

## Chapter 4

# Mobility, Modernisation and Agency: The Life Story of John Kikang from Papua New Guinea

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In this chapter I focus on the autobiographical notes and oral accounts by John Kikang, and how I have used these sources in writing a version of his life. My interlocutor came from a village in the heartland of the Ngaing, a people who inhabit the Rai Coast hinterland in Papua New Guinea's province of Madang. Kikang was over 70 years old when, in February 1997, he died in the village of his birth. Throughout his life Kikang had valued the ideals of progress and development. His narratives and writings tell of identifications and initiatives aligned to Western discourses and practices, particularly those of Australian government officers and Christian missionaries. He portrayed himself as someone who played a leading role in modernising his home region and was proud that his personal efforts as a pioneer of modernity were recognised and remembered in his village. I argue that Kikang's desire to record his individual history cannot be detached from this process of modernisation. I see my task as narrating Kikang's life story in a way answering to his notions of modernity.

I owe the term 'life story' to Peacock and Holland,<sup>1</sup> who used it to bring together two different dimensions in the study of biographies. 'Life' represents an approach that seeks via narratives to access historical, cultural and/or psychic facts. The spotlight here is on a reality standing outside the narrative; the narrative as such receives little attention. 'Story', on the other hand, foregrounds the narrative itself and its power to create reality in the act of narrating. Peacock and Holland see life stories as participating in a variety of processes:

[life stories] do indeed offer a window—though not a perfectly transparent one—on historical periods, cultural practices, and psychic events. And their content and telling no doubt do vary by audience. The communicative purposes, the effort to promote understanding yet sometimes to defend and hide, played out in the production of a life story, do result in narration tuned to, but not totally dominated by, immediate social conditions and communicative intent.<sup>2</sup>

I talk of Kikang's 'life story' with both approaches in mind. In order to illuminate the construction of my account of Kikang's life, I have drawn on the idea of 'mimesis'.

Following Gebauer and Wulf, I conceive 'mimesis' as embracing equally imitation and change, acquisition and articulation. Mimesis thus designates the interplay of internalisation, interpretation and re-enactment. Gebauer and Wulf talk of the subject's capacity to incorporate the outer world into the inner world, thereby creating references and identifications for subsequent use in social performances.<sup>3</sup> Through such mimetic processes of referencing and performing, certainties are created, attachments are generated, and realities are construed. 'Mimesis construes anew already construed worlds.'<sup>4</sup>

My account of Kikang's life is based on his journal entries and oral narratives, themselves the product of diverse mimetic processes. Kikang's representations refer to prior processes of internalisation, interpretation and re-enactment of discourses and practices from the world of the whites, such as allowed him to identify as a pioneer of modernity. His long years away from home working with Europeans changed how he saw his home region; compared with the world of the whites, his home region came to represent one thing: backwardness. Therefore, a leitmotiv in Kikang's self-representations was first the vision, then a concrete commitment, to re-structuring his home region, with a view to implanting the economic, political and religious modernity he had come to know in the capitalist and Christian colonial system. Kikang saw himself as a go-between, adept at organising exchanges between the rural countryside and the world of white modernity—yet also, on a spiritual level, as enabling exchanges between the real world of the Here and Now and the realms of the dead, or the Beyond.<sup>5</sup>

Mobility was crucial for Kikang's mimetic practice. Two forms of mobility need to be distinguished. One is the physical movement of a living person in the Here and Now. Thus the young Kikang left his homeland on the Rai Coast and spent many years in the white colonial world. After returning, he mainly worked for Australian administrative officers, who commissioned him to oversee agricultural projects. His other form of mobility was based on the indigenous belief that a portion of the self, namely a person's spirit-being (*asabeiyang* or *ananuang*), is able to detach itself from the body.<sup>6</sup> When its owner is asleep and dreaming, the spirit-being can have out-of-body experiences. Kikang spoke of dream-journeys that he took to the world of the dead, who, according to his representations, now lived as whites in a Western and largely urban landscape, in material prosperity free from care. In these spaces inhabited by the dead he saw the very modernity that, he believed, still awaited creation in the local world of the living.<sup>7</sup> Through his journeys into these different zones of whiteness, and his interactions with the whites, Kikang acquired cultural experiences,

habitual imprints and new forms of power-knowledge, all central to his self-perception and masculine identity, his agency and authority.<sup>8</sup>

When I attempt to fashion from Kikang's notes and oral accounts a life story that tallies with his identifications and initiatives, 'mimesis' describes my practice too. For what else do I explore but a mimetic process when I describe how I tell Kikang's life and change it in the telling? In this chapter, I begin by sketching how our collaboration came about and introduce the two chief sources for Kikang's life story: a) transcripts from tape recordings of our conversations, and b) Kikang's own autobiographical notes. Then I reflect on my decision to tell Kikang's story in chronological order and, finally, discuss my reasons for including in the text excerpts from our conversations.

## Methods and Materials

Early in my fieldwork among the Ngaing, several of my interlocutors pointed out John Kikang's achievements. They portrayed him as politically influential and instrumental in introducing both coffee cultivation and Catholic Christianity to the region following World War II. In the national archives in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea's capital, I came across several reports by Australian administrative officers who depicted a restless, disciplined Kikang, a man with an entrepreneurial spirit, energetically promoting vegetable marketing, coffee cultivation and other economic projects, and outstanding as village headman: 'Kikang is regarded as the most progressive Luluai in the Saidor Sub-District. His village looks a picture, and they have running water ... [He] is a tireless worker and a deeply religious man'.<sup>9</sup> His economic initiatives and his loyal cooperation with the local authorities won him standing with the Australian administration. The head of the Department of Native Affairs advised officials in Saidor: 'You should use Kikang as much as possible to spread progressive ideas in the area'.<sup>10</sup>

Upon returning to the village, I told Kikang what I had learnt in the archives; I asked him about this or that historical detail and expressed an interest in his career generally. Then I broached the idea of recording his entire life story. He was communicative—indeed he seemed honoured by my interest—and he agreed to let me tape his reflections on the past. His long years of working together and identifying with white people in Papua New Guinea certainly helps to explain his cooperativeness. He could see in our conversations, perhaps, a renewal of the recognition he had once received for his convictions, ideas, and initiatives.

We agreed on a series of interviews, usually meeting at my house in the evening. Often Kikang would arrive wearing a jacket, long trousers and, on occasion, dark shoes. Our conversations—conducted exclusively in Tok Pisin, the *lingua franca* of Papua New Guinea—were recorded on tape and eventually ran to more than 30 hours. The verbatim transcripts of the interviews form the

primary source for my account of Kikang's life story. I see my chief tasks as translating the interviews, selecting salient passages, undertaking any necessary editing (for clarity or to reduce repetition), ordering the material chronologically and breaking it up into chapters. I take my bearings from the structure Kikang himself provided in his remarks and writings. In ordering the interviews, I wanted to keep as closely as possible to Kikang's own narratives. I organised them into a continuous body of text running to 12 chapters. References to historical sources—such as missionary documents or patrol reports by Australian administrative officers—are found in the introduction, but have chiefly been relegated to footnotes in the actual narrative. The timeline of events forms the background against which this life story plays out. As I will discuss in more detail, this chronological ordering, oriented to Western conventions of linearity, accords with Kikang's own express wish.

Kikang's written notes comprise the second narrative format of importance for my construction of his story. When I began interviewing him, I had no idea that for years he had kept a written record of episodes and events that mattered to him. He began bringing photographs, medals, documents and sketches to our sessions. Then one day he came along with two journals he had once kept.

The first of these was an 'Australian Diary' from the year 1958 with various entries for the period between 1960 and 1983. Some entries take the form of registers giving the place, year and number of coffee bushes planted in the region; others are tables listing his personal income and expenditures; others again list the amounts of church collections, as well as donations and membership fees for local associations; there was a clan and family register for his own village setting out dates of birth; reports from board members on local self-administration bodies; also notes that Kikang had made on his political, economic and religious activities; and finally, notes on his personal achievements.

The second journal, written in a school exercise-book, contains entries from the 1980s. Here too are tables listing personal income and expenditures, but most of the space is devoted to writings of a spiritual nature. Kikang writes of events on the local Christian scene, his dreams and visions, his religious insights and initiatives, Jesus and Maria, his encounters with the spirits of the dead, the nature of the Beyond. On the journal's back cover Kikang had inscribed the telling words: 'SANTU BOK 1983' ('Holy Book 1983').

In his 'Holy Book', Kikang set down his thoughts in Tok Pisin, adding the date of entry; and was careful to adopt a business-like, official tone, always referring to himself in the third person. Many entries were rounded off with: 'Kikang wrote this' or 'John has written'. The model for Kikang's entries may have been the notes Australian patrol officers entered in the 'village register'. In his years of service as village headman, Kikang had to keep just such a register;

during my fieldwork, he still had it in his possession, the entries dating from 1956 to 1978. Here is an example of an entry made by an Australian officer:

9/6/61

Tax/Census Patrol. Stayed here for 3 nights. 1 ¼ hours walk from Waibol. Had a meeting with nearby village officials on general progress and economic development. Complaints re pigs spoiling gardens. Owners warned and Luluai told to take action. A good village.

{Signature A.D.O.}

For comparison's sake, here is a brief entry taken from Kikang's 'Holy Book 1983':

March 28/3/88

Bishop Noser came by helicopter and spoke with J. Kikang on what was the best way. And after the two had decided which way was best, he went back.

J. Kikang wrote this.

Interestingly, though Kikang imitates the report-writing style of administrative officers, Kikang's subject is (often) his dreams and visions. Thus the passage above tells of Kikang's encounter with the former Archbishop of Madang, Adolph Alexander Noser, who had died some time beforehand. Noser communicated by dream to Kikang how the souls of the dead were in future to be transported away from the locality. The dream was founded on Kikang's insight that the Catholic Church had modernised transportation for dead souls, having switched from ships to helicopters.

Kikang's two journals are heavy-going in a variety of ways. For a start, they are in a bad state of preservation: many pages are either loose or fragmentary; several have been torn out, and others have probably simply gone missing. Then both journals contain passages that are barely decipherable. Further, Kikang used a Tok Pisin orthography of his own devising, which I had to 'translate' into the standard version of Melanesian Pidgin after Francis Mihalic.<sup>11</sup> Although Kikang dated all his entries, they were rarely arranged in any systematic chronological order. Kikang placed his entries anywhere in the journal as yet unwritten upon. To this mosaic of entries, Kikang added narratives of past events and experiences, these being assigned a year presumably from memory.

It is, therefore, only right to ask how these autobiographical records should be handled. To me, Kikang's writings are valuable historical documents bearing on a specific time of transition. Kikang's primary socialisation was in an oral culture. After leaving his village, he received a rudimentary formal schooling. His journals show how he related to reading and writing. They bear witness to

a mimetic practice. Kikang appropriated this 'technology' because he saw he could fashion from it an autobiographical tool. Reading and writing let him actualise in himself his idea of a modern self.

So I have opted for two forms of representation. First, I shall combine a selection of journal entries with Kikang's own oral accounts. I have decided to place the latter at points in the text where journal entry and oral narrative directly bear on each other. Translated entries from the journal have been placed in grey-shaded boxes to set them off from the rest of the text. Thus the reader will be able to see that these entries are not part of the interview transcripts. Journal entries and oral representations thus run on parallel tracks, yet interrelate. This *modus operandi* however requires a number of passages from the journals to be relocated within the chronological framework of Kikang's narratives. Second, so as to compensate for the dislocation of the original journal material, I have decided to give readers access to the two journals in an appendix. There the edited Tok Pisin versions of Kikang's notes may be inspected in the original arrangement—albeit without the tables listing personal income and expenditures and without personal data from the village register about the inhabitants of Sibog.

In my account of Kikang's story, I want his life to be told as far as possible in his own words, therefore my account most resembles books such as *Ongka* by Andrew Strathern<sup>12</sup> or *Elota's Story* by Roger Keesing.<sup>13</sup> If I insert journal entries into the narrative flow, it is not only because I deem this necessary, but also because nothing less will bring out the fragmentary and protean nature of his story.<sup>14</sup>

## Chronology

When I first tried to conceptualise a framework to accommodate Kikang's life story, several questions were foremost in my mind: Where should I begin my account? Which of Kikang's episodes should go first? And how would that shape the rest of the story's structure?

I have already pointed out that Kikang wanted his life story to be told chronologically. We agreed that I would re-arrange his testimonies in chronological order. Several entries in the first journal show that, long before our encounter, Kikang had himself attempted to work out an accurate timeline for his life and career:

**STORY BOOK**

**SIBOG YEAR 1946**

**COMMUNICATION FROM MR. J. KIKANG. HE CAME TO THE VILLAGE OF SIBOG. HE BECAME LULUAI IN 1947 AND HE RESIGNED IN 1964 HE LAID DOWN HIS WORK AS LULUAI. AND IN 1970 HE BECAME COUNCILLOR.**

'Sibog Year 1946'—this entry exhibits the typical features of a retrospective. Kikang has his life story commence in the post-war era. In 1946 after a long absence he had finally returned to his village of birth. But this note apparently did not satisfy him. Immediately below it, Kikang wrote a new version. There he was at pains to extend the timeline, and dated the beginning of his story from the time of his departure from home.

**STORY OF J. KIKANG WHEN HE LEFT HIS VILLAGE AND IN 1917 WENT TO THE WHITES. HE WORKED WITH THE WHITES AND HE CAME BACK TO SIBOG IN 1946. IN 1947 HE BECAME LULUAI. HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VILLAGE AND IN 1964 HE CEASED HIS WORK. IN 1970 HE BECAME COUNCILLOR, COUNCILLOR OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR SIBOG IN 1970. THE PARENTS OF KIKANG SAY HE WAS BORN IN THE YEAR**

At this point the entry breaks off. His exact date of birth was something that clearly weighed with Kikang. In some sense, to be a full person required the year of birth. One of the pre-printed headings in Sibog's village register was 'Estimated or known year of birth'. Under this heading, an Australian administrative officer had placed after Kikang's name his (estimated) year of birth: 1917. Yet, in the above entry, Kikang dates his departure for work with the whites to that year. As related to me, this act of leaving home marked the beginning of his life story:

I was no more than a child when I left my village and set off. In what year that was I can no longer say. Apart from the mission and a few government officers, by the time of my departure not very many whites had ever been to see us. My mother had died and father was now looking after us. A friend of my father's had come up from the coast. Accompanying him was a firm that was hiring workers. They were looking for a couple of young men to work in some plantations. I took

a liking to this man. After all, he was a friend of my father's. I took a good look at him and liked what I saw. Why? He was wearing pants—and the loincloths, you know what I mean? I took a look at them, and then I wanted one for myself. That's why I went away. Father said: 'No way! You're not going.' I said: 'But I want to go!' And so the man took me with him, together with a friend of mine. They paid for us. They gave my father an axe and a knife. That was the price. At the time I was still quite young. I didn't even have a real bark loin-covering. So I went to the coast. That was where the firm was located. Here they gave me a loincloth. I was very glad when I could put it on.

Kikang then narrated how he had arrived with other recruited workers in Madang, the nearest colonial centre. There he met a doctor from England whose job was to examine the new arrivals. Kikang was, the doctor decided, far too young for plantation labour. That was why the Englishman finally took the boy home with him. There Kikang fell in with the indigenous housekeeper, who ran the European-style household, and she became his foster mother.

This episode about the young Kikang leaving his village shows how I take my bearings from Kikang's autobiographical testimonies. His written notes supply me with important indications as to how best to construct Kikang's life story. Hence his life story does not commence with his birth or early childhood. Instead, he chooses to begin it with his departure from home—a phase of transition. In his narrative, he actively brings about this transition against his father's will. In so doing, he positions himself in an interstice, evoking a liminal zone between his home region and the world of the whites. Kikang sees himself as mediating between different worlds—and this image of the mediator will run through his whole life story.

Turning over a few more pages in Kikang's first journal, we arrive at a third entry that further attempts to order his life temporally.<sup>15</sup> Again Kikang chooses to begin with his departure for the colonial settlements of the whites. But then the entry takes new turns. One novelty is that he now numbers (in the left-hand margin) the different phases of his journey through life. Another is that the text is broken into two blocks. In the first, Kikang describes his secular career. The second (and new) block is devoted to Kikang's spiritual experiences and messages.

Rai Coast No 1

MOT AREA SIBOG

No 1 John Kikang left his village in 1917, he went to the white station. And in 1919 he began school at Kavieng. He was the first person from Sibog to go to school. And in 1946 he went back to his village. Sibog was given a Luluai in 1946 and he became Luluai in the YEAR 1947.

No 2 John Kikang became Luluai in 1947. And in 1964 he stopped

No 3 In July 10/7/70 he became councillor.

No 6 On 10/11/77 John Kikang went and was given a message by Christ.

No 1 ON THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT A GREAT FIRE WILL COME DOWN AND ALL PLACES ON EARTH WILL BURN ALONG WITH THE ONES WHO ARE BURDENED WITH GREAT SINS.

No 2 TO KILL PEOPLE and TO STEAL MONEY and GREAT OFFENCES, TO DISOBEY THE WORD OF GOD.

No 3 and he taught a new prayer with a song from Sibog itself he named ATAT.

No 4 And all songs from Sibog itself and also the praying, you shall not only address to the Almighty.

No 5 if you want something, you must let Him know and HOLY MARY too. You want something.

No 6 You must turn to me, so I can send you something. I died on the CROSS.

No 7 Through my blood I have taken all sins on myself. And J. Kikang asked about the Day of Judgement and he

No 8 said, when ALL YOUR TEETH have fallen out, then he will come; take this message DOWN to your people.

No 9 You shall not be afraid of dying. It is a good thing. The body knows many pains. The SOUL knows no pain, everyone is well, without disease and wounds. Then he STUNG each of the eyes of J. Kikang. And he sent him back to EARTH. On SATURDAY IN THE NIGHT. Day 10. Nov. 1977.

Kikang wrote this

Here we see Kikang tightening his story's chronology by means of enumeration. This entry indicates, in my view, that Kikang associated a modern life story with linking together in linear sequence the various stations of his life.

Of special note is that the spiritual part of the entry is given a greater share of space than the secular. This weighting reflects a significant shift in Kikang's own life. After returning home in 1946 he became active above all in the economic and political sector, a role he continued to play up to the 1970s. At the end of the 1970s, however, he began increasingly to identify with the office and functions of a Christian missionary/priest. With his usual application, he took to studying Christian discourses and practices, the End of Days, death and dying, time and space in the Beyond. Kikang's second journal, the 'Holy Book 1983' is not the only evidence for this; in the second half of our interviews he spoke at length on Christian projects as well as on messages and visions. He was now intently anticipating the life that follows death. The closing sequence of the entry above demonstrates this new preoccupation, though the statement that Christ sent Kikang back to earth with a message on death and the Beyond shows how even in this late phase of his life, Kikang continued to present himself as a mediator. Whereas in the early postwar decades he mediated with colonial officers and mission representatives to promote modernisation in his home region, in later years, he increasingly mediated between the worlds of the living and the dead.

## Dialogue

In addition to articulating Kikang's written entries with his oral accounts and ordering these chronologically, I have found dialogue indispensable in constructing Kikang's life story. Although I foreground Kikang's self-representations as continuous text, I have inserted selected excerpts from our conversations. These dialogues serve to remind readers that they are dealing with a co-construction—one that has emerged from the interaction of two variously aged men of different cultural backgrounds.<sup>16</sup>

By including passages of dialogue, I can better analyse two core aspects of our cooperation. First, Kikang would often appeal to me explicitly, include me in the flow of his narrative, ask me questions or refer back to previous interviews and statements. To illustrate, let me take Kikang's account of how he came to learn his date of birth. I was most surprised when he raised this matter at our very first interview:

Kikang: By the way, I know too when my mother gave birth to me. That I can tell you right now. See for yourself. I have written it down [showing me his small notebook]. That's when I was born [pointing to the note 'Mar 3/31/1902']. Wrote it down myself, I did. Just like that.

Wolfgang: *Good. And how did you come across this date?*

Kikang: Well, we're able to dream. You know what I mean, dream?

Wolfgang: *Yes. And so you found that out in a dream?*

Kikang: Yes. I fell asleep. I used to think a lot about my [deceased] mother. And one day she appeared to me [in a dream]. By then I was already a young man. Mother came and said to me: 'The day on which I gave birth to you is this one' [Kikang pointed to the date in his notebook]. So what do you think? Do you think I'm right about this?

Wolfgang: *Well, it's your story. If you look at it like that, it could well be true.*

Kikang: So I immediately got up and wrote it down. Later on I thought: 'That's my day now.' Ever since then I take that day off and rest up a little.

Wolfgang: *Yes, that's what we do too—on a birthday.*

Kikang: At first I wasn't sure if my mother wasn't playing tricks with me. But later, on another occasion, she came to me again in the night. That was during the war.

Kikang then described how he first journeyed to the Beyond in a dream and talked of his experiences during World War II. But the exchange above shows, in my view, just how much having a date of birth to call his own mattered to Kikang. He saw this as a prerequisite for having a modern life story. What he hoped to get from me was more than just recognition of his chosen path, along which he had found his birthday. He was also signalling his equal status with whites generally and with their European notions of personhood. He wanted my confirmation, too, that by possessing his own birthday he qualified as having a modern life story.

My second reason for retaining various dialogues within Kikang's otherwise continuous narrative is because long sequences of it are only there, at least in that form, because of questions I had put. These were due, first, to my interest in local history, prompting me to seek insights into events that had shaped the region. But I also questioned Kikang about entries that I could make no sense of. To illustrate, I reproduce below a page from the second journal. Its entries date from between May and July 1984. The topmost (and the first for May) tells of a fight between Christians and non-Christians in a neighbouring village. The next refers to the Pope's visit to Papua New Guinea in May 1984. Then follows a note on holy men in the same neighbouring village, whom Kikang had seen while he was dreaming. Next, he notes a (dream-)encounter with dead persons from the Chimbu region of Papua New Guinea. The last entry names the places where the souls of the dead may abide; Kikang has also included a small explanatory sketch.

May 4/84 Message from the catechist at Sisagel. The heathen are fighting, says the Church. The people. The villages of Umboldi, Guyarak, Namga, Amun, Sor, Sibog and Silaling met up. Then there was a fight with the Catholics. And the heathens struck one of the Christians and one remained unharmed, but another was hurt. He later got better though.

May 8/5/84 The Holy Father Pope John Paul is coming to Papua New Guinea.

May 17/5/84 Holy Church message. In Sisagel, there are two groups of holy men, one wearing blue clothing and the other black. These two groups are the holy men in Sisagel.

Jun 13/6/84 J. Kikang saw men from Chimbu, dead men who greeted him.

Jul 2.7.84 John K. saw (1) klinpaia and (2) limbo and (3) pullkatori and (4) heaven. Four places where the souls go to. It is the story of the dead and where their souls abide.

The commandments

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
T N S P K S S G M K

O 4  
O 3  
O 2  
O 1



The four places of God the Father

Church meeting on the 1st of May 84

10 commandments, taught to the people as the 10 Commandments of Moses.

I asked Kikang about the last of these entries, dated 2 July 1984:

Wolfgang: *You have already spoken a couple of times now about journeying to Paradise or Heaven or Purgatory. Now in these notes of yours you write at one point: 'John K. saw (1) klinpaia and (2) limbo and (3) pullkatori and (4) heaven. Four places where the souls go to. It is the story of the dead and where their souls abide.' And you've made a little sketch as well. And underneath you've written: 'The four places of God the Father.' Can you say a little bit more about what these places are like?*

Kikang: ... Look at it this way, hell is where we are now—here on our land ... So you have someone here on the land. Then he dies. And he

has saddled himself down with guilt. So then he can't just get up and go. First he has to stay here a while. He can't just leave. First he's going to have to stay here on this land. And then the people that's us [the living] we have to pray. Yes, pray! It goes something like this: 'O God our Father, help, help, help.' And you just keep doing that, let's say, for 10 years or even more than that. Good, so the exact number of years is laid down in advance. Now, when he's got the last year behind him, now he'll be able to leave the place. So now he leaves the place and on he goes to the next one. Now if he's not a good person—[that means for him] first of all [a stint in] Klinpaia [i.e. station 1] ... That's a bit like Madang. A small town. So [he] stays in Klinpaia for, let's say, 12 to 20 years. And once again it's pray, pray, pray. Well then, so eventually he's done with Klinpaia. He gets the day behind him that was laid down for him. It's time now for him to go on to limbo [i.e. station 2]. So limbo is a good place. It's a good place. It is beautiful. Everything is laid on ... So there he stays. Then [what happens is that] he sets off from limbo. From there he now goes on to Pullkatori [i.e. station 3]. This is a perfectly holy place. As for paradise [i.e. station 4], that is the place of the tiny children. We adults never go there. That is for the tiny children—[who are] without sin. They do not know guilt. They were still too little when they died ... So I was in contact with the dead people, and I asked them: 'Where are you now?' And they said: 'We are in Klinpaia.' Well, I knew that is just a place like Madang. Nothing special about it ... Later—it was in another year—I prayed and then I asked them: 'And where are you now?' I was told: 'I am in Moresby [i.e. Limbo].' So I said to myself: 'Ah, I see, so it's Moresby now you've got to.' Still later I repeated my question—and all the while the praying was going on and on—'When are you going to leave Moresby?' And then I was told: 'I've already left Moresby. Now I'm in Australia.' Then I said: 'So he's finally arrived in the city. Now he's in Australia. That is Pullkatori. That is where Pullkatori is. Very close to heaven. There it's just like being in Australia. The places are like cities.' ... Madang is a small town and that's how you have to imagine Klinpaia. Lovely houses. People filled with joy. Now if you leave Madang behind you and go on to Port Moresby, then it's like you're in a big town. Lots of wonderful houses. Good roads. And after that comes Australia. Well you know how it is there, a real city. All of the time you just see machines working. Houses with lots of levels. Well, that's how you've got to imagine this place Pullkatori. All the people living there are happy. They are well-off. No hard work anymore ... Those are the messages the dead pass on to me. Well, that's what I ask all of them. All those who have died, I ask them [the same question], and they give me the answer ... But if one of them tells me 'I've gone to

Australia', then I don't pray for him anymore. Then I'm through [with praying]. He has already arrived. He's come home ... Well, that's how things stand with us humans after we die.

Kikang's cosmological imaginations of the Beyond depicted a moral trajectory from country to city, blackness to whiteness, sinfulness to redemption. The route to be travelled by the dead was clearly prefigured, leading out of the world of rural villages on the Rai Coast, passing through Papua New Guinea's urban centers, and ending in a land inhabited by white people. Thus the first station on the route was the so-called Klinpaia, a place marked by minor tribulations, which for Kikang was very like the provincial capital of Madang. Limbo, the next station, was something of an improvement, being a major town with many tall buildings; Kikang likened it to Port Moresby—Papua New Guinea's capital and largest city. The third station, which Kikang described as Pullkatori, was a 'holy place' (*ples santu*)—a city located in Australia.<sup>17</sup> The fourth and last place—'Heaven' in this hierarchy of levels—Kikang referred to, finally, as 'Paradise'. To this Garden of Eden, a landscape where all was pure and pristine, only small children, who had died young and so were free from all sin, could have access, according to Kikang. His primary focus, however, was on the sequence of urban landscapes in the Beyond that finally leads into the land of the whites and the heavenly city. This he conceived as a European-style city, at once holy place and epitome of modernity.<sup>18</sup>



Kikang once showed me a revealing photograph from his personal documents. Probably taken by a Catholic missionary at the beginning of the 1950s, it pictures one of the earliest Catholic churches in Kikang's home village. In front stands the man who designed and built it, John Kikang himself. The building, resembling a pagoda, is in a style not usual for this region of Papua New Guinea. But to eyes informed by Kikang's imaginings of the respective abodes of the dead, its stack of four storeys is clearly an architectonic parallel of his four-tiered model of the Beyond.

## Final Remarks

A central feature of Kikang's autobiographical writings and oral narratives is the linkage between the two worlds of the living and the dead. Dream-journeys are, therefore, no less significantly implicated in how he constitutes his modern self than are his real-world journeys to, and identifications with, the world of the whites in a colonial and post-colonial Papua New Guinea. Kikang would cite both kinds of mobility when claiming for himself authority and agency as a pioneer of modernity. Travelling provided him with the opportunity to tap into novel power-knowledge from the other world, whether it came from the whites or from the dead. In his writings and narratives, Kikang made the other world of the whites and the dead the central reference-point of his mimetic practice. By taking his bearings from discourses and practices from the other world, he was able to constitute whiteness, power-knowledge and modernity as core components of the local world and the indigenous self.<sup>19</sup> Rural home region and urban centres of modernity, blackness and whiteness, the world of the living and the world of the dead—instead of treating these as mutually exclusive domains, Kikang chose to 'infol' them, by which I mean that he construed each as containing traces of the other. What Kikang's writings and oral narratives make clear is that he constituted his personal identity as a process in which difference and sameness constrain, even as they pervade, each other.

So when we focus on (auto-)biographies in the Pacific region, what value, then, should we ascribe to constructions and experiences of sameness and difference? In terms of the role played by otherness in articulating identity, are idiosyncratic features discernible in Oceania? Might it not be that alterity—in its historically and culturally specific modes of articulation—is a distinctive characteristic of biographies in the Pacific region?

I construe Kikang's representations of his life as products of mimetic processes of transculturation embodied in his person. The account given here of his life is an attempt to comprehend these. His writings and what he told me himself have been my primary sources. Three principles have guided me in constructing Kikang's life story. First, I articulate his written notes with his oral narratives so as to set up reciprocal points of reference, all the while preserving each format's autonomy. In other words, they should be recognisable in their difference, despite being referenced to each other. Second, Kikang's efforts to create for himself a chronologically ordered, individual life story struck me as noteworthy. If I dwell on his initiatives in this direction, it is because they correspond, in my opinion, to his mimetic practice and his notions of modernity. At the same time, Kikang invariably links this chronological order to parallel time-spaces. In Kikang's imaginative world, the borders between spaces and times are rather more porous than is the case in the dominant Western discourse. It is interesting to note how he evades, at least in part, the modern idea of time

with its radical separation of past, present and future<sup>20</sup> —as when he receives messages from Christ, or commutes between the worlds of the living and the dead, or reconstructs his date of birth via his dream-journeys. In particular, it was Kikang's explanations of the exchanges between the time-spaces of the living and the dead that persuaded me to incorporate dialogue as a third principle in attempting to construe his life story. His representations concerning these matters were largely prompted by the questions I put to him. It therefore occurred to me that reproducing our dialogues was an excellent way to recall our co-construction of his life story; further, that I could render it comprehensible with the help of selected passages. At the start of this chapter, I stated my conviction that reflection on how we tell Pacific lives and change these in the telling should be seen as reflection on mimetic processes. The literary critic Arne Melberg has pointed out that '*Mimesis* is never a homogeneous term, and if its basic movement is towards similarity it is always open to the opposite'.<sup>21</sup> Thus mimesis designates a way of articulating similarity and difference.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> J.L. Peacock and D.C. Holland, 'The narrated self: life stories in process', review article, *Ethos*, 21: 3 (1993), 367-383.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>3</sup> G. Gebauer and Ch. Wulf, *Mimesis: culture – art – society* (Berkeley 1995), 2-4; *Spiel - Ritual – Geste. Mimetisches Handeln in der sozialen Welt* (Hamburg 1998); *Mimetische Weltzugänge. Soziales Handeln – Rituale und Spiele – ästhetische Produktion* (Stuttgart 2003), 102-26.

<sup>4</sup> Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, 317.

<sup>5</sup> W. Kempf, 'Mobilität und der Traum vom besseren Leben: Routen und Visionen eines Wegbereiters der Modernität in Papua-Neuguinea', in E. Hermann and B. Röttger-Rössler (eds), *Lebenswege im Spannungsfeld lokaler und globaler Prozesse: Person, Selbst und Emotion in der ethnologischen Biografieforchung* (Münster 2003), 43-63.

<sup>6</sup> W. Kempf and E. Hermann, 'Dreamscapes: transcending the local in initiation rites among the Ngaing of Papua New Guinea', in R.I. Lohmann (ed.), *Dream Travelers: sleep experiences and culture in the western Pacific* (New York 2003), 60-85; E. Hermann, *Emotionen und Historizität. Der emotionale Diskurs über die Yali-Bewegung in einer Dorfgemeinschaft der Ngaing, Papua New Guinea* (Berlin 1995), 56-59.

<sup>7</sup> M. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: a particular history of the senses* (London and New York 1993), 131-133.

<sup>8</sup> D. Holland, 'Selves as cultured: as told by an anthropologist who lacks a soul', in R.D. Ashmore and L. Jussim (eds), *Self and Identity: fundamental issues* (Oxford 1997), 171-179; B.M. Knauff, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia and Anthropology* (Ann Arbor 1999), 169-180; G.M. White, 'Afterword: lives and histories', in P.J. Stewart and A. Strathern (eds), *Identity Work: constructing Pacific lives* (Pittsburgh 2000), 172-187.

<sup>9</sup> E.V. Smith, Portion Mot C.S.D. Patrol Report No. 8 (A) 60/61. National Archives of Papua New Guinea (Waigani 1960/61).

<sup>10</sup> J.K. McCarthy, Saidor, Department of Native Affairs, Konedobu, Papua, 20th February, 1963, Patrol Report No. 6-62/63, 1. National Archives of Papua New Guinea (Waigani, 1963).

<sup>11</sup> F. Mihalic, *The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin* (Milton 1986 [1971]).

<sup>12</sup> A. Strathern (trans. and ed.), *Ongka: a self-account by a New Guinea big-man* (London 1979).

<sup>13</sup> R.M. Keesing, *Elota's Story: the life and times of a Solomon Islands big man* (Fort Worth 1983 [1978]); J. Fifi'i, *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: my life between two worlds*, trans. and ed. R.M. Keesing (Honiara 1989); A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart, *Collaborations and Conflicts: a leader through time* (Fort Worth 2000); M. Kwa'ioloa, *Living Traditions: a changing life in Solomon Islands as told by Michael Kwa'ioloa to Ben Burt* (Honolulu 1997).

<sup>14</sup> P. Hemenstall, 'Sniffing the person: writing lives in Pacific history', in B.V. Lal and P. Hemenstall (eds), *Pacific Lives, Pacific Places: bursting boundaries in Pacific history* (Canberra 2001), 34-46; M. Goldsmith and D. Munro, *The Accidental Missionary: tales of Elekana* (Christchurch 2002), xiii-xv, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Kikang sometimes writes in lower case and sometimes in upper case, the latter presumably to highlight points of importance. I have reproduced his practice.

<sup>16</sup> V. Crapanzano, 'Life-histories', *American Anthropologist*, 86:4 (1984), 953-960; Peacock and Holland, 'The Narrated Self'.

<sup>17</sup> W. Kempf, 'Cosmologies, cities and cultural constructions of space: Oceanic enlargements of the world', *Pacific Studies*, 22:2 (1999), 107.

<sup>18</sup> A similar conception was documented some time back by the anthropologist Peter Lawrence, who at the end of the 1940s and again in the 1950s did fieldwork in the Madang region with, among others, the Ngaing in the vicinity of the Rai coast. The Heaven to which the dead went, according to Lawrence, was in a part of Sydney or, in another version, it was in the clouds over Sydney. Peter Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo* (Melbourne 1964), 77-78.

<sup>19</sup> W. Kempf, 'The politics of incorporation: masculinity, spatiality and modernity among the Ngaing of Papua New Guinea', *Oceania*, 73: 1 (2002), 56-77.

<sup>20</sup> M.R. Trouillot, 'The otherwise modern: Caribbean lessons from the savage slot', in B.M. Knauft (ed.), *Critically Modern: alternatives, alterities, anthropologies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis 2002), 220-37.

<sup>21</sup> A. Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge 1995), 3.