics. As Harri Englund and James Leach have argued, whether modernity is pluralised or qualified as multiple or alternative, this concept rests on an ideal-type based on Western notions of progress against which the local difference is measured.²² It functions, the argument goes, as a meta-narrative through which to

¹⁹ Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow, eds., *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation and the Nature of Cultural Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

²⁰ Quotes respectively from Robert J. Foster, 'Afterword: Frustrating Modernity in Melanesia', in *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation and the Nature of Cultural Change*, ed. Joel Robbins and Holly Wardlow (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 208, 215.

²¹ Elfriede Hermann, 'Emotions and the Relevance of the Past: Historicity and Ethnicity among the Banabans of Fiji', *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2005): 277.

²² Harri Englund and James Leach, 'Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity', *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 2 (2000): 225–48.

organise the shift in scale between the global and the local, ‘a trope that links the shifts in contexts together’.²³

Michel-Rolph Trouillot includes modernity in his group of ‘North Atlantic universals’, concepts generated by a particular history but deployed with the pretence to be transhistorical.²⁴ Trouillot captures the aspirational quality of modernity when he writes that it does ‘not describe the world’ but rather ‘offer[s] *visions* of the world’, as such a concept simultaneously describes and prescribes: ‘not only what it is, but what it should be’.²⁵ Trouillot’s analysis begins with the recognition that the discourse of modernity presupposes and at the same time creates an Other, in opposition to which the ‘modern’ defines itself. Trouillot makes an important distinction between what he calls the ‘geography of management’ and the ‘geography of imagination’; the first describes the political economy of modernization and its material aspects, while the other organises the space of this political economy in terms of time.²⁶ It is from the disjuncture between the geographies of management and of imagination that the frustrated modernity of Kerewo emerges. The material conditions at Kikori do not match the ‘how it should be’ of the discourse of modernity; to use Timothy Mitchell’s words: ‘If modernity is defined by its claim to universality, this always remains an *impossible universal*’.²⁷

The most trenchant critique of any reified view of modernity is articulated by Frederick Cooper who, in his close analysis of the relevant literature, convincingly shows how it is impossible to define ‘modernity’ by any set of objective principles or to equate it with novelty, as there are historical exceptions that render any definition problematic.²⁸ Cooper suggests abandoning any preoccupation with an *a priori* definition of modernity, and rather paying attention to the *use* of such concept in specific social and historical contexts. As Cooper suggests, scholars should not preoccupy themselves

²³ Englund and Leach, 236.

²⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, ‘The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot’, in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauft (Bloomington - Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 220–37; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, ‘North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492-1945’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 839–58.

²⁵ Trouillot, ‘The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot’, 221–222 (my italics).

²⁶ Trouillot, 222–24.

²⁷ Timothy Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xiv.

²⁸ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 2005), 113-14; 119-48.

‘whether modernity *is* singular or plural, but how the concept is *used* in the making of claims’.²⁹ Indeed ‘Setting out to do an anthropology of modernity [...] is not a good research strategy. *Finding* a discourse on modernity could be a revealing demonstration’; and it is precisely a *discourse* on modernity that was articulated by Kerewo at the time of my fieldwork.³⁰ Other authors corroborate Cooper’s position. Donald Donham, for example, shows how modernity is a discursive space through which the local perceptions of global disparities in power and wealth are voiced along the lines of the modern/backward rhetoric.³¹ Debra Spitulnik similarly invites a close analysis of the local semantics of ‘modernity’ as performed in acts and registers of speech or actions.³²

Donham’s perspective is a useful lens through which to read the case at hand of Kerewo experience, and the Melanesian context more broadly. Bruce Knauff asserts that modernity is often associated with ‘desires for style of life associated with economic development and Western-style material betterment’;³³ and yet, as Jonathan Friedman correctly writes, the ‘Desire for the things or the life, objectified in images of the West, does not require the term “modernity”’.³⁴ The reference to the ideological discourse of

²⁹ Cooper, 131–32 (italic in original). Cooper brings as positive examples Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*; and Donald Lewis Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford: University of California Press, 1999). Although I do not engage directly with Donham’s ethnography in this dissertation, it was a source of inspiration in its combination of history and anthropology. For a thoroughgoing refusal of the concept of modernity, see John D. Kelly, ‘Alternative Modernities or Alternative to “Modernity”: Getting Out of the Modernist Sublime’, in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauff (Bloomington - Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 258–86.

³⁰ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 131 (italics in original).

³¹ Donald L. Donham, ‘On Being Modern in a Capitalist World: Some Conceptual and Comparative Issues’, in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauff (Bloomington - Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 241–57.

³² Debra A. Spitulnik, ‘Accessing “Local” Modernities: Reflections on the Place of Linguistic Evidence in Ethnography’, in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauff (Bloomington - Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 194–219.

³³ Bruce M. Knauff, ‘Critically Modern: An Introduction’, in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauff (Indiana University Press, 2002), 4.

³⁴ Jonathan Friedman, ‘Modernity and Other Traditions’, in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauff (Bloomington - Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 290; whose sentence continues ‘On the contrary, it is the analysis of such desire that can provide insight into the nature of this assumed phenomenon’.

modernity, instead, entails a conscious comparison between what it was, is, and what it could be. Analysing the ethnographic material drawn from Gebusi people's experience of modernity (Western Province, Papua New Guinea), Knauft shows how the structural marginality of the region in the cash economy is experienced subjectively in terms not dissimilar to what I call frustrated modernity: 'In a world of aspiring imaginations, fantasies of wealth and power easily fuel a sense of being left behind and out of the way'.³⁵ Kerewo people, as the Gebusi and many other groups in rural Papua New Guinea, deploy the discourse of modernity to articulate a critique of their own marginality.

Given the presence of the PNG LNG Project in the Kerewo area, it comes as no surprise that a term like 'development' features in discourses about modernity circulating at Kikori. As Arturo Escobar has demonstrated, the category of 'development' has a direct genealogy with the semantic field of modernization.³⁶ Ivan Karp's analysis of the contextual meaning of 'development' pushes Escobar's analysis further, by showing how in Kenya 'development' has deep roots in colonialism and rests on specific ideas of personhood and the implicit ranking of cultures that is, echoing Trouillot's reading, constitutive of modernity.³⁷ Yet, as Spitulnik has pointed out, the discourse of modernity spans a range of locally specific signifiers. For Kerewo people, the main domain through which modernity is signified is Christianity.

Christian modern, rupture, and temporality

For most Kerewo I met, to be 'modern' passes through 'being Christian' – that is, one form or another of Protestant Christianity. There are precise historical reasons for this, which I analyse throughout this dissertation. Here I discuss the relationship between Christianity and modernity, and how it shapes historical consciousness in light of the relevant literature.

Englund and Leach have criticised the idea that modernity entails a rupture; a position that derives from the perspective that modernity is not an objective condition, but the statement is more problematic when viewed from the perspective of modernity

³⁵ Bruce M. Knauft, 'Trials of the Oxymodern: Public Practice at Nomad', in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauft (Indiana University Press, 2002), 132.

³⁶ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

³⁷ Ivan Karp, 'Development and Personhood: Tracing the Contours of a Moral Discourse', in *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. Bruce M. Knauft (Bloomington - Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 82–104.

as ideology.³⁸ Robbins has insisted on the theme of rupture and discontinuity in anthropology, drawing on his analysis of Urapmin conversion to Christianity, locally perceived as a fundamental break between the past and the present.³⁹ Similarly, for Kerewo the evangelisation meant a temporal caesura, articulated through the idiom of a passage from ‘cannibalism’ to ‘Christianity’ that parallels the idiom of ‘darkness’ to ‘light’ found elsewhere among Christian communities in Papua New Guinea.⁴⁰

Webb Keane has illustrated the similarities between Christianity and modernity through the prism of rupture as temporal dimension. According to Keane, ‘Protestant conversion invokes an ambivalent historicity. [...] it often marks a specific moment of historic rupture across an entire social world’, and yet this transformation is never stable and can be potentially reversed: ‘for many Protestant sects, conversion can never be assured. At the individual level, it entails an ongoing process of self-examination, potential backsliding, and reform’.⁴¹ Even (Protestant) Christian modernity can be frustrated potentially.

Robbins’ perceptive insights notwithstanding, Christianity is mediated by particular people and specific denominations. As Jean and John Comaroff and Nicholas Thomas have shown, colonisers brought with them their own cultures.⁴² The Comaroffs’ study of the evangelization of Tswana people in South Africa by the Nonconformist LMS is particularly relevant to my work, as Kerewo people were evangelised by the same mission body and, as shown in Chapter 4, there are several similarities showing the ideological link between Protestantism and conceptions of modernity. As the Comaroffs demonstrate in numerous works, the LMS evangelists brought with them specific 19th century ideas of what is meant to be modern, grounded in particular

³⁸ Englund and Leach, ‘Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity’, 225, 227–29, 237–38. See Robbin’s comments in Englund and Leach, 239–40.

³⁹ Joel Robbins, ‘Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity’, *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1 (2007): 5–38.

⁴⁰ Michael W. Young, ‘Doctor Bromilow and the Bwaidoka Wars’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 12, no. 3 (1 January 1977): 130–53; Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewertz, ‘From Darkness to Light in the George Brown Jubilee: The Invention of Nontradition and the Inscription of a National History in East New Britain’, *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 1 (1994): 104–22.

⁴¹ Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 203.

⁴² Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

mundane practices and a labour ethic.⁴³ Focusing on this aspect of evangelization is not, as Robbins would have it, to deny local subjects their version of the conversion experience.⁴⁴ The Urapmin case analysed by Robbins rests upon conversions that took place during the 1970s, around two decades prior to Robbins' fieldwork, and the embracing of Christianity seems to have been the result of changing regional patterns of ritual power rather than direct evangelization.⁴⁵ When Robbins chides the Comaroffs for considering the 'form' rather than the 'content' of LMS evangelisation, I think his criticism is misplaced, as the LMS missionaries between the 19th and early 20th centuries *did* focus on reforming the daily lives of the people they intended to evangelise, especially through work. The nexus between conducting a Christian life and the material plenty that results from it is indeed part of the way in which Kerewo experience Christianity.

The notion of rupture in the discourse of modernity figures prominently in the work of the German historian Reinhart Koselleck.⁴⁶ At the risk of oversimplifying his elaborate argument, Koselleck contends that between the 16th and 18th centuries, Europe saw such profound transformations (from the Reformation to the French Revolution) that the Christian eschatological view of history was disrupted, and with the Enlightenment the future became understood as an unknown open field of human history, rather than a sacred or natural history. Such a reading exposes one to the kind of critique that Cooper has advanced for other essentialist readings of 'modernity', but what I find enlightening in Koselleck's work is his acute formulation of 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation' as the poles from which historical consciousness emerges.

For Koselleck, experience and expectation are categories that 'simultaneously constitute history and its cognition. They do so by demonstrating and producing the

⁴³ Beside the works already cited see also John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), chapters 3, 5, 9, 10.

⁴⁴ Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture', 5–9; *passim*.

⁴⁵ Robbins, *Becoming Sinners*.

⁴⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Rather than 'modernity' as a specific condition Koselleck writes about *Neuzeit* (lit. 'new time'). In considering Koselleck's contribution to the relation between 'modernity' and 'historical consciousness' it should be kept in mind that the German historian worked within the framework of *Begriffsgeschichte*, or conceptual history. For a useful introduction to Koselleck's thought see Hayden White, 'Foreword', in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, by Reinhart Koselleck, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), ix–xiv.

inner relation between past and future or yesterday, today, or tomorrow'.⁴⁷ Hence, if my reading is correct, both experience and expectation are characterised by their present-centeredness, and this is what I think is a key aspect of historical consciousness as act of (re)orientation of past and future in light of present conditions. Keeping in mind this aspect, it is possible to read Koselleck's definition of the two categories in less Eurocentric terms:

- *Experience* 'is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered. Within experience a rational reworking is included, together with unconscious modes of conduct which do not have to be present in awareness'.
- *Expectation* 'is the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet, to the nonexperienced, to that which is to be revealed.'⁴⁸

To insist on the present-centeredness of the two poles from which historical consciousness emerges might be read as committing the sin of historicism. But, I argue, my Kerewo interlocutors were prompted to reflect upon the tension between their (multifaceted) experiences of colonialism and their (Christian) expectation from the position of their present socio-economic condition. It is the short circuit between the space of experience and the horizon of expectations that produces Kerewo frustrated modernity.

New Melanesian Anthropology

The Melanesian region of Oceania occupies an almost iconic position in the history of the discipline of anthropology. It is through encounters in this region that now-classical ethnographic methods were developed and theorised, from W.H.R. Rivers' genealogical method to Malinowski's exemplification of what long-term fieldwork should be like.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 258.

⁴⁸ Koselleck, 259. The 'rational reworking' Koselleck speaks of is in line with the *a posteriori* evaluation of events that I have already discussed, and the reference to rationality should be read, I suggest, within the framework of Stanley Tambiah's ever-relevant discussion of rationality, cultural relativism, and the problem of commensurability; see his *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁴⁹ See James Urry, "Notes and Queries on Anthropology" and the Development of Field Methods in British Anthropology, 1870-1920', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1972 (1972): 45-57; George W. Stocking, 'The Ethnographer's Magic: Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski', in *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, ed. George W. Stocking (Wisconsin:

Within Melanesia, Papua New Guinea has long projected the image of ‘the last unknown’, and the late ‘discovery’ of the Highlands region provided generations of anthropologists with the fantasy of the possibility of studying relatively ‘pristine’ societies and their cultural orders.⁵⁰ Indeed, Melanesia became a source for theoretical innovation and also a location in which to test theories developed from the ethnographic encounter in other parts of the world. Up until the late 1980s, especially with the work of Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner on Melanesian sociality and personhood, the region was central to anthropology’s theoretical development.⁵¹

Lisette Josephides termed this later phase of ethnography of Papua New Guinea the ‘New Melanesian Ethnography’, an ethnography concerned with showing the coherence of the symbolic domain within given societies. While Josephides recognised the important contribution of this scholarship for treating myths and sociality not as separate and hierarchically arranged domains, she also criticised it for creating ‘parallel worlds where symbolic meanings take on the immediacy of “natural facts” by constructing sociality as a circular temporality’, thus obliterating internal contradictions by ultimately describing ‘a culture that does not generate an auto-critique, since it lacks the self-consciousness to recognise its own conventions’.⁵² Social reproduction, in this strand of ethnography, rests upon a cultural whole that leaves little space for cultural change.

Parallel to the development of the New Melanesian Ethnography runs another strain of research conducted by historians and historically-minded anthropologists,

University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 70–120; Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg, ‘Introduction: The Ethnographic Experiment in Island Melanesia’, in *The Ethnographic Experiment: A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*, ed. Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 1–43.

⁵⁰ I will discuss at length in the next chapter the place that the ethnography of Papua New Guinea Highlands has in the ethnographic literature on the country.

⁵¹ On the place of Melanesia in the context of wider anthropological theory see Marilyn Strathern, ‘Negative Strategies in Melanesia’, in *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*, ed. Richard Fardon (Edinburgh - Washington: Scottish Academic Press, 1990), 204–16; Joel Robbins, ‘Between Reproduction and Transformation: Ethnography and Modernity in Melanesia’, *Anthropological Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (1998): 89–98; Bruce M. Knauft, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia and Anthropology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁵² Lisette Josephides, ‘Metaphors, Metathemes, and the Construction of Sociality: A Critique of the New Melanesian Ethnography’, *Man* 26, no. 1 (1991): 158, 159.

which Robert Foster has dubbed the ‘New Melanesian History’.⁵³ Works labelled as such acknowledge the colonial encounter and its forces of encompassment (most notably Christianity, capitalism and the state) in shaping the actions and social relations of the Melanesians described. Nicholas Thomas’ study of the ‘entanglement’ of object exchanges beyond the gift/commodity dichotomy is a fine example of this scholarship.⁵⁴ James Carrier, in the introduction to an important volume on the subject, criticised New Melanesian Ethnography for the

systematic denial of the fact that villages are themselves fully located in the same twentieth century that the anthropologist inhabits, and which leads to a systematic failure to consider how villages may participate in and be shaped by many of the social processes and change that touch the researcher.⁵⁵

Ultimately the critique offered by the so-called New Melanesian History centres on the overemphasis on difference, which results in the creation of a radical alterity, and the oversimplification of the so-called West by a reverse form of Orientalism, referred to by Carrier as Occidentalism.⁵⁶ Read from the perspective of three decades later, the debate retains its relevance as it mirrors much current debate about the ontological turn in anthropology.⁵⁷ The positions adopted by the New Melanesian History are largely my

⁵³ Robert J. Foster, *Social Reproduction and History in Melanesia: Mortuary Ritual, Gift Exchange, and Custom in the Tanga Islands* (New York - Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. Introduction.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ James G. Carrier, ‘Introduction’, in *History and Tradition in Melanesian Anthropology*, ed. James G. Carrier, Studies in Melanesian Anthropology 10 (Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), 11.

⁵⁶ See Carrier, *passim*. On Occidentalism see James G. Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West: Images of the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁵⁷ See Michael Carrithers et al., ‘Ontology Is Just Another Word for Culture: Motion Tabled at the 2008 Meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, University of Manchester’, *Critique of Anthropology* 30, no. 2 (2010): 152–200; and also Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, ‘Who Is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf?: Some Comments on an Ongoing Anthropological Debate’, *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2015): 2–17; David Graeber, ‘Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying “Reality”’: A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 2 (2015): 1–41. A useful summary of the ontological turn is in Eduardo Kohn, ‘Anthropology of Ontologies’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44, no. 1 (2015): 311–27.

own, and are evident in the way in which I approach the field of the ethnography of historical consciousness.

In this dissertation I attempt to reconcile the tensions that still run through much of the humanities and the social sciences between the politico-economic and the cultural perspectives. With the exception of Chapter 7, which is almost exclusively ethnographic, each chapter moves back and forth between specific historical episodes and characters, and their local interpretations in multiple contexts. This use of the historical material has a twofold goal. On one hand to account for the social and cultural changes that have taken place in the Kikori area and how they have affected Kerewo people in particular, and on the other to present the images and interpretations that have constituted a local repertoire through which contemporary Kerewo people make sense of their present, navigate a complex moral and social geography, and organise their attempts to transcend present socio-economic conditions in an imagined future. The ethnographic material presented accounts for the internal as well as external power relations that govern the usage of such symbolic capital within a field of competing personal and collective futures and pasts.

It is the attention paid to the projected futures orienting social actions that permits a grasp of Kerewo historical consciousness, not the past itself. As will become clear throughout my dissertation, Kerewo perceive that their encounter with the promised future of modernity took place in the colonial past; and yet, as per today, such promises failed to fully materialise, creating a sense of frustration that prompts active consideration of their past. In this way I engage with Foster's proposed synthesis of New Melanesian Ethnography and New Melanesian History, which he termed New Melanesian Anthropology, on the grounds that it is necessary to recognise 'that Melanesians understand themselves and act in terms [...] conditioned by the continuing encounter between agencies of (post-) colonial states, capitalism, and Christianity, on one side, and highly localised practices for making meaning, on the other'.⁵⁸ The project of a New Melanesian Anthropology is still in need of further articulation, Foster's own attempt notwithstanding.⁵⁹ An attention to historical consciousness, I argue, is crucial for its undertaking.

Eric Hirsch asks the thought-provoking question, 'when was modernity in Melanesia', proposing, against the notion that modernity coincides with consumerism and individualism, that it has to be located – as a temporal orientation – in the colonial

⁵⁸ Foster, *Social Reproduction and History in Melanesia*, 5.

⁵⁹ A point raised also by Robbins, 'Between Reproduction and Transformation', 93–94.

See also Dan Jorgensen, 'History and the Genealogy of Myth in Telefolmin', *Paideuma* 47 (2001): 103–28.

encounter.⁶⁰ I quote at length a passage from Hirsch's article to rehearse, in this formulation of modernity as a temporal notion, the recursive presence of those features of modernity discussed in this and the previous section; namely the dialectic with an 'Other' and the perception of temporal rupture:

what is understood as modernity – the break or *rupturing of temporal perception and consciousness* – emerged in the Melanesian context with the advent of European power of various sorts. But to state this is not to suggest that the mere presence and dealings with Europeans constituted modernity for Melanesians. Rather it is the way Melanesians became implicated in the descriptions and actions – the intentions – of those seeking to transform their lives that appears to be critical: those agents who were part and parcel of the varied and multi-faceted projects to implement colonial government or mission religion. The intentions of these agents was to have the Melanesians *break with their pasts and attend to future prospects*.⁶¹

For Hirsch, though, 'the form of Melanesian historicity parallels that of Melanesian sociality'.⁶² This statement is deeply embedded in the New Melanesian Ethnography discussed above, especially the notion of personhood elaborated by Marilyn Strathern, and constitutes a recursive point of reference in Hirsch's publications on the subject.⁶³

Hirsch's insistence, in a publication co-authored with Daniel Moretti, on a specific form of Melanesian historical consciousness appears to reinstate the dichotomous – and, in relation to 'the West', stereotypical – distinction between Melanesia and the West, re-constituting the ground on which James Carrier has criticised Marilyn Strathern.⁶⁴ Hirsch and Moretti distinguish between a (Western)

⁶⁰ Eric Hirsch, 'When Was Modernity in Melanesia?', *Social Anthropology* 9, no. 2 (2001): 131–46.

⁶¹ Hirsch, 143 (my italics).

⁶² Eric Hirsch, 'Valleys of Historicity and Ways of Power among the Fuyuge', *Oceania* 77, no. 2 (2007): 160.

⁶³ Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1988). See Eric Hirsch, 'Making Up People in Papua', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7, no. 2 (2001): 241–56; Hirsch, 'When Was Modernity in Melanesia?'; Hirsch, 'Valleys of Historicity and Ways of Power Among the Fuyuge'.

⁶⁴ Eric Hirsch and Daniel Moretti, 'One Past Many Pasts: Varieties of Historical Holism in Melanesia and the West', in *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology*, ed. Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 279–98. The critique of Strathern is articulated in Carrier, 'Introduction'; James G. Carrier, 'Maussian

Universal History, largely grounded on the Enlightenment, and a (Melanesian) Universal Past. The first, the argument goes, is a way of looking at the past as separate from the present and thus objectively existing. The Universal Past, instead, is immanent according to the Melanesian worldview, and it is revealed only through narration in the same way as the Melanesian person is constituted through narratives.

In light of many ethnographies of Melanesia (this one included), Hirsch and Moretti are correct in saying that ‘the “Universal Past” seems to provide a common model for how Melanesians approach the past as a source of critique against past and present inequalities’; what I contest is the idea that the ‘Universal Past is [...] inherently “practical” while Western history is not.’⁶⁵ In fairness, Hirsch and Moretti acknowledge that in contrasting “Western” and “Melanesian” modes of imagining the past and their relation to present and future [...] we have of course engaged in a heuristic thought experiment that has inevitably *homogenized and simplified what are much more diverse and highly complex realities on the ground*.⁶⁶ Such acknowledgement, though, begs the question of why the dichotomy needs to be introduced in the first place. In the next section, I propose a view of a historical consciousness that attempts to avoid essentialising either Melanesia or ‘the West’, arguing that attending to history-making as a matter of politics conducted within fields of power might help to step outside these forms of dichotomist thinking.

Historical Consciousness

Anthropologists and historians alike have recently debated what historical consciousness might be. The array of definitions is heterogeneous, and only partially overlapping across the two disciplines, the conceptual ‘borrowings’ between them notwithstanding. In this last section I attempt to operate a cold fusion, to evoke Thomas’ insights on hybridity, of different perspectives on historical consciousness.⁶⁷ In my reading of the literature, two premises forcefully emerge: 1) the fact that historical consciousness is culturally inflected, and 2) that different forms of historical consciousness stand in opposition to (a supposedly) Western historicism. While such statements are acceptable in general terms, I prefer a critique of the lurking essentialism entailed in both assumptions, suggesting that historical consciousness, rather than *being*

Occidentalism: Gift and Commodity Systems’, in *Occidentalism : Images of the West: Images of the West*, ed. James G. Carrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 85–108.

⁶⁵ Quotes respectively from Hirsch and Moretti, ‘One Past Many Pasts: Varieties of Historical Holism in Melanesia and the West’, 293, 283.

⁶⁶ Hirsch and Moretti, 294 (my italics).

⁶⁷ Nicholas Thomas, ‘Cold Fusion’, *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 1 (1996): 9–16.

a mode of experiencing time, emerges as the *product* of competing interests in the field of history-making.

Recent scholarly efforts to understand historical consciousness are indebted to an older dialogue between anthropology and history which reached its apex in the 1980s. This legacy, whether openly acknowledged or not, has largely framed the premises on which current debates have developed. At the most basic level, the Promised Land between anthropology and history has turned out to be a Balkanised territory. Ethnohistory, historical anthropology, anthropological history, oral history, social history, microhistory, cultural history, ethnographic history are only a sample of labels used on either side to connote fairly disparate scholarly endeavours emerging from that encounter. No wonder then, as Charles Stewart has noted recently, that the ethnography of historical consciousness has ‘remained uncoordinated, with no distilled methodology or comparative synthesis and certainly no orientating label’.⁶⁸

Given the complexity of the subject (no less so for some terminological indeterminacy), I first discuss two definitions of historical consciousness with which I substantially agree. The first is by historian Jörn Rüsen, who conceptualises historical consciousness in relation to the domain of morality. Rüsen postulates ‘the need for historical consciousness in order to deal with moral values and moral reasoning’, and links this with the temporal orientation – connecting past, present, and future – inherent in human agency:

In its temporal orientation, historical consciousness ties the past to the present in a manner that bestows on present actuality a future perspective. This implied reference to the future time is contained in the historical interpretation of the present, because such interpretation must enable us to act.⁶⁹

This formulation offers a double advantage in conceptualising the case of Kerewo frustrated modernity. On one hand, it illuminates why Kerewo discuss historical episodes of their colonial past in markedly moral terms and, on the other, why through the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony, past, present, and future are connected through ritual action.

The other definition I want to discuss at this point is that advanced from the field of anthropology by Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart: “historicity” describes a human situation in flow, where versions of the past and future [...] assume present form in

⁶⁸ Charles Stewart, ‘Historicity and Anthropology’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45, no. 1 (2016): 81.

⁶⁹ Quotes respectively from Jörn Rüsen, ‘Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenic Development’, in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter C. Seixas (Toronto - Buffalo - London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 65, 67.

relation to events, political needs, available cultural forms and emotional dispositions'.⁷⁰ Such a formulation captures the cultural variability of the forms which presentations of the past can assume, and avoids the cultural essentialism that undermines much current conceptualisation of historical consciousness. Such cultural essentialism shows itself in two main ways: 1) in the equation of historical consciousness with culture, and 2) in the dichotomy that opposes a Western notion of history to other non-Western forms of knowledge of the past. In the last part of this section I suggest that such cultural essentialism can be overcome by looking at history-making as a field of power where competing visions and interests struggle to maintain or create a dominant position. Before expanding on this reading of historical consciousness, though, I discuss in some detail how cultural essentialism informs much of the existing literature.

Apologies to Sahlins

Within the discipline of history, the reflection on historical consciousness has been developed primarily in relation to comparative historiography, the discipline that, broadly speaking, interrogates the socio-political and epistemological dimension of historical accounts written by professional historians. These reflections have generally adopted Western-derived professional historiography as the yardstick for comparison.⁷¹ Such an ethnocentric approach comes as no surprise, especially in light of Dipesh Chakrabarty's insights on the indispensability of the historicist paradigm in writing history, despite its limitations.⁷²

What I find most problematic about the frame within which historians have dealt with historical consciousness is the ideal-typification of broad socio-cultural areas (the West, Japan, Africa, and the like), and the virtual reduction of historical consciousness to collective memory.⁷³ The broad characterisation and identification of historical

⁷⁰ Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart, 'Introduction: Ethnographies of Historicity', *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2005): 262. See also Chris Ballard, 'Oceanic Historicities', *The Contemporary Pacific* 26, no. 1 (2014): 96–124.

⁷¹ Jörn Rüsen, 'Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparative Historiography', *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (1996): 5–22; Chris Lorenz, 'Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives', *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (1999): 25–39; Jörn Rüsen, ed., *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002); Peter C. Seixas, ed., *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (Toronto - Buffalo - London: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁷² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁷³ These problems are respectively visible in Rüsen, *Western Historical Thinking*; and Peter C. Seixas, 'Introduction', in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter C. Seixas (Toronto - Buffalo - London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 8–10.

consciousness with a single (often spatial) image as characterising a specific culture (or nation, or geographical agglomerate) closely resembles the way in which some anthropologists have conceptualised historical consciousness as coterminous with culture, which I discuss at length below. An early formulation by the historian Jörn Rüsen seems to echo Sherry Ortner's notion of key symbol:

This "*historical sense*" is an image, a vision, a concept, or an idea of time which mediates the expectations, desires, hopes, threats, and anxieties connecting the minds of people in their present-day activities with the experiences of the past. [...] past and future merge into an entire image, vision, or concept of temporal change and development which functions as an integral part of cultural orientation in the present.⁷⁴

A genealogy for this formulation can be traced back to Clifford Geertz's notion of culture, which has been particularly influential among historians.⁷⁵ I have dealt with the Geertzian legacy on Pacific history elsewhere, hence I limit myself to recalling the critique offered by Italian practitioners of microhistory, who have argued convincingly that historical works inspired by the Geertzian notion of culture rest upon a pre-given cultural context, which does not account for its own formation and thus ultimately results in a tautology.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Rüsen, 'Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparative Historiography', 13. Sherry B. Ortner, 'On Key Symbols', *American Anthropologist* 75, no. 5 (1973): 1338–46.

Parenthetically it should be noted that the perspective advanced by Rüsen in this article about the threat of contingency for human agency is in line with Stewart's usage of the notion of *crisi della presenza* elaborated by the Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino; see Charles Stewart, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece* (Chicago - London: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 213–15.

⁷⁵ An insightful discussion on the uneven incorporation of Geertz and Sahlins in the works of historians can be found in Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Is Vice Versa? Historical Anthropologies and Anthropological Histories', in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terrence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 17–51. On Geertz see in particular Aletta Biersack, 'Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond', in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1989), 72–96. See also Dario Di Rosa, 'Microstoria, Pacific History, and the Question of Scale: Two or Three Things That We Should Know About Them', *The Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 53, n. 1 (2018), 25–43.

⁷⁶ This critique has been advanced by Edoardo Grendi and Giovanni Levi on the pages of the Italian journal *Quaderni Storici*; the English reader can find a good summary in Giovanni Levi,

Marshall Sahlins, on the other hand, made central to his scholarly interests the process of transformation of the structural relations constituting specific cultures. As Geertz became influential among historians, Sahlins' work has been key to shaping anthropology's end of the encounter with history, and thus to the later conceptualisation of historical consciousness. Suffice to consider Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's early and influential definition of historical consciousness as 'the *culturally* patterned way or ways of experiencing and understanding history'.⁷⁷ Such a formulation has softened over time, as evident in the most recent programmatic statement by Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart: 'the anthropology of history that we propose focuses foremost on the *principles* [...] – call them broadly *cultural* – that underpin practices of inquiry into the past, as well as the *forms and modes* in which the past is represented to others'.⁷⁸ This approach has the advantage of focusing on performative acts of representation, hence social activities, which a focus on culture alone need not entail.

To summarise Sahlins' reflections on history is a tremendous task, not only because of the sheer quantity of publications to consider, but also because each one seems a permutation of the dictum *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose* (the more things change, the more they remain the same); arguably the contrary also applies: the more things seem the same, the more they are actually different.⁷⁹ The core of Sahlins' historical analysis can be summarised in the propositions that 1) culture (or structure), especially as encoded in religious-political cosmologies, shapes the actions of historical actors, and that 2) the relationships among cultural categories can be rearranged through their praxis in a novel context (event). Sahlins famously termed the interplay between structure and event (or culture and history) the 'structure of the conjuncture':

Nothing guarantees that the situation 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. And these *contextual values*, if unlike the definitions culturally presupposed, have the capacity then of working back on the conventional values.

'On Microhistory', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, by Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 102–9.

⁷⁷ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, 'Introduction: The Historicization of Anthropology', in *Culture through Time: Anthropological Approaches*, ed. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 4.

⁷⁸ Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart, 'Introduction: For an Anthropology of History', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 1 (2016): 209–210 (my italics).

⁷⁹ See Alan Rumsey, 'The Articulation of Indigenous and Exogenous Orders in Highland New Guinea and Beyond', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 1 (2006): 47–69.

Entailing *unprecedented relations between the acting subjects [...] practice entails unprecedented objectifications of categories.*⁸⁰

Whether in the case of the death of Captain James Cook in Hawai'i, or the repeated attempts by Maōri to bring down British flagpoles in New Zealand, Indigenous historical action is interpreted in light of what Sahlins terms 'heroic history' or 'mytho-praxis'. By this he means that through 'the presence of divinity among men, as in the person of the sacred king or the powers of the magical chief', any action of these figures of authority 'becomes synonymous with divine action'.⁸¹ Indeed 'historical actions' become 'the projection of mythical relations'.⁸² Within Sahlins' corpus the (partial) exception to the mytho-praxis logic is exemplified by the war between Bau and Rewa polities in mid-19th century Fiji. In this case it is the avuncular relation known as *vasu* (uterine nephew), hence the structural position between the contending parties, which guides the actions of the people involved rather than cosmological views themselves.

As Sahlins himself wrote 'such effects as transformation and reproduction are maximally distinguishable in situations of culture contact';⁸³ and in fact his work has inspired much scholarship on the so-called 'first contact' situation that, in Melanesia especially, has put to test and questioned the efficacy of this model.⁸⁴ The bulk of this

⁸⁰ Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 35 (my italics).

⁸¹ Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 35.

⁸² Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 54.

⁸³ Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, 64.

⁸⁴ Marilyn Strathern, 'Artefacts of History: Events and the Interpretation of Images', in *Culture and History in the Pacific*, ed. Jukka Siikala (Helsinki: Transactions of the Finnish Anthropological Society, 1990), 25–44; Marilyn Strathern, 'The Decomposition of an Event', *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1992): 244–54; Edward L. Schieffelin, 'Early Contact as Drama and Manipulation in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea: Pacification as the Structure of the Conjuncture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 3 (1995): 555–80; Edward L. Schieffelin and Robert Crittenden, *Like People You See in a Dream: First Contact in Six Papuan Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Chris Ballard, 'La fabrique de l'histoire: Evènement, mémoire et récit dans les Hautes Terres de Nouvelle-Guinée', in *Les rivages du temps: Histoire et anthropologie du Pacifique*, ed. Isabelle Merle and Michel Naepels (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2003), 111–34; Margaret Jolly, Serge Tchekézo, and Darrell Tryon, eds., *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2009).

literature focuses on particular events, usually juxtaposing written records with oral accounts, trying to uncover the cultural logic of the encounter. Implicitly unquestioned though is another of Sahlins' assumptions, namely 'that different cultural orders have their own modes of historical action, consciousness, and determination - their own historical practice'.⁸⁵

According to Sahlins, much scholarship confuses 'history with change', a notion resting on what he sees as 'ossified oppositions' such as 'stability and change or structure and history', and especially on the notion of 'the past as radically different from the present'.⁸⁶ Sahlins' 'claim is not that culture determines history, only that it organizes it', and it is this feature that lurks behind much work on historical consciousness.⁸⁷ The strength of Sahlins' work is his attention to actual actions and practices, while in later scholarship it seems that the claim is that (largely mythical) narratives constitute a group's historical consciousness. Let's consider an example.

John Taylor demonstrates the centrality of the symbol of the tree in Sia Raga (Vanuatu) historical consciousness, as an image capable of articulating both emplacement and movement through its constituent parts: roots and branches.⁸⁸ Taylor shows how this key symbol, to adopt Ortner's famous formulation, reverberates through domains of Sia Raga social space such as the cosmology inscribed in the landscape, kinship, the gendered division of sacred spaces and its architectural materialisation. In the economy of Taylor's ethnography, Sia Raga historical consciousness is discussed in connection with a particular narrative known as 'the story of Jimmy'. This recounts the vicissitudes of a white boy who escaped from a plantation in Fiji, ending up among the Sia Raga, who raised him. After a period of intense relationships which were cultivated

Particularly insightful is Klaus Neumann's critique of 'first contact' literature; see Klaus Neumann, 'Finding An Appropriate Beginning For A History Of The Tolai Colonial Past', *Canberra Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1992): 1-19; Klaus Neumann, *Not the Way It Really Was: Constructing the Tolai Past* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992); Klaus Neumann, "'In Order to Win Their Friendship": Renegotiating First Contact', *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 111-45.

⁸⁵ Marshall Sahlins, 'Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History', *American Anthropologist* 85, no. 3 (1983): 518. Yet later, Sahlins reformulated this statement as such 'distinct cultural orders have their own, distinctive modes of *historical production*' or 'Different cultures, different historicities' Sahlins, *Islands of History*, x (my italics).

⁸⁶ Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 144-45.

⁸⁷ Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (Chicago - London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11.

⁸⁸ John Patrick Taylor, *The Other Side: Ways of Being and Place in Vanuatu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

as Jimmy became socialised into Sia Raga community, a European ship arrived and took Jimmy away, thus abruptly severing the relations that had been formed. According to Taylor, this story articulates tensions between Christianity (which is not mentioned in the narrative) and *kastom*, the uneven access to cash economy, and more generally asymmetrical relationships with Europeans. This interpretation permits Taylor to state that

telling histories on north Pentecost is not simply about recounting immutable pasts [...]. Within specific social contexts and at particular moments, histories provide lenses through which people make sense of their own presents. They are also used as a part of that work by which people seek to shape others, and in doing so give shape to their shared futures. Here, the story of Jimmy is used to focus aspects of the north Pentecost colonial past, and more important, to show how it has become a vehicle of social and political assessment and agency in the neo-colonial present.⁸⁹

Yet what Taylor's monograph seems to be missing is a precise description of those 'specific social contexts' and 'particular moments', or what 'the neo-colonial present' looks like in everyday life for Sia Raga communities. Given the statement quoted above, it is surprising to discover that the text of 'the story of Jimmy' analysed is a collation of different versions, leaving the reader uncertain as to whether the variants were generated in performative contexts or not, and what changing contexts might tell us about the intentions of the narrator. The 'story of Jimmy' is an instance of the co-presence of the rootedness and movement that echoes through other Sia Raga narratives. The key symbol of the tree is proven to do its cognitive job. Yet, if such a symbol provides the syntax, the reader learns little about the intentionality of the speakers. With this example I do not intend to dismiss symbols from the analysis of historical consciousness, but rather to suggest that they are not constitutive of it.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, narratives (mythical or otherwise) do provide the means of establishing, cutting, or rearranging social relations, but are not in and of themselves constitutive of historical consciousness. Narratives (Koselleck's 'space of experience') provide a charter with which to navigate the present, but the selection of *which* narrative is deployed cannot be inferred in advance. This is clearly shown by Daniel Knight, in his ethnography of how the inhabitants of Trikala town (Greece) and its hinterland conjured up specific historical moments to make sense of their experience of dispossession and hardship following the austerity measures subsequent to the 2008

⁸⁹ Taylor, 38–39.

global economic crisis.⁹⁰ If the long Ottoman domination, and the German and Italian occupation during WWII do provide effective terms of comparison, the civil war that followed the end of WWII does not (or at least not for everyone) despite the formal similarities that could be drawn between these three historical periods.

The past as symbolic capital and the production of historical consciousness

To state that historical consciousness cannot be subsumed under the label of ‘culture’ does not mean to deny that the past is given in different forms across the globe. Hirsch and Stewart ask ‘Can a dream, a song, a dramatic performance, a ritual of spirit possession or the perception of a landscape usefully be classified as “histories”?’⁹¹ The answer to this question is of course positive. But, I insist, these are ways in which the past is apprehended socially, not historical consciousness *per se*. Here I argue that historical consciousness is the product of the socio-cultural labour of giving meaning to the world using the temporal dimension as the main axis of thought. In formulating this statement I draw as much as from my own ethnography as from other monographs. What follows is a discussion of the main elements of historical consciousness that can be isolated (temporarily) from those ethnographies which I found most useful to think about historical consciousness.

Renato Rosaldo, in his landmark study of Ilongot (Philippines) perception of the past, clearly states that historical consciousness is the product of social actions, as for example when he writes that ‘the feud embodies much of Ilongot historical consciousness and often motivates marriages and residential moves’ thus being ‘a central moving force for both the conduct and the perception of history’.⁹² The Ilongot he lived with in the mid-1960s and early 1970s organised their history in terms of movement across a social landscape, turning shared history into the unravelling of social groups (*bērtan*), and relying on specific criteria of truth. Yet, and this is the chief lesson I draw from Rosaldo’s path-breaking ethnography, these cultural forms are ultimately a limited tool for the improvisation required in attempting to give shape to the future. The injection of world events into Ilongot daily lives was proof that the lives of previous generations were not always a reliable charter for the conduct of life under new conditions.⁹³ As Rosaldo writes, ‘Ilongot stories not only contained but also

⁹⁰ Daniel M. Knight, *History, Time, and Economic Crisis in Central Greece* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁹¹ Hirsch and Stewart, ‘Introduction’, 266.

⁹² Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 24.

⁹³ See especially Rosaldo, 53–60.

organized perceptions of the past and *projects for the future*'.⁹⁴ It is the orientation toward the future that, I insist, gives meaning to the past. History is history for. As will be shown throughout this dissertation, the telling of the past is a political act charged with intentionality.

Charles Stewart's history and ethnography of the cult of the cult of Panagía's (Virgin Mary) icon in the mining community of Kóronos (Greece) highlights another important element for the production of historical consciousness, namely a perceived socio-economic crisis (which ultimately is also a crisis of sense).⁹⁵ According to Stewart's reconstruction, Panagía appeared in dreams to some inhabitants of Kóronos, instigating them to search for icons in the nearby mountains and to build a church in her honour, in concomitance with the end of the Ottoman rule and the emergence of the Greek state under the Catholic Bavarian tenet in the 1830s. Stewart details the political and social vicissitudes of the local cult of Panagía, highlighting how the resurgence in faith in this particular religious figure coincided mainly with three moments of crisis: the 1830s with the creation of the nation state which tried to put aside the Byzantine past connected to Greek Orthodox Christianity in favour of the classical past on which the leaders of the emergent nation state wanted it ideologically to be rooted; the 1930s with the plummeting price of emery extracted in the mountains near Kóronos following the Great Depression; and finally in more recent years with the outward migration of this community to centres promising a more viable economic future.

Once again, the cultural forms – dreaming and visions – seem to be language through which to apprehend and articulate present anxieties in the face of an uncertain future, rather than historical consciousness itself. As Stewart writes:

In the dreaming imagination they [the inhabitants of Kóronos and the visionaries in particular] synthesized the personal experience of life conditions with imagery and meanings from the collective past. The 1930 dreams articulated anxiety over what lay ahead for the mining community. The dreams took shape in a problematic present, looked forward to a better future, and drew on the past for models of understanding.⁹⁶

The heuristic strength of Stewart's ethnography lies, in my view, not on the seemingly exotic practice of apprehension of the past, but rather the attention paid to the future as constitutive of human agency; a dimension well captured in the following quote: 'political and economic forces threatened life as the villagers had known it. The future became uncertain, and this destabilized the present. Many individuals shared an anxiety

⁹⁴ Rosaldo, 17 (my italics).

⁹⁵ Stewart, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*.

⁹⁶ Stewart, 145.

about what would happen next and what one might *constructively* “do”.⁹⁷ Similarly Kerewo’s future was not, at the time of my fieldwork, so much threatened by anything; rather it had failed to be transformed. The frustration of their modernity lies precisely in the fact that they have continued living ‘life as they had known it’ despite their conversion to Christianity and the presence of the LNG Project and other ‘development’ activities in the area.

The third element I deem crucial to understanding historical consciousness is that it is part and parcel of a political economy that is at once material and symbolic. This issue is central to Michael Lambek’s ethnography of the Sakalava (Madagascar) politico-religious system as ritually produced and reproduced.⁹⁸ Lambek illustrates how Sakalava historical consciousness is the product of a labour carried out by different actors, often in competitions among themselves, such as the living monarchs, shrine managers and residents, spirit mediums, common people, and the spirit themselves (*tromba*). From the Sakalava example, as presented by Lambek, it is indeed evident that ‘historical consciousness is not reducible to a single attitude but arises through the interplay of multiple voices’.⁹⁹

The idea that historical consciousness is the fruit of the labour of different social actors is in line with another perspective that I use throughout this dissertation, and especially in Chapter 7, where I draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of ‘field’ and ‘capital’ to conceptualise history-making. This perspective has the advantage of bringing to the fore the uneven distribution of knowledge within a given society, and accounts for how certain narratives remain hegemonic despite the co-presence of alternatives. For Bourdieu, a field is ‘the locus of the confrontation of competing discourses’, and this tension manifests itself as ‘a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces’.¹⁰⁰ Key to Bourdieu’s analysis of the field is human

⁹⁷ Stewart, 210 (my italics). The relationship between historical consciousness and human agency is discussed at length in Stewart, 210–15.

⁹⁸ Andrew Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1997); Michael Lambek, *The Weight of the Past: Living with History in Mahajanga, Madagascar* (New York - Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁹⁹ Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Quotes respectively from Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge - New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 168; Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed’, *Poetics* 12, no. 4–5 (1983): 312.

Bourdieu first elaborated his concept of ‘field’ in his ‘Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge’, *Social Research* 35, no. 4 (1968): 681–706; and in ‘Une interprétation de la

agency, as social actors invest their symbolic and economic capital(s) in particular projects. From this vantage point, then, I suggest that knowledge of the past constitutes a form of symbolic capital. Performances that mobilize the past as symbolic capital are an occasion to invest, transform, and increase a person's capital. Bourdieu was particularly aware that capital,

[h]as a *potential* capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the *structure of the distribution* of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e. the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world [...] *determining the chances of success for practices*.¹⁰¹

In adopting a polemological perspective on historical consciousness I embrace Stewart's insight that: 'Attending to the politics of historicity may be one way to see historicities with increased clarity'.¹⁰² The politics of history-making provided the richest perspective for the case under consideration, as the contestation of who has a stake in specific past events, and how, is a crucial site of social negotiation at Kikori.

Insisting on the political dimension of the production of historical consciousness permits the adoption of a non-essentialist position. By following Roger Keesing's positions on culture as knowledge and ideology,¹⁰³ the entire dichotomy between

théorie de la religion selon Max Weber', *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 12, no. 1 (1971): 3–21.

¹⁰¹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York - Westport - London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–42 (my italics).

¹⁰² Stewart, 'Historicity and Anthropology', 82–83.

¹⁰³ Roger M. Keesing, 'Anthropology as Interpretive Quest [and Comments and Reply]', *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (1987): 161–76. For a critique of Keesing's position see, beside the 'Comments' section of the same article, Valerio Valeri and Roger Keesing, 'On Anthropology as Interpretive Quest', *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 3 (1987): 355–57. The most substantive critique put by Valeri relates to the supposed incongruence between Gramsci's notion of hegemony and the ideological role of culture, as in many cases 'the subaltern classes themselves produce ideologies legitimizing their domination' (355). This is in my view a misreading of Gramsci, as subaltern and dominant cultures are mutually (though unevenly) constitutive, as much work on Italian folklore done in the Gramscian vein has convincingly argued (I refer in particular to the work of Alberto Maria Cirese and Clara Gallini).

Indigenous and exogenous begins to crumble, showing that ‘external’ visions of the future or a ‘Western’ view of what accounts for truthful historical record are all part of the same field. For example, to return to the issue of modernity that is central to my understanding of Kerewo historical consciousness, modernity then becomes not an *a priori* foreign introduction – thus reproducing that meta-narrative of modernity that Englund and Leach have convincingly criticised¹⁰⁴ – but part and parcel of the Kerewo imaginative landscape. Indeed, as Peter Pels aptly notes ‘we need to acknowledge that the dominance of certain images of the future forms a real social and historical condition for others’.¹⁰⁵ As Persoon and van Est, among others, remind us, it is not only the local that matters when it comes to shape the future and its image.¹⁰⁶ As Thomas acutely observes ‘What confront us [the ethnographer as the people s/he works with] is not merely a plurality of accounts, but a contested field’.¹⁰⁷

To say that history-making is political is not simply a metaphor, as clearly emerges from Andrew Shryock’s ethnography of Jordan Bedouin history-making. Shryock follows the historiographical pursuits of two men, both tied to Bedouin oral traditions that are locally perceived as inextricably political as they pertain to specific clans; all the stories about the past are histories *for*. Shryock analyses the role that the writing of Bedouin history has in the context of nation-states, and how one of the two main actors in his ethnography managed to soar into national politics by manipulating certain stories to unite the lower tribes against the candidate of the historically more prominent clan. As Shryock suggests, local recognition of the partiality (both as incompleteness and partisan) of historical accounts does not entail the idea that anything goes: ‘The contests that animate tribal history-making are taken seriously – which is to say, *not* in a spirit of relativism – because such disputes can, in fact, be lost’.¹⁰⁸ The struggle within the material and symbolic economy of history-making, so deeply related to the projectuality of social life, is a real one with social, cultural, political, and economic consequences.

¹⁰⁴ Englund and Leach, ‘Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity’.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Pels, ‘Modern Times’, *Current Anthropology* 56, no. 6 (2015): 782.

¹⁰⁶ Gerard A. Persoon and Diny M. E. van Est, ‘The Study of the Future in Anthropology in Relation to the Sustainability Debate’, *Focaal* 35 (2000): 16, 23–24.

¹⁰⁷ Nicholas Thomas, ‘Alejandro Mayta in Fiji: Narratives about Millenarism, Colonialism, Postcolonial Politics, and Custom’, in *Clio in Oceania: Towards a Historical Anthropology*, ed. Aletta Biersack (Washington - London: Smithsonian, 1991), 303. See for instance Michael Herzfeld, *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination*; Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*.

¹⁰⁸ Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination*, 145 (italics in original).

Chapter outline

The following chapter details the heuristic strategies adopted in both my archival and ethnographic work, keeping at the centre of my reasoning how the presentation of the past (either as document or oral account) is itself embedded in power relations that linger on. Rather than presenting my methodology as prescriptive of the investigation of historical consciousness, I highlight how it was the result of social, political, and economic conditions that are themselves historically situated.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the examination of how narratives of the past bear the intrinsic capacity to create connections with distant and novel social worlds. In particular I discuss Kerewo versions of the so-called ‘Papuan hero tales’ cycle, showing how the potential for creating connection is manipulated to open or close relations within Kerewo social space. In addition the chapter provides an outline of Kerewo early colonial social structure, insofar as it is possible to piece this together, providing the background knowledge that illuminates certain aspects discussed in other chapters.

Chapter 3 discusses at length the several representations of the death of Chalmers and his companions at Dopima. Here I show how this historical incident became over time an event both for colonial agents and Kerewo themselves, and elucidate the role it plays in contemporary Kerewo understanding of themselves within the postcolonial state, and in particular as Christians. Kerewo Christianity is the main subject of Chapter 4, which covers the evangelisation strategies of the LMS missionary Benjamin Butcher, and the local process of memorialisation of this social history in celebrations of the centenary of the arrival of the Gospel in Kikori.

Chapters 5 and 6 respectively cover Kerewo narratives of World War II, and the three decades that followed, leading up to Papua New Guinea’s Independence in 1975. These chapters show how Kerewo self-perception of their centrality in the history of the postcolonial nation state – thus using history to assert a moral claim – has to confront the colonial social and economic legacy that weighs significantly on the material basis of their contemporary frustrated modernity. This juxtaposition, rather than being a dismissive claim of false consciousness, wants to highlight the ideological function of history and the weight of historical silences in making certain aspects of the past meaningful, if not altogether visible.

Chapter 7 is centred on the politics of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony. Building on familiarity with the nuances of Kerewo historical narratives and of regional politics, this chapter shows the subtle strategies and competing agendas that guided the preparations for the ritual which seeks to clear Kikori from the curse cast by the death of Chalmers.

In the Conclusion, I return to the issues raised in this introduction, discussing them in the light of my work, and paying particular attention to the specific historical conditions which, in my reading, have delivered the particular form to Kerewo

understandings of the past and how these act upon and contribute to their frustrated modernity. These reflections have some bearing on how we might move beyond the New Melanesian Ethnography and New Melanesian History debate, and indicate several directions for the emerging field of the anthropology of history.

Chapter 1

Between Archives and the Field: Reflections on Methodology

In one of the finest examples of ethnography of historical consciousness, Renato Rosaldo describes how he moved from his initial project in the late 1960s of studying Ilongot (Philippines) social structures, to the study of their forms of historical consciousness and narrative styles of recounting the past in the mid-1970s.¹⁰⁹ The transition to a deeper attention to the historical processes of social formation, and the role of cultural patterns *vis-à-vis* the interpretations by actors of their current situation, stemmed from the need to make sense of the fragments of oral narrative collected during his early fieldwork. As Rosaldo reflected ‘I found little culture and therefore turned to history’.¹¹⁰ Rosaldo’s use and inversion of the culture/history dichotomy was, in my reading, a trope deployed as magnifying glass to expose the absurdity of the separation between historical and anthropological disciplines. His own work bears testimony to how productive this disciplinary marriage could be, and indeed one cannot but agree with John Comaroff’s statement that ‘there ought to be no “relationship”

¹⁰⁹ Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974*, 14–24.

¹¹⁰ Renato Rosaldo, ‘Doing Oral History’, *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 4 (1980): 90; the quote continues ‘And through their history I discovered their culture in a renewed sense’. Such separation between culture and history has a long story in anthropological thought, as exemplified by the somewhat unfortunate title of Eric R. Wolf’s path-breaking monograph, *Europe and the People Without History* (University of California Press, 1982); see also Talal Asad, ‘Are There Histories of Peoples without Europe? A Review Article’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, no. 3 (1987): 594–607. Although I cannot devote to the issue the space it deserves, and especially the examination of Wolf’s monograph, which cannot be reduced to a portion of its title, I limit myself to observing that the culture/history dichotomy was one of the many reconfigurations of the modern bourgeois discourses of ‘progress’, in which (a certain) ‘Europe’ had history and lost/freed itself from culture, and the colonised populations as well as European peasantry and working classes had no history (thus not participating in the bourgeois modernity) but plenty of ‘culture’. See for example Michel-Rolph Trouillot, ‘Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness’, in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 17–44. From the same premises Johannes Fabian moved his critique to the ‘denial of coevalness’; see his *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

between history and anthropology, since there should be no division to begin with. A theory of society which is not also a theory of history, or *vice versa*, is hardly a theory at all'.¹¹¹

My own arrival at a study of Kerewo historical consciousness began from a somewhat different point. As mentioned in the Introduction, a wealth of historical material exists on Kerewo people (though most of it is focused on a thin slice of time), while the available ethnographic accounts are so scant that it was impossible even to imagine how the past could be culturally ordered locally. In order to make sense of the oral narratives of the colonial past I had to understand Kerewo sense(s) of history. But what kind of questions could I ask to grasp such a volatile phenomenon as historical consciousness? The very way in which I formulated questions, shaped by the archival research conducted prior to my fieldwork, has informed, along with my interactions with Kerewo interlocutors in the Kikori area, the ways in which I have come to understand historical consciousness as laid out in the Introduction. As Michael Herzfeld aptly states, 'our theoretical capital emerges from our experiences and is inspired by the theoretical capacities of our informants',¹¹² and it is in this vein that I present the following discussion of some of the accidents and moments of serendipity that permitted me to gain an understanding of how historical consciousness in various social settings informs Kerewo lives.¹¹³

Archives

This section takes as its point of departure Trouillot's astute formulation that 'the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means of such production. [...]

¹¹¹ John L. Comaroff, 'Dialectical Systems, History and Anthropology: Units of Study and Questions of Theory', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 144.

¹¹² Michael Herzfeld, 'Passionate Serendipity: From the Acropolis to the Golden Mount', in *The Restless Anthropologist: New Fieldsites, New Visions*, ed. Alma Gottlieb (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 118.

¹¹³ In using the term 'serendipity' I follow Michael Herzfeld's insight that 'The very chanciness, the serendipity, of anthropological research [...] is actually the source of its greatest strength'; Herzfeld 'Passionate Serendipity: From the Acropolis to the Golden Mount', in *The Restless Anthropologist: New Fieldsites, New Visions*, ed. Alma Gottlieb (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 120. See also Michael Herzfeld, 'Serendipitous Sculpture: Ethnography Does as Ethnography Goes', *Anthropology and Humanism* 39, no. 1 (2014): 3–9.

History is the fruit of power'.¹¹⁴ Such conceptualisation of the historical work is in line with the nexus between history-making and historical consciousness outlined in the Introduction, and is a valid and fruitful perspective that goes beyond the West/Rest dichotomy. As Trouillot states, 'In history', including what is considered conventional history for (idealised) Western standards, 'power begins at the source'.¹¹⁵ 'Source' is the name often used in academic history to indicate the documents consulted for a certain piece of writing that is called 'history'. Yet, these sources are traces of or debris from the past that already passed through a process of selection, conscious or otherwise. As any historian – who does not cling to the fantasy of total history – knows, the texts used to evoke the past are inherently partial, and do not somehow constrain the possibility of producing certain kinds of historical works; to borrow once again from Trouillot: 'the *materiality* of the sociohistorical process [...] sets the stage for future historical narratives'.¹¹⁶

The most immediate problem posed by the material traces of the past lies in the presence or absence of particular voices in the document itself. The historiographical tradition of the Subaltern Studies devoted much attention to the possibility of uncovering the voices of the subaltern from colonial texts.¹¹⁷ Within Pacific historiography Bronwen Douglas has developed further this methodology by advancing the notion of Indigenous countersigns.¹¹⁸ More recently the academic gaze moved from the 'documents' to the archival institutions themselves.

¹¹⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix.

¹¹⁵ Trouillot, 29.

¹¹⁶ Trouillot, 29.

¹¹⁷ The exemplary study remains the essay by Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45–86.

¹¹⁸ Bronwen Douglas, 'Art as Ethno-Historical Text: Science, Representation and Indigenous Presence in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Oceanic Voyage Literature', in *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Diane Losche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bronwen Douglas, 'Provocative Readings in Intransigent Archives: Finding Aneityumese Women', *Oceania* 70, no. 2 (1 September 1999): 111–29; Bronwen Douglas, 'In the Event: Indigenous Countersigns and the Ethnohistory of Voyaging', in *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence*, ed. Margaret Jolly, Serge Tchekézo, and Darrell Tryon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2009), 175–98. Douglas provides a thorough intellectual excursus of this concept in her *Science, Voyages, and Encounters in Oceania, 1511-1850* (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 16–30.

Ann Laura Stoler has shown how, far from being monolithic, the power that shaped colonial archives was instead contested and unstable; a view not dissimilar from Bourdieu's notion of field.¹¹⁹ In her fine reading of Dutch colonial documents, Stoler shows how much epistemological anxiety is inherent in the practices of cataloguing and knowledge production. Far from being sites where only State authority exercises its power, archives are shown as a locus in which colonial agents more or less effectively attempted to understand what was going on around them. Stoler's argument is developed from the examination of certain kind of sources which map the circulation of information within the colonial apparatus, but she reaches conclusions similar to those of historians of modern Europe who have worked with different kinds of material.

As French historian Arlette Farge writes, 'the archive is born out of disorder'; documents are produced, collected, and collated for purposes distant from the needs of the historians.¹²⁰ Historians of modern Europe who engage in one form or another of microhistory usually comb archives created by bureaucratic or legal agents to uncover traces of peoples' actions or words. In colonial Papua New Guinea, the local personifications of the State (officers, magistrates, clerks, etc.) were not the only ones able to create knowledge inscribed in documents pertaining to specific language groups. Missionaries and anthropologists figure prominently as sources for understanding local socio-cultural dynamics. State apparatuses, missionaries, and anthropologists, were all part of the same 'colonial situation' created by European expansion, but stood in complex and seldom cooperative relation to each other.¹²¹ This means that sources for the anthropologist-cum-historian are scattered between the archives of those governments and institutions that engaged with the geographical area of interest. The notion of a singular and capitalised Archive, with its taxonomic brute force, demands further qualification in the light of a project that seeks to gather historical documents pertaining to a specific language group.

A fragmented 'archive' requires an effort in rethinking forms of knowledge production that are similar but say *almost* the same thing (to paraphrase Umberto Eco's felicitous expression).¹²² For a native Italian speaker this also entails a literal as well as conceptual translation of the forms of archival categorisation entailed in the Italian word *fondo* (short for *fondo archivistico*), which describes the

¹¹⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹²⁰ Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2013), 26; see also pp. 5-6.

¹²¹ A point articulated by Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹²² Umberto Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa: esperienze di traduzione* (Milano: Bompiani, 2003).

Groupings of document, whatever their form or their format, that were *compiled organically, automatically*, through the activities of a person or institution, public or private, and whose preservation in the archives respects this grouping and refrains from breaking it up.¹²³

Even the beautiful recent translation of Farge's 1989 *Le goût de l'archive* into English has to maintain the original French *fond* to preserve the oceanic metaphor encapsulating the all-encompassment of archival research:

When working in the archive you will often find yourself thinking of this exploration as a dive, a submersion, perhaps even a drowning . . . you feel immersed in something vast, oceanic. This analogy to the ocean can be found in the archive itself. The archival inventories are subdivided into *fonds* [...]. These numerous and ample archival *fonds*, stored in library basements, bring to mind the hulking masses of rock in the Atlantic, called *basses*, that are visible only twice a year during the lowest tides.¹²⁴

Farge's broader definition of *fonds* as 'the name given to collections of documents, which are grouped together either because they are similar in subject, or because they were donated by a particular individual' is closer to the English 'archival collection'. In my view the semantic difference between '*fondo*' and 'archival collection' is that the first engrains the moment of production of the document as part of a knowledge-making process, while the latter brings to mind an *a posteriori* selectiveness enacted by the repository institution.¹²⁵

No institution known to me has a '*fondo Kerewo*', and thus the task before me was to assemble my own. The geographical locations of the archives I visited (Canberra, London, Port Moresby, Geneva) map – with only one exception – the centres that, unseen by Kerewo or even most of the colonial officers on the ground, shaped Kerewo lives through financial or political decisions. Australia, England, America, the Archive, The Internet and the Queen or King, are all part of an imagined geography and are locally nominal reifications of those distant powers that shape their lives. They are also sites of knowledge that might effectively be used by Kerewo to reshape their

¹²³ Jacques André, 'De la preuve à l'histoire: Les archives en France', *Traverses* 36 (1986): 29; quoted in Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, 4 (my italics). Farge's definition of *fonds* is broader and corresponds to the English use of 'archival collection'.

¹²⁴ Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, 4. As the translator wrote: 'The French word *fonds* can refer either to archival collections or to the ocean floor', as in Italian; *ibid.*, 131 fn. a.

¹²⁵ For instance, it is common in Italy to find under '*fondo X*', items (books, papers, photographs, etc.) donated to the institution by the individual 'X'.

existence.¹²⁶ More than once I was asked by Kerewo interlocutors to ‘correct what is in the Archive or the Internet’, as for example the spurious detail that their ancestors tried to eat Chalmers’ boots, thus labelling them as savages and preventing tourists to come and visit the area bringing in their money.

In what follows I treat separately what I call ‘historical documents’ and the ethnographic literature about Kerewo people. The distinction, arbitrary as any distinction is, has operational rather than heuristic value, especially considering the well-known colonial entanglement between missionaries, colonial agents, and anthropologists in the period under examination.

Written documents

The majority of sources I use in this work are written, most of them being produced by colonial officers and missionaries. The remainder are accounts written by occasional visitors in the area, anthropologists included, or news circulating in Australian newspapers. Each piece of writing is part of a broader network that maps out the colonial nervous system; here I focus just on colonial and missionary documents to highlight the structures of communication that informed the material I worked with.

The area where Kerewo reside has been bureaucratically encompassed by different administrative units. Prior to 1910 it was technically part of the Western Division, but deemed to be so distant that it was impossible to effectively bring the population ‘under control’. The consequences of this will become clear in Chapter 3 where I analyse the event of Chalmers’ death. In 1910, the Delta Division was created in order to administer more effectively this portion of the Papuan Gulf, until it was merged with the Gulf Division (now Gulf Province). In 1910 a Government Station was established at Kikori, the administrative centre where a Resident Magistrate, flanked by other colonial officers, exercised his duties. A station journal was kept, recording important events as they occurred. The Division’s personnel routinely patrolled the area, feeding copies of the reports back to Port Moresby. The Lieutenant-Governor conducted an annual visit of inspection around the colony. This information was all collated in the *Territory of Papua Annual Report* by and for the Department of Territories in

¹²⁶ I use the expression ‘imagined geography’ as the active form of Andrew Lattas’ notion of ‘imaginary geography’; see his *Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 101–2, 110–11, 144; and Andrew Lattas, ‘The Underground Life of Capitalism: Space, Persons and Money in Bali (West New Britain)’, in *Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative, and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. Alan Rumsey and Weiner, James F. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 161–88. As Lattas shows, these imaginary geographies, including the underground as elaborated by Censure’s cargo cult among the Bush Kaliai, are sites where it is possible to reshape the consciousness of the past to create a new future.

Canberra.¹²⁷ A selection from these reports was then included in the *Colonial Reports* issued by the British Government. This hierarchical chain of command is reflected in the level of detail each set of documents contains. The *Territory of Papua Annual Report* not only chronicled the portion of social life in the area according to the authorities' view, but was a source of information vital for the functioning of the colony itself. Geographical, linguistic, and ethnographic data are provided alongside statistics for criminal records, missionary and economic activities, and conditions of individual villages as found during the patrols. The quality of these reports depended largely on the personalities and competency of individual colonial officers.

The records of the London Missionary Society records have a similarly hierarchical structure. The missionary in charge of the Mission Station at Kikori (Aird Hill) updated the Society yearly. Information on the progress of evangelisation was included, with a striking balance between praise and complaint. Objective difficulties, such as financial constraints and terrain, were usually highlighted in order to attract funds from London. Yet a certain amount of progress had to be shown in order to justify the flow of money into a particular evangelical project. Going through the records the reader becomes familiar with recurring issues, in particular the necessity to have a vessel to conduct visits along the intricate riverine systems. The LMS promoted technical training and built a workshop to keep their vessels and those of the Government running. The greater part of the year could be spent on such repairs, with significant consequences for the evangelisation of the area.

The Kikori Delta was often seen as an unforgiving environment. Indeed, it structured the Europeans' temporality. This can be grasped by going through the correspondence filed in Benjamin Butcher's personal papers. In his letters Butcher recorded almost every one of his days, producing what was in effect a diary. What strikes the reader who goes through each page is that sometimes letters can cover several days if the Government boat in charge of delivering and collecting the mails was late. Reasons for such delay varied, from bad weather preventing the crossing of the Gulf of Papua to low tides preventing travel upstream from the mouth of Kikori River. As I experienced, thanks to my Kerewo hosts, the breath of *Kiko turi* (Kikori River) is a primary source of time-structure for daily and seasonal activities. More intimate documents such as those gathered among Butcher's papers not only show a less constrained view of daily interactions with the local population, but are a reminder of what life was like for the colonists as well. For example, in a moving letter that Benjamin Butcher sent to his wife Eva, who at that time was not in the colony, he found a way to create a connection with his faraway spouse by reading the same passage of

¹²⁷ Some were published as *Proceedings of the Queensland Parliament*, an obvious legacy of the shift in the political geography of Australia since federation in 1901.

the Gospel together every night.¹²⁸ If not directly relevant for understanding Kerewo historical consciousness or specific events of their colonial past, documents like this are a reminder of the human side of the colonial enterprise and the emotional toll that it demanded from the people involved.

Visual documents

My archival research included visual documents such as photographs, maps, and films. As I prepared to go to the field I took with me a wealth of visual sources in the hope of eliciting memories and commentaries. I assembled two folders with prints of photographs ranging from the early 20th century to the 1950s.¹²⁹ These photographs are important historical documents in their own right, which encapsulate and depict fragments of Kerewo pasts in the first half-century of engagement with colonialism.

Francis Barton's photographs were taken either in 1905 or 1906, after the second punitive expedition following the killing of Chalmers and his party.¹³⁰ Consisting mostly

¹²⁸ Letter from Benjamin Butcher to Eva dated 27/3/1920, in, Benjamin Butcher's Papers, MS 1881, Box 1, NLA (Canberra).

¹²⁹ These pictures included: a) a selection of Francis Barton's glass negatives provided by *The Royal Anthropological Institute* (RAI 20744, RAI 20745, RAI 20746, RAI 20747, RAI 20748, RAI 20749, RAI 20751, RAI 20752, RAI 20753, RAI 20754, RAI 20760, RAI 20768, RAI 21221, RAI 21222, RAI 21226); b) a selection of Benjamin Butcher's lanterns held in Sydney at the Library of New South Wales (Slides 196, boxes 3-5); c) a selection of Frank Hurley's photographs digitised by the National Library of Australia and available on-line; d) a selection of Richard Fenn's pictures held at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra (04, 06, 08, 09, 10, 14, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28); e) a copy of the images contained in the album (unknown author and date) *Photographs of New Guinea*, Canberra, National Library of Australia, Pic Album 475d; f) a selection of images from the Anthropology Department glass lantern slide collection (unknown author and date) held at the Macleay Museum, Sydney (425.1, 425.2, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 517, 631, 632); g) a selection of the pictures contained in the album *Black and White Photographs of New Guineans, Plantation Workers, Missionaries and Buildings*, (Photographs of New Guinea series, Australian National University Archives, Canberra, ANUA 344; items 4, 22, 24, 27); and h) a selection of Sylvester M. Lambert's pictures digitized by the University of California, San Diego.

¹³⁰ Francis Barton, 'Barton – PNG, Oceania' (Photographs – Selected Holdings, Royal Anthropological Institute, London). On Barton's photographs see Christopher Wright, 'Supple Bodies: The Papua New Guinea Photographs of Captain Francis R. Barton, 1899-1907', in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 146–69.

of portraits taken *in situ* (the only identified man is Kemere, who was taken prisoner after the first punitive expedition), these photographs have an anthropometric and ethnographic flavour to them.¹³¹ Three photographs, two of a canoe full of men in the middle of the river, and one of a view of a *dubu daimo* (long-house), should be read in connection with the knowledge Burton had of the 1901 events at Goaribari Island (the mission boat surrounded by warlike canoes, and the mission party killed and consumed inside the long-house).

Similar ethnographic intent is apparent in the pictures taken by the Australian photographer and film-maker Frank Hurley during his 1922 expedition to the Territory of Papua.¹³² Hurley landed at Goaribari Island the day after a big feast, giving the photographer the occasion to capture men in their decoration, and skulls placed on the beach.¹³³ Other series of photographs are very much ethnographic in nature, similarly to the two collections I just mentioned. Items of material culture, especially the *titi ebiha* (carved boards) and *agibe* (skull-racks, 'shrines'), feature frequently.¹³⁴ These object images were also created by the LMS missionaries Benjamin Butcher and Edward Fenn during their residence as missionaries at Kikori (from 1914 to 1952). Yet their pictures show a more intimate relation with their hosts and the integration of their families, especially children, with the growing Christian local community. In their photographic representations, the missionaries were more alert to the changes occurring in relation to conversions to Christianity. Semi-nakedness was replaced by people clothed in Western style, or dressed as characters of the Bible for special representations, as for instance the Nativity.

I took much of this wealth of imagery to Kikori as part of the reciprocity that I wanted to establish with my hosts. Furthermore, I hoped to be able to elicit stories in much the same way as Joshua Bell did by taking back F.E. Williams' pictures to Purari.¹³⁵ Unfortunately I was not that lucky. The pictures aroused curiosity, and in the

¹³¹ The caption says: 'Kemeri, a man from the Aird River Delta, sitting on the verandah of a European style house, possibly Government House, Port Moresby' (RAI catalogue 400.20586).

¹³² Most of the relevant photographs taken by Frank Hurley in this part of Papua have been digitised by the National Library of Australia; the originals can be consulted at PIC/14197/140 LOC Drawer, NLA, Canberra.

¹³³ See Frank Hurley, 'Diary n.3' (NLA, Canberra, MS 883).

¹³⁴ See the 31 sepia photographs (30 x 22 cm), neither dated or their authorship known, contained in 'Photographs of New Guinea Pic Album' (NLA, Canberra, MS 475d).

¹³⁵ Joshua Bell, 'Losing the Forest but Not the Stories in the Trees: Contemporary Understanding of F.E. Williams' 1922 Photographs of the Purari Delta', *The Journal of Pacific History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 191–206; Joshua A. Bell, 'Out of the Mouths of Crocodiles: Eliciting

first days of my stay in any Kerewo village, the house where I was staying was swarmed by visitors eager to see what their ancestors looked like in the early days of colonial rule. Usually older men (sometimes women) commented on the pictures, explaining to the younger ones what certain things were and what they were called in Kerewo language. Not infrequently they also corrected the flamboyant interpretations that children in particular proposed for those images.

Yet the rare captions for the photographs were more important than the images themselves. Only when the photographer identified people or places were stories then offered about the subjects of the images. Barton's identification of the man pictured in profile as 'Kemere', was welcomed by one of my interlocutors as tangible proof that the stories about his ancestor were true. Fenn's (misspelled) identification of a woman and a man dressed as Mary and Joseph was warmly welcomed by some families at Samoa village, as they could see their grandparents in their youth.

When we encountered pictures without captions, I was usually asked if there was any story attached. What at first I perceived as a methodological failure actually gave me an understanding of how the images of 'primitiveness' intended by the photographers appeared for people who looked at them as confirmation of the Christian temporal trajectory that moved from the cannibalism of their ancestors to contemporary Christianity and modernity.

Sources not used

An important source for this work but one that I soon realised I could not use in my research were the Kerewo artefacts lodged in European, American, and Australian museums, not to mention private collections of which I am not yet aware. As Robert Welsch has noted, to understand chronologically when some groups were happy to part with objects once held sacred constitutes an important indicator of when certain shifts in values might have occurred.¹³⁶ I saw only a limited number of artefacts such as *titi ebiha* (carved boards) hanging from walls, including those of the Delta Store, their names and related stories often lost to memory. I was told that some people could identify from the designs which village, if not clan, these objects belonged to, but I never managed to find someone willing or able to share this knowledge with me.¹³⁷ When I asked how their ancestors parted with these objects, I received little or no response. The usual reply was

Histories in Photographs and String-Figures', *History and Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (2010): 351–73.

¹³⁶ Robert Louis Welsch, Virginia-Lee Webb, and Sebastian Haraha, *Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art and Society in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea* (Hanover: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 2006), 36–43.

¹³⁷ On Kerewo artefacts and their relations to sociality see Welsch, Webb, and Haraha, 36–43.

that Europeans, sometimes condensed into the figure of ‘Dr Thomas’, bought them.¹³⁸ When I sought elaboration on these brief statements, or asked if there was any regret over the loss of these objects, the response was often ‘Yes, our fathers were ignorant, they did not know the value of those objects; they gave them away for just a few hundred dollars’, usually adding, without the slightest hint of irony, that ‘they should have sold them for thousands of dollars’. I confess I was too naïve to know what to do with these answers, though they hint at the relation between knowledge and the material wealth envisioned by ‘modernity’. Two Kerewo men, Kenneth Korokai and Andrew Dairi, working with archaeologists Bruno David, Bryce Barker, and Lara Lamb, visited the Australian Museum in Sydney in 2012, where they gained access to the objects made by Kerewo stored there. As Kenneth told me more than once, the curator offered them the option of taking those objects back to Kikori if they wished so, but they refused as no proper storage facility is yet in place. However he asked me to map where Kerewo objects are, so that maybe his children might one day be able to access those histories.

Ethnographic literature on Kerewo people

Goaribari, the mistaken ethnic name for Kerewo people, has long been associated with the death of the LMS missionary James Chalmers and his companions at Dopima village in 1901.¹³⁹ The murder of the missionary and the harsh reprisals that followed this incident have strongly coloured documentation produced subsequently about Kerewo people. An enormous wealth of written records exists in relation to the two punitive expeditions (the first in 1901, and the second in 1904) that followed and were connected to Chalmers’ death, all concentrated in the time span of merely three years. The two punitive expeditions had great political significance at a time when the passage from British to Australian administration of the south-eastern portion of New Guinea Island was under discussion. In these accounts and debates, Kerewo people played the interchangeable role of the ‘bloodthirsty savage’ to be punished or the ‘inferior colonial subject’ to be protected.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ ‘Dr Thomas’ was likely Thomas Schultze-Westrum, a German conservationist and filmmaker who seems to have spent some time in the Gulf of Papua New Guinea studying art. I gather that Barry Craig of the South Australian Museum is working on editing Schultze-Westrum’s manuscript.

¹³⁹ See Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁰ See Dario Di Rosa, ‘A Lesson in Violence: The Moral Dimensions of Two Punitive Expeditions in the Gulf of Papua, 1901 and 1904’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 18, no. 1 (2017).

While geographical knowledge of the Kikori Delta area became more accurate, from a Western point of view, towards the end of the 19th century, ethnographic observations have been scant. Charles Seligman visited the area as part of the Cook-Daniels Expedition in 1903, collecting the anthropometric data and cultural artefacts on which he based his classification of British New Guinea ethnic groups.¹⁴¹ The Finnish anthropologist Gunnar Landtman (who at the time was conducting fieldwork among Kiwai people at the mouth of the Fly River) also briefly visited the Kikori area while accompanying missionary Benjamin Butcher who was looking for a suitable location for his mission station.¹⁴² In 1914 Alfred Haddon and his daughter Kathleen also visited Goaribari Island conducting an ethnographic inquiry and taking a wealth of pictures.¹⁴³ The death of Chalmers hovered over much ethnographic enquiry; our knowledge of Kerewo people in the very early days of colonial contact focuses on their material culture, particularly in association with religious beliefs and head-hunting.¹⁴⁴ Haddon also participated in debates with those colonial officers and missionaries who, confident in their longer residence, contributed to debates on ethnographic details concerning the customs of the region, usually in comparative perspective.¹⁴⁵ Colonial residents often focused on the material culture and an appreciation of local religious symbolism; a close

¹⁴¹ C. G. Seligmann, 'Note on a Painting on Bark from the Aird River Delta, British New Guinea', *Man* 5 (1905): 161; C. G. Seligmann, 'A Classification of the Natives of British New Guinea.', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 39 (1909): 255–59; plate XVII fig. 3. It is worth noting that Kerewo people, as many of the groups of the Gulf area discussed in Seligmann's 1909 article, are remarkably absent in his monumental C. G. Seligmann, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910).

¹⁴² See David Russell Lawrence, *Gunnar Landtman in Papua: 1910 to 1912* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), ix, 10–27, 56–58.

¹⁴³ On Haddon's activities in the Gulf see Joshua A. Bell, "'A Gift of the First Importance': The Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Papuan Gulf Photographic Collection", *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 17 (2005): 176–90; Joshua A. Bell, "'For Scientific Purposes a Stand Camera Is Essential': Salvaging Photographic Histories in Papua", in *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame*, ed. Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 143–70. Kathleen Haddon wrote about her experience in her unpublished manuscript *A Girl in New Guinea*, held at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge.

¹⁴⁴ A. C. Haddon, 'The Agiba Cult of the Kerewa Culture', *Man* 18 (1918): 177–83; A. C. Haddon, 'The Dance of the Gope in Kerewa', *Man* 34 (1934): 8–9.

¹⁴⁵ Haddon, 'The Dance of the Gope in Kerewa'; Leo Austen, 'The Dance of the Gope in Kerewo', *Man* 34 (1934): 4–8.

reading of the literature produced by field officers often enables us to trace genealogies for specific interpretations of socio-cultural practices.¹⁴⁶ Sponsored by the Field Museum of Natural History of Chicago to collect artefacts for the growing museum, Albert B. Lewis spent nearly a week in Kikori in 1912 as part of his four-year expedition to Melanesia.¹⁴⁷ Only a decade later, the renowned Australian photographer and filmmaker Frank Hurley also briefly visited the area collecting, legally or not, some artefacts and taking a wealth of pictures.¹⁴⁸ From Europe, the Swiss anthropologist Paul Wirz, too, visited the Kikori area in 1930, and also focused his efforts on the collection of artefacts and their religious significance, although his interpretations of the symbolism relied on comparison with other areas of south coast New Guinea.¹⁴⁹

A notable exception to the temporally narrow ethnographic engagement was the colonial officer Leo Austen, who served in the Kikori Delta Division from 1928 to 1931 before being stationed at Losuia (Kiriwina, Milne Bay Province); he had received a BA in anthropology from the University of Sydney under the mentorship of Adolphus Elkin. Austen, who is better known for his insights on Trobriand ethnography and the ensuing debates with Branislaw Malinowski, also published a series of articles covering many ethnographic ‘items’ of the Turama people (east of Kikori), and providing an unusual (for the time as much as for today) regional perspective in tracing connections with their neighbouring communities, including Kerewo people.¹⁵⁰ The Government

¹⁴⁶ See L. A. Flint, ‘Muguru at Torobina, Bamu River.’, *Man* 19 (1919): 38–39; W. N. Beaver, ‘Some Notes on the Nomenclature of Western Papua’, *Man* 14 (1914): 135–36; Wilfred N. Beaver, *Unexplored New Guinea. A Record of the Travels, Adventures, and Experiences of a Resident Magistrate... by Wilfred N. Beaver...* (Seeley, Service and Company, 1920). A notable exception for his ethnographic sensibility was E. W. P. Chinnery, who later became Government Anthropologist for the Australian Mandate of New Guinea; see E. W. Pearson Chinnery, ‘The Opening of New Territories in Papua’, *The Geographical Journal* 55, no. 6 (1920): 439–54.

¹⁴⁷ Robert L. Welsch, ed., *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia: A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition 1909-1913* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 447–48, 457–62.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee, eds., *The Diaries of Frank Hurley, 1912-1941* (London - New York - Delhi: Anthem Press, 2011), 220–25.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Wirz, ‘The Kaiamunu-Ébiha-Gi-Cult in the Delta-Region and Western Division of Papua’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 67 (1937): 407–13. See also his personal account in *Wildnis Und Freiheit: Aus Dem Tagebuch Eines Weltvaganten* (Stuttgart: Strecker und Schröder, 1933), 11–40.

¹⁵⁰ Leo Austen, ‘Legends of Hido’, *Oceania* 2, no. 4 (1932): 468–75; Leo Austen, ‘Head Dances of the Turama River’, *Oceania* 6, no. 3 (1936): 342–49; Leo Austen, ‘Melanesia: Ethnology.:

Anthropologist F. E. Williams produced two important monographs about communities living in the contemporary Gulf Province, but none related specifically to the Kikori area.¹⁵¹

The ethnographic knowledge collected and published over the first three decades of colonial presence in Kikori followed the theoretical questions of the time. As Bruce Knauft has convincingly argued, the anthropological enterprise in this part of what is now Papua New Guinea focused on religious beliefs and material culture, with little attention to other aspects of social life such as politics. Knauft claims that this created a divide in Papua New Guinea ethnography that crystallised around the Lowlands/Highlands divide, magnified by the publication of Peter Lawrence and Mervyn Meggitt with its insistence on the secular character of highlands society and the religious character of ‘seaboard’ communities.¹⁵² This divide is to be read in light of the important work of Arjun Appadurai and Richard Fardon, which has done much to further our understanding of how the ethnographic puzzles of specific areas have ossified domains of enquiry for those regions over time.¹⁵³ Marilyn Strathern, for example, analysed the intellectual history of ethnographic research in Melanesia from a surprisingly Highlands-centred point of view, effectively obliterating much early research done in the coastal areas of the region.¹⁵⁴ Parenthetically, it should be noted that

Notes on the Food Supply of the Turamarubi of Western Papua.’, *Mankind* 3, no. 8 (1946): 227–30; Leo Austen, ‘Papua: Social Anthropology. Notes on the Turamarubi of Western Papua.’, *Mankind* 3, no. 12 (1947): 366–74; Leo Austen, ‘Notes on the Turamarubi of Western Papua’, *Mankind* 4, no. 1 (1948): 14–23; Leo Austen, ‘Notes on the Turamarubi of Western Papua.’, *Mankind* 4, no. 5 (1950): 200–207.

¹⁵¹ Francis Edgar Williams, *The Natives of the Purari Delta*, Anthropology (Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea); Report No. 5. (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1924); Francis Edgar Williams, *Drama of Orokolō: The Social and Ceremonial Life of the Elema* (London: Clarendon Press, 1940).

¹⁵² Peter Lawrence and Mervyn J. Meggitt, ‘Introduction’, in *Gods, Ghosts and Men in Melanesia*, ed. Peter Lawrence and Mervyn J. Meggitt (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1–26; Peter Lawrence, ‘Twenty Years after: A Reconsideration of Papua New Guinea Seaboard and Highlands Religions’, *Oceania* 59, no. 1 (1988): 7–27.

¹⁵³ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (1986): 356–61; Arjun Appadurai, ‘Introduction: Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory’, *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988): 16–20; Arjun Appadurai, ‘Putting Hierarchy in Its Place’, *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988): 36–49; Richard Fardon, ed., *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing* (Edinburgh - Washington: Scottish Academic Press, 1990).

¹⁵⁴ Strathern, ‘Negative Strategies in Melanesia’.

John Barker and Bronwen Douglas have advanced a critique, concerning the late development of an interest in Christianity as an acceptable field of ethnographic enquiry, which rests on similar ground to Knauft's views on the highlands/lowlands divide.¹⁵⁵

After World War II, ethnographic research in the area came almost to a stop, with the exception of Robert Maher's and Dawn Ryan's studies of social change in the Purari river area and among Toaripi speakers respectively.¹⁵⁶ Undoubtedly Knauft is correct in saying that this temporal gap in coverage is largely to be imputed to a search for the untouched 'primitive', who had less contact with Europeans, although I would also add: 1) a lack of infrastructure making the area easily accessible, and 2) the colonial administration rushing to set up basic services in the newly 'discovered' areas once they envisioned the colony's independence.¹⁵⁷

Knauft's *South Coast New Guinea Cultures*, largely based on existing accounts of the groups residing in the area between the Purari River (Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea) and the region populated by Asmat people in West Papua (Indonesia), had the merit of placing these communities on the anthropologists' radar once again, and challenging models that were drawn from the rich ethnographies of the Highlands area. This book received considerable attention from specialists of Papua New Guinea and Melanesia more generally, especially in relation to the definition of 'culture areas'.¹⁵⁸ Yet

¹⁵⁵ John Barker, ed., *Christianity in Oceania: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ASAO Monograph, no. 12 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990); Bronwen Douglas, 'Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Narratives on Melanesians', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 1 (2001): 37–64; Bronwen Douglas, 'From Invisible Christians to Gothic Theatre: The Romance of the Millennial in Melanesian Anthropology', *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 5 (2001): 615–50.

¹⁵⁶ Robert F. Maher, *New Men of Papua: A Study in Culture Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961); Dawn Ryan, 'Social Change among the Toaripi, Papua' (M.A., University of Sydney, 1965).

¹⁵⁷ See Bruce M. Knauft, 'Melanesian Warfare: A Theoretical History', *Oceania* 60, no. 4 (1990): 250–311; Bruce M. Knauft, *South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6–41; passim.

¹⁵⁸ Simon Harrison, 'Southern New Guinea as a Culture Area', Bruce M. Knauft, *Current Anthropology* 34, no. 5 (1993): 798–800; Anton Ploeg, *Review of South Coast New Guinea cultures. History, Comparison, Dialectic*, by Bruce M. Knauft, *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 118, no. 1 (1993): 199–202; Paula Brown, *Review of South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic*, by Bruce M. Knauft, *Man* 29, no. 3 (1994): 769–70; Lourens Gustaffson, 'Review of South Coast New Guinea Cultures; History, Comparison, Dialectic', *Ethnos* 59, no. 1–2 (1994): 112–15; Marilyn Strathern, 'Review of South Coast New Guinea

none of the book's reviewers suggested actually conducting further ethnographic enquiry in the area. In 1967 Priscilla Reining listed 'Goaribari' in her catalogue of 'urgent research projects', but it was a call that went unanswered.¹⁵⁹

In the south coast New Guinea area, as delimited by Knauft, very little recent ethnographic research has been conducted by comparison with other parts of New Guinea. Important exceptions to this are Lawrence Hammar's study of the political economy of sex at Daru in the Western Province, Joshua Bell's various historical and ethnographic writings on the Purari area, Alison Dundon's work on Gogodala people's Christianity (Fly River), Michael Wood's work on Kamula people (Bamu River) especially in connection with the forestry sector, and Sandrine Lefort's work in the upper Turama River.¹⁶⁰ Recent research in the Kikori area has taken place in connection

Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic', *Social Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (1994): 65–66; Michael Wood, 'Review of South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic', *Canberra Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (1994): 124–26; Stéphane Breton, 'Review of South Coast New Guinea Cultures; History, Comparison, Dialectic', *L'Homme* 35, no. 135 (1995): 188–89; Richard J. Parmentier, review of *Review of South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic*, by Bruce M. Knauft, *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 2 (1995): 321–23; Dan Jorgensen, review of *Review of South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History Comparison, Dialectic*, *Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* 89, by Bruce M Knauft, *The Contemporary Pacific* 8, no. 1 (1996): 238–40; Lourens De Vries, review of *South Coast New Guinea Cultures; History, Comparison, Dialectic*, by Bruce M. Knauft, *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 155, no. 1 (1999): 171–72.

For a fruitful discussion of culture areas in New Guinea Highlands see James F. Weiner, ed., *Mountain Papuans: Historical and Comparative Perspectives from New Guinea Fringe Highlands Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988); Terence E. Hays, "'The New Guinea Highlands": Region, Culture Area, or Fuzzy Set? [And Comments and Reply]', *Oceania* 34, no. 2 (1993): 141–64; Terence E. Hays, 'Delineating Regions with Permeable Boundaries in New Guinea', *Reviews in Anthropology* 30, no. 3 (2001): 257–72. A trenchant critique of Knauft's delimitation of the south coast New Guinea cultural area is found in Mark Busse, 'Wandering Hero Stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea: Culture Areas, Comparison, and History', *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 4 (2005): 443–73; see below, 82.

¹⁵⁹ Priscilla Reining, 'Urgent Research Projects', *Current Anthropology* 8, no. 4 (1967): 387.

¹⁶⁰ The bulk of these works is available as journal articles, book chapters, or unpublished theses; I refer the reader – among the many possible choices – to: Lawrence Hammar, 'Sex and Political Economy in the South Fly: Daru Island, Western Province, Papua New Guinea' (City University of New York, 1996); Alison Dundon, 'Sitting in Canoes: Knowing Places and Imagining Spaces among the Gogodala of Papua New Guinea' (The Australian National

with the social mapping exercises conducted on behalf of first Chevron New Guinea, and then ExxonMobil, as required by Papua New Guinea legislation pertaining to the oil and gas sector.¹⁶¹ Although some publications are available, a wealth of research is officially restricted in reports to the oil company.

The recent works listed above, together with my own research, suggest that the area between the current Western and Gulf provinces of Papua New Guinea offer fertile terrain for ethnographic enquiry, not because of some opposition with forms of sociality in the New Guinea Highlands (though further research might provide a corrective to much generalization about ‘Melanesian sociality’), but for the divergent colonial and economic histories that place these two provinces in a structurally marginal position to the nation-state and its infrastructure, a situation that has not been relieved by the highly ecologically exploitative forestry and mining industries; this marginality to ‘modernity’ is all too striking for the people of this area themselves.

Fieldwork

If archives are the product of power relations, so is oral lore of the colonial past among Kerewo and its elicitation. The distribution of the knowledge of the past among members of clans (*gu*), villages (*o’opo*) and/or language groups within the Kikori area provides a constant source of challenges to any historical narrative. It is from my experience in the field that I came to appreciate the political nature of history-making as a privileged site in which to understand the dynamics that give shape, fleetingly, to historical consciousness. What follows is an account of some examples or key moments that shaped my understanding of what to look for in order to grasp historical consciousness.

University, 1998); Joshua A. Bell, ‘Intersecting Histories: Materiality and Social Transformation in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea’ (University of Oxford, 2006); Michael Wood, ‘Mesede and the Limits of Reciprocity in Fieldwork at Kamusi, Western Province, Papua New Guinea’, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (2013): 126–35; Jennifer Gabriel and Michael Wood, ‘The Rimbunan Hijau Group in the Forests of Papua New Guinea’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 322–43; Monica Minnegal, Sandrine Lefort, and Peter D. Dwyer, ‘Reshaping the Social: A Comparison of Fasu and Kubo-Febi Approaches to Incorporating Land Groups’, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16, no. 5 (2015): 496–513.

¹⁶¹ For a critical perspective on the transformation of the oil and gas sector’s legislation see Colin Filer, ‘Development Forum in Papua New Guinea: Upsides and Downsides’, *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law* 26, no. 1 (2008): 120–50.

Of Narratives and Imponderabilia

Much of my understanding of the uses of the past among Kerewo is linked to comments generated at the margins of narrations, especially when I turned off my recorder and thus surreptitiously shifted the social context from an aura of formality to a more relaxed situation. For example, during a break while recording the story of Babere (discussed in Chapter 4), my host at Samoa village, Pepo, insisted with the storyteller to give me a detailed version ('full' as he put it) of this story because that would help his claims to the land of Gairabu if the claims needed to be asserted in the future. Pepo's main concern was the possibility of claiming rights to land so as to receive benefits should a development project invest in that area of the Kikori Delta. The logic put in place by the Papua New Guinea legislation in connection to extractive industries was an omnipresent concern for my interlocutors.¹⁶²

The contestation of narratives and interpretation of the past was another key moment for me to understand what is at stake when Kerewo and other actors in Kikori talked about the past. The very timing of my research was of primary importance. I was present to witness the celebrations for the Centenary of the arrival of the first missionary resident in Kikori, and the preparations for the Peace and Reconciliation Ceremony, through which Kerewo people intended to dispel the curse withholding the arrival of 'development' and 'modernity'.¹⁶³ These two cases made me acutely aware of the political dimension of history-making. Through narration of the past, connections between past, present, and future are moulded, and relations between social groups are constantly rewoven into the social fabric.¹⁶⁴ Had I visited Kikori at another time, this ethnography would have been entirely different. As with anything else, this piece of writing also has to be historicised.

Major events aside, when the contestation of the past was out in the open, I could get a glimpse of a more suffused sense of historical consciousness by taking part in daily activities. The material culture pertaining to productive activities was often a source of comment pointing to the separation between the past and the present. Frequently I was shown objects, usually kept in patrol boxes or hanging in some corner

¹⁶² See Colin Filer, 'Custom, Law and Ideology in Papua New Guinea', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (2006): 65–84. For an interesting examination of the interplay between local concerns of recognition and the legal structure and practices surrounding the Papua New Guinea legislation on extractive enterprises see Joshua A. Bell, 'Dystopian Realities and Archival Dreams in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea', *Social Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (2016): 20–35.

¹⁶³ See Chapters 4 and 7.

¹⁶⁴ The theme of history as a creative way of making connection is explored further in the next chapter.

of a house, which bore testimony to the harshness of life before the colonial era. Changes in material culture brought about by missionaries, as well as by those Kerewo who engaged with the colonial economic order as labourers or police force, were perceived by my informants as part and parcel of the most significant watershed in their history: the advent of Christianity. Those objectifications of the past hard labour in order to sustain life were shown to me as a sign of Kerewo ancestors' *pupuo* (strength), something that the newer generations have lost as with new marital and residential patterns sexual taboos were broken. And yet there was no nostalgia in these comments; change – modernity – seemed to be a matter of fact, and there was no idyllic past to return to.

The prominent presence of narratives (both oral or written) in the present work largely stems from the conditions in the field. Other ethnographers have shown the richness of modes of conveying the past through songs, dances, objects, and other non-verbal media.¹⁶⁵ Yet, the narratological dimension was critical for my interlocutors in their presentation of the past, both to me and to themselves. As with my use of pictures as prompts to elicit stories, the materialised images acquired specific meanings only if names were attached to them, thus bestowing on the picture a corroborative value within a narration. Logocentrism is a conspicuous modality for social transmission of the past, which was almost invariably offered to me in the form of *oroa* (tale, narrative).

Multi-Sited Ethnography of a Certain Kind

Another important feature of my fieldwork was its multi-sited nature, as it immediately became clear that events such as the Centenary for the arrival of the Gospel (Chapter 4) and the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony (Chapter 7) had a micro-regional depth. To understand who was encompassed and who was not by the effects of certain past events could not be determined without inquiry.¹⁶⁶ Both the historical trends of migration and

¹⁶⁵ In addition to the ethnographic works which I discuss throughout the dissertation, see: Paul Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa* (Oxon - New York: Routledge, 1995); Johannes Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1996); Katerina Martina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Indiana University Press, 2014); Ana Mariella Bacigalupo, *Thunder Shaman: Making History with Mapuche Spirits in Chile and Patagonia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

¹⁶⁶ I spent between six and eight weeks in each of the following villages (listed in order of residence): Samoa, Apeawa, Babaguna, Bisi. I paid short visits to the coastal villages of Goare and Ai'idio villages, which have lower population numbers, due to weather conditions and the availability of water supplies. Kikori town was an integral setting of my ethnographic inquiry. For a spatial distribution of Kerewo villages see fig. 1.

processes of community formation, or even mundane foraging activities, demanded a high degree of mobility, not too dissimilar to Anna Tsing's account of her fieldwork experience among the Meratus (Indonesia).¹⁶⁷ As I use the term 'multi-sited' to describe my ethnography, a brief discussion of how it differs from conventional use of the term in anthropology is warranted.

In his seminal article on multi-sited ethnography, George Marcus wrote that this ethnographic practice 'arises in response to empirical changes in the world'.¹⁶⁸ New methods for new times, it seems. Marcus' main critique of 'conventional' ethnography is that the world system has been treated as mere context instead of being analysed ethnographically through multi-sited ethnography. I find his starting point, namely the 'empirical changes in the world' triggered by the decolonisation period, problematic. Marcus himself suggests implicitly in his essay that these changes, inspired by the rise of fields of inquiry 'such as media studies, feminist studies, science and technology studies' in the 1980s, are more intellectual in nature than 'empirical'.¹⁶⁹ Yet such insistence on the 'novelty', often as synonym of 'technology', falls into the trap of pre-determining what constitutes modernity, as criticised by Englund and Leach.¹⁷⁰

It is worth observing that the village-bound model of ethnography springs out of an essentialist view of fieldwork, quite removed from the historical experience. The image of the anthropologist studying a single village has been so engrained in the

¹⁶⁷ See Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, 65–66.

¹⁶⁸ George E. Marcus, 'Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 97.

¹⁶⁹ Marcus, 'Ethnography In/Of the World System', 97 (note the emphasis on new technologies). The stress on 'novelty' is also shared by Arjun Appadurai, 'Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology', in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 191–210; Ulf Hannerz, 'Being There... and There... and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography', *Ethnography* 4, no. 2 (2003): 201–16. Simon Coleman proposes an interesting different perspective on 'multi-sited ethnography'; he considers the shifts in fieldsite throughout the anthropologist's career as an instance of multi-sited ethnography, see his 'The Multi-Sited Ethnographer', in *Critical Journeys: The Making of Anthropologists*, ed. Geert De Neve and Maya Unnithan-Kumar (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 31–46. Similarly George E. Marcus distinguishes between 'first' and 'second' projects, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 233–45. These perspectives have been explored further with a wealth of insights in Alma Gottlieb, ed., *The Restless Anthropologist: New Fieldsites, New Visions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹⁷⁰ Englund and Leach, 'Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity'.

disciplinary imaginary that Clifford Geertz famously remarked, without really challenging the trope, ‘Anthropologists do not study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods...); they study *in* villages’.¹⁷¹ The foundational text/model for canonical fieldwork, as students are repeatedly told in introductory courses, is that outlined by Bronislaw Malinowski in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.¹⁷² Yet Marcus rightfully includes Malinowski’s description of the *kula* exchange as an example of the ‘follow the people’ methodology of multi-sited ethnography.¹⁷³ Prior to Malinowski’s extended residence in the Trobriand Islands there are other historical examples of multi-sited (regional) ethnography, as shown in the recent volume *The Ethnographic Experiment*.¹⁷⁴ The contributors to this book analyse the ethnographic enquiries of Arthur M. Hocart and William H. R. Rivers in Island Melanesia (Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) during the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition of 1908. As stated in the preface of the book,

the early work in the Solomon Islands by Hocart and Rivers constitutes one of the first, if not *the* first, examples of modern anthropological fieldwork employing methods of participant observation through long-term residence among the people studied.¹⁷⁵

Some features, though, distinguish the work of Hocart and Rivers from the Malinowskian model: 1) it lasted six months instead of the canonized one full year (or more) of residence in the field, 2) the research was conducted in Melanesian pidgin instead of vernacular, 3) it involved *two* ethnographers instead of one. What clearly emerges from *The Ethnographic Experiment* is the sensibility of the two ethnographers in understanding the extended geographical grounding of Melanesian worldviews. It is from this insight that their fieldwork could be characterised as multi-sited ethnography

¹⁷¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973), 22 (italics in original). This sentence is often quoted by microhistorians when accused of the ‘typicality’ of their circumscribed works. I touch on this issue in Di Rosa, ‘Microstoria, Pacific History, and the Question of Scale’.

¹⁷² Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

¹⁷³ Marcus, ‘Ethnography in/of the World System’, 106.

¹⁷⁴ Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg, eds., *The Ethnographic Experiment: A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908* (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, ix (italics in original).

ante litteram.¹⁷⁶ The connectedness of Melanesian communities comes as no surprise to scholars of the area. My ethnography is no exception, but I need to qualify the theoretical and practical grounds for my decision to conduct a micro-regional multi-sited ethnography.

My own conceptualization of ‘the field’ had been shaped by my engagement with the archives. Routine patrols in Kikori area left only fragmented records of single villages or individuals, and usually made gross generalizations about the ‘Goaribari’ people. Even the usually richer missionary records offered few insights into daily village life, as financial constraints prevented the establishment of a capillary network of local teachers.¹⁷⁷ The only village possibly suitable for microhistorical inquiry is Samoa at Aird Hill, next to the Mission Station. Significant events, such as the death of Chalmers and his companions, generated more detailed records, though usually concentrated in thin slices of time, and the fame of places like Dopima or Otoia (Kerewo village) attracted the attention of figures such as Alfred Haddon or Frank Hurley, who produced interesting written and photographic materials. Yet, during my first visit to Kikori, I found that both villages had been abandoned. This left me wondering where and how best to conduct my fieldwork.

Terence Hays’ work was a decisive factor in my decision to conduct multi-sited ethnography among Kerewo speakers in Kikori. Hays’ argument against village-based ethnography as in his call for attention to ‘linkages among communities and societies as they are formative of networks and regions’ seemed to speak to the situation I found myself in.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, it is part of a broader critical reevaluation of the anthropological notions of space as encoded in concepts such as ‘field’ and ‘culture areas’. My stay in the field was punctuated by constant moving along the riverine landscape of Kikori Delta, whether because I wanted to attend ceremonies like the Centenary or some *aria* (mortuary feasts), the several meetings for the Peace and Reconciliations held in different locations, or even more common foraging activities such as sago-making, hunting, or fishing. Given the circumstances, I think the decision to reside in several villages was not a mistake. As I will show in the next chapter,

¹⁷⁶ Edvard Hviding, ‘Across the New Georgia Group: A. M. Hocart’s Fieldwork as Inter-Islands Practice’, in *The Ethnographic Experiment: A. M. Hocart and W. H. R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*, ed. Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 71–107; Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg, ‘Introduction: The Ethnographic Experiment in Island Melanesia’, in *The Ethnographic Experiment: A. M. Hocart and W. H. R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*, ed. Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 33, 37.

¹⁷⁷ See below, 135–39.

¹⁷⁸ Hays, ‘Delineating Regions with Permeable Boundaries in New Guinea’, 257.

mobility is a fundamental part of Kerewo sociality. Moreover, I grew more aware of a feature of historical consciousness, namely its capacity to enable or constrain connections among groups.

Yet another reason to conduct multi-sited research was the centrality that denominational rivalries played in the interactions among and within villages, especially in connection to the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony (Chapter 7). The United Church, successor to the London Missionary Society, was a key player in the area, especially in the villages near Kikori town (Samoa, Bisi, Kikori). Historically, as will be evident in Chapter 6, the main competitors for the LMS were the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA). At the time of my fieldwork, the SDA had a church active at Apeawa village, with a few adherents at Babaguna, and a larger interethnic presence at Kikori town. SDA adherents usually kept their worship activities separated from those of the other denominations present in the area, not least because their Sabbath is on Saturday rather than Sunday. While I saw no open denominational animosity toward or from SDA followers, their ideals of bodily purity tended to create a separation in most communal activities.

At Kekea, one of the settlements at the outskirts of Kikori town, Kenneth Korokai, a young Kerewo leader in his forties, established a compound centred on the building of worship of the New Apostolic Church (NAC). According to Kenneth Korokai, as leader of this denomination at Kikori, the visit of New Apostolic Church missionaries to Kikori in the 1980s had rekindled the faith in Christianity among the coastal villages closer to the sea, which felt neglected by the United Church. NAC is particularly strong at Kekea, Goare, Ai'idio, and Bisi villages. In each village there were households which claimed to belong to other denominations, especially those of an evangelist tendency. The practice of multi-sited research proved indispensable in understanding how different denominations interacted with and regarded the of Kerewo's past and their consequences.

Table 1: Synopsis of the denominational presence in Kerewo villages and Kikori area

Village	Main denomination	Minoritarian denomination
Samoa	United Church	Revival Church
Babaguna	United Church	SDA
Bisi	United Church (3/5)	NAC (2/5); Catholic
Apeawa	SDA	Various
Goare	NAC	
Ai'idio	NAC	
Kikori town	United Church, NAC, and SDA figure prominently among Kerewo residents. To a lesser extent Kerewo are affiliated with the Catholic, Jehova's Witnesses and Baptist churches.	

Other Kikorians	The distribution of denomination affiliation in town is similar to that found among Kerewo. Kibiri, Porome and Rumu Kairi people living in rural areas, mostly belong to the United Church. There is also a strong Catholic presence among Highlanders.
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This change in the scale of inquiry, from the village to the language area, entails certain gains and losses in perspective. One advantage is avoidance of the essentialism implied in the use of ethnic names (the Tikopia, the Trobrianders, the Kerewo, etc.) to describe socio-cultural situations which, as I learned, differ perceptibly from one village to the other. Granted, sometimes I resort to expressions such as ‘Kerewo historical consciousness’ which participate in the same essentialism, but I do so as part of the inherited conventions of ethnography-writing, and I use it consciously when referring to widespread views. Moreover, my ethnographic vignettes try to evoke the social context of performances (verbal or otherwise) and the positionality of the people I am describing.¹⁷⁹

The category of ‘Kerewo’ as an ethnic name encompassing Kerewo speakers is both an etic and an emic one. On one hand it is the outcome of colonial and post-colonial classification practices: from the ‘Goaribari’ of colonial time to the ‘Kerewo’ crystallized in reports issued for development projects in the 1990s.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, in line with Frederik Barth’s classic analysis,¹⁸¹ it is deployed in opposition to other ethno-linguistic groups residing in the area. Primarily Kerewo distinguish themselves from their northern neighbours, the Kibiri and Porome people, two groups speaking languages belonging to the Porome-phyllum (see figure 4) residing respectively west and east of Kikori river banks. In pre-colonial times, both Kibiri and Porome were the target of Kerewo raids which came to an end with the pax-Australiana. Today, tensions between Kerewo and Kibiri and Porome people persist on issues of land-ownership or denominational competition, but I did not experience much overt ostility if not in

¹⁷⁹ In emulation of Andrew Shryock's ethnography, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁸⁰ A painfully known case of legacy of colonial taxonomies is the genocide in Rwanda, for analysis of which see Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁸¹ Fredrik Barth, ‘Introduction’, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Fredrik Barth (ed.) (Bergen - London: Universitetsforlaget - Allen & Unwin, 1969): 9-38.

connection with the activities pertaining the celebrations of the Centenary.¹⁸² Kibiri people, residing mostly in Kikori town, Veiru, and Doibo, have a high rate of intermarriage with Kerewo people, while marriages between Kerewo and Porome people are sporadic. Such discrepancy is likely to be the result of two socio-historical dynamics. First the fact that Kikori town, built on Kibiri land, became a site of intense interaction among different groups in the colonial era. The second is the peculiar history of interaction between Kerewo and Porome people around the LMS mission station that led Kerewo people to establish Samoa village on one side of the hill, and Porome people to establish Ero village on the other side.¹⁸³ Along with Kerewo, Kibiri and Porome, Kairi people – living further north – are another ethno-linguistic group that is encompassed by the emic category of ‘Kikorians’; a distinction marked by the mutual understanding of the Papuan pidgin Police Motu in opposition to Tok Pisin speakers usually labeled as ‘Highlanders’.

The category of ‘Kerewo’ encompasses other linguistic groups, like Havamere (residing at Bisi village) and Vera (who form a significant part of Apeawa village’s population) people. Both speaking a close variety of Kerewo, Havamere and Vera got caught into the process of reification, or ‘entification’ as Thomas Ernst so terms it,¹⁸⁴ both during the colonial times and the social mappings conducted in order to identify the landowners impacted by development projects.¹⁸⁵

Beside the ethno-linguistic category of ‘Kerewo’, other relevant social units are those of *o’opo* (village) and *gu* (clan), the latter a category that permits to cut across villages and even ethnic boundaries. That of ‘Christian’, or a more specific denominational affiliation, is another category commonly deployed to mark unity and/or distinction across groups in the area. The selective engagement with different categories of identity played an important role in my understanding of historical consciousness, as identities are continuously created and re-created through the telling of the past in conjunction with present (ongoing) experience.

Another advantage of doing fieldwork in several villages has been the scope for a better understanding of links between villages by means of kinship. As far as I could determine, there is no prescriptive marriage pattern today, but people belonging to certain villages are more likely to find a partner in specific villages in Kikori, if not within their own village as is more usual. Participation in logging activities as a workforce, and intense interactions at Kikori town, where the secondary school is located, are two important factors determining marriage outside the language group, and

¹⁸² See Chapter 4.

¹⁸³ See below 154-58.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas M. Ernst, ‘Land, Stories and Resources: Discourse and Entification in Onabasulu Modernity’, *American Anthropologist*, 101, no. 1 (1999): 88–97.

¹⁸⁵ See below fn. 665. I will analyse this case in more detail in a future publication.

marriages with Highlanders (usually to Highlands women, rarely to men) are increasing. At Samoa in particular, where the working population is overwhelmingly employed by logging companies in the area, marriages with 'Asians' (often Malaysians) are not exceptional, although male partners seldom visited or resided in the village. Kinship ties were not the only relations linking families across villages. Many men in their forties and fifties spent some time in Port Moresby when they were younger, and the experiences shared in the urban environment created solid friendships and solidarity networks. I was always (naïvely) surprised when, after moving to a new village, I saw familiar faces from my previous 'fieldsites' taking up temporary residence among kin.

The enhanced scope for observing networks folding and unfolding during my stay, something that indeed shapes this ethnography, came at some cost to the depth of personal relations. I usually found collaboration and interest in my project, but only in a very few instances was I able to develop deep personal relations with my hosts. Those close friendships, though, are lasting and were emotionally and psychologically important in my months at Kikori. I mention this downside of multi-sited ethnography for the simple reason that I seldom managed to record life histories, which could have given a different perspective to some of the chapters of this dissertation.

As I mentioned earlier, changes of scale come with gains and losses. As the reader will see in Chapter 6, networks proved to be extremely important in the making of the Peace and Reconciliation project; an instance of how methodologically important it was for me to be familiar with a wide network of villages and people. I am sure I would have not reached the same level of understanding had I resided only in one village, and showed up in the several locations related to the Peace and Reconciliation project as a mere visitor. And yet, Chapter 5 would have been significantly different had there been more in-depth interviews and life histories about the labour relations and conditions in plantations or other sites of capitalist production in colonial times.

Language competence

As Marcus noted in his 1995 article, multi-sited ethnography's possible weak point is language competence, where the term 'language' pertains both to vernacular and as well to group-specific jargon (for instance, Karen Ho's work on Wall Street 'culture' and its language).¹⁸⁶ I was determined to learn Kerewo language, but the linguistic situation in the Kikori area proved to be quite complex. What follows is an account of this complexity – especially as it becomes relevant in the process of inclusion and exclusion from the authority to deploy historical narratives – and how my language competence affected my fieldwork.

¹⁸⁶ Marcus noted that most multi-sited ethnographies were conducted in monolingual contexts (especially in English), 'Ethnography In/Of the World System', 101. Insightful reflections on this issue are articulated in the essays collected in Gottlieb (ed.), *The Restless Anthropologist*.

Thanks to the help of colleagues and friends at the ANU, especially Ruth Spriggs and Darja Hoenigman, I left Canberra with a workable knowledge of Tok Pisin, which I quickly refined in Port Moresby, and with Timothy Wama and Samuel William at Kikori during my first trip. In the months between my first and second visits to my fieldsite, I kept working on my proficiency in Tok Pisin, as it was to be my working language as I prepared to learn the vernacular. But my knowledge of Kerewo advanced little beyond a basic vocabulary. Available sources mainly consist of wordlists collected by colonial officers, and despite the fact that I had an idea of how this Papuan language worked as I was familiar with grammars of Kiwai language (to which Kerewo is closely related), the construction of verb tenses and numerals by the addition of morphemes made little sense to me. Transcribing the stories I recorded in vernacular gave me a better understanding of the language, and with the passing months I developed a competence that enabled me to get by in daily life and to conduct interviews in the vernacular without the help of translators. Furthermore, I practiced my Kerewo at any occasion, especially at the market where I was able to expand my network of acquaintances and gradually made myself known to people of far-away villages such as Goare or Ai'idio. There is nothing exceptional for ethnographers in any of this, but I mention it to provide a context for the politics of acceptance of my persona as I learned the language.

I confess that in the months spent in the field I paid a high emotional toll. Probably because I insisted that I wanted to learn Kerewo, I was often addressed in this language from the beginning. When I did not understand what I was told, I asked my interlocutor if s/he could translate into Tok Pisin, a request that was usually met by the simple repetition of the sentence in Kerewo; a tough pedagogical method. The sense of frustration with myself for my apparent inability to grasp this language led me to periods of withdrawal and isolation.¹⁸⁷ I never managed to make sense, from my hosts' perspective, of this refusal to engage linguistically in Tok Pisin with me if not out of exasperation for my incomprehension. Stubbornly I continued to use Kerewo vernacular on all occasions, including at the Kikori market where I was often 'appropriated' by Kerewo friends and acquaintances who many times cut into conversations I was having

¹⁸⁷ In Port Moresby I bought a copy of Rosalie H. Wax, *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice*, Midway Reprint (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986). This book, especially Chapter 2, has literally been a balm for me as I was going through a psychologically rough time, and made me rethink what was happening to me in novel ways. Though I knew of Jean Briggs' ethnography, in which her sense of isolation proved to be the centre of gravity for her understanding of Eskimo sociality, I could not relate to it at the time of my fieldwork as much as I could do later on; see Jean L. Briggs, *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1970).

in Tok Pisin with Highlander sellers and friends to remark that, as I knew their language, I was ‘their anthropologist’. Eventually I was rewarded by one of the strictest persons adopting the language pedagogy described above who, when I once mentioned in conversation ‘*dehabuo mo Kerewo wade umori*’ (now I know Kerewo language), replied ‘*Io, dehabuo ro mereihari*’ (yes, now you are a true man), using the morpheme – *iha* which denotes the essence of something.

This account is not meant as a heroic tale of the ethnographer ‘conquering’ the local language (my proficiency is far from complete fluency), but to give a glimpse at how I managed to weave myself into Kerewo and Kikori sociality by learning Kerewo vernacular. I was reminded of my limitations on more than one occasion. For example, someone at the market once addressed me in Police Motu (the *lingua franca* commonly used in interactions among Papuans at Kikori, a linguistic marker to differentiated themselves from Tok Pisin-speakers from the Highlands and the northern regions of the country), and, as I was surrounded by Kerewo acquaintances, I boldly replied, mixing Motu and Kerewo ‘*lau Motu diba lasi, mo Kerewo mereri*’ (I don’t speak Motu, I’m a Kerewo person); at which Malcolm, a Kerewo man, said in Tok Pisin ‘if you were a Kerewo you would know Motu as well’. My knowledge of Police Motu was and remains basic; I know enough to understand the topic of the conversation but I need to have it translated for me to get the details. If my knowledge of Kerewo permitted me a higher degree of freedom and autonomy in my interactions in the villages, Kerewo networks are obviously not confined to Kerewo speakers. Especially within the United Church, successor to the London Missionary Society, and widespread among Porome, Kibiri, and Kairi speakers as well as Kerewo, Police Motu was often the shared language of interaction among these groups, or with Roy Rohoro (the superintendent minister of the United Church Aird Hill circuit) and the occasional visitors from the United Church representative of Gulf and Central provinces.¹⁸⁸ The good will of my hosts helped me to navigate those conversations.

Despite full immersion in the language, I benefited from Ranghy Joseph’s assistance when transcribing the texts recorded. Ranghy kindly relocated temporarily from Samoa village to Kikori town, so that the transcription work could be done at the CDI facility, where power was available at least at night. Ranghy and I spent several night hours each night on transcription and translation, and in daylight hours – to the extent that the laptop battery permitted – it was often the case that others would visit and join in our work. While residing in the villages, I did not hire any assistant. The multi-sited nature of my fieldwork did not allow me a ready assessment of the village politics surrounding my presence; hence I largely let such politics play out while I navigated personal sympathies, competence and practical constraints as I went. Often people who were not immediately allied to me when I first came, helped me to

¹⁸⁸ See below, Chapters 4 and 7, *passim*.

understand contingent situations – like relations among the parties involved – and to confirm or adjust my linguistic understanding of what was said. Inevitably, my host families in each village were my primary teachers both of language and kinship relations.

The ethnographer as sign

My own personal character and abilities (or lack thereof) were obviously mediated by my physicality as a white male. Much has been written on the privileged position of the researcher deriving from these two characteristics; a critique I espouse up to a certain point, as I often see it lacking the notion of class. My Kerewo hosts partly drawing comparison with the different research practices adopted by the social scientists who conducted the social mappings for the extractive company, soon incorporated me into the category of sumatin (Tok Pisin for ‘student’) thus identifying me as a person who did need social support to complete his study.¹⁸⁹ Here I have no desire to embark in a discussion of identity politics (which can hardly avoid sounding self-apologetic). I will discuss instead my skin colour and gender as heuristic media as I experienced in the field. After all, as Herzfeld insisted ‘Any ethnographer is an “active sign” in the ethnographic encounter’; hence the following attempt ‘to make sense of how [my] informants make sense of [me]’.¹⁹⁰

As insightfully shown by anthropologist Ira Bashkow, the Papua New Guinea notion of waitman (white man) is inflected by moral ambiguities.¹⁹¹ The ‘white’ side of the coin is constituted by ideas of freedom of movement and from relations, to intrinsic qualities of food with the morality and sociality entailed in the process of production of it; the ‘black’ side of the same coin is no less moral and, sometimes, desirable. Often I was told how ‘you white people’ enjoy freedom: the State takes care of us and we, supposedly, do not have to look after our kin. Yet, when the conversations steered toward life in Kikori town or Port Moresby, the same notion of ‘freedom’ was connected to the village. In the city everything has to be bought with money, in the village everything is within reach. The very relations that are sometimes seen as a constraint, on other occasions are recognised as the safety net that permits you to go through hard times. It is this profound ambiguity between desire to be modern (like the

¹⁸⁹ I have recently presented a paper in which I discuss this issue at some length; Dario Di Rosa, ‘Gestire l’eredità dell’antropologia applicata in un contesto di sviluppo: Alcune riflessioni dal campo (Kikori, Papua Nuova Guinea)’ (V Convegno Nazionale SIAA, Catania, 2017).

¹⁹⁰ Quotes are respectively from Michael Herzfeld, ‘Looking Both Ways: The Ethnographer in the Text’, *Semiotica* 46, no. 2/4 (1983): 158, 153; the latter quote is slightly modified.

¹⁹¹ Ira Bashkow, *The Meaning of Whitemen: Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

white people) and the necessity to rest upon close social relations to survive that I try to capture with the notion of ‘frustrated modernity’.

Whatever changes were brought about in colonial times are *bohoboho oubi nara* (white peoples’ things), including Christianity, now a central part of many Kerewo lives. From the several conversations I had with friends and interlocutors, I could not see any attempt, now or in the past, to indigenise Christian characters, inverting the received racial categories as in other cases in Melanesia.¹⁹² Some Kerewo friends recognise similarities between the cultural hero Hido and Jesus Christ, but there was no further elaboration; the two were part of distinct realms. Faiva Eu’u, pastor of Samoa village, once explained to me that Christianity travelled around the globe for centuries before landing last in Papua New Guinea. In his understanding it is the waitman’s longer familiarity with Christianity that enables the West to enjoy a full modernity. The exogenous origins of this religion were never in question. Another example was a long and stimulating chat I had with Tom Tasimale, a pastor of the Revival Church at Samoa village. In an extraordinarily perceptive comment he told me that he was curious about my work among them. I came to learn their language and way of life much like they learned English and the principles of Christian life: ‘The Christian God is not our God; it is the God of you Hebrews. We were Gentiles’.

Another common assumption attached to me being white was my nationality; the first guess was that I was Australian. Alternatively, my disposition to eat any kind of food, willingness to engage in daily and often tiring activities, and consuming betel nuts were often remarked as a difference between Italians and Australians. During the construction of the pipeline, contracted to the French company SPIEGAPAC, many Kikorians interacted with French nationals, and the proximity of their country and my own, and the linguistic similarities, reinforced the vision that some Europeans were better disposed to mingle with Papua New Guineans than Australians have been. Furthermore, on the occasions when I was asked about my ples (village, but by extension place of origin), I compared Sicilian folk beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery with Kerewo *givari* (sorcery), told stories of women spirits I heard from my grandmother that resonated with Kerewo *nania* (spirits inhabiting certain places), and once I also recounted the Iliad in a mix of Tok Pisin and Kerewo when I was asked to tell a story. The usual reaction was amusement for white people having ‘culture/custom’ as the listeners understood their system of knowledge. Nevertheless, if my persona embodied an awkward version of what waitman are, the emic racial distinction of the embodiment of modernity was not touched on. Remarks on my persona, even as mere contrast to the ideal-type of waitman, have been a source of understanding of what is meant locally by ‘modernity’.

¹⁹² Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy*.

Lastly, I want to briefly talk about my gender and marital status. I arrived in the field when I was in a relationship back home. I was not married, thus instead of being called *dubu* (married man), I was half-jokingly addressed as *awo ohio* (big bachelor). Distance, stress, and poor communication ended my relationship, and this was an occasion to talk with some Kerewo friends about what I was going through. Soon enough, by means of jokes of a sexual nature, I began to discover more intimate gender dynamics (obviously biased by our shared maleness), and I started to notice that in a way or another I came to be perceived as sexually available. More than once I was given notice that the then Prime Minister O'Neill was half German, and if I married a Kerewo girl our progeny could have the same destiny. There were circumstances when my sudden change of status created uncomfortable situations for me.¹⁹³

Lawrence Hammar's work on HIV and the political economy of sex at Daru (Western Province, PNG), conducted in particular with migrants Bamu women, has been an excellent stimulus to thinking about my own experiences at Kikori.¹⁹⁴ Hammar, reflecting on the sexual drive of the ethnographer, suggests talking to sexual workers in terms of kinship such as sisters or mothers to decrease the tension.¹⁹⁵ I adopted a similar strategy. At Samoa, the first village where I did fieldwork, I was adopted in two *gu* (clan): Karuramio Arumi and Neboru. I lived with a family of the Karuramio Arumi *gu* who, for several reasons, aligned themselves with Neboru clan, and so I could

¹⁹³ On the heuristic value of being a potential sexual partner – as uncomfortable as this topic can be, especially for a white, male, and straight researcher – see Don Kulick and Margaret Willson, eds., *Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁹⁴ Despite the incontestable similarities, the magnitude of tensions I encountered in my fieldsite was not comparable with Lawrence Hammar's: his findings are discussed in his 'Sexual Transactions on Daru: With Some Observations on the Ethnographic Enterprise', *Research in Melanesia* 16 (1992): 21–54; 'Brothels, Bamu, and Tu Kina Bus in South Coast New Guinea: Human Rights Issues and Global Responsibilities', *Anthropology and Humanism* 21, no. 2 (1 December 1996): 140–58; 'Bad Canoes and Bafalo?: The Political Economy of Sex on Daru Island, Western Province, Papua New Guinea', *Genders* 23 (1996): 221–43; 'Sex and Political Economy in the South Fly: Daru Island, Western Province, Papua New Guinea' (PhD, City University of New York, 1996); 'Caught Between Structure and Agency: The Gender of Violence and Prostitution in Papua New Guinea', *Transforming Anthropology* 8, no. 1–2 (1999): 77–96. Part of Lawrence's Daru material is included in his broader study, Lawrence Hammar, *Sin, Sex and Stigma: A Pacific Response to HIV and AIDS* (Watange: Sean Kingston, 2010).

¹⁹⁵ Hammar, 'Sexual Transactions on Daru: With Some Observations on the Ethnographic Enterprise', 24, 44–51.

strategically swap between the two without much problem by saying, without specifying, that one was my maternal and the other my paternal clan. My *gu* affiliation was something I brought with me to each village, and I tried whenever possible to maintain residence with my clansmen as long as the situation allowed it, following the Kerewo custom to reside with clan members.¹⁹⁶ So, if I could address certain women as *nirabo* (younger sister), *mabira* (older sister), or *mamu* (mother), I could not do so with women from other clans.¹⁹⁷

This left my persona open to the potentiality of intimate relations, which I often tried to deflect, pointing out that I did not own any land, did not know how to make a canoe or a house, and I could not count on a scholarship allowing me to pay from my livelihood in the future. Yet when I was asked if I would work in the country I honestly answered that I would, and thus the possibility of me being incorporated in Kerewo communities was never completely dispelled. Once I became potentially part of a more intimate Kerewo sociality, I was told more freely of aspects of the political economy of land in connection to sexual transactions. Thus I gained insights into what the colonial sources depicted as ‘prostitution’ or ‘loose morals’; a domain I previously had no access to, despite my various strategies to elicit comment on these documents.

Despite my situated access to Kerewo women, it will be evident to the reader that my thesis betrays a heavily male perspective on history. Some women who shared their knowledge of the past with me were extremely knowledgeable, often presenting a level of detail far superior to that of the average man. Yet, the stories they told me were often those in connection to clan matters which, although they informed my understanding of Kerewo ways of historical consciousness, did not play a central role in the wider social context that gave shape to my fieldwork: the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony. Although not prevented from speaking in public events, women occupy a subaltern place within the male-dominated hierarchy of most Christian denominations. The historical knowledge and sensibility communicated to me by certain Kerewo women is present in the dissertation but remains, because of the way my argument is framed, largely implicit. This caveat, and my acknowledgement of it, is hardly sufficient to make up for such a shortcoming.

Final remarks

Far from being intended as an exercise of self-reflexivity *per se*, this chapter has sought to show how the theoretical positions I outlined in the Introduction, and which guide the

¹⁹⁶ Obviously this was not always possible, as factors such as safety and host’s prestige were also involved. I found that villagers negotiated who would host me ahead of my arrival.

¹⁹⁷ The only trans-clan terms I could safely use as forms of deference were *mamu gema* (grandmother) for women, and *dubu gema* (big/old man) or *abea gema* (big/old father) for men, according to the level of interpersonal intimacy.

following chapters, are the results of a situated encounter, both in the field and in the archives. No researcher steps into any research project free of the bias that is inherent in the conditions of production of his/her research, whether personal idiosyncrasies or the formation of the historical documents used. I cannot claim to have gone into the field entirely open to what I would find, and the very process of my research has been the fruit of several, and often difficult, negotiations with Kerewo people. Yet I treasured the advice Roy Rappaport gave to Edward LiPuma, to remain attentive to what was happening in the specific historical moment of fieldwork instead of chasing theories.¹⁹⁸ This, in my view, remains the valuable heuristic force of the ethnographic enterprise, notwithstanding recent debates over its value.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Edward LiPuma, *Encompassing Others: The Magic of Modernity in Melanesia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), xi.

¹⁹⁹ Tim Ingold, 'That's Enough about Ethnography!', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1 (2014): 383–95. See also the stimulant debate in Giovanni da Col, ed., 'Debate Collection: Two or Three Things I Love or Hate about Ethnography', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2017): 1–69.

Chapter 2

Beginnings: Space, Change, and Mythical Beings

Through the course of a long afternoon at my hosts' house at Samoa village, a steady stream of people came to look at the pictures I had brought with me in the hope of eliciting stories. I quickly lost sight of the two folders of images, as two groups formed around the individuals who were leafing through the pictures taken several decades earlier, prompting memories of stories heard from previous generations, along with plain guesswork. Over the last few days the same scene had been repeated, and my fieldnotes were full of scribbles recording all the comments that I could understand (with or without the help of an interpreter). That day I decided to pick just one set of photocopies to look at with my host Pepo in a quieter corner. I took out the copies of the maps I had found during my archival research and started to ask Pepo whether or not he recognised any of the place-names, to help me understand the social geography of the region. The map reproduced in figure 2 captured my attention, as it featured the toponym "Neuri", which by now I knew as the local name for Aird Hill, but here appears attached to a landmass far to the south of Aird Hill's location.

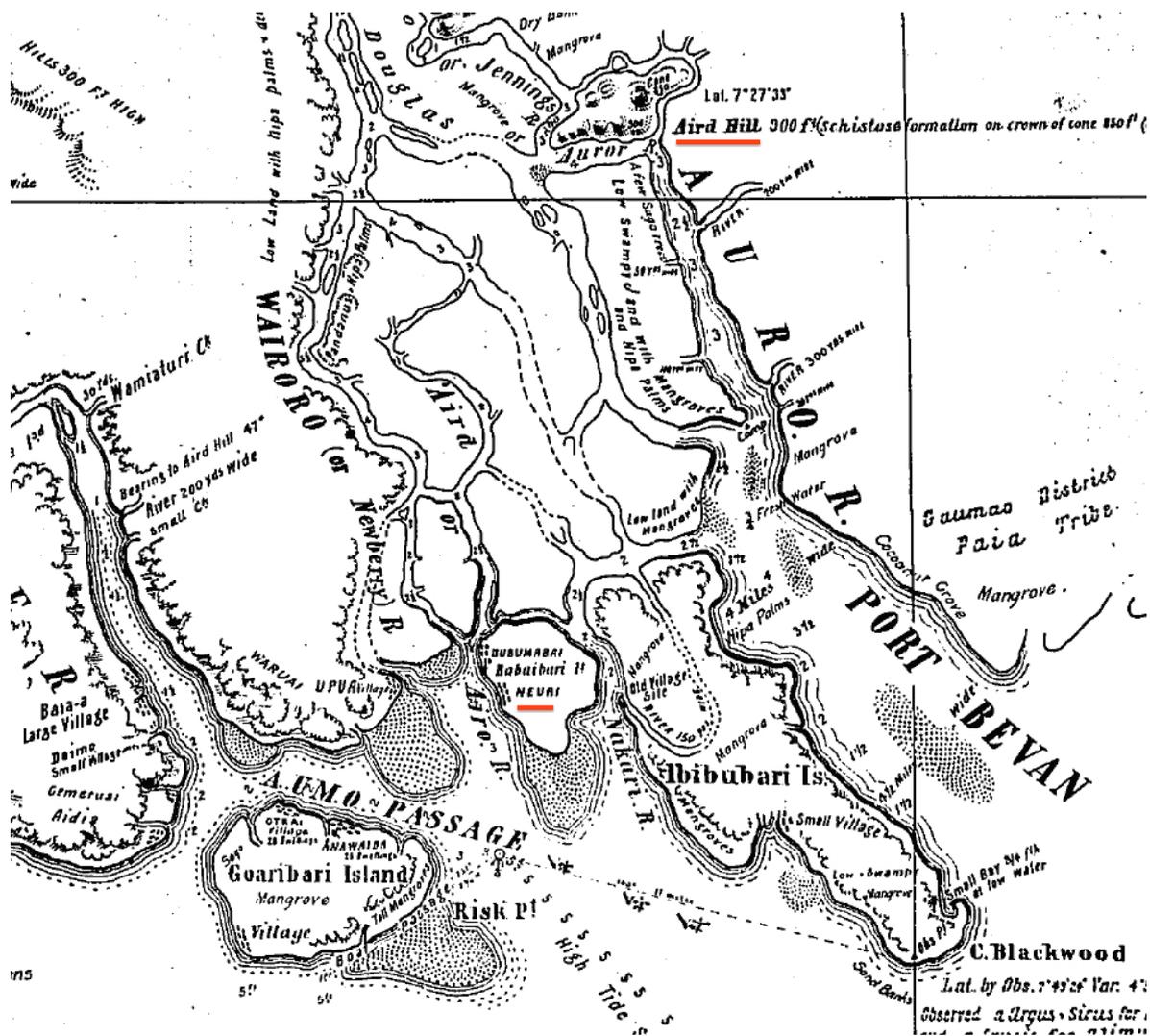


Figure 2: Particular of the map contained in *BNG Annual Report 1892*.

I expressed my puzzlement to Pepo, and he explained that during the *kidia oubi tau*, or time of creators, Neuri was a sentient being, who had ordered the mountain to its south to move away as it was blocking its view of the sea. The southern mountain, on hearing the command, moved to what is now Oro Province in northeastern Papua, where it can still be found today. I was advised never to speak Kerewo language near that mountain lest it seek revenge.

Familiar with the local cartography associated with exploration by figures such as Francis Blackwood (1845), Theodor Bevan (1886, 1887), and William McGregor (1892, 1896), I considered the changing shape of rivers and landmasses simply as the result of a cumulative and increasingly accurate knowledge of this area. What I was alerted to by Pepo and others with whom I discussed the matter was the ever-changing quality of the Kikori landscape.

Except for Aird Hill, elevated 200 metres above the surrounding plain, the landscape of the Kikori delta appears entirely flat, with few areas higher than 30 metres above sea level. Mangroves and nipa palms, with their dark colours, cover the littoral areas of the intricate labyrinth of streams that unravel as the river proceeds toward the sea. The tide, with its 12-hour cycle, temporally structures everyday activities as large areas of muddy land get flooded or channels dry up, preventing the passage of canoes. The tide is also connected to the currents, a great aid or obstacle to navigation depending on whether or not the canoe's occupants are paddling with or against the flow. It is no coincidence that, in Kerewo language, verbs of movement usually index directionality in terms of upstream or downstream movement.²⁰⁰

As explained in technical detail by Australian botanist Alexander Floyd, the horizontal roots of the local vegetation, which have to adapt to the salinity of water and the regular tides that inundate large portions of land, capture the mud carried downstream by the Kikori River, forming over time new masses of soft mud.²⁰¹ Contrary to what Simon Harrison describes for the Avatip of the Sepik River, very few of the changes in Kikori topography are due to human interaction with the environment except the clearing of small gardens and the much more significant effects of the underwater oil and gas pipelines, which have had a substantial impact on the form of riverbanks along their course.

During my fieldwork I frequently travelled on canoes with my hosts, either to see and map old sites, or for more mundane activities such as fishing and processing sago at the *kombati* (bush camps). It was during these trips that I slowly learned how much of daily life is structured by the river's pulse, and how to recognise whether the tide was rising or falling. Travelling along the Kikori River and its streams I also learned that the configuration of waterways and mud-banks changed significantly over time. Certain places were irretrievably under water, while others would occasionally emerge from the water.

The changing shape of the Kikori River is echoed in many myths, some of which are shared with Kerewo neighbours, while others, such as the mythic cycle of Hido, go well beyond places ever visited by Kerewo. In this chapter I focus in particular on the character of Hido, a figure who corresponds well with the characteristics of what is known in the scholarship of religions as a 'culture hero', a demiurge whose actions shape the environment and who teaches certain groups the fundamentals of their cultural

²⁰⁰ Very much like the Avatip of the Sepik River, which is ecologically quite similar to the Kikori River, described by Simon Harrison, 'Forgetful and Memorious Landscapes', *Social Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2004): 138.

²⁰¹ Alexander Geoffrey Floyd, 'Ecology of the Tidal Forests in the Kikori-Romilly Sound Area, Gulf of Papua' (Lae: Division of Botany, Office of Forests, Department of Primary Industry, 1977), 9–22. Floyd conducted his survey in 1955.

practices. I begin my ethnography of Kerewo historical consciousness with an analysis of Hido's cycle as it provides some tools with which to glimpse fundamental ideas about change that have played out since the colonial period.

I agree with Klaus Neumann's acute critique of the political implications of starting any history of colonised people with the first encounters with Europeans, and I share with him the problem of 'finding an appropriate beginning' for Kerewo past, hence the title of this chapter.²⁰² As pointed out in the opening vignette, early European exploration of the Kikori area is an inadequate point of departure. It is not just that Kerewo oral literature and archaeological evidence extend back far behind that period, but also that the first fifty or more years of European exploration of the Kikori delta lie beyond contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness. Almost without exception, the arrival of James Chalmers is considered the first occasion in which a white person arrived in the area. Although the death of Chalmers plays a central role in contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness and the dramatic transformations it brought about are hard to overstate, change in even earlier periods is also a feature of Kerewo lore.

Hido Stories at Kikori

A World Made of Fractions

The story of Hido, as it is known to Kerewo, forms part of a much larger chain of stories that encompass an impressive geographical area, which extends from the Purari River to PNG's Western Province, and stretches southward into the Torres Strait (and possibly also into the Cape York Peninsula) and westward into Iran Jaya.²⁰³ Early

²⁰² Klaus Neumann, 'Finding An Appropriate Beginning For A History Of The Tolai Colonial Past', *Canberra Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1992): 1–19.

²⁰³ Hido is known under several names in different areas: Tito (Porome), Sido (Kiwai), Souw (Daribi), Iko (Purari). The following is a list of the early colonial scholarly texts discussing the figure of Sido (the most recurring name in the literature, as Gunnar Landtman gave us the vast majority of those texts): Edward Beardmore, 'The Natives of Mowat, Daudai, New Guinea', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 19 (1890): 456–66; Archibald E. Hunt, 'Ethnographical Notes on the Murray Islands, Torres Straits', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 28, no. 1/2 (1899): 15–17; A. C. Haddon et al., *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits: Volume 5, Sociology, Magic and Religion of the Western Islanders*, Reissue edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 28–36; A. C. Haddon et al., *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits: Volume 6, Sociology, Magic and Religion of the Eastern Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 19–23; A. C. Haddon, *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits: Volume 1, General*

scholarship looked at the ‘Papuan hero tales’, either to shed light on local beliefs or as part of a larger mythical complex illuminated and pieced together with fragments of narratives recorded in a wide geographical area.²⁰⁴

Kerewo people, as with other groups in the Kikori area, are very well aware of the wide geographical distribution of this particular ‘Papuan hero’. Scholars have stressed that Melanesian myths often extend beyond single language groups, connecting

Ethnography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 374–80, passim; Gunnar Landtman, ‘The Poetry of the Kiwai Papuans’, *Folklore* 24, no. 3 (1913): 290–95, 303–305; Gunnar Landtman, *The Folk-Tales of the Kiwai Papuans* (Finnish Society of Literature, 1917), 18–20, 95–124; Gunnar Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea: A Nature-Born Instance of Rousseau’s Ideal Community* (Macmillan, 1927), 73–74, 284–91, 432–34; Francis Edgar Williams, *The Natives of the Purari Delta*, Anthropology (Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea); Report No. 5. (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1924), 248–55; Leo. Austen, ‘Legends of Hido’, *Oceania* 2, no. 4 (1932): 468–75; Jan van Baal and Jan Verschueren, *Dema. Description and Analysis of Marind-Anim Culture (South New Guinea)* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 267–73, 471–95. Riesenfeld’s text provides a summary of most of these stories to corroborate his questionable thesis; see Alphonse Riesenfeld, *The Megalithic Culture of Melanesia* (Brill Archive, 1950). Paul Wirz states that ‘The Sido Myth, which is so well known along the whole South coast, seems here [Daua, Torres Strait] unknown’, ‘Legend of the Dauan Islanders (Torres Straits)’, *Folklore* 43, no. 3 (1932): 286. See also Roy Wagner, ‘Mysteries of Origin: Early Traders and Heroes in the Trans-Fly’, in *Plumes of Paradise: Trade Cycles in Outer Southeast Asia and Their Impact on New Guinea and Nearby Islands Until 1920*, ed. Pamela Swadling (Coorparoo DC, Queensland Australia: Papua New Guinea National Museum, 1997), 285–98; Billai Laba, ‘Oral Traditions About Early Trade by Indonesians in Southwest Papua New Guinea’, in *Plumes of Paradise: Trade Cycles in Outer Southeast Asia and Their Impact on New Guinea and Nearby Islands Until 1920*, ed. Pamela Swadling (Coorparoo DC, Queensland Australia: Papua New Guinea National Museum, 1997), 299–307.

For a unitary treatment of the relevant literature see Alan Rumsey, ‘Introduction’, in *Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative, and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. Alan Rumsey and Weiner, James F. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 1–18.

A treatment of the Sido myth in connection to a specific social ideology can be found in Roy Wagner, *The Curse of Souw: Principles of Daribi Clan Definition and Alliance in New Guinea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 38–41; Roy Wagner, *Habu: The Innovation of Meaning in Daribi Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 19–37; 107–9.

²⁰⁴ As Roy Wagner aptly noted, the fragmented corpus of texts on Hido’s wanderings, taken as a whole and regardless of local specificities, ‘represents anything but an irregular sampling, geographically as well as textually, of the total complex’ Wagner, *Habu*, 19.

those groups and usually charting the relations among them.²⁰⁵ Specific episodes of the cycle of Hido pertain to specific localities, often leaving marks on the physical landscape. The groups inhabiting each locale know the story pertaining to their area and are well aware that other groups hold knowledge relating to different episodes of Hido's journey. This means that the stories about Hido I collected somehow begin in mid-stream, making it an apparently paradoxical beginning. As Italo Calvino has argued, any story intrinsically presupposes something outside the text, thus each beginning is already connected to the world both of the readers and to the fictional world as well:

how to establish the exact moment in which a story begins? *Everything has already begun before*, the first line of the first page of every novel refers to something that *has already happened outside the book*. Or else the real story is the one that begins ten or a hundred pages further on, and everything that precedes it is only a prologue.²⁰⁶

Calvino's insight is best exemplified by the version – recorded in vernacular Kerewo – of the story of Hido from an elder of Babaguna village, Garai Apai; the only version I encountered that tells how Hido and his wife arrived in the Kikori area:²⁰⁷

I start from here and finish at Otoia. Ok, here Hiura is on the top of a *nabea* [a type of tree]. His husband Hido goes. He looked at the reflected image in the water and said

“Oh Hiura, my wife!”

²⁰⁵ On the mythical cycle of the culture hero Kilibob in North-East New Guinea see Alice Pomponio, David R. Counts, and Thomas G. Harding, eds., ‘Children of Kilibob: Creation, Cosmos, and Culture in Northeast New Guinea (Special Issue)’, *Pacific Studies* 17, no. 4 (1994). Groups residing in the New Guinea Highlands fringe seem to be connected by ritual, mythical, and trading links, as argued by Aletta Biersack, ‘Introduction: The Huli, Duna, and Ipili Peoples Yesterday and Today’, in *Papuan Borderlands: Huli, Duna, and Ipili Perspectives on the Papua New Guinea Highlands*, ed. Aletta Biersack (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 8-23; 43-44. More generally I find Simon Harrison's argument about the ritual connectedness of many Melanesian groups particularly convincing: ‘The Commerce of Cultures in Melanesia’, *Man* 28, no. 1 (1993): 139–58. Edvard Hviding provides a good overview of Hocart's regional perspective in his study of New Georgia that draws upon the system of beliefs spreading across several islands; see his ‘Across the New Georgia Group: A.M. Fieldwork as Inter-Islands Practice’.

²⁰⁶ Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 153.

²⁰⁷ A similar episode is reported in Austen, ‘Legends of Hido’, 472–73.

“I’m here! Do you have the axe? Cut!”

So he started to cut, on and on, until it [the trunk] wears thin. Then he cut the tree from the other side, and it fell at Aird Hill.

For Kerewo, as in other Papua New Guinean cosmologies, the world was a given; there is no story of the genesis of the world, other than the version found in the Bible.²⁰⁸ The world has always existed but its current form has been produced through the actions of creators, *kidia oubi* (lit. people who create). Hido is only one of the *kidia oubi*, probably the most famous as his deeds are widely known in the Kikori area, although the ownership of the stories is often contested – for example those associated with Aird Hill/*Neuri Akabu* (Mount Neuri) are claimed by the neighbouring Porome people.²⁰⁹ Despite the claim of ownership by their Porome neighbours, the episode of Hido’s cycle that took place at Aird Hill is one of the best known by my Kerewo interlocutors. Garai of Babaguna village provides one version:

The woman [Hiura] got down at this place, in Aibaru’s *daimo* [house].
Aibaru asked her “What’s the matter with you?”

‘My husband cut this *nabea* [tree] and here I am”

“Come, come, come up here to me”.

The husband [Hido] pushed the canoe down to the Nabeo River. He went inside the Momiro Turi [a creek].

All men told Aibaru “Oh, Hido is coming”

“Let him come, he is a friend”.

[Aibaru] did not use to go around much, he just sat. His stomach was huge, not little, very big, due to the sitting. [...].

[Hido] He went up [and Aibaru said] “Come, come”. He [Hido] put the bow on top of the shelter, and his paddle. He [Aibaru] put the *baugo*²¹⁰ and said “sit next to me”

[Hido] “What’s up between the two of you?” said to his wife. [...]

[Hido] “I came to find her”

[Aibaru] “The woman is with me”. [...]

²⁰⁸ On the world as given in Papuan cosmologies see: Alice Pomponio, ‘Namor’s Odyssey: Mythical, Metaphors and History in Siassi’, *Pacific Studies* 17, no. 4 (1994): 64.

²⁰⁹ Among Porome Hido is known under the name of Tito and a version of this story was collected by the Swiss anthropologist Alain Monnier in 1985; see Alain Monnier ‘Mythes Porome’ (unpublished manuscript) M.1.2/4 (Archives of the Graduate Institute, Geneva). On the relations between Kerewo and Porome at Aird Hill see Chapter 4.

²¹⁰ Mat made out of black palm bark; also used to make *kurua* where the sago is collected when it’s “washed”.

Everyone went to sleep and next morning the *taepe*²¹¹ fell down [from the house].

[Hido] “Oh I’ll go down and get it”, and so he went, looked up and saw his [Aibaru] ass. He did not defecate. He [Hido] shot him in the ass and catfish [*amai amai*], barramundi [*gidobu*], all kinds of fish poured out, reaching the river, when he pierced him with the *taepe* and twisted it. Fishes jumped in this river and but spread. His [Aibaru] stomach reduced drastically: “Friend, what were you thinking? My tummy became tiny”.

In this segment of the narrative, Hido freed the fish that nowadays populate the Kikori River, providing the most common source of proteins. As the story goes on, other dangerous animals are generated and literally unleashed on the inhabited world.

Next morning the two of them [Aibaru and Hiura] reached an agreement. So he [Aibaru] sent them [Hido and Hiura] down. Everyone warned “Hey, Aibaru, he is a sorcerer!”

[Hiura] “Hey, my grass-skirt [*wapa*]! I left it on the verandah.” [...] His wife went up. [Aibaru] “what do you want?” the big man was standing, stopping her, blocking Hiura in the house.

[Hido] waited on and on, “The Momiro [creek] is dry now, how is it possible?”²¹² First he called a crocodile. When the crocodile bit him, its teeth broke. He put the teeth back. “Try to get me again!” and he jumped in the water. “Like this!”. He sent him [the crocodile] “Go and get the people of the village”. He called the bees, honeybees, and whatever, snakes, how many... he called them all. He called the mosquitoes, “you can stay and bite men”. [Hido, talking to himself] “How long? The creek is dry!” He pissed for a long time [suggesting that the water levels then rose again].

The theme of adultery is a common one in Papuan myths, and clearly prescribes ideal marital relations through negative example.²¹³ Nevertheless I want to linger on Hido’s qualities as *kidia dubu* (creator; culture hero). Hido’s creative capacities entail

²¹¹ Bone that was used, so I was told, to dig out from a container the lime to chew with betel nuts.

²¹² Tides mark the passage of time. Implicit in this sentence is the fact that when Hido reached Momiro creek, the level of water was high enough to put the canoe in and leave, but several hours passed while Hiura was absent.

²¹³ The most complete appreciation of narrative motifs in Papua New Guinea is John D. LeRoy, *Fabricated World: An Interpretation of Kewa Tales* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

the ability to evoke, mould, and express what the world contains *in potential* (as possibility).

The physical environment is also shaped by the hero's actions. Hido's own body creates marks in the landscape. For example, when Hido, suspicious of Hiura's cheating, climbed the hill to fight with Aibaru, Hido was killed by Aibaru's *niama* (younger brother) Kobai. Hido's body was rolled downhill, and the cleavage in the rock formation created by the hero's enormous body is still visible today.²¹⁴ In one version of the story, as the tide rose and Hido woke up, he took a lice (*nimo*) and threw it, forming an island called Nimo Ura in the middle of Momiro Turi (Momiro River).

The physical landscape was not the only creative act of Hido; he also taught people important features of Kerewo ceremonial life. From Aird Hill, Hido's body floated along Nabeo Turi (Nabeo river) and reached Aveoa, the place of origin of the Vera people.²¹⁵ This is an important section of the story, as Hido's deeds are foundational to many of the ceremonial practices that were performed before Christian evangelisation of the area. The following story was told by Ahi Auma at Babaguna village:

Ok, they threw him into the water. He changed into a small baby. The water/current took him downstream to Aveoa. He came up to Aveoa. Waime [a man] was fishing with the *geve*.²¹⁶ He caught him [Hido] inside the *geve* "My son" he said. His two wives were childless, Ohau and Oumo, stuck facing opposite directions [Siamese twins, joined by the back].²¹⁷ He took him, carried him up, put him on top of the *tor*²¹⁸ and lighted fire. He was in the fire, and screamed. He woke up. He boiled

²¹⁴ The spot is near where the Borneo Company had its operation at Aird Hill in the 1950s.

²¹⁵ Vera people speak a language of the same Kiwaian phylum as Kerewo. From a Kerewo-centric perspective, Vera people became assimilated to Kerewo through intermarriage, and they figure preeminently among the population making up the old villages of Ubuo and Babai nowadays mostly resident at Apeawa village and Kikori town. This Kerewo-centric view was challenged, especially in Kikori town, by some Vera interlocutors who gave me examples of how the two languages differ, and told me the origin story of their 'tribe' (term entered in the common use). The connection between Kerewo and Vera is also expressed in the myth of Ekai, the snake-man who brought fire to Otoia.

²¹⁶ Fish trap.

²¹⁷ The two names are the past tense of the two verbs *kohau* (to come out) and *koumo* (to go inside). Their very names index the polarity of movement that the women's condition as Siamese twins.

²¹⁸ Shelter above the fireplace

hot water with leaves of *wabare*²¹⁹. He boiled hot water and washed him thoroughly. He changed into a man.

Wahime's hands were like those of a turtle, double fingers. This time he looked at his father Wahime "Oh, your hand is bad. When you beat the drum [the sound] isn't good. Bring them here". He took the *kemehe*²²⁰ and cut his hands making the fingers, splitting. He made the fingers like this. Also the feet, he made the fingers. Before his fingers were like a turtle. Hands and feet.

[...]

[He] went to Iha[da]²²¹. He looked "Hey a big dance is coming up". When they danced they danced with *savai* [saw, of the saw fish], *maivo savai*. They didn't have the *tubuka* (head-dress), they danced with the *maivo savai*.²²² When he saw this [he said] "Hey, blood is coming out from the back of the head. Oh they dance with *maivo sava*". He went back and collected birds' feathers, and joined two of them together. Our ancestors danced with these two. He made them very well; enough for each one of them. He put them in the *hobo* (mat) and went on the other side the next night, to the Iha[da] people. They were dancing there; when they were getting ready he took them out and put them on them. It was nice. He took the *maivo savai* off, he did well. All danced now, till twilight. [He said] "It's very good". From there he went to U'uo.

Not only did Hido undergo a process of rebirth himself, but he also modified peoples' body parts so as to be more suitable for playing the drums used in ceremonial occasions. Furthermore, Hido substituted the uncomfortable and potentially harmful fish bones with the softer feathers used today as decoration (*bilas*). Hido, as *kidia dubu*, is the source of the knowledge for certain rituals that used to be practiced in the *dubu daimo* (long-house), but it is important to stress that what he introduces is a change. What I find compelling about this segment of Hido's story is that the change being introduced is better understood as a change from a rougher way of living to a more comfortable one; a reading corroborated by Peter Lawrence's insight about the materialistic and anthropocentric nature of Papuan myths which account, among other things, for material comfort and wealth.²²³ As I discuss in more detail below, this feature

²¹⁹ Aromatic tree. Almost certainly jasmine.

²²⁰ Sword.

²²¹ Eraro Baiara, my host at Apeawa village, was present at the transcription of this recording, and commented that it was the name of a village.

²²² *Tubuka* is Motu; *pore* is the Kerewo term. The two feathers put on top of the head when dancing, which moved with the body's movement.

²²³ Peter Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo: A Study of the Cargo Movement in the Southern Madang District, New Guinea* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), 9, *passim*. On the theme of material comfort as expressed in Papuan myths, see William R. Thurston, 'The

is important for the ways in which change in the colonial period is understood and presented in contemporary Kerewo groups.

At Aveoa, Hido was also responsible for the appearance of two important food stocks, sago grubs (*one*) and coconuts (*gota*). In the first episode we find again Hido's capacity for intervening in the composition of human bodies, while in the second we glimpse once more his relation – in the form of knowledge – with the animal world. Continuing with Ahi's narrative:

He looked at his two mothers; they were stuck together. One mother came out... the other mother went to the toilet and the other followed her. They used to do it in this way. When the child saw this he said "Wait wait, you two come back". The two of them stood up. With *kemehe* he separated them. He grabbed what held them together. Before they went to beat sago, sago's head didn't have *one* (sago grub). He put them inside the sago's head. From here the *one* started to exist, from this thing that joined the two [women]. He put the *one* in the sago, and now they are there.

[...]

He was going around the beach, and a *mukuru* (puffer fish) came. He shot the *mukuru* and took it up "What is this?", he threw it on the shore. From there he walked away, and went back. He sat only for a short time "Ehi, this thing I threw is here. What is this thing? It has a big egg". He carried it up. When he asked, he took the skin off, and broke it "It's water!" Water was falling down. "It's meat". He scraped the meat, and then lined the objects up. He called all the birds, and they all came. The birds ate it; a bird ate and ran away, without singing. It went on like this. A *ga* (parrot) screamed "koka! Koka! Koka!" "Oh, it's a coconut", He called it *gota* (coconut) "I planted it already, this coconut." Hido planted this coconut at Aveoa.

Considered from a symbolic perspective and through comparison with other myths found in the Kikori area (not always pertaining to Kerewo lore), both *one* (sago grubs) and *gota* (coconut) have symbolic associations with death, life, and female fertility. To conduct this kind of analysis would divert from the main purpose of this chapter, but it is important to stress Hido's relation with death and the afterlife.

Among Kerewo people of middle age it is common knowledge that Hido founded Dudi, the village of the dead – vaguely located west of Kikori, near the Fly River – where the soul of the deceased travelled to and resided. The details of the story are seldom recounted, either because they are really unknown or because it is considered someone else's right to tell this story. As Ahi said,

Legend of Titikolo: An Anêm Genesis', *Pacific Studies* 17, no. 4 (1994): 183, 200. For a theoretical and ethnographic engagement with Lawrence's thesis about Papuan mythologies see Pomponio, Counts, and Harding, 'Children of Kilibob: Creation, Cosmos, and Culture in Northeast New Guinea (Special Issue)'.

He [Hido] went to U'uo [somewhere to the west] and heard the sound of his father's drum. At U'uo he was killed. His graveyard is at U'uo. I won't tell the story; people at Daru will tell this story. Daru people and Gogodala people will tell the story about his [Hido's] wanderings, as they know it. It [the story] is going to go to West Irian [Irian Jaya].

Dudi is accessible only by drinking the water contained in a coconut from a tree standing at its entrance, which causes the sentient soul to forget about the world of the living. It is important to note that Dudi is a physical place in the world's geography; a world that is shaped by and shapes the world inhabited by the living.

The Place of *Kidia Oubi* Today

Stories also draw connections with the unprecedented. As observed by Mark Busse and Michael Wood, wandering heroes in southern lowland New Guinea area did – and in some cases continue to – perform a crucial role in the local understanding of socio-economic inequality, by knitting their locale together with a wider geography through stories.²²⁴

The connection to sources of wealth such as Australia or 'America' (USA) is not the only one possible. The presence of an extractive industry since the 1990s has reshaped Kikori social geography along new lines marked by the routes of the oil and gas pipelines. The Lake Kutubu area has been a central node for oil extraction operations since the mid-1980s and, over time, the camp at Moro (Southern Highlands Province) has become something of a citadel of the ExxonMobil Company.²²⁵ The core of this citadel is the plant with its facilities, and the small airport that serves the Papua New Guinean and expatriate labour force.²²⁶ The dark ash brown colour of the mud where the market and a store are situated contrasts with the dusty white unpaved roads surrounding the airport where the NGOs and other facilities have their offices and camps.

²²⁴ Busse, 'Wandering Hero Stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea'; Michael Wood, 'Mesede and the Limits of Reciprocity in Fieldwork at Kamusi, Western Province, Papua New Guinea', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (2013): 126–35.

²²⁵ For a history of petroleum operation in the Kutubu area up to the beginning of the 1990s, see Frank Rickwood, *The Kutubu Discovery: Papua New Guinea, Its People, the Country and the Exploration and Discovery of Oil* (Glenroy: F. Rickwood, 1992).

²²⁶ At the time of my fieldwork, the airport also served twice-weekly commercial flights, but helicopters and hired flights that connect Moro to other Exxon camps and major Papua New Guinea airports constitute the majority of the air traffic.

The Kutubu area, now flooded by migrants from all over Papua New Guinea and expatriates of various origins, is the territory of Foe and Fasu people who have been recognised as landowners and are thus entitled to receive royalties and compensation from the extractive activities. The groups inhabiting the Kutubu area had trading relations, especially of the valued pearlshell, with the Kikori area through the mediation of people residing along the Mubi River (at the border between Southern Highlands and Gulf provinces), as attested by a story collected by the Government Anthropologist Francis Williams.²²⁷ Separated by some 500 kilometres and several human groups from the Foe and Fasu, Kerewo people had no direct links with them, but all three groups have now entered the same bureaucratic world of recognition as landowners, and the two areas are connected by the pipeline. Moro has become a site to which some Kerewo leaders, along with other representatives of the several Kikorian groups involved in the oil and gas project, travel to discuss issues associated with the company's activities, access the services of the Bank of South Pacific, and occasionally travel to Port Moresby.

Among the Kerewo leaders who visited Moro was Wahega Katue, who at the time of my stay at Kikori was the *kaunsel* (elected local-government councillor) for the ward comprising the villages of Bisi and Babaguna. As discussed in Chapter 5, both villages are part of a relatively recent resettlement program that began in the late colonial period. Babaguna village is the result of the settlement of many Kerewo clans originating from several villages, including Aimahe village.²²⁸ According to the origin stories I collected, this village was established by Manu, a *kidia dubu* related to Kairi migrants (Manu Kairi), who was subsequently joined by Kerewo migrants coming from Otoia.

I spent some time at the *kombati* (bush camps) between Ubuo and Aimahe with my Babaguna hosts. I expressed a desire to see the old site where Aimahe village once stood and, during the trip along the labyrinth of channels, the sites of Manu's *nania nara* (spiritual objects, plants, or animals residing in the ground or underwater) were pointed out to me, and I was told that each *nania* (spirit) was connected to a specific episode of Manu's journey. That evening, after our return and after demanding tea overloaded with sugar to be prepared for them, Wahega and some of his kinsfolk came to the bush-house where I was hosted. We sat for a recording session about Manu's travels and a few lines of a song that belonged to this cycle. My storytellers were very much aware of the digital recorder, and asked me several times to turn it off while they discussed the episodes to tell me. Once our recording session was considered over, Wahega told me that he would not tell me the whole story of Manu, or at least would not allow me to

²²⁷ Francis Edgar Williams, *Natives of Lake Kutubu, Papua* (Sydney: Australian Research Council, 1941), 146–47.

²²⁸ The other villages are Ubuo, Ai'idio, Dopima, and Goro.

record it. His rationale for this choice was as follows: due to his political status of ward counsellor and his involvement with the PNG LNG Project he had travelled to Moro, where he learned that Foe and Fasu people knew about Manu and there is a village named after him. Wahega claimed he had this confirmed by an anthropologist involved in the social mapping exercise for the company, who knew the Kutubu area well.²²⁹ Another proof of the connection between the two areas noted by Wahega was the similarity between the drums used by Kerewo and those at Kutubu, with their characteristic ‘fish mouth’ shape (see figure 3). Wahega made it clear that he feared that if people from Lake Kutubu knew about the connections between them and Aimahe, a knowledge that I could validate and spread through my ‘book’, they would claim benefits from development activities that might take place in the future at Aimahe.



Figure 3: Kerewo traditional drum (picture by the author).

²²⁹ Thanks to the assistance of the NGO CDI, where I made valuable friends, I travelled often between Kikori and Moro, and spent days at the Moro market chatting with people while smoking cigarettes and chewing betelnut. Once I heard Wahega’s claim, I enquired about the existence of Manu and the possible connection with the ancestor of the Manu Kairi people. While the Manu story was unknown (to the best of my very limited knowledge), there is a village called Mano.

This example illustrates the lively politics of the past, which creates ties with distant groups (who are now connected both by stories and by the PNG LNG Project), and the urgent need for distinct identities with which to navigate the intricate political economy of development. It is the practice of telling the past that activates or soothes the potentiality for connections implicit in the narrative cycles of wandering heroes so prominent in this part of Papua New Guinea. As I have argued on the basis of Calvino's insight, this is a prerogative of narratives. They contain the possibility of extra-textual connections, forged or concealed in the practice of history. This characteristic, as will be evident in the examples discussed in the next chapters, is a characteristic of historical consciousness, as a modality drawn on to articulate and contest the existing socio-economic order and the web of relations that constitute it.

Hido's Place in Contemporary Kikori

The myth of Hido also accounts for ethnic differentiation. In a manuscript account of this mythical cycle, the missionary Benjamin Butcher reports that some time after the incident with Aibaru, Hido made the coastal people tall and those upstream in the delta short: 'They are the tall people HIDO MERE [sons of Hido] and all the short folk are AIBARO OUBI [Aibaru's people]'.²³⁰ In his voyage Hido 'took the Kerewa people as his own and made them a good people' and so too with Vera people near Cape Blackwood.²³¹ I heard this version only once during my fieldwork, and it does not seem to constitute as significant a source of differentiation with neighbouring groups as other features – for example the traditional ways of beating and washing sago; what Theodore Schwartz would call 'cultural totemism'.²³² Another small hint is contained in Butcher's text; the fact that all of Hido's people are 'brown', thus suggesting that Butcher's interlocutors might have used the story of Hido to account for their difference with white people. Analogous cases of resorting to mythical figures to incorporate the colonial newcomers into local worlds and account for the difference in access to wealth are documented repeatedly in the literature on Papua New Guinea.²³³ However

²³⁰ Benjamin Butcher Papers, MS 1881, box 2, folder 7, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² For example Kerewo people (and myself) beat sago standing on the side of the trunk, while Poropme people would sit inside it. Kerewo women would squeeze sago with their hands, while Porome women would use their feet. See Theodore Schwartz, 'Cultural Totemism: Ethnic Identity Primitive and Modern', in *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*, ed. George A. De Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1975), 106–31.

²³³ From amongst the vast range of possible references, see Jeffrey Clark, 'Gold, Sex, and Pollution: Male Illness and Myth at Mt. Kare, Papua New Guinea', *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 4 (1993): 742–57; James F. Weiner, 'The Origin of Petroleum at Lake Kutubu', *Cultural*

suggestive, this thesis is impossible to corroborate with the material available either from archives or oral accounts, nor am I interested in reconstructing a supposedly pre-colonial worldview.²³⁴ What is important for my argument is that stories are in place that account for difference within the region and outside it. Some of them are nearly forgotten, others are better known, but – following Calvino once again²³⁵ – the problem of origin as the core of an alleged identity is a thorough misconception in a Melanesian context, while the potentiality of connections is its more relevant feature.

Another mythic detail that substantiates my reading of *kidia oubi* (creators) as bearers of potentiality is Hido's relation to death. Nowadays all the Kerewo I interacted with firmly believe in the Christian Heaven and Hell.²³⁶ Yet some episodes I witnessed during my fieldwork suggest that the imagined Christian afterlife is not dissimilar to that imagined at Dudi.

A few days after the celebration for the Centenary of the establishment of the London Missionary Society in Kikori area, some Samoa villagers belonging to the United Church had visions; among them was the late Gairi, who had been sick and recounted his near-death experience to the small audience that gathered beneath the house of the United Church pastor.²³⁷ In the vision he had experienced during his convalescence, Gairi described in ecstatic terms how a golden ladder descending from the sky took him to Heaven. Here he saw his dead relatives and, as Gairi was describing this, he touched my naked arm saying '*bohoboho tama* (white skin), *kain olsem* (like) our brother here'.²³⁸ Over and over Gairi stressed that Heaven is 'freedom', the same

Anthropology 9, no. 1 (1994): 37–57; Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy*; Andrew Lattas, 'The Underground Life of Capitalism: Space, Persons and Money in Bali (West New Britain)', in *Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative, and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. Alan Rumsey and James F. Weiner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 161–88.

²³⁴ Dan Jorgensen documents how in Ok region (West Sepik, PNG) it is the latter of the divine couple Afek and Magalim – with his ambiguity not dissimilar to Hido – who has proved more resilient in Telefol cosmology; see his 'Locating the Divine in Melanesia: An Appreciation of the Work of Kenelm Burridge', *Anthropology and Humanism* 19, no. 2 (1994): 133–35.

²³⁵ Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

²³⁶ It should be noted that Hell figures rarely in sermons and common discourses. As for the Methodists in Fiji (Matt Tomlinson pers. comm. 2016), Satan is seldom discussed among Kerewo, and on those rare occasions is either commentary on sorcery or, more humorously, on children's behaviour.

²³⁷ News of Gairi's death reached me after I left Kikori.

²³⁸ I have deliberately maintained the trilingual expression used by Gairi to emphasize how my presence shaped linguistic interactions. Most of his description, from which I have extrapolated

English word that is often used to contrast life in the village and life in town. As discussed above, village life is ‘free’²³⁹ because in order to survive you rely not on waged work, but on your own labour; nothing in the village costs money. Similarly, Heaven is ‘freedom’ because nothing had to be acquired with cash, but neither do you have to rely on the fruit of your own physical labour. The three characteristics that Antony attributed to Heaven, (1) the presence of the deceased kin, (2) the white skin of the dead, and (3) the familiar village life released from the hardship of physical labour, are all traits that were associated with Dudi.

The limited ethnographic literature on the area encompassed by the Papuan hero tales suggest that parallels between Hido and Jesus were commonly drawn, at least in the past. Anthropologist Gunnar Landtman was told by of his Kiwai interlocutors that Sido was ‘all same Jesus Christ’, while Roy Wagner was told that ‘You call him Jesus ... we call him Souw’.²⁴⁰ Although I did not encounter similar statements among Kerewo, the parallels between pre-existing myths and biblical stories and characters were drawn to my attention more than once, albeit in a more tentative manner. The first to draw this connection was Maiu Joseph, chief of the Neboru clan at Samoa village, who used to feed me short snippets about Hido, sitting on my host’s veranda in the cooling dusk after a full day of hard work on the new church. Once he remarked suggestively that ‘Hido and Jesus seems almost the same to me, they are both creators’. Unfortunately I could not pursue this insight as he soon resumed his job at the logging site near Sirebi.

During my research I actively sought to elicit local parallels between Hido and Jesus, but without success. Once I was sitting with Andy Dodobai, a prominent figure of Apeawa village in his late forties, on his house porch with the view of a calm Dau Turi (Dau River) in front of us. Andy was telling me of the importance of recording Kerewo stories, and of focusing on *kastom*, including Hido’s cycle, in addition to narratives of colonial life. Andy went on to explain to me that Hido had created Dudi,

only some fragments, was carried in Kerewo, with a shorter summary in Tok Pisin for me. That Sunday his vision was recounted during the service at the new church, as testimony of God’s blessing; this time in Motu as the audience comprised people from Ero village.

²³⁹ ‘Ples em freedom’; as I was told in Tok Pisin many a time even if the conversation was carried in Kerewo.

²⁴⁰ The two quotes are respectively from Landtman, *The Folk-Tales of the Kiwai Papuans*, 116; and Wagner, ‘Emplaced Myth’, 76. Mark Busse and Michael Wood both registered the overlapping of Jesus with a local wandering hero respectively at Lake Murray and Bamu River (Western Province, PNG); see Busse, ‘Wandering Hero Stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea’, 451–53 and Wood, ‘Mesede and the Limits of Reciprocity in Fieldwork at Kamusi, Western Province, Papua New Guinea’, 132.

the village where the dead reside, and that once, during a mortuary feast, a deceased spirit (*gabo oubi*)²⁴¹ told the onlookers through a medium that Dudi had become overpopulated, and that the dead would be coming back. Andy continued: ‘When I heard this I immediately thought of the Second Coming of Jesus’. I tried to push him further, but he replied laconically that he knew no more, and that we had to wait and see.

Hido, like Jesus, wandered through the land teaching *kastom*, and both died and were resurrected. These parallels are also drawn by some Kerewo, but only very rarely. Unsolicited accounts of the Christian Heaven closely resemble the more rarely voiced descriptions of Dudi, the village of the dead. Yet, to claim a syncretic blend of the two figures would be an over-interpretation on my part. This uncertainty recalls the debate over the coherence of Melanesian religions, either as a superimposition by ethnographers (Brunton) or as an effect of the secret nature of certain kinds of knowledge (Jullierat).²⁴² If we accept Lawrence’s notion of ritual as experiments and tools with which to master the world, then the whole problem of coherence dissolves.²⁴³ In the Kerewo case, as Andy Dodobai’s remark suggested to me, the two extra-human worlds appear to coexist without challenging each other; they are both available. The socio-cultural world that gave meaning to the figure of Hido and other *kidia oubi* suffered a significant blow with the end of the initiations that used to be held in the *dubu daimo* (long-houses); as I argue in Chapter 4, the Protestant variety of Christianity in Kikori is embedded within the very modernity Kerewo seek to achieve. Yet fragments of the pre-Christian world lie dormant, with the potential to reawaken and reanimate Kerewo social worlds in the future.

²⁴¹ *Gabo oubi* literally means ‘people that take’, and, according to the accounts I heard about them, as I did not witness any case of possession, they resemble the figure of a medium in the anthropological literature.

²⁴² The debate developed through these articles: Ron Brunton, ‘Misconstrued Order in Melanesian Religion’, *Man* 15, no. 1 (1980): 112–28; Bernard Jullierat et al., ‘Order or Disorder in Melanesian Religions?’, *Man* 15, no. 4 (1980): 732–37; Dan Jorgensen and Ragnar Johnson, ‘Order or Disorder in Melanesian Religions?’, *Man* 16, no. 3 (1981): 470–75. For an appreciation of this debate see Roy Wagner, ‘Ritual as Communication: Order, Meaning, and Secrecy in Melanesian Initiation Rites’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13 (1984): 143–55. To corroborate the argument that Melanesian religions are fragmentary in nature see also the discussion on the exchange of rituals in the north/north-east coast of Papua New Guinea by Harrison, ‘The Commerce of Cultures in Melanesia’.

²⁴³ Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*, 5, 11, *passim*.

Wandering heroes as potentiality

In order to grasp the role that the Hido cycle performed (and in places continues to perform) among coastal South New Guinea societies, it is important both to focus on the local implications of the Hido myths for social ideology and to analyse the common themes as they are distributed across a wide area. First, I want to highlight two aspects that have not been stressed enough, namely: 1) that the geographical distribution of the Hido cycle has ramifications for understanding relations with other local groups; and 2) that this implicit connectedness opens up to the possibility of making connections with what was previously unknown.

Arguing against Knauft's delineation of the south coast New Guinea culture area, which is largely based on ecological and cultural factors, anthropologist Mark Busse argues that the wandering of cultural heroes in this region should be a parameter for deciding which areas should be included.²⁴⁴ This insight finds its justification in the fact that people are well aware that their knowledge is, to use Donna Haraway's felicitous expression, 'situated'.²⁴⁵

Most Kerewo storytellers who generously shared their stories with me were well aware of the limits of their knowledge. Even if the stories best known are those relating to features of Kikori landscape, there is an awareness that Hido performed similar deeds in other places. For instance, I was always told about Hido's giant footprint at Balimo; the exact story was unknown to my interlocutors, but the physical mark on the landscape was a sufficient proof for them that Hido had passed through that area.²⁴⁶ Roy Wagner, in discussing the relationship between myths and geography, captures well how a fragmentary and situated mythical knowledge can reconcile partiality and totality:

if myth predates rather than presupposes geography as a primary vector of land knowledge, *how it got from one very distant place to another may be less important than how a single myth pulls the two places together.*²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Bruce M. Knauft, *South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Mark Busse, 'Wandering Hero Stories in the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea: Culture Areas, Comparison, and History', *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 4 (2005): 443–73.

²⁴⁵ Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

²⁴⁶ A classic study of the relation between myths and physical landscape in Papua New Guinea is Miriam Kahn, 'Stone-Faced Ancestors: The Spatial Anchoring of Myth in Wamira, Papua New Guinea', *Ethnology* 29, no. 1 (1990): 51–66.

²⁴⁷ Wagner, 'Emplaced Myth', 77 (my italics).

The cycle of Hido, as with narratives of other *kidia oubi*, contains the potential to express the connectedness between distant people and places. Connection between places is a key feature of Kerewo sociality and relation with their environment. This is particularly evident in the relation people maintain with the *o'opo* (village) of 'belonging', as opposed to the one of residence or even birth. In order to understand this feature better, it is necessary to briefly discuss local understandings of the history of migrations from the village of Otoia (or Kerewo), the place of origin for all Kerewo, to which I shall now turn.

Kerewo Spatial Sociality

In the Kikori area, several origin stories account for ethnolinguistic differentiation in the area. Pepo, my host at Samoa village and in his late twenties, remembered that his grandfather would tell how all people used to sit on top of a mountain with their backs turned towards each other, and when the mountain broke, people scattered, giving rise to the different groups. A Kibiri friend in his forties, Samuel Williams, told me a long and detailed story of a flood that washed away the people living together along the coast, and how some survivors jumped on canoes and rafts, eventually losing sight of each other. With the passage of time the descendants of those survivors, Kibiri, Porome, and Kerewo people, lost all memory of their original unity. As I discuss below, some Kerewo are certain that their ancestors came from Mount Bosavi, to the north in what is now the Southern Highlands Province. Others, instead, proclaim that their ancestors must have come from Western Province as the Kerewo and Kiwai languages are so similar to each other. Yet, despite the co-presence of several competing narratives all pointing to a common origin, the narrative cycle of Hido suggests a claim of autochtony for Kerewo people.

Hido's Role in 'Discovering' Kerewo People

Hido is said to have discovered Otoia during his last journey through Kikori. I heard this for the first time from Kenneth Korokai, a young Kerewo leader whose friendship and collaboration I enjoyed throughout my stay at Kikori, who resides at the settlement of Kekea near Kikori town, belongs to Goare village, and is also a minister of the New Apostolic Church. Returning from my scoping trip to Kikori in April 2013 I met Kenneth in Port Moresby, and we talked at length about my first impressions and how my research project was shaped by that brief visit. I shared with him my puzzlement at the fact that each village seemed to have a story of settlement, except for Otoia; what

was its origin? On this occasion he told me the following story, in Tok Pisin, while I took copious notes:²⁴⁸

Once the Biwau mountain [possibly Mt. Bosavi] broke [possibly a volcanic eruption]²⁴⁹ and the ashes covered the entire land. A piece of this mountain slid to the sea and formed Kerewo [Goaribari] Island. Men and women were underground, covered by the dust created by the rupture of the mountain. Only a woman, Wamoi, was left on the surface. [...] ²⁵⁰ At that time Otoia people were alive and were conducting a normal life inside the ground, with dances and songs. After Ekai brought Wamoi the fire, Hido reached the island. While Wamoi and Hido were sitting together, Hido heard the noises of children, the songs, and the beating of drums. He noticed a bulge in the ground similar to that of a bush fowl nest. Hido told Wamoi to dig that bulge with an *oba*²⁵¹ and used it as a shovel. From the hole she dug, Otoia men and women saw the light of the sun and came out. Hido threw a *narea*²⁵² and a *dubu daimo* (long house) came up from the ground. Hido took his paddle and threw it against the *dubu daimo*, piercing the front and the back [thus creating the two entrances characteristic of Kerewo long houses]. All the men went inside.

It is important to stress that this story is not as well known, as one would assume. It has never been easy to record stories about Hido and his journey, and I received enormous help from old Ahi Auma of Babaguna village, a person belonging to Ai'idio and who has been deacon of the United Church. As Ahi and I were recording his versions of the story of Hido, I asked him if he knew about the episode belonging to Otoia. Taken aback, but with his usual aplomb, Ahi told me that he was not aware of it, but that he knew that Kerewo people originated from Mount Bosavi. Nevertheless, curious about this story, Ahi asked me to recount it, and I sketched it in Tok Pisin to him as I was told by Kenneth. A few days after Ahi professed his ignorance about Hido's journey to Otoia he sent word for me. As I climbed the steps into Ahi's house I

²⁴⁸ On that occasion Kenneth said that he already told that story and it was already in 'the report' for the PNG LNG Project. I insisted on hearing it in his own voice, to which he agreed, but he did not want me to record it.

²⁴⁹ In another version I recorded there was an earthquake at Otoia, caused by Hido having sexual intercourse with Manu's wife (another mythical being discussed below)

²⁵⁰ In Kenneth's account, it was at this time that the snake Ekai brought the fire to Kerewo people. This story, in few variants, was told me several times, but it was connected to Vera people, the 'owners' of this narrative. I do not include this episode here as it does not concern Hido.

²⁵¹ A wooden stick sharpened used to dig the ground.

²⁵² A headband made of dog teeth worn during dances.

saw a man sitting beside Ahi, who introduced his other guest as Goma Daraubi, whose ancestors were from Otoia. We recorded Hido's stories again, this time with Goma's contribution of Hido's travails at Otoia. Ahi told me the same version of the story I had recorded before, and Goma told me how at Otoia/Kerewo Hido created the proper paraphernalia used by Kerewo people during the dances, very similar to that already included in the section on Hido's adventures at Aveoa.

Kerewo Residential Spatiality

As argued throughout this chapter, stories draw together people from distant places, creating a sense of connection and validating ownership to certain land. This quality, encoded in the cycle of Hido, is amply mirrored in Kerewo sociality and its relation to space and migrations. From Kerewo/Otoia village, many other settlements originated, composing a wide history of migrations deriving from the fission of certain clans from the same *dubu daimo* (long house) due to ecological or social pressure, and subsequent resettlement. A synthesis of these stories is provided in Table 1.

Village	Village of Origin	<i>Papa</i> (reason)	Notes
Otoia/Kerewo	-	-	Discovered by Hido
Goare*	Otoia/Kerewo	Killing of a dog	
Dopima	Otoia/Kerewo	-	Ecological pressure. Dopima's site was richer in resources
Goro	Dopima	Dispute over marrying a widow	
Aimahe	Otoia/Kerewo	Shame/embarrassment (communal life)	Settled by Manu Kairi migrants from the north, subsequently joined by Kerewo migrants
Ai'idio*	Otoia/Kerewo	Water dispute	
Kemei*	Unable to elicit	Unable to elicit	Some versions suggest that it was settled by migrants from Paibuna River, later 'absorbed' by Kerewo through intermarriage
Mubagovo	Otoia/Kerewo	Unable to elicit	
Babai	-	-	Vera people (possible migration from Kairi)
Ubuo	-	-	Subsequently joined by Kerewo
Apeawa*	Ubuo, Babai	Sorcery	
Bisi*	Utumba (via Nagoro and Moinamo)	Government services	Havamere people
Babaguna	Aimahe, Goro, Dopima, Ai'idio, Otoia/Kerewo	Government services	

Table 2: Places of origin of past and present Kerewo settlements (village names marked by an asterisk (*) are those still in existence).

Joseph B. Jukes, the naturalist who accompanied Captain Blackwood on the first historically attested European visit to Kikori area, expresses his awe at first seeing a *dubu daimo*; approaching it ‘we were struck with astonishment at this most remarkable structure’, nearly 330 feet long (circa 90 metres).²⁵³ This reaction was hardly uncommon in the early days of colonialism in the Kikori Delta, and even more impressive structures were seen.²⁵⁴ The *dubu daimo*, where married and initiated men resided, was the centre of the *o’opo*. Other structures, including the *upi daimo* (women’s room) and *ohio daimo* (boy’s room; non-initiated males), made up the rest of the settlement.²⁵⁵ The *dubu daimo*, which would formerly have had a proper name, was divided internally into sections, in which different *gu* (clan) resided.²⁵⁶ Within each of them were the ritual paraphernalia of the *gu*, including the carved boards called *agibe* that contained a spirit (*urio*) granting protection in warfare if appeased with offerings. The *dubu daimo* had two entrances, *tamu* (front) and *nupu* (rear) where the two more important clans resided, guarding the long-house from attackers. Each end of the long-house was supervised by a *pai dubu* (chief). According to those of my interlocutors who more knowledgeable on these matters, the *pai dubu* at the beginning of every morning filled the space of the

²⁵³ Joseph Beete Jukes, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyage of H.M.S. Fly...* (T. & W. Boone, 1847), 271; see 271–78 for a description of the village named in this occasion ‘Pigville’ and the objects collected inside the deserted structure. On the exploration of *H.M.S. Fly* in the Gulf of Papua see Dario Di Rosa, ‘Mediating the Imaginary and the Space of Encounter in the Papuan Gulf’, in *Brokers and Boundaries: Colonial Exploration in Indigenous Territory*, ed. Tiffany Shellam et al. (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), 141–60.

²⁵⁴ See A. C. Haddon, ‘The Agiba Cult of the Kerewa Culture’, *Man* 18 (1918): 177–79.

²⁵⁵ Haddon correctly reports that the boys’ houses were addressed was *ohiabai*, a spelling of the plural of *ohio* I would spell as *ohiobaio*; Haddon, 178. Woodward, who was a Resident Magistrate in the area, in his contribution to the *Anthropology Reports* about the ‘native’ constructions, states that women’s houses were called *moto*, which today is the Kerewo word for ‘house’; see R. A. Woodward, ‘Houses and Canoes, Delta Division’, in *Anthropology Reports (n.2)*, ed. Wallace Edwin Armstrong, *Anthropology* (Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea), 41.

²⁵⁶ Peter Metcalf’s insight that ‘rooms’ were the distinctive units of sociality in the long-houses of Borneo applies well to my understanding of how Kerewo *dubu daimo* worked; see Metcalf *The Life of the Longhouse: An Archaeology of Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23–28, 38–50, *passim*. It is not clear from the material I elicited in the field whether or not the *dubu daimo*’s own name had any relation with particular stories and mythical characters. Today these names are kept as evidence of ownership and ‘cultural connection’ to produce in support of claims over tracts of land impacted by the PNG LNG Project and other development activities.

dubu daimo with their voices, shouting commands and organising male activities, including ceremonies and preparations for war. The *dubu daimo* was an exclusively male space, where women and uninitiated boys were forbidden.

The origin stories for several Kerewo *o'opora* (pl. villages) chart a history of migrations in response to political tensions and ecological pressure. Ritual, military, and political life was centred on the *dubu daimo*, but the economic activities (sago processing, fishing, hunting) ran along the lines of kinship, and were territorially more dispersed. Frictions within the political unit of the *dubu daimo*, with consequent re-settlement of part of the population, frequently triggered fission and the creation of a satellite community (composed of kin or *gu* members) and the constitution of a new settlement.²⁵⁷ Over the years this process has led to the population of a wide area of the coastal region of Kikori delta, with villages linked by ties of kinship, where the same *gu* (especially the more numerous ones) can be found in almost every *dubu daimo*, though in different hierarchical positions within the space of the long-house.²⁵⁸ These links account for the wide participation in events such as the sharing of the flesh of a white man.²⁵⁹

As described in Chapter 4, the encounter with Protestant Christianity had a significant impact on the way in which social life was organised, in spatial terms and others. The strict gender relations of the *dubu daimo* were reconfigured into an ideally single-family *moto* (house) where husband and wife lived with their children and kin; a model of residence that was sought after at the time of my fieldwork. Christianity, alongside the bureaucratic category of the 'village' employed in colonial censuses, reoriented the social space of the *o'opo* – including the church as the centre of communal activities; hence today the word *o'opo* comes to overlap with the ideal of village life as imagined by colonial, and now post-colonial forces.²⁶⁰ Today, ideally, an untroubled village (where quarrels, theft, and sorcery do not take place) is a token of a strong Christian faith, and thus a 'proper' sociality. More than once, people remarked to me, with special reference to a particular village, that their church was weak and had no

²⁵⁷ This process closely resembles the socio-political dynamic described by anthropologist Kaj Århem for the Pirá-Paraná of Colombia, *Ethnographic Puzzles: Essays on Social Organization, Symbolism and Change* (London - New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000), 82–90.

²⁵⁸ *Gu* names such as Karuramio crosscut even linguistic boundaries; see below, 154–58.

²⁵⁹ The reference is to LMS missionaries James Chalmers and Oliver Tomkins, whose flesh had been distributed along networks of relationships centered on Dopima village, the place where they were killed. This story is fully developed in Chapter 3.

²⁶⁰ John Barker, 'Village Inventions: Historical Variations upon a Regional Theme in Uiaku, Papua New Guinea', *Oceania* 66, no. 3 (1996): 211–29. See also Stasch, 'The Category "Village" in Melanesian Social Worlds', 48–52.

grip on the population, and this explained why fights, drunken behaviour, and sorcery took place there all the time. This consistent stereotype of the unnamed village strongly suggests the extent to which village sociality is nowadays morally connoted in terms of Christian values.

To use a structuralist perspective, the human space of the *o'opo* was opposed to the *bui* (bush), where the wild – both animals and spirits – resided. Largely basing their sustenance on hunting, fishing, and the processing of sago flour, Kerewo resided in hamlets – sometimes comprised of just a single house to accommodate the members of a *gu* (clan) – called *kombati*. *Kombati* dot the Kikori landscape, a cleared small plot of land and wooden structures suddenly emerging from the thick green forest of mangroves and nipa palms. These hamlets are used as a 'base' from which to conduct fishing and sago processing expeditions, and are linked to small gardens of bananas, sugar cane, and various kinds of vegetables. The ownership of *kombati* today follows family links rather than clan membership, and is usually linked to stories of warfare and the conquest of specific plots of land.

With the resettling upriver of many Kerewo during the late colonial and post-Independence periods, either to new villages or to Kikori town, the former locations of abandoned villages – called *o'opo kori* – are also used as bases from which to forage for food. The relationship to the old sites is thus maintained, not only by the means of storytelling, but also through the practice of travelling and the use of the land (*hopu*) for sustenance activities. Stories, as elsewhere in Melanesia, are often claims to ownership.

Traditionally, as I learned from some of my most knowledgeable interlocutors, the *hopu* (land) was acquired through different kinds of transactions. These transactions included sexual intercourse between the men of the selling party with women of the buyer's party, beside the payment in traditional valuables, and the *hopu* thus acquired belonged to a particular family. Other forms of transactions, especially subsequent to a military enterprise, involved the entire *gu*. According to many interlocutors, these and other nuanced forms of what we can loosely refer to as 'property' have been obliterated by the process of social mapping and the constitution of bureaucratic categories such as the Incorporated Land Groups (ILG), triggering dynamics of clan 'entification' and internal fission that are well documented for other communities involved in the PNG LNG Project.²⁶¹ At times of royalty distribution, as I had the chance to witness, villages

²⁶¹ The concept of 'entification' has been elaborated by Thomas M. Ernst, 'Land, Stories and Resources: Discourse and Entification in Onabasulu Modernity', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 101, no. 1 (1999): 88–97. On the ideological biases of the ILG see James F. Weiner and Katie Glaskin, eds., *Customary Land Tenure & Registration in Australia and Papua New Guinea: Anthropological Perspectives*, vol. 3 (Canberra: ANU Press, 2007); James F. Weiner, 'The Incorporated What Group: Ethnographic, Economic and Ideological Perspectives on

often experienced quite traumatic internal discord due to the unequal distribution of the money received. Tensions between social units such as *o'opo* and *gu* persist, although the reasons for friction today might differ from those in the past. As Roy Wagner observed long ago, colonial agents shared with some anthropologists (including myself), the epistemic anxiety to find defined 'groups'. After several frustrating attempts to find a 'basic social unit', whether the *gu*, the *o'opo*, or something else, I eventually realised to what extent Wagner's insight that differentiation is contextual and fluid is by no means confined to the New Guinea Highlands.²⁶²

Speaking of residential space among Korowai people (Papua, Indonesia), and the tensions between contrasting values centred on the village, Stasch captures well what for Kerewo is expressed through the relation between *o'opo* and *kombati*:

The village is a vivid ideal image of what society is, even when it is impossible to live in and stands empty; the "bush" is also in its way a utopia but an incomplete life; and moving between two spaces is a concrete way people fashion a life oriented to plural, contradictory, and mutually implicated values.²⁶³

To this, it should be added a third pole: that of the towns and cities. On one hand there is Kikori town, which with its market and shops is one of the primary nodes of cash

Customary Land Ownership in Contemporary Papua New Guinea', *Anthropological Forum* 23, no. 1 (2013): 94–106. On the social impact and particularly kin relation of resource extraction in Kutubu area see Emma Gilberthorpe, 'Fasu Solidarity: A Case Study of Kin Networks, Land Tenure, and Oil Extraction in Kutubu, Papua New Guinea', *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 1 (2007): 101–12; Emma Gilberthorpe, 'In the Shadow of Industry: A Study of Culturization in Papua New Guinea', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19, no. 2 (2013): 261–78.

²⁶² Roy Wagner, 'Are There Social Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?', in *Frontiers of Anthropology: An Introduction to Anthropological Thinking*, ed. Murray J. Leaf (New York: Van Nostrand, 1974), 95–122; Francesca Merlan and Alan Rumsey, *Ku Waru: Language and Segmentary Politics in the Western Nebilyer Valley, Papua New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 40–45; passim. As for Wagner, I realised the importance of context-specific differentiation as organising principle of sociality by attending several (mostly mortuary) ceremonies. These connections between individuals, families, clans, and villages intertwined in more complex ways than what Wagner reports for Daribi people along the lines of 'meat sharer' and 'meat exchanger'. For an appreciative critique to Wagner's argument see Rena Lederman, *What Gifts Engender: Social Relations and Politics in Mendi, Highland Papua New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 40–44; 52–55; Chapter 2 passim.

²⁶³ Rupert Stasch, 'The Poetics of Village Space When Villages Are New: Settlement Form as History Making in Papua, Indonesia', *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 3 (2013): 565.

income through the sale of food and betelnut. Beyond Kikori, in a broad Kerewo geographical imaginary, lies Port Moresby where their supposedly rich kin live. It is with particular reference to Kikori town and Port Moresby that the village-cum-*kombati* space is often described as a ‘place of freedom’; freedom from money as everything you need to sustain yourself is close to hand and costs you only your labour. And yet labour demands physical strain; sago processing requires long hours of work. The cities are considered places where you can even starve to death if you do not have kin to support you, but are also the aspirational loci of the wonders of modernity. This ambivalent polarity of village vs city is not unknown in the ethnographic literature; as Rupert Stasch convincingly argues, space – as moral geography – is an important medium for rural communities to understand their place within the world’s political economy.²⁶⁴ It is on the ground of this insight that I turn again to how *kidia oubi* are still important mediums in the articulation of relations with capitalism.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Hido mythical cycle presented in this chapter opens a window onto the relationship between change and historical consciousness. Human activities have been and are still embedded in an environment in which change is the norm rather than the exception. Furthermore, change is spatialised through stories that link places and create connections. Such connections are part of the potentiality of the world depicted in the Papuan mythical cycles connected to the *kidia oubi* (creators). Novelty comes about through revelation and, as Dan Jorgensen writes in his appreciation of the contribution of Kenelm Burridge to the study of Melanesian religions, ‘Myths and dreams are [...] best apprehended as reservoirs of possibilities [...] a source of cultural creativity’.²⁶⁵

Hido’s journey quintessentially invokes change, deriving from the movement of beings across the known landscape creating new links with the unknown. In the early colonial period, explorers, missionaries, and government representatives collectively embodied the Kerewo conceptual framework of change coming from afar. They brought new ideas and new objects into Kikori, enabling new relations that had to be mediated both conceptually and physically. It is no coincidence that in contemporary Kerewo accounts, figures such as Chalmers and Kemeru (discussed in the next chapter) share some of the characteristics of a ‘culture hero’ with the figure of the *kidia oubi*. Mediated by his death, Chalmers brought Christianity and its model of social life to Kerewo and

²⁶⁴ On Korowai ambiguity toward cities see Rupert Stasch, ‘Singapore, Big Village of the Dead: Cities as Figures of Desire, Domination, and Rupture among Korowai of Indonesian Papua’, *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 2 (2016): 261–63; passim.

²⁶⁵ Dan Jorgensen, ‘Locating the Divine in Melanesia: An Appreciation of the Work of Kenelm Burridge’, *Anthropology and Humanism* 19, no. 2 (1994): 133.

the overall Kikori area, while Kemeru mediated the material component of Western life by introducing Kerewo people to tinned food and rice.

The afterlife, whether represented by Dudi or the Christian Heaven, is an instance of that material utopia where hard work is not required in order to enjoy life. As Peter Lawrence alerted us long ago, Papuan cosmologies focus on material wealth, usually obtainable by the means of ritual.²⁶⁶ But, as argued in the Introduction and shown in the following chapter, acquiring material wealth effortlessly is also a promise of what has come to be perceived as Western-like modernity. From a comparative perspective, the linkage between wealth (foreign or otherwise) and the realm of the dead is well documented in Melanesian contexts, especially in the literature on so-called ‘cargo cults’.²⁶⁷ Recently, in his discussion of the relation between death and the image of the city as site of whiteness and capitalism among Korowai people (Papua, Indonesia), Stasch notes that ‘The question of the city’s prominence in Korowai consciousness is inseparable from questions of what history and hierarchy *feel like*’.²⁶⁸

Contemporary Kerewo people struggle to give meaning to their marginality vis-à-vis the State and an enormous development project, constantly presented in Papua New Guinea’s media as one of the central economic assets of the country. If rituals are technologies for acquiring wealth, then it does not come as a surprise that, at the time of my fieldwork, much effort was invested in the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony (discussed in Chapter 6). This ritual aimed to dispel the curse that had been cast by the killing of a missionary, thus enabling ‘development’ to freely flow into Kikori and ameliorating the conditions of Kerewo life. To understand that ritual, it is necessary to appreciate the multi-layered semantics and emic historical value of the arrival of Chalmers in Kikori, presented in the next chapter.

²⁶⁶ Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*.

²⁶⁷ See Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium* (London: Methuen, 1960); Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*; Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy*.

²⁶⁸ Stasch, ‘Singapore, Big Village of the Dead’, 260 (italic in original).

Chapter 3

Spilling Blood: The Death of Chalmers as Event

At the opening of the 20th century, James Chalmers – the LMS missionary who had earned his fame in British New Guinea and among missionary circles as a pioneer to new coastal areas – was residing at the Saguane mission on Kiwai Island, in the Western Division.²⁶⁹ During February 1900, Chalmers was joined by a young missionary, Oliver Tomkins, freshly recruited to the evangelising efforts of the LMS in the region. Accompanied by nine Kiwai-speaker mission students, a Kiwai chief, and the mixed-blood mission worker Jimmy Walker, the two missionaries set sail eastward on board the schooner *Niue* on 3 April 1901, anchoring near Goaribari Island four days later, on Easter Sunday. Scarcely two days had passed before the *Niue* left Goaribari Island, heading back to Daru, the Western Province headquarter, with just the schooner's crew on board, bearing alarming news of the fate of their passengers. From Daru, the rumours reached the Resident Magistrate of the Western Division, Gideon Murray, who rushed back to the station. In his diary entry for 23 April 1901, he wrote: 'Here found news confirmed of James Chalmers & Tomkins and eleven Kiwai boys death not at the hands of the Baramuba people as first rumoured but of the GOARIBARI Island (Risk Point) tribe'.²⁷⁰

The captain of the *Niue*, leaving Goaribari Island on 9 April, had not reached Daru until 17 April to report the likely death of Chalmers and his companions. When the captain learned that the Resident Magistrate was not at the Division headquarter but out on patrol, the news from Goaribari was left instead with A. H. Jiear, the Collector of Customs.²⁷¹ Jiear sent a cutter to the Bamu River, where Gideon Murray was on patrol, but the information he received suggested that the aggressors of the LMS party were Baramuba rather than Goaribari. In the meantime, the *Niue* had set sail for Port Moresby to alert authorities there to what had happened to Chalmers and his companions. What follows is the account that the Lieutenant-Governor of British New Guinea, George Le Hunte, recorded in Port Moresby following the arrival of the *Niue*, as chronicled in the official records:

²⁶⁹ See Diane Langmore, *Tamate - a King: James Chalmers in New Guinea 1877-1901* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1974), chap. 4.

²⁷⁰ Gideon Murray, "Diary of Gideon Murray, 2nd Viscount Elibank (1877–1951) as Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor of British New Guinea and Resident Magistrate, Western Division," 23 April 1901 (Port Moresby: Somare Library), NGC AL-132.

²⁷¹ See *BNG Annual Report* (1900-01), 32.

The Mission party had landed [at Goaribari] from the “Niue” on Easter Monday, the 8th April ... The captain, whose vessel had been looted and very nearly captured while the others were on shore, had left the place next day as he had not been able to see anything of them and was satisfied that they had been all murdered ... Although it was not at first believed that there was sufficient evidence of the Mission party having been killed, it was at once decided to proceed with the “Merrie England” and as many boats and police as could be got, and arrangements were completed in time to get away the first thing the next morning, 28th April.²⁷²

The ‘insufficient evidence’ to which Le Hunte refers consists of Indigenous reports and interpretations of the situation. Questioned by Le Hunte, the captain of the *Niue* said that ‘he noticed ... that some of the natives on shore made a certain signal, which the Fly River men knew meant they had killed those on shore and cut off their heads’.²⁷³ This Indigenous account was not satisfactory for the Lieutenant-Governor, and so Le Hunte sailed for Goaribari Island, hoping to find the LMS party still alive. Only later was he ‘sorry that ... for a moment [he] misjudged him [the Rarotongan captain of the *Niue*]’.

As Marshall Sahlins has written, ‘An event becomes such as it is interpreted. Only as it is appropriated in and through the cultural schemes does it acquire an historical *significance*’.²⁷⁴ Yet, as is clear from the reconstruction above, generated from the available records, colonial authorities were highly uncertain about what had happened to the LMS party, and this uncertainty guided their immediate response. The death of Chalmers and his companions *did* become an event in the sense proposed by Sahlins, a watershed moment both for the history of colonial Papua and for Kerewo themselves; but, diverging from Sahlins’ model of the structure of the conjuncture, the meaning of the event at Goaribari built up over time.²⁷⁵ Specific images and elements of the story were given greater relevance than others by different social actors; as I shall demonstrate, the place of the event of Chalmers’ death in contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness is the product of a game of mirrors, in which the mirrors have been distorted by the specific political goals of different actors.

This chapter is divided into two main parts: the first describes the unfolding of events surrounding the death of Chalmers and his companions, insofar as this can be

²⁷² *BNG Annual Report*, (1900-01), xv.

²⁷³ *BNG Annual Report*, (1900-01), 25-26.

²⁷⁴ Sahlins, *Islands of History*, xiv.

²⁷⁵ For an interesting elaboration of Sahlins’ notion of event see Bruce Kapferer, ‘Introduction: In the Event—toward an Anthropology of Generic Moments’, *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 54, no. 3 (2010): 1–28.

reconstructed from available records. This is not an attempt to present history ‘as it really was’, but rather a laying out of the narrative elements that are incorporated within and contested by contemporary Kerewo narratives about this event. In addition to the narrative elements of Chalmers’ death, this first part describes how certain interpretations of that event came to be crystallised for the colony’s European community, providing a background against or alongside which contemporary Kerewo narratives have been constructed. The second part explores ethnographically how the story of Chalmers’ death is locally interpreted and informs Kerewo historical consciousness. As will be seen, different elements of the story are used to make specific moral claims.

The Death of Chalmers and its Reverberations

The First Punitive Expedition, 1901

From Port Moresby the *Merrie England*, with the launch *Ruby* in tow, left for Goaribari Island, sailing westward with six colonial officers, two representatives of the London Missionary Society, and 36 members of the Armed Native Constabulary. In the meantime, as the rumours of Chalmers’ death began to spread, the Queensland Government sent the steamer *Parua* to Daru from Thursday Island, with an officer and 12 members of the Royal Australian Artillery on board. Gideon Murray, who joined the *Parua*, decided to go first to Port Moresby in order to get police reinforcements, whom he thought should be sent first to Daru where they would join the local police before proceeding to Goaribari Island. Yet, when the *Parua* reached Port Moresby, they learned that *Le Hunte* already left for Goaribari Island. It was only at Orokolo, about 70 miles east of Goaribari Island, that the *Merrie England* and *Parua* joined. On 2 May what the colonial officer Monckton later described as ‘the strongest fighting force that any district officer ever had available in New Guinea’²⁷⁶ made its appearance on the western shores of Goaribari Island.

The soldiers split into several groups, two of which landed in the villages marked on the maps as Tutotere (Otoia) and Dopima, advancing with difficulty through the mud with the order not to shoot first but to do so at the slightest sign of hostility.²⁷⁷ Skirmishes took place in all of the villages visited that afternoon, resulting in no less than 24 deaths and an unknown number of wounded, but, by *Le Hunte*’s own admission, it was ‘possible [...] that the real number killed or fatally wounded is

²⁷⁶ Charles A. W. Monckton, *Some Experiences of a New Guinea Resident Magistrate* (London: John Lane, 1921), 240–41.

²⁷⁷ *BNG Annual Report*, (1900-01), 27.

larger'.²⁷⁸ The European party spent an uneasy night camping in a village, keeping attackers at a distance under a heavy rain. During the skirmishes a prisoner, whose name was Kemere,²⁷⁹ was taken and interrogated with the aid of Corporal Peradi of Parama village (Western Division) who, according to the records, could speak the prisoner's language. This detail is problematic, though, and a matter of debate among Kerewo.²⁸⁰ Peradi's claim to be able to understand the prisoner could be due to the fact that Peradi's and Kemere's languages are of the same linguistic phylum (see figure 4), but it seems unlikely that the communication between these two men was sufficient for a complex narrative, even before being translated into Motu and then into English.

²⁷⁸ *BNG Annual Report*, (1900-01), 28.

²⁷⁹ Colonial records give the name of Kemeru, while Kerewo people indicate him as Kemere. I retain the Kerewo version of the name.

²⁸⁰ See Chapter 7.

It is impossible to evaluate the misunderstandings that contributed to Kemere's recorded statement,²⁸¹ but it was largely on the basis of his account that the colonial officers derived their knowledge of the circumstances of the deaths of Chalmers and his companions. The transcript of Kemere's statement, taken by Gideon Murray, begins thus:

The name of the village that I was captured in is Dopima. I, however, belong to Dubumba [...] I, myself, was not present at the massacre; only the big men of the village went. I have, however, heard all about it. My father, Marawa, sent me to Dopima to get a tomahawk to build a canoe.²⁸²

There follows a list of people and villages implicated in the killing of the members of the LMS party, a description of the assault, the beheading and consequent distribution of heads among warriors, and a mention that the bodies of the slain had been cooked and eaten. With the southeast winds looming, threatening to keep the government ships indefinitely in hostile waters, Le Hunte had to decide what punishment to inflict before heading back to Port Moresby. He resolved to burn the long-houses and war canoes, while leaving the dwellings untouched, to punish only a segment of Kerewo population, the male warriors, and thus avoid falling into the error of summary punishment.²⁸³ The ethical implications of this decision lie in the moral discourse of punitive expeditions, and the justification of a seemingly unrestrained asymmetrical and generalized violence, contrary to the Western view of individuality expressed in the legal notion of 'personal responsibility'.²⁸⁴ The reprisal took place at each of the villages mentioned by Kemere, sparing only his own, Dubumba. In Ubuo village a strong wind caused the flames to spread from the long-house to the rest of the buildings. Le Hunte, wanting to 'leave a

²⁸¹ It is interesting to analyse the language used, that points to an overlapping of categories which clearly do not belong to Kemere. For example, after beginning the statement in the first person singular, the document continues that 'Some of the natives remained to loot the "Niue"' (*BNG Annual Report 1900-01*, 33); a wording that sounds closer to the officer's biased understanding than Kemere's.

²⁸² *BNG Annual Report (1900-01)*, 32. Diane Langmore questions Kemere's reliability; *Tamate - a King: James Chalmers in New Guinea 1877-1901* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1974), 112.

²⁸³ Le Hunte expressed in his report his opinions on punitive expeditions in general: 'It is a form of punishment which I have always condemned, as it usually punishes most the weakest portion of the community' *BNG Annual Report (1900-01)*, 29.

²⁸⁴ See Di Rosa, 'A Lesson in Violence: The Moral Dimensions of Two Punitive Expeditions in the Gulf of Papua, 1901 and 1904'.

lesson behind', sailed to Daru on 6 May, after performing a funeral service for the LMS party the day before.

The updated information concerning the death of Chalmers and his companions spread in the Australian newspapers, mostly addressing the propriety of inflicting a punitive expedition on native subjects represented either as bloodthirsty savages or as ignorant of the European laws. After the initial sensation, the news soon devolved across much of the Australian media into yet another instance of a clash between colonisers and colonised, to be resolved by stricter control over the Indigenous people.

However, the killings retained a deeper resonance for two other groups: the Kiwai, whose kinfolk had been killed, and the LMS missionaries. The latter interpreted the deaths of Chalmers, an experienced South Seas missionary and a prominent figure in the establishment of a more just colonial system for Indigenous people in British New Guinea, and Tomkins, a young man who had just reached New Guinea to begin his mission, as a form of martyrdom. This view is evident in the biographies of Chalmers published shortly afterwards. Consider, for example, Lovett's description of their fate as 'the blood-stained crown of martyrdom'.²⁸⁵ If, as Langmore argues, the LMS missionaries were saddened by the loss of an old friend but deplored the death of a promising young colleague,²⁸⁶ the martyrdom of Chalmers and Tomkins shaped the LMS missionary Ben Butcher's resolution to start a mission close to the place of their death.²⁸⁷

Meanwhile, at the mouth of the Fly River in the Western Division, Gideon Murray reported that

this massacre has created the intensest state of sorrow, excitement, and revenge on the part of the Kiwai Islands natives [...]. Their great desire was to be allowed to muster all the large canoes on Kiwai, go to the spot, wipe out the offending tribes, and bring their heads to Kiwai.²⁸⁸

Gideon Murray denied them the possibility of such a swift revenge, but this would have some consequences for the evangelization of the area, which almost ceased. As reported by Jear, three years after the killings,

²⁸⁵ Richard Lovett, *James Chalmers: His Autobiography and Letters*. By [i.e. Edited By] R. Lovett, Etc (London, 1902), 485.

²⁸⁶ Langmore, *Tamate - a King*, 127.

²⁸⁷ In his memoir Butcher writes 'From the day I reached Papua my thoughts had constantly turned to the tribes where Chalmers and his party met their deaths. I had come out with the intention of getting among them'. Benjamin T. Butcher, *We Lived with Headhunters* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 83. See Chapter 4.

²⁸⁸ *BNG Annual Report* (1900-01), 34.

a coloured teacher was last year placed at Saguane, where for several years the Rev. J. Chalmers had his head-quarters [...]. The natives received the teacher rather coldly, refusing to supply him with any food, and the children did not attend school. When asked why this cause of action was adopted, they replied that the work of the mission was not of use to them, as it had been instrumental in the death of two of their brothers. Two lads from this village were killed with the missionary party at Goaribari, and they have not yet forgotten the loss.²⁸⁹

The reception at Daru of the news of the death of the Kiwai students, along with Chalmers and Tomkins, had profound reverberations that can be fully appreciated when considering alongside another linked set of historical happenings: a second set of violent actions directed against Kerewo people in 1904, to which I shall now turn.

A Further Expedition, 1904

In 1901 Le Hunte left Goaribari Island with the idea of making his 'next visit [one] of conciliation (except with regard to the actual murderers)'.²⁹⁰ Accordingly, in 1902 another visit was paid, and the *Merrie England* remained at anchor off the shores of Goaribari Island for a week. Le Hunte's intentions were to recover the skulls of the missionaries, establish more friendly relations with the Kerewo people, and handcuff the culprits.²⁹¹ These goals would prove to be mutually irreconcilable, but before returning to Port Moresby Le Hunte managed to retrieve the skull believed to belong to Chalmers. In Le Hunte's view, Dopima and Otoia, the two villages held responsible for the killing of the LMS party, had 'an unpurged offence still to account for'.²⁹² The following year, 1903, Le Hunte left his office in British New Guinea following his promotion to Governor of South Australia, with no time for a full round of visits of inspection before his departure, leaving the problem of Goaribari Island untouched. Le

²⁸⁹ *BNG Annual Report* (1903-04), 44.

²⁹⁰ *BNG Annual Report* (1900-01), 29.

²⁹¹ The *BNG Annual Report* for this year is missing the Appendices, but fortunately parts of the Appendix C, the one reporting details of this visit of inspection, is included as part of the evidence in the *Royal Commission* of 1904. In 1901 the government party found a skull that Giulianetti, an Italian working as Assistant Resident Magistrate of the Mekeo District, identified as belonging to a non-native person, but evidently they believed it was not Chalmers' or Tomkins', leaving only one option, that it was the skull of Jimmy Walker, a half-caste who was on board of the *Niue* and landed in Dopima. According to Diane Langmore, Walker was a Torres Strait Islander with a Scottish father and a Murray Island mother', *Tamate, a King: James Chalmers in New Guinea, 1877-1901* (Melbourne University Press, 1974), 153 fn. 2.

²⁹² *Royal Commission* 1904, Exhibit n° 4, 101.

Hunte's administrative duties were assumed by Francis P. Winter as acting Administrator.

A further appointment in 1903 was that of Christopher S. Robinson, a young New Zealander, who was appointed Chief Judicial Officer. It was he who led the visit of inspection in 1904 that would result in more bloodshed. According to the Royal Commission of Enquiry held in Australia from July to September 1904,²⁹³ Robinson felt that his duty was to fulfil what Le Hunte had left unfinished. His main goal was to arrest and handcuff the persons Kemere had identified as culprits back in 1901.

In February 1904, Robinson reached Goaribari Island and the *Merrie England* was left at anchor offshore. Using a tactic closely resembling that of the early blackbirders in their often-forceful recruitment of Indigenous labourers for the Queensland sugarcane fields, Kerewo were enticed on board the ship to conduct some trading. The first day, after winning the confidence of Kerewo men, the government crew located two men whose names appeared in Kemere's list. On the following day Robinson's men took the chance to seize one of the culprits together with a few more hostages, and a skirmish broke out. Amid a flight of arrows and a shower of bullets, several Kerewo people lost their lives and some were captured.²⁹⁴ According to descriptions of the fight given by several witnesses, it is evident that the Kiwai, who were in significant numbers amongst the Native Armed Constabulary on board, had not forgotten what happened to their kinsmen three years earlier and took their chance for vengeance.

On the return of the *Merrie England* to Port Moresby, rumours about what had happened started to spread and were picked up by Australian newspapers. As more information was gathered and became known to the Australian public, stronger criticism of Robinson's deeds began to circulate, fuelled by an anonymous source whom contemporaries and historians alike have identified as the LMS missionary Charles Abel. According to Wetherell, the quarrel between Abel and Robinson centred on a disagreement about the role of the Government in protecting its subjects, Europeans and Indigenous. In Abel's view Robinson proved to have more sympathy for the Europeans than the local people. The Goaribari case brought to the surface and came to embody those tensions within colonial society in British New Guinea.

A Royal Commission of Inquiry was called to investigate Robinson's conduct, a move designed to dissipate the anxieties surrounding the role that the recently confederated Australia was about to assume in the Pacific. At that time the Australian Parliament was discussing the so-called 'Papua Bill', a constitution for the colony

²⁹³ The *BNG Annual Report* (1903-04, 8) reads: 'The circumstances[?] of the unfortunate conflict which took place with the natives of this place [Goaribari] have been made the subject of a special inquiry, and need not to be referred here'.

²⁹⁴ Between 8 and 80.

whose baton was soon to change from British to Australian hands. Robinson was the first antipodean person to hold a high position in the Possession of British New Guinea, and so the official enquiry into his deeds shook the confidence of important segments of Australian public opinion over Australia's capacity to rule a colony. A few days after being summoned by the Royal Commission, Robinson committed suicide in Port Moresby on 20 June, his body being found beneath the flag post at Government House. Tragedy added to tragedy, contributing to embitter the positions of the different factions. Part of the non-missionary white community used Robinson's suicide to denounce the political influence of the missionary bodies over the colony. That Robinson's deeds came to symbolize a serious threat for the colonial conscience of Australian humanitarians, vis-à-vis Australia's own colonial and colonising past, is clear from a final statement of the Royal Commissioner:

He [the Commissioner] believes, that the now happily fading traditions of Northern Queensland, of the time when native blacks were treated almost as noxious game, will never be revived in New Guinea: and he sincerely prays that the painfully suggestive removal by the Goaribari natives of their women and children to places of safety on the nearly inaccessible mainland, at the sight of the white man's ship, may not be an omen of rapid degradation and disappearance of their race through the *white man's alluring poison and his foul disease, introduced under the guise of so-called civilization.*²⁹⁵

In much of the discussion, the two punitive expeditions were conflated into one, giving a sense of unity to the sequence of events. In a commentary on the outcome of the Royal Commission, it was argued, clearly damning Robinson's behaviour, that:

The Judge's observations regarding the principles that should guide those who govern the savage ... races in newly settled colonies were characterized by a fine appreciation of the spirit of British justice and fairplay, and his masterly appeal to the people of Australia to protect the Papuan tribes committed to their care from the cruel fate which befell so many of the primitive inhabitants on the mainland in the early days ... It is a matter for congratulation that such high ideal should have been set before the Federal Administration almost at the end of its career ... The 'high code of honour' which the present Governor of this State [Le Hunte, who was then Governor of South Australia] acted upon on that occasion was an exemplification of the best traditions of British colonialism.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Royal Commission 1904, 27–28.

²⁹⁶ 'The New Guinea Tragedy,' *The Register*, September 17, 1904, 6.

Le Hunte and Robinson, whose actions and intentions were not too dissimilar, were made by the new Australian political context into historical tokens of specific, opposed colonial projects.²⁹⁷ The recent past of the colonisation of Australia and the violent treatment meted out to the Aborigines coalesced in the Goaribari events, and became part of the symbolic ground for reshaping Australian imperial efforts in the Pacific.

Francis R. Barton, who was appointed Acting Administrator of the colony to replace Robinson, reached Goaribari on 18 March 1905 with the intention of releasing the prisoners Robinson had taken the year before. At first there was no sign of canoes approaching the *Merrie England*, but the Kerewo on board convinced their kinfolk to come out and in the end the Government party managed to enter a long-house and consume a meal there. On this occasion, Barton was given a skull believed to belong to Tomkins, thus ending the cycle of violence of colonial headhunting. The next year, Goaribari was visited again and, after some negotiation, three young men agreed to join the Native police force, inaugurating a long history of colonial migration outside Kikori area.²⁹⁸

When the British Protectorate became an Australian Territory under the rule of Hubert Murray as Lieutenant-Governor, some Kerewo were already living in Port Moresby, and had become acquainted with the *lingua franca* of that time, Police Motu or *hiri motu*; they were thus available and able to answer the curiosity of their employers. It seems likely that it was in these contexts, rather than during local visits of inspection, that a different explanation for Chalmers' death began to circulate, and was validated in Murray's book *Papua: Or British New Guinea*:

A generally accepted theory among those who know the Gulf of Papua is that some feast, of the nature probably of that which, farther west, is known as Moguru, was being celebrated at Dopima at the time of Chalmers's visit. Strangers are never admitted to this ceremony, and every effort was made to induce the visitors not to land; then, as they insisted upon coming into the village, it was decided to kill them.²⁹⁹

By means of this interpretation, a Sahlins-style structure of the conjuncture, Murray used the event of Chalmers' death to foster the idea at the basis of his long period of governance of what was then the Territory of Papua: that an anthropological

²⁹⁷ See Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁹⁸ See Chapter 6.

²⁹⁹ Hubert Murray, *Papua: Or, British New Guinea* (London : T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), 89.

understanding of subject communities was needed in order to prevent violent clashes between colonisers and colonised, and had to be considered when establishing or implementing the rule of law in the colony. Events, with their symbolic richness, are good to think with and can be manipulated to create new meanings.

Further Reverberations in the European Community

As argued in the introduction, history-making is implicitly a political act, for 'Westerners' as for 'Indigenous people'. Colonisers and colonised invoke specific events of the past to advance political claims. The interpretations over the event of Chalmers' death and its aftermath became a battleground for the political visions of different members of the colonial community in the Territory of Papua and the South Seas at large. If Hubert Murray used this event to foreground his subsequent policies based on an anthropological knowledge of the colony's subjects, later commentators used the same event to support or critique the kind of colony that Murray's policies turned Papua into. This factionalism within the European community in Papua can be grasped by looking at the depiction of the death of Chalmers in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* (hereinafter *PIM*), a monthly newspaper that, at least for the first part of its editorial life from 1930, gave voice to the views of white colonists in the Pacific.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Chalmers' death, *PIM* published an article by the Thursday Island correspondent, who cast the episode in martyrological hues consistent with the LMS interpretation of that event.³⁰⁰ The article stressed the importance of the exemplary punitive expedition to put an end to massacres of Europeans caused by the savagery of the natives, in this case incarnated by Kerewo people and their cannibalism. The following year another piece on Kerewo cannibalism appeared, written by the Port Moresby correspondent who reported that, when an officer asked an old Kerewo man if he was still a cannibal, he replied he was not any more as he had no teeth left.³⁰¹ This humorous piece is possibly a countersign of the fact that the old man was very conscious of what the officer's question entailed and accordingly gave an ironic response. But it can also be read as literally expressing the idea that the nature of the 'natives' was unchangeable.

If these two brief references in *PIM* tell us that the Goaribari Affray was still alive in the memories of some colonists in the 1930s, the more heated debate that took place in the 1940s, with Hubert Murray and Abel out of the colonial power game, clarifies what was at stake in interpreting the Goaribari event. On the 40th anniversary of the Scottish missionary's death, an article signed M.L. depicted the happenings in

³⁰⁰ Anon., 'Rev. Chalmers - Missionary and Explorer: Tribute to the Work of a Great Man', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1931.

³⁰¹ Anon., 'Why Goaribari Is No Longer a Cannibal', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1932.

Dopima in 1901, following closely the official reports I discussed above.³⁰² In response to this article, J. Nixon-Westwood wrote a letter to the editor giving another version, relating what he was told by the *Niue* captain in Daru: Chalmers had been warned by Kerewo not to land as a ceremony was being held, but he ‘remained adamant’.³⁰³ Supporting Hubert Murray’s early cultural interpretation, Nixon-Westwood’s piece challenges both the martyrological interpretations of the figure of Chalmers and the pacification with an iron fist that is engrained in the representations of ‘native savagery’.

The controversy over the death of Chalmers continued the following year, especially between M. R. Hunter and J. T. Bensted, the latter having been present in Port Moresby at the time of the events. Bensted substantially confirms that it was ‘common knowledge’ among Port Moresby white residents that Kerewo people did not entice Chalmers but rather tried to prevent him from landing.³⁰⁴ Similarly a correspondent under the *nom de plume* Wakilobo confirmed this version of the events by relating the tale told by a Kerewo worker employed a few kilometres east of Port Moresby.³⁰⁵ Hunter’s version, instead, relied heavily on the official documentation. These examples point to the fact that oral narratives were still circulating and treated as credible among Europeans, providing perspectives different to those of the official record.

The figures of Chalmers and Robinson were compared in several contributions to *PIM*, revealing how those two names came to embody particular views of the colonial project. The editor of *PIM*, R. W. Robson, though denouncing Robinson’s methods of luring Kerewo on board the *Merrie England* as similar to those used by blackbirders, did not absolve the missionaries for their own responsibility in the way events unfolded: ‘The missionary world was not satisfied with this act of vengeance [the first punitive expedition]. The heads of Chalmers and Tomkins were still being exhibited in the native long-houses (dubus). It was demanded that they be recovered for

³⁰² M. L., ‘40 Years Ago: How Chalmers Was Killed’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, May 1941.

³⁰³ J. Nixon-Westwood, ‘How Chalmers Was Killed: Letter to the Editor’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, February 1942, 27.

³⁰⁴ M. R. Hunter, ‘Two Related Tragedies of Papua. Murder of Chalmers: and Persecution and Suicide of Governor Robinson’, in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, January, 1943; J. T. Bensted ‘Two Related Tragedies of Papua – Some Corrections. Letter to the Editor’, in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, February, 1943; M. R. Hunter, ‘Two Related Tragedies of Papua - Some Corrections: Letter to the Editor’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, February 1943; M. R. Hunter, ‘Two Related Tragedies of Papua: Letter to the Editor’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, May 1943.

³⁰⁵ Wakilobo, ‘Some More Recollections: Letter to the Editor’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, March 1943.

Christian burial'.³⁰⁶ Robson criticised Abel for fuelling the rumours that likely led the former Acting Administrator to commit suicide. He reported that, before it was destroyed during the bombing of Samarai in the Pacific War, a monument to Robinson standing 'close to Kwato' – the place where Abel had established his mission – was 'the answer of the non-mission Europeans of the time to the activities of Abel in the Robinson affair'. A strong statement from the settlers was engraved on the monument:

In memory of Christopher Robinson, able Governor, upright judge and
honest man. Died 20 June, 1904, aged 32 years.

His aim was to make New Guinea a good country for white men.³⁰⁷

The debate in the pages of *PIM* over the murder of Chalmers and its aftermath is an example of how that event (or series of events) became a site of contested memory, both official and personal. By debating the past, the contributors fostered particular views on how and by whom the Territory of Papua should be shaped at a critical moment when the colony's government was under military administration during WWII. The events of Chalmers and Robinson's deaths, collapsed together, constituted a still vibrant locus in the contested historical consciousness of the colonisers, and epitomised different views of what the future of the Australian colony should look like.

Chalmers' death became a powerful story around which specific colonial projects were organised: for LMS missionaries it was an inspirational tale of martyrdom, for other colonists it was a lesson about the place the indigenous population should occupy in the colony. From the early colonial records, very little can be inferred of how Kerewo people experienced and interpreted those events, but there is no question that subsequent relations between Kerewo and colonisers were structured by this event. A perceptive patrol officer wrote in the late 1950s that:

So far as Goaribari is concerned, its initial contacts with Europeans were most unfortunate and this generally leaves an unsatisfactory situation, even decades later. Such a situation was – least until a few years ago – not improved by the London Missionary Society's tendency to exploit the story of the murder of Chalmers at Dopima. Over wide regions of Papua, London Missionary Society natives are inclined to look askew at Goaribaris as "the murderers of their first Missionary." This situation can hardly be encouraging to the Goaribaris.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ R. W. Robson, 'How Judge Robinson Died. Tragic Sequel to Murder of Missionary Chalmers', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, January 1943.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Report n.11/59-60.

Colonial representations of the death of Chalmers shaped and reinforced Kerewo self-perception through their engagement with the colonial world. The following section explores the place of Chalmers' death in contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness, paying attention to how the silences as well as the interpretations of the colonial version of this story are used by Kerewo people to make moral claims over their place in history and the frustration of their modernity.

Chalmers in Kerewo Historical Consciousness

The colonial records and other documents discussed so far provide a prism for interpretations of this chain of events but, apart from Kemere's statement, they provide no certainty about what happened inside the *dubu daimo* at Dopima on 8 April 1901. The events of that day form part of Kerewo historical consciousness and remain very much alive in the form of oral narratives, but they were not necessarily accessible for an outsider such as myself. For instance, while I was residing at Samoa village at the beginning of my fieldwork, I witnessed the celebration of the Centenary of the arrival of the mission in the area.³⁰⁹ Part of the program involved a trip to Dopima with the United Church bishop for Gulf Province and the Superintendent Minister of the Aird Hill Circuit, Roy Rohoro, who kindly invited me to join the small party on a boat trip.

That morning I got up very early and, escorted by my host Pepo, followed the difficult path from Samoa to the Mission Station. We were told that Rohoro was looking for fuel at Ero village, and to wait for him at behind the Station. As we turned around the corner after quite a steep climb, we saw a figure sitting on a low wall. Pepo said he would leave me with him, as he was a Kerewo man, and turned back. I greeted the stranger with a '*Mea kihehai! Mo paina Dario*' (Good morning! My name is Dario), and he introduced himself as Kamara Dairi of Babaguna village, United Church pastor of Dopima. After a short exchange, not always felicitous,³¹⁰ about my work, I decided to ask him if he knew what happened to Chalmers. He said that it was a member of his clan who killed him, but that he would not tell me the story, as it would remain a secret until the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony then planned for 2015.³¹¹ An uneasy silence ensued between us, fortunately dispelled by Roy Rohoro who came back from Ero. He invited us to join the bishop and himself for breakfast, and we headed upstairs, climbing the solid cement steps.

After I was introduced to the bishop, we sat in front of a platter of fried flour pancakes, jars of jam and peanut butter, and the inevitable mugs of steaming hot sweet

³⁰⁹ An account of which will be found in the next chapter.

³¹⁰ See below, 150-51. The conversation was held in Tok Pisin as, at that time, my Kerewo was at best uncertain.

³¹¹ See Chapter 7.

tea. Roy asked Kamara to tell the bishop about his connection to Dopima, and I was eager to hear the story from the mouth of a Dopima person. Kamara, in an initially shaky voice, told us that his ancestor had founded the village. I kept waiting for more to come, but I was disappointed. The quasi-secrecy surrounding the story of Chalmers is not at all confined to Kamara, and is more prominent among people belonging to Dopima village. For example, on 8 April 2015, during a public service held at the Kikori market when the United Church wanted to institutionalise that day as ‘Tamate’s memorial day’, Saira Amuke, a man from Dopima in his early 60s, addressed the crowd in Motu:³¹² ‘I want to tell this story, you listen carefully. Yes, it’s true, my ancestors killed him, I too carry a big pain and I am standing. My people. I speak with fear, this is something we hide’. His narrative was deliberately brief and with few details. It is important to keep this division of knowledge in mind alongside the concept of stories as property and ideas about their properness. My friend Ahi Auma, an excellent storyteller from Babaguna village, said that he knew what had happened to Chalmers but would not tell me because he did not want to encroach on the knowledge of people from Dopima.

As I got acquainted with people and significantly improved my competence in Kerewo vernacular, I learned and recorded several versions of the story of Chalmers’ death. Here I present one recorded at the end of my stay in Samoa village from Dauri Kisu, a leader of my adoptive clan (Karuramio) who usually lives in Port Moresby. It was told to him by his grandmother, who had been present as a small girl at the *dubu daimo* when Chalmers was killed. His version contains details I had not previously heard. I opt for it over several others not only because of Dauri’s ability as storyteller, but because his comments at the end of the story include most of the tropes briefly alluded to by other people. In some ways Dauri’s story provides a useful synthesis. I interpolate his narrative with brief discussions about the other versions of the same segment or the cultural relevance of specific actions taking place in the story.

Dauri: The son of a Kerewo chief took a wife, becoming a man. The woman stayed in the house. When a guest came she wanted to [kill him and] give him [her husband] sago with human flesh, to cook it, and give it.

Dario: What was his [the husband’s] name?

³¹² The language choice here is important. The market is usually spatially divided in two halves, the one where visiting Highlanders sell their produce, and the one where locals sell dry fish, coconuts, seasonal local fruits, and occasionally fresh pig and big fish. The only section where the two groups overlap is the area where tobacco leaves and betel nuts are sold. By speaking in Motu, Saira addressed only the ‘local’ (Kikori) part of the audience, since the Highlands lingua franca is Tok Pisin, rather than Motu. I discuss the relevance of this memorial day in Chapter 7.

Dauri: Gahibai. All Kerewo went here [Dopima], each single village. The chief blew his *tuture* (cone shell) and all the people gathered. They came to Dopima, and from here they would go to Urama [east of Kerewo territory]. They wanted to kill Urama people and bring them to Dopima. When they came back to the village. Gahibai's wife, whose name was Oroi, came down with a drum and she gave it to her husband. She said, 'My husband is this kind of man, a man who kills people, and I will make sago with the flesh of my husband's first guest'.

Some stories begin with a feast and either the wife or the sister of Gahibai asking for *hio* (meat/flesh) to grease a stick of sago.³¹³ It is interesting that I heard it prominently from people belonging to Dopima and Apeawa.

In early 2013, during my scoping trip to Kikori, I visited the current site of Dopima where the sight of three houses standing close to a vast dark beach superimposed on the image I had formed from my reading of colonial texts and early pictures. Later that year, along with the United Church crew that escorted the bishop, we went to see the place where Chalmers was killed, a thick mangrove forest that barely filtered the sunbeams. Today most Dopima people live in Kikori or Port Moresby, and a few Dopima households are to be found scattered in other Kerewo villages. The connection between place and story was not severed by the migration but has been maintained through the role of the *o'opo kori* ('abandoned village'; the semantics of the word *kori* include the idea of 'covered by bush') as a bush camp for fishing and hunting, and of course the property rights that give entitlement to a share of the royalties payments from Oil Search.³¹⁴ However, in preparation for the Peace and Reconciliation Ceremony the site had been cleared and temporary houses built.³¹⁵

Apeawa has a reputation in the Kikori area, and among Kerewo, for being a place where sorcery and other 'traditional' activities still take place, as I was warned before heading to reside there. It is also known as 'cowboy country' because of the fights fuelled by the consumption of alcohol, usually home-brewed, many of which I witnessed. In Apeawa there is an SDA church attended somewhat sporadically by a

³¹³ In the Kikori area, at least south of the station, sago (*dou*) is usually wrapped in Nipa palm leaves (*hoka*) and cooked on charcoal, not over an open flame, until the leaves brown. The result is a stick of sago that can be extremely dry, particularly if not freshly made (sticks are carried around when travelling or working in sago camps). Scraped coconut is the ingredient usually added to moisten the sago, making it more palatable, or even delicious. Fresh fish can have the same function, and pig meat is considered a real delicacy. Pig's fat, melting inside the *hoka*, wets the sago and impregnates it with flavour. On one occasion, after a successful hunt, small portions of sago cooked with pig meat were sold for 1 kina each.

³¹⁴ See Chapter 2.

³¹⁵ See Chapter 7.

small portion of the population. This ‘lack of self-control’ is usually attributed by other Kerewo, predominantly those belonging to the United Church, to the limited impact that the church has had on people’s morality. Those Dopima people at Kikori station also do not belong uniformly to the United Church, and their denominational affiliation is spread across the several churches that are active in town.³¹⁶ I am unable to assert with certainty why the detail of the feast is more common among Dopima and Apeawa people, but I suspect it is due to their relative distance from the United Church’s hegemonic reading of the Chalmers event.

Dauri continued:

His *mudu abea* and *mudu mamu*³¹⁷ thought it shouldn’t be like that, they thought they should not kill Tamate because of the *gabo oubi* (mediums who could be possessed and get in communication with the spirits of the dead). They [the *gabo oubi*] spoke in English; these women knew the future, what people would do. They communicate with the dead [*Dudi oubi*, lit. ‘the people of Dudi’]³¹⁸. They take the path and go to the dead, who tell what will happen, and then come back. The dead said that this kind of man would come, and he was not evil, he was a good man. He would bring the *pai mea*, the Good News in English [*bohoboho wade ito*; lit. ‘using the language of the white men’]. So they thought they would not kill and eat Tamate. They decided to go to Urama and kill those people, taking their bodies back. They would have gone the next day, but James Chalmers came straight to Dopima from Daru. Dopima people in the morning, around 7 o’clock, crossed [the distance between the village and the *Niue*] by canoe and took Tamate on board, bringing him ashore. They talked and he [Chalmers] left his people in the ship. He would be back for breakfast.

So they went to the village, and everything was good, nothing went wrong [*atana uba bihai*].³¹⁹ They invited him, and it was good, they welcomed him. He sat well [*kemi mea*],³²⁰ went up [the *dubu daimo* (long-house)] all right, and there he sat.

³¹⁶ Dopima was the first Kerewo village to be split along denominational differences after the coming of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) in the area; see Chapter 6.

³¹⁷ The *mudu abea* is usually the maternal uncle (MB), who performs a crucial role in the rites through which Kerewo boys and girls used to go through. Payments for the performance of rites of passage would traditionally go to him and his wife (*mudu mamu*).

³¹⁸ See above, 82, 87-89.

³¹⁹ The expression *atana bihai*, lit. ‘nothing else’ is translatable as ‘all good’, ‘never mind’, or ‘don’t worry’; the *uba* (bad) is in this case an intensifier.

³²⁰ *-emi* is the root of the verb for ‘to sit’, but semantically covers also ‘to belong (to a place)’ and ‘to be’ in the sense covered in the expression ‘I am well’, for example.

This is an important passage, almost universally acknowledged as accurate by Kerewo. Their ancestors, through the mediation of the dead, had known of Chalmers' coming and had the most peaceful intentions as he was bringing something new. As will be clear in the next section of the story, the cause of Chalmers' death was his own behaviour.

There he was, he closed his eyes [*idomai kirodomea*, lit. closed his eyes, but *kirodomea* is the Kerewo word for prayer/to pray], read the Bible and all people... everything was going well. No one had a bow, an axe, or a spear. No. He sat, prayed, read the Bible, and inside here [*dubu daimo*] the big man [*dubu gema*, lit. 'big man', expression used as referential], Gahibai's father...

Dario: What was his name?

Dauri: Maiabu. The chief Maiabu of the Karuramio clan. He took the *suku dove* [lit. 'smoke bamboo', bamboo smoking pipe] and began to smoke while he [Tamate] was praying. Tamate didn't like the smoking and he was wrong because he didn't know what he was doing... The *suku dove* was a truly *tana* ['sacred', or 'taboo'] and *wa'ia* [forbidden] object. It was something that the chief of the tribe always had with him, when he talked and took decisions: 'kill this man', or 'this pig', or 'give this piece of land' pointing with the *suku dove*...

He [Tamate] did not say 'No you just stop and when I finish you can smoke', he didn't warn... he took it [the *suku dove*] straight from the hand, broke it, and hit [the chief]. The people saw this and everyone said 'Oh, he broke the chief's [*dubu gema*] *suku dove*! You, bring a spear here'.

The detail of the *suku dove* occurs only once in the several versions I recorded or heard, but all of them say that a leader (sometimes Gahibai himself) was smoking while Chalmers was preaching, and the missionary, annoyed by the spirals of smoke, hit the smoker with the Bible, thus provoking his own death. Even today smoking is a social activity that marks the time of rest after intense work, something remarked to me in contrast to my own smoking patterns, and thus it is understandable why during Chalmers' prayer someone was enjoying his tobacco. Furthermore, tobacco was a scarce good, difficult to obtain, as stressed by the story of two brothers travelling either underwater or disguised as animals to avoid enemies along the route upstream the Omati River, where Kairi people traded tobacco for crabs, fish and seafood.³²¹ Often the cultural

³²¹ In Kerewo language the word for 'tobacco' is *suku*, and the dried tobacco leaves sold at the market, known in Tok Pisin as 'brus', are called *Kairi suku paha* ('leaves of Kairi *suku*'). Fundamental readings for a social history of tobacco in New Guinea are the following works: Terence Hays, 'No Tobacco, No Hallelujah', *Pacific Studies* 14, no. 4 (1991): 91–112; Terence E. Hays, 'Kuku - "God of the Motuities": European Tobacco in Colonial New Guinea', in *Consequences of Cultivar Diffusion*, ed. Leonard Plotnicov and Richard Scaglione (Pittsburgh:

logic underpinning narratives is found in the details, and the smoking trope, beside the socio-cultural values attached to it, could also be explained with the taboo of smoking inside a church (as the *dubu daimo* temporarily became through Chalmers' act of praying) or during a prayer. Once I was gently reproached, after lighting a cigarette outside the church premises after a particularly long service, for having carried a pack with me into the church.³²²

From the other side [of the *dubu daimo*] at the Ouri Turi [name of creek] the spear was passed all the way to the entrance behind people's backs. The last person [to receive the spear] was Gahibai's *emapua* [WF], Oroï's father, who said 'Gahibai, kill Tamate!', and gave him the spear... Gahibai was speechless as his *emapua* addressed him by name.³²³ He just threw the spear straight.

What leaps out from this account for anyone familiar with the archival documents is the absence of the Kiwai mission students and Tomkins. If the Kiwai presence is sometimes acknowledged, for the most part those narratives that seek to stress the primitiveness of their Kerewo ancestors in contrast to their modern, Christian selves, make no mention of Tomkins;³²⁴ this despite the fact that Kerewo are well aware of their Kibiri neighbours' claims that the young missionary was actually with them and not with Chalmers.³²⁵ As with the later European recollections, described above and discussed since amongst Kerewo, certain characters were elided in favour of other figures who came to embody particular meanings.

The spearing of Chalmers, in the majority of accounts, had immediate consequences:

University of Pittsburgh, 1999), 97–103; Terence E. Hays, "'They Are Beginning to Learn the Use of Tobacco": Cultural Context and the Creation of a Passion in Colonial Papua New Guinea', in *Drugs, Labor, and Colonial Expansion*, ed. William R. Jankowiak and Daniel Bradburd (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), 59–71.

³²² I am grateful to Glauco Sanga who prompted me to articulate the relevance of the smoking trope with his question at a seminar I gave at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in November 2015.

³²³ Name avoidance among certain kin is strictly observed, and it was sanctioned.

³²⁴ With the exception of those narratives that closely follow written accounts, popularized in missionary texts.

³²⁵ The patrol officer A. N. Asmussen reported in the 1960s Kibiri people's claim that Chalmers went to visit them first before being killed at Dopima; see Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/61-62.

[Chalmers] said ‘Enough, you sit down, I’ll pray’. When the prayer was over he let the Bible fall. It must have been around noon, and the sky became black. Total darkness.³²⁶ There was huge lightning and thunder crashed, splitting the Dopima *daimo* in the middle. Everyone was frightened; children and women went inside the canoes. Only later did they cut up Tamate like a pig, and all the Kerewo speaking people had their share...³²⁷ a small piece to each village, to each chief. No one had ever seen skin like that.

This segment of the story refers to the curse that Kerewo land and people have endured as a consequence of killing Chalmers. In certain versions of the narrative, it is said that Chalmers, knowing the fate awaiting him, asked for a few moments to pray before reaching Heaven, but he was speared in the body before he finished and Kerewo were cursed for this impatience. The curse is one of the most important elements in contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness. It is expressed in commentary on their lack of development and its material signs (electricity, ready availability of money, etc.), despite the presence of the PNG LNG Project, the largest single investment in the Melanesian region. Among the consequences of the curse, many Kerewo pointed out to me to the fact that few of their children reach Grade 10, and those who do make it to Grade 12 never go on to university to acquire the knowledge (*kisim save*) which would enable them to improve the material conditions of their parents.³²⁸

The curse is referred to as *mibo* in Kerewo – literally something heavy that impedes movement but also, metaphorically, something that makes one sad (as in the expression *mo giopu mibori*, my heart is heavy). This is what the organisers and supporters of the Peace and Reconciliation Ceremony want to remove, thus freeing Kerewo people, but also the Kikori area and the entirety of the Gulf Province, from the lack of the material realization of modernity. Throughout my sojourn, many Kerewo were working to organise an atonement ceremony to lift the curse (see Chapter 7).

³²⁶ Torres Strait oral histories record a total sun eclipse, dated by Blong’s source to early 1902; see Russell J. Blong, ‘Time of Darkness Legends from Papua New Guinea’, *Oral History* 7, no. 10 (1979): 68–69.

³²⁷ The issue of which groups ate portions of Chalmers’ body is a sensitive one and, at the time of my fieldwork, it was strategically used by non-Kerewo either to create distance from or to claim a stake in the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony. Among the strictly non-Kerewo speakers, but belonging to cognate languages, Dauri named the Lower Turama, Morigi, Iowa, and Paia’a (Havamere) people.

³²⁸ This, though, is contrasted with a vision of the church, embodied in former LMS schools, which provided *save* (knowledge) and education in the area, teaching English, perceived as the language of modernity. I discuss this further in Chapter 7.

Dauri's insights about the reasons for Chalmers' death are significant here. I recorded his version of the story when he came to Samoa village from Port Moresby to attend a funeral feast. It was on this occasion that he told me, and then the rest of the community, that a similar thing had happened in Fiji when the missionary Thomas Baker was killed for taking a comb belonging to a local chief, thus violating the taboo of touching the head (or its symbolic extension) of the ruler.³²⁹ In Dauri's eyes, the detail of the *suku dove*, as an object sacred to Kerewo chiefs, is an obvious parallel with the Fijian comb. The Fijian community in question, like Kerewo, suffered the consequences of a curse for killing a man of God but, according to Dauri, they finally made an atonement ceremony in local language and now enjoy full development and prominent political power. The Fijian case, which Dauri must have heard about when the news reached Port Moresby via newspaper coverage (in Kikori the absence of regular flights means that newspapers seldom reach the area), constitutes a model from which to assess the ritual efficacy of the Peace and Reconciliation Ceremony.³³⁰

A local theological explanation is proposed to account for Chalmers' death, probably shaped over the years by LMS and later United Church understandings of the event. Chalmers arrived for Easter, the time of Jesus Christ's rebirth, and the missionary's killing coincided, in contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness, with the beginning of Christianity in the Kikori area. On one occasion, Kamara told me that he had once read a biography of Chalmers and was struck by a detail of the missionary's early schooling. According to the book, Chalmers already knew at a tender age that he was destined to accomplish God's will at the cost of his own life; proof, Kamara stressed, that Chalmers did not come to Dopima by chance.

Many Kerewo, particularly those belonging to the United Church or following Kenneth's New Apostolic Church, see in the curse a trial from God who has chosen them, much like the Hebrews of the Bible, as a vessel for the spreading of the Gospel in the Kikori area. In fact, Butcher's establishment of a mission in the area was inspired by Chalmers' martyrdom and he did employ several Kerewo in his evangelization efforts, with far-reaching consequences. I discuss the evangelization of the area in the next chapter, but it suffices here to draw attention to the fact that the advent of Christianity and the dynamics it triggered are closely entangled in Kerewo historical consciousness with the event of Chalmers' death.

The establishment of the LMS mission followed closely on the colonial formation of the Delta Division, redrawing the borders of an area previously administered from Daru, which was too far away to be able to deliver an effective

³²⁹ See Andrew Thornley, *Exodus of the I Taukei: The Wesleyan Church in Fiji, 1848-74* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2002), 337-51.

³³⁰ More details about how Dauri's comments have been embraced in the preparation of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony will be discussed in Chapter 7.

response in case of emergency, as confirmed by the Chalmers killings. The events leading to Chalmers's death led directly to the establishment of the Kikori Government Station in 1910, once local warfare had been largely eliminated under the Pax Australiana. With the passing years, the area was deemed 'pacified' and missionary and entrepreneurial activities created a new social space where former enmities were expressed by means other than physical violence. In these new spaces, the killing of Chalmers remained a scar and this episode was used by their neighbours to denigrate and marginalise Kerewo people. This sense of opprobrium was still very much alive, as Kenneth Korokai once told me while we were waiting for people to arrive at the first Peace and Reconciliation meeting. In front of a number of other Kerewo, mostly men, he started to speak directly to me:

When we were kids or young men, and a fight or something else came up, people were ready to say "You killed and ate Chalmers", and we felt ashamed. With this Peace and Reconciliation we will publicly apologise for what our ancestors did, and so our children will not have to suffer the blame we suffered.

Many people nodded seriously when Kenneth finished talking.

Other linguistic groups in the Kikori area often articulate their difference from Kerewo through contrasting narratives of first contact with missionaries. Kibiri people, for instance, stressed in a dramatic dance performed at Veiru village, on the occasion of the visit by United Church bishop of the Gulf Province, that they were initially frightened by the white skin of their visitors. They decided to hide instead of confronting them with their spears and in the end discovered that the newcomers had left precious new goods like salt, sugar and rice (the almost universal tokens of 'introduction to modernity' in most part of Papua New Guinea).

The geography of blame just sketched extends beyond the local and even provincial borders, reaching several coastal areas of what was formerly the Territory of Papua. Langmore reported that Toaripi people proposed denying Kerewo people the right to vote for the 1961 Legislative Council. Demian recorded a common trope among Suau people of Milne Bay that Kerewo not only killed Chalmers and consumed his body, but also ate his boots.³³¹ The trope of eating Chalmers' boots is sometimes present in Kerewo narratives, performing the function of highlighting their ancestors' savagery and ignorance of the modern world, but, as Michael Lambek noted for another context,

³³¹ Langmore, *Tamate - a King*, 135, 157 fn. 63; Melissa Demian, 'Canoe, Mission Boat, Freighter: The Life History of a Melanesian Relationship', *Paideuma* 53 (2007): 95 fn. 3. The trope of eating the boots is used by Suau people to contrast their own experience of welcoming Chalmers when he arrived, with the 'savagery' of Kerewo. This highlighting of a Christian modern self is not too dissimilar from the Kibiri vignette sketched above.

this kind of self-irony is also a commentary on the supposed trajectory of modernity: ‘Sakalava laugh at themselves, their encompassment by Western “modernity” and the incompleteness and distortions of that transformation’.³³²

A proper survey of the knowledge of the deeds of Kerewo people in the other places where Chalmers established mission stations, ideally combined with other former LMS stations, would provide a more complex picture. What is important to stress here is the fact that the Chalmers event is not just a matter of local history, and that its external relevance also shapes Kerewo consciousness of themselves and their history within the nation-state and beyond.

The last part of Dauri’s narrative concerns the punitive expeditions that followed the events at Dopima in 1901:

They [the people who killed Chalmers] didn’t know what they did, and thought it was over. They stayed at Dopima, and danced. Two months passed and they saw two ships, with machine guns... You know, the Kerewo tribe was the biggest in Kikori, and you could see [in pre-colonial times] war canoes everywhere, in Nakari, Airo, Warue, Omati, Paibuna, Turama rivers. Thousands and thousands of people and canoes, and they only had spears and bows. They only knew tribal fighting, using bows and spears. Those [the machine guns and the rifles] were something new and they had no chance [*nei modobo bihai*, lit. ‘they were not enough’]. The machine gun fired, BANG! and many canoes and people went down... They shot everyone; it was bad, really bad.

The outcome of the two punitive expeditions, usually collapsed into a single one in local narratives, crowns this story as an utter injustice. Not only is Chalmers to blame for his own destiny, but the colonial retaliation defies the logic of reciprocity (one man for one man) and their technological superiority is stressed to depict Kerewo as helpless victims of colonial brutality.³³³ One consequence of the punitive expeditions, according to some Kerewo, was a perceived severe depopulation in relation to other groups in

³³² Michael Lambek, *The Weight of the Past: Living with History in Mahajanga, Madagascar* (New York - Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 248. I found this trope to be more openly used, and accompanied by laughter, during my scoping trip, while at a later stage of my fieldwork most Kerewo people asked me to correct this piece of misinformation, which they considered insulting. Whether this shift was caused by the approaching of the Peace and Reconciliation or by the role bestowed on me as historian of Kerewo is unclear.

³³³ Many people commented to me ‘We just killed one man, they killed thousands of us’. This is somewhat disingenuous, as the logic of exact reciprocity seldom applied to headhunting raids in which the aim was to inflict as many losses as possible on the enemy.

Kikori.³³⁴ This statement is not without foundation. Archaeological evidence, paired with oral narratives I heard or collected of pre-colonial warfare, suggest that Kerewo, pressured by food and land scarcity, were an expanding polity in the process of conquering portions of land in the Kikori delta.³³⁵

A further consequence attributed to the colonial expeditions was the status of Kemere, who was taken prisoner, and is today memorialised as a culture hero, not dissimilar from the wandering heroes discussed in the previous chapters. At the beginning of my first long fieldwork period, I brought with me some pictures taken during the colonial period, including a portrait of Kemere at Port Moresby.³³⁶ As soon as I reached Kikori, I began to renew the tenuous relationships established during my earlier scoping trip, and soon started to receive visits at the CDI camp where I was lodged. Kenneth was one of my first guests, and I showed him the two thick folders of printed pictures. As we stumbled across Kemere's portrait, I told him who the man depicted was. Kenneth's facial expression changed as he attentively scanned the figure printed on paper and he finally said after a long pause: 'Then our history is true! This man...', tapping on the plastic envelope protecting Kemere's picture, 'this man is one of my ancestors. He was taken after what happened to Chalmers and taken to Port Moresby or Australia. They taught him Motu, and when he came back he taught it to our ancestors. He also brought rice, salt, sugar...'. Kemere, like the culture heroes who populate the *kidia oubi ta'u* ('the time of the creators'), also brought from afar a new set of cultural practices, inaugurating a change in lifestyle (*kiiro*).

Local stories of Chalmers, as presented here on the basis of my fieldwork, encapsulate all the ambiguities of colonialism and the ways in which colonialism is perceived among a group of colonised people. The killing of Chalmers bestowed a curse on the land, but also introduced the Gospel, bringing a new form of life, and implicating Kerewo centrally in its spread. The punitive expeditions almost wiped out the Kerewo population, but Kemere's return initiated a new era, signified by the new kinds of food and language that became more and more entangled in Kerewo lives.

³³⁴ This assertion is demographically dubious, as Kerewo constitute a significant part of the population in Kikori town; but numerical accuracy is not relevant when it comes to perceptions.

³³⁵ See Bryce Barker et al., 'Otoia, Ancestral Village of the Kerewo: Modelling the Historical Emergence of Kerewo Regional Polities on the Island of Goaribari, South Coast of Mainland Papua New Guinea', in *Peopled Landscapes: Archaeological and Biogeographic Approaches to Landscapes*, ed. Simon G. Haberle and Bruno David (Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press, 2012), 157–76.

³³⁶ Francis Barton, 'Barton – PNG, Oceania' (Photographs – Selected Holdings, Royal Anthropological Institute, London).

Conclusions

This discussion prompts a rethinking of Sahlins' model of the structure of the conjuncture and its related notion of event. The largely Christian interpretations by contemporary Kerewo of Chalmers' arrival and death cannot possibly match their ancestors' experience of those events. Contemporary Kerewo interpretations can be understood, as Walsh aptly put it, 'only through the medium of experience',³³⁷ and the experience referred to in this instance is that of colonialism.

The death of Chalmers and its aftermath fits Raymond Fogelson's category of an 'epitomizing event', one capable of encoding and expressing historical processes larger than the event itself.³³⁸ This event epitomises the colonial encompassment with its promises and ambiguities. As a consequence of Chalmers' death, Kemere *was able* to bring to Kerewo those goods associated today with Western modernity. The LMS missionary Ben Butcher *did* establish a Mission Station in Kikori taking with him some Kerewo and translating parts of the Bible into their language; and thus Kerewo *were* a gateway for the Gospel to enter Kikori with its promises of modernity. A major extractive enterprise like the PNG LNG Project *did* impact the Kikori area although it failed to put in place an efficient infrastructure, thus further materializing in local eyes the power of the curse that prevents development.

All these considerations did not take place in a vacuum. During the colonial era, officials, missionaries, anthropologists, employers, and travellers – who knew the name Goaribari and gave it meaning only in the light of that episode of colonial history – asked Kerewo to explain to them what happened to Chalmers that day in 1901, often many years after the event took place. The totalisation to which Sahlins refers – which cannot be stable over time – is indeed the product of the competing and only partially overlapping interpretation of a specific event by different actors, hence supporting the argument advanced in the introduction that history-making is a field of struggle over meaning.

The following three chapters examine historical Kerewo experience of colonialism along with contemporary Kerewo understandings of several different periods of their own past. These chapters, along with the present one, enrich the understanding of the conflicts and strategies looming beneath the preparations of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony analysed in Chapter 7.

³³⁷ W. H. Walsh, 'Symposium: The Notion of an Historical Event', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 43 (1969): 163.

³³⁸ Raymond D. Fogelson, 'The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents', *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 2 (1989): 143.

Chapter 4

Caring for Butcher: Early Engagement with Christianity

My scoping trip to the Kikori area, in order to visit Kerewo communities and discuss with them the feasibility of my research, led me eventually to Aird Hill. As the boat approached the hill, the silhouette of a solid building came into view. The lush colours of the landscape matched the sepia of my mental image of the place, formed by repeated viewing of several photographs taken during colonial times; the Mission Station where Benjamin Butcher began in 1913 stood before us. Leaving the dinghy behind, we started climbing the steep hill toward the missionary building. Along the last section, timber steps had been laid leading up to the concrete structure, and Baito, one of the men accompanying me at the time, said ‘My ancestors put these steps here’. Close to the top he pointed to an empty space saying ‘Here is where the generator used to be’.

We finally arrived at the top and, as I stopped to catch my breath, I was immediately impressed by the view: a vast stretch of dark and intense green veined by the grey of several channels and larger watercourses. Part of our crew went ahead looking for ‘the missionary’, who only later I discovered to be Roy Rohoro, the superintendent minister for the Aird Hill Circuit of the United Church. Halfway up the climb, Roy Rohoro’s wife forbade us to visit the Station, as her husband was away and we needed his permission to look inside their home. Many people, she told us, came, took pictures, and made fortunes from their images. Taken aback, I asked her if we might at least have some water while resting, and she graciously agreed. Forbidden to take pictures, we had to be content with looking at the perimeter of the Station. I was shown the spot beside the building where Butcher’s daughter, who died at the age of 7, was buried: her name was Phyllis Neuri, after the local name of this hill (Neuri akabu or Neuri mountain in Kerewo).³³⁹ Here, I was told, two books containing the histories of the Kerewo and Porome people had also been buried, but they had been stolen long ago.

Only after my return to the CDI camp was I able to make sense of this incident. Timothy, one of the CDI workers at the time, had grown up with his father’s kin in the Southern Highlands (Folopa) but his mother was a Porome from Aird Hill, and so he told me about the stories of gold and jewels hidden deep inside the hill as a possible explanation for the incident. Butcher, so Timothy heard from his maternal kin, had been digging a well inside the Mission Station to extract those precious materials. The missionary found and sent a big jewel to Queen Victoria to adorn her crown. Timothy rushed to add that those were only stories he heard, and that probably I would find out

³³⁹ The name Neuri is shared by Porome and Kerewo people alike.

more by talking to people at Aird Hill. Similar tales of hidden wealth inside Aird Hill were recounted to me only later on, when some Kerewo began to confide in me.

During my second visit, which began close to the celebrations of the Centenary of the arrival of the Gospel, the most common connection between wealth and Christianity took a completely different form, one expressed through the idiom of the 'blessing'. During my second visit the atmosphere and the kind of discourses and narratives I elicited in connection to Christianity focused predominantly on the temporal rupture from the pre-colonial past.

The vignettes sketched above encode important themes to understand the place of Christianity in contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness: a sense of centrality of Kerewo people in the emplacement of Christianity in the area, the rupture with a 'savage' past, and the access to wealth. As already argued in the introduction, the discourses of modernity and Christianity share these two tropes. Conversion to Christianity is what, I argue, reoriented Kerewo historical consciousness, thus giving meaning to the event of Chalmers' death. This chapter analyses the processes of conversion and the ways in which such processes have been memorialised locally, especially through the lens of the celebrations for the Centenary of the establishment of the Mission at Aird Hill. What an ethnographic analysis of the Centenary allows us to uncover is not only the place of Kerewo's past within the region's past, but also the different levels of historical relevance of specific episodes within the Kerewo communities. Interestingly, such an articulation of different levels of relevance among Kerewo communities and other Kikorians does pair the Christian paradox of the universality and local realisation of its message. As will become clear from my analysis, the celebration of the Centenary catalysed tensions within Kerewo communities and between Kerewo of Samoa village and Porome people, as well as stressing their unity under the same faith. The Centenary was an important event in the United Church calendar in 2013, but it also impinged on other denominations to which Kerewo are affiliated, as it marked for all Kikorians the beginning of the Christian era. The tension between the universality of Christianity and its local specificity is captured by the history of Samoa village's past, which is entangled with the history of the LMS mission at Kikori. To insist on this point is to reinforce the argument that there is no unitary Kerewo past or historical consciousness, and that history-making is ultimately a political issue confronting contingent problems.

The Role of Kerewo in the Evangelisation of Kikori

The Coming of the Gospel and Its Protection

Inspired by the martyrdom of Chalmers and Tomkins, Butcher left England and began his service in the Torres Strait in 1905. As he wrote in his memoir, 'From the day I

reached Papua my thoughts had constantly turned to the tribes where Chalmers and his party met their deaths'.³⁴⁰ After some resistance from his superiors and Government authorities, Butcher, then stationed on the Fly River, was finally granted permission to explore the area east of Daru in 1912. Accompanied by the Finnish anthropologist Gunnar Landtman, who was at that time doing fieldwork among Kiwai people, Butcher went in search of a suitable location in the Kikori area for his mission station. Aird Hill, the only upland visible from most parts of the Delta region and not subject to the mild floods caused by the rising tides, was a natural choice. After some difficulties in negotiating the land lease, construction of the mission station began in 1913. It is this event that the Centenary I witnessed in 2013 sought to celebrate.

The inscription of Kerewo presence at Aird Hill is coterminous with the missionary presence. According to Kerewo oral narratives, a central role is accorded to the figures of Amini and his brother Kasimi, who were Butcher's *dabi dubura*, bodyguards.³⁴¹ Both were stationed at the mouth of a small creek not far from Samoa village, where the mission station was clearly visible (today a small island and the vegetation growing on it block the view). This place is called *Busa Neauri*, a name formed by the Kerewo rendition of Butcher and a form of the verb *-eauri* that means 'to look', 'to see' but also 'to look after', 'to take care'. This semantic extension encoded in the name *Busa Neauri* summarizes the perception of Kerewo residing in Samoa village of the initial role of their ancestors as protectors of the *lotu* (church) against attack from the neighbouring Porome. It also converts the prior historical role of Kerewo as 'murderers' of the Gospel into the carers for its messenger, articulating the ambivalence in Kerewo reflections on the death of Chalmers, analysed in the previous chapter.

As I was standing on the floating canoe at the mouth of the creek, I was told in vivid terms how Amini and Kasimi, standing under the cover of the thick vegetation of *Busa Neauri*, would watch the hills before them looking for signs of possible attackers, and discourage them with boastful/taunting threats. From several comments I heard on this portion of Kerewo's past, the main feature highlighted was the fame of the Kerewo amongst both the colonists and the neighbouring tribes as intrepid and successful warriors. This facet of early Kerewo engagement with Christianity found no space in the official celebration of the Centenary, but was a source of local pride.

Local evangelists

Once the mission was established and began its activities, Kerewo mission students gradually became the principal agents of conversion in the region. In several reports,

³⁴⁰ Butcher, *We Lived with Headhunters*, 83.

³⁴¹ According to my interlocutors, *dabi dubura* (plural of *dabi dubu*) were those people left behind to protect the villages when raiding parties went away. I did not encounter the word *dabi* alone in my daily conversations, unless I explicitly elicited the meaning of *dabi dubu*.

Butcher highlighted the conditions in which he had to work, and how they prevented him from effectively reaching out to the villages. Constantly working on repairing the boats, often overworked because he had to cover other stations (Urika and Daru) when his colleagues were away, or forced to leave for several weeks to attend the Papuan District Committee meetings in Port Moresby, and constrained by the irregular means of transport that connected the Delta Division with the colony's capital, Butcher frequently lamented that he had little time to visit the villages to carry out his evangelical work. Understaffed and underfunded as the Aird Hill Station was, Butcher could not send teachers to look after specific villages, a practice prescribed by the Society and followed in many other parts of the colony. Butcher's criticism extended also to the Indigenous teachers graduating from the Lawes College in Port Moresby. In his view, usually mission teachers only sought 'a secure and prominent position among his own people when once his training is completed'.³⁴² Butcher's reports on his work at Aird Hill are punctuated by apologetic remarks about the lack of visible signs of conversion, counterbalanced by evidence for improvement, as in this passage from 1921:

Church life is still in its infancy, the first man from Goaribari to be baptised is leading a quiet consistent life, a young couple defying the old traditions, have chosen the Christian form of marriage instead of the filthy ceremony village custom demands, and whereas when first we came and for years after we could get no girls to stay with us we are today having to build extra accommodation for them and they look so different to the wild creatures they were then first they came that it is hard to believe they are the same.³⁴³

The year 1927 marked a significant change in Butcher's perception of the mission's evangelical progress. He realized that small communities of believers were gathering in the villages around those people who lived in the mission and shared their experiences with their fellow villagers. Ahead of his time and anticipating the future development of LMS and (later) United Church policies, Butcher began to advocate for an Indigenous-led Church, overseen by a strong missionary centre but independent from the direct control of white missionaries.³⁴⁴ Already in 1931 Butcher wrote:

³⁴² Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill Report 1931*, CWM Papua Reports, Box 4, folder 46, 1931, London, SOAS Library, p. 2.

³⁴³ Benjamin Butcher, *Torres Straits [sic] and Kikori Delta. 1905 to 1921*, CWM Papua Reports, Box 3, folder 36, 1921, pp. 6–7.

³⁴⁴ Here, as in the rest of the chapter, I use the word 'Church' in upper case to refer to the notion of Christian community, while the lower case 'church' refers to the actual building.

Whether a truly indigenous and selfsupporting [*sic*] Church is possible [among] these primitive people remains to be proved but it appears [to be] the only way by which the evangelisation of the whole country can be achieved.³⁴⁵

If the model of an Indigenous Church was, perhaps, too premature for the Society to apply to the entire area of its influence, by the end of his mandate Butcher had no doubts that evangelism had to be adapted to local conditions. For instance, commenting on the negative effects of the ‘nomadic habits of these [Kikori] people’ on successful schooling, the missionary remonstrated that:

Our western methods seem ill adapted to such folk and I believe that their religious life or the experience of it in worship will need to be organised on lines quite other than those that sometimes seem to us essential. [...] Even if it were felt desirable to place trained teachers in them all [small villages with low numbers of residents] we should find the financial burden much too heavy and the nomadic habits of the people make one doubt if such methods would be justified. I have long felt that the Christian witness in these villages must come from the Church, untrained and illiterate as the majority of the members are at present.³⁴⁶

Contrary to ethical and political emphasis of the later theological and missiological debates which led to the transformation of the London Missionary Society first into Papua Ekalesia, and then into the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, for Butcher the creation of an Indigenous Church was first a financial and logistical necessity.³⁴⁷

Butcher recorded both in his private correspondence and official reports the work of some individuals whose contribution to the evangelisation proved to be key to the spreading of Christianity. Those named are usually young men, such as Makoni

a boy who has been born again before our eyes. On our rounds he goes ashore ahead of me very frequently and landing recently at his village of Apeawa I could hear his people with no uncertain sound and as I entered the DUBU daimo, there he stood

³⁴⁵ Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill Report 1931*, CWM Papua Reports, Box 4, folder 46, 1931, London, SOAS Library, pp. 2–3.

³⁴⁶ Benjamin Butcher, *LMS Annual Report from Aird Hill and Urika*, CWM Papuan District Reports, Box 5, folder [unmarked], 1937, pp. 2–3.

³⁴⁷ For an account of the transformation of the LMS into the United Church see Ronald G. Williams, *The United Church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands: The Story of the Development of an Indigenous Church on the Occasion of the Centenary of the L. M. S. in Papua, 1872-1972* (Rabaul: Trinity Press, 1972).

close by the Agibe where the skulls of past enemies are displayed, while around him listening intently were the village folks, his own people, ready to hear what he can tell them of a way that seems to them both new and strange.³⁴⁸

Makoni's career as an evangelist continued at Apeawa, and then at the plantation at Veiru. The work of others, conducted independently of the missionary, remained confined to their own villages, as in the case of Masi at Ubuo village:

Masi was preaching Christ among his people and when we visited his village we found a system of organised worship, even to the hollow log, which suspended by a string and struck by a stick serves as a bell calling the people to prayer. Masi calls the people to prayer and tells them all he knows of God. His Church is in the great house of the men and close by where he preaches the Gospel the old skulls of the past enemies still hang before the Agibe. But his word is listened to, a growing number of the village folk gather round the singing sounded heartier than that in our own church.³⁴⁹

One last figure merits a particular mention: Dauwa, the first Kerewo man to be baptised, who occupied a central position in the missionary imaginary because he was at Dopima at the moment when Chalmers and his companions were killed. In his official accounts Butcher describes Dauwa in terms that strip him of agency and will, and position the Kerewo men rather as a testimony and reminder of the missionary's own successes. Consider this passage: 'My old friend Dauwa, quiet, helpful, faithful, is a rebuke to me when I begin to doubt and an inspiration when I think how he has stood the test of years'.³⁵⁰ Yet, in 1936, a year before Butcher's retirement from his missionary work in the Territory of Papua, he was surprised when:

I had a visit from Dauwa [...]. He said there were some people to see me and hesitated when I told him to bring them in as there were rather many for the study. However we got them in, fifteen men and women who had come to tell me they wanted to follow Christ. Night after night all unknown to me Dauwa had been getting them together for Prayer and telling them what he knew of God. He cannot read or write. He came to us too old but he has tried to read the Gospel so long and so often that he knows a lot of it by heart and thus has

³⁴⁸ Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill Report*, CWM Papuan District Reports, Box 4, Folder 42, 1931, p. 2.

³⁴⁹ Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill Report*, CWM Papuan District Reports, Box 4, Folder 43, 1932, pp. 1–2.

³⁵⁰ Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill Report*, CWM Papuan District Reports, Box 4, Folder 42, 1927, p. 2.

brought these others to walk the way he has been treading since years ago he felt the touch of Christ upon his life.³⁵¹

The quietness and passivity of the early descriptions here gives place to a deep personal entrepreneurship and the full re-establishment of Dauwa's agency.³⁵²

Silent traces of conversion

Wayne Fife, in his analysis of the language used by missionaries in their official accounts, uncovers the racialised hierarchy that permeated evangelical work and screened white missionaries (characterised as heroes) from the threat of South Sea Islanders (referred to as teachers).³⁵³ What this useful model does not consider are those who are left out of the picture completely: the local brokers of Christianity. Alongside those men who were recognised by Butcher in his writings for their role in the evangelisation of the area, more silent or nameless figures, ensnared in the missionary's writing, give us a slightly different picture of the process of evangelisation.

Kerewo women were active agents of Christianity, as the story of this unnamed women attests:

Just what faith means to these people I find hard to say but it touches life and conduct [...] it must be something vital and full of *meaning in their life*. I shall never forget the way in which the wife of one of our young men told of her own experience as she spoke at one of our services. She had run from us in anger determined to go back to her own people and as she paddled down the river with her little child a tree crashed down upon her canoe, split it across and dashed the paddle from her hands. 'I was bad' she said and this was God's way of dealing with her and she told how she had still gone on to her village but with awe instead of anger in her heart, there to speak of God among her people.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill Report*, CWM Papuan District Reports, Box 4, Folder 51, 1936, p. 2.

³⁵² On the issue of Kerewo agency in evangelising the area, especially through the case of Dauwa's son, Wanua, see Chapter 6.

³⁵³ Wayne Fife, 'Heroes and Helpers, Missionaries and Teachers: Mimesis and Appropriation in Pre-Colonial New Guinea', *People and Culture in Oceania* 18 (2002): 1–22.

³⁵⁴ Benjamin Butcher, *LMS Annual Report from Aird Hill and Urika*, CWM Papuan District Reports, Box 5, folder [unmarked], 1937, p. 4; my italics.

Stories of conversion such as this are telling of the possible dynamics of personal conversion among Kerewo, and were also testimony to the missionary and the Society of the progress of their evangelical work.³⁵⁵

The language used by Butcher hints at a more complicated picture than the trope of God's intervention into peoples' lives. First of all, the woman was a wife of a 'mission boy', and the possessive adjectives used by Butcher ('our young men', 'her own people') indicate that, at least from the missionary's perspective, the mission and the Indigenous people living there constituted a social unit separate from the other villages, with the Station itself a model village, in a manner similar to Protestant missions in other parts of Papua.³⁵⁶ As Butcher remarked,

Aird Hill stands for a new idea and our work as a unifying force is all the more effective by reason of the fact that the station is associated with no particular village. [...] I have for many years had a theory that a Head Station would have a greater influence throughout a District if not attached to some particular village.³⁵⁷

The other trace I want to draw attention to is the fact that the woman who is the main character of the conversion story is part of a couple formed *within* the mission.

The LMS did not have a policy of active abolition of local religious practices, and focused instead primarily on providing positive models of Christian life to transform local behaviours. The nuclear family, embodied by the missionary and his

³⁵⁵ It is no accident that Butcher mentions this episode in his last report before retirement, which was promptly published in *The Chronicle* (the LMS publication reporting on the progress of the several missions) in the following year.

³⁵⁶ Diane Langmore, 'The Object Lesson of a Civilised, Christian Home', in *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial Impact*, ed. Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre (Cambridge - Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 85; Wayne Fife, 'Creating the Moral Body: Missionaries and the Technology of Power in Early Papua New Guinea', *Ethnology* 40, no. 3 (2001): 251–69. For an ethnohistorical analysis of how mission stations influenced regional social relations and residential patterns see John Barker, 'Mission Station and Village: Cultural Practice and Representations in Maisin Society', in *Christianity in Oceania: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 173–96; see also John Barker, 'Village Inventions: Historical Variations upon a Regional Theme in Uiaku, Papua New Guinea', *Oceania* 66, no. 3 (1996): 211–29; John Barker, 'The One and the Many: Church-Centered Innovations in a Papua New Guinean Community', *Current Anthropology* 55, no. S10 (2014): S172–81.

³⁵⁷ Benjamin Butcher, *Annual Report Aird Hill and Namau Districts 1921*, CWM Papua Reports, box 3, Folder 36, 1921, p. 3.

wife, proved to be a cornerstone for profound social transformations particularly in the domains of residential, marital, and gender relations. Mission records are dotted with accounts that emphasise the couples who married in the 'Christian form', marking a break, at least in Butcher's terms, with old customs, and in particular marriages (*buguru*).³⁵⁸ These couples took an active role in spreading Christianity by creating a Church (community): 'we see here and there a family modelling itself by the Christian standard and mark a new sense of sexual normality where only bestiality once existed'.³⁵⁹

Although Butcher espoused a non-interventionist policy toward local customs, along with other missionaries and colonial authorities before and after him, he was horrified by the apparent sexual licentiousness of marriage practices in many Kiwai-language speaking communities across the Gulf. Moreover, as the reader will recall from the previous chapter, one of the established interpretations of Chalmers' death is in connection with such ceremonies.³⁶⁰ The ethnographic literature of the time stressed the connection of these 'initiation ceremonies', as they were described, with sexual promiscuity: 'The Moguru time (the initiation ceremony) is a period of general license' (Chalmers), 'The *mogúru* is the one great exception to the strict rules of decorum and morality which on the whole are a very prominent characteristic of the people. [...] In groups, one after another, the men betake themselves to the women's compartments, where soon a promiscuous intercourse is in progress' (Landtman), 'the house [*dubu daimo*] is visited by women and girls only on the occasions of the *buguru* ceremony, which lasts for four days, and at which great sexual licence is permitted' (Haddon), 'The dance becomes an orgy in which dancers and onlookers wallow in sexual excess' (Austen).³⁶¹ The actual symbolic and social significance of such ceremonies in specific

³⁵⁸ See for examples Benjamin Butcher, *Torres Straits and Kikori Delta. 1905 to 1921*, CWM Papua Reports, Box 3, folder 36, 1921, pp. 6–7; *Annual Report Aird Hill and Urika Districts*, folder 37, 1922, p. 4; *Annual Report Aird Hill*, folder 38, 1923, pp. 3–4; *Annual Report Aird Hill*, CWM Papua Reports, box 4, folder 47, 1932, p. 2. The growing number of couples marrying within the church led to a lack of space and forced the mission to expand by building new barracks; see *Annual Report Aird Hill*, CWM Papua Reports, box 4, folder 46, 1931, p. 1.

³⁵⁹ Benjamin Butcher, *Annual Report Aird Hill*, CWM Papua Reports, box 3, folder 30, 1924, p. 5.

³⁶⁰ Murray, *Papua*, 89.

³⁶¹ James Chalmers, 'Notes on the Natives of Kiwai Island, Fly River, British New Guinea', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 33 (1903): 124; A. C. Haddon, 'The Agiba Cult of the Kerewa Culture', *Man* 18 (1918): 178; L. A. Flint, 'Muguru at Torobina, Bamu River.', *Man* 19 (1919): 34; Gunnar Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British*

localities is difficult to assess as different permutations of some of the same symbols are common across the so-called South New Guinea cultural area, as Bruce Knauft has convincingly shown.³⁶²

The few recollections I recorded in the field suggest that the *buguru* was a wedding ceremony that mainly took place in the *dubu daimo*, involved the entire community and featured sexual intercourse among people who normally are not allowed to have sex (with the exception of a strict separation between *ohio* – unmarried men – and *dubu* – married men), and during which the *mudu abea* (normally the maternal uncle) instructed the groom on marital life and other ritual secrets.³⁶³ For the purpose of my argument it is important to stress the fact that these ceremonies took place in connection with the life revolving around the *dubu daimo*, as opposed to the more private homes (*moto*) that were being built by the evangelised couples on their return to the villages. With this opposition in mind, what seem like a plain description acquires a new meaning as regards its social significance:

in some of these [Kerewo] villages the people gather together to worship God – led by certain of their own members & meeting as did the earliest Church *in the house of one of them*.³⁶⁴

The couples who refused to go through the *buguru* and marry instead at the Mission Station not only brought with them their understanding of Christianity, as they experienced it as part of the mission life, but also, by promoting new gender relations and establishing houses in the style of the nuclear family, they became a force that stood, at least spatially, distinct from the sociality of the *dubu daimo*. The coexistence

New Guinea: A Nature-Born Instance of Rousseau's Ideal Community (Macmillan, 1927), 352; Leo Austen, 'The Dance of the Gope in Kerewo', *Man* 34 (1934): 7.

³⁶² Bruce M. Knauft, 'The Question of Ritualised Homosexuality among the Kiwai of South New Guinea', *The Journal of Pacific History* 25, no. 2 (1990): 188–210; Knauft, *South Coast New Guinea Cultures*.

³⁶³ The existing ethnographic literature seems to suggest that the *buguru* involved an entire age-group, while the accounts I heard in the field do not indicate the existence of such age-cohorts. My findings do not disprove the existence of age-groups mainly because the people who told me about the *buguru* ceremonies witnessed them when they were very young and it is reasonable to think that the previous social structure of Kerewo communities had, in line with the argument I am developing in this section, changed significantly by then.

³⁶⁴ Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill & Urika Report*, CWM Papua Reports box 4, folder 45, 1930, p. 9; my italics.

of these two forces, not necessarily in confrontational opposition but certainly in tension with each other, created the space in which change was made possible.

Naturally, the conversion testimonies recorded by Butcher are an important piece of the puzzle of what brought Kerewo close to Christianity as it was configured in Kikori in the first half of the 20th century. If the argument advanced in Chapter 2 holds true, that for Kerewo change comes from the outside, this might explain why certain individuals agreed to join Butcher to establish a Station at Aird Hill. But the archives also contain other debris that hint at another part of the picture. A constant refrain in the mission and colonial records of this period is the significant decrease in population numbers caused by migration of able men out of the region for waged labour, aggravated by the spreading of venereal diseases and epidemics. Butcher saw the venereal diseases in moral terms, both a despicable sign of the threat of Europeans to the local population, and as further proof of the necessity to oppose the *buguru*, which helped to spread the maladies and the consequent decline in women's fertility.³⁶⁵

The two un-Christian sexual practices of Europeans and local people, the immorality which venereal diseases made evident on bodies, were subsumed into what Butcher labelled 'prostitution'.³⁶⁶ Commenting on the collapse of strong custom, Butcher wrote that expressions of sexuality 'formerly controlled by the social code have become commercialised and a man with several wives will take them round as

³⁶⁵ See in particular Benjamin Butcher, *Annual Report Aird Hill*, CWM Papua Reports, box 5, folder [unmarked], 1937, pp. 2–3. For a fine analysis of how fertility rituals involving sexual intercourse affected demographic trends see Knauff, *South Coast New Guinea Cultures*, 136–71.

³⁶⁶ Lawrence Hammar's important research on sexuality and political economy in Daru, in particular among Bamu women migrants, shows how the category of 'prostitution' is and was problematical for understanding the actual social relations revolving around sexual practices. I will defer discussion of my own ethnographic material on the subject for later work, only noting here that my findings are compatible with Hammar's; see his 'Sexual Transactions on Daru: With Some Observations on the Ethnographic Enterprise', *Research in Melanesia* 16 (1992): 21–54; 'Bad Canoes and *Bafalo*: The Political Economy of Sex on Daru Island, Western Province, Papua New Guinea', *Genders* 23 (1996): 221–43; 'Brothels, Bamu, and *Tu Kina Bus* in South Coast New Guinea: Human Rights Issues and Global Responsibilities', *Anthropology and Humanism* 21, no. 2 (1996): 140–58; 'Sex and Political Economy in the South Fly: Daru Island, Western Province, Papua New Guinea' (PhD, City University of New York, 1996); 'Caught Between Structure and Agency: The Gender of Violence and Prostitution in Papua New Guinea', *Transforming Anthropology* 8, no. 1–2 (1999): 77–96.

prostitutes in order to keep himself in tobacco and other things'.³⁶⁷ Christian marital practices with their ideal of monogamy screened off the converts, at least the young ones, from contracting venereal diseases, but missionary records also enable us to conjecture on the possible relation between healing and conversion.

In 1921, for example, an epidemic of influenza decimated the population in the villages while leaving the Mission Station and its occupants untouched. The archival material I consulted does not permit the sort of fine-grained analysis offered by Bronwen Douglas of a similar case in New Caledonia in the mid-19th century, in which she illuminates the nexus between epidemics, local notions of aetiology, and the local interpretation of the missionaries' presence in making sense of that historical conjuncture.³⁶⁸ In her work, Douglas argues that the presence of missionaries and the incidence of mortality among converts, paired with local aetiologies of disease in the actions of spirits and breaking of taboos, shaped the interactions between missionaries and Puma people (Balade), and thus the latter's subsequent incorporation of Christianity. The archival material I consulted operates under the same logic but points in the opposite direction: the mission *did* save people from contracting the illness instead of causing it.

In Kerewo view, as elsewhere in New Guinea, death is not natural; its causes are to be found in the extra-human realm (either *ebihara* – spirits – or the action of *givari dubura* – sorcerers), as well as its solutions; and in this instance the mission health records point to a pragmatic understanding of how Christianity might be effective against the illness. This explanation helps us to interpret the traces of an encounter between Butcher and Kibauu, a man whom the missionary characterised as 'the most powerful sorcerer in the District' who 'has been a pretty constant source of trouble to the government':

As we talked he admitted that the old ways of his people touched by new vices were working their ruin and said how he wanted us to live near him to restrain his men from their evil courses. Even Kibauu the sorcerer has come to feel the need of a power greater than his own.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Benjamin Butcher, *Annual Report Aird Hill*, CWM Papua Reports, box 5, folder [unmarked], 1937, p. 3.

³⁶⁸ Bronwen Douglas, 'Discourses of Death in a Melanesian World', in *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Dening*, ed. Donna Merwick (Parkville, Vic: University of Melbourne, 1994), 353–78.

³⁶⁹ Benjamin Butcher, *Annual Report Aird Hill*, CWM Papua Reports, box 5, folder [unmarked], 1937, p. 3.

What this passage shows, behind the rhetoric of Christian superiority, is that Kibauu, most likely a *pai dubu* (chief), was concerned for the failures of the traditional means of social reproduction, and started to acknowledge the efficacy of Christian healing powers.³⁷⁰

Christianity and Kerewo language

Butcher undertook the task of translating the Gospel into Kerewo language. His first achievement was the translation of the *Pai Mea Mareko* (Gospel according to Mark), moving on to the remaining three evangelists, the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Philippians, the first Epistle general of John, and the Book of Revelations.³⁷¹ I took copies of the *Pai Mea Mareko* with me into the field, distributing them to village churches regardless of denominational affiliation, and I was always thanked and told that today the Gospel in Kerewo is nowhere to be found in Kikori area. The absence of this important legacy is sometimes associated in people's minds with the curse; as Dauri once told me 'the *Pai Mea* was written in Kerewo but today we are looking for it because we are under a curse [*mibo gorowari*, lit. at the epicentre of the curse] ... It got out of our hands ... they were little books, we saw them once ... where are they today?' Although not everyone identifies the loss of copies of the Gospel translated into Kerewo as an effect of the curse, Dauri's passage is revealing of the importance of the material sign in evaluating the present situation. The curse reveals itself as an absence of signs, and the *Pai Mea* constitutes a material sign of the Kerewo role in spreading the Gospel in their language to their neighbours.

The choice of language was not casual. Butcher observed from his experience in an area extending from the Fly to the Purari rivers that 'Motuan has been regarded as the chief language of Papua but probably the language of which Kiwai is the best known dialect is spoken by a great number of people'.³⁷² This proved to be crucial for

³⁷⁰ For references on the importance of ritual efficacy in Melanesian religions see above fn. 239.

³⁷¹ While I found copies of the *Pai Mea Mareko*, I could not find any of the other parts of the Bible translated into Kerewo language. The plates of Butcher's pictures held at the Mitchell Library in Sydney ('Slides relating to New Guinea and missionaries, ca. 1905-1938 / collected by Benjamin T. Butcher', SLIDES 196 / Boxes 1-5) contain captions from the *Pai Mea Luka*, *Pai Mea Mataio*, *Pai Mea Ioane*, which I could not locate in their entirety in any archival institution.

³⁷² Benjamin T. Butcher, *Torres Straits and Kikori Delta. 1905 to 1921*, CWM Papua, Box 3, folder 36, SOAS Library, London p. 5. As I did not focus on collecting linguistic data that would shed light on the pragmatics of language use in a multi-linguistic situation, I can only point to the fact that at the time of my fieldwork Kerewo constituted something close to a *lingua franca* for a restricted number of groups that historically gravitated around Kikori. Kerewo,

figures such as Wanua, Dauwa's son, who preached among Gope and Urama people who speak languages of the same Kiwaian phylum as Kerewo.³⁷³ But another less practical consequence of the choice of translating the Bible into Kerewo language, or its use for services at the Kikori gaol where Kerewo and non-Kerewo speakers were temporarily forced into cohabitation, was to tighten the perceived link between Christianity and Kerewo in the consciousness of many inhabitants of Kikori area. This is a key aspect to keep in mind when pondering the weight of the assertion that 'we (Kerewo) were the gateway for the Gospel to spread'. The translation of the Bible into Kerewo vernacular reinforced the self-perception that Kerewo people had been chosen by God to fulfil His will.

Christianity and Kerewo modernity

The very activities toward the completion of the church building at Samoa village, which was to be inaugurated for the Centenary, were for me a lesson in history and the understanding of it through the lenses of historical consciousness. I spent hours surrounded by the smell of timber shavings carpeting the floor, while chatting in the semi-darkness of the church skeleton, as some new part was slowly but steadily added to its body. A common observation made by the men working on the timber, whilst carving out a window frame or a solid and smooth log to patch a hole in the elevated pavement, was that those very carpentry skills were a legacy of the Mission activities.

Early on, Butcher provided some technical training for the boys at his mission, later channelled through the Delta Technical School, which received generous funds from the colonial Government itself. The manufacturing of cane furniture was the most lucrative activity, and pieces from Aird Hill travelled along colonial networks as far as Sydney, Brisbane, New Zealand and Fiji.³⁷⁴ Construction and building or repairing was

Kibiri, Porome, Vera, and Hava Mere are all able to speak Kerewo with different levels of proficiency, and they constitute the first circle of an imaginary sequence of concentric levels associated with different *linguae francae*. The next ring is constituted by Kairi, with whom Police Motu is shared (though it is worth noting that usually Police Motu is used in interactions between Kerewo and both Kibiri and Porome). Finally Tok Pisin is used with the outsiders (epitomised by Highlanders or the foreign researcher). Courtney Handman's ethnography on the politics of Bible translation among the Guhu-Samane (Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea), provides a stimulating comparison for the linguistic situation I found at Kikori, but it goes beyond the scope of this chapter; see Courtney Handman, *Critical Christianity: Translation and Denominational Conflict in Papua New Guinea* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

³⁷³ See below, 204-05.

³⁷⁴ Benjamin Butcher, *Delta Technical School and Veru Plantation: Aird Hill and Kikori 1923*, CWM Papuan District Report, Box 3, Folder 38, 1923, SOAS Library, London, p. 1.

another major activity which, as candidly stated in Butcher's reports, allowed the mission to be run at low cost by employing local labour and, with the completion of the pit-saw, by using local timber. The engines of Government vessels along with those of the mission were also repaired with the help of the mission's workforce at Aird Hill. Gardening was taught, thanks to the expertise of South Sea Islanders and technical books, but with little success due to the condition of the soil and the environment, which were far less suitable for agriculture than the hunting and gathering on which people had been subsisting for centuries. The Mission's attempt to initiate a plantation at Veiru, a higher piece of land, proved unsuccessful, as had the Kikori Government Plantation before it and, to some extent, the Ogomabu Plantation later.³⁷⁵

The mission 'girls', under the supervision of Butcher's wife, were trained to undertake 'laundry and household work, sewing, raffia work and mat making', occupations that did not have any economic return but were part of a larger project of disciplining foreign bodies.³⁷⁶ This attention toward practical training was, in Butcher's view, a response to the failures to educate people in the three R's (reading, writing, arithmetic) as a process of 'civilization'. Butcher had no doubt that technical training was part of the same educative process, and insisted on this point in several passages of his reports: 'I regard this technical training as a most important element in the education of the Papuan and therefore prefer our efforts in this direction to be known as a School rather than an Industrial Mission', probably in relation to Abel's activities at Kwato.³⁷⁷

Many scholars have aptly pointed out the role of mission work in creating, through bodily practices, a new colonial subject suitable for the colonisers' needs of a docile workforce.³⁷⁸ While this Foucauldian interpretation is still valid for the Kikori area, it must be understood in the context of early 20th century ideas of the effects of cultural change on the survival of the colonised 'races'; namely that the dissolution of key cultural traits (cannibalism, warfare, sorcery, etc.) would lead to apathy and inertia

³⁷⁵ On the Ogamabu plantation see Penelope Hope, *Long Ago Is Far Away: Accounts of the Early Exploration and Settlement of the Papuan Gulf Area* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979).

³⁷⁶ Benjamin T. Butcher, *Torres Straits and Kikori Delta. 1905 to 1921*, CWM Papua, Box 3, folder 36, SOAS Library, London, p. 6.

³⁷⁷ Benjamin Butcher, *Annual Report Aird Hill and Namau Districts 1921*, Folder 36, 1921, p. 4.

³⁷⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1*, 4–8, 49–85; Wayne Fife, 'Education and Society in Papua New Guinea: Toward Social Inequality', *Man and Culture in Oceania* 11 (1995): 61–79; Wayne Fife, 'Creating the Moral Body: Missionaries and the Technology of Power in Early Papua New Guinea', *Ethnology* 40, no. 3 (2001): 260.

and consequently a depopulation of the area.³⁷⁹ The words used by Butcher in one of his earlier reports to the Society in order to express the necessity of filling young peoples' lives with new activities, resonate quite clearly with similar concerns voiced by Government anthropologists such as F.E. Williams and E.W.P. Chinnery, and the Lieutenant Governor J.H.P. Murray.³⁸⁰

Butcher was explicit in saying that technical education and labour were an integral part of the Christian message,

For primit[i]ve peoples such as we are dealing with I consider this most essential. We preach the Gospel of Gods [*sic*] Love and God's purpose for their lives but we have also to show them how to live their lives according to His purpose. [...] We have come to realise that the programme of Christianity deals with the whole social life of man and here we face a task that is complicated by the fact that old social life is breaking up before the new forces the White race have introduced.³⁸¹

The alternative to this course of action would result in an indolent attitude to life in the villages where the social structure was, according to the missionary's perception, collapsing without something new to replace the old customs that gave meaning to those lives:

³⁷⁹ William H.R. Rivers, ed., *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922); Francis Edgar Williams, 'Depopulation and Administration', *Oceania* 3, no. 2 (1 December 1932): 218–26; Francis Edgar Williams, *Depopulation of the Suau District* (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1933). For a critical analysis of Rivers' psychological interpretation of depopulation in Melanesia see Tim Bayliss-Smith, 'Colonialism as Shell Shock: W.H.R. Rivers's Explanations for Depopulation in Melanesia', in *The Ethnographic Experiment: A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*, ed. Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 179–213; and Judith A. Bennett, 'A Vanishing People or a Vanishing Discourse? W.H.R. Rivers's "Psychological Factor" and Depopulation in the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides', in *The Ethnographic Experiment: A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*, ed. Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 214–51.

³⁸⁰ The convergence between Butcher's practical understanding of cultural change and Government positions on the same issue is evident in the praising of F.E. Williams' *The Blending of Cultures: An Essay on the Aims of Native Education* (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1935) in one of his last reports, Benjamin Butcher, *Aird Hill District Report for Year Ending October 31st, 1935*, CWM Papua, Box 4, folder 50, 1935, SOAS Library, London, p. 4.

³⁸¹ Benjamin T. Butcher, *Torres Straits and Kikori Delta. 1905 to 1921*, CWM Papua, Box 3, folder 36, SOAS Library, London, p. 5.

Old occupations are gradually disappearing or are being carried on in a different manner and we try here to give them new ideas and to show them how to employ their days under new conditions. At present a young Papuan has to choose between a rather indolent and unclean life in his Delta village or one with [a] labour gang in some plantation.³⁸²

It is no accident that Butcher marks as negative both village life under new conditions and life as a labourer at plantations or other workplaces. Colonial discourses about depopulation and cultural loss, and practices which created novel forms of subjectivity coexisted, and opened up a contested space in which different colonial forces could project their own ideas about what colonialism and the people subject to it should look like.³⁸³

Celebrations of the Centenary

Naming the Church

An important part of the Centenary celebrations was the inauguration of two new churches, one at Ero village (Porome) and the other at Samoa. The naming of Samoa's *tana moto* (church), a project inherited from the previous generation, constituted an important moment in which to position Samoa village within a broader regional historical framework. One evening when I was present, the majority of the adult population of Samoa discussed these issues at length, narrowing their choice of a name to either the 'Tamate – Ben Butcher Memorial Church' or the 'Kerewo Missionary Memorial Church'. The latter name was already circulating in Kikori.

As the discussion continued, I kept abreast thanks to the interpolation of English sentences and the kind assistance of the people sitting or standing around me in translating into Tok Pisin. I took Ranghy to one side, and expressed my thoughts on the matter. I stressed the fact that the names of Chalmers and Butcher were already present in connection with the area; Chalmers' name was already inextricably connected to Kerewo people, and the Mission Station a couple of kilometres away was already a testimony to Butcher's presence. There was no mention of Kerewo missionaries or their ancestors who played a key role in the spread of Christianity. I blurted out my thoughts to Ranghy, whose face brightened up while I realized that what I had just done constituted a significant interference; I apologised immediately, begging him to disregard what I just said, that this was none of my business. Feeling guilty I dodged the

³⁸² Benjamin T. Butcher, *Torres Straits and Kikori Delta. 1905 to 1921*, CWM Papua, Box 3, folder 36, SOAS Library, London, p. 6.

³⁸³ Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government*.

invitation to repeat what I just said standing under the lights illuminating the middle of the shelter in which the meeting was taking place; the last thing I wanted was to be ‘on stage’. Ranghy translated what I said into Kerewo, pointing at me. Half hiding behind a pole, with an embarrassed expression, I was watching the reactions of Pastor Faiva, the primary proposer of the Tamate – Ben Butcher Memorial Church option. To my surprise he was nodding, and it was remarked that the name had to be chosen carefully because God’s blessings would come from it.

With this new point of view to consider, the discussion went on: the history of the transition from LMS to Papua Ekalesia, and finally to United Church unfolded. The argument revolved around the existing toponymies: the New Apostolic Church led by Kenneth, the primary denomination ‘rival’ of the United Church among Kerewo, did not contain the ethnic name; Chalmers died at Dopima and his name should not be included as it was part of some other locality’s history; the Mission Station was already named after Butcher; and finally at Veiru (a Kibiri village which played an important role in the LMS history in the area) the name of Oliver Tomkins was used. After all these considerations, it was agreed that the name would be “Kerewo Missionaries Memorial Church”. The stress on the collective name, a memorialization of all Kerewo pastors without distinction of village of origin, was justified with reference to the fact that Samoa Kerewo were sometimes marginalized because they abandoned their villages to settle in another land. Making a call to unity seemed the right thing to do.

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has explained, history is also made up through silences and the choice of what remains hidden has political stakes.³⁸⁴ By choosing to name Samoa’s church the ‘Kerewo Missionaries Memorial Church’, the role of historical actors like Dauwa, Makoni, and Masi – who do not usually appear in discussion and are seldom acknowledged – is given a well-deserved centrality. Moreover, the choice of a collective name was in line with the ecumenical ethos that Samoa village authorities wanted to give to this celebration. The choice did not please everyone, as Kamara Dairi made very clear to me when we first met.³⁸⁵ Contrary to other reactions I elicited on the day of the opening, Kamara complained that the church should have been named after Makoni, the first Kerewo to be ordained pastor. Yet the collective name “Kerewo Missionaries” breaks the widespread pattern of memorialising specific individuals and places, thus insisting on the ecumenical Christian message over local specificities.

With a cunning twist, though, those groups of people silenced with the choice of that particular name are denied their historical role in the process of evangelisation, showing that the limits of the attempted ecumenical encompassment. One group is the women who were active promoters of conversion; another is the South Sea Islanders

³⁸⁴ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

³⁸⁵ See above, 117-19.

who played such an important part in the daily functioning of the Mission. It might be argued that the inclusion of the South Sea Islanders in the memorialisation of the evangelical process would, in practice, have placed Samoa village at the centre, as its name is obviously a legacy of the Samoan missionaries at Aird Hill.³⁸⁶

Ecumenical history ...

The choice to encompass the unity of contemporary Kerewo under Christianity, by using the collective name ‘Kerewo missionaries’ for the Samoa *tana moto*, was also a way to articulate important historical questions: what is the role of understandings of the past in a particular locality which, through the accidents of history, comes to play a specific role in the wider history of a wider community? Moreover, how does the cultural memory of a specific place, its social significance, change in a group’s historical consciousness if viewed from that same locality or from a micro-regional perspective? The answer to these questions was theological.

The rootedness of Christianity in Aird Hill is captured in the image that Ranghy designed for the church’s banner (see figure 5) in which, as Ranghy explained to me, the hand of God is holding Neuri akabu (Neuri mountain). A Bible dominates the mountain and a cross, symbolizing Christianity, germinates from the book.

³⁸⁶ The historical legacy of South Sea Islanders at Samoa is evident from local onomastics (i.e. Faiva, Feku, Olivia, Tasimale), or the presence of introduced plants such as breadfruit, or – this time not only confined to Samoa but spread throughout the area evangelised by the LMS – the geometric design patterns that decorate mats and hand-fan made of grass, and the use of laplap (waistcloth) by pastors particularly during important service, On the role of South Sea Islanders, and especially Samoan teachers, see David Wetherell, ‘From Fiji to Papua: The Work of the “Vakavuvuli”’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 13, no. 3 (1978): 153–72; David Wetherell, ‘Pioneers and Patriarchs’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 15, no. 3 (1980): 130–54.



Figure 5: Banner created by Ranghy Joseph in occasion of the opening of the Kerewo Missionary Memorial Church at Samoa (photograph by the author)

For his design Ranghy was inspired by two passages of the Bible. The first reads:

(5) A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. (6) And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. (7) And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. (8) And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit an hundredfold [Luke 8:5-8].

This passage signifies for Ranghy the need for favourable soil for the seeds of Christianity and its universal message to take root and germinate. It stresses the contingency of its diffusion which coincided, in Kikori, with the local history of Aird Hill, of the Porome people and the Kerewo mission students who followed Butcher. The parents of today's Samoa villagers watered those seeds, which Ranghy's generation had the privilege of harvesting through participation in the Centenary.

The other Biblical passage captures the tension between specificity and universality: 'Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves' (Luke 10:3). For Ranghy this passage encapsulates the dangers that the first Kerewo converts

had to face when preaching amidst kin who were still practising warfare and cannibalism. These two practices, unlike other ‘un-Christian’ practices such as sorcery, which remains part of the contemporary fabric of social life, were the very acts that had been uprooted definitively through adherence to Christianity, thus marking the sharp passage ‘from darkness to light’, the feature common to all forms of contemporary Kerewo historical consciousness.

Ranghy’s banner and the theological reasoning underpinning it mirror the centuries-long theological and missiological problem of the universality of the Christian message, and the contingency of its reception already present in the Pauline Biblical message.³⁸⁷ It is no accident that this very tension is being expressed at the time of celebrations for the arrival of Christianity in Kikori area. Viewed from outside, the past of Samoa village is incorporated within a wider trajectory of socio-cultural change, captured by historical consciousness, but not entirely subsumed by it. The irreducible differences between a specific local history and a broader one play a critical role in local politics.

...grounded history

The location chosen by Butcher had, in his view, the additional advantage of being neutral ground. The missionary, suspecting that local politics might be an obstacle for an ecumenical evangelization, held the idea that ‘a Head Station would have a greater influence throughout a District if not attached to some particular village’.³⁸⁸ Initially, Butcher questioned his intuition because ‘practically all the boys and girls we had about us came from the villages around Goaribari while the people who were nearer to us remained aloof and suspicious’.³⁸⁹ But, from as early as 1921, less than a decade after he began his evangelization work at Kikori, Butcher could see the value of his decision by enthusiastically observing that young boys from the Urika mission station (in the Purari area) were eager to visit Aird Hill, which ‘stands for a new idea and our work as a unifying force is all the more effective by reason of the fact that the station is associated with no particular village. Boys from the Purari can come here and feel this is every bit as much their Mission Home as boys from Goaribari’.³⁹⁰ If the Mission Station could stand as an impartial space to accommodate people coming from different areas, the land on which it still stands is politically charged, and Butcher’s decision to encourage Kerewo people to join the mission impinged on local politics, dramatically evident in what would be labelled the ‘Kumukumu incident’.

³⁸⁷ See Handman, *Critical Christianity*, 108-11; 266–67.

³⁸⁸ Ben Butcher, *Annual Report 1921: Aird Hill and Namau Districts*, CWM Papua, Box 3, Folder 36, p. 3, SOAS Library, London.

³⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

In 1914, while Butcher was away in England, the Samoan teacher Fitui and his wife remained in charge of the Mission Station. According to a report subsequently compiled by B. W. Bramell, the Commissioner for Native Affairs, a group of Porome attacked the mission because the Kerewo (of Mubagovo village) employed at the station had been stealing from their gardens.³⁹¹ Fitui reported the attack to the authorities at Kikori, and a police party was sent to Kumukumu to make arrests. The European officer, C. L. Herbert, decided to enter the *dubu daimo* while it was still dark, and the situation quickly degenerated, leading to the deaths of eleven people, including a little girl by the name of Kolowa who was found bayoneted, and the burning down of the *dubu daimo*. The outcome of this further episode of colonial violence triggered an exchange of blame bouncing from the missionaries to the Government officers and vice versa. Despite their strong denials of any responsibility on the part of the mission, voiced both publically and in private correspondence by Butcher and his wife, the Kerewo and Porome people I spoke with about this incident have little doubt that it was Butcher, as the embodiment of the mission, who had called in the police because he felt threatened.

What became known as the ‘Kumukumu incident’ is part of a longer story of interaction between Kerewo and Porome people in pre-colonial times – a story which belongs to the Karuramio clan of Kerewo Samoa villagers, and which traces the clan’s right to reside at Kumukumu (only later renamed Samoa) back to an episode of inter-group warfare. Below I present an edited and shortened version of the narrative as told by Dauri Kisu, head of the Karuramio clan in Samoa, integrated with details collected through other interviews with Karuramio clan members. This story constitutes the background to the Kumukumu massacre, while also providing a local political frame through which to read the role of Kerewo as Butcher’s *dabi dubura* (bodyguards).

The story of Pepo took place before James Chalmers’ death.³⁹² Pepo was just a baby when Kerewo went to attack Porome where they lived, at Bereme Creek [see fig. 2]. They attacked at daybreak and took this little child, Pepo in Porome language, Babere in Kerewo. The leaders of the expedition were Kevari, Simio,

³⁹¹ Although this account is based primarily on B.W. Bramell, *Native Rising at Aird Hill Papua* (A1, 1914/21935, NAA, Canberra), it is also informed by my familiarity with government reports, personal correspondence and diaries, and newspaper reports in Australia. To include these sources would complicate this story beyond the immediate aim of this chapter, though it constitutes a rich case study with which to analyse the structural and personal-affective relations between colonial agents.

³⁹² Darui, in another occasion, told me that Pepo was present in the Dopima *dubu daimo* when Chalmers was killed, and it was then that he decided to flee to Ubuo village.

Darai, and Gomidi. They took care of him [Pepo/Babere] and so he grew up here [among Kerewo people].

This part of the story refers to Kerewo forms of adoption according to which children adopted at a tender age become part of the family who raised them. To reveal the secret of adoption is to threaten familial relations and to infringe this taboo is, at a normative level, sanctioned by death *givari ito* (by sorcery).

He grew into a man, among Kerewo, and he himself started to raid, on war canoes and with his bow, his own people. They killed to extend their territorial boundaries, because at Kerewo Island, now called Goaribari Island, the population was growing. There was no land where they could make gardens. From Kamaumiri [at the back of Ubuo village] they went to Porome territories: Evamu, Kibai, Erea. They [Kerewo people] started to chase them [Porome people] as far as Wave and Mure creeks.³⁹³ This was one of the last fights, and when they killed the Porome the chief was sorry for Babere who was dancing in the middle of the canoes. Around 5 or 6 Porome bodies were inside the canoe. A man from Turama [who joined the raid] was the first man to kill at Keo [name of the Porome village], his name was Kaiba. Chief Simio said inside the canoe ‘This is your land, it will be called Gebari’. Babere was dancing then inside the canoes, and people said ‘It’s a pity, he is eating his own flesh and is rejoicing and dancing!’ He [Pepo/Babere] became sorry for his own people and cried as he began to unload the dead bodies [from the canoes]. Simio and Kevari [the two Kerewo chiefs] reached him and said ‘You go up there and clear Kumaumiri, your village, because you are from Kamaumiri, you are a Porome man’.

Despite the prohibition on revealing Pepo’s adoption into Kerewo, the very fact that he was not only rejoicing for his own blood, but also likely to eat his own flesh, led a pitying *pai dubu* (chief) to tell him the truth. Shocked by the news, Pepo left his companions and wandered along the streams of Kikori delta before finally landing at Veraibari, a place with deep kinship links with Ubuo, his former village.

Babere went to Veraibari and stayed with chief Dodomoi. He [Dodomoi] knew the Porome language, while Pepo did not as he was taken when he was little. People from Bitaria and Baravi [two Porome villages] came, including Maruru [Pepo’s MF] and they cried. Pepo said ‘I came back, but now I will go’. He went back to Ubuo and from there he went to Gairabu [a Porome land; see figure 1]. He was already old and close to dying. Porome and Kerewo made peace and fights ended. People from Daruo, Bitaria, and Kei’o [three Porome villages] said ‘This man is a Porome, who was brought up amidst Kerewo. Today he came back, and in the

³⁹³ The word for ‘creek’ in this case is *wapo*, which means the head of a stream.

future we will not kill each other'. They all went to Nabeo River and marked that place, establishing the boundaries between Kerewo and Porome lands. Just because of Babere, Porome and Kerewo came together.

Other versions of this story, confirmed by members of the Porome Karuramio clan, assert that Pepo's sons left Ubuo village after the youngest brother was eaten by a crocodile during a raid, a clear sign of *givari* (sorcery) attack. Feeling unwelcome in their own village, and having been told several times that they belonged to the mountain (Aird Hill), the four brothers decided to travel to Neuri akabu, where they were recognised as the descendants of Pepo and welcomed in the *dubu daimo* at Kumukumu. According to some knowledgeable friends, Butcher negotiated the land lease for the mission with the chiefs of Kumukumu, and they coexisted peacefully, but this did not stop other Porome from attacking the mission. Fearful of suffering Chalmers' fate, according to local interpretation, Butcher decided to call in the police to shoot his assailants, but his ignorance of the distinctions among the Porome groups led him to harm friends instead of foe.

The presence of Kerewo people on Porome land became a matter of constant litigation between the two groups, a matter on which the colonial jurisdiction eventually had to intervene. It was not until the late 1950s that the matter was finally decided in favour of Kerewo people on the basis of prescriptive rights – based on a misunderstanding of how local land ownership works – and of their ability to trace genealogical claims through the story of Pepo.³⁹⁴ If the colonial authorities thought that the matter was settled, my experience at Aird Hill proves contrary, as those longstanding tensions were still at play during the Centenary celebrations.

Tensions

Despite the story of Pepo/Babere grounding the rights of a certain clan to reside at Samoa, with the date of the Centenary celebration approaching I started to sense a growing tension in the village. It was not widespread, but it was lurking nevertheless in the minds of some of my friends. Once Ovinou, a man in his thirties with a role in the church who became a close friend over time, came to visit me. He told me that, in the recent past, Porome people came from Ero village to Samoa village to cut their trees, a clear sign that Kerewo were not welcome on their land. Kerewo of Samoa, numerically lesser at Aird Hill, went to Ero village to pay them back, but somehow the impending threat of a direct confrontation was defused. As Ovinou said 'Nothing happened and things settled down, but we do not forget. With the Centenary the LMS lease will end, and we fear that Porome people will question our right to stay at Aird Hill'. I could find no words to comment on this declaration of fear. If Samoa village's identity and right to

³⁹⁴ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 8/58-59, p. 7.

be on someone else's land would be solely tied to the missionaries' activities temporally bracketed by the LMS land lease, then these fears might take on a sinister reality.

This episode plays a key role in Samoa villagers' understanding of their past and present territorial relations, but it is not relevant for all the Kerewo I know. This very simple, common-sense point is an example of the benefits of a micro-regional/multi-sited ethnographic practice, and the limits of village-bound research. The peculiarity of Samoa village is its relevance for broader historical dynamics that shaped Kerewo lives under colonial rule and after. As the epicentre of the spread of Christianity in the region, Samoa village is almost metonymical of both European and Kerewo missionary activities for those who do not belong to this village. My analysis of the Kumukumu massacre within the context of a longer perspective on Kerewo-Porome relations is another example of the role of historical consciousness in mediating experiences, expectation and fears. The Centenary celebrations offer a window onto the broader significance of the mission activities for Kerewo historical consciousness and notions of modernity that inform their temporal relations between past, present, and future.

With the approaching day of Samoa's church opening, the village, as a social unit, and the local United Church authorities, pressured by time, had to depart from the official program as laid out by the Mission Station. The day before the church opening I joined the pastor and other community leaders for a quick trip to Kikori in order to shop for the feast the following day. We went back to the village very soon after, and I accompanied a small party to the Mission Station to raise the flag of Samoa village. Once there, our host offered some betel nuts to the guests, reproaching the men from Samoa village in front of the bishop: 'You have missed a very important event'. Only then I learned that, in the morning, each United Church parish of the Aird Hill Circuit raised its flag on the poles in front of the Mission Station. After that bitter comment, Rohoro also added that Ero village's flag did not go up smoothly, and left this remark hovering. We walked back to the village to get ready for the important morning on the next day.

The early morning clouds gave way to a clear bright sky by the time the bishop and the other United Church delegates, arriving by dinghy from the Mission Station, started to cover the path marked by palm leaves, symbolically reproducing the scene of Jesus' entrance at Jerusalem. As soon as the welcome was over, the first act was to bless the actual site of the Kumukumu massacre, where the archaeologists had conducted their excavations, behind the church. Taped to the cement monument was a printed sheet with the words:

The Massacre
Fallen heads of our grand fore
Parent of Kumu Kumu traditional
Ancient village – 1914

The bishop remarked on the importance of acknowledging the events of the past but, despite the setting of a remembrance ceremony, he insisted that ‘We want to let the past go, let’s not dwell in the past. God has something better for us’. At the very site of the highly contested and symbolically charged past, at the core of Porome-Kerewo of Samoa relations, I interpret the bishop’s words as a remark on the caesura brought about by Christianity with its ecumenical message between the divisive past and the unifying Christian future – a message that was repeated during the service by explicitly stating that to hope for a better life the past had to go. It was inside the newly christened church that I heard the first official public announcement of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony, scheduled for April 2015, marked by the words ‘We want to say sorry to God, forgive and *forget*’.

With this mention of the Peace and Reconciliation, the event of Chalmers’ death was emplotted within Kerewo Christian historical trajectory. Kenneth Korokai, leader of the New Apostolic Church, remarked at this point to a large crowd of mainly Kerewo, in a speech that retraced Kerewo history, that: ‘He [Chalmers] has lost his physical life, but what he left blessed us [...] upon that curse the Gospel has built up’. Rohoro highlighted the ambiguous continuity between Chalmers and Butcher in local history, despite the interruption marked by the former’s death at Dopima: ‘When the Gospel came here the escort of that Gospel were the killers of the Gospel’. The initial words of the bishop about the importance of remembering and the need to forget gain further meaning when placed in this context. While the past to be forgotten – the Kumukumu massacre and the resulting political tensions between Kerewo and Porome – was evidently highly conflicted, the ecumenical past of the arrival of Christianity had to be acknowledged and its contradictions resolved, by means of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony, in order to begin a new peaceful Christian life. Rohoro also publicly encouraged Porome and Kerewo to form a covenant, as the very emergence of Ero and Samoa villages was the result of the arrival of Christianity and local engagement with the missions. In this tension between local and ecumenical pasts, the United Church hierarchies which organised the Centenary stressed the latter as future oriented; as Rohoro publicly stated, they had to think of the next 100 years. In ritually structuring and orienting the temporal ideology toward the future, often by hinting at the millenarian motif of the Second Coming, the local past that was meant to fade away resurfaced in the form of anxiety over the form of the new era.

The friction between Kerewo and Porome, and especially between Samoa and Ero villages which are encompassed under the same ward, became magnified as the Centenary celebrations unfolded. On the Sunday before the actual day of the Jubilee, a special service was held at the Mission Station, and I went along, following the Samoa villagers whose children were to be baptized that day. Roy Rohoro, the superintendent minister of the Aird Hill circuit, led the main service, but several Porome leaders also

gave speeches. The predominant language used was Motu, occasionally mixed with English and more rarely with the Porome vernacular. Since my command of Motu was negligible at that time, I relied on the Kerewo amongst whom I was standing in the big field in front of the mission house to gain an understanding of what was happening. There were three themes recurrent in those speeches: 1) Porome people were the chosen ones, like the Biblical Israelites, for this Centenary; 2) this ceremony was going to mark the beginning of a new era; and finally 3) blessings would reach Porome and the neighbouring tribes. The first of these three points is explained by the fact that Rohoro gave the leadership of the Centenary organisation to the people on whose lands the Mission Station was standing, a move that *de facto* denied Kerewo's part in the history of Aird Hill and the installation of Butcher. By subsuming Samoa villagers under the rubric of 'other tribes' (the name Samoa was mentioned only once) the political animosity between Kerewo and Porome shifted to the symbolic battleground of the past, which, on that occasion, was made Porome-centric. If the first and last points were group-specific, and deliberately treated as such, the trope of the beginning of a new era was more ambiguous. Although nothing precludes the possibility that a 'new era' can begin for one group of people and not another, such rhetoric is part of a Christian ecumenical message and was part of Kerewo as well as Porome discourses about the outcome of the Centenary.

The next day, the opening of the new church at Ero village afforded some friends from Samoa village yet another occasion to play out enmities with their neighbours. Kerewo at Aird Hill are a political minority, as Samoa is part of a ward (a territorial electoral unit) that also comprises Wowo and Ero, two Porome villages. Articulating this political imbalance, some Samoa villagers insisted that, while they were relying on their own funds to build the Kerewo Missionary Memorial Church, Ero villagers could rely on 15,000 kina funds from the PNG LNG Project secured by the Ward Councillor, a Porome man. Marking their achievements as the result of their own sweat was also intended as a theological statement, in line with the United Church policy of financial self-reliance. When the Natai church at Ero was opened on the day of the Centenary, several of my Kerewo interlocutors from Samoa remarked mischievously that, despite all the money Ero villagers had secured without sweat, their church was not completely painted and was missing some final details. These comments revealed some of the complexities of the nexus between God's favouring of hard work, blessing as material wealth, and the ambiguous morality of money. At least since Marx the idea that money is an expression of a relation (between value and labour in his view) has become a truism. Webb Keane's analysis of money as a signifier with a vast array of meanings for Sumbanese Protestants helps us to understand the remarks of my friends.³⁹⁵ What they were telling me (and themselves) was that Porome had failed to

³⁹⁵ Keane, *Christian Moderns*, 270–84.

establish any relation with God by means of the money they had received, in contrast to the Kerewo, whose money was the product of their labour and sweat in order to carry out God's will.

The hospitality of their Porome neighbours was also questioned. At the opening of the church in Ero I could not get in as it was too crowded. But this gave me the chance to sit with some Samoa villagers and listen to their comments. Many Samoa villagers stayed outside, with the exception of John Aukei, whose mother is a Porome woman, and his family. After a long service and the ceremony of the generational passage of flags, the long time spent on the christening of Ero church was becoming tedious for those of us who could not enter the building. Many of my Kerewo friends remarked that they were growing hungry and that it was not polite to leave guests waiting till afternoon to be fed. As Miriam Kahn and others have argued, food is a culturally grounded means through which to comment about social and moral relations, and it is no surprise that the day after the Centenary much of the commentary concerned the feast.³⁹⁶ For the Kerewo men I was sitting with, the feast started too late, and too much time was spent in giving space to each of the Porome clans, thus showing a community fractured along clan boundaries instead of presenting a uniform Christian community, not to mention the disregard for the fact that their guests had had a long day. This turned to be a comment on the alleged inability of Ero to act appropriately as a village and to put aside clan identity,³⁹⁷ much in contrast to the representation my hosts proposed of Samoa village politics as a cohesive unity, gathered around the church when facing outsiders. The quality of the food was also a focus for gossip; from the alleged complaint (attributed to the bishop) that the pig was too greasy, to the alleged diarrhoea of one of the musicians. The underlying issue behind these comments was

³⁹⁶ Miriam Kahn, *Always Hungry, Never Greedy: Food and the Expression of Gender Relations in a Melanesian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁹⁷ Ero village is the result of the amalgamation of three different Porome villages brought together by Eko Natai to be closer to the Mission Station. Although I have not conducted thorough research at Ero, from the discussions I had with some of my acquaintances, I gather that clans are the privileged site of identity and aggregation for Ero villagers. Although the village of Samoa is similarly the result of the history of evangelization and Indigenous responses to it, it was only individuals that at first moved to Aird Hill. As this was an unfriendly territory and Kerewo mission students did not have their kin network to rely on, it is normal that an ethno-linguistic focus of identity creation was developed. Today this unity is centered on the church, part of the village symbolic identity. In the Kikori area there is also a third village, Veiru, composed of Kibiri people, which is claimed to be the result of an amalgamation of different villages as response to the arrival of Christianity. A comparative study would be of some interest to understand how the dynamics of evangelization impinged on local politics.

that Porome people had left no space for Kerewo to speak despite the Peace and Reconciliation – something pertaining specifically to them – having been mentioned several times. Kerewo of Samoa village were complaining because the Centenary was meant to be an ecumenical event, commemorating a past that they shared with Ero villagers and that indeed extended across the Kikori area, and that the Porome people had turned the event into a matter of local, if not clan, history, not only betraying the potential reach of the Centenary, but also marginalizing the role of Kerewo within it.

Conclusions

The opening of the Samoa *tana moto* (church) on the occasion of the Centenary was a catalyst for expression of the desire for modernity, articulated through the idiom of history. The ubiquitous nexus between material signs and God's favour, which characterises the Protestant ethic, was often articulated in sermons and public speeches through the idiom of 'blessings'. This term encompassed semantically disparate things: a way of village life conforming to Christian values, free of quarrels within or between households, implying the cessation of sorcery and the disorderly behaviours associated with marijuana and (usually home-brew) alcohol consumption. These shifts are articulated in terms of changing ways of thinking (*tingting* or *imini*) and ways of being together (*sindaun* or *emidio kiiro*); a project of Christian life that remained to be completed – or, in different terms, an incomplete modernity.³⁹⁸

According to some of my interlocutors at Samoa village, the blessings that they anticipate as an outcome of completing the new church will transform the village into a model for other Kerewo communities, which in their view are plagued by a lack of cohesiveness resulting in out-migration from the coastal areas toward Kikori, Port Moresby and other towns³⁹⁹ and their perception of other Kerewo villages as being still under the control of powerful sorcerers. 'Blessing' could also mean a change in personal life trajectory, expressing more intimate desires, as was the case for Ovinou. In his thirties, and living in someone else's home, Ovinou had dedicated a significant part of his early life to church activities and had refused to marry in order to dedicate himself fully to God's ministry; he hoped to be rewarded by God for his hard work by finding a spouse with whom to settle down, start his own household, and finish his

³⁹⁸ As argued by Handman, *Critical Christianity*.

³⁹⁹ There is an obvious contradiction in this statement, which is the high number of able male workforce employed at logging camps. From what I could observe, though, Samoa villagers are much more prone to send remittances back to their families in the village, contrary to, let's say, migrants living at Port Moresby who hardly contribute to village wealth in many other cases. I believe that a more detailed economic analysis of the remittance economy among Kerewo will confirm my point.

schooling. By and large, though, ‘blessing’ signified the achievement of improved material conditions and ‘development’.

It is in Kerewo inflections of Protestant Christianity that a certain relation with temporality unfolds: a better material future lies ahead for those who, following the teachings from the past, act in the present according to Christian principles. The past being referred to is that which revolves around the evangelization of Kikori, as opposed to the pre-Christian past which persists in the present in the form of sorcery practices and violent behaviour, both considered minor transformations of the head-hunting and cannibalism associated with a pre-civilized past.

The ideology of progress, brought about by LMS missionaries, became grafted into Kerewo self-consciousness, and took root by observing the changes in the material world and production that transpired over the course of just a few generations. For instance, one Sunday afternoon, the church leaders screened to a large audience of parishioners the silent films shot in the area by the missionary Edward Fenn.⁴⁰⁰ I heard many people whispering comments, too distant for me to understand, and hoped I would be able to elicit some memories at the end of the screening, but without success. It was only days later that the content of the films was used to comment on the changes that had taken place in Samoa village and among Kerewo people more broadly. Apart from the trope of wearing cloths (*hipura*) as opposed to going around half-naked (as nating), which was a comment made every time I showed these images, one particular scene captured the imagination of some of my interlocutors. In this scene, half a dozen women were lined up parallel to a huge sago log, beating the internal part of it to obtain the almost pulverized pulp from which to wash out the glutinous substance that later solidifies into raw sago flour. These images bore witness to the hard work their ancestors had to undertake in order to (re)produce, and to the harsher conditions of former lives. The movies were an occasion to reflect on the changes that had occurred: the different process of washing sago, which today follows the ‘Sepik style’ instead of the more traditional *wowo* (made out of sago branches), the contemporary use of outboard motors instead of paddling when it comes to long journeys (at least for those who can afford them), and the use of money instead of traditional valuables.

All these changes are understood as the result of evangelization; the missionaries brought about these changes and comforts, already enjoyed by white people because they had received the Gospel much earlier. Although the missionaries introduced these tokens of modernity to their lives, Kerewo do not yet fully possess them nor are they evenly distributed. Few people own an outboard motor, and those who do use it to transport passengers from the village to Kikori and back, charging in order to cover the

⁴⁰⁰ Edward Richard Fenn ‘Papua New Guinea, c1950: Village and Mission Scenes; South Pacific Village: Christmas Time’, (Canberra, NFSA, item no. 63872); and ‘New Guinea: Aird Hill, Port Moresby, Urama and Mailu Mission Station’ (Canberra, NFSA, item no. 282062).

high fuel expenses and to make a profit. Even fewer people run a small shop (kantin) that provides the village with store products at a higher price than the stores in towns, but they make profit only when some 'emergency' comes up, as there is not much money circulating in the village and it is usually saved for shopping in town or for church offerings. People who do not own these means make money by selling sago, seasonal fruits and produce, fish, or occasional game, at the Kikori market, reinvesting the profit mainly in store food and transport fares. In contrast to the perception that Kerewo have of the lives of whitemen, they see the project of modernity in Kikori as incomplete and it is through reflection on past and present conditions that they find explanations for the contemporary state of their lives.

Chapter 5

‘If It Wasn’t For Us...’: The Place of Kerewo in World WarII Between Local and National Past

The previous two chapters have addressed narratives of the pre-war colonial period and episodes that constitute the backbone of contemporary Kerewo orientations toward temporality. The death of Chalmers and its consequences, including the arrival and spread of the Gospel, play a quasi-cosmological role for many Kerewo in understanding their present socio-economic conditions and future possibilities. The narratives pertaining to World War II do not have the same function of moulding historical consciousness, but they do support and reinforce the temporal orientation shared by many Kerewo in the Kikori area. The deeds of Katue – a Kerewo sergeant who fought during the war and who, in local accounts, played a crucial role in the ultimate victory of the Allied forces – are perceived and recounted as yet another example of the centrality of Kerewo in regional and national histories. The lack of subsequent ‘development’ is thus presented as a lack of external recognition of the true place of Kerewo in history.

This chapter addresses the role played during the war by Kerewo, along with many Papua New Guineans, highlighting their historical agency in the war effort, whether as soldiers, carriers, or labourers. Colonialists acknowledged indigenous agency, though in paternalistic and racialised forms. It is the consciousness of this agency that constitutes the ground for claims regarding the betrayal of the expectations and hopes that the colonialists themselves stimulated at the end of the war. Local stories about Katue embody this sense of historical agency, and it is in this light that I read them as moral claims articulated through the idiom of Papua New Guinean and Australian national histories.

The figure of Katue, read through the traces left in the archives, also speaks of significant migration from Kikori to areas near Port Moresby. The demographic trends triggered by the war had deep consequences for the socio-economic history of Kikori (see Chapter 6). It is at this time that Port Moresby became an integral part of Kerewo social geography; Kerewo now lay a certain claim to the place that embodies modernity in their imaginary, with all its riches and inherent hierarchies.⁴⁰¹ From a historical point of view, the decade following the end of the war constituted the antechamber of the

⁴⁰¹ See Wolfgang Kempf, ‘Cosmologies, Cities, and Cultural Constructions of Space: Oceanic Enlargements of the World’, *Pacific Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 97–114; Rupert Stasch, ‘Singapore, Big Village of the Dead: Cities as Figures of Desire, Domination, and Rupture among Korowai of Indonesian Papua’, *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 2 (2016): 258–69.

structurally marginal position of Kikori in the political economy of the country; a marginality that Kerewo people regarded, at the time of my fieldwork, as incongruent with their historical centrality in contributing to the outcome of the war.

The Pacific War⁴⁰²

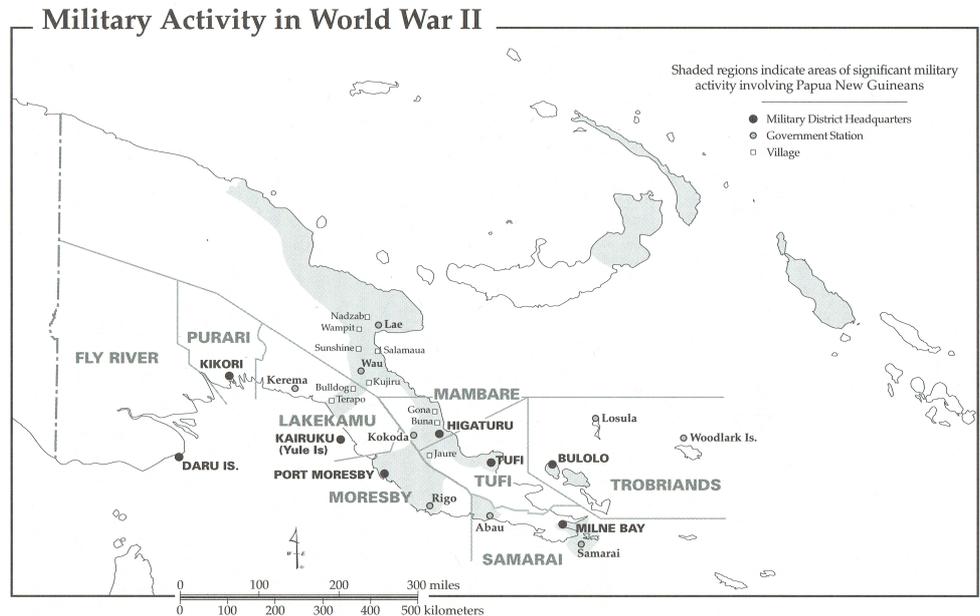
As Hank Nelson has pointed out, a multitude of local histories about the war in New Guinea have remained local and have never contributed to a national narrative.⁴⁰³ As in the case of ‘first contact’ literature in the Highlands, the testimony of witnesses and participants of the war has taken a central place in the oral-*cum*-archival research on the history of the war in Papua New Guinea, as elsewhere in Melanesia and Micronesia.⁴⁰⁴ The locations of battlefields and strategic positions, when seen on a map (figure 6), clearly carve Papuan territory into two areas, dividing the eastern part where war operations took place from the central and western part that was mainly a source for labour. Historiography has oriented itself accordingly, understandably privileging those areas directly impacted by the conflict. As Nigel Oram observed, studies on the effects of the war on local communities ‘are mainly concerned with New Guinea where the war

⁴⁰² With the label ‘Pacific war’ historians usually refer to those WWII battles fought in the East Asian and Pacific theatres, including New Guinea. Although I use the labels WWII and Pacific war as synonyms here, I am aware that shifting the perspective from Europe (WWII) to East Asia (Pacific war) has implications for Japanese historiography which considers the ‘Great East Asia War’ (*Dai Tō-A Sensō*) to be a continuation of the Sino-Japanese war of 1937.

⁴⁰³ Hank Nelson, ‘Introduction’, in *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea: Memories and Realities*, ed. Yukio Toyoda and Hank Nelson (Tokyo: Rikkyo University Centre for Asian Area Studies, 2006), 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Neville K. Robinson, *Villagers at War: Some Papua New Guinean Experiences in World War II* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981); Geoffrey M. White and Lamont Lindstrom, eds., *The Pacific Theater: Island Representations of World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); August Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother: The World of the Papua New Guinea Colonial Police, 1920-1960* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 164–203; August Kituai, ‘The Involvement of Papua New Guinea Policemen in the Pacific War’, in *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea: Memories and Realities*, ed. Yukio Toyoda and Hank Nelson (Tokyo: Rikkyo University Centre for Asian Area Studies, 2006), 186–208; Lin Poyer, Suzanne Falgout, and Laurence Marshall Carucci, eds., *The Typhoon of War: Micronesian Experiences of the Pacific War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001). An important source for oral testimonies and accounts of the war is the journal *Oral History* issued by the Department of History of the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby.

had a more drastic effect'.⁴⁰⁵ But what about places like Kikori, which were only slightly touched by war? Even if the Kikori area, as with many other areas in the former Territory of Papua, was not immediately impacted by open conflict between the Japanese and Allied forces, this does not mean that inhabitants did not pay a toll.



Map 3

Figure 6: Map showing military activities in Papua New Guinea during WWII (from Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother*, 170).

As fascist forces in Europe, at the height of their power, began to pose a threat to the stability of the continent, the Australian Defence Force decided to organise a unit in the Territory of Papua that would be known as the Papuan Infantry Battalion (hereafter PIB). Between February 1939 and the beginning of 1940, former and active members of the Native Police Force were recruited to join the PIB, but the unit was not officially recognised until August 1940.⁴⁰⁶ A year before this recognition, Patrol Officer John P. Campbell-Kennedy received instructions to ‘check up on [... a] list of ex A.C.s [Armed Constabulary], noting which are [...] fit for active service’, and concluding ‘*This matter is important and urgent*’.⁴⁰⁷ Campbell-Kennedy reported that each member of the Armed

⁴⁰⁵ Nigel D. Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City: Port Moresby, 1884-1974* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), 81.

⁴⁰⁶ Hank Nelson, ‘As Bilong Soldia: The Raising of the Papuan Infantry Battalion in 1940’, *Yagl-Ambu* 7, no. 1 (1980): 19–27.

⁴⁰⁷ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4 of 1939/40 (my italics).

Constabulary was ‘willing and enthusiastic in the execution of his duty’.⁴⁰⁸ A Kairi (Kikori upriver) man, Sergeant Samai, was assigned the number ‘1’ on the list of PIB members. Alongside another local member of the PIB, Sergeant Katue, Samai is a well-known figure among contemporary Kikorians, and a source of much regional pride.⁴⁰⁹

Attempts to recruit men from Kikori for the PIB continued, with varying degrees of success. For instance, in 1941, Patrol Officer Foldi was instructed ‘to recruit for the P.I.B. up to 50 big strong “soldiers”. Pay for 3 y[ea]rs, 10-, 15- and 20-. Food excellent and work mostly guards etc. – Camp at Three Mile, Port Moresby’.⁴¹⁰ Foldi’s remarks about the failure to recruit people from the Kerewo areas are imbued with utter irony after the effects of the two punitive expeditions in 1901 and 1904, and the government’s repression of head-hunting practices: ‘Although enquiries were made at each stop no recruits were forthcoming for the P.I.B. It would seem that long years of protection have dulled the appetite of the Goaribari for a fight’.⁴¹¹

The wartime reports written about the Kikori area do not contain any of the scenes of devastation, fear, displacement, and misery of other areas touched by the conflict.⁴¹² The image of Kikori emerging from these documents testifies to ANGAU’s⁴¹³ determination to maintain law and order, and to organise labour for the war effort. The armed conflict intervened in strange and yet marginal forms within the Kikori landscape. In August 1943, work began on the construction of an airfield at Kikori, partly to replace ‘emergency landing grounds’ that are ‘available all along the coast as far as GOARIBARI Island’, but that were ‘only available at low tide and then if they are clear of snags’.⁴¹⁴ Quite ironically, in that same month an American P38 fighter aircraft

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ The figure of Samai was recalled several times in discussions about WWII with many interlocutors or in public speeches. As I did not conduct fieldwork among Kairi people I shall not expand on this figure from Kikori, but I want to stress that he is part of a regional historical knowledge.

⁴¹⁰ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5 of 1941/42.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² See for example Robinson’s account of the diverse war experiences of people living in the Toaripi area, Hanuabada, and Butiban; *Villagers at War*.

⁴¹³ The acronym ANGAU stands for ‘Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit’, which replaced the civil administration of both the Territory of Papua and the Mandate of New Guinea in 1942. See Alan Powell, *The Third Force: ANGAU’s New Guinea War, 1942-46* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴¹⁴ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2 of 1943/44. Port Romilly was another site of an emergency landing ground. During this patrol Lieutenant Ross was instructed to take an iron roller from the LMS station at Urika (Purari area) for the construction of the airfield.

was reported to have crashed near Ai'idio village; on further inquiry it seemed that what had caused the incident was shortage of fuel, as confirmed by the pilot when he was taken to Kikori Station.⁴¹⁵ Several times my companions pointed out the location where this plane had fallen as we were travelling along the channels between the Omati and Kikori rivers. In 1945, further debris came not from the sky but from the sea, as two mines of unknown provenience showed up, once again, in the proximity of Ai'idio village. Other explosives cost the lives of '5 GOARI natives who were killed when they opened and tampered with a box of grenades that were found on the shore', along with the fingers of a man whom I met at Goare village on my first visit to Kikori.⁴¹⁶

Australian anxieties about a Japanese extension of conflict into the Pacific became real with the strike against the US on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The fear of an invasion of the homeland via New Guinea followed all too swiftly when Japanese forces attacked in January 1942 and occupied the town of Rabaul, an important strategic forward position in defence of their activities in Micronesia.⁴¹⁷

Prior to the invasion of New Guinea, the Indigenous population of the Territory of Papua received news of the war from the monthly government-printed newspaper *The Papuan Villager*.⁴¹⁸ The issue of September 1939 opened with the title 'WAR', the article beginning with 'We are sorry to have to say that the British Empire is at war' and concluding, after a lengthy explanation of which nations were involved and Hitler's role in triggering the conflict, with the unlikelihood of the conflict ever reaching the

⁴¹⁵ This incident is reported in Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5 of 1943/44, n. 6 of 1943/44, and n. 10 of 1943/44.

⁴¹⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Report n. 5 of 1946/47; it should be noted that the previous records make no mention of a case of grenades, and this information was collected during a hearing for war compensation claims.

⁴¹⁷ Henry Frei, 'Why the Japanese Were in New Guinea', in *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea: Memories and Realities*, ed. Yukio Toyoda and Hank Nelson (Tokyo: Rikkyo University Centre for Asian Area Studies, 2006), 172–85.

⁴¹⁸ In the intention of its editor, the government anthropologist Francis E. Williams, *The Papuan Villager* was a tool to inculcate a sense of national (that is, Australian) identity and to foster education and literacy among those Papuans who could read English; see Hank Nelson, 'The Papuan Villager: A National Newspaper', *Journal of the Papua and New Guinea Society* 2, no. 1 (1968): 79–85. This attempt to create a national consciousness by means of print capitalism fits the analysis conducted many decades later by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 2006); except that *The Papuan Villager* was run not by capitalists for profit but by the state.

Territory of Papua.⁴¹⁹ The monthly newspaper covered the development of the conflict on various military fronts, from the Mediterranean to Russia. In October 1941, *The Papuan Villager* covered Japan's alliance with Germany and Italy, but the reader was told that:

So far the Japanese have not entered our war. They have done a lot of talking, but they have not begun to fight. [...] Japan is like a very snappy little dog, barking at three big dogs [Great Britain, America and Russia] that just lie down and look at her. [...] If this little dog ever begins to bite, then the three big dogs will jump on her and tear her to pieces.⁴²⁰

The next issue betrayed uneasiness on the colonial government's part while trying to reassure the readers once again that the Japanese 'are not in the war, and we hope that they will not be silly enough to come in. They are having talks with America; and although they are a very fierce people we hope they will not be fierce enough to take on a fight with such a big enemy'.⁴²¹

Despite the administration's efforts to keep people informed about the war and at the same time reassure them 'that it is not at all likely that the enemy should ever come here', the rumours of war were likely spread by those Papuans schooled by missionaries who could actually read *The Papuan Villager*.⁴²² Oral testimonies suggest that in many parts of the Territory, the population was largely unaware of any foreign threat until the Japanese attack on Rabaul; as Oram points out: 'The Papuan population knew little about the war until it was upon them'.⁴²³ Even then, despite the disarray it created among the European population in the Territory of Papua, people in many parts of the colony seemed at first to be more puzzled than concerned.

All this changed with the bombing of Port Moresby in February 1942. Panic erupted across the Territory. As many historians have pointed out, the chaotic evacuation of Europeans from Port Moresby had a significant impact on the local

⁴¹⁹ 'War', *The Papuan Villager*, vol. 11, n. 9, (1939): 65.

⁴²⁰ 'The War' *The Papuan Villager*, vol. 13, n. 10 (1941): 74 (my italics).

⁴²¹ 'The War' *The Papuan Villager*, vol. 13, n. 11 (1941): 84.

⁴²² 'The War' *The Papuan Villager*, vol. 11, n. 10 (1939): 76.

⁴²³ Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*, 63. See also Ulli Beier, 'The White Man's Burden: As a Group of Carriers Saw the War', *New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South-East Asia* 4, no. 3 (1969): 31; Robinson, *Villagers at War*, 96–98, 165–66. Robinson's account clearly shows the striking diversity of access to information in places like Hanuabada (very close to Port Moresby; a small portion of its population was employed in clerical jobs), the Toaripi area (about 300 km from the capital), and Butinabam (near Lae, in the then New Guinea mandate).

population. In the eyes of many Papuans, the palpable alarm among the European population was a hard blow to the myth of white men's superiority.⁴²⁴ Lines of workers, who walked back to their home villages when the colonial order momentarily broke down, spread the news across a part of the country. Part of the European population of Kikori was also evacuated.⁴²⁵ Ahi Auma of Babaguna village shared with me the stories that his parents, and especially his father Mabusu, used to tell him about the war. Ahi's tale gives a feel for the sense of panic in Papua that accompanied the outbreak of the war:

At that time white people started to go out [of the country], running away; they knew because of newspapers or they heard news that war started and reached Papua New Guinea, arriving to Buna. The white people started... the doctor's wife, and the Administrator's wife, the patrol officers' wives, all of them were frightened.

They(2) [Mabusu and his wife, Ahi's parents] put them in the boat, and the boat sailed straight to Port Moresby. The war already began, and people were frightened and scattered all around. Some of us Kerewo went on foot from Port Moresby to Kikori, from the plantations. They ran here on foot.

The two of them [Ahi's parents] went [to Port Moresby] to put these [white] women on the plane. The next day they came back with Katue. While they were sleeping [there in Port Moresby] warplanes came. Frightened, my mother ran away and she was pushed to the ground, she was frightened too [implying that white women were not the only ones who were scared]. She used to tell [us] about this. She was afraid and ran and hid into the ground, in holes. They waited for a long time, and the warplanes flew over them; so they came out. The next day they went on a boat, and came back here to Kikori. [...] Just one white man remained; doctors or whoever they left. They waited out the war in Australia.

Ahi's account of his parents' memories of the war is an interesting counterpoint to the Australian rhetoric of the shared dangers of the conflict endured by the Allied soldiers and Papua New Guineans alike. As Liz Reed has convincingly argued, the historiography about the Pacific War and the commemorations of it are clearly male-

⁴²⁴ Ken Inglis, 'War, Race and Loyalty in New Guinea, 1939-45', in *The History of Melanesia (Second Waigani Seminar)*, ed. Ken Inglis (Canberra - Boroko: ANU - University of Papua New Guinea, 1969), 508-12.

⁴²⁵ Oram notes that 'When European women and children were evacuated from Papua in December 1942, the London Missionary Society ordered the women belonging to the mission to leave, but the men stayed. [...] The training college of the London Missionary Society continued to take in recruits and indigenous pastors carried on with their duties', *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*, 73.

dominated narratives.⁴²⁶ Men involved in the fight endured and suffered dangers that made them into war heroes (anonymous or named). The fear experienced by Ahi's mother, like other Papuan women who suffered from the war, was the same fear which harried the white female population into leaving the country; an option not given to those 'brown' women whose lives were intertwined with the colonial system.

In addition to those men from Kikori who joined the PIB, Kerewo people, along with many other groups around the Territory, provided the labour necessary to sustain the war effort, either in the battlefields as carriers or as plantation workers. These workers constituted the ignored mass that made the Australian victory possible on the Pacific front. Almost all of my Kerewo interlocutors recounted how their fathers had been lined up in the villages, checked for signs of hair under the armpits or an incipient beard to assess their age, and then conscripted for work. Under the ANGAU administration, Papuan labourers were supposed to be volunteers, but this regulation was not always observed. Patrol Officer Grimmer was ordered to recruit 100 men during his visit of inspection at Kikori; he managed to gather 51, and commented that 'the chance of finding recruits is hopeless, as none of the number being sent in have actually volunteered'.⁴²⁷

Many villages were depleted of their able-bodied male population, and this demographic situation has to be taken into account in evaluating the situation that Patrol Officer Robinson found at Kikori in April 1943. Robinson reports that people in the Goaribari Sub-District were in a state of 'apathetic blight', many villages had been largely abandoned for life in the *kombati* (bush camp), and signs of split within the villages of Kerewo (Otoia) and Goare were evident.⁴²⁸ Robinson attributed this to the spreading of diseases that were causing so many deaths, and wondered if the option of abandoning the villages in favour of *kombati* was not an 'unconscious revolt against the dubu [long-house]'.⁴²⁹ Robinson's explanation, resting on Western notions of hygienic norms, does not contemplate the likely social consequences of death, especially sorcery accusations, particularly in a demographic situation that must have reconfigured the relationships between genders and age groups. The patrol officer appeared oblivious of what the absence of a large number of men might imply for everyday lives.

Comparison between the numbers of people found at Dopima village and those at Kerewo village leave little doubt about why the population of the latter was inclined to split: while at Dopima Robinson counted '14 men, 16 women (6 of child bearing age)

⁴²⁶ Liz Reed, "'Part of Our Own Story": Representations of Indigenous Australians and Papua New Guineans within Australia Remembers 1945-1995 — the Continuing Desire for a Homogeneous National Identity', *Oceania* 69, no. 3 (1999): 166–67.

⁴²⁷ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5 of 1941/42.

⁴²⁸ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 1 of 1943/44.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

and 4 children' and was told that some other people had left the village to trade with Kairi people, at Kerewo village he counted '25 women (10 child bearing age) 6 old men'.⁴³⁰ And yet, despite this demographic situation in the area, a further 41 men were recruited as labourers during this patrol. Robinson closed his report commenting that the difficulty in recruiting people was:

purely a temporary set-back and the District should be better off later, consequent upon the experience and broadening of outlook that the ex indentured labourer should have acquired. And for the native himself, it is a form of forced advancement – the inevitable rubbing shoulders with civilization to which sooner or later he must be subjected, and the sooner the better, for his ultimate advancement.⁴³¹

In the colonial fashion, which began for Kerewo with the taking of Kemere to Port Moresby after the first punitive expedition in 1901, members of the same ethnolinguistic group were thought to serve the dual function of providing cheap labour and acting as 'agents of civilisation'. This well-established practice seemed to be effective as Patrol Officer K. M. Ryan, reporting on an inspection carried out between late December 1943 and early February 1944, could write: 'Unlike the TURAMA people the GOARIBARIS are now voluntarily reporting to KIKORI for employment, no doubt being overcome with the tales of glory told by spell [i.e. indentured] labour'.⁴³²

What kind of 'glory' Ryan referred to is hard to picture. Many scholars have pointed out that, although medical care and the food provided were usually adequate, labour recruitment quickly changed from a voluntary basis to coercion, labour conditions were harsh, workers were often subjected to physical punishment, and the pay was low (between 6 and 7 shillings a month) and received only at the end of the contract.⁴³³ In the absence of either roads or pack animals, human carriers were needed in

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 15 of 1943/44.

⁴³³ See Peter Ryan, 'The Australian New Guinea Administration Unit (ANGAU)', in *The History of Melanesia (Second Waigani Seminar)*, ed. Ken Inglis (Canberra - Boroko: ANU - University of Papua New Guinea, 1969), 539–46; Beier, 'The White Man's Burden: As a Group of Carriers Saw the War', 33–35; Edward P. Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1975), chap. 8; Hank Nelson, 'From Kanaka to Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel', *Labour History*, no. 35 (1978): 172–88; Hank Nelson, 'More Than a Change of Uniform: Australian Military Rule in Papua New Guinea, 1942-1946', in *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea: Memories and Realities*, ed. Yukio Toyoda and Hank Nelson (Tokyo: Rikkyo University Centre for Asian Area Studies, 2006),

order to transport goods, armaments, and also wounded people across difficult terrain. As supplies of rubber and copra from Malaya were cut off by the war, the production of these goods in Papua had to go on ‘even if a temporary sacrifice of native interests is involved’.⁴³⁴ ‘Glory’ does not seem like the right word to describe what many Kerewo were seeking by enlisting to work outside their District under those conditions, but the words of my host and friend Pepo Arumi of Samoa village might shed some light: ‘us Kerewo do not work to just to get money; we do it to gain knowledge [*kisim save*]’.

Not until June 1945, a couple of months before the war on the New Guinea front was won, did Patrol Officer O’Connor include in his report these honest and perceptive observations: ‘I have come to the conclusion that [...] the fault’ for the poor conditions of the villages at Kikori ‘largely lies with us; I.E. most of the virile men have been taken from these areas [...] and are only now being repatriated [...] while many are still away working on contracts’.⁴³⁵ Yet the recruiting policy did not change. In January 1947, when the civil administration was restored, Patrol Officer Holmes gave some astonishing figures for Mubagovo [MUBAGOA in the original document] village: ‘Of the village male population of 22, 5 only remain there, the other 17 having signed for work on various STC plantations’, or

Whereas an AI:I:IDIA census dated 1942 shows a total of 163 people there are now about half that number in the same village. Of the 65 males recorded in 1942 24 have died in the past 2 or 4 years, 6 have migrated to GORO and KEMEI, and of the 35 remaining 23 are under indenture.⁴³⁶

Holmes recommended restricting recruitment from Kikori as ‘to allow a breathing space, which has not been enjoyed since before the war, to the peoples’.⁴³⁷ The extent to

241–45; Robinson, *Villagers at War*, chap. 2; John Waiko, ‘Oral History and the War: The View from Papua New Guinea’, in *Remembering the Pacific War*, ed. Geoffrey M. White (Honolulu: Centre for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 1991), 8–10; Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother*, 171–85; Noah Riseman, ‘Australian [Mis]Treatment of Indigenous Labour in World War II Papua and New Guinea’, *Labour History*, no. 98 (2010): 163–82; Noah Riseman, *Defending Whose Country? Indigenous Soldiers in the Pacific War* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), chap. 3.

⁴³⁴ Robinson, *Villagers at War*, 16. See also Nelson, ‘More Than a Change of Uniform: Australian Military Rule in Papua New Guinea, 1942-1946’, 241–45.

⁴³⁵ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 19 of 1944/45.

⁴³⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5 of 1946/47.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

which Kerewo villages were in need of a pause from recruitment can be assessed from the figures compiled by Holmes in his next report (table 2).

Table 3: Goaribari District, Population Census March 1947, Appendix A in Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5 of 1946/47 (the orthography of village names is as given in the original document)

Village	1 Adults (exc. column 3)		2 Children		3 I/Ls, Casuals, Wives, etc. "permanently" absent from village.		4 Total Population (inc. col. 3)
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Gauro	27	18	3	-	2	-	50
Iowa	25	21	3	-	2	-	51
Kemei	18	24	5	3	24	-	74
Ai:idia	17	32	5	2	22	1	79
Goari	18	24	3	5	8	-	58
Namaiture	8	13	3	6	-	-	33
Kerewa	26	46	10	9	23	-	114
Mubagoa	12	18	2	8	15	-	55
Gainibari	11	6	2	1	6	1	27
Kereka (?)	2	2	-	1	-	-	5
Pai:ia:a Poiko (No. 1)	17	17	8	11	16	2	71
Pai:ia:a (No. 2)	30	27	23	9	15	-	104
Nagoro	34	34	11	15	26	2	122
Moinamu	3	2	2	1	8	-	16
Goro	42	41	17	14	12	3	129
Dopima	28	54	10	16	34	5	147
Aimahe	40	57	17	16	23	2	151
Ubuo	26	36	10	10	16	1	99
Tatana	2	1	-	1	-	-	4
Babai	32	42	21	20	13	-	128
Gebebari	19	22	12	11	7	3	74
Dubumba	38	30	10	11	24	-	113
Kiviri	42	43	16	17	5	-	123
Pairi	11	9	1	-	-	-	21
Lona [?]	10	7	1	2	-	-	20
Paile	16	25	11	13	7	4	76
Babauina	8	7	5	2	6	3	31
Mumuria	20	23	7	6	11	5	72
Samoa	35	28	14	11	12	1	101
Kirivapu	8	11	1	5	2	1	28
Kulumadau	5	5	2	2	1	-	16
Total of Kerewo Speaking People	630	722	238	228	340	34	2192

The demographic impact of the war also affected the villages in other ways. For example, one feature emerging from the reports but not recalled by my interlocutors was the constant need for food supplies for Kikori station. The beginning of the war, first in Europe and then in Papua New Guinea, did affect the colony's capacity to import and distribute goods, and the Kikori area relied on sago, a starch flour as nutritious as its taste is bland. The purchase of sago from villages for the war effort was often 'urgent' and certainly placed a burden on the villagers. In 1939 Patrol Officer Campbell-Kennedy purchased 123 bundles of sago, each bundle weighing about 20kg.⁴³⁸ Each bundle was bought with one and a half sticks of tobacco and it is worth stressing not only the inequity of the exchange value between these two products, but the very fact that the administration, usually so eager to draw villagers into the market economy, conducted transactions in a barter-like fashion when it was to its own advantage. The burden of producing sago fell on women, some of whom were recruited as labour, although in fewer numbers than their male counterparts.

The stories that I was able to piece together from oral and written accounts of the war paint a stark picture of the harsh experience of many Kerewo (and Papua New Guineans) during the war, both at home and in war zones. Personal memories of fear and loss were passed from parents to children within individual families, but failed to merge into a communal narrative that made sense of the event of the Pacific War. Stories of Katue and his deeds against the Japanese army fulfilled the function of a collectively-known narrative framework which might reinforce the claim that Kerewo people occupy a central place in the history of Papua and New Guinea.

Katue between war hero and troublemaker

As historian August Kituai proposes, while some individuals have been covered by historiography and in this way have come to occupy a sort of national status (though it is questionable how true this statement would be two decades after the publication of his book), '[l]ittle is known of the others who achieved a great deal [...] and are not readily known beyond the people of their home provinces'; Katue is one of them.⁴³⁹

From the written records, little is known of Katue of the Davadai *gu* of Goro village before he became an Armed Constable. Katue would have spent between six months and one year training at Port Moresby, shaping his physique for long patrols, learning English, and refining his aim with the issued .303 rifle, as part of the training received by the police force.⁴⁴⁰ In his capacity as an Armed Constable (A.C.), he was then selected for several patrols that took him across Papua.

⁴³⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 11 of 1939/40. Several other reports refer to the supply of sago for Kikori station as a pressing matter; see Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 15 of 1943/44.

⁴³⁹ Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother*, 192. A biographical description is in Kituai, 194–95.

⁴⁴⁰ For a detailed description of the recruits' training see Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother*, 85–109.

Katue distinguished himself during the famous Bamu-Purari patrol of 1936, led by Patrol Officer Ivan Champion. During this patrol the party's path was blocked by the Hegigio River; here 'A.C. Katue tried to swim across with a line. He almost succeeded, but he was swept away in the roaring current at fifteen miles per hour and we gave him up for dead. But he got ashore unaided. It was a magnificent effort.'⁴⁴¹ Katue's physical strength impressed Champion, and won him 'a Papua-wide reputation for valour as a police boy'.⁴⁴² George Johnston, a war correspondent for the Australian press during the Pacific War, adds that Katue 'swam a flooded river with a rope tied around his waist to save 3 white officers from certain death'.⁴⁴³ Johnston's later version is obviously in contradiction with Champion's account, but to ascertain the factuality of whether or not Katue had saved the lives of white officers is less important than noting how Katue became invested with an aura of heroism.

Not all reports about Katue depict him in a positive light; the alternating representation of the Kerewo man as either war hero or troublemaker is a constant feature of the official records. For instance, in late February 1942 Lieutenant Faithorn went on patrol in the Rigo subdistrict (in contemporary Central Province) to reassure villagers that, despite the war, there was a government in charge. In his remarks he considered this patrol timely as 'The natives were showing signs of restlessness and were under the impression that there was no Government', thus threatening the maintenance of law and order. Faithorn assured the people that 'There is a Government. A strong Government. An army Government'.⁴⁴⁴ During this patrol, Faithorn discovered that Sergeant Katue, while at Hula village (about 120 km east of Port Moresby), had illegally issued the local Village Constable with an order to shoot a village pig, and had also 'held "Court" and given a decision on a Civil "case"'.⁴⁴⁵ Faithorn did not find Katue, who 'was out at KALO evidently rounding up plantation labourers', and so he reported the Kerewo man to the PIB Sergeant Major, adding in his report that he was of the opinion 'that Sgt. Katue is a menace and exercising a bad influence on natives when acting away from European supervision'.⁴⁴⁶ Faithorn did find large quantities of rice and flour at Hula; he suspected that this food had been obtained illegally but – as he could

⁴⁴¹ Territory of Papua, Annual Reports, 1935-36; p. 21. Champion's account in *The Geographical Journal* depicts the same scene in more neutral words: 'An attempt by A.C. Katue on the following day to swim across it was unsuccessful'. Ivan Champion, 'The Bamu-Purari Patrol, 1936', *The Geographical Journal* 96, no. 3 (1940): 203.

⁴⁴² George H. Johnston 'Papuan Sergeant's Private War' in *Argus*, October 10, 1942, p. 3.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ Patrol Report, Rigo, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁵ Patrol Report, Central District, Rigo, no. 1 (1942-44): 2.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

not confirm his suspicion – took the villagers’ word that they had paid for it. Yet, Faithorn’s observations suggest another, conjectural, interpretation. As the officer noted, the Village Constable Kove had long experience in his position and would have known that Katue’s order to shoot a pig was unlawful. This suggests that Katue might have been developing ties and networks to establish his power in an area where he was residing. This inference is obviously unverifiable, but it seems plausible in light of the role Katue played in the establishment of Kerewo settlements in Port Moresby, discussed below.⁴⁴⁷

Just a few months later, the Australian press featured articles with titles which are in stark contrast with Faithorn’s remarks: ‘Black Warrior: Astonishing Exploits of Katue’, ‘Loyal Papuan Police Boy’, or ‘Sgt. Katue: Papuan Hero’. War correspondent George Johnston’s report is worth quoting at length in order to appreciate the tones in which Katue’s actions were depicted to the Australian public, and later received back in Papua New Guinea when newspaper clippings began to circulate among veterans:

This is the story of Sgt Katue, a squat, broad-shouldered, well-muscled and coal black warrior of a Papuan force. Many of the native troops of this all-native unit [the PIB] have performed magnificently in the Papuan jungles since the Japanese landed 10 weeks ago. But none has a record comparable with that of fierce-faced Sgt Katue, who returned yesterday from more than 2 months patrolling in the mountain jungles. Stitched to the shoulders and sleeves of his stained khaki jacket was a mass of stripes, badges and regimental insignia taken from some of the 26 Japanese soldiers and marines whom Katue shot dead.⁴⁴⁸

The next seven paragraphs of this article recount in detail the deeds of this ‘gunman of the Wild West’, stressing Katue’s courage and efficacy behind enemies’ lines and his ability to organise the local population and his own troops against the Japanese soldiers while maintaining their welfare. Johnston concluded:

⁴⁴⁷ The use of conjectures, of the ‘most likely’, in historical accounts is epitomised in the work of Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). I do have some reservations about the use of this ‘method’, and largely agree with Carlo Ginzburg’s objections; see Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Proofs and Possibilities: In the Margins of Natalie Zemon Davis’ *The Return of Martin Guerre*’, *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 37 (1988): 113–27 [which appeared first in Italian as an afterword to the 1984 translation of Davis’ book]; Robert Finlay, ‘The Refashioning of Martin Guerre’, *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 3 (1988): 553–71. It is only in this instance that I felt that conjecture could be legitimated by an overwhelming absence of records and oral histories pertaining to that period, especially in light of Katue’s actions after the war.

⁴⁴⁸ *Kalgoorlie Miner*, October 10, 1942, p. 4.

Katue, this loyal and brave *Australian*, grinned boyishly when I left him today and called after me: “Me go out again quick time. This time me bring back stripes of Japanese general!” And it wouldn’t surprise me if he did, because Sgt Katue of Papua is just the chap to do it.⁴⁴⁹

The story recounted by Johnston was a piece of the mosaic that was building a new Australian image of the Papua New Guinean, that of the loyal native, captured under the label of the ‘fuzzy wuzzy angel’.⁴⁵⁰ Johnston’s narrative, inscribed in poorly-preserved newspaper cuttings jealously kept by some of my interlocutors, also serves to confirm Kerewo lore about Katue.

Katue’s war exploits are known to most of my interlocutors. While their accounts vary in some details, the overall structure of the different narratives is similar. What follows is the account I recorded during an interview with Dauri Kisu. The first part establishes the historical value of the PIB for the Kokoda Campaign, the moment when the Allies forces managed to stop the Japanese advance toward Port Moresby:

Australia and New Zealand were outnumbered. Their first action was at Avara [village in the Central Province]. Captain Hitchcock gave the order to the PIB to go first; it was July 23 1942. They were the first to open fire. They won [the battle] and celebrated at Avara with a Kiwai dance. [...] They were gaining strength; they got strength out of the PIB, *the army of this nation*.

The Japanese were already attacking [Imita] Ridge; in a day or so they would reach Port Moresby. [...] The Australians pushed them back only thanks to the PIB. You know, when they write a story they don’t do it accurately, they didn’t name everyone. They only named these people: Katue, Samai, Sgt. Kari, and [few] other people.

Then Dauri recounted the story that pertains properly to Katue:

About 500 Japanese soldiers were carrying the Japanese Marshall. At Gona [village] Katue decided to ambush them, and so told all the battalion. It was Iamere

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., my italic.

⁴⁵⁰ The expression ‘fuzzy wuzzy angel’ comes from a poem written by a Canadian soldier, Bert Beros, while serving in New Guinea, published in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*. The last two verses read: ‘May the mothers of Australia, when they offer up a prayer/ Mention those impromptu angels/ with their fuzzy wuzzy hair’; *Courier-Mail*, October 31, 1942, p. 4. The expression came to signify the great significance of Papua New Guineans in saving Australian lives during the conflict, and marked a shift in perception of Australia’s colonial subjects; see Nelson, ‘From Kanaka to Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel’.

who shot this man [the Marshall]. [The Japanese commander] put his hands up and said ‘Who is that boy? Come!’, and [after asking for his name] he wrote it down in a book and gave it to Iamere. Then Katue shot them all. Katue took the general’s uniform and on the same afternoon he was transported by the army Air Force to Australia. The newspaper said ‘Katue the “Green Shadow” is in the general’s uniform’. But then, when they wrote the story, the Australians hid this fact because they were the colonisers; they celebrated only their own exploits. It was a Papuan who shot the general! [...] After this the Japanese surrendered. They went to the enemy camp with a white flag and said: ‘it’s over, we don’t want to fight against you anymore’. Japan surrendered and they signed [the peace].

Among the narratives I recorded, Dauri’s most explicitly links Kerewo to Australian and Papua New Guinean national histories. During his long residence in Port Moresby, where he worked as a magistrate, Dauri has been involved with the association of War Veterans. The reference to the participation of New Zealanders along with Australians and the mention of 23 July is linked to the politics surrounding Papua New Guinea’s own celebration of the war, for which 23 July (the date of the first action of the PIB) has been preferred as a national Remembrance Day over the Australian ANZAC Day on 25 April, to mark a break in the two national histories after Independence.⁴⁵¹ The mention of Katue as ‘Green Shadow’ is a reference to Byrnes’ history of the PIB and also the titles of several Australian newspaper articles kept by Dauri in a folder.⁴⁵²

According to Byrnes, ‘Green Shadow’ is the English translation of the Japanese term *ryokuin* which Japanese soldiers used to refer to Papuan soldiers, whom they feared and respected.⁴⁵³ Dauri’s explanation is similar:

A Japanese officer wrote ‘in Papua New Guinea we were fighting with ghosts’. They [the Japanese] couldn’t see our soldiers; they were using their *ebiha* [spirit that grants powers]. They would only see a shadow, a green shadow. They were expecting shots coming from the front, but they came from the rear instead.

The *ebiha* granted PIB soldiers the power to hide beneath the ground or in trees from which they would emerge to kill the enemy. A combination of hunting skills and

⁴⁵¹ See Hank Nelson, ‘Gallipoli, Kokoda and the Making of National Identity’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 21, no. 53 (1997): 158; Hank Nelson, ‘Kokoda: And Two National Histories’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 74–76.

⁴⁵² G.M. Byrnes, *Green Shadows: A War History of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, 1 New Guinea Infantry Battalion, 2 New Guinea Infantry Battalion, 3 New Guinea Infantry Battalion* (Newmarket: G.M. Byrnes, 1989).

⁴⁵³ Byrnes, 1.

supernatural powers were, for many Papua New Guineans who fought in the war, the key to their successes in battle.⁴⁵⁴

Dauri's version mentions Iamere, a man from Dubumba, as instrumental to Katue's success. When I asked for clarification of his role, the answer reproduced the military hierarchy: 'Iamere is a private. Katue is a sergeant; he gave the order when they ambushed [the Japanese]. Katue ordered him "go and hide there because that man [the general] will come this way; you look at me and, when I say so, you shoot"'. It was Katue's own *ebiha* that told him of the Japanese movements and who to shoot. But the version that is considered most authoritative at Kikori accords significantly more prestige to Iamere; *he* becomes the war hero who voluntarily stripped himself of his honours. The following transcript is from a longer interview that I conducted with Beamo Pari of Apeawa village, the adoptive son of Iamere:

I am the son of my father, Iamere, who resided with the mother who birthed me. He himself told me this story, the one that I'm telling. 'Katue did not shoot the king [of the Japanese], it was me, Iamere, who did it. I was only a little boy, still *ohio* [unmarried], and so I said "I am still *ohio*, I don't have a wife" and I gave the kings' numbers [military insignia] to Katue'. [The king] gave the book only to him [Iamere] and the king's name was Hitler, the king of Japan. Iamere shot him on the thigh.

He hid with his *ebiha* inside a tree. The *ebiha* told him [Iamere] 'They are coming from the front; let them through. Then another group will come with two flags, and a man will be riding horses; shoot him in the thigh. If you shoot him all the others will die.' That's what the *ebiha* told him.

They came, and the head of the convoy passed; then came the contingent in the middle, and the *ebiha* said 'Shoot this one.' As soon as he shot Hitler, the king, in the thigh all the [enemy] soldiers put their guns down and didn't move. 'Who are you? Come out, don't be afraid'; and so Iamere came out [of his hiding place]. The king said 'You shot me, I'll give you my numbers [military insignia]', and so he took off the insignia: his shirt, his hat, all he was wearing.

'Your name?'

'Iamere Banie'

The king himself wrote down the name in a book and gave it to Iamere. [...]

Katue heard the noise of guns but when he arrived everything was over. He [Katue] shot the king in the head.

Iamere, frightened, ran away. Katue came out [of the bush] and reached him.

[Iamere said] '*Nana* [older brother] I am scared'

[Katue replied] 'I shot the king dead'

'Is it true?'

'Yes'

⁴⁵⁴ Kituai, 'The Involvement of Papua New Guinea Policemen in the Pacific War', 203.

And so Iamere gave Katue the king's shirt and hat.

Katue was dancing at the camp and the white people asked 'Katue, what's happening?'

'I shot the king dead', and so it was only his deeds that were celebrated, not Iamere's. Iamere shot the king. But only Katue's name was celebrated and so they gave him land, at Gabutu. Katue took a Hula wife, and so he resided at Aroma [Central Province], at Gabutu.

Beamo's version, which rests on the authority of his relationship with the protagonist, contains many elements in common with the narratives of Dauri and others, the most important of which is the claim that this action ended the war. The figure of Hitler as the king of Japan is the very personification of the enemy defeated. Although the motif of the 'king of Japan' (usually unnamed) is common in Kerewo accounts, it is sometimes contested. For example, John Aitau, a Kerewo leader resident at Kikori from Apeawa village who served as a soldier during the Bouganville Crisis, explicitly told me that the claim of killing Hitler is born of an ignorance of history. For John, it was simply a high-ranking officer of the Japanese forces who was killed, but this does not change the fact for him that Kerewo people contributed significantly to the ultimate victory of the Allies over the enemies. An apparent lack of historiographical accuracy does not undercut the essential truthfulness of Kerewo oral stories or their moral message.

The discrepancy between Dauri's and Beamo's versions, which I am using as examples of the two poles of 'historiographical accuracy' between which peoples' accounts shift, can be explained by the different social contexts in which these versions were elaborated. Dauri had been a magistrate in Port Moresby and has his residence there. In the capital he got involved with Papuan war veterans and he felt it was his duty to promote their historical and moral claims, especially after Ben Moide, the last surviving veteran, died at the end of December 2013. Less than two months later, I recorded my interview with Dauri when he came to Kikori for a visit. In contrast, Beamo's version is to be read in light of the politics of secrecy within which the power and truthfulness of stories are to be understood.

To know the real name of a person or a place is to have access to truth and its power. This became apparent to me on many occasions when I discussed this historical episode and its different versions. One interlocutor told me, in front of a large group of people all from the same village, that both stories about Katue and Iamere were false; instead it was a man from their own village who killed the Japanese general. On this occasion all agreed not to tell me more otherwise I might have been endangered by *givari* (sorcery). Secrecy, as Wagner has shown, contains in itself the potential for creating and disentangling the constituted order of meaning; to keep secret the 'real' name of the person who killed the king of Japan is to retain control over the story, but at

the same time the restricted circulation of the true name brings the risk to see rejected the recognition of the truthfulness of one's statement.⁴⁵⁵ Differences notwithstanding, the moral message that Kerewo articulate through these stories is uniform: we contributed to ending the war, but we have been forgotten.

Katue's place in national and local histories

As the war progressed, public opinion in Australia came to recognise something of the debt of gratitude owed to their colonial subjects. The 'natives' who worked and fought alongside Australian and American soldiers and carried the wounded were transformed into 'fuzzy wuzzy angels'.⁴⁵⁶ Papua New Guineans were addressed by speeches such as this:

In the past, you natives have been kept backward. But now, if you help us win the war and get rid of the Japanese from New Guinea, we Europeans will help you. We will help you get *houses with galvanized iron roofs, plank walls and floors, electric light, and motor vehicles, boats, good clothes and good food.* Life will be very different for you after the war.⁴⁵⁷

The admission of having deliberately kept the colonial population backward is likely to have been interpreted as confirming the idea that white people held a secret to their material wealth, and were now willing to share it with Papua New Guineans. It is no accident that two of the most famous leaders of so-called 'cargo cults', Yali and Tom Kabu, were veterans of the Pacific War.⁴⁵⁸ The goods and services listed above are still powerfully attractive to any contemporary Papua New Guinean living in rural areas or town settlements. But, if not betrayed outright, those promises have never been realised.

The recognition of the significance of Papua New Guinean contributions to the war for Australia has increased over the years. As Inglis noted 'Kokoda', the track where the Australian counteroffensive took place, 'was felt to be a defence of home and hearth'⁴⁵⁹ – an Australian 'home and hearth' defended on Papua New Guinea soil. After the country's Independence, more than one Australian Prime Minister attempted to draw the events of WWII into the foundational myth of the nation.⁴⁶⁰ The political act of

⁴⁵⁵ Wagner, 'Ritual as Communication'.

⁴⁵⁶ Nelson, 'From Kanaka to Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel'.

⁴⁵⁷ Inglis, 'War, Race and Loyalty in New Guinea, 1939-45', 523 (my italics).

⁴⁵⁸ See below fn. 494.

⁴⁵⁹ Inglis, 'War, Race and Loyalty in New Guinea, 1939-45', 506.

⁴⁶⁰ See Nelson, 'Gallipoli, Kokoda and the Making of National Identity'; Hank Nelson, 'Kokoda: The Track from History to Politics', *Journal of Pacific History* 38, no. 1 (2003): 109–27; Nelson, 'Kokoda', 2007.

mobilising this specific past that ties the independent Papua New Guinea to Australian nationalism has acquired a particular value for people of the former Territory of Papua.⁴⁶¹ Many of my interlocutors who were born before Independence in 1975 see themselves as Australians, stripped of their rights as Australian citizens by the process that led to Independence – a process orchestrated and accelerated, in their eyes, by Michael Somare, a man from the Sepik region. In the views of my older informants, Somare came from an area that had enjoyed the development brought about by colonialism for longer than they had, and they consider that Independence was deliberately granted too early for areas, like Kikori, where people were not yet ready for it.

It is within this framework that I interpret the words spat out with a mixture of anger and pride by Soborou, one of my interlocutors at Kikori, at the end of his recounting of the history of Kerewo engagement in WWII: ‘if it wasn’t for our ancestors they would be eating Japanese people’s leftovers’. In this one statement Soborou made public his claim for the critical role that Kerewo people should occupy within Papua New Guinea and Australian histories, invoking an alternative history that did not come to pass, thanks to them alone. On further inquiry, Soborou explained to me that he was referring to those New Guineans who were subjugated by the Japanese forces. This statement opens a window into the way Kerewo further articulate their marginality through the idiom of history vis-à-vis the national context.

Papua New Guinea comprises four macro-regions partially corresponding to, but further breaking down, the old division between the Territory of Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea before they were merged at the end of the war: Papua, Highlands, New Guinea Coast, and New Guinea Islands.⁴⁶² In the 1960s, when urbanization was steadily increasing with migrants flowing from all parts of the country, these regional identities each bore the weight of the different histories of their engagement with colonialism, determining a differential access to training and skills,

⁴⁶¹ On the separatist movement that emerged among ‘Papuan’ at the onset of Independence see Ralph R. Premdas, ‘Secession and Political Change: The Case of Papua Besena’, *Oceania* 47, no. 4 (1977): 265–83; Bob McKillop, ‘Papua Besena and Papuan Separatism’, in *Micronationalist Movements in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Ronald James May (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982), 329–55.

⁴⁶² Today, the New Guinea Coast regions is known as Momase, from the acronym for the four sub-regions: Morobe, Madang, Sandaun, and East Sepik. It is worth pointing out that printed newspapers like the *Post Courier* have specific sections for news from each of the four regions. As Anderson alerted us, print capitalism and especially newspapers played a significant role in the building of a national consciousness; see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. Newspapers in Papua New Guinea are no exception, but the very existence of those different four sections in the newspaper has the potential to erode national identity for already existing regional ones.

and thus access to better paid jobs in towns. In their research on the urbanization of Papua New Guinea conducted in the early 1970s, Levine and Levine recorded that '[a] pattern of regional socio-economic differentiation is developing in urban Papua New Guinea with Coastals (especially Papuans and Islanders) in the most privileged positions and Highlanders in the least'.⁴⁶³ Macro-regional identities 'often become foci of ethnic conflict in the towns, especially when regional inequalities are stressed'.⁴⁶⁴ Thus class differences were (and are) articulated in terms of ethnicity, deploying colonial boundaries as categories imbued with stereotypes reified by the very acts of classification.⁴⁶⁵

Macro-regional stereotypes and ethnic classifications are deployed to make sense of the demographic composition and inter-group dynamics in Kikori town. Chapter 4 explained how, in the Kikori area, language competence in Motu is used as a marker of identity around the two macro-regional categories of 'Papua' and 'New Guinea', positioning Highlanders as outsiders to the town. Moreover, the Kerewo term for Highlanders, *gimini oubi* (literally 'back people'), derives from the early participation of Kerewo as carriers for patrols in the early colonial days. As Highlanders were contacted later, many Kerewo informants insisted that the *gimini oubi* were less civilised than their fathers were. Yet, since the PNG LNG Project operations began in the Kikori area, workers from the Highlands (especially the Southern Highlands Province) have arrived in the area, staking claims within the local market. Alongside the dried fish, sago, and other seafood, the small markets host sellers with fresh produce coming from areas where the environment is more suitable for agricultural activities. Highlanders run the trucks transporting sellers and their produces, having the means to take advantage of the poor roads that connect Kikori town with the mountains. This relatively recent immigrant population from the Highlands fringes has taken residence in the part of the town more distant from the river shores. Two of the storeowners in town are Highlanders; the other stores are run or managed by 'Asians'. Many Kerewo, and Kikorians at large, lament their inability to partake in any of these business opportunities.

⁴⁶³ Hal B. Levine and Marlene Wolfzahn Levine, *Urbanization in Papua New Guinea: A Study of Ambivalent Townsmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 38.

⁴⁶⁴ Levine and Levine, 38.

⁴⁶⁵ See Hal B. Levine, 'Reconstructing Ethnicity', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 2 (1999): 165–80. For example, Levine's informants from the Eastern and Western Highlands 'felt "coastals" dominated the country and worried the highlanders would form a permanent underclass after independence. "Coastals" in turn seemed to fear and despise the highlanders', Levine, 170.

The skills associated with *wokim bisnis* (making business) which Kerewo credit to ‘Highlanders’ sometimes do conflate the categories of ‘Highlander’ and of ‘New Guinean’: during the Japanese occupation of New Guinea people acquired a ‘*konkon* mentality’ (Asian mentality). Whether or not this semantic extension bears any historical truth, it has to be read as a moral statement and a point of ethnic differentiation that uses the past to account for the perceived inequalities within the country. The Tok Pisin word *konkon* is a derogatory term for ‘Asian’ that implies, at least in Kikori usage, a ruthless and rapacious business attitude that does not involve reciprocity with the local communities. It is in this light that I suggest we read the ‘Papuan’ vs ‘New Guinean’ identity divide in Kikori as a permutation of what John Cox labelled the post-colonial racial triangle – constituted by Melanesians, Europeans, and Asians – which he presents as ‘a model for approaching racialised understandings of modernity’.⁴⁶⁶ Cox follows Wood’s perceptive insight that, with the increasing investments of Asian companies in Papua New Guinea’s economy, scholars can no longer rely solely on models of interaction between locals and Europeans to make sense of the neocolonial situation, but have to include as well the place of non-European foreigners within the discourse of modernity.⁴⁶⁷

Levine and Levine make us aware that ‘internal differences within regions’ are often masked behind macro-regional categories, but also stress that ‘[s]pecific variations are likely to be ignored when regional stereotypes come to the fore’.⁴⁶⁸ Kerewo identification as Papuans does not account for the relatively better access to education that other Papuans, such as the Hula speakers, have achieved through the same institutions that Kerewo have belonged to, such as the LMS.⁴⁶⁹ As many informants told me, before Independence it was mainly Papuans who frequented Port Moresby; Police Motu was thus the language you could hear at every corner of any street. Since at least

⁴⁶⁶ John Cox, ‘Israeli Technicians and the Post-Colonial Racial Triangle in Papua New Guinea’, *Oceania* 85, no. 3 (1 November 2015): 350.

⁴⁶⁷ Michael Wood, “‘White Skins’, “Real People” and “Chinese” in Some Spatial Transformations of the Western Province, PNG’, *Oceania* 66, no. 1 (1995): 23–50. For an account of the morally ambiguous place Europeans occupied, and often continue to occupy, in Papua New Guinean communities’ idea of modernity see Bashkow, *The Meaning of Whitemen*. This literature relies on the notion of ‘Moral European’ as found in Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium* (London: Methuen, 1960), 209–10; further articulated in John Barker, ‘All Sides Now: The Postcolonial Triangle in Uiaku’, in *The Anthropology of Morality in Melanesia and Beyond*, ed. John Barker (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 75–91.

⁴⁶⁸ Levine and Levine, *Urbanization in Papua New Guinea*, 38.

⁴⁶⁹ Nigel D. Oram, ‘The London Missionary Society Pastorate and the Emergence of an Educated Élite in Papua’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 6 (1971): 115–32.

the 1970s, as many people who have visited the capital tell when they return to Kikori, Highlanders have monopolised the running and ownership of urban transport (both taxi and PMV).⁴⁷⁰ The historical consciousness of the different colonial experiences, and thus different modalities of access to modernity in different regions, provides Kerewo with the symbolic means to articulate class differences across the country.

Settlement in Port Moresby

Beamo Pari's version of Iamere's story ended with Katue marrying a Hula woman and being given land at Gabutu. Katue's story – as the epitome of Kerewo engagement in the Pacific War – links Kerewo at Kikori to the social space of Port Moresby.⁴⁷¹ In his social history of Port Moresby, Oram aptly noted the demographic impact of the war on the urban ethnic configuration of the later-to-be capital: 'Many of the early recruits to the Papuan Infantry Battalion came from the area surrounding the Gulf of Papua and a number of them settled in Port Moresby after the war'.⁴⁷² The significance of this statement gains weight when quantitative data are considered: 'In 1971, over 80 per cent of the indigenous population of Port Moresby were born in Papua, and of these 70 per cent were born in the Central and Gulf Districts'.⁴⁷³

While the circulation of the Indigenous population in town was strictly policed, this was not true of the squatter settlements giving shelter to migrant labourers. In Port Moresby the area of Badili, 'then outside the town boundary, was the first significant housing area of indigenes aside from native villages', and today is considered home to many urban-dwelling Kerewo, along with nearby Koki, Gabutu, and Kaugere.⁴⁷⁴ It is important to keep in mind that Indigenous migrants were not considered as belonging to the town proper, and it was not until 1966 that the migrant population was included in Port Moresby's census, hampering the scope for extended historical analysis of the

⁴⁷⁰ PMV stands for Public Motor Vehicle, a multi-seat bus that functions as public transport for a reasonably low fare. I spoke to many taxi drivers and PMV crews while in Port Moresby, and they too stress – with undertones different from those of my Kerewo informants at Kikori – the fact that these two businesses are the virtual monopoly of people from the Highlands region.

⁴⁷¹ Although I lack space for further elaboration, I stress that Dauri Kisu worked with the local community on the case of the eviction of Kikori people from Paga Hills in Port Moresby. Dauri forcefully argued that the inhabitants had received their land-use rights from the landowners because it was their ancestors who defended that land, where a heavy gun battery was built, during WWII.

⁴⁷² Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*, 79.

⁴⁷³ Oram, 80.

⁴⁷⁴ Levine and Levine, *Urbanization in Papua New Guinea*, 15. It was at Koki and Badili that I interacted with many of the Kerewo whom I met during my fieldwork at Kikori.

data.⁴⁷⁵ Moreover, censuses were conducted on an ethno-linguistic basis rather than a residential one, hence, for example, any ‘Goaribari’ working outside his village would have been included in the Goaribari census rather than the one pertaining to his workplace. The LMS missionary Percy Chatterton, who had worked since 1924 at Hanuabada and Delena (in the Central District), ‘ministered at Koki [a waterfront section of Port Moresby] to the migrants from other parts of Papua and New Guinea who were drifting to the town in search of work’ from 1957.⁴⁷⁶ It was he who assured Oram that ‘Before 1941, there was “a mere handful of non-local Papuans, mainly cooks from Suau and *wharfies* [dockworkers] *from Goaribari*”.’⁴⁷⁷

Farge’s research on urban 18th-century France gave her the insight that ‘[T]he archive is born out of disorder’, a formulation that is particularly appropriate as a description of the difficulty of doing historical research using records created when the very population the scholar is researching was denied official existence in an urban environment.⁴⁷⁸ Traces of Indigenous agency get caught in the archives when laws and norms are broken, and it is from this kind of record that it is possible to identify the presence of Kerewo in Port Moresby, though they are too often caught under a negative light.⁴⁷⁹

As scholars have repeatedly shown, the colonial legislative architecture was designed to keep the Indigenous population strictly separated from the European community in Port Moresby.⁴⁸⁰ Labourers did not have quarters within the town boundaries unless they served as ‘house boy’ for a European. A curfew was imposed on Papuans after 9 pm, unless they were carrying a permit written by their employer or had a valid excuse. The peak of the anxiety of racial mixing was reached when eight Indigenous men were trialled and convicted for sexual assault against white women, eventually leading to the promulgation of the so-called *White Women's Protection Ordinance, 1926-1934*.⁴⁸¹ People of the Gulf and Delta Districts were a particular focus

⁴⁷⁵ See Levine and Levine, 17.

⁴⁷⁶ Diane Langmore, ‘Biography - Sir Percy Chatterton - Australian Dictionary of Biography’, accessed 11 June 2017, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chatterton-sir-percy-12308>.

⁴⁷⁷ P. Chatterton, personal communication in Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*, 38 (my italics).

⁴⁷⁸ Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, 26.

⁴⁷⁹ See Farge, 23–46.

⁴⁸⁰ Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea*, 37–39, 45–59, 125–40; Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*, 42–61; Levine and Levine, *Urbanization in Papua New Guinea*, 15–23.

⁴⁸¹ See Amirah Inglis, *Not a White Woman Safe: Sexual Anxiety and Politics in Port Moresby, 1920-1934* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974). More generally about the

for sexual anxieties for two reasons: a) they constituted the majority of domestic servants, and b) they had a reputation for sexual laxity that grew out of the ethnographic literature as well as colonial officers' observations.⁴⁸² This led in 1930 to the issuing of a special Order-in-Council under the Native Regulation Ordinance by which '[n]o Papuan from the Gulf or Delta Divisions [...] was henceforth to be employed as a domestic servant outside his own district', and their employers were encouraged to discharge them and not to employ people from those areas as casual workers.⁴⁸³

Another instance of archival traces of the presence of Delta District people in Port Moresby is provided by Igo Erua, a correspondent for the monthly *The Papuan Villager*, who in March 1933 reported that:

A fight occurred on the afternoon of the 13th ultimo, between Toaripis and Goaribaris, and again on the next morning at Koki. The latter one was very very serious, because some of the Toaripis were badly wounded by Goaribaris. That morning the Goaribaris got up early in the morning and went to the Compounds where the Toaripis were, and chased them in the bush [...].⁴⁸⁴

This fight resulted in the hospitalisation of two men. I was unable to locate any records of the court case (if there was one) in the archival institutions consulted, but it seems likely that tensions in settlements near Port Moresby would have been caused in part by conflicts in coconut plantations where Kerewo were employed. As Lewis argues, European entrepreneurs 'probably did some recruiting for the estates in the Central Division, as labourers from the neighbouring Delta Division, collectively called "Goaribaris" and from the Gulf, the "Keremas" and "Orokolos", were in demand at

colonial anxiety of racial mixing see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸² Inglis, *Not a White Woman Safe*, 12–13, 103–4. On the ethnographic and colonial representation of sexual intercourse during ceremonies in the South Coast New Guinea area see above fn. 239.

⁴⁸³ Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea*, 38. See also Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City*, 48.

⁴⁸⁴ Igo Erua 'Fighting' *The Papuan Villager*, vol. 5, n. 3, (1933): 22. Drawing from Dawn Ryan's unpublished thesis, Langmore reports that the animosity between Kerewo and Toaripi people was still ongoing in the 1960s; see Langmore, *Tamate - a King*, 137, 157 fn. 62; Ryan, 'Social Change among the Toaripi, Papua', 31.

various times'.⁴⁸⁵ Those whom Lewis, following the colonial label, calls 'Keremas' are Toaripi people, and so it is legitimate to speculate that conflicts over the possibility of being recruited, or just plain tension over incidents at the work site, might have escalated into open conflict.

As noted above, Kerewo labour migrants were present on the outskirts of Port Moresby, but a small detail recorded in a patrol report for the Kikori area helps to confirm that the patterns of urban settlement highlighted by Levine and Levine also apply in the case of Kerewo. In 1939, Patrol Officer Karius reported that 'One [N.C.S. labourer from Nagoro village] failed to return – native BOIMU KATUE – said to have remained in Port Moresby with the brother (?) Cpl. Katue'.⁴⁸⁶ The genealogies I collected do not substantiate the kinship between Katue, who by then was part of the PIB and stationed in Port Moresby, and Boimu, who likely was working on a plantation in the central area. This seemingly insignificant fragment of information, which was of value to the administration only in order to apprehend a person who had transgressed against the Native Labour Ordinance requiring migrant workers to return to their home area, identifies Katue as a possible catalyst for Kerewo settlement in Port Moresby. The existence of a specific figure around whom new Kerewo communities were built, often through personal ties, suggests that settlement patterns outside the Kikori District followed a process similar to the description of early Kerewo migration patterns in Chapter 2.

At the end of the war, Katue's role as an organiser of Kerewo communities appears confirmed by colonial records. As Patrol Officer Kennedy recorded:

He [Katue] appears to have started a *GOARBIBARI* village in *PORT MORESBY*. From his home village of *GORO* he has 14 young men with him and from *PAILE* there are three married men and their wives and three single men. From *KIRIWAPO* there is one married man and wife and two single men. From *DOPIMA* two single men and two married men with their wives. From *UBUO* one married man and one single man. From *BABAI* one single man. From *MUMURIA* one married couple. Total single men 23, married men and wives 8, grand total 39 people.⁴⁸⁷

From the perspective of Kikori station, Katue organised the Kerewo settlement at Koki around a business that sought to market sago produced at Kikori in Port Moresby. At

⁴⁸⁵ David Charles Lewis, *The Plantation Dream: Developing British New Guinea and Papua 1884-1942* (Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1996), 96.

⁴⁸⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 3 of 1939/40. See Levine and Levine, *Urbanization in Papua New Guinea*, 17–22.

⁴⁸⁷ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 3 of 1949/50 (my italics).

first the production of sago was concentrated in those villages where Katue had kin ties: ‘Interest in sago making for outside sale is apparent only in MUMURIA and GORO. Both these villages contain many of the relatives of the organiser – KATUE’.⁴⁸⁸ Just a few months later, the same patrol officer recorded that ‘Interest in making sago for sale in Port Moresby appears on the increase’.⁴⁸⁹ For the colonial administration at Kikori, Katue’s economic venture meant that the villages involved were found in a poor state of maintenance, and only sanctions reversed this state of affairs. Following several reports lamenting the state of Goro village, a patrol officer recorded that ‘[T]he village was in very good condition and the health was in quite good order. Considering the fact that *many of the men are away at Port Moresby* the village is a credit to the people who do the work’.⁴⁹⁰

The same officer learned some details about the nature of Katue’s venture and villagers’ involvement in it: ‘[Katue] is alleged to have arranged for a good deal of sago to be sent into PORT MORESBY where he would act as the agent. Large quantities are said to have been sent in and no returns have been forthcoming’.⁴⁹¹ The District Officer Healy made sure to inform his superiors that he warned villagers of the potential risks of joining Katue’s project:

Regarding the sago sent to KATUE – when shipment was being made I personally talked to many of the consigners and told them that their chances of payment from KATUE were very slim; however they were willing to try once and did so to their sorrow.⁴⁹²

Apparently the enthusiasm for the economic linking of Kikori with Port Moresby via personal relations deflated quickly, and by 1948 ‘[i]nterest in sago-making for the Port Moresby market in association with KATUE has disappeared altogether’, and at least 6 of the 39 Kerewo residing at Koki returned to the district.⁴⁹³

Katue’s business was depicted by the administration as a scam, but it is worth noting that the economic viability of transforming Kikori into a specialised area of sago production for the Port Moresby market was not so far-fetched, even in the eyes of the colonial administration. In the mid-1950s, a patrol officer proposed the creation of a

⁴⁸⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1948-49, p. 8; see also Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 11/1947-48.

⁴⁸⁹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 6/1948-49.

⁴⁹⁰ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 3/1949-50, p. 4 (my italics).

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 11–12.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ Kikori Patrol Reports, Report n.6/1949-50.

network for Kikori sago to be exchanged with Hanuabada villagers.⁴⁹⁴ Again during the late 1960s, at the height of the colonial administration's push for economic development, a similar option was aired: 'It might be interesting to ascertain the costs of production [of sago] and landed cost [at] Port Moresby. [...] It may warrant investigation though the return to the producer would be small'.⁴⁹⁵ If 'financial illiteracy' of the parties involved in Katue's business might account for the administration's distrust of the Kerewo war hero, the remark made by another patrol officer when he reported on the composition of Katue's settlement suggests that other concerns might have engaged the minds of colonial administrators: 'He does not seem to be influencing the normal way of life of the natives in any way'.⁴⁹⁶

The anxiety regarding Katue's influence over his fellow Kerewo has to be read in light of suspicion about the activities of another war veteran from the nearby Purari Delta, Tom Kabu, who spent three years in urban Australia.⁴⁹⁷ In 1946 Tom Kabu led a movement that sought to get rid of 'traditional' culture in Purari societies, organised around the *ravi* (long-house; the equivalent to a Kerewo *dubu daimo*), which – according to anthropologist Robert Maher – was already losing its social and military functions as a consequence of pacification, and to improve living conditions to the

⁴⁹⁴ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1954-55, p. 12.

⁴⁹⁵ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1968-69.

⁴⁹⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1948-49, p. 8.

⁴⁹⁷ The following account on the Tom Kabu movement is based on the following works: Robert F. Maher, 'Tommy Kabu Movement of the Purari Delta', *Oceania* 29, no. 2 (1958): 75–90; Robert F. Maher, 'Social Structure and Cultural Change in Papua', *American Anthropologist* 62, no. 4 (1960): 593–602; Robert Francis Maher, *New Men of Papua: A Study in Culture Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 58–69; Robert F. Maher, 'From Cannibal Raid to Copra Kompani: Changing Patterns of Koriki Politics', *Ethnology* 6, no. 3 (1967): 309–31; Nancy E. Hitchcock and Nigel D. Oram, *Rabia Camp: A Port Moresby Migrant Settlement* (Canberra - Port Moresby: New Guinea Research Unit, Australian National University, 1967); Norman S. Pixley, 'Tommy Kabu of Papua', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 11, no. 3 (1982 1981): 1–13; Catherine Snowden, 'Copra Co-Operatives', in *A Time to Plant and a Time to Uproot: A History of Agriculture in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Donald Denoon and Catherine Snowden (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1981), 185–204; Graham Hassal, 'The Failure of the Tommy Kabu Movement: A Reassessment of the Evidence', *Pacific Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991): 29–51; Anthony Yeates, 'The Patrol Officers and Tom Kabu: Power and Prestige in the Purari Delta', *The Journal of Pacific History* 40, no. 1 (2005): 71–90.

European urban standards he had experienced in Australia.⁴⁹⁸ Tom Kabu ‘hoped to unite Papuans with himself as their head [...] a long-term aim, because he regarded [...] *the success of his economic plans as a prerequisite to the achievement of his political aims*’.⁴⁹⁹ The economic plan was the establishment of a trading business to produce sago in Purari for sale at Port Moresby, and in order to achieve this Tom Kabu bought a vessel, the *Ena*.

Through the kin ties of some of his men, such as Aua Akia, Tom Kabu managed to obtain land-use rights from Koita people of Kila Kila (in Port Moresby), after the colonial Administration refused to help him to locate a suitable place for a settlement. The base of Tom Kabu’s sago-trade operation became known as Rabia Camp, from the Motu word for sago, *rabia*.⁵⁰⁰ After initial open hostility of the colonial authorities at Kikori (under whose supervision the Purari sub-District was), the Co-operative Board sought to help Tom Kabu’s business, but their paternalistic attitudes and impositions ultimately alienated the Purari leader from accepting their conditions.

The life of Tom Kabu’s sago-trade venture was short, and by 1953 he was forbidden to purchase sago from Purari for sale on the Port Moresby market. Once the economic venture failed, the administration came to regard the presence of the Rabia Camp settlement as a problem and withdrew all support. Oram has convincingly argued that: ‘Tommy Kabu wished the settlers at Rabia Camp to adopt the way of life enjoyed by residents of the high-grade development areas, but was prevented from achieving this by his failure to obtain the co-operation of the Administration in his efforts’.⁵⁰¹ Ultimately the business venture failed for lack of support by the administration, whose initial hostility is to be seen in the light of the fear of other similar movements that threatened the colonial order, such as Paliau’s on Manus and Yali’s on the Rai Coast.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁸ On social changes at Purari see Maher, ‘Social Structure and Cultural Change in Papua’; Maher, *New Men of Papua*; Maher, ‘From Cannibal Raid to Copra Kompani’.

⁴⁹⁹ Nigel D. Oram, ‘Rabia Camp and the Tommy Kabu Movement’, in *Rabia Camp: A Port Moresby Migrant Settlement*, by Nancy E. Hitchcock and Nigel D. Oram (Canberra - Port Moresby: New Guinea Research Unit, Australian National University, 1967), 17 (my italics).

⁵⁰⁰ The use of Motu for the settlement’s name is not coincidental; in fact ‘Police Motu was adopted as the language of the movement’; Oram, 11.

⁵⁰¹ Oram, 42–43.

⁵⁰² See respectively Margaret Mead, *New Lives for Old: Cultural Transformation--Manus, 1928-1953* (New York: Morrow, 1956); and Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*.

On the political nature of so-called ‘cargo cults’ see, among the many works available, J. Guiart, ‘“Cargo Cults” and Political Evolution in Melanesia.’, *Mankind* 4, no. 6 (1951): 227–29; Jean Guiart, ‘Forerunners of Melanesian Nationalism’, *Oceania* 22, no. 2 (1951): 81–90; Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of ‘Cargo’ Cults in Melanesia* (London:

Katue's name does not appear in any colonial or scholarly account of life in post-war Port Moresby, yet there are clear traces suggesting that his sago-trading venture coincided with that of Tom Kabu. First, Katue must have been familiar with one of the key figures in the settlement of Rabia Camp, Aua Akia, a fellow policeman and then PIB member.⁵⁰³ Rabia Camp was located at Kaugere, next to Koki, where urban Kerewo came to live; as Oram states, 'When the sago trading and other commercial activities ended, the function of the camp changed and it became a housing settlement for Purari and Goaribari people, many of them with their wives and children, in Port Moresby'.⁵⁰⁴ Moreover, some of the people who followed Katue were from Mumuria, a place north of Babaguna village. According to Oram's oral history, 'In 1954 [the] Mumuria Village Society [...] opened a store with money subscribed, according to Tommy Kabu, by both Mumuria and Goaribari people living in the camp. [...] The store was rebuilt at the Goaribari end of the present site when the camp was moved'.⁵⁰⁵

These elements suggest that, despite the colonial records' silence about Katue's participation in Tom Kabu's activities, the Kerewo war hero catalysed the movement of fellow Kerewo towards Port Moresby. The administration's anxiety over Katue's emergence as a leader, after his participation in a movement such as Tom Kabu's, is recorded by a patrol officer who noted Katue's rising influence at Kikori when he returned to his district as an employee of John Senior. Senior, whose role in the economic history of Kerewo people is discussed at some length in the following chapter, was an Australian businessman who based his copra activity at Boriowo,

MacGibbon & Kee, 1957); Roger M. Keesing, 'Politico-Religious Movements and Anticolonialism on Malaita: Maasina Rule in Historical Perspective', *Oceania* 48, no. 4 (1978): 241–61; David Akin, *Colonialism, Maasina Rule, and the Origins of Malaitan Kastom* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).

⁵⁰³ Aua Akia served as policeman before volunteering to join the PIB; see Oram, 'Rabia Camp and the Tommy Kabu Movement', 9.

⁵⁰⁴ Oram, 26. Maher adds 'A particular feature of the Movement was its lack of concern for tribal boundaries. Harmonized with widespread desires among the people of the delta for new conditions of life, the Movement quickly encompassed all of the Purari tribes and extended beyond them to include the small Ipiko tribe and a large part of the more numerous Goaribari. From it a new political and economic unit appeared which was pan-tribal in extent. In its strongest and most inclusive form, it lasted for only a few years, but it left behind a radical alteration in the political institutions of the tribes involved'. Maher, 'From Cannibal Raid to Copra Kompani', 309.

⁵⁰⁵ Oram, 'Rabia Camp and the Tommy Kabu Movement', 16.

roughly where Babaguna village is, and not too far from Mumuria.⁵⁰⁶ The patrol officer was impressed by the fact that:

KATUE as bossboy at BORIOWO appears to be allowed an unusual amount of freedom of action from his employer in the organizing of these periodical feasts and sing-sings [at the newly built *dubu daimo*; sing-sing is a Pidgin term that refers in general to ceremonies]. Thus KATUE already possessing considerable prestige as an important clan leader is enabled to further add to this prestige as to make himself an unusually powerful figure for this area; *the situation would appear to require surveillance on this account.*⁵⁰⁷

As was true of Tom Kabu, Yali, Paliau, and other Indigenous leaders who emerged from the experience of the Pacific War, Katue's potential concentration of power was viewed with considerable suspicion.

Conclusion

For contemporary Kerewo, stories about their ancestors' contributions to WWII are moral assertions of the group's central place in the history of the nation. As evident in the earlier chapters, Kerewo already saw themselves as pivotal to the regional history of evangelisation. The war accomplishments of Katue and other Kerewo men with their powerful *ebiha* (spirits) confirm this centrality at a national level. The opinion held commonly among Kerewo is that it was their ancestors who played a central role in the preservation of a Western-like modernity (rather than an Asian and presumably non-Christian modernity), both for Papua New Guinea and Australia, by defeating the Japanese threat. Such statements do provide Kerewo with a powerful moral position from which to lament their present marginality.⁵⁰⁸ It is from this historical perspective that the experience of frustrated modernity weights heavily on Kerewo shoulders.

Historically, the war experience and its aftermath, and the rhetoric that accompanied this period, saw a rise in expectations doomed to be frustrated. The

⁵⁰⁶ John Senior came to Kikori as an employee of the Australasian Petroleum Company (APC), and soon established himself as a key entrepreneur at Kikori. Many Kikorians remember him, with his two wives from the Western Province, as part of the social landscape of the area. It was Senior who established the Delta Store providing jobs for locals. Today it is Robert Senior, John's son, who runs the Delta Store that provides accommodations, and markets timber logs (through the Delta Store Ltd), in addition to functioning as the largest store in town.

⁵⁰⁷ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol 5/1958-59 (my italics).

⁵⁰⁸ Considerations of the post-colonial racial triangle discussed above must take into account how racial stereotypes vary across the country in the light of different experiences of the WWII.

immediate post-war period saw the active involvement of Papuans who had served as soldiers in projects of socio-economic change in many parts of the country. Yet fear of the potential threat constituted by social movements, which were often derided as ‘cargo cults’ by the established colonial order, hindered the fostering of a potential political elite. Hank Nelson captures well the tragic neglect of this generation of Papua New Guineans:

When Papuans and New Guineans began taking positions of real power and wealth 25 years after the war, the ex-servicemen were too old and had too little formal education to exploit the opportunities then opened. They had heard the promises, demonstrated their ability, but *others had taken the reward*. Men who were children or unborn during the war became car-owners, took overseas trips, said where the next road or school would be built, and moved into the large houses on the hill.⁵⁰⁹

It is in light of this generation that we can appreciate the force of Wolfers’ charge that: ‘The lack of an *élite* of articulate and critical Papua New Guineans was itself the deliberately planned product of Australian policies in regard to education and political development’.⁵¹⁰

In the next chapter I review the history of rising hope and serial failure associated with economic enterprises at Kikori following the end of the war, the legacy of which constitutes the material basis of the frustrated modernity articulated by contemporary Kerewo.

⁵⁰⁹ Hank Nelson, ‘Hold the Good Name of the Soldier’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 15, no. 4 (1980): 216. Similar grievances were voiced by retired policemen who felt they actively contributed to the country’s changes through their work; see Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother*, 264–68.

⁵¹⁰ Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea*, 133.

Chapter 6

From Centre to Periphery: Shifting Positions in the Post-World War II Period

As argued in the introduction to this dissertation, the concept of frustrated modernity is grounded in the horizon of expectations of a better future and its non-existence in the present. The previous chapters have discussed how certain historical events and periods are conceptualised by Kerewo people through a Christian idiom in order to make sense of the present lack of signs of development in Kikori area. As Ferguson poignantly illustrates in his ethnography of 1980s Copperbelt miners in Zambia, expectations of modernity are grounded in material objects constituting signifiers of the presence or absence of ‘modernity’.⁵¹¹ I suggest that the roots of present socio-economic conditions that coalesced into what I call frustrated modernity are to be found in the long socio-economic history of the Kikori region. As District Commissioner John Murphy remarked in the late 1960s, ‘The Goaribari [area ...] has been subjected to a number of schemes and *hopes* which have [...] *never materialised*’.⁵¹² Trends already visible in the early years of colonisation would become exacerbated during the post-war period.

If the socio-economic history outlined below accounts for the structural nature of the genesis of a sense of frustrated modernity, this chapter also opens a window onto the importance of historical silences for the analysis of historical consciousness, a theme magisterially explored by Trouillot.⁵¹³ Paradoxically this chapter relies more on archival material than the usual site for subaltern histories, oral narratives, inverting the common idea that Western written documents hide or omit aspects of the past that only oral history can bring to the surface. In contrast to many of the oral stories I used in the previous chapters, those pertaining to the post-war period are not organised into a common master narrative that is more or less shared among all Kerewo across generations. I suggest that the absence of an organised shared narrative about this period is a refraction of the experience of the loss of a sense of centrality of Kerewo in the Kikori area during the post-war years. This decentring was experienced on two separate and yet interlinked levels: on one hand the mission’s changed interests in the area, and on the other the place of Kikori in the political-economy of marginal capitalism. Although I will treat these two factors separately, before re-combining them in conclusion, it is to be borne in mind that they were always unfolding simultaneously.

⁵¹¹ Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*.

⁵¹² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1968-69 (my italics).

⁵¹³ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

From neglect to margins

In Chapter 4 I analysed at length the centrality of Kerewo people in the evangelical work of Ben Butcher at Kikori and the establishment of the LMS mission at Aird Hill. Butcher retired in 1939 and in the following years the place of Kerewo in the LMS evangelical agenda became more marginal. Butcher was soon replaced by an Australian couple: Edward Richard Fenn and his wife Ida Elizabeth Muriel Prosser.

In her memoir Ida Fenn recounts their arrival at Aird Hill briefly overlapping with Butcher's presence. Both Ida Fenn's memoir and Edward Fenn's official reports to the LMS in London present a picture of the early days as a moment when the old enmity between Kerewo and Porome was fading due to the presence of the mission: 'our station people are getting together into more a family group, whereas before, they resented other villages and tribes having anything to do or say in our station work'.⁵¹⁴

Very early on, the old staffing problem of the LMS mission in the Gulf area forced Fenn to divide his work between the mission at Aird Hill and those of Urika (Orokolo) and Daru alternatively. Moreover, problems of transportation prevented him from conducting evangelical circuits along the Kikori River. Veiru and its Technical School, which were more easily reached, kept Fenn busy enough, while Kerewo teachers reported an increase in school attendance at Apeawa and Dopima villages. In those first years, a station was opened at Karaulti, east of Kikori, to consolidate the progress achieved among Gope, Era, and Urama people.⁵¹⁵ The latter accomplishment was credited to Wanua, son of that Dauwa who was the first Kerewo to be baptized, whom Fenn described as 'the man who pioneered the Gope district [...] our Kerewo

⁵¹⁴ Edward Fenn, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1940', p. 35, CMW 1941-50 PNG/7, folder 1, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

“Job”⁵¹⁶ The area east of Kikori became for Fenn a priority prompted ‘partly by the threat of a large scale S.D.A. invasion’.⁵¹⁷

With the approaching menace of the Japanese invasion the Mission Station was left to the care of South Sea Islanders. First Ida Fenn, in line with LMS instructions, left the colony in 1942,⁵¹⁸ and then Fenn took a furlough between 1943 and 1944. At his return to Papua when the war was nearly over, the situation at Aird Hill changed again. A particular episode marked this shift for the Australian missionary:

In early October [1949] we had a deputation from three Poromi villages asking for our help to regain their old village site near Aird Hill, deserted by them when so many of their people were massacred by Government police forces on May 6th 1914. Kerewo people have “squatted” on this land ever *since and proved themselves a bane to us*.⁵¹⁹

The delegation, at least according to Fenn, did not come to take the land back, but to ask for his help and guidance for the construction of a new village near the station; the would-be Ero village. Probably struck by this request, Fenn’s sympathies unmistakably shifted toward Porome people. The contrast Fenn draws between Kerewo and Porome people in his reports is strikingly clear:

⁵¹⁶ Fenn described Wanua’s dedication to his evangelising mission as such: ‘Misfortunes have come thick upon him and yet, through it all his faith has stood firm and strong. His father dies, his wife follows soon after, his son goes astray and he loses all his worldly possessions in a canoe incident, yet he cheerfully goes on his way praising God for His Mercies’, Edward Fenn, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1947’, p. 5, CMW 1941-50 PNG/7, folder 8, SOAS Archives, London. See also Edward Fenn, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1940’, p. 35. On other occasions Fenn was less generous in his description: ‘not over-blessed with brains yet endowed by Nature with an extremely pleasant temperament it is only the real “old dyed in the wool” savage that can resist his smiles’. Fenn Edward Fenn, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1945’, p. 4, CMW 1941-50 PNG/7, folder 6, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵¹⁷ Edward Fenn, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1946’, p. 3, CMW 1941-50 PNG/7, folder 7, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵¹⁸ ‘Chatterton [a prominent LMS missionary] affirms that all male LMS missionaries remained. Their wives and the unmarried female missionaries were evacuated to Australia, but this was a mission and not a government decision’ Robinson, *Villagers at War*, 101.

⁵¹⁹ Edward Fenn, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1949’, p. 6 (my italics), CMW 1941-50 PNG/7, folder 10, SOAS Archives, London.

If only we could get the Kerewo people to heed our advice and accept our help to the same extent [as Porome people do], maybe they too would become a strong healthy growing tribe instead of being what they are, a tribe faced with extinction. A people slowly dying out, the young males recruited away year after year, the girls and women prostituted into an early grave.⁵²⁰

Fenn's personal preferences must not have been confined to his reports to London but felt on the ground when he reported for that same year: 'At our September quarterly meetings, we were accused by some of our Lay Readers of ignoring the Kerewo peoples and favouring the Gope and Poromi people'; an accusation that Fenn refuted by saying that he tried but Kerewo 'just don't listen'.⁵²¹

Judging from the reports Fenn wrote, it appears that what started as a simple preference turned into hostility: 'We hesitate to believe that this Kerewo sub-district of ours is only fit to be ranked with that other district of Biblical fame of which we read that even Jesus had to turn away from there because He could not do nothing [*sic*] with the people', probably referring to Mark 6:1-5 when Jesus could not perform miracles in his own hometown.⁵²² For the decennial review of his evangelical mission Fenn went so far as to write, after lengthy praise of the progress in the Gope-Era district and elevating Porome as the jewel in the crown, that: 'In some ways, the action of my predecessor [Butcher], of bringing into the area numbers of Kerewo people was a very unfortunate one'.⁵²³ The very people who have been the 'gateway of Gospel into Kikori', found themselves suddenly confined to a position of marginality. Paradoxically the denigration of Kerewo in general was paralleled by the praise of Wanua, a Kerewo man, who 'opened up [...] and was waging desperate warfare with Irikawe [a spirit] and the other "spirits" that filled the hearts of the Gope people with fear and superstition'.⁵²⁴

When Fenn left Aird Hill in 1951, Gordon Price only replaced him two years later. Meanwhile the District was left under the care of C. R. Fisher, the teacher at the Chalmers Technical Centre at Veiru village, who found it hard to divide his time between the work for the school and the pastoral work of circuits around the District. At his arrival at Kikori, Price was welcomed by the consequences of Fenn's policies toward Kerewo: 'In the interim period [...] between my predecessor's departure and my own arrival, a new "dubu daimo" appeared, [...] and *the people now appear to be quite*

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 6–7.

⁵²² Ibid., 7.

⁵²³ Edward Fenn, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1950', p. 7, CMW 1941-50 PNG/7, folder 11, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

apathetic toward the work and message of the L.M.S.'⁵²⁵ This did not mean a complete rebuttal of the LMS (or Christianity). The mission, and in particular its technical school, was still the main provider of training that could lead to wage labour; Price reported that 'some boys have asked [... for] a "quick school", presumably' with the goal 'that they may obtain good jobs with the A.P.C. [Australasian Petroleum Company] and other firms'.⁵²⁶

Price's own ministry at Aird Hill was short-lived. In 1954 he was replaced by John Cribb, the third missionary whose name endures in contemporary Kerewo memories as one of the triad of white LMS missionaries recalled as having worked in Kikori: Butcher, Fenn, and Cribb. Only four months into his work, Cribb reported to the mission body in London that:

Perhaps the most unfavourable picture of all was at Dopima and surrounding villages. The sullen inhabitants of Dopima looked quite prepared to add another missionary martyr to their tradition and give the impression of being well advanced in the adoption of the new paganism before they've emerged from the old. Nine months ago they called in the S.D.A.s [Seventh Day Adventists] because the L.M.S. layreader refused to assist with the village store, and although Kauma, our trained pastor, is doing a good job the situation is still unhappy. The general backwardness of this area and the presence of rival teachers at Dopima and Babai seems to warrant the establishment of a sub-station here as soon as possible.⁵²⁷

The potential loss of Dopima village, such a symbolically charged place for the LMS's own narrative of its work in the region, seemed to warrant a re-centring of missionary efforts into the area. It is to Cribb's credit that he understood that, if the mission wanted to maintain its grasp on the area, they had to invest energies and resources there. Yet, the situation seemed to be unfavourable when Cribb reported that:

The Goaribari picture is rather uniformly depressing. After many visits and protracted negotiations for substation land at Dopima, the L.M.S. has been decidedly snubbed and the S.D.A.s have won a temporary victory. This village seems particularly appropriate to Christ's injunction about shaking the dust off one's feet, but perhaps

⁵²⁵ Gordon Price, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1953', p. 6, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder C, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵²⁷ John Cribb, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1955', p. 6, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder E, SOAS Archives, London.

it's a timely judgment of *caring more for Dopima's historical importance than for the souls of its unattractive residents*.⁵²⁸

It is telling that for the LMS authorities the value of Dopima village was mostly of a historical nature. The years of neglect opened the flank to the penetration of Seventh Day Adventist rivals, and with such competition and the end of LMS monopoly on Kikori souls, practicalities such as the purchasing of land became more problematic. Dopima itself split into the two distinct settlements (*o'opo*) of Dopima and Paile, along the denominational divide, being LMS and SDA respectively.

The situation at Kikori for the LMS looked quite grim. Some Kerewo teachers like Kauma and Awage faced personal difficulties such as domestic unhappiness and illness that led them to abandon their evangelical duties; others, only partially trained at the Lawes College (an LMS college set up south of Milne Bay to train Papuan pastors), failed to show sufficient leadership according to the missionary. This state of affairs meant 'that in the Goaribari area we have only one layreader while three other villages are staffed by Seventh Day Adventists who have been pushing in energetically this year'.⁵²⁹

Not all Kerewo villages were lost though. If Dopima and Babai seemed to be oriented toward the Seventh Day Adventists, other villages gave some hope of anchoring the LMS presence into the area. Cribb wrote in 1956 that 'One hopeful event was a deputation from another village [Aimahe] requesting that the substation be established there'.⁵³⁰ The following year he could already report that at Aimahe:

land has been cleared and a house built near Aimahe village opposite Goaribari Island as the first step towards the establishment of an LMS substation. [...] I spent three weeks at Aimahe studying Kerewo verbs, encouraging working-bees on landclearance and swamp drainage and holding school on the black sand. It would be impossible to repeat this in all of the fifty six villages of the district, but I felt at the end of the time that I have been able to draw fairly near to Kerewo folk for the first time.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ John Cribb, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1956', p. 5 (my italics), CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder F, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵²⁹ John Cribb, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1957', p. 41, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder G, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵³⁰ John Cribb, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1956', p. 5 (my italics), CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder F, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵³¹ John Cribb, 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1957', p. 41, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder G, SOAS Archives, London.

The passage quoted above testifies to the importance of direct and personal engagement with local communities in order to make the missionary presence successful, but also the amount of time and energy that needed to be invested in order to have results everywhere in the District.

Cribb seemed to be fully aware of the setback set in motion by post-war policies. The ‘apathy or even actual hostility’ he encountered in the Goaribari sub-District

I suspect, is [due to] the feeling that they have been neglected in favour of their traditional enemies, the Gopes and Poromes. The charge of neglect is not without foundation since for reasons of isolation and lack of response the tendency has been to *concentrate resources in the more favourable areas*. The task of claiming this people from the enemies of paganism old and new and of heresy would seem *impossible with present resources*.⁵³²

The lack of resources Cribb mentions forced, once again, a shift in the social geography of Christianity at Kikori. With Ero village growing, and the Gope-Era area proving to be a fertile ground to keep at bay the competing SDA denomination, the centre of gravity of LMS activities at Kikori definitively shifted. It was Eric Ure, the LMS Secretary and Treasurer who visited Kikori in 1958, who took the decision, as part of his plan to develop the Delta, to move ‘Aird Hill head station to Veiru and the maintenance of Aird Hill as an area station’.⁵³³ The very station built by Butcher that has been for over four decades the symbol of the LMS presence in the area, and is still considered the centre of the United Church’s power in Kikori, was to be downgraded to a station. This was part of a general re-orientation of local political economy toward Kikori Station.⁵³⁴

Even a cursory reading of the LMS (and from 1962 Papua Ekalesia) reports for the 1960s shows that the Chalmers College at Veiru, where students from many language groups were trained, became the centre of evangelism in the Kikori area. The other main LMS centre in the region became Kapuna, in the Purari area, with its hospital and medical training facilities. Cribb moved from Aird Hill to Kapuna in 1965

⁵³² Ibid. (my italics)

⁵³³ Eric Ure ‘Report to the Papuan District Committee of a Visit to the Delta, September 28th – October 8th, 1958’ p. 5, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder H, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵³⁴ See the section below on resettlements. The reorientation toward Kikori Station was evident to the missionary, who wrote ‘The district owes a considerable debt of gratitude to the staff and students of Chalmers College who are keeping a strong witness alive among the small Kerewo villages near Kikori’, John Cribb, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1959’, p. 4, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder J, SOAS Archives, London.

with his wife Hazel and son Malcolm. Contrary to Fenn's years, where the loss of centrality of Kerewo people seems to be ascribable to the missionary's personal attitude toward Kerewo and Porome people, the general shift from the mid-1950s to 1970 was motivated by changing evangelical doctrine and, more generally, the rearrangement of LMS social space across a larger area than that in which Butcher began to operate in the 1910s.

A politico-economic history of post-war Kikori

As argued in the previous chapter, one of the highest tolls paid by Kerewo people in the conflict to stop the Japanese invasion of New Guinea was demographic in nature. The figures reported in table 2 paint the picture of an aging population unable to achieve biological (let alone social and cultural) reproduction, as the births/deaths ratio makes starkly clear, due to the spread of venereal diseases that made women infertile and the absence of men of marriage age from the villages.⁵³⁵ The war undoubtedly aggravated an already existing problem, which was the high number of people from the Kikori area enlisted as indentured labour outside the region. Since the establishment of the Government Station at Kikori, Kerewo people had been involved in the cash economy as unskilled labour in several ventures. They were the main source of manpower involved in clearing the area where the station was to be built, preparing the timber for construction, and making gardens and planting coconuts to feed the white personnel.⁵³⁶ As one of the first groups in Kikori to come under the administration's control, Kerewo people had been routinely employed as carriers for patrols, and some of them soon joined the native police force. Some of the most famous explorations of the early period of Australian colonisation in Papua, such as the Hides-O'Malley patrol of 1935, employed Kerewo men as carriers.⁵³⁷ In proximity to the Kikori Station, on Kairi land, the Ogamobu plantation was established as early as 1914, and several Kerewo were employed there. First coconuts and then rubber were planted in the area, but the venture

⁵³⁵ The births/deaths ratio was a chief concern of many reports from this period; see Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 11/47-48.

⁵³⁶ See Kikori Station Journal, 1912; CRS G91, Item 386, Australian National Archives, Canberra. It should be noted that, at this time, prisoners in gaol were also employed as workforce; for an account of the prison system as 'civilising' tool of the colonial administration in Papua see Amirah Inglis, *Karo: The Life and Fate of a Papuan* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982).

⁵³⁷ For an account of the Hides-O'Malley expedition see the excellent collection edited by Schieffelin and Crittenden, *Like People You See in a Dream*.

was abandoned by 1929 due to both internal conflict among shareholders and plummeting international market prices.⁵³⁸

Outside the Kikori area, plantations were the main venue of employment for Kerewo people, and in his study of early gold mining in Papua New Guinea Hank Nelson reports the presence of ‘Goaribari’ people at Lakekamu Goldfield.⁵³⁹ To leave their home area in order to gain knowledge of the *bohoboho oubi* (white people) ways, a strategy originally pioneered by Kemere when captured during the first punitive expedition in 1901, was no longer a novelty. It is the magnitude of the bleeding out of the able-bodied population during and after the war that had significant consequences for Kerewo social life, also shaped by the administration’s attitude toward this issue. A close reading of the reports from the three decades between the Pacific War and Independence strongly suggest that the Administration, backed by the LMS missionaries, saw the economic development and opportunities of cash income in the District as the chief solution to the depopulation of the area.

Income generated by the indentured labour of single individuals seldom came back into the Kikori region, and nor did it sustain links with market centres developed in order to specialise the area in the production of a particular commodity. As Donald Denoon states, ‘much labour has always been recruited from regions remote from the plantations, and on terms of indenture. *Plantation work has never been a means of accumulating capital.* [...] The returning labourer has rarely been able to hold on to his accumulated pay when he returns to his village.’⁵⁴⁰ Furthermore the plantation economy on which the colony of Papua rested for its meagre finances created geographically tangible socio-economic divisions; ‘regions without plantations have become reservoirs of labour, receiving much less than an equal proportion of development expenditure’.⁵⁴¹ Kikori is a textbook example of this. As Maxine Dennis has shown, ‘plantations clustered around Milne Bay and the Islands (and to a lesser extent in the Central Division), whereas the western regions mainly supplied labour for productive enterprises farther east’.⁵⁴² The burden on villagers to reproduce the labour force was

⁵³⁸ An account of the Ogamobu plantation can be found in Hope, *Long Ago Is Far Away*, vii–ix, 144–247.

⁵³⁹ Hank Nelson, *Black, White and Gold: Gold Mining in Papua New Guinea, 1878-1930* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1976), 210.

⁵⁴⁰ Donald Denoon, ‘Introduction’, in *A Time to Plant and a Time to Uproot: A History of Agriculture in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Donald Denoon and Catherine Snowden (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1981), 4 (my italics).

⁵⁴¹ Denoon, 10.

⁵⁴² Maxine Dennis, ‘Plantations’, in *A Time to Plant and a Time to Uproot: A History of Agriculture in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Donald Denoon and Catherine Snowden (Port Moresby:

usually not repaid, when workers went back to their villages of origin, in the form of a knowledge that would permit local engagement with cash economy: ‘plantation workers have acquired few relevant skills, and much too little capital to establish themselves as independent producers’.⁵⁴³ This meant for Kikori that the migrant population had no incentive to return to home villages and start businesses.

The demographic situation in the District was objectively grim. Despite the figures the Administration reacted in two conflicting ways. In a single patrol report we find both these attitudes present. In his comments on a patrol report to Goaribari area in 1951 the Acting District Commissioner of the Delta Division K.C. Atkinson wrote that ‘the percentage absent from the whole area is 56.52 [%]. [...] In view of the figures which are *nothing less than alarming*, I recommend that the whole area be *closed to recruiting* for a period of not less than two years’.⁵⁴⁴ And yet his superior, the Commissioner of the Gulf Division, J.H. Jones, was not alarmed because

The analysis of the able-bodied men absent from the villages discloses the fact that a great percentage of these men are still in the District. The percentage of men working inside and outside the District appears very large but those working in the District have an opportunity to visit their homes, and unless you have further facts, *it is not considered that any action should be taken to close the area.*⁵⁴⁵

Jones’ reasoning about the proximity of workers within the district to their villages was optimistic. Numerous patrol officers complained again and again about the poor state of villages and, although they punished some villagers and the Village Constables for not carrying out their duties, they repeatedly pointed out that a population made up of women, children, old people, and only a very few young men could hardly be expected to keep villages clean and buildings repaired. In the words of Patrol Officer Routley, the remaining villagers lived in an ‘atmosphere of hopelessness’, and the young were eager to leave. In the past the District had been closed to recruitment, but only for short periods of time. There was always demand for labour and, as District Commissioner L.J. O’Malley stated, ‘they [Kerewo] have been a potential labour line for years, and *are*

Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1981), 244. Dennis convincingly argues as well that the contemporary north/south division along socio-economic lines rests on the different aims of German and British colonialism in the early phase of colonisation of New Guinea, and especially the development of the plantation economy (and, I add, the infrastructures that made it viable).

⁵⁴³ Dennis, 245.

⁵⁴⁴ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 10/1950-51 (my italics).

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid. (my italics).

still in demand by various plantations'.⁵⁴⁶ It appears that the Administration's need for cheap labour had priority over the needs to reproduce the work force or develop remote areas.

Controversies over numbers continued to surface in patrol reports for nearly two decades, until the more pressing matter of decolonisation swept most of the other concerns aside.⁵⁴⁷ The Administration did not close the area to recruitment of labour. As the plantations of the country kept extorting their toll on the population of the Delta District, the economic development of Kikori area itself was considered the only viable solution to the problem of depopulation. Much like Katue, who had tried to bridge the gap between Port Moresby and Kikori by making the latter a centre of specialised production of sago, the Administration sought to reach the same goal, while maintaining the local population within the District borders, by orienting Kerewo population to the production of copra.

Copra

In 1948, Patrol Officer Francis Robb observed that people at Dopima village (the parent village of Goro, where Katue's links were stronger), unsatisfied with Katue's venture, showed an interest in revitalising copra production after this business came to a halt due to the plummeting copra prices in the global market during the Great Depression.⁵⁴⁸ Goaribari Island was naturally favourable to such an enterprise, particularly given Dopima villagers' previous experiences in such venture:

The only three villages in Goaribari with the necessary supply of coconuts to attempt the making of copra are – AIMAHE, DOPIMA, and GOARI. Of these, DOPIMA alone has had prior experience in the making of copra in the village, and by the villages as a whole. [...] Dopima has the further advantage, in that the

⁵⁴⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1954-55.

⁵⁴⁷ For example a patrol officer reported that 'Within 6 years (1949 to 1955) the aggregate population of the Goaribari census unit has decreased from 2434 to 2182'; 'one quarter of the total Goaribari population is absent from the area – either dwelling at Port Moresby or hiring out their labour on Papuan plantations or Australian Petroleum Company oil search', and yet 'The hiring of his labour is the only means by which the Goaribari native can enter a money economy – apart from a little copra production. It would therefore be quite a set-back to his interests if the area was closed to recruiting'; Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n.4/1954-55. Only few years later the demographic figure went down to 2054 people (Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 1/1958-59), in 1965 the population number was of 1808 (Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 6/1964-65, p. 11). Only in the administrative year 1967-1968 did the figures go up again, recording a population of 2144 people (Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1967-68).

⁵⁴⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/48-49, p. 5; see Dennis, 'Plantations', 222–24.

majority of the palms are not scattered, as in the case of the other two villages. All three villages expressed the desire to erect smoke houses and to commence the production of copra. The loan of copra sacks was promised by the government.⁵⁴⁹

The site had all the necessary characteristics for production, the population was willing to initiate the business, and the administration was available to provide some assistance. And yet, the depopulation of villages immediately resurfaced as an obstacle:

However the main drawback at present, is the number of men absent at indenture. Too few are left in the three villages to really get the scheme under way, at least at the present, when a fairly quick return is desirable, in order to stimulate and maintain interest in the venture. There are men in each of the villages, with the necessary knowledge to erect and use smokehouses, and other matters relevant to the process. However much assistance, and propaganda, will be required of future patrols, if the scheme is to be a success.⁵⁵⁰

Less than twelve months after Robb's report another patrol officer could write: 'a Copra dryer was seen at DOPIMA and others had them at kombatis [bush-camps]. The quality of the DOPIMA produce appeared fairly good'.⁵⁵¹

Dopima village paved the way for what seemed to be the key to local development, and other Kerewo villages followed its example. For instance: 'The new Counsellor of URURUMBA is the man behind the copra production in that village. He, seemingly, has done a good job in convincing these people of this lucrative source of revenue and with a bit of backing he should do well.'⁵⁵² And yet it seems that the administration's support was not always provided, as when a patrol officer reported that the Government vessel *T.N.G.*, used to patrol the area, refused to embark a load of copra ready for shipment that eventually went to waste.⁵⁵³ By the mid-1950s, 'Almost all the GOARIBARI villages are now engaged in copra production as being one of the only two methods of making money at home'.⁵⁵⁴

As Peter Fitzpatrick has shown, the Registrar for/of Cooperatives was closely monitoring all Indigenous economic activities in Papua New Guinea, and played a crucial role in channelling the social forces liberated by the hopes raised at the end of

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n.4/48-49, p. 7.

⁵⁵² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 3/49-50, p. 5 [pages numbered in decreasing order in pencil].

⁵⁵³ See for example Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/54-55, p. 10. A similar incident happened as late as 1968; see Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1968-69.

⁵⁵⁴ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1956-57, p. 4.

the Pacific War.⁵⁵⁵ Yet this paternalistic control had an alienating effect. For instance, a patrol officer reported that Ai'idio villagers were 'complaining that the copra sold at Kikori for £2 per bag was sold at Port Moresby for £7'.⁵⁵⁶ How could he account for the fact that copra was sold over three times more once it reached the capital? The patrol officer laid the blame on the local climate, over which people had no control: 'people were told that the damp climate reduced the quality of the copra'.⁵⁵⁷ And yet, as Snowden persuasively pointed out, the Copra Board asked for impossibly high quality and the cash turn-out for the producers was consequently low.⁵⁵⁸ Other patrol officers realised how the alienation of copra-makers from the price at which their product was sold risked dissatisfaction and suggested raising payments for producers.⁵⁵⁹

During the 1960s the price of copra on the global market fell,⁵⁶⁰ and only a private businessman like John Senior was buying Kikori copra, but Kerewo people received a meagre 2 ¾ pence per pound against the 6 pence per lb. formerly paid by the Administration. Furthermore, high quantities of copra were rejected for its low quality and this naturally provoked 'quite a lot of ill feelings as a result'; in the eyes of the Administration, local people were themselves at fault: 'it was explained that the people were to blame in that they made no effort to produce good copra'.⁵⁶¹

This form of colonial discourse is a twist on the capitalist credo that poverty and lack of success in business ventures are consequences of the inadequacy or fault of the individual or the group. In this kind of vision there is no space in which to foreground

⁵⁵⁵ Peter Fitzpatrick, 'Co-Operatives Law and Overdue Reforms', *Melanesian Law Journal* 3, no. 1 (1975): 77–91. Australian intentions were quite explicit: 'The war's disruptive impact and its demonstration of European technical achievement on a colossal scale had evoked a new ferment amongst Papuan peoples which could be dangerous or beneficial, according to the channels into which it was directed. Tactically the Administration's assistance [with co-operatives] was designed to guide potential forces of resistance into proper channels'. John David Legge, *Australian Colonial Policy: A Survey of Native Administration and European Development in Papua* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956), 218; quoted in Fitzpatrick, 'Co-Operatives Law and Overdue Reforms', 79. Snowden clearly shows how the Administration's main concern was the prevention of political challenges from local leaders, whose 'movements' were labelled as cargo cults; see Snowden, 'Copra Co-Operatives'.

⁵⁵⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n.5/1958-59.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ See Snowden, 'Copra Co-Operatives', 194–203.

⁵⁵⁹ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n.9/1958-59.

⁵⁶⁰ See Snowden, 'Copra Co-Operatives', passim; Dennis, 'Plantations', 222–24.

⁵⁶¹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n.9/1960-61.

structural problems like the lack of infrastructure, training, or control over prices (or even explanation of how prices are formed on the global market), the Registrar's own role in this process, or the exploitation of the population to supply disposable labour. Chapter 4 demonstrated how Protestant notions of the self mingled with a capitalist ethos.⁵⁶² In the 1960s there was a reinforcement of that ethos by means of colonial deception about the workings of the capitalist mode of production to which they sought to recruit local people. This becomes clear by looking at the shifts in the Administration's attitudes toward the social units of production.

In the post-war period the colonial Administration pushed for the development of co-operatives to start local businesses, usually complementary to the Australian economy. At Kikori no co-operative was registered but copra-making ventures were communal efforts on village basis and functioned, socially if not legally, as co-operatives. By the end of the 1950s there was an ideological shift toward individualism in production. Assistant District Officer Jefferies wrote in comments to a patrol report that '*community effort and ownership is almost a social evil*' as 'responsibility' and 'ownership' were hard to properly locate.⁵⁶³ Jefferies continued in what seems like a textbook example of capitalist individualism and trickle-down doctrine:

I much prefer to *encourage the individual*, and allow him to reap the benefit of his labour and his success will encourage others. It is also reasonable to assume that where a community is beginning *to evolve entrepreneurs*, therein exists material for the development of Native Local Government.⁵⁶⁴

This view contradicts what Jefferies himself told Kerewo people during a meeting at Kikori Station in July 1958, when he suggested that, in order to pay for hot air driers to improve the quality of their copra, each village was to provide £50 and 50 coconuts per head had to be planted in each village.⁵⁶⁵ If, in this view, coconut ownership might be individual (and it is disputable because the use-rights of *gota* – coconuts – are usually arranged by kinship relations), the accumulation of capital to buy driers clearly could not be achieved without communal effort. Furthermore, it was Jefferies who instructed his patrol officers: 'At all times [...] stress to them [Kerewo] that *they are one linguistic group* and that they must learn *to co-operate together for their mutual advancement and welfare*'.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶² See above, 146-49143-46143-46.

⁵⁶³ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n.5/1958-59 (my italics).

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. (my italics).

⁵⁶⁵ Kikori Patrol Reports, Report n. 1/1958-59.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

Jefferies' altered policy was aiming at forcing the emergence of local businessmen who could become leaders. This meant that villagers 'were told to produce their copra as individuals not as a group. One man to plant his own nuts, to make his own copra, and to get his own copra money'.⁵⁶⁷ In Jefferies' opinion,

it is hoped that by encouraging this system a challenge will be offered to less industrious types and at the same time act as a stimulus to greater economic activity with the object of more material gains. I also hope that a degree of civic pride will be developed from which will stem a genuine desire for community effort.⁵⁶⁸

The bleak individualism discursively enforced by patrol officers must have appeared a logical contradiction for the Kerewo who knew that the means of production such as copra driers could not be owned by a single local individual. Even a sensible compromise between the Administration directives and the form of local social organisation around the *gu* was stubbornly rebutted, as in this example: 'The people of Ai'id'io village had got the idea to produce as clans. As this is virtually the same as a company the people were told that the only method in which they are to produce their copra is as individuals'.⁵⁶⁹ It is hard to assess whether this obstinate fundamentalism about individualism and refusal of any kind of common effort was a consequence of Cold War ideological dictates or Jefferies' personal idiosyncrasy, but it is clear that between the mid-1950s and the 1960s the Australian colonial discourse of capitalist economic development hardened into moral discourses about individuals in competition whose failures were in the end personal.

Stores

The capital accumulated with the copra business was invested in the establishment of stores in the villages. Dopima village, thanks to its relatively conspicuous capital, pioneered this path: 'The people of DOPIMA village have about £400 in Bank and have expressed the desire to start a "store"'.⁵⁷⁰ The local administration was concerned at the lack of local accounting skill, and provided conflicting responses. On one hand local colonial officers thought that 'Under present circumstance this project is impracticable' and tried to 'persuade the people to expend their money in a more practical manner', though what this could be was not specified.⁵⁷¹ On the other hand they were aware (consciously or not) of the fictitious nature of desires as driving force of capitalism, and

⁵⁶⁷ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5/1959-60.

⁵⁶⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 9/1958-59.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 10/1950-51.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

thought best not to obstruct the venture: ‘the only reason people go out to work or indulge in other revenue producing ventures is to satisfy *the artificially created needs for luxury items*. If the satisfaction of these needs is to be denied any hope of economic advancement must be foregone’.⁵⁷² The solution came from the District Commissioner E. Flower who encouraged delaying the store until someone could be trained to run it: the ‘Registrar Cooperatives has suggested that one young man who has had some schooling be sent to the Co-Op. School at Kerema for training’.⁵⁷³ As far as I can tell from available documents, this never eventuated.

The administration conceived the desire to set up stores through the lenses of capital accumulation, investment, and accumulation; the accumulated capital had to be invested into another economic venture in order to would generate more capital. With the characteristic paternalism of Australian colonialism, a technical solution was found in the education of some in order to acquire the necessary skills to run the business. This is evident in the way patrol officers described a ‘scheme’ that was emerging on land between the Omati and Turama rivers:

Natives from the villages of MUBAGOA, AIIDIO, KEMEI, GAURO and IOWA have apparently made fairly considerable contributions to an economic scheme advanced by MABUSOU, a native of AIIDIO. Seven MUBAGOA natives claimed to have given MABUSOU a sum totalling £38-9-0 (the largest sum was £20 from KIBAU). At AIIDIO at least £28 was contributed (some of those involved in the scheme were absent at Kikori with MABUSOU at the time of the patrols visit); KEMEI contributed about £4 and IOWA and GAURO £14. Some of the contributors appeared to have died since. *Most of these people seemed vague about the aims of this scheme*, but it seems that MABUSOU, *who is illiterate*, wants to start a store and a pitsaw. These schemes seems to flourish all over the Goaribari, e.g. at APEWA and MUMURIA.⁵⁷⁴

The District Commissioner L. J. O’Malley vouched for Mabusou in his comments to the report: ‘I personally know this native, and although he may be illiterate he is a good type of native and one of the “old class” of Goaribari native’.⁵⁷⁵ Far from being unique, other stores were described in a similar manner. For example another patrol officer wrote of the store at Mumuria village: ‘The natives claim that their original capital was £300. Of this £100 was given to someone in Port Moresby to buy stock, but the

⁵⁷² Ibid., pp. 9–10 (my italics).

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1951-53.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

gentleman concerned promptly put the money into his own business'.⁵⁷⁶ O'Malley's reassurance about Mabusou's intentions notwithstanding, the language used is the one usually reserved to depict scams for the gullible. Yet the goals of such a 'scheme' are in plain sight: 'to start a store and a pitsaw'; an attempt to enter the cash economy exactly as the colonial government was urging people to do. John Cox has convincingly argued, in his analysis of a Ponzi scheme that grew quickly into a bubble in PNG starting from 1999, that the depiction of people who fall into these frauds as 'financially illiterate' and 'gullible' conceals the actors' moral and economic rationality.⁵⁷⁷ Cox's interlocutors were aware of the risks involved in any kind of financial speculation, and had rational reasons to invest in what only later was found out to be a scam. The Papua New Guineans Cox spoke to and the Kerewo who invested in business ventures that would link Kikori to Port Moresby were all attempting to enter the economic realm of 'modernity'.

Despite the administration's depiction of unsuccessful businesses as the own fault of ignorant natives, the (infra)structural roots of the lack of economic development were clearly registered in the pages of records received at Kikori and forwarded to Port Moresby. For example the 52 shareholders of the trade store at Dopima were 'hampered by a lack of transport and unguided in their purchases from Port Moresby'.⁵⁷⁸ Competition with private business was another factor. Patrol officer G. D. Phillips listed the following problems that local stores faced:

1. Proximity of Delta Stores, with its wide range of stock and efficient management.
2. Lack of capital, and therefore limitation on stock range.
3. Inexperience of store owners, and lack of knowledge of fundamental business principles.

If the stores could be amalgamated, and capital thus be increased, with proper supervision, a profit-making business could possibly be set up.⁵⁷⁹

The administration found itself caught between the rock of its own racist and paternalist views that read the lack of development as the fault of Indigenous peoples, and the hard place of the need to keep the stores (as other businesses) alive to prevent the shattering

⁵⁷⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1956-57.

⁵⁷⁷ John Cox, 'Prosperity, Nation and Consumption: Fast Money Schemes in Papua New Guinea', in *Managing Modernity in the Western Pacific*, ed. Mary Patterson and Martha Macintyre (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2011), 172–200.

⁵⁷⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1954-55.

⁵⁷⁹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1956-57.

of hopes raised by economic ventures.⁵⁸⁰ It is from the milieu of these business ventures, which catalysed political power around some individuals, that the leaders of the period leading to Independence would emerge.

Private sector

At the beginning of 1950s the New Guinea Borneo Mangrove Co. set its catch (catehu, for tannin) industry at Aird Hill, between the station and Samoa village. In 1951 Fenn wrote that the company was 'expected to start operations at a very early date. By this time the whole of *the district had an air of expectancy*'.⁵⁸¹ Indeed, as the journal *Pacific Islands Monthly* reported, this company 'was expected to give the Division of Papua its first important industry'.⁵⁸² It seems, at least according to Fenn, that Ero villagers were the ones who benefited most from the company's presence:

The advent of the Mangrove Company has been a real boon to our Ero village people. It is hard to distinguish between station and village people nowadays. In pre-Company days the difference could easily be seen. With the coming of regular wages to the village people's [?] conditions have greatly improved. People are better dressed and having more clothes are able to keep them cleaner.⁵⁸³

The fact that Kerewo people might have had a more marginal role in this industry compared with Porome people is hinted at by the District Commissioner O'Malley's remark that 'No doubt [...] if the New Guinea Borneo Mangrove Co. *operate on a large scale*, the GOARIBARI people should play a great part in the development of the

⁵⁸⁰ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1954-55.

⁵⁸¹ Edward Fenn 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1951', p. 41 (my italics), CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder A, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵⁸² Judy Tudor, '[?] Cutch Industry has Troubles in the Gulf of Papua' in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 8 (1957): 45. The journal *Pacific Islands Monthly* devoted a few articles to this enterprise, chronicling its beginning with the wedding of the Robinson couple ready to move to Kikori, to the company's liquidation; see the issues Vol. XXIV, No. 7 (1954): 69; Vol. XXIV, No. 11 (1954): 34-35; Vol. XXV, No. 5 (1954): 157; Vol. XXIX, No. 6 (1959): 27. See also Sheila Patrick 'Couple Glad to Return to the Jungle' in *Australian Women's Weekly*, Wednesday 27 June (1951): 13.

⁵⁸³ Edward Fenn 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1951', p. 42 (my italics), CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder A, SOAS Archives, London.

Mangrove Industry'.⁵⁸⁴ An expansion of operations might have led to the need for a larger workforce, but by 1958 the company had already collapsed.⁵⁸⁵

The Gulf of Papua had been subjected to oil exploration since the early phase of Australian colonialism. Although rich oilfields had not been found along the coastline, the search for this fundamental raw material of fossil capitalism did not stop.⁵⁸⁶ The Australasian Petroleum Company (APC) went in search of oil in the area, as the Gulf region promised to be rich in this natural resource.⁵⁸⁷ According to my interlocutors, some Kerewo men did work with the APC as cooks and labour, and their knowledge of the environment was used during surveys, but they were only casual employees, and this was hardly a steady source of income. Nonetheless, small settlements mushroomed around the APC camps. A quarrel over whether the oil company should or should not provide for the families of their casual employees reveals another set of dynamics that involved women.

There is a constant migration of GOARIBARI natives with their womenfolk to form themselves into small hamlets around the A.P.C. WANA Drilling Site and adjacent to the A.P.C. SEISMIC Camp on the IOWA River. In some cases the GOARIBARI's [*sic*] went there to build their canoes, but I feel sure they were hawking their womenfolk. [...] Those present at the hamlet numbered 14 men, 18 women (over 16) and 6 children. LUCAS at WANA was contacted and he stated A.P.C. would not ration any wives at all. Thus the position is that 13 men's rations are being spread around 37 mouths. Either the men are not going to get their full native labour ration scale or the women are going to earn it themselves for they have no garden in the v[i]cinity.⁵⁸⁸

The patrol officer's concern about the feeding of workers' families was completely adumbrated by the comments on this report by his superiors. The District Officer said that the company had no obligation to sustain the employees' spouses and 'should any employee bring his wife *to the camp* his services will be terminated'.⁵⁸⁹ Ivan Champion,

⁵⁸⁴ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1954-55 (my italics).

⁵⁸⁵ See John Cribb 'Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1958', p. 9, CMW 1951-60 PNG/2, folder H, SOAS Archives, London.

⁵⁸⁶ For a recent history of the role of fossil fuels in the expansion of Capitalism see Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso Books, 2016).

⁵⁸⁷ Rickwood, *The Kutubu Discovery*.

⁵⁸⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4/1950-51.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

by then the Acting Director of Office of Native Affairs, went even further: ‘Settlements in the vicinity of WANA by GOARIBARI and other casual employees employed by the Australasian Petroleum Company should be regarded as forbidden settlements under the Native Administration Regulations and dealt with accordingly’.⁵⁹⁰ Champion, who in the past relied on Kerewo carriers for some of his most famous patrols and knew the area well, had no doubts that ‘these settlements are nothing more than brothels’, and Healy requested authority to enforce the elimination of ‘prostitution’ by paying regular visits to the APC sites.⁵⁹¹

The ethnographic literature on south coast New Guinea cultures highlights the prominent role of sex in the socio-ritual lives of many groups in the area. What the Administration labelled as ‘prostitution’ could have been a means to create fictive kinship, or, according to my own ethnographic data, an attempt to acquire rights over a portion of land (*hopu emidai tama ito*, literally ‘to take land by the means of the skin’). As Lawrence Hammar has discussed in the case of Bamu migrants at Daru in the 1990s, the category of ‘prostitution’ conceals women’s role in providing family-like ties to migrant workers, and the fact that to sell sex is ultimately a product of a politico-economic system that marginalises specific groups. In the case discussed by Hammar, it was the PNG state and the churches that read such practices and the consequent spread of HIV in moral terms. Similarly the colonial Administration seemed to be concerned about the health (and labour force) implications of this practice rather than objecting on a moral ground. In fact it was recognised that

Prostitution in this area has for many years formed *part of the peoples social system*, and has resulted in V.D. becoming wide spread throughout the area. This in term has caused the present decline in population by making most of the women sterile. I would suggest that every effort be made to stamp out this practice, *even though you would be stopping a lucrative money earner*.⁵⁹²

I suggest that the presence of Kerewo families nearby Wana Camp seems to follow a similar logic to the one presented by Hammar, in which sexual intercourse for money, if it actually occurred, should be read in the light of the household economy of marginal and precarious casual workers.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1968-69 (my italics).

⁵⁹³ Hammar, ‘Bad Canoes and Bafalo: The Political Economy of Sex on Daru Island, Western Province, Papua New Guinea’. The idea that Kerewo ‘prostitution’ was a customary practice no

Finally, the entrepreneur John Senior deserves mention. Senior came to Kikori in late 1950s with, according to oral stories I collected, his two wives (two sisters) from the Western District. He is remembered as a friend of Kerewo people for the economic opportunities he gave them; a man who could speak fluently in Motu, and understood Kerewo language.⁵⁹⁴ He first set up at Boriowo, a site near Babaguna (today encompassed by the village), and there he employed Katue as bossboy. The main activity at Boriowo was copra production, and it soon became the place where all the copra produced by Kerewo villagers was sent, as discussed above. Foreshadowing what appears to be a ubiquitous trend in Melanesia, private enterprise replaced the colonial State's function of accessing the cash economy. This is evident in the following remark:

The men of the five Census divisions patrolled are disdainful of the poor wages paid by the Administration to labourers and outboard motor operators, consequently the Administration has to rely on labour from less civilised areas while the oil companies, which pay well, obtain the more sophisticated and invariable more capable natives for their employment.⁵⁹⁵

The local stories depicting John Senior as a provider of economic opportunities corroborate this interpretation and crystallise these dynamics into his figure.

Copra was only one of the businesses in which Senior was involved. He also established the Delta Stores where a few Kerewo were employed and which became the main marketing site for Kerewo produce. The Delta Stores, though the Delta Fisheries, was one of the two ventures that tried to start and sustain a fishing industry in the area. This industry developed very late, almost at the onset of Independence. I share the surprise of Patrol Officer Du Bois at this late realisation that the riverine system and the sea, which had been portrayed routinely as obstacles over the past six decades, could actually be a resource:

At Baimuru a fishing industry has been started by the Department of Fisheries. It surprises me why they? have not done like wise at Kikori and if supervised and run

doubt fed upon earlier depiction of ceremonies like the *buguru* portrayed as of orgy-like gatherings I discussed in in other chapters; see above, 140-43.

⁵⁹⁴ John Senior's son, Robert, who is currently the owner of the Delta Store at Kikori, is said to speak fluently in Kerewo. I tried to obtain an interview with him in two occasions: once in Port Moresby through a common acquaintance with an Australian-Malay businessman I met on the plane from Brisbane to Port Moresby, and the other one when he came to Kikori to take care of the store while his Indian manager took leave. My attempts unfortunately did not produce any result.

⁵⁹⁵ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1967-68, p. 14.

correctly it would be a great asset to Kikori and to their department, for fish are plentiful in the waters of the Kikori sub-district.⁵⁹⁶

John Senior and the Veiru Vocational School tried to take advantage of this serendipitous realisation, but immediately faced problems. Both organisations had to deal with technical issues with their refrigerators. Furthermore, Veiru Vocational School relied on two markets in the Highlands to sell the fish, and with the collapse of those markets they could only sell first-quality barramundi while having to discard the remaining catch.⁵⁹⁷

Before attempting to start a fishery industry, John Senior was already engaged in the exploitation of another marine resource: crocodile. Many Kerewo friends in their late 60s told me several stories of prowling along narrow channels hunting crocodiles for Senior. According to patrol officer Maynard '[t]he only industrious outaking [*sic*] in this area was shown to be crocodile shooting' and despite its remunerability it was 'not carried out on a large scale'.⁵⁹⁸ This remark is quite important as it implies that the copra industry, once the hope for Kikori's economic future, had lost importance by the end of the 1960s. The selling of crocodile skin was lucrative if 'One man of Dopima has recently made enough money to purchase a Johnston outboard motor'.⁵⁹⁹ But this business venture faded away as well.

Onset of Independence and Kerewo leadership

As international pressures triggered in Australia debates over the propriety of and modalities for granting independence to its northern colony,⁶⁰⁰ on the ground officers' attitudes were paternalist at best. For example consider the following statement:

There have been no signs of political awakening in this area to date. The presence of the Administration, Missions and non-natives has not formed any part of the political thought of these people which *has remained within the bounds of their own social groupings*. Local Government would help broaden their outlook and give them their first opportunity to express their own thoughts and ideas.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 15/1969-70.

⁵⁹⁷ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 36/1972-73.

⁵⁹⁸ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 4A/1967-68. See also Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1961-62.

⁵⁹⁹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5/1961-62.

⁶⁰⁰ Hank Nelson, 'Liberation: The End of Australian Rule in Papua New Guinea', *The Journal of Pacific History* 35, no. 3 (2000): 269–80.

⁶⁰¹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 6/1964-65 (my italics).

The primitivist trope of people who never crossed their linguistic boundaries is of course ridiculous, not only because throughout the country the already widespread pre-colonial trade routes had further expanded with colonisation, but even more so in an area where ‘the average Goaraberi [*sic*] over the age of twenty has at one time or another worked in Moresby’.⁶⁰² The Kerewo regional leaders who emerged in the last decade of Australian colonialism all had experience outside the area.

Nigel Oram has convincingly shown the crucial role that mission-led education provided by the LMS had for the emergence of a local élite at the onset of Independence, especially among Hula-speakers near Port Moresby.⁶⁰³ The same mission body played a similar role at Kikori, but instead of fostering a class of public servants it concentrated on skills that could be employed in the village. The missionary Johnston Nicholl, who replaced Cribb at the guidance of Aird Hill, assumed his duty ‘to prepare their [Kikorians’] children for the great transition period in which they are involved’,⁶⁰⁴ and was convinced that he had to

[make an] effort to reach a balance between knowledge gained from books and blackboard and that gained from practical work – such as woodwork and gardening. We must be careful, I feel, *not to follow the general trend of education in the Territory which trains only the brighter children, fitting them for ‘white collar’ jobs and making them dissatisfied with village life.* We want to educate our children to be ready to meet the needs of the village where many people still need to learn how to build good houses, make good gardens and show more initiative in earning money to supply some of their basic needs by cutting timber, making copra or fishing.⁶⁰⁵

The contrast between the cases of Hula speakers and Kikorians remind us that within the LMS-dominated area there were internal hierarchies reflecting spatial proximity to certain centres of state and missionary power. It is no coincidence that even before the Pacific War some Hanuabada villagers were taking clerical jobs in Port Moresby.⁶⁰⁶ With the rapid pace of decolonisation from the mid-1960s public service positions needed to be filled quickly, and educated Papuans, especially from nearby districts,

⁶⁰² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5/1959-60.

⁶⁰³ N. D. Oram, ‘The London Missionary Society Pastorate and the Emergence of an Educated Élite in Papua’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 6 (1971): 115–32.

⁶⁰⁴ Johnston Nicholl, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1967’, CMW 1961-70 PNG/3, SOAS Archives, London.

⁶⁰⁵ Johnston Nicholl, ‘Papua District Committee Annual Reports, 1966’, (my italics), CMW 1961-70 PNG/3, SOAS Archives, London.

⁶⁰⁶ See Robinson, *Villagers at War*, 96, 198 (Appendix 3f).

soon came to occupy those positions.⁶⁰⁷ Local LMS pastors were trained at Lawes College (south of Milne Bay), but with the merging of different denominations into the United Church of Papua and Solomon Islands (1968), the centre shifted significantly. Lawes College was closed and ministers were trained instead at the Theological College at Raronga, in the Gazelle Peninsula (New Britain), removing all possibilities for Kikorians belonging to the United Church to get training in what they considered their regional social space.⁶⁰⁸

Contrary to what Oram depicts for Hula speakers, missionary education did not constitute the principal source for the emergence of a political elite in the Kikori area. A patrol officer reported a rate of literacy among Kerewo of 3%, and stated that '[n]o one person has received higher education [... nor] students are away receiving [it]'.⁶⁰⁹ For Kerewo people, leadership emerged instead from the wave of village amalgamation and resettlement near Kikori Station. This process was already set in motion at the end of 1950s by District Commissioner White, who was in 'favour of reforming large villages' not only to halt the dispersion of Kikori population in *kombati* (bush-camps), but also as 'the only way to progress'.⁶¹⁰

The encouragement toward resettlement in areas near Kikori had a strong economic basis from the point of view of a colonial administration focused on developing agricultural capitalism (mainly copra) to the detriment of other forms of

⁶⁰⁷ From the vantage point of his presence in Port Moresby in those crucial years, Oram noted that 'The development of education facilities has led to a rapid change in employment opportunities for indigenous people. The main opportunities are in the public service. In the 1950s the most senior positions held by Papuans were those of teachers but there are now Papuans and New Guineans in all branches of the public service. [...] Since the early 1960s a small number of Papuan politicians, public servants and church leaders based in Port Moresby have achieved prominence beyond the confines of their own village or linguistic groups. A high percentage of these members of an emergent *élite* are either children of pastors of the London Missionary Society [...] or are closely related to pastors', 'The London Missionary Society Pastorate and the Emergence of an Educated *Élite* in Papua', 117.

⁶⁰⁸ The effects of the hierarchical discrepancy in the new social geography has been recorded as well in an official history of the LMS; as Frank Butler writes: 'The concentration of training institutions in New Britain was felt keenly by many Papuan folk as a loss to their own region', 'Papua New Guinea: From Many, One People', in *Gales of Change: Responding to a Shifting Missionary Context: The Story of the London Missionary Society, 1945-1977*, ed. Bernard Thorogood (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 161.

⁶⁰⁹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 6/1964-65, p. 19.

⁶¹⁰ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5/1958-59.

production.⁶¹¹ District Commissioner John Murphy delineated the ideas behind the resettlement plans as such:

The Goaribari is a depressed area with a declining population and it would appear that we can do little to assist them until they agree to resettlement on more solid ground. If the Southern Highlands – Gulf road eventuates large tracts of presently unoccupied land will be available for resettlement. I believe that the majority of the people are against moving out of the swamps, but once we have land available for resettlement we should use every available avenue to encourage them to move.⁶¹²

Hidden within the statement about reticence to move from the known ecology of deltaic swamps to an unknown one is the old evolutionist prejudice against hunters and gatherers rather than cultivators suited for conversion into peasantry. But it is the mention of the road connecting the South Highlands with the Gulf that indicates where infrastructural development was heading. As already mentioned in the section about marine resources, the Highlands were a potential market for the Kikori area. Yet this road remained on paper only. As recently as 2014, when Prime Minister Peter O’Neill visited Kikori to inaugurate the opening of the bank, he insisted that his government would focus on the building of this road to boost the Kikori economy.

Babaguna and Bisi, two villages where I conducted fieldwork, were part of this push toward resettlement. For the administration the movement to higher (thus drier) land would have boosted the making of copra and the entire regional economy.⁶¹³ What is presented in the colonial records as an initiative guided by the administration, was presented to me in the field as the achievement of local leaders who led their *gu* (clan) closer to the area where services were provided. I cannot do justice here to all of the stories I was told, but it is important to stress that the rights over those portions of land, previously owned by Kibiri people, predated the colonial period.⁶¹⁴ The colonial administration was aware of the potential conflicts over land ownership, and they took

⁶¹¹ Not everyone in the administration was in favor of village amalgamation under present conditions. For example, Assistant District Officer Brown was against such a move until crops more profitable than copra, such as coffee, could be planted; see Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1961-62. The history of coffee production in Papua New Guinea suggests that Brown’s considerations had substance; see Paige West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁶¹² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1968-69.

⁶¹³ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 12/1970-71.

⁶¹⁴ I intend to analyse this material in other publications.

seriously Kerewo claims to the land of Babaguna by right of conquest; Director of Native Affairs J. K. McCarthy ruled that ‘You may consider *the right of conquest and subsequent settlement as definite usufructuary ownership*’.⁶¹⁵

Nanai Gigove led the migration, first from Aimahe and Ubu’o villages, to Babaguna. His leadership position was connected to the small industry of the ‘pit-sawing of bendora [timber] planks [... which] fulfils orders from Kikori’ and which won the administration’s approval.⁶¹⁶ Nanai Gigove worked as bossboy for the APC for over 28 years in various parts of Papua before being appointed a member of the District Advisory Council in 1960, mainly because ‘he was the only man from the sub District and living within the sub District with the necessary qualifications’.⁶¹⁷ Yet what the administration saw as Nanai’s qualities must have created some issues within his own community if, as a patrol officer reported, because of Nanai’s familiarity with ‘a local trader’ who ‘was also a member of the same Company [APC,] he was never fully trusted by the people’.⁶¹⁸

Nanai’s intention to improve village conditions was recorded by Patrol Officer Hawley in a report in which he assessed local leaders as potential candidates for the Local Council elections of 1964. He wrote of Nanai that ‘He is a go-ahead personality and is constantly trying to help his people to the best of his ability – he has used his experiences as D.A.C. member to interest his people in Local Government and to increase and improve their copra production but he is sometimes met with apathy’.⁶¹⁹ In fact, at the time of elections, Babaguna villagers did not nominate Nanai as a candidate. Hawley remarked that although Nanai was ‘considered a leader by local Europeans he is not by village standards’.⁶²⁰ During my fieldwork I enquired several times about people’s own opinion about Nanai’s political story, but in one form or another, I received the same answer to my questions: ‘it is not up to me to tell this story’. Yet it is possible to speculate about it with reasonable plausibility.

Nanai’s long residence outside the region was probably the most significant factor that determined the decision of Babaguna villagers not to nominate him. Kerewo leadership was not hereditary but rested rather on personal qualities, especially the capacity to mobilise and coordinate people into communal effort through the powers granted by possessing one or more *ebiha* (personal spirits which enhance physical qualities or give access to *givari*, sorcery). According to what I was told by my Kerewo

⁶¹⁵ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 2/1962-63 (my italics).

⁶¹⁶ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 8/1960-61.

⁶¹⁷ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. Patrol n. 7/1965-66.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 6/1964-65, p. 14.

⁶²⁰ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 7/1965-66.

interlocutors, the main quality of a *pai dubu* (a term that loosely can be rendered by ‘chief’) was that of organising the collectivity for warfare or productive activities on the occasion of feasts: he was someone who talked and to whom people listened. With the gradual dissolution of the collective sociality that revolved around the *dubu daimo*, exacerbated by the flux of young men out of the region, the organisational capacities required of a *pai dubu* shifted toward the ability to mediate between the colonial order and the villages, and to show material signs of this mediatory effort in the form of economic gains. The colonial reports offer no further insights into Nanai’s small timber industry, probably a sign that it was not a major source of local access to cash.

A different political parable features Dodobai Wataui, whose biography summarises the patterns of entanglement between political leadership and economic enterprise described above. Dodobai started a store with capital accumulated by Apeawa and Ururumba villages amounting to £225-13-0; he ‘look[ed] after the books and *employ[ed] three storemen* to look after the stores’ and managed to make a profit of 18%.⁶²¹ The colonial administration, as seen in the previous section, was distrustful of the accounting skills of Indigenous store-owners. Yet Dodobai showed initiative by requesting to attend the school at Kikori for training, something that won him the praise of the patrol officer: ‘having already received some training at the Co-op. school Port Moresby on a Storeman’s course [Dodobai] now seeks tuition in arithmetic through Educ. Dep.’.⁶²² Already managing a store, Dodobai also coordinated the amalgamation of Apeawa, Aveoa, Dubumba and Urumba villages (all formed by clans migrating either from Ubuo or from Babai), bringing them to the site known as Runa, which is the current site of Apeawa village.⁶²³ As pointed out to me in several conversations, Dodobai Wautai won the elections twice thanks to the social capital accumulated by means of his economic and political organisation.⁶²⁴

In 1964, Dodobai had a place as Vice President of the Local Council. Only a few years later, the first elections for the House of Assembly took place, which saw him elected candidate for the Kikori Open Electorate. Dodobai went on several patrols

⁶²¹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 1/1958-59 (my italics).

⁶²² See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5/1958-59.

⁶²³ See Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 5/1959-60, and Patrol n. 11/1959-60. As Andy Dodobai – one of the children of Dodobai Wautai – told me during an interview, the name ‘Apeawa’ was maintained so as not to introduce confusion for the administration.

⁶²⁴ Apparently the social capital Dodobai acquired was accorded to him also by the colonial administration. The patrol officer Rowley wrote: ‘Entrepreneurs for the area are not outstanding with the possible exception of DODOBAI WAUTAI of AVI’OU’A who is not doing anything at present but has obvious talents of organization. [...] [H]e is an energetic organizer in the economic field’; Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 6/1964-65, p. 27.

around the area to explain the implications of the electoral result: ‘At all centres visited, M.H.A. Mr. Dodobai Wautai explained the new coalition government to the people. Care was taken to point out which parties had joined and the importance of the formation of this government’.⁶²⁵ Today, Dodobai’s legacy is mostly in the domain of local politics. His sons Joe and Andy had important positions as councillors of the Apeawa Ward; his daughter Ella was the mayor of Kikori town at the time of my fieldwork. Not everyone I spoke to was enthusiastic about Dodobai’s tenure as their Member for the House of Assembly, but invariably people remarked that he was the first and last Kerewo man who entered national politics. At several meetings for the organisation of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony the possibility that, once the curse was removed, a Kerewo man could become Papua New Guinea’s Prime Minister was often voiced. As it had happened in the past, so it could happen again in the future.

Conclusion

Papua New Guinea’s colonial history seems to challenge the well-established connection between colonialism, plantation economy and capitalist expansion characterised in the writings of Sidney Mintz.⁶²⁶ As Denoon has argued, Australian colonialism rose from strategic concerns rather than economic ones, and thus ‘For the first 60 years of colonial control, Papua New Guinea experienced *colonialism without capitalism*: for another 20 years it experienced *colonialism and capitalism but without capital*’.⁶²⁷ The very process of decolonisation, which in other parts of the world saw a push toward emancipation, was conducted with the paternalism that has been the hallmark of Australian colonialism since its beginning; as Wolfers pointed out, Australian colonial authorities had the power ‘to control the indigene’s rate and style of entry into the modern world’.⁶²⁸ Denoon’s statement about the legacy of Australian colonialism is unequivocally damning: Australia ‘did not *fail* to transform societies and economies: it *declined* to do so’.⁶²⁹

Denoon’s appraisal of Australian colonialism might appear harsh, especially to an Australian audience to whom this period of their history has been depicted in

⁶²⁵ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 19B/1971-72. See also Kikori Patrol Report, Patrol n. 22/1971-72.

⁶²⁶ Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

⁶²⁷ Donald Denoon, ‘Capitalism in Papua New Guinea: Development or Underdevelopment’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 20, no. 3 (1985): 128 (my italics).

⁶²⁸ Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea*, 17.

⁶²⁹ Denoon, ‘Capitalism in Papua New Guinea: Development or Underdevelopment’, 133.

positive terms.⁶³⁰ Yet, from the perspective of Kikori's economic history, there is no room to pledge ignorance of the situation. In 1969, District Commissioner R. S. Bell wrote to an officer at Kikori: 'your office records will reveal a history of collapsed trade or ventures between 1945 and 1966'.⁶³¹ Maynard, a patrol officer, captured well the sense of frustrated modernity people were experiencing: 'people [...] seem to believe that their position [in regard to economic development] is *hopeless*', and it was bound to remain so until the colonial state created the necessary conditions:

It is apparent to the author that the position is indeed hopeless unless some authority over rural development funds and policies can be wrestled from land development orientated parties. In the past statutory bodies and the general public over the rest of the Gulf District have been *unsympathetic towards the problems of Kikori area in respect of both economic and social development*. The resultant neglect is now apparent in the conditions existing in the villages throughout the Kikori Sub District and the *general lack of development*.⁶³²

Adding insult to injury, a patrol officer plainly wrote 'The GOARIBARI must face the fact that their area is a virtual cesspool, economically poor and *unworthy of the help they envisage*'.⁶³³

For the Copperbelt miners with whom Ferguson worked, modernity 'was not something to look forward to in an anticipated future but something to remember from a prosperous past'.⁶³⁴ The almost ubiquitous nostalgia for the colonial times I encountered in many conversations with middle-aged Kerewo men and women suggests a more complex configuration of temporality. Modernity was something that the colonial state did bring to Kikori, but instead of fully providing it to the colonised people, colonialists just pointed at it, leaving people to struggle on their own to reach it. That modernity that I understand Kerewo people to experience as frustrated, is not something that was once and is now no more; it is rather something that could have been and yet still is not.

Considering the decades-long history of rising and falling hope for economic and material development, a history that extends well into the post-Independence years, it is no wonder that Kerewo people, as in other parts of Melanesia, today resolve to achieve change through the means of Christianity and its rituals instead of turning

⁶³⁰ Sean Dorney, *The Embarrassed Colonialist* (Melbourne: Penguin, 2016).

⁶³¹ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 11/1968-69.

⁶³² Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 36/1972-73 (my italics).

⁶³³ Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol n. 3/1965-66 (my italics).

⁶³⁴ Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 13.

toward secular means.⁶³⁵ During my stay at Kikori much effort was invested in the organisation of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony, which aimed to lift the curse cast by Chalmers' blood, and through which the 'horizon of expectations' might finally materialise. The politics surrounding the organisation of this ritual are the subject of the following chapter.

⁶³⁵ A point well made by Matt Tomlinson and Debra L. McDougall, 'Introduction: Christian Politics in Oceania', in *Christian Politics in Oceania*, ed. Matt Tomlinson and Debra L. McDougall (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 11–12.

Chapter 7

Ameha via Tivona: The Politics of the Peace and Reconciliation Ceremony

It was only after my last visit to Kikori that I managed to watch the Kerewo episode of *The People Detective* (BBC2), presented by Daru Rooke.⁶³⁶ At the SOAS library in London I sat in front of a screen, inserted the VHS in the player and, rather nervously, strapped myself in to watch the episode aired in 2001 where Charlotte Sainsbury, a descendant of James Chalmers from his first marriage, visited Kikori one hundred years after the death of her ancestor. After a brief summary of Chalmers' biographical trajectory which had brought him to what was then the Protectorate of British New Guinea, pictures of Kerewo in war-gear appeared in sequences on the screen; old colonial images with which I am very familiar.

Early in the show, Charlotte Sainsbury states her conviction that Chalmers should not have travelled around the world preaching. Arriving in Papua New Guinea from England, the TV crew's journey starts at Port Moresby, where they shoot footage of a plaque commemorating the deaths of Chalmers and Tomkins. From the capital the scene moves to Suau, in the eastern corner of the country. Here the British crew interviews the United Church bishop Heneao,⁶³⁷ and Charlotte Sainsbury defiantly asks if he really thought it was the fault of the Goaribari if Chalmers got killed; after all they did not know about Christianity. The bishop's answer will sound by now familiar to the reader: it was God's plan to make Chalmers' story known. Cut.

The next scene takes the viewer to Ero village. Immediately I recognise the wharf at the bottom of the mission station. Here they are met by a community leader who turns his grim face to Charlotte Sainsbury, saying in English 'we are desperate to see you but we were not expecting you today', and keeps stressing throughout the conversation that the community had not been informed of her plans beforehand. At the end of the dialogue, in which Charlotte Sainsbury keeps stressing her conviction that

⁶³⁶ Daru Rooke, 'The People Detective - James Chalmers', VHS, *The People Detective* (London: BBC2, 2001), MS 380751, SOAS Archives. See also the related article 'If You Can't Eat 'em, Join 'Em', *The Guardian*, 20 April 2001, sec. Culture, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/apr/20/tvandradio.television>.

⁶³⁷ The caption in the film says Heneao, but it might be a misspelling as Ravu Henao was one of the first Papuan bishops since Papua Ekalesia merged with Methodists to become United Church. See John Garrett, *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania Since World War II* (Suva and Geneva: Institute of Pacific Studies - World Council of Churches, 1997), 19–21, 172, 329–30.

her ancestor should have not tried to change them, Wahega replies, 'Because of his [Chalmers'] coming we are civilized'. The contrast between Sainsbury's refusal of the colonial past, and the local embrace of it, must have been amusing for the British audience. Cut.

The viewer is taken next to the airstrip at Kerema, provincial capital of the Gulf Province, where the TV crew has not received the clearance to travel, as, Daru Rooke says, the people of Kikori would not welcome them. Only hours later, I imagine after much insistence, they were allowed to travel at their own risk. Accompanying the crew there is Linus Digm'Rina, an ANU-trained anthropologist from the Trobriand Islands. The fact that the crew left Ero to go back to Port Moresby, where Linus is based, to hire anthropologists who could mediate makes me think that the British crew must have hit a hard wall while at Kikori.⁶³⁸ Once they had arrived at Kikori the crew was met by three Kerewo, whom I never met, identified as Bauno, Andrew, and Arumi. Andrew claimed he is a direct descendant of the man who killed Chalmers. The next scene focuses on a woman, a landowner, who emphatically tells them she does not want them to go to Dopima. She speaks in Kerewo, and I understand that she is not happy because the *o'op ubi* (lit. the people of the village) had not been warned. Linus' attempt to mediate proved ineffective. Cut.

The so familiar (to me) setting of CDI camp provides the background for the following shot, where Rooke, Sainsbury, and Linus sat with some Kerewo; the younger features of some of them I recognise. Linus tells the two British people that in Papua New Guinea you enter a village either as a guest or as an enemy. Misreading Linus' words, Rooke tells the audience, both at home and at CDI camp, that after this visit to Kikori he understands better how Chalmers could have been killed. Rooke's own experience reinforced the essentialist view of Kerewo people as unwelcoming, even if, paradoxically, he said that while sitting with some of them. The conversation goes on, and comes around to the fact that there is a 'Lasting damage to the reputation of the Goaribari [... who] have never been forgiven by other Papua New Guinea's groups'. Andrew confirms that they are blamed indeed. By the end of the episode, Sainsbury realises that her ancestor 'is the most important person in their [Kerewo's] history, it seems'. Credits roll.

The Peace and Reconciliation and the Politics of History

Why was the opportunity to have a descendent of Chalmers' involved in the centenary of the LMS missionary's death dissipated? The answer the TV show provides – through the words of the woman from Dopima village and Linus' later explanation – is that local people were not prepared as no one had warned them that Sainsbury was coming. If no prior relation had been established between the parties, and no negotiation had

⁶³⁸ Unless, of course, such temporal warp is the result of the editing.

taken place, how could reciprocity exist? I propose a different – yet complementary – explanation: the coming of Chalmers’ descendent to Dopima might have triggered a series of political grievances that would have undermined the efficacy of a supposedly mutual apology. The Dopima woman’s insistence on ‘not being prepared’ is an important clue, which gains meaning if seen from the perspective of the main argument of this chapter; namely that dealing with and evoking the past is a political act.

As I will show in the remainder of the chapter, the community of Kerewo speakers is fractured along political, geographical, and denominational lines when it comes to the interpretation of the event of Chalmers’ death, and such diverse interpretations (or the different emphasis put on specific narrative elements) inform the ways in which the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony was imagined and re-imagined over several months. If the goal of making peace with the past and thus cleanse the land from the curse was shared among many Kerewo, the means by which to achieve it and what it does exactly entail was – in Bourdieu’s formulation – a field open to dispute among social actors.⁶³⁹

The internal political struggles within the community of Kerewo speakers took place amid (and partially overlapped with) the concomitant claims made by the regional authorities of the United Church on the symbolic capital at stake in the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony. As shown in Chapters 3 and 4, the death of Chalmers was never a matter concerning Kerewo people alone. In this regard it is instructive to say that in 1951, on the occasion of the Jubilee of Chalmers’ death, the LMS held celebrations at the District level to mark the event that laid the foundation of their presence in the region. The missionary S. H. Dewdney, who at the time was stationing at Orokolo, wrote in his report:

A highlight of the year was the Chalmers & Tomkins Jubilee Celebration in April. We planned a District Gathering [...] at Orokolo, and the local villagers

⁶³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu ‘Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge’, *Social Research* 35, no. 4 (1968): 681–706 and ‘Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber’, *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie* 12, no. 1 (1971): 3–21. It is in his work on art and literature, though, that the French scholar gives an operational description of ‘field’ as ‘the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field [...] defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of distribution of this specific capital.’ Any field ‘is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces’; ‘The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed’, *Poetics* 12, no. 4–5 (1983): 312 (emphasis in the original).

produced for our entertainment two scenes from district history – one depicting Chalmers’ arrival and welcome by the Orokolo chief, Apovea, and the other the murder of Chalmers and Tomkins at Goaribari.⁶⁴⁰

Fenn, commenting on that enactment, wrote that ‘So realistically did they perform that some of the audience were visibly scared’, adding only in passing that ‘On a later visit to Dopima we were able to hold a Memorial service there’.⁶⁴¹ The description of the celebration takes almost half a page in Dewdney’s account, while only five lines of Fenn’s report concern Dopima and ‘Goaribari’. Such disparity is imputable to the shift of Kerewo people at the margins of the LMS evangelical project shown in the previous chapter. The trope of the welcoming native in contrast to the murderous ‘Goaribari’ put on stage at Orokolo should also by now ring familiar to the reader. What is important to stress here, though, is that Kerewo people had and have (in the ethnographic present) to deal with their past in forms that are not entirely of their own making. On the first Jubilee of Chalmers’ death, 50 years before the BBC 2 crew landed at Kikori with a descendent of Chalmers, the people of Dopima (and Kerewo more in general) were just an appendix to the place where Chalmers died, not an active part of the memorialisation of the event.

To the best of my knowledge there is no other record indicating that similar dramatizations of the event of Chalmers’ death at Kikori were attempted until the mid-1990s, when the area became involved in the extraction of natural resources. On the first page of one of the national newspapers, the *Post Courier* dated 19–21 April 1996, appeared an article about the performance of an atonement ceremony at Goaribari Island. The accompanying picture (see figure 7) presents a man in a white robe and green stole with the United Church symbol distinguishable on its fringe. The man holds an open book (the Bible, presumably), and stands in front of a post, with a small crowd standing behind him. The caption states simply ‘Post marks historic spot’. As the reader soon learns, that is the spot where ‘missionary James Chalmers was killed and eaten. Church members from the Kikori Delta this week saw Rev Sam Mea stand barefoot on the site chosen for a memorial’. The article continues on the second page, under the heading ‘Massacre memorial to mark sorrow’:

The stone memorial is to atone for the deaths, to make peace with history, and to honour one of Papua’s most famous missionaries. Village communities of Goaribari, in the delta of Kikori, have lived for almost a hundred years under a cloud of sorrow for the actions of their warlike ancestors. [...] With the help of the Kutubu petroleum

⁶⁴⁰ Dewdney, P.D.C. Annual Reports 1951 [folder A], Orokolo District, p. 31.

⁶⁴¹ Fenn, P.D.C. Annual Reports 1951 [folder A], Aird Hill District.

project, the church members plan a re-enactment of the fateful landing, and hope to receive visitors from other parts of PNG and overseas.⁶⁴²



Figure 7: Picture accompanying the article ‘Massacre Memorial to Mark Sorrow’ in *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 19 April 1996.

Two things are worth noticing: the financial support of the oil company, and the prospect of attracting tourists. When I asked my Kerewo interlocutors about this newspaper article, I was told that in the end the Goaribari landowners did not agree and the ceremony never took place. The politico-economic context was different from the one in which the 1950s Jubilee took place. The presence of the oil company conjured images of riches and the landowners (identified as such in official documents) felt they had much at stake this time.

During my fieldwork I attended the several meetings and public events leading to the ceremony usually referred as the ‘Peace and Reconciliation’. It is to their analysis

⁶⁴² ‘Massacre Memorial to Mark Sorrow’, *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 19 April 1996.

that I shall shortly turn. Such meetings and public events should be considered as rituals to which Victor Turner's classical analysis of the tension between structure and anti-structure applies.⁶⁴³ During such collective performances the existing power relations among interested parties were tested and the division of ritual labour reshaped accordingly. The fluidity of relation within the ritual *communitas* was achieved by the investment of different actors' symbolic and economic capital, converting one into the other. This was particularly evident during the fund-raising for specific goals in order to move forward the preparations for the Peace and Reconciliation. Such conversion from one form of capital to another was perceived by the Kerewo who participated *en masse* in the fund-raising and other activities as in no contradiction with the prosperity theology underpinning both the United Church and New Apostolic Church as I encountered them in the field. My use of Bourdieu's distinction between symbolic and economic capitals, then, should be read as a fictional abstraction for analytical purposes only. Hence I reject Bourdieu's position that the symbolic realm giving meaning to the process of production simply euphemises its economic nature.⁶⁴⁴ The relation between economic and ideological domains should not be read as an instance of false consciousness; in fact, as Webb Keane observes

questions of legitimation are not necessarily simple instrumental assertions of ideology directed by the powerful to those over whom they exercise their power. First, because there is no view from nowhere from which the purported user of ideology can see all his or her options as objective tools to be wielded in the service of objective interests. Second, because ultimately ideology constitutes those interests as much as it serves them.⁶⁴⁵

It is from these analytical coordinates that I present an account of what I came to learn and witnessed about the Peace and Reconciliation during my ethnographic sojourn.

⁶⁴³ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca - London: Cornell University Press, 1967); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969).

In conceptualising the meetings I attended as secular rituals I draw as well on Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977); and Bronwen Douglas, *Across the Great Divide: Journeys in History and Anthropology*, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), chap. 2.

⁶⁴⁴ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 242–43.

⁶⁴⁵ Webb Keane, 'Afterword: Reflection on Political Theology in the Pacific', in *Christian Politics in Oceania*, ed. Matt Tomlinson and Debra L. McDougall (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 214.

The folding and unfolding of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony

October 2013 – Kerewo images of the Peace and Reconciliation

During my first visit in March 2013 I was told in vague terms that a Peace and Reconciliation ceremony would take place. It was only in October of that year that I learned a little bit more about how the shaping of this ceremony was imagined. I was sitting at the CDI camp, looking with Kenneth Korokai, Joyce Mavera, and Cathy Alex at copies of pictures taken during the colonial period. Kenneth was one of my first contacts among Kerewo and played a key role in previous LNG-sponsored research in the area. Joyce, a young Kerewo woman from Samoa village (resident in Kikori), worked at CDI and is a close friend of Cathy, a woman from the Highlands who has been active in the NGO's activities. It was on this occasion that I asked whether or not the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony would take place any time soon. Kenneth gave me an affirmative answer: next year (2014).

Kenneth told us that the United Church had already tried once, but had encountered some resistance from the landowners.⁶⁴⁶ This attempt took place in 1996, at a time when Chevron Asiatic Ltd was exploring the possibility of using the already existing infrastructure created by petroleum extraction to initiate a gas project that would have impacted directly on Goaribari Island. I did not manage to reconstruct in detail what happened then, but the politics of the Peace and Reconciliation and those connected to the gas project got entangled, triggering opposition from the landowners.

With the images of pictures taken in the aftermath of the punitive expeditions that followed Chalmers' death fresh in our minds, Kenneth told us how he imagined the ceremony would be. Three memorial stones would be laid down, one for Chalmers, one for Tomkins, and the other for the Kiwai who accompanied the two LMS missionaries. The element of atonement for this sin in the eye of God was present in Kenneth's account, but in this account the necessity for reciprocity between Kerewo and the former colonial government was also stressed. Kenneth envisioned a public representation in which Kerewo would acknowledge the killing of the Scottish missionary, and they would take their *gagari* (bows, weapons), break them, and throw in the fire. A representative of the British and Australian governments should take European *gagari* (guns) and burn them, sealing the reconciliation between the parties.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁶ Here Kenneth is most likely referring to the attempt made in 1996 reported on the *Post-Courier*.

⁶⁴⁷ The word *gagari* means 'bow' but by extension can also refer to firearms as both weapons are for long-distance combat. This connection is not surprising when considering that sorcerers

A few days later I was invited to Kekea, a small settlement not far from Kikori, at the margin of which Kenneth lives with his family and a few other households disposed around the New Apostolic Church *tana moto* (church), to participate in the mortuary feast for one of Kenneth's missionaries. Under the green plastic covers that provided shade to those under the wooden structure built to accommodate the hosts, several speeches were given. Before the mortuary ceremony began, with its exchange of speeches of sorrow and accusations concluded with exchanges for compensation and the distribution of food, more mundane topics were discussed. At the time my knowledge of Kerewo was very limited, and I had to rely on the good will of those around me to grasp what was happening. Joe Dodobai, whose acquaintance I made during my first visit, was one of them. Son of Dodobai Wautai, the first member of Kikori to be elected to National Parliament at the time of Independence, and married to a woman who is a Dopima landowner, Joe declared his disagreement with the Peace and Reconciliation when the topic was raised. For him Chalmers was a traitor who came to find land on which to settle, as had Christopher Columbus and Captain Cook before him. Moreover, Tamate did not have the right to slap those who were smoking with the Bible; they were seeing a white man for the first time and were cannibals. 'Thousands' of Kerewo died because of him, and now they are a minority in the region, Joe concluded. A Christian himself, Joe always presented the more practical aspects related to the death of Chalmers, particularly the severe losses suffered from the two punitive expeditions.

Kenneth's and Joe's opinions on the Peace and Reconciliation, though diverging on several points, have in common the fact that a reciprocal apology involving the former colonial authorities was necessary. At this stage, there was little doubt that God would be a prominent addressee of the ceremony, but the acknowledgement of Kerewo sufferings that followed Chalmers' death was no less central. Over time this important element has lost its prominent position as a consequence of the shifting power relations between parties.

November 2013 – Announcing the Peace and Reconciliation

The first public announcement of the Peace and Reconciliation was made on the occasion of the Centenary described in Chapter 4. The day before the opening of the Kerewo Missionaries Memorial Church at Samoa, I noticed that a large banner was hanging from the front of the stage arranged at the Mission Station for the following days (see figure 8).

can attack their victims by using their 'spiritual' *gagari*; another instance of attack without contact. Usually, though, the Motu word *ipidi* is used when talking about guns.



Figure 8: Banner announcing the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony shown in occasion of the celebrations for the Centenary (photograph by the Author).

The words ‘To be known as a peaceful land & peaceful people’ suggest that the Peace and Reconciliation had as its goal, for the United Church as much as for Kerewo, the aim of cleansing the poor reputation of the area by ending its association with the murder of the missionaries. The reference to the Biblical passages of Genesis 4: 9-10, where God asks Cain about his brother and he denies responsibility for his sibling, is a template encouraging Kerewo to take responsibility for their actions. The emphasis on the relevance of that event for Christianity in Kikori is evident in the words ‘The blood of Chalmers became the seed of the Gospel’, following common martyrological metaphors.

On the day of Samoa’s *tana moto* (church) opening, the Bishop in his service announced that the Peace and Reconciliation would take place on 8 April 2014. Addressing the crowd from several Kerewo villages present inside the church, the bishop said ‘We want to say sorry to God, to forgive and *forget*’, reiterating once again how the ceremony would mark a new Christian beginning, free of the weight of the past.⁶⁴⁸ Once the service was over, we gathered outside the church, where some notables delivered speeches. Kenneth, giving an overview of Kerewo history in English, remarked that Chalmers brought the Gospel with him: ‘he has lost his physical life but

⁶⁴⁸ On the bishop’s insistence on the theme of forgetfulness see above, 158-59.

what he left [behind] blessed us'. His final words hinted to a millenarian flavour to the Peace and Reconciliation, a trait that would progressively become more evident, when he said 'As Christians we are waiting for Jesus to come back; how many of us Kerewo will go to Heaven?'

The last speaker was Roy Rohoro, superintendent minister for the Aird Hill circuit. The speech was delivered mostly in Motu, with some interpolations in English when he wanted to emphasise and give more authority to certain sentences. The theme of change and renewal was conveyed by words such as 'for taking a new face the first one has to die'; thus reinforcing the necessity of a break with the past.⁶⁴⁹ Furthermore Roy stressed the desirability of a covenant between Kerewo and Porome, as both villages (Samoa and Ero) were founded in the name of a common God. The treatment of Kerewo as the sole inhabitants of Samoa, regardless of the complex and sometimes conflicting existing positions, is a good example of the positionality of Roy. This leading local figure and middle-man between Kikori and the larger United Church hierarchical structure is embedded in relations of proximity and distance (both geographical and personal) within a wider geography affected by the curse. In his concluding remarks, Roy said 'Kerewo, you have to lead because the blood is on your hands, it is your responsibility.' With these words Roy matched what he did with respect to the Centenary, giving the responsibility to the landowners and positioning himself as a facilitator, as he frequently did throughout the months of my sojourn. As will become clear, this was not always the case.

The next day I was kindly invited to join the bishop and his party on a boat ride to Dopima, where I first met Kamara Dairi, the pastor of Dopima (resident of Babaguna).⁶⁵⁰ Before departure I sat at the breakfast table on the first floor of the mission station with the bishop, Kamara, and Roy. Feasting on fried flour pancakes, peanut butter, and jam, washed down with sweet hot tea, I had the privilege of participating in a conversation that was telling of the potential future tensions.

The two main topics for discussion were the events of the previous day and the Peace and Reconciliation. The bishop told Kamara that they, as church, should not wait for either the Government or the 'company' (PNG LNG) to provide funds; the very fact that neither had sent a representative to attend the Centenary, he added, was sufficient proof of their uninterest. Instead he promised to allocate 5000 kina to buy a vehicle to be used to start a business between Kikori and the Highlands, selling fish, crabs, and coconuts and buying sweet potatoes and cabbage to sell at the coastal market: 'money must make money'. The distrust of the Government, and of the development companies

⁶⁴⁹ For a discussion of the Christian trope of rupture see Joel Robbins, 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity', *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1 (2007): 5–38.

⁶⁵⁰ See above, 117–19.

that often are its local surrogate in service delivery, comes as no surprise in a country characterised as a 'weak State'. However, the stress on self-reliance that followed the bishop's statement is also part of the longer history of the LMS in Papua, including more recently in its amalgamated status with other denominations from 1968 as the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Since the amalgamation, the flow of metropolitan funds stopped, and the individual parishes have had to provide financially for themselves.⁶⁵¹ As Ahi Auma of the United Church later brought to my attention, this was in contrast with the financial situation of the New Apostolic Church, which could still rely on some funds from its central body overseas.

After some remarks on the opening of Samoa's *tana moto* (church) the previous day, Roy encouraged Kamara to tell the bishop about his connection to Dopima, and the pastor briefly said that it was one of his ancestors who founded the village. To my great surprise, he did not mention his ancestral connection to the death of Chalmers, which he mentioned to me as we were waiting outside the Mission Station to be invited in. At the time I was puzzled by Kamara's commitment to secrecy, but now I interpret it as accumulated symbolic capital, to be strategically invested at the right moment so that Kamara is able to maintain a leading role as a hinge between the Kerewo 'tribe' (a noun sometimes used locally) and the United Church, spinning from his epicentral connection to Dopima.⁶⁵²

After a brief stop at Kikori to stock up on food and fuel, a party composed of the bishop, four United Church delegates from other congregations from the Gulf, the kaunsel of Ward 8 (Ero, Wowo, and Samoa villages), Roy, Kamara, Kenneth, and I reached the old site of Dopima around noon. Kenneth had been appointed skipper of the

⁶⁵¹ As Debra McDougall aptly notes, there is often nostalgia among Melanesian Christian communities for the colonial era, when funds came from overseas, see 'Evangelical Public Culture: Making Stranger-Citizens in Solomon Islands', in *Christian Politics in Oceania*, ed. Matt Tomlinson and Debra L. McDougall (New York - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 126–27.

⁶⁵² The importance of secrecy in Melanesian religious systems is a well established topic. Some references can be found above fn. 239. Fredrik Barth's work on ritual in the Mountain Ok area of Papua New Guinea remains seminal; see *Ritual and Knowledge Among the Baktaman of New Guinea* (Oslo - Yale: Universitetsforlaget - Yale University Press, 1975); *Cosmologies in the Making: A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); for a more recent treatment of this topic for New Britain (Papua New Guinea) see Andrew Lattas, *Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998). For an intellectual history of 'secrecy' in anthropology see Gilbert Herdt, *Secrecy and Cultural Reality: Utopian Ideologies of the New Guinea Men's House* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

boat. We made our way through thick vegetation and mud that sucked at the legs of a clumsy and inexperienced walker like myself. It was the kaunsel (counsellor)⁶⁵³ who showed us the small creek used to transport Chalmers' dead body to the site where it was dismembered. I was bewildered not only because the *kaunsel's* depiction of the events was at odds with the documentation and oral traditions, but mainly because it was he, a Porome, and not the two Kerewo who were accompanying us, who was charged with telling the story. After collecting some coconut sprouts from Dopima, we made our way upstream to Veiru in order to attend another event. Inside the dinghy I remained silent; with the overwhelming engine noise screening me from conversations, pondering on the power relations I could not make sense of yet.

For the rest of the Centenary celebrations, the United Church authorities incorporated the Peace and Reconciliation into the discourse of the beginning of a 'new era' marked by the end of the first one hundred years of Christianity in the region. The ceremony-to-be acquired specifically Christian undertones, and the bishop announced publicly that he would contact the British and Australian High Commissions in order to negotiate the presence of representatives of those who had killed so many Kerewo in the punitive expeditions. Finally he added that 'It [the Peace and Reconciliation] is a big thing and it will cost a lot of money, and this money will come from your hands'. With this speech the bishop secured the United Church's position as broker between the local and the international. He thereby exploited the social capital deriving from his own status within the church and his good fortune of residing in Port Moresby, in proximity to the appropriate diplomatic offices that Kerewo residing in Kikori could seldom afford to contact except at significant monetary cost. When we had breakfast together the previous day, he had mentioned a failed attempt made by his predecessor to organise an atonement ceremony. Clearly at stake were not only Kerewo concerns, but also the United Church's corporate prestige.

January 2014 – The Peace and Reconciliation in question

Soon after the Christmas and New Year period I left Samoa village for Kikori to arrange my stay at the next Kerewo village on my list. While in town I met with Tami Aubai, one of the leaders of Dopima now residing at Kikori, where he conducts his affairs, including his role as chairman of the Anataramio Dopima ILG (Incorporated Land Group). Tami expressed his disagreement with the whole Peace and Reconciliation project, and in particular with how it had been conceived by Roy Rohoro, on the ground that the losses suffered by Kerewo, and in particular the inhabitants of Dopima village, were being downplayed. In the United Church's plan, in his view, there was no place for the compensation due to Dopima people. Tami's comment was revealing to me as it

⁶⁵³ Ward counselors (kaunsel in Tok Pisin) are figures elected within the administrative unit known as 'ward', usually comprising more than one village.

showed another pre-existing fracture potentially undermining the Peace and Reconciliation project. Dopima people themselves, as the landowners of the very site where the main activities would have taken place, were divided on the issue. On one hand there was Kamara Dairi, who led his Dopima United Church congregation, consisting mainly of his extended household in Babaguna village, and sided with the United Church Aird Hill Circuit. On the other hand there were figures like Tami Aubai and Joe Dodobai, who were important politically as brokers with the PNG LNG Project and government officers, and felt strongly about the issue of compensation from the former colonial governments that authorised the two punitive expeditions following Chalmers' death.

Only a few days after my chat with Tami a meeting was scheduled to update the community about recent developments taking place in the Kikori region. The first item on the meeting agenda was the churches' activities, and in particular the Peace and Reconciliation. In his opening speech Kenneth encouraged Kerewo people to meet the goal of organising the ceremony for April 2015. Kenneth also announced that the United Church bishop would be the moderator, and then stressed the importance of the ceremony for Kerewo and the region more widely. According to Kenneth, through the ceremony Kerewo would put an end to the accusations of being *kava kava* (Motu for 'mad', 'irrational'), but the point that struck a chord and resonated most deeply with the people present was '*Kikoriwa development bihai*' (at Kikori there is no development).

Once the meeting was opened to a discussion, Ahi Auma, the United Church deacon of Babaguna village, reminded all present that Goaribari Island was the doorway for the entry of the Gospel to the Kikori region. Elijah Eu'u, originally from Samoa and now a key figure in the United Church at Kikori, then reinforced Ahi's statement by placing Dopima at the centre of Kikori, and reminding everyone that the church at his village was named after the tribe (the Kerewo Missionaries Memorial Church) instead of after Samoa village's own particular history.⁶⁵⁴ The events of the Centenary had provided Elijah with renewed symbolic capital in that he invoked the unity of Kerewo in order to realise the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony. To mitigate the impact of these two speeches, Kenneth remarked that many Kerewo belonged to other denominations, without naming his own. Within the general area, the United Church claims the majority of Kerewo followers, thus enjoying a significant degree of social capital that other denominations cannot match on their own. On this occasion Kenneth's remark was an attempt to soften this numerical disparity.

Kamara remarked that he would follow the Bishop and Roy's lead and move according to their decisions, closing his statement with bureaucratic language (in English): 'this is the procedure'. Then, after a few moments of silence, Kamara launched an invective against Kerewo leaders for not having contributed to Kikori's

⁶⁵⁴ See above, 149-53.

development with the PNG LNG Project money, and yet, despite this failure, still wanting to have a say on the Peace and Reconciliation. As Kamara was speaking I looked around the gathered audience for their reactions. Faces were still. I sensed the tension, though it did not show in people's face. Kamara closed his intervention by drawing a parallel between the Kerewo and the Israelites, both chosen people in God's eyes, thus underlying the importance of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony for Kerewo's future.

After another speaker intervened in the discussion, Kamara spoke again to stress the importance of financial contributions in order to organise a successful ceremony. Kenneth, then aware of the positive response to Kamara, remarked that the Dopima pastor's words were to be taken as an encouragement. He added in English 'as offspring of the curse owners I must stand up', and reasserted the unity of the Kerewo ethnic group in light of the predominance of the United Church. Here at play there were two kinds of symbolic capital; the ethnic identity mobilised by Kenneth to contest the denominational symbolic capital mobilised by Kamara and other United Church representatives. The following day Kenneth told me that the United Church, inheritor of the LMS, arrived *after* the death of Chalmers, and thus the Peace and Reconciliation was something pertaining to all Kerewo and not only one denomination.

This meeting was an important moment highlighting the competing forces shaping the field of the Peace and Reconciliation project, but its context was also telling of the relationship between the projected ceremony and local notions of development. In fact, the other points on the agenda revolved around the Kerewo Marine Resources company due to be launched in Port Moresby, the future of logging activities in the area and the revenues to be expected, the potential environmental impact, and finally the impending shift in the relations with the PNG LNG Project at the end of the construction phase of the pipeline, which would see the end of a source of immediate income. As Matt Tomlinson and Debra McDougall aptly noted in their volume *Christian Politics in Oceania*, the nexus between Christianity and politics in so-called 'weak states' is of primary importance because people are experientially aware that change will not come from merely secular institutions such as the State.⁶⁵⁵ Kikori is no exception. As argued in the previous chapter, the late pre-Independence period saw a withdrawal of the colonial sources of change. This trend continued after 1975 once the State, inheriting its organisational structure from its colonial predecessor and highly constrained by it, failed to achieve financial self-reliance, leaving the economy dependent on foreign aid and investments, including mining activities.⁶⁵⁶ This is an area where the development company is expected to provide services within the State's

⁶⁵⁵ Tomlinson and McDougall, 'Introduction: Christian Politics in Oceania', 11–12.

⁶⁵⁶ See Donald Denoon, 'Capitalism in Papua New Guinea: Development or Underdevelopment', *The Journal of Pacific History* 20, no. 3 (1985): 119–34.

competence (particularly infrastructure). With clear signs across the semi-urban and rural landscapes that the services provided are not up to the ideal standards of cities like Port Moresby, the idealisation of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony as a ritual means to achieve the longed-for ‘development’ promised by the oil and gas extraction activities becomes evident.⁶⁵⁷

January 2014 – Speaking as one

Some days later I found a note on the Delta Store’s notice board announcing: ‘Kerewo Peace & Reconciliation Program: Meeting # 1’, and ‘Kerewo: now your day has come to reconcile to God to say sorry for killing his servant on our land and by our ancestors... Attend to hear more about yourselves...’. This meeting, organised jointly by Kenneth and Kamara, targeted Kerewo people belonging to the villages of Babaguna, Bisi, Dopima*, Goare, Ai’dio, Kemei, Mubagowo*, Samoa, Apeawa, Babai*, Goro*, and Kerewo (Otoia)*. This list demonstrates how the curse affects the whole Kerewo community, and is also a sign of inclusion/exclusion from the ethnic group. Bisi and Babai (and to some extent Apeawa) are villages belonging to two other ethnic groups, Hava Mere and Vera, whose relations with Kerewo have been further reshaped by the bureaucratic processes of social mapping and the constitution of ILGs (Incorporated Land Groups). Furthermore, this list comprises a mix of both extant and former villages (the *o’opo kori*, village sites covered up by forest, are marked with an asterisk ‘*’), linking the potential audience through their connection to their fathers’ villages that received a share of Chalmers’ flesh.

On the morning of the meeting I went early to the ‘Delta waterfront’, in front of Tami’s household compound. As people slowly gathered I had the chance to look at the program drafted by Kenneth for discussion that morning. The first point on the agenda was the formation of a committee to direct the future ‘Kerewo Missionaries Society’, a society, as Kenneth explained, to be constituted in order to have a single bank account for the specific purpose of the Peace and Reconciliation. Members of the committee were to be elected from the pool of village committees. A separate election had to take place to choose the Finance Committee. The second point on the agenda was a list of potential donors ranging from churches to development agents, from NGOs to businesses in the area; but at the top of the list was written ‘Kerewo people from their own sweat’, reinforcing the widespread prosperity theology that requires self-sacrifice in order to obtain blessings.⁶⁵⁸

The project (point 3), as designed by the proponents, consisted of rebuilding Dopima village for reoccupation by residents and visits by tourists. There the ‘James

⁶⁵⁷ On ‘development’ as discourse in Foucault’s sense, see the now classic Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

⁶⁵⁸ See above, 146-49.

Chalmers Memorial Church' would be erected, and two headstones put in place, one commemorating the missionaries and the other the Kerewo who lost their lives between 1901 and 1904. Furthermore (point 4), peace will be sealed between Kerewo and the relatives of the missionaries, God and Kerewo will reconcile, and by the means of a 'Holy Divine Service' God will 'bless Kerewo, Kikori District, Gulf Province'. This sequence of increasingly larger administrative units, with the ethnic name at the centre, implicitly parallels a widespread aspect of Kerewo consciousness of their past: as Kerewo have been the gateway through which the Gospel came to Kikori area, so through the Peace and Reconciliation they will become the channel for the blessings of Christianity to enrich not only themselves but the whole area and Province. Through this ritual, the centrality that Kerewo enjoyed in the(ir) world order of the early colonial era will be reclaimed in the present for the future.

The last point on the agenda was a call to change life and behaviours such as public drinking, and an invitation to start financing this project at once, 'For your good prosperity', the paper said, 'start today for tomorrow!' As I finished copying the program into my notebook, I glanced at my watch. The scheduled time for the meeting, 10am, had already passed, and the few attendees, who came from several villages, were talking in small groups. The two main refrains were '*imo Kerewo gema*' (lit. 'us the big Kerewo') and '*sono na'o, imini na'o*' (lit. 'one head, one thought'), expressing the need for the 'tribe' to act as a single entity, putting aside internal controversies. The morning was turning into noon with little sign of other people showing up for the meeting. The roughly twenty people gathered at the Delta Waterfront were weary from the heat and waiting, passing time telling stories, making casual comments, chewing betelnut and smoking cigarettes, with occasional incursions to the market or the store to find something cold to quench the thirst.

At around 2pm. Roy telephoned Siulangi Kavora, a United Church minister based in Port Moresby whose acquaintance I had made on my first visit of the country. When the call ended, Roy related the content of the conversation pertaining to financial and diplomatic matters. The United Church in Port Moresby would take care of contacting the descendants of the missionaries killed via diplomatic channels, involving the Papua New Guinean Government and British High Commission. Even if unsaid, the United Church, with its capillary structure, was the only organisation capable of taking the lead to begin these negotiations. For once, I thought that Roy's phone call was part of a genuine collaboration among different denominations to achieve the same goal. The very fact that the meeting agenda was the result of negotiation between Kamara, Kenneth, and Roy bore witness to a willingness to cooperate. It was a pity, I thought then, that so few people had shown up.

As more time passed I started to realise that the meeting was not going to take place that day. Kenneth, sensing the discomfort of those gathered, eventually publicly

addressed me saying that he wanted to tell me a story. Conscious of the bystanders' attention, in addition to my own, he began to tell a story that had the flavour of a parable. Kenneth told me that the Peace and Reconciliation is in line with Kerewo customs pertaining to the reparation for wrongdoings. As I learned later during my fieldwork, the logic of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony had a strong resemblance with the *tivona*, the ceremony of excuse and compensation to seal a peace between parties which I was told about by older people. On such occasions, people painted themselves white with *ameha* (lime, obtained by burning shells).⁶⁵⁹ After this remark, Kenneth gave me, along with those Kerewo present at the Delta Waterfront, a lesson on what the curse and the attached blame meant for them.

Pointing to the older people present, Kenneth began to tell how Kerewo living in Kikori area were always addressed as the killers of Chalmers when, for example, some petty fight ended with someone injured. His generation and that of his children were no different; they were always singled out as the descendants of the killers of the Scottish missionary. For this reason they wanted to enact the Peace and Reconciliation, to clear their name and dispel the blame. After the ceremony others would have to acknowledge that the Kerewo had apologised and could no longer be held responsible. Kenneth continued that he had read in a magazine issued by the New Apostolic Church how HIV plagued some people in Africa, and they had started to ask why they were affected. After much reflection they turned to the Bible and realised that the sexually transmissible disease was at odds with one of the Ten Commandments: 'thou shalt not commit adultery'. Once the root of the mortal illness was found, people gathered in prayer under a scorching sun, and by means of their prayers their curse ended. With Kerewo, Kenneth added, it is the same thing. They had identified the cause of their curse, and now they had to act on it as Christians in order to dispel it. With much gravitas, slowly turning his head from left to right encompassing the audience with his gaze, Kenneth added that this time they had to succeed. They had tried three times already: 'there is no "try" this time'. It was with a certain trepidation that I let these words sink in my mind. I was to witness what would be a historic moment in Kerewo history.

By 4pm Roy Rohoro announced that he had to return to Aird Hill before sunset, and added that he was pleased with the plan. The meeting was postponed to a future date. The small assembly disbanded, heading to their respective homes. I walked back to the CDI camp pondering Kenneth's words, and the connection between his determination and commitment to make the Peace and Reconciliation take place and the

⁶⁵⁹ Thus the title of this chapter *ameha via tivona*, the first being the colour of peace and the latter a ritual of reconciliation. The expression used more commonly, though, was the English one. Few adopted the Kerewo version I am giving, and not everyone agreed on the first word, as for example Kenneth who told me it would be more correct to say *niæ niæ* (sympathetic sorry).

surprisingly smooth collaboration between the United Church and New Apostolic Church.

As some clues revealed, though, denominational tensions were not quieted. For instance, on the occasion of Kamara's instalment as United Church pastor of Bisi, a village denominationally divided between the New Apostolic Church and the inheritors of the LMS, the theme of unity between the two main denominations was publicly insisted upon by Roy, who stressed that they were all a 'community of faith'. In that context, the Peace and Reconciliation – and the curse it aimed at lifting up – was presented as matter affecting the whole of the Kikori region. Furthermore, it was announced that a resort would be built at Dopima to attract tourists and bring in money, and thus Kerewo should start crafting traditional objects (those same objects that had been signs of non-Christianity for people like Butcher). The insistence on the economic benefits that would be enjoyed after Goaribari Island was reshaped by the activities in preparation for the Peace and Reconciliation were important indicators of a general sense of increasing expectation surrounding the atonement ceremony. Optimism was undoubtedly fuelled by what looked to me to be a strengthening of the collaboration between the two main denominations involved. But, on the day of our departure from Bisi, while waiting for the high tide to permit us to leave, we passed by a plot of land and Roy pointed to some timber posts standing up in the ground. These, he explained, were the posts where his denomination's church should be standing, and he commented that the New Apostolic Church had taken root here only because the United Church neglected this village. I opted for silence while realising that Kamara's appointment as United Church pastor of Bisi was a political move to regain hegemony among Kerewo speakers, and that hostilities among the two denominations were not over after all.

Denominational differences were not the only political lines along which the Kerewo community was fractured. On another occasion yet, during a meeting held at Kenneth's compound at Kekea, John Aitau, whom I knew as he was the CDI manager and a prominent figure of the Apeawa community and Kerewo more in general, added that the role of the church was that of facilitator, as the Peace and Reconciliation was something between Kerewo and the descendants of the missionaries. John, while not denying the role of Christian denominations in the process, was championing more secular concerns shared by those Kerewo not involved with either the United Church or New Apostolic Church. A man I did not manage to identify also stressed how the preparations had to be well conceived and the need to be respectful of the many different positions of those involved. He supported his argument by reciting the story of Moses who wandered for forty years in the desert because he tried to find a short cut. Things should not be rushed and should be done properly. The more secularist positions were inflected by that need for compensatory reciprocity connected to the episode of the two punitive expeditions suffered by Kerewo at the hand of colonial governments. This

aspect of Kerewo past, some people felt, was slipping on the background of the Peace and Reconciliation.

Yet the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony began to acquire in the imagination of many the role of a means for the radical transformation of present livelihood at Kikori. In this respect, its millenarian Christian overtones were key. At the meeting mentioned above, a Kiwai (Western Province) woman, married to a Kerewo man, reminded everyone that she had been waiting for sixteen years for the Peace and Reconciliation to take place (possibly counting from the attempt of the 1990s).⁶⁶⁰ Her passionate speech, in a mix of English, Kerewo, and Kiwai, had millenarian overtones, as she said 'Jesus is coming very soon, are you prepared? He is coming to take whoever is ready. [... If you will not be ready you will be] left behind Christians'. This Kiwai woman was making explicit what some other discourses surrounding the Peace and Reconciliation kept implicit: the atonement ceremony would coincide with a radical transformation, be it the coming of the Kingdom or the participation in the wealth promised by 'modernity' in the form of God's blessings.

John Aukei, a church and community leader at Samoa, stressed how they should keep a Christian perspective on the Peace and Reconciliation, lest partisan interests over land block them again. John's position is a good example of the type of new encompassing identities and group formations enabled by Christianity and noted in much of the literature on the anthropology of Christianity.⁶⁶¹ A Morobe man, married to a Kerewo woman and a fervent member of the United Church, he also stressed the importance of the church for the success of the Peace and Reconciliation, in contrast to what John Aitau had said. He opened his speech by saying 'gutpela tambu blo mi' (my good in-laws) and continued to map the development projects that were coming into the region, praising the organisational capacities of Siulangi (in Port Moresby), in particular with the institutional networks. He also stressed how the lack of leadership among the Dopima community led to constant conflicts, and thus the necessity to entrust the organisation of the Peace and Reconciliation to more experienced men. The organisation was complex, he added, as it involved many levels, from the Prime Minister to representatives of other nations. The United Church, in his view, was the only structure within which these complexities could be effectively worked out. Indeed the United Church, as I already noticed, had a consistent reserve of social capital rooted in a deep history of engagement with Port Moresby as the administrative centre, which was barely accessible to other parties.

⁶⁶⁰ 'Massacre Memorial to Mark Sorrow'.

⁶⁶¹ Joel Robbins, 'Is the Trans- in Transnational the Trans- in Transcendent? On Alterity and the Sacred in the Age of Globalization', in *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 2009), 55–71.

The distinction between secular and religious ends is, of course, fictitious and a matter of shades, as signalled by the plans for the reconstruction of what was then Dopima *o'opo kori* (abandoned village). Buara Isego, kaunsel of the ward comprising Goaribari Island, announced that he was negotiating with the regional Government and the developers to access funds for the atonement ceremony in order to provide those basic services that would make life in the coast area sustainable. Buara, a leading figure of Goare village, was a very qualified person to map these needs, as he knew very well the difficulties faced by being surrounded by salty waters during the dry season, and being exposed to winds and raising tides. The project of repopulation of Dopima village, through the contribution of Buara, was not limited to the building of a church in memory of Chalmers and possible venues for tourist revenues, but paid attention to the infrastructural necessities for the villagers themselves. I listened to his words with admiration, as Buara is in my opinion one of those rare cases of a committed politician who shares the hardships with the people he represents instead of fleeing to more comfortable places. The plan seemed to be approved by Gageda Dairi, one of the few people belonging to Dopima who spoke that day. And yet the repopulation of Dopima, in my experience, was in my mind an uphill project as a very significant portion of people belonging to this village now lived in Port Moresby.

As many noted in this meeting, with the prospect of the imminent payment for the royalties connected to the first shipment of gas from the PNG LNG Project, this was the most favourable year to organise the ceremony – something Kenneth stressed, once again, with the words ‘there is no “try” this time’. Other speakers from the audience, including Peter Eu’u, deacon of Samoa village’s United Church, stressed that their experience with the Centenary proved that small donations spread over a long time were an effective way of raising funds, and that there was no need to wait for the Government’s or the company’s money. His words proved prophetic as, at the time of my writing, Kerewo people (among other landowners) had not yet received the expected royalties from the first gas shipment. Furthermore, Peter stressed once again that *imo awo Kerewo* (lit. ‘we are big Kerewo’, meaning ‘we are all Kerewo’), and landowners should not obstruct the Peace and Reconciliation. At the end of the meeting Kenneth addressed the same issue from a different angle: in order to succeed they had to change their behaviour, especially in public, and that part of the preparation for this crucial event was to conduct a Christian life. Kenneth’s words stressed that the engagement required in order to transform Kerewo lives, by the ritual means of the Peace and Reconciliation, had to take the form of personal change, a point that finely fits with the existing literature on the nexus between Christianity and the transformation of the self (including the public self).⁶⁶²

⁶⁶² The transformation of the self in Protestant varieties of Christianity is a central point of Webb Keane's *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley:

March 2014 – Launch of the Peace and Reconciliation Program

The Peace and Reconciliation program was formally launched at Babaguna village during a two-day event. At the time I was based at Apeawa village, where the Seventh Day Adventists comprised the majority of the Christian population. As the launch had been scheduled for the SDA Sabbath, this generated some internal debate about whether to go or not. The negative response prevailed and in the end I went with Soboro, a fervent SDA believer but also a person extremely conscious of Kerewo history and the importance of reconciling with the past. I could not fail to notice that the cherished rhetoric of erasing denominational differences for a common goal was indeed compromised by the disagreement between United Church and New Apostolic Church on one hand and SDA on the other hand on which day of the week is the holy day. Organising the event on the SDA's Sabbath and completing the launch with a Sunday service had the effect, unintentionally or not, of forcing a competing denomination into the impossible position of choosing between their theological convictions and inclusion in the Peace and Reconciliation activities. On our arrival at Babaguna, I heard many people lamenting the absence of Apeawa representatives, as Soboro decided to play his affiliation with his village of origin, Samoa, when group pictures of the several village delegates were to be taken.

On Saturday, people gathered inside the United Church *tana moto* (church), where Kenneth and Roy delivered their speeches. They stressed the importance of this atonement ceremony and the need to discuss disagreement in the open instead of complaining and sabotaging activities behind the committee's back (a reference to the past behaviour of Dopima landowners who blocked the previous attempts from being successful).

During his speech, Roy quoted passages from the Annual Report and other colonial accounts of the death of Chalmers, as contained in a book supposedly titled *Strategy at Dopima* (which I had never heard of before or found reference to). Place names, misspelled in the colonial texts, were corrected by the audience. The names of the people held personally responsible for the murder of Chalmers and his party, as listed in the colonial records, were read aloud. It was Kemere, who identified himself as

University of California Press, 2007). Courtney Handman's insightful ethnography of Guhu-Samane shows well how different public behaviours are associated with ideas of 'true Christian life'; see her *Critical Christianity: Translation and Denominational Conflict in Papua New Guinea* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014). For a comparison between Amazonia and Melanesia see Joel Robbins, Bambi B. Schieffelin, and Aparecida Vilaça, 'Evangelical Conversion and the Transformation of the Self in Amazonia and Melanesia: Christianity and the Revival of Anthropological Comparison', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (2014): 559–90.

belonging to Dubumba village, who provided the list of ‘culprits’.⁶⁶³ At the mention of Kemere’s name and his association with Dubumba, a murmur rose among the audience. Dubumba was one of the villages merged to form Apeawa, and complaints about the absence of Apeawa villagers, so obviously involved in the murder, were voiced. Sitting among the audience, I was sympathetic to people’s concerns, but also aware that an error had been made when the village committees were formed. The members of the committees were overwhelmingly chosen from among church leaders, but at Apeawa this meant that the SDA theological particularities had to be taken into account if they had to be involved. I was not sympathetic to the accusations against the SDA for being incapable of putting denominational liturgical differences aside. Kabu, the SDA pastor of Apeawa, was unmovable from his commitment to the Sabbath. However, many non-SDA leaders from Apeawa, knowledgeable in history and politically relevant among the Kerewo community at large, could validly have been selected. The insistence on working within the church communities across denominations proved, in this case, to be a mistake.

Roy’s speech also raised expectations among the audience when he said that Kerewo people would become national leaders and from among their ranks a Prime Minister would emerge. The nexus between the Peace and Reconciliation and the rise of Kerewo from their position of marginality to national prominence was becoming more and more explicit. Its importance, as repeated by both Kenneth and Kamara, was remarked with the words *keiki na bihai* (lit. ‘not a small thing’).

At the end of the ceremony a crowd of people, mainly from Samoa village and all men in their forties, gathered outside the church. I joined them hoping to hear their comments on the events and words of the morning. They were discussing the passage from the book read by Roy. In their view that story *nou gamo bihai* (lit. ‘is not straight’; ‘is not right’) and needed to be corrected. As all those gathered said, this was not the story their fathers had told them; in particular, the detail of the *suku* (smoke) was missing, thus depriving Gahibai’s action of any rationality. Different versions were compared: Jason said that the reason for Gahibai to kill Chalmers was that the missionary hit his daughter who was playing in the *dubu daimo* during the impromptu service; while others recounted the more common version discussed in Chapter 3, in varying degrees of detail. The one thing that became clear to them was that what was recorded in writing was not the account of an eyewitness, as Kemere said in his testimony to the colonial officer that he was not present but had heard the story from a chief of his village. Furthermore, as Jason remarked, the account was translated from Kerewo, by a Kiwai speaker (who had a stake in the discussion as some Kiwai were also killed) into Motu, and then into English. Pointing at me he added that no one before

⁶⁶³ See above, 105-108, 128-29.

me had bothered to learn their language and learn their customs, thus trying to get the real picture of those events.

The participants agreed that it is because of this false and damning story that tourists did not reach Kikori, because they think Kerewo are still cannibals. But Kerewo had since changed, while a closer examination of the evidence showed that Chalmers was not without responsibility. Some speakers took issue with the false claim that their ancestors had tried to eat the missionaries' boots since they undoubtedly knew the difference between flesh and clothes; if they were primitive, they were also human beings with brains. This insistence on the rationality of the ancestors had already been implied by the argument that Chalmers shared some responsibility for his own demise. The men concluded that the clash was caused by incomprehension due to mutual ignorance of customs (Christianity and cannibalism), not by animalistic primitivity.

It was also claimed that the book Roy read from did not mention that, subsequent to the two punitive expeditions, some Kerewo were taken as slaves to work on Australian plantations. Although historically unlikely, since New Guinea was banned to Australian labour traders from mid-1880s, the assertion is important because it emphasises the local consequences of the 1901 event for Kerewo, and denounces the non-recognition of their own sufferings by outsiders who have only heard one side of the story.⁶⁶⁴ Bobby Ken, a young man from Babaguna, told the rest of us of how in Fiji a community performed such a ceremony and now are among the national leaders of the country, reinforcing Roy's quasi-prophecy about the future emergence of a Kerewo Prime Minister.⁶⁶⁵ He also added that some Kibiri people should also be involved, as their story says that Tomkins was not with Chalmers but with them at the time of the massacre. This was clearly another discrepancy between the written and the oral knowledge that had to be addressed. Before disbanding, the historians agreed that – before the official launch of the Peace and Reconciliation program – knowledgeable people had to get together, compare information, and synthesise this knowledge into a shared Kerewo version of the events. The prospect of a night listening to competing versions of the Chalmers' story was appealing, but I saw no subsequent sign that such a gathering would take place, nor did I ever hear that it did.

On the following day, the Sunday service overlapped with the launch of the Peace and Reconciliation program. A long line of Kerewo children dressed in traditional costume proceeded in pair, male and female, carrying the document of the program in procession from outside the church toward the altar. The document was handed to Kamara, and passed around among the people, all standing around the altar, who were to play an official role in the preparations for the Peace and Reconciliation; a sign of

⁶⁶⁴ Corris, Peter. "Blackbirding" in New Guinea waters, 1883–34: An episode in the Queensland labour trade.' *The Journal of Pacific History* 3, no. 1 (1968): 85–105.

⁶⁶⁵ On the reconciliation ceremony in Fiji see below.

cooperation and unity. Their names were called, and as a solemn crescendo rose from the electric piano, Kenneth recited in English, with his eyes closed, ‘God, I am standing as a Kerewo man ... I take this responsibility for lifting this curse. I commit my tribe before you’.

During the service, Roy remarked that ‘the mess left by our ancestors [notice the use of the first person plural pronoun that includes him], we will clean it up to build a path for our children’. The Peace and Reconciliation was an unfinished legacy from their fathers that they had to fulfil in order to start a new era; a rhetoric closely resembling the one adopted for the Centenary described in Chapter 4. Roy then asked people to close their eyes and to commit themselves to God Himself to donate a certain amount of money without revealing the sum and to raise their hands when they were done. I saw almost all of those present raising their hands, sign of a widespread commitment. Roy also added dramatically that the curse would strike those who opposed the Peace and Reconciliation for their selfish interests, and that those who did not actively contribute to it would not be allowed to ‘get on the winning horse’.

This part of the service was followed by several speeches, all by men, too many to be treated individually. The most recurrent and striking theme was the connection, explored through personal testimonies, of the relation between Christian training through participation in church life and the acquisition of knowledge (*save*). Almost every person who gave their testimony stressed that they had had to drop out of school due to one difficulty encountered or another, but that thanks to the church they had learned those skills that made them people capable of engaging with the modern world: proficiency in English and the use of computers, or oratorical capability that gave them social capital in relations with the developers or State agents. The link between Christianity and the knowledge associated with modernity was summed up by Jason; to paraphrase his words, ‘the missionaries brought in the signs of civilization like clothing and formal education, the State came only subsequently’.⁶⁶⁶ The stories told in this context were an implicit critique of the post-Independence State that had failed to provide those services necessary to engage with the modern world. It was through Christianity that they could fulfil the aspiration to do so; the Peace and Reconciliation was presented as a ritual means by which change could take place when the State was so blatantly absent from Kikori.

The ceremony neared its conclusion with Kamara calling those people belonging to Dopima, the land and village owners, to the altar and solemnly asked them if they formally endorsed the Peace and Reconciliation; a positive answer followed. After this, Roy added a few closing remarks, describing his role as that of a mere facilitator linking

⁶⁶⁶ For a historical analysis of the shift of the educational system in post-WWII Papua New Guinea see Wayne Fife, ‘Education and Society in Papua New Guinea: Toward Independence 1945-1975’, *Man and Culture in Oceania* 12 (1995): 1–18.

Kikori to the United Church in Port Moresby which was in charge of the relations with the Government and embassies, and led the ceremony to its conclusion. The whole day was marked by a strong sense of unity between the two main denominations and a shared sense of purpose for Kerewo at large, something conveyed by Buara's words '*Kerewo nau'buo gawa, nau'ubo kiiro*' (there is only one Kerewo, only one custom/way of life).⁶⁶⁷ The sense of cooperation, though, was in my mind somewhat diminished by the de facto exclusion of the Seventh Day Adventist church, and the fact that 'Dopima', a key symbol in the Peace and Reconciliation, was represented by Kamara's own network (social capital) with no representatives from other landowners. A significant amount of money was raised that day through donations and tithes; the sum was unusually high and the investment of single households or entire parishes later became a source of discontent when it saw no returns.

The Peace and Reconciliation program was officially presented in Kikori a week later.⁶⁶⁸ Leaders of other Kikori language-groups, so I was told, enthusiastically accepted the program. It seems that the trope of the curse preventing development was also good to think with by others besides Kerewo speakers. The image used was one in line with the ecology of Kikori River: the blood that had been shed at Dopima was carried by currents upstream to Kikori, contaminating the fauna and flora of the region, which constituted the subsistence of all groups living around Kikori. Following this public launch, some 'awareness' campaigns took place, visiting villages both near and far along the coast. On my return from Goroka I was told that the next day there was going to be a meeting with Dopima landowners who were unhappy about how things were taking shape.

May 2014 – Signs of development

In late May 2014, expectations connected to the Peace and Reconciliation and the advent of 'modernity' took the form of the delivery of services to Kikori. A BSP (Bank of South Pacific) branch, along with a post office, was to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Peter O'Neill. On the day of the opening, the Prime Minister and other authorities addressed the crowd by saying that the services delivered that day were only the beginning. The Government allocated funds for schools and the hospital, and several projects were to take place in the area, particularly at the infrastructural level: the Highlands Highway would soon to be joined with Kikori, the airstrip was to be fixed

⁶⁶⁷ *Kiiro* has an ample semantic meaning: it means 'life', 'custom', 'habits'.

⁶⁶⁸ I did not attend this event, as news of my mother's hospitalization convinced me to go to Moro ready to fly back to Port Moresby and then to Italy if I needed to. The following account is based on phone calls with some Kerewo friends and later interviews. Overwhelmed by the stress of the wait and of months of fieldwork, once I was assured that my mother had recovered, I decided to take a break and went to Goroka.

and with time turned into a proper airport, and the connection of houses in Kikori to a power line would provide lighting to each household. Development was to come soon. The timing of this prospect of sudden development coming into the region was not lost among those who put their hopes in the Peace and Reconciliation.

March 2015

On my last visit to Papua New Guinea, after some months of absence, I went to visit Siulangi at the Hohola church in Port Moresby to receive updates on the Peace and Reconciliation. I was told that the two peace treaties had been signed during my absence (notice the diplomatic language): one among the Kikori tribes, and the other between the bishops of the Western and Gulf Provinces. Despite this progress, though, the ceremony was postponed to November. When I reached Kikori I found Roy evasive about the Peace and Reconciliation; apparently some delays and financial issues had got in the way of the plans. Only much later did I find out that Kamara had some friction with Siulangi because the former, a representative of Dopima, had not been invited to join the United Church delegation at Daru. Other members of the Peace and Reconciliation committee were in disagreement with their fellow Kerewo, as they all agreed that Siulangi was only doing his duty as a neutral party between Kerewo and Kiwai. Apparently, also within the United Church ranks, competition to accumulate symbolic capital had led to a rift, affecting the field (in Bourdieu's sense) of the Peace and Reconciliation.

8 April 2015 – James Chalmers Day

I had been based at Bisi village for some time, working with Hawamere people on their history, their relations with Kerewo people, and how the social mapping exercises conducted in connection with the oil and gas extraction projects affected their definition of ethnic identity.⁶⁶⁹ After much travelling along the rivers surrounding their territory, we went to Kikori town in order to stock up on trade store goods. At Kikori I met Roy by chance, and he told me that the following day a ceremony to remember Chalmers would

⁶⁶⁹ Havamere people claim to be a distinct group from Kerewo, an ethnic label under which they have been subsumed at the time of social mappings. Their origin stories differ from those of Kerewo, and stories of the pre-colonial period point to a complex relation of amity/enmity with Kerewo. Havamere today speak a language that almost completely overlaps with Kerewo language, but some idiomatic expressions and words are a sure sign of the speaker's origin. For example a Kerewo would use *noupa* (it must be so), while a Havamere would use *hipa* for the same meaning. Despite all this differences, the involvement of Paia'a village (one of the three main Havamere old villages) in the first punitive expedition following Chalmers' death, ties the two other groups more closely, as will become clear. I aim to treat the case of Havamere at more length in a separate publication.

take place, including a re-enactment by the youth groups of what happened at Dopima in 1901. The intent was to institutionalise 8 April as 'Chalmers Day'. I was taken aback, not so much for the sudden news which affected my plans, but rather because I had not heard a word about this ceremony from the Kerewo friends whom I had met that morning. I immediately went to the 'Bisi corner' (a section of Kikori that is considered a Bisi settlement) to update Aibaru, my host at Bisi, of the change of program, with profuse apologies for the extra day to be spent at Kikori. Aibaru was rather annoyed by the delay, but his irritation progressively transformed into disbelief, shared by the other residents of the 'Bisi corner' as well as by myself, because no Kerewo knew of or had heard about Roy's intentions. What I found particularly striking was Aibaru's reference to *imo Kerewo* (we Kerewo) in connection to the Peace and Reconciliation, subverting the usual distinctions between Kerewo and Havamere. I spent the rest of the afternoon listening to complaints about the lack of consultation with Kerewo over the forthcoming events. What was perceived as exceeding Kerewo's ownership in the matters related to Chalmers also prompted expressions of open dislike about the use of donations for the Peace and Reconciliation committee to go to Port Moresby without bringing results home. It was widely held that the economic capital invested had not produced any concrete result. Dissatisfaction was in the air.

On my way back to the CDI camp I stopped at Joe Dodobai's house, to repeat my condolences for the recent passing of his wife (a member of the Peace and Reconciliation committee, appointed by her brothers residing in Port Moresby to represent the interests of Dopima landowners), and the conversation slipped into the topic of 'Chalmers Day' and the lack of consultation. Joe told me that they were not happy at all about how things were going. He knew that other United Church circuits within the Gulf Province were ready with their program, and only Aird Hill was behind due to money mismanagement. Malcolm, Joe's son, at the mention of 'Chalmers Day' quite angrily said '*botiri Tamate kepiyai? Nou tubudiai o imo tubudiai?*' ('Who killed Tamate? His ancestors or our ancestors?' – *tubudia* is the Motu word for Kerewo *uko*). Even Kamara, supposedly the United Church representative of Dopima village, had not warned them of what was happening, restricting his network to his extended household at Babaguna. According to Malcolm, the Peace and Reconciliation process 'was not straight' (*gamohia bihai*).

On the morning of the 8th I approached the marketplace in front of the Delta Store where the celebration of 'Chalmers Day' was to take place. The emotion expressed by many Kerewo I met was *gunuini*, a term that covers anger and rancour over an offense. Rumours of a potential interruption of the ceremony were circulating. As it was explained to me, the main dispute was about the re-enactment planned for the ceremony; this was a story that Kerewo themselves had to perform. If Roy limited himself to a commemorative service there would be no problem, but to perform Kerewo

history without consulting them was beyond his authority. Kerewo derived that authority from the very *savi* (blood) shed as a consequence of the punitive expeditions.

I met Kenneth, and I discussed with him the rumours and course of events. He too had been warned only the day before, but he dismissed the complaints as only a request for money. He assured me that no interruption would take place. Although I could not confirm this with him or other leaders, I had a strong sense that his sincere commitment to the success of the Peace and Reconciliation led him to underestimate the gathering tensions. With some defeatism in his tone, he told me that his last hope was for Kerewo clans to contribute to the atonement ceremony with the sums to be received as royalties from the first gas shipment. He wanted it to happen in November, whether or not the monuments and other engineering projects were ready; the only thing they really needed was accommodation for the guests. The visions of grand works over the previous months had faded in the face of the recent difficulties.

Around noon, Roy arrived with the musicians and their instruments, ready to set up the platform beside the main marketplace. He rushed to tell me that this day had nothing to do with the Peace and Reconciliation but it was instead a way to celebrate Tamate: 'yumi laik wokim pis na yumi i no save tingim em. Yumi tingting em pastaim' (we want to make peace, but we do not think about it. We have to think about it first).

From the stage, now set up with microphones and musical equipment connected to the Delta Store power line, the service began. Several speeches in succession punctuated the service, most in Tok Pisin, given the presence of many Highlanders at the market, and some in Motu. The Kerewo who spoke that day narrated an abbreviated version of their story (skipping the detail about *suku*), informing the people of the responsibility of their ancestors. Later that day Kamara presented to the audience a cartridge shell found at Dopima during the operations of clearing the site.

Roy, flanked by Ella Dodobai – a Kerewo woman who was the mayor of Kikori – made the point that he was not overshadowing Kerewo authority; the United Church of Papua New Guinea marked 8 April as 'James Chalmers Day', and he was handing it over to the provincial Government, represented by Ella and other political figures present that day, so it could be institutionalised in Kikori's local calendar. Hearing these words I was surprised to realise that it had taken more than 110 years to inscribe such an important event in Kikori history as an institutional day of commemoration. Once again, the religious and the political were merging into one by the inscription of the death of Chalmers into the (provincial) Government's calendar.

The event attracted people's attention, particularly the non-Kikorians, as a welcome distraction from another day spent sitting at the market. Despite the curiosity of many Highlanders, I could not fail to notice that among Kerewo people, only people from Babaguna were present *en masse*. Nor was there much enthusiasm shown by other descendants of Kerewo (those few present made bitter remarks that the story presented

by the speakers was only skimming the surface). The offerings, though, were mainly donated by Kerewo and to a lesser extent by Kikorians; I could see no Highlander donating money, either because they were not invested in this story or because none of them, to the best of my knowledge, belonged to one of the church denominations involved.

The object of the enactment, performed by the United Church Youth from Ero village, was Jesus Christ's crucifixion, highlighting the cross as a symbol of suffering that leads to the atonement of sins. The scene we were presented with was not what I had been told about the previous day, possibly to avoid tensions. Beside the involvement of Porome people in this event, Kairi people were also included in the orbit of the Peace and Reconciliation through Faiva Eu'u, who was stationed for his pastoral care from Samoa village to Kopi village. As he said, Rumu Kairi were also involved in the death of Chalmers, as the weapon that killed the Scottish missionary was manufactured by their ancestors and traded with Kerewo people, as he had recently learned in his new residence.

The 'James Chalmers Day', in my view, rendered the existing tensions visible to the communities involved. The strategic recuperation of the relation with Kerewo attempted by the United Church authorities was only partially successful, leaving the Peace and Reconciliation project endangered. Fights over symbolic and economic capital were threatening to disintegrate the ceremony's field.

May 2015 – Consecration of Dopima

While in Kikori working with Ranghy on the transcription and translation of some interviews, I learnt from Kenneth of Siulangi's arrival at Kikori. I knew he was supposed to come, but I did not expect that we would leave the same day for Dopima. I collected the equipment I needed and made my way to the Delta Store to buy the fuel we needed for the trip. There I met Siulangi, Roy, and another representative of the United Church whom I did not know. We greeted each other cordially and Siulangi told me that I was to participate in a historical event. He explained to me that too many things had gone wrong, and he had been searching for an explanation. The consecration of Dopima land would free the souls trapped in the ground, and at the same time free Kerewo from the belief that they live under a curse. This, in his opinion, would change their attitude and push them to take responsibility for the Peace and Reconciliation.

I got in touch by phone with Kenneth, who told me he did not have enough money to purchase fuel. My offer to provide for him was politely declined, much to my surprise and dejection as I had come to admire Kenneth for his commitment to the Peace and Reconciliation; if the consecration of Dopima land was an historical moment for Kerewo people, as claimed by the United Church, then a person like Kenneth should be present. Faiva Eu'u, an old acquaintance whom I consider a good friend from my

time at Samoa, asked me to join his crew, comprising people from Dopima like Saira (resident at Kikori) and others living at Kekea.

The long voyage from Kikori to Dopima was filled with Faiva's contagious laugh. Eventually we saw the Dopima shoreline, and it looked nothing like I remembered. Big *kombati*-like houses were built on the space previously occupied by thick bush. I was truly impressed. At night we were sitting in one of the houses consuming our meal, and Saira, Faiva and I were discussing the fact that many Kerewo were frightened (*toreti*) to come for fear of dying by *givari* (sorcery). As Faiva told us, this place was full of spirits (*urio*, the Kerewo term of 'spirit' but also 'soul'), including the one of Tamate; he saw many of them during the operations to clear the area over the past year.

The next morning Siulangi gave a speech in which he announced that that day the curse was removed, and he would talk to the national media as soon as he got back to Kerema. This was the first time they attempted a ritual like this, but it was a necessary one as it was clear that the curse was the reason for the obstacles encountered despite a year of hard work. Faiva, alternating between the Kerewo and Motu languages (for the Ero villagers present) explained that *dehabuo mibo aroropoidai* ('today the curse will be over'), but they would have to focus on God, the only one able to lift it.

The next morning I could finally see how many people were taking part in this ritual. There were about ninety, the majority from Samoa and Babaguna villages (the latter camped at the nearby *kombati* of Ahimahe), as well as Ero, Dopima village (both from Babaguna and Kikori and its hinterland), and Goare (the only representatives from New Apostolic Church). It suffices to compare this list with the one presented in January 2014 to realise that it was hardly Kerewo as a whole that participated in the endeavour. The United Church was the driving force behind this ritual, which sought to address the roots of the internal divisions within the Peace and Reconciliation field.

The service that day was filled with tropes of repentance and confession to clear the hearts of the thoughts withheld in them. This service, in Siulangi's words, was to move them forward with the help of God; to break free from the past: 'God will move you away from where you have been to where He wants you to be'. To lift the curse was also to break free from what Michael Lambek in another context calls 'the weight of the past', a fitting semantic extension of the Kerewo term *mibo* used to name the curse.⁶⁷⁰ The service was reaching a climax with the orators bursting into tears, particularly when Roy remembered Joe Dodobai's deceased wife who had worked so hard for this moment and would not witness it.

A procession followed the group of young girls and boys carrying a cross, from the spot where the service was taking place to where Chalmers was killed. Once there, the attenders circled the cross and Roy prompted a 'prayer of confession'. Eyes closed,

⁶⁷⁰ Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*.

hands stretched to the sky, a cacophony of voices was mounting in a crescendo of Motu, Kerewo, and voices broken by tears; the indistinguishable dissonance of voice woven together occasionally lacerated by a voice raising from the circle making his personal prayer heard to all; a very intense moment. As the prayers diminished in intensity and the cross was raised upright, Siulangi removed the curse with a prayer to God. A forest of hands rose to the sky channelling the request to free Kerewo and Kikori land from the curse. At the end of the prayer, in a mixture of gravity and relief, Siulangi said ‘We will not talk about the curse anymore; we will not say we killed Chalmers and therefore we are cursed; that is not true anymore’. Wealth, he continued, will freely flow now, as the royalties will be paid.

We moved in procession to the shoreline, where the cross was planted at the spot where Chalmers’ body was consumed. The United Church flag was flying over the cross, and after the last prayer everyone embraced each other or shook hands. A sense of relief was palpable. Soon after the ceremony was over the party that accompanied Siulangi left for Kerema, and I enjoyed a very relaxed afternoon with those who remained. I could sense real joy in the air. The comments I heard bore witness to the change in attitude and perceptions. A woman said that when she was clearing the site she had seen the spirit of Chalmers, who thanked her as now that the vegetation was gone he could see the light of the sun again. Then she added: ‘*dehabuo imo orio peri, mabu awaha nana taroropoio*’ (today we are on a new course, as everything is over).⁶⁷¹ Someone else said ‘*mo Kerewo mereri, mo dehabuo pidawari*’ (I am a Kerewo man, today I stand in the light).⁶⁷²

Given the light atmosphere I joked with Faiva that when the re-enactment took place, I might impersonate Chalmers. With his usual sudden changes of facial expression he laughed at first and then dead seriously said that the ‘drama’ would never take place, as it was now taboo (he used the Motu term *taravato*) the curse being over. From now on, whoever brought up again this matter ‘*em bai kisim hevi*’ (will find a reason for aggravation), he remarked in Tok Pisin to be sure I understood. Then he smiled, and a joke washed away his seriousness.

Saira told me he was thinking of leaving Kikori to resettle at Dopima. ‘*O’opo nou mo[r]i nanu, awaha nana airia, nara, kaurira... Ro maket nana modobori, ko’u, Kikori ito*’ (This is my village, everything [necessary to live] is here: fish, crabs... When you have enough stuff for the market, you go to Kikori).

⁶⁷¹ Lit. ‘today we are in a new canoe (*pe*), the root of it all things are finished’. *Pe* indicates in Kerewo both the ‘canoe’ and the metaphoric meaning of ‘course’, ‘passage’.

⁶⁷² Lit. ‘I am a Kerewo unmarried man (*mere*, which also means ‘son’), today I am within the light at its center (*pida* ‘light’, ‘torch’; *-wa*, morpheme for, ‘inside’, ‘within’ with a connotation of centeredness; *-ri* copula).

Looking at the horizon Faiva, Kamara, Saira and I were listening to the waves gently washing ashore. Kamara, whose eyes did not leave the line of the horizon, gently interrupted the peaceful quiet to say that one hundred and fourteen years had passed. This remark was concluded with the Kerewo formulaic expression used to conclude a section of any narrative, marking the end of a certain action or period of time: *oboi' ta*.

Coda

I left Kikori not long after the Dopima consecration, and I was told that the Peace and Reconciliation would take place in November 2015. While in Port Moresby I visited Siulangi at his church at Hohola to say goodbye and naturally we ended up talking about the ceremony. He told me that November was the month when the celebrations for Ben Butcher were to take place; so he wanted the Peace and Reconciliation to happen in April the following year (2016). This would give them time and be more appropriate from a calendric point of view; but I thought also that Roy's term was to finish that year, and wondered whether this would affect the choice of date. Since then I have kept in touch, usually via Facebook, with the few friends who have access to Internet. Apparently problems have arisen in connection with money, and the death of Kenneth's wife also led to his withdrawal from the Peace and Reconciliation program. At the time of submission of this dissertation, as far as I could ascertain, the atonement ceremony was not performed.

The situation described above is reminiscent of Jacqueline Ryle's description and analysis of the ceremony – which took place in 2003 – to atone for the killing and eating of the Methodist missionary Thomas Baker and his Fijian assistants in 1867.⁶⁷³ The people of Navatusila had already attempted twice – in the early and then in the late 20th century – a traditional reconciliatory ritual by which 'grievances are [normally] considered buried, laid to rest – forgotten'.⁶⁷⁴ Yet, people felt the curse they were suffering did not cease to haunt them; thus the organisation and performance of the ceremony that took place in 2003, the outcome of which was perceived as successful. Ryle has convincingly argued that the shift in perception was due to the fact that both Pentecostal and Methodist churches, in 2003, engaged in a project of spiritual preparation prior to the ceremony that restructured the relationship between Christian faith and Fijian traditions (according primacy to the first), concluding that:

The "healing of the land" conducted prior to the Baker reconciliation held tremendous *transformative and empowering potential* in the fact that pastors from Suva [Fiji's capital] came especially to a *neglected*, rural area and stayed

⁶⁷³ Jacqueline Ryle, 'Burying the Past - Healing the Land: Ritualising Reconciliation in Fiji', *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 157 (2012): 89–111.

⁶⁷⁴ Ryle, 92.

for a prolonged period to work with the villagers and guide them through a programme of ritual spiritual reconciliatory interaction. The *serious attention* bestowed on the people of this area and the ritualised opportunities individuals were given to act, to take charge of their life and make a conscious, personal decision to change, is unusual and empowering in relation to the highly hierarchical norms of traditional rural Fiji society.⁶⁷⁵

The parallels with the Kerewo case are evident in the theme, repeatedly stressed in the Peace and Reconciliation meetings, of taking charge of the changes Kerewo were seeking by transforming their lives according to the Christian principles. Yet, as far as Ryle's account permits such assessment, there are differences as well. Some in particular seem relevant to account for what I perceived as a sense of incompleteness surrounding the last phase of the Peace and Reconciliation program.

The first is the lack of wider recognition from the state and other extra-regional actors (including the descendants of Chalmers, Tomkins, or the Kiwai students), which was enjoyed by Navatusila people in Fiji. Kerewo's claims of their place in history were not heard. Another is the fact that, contrary to the Navatusila, Kerewo did not see any concrete sign of the blessings they were after.⁶⁷⁶ Rather, in August 2017 an article appeared in the newspaper *The National* titled 'Chalmers' Murder Haunts Gulf'.⁶⁷⁷ Finally, though Ryle's account suggests that Pentecostal denominations had the lion's share in the processes of transformation in Navatusila Christianity, the atonement ceremony for Baker and the period of spiritual preparation that preceded it saw the concerted cooperation of both Pentecostals and Methodists alike, while in Kikori the micropolitics underpinning denominational rivalries overrode the calls for unity largely articulated around the sense of identity as Kerewo. Many Kerewo villagers who contributed their hard work and money toward a successful completion of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony saw their efforts once again frustrated. The cleansing of

⁶⁷⁵ Ryle, 106 (my italics).

⁶⁷⁶ See in contrast the following account of the post-reconciliation, which appeared in the Pentecostal magazine *The Harvest Times* (33, 2004: 12): 'Tremendous blessing... has come down on the people of Navatusila. From stagnant, dry weather, rain falls here... the crops are in abundance... there is an abundance of fruits, root crops as well as the fish in the river. The skin diseases [...] have disappeared. [...] The young people [...] decided to pull up all the marijuana in the village' cited in Ryle, 100.

⁶⁷⁷ Malum Nalu, 'Chalmers' Murder Haunts Gulf', *The National*, 21 August 2017, 18. It is worth noting, though, that this article expresses the ideas of the United Church voiced on the occasion of the Gulf Synod held at Iokea village (between Kerema and Port Moresby), in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer Charles Abel, the Gulf Governor Chris Haiveta, and the Kikori MP Soroi Eoi who were elected that same year.

Dopima from the curse, mostly a United Church initiative although not limited to it, might have opened up a space to claim the end of the curse but, incomplete from the point of view of those excluded (for various reasons, including self-exclusion), also left unfulfilled the potential for a found-again unity on which to operate for the benefit of Kerewo as a whole.

The Kerewo horizon of expectations seems to have been galvanised once again by promises of richness, as the Minister for Petroleum and Energy of the newly elected Government Fabian Pok confirmed that Kikori landowners would receive between April and May 2018 the long-awaited payment of the royalties connected to the PNG LNG Project.⁶⁷⁸ Moreover, images of grandiose development of the area have recently been proclaimed with the announcement on national newspapers of project for Chinese capital to build a 100-rooms hotel at Kikori to house PNG LNG workers, for the construction of a deep water port and facilities to process the liquefied natural gas, and for the transformation of Kikori into a Free Trade Zone to attract further investments.⁶⁷⁹ Some Kerewo people have now access to such news through their phones and Facebook accounts, as newspaper clips are posted on the Facebook page 'Kikori Community Forum'. What role the story of Chalmers' death and the events described in this chapter might have in this renewed landscape of promises, though, is impossible to ascertain without further ethnographic research.

⁶⁷⁸ 'Kikori Landowners to Receive Royalties', *Post-Courier*, 8 November 2017.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Kikori Delta Set for Development', *Post-Courier*, 3 January 2018.

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to show how Kerewo marginality might be understood as substantially the product of local negotiations with global, national, and regional forces and their capacity to produce meaning.⁶⁸⁰ The Peace and Reconciliation ceremony was perceived as a vehicle through which the undelivered promises of modernisation and wealth, made since the time of Independence and culminating with the advent of the PNG LNG Project operations, might finally be materialised. During the early 2000s, the Kikori area saw the construction of a road connecting the town to the Southern Highlands, and the building of a base-camp at Kopi, just upstream of the village of Kairi. At that time the French company SPIEGAPAG provided temporary jobs in order to lay the pipeline on land and under water. When these operations were completed, there were few jobs left for most Kikorians, but they were told that money would flow in as royalties for the use of their land. However the amount of money received as royalties that were connected to the oil extraction failed to match expectations; royalties for the gas itself, anticipated since the first shipment in May 2014, were still unpaid as of January 2018, provoking considerable anger and a feeling of impotence. Why, despite the presence of such a lucrative development project, has modernity not reached Kikori? Kerewo people seek the answer to this question in their colonial past.

The killings of Chalmers, Tomkins, and the ten Kiwai who went with them to Dopima in 1901, have been interpreted retrospectively as the moment in which a curse (*mibo*) was cast upon Kerewo land, extending throughout the Kikori area. But this event also signified something of potential benefit for Kerewo people. The arrival of Chalmers at Dopima, as bringer of the good news (*pai mea*), had been predicted explicitly by local mediums (*gabo oubi*). The *pai mea* is obviously the Christian Gospel, but its literal meaning is something new and good. The event of Chalmers' death stands for the ambiguities of colonialism with its promises and harsh realities. But the relevance of this particular event did not rest solely on its multilayered semantics. As shown in Chapter 3, the relevance for the colonial imaginary of Kerewo people of Chalmers' death and its aftermath, as these events were filtered through local self-

⁶⁸⁰ Tsing writes: 'there is a popular notion that roadbuilders, development planners, and timber merchants have no cultural commitments. They just follow the obvious natural dictates of efficiency and progress. [...] Against such notions, I would argue that efficiency and progress are always projects of the imagination. The connections formed between remote rural areas and cosmopolitan centers involve impositions of meaning, as well as political and economic expansions. [...] Regional, national, and international imaginings form frameworks for cultural negotiations in the Meratus Mountains, in which power relations and religious, ethnic, and gender identities are formulated.' Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, 287–88.

representation, was reiterated by the same LMS missionaries who found in the martyrdom of Chalmers an inspiration for their own evangelical work in remote areas. The theme of Chalmers' murder was reinforced within the geography of blame that must have guided inter-ethnic relations in the new colonial social environments, whether on plantations, in Port Moresby, or amongst other LMS congregations.

The stereotyping to which Kerewo people have been subjected during the colonial period and since is reminiscent of Michael Herzfeld's analysis of the role played by negative stereotypes in the emergence of 'cultural intimacy', defined as

the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the basis of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation.⁶⁸¹

To be Kerewo means to be associated with the murder of Chalmers and carries the burden of having to deal with this past. This is what Kenneth conveyed to a wide audience of Kerewo and myself, gathered to discuss the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony, when he said that their children should not experience what they had in their youth; whenever some fight with other groups broke up and someone got injured, the trope of 'murderers of Chalmers' and 'savages' resurfaced. It is in this sense that many Kerewo described the curse to me as *saviwari* (in the blood), and thus the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony aimed in part to put an end to this source of embarrassment for the younger generation of Kerewo. And yet the negativity of the stereotype has been appropriated and partially transformed into a positive resource. In Chapters 3 and 4, I have addressed the historical grounds on which Kerewo base their role as central to the spreading of Christianity in Kikori by employing the death of Chalmers at Easter within the Christian framework of cosmological death and rebirth.

The narratives relating to WWII do not structure Kerewo understanding of their present in historical terms to the same extent as Christian narratives, but they do echo and amplify the perception of Kerewo centrality in regional and national history, thus creating a cognitive short-circuit produced by the absence of material signs of modernity that should acknowledge this privileged position. A historical perspective on

⁶⁸¹ Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 3. Another definition of cultural intimacy is 'the sharing of known and recognizable traits that not only define the insidehood but are also felt to be disapproved by powerful outsiders'; Herzfeld, 132. In using the word 'stereotype' I follow Herzfeld's insight that stereotypes are a form of social poetic and essentialism a social strategy; see Herzfeld, 26–30; 116–17; Chapters 8–9.

socio-economic conditions suggests that the years encompassing WWII and independence (Chapters 5 and 6) bear more heavily on the present socio-economic configuration of the Kikori area and its structural underdevelopment.

What an external eye might perceive as the causes of Kerewo marginality is not mirrored in present Kerewo historical consciousness, which is thoroughly permeated by Christian idiom and ideology. A crucial question that needs to be answered is: why is it that Christianity, with its locally specific past and ecumenical future temporalities, came to be so relevant for Kerewo people in the historical period of the 2010s when I conducted my fieldwork? Why is it thought that the transformation of present socio-economic conditions can be achieved only by means of a Christian ritual?

At the Margins of the Neoliberal State

One possible answer to these questions lies in the specific configuration of the neoliberal state. A prominent theme in recent scholarship on Melanesian nation-states has been the weakness of the state and the near-absence of a sense of nationhood.⁶⁸² Robbins contends that ‘one reason Melanesian nations are weak is that Melanesians are more concerned with reproducing their own local social relations than they are with reproducing national imaginings’.⁶⁸³ For the Papua New Guinea state, at least, I would add to this the peculiar conjuncture of political independence with a neoliberal economic and social reconfiguration of citizens as consumers. As argued throughout this dissertation, the consumption of Western goods is locally perceived as participating in the project of modernity.

During the colonial era, ‘the Government’ was embodied by a handful of white officers carrying out visits of inspections throughout the country, usually at intervals of several months.⁶⁸⁴ Beside the government stations in the district headquarters and the prisons, the colonial state had little physical presence in the lives of many Papua New Guineans, beyond those economic centres such as plantations or mines, which created concentrations of Indigenous workforce as well as European businessmen. Even in

⁶⁸² Bronwen Douglas, ‘Weak States and Other Nationalisms: Emerging Melanesian Paradigms?’, *State, Society, and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper*, 2000.

⁶⁸³ Joel Robbins, ‘Between Reproduction and Transformation: Ethnography and Modernity in Melanesia’, *Anthropological Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (1998): 95.

⁶⁸⁴ For a fine analysis of the use of collective categories in the scholarship on Papua New Guinea see Hank Nelson, ‘Mobs and Masses: Defining the Dynamic Groups in Papua New Guinea’, *State, Society, and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper*, no. 4 (2009).

these economic centres, workers' unions emerged only in the 1960s.⁶⁸⁵ Wolfers has convincingly argued that Australian colonialism in Papua and New Guinea was shaped by the preoccupation with maintaining control over the subject population despite the limited numbers of colonial officers in the field.⁶⁸⁶ The result was 'systems of "native administration" in either territory [which] were systems of structured dependence', mediated by the village head (who owed his position to the government), a policy resting upon the self-asserted claim of British colonists at the time of the Protectorate: 'to intervene unilaterally in village affairs; and to control the indigene's rate and style of entry into the modern world'.⁶⁸⁷ The colonial agents who were most present on the ground were the mission bodies which, in addition to their evangelical activities, provided most of the services – especially education and health – commonly considered the prerogative and responsibility of the state, at least until the 1960s.⁶⁸⁸ What would become the Papua New Guinea state was already weak – at least in terms of social services and infrastructure – at the time of Independence.

The timing of Independence and the formation of the nation-state should not be overlooked. Discussion of the possibility of independence followed the wave of decolonisation in Africa and Asia in the 1960 with its promises of liberation but, by the very early 1970s, the first signs of the problems facing the newly independent states were becoming evident, further polarising the debate in Australia over the propriety and timing of handing over state power to Papua New Guineans.⁶⁸⁹ Despite these debates, the process leading to independence was formally set in motion in 1973 by the Australian Labour government, accompanied by a great expansion of expenditure on social welfare. By 1975, when Papua New Guinea formally gained its independence, the Australian Liberal party was in power, at a time when Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were rising as prominent figures within the conservative arenas of their respective countries, to which Australia was closely tied. The Papua New Guinea independent state thus arrived on the global political stage just as neoliberalism and its

⁶⁸⁵ See Michael Hess, *Unions Under Economic Development: Private Sector Unions in Papua New Guinea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁶⁸⁶ Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea*.

⁶⁸⁷ Quotes respectively from Wolfers, 7, 17.

⁶⁸⁸ On education see Wayne Fife, 'Education and Society in Papua New Guinea: Toward Social Inequality', *Man and Culture in Oceania* 11 (1995): 61–79; Wayne Fife, 'Education and Society in Papua New Guinea: Toward Independence 1945-1975', *Man and Culture in Oceania* 12 (1995): 1–18; on health services see Donald Denoon, *Public Health in Papua New Guinea: Medical Possibility and Social Constraint, 1884-1984* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁸⁹ Nelson, 'Liberation', 269–70.

social and economic positions were beginning to dominate policy globally. As Hank Nelson put it:

Papua New Guineans were promised control of the state when governments were expanding state revenues and functions, but once they took possession they were told they should reduce the numbers in the public service, cut wages and lower people's expectations of what government could do for them.⁶⁹⁰

The shallow roots of the colonial state apparatus combined with a worldwide tide of neoliberal politics created a perfect storm for Papua New Guinea. Under the tenets of neoliberalism, the state effectively shifted its functions from providing services to citizens, to regulating (or, to be more precise, *deregulating*) flows of capital across national borders. Such a state of affairs has shaped the ways in which Melanesian citizenship can be experienced and achieved. Nicholas Thomas has suggested that the insecure character of Pacific nations should be not ascribed to the inability of 'un-modern' natives to conform to Western political standards and practices, but rather to the neoliberal political project that seeks to transform citizens into consumers.⁶⁹¹

Robert Foster, in his *Materializing the Nation*, shows how the relationship between the Papua New Guinea state and its citizens is largely mediated through the consumption of indigenised Western goods, and of images blending together 'tradition' and 'modernity' or sport events.⁶⁹² The consumption of these goods and images creates, through a shared sensorial experience, a sense of participating in a national and global community, famously identified by Benedict Anderson as an 'imagined community'.⁶⁹³ If one side of neoliberalism's predicament lies in consumerist culture, the other side of the coin is the withdrawal of the state from performing public services. Yet for many

⁶⁹⁰ Nelson, 274.

⁶⁹¹ Nicholas Thomas, 'Nations' Endings: From Citizenship to Shopping?', in *Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific*, ed. Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 211–19.

⁶⁹² Robert John Foster, *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption, and Media in Papua New Guinea* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Robert J. Foster, 'From Trobriand Cricket to Rugby Nation: The Mission of Sport in Papua New Guinea', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006): 739–58.

⁶⁹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

Melanesians, according to Alison Dundon, consumption is more closely linked to engagement with Europeans than with the state itself.⁶⁹⁴

In an important article, Ferguson and Gupta have expanded the anthropological literature on states as ‘powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production’ grounded on spatial images of verticality and encompassment.⁶⁹⁵ As evident at various points in this dissertation, Kerewo experience and talk about marginality in terms of a lack of encompassment by the state, with its material signs of modernity such as roads, an airfield, electricity, and the like. It is the *absence* of encompassment that is presented as troublesome, while the vertical relations implicit in the form of the nation-state are acknowledged through (mostly verbal) acts of blaming, thus actually giving substance to an otherwise abstract entity.⁶⁹⁶ More often than not it is the reified abstract entity of ‘the state’ (usually referred to as ‘the Government’, as during the colonial times) that is blamed for the current state of affairs. Sometimes the name of a specific politician of the Kikori electorate might substitute for ‘the Government’, as an incarnation of the source of neglect, but the image of the politician living in the capital spending people’s money in amoral practices (as extreme non-reciprocity) is another example of the spatial and symbolic nature of the state. Before returning to the relationship between consumption, Christianity and the state, I want to expand further on the specificity of the neoliberal state.

As Ferguson and Gupta note, under neoliberalism ‘the central effect of the new forms of transnational governmentality is not so much to make states weak (or strong), as to reconfigure states’ abilities to spatialize their authority’.⁶⁹⁷ It comes then to no surprise that ‘the Company’ (ExxonMobil), with its presence in the social and physical space, is often sought after to fix the few roads at Kikori, provide water-tanks for the villages, or send helicopters to transport urgent cases from the poorly equipped Kikori

⁶⁹⁴ Alison Dundon, ‘Tea and Tinned Fish: Christianity, Consumption and the Nation in Papua New Guinea’, *Oceania* 75, no. 2 (2004): 73–88. See also Joel Robbins, ‘On Reading “World News”: Apocalyptic Narrative, Negative Nationalism and Transnational Christianity in a Papua New Guinea Society’, *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 42, no. 2 (1998): 103–30.

⁶⁹⁵ James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, ‘Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality’, *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (2002): 981.

⁶⁹⁶ As Herzfeld aptly noted ‘The option of blaming the state gives definition and authority to its shadowy power’, *Cultural Intimacy*, 10.

⁶⁹⁷ Ferguson and Gupta, ‘Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality’, 996.

Hospital to other towns such as Mendi.⁶⁹⁸ The Papua New Guinea state is in no position to provide such services. Much as the colonial state abdicated its function to provide services to the mission bodies, the contemporary state now delegates some of its functions to developers and NGOs.⁶⁹⁹

As the case of Chalmers' place in Kerewo historical consciousness makes clear, – along with other missionary figures in Papua New Guinea such as George Brown in New Ireland, and William Bromilow in the D'Entrecasteaux area – the figure of the missionary-as-culture-hero mediates the local understanding of modernity and its promises in several parts of the country.⁷⁰⁰ With their longer association to those

⁶⁹⁸ It is important to note that ExxonMobil has a closer hospital facility at Moro, but it is reserved for employees. The theme of development companies performing state functions is no novelty; see among other possible works: Chris Ballard, 'It's the Land, Stupid! The Moral Economy of Resource Ownership in Papua New Guinea', in *The Governance of Common Property in the Pacific Region*, ed. Peter J. Larmour (Canberra: The Australian National University Press, 1997), 47–65; Chris Ballard and Glenn Banks, 'Resource Wars: The Anthropology of Mining', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 287–313; John Burton, 'Mining and Maladministration in Papua New Guinea', in *Governance and Reform in the South Pacific*, ed. Peter J. Larmour (Canberra: Australia National University, 1998), 154–82; Colin Filer, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Mining Projects, "Indigenous Communities", and Melanesian States', in *Mining in Papua New Guinea: Analysis & Policy Implications*, ed. Benedict Y. Imbun and Paul A. McGavin (Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea Press, 2001), 7–23; Stuart Kirsch, *Mining Capitalism: The Relationship between Corporations and Their Critics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

⁶⁹⁹ An exception was the building of a rural branch of the Bank of South Pacific (BSP) and a Post Office in Kikori, inaugurated in May 2014 by the then Prime Minister Peter O'Neill who flew in by helicopter along with Mark Mapakai, the representative of Kikori Open electorate. Curiously O'Neill was cheered for his achievement while Mapakai was angrily contested with various formulations of the following sentence: nogat mak bilong yu long hia, not having left a concrete sign of his political activity as representative of the area. As a means to bring about change, national politics has been proven repeatedly to be ineffective.

⁷⁰⁰ Errington and Gewertz, 'From Darkness to Light in the George Brown Jubilee'; Michael W. Young, 'Commemorating Missionary Heroes: Local Christianity and Narrative of Nationalism', in *Narratives on Nation in the South Pacific*, ed. Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 91–132. Particularly stimulating are the thoughts offered on the perception of the Papua New Guinea state in Jeffrey Clark, 'Imagining the State, or Tribalism and the Arts of Memory in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea', in *Narratives of*

services and goods associated with ‘modernity’, it is no surprise that contemporary local churches and their leaders have come to be seen as alternatives to the state, and provide the framework for change. Bronwen Douglas, in her work on Melanesian civil society, captures this point clearly:

The villages and smaller rural settlements in which the great majority of Melanesian citizens reside today are mostly actively Christian spaces where modernity is part of everyday experience and *aspiration*, however limited its material trappings. [...] [L]ocal churches ... are often the only functioning community-wide organizations and provide the only effective linkages beyond the immediate community including ... access to national and even international organizational frameworks.⁷⁰¹

Contemporary churches, coloured by their historical role in mediating modernity, also provide a structure and an ideological horizon on which to act to achieve the desired social change. The Christian ritual of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony had to be performed in order to generate the changes sought by Kerewo people.

In this section I have proposed an explanation for the specific historical configuration that has contributed to the structural problems generating Kerewo frustrated modernity. As I argue in the introduction, it is a sense of frustrated modernity that has largely informed the expressions of historical consciousness being articulated at the time of my fieldwork.

Moving Beyond the Impasse between New Melanesian Ethnography/History

Any dichotomy between an Indigenous and a colonial view of specific historical events appears untenable – not only because the two categories are presented as internally homogeneous, but also because they are mutually imbricated. My analysis of the Kerewo case suggests a crucial limit to the debate between New Melanesian Ethnography and New Melanesian History (summarised in the Introduction), especially as it has been articulated in terms of ‘authenticity’ in the debates about *kastom* from which the distinction appeared in the first place.

For instance, how are we to read the view widely shared amongst Kerewo that material wealth comes from performing the everyday rituals of a Christian life or

Nation in the South Pacific, ed. Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 72.

⁷⁰¹ Bronwen Douglas, ‘Christian Custom and the Church as Structure in “Weak States” in Melanesia’, in *Civil Society, Religion and Global Governance: Paradigms of Power and Persuasion*, ed. Helen James (London: Routledge, 2007), 159, 166 (my italics).

through the full achievement of the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony? Is this a transmutation of pre-colonial religious practices or is it a product of the locally mediated acquisition of a Protestant ethic? Neither a sharp distinction between the two options, nor a third – ‘a bit of both’ – enriches our understanding of contemporary Kerewo people lives.

In moving beyond the impasse created by the New Melanesian Ethnography and New Melanesian History, I find Ann Stoler’s concepts of ‘ruin’ and ‘ruination’ particularly useful. According to Stoler, empires (at least nominally) withdrew from the territories their agents once occupied, but the legacy of those histories lingers on; the scholar’s task is ‘to name the corrosions and violent accruals of colonial aftermaths, the durable forms in which they bear on *the material environment and on people’s minds*’.⁷⁰² Stoler’s formulation insists on the entanglement between the environments on which the material conditions of life rest and the cultural subjectivities produced within such environments. Ruins are ‘what people are *left with*: to what remains blocking livelihoods and health, to the aftershock of imperial assault, to the social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things’.⁷⁰³

By insisting on the active verbal form ‘to ruin’ and the processual nature of ‘ruination’ Stoler clearly points to the temporal nature encoded in such processes:

Ruins draw on residual pasts to make claims on futures. But they can also create a sense of irretrievability or of *lost futures*. [...] The sense of arrested rather than possible futures and the ruins they produce is one way to convey the problematic process of development policies.⁷⁰⁴

Stoler’s suggestive image of empires leaving their debris behind in the colonies to rot (albeit a rottenness with generative qualities) aptly captures what I describe as frustrated modernity. It is from this perspective that I insist on analysis of the colonial past in order to grasp Kerewo people’s understanding of their present – not in a causal and deterministic fashion, but from a perspective in which past, present, and future all coalesce into images of potentiality to be acted upon. Kerewo lives in post-Independence Papua New Guinea are immersed in a landscape full of ruins: the road connecting Kikori to the Highlands, the airfield next to the hospital reclaimed by weeds, or the luxuriant vegetation that suffocates the small inlet where the Borneo Mangrove Company had its short-lived operations on Neuri Akabu (Aird Hill). These material

⁷⁰² Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Introduction: “The Rot Remains”: From Ruins to Ruination’, in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 2 (my italics).

⁷⁰³ Stoler, 9.

⁷⁰⁴ Stoler, 21 (my italics).

signs on the Kikori landscape, visible or concealed, are imbued with past visions that never eventuated or fulfilled their promise to radically change people's lives.

These traces of ruination stand beside other signs that give a concrete form to the discourse of 'modernity' to which many Papua New Guineans are subjected by the national government as well as by international agencies. It is from this contrast that reflections on the present, mediated by the 'horizon of expectations' and the 'space of experience', are triggered, thus giving shape to that form of historical consciousness that I have called 'frustrated modernity'. The relevance of juxtapositions of material signs standing for different historical epochs for the ingeneration of a crisis is beautifully captured by the words of Dimitri, an informant of Knight's, who thusly commented on the EU's quasi-imposition of the production of green energy on cultivable land: 'despite having futuristic solar panels on my land, I believe I am living in the past... I still have to burn firewood and old pieces of furniture to heat my home at night'.⁷⁰⁵ Dimitri's present, once oriented to the future by the discourse of progress, had been shattered by the 2008 financial crisis and suddenly became out of joint: the 'future' was materially present (photovoltaic panels) but he felt confined within a past filled by hardships of past epochs (burning firewood and furniture). Dimitri's experience calls to mind the situation in which most Kerewo people in the Kikori area live: their daily lives are conducted through the hardship of sago-processing and fishing labour, while 'modernity' flashes across their landscape in the form of ExxonMobil's vehicles and infrastructure (such as the ExxonMobil camp near Kopi village).

This coexistence of multiple time frames in the same social space, as my ethnography has intended to show, entails the possibility to comment on the present through historical consciousness. This in line with Lambek's ethnography of Sakalava (Madagascar) spirit possession and history-making. In public performances many *tromba* (spirits from different historical epochs) are present at once; thus different temporalities coexist in the same time-space, and this co-presence 'allows each period to serve as a locus of commentary on the others'.⁷⁰⁶ To look at historical consciousness as a critical perspective on the past, present, and future cautions against any essentialist vision of the dichotomy 'tradition' vs 'modernity'. What is usually encompassed by both terms is part of the same social imaginary, and is mobilised as symbolic capital by different social actors to shape social action. Indeed 'History [...] perdures as a kind of continuous political argument. Positions and controversies are played out by means of specific historical voices [...] engaged in arguments that have real consequences'.⁷⁰⁷ The Peace and Reconciliation ceremony was a way to *act* on the crisis Kerewo were experiencing as the non-materialisation of 'modernity', and the competing narratives

⁷⁰⁵ Knight, *History, Time, and Economic Crisis in Central Greece*, 42.

⁷⁰⁶ Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*, 51.

⁷⁰⁷ Lambek, 194.

put forward by those involved in organising the ceremony were part of a struggle to give shape to the future as well as to the past. Yet, the efficacy of the deployment of different conceptions of what constitutes history and what is a valid historical claim, depend on the power relations among the actors engaged in a particular field. The Comaroffs' important distinction between ideology and hegemony is of help in navigating this Bourdieuan field.

According to the Comaroffs, ideology is characterised as the power to produce meanings that are naturalised and go unquestioned; hegemony, instead, emerges from the contradictions experienced by the subalterns hence putting in question the 'naturalness' created by ideology.⁷⁰⁸ Ultimately, so the Comaroffs' argument goes, the distinction between ideology and hegemony lies in consciousness. Drawing on their insight it might be said that for Kerewo 'modernity' occupies the space of ideology; there is no question about the desire to live 'modern' lives (however these might be imagined). But the very incongruity between Kerewo spaces of experience and horizons of expectations opens up historical consciousness as a site for contestation over narratives originating both within and outside the immediate social space in which rural Kerewo live. Those lives appear to be caught in:

the realm of partial recognition [...] in which individuals or groups know that something is happening to them but find it difficult to put their fingers on quite what it is [...] the realm from which emanate the poetics of history, the innovative impulses of the bricoleur and the organic intellectual, the novel imagery called upon to bear the content of symbolic struggles.⁷⁰⁹

History, then, is a particularly salient field for capturing a glimpse of how power works. Thomas identifies the specificity of history as a site of contestation:

the past differs from certain other cultural resources in the sense that it is not a unitary commodity [...] because] scarcely any story exists in the absence of competing variants, of alternate claims about what really transpired. One telling does not, in itself, preclude, marginalise, or even influence others. It is the institutional practices and modes of circulating written and oral histories which create dominant views and render dissent, or the views of the various actors themselves, peripheral.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁸ See Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1*, 19–28.

⁷⁰⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, 29.

⁷¹⁰ Nicholas Thomas, 'Partial Texts: Representation, Colonialism and Agency in Pacific History', *The Journal of Pacific History* 25, no. 2 (1990): 155.

This is what I have been referring to as ‘cultural capital’ and ‘field’, drawing on Bourdieu’s formulation of these concepts. The contestation of particular discourses has practical consequences for local understandings of the forces shaping a community’s world. Historical consciousness opens up the space for such contestations.⁷¹¹

Historical consciousness is what emerges in the effort to manipulate the past in order to influence present conditions and thus shape the future. Lambek writes that ‘As the world peripheralizes places like Mahajanga, their inhabitants struggle to recenter themselves’.⁷¹² This statement not only resonates strongly with the historical and ethnographic case presented in this dissertation, but also points to the political value of historical consciousness in understanding and attempting to shape the world before us. Tsing’s depiction of the attempts by some Meratus women to carve out a political space of their own in an essentially male-dominated political milieu constitutes an important lesson on the capacity of ‘the margins’ to voice powerful critiques of existing power configurations.⁷¹³ Such cases point to the ongoing importance of seemingly marginal places in the world to enhance our understanding of global capitalism, made and unmade as much in the in its peripheries as in its politico-economic centres.

As Peter Pels has argued, ethnographic attention to the future is of primary relevance for advancing the anthropological project, by extending Johannes Fabian’s notion of coevalness beyond the immediate ethnographic present. Orientation towards the future is what guided the actions of my Kerewo informants in the several months I spent in the field.⁷¹⁴ Pels has argued that what is often referred to, following Walter Benjamin, as ‘homogenous empty time’ produces empty futures, at once open to aspirations but riddled by the incongruity that the discourses of modernity or development create the spatio-temporal category the ‘not there yet’.⁷¹⁵ This is the nexus between Kerewo perceptions of their frustrated modernity and their temporal orientation (or historical consciousness). For Kerewo people, past, present, and future all coalesce

⁷¹¹ The nexus between politics and historical consciousness has been also explored by Dipesh Chakrabarty who makes an important distinction between the citizen and the consumer under late capitalism, and the relation of these two forms of subjectivity with history, see ‘The Death of History? Historical Consciousness and the Culture of Late Capitalism’’, *Public Culture* 4, no. 2 (1992): 47–65.

⁷¹² Lambek, *The Weight of the Past*, 27.

⁷¹³ Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, Introduction and pt. 3.

⁷¹⁴ Pels, ‘Modern Times’, 779.

⁷¹⁵ Pels, 786–88.

into images conjuring up lives ‘haunted by events that had not actually happened, *futures that failed to materialise* and remain spectral’.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁶ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester - Washington: Zero Books, 2014), 107 (my italics).

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