A STRUGGLE WITH SPIRITS: HIERARCHY, RITUALS AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN A SEPIK COMMUNITY

Borut Telban

Introduction

Ambonwari village, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, has encountered significant social and cultural changes over the last 10 years. On 4 December 1994 a statue of the Virgin Mary was brought to the villages of Ambon Subdistrict followed by a visit of seminarists from Wewak. That was the time, the Ambonwari say, when the Holy Spirit entered their village and their bodies. People were falling into trance and beginning to speak in tongues. Bob Kanjik Anjapi, a big man and the most powerful traditional leader of the village, died a few years later. At the beginning of the new millennium the most experienced and influential traditional healer, Tobias Yangi Akawi, was also dead as was Bob’s brother, Andrew Andari Anjapi, a specialist in bamboo divination. Although there were two men still alive who could perform a healing ceremony and divination, they were much less experienced, less powerful and less respected. Suddenly the link with their spirits was weakened. Ambonwari

1. A preliminary version of this chapter was presented at the International Workshop (Power and Hierarchy; Religious Conversions, Ritual Constructions, and Cosmological Belief Systems in Asia and the Indo-Pacific), co-organized by Dr. Pamela J. Stewart, Prof. Andrew Strathern, and Dr. Guo Pei-yi, at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, 30 May–1 June 2003. I thank Allan Young, Pamela J. Stewart, Andrew Strathern, and Michael Young for their comments on an earlier draft.
sago grubs to bandicoot, and coconut to breadfruit, though they eat all the latter foodstuffs as well. Across Konmei Creek and up the hill lies an even bigger village, Imammeri, long-time enemies of Ambonwari. They speak a different language and Ambonwari regard them as mountain people lacking the relevant skills needed for life amid the swamps of the lowlands. Further upriver, towards the northeast, lies Kansimei (representing another different language group), which is a much poorer and smaller village. During last few years its inhabitants have been seriously involved in collecting eucalyptus. Downriver towards the southwest lies Konmei, a Karawari-speaking village that was built a few generations ago by immigrants from Manjurau who were searching for a better fishing spot. Although they are in constant conflict over their borders with Ambonwari they nevertheless recognize, as Kansimei do, Ambonwari's and Imammeri's domination of the area.

Ambonwari's patrilineal lineages are grouped in twelve clans that can be regarded as 'domestic units' or 'wards' of fathers and brothers whose wives joined them from other clans and more rarely from other villages. Their social organization, clan and village leadership, their Omaha-type kinship system, the organization of life in individual houses, their land ownership, naming system, men's houses, rituals, and spirit-based traditional religion, are all based on myths of origin and an elaborate cosmology.

Over the last sixty years or so, however, Ambonwari became more and more influenced by new beliefs and practices encroaching from the wider Sepik area and the Ambonwari life-world began to change. These changes were material, social and cultural, and involved people's engagement in education, business, travel and new religious practices. Before World War Two Ambonwari men had already left the village to work on copra plantations. During the war Japanese soldiers made two camps in a vicinity of the village. In the 1950s the village was collectively baptised, though missionaries did not live in the village. Looking at the map of Ambonwari village that the late Anthony Forge (personal communication) sketched in May 1959, one can see a large building designated as a church. In 1960 the Ambon government station, complete with an elementary school, began to operate. In 1977 Ambonwari and Imammeri built a new elementary school near Konmei Creek at the place called Karubat.

Among many changes in material culture, people remember how in the 1960s they started to use newspaper for rolling cigarettes and slowly abandoned the use of banana leaves. At that time the first radio came to the village and in order to adopt it properly and at the same time introduce it to their spirits, Ambonwari performed an inauguration ritual (see Telban 1998: 105–108). In the 1970s large-scale commercial enterprises entered the Karawari area: first timber and then later pear and palm. In more recent times Ambonwari women men
introduced open-air 'disco' to the village, while the sound of acoustic guitars began to be heard in the afternoons and evenings. They even bought generators to provide power for a television and a video player. Although broken today, these pieces of equipment belong to Steven, an Ambonwari man who for decades has held the position of Aid Post Orderly in Ambon. In 2001 several new species of large fish appeared in the surrounding rivers and creeks. As this occurred at the same time as many other introduced things, people were at first extremely suspicious and refused to eat them. After two brave men survived eating these fish—one of which was named rubber mouth or pig nose and the other red belly or, because of its sharp man-like teeth, testicle cutter—this new food took pride of place in the villagers' daily diet.

While all introduced things, animals, and practices, including education and Christianity, were easily adopted and were either filtered through or co-existed with their cosmological worldview, it was not until the end of 1994 that a major cultural change occurred in the area. That year is well remembered as the beginning of a Catholic charismatic movement whose main features included trance, speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing practices, and, of course, possession by the Holy Spirit. It was this movement that quickly undermined people's relationships with their spirits. It was the first time that a group of mainly younger Ambonwari people, both male and female, through passionate participation in new charismatic rituals, began to address the cosmogonical issues of their existence.

**Cosmology and Spirits**

Ambonwari people and their carved spirits were first baptised in the 1950s. Men reluctantly and anxiously accepted directives given by a visiting Roman Catholic bishop to bring their secret spirits out of the men's house (Telban 1997b). A special small house was built in the forest, where the carved spirit-crocodiles, skulls, stones, shields, flutes and other spirit-objects were placed and left to decay. People told their spirits that they should leave and go wherever they wanted. That was a period when many men abandoned the spirits—skulls, bones and stones—from the leading houses of their lineages. Retrospectively, it was the end of active interaction with house/lineage spirits and the harbinger of a revolution in religious thinking that would take place about forty years later when the impetus for change came from young Ambonwari people, both male and female. This time it came from within the community and was Catholic charismatic. It had a similar appearance and similar consequences to those of the Pentecostal movement in Fiji as recently discussed by Linda Newland: “While there has long been ambivalence and ambiguity about which local practices could be sustained under Christianity, ... Pentecostal revival has intensified the demonisation of local practice” (2004: 5–6) and the spirits of pre-Christian times have become bad and evil.

Before this happened, however, the Ambonwari re-established their association with their spirits. In 1975, while celebrations of national independence were taking place throughout Papua New Guinea, Ambonwari people, in many ways regretting the withdrawal of colonial administration and uneasy about the changes that might ensue, revived their initiation ritual. After spending two months in a men's house, six young men were fully initiated. Ambonwari men recovered the most important spirit-stones from the forest, built new men's houses, carved new spirit-crocodiles, and made new flutes. Over the next few years they continued to organize initiation rituals: the second one in 1979 (four initiants), the third in 1980 (two initiants) and the fourth in 1981 (five initiants). As I have written elsewhere: “Initiation and first menstruation rituals are not simply transformations of boys and girls into Ambonwari men and women, but are means of regaining and preserving the relationship with their spirits ... They are means of re-forming the Ambonwari cosmology and the life-world which it sustains” (Telban 1998: 225). Moreover, male initiation ritual was a cosmogonical event par excellence.

Ambonwari cosmology can be understood as a continuous process that oscillates between the closing and re-opening of their cosmos. Keeping both macrocosm and microcosm (their bodies, for example) 'closed' was a collective metaphysical construction. Many prescribed and preferred practices pertaining to different issues of their life-world were focused on closure and protection of their cosmos. These practices included the roles of 'fathers' and 'mothers' of the village, obligations between a person and his or her maternal lineage, the institutions of ritual inaugurators and dancing partners, marriage paths, naming system, food taboos, a denial of male defecation (Telban 2004), dance formations, kunang ceremony (better known as naven among the allmum), mourning practices, and above all their continuous relationship with spirits. Ambonwari achieved this state of self-sufficient 'oneness' through the collapse of generations and the denial of sexual differences. This abolition of time was enacted through their use of kin terms, marriage paths, the identification of male members of a clan with their founding ancestor, and the structure of initiation ritual. In this way their past became their future, while in the present each lineage guaranteed its own reproduction through marriage and offspring, by initiating a new relationship with some other lineage from some other clan. The patrilineage could 'perpetuate itself only on condition that it divided its ownness'; yet the only real limit is that of the village's indigenousness” (Telban 1989: 277–8).
On the other hand, Ambonwari community has throughout its past imported and exported material objects, rituals and many other practices—not only from and to many other Sepik villages but also from and to New Guinea communities beyond. Its microcosm and its macrocosm, as far as an ethnographer can trace, have always been open. However, every thing or person that entered their life-world had to pass through a special inauguration rite: humans through initiation and important objects through a customary ‘blessing’ ceremony. One of most important reasons for doing this was to familiarize Ambonwari spirits with new people, new objects, and new practices. The cosmology was always based on the coexistence of humans and spirits, and their past was built on a continually reconstructed and readjusted balance between the living and the dead. We might say that spirits (carved crocodiles, sludrum, flutes, posts, spirits of the dead, forest spirits etc) acted as protectors from the outside world in every sense, thereby enabling people to anticipate a predictable future. While they protected the village from bad things, however, they also kept out the good things. The spirits encircled and closed the village facilitating internal reproduction without outside intrusion; the village was a kind of a bubble which the spirits prevented from bursting. Whenever something upward happened or threatened to happen rituals were performed to settle the problem.

In recent years traditional modes of autonomy came into question. Following the deaths of the traditional leader Bob Kanjiq Avajip (Telban 1997b) in 1999 and the locally renowned traditional healer Tobias Yangi Akawi (Telban 1997a) in 2003 Ambonwari began to reject everything that connected them to their spirits (initiation, men's houses, spirit-crocodiles etc). As they told me during a visit in February and March 2005, they wanted to get rid of two remaining rituals: bamboo divination after a death and the hair-cutting ceremony at the end of the mourning period. Spirits were suddenly seen not as protectors but as the ones primarily responsible for sickness, death, misfortune and poverty. By expelling the spirits of the place—physically removing their icons, denying them food, ceasing to practice relevant rituals (initiation, healing, divination etc.), and generally distancing themselves from the spirits in everyday life, Ambonwari deliberately weakened the cosmological boundaries of the village. The borders that Ambonwari rejected were not simply spatial; they were also temporal. Significantly, by abandoning their ancestral past in the present they were abandoning their ancestral future as well.

Besides origin myths of individual clans (Telban 1998: 142–163) Ambonwari held on to a myth about the beginning of the earth and the cosmogony of humanity. In brief, for several Ambonwari and Imanmeri men all people and all spirits too originated from a large stone ripning in the mountains south of Aralundi River, a tributary of the Karawari (see Telban 1998: 151 fn.18; Roscoe and Telban 2004). Most of the people left immediately after being ‘born’, while the black people stayed to look after mankind’s original homeland. Following this local variant of a very common Melanesian ‘cargo’ myth, they blamed the whites, not because they had left but because they had taken with them the most powerful items, and most importantly the knowledge that helped them to get their wealth. This knowledge enabled the whites to prosper, to build, to invent, and to produce things beyond their black brothers’ expectations. But they never thought of their ‘brothers’ to whom this knowledge also belonged through their shared heritage of cosmogony and place of origin, and they never brought their secret knowledge back to Papua New Guinea. Ambonwari were left with their local spirits who were responsible for their closed life-world. It was not until their experience with charismatics (the gifts of the Holy Spirit) that Ambonwari seriously began to question their customary rituals, their relationships with local spirits, and their own cosmogony.

Hierarchy and Leadership

Many ethnographers have emphasized the egalitarian aspect of social relationships in the Sepik River area. While contrasting ritual hierarchy with secular equality Harrison argued that ritual and the division of ceremonial powers create hereditary inequalities in status and represent not only the model but also the lived experience of hierarchy (1990: 4, 6, 7, 85). Ambonwari hierarchy based on inheritance and a system of leadership that was exclusively in the hands of ritual experts and orators skilled in cosmological knowledge has in recent years, following people’s involvement in charismatic Catholic movement, begun to transform. By beginning to reject their spirits the villagers began to reject many important practices of their ancestors and a significant part of their cosmology. Literacy and newly acquired knowledge became more important than ever. New charismatic rituals were led by new non-traditional leaders and this had a significant impact on village hierarchy.

It is understandable that leaders in general are expected to have certain skills, ritual and oratory in particular, and know how to use relevant knowledge. They should also be fearless and strong, though generous and fair (Telban 2002). Overall, we can say that nowadays leadership in Ambonwari covers five main domains, often overlapping in the case of particular individuals:

- Leadership based on inheritance of roles. ‘Fathers’ and ‘mothers’ of the village ‘Fathers’ of individual clans.
Leadership based on skill. We can count in this group those leaders who are skilled in customary practices, as well as those who acquired certain skills when they worked for wages elsewhere.

Leadership based on government law. Councillors and committees chosen by the villagers and approved by the government.

Religious leadership. Traditional ritual leaders, Catholic Church leaders and leaders of the charismatic movement.

Leadership based on economic power. Those individuals who are paid workers: three Aid Post Orderlies who are mostly absent from the village; two village teachers; and those who work in towns but rarely return to visit their relatives.1

Customary hierarchy of the village is ultimately based on the order of arrival of the first ancestors of every clan and the knowledge (and therefore ownership) of personal and place names, myths, songs, men’s houses, spirits and rituals that they brought with them. Among twelve totemic clans three are particularly important and their wards occupy the following areas: the ward of Bird of Paradise Clan (descendants of Akumbrikupan, the eldest of three brothers, and second to arrive in the region) lies furthest downriver; the ward of Crocodile-1 Clan (the descendants of Kapi, the youngest brother and the founder of the village) lies next to the ward of Bird of Paradise Clan, upriver; and the ward of Crocodile-2 Clan (the descendants of Mammangamay, the second brother and the last to arrive) lies furthest upriver. The only clans whose wards lie furthest upriver are those of ‘latecomers’ who joined the village only a few generations ago from the nearby area called Arkwas. The village and its surrounding landscape are organized according to their cosmology and myths of origin; distribution of land also reflects the order of arrival of clans. When ar-

---

3. Ambonwari, like many other Papua New Guinean communities, developed a specific understanding of the production and use of money. In ritual and exchange contexts money ‘moves’ in the direction of a person’s mother’s brothers. At the same time mother’s brothers provide food, clothes, mosquito nets, cooking pots, radios, and so on. In cosmological contexts, however, Ambonwari search for the cosmogonical origin of money. On different occasions I was asked to bring into the village a device that could produce money or at least plastik (credit cards). This ‘device’ should be understood as a machine and, metaphorically, as knowledge. Such a view is supported by their words: “Money is a knife and an axe used for clearing a forest, for going inside and making a path.” Money became a transformative tool. Not only do these men—no women yet—have access to money, they also have access to a special kind of knowledge—the ‘knowledge of town’ and the ‘knowledge of the white man.’ Ambonwari also say: “Money is a young woman with firm breasts” alluding to its nutrition and function. 

As Francis Bacon said in his Meditations (1597), knowledge is power. However, we might ask, what knowledge? Those in power actually define what counts as knowledge and how to access it (Télban 2001: 11, Flynbjerg 2001: 131). Therefore, to know something you may not only know the col-
A Dual Division of the Village

One aspect that is closely related to village hierarchy and changes in leadership is related to the growth of the village and the increasing number of inhabitants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 1990</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1997</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2001</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Population Growth in Ambonwari (1954–2005)*

While the population between 1990 and 2005 has grown significantly (by 48%) the number of houses in which people actually lived— not counting abandoned houses and those under construction—has remained almost the same (see Table 1). Nevertheless, the village significantly expanded in space towards the north and northeast. Villagers themselves emphasize the recent use of surrounding land for new houses. They say that their village has already stretched almost to the grassland where people go fishing. Over the years it became evident that Ambonwari people began to divide themselves, more forcefully than ever before, into those who live upriver and those who live downriver. Since 1995 the community has had two church leaders: one from upriver and one from downriver. In March 2005 Ambonwari began to consider the possibility of having two councillors, one for the upper part of the village and another for the lower part. When discussing a possibility of buying an outboard motor for the village, several men suggested that I should buy two: one for the upper part of the village and another for the lower part.

This dual division of the village is, on the one hand, contrary to the tripartite division made by the three brothers, the mythical founders of Ambonwari. On the other hand, it restores Ambonwari to the moiety structure which two brothers, Kapi and Akumbrikupan, as representatives of Sun and Moon moieties respectively, established originally (Telban 1998: 71–75, 143–155). This original division, which lies at the foundation of Ambonwari cosmology, can also be seen, for example, in dance and other ceremonial formations when two dancers in the front row represent Kapi and Akumbrikupan, while their third brother from Crocodile-2 Clan and his partner from Cassowary Clan occupy the back row. If the village were to break up, the descendants of two ancestral brothers (members of Bird of Paradise and Crocodile-1 clans) would stay together as downriver people. I would not be surprised if in the near future Am-
bonwari people split and formed two villages similar to those of Yimas-1 and Yimas-2 or Kundiman-1 and Kundiman-2. It could also happen that Ambonwari will divide themselves into three groups, one of which will return to its 'natal' land in Arkwas.


Ambonwari never had any missionaries dwelling in their village and Sunday prayers were for decades attended mainly by a small group of women and children. In 1990, when I began my fieldwork in Ambonwari, a single man named Raymond Yakopia (Eagle-2 Clan), after a week's course in Amboin, became a prayer leader and began to organize Sunday prayers in his own rather small house. From the time of the first arrival of missionaries in the area Ambonwari was nominally a Catholic community. However, their own traditional ways were flourishing and Christian rites were seldom used—almost never in times of crisis such as sickness, death, and other kinds of misfortune. There was coexistence of two religions, Christian and pre-Christian, for some, while others simply followed the ways of their ancestors. The latter was also enforced by the big men, ritual experts, healers and diviners.

On 4 December 1994 a small wooden statue of the Virgin Mary was brought from Wewak to Amboin Parish in order to make a procession circuit around the Karawari area. It was just a few months after Pope John Paul visited Port Moresby. Konmei villagers decorated themselves in their finest traditional ornaments and, singing and dancing, brought the statue to Ambonwari. The statue was kept overnight in the village. People prayed and sang around it and then took it across Konmei Creek to the Kurumbat Primary School where they passed it on to their neighbours, Imanmeri. After a similar night in Imanmeri the statue was taken further up the creek to Kansimel. Kansimel people then took it back to Amboin. While traditional spirit icons were never taken on similar circuits but were confined to individual villages the statue became an icon of regional and not only local religion.

Robin Sarabbi Ingim (Wallaby Clan) does not forget those days. On 4 December 1994 not only the statue of Virgin Mary came to the village but also his firstborn daughter Madeleine died that same day. He explained the days that followed. On 6 December Mother Maria called him while he was lying under his mosquito net. He heard only her mouth saying: "You come! Do not worry! You will look after all those men and women who will get possessed." Although he did not require the power of spirit
the Holy Spirit (he experienced this only later in 1996), he became a leader and began to organize prayer camps and prayer nights. Since the beginning of the movement two women took the lead: Albert’s daughter Augusta who later married another charismatic leader Leonard, and Maureen, the daughter of the late Boniface, a renowned traditional healer. The two women received a gift of prophecy and became so called ‘mothers of the team’. Robin explains:

They received the words and they spoke to me. And I revealed [i.e. translated their words and meanings] to the community. So I said: “We should do it like this, this will happen, the Holy Spirit will come, we have to change, tradition must end.” ... All others, they did not know. They most probably had very different thoughts. Later we did prayer work and with prayers we made people faint, made them rest in the Spirit. And so they too received ‘resting in the Spirit’ and speaking tongues.

In August 1997 Jacob Sangimbi Kamak (Bird of Paradise Clan) told me about the beginnings of the charismatic movement:

The statue had the power of God’s Spirit. I checked the thoughts of many people. It sounded them out. If...

with the Holy Spirit and they used it. Those who were held by the Spirit began to talk in different tongues. There were eight young men and four women. We witnessed this before, in Imamaru. I thought: “How are we going to organize ourselves?” We asked Imamaru to guide us in this matter. They came and stayed overnight with us. They told us: “The Spirit gave you only half of its power. God did not give you the full thing yet.” So we prayed. We sat, talked, prayed for three or four days, and we got it in full. We organized ourselves into a charismatic group. The Spirit held men and women; sometimes they fell down and lay on the ground for a short time. Then they got up and spoke in their specific language [i.e. glossolalia]. Others came and said: “Me too, me too!” So we decided that next time we would make them rest in the Spirit and leave them to experience the power of the Holy Spirit. I said: “It is up to him or her who pretends and who does not.”

Konimei Creek villages (less so Yimas and Kundiman villages on Karawari and Arafundi rivers) were ready to accept such changes in their Catholic ‘path’. The powerful religious experiences of individuals were attributed to the Holy Spirit.
A New Millennium

The Chairman of the charismatic movement for the whole of Ambon Parish and, of course, for Ambonwari in particular, is Robin Sambri. Within the village, Vice-Chairman Jacob Kaamuk and prayer leader Leonard Luke are said to 'look after the place.' Using books such as Biungin God Lung Prai (Meeting God in Prayer) and New Life (a hymn book), Jacob and Nancy organize the Rosary Corona prayer for women when those who are illiterate learn the words of the prayer. The weekly programme that now includes three charismatic praying nights is as follows:

- Monday — free day
- Tuesday — Rosary Corona
- Wednesday — special prayers asking God for strength to help them with their work
- Thursday — free day
- Friday — Prayer Meeting Night, a time of happiness, a night of worship
- Saturday — free day
- Sunday — Church mass, ordinary Catholic service

On Sunday those charismatics who know how to read well read from the Bible. A prayer leader decides what passages will be read. The focus is on three kinds of prayer: for believers, for thanks to God, for the family unity of the Church. These three prayers are followed by a prayer for shaking hands, announcements about the school, the church, welcoming visitors, community work, and the Aid Post. At the end of the service they announce where — in which area and whose house — charismatic meetings are going to take place during the following week.

---

5. The words and explanations of Robin, Jacob and Nancy about the beginning of the charismatic movement in Ambonwari were recorded on a video tape and later edited for a film "Charismatic Grace: Black Fire in Ambon Parish". (1998, Director: Most Rev. Regis Chik.)

6. Charismatic singing, dancing and praying take place in different houses from the top of the village to the bottom. The division of the village into three praying areas does not exactly accord with the clan areas that pertained to the three fathers of the village: Area 1 (Bird of Paradise, Crocodile-1), Area 2 (Wallaby, Pig-1, Eagle-1) and Area 3 (Crocodile-2, Cassowary, Pig-2, and Eagle-2). The houses where the meetings are usually held are those of Michael (Cassowary), Nelson (Wallaby), Joe (Crocodile-1) and Greg (Bird of Paradise), the last two being official fathers of the village. They select the prayer leader for each week.
Since 2001, the village has experienced further changes that the majority of people quite willingly accepted. Men's houses were abandoned, the most sacred objects were brought into the open and women and children were free to move into those spaces that were once heavily tabooed. As Jacob said: "We did not want spirits to be angry, so we simply removed them." This pertains also to the sacred sites in the forest once known as the abode of powerful spirits. In these places people began to cut trees for their houses and canoes and collect edible plants. As the sacred has always been a synonym of spiritual and hierarchical power, capable of generating and destroying life, the sacredness of local sites has been replaced by a more abstract and non-localized conception of the sacredness of God who, through the Holy Spirit, is able to enter every individual. Posters and statues of Jesus Christ, the Last Supper, and the Virgin Mary can now be found almost in every house and their owners decorate them with flowers.

After the death of Tobias, the most important healer, Ambonwari rejected traditional healing practices and traditional healers, saying: "God doesn't like men chewing ginger with a betel nut." In the transition period, however, they were, by their own admission, uncertain about the causes of sickness, and for some time they relied on two cosmologically different healing practices. Here are three examples from the year 2001.

On 4th of February, Albert's daughter Augusta gave birth to a stillborn child (the father was Leonard who later married her). Robin, who being charismatic leader was often called into a house when someone was sick, spent a whole night praying over Augusta. Nancy, who by now was speaking in tongues and joined the praying party, said that people in the past often saw spirits. She added: "Nowadays when villagers believe in God the spirits do not show themselves any longer. People are not afraid of them anymore."

When his wife Joanne was sick with malaria and reacted with nausea and vomiting to chloroquine tablets that I gave her, her husband Jacob called Tobias' adopted younger brother Felix, who performed a healing rite, talked to the spirits, and extracted two bones from her chest. Just before his healing rite he found a muddy bundle of twisted vine (see Telban 1997a) in front of the house and gave it to Jacob's son Dickson to undo. This was on 11th February 2001.

Three days later, on 14th February, Johannes, the son of the late Bob Kajik, who had suffered from tuberculosis for quite some time, died. People said that Bob took him with him. Around midnight a bamboo divination was performed (see Telban 2001). At this time the bamboo's tapping marked dancing in a men's house, meaning that the spirits were requesting an initiation ritual. Bob's brother, Andrew, said: "No, no, this is finished" Andrew's son Anton added: "We abandoned this. We are now the children of God."

What I want to show with these incidents is that even in a new millennium there was a period when Christian and pre-Christian practices coexisted, and people chose to accept either of them or both. Thus Albert chose prayers over his daughter and rejected traditional healing. It was this move that helped him at election time to win over the more traditionally-oriented previous councilor, Samuel. Robin, who was by then already the leader of the charismatic movement, conducted the prayers. In 2005 he said: "If you have a single belief than you will sit well and you will be free. If you move from one belief to another you will be in trouble. Heavy weights will come on top of you." Jacob, on the other hand, was still searching in 2001 between two religions, acknowledging spirits and the way of the ancestors while at the same time actively participating in charismatic prayer meetings several times in a week. Andrew, one of the oldest and most traditionally-minded men (and also Bob Kajik's brother from Crocodile-1 Clan), publicly announced the end of initiation. His middle son Anton readily supported his words. After the death of Andrew, a renowned listener of bamboo in post-mortem divination, the practice was abandoned.

During the following years Kanduam village on the Sepik River became the centre of the charismatic movement. Kanduam Parish Sepik River Training Formation Workshop took place for the first time in 2003. Eddie Nambu, an Imammeri charismatic leader, attended it. Since then Catholic charismatic workshops have taken place in Kanduam every year. Ambonwari attended it for the first time in February 2005. They paid 30 Kina (15 A$) each for a one-week seminar. Leonard and Jimmy (the sons of two old men, the brothers Luke and Rius, Crocodile-2 Clan) together with 14 Imammeri men (who are even more involved in the movement than Ambonwari) attended the workshop that was led by Ken Charles Aima from Kanduam, a Chairman of the Catholic Charismatic Office in Wewak. People said that in March 2005 he would be on his way to Australia to get new material and learn new steps in the movement. He would then return to Papua New Guinea and on 25 July chair a charismatic rally in Ambonwari Parish.
When I returned to the village in the middle of February 2005 Ambonwari charismatic members were having meetings in Konniej teaching the people how to preach, sing and pray. They called spreading 'good news' to other villages an 'outreach' and a 'course' and they stayed in Konniej for 5 days. They repeated the same practice in Kansitie one a couple of weeks later. On each return, after preaching about Big King Jesus, the villagers received them with the welcoming ceremony, singing, dancing, clapping and the shaking of hands. An Imanmeri primary school teacher said that it was the charismatic movement, and not education, that brought together in peace two of the largest villages in Ambon Subdistrict, that is, Ambonwari and Imanmeri. These villages took the lead in the movement after individuals attended workshops and extended the movement's influence to other villages. There were fewer disputes between the villages now, and whenever they do occur they are less violent. The emphasis is on solving problems quickly and confirming the results with prayers.

Seminars and workshops have become very popular during the last few years. Thus, for example, on a pamphlet shown to me by Eddie Nambo from Imanmeri, the Asia-Pacific School of Evangelisation situated in Australia and conducted by Disciples of Jesus Covenant Community8 called for young people between 18 and 35 to participate in the Wewak Training School between 18 September and 9 October 2005. The Charismatic movement involved: "A rich experience of communal prayer including Eucharist and Divine Office, Adoration, charismatic praise and worship, intercession and Rosary." For three weeks in Wewak the participants needed to pay 420 Kina, a huge amount by local standards. The plan included an optional mission to Bougainville (for the duration of 10 to 14 days) and involvement in 'outreach' into Catholic high schools, parishes and youth groups.

Nancy is one of the most active women in the charismatic movement and a medium who experiences the Holy Spirit through trance. She said to me in February 2005: "Many villagers have experienced that the Holy Spirit has entered their bodies while they were participating in healing services. Also during prayers when women had problems during pregnancy or childbirth. It began with many women being involved. We say that the way of the ancestors died first with Bob and then with Tobias." And Jacob said: "We did not leave the custom. Good ways we still keep. We abandoned bad ways such as bamboo divination after death, killings, cannibalism, and initiation. We abandoned our spirits because they brought us illness." And he added more quietly: "Memory of old times, however, is still in our minds." Jacob knows that getting rid of spirits that bring illness and of ancestral ways that dealt with spirits is not as easy as it sometimes seems.

The implementation of a new understanding of the world can also be noted in other cosmological elements, and not only in those that are obviously related to spirits and rituals. As the way of the village depended on the way of the ancestors, however, spirits were part of every Ambonwari institution. I think here of social organization, kinship and marriage, the distribution and ownership of land, the naming system, and, of course, hierarchical relationships in the village (see also Mosko 2001). It seems that after rejecting initiation rituals and men's houses, the next targets were healing rituals and those dealing with death and misfortune. Charismatics stepped in with Christian prayers over those who suffered (healing ceremonies) as well as preventative prayers for those who might suffer in the future. The healing powers of those who claim to have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit has become an important factor in the public acceptance of charismatics in Ambonwari. However, their almost obsessive engagement with the Holy Spirit also began to influence other dimensions of Ambonwari cosmology. Social structure, on which village hierarchy was based and which provided 'traditional' leaders, for example, began to totter; certain practices that were part of customary kinship obligations came under question too (for instance, the role of the maternal lineage in the shaving hair ceremony that ended the mourning period); over the years preferred marriages were replaced by what people called 'like marriages' based on personal preference; Biblical names that in the past had no symbolic significance whatsoever suddenly acquired new importance.

Charismatic leaders, who now included Leonard and Jimmy, were counting on the support of the village majority to remove Raymond from the position of leader of Sunday Church meetings. Raymond was apparently stubbornly dictatorial about the programme. He did not wait for people to gather, and especially charismatic leaders were no longer satisfied with him. In December 2004 he was suspended and in March 2005 they discussed how he would be finally removed. Another man, Clemens, was at the same time in the process of training and was supposed to go to Wewak for a 10-week course. On Sunday 27 February 2005 Leonard made an announcement in the Church that this orthodox kind of Christianity was to end this year. Kanduanam and Ambon Parishes would be the first in the wider area to introduce the Catholic Charismatic Church. People were alarmed, questions "Are you one holy (i.e. in harmony)?"
Concluding

Since the birth of Pentecostalism in 1906 and its expansion into charismatic Catholicism in 1967, the movement—characterized by the believers as receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit—began to spread rapidly throughout the world (Robbins 2004b). Joel Robbins recently published an in-depth book about the processes of cultural change among the Upmin in Sandaun (West Sepik) Province, Papua New Guinea (Robbins 2004a). Just as these 390 Mountain Ok people are continually re-created by change, they are also self-conscious generators of it. Since the beginning of a Christian revival in 1977, that is shortly after Papua New Guinea gained independence, the Upmin have been assailed by conflicting moral values. The appearance of revivalist and charismatic Christianity confronted a traditional life-world based on men’s houses, rituals, spirits and taboos and drove them to the edge of moral collapse and apocalyptic fears. Urapmin became a very short time a completely Christian community.

Looking back at social and cultural changes that have taken place in Ambonwari over the last 50 years and especially the last 10 years, one sees how changes were not linear but rather historically complex. Nowadays, Ambonwari charismatics are extremely well informed about everything that is related to their movement. They talk about personalities and locations mentioned in the Bible. They borrow concepts, symbols and metaphors from the Bible and apply them to their own lives. Younger, literate people without an important position in ‘traditional’ society have increasingly made their voices heard and come to the forefront regarding the knowledge and practices necessary for this Christian movement to prosper. In a generational turnover, younger people took over many roles otherwise reserved for wise old men. While these old men were both feared and admired in the past, the new charismatic leaders advertise a common egalitarian participation in the movement and experience of the Holy Spirit. In their rituals, involving singing and dancing in trance, they focus on both bodily and spiritual experiences. Moreover, these kinds of experiences with all their paraphernalia became available to women and children as well. On the other hand and regardless of their claims about egalitarianism, charismatics impose their views and their practices on fellow villagers. They slowly but persistently penetrate into the village’s hierarchical structure and continually challenge ‘traditional’ as well as ordinary Roman Catholic forms of leadership. While many—though not all—‘traditional’ beliefs and practices in the Ambonwari were in many ways able to coexist alongside the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, they became unacceptable for the followers of a more intolerant sect of charismatic Catholicism.

As the focus of charismatic Christianity is on the individual we must now consider whether the change can be explained in this way. If an Ambonwari person, as I argued at length elsewhere (Telbon 1998), is a being that combines kay person, as I argued at length elsewhere (Telbon 1998), is a being that combines kay person, as I argued at length elsewhere (Telbon 1998), is a being that combines kay person, as I argued at length elsewhere (Telbon 1998), is a being that combines kay person, as I argued at length elsewhere (Telbo...
its, for example, were all unquestioned (but not unchallenged) institutions on which the community based its existence, values and morality. The possibility to develop a secondary habitus—the one related to education, globalization, rapid developments in transportation and communication (not to add more ‘atations’) — was minimal. Conversely, it was not so for the young Ambonwari people. First of all, though they participated in traditional events such as all-night dances, for example, they were never effectively introduced into the religious aspects of their cosmology—neither through ritual practices nor through stories. Second, they were already socialized into some religious practices and knowledge of Christianity, in both village and wider Papua New Guinea contexts. Quite easily and without much concern they could reject significant features of village cosmology, especially those associated with spirits.

For young Ambonwari people, recent developments did not represent such a significant change but in many ways the continuation of a life-world into which they had been born. Their future, just as the future of their elders, was and is also based on their past. This is what Bob Kanjik Amaji meant when throughout the 1990s he talked about young men taking over the politics of the village. Seeing that the village was losing the knowledge of and its connection to the cosmological past, he thought that men should organize another proper initiation ceremony. The young men, however, became tired of living in a ‘bubble’. Many left to work in Lae. While they themselves went into the world, others brought the World into the village.

Not only did charismatic Christianity play an important role in redressing a sense of marginality of Melanesians in the contemporary world (Eves 2000, Jorgensen n.d., Robbins 1998, Stritecky 2001), but it addressed also a sense of marginality of women, younger men and those from unprivileged lineages and clans within the village. The village hierarchy began to change. Ambonwari charismatics dismiss over-enthusiastic traditionalists as sorcerers and ignore the sceptics. They started to look for the ways of replacing the words (‘just stories’) of Church ministers with a more active speech and a more elaborate ritual. With singing and dancing, trance, speaking in tongues, resting in the Spirit, prophecy, and so on, and with imported concepts, such as ‘rebirth’, ‘renewal’, and a ‘new life’, they aim directly at their cultural beginnings, at the village cosmogony. If initiation and first menstruation rituals were focused on the formation of Ambonwari beings from non-beings and on re-creation of the Ambonwari life-world (Telfan 1997a), charismatic rituals are also focused on the formation of beings of the World from non-beings and on re-creation of a Catholic charismatic life-world. These beings of the World are therefore not just any beings of the World. Through the actions of the Holy Spirit every woman could become identified with Mother Mary and every man with her son Jesus. Such as identification would enable every Ambonwari man not only to live the life of Jesus but also his death and reincarnation. This kind of conceptualization is actually not too far from the one pertaining to their traditional cosmology. However, Jesus is neither Kapi nor any other clan’s mythical ancestor; and the life (and suffering in particular) of Jesus carries with it a different kind of human existence and a different kind of morality than the life of Kapi. No wonder that traditionalists continually express their nostalgia for that masculinity (cf. Tuzin 1997) that used to be central to their life-world and vital for the reproduction of their cosmology.

References


APPENDIX


---

**List of Contributors**

*Dr. Pei-yi Guo*, Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

*Dr. Pi-chien Liu*, Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

*Professor Joel Robbins*, Department of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego, USA

*Professors Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) and Andrew J. Strathern* are based at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. They are also affiliated as Research Fellows at the Research Institute for Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen, Scotland; Visiting Research Fellow and Visiting Professor, respectively, University of Durham, England; and over a number of years they have been Visiting Scholars at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan. Their webpage is (www.pitt.edu/~strather).

*Dr. Chang-Kuo Tan*, National Taitung University, Taiwan

*Professor Borut Telban*, Institute for Anthropological and Spatial Studies, Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenia

*Dr. Yi-Jia Tsai*, Department of Religious Studies, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan

*Dr. Shun-Yuan Yang*, Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

*Dr. Chuen-rong Yeh*, Associate Research Fellow, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan
Religious and ritual change: cosmologies and histories / by Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, editors.

Papers originally presented at a conference held in Taipei, Taiwan, in May 2005.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data


Copyright © 2009
Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern
All Rights Reserved

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Cover photo: the Kivisia church of the Bunun Presbytery, Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, Christmas, 2003. Inscriptions on the church read “God loves everyone” and “Jesus loves you.” The church stands in mountainous country between Hualien and Taitung, south-east Taiwan. (Thanks to Shih-hsiang Sung for help in identifying this photograph, which was taken on a field journey with Yi-tze Lee from Taitung to Hualien). (Photo P. J. Stewart / A. Strathern Archive)

Printed in the United States of America