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Transformations of Monetary Symbols in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea

Pamela J. Stewart & Andrew Strathern

THIS PAPER takes its starting point from the transaction and symbolic use of shell valuables which have been widely reported as both ornaments and as wealth forms throughout New Guinea and the wider Pacific region. As decorative elements shells enhanced the human body by marking the status and achievements of their wearers or their wearers' kin or associates. These objects were exchange items capable of recapitulating exchange practices, ties, and pathways of relationships between people¹. They were also links between the human and the cosmological realms. For example, the bright yellow color of pearl shells was sometimes linked to Sky Beings, in particular Female Spirit categories who were thought to bring fertility and well-being to humans (Stewart & Strathern 1999a; Strathern & Stewart 2000a). In the past, shells traveled on long pathways of trading ties and represented wide extensions of human and spirit relational agency, captured in local contexts (compare Gell 1998). Also, the mythological importance of shells was represented in the close contact of the objects with the human body (see Clark 1991, Weiner 1988).

In the Melpa language of Mount Hagen the surface of pearl shells can be compared to the skin of people: if it is smooth and good this is a sign of good relations just as it is for the skin itself (the terms in Melpa are *mbongona* and *romint*) (see also O'Hanlon 1989). The growth rings on the kina shells were observed and described by saying that the old growth ring carried a child on its back and the next growth ring carried another child on its back and so the whole shell grew this way. The Melpa expression for the way that it was thought

1. Akin & Robbins 1999; Breton 1999; Schieffelin 1976; Sillitoe 1979; Strathern & Stewart 1999a, 1999b; Wagner 1977.

————— We would like to thank Stéphane Breton for asking us to contribute a paper to the special issue of *L'Homme* devoted to this topic. We also thank our Hagen and Duna collaborators Ru-Kundil, Mande-Kele, Puklum-El, Joseph-Tukaria, Ben-Ipu, Au-Huri, Pake-Kombara, Wapiya, Rex-Hora, Male-Kaloma, and others for their comments and discussion of the topics presented herein.

that the growth rings appeared is *up rorom*. The same expression is used to describe how Hagen women frequently carry their children on their shoulders with the child's legs around their neck, and here it also means « to give birth ». The shell's rings, we might say, are a metaphor for continuity in sustained reproduction since the new rings cannot be laid down without the old ones being in place as a support.

Shells were worn on the human body and removed from it so as to enter into transactional pathways where they would take on a new life and enter into new relationships with different owners (Fig. 1) – not unlike the movement in some areas of a young woman from her natal place to her husband's place of residence. Shells can be seen as carriers of the agency of persons and this definition can be extended to the physical substance of the person including the biographical consciousness and social standing of the previous owner. The wearing of shells as ornaments renews their connection with the human body and the body's connection with exchange and outside relationships². The decorated body displays shells as a reminder to viewers and recipients of the shells' link with the human body (here taken to include mind). Some shells that are worn are lent by people to each other and thereby create relationships that bring them together and ultimately lead to further exchanges. At the same time individuals are in competitive relationships, seeking to outdo each other and maximize their prestige. It is for this reason that we refer to the overall concept of social personhood as that of the « relational-individual » (Stewart & Strathern, eds 2000 ; Stewart 1998a).

Anthropologists have often discussed the differential ease or difficulty with which shells have been replaced in exchanges by state-introduced money (Akin & Robbins 1999). We have previously approached this problem from the standpoint of both external circumstances and internal perceptions in one society (Strathern & Stewart 1999b). There we argued that the people first viewed the influx of shells brought in by the Australian colonists in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea as a welcome opportunity to expand their exchange networks, but over time saw that the shells gave them no opportunity to enter directly into exchanges with the « whites » themselves (the usage of « whites » is from the Tok Pisin phrase used widely throughout PNG and refers primarily to Europeans and Australians and more recently Americans). Extending this argument, we can perceive that in « opting » for state-introduced money rather than the shell valuables as their currency both for commodity transactions and for ceremonial exchanges and bridewealth, these people (the Hageners) were effecting their incorporation into the outside world, claiming parity with that world, and announcing a new identity for themselves that went beyond their own language group and ambit of customary practices.

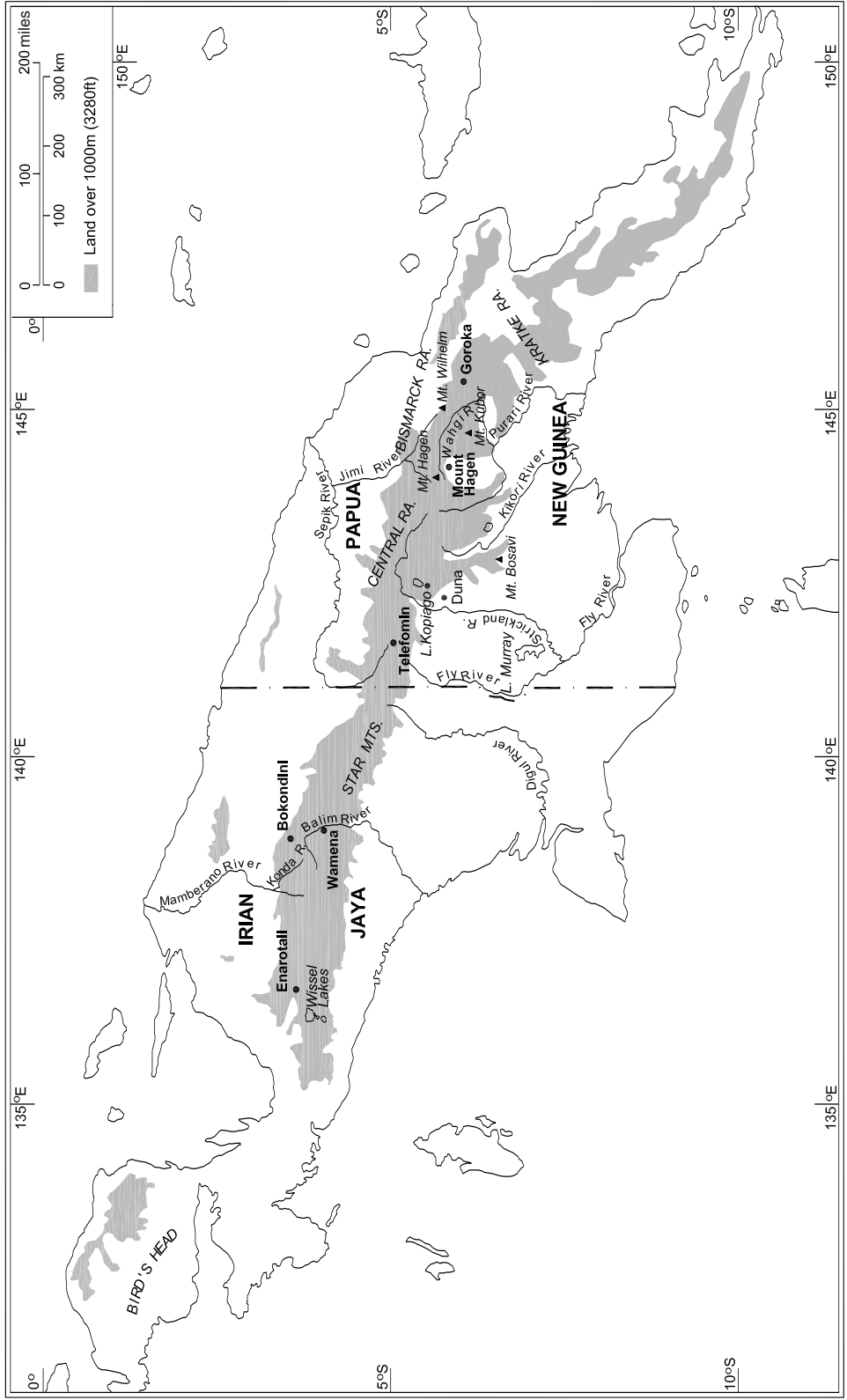
In this paper we will present further materials on the relationship between shells and historical change in the Highlands. We explore the fact that the

2. See Sillitoe 1988 for descriptions of the manufacture of a wide range of decorative shell items.

people themselves use the topic of shells as a focus for their own discursive reflections on change. Shells, for them, are good to think with historically, and their eclipse, or their maintenance, as media of exchange is closely bound up with senses of historical identity.

We will be presenting materials primarily from the Hagen and Duna areas in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (see Map). Both areas used shell valuables as a monetary form in the past prior to the introduction of paper money and coins by the Australian colonial power. The two areas have markedly different histories. Australian explorers, missionaries, and government agents opened up the Hagen area to outside influences from the early 1930s onwards, bringing in great numbers of shells, mostly pearl shells, using these to purchase food and labor, building a township and roads, and introducing from the 1950s coffee and tea as cash crops. The Mount Hagen people experienced first a shell « boom », and then an increasing incorporation into the monetary economy. They responded by gradually giving up their use of shells in exchange and adopting money instead, while still holding on to their pigs as a basic store of value. Prior to direct European contact they had also gained access, through trade networks to the south, to an increased flow of shells from the Papuan coast, and this appears to have stimulated the development of their *moka* system of competitive reciprocal exchanges led by « big-men ». These men married several wives, since it was the labor of women in rearing the pigs that allowed the system to function and each leading man needed to have wives to work with him so as to have the number of pigs that were needed (Stewart & Strathern 1998a). Pigs also came in through transactions themselves (Strathern 1969 ; Strathern & Stewart 2000b). The Hageners appear to have had a considerable « pull » on the shell trade and to have diffused the innovation of using shells in *moka* westwards to the Enga people. They also used pearl shells as display items in the dance for the Female Spirit cult, which was focused on community fertility (Stewart & Strathern 1999a ; Strathern & Stewart 1999c, 2000a).

The Duna people belong to a far western corner of what is now the Southern Highlands Province, neighboring non-Highlands peoples, the Oksapmin and Hewa, to their west and north, and their own highlands congeners, the Huli, to their south. Pearl shells were very rare among most of the Duna prior to contact with Australian outsiders. Instead, their main shell valuable was the cowrie, traded for with the Oksapmin and Hewa. They did not have the ramifying networks of exchanges of wealth found among the Hageners and Enga (Modjeska 1977 ; Stewart & Strathern 2000). The Australians did not open up their area until the 1960s, and after a brief period of using shells to purchase labor and land for a government station, they introduced the people directly to money, as happened also among the Wiru people in Pangia, but with different consequences for the use of shells, since in Duna shells disappeared as currency but in Pangia they were kept for some time, at least as especially valuable « heirloom » pearl shells (Clark 1995). The Duna gave up shells for reasons similar to those of the Hageners, and also because their shell trade with the Oksapmin



New Guinea, showing the locations of the Duna and Hagen areas in Papua New Guinea

people atrophied, as we describe below. They incorporated state money into their exchanges and have given it a local « fiduciary » framework by slotting it into the symbolic placement held earlier by shells. Unlike the Hageners, they did not experience shell inflation, and they do not have much access to cash cropping and business activity.

Both areas have an intensive history of contact with missionaries, and most people belong at least nominally to one or other denomination of the Christian church (Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea). Lutheran evangelists in Hagen preached against the *moka* system in the 1960s, when it was in a stage of efflorescence ; Seventh Day Adventists prohibit the consumption of pork ; and while the Catholics have been most liberal about the use of adornments and decorations for ceremonial occasions, the Assemblies of God prohibit « traditional » forms of decoration and dancing (Stewart & Strathern 1998b ; Strathern & Stewart 1998, 2000a). The missions have therefore impacted strongly, in one way and another, on exchange practices including self-decoration for dances.

The Hagen Case

For the Hageners, the pearl shell (*kokla kin*) (also described in Tok Pisin as « kina », a Gazelle Peninsula word) was the most admired and sought after valuable until its demise in the 1970s (Fig. 2). Many other shell types were used also, but were given up as currency earlier than the pearl shells, while still used variously as forms of bodily adornment. These included the baler (*raem*), cowrie ropes (*ranggal*) ; nassa shells (*nuin, pikti*) sewn into mats (*pela öi*) with a central diamond shape called a navel (*uklimb*) from which the shells radiated outward in a design ; and green-snail (*kötö, örpi*), used largely as ornaments, attached to the ears and ringlets of hair, primarily by women (see Strathern 1971 : 102).

Pearl shells began to lose their place in *moka* after the mid-1960s. For the Kawelka people of Dei Council area, the first beginnings of the use of state money in *moka* were observed in July and August of 1964, at an event we discuss later in this paper. In 1999, seeking to elicit some latter-day retrospective reflections on the historical passage of shells, we asked two senior Kawelka men of the Kurupmbo sub-clan, Ru-Kundil and Puklum-El, to outline their views on this topic. Ru spoke, checking from time to time with Puklum, who also prompted him on occasion. In our rendering, we do not include the various interjections, hesitations, and recapitulations of the discussion. It is important, though, to note that Ru was in fact casting around to put his thoughts in order about a topic which to him clearly appeared antiquarian.

Ru's account

« Pearl shells were the most important. After them came cowries, nassa shells, balers, and finally green snail. Pearl shells continued to be used after the cowries and nassa shells were given up. The white people did not bring many of the cowrie and nassa

shells with them, so we dropped them because we saw the whites did not see them as important and we decided not to consider them as valuables any longer. When paper and coin money came we stopped using these smaller shells. We saw that we could use money to buy pearl shells [these were sold at tradestores during the colonial years alongside sacks of rice, tins of fish, and packets of biscuits].

At first we thought that money was just a means to obtain pearl shells. So during the 1950s and early 1960s we used both money and pearl shells. Subsequently, we got Local Government Councils – we became members of Dei Council. The Kiaps [Australian government officers, placed as Council Advisors at this time] said that money would make the Council work efficiently. So the people began to think that shells were unimportant and they gradually gave up the use of them. It was not as though someone made a speech and said, “Let us give these shells up”, it just happened gradually as money was used more frequently. The people saw by then that pearl shells did not produce anything [*ie* they could not be used to purchase the same sort of things that money could] and only money produced things. Previously it was true that pearl shells had work in brideprice payments and other payments, but from that time forward they did not think that they had work anymore. In the past there were hundreds and hundreds of pearl shells with resin boards, but where are they now? They are not to be seen at all!

As for the shape of the pearl shell, the top is the “head” (*peng*) and that is what bore the shell. This “head” was broken off. It is not shiny, so it was removed when the shell was processed for use. They took the part with the good yellow color and fixed it on a board with tree resin, but if they wanted the shell as a neck decoration then they would cut it smaller. The edge of this colored part that is used is called the “tongue” (*anmbil*)³.

We had stopped using the small shells (cowrie and nassa) in the 1960s. We remember this because this was around the time that there was a big sickness and people were using money instead of shells at this time. Early in the 1970s we gave up using pearl shells because at that time there was plenty of money and we saw that the money could be easily carried to other places and used to purchase food and things that we needed. We did not complain about giving up the use of shells. We are not sorry for these shells or nostalgic about them. Now we have money and we can use it to buy pigs or as brideprice. »

Discussion on the Hagen Case

Ru is a man well into his fifties. In 1965 he was engaged along with his father Kundil in partnerships involving pearl shells and pigs that belonged to an elaborate sequence of *moka* prestations between the Kawelka and their neighbors the Tipuka people. At this time Ru was in his very early manhood and newly married to his first wife. He therefore recalls the whole sequence of events at least from the 1960s onwards, some of which he also discusses in his own autobiography (see Strathern & Stewart 2000c). Overall, it is clear that he sees the transcendence of pearl shells and their replacement by money as a mark of historical progress. In their views of history the Hageners have seen themselves as reaching out to the

3. See Strathern & Stewart 1999b for a full description of this manufacturing process.

external world, grasping it, and incorporating or « pulling » it into their own spheres of action. This is how in fact an older generation of male leaders saw the creation of the *moka* system itself and the later influx of shells brought by the Australians. Ru continues in this broad tradition of thought, a discourse about change having to do with media of exchange, at each stage of which something new is taken in and transformed while itself becoming an agent of internal transformation. Since wealth items continue to be central to identity, the past in a sense repeats itself; and since each historical situation is different, the past is also in another sense always left behind while the imagination incorporates the present into the future. The shell valuables are markers of these transitions.

In organizing his account Ru, with Puklum's help, systematizes the different shells in terms of their importance. In fact, in the earliest phases of direct contact with the Australians, Hageners were keen on all types of these shells and manufactured them into impressive valuables. Cowries, however, were used for smaller transactions between the outsiders and the Hageners, and so came to be identified as of « less importance ». The brideprice for Ru's own first wife was paid for partly with *nassa* mats made from handfuls of these shells his father earned working at a plantation some three miles from their home. Ru's personal experience begins with the florescence of the pearl shell prestige economy and the transition from it to state money.

His account makes it clear that the Hageners saw state money as having more expansive power than shells. The perception coincided with the opening up of the Highlands for travel and labor migration and the new senses of identity that came with this process. Money was an efficient medium for inter-ethnic exchange. It could be used to obtain food; just as the first « white » explorers had used shells to break into the Hageners' world, so the Hageners could use money to break across their own social horizons. In Tok Pisin Ru said that shells did not « bear food », *ino karim kaikai*, with the wider sense that there was no further profit to be gained from using them at this time. Mimetic appropriation of the « white-men's » ways thus took over, coupled with a feeling of overcoming what, again retrospectively, was seen as the trickery of the « whites » in at first with-holding their own « real » money. But it is also true that the Australian government itself had a program to switch the people to state money over time, as its own means of incorporating the Hageners into the state structure through tax and cash-cropping. Both sides, therefore, in fact participated, for quite different purposes, in the same transition, each feeling that they were taking the initiative either to grasp at new opportunities or to impose a new economic order. Ru's rejection of any notion of nostalgia for the past is interesting, and stems from his views of progress and the changing objectifications of self and culture that go with such a view, also enunciated by other senior men such as Ongka-Kaepa (Strathern & Stewart 1999d). Shells were first identified with the new order of colonial life, then were themselves seen as transcended by a further new order (see also Merlan & Rumsey 1991 : 229). The narrative of shells and money thus becomes a means of self-reconceptualization over time.

Ru omits from his account any stress on the fact that state money was introduced into *moka*, displacing shells. This move of « involution » runs counter to his own narrative of change, but it has been an important part of the history of change, begun, as we have noted, in mid-1964 with a *moka* event among the Kawelka people.

The genesis and execution of this *moka* show the incremental and improvisatory steps by which money entered these exchanges. Various reasons were given for the event, which was dubbed a *rok moka*, a *moka* for tobacco, *i.e.* by meiosis something unimportant or trivial, having to do with the casual exchanges of younger men. Another version was that the two groups involved, neighbors and closely intermarried, had stolen pigs from each other and the *moka* was to put an end to this. One middle-aged man declared that he had paved the way for the *moka* by tying up a pig belonging to a clansman of the other side which had given the first sum of money, and had returned the pig to its owner, establishing a pact of good behavior. The groups were the Minembi Yelipi and Kawelka Kundmbo clans in the Dei Council area, and the Yelipi Councillor, Ruri, son of a traditional « big-man », Mambokla, had initiated the sequence by giving money to the Kundmbo. Ndamba, a senior and respected Kundmbo « big-man », said that the money *moka* was also to forestall any sorcery being made on the young men of his clan who were going around playing cards (gambling for money) with their Yelipi peers. Young men at this time spent much time gambling and on chasing the winners in a particular game in an attempt to play again and win back their stakes plus a profit. Older men such as Ndamba saw the conversion of all this back into *moka* as a device for stabilizing the younger generation's activities and for reasserting some of their own control as leaders in the group.

Not only young men, however, were involved. The older men, including the leaders, had joined in also, and all combined in providing a small feast of cooked food, including new items such as chickens, cabbages, tinned fish, dripping, and rice, for the visitors. The Kundmbo were the donors for the event, which was staged on August 4th, 1964 at the Möimanga ceremonial ground where later in 1973 the Kundmbo performed the Female Spirit fertility cult (Strathern & Stewart 1999e). They attempted to divide up both contributions and recipients according to clan subdivisions known as men's house groups, but found the arithmetic and accounting complex. At this time the Australian currency was still in pounds and shillings. Each men's house group or sub-clan was supposed to add an extra amount to the sum the Yelipi had given earlier. The chief Kundmbo recipients had divided out what they previously had received to their sub-clansmen and now these were expected to provide a return plus increment to bring about the *moka*. For example, in Ndamba's sub-clan, the Kikpuklimbo, a total of twelve men out of twenty in the group had received £51 and now added £36 in order to make a total of £87 to give back (according to one set of accounts). Older « big-men » tried to direct the proceedings, but younger men crowded round the money, engrossed in the actual work of



Fig. 1 Mount Hagen : women wearing pearl shells that have been mounted on resin boards. The pearl shells are displayed on their backs. At the edges of the women's headdress green snail shells are dangling. These would make loud clattering noises when the women danced



Fig. 2 Tambul, Papua New Guinea : man wearing a pearl shell on his back. The shell rests on a bed of fern leaves



Fig. 3 Duna : men decorated for an Independence day celebration, showing various forms of shell decoration



Fig. 4 Duna : men displaying money (kina notes) on poles, that will be used as brideprice payment (1999)

counting it. The amounts of money were tied up in handkerchiefs and presented as bundles to Yelipi recipients. One young man shouted out that all this was the fruit of business and coffee-growing. The Yelipi Councillor Ruri was prominent among the recipients, and he attempted to get some of the totals down on paper, while the Kundmbo laid out the money in three rows, the first row to acquit the debt, the second row to add something to this (referred to both as « profit » and as *poroman*, that is, « companion », money), and the third « new money » (*ku kont*) to stimulate the Yelipi to make returns. This performative act of laying out rows of money like shells indicates the transfer of mind-set between one schema and another and shows how money truly was slotted into the place « vacated » by shells – on other occasions money was laid out in rosette formations that resembled in size and shape pearl shells mounted on resin boards (see Strathern & Stewart 1999b, 1999e for photographs). At the same time the introduction of a written record indicated the mimetic context, in which the accounting practices and techniques of the whites were being followed by a new generation of leaders within the Council system, set up in 1962 only two years earlier. Meanwhile older leaders such as Ndamba either quietly supervised the practical arrangements, trying to fix them in their own cognition, or made overarching remarks. A., for example, a leader in a sub-clan different from Ndamba's, declared that the « big-men » were not involved in the event since only the young men were giving, but everyone needed money to pay their Council taxes before the year's end, so the Yelipi should make returns quickly. (In fact, A. himself had received earlier but is not recorded as contributing to the returns, which may explain why he found it difficult to get a hearing for his remarks.) The overall total recorded as presented was £317 s10, a very considerable sum for that time.

Presenting saucepans of food along with the gifts was a part of the new style of this *moka*, and Kuri, a Lutheran mission evangelist (*miti-man*) who came from A's subclan, the Kumbambo, made a Christian prayer to bless the food, adding: « Money is strong and comes from Jesus, who is our big-man (*wuö nuim*) up above, so you can make *moka* with it. Later, when the Yelipi make returns, you Kundmbo can use this money to build a church here. This money is being given to end the stealing between the Yelipi and the Kundmbo. We do not have much business in our place, we are short of money, so you Yelipi must make returns to us quickly. »

The whole event shows the complex performative ways in which money was socialised into an existing order and how this order was itself changed to accommodate and to express something that was new. The participants' horizon of consciousness included the demands of the new Council system, so that the nexus between an old institution and a new one was made quite explicit. Finally, the Lutheran evangelist spoke of funneling the returns into a new investment with God, legitimising money itself as the blessing given by Jesus and implying that a return to the church was needed for this. At the very start of the entry of state money into the *moka* we see here a foreshadowing of much later develop-

ments in the late 1990s, when the *moka* system overall was in decline and further transformations had taken place, so that 35 years after the prayers at the event detailed here we find a new sort of *moka* taking place in which money is sought through relational ties in order to build a new Assemblies of God church at Ru's settlement place (Stewart & Strathern 1998a, 2001).

The Duna Case

The materials that are presented here were gathered from the Duna people of the Aluni valley in the Southern Highlands. The shells that they used as transactional items in the past included four categories: *kuriapa* (pearl shells) – said to be like the moon in shape when it is in its waxing phase; *tange* (cowrie shells) – the shell that marked a person as having high status in the society; *tarakambo* (green snail shells) – a decorative item that was traded for; and *tombo* (nassa shells) – used in some payment transactions and as a forehead decoration for grown men (*hongo*). The Duna traded salt, pork and live pigs for all of these kinds of shells.

The *kuriapa* (pearl shells) were said to have entered into the area from the Huli region south of the Duna in precolonial times. They were, it seems, very rare prior to the 1960s when the government brought them directly to the Duna. In July 1999 we asked a knowledgeable middle-aged man, Au-Huri, for a narrative on the provenance of shells in his area and he told us the following:

« People asked where these pearl shells came from and they were told that they came from an *ipa kurupu* (big pond or body of water) – a place that was not marked by a particular tree or hill. The man who provided these shells at the *ipa kurupu* was named Ambu [this word means yellow and it could be a reference to the color of the pearl shells, which are thought to be more beautiful and thus worth more if they are shiny yellow instead of matt white]. These shells came up on his skin as mushrooms do [on a tree]. A stick was used to push the shells away from his skin to free them. The whites removed the shells from Ambu and brought them. We have heard that the *hatya* (pathway) of the shells was Lae, Goroka, Hagen, Wabag, Laiagam, and then Kogiago. The young people do not know or understand these things. »

When pearl shells first entered the Duna area they were already cleaned and processed. Thus, they did not have any remains of the mollusk's muscle or ligament still attached to them. Subsequently, an influx of « unfinished » pearl shells became available in the Highlands owing to their importation by Australians, when the Huli area was opened up in the 1950s. Once these entered the trade network it was then recognized that flesh had at some time been attached on the shell's interior, since pieces of it were still visible. Au said that the story that he told us was the one that he had heard about the shells and that when they saw that pieces of flesh were attached to the shell it made them believe that the shell had been fixed at some point onto a man's body. He went on to say that:

« Before we did not know of the salt water and only when the whites came we heard of it [the ocean]. The earlier ancestors did not know about the origin of pearl shells,

but when these shells came up in my generation, then they saw the flesh attached to the shells and they understood the origin of them. Now, no one has these shells anymore. The appearance of these unfinished shells indicated that a change was going to come up – *arikena* [something new, or some new set of events that is not good]. We saw these unfinished pearl shells and at the same time we began to see unfinished cowrie shells. »

This retrospective recognition that the appearance of the unfinished shells heralded change is Au's way of commenting on the fact that shortly after the arrival of these items in the area the colonial administration and Christian missionaries entered the area and life was indeed changed forever (Stewart & Strathern 1999b ; Stewart 1998b).

There is an interesting conjuncture here with the pearl shell's origin and other notions that the Duna have expressed in a plethora of stories in which wealth items such as pigs and cowrie shells come from pools of water (Stewart & Strathern 2000). For example, there is a commonly told story of a *tsiri* (a category of mischievous but also helpful male spirit beings) who frequented a lake where he « fished » for cowrie shells which he would exchange for pork offered by humans. Pake-Kombara, a senior knowledgeable man and leader (*kango*), told us in June 1999 that : « It was thought that the good will of the *tsiri* would bring many cowries and pigs to men but now we make prayers to God for our needs ». Here we see that God has been slotted neatly into the place that the *tsiri* spirit (and other spirits) occupied previously.

The *ipa kurupu* that is referred to could be a label given to the ocean. Such an image of an expanse of water may have been described by traders from further to the south of the Huli and Duna, who carried these shells and might have heard the stories of the ocean. *Ipa kurupu* was a name called out by the Duna in traditional *Tawe* songs directed to Sky Beings, drawing an association between the clouds of the sky and bodies of water such as ponds and lakes (Strathern & Stewart 2000a). We may suggest that in many instances the Australians who initiated the great influx of pearl shells into the Highlands were seen as spirit or non-human entities belonging to the margin of the universe generally and also that they were associated or conflated with sky beings (Schieffelin & Crittenden 1991 ; Strathern 1996 ; Strathern & Stewart 2000a). Au continued :

« Pearl shells were used for brideprice payments, compensation payments, and to give to other persons as payments [and also to buy pigs]. A little pearl shell was considered to be equivalent to a *kurini* (little pig) and a big one to a *tangetia* (a big female pig). If a person was about to die they might pass on a particularly beautiful shell that they had as a *palini* (free gift) to someone who was close to them. I have one given to me by my aunt (father's sister). It was given to her by her mother who had received it from her mother. »

The second type of shell described by Au was the *tange* (cowrie shell) :

« These shells came from the Oksapmin and Hewa sides. I do not know how they got there. When I was small an Oksapmin man came to the nearby village of Haiyuwi. My father and I went and bought both worked and unworked cowries as well as stone axes.

We would trade salt for these items. A long pack of salt would be exchanged for cowrie shells strung together into a rope of about five feet in length. They [the Oksapmin traders] would mark the size of salt pack that would be worth an amount of green snail shells or nassa shells. We did not have cowrie shells and we needed them for many purposes : for brideprice, to pay ritual experts and healers who worked in the cults such as *kira*, *liru*, *himuku*, and *heka* [all cults dedicated to group ancestors and their skulls or sacred *auwi* stones]. The Oksapmin traders told us that we could trade with salt which they needed. We could go and cook salt at Karukwa [towards the Huli area] and bring it back or we could buy salt with pigs. The Oksapmin said that we must also rebuild and repair, when needed, the cane bridge that spans the Strickland river so that they could come over to our side to trade. The *tombo* (nassa shells) were used in compensation and brideprice payments. The *tarakambo* (green snail shell) was used for dances in the form of armlets and earrings. They made a large noise which could be heard very far away and notified people that we were holding a dance. »

Pake explained further about the trade salt :

« *Api* (salt) was obtained from Wake mountain, and Waketa on the Karukwa [Huli] side. The salt would be covered with pandanus leaves called *api lumu* or by *kulama* leaves (ground orchids), and it was called *api pakuma* for the long packs of salt. The very small packs of salt were called *api kou*. They were bound with a rope. This salt was good as a medicine when mixed with steam-oven-cooked ginger and green leaf vegetables. »

The cowrie shell was extremely important to the Duna. It was a prime sign of wealth and status. A person with pigs could obtain cowrie shells. Pork was also exchanged for cowrie shells. Women acquired cowries by exchanging them for pork or by selling netbags and men's aprons which they had made in return for them. Pake told us that in the past a person with status was marked by owning cowries, « but now a "businessman" is the equivalent of those people and today that is a person who has money ».

Discussion of the Duna Case

One of the reasons the trade in cowrie shells collapsed in the area was that the cooked salt which was exchanged for shells was in less demand after « trade salt » was brought into the area by the Australians and became available for purchase at tradestores. Two other items that the Oksapmin had brought in the past for trade were marsupial furs and bird's feathers. These would be purchased by the Duna with *tindi hare* (red ochre pigment) which had previously been obtained from the Huli area, but the demand for this pigment, that was used for body decoration, ceased when tradestores also began selling cheap pigments that were imported from Asia or Eastern Europe.

Unlike Ru's narrative for Hagen, Au's and Pake's did not explicitly discuss reasons for the shift from shells to state money as currency. The Duna have, however, in fact made this shift. The explanation is found in the foregoing discussion of the collapse in the cowrie shell trade. The Australians did not bring in cowries from elsewhere to replace the old trading networks nor did they bring in any

large number of shells. Since colonial administration among the Duna effectively began, as in Pangia, only in the 1960s, administrators early on began encouraging the use of Australian money. Au and Pake have simply taken this shift for granted in their accounts. Perhaps they tacitly subscribed to the idea that the change meant progress or modernity, but we cannot say so. What we can note is that, for them, discussions about wealth forms were a way of articulating notions of historical change, as they were for Ru in the Hagen case.

Au used a generational approach in his account. The origins of the rare pearl shells were not known to the more remote ancestors, he said. The story of Ambu was one he had heard in his own time, from his father, and then came the « confirmation » from the advent of the unprocessed shells brought into the Huli area by the « whitemen ». These, he declared, were seen as omens of further change, but were also taken as evidence that the shells were indeed removed from Ambu's flesh. The image here vividly illustrates the point that shells are seen as intimately connected to the human body and are detached from it for purposes of circulation (Fig. 3). At a later stage again people realized that shells came on a long route from coastal areas, but here again the story of Ambu and the lake « anticipates » this or incorporates the narrative into the Duna world view. This incorporation grants to shells both a value derived from their exotic provenance and a value based in the mythological matrix of Duna thought.

The same is true for cowries. Au gave the pragmatic, historical story of their source from the Oksapmin people west of the Duna, as an exotic trade item. Pake and another senior man, Wapiya, who was said to be the custodian of this story, gave its mythical source in the narrative of the *tsiri*. Once again, we see an exotic item brought into the ambit of the local, although it is still a gift from a wild spirit outside of the human community. (In one version of the story the *tsiri* in fact demands, and gets, the sister of the man to whom he gives cowries, and instead of marrying her he eats her.) This juxtaposition of two origin stories is characteristic of the ways in which the Duna deal with their own history and identity. Shell valuables were seen as authenticated both through exogenous trade and through a narrative of endogenous origins based on a paradigm of spirit/human exchange. The version of the origin story we were given did not portray the *tsiri* as having the prominent « anus » mentioned in the version Charles Modjeska (1977 : 27) reports ; and the round depression in the *tsiri*'s *auwi* stones that were purchased were described as the spirit's « eye », not its anus. Nevertheless, the overall message of male endogenous origins is comparable in the two versions, since both associate the cowrie shells with a local male spirit entity. Dan Jorgensen, also, reports for Telefomin, west of the Oksapmin area, that dog-whelk (*nassa*) shells there originated according to myth « from the corpse of a man » (Jorgensen 1991 : 265).

Another Duna story told to us in 1999 demonstrates the way in which paper money has itself been brought into the mythological origin stories of the people, placing it into the endogenous origins of the local landscape as had been done with cowrie shells previously : « A young Duna boy was led by a spirit female

(*Payame Ima*) down into the core of the earth [at a place where an oil company had set up a drilling operation]. There he saw a city in which everything, including large and small buildings, roads, even the toilet, was constructed out of money. A giant man was seated there on a chair made out of money. This giant was *tindi auwene* (“the ground owning spirit”) » (interview with Rex-Hora, 1999). In addition to this story we were told that a giant snake (Puyara) lives under the ground in Papua New Guinea and rests on top of all the gold and oil reserves which are its eggs (Stewart & Strathern 2002).

Both stories clearly state that the wealth of Papua New Guinea comes from its own ground and not from outside sources, and they indicate that the people understand very well that their country needs to be protected from outsiders who may wish to exploit their natural resources and deplete both the wealth and the fertility of their land. One senior Duna man, Male-Kaloma, spoke about the oil company’s efforts to drill for oil on the Oksapmin side of the Strickland river in the late 1990s by explaining that he was glad the company had failed to find oil because the source of that oil was the « grease » from the decayed bodies of the dead people who were buried locally and that if that were taken away from under the ground then the fertility of the land would be lost and it would no longer be able to sustain human life.

Cosmological Implications

In both the Hagen and Duna areas there were, prior to colonial encompassment, categories of Female Spirits who were thought to bring fertility and well-being to the groups and to make it possible for men who gained the favor of these Spirits to « pull in » wealth items. For the Hageners it was the *Amb Kor* who helped particular men to acquire pearl shells. For the Duna it was the *Payame Ima* who aided favored men to obtain cowrie shells. In both instances the Female Spirit had to be honored through special activities and her « laws » had to be strictly obeyed in order to gain her good favor and to avoid inciting her anger which could bring poverty, sickness, and death (Strathern & Stewart 1999c, 2000a)

Nowadays the *Amb kor* cult in Hagen is no longer performed nor are the boys’ growth practices (*palena anda*) among the Duna in which the *Payame Ima* provided growth magic and guidance. To some extent Christianity has slotted into the place of these « traditional » practices although not completely. For example, in 1997 a young Kawelka man whose brother is a pastor in a local Assemblies of God church told us not to look too strongly at a grassy regrowth area where an *Amb Kor* performance had been held in the past because the Spirit might become angered and do us some harm.

In the Duna area the *Payame Ima* figure is still an enduring aspect of life. She is seen as looking out for the environment, including the wild animals (*e.g.* marsupials) that live there and that the local people hunt. She has not been abandoned even though the people have notionally joined the various Christian churches. When the Porgera Joint Venture Mining Company was negotiating

with the Duna people over « water-use » payments, to be made from the company to the people for dumping mine tailings into the Strickland River, she was said to have been angry over the « unauthorized » use of her river. Through the invocation of the name of the *Payame Ima* to the Company she became an aid in requesting compensation payments. Thus, she is still seen as helping to « pull-in » wealth to her favored people.

But the overall impact of the Christian missionaries in Duna and Hagen has been enormous in proscribing aspects of identity and self-worth such as that formed through self-decoration. One of Ru's four wives, Mande-Kele, is a member of the Assemblies of God church with which Ru is also affiliated. She described in 1995 how her church saw the wearing of decorative attire :

« In the Lutheran and Catholic churches the pastors tell people from time to time to decorate themselves... But in my church this is forbidden. We are forbidden to wear beads, or feathers, or fine clothing. Or pearl shells at our necks, anything like that is taboo. They say we should not handle these things at all, we must just worship quietly in the church. So we don't know what to do about that and are quiet and obey the pastors, and just look at what other people do. They tell us that we should not be proud of our own skin and not show off in that way. They say that decorating oneself and displaying oneself and playing around like that is the work of Satan » (Strathern & Stewart 1998 : 51-52 ; see also Stewart & Strathern 1998b).

We see here some of the contradictory elements of ideas that have become a part of people's attitudes since they joined the various Christian churches. State money itself has been legitimized at least in part by arguments that it is a blessing from God and is therefore morally acceptable provided it is used at least in part for God's service (as in the early formulation by the Lutheran evangelist Kuri, see the section above « Discussion of Hagen case »). On the other hand shell and other decorations, which in the past represented the flow of sociality connected to the « skin » of people, are decried by the local Assemblies of God church as reflections of self-pride before God. Such a view is ultimately based on a mistaken form of ethnography, since decoration was not to be interpreted as a purely individualistic act but included an expression of the « relational-individual's » place in the total cosmos of reproductive fertility and health. This devaluing of decorations by some church teachings does not deprive money of its worth, but it does alter the cosmological scheme of life, creating a space that is in turn filled with other Christian notions about blessings, prayers, contributions of money to the building of churches and the expectations of God's grace in return for these. In the earlier system wealth items and adornment were joined in a single set of ideas about flows of life force. In the Assemblies of God worldview as represented by Mande, wealth and adornment are separated, and adornment generally is denigrated, while wealth gains its moral worth not through its connection with the human body but through its significance for the fate of the human « soul ». In this way a new « soul/body split » is made, along with a new split between heaven/earth, a notion which sits uneasily within indigenous ideological doctrines of spirit and body.

An illustration of the enduring « traditional » attitude in which wealth, adornment, personhood, and exchange were all linked together can be found in a speech requesting compensation for a sorcery killing among the Duna, which was recited by Pake-Kombara on September 10th, 1991. This genre of speech is called *tambaka* (*tamba haka*, compensation words). Pake recited it as an example to indicate the character of the genre. The speech praises the man who died and asks for his « bone » to be given back, that is, for a compensation to be paid :

« This man's face was like a waterfall.
 He wore a pearl shell piece at his forehead.
 He was like a well-fed favorite piglet,
 Like the first rays of morning sun,
 This man whom you killed...
 Remove his bone and return it to me...
 I will put it in the *pokopi* cave
 I will put it in the *yawepi* cave...
 I will take his bones for the Kira cult and drink water.
 Remove the bone and come.
 I say this :
 His chest clinks as it comes,
 The shell-piece on his forehead clinks as it comes.
 The leaves on your pandanus trees flourished
 The leaves of the swamp taro were big... »⁴

In the speech, the shell piece becomes a marker for the man himself, going with his fine appearance and impressive demeanor. The speaker says he wants to be able to give the man's bones a proper burial sequence, restoring them to his ancestral land, and so contributing to its fertility. The speaker repeats the image of shell pieces clinking on the dead man's body and refers to magic made with shells to make the crops fertile. The *tini*, or spirit of the dead man, cannot be put to rest until his death has been paid for, referred to as « giving back his bone ». The connections between the man, his body, his shell ornaments, his bones for burial, and the fertility of crops are all made clear in the sequence of lines given above. The small sliver of shell at his forehead and between his eyes is like a condensed symbol both of the man himself and of the cosmos to which he is linked.



We have presented some materials on the manners in which people in the Hagen and Duna areas use the topic of shell valuables as ways of talking about historical change and relations between themselves and the incoming « white » people who entered their world from the 1930s onwards. We have also shown how the actual process of switching from shells to state money in Hagen was mediated by the adoption of money into *moka* exchange, as has been argued

4. Pokopi and Yawepi are two rock shelters used for secondary burial sites ; the Kira cult was an important cult in which ancestral skulls were painted and fed, to restore fertility, and drinking special water was integral to the ritual ; the pearl shell piece was worn vertically at the forehead.

previously (Strathern & Stewart 1999b), and that this in turn was a complex matter accompanied by a variety of aims and pressures resulting from interaction with the Australians and from inter-generational relationships within the clan groups, as well as from the over-supply of shells themselves.

Among the Duna, as in Pangia, historical change was more compressed. The trade in cowrie shells was undermined at the same time as pearl shells, and in rapid succession Australian money, came to the Duna through interactions with the « white » newcomers in the early 1960s. The Duna, like the Hageners, use money as both a ceremonial valuable and a medium for commodity exchange, and they no longer employ shells in their transactions. Dollars and cents, and later the kina and toea [the current national monetary form] currency have been accepted both because they have the imprimatur of the state on them in a conflation of the « white » people's world and aspects of their own Papua New Guinea government, and because they have been given a purely local set of values through being incorporated into the life-cycle exchanges and indigenous mythology and ritual (Fig. 4). With the demise of shells, however, the immediate links between valuables and the body have been altered. No one, for example, wears paper notes or coins directly as an adornment.

In overall terms both the shell currencies of the past and today's state money depend on a complex grid of legitimizing and authenticating factors which ultimately refer to an overall cosmos. Examples of this are to be found in the Female Spirit figures among both the Hageners and the Duna (and a similar cult was found in Pangia) (Strathern & Stewart 2000a ; Stewart & Strathern 1999a). This cosmos is not unchanging. Indeed people's perceptions of it and their place in it are affected by what we may call economic factors in addition to many other factors. Over-supply of shells in the Hagen case, and under-supply in the Duna, played their parts in undermining the use of shells in exchanges in both places. A newspaper report from Papua New Guinea points up further the potential vagaries in the lives of currencies. The national currency, the kina, suffered a devaluation of its exchange rate against the Australian and American dollar units during 1998-1999, and it was reported that an enterprising businessman from the coastal Tolai area took advantage of this situation by instituting a traditional shell money bank, to be called the Universal Traditional or Kastom Bank (Custom Bank). It was said in the article that he pointed out that the Tolai nassa shell money has tended to keep its value better than the national currency, and still circulates in commodity exchanges for goods among Tolai themselves as well as being a good medium for their savings (making up the fathom units and *lolo*i coils cut open and distributed at funerals). He was reported as saying : « I urge the Tolai people to take stock of their shell money now and record how much they have, for they may one day rely entirely on this traditional form of wealth to live. The way things are going, our kina may not mean a cent one day so we need to be prepared »⁵. One might ask if this is an example of globalization in

5. *Papua New Guinea Post Courier*, 12/03/98.

reverse – the reinvention of tradition – market innovation – or perhaps all of these together ?

KEYWORDS/MOTS CLÉS : cosmology/cosmologie – historical change/transformation historique – money/monnaie – shell valuables/monnaies de coquillage – Papua New Guinea/Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée.

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Pamela J. Stewart & Andrew Strathern, *Transformations of Monetary Symbols in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*. — This article discusses the transformations of « monetary » systems among the Hagen people of the Western Highlands Province and the Duna people of the Southern Highlands Province in Papua New Guinea, with some cross-reference to the Wiru people also of the Southern Highlands Province. The materials demonstrate how colonial and post-colonial experiences have impacted the way these monetary forms have been perceived over time. The « worth » and « moral » weight of the shell valuables that were used prior to the introduction of paper money and coins were integral to definitions of self and personhood. The decline of indigenous systems of exchange has changed the definitional parameters of what we call the « relational-individual » within the group and the ways in which transactions of all kinds are conducted. Reflecting on this point, the people themselves have used this topic of alterations in the kinds of monetary forms they employ in transactions to construct their own narratives of historical transformations.

Pamela J. Stewart & Andrew Strathern, *Transformations des symboles monétaires dans les Hautes-Terres de Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée*. — Cet article traite de la transformation des systèmes « monétaires » chez les Hagen de la province des Hautes-Terres occidentales et chez les Duna de la province des Hautes-Terres méridionales de Papouasie Nouvelle-Guinée, systèmes qu'éclaire une comparaison avec les Wiru de la province des Hautes-Terres méridionales. Les matériaux ethnographiques montrent l'importance de l'expérience coloniale et post-coloniale dans la perception et la transformation de ces systèmes. Avant l'introduction de la monnaie de papier, la « valeur » et le poids « moral » des monnaies de coquillage en circulation étaient intégrés à la définition du moi et de la personne. Le déclin des systèmes d'échange locaux a modifié l'identité au sein du groupe de ce qu'on peut appeler l'« individu-relationnel », ainsi que la manière dont les diverses transactions étaient conduites. C'est en considérant cet aspect des choses que les gens eux-mêmes se sont servis de l'idée de l'altération des formes monétaires pour construire leur propre récit des transformations historiques dont ils ont été les témoins.