Witchcraft, Statecraft, and the Challenge of "Community" in Central New Guinea
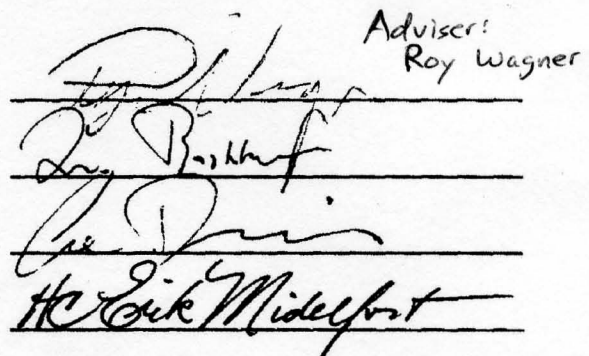
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abstract

This dissertation examines how and why "witchcraft" came to be the primary obstacle of local efforts to build "community" in Nimakot, an area in the Mountain Ok region of central New Guinea. I begin by pointing out that witchcraft is a part of a broader cultural process I call relational sociality, oftentimes referred to in studies of self and personhood as dividuality. "Community" on the other hand is part of the very different cultural process of modern statecraft. One of the core differences between these two cultural processes is in the domain of personhood and identity. While relational sociality emphasizes relational identities, modern statecraft instead emphasizes categorical identities. The tensions between these cultural processes come to a head in Operation Clean and Sweep, a plan developed by indigenous government officers in which the small hamlets scattered throughout the bush were to be eliminated, forcing all people to live in one of twelve government-recognized villages. The plan comes to a halt however, when many begin complaining that they cannot move to the government villages due to fears of witchcraft. At this point, the operation altered its focus as it became a concentrated effort to use the mechanisms of statecraft to annihilate witchcraft, clearing the way for "community." While witchcraft is a small part of a much broader relational ontology, this relational ontology is most visible to social actors in the accusations and imageries of witchcraft. Hence it is witchcraft that is viewed locally as the core obstacle to community. I examine how the cultural processes of relational sociality and statecraft interact throughout the operation and how the dynamics between them are negotiated. In conclusion, I illustrate that by attacking witchcraft, the operation only attacks relational sociality tangentially – allowing the relational tensions it does not address to produce more witchcraft accusations, ultimately reproducing the small scattered hamlets and relational sociality the operation originally set out to eliminate.

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Everywhere I went throughout the Mountain Ok region I received a hero's welcome, yet I was only a stranger. The reason for this is surely embedded in customs and colonial history of which I explain in this dissertation, but also on the warmth, kindness, and integrity of the anthropologists who have come to the region before me. Though many people I met did not know what an anthropologist was, my explanation that I was "like Dan" (Jorgensen), "Joel" (Robbins), "Wilson" (Wheatcroft), "Tony" (Crook), "Don" (Gardner), "George" (Morren), or "Eytan" (Bercovitch) was always greeted with the most joyous and enthusiastic response, as if they had reconnected with a long lost brother. I am grateful for all of the help and support each one of these

anthropologists has given me throughout my research, and especially for being so gracious in the field that I was warmly welcomed throughout the region.

I would like to thank the Melanesian And Pacific Studies (MAPS) Center at the University of Papua New Guinea for inviting me to give a seminar as I was leaving the field in 2003. The rich discussions that followed helped a great deal in shaping my ideas. I would especially like to thank Nick Araho, Andrew Moutu, and the entire staff at the Papua New Guinea National Museum for giving me a place to stay in Port Moresby and providing a rich intellectual environment. During this time I also had the pleasure of meeting Robert Welsch, a great listener, and a tremendous guide on many levels.

I came to the Mountain Ok region of New Guinea for the first time in 1999 as an over-spirited and somewhat naive first year graduate student of anthropology, but I did not come to Nimakot to do anthropological fieldwork. I came only to fulfill a simple promise made to a fast friend – whom I now know and love as a brother – that I would visit the place where he grew up and now lives with his wife and newborn son. It was to be a quick visit, a simple stopover, a side-trip along the way to my real field site 30 miles east of Nimakot. But I fell in love. I had been to many places throughout Papua New Guinea, but none as happy, playful, enthusiastic and vivid as Nimakot. I wish to thank all of the people of Nimakot for an unforgettable 18 months, but most of all I must thank Lazarus, Penny, Alfonz, and Deon. The classic term "key informants" simply does not do you all justice. You are my best friends and brothers *na tru tru mi no inap lusim tingting long yu*.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Above all, anthropology should proceed, like good fieldwork, in full awareness

of difference and contradiction.

     - Roy Wagner, The Invention of Culture 1981(1975):158

This research started with the wrong question: *Have conceptions of self and*

personhood in central New Guinea transformed from dividual or relational forms to

more individualistic forms since the introduction of modern institutions such as

statecraft, Christianity, formal education, and biomedicine? I am not the first to ask

this question. Several research projects in Melanesia and elsewhere, especially over the

past 20 years, have had some form of this question in mind, at least as a tangent to the

research if not the main focus. Fortunately, the process of discovering why this was the

wrong question sheds light towards a solution, so recounting my own mistakes by way

of introduction seems appropriate.

    Following Michelle Rosaldo, I take "conceptions of self" to be "all concerns that

bear on folk understandings of human action" (1980:262 n.18). In Melanesia, shifting

conceptions of self are considered to be fundamental to understanding broader cultural

changes. As Edward LiPuma noted recently, conceptions of self

      "figure centrally in any understanding of the forms and implications of the

      conversation between Melanesia and the West, not least because the concepts of

personhood indigenous to Melanesia and Papua New Guinea in particular are significantly different from those embodied in Western practice and texts and presupposed by the colonially inspired political institutions that define the emerging states of Oceania" (2000:128).

The differences between Western and Melanesian conceptions of self were most thoroughly laid out by Marilyn Strathern. In a landmark study bringing together masses of ethnographic data, she described Melanesian personhood as being as much "dividual" as *in*dividual, pointing out that Melanesians tend to conceptualize themselves as defined and constituted by social relationships rather than independent from them (1988; see also Wagner 1974, 1975, 1988). For Melanesians, the person is socially and collectively constituted rather than individuated. A person's strength, health, intelligence, disposition, and behavior depend on the strength and nature of one's relationships (Read 1955, Goodale 1995, Knauft 1999:26).

Before explaining why the question was misguided, allow me to elaborate on why the question seemed so compelling by recounting some of the previous research on self and personhood in the region where I was working. Wilson Wheatcroft's research from 1968 to 1970 among the nearby Tifalmin and the subsequent work of Eytan Bercovitch from 1981 to 1985 among the Umfokmin (Atbalmin) provided a detailed understanding of the discourses and basic cultural postulates related to self and personhood as they existed prior to the introduction and widespread acceptance of Western institutions. Though Western institutions were present when both of them did

their respective fieldwork, they were not widely accepted or incorporated. Both researchers were able to marginalize the effects of these institutions in their original findings.

Wheatcroft's analysis focuses primarily on three basic cultural postulates which he claims were fundamental to their understanding of social life and the self – *sinik* ("spirit"), *awaim* ("taboo"), and *bis* ("witchcraft"). The strength of a person's sinik determined social and practical intelligence as well as physical prowess. Illness or ill behavior was often attributed to a weak sinik. The strength of the sinik was dependent on strong relationships with other sinik – the sinik of other people and ancestors, as well as plants and animals. Men went through an elaborate series of initiations in order to bring them into strong and significant relationships with the siniks of ancestors, thereby strengthening their own sinik. Siniks could either help or poison one another and so had to be kept in proper relationship by a broad range of taboos (*awaim*). Each stage of initiation remapped one's relationships, thereby entailing a transformation of the sinik and a corresponding change in the taboos ("*awaim*") one must observe. Misfortune and ill health were often traced to a transgression of awaim and the intermixing of incompatible sinik, but rarely were such transgressions considered to lead to death. Deaths were instead explained by witchcraft (*bis*). Together, bis, awaim, and sinik were the basic postulates used to explain good and bad behavior, strength and weakness, vitality and death, and sickness and health.

Through several ethnographic examples, Wheatcroft examines how these postulates were fundamental to local understandings, descriptions, and explanations of

everyday life. Relating these postulates back to broader categories of self and personhood, Wheatcroft illustrates that these postulates encourage and emphasize values of interdependence and relationality over those of independence and individualism, as the strength of the sinik depends on strong amiable relationships defined by awaim taboos, and those who exhibited independence and refused to share or socialize amiably with others were most at risk of being attacked by, or accused of, bis witchcraft. Later work by Eytan Bercovitch shows that these basic postulates remained operative through the early 1980s. Working in nearby Bomtem from 1981 to 1985, Bercovitch reported that relationships with spirits (which included sinik and bis among many others) determined a person's physical and mental condition and their behavior (1989a, 1989b).

But new discourses were on the horizon and major changes were imminent even while Bercovitch was still in the field. As he prepared to leave in 1985, a group of recently converted Christian women were making threats to burn down what they had come to view as the "sinfully secretive" male ritual house, while the men who watched over the house were growing more and more apathetic (1998, 2004, and personal communication). By the time I first arrived in Tumolbil in June of 2000, the house and its relics had long since been burned and buried, and now seem a distant memory. Presently, the basic cultural postulates of *awaim, sinik,* and *bis* have been significantly altered: the *awaim* taboos rarely hold, *sinik* often denotes first and foremost the Christian Holy Spirit, and while *bis* is still a powerful postulate, it participates in a

radically altered socio-cultural field that includes state bureaucracy, law, biomedicine, education, and Christianity.

Historical studies of modernity in the West have suggested that institutions such as these are markedly individualist, and played central roles in the development of Western individualism (e.g. Foucault 1975, 1978; Taylor 1989; Dumont 1980). These studies argue that the discourses and practices of these institutions covertly impose conceptions of a bounded, inward, independent individual. Education imposes an interior, individual *mind* that can be filled up with abstract knowledge to guide individual action, biomedicine formalizes the *body* into a purely material and individual object, and Christianity presumes the individual *spirit* as the unit of salvation, fosters a self-monitoring inwardness, and marks the body as the spirit's *sin*ful and lustful counterpart. School, clinic, and church are like institutional manifestations of the Western trilogy of the individual – *mind*, *body*, and *spirit* (LiPuma 2000).

The contrast between Nimakot propensities towards relationality and these recently introduced individualizing institutions led to that question, *Have conceptions of self and personhood in central New Guinea transformed from dividual or relational forms to more individualistic forms since the introduction of modern institutions such as statecraft, Christianity, formal education, and biomedicine?*

I proceeded well aware of current arguments that suggest that this question is misguided because the dichotomy of dividual Melanesians and individual Westerners exaggerates differences to the point of incommensurability, leaving no space for the possibility of a cross-cultural exchange (LiPuma 2000, Stewart and Strathern 2000: see

also Said 1978; Fabian 1983; Hollan 1992; Spiro 1993). Critics of the dichotomy point out that both Western and Melanesian ideas and institutions contain both dividual and individual aspects, and it is these correspondences that have facilitated the incorporation of state government, schools, churches, clinics, and other aspects of modernity. For example, Christianity contains dividual aspects such as kindness and the nurturing of social relationships, while some indigenous institutions such as competitive exchange and bigmanship have individualist aspects. In short, they argue that though there are differences, there are also points of commensurability that allow for a cross-cultural conversation.

I was skeptical of this argument however, as it seemed to deny some of the very real cross-cultural differences I had experienced in my earlier fieldwork. Instead of taking commensurability for granted I wanted to see how commensurability was built and created across differences within the social field.

There were two types of differences I expected to find: those between different people in different social positions, and those between different cultural systems (which I then imagined as Foucaultian "discourses" building from recent developments in Critical Discourse Analysis I explain below).

The differences I expected to find between people were primarily between those with different levels of experience with the modern institutions I assumed to be transforming conceptions of self. I expected the younger generation, many of whom were to be educated in Western schools, to have more individualistic concepts of self than their elders who never attended school. I expected to find other important

differences between Christians and non-Christians, and between the rising elite of government officers, teachers, and medical technicians, and less educated people in the village.

While my question was misguided for reasons I will get to shortly, I found this particular part of my approach to be very productive. Instead of imagining a singular culture I built from the strand of theorizing involving what Theodore Schwartz calls a "distributive model of culture" (1978; see discussion by Rodseth 1997). This relatively silent alternative to the homogeneity model of culture has been around at least since Sapir's famous reminder of the conflicting reports Dorsey received during his fieldwork over one hundred years ago, "Two Crows denies this" (1938:7). In its most useful formulations, this model asks for a "re-sociologization of culture" in which the distribution and production of meaning is viewed in the context of a contested field of social existence and relationships (Friedman 1994:207; Hannerz 1992, 1999; Brumann 1999). Along similar lines, Roger Keesing has insightfully argued that we must understand the ways meanings are distributed and controlled, and that "cultures as texts … are differently read, differently construed, by men and women, young and old, experts and non-experts, even in the least complex societies" (1987:161, cited in Hannerz 1992:13).

As I mentioned, I also expected to find differences between different cultural systems or "discourses" within the same social field. I found support for this approach in Eytan Bercovitch's most recent insightful analyses of the Umfokmin, just 22 kilometers east of Nimakot. He uses the term "social multiplicity" to refer to similar

complexities in the social field in which "people possess several, often contradictory sets of beliefs and practices" (2001:212). Along with Christianity, Bercovitch designates government and business along with indigenous ways as other sets of beliefs and practices in conflict with one another. Just before I left for the field in 2002 I also received a manuscript from Joel Robbins taking a similar approach as he interpreted Christianity among the Urapmin as a culture taken on in whole which existed uneasily along side the indigenous culture (the manuscript later became Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society (2004)).

I originally used the term "discourse" to describe each of the multiple sets of beliefs and practices present in the social field. I hoped to capitalize on the term's ambiguity, for it's meaning varies from "language in use" to critical social theorist definitions stemming largely from Foucault as a set of symbols and meanings, the rules for the use of those symbols and meanings, and the power relations that sustain those symbols and meanings. In this sense we can speak of both discourse as "language use" as well as "*a* discourse" as a particular set of discursive practices, power relations, and symbols and meanings. I hoped to capitalize on the enlightening steps others have taken towards integrating the linguistic and critical social theory sides of discourse analysis into a powerful tool for understanding the everyday production and contestation of meanings in complex power-laden social fields (e.g. van Dijk 1985, 1997; Fairclough 1992; Howarth 2001).

Shifting my view of the social field from culture as a singular shared system of symbols and meanings to one based in "discourse," I entered the social field of Nimakot

viewing it as composed of several discourses – each of them a system of partially shared symbols and meanings that are produced, reproduced, and negotiated in everyday life. Some are grounded in particular institutions such as the school, church, and clinic. People can negotiate between these different discourses throughout their social interactions (as in Goffman's use of "frames" (1974)). Not everybody shares the same discourses, the same level of knowledge of each discourse, or the same position within each discourse, and this will lead to misunderstandings and perhaps overt conflict and struggle. It was these interactions that I hoped to analyze as key moments in the production and negotiation of cultural change, particularly as they related to conceptions of self.

So how does this transform the original (wrong) question? I wanted to approach the question of whether or not conceptions of self were shifting from dividual to individual forms. I assumed that some particular people may have become more "individual" than others by participating in different "discourses" that emphasized individuality. I expected them to speak and act differently than those who were more "dividual." Ultimately, I hoped to find that as those who were more "individual" conversed with those who were more "dividual" there would be rifts and misunderstandings to explore. As people repaired these misunderstandings, I reasoned that I would have a window into how commensurability between the radically different conceptions of self was created in day to day life, and how such conceptions might subtly change in these everyday interactions.

So what was wrong with the question, and my overall research agenda? There were mundane as well as theoretical problems. First, the field was not as I expected it would be. In particular, Christianity and education were not as active as I had expected. Local people were much more interested in statecraft and their efforts at building "community," so I altered my focus to address these issues. Secondly, my focus on "discourse" was misguided in two ways which I describe below. And lastly, I found that "individualism" itself was a misleading concept on which to base the study as our understandings of it are deeply shaped by the trappings of our own modernity. I needed new terms to describe the particular conceptions of self either implicit in, or required by, statecraft and "community." I describe these mistakes and the adjustments I made to my research agenda in more detail below.

First mistake: Expecting the field of my fieldwork to be anything like I expected. Re-adjusting the focus of the research.

When I first wrote my proposal for research I planned to study everyday life in the village as well as the practices and discursive interactions in the school, clinic, and three different churches. However, neither the school, clinic, nor any of the three churches made for a suitable site for research. The school was rarely in session and few students attended when classes were held. Teachers left for town and would stay away for months, leaving the classrooms back in Nimakot empty.[1] The school had only been operational for 4 of the last 17 years and the last true Nimakot graduating class finished

in 1987. The few youths who had the money and desire to attend school often went to distant villages to find a more stable schooling situation. Christianity was in rapid decline. More and more people were declaring themselves "normal," a local Tok Pisin word meaning "not Christian." On any given weekend less than 20% attended church. The clinic was almost always operational and well-attended, but my presence was ultimately too distracting. Patients often mistook my white skin for an in-depth knowledge of medicine. When I could not help, suspicions arose that I refused to help because I did not want to, not because I didn't know how.

Though the practices and discourses associated with these various institutions weighed heavily into my final analysis, they were ultimately not the primary focus of my research because they were not the primary focus of local people themselves.

I recalled the first order of advice given to Edward LiPuma by Skip Rappaport just before he set off to study the Maring. He told him that "the essence of fieldwork was to follow the ethnography, to be very attuned to what was happening at that historical moment in the lives of the people with whom I was living. Research plans and agendas were less important than letting the ethnography make the ethnographer" (2001:xi).

When I first arrived in 2000, it was clear that government was the most exciting development throughout Nimakot. It was taken on as a complete cultural system that offered almost millenarian hopes for the future. Young girls sang as they did community work, leveling out the rocky ground to create space for all of the developments that were soon to come. A government base camp (approved in 1991 and

only just then getting started) including at least seven houses for public servants were all predicted within the next five years and they needed to carve out extra flat land to accommodate the developments. They had good reason to be hopeful and to celebrate government. One of their own was recently elected a member of the national parliament in the capital city and regularly flew friends and family from the remote Nimakot to the thriving coast, lavishing them with money and gifts. The newly formed Local Level Government (LLG) ran by the locals themselves held the hope of bringing services directly to the people at their own request.

Yet there was a profound and pervasive skepticism as well. As one young man commented while watching others joyfully level the ground for the coming developments, "I worked briefly for a man from Singapore last year and he said to me, 'Son, when they say LLG that means you. You and your people *are* the government.' When he said that I knew that we were ruined. You watch. There won't be one single thing that will be built here. They work hard for no reason. Us blacks, you know ... it's the *wantok system*."[2] Others said jealousy (Tok Pisin: "jelas pasin"), a euphemism for witchcraft, would ultimately halt all developments as it had done so many times in the past. When I left three years later, such pessimistic predictions had so far proven true. The events during this time which are recounted later in this dissertation, made it abundantly clear that "following the ethnography" would at least in part require an analysis of government in Nimakot, why it consistently failed to create the "community" they all seemed to desire, and why "witchcraft" was so often considered to be the main obstacle.

Second Mistake: Life is not limited to discourse.

Finding a new model based in "cultural process"

In line with the "distributive" models of culture I described earlier, I approach Nimakot as a social field full of multiple systems of practices and partially shared symbols and meanings. I had originally used the term "discourse" to describe these systems, allowing me to capitalize on the insights of Foucault while also grounding my research in the domain of talk.

This approach also built partially from the work of Richard Shweder and Edmund Bourne. They compared Americans and Oriyas in the way they described their close acquaintances. Through a series of semi-formal interviews with each group they found that Americans tended to describe others using abstract context-independent terms while Oriyas used concrete context-dependent terms, a distinction they tied back to a difference between ego-centric and socio-centric conceptions of self.

I hoped that by analyzing talk in the field I might be able to perform a similar analysis in a more natural research setting. What I discovered however was that conceptions of self extend far beyond the domain of how people talk about one another and are deeply embedded in other cultural ideas and practices.

This also meant that my original assumption that some locals might be "individuals" while others were "dividuals" overlooked the fact that these conceptions are intersubjective, not subjective, meaning that they are much more pervasive and

diffuse at the same time. Even I (the quintessential "individual" in Nimakot) would act within a social world marked by a pervasive relationality. All actions are understood and reacted to within this logic (which is so pervasive in practice as to bring the use of the word "logic" into question).

To broaden my analysis beyond discourse I have instead chosen to frame this work in terms of "cultural process." Using this term I hope to draw both on notions of "social process" from Victor Turner and the Manchester school as well as theories of culture such as Roy Wagner's that recognize culture as symbols and meanings that are constantly being re-invented and negotiated. Putting both notions together I propose that these cultural negotiations take place in an uneven, power-laden, and multifaceted social field, and to incorporate one of my original goals, I maintain that people in different social positions negotiate and participate in these processes in different ways, but they *all* participate.

Another advantage to using the term "process" is that it allows me to discuss social action and change without suggesting that these actions and changes are disconnected from the past or the future. While this idea builds largely from the plethora of theoretical developments in practice theory (e.g. Bourdieu 1977), the term cultural process is more holistic than the term "practice" now implies (see for example Schatzki et. al. 2001). Like "practice," "process" carries a connotation of both change and continuity, effectively reproducing itself through its own effects, particularly as it has been formulated by Victor Turner and the Manchester school.

Rather than studying "individualism" and "dividualism" then this is a study of two broad, powerful, and pervasive cultural processes interacting and in great tension in Nimakot today. One is the cultural process of statecraft and the other is the local cultural process of relational sociality. I will describe each of these in-depth as the study continues, but for now I need only mention that both are systemic processes embedded in local everyday life that reproduce themselves through their own practices, motivations, and logic.

Third mistake: Assuming "individualism" would be central to the study.

One of the expectations of this study was that modern institutions such as statecraft automatically create "individualism." There are two problems with this expectation which I describe below.

Firstly, "individualism" holds many diffuse meanings associated with our understanding of it in Western forms of modernity. It is bounded, autonomous, self-sufficient, introspective, reflexive, creative, and unique to name just a few of its many characteristics. It is possible to imagine cultural changes which encourage a cultural value on creativity without necessarily implying these other aspects of individualism.

Secondly, this conception of "individualism" developed through a very particular history in the West through the effects and interactions of a number of institutions such as statecraft, education, Judeo-Christian religion, and biomedicine. None of these institutions necessarily create or require "individualism" in themselves, though they may operate more smoothly in situations where people do maintain a more

individualistic ontology. The problem in non-Western contexts is that these institutions are not related in the same ways as they are in the West. They exist in different cultural contexts and are likewise transformed by those contexts. So while I might not be able to expect statecraft to create "individualism" in Nimakot, an equally interesting question that is implicitly explored in this account is how statecraft operates without individualism.

By recognizing that "individualism" as we know it arose in a multi-faceted cultural context, I also found that "statecraft" does not require, imply, or encourage "individualism" in its entirety, but only a small part of it that I call "categorical identity." I use the term categorical identity in two interrelated ways: identity *with* a category and identity *as* a category. First, a categorical identity is simply identification with a particular category such as "Papua New Guinean" or "anthropologist." But this sense of categorical identity is largely dependent on a more abstract sense in which I am using the term to designate how one might self-identify *as* a category. In this more abstract sense, somebody with a categorical identity is somebody who conceives of themselves first and foremost as an bounded, distinctly, non-relational category over and above their place or identity within a field of social relations – part of what we mean by "individualism" but not all of it.

In sum, my agenda, approach, and question all required modifications in the field. By "following the ethnography" I ultimately came to focus my analysis on the tensions between the cultural processes of statecraft and relational sociality, finding

within these tensions some answers as to why "community" is so challenging for people

of Nimakot, and why "witchcraft" always seems to get in the way. Though the original

question regarding individuality and dividuality seems to have changed altogether, to

the extent that this research began with the question in mind, and kept it at least

marginally in mind throughout, the results ultimately speak in some way to that

important question, wrong and misguiding as it may be. The following section

recounting the historical background of this study further illustrates the issues I will be

addressing and how "following the ethnography" would inevitably lead me to an

analysis of witchcraft, statecraft, and the challenge of "community."

RESEARCH SETTING AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Nimakot lies midway between the populous areas surrounding Kiwirok in the

west and the Tifalmin, Urapmin, and Telefomin areas in the east, in the heart of what

has been called the "Mountain-Ok" culture area following Alan Healey's grouping of

the Mountain-Ok family of languages (1964).[3] All of these areas surrounding Nimakot

have extensive grasslands, suggesting long-term extensive occupation. In contrast,

Nimakot shows little evidence of long-term occupation. Much of the forest is uncut and

there are no grasslands. This environmental evidence along with oral histories suggest

that the region has been settled only in the past 2-300 years, perhaps as the introduction

of the sweet potato increased population and allowed people to exploit more rugged

environments such as that of Nimakot. Sweet potato is by far the most common staple

crop of the area, far surpassing taro which thrives in the areas both to the east and west from which the first settlers came.

The approximately 2,400 people now living in Nimakot are part of a long history of migration from more populated areas east and west of them. Stories of people arriving in the region from nearby areas almost invariably attribute migrations to a violent conflict or tensions over witchcraft and witchcraft accusations in outer areas. Migrations were not *en masse*, but generally of a small family, some brothers, or other small group of people. Over the past few hundred years there have been hundreds of these small migrations.

Those migrants from the west brought with them a variant of the Ngalum language, locally known as *Nek*, while those from the east brought a variant of Tifal, locally known as *Kali*. The languages are mutually unintelligible, but people of the region became bilingual and sociality has not been bounded by linguistic difference. Noting their bilingualism, some locals claim to speak *Nekali*, merging *Nek* and *Kali* into a single word. It is certainly not uncommon for a speaker to code-switch from Nek to Kali and back again even within a single sentence.

These migrants found expansive land on which to settle at Nimakot. They set up small hamlets in the bush and made small gardens around them by cutting down the trees, burning them, and planting primarily sweet potato, taro, and bananas in the resulting compost. Men went into the surrounding forests to hunt small birds, cassowaries, marsupials, and wild pigs. Houses deteriorated and gardens were

exhausted in 5-10 years and the hamlets would move, sometimes splitting up if tensions were too high or if some just wanted a change of neighbors.

The early migrants to the region could not have known it, but as they were continuously moving into and around the region, a Dutch ship had docked on the coast directly south of them in 1828 and after seven weeks of clearing the bush, proclaimed possession of "that part of New Guinea, and its interior, beginning at the 141st meridian east of Greenwich on the south coast." Though the claim did not yet extend to Nimakot, it was the first mention of the 141st meridian as a suitable boundary, and destined the people and land of Nimakot to be divided between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

These early European explorers did not know there were people in the interior they were dividing up. They knew the region only from a distance, mapping the peaks and ridges from the distant lowlands and naming them the "Star Mountains." The mountains near Nimakot were called the Scorpion Mountains after the constellation of Scorpio, and the largest peak in the region was given the name "Antares" after the brightest star in the constellation (Brongersma and Venema 1962:158).

Antares towers above the tree line up to 4,100 meters like a great stone wall at the southern edges of Nimakot. Heading north through Nimakot the folds and peaks of the Antares complex repeat themselves in a multitude of configurations as the landscape descends into the rainforests below. There seems to be no end to the number of folds in the earth. Mountains are made up of smaller mountains and smaller mountains of

smaller mountains still all the way down to the confluence of the Nim and Smol rivers

at an altitude of 500 meters.

The Smol and Nim rivers dash down these steep forested mountains often

forging spectacular waterfalls and rumbling past picturesque hamlets before converging

at the foot of Mt. Kobu. The ruggedness of the terrain and density of the rainforest

foliage can almost be claustrophobic, but the spectacular Kobu can be seen from almost

anywhere in Nimakot, standing alone in the distance in the only direction in which

anyone can see any distance at all.

The rivers are fed by an almost clockwork schedule of afternoon and nightly

rains, giving the region over 4 meters of rain per year. The torrential rains and the

ruggedness of the terrain led one area researcher to refer in jest to the area as "vertical

swamp." Only the prevalence of stones in the soil saves a stumbling foreigner like me

from slipping on, or sinking into, the mud. Digging a hole in the region is a matter of

removing stones more than it is one of moving dirt. The plethora of stones gives many

of the localities their name. Tumolbil, the largest village in the region (actually a

collection of smaller villages), means, "stony flat land."

Nimakot is part of the Mountain Ok culture area, though it should be noted at

the outset that "Mountain Ok" is not a term known or used by locals. The Mountain Ok

are most noted for their elaborate practices of secrecy, male initiation, and mythology

centered on the ancestress heroine Afek (Barth 1975, 1987; Wheatcroft 1976; Jorgensen

1981; Craig and Hyndman 1990). Afek is said to have walked throughout the Mountain

Ok region, building cult houses, leaving special powerful objects that would increase

fertility and ferocity, and giving birth to virtually all of the Mountain Ok cultural features (Brumbaugh 1990). Until recently, the mythology and practices associated with Afek were embedded within a village organization in which men lived apart from women and children in male cult houses. Today, only a few cult houses remain, mostly west of the 141st meridian in Indonesia. Most cult houses have been abandoned since an ecstatic Christian Revival swept large parts of the region and the large Ok Tedi gold and copper mine opened in the late 1970s (see Hyndman 1994:135-142; Polier 1994; Robbins 1998). Nimakot was fairly marginal to the Afek religion. It held none of the most powerful objects or stories. Afek was said to have been raped just east of Nimakot when she was walking through the region. Shaken by the assault, she sped through Nimakot without stopping to build a substantial cult house or leave any powerful objects.

As a result of the international border being set at the 141st meridian, Nimakot found itself on the margins of an entirely different system, wedged between two colonialisms as the colonial era dawned upon the Mountain Ok region in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Dutch established a patrol post 50 km west in Oksibil, the Australians 100 km east in Telefomin. Nimakot was a hard 7-14 days patrol from either post and remained uncontacted until a brief unofficial exploratory patrol by a Dutch patrol officer in 1959. The first official patrol came from the Australian side in 1963.

The Australian patrol was part of a new era in which significantly more attention was paid to the border as Indonesia was soon to take over West New Guinea from the Dutch (Sinclair 1981:220). The district office at Telefomin was too far to keep an eye

on the border, so the administration decided to establish the Atbalmin Rural Police Post

just over a mountain pass from Nimakot. The post was manned intermittently by men

from Telefomin and other areas of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The first

man stationed there was a man from a village near the district offices at Telefomin,

Constable Kwetokim. He was very well-liked by most people in the region, and

eventually married a local woman. He stayed only briefly. The next man, Constable

Forbaiuk disliked the locals and the locals disliked him. When he injured his back, the

patrol reports read, "the local people claimed that he had been shot in the back by an

invisible (witchcraft) arrow as punishment for his misdeeds" (Telefomin PR 5 of

65/66:B3). By local understandings, he was chased out by witchcraft.

From here the history of Nimakot sounds a familiar refrain – development

comes, witchcraft chases it away. As the Atbalmin Rural Police Post faded in a shroud

of witchcraft accusations in the mid 1970s, construction of an airstrip at Tumolbil began

and Baptist missionaries from Urapmin (an area near the Telefomin station) came to

bring the word of the Christian God to the area. When illness struck their family they

became convinced that they had been bewitched and left soon afterward. A few years

later in 1981 a school house was completed. Men from Tifalmin (also near the

Telefomin station) came as teachers, but again left for fears of witchcraft. It was the

last time anybody from the Mountain Ok region dared come to teach or preach in

Nimakot. While first traveling to the region I was given many warnings by other

Mountain Ok people about the rampant witchcraft in Nimakot. After I arrived, I soon

found that locals themselves held a similarly grim view of themselves as a dark pit of witchcraft.

But equally oppressive to development and daily life was that great red mark of statecraft, the international border – every bit as invisible and powerful as witchcraft. Special border patrols were made in 1979 and again in 1985 and 1987 primarily to inform people where the border was and in later patrols to educate them regarding the Basic Border Agreement between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia signed in 1984 (United Nations Treaty Series 1986). Most importantly, the agreement states that people living along the border must establish permanent residence in their country of citizenship but that they may cross for brief periods for traditional purposes such as gardening, hunting, and trading.

In line with this agreement the 1987 patrol placed a large metal monument just southwest of Tumolbil at an area called Philip to mark the international border. Residents were asked to move *en masse* to the eastern side of the border to maintain their Papua New Guinea citizenship. Over 2,000 people were crowded into the narrow Nim valley for a brief period in the late 1980s. Land conflicts, witchcraft accusations, and resource shortages forced most people to return to their homelands west of the 141st meridian soon afterwards, but nearly 1,000 people stayed, making the narrow Nim river valley one of the most densely populated valleys in the Mountain-Ok region, and Tumolbil, the area surrounding the airstrip, is now known as one of the largest villages. Hamlets that were once widely dispersed now huddle around the airstrip like neighborhoods and suburbs, their populations swelling as people crowd around for the

possibilities and excitement that the school, missions, clinic and plane might offer. It is the only airstrip, the only clinic, and the only school serving over 3,000 people spread across 25 kilometers east to west and north to south. Oftentimes over one thousand people live in this narrow Nim valley, taxing the resources while filling the village with a vividness that is extraordinary even by Papua New Guinea standards.

Despite such a large population and the prosperity that came with it, Tumolbil is still widely feared for its witchcraft and known throughout the Mountain Ok region as what they call in Tok Pisin, "bush". Certainly by most scales of modernity, from those used openly by the World Bank to those covertly implied in modernist discourse, Tumolbil is one of the most backward places in all of Papua New Guinea. There is no road access. There are no stores, no electricity, and very little money. The elder generation was born in a pre-colonial era. It is a place where some men still prefer the penis gourd to second-hand trousers and where some women unselfconsciously bathe topless in public. Their neighbors – the Telefomin, Tifalmin, Oksapmin, and Wopkaimin who themselves are mocked as "bushy" in Papua New Guinea's more metropolitan centers – mock the people of Tumolbil as "bush straight," a Tok Pisin term meaning "nothing but bush." Even the more traveled and outside-oriented of Tumolbil get in on the slander, referring to themselves as the last line, the last man, the last people on the very edge of Papua New Guinea. They point out their position on the border, that the road of the Whiteman came from the east, and Tumolbil was the last stop.[4]

One reason for their backward image is the remarkable developments just 40 km to the southeast around the Ok Tedi gold and copper mine. Near the mine is the town of

Tabubil, a thriving metropolis by central New Guinea standards. The town is home to hundreds of ex-pats from Australia and other parts of the world. Along with their remarkable pre-fab homes with satellite television and automatic dishwashers, the town also has a hotel with a swimming pool, a large supermarket, and several clubhouse restaurants. The mine employs thousands of indigenous people from the surrounding area who live in small pre-fab homes or dormitories. However, nobody from Nimakot works there, a fact that is both cause and effect of their marginality.

But one person's margin is another's metropolis and for many people living in small hamlets in the surrounding areas of Tumolbil and throughout Nimakot, Tumolbil is nothing less than spectacular, by far the most prosperous village they have ever seen. Whether they enter from north, south, east, or west, their first view is from the top down on to the shimmering corrugated iron rooftops of the school, clinic, churches, and the upscale homes of the Dirukbil hamlet near the airstrip.

Those living outside of Tumolbil, particularly in the Smol river area, continue to live for the most part in over 50 widely dispersed, constantly shifting, small hamlets, most of which have populations of fewer than 30 people. They look enviously upon the developments of Tumolbil, knowing that they are the direct result of the people finding a way to live so closely together, thereby producing a high census figure. The importance of a high census figure is well known throughout the area and is captured in a common Tok Pisin phrase, "namba tok," which means exactly what it sounds like, "numbers talk." Numbers talk to the state, making the people visible, qualifying them for projects, health care, and other amenities.

When Tumolbil's numbers finally started talking in the mid 1970s they called forth an airstrip, clinic, school, and Baptist mission. When the border mark was placed and people crowded around the airstrip in the late 1980s the numbers talked even louder. The large population literally put Tumolbil "on the map," dramatically increasing its visibility to government and foreign aid. Drawn by the large population, Seventh Day Adventists provided funding for a mission there in 1989, the World Bank funded a two room clinic at the head of the airstrip in 1992, and the Catholic church rebuilt, refurbished, and took control of the schools in the late 1990s while establishing its own mission in the region. With all of these developments pulled in by their number alone, local people throughout the area became exceedingly concerned with how they might best increase their namba to make it talk to the state.

The high census number of 1990 also created a substantial sum of money for the creation of the Tumolbil Base Camp, a government office that would ultimately allow locals to work as agents of the state themselves. A number of problems delayed construction, but when I first arrived in May of 2000, construction on the base camp had begun in earnest.

This is the historical moment at which I entered the field. I spent the summers of 2000 and 2001 in Nimakot before coming for a year starting in August 2002. During this time the people of Nimakot were excited about government and embraced it with great passion. They wanted to live in large, peaceful communities with high population numbers that the state could see and serve. But there was also anxiety about their abilities to do this. When I left, such anxieties had proven well-warranted. Efforts to

build "community" had failed, and their failures throughout focused on "witchcraft" as the primary obstacle to success.

A Brief note on "witchcraft" and "sorcery"

There may be some terminological confusion over my choice of the term "witchcraft" to gloss local terms such as "*bis*" and "*sanguma*". *Bis*, in the local vernaculars of Kali and Nek, and *sanguma*, a Tok Pisin word, broadly refer to any act of hidden and mystical violence. Most of these acts involve "poisoning" the victim by stealing a scrap of their food and wrapping it into a bundle (*bis yokop*), or ambushing the victim with invisible arrows or other invisible weaponry.

Following Evans-Pritchard's study of the Azande, anthropologists have distinguished between witchcraft and sorcery building from a distinction that is particular to the Azande. Following the Azande distinction, witchcraft does not involve the use of implements, rites, spells or medicines while sorcery may employ one or several of these methods. The most important elements of this distinction include the idea that witchcraft is a psychic act that may be involuntary and unconscious, while sorcery is a physical act that is always voluntary and conscious (see Evans-Pritchard 1937:21).

Strictly by this static definition alone it would seem that "sorcery" is the better term to gloss bis and sanguma. However, the actual social events in which *bis* is involved and that make-up this dissertation make the static vocabulary of "witchcraft" and "sorcery" obsolete. It becomes less important what "bis" is, and more important

how the multitudinous complexities of life's dramas are constantly shaping and reshaping its domain. Victor Turner made this same argument in slightly different terms in his article, "Witchcraft and Sorcery: Taxonomy versus Dynamics" (1964). There he illustrates the ways in which the ever-changing contexts of social dramas can transform "witchcraft" into "sorcery" and vice-versa.

An example from my own fieldwork can demonstrate this. A woman was accused of taking a small piece of food, thereby working "sorcery" on a small child. She denied the accusation but ultimately conceded to the charge as she was faced with overwhelming pressure from her accusers. However, she denied doing this voluntarily (a key component of "sorcery") by claiming that an evil spirit (*bis man*) who resides within her without her permission took the food and had in fact done the evil deed without her knowledge until after the deed had been done. Her explanation fit local understandings of *bis* and was accepted, but only after her accusers convinced her to admit that it was her own jealous thoughts that the evil spirit was acting upon, thereby making it an involuntary psychic act, within the domain of what traditional anthropology might call "witchcraft." This example, along with many others provided by Turner, illustrates that the distinction between "witchcraft" and "sorcery" loses its usefulness and credibility when an attempt is made to understand the dynamics of actual social life rather than creating a simple, static taxonomy. Within the realm of social dynamics, the distinction is perhaps best left to the Azande and may not translate well to other cultures.

I have chosen the term "witchcraft" primarily because this is not a study of people who are consciously and intentionally attempting hidden and mystical violence through the use of spells, rites, medicines, or the use of various implements. I know of very few examples of people who actively practice such "sorcery" in Nimakot, and these activities are not discussed in this dissertation. Instead, mention of *bis* throughout my fieldwork emerged almost exclusively in the form of accusations. Most accusations were made amid a complete lack of any physical evidence and no implements of "sorcery" were ever forthcoming. It was always a completely hidden and therefore imaginary world that was the field for dramatic confrontation in the series of accusations I witnessed. The choice of "witchcraft" as a term helps to locate this study within the rich literature on witchcraft and witchcraft accusations, yet it should not be taken as a sign that works on "sorcery" have not greatly influenced this work as well (e.g. Fortune 1932, Knauft 1985, Stephen 1996 among many others).

OUTLINE OF ARGUMENT AND CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This dissertation examines how and why witchcraft came to be seen as the primary obstacle to "community." Ultimately I locate the answer within an analysis of how the cultural process of statecraft interacts with the local cultural process of relational sociality. As I examine how these two processes interact, I also analyze how different people in different social positions navigate the complexities and tensions produced.

In Chapter Two I begin by identifying and describing the local cultural process I have called "relational sociality."   Implicit in this description is the argument that witchcraft is an intimate part of this sociality and should not be understood as a de-contextualized entity or category of action in and of itself. Relational sociality is what Sahlins might call a "performative social structure" in which being related is a matter of continuously relating to others in the reproduction, nurturance, and growth of people. Of key importance to productive relating is complete and open unconditional sharing, referred to locally as "looking after" one another. This "looking after" one another is embedded in hamlet organization in that open doorways all face one another in an arrangement of mutual visibility. Despite the focus on openness, the demands of maintaining productive relationships are strategically negotiated through the use of secrecy, deception, and intentional ambiguity and misdirection. This secrecy, though necessary for negotiating this social world, in turn inspires imagery of witchcraft in which male and female witches invert the characteristics of open unconditional relating deemed essential to growth and nurturance of people and are imagined to be constantly hiding, hoarding, and engaged in the consumption of people. Witchcraft fears and accusations continually disintegrate hamlets, creating a residence pattern in which people are constantly moving and live scattered throughout the landscape.

The key logic involved in relational sociality is a focus on interpersonal relations rather than on bounded categorical groups. Relations and interactions are negotiated through face-to-face interactions. As Marilyn Strathern has pointed out for Melanesian notions of sociality, there is "no indigenous supposition of a society that lies over or

above or is inclusive of individual acts and unique events" (1988). As Edward LiPuma has elaborated, the idea of society is a "modernist project" in which "a collection of individuals have ... agreed, contractually, to cooperate and collaborate in the interests of the common good" (2000:121). As he rightly points out, such a project ultimately demands a release from relational sociality, for it "requires that agents abstract themselves as conceptually distinct from the relations definitive of their lives and the fields they inhabit" (2000:124).

In Chapter Three, I begin my analysis of statecraft, which can be viewed as just such a modernist project, geared towards making "society" and "community." The residential pattern and relational logics of relational sociality have been in tension with modern statecraft since the first Australian patrols entered the region over 40 years ago. Because of the vastness of the state's domain and its only ephemeral contact with its subjects, statecraft requires that the complexities of everyday life among its millions of inhabitants be somehow summarized into easy to use lists, figures, and diagrams in such forms as censuses and maps. But taking a census and drawing a map are not such simple affairs in a place like Nimakot, for those who attempt such tasks are constantly sabotaged by the reality of the relational sociality that subverts the stable categories used in a census or drawn onto a map. Together, the census and the map are the eyes of the state, used to determine how state funds and projects will be distributed. This is recognized locally in the phrase, "namba tok," meaning "numbers (population, statistics, etc.) talk." The greater the number, the stronger the voice, so people are

intent on creating large stable villages that are visible to the state and in line for services and development projects.

While locals are quick to understand the power of categorical entities in the cultural process of statecraft, they do not readily assume identity with these categories, which is to say, they do not take on a categorical identity. The local relational sociality is at least as pervasive and encompassing as statecraft, and fosters a conception of the self or ontology that is relational rather than categorical. This is the core of the tensions between relational sociality and statecraft that I begin describing in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Four I also argue that the tensions between statecraft and relational sociality are productive of much of the social life in Nimakot today, from how and where people live to how they interact. Much of what is produced from these tensions seems geared towards resolving the tensions, but as I illustrate throughout the dissertation, they ultimately only reproduce the tensions themselves, sometimes even exacerbating them.

In this chapter I also introduce Operation Clean and Sweep as one of the examples of what is produced from the tensions of relational sociality and statecraft. Operation Clean and Sweep was a plan developed by government officers in which the small hamlets scattered throughout the bush were to be burned, forcing all people to live in one of twelve government-recognized villages. The plan comes to a halt however, when many begin complaining that they cannot move to the government villages due to fears of witchcraft. At this point, the operation altered its focus as it became a

concentrated effort to use the mechanisms of statecraft to annihilate witchcraft, clearing the way for "community."

Here I argue that while "*a community*" may be created as a categorical *entity* simply by naming a location on a map or listing names under the community's name in a census book, "community" requires people to take on categorical *identities* in both senses of the term for that community to exist in reality. The community is a category in which people must accept membership above and beyond their relations. But relational sociality is deeply embedded and fosters a relational ontology that is antithetical to categorical identity. This relational ontology is the core obstacle of all efforts to build "community" in Nimakot. Unfortunately, this relational ontology is most visible in the accusations and imageries of witchcraft. Hence it is witchcraft that is viewed locally as the core obstacle to community.

The result was a witch hunt. Using the mechanisms of statecraft, government officers held trials of suspected witches. Those who confessed were asked to list names of other witches. Before it was over, the list had grown to over 100 names and 11 people had been convicted and sentenced to "community work" digging a government road at the Tumolbil Base Camp that was then under construction.

In Chapters Five and Six I examine how the cultural processes of relational sociality and statecraft interact throughout the witch hunt and how the dynamics between them are negotiated.

Chapter Five focuses on the effects of the tensions between the two processes on the witch hunt and on local conceptions of "witchcraft" and "witches." I illustrate how

the categorical bias of statecraft transforms the way witchcraft is imagined and handled.

People who are accused as part of very specific breakdowns in relationships are charged

as criminals of the state who have broken the categorical law against witchcraft. They

are transformed from temporary and indefinite witches to permanent and categorical

witches, who can be listed, just as in a census book. Without the logic and mechanisms

of statecraft, it was this or that particular act of witchcraft as a manifestation of certain

bad relations that was the problem. In the context of statecraft, it is "witchcraft" itself

that is the problem and the imagery of witchcraft begins to transform. I conclude the

chapter with an analysis of those transformations in "witchcraft."

Chapter Six takes a more diachronic approach to examine the dynamics of the

witch hunt and the ways relational sociality and statecraft interact throughout its

dramas. I argue that relational sociality and statecraft actually co-produce the witch

hunt through a mutually generative process in which the list exacerbates relational

tensions which in turn provides the energy and revelations for the list to grow, further

exacerbating tensions in a dynamic feedback loop. But embedded within the list itself

is a tension between the fact that those listed are a part of very specific relational

tensions while statecraft views them as categorical witches. People in different

relational positions came to view the list differently. If a close relation was listed they

began to distrust the list. This tension is the beginning of a schismogenetic dynamic in

which the two logics and processes involved move further and further apart, at first

intensifying but ultimately undermining the government's pursuit of witches.

Tracing these dynamics also gives me the opportunity to explore how these dynamics and tensions might be negotiated differently by people in different social positions. To illustrate this, I examine and compare how the kiap, kaunsels, and komitis negotiate these tensions.

I conclude the dissertation by examining the aftermath of the hunt, arguing that the same tensions that motivated Operation Clean and Sweep have been reproduced. People were left living in small, scattered hamlets, wishing they could somehow come together to live in large prosperous villages whose population numbers would be great enough to "talk" to the state and bring in valuable services. To show how these tensions continue to play out I examine the efforts of one government officer to establish a large prosperous community. Ultimately it fails in a flurry of witchcraft accusations. This example re-enforces my argument that the core obstacle to "community" building in Nimakot is the challenge of creating categorical identities within a deeply embedded relational sociality. By attacking witchcraft, the operation only attacks relational sociality tangentially – allowing the relational tensions it does not address to produce more witchcraft accusations, ultimately reproducing the small scattered hamlets the operation originally set out to eliminate.

Chapter Two

Nimakot Relational Sociality

In this chapter I begin the analysis with a description of one of the two sets of beliefs and practices I am most interested in for this study – what I refer to as relational sociality. Relational sociality is a cultural process based in small hamlet life. As I describe in the following, all hamlet residents "look after" one another and extend nuclear family kinship terms to fellow residents. Strong and healthy relations are considered necessary for the vitality of hamlet residents. Likewise, conflicts and unhealthy relations are often looked to for explanations of illness and death. This sociality is not built up of rules and roles. Instead relations are constantly made and remade in a fluid, temporary, negotiable, contested, and ambiguous social field, a pattern I analyze through Marshal Sahlins' idea of "performative social structure" (1985). Because there are no hard and fast "rules" of relating, morality and justice are worked out in particular situational encounters. The demands of maintaining relationships under these conditions, which involve the high stakes of health and life itself, are strategically negotiated through the use of secrecy, deception, and purposeful ambiguity and misdirection. This secrecy, though necessary for negotiating this social world, in turn supports an imagery of witchcraft in which male and female witches invert the characteristics of positive relating as the production of people and are imagined to be constantly engaged in the consumption of people.

Witchcraft then, is part and parcel of this relational sociality and exhibits its core logic that the person is made up of his or her relations. When any illness or death occurs its ultimate cause is sought in witchcraft by tracing where relations have weakened and possibly turned deadly. These witchcraft discussions and the accusations that follow (both hidden and revealed) break up hamlets and scatter people throughout the landscape. Rarely do hamlets exceed 50 people before breaking up. Such break-ups reproduce the system of people living in small, tight-knit hamlets oriented on strong "kinship" relations.

This description and analysis of relational sociality sets the stage for a comparative analysis of modern statecraft in Nimakot and the ways in which it interacts with this local relational sociality. The tension between them ultimately rests in the fact that the logic involved in relational sociality focuses on interpersonal relations rather than on bounded categorical groups or "community," a subject to which I will return in later chapters.

NIMAKOT RELATIONAL SOCIALITY:
EVERYDAY LIFE IN A NIMAKOT HAMLET

At first glance, Nimakot hamlets seem a magnificent world of friendliness, generosity, and joviality. Abundant words of praise for hamlet life are often aired, "We tell stories together, eat together, and sleep together – it's our way." (Tok Pisin*: "Stori wantaim. Kaikai wantaim. Slip Wantaim. Em pasin bilong mipela.*") "When a man

has a need, you must give to him." (Tok Pisin: "*Yu lukim man i gat nid, yu mas givim*.") Most houses do not even have doors. The hamlet is a world without strangers. People pass freely from one house to another without bothering to knock and join others sitting around the fire joking and telling stories. Like Knauft noted for the Gebusi, "good company" is a central value of hamlet life (1985).

As one enters the hamlet or a house, one is greeted by the trademark click handshake in which the knuckle of one interlocutor is inserted between two fingers of the other. With a squeeze of the knuckles and a quick pull the knuckles "SNAP!" together. The snapping is accompanied by a chorus of unique laughter, which itself is like a micro-ritual of integration. A good laugh involving two or more people pauses briefly after a few seconds and erupts into a communal yell, "Yeeeeeee!!!" The best of these are followed by an antiphonal call-back chorus which sometimes is a voluminous, "WU wu WU wu WU wu Wu Wu" or sharp, "YEK yek YEK yek YEK yek YEK yek." A good laugh crescendos into more snapping handshakes, affectionate gestures, and oftentimes a final, "ah, my brother, my brother" or "my sister, my sister" (Tok Pisin: "*a brata (susa) bilong mi*").

If food is being served a portion is quickly distributed to the new visitors without them having to ask. There is a strong egalitarian ethos in which those with plenty give freely to those with little. People proudly note that this carries them through thin times between cycles in their own gardens when others are at the peak of the cycle in their gardens. Such gifts are often received without ceremony – as if it were so regular as to not warrant notice (see Crook 1997:90).

It is through such constant unconditional sharing of food, talk, laughter, and other items that that villagers proudly announce that their hamlet is "one family" and extend sibling and parent-child kinship designations to fellow residents, regardless of biological kinship ties. Being related is a matter of continuous relat*ing* through open and unconditional sharing and exchange, more than it is a matter of biology.

Continuous relating is spoken of in terms of "looking after" one another (Kali, "tiin molin"; Tok Pisin, "lukautim"). Continuous relating is not just a matter of family or friendship. "Looking after" one another is considered vital to health and well-being as the person grows through the benefits of this constant relating. Healthy relations make for a healthy person. This is true not just as an abstract conception, but in practical terms as well, for much of the work of relating to one another is in the actual work of growing, gathering, or hunting food and sharing it. In short, relating *is* the production, exchange, and growth of people.

A traditional Nimakot house has only one small opening. This opening is oriented towards those with whom one has strong relations, emphasizing the sense in which they "look after" one another.

Most people of Nimakot live in small isolated hamlets of 3-5 houses each perched along the rugged mountain sides near their gardens. Traditionally (until the early 1970's) one of these houses was the men's house in which women and uninitiated boys could not enter. It was usually uphill from the other huts and separated from them by the cordyline plant used to mark prohibited areas. The door was small and elevated so one could not see in from the outside. The women's menstrual hut was downhill

from the other houses so that dangerous and polluting menstrual blood would not infect the village. The other houses, where women and children slept and where men took their meals with their families, faced one another in an open clearing. The doors of these houses were always open allowing each house to see the others with mutual visibility. The visibility was important for people of the hamlet were said to "look after" (Kali, "tiin molin") one another by the unconditional sharing of food and other items. In this way people of the hamlet were constantly relating to one another. This constant relating was viewed as essential to the health and vitality of people and by looking after one another they "grew" one another. The visible constant relating between members of a hamlet was a key element in the growth and nurturance of people.

Traditional Nimakot Hamlet
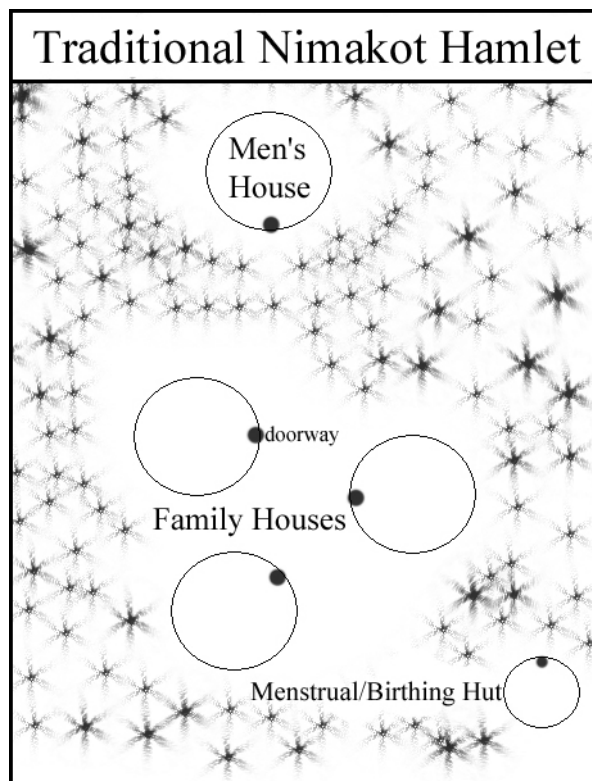
Though hidden from the view of women and children, the men's house also fostered visibility and productive relating, but of a different sort. They were instead relating to the hidden world of ancestors, spirits, and power by creating the conditions under which a visibility of this hidden world could be fostered. Mutual visibility is essential to relating, and relating essential to vitality and the production of people. Hence, their ritual activities were essential to the maintenance of vitality and growth throughout their area – not only for the vitality and growth of people, but for the vitality, growth, and fertility of their environment as a whole.

Though men's houses are no longer standing and menstrual huts are rare, Nimakot hamlets are still organized in much the same way that they were forty years

ago before the colonial encounter, emphasizing mutual visibility between hamlet
residents who "look after" one another with unconditional sharing that grows one
another.

Typical Nimakot Hamlet 2003

doorway

Family Houses

Toilet
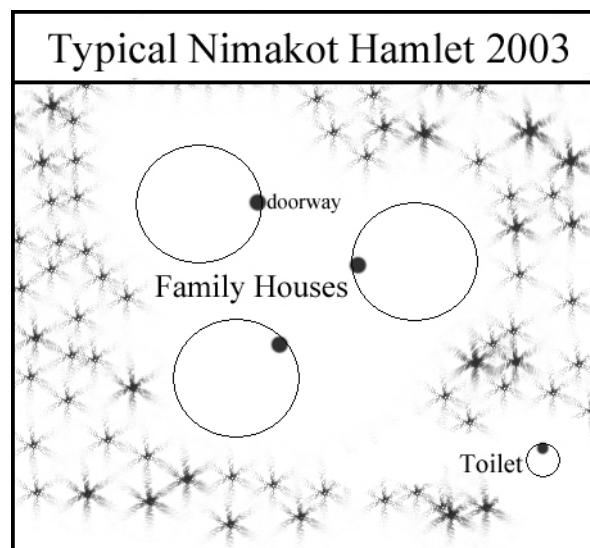
As of February 2003 there were approximately 2,400 people living in Nimakot,
most of them scattered throughout the landscape in isolated hamlets such as the one
drawn above.

RELATIONAL SOCIALITY AS PERFORMATIVE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The continuous productive relating in Nimakot hamlets fulfills much of what is
generally called "social structure." It is useful here to borrow Sahlins' distinction
between performative and prescriptive social structures (1985). In a performative

structure, such as the one I propose for Nimakot, much of what is normally called kinship and descent are continuously negotiated and revised according to the "performances" of everyday life while in prescriptive structures there are rules and roles that "prescribe" who and who not to marry, rights to land, and group membership. I have called the performative structure a "sociality" to note that it is social structure in action, which can only be understood as it actually occurs in everyday practice. Relational sociality refers to the ways people are continuously "making relations" rather than what relations make of people (see Robbins on the Urapmin 2004:189)

Performative social structures are not easy to "map" and place within the proper categories of kinship terminology, descent system, and residence patterns. These challenges may be a key reason why Melanesian anthropology is often the source of new theoretical developments that extend phenomenological and practice-based approaches to new lengths (e.g. Munn 1986, Merlan and Rumsey 1991). In Nimakot relational sociality, kinship terms and names for descent groups only masquerade as stable categories but are in practice tools for negotiating, producing, and sometimes denying relations. Rather than beginning with categories, we might instead just begin with what people do and what they themselves say they are up to – producing people.

Producing people is seen as an act that requires continuous relating, an idea expressed throughout many Melanesian cultures, most often through the idiom of exchange. The exchanges that produce people begin with the acts of intercourse that form the human fetus, and though ideas are now changing with the coming of the clinic, most people in Nimakot maintain that conception requires multiple acts of intercourse.

A child is said to be produced through the exchange of sexual fluids and raised through still more exchanges – gifts of food and care from people in their household, throughout the hamlet, and beyond. These gifts *make* kinship relations and a child who is fed frequently by a man or woman will address them as a parent or parent's sibling. Children find themselves actually grown by many such relations and enmeshed in a web of many mothers, fathers, and siblings.

When children grow into adults and decide they want to produce children themselves they need to negotiate a complex field of relations formed by all of those who have helped to grow them. A man will have to ask those who grew him for help in accumulating a bridewealth payment. Meanwhile, the woman must seek the blessing of those who have grown her, knowing that they may have plans for her to be given to somebody other than her chosen mate. A woman does not ask for permission directly as she must conduct herself as the passive object of exchange rather than the active subject. She might simply mention that she wants to "get water" or "try planting sweet potato" at the hamlet where the man resides. If the father or primary caretaker of the woman is already aware of her desires, he might ask her if she wants to "cut the banana" where the man resides. One elderly man had tears in his eyes as he told me how his daughter had responded yes when he asked her if she wanted to "cut the ripe bananas" at Busilmin two hard days' walk away. He disapproved, but ultimately knew that he could not stop her as she was "strong" in her desires.

Those who have helped to grow the woman, known as the "woman's side," (Kali, "wanang kayak"; Tok Pisin, "sait bilong meri") will make demands for a

bridewealth payment that is invariably many times more what any single man can afford. The man will need to call upon those who have helped to grow him, known as the "man's side" (Kali, "tinum kayak"; Tok Pisin, "sait bilong man"), to support him in accumulating a bridewealth payment. Even if he were an exceedingly rich man the price would be raised appropriately so that he would still need to rely on others to help him with the payment. The man faces tremendous stress in gathering the payment. He feels "shame" in asking for help from those who have already helped him with so much, yet in order to have a child of his own, perhaps the greatest joy of his life, he needs to do it.

The bridewealth, which includes axes, knives, clothes, money, and other items, is placed around the woman in a manner in which it might be said to substitute for her. It is not a payment in which she is considered to be property permanently acquired by the man's side. The bridewealth is distributed among all those of the "woman's side," and virtually anybody who has contributed to the growth of the woman will ask for a share of the wealth. Each of the recipients will then make a return gift to the appropriate giver on the man's side.

The woman's side, the wife-givers, will expect that eventually they will receive a woman in return, becoming the "man's side" in a future transaction. However, because the man's side and woman's side are not categorical groups but are instead determined by their ongoing relating to particular individuals there is never perfect symmetry of exchange. A woman later given in return to one person on the "woman's

side" will not necessarily share the same exact relations with the woman originally given and some will feel that a woman has not yet been given in return.

Bridewealth exchanges, like all gift exchanges in Nimakot, create, recreate, and maintain relationships. Not only are the exchanges binding in that they call for a return. The return itself must be returned, and that return returned and so on. One metaphor often used by people of Nimakot in describing this process is that of making roads. A gift is said to make a road on which more gifts will flow. It creates a relationship and future gifts maintain it. A large gift does not "pay the debt" and end the relationship. Quite the opposite it "widens" the road and larger gifts will now be expected to flow on this road.

Though bridewealth exchanges may be said to create roads of relating, they are not often smooth and without contention. And because it is human life that has been passed on these roads (and perhaps more importantly, the ability to *create* human life) the stakes are high. As will be seen later, more witchcraft accusations are between people on opposite "sides" of the marriage transaction than in any other relation.

Many of what the outside observer might classify as "rules" or "norms" of marriage can be traced to the practical concerns men and women face in trying to get married. People generally do not marry those closest in relation (through continuously relating) to them, not because it is illegal, sick, or morally wrong, but because for practical considerations it is very difficult. Consideration of how one is to come up with the bridewealth demand weighs heavily. A man literally cuts his "side" in half if he decides to marry a woman too close to him. Likewise, a woman undermines her

"side's" ability to return long-standing debts in human life by wanting to marry somebody who from many perspectives is already on her "side," and she will be unlikely to receive the blessing and the necessary help in arranging the transaction.

Statistically, one might conclude that the people of Nimakot follow patrilocal or virilocal rules of residence. However, their choices are ultimately a matter of performing relationality rather than following strict rules. There is no "rule" of residence after marriage and newlyweds feel free to live wherever they choose. Their primary consideration is where they have the strongest "land rights." These rights are determined by "use" or what might better be phrased as "relating to the land." Just as they relate to one another by "looking after" one another, so they relate to the land by "looking after" the land.

The work of relating to the land is gendered. Though there are no absolute rules about the division of labor, men tend to do the "heavy" short-term work of clearing and burning the trees at the garden site, while women do the more mundane and sustained work of planting and weeding the garden. The importance for the way they relate to the land is that men's work leaves "marks" on the landscape, making their relation to the land visible. Such marks play a significant role in determining where one will decide to live. They tend to go where they already have left such a mark. As it is men who make the marks, residence patterns look "virilocal."

Over time this virilocality forms an ad hoc patrilineage. These are given names known in Kali as tinum miit and in Nek as kaga don, both of which translate as "man

source, root, or base." Sometimes the two vernaculars are mixed forming the term "don miit." There are over 45 don miit names in use in Nimakot.

The don miit naming system is extremely flexible. They are passed through cognatic descent, meaning that one can claim the don miit name of either their mother or father. Their mother and father can do the same, and so on, so that even knowing one's genealogy to two generations allows them as many as eight choices. Furthermore, don miit names can be passed by frequent relating. The same relating that forges "fictive" kinship ties can also allow one to claim a particular don miit name.

Don miits are often used as an idiom of unity and follow such often heard phrases as, "We are one line, one family." For this reason, despite the numerous possible don miit names one might be able to claim, one name tends to be the most prominent in any particular area and will masquerade as a categorical "clan" name, despite the flexibility of the performative sociality that creates it.

There may be several don miits within any one village or area. However, over time if one don miit becomes increasingly popular it may eventually become virtually the only don miit ever claimed in the area. There is a momentum to the growth and decline of don miits because of their indirect use in making land claims and declaring group solidarity. Though land claims are generally based on prior use by mother or father, land claims may also be made by don miit membership, as the don miit designates that the person is related in some way. To strengthen land claims and increase group solidarity people often claim to be of the more prominent don miits. Conversely, unpopular don miit names dwindle and disappear, their members

emphasizing their other don miit affiliations with larger more powerful lines. Over time, a village or area tends to unify under one don miit, absorbing newcomers as part of this dominant don miit, even if they had been claiming another affiliation when they lived elsewhere.   However, as will be seen later, relationships may grow tense leading people to move away, claiming a different don miit affiliation.

Although one could "map" these don miits as "clans" and "clan lands" – and the efforts to do so will be addressed in Chapter Three – I have chosen to show how they emerge through relational sociality to give some sense for the way in which social life appears to a person in Nimakot rather than how it might look by a map. It is also important to recognize that while the boundaries of don miits may be talked about and even pointed to, they will be differently construed by different people and in different contexts. As LiPuma noted for Melanesians in general, "boundaries come into being only as they become practically necessary because they are not inherently necessitated by the practices of sociality ... Such boundaries are potential, not elements in its table of organization ... Boundaries in Melanesia are emergent" (2000:103). As I illustrate in Chapter Three, this has caused considerable confusion among administrators attempting to map these relative emergent boundaries into stable categorical maps.

NEGOTIATING NIMAKOT RELATIONAL SOCIALITY

To the person in Nimakot nothing about the process of relating seems predetermined and moral failure always seems imminent. Other researchers in the Mountain Ok region have found similar anxieties. The problem is rooted in the fact that

relational sociality is rooted in a complex web of tenuous relationships that require

constant maintenance. What appears right or moral from one perspective in this web

will appear wrong or immoral from another. Framing this in terms of "lawfulness" and

willfulness", Joel Robbins has noted that among the Urapmin there is a "paradox of

lawfulness," that what appears lawful from one perspective appears willful from another

(2004). As Bercovitch noted for the Umfokmin, an action that seems to give to one

relationship will at the same time seem to take from another (1994). In the following, I

outline more of the difficulties of relational sociality, the implications of these

difficulties as people of Nimakot attempt to navigate their way through them.

Relational sociality requires a constant negotiation in which there are few rules.

As has been noted for their neighbors and others throughout New Guinea, people have

almost complete autonomy. They are not restricted by categorical rules or rulers.

Leaders emerge as somebody with a knack for influencing others – which is what

makes him or her a "leader" – but ultimately they have no real authority or power. If

people do not wish to be constrained by a person's leadership they can simply move.

As Peter Lawrence has pointed out, "an examination of leadership or authority vested in

individuals in these societies (of Papua New Guinea) reveals comparatively little about

the processes of social control" (1969:25).

People are only restricted by other people who are equally autonomous. An

action is judged by its effects on others rather than in comparison to an ideal or to a set

of rules. They live by a situational morality, to be negotiated as life goes on. This

creates significant stress to Nimakot social actors, who must constantly negotiate a shifty and complex field of relations.

As I have argued above, it is imperative that people continuously positively relate to one another through open unconditional sharing. A breach in a social relation is detrimental to the health of people, their gardens, and the rest of the world around them (see Barth 1987:14). Even small breaches are dangerous for they all too easily feed into larger conflicts. To understand the social life of Nimakot then, one must be aware of the dangers of conflicts, and what it is like to try to avoid conflicts while living a lifetime entirely in the presence of those you know – a world without strangers.

In an effort to avoid conflict, all overt competition is avoided, even in recently imported sports we normally think of as competitive. While there is much laughter and liveliness at such sporting events, there is absolutely no cheering, encouragement, or praise given. I learned this slowly and ultimately with great shame, as I eventually realized how aghast people were with my showboat performances; reverse lay-ups, behind the back passes and – perhaps worst of all – throwing my hands up in the air or applauding with excitement when I scored. I soon discovered that applause is only appropriate when the score becomes tied and the scorekeeper kindly asks those watching to clap their hands (Tok Pisin: "16-16 paitim han").

Just as they are humble in sport, they are also humble in the ways they portray themselves while talking. They use language that is non-threatening, and often even self-effacing. They make requests that are subtle and indirect in such a way that they do

not seem like demands and are vague enough that if the person they are asking wants to deny them they can conveniently fail to interpret their remarks as a request at all.

They reveal their ideas slowly and vaguely, readily allowing interruptions from people to further guide the discussion. In this way, most ideas are shaped through a highly cooperative interpersonal production. One's words are rarely solely one's own.

People quickly dissociate themselves from their talk as they speak with such phrases as "I'm not sure," "I'm just talking," and "That's just my thoughts," spoken in self-deprecating tones.

Arguments are rare and apparent agreement and consensus abundant. The same person will agree with one position in one moment in one interaction and agree with its antithesis the next. What Kulick and Stroud have noted for the Gapun of Papua New Guinea could just as easily be said of Nimakot, "(social) competence is expressed by being outwardly self-effacing, accommodating and agreeable ... and not, as in Anglo-American culture, on expressing one's opinions, feelings or thoughts" (1990:299).

These strategies are necessary because Nimakot is a small world where, as they say, "talk never dies" (Tok Pisin, "tok no sa indai") People "carry" talk from house to house, hamlet to hamlet, and valley to valley. Negative comments about another invariably make their way to the person who has been disparaged. In such a situation it is important that they are careful what they say and to whom they say it.

Secrecy is an important tool for negotiating this sociality. Secrecy is as much about being ambiguous or confusing as it is about hiding information. People in Nimakot often "turn" their talk and do not talk "straight" when they want to hide

something. They rarely speak plainly about certain aspects of reality, particularly those that are sources of great tension. They leave the details of disputes and conflicts unspoken and always open to revision.

Because of this secrecy, people are keen interpreters of the "hidden" meanings behind people's actual words and actions. This makes it even more important to be careful what one says, as even when one intends no harm, the words may be interpreted by others differently. They would take Bakhtin's argument that "the word in language is half someone else's" (1981:293) as a matter of common sense and practical necessity rather than an intellectual insight.

What one says can easily be taken the wrong way, so people rarely use names when talking about somebody, leaving open the possibility to claim that they were talking about somebody else. For example, when items disappeared from the school a meeting was held to discuss possible suspects. Though no names were mentioned, it was clear that everybody was talking about the same person as the prime suspect, mentioning such identifying markers as his home village, grade, and current (suspicious) flee to the nearby mining town. Of course each of these identifying markers was appropriately disguised as general admonishment: "People who live near the school especially should respect it" (identifies location of suspect). "Sixth grade is an important grade. Sixth graders need to look after their school. It is their future" (identifies grade of suspect). "All the students should be here to discuss this. They should not be running off to town to flirt and party" (identifies suspect as somebody that has ran off to the mining town). Though clearly identified as such, this did not have

anybody visibly upset until the name was actually mentioned, sending the father into a violent tirade that did not subside until he himself became a recluse from the public eye. "You have ruined his name!" he exclaimed, and later permanently transferred his son to a school in a distant village where his name was not yet ruined.

The careful negotiation of secrecy – what to reveal to whom, when, how, and why – is not only important in the exchange of talk, but in the exchange of wealth as well. Productive relating requires open unconditional sharing. However, people find that they do not have enough for everybody or possibly even for themselves. Hence, they are forced to hide some of their wealth (Bercovitch 1994).

People hide virtually everything they can for fear that somebody may ask for it, or that based on the apparent wealth which the item signifies, ask for something else. Knives are stashed into the thatch of rooftops, precious food such as pandanus or meat is buried in the bush, and money is held in hidden packets inside hidden packets. It is not unusual for a man to take several minutes getting to his money through a set of various contraptions that open layer after layer like a set of Russian nesting dolls. More than one person has confided to me that their own most secret hiding place is inside their toilet hole, where they have tied a small plastic bag with valuables inside to a string and dangled it from the supports that cover the hole.

People purposely dress worse than they can in an effort to appear poor. Clothes are a sign of wealth and one must do their best to appear only as good as they can afford to. One clever young man started buying un-numbered soccer jerseys. They come in 12-packs, each one the same. He hides the packet in a locked room of his house and

wears a different one every few days. He seems to have worn the same shirt every day for years, and will likely get several more years out of the packet.

Other people with relatively new untorn shirts hidden away in their homes prefer to wear t-shirts with nothing but the collar and the cuff still hanging together by a few threads. Their shoulders, back, and chest are uncovered and the outsider wonders why they are wearing a shirt at all. But these shirts are not only worn, they are prized for the illusion of poverty they provide. They are sometimes traded or given to people making long journeys. They don't get heavy in the rain and they don't make "heavies" (Tok Pisin for "problems") in distant villages by making people jealous.

If one has a major request to ask of somebody they generally "dress down" for the occasion, shedding all Western clothes and opting for the traditional dress of a penis gourd for men and a grass skirt for women. The requester begins by pointing out just how poor they are, how they can afford to wear nothing but this penis gourd. They often drape themselves in sweet potato vines and hold a bow and arrow or stone axe, pointing to these items as the meager means through which the eke out a living. Their hope is to make the benefactor feel sorry for them and offer assistance.

Exchanges are yet another domain which must be carefully negotiated through the use of secrecy. People find themselves in a web of relations with competing contradictory demands. They cannot possibly satisfy them all. In giving to one relation they are not giving to another, so they must be stealthy about some exchanges (Bercovitch 1994).

The type case of this kind of exchange is the hidden pig feast. Unlike other areas of New Guinea, pigs are relatively rare – with only approximately one pig for every four persons. On the rare occasion that a person slaughters their pig they have to be very careful to fulfill all of their previous obligations. To do so they often invite those they want to share with to a secret meeting in the forest where they cook the pig in an earth oven and eat it. All sorts of ruses are used to disguise the meeting – code words, decoys, and look-outs.

As the epitome of anti-productive relating behavior, the cultural imagery of witchcraft builds from this secrecy of everyday life. Like the secretive pig feasts described above, witches are imagined to meet secretly in the forest or underwater, but in a gross inversion of these events they do not cook and eat pigs, they cook and consume humans they have recently killed.

WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft is an integral part of relational sociality. It is not merely a set of beliefs that can be studied on its own. A focus on witchcraft in itself would be a misguided pursuit. Witchcraft in Nimakot is better understood as what Karen Fields calls a "moral artifact," which she describes as "neither errors nor lies because they are not mere matters of belief" (1982:586). Witchcraft is not just emergent from everyday life and the relational sociality I have described, but part and parcel of it. Building from Durkheim's concept of "moral community," Fields perceptively points out that

witchcraft is no less a "real" construction than our own society's notions of "self,"

"race," or the "value" of gold (585; from Durkeim 1915). As Evans-Pritchard noted for

the Azande, witchcraft is a "web of belief" that is much more than "an external

structure." For the Zande social actor witchcraft is part and parcel of everyday social

action and "the texture of his thought" (1937).

Nearly sixty years ago Monica Wilson pointed out the importance of a

worldview "dominated by personal relations" to witch beliefs (1945). She further

elaborated that "witch beliefs are generally in small-scale societies ... dominated by

personal relationships, societies in which people think in personal terms and seek

personal causes for their misfortunes" (1951:313).   Mary Douglas expressed a similar

perspective in 1970:

> We would expect anthropomorphic ideas of power to dominate where
>
> humans press closely upon one another. And if these intensive social
>
> relations are well-defined, we would expect the anthropomorphism of the
>
> cosmos to be regulative, to uphold the moral and social codes by just
>
> ancestral wrath; whereas, if intensive social interaction is ill defined, we
>
> would expect a witchcraft-dominated cosmos (1970:xxx).

In a study of sorcery among the Mekeo of Papua New Guinea Michele Stephen

goes one step further than Douglas and Wilson, pointing out that it is not just intense

personal relations, but the fact that personal relations are actually constitutive of the

person among the Mekeo (1995, 1996). Drawing on ideas of Marilyn Strathern (1988),

she notes that the Mekeo person is not an individual set apart from all relations but a "dividual" intimately connected to those relations. Dividuality implies that relations play a central role in the health and well-being of the person. When one becomes ill, they might seek the cause as a failed or "poisonous" relationship, leading to an accusation of witchcraft. Hence, witchcraft can bee seen an integral part of dividuality, or as I have preferred to call it, relational sociality.

People of Nimakot often voice their uncertainty about witchcraft. They lament that they do not know precisely how it works. Only witches know how witchcraft works (compare Jones 1980:252). Nonetheless, when somebody dies or becomes ill, an elaborate shared understanding of how witchcraft works is drawn upon in discussing the ultimate cause of death or illness. These discussions not only help to determine who was responsible for the malady, they also provide people with more stories and information to add to their understanding of witchcraft. This understanding is necessary in order to protect themselves from future witchcraft attacks. Each discussion of witchcraft is full of stories of previous attacks of witchcraft. Each new story draws from the collective understandings of previous stories, but is free to elaborate, particularly on issues or areas where stories have conflicted or not touched in the past. This creates extreme variability and flexibility in understandings about witchcraft. Such variability is common throughout Melanesia (e.g. Williams 1969(1940):104, Jones 1976, 1980; Welsch 1982; see also Geschiere 1997on Cameroon).

Despite such variability, the imagery clearly builds from a combination of understandings about positive relating in everyday life and the inevitable and pervasive

secrecy that is both integral and antithetical to this positive relating. More to the point,

the imagery is an almost complete inversion of local ideals about positive relating. In a

survey of witch beliefs worldwide, Rodney Needham found that "the witch's conduct is

not merely contrasted with the ideal: there is nothing worse than the acts that the witch

is imagined to perpetrate, so that the witch's conduct is strictly opposite of the ideal"

(1978: 29). It follows then that a study of witch imagery might also reveal the ideals of

those living with such imagery.

In Nimakot, female witches are not imagined to perform the cultural ideal of

giving food to others to nurture and grow them. Instead, they steal food from others and

ultimately attempt to kill and consume the person. The food they take is wrapped up

into a small bundle called a *yokop* and hidden away (rather than openly shared). The

specifics of what is done to the food beyond this are unknown, but the bundle is said to

poison the victim who is intimately attached to the food that is bundled and hidden

away.

Instead of caring for children by giving food, the female witch is suspected of

having a "witch child" (bisman) that helps her to take food scraps from others to work

her witchcraft. In short, the female witch does not give birth and reproduce life, she

consumes life.

As with the female witch, the male witch is an inversion of the productively

relating man. Male witches do not hunt animals to feed their fellow villagers helping to

grow them as good men do. They transform themselves into those very animals they

normally kill *for* humans and instead kill humans themselves. People are unsure

whether or not a yokop made by a female witch is enough to kill a victim. There is speculation that it merely weakens the victim so that men can come in to shoot them with invisible witchcraft arrows as I just described. The victim is dead at that point, though his physical body may appear alive for the next few days. To hide their identities, witches are said to do something to make the victim forget the attack. Some speculate that the victim is made to eat his own flesh or drink his own blood. Others say he is simply beaten severely on the head to make him forget.

It is strongly suspected that witches meet together in secret to feast on human flesh and to plan their next move. Again there is an inversion. Ideally, the productively relating man orchestrates exchanges of people (wives and children) that produce and reproduce life. Male witches make nefarious exchanges of dead human flesh, working instead to consume life. The male witch is also imagined to recruit others into witchcraft, luring them in with the sweet taste of human flesh.

These exchanges may become part of large networks of death exchanges which "normal" non-witches may enter into by hiring witches to kill for them. This bribery is called *bis bilwan*. The person wishing to make the bribe takes an item associated with the victim and gives it to another man with a vague instruction of what to do with it. The man understands it is for a bribe and passes it on to somebody else with the same vague instruction. Eventually it falls into the hand of a witch who, it is suspected, calls on his witch friends to perform the deed. The witch will then expect payment and will continue to kill relatives of the person he was asked to kill until he receives his

payment. If payment is still not prompt he then turns on those who hired him, killing them one by one until the whole "line" of relations is dead.

There are certain defenses against witchcraft. One strategic defense is to share every item of food you eat with somebody else. This way the witch will have to poison both you and the person you have shared with in order to poison you as every scrap of food will be a part of you both. I was often used for this purpose as people assumed that nobody would want to work witchcraft on me. As witchcraft is cooled and made ineffective by water, another strategy is to carefully gather all of your food scraps and throw them in the water when you are done eating. This is also why suspected witches are asked to wash their victims. The water is said to "cool" their witchcraft, making it ineffective.

Although all these aspects of witchcraft are strongly suspected, everybody maintains that they ultimately do not know how witchcraft works, and maintain an openness to new understandings. Only witches know how it works precisely. Only witches know how the bundle is made or what is done with the bundle to make it effective. Only witches know how to transform into other animals, what animals they can transform into, where to find invisible arrows and how to shoot them, how to cut the body to eat somebody's flesh, how to stuff them full of fake flesh and make them appear to be alive, and how to make them forget the attack.

Along with the uncertainties about how witchcraft works are uncertainties as to whether or not witchcraft works at all. As I asked questions about witchcraft before Operation Clean and Sweep began, young men especially continually reminded me that

it is "just a belief" (TP, "bilip tasol") and that nobody has ever seen any physical evidence that witchcraft actually works. "Our ancestors believed these things and taught us these things so now we also believe these things, but we have never seen it with our own eyes," one young avid Seventh Day Adventist told me, adding, "I walk alone in the forest all the time. I throw my food scraps wherever I want. I'm not afraid of witchcraft." Moments later as an older man told a convincing story about a man shooting another with an invisible witchcraft arrow, this same young Adventist seemed taken in by the story and exclaimed, "It's true! Fuckin'! Kill them all!"

Observing how discourses about witchcraft became manifest in everyday life I found that skepticism and uncertainties about witchcraft were not intellectual pursuits but were instead used as discursive tools, used to accuse or deny accusation. I found that those who seemed skeptical of witchcraft were those who were in danger of being accused or had a relative who might be accused. One man who had graduated with high marks from Telefomin High School publicly expressed well-thought-out and clearly articulated skepticism one day, but after his young cousin passed away raged in public about the vicissitudes of witchcraft.

The uncertainties about witchcraft make it a particularly fruitful area for research. It is an imaginative space reflecting cultural anxieties as well as ideals, and a space for contestation and transformation through the tensions of everyday life. I have only briefly outlined the most broadly agreed upon aspects of witchcraft in Nimakot here. As will be seen, it becomes a key node of contestation as the relational sociality I

have been describing comes into tension with the process of modern statecraft in Nimakot.

Case Study: The (Dis)Integration of Kotinim

The following case study illustrates how the process of relational sociality works in the case of a serious illness and the role witchcraft imageries play in this situation. If productive relating causes growth, health, and fertility, the place to find the causes of decay, sickness, and death are logically to be found in broken or unhealthy relationships. Thus, the personal history of the ill victim is scrutinized both for times in which he may have wronged another or they may have wronged him, in either case tarnishing the relationship, negatively relating, and sending the relationship into an interminable regression into suspicion, hate, and jealousy. *Has he stolen anything? Has he failed to return on a gift? Has he committed adultery? Have his pigs destroyed any gardens? Has he said anything negative about anybody? Has he laughed at anybody?* All of these questions are pursued. The ill person is an integration of relations that have grown him. Now those relations are dis-integrated to be analyzed for a "sick" relation that may be the cause of the illness revealed in the body. It is hoped that such dis-integration will clear the way for a healthy re-integration of relations and a healthy body. The case illustrates the importance and flexibility of witchcraft imagery and how the dynamics and strategies of secrecy and revelation are employed and negotiated by different people throughout the process.

November 2002. While we sat around the fire discussing the raucous feasts of

the past pandanus season and anticipating the large Christmas feasts soon to come,

Kotinim began complaining of stomach pains. He lamented that he had felt too weak to

go to the garden for some time now and lifted his tattered t-shirt to show us how his

stomach had swollen. He explained that his stomach did not hurt all over, but only in

two places, as if an arrow had hit him near the center of the stomach and exited through

his side. In fact, that was precisely what he suspected – that he had been shot with an

invisible witchcraft arrow.

As the Christmas feasts passed, his stomach grew larger while his arms and legs

grew weaker. He had no energy to work in the garden. As his condition worsened

people started discussing its possible causes in the relative privacy of their own homes.

The overwhelming consensus was that it was most likely caused by a witch, and

discussions sought to inventory the possible reasons somebody may have wanted to kill

Kotinim. These first speculations were relatively private and low-key, illustrating the

way in which revelations are usually a cooperative project in Nimakot. Revelations are

always minor, vague, and are often followed by a qualifying statement such as "it's just

an idea" (tingting tasol) or "I'm just talking" (Tok Pisin, "mi tok tasol" or Kali, "weng

kup"). Nobody dared speculate too specifically in public at this point. No names or

other specifics were mentioned, even as I (in my duty as anthropologist) naively nagged

for details of the who, what, when, why, and how. They spoke of events that to my

foreign ears sounded vague – "he killed a pig," "a chicken was killed," "he went to

town with 80 kina," – but everybody else seemed to have a pretty good sense of the unspoken specifics, and slowly a consensus inventory of possibilities was building.

Illustrating the logic of relational sociality, it was an inventory of possible broken or strained relations between Kotinim and others. The vague public stories told of times Kotinim had wronged another person, implying that the person may have worked witchcraft for revenge. While Kotinim's body grew hideous with illness, so his reputation also suffered as all his wrongs were systematically revealed for public scrutiny. Every revelation was filled with the hope that it may be the real cause that might lead to the cure, but at the same time brought another social scar into the public eye.

Through the goodwill and actions of countless relations feeding him and looking after him since he was a baby he had grown into the man he now was. As his body deteriorated people wondered who of evil will and actions was now killing him. All the ugliness of his own wrong-doings was now the foremost topic of conversation throughout the community. *Who had he wronged? Who wanted revenge?*

Despite the secrecy, even I was catching on to the inventory of possibilities. If anybody had asked myself or almost anybody else in the area who the prime suspects were we could have listed them. But their names, and the specifics of the suspicions, were not publicly revealed. Of course, this meant that even though nothing had been revealed publicly the suspects themselves knew of the suspicions against them, and each of them was subtly trying to hedge suspicions away from them while preparing for a possible public defense should the suspicions be revealed. Lokim was one of them.

He was emerging as the most probable suspect linked to the vague and now often-told public story of Kotinim killing a pig. That Kotinim had killed a pig was all that had been revealed. The hidden side that everybody knew but nobody would dare reveal was that the pig belonged, in part, to Lokim, and that Lokim had been very upset after losing the pig, taking part of the backbone to the counsel as evidence and charging Kotinim 150 Kina and other valuables. Kotinim paid the compensation but as he grew ill people began speculating about where the *other* part of that pig's backbone had gone. *Was Lokim, the most powerful surviving man of the "before" time, working witchcraft on this backbone and making Kotinim ill? Had he sent it to other witches along with payment to kill Kotinim?*

None of this was revealed in public. Had one person been brave enough to reveal such detail and name Lokim personally, he or she would face severe consequences. Lokim would have raged in public about how his name had been trashed, the public display both illustrating his innocence ("*would a guilty man be so angry?*") and paving the way for him to receive compensation from the person suspecting him. But an even greater danger to revealing witchcraft suspects is that the witch may attack for revenge. Even in non-witchcraft cases, people fear that revealing the specifics of a suspicion may lead to a witchcraft revenge on the part of the suspect. Eventually the hidden aspects of the "Kotinim killed a pig" story would be revealed by Lokim himself, but not until it was clear that he was under such broad suspicion that it would not go away without him making a public statement of his innocence and somehow showing his innocence in a meaningful way.

Lokim was taking his time however, and Kotinim was growing more and more anxious and alerted the counsel president of his dilemma. The counsel president is a new category of person that – however tentatively – stands slightly outside the normal demands of social relations (see Chapter 3 for further analysis). He is a socially sanctioned mediator with limited power to reveal details that others must keep secret. Kotinim described to the counsel president a dream he had showing him how Lokim had taken a piece of the pig he had killed, bundled it, and placed it at the base of a sago palm. There the roots of the sago palm were slowly growing over the food and enveloping the life of Kotinim at the same time. Dreams are considered to be as good as actual eye-witnessing in matters of witchcraft, which are not available to normal everyday vision. The counsel president took the report of his dream very seriously.

The counsel president, in his unique position as mediator, is generally empowered to reveal the hidden side of suspicions without fear of retribution. So when the counsel directly confronted Lokim with the suspicion, Lokim did not go into a public rage. He claimed his innocence and promised to wash Kotinim to prove it.

The next day Lokim found a bar of soap and went to everybody implicated in the pig-killing affair and asked them to touch the soap and wish Kotinim a full and healthy recovery. It was not just Lokim who was implicated, though his was the name that went public. Everybody who was in some way expecting a share of the pig was implicated, for any one of them may have wanted revenge for their loss. He then carried the soap to the house where Kotinim was waiting with his family and closest friends.

Before washing Kotinim, Lokim exercised his new powers as a publicly revealed suspect, which included the freedom to reveal the other suspects, which he promptly did, names and details included. "There are four other possibilities," he announced, and listed them while counting them off on his fingers. "One, after you killed the pig you lied to Kenny. Two, you stole money from the Baptist youth group to go to town. Three, you hit Nokan for suspecting you of killing her chickens, and for suspecting your children of stealing." Kotinim defended himself and his children against the suspicion of stealing, and said that he had already compensated Ona for hitting her. But Lokim was not done, and had saved his largest and most powerful revelation for last. "Last, you were beating your wife and her parents were very upset with you. You told them not to follow you to Denka but they did. They may have bewitched you there. You have been hiding this and now I am revealing it." "I can't hide it," Kotinim conceded.

Having placed sufficient suspicion on this final alternative possibility, Lokim then defended himself based on the logistics of his supposed witchcraft. He restated the specifics, that he was suspected of taking part of the backbone of the pig Kotinim had killed and placing it at the base of a sago palm where the palm was now enveloping Kotinim's life. He reminded us that many people had eaten part of that pig, most of them his own family. If he had worked witchcraft on the backbone it would affect everybody who ate it, including his own sons who were alive and well.

He then reminded Kotinim of the ways in which they were related, how Kotinim's grandfather had helped Lokim's father pay the brideprice for Lokim's

mother. This placed Lokim and Kotinim together on the "man's side". He told

Kotinim that he was initiated into the men's house by Kotinim's grandfather – that they

were "one line" and he could not imagine harming him.

Nonetheless, he would wash him to prove his innocence and to ease Kotinim's

worries. Kotinim took his shirt off, revealing his swollen stomach, and sat on a stone

near a bucket of water. Lokim swirled the soap in the water while he mumbled a

prayer. He spoke short phrases quickly and quietly, his voice slightly rising as he began

each one addressing the Christian God, "Father God, Jesus" (Kali, "Atang God

Yesute"). Lokim splashed water onto his back and head, rubbing him as he continued

to pray. The water was to "cool" his witchcraft and those of others who had touched the

soap.

Lokim reiterated the four points of his defense. First, there were other

possibilities that may have led to the illness, particularly the highly suspicious way in

which his mother-in-law followed him to his house after he beat his wife. Second, there

were logistical problems in the way Lokim was said to have made Kotinim sick. Third,

Lokim and Kotinim were close relatives and Lokim had important relationships with

Kotinim's forefathers. And fourth, if Kotinim did not recover after Lokim washed him,

it would stand as further evidence that Lokim was not the witch. Lokim noted that

when Kotinim did not recover after his washing others must wash him. One by one

they would go through the list of possibilities he had listed.

Safety Meeting

Ok Tedi Mining Limited makes a large production of safety. Signs and postings on bulletin boards, buildings, and cars constantly announce to the visitor, "Safety First!" There is a billboard in the center of town advertising safety and includes a running tally of how many accident-free hours have been worked since the last injury. Taking the message to the people, representatives of the company tour local villages to hold "safety meetings," encouraging people to bathe often, eat properly, and to not partake in risky behavior such as excess drinking, drugs, and prostitution. It is one of their ways of giving back which they proudly feature in their promotional material (see http://www.oktedi.com). Though these proselytizers of safety have never been to Nimakot, the people of Nimakot are familiar with their work and have incorporated it into their own lives.

Though safety meetings of Nimakot are also concerned with bodily safety it is not generally considered that cleanliness, good nutrition, and control of excess are necessary or sufficient, except to the extent that such strategies may help to avoid social friction. It is social problems – "heavies" – that are discussed in Nimakot safety meetings. Heavies that may potentially or may have already led to witchcraft. "Safety" almost always means safety from witchcraft.

Thus far, relatively private family discussions have slowly dis-integrated the ill person by taking apart and analyzing their personal relationships that are so integral to their health and well-being. The hope is that by locating the poisonous relationships and healing them, they will thereby heal the victim. Now this same process is brought out into the open in the form of a safety meeting. The inventory of possibilities relating

to the person will be made public and plans will be made for retribution so that these social ills may be healed, hopefully healing the victim as well.

It is secrecy that ultimately makes the safety meeting necessary. Due to secrecy, nobody knows (or is in a position to reveal) the full context, details, and extent of any one series of events and relations that may be relevant to the case. Secrecy is also strategically used throughout the meeting, as people reveal only small bits and pieces of information at a time and allow others to fill in other details as the participants slowly work towards what will hopefully be a consensus conclusion. However, as will be seen throughout this dissertation, apparent consensus is rare, and true consensus is likely unattainable.

That the English word, "meeting" is used to denote such an event is telling. The format is self-consciously borrowed from other meetings they have seen held by the "Whiteman" or people with extensive experience with Whiteman-style meetings. Seventh Day Adventists are particularly well-trained in the intricacies of holding a proper meeting as they participate in quarterly "business meetings." Some people, especially young men, often lament that they are only just now beginning to learn how to have a proper meeting and therefore their talks do not go "straight."   Many people talk at once, people pose problems entirely off-topic, and the agenda is never followed or completed. Any of these infractions can be cause for a young man (or less often, woman) with considerable meeting experience to "take the floor" (by demanding it with precisely those words) and describe, once again, the proper rules of meetings. The counsel president often does this while gesturing vociferously to his clipboard and

paper, "Follow the agenda!" There is always complete consensus that he is right as people in the crowd murmur their appreciation along with a few self-deprecating jokes about the slovenly disorderliness of "ol blak" (blacks) (a theme I take up in more detail in Chapter 4).

Two days after Lokim washed Kotinim, the people of Nekalibil and other interested parties crowded under the awnings of houses facing a hard-packed dirt clearing where the counsel stood holding his clipboard over his eyes to block the sun. He faced a semi-circle of approximately 80 men. About 20 women sat under a house behind him to his left, distant enough that they could make commentary among themselves as they wove string-bags. Kotinim sat to the left, his tattered red t-shirt no longer large enough to cover his protruding belly, yet it hung loosely on his emaciated arms. His whole body was skeletal, yet his stomach looked as though it would explode.

"There is a pregnant man sitting here," the counsel began. "Men don't get pregnant." This is a common way of implying witchcraft – to point out an otherwise impossible occurrence.

Then with the proper discursive ceremony that a meeting entails he began, "I now bring this talk to the floor." (Tok Pisin, "*Mi putim dispela tok long floa.*")

"The first charge I bring forth is on Lokim. The second is on Kotinim's mother-in-law (Tepnip)." Tepnip, who Lokim had already revealed as a primary suspect just before washing Kotinim for the suspicious way in which she had followed Kotinim to his home in Denka after their big argument, was nowhere to be found. For those suspicious of her it only increased their suspicions. Others considered her absence a

misunderstanding – she had thought the meeting to be exclusive to the people of Nekalibil.

Lokim was asked to talk first. "Now I will tell you the story of how he killed my pig." This was the official public revelation of the story that had previously only been referred to as, "Kotinim killed a pig." He briefly verified the story, recounting how Kotinim had killed the pig, hid what he couldn't eat in one sitting, and when it was discovered by Kenny's dog, lied to Kenny saying that he was a Christian and could never even think of stealing somebody else's pig. Later Kotinim admitted killing the pig and paid compensation to Lokim. Lokim reminded people that he was able to buy an even better pig with the compensation and had happily eaten it already, calming any thoughts of revenge he may have still held in his heart.

This brief story completed, Lokim shifted the topic to Kotinim's mother-in-law, Tepnip. He recounted the evidence against her, emphasizing that he saw with his own eyes how she held a stick in anger ready to beat Kotinim for beating her daughter and then followed him to his home in Denka just before he got ill. "If she is a witch, she'll say it was the problem with my pig. She and Kotinim have a problem between them though too. Without her here all the talk will just come to me. She needs to be here for this."

Lokim then shifted to another possibility, the killing of Nokan's chicken. Previously this story had been glossed simply as "Kotinim was suspected of killing a chicken." Now Lokim revealed the names and particulars for all to hear. At the sound of her name Nokan countered, claiming (as Kotinim did 2 days previously) that Kotinim

had already paid her compensation and it was over. "We're just talking," Lokim said and the counsel affirmed, "just talking." Nokan took the "just" (*kup*) and magnified it, implicitly stating her case that the talk was vacuous, "*Just* talking."

The only possibility remaining in the inventory Lokim had given 2 days ago was the money Kotinim had stolen from the Baptist youth group to buy a plane ticket to Tabubil. But leaders of the Baptist church had already made public announcements that the church should not be involved in suspicions of witchcraft because the church was part of the "new road" that did not include witchcraft.

The counsel turned attention back to the stolen pig, which he announced was to be the main topic of this meeting. The issue was made more serious because the pig would have been shared with many people and any one of them may have wanted to revenge their loss by bewitching Kotinim. "Lokim is okay because he washed him, but there are many others who may feel the weight of this pig problem, or Lokim may have bribed somebody to harm Kotinim. So let's discuss this and then everybody must wash Kotinim." For Christians who had expressed that they may feel shame in participating in a traditional custom like washing away witchcraft he added, "Even if you go to church, at least touch the soap that will wash him."

Kotinim's best friend (they often referred to each other as "brother") then spoke on behalf of Kotinim himself and recounted the possibilities Kotinim had enumerated: the pig, the chicken, the problem with his in-laws, and the Baptist youth group money. But beyond these he wanted to explore deeper conflicts extending into the past and shift the discussion from Kotinim's personal relations to broader relations between families,

clans, and communities. He pointed out that Kotinim's brother had died of the same illness and suggested that perhaps powerful people with a long-time grudge against Kotinim's family had strategically attacked him after he stole Lokim's pig, knowing that the blame would then be placed on Lokim.

Such a charge was serious because it implied a broad scale conflict with many victims and just as many perpetrators (see Chapter Seven). Many such conflicts are framed in terms of clan versus clan or community versus community, causing broad-scale suspicion and revenge. It was quickly diffused by Boski, a man who had been a government leader in Nimakot for almost 20 years and was well-respected as somebody who had studied and knew clan and community histories. But he did agree that there was an uncanny resemblance between the illness that was now killing Kotinim and the one that killed his brother just a few years prior. He pointed out that his brother also had a problem with stealing and when he brought him to court the brother commented, "As long as I live I will never be able to stop stealing." Behind him Boski heard an elder say, "Wherever there are boys like this, one day trees will grow."

The statement by the elder was taken to have a double meaning. One meaning was clear – that stealing was not good for village life, that it would rip villages apart or lead to rampant witchcraft, and trees would one day grow where the houses once stood. But did the elder mean only this, or was there the hidden meaning that he himself would kill the boy and trees would grow over his grave?

"We're at the root of the matter now!" one man exclaimed. Others too were excited by the revelation. "It wouldn't be good for us just to play around on the surface

(TP, "trip antap antap") so now I have dug up some roots," Boski commented, phrasing

revelation with an often-used botanical metaphor (cf. Crook 1999). But the excitement

soon died out. The elder had recently gone completely deaf and could not be consulted

as to the meaning of his statement.

Safety meetings are full of dead-end revelations such as this. Each one seems to

fall away without effect but is nonetheless remembered, ready to be a part of later

revelations either at this safety meeting or any other future discussion.

But as revelations fall away with no effect there comes the growing suspicion

that somebody is hiding something very serious. Anybody present can see that Kotinim

is seriously ill and it remains only to be seen who is making him ill. Bad thoughts alone

do not make somebody ill. Witchcraft is a conscious act. As far as the people at the

meeting were concerned, somebody was making Kotinim ill and they were not

revealing it or their reasons for it.

The ward 12 counsel began showing his frustration. He banged his clipboard

and harangued people for not confessing their own problems with Kotinim. There were

not just these few little problems, he exclaimed. None of these problems warranted

witchcraft. Somebody was hiding something. "Talk out! Talk out!" he yelled and

added a familiar refrain which will sound throughout this dissertation, "Think of our

population!" "Population" is of utmost concern to government officials, a theme I will

address in more detail in the next chapter.

This was followed by a string of personal confessions stating a previous problem

with Kotinim or a relative of Kotinim, how the problem was solved, and why it has no

bearing on the present case. With each personal confession came another familiar refrain, "We can't blame one person. This is just a general discussion of our problems." The comment was to soften any relational problems that may have been revealed. While the safety meeting was meant to reveal such relational problems, they still had to be revealed in a tactful way that itself was cognizant of the relations the statement might be reshaping and/or harming.

Vague and ambiguous references to broader relational problems were revealed but quickly concealed once again as nobody thought it was a legitimate possibility. The revelations unveiled the underlying ambiguities of social actions. Every act of sociality holds the possibility of being misread, as people are not in complete control over their own meanings. One man defended the fact that he had shaken Kotinim's hand, for even a social act as simple as a handshake, while a necessary part of being friendly, may at any moment be used to pass poison to the victim, or one may be suspected of this. Laughter is also fertile ground for suspicion, for it may be suspected of being *at* rather than *with* somebody.

Eventually all possibilities were exhausted and no consensus was reached. Everybody would walk away feeling that somebody was hiding something. Many would have strong suspicions about *who* was hiding something and *who* was killing Kotinim, but there would be very little public agreement on the matter.

With no clear consensus suspects the counsel president asked everybody in attendance to wash Kotinim. A bar of soap was passed throughout the crowd which everybody had to touch. Several people, particularly those who had actually been

mentioned in the meetings in association with particularly suspicious events, used the soap to wash Kotinim and say prayers over him while they did so.

Kotinim was not satisfied. He felt somebody was hiding their witchcraft and that he would die soon. The community of Nekalibil, which had just suffered through the revelations of countless problems, had an equally grim future.

DISINTEGRATING VILLAGES

As Victor Turner and others of the Manchester School noted in their processual studies of witchcraft accusations, the problems revealed in these accusations ultimately eventuate the division or "schism" of communities. It is such processes that continuously reproduce small hamlets in Nimakot. Rarely do hamlets exceed 50 people and it is these larger hamlets that generally face the most tensions over witchcraft and are likely to break apart soon.

Every death or illness brings about relational tensions that must be alleviated. Rituals of washing or compensation payments can sometimes heal bad relations and hold a village together. However, the demands of relational sociality and secrecy I have described are more and more difficult to negotiate as one is drawn into more numerous close relations. Hamlets and villages, where everybody is visible to one another and is expected to productively relate to one another through openness and unconditional sharing are, as Barth and Jorgensen have pointed out, "demanding social arenas" (Jorgensen 1983; Barth 1975) As Bercovitch noted for the nearby Umfokmin, "Even a community of 60 seems a remarkable achievement" (1984:59). One can only

constantly and continuously relate in an open unconditional way with so many people. With more people the possibilities for conflict increase exponentially.

In Nimakot there are ample opportunities for movement. Houses usually only last 5 to 7 years before needing to be rebuilt. Gardens are also exhausted in similar time spans. If relations are not healthy, a man will consider moving his household to a new hamlet with new neighbors, or perhaps even start a new hamlet afresh with his own household as the sole residence until others decide to join him.

Moves are also facilitated by the flexibility of relationality. People can claim and emphasize kinship or don miit affiliation with a wide range of different people in the surrounding areas, giving them several options for new homes with new neighbors.

The history of Nimakot is largely driven by the expansion and disintegration of hamlets. They grow and acquire a "big name" but ultimately collapse in in-fighting and suspicions of witchcraft. They become just another overgrown clearing in the forest, and another name in a long list of failures. As has been noted for people throughout the Mountain-Ok region, they see their world as constantly falling apart (Jones 1980, Jorgensen 1981, Bercovitch 1994, and Crook 1999:60).

RELATIONAL SOCIALITY AS A CULTURAL PROCESS

Having outlined Nimakot relational sociality and the ways it is navigated by people through real life situations, we can now understand it as more than just a mode of sociality, logic, ontology, self, or personhood, but as a pervasive cultural process that entails and actually reproduces these various elements through the process itself.

Relational sociality is a cultural process that both "fits" with life in small, scattered hamlets and reproduces those small, scattered hamlets. Its core logic is relational, expressed in moral terms in the ideal of "looking after" one another as essential to growth and nurturance while not "looking after" leads to illness and death. The paradox of relational sociality is the recognition that one simply cannot "look after" everybody, which leads people into a continuous strategic negotiation of secrecy and visibility, hiding goods, exchanges, and sometimes even themselves. This secrecy, along with the core logic that bad relations lead to illness and death provide the imagery for witchcraft. These logics come together to ultimately reproduce their own social and material basis, as any illness or death leads to witchcraft accusations that often generate residential schisms, reproducing the small hamlet as the node of sociality.

It is this self-replicating process that is in tension with the demands of modern statecraft and the growing local desires for "development." In the next chapter, I outline modern statecraft as a cultural process that ultimately comes into conflict with the cultural process of relational sociality as I have described it in this chapter.

Chapter Three

Modern Statecraft: Making Groups in Nimakot

When Afek was at Bontalabip she gave birth to a child. There were two brothers there. One of them, whose skin was white, stayed close to the child and looked after him. The other boy, whose skin was black, stayed far away and refused to help care for the child. Afek had many things to give but seeing that the black boy was selfish and unwilling to help her child she gave him nothing but a stone axe, bow, and a stalk of taro. She was pleased with the white boy. She gave him a pen, paper, and a shotgun and sent him down the Ip River in a boat. He drifted down the Ip River to the Sepik and on down into the ocean, far, far away. There the white man made many good things – cars, airplanes, and cities. Now at last he has returned with his pen, paper, and shotgun to help his brother the black man.

- common variation of the Afek myth as told in Nimakot

It is a mark of insight, and forty years of experience, that the emerging mythology of Nimakot now traces the differences between the "Whiteman" and "Blackman" to the technologies of the shotgun, pen, and paper. There was perhaps nothing more prevalent or impressive than these three items in the patrol officer's

arsenal. As simple as they are, they are the primary technologies of modern statecraft. By simplifying the cacophonous blooming buzzing complexities of life into legible categories, regularities, and rules, the pen and paper are both the eyes and the voice of the state (see Scott 1998). They run the system. The shotgun ensures that the system is enforced.

The following analysis of modern statecraft in Nimakot can be placed within the growing literature inspired by Michel Foucault's lectures in the late 1970s on government rationalities he called "governmentality" (Foucault 1991). Foucault argues that beginning in 16th century Europe a new form of governmentality began to take shape that attempted to model the government of the state on the government of the household. The challenge was being able to "see" one's domain the way the head of a household can easily see their own domain. Censuses, statistics, and maps played vital roles in this new form of governmentality, providing the technical means for governments to create "the population" and making it easily visible as a *thing* to be measured, surveyed, and controlled on paper (1991:87). While not always explicitly citing Foucault's work on governmentality, a number of recent works have built on similar themes and inform the following analysis, most notably Akhil Gupta's analysis of the growing global governmentality as it manifests in India (1998), Tim Mitchell's work on the history of colonialism and the power of "exhibition" and representation in Egypt (1988), and James Scott's analysis of state-based rationalities in *Seeing Like a State* (1998). These works and many others provide remarkable connections to be drawn with the material I present in this chapter, enough for another entire dissertation

in itself. While some of these connections will be evident, I have left aside a further exploration of these interconnections for a later date in the interest of sticking to the primary argument of this dissertation.

My choice of the term "modern statecraft" is strategic in attempting to build from Foucault's insights on governmentality. First, by using the term "statecraft" rather than state, I hope to understand the state as an ongoing practice. The state is not so much an entity as it is a continuous process that is being "crafted" by social actors in a particular socio-cultural environment. I use the qualifier "modern" to distinguish this process from other forms of statecraft. I use the word "modern" in this phrase not to mark this form of statecraft as "contemporary" or "state of the art" but rather to designate the culture of "modernity," marked by a number of beliefs, ideals and values including categorization, rationalism, abstraction, individualism, and progress among many others. Modern statecraft itself does not necessarily produce or exemplify all of these values, but it has emerged in a global process of interaction with other institutions that helped to shape these values (see Friedman 1994).

A place as isolated and marginal as Nimakot underscores the importance of writing for the cultural process of modern statecraft. The only way for the state to "see" its many subjects is for the complexities of everyday life among its millions of inhabitants to be somehow summarized into easy to use lists, figures, and diagrams such as census lists and maps (Anderson 1991). There are profound implications of such writing practices, particularly in regards to their bias towards categorization. Through

such methods every citizen becomes a number placed in its proper category – in a province, in a district, in a village, in a clan, in a household.

This bias towards standardization and categorization is radically distinct from the relational sociality I described in the previous chapter. The cultural process of relational sociality prioritizes relationships rather than any collective abstraction one might call a "society." Thus a statecraft that models itself as "society" and tries to create one among its constituents is engaged in a radically different project. Edward LiPuma calls this the "modernist project" in which "society is a collection of individuals who have ... agreed, contractually, to cooperate and collaborate in the interests of the common good" (2000:121).

Perhaps the biggest challenge to statecraft's attempts to create a "society" or "community" is the fact that most local people do not subjectively think of themselves in these terms. They do not imagine themselves to be part of "adjacent and competitive empires" (Strathern 1988:102). Their terms are largely relational and mark distinctions that are only situational and temporary. They do not think of themselves as belonging to a bounded cultural group or tribe.

This poses a significant problem for modern statecraft. As LiPuma rightfully points out, modern statecraft ultimately demands a release from relational sociality, for it "requires that agents abstract themselves as conceptually distinct from the relations definitive of their lives and the fields they inhabit" (2000:124). The fundamental challenge of nation-building in Nimakot then is not how to get multiple ethnicities or tribal groups to think of themselves as one nation, but rather to get people to think of

themselves as groups in the first place. The cultural logic of relational sociality is one based in relations not categorical groups.

This distinction between a culture modeling itself as a collective "group" or "society" and one emphasizing relationality extends from a seemingly odd question posed by Roy Wagner in 1974, "Are There Groups in the New Guinea Highlands?" By tracing various relational processes such as those I outlined in the preceding chapter, Wagner answers that there are not "groups" in the New Guinea Highlands. Facing this question again over thirty years later I find that while it is true that the local emphasis on relational sociality seems to preclude a model of social reality in terms of "groups," there are certainly people and institutions trying to *make* groups.

I begin this chapter with an exploration of the ways the categorical bias of statecraft came into conflict with the local relational sociality as early patrol officers attempted to "make groups" in Nimakot and the immediately surrounding areas. I then trace the local incorporation of this categorical bias to the moment when locals began to recognize and create categorical entities themselves in hopes that they could be seen (and served) by the state. I then return to Sahlins' distinction between performative and prescriptive social structures to describe how the process of statecraft works in Nimakot, ultimately setting up a more thorough analysis of the ways statecraft intersects and articulates with relational sociality in the rest of this dissertation. However, I will argue that while many locals may recognize the importance of categorical entities they do not take on a strong categorical *id*entity, remaining instead deeply embedded within the process and ontological logics of relational sociality.

THE CATEGORICAL BIAS OF MODERN STATECRAFT

Listing "an apathetic, listless people ..."

The patrol was met by an apathetic, listless people, who showed many obvious

signs of fear and suspicion.

- Patrol Officer GF Booth on the Atbalmin. 1956

When Booth first encountered the people around Nimakot they were truly "listless" for they had not been listed. He and other patrol officers would soon find that they were scarcely list*able*. Because the people of Nimakot talk of and define themselves relationally and not categorically, taking a census and drawing a map are not such simple affairs, and statecraft has struggled greatly, and still struggles today, to place them into the categories of the state.

It is by now a familiar argument to point out that many "tribal groups" and their boundaries were actually created through the colonial encounter (e.g. LiPuma 2000). As the by now well-reviewed critique has shown, ethnographers were an integral part of these encounters and played important roles in the creation and justification of these objective groups. Despite such critiques, most ethnographies still frame their subject as about "the X" (insert tribal name in the space marked "X"), even when the local people do not recognize the designation and would not identify with (or do not even know of) others who share the designation.

The problem is readily apparent in many field situations in which the people being studied do not have a name for themselves and the ethnographer must invent one for them (not so different from what a government administrator might do). Such is the case in Nimakot. As I pointed out in the preceding chapter, there are no indigenous tribal names locals use to name themselves as a bounded cultural group or "tribe." Yet by a recent map of ethnographic groups published in an Oceania monograph, it would seem my fieldsite was on the border between the "Atbalmin" and "Kufelmin" groups in the "Mountain-Ok" culture area (Craig and Hyndman 1990:213). The boundary between the two groups is meant to coincide with the linguistic boundary between Nek and Kali. By the map, it would seem that I have decided to study one of those peculiar margins or cultural borderlands. But as I noted earlier, the people there are mostly bilingual. It is at best a "fuzzy" border and is not experienced on the ground as a border at all.

However, as will be seen, statecraft is a tenacious cultural process that performs what James Scott has called "a twist on the Heisenberg Principle" 1998: 359-360 n.6). Instead of altering what it tries to see making it essentially unknowable, it transforms what it sees to fit its own assumptions – what it already "knows." Eventually the people of Nimakot would begin to use the same categorical entities that the processes of statecraft created for them, and begin to manipulate those categories themselves.

Importantly, the resistance to this transformation was not conscious. In fact, there are several moments in the following history where it is apparent that locals hoped to cooperate. It was culturally embedded relational social processes that included

scattered, shifty residences and relational rather than categorical names that continuously undermined the categorizations of statecraft, not willful resistance.

I have organized the following by examining the categories that early patrols into the region were attempting to find and ultimately fill. I begin with what was perhaps their biggest concern – the tribe.

Tribe: _____

The relational sociality I described in Chapter Two ensured that people did not live in stable objectively recognizable groups within clear-cut (and therefore easily mapped) boundaries, nor did they think of themselves in terms of such objective criteria. Locals, who lived through the logic and processes of relational sociality, had no need to conceptualize themselves as members of discrete, abstract, categorical groups. Though they made distinctions (wife-givers and wife-receivers for example), these distinctions were always situational and temporary. Even those distinctions that appeared categorical, such as the don miit "clan" names, were constantly being negotiated and altered through relational processes.

When the Australian Administration arrived in Telefomin, 100 km east of Nimakot, in 1948, one of the first things the officers did was work with informants from Telefomin to piece together a rough map of the tribes in the surrounding area. A crude map sketched into an Australian administration patrol report dated April 4th, 1949, illustrates the results of their efforts.

Rogers Patrol Map Overlay 1949
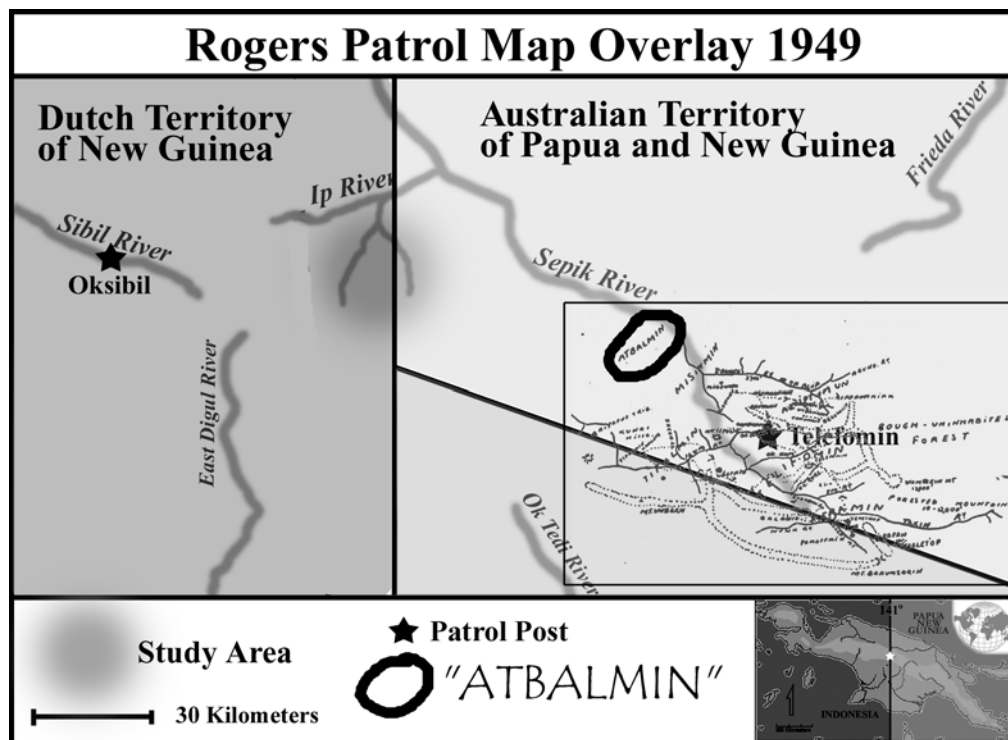
For the people living in the depths of the forests far to the northwest, Telefol informants gave the tribal name, "Atbalmin," a Telefol word meaning "people of the bush." The complete lack of features mapped around the name illustrates just how little was known about the "Atbalmin" region. It was thought to be a very small group, perhaps just 150 people. But over the next 15 years, the time it took for the Administration to finally explore the region all the way to the edge of their territory at the 141st meridian, the name would come to represent over 3,000 people in an area of over 1500 square kilometers, none of whom had ever heard the name, or considered themselves a group. The following is a brief story of statecraft in action, making categories where it needs them.

The first assessment of the Atbalmin by the Australian administration, made by patrol officer D. Clifton-Bassett on November 3rd 1949, illustrates just how limited their conception of the "Atbalmin" was at this time:

> We crossed over from URAPMIN country to ATBALMIN country and made camp … ATBALMIN is a small group, individual gardens and houses widely scattered is the mode of living. There would probably be no more than about one hundred and fifty people in the whole area. (PR1 of 1949/50)

Four days later, on November 7th, he stumbled upon more "Atbalmins":

> At about 2:30 pm rain threatened and camp was made. Our carriers while roaming far for suitable leaves to thatch their housewares (were) apparently heard by some natives and late afternoon we were surprised to be visited by about fifteen men bringing food. They had never seen Europeans before but were part of the ATBALMIN group and had heard of us through their people who live on the south-eastern side of the range. (PR1 of 1949/50)

This was the beginning of a pattern in which all of the people living in the heavily forested areas west of Tifalmin took on the name Atbalmin. The Telefol men who were acting as carriers and translators were not naming a tribe, but simply describing the people as "people of the bush." The patrol officers, trying to place everybody and every square inch of land into its proper category, took the name as a tribal designation.

It was clear that the Telefol men were unfamiliar and fearful of the area. … when we mentioned our intention of traveling in the westerly direction we were immediately faced with the threat of desertion by our entire carrier line. It appears that the spirits of the dead ancestors of the ATBALMIN people are said to dwell in the forested mountains and that they make fires at night. The carriers who had heard of the story were quite upset that we should want to go over there and so rather than have them all leave, another track was tactfully chosen.

Two years later, a patrol led by LJ Doolan managed to overcome their fears and press further west, finding three more groups which he recommended could "conveniently" be classified as "Outer Atbalmins":

The following people were initially contacted by this patrol – KORBORENMEN, OFAKMUN and ILELEMTENAM. … Newly contacted groups could be conveniently classed as OUTER ATBALMINS, being the same linguistic group as the previously visited villages, even though visits between them are very seldom, owing to the distance separating them …

– PR No. 1 of 51-52 August 3rd – 30th 1951

Doolan Patrol Map Overlay - 1951

Dutch Territory of New Guinea

Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea

Frieda River

Ip River

Sibil River

Oksibil

Sepik River

Telefomin

East Digul River

Ok Tedi River

Study Area

30 Kilometers

★ Patrol Post
◯ "No Population"
◆ "Outer Atbalmin"
▢ "Inner Atbalmin"
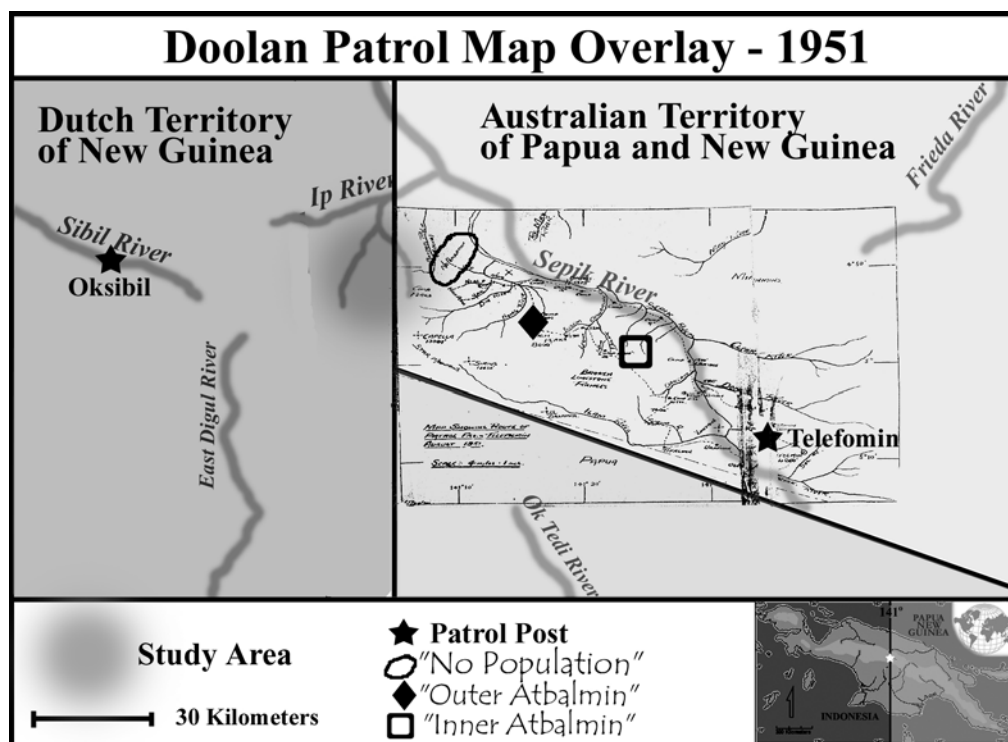
Doolan's map that accompanied this report shows the area immediately east of present-day Tumolbil (and presumably including Tumolbil as well) as having "no population" (see map). He concludes that he has outlined the extent of the Atbalmin group:

> … It can now be assumed that all the ATBALMIN Group has been visited. With a total estimated population of 1000, these people are scattered over many square miles of mountainous country, from three to twelve days hard walking from TELEFOLMIN.

As new officers were rotated into the Telefomin District jurisdiction, it was soon forgotten that "Atbalmin" was a label of convenience and not one that realistically

described any single social group. Map and census, the eyes of the administration, showed the Atbalmin as a distinct categorical entity, surrounded to the south by the Tifalmin and Urapmin, to the east by the Telefomin, and to the north by the Mianmin. The Sepik River provided a natural barrier between the "Atbalmin" and "Mianmin" tribes, both of which were creations of the administration. When fighting broke out along the Sepik between a small group on the north side and another small group on the south side, the administration saw it as a tribal war between the Atbalmin and Mianmin.
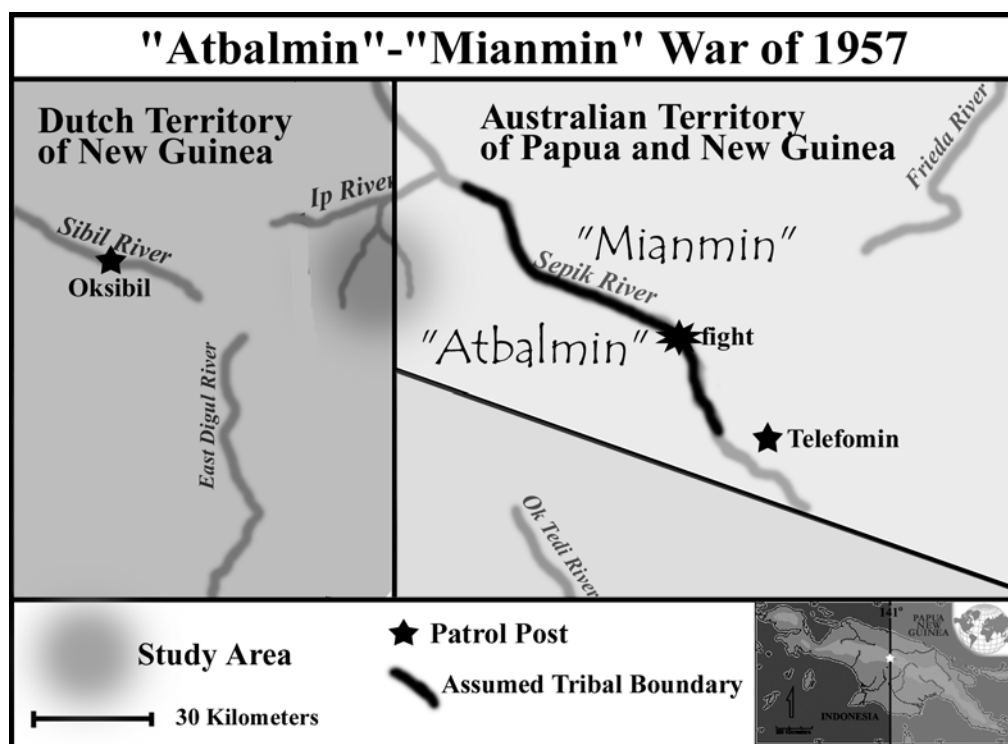
The administration stopped the war by apprehending 25 "Mianmins" for the massacre of 16 "Atbalmins." It was hoped that this would create strong relations with the Atbalmin, but it was not to be. The administration had forgotten that the "Atbalmin" was a group of their own invention, with little basis in local conceptions.

The next patrol, led by GF Booth, received disappointing welcomes from what they expected to be grateful Atbalmins:

> The patrol was met by an apathetic, listless people, who showed many obvious signs of fear and suspicion. …
>
> Clearly the ATBALMINS failed to realize that the Government's friendship towards one ATBALMIN Sub-Tribe, the ATEMKISMIN, was an indication of friendship to all the ATBALMIN Sub-Tribes. The people recognized themselves primarily as members of their respective sub-tribes, and NOT as members of the ATBALMIN Tribe. The close ties which bound the people to their sub-tribes made the work of this patrol all the harder, as each and every sub-tribe had to be treated as a separate entity, and not as just a part of the ATBALMIN Tribe."
>
> - GF Booth PR No. 5 56/57

By 1961, Patrol officer Tierney was careful to place the Atbalmin "tribe" in inverted commas, as "comprised of a number of small groups of people scattered over an extensive area of some 550 miles." It was now clear that "Atbalmin" was a category of convenience. Though the people of Nimakot had not yet been visited by a patrol they were already destined to become part of this imaginary tribe, something of a residual category to cover the area south of the Sepik, north of the Tifalmin, west of the Telefomin and east of the *Kufelmin*.

The Kufelmin were perhaps the biggest wrench in the administrative system as officers sought to map groups and their boundaries. In unexpected ways, the "Kufelmin" name played an important role in ensuring that the "Atbalmin" name extended all the way to the international border. As the patrols headed still further west, stopping in each valley to carefully map the tribal and sub-tribal boundaries, they asked locals who they might encounter next as they traveled west. The answer was invariably, the Kufelmin. As the patrols moved further west the inhabitants of each valley claimed the Kufelmin were still further west. Even precise statements associating the Kufelmin with a particular river or other landmark proved false when this river or landmark was approached and the local inhabitants denied the designation, always claiming the Kufelmin to be still further west. They were described as a "mystery group" in the patrol reports. In a land where the most powerful things are invisible (witchcraft, bush spirits, international borders, etc.), it is only fitting that the Kufelmin who had such a powerful grip on the colonial imagination, had still not materialized by the time JR McArthur became the first Whiteman to enter the Nim river valley in 1963.

By then the eyes of the state – census and map – had put together an inscribed two-dimensional vision of the landscape in which the Nim valley was the last piece of a puzzle that finished at the 141st meridian. To the west of the meridian was another puzzle, to be pieced together by another administration. Without ever consulting the people of Nimakot, the processes of statecraft had already established their broadest and most significant categorical identities. Those west of the 141st meridian were under the Dutch Administration and would soon become Indonesians. Those east of the meridian

were under the Australian Administration and would soon become Papua New Guineans. Their tribal designation was also predetermined. Unless they would claim to be the Kufelmin, they would become part of that convenient categorical leftover, the Atbalmin.

That Lokim, Atangim, and other local people who led McArthur to the Nim river valley did not claim to be Kufelmin was sufficient enough for him to classify them as Atbalmin. As he stood on the international border and asked for more information about the next valley to the west, the response was a familiar one. The people in the next valley are the Kufelmin, he was told. He dutifully marked it on the map, and as no Australian patrol would ever cross the border to go further west to check this information, the name stuck. The tribal border between the "Atbalmin" and "Kufelmin" – both of which exist only in the imaginary of statecraft – conveniently coincided with the international border. Yet the Kufelmin had not yet officially been found.

Anthropologists have not fared much better in locating the Kufelmin. Eytan Bercovitch, who did three years of fieldwork just 22 kilometers east in the Umfokmin area in the early 1980s, carefully mapped the various tribes, sub-tribes, and clans of the region just as previous colonial patrols had done. As the patrols had concluded, he marked the Kufelmin as just across the international border. However, at the same time, a German anthropologist, Thomas Michel, was doing fieldwork in that very location, and after his research reported that the Kufelmin were actually located 60 kilometers still further west, where the Ok language family transitions to the Mek language family (Michel 1986).

Nalumin and Kufelmin in Ethnography
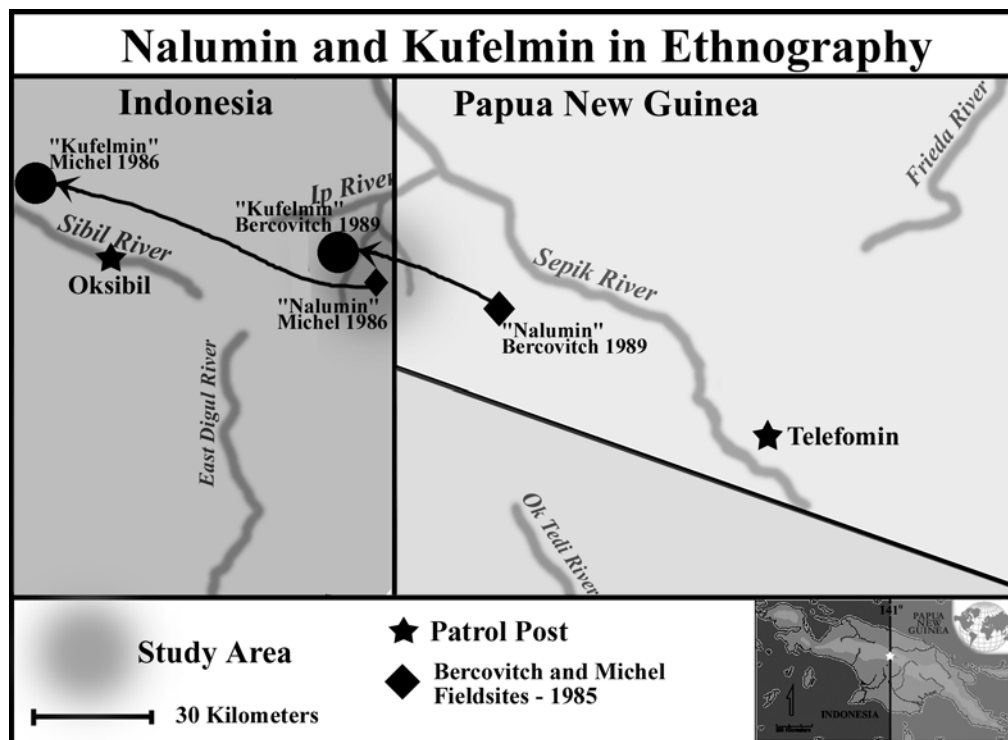
As it turns out, the problem with finding the Kufelmin rests on a problem in translation. "Kufelmin" does not name a group of people, it marks a distinction. It is not a categorical term. It is a relative one. "Kufelmin" simply means, "the people to the west" and explicitly contrasts with "Nalumin" meaning "us people of the east." So no matter where one is in the region, the locals are the Nalumin and the Kufelmin are always further west.[1] This explains why "Nalumin" has been the name given for the local group from as far as Siktaman in the east (Bercovitch 1989) to Apmisibil, some 150 km to the west (Hylkema 1974). The various attempts at mapping the Nalumin and Kufelmin were destined to failure because maps designating the boundaries of groups require stable categorical names for these bounded units of land and people. In the timeless two-dimensional world of the map, relational terms such as Nalumin and

Kufelmin masquerade as names for bounded groups, obscuring important differences between those who use them in everyday life and those who use them as written categories. Ethnographers are necessarily complicit in this mistake. The map below, published in the Oceania Monograph, "Children of Afek," maps the "groups" of the Mountain-Ok, placing Nimakot on the boundary between the "Atbalmin" and the "Kufelmin."

Ethnographic Group Boundaries - Chandica 1990
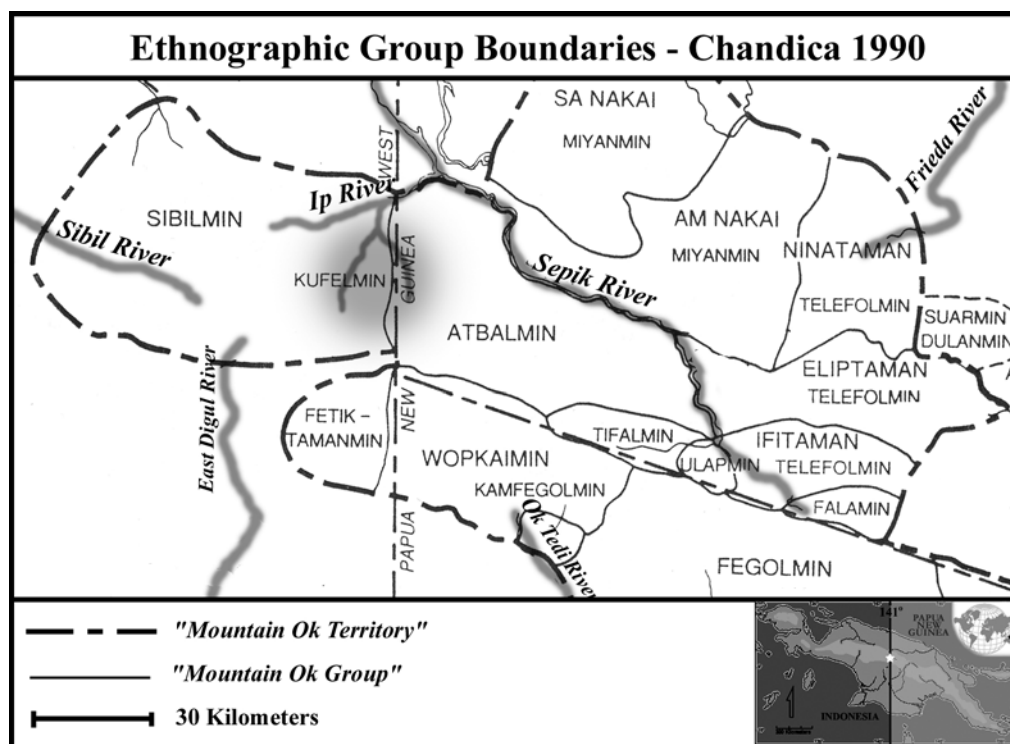
Sub-tribe: _____

There were moments when officers of the Administration questioned their tribal categories, particularly the "Atbalmin," for it was at times apparent that it was not a

name or entity recognized by the local people themselves. But if the Administration had to fabricate a tribal category for administrative efficiency, at least they could count on those smaller groups, the "sub-tribes" (or "clans"), as being real and in accordance with local conceptions. These smaller groups, they thought, were clearly bounded in space. Large, almost impassable rivers and towering mountains separated one group from another. Mapping them was as easy as finding areas where hamlets tended to cluster together in valleys, separated from other clusters, and ask people for their sub-tribal name, their *tinum miit*.

Following this logic, the patrols moved further and further west into the Atbalmin territory carefully carving the landscape into separate sub-tribe domains – a project patrol officer BM Fischer claimed was necessary "to rationalize the situation" (PR8 of 69/70). The situation, as Fischer's comment intimates, was not as "rational" as the cleanly carved maps seem to indicate. Fischer goes on to note that "it was observed that their acknowledgment of wider group identities than the extended family were somewhat vague and it is this factor which makes census so difficult to complete accurately" (Fischer PR8 of 69/70). As I noted in Chapter Two, clan names are extremely flexible. Due to a fully cognatic descent in which descent can be traced through either the mother or father to as many generations as one can remember, virtually everybody can claim to be a part of virtually any clan. Clan names and boundaries emerge from complex social relational processes of conflict, migration, integration, and disintegration. Both the names and boundaries are negotiable and always changing.

Some people in different areas go by the same clan name but claim to be of different clans. Or people going by different clan names claim to be of the same clan. As Eytan Bercovitch noted in the early 1980s, "This caused much agonizing among early patrol officers, who in the end tried to resolve the situation by telling people which (clan) name they should be known by" (1984:56, see also Barth 1987:11). "To rationalize the situation" meant to freeze the ongoing local relational processes into the Administration's categories of convenience.

Sub-Tribes of the Atbalmin 1963

Dutch Territory of New Guinea

Ip River

Sibil River

★ Oksibil

East Digul River

Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea

Frieda River

— Ipkulin
— Wimulapmin
— Alim

Sepik River

★ Telefomin

Ok Tedi River

Study Area

30 Kilometers

★ Patrol Post

▪ ▪ ▪ assumed "tribal" boundary

⌒ assumed "sub-tribal" boundaries
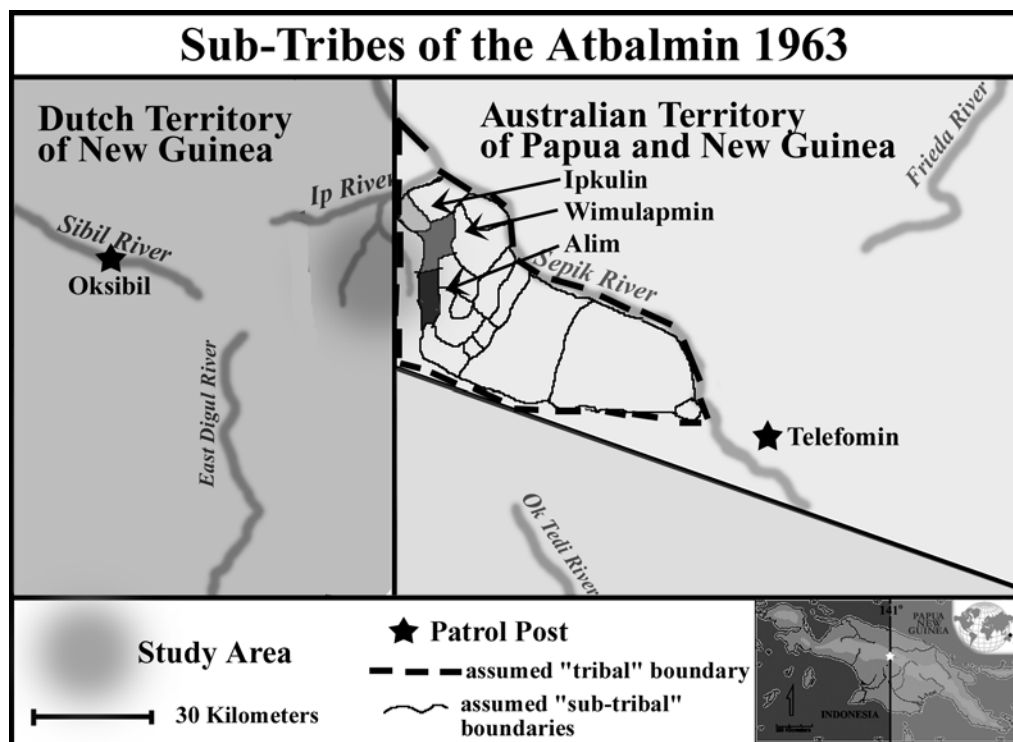
I learned of the pitfalls of mapping these "sub-tribes" through my own experience. One of the first tasks I set for myself during my fieldwork was to make a map of clan lands. After much confusion and frustration I began to recognize the complicated relational process playing out before me as I tried to make my map. There

were many contingencies that determined what don miit name would be told to me as the name to be placed on the map. I found several patterns in the responses that ultimately allowed me to make a reasonable reconstruction of the processes that led to the particular maps made by the early patrols.

Speaking to one person in one hamlet could elicit a completely different name than speaking to another person in another hamlet, making the route of the patrol, who they talked to when and among whom, very important in determining what name would ultimately end up on the map. For the people of the Nim river valley, who were pre-destined to be considered one unified clan by the narrowness and isolation of their valley, there were several possibilities. Had the patrol come from the north, through an area where there were several primarily "Ipkulin" hamlets, they would have likely been told that the people in the Nim area were "*miit magup*" – of the same clan – and would have called the people of the Nim, the Ipkulin. For similar reasons, had the patrol come from due east they may have been called "Wimulapmin." As it was, the patrol came from the southeast, through several predominantly "Arimin" hamlets, at which they were told the people in the Nim area were "miit magup" – of the same clan.

Surrounding "Sub-Tribes" 1963
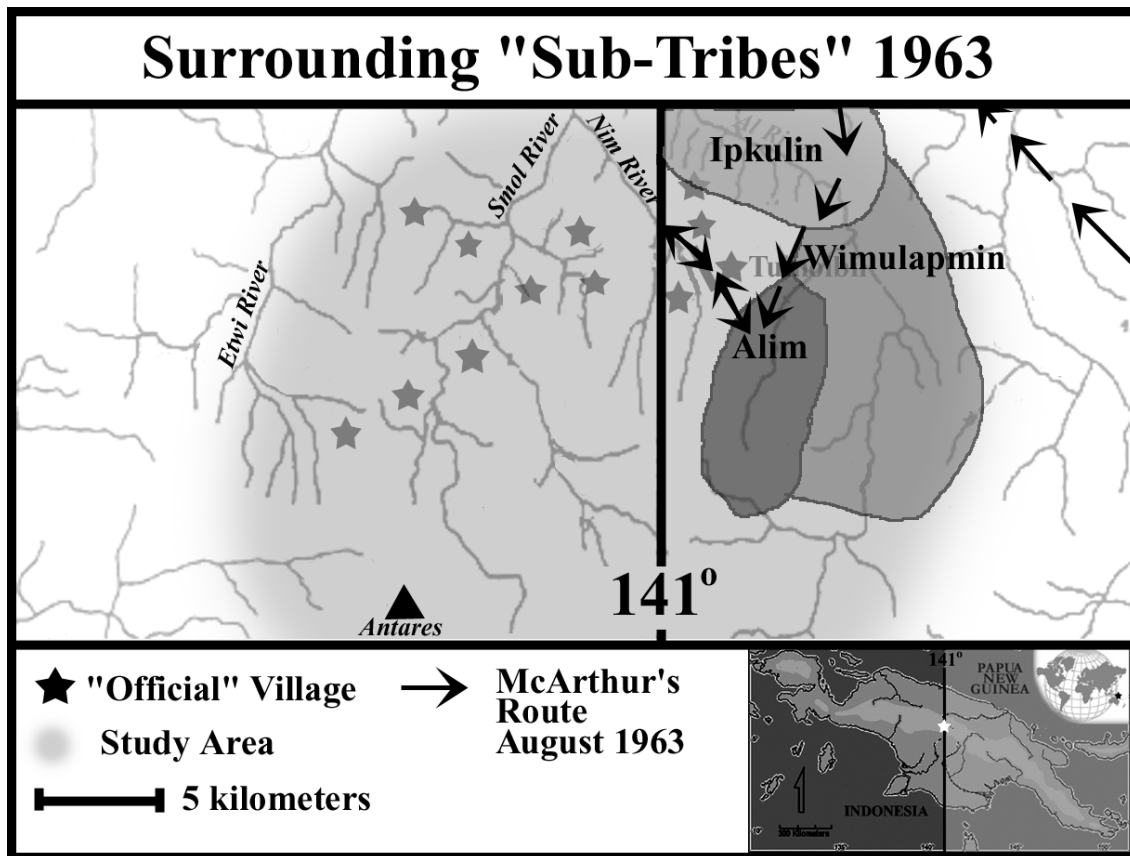
So it was that the people of the Nim took their proper category in map and census, as the "Arimin" sub-tribe of the "Atbalmin" tribe. But their largest and most important category was as yet undetermined.

State/Nation: _____

The misunderstandings that occurred during Nimakot's first encounter with an administrative patrol and the ways in which the encounter is remembered differently by locals as opposed to what was written in the patrol report illustrate the disjuncture between the local relational sociality and the categorical bias of modern statecraft.

The patrol was led by JR McArthur in August, 1963. He had no plans to visit Nimakot himself, but was ultimately pulled into the region by four local men who hoped to establish a strong relationship with this powerful outsider. Two of these men, Atangim and Lokim, played important roles in pulling me into the region as well, almost 40 years later. With McArthur's patrol report in my hands and these two men telling me the story as they remembered it, I had the remarkable opportunity to reconstruct this moment of "first contact" from two very different perspectives.

Lokim and Atangim heard rumors of McArthur's arrival in the nearby Al River valley and set out to meet him and "pull" him into their own homelands in the Nim River valley. A few days later, they led McArthur across the Nim-Taknip divide and entered the Nim valley at precisely 1027 hours on August 16th, 1963, a fact McArthur dutifully recorded in his notebook (Telefomin Patrol Report 12 of 1962/63). McArthur then followed them down the mountain with pen and paper in hand, recording the precise moment he crossed the Sunim creek (1109 hours), came to Sunimbil (1117 hours), and likewise on and on to his final destination near the base of the present-day airstrip. Such recordings of precise times and locations would later be used to map his route, and if possible, to revise the maps themselves.

McArthur did not record his impressions of the landscape – aesthetic digressions have little place in the patrol report genre – but I like to imagine they were favorable. Fog disturbed his first chances to glimpse the magnificent landscape, but cleared as he came to Sunimbil at 11:17am. From there he would have had a view of one of the most

picturesque valleys in all of New Guinea, the Nim River rumbling down its center,

finishing at the foot of the spectacular Mount Kobu.

Picture 1. View McArthur would have seen in 1963 from Sunimbil though today

there is an airstrip, school, three missions, and considerably less primary forestation.

Mt. Kobu is at the base of the valley.

But McArthur surely had his mind set on an altogether different feature of the

Nimakot landscape, one that is not visible to the naked eye.   For among the spectacular

steep mountains painted with lush green gardens, sparkling waterfalls, and towering

virgin rainforests – where colorful cassowaries, toucans, and birds of paradise dance

among the cute and quirky tree kangaroos, spotted cuscus, and the reclusive and all-too-

wise echidnas – lurks the region's most impressive, imposing, and yet altogether

invisible feature, the 141st Meridian East of Greenwich, what was in 1963 the colonial

border between Australia and Dutch New Guinea and now marks the international

border between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

Picture 2. Same view as picture 1 with international border inscribed.

The people of Nimakot had no idea then that they were living on and daily

traversing what one of them would later call, "that great red mark that cuts us right

through the heart." They were instead busy discussing who would accept the *luluai*

medal that they were expecting the Whiteman to give to one of them. Word had spread

that in each valley a medal is given to a local leader who becomes luluai, acting as an

intermediary between the Australian administration and the local people. In local terms

this was seen as the creation of a major exchange relationship that required a substantial

return gift in the form of a pig. Lokim, a local man with wide influence, was the

obvious choice to become luluai, but all of his pigs were tied up in other obligations. Upon further discussion, it was decided that Atangim would accept the medal instead.

Meanwhile, McArthur was busy examining maps and aerial photographs to determine the precise position of the border. Through several accidents of history which I do not have the space to recount here, the border had been established at the 141st meridian east of Greenwich, separating the island of New Guinea roughly in half. McArthur's preliminary conclusion was that he was still east of the meridian in Australian territory, so he decided to take a census and appoint a luluai. Lokim was his first choice but Atangim came forth for the medal since Lokim had no pig to give.

While Atangim headed off to find a pig to complete the exchange for the medal, McArthur set about trying to fix the border more precisely. He took more bearings, studied the photos and maps again, and sought out streams and landmarks that might help him determine his location. Two days later he had grown confident that he had inadvertently crossed the 141st meridian and was now in West New Guinea, outside his proper domain. He sent two local men to find Atangim, "for it would be necessary to get back the badge issued to him, and to explain to the people this new development."

A few years later, it would be discovered that McArthur was mistaken. He had not yet crossed the border. What he presumed to be the border was actually over one kilometer east of the 141st meridian.

McArthur's Border - 1963

Study Area legend:
- ★ "Official" Village
- Study Area
- ⊢—⊣ 5 kilometers
- → McArthur's Route August 1963
- ‖ McArthur's Border 1963
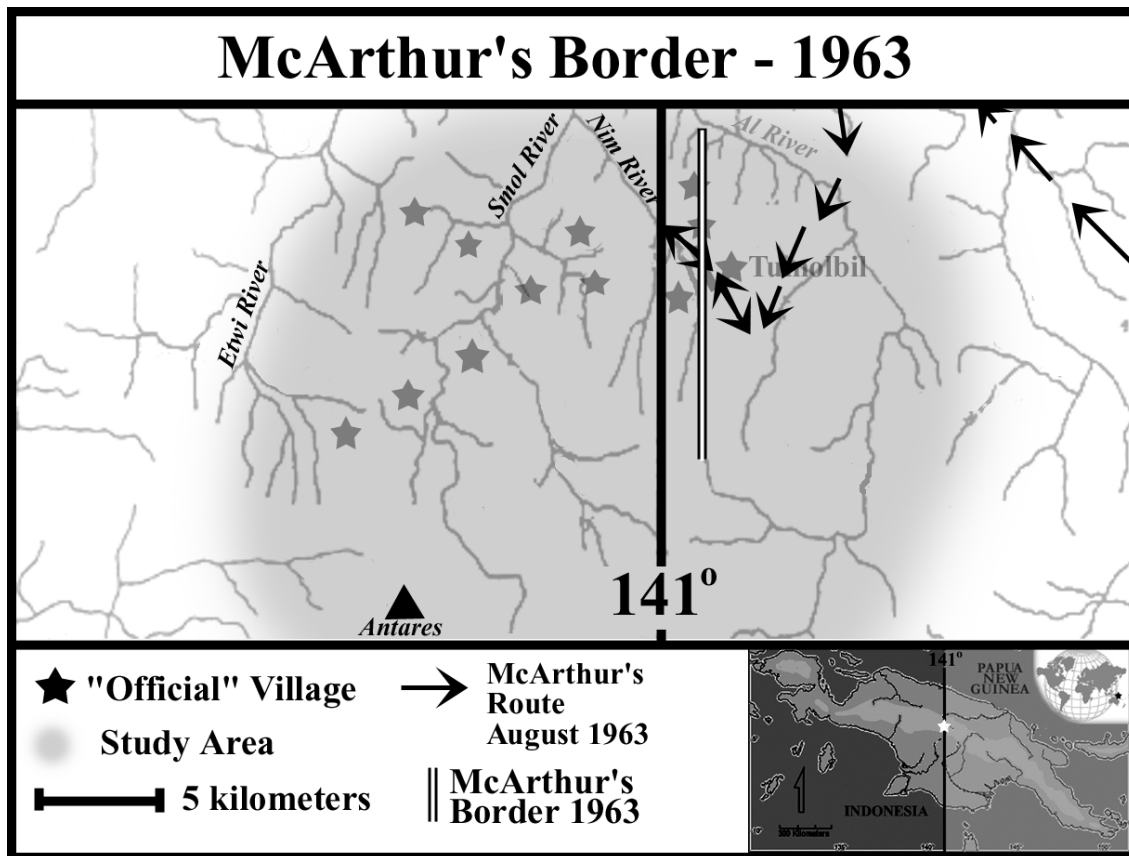
From here McArthur tells the story like this:

At 0910 hours the new luluai arrived with about fifteen to twenty of his people, men and women. I saw one new face among them. They had a pig. The luluai had been absent yesterday arranging the supply of this pig. Once again, as I had done on Friday, I explained to them the position of the International Border ... (and) explained to them their relation to the Border. Those living across the Border came under the administration of West New Guinea, and those living on this side of the Border e.g. where we are now talking, came under the Administration. I told the luluai I would have to take the badge back, as he was

living well within West New Guinea; but that if he had been living within

Australian New Guinea, he could keep the badge. He returned the badge. I

gave him a sheath knife to show that we are not angry with him. We then

bought his pig, giving as payment a tomahawk, small knife and matches. He

and his people were very pleased, particularly with the tomahawk. ... We said

farewell to these people. They were satisfied with my explanation.

- Telefomin Patrol Report No. 12 of 62/63, page 51

When I sat down to talk about these events with Lokim and Atangim in 2002

they told a very different story. In order to understand Atangim's interpretation of the

events I will remind you that one way of working witchcraft in Nimakot is to take a

piece of the food somebody has eaten or will eat and poison it by making a *bis yokop*, a

"witchcraft bundle." The pig had been sick, so Atangim had cut its ear in an effort to

bleed the sickness out of the animal to cure it. Atangim thought that when McArthur

saw the pig's ear missing he must have thought that the ear had been taken to work

witchcraft, thereby poisoning the pig and whoever was to eat it. Atangim felt that

McArthur must have been enraged by the attempted witchcraft, and this is why he took

back the medal, promising that neither he nor any other Whiteman would ever return.

It is telling that this first encounter between the people of Nimakot and the

Administration would ultimately revolve around such fundamental misunderstandings

between relational sociality and statecraft. McArthur saw his work as one of fixing

boundaries, taking names, and extending the great taxonomic system of statecraft that

would ultimately rationalize and order even this remote corner of the globe. When he

found that he had inadvertently stepped outside his rightful domain he promptly left.

His work was to make and obey categories. Conversely, the people of Nimakot were

primarily concerned with making relationships – in this case a very important

relationship through which valuable goods, the likes of which they had never seen,

would flow. When the relationship failed it devolved as all failed relationships do into

fear of witchcraft. As I described in the previous chapter, fears and accusations of

witchcraft often lead people to split apart. By local understandings then, the Whiteman

did not leave because he had left his rightful categorical domain, but because he

suspected those around him of witchcraft.

The next patrol by MJ Edgar again placed Nimakot west of the 141st meridian,

calling them "Arimin No 2 part West Irian." It wasn't until Bragge's patrol in 1967 that

the Nim river valley was finally placed in the domain of the Australian Administration,

destined to become part of Papua New Guinea. Bragge dropped the "Arimin No 2 part

West Irian" name in favor of "Nim Rv Arimin" (PR 1 of 67/68, Appendix G, Page 5).

Meanwhile, the rest of Nimakot, particularly the large population of over 1,000

people living in the Smol river valley, was largely uncategorized. By the map they

were west of the meridian, and therefore destined to become part of Indonesia, but

nobody had yet come to the region to inform them of this. Through their own relational

strategies they would decide for themselves with which country they would primarily

relate and pull that country in themselves. Just as Lokim and Atangim had pulled the

Australian Administration into the Nim valley, they too would pull the Administration

or their successor, the government of Papua New Guinea, into the Smol valley, even if

it meant moving a mountain of modernity like an international border, tied as it was to that other, much larger, mountain of modernity, time and space itself. I will pick up this storyline in the Native Situation section below. First, I must complete the categories of statecraft. Though the group boundaries have taken shape, they are still lacking their content: people.

Village: _____

The ultimate goal of these categories which the patrol officers had to struggle to create against the constant flux and fluidity of the relational sociality, was to categorize actual people. Unfortunately, the semi-nomadic lifestyle that was part and parcel of this relational sociality made it difficult for them even to *find* the people who were to be categorized. Without finding them, the people could not be named, categorized, counted, and then aggregated and summed into statistics. They were not legible.

It was for this reason that these first bearers of statecraft lamented the complete lack of villages and the wide dispersion of people throughout the area.

> "Villages do not exist in the ATBALMIN … The most common type of
>
> settlements are hamlets ranging in size from one to four houses."
>
> - GF Booth 1956

It was further lamented that these small hamlets were "regularly shifting every three to four years as their gardens are worked out" (Fischer 70/1). Fischer noted that even after several tries at a complete census there were still names unlisted,

"the main reason for this is residence/garden pattern followed by these

people whereby nuclear, or at best, extended family lives nearby to their

own gardens effectively cut-off from all social-intercourse with

neighbors by rugged intervening mountains and valleys."

Fischer's primary recommendation "to rationalize the situation" was to make

villages, or at least central meeting points for an annual census. The situation had to be

"stabilized," which would then allow them to construct walking tracks between stable,

permanent villages where people would be easily visible, and countable, for visiting

patrols.

The Administration's desire for villages further increased the need for mapping

clan boundaries. As Fischer argued, "Once land boundaries are established

satisfactorily it will then be possible to determine one central point for census" (PR8 of

69/70). Building from their own categories of tribe and sub-tribe it was hoped that by

clearly mapping the boundaries of each sub-tribe the Administration would be able to

make a rational decision about where to place a village or centralized census point.

But in mapping clan boundaries they fell back in to the slippery traps of

relational sociality. Clan names seemed to be constantly changing and boundaries

(which were in fact non-existent) seemed flexible and impossible to map. Though they

tried to encourage people to move to centralized locations (and were successful in doing

so in other areas with more sustained contact), they never succeeded in making villages

in Nimakot.

Name: _____

And then there was that final category – the smallest and most important – the name. If the people were to be legible, they would need permanent names making them readily and unambiguously identifiable. Again, it was a problem. Living in small groups in which there are no strangers, names were rarely necessary and could be made up on the spot if needed. There was no tradition of equating a permanent name with a particular person in the way the census requires. Different people had different names for the same person. People claimed the names of others and then took other names within the same census session. Teknonyms and nick-names were so common as to call into question the very notion of one "true name." Patrol officers like BM Fischer complained of the sheer numbers of names each person might be known by, "A person may have two or three personal names and this coupled with the father's two or three names (used as the surname) can give quite a combination of confusing names at census time." Bragge added:

> Census in Atbalmin groups is a matter of great difficulty due to people
> changing their names. This seems to be more pronounced in Atbalmin than
> anywhere else in the Telefomin Sub District. ... (one woman) gave a name and
> then immediately called another. This happened twice with the same woman
> and she gave the impression that she thought the first name was hers, and then
> remembered it was not and then called her real name.

- Bragge Telefomin PR No. 1 of 67-8, page 29

The officers saw the census as what should be a straight-forward process. What could be more simple, after all, than making a list of names? The problem was that just as people did not think of themselves as belonging to this or that particular group, they also did not create stable categorical identities marked by a permanent name. Names were as emergent through relational processes as the fluid and flexible groups and boundaries patrol officers struggled so much to define and map.

Native Situation:

Most patrol reports have a section called "Native Situation" which discusses the native reaction to the Administration. The earliest patrols were met with "obvious fear and suspicion," but in later patrols the patrol officers' reputation (and perhaps more importantly their valuable trade goods such as matches, machetes, and steel axes) preceded them, paving the way for friendly, even eager, welcomes. Such was the case by the time they arrived at the Nim River, where local men actually set out to make the "first contact" rather than the other way around.

Even then, however, the "native situation" was not as the Administration would have liked it to be. As Edgar noted in 1965:

It is very difficult to give an accurate picture of the native situation in its

attitudes towards the Administration. We were told many deliberate lies and

half truths. Generally, the patrol was not given an enthusiastic welcome nor did

the people show any interest in it other than a source of salt, matches, beads,

and anything else we might be prepared to give them. Absenteeism was high

despite the prior knowledge of the patrols coming. ... The whole attitude

displayed by the ATBALMINS leaves me with an empty feeling. The only

way I can reconcile this attitude with my feeling is that the people passively

resent patrols visiting them and are prepared to offer passive resistance to any

work that they might be trying to accomplish. I think they realize that we

cannot afford to spend much time in one area and make a really determined

effort to trace each person.

                    - Edgar, Telefomin PR No. 4 of 64/65, page 5

By the logic of statecraft there was a direct positive correlation between the

number of people who made themselves visible for the census and the native attitude

towards the administration. In that sense, the "native situation" could be directly

calculated by the census itself. Two years after Edgar reported his disappointments

with what he perceived as native resistance, Bragge found reason for hope in a sudden

surge of numbers:

Indications of the overall situation can be seen in the above listed figures of

people actually seen by the patrol (NB Patrol 5/65-6 saw 896 people compared

with 1527 by this patrol, and this can be taken as some indication of the change

in attitude from last years patrol to this years).

- Bragge, Telefomin PR No. 1 of 67-8, page 25

Beginning with this report in the late 1960s there is increasing evidence that the locals were becoming more welcoming of the Administration. As Bragge noted, "Further evidence (that they appreciate the Administration) can be found in the amount of tracks cut immediately before the patrol's arrival, and in the construction of two rest houses by the people."

 But perhaps even more noteworthy was the marked increase in native humility, what Marshal Sahlins has called the pre-requisite for radical social change (1992:24). As Fischer noted in February, 1969:

> It was seen that the people of the Atbalmin Census Division, although still
> primitive, have an appreciation of the difficulties and backwardness of their
> area and are at that stage where they are awaiting some lead in development by
> the Administration.

- Fischer, Telefomin PR No. 5 of 68/69

A year later Fischer again reported on the dramatic shift from apathy and resistance to great interest in and acceptance of the Administration:

> The general attitude of the Census Division towards progress and development
> is that they now expect, generally want and know they need Administration

guidance towards these ends. I think I detected a greater degree of interest

towards the administration on this patrol than that seemingly expressed towards

previous visits.

<div style="text-align: center;">- Fischer, Telefomin PR No. 8 of 69/70</div>

Despite these transformations in the native situation, categorizing the people

remained difficult due to the local relational sociality that entailed a residential pattern

of small, scattered, constantly shifting hamlets. In 1973, Mark Winfield complained:

Since these people are semi nomadic subsistence farmers (nomadic in the sense

that even though they remain in the one area they may shift from valley to

valley) I expected to miss <u>some</u> of the people. However, I did not expect to

'overlook' up to 600 persons. The only reason for this is apathy and laziness on

the people themselves. … The difference indicates one of two things – mass

deaths or "bigheadedness" Since no reports of the former have come to

Telefomin I think we can dismiss that hypothesis and assume the latter as being

closer to the truth.

<div style="text-align: center;">- Winfield, Yapsie PR No. 2 of 73/74</div>

"Namba Tok"

Local Uses of Categorical Entities

Because the people of Nimakot talk of and define themselves relationally and not categorically, taking a census and drawing a map were not such simple affairs, and statecraft has struggled greatly, and still struggles today, to place them into the categories of the state. However, as will be seen, statecraft is a tenacious cultural process that performs what James Scott has called "a twist on the Heisenberg Principle" 1998: 359-360 n.6). Instead of altering what it tries to see making it essentially unknowable, it transforms what it sees to fit its own assumptions – what it already "knows." Eventually the people of Nimakot would begin to use the same categorical entities that the processes of statecraft created for them, and begin to manipulate those categories themselves.

Frustrated Australian patrol officers eventually decided to entrust a few local men with the task of moving people to more centralized locations to ease the census and ultimately, "to rationalize the situation." Mark Winfield, who had been so discouraged in his previous trip through the Atbalmin area, decided to appoint a man from the Nim Rv Arimin group. In the introduction I recounted the story of how Atangim was appointed luluai during the first patrol to the region by McArthur in 1963, only to have the medal taken away from him when McArthur mistakenly concluded that he had crossed into West New Guinea. Finally, eleven years later, the medal was again available. Lokim, who had passed up the medal in 1963 because he had no pig to give, did not pass it up this time. As he tells the story, "Master Mark offered the medal for

the leader of the Arimin. I should really be Ipkulin since I was then gardening and living in Denka but I thought, 'oh well, I can be Arim too.' So I took the medal and became the Arimin representative. He then told me to move people to a central location and promised good things if I succeeded – an airstrip, school, clinic, lots of things."

Designating local leaders to represent particular groups went much further towards making those groups actual living categorical realities than any map could. There were now men who could negotiate the fluid and contestable complexities of relational sociality and organize it into what at least *looked like* a more rationally ordered society.

Lokim managed to encourage over 300 people to move, not so much into a village, but at least into a reasonable proximity of hamlets.   As is evidenced by the way hamlets are constructed today, the breakthrough in making these hamlets appear as stable villages was in building hamlets close together in terms of abstract map space while maintaining a sufficient experiential/social space to accommodate the tensions of relational sociality. This was accomplished by not clearing paths between adjacent hamlets, building a nearby hamlet on top of a steep ridge without making a proper path up to it from lower hamlets, turning doorways away from central spaces, or just by maintaining habits of avoidance (see Chapter Four for more details).   By the map, Lokim and the people of the Nim river valley had succeeded in making a large village. The patrol reports praised him for his leadership, and he and the 300+ people he managed to organize into the new census village called "Tumolbil" were rewarded with

a flurry of development projects from 1976 to 1981 that included all those things that were ever promised – an airstrip, clinic, and a two room school house.

Thus began the incorporation of statecraft on the local level, a growing local understanding of what the census and maps were for – an understanding captured in a simple Tok Pisin phrase that sums up in two words the core of my argument in this chapter: "Namba tok" ("Number(s) talk.") "Namba" has three meanings. It refers to the total population, one's own name and "namba" in the census book, or to a government position. When one registers their name in the census they say that they placed their "namba," and when those names are counted, the result is the "namba" (population) of the village. When somebody gets a government position such as the Tultul position Lokim received, they might say, "Mi kisim namba" ("I got a number (position).") When people say "namba tok" they may be referring to any one of these three meanings. The population "namba" "talks" to the state, placing your "namba" in a particular census unit is your voice to the state, and those who find positions within the state have a "namba" and can thereby "talk" to the state, while also having expanded powers of talk locally as well.

When the people of Nimakot say "namba tok" they are pointing out that it is primarily numbers that "talk" to the state, and in fact, it often seems that it is the only thing the state listens to. "Namba" is a key element to the state's ability to "see" the entirety of its domain. In a state of widely scattered rural settlements, in which the state's synoptic view is necessary to visualize the whole, a number like the 300+

Tumolbil put in the books cries out to the state as a major settlement, enough to warrant the developments Tumolbil ultimately received – a school, clinic, and an airstrip.

Facilitating the incorporation of categorical entities were local understandings of the role of visibility in productive relating. As described in Chapter Two, people of Nimakot say that those who see each other "look after" each other by giving them gifts and support when they need them. Locals began to recognize that placing their "namba" in the book would allow the state to see them, and to help them.

The developments in Tumolbil were envied throughout Nimakot, particularly among residents of the Smol river valley west of the 141st meridian who were starting to feel neglected as no patrols had come to their valley. Australian, and later Papua New Guinean, patrols only came as far as the Nim River to their east. Indonesian patrols, which were notorious for burning houses, slaughtering pigs, and raping women, only came as far as the Etwi River to their west. The brutality of Indonesia to their west and the developments by Papua New Guinea to their east had made the power of statecraft all too visible, and it was clear to them which state they preferred. It was also clear to them that to be a part of that state, they needed to get their names in the census. Many of them started coming to the Nim river valley for the annual census patrol to put their own "namba" in the book.

In 1978 they were tenacious enough to convince the patrol officer to place their names in the census book. The officer even went so far as to give them their own new category of "SMOL RIVER" but the category was promptly removed the following year when it was determined they were living west of the 141st meridian. Tony Friend,

the patrol officer conducting the 1979 census who removed their names noted in his report that "the people concerned were annoyed that I would not census them." In personal correspondence with me, he elaborated, "I remember one man from Wara Smol complaining that he had been in Wewak Corrective Institute for 13 years (murder) and surely he was regarded as a PNG citizen!" I talked to this man about these events. He and others said that they raged outside of the house where Tony Friend was staying in Tumolbil, threatening his life. They very nearly killed him. Finally, Officer Friend was able to explain to them that it wasn't his fault, he was just following the map.

The rage they showed at *not* getting their names listed is a long way from the "apathetic, listless people" patrol officer Booth met in 1956 when trying to census the Atbalmin region. Locals now urgently wanted their name in the book and were now actively trying to pull statecraft to them.

Tony Friend was the last of the expatriate kiaps to work in the region as Papua New Guinea nationals were slowly phased into these positions following independence in 1975. The people of Wara Smol had better success with these nationals, some of whom were sympathetic to their cause. In 1982, patrol officer Matin Mesan, one of the first Papua New Guinea nationals to be placed in the area, placed "SMOL RIVER" back in the books. Not only was the namba of Wara Smol people in the books, Officer Mesan also gave out several "nambas," awarding men throughout the region with Tultul and luluai medals.

Intermittent skirmishes between the OPM and Indonesian military created a steady stream of refugees in to Nimakot from areas further west in the mid to late

1980s. Due to this influx of refugees, border officials of both countries decided it was time to increase border security. The border was surveyed in 1985 and in 1987 a permanent metal marker was placed at the 141st meridian near Philipsikin, just over 2 kilometers northwest of Tumolbil. The people of Nimakot, particularly those living west of the meridian in the Smol river valley, were informed that they had to live east of the border in Papua New Guinea if they wanted to remain Papua New Guinea citizens.

The people of Nimakot were unanimous in wanting to be citizens of Papua New Guinea rather than Indonesia and over 2,000 people crowded into the narrow Nim river valley. However, the land east of the border, a mere 14 km^2 was not sufficient to support such a large population. Within two years, many people started moving back to their homelands in the Smol river valley.

While many of those forced to move east of the meridian in 1987 had moved back to the Smol river valley by the time of the census in 1990, over one thousand had stayed and were counted under the village name, Tumolbil. Tumolbil suddenly had 1,112 people. *Namba tok*, and in this case the namba was so great as to literally put Tumolbil "on the map." Suddenly they were visible not only to the Papua New Guinea government, but to foreign aid agencies as well. They were swarmed once again with a series of development projects as they had been in the late 1970s. The World Bank funded a new two room clinic with running water and solar-powered lights and refrigeration. The government planned a base camp and flew in materials from the provincial capital.

Election season is a time in which numbers talk so loudly that in the last round hundreds of people were killed trying to silence them in brutal election violence throughout Papua New Guinea. Those who win the election have access to the distribution of hundreds of thousands of dollars where most people scarcely handle $10/year. And in a first past the post democratic election in which there are so many candidates that often 2,000 votes is enough to win, it is anybody's game.

In that other numbers game of "service by numbers," the state ensures 20 kina per person per year (about $5). Three hundred people pull in $1500 per year – enough for a water tank this year, a market house the next, a trade store the next, a chain saw the next, and so on.

In such a high stakes game of numbers, it should come as no surprise that the numbers are manipulated. In a recent article on "audit culture," Marilyn Strathern recalls Goodhart's Law which states that if it is just numbers that are doing the talking, people will find a way to make the numbers say what they want (1997). In Nimakot, the creation of pseudo-villages is just one of many techniques used. In areas where people have been unable to sustain larger villages they have given the same name to a number of hamlets and place them all under one village name in the census. To distinguish these hamlets in everyday discourse they add a number to the name of the village. For example, the census village of Kagading is actually three hamlets, named Kagading 1, 2, and 3. Another technique has been the creation of the "garden house." People build one "permanent house" in the village which they in fact rarely sleep in.

They instead live in small hamlets which they refer to as a "garden house" when it is in fact their primary residence.

Even more elaborate techniques for manipulating the numbers and the categorical entities themselves were developed by a small group of young men, 8 of whom were the first (and only) graduates of Tumolbil elementary school who went on to Telefomin High School in the late 1980's. Along with English, Math, and Science, they had learned about "their country" and the many different "cultures" it contained. As Edward LiPuma has insightfully pointed out, even lessons in Geography, wall maps, and globes were "lessons on nationalism" (2000:286). They showed students the order of the world, organized into discrete territories, with every square inch of land coming under the authority of a state. Here is where they would finally see that imaginary line numbered 141 that had already played such an important role in their own history, splitting not just Nimakot, but the whole island of New Guinea in half.

They became sincere Papua New Guinea nationalists while also learning the language of nationalism and statecraft. In the 1990s they began taking on roles in the government. One capitalized on the large "namba" of Nimakot and was elected as the provincial member. But with their precarious position on the border between two states, these young men also knew that they would need to ensure that their namba would count in the future as well. Category by category – village, sub-tribe, tribe, and even nation – they began rewriting the books themselves.

Village: Early colonizers lamented the lack of stable villages connected by adequate walking tracks. With a local man as provincial member and in control of
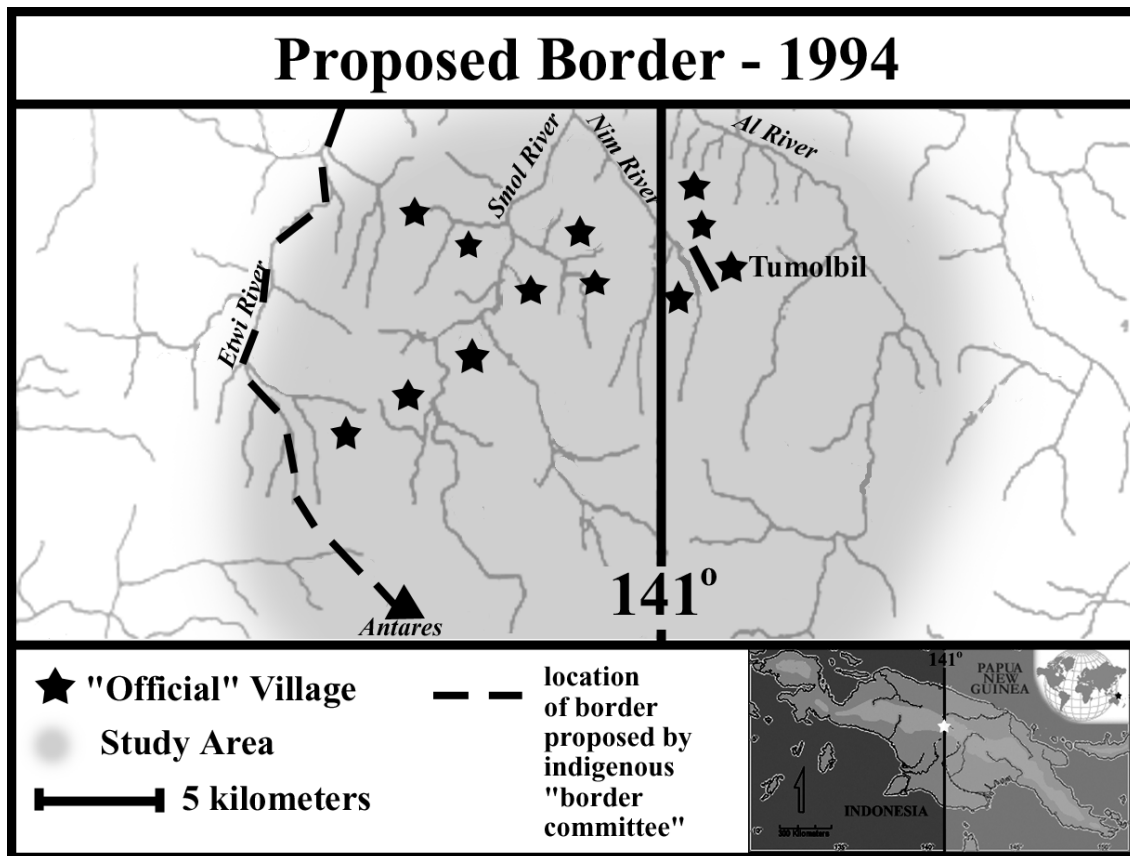
funds coming into the "Atbalmin" census division, funds marked for walking track maintenance in areas east of Tumolbil were diverted for a 27 kilometer track circling around the entirety of the Smol river area. As former colonial officers had once dreamed of doing for the "Atbalmin," young men of the Smol river area arranged for 8 village sites along this track where more than 50 small hamlets were to congregate into 8 village census units.

Sub-tribe: All units were to be under one sub-tribe, the Wanangkulinmin, emulating the colonial practice of putting one sub-tribe per valley or otherwise bounded area. "Wanangkulinmin" is just one of 44 clan names used in the region, but given the flexibility of the *don miit* system it is not necessarily "untrue" to say all people are Wanangkulinmin. Locally, people would continue to use don miit names to negotiate relational sociality. Wanangkulinmin became their "census clan," the only name to be given at census time. The name was politically motivated to help ensure the residents of the Smol river valley were considered to be Papua New Guineans, capitalizing on an often-told story of a major Wanangkulinmin migration just over 120 years ago from an area far to the east in Papua New Guinea. By emphasizing their Wanangkulinmin-ness, they hoped to strengthen their claims to Papua New Guinea citizenship.

Tribe: They also sought to change their tribal designation. The "Atbalmin" name bestowed upon them by the Australian Administration was not only considered derogatory, it also unjustly separated the people of the Smol River from the people of the Nim River and those further east. As I recounted earlier, the boundary between "Atbalmin" and "Kufelmin" conveniently followed the international border. In seeking

to challenge this imposed tribal boundary (and the international border), young men came up with a new tribal name, "Nekalimin." The name is built from the two languages in which most people of Nimakot are bilingual, Nek and Kali. They pressed the district and provincial governments to change the "Atbalmin Census Division" to the "Nekalimin Census Division" and permanently recognize the people of Wara Smol as Papua New Guinea citizens.

Nation: More than anything though, they hoped to remap the international border and place themselves clearly within the boundaries of Papua New Guinea. Sakias, the recent high school graduates, and others formed a "Border Committee" in 1994 and wrote a four page border report. In the report they recounted the times the people of the Smol river valley had been censused by Papua New Guinea and the complete neglect of the area by Indonesia. They wrote of their position on the border as one that has caused them to "fall behind" the rest of the world, claiming "It is as if we live in 1901!" Citing a 1993 United Nations proclamation "to strengthen international cooperation for the problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education, and health" the committee concludes the report with a strong demand to move the international border to include Wara Smol as part of Papua New Guinea, "The United Nations, Holland, Germany, America, England, and Australia have all conspired to mark the border unfairly and in only their own interests. Now we ask that the United Nations change the border" (my translation from Tok Pisin).

Map from 1994 Border Report written by indigenous Border Committee.

An overlay of the border they have marked is presented in the map below.

Proposed Border - 1994

Smol River
Nim River
Al River
Etwi River

★ Tumolbil

141°

Antares

★ "Official" Village

Study Area

⊢————⊣ 5 kilometers

location
of border
proposed by
indigenous
"border
committee"

141° PAPUA NEW GUINEA

INDONESIA

From the perspective comparing relational sociality to statecraft, the fact that politically active and educated local people have rejected the name given them by outside government, "Atbalmin," redrawn the boundaries and renamed themselves "Nekalimin" is a victory for statecraft in the guise of resistance. It is these local people who have taken over as state functionaries, doing their best to "make groups" in a frustratingly shifting sociality.

As I will illustrate throughout the remainder of this dissertation, they have not been significantly more successful than their Australian predecessors. While one might expect a kind of syncretic synthesis of the local with the processes of statecraft, there

are still many ways in which both remain systems in their own right – still at odds with one another.

MODERN STATECRAFT IN NIMAKOT:
A PRE-SCRIPTIVE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In the last chapter I introduced the distinction Marshall Sahlins makes between performative and prescriptive social structures and described the performative social structure of Nimakot as "relational sociality." As the word "pre-scriptive" implies, the modern state's dependence on writing also entails a "pre-scriptive" social structure that is in many ways radically different from relational sociality. Written documents are not just the eyes of the state. They are also its voice. Law books, standing orders, and bureaucratic structural diagrams and documents pre-scribe the rules and roles people must take on as administrative personnel and citizens of the state. It is now possible to find at least one young man in Nimakot, the government council president, holding in his hand a pre-*scriptive* social structure, the Organic Law of Papua New Guinea. Melanesian forms of sociality are not predicated on the idea of "society," yet this book lays out what amounts to step-by-step instructions for what Wagner might call "the invention of society" (1975), while describing how the social organism of government *should* work.

The people of Nimakot had long been left out of significantly localized forms of state governance. As they were being awarded Tultul and luluai medals for the first time from the 1960s to the early 1980s, other areas in the Telefomin District all around

them had long since abandoned the Tultul/luluai system and moved on to a system in which local people played a more active role in government, a system known as the Local Government Council, or LGC. Tultuls and luluais were limited in their powers. Though they represented the administration, they could do little more than encourage people to follow the law and report infringements to state officials. They could not enforce laws, or make their own laws. LGCs on the other hand, made up of a kaunsil (councilor) and several komitis (committee members), could hold court, punish those who broke the law, and could even make their own laws within certain limits. Administrators had decided that due to the lack of education in the area, and their sporadic and brief contact with the administration, the people of Nimakot were not yet ready for an LGC.

In 1997, Nimakot was finally given their own powers of government at the local level as the LGC system they had been left out of was reformed by the Local Level Governance (LLG) Act of 1997, a reform designed to further decentralize government by creating a community government in even the most remote areas of the country. The LLG system was the structure of statecraft in place during the time of this research and is still present as I am writing this. The structure is similar to the LGC system, but in many regions the area coverage of the LGC was made smaller to better match the actual size of "communities" in Papua New Guinea. Hence, the LLG system is also known as "community government."

The "communities" are roughly mapped along the sub-tribal boundaries that the Australian Administration mapped in the colonial era. The performative sociality that

produced these distinctions is now replaced with what is *literally* a pre-*scriptive* social structure with pre-*scribed* rules, roles, and boundaries. In this structure, Tumolbil and Wara Smol have become two separate wards out of 19 in the Yapsie Rural LLG.[2] The Yapsie Rural LLG is in turn part of the Telefomin District, one of six districts in Sandaun Province, one of 19 provinces in Papua New Guinea.

"Scription" is a key element of this structure, as can be illustrated in the detail with which rules and roles are pre-scribed in government documents such as the LLG Act. For example, Section 14.4 pre-scribes that each ward elects their own representative who is called a "councilor" known locally in Tok Pisin as "kaunsel." These 19 kaunsels vote to appoint a kaunsel president as defined in Section 14.2.C. Each kaunsel is then allowed to appoint "committee members," known locally in Tok Pisin as *komitis*, to help him carry out his or her duties.

Despite the fluidity of residence and the flexibility of don miit identities, kaunsels generally select komitis from each village or don miit, and sometimes allow a village to elect their own komiti by vote or consensus. Kaunsels and komitis generally work together. They settle minor disputes informally or hold minor court cases. They also brainstorm development projects that would be useful for their village or area they represent and present these ideas to the kaunsel president or the kiap for approval or for further consideration.

The kiap holds the official title of Council Executive Officer for Yapsie Sub-District. Strictly "by the book" the kiap has limited powers. He is to execute the plans and wishes of the kaunsels, and to give them advice on development projects and

problems of law and order. In practice, and for all practical purposes, the role of the kiap is much more powerful and closer to that of the kiaps of colonial times – being chief magistrate, police officer, development coordinator, village recorder, and legislator all in one. This is not unique to Nimakot, and is unofficially encouraged and sanctioned by provincial officials who do not fully trust Local Level Governments in the hinterlands to be operated entirely by untrained locals themselves.

The scription of statecraft creates the roles of kiap, kaunsel, komiti, and citizen as categorical entities. To the extent that these people identify with their state-defined role above and beyond their relations, we could say they have adopted a categorical identity.

One way of describing the duty of the categorical identity of "kaunsel" is that he is to create more categorical identities – extending them to all constituents who will be full members of categorical groups, aligned in villages, living under the law. His primary goal is to persuade and encourage people to live in communities as citizens and to view their relations as secondary.

Part of this endeavor is updating the local "Village Book." Section 11 of the LLG Act underscores the point, stating that the "primary duty" of the kaunsel is "to ensure that the Village Book, relative to the ward which he represents, is maintained." The Village Book is the eyes of the state, and the kaunsel must ensure that the state sees his constituents clearly. The book requires all the information gathered by previous administrations during patrols and then some. Under Section 57 of the LLG Act, the Village Book is to contain, "(a) the names, clans, ethnic groups and, where applicable,

addresses of all persons within the ward; and (b) the particulars of village officials; and (c) ... information on assets, facilities, and other matters." Kaunsels lament that they are not yet able to provide all of this information. In giving their reasons why they sound the familiar refrains of the Australian officers: the people are too "big-headed," living scattered throughout the forests like "primitives" (their word), and not "hearing the talk" (TP, "harim tok") of the kaunsels and komitis.

Just as they struggle to maintain some semblance of authority, they also struggle to make the fluid, flexible, and ambiguous terms of their own relational sociality fit the categories of the village book.

Such struggles were exemplified during census exercises in February 2003 led by local government officers. At each village people were fighting for more "namba" and the census became a serious point of contention, particularly in ambiguous cases such as for those who did not live in or near any of the official government villages listed in the census, people who moved frequently between two or more villages, and those who were children of intervillage unions who were considered "namba" of both villages. Several names elicited long discussions about where they should and should not be placed, some of which became very heated.

One difficult case involved a child who had lost his father. It was unclear whether he should go under his father's or his mother's village. When his father died he was taken in by his father's brother, though his mother also provided much of his care. He split his time between his mother's house in one hamlet and his father's brother's in another. At the census the two sides fought vehemently to place him in their own

respective village census list. The argument grew tiresome for others waiting for their

name to be called and for the census to conclude, thus sparking another argument about

how arguments waste too much time. Fifteen minutes later one man in exasperated

frustration summed it up, "You all talk and talk and talk and we get nowhere!" The

kiap joked with them, "That's right we all talk and talk so I think I'll just get rid of all

the village and clan names and just call you all the Addition Family, because no matter

what somebody says you all have to add, add, add more and more and talk never dies."

The book is essential to "sev" the people because it is the only way the state can

see them. One kaunsel describes this book as a "village development file." He came to

me one day hoping I could help him complete his file with the use of my computer.

> I want to make a Village Development file. It will list important things like
>
> how many years it has been that we have not received any services, who our
>
> luluais were, how many years they were in office, and how long it has been that
>
> we have been under the government without one single thing developing. I
>
> want to put in there how far we have to walk to get services and how many
>
> people are served in the ward. The government will look at this and follow
>
> this. I have noticed that we don't have a proper file. Telefomin district, Yapsie
>
> LLG, all the way down to ourselves must have this file so the government can
>
> see.

He began to talk wistfully about the possibilities such a file might bring him. He recounted how it had been over 40 years since his people were first placed under the government without any services ever having been brought to them, and thought that if this could be made visible to the government he would receive valuable services to make up for lost time. But he was noticeably unsure about some of the particulars required for the file, in particular his proper clan name. He told me that this is why he had come to me for help, "You can check my clan on your computer, then I can put it in the file and they will know what clan I am. We can do that with everybody and there won't be so much confusion."

Now the colonized have come full circle to become their own colonizers. Within fairly broad limits the people who obtained a "namba" in the new system could write and enforce their own laws. They could hold court. They could make budgets, plan projects, and distribute funds. They would even largely control the writing of their own census. Imbued with the power of the state they now had more authority than ever, but they also felt the same confusions and tensions felt by their Australian predecessors. I turn to an analysis of these tensions in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

The Tensions of Relational Sociality and Statecraft

In Chapter Two I described the everyday life and social structure of Nimakot as "relational sociality" in which being related is a matter of continuously relating to others in the reproduction, nurturance, and growth of people. This performative sociality is not built up of rules, rather relations are constantly made and remade and are thus fluid, temporary, negotiable, contested, and ambiguous. Because there are no hard and fast "rules" of relating, morality and justice are worked out in particular situational encounters. Actions are judged by the effects they have on others rather than through comparison with an abstract ideal. The demands of maintaining relationships under these conditions, which involve the high stakes of human life itself, are strategically negotiated through the use of secrecy, deception, and purposeful ambiguity and misdirection. This secrecy, though necessary for negotiating this social world, in turn inspires imagery of witchcraft in which male and female witches invert the characteristics of positive relating as the production of people and are imagined to be constantly engaged in the consumption of people. The tensions of relational sociality, ultimately expressed in the imagery of witchcraft, continuously reproduce the small hamlet as the basis of Nimakot life.

Similar processes of social interaction as the relational sociality I have described here are noted throughout Melanesia. In her landmark text addressing similar phenomena, Marilyn Strathern notes that in Melanesian concepts of sociality:

"... there is no indigenous supposition of a society that lies over or above or is inclusive of individual acts and unique events. ... The imagined problems of social existence are not those of an exteriorized set of norms, values, or rules that must be constantly propped up and sustained against realities that constantly appear to subvert them. People are subverted by the actions of other people. Or they are attacked by nonhuman forces forever beyond their reach. The world is not mapped into spheres of influence, into adjacent and competitive empires"

- Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift* 1988, page 102

Just as I have argued for the people of Nimakot, "people are subverted by the actions of other people" through witchcraft and other relational conflicts. Morality is situational and negotiable and not determined by "an exteriorized set of norms, values, or rules." But as I illustrated in Chapter Three, this description becomes problematic and incomplete in the wake of the recent incorporation of modern institutions and social forms. Referring back to the quote above by Marilyn Strathern, what are the states of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia but "adjacent and competitive empires"? What is state law but "an exteriorized set of norms, values, and rules"? And it is precisely in the socio-cultural fields of Nimakot dominated by relational sociality that these empires and rules "must be constantly propped up against realities that constantly appear to subvert them."

In this chapter I begin by outlining the tensions. I then examine how locals themselves understand these tensions through discourses on the "wantok system" and witchcraft. The core argument of the chapter is that the tensions between these two processes are ultimately productive of much of the social life, forms, and styles in Nimakot today. I give three examples of this, including an analysis of the beginnings of Operation Clean and Sweep which I also argue is produced through these tensions. I conclude that the core of the tensions, and the reason why the tensions are not ultimately resolved by any attempts to do so, resides in the fact that the ontology statecraft and its logic of groups, categories, and above all "community" requires is radically different than that which is embedded in the local cultural process of relational sociality.

TENSIONS OF RELATIONAL SOCIALITY AND STATECRAFT

The cultural processes of statecraft and relational sociality are in tension on a number of levels. They have different logics, perspectives, social structures, moral orders, idioms, and encourage very different living patterns. In this section I will outline some of these tensions in detail.

The core logic of relational sociality is based in relations, while the core logic of statecraft is based in categories. Furthermore, statecraft seeks (and/or makes) categories that are ideally stable, permanent, and non-negotiable, while the relations of relational sociality are fluid, temporary, negotiable, contested and ambiguous.

Through relational sociality local knowledge of relations includes tremendous interpersonal details. In contrast, the state's knowledge of the local is ultimately mediated by what can be written into abstract categories that can be listed, counted and aggregated, producing a *synoptic*, *distanced*, and *decontextualizing* perspective. When summarizing the perspective of relational sociality as a whole one might say it is *engaged, practical,* and *subjective*.

The basis for moral order is also radically different. In the cultural process of relational sociality people are not restrained by law or higher powers (such as a government). They are restrained only by other people who are relatively equal to them. Morality is situational, heavily dependent on context, personal relationships and the ultimate outcome of actions rather than the action itself. In contrast, statecraft consists of rigid laws dependent on authority to enforce them.

The local relational sociality I described in chapter two continuously presses to reproduce small, tight-knit hamlets oriented towards strong relations expressed in the idiom of kinship. Statecraft seeks to create large stable villages expressed in the idiom of "community."

The tension is not only expressed objectively in the need for large stable villages, but subjectively as well, in the state's need for people to orient themselves primarily as citizens and individuals under the law, respecting authority, and doing what is best for the community rather than acting as relational "dividuals" – orienting their lives primarily towards the demands of kinship and other relations.

Comparing these two cultural processes and logics shows a striking resemblance between the distinctions I have identified here and other classic dichotomies of social science. Morgan made the distinction as early as 1877 in Ancient Society. Relational sociality bares resemblance to Morgan's *societas* which he describes as "founded upon persons, and upon relations purely personal" (1971(1877):6). This is to contrast with government "founded upon territory and upon property" which he identifies as "*civitas*" or "the state" (1971(1877:7). Similar distinctions have been applied in studies of Papua New Guinea as well. Peter Lawrence distinguishes the state from what he called the "stateless societies" of Papua and New Guinea. He identifies the state and the stateless as "two radically divergent – indeed, diametrically opposed – systems" (1969:15) and "based on virtually diametrically opposed principles" (19).

More ethnographically nuanced approaches also re-state the dichotomy, though in slightly different form. Roy Wagner's distinction between differentiating and collectivizing traditions matches the distinctions I have made here. Statecraft is a "collectivizing" tradition in that it imagines people to be inherently individual and in need of being "collectivized" - brought together to live under the (collectivized) law and order of the state. Relational sociality is a "differentiating" tradition in that it imagines social relations to be an innate part of people so that one must "differentiate" one's self against a background of innate similarity and connection to others (1981(1975)). These distinctions made by Wagner were elaborated upon by Marilyn Strathern in her distinction between Melanesian "dividuals" and Western "individuals." (1988). Statecraft is key to this distinction, as pointed out by Edward LiPuma:

... concepts of personhood indigenous to Melanesia and Papua New Guinea in

particular are significantly different from those embodied in Western practice

and texts and presupposed by the colonially inspired political institutions that

define the emerging states of Oceania. Concepts such as nationhood, liberal

democracy, civil rights, and electoral politics presuppose at least a Western-like

image of the individual (ideologically defined as an autonomous, self-animated,

and self-enclosed agent)" (2000:128).

Shying away from the individual/dividual distinction I prefer instead a

distinction between a relational ontology and categorical identity. This distinction

originates from Craig Calhoun's study of Nationalism in which he marked out two

related distinctions: "between networks of social relationships and categories of similar

individuals, and between reproduction through directly interpersonal interactions and

reproduction through the mediation of relatively impersonal agencies of large-scale

cultural standardization and social organization" (1997:29). The former in both of these

distinctions make up the essential components of relational sociality, while the latter

describe the mechanisms and categorical identity forms of statecraft.

In relation to this distinction, Calhoun introduces the term "categorical identity"

to designate "identification by similarity of attributes as a member of a set of equivalent

members" (1997:42). I elaborate on this definition in the conclusion of this chapter.

While one might expect a form of syncretism to emerge between the two

processes, I ultimately found that both exist simultaneously and must be negotiated by

all people within the social field. While people in different social positions with different inclinations negotiate this tension in different ways, and act on this tension in different ways, the tension is still there for all, penetrating everyday life.

They are not different sets of beliefs held by different people. They are powerful and pervasive social processes with their own cultural logics, continuously reproducing themselves because they are embedded in everyday practices. Relational sociality is embedded in the everyday practices of subsistence, exchange, and interpersonal relating. Statecraft is embedded in a state bureaucratic system with its own tremendous momentum based in the ways it rewards "namba" and proper protocol. The right form filled out in the right way and given to the right person, following the proper bureaucratic procedures, can produce real results.

MODERN NIMAKOT VISIONS OF RELATIONAL SOCIALITY

The tensions between the processes of statecraft and relational sociality are so pervasive that there is now an elaborate local discourse on the differences between the two systems. Statecraft is often referred to as the "new road" or the "new system" while people talk disparagingly about relational sociality as the "*wantok system*" that constantly undermines and subverts their attempts to follow this "new road." A wantok is someone with whom one has a strong relation. The wantok system results from people granting special favors to these relations and not to others – a cronyism gone out of control. "Wantok system" is the key term in an emerging indigenous anthropology,

employed in forums from national newspapers to casual conversations around the

family hearth, used to explain all the ills of Papua New Guinea, from political

corruption to rampant witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. Locals often say that the

wantok system is their *kastom*, their traditional way of life, and that it is unfit for the

"new system" of capitalism and state-centralized democratic government.

The wantok system is so widely discussed as the Papua New Guinea way of life

that it has even become part of the school curriculum. In Social Science Module 1.4

students learn that

> The wantok system is both an organic safety net and social security system –
>
> and the plague of democratic politics. There's no level of PNG society that is
>
> not affected by the wantok system ... when these ideas are transposed to the
>
> political and public affairs arena, it simply becomes nepotism and, at worst,
>
> outright corruption. In the public service, the police, the army and especially in
>
> politics, this is a huge problem.
>
> - Social Science Module 1.4:14

Students are asked at the end of the module to debate the topic "the wantok system

hinders progress."

At no point is the tension between relational sociality and statecraft more

palpable however than in public discussions of witchcraft. At these meetings, such as

the one addressing the sickness of Kotinim in chapter two, it is so often recited as to

become cliché, "Numbers Talk and we get services. Numbers talk and we win

elections. Why are you witches downing our numbers? You must think of our

population." Through such comments it is clear that witchcraft poses a double threat to the numbers game on which statecraft depends. Not only does it kill, and therefore lower numbers, it also points to strains in social relations, strains that if not mended can break a village apart, decimating its numbers, and therefore degrading its prospects for state services. When a village loses its numbers, it becomes invisible. Again there is a cliché for this: "A village with a name has a number. No number. No name." This is always followed by a rant against witchcraft for downing numbers.

Relational sociality and statecraft are revealed to locals through the tensions between them and from the perspective each side provides on the other. Through the lenses of statecraft, relational sociality appears first as a primitive, nomadic, unstable, impermanent, non- / anti-developmental way of life mired in the "wantok system" and full of rampant witchcraft – a wholly negative view. While through the lenses of relational sociality, statecraft also appears negatively as too strict, bossy, and exploitative, there is a recognizable positive side in that it is viewed as a technology for freezing the ambiguities of relational sociality that cause them so much stress. Statecraft also holds the promise of making them visible to a larger more powerful entity that can provide valuable development projects and services. However, it must be recognized that both sides are fundamentally misperceived from the standpoint of the other. It is only the content that is made visible and not the framework. Witchcraft accusations and allegations of the wantok system are simply the negative visible manifestations of a more pervasive and inclusive relational sociality that frames them. Likewise, government projects, services, requests to do community work, and census

taking are merely the content of the much broader framework of statecraft.

Recognizing the ways these processes are misunderstood is essential to understanding

the dynamics between them.

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF TENSIONS

There are many ways in which the tensions between relational sociality and

statecraft produce many of the features of everyday life one might observe in Nimakot.

In the rest of this chapter I begin by describing two phenomena that I argue can be

traced to the dynamics between these two cultural processes: village organization and

the style of governance adopted by Nimakot officers I call "govern-mentality." I then

illustrate the ways these tensions produce Operation Clean and Sweep, a movement by

government officers designed to end the tensions by freezing the more fluid aspects of

relational sociality that frustrate them in their efforts of statecraft.

Productivity of Tensions Example 1: Village Organization:

The Negotiation of State and Local Visibilities.

As I recounted in the previous chapter, when the first patrols arrived the people

of Nimakot were living in scattered, semi-nomadic hamlets. Group names, such as

"Kufelmin," were relational rather than categorical. These characteristics of the local

relational sociality made the Administration's job of making maps and taking a census

very difficult.   Patrol officers sought the solution to these difficulties by making large,

stable, centralized villages. Such village would allow them to "see" their citizens for

surveillance purposes, as well as to facilitate serving them by providing medical aid posts, schools, and other services in these central villages. However, the local relational sociality actually works to produce just the opposite – small scattered, semi-nomadic hamlets.

Over time, locals began to understand statecraft in their own relational terms. Eventually they developed a desire to be visible to the state so that the state could "lukautim" ("look after") them. They needed their namba to talk to the state so that the state would see them. However, they must at the same time negotiate their own visibility in the village to mitigate who they will be responsible for looking after as well. The tension between these two drives ultimately creates the virtual hamlet organization of villages one now finds in Nimakot.

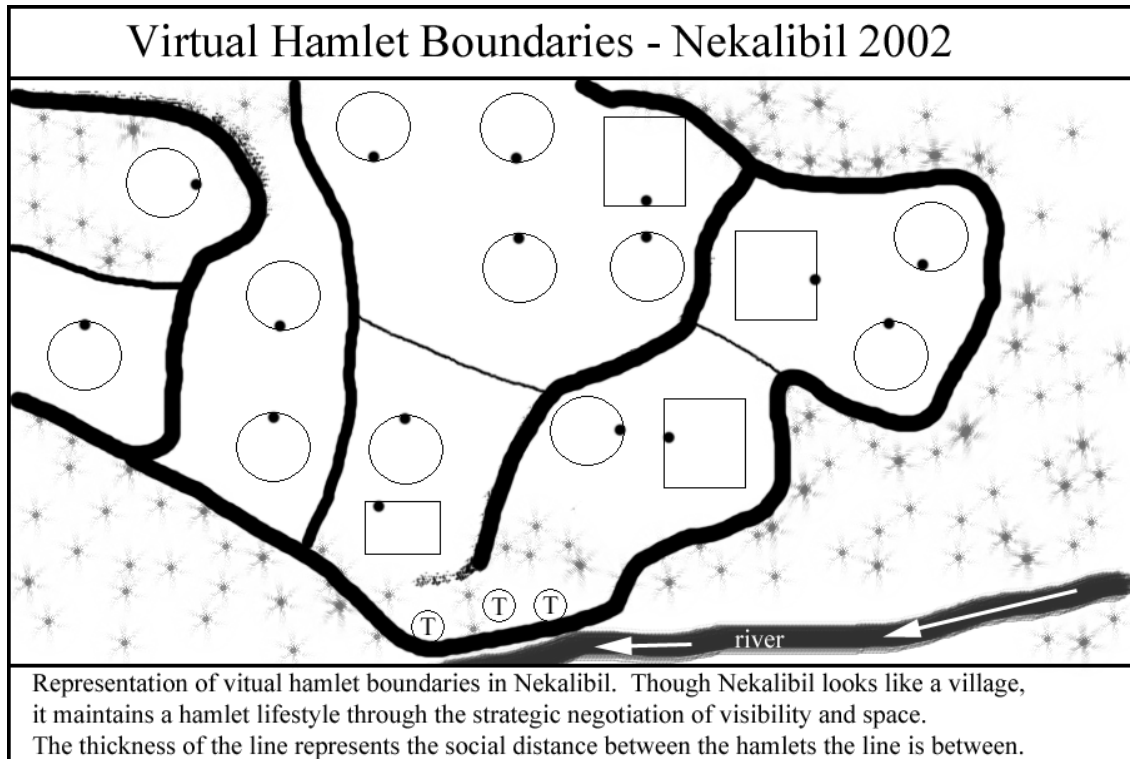The "villages" that come about in this context are in many ways representative of the tensions between the divergent demands of relational sociality and statecraft, and were produced from these tensions.   Although the villages are relatively large (between 100 and 450 people), the tight-knit relational sociality of the hamlet is maintained through a strategic manipulation of visibility. Doorways are made to face those with whom one has mutually productive relations. Cliff-sides, trees, and other boundaries are used to separate what might be called "virtual hamlets" within the village. New western style houses with doors and locks are also used to negotiate visibility. Sometimes houses are nothing more than place-markers built by people who actually live in isolated hamlets far away who use the house to claim residence in the official village. In one case, 34 people "officially" live in the same house, while in reality they

live in a distant isolated hamlet. As has been noted elsewhere in New Guinea,

compulsory villages have also inspired many to build more permanent garden houses

where they may spend most of their time (e.g. Wagner 1967:23). Spending 16 months

in these villages I quickly learned that the unconditional sharing associated with hamlet

co-residents did not extend to the entire village and was only present between people of

the same virtual hamlet. The two maps of the official village below show the ways in

which people have arranged their homes to reflect and produce the boundaries of these

virtual hamlets.

Negotiating Visibility - Nekalibil 2002

○ Traditional style round-house and doorway
☐ New style house and door
Ⓣ Toilet

Cliff-side, trees, or other boundary
Surrounding Bush

Nim River

Virtual Hamlet Boundaries - Nekalibil 2002

Representation of vitual hamlet boundaries in Nekalibil. Though Nekalibil looks like a village, it maintains a hamlet lifestyle through the strategic negotiation of visibility and space. The thickness of the line represents the social distance between the hamlets the line is between.

This negotiation of visibility is just one small example of the ways the local relational sociality and statecraft are in a relentlessly dialectical relationship in which the terms of one simultaneously encompass and are encompassed by the terms of the other.

Productivity of Tensions Example 2:

The Schismogenetic Production of Nimakot Govern-mentality

(to line and to learn, to save and to serve)

The emphasis local government officers place on authority is striking. Many of them seek out old military uniforms and army boots and talk in a loud, slow, and measured style, constantly berating others. Certainly one source for this extremism is the history of governments the people of Nimakot have witnessed or been a part of, as both Indonesia and Papua New Guinea particularly the militaristic regimes of Indonesia. But I would like to argue that government officers at Nimakot are not merely imitating these brutal authoritative government styles. Their particular style of authoritarianism is actually produced dialectically through the tensions between statecraft and relational sociality.

First, allow me to briefly describe styles of governance in Nimakot. The two words most used to describe the work of government officers are *lain* and *sev.* Both have double meanings. "Lain" means both "to teach" and to "line up," with a strong emphasis on discipline and order. Officers often claim that they will "lain" the people meaning both to teach them the law, and in doing so, discipline them and put them into order (line them up). *Lain* is used not only to describe the pursuit of law and order in social life, but also for houses to be "lined" up straight. "Sev" means both "to serve" and "to save," which are not mutually exclusive. Government in Nimakot is primarily about getting services, as illustrated in the phrase "namba tok," and it is through such

services that government officers claim they might "save" the people. As we have seen, services ultimately depend on large villages and so to sev, officers realize also a need to lain.

Importantly for my argument here, to "lain" requires authority. The government officer must be exonerated from the demands of relational sociality in which he is constantly defined and redefined through his relations. His or her power and authority depends on what LiPuma calls "the transcendence of kinship – a modern inversion of the customary pattern of socio-political relations" (2000:163)   His definition as a person must now be categorical and pre-scribed as "kaunsel," "kiap," or "komiti."

Yet just as their "namba" as a categorical identity requires authority, this authority is constantly undermined by the fact that their "namba" was bestowed upon them by the "namba" of their constituents voting for them. Enacting the constraints of relational sociality, anytime people felt that the kaunsels were overstepping the bounds of their authority they reminded the kaunsel to "think of the future" and remember how he "got his namba." In the most heated scenarios, people promised to go put their "namba" elsewhere, meaning they would move to another village or ward. This sounds like democracy, but these processes are embedded within a very different cultural field. When somebody threatens to movie his "namba" elsewhere, he is not referring merely to himself as an individual with a single vote, but to his entire network of relations.

Though kaunsels are highly respected they never seem to have enough authority to overcome the autonomy of their constituents. The relational field constantly envelopes their categorical identity and redefines it as a relational one. Officers talk

eloquently and at length at public forums at least three times a week trying to encourage people to move to the large government villages and do "community work," mandatory work that functions as a "tax" where people have little or no money. It seems everybody is in agreement that they should do these things but nothing ever happens. People still live in scattered hamlets. Community work doesn't get done.
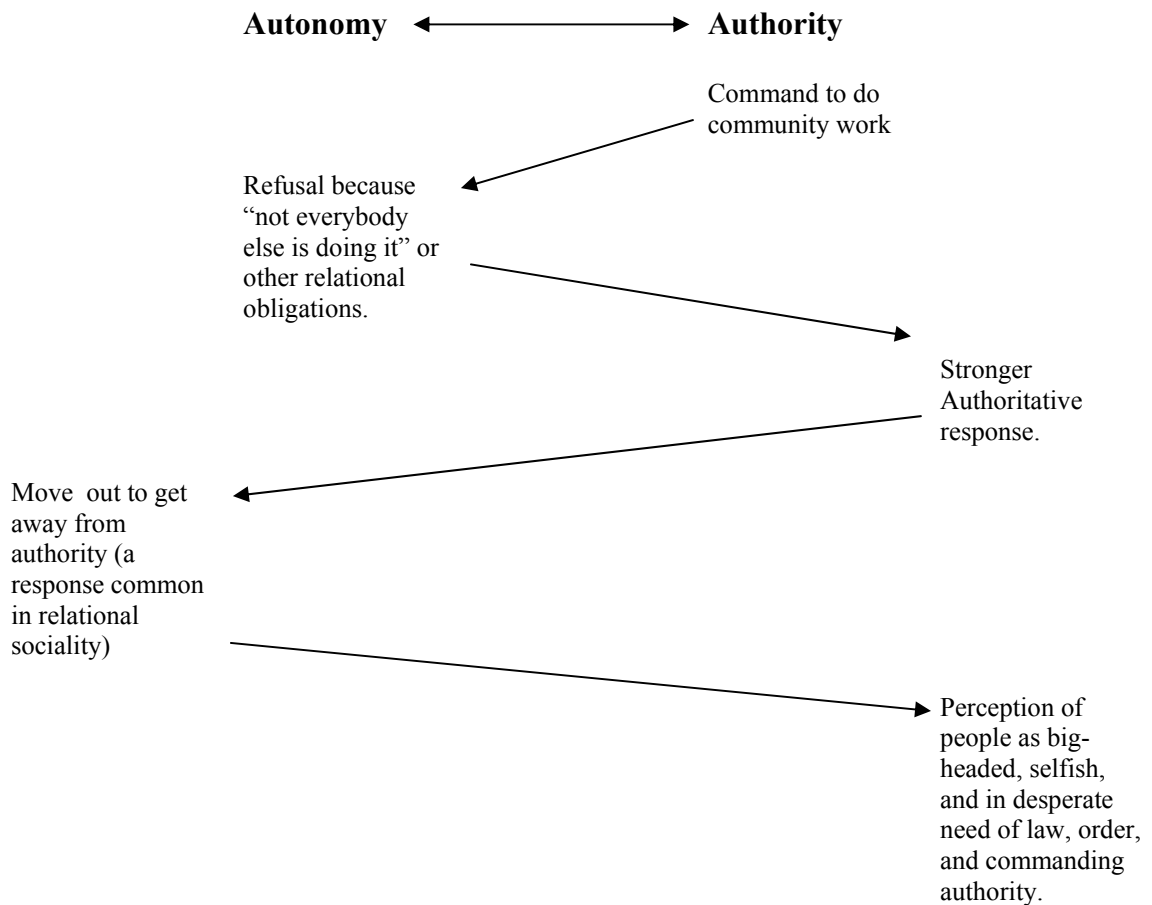
Now and then a kaunsel will rage at somebody who is being "big-headed" and not following government orders. Though in his rage he seems ready to burst with violence, the rage is always quickly diffused with a smile and a handshake from the person being attacked. The man apologizes, makes light of the situation, and then carries on without acceding to the command.

The kaunsels' struggles with authority and the perceived need for it have raised "authority" to almost emblematic status as the key to effective government. The essence of Nimakot govern-mentality is strong, unforgiving authority. This authority is produced through a process best described by Gregory Bateson's term, "complementary schismogenesis" (1935, 2000(1972):68, 1958(1936):176). Complementary schismogenesis is a process of differentiation whereby two sides act differently toward one another in a way that one side's actions complement the other side's response and the two sides move further and further apart. The example Bateson most often uses is when one side (A) is assertive and the other side (B) is submissive. The submissiveness of (B) elicits more assertiveness from (A) which in turn elicits more submissiveness from (B) in a dynamic feedback loop driving the two sides to further differentiate. In the case I am describing here, it is the autonomy of locals on the one hand and the

authority of government officers that are in a complementary schismogenetic relationship to one another. The more authority government officers attempt to exercise the more local people deny that authority, sometimes going so far as to fully exercise their autonomy by moving away from the government officer.

Each encounter between a government officer attempting to exercise authority and a local resisting and exercising autonomy feeds the schismogenetic dynamic. There are in fact several identifiable schismogenetic "moments" in which this can be seen. The type case is when a government officer attempts to coerce locals to do community work. Every Monday morning the tensions surface as kaunsels and komitis try to organize the people to do community work. Each person faces a tension between the demands of these leaders as well as their own desires to develop a good community and the demands of their relations which may include garden work or gathering items for an exchange. As some ultimately choose to attend to their relational demands, others follow suit, not wanting to waste their own time working for the community when nobody else is, and the very idea of "community" is called into question. Though Tumolbil has approximately one thousand people in the community, it is rare that more than 50 people actually participate in community work, and more often than not, community work does not get done at all. This is one of the primary motivating factors cited by ward kaunsels and komitis for wanting to force people into large stable villages. In these large villages, they hope, it will be much easier for them to convince people to do community work because they will be more mutually visible to one another.

The schismogenetic moment, showing how it can further polarize authority and autonomy can be graphically illustrated as such:

Autonomy ←————————→ **Authority**

Command to do
community work

Refusal because
"not everybody
else is doing it" or
other relational
obligations.

Stronger
Authoritative
response.

Move out to get
away from
authority (a
response common
in relational
sociality)

Perception of
people as big-
headed, selfish,
and in desperate
need of law, order,
and commanding
authority.

And yet all of these government officers are also locals, and when they are not being government they just as quickly shed their govern-mentality and engage humbly in relational sociality. Such disparate personhoods are difficult to negotiate, as will be seen, particularly in Chapter Six when I address this question further.

Productivity of Tensions Example Three: Operation Clean and Sweep

The paradox is that these products of the tension seek to annihilate the tension itself, but only re-create it or even increase it. This is best exemplified by Operation Clean and Sweep, a plan developed by native government officers to finally align local social and cultural patterns with the demands of statecraft. Operation Clean and Sweep started in February 2003 and continued with great force and momentum until early May 2003. Even after May however it was not "officially" over and its methods and policies were still being promised (or threatened, depending on one's perspective) by government officers until I left the field in August of the same year.

The primary goal of Operation Clean and Sweep was to move people out of the many small, scattered hamlets throughout Nimakot into one of the official government villages. Though virtually everybody in the region had a desire to make their "namba" visible to the state, the cultural processes of relational sociality counterbalanced these desires and over 50 small hamlets still existed as of early February. The tension embedded in this situation was exacerbated when a border survey by a joint commission of officials from Papua New Guinea and Indonesia used a helicopter equipped with GPS to verify the official census taken in 2000. They found a number of the small hamlets and thought the official villages were too small to contain the high numbers reported in the census. If the numbers of Nimakot were to continue to talk, they would need to find a way to reside in the official government villages.

Among those listed by the village recorder was "to drive out confusion," referring to the tensions between relational sociality and statecraft that agents of the latter always read as confusion, bigheadedness, and lies. Moving the people to large government villages would help to resolve confusion by placing everybody under an official government representative of the village who would be able to easily perform his duties of maintaining the village book, guiding community work, and maintaining law and order.

As locals, these officers also knew however that the Operation would ultimately need to drive out the confusion locals felt as well as they tried to live with two contradictory cultural logics and processes. The extensive proposals to accomplish this grew each time they were discussed, as people presented more and more challenges to living in large villages. Such proposals were not implemented immediately, but they illustrate the tremendous transformation sought through the Operation.

As I mentioned earlier, people build their houses so that their doorways face their strongest relations. Under the Operation, new villages were to be built with all the houses numbered and placed in straight lines. Whereas many houses did not have a door at all, under the Operation all houses would require doors and locks for privacy. Whereas typically people of Nimakot often wonder from house to house visiting friends and relatives, under the Operation visits to other households would be made by appointment only. Furthermore, public paths would have bypasses around villages so that people would not see what people were carrying home from the garden or bush and grow envious.

Items sometimes used in conflict would be hidden away as much as possible. Bows and arrows would not be allowed to be carried into the villages or on to government station grounds. A location outside of each village would be selected for these items as they were part of the "old road" of fighting and had no place in the new villages.

Officers proposed that over 200 meters be left between any house and the government station. This would allow village problems to remain in the village and not leak into tensions between locals and government officials, school teachers, clinic workers, and other public servants.

These proposals suggested radical transformation, yet there were more that were perhaps even more fundamental, dealing with the social structure itself. The kaunsel president proposed they adopt a fully patrilineal land tenure system to avoid any more confusion with their current cognatic system which left land rights and don miit affiliations too fluid, flexible, and ambiguous. People were to adopt the land of their father. If a man wanted to use the land of his mother or wife he would have to obtain signed permission from the patrilineal landowners.

He suggested ways to avoid conflicts over bride wealth as well, proposing that all bride wealth be set at fixed rates based on the education of the woman. Women who had attended high school would be as much as 1,000 kina ($250 USD) and "village women" (TP, "ples meri") would be 300 kina ($75 USD).

Together these proposals were all meant in some way to create "community." In a later meeting that I examine in more detail in Chapter Six, the kaunsel president

explained that people in Nimakot "don't know community" and that people needed to not only move into large villages ("communities") but also to live peacefully with one another with a true sense of "community."

None of the proposals beyond moving people into large villages were implemented immediately, but they provided something of a road map to the "new road" that government officers envisioned and that Operation Clean and Sweep sought to bring about.

The first goal of the Operation was to eliminate the small, scattered hamlets, and they would do this by burning them. Warnings were sent out in advance to inform people that they would need to move to an official government village or their house would be burned down. Some heeded the warnings, but many did not. The officers mounted a two week patrol that would take them to each of the official government villages, burning hamlets along the way.

The first hamlet to burn was the kiap's own native hamlet. He could not have chosen a more powerful statement for the proclamation that Operation Clean and Sweep had officially begun. He would resolve the tensions of relational sociality and statecraft with the bold statement that community and state always come before relations. There would be no tolerance for the "wantok system."

As the patrol continued, komitis ventured into the more isolated areas off the main paths where there were more hamlets and demanded that the residents of those hamlets be "swept" into the larger villages so that the landscape would be as clean and orderly as the census list itself. "No brothers! No wantoks!" was the rallying cry I first

heard from the kiap, and then by others. In one speech, the kiap encouraged the komitis:

> This is very important. You must think of creating a good life for us in the future. Some of you are now thinking about your brothers and sisters who live in those hamlets you are about to eliminate. Maybe you are thinking that you will eat pig with them and come back. It is this type of system that continues to mess us up. No wantok system! This is an operation!

There was widespread support for the Operation as it began, and support for it grew as the patrol proceeded. At any given time there were over 150 men volunteering to walk with the patrol, including those who had lost their houses to the Operation. At each of the official villages the Papua New Guinea flag was already flying proudly as the patrol arrived. Pig feasts and large dances were staged every night. The kiap was given a king's welcome at every village, sometimes being lifted and carried by local villagers for the final meters before entering the village.

Officers used public meetings in the official government villages to explain the goals of Operation Clean and Sweep. On the first night after hamlets started burning, the kiap explained:

> The government will only look at your total population number when deciding whether or not to give you a service. Having a large village population is very important. This is why we are trying to pull you into the large registered villages. ... We can't put a big number for no reason. Government officials will come and if they don't see many faces they won't give a service. You all fight

over land, food, water, and witchcraft and you all runaway to the bush. All of

you must come join this main village. I won't be running around the bush

trying to find you.

As the patrol moved on the kiap polished his speech. By the time they arrived in

Kagading two days later the kiap was able to work his word magic, inspiring fear, hope,

tears, and laughter all at once. *"Kagading! Kagading! Kagading!"* he yelled while

bobbing his head vigorously, startling the crowd with the force of his voice. Then

putting his hand over his eyes with a gesture of looking into the distance he continued,

"The name fires up all the time but I don't see any people." The less than 100 people in

attendance laughed nervously as the kiap continued, "So I'm checking what villages

have more than 200 people. If there are less than 200 people forget it. I will eliminate

it."

He directly addressed recent attempts by unofficial hamlet leaders to maintain

their hamlets while still maintaining that they lived in Kagading by calling themselves

Kagading #2 and Kagading #3. Though such attempts may have worked in the past

when they themselves were in complete control of the census book and nobody

patrolled the area to actually see them in person, it would not work when Indonesia was

flying over with GPS carefully mapping every house and hamlet. "We are Papua New

Guineans but we live in No Man's Land. Only the name of this village, Kagading, is on

the map. It is on the government list. Only Kagading is on the list and map so you

can't go off thinking, '*I'm going to call my place Number Two or Number Three

Kagading'* and stay where you are. You must move here and stay here."

Most of the people who were moved seemed remarkably calm and unperturbed. Some even invited the operation team in and fed them what was to be the last meal served in the house before it was abandoned forever. But no matter how nice the locals seemed to be to the operation teams, team members viewed all of their actions with great suspicion, which in many ways served as an omen of what was to come. Team members were careful not to leave food scraps lest they be used for witchcraft. They were equally suspicious of what the victims of the operation said, regardless of how kind or irrelevant their words may have seemed. One man who was forced to move spread fear throughout the operation team by simply saying, "It's okay. I'll just go to the village where I was born." His statement was taken to mean that he would go find dangerous witchcraft at his home village and have his revenge on those who had forced him to move.

The tensions between relational sociality and statecraft were coming into focus in the domain of witchcraft. It was witchcraft that locals perceived as the true danger of living in the large government villages. One man whose house was in a small hamlet scheduled to be burned the following day interrupted a public meeting at one of the official government villages. His words captured the tension I am describing:

> I am a community man. Yes, I have my little house in the forest where I live. But I work for the community. I am a man of the government. I have always stood underneath the government. Now I don't know. If I build my home in a government village I think I will die. My family will die. The government village is not my home.

The next day another powerful man from one of the doomed hamlets entered a government-recognized village carrying the bones of his deceased mother that he had dug up that morning. An expert hunter with years of experience killing and carving animals he pointed out subtle knife marks on her left wrist, evidence that she had been murdered, possibly by witchcraft. He further elaborated that after the murder, now over two years ago, he had traced the footsteps of the assailant back to this government village. Now the government was about to force him to live in this very village. He held the bone for all to see and raged, "*How can I live among those who wish to kill me and my family!?*" The bone shook in his hand as he spoke, his voice now cracking*, "You all look at this! My mother! They killed her! This is a place of witchcraft! I won't live here!"*

Such virulent complaints about witchcraft were held by many, and virtually blocked any possibility of moving people permanently into large villages and resolving the tensions between statecraft and relational sociality. On that same day Kotinim (see Chapter Two) passed away. Nobody doubted that it was witchcraft, and indeed it was thought to be all the stronger and malevolent given the strong efforts people had made to stop it through safety meetings and washings. Somebody was somehow able to work their witchcraft despite all of these washings and pleas to stop.

Two days later the kiap returned from the patrol to find his son seriously ill. A séance by the last *kusong* (shaman) in the region revealed a small witchcraft bundle of pork and sweet potato, suggesting that some pork the child had been eating had been

stolen and used to bewitch him. The child had apparently been bewitched while eating part of the pig the kiap had confiscated during Operation Clean and Sweep.

The events held an ironic parallel inversion to the events of 1963 when McArthur refused the pig because, by local understandings at least, it had been bewitched. Actually McArthur left the valley because he was certain he had inadvertently crossed the border. This time it was a local leading the first patrol through the Smol river valley. He purposely crossed the border with the hope of staking out a new one. He was not given a pig, but confiscated one. And it was not locals who suspected the pig had been bewitched, it was himself who held the suspicions. In any case, witchcraft and statecraft once again confronted one another. The officer immediately arranged for a safety meeting like no other.

THE BIG SAFETY MEETING

The difference between this safety meeting and the one I recounted in Chapter Two were emblematic of the new perspective the government Operation was taking in relation to witchcraft.

The safety meeting began with the familiar refrains. People complained that others were hiding too much and witchcraft was bringing down the population. But by all accounts this was different from previous safety meetings. It was the biggest by far, bringing together people from throughout the area. Over 400 people were present. It was widely spoken of as a "first," an expression sometimes of resentment and other times of hope.

The women sat and lined one side of the flat empty space that had been dug out and flattened two years previously with the hopes of coming developments that had not yet come. They sat calmly with their children, working on their string bags until they were berated by komitis for not showing proper "respect" for the seriousness of this meeting. The men lined the other side of the empty space, shouting familiar one-liners while waiting for the kiap to arrive, "You witches, why do you bring down our population?!" "You must reveal yourself! Don't hide your witchcraft!" "What are you jealous of? Why must you eat human meat?" The longer we sat the louder and more vindictive their comments became, until a full cacophony of tense and angry voices filled the air.

When other people "take the floor" at public meetings they usually do so by yelling over such a cacophony, hoping that they might win people's ears for some brief moment. The kiap was the only one I witnessed who could take the floor simply by standing up. Only those who had not noticed him stand kept talking, but were quickly stared into silence by the kiap's piercing gaze.

The kiap's command of the audience indexed a significant difference between this safety meeting and others. Though previous safety meetings had attempted to maintain an agenda and some sense of orderliness and turn-taking they inevitably transformed into lively discussions in which several smaller discussions coincided with the main discussion, people moving from place to place to discuss particular details, and then finally somebody would "take the floor" and demand everybody's attention for a few fleeting moments before the smaller discussions again swarmed all around the

speaker until he was drowned out in the cacophony of community discussion. By the end of a typical safety meeting there was no semblance of a large meeting left, for it had long since dissolved into a dozen smaller ones, constantly changing topics and participants. This safety meeting was different from the beginning. People sat in rows facing the kiap and did not dare turn to one another to speak. It was more of a lecture than a discussion. The order was maintained throughout, weakened only slightly as other less engaging government officers took the floor. People maintained their rows and listened to the officers.

"*Liva*" and "*Livings*" were the catchy alliterative key words with which the kiap had chosen to open his talk. *Liva* is a Tok Pisin word derived from the English "liver" and refers to the heart or inner self. Livings refers to "lifestyle" and more broadly implies custom, habits, and the outer self. "Both liva and livings," the kiap began, "must change dramatically."

Their *liva*, the kiap proclaimed, was lustful, slovenly, selfish, disrespectful, and bigheaded. Their *livings*, their avoidance of community work and the way they hid in the bush so they could work their witchcraft especially, marked them as primitive, backward, and uneducated. In his rage he used common local clichés of self-deprecation, re-affirming the locals' own critiques of themselves. "You really are the last line." "This is a trashy place." "You *Atbalmin* don't *really* have a name." His use of "Atbalmin" was clearly calculated. He had spent a good deal of energy trying to rid the word from common usage in favor of "Nekalimin." He now seized the advantage of using "Atbalmin" to disparage his audience.

Like other safety meetings, this one would analyze the web of social relations and histories of relating, attempting to determine where relating may have turned from productive to destructive and perhaps turned deadly. What made the meeting so different, was that it was the kiap's relationships that were to be analyzed, and moreover this analysis would be firmly controlled and guided by the kiap himself. This meant that his personal relationships were only fair game for analysis in so far as he revealed them, and he revealed very little. It was people's relationship to his *categorical identity* as *kiap*, a representative of the government, that would be of primary interest. In that sense it was the people's relationship to the government and statecraft that was under scrutiny, rather than interpersonal relationships.

This provided a forum for government officers to lecture to the general public about their failings through the eyes of statecraft. The first and most obvious was that they rarely did community work. The kiap was the most vociferous of community leaders in trying to motivate people to do community work. *Were they upset at the kiap for yelling at them and making them feel shame for not doing community work? Is this why they bewitched his son?* During the Australian era people were paid for this same work. "Now you all cry for a picture of Michael Somare," the kaunsel president commented, referring to the picture of Michael Somare on Papua New Guinea currency.

And then there was the Operation. *Were people upset at him for forcing them to move into villages?* He had recently revealed plans to burn hamlets north of Tumolbil and move them into the main Tumolbil area. Perhaps these people were upset and poisoned his son.

Though he did not mention any tensions between himself as the new government officer and elders who once held prominent positions as tultuls and luluais, the elders themselves felt it necessary to clarify that their visits to the kiap were not to work witchcraft on him but to share their knowledge of leadership. Lokim, the first luluai and powerful leader who oversaw the construction of the airstrip, aid post, and school, commented that if he was to be a suspect he would not allow anybody to use the word, "Tumolbil." "If it weren't for me, 'Tumolbil' would not exist," he reminded them.

None of the tensions that were revealed resulted in any leads into the possible source of the witchcraft now afflicting the kiap's son. After hours of tirades by government officers trying to press for revelations of discontent with the government, they finally stopped asking and revealed that they already knew who had worked the witchcraft but suspected there might be others and had hoped to reveal them all at once. "I know you all have lots of witchcraft," the kiap concluded, "that is why I have made you sit in the sun all of these hours. Now it looks like we'll just have to start with this one woman." Komitis were sent off to find the suspect. Moments later she arrived, escorted by komitis to the center of the meeting where she sat on the ground, silently pulling at the grass around her legs as the government officers concluded their tirade, not only about her, but about the *liva* and *livings* of all of Nimakot.

It was then that the kiap declared his plan to completely "eradicate" (TP, "iradiketim") witchcraft. He promised that starting with this suspect, whom he had accused of poisoning his son, he would invite elder women to his office who would

reveal all the witches in the area. "You all know that there are old women here who will tell me these things. So all you witches, look out! You will also come to the office. I'm going to get you all."

Previous safety meetings I witnessed such as the one involving Kotinim had not sought to identify any one particular individual as the witch. As Evans-Prichard noted for the Azande, "A Zande is interested in witchcraft only as an agent on definite occasions and in relation to his own interests, and not as a permanent condition of individuals" (Evans-Prichard 1937:26). Previous safety meeting were held to "scare" witches into abandoning their witchcraft without personally identifying them. Faltering relationships were scrutinized not to identify a particular witch and place blame but so that the relationships could be healed. Nobody had the authority to state who was and was not responsible for the witchcraft and ultimately nobody was clearly identified, though people might nonetheless walk away from the meeting holding silently to their suspicions about who was responsible.

This safety meeting was altogether different, and not only in that it ended with the unequivocal identification of the witch at fault. The key difference was the nature of the relationships that were scrutinized, and the way in which they were addressed. As I mentioned, the relationships analyzed were between *the government* and *the people*. Though it was the government (as embodied in the kiap's son) who was sick, it was not the faults of the government in relating to people that were to be analyzed in the way the faults of Kotinim in relating to others were analyzed in the case study in Chapter Two. The government is a pre-scribed social order which cannot be at fault.

Nimakot government stands beyond censure. The fault had to lie with the inadequacies of the local people for not yet understanding the "new road" of "community life" under government law.

The solution was not to mend the relation between the government and the people through exchange and compensation. In fact, officers sought ways to make relations disappear. As they would often exclaim, "No wantok system!" As emblematic of this, all handshakes and gifts of food to the kiap were forbidden, lest they be considered a bribe or used to transmit witchcraft.

CATEGORICAL ENTITIES AND ID-ENTITIES:

Why "witchcraft" is perceived as the primary challenge to "community"

In Chapter Three I recounted the way the cultural processes of statecraft create categorical entities such as tribes and sub-tribes, as well as individual persons. The modern state treats each person as an individual under the law with certain rights and obligations as individual citizens. However, these are only categorical *entities* until the persons assigned to these categories self-identify with them. Only then do they become what we might call a categorical *identity*.

I use the term categorical identity in two interrelated ways: identity *with* a category and identity *as* a category. First, a categorical identity is simply identification with a particular category. "Anthropologist" is a categorical identity of mine as I identify with those calling themselves "anthropologist." I might have several other

categorical identities such as "teacher" and "American" to name just two examples. But this sense of categorical identity is largely dependent on a more abstract sense in which I am using the term to designate how one might self-identify *as* a category. In this more abstract sense, somebody with a categorical identity is somebody who conceives of themselves first and foremost as a bounded, distinctly, non-relational category over and above their place or identity within a field of social relations. Here the term "categorical identity" roughly corresponds to the "individual" of the individual/dividual dichotomy. However, individualism often also implies values and ideals emphasizing creativity and uniqueness, which are not appropriate to the meaning of "categorical identity" here. Nonetheless, a transformation from relational sociality to categorical identity would be equally dramatic for people in Nimakot, for it ultimately would require them to conceive of themselves as set apart from their relations.

While "*a* community" may be created as a categorical *entity* simply by naming a location on a map or listing names under the community's name in a census book, "community" requires people to take on categorical *identities* in both senses of the term for that community to exist in reality. The community is a category in which people must accept membership above and beyond their relations.

The extensive proposals for Operation Clean and Sweep that seek to undermine relational sociality and discussions about the "wantok system" illustrate a profound local understanding of precisely this problem.

But relational sociality is a cultural process deeply embedded in everyday practices of subsistence, exchange, and interpersonal relating. As opposed to a

categorical identity, relational sociality fosters a relational ontology, the sense that one's being is integrally connected to one's social relations. This is the core obstacle to all efforts to build "community" in Nimakot. Unfortunately, this relational ontology is most visible in the accusations and imageries of witchcraft. Hence it is witchcraft that is viewed locally as the core obstacle to community.

That the kiap himself – who perhaps has the greatest sense of "categorical identity" in Nimakot – also subscribes to witchcraft illustrates the profound ways in which relational sociality and statecraft are both embedded and in tension in Nimakot life. In the next chapter I turn to a detailed examination of how the interaction between the contrary logics and processes of relational sociality and statecraft transformed local understandings of witchcraft.

Chapter Five

Relational Sociality, Statecraft, and the Modernity of "Witchcraft"

Afek watched as a small dilamkon *bird was eating the fruit of an* inak *tree. A*

piece of the fruit the bird had been eating fell beside her. She did not want to

eat this fruit. She wanted to eat the bird. So she created witchcraft to kill the

bird. She took the piece of fruit that the bird had been eating and wrapped it up

to make a bis yokop *(witchcraft bundle). The bird fell dead. Her brother*

begged her for a share of the meat despite her warnings that it would poison

him. He ate it and died. Afek gathered leaders from all of the major cult

houses in the area and gave each of them the power of witchcraft by giving

them human meat that could open their eyes to the hidden world of witchcraft.

After giving a share of the meat to everybody, the Atbalmin representative hid

his share and claimed not to have any. Afek gave him more. He hid it again

and asked for more. So Afek gave him more. Again he hid it. On and on it

went like this so now we have too much, and it is hidden so well we cannot see

it to get rid of it.

　　　　　- common story told in Nimakot of the origins of witchcraft.

　　　People of Nimakot look enviously upon their neighbors such as the Telefomin

who do not practice a completely hidden form of witchcraft. The Telefomin are said to

have long given up the art of poisoning victims through completely hidden means and

now use syringes stolen from the local clinic to administer poison to victims. This

makes it much easier to trace who the perpetrator is, for there is visible "hard" evidence to be found. As for the people of Nimakot themselves, their witchcraft practices don't leave a single trace of physical evidence. As the story above intimates, it is completely hidden, and far too prevalent. Unlike other stories, those telling this story often refer to themselves as "Atbalmin," "people of the bush," underscoring their shame in a story about the origin, prevalence, secretiveness, and seemingly hopeless permanence of their witchcraft practices.

In Chapter Two I illustrated how witchcraft imagery and accusations are part and parcel of the cultural process of relational sociality. I then showed ways in which the cultural process of modern statecraft and its categorical bias exacerbate tensions of relational sociality by forcing people to live in large stable villages. In this chapter I will illustrate how the categorical bias of statecraft also affects the way witchcraft is handled. People who are accused as part of very specific breakdowns in relationships are charged as criminals of the state who have broken the categorical law. They are transformed from temporary and indefinite witches to permanent and categorical witches, who can be listed, just as in a census book. Without the logic and mechanisms of statecraft, it was this or that particular act of witchcraft as a manifestation of certain bad relations that was the problem. In the context of statecraft, it is "witchcraft" itself that is the problem and the imagery of witchcraft begins to transform as it becomes yet another category in the eyes of the state – banished by law – Village Courts Act 1989 Section 41 Subsection p.

Recent research on present-day witchcraft has suggested that such phenomena emerge from the radical social and cultural changes associated with the introduction of statecraft and other institutions of modernity (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, Moore and Sanders 2001). Such radical changes no doubt create new contexts and possibilities for tensions to emerge in which witchcraft may be suspected, and certainly witchcraft is imagined as a translocal phenomenon in even the most remote of places. However, I maintain that these arguments grounding witchcraft phenomena in modernity are over-stated and suggest instead that the basic logic of witchcraft and particular witchcraft accusations are deeply embedded in local socio-cultural processes, logics, and everyday practices of relating to one another which I have called relational sociality. The role of modern statecraft is not to create witchcraft imagery and accusations but to reveal them and make them more evident (particularly to outsiders) by separating witchcraft from the local processes in which it is grounded, creating "witchcraft" as a category of action unto itself that is against the law and separating it from the socio-cultural logic and context in which it normally participates. The "witch" becomes a categorical entity and people who are accused of witchcraft as the result of particular relational conflicts are transformed from temporary, ambiguous, and situational perpetrators of witchcraft into permanent, certain, and categorical witches who must be stopped or eradicated.

In this way, I propose a subtle inversion of Geschiere's now famous phrase (and the title of his book) "the "modernity" of witchcraft" (1997), and suggest instead an analysis of the modernity of "witchcraft." In short, I argue that the logic of categories that is integral to modernity in general and to statecraft in particular is essential to the

creation of "witchcraft" as a thing in itself that agents of statecraft/modernity find troublesome, backward, primitive, and in need of eradication to prepare the way for modern prosperity.

THE MODERNITY OF "WITCHCRAFT"

Recently, it has become more and more common for anthropologists to note that witchcraft, often thought of as something "traditional," has not faded with the impacts of modernization. There is no clear opposition between witchcraft and modernity in which one necessarily excludes the other. Instead, witchcraft is an active conceptual field for locals to interpret and act on the fields of modernity. In what has become a landmark text, Peter Geschiere comments that "in many respects, then, one can speak of the "modernity" of witchcraft" (Geschiere 1997:3).

While many anthropologists have emphasized witchcraft's co-existence with modernity, it should be pointed out that most government officials, church leaders, teachers, and other agents of modernity do not look upon this situation favorably. Perhaps witchcraft is a part of their particular modernity, they admit, but it shouldn't be. They seem to reiterate the words of Frederick Kaigh (who believed very strongly in the power of witchcraft) who while in Africa in 1947 called witchcraft "public enemy number one. Nothing heretofore mentioned is possible, no elevation, no education, no co-operation, no future, while witchcraft flourishes as it does today. This is the cancer actively rotting away all advancement and enterprise" (1947:vii).

Anthropologists have long recognized a certain relationship between modernity and witchcraft. In 1935, Audrey Richards published a paper tellingly called "A modern movement of witch-finders." She persuasively argued that the witch-finding movement found broad support because of the negative effects of colonialism, wage labor, migration, Christianity, and urbanization. Her argument, posed almost 70 years ago, if stripped of its structural-functional language, could easily pass for an excellent contribution to the literature still today. Her argument was supported by others who argued along similar lines that witchcraft accusations increased under the pressures of modernity (e.g. Mayer 1954). However, as Mary Douglas has pointed out, the argument that modernity leads to an increase in witchcraft accusations falls prey to structural-functional circularity: "Starting from a homeostatic model of society in which witchcraft beliefs help to maintain the system, the natural way to account for witchcraft accusations getting out of control was by reference to a general breakdown of the society" (Douglas 1970).

More promising work that built from the structural-functional framework came from the Manchester school, particularly approaches such as Victor Turner's Schism and Continuity, using the extended case method (1957). By following the same social actors over extended periods of time, the method revealed how tensions embedded in the social structure played themselves out over time, processually. Witchcraft beliefs were not part of a homeostatic system. They worked within a highly contestable field that people in different social positions negotiated in different ways. They could be

used to break off relations, forcing village break-ups and movements. They were an integral part of how local history was made.

Turner's scathing critique of the static nature of structural-functionalism came at a time when many anthropologists were turning away from social structure – and as they did, they also turned away from witchcraft. By 1972, Max Marwick wrote of the declining productivity of anthropologists in the sociology of witchcraft, lamenting that of the top 6 contributors to such a sociology 3 were historians, 1 a lawyer, and only 2 anthropologists (1982(1970)).

The anthropology of witchcraft did not disappear altogether. It dissolved into broader analyses of local concepts and symbols. Malcolm Crick stated the differences explicitly as those between the "old" style of structural-functionalism and the "new" style of semantic anthropology. In a series of articles (1970; 1973; 1979), he attempted to make "witchcraft" disappear. Just as Schneider had done for kinship and Levi-Strauss for totemism, he proposed that the term "witchcraft" be abandoned in favor of a broader study of the culturally specific moral field with particular attention to local theories of social action and personhood.

Unfortunately, in order to obtain the interpretive depth he and those who shared his perspective were seeking, such studies abandoned the insights of Victor Turner's processual perspective, extracting static "texts" for interpretation from the complexities of ongoing social life. Process and history had little place in their interpretive scheme.

Where history was of importance was in the perspectives emerging from political economy (e.g. Wolf 1982). However, such studies rarely focused on witchcraft

as it was increasingly considered to be mere exotica. In this theoretical environment the few works in the early 1980s addressing witchcraft were almost apologetic in their attention to such phenomena (e.g. Brain 1982). Yet it was this theoretical environment with its attention to history and interest in the intersection of local cultures with modernity that set the stage for the tremendous revitalization of witchcraft studies we have seen in the past 10-15 years.

Part of the revitalization in "witchcraft" studies is due to the apparent importance of witchcraft throughout the world in precisely those processes of modernization anthropologists are now seeking to explain. While ethnographers the world over seek to understand how different local modernities are forming, locals themselves are using the paradigm of witchcraft to explain their own experiences of modernity, in particular why they are poor, subservient, corrupt, dying of AIDS, or losing world cup soccer matches. Witchcraft explains why a development project didn't work, or why it DID work for the neighboring village but not one's own. It provides a framework to understand new inequalities of wealth and political power. The pervasiveness of witchcraft is matched only by the pervasive persecution of accused witches – often by young men acting on behalf of the state, part of a vigilante group, or of a political party. Some estimates suggest that the rate of witch killings in the world today is many times higher than they were in Europe during the height of the so-called "witch craze" from the 15th-17th centuries (see Behringer 2004).

It seems that just as anthropology began dissolving "witchcraft" into broader cultural analyses, locals engaged in various emerging modernities were themselves

beginning to frame "witchcraft" as a categorical entity that was at the root of all of their struggles.

Fittingly, this coincided with the movement of many anthropologists turning their back on "culture" just as locals the world over were discovering and using it (suggesting that anthropology was turning "post-modern" just as the "native" turned "modern" (see Comaroff and Comaroff (1993:xi)). That the recent flurry of witchcraft studies has developed alongside recent critiques of the culture concept as too static, bounded, reified, and othering has had an important impact. Witchcraft is not framed as a traditional survival but is instead viewed as dynamic, fluid, creative, and engaged in global/local processes. Some go so far as to claim that witchcraft is a *critique* or *product* of modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Auslander 1993).

Here is where there is substantial confusion based on what one means by "witchcraft" on the one hand, and "modernity" on the other. Starting with "modernity," if modernity is taken to simply mean "contemporary" (as Friedman 2001 argues Geschiere has done), then this is the rather empty statement that witchcraft is still prevalent in the contemporary world. When modernity is taken to mean "contemporary" the idea of "multiple modernities" is little more than a euphemism for the culture as group concept. If, on the other hand, modernity is taken to be a certain identifiable set of traits, ideas, ideals, and institutions (such as the list Friedman offers which includes individualism, democracy, nation-state, capitalism, and developmentalism among others (Friedman 1994)) then to say witchcraft is a product or

critique of modernity takes on more substance. This is the meaning of modernity I have intended to use throughout this dissertation.

The term "witchcraft" poses other sorts of problems. Most recent work on modernity and witchcraft has used the term "witchcraft" fairly loosely. What defines "witchcraft," "sorcery," or "magic," is often simply that they are "occult" and "irrational." In this framework, the selling and purchasing of magic charms, the commoditization of body parts, accusations of witchcraft, and other phenomena are all grouped together as "occult phenomena."

This conflation of different activities as "occult phenomena" confuses conversations about "modernity" and "witchcraft." The confusion can be illustrated by simply looking at two sides of witchcraft itself, accusation and practice. The statement that the practice of witchcraft (which may include magic and sorcery) is a critique or product of modernity is significantly different from the claim that accusations of witchcraft are a critique or product of modernity, yet the two are often conflated as one and the same (e.g. Geschiere 1997:1-4 or Moore and Sanders 2001). In the first case we might imagine that witchcraft is embraced for the power it provides to people who find themselves otherwise powerless in the fields of modernity. In the second we find just the opposite, people terrified by the power of witchcraft and hoping (often praying) for its eradication.

While I would agree that witchcraft imageries are part and parcel of modernity in that they participate in the contemporary world with modern social forms, I am uncomfortable pushing this to the idea that they are all about "modernity." Not only

does this flatten studies of different situations involving witchcraft imageries, it also transforms thick social dramas into mere social commentary. It imagines that rather than dealing with their own issues locals are somehow mainly or even solely engaged in our own anthropological issues, critiquing capitalism, globalization, and modernity.

What I find particularly modern about "witchcraft" is the way in which it is often construed locally as a category in precisely the ways that I am suggesting are not useful to anthropologists studying such phenomena. Not only anthropologists, but locals as well are categorizing any way of acting in relation to modern social forms that is not "rational" as "witchcraft." In this way, Geschiere is right to defend his loose use of the term by pointing out that it is precisely how the term (and other common terms such as "sorcery" and the French "la sorcellerie") is used throughout Africa in print and electronic media, political discussions, and everyday life. In Papua New Guinea, the term most often used is "sorcery," and local news sources often report on "sorcery" (either the belief in it or the practice of it – depending on the author) as a serious national problem hindering development at every turn. What is "modern" about "witchcraft" (or "sorcery") is that it is set apart and isolated as a thing in itself, and usually a troublesome one.

In the following analysis I want to change the emphasis on Geschiere's now famous phrase, "the "modernity" of witchcraft," and turn my focus to the modernity of "*witchcraft*." I interpret Geschiere's use of quotes around "modernity" as a way of calling attention to the surprising ways in which witchcraft co-exists with modernity. By instead placing "witchcraft" in quotes I hope to instead draw attention to the ways

witchcraft is reconfigured in the fields of modernity in such a way that it becomes understood as a categorical act in itself, dispossessed of its place within the broader moral field of relational sociality I described earlier.

Within the highly contested and constantly negotiated field of relational sociality there is no culturally agreed upon set of people known as "the witches." One person's suspicions will not necessarily match those of another because they suspect those with whom they have bad relations. As each person sits in a different place within a network of relations, nobody ultimately could agree on who "the witches" are. It is sometimes assumed by researchers that "the witches" are those who are "marginal" to "society" or the "community." I have argued however that witchcraft imageries thrive in situations where "society" and "community" are not fully present – where networks of relations are more important to local ontologies and identities than categorical entities such as society and community. The category of "witches" and "witchcraft" must be constructed just as "community" and "society" must be.

As locals became more concerned with the development of "community" they also began to imagine "witches" and "witchcraft" as categorical entities working against their efforts. When people told the history of failures in community it was always marked by tales of witchcraft accusations leading to residential schisms. The more famous of these tales were those explaining why the first Whiteman left in 1963, the first missionaries in the late 1970s, the first teachers in 1981, and teachers again in the early 1990s when the school made an attempt to re-open after being closed for several

years. By local understandings, all of them had left due to fears of witchcraft, and witchcraft was the primary obstacle to building community.

"Community building" had for some time then been an effort to rid the area of witchcraft.   Not only was this necessary in order to make large, peaceful, and prosperous villages in which people worked for the good of the "community," it would also allow future public servants from outside of the region to feel safe and comfortable. Local methods of dealing with witchcraft sometimes worked to resolve relational tensions but nearly every illness or death brought about more suspicions of witchcraft. By local understandings then, their methods simply were not working. Some hoped that the law might be more effective.

WITCHCRAFT AND THE LAW

In December of 1893, the Native Regulation Board put forth the first regulation regarding sorcery in what was then the British colonial Territory of Papua:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              SORCERY FORBIDDEN                    │
│                                                   │
│   1. White men know that sorcery is only deceit,  │
│   but the lies of the sorcerer frighten many      │
│   people.  The deceit of the sorcerer should be   │
│   stopped.                                        │
│                                                   │
│   2. It is a forbidden act for any person to      │
│   practice or to pretend to practice sorcery.     │
│                                                   │
│   3. It is a forbidden act for any person to      │
│   threaten any other person with sorcery whether  │
│   practised by himself or by any one else.        │
│                                                   │
│   4. Any person who practices sorcery or who      │
│   procures another person to do so or who         │
│   threatens anyone with sorcery may be tried by   │
│   a Magistrate.                                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Though the preamble has since been dropped, the rest of the ordinance has remained largely unchanged to the present day, except for the addition of a sub-regulation banning the "possession of implements or 'charms' used in sorcery," added in a 1911 revision.

The preamble of the original draft points to an ambivalence in the law's approach to the reality of sorcery that has always shrouded the law in paradox as it has been attempted to be employed in practice. When the ordinance was re-enacted in 1911 as part of the Native Regulation Ordinance 1908, it was introduced with a slightly modified preamble which read, "Sorcery is only deceit, but the lies of the Sorcerer frighten many people and cause great trouble, therefore the Sorcerer must be punished" (Native Regulations 1908: para 80(1)).

Though the preamble was eventually removed, the ambivalence towards the reality of witchcraft and sorcery is still present in the current Sorcery Act drafted in 1971:

> Even though this Act may speak as if powers of sorcery really exist (which is necessary if the law is to deal adequately with all the problems of sorcery and the traditional belief in the powers of sorcerers), nevertheless nothing in this Act recognizes the existence or effectiveness of powers of sorcery in any factual sense.
>
> No. 22 of 1971

By definition, sorcery or witchcraft ultimately work in ways not traceable through physical evidence, and this, more than anything, has caused the law to be troublesome both for magistrates and local people.

Up until the recent arrival of the native-born kiap, the law was virtually ineffectual in Nimakot as Australian colonial officers often refused to hear sorcery cases due to lack of empirical evidence.

Two elderly brothers living in the area often tell the story of how they led other men on a rampage of another nearby hamlet, apprehending three people they suspected of killing their father with witchcraft. They marched the suspects all the way to the Telefomin station over ten days' walk away where the Whiteman asked them for "evidence." Having none to show, the Whiteman harangued those who had apprehended the suspects and promised that if they did it again it would be *them* and not the suspects who would be put in jail.

After Independence in 1975, native Papua New Guinea kiaps seemed to show more willingness to prosecute witchcraft, though this remained unclear to the people of Nimakot. In one case in 1981, a man and two women accused of killing a child were taken by a Papua New Guinea kiap to Telefomin to stand trial. Eytan Bercovitch, who was in the area at the time, reports that they were sentenced to six months in jail (1989:499 note 1 and personal communication). However, speaking to the three suspects today they express uncertainty as to whether or not they were convicted. They tell the story of how they were taken to Telefomin where the magistrate said he could not deal properly with the case and sent them to a higher court in the provincial capital of Vanimo. They remember speaking to a magistrate there and returning home to Tumolbil some time later. Unable to speak Tok Pisin, they were not sure if they had been convicted or not, but they all claimed it was one of the more enjoyable experiences of their lifetimes, having the opportunity to eat rice and canned fish and to see the ocean. As the story is told throughout Nimakot today, they were let off due to lack of empirical evidence just as all other cases had been.

There are several more stories of people bringing reports of witchcraft to the Yapsie station one long day's walk to the northeast of Tumolbil. But the officers there have never taken any action on the cases due to lack of evidence. People tried to bring evidence. They brought the clothes the person had died in. If the victim had fallen from a tree they brought a piece of the tree. If the victim was killed by a landslide they brought the stone thought to have struck the victim. If the victim had hung him or her

self, they brought the rope and the branch to which it was tied. Though these were hard physical objects that could be seen, the officers told them that they were not "evidence."

Locally, tultuls and luluais did not have enough authority to prosecute suspected witches. They did not stand far enough outside local relations and the various pulls of relational sociality to act unilaterally against witchcraft suspects.

When I discussed witchcraft and the law with people in Nimakot in 2000, 2001, and 2002 prior to the kiap's arrival they seemed to have the same depressed view of the situation as Bercovitch observed in the early 1980s: "The advent of government administration has only added a further obstacle to an effective solution to sorcery" (1989:499). The government made killing a witch out of revenge out of the question, for it carried a heavy jail term of 14 years. Without this threat of retribution the people felt relatively powerless against witchcraft.

It was possible to take a suspected witch to court but the courts were rarely favorable to the accuser. Outside courts at the sub-district station of Yapsie and the district station at Telefomin did not know (or care) about various relational tensions that provided the primary logic behind the accusation. Again, the problem was evidence. If sufficient empirical evidence could not be provided (and it never could, locals lamented), the accuser would face a "suspect" charge in which they would pay the accused as much as 1,000 Kina ($250 US).

Local courts were not much better. These were unofficial impromptu court sessions held to settle specific disputes. Before the arrival of the kiap, local courts were presided over by whichever kaunsels and komitis could be found on that particular day.

Depending on the number of people interested in the case, the court would be held in an open outside area or inside a house. Everybody who had anything to say was allowed to speak at length on any subject they thought was relevant to the case. In such cases, the act of witchcraft quickly faded as the primary topic of discussion and instead testimonies focused on the long relational histories of grievances between the interested parties, not unlike a safety meeting. The kaunsels and komitis did not stand far enough outside of social relations to accuse any one individual of witchcraft and charge them under the law. Instead, a decision was often made in which both parties were found to be partially at fault for the various grievances between them. Each was asked to pay compensation to the other. If one side was deemed to be slightly more at fault than the other, they would be asked to pay slightly more compensation. Such cases helped to resolve relational tensions, but eventually another illness or death would create another venue for relational tensions to surface and a witchcraft accusation was inevitable. By local understandings then, such court cases did little to dissuade witchcraft.

"Safety meetings" such as the one described in Chapter Two emerged in this context as an attempt to resolve relational tensions that might foster witchcraft, and to plead with people to stop working witchcraft. Without any strong authority figures standing outside the tensions of relational sociality, action beyond this required some semblance of consensus about who was doing the witchcraft but such consensus was rarely forthcoming. Safety meetings were the best they could do, and it was obviously not enough.

It was in this environment of hopelessness that the kiap's harsh stance on witchcraft and his promise to completely "eradicate" it came as welcome news, and was widely celebrated throughout Nimakot. Finally, they had somebody they could go to that understood their own local style of hopelessly hidden witchcraft and was willing and able to do something about it.

TENSIONS IN THE TRIALS

As the kiap would say time and time again throughout the interviews, interrogations, and trials, he was attacking witchcraft through the "true" law. His approach was significantly different from safety meetings and local court cases in three primary ways. First, he would not be concerned with an in-depth analysis of the history of relational interactions to reveal where the web of relations may have weakened or become poisonous. Such analysis would only be important to the extent to which it could provide a "motive." He was much more interested in "evidence" and "eye-witness." Placing people at the scene of the crime would carry more weight for him than their relational histories with the victim and the victim's relations. Second, because he was not interested in the web of relations but in the act of witchcraft itself, it was unnecessary (not to mention improper protocol) to hold lengthy public discussions analyzing relational histories. Instead, he would hold semi-private interrogations between himself and a single suspect who would ultimately be found guilty or not guilty based on the weight of evidence. Third, witches were framed not as an enemy of one particular person or family but of the "community," and more broadly, the state of

Papua New Guinea. Hence, all convicted witches would serve a proper sentence to

"pay their debt" to the state, society, and community.

Exemplifying the turn away from the local relational logic, he continuously

championed "natural justice," explaining that all people of the region were his "namba,"

his "people," even the suspects themselves, and "natural justice" required that he protect

the inalienable rights of each and every one of them. Building on Weber's definition of

the state (1947), Peter Lawrence notes that *ideally* "the allegiance and responsibilities

the state demands, and the protection it provides, should apply equally to every member

of the society. This can be achieved only if every member is conceived and treated as a

citizen-isolate or citizen-unit" (1969:18). In other words, there can be no *wantok*

system. One's relations (particularly one's relations with people of authority) should

not affect the outcome of the trial. Each individual has an equal relationship to the

state, "equality before the law: one law for all" (Lawrence 1969:18-19).

From a Western point of view this sounds like progress towards a more

humanitarian protection of basic human rights. Yet when applied to witchcraft,

grounded as it is in presuppositions of relational sociality, what otherwise appear to be

positive developments would have tremendous, ultimately destructive, consequences.

The kiap transformed the court from what Erik Midelfort has described as essentially a

"private-accusatorial trial" to an "inquisitorial trial" (1972:68). Examining patterns of

witch hunting in the early modern German southwest, Midelfort notes that it was this

kind of transformation in court trials that provided a key precondition for large witch

hunts. Both Nimakot and early modern German private-accusatorial trials required a

plaintiff with enough evidence and courage to accuse another of witchcraft. If the plaintiff failed, he or she faced financial and/or physically violent consequences from the court and/or those they accused. In this way, there was a system of checks and balances built in that discouraged a long series of rampant public accusation. In contrast, the inquisitorial trial places the suspected witch on trial for breaking a categorical written law of the state.

The "trials" were held in the government office, a small room housing the kiap's government books, his typewriter, and the government radio which connected him to district and provincial headquarters. Suspects were brought in by komitis. These komitis, along with the two kaunsels and myself were usually the only people present at the trials. There were approximately 30 "trials" in all, though some were considered to be "interrogations" rather than trials as no assignment of guilt was sought.

The problem was in locating precisely who the witches might be. "Normal" people cannot see witches. Only other witches can see witches. Building from local conventional understandings of witches as a conspiratorial group who work together to make their kills, meet for feasts, and make plans together for future kills, the officers hoped that they would be able to enlist some of the "weak" witches to name the other witches in the area who she had presumably worked with or at least *seen* working witchcraft.

The "weak" were people with very few strong relations with others who might stand by them and defend their innocence. Ultimately there would be four women who would be the primary "witnesses" for the state. Three of the four were women from

other areas who had married into Nimakot but had since become widows. The other had married in from another area. Her husband was still alive, but they disliked each other had often accused each other of witchcraft in public.

As a man of the law, the kiap needed proper evidence, witnesses, and preferably a confession. Much to the bewilderment of many suspects, the case did not hinge on bad relations between themselves and the government, or themselves and anybody else. The court only needed to know whether or not they had done any witchcraft.

Several suspects expressed confusion as to why the government was accusing them of witchcraft. They assumed that the officers were accusing them of working witchcraft on *them* not on working witchcraft *in general*. They defended themselves by expressing their untainted relations with the officers in the room. They would claim that they "had no troubles" with the officers and were often even more specific by tracing ancestral histories of several officers in the room and pointing out that their ancestors never had problems with one another either. To this the kiap often responded by saying, "It's not me that you have crossed. It is the law."

"Normal" witnesses were sometimes summoned, not to confirm a grievance or relational problem as might be done at a safety meeting, but to confirm that witches were either very near or very far from the presumed location of the crime. Only one defendant brought forth his own witness in his defense. The witness stated that the defendant had been over a day's walk away from the supposed victim. However, the kiap had his own witness – a confessed witch who claimed that she and the defendant killed and ate victims together. The kiap responded to the testimony of the defendant's

witness by turning to the defendant and stating, "I don't care where you were. You witches can fly anywhere anytime. I know your ways. You can't hide it from me."

When possible, the kiap and his officers sought evidence in the form of witchcraft bundles (yokop) and other items thought to be used in witchcraft. The houses of suspects were sometimes searched, but nothing was ever found. This did not exonerate the suspects, for they were already presumed guilty by being witnessed by witches who had already confessed. Instead, it only indicated to the officers that they were choosing to continue to hide their witchcraft and would continue to perform witchcraft in the future.

Each interrogation/trial was entered into the log book as a report that was to be placed in a gazette in the provincial capital. Such reports stripped the complexity and ambiguity from the trials revealing a succinct case against the suspect, placing them in the category of "guilty". An example of one of these reports is presented below with names removed.

> 17/02/03
>
> Sorcery
> XXXX XXXXX
>
> Interview
>
> So much interview, she confirm that
> actually, she sitted next to step on Friday
> 14/02/03
>
> Witness
> 1. XXX XXXXXX
> 2. XXXXX XXXXXX
>
> _____
>
> She said, she got the piece of meat and
> kaukau (sweet potato)

This particular report begins with the defendant's own confirmation that she briefly sat by some steps on the day that presumably a scrap of food was taken from that location. Two people testified that they witnessed her sitting near the steps. This is followed by her confession that "she got the piece of meat and kaukau (sweet potato)."

The report itself underscores the differences between relational methods of dealing with witchcraft and the methods inspired by the categorical biases of statecraft. The entire report is written in the third person, representing the state's detached and disembedded perspective. As opposed to an engaged face-to-face relational perspective it is a perspective from somewhere outside of social relations. The list that would soon be created would take on the same aura of objectivity.

As illustrated in Chapter Two, accusations are usually made against those who have wronged or been wronged by the supposed victim. Those who were convicted ultimately made sense of the charges against them through a relational logic by relating it back to their own failed relations with government officers or relations of government officers. Sometimes these had to be elaborate, involving relations of relations of relations and events that occurred years ago. One convicted witch reasoned that her failed marriage to a distant relative of a government komiti 10 years ago may have been cause for the accusation. Another thought that it was perhaps the actions of her mother, who had been in an argument with another government komiti over a bridewealth exchange.

Through over thirty trials, eleven were convicted of witchcraft and sentenced to do six weeks of community work, digging a standardized government road.

Nine of the eleven convicted confessed. *Why would they confess?* One factor was certainly the threats of violence and the occasional flogging by frustrated officers. I would argue though that much more powerful than the violence may have been the category of "witch" itself, underscored by the growing list of witches that emerged throughout the trials. The kiap started each trial by reading the defendant's name from the list. He then explained that he "had the whole story already" and that it was "not good." He reminded the defendant to "talk straight" so that he could "sev" the community. The list had a tremendous aura of factuality. As the kiap read the name of the defendant from that list he was in essence saying, "I already have you right here" (c.f. Carpenter 1972:79).

Michael Jackson posed the same question about confession in the case of those who confessed to the witch-hunting cult known as *Gbangbane* in northern Sierra Leone. As I have done, he points to the power of "witch" as a category. Those who confessed were those who felt that they were already unambiguously categorized by the officers as a "witch." Confession is what Jackson calls "a desperate stratagem for reclaiming autonomy in a hopeless situation." Borrowing the words of Victor Frankl, Jackson argues that confession is "the last freedom" which he eloquently construes as "the choice of determining how we will construe our plight, (and) the freedom to live it as though it were our will" (1988:100-101).

Interestingly, the only two who were convicted without confessing were a young educated man and his sister who faced trial together. They were convicted based on the eye-witness testimony of two "witches" who had confessed. They maintained their innocence even after they were convicted and stopped serving their sentence after only one week, strengthened by a then growing consensus that the government's methods for finding witches were flawed (see Chapter 6).

The trials were not nearly as successful as the kiap and other officers had hoped. For them, everybody on the list was a witch, but they needed either a confession or the eye-witness testimony of a confessed "witch" to convict them by the law. Unfortunately for the officers, those who were too weak to maintain their innocence in court were also too weak to testify in front of those they had listed. This is why only 11 were convicted in over 30 trials.

TENSIONS IN THE LIST

The logic of "witchcraft as category" that is integral to statecraft in Nimakot misunderstands witchcraft by viewing it as a thing in itself as detached from the relational sociality in which it participates. Witchcraft accusations emerge from relational sociality and are best understood within its terms. Through the logic of relational sociality, an act of witchcraft is part and parcel of particular bad relations. The way to stop the witchcraft is to heal the relation. Statecraft imagines witchcraft differently – as a categorical entity that constantly undermines all efforts at development.

The tension is felt in the very making of the list. The list that would emerge had all the look of a census. The main villages were underlined as headings with witches listed underneath. But though the list had all the look of census-like categorization it was clear by analyzing the names on the list that it had been produced through a complex analysis of relational histories that had led to witchcraft accusations. This would be a constant point of frustration to the interrogating officers who wanted the suspect/informant to simply list other witches they had actually *seen* doing witchcraft rather than recount long relational histories of people they *suspected* of doing witchcraft.

The government officers had hoped the confessed witches would entirely agree with one another, list the same people, and thereby confirm those listed. But just as taking a census is not as simple as walking into a village and recording the names of the

people there, the witch list was not as simple as a witch walking into a witch feast of human flesh and recording the names of the people she sees. It was instead a complex analysis and discussion of long histories of relating, from a very particular vantage point in a field of relations. The informants ultimately relied on their own analyses of relational histories that they knew from experience, rumor, gossip, and previous accusations that were made public in safety meetings or other contexts. Because each of the suspects/informants viewed these relational histories from different locations in different webs of relations their lists did not match.

In this way, the list was primarily built on stories – past and present stories of relational tensions and witchcraft accusations. People would judge the list on the same basis on which it was built. If a name on the list "had a stori" (Tok Pisin, "i gat stori i stap"), it was considered credible. Most of the people named had already been revealed as suspects in safety meetings and through the more covert networks of gossip and rumor, but always in association with very particular relational problems. Most of them "had stories" and this provided the primary means through which officers could find credibility in the names the witnesses called out. The same process of looking to such stories was used both by the informants to name the names, and by the officers to verify those names, though the officers and most others in the region believed that the informants were naming witches that they had actually worked with and with whom they shared in the eating of human flesh. However, many stories are valid to some and invalid to others, often based on their relations with those whom the story is about. In

this way, the list was not credible to everybody, particularly to those who were closely related to those listed.

Because of this, revelations depended on who was in the room. "Witches" followed typical Nimakot discursive patterns, hesitating to state clearly and forcefully who they suspected. The interrogations became an exercise in cooperative revelation – the outcome of the list depending as much upon the suspect as those doing the interrogation. Suspects tended to be vague and frustratingly hesitant in their revelations, leading officers to prod and encourage with their own input, based on their own suspicions. Through a series of exchanges between officers and "witches" the list slowly took shape. Although the officers might have been able to create the list themselves, they ultimately *needed confessed "witches"* to reveal them. Nobody else could reveal them without themselves being named a witch, and they needed the credibility of a witch with the presumed ability to see other witches.

The case of Kotinim was fresh on everybody's mind and the talk that had circulated during recent safety meetings and more private networks of gossip informed many of the accusations. However, each suspect had a slightly different relation to the events surrounding Kotinim's death. Some suspects named those associated with Lokim's pig that Kotinim stole. Others named his in-laws. By the list, it would appear that Kotinim's in-laws and Lokim worked together to kill Kotinim, while in the safety meeting and other everyday contexts they were on opposite sides of virulent accusations and counter-accusations.

Some suspects used the interrogation and their new found authority as witches (the only ones who could "see" other "witches") to reveal suspicions they had long held against people they did not like. Seven of the 12 names on one suspect's list were clearly associated with a complex series of accusation and counter-accusation going back fifteen years in which she herself had been intimately involved. Using her position as witch/informant to her advantage, she listed those with whom she had grievances and whom she suspected.

As described in Chapter Two and illustrated now through several examples, people of Nimakot use spoken language strategically. They intentionally speak ambiguously or hide information in an effort to negotiate the complexities of relational sociality. Because of this, they are astute observers and interpreters of each other's talk. They invariably distrust the surface meanings of one's talk and look beyond this to see what LiPuma refers to as the "layer" of intentions underneath. Written language is experienced altogether differently, particularly documents . If authority is somewhat contingent on one's ability to step outside of social relations, the document written in the third person is the ultimate authority. It hides the relational processes of authorship in the clean rational lines of names. The author of the list dissolves into the enchantment of its order and presents itself as the objective revelation, (LiPuma 2000:183). Here the list shows its power as a technology of revelation. It transforms the frustratingly shifty and often secretive relational processes of accusation into an open book. Once written all of the processes that went into producing the list quickly

fade into the background and the list becomes a thing in itself – the ultimate authority on who is and is not a witch.

Though the officers were very proud of the list, they lamented that the talk of the "witches" was not as "straight" as they had hoped. They complained that "witches" persistently "hid" the details of witch feasts and meetings. The officers had hoped "witches" could just list the people that attended these meetings. Instead suspects told extensive stories on which their suspicions were based, just as people do at safety meetings, attempting to trace where certain relations had gone bad and where witchcraft may have occurred. Officers expressed frustration that "witches" recounted relational histories to support their suspicions rather than simply listing those they saw at the witch parties.

WHO IS ON THE LIST, WHAT IS IN THE CATEGORY, AND WHY

Just as a census freezes the constant fluidity and flux of local residential patterns and attempts to place people in permanent census categories, the witch list freezes the constant negotiation, ambiguity, and flux of interpersonal relating to place people in the permanent category of "witch." Without the list, people were concerned with a particular act of witchcraft and ensuring that the act of witchcraft was stopped. Witchcraft was part and parcel of relational sociality. The list froze relational histories and created the permanent category of witch as a thing to be eradicated.

It is commonly assumed that "witches" are those who live at the margins of society. I have instead been arguing that such a category of "witch" only arises in contexts in which a "society" is first imagined. Furthermore, much of our understanding about who is considered a witch comes only from who has been *publicly accused* of witchcraft. Here it is important to note that there are two parts to any accusation, both a suspicion *and* a revelation of that suspicion. Powerful non-marginalized people may be equally suspected of witchcraft but such suspicions may not be revealed.

The list placed the category of "witches" before the eyes of the people of Nimakot in a way they had never seen witches before – as a category to be understood in its own right, devoid of the relational circumstances of its production.   Though there was no stereotypical "witch" before the witch trials began, one was now emerging. An analysis of the list can help to reveal what the stereotype was, and how it emerged.

The list eventually contained over 100 names, but by that time it was not considered very credible – the result of processes I describe in the next chapter. Here I want to analyze the list as it existed when it was most credible and substantial. This was a point about three weeks into the trials by which time 4 confessed "witches" had helped to create a list of 44 people. Although each person listed had been originally suspected under very particular circumstances there were still some revealing patterns in the list, particularly in relation to age. Gender was not as revealing. There were 21 women and 23 men listed at this point. . In fact, as people of Nimakot often say, men are the true witches. "Women just tie the rope. Men shoot the arrow."

The most significant factor on the list was age. The estimated average age of those listed was 54.7, which is roughly the life expectancy in Nimakot. Very few actually know their age however, so it is even more telling to break the list down by age categories commonly used in Nimakot. Tok Pisin terms have been adopted into the local vernaculars to designate these different generations. The terms are "yut" (youth) covering the ages roughly from 20 to 35, "hap lain" ("middle-aged") covering the ages roughly from 35 to 50; and "lapun" ("elder") covering all ages above 50. Of the 44 listed, 31 were "lapun," 9 were "hap lain," and only 3 were "yut." No children were listed.

Of the 3 youths, one of them was a woman who had married into the region and had since been widowed (disconnecting her from almost all substantial relations), another was a deaf mute, and the third was a young man who most suspected had been falsely accused. Of the 9 middle-aged suspects, 4 of them had been reduced to "shoot only" status, meaning that they are not suspected of being full witches who partake in witchcraft parties. Of the 31 elders, only 1 had been reduced to "shoot only" status, notably he was the elder most active in the Seventh Day Adventist church which is full of youths and middle-agers while most elders remain Baptists or "normal," meaning they do not attend church at all.

The discrepancy between the number of elders listed compared to youths and middle-agers becomes even more acute when we place the numbers within the total number of people in each category. There are only 54 elders in the Nim river area from which the 31 elders had been listed. This means that over 58% of all elders had been

listed. In contrast, only 8% of the middle-agers had been listed, and just 2% of the youths.

Since over half of the elders are on the list, it may be easier to ask why *all* of them are not on the list. When I asked one of my closest friends in the area why certain other elders were not on the list he scoffed and said, "They're just hiding it. They're all witches too." He then proceeded to recount elaborate stories of all but 5 of the remaining 23 elders who had not been listed. By his count, only 5 elders had not at some point been suspected of witchcraft. Of those 5, he suspected they were also witches but that they had hidden it well.[1]

The lack of young people being listed was widely discussed. Many noted that they had only rarely heard of young people being accused. Some saw this as cause for hope that possibly as soon as the elders all died there would be no more witchcraft. The Ward 4 kaunsel took a more grim view, comparing his own fate to that of former leaders who had been listed, and lamented that he too would one day be suspected of witchcraft.

Others suspected that there were several young witches but that they were too powerful for the witnesses to reveal. It was thought that the witnesses might fear beatings from young men, or simply know that they would not be able to stand up to the "strong" talk of young men who could employ the more prestigious and powerful Tok Pisin language. "If you are a Tok Pisin man, these witches can't reveal you," one man noted.

The most common explanation for why most of the witches were elders was because witchcraft is a learned skill that takes considerable training and experience that takes years and wisdom to master. Many of the elders are thought to have acquired the ability to perform witchcraft during secret initiations. Youths following the "new road" are thought to be too busy with school and church to bother with learning witchcraft. This was not absolute however, and people maintained that it would be possible for a young person to work witchcraft.

It must be made clear that the elderly were not targeted because there is a stereotypical image of the witch as an elder. People seemed genuinely surprised that there were no young people on the list, hence the many discussions exploring why none had been listed.

A popular psychological explanation as to why the weak and elderly are often accused of witchcraft is summarized by Robert Paul, "... What is not and cannot be comfortably talked about in the world of actual occurrences - namely, feelings of resentment, hostility, jealousy, rivalry, and envy directed by individuals against their neighbors - is displaced, by the psychological mechanism of projection, either into the supernatural world or onto people - old women, the handicapped, and so forth - whose structural position in society makes them suitable, non-threatening foci for consensual dislike" (1995:23).

This explanation fails in the Nimakot case however. The Nimakot example shows clearly that feelings of resentment and hostility are held for both men and women, the strong and the weak. Any of these may be *suspected* of witchcraft, though

women and the weak are more likely to be accused and persecuted. The structural position of the weak does not make them more prone to dislike by "projection," but rather, more prone for dislikes and suspicions to be *revealed*.

We need not dive into hidden psychological explanations for an explanation as to why the old are the ones primarily being listed. Each person is named in relation to particular relational histories. Only in retrospect does it appear that the elderly are the stereotypical witches. If we remember that each accusation reflects pre-existing strains in relations between people there is yet another reason why elders are more likely to be named as witches. Elders have simply lived longer, and therefore have more complex histories of relations full of tension and conflict. In particular, they have long histories of dealing with the most important relational exchanges of all, exchanging people. They (both men and women) have several times been among the primary givers and recipients of women and children, relationships that are ultimately matters of life and death, and the most cited reason for witchcraft. Of the 44 listed, 21 have infamous stories associated with them of how they bewitched an affine across the wife-giver/wife-receiver relationship. The long contentious relational histories of elders, combined with the imagery that elders follow the "old road" of witchcraft to settle such conflicts goes a long way towards explaining why elders are so often suspected and are so prominent on the list.

Though the list was not strongly gendered, the stereotype that was emerging was leaning more towards the idea that elderly females made up the bulk of witches while the few elderly males involved were the more powerful witches leading them. I would

argue that this stereotype was produced by the fact that the collection of people who had been convicted was more visible than the list, as they were sentenced to do community work in the most visible of places – the middle of the new government base camp near the airstrip. There were 8 elderly women, 1 widowed younger woman, 1 elderly man, and 1 younger man (who only served one week of his sentence). This collection of people helped to create a new stereotype of the witch as an elderly marginal woman. While I would argue that they confessed because they were marginal and could not defend themselves from the officers, officers and other locals concluded that they were truly witches and their marginality and weakness led them to be unable to defend themselves against witches who recruited them into their ranks. Similar stories of witches giving into the devil were common in Europe which may have gone through a similar process in creating the elderly marginal woman as the stereotypical witch that we still have today.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF "WITCHCRAFT"
IN THE IMAGE OF STATECRAFT

T.C. McCaskie noted in his analysis of witchcraft among the Asante that throughout the 20th Century its "carrying capacity was inflated ... They enlarged its ontological status so that they might use it to categorize a widening spectrum of intractable anxieties" (2000:193). As I have noted for Nimakot government officers, he

notes that "Colonial Asante people interrogated witchcraft as a category, and tried to deduce generic meanings from its manifestations" (2000:193).

The authority of the list helped overcome the inconsistencies produced by the incongruencies between what the officers expected of the suspects and what the suspects could tell them. Through such inconsistencies, the officers did not find reason to question their own assumptions. Instead, the information provided by the informants only strengthened their imagery of witches as a vast, highly organized conspiracy working to consume the "community" both by consuming human beings and by breaking communities apart through the suspicions and accusations they create.

Comparing the lists created during different interrogations of different suspects can illustrate this point. Of sixteen names on the first list, only four matched the list from the second. Several of the people on the second list were known enemies of people on the first list. Given that the officers had been trying to "confirm" the original list of sixteen, this would seem to be a failure. Compounding the problems with these inconsistencies, the second list included several people that nobody, including the officers, was willing to consider as a witch. Furthermore, neither of the suspects offering these lists would admit to attending witch meetings and feasts – a fact that led them both to recount long detailed relational histories of people they *suspect*, rather than those they *see/know* as witches. Any of these facts could have been taken as evidence that the two suspects were not witches, or that witches were much more factionalized and unorganized than previously thought. Instead, officers met afterwards and agreed that the witches were likely much more organized than they had previously thought, and

more cleverly secretive. Officers suspected that these suspects had been told by other witches before they came to the office to only reveal a few names and to reveal some "normal" people to confuse them. Some suspected that the suspects had ear pieces or other technology that allowed her to receive instructions from head witches, telling them how to respond. It also did not surprise the officers to find that those who seemed so opposed to one another in public would secretly be closely allied witches who conspired to kill Kotinim and others. This only further illustrated just how clever and highly organized they must be, that their seemingly bad relations in everyday life might be nothing more than a planned distraction, a ruse, or if real, overlooked in their endeavors as witches.

In this way, the list of witches took shape in the government's image. Just as conventional understandings of witchcraft inverted elements of everyday relational sociality, officers looking through the lenses of their own statecraft and govern- mentality now began to imagine witchcraft in their own image, embodying and inverting many of their own characteristics. The witch was a mirror image of the government officer and witchcraft the mirror image of statecraft. They imagined witches as having their own officers and a highly organized system of governance used to orchestrate witches in a vast network conspiring to consume citizens, reducing their "namba" (population) and undermining all efforts at building large, prosperous villages.

Through the categorical logic of statecraft all people on the list were witches and revealed aspects of the witch as a categorical identity that had not until then be revealed. As I described above, the fact that most people on the list were elderly began to

generate what might be called a "stereotype" of the elderly witch. Along with this came suggestions that witchcraft may have been learned through male initiations in the old days (TP, "tumbuna taim") along with garden magic and other forms of magic. Officials began to suspect these other forms of magic as witchcraft as well.

In Chapter Two I introduced Needham's thesis that witchcraft imageries are inversions of core cultural ideals and values. Through the process of modern statecraft, the witchcraft that was deeply embedded in relation sociality, has been transformed into a more strictly categorical "witchcraft" that is in many ways an inversion of modernity's core ideals and values. Witchcraft has been transformed from an act occurring between poor relations, to an act performed by "primitives" who "still" use "magic" and are uneducated and hence "irrational," all of which run counter to modernity's ideals of progress, science, and rationalism.

While Geschiere and others were correct in pointing out that "witchcraft" co-exists and participates with modern social forms (such as statecraft), they have thus far overlooked the ways modernity re-creates "witchcraft" as a categorical entity in the inversion of its own image. Through an analysis of how statecraft dealt with witchcraft during Operation Clean and Sweep I have attempted to show that such inversions do not simply emerge automatically from a symbolic logic of inversion, but actually emerge slowly over time in the complex negotiations of people attempting to navigate the tensions of relational sociality and statecraft. In the next chapter I turn to a more detailed analysis of how such tensions interact throughout the witch hunt and how particular people in different social positions navigate these tensions in different ways.

Chapter Six

Schismogenesis and the Dynamics of a Witch Hunt

In this chapter, I analyze the dynamics of the end of the witch hunt. I argue that relational sociality and statecraft actually co-produce the witch hunt through a mutually generative process in which the list exacerbates relational tensions which in turn provides the energy and revelations for the list to grow, further exacerbating tensions in a dynamic feedback loop. But embedded within the list itself is a tension between the fact that those listed are a part of very specific relational tensions while statecraft views them as categorical witches. People in different relational positions came to view the list differently. If a close relation was listed they began to distrust the list. This tension is the beginning of a schismogenetic dynamic in which the two logics and processes involved move further and further apart, at first intensifying but ultimately undermining the government's pursuit of witches.

This chapter marks a change in focus in which I shift from what has largely been an analysis of the contexts and tensions providing the background and motivation for the government's pursuit of witches to a dynamic analysis of how these contexts and tensions were negotiated, contested, and/or affirmed by people in different social positions throughout the witch hunt. In particular I will be focusing on the tension between relational sociality and statecraft as providing the primary logics and mechanisms through which the witch trials operated in the way that they did – and for the way they ultimately collapsed.

Of key importance to the dynamics of the witch hunt is the way in which the processes and logics of relational sociality and statecraft respond to one another. In the first phase of the witch hunt there is a process I call "mutual generation." Simply stated, as the list gets bigger, tensions become greater, leading to more accusations which feed back into the list making it bigger still, increasing tensions, etc. in an on-going process. However, due to fundamental differences between the logics and expectations of relational sociality and statecraft the two sides pull further and further apart through a process best described by Bateson's "complementary schismogenesis" (1958(1936):176). In brief, the list creates its own enemies who are oppositional to the hunt, but the more opposition there is to the hunt, the stronger the officers push forth. Of key importance here is that the more those listed resist their accusations, or the less the list seems to match expectations, the more the government officers become convinced that they are indeed dealing with a vast conspiracy of witches that are much more highly organized, clever, and persistent than they had previously imagined.

In this analysis I have drawn significant insight from the historical literature on the European witch hunts. Though historians are limited to documents, they have amassed an enormous amount of relevant information about witchcraft in Europe at the dawn of modernity, and have been busy interpreting this information in a framework that necessarily addresses history and social change.

Furthermore, this literature addresses witch hunts which are remarkably similar to what I witnessed in central New Guinea. Trials were held in which lists were taken and followed to apprehend more people for trial in a tenacious cycle. The European

hunts were not a region-wide hysteria that lasted hundreds of years as is commonly

believed. It was instead an era in which several episodes much like the one I witnessed

in New Guinea flourished and then quickly subsided. Most of them occurred on the

fringes of statecraft, another important parallel with what I witnessed on the margins of

the state of Papua New Guinea. The witch hunt that followed from Operation Clean

and Sweep has all the characteristics of what Brian Levack, following Erik Midelfort

(1972), has categorized as a "large hunt" with the only exception that people were

sentenced to do community work rather than killed (1995:174).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was considerable conversation between

the disciplines of anthropology and history on the topic of witchcraft and witch hunting,

marked especially by the prominent volumes edited by Max Marwick (1982(1970)) and

Mary Douglas (1970) respectively. Historians such as Alan Macfarlane (1991(1970))

and Keith Thomas (1971) capitalized on the interdisciplinary exchange with a re-

analysis of witchcraft and witch hunting in early modern England using the insights of

structural-functional anthropology. Unfortunately, their books were published at a time

in which the discipline of anthropology was beginning to vigorously condemn the

assumptions of structural-functionalism, leading up to the noteworthy exchange

between Hildred Geertz and Keith Thomas in the Journal of Interdisciplinary History

that virtually ended what might have been a fruitful conversation between disciplines

(Geertz 1975; Thomas 1975).

Since then there seems to be a pattern of mutual avoidance between disciplines

on the subject of witchcraft. Some historians have claimed that early modern Europe

was "more developed" than contemporary cultures with witchcraft practices that anthropologists study (e.g. Sharpe 2001:9). Anthropologists, likewise, have stated that the cultural differences are great and that comparisons are more deceptive than fruitful (e.g. Crick 1976). However, as more anthropologists such as Geschiere and I focus on witchcraft as a modern phenomenon engaged in processes of socio-cultural change the comparisons again become relevant.

In this vast historical literature, we find several explanations for witch hunts, from moldy rye causing hallucinations to the ignorance and insatiable appetite for power of state and church officials. But in the flurry of scholarship over the past 40 years such mono-causal explanations have become unsatisfactory. In this environment two broad perspectives have emerged which can be broadly classified as "top down" and "bottom up" referring to where the impetus for the witch hunt is proposed to come from (Sharpe 2001). Top Down approaches suggest that clergymen and government officers persecuted witches in order to instill law and order, to advance politically, or to divert attention away from internal corruption. Bottom Up approaches such as Alan Macfarlane's study of Essex build from the insights of anthropology to suggest that accusations were the result of intravillage tensions building up. Top Down approaches often overlook local cultural logics and social processes in which witchcraft played a key role, proposing that witchcraft was "invented" by power-hungry elites. Bottom Up approaches invert this, overlooking the cultural logics and social processes of church and state.

Recently, synoptic works by James Sharpe (2001), Brian Levack (1995), and Robin Briggs (1996) have illustrated the importance of bringing these two approaches together, suggesting that accusations spring from local intravillage tensions – from the bottom up – but that these tensions are exacerbated from the top down, and that hunts often use the technologies and logics of church and state governance to administer the witch hunt.

Following from and contributing to this merger of bottom up and top down perspectives, I have developed my argument that what is needed for the description and explanation of this particular witch hunt and Operation Clean and Sweep in general is a detailed ethnography of both local interpersonal processes of relational sociality and cultural processes of modern statecraft as intimately intertwined and inseparable, recognizing that neither is static, bounded, homogeneous, or without contradictions. In this chapter I continue to weave these two storylines together, pointing out specific tensions between the two processes that provide the contexts and motivations for the witch hunt while also explicating the logics and mechanisms through which the hunt operated in the way that it did – and for the way it ultimately collapsed.

MUTUAL GENERATION

The Dynamics of the Beginning

The witch hunt could not have occurred how it did without certain preconditions first being met. Statecraft, both its logic and its structure, played the central role in this. Key to the structure was the authority of the kiap, strong enough that he could act

unilaterally against suspects of witchcraft. Key to the logic was the way statecraft envisions its domain through what can be, or is, written. In the elusive rounds of gossip and rumor, and in public meetings filled with strategically ambiguous and indirect talk, people suspected of witchcraft are suspected only peripherally and temporarily, never directly and permanently. Writing transforms this, particularly in a fully inscribed bureaucratic system like that of the state with written laws. When written down the person becomes a categorical witch, who can be listed with others.

Furthermore, the motivation for the witch hunt emerged from the tensions between relational sociality and statecraft. Operation Clean and Sweep was a movement seeking complete annihilation of relational sociality as it is locally recognized in the wantok system and witchcraft, both of which are blamed for the inability of the people to build large, prosperous communities.

By the end of the big safety meeting recounted at the end of Chapter Four, people seemed unanimous in their profound desire, almost desperation, to get rid of witchcraft. The original efforts of the officers garnered wide-spread support. Many expressed optimistically that perhaps they would now finally be rid of witchcraft. Akige, the man who had stormed into the government village holding the bones of his mother, mused that it might not be long before he would be able to move into the government village.

Within this environment of broad-based support for the witch hunt, the list engaged with the relational sociality in a way in which it was mutually generative both of relational tensions and the list itself. Each name on the list revealed or exacerbated

local relational tensions. When a person heard of their name being listed it sometimes led them to public tirades in which they often accused others. The larger the list became, the more relational tensions intensified. In a positive feedback loop, the more relational tensions intensified, the more they were revealed. They could then be listed by informants, and the list grew larger. The first two suspects listed no more than 16 people each. The third listed 38, and several people started coming to officers volunteering their own suspicions. These suspicions were not immediately added to the official list, but remained on smaller lists to be pursued later. The important point to be made here is that these lists only created more and more tension, thereby creating more and more possibilities for the list.

The mutual generation can be drawn very simply as in the following:

RELATIONAL TENSIONS ⟷ mutually generative ⟶ LIST
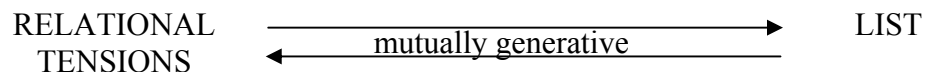
This is the central dynamic engine that might be recognized behind many witch hunts beyond this particular case I have analyzed here. This model provides a solution for what appears to be the paradoxical situation in which a witch "hysteria" is accompanied by an almost hyper-rational pursuit of witches through listing.

As the hunt in Nimakot proceeded, witchcraft was on everybody's mind and relational tensions intensified. Some names confirmed some people's suspicions. Some names surprised some people. Those who were named were likewise suspicious of those who listed them. Importantly for the model I presented above, an accusation of witchcraft is not only revealing of tensions, it creates and/or exacerbates them. This

meant that there were more and more discussions about witchcraft around the many family hearths every evening, exploring relational tensions, trying to discover who was and was not working witchcraft before it was too late (and one fell victim to another act of witchcraft).

The list heightened both fears and fissions – fear feeding fission and fission feeding fear. Even a few families were breaking up, especially as some youths heard for the first time that their own mother or father was a witch and thought it best to distance themselves from them rather than try to defend them. When one woman who was listed was berated by her son for witchcraft, she countered that he was only her "was pikinini" ("adopted son") and that she must have merely dreamed all the pains of labor and the care she gave him when he was too small to fend for himself.

Even young men who had expressed skepticism in witchcraft and had nonchalantly claimed to never fear it were now carefully disposing of every food scrap, making sure to leave nothing behind for a witch to work with. Stern warnings were given to all to not walk alone lest they get attacked by witches, or worse, be convinced to join the witches for some now suspected that they must be gaining new members quickly given the number that had been listed.

Fulfilling the processes of relational sociality many were discussing the possibility of moving, either away from those they suspected or those who suspected them. New housing plots were being staked out as people contemplated their moves.

Despite these tensions, in the early stages of the hunt there was only minor opposition to the hunt, shown largely by those who had discovered that they had been

listed. For the most part people still felt that the hunt held great promise for eradicating

witchcraft and allowing them to live in large, prosperous communities – even as

tensions grew so great that they could not maintain the communities in which they were

already living.

THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHISMOGENETIC DYNAMIC:
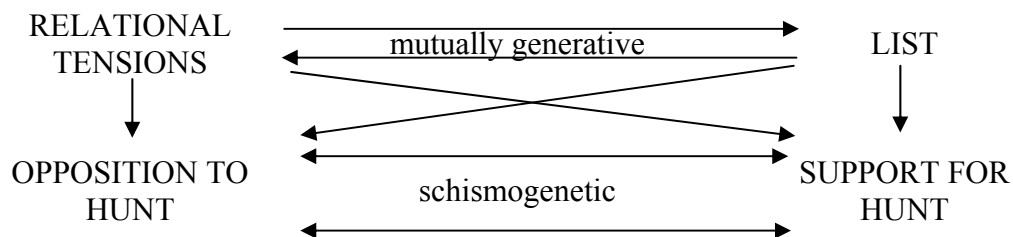
THE MAKING OF AN OPPOSITION

The list was troubling, even to those who were not listed and did not have

relatives on the list. Many of them expressed their surprise at discovering that there

may be even more active witches than they had ever before suspected. As Bercovitch

aptly commented while working in the area in the 1980s, "There is nothing reassuring

in the knowledge that many of the people around you are homicidal cannibals with

supernatural powers" (1989: 474).

Most of those who had been listed along with their close relations were anxious

to discredit the charge. Here is the beginning of the schismogenetic dynamic that would

drive the agents and opposition of the witch hunt further and further apart. The core of

the dynamic is the simple fact that *the list makes its own enemies*. Many of those listed

do one of the culturally appropriate things to do when accused of witchcraft which is to

vehemently deny the accusation and discredit the source of the accusation.

Through the eyes of those most invested in the process of statecraft, such denials

did not challenge the credibility of the list or the imagery of a vast conspiracy of

witches. The denials were seen by government officers either as legitimate denials (suggesting that the informant witches may have been commanded by head witches to confuse the government officers), or as clever (but false) denials, illustrating the intelligence and persistence of the witches to continue engaging with their killings even in the face of such a strong government stance.

The more people opposed the hunt, the stronger the government officers pushed forward with the hunt. The more the opposition, the greater the support and vice versa. This schismogenetic dynamic emerges directly from the dynamic of mutual generation I presented earlier, and can be illustrated as such:

RELATIONAL TENSIONS ————— mutually generative ————→ LIST

OPPOSITION TO HUNT ————— schismogenetic ————→ SUPPORT FOR HUNT

Although increasing "namba" was the primary motivation for the operation, it was now becoming apparent that it may actually decrease namba as people were now moving out of the large villages to protect themselves from what they saw as a growing threat of witchcraft. At an informal gathering of over 100 people one Monday morning, several people began to speak out against the witch hunt. "Forget about this operation. Just keep telling people not to do witchcraft. The operation is starting to decrease

populations so forget about it," one man announced. A kaunsel visiting from a nearby less-populated ward (who was skeptical of the witch hunt) joked, "If you don't want these witches send them to me. I could use a higher namba."

Though there were people at the informal gathering who still fully supported the operation, they became more and more silent as there emerged a growing consensus that while witchcraft was real and dangerous, the operation was not the best way to deal with it. The list was flawed, the brutality overbearing and ineffective, and ultimately the operation only increased the fissions it sought to resolve. "Forget about this witch hunt," one man pleaded, "We all suspect one another and now our lives are all messed up so forget about it. Stop doing it. They are all calling out names for no good reason and then getting innocent people to come to the office. Then they turn on the informant women and give them big pain, so let's stop it. Forget about the witch hunt."

Though the operation was (and remained) supported in Christian terms, some now used Christian terms to oppose the operation. A leader of the Seventh Day Adventists argued that even if witchcraft could be eradicated, "You can't stop death. Adam and Even showed us this road long ago and there is no getting off of it. We will die and die until the end of the world."

For many, particularly Seventh Day Adventists, the end of the world did seem near. No less than three times during the 12 minute informal discussion somebody interjected, "All this talk, rumor, suspicion, and infighting ... God must be coming soon. The world will end soon."

There was an LLG meeting scheduled for that afternoon. Kaunsels from all over the region would be meeting with the kiap to discuss region-wide policies. First on the carefully prepared type-written and official agenda was Operation Clean and Sweep. The consensus at the market was clear, and expressed by one man, "Please, kaunsel, komiti, kiap. You all meet and close down the operation." But this was only one side of a schismogenetic dynamic. The momentum of statecraft would respond in its own way, with its own particular style and ritual.

THE MOMENTUM OF STATECRAFT

Putting Operation Clean and Sweep in the Books

The LLG meeting would contrast greatly with the lively informal discussion. Rather than a spirited cacophony peppered with pointed humor eventually coming together into a harmonic consensus, the meeting would plod along through the ritual of a proper meeting, one droll voice at a time, moving towards a final vote that was to stop all discussion on the matter. Only the representatives of statecraft – the kaunsels – would vote.

The meeting and its results would illustrate the momentum of statecraft. One key factor in this momentum is that statecraft creates its own agents who find they have a vested interest in maintaining the state and its goals. Though they "represent the people," the kaunsels are placed in a position within the organic system of statecraft in which it serves their own interest to make large stable villages where they can "see" their constituencies, count them, order them, and control them. It is not surprising then

that they would unanimously vote "yes" for Operation Clean and Sweep. As Bourdieu has written, "the dominant class have only to *let the system they dominate take its own course* in order to exercise their domination" (1977:190).

The ritual of the meeting also contributes to the momentum of statecraft, being the culmination of what Bourdieu has called "a system of mechanisms ... capable of objectively ensuring the reproduction of the established order by its own motion" (1977:190). The meeting was to be executed "by the book." The book in this case was the "Standing Orders of the Sandaun Provincial Assembly," which the kaunsel president kept close at hand in the weeks leading up the meeting, studying it during every spare moment. Among other rules that are contrary to the way other Nimakot debates take place, the standing orders demand that all discussion is directed to the meeting chair who is to be properly addressed with gratitude and abeyance (Standing Order 70). The orders define seven specific scenarios in which members may speak, largely demanding that members speak only to the matter at hand, "but not otherwise." (S.O. 73). Members cannot "speak twice to a question" (S.O. 76), allude to any other debates (S.O. 81), reflect on personal issues of others (S.O. 86), digress from the matter at hand (S.O. 89), and perhaps most importantly, "No Member may speak to any question after it has been put by the Chairman and the voices have been given in the affirmative and negative on it." When a debate is over it is over. Like other mechanisms of statecraft, the standing orders are rationalist and seek order and permanence while attempting to strike out fluidity and ongoing negotiability – straight by the book.

The meeting is not only by the book, it is *for* the book, as the "order" of the standing orders is an order particularly well-suited for making written records of the meeting (defined in Standing Order #33 under "Minutes of Proceedings"). Unlike the cacophony of other public speech events that pose a challenge to any attempts at transcription, only one person is allowed to speak at a time. Furthermore, members are to categorize their own utterance as they begin speaking, defining it as a comment, question, supplementary question, or the like. When done properly the real world reads as cleanly and orderly as a book, ultimately coming down to a vote, summarizing the winners and losers of the debate in numbers. Each debate can be simply summarized in a series of categories placed in the minutes: Motion, Questions, Comments, and Vote Count.

The meeting was held in one of the school buildings. Approximately 70 feet long and 30 feet wide with open-air windows on the long sides, it is the most spacious building in the area and provided ample opportunity for others to watch. Hundreds gathered for the meeting. The kiap crowded them into the back half of the room and addressed them, "I'm glad you have come. You have a right to be here. Now you will see how a meeting works. You can sit here, but you cannot talk. You can talk to your kaunsel outside but not here. We will make some important decisions. You have to behave. You cannot change the resolutions we make here." He then addressed them specifically on the subject of the operation, the questions regarding the witch list, and the complaints at the informal gathering earlier that morning that he had since heard about. "If I pursue trouble-makers (witches) and you oppose my actions, this base camp

will close. So you need to think before you do this kind of thing. You ruin everything good when you complain."

After the ritual entry of the kaunsel president in which everybody was instructed to stand (the "assembly rise" ritual) and the opening prayer, the kaunsel president began a lecture on the proper way to conduct and participate in a meeting. For many kaunsels it was their first experience with a formal meeting. The kaunsel president explained how the chair must be honored, how only one person may speak at a time, how each statement must be identified as a question or comment, and that talk must go "straight" and not stray from the subject matter at hand.

Finally, the kaunsel president proceeded to the first "order of the day," Operation Clean and Sweep. He briefly explained it as a good program that would punish trouble-makers, especially witches, and eventually bring everybody in the area into accordance with the law, living in large stable villages. He then opened it up for discussion.

The following brief transcription of the opening remarks illustrates the ritual of speaking at the meeting:

Kaunsel Pres.: Honorable members that is my introduction. Now I put it to the floor. Honorable members if you have some thoughts about this you can comment now.

Women's Rep: (stands) Yes, excuse me kaunsel. I think that what you want to do is all

very good. It is good but some of it is no good. That's what I think.

So thank you, your honor. (sits)

Kaunsel Pres: Honorable member, if you say it is good and no good, perhaps you can

explain further. Please tell us more so we can all hear your full

comment.

Women's Rep: (stands) We would like to say that these witches who have come have

listed many suspects. This, I believe, is not good. (sits)

Kaunsel Pres: Honorable Member of Maskabil you may now speak.

Kaunsel W12:   (stands) Good afternoon all honorable members, and a very good

afternoon to the kiap and our president, the chairman. Thank you for

listening. This operation, I would like the members of this LLG to say

yes and approve it. We must approve it. That's all I have to say.

Kaunsel Pres: Honorable member, I ask that you explain your position further to the

assembly.

As the discussion plodded through its rituals, the Ward 12 kaunsel, one of the

operation's original planners and most steadfast supporters, argued that not pursuing

witchcraft would only ensure that witchcraft would increase and continue to kill off the

population, destroying the future of the entire region. The women's representative who had spoken against the operation shifted in her chair uneasily, struggling against Standing Order #76 which restrained her from speaking again to the same question.

As chairman, the kaunsel president hedged away from the volatile topic of witchcraft by reminding the members that the witch hunt was only a small branch of Operation Clean and Sweep. "Why have we proposed this operation?" he asked pointedly, "It is because the people of this Yapsie LLG do not do community work. They don't know about community. We have a school here, but there are maybe 10 or 20 families that don't even know that this school is here, or that this clinic is here." He proposed that the true agenda of Operation Clean and Sweep was not to pursue witches, but to move people to large government villages. He noted Telefomin as an example of a place that had already organized, establishing permanent villages categorized by clan. "We are the opposite. We live scattered throughout the bush and die all over the place." Operation Clean and Sweep was designed to give full authority to kaunsels, komitis, and the kiap to move people into large villages, by force if necessary.

In short, the operation promised the kaunsels would have even more power and authority. As might be expected, the kaunsels showed full support for the plan. As one kaunsel iterated after proceeding through the proper standing ritual, "Many people don't listen to us kaunsels and komitis now even after 5 years (of LLG government). People still live scattered throughout the bush. They don't do community work, help with the school, or clean the airstrip. We have talked and talked for five years now and our mouths are sore for no reason. The operation must be approved and bring all of these

people who live scattered in the bush into the place that has a name in the government book ... They must live underneath us and hear our talk."

The chair then yielded the floor to the kiap to speak about the "technical side" of the operation. The kiap explained the importance of numbers, noting that non-government organizations (NGOs) and the government only look at the number. The goal, he reminded them, is not to beat and punish people, but to move people into bigger, fewer villages that are visible to the state, both as a number visible in the book, and also visible to the kaunsels who will more easily be able to give announcements, control, and serve people who are aggregated into one village rather than scattered throughout the bush. "Authority" was key to all of this. People living in the bush have no respect for authority, he said, and they must be brought into large villages where they can be taught to live under the law and authority of the kaunsel.

The ritual vote was motioned for, seconded, and passed unanimously. The Chairman made the formal announcement, "Operation Clean and Sweep will go ahead now. There can be no decisions made about this outside of this room now. We cannot question authority. Honorable members take note. It is effective as of today." With that, Operation Clean and Sweep was "in the books" and officially typed up in the meeting minutes.

> **1. To give full Authority to carryout Operation Clean & Sweep (OCSS).**
>
> The chairman explain why Yapsie Rural LLG is introducing this Operation Clean & Sweep programs, he then put on the floor of the LLG Assembly to debate on it. After the debate on the topic/item, the Chairman then ask the acting LLG-CEO then explained consequently.
>
> The Honourable Mr. Isac move the motion. Seconded by Mr. John Tiweng.
> All in favour, Resolution No. 1/2003.

The schismogenetic response by statecraft to those who opposed the witch hunt could not have been more clear. The two sides were beginning to pull apart and the tensions between them were growing.

OPERATION CLEAN AND SWEEP IN EFFECT

... AND INEFFECTIVE

March 18th 2003. Death of Namfupkon

The death of Namfupkon, just one day Operation Clean and Sweep was officially put into effect, offered a challenging test of the government's methods for dealing with witchcraft accusations.

Nekalibil was in trouble. The death of Kotinim had increased intravillage suspicions and tensions. The list was full of Nekalibil suspects with one in every five adults now on the list. Many, such as Kodim and his family, had taken to living in garden houses outside of the village to stay away from witchcraft or suspicions of

witchcraft. Kodim's wife, Namfupkon, was ill, and Kodim suspected it might be because of witchcraft by his neighbors, particularly Lokim and Mikson who had both been complaining about his pigs getting into their gardens. Ever since they started complaining his pigs had died one by one from a mysterious illness. Now with his wife ill, he suspected that the same illness had grabbed hold of his wife as well.

While away in their garden house a hard day's walk from any major village, Namfupkon died. When word arrived back in Tumolbil that she had died, Panius was livid. Though not biologically related, he had grown up "by her hand" and was considered her only "son." He was angry because the people of Nekalibil had not properly "looked after" her (see Chapter Two). They may in fact have poisoned her due to the problems with the pigs, and he wanted payment. He went to the government office to ask permission to go kill a pig for compensation, "They complained about this pig and poisoned her so they must give me a pig. Say yes and let me go kill one of their pigs. When a person dies this is what we do."

Instead of letting Panius go however, the officers put together a team of komitis to do an "operation" with the plan of killing a pig, any pig, from Nekalibil. The pig was not for Panius, but for the government, to be split among kiap, kaunsels, and komitis. Through the lenses of statecraft the problem was not a relational one between Panius and others, but a problem with Nekalibil as a failing community, and the whole community of Nekalibil needed to be punished.

The pig that was ultimately shot and taken by the government belonged to Ranweng, who had nothing to do with the current conflict. Worse, the pig they took

had itself been compensation for the death of another man. It was a "tinum dubom" payment – the metaphorical "head of a person" given in compensation to substitute for the person who has died. The government was suddenly encompassed by the local relational sociality as the sons of Ranweng demanded the government officers to explain their actions and pay compensation. The kaunsel president looked shocked as he wondered out loud, "Now what law will we follow? We really messed things up in Nekalibil."

The people of the law and the people of Nekalibil diverged greatly in how they chose to deal with the aftermath of these events. The kiap went immediately to his informants working on the government road to find out what they had witnessed regarding the death of Namfupkon. Given the conspiracy of witches, he reasoned that they should know who had killed Namfupkon.

One of the informants named a woman who was apprehended and brought in for questioning. The kiap charged her with using witchcraft to kill Namfupkon and asked her to name those who had helped her kill and eat the victim. Interestingly, instead of listing several others she named only one other person. The kiap was furious with her testimony. He obviously did not believe that just she and one other person had eaten the entire body of Namfupkon alone. He noted that she was obviously afraid to list more names because other informants had already been threatened or beaten for listing others. Because of this, she was reluctant to name anybody beyond herself and a weak and elderly man. That man, who had now been listed numerous times, became one of

the top suspects on the list, while the woman took her place among the convicted witches digging the straight and standard government road.

The conviction of this woman was meaningless to Kodim, and undermined his and other people's confidence in the government to find the true witches. As far as Kodim was concerned he had no problems with this woman and could see no reason why she would have killed his wife. He also had few problems with the man who had been listed, and again could see no logic in the charge. His real problems were with Lokim and Mikson. The government had only exacerbated his troubles by creating a problem between himself and Ranweng. Ranweng blamed Kodim for the government taking his pig because it was Kodim who caused the government to become involved by filing a complaint about his problems with his pigs and Lokim and Mikson.

Young men of Nekalibil who were intent on keeping the community together so that their "namba" remained strong, abandoned the methods of the operation and devised a plan to solve the community's current problems and avoid another intervention by the government. Lokim and Mikson would pay compensation to Kodim for the loss of his wife. Kodim would then use the money and valuables to buy a pig to give to Ranweng to replace the one that had been taken by the government. Praising the idea, one man declared, "Yes, let's follow our own *kastom* law and straighten this out."

Lokim and Mikson gathered 12 bushknives, three bags of clothes, two boxes of matches, and 56 kina (about $15) for the payment from people throughout the community. All three men fought back tears as the gifts were presented. "We are all truly brothers," Lokim said with a broad smile and tears in his eyes. "Let's stop

complaining about one another." The three of them embraced as others in the community clapped and exchanged joyful click handshakes.

The success of the exchange further undermined the methods employed as part of Operation Clean and Sweep. Since the beginning of the operation, this was the first death with which it had to deal, and it failed miserably. If the courtroom interrogations did not elicit a list of witches that was not altogether wrong, it was at least largely irrelevant. Neither Kodim nor anybody else in Nekalibil seemed to believe that the woman charged had anything to do with the death of Namfupkon, and what is more, the apprehending of this woman did nothing to heal the ailing relationships between Kodim and others in Nekalibil.

As the events following the death of Namfupkon begin to illustrate, the goals of Operation Clean and Sweep in general and of the witch hunt in particular were constantly undermined by the local relational sociality. Statecraft and relational sociality work at cross-purposes and on different logics. The more government pursued categorical witches without fully examining the relational histories involved, the less it appeared that they were finding the right witches.

Just as statecraft has its own momentum, so does the local relational sociality. Relating is a part of everyday life, and along with it comes a continuous and pervasive scrutiny of all interpersonal interactions to determine whether the relating is positive or negative. Despite the government officers' attempts to shed their relational obligations and to accept their categorical identities under the state they still had to deal with the

relational consequences of their actions, as their actions were interpreted through the logic of the pervasive relational sociality.

NEGOTIATING THE RISING TENSIONS
BETWEEN RELATIONAL SOCIALITY AND STATECRAFT

My analysis of the ways in which statecraft and relational sociality are separate cultural processes co-existing with a certain tension between them in the social field builds off of Eytan Bercovitch's most recent insightful analyses of the Umfokmin, just 22 kilometers east of Nimakot, as well as Joel Robbins' analysis of Christianity among the Urapmin 55 kilometers east of Nimakot. Bercovitch uses the term "social multiplicity" to refer to a social field in which "people possess several, often contradictory sets of beliefs and practices" (2001:212). Along with Christianity, Bercovitch designates government and business along with indigenous ways as other sets of beliefs and practices in conflict with one another. Robbins takes this a step further, suggesting that Christianity is a culture unto itself that has been taken in whole by the Urapmin, and co-exists uneasily along side their own culture. Both provide remarkable insights into the tensions and uncertainties of such complex social fields.

Unfortunately, their analyses of how "the Atbalmin" or "the Urapmin" dealt with a situation of social multiplicity rather than analyzing how different people negotiated *each other* as well as these sometimes contradictory discourses in a field marked by social multiplicity. Both stop short of analyzing differences between people, and the ways different people in different social positions participate in these

contradictory sets of beliefs and practices in different ways. In short, they maintain a model of cultural homogeneity despite his focus on social multiplicity. All Atbalmin or Urapmin are the same in the analysis – all facing and attempting to resolve the same contradictions.

While it is true that all face the same tensions, they can be negotiated very differently by people in different social positions. To illustrate this, I examine how the kiap, kaunsels, and komitis negotiate the tensions between statecraft and relational sociality as they tensions are exacerbated and intensifying through the dynamic of complementary schismogenesis.

On one end of the scale was the kiap. He was a self-proclaimed "independent man." As the hunt proceeded he negotiated the tensions by further removing himself from his relations. He refused all gifts of food and accepted few visitors. He refused to shake hands. He stopped eating in his (more public) kitchen house and ate his meals alone with his wife and children behind the closed doors of his large Western style house. He fenced in his house and yard with cordyline plants to discourage trespassers. He closed the path that ran just meters from his house and ordered a new path to be dug that did not come within 30 meters of his house and the government office. But even as he tried to remove himself from relations and the tensions of relational sociality he could not escape the fact that people would ultimately judge him within its terms, a fact that would ultimately undermine his pursuit of witchcraft.

Of all government officers, the komitis stood in the most precarious position. The kiap received a paycheck from the state. He could afford to be independent. It was

actually financially beneficial for him to cut himself off from relations. The komitis received no pay and were deeply embedded in relational sociality. Many of them had only been komitis for a few months and had no aura or history of leadership and authority. They found that they could not maintain singular categorical identities as government officers. Their actions were judged and interpreted within the terms of relational sociality. They were easily encompassed by the demands and restraints of relational sociality as they never stood too far outside the web of relations.

The events surrounding the death of Namfupkon started to reveal these issues. Though the komitis who took Ranweng's pig defended their actions by pointing out that they were simply executing government orders, they were nonetheless widely disparaged for their actions. Relational logics were employed to determine why those particular komitis had taken that particular pig that belonged to Ranweng. The relational histories of Ranweng and these komitis were carefully discussed and made the rounds of rumor and gossip. Many of the komitis started to fear retribution from Ranweng or his relatives, possibly in the form of witchcraft.

The komitis also became targets of people on the list and their relatives who started to blame the komitis, not the informants, for listing them. This came about as the informants started to claim that they had been "pushed" by the government officers into giving false names. These claims undermined the credibility of the list and the effectiveness of the operation as a whole. Many suspected that the accused witches were not doing the listing, but rather the komitis were naming names and the witches were simply saying yes or no to confirm or deny the accusation. Those on the list (or

with relatives on the list) who had been angry with the informants for falsely accusing them now turned their anger towards the komitis.

There were also complaints of the wantok system being exercised among the government officers. People complained that the government officers were protecting officers who had been accused of witchcraft from being placed on the list. Some people were especially frustrated that one of the komitis who had clearly been named as a witch by one of the informants had not been placed on the list. As the poor, weak, and elderly women worked daily on the government road, many began to wonder why only such old and powerless women were being persecuted. Following the common understanding that "women just tie the rope, men shoot the arrow," many felt that the witch hunt was ineffective at getting the truly powerful witches.

Due to these tensions, many komitis began expressing their own feelings of discontent with the operation. Several of them began avoiding the kiap and kaunsels in the hope that they would not be called upon to perform yet another operation or sit in on another interrogation that might get themselves in even more trouble. Many of them went on long hunting trips where they could not be found for weeks at a time.

Tensions were exacerbated over a period of two weeks when there were eight deaths. The sheer number of deaths was cited by some as a sign of the complete ineffectiveness of the government witch hunt. Even with the strong government stance on witchcraft, people were still dying. "You can't stop death," it was widely stated. "We persecute these women for nothing." In the atmosphere of broad dissent from the government's dealings with witchcraft, all but one of these deaths were publicly blamed

on factors other than witchcraft. In most cases, family members of the deceased privately suspected others of witchcraft but did not reveal these suspicions publicly so as not to get the government involved.

The only one to publicly declare one of these deaths an act of witchcraft was one of the kaunsels, a self-proclaimed "father" of Operation Clean and Sweep. His father passed away. An analysis of his father's relational histories convinced him of the person responsible for the death. He went to one of his informant witches who confirmed his suspicion. Though he was fully convinced, others found the circumstances of the accusation to be suspect. Without a proper public discussion or safety meeting to discuss all of the relational histories relevant to the case, many found the accusation baseless. Many complained that the kaunsel was using his position for personal use to get his revenge on those he suspected of killing his father. Without strong support for the kaunsel's actions, the komitis who were already suffering the tensions between their position and the relational sociality were unwilling to lend their support to the kaunsel.

The kaunsel negotiated the tensions between relational sociality and statecraft by trying to eliminate the constraints and demands of relational sociality altogether. He emphasized his authority and single-minded support of "government" over all personal complaints about his actions. The more complaints he heard and the more evident the resistance to the operation became, the more tenacious he became in his pursuit of the operation's goals and in the complete eradication of witchcraft. If the komitis would not help him because they were too wrapped up in local webs of relations, he would

turn to outsiders who could maintain their categorical identities associated with the state, namely mobile policemen stationed at the provincial capital.

The kaunsel used the government radio to call the kiap who was in the provincial capital for a meeting. The kaunsel explained to the kiap the current antagonism towards the operation and lamented that his komitis would not help him apprehend the suspects. He demanded that 10 mobile police be sent immediately who could go down the witch list one by one to "make them know" (Tok Pisin, "mekim save") the law of Papua New Guinea. Rumor spread quickly that the kiap had agreed and was now arranging to come back from the provincial capital with 10 policemen.

True to the schismogenetic model I proposed earlier, the news of mobile policemen coming and the promise of such brutal punishments increased the opposition to the operation. If people were not concerned about the brutality the policemen would inflict on people who quite possibly were innocent, then they were concerned about the wasted money on such policemen that could be going to a more fruitful project.

After several tense weeks of waiting, the kiap returned without any mobile policemen, much to the relief of many and the disappointment of the kaunsel and his few supporters. Importantly, the kiap also returned without money or materials to continue building government services as he had promised.

Despite the kiap's desire to be completely outside the constraints of relational sociality, he could not help but be interpreted within its terms. His stance as an "independent man" only led to suspicions about his activities behind closed doors. Many suspected that he was embezzling money that had been marked for development

projects. The 60 local men working on the government buildings had not been paid in months and the necessary materials to continue the work had not arrived, stalling its progress. People suspected the kiap may have stolen the money and put it in his own account or used it to buy the store-bought foods, pans, buckets, plates, silverware, toys, or electronics he shipped in regularly from the provincial capital. Even if he was not embezzling money, people complained that he was not giving his full attention to development projects and instead chasing witches around for what was now beginning to appear like no good reason.

HOW IT ENDS

Up until this moment I have been describing a schismogenetic process through which supporters and opposition of the operation grow further and further apart. What makes the process so powerful is that the two sides actually *reproduce* themselves through the other. For example, as statecraft presses on with the operation it actually encourages the reproduction of relational sociality as people move out of villages to avoid relational tensions. However, there is a complementary schismogenetic response to this movement, whereby such movements inspire the kiap and kaunsel to press forth even harder on the witch hunt with the broader goal of moving people into large village "communities." This likewise feeds back into increasing relational tensions and forcing people to move out. In this way, the two sides are in a mutually generative schismogenetic relationship.

The important question arises then as to how it ultimately comes to an end. Bateson faced a similar problem when he first outlined the complementary schismogenesis model. He suggested that there were limits to schismogenesis. He uses the image of the governor on a steam engine known as "Watt's governor" to illustrate his model (1958:288). The governor is designed to counter the momentum of the steam engine to maintain its speed at a particular level. This is accomplished with the use of two arms that hang along the sides of a vertical rotating axle. The two arms swing out as the axle rotates. The faster the axle rotates the wider the arms swing. The arms are attached to a valve at the top that provides the energy for the axle's rotation. The wider the arms swing the more they tighten the valve, reducing the speed of the system as a whole.
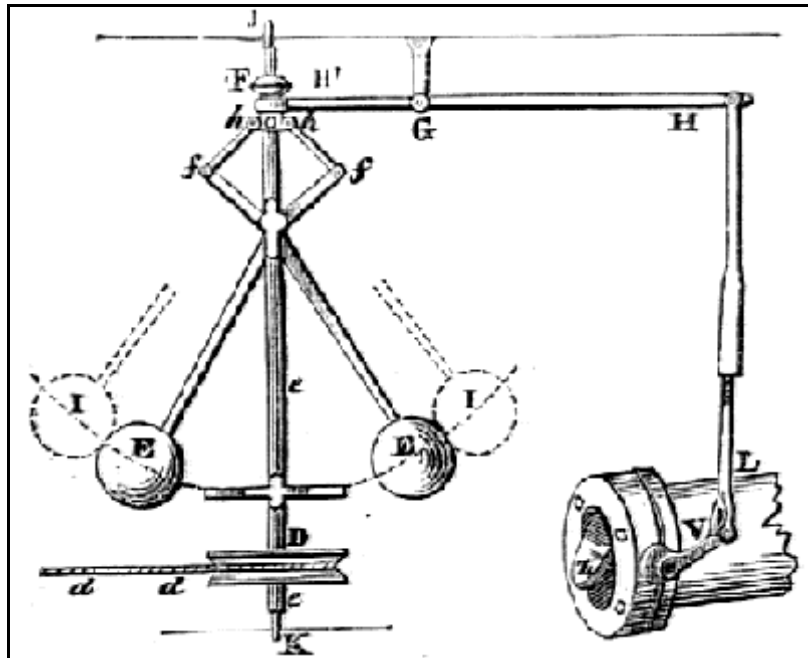
Watt's governor. As the axle spins faster, the arms swing from "E" to "I"

and tighten the valve at the top, decreasing the energy coming into the system

and slowing the rotation. (Drawing from

http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/6914/regole.htm)

Unfortunately, Bateson is unable to identify any particular social process that correlates with Watt's governor. Furthermore, Bateson's model describes how a schismogenetic process might reach a moment beyond which it can proceed no further, but not where it completely breaks down. Therefore another model might be more appropriate to this particular case.

Through an analysis of the breakdown of the operation, I suggest that there are two processes working together that slowly break down the schismogenesis. First, people acting on behalf of statecraft are ultimately subsumed by relational sociality and forced to abandon their efforts and secondly, these abandonments require increased inputs on the part of statecraft that may not be available (particularly in a "weak" state like Papua New Guinea).

I have already mentioned the manner in which many komitis abandoned their efforts due to relational tensions. To maintain the hunt, the kaunsel and kiap needed to draw on external resources, namely outside government officers or mobile policemen who have no local relations and are therefore not easily susceptible to the "governor" operating locally. These external inputs are simply not available however, and the schismogenetic movement collapses into the side that continues on, the side of relational sociality.

It is worth asking what might have happened if the state did have the resources or priorities to fulfill the request for outside officers. While the kaunsel and kiap hoped and predicted that these external officers would at last "show people the law" (Tok Pisin, "mekim save long lo"), thereby "finishing" relational sociality, I would counter-argue that the schismogenetic process would have simply taken one more giant step. Locals would have simply retreated further from statecraft, moving into widely dispersed and isolated hamlets, visiting the government station only rarely, hoping to avoid confrontation with the law.

Ultimately the kaunsel and kiap were also drawn into relational sociality as well. As the kaunsel and kiap move further into an authoritative govern-mentality, the growing numbers of people opposing the hunt become suspicious of their activities as viewed through the lenses of relational sociality. As the kiap and kaunsel attempt to cut their relations they are still viewed through relational logics and judged in its terms. Their actions are mistrusted as non- or anti-productive selfishness. In a perfect manifestation of the ability of relational sociality to encompass statecraft, some people ultimately publicly accused the government officers themselves of witchcraft, and of using the witch hunt as a diversion to hide their own witchcraft.

With popular support for the witch hunt waning, the kiap began to reconsider. He talked over the complaints against the witch hunt with the kaunsels and komitis. While one kaunsel continued to profess his relentless determination to rid the area of witchcraft, the kaunsel president requested that witchcraft cases no longer be pursued by the government in his ward unless specifically requested by himself. Several komitis

complained that they could not continue their involvement with apprehending and interrogating suspects due to the relational strains it was causing them. At the following Monday morning market on May 5th, the kiap made the following announcement:

> I want to give one very strong talk. I gave you all a big talk about witchcraft before, and you took this talk from house to house, crying about it as you went. You fought with me and fought with each other. You did this so I will no longer be holding witchcraft cases. … If one of you dies, you can't come crying to my office.

> Just now the witches put several people in their graves. You thought that I was pursuing the witches for my own benefit, or for my family's benefit, but I was doing it for all of us.

> You have complained about my work and now many of your loved ones will die. You will be sorry. Parents will die and the children will live with worry and sadness. You weren't thinking about this, were you? You weren't thinking when you complained and cried, cried, cried like a baby crying for your mother's milk.

Despite his stance as an "independent man" the kiap had given in to relational tensions. He had initiated Operation Clean and Sweep in an effort to eliminate such processes of movement and community disintegration. Now, in a perfect manifestation of the cultural process of relational sociality, he began preparations to move, promising to take the government and all of its projects and services with him.

The kiap's statement that he will move is double-sided, manifesting both statecraft and relational sociality. Through statecraft he reproduces himself as an individual categorical identity by cutting his relations. But at the same time his actions can be viewed as appropriate for relational sociality, manifesting the culmination of the process by moving away. Like McArthur, the first missionaries, and the first teachers, it now seemed that the first native kiap would fall into the same local pattern: development comes, witchcraft chases it away. The history was already being told before he left. Although many were relieved that the hunt was over, there was at the same time a collective sigh and lamentation, "oh no, we missed our chance again."

CONCLUSION

Why "community" fails: The Disintegration of Nimakot

Earlier I painted the vignette of people from outer hamlets walking into Tumolbil and being greeted by a spectacular shimmer of zinc-iron roofs glistening in the sun. Such sparkling roof-tops are rare to non-existent anywhere within a 10 mile radius, making Tumolbil appear rich in its context. But while the richness is admired and envied, those who know the recent history also recognize those shimmers as shattered dreams. The zinc-iron roofs of residents are the remains of development projects gone wrong – a community market house that never had a market, a community chicken coupe that lost its chickens, an abandoned government patrol post, a handful of tradestores with nothing to trade but lists of creditors, and worthless community water tanks pounded flat. Their relatively large flat lawns are old sports fields, reclaimed by grass and shrubbery when "community" did not work.

In the shadow of the failures of Operation Clean and Sweep, the kiap was not the only one planning to move. Ever since the beginning of Operation Clean and Sweep people had been planning to move. First, in line with the government request that everybody move into large villages, people who lived in isolated hamlets were considering abandoning their current homes for the village. But soon this reversed. The fears and fissions associated with witchcraft and the witch hunt had the people in villages considering, planning, or actively pursuing a move out. There was not a single village in the Nim river valley that would not be moving and/or changing shape over the

course and aftermath of the witch hunt. As the process of statecraft pressed to forcefully move people into large villages it was consumed by relational sociality and ultimately played into those very processes it sought to eradicate.
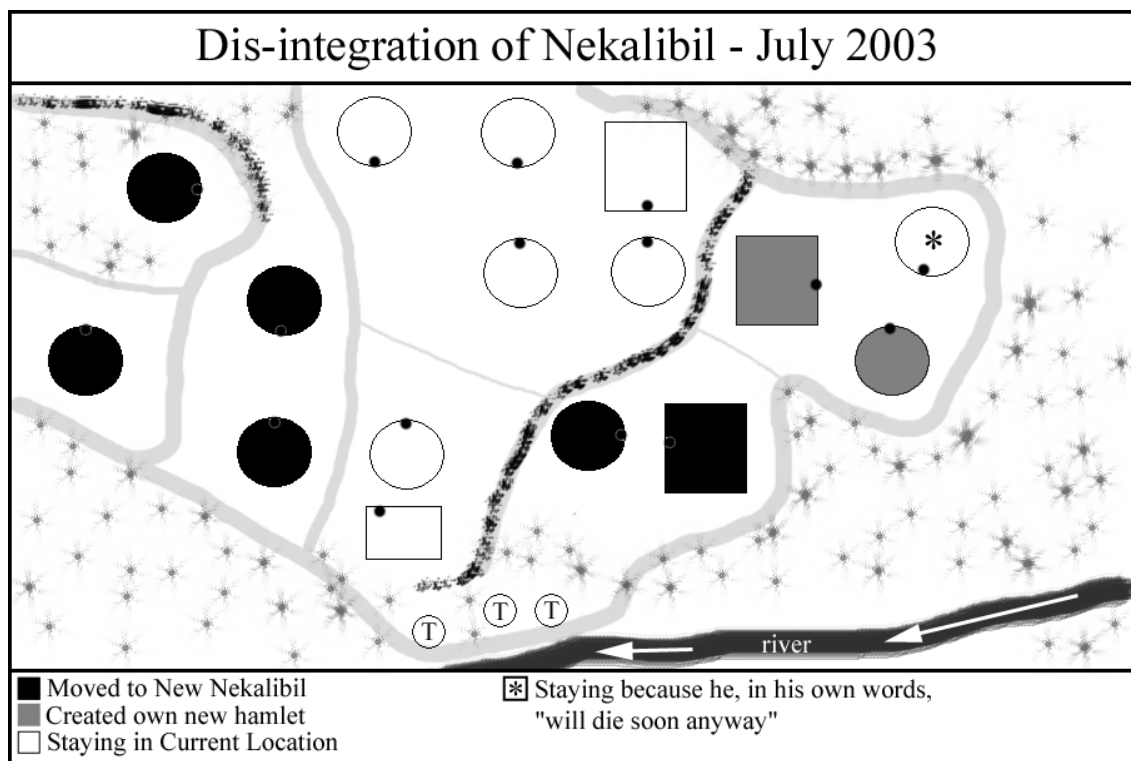
Those near the government station moved further away from the station, as the kiap had requested, so that the kiap and future officers and government workmen would feel more safe from the dangers of the local witchcraft. But the move provided an opportunity for people to reconsider their living arrangements and choose new neighbors, and most chose to have as few neighbors as possible, undermining any possibility for a high "namba" that would talk to the state.

Based on the pattern of accusations the moves were predictable. A young man who had berated his own mother for witchcraft created a new settlement apart from the one he had lived in with her. A young man who felt betrayed by everybody created his own settlement exclusively for himself and his brothers with a stone wall piled around it to discourage visitors.

The Seventh Day Adventist church decided that the reports of sin within their community were a disgrace to the church's name and asked that all residents move away from the church grounds, allowing only church leaders to live in the SDA camp.

Although Nekalibil had staged a touching exchange in an attempt to save the community, it ultimately broke down into three separate camps representing the three factions involved in the death of Namfupkon. It was originally hoped by the komitis that "New Nekalibil" would include everybody from old Nekalibil plus some in a prosperous community. Instead, Kodim and his supporters moved over the mountain to

the Al river valley. Mikson and his supporters moved 100 meters down the valley to "New Nekalibil," while Lokim and Ranweng stayed put with their families. The movements broke roughly along the very lines that could be drawn around the virtual hamlets that made up Nekalibil (see map). New Nekalibil had less than 50 residents.

Dis-integration of Nekalibil - July 2003

■ Moved to New Nekalibil
▦ Created own new hamlet
□ Staying in Current Location

✳ Staying because he, in his own words, "will die soon anyway"

All said, what had been the great accomplishment of Tumolbil, that in 1990 had been censused as a community of 1,112 people, was now disintegrating. What had been a collection of hamlets so close together as to be considered a single village was now once again a scattering of hamlets.

Nimakot came full circle to reproduce relational sociality *through* statecraft. Even through Operation Clean and Sweep, a plan to completely eradicate relational sociality, the relational sociality still found a way to reproduce itself. In fact, through the schismogenesis exacerbated by the operation, one might say that relational sociality reproduced itself *with a vengeance*. Here I conclude with an analysis of how one "community" (i.e. government-recognized village) deals with a witchcraft case and struggles to reproduce itself in the aftermath of the operation. The analysis underscores the persistence and pervasiveness of relational sociality, and shows that the tensions I have described between relational sociality and statecraft still remain, begging for resolution. Ultimately it is not just relational sociality that has managed to reproduce itself through the operation, but the tension between relational sociality and statecraft. Through the schisms in the tumultuous breakdown of the operation came continuity with the very tensions that produced the operation in the first place.

AFTER THE OPERATION:

RELATIONAL SOCIALITY WITH A VENGEANCE

The local komiti of Kaliding had high hopes of building a new and prosperous modern community. However, his attempts were undermined when a young local man died and witchcraft accusations ensued. The way the people decided to deal with the situation illustrates the ways in which the schismogenetic tensions of Operation Clean and Sweep were still being felt months later, pushing people to deal with witchcraft

cases through relational sociality rather than through statecraft. In this case, they not only sought out the poor relations that led to this particular death, but instead open up a long series of relational analyses trying to account for all deaths in the past 20 years. This is not just the return of relational sociality, but relational sociality with a vengeance, the implementation of hyper-relational analyses in a hope to heal relational tensions throughout the region.

The village of Kaliding was facing the same tensions that were causing the rest of the valley to break apart, but the local komiti and other leaders still had hope that Kaliding would not only survive, but maybe even grow through the turmoil. By the beginning of 2003 Kaliding had managed to bring together several hamlets giving them the respectable namba of 117. There had been talk of encouraging the residents of Kaliding and Nekalibil to join together in an effort to eventually reach the namba of 200, which the kiap had marked as the magical namba that would qualify a village for government services such as an elementary school or medical aid post.

The komiti and local leaders sought the help of the head nurse (who was also the pastor of the SDA church) visiting from Hagen (a large Papua New Guinea town in the Highlands), to plan a new village. Together they drew up the following village plan.

VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLAN
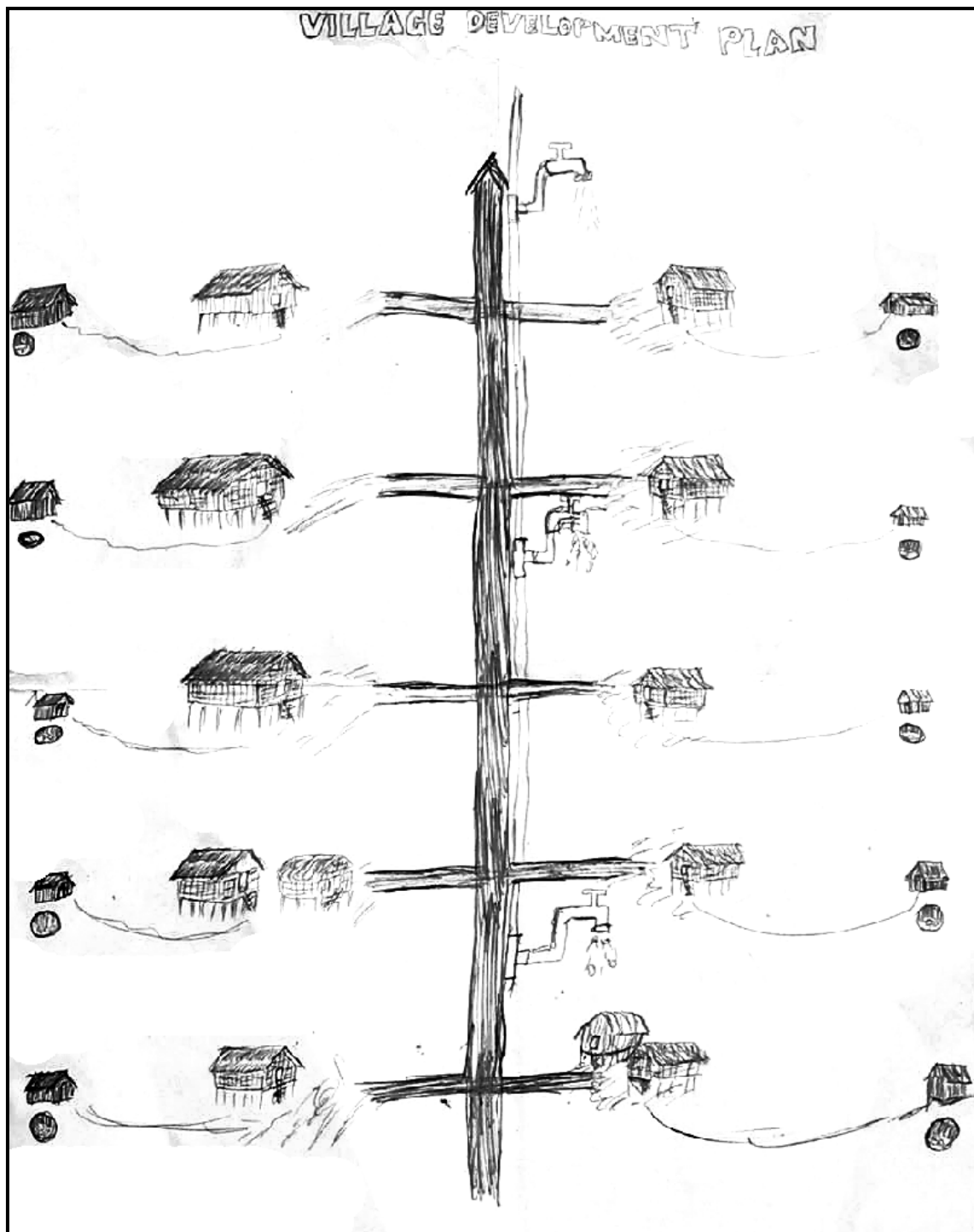
The plan is a triumph of visual rationalism designed "*straight* by the book." As can be seen in the picture, houses are to line up along a straight road with each house having its own private path joining the main road at perfect ninety degree angles, a plan that looks best when drawn up on paper. People are lined up, just as in a census book, and it was even said that it would make the census much easier. The plan is made in abstract two-dimensional space, the distance between houses equal, their lines perfectly parallel. It is a plan made from a bird's eye perspective. As James Scott commented about the grid layout of modern cities, "the order in question is most evident, not at street level, but rather from above and outside" (1998:57). When each household planned their own homes they controlled their visibility by the placement of their door. As I showed in Chapter Two, the lines of visibility correlate with the strongest relationships and formed virtual hamlets within the village. The plan drawn up by the nurse and komiti was truly a plan for a "community," full of law-abiding, rights-bearing citizens, united in their equality as members of the community. Their doorways do not face their favorite relations. They face the straight and orderly road.

Such a village would not only build community, it would also have to be *built by* a community, working together, in order to execute the plan. One single large area would have to be flattened along the mountainside, not several small niches where a patchwork of hamlets would only *masquerade* as a village community, and the location of each house would need to be carefully plotted and measured. It could not be built by putting one's favorite or strongest relations first. "Community" would have to come first.

When the nurse was invited by the komiti to present the plan, the nurse seized the opportunity to speak out against the belief in witchcraft. The witch hunt was over, but he feared it might start again. "Now you all blame witchcraft but sometimes the blame is with your own selves and not looking after your own health. You all throw your talk towards witchcraft. My main point is that we all need to look after our own selves (TP, "yumi yet lukautim yumi yet") and our lives will be better. Sick comes when we don't look after ourselves and our village. You shouldn't blame a witch and then throw blame on each other like you do."

Later I would hear appreciation for what the nurse had said. Everybody agreed that they were not properly taking care of themselves and the village. But few connected it with health. They instead interpreted it through their own framework in which witchcraft is an unquestionable reality. In order to "look after ourselves and our village," as the nurse had suggested, they would need to be more vigilant against witchcraft. Illustrating the pervasiveness of witchcraft (due to the fact that it is part and parcel of relational sociality which is of a higher order), they did not hear his speech as a campaign against the *belief* in witchcraft, but as a campaign against the *practice* of witchcraft, and the best way they know to stop the practice of witchcraft is to hold more safety meetings.

The komiti treasured the village plan and displayed it proudly and excitedly whenever he had the opportunity. He studied it frequently, smiling and shaking his head side to side, ticking his tongue, and exclaiming, "Ah, rait, rait!" an expression of ultimate satisfaction. He had big plans – a namba of 200 living peacefully as a

community, working together, with a school, medical aid post, and perhaps even more given by the government as their reward. Unfortunately, the mysterious death of a young man would call forth a series of safety meetings that would reveal a long history of suspicions and fissions that would jeopardize his dreams, and ultimately disintegrate Kaliding, and much of the rest of Nimakot as well.

Immediately after burying him they opened up the first of many safety meetings to inquire into the cause of death. In the aftermath of the operation, this would not be a typical safety meeting. It would be a schismogenetically produced hyper-relational response to the techniques and categorical logic of the witch hunt. They not only would analyze the poor relations that led to this one death, but the poor relations region-wide that had been the underlying basis of many (and perhaps all) deaths in the past 20 years.

This emerged dynamically through the safety meeting. It was first noted that he was the 4th young person in less than a year to die in Kaliding, each of them dying "before the grass grew back over the grave of the previous." Furthermore, the deceased were all descendants of the same family network that had moved from an area just west of the border to Kaliding when the border mark was placed in 1987. The problem became more pressing as it was noted that two more young men from the same family were already sick and losing weight quickly. The question was not just why Yanok had died, but why all of these young people from the same family had died and were still dying.

Phrased in this way, several possibilities no longer seemed viable. It could not be a sickness, they reasoned, because sickness does not follow family relations. It could

not be angry spirits, because they would more likely haunt an entire village rather than only one particular family within that village. And it was unlikely to be a single witch, because it was a much too broad and sustained pattern of killing to be the result of a grievance with one single witch. Instead, there was broad consensus that it was the result of much longer histories of conflict with other families from throughout the region. Such broad historical conflicts work through *bis bilwan*, witchcraft bribery. It is such conflicts that have largely defined, reshaped, and constantly reconstitute the boundaries between families, clans, and other social distinctions.

Bribery is the most common form of payback killing in Nimakot. When a family member ("real" or "fictive") dies, the grieving family members might take an object somehow associated with the deceased and give it to somebody else with a vague instruction or code, such as "chop down that banana tree on the hill" or "there is a wild pig down in that valley" that can be interpreted as asking to kill those responsible. The person who receives the bribe then passes it on with the same instruction to somebody else, who may pass it on again, and again, until eventually it lands in the hands of somebody capable of witchcraft willing to accept the bribe. After the kill, the hired witch expects payment in the form of a pig, "to cool his witchcraft." Until the pig is received the witch will continue to kill people from the marked family. After some time they may become impatient waiting for payment and start killing the family who originally gave the bribe. The witch starts with immediate family members, then extended family, in-laws, and eventually will kill everybody in the hamlet, village, and region. The analysis of witchcraft bribery holds the potential of revealing underlying

relational tensions that have caused a great many deaths over many years. This is why I refer to this particular relational analysis performed by locals as the return of relational sociality with a vengeance.

The giving of a bribe is such a simple act that some people fear they may have given one by mistake. After a death the family is asked for compensation from people all over the region, and there is a fine line between giving compensation and giving a bribe that is not within one's own intentions. The recipient of the gift may themselves interpret it as a bribe, or others who witnessed the giving may interpret it as a bribe. Because gifts such as this are distributed at every death, it was no surprise to find that there seemed an almost infinite number of possibilities to be considered by those at the safety meeting. And because a bribe could eventually backfire and kill one's own family, what gifts had been given were as important as what gifts had been received. Virtually no exchange was irrelevant.

Several death payment gifts were traced. No matter how seemingly insignificant the gift might seem, it was traced throughout its long history, often extending across more than five exchanges before being broken, burned, or buried and therefore not possibly an active bribe.

The inquisitions revealed long-standing tensions that had been disintegrating Kaliding for the past 20 years just as it had also been simultaneously integrating new families moving from the west side of the international border mark. As an example of the detail involved in these analyses, consider one of the first scenarios that was revealed through a long dialogue between safety meeting participants:

When Yanok's father, Atiweng, died, Maweng (Atiweng's brother) tried to attack Atiweng's widow, Melkon, with an axe as he suspected her of witchcraft. Melkon is Kamokim's sister, and Atiweng's patri-family blamed Kamokim and his family for the witchcraft. All of them except Yanok moved out in the early 1990s. The axe Maweng had used to try to kill Melkon was suspected as a bribe. The axe was traced through no less than seven exchanges before it was discovered that it had been long since broken and buried.
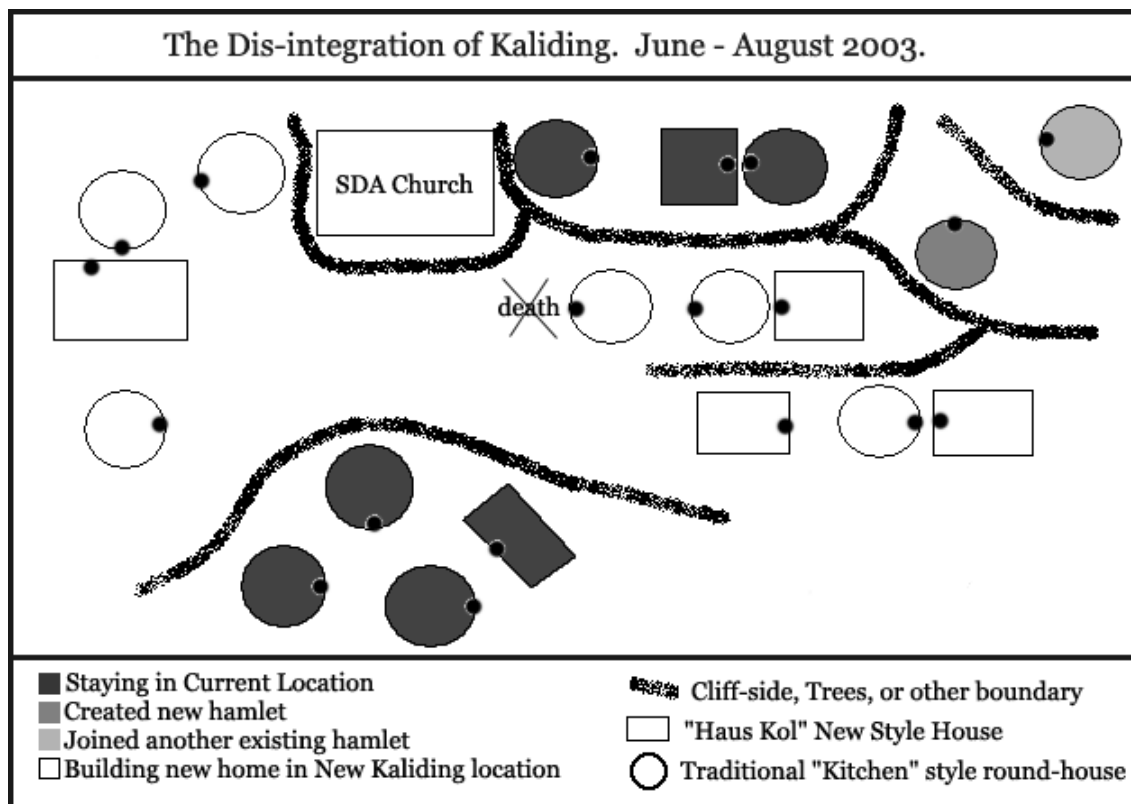
Not all scenarios could be traced to such a conclusive finishing point however, and many possibilities and suspicions arose. Several times over the course of the next five weeks the meeting had to be suspended until people not in attendance could be called forth to provide a key detail about this or that exchange or relationship. The meeting snaked its way around Nimakot, following the path of possible briberies, moving to where people who knew the right details could be called on to give key information. Every time there was missing information the meeting adjourned and met again in or near the location where the person with the missing information resided.

The exchanges had gone throughout Nimakot and beyond, implicating everybody as victim or witch along its path. But even as the scope and breadth of the accusations grew, with each meeting the attendance grew smaller and smaller. By the third meeting, nobody from Kaliding who had an interest in the death was in attendance and the meeting was now taking place in Maskabil. The people of Kaliding had already drawn their own conclusions about what exchanges were bribes and were relevant to the case at hand.

Broadly speaking, the large meetings which could never reach consensus were continuously dissolving into smaller meetings (often exclusively among hamlet members) where consensus could be reached. Each of these small consensus groups came away with their own reading of what had happened, and secretly maintained their own suspicions about who and who was not working witchcraft. At each location the analyses disintegrated what were basically "fake" "communities," dissolving them into the hamlets that composed them.

In Kaliding, there were four very different conclusions. Each "virtual hamlet" composing Kaliding had come to its own conclusion, often suspecting somebody of one of the other virtual hamlets for the recent deaths. What was worse however, was that whoever was doing the witchcraft was not admitting it, suggesting that the killings were not over and would continue, possibly until Kaliding was "finished." The komiti's dreams of a new and prosperous Kaliding began to fade.

For the people of Kaliding, their future did not include a perfect execution of the Kaliding Village Development Plan that the komiti had been so proud of and eagerly anticipated. There were too many fears and tensions between factions within the village. Instead of building a new village, the plan to rebuild Kaliding in a new location offered the opportunity for people to split up, and they did so along the fissions that the recent safety meetings had revealed.

The Dis-integration of Kaliding. June - August 2003.

SDA Church

death

■ Staying in Current Location
■ Created new hamlet
■ Joined another existing hamlet
□ Building new home in New Kaliding location

Cliff-side, Trees, or other boundary
□ "Haus Kol" New Style House
○ Traditional "Kitchen" style round-house

As can be seen in the map, the fissions were already apparent in the arrangement of the village and had been long-standing. Each family group had its own hamlet within the village of Kaliding. The hamlets would each more or less maintain their current constituencies, but would now be more scattered.

One man escaped local tensions by moving his family to join his half-brothers at a recently created hamlet. Another man, suspected by a man who suspected him in return, moved to the backside of the mountain and created a new two-house hamlet there with his son. With everybody around him moving, a pair of brothers decided they could stay where they were, forming a relatively isolated three house hamlet. On the far

side of the village, another man found himself and his closest relations similarly isolated and decided to stay put with his sons, brother, and their families.

Ultimately, the families of the komiti and his closest friend were the only two who had not shown hostilities towards one another during the safety meetings and were the only ones to move to the new Kaliding location.

Although the village would be smaller than the komiti had envisioned, he still had plans to build Kaliding according to the plan he had drawn up with the nurse. But to build Kaliding by the plan on paper it would take co-operation between all of those moving to the new village to first flatten out a single area on which to line the houses. It was not to be. Already his friend's family had formed a co-operative household and dug out their own flat land apart from where he and his relations dug theirs. New Kaliding was looking like old Kaliding, a pastiche of contentious hamlets joined together to masquerade as a village.

By August the old Kaliding looked empty. The homes that had filled the middle (shown in white in the map) had mostly been torn down, moved, or abandoned. Only the homes at the far ends of the original village were still occupied. Further down the road new Kaliding was lighting its first fires, where I sat with the komiti as he lamented the disintegration of his community. Once again, witchcraft had chased development away. The failure inspired the familiar refrains, "Maybe the Whiteman can do it, but not us blacks." "We blacks are selfish and big-headed. We don't work for the good of the community." And perhaps the most pervasive, "It's the wantok system."

As I left the field, the same tensions that motivated Operation Clean and Sweep have been reproduced. People were left living in small, scattered hamlets, wishing they could somehow come together to live in large prosperous villages whose population numbers would be great enough to "talk" to the state and bring in valuable services. Every effort at "community" seems to fail in a flurry of witchcraft accusations. The true challenge of "community" is the challenge of creating categorical identities within a deeply embedded relational sociality.

ENDNOTES

Chapter One

1. All names of local people and place names, with the exception of "Tumolbil" are pseudonyms. Tumolbil is a place name that may be recognized on maps and allows other researchers to roughly locate the study, but refers to a collection of villages. When referring to a specific village I use a pseudonym to help protect the identity of those portrayed in this work.

2. Wantok comes from the English "one talk." In other areas of New Guinea the term is often used to refer to people who share the same language. However, in Nimakot, "wantok" simply means somebody with whom one has a positive relation. It is used interchangeably with the Kali term, "dup" meaning "friend" or "exchange partner." While the term "wantok system" builds from these meanings it is also different, and is almost always used for self-deprecatory remarks about Papua New Guinea culture and corruption.

3. In local terms, "Nimakot" refers only to the area near the confluence of the Nim and Smol Rivers. However, I believe I am being consistent with local practice of expanding such terms relative to my audience. In this case, as the reference point for my audience is the entire world, "Nimakot" seems a sufficient term to cover the entirety of the Smol and Nim river valleys.

4. People in villages and hamlets throughout Papua New Guinea often claim to be the "last man" in self-deprecatory tones. See Brison 1996, Robbins 1998, and Bashkow 2000 for other examples.

Chapter Three

1. If a person from an area to the west visits an area to the east they may be introduced to others as a "Kufelmin" and the visitor will accept the designation. But upon return to his homeland he is no longer a Kufelmin and the group he lives with does not refer to themselves as Kufelmin.

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