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**FACES OF SHAME, MASKS OF DEVELOPMENT:
RECOGNITION AND OIL PALM AMONG THE BAINING OF PAPUA
NEW GUINEA**

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**PhD Social Anthropology
The University of Edinburgh**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that no part of it has been submitted in any previous application for a degree or professional qualification. Except where I state otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Inna Zlatimirova Yaneva-Toraman

September 2019, Edinburgh UK

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of “shame” in the Vir Kairak Baining people’s understanding of the relationships that underpin positive social change. Previous studies of shame in the context of colonial and postcolonial transformation in Melanesia have suggested that encounters with outsiders humiliated local communities and incited their cultural and economic conversion. This thesis starts from the position that “shame” could be an inherent feature of and a virtue within a culture that offers both grounds for resisting and prospecting change and development. While previous studies have often discussed “shame” as a negative experience, this thesis argues that among the Vir Kairak Baining people of Papua New Guinea “shame” is cultivated through practice and understood as a highly productive behaviour that enables social ties within the community and forms the basis for development.

The study draws on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, which I conducted mainly in a Vir Kairak rural settlement in central East New Britain. Recently, the Baining region has become central to Papua New Guinea’s rapidly expanding oil palm sector and many local communities have agreed to lease their customary land for the establishment of monocrop plantations. This thesis shows how the transition from smallholder farmers to rentiers occurred as a result of people’s land and market insecurity driven by their resettlement by the Australian administration in the aftermath of World War II and the Cocoa Pod Borer (CPB) blight in 2006. It explores how people envisioned the oil palm plantation and their relationships with the company and the state, what outcomes they imagined for their community and customary land, and how the land-leasing process affected their sociality and identity. It traces the links between notions of landownership, local understandings of shame, and struggle for recognition, through which the Baining people conceive and position themselves in relationships with others and the environment.

This thesis argues that whilst Baining experience of shame involves some degree of hiding, it is ultimately about shaping and displaying one in a particular form for others to see. This form enables people to relate in meaningful ways and orient their actions with respect to their future aspirations and expectations from that relationship. The thesis explores the ways in which the Baining make themselves visible and seek recognition by others (such as the state, international corporations, God, provincial bureaucrats, expats, NGO representatives, scientists, tourists, members of other Papua New Guinean and Baining communities) as persons and people with particular kind of capacities, in hopes to re-claim their land and bring development to their community. But drawing on the large body of anthropological literature that has highlighted the “looseness,” “fluidity,” and “instability” of Melanesian social identities, I discuss recognition not merely in terms of recognising individual identity, indigeneity, or legal rights, but as a condition for agency and relationships with others as well as realisation of personhood. I illustrate how people frame their “right to development” and deploy discursive and practical strategies that are shaped by local understandings of shame, in order to establish their recognition as a people, landowners, mask makers, and Christians.

By showing the participation in and display of multiple identities by which local people want to be recognised and bring the kind of development they desire, this thesis offers a valuable contribution not only to the wider discussion of recognition and the role of emotions in producing visible and recognisable people and relations, but also to the studies of political ecology and development.

Lay Summary

This thesis explores the meaning of “shame” and its relationship to ideas about “social identity” and “development” among the Vir Kairak Baining people of Papua New Guinea. It draws on a long-term ethnographic fieldwork carried in a Vir Kairak rural settlement and museum research at the National Museum of Papua New Guinea. The thesis argues that “shame” among the Vir Kairak is a highly productive social behaviour cultivated through practice in everyday-life, through which people exhibit themselves in a desired way and create social relationship. In Vir Kairak society, social relationships are highly valued and crucial for people’s ability to engage in exchange of goods, services, and other types of valuables. Therefore, the thesis argues that people try to attract development aid to themselves and their settlement by creating the right kind of social relationships with significant others such as other Baining and non-Baining communities, government representatives, expatriates, business corporations, and tourism agents. In this way, they believe that they could become visible to and recognised by the state as people possessing a variety of positive attributes and capacities, making them worthy of engaging with and being part of the nation. The thesis explores how the Vir Kairak frame their “right to development” and the things they do to attain their development goals, by looking at the beliefs and practices involved in traditional mask dances, adherence to Pentecostal Christianity, and their clan’s engagement in a massive oil palm plantation project. In this way the thesis traces the links between social identity, customs, local and global economies, landownership, ideas of change, and development.

To my mother

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Acronyms

CRC	Christian Revival Crusade
ENB	East New Britain
ENBP	East New Britain Province
ENBPG	East New Britain Plantation Group
ILG	Incorporated Land Group
K	Kairak Language
LMS	London Missionary Society
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RCF	Research and Conservation Foundation
TP	Tok Pisin
UC	United Church

A Note on Language

This thesis is the result of one month of museum research at the National Museum of Papua New Guinea and seventeen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the rural settlement I call Tavir, in central East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea.

In the capital city, Port Moresby, most people I worked with in the museum preferred to speak with me in English (the official language of Papua New Guinea) and only seldom did they use phrases in the *lingua franca* Tok Pisin. In East New Britain most people were fluent in both their own vernacular and in Tok Pisin, and often included some words in English when they spoke either language. Most of the Vir Kairak with whom I lived in Tavir had very good command of Tok Pisin, and most church services and community meetings were led in this language. In private though people spoke in the vernacular Kairak language. Hence, while I conducted most of my interviews and conversations in Tok Pisin, I also worked with interpreters when talking with the older residents, and I learned a fair amount of Kairak that helped me understand the overall topic of conversations, public speeches, and songs.

In this thesis Tok Pisin use is *italicised*, while Kairak is both *italicised and underlined*. When a speaker has included English words, these are presented in **bold**. Additionally, in some cases I include a bracket with the abbreviations [K] for Kairak and [TP] for Tok Pisin. For longer quotes the transcripts in the original language can be found in Appendix 1.

Prologue

Barnabas stood up amidst a large thicket of plants that divided his own hamlet from the community meeting area. As he addressed the crowd his head was turned either to the side or bowed forward, escaping their eyes. One could barely see his face behind the large leaves and red flowers. His words were muffled from his awkward position and the distance, so a couple of women asked why he was standing behind the plants. When their questions remained unanswered, the ward member told Barnabas to come forward and speak from the centre of the meeting area, but he replied: "*Quir, guvorvāt*" (No, I'm ashamed). The audience lit up with wide grins, some letting out soft giggles. Barnabas went on explaining that he felt very sad and worried for not organising the cleaning of the cemetery earlier and that now it had become overgrown with weeds. He repeated timorously a few times that next Monday "*mipela bai klinim matmat*" (we will clean the cemetery), which signalled to everyone that they should come and help.

As he completed his speech and retreated to his hamlet, I wondered why he had such intense *vorvāt* (translated as "shame" or "shyness" in English, and "*sem*" in Tok Pisin) that he felt the need to hide behind the plants. His unusual presentation of himself differed tremendously from all the speakers I had seen at Tavir's biennial community meetings. Even the ones who blushed and shied away, or had their voices fail them, when speaking in front of the large audience did not hide in such a *visible* way. These meetings were held in the well-kept community area where a large shed and several Malay apple trees provided shade for the participants. The topics generally included reminders about tax collection, land disputes, pleas to pay the primary school teachers their wage, announcements about upcoming church fundraisers or community work, and notices about inappropriate or disruptive occurrences in the ward. To me the meetings appeared very relaxed and even disorganised, with attendees scattered around and often chatting amongst themselves, speakers not showing up, and people coming and leaving halfway through a speech. But for the people of Tavir these public events offered a kind of visibility for both the persons

and their community. Some elders suggested that in this context most people felt vorvāt, especially the women and younger men because of their limited knowledge of Tok Pisin and English and little experience with words or being looked at by an audience. But Barnabas was in his mid-40s and had given numerous public speeches before I came to live in the ward, so this could not be the reason for his hiding behind the plants.

The second plausible explanation I could think of was people's vorvāt to speak in front of me, as many suggested that I, as a "white European scientist," had "big knowledge" and would know if they spoke "wrong" (*rong*). Indeed, throughout the initial ten months of fieldwork many avoided speaking with me, answering my questions, and showing up to scheduled interviews. And it took a lot of work on my part to build rapport and reassure my interlocutors that I did not know everything, that they knew their culture best, and that I was genuinely trying to learn from them, without any judgements about their knowledge and morals. Yet Barnabas was one of those people I never got a chance to speak with; and thus, I suspected he might have felt vorvāt in my presence. My interlocutors had placed me in a large group of people such as pastors, government officials, expatriate businessmen, and NGO representatives, who they felt gutārār (respect) towards, and thus saw as a source of vorvāt because of their immense experience and knowledge. Nevertheless, Barnabas's speech had nothing to do with right or wrong. He did not tell a story or present his position on a matter of dispute, but simply announced that the cemetery had to be cleaned. This left little room to feel vorvāt from me about what he was saying.

As I pondered on the issue, I thought maybe his vorvāt was the result of some personal misdemeanour, so I asked a few attendees after the meeting what they thought had happened. They commented that he was vorvāt and hid behind the plants because he "had not done his committee work," "had not fulfilled his responsibilities as committee [member]," and "had not been on top of this cemetery work." Moreover, they noted that his inability to do this work resulted in the massively overgrown cemetery, which people could see when they walked past it. In other words, his

failure to fulfil his responsibility was now physically visible in the landscape. By the same token, due to his failure to do this work, and feeling *vorvāt* because of that, he tried to make himself less visible (if not invisible) by hiding in his hamlet and behind the large plants. Moreover, a couple of the younger attendees suggested that he also felt *vorvāt* because he had to ask people to come and do the work, but his past failing to do this had made the very act of requesting harder because people lost their “respect” (*gutārār*) and engaged less with those who had “failed” (*pelim*) in some way and did not display a “good character” (*gutpela character*) – as Barnabas had done by ignoring his duty and the cemetery.

This vignette offers a glimpse into the social life of the Vir Kairak Baining of East New Britain, Papua New Guinea, whom I found largely dominated by the experience of *vorvāt* and efforts to make themselves visible (or invisible) in specific ways. It provides context to this thesis’s main argument that they experience and perceive *vorvāt* both as a weakness and virtue, that shapes the modes of visibility they take and the forms in which they present themselves in their pursuit for social recognition and development. By taking *vorvāt* in its local meaning as described by my interlocutors – that messy state of simultaneously experiencing feelings of shame, modesty, bashfulness, atonement, and so on – I illustrate that its translation into “shame” or “shyness” in the way these are understood in Western context, fails to capture its full meaning and role in forming Vir Kairak social action and relationships. While the literature on shame has shown the significance of this feeling in fostering proper behaviour and ensuring social order and cohesion, it has presented it as the outcome or anticipation of one’s negative action and another’s reaction. This thesis takes a different position and suggests that the feeling of shame does not necessarily derive from a negative experience, but could project a positive image of oneself and society. For the Vir Kairak to be *vorvāt* is to show not only one’s evaluation of a failing associated with them, but also their *gutārār* (respect) for others. It reveals one’s consideration for others and is desirable in those holding a position of leadership. Thus, as it can be seen in Barnabas’s example, while *vorvāt* involves some degree of “hiding,” it shapes and displays one in a particular form for others to see. And I argue

that this form enables meaningful ways for people to define and relate to each other, and orient their actions either inward onto themselves or outward towards others, with respect to their future aspirations and anticipations for relationships with significant others.

INTRODUCTION

“One could read hundreds of books about a place and still not know it until physically being there.”

This was my first thought when I exited the airport of Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG), on an early morning in January 2015. The sun had not yet risen, but the air was stifling and felt heavy. Laden with two backpacks and a reporter bag, tired and confused, I followed my husband Can to the edge of the pavement where a tall, young man held a piece of cardboard with the name of our lodge. To conduct ethnographic fieldwork in PNG, one had to first go to Port Moresby and pay the necessary research fees, visit several institutions, and establish contacts both in the capital and at the prospective fieldsite. But for me Port Moresby was more than a stop on the way. It was the seat of the National Museum of PNG, where I was to spend a month examining the gigantic barkcloth masks of the Baining people of East New Britain Province (ENBP), measuring their proportions, digging through paper archives, and listening to the stories of museum staff – all in order to learn about the significance of *kastom* (Tok Pisin for “custom” or “tradition,” which in Melanesia has come to signify historical continuity in the face of change¹) and material culture for both local and national identity, politics, and economy.

My research objective at the time was to explore the multiple values attached to Baining traditional masks and learn what they can tell us about Baining personhood and sociality. Knowing that in Papua New Guinea persons and artefacts were entangled in a myriad of relationships (M. Strathern 1988, 1999; Wagner 1986), and that materiality played a significant role in making persons and kinship relations (Battaglia 1983; Damon and Wagner 1989; Bell and Geismar 2009), I set out to find why people used masks and what masking processes entailed more generally. My aim was to go beyond well-established ideas within the studies of African art and

¹ See Keesing and Tonkinson (1982), Foster (1995), and K. Martin (2013) for a discussion on *kastom* as resistance to colonial powers, and within overall relations of reciprocity.

ritual that these objects created and strengthened the social order (Garbett 1969; Weil 1971), produced and reproduced power relationships (Siegmann and Perani 1976; Pratten 2008) and/or gender differences (Yoshida 1993), and expressed social identity and feelings of belonging (Franco 1998; B. Reed 2005). Following the works of Tonkin (1979), Jedrej (1980), and Strathern (1979, 1999, 2013) on masks and self-decoration, I wanted to learn what happens to a Baining person whilst wearing a mask, what this process involved and transformed, and with what implications for the future of both the wearer and observer. Influenced by the literature on the anthropology of the body, death, and personhood, and the works of Gilles Deleuze (1981 [2005], 1983 [2006], 1988), I wanted to learn how, by conferring the boundaries between visible and invisible, Baining masks made persons and relationships and formed people's notions about life and death.

When I put my research in such words, the museum staff nodded with approval and said that this was "a very important and timely project," especially since the country was amidst political and religious disputes about *kastom* after a speaker of the parliament had initiated a purge of all traditional artefacts from the Parliament building earlier in 2013. This had resulted in the public destruction of several wooden carvings, which he deemed "evil" and initiated debates about PNG's place as a Christian nation (Hill 2013). The museum staff explained that since the Christian Revival movements swept through the country in the 1970s such pursuits to end *kastom* had been an ongoing issue throughout all provinces (see Jorgensen 2005). They also drew my attention to the devastating effects of environmental change, mining and deforestation, which threatened *kastom* by eradicating the raw materials people needed to make traditional objects and paraphernalia. As I listened to these stories, I realised that if I wanted my project to be relevant for the people I worked with, I had to also look at these disputes about *kastom* between different Christian denominations and the transformative effects of mining, logging, and agriculture projects on both the landscape and local cultures. I began to wonder whether such processes of "change and loss," as people in Port Moresby put it, were happening amongst the Baining as well, and if so, how did the people themselves perceive, adapt to, or resist it?

I initially went to PNG to study Baining masks, but my experiences in the first few months revealed that the mask dances, and *kastom* more generally, were only one part of the story that people wanted to tell about themselves and how they desired others to “see” (*lukim*) them. Upon visiting East New Britain (ENB), one quickly learns and repeatedly hears from the local people, tourist agents, and expatriates that “the Baining were the original and indigenous inhabitants of the island.” This was usually accompanied by accounts about their mesmerising fire dances which for many years have intrigued countless missionaries, scholars, explorers, and collectors. Yet, despite all that popularity, the Baining people themselves have remained at the fringes of economic development, welfare, and political representation. According to the people of ENB, this was the result of 1) a failed government (referring both to the colonial and post-colonial administrations) that has ignored the needs of all of its people, and 2) a failed people, whose own cultural disposition has prevented them from taking part in their own development.

Such opinions were often voiced in a manner of comparison between the Baining and their Tolai neighbours – one of the island’s colonial legacies² – who have been generously depicted in the literature and throughout PNG as the “indigenous elite;”³ a people more developed, economically calculating, aspiring and adaptable to Western values and the global market (Rohatynskyj 2001; AL Epstein 1992). In contrast, according to many residents and visitors, the Baining were so intensely shy that they just hid in the bush. Many Bainings did agree that years of marginalisation and belittling, coupled with the humiliating narratives, told and retold to anyone who

² Throughout the colonies relationships of difference among the native population resulted from colonial practices of division that “layered class logic upon the racial one” (Li 2007: 15) by means of sorting native people into categories and groups such as “improvable” or “adaptable” (often the existing or emerging elites) or “backward” and “stubborn” (see Hindess 2001; Ferguson 2013; Middleton 2013).

³ See Martin (2013), T. S. Epstein (1968), A. L. Epstein (1992), Rohatynskyj (2001) and Errington and Gewertz (1995) for insight on Tolai identity and class relations in East New Britain, and Gewertz and Errington (1999) for a more general outlook on class in PNG.

visits the province, about the Tolai raiding, cannibalising, and pushing them inland, have resulted in their own low self-esteem⁴ and shame that prevented them from taking part in the wider social life of the province, and lack of aspiration for any social mobility.

During the period in which I conducted fieldwork in ENB, between February 2015 and July 2016, the Baining were involved in several discussions about their identity, land, and mask dances, which informed my research and selection of a fieldsite. The first was the effort led by several men to change the “Baining” name to “Qaqet.” These were Mali and Simbali Baining leaders who had been involved in the Ili-Wawas Integrated Rural Development project of combined logging and oil palm in the Pomio region, and in 2011 had formed the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council. The primary aim of the council was to protect their people’s interests and culture by mediating their dealings with the state and interested agri-business companies, offering advice and facilitating awareness programmes on proposed or ongoing development projects. Their choice of the name “Baining/Qaqet” was an attempt at changing the prevailing negative perceptions about the Baining people.

Many Bainings agreed that their name was derogatory and associated with “wildness” and “backwardness.” They also speculated that it was probably Tolai or other Melanesians who had worked for the “blackbirders” (recruiters of forced labour for plantations in Australia) in the 19th century who gave it to them. At one of my visits to the council office, the stewards argued that by changing the name they would also “change the mind-set” of their people and ensure their “total liberation.” Often, my interlocutors remarked that outsiders imagined the Baining people as “*busman*” (Tok Pisin phrase referring to people of the bush or people associated with wilderness and backwardness) with “*bik het, raun bel, na bikipela lek*” (big head/stubborn, with

⁴ Both Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1995) have shown that lack of recognition or *misrecognition*, when the society at large reflects a demeaning or constricting picture of the person or group of people, can result in the loss of self-value and distorted or damaging self-(re)presentations.

round or big bellies, and big feet). They claimed that such denigrating representations that implied ignorance, worthlessness, and lack of ambition, were held not only by the Tolai, Chinese, and white expatriates of East New Britain, but also by other Papua New Guineans who lived well beyond the province.

Many of my informants argued that their own awareness about how others saw them had influenced the way in which generations of Baining saw themselves as well. For example, they claimed that many youths were embarrassed to say that they were Baining, and replied only by saying they were from Pomio, the Gazelle [Peninsula], or the North coast. The council chairman also noted that in order to change their name they needed government support and made the following comparison: "Now it is unacceptable to call an African American negro. The Government has supported this. With the Baining [name], the Government should support this." The stewards argued that "if development is to happen for the Baining it has to begin with re-correcting our identity." They believed that by finding the "originality of the true Baining" and their life "prior to the institution to the outsiders," they could finally gain a more positive representation of themselves and bring about the kind of change and development *they* wanted.

The stewards proposed that the name Qaqet was more appropriate because the Qaqet Baining of the North coast seemed to be the *original* Baining. They claimed that "the Qaqet language is the most genuine," while the other clans' languages had probably changed over time because they were more "flexible." I suspected that the men's perception about this had been greatly shaped by the amount of published work about the Qaqet by several missionaries and anthropologists, and their collaboration with linguist Tonya Stebbins in writing the Mali Baining dictionary. Later in my fieldwork, another council member suggested that the books of anthropologists and scientists offered true knowledge about them and who they used to be, so they knew that they were in fact Qaqet, not Baining.

The second issue involved the Council's support of a land lease deal between several Baining clans and a Malaysian oil palm company. The stewards claimed that neither

copra (coconut) nor cocoa production in the province had brought any meaningful changes and infrastructure to the Baining communities. In fact, they suggested that these two crops and the road network only went as far as the Tolai went inland. This enabled only Baining settlements closer to the coast or roads to engage in copra and cocoa farming and the cash economy, while leaving those in the hinterlands in scarcity.

Since the aftermath of World War II, both the mission and the PNG government (especially after Independence in 1975) had encouraged local people to plant cocoa and participate in agriculture cooperatives not just as a way to earn some cash for taxes, school fees, tithes and offerings, but to secure progress and steady income. Provincial agricultural officers (*didiman*) regularly visited the more accessible rural settlements, while pastors often directed the establishment of cocoa blocks for their church and congregation. These initiatives intended to educate and entice people to plant cocoa for themselves and boost their economic situation. Indeed, by the end of the cocoa boom in the 1980s, almost all households near the coast and main roads – a total of around 23,000 smallholder farmers and their families (Curry et al. 2011) – were managing cocoa blocks. ENB's annual cocoa production after then measured between 17,000 to 20,000 tonnes (with some drops after the 1994 volcanic eruption and 1997 drought), which amounted to over half the national cocoa output (*ibid.*). Furthermore, cocoa growers in this province have been reported to receive relatively higher income than those in other parts of the country (Omuru et al. 2001), with an estimated average household income of K2,271 (Curry et al. 2007). This had significantly impacted local lifestyle, subsistence, and access to commodities and technologies (e.g. diesel generators, chainsaws, motorised vehicles, radio, and television) even among the Baining cocoa-producing communities.

However, in 2006, a mosquito-sized moth pest called *Conopomorpha cramerella*, also commonly known as Cocoa Pod Borer (CPB), appeared in the province and destroyed 80% of the cocoa-producing trees. The pest spreads quickly by laying eggs on the surface of cocoa pods and when the larvae hatch, they tunnel into and feed from the

Pods. The pest can affect entire farming blocks if not managed by spraying pesticides, pruning, and harvesting regularly. Unable to afford pesticides, many Baining farmers found it difficult to maintain their cocoa blocks and by 2015 the majority of cocoa growers in the Central East New Britain had not yet recovered from the CPB. Several of my interlocutors also expressed that they lacked information and confidence to participate in the cocoa rejuvenation project led by the World Bank, which offered free seedlings and block management training. Therefore, with the sudden drop of cash and commodities circulation after CPB, both Baining communities that grew cocoa and those that did not, put their hopes for future prosperity, development, and infrastructure in oil palm.

For many years ENB engaged in oil palm production only on a very small-scale in the western parts of the province, near the border with West New Britain where PNG's leading oil palm company, New Britain Palm Oil Ltd (NBPOL), operated. The first large-scale oil palm plantation in ENB was established in 2008 by the Malaysian company Tzen Niugini, as part of the Ili-Wawas project mentioned above. The deal between the company and Baining landowner groups on the south coast resulted in a 99-year lease agreement of customary land in return for rental payments and dividends, locally called "royalties," and infrastructure such as roads and permanent buildings. In 2010, the company expanded further in the province and by 2015 there were already two fully-grown oil palm plantations on Baining customary land, with negotiations for a third plantation underway.

These developments and the land disputes they caused with cocoa farmers, as well as the outcry from cocoa buyers, conservationists, and the World Bank were at the centre of provincial politics and media when I commenced fieldwork in ENB. As I will discuss in part II of this thesis, the Baining clan leaders argued that through the oil palm deal, they were able to assert their customary landownership claims and take back their land from the illegal settlers who had inhabited it since World War II. Nevertheless, though the leaders had signed the land lease, a significant number of people, both Baining and non-Baining, opposed the oil palm project and claimed that

the land was not theirs to give in the first place or that they had not been properly consulted about the deal. These disputes and the lawsuits accompanying them were still ongoing during my fieldwork.

Finally, there were disagreements about Baining mask dances and their local meaning. On the one hand, there were those within the Baining society who argued that their dances should not leave their original local setting and should not be performed at festivals or other touristic events, as that made them into spectacles that could potentially devalue them and result in the loss of their *kastom*'s cultural meaning. On the other hand, there were those who had converted to Pentecostal Christianity and associated the masks with the devil, describing those who practiced certain kinds of *kastom* as Satan's agents on earth. These men and women preached for the complete eradication of the dances, and spread their *kastom*'s secrets in attempt to weaken it and steer people away from it. Conversely, men who partook in *kastom* and wanted to perform in front of foreign and domestic audiences in the context of festivals and provincial events, believed that by making their masks more "visible," they added value to them and made the Baining people more "visible" and "liked," whilst ensuring *kastom*'s survival and the flow of resources into their communities.

These issues led me to shift my research focus to the wider investigation of land and *kastom* as well as Baining notions of visibility in and on various contexts and scales, and as a way for them to draw recognition, resources, and development from the state and other significant others. This thesis draws on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Papua New Guinea between January 2015 and July 2016, which I conducted at the National Museum of PNG, the provincial centre of East New Britain (Kokopo), and mainly at a Baining rural settlement in the Gazelle District, which I refer to as Tavir in order to preserve the anonymity of its residents.⁵ It presents a study about a group of Papua New Guinean people who carry three names: Baining, Kairak, and Vir. And while I discuss the construction of these names and their political and

⁵ Additional archival and artefact collection research was conducted in August 2015 at the Australian National University, National Gallery of Australia, and Queensland Museum.

social implications in chapter 6, it is important to give some context about their use throughout the thesis.

The Baining, as they are known in PNG and within the ethnographic literature, are a group of non-Austronesian speaking people who reside in the northern portion of East New Britain Province. Like other Papua New Guineans, the Baining have adopted the term “tribe” to refer to the larger group, “clans” to distinguish between the language groups, and sub-clans or just “groups” to show who forms those clans. Geographically, people spoke about the Qaqet⁶ Baining of Northern ENB, the Uramot and Kairak Baining of Central (or Inland) ENB, the Mali and Simbali Baining of Southern ENB (or the South coast), and the Makolkol Baining of the Southwestern coast, who were officially recognised as a clan just a couple of months after I completed my fieldwork.

Since evidence suggested that Baining fire dances that are performed at night with large barkcloth masks and pythons had originated among the Central Baining (Laufer 1959; Corbin 1976), I had planned to conduct my research in this area, where Gregory Bateson also undertook his first fieldwork in 1927. After several trips to the settlements falling under the Inland Baining Rural Local Level Government (LLG) and familiarising myself with the geography and socioeconomic composition of the area, I decided to conduct the rest of my fieldwork in Tavar. This was a large ward of approximately 400 residents and one of the five settlements of the Kairak Baining – a group of roughly 1,100 people – who had leased 11,000 hectares of their customary land for oil palm development. However, soon after I settled there, I learned that the majority of its residents identified as Vir and traced their descentance to ten families that had been resettled to this area by the Australian administration in 1947. As I will show in Chapter 6, they argued that while they spoke the Kairak language, their origin was different from the people in the other four settlements. Further literature review revealed that indeed there were Baining people called Vir (Laufer 1959), but at the time of writing this thesis, this was not an officially recognised clan and there

⁶ Also registered as Chachet in the literature.

were still ongoing disputes about whether it was a clan or a sub-clan of the Kairak. Therefore, I have decided to use “Vir Kairak” throughout this thesis to refer to the residents of Tavir, and “Kairak” or “Kairak Baining” to refer to the larger language group.

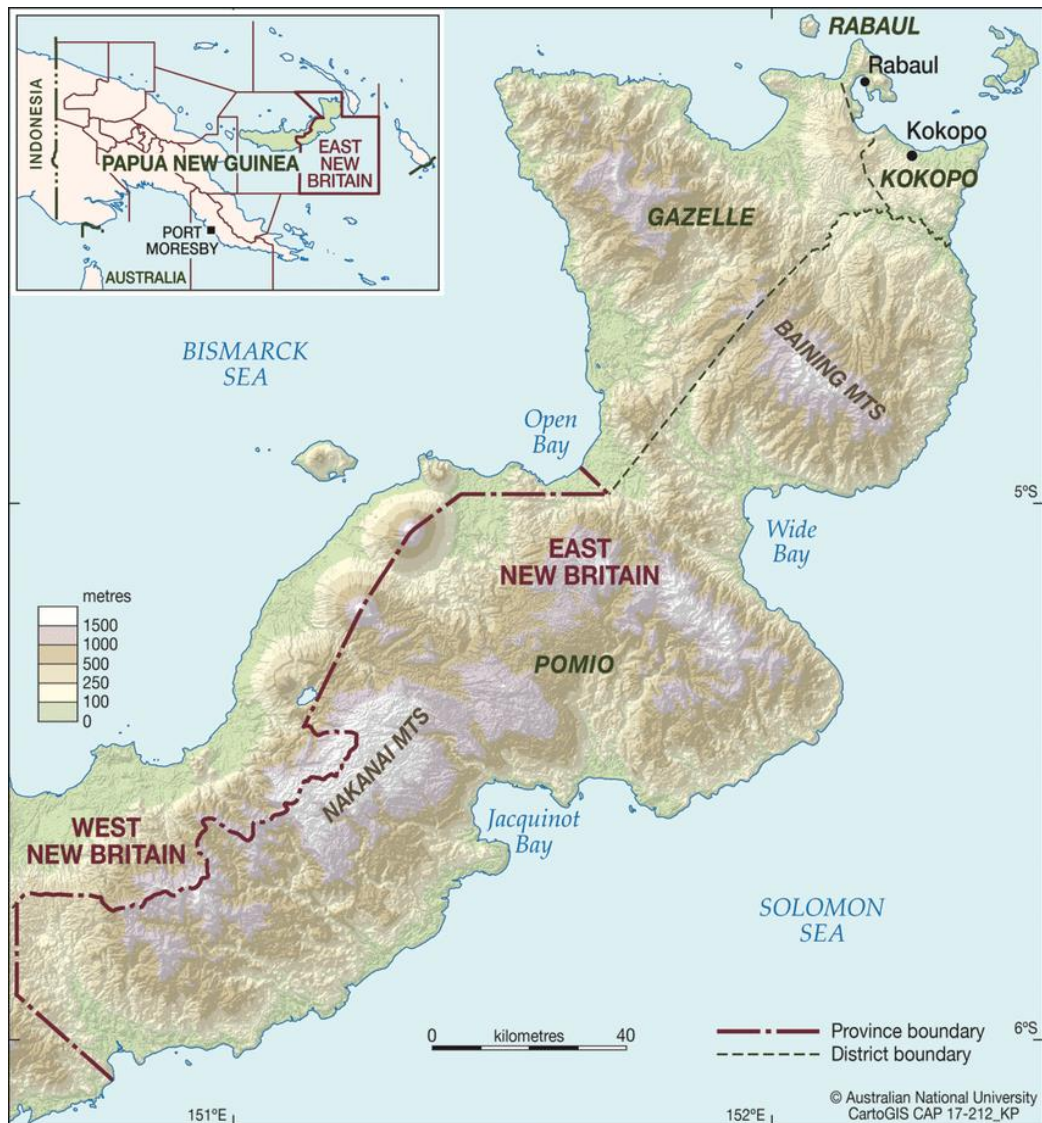


Figure 1 - Map of East New Britain, reproduced with permission, © Australian National University, College of Asia and the Pacific, CartoGIS Services

Ashamed, Shy, or Vorvāt People?

During my fieldwork it became clear that Baining people's relations with others, and the visibility they, or their community as a whole, held for specific others, were guided by and contingent to a feeling the Vir Kairak called vorvāt, which loosely translates to "sem" in Tok Pisin and to "shame" or "shy" in English. Soon after I moved to Tavor, I realised that everyone felt vorvāt in front of someone else on a daily basis, and that people often commented about themselves or others in terms of whether they were vorvāt in a given situation. Conversations with my interlocutors revealed that experience and display of vorvāt formed the basis of Vir Kairak ideas about proper ways to present and conduct oneself or society. Therefore, this thesis illustrates how people's connection to their land and *kastom*, and the relations they formed and revealed through them, as well as the strategies they deployed to become visible to others, were all informed by vorvāt. It is precisely for this reason that the present study sheds different light on the Baining people by exploring their struggles for recognition of their worth, social belonging, and will to improve (cf. Li 2007) whilst showing the value they put on their apparent shame and shyness.

The reader will find that vorvāt runs as a common thread throughout all chapters. But following Volosinov (1973) and Bakhtin (1973, 1981), I argue that its dominant translation into "shame" has failed to capture the multifaceted meaning it holds for the Vir Kairak people. According to my informants the vernacular vorvāt described a state that involved a wide array of feelings from shame to modesty, from shyness to anger, that depending on the situation were felt wholly, or in some combination, at once. Bakhtin suggests that a word is a "language in its complete and living totality" (1973:150), whose meaning depends on the relationship between the context and the speaker's authority. Similarly, Volosinov proposes that "there are as many meanings of words as there are contexts to its usage" (1973: 79), and that for an outsider to understand meaning and provide a translation is often difficult, because it requires some fixity of meaning. This is why for many months I struggled to understand why my informants were "ashamed," even when I thought it did not really make sense to feel shame. At the time, I was drawing on vorvāt's English translation, "shame," and

was contextually fixing it as a negative feeling of embarrassment that derived from the revelation of personal shortcomings or inappropriate behaviour – in a way paradigmatic in Western thought (see Brown 2010, 2012). In fact, it took me a couple of years to begin to see that in the English-speaking world the feelings of shyness and shame had been differentiated with their respective words, and connoted varying degrees of positive/negative meaning, while this was not the case in all languages (for example, Bulgarian and Turkish, or Kairak and Tok Pisin).

In PNG, anthropologists have widely discussed the role of shame in gift exchange, consumption, and notions of power, prestige, and modernity (A. Strathern and Strathern 1971; M. Strathern 1999; Foster 1995; Damon and Wagner 1989; LiPuma 2000; Robbins 2004). Schieffelin (1983) for example, has illustrated how the Kaluli deployed shaming in exchange relations to instigate reciprocation of overdue gifts. Andrew Strathern (1971) has described how at Mt Hagen Moka ceremonies donors gained prestige as they shamed their exchange partners by giving too many valuables. Barnett-Naghshineh (2018) has observed how people perceived selling fresh produce at the market in Goroka as a shameful activity for men, whilst expecting women to engage in it, and concluded that shame is a moral idiom that created and reproduced gendered persons. These approaches, however, place shame as a feeling originating from the negative perception of one by others. In other words, people's moral valuation of others as having or lacking specific qualities, or failing to fulfil social expectations, resulted in the experience of shame by those evaluated. Put this way, shame in PNG is typically presented as the outcome of revealed inappropriate behaviour (a deviation from a prescribed social role or cultural norm), culpable act (e.g. theft, adultery), or private affair (e.g. defecating); of being proven wrong; or being accused of sorcery (e.g. A. Strathern 1975; Telban 2004).

While the Vir Kairak evaluated people's *vorvāt* that resulted from the revelation of such inappropriate acts as unfortunate and undesirable, they also perceived the experience of *vorvāt* itself as a "good behaviour" (*gutpela pasin*) that integrated them into normal social relations (see also Fajans 1983). For example, if people displayed

vorvāt when others accused them of adultery, they showed that that they as well perceived adultery as inappropriate, and themselves as guilty of engaging in it. In this way, they reaffirmed that they were socially attuned despite their wrongdoing. Therefore, people described *vorvāt* not just as the result of other's judgement but also of one's own evaluation of oneself and others within the situations they found themselves. At the heart of such evaluations, I argue, lied the realisation of becoming *the object of another's look* – that is, *to be seen* by the other, and consequently to be judged by them.

This led me to consider what Goffman (1956, 1957) has termed as the “sense of shame” as a more appropriate explanation for people's apparent “shyness” to speak in public, receive guests, answer questions about themselves, and be seen in a ceremonial context. The “sense of shame,” Goffman articulated, was what put people in continuous anticipation of being ashamed in some way, which seemed plausible within the Melanesian context where people's failure to appear in the appropriate form resulted in their failure to elicit relationships (Wagner 1986; M. Strathern 1988). It also accounted for ideas about shame as regulatory feeling that attuned people into the normal social order and communicated the prevailing social norms and values within a society⁷ (see also A. Strathern 1975; Fajans 1983). From Melanesians' joking and avoidance relations, such as those between opposite sexes, affines, and kin of specific age or code, to the importance of keeping certain things or acts hidden (e.g. sexual intercourse, defecation), the literature is full of examples of shame evincing proper forms of persons and sociality (e.g. Bateson 1936; Hogbin 1947; Chowning 1979, 1989; A. L. Epstein 1984; Wagner 1986).

More recently Fajans (2006) has argued that whilst many, including herself (e.g. Fajans 1983; Myers 1986; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990 (eds)), have differentiated between personal feelings and social sentiments, there is a continuum between them. She postulates that particular emotions that are socially desirable in specific

⁷ Compare from Durkheim's discussion on social integration and deviance in *Suicide* (1951) and *Moral Education* (1961).

circumstances, such as sorrow at mortuary events, and pride or shame at competitive events, are initially learned and manifested regardless of an individual's internal feelings, but later can generate that feeling within a person. In other words, the feelings that arise from acting in specific way in specific situations are not simply imposed on the person, nor are they just the result of a person's own evaluation of the circumstances, but a dialectical relationship of both.

My own understanding of *vorvāt* similarly positions it within the framework of social expectations and internal feelings. The Vir Kairak described two dimensions of their experience of *vorvāt*: 1) socially it was a "good behaviour" and 2) internally it was an uncomfortable feeling. Since people expected to see *vorvāt* in a set of relationships that displayed one's respect for another and for the community, *vorvāt* was a cultivated behaviour as much as it was felt, and it involved self-reflection (i.e. "how do others see me?" / *narapela i lukim mi hau?*) as much as it did a consideration for the social norms.⁸ In this sense, I frame *vorvāt* as a virtue, and similar to several authors who have drawn on Aristotle's articulation of virtuous character (e.g. MacIntyre 1981; Lambek 2008; Laidlaw 2012), suggest that virtues are cultivated through practice whose aim is intrinsic to itself, rather than to an external end (Widlok 2004). In other words, my Vir Kairak interlocutors experienced *vorvāt* for its own sake, because it was the right way to act – a "good behaviour" (*gutpela pasin*) whose practice was good not only for those who were *vorvāt*, but also for everyone else they interacted with.

While my interlocutors claimed that their *vorvāt* was also a sort of weakness within the modern economic and political setting of ENB, which prevented them from participating in the wider socio-politico-economic arena, they believed that it ensured people's respect for each other, prevented too much unequal accumulation of wealth and authority, and ensured the survival of their community. Thus, I illustrate that Vir Kairak *vorvāt* involved both hiding and display of oneself or community in order to reveal them in a particular form and enable the Vir Kairak to do what they are

⁸ This is how my analysis of *vorvāt* diverges from Durkheim's articulation of moral obligation as a subject of the collective consciousness i.e. society in *Essays on Morals and Education* (1979) and *Moral Education* (1961).

supposed to do in particular situation that could potentially result in their recognition for holding specific qualities, skills, capacities, and so on. This shall become clearer in the following section. My thesis shows that *vorvāt* shaped Vir Kairak social action, self-image, and self-presentation, and was not simply the result of colonial and missionary contact and “humiliation” as authors like Robbins (2004), LiPuma (2000), and Dalton (2007) have shown for other societies in PNG, but instead that *vorvāt* was intrinsic to the wider social framework of personhood and agency.

Visibility and Recognition

From the very start, the kernel of this research has been the concept of “visibility.” Scholars have shown that in Melanesia, processes of revelation and concealment, and visibility and invisibility, play an important role in making persons and social relationships, and that things and people alike are displayed for others to see and elicit difference or transformation (Wagner 1967; Biersack 1982; M. Strathern 1988, 2013; Battaglia 1990; Leach 2002; A. Reed 1999, 2004). Thus, I began this study asking what it meant for the Baining to be “masked,” “to see and be seen” (Geertz 1960), and what kind of things and relationships their masking practices made visible and invisible. Strathern’s work (1988, 1995, 2004a, 2004b) has been particularly influential to my approach. Her model of Melanesian sociality proposes that persons cannot be imagined outside social relations, and that objects such as ceremonial headdresses, for example, reveal the relations through which they were made (e.g. gift giving, exchange, loaning, inheritance), while the dancers who wear them, become “living evidence” of these relations (M. Strathern 1999). That is, she argues, each piece of decoration attached to the dancer’s body is part of someone else, thus, making the dancer an “assemblage” of his relationships with others. But for those relationships to be “activated” they had to be seen by others in the appropriate form (M. Strathern 2013: 121).

Furthermore, visibility not only elicits relationships within an already existing network but creates the possibility for new ones. Therefore, drawing from the

literature on gift exchange and (self)display in a ceremonial context, as compelling particular actions (usually of giving and reciprocity) between the involved participants (M. Strathern 1988; Munn 1992 [1986]), I sought to explore the kind of power visibility and invisibility evinced among the Vir Kairak that reproduced people and their relationships with others (see also Gell 1992; A. Reed 1999; Leach 2003). I asked how the Vir Kairak make themselves visible/invisible, in what contexts, and with what implications for the future? What things do they want to conceal/reveal in their everyday lives and from/to whom? Are houses and hamlets made visible/invisible? What is made visible/invisible with their masks and dances? How do they make their land visible/invisible? How are memories and stories, or various material things, deployed to present people in certain ways or to make the land visible/invisible?

As I explored these questions, it became clear that a large part of Vir Kairak social life, self-narration, and self-presentation revolved around the issue of “recognition,” and more precisely their lack of recognition or “*misrecognition*” (Taylor 1994 emphasis in original). Taylor proposed the term *misrecognition* to emphasise the significance of individual identity within the Euro-American context and the likelihood of its incomprehension by others (cf. Honneth 1995). In recent years, this concept has become integral to studies of political identity that explore the powers that subordinate, denigrate, humiliate, and deny recognition of subaltern groups as equal human beings (Langman 2019). These studies have revealed the centrality of recognition in conceptualising struggles for identity, belonging, resource access, authority, and autonomy (Fraser 2000; Middleton 2013; C. Lund 2016), as well as its primacy (and often difficulty) not only for those who seek it (Warren 1998; Li 2000; Povinelli 2002) but also for government agendas that shape officials’ attitudes with respect to indigenous and minority groups (Merlan 2014).

Povinelli (2002) has shown that in Australia liberal multiculturalist aspirations have placed significant pressure on indigenous communities that force them to showcase their authentic indigenous identity as a way to claim citizenship, land, native title,

and material compensation for colonial harm. She suggests that this task is often difficult (if not impossible) because what state law considers as authentic identity must be rooted in the “real acknowledgement of traditional law and real observance of traditional customs” (Povinelli 2002: 39). Thus, when indigenous claims fail, people often perceive this as the result of their failure to hold onto their traditional culture. Ironically, however, the state recognises Aboriginal identity contingent only on traditional knowledge and practices that are deemed appropriate and non-repugnant within Australia’s (post)modern multicultural context.

Therefore, Povinelli argues that national pageants of shameful repentance for the violence and injustice suffered by indigenous communities during the colonial period, and the recognition of subaltern worth, remain inflected by the conditional (and I would add, by the colonial), whereby difference is celebrated as long as it does not involve a sense of repugnant that could violate contemporary common law values. In other words, as she puts it, as long as “they are not, at heart, not-us and as long as the real economic resources are not at stake” (Povinelli 2002: 17). In this way, her work shows that within contemporary politics of identity and recognition, what the state recognises, capital commodifies, and courts try to protect, are fixed imaginaries of an ancient past and indigenous law, whose present existence and nationwide celebration offer redemption for the atrocities of their colonial past.

But while the literature largely deals with the process of recognition/misrecognition based on notions of individual or fixed identity, in Melanesia identities have always been unstable and multiple (Robbins 1998; Harrison 2000), and persons choose to participate in and display, or “eclipse” (M. Strathern 1988), particular kinds of relations and aspects of themselves within particular contexts. Therefore, this thesis explores the ways in which Vir Kairak tried to make certain things visible, such as their land and traditional masks (while others invisible), in order to make themselves recognisable to others as worthy of engaging with in a positive and productive way (see also Street 2014). My ethnography contributes to the study of recognition, by showing that misrecognition does not necessarily depend on stable identities, but can

be the result of a mismatch between the images people project of themselves in order to be recognised in certain ways, and those images through which they are imagined by the agents whose recognition they seek. In other words, people, institutions, and states often see others in ways they imagine or expect them to be in a particular spatiotemporal context, but this may not be how these others are or want to be seen.

Following Lund's suggestion that property, citizenship, and authority are "mutually constitutive and represent social contracts of recognition" (2016: 1200), and Schneiderman's (2015) account that people desire to objectify their identity in terms recognisable to others, I explore Vir Kairak struggles to make 1) themselves recognisable as landowners, 2) their land recognisable as valuable and productive, 3) their masks and dances recognisable as beautiful and powerful, and 4) themselves recognisable as a Baining clan and Papua New Guinean people worth engaging with and offering development. I argue that land and *kastom* are important for people's struggles for recognition, not only because they are constitutive of Vir Kairak sociality and personhood, but also because the recognising agents (state or non-state, such as officials in esteemed positions, international corporations, expatriate businesspersons, foreign and domestic tourists, researchers and NGO workers, and religious leaders) deem these important in conceptualising identity. Both land and *kastom* offer "place-based notions" (Byrne et al. 2017: 80) of political belonging, citizenship, and identity. Therefore, by looking at Vir Kairak practices of self-(re)presentation, revelation and hiding, landownership and authority claiming at different scales, I offer insight into what has now become commonly framed as the "politics of identity."⁹

However, when discussing recognition and identity one should also acknowledge that such ideas are paradigmatic in Western thought and rooted in the distinction between Hobbesian notions about the human subject as naturally self-interested and self-asserting and Hegel's (1991 [1820]) discussion of political struggle that framed

⁹ For some examples see Pratten (2008), Comaroff and Comaroff (eds) (2006), Pile and Keith (eds) (1997), Robbins and Wardlow (eds) 2005, Akin (2004), Middleton (2015), Gilberthorpe (2013)(Gilberthorpe 2013), Besky (2013), Schneiderman (2015).

people as primarily concerned with and seeking recognition and relationships. Hegel argued that society is based on mutual recognition, whereby one distinguishes oneself from others and forms relationships only after recognising the other as a subject and being recognised as one in return. In other words, the recognition one receives is only effective if it comes from someone who the self has already recognised.

Building on the Melanesian literature about gift exchange and materiality that illustrates how people recognise and objectify themselves and others as social beings through gift exchange (M. Strathern 1988; Biersack 1996; Mosko 2000), Robbins (2003, 2009) has shown the compatibility of Hegel's argument with Melanesian social life.¹⁰ He argues that gift exchange is the ultimate mutual recognition, whereby through gift giving the donor recognises the recipient as a subject, and in turn, reciprocating that gift offers the kind of recognition that forms the donor's self-conscious selfhood and (self-)worth. Similarly, Keane (1997) has argued that gift giving presents a challenge to respond on the receiver that elicits mutual recognition and places both parties in mutual dependence. To elicit a response and receive recognition, the giver must give a gift that can be reciprocated. On the other hand, the receiver must be challenged by the giver's gift in order to enable one's expression of agency through an appropriate response. From this point of view, Keane concludes that even "the most authoritative kinds of agency are out of the hands of any single party... but are jointly (though not necessarily equally) constructed" (1997: 16).

This is why, I suggest, the Vir Kairak's struggle for recognition as landowners was not simply about recognising their rights to access and control the land, but to reveal themselves in a recognisable form (as landowners) in order to elicit relationships with the government and agri-business companies that could result in the exchange of the

¹⁰ Robbins (2003) argues that recognition is acquired through the ownership of property, which is seen by others. But this, according to him, is only one-way recognition, and that real potent recognition only derives from someone the self has already recognised. In other words, effective recognition is only possible from subjects who have been recognised for their property ownership.

land's productivity for royalties (land rental payments) and development. Similarly, recognition of their *kastom* and masks as powerful, beautiful, and valuable by state or non-state agents gave recognition of the people as strong, creative, and worth engaging with, bringing tourists to their settlements, inviting them to perform at festivals, and commissioning their masks for political and cultural exhibits. The transaction of recognition and their outcomes offered the Vir Kairak meaningful and visible aspects of their selfhood, belonging, and worth as a people.

Finally, scholars have shown that governments are formed around resources, especially land (property) and people (labour and citizenship), and that their authority stems from their control over such resources (Scott 1998; Harvey 2006; Li 2007; Eilenberg 2012; Besky 2013; Rasmussen and Lund 2018). The ability to control land and the provision of landownership and citizenship rights are essential for authority. Therefore, Lund suggests that “[s]truggles over property and citizenship are...as much about the scope and constitution of political authority as they are about access to resources and membership of polities” (2016: 1201). The thesis argues that while documents such as title deeds offer people the ability to constitute themselves as subjects of a nation state (cf. S. Lund 2001; Kelly 2006) and their materiality elicits specific responses and relations with the state (Bell 2009), the Vir Kairak did not become visible and recognisable as landowners by obtaining their title deed, but only after the land's transformation into an oil palm plantation – a territorialised space (Besky and Padwe 2016) with state like effects (see Byrne et al. 2017; Tammisto 2016). That is, due to its monocrop character and fixity the plantation created a form of vegetal infrastructure and a territory that made both the land and the people who claimed rights to it, as well as those who resided on and used it, visible to each other, the state, and other non-state actors.

I argue that on the one hand, the Vir Kairak's strategy to use oil palm as a tool for gaining recognition as landowners had been shaped by their *vorvāt*, whereby they revealed themselves in this form by covering the land with the palm and hiding themselves behind it whilst also avoiding direct conflict with the settlers who

occupied the land and having the company get rid of them instead. On the other hand, the inefficiency of the title deed alone suggested the state's lack of authority and ability to provide development to the Baining people. For this reason, the Vir Kairak recognised the power of the company to provide them with the recognition and development they sought (cf. Kirsch 2006; West 2016). And in the process, they also recognised their land's ability to draw the company to them, as well as its capacity to provide the things which the government had failed to. Thus, the thesis shows that in the case of failed recognition and authority on part of both the state and the people, people seek other recognising agents that can offer something in return.

Land, Place, and Persons

We are connected to our land.

The ground is life. The ground is kastom.

We Baining are connected to the ground... to the land.

You can't see us wandering in town, doing nothing.

We come back to our village.

Because our land is nice; it is life.

Going over these early fieldnotes about how my Baining informants described themselves and their difference from other Papua New Guinean people, I began to see that for them *kastom* and the land could not be separated from each other or from their Baining identity. People experienced the ground and the landscape they traversed not as a mere thing, but as a source and manifestation of a myriad of relationships with multiple others such as plants, animals, creeks, ancestors, spirits, other people, and their masks. By moving through and narrating the stories of various

places and people, their past and present encounters and journeys, they created what Chua (2015) calls “co-presence,” and the very fabric of Baining social life. Moreover, this landscape mediated the old and new relations with capital and the state and sustained their visible marks in the form of plantations, roads, deforested muddy slopes, abandoned cocoa dryers, electricity posts, and mobile telecommunications network towers. In that sense, the landscape was more than a scene of encounters; it was the very substance of memory, relatedness, and sociality (Ingold 1993; Basso 1996). It sustained people’s connection with their past and ancestors, and other beings such as bush spirits and the Judeo-Christian God, through stories, biographies, and physical places or marks. For them “land is life” because of its capacity to sustain and shelter wildlife, produce subsistence crops and agricultural commodities, mediate relations between people, state, and capital, and create notions and feelings of belonging to a society, group, or category of people. This thesis argues that the link between land and the production of persons structures people’s everyday lives, relationships, and future aspirations; and that when people are displaced from their land, they are also separated from all those things that offer not just material means to live but also meaning about their existence, identity, and relations with others. It explores the Vir Kairak’s struggle and strategies they have deployed to reclaim their land and its material and immaterial resources of which they have been deprived by several “powerful outsiders,” including the Australian administration, the Methodist mission, Tolai and migrant Papua New Guineans from the mainland, and agribusiness corporations.

This thesis is situated within the larger study of land and its material and symbolic value for the people who relate to it (Shipton 1994). But as Li reminds us, the English word “land” comes with its own cultural baggage, and not everyone in the world “lumps together the same set of material substances under one label” (2014:590). While Melanesian scholars have long used the term and demonstrated that “land” is not simply a category of property,¹¹ and that Melanesians’ “dividual,” “composite,”

¹¹ Robbins (2003: 16) argues that much of Melanesian literature rejects the idea of possession of personal property because Melanesians “never truly hold things as their own, but instead

(M. Strathern 1988) or “partible” (Mosko 1992) personhood is also contingent on relationships with the land and its various affordances (Biersack 1982, 1999; Toren 1995; Bamford 1998; J. F. Weiner 1998; J. Leach 2003; K. Martin 2013), in agrarian studies the word generally connotes property relations, commodity economy, and alienability (Bohannon 1963; Duncan and Rutledge 1977; C. Lund 2008; C. Lund and Eilenberg 2017). It is thus necessary to clarify how the Vir Kairak talked about the land in various contexts and what words I use throughout this thesis to describe these different models of land.

In the Kairak language “ground” or “land,” in a rather geographical sense, is *vārām*, which describes the relationship between an area (of bush, gardens, fallows, hamlets and so on) and the people who have claims to use it (usually an extended family or patrilineage). While *sāpdavāt* (home, hamlet), *lat* (garden), and *māran* (bush) denoted the “thingness” of places, distinguished by their physical composition, use and ownership (cf. Verdery and Humphrey 2004), *vārām* emphasised the relationship of “belonging to” and the rights to use and reside by the people whose histories were entwined with that place. Whilst walking the village pathways my Vir Kairak interlocutors uttered the names of hamlets, creeks, gardens, and places in the bush they passed by and the people associated with them. A beautiful house, a large mango tree, a healthy batch of tapioca plants, or a rusty water drum did not simply signify a place but elicited the relations between that place and the person(s) who put that thing there; for example, the solidified cement bag that Wartovo forgot in the rain and became the perfect platform for washing clothes near the creek. Or Sara’s beautiful *aibika* garden behind her house, which used to be her in-law’s cocoa block and later the site of a “cargo cult church” in the 1970s. All places had stories, people and things attached to them, and they constituted what people called *vārām*. Likewise, when recounting life events about oneself or talking about the Vir Kairak past, one elicited social relations in spatial terms through the histories of people within various places (Ingold 1993; Maschio 1994; Bamford 1998). Countless times people reiterated to one

always already owe them to others” with whom they have exchange relations or have inclusive rights to the things in question.

another that their ancestors first settled at the hamlet called *matmat* (cemetery), pointing to Tavar's present day cemetery, and described how all families lived together and built a church there. And they often told stories about how they decided to build a house, become a lay preacher, or make a specific type of mask whilst walking through, working, or sleeping at a particular place. Life histories emerged through the description of earlier settlement places, garden places, church places, cocoa block places, hiding places, burial places, caves, creeks, pools, spirit dwellings, and places where various customs originated from. These places were not only spaces of various happenings but also parts people collected through stories that constituted Vir Kairak personhood (cf. Battaglia 1990). Vir Kairak social identity eventuated from people's connection to *vārām* (Bamford 1998), which they embodied in their relations with others as well (Descola 1992).

While *vārām* offered insight to my understanding of people's relationship with the land, I conducted most of my fieldwork in the lingua franca Tok Pisin. In this language the Vir Kairak used the words "*graun*" and "*lend*" to describe the soil, earth, or land. At times it seemed as if they used these interchangeably, but after a more detailed analysis I realised that when people talked about social relations mediated through the land, *kastom*, or gardening they generally referred to land as *graun*; and when they talked about their "land(ownership) rights" and "indigenous identity" they referred to it as *lend*. Moreover, talk about *lend* often included talk about title deeds and customary rights. Seemingly then, *lend* was the more legalistic representation that formed Vir Kairak national and political identity and referred to the tract of land now recognised as "customary land," while *graun* engendered their sense of personhood and connectedness with the environment in which they and their ancestors dwelled. But as these words and the categories they represented have entered the Vir Kairak lexicon and imagination as a result of colonial contact, they should be accompanied by a note on the difference between "emic" views and objective "etic" representations of land.

My own view on this subject is that ethnographers' own categories and concerns "must, by definition, be inadequate to translate different ones" (Henare et al. 2007: 12), and that they cannot be taken as universal translators. However, I also suggest that categories – native, colonial, or scientific – are mutually transformed through our encounters and relationships with each other. Therefore, while this thesis is based on the analysis of emic models that more often than not misalign with the etic categories the state and capital claim to have adopted, it also shows that when it comes to the question of land, these models influence and are influenced by people's behaviour, actions, and knowledge. What this means is that while for the Vir Kairak the fabric of social life eventuated through ties with the *graun* or *vārām*, for the state and capital the "land" that was "out there" had to be appropriated, acted upon, transformed, and made profitable (Smith 1984; Harvey 1996; Soja 1996), leading to the creation of new emic categories such as "alienated land," "state land," and "customary land" that introduced *lend* into the Vir Kairak imagination.

This also comes as a critique of the Melanesian literature that has taken the category of customary land as one and the same thing as people's emic models of land (or traditional relations with the land), whilst they very well show that customary land is in fact land that has been objectified as a result of colonial processes of accumulation and dispossession that established new models of land tenure and property relations in the region. In other words, in order for customary land to exist there first had to be dispossession. In that sense, the category of customary land comes not only as colonial conciliation, but also as a device of state-making by which people's identity became tied to the land and relationships with the state objectified through it. With this historical context in mind, it is probable that while the colonial administration recognised and legitimated the category of customary land with the land registration law (the Real Property Act 1913 in the territory of Papua and the Lands Registration Act 1924 in the territory of New Guinea), the Vir Kairak began to see and describe their ancestral ground as "customary land" only after they saw its capacity to give them state recognition and development.

The thesis explores how the Vir Kairak relate to the land in a number of ways. First, as I have already suggested, the land as *graun* is at the very heart of Vir Kairak personhood and sociality by mediating meaningful relationships between people (A. J. Strathern 1977; A. B. Weiner 1976, 1980; Munn 1992; J. Leach 2003; M. Strathern 2004a; Bamford 2009). Gardening and garden produce are essential for creating and maintaining relations of feeding, giving, and cooperation that are valued for their productive capacity to make socialised persons and a strong community (Chapter 1). Different from scholars who have shown the significance of food as shared substance that makes kinship (e.g. Carsten 1995, 1997; Weismantel 1995), the thesis explores the dichotomies between feeding and eating, and giving and consuming, to show the ways in which people see land as an agent and “provider,” homologous to the ideal social relationships they establish between themselves (Descola 1992).

Second, contesting notions of landownership and land-use mediate the ongoing construction of relations within and outside Baining society. The studies of political ecology, geography and anthropology have already shown the role of power relations in shaping notions about the environment, land, and peoples’ place within it (Said 1993; Wolf 1994; Bates and Lees 1996; Sivaramakrishnan 1998; Blomley 2003). This body of literature also illustrates the immense effects of transforming property relations and imposition of new economic and spatial order under colonialism on local communities and livelihoods (J. L. Comaroff 1980; Kain and Baigent 1992). It has also shown the links between imperialism and ecology (Peet and Watts 1994), land (Said 1993), and capitalism (Wolf 1994). In East New Britain, during its colonial period between 1885 and 1975, this mainly entailed the accumulation of land for plantations and logging (PNG Forest Authority 1998) by means of displacement and resettlement of local populations (K. Neumann 1992b; K. Martin 2013) into consolidated rural settlements where they became subject to census, taxation, and state control. The thesis shows that the establishment of migrant plantation worker settlements and plantations inside the dwelling, hunting, and gardening grounds of Vir Kairak’s ancestors has created relations such as indigenous vs outsider, victim vs intruder, owner vs user, which are instantiated through the land. Thus, Vir Kairak self-

(re)presentations, I argue, are shaped by ideas about victimhood and dispossession, while social identity and ties between generations depend on people's ability to *activate* their *lend* claims through labour, revelation, and covering the earth with agricultural crops such as cocoa and oil palm (Chapters 1 and 4). Moreover, the adoption of the category of customary landownership, that is not simply transmitted through inheritance or labour but is contingent on one's knowledge of the landscape and its entangled histories with various people and non-human others, has been deployed in elicitations of difference, clans, and leadership (Chapter 6).

Third, relationships with the land are also brought into discussions about identity and development (Chapters 3 and 5). My fieldwork revealed that the effects of early geographers' contribution to the colonial project of objectifying the land and its people, and to "the actual and conceptual mapping of savagery" (Blomley 2003) are still felt in East New Britain. For the colonial and post-colonial administrations and other residents of the island, the Baining landscape, due to its geography, flora and fauna, was metonymical to its people's "wild," "backward," and "underdeveloped" nature (see also West 2016). However, while aware of this, in the eyes of the Vir Kairak the land is also a medium through which they can gain the development other Papua New Guineans and foreigners enjoy, such as infrastructure, roads, education, and commodities. And while the latter seems like a very familiar story from the literature on frontiers and placemaking that illustrates how capital forces create wilderness in order to fill it up and make it valuable (Tsing 2005; Eilenberg 2015; C. Lund 2018), and that local people often become part of this process of objectification, commodification, and land grab (Li 2014a), the thesis shows that Vir Kairak aspirations to acquire development drew on traditional notions and relations with *graun* as an agent and provider (Chapter 5).

Fourth, *kastom* and its proper performance are tied to the land and create local and national identities (Chapter 6). The origin of Vir Kairak traditional masks and dances is rooted to specific places and their stories that are passed from generation to generation. Their design and performance not only offer insight into the power of

these places, but also of the people who make them. And it is through *kastom* that people elicit their sociality and cultural distinctions from other Baining and Papua New Guinean people (Wagner 1974, 1986). Moreover, *kastom* was used to assert people's connectedness to the land, and sometimes deployed to legitimise claims to it (see also Martin 2009, 2013).

Finally, land acquired economic value for the Vir Kairak after their resettlement to Tavir in 1947. Its ability to produce cash crops that could be sold at the urban markets or to cocoa and copra buyers, established new relationships within and outside the community (Chapter 4) and led to contests about land use and leasing rights (Chapter 6), and ultimately to the adoption of customary land as a category in their imagination and future aspirations for development. By leasing parcels of land to inquiring "outsiders" since the early-1970s, the Vir Kairak had unknowingly participated in the process of commodifying their own land (cf. Li 2014a). For them these leases had little to do with commodity transactions and more with the ability to use land as a mediator of relations based upon exchange and circulation of goods (Chapter 1). And it is hardly surprising that in ENB, where the soil is rich and fertile, where fallows regrow rapidly, and places are entangled with stories and people, the Vir Kairak bestowed agency to the land and perceived its capacity to grow things as something intrinsic to it. Thus, for them its economic value was not in its exchangeability but in its productivity and mediation. That is why in recent years the Vir Kairak leased half of their customary land to an oil palm company, believing that it would reveal their landownership, establish relations with the state and "powerful outsiders," generate and circulate wealth, and bring development to them (Chapters 4 and 5).

"Development"

For many years the provincial government of East New Britain has asked why the Baining people have been unable to procure the social and economic development long enjoyed by their Tolai neighbours. In 1991, they even designed and commissioned anthropological research to look into this issue. The Tolai-dominated

provincial government had framed a model of a “successful ethnic group” and inquired how the Baining fit into it. It argued that ethnic groups that were successful had 1) a clear and highly valued sense of identity, 2) took pride in and displayed their traditional culture, and 3) had the ability to adapt and turn to their own advantage the vast economic and political changes that had taken place in the lives of their members (Rohatynskyj 1992: 6). Despite the good intentions behind this project, and the government’s efforts to solve ENB’s inequality problem, their model clearly drew on popular and scholarly representations of Tolai culture (T. S. Epstein 1968; A. L. Epstein 1969; Salisbury 1970) and notions of class formation in PNG. These have been discussed mainly as a result of colonial and missionary contact, accumulation of capital within certain groups, differences in access to formal education and major development projects, cash cropping, and various types of commodities (see (Errington and Gewertz 1995; Gewertz and Errington 1999; Foster 1999). In this way, government and NGO rhetoric about the Baining have further extended the colonial legacies of inter-ethnic hierarchy and dominance on the island (see also West 2016). Moreover, the initial design of the provincial study mentioned above maintained that a particular kind of identity was necessary to engage in economic activities and development projects (Rohatynskyj 2001).

Such rhetoric underpinned the link between urban lifestyle, economic prowess, and modern identity in opposition to the “backwardness” of rural hinterland dwellers. They reinforced the premises of improbability upon which planned development was framed, and the boundaries between those who need to be developed and those who would do the developing (Pigg 1992; Li 2007). And the scholarly work on development has long shown that projects aimed at understanding and empowering “underdeveloped” communities have in fact amplified the existing social differences (or created new ones) that justified development interventions (Escobar 1984, 1995; Pigg 1993; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Cornwall et al. 2007). In this way, Ferguson (1990) famously showed, poverty was transformed into a developmental issue rather than one of political concern. In the 1990s the development paradigms saw a shift towards notions of “empowerment,” “self-reliance,” and “participation” that sought

to tackle poverty by incorporating underdeveloped populations into the capitalist market and spurring local entrepreneurship. This “capacity building” discourse also marked a shift from *government* to *governance*, increasing the power of non-state actors (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992) and justified the removal of the state from the economy, whilst empowerment came to signify individualised pursuits for profit and participation in the competitive market (Cornwall and Eade 2010). Moreover, within this discourse, ideas about small-scale “community development” became integral to national and international agendas aimed at preventing rural to urban migration, and optimising the input of environmental and financial resources required by various projects that could provide sufficient output to elevate the socioeconomic situation of the communities involved (Makim 2002; van Meijl 2011). In the light of these articulations within government and NGO circles, the Baining lack of development came to be explained not so much as the failure of the state as it was the failure of the people to assert themselves in the market and make economically rational decisions that could alleviate their living conditions.

This thesis takes into account these developments and agrees with other scholars’ interpretations about the Baining’s own internalisation of their negative representation (K. Neumann 1992a; Fajans 1997) as well as inability to find “a forum where they could objectify their cultural selves to their benefit” (Rohatynskyj 2001: 32), which have amplified their feeling of shame and inadequacy. However, I also argue that the apparent failure of the Baining to assert themselves has been inherently a display of their virtue of *vorvāt*. Moreover, I suggest that Vir Kairak’s experience of *vorvāt* can be linked to Povinelli’s (2011) articulation of “endurance.” As the Vir Kairak found themselves in a position of precarity and uncertainty regarding their living arrangements, i.e. they had to live and make gardens within a territory that customarily belonged to the Uramot Baining and the Taulil people, whilst their own ancestral ground had been occupied by Tolai and Sepik settlements and cocoa blocks, their emphasis on work, gardening, giving, cooperation, and hiding, which I show in Chapter 1, are all guided by *vorvāt* and expressed in terms of virtuous behaviour. I suggest that these can be read as components of their endurance within the material

and social conditions created by their dispossession, marginalisation, and representation as underdeveloped people who lack aspiration (cf. Appadorai 2004), whilst in fact their capacity to endure through *vorvāt* has been a means to fulfil their aspirations for a stronger and more developed community. Povinelli's articulation of "endurance" as a temporally continuous act, without a beginning or an end is important for my account here. Put in such terms, "endurance" is an active process that suggests both a form of living and of resisting to give up (to be exhausted). Therefore, the enduring subjects are not simply "suffering subjects" (Robbins 2013), reacting to the conditions they find themselves in. Rather, they are creatively negotiating their place within the wider society and market relations.

Furthermore, rather than looking at the ways in which notions of development create difference and domination, my thesis explores how people themselves are concerned with this project by means of making and revealing themselves as a specific kind of people, in order to draw "development" to their community. According to my Baining interlocutors, the Tolai were able to achieve higher social and economic development as a result of their close relations with the colonial administrations and later by becoming the provincial government themselves, thus ensuring the flow of resources into their own settlements, and providing education, training, and government posts for their children. But the Baining also found the assertiveness of most Tolai as too aggressive and inappropriate. This was also visible in their encounters and the relationships they established with a number of Tolai who lived in and near Tavis. That is, while the Tolai who were more modest and reserved had won their Baining neighbours' respect (*gutārār*), the ones who seemed more self-confident were often looked at with disapproval and suspicion, and even associated with sorcery attacks. The thesis thus offers a new insight into the study of development by asking how it is that people who are evaluated by development agents as lacking skills to enter the capitalist market can ever gain social and economic development.

The thesis starts from the position that “development” means different things for different actors and that ideas about the means by which it can be achieved are shaped not only by dominant discourses but also by local understandings of personhood, sociality, and agency. Among the Vir Kairak “development” meant a number of things: 1) the development of communities through education and economic activity, 2) the development of landscapes by creating agricultural zones, 3) the development of rural areas through infrastructure and roads, 4) the development of the province and the country with economic growth and sincere politicians, and 5) the development of people through work, cooperation, and Christian worship.

In the 1950s, the colonial administration in PNG shifted its efforts from providing “relief” (through war compensations, for example) to promoting community development and economic uplifting, framing progress as its goal. Progress, however, as Arendt (1998) has shown, has for some time now been equated with the world’s capitalist history. Thus, Büscher (2015) argues that in its dominant articulation development progress has been seen as capitalist progress. And even in the 21st century, with the emphasis on the social and ecological aspects of sustainable development,¹² many development agents continue to focus on and promote the kind of change that supposedly can deliver capital and supposedly solve the world’s poverty issue (World Bank 2002a, 2002b; Collier 2007). Within this discourse we have seen the intensification of the search for natural resources, especially following the global financial crisis in 2007-2008. And an increasing need for many Global South countries, including PNG, to link their development with the expansion of their mining, fossil fuel, and agriculture sectors. This thesis explores local issues relating to the recently established oil palm sector in ENB as a result of growing worldwide interest in the plant. PNG’s Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030 has suggested that oil palm offers the best and most profitable way to increase the country’s agricultural output and provide better income and job opportunities (GovPNG 2010). Moreover, it has been shown that when left with a decision about agricultural development,

¹² As demonstrated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

usually the scales tip towards oil palm plantation projects that provide instant benefits to both local communities and the state in the form of improved infrastructure and tax income (Eilenberg 2015). In PNG, foreign companies' ability to deliver infrastructure and services in return for tax credit from the national government has resulted in their evaluation by local people as entities that operate like the state (Banks 2009).

Similarly, in ENB, the Baining people chose to accept having oil palm plantations on their customary land, believing that these establishments would finally lead to the building of roads and other permanent infrastructure such as schools, churches, and medical outposts in their rural settlements. As I have mentioned earlier the notion that the roads stopped where the Tolai settlements ended, illustrated the central role of roads in people's political imaginary and their link to modernity, progress, and economic opportunities (Beer and Church 2019). Like elsewhere in the world, roads were the visible infrastructural achievements of governments. Oil palm plantations required a large scale and good network of wide roads to transport the palm fruit to nearby mills and ports. Yet the Vir Kairak considered the company and the palm not so much as agents but "tools" for development, and bestowed the agency to deliver development to their land through its productive capacity and ability to reveal and connect people. The land could grow things and had drawn the company to ENB; the land grew the oil palm, which in turn revealed the Vir Kairak as landowners and provided the company with the money to build infrastructure. Therefore, this thesis makes a contribution not only to the wider investigation of objectification, commodification, and marketisation of nature, but also to the relationships between capitalist ideology and the non-capitalist environment (see also Benson and Kirsch 2010; Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012), and the capacity and agency of rural people in capitalist frontiers (Tsing 2005; Gillespie 2012; Li 2014a; C. Lund 2018). The thesis also shows the significance of presenting specific kinds of identity within capitalist encounters that also expose the multiple values and meanings attached to notions of belonging and landownership.



Figure 2 - Kokopo Market with Baining masks images on the wall



Figure 3 - Abandoned cocoa bean dryer in Tavor

Fieldwork

"One could read hundreds of books about a place and still not know it until physically being there."

The second time I thought this was as I rode in the backseat of a pickup truck from Tokua airport to Kokopo, East New Britain Province, and looked at the vast green plantations stretching on both sides of the road. First, there were the giant coconut palms with their crowns high above the ground, as if on the lookout for those who dare to enter their forest. Second, were the young ochroma (balsa) trees that stood in rows of hundreds. Little did I know that they were only there to be sacrificed for some child's school project, a hobbyist's airplane model, fishing crankbait, and various toys and sports equipment, all on the other side of the world. This "silent symmetry," as Tsing (2005) has called it, simultaneously natural and unnatural, overwhelmed my senses and left me wondering. How did people relate to these manmade forests? How did the real tropical forests look? And how could we talk about visibility in such a rich scenery where I found it so intensely difficult to focus my eyes?

This was East New Britain: a place of fertile volcanic soil and lush forests, rumbling rivers and beautiful coastlines, with magnificent mountains and mysterious cave networks. The north-eastern coasts hosted flourishing Tolai settlements and the urban centres of Kokopo and Rabaul, while the inland bush was dotted with Baining gardens and hamlets that usually clustered near the provincial roads. And in spite of all the plantations and logging that had transformed the landscape since its German annexation in 1884, East New Britain had retained much of its majestic green beauty. But recently a new tree had entered the province: the oil palm. This tree was different from the coconut and cocoa that could grow together and which local people had embraced for many years. The oil palm, they were told, required a massive scale and could only grow on its own. And step by step, land deed after land deed, it began its takeover of this vibrant landscape – particularly within the Baining region.

When I first sought to work with the Baining, I imagined that it was not going to be easy, as several anthropologists¹³ before me had noted the difficulty in building rapport or having any conversation with them. But as a naïve student, I thought that this was probably due to the researchers' own shortcomings rather than the people's general attitude, and that if I was really open and friendly, I could easily make relationships at my fieldsite. Little did I know that I would spend months either blaming myself or my interlocutors for our inability to build effective rapport that would enable the Baining to speak and act freely in my presence and I could finally observe the real social life of Tavir.

Tavir was an excellent fieldsite for several reasons. First, almost half of the community opposed the oil palm plantation project and was involved in the ongoing lawsuits against the company and the Kairak Incorporated Land Group (ILG). Second, Tavir had significantly benefited from its geographical location and proximity to Gaulim village – the centre of the Methodist mission in this region – and the provincial road connecting it to ENB's urban centres, which had boosted cocoa production in this area. This presented an opportunity to look at the rich history of Baining relations with the mission and their involvement in the local and global markets. Third, Tavir was the only Kairak Baining settlement at the time that still performed mask dances and its men proudly announced their ability to hold on to (*holim*) and protect (*protektim*) *kastom*. Even the ward member (village councillor), who had converted to Pentecostalism and had stopped dancing, said that their masks were the best in the province when I initially visited the settlement. Indeed, besides their usual participation at the National Mask Festival in Kokopo, Tavir's dancers had also performed at the Pacific Festival of Arts in 1980 and the Melanesian Arts Festival in 2014, both held in Port Moresby. The settlement also regularly received tourist groups who wanted to see "a *real* Baining fire dance in the *traditional* setting". The prominence of Tavir's masks invited research about their role in the national and provincial economy, in forming Baining social identity, and notions about

¹³ Gregory Bateson (1932), Jeremy Pool (2008), Jane Fajans (1997).

nationhood and belonging. Finally, a large portion of Tavir's residents had converted to Pentecostal Christianity, which associated some forms of *kastom* with Satan, and urged people to abandon the old ways. This offered a chance to explore the relationships between different denominations, their views on the value of *kastom*, and masks' configuration within a changing economic and religious setting.

After asking the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council and Tavir's ward member for permission to conduct research in this settlement, my husband and I were allocated a *vātka* (house for sleeping) and a *vātki* (house for cooking) to rent for the duration of our stay. These were built and owned by Tavir's volunteer primary school teacher, Noah, who had recently married and built a new house near his gardens. On the first morning after we moved, Noah's father, Joshua, came and announced that by residing in his hamlet we have effectively become his children. He placed his palm on his chest and said in Tok Pisin: "*Nau bai yu kolim mi: meam, na misis bilong mi: nan. Nau mipela papa na mama bilong yupela, bikos yu stap long haus bilong mi. Yu stap long graun bilong mi.*" (From now on you will call me: father, and my wife: mother. Now we are your father and mother, because you stay in my house. You stay on my ground.) This was the very first instance where I had some sense about how Vir Kairak kinship was made not just through blood or food, but also through co-habitation on the same ground.¹⁴

In the months that followed, my relationship with Joshua and his family grew deeper as we shared the same hamlet and interacted with each other on a daily basis. They became my key informants, friends, and teachers, who taught me about Vir Kairak history and *kastom*, and shed light onto what I observed and learned about the community's everyday lives, relationships, conflicts, and aspirations. And I was very lucky to have ended up living with them, as I later learned that my host father was

¹⁴ People became kin by living together. Adopted children were incorporated into the family by their residence as much as the parent's provision of food. Hence, when an adopted child spent more time in its biological parent's hamlet, the adoptive parents expressed that their relationship was not strong enough. Co-habitation with visiting relatives also formed stronger kinship bonds, and resulted in feelings of loss and sadness when they left.

the leader of the mask dancers (the man most knowledgeable about *kastom*) at the time, which offered very easy access to the men's house and masks' secret knowledge. Due to the growing power of the Pentecostal churches and the ongoing disputes about *kastom*, Joshua felt that by recording their stories and practices he would not only protect *kastom* but also show its value as something recognised by foreign scientists as "*important na gutpela*" (important and good). Moreover, he was also one of the key people in the lawsuit against the oil palm plantation and argued that the land was never Kairak's to begin with. My interest in the issue and sympathy for his stance resulted in long conversations about the plantation and their land, which he hoped would make their way into my "*bikpela buk*" (big book, i.e. doctoral thesis) and offer recognition of their land and clan, as well as help their case against the company and the ILG. Without his captivating stories and extensive knowledge about *kastom* and the land, little of this research would have been possible.

But in the beginning, apart from Joshua's stories about *kastom* and Noah's Kairak language lessons, getting to know people and learning about their community was not easy at all. For almost eight months I felt desperate and even angry towards my interlocutors for their unwillingness to speak with me. After the initial period of curiosity in the first couple of weeks when everyone in Tavir came to have a look at the two white researchers, suddenly they were all gone and started to avoid us. Even my host family seemed more distant. During this period, I sat in my small shed, where I worked during the day, and kept hearing distant chatter in the vernacular that repeated the words *golungi* (white female) and *golunga* (white male), and became very annoyed that people talked *about* us but not *with* us.

After a couple of months of visiting each hamlet, going to church, and explaining to the elders, pastors, and ward committee members that everyone in Tavir had valuable knowledge about their culture and way of life, and that I wanted to speak with men and women, *kastom* practitioners or not, young and old, Methodist and Pentecostal, I finally began to develop some rapport and have meaningful conversations with several people (who eventually became my key informants). This time, however, I

had to carefully craft my questions and ensure that my informants could say what they thought rather than what they thought I wanted to hear. The latter was not much of an issue actually, because people preferred to say that they did not know the answer (even if I simply tried to clarify whether I had correctly understood a part of a story, e.g. whether a spirit entered a stone or sat on top of it) and that I, as a “*golumgi*” and “scientist,” knew better than them. So typically, the answer I got was of the sort: “*Mi no save. Yu save tru. Mi no gat save. Yu tasol gat save, bikos yu wait scientist*” (I don’t know. You know the truth. I don’t have knowledge. But you have knowledge, because you are a white scientist). To which I responded that they should not think of me in this way; that they were the real experts of their own lives and culture, and that I came to learn from them and be their student, because they were as unique and important as anyone else in the world.

But as much as I tried to convey this and form relationships of equality with my interlocutors, I could always feel that uncomfortable power dynamic due to the colour of my skin, my education, and access to money and commodities. In fact, this was true not only for my relationships with the Baining, but also for those I established with the Tolai and Taulil. And whenever this became noticeable in my conversations, I thought about what my guide and good friend ToJohn Wargul had told me on the first day we met and reiterated a few times afterwards: that in East New Britain people still showed respect to the Europeans.

The hardest thing to comprehend was the shyness my interlocutors displayed whenever we were together. Even after a year and a half, friends with whom I had done numerous things together and conversed for hours, still blushed and giggled, and shied away when I talked to them. Others preferred not to show up at all to interviews, or to hide in their houses whenever I visited their hamlets. But by the end of my fieldwork, I realised that *vorvūt* was an intrinsic part of the Vir Kairak social life, which not only shaped their relationships with others but also their self-image, identity, notions of authority, community, and strategies for recognition of themselves and their land.

In terms of research operationalisation, I began by looking at the relationship between Vir Kairak masking practices and notions of personhood (see figure 4). My initial line of inquiry involved what masks do *to*, *for*, *with*, and *against* the person, and what meaning people attributed to them. I listed the following areas of study as entry points to answering my research question: kinship, notions about the body and humanness, the efficacy of material culture, and relationships with the land. Second, I set out to collect data about the masks and learn how and where they are made, and by whom; the setting, organisation, and components of their dances; and the myths and stories about their origin and people's spirits encounters.

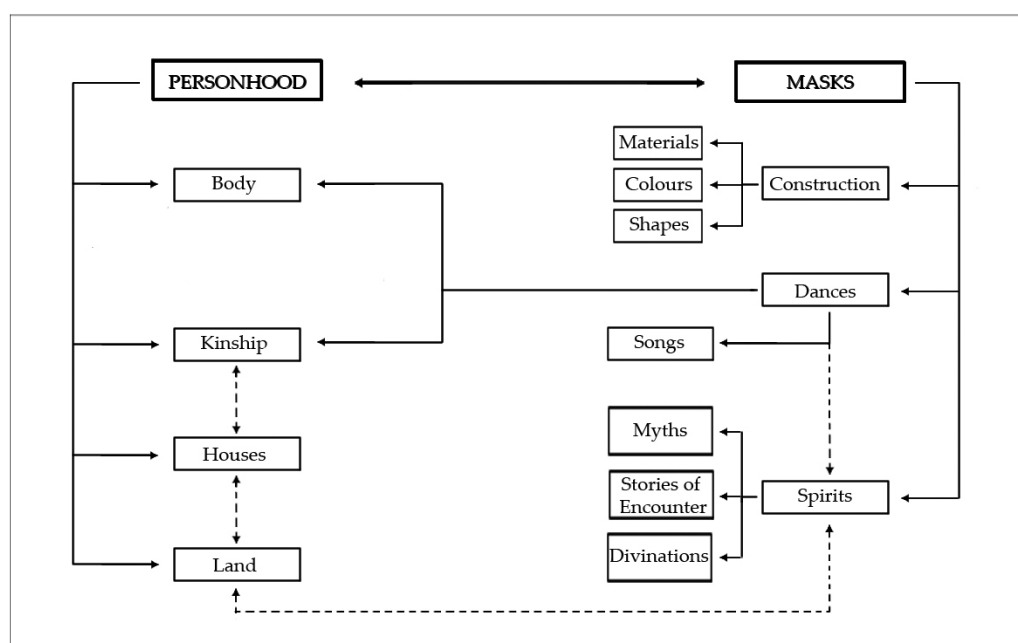


Figure 4 - Operationalisation diagram of the research

The research was carried out in two phases. First, I spent a little under a month in Port Moresby, carrying out archival research and collection review at the National Museum and Gallery of PNG, and conducting interviews with museum staff, tourism agents, local hotel owners, and bureaucrats. The decision to conduct museum research was shaped by my preliminary research and experience working on the Pacific Collection Review project at the National Museum of Scotland carried out by Eve Haddow and Chantal Knowles. This work had showed me how the material qualities of artefacts offer insight about the context of their use and meaning for the

people who use and see them, as well as inform about differences in their making across time and region. Additionally, the stories told by museum staff and members of the tourism board and PNG cultural commission, directed my attention to the ongoing disputes about the cultural and national value of *kastom*.

The second phase of the research involved a short stay of several weeks in the provincial centre of ENB, and 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Tavar, where I immersed myself in everyday Vir Kairak life. This included observation and inquiry about people's kinship relations, religious beliefs, notions of belonging and community, birth and death rites, gardening cooperation, *kastom* obligations, and relations of *vorvāt*, respect (*gutārār*), and avoidance.

My methodology entailed the integration of various methods such as participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, document analyses, participatory visual methods, collection of life histories, myths, and songs, participatory map making, and kinship interviews and chart making (figure 5). Where appropriate, and after obtaining consent, I recorded interviews, stories, and songs. Partial transcription was done in the field, however the majority of the data was transcribed, coded, and analysed after returning to Edinburgh.

Throughout the study I took detailed field notes, and produced short Tok Pisin and Kairak dictionaries. When writing my field notes I tried to provide as much "thick description" as possible. Drawing from Morse's (1994) suggestion that to achieve saturation an ethnographic study should include between 30 to 50 interviews, I collected data from a total of 57 people with whom I met and carried out conversations and semi-structured interviews more regularly across Port Moresby, Kokopo, and Tavar. Therefore, I hope sample size is large enough to ensure most perceptions presented in this thesis offer a good representation of the field. My research in Tavar eventually ended with fourteen key informants who shared with me their life histories, beliefs, and aspirations; told me Vir Kairak's stories, myths and songs; taught me how to cook, hunt, build shelter, plant and harvest peanut and sweet potato; shared their worries and suspicions; explained why they acted in certain ways

(e.g. *vorvāt*); and from time to time shared some gossip or complained about their relatives and neighbours.

Of specific note is my access to men's secret knowledge, which as I mentioned earlier, was mainly possible through my host father and male relatives. These men shared privileged information with me, which I was sworn to never discuss or reveal to the women and children. In this thesis, I have tried to keep this promise and do not discuss the secret stories or things I saw in the men's house. Nevertheless, in Chapter 2 I share information that has already been made public by George Corbin (1982, 1988) in several of his published works. Finally, my analysis of what donning and dancing with traditional masks entail was shaped by my conversations with *kastom* practitioners and Pentecostal men alike. The latter were particularly helpful because, even though they involved certain Christian theology, they offered insight about how local people themselves understood the process and experience of being masked.

Chapters Overview

The thesis is organised into three parts. Part I explores the changing context of Vir Kairak social life through their gardening, masking, and religious practices and consists of three chapters.

Chapter 1 explores the morality of exchange and circulation of goods among the Vir Kairak. It demonstrates how certain modes of giving and reciprocity enabled people to lead a "good life." It explores gardening as a collective activity that instantiates relations of feeding and giving. Specifically, through its demand for intense labour and cooperation, my interlocutors understood gardening as an essential component in the constitution of persons, families, and strong community. Through this example the chapter illustrates Vir Kairak ideas about the shamefulness of eating and the value of feeding and giving for social relations and aspirations for development. It argues that the importance placed on gardening, feeding, and cooperation as opposed to consuming and accumulating, is grounded in ideas about survival as a clan.

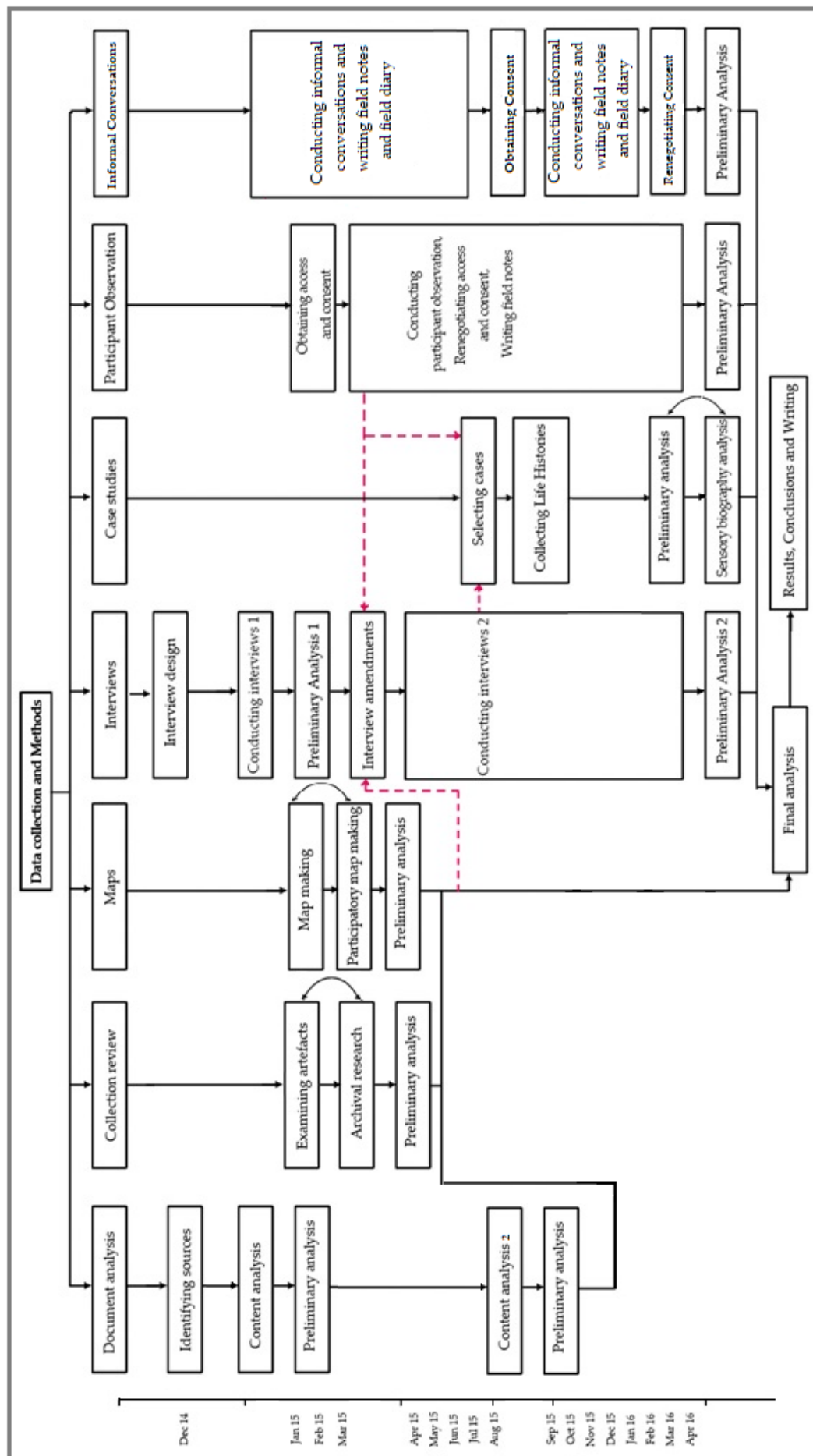


Figure 5 - Methodology Diagram

The succeeding two chapters explore the ways in which ideas of change (*senis*) have shaped Vir Kairak strategies to gain recognition and draw tourists, performance invitations, and development projects to themselves. Chapter 2 describes how Vir Kairak traditional masks and mask dances embody people's relationships with their land and each other, as well as offer a source of pride for and link to a Vir Kairak identity they try to maintain. It illustrates men's efforts to protect and preserve their *kastom*, while at the same time they try to "modernise" and "make it better." It argues that Vir Kairak masks offer a way for the people to become more visible and draw resources to their community through their ability to "captivate," "empower," and "enchant."

Chapter 3 explores the denominational schism in Tavir and proposes that Christianity has played a significant role in people's acceptance of the oil palm project by framing it as a blessing from God. It argues that Vir Kairak beliefs about change as something that occurs from inside and development being that which is received from the outside, had shaped their strategies to make themselves into specific kind of persons in order to elicit relationships with significant others.

The following three chapters in Part II illustrate Vir Kairak relationships with the land through the story of the oil palm. Chapter 4 discusses local notions of covering the land with cultivated crops as a way to reveal and fend off migrant settlers and transfer control over it to the *real* customary landowners. It shows that despite their success in obtaining the customary land title deed, the Vir Kairak had to establish some sort of vegetal infrastructure on their land to assert ownership. That is why after the CPB contagion, a number of Kairak men agreed to lease and transform the land into a large oil palm plantation as a strategy to reclaim and preserve it for future generations.

Moving on Chapter 5 offers further discussion on Vir Kairak attitudes towards this new crop and its capacity to create a vegetal infrastructure and bring in capital. It argues that due to the plantation's failure to remove the migrant settlements, the rhetoric in support of the project had to shift from that of asserting landownership to one that primarily emphasised its link to development. It describes how there were

two dominant views among the Vir Kairak: those who understood the oil palm project as a way to gain recognition from the state and other non-state actors; and those who believed it could offer them autonomy from the government by delivering everything they needed. Eventually, the chapter reveals that both positions held the land in higher regard to the company and the state and claimed that the agency to deliver development was in fact an inherent part of the land.

Chapter 6 examines the Opposition narratives against the oil palm project and how people framed the main problems brought by the plantation. It argues that clans are a colonial invention that have become essential in order to make claims over the land, and that by forming clan ILGs (Incorporated Land Groups) and disposing of customary land through modern ways, the Vir Kairak were also experiencing changes within their leadership structure, whereby the oil palm project had given some men “real” decision-making authority.

Finally, in Part III, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis with a discussion of vorvāt within local contexts and mask dances, in order to show how it moulds and presents certain identities in certain contexts and “eclipses” the relationships that compose them. The chapter illustrates that experiencing vorvāt also involved certain awareness about and regard for others. It argues that despite its apparent weakening effect, the Vir Kairak considered vorvāt a virtue that revealed people in the appropriate form within various relations. Both vorvāt and hiding shaped the way in which my interlocutors wanted others to recognise them for particular qualities, attributes, and relationships.

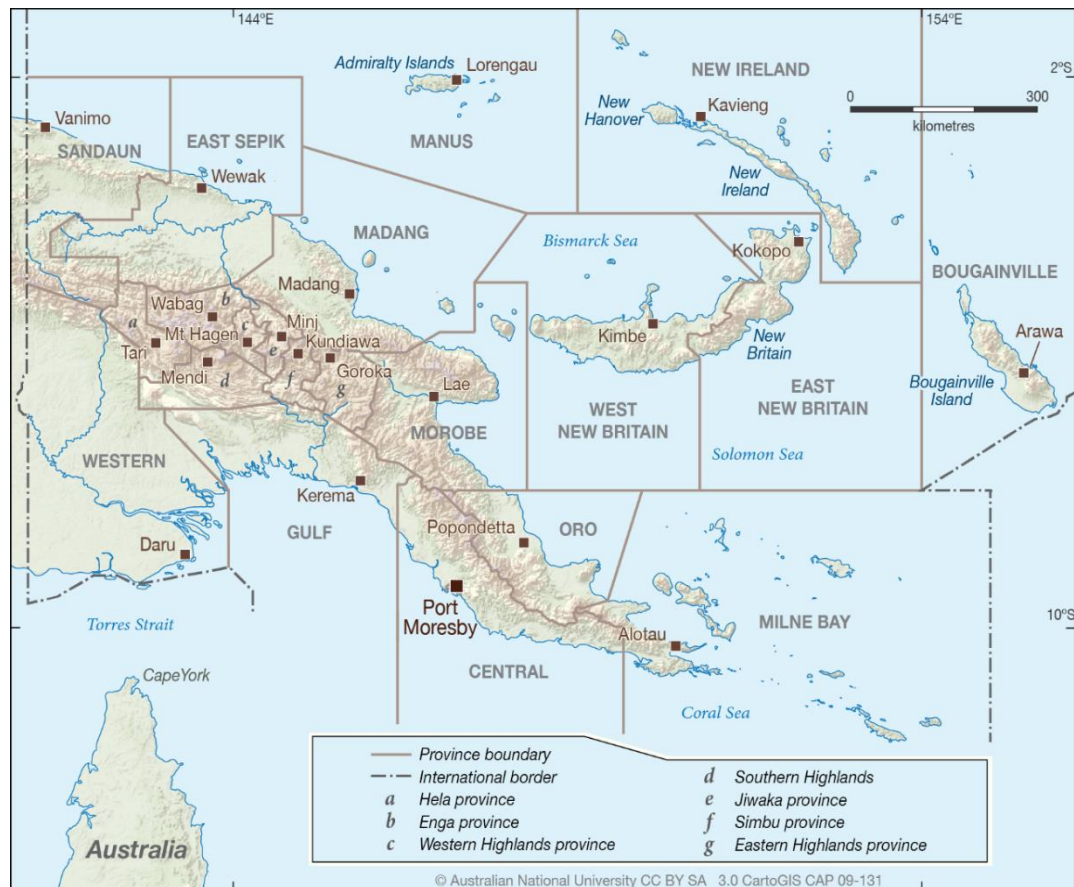


Figure 6 - Map of PNG Provinces, reproduced with permission, © Australian National University, College of Asia and the Pacific, CartoGIS Services

PART I

CHAPTER 1

GARDENS, MONEY, AND THE SHAME OF EATING

Ilias, Noah, and I sat under the shade of a small flimsy shed, where the old man spent most of the day. Ilias's eyes lit with delight when I said I wanted to hear and record their story. He began to recount the events of their resettlement, pausing after every couple of sentences to allow Noah to translate into Tok Pisin.

Before, our ancestors lived in the bush. We lived in a place called Qrănyit, in the North – a place near Vunapaldin. We fought with the Qaquet, and we fought with the Uramot. Always fighting. Then a Qaquet chief took us into his settlement, in a place called Rangulit. We became Catholic. In a year or so we went back to the bush. We went to Qănqănit, which is in Ramăsaga. We continued to fight with the Qaquet and the Uramot. We fought, we fought, we fought... And now, we were ten families only. We lived in the bush. Big bush, with big trees. Not like here. After second big war [WWII], another pastor came – Pastor Sakiat Vugalia – a Tolai pastor from Toma. He had a thought. He went to the big-men of Gaulim and Taulil and told them he wanted to bring us here. He asked them for land for us. He saw we were only a few people left – only ten families. He thought we would die in the bush. He saw that we spoke similar language to some other Baining who lived here. So, he went to Kokopo and started a missionary court. He called the patrol officer (*kiap*). A white man – master D'Arcey (*master Dasi*). They came to Gaulim with his two police officers – Alakam and Peu. The big-men of Gaulim and Taulil gave some of their land. Then, master D'Arcey sent his police officers to the bush. They came to Qănqănit with guns. They told us to gather and go to Gaulim, so we came to Gaulim. They told us we must now live here because we are a few people – only ten families. They told us, after some time, when we are many, we can go back. Master D'Arcey was angry. He scolded our elder (*morka*). He told him we were very few people; that we were going to die. We were only ten families.

This story was one of the first things I heard when I moved to Tavir to live with the Vir Kairak Baining. It was probably the one thing I heard most frequently throughout my fieldwork. Told and retold by different people in various ways and different contexts, it always returned to the fact that there were only ten surviving families and that the ground (*graun*) on which they lived today was not theirs. While relations with the land and conceptions of landownership were not something I was interested in before commencing my fieldwork in East New Britain, I could not ignore their importance for my interlocutors. Their resettlement story showed how “being few” and “becoming many” in order “to take back their land” were principle ideas deeply embedded in Vir Kairak’s vision of themselves. Moreover, just weeks after I moved into the hamlet of my host family, I realised that much of social life revolved around issues about the land, while gardening (or work), feeding, and giving played an important role in people’s capacity to build social relations and their identity as Vir Kairak (see also Gillison 1993; Fajans 1997; Leach 2003).

The Vir Kairak used to reside in the north, near Ataliklikun Bay, but as their story reveals, after World War II, the Methodist mission and the Australian administration resettled the ten surviving families to Tavir. Everyone, young and old, knew about the pastor who found them hiding in the bush and told the *kiaps* to move them near Gaulim, where they could live with other Baining people who spoke the same language (or a similar dialect). They recounted how the *kiaps* had told them that in order “to survive,” (*long survive* or *kisim laip istap*) they had to stay there and “build a strong community” (*wokim strongpela kominiti*) (cf. Rollason 2014). The term *kominiti* (community) often came up in daily conversations about activities such as church meetings, money raising, tending the common areas (cemetery, community hall, etc.), and organising the Saturday market of garden produce. It was also frequently used in speeches delivered at community meetings, church sermons, mortuary rites, and village courts. In all of these, either directly or indirectly the speakers tried to prevent potential conflicts within the settlement by emphasising the significance of having a strong community in order to survive as a clan, a Christian fellowship, or Baining culture. To make a point, they often contrasted the way their ancestors lived in hiding

and perpetual war (a period they described as “darkness” – *tudak* [TP] or *bānangi* [K]), with their life as a community now and warned that this was only possible when people participated in various community activities and assisted others. Thus, just as High (2016) has observed in Amazonia, for the Vir Kairak *kominiti* was an ongoing process of engaging productively with other families and neighbouring peoples.¹⁵ Moreover, similar to Rollason’s (2014) discussion of Panapompom (elsewhere in PNG), it appeared that by introducing the Vir Kairak to the idea of community, both the mission and administration had attempted to direct people’s attention away from the fact that they were occupying someone else’s land and replace their traditional mode of connectedness to the land with that of *kominiti*. Differently, however, for my interlocutors building a community provided means to take back their ancestral ground, and thus, offered a new mode for relating to the landscape they claimed through genealogies, myths, stories, and so on.

The aim of this chapter is to show the links between a number of things concerning Vir Kairak social life, community ties, and the morality of exchange and circulation of goods. My interlocutors’ notions about building a strong community went hand in hand with their vision of leading a “good life” (*gutpela laip*), which they attributed not only to the development of infrastructure and services, or community prosperity, but also to their own hard work, cooperation, generosity, education, and religious piety. They valued gardening as an activity of feeding and cooperation that produced social persons and families, formed social relations, and built a strong community. In contrast, they perceived eating (consumption) and accumulating for oneself as shameful acts that weakened the community. Thus, they often emphasised the importance of generosity through giving one’s things and gardening labour to others, and how this made them different from the other Baining people.

¹⁵ Tavar’s geographical location has also allowed for numerous NGO and Mission-led community development projects to take place in this settlement. Several residents were or had been taking microloans and participating in various training programmes and workshops in agriculture, accounting, and entrepreneurship that aimed to raise people’s living standards. When people talked about these, they consistently reiterated the need for “community development” and “community building.” Their involvement in such projects and activities, it seems has enforced ideas about *kominiti*.

By discussing Vir Kairak engagements in exchange, this chapter illustrates that similar to feeding and giving, for my interlocutors, *vorvāt* was a virtue (see also Widlok 2004), which people cultivated in order to live a good life (Laidlaw 2014; Mattingly 2012). Since consumption and accumulation of things for oneself was wrong (*nogut*), people felt and displayed *vorvāt* when they ate in public or when someone pointed that something (e.g. basket, blouse, hat) they had was nice or in abundance and in effect asked them to give it to them. My hosts explained that through *vorvāt* people showed their *gutārār* (respect) for the community, their commitment in building a strong community, and their moral character (which involved not only their beliefs, but also feelings, bodies, and everyday activities, as this and the following two chapters will show).

I also propose that hiding played an important role in Vir Kairak's ability to both display their *vorvāt* by partially (or visibly) hiding themselves (as the example in the prologue of this thesis has shown) and keep things for themselves by hiding them from others. Therefore, examining hiding can offer insight into the dynamics of people's relationship to the community in their conformation and resistance to its moral rules.

Gardening

To understand the significance of giving, feeding, and cooperation among the Vir Kairak, it is first necessary to understand their relationship with gardening.

In Tavar, people worked in their gardens almost every day. The village itself was renowned for the extremely long periods people spent there. They woke up early, ate breakfast, and went to the gardens where they worked until noon. From midday until early afternoon, when the day's heat made it intolerable even to breathe, people hid in their kitchen houses or slept beneath large trees near the gardens. In the afternoon, either heavy rain fell, and everyone stayed in the hamlets, or the sun hid behind white clouds, and they returned to their gardens. Typically, work ended at dusk, and the hamlets were once again vibrant with laughter, songs, stories, and the smells of

smoke and sweet potato soup. Other nights, when the sky was clear and the full moon lit the ground, many went back to their gardens around midnight after taking a short nap. Such nights were rare and the Vir Kairak loved them, for they could work in the cool air.

At the time of my research, most people sowed mainly sweet potato for subsistence and had some bananas, tapioca, and *pitpit* (*Setaria palmifolia*). Households sometimes owned a taro garden or two, but more common was the Chinese taro known in East New Britain as *singapo*. There were also gardens with leafy greens such as *aibika* (*Abelmoschus manihot*), *karakap* (*Solanum nigrum*), and *choko* (*Sechium edule*), which were entirely managed by the women and usually sowed near the hamlet or over a section of an old sweet potato garden. As a cash crop the Vir Kairak had recently turned to peanut, since the Cocoa Pod Borer moth (CPB) devastated their entire cocoa blocks in 2006.

When people talked about their gardens, they associated some with the married couple of a household, others with a particular child, and the leafy greens gardens with the mother. If the couple had an unmarried son(s) who had moved to a boys' house, they still mentioned their son's garden as part of the household. This "ownership" of a garden, I argue, had both social and economic value, and played an important role in making Vir Kairak persons (*ma rāvek*) and families (*lanivini*). Every child aged seven or over had at least one garden. Surprised by this, I asked my interlocutors why children would have separate gardens, when it was clear that they could not manage them on their own. They explained that as the mother and father looked after their children and "fed them," the children too fed their parents with their own gardens. While the gardens' products remained within the household, they were made to appear as the outcome of a particular person – a child who "feeds" the family (cf. Kahn 1986).

My informants argued that food transformed both one's body and relationships (J. F. Weiner 1982; Fajans 1988), and through feeding people became related (Carsten

1997).¹⁶ Similar to Rappaport's (1968) observation for the Maring people of PNG, who incorporated their pigs into the family through feeding and care, my Vir Kairak family suggested that their pigs were also their children because they fed them. As my host brother Benjim put it: "I give Mukam [name of piglet] food, that makes him my child. He is like Elis [his daughter], and she calls him brother." As people said that parents fed their children, and later the children fed their parents, pigs too fed the family when they grew big and were consumed.

My host sisters-in-law described gardening as a productive activity that involved feeding and lending one's labour to others. Both of these played a significant role in making socialised persons and social ties within the community (see also Fajans 1997). Gardening was organised as a collective activity performed by all the residents of a hamlet with some assistance from neighbours, relatives, and friends. Thus, everyone spent a lot of time gardening because almost every day there was some gardening scheduled for a particular household whom the others helped. One could say that in Tavir, people's daily lives were structured around a highly functioning system of household-based gardening cooperation. While scholars like Foster (1995) have argued that in PNG the household emerged as an economic unit from the influence of colonial and post-colonial processes of commodification,¹⁷ my informants

¹⁶ The link between feeding and making persons has been widely discussed in ethnographies of Melanesia, Amazonia and Southeast Asia. In these contexts, scholars have used the term "dividual" to illustrate the composite nature of personhood, whereby people are open to the influence and incorporation of parts from others (Marriott 1976; Daniel 1984; M. Strathern 1988; A. C. Taylor 1996; Viveiros de Castro 2004b, 2004a). Self-definition, it has been shown, is often dependent on the process of absorbing the qualities of others (Gregor and Tuzin 2001). In these societies, scholars have illustrated that especially sharing food and eating together make kinship (J. F. Weiner 1982; Carsten 1995, 1997; Thomas 1999; Gow 2001; Vilaça 2005). In Papua New Guinea, in societies such as the Daribi, Melpa, Bena Bena and Garia sharing food is equated with sharing a biogenetic substance (Hogbin and Lawrence 1967; Wagner 1977), and locality or living together as means to create kinship ties (A. J. Strathern 1973; Schieffelin 1976). Fajans (1988, 1997) argues that social reproduction through food giving is parallel to the natural process of biological reproduction among the Northern Baining, who say that their adopted children become their "true" children when they give them food.

¹⁷ He illustrates how in Tanga, New Ireland, this process created a stark opposition between *kastom* (custom) and *bisnis* (business), whereby the household became the locus of commodity relations (the domain *bisnis*) and the matrilineage a unit for non-commodity relations (the domain of *kastom*).

suggested that the household has always been part of their social organisation and that household-based gardening enabled people to build social relationships within the hamlet and to establish themselves as part of an extended family (*lanivini*) and the community.



Figure 7 - Gardens in Tavor

For example, when a married couple sowed a new garden, the man's agnatic relatives usually offered help. Married daughters and neighbours often assisted too, either because they had received some help from the couple or were expecting it in the future. At the end of the day, everyone who contributed received a large bowl of cooked food (and a small amount of garden produce if it was harvest). The more gardening one did for others, the more help they received in their own gardens. My host sisters-in-law spoke of this as "giving work" (*givim wok*) and suggested that people were free to choose whether to offer their labour or not, but usually they did because it was a "good thing" (*gutpela samting*) to do. Similarly, people often remarked with pride that their excessive engagement in gardening ("*wok tumas long*

garden") differentiated Tavir from other Baining settlements: that they were building a strong community because they worked a lot and helped each other in the gardens.

Participating in gardening maintained relations within the hamlet and expressed a person's position within the extended family (*lanivini*) and the community at large. In conversations I had with my host father Joshua and his in-law Pauline, both expressed a parallel notion when talking about the youth, especially boys, who, they claimed, were just "*roun roun tasol*" (strolling in the bush) and "*paulim*" – a Tok Pisin phrase from the English "foul," which people used to denote bad behaviour such as drinking and smoking, or having sexual relations, and not thinking of the community. In fact, my interlocutors said that through marriage people settled down and became more responsible by working in the gardens and thus contributing to the community. They suggested that marriage transformed men from "*paul-man*" to "*garden-man*." Hence, many of the middle-aged and older residents in Tavir had arranged marriages, which were the result of their parents' and uncles' (*akak* – mother's brother) decision that they should begin to contribute to the family and the community, as was Joshua's case. When women spoke about a particular man as a "*garden-man*" they showed their admiration for him for his hard work and ability to give food and his labour to his family and others.

Sometimes, however, people had to request help from others if they knew that few or no people would show up to their gardens (for lack of assistance on their part). As payment to those who came to help, they had to offer some cooked rice and tinned fish or chicken, or pay with state currency (PNG Kina). In particular, bigger meals of mixed store-bought and garden food were given when the requested work involved clearing a bush plot for a new garden (a type of work done only by the men), while smaller meals would suffice when the work required only weeding (work done only by the women). Usually the owner of the garden announced whether he would give rice and meat or money when asking for assistance.

Noah elaborated that if a couple were going to harvest a sweet potato garden the man could tell his brother: "Tomorrow I will harvest my sweet potato garden" or

"Tomorrow you and I will harvest my sweet potato garden." The former informed the brother of the gardening activity and if he wanted to help, he went to harvest the sweet potatoes. Noah reiterated that the decision was left to the brother, although, in most cases he would feel obliged to help. In the latter expression, the man told his brother that they were both going to harvest his garden. This time the man requested help and signalled how he would pay for it afterwards by saying, for example: "Lisa will cook some rice. I will get some meat." This time the brother could not refuse to help because the man's request fell within Vir Kairak's moral system of what has become well-known in anthropology as demand sharing (Peterson 1993)¹⁸ (further discussed below). That is, giving when asked, be that a material object or help, is the appropriate way to behave within a *lanivini* (extended family), especially between brothers who are immediate kin.



Figure 8 - Sorting peanut after harvest

¹⁸ The term was taken up by anthropologists to correct previous propositions that hunter-gatherer societies shared things altruistically. For further information about its use and application in the Pacific region see Musharbash and Barber's (2011) *Ethnography and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge: Essays in honour of Nicolas Peterson*.

Giving and Eating

In a couple of interviews with Baining belonging to the neighbouring Uramot clan, one of whom was with a pastor who had served in Tavar, my informants noted the excessive amount of time Vir Kairak spent in their gardens. The pastor commented that this might be because “they liked to eat too much,” and described the large bowls of food people gave him when he lived in Tavar. Indeed, every time my husband and I received cooked food from our host mother, we were astonished by its amount, yet she kept saying that it was just “a little bit” (*dilini*). Similarly, the food given to everyone who had contributed their labour in the gardens was served in large basins measuring around 40cm in diameter. Large amounts of food were also distributed at celebrations and mourning feasts. But these are the only occasions one could see what other people ate, as eating was done privately within the household’s kitchen. In fact, when people received food, they retreated and ate in solitude. I cannot count the number of times our host mother gave her son Noah a bowl of stew, which he ate far away from everybody, looking listless and uncomfortable. Surprised by this, especially since feeding held such a prominent place in making people and families, I asked why he ate alone or only with his wife. “Because I am ashamed” (*guvorvāt*), said Noah, and he explained that it was “not good” (*nogut*) for others to see him eating.

By that time, I had already learned about the practice of demand sharing in Tavar, and how people typically hid the wild pigs and cassowaries they caught. Such wild meat was cooked in secrecy at night to fend off the requests from others, and small amounts wrapped in leaves were given to close kin in the morning. Similarly, Kahn (1986) has noted that the Wamiran had to share their food if others saw or knew about it. Foster (1995) also has described how in Tanga people regulated the presence of others whilst eating and the visibility of consumables such as food, betel nut, and tobacco to avoid any requests. Therefore, I initially thought that the seclusion while eating had to do with preventing others from asking for food. I speculated that Noah’s *vorvāt* mainly resulted from his inability to give food to others.



Figure 9 - Preparing food for those who helped harvesting

Later, I witnessed that in Tavir people also avoided those who ate. For example, while it was fine for relatives and friends to enter one's kitchen house, they approached the door cautiously and checked whether the owners were eating. If so, they said they would come back and quickly moved away from the building. A few times when my host parents and brothers found my husband and I eating in our shed, they immediately apologised and disappeared. This was described to me as the appropriate way to act in order "not to shame the people eating" (*long no semim lain husat i kaikai*).

Elsewhere in PNG, Munn (1992) has contrasted the acts of consumption and transmission, and suggested that among the Gawans, people built their reputation by giving food, whereby making others "think of them," while consuming food created a bad reputation and negative social efficacy. Likewise, Brison (1999) has shown that the Kwanga valued having a "small stomach" and being able to contribute a lot of food in exchanges. In Tanga, Foster (1995) has observed that while eating itself did not hold a negative connotation, excessive eating or the inability to control one's eating were seen as antisocial behaviour. Tangans, he suggests, mediated between

and transformed consumption (*en*) into non-consumption (*fat*) by the act of “giving” (*fen*), which was also causatively defined as “making [others] eat” (Foster 1995: 179 brackets Foster’s). In these cases, one could articulate that “giving” is morally superior, while “consuming” obstructs the flow of food – and in turn, obstructs the making of relationships and kinship.

I argue that among the Vir Kairak eating was shameful because rather than feeding others, it entailed consuming for oneself. Moreover, my interlocutors claimed that eating overtly was a form of showing off. Hence, when people received food after contributing to gardening, they dispersed into groups of two or three with their close kin of similar age to eat it. Similarly, at funerary rites, after receiving an enormous basket filled with cooked food, each extended family took their portion and consumed it in the privacy of their own hamlet. On a daily basis while young children ate openly, the youth and adults covered their mouths bashfully if someone came by and saw them eating fruits or some store-bought biscuits.

Furthermore, my interlocutors articulated the negative aspect of eating and excessive consumption when they talked about the cocoa blight. For many years Tavir had been a very fertile place where almost all households looked after 500 to 1000 cocoa trees. Joshua’s youngest brother Peter recalled with a note of regret in his voice that back then everyone had a lot of money and that they sent their children to the local trade stores with at least a hundred Kina in their pockets. He smiled: “Money came. All you had to do is collect the cocoa. Everyone had money” (*Moni i kam. Yu kisim fruit kakao tasol. Olgeta lain i gat moni*). However, like elsewhere in PNG, the Vir Kairak planted their cocoa trees close to each other, and rarely pruned or used any insecticides, making them particularly vulnerable to the CPB pest. Eventually, one by one all of Tavir’s cocoa farmers lost the blocks they had. The money that entered the village became scarce and people had to resort to other means to bring cash into their households (which were often more difficult and earned them less, such as timber mill or plantation work, or marketing sweet potato and peanut).

Many in East New Britain talked about CPB as a punishment from God for their inability to use cocoa money wisely. Peter once said: “It must be God’s punishment. Because all the money we got from cocoa we used for eating. We didn’t contribute to the community” (*I mas God panisim. Bikos ol moni mipela kisim long kakao ol i kaikaim. Nogat contibutim long kominiti*). Similarly, my host sister-in-law Lisa said that too much money had made them hungry¹⁹ (*hungare* [TP], *nigi* [K]), and added: “You know all, they didn’t think of the future. They just ate all the money” (*Yu save ol, ol i no tinktink long fyutsa. Ol kaikaim ol moni tasol*), with a hand gesture imitating eating. Statements like these placed eating in opposition to building a future and community. Foster (1995) records similar use of “eating badly” in Tanga to label selfish men in contrast to the ideally generous men who initiate reciprocal giving (1995: 180). My interlocutors criticised the way people used money only for personal consumption rather than giving to others and effectively directing their actions towards the future (Munn 1992), thus weakening the community.

The Virtue of Shame

In order to understand the Vir Kairak morality of exchange, or put differently, the appropriate things to give and ways to act in various circumstances within specific types of social relations, a short discussion on people’s experience of *vorvāt* and the way in which it was conceived in relation to the idea of building a strong community is necessary at this point.

In this thesis, I discuss how the Vir Kairak perceived *vorvāt* as a virtue and expected to see it in others and themselves. For example, Lisa suggested that to display *vorvāt* showed that a person had *gutārār* (respect) for others and valued the community more than oneself. Therefore, it appeared that for my interlocutors *vorvāt* was not simply something people experienced passively as a result of being seen in a particular way,

¹⁹ Hungry here could be understood as hungry for consumption of commodities in the classic sense of the word (Meyer 1998) and these commodities were mainly packaged foods.

but also something expected of them that showed their commitment to the wider community. During my fieldwork, I observed people experience *vorvāt* in almost all types of activities such as visiting someone's hamlet, receiving guests, eating, dancing, talking in public or with someone they believed had more knowledge, going to social gatherings or ceremonial events, washing in the creek or behind their houses, cooking, and so on. Initially, their *vorvāt* appeared to originate from a sort of lack (such as things to give) or inability to do something, but when I asked my hosts whether that was the case, they often dismissed my reasoning as inaccurate. In fact, most people described *vorvāt* simply as the proper way to behave in that circumstance and added: "because I respect (*gutārār* or *rispektim* [TP]) her/him/them."

In one conversation, my host uncle (*akak*) Jacob expressed his amusement with the way people in Tavir nowadays could talk about and wait for the royalties they ought to receive from the oil palm plantation. He said that he would be *vorvāt* to receive money he did not work for and reiterated that work was the most important thing (*namba wan samting*). For Jacob, to receive things when one had not worked generated *vorvāt*, and to wait to receive them was inappropriate (*nogut*) (cf. Gewertz and Errington 1999: 49-58 discussion on "handouts"). Moreover, he suggested that in this way people learned to be lazy and only consume, which ended proper social relations (*pinisim gutpela pasin wantain narapela lain*). This shows a couple of things: first, because work was the most valued social activity among the Vir Kairak it was desirable to be hardworking. Second, to receive things as a result of one's own work was the correct and desirable way to gain them. Third, feeling *vorvāt* when receiving things when one has not worked was the desirable feeling and expression of Vir Kairak sociality. Therefore, to receive things when he had not worked for them made Jacob feel *vorvāt* not because the donors were shaming him, but because of his own evaluation of his work and the social value put on work.

Demand Sharing of Visible Things

Once, Lisa and I went to visit her classificatory sister Idao (her mother's sister's daughter). We spent a couple of hours chatting about her post as a nurse on the South coast and I recorded her life history. As we were about to leave, Idao told Lisa that her basket was nice ("*mamārki ama basket*"). It was a small, beautifully plaited basket, with colourful strings, which Lisa had bought the previous day from the Pentecostal Zion Church fundraising event. As a response she put a bashful smile, thanked her, and became a little flustered and *vorvāt*. We then parted and went back to our hamlet, where we found Noah building his small trade store.

Displeased, Lisa told Noah that she had to go and get her old basket, put her things in it, and then go back to Idao's to give her the new one. My host brother was surprised and noted that Idao's extended family had organised the fundraising (and she was the pastor's daughter), so she was effectively asking for something back that they had just sold. "Yes, I know, but she asked" (*ye mi save, tasol em askim*), said Lisa, "I am sad" (*mi sorī*). Earlier that morning she had showed me the basket, noting that she really cherished it and was very happy to have bought it. When Noah stirred things a bit, Lisa started to count the other times Idao had asked for things. But when I asked why she gave them, she said: "This is how we are; we give when asked. She is my cousin sister.²⁰ If she asks, I give her. This is our way" (*This is how we are; mipela givim taim wanpela askim. Em kasin sista bilong mi. Sapos ema skim, mi mas givim. Em pasin bilong mipela*).

Traditionally, the Vir Kairak had very little material possessions, and what they had, they shared with each other. When I lived in Tavir, I was impressed with the frequency material things changed hands as a result of their demand sharing. People could ask their relatives and friends for things such as baskets, string bags, clothes, hats, building materials, plastic bottles, containers, plates, shoes, meat obtained through hunting, and so on, effectively obliging them to give them. They generally

²⁰ This is how my interlocutors clarified to me that they were talking about a classificatory sibling - cousin sister or cousin brother.

asked those closest to them (e.g. siblings, cousins, uncles, close friends), with whom they had close relationships and had given to and received food from and many other things. People built these relationships from a very young age starting with their parents and siblings, then expanding outwards to their extended families, friends, distant relatives, and outsiders.²¹

From conversations with my host family, it became clear that people's ability to ask for things showed the closeness or strength of their relationships with others. They often asked for things directly when the object was visible. As my host brother Noah put it: "when one sees something, he can say he likes it" (or "likes to have it" – *taim wanpela lukim samting em inap tok olsem em i laikim*) or that "it is nice" (*em naispela* [TP] or *mamār(ki/ka)* [K]), implying that they desired²² (*mangalim*) it and obliging the holder²³ to give it to them. Thus, he and his wife Lisa were very surprised when I told them that in other Melanesian societies, people could not ask openly for things, but instead got them through more indirect ways such as using sorcery or making others feel sorry for them. "So, they don't talk straight? One can't come look you in the face and ask, ha?!" (*So ol I no tok stret? Wanpela noken kam lukim yu long fes na askim, ha?!*) asked Lisa with a frown on her face. She criticised the use of deception (*trik*) and noted that to ask was a sign of closeness and truthfulness of the relationship (*klostu na trupela*). Nonetheless, she also explained that in Tavor, if a friend or relative asked for something, one had to give it to them, because if he didn't, "people would talk" (*ol lain bai toktok*). In this sense, both the act of asking and people's judgements in the event of not giving, generated the experience of *vorvūt* for the object's holder. This was, however, different when it came to my interlocutors' relationship with the state. Many complained and criticised the state for not providing development and infrastructure to their area, but said that they could not ask it for things (*no ken askim*

²¹ Magnus Course (2007) observed similar "centrifugal" directionality in making relations among the Mapuche people of Chile.

²² I translate the Tok Pisin word "*mangalim*" as to desire, because in Tavor it was always used in the context of people seeing something and liking it very much and wanting it for themselves. The word did not imply any jealousy as that was voiced by using "*jealos*."

²³ I use the word "holder" instead of "owner" to show the temporary possession of things within the Vir Kairak system of asking and giving.

gavman long samting) because they did not have close ties to the people in those positions of power to give. Therefore, as I show in the following chapters, they tried to make themselves appear in certain ways in order to establish such relationships (become recognised) and elicit the state or other agents to give them development (see also Street 2009).

Lisa's basket example illustrates the coercive aspect of demand sharing (Peterson 1993) as well as its ability to establish people's position within the community where relationships were constantly renegotiated. Nevertheless, giving when asked did not necessarily mean reciprocation of previous acts of giving, and I do not believe the term "exchange" rightly captures what my interlocutors engaged in. While many expressed dissatisfaction when others requested something from them, they also explained that circulating these objects within and outside the family related them and strengthened their community. Thus, their emphasis was more on the circulation rather than reciprocation of things (Widlöck 2004).



Figure 10 - Baskets and net bags

On the other hand, people also tried to hide some of their possessions to avoid giving them away. For instance, when I moved to Tavir I gave a long PVC pipe to my host brother. A week later, I offered to give him another one, since we couldn't use it for our water tanks due to its length. He accepted but enquired if he could leave it on the roof of my kitchen house until he built a new house and installed it there. He explained:

Here no one will see it and can't ask for it. Because everyone asks me who gave me the other one. If they see this, they will say "You have two, give me one" and I must give. When I attach the pipes to the house, my brothers won't ask for them.[1]²⁴

What this instance shows is that things that appear in excess or abundance are often the ones that fall into the world of circulation (see also Altman 2011; Broz and Willerslev 2012). People would hardly ask for things that were used and could not be replaced by something else (e.g. mobile phone, radio, chainsaw). Furthermore, the abundance of things held by one person or household would potentially create inequalities with others, and thus, accumulation had to be prevented (Woodburn 1980). Noah suggested that "it is not good for one to have too many things and others none" (*Em nogut if wanpela i gat planti samting na narapela nogat*). As they emphasised the importance of equality of wealth and possessions, and encouraged the circulation of goods within the community, they also relied on hiding to avoid the burdens of demand sharing.

After living in Tavir for almost half a year, I realised that plastic bottles to bring water from the creek were very valuable and people often asked each other for them. After my host family and relatives enquired a few times whether I could give them some plastic bottles, I decided to start buying bottled water from town (for my own consumption), so I could collect bottles for them. About once a month, my host brother Benjim came to check if I had any and asked if he could come later at night to pick them up so no one could see him. He said that when people saw him or his wife,

²⁴ Numbers in brackets designate the passages in Appendix 1.

they requested one or two of their bottles, so they were always left with very few. He reiterated: “If they see that you gave me some, they’ll ask, and I’ll have to give” (*Sapos ol i lukim yu bin givim mi, ol bai askim, na mi mas givim*). In this sense, things that were in abundance and visible eventually found their way to new holders.

The need to hide one’s things was also reflected in the architecture of Vir Kairak houses. In Tavar every married couple had a *vātka* (house to sleep), and a *vātki* (house to cook). In a conversation with Noah and my host mother they told me that the door of the *vātki* was “always open” (*stap op*) and that “everyone could enter or look inside” (*olgeta inap go insait o lukluk*). The interior and exterior of this structure were social spaces where family members and visitors exchanged food and betel nut, told stories, smoked tobacco, and strengthened their relationships. Of course, what my hosts meant by “everyone” included only the people they were related to through kinship or friendship, as I observed that those of more distant relationships lurked or sat farther from both buildings. The *vātka*, however, was a private space which only particular members of the family could enter; and even then, some of the rooms were only accessible to the house owners. The interior of this building was kept secret through the construction of a hallway (1-2 square metres) or a screen placed parallel to the entrance (about a metre away from the door) (figure 13).

When my host brother was designing his new house on a piece of wrinkled paper, he kept working on the hallway and tried to calculate how much space he needed. At that time, I could not understand why one would make the other rooms smaller just to fit in a hallway. It seemed unnecessary and impractical as it could not be used for anything besides entering the house. But Noah turned to me and said, “You must make one” (*Yu mas wokim wanpela*). He seemed surprised that I could not understand why, and he continued, “It blocks the seeing/vision of people. It’s bad if people see what’s inside” (*Em i block lukluk bilong pipol. Em nogut narapla i lukim wanem samting istap insait*). Noah’s account suggested that having others see what someone had in their possession was bad because 1) they could judge what they see as accumulation, and 2) they could request those things.



Figure 11 - Hamlet in Tavir

The interior of the *vātka* was thus, a place where one could hide things such as baskets, string bags, clothes, blankets, tools, plastic bottles, containers, plates, pots and so on. By blocking the vision and excluding others from entering one's house, one was able to keep these possessions for a longer period of time. While all relatives and friends could ask for something, only the couple, their unmarried children and the man's mother could enter the *vātka* and see what was inside. If others saw the interior of one's *vātka*, my host brother explained, the owner would be *vorvāt*. Similarly, Adam Reed (1999) has observed that at Bonama Prison in PNG, the prisoners made secluded spaces, also called "cubes," by hanging blankets in series along wires in the prison's hall. According to Reed, these cubes were "distinguished as dark and hidden" and enabled people to escape undesirable, and often demanding gazes (1999a: 49). Likewise, Vir Kairak's *vātka* guarded things against being seen and demanded. Its door always opened into a small corridor or a screen, and its windows were always covered with cloth, cardboard, or some sort of paper. According to Carsten (1995), the principles that shape relationships between generations, ages and gender groups are encoded and internalised through houses. Houses, she suggests,

“are not just imbued with social meaning, they are crucially involved in the reproduction of meaning” (Carsten 2004: 49). Indeed, the properties of Vir Kairak houses not only inform social relations established through kinship, wealth, and gift exchange, but also the significance of secrecy, concealment, and revelation in making such relations (Strathern 1988) as well as people’s concerns about the boundaries with others (Stasch 2009), and the circulation of goods.

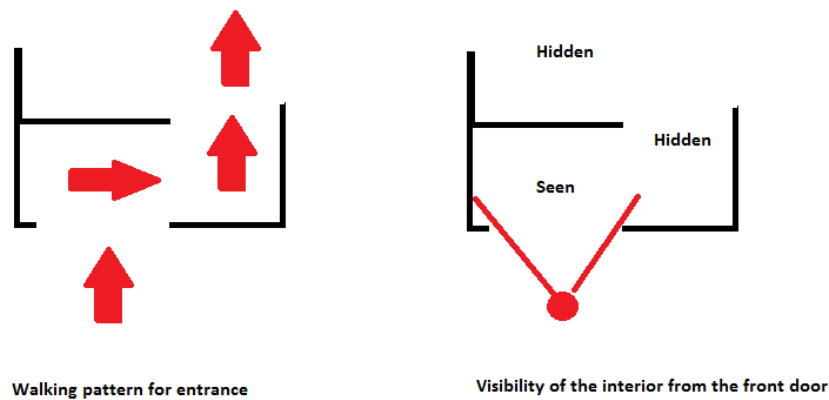


Figure 12 – Diagram of Vir Kairak’s vātka

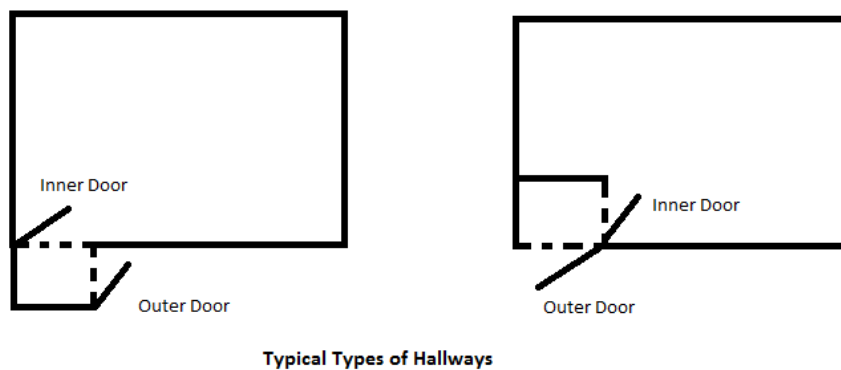


Figure 13 – Diagram of Vir Kairak’s vātka showing the position of the doors

Pastors Must Give

Some weeks after I began my research in Tavar, Lisa said she could take me to meet her mother's sister, who was the village's traditional midwife. For some time, I had been trying to find her and record her life history and learn about birth and maternal care, but she was always away in the gardens or visiting mothers-to-be. That morning too, Lisa and I had missed her, so instead we sat on the bamboo benches in their yard and had a conversation with her husband, Pastor James. He was in his late 50s but looked much younger and his face was always radiant with a smile. As we sat and talked, an attractive frizzle-feathered rooster passed by, followed by a hen with about a dozen small chicks. Fascinated by this breed, I remarked that it was very beautiful and that I had never seen it before. This instigated a conversation about the chickens we were both looking after and that they were "nice to look at" and quite therapeutic. As we talked Pastor James called his grandchildren and asked them to catch one of the chicks. Cuddling it he showed me the mixed attributes of two breeds – frizzled feathers and naked neck. And when Lisa and I were about to leave, he gave me the chick and said it was now mine. I felt very grateful but also ashamed and uncomfortable, blaming myself for probably pushing him to give it to me by admiring the rooster (though at the time, I did not know that people asked for things by remarking on their beauty). After unsuccessfully trying to kindly refuse (unsure whether that was appropriate either), I accepted the gift and thanked him over and over again in the Kairak language "mamār mes, mamār mes, mamār mes!" He smiled and said, "it was all right" (*em orait*), and that I should name the chick Mamār, for I was very thankful. When Lisa and I put some distance between us and his house, I told her that I felt guilty for making him give me Mamār. She turned to me with an enormous smile, "No. You mustn't worry! That's how it is! He is a pastor. He gives. Pastors have big heart – they give from the heart" (*Nogat! Yu no wari! Em olsem pasin. Em pasta. Em givim. Pasta i gat bikipela hart – ol givim long hart*).

Historically missionaries in Papua New Guinea were associated with the goods (food and commodities), techniques, and knowledge they possessed and gave to the local population they tried to "convert and civilise." During the colonial period, they

provided the main point of contact with Westerners, and offered education, medical services, and economic opportunity to their congregants through the production and marketing of cash crops (LiPuma 2000). They also preached that those who followed the word of God would enjoy prosperity and would be rewarded both in this life and in heaven. LiPuma (2000) has argued that the sort of prosperity local people imagined, however, was shaped by what they saw as the wealth of these missionaries. Elsewhere, Birgit Meyer has shown that the propagation of a new Christian lifestyle in Africa was done through the promotion of work for money and that Western goods were self-evident features of Christian life, while lack of them was “a sign of ‘savagery’” (1998: 757). Thus, she argues that Christianity in Africa not only enabled people to buy commodities, but was itself produced through consumption.

The Reverend Ian Fardon (1940-1975), who was posted as Circuit Minister in Gaulim (the centre of the Methodist Mission located less than an hour’s walking distance from Tavir) between 1966-1968 writes that both the “Mission and Government education taught people to want new ‘things’ and gave rise to a new materialism.” He notes that at times, one is “unable to distinguish between true belief and those who came to the Church not because of their faith but because they wanted education and material benefits.” Similar worries that people would associate the Church only with the economic and political benefits it brought to them were held by all the Missions throughout Papua New Guinea. Fear of creating the so-called “rice Christians,” who professed Christianity as long as they received Western commodities, led many of the early missionaries to emphasise the importance of a deeper understanding of God’s gospel, filling one’s heart with His word, and finding “spiritual strength” without thinking about material rewards (LiPuma 2000; Handman 2015).

Nonetheless, the link between material goods and missionaries continued to guide people’s relationship with the clergy. Among the Vir Kairak, I argue, the way in which people expected pastors to be, fused with local notions about giving and consumption. The influence of Christian theology about generosity on the lives of the Vir Kairak is undoubtful, but whether Christianity brought about the significance of

sharing and giving, or whether it was always part of traditional culture was not something my hosts could comment on, nor is it my intention to find out which predated or led to the other. But it was clear that in people's minds there was a sort of relationship between Christianity and giving, as it was expected that a "good Christian" would give what he has to his fellows, and Pastors specifically were always supposed to be generous and give from the heart.

A couple of months before I commenced fieldwork in Tavir, a new United Church pastor had been posted to serve the community. His stay, however, was cut short and he was transferred to another ward after only a year of the mandatory three years' service. I wondered why this happened and whether Noah had anything to do with it, because he had been complaining that "this pastor was not doing his job" and "was not contributing to the community." People in Tavir were also unhappy with the pastor's pigs, as they roamed freely and destroyed a lot of the gardens. This happened to my host father's garden too, Noah told me. "I tried to kill the pastor's pigs," he said, "they ate all the sweet potato, so I shot at them with a spear" (*mi trai kilim pik bilong pasta...ol i kaikaim ol kaukau bilong garden, so mi sutim ol wantaim spia*). Yet when I asked Joshua about the incident, he avoided talking about the pigs or mentioning the pastor, and said that it was probably his son Benjim's pig that ruined the garden. That day my husband told me not to delve into the pastor's issue to avoid any disputes. So, when I heard he was transferred, I started to ask around for the people's explanation for his early departure.

As usual, no one wanted to speculate. One afternoon, however, Joshua noted that while he didn't know why the pastor was going away, he thought that "he did some work, but not so much, and brought his pigs from his own settlement" (*em wok tasol i no tumas, na em bringim pik bilong em long ples bilong en*). The pastor had five pigs, Joshua counted, "a sow and three piglets, and a stag" (*i gat hamas, wanpela pik meri na tripela pikinini, na wanpela pik man*), and let them roam and destroy many gardens, which made people unhappy. He continued, "to have a garden is okay for a pastor, but so many pigs, and to bring them from another village, is not good. If it were one

pig, and if he kept it tied it would've been alright" (*em orait long pasta wokim wanpela garden, tasol dispela planti pik, na bringim ol long ples bilong en, nogut samting. Sapos em i bin gat wanpela pik na pasim lek bilong em, em bai orait*). And he concluded that no pastor before him had had so many pigs.²⁵

What is interesting in Joshua's account is the significance placed on the number of pigs the pastor had. Pigs generally played an important role in Vir Kairak social life and were essential for a number of rites. People often remarked when talking about pigs or food that pork was the "best meat" because of its taste and relevance to *kastom*. While the elderly recalled that at feasts in the past people placed the meat on long platforms where they divided it among the guests, nowadays the Vir Kairak distributed each portion inside large baskets plaited from coconut leaves and rarely displayed the meat. When I attended a mourning feast, the group of women I sat with described these differences between pork distribution in the past and today, and suggested that the meat was divided based on the number of people within a family and their relationship to the hosts, but by placing it in a basket (and hiding the amount from everyone), they also prevented jealousy and conflicts. Though people knew exactly how many pigs were slaughtered and who had contributed towards the feast, both the animals and meat were hidden from view, and seemed to hold less significance for the prestige of the host (cf. A. Strathern 1971).

During my fieldwork, most families looked after one or two pigs, and they often bought from, sold, or gifted piglets to their relatives. These transactions were usually reciprocated, explained Yulay (my host father's niece). Large pigs, on the other hand, were either slaughtered for feasts or sold. The problem with the pastor's pigs was that they were greater in number than those held not only by previous pastors but also by anyone else in Tavir, and that he had brought them from his own village. This suggested that he had accumulated something of high economic, social, and cultural value, which was contrary to how pastors were supposed to be, and in the one year

²⁵ See also Rappaport's (1968) *Pigs for Ancestors* for a discussion about the balanced distribution of pigs in Maring society, social ecology, and social order.

he served, he was not able or willing to create relationships with the Vir Kairak through the transaction of pigs. Specifically, because the pigs roamed free and entered the gardens, they were visible to the people of Tavir who evaluated them as assets in abundance. As Widlok (2004) has argued, accumulation involves the use of resources for the sake of something else beyond their intrinsic good (e.g. pig's meat for consumption versus pigs for exchange and prestige). By accumulating pigs from his own settlement the pastor had raised suspicions about his intentions and doubts about his commitment to the community.

Finally, Lisa shared with me her observation that to have too much money meant one was not contributing to the community, but instead accumulating for one's own consumption, and if this was a leader, and specifically a church leader, then it could potentially lead others to do the same and ruin the community. "A church leader is supposed to be an example" (*lider bilong lotu mas wok example*) she said, "and if the only thing he thinks about is money, then what will happen to the community?!" (*na sapos em tinktink long moni tasol, then wanem samting long kominiti*). She was criticising the recently established Revival Church's pastor and their belief that money was a sign and blessing from God. Like other Pentecostal groups throughout the world, this congregation believed in gifts of healing and prophecy received through the Holy Spirit, the need for spiritual warfare against Satan, the imminence of the Last Judgement, and the gospel of wealth, which teaches that God will bless true "born again" Christians with material prosperity (Meyer 1998; Coleman 1996; Gifford 1994).

Pastor Michael preached that one must change oneself spiritually and economically, so that others would too. Such change (that was often visible through the material goods one possessed or abstained from), he suggested, would bring development to the village (more in Chapter 3). He often remarked upon his story of becoming a "born again" Christian and that his successful business and material possessions were in fact blessings from God. It is not uncommon for Pentecostalism to attribute the wealth of preachers to God, thus making the church attractive (Meyer 1998; Marshall 2009). But the other denominations in Tavir saw this as immoral accumulation and

having too much money and material things. Thus, they expected people to either display *vorvāt* and give instead of boasting about their possessions, or hide them and be more modest.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored Vir Kairak's morality of exchange and circulation of goods by showing the significance people put on feeding and giving, in opposition to eating and accumulating for oneself. I illustrated that for my interlocutors, gardens signified the act of feeding within the family, whilst gardening as an activity that involved both giving food and one's labour to others, produced social relations and strong community. Essentially, by emphasising the importance of cooperation in gardening and how this made them different from other Baining people, the Vir Kairak believed they were building a strong community and hoped others to recognise them as such.

This chapter also discussed how people experienced *vorvāt* when they ate in public or when someone commented on their possessions. It showed the link between hunger and money, and described how my hosts believed the CPB blight came to East New Britain as punishment from God because they had "misused" (*misuse*) and "eaten" (*kaikai*) all the money they earned from cocoa farming and neglected their community. In this way, I elaborated on the negative aspects of eating and accumulating, but suggested that *vorvāt* itself was not something negative for the Vir Kairak, but rather a virtue and display of "good behaviour" (*gutpela pasin*). Thus, this chapter offered an entrée into the main argument of my thesis by showing how *vorvāt* was something people cultivated in order to present themselves in a particular form. This form showed that they desired relations with others and respected (were committed to) the larger community.

Finally, by exploring people's responses to demand sharing and the relationships revealed through exchange and circulations of goods, I proposed that people made use of hiding in two ways: 1) as a way to display their *vorvāt* (e.g. through seclusion or turning away from people when eating), and 2) as a way to avoid giving (e.g.

through the architecture of the house). Moreover, hiding also suggested a form of modesty as I illustrated in the final section when discussing how Tavis's growing Pentecostal congregation spoke about their possession of material things as a blessing from God while my Methodist informants evaluated their behaviour as a form of immoral accumulation. I return to Vir Kairak's evaluations of Christianity and the importance of leading a "true Christian life" in Chapter 3.

In the next chapter, I discuss the significance of mask dances in Vir Kairak's self-(re)presentations and participation in local and national identities, and show how my interlocutors understood the link between *kastom* and recognition.

CHAPTER 2

MASKS AND THE POWER OF BEING SEEN²⁶

Meska and I sat under the shade of a large mango tree. There was enthusiasm in his voice as he talked about the masks and their curious designs. “You see,” he started with a hand gesture, “all nice something is first made in Tavir, then in all other villages” (*Olgeta naispela samting i kamap em Tavir, na ol narapla ples second*). He was referring to the shapes of the masks and the patterns painted on them.

All men from other places come and copy it from Tavir. When we make it, [they] all envy us. If a mask from another village joins us in a dance, people can tell the difference. All women too. They don’t know the secrets, but they too can see that one mask is wrong. It’s different yea. And here we say that Tavir is the best. Did you see the one they put on the money?... I’ll show you.[2]

He rummaged through his bag and pulled out a small, crinkled plastic bag. Inside he kept his paper money. He took a 50 Kina banknote neatly folded in half and showed it to me. Pointing to the Baining mask on the note, he said: “This belongs to Tavir. It belongs to the Vir Kairak” (*Em ya bilong Tavir. Em ya bilong Vir [Kairak]*) and proudly continued, “I made this barkcloth for this mask... I beat the skin of the tree, and transformed it to cloth. Then my big brother and all took it to [Port] Moresby... my uncle danced with the mask” (*Mi mekim dispela laplap bilong mask...Mi paitim disela divai ya, na i kamap laplap. Na bikipela brata ol i kisim i go long Mosbi... Em uncle bilong mi danis wantaim en*). He was referring to the South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1980. The mask itself had been assembled in the capital by James (who later had stopped performing *kastom* and had become a Pentecostal pastor) and presented as a gift from them to the Governor-General Sir Tore Lokoloko, at the end of the festival.

²⁶ Part of this chapter is in publication in a special issue on Melanesian bark cloth, edited by Andrew Mills and Wonu Veys, in the *Journal of Pacific Arts*.

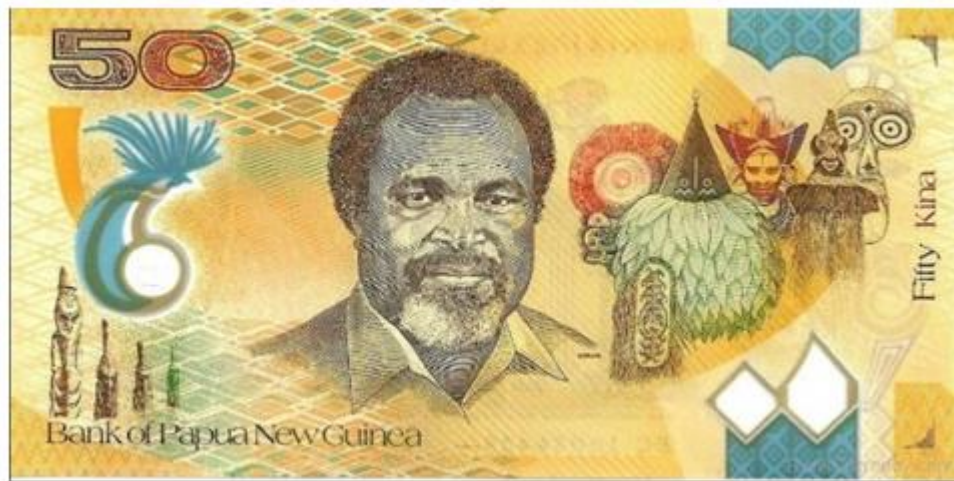


Figure 14 - Papua New Guinean 50 Kina Banknote

Two years later, the mask had been donated to the National Museum of Papua New Guinea, and today one could see it hanging in the most awkward place in the main gallery – above the staff entrance –, and in the most unusual way – tilted 90 degrees to the left. Whether it was placed like this, or one of its screws had fallen out, none of the staff could tell. Its label was missing, and apart from a half sentence about its donation no information about it could be found in the archives. But the men in Tavir immediately recognised the mask from photographs I took with me. They pointed to the star, the shape, and paint pattern; and there was no doubt that this mask and the one on the 50 Kina note was one and the same, and it was *theirs*. It was Tavir's mask. While they were pleasantly surprised to learn that the mask still existed, the fact that it was displayed in the museum had little significance compared to the image on the banknote. Among so many different masks in Papua New Guinea, and so many Baining settlements, it was their mask that was depicted on the money. And what better place to put its image, than on the valuable piece of paper that everyone uses!



Figure 15 - Vir Kairak's Kavet mask at the National Museum of PNG, Port Moresby

From the beginning of the 20th century many of the missionaries, explorers, and researchers who came to East New Britain became intrigued by the elaborate mask dances of the Baining people (Parkinson 1907; Rascher 1909; Bley 1914; Read 1931; Poole 1943; Laufer 1959; Hesse and Aerts 1982; Fajans 1997). The works of Bateson (1932), Laufer (1959), Pool (1971) and Corbin (1976, 1988) have suggested that these were fertility-oriented, cyclical events that took place after harvest and in combination with mourning or initiation rites, weddings, births, or the completion of a new house. Later, however, Fajans (1997) argued that they had nothing to do with such events and were simply done for “play,” whereby they revealed the socialising agency of “work” and the importance of transforming nature into culture, i.e. natural entities (people, animals, spirits, etc.) into social products. My research confirmed that the dances were indeed organised for various life-course, religious, and annual events, but as far as my hosts were concerned, they were a non-essential component and the celebrations could be done without them. They explained that preparations for weddings and morning rites, for example, already required spending a lot of

money and food, with the huge amounts of rice, tinned fish, taro and pork that the hosts had to distribute to their guests. And the dances put further financial pressure on the families, since to organise a dance they had to invite and pay men from a neighbouring community to sing and/or dance (as the village's own dancers and musicians would attend the feast as either hosts or guests). Therefore, nowadays many chose not to host a dance. Moreover, inter-denominational marriages and the insistence by Pentecostals that some elements of *kastom* within these feasts were "good" (e.g. the announcement and distribution of food) while others "bad" (e.g. mask dances and fasting taboos), had further reduced the number of dances.

The absence and apparent insignificance of dances for such events easily made them appear as a form of play, but my interlocutors emphasised that mask dances were in fact *kastom* and offered a "connection with their past, ancestors, and land" (*pasim taim bipo, tumbuna, na lend bilong mipela*). They strongly differentiated *kastom* from activities of *pley* (play) such as games, swimming, strolling in the bush, cutting and collecting firewood, fetching water, hunting, and climbing coconut or areca palms. Placing this at the centre of my analysis and drawing on the large body of literature that has shown the significance of *kastom* in objectifying and transmitting group affiliation, power, prestige, and national identity (A. J. Strathern and Strathern 1971; Allen 1981; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Jolly 1992; Harrison 1993; Bossen 2000; Eves 2004), this chapter argues that mask dances enabled the Vir Kairak to (re)present themselves as a group and create relationships among themselves and with others. It shows that the image of the mask on the 50 Kina banknote consolidated two things for the Vir Kairak: 1) that in opposition to what Pentecostal Christians said, "*kastom* was good" (*kastom em gutpela*), and 2) that "Tavir's masks were the best" (*mask bilong tavir em namba wan*).

These ideas not only justified the practice of *kastom*, but also provided the Vir Kairak with a sense of self-worth, inclusion, and capability to impact the nation state. Their mask dances had significant implications for the way in which they saw themselves and wanted others to see them. Here by "seeing" I mean both to be seen in a particular form and to be recognised as a people worthy of engaging with in meaningful

relationships, as Papua New Guineans with strong *kastom*, and a *ples* (settlement) with beautiful masks and skilled people. In this sense, the image on the 50 Kina was supposed to have certain effects on how others should judge them, including the Pentecostals who repeatedly said that these masks were agents of Satan. Furthermore, having their masks recognised as *namba wan* (the best) by government officials also entailed being invited to perform at international festivals and various provincial events, such as the opening of new schools and medical outposts, ground-breaking ceremonies, and other religious commemorations or celebrations.

This chapter explores how the Vir Kairak talked about “change” in relation to their masks, and how this made their *kastom* better (*mekim kastom better*) in order to drawn recognition to their community. In this way, it shows the interesting situation Vir Kairak men find themselves in today, where on the one hand, they try to preserve and protect *kastom* from new forms of Christianity, and on the other hand, they strive to “modernise the masks” (*modernaisim* mask) so they could attract more people to see them. Finally, by looking at the relationship between the masks’ image, bush spirits, and clan self-(re)presentations, I will show how Vir Kairak masks embody people’s relationship with the environment, humans, and non-human others.

Different Times, Different Masks

The Vir Kairak have two categories of dance events distinguished by the time of the day they are performed – day dances and night dances. The sequence of each dance event can include a variety of masks depending on the occasion for which it is performed. For example, yellow grass masks called Burām can appear during day dances for weddings and mourning rites, or appear at night dances for initiation rites. Other masks can only dance at their designated time-frame, such as the Mādas who perform only in the daytime, or the Kavet that appear only at night. And sometimes events involved only a particular type of mask, for example, at the annual celebration

of ending the *ḡue* (year)²⁷ the mask called Gunaneng visited all hamlets and scared the younger children. By the time I went to live in Tavir, *ḡue* celebrations had become very rare and held only by a couple of hamlets in the ward. Similarly, throughout the whole area, day dances had been performed only once every few years, and the last ones my hosts could recall were organised for the re-opening of Gaulim Medical Centre in 2008, the opening of a *singsing* (performance) stage in Gaulim in 2013, and the opening of a store in Ganbraga sometime around 2010.

Night dances, on the other hand, took place quite often, and especially during the dry season when most tourists visited the island. Apart from performances specifically for tourists, people organised these dances for various local events such as weddings, the opening of a store, the blessing of a new house, mourning or initiation rites. And at least once every couple of months, late into the night one could hear the music of bamboo ideophones echoing from the neighbouring hamlets. These dances were dominated by the giant masks called Kavet,²⁸ who danced round a large bonfire, walked through it, kicked up its embers, picked up and threw its burning logs, and eventually killed it with their feet. It was this type of mask that the PNG government had depicted on the 50 Kina banknote and men in Tavir felt most proud of. Thus, in this chapter I focus particularly on the designs and significance of the Kavet.

In the conversation with Meska presented above, he claimed that all “nice something” related to the masks was first made in Tavir, and then copied by the other settlements. This included how the masks were painted. Traditionally, Baining men made Kavet with a large cane frame and fine white barkcloth, which they painted with organic red and black colourants²⁹ obtained from the bush. Nowadays, however, they used store-bought red marker pens, and black natural colourant because, as Joshua

²⁷This is also the name of the edible plant *Setaria palmifolia* called *pitpit* in Tok Pisin that fruits only once a year.

²⁸ In the literature this mask also appears as Kavat or Qavat; and appears as Atutki and Ningum in the works of Fajans and Hesse, respectively.

²⁹ Black from the sap of a tree people called *qālānka* that is collected, dried under the sun, and then chewed; and two shades of red: *quel* from chewing together the bark of a tree they call *oritka* and a type of grass they called *riqār*, and *rānasinḡi* obtained by chewing the leaves of a tree.

explained, the audience “like to see bright red but bush red is dark. And the black must be very black, must be dark, and the store black is light” (*ol i laik lukim lait red tasol bus red em tudak. Na blek em mas blek tru, em mas tudak, na blek yu baim em lait*). These new masks also featured images on the forehead painted with various store-bought paints, predominantly in yellow and green. But the men explained that these were not so much for the audience to see, as they were for the men in the men’s house, since it was simply impossible to see these colours in the dark. Nevertheless, these small details contributed to the overall image of the mask and offered a glimpse into my interlocutors’ imagination and creativity.

Moreover, while the traditional patterns of repeating motifs³⁰ were part of men’s secret knowledge of making masks, and each settlement had their own, the way in which masks were decorated could be copied. To elaborate, early Baining masks had fewer patterns and motifs, and my interlocutors described them as “mostly white.” But with time, men incorporated new decorations, such as the mask’s brow above the eyes, which was something first added to Tavir’s masks at the end of the 1970s. “Later they all copied us” explained Zane, and added that in the past “masks were not so good” and were “uglier.”

Further changes included increasing the overall size of the mask, its eyes and protruding mouth, and drawing images on the forehead such as birds of paradise, scorpions, stars, hearts, and the United Church cross, which my interlocutors summed up as “modernising the masks” (*modernising ol mask*). While notions about “improvement” and “innovation” of mask designs had been part of Baining *kastom* for generations (see Corbin 1976, 1982, 1988; Küster and Corbin 1986), many of these changes, and specifically the idea of *modernising*, came about after Papua New Guinea’s Independence in 1975.

³⁰ These were passed from one generation to the next, and some of these patterns also had a specific name.



Figure 16 - Kavet mask from Tavir 2016



Figure 17 - Kavet mask from Tavir without a brow; collected by George Corbin in 1983



Figure 18 - Kavet mask from Tavir; collected by George Corbin in 1983



Figure 19 - Pattern on a Kavet mask from Tavir; collected by George Corbin in 1983

George Corbin has observed that in the late 1970s and early 1980s both the Kairak and Uramot Baining made conscious attempts at maintaining and reviving their day and night dances, and Tavir had been particularly active in that pursuit (personal communication, July 27, 2017). Furthermore, in post-Independence Papua New Guinea, *kastom* attained significant political value as part of the nation building project (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Otto 1992). In East New Britain, like elsewhere in the country, mask dances and other forms of *kastom* became a symbol of the “culturally diverse” but “united” single nation.³¹ Additionally, *kastom*’s economic value had increased over the years with its ability to draw tourist and art collectors to the country. In turn, both the tourism industry and the recognition of “good *kastom*” by government officials and festival organisers encouraged the process of preserving, reviving, and modernising *kastom* among the Baining. What follows is a discussion of these innovations, which people referred to more generally as “*senis bilong kastom*” (changes of *kastom*).



Figure 20 - Images on Kavet masks’ foreheads

Shapes of Kavet

The early literature on Baining masks describes that there were many different types of Kavet (e.g. Parkinson 1907; Rascher 1909) and Corbin (1976, 1982, 1988) has written extensively about how Baining men dreamt about the bush spirits in their various forms, or were inspired by nature into creating new shapes for their masks. Indeed, copious examples of Kavet masks can be seen in museums, art galleries, and private

³¹ As presented in the PNG constitution.

collections around the globe, as well as at various dances in East New Britain. However, for some years now, the men in Tavir have stopped crafting new masks and only make Kavet in seven distinct shapes: butterfly, grasshopper, moth, cat, taro leaf, branch of tree, and pig's shoulder bone.

At first, I interpreted this as lack of knowledge, since many complained that much of their *kastom* and stories had been forgotten. Having the Tok Pisin phrase "*mipela no save wokim*" (we don't make them) did not help either, as one new to the language could easily confuse it with "*mipela no save hau (long) wokim*" (we don't know how to make them). However, later I understood that the exclusion of other designs was done intentionally and had to do with what the masks and their shapes represented, and how these particular shapes attained the desired effect on the audience.

Men claimed that the masks were the reflection or image of the bush spirits. They often used the English word "represent" or its Tok Pisin variation "*representim*" to explain that the masks weren't the spirits themselves but their reflection. However, I argue that representation in its simplistic meaning fails to encompass the kind of relationship between the image and the "represented" being conceived by my Vir Kairak informants. To elaborate, the Vir Kairak believe that each living thing has a body (*sārāyar*), soul (*mārmāran*), and reflection or shadow (*yuski*). When one dies the body rots and disappears, the *mārmāran* goes to the place of the dead, and the *yuski* stays where one used live. The *yuski* is the way someone or something appears to another. It is the image of one in the water or mirrors, in photographs, and one's shadow. The *yuski* of the dead can appear in various shapes, such as black figures in the night, fireflies, butterflies, and grasshoppers. Similarly, the bush spirits which are called *yuska* have a reflection – that is, an image in which they can appear. This is a bush spirit's *yuski*. Again, the bush spirits can appear in many shapes: they can become insects, animals, plants, and even the bones of pigs. Hence, the different shapes of the masks.

When a man wore a mask, he said he was covered by the spirit's image (*karamapim wantaim yuski*). But there was no confusion about who was dancing, and both men

and women knew that these were not the bush spirits themselves. Everyone said: "*Em man yet husat i danis*" (It is still a man who dances). Additionally, men explained that there was no sorcery involved, no secret songs or calling/luring of the spirits – contrasting themselves from their Tolai neighbours. Twice Joshua remarked that "all Tolais think Baining call the spirits and use sorcery" (*ol Tolai tinktink mipela Baining kolim ol spirit na i gat sampela poisin*); laughing loudly, he continued, "it is just a man that dances!" (*em man tasol i danis!*). This was also an issue of pride when it came to the most spectacular aspect of the dance – that is, walking through the fire and kicking its embers.

In his work on art as "*technology of enchantment*" Alfred Gell (1992 emphasis Gell's) articulated that the "primordial efficacy" of art objects resided in their power of fascination or captivation (Gell 1998: 68-69). He suggested that when art objects are "difficult to make, difficult to 'think,'" they "fascinate, compel, and entrap as well as delight the spectator" (Gell 1998: 23). Such artefacts seem like "miraculous creations" that are often understood as the outcome of magic, since the observer cannot conceive the technical processes through which they were made (Gell 1988). That is, art objects captivate the beholder because of their technical excellence which appears to exceed the limits of human capability, hence can only be understood as deriving from some magical province. In the same way, the Baining mask dancer walking through the fire is a spectacle that creates that "jaw dropping effect" Gell (1998) speaks of, not simply by virtue of walking and appearing not to be burnt, but as an overall image created through various materials, both bush materials and the human body (to extend Gell's notion of *transubstantiation*). The effect is achieved on two levels. First, the mask and the decorations cover the dancer, rendering him as other than "simply-human-being." The so-called illusion is created through this spectacular assemblage, and is incomprehensible as a mere costume and the product of human capability. Second, the energetic dance with some rather aggressive movements including the act of walking into fire – something that normally "no sane person would do, only a mad man" (*nogat man bai wokabaut long paia, longlong man tasol*) as both Noah and Joshua

put it – astonishes and captivates the viewers, leaving them unable to attribute such actions and abilities to a “simply-human-being.”



Figure 21 - Fire dance in Tavor, 2015

While Vir Kairak men took delight in their Tolai neighbours’ bewilderment and misconceptions about their dance, they too admitted that when the men danced, while they remained “only men” (*man yet*) they also gained some sort of “powerful feeling” (*strongpela pilin*) through the masks. In a sense, the dancers were not just men either: they were covered by the image of the spirit, i.e. the mask. And the mask, as one of the manifestations of a spirit’s *yuski*, also contained some power. “When you wear the mask and all decorations”, my host cousin Benson explained, “you feel strong and unafraid of the fire” (*Taim yu ptim mask na ol bilas yu pilim strong na nogat pret long paia*). According to my Pentecostal interlocutors and Pastor James, this strength came from the bush spirit and it was an ungodly power. But for the men who still practiced *kastom* there was a difference between the power of the spirit (*yuska*) and the power of the image of the spirit (*yuski*). All men agreed that neither the *yuska* nor the *yuski* possessed the dancer, and that the dancers were still in control and aware of their thoughts, bodies, and movement. Nevertheless, Christian ontology

reduced the *yuska* and the *yuski* to a single entity – a spirit – which was either referred to as a servant of Satan or Satan himself. Furthermore, Christianity strictly forbade any form of idolatry, whereby persons and divinities could attain “*real physical interaction*” (Gell 1998:135 emphasis in original). The use of religious images that were not simply symbolic and fell into the realm of idolatry were thus condemned by the church.

In Tavar, the Pentecostal Zion Church had taken this in a fundamental way and even preached against using images of the crucifix or bare cross. Differently, Vir Kairak traditionally separated the entities of *yuska* and *yuski*, and while there was indeed some connection between the image of the being and the being itself, the masks were not meant as a tool to interact with, or as Pentecostals referred to it, to “worship” the spirits. The image of the spirit was different from the spirit, just like the *yuski* of a person or an ancestor was not exactly that person, and it had an agency of its own that could give strength, but also inflict harm.

**

Sitting on small stools in front of my kitchen house, one late afternoon Joshua told me a story about a man married to a woman from Tavar, who was almost killed by his Kavet. Some years ago, he had tried to make a mask in the shape of a duck, but it turned out looking like a snake. After the dance the man fell severely ill. People had suggested that the image of the snake wanted to kill him. Not the bush spirit itself, or the spirit of a snake, say as a totem animal; but this particular image of a bush spirit, Joshua explained, in this particular shape of a snake had harmed the man. He said, “when you want to copy the image of something, make a mask like it, it can get angry” (*Taim yu laik kopi lukluk bilong samting, mekim mask olsem em, em bai inap kros*). This was the *yuski* – the image of the spirit. Thus, men were careful when making masks and chose specific shapes over others. They preferred the seven shapes listed above, which they had perfected over the years.



Figure 22 - Fire dance in Tavor, 2016; photograph by Masaaki Okuno

Fajans (1997) has postulated that Baining mask dances are a form of play that re-enacts the transformation of wild into social, nature into culture, through the socialising process of work. This was also her main argument about Baining personhood – as something that is made through work. In this sense, the masks confer the boundaries between nature and culture, humans and non-human-others, and have the agency to transform one into the other. While my research findings suggested some similarities with Fajans's approach, I would point to another possibility: It appears that in Tavor, men chose to make only specific kinds of masks whose shapes represented things with some social role in the Baining life-world.

Butterflies and grasshoppers for example, were the shapes in which deceased relatives appeared to inform the Baining about their own death, to warn about something, or when called upon by the living during mourning rites. The moth was in fact a particular type whose grubs were highly praised by my hosts as a rare and delicious meal. The “Y” shaped branch of a tree called *sugulki* was an important component of various structures (e.g. posts of houses and sheds, frames for cooking over fire, traps) or alone used as tool (e.g. a slingshot, a stick to catch pythons, a hanger to store food). Pigs and taro were intensely cared for and grown as the most valuable food sources necessary for the completion of most rites and celebrations, with significant roles in making and eliciting social relations at such events. And cats were domesticated and admired for their ability to catch and clear rats from the houses. While they too were sometimes eaten when they grew old, their owners could not bear to kill them or watch them being killed by another (in contrast to what I was told about dogs). Talking about these shapes of the Kavet masks, Benson remarked that one “should not make other animals like tree kangaroos or cassowaries, because they can get angry” (*yu no ken mekim narapla animal olsem sikau o muruk, bikos em bai kros*).

I argue that the specific choice to have certain types of masks also informed about the level of familiarity with the things they represented. As Meska told me, when he first thought about making a mask in the shape of a cat, he spent days looking at cats, studying their head, nose and ears, as well as their movement and behaviour. In this sense, it takes a certain level of familiarity with the animal to be able to make a mask that is both aesthetically pleasing and safe for the dancer. Then “a man will draw on the ground the shape of Kavet he wants to make. Many times. Many days he will look and draw and think...All patterns too. He will draw these on the ground and practice.”[3]

This process of familiarising and practicing is a prerequisite to what Gell (1992) refers to as the “technical virtuosity” of the originator who makes the art object. According to Gell, technical virtuosity is “intrinsic to the efficacy of works of art in their social

context, and tends always towards the creation of asymmetries in the relations between people by placing them in an essentially asymmetrical relation to things” (1992: 52). Gell suggests that the agency of art objects to captivate or fascinate “ensues from the spectator becoming trapped within the index because the index embodies agency which is essentially indecipherable,” partly because of this technical virtuosity of the artist, whereby the spectator is unable to mentally rehearse the origination of the index (Gell 1998: 71). But of course, Gell admits that the captivation has other sources as well, as there are many other types of “abduction of agency” from the index (ibid: 72). For example, Benson explained that when he makes a mask, he thinks he is “*mekim nating*,” which I translate from Tok Pisin for this context as making something ordinary or of little niceness/significance:

You make its [the mask’s] wrap/cover thinking it’s just ordinary/empty/bare. You make something ordinary/insignificant. You put something ordinary/empty/bare over your skin. You put it and dance and think it’s not good. When one takes a photo of you and gives it to you; you look and you are embarrassed. You look, you are *fascinated*. You think you looked ordinary/empty/bare but you looked good.[4]

I believe that translating *mangalim* here as “to be fascinated” adroitly captures the surprising effect of seeing an image that astonishes and delights the viewer, who is in this instance both the originator/artist and the beholder. The use of *mangalim* only extends to things that are perceived as nice or good. They captivate the viewer by making him want to look at and think of them; sometimes this may entail only “liking,” other times “wanting to possess” them (as illustrated in Chapter 1). Examples of such things are the colourful net bags (*bilum*) made by women or the houses decorated with geometrical patterns weaved into their bamboo walls. Now let’s turn back to the case of the photographed dancer. If Benson, as the originator/artist himself was fascinated by his own image – the assemblage of mask, human body, paint and decorations – then surely the fascination or captivation effect is not just rooted in the cognitive inability to rehearse the specific technical processes through which raw material is transformed into the finished product, i.e. the mask,

as Gell has put it. Furthermore, what about the agency of the mask to give the feeling of strength and courage, or to inflict harm?

On the meaning of art Anthony Forge (1979) articulated that the making of art objects involved overt rules of style such as techniques of carving and painting that were transmitted consciously in master-apprentice situation, but the meanings depended on nonconscious structures that may not be completely present in either the pupil or the master. To elaborate, he explains that intergenerational transmission of culture, or art, is not only what is consciously provided to the child but involves “patterns and structures of interrelationships that are never consciously conveyed” or received (1979: 283). Language, he suggests is a good example, since a child learns to speak with correct grammar, and perceives mistakes without explicitly learning or knowing the grammar as a set of rules that shape the language. Similar to the way a child can detect ungrammatical statements as “wrong,” so can a person make assertions of correctness such as “it is good grammar” (ibid: 284), “it is a good art object,” or “it is a good mask.”

Works that successfully embody major portions of the structure of the system in terms of the interrelationships they contain are likely to arouse pleasure and a sense of fitness, even of perfection, that, because the criteria of appreciation are not conscious, may manifest itself as a sense of the presence of the supranormal, of more power than human alone can achieve (Forge 1979: 284).

Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini (2010) interpret what Forge discusses as the “prescription of correctness” in terms of style – that is, the “aesthetic excellence” – as the *beauty* of art objects. They suggest that while Gell was unable to conceive of beauty as a form of power, Forge “saw in it what Gell saw in technical virtuosity” (2010: 138). He articulated beauty as the expression of unimaginable human talent, as expression of transcendence.

Drawing on this, I argue that the correctness or wrongness of a Baining mask comes from the unconscious structure that forms notions about style (the women’s recognition of the “wrong” Baining mask from the other village is an example of this).

And, the aesthetical excellence, or beauty, derives from the harmonious interrelatedness of the forms. Thus, beautiful masks are those that have greater charge than those of mere correctness. Accordingly, to come back to Benson who thought of his mask as something of little niceness/significance while making and wearing it: if he was fascinated by his image in the photograph, then was it not rather the mask's beauty than the incomprehensibility of the technical processes that enchanted him? If so, maybe the image itself has some potent agency stemming from its beauty: beauty which is conceivable only when it appears in a particular form (as an assemblage, in a photograph), at a particular place (night dance), and is seen by a particular other (a viewer). I will return to this later in the chapter, but for now I suggest that the beauty of Kavet, as we have seen, depends on technical virtuosity, and technical virtuosity on familiarity and practice.

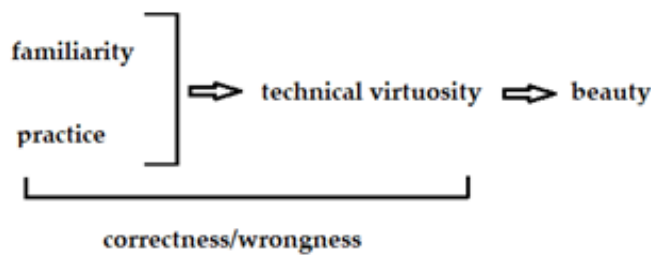


Figure 23 - Diagram of correctness/wrongness of form

Finally, it is also necessary to address the *sem* (embarrassment) Benson felt when he saw himself in the photograph. As I conducted the interview in Tok Pisin he used *sem*, but a more correct way to express his state would be vorvāt, as I have argued throughout this thesis. His description of the way he felt whilst making the mask, dancing with it, and having his image shown to him, offer insight into Vir Kairak notions of vorvāt and what it means for them to be seen in a particular way. First, the idea that men were “mekim nating” suggests their experience of vorvāt when they make the masks. In the men's house, as I watched my interlocutors paint their masks and help each other, I observed an awfully quiet, concentrated, and somewhat bashful group of youth and adult men. Many of the adolescent boys seemed unsure

and nervous about what they were doing and often an older brother gave them some advice about the paints, patterns, materials, and so on. But even the older more experienced men looked critically at their masks and body decorations.

Second, the *vorvāt* Benson felt when he initially saw himself in the photograph was also shared by my host brothers who described their experience as feeling surprised by and happy with their appearance but also *vorvāt* by the fact that they are seen in this form by the other men (and the one who took the photograph). That is, while the audience did not know the identity of the men behind the masks, the men in the men's house knew everyone and saw everyone but themselves before and during the dance. Therefore, I suggest that feeling *vorvāt* in making the masks and seeing oneself in photographs derives from men's perception of being seen and their desire to be recognised by the other men for their mask-making and performance skills. This becomes even more apparent when men claimed that once they wore the masks and went to dance, they did not feel *vorvāt* of the audience (I explore this further in the final chapter) as they normally felt when performing or giving a speech without masks. Hence, people felt *vorvāt* when they were or anticipated being seen by others, and *vorvāt* shaped the way in which they presented themselves to others as well as how they felt about the things they were making (e.g. masks) that were visible to others.

Secrets of the Shapes

To turn back to the significance Tavar's men put on making Kavet masks in only the abovementioned seven shapes (butterfly, grasshopper, moth, and so on), in this section I explore the aspect of secrecy. Like elsewhere in Papua New Guinea where men's kastom is kept secret from the women and children (e.g. (Gell 1975; Tuzin 1980; Gillison 1993; Harrison 1993) so were the meaning and stories of Vir Kairak masks. Younger women and children were neither supposed to know that men were dancing, nor the names and meaning of the masks' shapes. Therefore, the men of my host family suggested that to keep these secrets the masks had to appear in a

particular way: for example, Joshua explained that the decision to increase the overall size of the mask and its protruding mouth was not simply done for aesthetic reasons, but in order “to keep *kastom* strong.”

He elaborated that the dancers could see through the opening of the mask’s mouth, but in the same way women could also get a glimpse of their eyes. He continued:

In the past *kastom* was heavy, people respected it. Even if a woman saw the eyes she kept quiet. Now *kastom* is light, it is not as strong as before and if women see they talk out, and people talk down of *kastom*. So we made the mouth larger to hide the men’s eyes.[5]

Of course, most men knew that the women were aware the Kavet were in fact men covered with masks and decorations, but preferred to say that “*meri i no save*” (women don’t know). In fact, older men explained that their wives knew this secret but kept it to themselves. And while older women taught the adolescent girls about the masks and cautioned them not to talk openly about them, they only knew very little about the Kavet and what their shapes meant.

Once I was watching a night dance with my host sisters and nieces, and we were counting the masks. By that time, I already knew most of the shapes and the names. But when a Kavet in the shape of a grasshopper entered the dance area and I could not recognise it, I turned to the young women and asked what that mask was called. Instantly they replied: “*Em* (it’s) Kavet.” “*Mi save* (I know),” I said, “*tasol narapela nem bilong em wanem* (but what’s the other name)?” Puzzled they looked at each other and turned to their mother, who also replied “*Em* Kavet,” then pointed to another night dance mask with a red conical head and said “*dispela em* (that one is) Lingen.” I suddenly realised that I was about to reveal a secret that the men had entrusted me with but failed to mention that women didn’t know about it. I quickly smiled and made an exclamation as if I finally understood what the women were telling me. The next day I asked Noah, and he confirmed that women did not know about the meaning of the shapes. The masks’ designs had to be done in such a way that it wasn’t clear what they represented – hence their rather surreal shapes. Later Benson

explained that “when a woman looks at it [a mask], she should not be able to say this is a wallaby or other animal” (*taim meri lukluk em bai i no inap tokim dispela em sikau o narapela animal*). Thus, the masks had to be partially unrecognisable, in order to have a strong effect – that is, for the audience to see something incredible, and to be captivated by its image.

In fact, to draw the viewer’s eyes masks had to adhere to particular visual aspects and appear in a particular way. First, a Kavet had to be very large and appear as part of the body, rendering it incomprehensible as a costume worn by a human being. Second, it had to appear from the darkness of the bush, and be viewed only from a distance, and always in motion (dancing or bouncing in accordance to the correct choreographical principles). Third, both the Kavet’s shape and the patterns painted on it had to be symmetrical and made with great precision – as if “painted by computer rather than a man’s hand” (*paintim olsem **computer** nogat han bilong man*), explained my host brother Benjim, who despite his young age had already become renowned in Tavir for his talent and great skill in making masks. Many said he took this from his uncle (*akak* – mother’s brother), Jacob, who had been a sort of “*innovator*” in creating new and beautiful masks in his time, such as the butterfly Kavet specific to Tavir. Fourth, the main patterns on the Kavet had to be painted carefully using red store-bought marker pens, and black natural colorant obtained from the bush, because as Joshua put it, both the black and the red had to contrast with each other and on the white barkcloth, “because when people look, they do not only see the pattern you draw, but the picture that comes out from the white too” (*bikos taim ol lain lukluk ol i no save lukim patern yet yu paintim, tasol ol i lukim piksa i kamap long wait tu*). Meaning that the contrast these patterns created with the white background also created a visual effect that captivated the viewer.

Gombrich (1979) in his discussion of the art of Dutch graphic artist Escher, suggested that the images he creates are dazzling to the eye and mind because the repeated motifs may be interpreted differently based on what the viewer’s eye selects as figure and background (1979: 89). Therefore, it could be argued that the Vir Kairak men

make a conscious attempt to create such complex and precise repeated motifs to create the same effect. Indeed, as a viewer myself at many fire dances, I became astonished by the confusing nature of the dance and the masks' designs. The entrance, dance, and exit of the masks was significantly difficult to follow. Disoriented and overwhelmed by the visual exposure, I was unable to register and understand which mask I was looking at at any given time. Similarly, the patterns on the masks seemed to change and move, almost like optical illusions. While Gell (1992) mentions that there may very well be an innate susceptibility to eye-spot patterns, such as the ones on the Kula canoe-boards and the Baining masks, due to their bold tonal contrasts and bright colours, he does not delve into this, nor do I have the space to do so here. Yet, it certainly seemed that there was an intentional attempt at making these patterns as symmetrical and contrasting as possible, and men suggested that these had to "make the eye want to look" (*mekim ai i laik lukluk*).

Finally, these patterns and the applied body paints also had to appear "wet." This was achieved by using specifically selected paints as mentioned above, deep black body paint, and a water-honey (or sugar) mixture sprayed onto the dancer's body. The resulting glossy appearance created the desired visual effect, as if the Kavet had emerged from a body of water, where the bush spirits are normally thought to reside. This look and the meaning it carried further enhanced the enchantment effect. Nevertheless, the women did not know that Kavet resided in water, as this myth was also kept secret from them. While many were aware of stories about bush spirits living near water sources and creeks, they did not know where the Kavets come from. Hence, it is partially the lack of knowledge of what one saw and could not explain that made the mask "hard to think" and captivating, such as their surreal shapes and appearance of wetness.

Each of the aspects discussed above added to a mask's beauty and made the viewer look in wonder. This was achieved partly by hiding or making certain aspects of the object unrecognisable, puzzling, and disorienting. All masks had to appear in this way, or else the dance would not achieve the desired effect and was deemed

unsuccessful. Therefore, much attention was given to the making of each mask and the overall appearance of the settlement's dancers. In the following section I discuss the significance men put on appearing as a group in a particular form and why it mattered to them.

Aesthetics of Visibility

One afternoon my host father, Joshua, asked me if I wished to go to a night dance at the nearby hamlet of Mademga, on the outskirts of the largest local settlement Gaulim. He explained that the dance was organised to mark the opening of a new store and that the men from our village had been invited to perform. This invitation was important, because such dances had a strong dimension of competition between the participating clans or settlements, where the dancers tried to show they were "*namba wan*" (the best). Like Mt. Hagen *moka* festivals (Strathern and Strathern 1971), the competitive nature of Baining dances played out through a variety of modes. First, the number of the masks was of great importance – the more masks involved, the more spectacular a dance was considered to be. Second, the number and size of displayed pythons and parcels of pork carried by the dancers when they first entered the performance ground showed the skill, strength, and wealth of their group. Third, the beauty of the masks and the richness of body decorations had to be *namba wan* and make viewers from other groups *mangalim* (be fascinated by or like to have/be). Fourth, the host musicians would try to make their performance as energetic and lengthy as possible (usually until dawn), occasionally changing the rhythm in order to evoke "hot" feelings (e.g. excitement, anger) inside the *bel* (abdomen) of the dancers that both encouraged and confused them in their dance. Thus, the guest dancers would try to keep up with the musicians and dance energetically without falling down or being burned by the fire. If a dancer fell, it was said that the musicians had won. If all went well and the masks danced until the last beat of music without falling, it was said that the dancers had won. Therefore, only the more experienced men with

well-made masks would dance at such dances, saying that it was too dangerous for the young, less experienced boys who could fall and burn or hurt themselves.

Around 11pm the next night, we set out for the hamlet of Mademga. As we were walking on the main road, I could only see the patches of asphalt I pointed my torch at, plastic bags and empty drink cans, rubbish, and carefully spilled patterns of betel nut spittle and urine. I had not ever seen the road so dirty. After a while my host brother David appeared from the bush. He had been in the men's house helping the dancers with their masks and body decorations and told us that they were almost ready. He walked with us until the junction to Main and then disappeared into the bush. There we came across a large group of women and children from Tavir, who were slowly walking towards the dance area. We continued with them, treading in the dark for another 20 minutes or so, and eventually arrived at Mademga.

A loud generator buzzed powering two fluorescent lights that illuminated the newly opened trade store and the owners' house in the background. Groups of guests had gathered around the yard, waiting, napping and chatting; all facing the store that had been decorated with a huge *SP Brown* beer banner and some colourful Christmas decorations. The opening ceremony and blessing had taken place earlier that day, and for the night the owners had arranged a mask dance to celebrate and ensure the success of their new business venture. According to some of my informants this was "real *kastom*." It drew on the power inherent in the masks' images of the bush spirits, to provide wellbeing to the hosts and participants. It also offered an opportunity for different settlements to compete. Thus, it was not like the shorter dances done for tourists.

Such "real dances" had to be paid for with cooked food, which the dancers ate in the men's house before putting on their body decorations. Through the gift of food, the dancers were made capable of dancing well, and through the dance, the hosts were given good fortune. These dances also offered an opportunity to initiate young boys and teach them the secrets of the masks, instead of having to organise periodical initiation dances. Moreover, they provided an occasion on which dancers could

progress from wearing the conical red masks called Lingen to the large rectangular Vunvun, and finally to the spectacular Kavet masks that walked with their bare feet through the large bonfire.

At Mademga they had built a very large bonfire. When the dancers sent news that the dance was about to commence, some of the older men in the audience started to throw even more logs onto the fire. Joshua also helped and kicked some of the protruding branches, trying to make the fire uniform from all sides. He then wandered over and murmured a couple of times that the firewood was too big and dangerous, and that he had to “lookout after it” (*lukautim paia*). Indeed, it was by far the largest dance fire I had seen, and the worst built – with branches protruding dangerously in all directions. But when the fluorescent lights went out and the beating of bamboo ideophones started, there was nothing more that Joshua could do about the fire. One by one, the masks emerged from the bush into the warm, lit dance ground. After their introductory display in a single line, they broke apart and began to dance, circling one another and the fire. Then what we had all feared happened; one Kavet crashed into a protruding branch just above his line of sight and fell. While he seemed to be alright – immediately leaping up and carrying on – this accident had confirmed Joshua’s worries, and given advantage to the host settlement.

The masks jumped and swung, circled and walked through the fire; kicked up the embers and tossed burning logs into the audience. Such aggressive acts were an integral part of the Kavet performance, and kept the spectators at a distance. The whole made a chaotic sequence of happenings; simultaneously aggressive, fast, astonishing, captivating, and confusing. I watched drunken men running towards the fire and jostling the Kavet as they energetically whirled and bumped into one another. I heard babies crying and children laughing amid the sounds of men drumming, dogs fighting, and uninvited guests creeping in the bush. I smelled beer and homebrewed spirit; betel nut and lemongrass; sweat, smoke and mildew. As phone cameras and torches flickered in the night, one by one the masks disappeared back into the bush and the music stopped. “Strange,” I thought and started looking for Joshua. It was

only then that I saw a large group of people gathered in one corner of the hamlet. All attention now turned to them as the news travelled quickly from person to person: one of the guests from our village, Tavir, had been slashed with a machete. Suddenly a woman's high-pitched wail erupted near the house and a cluster of bodies quickly moved in her direction. She was helped into the back of a truck, where her son, a man in his early 20s, lay with a wound on his back. Joshua came quickly, leading his grandchildren by their wrists. The guests started to leave, and once we were surrounded by all the women, children and elders of Tavir, we all headed back to our village in worry and anticipation of the possibility of a larger fight breaking out.

The morning after the dance, Joshua explained that it all had happened because a man from the neighbouring settlement Main wanted to dance with them, but Tavir's men had not let him. Joshua sighed: "If one wants to dance, you should let him, I said. But they didn't listen to me, and so this something happened." [6] He muttered, "I said they should let him because that is the *kastom* – to have many kinds of masks. But now they don't want this. They didn't like his mask." [7] The men explained that all masks had to be "pleasing to look at" (*naispla long lukluk*) and that even one ugly mask could ruin their dance. They rejected the man from Main because they had seen his Kavet in the shape of a wallaby at another event, and thought it was "quite ugly," and that even the women would see that his mask was "wrong" and guess what it was (i.e. a wallaby). My host brother Benjim sternly said: "Here if a mask turns ugly, the men will burn it and make a new one" (*Long hia, sapos mask i kamap nogut, ol man bai kukim em na wokim nupela*). But this had upset the man from Main, so on the night of the dance, under the influence of alcohol, he wounded one of the spectators from Tavir.

Tavir and Main were both established after WWII as a result of the colonial administration's enforced resettlement of affected communities with high mortality rates and little subsistence resources (Baining Patrol Reports 1965-1969). While Tavir

was populated by the Kairak Baining, Main was an Uramot Baining settlement with its own distinct customs, masks, and land boundaries. Until the late 1970s both settlements were organised as a single congregation of the Methodist Church and their residents attended and planned religious and national celebrations together. In the 1980s with the cocoa boom and steady population growth, Tavir and Main built their own churches and separated much of their activities. During my fieldwork, men from both settlements frequently performed dances and considered themselves resilient “protectors” of *kastom*. They also spoke of each other with respect on issues related to *kastom* – especially when juxtaposed with the growing influence of Pentecostal Christianity. Easily accessible from the urban centres of Kokopo and Rabaul, these settlements received the largest number of tourists in the area (if not all the tourists). But in the last couple of years, Main had surpassed Tavir, due to stronger relationships between its elders and tourism agents operating in the province. They had also registered their dance group with the Kokopo Tourism Authority. This was a new requirement introduced by the Cultural Commission of PNG and the Tourism Board intending to regulate the quality and authenticity of *kastom* performances.

However, Main’s growing popularity as a tourist destination seemed not to bother the men in Tavir. While they too wanted to perform dances for tourists, whereby they could initiate the younger boys, gain more experience, and earn some money, nobody spoke with anger or envy about Main. Similarly, nobody saw Main’s success as stealing or blocking the flow of tourists to their own settlement. In fact, some, like Kilala, said they were happy that at least *kastom* still prevailed, and that if tourists went to Main today, they would come to Tavir another time. This suggested two things: 1) that there was no rivalry between Main and Tavir regarding their tourism economies, and 2) that tourists were not the targeted primary audience for Baining dances. Rather, men wanted people from neighbouring communities and other parts of East New Britain and Papua New Guinea to see their *kastom* and know they were “the best.” They wanted their masks to fascinate the viewers to such an extent that they would later tell stories about the dance to others who had not seen it – in effect recognising their *kastom* and the dancers’ talent and capability.

People of *Ples*

In Melanesia, cultural practices, and particularly dances, are often performed as a sort of implicit or explicit competition for prestige (A. J. Strathern and Strathern 1971; O'Hanlon 1983) that is typically achieved through some sort of innovation and incorporation of new elements into the existing practices (Allen 1981; Jolly 1992; Harrison 1992). In some cases, the adoption of new dances, costumes, decorations, and other performance paraphernalia has been analogous to obtaining famous valuables from trading partners (Schwartz 1973: 159; Otto 1991: 144). Therefore, according to Harrison (2000) the origin of such imported elements was often emphasised because it enhanced the prestige of the person or group who introduced them (and was able to obtain them) in the first place. Such processes of incorporation also suggest that Melanesians had objectified their culture long before colonial contact (ibid.), and that instead of focusing on its preservation, they had made conscious efforts to improve their performances by means of innovation. Moreover, Harrison (2000) argues that by taking cultural practices as possessions, Melanesians had also constructed their cultural and group identities through means of objectification. That is, people could be considered part of a group because of their knowledge about particular dances belonging to that group; knowledge they obtained by means of transmission/inheritance, exchange, gift-giving, and so on. Therefore, people in Melanesia could have affiliation to and participate in several cultural identities (Errington and Gewertz 1986; Linnekin and Poyer 1990).

However, from the late-1960s onward, and gaining momentum in the 1970s with indigenous societies' mobilisation against colonial powers, cultural practices became a tool for resistance (Foster 1992) serving as a political symbol for group or national identity (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982). Thus the emergence of the Pidgin word *kastom* and its explicit referral to the sphere of "tradition" or "*pasin bilong tumbuna*" (customary behaviour), as opposed to *bisnis* (business/commerce), *gavman* (government), and *lotu* (church) (Foster 1992; Otto 1992). On the one hand, the objectification of culture through *kastom* was an attempt to codify national culture,

and promote unity through diversity and “combined heritage” (Constitution of PNG). At this level, however, Tonkinson has argued, *kastom* had to be “largely devoid of specific content if it is to have the desired effect” (1993: 600). On the other hand, in local context people strategically deployed their detailed knowledge and performance of *kastom* in the creation and maintenance of social and geographical boundaries, “expression of ethnocentrism, and in competition for social and political pre-eminence demands” (ibid.).

Now to return to Joshua’s statement that their *kastom* previously had many kinds of masks. By “many kinds” (*planti kain mask*) he meant both having different mask designs and dancers from various settlements. On numerous occasions the older men in Tavar explained that the dances were open to any man who wanted to perform. But it seemed this was no longer entirely true. The dances I witnessed and heard about included only men from a particular *ples* (settlement). Typically, a *ples* was organised through kinship and clan ties, but with the increasing number of inter-clan and inter-tribe marriages, as well as land leasing practices to non-Baining incomers, the rural populations too had become quite diverse. Therefore, the dancers of a *ples* could include men associated with a different clan or entirely different people based on their patrilineal ties.

In Tavar, for example, the dancers were of Kairak, Qaqet, and Uramot Baining background. There was also one Tolai man whose parents (both Tolai) had settled in the ward many years before. But not everyone living within the geographical boundaries of the *ples* was initiated and taught the secrets of Vir Kairak *kastom*. As Benjim put it, only those who were interested, wanted to learn, and participated in the wider community through the relationships they created and embodied, could become part of the men practicing *kastom*. Likewise, those who were initiated and possessed knowledge about Tavar’s particular kinds of mask designs, painting patterns, dance moves, songs, and initiation ties between the men, became associated with the identity of a Tavar man rather than a Tolai, Qopki, or Qaqet.

Men created and strengthened their relationships through work in the bush, in the men's house, and in dances. They spent hours together making the masks, eating, chatting, smoking, joking, putting on the body decorations, and helping each other. This provided the means to become part of the *ples*, to be visible to and with the others, and to elicit certain relations with others. Therefore, *ples* was more than a geographical area: it was an index of relationality, of belonging to a community, and participating in the identities it encompassed. By the same token, on a local level, a mask from a specific *ples* not only signified that *ples*, but also expressed its community identities and ties. My interlocutors argued that in a dance, the masks were not seen individually but as a whole; their designs, movements, and concordance with each other and the music were parts of a whole that recapitulated their relationships with a *ples* (Strathern 1999). This is why they had been reluctant to include men from other settlements whose masks did not comply with their vision of aesthetics and thus were unable to display their *ples* in the form they wanted others to see.

Finally, we must also recognise the significance of *kastom* in people's capacity to participate in Papua New Guinean national identity. Men's pride in having their Kavet on the 50 Kina banknote had to do with the recognition they had successfully drawn from neighbouring communities, tourists, festival officials, and the PNG government, for being the "*namba wan*" practitioners of a "*strongpela kastom*" (strong *kastom*). In this way they and their *ples* had become part of the wider nation, and representatives of PNG's national culture. To be the best, as men put it, entailed being invited to dance at various events in other settlements, such as the one described above; to be chosen by festival organisers for upcoming festivals in and outside the province; and to receive a larger number of international tourists. Moreover, the importance of recognition as a *ples* seems to have become a more prominent concern with the recent attempts by the PNG Cultural Commission and Tourism Board to register all dance groups. Hence, while competition has been a longstanding practice of Baining dances, nowadays the ability to make masks and perform better than all others gave the dancers and their *ples* a prestige that emphasised local identity,

elicited relationships with powerful outsiders such as government and festival officials, and drew resources to the *ples*.

In this section I explored *kastom* and *ples* as social and political categories in order to understand why my hosts did not want the man from Main to dance with them at Mademga. While the men from Main and Tavir respected each other's *kastom*, they also watched each other's dances with a scrutinising eye. Their competition was not simply for local prestige, but for prestige on a national level. And if the man from Main had joined in the dance, he would have inserted Main's Kavet into the whole and displayed Main's ability to make masks and perform *kastom*, whereby distorting the effects of the dance and the category of *ples* as part of these performances. Moreover, if the man had danced, and the dance was successful, then it would not have been just Tavir who had "won the dance" (*winim danis*), thus, effectively challenging their success as a group.

Where is *Kastom Kastom*?

Vir Kairak's efforts to "modernise" their masks had not only put their Kavet on the 50 Kina note, but also drawn festival organisers' attention. They have danced for many years at the National Mask Festival held in East New Britain, and were even invited to Port Moresby twice to perform at the South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1980 and the Melanesian Festival of Arts in 2014. These events held an important place in Tavir's shared memory as they marked the recognition and inclusion of the Vir Kairak people and *kastom* into the nation's culture. "We showed all people of PNG that we are also part of PNG" (*Mipela soim ol pipol bilong PNG mipela tu part bilong PNG*), said Neli, one of the more experienced men, who had performed in the capital.

However, festivals and dances organised away from their *ples* received much critique and opposition by some of the Baining leaders from other settlements. Some claimed that these performances sensualised Baining *kastom* and rendered its sacredness meaningless. Others suggested it only created an opportunity for other Papua New Guineans to "undermine and look down on the Baining" either by seeing them as

“stuck in the past,” and thus “stuck in the bush,” with their *kastom*, or by trying to ruin their dance by throwing broken glass and nails into the fire through which the Kavet dancers walked. Thus, there has been growing public pressure, mainly led by leaders of the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council (which represents the Baining clans), to prevent Baining dances outside of their traditional setting and local *ples*. Their efforts were mainly directed at persuading influential Baining elders not to allow such performances and suing the dancers’ leaders at village court.

Joshua described one such occasion, which occurred in 2013, when a Japanese woman came to Rapopo Beach Resort (in Kokopo), looking for a group of Baining dancers to perform at a festival in Japan. With the approval of the Tourism Board and the help of a tourism agent, arrangements (including having their passports made and flight tickets booked) were made for a small group of six men from Tavir to go to Japan. However, several elders from the neighbouring Kairak village Ganbraga and representatives from the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council had been displeased with this development, so they sued Joshua and the dancers at Ganbraga’s village court. “They said that we cannot reveal *kastom* in Japan, in another place” (*em i tok mipela noken kamautim kastom long Siapan, long narapela hap*), Joshua explained. The court ended without a verdict, or as Joshua put it “it ended, and I did not pay the court” (*em pinis tasol, na mi no baim kort*) (he had not paid any fines). The dispute had resulted in the withdrawal of the Japanese representatives, and in the end, Joshua sighed, “we didn’t go, they cancelled I think” (*mipela no go, ol I kanselim ating*).

This was not the first time a Baining fire dance planned for Japan had been hampered. In 1991, the ENB Tourist Board had arranged to send a group of dancers from Ganbraga to a trade show in Japan and later to Port Moresby and Lae to perform at the South Pacific Games. But some Baining leaders from the other clans expressed discontent about taking the dances outside of *ples*. Mr Boniface Setavo, a leader from the Mali Baining, sent a letter to the Tourism Board, the Member of Provincial Assembly for Lasul Baining, the Masi Welfare Association, and Radio Rabaul, which

was later published in the Post-Courier (dated 1st May 1991). A section of the letter as it appears in Rahatynskyj (2001: 28) was as follows:

I ask my fellow Bainings to support me. But I shall be disheartened and defeated if my fellow Bainings remain silent. I shall develop dislike for those politicians concerned in the present provincial government and the ENB Tourism Board if they exercise their iron fist and pursue their plans to send the dancers to Japan or even to Port Moresby and Lae during the coming South Pacific Games. I would like to let it be known that encouraging the Bainings to perform their sacred fire dance in such alienated and unnatural surroundings is a show of disrespect and total disregard for the rights and identity of the Bainings and their culture. Yes, it may be good for the tourism industry. Tell me what direct long-term benefits will these trips outside of East New Britain have on the Baining villager?

This shows that Mr Setavo, and others like him, understood the sacredness of the dance as something deriving from its link with *ples*. They argued that to uproot it and put it in an “unnatural surrounding” would be a show of disrespect not only to the *kastom* itself but also to Baining identity – thus, illustrating the connection between performing *kastom* in the right manner as embodying Baining identity. Furthermore, Mr Setavo drew attention to the inability of tourism to provide any positive long-term effects on Baining communities. At one of my meetings with Mr Setavo he expressed exactly the same sentiments regarding the annual Mask Festival in Kokopo, asserting that it only benefited the hotels and Air Niugini, while bringing nothing to the Baining people. In fact, according to him and some of the Baining elders in the Stewardship Council, these dances performed in urban settings only provided an opportunity for the Tolai and other Papua New Guineans to belittle the Baining people. They shared numerous accounts about broken glass and nails being placed in the bonfire, and viewers throwing bottles and rocks at the masks to injure them and make them fall. According to these leaders, such horrid acts tried to undermine Baining *kastom* and weaken it, in effect creating power tension and separation between “us” and “them”, Baining and non-Baining, Papua New Guineans and Bainings. Therefore, they decided, that *kastom* was powerful as long as it was done in

its *ples*, and advocated the banning of performances outside of Baining settlements. They even suggested that dances organised for tourists must be completely abandoned, and if foreigners really wanted to see “Baining ritual” they could always “come to the villages and see the real thing.”

Taking this stance, the Stewardship Council and some elders from Ganbraga had sued Tavir for trying to take *kastom* outside, and prevented the dance in Japan from happening. Apart from feeling upset about this, Joshua also expressed discontent with two particular aspects of the court: first, the magistrate was a woman, which according to him was wrong, because the issue concerned men’s *kastom*. It was thus something she did not and should not know about, making it impossible for the men to speak openly at the court hearings. Second, it was a contradiction for Ganbraga’s leader and Kairak representative in the Stewardship Council to talk about the significance of *ples* for *kastom*, when he himself had not practiced *kastom* ever since he converted to Pentecostal Christianity. Joshua noted his hypocrisy, “he stopped people from practicing *kastom*, and he attended the Marusem crusade, where they revealed the secrets of the masks to all women and children.”[8] But at the court hearing the man had argued that dancing outside of PNG was wrong because it would “*kamoutim kastom*” (reveal *kastom*). Joshua also pointed out that the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council was supposedly “protecting” *kastom* while they turned a blind eye to the way “others [Pentecostals] were ending *kastom* among the Kairak” (*ol i pinisim kastom long Kairak*). Indeed, in my conversation with the council, they only criticised the Kairak and Uramot settlements in the area near Tavir for having forgotten the “original true Baining ways” and “the sacredness of *kastom*,” and for dancing at festivals and for tourists, but not once mentioned the Pentecostals’ war on *kastom*.

For the men in Tavir, however, dances for tourist were no less “real” than the ones made for weddings, for example. Even though there were some differences, such as the length of the dance, the height of the fire, and the number of masks; in the end, these dances were still *kastom*. And while tourism did not bring long-term financial benefits, it provided men with the opportunity to preserve and practice *kastom*, to

develop and pass on their skills in making masks. Moreover, it created and sustained strong relationships with tourism agents, officers of the Tourism Board, and other government officials, which ensured getting invited to dance at national and international festivals. Finally, dances for tourists often drew other viewers from neighbouring communities, and thus became a way to display a settlement's ability to make masks and draw viewers.

On the other hand, performances such as those in Japan, even if they never commenced, enhanced a settlement's status through their recognition by other Bainings, government officials, and foreigners. Regarding the 1991 dance in Japan, Marta Rahatynskyj notes that the Uramot Baining in the village of Main spoke about the selected dancers with both admiration and outrage (personal communication, 26 July, 2017). Either way people talked, and by doing so they recognised the dancers' skills, their *ples*, and masks.

Conclusion

Could we say that the image on the banknote created certain expectations from the men in Tavor? Maybe. After PNG's Independence in 1975, *kastom* attained significant political and economic value and played an important role in the country's nation building project. In the years that followed, Corbin (1988) writes that many Baining villages revived older mask forms and dances, which they had stopped performing after conversion to Christianity. Among the Vir Kairak greater attention had been given to "bettering the masks." One of the main reasons for this was the value of *kastom* as a tool through which people could be recognised and feel as part of the nation. Between 1975 and 1985, for example, the bird of paradise – as it appears on the country's coat of arms – painted on the foreheads of masks became a popular design among the Vir Kairak. Such masks, although not as numerous as before, were still made during my fieldwork, and one could see the bird painted on stores and house doors throughout Tavor. Noah, who had decorated many masks with this

image and had painted it on his front door explained said that they “make the bird because it is PNG. And we are PNG. We are part of PNG and our *kastom* is part of PNG.” Similarly, the 50 Kina banknote solidified their relationship to the country. It became a reference point for their ability to make masks and crystallised the Baining *kastom* through Tavar’s Kavet mask. While to most outsiders the Baining were simply “the Baining” (a single whole of people) and differences in their masks did not concern them, for my interlocutors these differences provided ways to objectify their group identity, which they wanted others to see and recognise. Thus, the mask on the 50 Kina banknote was a “representation” of many things – the spirits, the Vir Kairak, Tavar, the Baining, and their *kastom* – rendering them visible to themselves, the Pentecostals, outsiders, state officials, and tourists.

In the next chapter I offer a more detailed discussion on Vir Kairak’s conversions to Pentecostalism, their attitudes towards *kastom*, and how my interlocutors understood the relationship between practicing Christianity, change, and development.



Figure 24 - Bird of paradise image on store

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING LIVES

This chapter explores Vir Kairak notions and articulations of leading a “true Christian life” and the transformative efficacy of secondary conversion for both persons and the community at large. It illustrates the role of Christianity in effecting positive and meaningful change in people’s social lives and relationships that would entail their recognition by powerful others and attract development to their community.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the anthropology of Christianity, and especially in the comparative aspects of missionisation, conversion, and ritual (Csordas 1997; Robbins 2004a; Cannell 2007; Lindhardt 2017). Many of these studies have been predominantly interested in discussions about continuity and change, modernity and tradition, and the ways in which local religious order is established, transformed, and intertwined with notions of rupture (Robbins 2009a). This body of literature has shown how both from the standpoint of the Christians and the anthropologists who work with them, conversion brings a sense of a break between the pre-Christian past and Christian present, and is shaped by an orientation towards a brighter future (Meyer 1999; Engelke 2004; Robbins 2004b; Keane 2007; Marshall 2009; van de Kamp 2011). In this way, the anthropology of Christianity has challenged a certain inclination within the discipline to look at cultural continuity and ignore the possibility of radical change (Robbins 2007). Contrarily, others have argued that Christianity draws on continuities between the past and present, and in some cases emphasises the importance of traditional practices (Hann 2007; Chua 2012).

While the ethnographic material in this chapter offers a valuable contribution to this debate, my focus is rather on the significance of secondary conversion to Pentecostalism in shaping local notions of recognition and self-making, and particularly their relationship to Vir Kairak understandings of development. This chapter explores how processes of reaction to and adoption of particular forms of

Christianity have unfolded in Tavir, and illustrates local perceptions of change, the conflicts that come with it, and how people have learnt to see and live with each other in different ways. I argue that Pentecostal adherents actively try to change themselves and their community in order to be “seen” in a particular way by God and significant others, such as state officials, expatriate businessmen, researchers, and so on (“will see how we’ve changed” / *bai lukim hau mipela senis*).

The title of this chapter comes from the Tok Pisin phrase “*senis(im) laip*” (changing [one’s] life), which my interlocutors frequently used to describe people who had converted to one of the “local churches” (*ples lotu*) – a term that encompassed all churches that were not Catholic or Methodist – and stopped performing most Vir Kairak customs (*kastom*). The pastors of these churches also talked about their lives in terms of change and reflected that “*senis(im) laip*” was a process done over time, rather than an instance of rupture (e.g. a moment of revelation or baptism with the Holy Spirit). Furthermore, elders used “*senis(im) laip*” to describe the Vir Kairak’s resettlement to Tavir and their initial conversion to Christianity. They referred to the time before resettlement as *tudak* [TP] or *bānangi* [K] (darkness/night) and the period after “learning the Word of God” (*lainim tok bilong God*) or “hearing the Good News” (*harim good news*) as *lait* [TP] or *gunun* [K] (light/day). As I have already mentioned in Chapter 1, “darkness” was a time of perpetual war and death when the Vir Kairak had to hide in the bush and kill anyone they came into contact with, in order to keep themselves safe. Yet, with their resettlement to Tavir and the “light,” people now lived in peace.

In this new setting, the Vir Kairak had to learn how to dwell with others and navigate within the local governance system of *luluais* (village councillors) and *tultuls* (constables), where they no longer needed to (or could) stay hidden. Moreover, their new hamlets and gardens too became subject to the colonial gaze as the Australian administration and missionaries demanded well-kept and visually pleasing hamlets and gardens (see also Nelson 1982; Rollason 2011). The increased emphasis on keeping clean hamlets, good gardens, and planting coconut palms, brought

significant changes to Vir Kairak social and economic wellbeing, especially compared to the WWII period when Baining settlements and gardens were frequently raided and destroyed. Thus, my interlocutors often claimed that “the time of darkness” (*taim bilong tudak*) had reduced them to only ten families, while Christianity and “the time of light” (*taim bilong lait*) had produced growth and plentiful gardens. The juxtaposition of day and night, light and darkness, war and peace, hidden and not-hidden, pointed to a sense of rupture. Hence, conversion appeared to have provided new ways for the Vir Kairak to perceive time and transitions between past, present, and future (Engelke 2004; High 2016).

Conversion also entailed refashioning oneself into a religious and national subject – the Christian person – who adopted new ways of living and relating to others. What I mean here by the Christian person is any Vir Kairak man or woman who embraced God and subsequently embraced “change,” and thus made choices about which cultural elements (*kastom*) to take on and which to abandon as a route to changing his or her life. These elements were further called into question when the Vir Kairak adopted Pentecostal Christianity in the 1980s and early-2010s (see also Jorgensen 2005; Jebens 2011; Barker 2012). Fundamentally, many in Tavor believed that a stronger break from the ways of *kastom* was necessary in order to reconfigure themselves as “true Christians” (*trupela kristen*), who could bring development into their lives and community.

Vehicle of Change

One of the most challenging tasks during my fieldwork was to understand the differences between Tavor’s three churches, and why people decided to switch from one to the other. At first glance, the congregations appeared as groups organised through kinship ties and Sunday services felt like extended family gatherings. Indeed, my informants suggested that kinship, especially the affinal relations of spouses

moving into their husband's or wife's hamlet³², determined peoples' congregation. They claimed that while as a general rule women took on their husband's denomination, in some cases, if the woman's "belief was too strong" (*bilip bilong em strongpela tumas*), each person could continue to go to their own church. For example, Joshua's two younger brothers, Barnabas and Peter, were married to Helen and Joyce, respectively, who were also classificatory sisters (paternal parallel cousins). While most men in Joshua's lineage were Methodist, his younger brother Peter had converted to Pentecostalism following his wife Joyce. Differently, Barnabas continued to affiliate with the United Church after marrying Helen, who also did not leave the Pentecostal Zion Church. Both sisters had moved to their husbands' hamlet, and almost all of their affines were Methodists, yet they had kept their church affiliation. Significantly, all but one of Joyce's siblings and their spouses were Pentecostal, while all but one of Helen's siblings and their spouses were Methodist (see Figure 25).

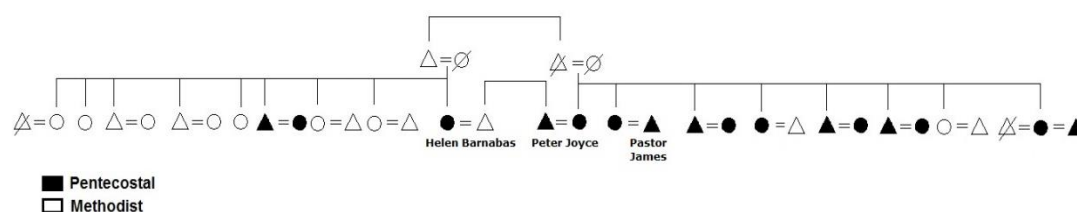


Figure 25 – Kinship Chart

The presence of such cases made it hard to establish a correlation between people's kinship and denomination, and generally, my informants suggested that spiritual belief was a "matter of the heart" (*samting bilong hart*) not something one could be tricked (*trik*) into by their Pentecostal spouses (as some Methodists claimed when discussing their relatives' decision to change denomination). Of course, they added that as a spouse, parent, or in-law, it was their duty to talk and show the "right way" (*rait rot*), or in other words, the right denomination to follow. Essentially, the "right

³² The Vir Kairak spoke of themselves as a "patrilineal people" (in English) and described their residence pattern as one that "follows the man" (*bihainim man*). This entailed a married woman moving into her husband's hamlet. However, if a man had only daughters, he could ask that one of his sons-in-law move to his hamlet and pay a groom price to his parents.

way” was always related to ideas about “*senis*” (change) and living a “good life” (*gutpela laip*).

My Pentecostal interlocutors often reiterated that it was only when they changed their own lives, that they could also change the community and bring development to Tavir. For example, during a funerary feast, Miriam, who was raised in and married to a Pentecostal family, told me that when one stopped performing mourning taboos that could last up to two or three months, one could devote that additional time to working in the gardens or at the oil palm plantation,³³ and give one tenth of the earnings as tithes and offerings to their church. This, in turn, brought wealth to one’s family and church and pleased God. She suggested that as a response God would then “pour down wealth from heaven” (*kapsaitim **wealth** long heven i pundaun*) for the whole community (referring to Malachi 3:10).

In their discussions about change, people focused predominantly on the body, which had to be controlled and looked after by means of limiting consumption (avoiding substances such as alcohol, tobacco, betel nut, and marijuana), wearing “modern” but modest clothes, and refraining from the practice of *kastom* and living according to the old ways of the ancestors. They also emphasised the importance of work, collaboration, and non-reciprocal giving (discussed in Chapter 1), as well as obtaining secondary education, and having a particular type of house as elements of one’s positive change. They described this as leading a life of example that would invite others to change as well. Within this context, I argue that the Christian person was seen as a vehicle of change and a means to attract development.

People in Tavir ubiquitously understood development in terms of infrastructure. As one of my informants explained: “With development we will have many good roads [mobility], electricity [connection to the grid], good permanent schools and churches [building], local aid posts with lots of medicine [healthcare] and water [solution to

³³ Compare from A. L. Epstein (1979) who describes similar example for the Tolai people and the negative relationship between *tambu* shell money (*kastom*) and economic and social development.

the dry season shortages], banks [state currency and business loans], large stores like the ones in town [modern commodities], and permanent houses for everyone.” Such things associated with development were never isolated from their history and links to foreigners (mostly white Europeans and Australians, but also PNG-born Chinese) and missionaries. Development was thus discussed as something that came from the outside – something that could be brought from the outside – as a result of change from within. Hence, a focal point of this chapter is the notion of change, which when approached from the lens of Pentecostalism, or even more generally from the Vir Kairak point of view, appears as something that comes from within the community. It begins with the person and makes its way outward: it transforms the community, which in turn brings development from without. Such an understanding points to a double movement: change from inside to outside, and development from outside to inside (see Figure 26).

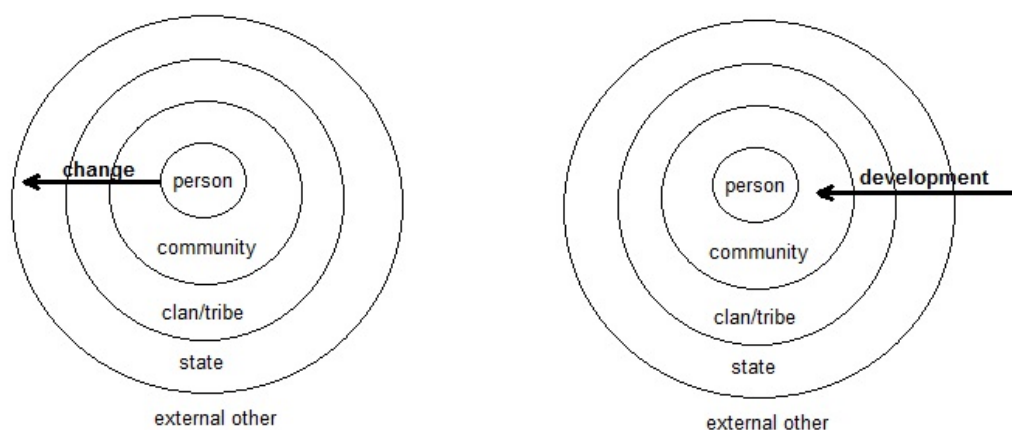


Figure 26 – Direction of change and development

This, I argue, should also be understood historically as a result of the colonial and post-colonial relationships within the province. East New Britain is well known throughout PNG for its good roads and electrified Tolai settlements. In academic literature, provincial publications, and tourism magazines, the Tolai people are well

spoken of in relation to European values, skills, and their penchant for entrepreneurship (T. S. Epstein 1968; A. L. Epstein 1969; Salisbury 1970), and often praised within the expatriate circles in Port Moresby, Lae, and Kokopo for their willingness to adopt “modernity.” The Tolai themselves were proud of the fact that they had “developed” because, as my guide John put it, they “liked and wanted what the white missionaries and colonial officers taught” them. Similarly, a sailor working for the *Solwara Meri* boat company (which carried passengers between Kokopo and Namatanai) once said to me: “You see, the clothes, jobs, cars, houses; everything the white men brought and taught us was better, more logical.” Many of my Tolai informants from Kokopo and Rabaul region often differentiated themselves from other Papua New Guineans (especially the Highlanders³⁴) on the basis of their “development” and “adaptability,” their “political consciousness” and “business head.” It is no surprise then that having such a close contact with the Tolai people – going to school and church together, engaging in trade, and even residing with them in the same ward – the Vir Kairak had witnessed not only the difference in the way Tolais carried themselves and their access to various commodities and infrastructure, but also their relationship to change and development (T. S. Epstein 1968; K. Martin 2007) – i.e. the willingness to change as a route to development.

Vir Kairak desires for recognition as people, landowners, Christians, and citizens of the state occupied a central place in Pentecostal rhetoric, especially in relation to their long history of marginalisation and representation as underdeveloped “*busman*” [TP] (people associated with wilderness and backwardness) by both the colonial and post-colonial administrations as well as the Tolai people (Rohatynskyj 1992). Therefore, I argue that my interlocutors understood change as a way to become visible in a particular form, comparable to a prior state associated with the ancestral past they imagined (“times of darkness”). This form, however, was not completely disassociated from their “unique Baining identity,” as some called it, that derived

³⁴ My Tolai friends suggested that while the Highlanders had certain business prowess because they were aggressive, they attributed successful business ventures on their part as a result of their calculating ability, *kastom*, and vast reciprocal networks.

from the ancestors and was linked to hard work, cooperation, giving/feeding, and *vorvāt* (Chapter 1). Through change people believed that they could gain recognition, wealth, and education, which could one day provide them with their own representatives in the provincial government and national parliament. Such desires unfolded as a critique of the post-Independence government's corrupt character and lack of attention to people's needs. They were also directed internally towards the Baining's current state, inability to change, and bring about "*bikpela senis*" (big/meaningful change) that went beyond one's own community.

Becoming Christian

The Mission came to the territories of German Papua and British New Guinea in the late 1800s. First were the London Missionary Society (LMS) to the South, and the Methodists to the North, followed by the Lutherans in German New Guinea and the Roman Catholics who were not concerned with limiting their activities to any one area but spread throughout the islands. First to come to East New Britain were the Wesleyan Methodists with the arrival of Dr George Brown at Molot on 15 August 1875. Each year on that day, people in ENB pay tribute to these missionaries; pastors and students alike recite John Wesley's biography, and celebrate the coming of "Good News" to their island. Everyone knows the stories – especially the one about Brown's Fijian missionaries who were killed, dismembered, and cannibalised by the Tolai in 1878 in Kabakada. Today, this sacred place, where the "real" *mumu* (earth oven) stones are kept, attracts annual pilgrims in honour of the martyrs.

The Catholic Sacred Heart of Jesus Mission came seven years after the Methodists. They established a base in Kiningunan and renamed it Vunapope³⁵ (in present day Kokopo) and quickly began work in the area near the harbour. They came in greater numbers and had sufficient resources. On the other hand, at the turn of the nineteenth century the Methodist mission was frail and struggled with financial shortfall

³⁵Meaning "home of the Pope" in the Tolai Kuanua language

(German New Guinea Annual Reports 1899-1910 [1979]).³⁶ Settlements initially converted by the Methodist Church began switching to Catholicism, and thus the tension between Methodist and Catholic missionaries began (see K. Neumann 1992a). In order to appease the sectarian rivalry, the German administration implemented restriction on Catholic activities and divided the Gazelle peninsula into mission districts with boundaries favouring the Methodists (K. Neumann 1992a; Were 2015). But even with the vast missionisation efforts prior to WWII, much of the interior region of ENB remained out of reach due to its rough terrain and was unfavourable for travel due to often poor weather conditions.

Early Australian Patrol Reports by officer Ian Mack (1926-1931) suggest that the Kairak people of Ramasaka³⁷ (see Chapter 1) came into contact with the administration and the Methodist mission in the beginning of the century. However, the people of Tavir traced their conversion to Christianity back to just “after the big war” (WWII). Likewise, they associated the “time of light” with the “coming of Good News” (learning about Jesus), which, as it will be shown below, occurred some years before the Vir Kairak’s resettlement to Tavir in 1948. Nevertheless, my interlocutors linked the beginning of light to the period after WWII. I take such ambiguities within their conversion narratives not as contradictory or flawed, but as underlining how the transition from darkness to light is in fact a process that started years before, and continued after, their resettlement. Both change, and what anthropologists of Christianity have termed as “rupture” following conversion, do not occur in an instant, but are rather a continuous process of negotiating between past, present, and desired future (cf. Haynes in press).

³⁶There were only a few European Methodist missionaries and the mission generally avoided involvement in commerce. This situation continued until much later, mainly due to the influential recommendations of minister Dr John Burton who strongly advocated the separation between Mission and trade.

³⁷ Ramasaka is an old village site north of River Kerevat. Today’s Vir Kairak consider this area their home-land. The resettlement records kept by the Australian administration suggest that present day Tavir also used to be called Ramasaka as it was made of the people migrating from Ramasaka.

By now we know that Melanesians were never fully isolated, but participated in trade and exchange. Similarly, the people of the Gazelle peninsula were never static, but in constant movement and contact with each other, either through gardening, trade, or warfare. While Vir Kairak conversion to Christianity took place much later than other Baining people, they have not been completely isolated from communities who had already become Christians. For example, Tavir's elders spoke of a short period of peace between the Vir Kairak and the Qaqet, when one Qaqet leader took in the Vir Kairak to live among his people. They stayed there for a while, but eventually returned to their own ancestral grounds. During that brief time, however, my host brother Noah explained, they "became Catholics and went to the local Catholic church led by one white priest." People remembered this period as the time they first learned about God. However, when they went back to the bush, there were no churches or pastors, so they "stopped being Catholic" (*stop bilip long Katolik*). Then, WWII started, and they hid. They hid from the Japanese and their Sepik *kempi* ("police boys"), from the airplanes in the sky, and from any outsiders that came nearby. No one lit a fire out of fear of being seen, or worse, getting killed in an airstrike – truly dark times.

Noah continued: "After the big war, a Methodist pastor came to our settlement. He started preaching in the bush. So now, we became Methodist." [9] Thus, began the conversion to Wesleyan Methodism, but according to my hosts, not everyone's heart felt the warmth³⁸ of God until they eventually settled in present day Tavir. From the 1950s onwards, all Vir Kairak professed Wesleyan Methodism and regularly attended services at the local Methodist Church, which in 1968 became the United Church of Papua New Guinea (UC) after its union with the Papuan Ekalesia (which grew out of the LMS).

It was not until the arrival of the Christian Revival Crusade (CRC) in the mid-1980s (a Pentecostal denomination that started in Australia), when the inland Baining area where Tavir was located underwent significant denominational schism and sectarian

³⁸ To use Wesleyan terminology.

rivalry. The CRC mission established their centre just outside Rapitok,³⁹ a Tolai settlement about a couple of hours walking distance from Tavir, and quickly drew local people's attention to their crusades, bible schools, and training courses. In 1990, after completing a year-long pastors' training at the mission base, Pastor James from Tavir became a CRC preacher in the neighbouring settlement Ganbraga. A small portion of Tavir's residents decided to follow him and leave the United Church. With time, the CRC fellowship grew and incorporated more believers from Tavir. However, this also intensified the schism between the Ganbraga's CRC pastor and James's spiritual distinctions and understandings of "God's message." As a result, the adherents from Tavir started to call James "pastor" and in 2005 established their new church of Apostolic and Prophetic Grace (part of a network of churches following Dr Bill Hamon) at his hamlet in Tavir.⁴⁰

Pastor James explained that when the ministry they were part of, sent out new revelations about the message, the name of their church also changed. He said: "I follow the Word, [I] don't change church (*Mi bihainim Tok, nogat senisim lotu*). Thus, soon after their split they adopted the name Governing Church, and around 2011 it became the Zion Fellowship. During my fieldwork the congregation still identified as Zion Fellowship (or Zion Church), which was linked to Pastor Steven Maganai from Bougainville, and the network of Dr Jonathan David from Malaysia. They believed that the Zion message was the "final message" (*las tok* or *las mesij*). By that time, the Third Wave Revival (see Jorgensen 2005) had swept through the province, and almost half of the residents of Tavir had become adherents of Pentecostalism. Finally, in 2013, a new group of Christians who deemed Baining *kastom* "un-Godly" and labelled their traditional masks as "false gods" or "idols" detached from the United Church and established their own local congregation – Tavir Revival (United) Church (Figure 27).

My hosts also mentioned that for a while, during the 1960s and 1970s, "everyone" participated in the local *kago kalt* (cargo cult) known as Melki's Kivung. In Tok Pisin,

³⁹ Where Scarlett Epstein conducted her research between 1959-1961.

⁴⁰ See also Haynes (2015) for a discussion on Pentecostal schism and hierarchy in Zambia.

kivung means “meeting,” hence, the name literary translates into Melki’s Meetings. According to my informants, at the time of their participation in the Kivung, they understood it simply as that – meetings similar to the bible group meetings they held. Yet, due to the Kivung’s similarity to other millenarian movements across Papua New Guinea that 1) had a charismatic leader, 2) involved mythical and ritualistic elements, 3) mimicked white foreigners, 4) involved stories about loss or lack of knowledge, 5) explained the reasons for their current economic disparity, and 6) aimed at effecting transformation, and 7) attaining wealth and power (see Lawrence 1964; Worsley 1968; Lindstrom 1993; Lattas 1998), ENB’s colonial officers labelled it as a “cargo cult,”⁴¹ and kept a close eye on its activities (Papua New Guinea Patrol Reports Rabaul 1970-1971).

Melki was a charismatic leader from Gaulim, who had established a community of followers from the surrounding settlements. His supporters believed that he could communicate with the ancestors and receive divinations from God in his dreams. They held meetings after church, where he offered further interpretations (or re-interpretations) of biblical stories along with guidance about how to lead a good Christian life – as my host father put it, “the cult teachings said not to sin, and to live as God wants you to live” (*kalt tichim i tok noken sin, na yu mas laip olsem God i laikim*). The most significant aspect of Melki’s tenets, however, was the idea that the Baining land was full of diamonds and that this was the reason why the white men had come to ENB. Joshua described their activities within Melki’s Kivung as following:

We strode and walked, walked, walked... to finish many places in the bush to find this good thing [diamond]. We followed [Melki’s Kivung] because this story is true. For me, personally, this something the cult was teaching is true. We got some white man’s device to find [it]... We tried but nothing. We must work hard to get it. All white men know. This thing is there – it’s true something. But because we tried and couldn’t [find it], we don’t know how to get it... If you are

⁴¹ The term “cargo cult” and its association with derogatory ideas of “madness,” “primitiveness,” “heathendom,” and “backwardness” (Hermann 2013) have been long discussed by anthropologists of Melanesia (see Abong and Tabani 2013).

strong, this ground that belongs to you, yea; you will get it and this ground will win. We tried but nothing, so now all planted this something [oil palm] ... Then our government told us that this thing doesn't exist here. Before, all said this, this, and this island, are full [of diamonds]. But later, our government and some men from other countries said there's none. So, I don't know if it's true that there is some or [not] so like that we are ashamed.[10]

Others in Tavir also recalled this search for diamonds. They emphasised that because their ground had diamonds, it had attracted the white men. Melki had told them that the white men knew how to find the diamonds but would not share this knowledge with the Baining. "If a man had diamonds, he would have a lot of money," said my hosts' in-law Kilala. They described gold as second (*namba tu*) to diamonds as the world's most precious thing and said that their land had both, but they did not know how to find them. Thus, Joshua's younger brother Meska recalled that Melki had also told them to look for the big python – a bush spirit that lived near waterfalls – who could give them the knowledge white men possessed.⁴² After many years of looking for both the diamonds and the python, however, Joshua said they eventually gave up, and realised that most of the things Melki said were lies. He continued:

So now we rest and pray only to God. As we became like this, this change happened to the ground [where] they planted [oil] palm on it. That's it, they want to change our lives, so we don't have little bit of money. They changed the ground as they want [it] to benefit the people with some money that will come from the [oil] palm.[11]

Vir Kairak's participation in Melki's Kivung might appear as an action directed purely towards material gains. Indeed, scholars have shown that the coinage and use of the term "cargo cult" involved assumptions about local people's desire for material

⁴² This story is also mentioned by Patrol Officer J. Anderson in his 1970-1971 patrol report, where he describes that according to Melki's followers the Garden of Eden is an island somewhere abroad where all cargo is stored. Melki claimed that years ago two men lived in Eden: one followed the law and commandments of God and stayed innocent, and another who with the assistance of the snake found out the secrets of God and chased away the other man. The Baining were descendants of the former, while all white men descendants of the latter (Papua New Guinea Patrol Reports Rabaul 1970-1971).

goods, and in fact, tells us more about colonial relations and Western attitudes towards materialism than about the people who it referred to (Lindstrom 1993; Kaplan 1995). Patrol officers in ENB make a note of Melki's claims about all "cargo" (all Western goods and technology) residing in the Garden of Eden, and that the Baining would eventually receive it. However, my informants did not recall such accounts about the coming of cargo. Instead, they mainly spoke about their efforts in trying to find the diamonds that belonged to their ground.⁴³ Their stories primarily focused on their lack of knowledge – knowledge that the white men possessed – and the prosperity that entailed the ground and people who had access to diamonds. Therefore, for my interlocutors, their participation in the Kivung was primarily about Vir Kairak's relationship with their ground (their birth right to reside on and use the land), white people's relationship with the Vir Kairak ground (that is, how by having diamonds the ground drew the white men to ENB), and Vir Kairak's relationship with white people (the absence of knowledge transmission between them). While colonial and scholarly assumptions at the time suggested that people were after cargo, they were, in fact, after the relationships embodied in material things, and hoped that possessing valuable things such as diamonds would not only bring them access to various commodities but also convey a measure of recognition by the white men and other Papua New Guineans. In other words, the so-called "cargo cults" were about materialising relationships (see Bell and Geismar 2009), and about people's ability to display themselves in the right way – wearing the right clothes, doing the right things, possessing the right things⁴⁴ – so that white people would recognise them as someone worth engaging with.

⁴³ For similar observation about the Yali movement in Madang region see Hermann (1992).

⁴⁴ For example, in his personal papers, Rev. Ian Fardon describes one of Melki's Kivung meetings near Mandarabit, where people gathered at dusk and with the command of one man everyone stood up and fell into two lines facing a lantern placed at the centre of the meeting area. The man then commenced a long drill (similar to military drills) shouting commands such as "Right turn," "Left turn," "Round turn," followed by military-style salute repeated three times, and the singing of the national anthem. The meeting also included four speeches delivered by two men and two women, who remarked on his unexpected visit and expressed their appreciation for his attendance. This also hints that the whole procession and the imitation of military drill was intended to make and display people in certain way that the Baining understood as appealing to white people.

Christianity in PNG and Tavar

— 1871	London Missionary Society establishes a mission station (Southeast coast / Port Moresby)
— 1875	The Methodist Mission begins activities in the Bismark Archipelago (George Brown arrives at Molot Island)
— 1878	The Fijian Methodist missionaries are massacred by the Tolai at Kabakada
— 1882	The Catholic Sacred Heart of Jesus Mission arrives at Matupit Island, East New Britain
— 1886	The Lutheran Mission arrives German Papua (Finschhafen)
— 1968	The United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands is established from the unification of the Methodist Church and the Papuan Ekalesia (previously LMS)
— 1960s - 1970s	Melki's Kivung in Gaulim area
— 1975	Revival movement within the United Church begin
— 1982	Pastor Michael establishes a bible group and begins lay preaching
— 1985	Cristian Revival Crusade (CRC) establishes a mission station in Rapitok, East New Britain
— 1990	Pastor James completes CRC pastors' training
— 1996	The United Church of PNG and of the Solomon Islands separate
— 2005	Tavar's CRC congregation establishes the Apostolic and Prophetic Grace Church
— 2011	Tavar's Governing Church takes the name Zion Fellowship
— 2013	Pastor Michael's congregation establishes the Revival (United) Church

Figure 27 – Mission and Church establishment in Tavar Timeline

Lotu and Gavman

It is tempting to argue that the turn to Pentecostalism might be linked to the Baining's lack of development and visibility by the state, and that their motivations in switching to other denominations were rooted in the history of their forced resettlement. My hosts often noted that before the arrival of the Methodist pastor, their ancestors regarded strangers as enemies. As this pastor was the one who recommended the Vir Kairak's resettlement to the provincial administrators, and negotiated with the Uramot and Taulil leaders for the land occupied today by Tavar's hamlets and gardens, it was, in a sense, the *lotu* (chuch/mission) that broke up their isolation and

brought them into contact with large numbers of strangers. Due to the mission's close connection with the colonial government and the services it provided to local communities, many people came to see *lotu* as an institution of the government, if not as the *gavman* (government) itself, at least in the beginning. Indeed, Young (1997) suggests that the mission in Papua New Guinea had been so influential in the rural areas that it acted as a quasi-governmental body. In ENB, Neumann (1992) writes that up until WWII the *lotu* constituted the *matanitu*, which was the Tolai term for "government" (in Kuanua language) that included political structures as well as Western-style education, judiciary, and police (1992: 99). Similar sentiments were expressed by the elders in Tavir, although no one suggested a direct link between *lotu* and *gavman*. It was the *lotu* that introduced them to both the local and global religious order, as well as to the political and economic structures beyond one's village boundaries. And apart from sustaining the emotional and spiritual relations between people, the *lotu* also regulated the daily activities, gardens, and hamlet upkeep, and controlled the health and education of its congregation. In this context, it was primarily the pastors who introduced notions of development, and the church provided an institutional framework to establish, consolidate, and control social relationships in the name of development (cf. LiPuma 2000).

By the time the Vir Kairak had come to know the Methodist *lotu*, it was already well established and had strong influence, particularly in the region of present day Tavir. The larger rural settlement of Gaulim, less than an hour's walk, had been the heart of the Methodist Mission in Central East New Britain, and the locals greatly benefited from their proximity to Gaulim Health Centre, Gaulim Teacher's College, and Gaulim Primary School. The older generation in Tavir remembered how after resettlement they had been "looked after" by many European nurses, doctors, pastors, and teachers; they talked about those days as times of "learning and change" (*taim bilo lainim na senis*). In Australian patrol reports from the 1960s, the "improvement" of Baining settlements is recorded in terms of attaining higher living standards and good hygiene (especially emphasising the building of latrines), and local people's

willingness to participate in the copra business (Papua New Guinea Patrol Reports, Rabaul 1965-1967; Patrol Reports Kokopo 1963-1970).⁴⁵ During my fieldwork many of my interlocutors talked about hygiene and how it was important to have “good hygiene for good health” (*gutpela haijin long gutpela helt*). What people meant by hygiene was to have a latrine and a rubbish pit, and to wash regularly every day. In fact, on a couple of occasions when talking about the Qaqet Baining in the North, my host brother Noah giggled and said that the Qaqet did not wash, and if they did, they only washed a few times a year. Although Noah had been to the Qaqet settlements only once, when visiting his maternal kin, his memories and lay knowledge of them stressed their “lack of washing” and in turn “lack of hygiene.” Washing was a clear sign of change that people used to differentiate between their past (before contact with the mission) and the present (the “time of light” and knowledge). For example, on numerous occasions Lisa exhaled with frustration when commenting on someone’s children’s ringworm infection (*grile*) or never-ending cold (*kus*), on some families’ lack of latrines, or on the general “uncleanliness” of someone’s body, clothes, or hamlet. “Some people don’t know hygiene” (*Sampela lain i no save haijin*), she started, “How can’t they?! The church taught us. We are not in the bush anymore! God wants us to be clean. Being clean is healthy. But some people just don’t know hygiene!” (*Hau ol i no save?! Lotu i bin tichim mipela. Mipela i no stap long bus. Clin em helti. Tasol samplea lain i no save haijin!*). According to her, the church had changed their lives and people were supposed to act differently from their ancestors.

This rhetoric was frequently used by the pastors and lay preachers in all three churches of Tavar, especially in relation to cleanliness and clothing. The replacement of grass skirts and loincloths with cotton *laplap* (wrap cloth) marked the Vir Kairak’s introduction to the “Word of God.” Often the traditional clothing was associated with “nakedness” (*asnating*) and “lack of knowledge,” but, as one of the lay preachers in the Revival Church once said, when “truth [Word of God] came to them and there

⁴⁵ Though the reports also emphasise the concentration of the Departments of Agriculture and Health in Tolai settlements and their insufficient work in the less accessible Baining areas due to its rough terrain and lack of roads.

was light, they abandoned their old clothes for the shirts, *meri blouses* (women blouse or dress), *laplaps*, and trousers all wore today.” But clothes marked one’s transition not only as a Christian, but also in terms of development and economic power. To Peter, my husband’s choice to wear a *laplap* was seen as comical,⁴⁶ because this was a garment of the past when people did not have money. “When you get some money, you buy trousers. Good trousers – like jeans, show that you have money. Only the ones who don’t have money wear *laplap*.” But Peter was also a fellow of the Zion Church: one of the two churches in Tavar that identified as Pentecostals and exhibited many of the features that define new religious movements such as charismatic leaders, radical interpretation of biblical texts, glossolalia, and some millenarian beliefs (Fox 2005). For the male fellows of this church to *not* wear a *laplap* had both economic and religious significance. This simple rectangular cloth wrapped around one’s waist, and fastened with a belt, was still considered the traditional attire of the mainstream churches in the province, namely the Catholic Church and UC. Leaders within the UC would sometimes wear trousers, other times put on a clean, dark coloured *laplap* and a nice, spotless shirt. But for many in the Church of Zion and the Revival Church, *laplap* was associated with backwardness and lack of resources. This argument could also be extended to the symbolic relation between *laplap* and the Tolai people, since it was not traditionally Baining but Tolai clothing, and wearing it, similar to the women’s *meri blaus*, was enforced by the colonial administration and missionaries.

While the UC had been fundamental in providing much of the necessary health, education, and infrastructure services that the provincial government had otherwise failed to deliver, it would be wrong to argue that the UC was seen as a replacement for the government. In fact, the adherents of the two Pentecostal churches in Tavar explained that despite the UC work, their communities were still lacking development, and the main reason for this was the lack of change in people’s own lives. In this sense, the UC had brought change to Baining life to some extent, but this

⁴⁶ Indeed, Peter broke into intense laughter when he saw him with *laplap*. During this encounter, Peter was wearing jeans.

was not enough, mainly because Methodists still practiced *kastom* and followed the old ways. By allowing local culture to coexist with Christianity, the UC had failed because many of the local customs were “of Satan” (*bilong Satan*) and made God angry. This in turn prevented development from *coming* to the Baining.

Revival Church

The Revival Church in Tavir was led by Pastor Michael, a rather short, stout man with round eyes, and full cheeks. He may have been lean and strong in his youth, but now pushing sixty, and rarely working in the gardens, his round belly protruded beneath the brand-new Toyota labelled T-shirt he recently bought from town. He was mostly preoccupied with preaching, running a small timber mill business, and coordinating with the oil palm company. As the Kairak Incorporated Land Group’s (ILG)⁴⁷ vice chairman, and a smart businessman with good local connections, Pastor Michael had been able to accumulate some wealth and then apply for a bank loan. He used this money to buy himself a truck, which he put to service as a PMV (public motor vehicle) running between Gaulim and Kokopo. And this was not his first venture into some kind of business. Previously he had run a local store, and even opened a tourist guesthouse, which was rather unsuccessful, but still an effort worthy of mention. Pastor Michael was a businessman, as the locals would put it – “*man bilong bisnis*” (man of business) opposed to “*man bilong wok*” (man of work, which mainly refers to manual labour, especially gardening) or “*gaden-man*” (as described in Chapter 1). While his success in business and prominent role in the Oil Palm Development Project, along with previously held positions such as village councillor, were significant components of his status as a leader in Tavir, Pastor Michael saw himself primarily as a “man of God.” He emphasised the fact that he did not receive formal training as a pastor, but that he was a lay preacher, and that he “preached from the heart.”

⁴⁷ The ILG scheme in PNG was formed to legally represent customary landowners. In other words, the Kairak ILG consisted of the Kairak customary landowners of the Kairak customary land. Part II of this thesis offers an extensive discussion on this.

During my fieldwork, the Revival Church had a rather small congregation compared to the other two churches in Tavir. Most of its fellows had been members of a study group within the UC. This study group led by Michael, who was not a “pastor” at the time, but soon after people started to refer to him as such, had embraced different “forms of worship” (as my UC informants put it), using modern musical instruments such as guitars and keyboard when praying and praising; and preached against the practice of *kastom* involving mask dances. Their adoption of these new elements of Christian ritual and emphasis on breaking away from traditional culture had divided the church community, since most Methodists, like the Catholics in the province, still practiced *kastom*.⁴⁸ Eventually, Pastor Michael’s study group separated in 2013 and formed their own church, which gathered in an open-air, non-permanent shed, erected within the pastor’s courtyard.

The Revival Church got its name from the 1970s Revival movement within the United Church, when an evangelist associated with Billy Graham (see Eves 2007) organised a “crusade” in East New Britain, emphasising the notion of being “born again” and the power of the Holy Spirit. For Pastor Michael, the Revival Church was still part of the United Church, and along with several other Pentecostal churches constituted the Body of Christ (a term first used by the Apostle Paul referring to the Christian Church).⁴⁹ But for the United Church congregation in Tavir, the two churches could not be more different. The Revival Church was a typical example of charismatic Christianity with their emphasis on the immediate experience of the Holy Spirit, radical and often literal interpretations of biblical texts, charismatic leadership, millenarian beliefs and the prosperity gospel – the belief that God will send “blessings” of material wealth. Many of their sermons included warnings about the “last days” and “final judgement,” freeing oneself from demonic powers and Satan (which were usually associated with performing *kastom*, chewing betel nut, smoking tobacco, and drinking alcohol), and how God would send his “blessings” only if the

⁴⁸ Neumann (1992) writes extensively about the mainline missions in ENB and their tolerance towards *kastom*, compared to other provinces in PNG.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on the use of this and other Christian terminology elsewhere in PNG see Handman (2014, 2015).

community rid itself of these evils (thus, emphasising religious warfare). These claims were supported with selective readings of biblical verses and prophecies that came in the form of dreams.

Dreams were also what led Pastor Michael to his route to “change [his] life” and form the Revival Church. When he talked about this process, either in private conversations or as part of his Sunday sermons, he always started by recounting his sinful youth and early adulthood: “I was one ‘rotten man’ (*bagarapman*) in the community. I was a thief. A drunkard. I troubled the community with my deviance” (*mi wanpela bagarapman long kominiti. Mi wanpela stil. Wanpla spak. Brukim kominiti wantaim pasim bilo mi nogut*). For him this past behaviour was why in 1979 he received a dream from God:

I saw my image – me Michael – and what’s inside me. I saw my heart, and inside it was rubbish, rubbish was inside here, and darkness. No light inside. Okay, next to me I saw a Bible. It opened and light spread from it. With this light I saw the devil inside me. He had horns and a spear. He was pressing my heart with his spear. I woke up that morning and cried. I told my wife about the dream and that I was a “rotten man,” a man of sin. That same year there was a big UC camp, Bible study, in Gaulim. When one Reverend was giving a sermon, I stood up and told him about this. I confessed. Asked God to forgive me. I stood up in front of everyone, and told them about this [dream], and I prayed. The pastor, *talatala* (Reverend), he prayed over me.[12]

By acknowledging his sins, publicly confessing,⁵⁰ and repenting, Michael had taken the first steps towards “changing [his] life.” Like elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity among the Baining placed a strong emphasis on an individual’s recognition of their moral failings (Eves 2011), and Christian dreams were often seen as gifts from the Holy Spirit that aided one in “seeing” the *truth* about oneself. For Michael, this dream had been a warning to end his sinful conduct and give his life to God’s teachings. It also revealed my interlocutor’s beliefs

⁵⁰ Though this was done quite vaguely, only by suggesting the behaviour and without giving any specifics, because public confession is unimaginable - see also Eves (2011).

about possessing evil/good, darkness/light, Satan/Jesus inside one's body (see also MacCarthy 2017).

Okay, then I was still a man of *kastom* – of fire dance. I was the leader of the fire dancers. Okay, in 2010 I was in my garden in Kalangmes [and] I saw another dream. In this dream I saw one fire dance mask. It was standing on the ground and then the ground consumed it.⁵¹ Then I heard a voice. There was no man; I only heard the voice. It said [to me]: “You see, God destroyed the mask of the Baining. And now there won't be any more fire dance masks, because they imprison you.”[13]

Michael understood this dream as a divine message: “It was God's wrath. God is angry with the Baining. That is why there is no development. Because of the masks” (*Bel hat God ya. Bel hat long Baining. That's why nogat development. Bikos long mask.*) It was a well-known “fact” among Kairak men that the fire dance masks were made in the image of spirits. After initiation boys were told about the origin stories of these masks and how they were the “picture/image of the spirit” (*piksa bilong spirit*) [TP] or *yuski mrama yuska* [K] – *yuski* as reflection or shadow, and *yuska* referring to the bush spirit). While the mask itself was not considered a spirit, according to Michael, when people danced with it, they were in fact “worshiping the spirits.” He continued:

Our ancestors took the masks and adopted them. They are the image of the spirits. And the Bible says – God says: You cannot worship another god. There cannot be one spirit in heaven, one here, and one on earth, and [you] to make their images and worship them, because I am a jealous God.[14]

For Michael, the dream was a warning from God, by which he “understood” that the masks were idols. The next day he gathered the men and told them what he saw. He explained that God was angry with the Baining because they were still worshiping the bush spirits, and that they must stop dancing with masks. While these dances were not explicitly done in relation to the spirits (as I showed in the previous chapter), according to Pastor Michael they were a form of worship in the eyes of God. Hence,

⁵¹ Translated from the Tok Pisin “*karamapim*.”

even if done unintentionally, through these dances people still worshipped the spirits. “They don’t know but the dances are [a form of] worship” (*Ol i no save tasol danis em worship*) and this infuriated God. He reiterated: “That is why there is no development in the Baining”.

According to Michael, a good pastor was one who had “food in this talk” or “talk that bears fruit” (*kaikai lo tok bilong en*). He meant that a pastor’s preaching not only has to have substance in terms of discussing relevant community issues, but also has to nurture the youth and bring “change in the community” (*senis long kominiti*) – or bear fruits. He said, “When there is a good pastor, who leads all the youth, leads them so they can know the *truth*, and they can *change* their life, there would be *change* in the community.” According to him, very few UC pastors were like this; hence, *ol yangpela* (the youth) still chewed betel nut, drank alcohol, smoked tobacco and marijuana, and *raun raun tasol* (strolled in the bush). When talking about *ol yangpela*, my informants generally referred to the older teenage boys, while issues related to the girls or their behaviour (*pasin bilo ol yangpla meri*) was a topic reserved only for women. Lay preachers within the Revival Church frequently spoke about the failings of *ol yangpela* and how they had to change their lives if God was to “send blessings” to Tavir. While marijuana and alcohol were deemed evil by all three churches, both the Revival Church and Zion Church put significant pressure on abandoning all “*harmful samting*” (harmful substances) because one’s body was considered the “Temple of God” and one had to look after it.

My Pentecostal interlocutors suggested that only by changing their lives, could the Baining receive God’s blessings and get development to their settlements. As I discussed in Chapter 1, people expected pastors to live by example and influence their community not only with their teachings but also with their actions. They explained that appearing in front of others in the “right way” – wearing the right clothes (modern and modest); doing the right things (work, gardening, helping, giving, etc.); sitting, walking, and talking the right way – and sharing the Word of God would incite others to change as well. As one of my informants put it, “Because they will see

the life inside you and want it too" (*Bikos ol bai lukim laip insait yu na laikim*). She suggested that there was something in the way "true Christians with strong belief," especially pastors, presented themselves and talked that made people feel the life inside themselves (*laip i stap insait*) and feel an urge to do or stop doing certain things. Many said this was the Holy Spirit working inside people's hearts. On the other hand, her husband Eliakim described this desire to change as a conscious and rational choice, recalling how he evaluated his own situation compared to other Pentecostal adherents and said to himself that they all were men of the same *ples* (rural settlement), all had made gardens, and all had families, so if they were able to wear good clothes, send their children to school, build good houses, do some business, and have some money, then he could change too. There was a consensus among the Pentecostals I spoke with, that when people changed their lives they made their community appear worthy in front of God and the government to get development. In other words, changing one's life had a direct effect on changes within the community, and presenting it in the appropriate form – as aspiring change (cf. Appadorai 2004) – that could bring development.

One Monday noon in February, Lisa and I were talking under the shade of her kitchen house. My husband was getting supplies from town and the rest of the family had gone to the gardens, so we were alone in the hamlet. It was hot and sunny, and at that hour people usually slept or hid under the tree shades, so we did not expect visitors. Being alone, Lisa was more relaxed and spoke her mind without hesitation. I strategically took this opportunity and turned our conversation to the churches in Tavir and their differences.

The previous day Lisa had offered to come with me to the Revival Church's Sunday service to help me understand the kinship relations within the congregation. In this way, she was also able to hear what the other preachers taught. Sometimes people went to the other churches' Sunday services when invited by their relatives within

the congregations. For the inviting party, it was a way to draw their kin to their congregation; for the invitees, going was a good way to learn what others were saying and doing. Lisa reflected on this and then moved on to explain the relationship between their churches. I was surprised to learn that Pastor Michael spoke down about the Zion Fellowship, as it seemed to me that both congregations had similar theology. “He says we don’t preach from the Bible, and that [when we do] we misunderstand [the verses]. He says we don’t get the scripture clearly” (*Em tok, ol i prich long Baibel, na mipela i bin misunderstand. Em tok ol i no kisim tok stret*).

Furthermore, he had forbidden his congregation to attend any of the Zion Church’s “outreach” gatherings (also known as “crusades”), with the pretext that their pastors were false preachers. But Lisa thought he was also afraid of losing his followers to Zion. She referred to the recent denominational switch of Pinot – a widow who upon her return to Tavar started going to the Revival Church, but was unhappy with the preaching and congregation, “didn’t feel the power of the Holy Spirit” (*em i no pilim pawa biling Holy Spirit*), and decided to switch to the Zion Fellowship. Like Pinot, many of the UC and Zion adherents thought that the Revival preachers were preoccupied with the notion of “blessings.” Blessings were material gifts from God, that came after people changed their lives. Such beliefs were seen as too materialistic and some discreetly mentioned their resemblance to cargo cults. In this context, the suggestion of a resemblance between the Revival church and a cargo cult was pejorative (Sullivan 2005; Jebens 2005), and implied the irrationality of its followers to believe the lies of yet another charismatic leader. With frustration, Lisa began recounting:

They say everything is blessing. This is blessing, that is blessing. Money is blessing, car is blessing, oil palm [plantation] is blessing, everything is blessing! I don’t like it. Look at his truck. It was a blessing yea. Even he named it Heavenly Blessing⁵². Now the truck is broken and stays in the yard. If it’s blessing why did it break, then?! It’s no blessing.[15]

⁵² Name changed for anonymity purposes.

Pastor Michael preached that the oil palm plantation was a blessing – a gift from God. And he advised his congregation to take up jobs there. In 2015, a significantly large number of the people who still worked in the plantation were from the Revival Church. He had promoted these jobs as something that was made available because “God wanted the Baining to benefit from their land.” Furthermore, the vacancies had to be taken by Bainings, or otherwise migrant workers would “overflow the land.” Essentially, he promoted the oil palm plantation as something that would bring the development that the state had failed to provide to the Baining (i.e. infrastructure, mobility, and access to health, education, and commodities). The oil palm plantation was promoted as a “development project” that could bring all of these things (more in Chapter 5). According to Pastor Michael, the plantation was a blessing from God, that provided the means to get development because he saw that some Bainings had changed their lives and stopped worshipping idols. He used its example as affirmation that God would send blessings to the people who were willing to change, and to the whole community. The more people were devoted to Jesus, both in numbers and behaviour (*pasin*), abandoning sinful *kastoms*, the more “development would come to the Baining.” During the Sunday service Lisa and I went to, Pastor Michael devoted much of his preaching to this theme:

All your blessings, your inheritance, that God prepared for you through the name of Jesus, will come to you. We all Baining don’t have a name. All men talk down on us. They all say we don’t have knowledge (and/or ability). In the big schools, in big workplaces, there is no one who knows our name, *because we are nothing*. But through the Holy Spirit we can come up somebody! In Jesus! Powerful! Wealthy men![16]

Today we are *privileged* because the spirit of God is in you! Hallelujah! Because through God, through the Holy Spirit, he raised people who do not have name and there is light through Jesus. We are happy today. Because God lifted within us. The government did not help us. Hallelujah! You can see many men of Jesus, God lifted you to his glory. Not the government. The government doesn’t do that (or isn’t able). Today all children go to school and come back, go drop out, drop

out, drop out. There is no [Baining] man that flies the airplanes, no man that is captain of the ships in the sea. No man became lawyer. Not one Baining became doctor. Not one man that went into parliament. No, no Baining man. Why!? Because education is in the system. The system of the government.[17]



Figure 28 - Sunday Sermon at Revival Church

For Pastor Michael and every other person that I spoke in Tavar, the government has failed in providing them the means to get a good education and hold such positions. Education in Papua New Guinea was expensive, and most Baining families struggled to come up with the money for students' travel, accommodation, and living expenses. As my host father explained, "we Baining now are at the bottom not having much money," and like most people in Tavar, he immediately added that "the Tolais yes, they have money" (*mipela Baining nau mipela i stap tambilo tru nogat planti moni; ol Tolai yes, ol i gat moni*). These sorts of comparisons between the Baining and Tolai, and their access to money, services, jobs, and commodities was very common, and often part of narratives of desperate or unsuccessful struggles to accomplish something (e.g. send a son to university or get a job in town). However, Pastor Michael preached that through God, through his blessings and the development that would come through

the oil palm plantation, the Baining would finally have a name that others would recognise, they will *become somebody*, and their children would attain professional jobs (cf. Bialecki et al. 2008). His speech also illustrates my interlocutors' discomfort with the derogatory meaning of their name – "Baining" – and other people's lack of or negative perception of them (as I have described in the Introduction).

Zion Fellowship

The Zion congregation in Tavir was also initially formed within the United Church as a consequence of the Revival wave in the 1970s and 1980s. According to the UC leaders they separated around 1985, when a group within the Methodist congregation stopped chewing betel nut, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, eating pythons, and performing *kastom*; and instead started praying and praising with clapping, singing, and dancing. Such instances of appropriating new ritual elements, and banishing consumption of specific substances and foods (sometimes including pork as was the case for Seventh Day Adventists) had been common at the time, and raised heated disputes within both Baining and Tolai communities. Those who accepted the Revival in a fundamental way were seen as a threat to traditional way of life, especially in relation to bride prices, mortuary rites, and relationships established through male initiations. As a result, the emerging new groups within the church either separated on their own, or were forced out by the rest of the congregation. Pastor James, who had been leading the group from which the Zion Church was formed, explained to me that they were "persecuted" by the UC members and pushed out of the church. He said that "They didn't want/like the Revival inside the United Church. We wanted it, and to change life, but they didn't." Hence his followers separated and went to the CRC church in the neighbouring ward. But in 2005, Tavir's congregation established their own church and took the name Apostolic and Prophetic Grace, which one of its adherents described as a "prophetic network" founded by Dr Bill Hamon (from the United States). Pastor James had attended a few sermons in Kokopo, where he learnt

the preaching of Dr Bill Hamon and “took” (*kisim*) it. But part of the CRC congregation had not been happy with this, and so they had to split.

In 2011, Pastor James’s congregation once again changed their name and became Zion Church or Zion Fellowship. This happened after receiving “the *final* Word” (interpretation of the biblical texts describing the final days on earth before the second coming of Jesus Christ and the Last Judgement) from Dr Jonathan David from Malaysia – a pastor with the gift of prophecy. Zion Church adherents often reiterated: “We don’t follow the church, we follow the Word of God,” and stressed that the *mesij* (message) was important, not the name of the church. Hence, composition-wise this congregation had to a large extent stayed the same since its formation, but their name has changed throughout time depending on the message they embraced. According to Pastor James, the message of Apostolic and Prophetic Grace and Zion is actually “the same message;” but the Zion message “grows deeper.” They believed that God sends his revelations to the prophets, who then pass them on through their preaching; one could know which messages were *true* and really from God if they “felt it with the [Holy] Spirit inside them” (*pilim wantain Spirit insait ol*), as mentioned above in Pinot’s example.

Most Zion members suggested that there was a kind of chronology to the prophecies and their church had changed with the newer pieces of God’s message. Significantly, they suggested that they also experienced some changes in their lives when receiving each of the revelations (although no one could give concrete examples as to how they had changed). Lisa explained that it was about “following the Word” and “doing what you say and what the Word says” (*aktionim tok*). Others like Joyce and Peter, said that it was about following what the pastor said and did, because he knew the Word. Something that Lisa explained as the “*standard* of his Christian life grew inside him” (*standard bilong Christian laip bilong em i grow insait em*) and as he changed and became a different man (*narapla kain man*), they also had to change like him. The transition of Pastor James’s congregation from one denomination to another, while mostly consisting of the same church members, shows the flexibility and creative

aspect of Pentecostalism (cf. Csordas 1987)). Additionally, by taking on new interpretations of biblical texts they formulated new (better) ways to act and present themselves, and they built more substantial understanding and links between their past, present, and future (cf. Haynes in press).

Moreover, there also seemed to be financial reasons behind the changing of names and networks. Pastor James said that he did not like the structure of the UC, CRC, and Apostolic and Prophetic Grace, because he could not make any decisions on his own, and had to wait for approval from the district Reverend and the ones above him. However, in Zion Church they only had Pastor Steven from Bougainville, who had initially brought the Word to Papua New Guinea. For Pastor James, his relationship with Pastor Steven was not hierarchical (comparing it to relations in UC and CRC), but more like “father and son,” and elaborated: “I am not under him; I am with him.” Similarly, my informants described the relationship between fathers and sons among the Vir Kairak as one of learning and working together, rather than of authority and submission. Pastor James also called Pastor Steven “Papa Steven,” because he was like his child as he took the impartation from him. Yet, when they were Apostolic and Prophetic Grace, all tithes and offerings collected in Tavir were sent to the church’s headship in PNG, in Enga Province, which was then supposed to send the funds to Dr Bill Hamon. “And we couldn’t build our church because very little money stayed with us,” explained Pastor James. On the other hand, as Zion Fellowship they now did not need to send all of the tithes and offerings, and Pastor James only took part of the tithes – tithes of tithes – and sent these to Papa Steven, who sent part of his tithes to Dr Jonathan David.

The Message

For the Zion congregation the message of Zion was the final one, and what it said was *true* and happening *now*. Pastor James had received this “impartation” from Papa Steven, who got it from Dr Jonathan David, and it focused on John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (New International Version).

According to them, this meant that God had incarnated and now walked among them through the bodies and lives of the ones who had accepted him, and had “changed their lives.” This was a rather non-standard interpretation of the verse, which most clergymen and theologians understood as the reincarnation of Jesus. My Zion Fellowship interlocutors suggested that their bodies were Jesus’s Temple where he resided, and He manifested through their lives. Pastor James explained:

God came inside man. Through man we know God is inside man. When a man makes something, God moves through him. Through the body. God is in all people. Man must change his life, and God will come inside them. God is Spirit. We can’t see God, but we can see God through man...God is life. He gives you strength. But a person must change their life first. They must be *born again*, to receive Christ in their life *inside*.^[18]

The “Word” was very important for them and they constantly recounted John 1:1 in English: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (New International Version). The Word among the Vir Kairak seemed to be equated with the Holy Spirit, which manifested through glossolalia and prophesy. But beyond that, the “Word” was used in relation to doing what you say (*aktionim tok*). If one truly spoke through the Spirit, one’s actions would reflect what he said. This aligning of talk and action was particularly used in relation to gift giving and work. In criticising the Revival Church preachers, Lisa said that it is more important to give [gifts] to others and to carry a life that reflects on what you say and advise others, rather than think of and wait for divine blessings of wealth. “If you preach the conduct of giving gifts, you must also do this that you say. You must give.”^[19] According to her, the Revival preachers could not align their words and actions in this regard, and thus could not manifest the presence of God.



Figure 29 - Zion Fellowship praying and glossolalia

Work as Worship

I sat with my host aunt Joyce in my shed trying to learn how to make string bags. She had folded up her *laplap* and tied a piece of string around her thighs. She patiently pulled the stubborn string between the loops and said: “When you work, when you make something, it’s Jesus that works through you” (*Taim yu wokim sampela wok, wokim sapmela samting, em Jesus i wokim wantain yu*). She explained that when people have Jesus inside them, if they get this feeling or urge to do particular work, such as making a string bag, or building a house, or even making a garden, it *was* the Spirit that wanted that work done. For the Zion Fellowship, work was of utmost importance because through it one could see the works of God. Furthermore, the time when one worked was the “purest” time (*taim pyua* or *taim klia*) to think of God and praise him. In a discussion about this, Zane said:

A person has many worries. Money, children, school fees, gardens, everything. Your mind thinks of other things, not of God. But when you work, when you make a garden or build a house, your mind doesn't think these things. Then you must think of God. This is the purest time to think of God. To worship God.

That was also given as a reason why they did not celebrate Christmas or any of the religious holidays, explaining that they worshiped God everyday with every work that they did. They also criticised those who celebrated those days as "not worshipping enough," hence having the need for such holidays. But for the Zion Fellowship everything they did, or made, was included in their "worship", and at the same time was a reflection of God's work.

My interlocutors argued that people should be grateful for their ability to work, for having the strength and health to work, which came from the Holy Spirit. To be unhappy when working, to complain (such as why no one helps them), to think "bad thoughts" (*nogut tinktink*) such as jealousy for others' gardens or lives, were considered the opposite of worship. One had to always think good of the work, because through it they "uplifted the name of God" (*Yu wokim lo lift upim nem bilo God*). Laziness, on the other hand, came from Satan they said, "that's Satan, that's the nature of Satan." But they claimed that through one's will to change, one could invite God into their body. This notion of work as a form of worship was an important aspect of the Zion fellowship, which also fed back into the community as way towards change and development. To elaborate, I turn to Peter's account about building the first permanent house in Tavor.

When the Zion message came, there were still no permanent houses in Tavor, and according to Peter, people thought that only the "white men" and the Tolai could have those. He said that despite having much money during the cocoa boom in the 1980s, and later in the 1990s and early 2000s, people in Tavor did not think they could have permanent houses. He suggested that they did not know how to make them, and how to use their money to make permanent houses. Nevertheless, one day Peter decided he wanted to have such a house, made with iron posts, metal panel walls,

and corrugated iron roof. So he began working on it. "I worked hard and made gardens," he said, "with the little money I got, I bought little building material. Then again, a little money, little more material. And so, I finished the house." [20] Peter was very proud to have been the first person in Tavir to build a permanent house, and to have shown the others (*soim ol*) that the Vir Kairak too can have them. According to him and his wife Joyce, all the hard work they put into building the house was the work of God manifesting through them. In fact, God wanted the Vir Kairak to have good houses and other things that were of development (*bilong development*). Work and cooperation were the path to this and it was only through them that people could bring development to the Baining.

Changing Relations

I went to my host mother's *vitki* (kitchen house). A small fire was smoking in the corner. The smell of burning coconut skin and wood filled the room. Joshua was peeling a giant taro; its bright white interior stood out in the dirt and soot. In the middle of the room, his younger son and two grandchildren sat on a ruffled mat. They were removing the seeds of a large breadfruit, and carefully placing them aside. These round seeds were considered more precious and tastier than the fruit itself, which explained the children's excitement each time they pulled a new seed from the juicy flesh. Joshua took two stools and placed them near the fire. I sat on one, and he on the other. As we talked, he fed wood to the fire, preparing it for cooking. His wife Niba was away, visiting her daughter and new-born grandson, so Joshua was cooking for the family that evening. He had just returned from a "Baining leaders meeting," which had included many of the Kairak and Uramot elders and pastors from the area around Tavir. It was a meeting about the organisation of an opening event for the new Maternity Ward building at Gaulim Health Centre. He was not happy. He said: "I told them that they cannot end *kastom*. I told them I am holding it tight" (*Mi tokim ol no ken pinisim kastom. Mi tokim ol mi mi holim em strong*). He raised his fist. Then his

face saddened. “But I didn’t talk very well. I couldn’t explain. And, they didn’t get me” (*Tasol mi no toktok gut. Mi no eksplenim gut. Na ol i no kisim*).

From the very first weeks, until the end of my stay in Tavir, Joshua and I frequently spoke about certain types of Christianity threatening *kastom*. He kept saying that “they” were trying to end *kastom*, and that he was “holding” it tight. Each time I asked who was “they,” he replied “*ol narapela lotu*” (all other churches/denominations). When he was recounting an event, “they” often referred to both the pastors and the fellowship. For example, he recounted how at a Pentecostal crusade in Marusem in 2012, the Revival Church had ended (*rausim*) *kastom* in that settlement, by exposing the masks’ secrets and showing the objects in broad day light to both women and children. Other times, when he talked about the Kairak’s political and religious leadership meetings, such as the one about the opening of Gaulim Maternity Ward, or even when he was discussing other congregations’ beliefs, “they” meant the pastors and lay preachers. While it was not very clear how at this particular occasion “they” had threatened *kastom*, what Joshua had said at the meeting was striking.

“They talked about apology,” he explained, “so I said: You must apologise. You ended *kastom*. But I hold it. Then, they spoke and spoke. Afterward, I stood up and said: Your fathers were first to take off the *kep* (cap)! All kicked it around.” He referred to the Kairak of the neighbouring village, who were supposedly from the Qopki sub-clan (more on this in Chapter 6), and the *kep* he spoke about was the cap worn by the *luluai* (village councillors) and *tultul* (constables) during the colonial period. Joshua said that the cap was the “*namba bilong Australia*” (number of Australia suggesting its authority), “but when we first heard about this council we were going to get,⁵³ they all took off the *kep*, and kicked it, as if it was nothing. They played football with it, and said it was useless.” He paused and put a piece of wood into the fire.

⁵³ This was in 1969 during the disputes about the legibility of the Multi-Racial Local Government Council made by the Mataungan Association (MA), which was formed by the Tolai people and demanded early independence for the territory of Papua New Guinea.

Before, suppose a *kiap* (patrol officer) came to this place and I am the *luluai*; I cannot forget my *kep*. I must take my *kep*, put it on, and then I can talk with the *kiap*. The *kiap* knows me; that I am *luluai*; but I must put on the *kep*, it is a “*namba*.” When I put on *namba* I am respecting this – *namba* yea. This position. Here, in Tavir, we kept the *kep* until 1977.⁵⁴ So I told them: Your fathers were the first to take off the *namba* of Australia, and now you are trying to end the *namba* of us Baining. For me... when I look at a dance, I don’t see a god. No. I know. When I am in the *tarayu* (men’s house in the Tolai Kuanua language) I pray to God to help me with the making of this [mask]. I see this [kastom]... it’s *important value*, because of the body. When its [the mask’s] image is on the money (referring to the 50K banknote), I say it is something of the body, of this life. But I couldn’t speak clear, and they didn’t understand me... It is hard to explain.[21]

Indeed, the UC fellows struggled to justify why *kastom* was important and rarely engaged in open conversation, let alone disputes, about its relationship to Christianity. As illustrated above, the Pentecostals, however, often raised the *kastom* issues at Sunday sermons, in their testimonies, and at outreach events/crusades. My Methodist interlocutors said that they preferred not to interfere and that disputes, or even conversations, were pointless. Many of them, especially the men, said that one should leave the Pentecostals to God’s judgement (*larim em/ol long God*). But Joshua was the leader of the mask dancers and felt that it was his duty to publicly protect *kastom*. Hence, when an opportunity presented itself (even if the conversation had nothing to do with *kastom*), he tried to speak his mind on this issue. His account presented above is particularly striking, because not only did it confer blame and the necessity for an apology, but also indicated a relationship between Christianity, *kastom*, and the colonial history of the region. By implying a connection between the other Kairak settlements’ removal of the *luluai kep*, their disrespect for it, the position it represented, the Australian administration, and the Pentecostals’ efforts to end *kastom*; Joshua was trying to show the significance of *kastom* as the *namba* of the Baining people. This *namba*, as he used it, referred to the thing that made them

⁵⁴ Two years after the Independence of Papua New Guinea.

recognisable to others – a colonial officer recognises the *luluai* through his *kep* – and gave them a sort of authority to represent their people and look after their community. Therefore, Joshua suggested that their *kastom*, specifically their mask dances, made the Vir Kairak recognisable and offered them a sense of group identity.

Conclusion

This chapter showed that the Vir Kairak understood their conversion to Christianity both as a breaking point from their ancestors' way of life of hiding and darkness, and as a process that required their continuous efforts to lead a good and exemplary Christian life. It illustrated how people's relationship to "change" involved their aspirations to "rehabilitate their stigmatised identity," to borrow from Hermann (1992: 64), linked to their "Baining" name. While this was relevant to all denominations in Tavir, it was especially important for the Pentecostals, who claimed that by becoming "true Christians" the Vir Kairak could finally become known and seen for who they truly are, both by God and significant others. Thus, this chapter has argued that Vir Kairak's conversion to Pentecostalism involved local understandings of recognition, whereby they actively worked towards changing themselves and their community (from within), so they could draw development (from the outside).

This chapter has also offered a contribution to the continuity-change and individual-society debates in the anthropology of Christianity. Robbins et al. (2014) have argued that in Christianity the moral emphasis shifts away from the relations between persons to the state of the adherent's heart and its relationship with God, which could be understood as a move towards individualism. In this chapter I have shown that among the Vir Kairak the personal experience of the Holy Spirit triggered the desire to change one's life and to present oneself to others in such a way that they would also desire change. My Pentecostal interlocutors understood change not simply on personal level, but as a condition that shaped the whole society and made it attractive for development projects such as the oil palm plantation (discussed in Part II of the

thesis). They argued that as the numbers of people who change their lives and accept the Revival increased, so did the blessings that God poured down from heaven. On the other hand, the Zion Church congregation focused on work, cooperation, and leading exemplary lives because in these activities they believed God and God's work manifested and made Him visible to others. Again, this view of Christianity involved presenting oneself in the right way to make something visible (God and oneself as a true Christian). Finally, for the UC adherents, it was wrong to banish *kastom* because it was the Vir Kairak's "*namba*" – it created social ties, taught respect, and made it possible for others (such as tourists and government officials) to "see" and know the Baining people.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

BUSH TO OIL PALM

When I went to live with the Vir Kairak my research focus was to understand their mask dances and practices of hiding and revelation. Therefore, I was not very interested in studying Baining movement and resettlement or issues about landownership. However, soon after I settled in Tavir it became clear that a great deal of Vir Kairak storytelling and self-representation had to do with the land they and their ancestors lived, hunted, fought, and made gardens on. Such stories were often told by elders while sitting around a fire or walking through the bush to share memories about a particular stream, river, hill, or overgrown garden. Stories were also evoked at community meetings and village court hearings to comment on current social and economic issues including land claims. These stories and the life histories and genealogies I collected all began with an account about where one was born and were framed in more or less the same way: “My mother gave birth to me in this settlement. We were all born in this settlement. Our ancestors were born in the bush. A place called Ramāsaga.”[22] The present chapter is about this place from which the Vir Kairak trace their origin and the area surrounding it. Neither are bush anymore, as my interlocutors’ stories suggested, but a vast cleared tract of land occupied by hundreds of thousands of oil palms, stretching as far as the eye can see. The coastal plains where River Vudal meets the sea and the west valleys of the River Kerevat, including the fertile hills and slippery slopes south of Kerevat Corrective Institution (the provincial prison *Karabus*, as the locals called it), were covered with these stumpy trunks of tough, dry scales with large crowns of spikes, and over-ripened, blood-red fruits bursting from their bodies.

Oil palm came to East New Britain as part of an ongoing plantation project brought to the Baining in the guise of “development.” The Malaysian investors and Baining middlemen negotiating the deal suggested that both the profit and royalties, as well as the very existence of the plantation, would finally bring infrastructure, education,

mobility, and wealth to the Baining region. But more importantly, they presented the plantation as a tool to reveal and reclaim Vir Kairak's customary land, which has been inhabited by illegal settlers (as my interlocutors called them) of Sepik, Aitape,⁵⁵ and Tolai origin, since the aftermath of World War II.

This chapter begins with a brief account about the conflict between the Baining, Taulil, and Sepik people residing in the area along River Kerevat and River Vudal. I argue that Vir Kairak stories and patrol reports about the Japanese occupation and its aftermath reveal not only how the relations between them and the colonial administration were imagined at the time, but also how people today commented on their position in relation to powerful outsiders such as the neighbouring Tolai and migrant Sepik and Aitape communities. They also provide insight on how the Baining perceive their relationship with various foreign investors and expatriates interested in extracting value from their land. The chapter picks up from the notion of "becoming many" (introduced in Chapter 1), whereby the Vir Kairak hoped to regain their ancestral ground, and shows the significance of gardens in keeping and revealing their rights to use and reside on it (cf. C. Lund 2016). Finally, it provides local accounts about the oil palm – the promises, expectations, worries, and issues arising with the plantation boundaries and scale – illustrating how Baining interest in this crop had been spurred by its need for vast land, which could not be occupied entirely by Kairak gardens and settlements. The plantation as a large-scale monocrop of commercial agriculture and vegetal infrastructure occupied the land and prevented others from using it.

Resettlement

The "modern" origin story of the Vir Kairak presented in Chapter 1 is a story of resettlement. Forcefully removed from their homeland by the Methodist Mission (which they came to know through the Tolai Pastor Sakiat Vugalia) and the

⁵⁵ Both Sepik and Aitape are non-indigenous to the island of New Britain, and have migrated from mainland Papua New Guinea.

Australian *kiaps* (patrol officers) represented by officer D'Arcey (*masta Dasi*), Tavir's settlers often reiterated that the place they resided now belonged to the Taulil and Uramot people, and that one day they would want it back. This concern with the precarity of their residence had pushed my interlocutors to "think about the future" (*tinktink long tumora/fyutsa*), as they said, whereby they discussed "what if" scenarios of rapid population growth, famine, and land wars, and positioned themselves spatially and socially as squatters on others' land. Therefore, many suggested that one day, when they become many (i.e. grow in numbers), they would move back to their *own* ancestral ground (*graun* or *bus bilong tumbuna*).

Many of the Taulil also assessed the current living situation in the area in a similar way. When I was ill with a drug-resistant strain of malaria and stayed at a guesthouse in Kokopo town, I became friends with Susan, who I later learned was daughter of the Taulil chief. In one of our conversations she started: "Do you know whose land is that where you live now [Tavir]? It's not Baining. The Bainings were in the north, near the sea. When the Tolai came they pushed them. The Baining moved to this land. But before them, it was ours. Taulil land." Her tone and face suggested discontent that mirrored the longstanding tension between the Taulil and Baining regarding their land boundaries (Patrol Reports Rabaul 1968-1969).

In East New Britain, people speculated that the Taulil came from New Ireland or Duke of York Island some years before the Tolai. At this time, they claimed, the Baining lived near the coast, so the Taulil settled inland.⁵⁶ However, after the Tolai came and pushed the Baining towards the mountains, Taulil and Baining conflict over their territories began as both depended on swidden cultivation substituted with some hunting and gathering. The tension between them only escalated after World War II, when the Australian administration started to move natives from their hamlets into easily accessible, well-defined villages, where they became subject to census and taxation. As a result, patrol officers enforced the clustering of different

⁵⁶ The area which is today home to the Kairak and a small portion of the Uramot Baining.

groups in the same area and negotiated people's land use rights and boundaries for them (Patrol Reports Rabaul 1968-1969).

Scholars who have worked with the Baining before, have recorded that prior to their relocation into consolidated villages and wards, they made settlements based on periodic swidden horticulture (Corbin 1976, Fajans 1997). This entailed a great deal of movement within their ancestral ground, which often resulted in conflict over soil use and wild prey, either with other Baining groups or the Tolai (who in the past also kept Baining slaves) (Laufer 1959). Furthermore, during WWII and its immediate aftermath, many were forced to frequently move and hide in order to protect themselves from the invading outsiders. Patrol Officer Parish reports that the Baining had suffered numerous Japanese raids and murder, the destruction of their gardens, and misappropriation of their pigs and dogs (Patrol Reports Kokopo 1946-1948).

Worse, however, had been the mainland Papua New Guineans who had come to the island as plantation workers during the German administration (between 1884-1919). Many of these men, mainly from Aitape and the Sepik region (mainland PNG, see Figure 6), had enlisted as *kempi* ("police boys") for the Japanese and wreaked havoc throughout the peninsula (ibid.). Patrol officers describe them as largely pre-occupied with raiding Baining settlements and gardens, kidnapping, murder, and rape. Pointing to these atrocities, my hosts called this period "the time of darkness" (as described in Chapter 3) and "the time of hiding" (*taim bilong hait*), when the surviving families moved from one place to the next, to find food and safety. Hiding in the bush, they also killed anyone they came across, in order to keep the location of their houses and gardens hidden. As my neighbour Metene put it: "Say, if you walk in the bush and see someone from another people/group (*lain*), you must kill them. Because if you don't kill them, they will kill you. Or if they run away, they can bring their men and raid your settlement." [23]

Patrol officers of this period reported the drastic decline in Baining population due to illness, starvation, and raids, and even speculated that the natives had lost their will to have more children (Patrol Reports Kokopo 1946-1948). As a result, apart from the

distribution of war compensation, the Australian administration started to relocate the surviving natives closer to each other. For instance, Patrol Officer Parish writes that the natives of Ramāsaga (ancestors of Tavir’s residents) and Rangulit villages were to “amalgamate into the one village at Vunapaladig” (ibid.), but had later split once again – a fact expressed in the Vir Kairak’s resettlement story when they describe living with some of the Qaqet in the north before eventually moving to Tavir (in Chapters 1 and 3). The Patrol Officer in the story, Mr D’Arcey, also writes that in November 1947 the settlement of Ramasaka consisted of ten houses which were burned by a “mentally deranged native” and that a new village was going to be built in the area of present day Tavir – pointing to the ten surviving Vir Kairak families. In March 1948, D’Arcey reports that the Ramāsaga natives’ resettlement had been successful, and that they had built new houses and made gardens at Tavir. He also notes that they had been “wandering about in the bush between Ganbraga and Mendres ever since the war finished” and that hopefully with their residence near the Mission centre, they would “discontinue the nomadic existence they have been living in the past” (Patrol Reports Kokopo 1946-1948). Similarly, my hosts explained that because of the *lotu* (church or Mission) they came out of hiding to the visible *ples* (rural settlement), where they now lived in peace, close to others (Chapter 3).

My interlocutors claimed that such settlement arrangements were necessary because there were only a few pastors and churches, schools and medical posts, that required them “to live close to each other in order to survive” (*i mas stap clostu clostu to sarvaiv*). Such explanation also echoes the one used by the administration to justify their efforts in establishing bounded villages. When my host father’s cousin Isaac told the story of their resettlement, he specifically elaborated on the Methodist pastor’s worry (*irrāski*) about them, because many had died during the Japanese occupation and the following post-war years. He then emphasised the *kia*p’s – *master Dasi*’s (Patrol officer D’Arcey) – anger (*kāsāren*) and how he scolded (*krosim* [TP]) their elder (*morka*) Peniel, because they were hiding in the bush and were only a few people left (also in the vignette in Chapter 1). Thus, these men ordered the Vir Kairak to settle in Tavir where the Mission and the administration could help (*rāratnārām*) them to survive. As a

result, the Sepik migrants established settlements over a large portion of Vir Kairak's ancestral ground, the administration moved a number of Tolai families into the Vunapaladig area where Ramasaka used to be, and declared part of the land near River Kerevat a forestry reserve (Patrol Reports Rabaul 1968-1969).

The style of the narrative presented above not only resonates with patrol reports from the period immediately after the war, which evoke sentiments about the dying and suffering native in need of the administration's care (Patrol Reports Kokopo 1946-1953), but also, I argue, it illustrates how people today constructed their group identity (Basso 1996; Ernst 1999; Oakdale 2005; Golub 2007b; High 2015) and positioned themselves as victims who barely survived multiple encounters with powerful others (cf. High 2015). That is, when my interlocutors talked about their violent past with the Sepik and the Japanese soldiers, and reiterated the popular account about the Tolai migration that pushed the Baining inland, they revealed their own position, both past and present, in relation to outsiders who invaded and terrorised them. To survive, their narrative suggests, they needed help from other powerful outsiders – the Mission and the government – and had to maintain good relationships with the Taulil and Uramot on whose land they depended for residence, subsistence, and their ability to reproduce themselves.

This history also provides insight about why throughout my fieldwork I frequently heard people in Tavir complain about 1) the Tolai, who had gained favour with the government ever since the German administration, and ensured the flow of resources and development into their settlements; and 2) the Sepik migrants, who had *pasin nogut* (bad manner/behaviour), stole food and pigs, drank alcohol and used drugs, raped and killed the Baining. In fact, the Sepik rather than the Tolai were the “bad outsiders” (contrary to previous ethnographic accounts), who had encroached onto Baining land and raided its resources (a point to which I will return later in this chapter when discussing the oil palm plantation), while the Tolai, for the most part, had been placed on that land by the colonial and post-colonial government.

Rights to Settle – Lanivit

State building, both in the colonial and post-colonial era, heavily depended on property relations and the codification of the land system (Stead 2017). After PNG's annexation, Golub (2007) writes, the Australian administration had very few funds to do more than govern the urban centres and periodically patrol the rural hinterlands. This "lack of capacity turned into a moral and fiscal virtue" (2007: 39) when PNG land law declared that native land was by default held by the natives under their own customary land rights. However, the same law also stated that the subsoil resources were owned by the State, and unused land could become state property. This interpretation of landownership appears to draw on two distinct models: 1) John Locke's account that one can appropriate the land through the application of one's labour, and 2) that landownership is inherited or acquired through some form of relationship (e.g. kinship, transaction, gift) (in Kalinoe 2004). That is, on the one hand, the administration acknowledged local people's landownership claims through genealogies, stories, and cosmologies that formed the basis for their land tenure rights, and thus drafted PNG land law accordingly (which has been the dominant route to landownership throughout the Pacific). On the other hand, they refused to see the landscape as entwined in its entirety with people's lives, and perceived the sparsely populated massive bush as uninhabited and inefficiently used (or unused at all), which they could dispossess, lay claim, establish plantations and commercial forests, and place migrant workers (see E. Wolf 1982; R. P. Neumann 2001; Blomley 2003).

Both German Annual Reports (1906-1916) and Australian Patrol Reports (1968-1969) from East New Britain illustrate the importance placed on forestry and timber production in the province, as well as colonial sentiments to study and protect the environment from its invasive local inhabitants by establishing botanical gardens, forestry reserves, and forests of various exotic species, particularly eucalyptus and ficus (*Ficeae*) (see also Anderson and Grove 1987; M. Leach and Mearns 1996). Similarly, Sivaramakrishnan (1998) has shown that in India, colonial forestry policies moulded the landscape into state owned forests and rice fields, and classified trees as

timber. Likewise, von Hellermann (2016) has described how in west Africa, officers believed that tree planting would contribute to the colonial economy and to rural development by providing timber and firewood. In East New Britain, this occurred in the form of forestry reserves and privately-owned or Mission-owned plantations, that were established on alienated state land or places acquired through means of deception (Neumann 1992; Filer and Lowe 2011).

These instances show the significance colonial regimes put on codifying and controlling the landscape for its resource value. Their perception of and prejudice regarding what could be considered “real use” (which generally involved intensive farming or agro-forestry, logging, and mining) allowed for the enclosure and commodification of land and the creation of property relations, which local people had to learn and incorporate into their lives. For example, post-WWII, the administration directed its efforts in encouraging people to plant blocks of copra and cocoa, and sell their produce to the expatriate-owned plantations. In this way, they enforced the transition from shifting cultivation carried out in non-bounded ancestral ranges, to petty commodity production and landownership of bounded blocks of land (see also Moore 2005; C. Lund 2008). This also entailed a shift from inclusion to exclusion, as Peters puts it, from people “belonging to a place to a property belonging to someone” (2004: 305) Hence, while it may be argued that PNG land law was quite liberal, it still created the circumstances through which local people such as the Vir Kairak were dispossessed of and displaced from their land.

Over the years after Independence, more Tolai, Sepik, and migrants from the Highlands moved to the Baining ranges, where they built small hamlets and planted cocoa blocks. Many bought these parcels from Baining men whose families had used or resided in that area. As my informants put it, these *tumbuna* (ancestors) did not understand the transaction they participated in as permanent transfer of landownership rights, but merely as use rights for a particular period of time (see also Stead 2017). A large number of migrants, however, settled near the hamlets inhabited by their *wantok* (of one language) without acquiring permission from the Baining. In

the process, a few large settlements emerged within the Vir Kairak's ancestral ground, whose residents also used the surrounding bush for hunting and gardening. To prevent further expansion of these settlements, Tavir's residents continued to make taro, yam, and tapioca gardens near the area from which they were once moved, and they revived old ancestral gardens north of River Kerevat. My interlocutors said that there were two ways to reveal their landownership: 1) show that you know the stories about the land and the names of markers on the land (rocks, rivers, creeks, trees, etc.), and 2) grow something on the land.

"You see we don't have fences" (*Lukim, mipela i no gat banis*) said Ada, one of the oldest women in Tavir during my stay, "we border our land with tapioca, banana, and coconut. When something grows on the land, others know it belongs to someone. They [the administration] brought us here, but we must keep our land." [24] Later, in the 1990s many started to plant cocoa blocks in those distant gardens. Peter articulated that "the soil is better [there], and when you plant your cocoa there, the outsiders can't plant theirs" (*soil em gut, na taim yu planim koko, narapla, ousaider, bai no ken planim*). While this practice may seem to draw on the Lockean (or colonial) model of landownership, I argue that claiming land rights for these gardens had less to do with the labour, and more with the act of covering the surface with cultivated crops and trees. This was expressed through the phrase "*karamapim graun*" (cover the land) and not the usual "*wokim graun*" (work the land). It also implied that the land became visible as something already in a relationship with some people through the form it appeared – that is, not wild bush but covered with domesticated crops (cf. Fajans 1998).

Nevertheless, many complained that not only did the settlers use the resources that were originally Vir Kairak's "birth right," but that they also stole from these distant gardens and cocoa blocks. "They do not respect our gardens. They do not respect us" (*ol i no rispektim garden bilong mipela. Ol i no rispektim mipela*), explained Lisa. Therefore, most families built a small house from bush materials next to their gardens, where they stayed for about a week every one or two months. The neighbouring Kairak

ward of Ganbraga also followed a similar practice, that eventually resulted in the emergence of three new settlements at these gardening sites. Lisa's birth parents and brothers lived in one of those settlements, which first split from Ganbraga. It was called Lanivit.

My birth father went first to Lanivit. He made a block of cocoa and planted some taro. He planted some coconuts too, and today they are tall and give lots of coconuts. He made a house and took his family to live there. Then others followed... The soil is still good in Lanivit. It's black and soft. Not overused like the one here [around Tavir and Ganbraga]. So, my father went to make a big cocoa block and stop outsiders from using it. In 2012 he died, and they cemented his grave and placed a cross and a small house on top to mark him as the founder of the village.[25]

Lisa often visited her birth mother and brothers in Lanivit and with their help, she once even made a large peanut garden there. When she talked about Lanivit and her father, her voice was full of joy and admiration. She said that others from Ganbraga followed him and made cocoa blocks and houses there, and that when he saw that many had settled permanently, but there was no church, he built one by himself and acted as the lay pastor of this new settlement.

Following Lanivit's establishment, people from Ganbraga and Lanivit formed the village Ripka. And in the early 2000s the village Marusem emerged out of the gardens of Lanivit and Ripka. My interlocutors evaluated this formation of new settlements as a way to reclaim their customary land by repopulating and covering the land with gardens. They were also quick to note that Ganbraga had many families and a larger population, while Tavir was still small. "Because they are many they broke and made new settlements. When we are also many, we will go back to our land" said Noah bitterly. In another conversation one of the elders from Ganbraga said that the Kairak customary land was "the largest unpopulated Baining land among the five clans," thus "keeping it from outsiders was hard." Therefore, the Vir Kairak found themselves in a position of lack while having an abundance of land and resources: that is, they lacked the rights to the land they currently resided on, and the means to

take back their own vast land. This has led them to develop new strategies to keep ownership of their land: while in the past they kept gardens and settlements hidden by killing everyone who came near them, now they revealed their land by covering it with crops and trees.

Turn to Oil Palm

One early morning Noah came to my kitchen and asked quietly if I wanted to see a wild pig. His cousin Kapinyas had returned from hunting and knowing that I was interested in various Kairak activities, had sent Noah to get me. Once we got to Kapinyas's house we found the man and his nine-year-old son sitting in the shade, sorting some bird feathers. After he showed me the wild pig, which he had tied and hidden in his wife's kitchen, he took out a few pig jaw bones, bird beaks, and cassowary feathers he had collected over the years. We sat on the cement steps of his house and had a conversation about these pieces and how Vir Kairak men hunted the animals these belonged to. He explained that a hunter set more than twenty traps in the bush and went to check them regularly every week. "If you don't check in time, the animal may die and the meat go bad, or someone can steal your catch" (*sapos yu no sek, animal bai dai na abus bagarap o narapela bai stilim em*). He noted that on more than one occasion he had found his traps empty, and surrounded by footsteps and dog tracks. "Probably some Sepik man. They hunt with their dogs. And steal our pigs." (*I mas sampela Sepik man. Ol i hant wantaim dog. Na em stil pik bilong mipela.*) Usually hunters did not claim that taking a trapped animal was stealing, but in this instance Kapinyas was referring to the act of taking the pig from their hunting grounds on *their* customary land. "The problem is not the ones who have bought some land. The problem is the illegal settlers," (*Em problem em nogat man i bin baim lend. Problem em dispela illegal settlers,*) he explained. Many of my interlocutors made similar statements when they decided to share their opinions on this issue.

Migrants who had bought land from individual owners were recognised by the Vir Kairak as legal settlers with some rights to reside and use the land. Still, a point was

made that the entire clan owned the land, hence, one man could not sell *his* land; and even if he did, “the case should be one of leasing, not selling,” explained Simon, who was one of Tavir’s ward committee members. Nevertheless, if the migrants held some documents proving they had bought the land, this was acknowledged as “legal rights to settle” and any disputes over that parcel resolved through means of compensation. But according to the Vir Kairak most settlers were illegal. They suggested that these were mainly Sepik, some Highlanders, and Tolai, who had made hamlets and gardens without the permission of the landowners. “We have tried to keep our land with gardens, but they still settle,” exclaimed Simon. “Then some elders got the land title. But still the settlers wouldn’t go.”

He was talking about the first legal steps the Vir Kairak took to claim their land in the 1990s. Officials from a logging company that operated in East New Britain advised them to file a lawsuit for the portion of land occupied by these migrant settlements. Several surveys were done, maps were drawn, and stories about the land recorded. My host father Joshua described how he showed the government officials (*ol man bilong gavman*) their land and recounted its stories. Creeks, rocks, pools, and trees, all had a story, and knowing these, asserted ownership over that area. Joshua described how he flew in a helicopter and showed the surveyors their boundaries. “They took me to different places in the bush and tested my knowledge by asking me about that place.” (*Ol i bin kisim mi long narapela narapela hap insait long bus na testim save bilong mi, olsem askim mi long dispela hap.*) Eventually, the court recognised the vast portion of land north of River Kerevat as Kairak customary land.

However, the land title did not help the Vir Kairak much in their efforts to remove the illegal settlers. Zane, who was Tavir’s ward member explained that “it [the title] revealed the land on paper, but in reality, they [the settlers] had hamlets and gardens, and we didn’t. If it’s bush, they could settle.” And on numerous occasions my informants said that when they had confronted the migrant settlers about the land they resided on, they did not listen but fought with their bows and arrows. “The last time they shot one of our men in the leg,” explained Noah. Furthermore, if the land

seemed unused and the settlers had transformed it with gardens and trees, they could make claims for the future value of their produce.

Things got worse in 2006, my hosts lamented, when the Cocoa Pod Borer (CPB) blight affected East New Britain. This resulted in almost all Kairak cocoa growers to abandon their cocoa blocks or replace them with peanut and sweet potato gardens as cash crops. These did not require much expansion and in fact, my interlocutors in Tavir preferred to grow them near their settlement because it was easier to ward off parrots and wild pigs. But in this way, they also could not cover much of their customary land with cultivated plants and trees and keep it safe from the illegal settlers. Therefore, in 2010, when representatives of a Malaysian oil palm company approached the Kairak leaders about leasing their land, they saw this as an opportunity to once and for all “get rid of the settlers.”

As I was riding in the front seat of one of the company pickup trucks lent to the chairman of the Kairak ILG⁵⁷, behind the wheel Hosea pointed at the hills covered with oil palm and said:

This area you see here, Vudal division, now we are travelling; it was once full of settlers. Once full of settlers, all this area here. Tolai, Sepik, you name it. Okay, we come we chase them, we tell them to move out, we tell them we won this land back from the State, you don't settle here, this is our land. For many years our fathers were doing that and then us, we were doing it after them. They do not move out, they continue to flood in. This land. We registered it, but they were still settling on the land. So, this oil palm developer came and told us, 'you have any customary land registered?' Yes, we have our customary land registered and still we have the problem of settlements. So, they said, they are willing to help us put a project on the land so that it will help move those illegal settlers out; that is the reason why we agreed. Okay, we can sign some agreements, we said. You put your plant – the oil palm – on the land and get rid of [the] settlers. And that

⁵⁷ Details about the ILG are given in the following two chapters.

is why the company came in, then it started moving all the people – illegal settlers
– out, and we used that *oil palm as a tool for us to clean our land and get it back*.

Hosea was a respected member of the Kairak community for his role as clan representative in the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council. While this council had very little influence on the provincial political arena, it was crucial in promoting the oil palm development project throughout the Baining lands. In the Kairak settlements specifically, the council claimed that the plantation would once and for all “clear the land from illegal settlers.” This had to do mainly with the plantation’s large-scale monocrop nature. Mr Tarun Suvarna, the General Manager of Olam International, explained in an interview:

Oil palm needs scale – it is not something which can grow in a crop diversified environment. So, if it is a plantation, it needs to be everything, and it needs certain scale to be running in a profitable way... you need that kind of scale to run one particular mill, which needs to be on-site. If you don’t have that scale, if you don’t have enough land, you don’t invest in it, because it is a huge investment.

His company was concerned that the oil palm expansion into East New Britain threatened the cocoa industry because it replaced the small-holder cocoa farms (established by both legal and illegal settlers) with palm plantations.⁵⁸ Mr Suvarna described oil palm as “a complete substitute,” since it did not grow alongside other crops such as cocoa, copra, or rubber. Moreover, to guarantee profit, the plantation had to ensure that the palm grew unobstructed by other plant species, which entailed heavy chemical spraying.

Having a single crop throughout an expansive tract of land aligned well with the Vir Kairak’s efforts to reclaim their land. Zane, for example, described this as a process of covering and revealing: “By covering the land with oil palm, we are exposing the illegal settlers and pulling them out.” Peter similarly suggested that the oil palm “will

⁵⁸ Most of these small-holders were funded by the World Bank’s PNG cocoa rejuvenation project that started in 2010. During my fieldwork these cocoa farmers partook in the ongoing lawsuit against the palm oil company, the Kairak ILG and PNG government (further on the lawsuit in chapter 4).

cover the Kairak land and show the real landowners” (*em bai karamapim ol Kairak lend na soim real lendowners*). Pastor Michael, who was the ILG vice-chairman, said that all leaders who support the project “have a vision: [they] think of the future.” After the land is covered with palm and rid of the settlers, it will be *free* for the Kairak to move back on it once their population grows in number. He exclaimed, “because it’s *our title*, okay, when the population is large, we will remove the oil palm and make houses, because it’s *our land*. It is not owned by the company. It’s *our right*.” Hence, the act of covering the land with a crop was not only revelatory for both those who reside on and who own it, but also those who would protect and prepare it for future repopulation by its real owners.



Figure 30 - Oil Palm Nursery

For my interlocutors the oil palm plantation, as a vegetal infrastructure that was hard to remove and cultivate with other crops, kept the land “secure” (*securim*⁵⁹) and ensured it would be *theirs* in the future. In a sense, the plantation, in its entirety as

⁵⁹ The Tok Pisin *securim* was mainly used in relation to the oil palm plantation and the land title deed as in “*securim taitl*” (secure the title deed).

palms, people, roads, infrastructure, and relations, was perceived as a spatiotemporal hybrid entity that both revealed the present occupiers and landowners, and safeguarded the land for future settlement and gardens (cf. Munn 1977; Latour 1993). “Like before you make a garden you must clear the plot,” Lisa likened the process of removing the settlers to clearing the bush to make space for gardening. In the same way as the cleared land was then planted with crops, so was the customary land going to be repopulated with Kairak people. Furthermore, Pastor Michael said that the company “fights our fight” to remove the settlers. He said:

It is easier to fight in the court, look today how many settlers, how many sectors it [the plantation] has removed...They all had houses – permanent houses. We removed many. They had covered our land – all Tolai, all Sepik – we removed them. The company helped us with our right to landownership.[26]

The narrative about the ongoing problems with the Sepik and Tolai settlers, the outsiders fighting with bows and arrows, stealing and disrespecting the Baining, and Vir Kairak’s lack of large population and inability to remove the settlers without the company’s help show how people positioned themselves within these relations as victims of injustice, both in the past and present. Even though they had gained the legal rights to their customary land, they still needed the help of powerful outsiders – the Malaysian oil palm company – to clear the land and provide future Kairak generations with a place to live and make garden, similar to the way in which the Australian administration and Methodist Mission had brought them to Tavar.

Unclear Prospects About a Patchy Land

Five years after the oil palm project began, and the plantation gave its first fruits, there were still ongoing issues with the settlers. In February 2016, during one of our string-bag weaving sessions with Joyce, we again found ourselves talking about the oil palm plantation after she mentioned the rivers where they went to catch eel. She noted that in 2010, when men from the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council first introduced the project, Tavar was divided into two factions: those who supported and those who opposed the plantation. She said that after the council representative “came and

talked to us all, everyone accepted” (*ol i tokim mipela olgeta, na ol akseptim*). But as she was telling the story I saw some tension building on her face. When I asked if she was happy with how things had turned out, her lips protruded into a sulky pout and then turned into a disappointed smile: “I have some thoughts; some worries of mine” (*Mi gat tinktink bilong mi; sampela wari bilong mi*). She explained that they were told they would receive royalties in 2015, after the first harvest, but it was already 2016 and they had not received anything yet. “Others talk about this too. But nobody would ask.” (*Narapla toktok long dispela tu. Tasol nogat lain bai askim.*)



Figure 31 - Bulldozers Clearing the Bush

I had already heard similar sentiments from Lisa about the royalties: “You know us all Baining, we talk when at home, but at meeting all are *vorvāt* (ashamed/shy).” She also mentioned that the Pentecostal group in Tavir had selected Pastor James as one of the ILG board of directors, also called “oil palm directors” or “ILG directors” that consisted of fourteen Kairak men who represented the clan in negotiations regarding their customary land, so he would oversee the plantation dealings and protect people’s interest (*lukautim na sekim ol*). “He is a trustworthy, good man,” she said,

however, “because of his legs [suffering from rheumatism] he can’t go to the plantation and meetings very often.” Knowing this I asked Joyce if she had spoken to Pastor James about the royalties, but she shrugged and said: “I can’t...we can’t ask because we are *sem*; we are *vorvāt*” (*Mi no ken...mipela no ken askim, bikos mipela sem; mipela vorvāt*).

As I have already discussed in Chapter 1, among the Vir Kairak asking for visible things was the norm when people were in the right kind of relationship. However, people like my host uncle Jacob and my host father claimed that it was wrong to wait and ask for royalties when one had not worked to deserve them – such expectations were deemed closer to acts of accumulation than of giving as one would when contributing to garden work and in turn receiving food or money. Moreover, my interlocutors described their relationship with the oil palm directors in terms of *vorvāt* and *gutārār* (respect) not simply due to their position as such, but because (as I will show in Chapter 6) these men were already acting as community leaders and had gained the respect of their people. On the other hand, they saw the Malaysian plantation managers as distant and unwilling to see them as anything other than “black skin” (*blek skin* – something they often mentioned in relation to the way they felt scrutinised in a negative way every time they entered a migrant Chinese-owned⁶⁰ store in town or worked for a Chinese timber mill). Therefore, the reason why many Vir Kairak felt *vorvāt* to enquire about the royalties had multiple layers: they could not ask because 1) they could not see whether there was any money or not (and whether some people received royalties or not); 2) they did not want to appear as if they were preoccupied with desiring money, accumulation, and consumption; 3) they said the oil palm directors knew more than them about what was going on and what was right, so it was not their place to ask; and 4) they did not have the right relations with the Malaysian managers that enabled them to ask for things from them.

⁶⁰ Contrasting the way in which PNG-born Chinese acted towards the local Tolai and Baining, and the way newcomers from China and Malaysia did.

The second issue on Joyce's mind was that certain parts of the plantation had overgrown with weeds and bush. She complained that the workers did not properly weed and spray all the blocks, and that one part of the plantation was well kept while the other was not. She said that all directors must talk to the plantation boss about this, and make the workers work better, but again, they were *vorvāt* to say this to the directors, and the directors were *vorvāt* to talk to the plantation boss. Joyce's worry about the condition of the plantation had to do with the idea that if the land was overgrown with bush and seemed unused, then settlers could take it. Furthermore, the frustration with the workers, whom she described as lazy and of bad *pasin* (habits/behaviour), had to do with their "outsider" status as migrants from mainland PNG.

In the first years of the project, the Stewardship Council enticed many Bainings from all six clans to work on the plantation. According to Hosea such employment provided "secure income to build a future," thus Baining workers were given priority when hiring. However, their hopes to uplift their lives through plantation labour significantly diverged from the reality of contemporary plantations as still relying heavily on a system of indebtedness, whereby migrant labourers or dispossessed local populations were bonded to the land and labour through very low wages that made them dependent on other nonmonetary forms of compensation such as housing and food rations (Besky 2013; Li 2014a). Typically, people discussed the plantation's poor working conditions and low wages in relation to racial prejudices about their capability, trustworthiness, and respect by the company owners – their "black skin" in comparison to the highly paid expatriates from Europe, Malaysia, and India (see Cooper and Stoler 1997). While no one was explicit about the ways in which some Kairak took higher positions as supervisors, it was obvious that they had very close ties with the oil palm directors (see also Gillespie 2012). Therefore, by the time I went to Tavir, most of the Vir Kairak had quit their plantation jobs and returned to gardening, which resulted in the employment of many migrant workers. My interlocutors often described these workers as Sepik and Highlands Papua New Guineans, who brought "bad behaviour/conduct" (*pasin nogut*) to the Baining lands.

Finally, Joyce was upset about the area covered with oil palm. She explained that in the beginning they were told that the plantation would first cover the area after Vudal and remove all Sepik settlers, then move towards the site near Kerevat, where the Kairak settlements and gardens were. "The oil palm was going to clear all Sepiks, but they are still there. Why haven't they planted on the other side yet?" (*Oil palm bai rausim ol Sepik, tasol ol i stap yet. Wai ol i bin no planim long arasait yet?*) She was very angry at this point of the conversation and noted that many of the Vir Kairak had lost their gardening land to the oil palm, while the Sepiks still had settlements and gardens. And many people pointed to the settlement of Marusem, which had been completely engulfed by oil palms, and its residents compelled to plantation work entirely. During my house survey Joyce's brother Ephraim remarked he felt *vorvāt* about the state of his house, which he had repaired numerous times, but couldn't afford to build a new one, because all of his family gardens were claimed by the plantation and he only had a few left near Tavir. These, unfortunately, did not produce enough cash crops so he could not buy building materials and put his four children through school at the same time, especially since they could no longer earn from their cocoa blocks.

When my interlocutors discussed this issue, they also pointed to the fact that the plantation had skipped and surrounded (*raunim*) some of the Kairak gardens. A frequently mentioned example was the garden area owned by the ILG vice-chairman. When I brought this issue to him and asked whether the people who opposed the project did so because they had lost their gardening land, he gave a rather evasive answer, explaining that the plantation followed a planting plan, but there had been an issue with the outsider settlements.

First, we were going to plant at the Vudal and then at Kerevat, but it changed...There is delay because of the settlers. Some Tolai and others from another province live on that land. And they have blocked that area inside the land title where the [palm oil] mill was going to be build. They have disputed our rights to landownership.[27]



Figure 32 – Ephraim's house

The project plan suggested that the plantation should begin planting on the area near River Vudal and finish the mill by the end of 2014. However, the settlers had fought both physically and in court for their rights to live there and compensation should they be removed. "They have disturbed the work of the company, delaying the mill and our royalties," Michael commented. Therefore, in 2015, East New Britain Palm Oil Ltd decided to change the project and build the mill near the beach in Vunapaladig area, where the original Vir Kairak settlement called Ramasaka used to be. This decision came after they had transported the first harvest of five tons from the Kairak plantation to the company mill in Pomio, and much of the palm fruit left at the plantation had rotten due to the lack of processing facilities. Michael explained that "there are no royalties yet, because we are waiting for the mill. When the mill is built and starts to make oil...cook oil, and then sell it...then the royalties will come."



Figure 33 – The Mountain Area (at very back) with Sepik Settlements

The “blockage by the settlers,” as he put it, had also “disturbed the company’s planting plan”. The lawsuit lodged by a group of the settlers and some of the Kairak who opposed the project was still ongoing at the time of my fieldwork. During this period the company could not plant oil palm on the disputed land near River Vudal. Thus, they had to change their planting pattern and cover the area near River Kerevat first, which resulted in the destruction of many Kairak gardens. Pastor Michael was one of the “lucky” ones whose gardens were still thriving. In the last few years, he and his wife had built a house there, and along with a couple of other families related to him, permanently settled on this garden land people called Kalangmes⁶¹. And since the plantation became operational, it built new, wide roads, suitable for large trucks, that connected Kalangmes to the rest of the peninsula. When I pointed this out, and that other Tavir families also used to have gardens and houses on their customary land across the River Kerevat, he said:

⁶¹ Name changed to protect anonymity

On the side of Kerevat, no man from Tavir had made a house there when the oil palm was moving to cover this [area]. It was just blocks of cocoa and no houses. These [gardens] didn't come from the ancestors. No. Now, men now, made gardens and a little bit of cocoa. When CPB – Cocoa Pod Borer – came and killed all cocoa, all cocoa blocks became bush. Bush had covered [these], because of CPB. Only I stay up there in Kalangmes, and all others stay down here. But with our plan, we want all people here to move to their land, because the land that is ours is there where I live in Kalangmes. All other land that belongs to all. If they want a block in Kalangmes, they can come stay with me, but they must leave all blocks that are here [inside the leased land], for the company to plant palm on them, so they belong to all again.[28]

It seemed that Pastor Michael did not consider the small huts made from bush material where people stayed when they went to work for longer periods, as houses. Moreover, he did not acknowledge that the Vir Kairak were slowly transforming their cocoa blocks into peanut and sweet potato gardens, or that some have recently started replacing their old cocoa trees with the new cloned variety, which was resistant to CPB – both processes that took time. Therefore, for him nothing was lost as compared to what was won with the oil palm – it had marked their land all the way to the banks of River Kerevat and got rid of many settlers in that area. He also suggested that all Kairak could move to the area where there weren't any oil palm or settlers and make gardens and permanent houses there, because there were two portions inside their land title: portion A (11,000 hectares) was designated for agriculture and development; and portion B (25,000 hectares) for conservation, where they could live, hunt, and make gardens because it was “their right, their land, bush, and water” (*rait bilong ol, grau, bus, na wara bilong ol*).



Figure 34 - Diagram of Vir Kairak's Customary Land

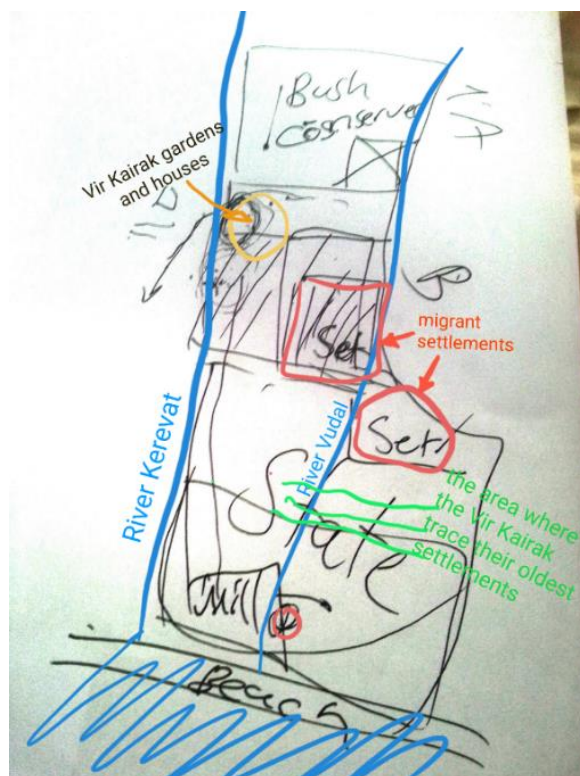


Figure 35 - Diagram with added notes



Figure 36 - Map roughly showing the areas discussed in this thesis; yellow semi-circle is the area the Vir Kairak trace their ancestry to, red is the oil palm plantation in 2016, green the area designated as conservation, light blue is the alienated state land, and purple the new mill site.

This answered my question about why some people's gardens were lost to the oil palm, while others were not, as it turned out the land farther in the southwest fell inside the conservation area. But while my interlocutors understood the idea of dividing the land for conservation and agricultural purposes, they were not pleased with the decision about where their boundaries should begin. "Our ancestors too, we too, clear some ground for gardens, and leave other bush," said Kilala, "but who is deciding this today?!" (*tumbuna i bin klirim graun long garden na larim narapela bus, tasol husat i decidim dis tude*). Moreover, people who were not Pastor Michael's relatives or part of his congregation could not imagine having gardens and houses in Kalangmes. Joyce, her brother Ephraim, and my host father Joshua, all insisted that in the past, their fathers or grandfathers, or the fathers of their grandfathers, had made some gardens or houses and had drawn boundaries between each other's land. This is where their descendants went to plant cocoa and taro. "They used rocks and creeks to mark their boundaries," explained Joshua. While these Vir Kairak agreed that everyone is free to make gardens anywhere on their customary land, they suggested that people were still supposed to follow some land inheritance rules and ask permission to settle on other families' ancestral land. Hence, the takeover of their gardens by the plantation demanded from them to either search for new gardening land deeper in the bush or negotiate for some plots with other members of the clan. Others simply bought garden produce, or rented a plot and labour, with the money they earned at the plantation. This created all sorts of new relations and inequalities between the families in all five Kairak settlements. It also resulted in some discontent about the oil palm. And amidst those changes the rhetoric in support of the project had to shift from one about clearing the land of settlers to one of development.

Conclusion

Like other places affected by colonial regimes, in ENB the history of property relations and land claims is entwined with violence, dispossession, resettlement, and transformation of local livelihoods. In this chapter I have unpacked the Vir Kairak

resettlement story and presented the precarious conditions in which they find themselves today as customary landowners without access to their land and settlers on someone else's territory with little means for engaging in subsistence or commodity farming. I also showed how colonial influence and codification of the landscape (into village space, subsistence plot, plantation, forestry reserve, and so on) had resulted in the transition from shifting cultivation to petty commodity production in the form of cocoa and copra farming, and in turn, from belonging to a land to owning customary land and individual cash crop plots.

For many years, the Vir Kairak have tried to reclaim their ancestral ground with their stories, genealogies, myths, gardens, and land title deeds. When these were insufficient to create the desired result and clear the land from migrant settlers, people saw new hope in the oil palm plantation project. By looking at the relationships my interlocutors described in their stories and the ones they put themselves in today, I proposed that they had imagined the effects of their agreement with the Malaysian company as similar to their liberation from hiding, raids, and darkness (cause by the Sepik migrants) by the Methodist Mission. Moreover, I argued that the Vir Kairak understood the plantation as a spatiotemporal hybrid entity that covered the land with a "permanent" large-scale vegetal infrastructure and safeguarded it for their future settlements and gardens. This notion had been shaped by people's traditional practices of swidden agriculture in non-bounded zones, whereby gardens were marked just by the domesticated crops that grew on them. In other words, the ownership of a plot was made visible through the crops that grew on it.

The Vir Kairak applied this same strategy of "covering the land" with oil palm in an effort to keep their ties to and reveal their rights to their ancestral ground. The scale and monocrop nature of the plantation had played a significant role in people's acceptance of the project, as they imagined it could cover their vast land and get rid of the settlers. However, as it happens in most of these cases, people's expectations were not met by the reality of the situation and not only was the oil palm unsuccessful in removing the Sepik settlements, but it also entailed the destruction of many Kairak

gardens. As a result, the Baining leaders involved in the project had to shift their message of support for the plantation to one that focused on its economic effects and development, as the following chapters will show.

CHAPTER 5

THE LAND IS OUR GOVERNMENT

Two days after I came to East New Britain, my guide and now good friend John Wargul arranged a meeting with the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council at the hotel where my husband and I were staying. He explained that this was “the proper way people hold meetings – if they wanted to talk to someone, they invite them where they stay.” The council was officially formed in 2011 and represented the six Baining clans (five at the time of my fieldwork)⁶² in their dealings with the provincial government. Before commencing my fieldwork I was advised by a couple of scholars who worked in ENB that I should ask for the council’s permission but also keep my distance from them, because some years before they had tried to stop the research and publication of several works about the Baining. With all that in mind, I was happy to learn that John had a very good relationship with the council’s executive officer, Mr Boniface Setavo from the Mali Baining, who was a retired school principal, and had held titles such as ENB Province Deputy Governor, President of Sinivit Local Level Government, and Chairman of Lands and Mining in the Province Assembly.

That morning as we waited for our guests to arrive, we sat under the gazebo by the beach and listened to John’s stories about the Baining, which he had learned from Bishop Karl Hesse whilst working for him. One such story he often reiterated was about how Baining traditional houses had a front entrance and a small back door; so when the Bishop followed people in to talk with them, they would have already run away through the other exit. I wondered whether John’s loud laughter as he told this story derived from his evaluation of Baining shyness, or the situation the Bishop found himself in.

After two hours of waiting for the stewards, I became anxious and started to speculate that they probably didn’t want another foreign anthropologist sticking her nose into their people’s lives. When I voiced these concerns to John, he reassured me that this

⁶² There were five clans during the time of my fieldwork, but in 2016 just after I left Papua New Guinea the Council recognised the Makolkol as the sixth clan.

was “PNG time” and that people were always late. He also said that “maybe they don’t have a car and decided not to come,” and released another bout of loud laughter from his big chest. But if that was the case, why had they confirmed the meeting when I called them that morning? Nervous, sweaty, and tired of waiting I asked my husband (as a man) to call Mr Setavo and learn what was happening. Indeed, it turned out that they did not have a car, so we agreed to go and meet them in their office at the Catholic Mission in Vunapope.

The Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council was given a large, second floor room in one of the mission’s buildings. The office walls were covered with a couple of whiteboards and numerous posters and photographs of the Baining people. There was a meeting table, two desks stacked with files, papers, and magazines, an old desktop computer and a printer, and a library with “everything that has ever been published about the Baining people,” as Mr Setavo proudly put it. Upon entering the room, he, the council chairman Mr Nicholaus Leo, two Mali and one Qaqet elders, and Mr Leo’s son (who was studying to become a journalist) welcomed us with warm smiles and strong handshakes. John had prepared me for this moment by lending me a dozen betel nuts to exchange when I shook hands with the men. They accepted both the betel nuts and the cakes I had brought from the hotel with modest smiles, but kindly explained that as hosts, they were the ones who were supposed to offer something, and quickly made a comparison between Baining and Tolai custom.

We drank some extremely sweet instant coffee while I gave a quick briefing about my project and handed them copies of my research proposal and permits. Following my introduction, Mr Setavo remarked that they had long been waiting for an anthropologist to come and study their people, and Mr Leo added that they were very angry with the way the Baining were represented as “the most boring people in the world.”⁶³ They said my husband and I were “truly godsent,” that our arrival was

⁶³ There is a substantial web discussion on this issue in the comments section of an article titled ‘All Work and No Play Make the Baining the “Dullest Culture”’ by Peter Gray (2012) in Psychology Today at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201207/all-work-and-no-play-make-the-baining-the-dullest-culture>

“very timely,” and that the Baining people “had to be introduced to the world.” Then, Mr Setavo briefly mentioned the work they had been doing so far to try to raise awareness about the importance of education and small business ventures as well as their efforts to protect the Baining fire dance and “prevent its alienation and dislocation from the customary land” (as discussed in Chapter 2). He then moved on and said that “nowadays the Baining people have been finally recognised by the provincial government” (through their council and more particularly through the oil palm plantations) and suggested that they were “lucky because the current leaders, even the Tolai leaders, are supporting us.” “However,” Mr Leo interrupted, “for many years it has been difficult for the government to understand the kind of development *we want*; [hence] there is need for more detailed studies about Baining culture, so that people can *understand the Baining*.”

Our discussion on development and lack of government aid in infrastructure, education, and health led to the significance of “changing the [Baining] mind-set.” They proposed that the first step to that is through changing the name “Baining” into “Qaqet,” because the former was a derogatory word and they believed that the Qaqet were the oldest clan from which all others derived. Moreover, Mr Leo suggested that “registering the land to the original settlers whose forefathers it belonged to [was] the most important [step] for the economy” of their people. The land had to be “demarcated” and “laws [put] to protect the next generation.” Mr Leo’s face creased with some further tension in his eyebrows, and his voice deepened: “I am very sad to see my people sit all day and night trying to sell their produce, just to put money on the table.” And he suggested that the only way to change this was by “promoting cultural land laws.” The chairman explained that in Baining tradition (*kastom*) landownership resided with the clan, not with the individual men. However, “this had to be put into writing, so the PNG government would accept that claim,” and they noted that “in ENB we move in more strategic way” by forming ILGs.

He was talking about the Incorporated Land Groups, which I later learned were a type of company formed by local landowners that represented the clans or sub-clans

and allowed them to lease their land to the state and private companies. These points were made as an introduction to the Baining oil palm project, which the stewards really wanted to discuss. With a slightly elevated voice, and somewhat excited, Mr Leo said that “The ILG opened a corridor to the oil palm,” which in turn was a service that would “deliver education and development but preserve the terrain.” He then noted the inability of copra and cocoa to bring roads, infrastructure and education to the Baining land. “For years there has been copra and cocoa and what has that brought us?! Nothing!” Both Mr Leo and Mr Setavo’s faces expressed bitter disappointment, while the rest of the room was looking at them and nodding in silence. The chairman kept reiterating that the oil palm would build roads, and factories, and give jobs to the Baining.

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In the previous chapter I discussed the expansive monocrop nature of oil palm plantations as a significant reason why the Vir Kairak accepted the project as means to claim back their customary land. Starting with the encounter described above, here I will explore the effects of the plantation on Baining social and political life. Recent work in Melanesia has become increasingly interested in the ways people cope with and are affected by large-scale projects that transform, and often exploit, indigenous land such as mining, logging, and oil palm (Gilberthorpe 2007; Bainton 2010; Filer 2011; Lattas 2011; Tammisto 2016; Filer and Le Meur 2017). While many of these studies have suggested that such projects have created land insecurities and precarious communities, jobs, and futures, my aim here is to show that the Vir Kairak were already living within such a state of insecurity and precariousness, brought by their displacement from and dispossession of their ancestral land, and that the oil palm plantation revealed and further complicated their situation as landless landowners who were in search of development. My focus, however, is not on the legal aspects of landownership and clan identity, nor on the spatial and social

organisation or everyday practices on the plantation,⁶⁴ but on Kairak internal discussions about the oil palm in order to show how people perceived themselves and their place in relation to development, and envisioned the plantation's effects on their livelihoods and relationships with their land and the state.

In this chapter I argue that a majority of the Vir Kairak accepted the oil palm project as "a tool for development" and show how various Baining actors saw the plantation either 1) as a way to gain recognition by the state and draw development, or 2) as a way to gain autonomy from the state because their land was going to provide them with their *own* development. I recorded these views in conversations and interviews carried out with men who took an active role in the Kairak ILG that listed the landowners of Kairak customary land, and in the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council that represent the Baining clans. While this chapter is mainly about the people who supported the oil palm plantation, in the following chapter I will discuss the "Oil Palm Opposition" ("the Opposition") that was formed by a group of Kairak elders, who criticised the project and claimed that it only benefited those involved in it (i.e. the Malaysians and the ILG leaders).

I begin with a discussion about the implementation of the project, the way in which it was presented to and accepted by some of the Baining people, and the lack of solidarity and transparency in the processes of registering and leasing the land. I illustrate how recent government plans envision the expansion of the agriculture sector as the primary means towards development, and in this way I show the economic and political value of the Kairak land on both a local and national level. I then explore the significance of the plantation in making the Kairak people more visible and thus recognised by the state. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion on people's relationship with the land and how it informs and is informed by ideas about what the government is supposed to be and do. In this way, the chapter elaborates further on the significance of land in forming personhood,

⁶⁴ For this see Tammisto (2016) who discusses the Pomio oil palm plantation on the south coast of East New Britain.

sociality, and group identities among the Vir Kairak, and shows how their displacement has placed them in a position of financial, political, and social precarity and in search for ways to reclaim their ancestral ground and draw development to their clan. Therefore, it not only contributes to Melanesian studies of landownership, identity, and governmentality, but also to the wider works on development, agriculture and land reform.

The Oil Palm Project

The oil palm plantation business was introduced to East New Britain in the late 2000s. The province had mainly been involved in cocoa and copra production, and to a lesser extent balsa wood. But with copra's fluctuating prices since the early 2000s⁶⁵ and the CPB crisis, agribusiness companies such as Hargy Oil Palms Limited and New Britain Palm Oil Limited, as well as new competitors, saw an opportunity to expand their business with smallholder producers in the province, which was not only fertile due to its mineral-rich soil and volcanic ash, but also within the suitable altitude to grow the palm. Moreover, most of the land belonged to the Baining people, who consisted of "only five clans," as Mr Leo put it, and was thus less prone to ownership disputes, as was the case in other parts of Papua New Guinea. Indeed, reports have shown that many agro-forestry⁶⁶ and mining projects have been put on hold due to contested land claims (Jorgensen 2007; Filer 2011; Winn 2012; P. Nelson et al. 2014). This has been the result of the latest legislation involving customary land tenure – the Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) act of 2009 and the Land Registration (Customary Land) (Amendment) Act of 2009 (Customary Land Act) – whereby landowners are required

⁶⁵ While copra's value has steadily risen in the early 2000s, its price has fluctuated since the beginning of the global financial crisis, falling drastically in 2009. As a result, PNG's exportation infrastructure had to be transformed, leading to a significant decline of copra production that reached its lowest in 2003. This had been the outcome of a top-down decision to export copra oil instead of copra, which led to the closure of numerous copra buying depots throughout the country. With little access to the mills and no buying depots nearby, many smallholder producers have been left outside the chain of production.

⁶⁶ While "agro-forestry" typically refers to a mixed cropping system that includes trees, in Papua New Guinea it refers to the development of agricultural projects on a deforested area that has been cleared for timber.

to form ILGs in order to become legally recognised entities, or as Scott (1998) terms it, become “legible” before the state, and gain the legal capacity to lease their land. Leasing is done through the so-called “lease-lease back” arrangement under the Act, by which the landowners lease their customary land to the state, and the state then issues a Special Agricultural and Business Lease (SABL)⁶⁷ to the same landowner’s ILG or another corporate entity such as private agri-business company in exchange for rent and royalties.

The problem with this system in many parts of PNG, however, is that the demarcation and codification of land is not as much of a clear-cut process as the legislative, administrative and judicial mechanisms of the state want it to be (Stead 2017). Nor is the idea of clans as “customarily” corporate, or collective, units with shared interest (J. F. Weiner 2007). Hence, more often than not several ILGs are found contesting each other’s claims to a portion of land on grounds of landownership rights, lack of inclusion of the whole community in the ILG, or the absence of unanimous consent before implementing the project. The latter was also the case among the Vir Kairak, and before my arrival to Tavar there had been many disputes about whether the oil palm plantation was actually the right thing for their land or not, and who really had the right to lease it to the company (see also M. MacIntyre 2007) – specifically, whose land was it? Vir’s or Kairak’s? And who were the people that made up those groups? In the following chapter I explore these questions through the stories of people who opposed the project, but first we must understand how the oil palm business expanded in East New Britain and why some of the Baining found the idea of having a plantation on their customary land so enticing.

⁶⁷ However, according to the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council the Kairak oil palm plantation was not under any SABL. In a response statement in *The National* (dated 12 October 2016) it claimed that “SABL applies to forest areas/virgin forest areas such as the Illi-Wawas and Memalo projects. Kairak was never a logging project. It went straight into oil palm.” One wonders what then happened to all the trees that were cut down. See Nelson et al. (2014), “Oil Palm and Deforestation in Papua New Guinea.”

In 2008, a Malaysian company called Tzen Niugini⁶⁸ established the first plantation on the customary Baining land of the Mali clan in the Wide Bay area of Pomio district. This was a new competitor that had recently entered the oil palm market and was aiming to grow its business in Papua New Guinea. With the perceived economic success of the first plantation, in 2010 a representative of East New Britain Plantation Group (ENBPG) approached the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council, prospecting for more land to expand Tzen Niugini's already established 6,300 hectares of oil palm business. Several meetings took place among the Baining stewards and the Kairak clan leaders, especially because they were a smaller clan in terms of population than other Baining, but owned vast tracts of land that had already been surveyed and registered. The clan only needed to form an ILG, and fortunately, due to the growing logging industry in the area, "all the necessary documents were also ready," explained Hosea, Kairak ILG's chairman.

This is why, according to Pastor Michael (the vice-chairman) from Tavor, the oil palm project was indeed "godsent." With excitement, he exclaimed: "How else could the timing be so perfect?!" and recounted that the plantation representative approached them just after a long process of surveying, mapping, and registering their land, establishing a land committee, and putting together the documents they needed to form an ILG. "So the deal happened very quickly," he laughed, "we went to Port Moresby, lodged our application, and by the end of 2010 the ILG was *legal*." Then they leased 11,000 hectares of their total 36,000 hectares of customary land to the Malaysian "developer" to plant oil palm for 99 years. Without losing much time the company deforested and transformed part of this land into plantation blocks, workers compounds, administration buildings, and security outposts. By the time I went to carry out fieldwork in Tavor, most of the palms had already reached maturity and had borne fruit.

⁶⁸ Tzen Niugini is a subsidiary company that was owned by Kenlox Global in 2011. It has been acting in PNG's logging business since the early 2000s.

This story about how quickly things progressed reveals a lot about the way in which such projects are implemented without the consensus of the whole community. Among the Vir Kairak, as in other parts of PNG, community decisions were reached out through a long process of meetings and exchanges where people's struggle for agency and issues they deemed more important⁶⁹ often disrupted the polity of the event and left things unresolved (e.g. Merlan and Rumsey 1991; Brison 1991). From what I observed in Tavir, the regular lack of attendance and unwillingness to speak up at such meetings, had also resulted in the top-down imposition of various decisions about the community. Thus, Kairak's ability to quickly lease their land shows how this process had been instigated and carried out only by a few men, who acted on behalf of the whole clan. In this way, I argue and discuss further in the following chapter, these men have gained decision-making authority through their involvement in various agriculture and logging projects, and dealings with several state institutions.

Moreover, PNG law requires the implementation of "awareness activities" with the landowners and other stakeholders before finalising the lease of land to a private company (Gabriel et al. 2017). At these meetings the developers are responsible for informing local communities about all the potential effects and outcomes of their proposed project. During all my conversations with the Kairak ILG representatives they said that they had run effective awareness events, but many of my interlocutors complained that "no real awareness was raised at those," and that the events were in fact, convened after signing the deal with the company. Therefore, the lack of extensive planning and implementing of such activities also explains how the process of registering and leasing the land took such a short time, and left many of my interlocutors displeased.

⁶⁹ I suspected that most of the time my host father Joshua brought the issue of *kastom* to community leaders meetings, whilst people discussed other issues. Similarly, I observed that at community meetings my interlocutors often changed the subject by bringing up topics in which they themselves had some investment.

In the previous chapters, I showed that when people talked about their land, they encompassed a variety of everyday experiences and relationships mediated through it (e.g. gardening as feeding and giving; plentiful harvests as result of good relations and blessing from God; unsuccessful hunts as bad influences by outsiders and ancestral spirits). But in the vice-chairman's story, the land becomes an object through the processes of mapping, surveying, registering, and leasing. Moreover, it becomes a commodity as it procures new value as an "underutilised resource," to quote Tania Li, that must be "put to efficient and productive use" (2014: 13). Hence, I argue that besides the story about "covering the land," described in the previous chapter, some of the Kairak leaders believed from the get-go that the plantation presented a great economic and political opportunity⁷⁰, and they shifted their emphasis onto the plantation's capacity to bring development (as illustrated in Chapter 3 as well), when it appeared to be unsuccessful at removing the migrant settlements. This was deeply grounded in modern notions of development in Papua New Guinea, which have become largely inseparable from capitalist relations of production and exchange across land (West 2016; Stead 2017).

Development Projects

In its dominant articulation, development has been and continues to be a process equated to economic growth that is often measured through gross domestic product (GDP) (Bowen and Hepburn 2014). Economic growth is generally regarded as the one sure thing that lifts people out of poverty (World Bank 2002a; Collier 2007). Within this discourse the value of land has been measured through productivity, which often involves its objectification and mobilisation for capitalist industry, while dispossessing and transforming the people residing on it into workers (Polanyi 2001; Li 2014b; West 2016; Stead 2017). Following this growth model, in Papua New Guinea ideas about development have become inseparable from the expansion of the

⁷⁰ Different from previous unsuccessful attempts at striking a logging deal or the closure of Sinivit gold mine in Central Baining Area due to the company's inability to provide safe and environmentally-friendly working conditions.

agriculture sector. The country's Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030 puts forth the growth in PNG's agricultural output as a means to attaining "the best available income and job opportunities" (GovPNG 2010). If successfully implemented, this strategy is expected "to support a five-fold increase in agricultural production in PNG between 2010 and 2030, creating an estimated 267,400 additional jobs and K7.2 billion in addition to national income by 2030" (ibid.). Through this language of development that informs policies, decisions, and practices both at national and local level, Stead (2017) suggests that places and communities have been inscribed as places without jobs, cash, security, industry and investment, i.e. without "development," rather than as places and people with different livelihoods and forms of work, exchange, culture, and ways of being. It devalues the petty economies of the informal sector, such as the Baining (often women) selling garden produce and cooked food beside the road, which in the opening vignette the Stewardship Chairman commented on as heart-breaking and added that this form of work had no positive impact on Baining society.

Escobar (1995) has shown that development ideologies not only reflect the existing divisions in the world, but also create them. That is, the idea of the "Third World" is entirely a project of development discourses and the assumptions that prosperity and growth are what differentiates developed from underdeveloped states (see also Jackson 2009). Moreover, the tendency to associate development with the urban, modern way of life and relationships with the land as commodity have been instilled to local communities, thus creating division between the "urban" and "developed" versus the "rural" and "backwards." In East New Britain, this link between development, commodities, and infrastructure was present in the everyday experiences and (self-)narratives of the Baining as the underdeveloped community in contrast to the "more developed" Tolai (a tension I will explore further below). In her work on development in Nepal, Stacy Leigh Pigg (1993) has shown that development interventions often amplify existing social differences and sometimes create new ones, which justify the intervention of development institutions. Among the Vir Kairak, such differences also informed people's assumptions about their relationship

and visibility to the state, since according to them, the government “gave development to the people it had one [representative from]” (*gavman i givim development long lain em i gat wanpela*). Thus, according to my interlocutors, the provincial government developed Kokopo and Rabaul region where the Tolai lived, while it ignored the Baining and Pomio hinterlands. Therefore, on a national level “development” was described as economic growth reflected in the GDP and number of jobs, while on a local level it was portrayed as the services provided to villages by the state, such as education, health, mobility, security, investment, and so on.

Here I argue that differing assumptions held by both the State and local people about development have acted at different levels in the legitimisation of the oil palm scheme within the Baining region. To begin, almost all of East New Britain’s members of parliament have consistently supported the establishment of oil palm plantations throughout the more remote areas of the province, advocating that the companies undertaking these projects funded the major extension and upgrade of the provincial roads (Gabriel et al. 2017). On a national level, PNG’s government has introduced a strategic plan under the framework Vision 2050 (launched in October 2009), targeting the improvement of agricultural productivity by 60% and expansion of the area under cultivation by 180% by 2030 (GovPNG 2009). The palm oil sector that has become the country’s biggest agricultural export since 2000 at near 1 billion Kina per annum, and takes a central place in the expansion goal. An estimated 150,000 hectares had been covered by oil palm in 2016, which is expected to increase by 10-fold to 1.5 million hectares by 2030 (Bito and Petit 2016). While the country currently accounts for just 1% of palm oil’s global exports, the industry is expected to grow drastically by 2050 with a 23-fold expansion rate of the plantations (ibid).

In the Kairak settlements, many of my interlocutors not only referred to the plantations as “development projects,” but genuinely believed that they would have positive effects on their social, spatial, and economic mobility. Indeed, in PNG it has been a very common feature for various aid programs and company-led projects to deliver infrastructure and services that the government had otherwise been

unsuccessful in providing. In East New Britain, the Ili-Wawas Integrated Rural Development Project of 2004 (which involved the establishment of Tzen Plantation Ltd) is a good example. The project proposed that the logging and oil palm companies would build a road between the villages of Ili and Wawas, linking the already existing logging roads in Pomio with the provincial road network in the north, for a concession on logging and land leases. In this way revenues from logging and oil palm would fund the building and maintenance of the roads, bring income to the state and the local landowners, and provide access to wider markets and services (Tammisto 2010). On the other hand, as Filer (Filer 1997, 1998) has illustrated, within the idiom of landownership local people have also been able to claim compensation and provision of government services in the presence of such projects. That is, where mining or logging have been proposed or implemented, local communities have been able to bargain the extension of services to their settlements by withholding their consent and thus effectively putting the projects on hold (see Filer and Le Meur 2017).

When the Kairak ILG leaders and Malaysian company representatives first introduced the Trans-Kerevat oil palm project to the Kairak people, Kilala recalls that “they said it would bring the *developments* the government didn’t give us for many years” (*ol i tok em bai givim **developments** gavman i no bin givim long planti taim nau*). This was going to happen as a result of two things that were happening through the oil palm project. On the one hand, some leaders believed that the plantation would make the state “see” the Baining people and thus become accountable for their development. And on the other hand, there were those who suggested that they did not need the government and that their land would give them the ability to develop themselves.

Visible to the State

Studies about development in Papua New Guinea often refer to the differing perspectives held by local people and “outsiders” such as capitalist investors, social and environmental NGOs, or World Bank representatives (Van Helden 2001; West

2006; Stead 2017). A recurrent point made is that when local communities talk about development, as West puts it, “they imagine themselves in social relationships that would allow them to access goods and services and ultimately asserting them in particular ways” (2006: 45). While Melanesians’ efforts to establish reciprocal relationships and make themselves appear in a certain way or form (Strathern 1988) in order to draw things, goods, services and prestige to themselves and their clans have been central to these discussions, little has been said about how exactly people expect things to unfold within that relationship. I argue that, first of all, the Baining tried to become visible to the state through the oil palm, and partially the logging business, as they engaged with its various organs either in formal meetings or documents. While contact with government representatives was not something new (although their visits were very rare, even in the case of tax collectors), the oil palm project had made it possible for many of the Baining leaders to take part in more formal settings along state officials and company representatives.



Figure 37 - Plantation Road

For example, the palm oil mill in Pomio district was opened with a large ceremony by PNG's Deputy Prime Minister Leo Dion in 2014. This in effect gave the Baining a sense of recognition by people in the government that they had never felt before. In other words, the Baining leaders' work with the oil palm project and their engagements with administrators in various branches of the state (e.g. PNG Department of Lands and Physical Planning, Lands Titles Commission, District Courts) and handling of material documents (e.g. title deeds, project proposals, lease agreements) that made their land and clan visible as well as enabled people to display themselves as subjects of the state (Kelly 2006) were, as Street puts it, "all mediated by attempts to elicit a desirable relationship with the state" (2014: 22). Nevertheless, I suggest that it was not the bureaucratic processes of acquiring these documents alone, nor their act of registering the land that made the Baining recognisable to the state, but their relationship with capital (the oil palm company), which revealed their capacity to draw in relations (Strathern 1999) and become stakeholders in the province's oil palm business.

Secondly, in my meeting with the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council both Mr Leo and Mr Setavo said that the "Tolai government" (referring to the provincial government) had always ignored the Baining, however, nowadays they had "a much better relationship," as the "young Tolais have changed" and were supporting them with the oil palm project. Further, they suggested that these new Tolai officials recognised their council and were open to listen to what the Baining people needed. By making these points, the men were also strengthening their argument that the oil palm had finally given them a foothold on the provincial political arena and was going to bring the development they wanted. In the long-run, these Baining leaders believed that with the schools and resources provided by the oil palm company, their children would receive education and opportunities that would pave the way for them to take up various high-skilled jobs and positions within the PNG government (as I discussed earlier in Chapter 3).

Such hopes for political futures show that similar to other Melanesian and Amazonian people who have acquired political consciousness after the emergence of large-scale developmental projects (Conklin 1997), some of the Baining also gained a sense of political visibility and agency through their engagement with the oil palm company. Nevertheless, on a local level this same process had equally resulted in the emergence of some Baining leaders who suggested that they “don’t need the government.” These men and women argued that they had never received anything from the government, and that *their land* was what had always “looked after” them. For them, recognition by the state was of little importance, and instead they wanted to enter a reciprocal relationship with the agribusiness companies; a relationship that was, according to them, enabled by their land.

Land as Government

In the previous chapters I have described extensively how many Baining feel marginalised from the wider political and economic arena of the province and often make comparisons between themselves and their Tolai neighbours. Another example of their exclusion is the large portion of Tolai settlements that have been supplied with electricity and permanent buildings for schools and churches, while almost none of the Baining settlements have received either. Tavir’s case is rather striking, where its neighbouring settlements on both sides (Gaulim and a number of Tolai and Taulil villages) have enjoyed the benefits of electricity for more than twenty years, while the Kairak have been literally left in the dark. In this case, the electricity cables by the road and fluorescent lights at night that surrounded Tavir, made Vir Kairak’s lack of development visible in the landscape (see also Rollason 2014). Therefore, many of my interlocutors expressed sadness and anger towards the way they were treated as the government only “looked after their own.” In a speech delivered at the ceremony of the first harvest of the Kairak Oil Palm Plantation, the chairman of the Kairak ILG said:

Our customary land rights, humanitarian rights as well as developments, service delivery rights have been neglected since independence by the national and provincial governments and other stakeholders. We are still far behind in terms of development, even in the political arena and having no representative in Parliament. We cannot sit and watch, while development is taking place in other parts of the province. We had to bring in some development partners into our customary land to put up development projects that will bring about changes (The National, August 18th 2015).

He pointed out that the Baining could not “sit and watch” but had to become active agents in getting their own development because they were ignored by the government and were not even represented in the Parliament (similarly, in Chapter 3 I described the link my interlocutors perceived between the conscious act of change and development). By bringing in development partners themselves, they were able to bargain for “the kind of development they wanted,” which also gave them a sense of political agency.

Discussions about the conflict between local communities and capitalist developers or their differing views about land and ownership often either completely left out the state or just mentioned communities’ relationship to the politicians involved in such development projects. However, we must also acknowledge that in many of these projects the state is also a stakeholder that enables and mediates the transactions between the landowners and companies.⁷¹ While the title deed enables customary landowners to use and lease the land as they please, it is the state that proposes and passes land laws, grants land titles through the Local and District Land Courts, the Land Titles Commission or the National Court, and creates favourable conditions for foreign investors to build or expand their business within the country. In the case of the Kairak Oil Palm Project, while the majority of the land occupied by the plantation

⁷¹ The mechanisms for registering and leasing land have been used for many years by the oil palm industry, specifically in West New Britain, to create “mini-plantations” on customary land adjacent to plantations developed on state land alienated during the colonial period (Filer 2013). In such schemes the state, the customary landowners, and the developer company have always worked in a triad.

was Kairak customary land, the ILG Chairman Hosea mentioned that a small portion of alienated state land in the Vunapaladig area was also part of the project. Moreover, since the mill site in the original proposal could not be cleared from “illegal settlers” in time (as discussed in the previous chapter), its construction commenced near the beach of Ataliklikun Bay on a block of alienated state land. In this way, the state not only supported the oil palm development plan in accordance with its Vision 2015 framework, but also was a stakeholder in the business of the company.

Although the Kairak plantation was a state-supported endeavour, which many acknowledged through their reiteration of the “good relationship with the government” built through the project, for some Baining leaders the oil palm also presented an opportunity to claim some level of political autonomy through their position as landowners. Scholars working in PNG have shown that where the state is limited in delivering sufficient services such as education, health, justice, security and development to the rural areas, its authority and legitimacy might be challenged by the people living there (A. Strathern 1993; Standish 1994; Ballard and Banks 2003; Ballard 2013). An example of such contestation of the state’s legitimacy can be seen in the Bougainville rebellion in response to the Panguna mine (see Regan 2014). Similar sentiments emerged in a conversation I had with one of the Kairak men involved in the oil palm project, who started to talk about the “Tolai government,” with a heated tone and waving his finger in the air as we drove through the plantation:

The Tolais. The Tolai government. They are jealous. They are talking “Hey oil palm is bad (*nogut*).” Okay, what is the alternative to develop the Baining?! What crop to give to us?! Nothing you can give, so we are trying, we are going ahead, we are trying to develop ourselves. We don’t need you. We don’t need your government; we don’t need you anything! We are self-reliant because we have the land. Our land can develop us. Our land is our government, you are not our government! Our land, we are relying on our land, our land will provide us with many things. Provide us with cash crop, provide us with money, provide us with roads, provide us with many things, many services that *you government*, are denying us. *You government*, have forgotten us! So, you don’t talk about oil palm

because we can provide oil palm because we have land. You, you got no land! We are the indigenous people of this land! We have the land, we plant what we, we plant for ourselves. We decide for ourselves. We don't need you. We don't need you. You don't complain about us because you just keep quiet, you don't stick your nose to our affairs. You don't stick your nose to whatever development we want. You just keep quiet and concentrate on your area. We believe that our land is our government. That will provide us and develop us in all our areas of life. So that's what Qaqet [Baining Stewardship] Council is fighting.

This argument offers a glimpse into my interlocutors' vision for sovereignty, whereby they justified the enclosure of their customary land for a large-scale monocrop plantation in order to gain control over their land and its resources, and thus claim self-sufficiency and autonomy (cf. Eilenberg 2014). One cannot dismiss the fact that "plantations," as a colonial and historical entity, have always been about sovereignty over land and bodies (labour) (Mintz 1989; Besky 2013), and that the new forms of concessions to private agribusiness companies involved a sort of "grading" sovereignty (Ong 1999). However, as Stepputat (2008) has argued, we should take sovereignty as a set of practices of exclusion, measures of exception, and use of force in the name of a particular community, rather than its classic association with state, territory, and law (see also Hansen and Stepputat 2006). For example, Moore (2005) has shown that in Zimbabwe ideas about sovereignty organised people against the white settlers and their private control over ancestral land. In this sense, Vir Kairak's turn to oil palm that resulted in the reorganisation of the landscape, expulsion of migrants, and destruction of hamlets, garden, and cocoa blocks, could be understood as steps towards Baining sovereignty, although it was in fact capital (the oil palm company) that had acquired authority over the land.

Moreover, in the speech above, the man refers to the land as a provider and even equates it to the government. This offers insight about Baining ideas about what a government *is* and what its functions are. Similarly, West (2016) has shown how the Gimi have come to see the Research and Conservation Foundation (RCF) as their "second government" because of its failure to deliver the development it had

promised. As one of her interlocutors articulates this, the RCF and the government before it had very similar *pasin* (behaviour/character) in that both told the Gimi that they would give them development if they first fulfilled certain requirements, such as burying their dead, stopping the fighting amongst each other, and looking after the forests and animals in the conservation area, but then they forgot about them (West 2016: 115). West suggests that when people said “conservation is our government now” they critiqued both the government and the RCF for their failure to provide services and goods that they imagined as development. In this sense, the Gimi articulated the government as something or someone that reciprocates their actions by providing the things they needed. For the Gimi, the RCF is their second government because of the failed reciprocal relationship they thought they had established.

On the other hand, when the Kairak referred to their land as their government, they did not intend this as a critique in the same way as the Gimi. Instead, what was emphasised in this sentiment was the land’s capacity as a provider that could help them get the development they needed – something it would do for them both through its productivity and by mediating a relationship between the Kairak and the oil palm company. Both among the Kairak and in the Gimi example the “government” and the “state” are words that describe not a specific entity but a category of people (e.g. politicians, conservation workers, researchers) that are seen as a provider. That is, in the words of the Lihir landowner associated chairman quoted by Filer (1995: 68), “the State is only a concept,” which could be used for anyone who fulfilled its role and relationship.

Fajans (1988) has recorded the northern Baining as saying “the land is our mother because it gives us food,” and I have shown in Chapter 1 that among the Vir Kairak relationships with and through the land are also part of what makes people, families, and a community. In Tavir, many of my interlocutors referred to their land as *mama-lend* (mother-land) or *mama-graun* (mother-soil/earth), especially when discussing the deforestation for the plantation project, and added that it used to “give them food

and look after them.” This idea about the land as mother and provider was taken further by the chairman and some of the other Baining leaders, who said the land was their government, referring to its capacity to provide the things that the state – that is, the Tolai provincial government and the politicians in Port Moresby they occasionally read about in the newspaper – was unable or unwilling to. They believed that if these people and the institutions they represented did not enter into a reciprocal relationship with everyone in PNG, but just served their own communities, then the Baining too had to stop relying on them and start developing themselves through the one thing they knew for sure would give them what they needed – their land.

“Our Land is Life”

In most of my conversations about the Vir Kairak and the oil palm plantation my interlocutors emphasised their relationship with the land. For example, at the meeting with the Stewardship Council I explained that my research was going to look at the links between kinship, values, and land, and then the chairman exclaimed: “This is what Baining life is about!” He said that “the Baining are very much connected to the land and there is no Baining who doesn’t feel so.” Later, Mr Setavo noted that the Baining are good, kind people, who are attached to their land, so one cannot see young Baining on the streets in town, but “they go home, to the village, because the Baining is drawn to his land and to his people” (he was referring to the culture of *raun raun tasol* that I have described earlier as strolling lazily either in the bush or in town). Similarly, a few times Noah said that the Vir Kairak students love to come back home during their school vacation so “they could stroll in the big bush of their ground” (*bai raun long bikpela bus long graun bilong ol*). He was smiling and talking with a sentimental tone in his voice. Unable to comprehend the relations one had with the physical land, its history, and the relations it embodied, I asked him what these youths were doing in the bush. With eyes sparkling with joy, he responded: “they stroll; they stay in the bush. It’s nice; it’s our ground, and our ground is life” (*ol raun;*

ol stap long bus. Em nais, em graun bilong mipela, na graun bilong mipela em laip). On a different occasion, when talking about the plantation, Kilala similarly said: “Our life is the land” (*Laip bilong mipela em lend*).

Among the Vir Kairak, like elsewhere in Melanesia, the land makes the people as much as the people make the land. People are made through memory (in the stories about the clan and the land) (Battaglia 1990), transformation of substance (gardening and eating) (Crook 2007), and elicitation (of clan identity and relations between people within the landscape) (Wagner 1986). In this sense, people understood the land as something with intrinsic capacity to produce relations between persons (J. Leach 2003, 2004). When the Vir Kairak said “land is life,” they not only referred to its productivity and capacity to grow food and nurture them, but also to its embeddedness in their social lives, which defines who they are. That is why their self-narratives always started with their displacement within the landscape and the loss of their own land. For them, memory about the land was not merely knowledge to be passed on, but as Battaglia (1990) has observed for the people of Sabarl, it was something they had to actively work on in their everyday lives in order to maintain the social relationships that made them who they were. Furthermore, these stories also constituted the “traditional evidence” of customary landownership and included genealogies, oral histories, myths, artefacts, customs, natural and manmade boundaries, land use marks, knowledge of the natural landscape, and cosmologies associated with its formation (Kalinoe 2004). This shows the deep entanglement between people and their land, as well as how my interlocutors saw themselves in relation to others as displaced and dispossessed, not only of their land as a material resource, but also their land as a source of identity.

Ballard (2013) has observed that in recent years, studies of landownership in PNG have frequently mentioned the “special” relationship between people and customary land, but rarely questioned it. He argues that with the rise of the term “landowner” there has also been a resurgence in this reference to people’s connection to the land, and suggests that in PNG “landowner” has come to connote “an unusual degree of

inclusion” (Ballard 2013: 54). My work, like Ballard’s, shows that even with displacement, people continued to refer to their special relationship with their ancestral ground, which they had not even seen with their own eyes.

Thus, I argue that the ideas held by some Baining leaders that they could secure development through the royalties and benefits provided by the oil palm company, and their hopes to gain the attention of the state and a place in the country’s political and economic arena through this project, has to be understood in relation to the link between Kairak people’s land and identity.⁷² On the one hand, they had accepted the project to claim back their land and in that way their identity as Vir Kairak. In other words, people participated in various identities as swidden farmers, hunters, mask makers, descendants, *kastom* practitioners, and so on, through their knowledge of and access to the bush and its resources. On the other hand, it was their land, of which they had been already dispossessed, that made their relationship with the company possible – a relationship that was going to bring them development. As Hosea said to me once, referring to their land occupied by the Sepik settlements: “We have the land staying nothing, staying idle. Outsiders come, they deprive us [of] our rights to our land rights.” Many of my interlocutors in Tavar made similar statements about the inaccessible, and thus unproductive, part of their land. Therefore, while the Vir Kairak saw their land as part of who they were, they also envisioned it as a “zone of potential,” to use Li’s (2014) words, waiting to unlock its productivity.

Escobar (1995) has criticised the mainstream development literature, in which people are often described as powerless, passive, ignorant, and lacking historical agency. He suggests that through such representations, “underdeveloped subjects” are presented as if waiting for the (white) Western hand to help them. Similarly, in popular rhetoric in PNG, the Baining have always been represented as ignorant, powerless, marginalised, and shy victims, who lack the initiative to develop or adopt modernity (in contrast to their Tolai neighbours). When in Port Moresby, at dinner tables with

⁷² Leach (2004) has illustrated that land disputes often arise when people’s relationship with land come to have new effects, promise new outcomes, or facilitate relationships with significant others.

representatives from the PNG Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Tourism Authority, I felt uncomfortable listening about how well-educated, developed, and modernised the Tolai were, while the Baining – bushmen – stayed ignorant and undeveloped. Maybe to some extent, I have also fallen in this trap of representation through comparison and offered a similar picture so far, but my intention in emphasising this narrative has been to show that many Baining, as Rahatynskyj (1992) has observed, have internalised and come to consistently perceive themselves in contrast to the Tolai. So I propose that the way in which the Vir Kairak articulate development through their contrast with others, and the historical conditions that have led them to adopt this idea of development, as well as the place of power occupied by the Tolai in the province, have all played a significant role in shaping the value placed on landownership as a route to *their own* development.

The Vir Kairak were both displaced and dispossessed of the means of production not only of food but of themselves (West 2016). Since “land is life,” its lack created a sense of insecurity in all other spheres of life. From the situation my informants found themselves in, they saw “landownership” as something that could give them all those things that made life – or as Zane once remarked: “our land will give us ‘good life.’” He said this in a conversation about the plantation, which he described as an opportunity for their land to bring development:

We said to the company: This is our land, we allow you to plant oil palm; but... you come with the development. You build our schools; you build our hospital. All these things we told them to build...and also build houses for the Kairak people. For the landowners... if they build our houses and if we have this agreement fulfilled, then some years [later, when] you come back, you will see Tavar change[d].

Here the notion of change not only connoted the physical changes of infrastructure in the settlement, but also the way of life people were expecting to live as modernised, hardworking, well-educated, clean, “true Christians,” living in a “strong community,” which constituted ideas about the “good life” (as has been discussed in

Chapters 1 and 3). This imagined future was the envisioned outcome of the infrastructure and services (i.e. development) provided by the oil palm company. In this sense, when my interlocutors talked about development, they suggested that it was something that came from the outside. Yet, they also believed that it was actually their land that provided those things, through its capacity to draw in and create relationships between them and capital or state. In this sense, both the idea that the oil palm project would help the Baining gain recognition and a foothold on the political and economic stage, as well as the notion that the land is *their* government, were grounded in the same understandings about the land's capacity to provide "good life."

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis I suggested that the Vir Kairak perceive the act of openly asking for things as something that revealed and instantiated relationships. However, they also felt *vorvāt* to ask those whom they felt distant from, and thus, my interlocutors claimed, they were unable to request services from the government. Ironically, they often complained that the state had neglected and marginalised them, and only provided infrastructure and development to those people it had some relationship with. In contrast, the Malaysian oil palm company came to ENB and asked the Baining for their land, promising to give them royalties and infrastructure in return. In this way, many came to see the company as an agent drawn in by their land (through its appearance, productivity, capacity, and so on), who wanted to enter a reciprocal relationship with them.

This chapter illustrated how the deal with the oil palm company had been struck through a series of meetings, negotiations, and agreements carried out by a small number of men. It also showed how this process had resolved in a significantly rapid manner as a result of lack of transparency and community consensus about leasing the land. This had resulted in a divide between the Kairak who supported and the Kairak who opposed the project (which the next chapter will discuss further). While

in the beginning, the Kairak leaders who wanted the plantation had argued that it would clear their land from settlers, later on, their emphasis shifted to its ability to deliver development to their communities. Their perception of the plantation as a “path to development,” to quote Michael, drew on ongoing neoliberal assumptions about the link between capital, land use, and social and economic development, that has been responsible for the massive transformation of landscapes through logging, mining, and agribusiness projects in the global south (Büscher 2015).

Moreover, I argued that my interlocutors held two distinct but related positions about how oil palm enabled their development. On the one hand, there were those who understood their relationship with the Malaysian company (capital) as something that allowed them to participate in various bureaucratic process and to become recognised by the state as a people who deserve services, opportunities, and a seat in the country’s political arena. Not only did they expect the royalties and services from the company to enable their children to gain good education, high-skilled jobs, and offices in the provincial and national government, but they also believed that their identity as customary landowners provided grounds for the state to include them in its development agenda.

On the other hand, there were some Kairak who suggested that both the colonial and post-colonial governments never gave them any services, and that through the plantation they could finally gain the development they wanted and become self-reliant. Here, I proposed that these ideas, which we could also frame as a vision for sovereignty, had been shaped by people’s conception of the land as a provider (Chapter 1) and understood its capacity to make persons and relations as what drew the company in the first place. In both views, I argue, the responsibility to attract development was placed on the people through their relationship with the land and the company. It also appeared to me that my interlocutors’ complaints about the state’s lack of interest to give them development, had to do with its inability to previously see them as a people worthy of engaging with. Therefore, many understood their relationship with capital as something that revealed their identity

as landowners and made them recognisable to the state. However, not everyone saw the plantation in such positive terms, and from the very beginning there had been a group of Kairak who strongly opposed the leasing of their customary land. The following chapter presents their stories and how they described the transformations oil palm had caused to their land and community.

CHAPTER 6

LAND OF CLANS

It was not long until I figured that the best time to write my fieldnotes was from noon until 3pm when everybody rested in the shade of their houses or under the massive trees in the bush. And if anyone would ever visit me at this time, it would be my host brother Noah. When he came, he usually sat on the tree stump by the entrance. One hand rested on his thigh, the other covered his round belly of which his wife was so displeased. Although he seemed tired, his head was always held high, and his eyes filled with curiosity and enthusiasm. A big bushy beard covered his jaw and small wrinkles lined his eyes and forehead. While he was in his early 30s, the grief of losing his older brother and much beloved grandfather had made him look older. He often looked anxious, but when I asked if he was alright, he showed his bright white teeth with a big smile and exclaimed: “Yeah!” with a melodic voice, somewhat playful on the ending note. It took me a while to learn that his creased brow had nothing to do with anger or worry. Instead, this expression was commonplace among the inhabitants of Tavir.

On one of those afternoons, as we were talking about Tavir, Noah told me that the Vir Kairak at least knew some parts of their history, while the other two Kairak groups had no idea about their past. He recounted: “There are four major stories: the first one is how East New Britain came into being (*kamap*). The second one is how the first people came into being. The third story is about Gorimgi [the way to the place of the dead]. And the fourth is about Baining *kastom*.” He reaffirmed that I had already heard the third story from our father, and said that he would now tell me the second one.

He took a pen and paper from the table and started to draw a diagram. With Noah, the routine was always the same; he described things by writing and drawing in my notebooks. He carefully wrote each word, taking about half a minute to think before

pressing the pen onto the paper in front of him. At the top he wrote “Uptamga,” then drew a downward arrow and wrote “Lavuyāna.” Then followed another downward line which he divided into seven arrows, each leading to one of the clan names: Kairak, Mali, Uramot, Vir, Chachet (for the Qaqet), Simbali, Makolkol. He then left some space on the righthand side and said that “there are others too, but I don’t know about them. Pomio, Sulka, Mengen...” In this diagram he separated the Vir from the Kairak, which I found interesting because previously he had drawn another diagram, showing how the Kairak were made up of three groups: Vir, Qopki and Supramatka. But just a few weeks before, I had learned that many in Tavir regarded themselves as Vir rather than Kairak, and claimed that Kairak was actually a language (*Kairak em Tok ples*), not a clan. He said that these groups, in *this* diagram, were the *original people* of the island. Then he wrote “manaski” between the word “Lavuyāna” and the clan names, but couldn’t tell me what it meant exactly. “It is something that must be there,” he said, “the people of Main and Gaulim maybe know it better. You should go ask them. The Uramot maybe know that story better.”

After he was done with the diagram, Noah explained that when the island came into being “a big mist covered everything.” With a hand gesture and amusement in his voice he said that “it was so thick that you couldn’t see anything,” and continued: “This mist we call Uptamga,” pointing to the top of the diagram, “when it went away, the first people were there (*first pipol i stap*). Many families. All mothers, fathers, and children. We call them Lavuyāna.”

He then placed his index finger on the word “manaski” and said:

After some time Lavuyāna broke into clans, but we don’t know that story well. I recall some parts, but not the *true story*. So you better check with the other Baining. It is about a big tower they, the Lavuyāna, built. All Lavuyāna started to build a big tower up towards the sky. They built it, built it, built it, but it broke and the people fell down. All to different places in East New Britain. Now they spoke different languages and had their own land.[29]

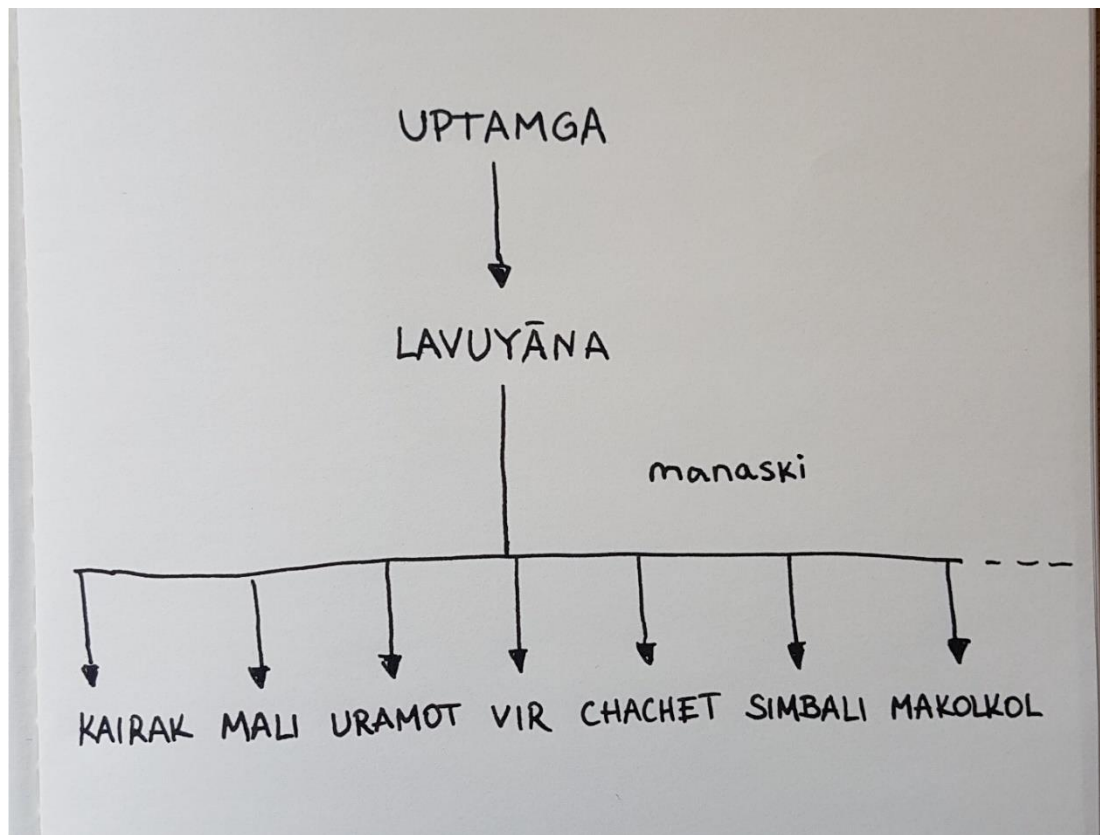


Figure 38 - Reproduced from Noah's drawing (original destroyed in the rain)

This immediately reminded me of the biblical text about the tower of Babel, which tells how God scattered humankind across the earth and confounded their speech so they could no longer understand each other. Since Noah was uncertain about the story, explaining that it was not the *true story* because it wasn't passed by their ancestors or told in the exact way, and he claimed that *they* (the Vir Kairak) didn't know it well, whilst the Uramot (who were introduced to Christianity much earlier) may know it better, I presume that this story was probably taught to the Vir Kairak after their contact with the Methodist Mission. In contrast, Noah's ability to recount the names and details about the mist and the first people, and describe the story as one of the main narratives that made up their past, is suggestive of its traditional origin and value in Vir Kairak social reproduction. However, here I am not concerned with what is traditional and what came after conversion to Christianity, although that certainly could tell us a lot about how people conceive of themselves and others and construct narratives about them (Robbins 2004a; Oakdale 2008). Yet, what I want to

show is that notions about confined clans and language groups may not have been of particular significance for the Baining as they were for the early missionaries and colonial patrol officers (Wagner 1974). For example, as I have noted earlier in this thesis, when my interlocutors told the story of their resettlement, they always described in detail how the Methodist pastor saw that they spoke the same language as another group, and told the *kiaps* (patrol officers) to put them both to live together. This illustrates how language had been deployed as a tool to demarcate the Baining groups. While my interlocutors may not have, or may not remember, an origin story about the formation of distinct Baining groups, at present, ideas about clans and languages have become a major concern that have raised a plethora of disputes over customary landownership.

**

In this chapter I will explore the effects of the oil palm plantation on Vir Kairak sociality and notions of clan identity and leadership. Here I present the views and stories of the “oil palm Opposition” (also referred to as the Opposition throughout), who were a group of Kairak families mainly from Tavir and Lanivit. They saw the plantation project not as a “tool for development” (as the previous chapter showed) but as means “to gain money and authority” and they criticised the ILG leaders who had “inserted themselves as landowners” of a land that was not actually theirs. In this way, I argue that while PNG’s legal system considered ILGs and clans as one and the same thing, in the rural settlements people’s understandings about social groups and corporateness often differed from that of the state. Hence, I illustrate how ideas about bounded social groups such as clans and sub-clans have resulted in internal disputes about the *real landowners* and raised questions about what clans are, whether they differ from language groups, and who could be *of* the clan and could have rights to claim its land. I begin by showing how terms such as “tribes” and “clans” were in fact a colonial invention that placed people in bounded categories and enabled the dispossession and accumulation of their land. I also suggest that the Baining have

taken up these terms to gain legibility and claim landownership (see Scott 1998; Jorgensen 2007), as well as establish the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council that in theory was going to bring recognition and political agency to their people.

Through the chapter it will also become clear that the plantation brought forth not only questions about clan identity and landownership, but also about Kairak social norms and values. Kairak's customary land had been leased to East New Britain Plantation Group under a special agricultural and business lease (SABL) through the "lease-lease back" scheme. This scheme required customary landowners to form an ILG (to become a corporate and legible entity⁷³) and lease their land to the state, who in turn, issued a SABL to the same ILG and enabled it to lease or sub-lease the land to private companies. Through this process the Kairak ILG had leased their customary land to the oil palm company in exchange for royalties, roads, houses, and plantation jobs. However, since the government and the company could not deal with the entire clan listed under the ILG, the Kairak had to choose a group of "directors,"⁷⁴ (referred to in conversations as "oil palm director(s)" or "ILG directors"), who in theory, represented the interests of the landowners during negotiations. Thus, the ILG formed a board of directors of fourteen men, who, according to the chairman, "were chosen by the people" through their "roles as community leaders." However, this also entailed the exclusion of certain community members from the decision-making process.

Therefore, this chapter explores Vir Kairak notions about leadership and particularly how new positions such as "ILG member" and "oil palm director" differ from the traditional roles of Baining elders, and even from the more recent designations of *luluai* (village chiefs designated by the Australian Administration), village councillor (*kaunsil*), or ward member (*ward memba*). My fieldwork and previous studies among the Baining (Bateson 1932; Hesse and Aerts 1982; Fajans 1997) have recorded that in

⁷³ Just a couple of years before Independence, in 1973 the Commission of Inquiry into Land Matters (CILM) declared the central place of collective or corporate landownership in PNG.

⁷⁴ The *Land Act* has had direct impact on local social structure through the mechanism of agency it suggested, which put only a small number of people as representatives of the ILG (Golub 2007a: 79).

these communities there were no big-men or chiefs, but instead decisions were made by a group of male and female elders (*morka* (m); *morki* (f); *mor* (pl)). However, with the establishment of the ILG and the land lease, we can see the rise of some men, both economically and in terms of decision-making authority, which departed from traditional forms of Vir Kairak sociality and created tension within the community (cf. Li 2014).

Significantly, the exclusion of some elders and women from the ILG seemed to be precisely for the same reasons – that is, to prevent them from gaining more influence and acquire a position of actual authority. Golub has noted that in resource rich-areas of PNG, the lack of clear demarcation of the identity of landowners and politicking over who gets to be a landowner has prevented the distribution of compensation and royalties and in some cases even halted the development projects altogether (Golub 2007a: 76). This however was not the case with the Kairak Oil Palm.⁷⁵ Instead, for most residents in Tavir, the main issue was the level of decision-making power obtained by some Kairak men and their blatant act of subsuming the Vir into the Kairak group. The problem for the Opposition was not that they would not receive royalties, but that others who had no rights in their land would as well, and that “those who had no roots in the land” (Kairak, Tolai, and Malaysian actors) were making decisions about it.

Place Names or People?

The literature I examined before commencing fieldwork suggested that different from the North Baining, who did not seem to have any distinct groups or big-men, the Central and the South Baining were divided into totemic clans organised in patrilineages (Laufer 1970).⁷⁶ Specifically, my understanding that the Baining were a

⁷⁵ Since the Kairak ILG’s board of directors often reiterated that they had included everyone’s names in the ILG documents, and had ensured that each family would receive their royalties once the mill became operational.

⁷⁶ Of course, it should be noted that father Laufer’s work predates the anthropological debates about unilineal descent groups in Papua New Guinea (see Barnes 1962; Langness

non-Austronesian speaking group made up of five clans (Uramot, Kairak, Mali, Simbali and Chachet – also known as Qaqet) was mainly shaped by Corbin (1976, 1988) and Laufer's (1959) work. Through my attempts to interpret Laufer I also learned that some Baining groups had disappeared as a result of warfare amongst each other, leaving only the abovementioned clans (Laufer 1959). Similarly, during my visits to the Baining/Qaqet Stewardship Council in Kokopo, several council members recounted the remaining Baining clans and stories about the disappearance of others, pointing to the small numbers of the Makolkol people as an example. These encounters had firmed up my understanding about the Baining people as a single language group, divided into five clans (excluding the Makolkol) that spoke different dialects (Corbin 1988, Fajans 1997). However, after two months of fieldwork, I was taken by surprise when I learned that most residents of Tavar identified as Vir rather than Kairak.

Each time my host father told stories about their lives, history, or customs, he began with, "We here are Vir" (*mipela long hia a Vir*⁷⁷), which made no sense to me in the beginning. After some confusion whether the name referred to a clan or sub-clan, I realised that for my interlocutors such anthropologically-informed terms held little meaning and that the name itself described not only a group of people but their history and relationship with their ancestral ground as it was told and retold in the story of the ten surviving families (discussed earlier in the thesis). It showed their struggle as the Vir people, who had lost their land and were now supposed to call themselves Kairak in order to claim it back.

When I learned about the Vir I became almost obsessed with finding some historical record of the name in German New Guinea Annual Reports (Sack and Clark 1979), Australian Patrol Reports and early missionary works. The gravity of this endeavour

1964; Meggitt 1965), and Wagner's seminal work (1974) 'Are There Social Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?'

⁷⁷ People used "*a Vir*" in the vernacular even when they spoke in Tok Pisin. In Kairak the word "*ma*" is a determiner that is used when presenting a noun. For example, "*ma lamāsaqi*" means "a/the coconut." For some words, "*ma*" transforms into "*a*," so when people said "*a Vir*," it meant "the Vir."

became more apparent when I discovered that the group who opposed the oil palm project had deployed this name to argue against the plantation and claim ownership over the leased tract of land. Not long after that, I realised that when people told me stories to put down in my “big book” (PhD thesis), they believed that having them written down would also give legitimacy to their claims of clanship and landownership status. For example, one early morning my host father came and said that I should record two stories about the land, which he had recently told at a court hearing. Each story, he explained, described a disputed portion of land, but because the Vir Kairak knew them, and because they were passed to them by the ancestors – that is, were *true stories* (*ma sega* [K], *stori tru* [TP])– and talked about their life with the land, they clearly showed that “the land was Vir” (*lend em Vir*).⁷⁸

But was Vir always a clan? And were there indeed any Baining clans as people today claimed? Early research in the Gazelle Peninsula suggests that the Baining people referred to each other by the area they lived in. In other words, they identified people by territory (access and use of geographical landscape), rather than as bounded and corporate groups. Rascher (1909) for example, describes that in the North people talked about the Puktas, the Kara, the Loan, the Lassul and so on. Similarly, when Bateson (1932) writes about Baining groups he refers to their location as in “the Toriu natives” or “Toriu men,” and concludes that the mask dances were probably a way to cement “the widely scattered semi nomadic groups into a tribal unity” (1932: 341). Even Jane Fajans’s (1997) ethnography among the Northern Baining, which she conducted between 1976-1978, shows that people talked about others by referring to their villages. Similarly, my own fieldwork revealed that before mentioning any clan names, my interlocutors usually announced where a group lived, as we can see in the opening vignette where Noah says that the people of Main and Gaulim might know

⁷⁸ His use of Tok Pisin to say “the land is Vir” (*lend em Vir*) was quite interesting because one could equally translate it into the literal sense that the land is called Vir, or made of the Vir people. With this short phrase Joshua was making such a big statement about the relationship between people, land, and names that could not be captured in the legal framework of Papua New Guinean land law. And by having these stories recorded and written about, he knew that they would become tied not only with the storyteller, but also the land and the people, essentially providing legitimacy to their claim.

the story of the tower better, before he describes them as Uramot. Likewise, in the 1912 German Annual Report the author writes:

In Baining [region] some of the natives living in the Wir [Vir] Mountains between the Kerawat [Kerevat] and Vundal [Vudal] Rivers were successfully brought into closer contact with the Administration, as was shown clearly when they moved their homes towards Taulil. The recruitment of labour was also extended immediately to the newly organised areas, and the recruiters were very successful.

This account offers historical evidence about the Vir (Wir in German), who indeed claimed that their customary land stretched between the rivers Kerevat and Vudal. The same report also states that in November 1912 “a village of the Wir people attacked a village of the Aichumki in the Baining Mountains near the boundary of the organised district,” and that to prevent a blood feud “the expeditionary troop not only succeeded in punishing the aggressors but in occupying the country as far as the central massif of the Sinewit [Sinivit mountain] and preparing it for administrative control” (German Annual Report 1912). Again, this illustrates how local people were referred to not by clan names but the areas where they resided – that is, the Wir people of the Wir mountains.

Moreover, Laufer has argued that a distinction had to be made between the “only recently known Southeast tribes (Uramot, Kairak, Mali and Asimbali-Kumkumkina) and those of the Northwest groups that have been around for a long time as slaves of the Melanesian coastal population” (Laufer 1959: 907) – noting down some of the names currently used as clans among the Baining. He also describes the night dances of the Uramot and Kairak in Central Baining as being quite different in character to those of the North Baining, and states that “[t]he now extinct Vir people, who clustered near River Vudal, formerly belonged to this group [Uramot-Kairak] as well” (Laufer 1959: 919 my own translation). In this way, he both distinguishes the Vir people from the Uramot and Kairak, and places them within the same group, both geographically (Central Baining) and culturally (who had similar night dances).

Looking at this information from the lens of migration and resettlement due to warfare, subsistence, and state control, however, the boundaries of Baining groups and their residence often become unclear. With the history of shifting residence, their names too have changed in order to encompass or exclude others. Therefore, when the Methodist pastor and provincial patrol officers decided that the Vir had to be moved near Gaulim, where there would be placed with other Baining who spoke the same language, they also envisioned them as and incorporated them into the Kairak group. What we see with this story is how from the missionaries' and Australian patrol officers' point of view, social groups were fixed and formed through some unifying similarity (e.g. language, physical attributes, customs). However, as Wagner has shown for the Daribi, people in PNG use names to elicit groups at particular moments (see also Strathern 1988), but that does not necessarily mean that these groups are bounded and people's affiliation to them is fixed. For instance, Harrison has noted that groups and persons "in precolonial Melanesia could have rights in, and affiliations to, several cultural identities at once" (2000: 673), and that group identities were constructed by means of objectification. This is a process which Ernst (1999) has also framed as "entification," whereby entities such as clans are formed from contingent categories.

To elaborate, one day Joshua returned from a court hearing very sad. He sat on a piece of wood and started to peel a betel nut with a small paring knife. He turned to me and said that he was sad because Kairak was a language and not a clan, that they were Vir and not Kairak, but that they spoke Kairak. However, he explained that the opponents' lawyer used his narrative against him in court (*tanim tok bilong mi*). That day, he had asked Joshua whether some years before, when Joshua had been appointed as a director in a logging project, he had used the name Kairak to describe the people. Joshua elaborated how ashamed he had been made to feel (*em mekim mi fil bikpela sem*) in front of everyone, because they thought he had lied, while he had made a promise not to do so in front of God (with a hand on the Bible). Distressed, Joshua explained that his words were changed (*tanim tok*), and that he could not clarify what he had previously said. While he was able to tell me that they were

Kairak because they spoke the language, and were Vir because of their connection to that land and the ancestors who lived on it; he had been unable to express this in court and what being Kairak or Vir meant for them.

However, if people referred to themselves and others based on the area they occupied, as it seems to have been the case with the Vir, then their resettlement has cut not only their connection with their land but also part of their identity (as I mentioned in the previous chapter). This of course does not suggest that the name Vir refers to a bounded clan, but acknowledges that even if we criticise the idea of fixed social groups in Papua New Guinea (Wagner 1974), we still need to recognise people's connection with their land and its significance for their social identity. In this way, we could steer away from generalising assumptions that people's decision to use particular names for themselves, for example, is a mere response to recent economic developments in the mining, logging, gas, and agri-business sectors (cf. Jorgensen 2007). In fact, Martin (2009) has argued that the kind of genealogical manipulation and clan-making (eliciting) described by Jorgensen (1997, 2007) for the Telefomin has been an ongoing process in East New Britain since the start of the 20th century. While Jorgensen's work has shown that the emphasis on finding and defining clans was a result of social and economic change brought by capitalist investors, Martin illustrates that land disputes among the Tolai have instigated discussions starting from the wider definitions of clans to ever smaller sub-lineages. Further, Martin argues that for the Tolai at Matupit, "*in the relevant contexts, social group identity can be fixed, and is described by language such as the naming of the two related *tumbuans*," (which are spirit mask figures of men's secret society), under whom the groups were formed (2009: 172 emphasis Martin's). My intent here, however, is not to argue that Vir or Kairak are bounded social groups, but that these names are deeply entwined with people's connection to their land and thus have important implications for their social identity. While I am aware that contemporary language of clans and ILGs in PNG has worked towards asserting clear boundaries between groups and has become a tool in the politics of "cultural identity" (Ernst 1999, Weiner 2007), I argue that such terms have also created a challenge for people to express their identity in the non-bounded,*

fluid fashion that Wagner and others have talked about New Guineans, as well as in Martin's contextual fixed state.⁷⁹

Vir versus Oil Palm

My hosts' in-law Kilala and his family were part of the Opposition and they openly voiced their discontent with the plantation. From their hamlet, which was situated at the very end of Tavir, high on a hill overlooking the plantation, every day Kilala saw the "lifeless slopes" (*mauntein nogat laip*) occupied by young oil palms. When we talked and he expressed his concern that the plantation had ruined their land, he always compared this scenery to the lush forests of some years before. One day, he said:

We Vir don't want it. But Kairak is the big name. So, all want us to go inside [this name]. We don't want to. Because ground is something important. And we don't know how they grow oil palm, because we know that oil palm ruins the ground. We look at West New Britain. They have ruined the ground. And gardens, food [garden produce] won't grow good... When the project came, the Kairak people with the Qopki and Supramatka [agreed]. Not the Vir. We Vir stay. We watch only. Time goes and goes, and now, a dispute erupted. [30]

Here we have two groups: those who support the oil palm, and those who oppose it. There were many disputes. Now most have accepted the project, but we are still a group who opposes it. We have a lawsuit. Your father is leading the lawsuit, along with some people from Lanivit and Ripka, Ganbraga and Gaulim. [A lawsuit] to remove the company. All don't want the oil palm to stay on the land because it ruins the land. For us Baining, our life is the land, with the work in the garden. Gardens... and trees that are on it, and animals like wild pigs, cassowaries, [tree] kangaroos, all game animals.[31]

⁷⁹ Also Merlan and Rumsey when they suggest that "'groups' in general, and 'corporate' ones in particular, should not be taken as pre-constituted entities, but as contested ones, which are more or less problematically instantiated or reproduced in social action... much of what goes on at public exchange events can be understood as the reproduction or contestation of specific segmentary groupings" (1991: 40-41).

With this account, Kilala distinguished the Vir from the other Kairak-speaking people, and suggested that unlike them, they had been against the plantation from the very start. He described Vir's lack of action – just watching – as a way of showing their unwillingness to give up their land or to take the Kairak name above their own Vir identity. Many of my interlocutors suggested that if people did not verbally state their support about something, that meant that they did not like it. Ironically, they also made most community decisions in the same way, whereby lack of action also meant that nobody disagreed with a given proposal. Therefore, when the Kairak leaders finalised the oil palm deal, they had subsumed the Vir into the larger clan – to go inside the big name – and effectively subsumed Vir's land into the project. As a result, a series of local disputes about who the *real landowners* were had broken out.

Moreover, like Kilala, most of my interlocutors knew about the oil palm industry in West New Britain from the national newspapers and the stories of friends (or friends of friends) who had worked in that province (mainly in the logging sector). Thus, they often made comparisons between the landscapes of West New Britain they imagined and their Baining ranges, in order to show either their frustration with the plantation and point to the destruction of the bush, or to illustrate how *their* project was more “environmentally aware” and “sustainable” as it preserved some parts of the bush (cf. Makim 2002). The Opposition deployed the example of West New Britain as evidence of the devastating ecological effects of oil palm and the end of subsistence farming in the region to justify their position. Therefore, those in favour of the plantation preferred to use the Pomio plantation (that Tzen Niugini established in 2008) as an example, rather than those near Hoskins in West New Britain and claimed that in East New Britain people had more say about the ways in which their customary land was going to be used.

While the ILG leaders had decided to lease only a portion of Kairak's customary land and keep a larger tract for “conservation,” where they could hunt, make gardens, and build houses, the Opposition claimed that this could not justify the destruction of such a vast bush to plant oil palm. All their gardening land beyond River Kerevat and the

bush they used to go hunting had been deforested and covered with palm, in effect killing or removing any other living thing from the area. Everything on which my interlocutors depended to live, from the edible plants to the wild animals, from the creek water to the building material obtained from the bush, had been replaced by this new and alien palm. With the destruction of the bush, the places that appeared in ancestral stories and myths, and provided the Vir with their genealogical connection to the land, were lost as well. In other words, they had lost both their genealogical mode of connectedness with the land and its resources. Moreover, with the now enclosed and guarded plantation they had also lost their ability to physically access that space. Thus, Kilala continued:

Now the Malaysians have secured the title [deed] of the Kairak land. They have defeated all. So one cannot take the title [deed]. When they put it [the title deed] they enclosed the land with the title [deed], it is their land now – Malaysians.[32]

Those of my interlocutors who opposed the project were annoyed with the fact that the Kairak ILG had claimed the land that was originally Vir's customary right, and that its title was now in the hands of foreigners – the Malaysian company. Just as they were dispossessed of their land by the foreign Australian administration, today they had to give it to another foreigner. While in the past their land had been inaccessible due to forestry reserves and Sepik and Tolai settlements, today it was so due to the enclosed oil palm plantation. In my interlocutors' eyes the land that was their birth right continued to be inaccessible, while others made decisions about its use, thus suggesting that *de facto* it was still not theirs. Stead (2017) has suggested that when the customary landowners are formally recognised as such but nonetheless alienated from the land, the notion of "customary landowner" is largely emptied of substance and reduced to modernist legalistic status. Indeed, this is the situation in which countless Melanesians find themselves today. Yet, Stead (2017), like many scholars of PNG, fails to acknowledge that the very notion of "customary landowner" is already an invention of colonial law and thus a modernist legalistic status, that enabled the dispossession, accommodation, and commodification of land and the expansion of the colonies' agriculture and logging industries (Wolf 1994; Blomley 2003; Dove 2011).



Figure 39 - View from Kilala's hamlet; oil palm in the distance

Rights and Exclusion

In 2012 my host father and four other men, who represented the Supramatka Kairak, the Uramot, and the Qaqet, filed a judicial review against the State and East New Britain Oil Palm Ltd. They claimed that the land falling under portions 908C and 909C was leased without the full consent of their clans. Further, their attorney argued that the land acquisition had transpired without following the statutory preconditions stated under the Land Act 1996, and that the Minister and Secretary for Lands and Physical Planning had failed to conduct “meaningful consultation with the landowners” (ACTNOW 30 August 2016). When I moved to Tavir, the lawsuit was still ongoing, and periodically my host father went to testify about the ways in which the Vir people were either persuaded or ignored during the initial talks about the plantation. At these hearings, he was also expected to show his knowledge about the land and support his claim that the Vir were the *real landowners*. He kept saying that Kairak was a language and not a clan, and that the Qopki and Supramatka had put

themselves and the Vir under the name Kairak without their consent. In this way, he argued, the Kairak ILG, which was formed and run by Qopki men, was able to control the Vir land (*bosim lend bilong mipela*). Thus, he explained that in order to protect the land, they had to sue the ILG and the company (*mipela mas cortim long protektim lend*).

The term “exclusion” has been widely used in agrarian studies to show either 1) inequalities between groups of people that entail the exclusion of some from accessing or owning land while allowing others to hold it in large expanses, or 2) characteristics of private property ownership whereby landowners can exclude others and enclose their land. Hall et al. (2011), however, have argued that all land use and access require some form of exclusion; from the farmers who plant crops knowing that others will not use their plots until harvest, to the conservation initiatives that keep people away from or forbid certain kinds of activities (e.g. agriculture, fishing, hunting) within a given (and often bounded) area. Their use of “exclusion” thus, puts it not in opposition to “inclusion,” but rather to “access,” and refers to the ways in which people are prevented in one way or another from benefiting from the land. Similarly, in the previous section, I argued that through the oil palm plantation the Vir Kairak had been excluded from using the resources of their land as well as from physically traversing it. Here, however, I use exclusion to show how various members of Kairak society had been excluded from the decision-making processes involving their land. And I argue that this form of exclusion has effectively created new forms of inequalities and left many of the excluded people without access to their land (for example, as I illustrated in Chapter 4, many Kairak gardens had been destroyed and replaced with oil palm).

Among the Kairak Baining, families and individual men could assert use rights to their clan’s land. However, they could not sell or lease it without the permission of their clan. Similarly, if a family ceased to use their garden plots for a period of several years, the rights over these reverted back to the clan. Of course, the family’s descendants could later make claims to use the same plots, as I have already described in Chapter 4, and often people felt uncomfortable using land to which they had no

genealogical ties (as was the case for the gardens surrounding Tavar). Since even the smallest plots had histories involving particular people and at the same time belonged to everyone, many of my interlocutors found it incomprehensible how such a vast tract of their land could be leased to the oil palm company by the Kairak ILG members. How could just a few people have a say in what happens to all that land that everybody traditionally had rights to? Their discontent with the top-down decision about the oil palm project, thus stemmed from their exclusion from the processes that had led to the land lease, and involved a confusion about what and who exactly an “ILG member” was.

While in the eyes of the PNG government, ILG members represented all landowners, in the local setting, this was not always the case. I myself often experienced a difficulty in following who my interlocutors referred to when they said ILG member, because in the official sense it was supposed to mean: any one person who belonged to the Kairak clan; or as Zane put it: “It’s everyone. Everyone! All men, women, children. When new babies are born, they too go into the ILG.” On the other hand, when Yulai turned to me with a bitter voice and a frown and said that the ILG members had to do their job and ask the company boss what was happening with their royalties, she specifically meant the board of directors. Like her, other Vir Kairak also used “ILG members” to denote the directors from Tavar when they discussed their inability to protect their rights and royalties. When people complained about the land lease, however, and said that the ILG members had given their land away, they actually meant the few men in charge of the ILG. For example, Kilala once said that the ILG members had stolen my host father’s knowledge about the land – that is, the traditional evidence to landownership claims in the form of stories and myths (discussed in the previous chapter) – and they had used it to lease the land. At that moment, he was criticising the ILG’s vice-chairman and a couple of Kairak men related to him, who had formed the ILG. All these various ways in which people used “ILG member” show how not only the affiliation to a group could be contextually contingent, but also how the group itself could be imagined differently based on what one tried to convey and how the formation of such groups involved forms of

exclusion (cf. Golub 2007). Furthermore, the fluid meaning of “ILG member” in the rural setting informs about the differences between local and national understandings, traditional and modern legal claims of landownership.

Joshua justified the lawsuit and his efforts in opposing the project through the ILG members narrative as well. He argued that the ILG certificate had no *Vir man*’s name on it and that while “some *true Vir men*, who had roots in the land” (*sampela tru Vir man husat i gat lek long lend*) were said to be ILG directors, their names were not listed as such in the document. Therefore, he believed that he had to fight for the *Vir* rights because the land was originally theirs. His opponents, however, claimed that he was the only one who thought in this way, and that one day he would see that the project will benefit everyone. One of the ILG directors, for example, said that when the initial talks were underway, they had offered Joshua a place on the board, but that he had refused. Another claimed that Joshua had sued the ILG and the company because he was hungry for power (*pawa hangare*). But according to Joshua’s brothers and in-laws the ILG had excluded him because he had knowledge about the land and *Vir* genealogies (and about Christian theology and Baining tradition), because he practiced *kastom* (while all but one director did not because they had converted to Pentecostalism), and he had disputed the land lease from the very start at the village court. Indeed, my observations and relationship with Joshua enabled me to see him as a once respected leader, with a wide range of attributes and knowledge that had made people look up to him, but who had recently become less influential and often sidelined by the men involved in the oil palm project.

In the introduction of this chapter I mentioned that the ILG had fourteen directors who represented the clan in its dealings with the oil palm company. On several occasions, three of the directors I spoke to said they all had been “chosen by the people” and were “respected leaders of the Kairak.” However, when I questioned how the process of selecting the directors had taken place, it was revealed that these men’s names had been listed by only a handful of men who had drafted the documents. They were selected by virtue of their gender and local status as *morka*

(male elder). The Opposition criticised the men who had formed the ILG precisely for this reason: because the decision-making authority over their land, which was collectively owned by their clan, had been given to only a small group of men, chosen by an even smaller group of men. This effectively meant that on paper the clan seemed well represented, but in practice, the actual decision-making authority was in the hands of a few men, who weren't even Vir.

Moreover, my interlocutors described that in traditional Vir Kairak society women who were elders (*morki*) had always played a significant role in decision-making processes on important community issues. Additionally, many of their traditional stories described women whose advice or provocation directed men's actions. Kilala, for example, said women were naturally leaders that others would listen to "because they are mothers and all respect their talk." Indeed, many noted that motherhood gave women an innate perspective that always thought of and contributed to the community. Hence (and to my surprise), in Tavir several women had held the office of ward member (a position previously termed as village councillor - *kaunsil*), and during my fieldwork a couple worked as ward committee members (*komiti*). Nevertheless, landownership discourse in PNG dating back to German colonial rule, has emphasised the significance of customary inheritance laws and the categorisation of societies as either patrilineal or matrilineal. This has led to exclusionary land claims based on male genealogical ties and in post-Independence PNG issues of land had become primarily the domain of men (cf. Jorgenson 1997). Hence, just as H. L. Moore (1994) has articulated, the Vir Kairak did not have a single model of gender but multiple and contradictory gender discourses, especially when it came to notions of leadership and decision-making authority.

The preclusion of women's rights to landownership as a result of "primitive accumulation" has been the case in most rural societies in the world. Marx (1909) deployed the term "primitive accumulation" to describe the process of transformation from feudalism to capitalist mode of production and show that capitalism depended on the prior concentration of labour and capital, as well as the

violent divorcing of people from their traditional means of production. Federici (2009) has further shown that this entailed not only the accumulation of exploitable workers and capital, but also the subjugation of women to reproductive labour (see E. Martin 1987) and devaluation (and in some contexts, criminalisation) of their work outside the domestic sphere. Therefore, she argues that primitive accumulation is also “*an accumulation of differences and division within the working class*, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as “race” and age, become constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat” (2009: 64 emphasis Federici’s). Indeed, we have seen that in many Melanesian societies when rural swidden farmers turn into petty commodity producers (e.g. of cocoa, copra, coffee) or take part (as landowners) in mining, logging, or agriculture projects, land typically transforms into property associated with men. Participation in these new forms of economies also involved the construction of new affiliations and identities (Appadurai 1990), which were often entwined with inflated ideas about gender differences (Seymour-Smith 1991), masculine prestige and feminine propriety (A. Strathern 1979; Knauft 1996; Bruce M. Knauft 1997). This has resulted in the intensification of gender discrimination and exclusion of women from major decision-making processes (M. MacIntyre 2007). Among the Kairak, men justified their authority over the land and exclusion of women from the ILG’s board of directors through a well-framed, and often reiterated, description of their society as “patrilineal, where the man owns the land, and the woman follows the man” (*em patrilineal, we lend i bilong long man, na meri i bihainim man*). This also gives us a glimpse of Vir Kairak’s changing leadership structures after forming a relationship with the oil palm company.

Rose’s Case

Rose was a middle-aged woman, who gained the status of *morki* (female elder) as a result of her age, experience, knowledge, and contribution to the community. She was married to a Tolai man, who she met whilst working as a nurse on Duke of York Island, and she had two sons. She was a member of the Pentecostal Zion Church,

worked at Gaulim Medical Centre, and spoke publicly against the oil palm project. Together with Joshua, Rose was one of the first to oppose the ILG's plan, claiming that it dispossessed the people of their land and ways of living/being. Though she had been pressured by her family to accept the project, she said she was firm in her position and had her own thoughts, and that nobody could persuade her that the oil palm was good. Rose's story provides insight on a wide array of issues concerning the plantation and sheds light on Vir Kairak sociality, group identity, kinship ties, gender, leadership, and environmental matters. Thus, I dedicate this section to her words and what they can tell us about people's experience of the oil palm project.

Kairak Decision and Directive

I will say it like this: In 2011 they [the ILG chairman and directors] came and talked. They called a meeting in Ganbraga. Then they called a meeting in Tavar, Lanivit, Marusem, Ripka. They came, [but] they didn't do awareness. They came to this meeting to tell everyone this: "[an] oil palm project will come inside, and you must, when the oil palm comes, you must all say you want it. And you must all say that you are all Kairak. *You are Kairak!*"[33]

One of the main issues raised by the Opposition was that the decision to have the plantation on their land was made very quickly, "without the real consensus of the community" (*nogat riil konsensus long komuniti*). They supported this claim by pointing to the absence of any meaningful awareness activities, which were legally required of the developer company before obtaining the title deed and permission to commence the project. Such awareness activities had to address any potential environmental, social, and economic effects and outcomes of the project, and disclose the company's aims and plans of operation. The ILG directors I spoke to claimed that a series of community meetings had been organised in all Kairak settlements, where they informed everyone about the oil palm as a crop, the plantation project, and its benefits to their people. However, like many of my interlocutors, Rose said that these awareness meetings did not involve any company representatives, and did not provide clear information (*tok klia*) about the plantation's full impact on their land and

lives. In fact, many claimed that the meetings took place after the land title had been transferred to the company. “They had signed the deal and got the title,” exclaimed Kilala. When talking about that, Rose became angry and said that the meetings felt more like the men were giving orders (*bosim mipela*), rather than raising awareness (*nogat reisim awernes*). Moreover, her story shows the significance of an undisputed Kairak clan identity in order to successfully implement the project, since the land had been registered as “Kairak customary land.”

Indeed, the ILG vice-chairman once mentioned that when the company representatives had asked whether their land was registered, they also had said that in order to have the plantation, the ILG had to make sure that all the people to whom it belonged were Kairak. In this way, the company had tried to avoid any potential disputes that could complicate or even stop their project.⁸⁰ By directing everyone to identify as Kairak, both the ILG and the company had ensured that even if the Department of Lands and Physical Planning carried an investigation into the customary land claims, they would be satisfied with the current land title and lease. That is, as I have suggested earlier, in the eyes of the PNG government the ILG was the corporate and legal manifestation of the clan: the Kairak ILG was one and the same as the Kairak people. But for Rose and the multitude of people in Tavar, Kairak was a name impressed on their parents and grandparents when they resettled to this area. It was a name that they recognised and identified with as the language they spoke.

Therefore, in August 2016, just a month after I left PNG, Justice Lenalia Selatial ruled that the Kairak ILG’s decisions to lease the land and have an oil palm plantation “are null and void,” since the decision-making process had been “hijacked from appropriate landowners” (ACTNOW 2016). He maintained that the Minister for Lands and Physical Planning could only grant SABLs when he had been satisfied with the land inquiry carried out by officers of his department, and when the provincial

⁸⁰ For examples see Filer (1998), Jorgensen (1997), and Golub (2006).

lands office had established that all landowners had agreed to the land transaction. Selatial stated that he was not convinced by the evidence presented that the three-day meetings held at Malabonga High School community hall on September 1-3, 2010, met the requirements of meaningful consultation with the landowners (ibid.). While this ruling had been considered a victory for the Opposition, its consequences are not very clear. A couple of my informants I communicated with after returning to Edinburgh suggested that the oil palm company had stopped planting for now. Other sources have claimed that the company has now included cocoa cultivation into its project plan, which I suspect had to do with the disputes over the World Bank-funded cocoa blocks within the leased tract of land. What these decisions hold for the future of the Vir Kairak and their claim to landownership of those disputed areas are still unclear.

Dead Land

In Chapter 4, I described how many of my interlocutors were displeased with the fact that the plantation had subsumed most of their gardens, while it skipped those owned by several men involved in the ILG dealings. Rose explained that because she was married to a Tolai man, she had asked her brothers for some of their father's land, to make gardens for her family. "My brothers and I, we all had land. Now all our land is ruined but his [ILG director] still stays," said Rose, suggesting that there was a bias in the planning process and charting out of their customary land into development/agriculture and conservation zones. Some of my interlocutors also pointed to the fact that the men who had formed the ILG had secured gardens for themselves and that the company was also building permanent houses for them near those gardens. In fact, under the development agreement signed with the company, each Kairak family was supposed to get a permanent house built on the land they chose to reside on – that is, either in Tavor or on their customary land that fell outside of the plantation itself. Nevertheless, not all people in Tavor had family ties with the preserved customary land (as mentioned earlier), nor did they wish to have a house

in their current hamlets, out of fear that the Uramot and Taulil may remove them from this area.

Those of us who now stand in opposition, we disagree [with the project]. That is, it is not honest. We must stand for our rights. That is, we cannot ruin our bush land. In order [to do this] we must stand and go back to this [way] we make garden, we find wild game [*abus*] in the bush and rivers. They cannot ruin [those by] planting oil palm. Because they say 99 year; after 99 years they will finish this work, yea, but we do not know, what will it [the land] be after 99 years. And all this time where would we make garden? It [oil palm] is something that ruins the land, yea. You cannot plant one subsistence plant. The subsistence plant won't come out good.[34]

However, the issue was not simply their dispossession of gardens but the way in which the land was treated. After the project started, many in Tavir were surprised to see that the land used by the plantation had to be rid of all other plants and animals (which was something neither cocoa nor copra required). They also became aware that the deforestation resulted in a pest crisis in their own gardens from migrating rats, insects, and a kind of green parrot (locally called *kalangar*). Pointing to the barren, dry hills occupied by the palm, people said that the ground was dead (*graun em dai pinis*). One afternoon, I saw Peter after he had visited some of the plantation sites. He turned to me and said that he had cried; "I cried because mother land is dead. They have killed mother land who has looked after us. So I am sad" (*Mi crai bikos mama lend em ded. Ol i bin kilim mama lend husat i bin lukautim mipela. Olsem mi sad*). As I have argued in Chapters 1 and 4, people's relationship with the land was one of nurture and giving. Even though much of the land Peter was referring to had been used by the Sepik and Tolai settlers, it still had a significant role in Vir Kairak's social reproduction and their group identity. To see it dead, deeply distressed my interlocutors and planted seeds of doubt about the value of the plantation. Although Peter had initially supported the project idea, he said he was now unhappy with the plantation.

The residents of Tavar who had worked at the plantation or heard stories told by other workers, described the chemical spraying around the palm as the worst kind of work and referred to the chemicals (glyphosate) as poison (*poisen*).⁸¹ They expressed immense fear about coming into contact with this substance due to its ability to stop life (*stopim laip*), and were bewildered as to how the oil palm could survive it. But beyond the chemicals and deforestation, the land was dead not only because it grew only oil palm, but also because a foreign company owned it. Kilala suggested:

Because the title [deed] is a strong mark; if they get the title, the land dies. It is theirs now... They got the title. They have killed our land. They used big money, bought the title. They bought [from] the Kairak...Because it belongs to others it will die, yea.[35]

This implied that the land was dead not just because it had been transformed, but also because it had been separated from its people on whose relationship of co-care and co-production it depended. And my interlocutors' growing familiarity with the plantation and its crop deepened their doubts about whether the land could be rejuvenated at all after the 99-year lease ends.⁸² Like Rose, other mothers and fathers in Tavar, expressed worries about their children's and grandchildren's futures. Even those who had welcomed the project were concerned whether at the end of the lease their children could still have gardens there and be able to reproduce themselves and their community.

⁸¹ The spraying of oil palm was differentiated from the spraying of cocoa through the opposition of the words *poisen* and *marasin* (medicine). While *marasin* was something that cured or made feel better, *poisen* was always related to killing. Locally *poisen* also meant sorcery, usually through the deployment of poisonous or powerful substances that are ingested or come to be touched in some way by the targeted person. In the case of the oil palm, *poisen* could be related to both meanings, whereby the Malaysian company kills the land in a way that is quite like sorcerers' ability to kill others by means of *poisen*.

⁸² Around the lawsuits and discussions about the oil palm's environmental impact, some of my friends had learned that after 99 years the soil will retain only part of its fertility (a quarter according to Olam's East New Britain manager). Thus, they worried whether their children would have gardens back on their own land as had been promised by the ILG leaders.

Father's and Brother's Land

At community and church meetings, and during conversations, it was clear that everyone respected Rose's opinion and listened carefully when she talked. However, as I explained above, people prioritised men's land rights and views in discussions about landownership. Therefore, women's thoughts about the plantation (specifically the ones they voiced) were strongly shaped by their consequences for their fathers, brothers, and husbands.

One time they took me [to talk], just in the village (*long ples tasol*). They sent word to me to come and sit down at a [family] meeting. My sister, the wife of the pastor, and others too, have been hiding this talk/meeting [from me]. They had told me that one Sunday our family should meet – a family meeting. But on Saturday two of my aunties had heard others talk like this: Rose does this and that, and others talk this and that; we must quickly straighten up this talk, it won't be good if Rose's brothers don't get their royalties. Like that, and they revealed [what] this meeting on Sunday [was about].[36]

And on Sunday they said to me that I married outside [to Tolai] so I will not get [royalty]. Others had told them: "Rose talks and talks and this [way] her brothers will not get [royalties]. So you get her to come and tell her to seal her lips." Like that, they were all heavy-hearted (*bel hevi*). So, they took me on Sunday evening, it was night now, [and] they told me... First, [they] asked me and I said: "I stand on the right side. I stand on the right as I am not happy [that] they took, you/they took the land, all our land you/they took and then where do we make gardens and all other something we do? There is no more land." [37]

This story shows that in order to ensure Rose stopped slandering the plantation project, the ILG directors approached her family and suggested that her actions could potentially prevent her brothers from getting their royalties. It reveals how processes of decision-making had become reliant on intimidation on the part of the leaders and coercion by the families. Specifically, it shows how promises of money, or threats of withholding it, were deployed to entice and ensure everyone's compliance. And when

women were not in direct receipt of royalties because they had married outside the clan, their kinship relations demanded their submission and acceptance of the decisions made by the ILG.

Also, this manager [ILG vice-chairman] yea, will you see the fruit of this hard [plantation] work of yours. Will you see [it] after and will you get [pay] later, will he give you royalty money?! The kind of money you are supposed to get, will he give you or not?! I, I know I am right because in the past he didn't give you anything from the logging.[38]

They all rose up and said: "That man changed. His manner/character (*pasin*) changed and he will make it [i.e. pay]." And I, I should not talk or else my brothers will not get the royalty money... I do not agree with you. I cannot change my thoughts to say I am fine [with the oil palm decision] and follow you with that thought. You approve of the oil palm. I don't.[39]

In Chapter 1 I suggested that, on the one hand, people believed that money would benefit the whole community and bring development, while on the other hand, they generally linked the desire to have money to personal accumulation and consumption (both negative acts). In the case of the oil palm, my interlocutors followed a similar logic. They argued that the royalty money would elevate their lives (with better houses, clothes, food and commodities) and community (with better schools, churches, and access to medical care), but also maintained that the promises of money ruined people's thoughts (*bagarapim tinktink*), and made them hungry (*hangare*) and greedy (*mekim ol gridi*) (cf. Stewart and Strathern 1998). Many of my interlocutors believed that money's bad influence would corrupt the ILG leaders, and as a result they would not share the oil palm royalties with them. For example, Solomon once said: "We know when benefits come – money – it will belong only to them. Only they will get the money. And we won't. We know. They did this before, with logging. They are greedy with money. Only the big-men." [40] Likewise, several others from Tavar voiced their doubts about the ILG leaders' promises and referred to the men's dishonest actions in a logging deal in the 1990s. Such claims were then refuted with

the narrative of “change” – “that man changed,” “his manner/character changed” – which I discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Truth, Lies, and Shame

People’s doubts about the promises of royalties show the problematic place speech holds among the Vir Kairak. While speech constituted a form of social action (Merlan and Rumsay 1991), it did not show people’s real intentions as their real actions did, such as the work they did, the transactions they entered into, the gift giving they initiated, and so on (see also Robbins and Rumsey 2008; Rumsey 2013). That is, similar to Biersack’s (1982) description of Paiela communication, my interlocutors suggested that people revealed what they thought by talking (*toktok*) and doing (*wok*), but treated verbal promises as inferior to one’s doings, because they were “just words” (*toktok tasol*) that could possibly be a lie (*giaman* [TP] or *ma qook naga malinye* [K]). That is why Rose put a lot of emphasis on her honesty in opposing the oil palm project.

We are this group, yea, we are a small group in Tavar who stand on solid ground (*mipela i sanap ples klia*). And many people in Tavar, have one leg here [and the other there], because they cannot stand honestly in public and speak up. They are afraid and all they know is to hide behind others. And I am one honest woman who stands on solid ground with this one, Joshua, and his two brothers Barnabas and Meska. I am a woman people know stands on solid ground and talks the truth.

Several of my interlocutors pointed to the rising discontent due to lack of royalties and suggested that many in Tavar had become very upset with the oil palm. However, as I have illustrated earlier, they were also too ashamed to talk about this in public. Ellen, for instance, scoffed: “We Baining are *vorvāt* (ashamed/shy) – we talk among ourselves, but don’t stand up [and] talk at meetings.” Some even suggested that because of this trait they would never get their royalties, and the big-men will tell them lies, make decisions, and get all the project money. Therefore, for Rose speaking up in public was more than mere talk but an action, that is, public speaking as a

medium of social activity (Merlan and Rumsey 1991) – in this case, to actively oppose the project and protect the land.

In fact, both the ILG directors and the Opposition spoke in public, but they differentiated each other's mode of communication: while the ILG made promises (*toktok*), the Opposition stood up against the project (*wok*). Similarly, while the ILG believed they were doing development work (*wok*), they evaluated the Opposition's efforts as "just talk" (*toktok tasol*) and lies to gain power (which also was exactly what the Opposition argued about the ILG). On the other hand, the majority of Vir Kairak listened and only spoke in private. The ILG considered this as acceptance,⁸³ while the Opposition regarded it as shame, fear, or lack of decision-making – as exemplified in Rose's claim that most people had "one leg here [the other there]". Nevertheless, when I asked Kilala why they did not do anything when only the Pentecostal churches received royalties and not the United Church (formerly Methodist), he presented a third view on the subject of inaction:

We leave them [the ILG leaders] to the hand of all. Because we thought they will give to all churches. Then they didn't give, [and] we leave them [be]. We thank them only. Thank you for your promises. Leave them like this...This is the manner/character of our ancestors. They didn't talk. If you lied to them, they left you like that. One oneself lied. Later we don't know when one dies, where one goes. All ancestors before were good men... So we still follow this.[41]

This shows that some Vir Kairak considered their lack of participation in public disputes as a virtue that they inherited from their ancestors. In other words, what some described as fear and indecisiveness, and glossed as *vorvāt*, others thought of as a good manner that made good people (*gutpela pasin wokim gutpela man*). In the following section, I discuss the importance of exhibiting *vorvāt* when delivering a public speech, and how elders were traditionally expected to feel *vorvāt*, or Kilala put it: "Good people and good leaders felt *vorvāt*."

⁸³ The ILG directors claimed that those who did not speak against the project were happy (*hamamas* [TP], *mārmār kālām* [K]) with it.

Leadership

In early January 2016, the residents of Tavir held a community meeting at the large open-air shed next to the village school. Colourfully dressed, the crowd stood out on the bright green grass of the school yard, where children regularly played football and “tins bowling” after school. Some brought a few chairs and benches from the school and nearby homes and placed them on each side of the shed. This was where most elders sat, an overwhelming majority of whom were men. The rest of the participants sat under the surrounding trees, while most women clustered with their children on the green grass between the shed and the road. It seemed as though the younger women paid more attention to their children than the speeches delivered at the event. Some played with their new-borns, others nursed; some showed their baby to other groups of women, others introduced toddlers to each other. During prayer everyone’s eyes closed and heads dropped forward, but as soon as it ended, they returned to their children and chatter. The older women, on the other hand, sat at the front, close to the shed – their faces serious and lips pursed, as they listened to the speeches.

One by one, several men presented an issue they wanted to discuss with the community. The meeting chair Demas presented each speaker by stating their name and position within the community (e.g. pastor, committee member, elder and so on). When Joshua’s turn came, Demas described him as “*bigman bilong mipela olgeta*” (big-man of all of us). My host father slowly came to the centre of the shed and thanked Demas and the crowd for being invited. He had a very pleasant voice and a charming, yet humble, smile. His wrinkled, light blue shirt and navy *laplap* (sarong) gave him a clean and more formal look. His tone differed minimally from ordinary conversations and storytelling, especially compared to the oratorical style of Pentecostal preaching and the more patronising character of community speeches by the ward, ILG, and Stewardship Council members. His body moved coyishly, with his head and

shoulders slouching forward, his palm gliding over part of his shirt, and from time to time hastily running his fingers through his hair.

Joshua turned to Demas and then to the crowd and said that he did not like being called “big-man” because he was not one, turning his gaze to Zane (Tavir’s ward member and ILG director). He continued, “I am not a big-man, I am only an old man” (*Mi no bigman, mi lapun tasol*), and turned around sweeping the crowd with his eyes, which stopped again at Zane. A few faces lit with wide grins and some giggles broke out among the men. The young ward member too chuckled and moved his torso a bit, as if poked by Joshua’s words. “There is only one big-man, and he is up in heaven (*i gat wampela bigman tasol, na em i stap antap*), said Joshua, pointing his finger up at the sky. The crowd nodded and hummed, and a couple of “Amen!”s came out.

Joshua’s speech about big-men and old men represented the politico-social situation at the time of my research. The Opposition specifically had been displeased with the growing decision-making authority of several men in their society as a result of the ILG and the oil palm plantation. As I mentioned earlier, the Vir Kairak had no big-men in the classic sense of the term, however, some equated some of the rising ILG members with the big-men seen elsewhere in Papua New Guinea. Earlier anthropological studies described Melanesian big-men as paramount leaders, wealth-oriented entrepreneurs, and authority figures with large networks of exchange partners and supporters, which they had established through debt economy and mobilised to further build their renown (Sahlins 1963; T. S. Epstein 1968; Salisbury 1970; Finney 1973). The works of A. Strathern (1971) and Berndt and Lawrence (1971), however, showed that these men did not hold a more privileged position than ordinary members of the society, and that they had to spend a lot of effort in coordinating and influencing people to support their endeavours and contribute to their feasts in exchange for helping them to attain social, political, economic, or religious goals of their own. Moreover, by the late 1970s, it had become clear that among many Papua New Guinean peoples, the Tok Pisin term “*bigman*” had been prescribed by the colonial officers that they came into contact with as a translation to

the traditional title held by the most important men (Chowning 1979). However, this did not necessarily mean that people themselves distinguished those men as chiefs or paramount leaders, but simply recognised their position as senior men or respected them for specific attributes, abilities, or experience. Similarly, my interlocutors often reiterated that they did not have (neither in the past nor now) any big-men or chiefs, but instead community decisions were made by all their elders (*ma mor* – plural). Hence, when the Australian patrol officers brought them to Gaulim and asked about their chief, they had presented their most knowledgeable and experienced elder at the time to become their *luluai* (term used in the past for village councillor), but “that was it” (*em tasol*) – that is, *luluai* was “only his job” (*wok bilong en*).

When speaking in Tok Pisin the residents of Tavar referred to their elders as “bigman,” however, they differentiated between them and the “big-men” of the Tolai and other Papua New Guinean people. They emphasised that Vir Kairak elders consisted of both men and women who offered advice, organised work groups, collected resources and food for wedding and mortuary feasts, initiation rites, and church events, and dealt with issues related to their respective genders (e.g. educating, initiating, traditional healing). Typically, these elders emerged as a form of leader for specific activities (e.g. mask making, initiations, feasts, dances, hunting, trade store cooperative, church fundraiser) and the respect (*gutārār*) people felt for them stemmed from their seniority (age) and experience in that area. In this sense, the Vir Kairak appeared to have “great men” instead of “big-men,” as no single man could claim ultimate leadership (Godelier and Strathern 1991). Indeed, my interlocutors suggested that no one had advanced experience and knowledge in all spheres of life, and that each person was very good or knew a lot about only a small number of things. Thus, when one did what one was good at, others saw him or her as “very skilled” or “very knowledgeable,” and sought his or her advice on related matters. Moreover, they said that in order for people to respect an elder and consider or agree with his/her proposals or decisions, he/she had to live an exemplary life and contribute to the community. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this entailed giving to and cooperating with others, working in the gardens, and acting out one’s words (i.e.

doing what you say). Therefore, elders who were skilled and knowledgeable in a variety of areas; who were hardworking, generous, and honest; and who maintained good relationships with a large number of people, were considered community leaders.

On the other hand, scholars have shown that in PNG the intrusions of capitalism have profoundly changed traditional societies and big-men either adapted to these circumstances and became models for the transition to capitalist mode of production, exchange, and consumption (TS Epstein 1968, Finney 1973); became dependent on outsiders for resources to hold their position as big-men (Errington and Gewertz 1993); or lost their traditional authority by being unable to repay their debts and measure up to younger men, women, and outsiders who engaged in some form of business or paid work (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997). Similarly, Kier Martin (2013) has shown that among the Tolai people, traditional big-men's power came from their ability to enforce customary obligations of reciprocal interdependence and to mobilise and assist people in fulfilling their customary roles and responsibilities. However, he recorded that in recent years, the Tolai have witnessed the decline of their big-men, and the rise of the "big shot" – a term people used to describe the men who had accumulated wealth for themselves whilst failing to fulfil their *kastom* obligations.

These accounts about changing social structures have painted a picture where the traditional role of big-man loses its weight and gets replaced by new emerging forms of leadership or entrepreneurship. However, during my fieldwork among the Vir Kairak, it appeared that the term *bigman* pointed to a newly emerging group of men rather than one that was disappearing. That is, its meaning had shifted from the translation of *morka* into expressing the changing status of the men involved in the ILG and the Stewardship Council. Therefore, at the speech described above, when Joshua said that he was not a "big-man" but only an "old man" (*lapun*), he meant that Vir Kairak elders were elders precisely by virtue of their age and experience (as old men and women), and implicitly pointed to their difference from the big-men as he

looked at Zane and provoked laughter from the audience. While my interlocutors suggested that they continued to respect and seek advice from the elders, and believed that community decisions should be made by them as a collective, they recognised that some men, both young and old, had attained different status through their wealth, participation or ownership of some business, political links, and relationships with outsiders (such as the plantation company expatriates) (cf. High 2007). Their perception of this situation had been shaped mainly by 1) the men's wealthy appearance through clean modern clothes, accessories, use of various technologies and commodities, 2) their way of speaking in public, and 3) decision-making authority regarding their customary land.

These new big-men who were involved in the oil palm projects presented themselves to the public in a way in which they hoped they would be exemplary and inspire others, as well as become recognisable as leaders by their people, the company representatives, and provincial officials. However, in their efforts to "change themselves" and bring development to their community (as discussed in Chapter 3), others started to see them as significantly diverging from Vir Kairak's traditional way of life and leadership. The men's appearances, their "bossy speeches" (*toktok bosim mipela*), ability to buy commodities, and frequent travel within and outside the province, also raised suspicions about hidden deals with the oil palm company and the government, as well as ownership of some secret business that allowed them to accumulate more wealth. These speculations also enforced people's fears that the ILG men would not share the oil palm royalties with the whole community but distribute them to a selected few with whom they had good relations. Within this context, the Opposition claimed that the ILG men were becoming more like the Tolai (government) and the corrupt politicians, i.e. "big-men" who boasted in public and made promises but did not keep them. Hence, I observed that traditional elders like Joshua had started to resist this new form of leadership by implicit and explicit criticism of the men's changing status and relationships with the community. Thus, he expressed his disapproval of *bigman*, arguing that only God could be considered as one and have the authority to decide for and control people.

Finally, the differences between Vir Kairak's traditional elders and the new big-men also involved the degree of *vorvāt* they displayed when presenting themselves in public. As I discussed in Chapter 1, my interlocutors described *vorvāt* as a virtue that showed the *gutārār* (respect) people felt for others. For them *vorvāt* was not simply the result of one's lack of desired attributes, knowledge, or abilities, or one's bad conduct (e.g. adultery, stealing, lying), but a cultivated behaviour as well as an internal feeling that involved self-reflection of one's place within the community and various social relationships (i.e. "who am I and how do others see me?" – old man, mother, in-law, pastor, etc.). Therefore, when elders spoke in public and showed *vorvāt* they showed their consideration for others and the community as a whole. When Joshua spoke at the event described above, his physical appearance (in more traditional attire with the navy *laplap*), posture (with shoulders slouching forward), mimics and gestures (warm but coy smiles), and his self-reflection that he was only an "old man" (*lapun* or *morka*), showed that he was concerned about the community, valued it more than himself, and did not feel he could *bosim ol* (boss around or control). On the other hand, according to some of my interlocutors the new big-men were becoming less *vorvāt* and more like the Tolai politicians and entrepreneurs, with their inflated speeches (usually about money and development), confident appearance in public, ability to make larger contributions to community events or customary rites (e.g. funeral arrangements and mortuary feasts), and self-appointed right to make decisions for everyone. Moreover, since most of them had stopped performing *kastom*, their growing wealth and decision-making authority appeared to be at the expense of taking part in customary reciprocal relations (which they actively tried to reconfigure as I described in Chapter 3) (cf. K. Martin 2013). However, I argue that the new big-men who were involved in the ILG and the oil palm project had also reshaped their appearance in encounters with powerful others, and reconfigured the steps they took to reclaim their land through their own experience of *vorvāt* and its relationship to hiding (which I discuss in the following chapter).

Conclusion

The processes of clan formation and landownership registration have been extremely problematic in Papua New Guinea. In this chapter I showed that the decision to lease Kairak's customary land had been met with resistance by a large number of Vir Kairak people. The group many referred to as the Opposition, claimed that the land was not owned by the Kairak in the first place and that the ILG leaders did not have any rights over it. This had resulted in local disputes and a lawsuit about who the real Baining clans were and the identity of the families that formed their sub-clans. Therefore, I argued that the oil palm project had triggered people's re-evaluations and changing perceptions about their group identity and clan leadership.

By focusing on the Opposition, I showed the discontent about the oil palm deal and its effects on local level politics and notions about decision-making authority. I suggested that the legal requirements from landowners to form an ILG and appoint a board of directors who in theory represent the interests of the whole clan, had resulted in the rise of some men and the exclusion of others. Additionally, with the codification of Baining land as patrilineally owned, women had been completely removed from the processes involving decisions about the clan's land. The chapter showed that for the most part, women's views had been disregarded or shaped by their kinship obligations. Through Rose's story, I illustrated that in cases where women did not approve of land development projects, people tried to make them capitulate through intimidation and threats to cut off their brothers' and fathers' benefits. All these showed that even though the oil palm plantation was initially introduced to the Vir Kairak as a tool to reclaim their land and attain development, it involved processes of exclusion that kept people from physically accessing, making decisions about, and benefiting from their land.

Finally, the chapter argued that the oil palm had created new forms of inequalities with the rising wealth and decision-making authority of some men, whom I introduced as the "new big-men" within Kairak society. I presented data about the ways in which my interlocutors understood speech in opposition to action, and how

many doubted the promises made by the company and the ILG directors. They suspected that those men who were involved in the oil palm deal had secret businesses and that they were not going to share the royalties from the land lease. At the heart of these worries lay ideas about proper Vir Kairak behaviour and forms of leadership that were shaped by *vorvāt*. Thus, I argued that people understood their traditional elders' experience and display of *vorvāt* as a virtue that showed their respect for others and the community, and implied a sense of modesty and humility. On the other hand, they assessed the wealthy appearance, confidence, and decision-making authority of the new big-men as departing from traditional Vir Kairak values and leadership, and deemed them as becoming more like the corrupt politicians who made promises they never delivered. However, I also suggested that for these men who tried to change themselves and their community, and believed in the positive effects of the oil palm project, *vorvāt* played an important role in the way they shaped themselves and their actions in order to obtain landownership rights and recognition from the company and provincial government. Their actions, I propose, had been guided less by the explicit display of *vorvāt* than by its relationship to hiding. Hence, in the next chapter, I offer a more detailed discussion of the significance of hiding in shaping one's image in front of others by exploring a Vir Kairak initiation dance.

PART III

CHAPTER 7

DANCING AWAY THE SHAME

Throughout my fieldwork, and for many months after, I struggled to find a proper translation of *vorvāt*. My interlocutors who understood both Tok Pisin and English, were not fully satisfied with the list of words we had come up with as possible translations. In fact, they found it difficult to differentiate between shyness, shame, embarrassment, modesty, humility, and so on, and explained that when they felt *vorvāt*, they experienced a variety of feelings, flowing and merging, experienced simultaneously, but to different degrees, some coming to the fore whilst others fading to the background throughout different moments within their encounter. For them, it was almost impossible to say where exactly, if at all, one feeling ended and the other began. Thus, *vorvāt* was a relative term rather than one with a fixed positive or negative meaning, and it contained a whole range of feelings from those involving a reaction to accusations, rejection, failure, self-depreciation, and inadequacy, to those of excitement, respect, modesty, and recognition that was aroused when interacting with elders, hosting honoured guests, or giving a public speech, for example.

In PNG scholars have shown that people often associate feelings with particular parts of the body. For example, Andrew Strathern (1975) has shown that the Melpa-speaking people of Mount Hagen wear shame on the skin, and Eves (1998) has described that among the Lelet of New Ireland the abdomen is a source of anger and lust. While the Vir Kairak did not talk about *vorvāt* as something that they felt anywhere particular in their bodies, people in Tavar had an almost identical and detailed description about the way in which *vorvāt* was experienced and could be observed in others. When they described *vorvāt* or explained why they thought someone was feeling that way, they often enacted what they were saying: “your eyes look down,” “your head is down,” “your head is tilted to the side and forward,” “your shoulders come forward,” “you feel your face is hot,” “you feel everyone looks at you,” “you think you can’t speak well,” “you don’t know what to do, how to stand

or sit,” “you want to hide.” Knowing these visible aspects of *vorvāt*, people usually pointed out and discussed with each other whether someone they saw was *vorvāt* at a given occasion.

This is interesting because like elsewhere in Melanesia, the Vir Kairak avoided making statements about what feelings, motivations, or intentions other people might have (Robbins and Rumsey 2008; Rumsey 2013). When talking about others, they only referred to their attributes, such as being knowledgeable or not, well-spoken or not, hardworking or not, and so on. Or they made deductions about what others might have done: “he is sweaty and dirty, must come from the garden” (*em swet na doti, em mas kam long gaden*), “she is wet and carries a basket, must come from washing clothes” (*em wet na em karim basket, em mas i bin waswas laplap*). Nevertheless, inner feelings and thoughts were never discussed and when I pushed with my questions, my interlocutors expressed their speculations cautiously. Even when there were visible signs such as weeping and lethargy during funerals, people were reluctant to say whether someone was sad about the death: “I don’t know. They cried. They must be sad” (*Mi no save, Em i crai. Em i mas sori*). Thus, even the display of signs linked to a feeling was not enough to know or make assumptions about the inner feelings of another person.

Yet, talking about whether one was *vorvāt* and why, was quite common and often remarked upon no matter the age, sex, or distance of relationship with that person. My interlocutors typically turned to me and announced that the person we had encountered was *vorvāt* for some reason. For example, *vorvāt* was proclaimed when a child shied away after a group of adults remarked on her new trousers, or when a man was asked about the bride price he had to pay after running away with his bride-to-be, or when a woman’s in-law asked her to weed the hamlet yard, or when a child did not go to school because he did not know the subjects as well as his classmates, or when a man avoided walking near his in-laws’ hamlet or gardens, or when one received a gift or food, or when they realised someone was watching them whilst they did some sort of work.

In this chapter I build on my argument that for the Vir Kairak *vorvāt* was a virtue that people cultivated in order to appear and act in the proper way within everyday interactions with a variety of others. I illustrate this through the ethnography of a male initiation event and night dance. Earlier I described *vorvāt* as both inner and embodied feeling that characterised and shaped people's behaviour and relationships, and produced collective understandings about what was "good" vs "bad" conduct, Baining person vs other, traditional elder vs new big-man. Therefore, my interlocutors suggested that *vorvāt* was not just the result of external judgement but also of internal evaluation of one's self, appearance, abilities, and actions. However, *vorvāt* always depended on the presence and realisation of another's look. One could be happy, sad, angry, or even anxious when they were alone, but *vorvāt* only resulted after realising that someone was watching. In other words, the realisation that one has become the object of another's look. It is no wonder then why my interlocutors associated *vorvāt* with the strong desire to hide, or publicly enacted their *vorvāt* through visibly hiding themselves.

Scholars of shame such as Goffman (1957) have interpreted people's desire to hide, their embarrassment and flustering during face-to-face interactions and public appearances, as feelings that arise out of fear from destroying one's public persona and relationships. In this way, they have depicted shame as a negative and destructive feeling, and hiding as a way to escape it. While Scheff (2000) has argued against this and suggested that shame is the most social of all human emotions, he also traces its roots in the sense of threat to people's social bonds with others. However, among the Vir Kairak such feelings encompassed by the vernacular term *vorvāt*, appeared both as a result and expression of one's appreciation and respect for others. In other words, *vorvāt* was not simply the outcome of fear of destroying relationships but also a component that built and displayed them. Accordingly, my interlocutors suggested that it was good to be *vorvāt* on some occasions, and not to in others. Thus, drawing on Helen Lynd's (1958) discussion on shame as a social emotion that reaffirms the social and emotional interdependency of people, whereby sharing one's shame created closeness and strengthened people's social ties (1958: 66),

I propose that the Vir Kairak experienced and cultivated *vorvāt* in an attempt to preserve, elicit, and enable important social relations.

Men's Initiation and Dance

The light evening rain had soaked the earth and brought the sweet smell of grass and mud. The hamlet was quiet. Even though the whole family was sitting around a small fire in front of the old mother's *vātki* (kitchen house), they conversed softly. This was not the usual loud family gathering full of laughter and high-pitched shouts. Instead, their faces and demeanour expressed anticipation. They had spent weeks in preparation for this night, when the youngest of the old father's sons was finally going to be initiated and taken by the Burām masks to the men's house in the bush. His mother approached me and said that when they came, she was going to cry. "Women cry" she said, "this is the *kastom*, because they [the men and the Burām masks] take their children". She smiled. Her eyes sheened in the soft light with hints to bittersweet thoughts and deep affection. Not that the boys were taken away from their mothers for a prolonged period of time, or that they would not live in the same hamlet, but it seemed that her expression of "taking" meant that the boys were now adults (not as dependent as they were to their parents) and were going to build a new house for themselves.

We sat for a while on the bamboo mats near the fire and talked about the feast and the day dance we had all seen earlier. At one point, Sepenia, the oldest brother, came and told us to get ready because the Burām were coming. He and his father had prepared a *bilum* string bag for the boy, filled with betel nut (areca nut), betel pepper (*daka*), lime powder (*kambang*), tobacco, a page of a newspaper for rolling cigarettes, some store-bought biscuits and salty crackers, which were all considered good gifts for a man who practiced *kastom*.⁸⁴ The father hung it over the boy's neck and then all of us moved to the centre of the hamlet's yard. The family lined up next to each other.

⁸⁴ Pentecostal Christians did not smoke tobacco or chew betel nut, and publicly spoke about those as evil things that Satan used to tempt people.

On the boy's left stood one of his uncles (*akak* – his mother's brother), beside him his father, and then his mother (the Burām had to greet her first); on the boy's right stood his initiator, who came just before the masks. The initiator and the boy shook hands, both looking down, muttering their greeting words, and subtly exchanged their *bilum* string bags.

Suddenly the hamlet was not so quiet but filled with chatter, and numerous torches pierced the darkness. Men and women from both the boy's and the initiator's families, neighbours, and friends, young and old, had come to see this event. Depending on the intimacy of their relationship to the boy's family they stood inside, outside, or at the entrance of the hamlet, because only close relatives could enter (especially at night). As people were gathering, two Burām masks appeared from the darkest corner of the hamlet. They were accompanied by one of the boy's older brothers and another classificatory brother. These two men guided the Burām towards the family and helped them extend their arms in the right direction so they could shake each person's hand. The men also announced to the Burām who they were about to greet (saying both their names and/or relationship to the boy).

The masks did not stay still but were constantly moving rhythmically from side to side, forward and backward, up and down. Their paraphernalia of green leaves (wild species of the *Cymbopogon* genus), ferns, and flowers, as well as their yellow grass masks moved in smooth waves, making a soft, swishing sound. They smelled of sweet herbs and grass. In their cold and wet hands, they carried thick pieces of wood, also painted in black mud. The initiator later told me that these clubs were once used to beat the initiated boy, because it was expected that they go through some pain in order "to enter and gain knowledge." But then he quickly added that today no such thing was done and that even he had not seen anyone get beaten by the Burām, or knew when this has last happened. Now the Burām used these only to strike the posts or walls of the houses they passed by, and dragged their clubs over the grooves of the buildings' sidings, making a sharp rat-ta-ta-tat sound. These sounds conveyed their power and frightened the women and children. And he added that the Burām were

considered “soldiers,” and were the most aggressive of all masks. Indeed, the relationship between violence, pain, and initiation has been long studied by anthropologists, and established that it ensured the secrecy of the knowledge passed was kept by the initiates (see Van Gennep 1960; Maurice Bloch 1992; Whitehouse 1996; Berliner 2009). While the Burām no longer beat the boys, their aggressive actions generated people’s fear of getting beaten by them. In other words, the mode of their violence had shifted from physical to psychological.

The reception of the Burām finished in a heartbeat and the group of men quickly took the boy and left the hamlet, which was now permeated with the mother’s exaggerated wails. On their way to the men’s house they passed by other houses and took other boys with them. As they walked towards the bush, and now away from the hamlets, the boys’ initiators gradually began to reveal the men’s secrets and teach them about *kastom*.

In the men’s house, the first sequence of events tested the boys about their knowledge and involvement in the community. As these were men’s secret knowledge, my interlocutors had me swear not to write about them or give any details about what I saw there. For the purpose of this chapter, it should suffice to say only that the initiates were put at the centre of the large sheds and everyone’s attention. There they were expected to play a particular role and reply to the men’s questions. The initiates were bashful and quiet, lowering their head, not knowing where to put their hands, their bodies slouching. Whilst all eyes focused on them, they were *vorvāt*.

After their tests, their initiators took them around the men’s house and gradually revealed the masks and the secret stories about them. Then, the men dispersed to do final preparations for their dance, and some showed the new initiates how they painted the rectangular Vunvun mask made with two screens of green leaves. The boys’ older brothers, on the other hand, unpacked the baskets full of rice, tinned fish, and meat their families had prepared for this event. Once all the men sat to eat, the new initiates stopped displaying *vorvāt*. The men no longer looked at them. They had become part of the group – no longer object of another’s look.

Inside Tavir, the hamlets that participated in the initiation feast were silent.⁸⁵ The whole day of events, speeches, distribution of food, songs, and dances, on top of many weeks of preparation and rehearsals had left most of the participants weary. Thus, they took what little time they had before the night dance to rest and get some sleep. Around midnight people began to gather at Tavir's community meeting space where they held the feast. A few men carefully constructed a large bonfire when the musicians from Gaulim arrived. Soon after that the orchestra started to play their bamboo ideophones and sing some of the slower songs in their repertoire. One by one Tavir's women threw a long stick of sugar cane over their shoulder and began to circle the bonfire with small, rhythmic, fast steps, sometimes hopping playfully and making the crowd (mainly the women in the audience) burst into laughter. The sugar cane bent and swung, bouncing over their shoulders. At one point, the women's movements synchronised and there was barely a space between them. Their silhouettes became indistinguishable and impossible to look at as separate bodies. Their figures completely covered the firelight and spun like a carousel of dark shadows. This dance, one of the elder men standing beside me explained, "invited" the Kavet masks. The women next to us nodded and hummed in confirmation.

When the Kavet were ready and waiting in the nearby thicket, the women dancers dispersed, and the first masks entered the dance area. The newly initiated boy, his initiator, father, and oldest brother accompanied one Kavet and one Vuŋvuŋ mask. They were followed by the boy's mother, and two classificatory mothers (his mother's brothers' wives), who moved slowly and stayed behind the men. They all carried large baskets, bags, or leaf parcels filled with pork meat. The group circled the bonfire and went in front of the musicians where the masks performed their introductory dance. Then, they moved to the opposite side of the performance area. There, the

⁸⁵ There were those hamlets with overwhelming number of residents from the Pentecostal Zion Church or the Revival Methodist Church, who did not attend the dances, but held their own religious gatherings that night. While the fellows of the Zion Church attended the feast during the day and left only when the day dance masks came, Pastor Michael of the Revival Methodist Church had instructed his congregation not to come to the feast or eat from the food that was distributed because both the feast and the food were of Satan. Instead, he had organised another feast in his hamlet, devoted to the "right way;" devoted to Jesus.

masks, the boy, his initiator, and father stood in a line facing the bonfire, while the rest of the family members broke away, taking the baskets and parcels with them. Other masks and other initiates with their families appeared one by one, following the same pattern of introductory dance and lining up on the other side.

Once each initiate had been revealed, the rest of the masks made their entrance, either one by one or in pairs. By the end, the line of masks was so long that it became difficult to count them. Most of them were Kavet, but there were also a few Vunvun masks, all bouncing up and down in constant movement before the audience. After their line display, they disbanded and simultaneously moved towards the bonfire, spreading in each direction, dancing and bouncing, shaking and spinning. The initiate and his initiator went to the boy's mother and the man gave her the parcel of cooked pork he was carrying. Then they went on to find the initiator's wife to whom the boy gave his parcel of cooked pork. The rest of the dance proceeded without any further display of the initiates. Close to daybreak, the sound of dance music still reverberated from the community area. As I discussed in Chapter 2, such dances continued as long as the orchestra continued to sing. Both musicians and dancers tried to exhaust each other in order to "win" the dance and show which settlements' group was the best.

Object for Another's Look

Vir Kairak initiation events put the new initiates on display in three stages: first, when they line up with their initiator and family and welcome the Burām; second, at the men's house, where they stand in the middle of the structure and undergo the older men's tests; and third, at the night dance, as they emerge from the bush and enter the dance area together with the masks, their initiators, parents, and relatives. In the first instance, they appear as boys for one last time in front of the people who watch their departure to the men's house. In the bush, they are evaluated by the scrutinising looks of the men who test them to see how well they know their community. As explained above, I cannot provide details about this part of the initiation and only state that the tests required the initiates to know and be involved in the community. Finally, as they

emerge from the bush into the dance area, they are displayed along with the masks related to them (donned and made by their brothers, fathers, and uncles) to show their transition from boyhood into manhood and that they have now become part of the men's group.

This is a typical sequence of male initiation one could find in the anthropological literature on the subject (e.g. Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967; Maurice Bloch 1992). It starts with the collection of the boys, followed by their seclusion, and eventually their display in front of the whole community to show their changed state. In Melanesia the transformative efficacy of hiding and display, invisibility and visibility, has been widely discussed (e.g. Wagner 1986; M. Strathern 1988; MacKenzie 1991; J. Leach 2003). For example, Biersack (1982) has shown that among the Paiela, in order to make things visible in a transformed way, they are always hidden first. Thus, when Melanesian persons appear in a particular form at various ceremonial events, they do so in order for others to see and recognise their transformation. While the same thing is true for Vir Kairak male initiation rites, my focus here is less on the transformative aspect of hiding, than on the relationship between display, or being seen by others, and vorvāt.

I argue that at each sequence of revelation when the boys are looked at by a plurality of others, they experience vorvāt and are expected to show that they do so, in order to make others know that they feel gutārir (respect) towards them or specific others (e.g. their parents, the initiator, or the masks). Throughout the thesis, I have tried to show that the Vir Kairak did not experience vorvāt passively but cultivated both the internal feeling and its bodily manifestation in order to participate in and make relationships within the wider community. While in some cases my interlocutors talked about vorvāt as a setback that prevented them from gaining development (Chapters 3 and 6), many argued that vorvāt was their way of being (*em olsem hau mipela i stap*), a kind of good behaviour (*gutpela pasin*), and a way to show respect (*soim rispekt* or gutārir). Therefore, vorvāt involved other people's judgements and expectations, as well as one's own evaluation of themselves and the situation or relationship they found

themselves in. To elaborate, in a conversation about this issue, my host brother said that only *badpela man* (bad, immoral, or dishonest people), *spakman* (drunkards), and *longlong* (the insane) did not experience vorvāt. In other words, he suggested that only those who did not care for others and their relationships with them did not feel vorvāt.

Moreover, my host sisters described one's vorvāt as a visible sign of their *gutārir* towards another and the desire to have a good relationship with them (*laikim gutpela rileition*). But more than that, one's experience of vorvāt towards others also made it possible for them to engage with that person more comfortably, knowing that that he or she was attuned to the community and valued others' looks. In Melanesia, Strathern (1988, 2013) has suggested that there is a certain imagined reciprocity of gazes, whereby visibility establishes relationships and coerces or enables particular actions on behalf of the ones who are seen and the ones who see them. In the same way, I argue that vorvāt among the Vir Kairak is a two-way relationship that allows other sorts of relations (marriage, affinity, reciprocity, and so on) and results from being seen in a particular way or by seeing others in a particular way.

To illustrate, my male interlocutors said that they felt vorvāt when a guest came to their hamlet and saw them without a shirt or when they did not have any betel nut or garden produce to give to them as gifts. In this example, the one who is seen, i.e. the one who realises that he or she has become the object of another's look feels vorvāt. Just as Sartre proposes that shame (in Western context) "is shame of oneself before the Other" because a person sees themselves as an object (of another's look) only when someone else sees them (1978: 222, emphasis Sartre's), vorvāt among the Vir Kairak is vorvāt of oneself when one becomes visible and looked at by others. However, one could also become one's own spectator when seeing someone else in a specific way. When I asked my hosts what they thought about two men holding hands – which was a common thing among the Tolai but completely non-existent among the Vir Kairak – they responded that they would feel vorvāt if they saw that. With bashful smiles, they expressed their amusement with the Tolai men for not feeling vorvāt to hold hands in public. Here, vorvāt was both expected from those who were seen (the men

holding hands) and those seeing them. My host brother explained that he would feel *vorvāt* not because the two men also could see him, but because by seeing them he would find himself in a situation where he would become more aware of himself as an external viewer.

Initiate and initiator relations

To show the wider relationships established through *vorvāt* I now turn to the initiator-initiate relationship among the Vir Kairak as it was described to me by a number of men. Throughout their lives both the initiator and the initiate perform in a very particular way, where physical contact between them (and their families) is minimal; speaking to each other or in each other's presence is done in a low voice, and each person's eyes rarely meet. Moreover, the initiate could only call, or speak about, his initiator using the term "*guarāmātka*" (my initiator), referring to their relationship, and never say the man's name out loud even in his absence. My interlocutors referred to such relations that were hierarchically structured and required avoidance, as relations of *gutārīr* (respect). They explained that the enactment of *vorvāt* resulted from and displayed one's *gutārīr* for the other.

As I have already discussed in the first part of this thesis, the Vir Kairak were organised in patrilineages that followed a patrilocal residence pattern in the same or adjacent hamlets (typically consisting of three or four generations). People organised everyday family activities, participation in feasts, and movement through the settlement around kinship and initiation relations, all of which included some sort of *vorvāt-gutārīr* relationship (e.g. children : adults, young : senior, initiate : initiator, bride/groom : in-law). Through initiation each patrilineage had been paired to another, where the men from each lineage acted as initiators for the younger boys of the other. Within this relationship people referred to each patrilineage as *erāmāt*.

The classification of lineages as *erāmāt* was common knowledge to both men and women as they all had to follow certain rules of avoidance and taboos. For example, hamlet visits were limited and very rare even for the women who were part of these

lineages; marriage with the other *erāmāt* was taboo; and members of each lineage had to show *gutārīr* to those who belonged to the other. Thus, the relationships between people from related *erāmāts* involved feeling and displaying *vorvāt* in each other's presence. The following kinship diagram (Figure 40) shows two patrilineages from Tavir that were related through initiation. Each *erāmāt* is presented in different colour, showing that unmarried and divorced daughters remained in their father's *erāmāt* while married daughters became part of their husband's *erāmāt*. The two *erāmāt* presented in green and blue were within an initiation relationship, where x had been initiated by y, who had been initiated by z, and in the future x was going to initiate someone from y's *erāmāt*.

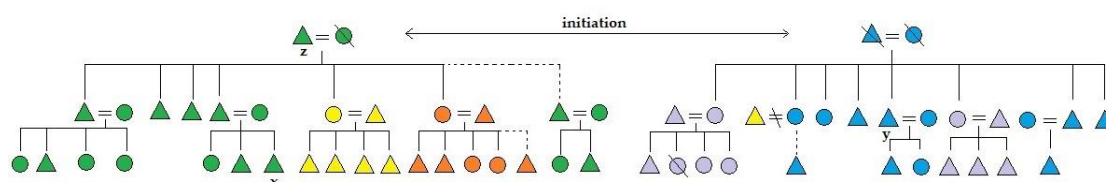


Figure 40 - Kinship diagram representing initiation relations

With each initiation one of the *erāmāt* was designated *ma lavo* (also meaning “children” in Kairak) and the other *ma mota*,⁸⁶ and each subsequent initiation had to be done based on who was *ma mota* and who *ma lavo*. To illustrate, when z initiated y, the green *erāmāt* became *ma mota* and the blue *erāmāt* became *ma lavo* (children). Before anyone else from the blue *erāmāt* could be initiated, someone from their *erāmāt* had to initiate a boy from the green *erāmāt* because the *ma lavo* had to become *ma mota* and so on. In short, the *erāmāts* had to take turns in becoming *ma lavo* and *ma mota*.

My host father explained that during each period, the men who were *ma mota* were expected to give food gifts to their *ma lavo*, and that was why the *erāmāts* took turns –

⁸⁶ My interlocutors did not offer any other translation apart from that it referred to the initiators as a group. Possibly the word had something in common with the Kairak verb *mot*, which means “to fight.” This would make sense, since in the past initiations involved the beating of the initiates.

“to give back food gifts” (*givim bek kaikai gift*). He noted that the two family lines were *tambu* (taboo) because of their gift-giving relationship, and explained that in the past such gifts were given regularly, but nowadays had become hard because hunting wild pigs and pythons required a great deal of effort with much of their bush being transformed into oil palm plantation, and people had little money to buy domestic pigs. Normally, during each period of the *ma mota-ma lavo* cycle the *ma mota* used to hunt and cook food, then distribute it to four men who are *ma lavo*. The diagram below (Figure 41) depicts the order in which a man making a food offering had to give one portion to his initiator or initiate (based on which *erāmāt*’s turn it was), one portion each to two of the initiator or initiate’s brothers that are *ma lavo*, and then one portion to a man from an unrelated *erāmāt* who at the time is also *ma lavo*. Once these *ma lavo* become *ma mota*, they had to reciprocate the gift of food, and the unrelated *erāmāt* additionally presented a portion of meat to those who had given them one earlier (when they have become *ma lavo*).

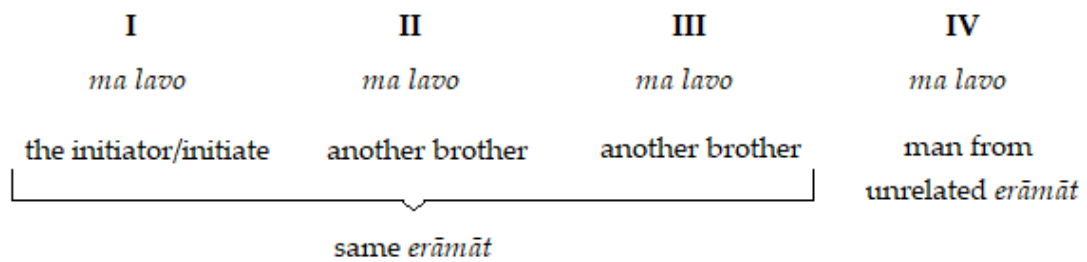


Figure 41 – *Ma mota* food prestation to four men designated *ma lavo*

If the *ma mota* had not yet reciprocated their gift of food, they felt *vorvāt* in the presence of the *ma lavo* related to them. While *vorvāt* in this instance was the result of a delayed reciprocation, it was not experienced as the outcome of any public or private shaming, as Schieffelin (1983) has observed elsewhere in PNG among the Kaluli, but rather the *ma mota* felt *vorvāt* when they encountered their *ma lavo* and knew they were “seen” by them. Here *vorvāt* was the product of interaction and not of a sense of wrong or right, or loss of reputation, since those that expected to receive gifts did not make the delay explicit, but rather made the prospective donors feel *vorvāt* in their presence.

The cycle of *ma mota* and *ma lavo*, and the reciprocation of food gifts, determined *vorvāt-gutārīr* relations between the initiates' and initiators' lineages. My interlocutors suggested that while an initiate and his initiator were always in this relationship, where each displays *vorvāt* in the presence of the other, they and their extended families also rotated their relations of *vorvāt* with others when they turned into *ma mota* from *ma lavo* and vice versa. That is, those that were *ma lavo* exhibited *vorvāt* in the presence of all of the settlement's *ma mota*, even if these men were not their own initiators. To illustrate, the diagram below (Figure 42) shows three sets of *erāmāts* connected through initiation (shown with the blue lines) and the direction in which their members exhibited *vorvāt* (the red arrows point to those in whose presence the *ma lavo* felt *vorvāt*). Women explained that their husbands, fathers, and brothers told them at the beginning of each cycle whether they were *ma mota* or *ma lavo* and listed the lineages towards whom they had to display the *vorvāt-gutārīr* relationship. Hence, we can see that Vir Kairak male initiation not only involved men's relationships, but also shaped relations within the whole community and established an order in which people related to others and acted in each other's presence.

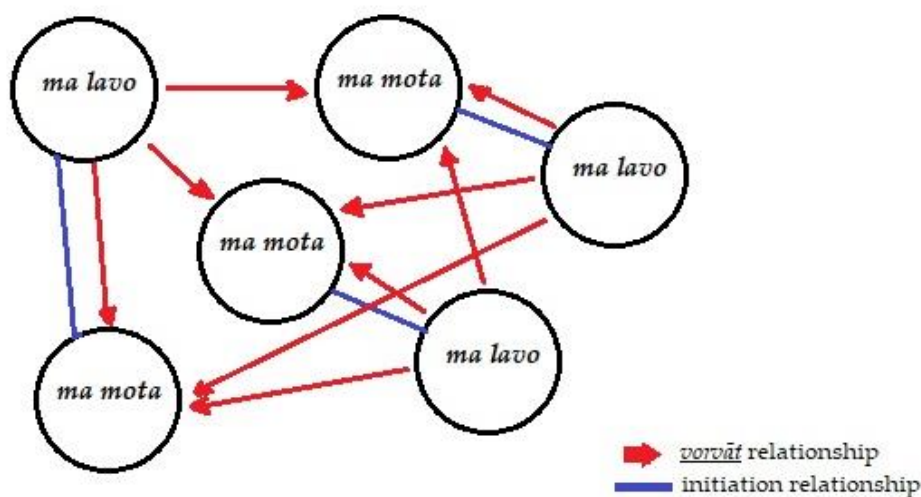


Figure 42 - *Vorvāt* relationship between *erāmāts*

Food and *Vorvāt* within the Dance

In the fire dance presented above the newly initiated boy, his initiator, father and brother entered the dance area together with a Kavet and a Vuṇvuṇ mask, followed by the boy's mother and two classificatory mothers.⁸⁷ The group, including the masks, carried parcels, baskets, and bags filled with cooked pork. While the boys and the initiators exchanged their parcels at the end of the introductory dance by presenting them to the women closest to them (mother or wife) with whom they shared food on a daily basis, the rest of the family members took their own parcels back home and ate the food on the following morning. The initiate's mother who danced behind him took the parcels carried by the Kavet and the Vuṇvuṇ, who were the new initiate's (classificatory) brothers, and either prepared and distributed the food back to them (in the case when they were unmarried), or gave it their wives to deal with.

According to my interlocutors this display and exchanging of food at the beginning of the dance were the focal point of their initiation rites as they showed the wealth of the family, their contribution to the feast, and support for the initiated boy. My hosts explained that the initiate's mothers danced slowly behind the men to show not only that they were happy for the boy and proud, but also that they and their husbands (the boy's mother's brothers) had contributed to the feast and had also received a portion of meat prepared by the boy's parents and classificatory fathers (father's brothers).

Recently, smaller initiation feasts had become a more common practice as the numbers of men participating in *kastom* had significantly decreased with the influence of Pentecostal Christianity. During my fieldwork in Tavir, I witnessed three fire dances that involved the initiation of seven boys in total. However, every few years the Vir Kairak held larger initiation feasts for more than a dozen boys that had come of age. On such events, the men explained, all masks carried live pythons and parcels of cooked pork when they entered the dance area. These dances were characterised as the most prestigious as they showed the men's hunting skills, the wealth of the

⁸⁷ His mother's brother's wife and his father's sister.

whole community, and their care for the boys. Therefore, to dance without a python or pork at these events caused great vorvāt to the dancers.

Likewise, during smaller initiation dances, the new initiates' (classificatory) brothers who donned the masks had to carry some food as they entered the dance area. This was in fact the case for all fire dances, and the sight of masks carrying pythons excited the audience. Nevertheless, not all men could find pythons or pigs, nor were their families able to provide a domestic pig for each dance. My interlocutors suggested that the absence of food at such events caused the dancers to feel vorvāt, and added that to dance with vorvāt was "wrong" (*nogut*), because it could ruin the whole dance. Hence, in recent years, Tavir's men had restructured their fire dances in order to alleviate their vorvāt in the absence of pythons and pork. This was explained in the following way by my host father:

It was something that started when, you remember I told you, when all hold this cooked food. For example, I have three sons: Benjim, David, and Junias. Suppose all of them go to the bush to find meat and David cannot find one for himself, and Benjim and Junias have some. Suppose Junias [the youngest] will go with a Vunvun [mask]. Okay, two brothers will walk together: Benjim and David with Kavet and Junias [with] Vunvun. Three brothers will walk together. Because one man, one Kavet doesn't have food, he will hide among this food that belongs to the other two, yea. When all look at them, they say: "here all this food belongs to all, yea." [42]

In this way, the men had transformed the structure of the dances. Where in the past each mask entered the dance area alone, or if holding a python, together with a man dressed in traditional attire, nowadays they entered in sets of two or three – either a Vunvun with Kavet(s), or pairs of Kavet. In Joshua's hypothetical example he illustrated that the reason for this change had been the vorvāt men felt if they did not have food to display. By entering together with their brother(s) they were able to "hide" this absence among the presence of other's pythons and parcels of pork. My host father reiterated that a man without food "is vorvāt because at this big time [initiation dance], all Baining know that all masks will (be capable to) hold

cooked food and snakes.” In a sense, people expected the masks to have food as this showed not only their power and the hunting skills of the men but also, as I describe below, their relationships within the patrilineage.

My interlocutors suggested that all men are *vorvāt* before they enter the dance area, but as I described in Chapter 2, as soon as they donned their masks, they felt powerful and unafraid to dance and walk through the fire. My host classificatory brother Samson said that once all preparations have been completed, men stop thinking about whose mask is best and whether theirs is beautiful or not, but only feel *vorvāt* to go and dance. Their *vorvāt* arose from their respect for each other as a men’s group, for their patrilineages, and uncles (*akak* – mother’s brothers). Samson noted that once they entered the dance area everyone looked at them, hence their *vorvāt* began with the anticipation of that moment of being “seen.” But once they donned their masks, my interlocutors said that “there is no more *vorvāt*,” because the masks made them feel strong and invincible. Thus, I suggest that through the capacity of the mask to hide and obscure the identity of the dancer, it alleviated men’s *vorvāt* to appear in front of the eyes of a plurality of others. And this was necessary because the men argued that dancing should be done without *vorvāt* or else the dance could be ruined. However, the mask alone could not eliminate men’s *vorvāt* from not having any pythons or parcels of pork, because the masks were still related to a group of people – their patrilineage. Therefore, they had to get rid of this *vorvāt* by means of hiding in some other way – that is, by pairing up with other brothers who had food.

Python

To show the significance of food display in presenting the dancer, his patrilineage, and the entire men’s group in a desired way, I now turn to the role of the python in revealing specific aspects of Vir Kairak capacities and sociality. Numerous scholars have observed that Melanesian ceremonial displays of garden produce, pigs, or cooked food simultaneously displayed people’s own potency, capacity, and renown

(e.g. A. Strathern 1971; Battaglia 1985; Kahn 1986; Munn 1992). In the same way, I argue that the pythons carried by the masks also showed important attributes of the community.

One evening, I asked my host father and brothers why they carried this particular type of snake at fire dances and what it represented. Joshua immediately replied: "Because python is the most valued meat, and our most valued thing" (*Bikos moran em namba wan abus na namba wan samting bilong mipela*). He was referring to the value of the animal as a food source and as something that symbolised Baining culture because of its direct relation to *kastom*.⁸⁸ According to him, both pigs and pythons were of the same value when considered from this perspective, but pigs were easy to find and easy to catch, while pythons were not. Therefore, if a man caught a python, Noah continued, "he dances with it in a dance. He wins because he found one. The bigger the python, the bigger the man" (*em danis wantaim em long danis. Em i win bikos em painim wanpela. If em bikpela moran, em bikpela man*).

Nevertheless, during the dance the audience did not know whose python they were looking at because two people carried it – a mask and another young man painted with white mud and dressed in traditional loin cloth (though nowadays they appeared in T-shirts and shorts). Bringing this to the conversation, I asked what the python revealed, about whom, and when? The men replied that if the fathers or brothers of a man who was going to dance with a mask caught a python, they would give it to him to dance with. In such a case, the mask entered the dance area holding the python's head and his brother the tail. After circling the fire and completing the introductory dance they lined up opposite the musicians (as described above). Later, when the masks started to dance, the man painted with white mud took the python and gave it to a woman from his patrilineage to cook it. Joshua explained that this

⁸⁸ Because of this relation Pentecostal and Revival Methodists did not eat the animal, and found it revolting. Furthermore, they referred to the biblical texts of Genesis and Revelation to show the relationship between Satan and the snake.

woman was usually the mother, wife, or sister-in-law of the man who had caught the python.

My host brothers said that throughout the dance, the viewers wondered whose python they saw. It could have been caught by either man holding it. At a dance performed for a wedding, I heard a couple of women comment on the python held by one Vunvun mask and one of my host classificatory brothers. They suggested that the snake probably belonged to a man in my brother's patrilineage. In fact, Joshua suggested, that during the dance the python was conceived as *of* both men and their fathers simultaneously, but not owned by both (because only one could have caught it). The he smiled and said that even the woman who cooked it did not know the owner until the next morning.

She would wonder whether it is her son, husband, or brother-in-law. Or her father or brother, if she is married. The next morning, when she brings the python to the mother or wife of the man who gave it to her, she will learn the owner. If the mother or wife accepts the python, then the woman would know that this was the man who caught the python. If his wife or mother says, you take the meat to one of the woman's sisters-in-law, then she would know that it was her brother who caught the python.[43]

The ambivalent appearance of the python within the dance and during its preparation tells a lot about Vir Kairak moral values about giving and consumption. Remember that in Chapter 1 I illustrated how my interlocutors perceived feeding and giving as good social behaviour that built a stronger community, while accumulating and consuming were considered socially destructive. In Chapter 6 I also showed that traditional Vir Kairak leaders were modest, generous, and expected to experience *vorvāt* as a sign of their *gutārir* for the community. With the ownership of the python we can see a similar picture, whereby the man who has caught it does not appear in front of everyone and does not boast his skill as a good hunter, but instead remains hidden; he remains in the background only for the fact to be revealed the following morning. The display of the python does not enhance his status at that moment, but instead enhances his whole patrilineage and the entire group of dancers. Even in the

morning when people remarked that he was the one who had caught it, he still exhibited vorvāt. Moreover, we should not forget that the uncertainty about who owned the python also prevented people from asking for the meat, which would have effectively obliged the owner to give some (Chapter 1). Finally, the revelation of the owner subtly revealed the mask dancer as well, since the woman who prepared the food in the example given by Joshua, could comprehend that her brother had been the one that danced with the mask. In this way, the men had indirectly included some of the women into their *kastom* and secrets.

Hiding and Showing Vorvāt

Goffman (1956) has suggested that in social encounters people try to project an acceptable self, which could be damaged by the experience of shame. That is why, he argues, people try to hide their shame behind their posture, gestures, and speech, or simply avoid an embarrassing situation. However, throughout this thesis I have shown that the Vir Kairak also projected their vorvāt as a way to show that they valued various social relations and felt gutārir towards certain others and the community. They physically exhibited and often voiced their vorvāt, as well as openly commented on others' state of vorvāt. In this context, I argue that hiding took different forms towards different ends. That is, my interlocutors did not always try to hide themselves or their vorvāt, but instead, on some occasions, they presented themselves in another form through hiding in a visible manner. In this way, they presented themselves as a person who was hiding to show something else about oneself.

Remember in the prologue I described how Barnabas spoke at the community meeting from behind a thicket of plants, because he had not arranged the cleaning of the cemetery, and thus he had failed to fulfil his responsibilities as a health committee member. In that moment, he was showing his vorvāt by visibly hiding himself. In other words, he was making others see him as someone who was hiding – as someone who was not entirely in view but also not entirely out of sight. By doing so, Barnabas did not avoid the situation of becoming the object of other people's looks and

judgements, but took steps to do the work and displayed his respect for the community by showing his regret and vorvāt. As he hid behind the plants and exhibited his vorvāt he showed the audience that he was socially attuned and aware of his responsibilities to the community.

In this chapter I described how Vir Kairak relations established through male initiation rites involved certain avoidance, gift giving, and display moments. The ethnography presented showed that at specific times during the initiation event, vorvāt was an important component expected from various actors, while at other times, the feeling was undesired (e.g. the mask dancers had to push away their vorvāt in order to dance properly). It was good to show vorvāt when people expressed their respect for others in order to enable, elicit, or create a new relationship. But in situations such as the fire dance, where a person's appearance simultaneously affected and revealed the capacities of the entire group (recall Chapter 2 and the discussion of beautiful vs ugly masks), one's vorvāt had to be pushed away in order to reveal other qualities such as skill, strength, unity, and so on. In such moments, certain relations had to be suppressed while others brought to the surface (Strathern 1988). And I have argued that people did this through hiding – first, behind their masks, and second, among their brothers who had pythons and parcels of food.

Hiding, in this context, is a double action. It both reveals vorvāt and suppresses or pushes it away. Hiding reveals persons or groups in a particular form by hiding something else – either the dancer's identity behind the mask, or the lack of food. Thus, the aim of hiding in such a visible way (as the cases I presented show) is not to prevent people or their vorvāt from being seen by others, but to display the right kind of persons and relationships at that moment (cf. Battaglia 1990; M. Strathern 2013). In other words, visibly hiding amongst or behind something or someone, enabled people to appear in front of others and do whatever they were supposed to do (e.g. dance, give a speech, interact with others), as well as be recognised by and engage in meaningful relationships with them.

Drawing on this, I suggest that my Vir Kairak interlocutors' everyday interactions as well as wider community decisions and actions taken regarding their land and group identity, involved some form of *vorvāt-gutārīr* relationships and visible hiding. As I demonstrated in part II of this thesis, people perceived the oil palm plantation as a number of things: 1) something that covered their land and revealed the illegal settlers and real landowners; 2) got rid of the migrants and safeguarded it for future generations; and 3) a tool that was going to bring development to the Baining people. My interlocutors claimed that their earlier attempts to reclaim their land from the Sepik settlers had been unsuccessful because their opponents were aggressive, fought with weapons, and did not abide by the law. Their failure to become recognised by the settlers as strong landowners capable of pushing them away and protecting their land had resulted in Vir Kairak's deal with the oil palm company. Just as men spoke about it being undesirable to feel *vorvāt* whilst dancing, they also claimed that there was no place for *vorvāt* whilst fighting for their land. Thus, many of my interlocutors suggested that they had inserted themselves into the oil palm project so the company could fight their fight with the settlers. That is, they had visibly hidden themselves and their lack of qualities that could win them back the land through their relationship with the company, and revealed themselves as the real landowners.

Conclusion

To sum up, initiation relations among the Vir Kairak were characterised as *vorvāt-gutārīr* relationships that affected the whole society and shaped how people appeared in front of one another. Each display sequence in the initiation event took place in order to reveal the new initiates' transformation and the relationships through which they had been produced as persons, boys, and men (by lining up with their initiators and relatives, and emerging with them into the dance area). At those moments when everyone looked at them, the initiates experienced *vorvāt* not simply because they had become the object of all those looks, but because they valued the relations they had with those looking and felt *gutārīr* towards them.

The chapter, thus, showed that experiencing *vorvāt* involved certain awareness about and regard for others. That is why, people in Tavir considered those who were bad (immoral), drunkards, or mentally ill as unable to feel *vorvāt*. Moreover, I illustrated that unlike other kinds of feelings, *vorvāt* resulted from becoming an object of someone's look. My interlocutors' stories about feeling *vorvāt* when they saw someone or something also suggested that in some cases, the observer could be the one who sees oneself and generates one's own *vorvāt*. In other words, people saw themselves as seeing something that made them feel *vorvāt*.

Finally, I argued that the experience of *vorvāt* often created the desire to hide. While my interlocutors generally prefer to hide in their hamlets or in the bush, on some occasions they appeared in front of others by hiding themselves in a visible manner that would be recognised by the observers as such. In this way, they displayed themselves in the appropriate form for that specific social interaction. Thus, I have argued that *vorvāt* and hiding shaped the way in which people wanted others to recognise them for particular qualities, attributes, and relationships. I illustrated this through a discussion about the mask dances and the necessity to push away one's *vorvāt* in order to dance properly and (re)present the entire group. Hiding behind the masks and hiding amongst others allowed the Vir Kairak to display, elicit, and create their relations with a plurality of others. It also enabled them to do what they were supposed to do in that moment.

This thesis opened with a discussion on hiding and *kastom* that has come full circle. My intention has been to offer the reader a holistic view of *vorvāt* that shows the role of *gutārir* for others, hiding, comparing with others, displaying unity, and building a strong community for Vir Kairak social reproduction and struggles for recognition as a group of people worth engaging with and receiving development. The thread of *vorvāt* has run through my interlocutors' stories to shed light on a giant web spanning their relations with themselves, other Baining, the Tolai and Sepik people, the provincial government, and the Malaysian oil palm company.

CONCLUSION

BIG FEET, SMALL FEET: BEYOND REPRESENTATIONS OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

A week before I left Tavis, my neighbour Micah came to present a gift to my husband. He had weaved a traditional Vir Kairak slingshot using fibres obtained from tree vines. After several demonstrations by Micah and my host brothers of slinging stones at nearby coconuts and flying foxes, the men began to tell stories about their ancestors and the wars they had waged with other Baining clans. Micah reiterated that in those days their forefathers had to hide in the bush and kill anyone they came into contact with. Pointing to the slingshot in his hand, he said that it was this weapon that they had used from the shadows of the bush to kill their enemies. He described how they did not stand in a single place, but rather shot and ran to another location from which they would shoot again and then repeat this, to give the illusion that there were many men and to incite fear in the opponents. With a big smile, Micah declared that everyone used to fear the Vir because they were strong and fast, and thus, “invisible” to their enemies. He concluded:

So, when the Qaqet [Baining] saw footprints in the mud they looked at their size. If they were made by small feet, they belonged to the Vir. So, the Qaqet were afraid and ran away. If the footprints were made by big feet, they were not afraid because they [the prints] belonged to the Uramot [Baining].

Micah’s story encompasses a number of themes I have discussed in this thesis. Therefore, it is rather fitting to begin my concluding remarks by a short analysis of the messages and representations embedded within it. Then, I will move on to show how each chapter revealed various aspects about the Vir Kairak and how they wanted to be “seen” by others. Finally, I will convey some of my thoughts on ideas about “community development” and the effects of large-scale agriculture development projects on local communities.

First of all, this story emphasises the difference between Vir Kairak ancestral ways of life, characterised by hiding and warfare, and people's own lives today as a community, living in peace with their neighbours. Recall that in several chapters (especially in Chapter 3), I drew on the difference between the two temporal settings described as "times of darkness" and "times of light" by my interlocutors, in order to elaborate on Vir Kairak notions about survival as a clan, community development, and ability to reclaim their ancestral land.

Second, Micah's story offers insights into Vir Kairak's past and present relationships with other Baining and non-Baining people, and the ways in which they wanted to be perceived by them. The description of old fighting strategies is particularly important here. By hiding and shooting from different locations, the Vir Kairak appeared more numerous to their enemies. This, I argue, underlines the significance of hiding and invisibility in creating desired effects and images of their people. In other words, hiding not only enabled people to avoid attacks by outsiders and survive the harsh conditions at the time, but also to bewilder and shape external perceptions about themselves. The thesis presented a number of examples, from mask dances to house architecture, where people deployed hiding in various ways in order to appear in a desired or appropriate form. Moreover, the expressed importance and strength in having, or seeming to have, a greater population, directly feeds into my discussion about Vir Kairak's vision of "becoming many" in order to reclaim and repopulate their ancestral land (Chapters 1 and 4).

Third, the story does not describe a dark past in which the Vir Kairak are victims, in the way that their contemporary origin story about the ten surviving families implied (Chapters 1, 3, and 4). Rather, by suggesting that their ancestors used to be skilled and feared warriors, it offers a glorified image of the Vir Kairak. In this sense, the story and my host brothers' comments that accompanied it, expresses a sense of pride of being Vir Kairak; of having been known by others as strong (and feared) people; and a desire to be recognised for their past and present selves today. I also suggest that the explicit reference to their past conflict with the Qaqet Baining, and superior

status within these antagonist relationships in comparison to the Uramot Baining, offers a subtle comment on my hosts' current living situation as occupants on Uramot and Taulil land. As I explained in the first part of this thesis, Vir Kairak's resettlement to Tavir had taken place after an unsuccessful attempt to live together with the Qaqet. By remarking that the Uramot were not as fierce as the Vir Kairak, the narrative also comments on the relationships between these two clans after their resettlement to the same area – something I have also discussed in relation to the competitive aspect of their mask dances in Chapter 2.

Finally, Micah's conclusion about the footprints is particularly interesting for the obvious reason that it also emphasises outsider perceptions about the Baining and the metonymic relationship between foot size and ideas about progress and development. Earlier in the thesis, I articulated my interlocutors' frustration with popular misrepresentations of the Baining as "*busman*" who had "big heads, big bellies, and big feet." My informants were well aware that the association of these physical features with wildness, ignorance, and idleness were well-rooted in colonial assumptions about evolution and progress, and persisted among the white and other non-Baining residents of East New Britain. I also suggested that such archaic representations justified the marginalisation and exploitation of the people, by implying some natural grounds (e.g. biology, habitat, and adaptability) for their underdevelopment. Moreover, this put blame on the people themselves for their apparent lack of aspiration and ability to undertake various activities associated with development.

Therefore, the distinction between big feet and small feet in the story appears as a counter representation of the Vir Kairak, using the same terms deployed by outsiders. That is, they distinguished between themselves and other Baining by suggesting that their feet were smaller. In this way, they did not simply point to a difference in physical appearance, but in capacity – the capacity they possessed that enabled them to have become better, stronger, and faster warriors. Additionally, in Tavir, people associated smaller feet with urban life and the ability to access and utilise resources

and commodities. On numerous occasions my interlocutors remarked that I could not walk properly and often fell down the slippery slopes because my feet were small. They suggested that [people with] small feet only know how to walk in town, ride in cars, or take PMVs (public motor vehicles). They talked about rural lifestyle and heavy gardening labour as growing the feet,⁸⁹ in contrast to town jobs and “easy” access to money, which made them small. But, as I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, my informants also believed that people with town jobs and money possessed those because they had the right relationships – and more importantly, they had the capacity to elicit such relationships (Wagner 1986, Strathern 1988). Hence, I suggest that the small footprints in the story refer to this capacity to be seen in a particular way by others and elicit a desired response.

In this way, Micah’s story is not simply a story about past relationships between the Vir Kairak and other Baining people, but a window into the ways in which people also evaluated their present selves and relationships with others today. In the Introduction, I proposed that property, citizenship, and authority are mutually constitutive contracts of recognition (Lund 2016), and that people desire to objectify their identity in terms recognisable to others (Schneiderman 2015). I also suggested that similar to other Melanesian and Southeast Asian societies where “otherness” plays an important role in people’s social lives (e.g. Munn 1992; Keane 1997; Stasch 2009; Robbins 2004a; Bashkow 2006), the Vir Kairak related to others and formed an identity for themselves by underlining their differences with particular others.

Thus, I argued that various Vir Kairak activities such as gardening, *kastom*, and Christian ritual, as well as decisions about the land and performances of traditional mask dances, emphasised various differences within and outside their community. For example, I discussed how my interlocutors differentiated themselves from others as a hardworking community (Chapter 1), as skilled mask makers (Chapter 2), as

⁸⁹ In addition, gardening also blackened the skin and strengthened the body. For a similar discussion on different types of work and ideas about blackness and whiteness see Rollason (2010).

“true” Christians (Chapter 3), and as Vir landowners (Chapter 6). Moreover, by engaging with questions about land tenure, clan formation, national representations of culture, and notions of shame and development, my thesis showed the intricacies of forming social identities and interconnectedness between various localities and people, both spatially and temporally. And I argued that through such distinctions, they tried to make themselves into a particular kind of people that could be recognised as worthy to engage with and receive development aid.

The thesis illustrated that the active pursuit to be recognised, on the part of the Baining, had to do with the precarious and underprivileged position they found themselves in as compared to other residents of East New Britain. Several chapters presented my informants’ views on differences between themselves and their Tolai neighbours in relations to access to resources, business opportunities, education, and political power. In this way, I suggested that the Vir Kairak have adopted a view of themselves based on their engagements with “negative others” (such as the Tolai, the Sepik, the Chinese, and whites). Scholars such as E. Said (1978), Stoler (2010), and Mbembe (2017) have shown that processes of negative othering within colonial and post-colonial settings produced structures of political and social subordination, exclusion, and shame. Drawing on this material, my thesis showed that the negative representations of the Baining that are grounded in comparisons with the Tolai, have subtly and overtly emphasised their underdevelopment, and contributed to a sense of being Baining as somehow entailing material and moral impoverishment. As a result, many of my interlocutors commented that these outsider perceptions have enforced Baining people’s feelings of shame.

Nevertheless, this thesis has tried to go beyond representations of the Baining as “humiliated” and “suffering subjects” (Robbins 2004a, 2013). Rather, my main objective has been to show how the Vir Kairak negotiate their identity and reconcile their desire for development with the precarious reality (produced by global-scale processes of alienation, dispossession, and commodification) of their lives today. Therefore, my thesis explored various aspects of Vir Kairak social life that prompted

feelings of pride in being Vir Kairak (or Baining) by emphasising their capacities – be that in relation to *kastom*, Christianity, or land. In this way, it offers valuable insight into studies about how people actively make and participate in social identities and relationships in order to “endure” (Povinelli 2011) and go beyond the material, social, and structural conditions of their lives.

Self(re)-presentations with Vorvāt

This thesis also showed the centrality of vorvāt for engaging in ideal sociality and processes of self-definition and display as a group. I argued that the overtness of experiencing vorvāt involved varying degrees of hiding that ultimately presented people in a particular form for others to see. This form enabled people to relate in a meaningful way with each other and outsiders, and to orient their actions with respect to their future aspirations and desires for development. By appearing in particular forms such as landowners, mask makers, Christians, project partners, and *kastom* performers, my interlocutors sought to be recognised as persons and people with particular kind of capacities that made them worth engaging with, in hopes to re-claim their land and bring development to their community.

In Chapter 1, I illustrated this through a discussion about the importance of giving and feeding as productive acts that built a stronger community, as opposed to the shamefulness of appearing as someone who only accumulated and consumed for oneself. This chapter introduced Vir Kairak understandings of vorvāt as a virtue that showed people’s gutārār (respect) for and commitment in building a strong community, and their moral character. Here I proposed that hiding enabled people to both display their vorvāt by partially (or visibly) hiding themselves and to keep things for themselves. Thus, the chapter articulated that hiding revealed the everyday dynamics of people’s relationships within their community in their conformation with and resistance to moral rules of sharing and contributing.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I focused on ideas about *senis* (change) that shaped how people thought about their own capacities and the practices they engaged in, as precondition to their community development. I first examined the significance of Vir Kairak traditional masks and dances within the local and national context, and showed how these brought a sense of self-worth, inclusion, and potential to impact the state. I suggested that by introducing certain changes to design and structure of their masks, they strived to make their *kastom* and themselves more visible to other Baining and non-Baining alike – a process that entailed their recognition as superior mask makers and *kastom* performers, who could potentially draw more resources to the community. Later, in Chapter 3, I presented a discussion about change at a personal and community level through the observance of “true” Christian life. I argued that in local terms, development has always been something related to and emanating from the outside as the outcome of change from within. Through change people appeared in an appropriate form that could draw recognition and development projects to their community.

This theme also ran through the second part of this thesis, where I explored Vir Kairak relationships with the land, and their role in making and displaying specific social identities. In Chapter 4, I showed how people presented themselves and retained their identity as customary landowners by transforming the landscape into subsistence gardens and cocoa blocks. I discussed how within PNG’s colonial and post-colonial contexts, most efforts have been put into processes of territorialisation and extraction of value from the land. In the process, I argued, Vir Kairak understandings of landownership in recent years have come to involve ideas about covering and revelation as means to maintain control over and display relationships with the land. This, also paved the way for the introduction of oil palm to East New Britain with its demand for massive scale, which offered local people a way to cover their land with a “permanent” vegetal infrastructure and assert their landownership rights.

While my focus in Chapters 4 and 6 was on Vir Kairak strategies to reveal their identity as customary landowners, in Chapter 5 I explored the ways in which such identities were presented in various encounters with agents of the state and capital. This chapter illustrated how the state and local people themselves perceived the link between oil palm and development. Here I also demonstrated how a number of Baining actors perceived their involvement in the oil palm project as something that enabled them to engage with and become more visible to representatives of the provincial and national government. Therefore, many understood their relationship with capital as something that revealed their identity as landowners and made them recognisable to the state. In this way, they imagined that they could finally receive important services such as healthcare and education, infrastructure, economic opportunities, and a seat in the country's political arena. Hence, I showed that even though people in Papua New Guinea perceived the responsibilities of the government as ultimately "looking after" its people, they saw the task of attracting development and eliciting a relationship with the state as a burden on themselves.

In the final chapter, I suggested that *vorvāt* and hiding shaped the way in which the Vir Kairak wanted others to recognise them for their qualities, attributes, and relationships. Several examples throughout this thesis showed that the experience of *vorvāt* involved certain awareness about and regard for others and/or the community. Therefore, I argued that by overtly showing one's *vorvāt* my informants believed that they could be recognised by others for their *gutārir* towards them and engage in reciprocal relationships with them. Moreover, with the discussion of the mask dance sequence where dancers displayed food, I elaborated the significance of appearing as a group. I showed how dancers who did not possess food hid amongst their brothers as they entered the dance area with them, in order to prevent feelings of *vorvāt* and ruining the dance. Similarly, the owners of the pythons that were displayed remained hidden, so that the appearance of these animals in the dance could enhance the status of the entire group rather than the individual men who had caught them.

Community (as) Development

To conclude, it is important to address how my research speaks to the copious amount of literature on development at a community level. A major part of my discussion included Vir Kairak articulations about the link between development and (strong) community. Since the term “community” emerged from my fieldwork, I have made use of it throughout this thesis to describe the totality of Vir Kairak residents of Tavar who referred to themselves in the Tok Pisin variant “*komuniti*.” I also described other Papua New Guinean people who resided together, spoke the same language, and engaged in social interactions with each other as communities.

However, this terminology and the emphasis on my informants’ accounts about the importance of preserving and strengthening their community, did not try to paint a picture of unity and integrity of social beliefs, experiences, and relations (cf. Tönnies 1979). On the contrary, with each chapter I revealed the complexities of Vir Kairak social life, people’s challenges of community building, and the wider processes – from the local and global markets of agricultural products, to touristic and national performances of *kastom* – that created and enforced differences and socioeconomic inequalities. And yet my thesis showed the prevailing importance of ideas about community development – or rather, community as a route to development – within development discourses (van Meijl 2011).

I suggested that for the most part people’s desires for development, modernity, and prosperity involved, and went hand in hand with, ideas about building a strong community (Chapters 1, 3, and 6). On the one hand, people believed that a strong *komuniti* and *senis* paved the way to development. On the other hand, they understood development itself as something that would improve their living conditions and strengthen the community. The thesis showed this link by exploring the anxieties people experienced about their material circumstances, precarious living arrangements, changing power structures within the community, and economic instability after the Cocoa Pod Borers infestation. In particular, Part II presented the events and conditions that led to the decision to participate in the oil palm project.

I proposed that many Kairak people perceived the oil palm plantation as a tool to gain some form of political autonomy and sovereignty over “their” customary land. They also believed that involvement in the project could make them visible to significant others and elicit development aid and wealth from outside their community. A majority of Kairak Baining had been led to believe that the oil palm plantation would finally lead to the building of roads and other important infrastructure such as schools, churches, medical outposts, and permanent houses for the landowners. They also envisioned that the rent and dividends they expected to receive after the mill became operational, would elevate people’s material conditions, enable wider mobility, and access to desired commodities. Such “developments,” they claimed, would change their community in a positive manner, and end their unequal and marginal position compared to other Papua New Guineans and foreigners who had better opportunities and livelihoods.

However, the land lease deal with the oil palm company resulted in a stark divide between those Kairak who opposed the project and those who supported it. The apparent lack of transparency and community consensus about the lease, and the destruction of many Kairak gardens (Chapters 4 and 6) had prompted disputes about who the real landowners were, which clans had rights to the land, and what sort of capacities the land held and for whom. Thus, I argued that the oil palm project had caused people to re-evaluate and alter their perceptions about their group identities and community commitments. And I showed that local and legal notions about customary landownership and landowner clans were deeply engrained in various historical and economic processes that more often than not failed to take into account the fluidity of Melanesian identities and personhood.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I suggested that the establishment of the Kairak ILG and the land lease triggered significant transformations in Vir Kairak leadership structure. Through the selection of a small group of Kairak men to fulfil the roles of “oil palm directors,” the project leaders had excluded a large number of elders from the decision-making processes involving their land. This, I have shown, resulted in the

rise of some men, both economically and in terms of decision-making authority, and created tension within the community. I also drew attention to the codification of Baining land as patrilineally-owned, which pushed out women from any discussions about the clan's land. I illustrated the fact that women's views were either disregarded or shaped by kinship obligations and threats to cut off their male relatives from receiving royalties.

All these factors demonstrated that even though the oil palm plantation was initially introduced to the Vir Kairak as a tool to reclaim their land and attain development, it involved processes of exclusion that kept people from physically accessing, making decisions about, and benefiting from their land. On the one hand, my interlocutors expressed contentment with a number of positive services and infrastructure delivered by the oil palm company, such as the new roads that connected the Kairak settlements and several of their garden sites, the electrification of some hamlets, and the building of a school, a church, and few dwelling houses, as well as the monthly sing and play sessions for children, and periodic sports competitions for the youth. On the other hand, they had become aware that the project had disrupted their community, changed their leadership structure, raised disputes about their identity, and cut them off from their means of reproduction. Thus, this thesis showed that while the discourse of development had shaped Baining understandings about community (as) development, and effectively criticised existing social and economic inequalities, it had also created the conditions that led to Vir Kairak's further dispossession and the emergence of new inequalities both within and outside the community.

“A storyteller does not concern themselves with the truth.
Stories are truer than the truth.”

Ibis, American Gods

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – Transcripts in Tok Pisin

1. *Hia nogat wanpela bai lukim na askim long em. Bikos ol lain askim mi husat i givim mi narapela. Sapos em i lukim dispela, em bai tok olsem “yu gat tupela, yu givim mi wanpela” na mi mas givim. Taim mi putim paip long haus, brata bilong mi bai no askim.*
2. *Ol i kisim long Tavir. Mipela wokim, ol mangalim. Sampela bilong narapela bai ol i kam, joinim ol lain long Tavir; inap bai yu luksave. Dispela, em dispela bilong narapela ples ya. Ol mama tu i olsem. Ol mama ol i no save long sikret. Na bihain ol mama long hia, bai ol i luksave long dispela em rong. Narapla yea. Na yumi, yumi save tok olsem: em hia, yumi em namba wan. Yu lukim dispela, ol i putim wanem moni? ... Em ya, bai mi soim yu.*
3. *....man bai wokim piksa bilong Kavet em i laik wokim long graun. Planti taim. Planti de bai em lukluk na wokim pisksa na tinktink...Ol paten tu. Em bai wokim piksa long graun na praktisim.*
4. *Yu wokim **wrap** bilong em nating tasol. Yu mekim nating! Yu putim nating lo skin bilo yu. Yu putim na danis nabaut tinktink olsem i no gutpla. Taim wanpla i potoim yu na givim yu; yu lukim em bai yu sem. Yu lukim, yu mangalim. Yu tink yu lukim nating tasol yu lukim gut.*
5. *Bipo kastom em i bin hevi, na ol i respektim. Sapos meri i luksave ai em bai stap. Nau kastom em lait, em i no strong olsem bipo, na taim meri luksave ol bai tokautim, na ol daunim kastom. So mipela wokim bikipela maus long haitim ai bilong man.*
6. *Sapos sampela i laik danis yu mas larim em, tasol ol i no harim tok bilong mi na dispela samting i kamap.*
7. *Mi tokim ol yu mas larim em bikos em kastom – i gat planti kain mask. Tasol nau ol i no laikim dispela. Ol i no laik mask bilong en.*

8. *Em stopim ol long wokim kastom, nae m i go long **crusade** long Marusem, we ol i kamautim sikret bilong mask long ol meri na pikinini.*
9. *Bihain bikipela war, wanpela Methodist pasta i kam long ples. Em stat prich long bus. So nau, mipela stap Methodist.*
10. *Mipela i stradim wantaim i go go go... long pinisim planti hap long bus long kisim wanpela gutpela samting. Mipela i bihainim bikos dispela toktok em tru. Dispela samting kalt i tichim, long mi yet, personally, i tok sampela em tru. Mipela kisim sampela divais bilong sampela man – wait man long painim... Mipela i traim nogat. Mipela mas wok strong long kisim. Ol wait man em i save. Dispela samting i stap – em trupela samting. Tasol bikos mipela i traim nogat, i no save hau na mipela i kisim... Sapos yu strong dispela graun bilong yu ya; bai yu kisim na dispela graun bai win. Mipela i traim i go go go nogat na nau ol i wok long planim wanem ya... Bihain gavman biling mipela i tok olsem dispela samting i no stap hia. Bipo ol i tok dispela dispela dispela island em i pulap. Tasol bihain gavman bilong mipela sampela ol man bilong narapla katri i tok nogat, na mi no save i tru nabaut em i stap o so olsem mipela i sem.*
11. *So nau mipela i stap malolo olsem mipela i lotu tasol long God. Taim mipela i stap olsem em ya dispela kain senis i kamap olsem long graun ol i planim palm long en. Tasol ol i laik senisim laip bilong mipela long bai mipela i [no] gat liklik moni. Ol i senisim graun bilong ol i laik benefitim pipol long sampela moni bai kam long palm.*
12. *Mi lukim piksa bilong mi – mi Michael – ples bilong mi. Insait i gat hart, na insait hart i gat wanem kain rubbish, rubbish i stap long hia, na tudak. No light, i stap long hia. Ok mi lukim baibel i stap long hia [somewhere near]. Em open, i stap lo hia, mi lukim lait. Lait long dispela baibel em i kam insait. Em lait long mi. Na devil i gat tupela horn, na spia bilong em, em i stap long hia [the spear] long hart bilong mi. **When I woke up in the morning I cried.** Mi tokim nupela mama [wife] mi lukim drimman, mi yet bagarapman, mi sinman. **The same year we had a big camp,** baibel stadi **in Gaulim of UC.** Taim wanpela reverent i bin toktok, mi sanap **and I told about this. I***

confessed. Asked to God forgive me. I stood up inform of all, and told them about this, and I prayed. The pastor, talatala he prayed over me.

13. *Okay, then I was a man of kastom – of fire dance. Mi bin masta long paia danis. Okay 2010 i kam I was in my gardens in Kalangmes I saw another dream. In this dream I saw one fire dance mask. Mask paia dans i stap na graun i karamapim. Then I heard a voice shout. There was no man, I only heard the voice. It said: “You see. Mask bilong Baining God bai distroyim. Na nau bai nogat mask bilo paia dance, bikos displa em givim karabus.”*
14. *Our ancestors took it, adopted it. The image of the spirit. Baibel i tok, God i tok olsem: no ken, **do not** worshipim **other god**. No ken wokim wanpela spirit i stap long heaven, i stap long hia, i stap bilo graun, long wokim piksa bilong en, na worshipim bikos **I am a jealous god**.*
15. *Ol I tok, olgeta samting em blessing. Dispela blessing, narapela blessing, Moni blessing, car blessing, oil palm blessing, olgeta samting blessing! Mi no laikim. Lukim trak bilong en. Em blessing ya. Nem bilong em Heavenly Blessing. Nau em bruk i stap long haus. If em blessing wai em bruk?! Em i no blessing.*
16. *Olgeta blessing, **inheritance** bilong yu we god i bin redim tru long nem bilong Jesus, em bai kam long yu. Yumi ol Baining nogat **name**. Ol man i tok daunim yumi. Yupela i tok ol i no gat save. Insait long bikipela skul, bikipela wok, ol i no gat man i stap long save long nem bilong yumi bikos **we are nothing. But through the Holy Spirit** yumi kamap sambodi! [louder] **In Jesus! Powerful! Wealthy men!***
17. ***Today** yumi **privileged** bikos spirit long God **is in** yu! Hallelujah! Bikos tru long God, tru long spirit bilog God, em i reisim man i no gat name na i kamap lait tru Jesus. Like tude yumi amamas. Bikos God i kalap long yumi. I no gavman i halivim yumi. [people nodding and humming in confirmation] Hallelujah! Yu ken lukim planti man long Jesus [clapping] God yet i kalapim yumi long glory bilong en. I no gavman. Gavman i no save. Tude, ol pikinini i seve go long skul na kam bek, go kam bek, go drop out, drop out, drop out. Nogat man i holim bai stetes long balus long flai antap, nogat man i holim stetes bilo kaptan long sip long rot long sol wara. Nogat man i kamap lawyer.*

Nogat wanpla Baining i kamap dokta. Nogan wan man i presin long bikpla ol haus i nabout. Nogat, nogat Baining man. **Why?! Education** i stap long aninit long system! **System** bilong gavman.

18. God i kam insait long man. Tru long man yumi bai save em God stap long man. Man i wokim samting em God i move tru long man. Tru long bodi. God em i stap long ol pipol. Man i mas senisim laip bilong en, na God bai kam insait long em. God em Spirit. Mipela no ken lukim God, tasol mipela inap lukim God tru man...God em laip. Em i givim yu strong. Tasol, pastaim wanpela i mas senisim laip bilong en. Em i mas **born again**, long kisim Christ long laip insait.
19. Sapos yu tok long gift pasin long givim. Sapos yu prichim dispela yu mas also actionim dispela tok. Yu mas givim.
20. Mi wokim hart na mekim gaden; wantain liklik moni mi gat, mi baim liklik samting long wokim haus. Bihain gen, liklik moni, liklik samting. Na olsem, mi pinisim haus.
21. Bipo sapos kiap i kam, long displa ples na mi luluai. Mi no inap lusim tinktink long kep, mi kisim kep, mi putim, mi go, mitupela i toktok wantaim kiap. Kiap i save olsem mi luluai, tasol mi mas putim yet kepm em namba. Mi putim yet namba olsem **respect** long dispela, namba ya. Em disela **position**. Hia long Tavir kep i stap until 1977. So mi tok: Papa bilong yupela i rausim namba bilong Australia, nan au yu laik rausim namba bilong Baining. Long mi... long danis, mi no lukim olsem god. Nogat. Mi save. Taim mi stap tarayu, mi prey long God long halpim (halivim) mi long wokim dis samting. Tasol mi lukim olsem dispela, em **important value**, bikos long bodi. Na taim em piksa bilong en i stap long mani, mi kolim olsem em ting long body, long dispela laip. Olsem na mi no klirim ol, na ol i no... em i hard long **explain**.
22. Mama bilong mi karim mi long dispela ples. Mipela olgeta i bin karim long dispela ples. Tumbuna bilong mipela i bin karim long bus. Wanpela ples ol i kolim Ramāsaga.
23. Sapos yu walkabout long bus na you painim lain bilong narapela, yu mas kilim em. Bikos, sapos yu no kilim, em bai kilim yu. O sapos em ranawe, em ken bringim man bilong em na redim ples bilong yu.

24. *mipela banisim graun wantaim tapiok, banana, na kokonas. Taim graun kamapim kaikai santing, ol lain bai save em bilong onepela man. Ol i bringim mipela long dispela ples, tasol mipela i mas holim pas graun bilong mipela.*
25. *Pasttaim em birth papa bilong mi i bin go long Lanivit. Em i bin wokim koko blok na planim sampela taro. Em i bin planim sampela kokonas tu, na tude ol bikipela na givim planti kokonas. Em i bin mekim wanpela haus long hap na em i bin kisim pamili bilong en. Bihain narapla i bihainim em... Graun em gutpela long Lanivit. Em blak na em soft. I no bin planim, i no bin yusim planti olsem long dispela hap. So, papa bilong mi i bin go long wokim wanpela bikipela koko blok na stoppim ol outsiders inap planim. 2012 em i dai pinis, na ol lain i sementim matmat bilong em, na putim wanpela kros na dispela liklik olsem haus antap long matmat long makim en olsem em founder long ples.*
26. *Easi long paitim cort. Tude lukim hamas **sectors** em rausim...Ol i wokim haus – permanent haus. Mipela i rausim planti. Karamapim olgeta graun, olgeta i bin karamapim – ol Tolai, ol Sepik – mipela i bin rausim ol. Kampani halivim mipela wantaim right papa graun.*
27. *...Delay bilo thispla oil i no sanap bikos ol settlers. Sompla Tolai, ol bilo naprla provins olgeta i stap lo hap lo graun. Na ol i bin pasim hap we bai mill i stap lo instait long title. Ol i disputim right bilong mipela long papa groun.*
28. *Long sait long Kerevat, ol lain hia bilong Tavir, nogat man i bin wokim haus tambilo long taim ol i muv yusim oil palm i karamapim em ol blok. Em ol block koko tasol, i no haus, i no kam lo tumbuna bilo bipo o ol i senis. Nogat. Nau nau, ol man tasol i wok garden, planim liklik kakao. Taim CPB – Koko Pod Bora – i kam na kilim olgeta kakao, olgeta kakao blok i bush. Bush i karamapim pinis, bikos long CPB. Mi wan mi stap antap long Kalangmes na ol narapela i stap tambilo. But long plan bilong mipela, mipela i laikim bai dispela ol lain hia ol i mas muv long ol blok bilong ol, bikos graun bilong ol i stap wantaim mi long Kalangmes. Ol narapela land bilong ol. Ol i laik blok stap long Kalangmes ol i ken stap wantaim mi but ol i mas lusim ol blok bilog hia bai kampani i planim palm long en bai bilong ol gen.*

29. *Bihain sampela taim ol Lavuyāna bruk long ol **clan**, tasol mipela no save gut dispela stori. Mi rekolim sampela part tasol i no tru stori. So yu mas sekim wantaim narapela Baining. Em stori long wanpela bikpela tower ol Lavuyāna i bin wokim. Ol Lavuyāna stat wokim wanpela bikpela tower i go antap long skai. Ol i wok, wok, wok, na em bruk na ol pipol o pundaun. Ol long narapela ples i stap long East New Britain. Nau, ol i toktok narapela tok ples na ol i gat lend bilong ol.*
30. *Mipela Vir i no laikim. Na Kairak bikpela nem. So ol i laikim mipela go insait. Mipela i less. Bikos graun em bikpela samting. Na mipela i no save hau ol wokim oil palm, bikos mipela i save olsem oil palm save bagarapim graun. Mipela i lukim long West New Britain. Ol i bagarapim graun. Na garden, kaikai bai i no kamap gut...Taim projek i kam Kairak lain wantaim Qopki na Suparmatka. Nogat Vir. Vir mipela i stap. Mipela i lukluk tasol. I go, i go, na nau, dispyut i kamaut.*
31. *Long hia mipela i gat tupela grup: ol lain husat i saportim oil palm, na ol lain husat i oposim. I bin planti dispyuts. Nau planti i bin akseptim project, tasol mipela stil wanpela grup husat i oposim. Mipela i gat wanpela kort. Papa bilong yu em lidim dispela kort, wantaim sampela ol lain bilong Lanivit na Ripka, Ganbraga na Gaulim. Long rausim kampani. Ol i no laikim oil palm bai stap long graun bikos em bagarapim graun. Mipela ol Baining, em laip bilong mipela, em graun, long wok garden. Garden... na ol divai i stap antap na ol enimal olsem ol waild pik, murup, kengeru, ol long hunt.*
32. *Nau ol Malaysia i strong long taitilim graun long ol Kairak. Na ol i strongim. So dispela taitil i no inap wanpela long rausim. Taim ol i putim ol i raunim graun wantaim taitil, em graun bilong ol nau – Malaysia.*
33. *...ol i no wokim awernes. Ol i kam na dispela miting ol i kam long tokim ol man olsem: Bai gat project lo oil palm blo kam insait, na yupela bai mas... taim oil palm bai kam yupela mas tok olsem yupela i laikim. Na yupela olgeta bai tok olsem yupela ol Kairak. Yupela Kairak!"*
34. *Husat mipela i nau sanap opposition mipela i bin disagri. Olsem, em i no stret. Mipela mas sanap lo raits bilo mipela. Olsem, mipela noken bagarapim bus graun bilo mipela.*

In order mipela i stap na bihain mipela i go bek long dispela bai mipela i wok gaden, bai mipela i save painim wail abus lo bus na lo wara. Bai ol i no ken bagarapim planim oil palm. Bikos ol i tok lo 99 yias; bai 99 yias bihain bai ol i pinisim dispela wok ya, tasol yumi no save, bihain lo 99 yias bai olsem wanem. Na tu, ol dis taim bai yumi wok gaden we? Em samting ya i save bagarapim graun ya. Yu no inap planim wanpela kaikai. Em bai kaikai bai i no kamap gut.

35. *Bikos taitil em strongpela mark; sapos taitil ol i putim, em graun em dai pinis. Bilong ol nau... Ol i taitilim pinis graun. Ol i kilim graun bilong ol. Bikpla moni ol i yusim, ol i baim taitil. Ol i baim Kairak...Bikos em bilong narapla man em bai dai, ye.*
36. *But Satade tupela anti nis bilo mi i bin harim narapela, ol lain i wok lo toktok olsem: Rose i save olsem olsem na ol lain i tok olsem; yumi mas stretim toktok hariap nogut ol brata bilo Rose no inap kisim royalty.*
37. *“Rose i save toktok toktok em bai ol brata bilong em bai no inap kisim [royalty]. Olsem na bai yupela i kisim em i kam na toktok long en i pasim maus bilong en” W...Mi tok: “Mi sanap lo rait sait. Mi sanap lo rait olsem, mi no amamas ol i bin kisim, yupela i kisim graun, olgeta graun ya yupela i kisim na bihain yumi save wok garden na olgeta samting bai yumi wokim we? Nogat graun moa.”*
38. *Tu, dispela manager ya bai yupela i lukim frut bilong wok hat bilong yupela. Bai yupela i lukim long bihain later bai kisim yu, bai givim yupela rayalti mani?! Wanem kain mani yupela i sapos kisim bai givim yupela o nogat?! Mi, mi save stret bikos bipo i no bin givim yupela wanpela samting taim bilo logging.*
39. *Ol i kirap na ol i tok olsem: “Man ya em senis. Pasin bilong en senis na em bai mekim.” Na mi, mi no ken toktok nogut ol brata bilong mi bai no inap kisim royalty mani...Mi no inap wanbel wantain yupela. Mi no inap senisim tingting bilo mi olsem mi tok orait na mi bihainim yupela long dispela tinktink olsem. Yupela wanbel wantaim oil palm. Mi nogat.*
40. *Mipela i save, samting bai kamap olsem benefit – mani – em bai bilong ol yet. Ol tasol bai kisim mani. Na mipela bai nogat. Mipela i save. Ol i save wokim olsem bipo, taim*

ol save kisim mani long ol loging. Ol tasol i save gridi wantaim mani. Ol tasol, ol bik man.

41. *Mipela i larim long han bilong ol. Bikos mipela i ting ol bai i givim ol lotu. I go na i no givim, mipela i larim. Tok tenkyu tasol. Tenkyu long promis bilo yupla. Larim olsem...Bipo ol tumbuna, em pasin bilong ol. Ol i no save toktok. Yu giamanim em, em larim olsem. Em yet i giamanim em. Bihain taim mi no save, yu dai bai yu go we. Ol tumbuna tu olsem. Ol tumbuna bipo ol gutpla man... So mipela i bihainim yet.*
42. *Em, bipo i bin kamap long dispela mi bin toktok ya. Sapos wanpela paia danis na olgeta bai i holim kuk kaikai. Na tok piksa, sapos em, pikinini bilong mi em tripela: Benjim, David, na Junias. Na sapos ol i wok long painim abus na David ya i no inap painim wanpela abus bilong en, na Benjim na Junias ol i gat abus. Na sapos Junias bai go wantaim Vungvung, oke em tupela brata bai wokabaut wantaim: Benjim na David wantaim Kavet na Junias wantaim Vungvung. Tripela bai wokabaut wantaim. Bikos narapela man, narapla Kavet i no gat kaikai, na bai olsem hait long dispela kaikai bilong tupela ya. Ol man i lukim, "em ya olgeta kaikai i bilong ol ya."*
43. *Em bai tinktink em pikinini, man bilong en, o brata bilong en husat i painim. O em papa o brata, sapos em marit. Bihain, morningtaim, tai mem i bringim moran long mama o meri bilong dispela man husat i givim em, em bai lainim husat i ownim moran. Taim mama o meri akseptim moran, meri bai save em i bin dispela man husat i kechim moran. Sapos meri bilong en o mama tokim em yu go givim abus long wampela susa bilong dispela meri, em bai save em i bin brata bilong en husat i kechim moran.*

APPENDIX 2 – ILG Registration Form



Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Sec.5

THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

APPLICATION FOR RECOGNITION AS AN INCORPORATED LAND GROUP

INSTRUCTION FOR COMPLETING THIS FORM

1. This form must be completed in BLUE PEN and must be hand-written.
2. This form must be accompanied by the following requirements;
 - 2.1) Form 2 - Records of Meeting Decision
 - 2.2) Form 3 - Certificate on Adoption of Constitution
 - 2.3) Form 4 - List of Membership accompanied by Birth Certificates
 - 2.4) Form 5 - List of Property
 - 2.5) Constitution of the Land Group
 - 2.6) Sketch map of all customary land owned by the land group.
3. The application with all required information must be submitted in DUPLICATE.
4. This form should be completed with the assistance of the Provincial Customary Lands Officer.
5. Provincial Lands Advisor must endorse your application. Without the Provincial Lands Office's endorsement, the application will not be processed.
6. All applications must be lodged through the respective Provincial Lands Office.
7. All Publication Fees in the National Gazette and the Media is to be paid by the Applicant.
8. Your ILG Certificate will be forwarded by registered post, unless you elect to be collected personally by the group Chairman or the Secretary strictly upon presentation of a valid identification card only. Ensure your postal address used in this application, must be reliable.

1. I, ... (Secretary) of (Village), ... (Province) being the person authorized by the members of the land group to make the application on their behalf for their recognition as an incorporated land group to be known by the name of Land Group Incorporated. The land group hereby submits the application for incorporation.

2. The group has the following qualification for recognition as an incorporated land group:

(i) The group is entirely made up of the members of (Clan) of (village) village, which have been in existence for generations, and which has common customs and shared interests in customary land.

The members of the group reside in the Local Level Government Area District Province

The accompanying list of members includes their particulars like Name, Date of Birth, Place of Birth, Capacity (Full Member, Guardian), Current Address.

Certified copies of birth certificates should be submitted with the list of members.

(ii) The group enjoys varying interests according to custom to the following as specified in the attached list.

3. The group is within the jurisdiction of the Village Court

4. The proposed dispute-settlement authority of the group comprises:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Village</u>
.....		
.....		
.....		

(Note: No members of the Management Committee should be included on the Dispute Settlement Authority (DSA). The DSA should be an independent and a neutral body to deliberate on the ILG's disputes)

5. The Management Committee comprises:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Chairperson		
Deputy Chairperson		
Secretary		
Treasurer		
Female Rep		
Female Rep		

Dated this _____ day of _____ 20____

Signature of Applicant: _____

Name of Applicant: _____

Postal Address: _____

Current Phone Contact: _____

Collection/Despatch Instructions to the Office of Registrar of ILG: (Tick whichever is applicable)

☐ The ILG Certificate will be collected in person when it is ready.

☐ Please send the ILG Certificate by registered post to the above address when it is ready.

Assisted by the Provincial Customary Lands Officer:

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Comments and Recommendations by Provincial Lands Advisor:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Signature: _____

(Note: Please sign and stamp)

Name: _____

Date: _____



Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Form 2

Sec. 14A - 14D

RECORD OF MEETING DECISION

This is to certify that, a meeting of the land group held at.....
.....village on the day of
20....., where.....adult members of the group were
present, the following decision was taken:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Under the Constitution of the land group, this decision is a decision of the land group, and is binding on all members of the land group.

The Committee;

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Chairperson		
D/Chairperson		
Secretary		
Treasurer		
Female Com. Member		
Female Com. Member		



Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Form 3

Sec.5

CERTIFICATION

1. Adoption of Constitution;
2. Records of Meetings

.....Land Group (Incorporated)

This is to certify that, at a meeting of the Land Group held on

the.....day of 20.....

at.....Village.

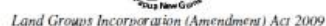
Decision was taken:-

1. The.....Clan shall incorporate under the Lands Group Incorporation Act
2. The.....Clan hereby adopts this Constitution
3. The.....Clan hereby adopts the attached list of members and their respective birth certificates as an accurate record of the present living clan members.

Under the Constitution of the Land Group, this decision is a decision of the Land Group, and is binding on all members of the Land Group.

Dated this.....day of.....20.....

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Chairperson		
D/Chairperson		
Secretary		
Treasurer		
Female Committee Member		
Female Committee Member		



Sec.5



..... Clan Village
..... LLG, ... District

[illegible]

Endorsed by: (Ward Member)
 (Council Ward)
 (LLG)
 Signature:

Signature: _____



Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Form 5



Sec.5

LIST OF PROPERTY

.....Clan Village
.....LLG, ...District

Property Name	Indicate Type (ie. Land, river, reef, mountain, swamp etc)

Endorsed by: (Ward Member)
..... (Council Ward)
..... (LLG)

Signature:

Note: Attach sketch map of the properties listed in the property list.



Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Form 6

Sec.5B (2)

Dissemination of Notice of Incorporation of Land Group

To: The Registrar of Incorporated Land Groups.

I, ... District Administrator for
..... District in whose district the land group is
situated hereby confirm receiving the Notice of Incorporation of Land Group
to be known as Land Group (Incorporated).
The Notice of Application has been widely published to persons having
knowledge of or interest in the affairs of the land group or its members.

Dated this day of 20.....

Signature:

Name:

Designation: District Administrator

(Official Stamp)



Land Groups Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Form 7

Sec.5B (2)

Verification Form

To: The Registrar of Incorporated Land Groups.

I, ... District Administrator for

..... District in whose district the land group is

situated am satisfied that, the Notice of Application by.....

..... Land Group has been widely published to

persons having knowledge of or interest in the affairs of the land group or its members.

I acknowledge receiving (tick which is appropriate)

☐

No Objection

☐

Objection

within the 30 days period from members of the land group or the community at large and therefore recommend that you shall (tick which is appropriate)

☐

Issue the Certificate of Recognition the Land Group.

☐

Not issue the Certificate of Recognition to the Land Group.
(give reasons below)

.....

.....

.....

.....

The.....day of 20.....

Signature:

Name:

Designation: District Administrator

(Official Stamp)



Form 8

Land Group Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009

Sec. 9

ILG Reg. #.....

CHANGE OF COMMITTEE FORM

The following change in the committee of _____ Land Group (Inc)
took place on (Date) _____ At (Venue) _____
ILG meeting number _____

Committee Retiring

<u>Names</u>	<u>Signed</u>	<u>Position</u>
1.....		
2.....		
3.....		
4.....		
5.....		
6.....		

Committee Appointed

<u>Names</u>	<u>Signed</u>	<u>Position</u>
1.....		
2.....		
3.....		
4.....		
5.....		
6.....		

Dispute Settlement Authority

<u>Names</u>	<u>Signed</u>	<u>Position</u>

1.....
.....
2.....
.....
3.....
.....

Date:..... Witness:.....
Print Name.....

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