Preface

Sticks and stones may break my bones
But names can never hurt me.

The incidents recounted in this book happened to real people, but I have too much respect for them as persons to label them with the names by which they are commonly known, and often readily identifiable, in their own land. They have been kind enough to allow me to observe, hear about, and record behaviour which they themselves have often known to be scurrilous, immoral, and sometimes illegal in the eyes of Australian immigrants and expatriates. This kindness was made possible initially by Mr Jack Emanuel (Acting District Officer at Minj at the time of my arrival in 1953) explaining to their leaders that my work was to find out about and understand what I could of the ways of the local people. In the days when the *kiap*'s word was law, he instructed the leaders that they and their people must help me in this work. Their initial difficulty in regarding the task of learning the ways of a particular people as 'work' was overcome when I explained to them that I was not simply doing this for my own interest but was paid by a *bigpela masta istap long Canberra*. The *bigpela masta* was modelled largely on the late Professor S.F. Nadel,[1] the head of the department in which I was collecting material for a doctoral thesis; but his image was expanded to include some aspects of The Australian National University's relations, as an educational institution, with one of its research scholars and also to account for my reactions, which I could not refrain from expressing verbally at times, to communications from my particular supervisor of studies. The people among whom I lived and worked had no means of knowing that the demands of impending thesis-writing loomed larger in my mind than the demands of a particular professor of Anthropology and Sociology in my insistence on precision in detail, accurate dating of past events, and such matters.

I hope that the people among whom I worked and propose to work further will eventually be literate enough in both English and their own vernacular to read this book and judge for themselves what it contributes to an understanding of a particular period in their life. The language that is their own (and which I call Minj Agamp Yu)[2] is rich in overtone. It is a marvellous language for punning, in which they themselves delight. Possibly the best puns are those using words with different connotations in Minj Agamp Yu and Pidgin. Playing on words that

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1   Siegfried Frederick Nadel (24 April 1903-14 January 1956), known as Fred Nadel, was an Austrian-born anthropologist, who specialized in African ethnography. In 1950 he was appointed to the Inaugural Chair in Anthropology at The Australian National University, also shortly becoming Dean of the Research School of Pacific Studies. He died unexpectedly at the age of 53 of a coronary thrombosis after only a short time in residence in Canberra.

2   See Editor's Introduction regarding Akamp; yu 'language'.

have at least three distinct meanings (in one language or another, or both, and also in one or more of the secret vocabularies in either tongue) is not unusual. When they grasp the subtleties of English they will probably be responsible for the most complex and semantically exciting puns ever devised.

Many of the names I have given for the characters in this series of sketches are simple, direct translations of the vernacular names into their English equivalents. English versions of some names are derived logically from their verbal components, but these are often ambiguous and some names are not directly associated by the people themselves with the particular derivations that can be identified. The system of naming these people follow is so different from our own that an occasional name may startle or mystify a reader, so a word of explanation may be in order. The people of the Middle Wahgi tend to use the total resources of their language in bestowing personal names. Most names refer directly or indirectly to some incident or saying that took place about the time of a person's birth;[3] but when a person dies his name is often perpetuated by being 'changed' or substituted for the name by which a young relative has been known up to this time. Thus the name may refer to an incident or saying from the time of birth of some long forgotten ancestor, and sometimes the incident or saying is not even known precisely to the parent who bestows the name. It seems quite probable that personal names for which no meaning can be found may have been derived in this way and corrupted later, over the generations, until they have no apparent semantic content at all. The names I give in Chapter 3 as Ko I and Ko II are common female names beginning with Ko, one ending with the word for 'no' and the other ending with a second person singular verb form.

Trees, flowers, weapons, and the elements of ceremony are commonly found names. With all the resources of language to choose from, some givers of names have selected parts of speech (particularly participles and second personal singular verbs). Place names serve as personal names; natural and manufactured objects are common. Biological processes yield names which are used in conversation without shame or embarrassment, and when a man's name is found to be Defecating or Vomit this does not allege anything about his personal habits. A woman is called Love (which should be understood in a strictly physical sense) simply because her father came upon a public petting party soon after her birth. Another is called Harlot because she was with her mother in the birth-hut when a potential prostitute arrived in the territory of her father's clan.

The man whose name I have translated as Defecating had that name bestowed on him as a child, but in adulthood he is addressed and referred to by a

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3   As elsewhere in the Central Highlands; see Merlan, Francesca and Alan Rumsey 1991. *Ku Waru: Language and Segmentary Politics in the Western Nebilyer Valley, Papua New Guinea*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 236-238.

double-barrelled name which I have had to translate for brevity as Defecating-In-Law. The second part of the name is not a direct translation of 'affinal relative' [relative by marriage], it is a common term of address for men who maintain two places of residence and alternate between them. One or two men in each clan are addressed by this term. The only alternative places of residence a man ever has are the territories of his own patrilineal clan and that of his wife's clan, so it is by virtue of being an 'in-law' to the men of the latter clan that he receives this designation. This clan has almost invariably at least one other man with the same bestowed name as the affine, so the special term of address is a distinguishing device.

Readers who are acquainted with my earlier book, *The Kuma* (Melbourne University Press for the A.N.U. 1959),[4] will recognize that the people I call Minj Agamp[5] here are the same people as I called Kuma then. I considered but rejected retaining the earlier designation for consistency. Certainly in 1953-55 the people living north of the Wahgi River referred to the southerners collectively, when they had to do so, as 'Kuma'; but by 1963 they had dropped this practice. The establishment of distinct local government councils north and south of the river, making the entire southern region the 'Minj Council area', provided the northerners with a handy label for the southerners as a whole—the Minj people (Minj Agamp in the vernacular). Considering the real barrier to communications the wide and swiftly flowing Wahgi River constituted before it was effectively bridged in the mid-50s, and the nature of the pre-European contacts between north and south, it seems certain that the 1953-55 collective name 'Kuma' was just as much an introduced label as the later 'Minj' designation. It was a less effective label. The name 'kuma' is an abbreviation of Konumbuga, the name of the largest clan south of the Wahgi. It signified primarily the name of the phratry[6] centred about the Minj River, a phratry which included Konumbuga clan and was distinguished as the 'real' Kuma whenever it was necessary to make it clear that this phratry alone was referred to, and not the people of the south as a whole. The people called 'Kuma' in 1953-55 constituted a unit for patrol officers who made separate census patrols on foot on either side of the river, and also for an anthropologist trying to find a reasonable unit of less intensive study than the intimate clan-community; but the local people themselves had no other real occasion for seeing all people situated south of the river as a unit. The northerners exchanged wives and trading partners with particular clans in the south but had no occasion for developing a special term for southerners as such until they and the southerners were being censused.

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4   See Reay, Marie 1959. *The Kuma: Freedom and Conformity in the New Guinea Highlands*. Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press.

5   Minj people. Reay uses 'Minj Agamp' and 'Minj people' alternately in this book.

6   A term used in anthropology to refer to larger units which interact in ritual, marriage or other affairs, sometimes also called a 'super-clan' unit.

Konumbuga, which has always been in modern times the most numerous and eminent clan in the south of the Middle Wahgi, was exceptionally successful in warfare and had more enemies of long standing among individual clans than any other group. A clan in the Middle Wahgi would read an unforgiveable insult into any attempt to subsume it for scientific or any other purposes under a name that is a simple abbreviation of the name of its traditional enemy, and I hope that any future member of the Minj Agamp who is able to read my earlier book will view with tolerance an anthropologist's effort to integrate into her mode of classification the fashion of a particular era in which her first fieldwork in the region was done.

Agamp means 'people'. Etymologically it is plainly derived from the words 'eastern woman'[7] (or women), and I do not want to be dogmatic about why it should have been derived in that way. It seems likely that it may express a migration from the direction of Mount Hagen in earlier times. And part of the answer will doubtless be that Minj Agamp Yu (the language whose speakers call it the only 'true speech') is essentially the language of a male speaker, so that any term for 'people in general' (including both male and female) would need to specify not both male and female but simply some idea of 'women as well as ourselves'. Being a woman myself, I try to show in this book that the women of the Minj Agamp are people in their own right and not simply specific adjuncts to a male-dominated society.

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7   As discussed in the Editor's Introduction, the form cited does not relate to the word for 'east', which contains a velar lateral [*akl*]. This one is [*akamp*]. Reay seems to have incorrectly identified the consonant.