

## Working Out of Two Mindsets: Critical Methodology and PNG Village Traditional Ways

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### Abstract

The article sets out to describe two different ways of thinking and operating that are found in Papua New Guinea today. It seeks to put them in relationship to one another, and to clarify their areas of operation and validity. The different ways are termed the Village Traditional mindset and the Critical Methodological mindset. Although modern villagers are often charged with simply confusing aspects of the modern world by trying to react to them out of traditional premises, it is here rather proposed that the two mindsets are doing different things; they are trying to answer different questions put to reality. The village viewpoint seeks to account for social and personal values involved in a set of events. The critically methodological view wants to explain the events as separate from human involvement and as relationships established to exist among things in themselves. It is probably necessary to hold both views separately and alternately at the present time. The ideas of Robin Horton and experiences of dialogue between religious traditions are used to enlighten this discussion, and examples are given where the two mindsets function together.

### Introduction

It is a matter of daily concern in Papua New Guinea that citizens are working out of two different mindsets at the same time. I believe it is not difficult to work out of two mindsets at the same time. However, these worldviews do not rest easily beside each other, and even today in educational and health circles, charges result that villagers are 'ignorant', 'foolish', 'schizophrenic', 'hypocritical' and 'out of their depth in the modern world'. Even describing the protagonists here is problematic. Let us try to nail down the two mindsets in discussion here.

### Evidence for the mindsets

Let us start by identifying the two mindsets as PNG Village Traditional and the Critically Methodological, and present a couple of examples to show the rub between these mindsets. A mindset is not a theoretical idea with logical deductions, but a determination to operate according to certain guidelines<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> As taken from Wikipedia: 'A mindset, in decision theory and general systems theory, refers to a set of assumptions, methods or notations held by one or more people or groups of people which is so established that it creates a powerful incentive within these people or groups to continue to adopt or accept prior behaviours, choices, or tools. This phenomenon of cognitive bias is also sometimes described as mental inertia, 'groupthink',

basic task of this essay is to describe the two mindsets adequately, and to allow a place for the co-existence of the two<sup>2</sup>. By the Critically Methodological mindset I mean to avoid terms such as ‘Western scientific’, ‘rational’ or ‘technological’, which do not stand up to investigation and valid contrast with the Village Traditional mindset. The Critically Methodological mindset is characterised by applying epistemological rules which are cyclical and self-correcting; which value impersonal canons of experience, understanding and judgement; and which imply a commitment to objectivity in knowledge and practice. We will now illustrate the contrasts of the mindsets by a set of five cases.

**Case 1:** In a remote mission station in Nuku, West Sepik Province, the sister-in-charge and her nursing aides were told about a young woman who had carried a child and had had great difficulty in delivering the placenta. By the time the woman came to the station she was suffering from septicaemia and was in danger of death. The station clinic brought out all its supply of antibiotics, and radioed for supplies from the neighbours. The nurses went into Intensive Care mode and watched over the woman for two weeks, day and night. Finally it seemed she was turning the corner and would survive.

At that time the villagers brought in an old man who had a reputation as a ‘bush doctor’ or *glasman* (Tok Pisin: a person who can discern meanings from events and appearances.) The little old man came into the ward of the clinic, dressed in grubby clothes, yellowed from age and smoke—something of a health hazard himself in that antiseptic environment. The old man chewed some herbs, sprayed some juices from his mouth over the woman, circled her with some plants while speaking words quietly, and then left. After a couple of days the woman was well recovered and could walk around. The village community, in deep gratitude, gave the old man K100, but gave the clinic nothing.

The most difficult thing in this case is to see the justice of the matter, when the clinical personnel invested so much of their resources of time and medicine for the woman, while the old man had only to address the spirits that he found to be active in this case. It is apparent, however, that the villagers valued the old man’s intervention highly, and were not so impressed with the value of the nurses’ work. A medical officer, on hearing this case, exclaimed: ‘They are ignorant.’ He meant this in the simple sense of saying that the villagers had no insight into and did not understand the agencies of infection. But such a label spontaneously becomes a smear on the whole traditional lifestyle.

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or a ‘paradigm’, and it is often difficult to counteract its effects upon analysis and decision making processes.’ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindset>, Accessed: 30th October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these examples have already been published in an in-house publication (Gesch 1996), where they served the purpose of bridging cultural differences. Those differences are here being re-examined for a more rigorous description of difference and compatibility.

**Case 2:** A community from one village of the East Sepik Province were living together in Sisiak, in Madang, and making their living from carving articles out of wood. They were given a grant from the Tourism Office to build a house out of traditional local materials to display their goods. As members of the Church community, individuals told me that the opening of the display house was imminent, and invited me to come along to the opening event. I told them that I was most keen to be on hand and to take part.

Suddenly, one Sunday morning, I was told that the building had already been opened. I was severely disappointed, as I knew that it must have been done with a lot of colourful dancing and symbols. I asked why I had not been informed and invited to the actual event. The answers were hopelessly vague. Finally one church leader gave the explanation: 'The leaders of the community wanted to take no chances. This display house represents our livelihood and we need to influence tourists to come and purchase our products. So the leaders insisted on killing chickens at each of the carved posts of the house, and sprinkling the blood on the posts. They did not think that you, as the local parish priest, would like that, so we could not invite you.' I felt doubly disappointed, that I had also missed the chicken killing ritual.

In this case, members of other Sepik communities within Sisiak were quick to accuse the first community of being *tubel* (TP: ambivalent, or hypocritical in church contexts.) They were trying to hold onto traditional village beliefs on the one side, while still identifying themselves as being practicing Christians. These rituals and beliefs had a long history of being condemned by missionaries, and the thinking was identified by passages of the Gospels where Jesus accused religious leaders of his time with being hypocrites.

In recent days, an evangelical Christian missionary wrote me an email lamenting the fact that her leading Bible translator in a Sepik village was spending too much time in the *haus tambaran* (TP: meeting house with spiritual significance). She said that prayers were needed for this compromised situation. Her ideal would be that there was no mention of spirits in the *haus tambaran*, following the prescriptions of the First Commandment, 'I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods than me.' (Deuteronomy 5:6f.)

**Case 3:** The villagers generally would like to think that deeds by fellow villagers in the townships are beyond judgement, saying that town and the present days are a matter of *laik bilong wanwan* (TP: you can do whatever you like.) However, when I reported in the village that one of their young men had four wives in town, and did not feel restricted in any way, an older man commented quietly, 'You can do that in town, but if it happened here in the village, you would die by *sanguma*' (TP: witchcraft.) Because one of the young man's marriages is with a woman from a hostile Sepik village, the people in the home village are starting to demand K7,000 and 7 pigs from this young man, because seven deaths are laid to the responsibility of the other village in past times. His own brother states strongly that if one of his children becomes mortally sick in town, then the woman from the other Sepik village will die by his hand and he will happily go to prison for nine years.

The ideas of an arranged marriage or of a proscribed marriage are not welcome thoughts in urban life. However, the main sanction comes from the history of killings between the villages, and is based on a conviction that close family relatives will be made sick and will die in the remote towns because of the judicial power of the *sanguma* agency exercised by village authorities as a group with complex rules and motivations. This situation is not to be taken lightly: a serious illness or accident on the part of family members might lead to the death of the other woman. The freedom of individual choice in urban life has received a hostile reception in the home villages.

**Case 4:** A related example comes from the viewpoint of a villager who came to work in town and wanted to reap the benefits of the superannuation scheme into which he had been subsumed. He went to the office of the fund and showed his registration number and asked for his entitlements. The woman at the desk said that his name simply did not appear on the computer. He decided to go away and try again another day. Next time also, the woman entered the name and number he gave and it found no correspondence in the computer. The worker was not alarmed. He stated that the settlement people knew about these things and could take care of them. So he killed a chicken and gave it to one of his fellow villagers, a *glasman*. The blood was sprinkled around the settlement residence for the cooling of disputes that the family was involved in. The *glasman* went to sleep and had a dream in which his spirit went to the home village and wrestled with the offending '*samting bilong graun*' (TP: lit. 'a thing of the earth'. I was told this means: a determination emerging from the home community). Next day the worker went to the superannuation office, gave his name and number and received directly the assurance that his benefits would be paid. The woman in the office was reported as saying that she had been forgetting to insert a '1' as necessary prefix to the member's registration number. But now she remembered to insert it and things functioned normally.

The expatriate villagers asserted their worldview was more basic than Critically Methodological views of human-computer interaction. Their explanation based their difficulties on social disputes rather than operator error. They refused to be oppressed by technical systems of operation, and insisted that their views of social adjustment were useful in all human circumstances.

**Case 5:** When I was new to a village an old man, Pasuan, came weeping to me as I was about to make my departure. I asked others what he was saying to me. They said, 'His thirteen year old daughter has died. He wants you to have a dream of her, take a photograph of her, and bring it to him so that he can ask her who killed her by sorcery.' When I got to know them better over the years, these villagers told me that they had thought I was a dead man returned. 'When we see new priests and sisters coming to the village, we look at their features and we say to one another, 'She is your mother,' or 'He is your *kandere*' (mother's brother).'

It is not a bad thing to be closely identified with the family of new-found friends, but such a view does not accord at all with my own self-understanding.

Nor do I believe that my dreams are so concrete as to be registered with camera technology. Nor do I attribute such personal reality to photographic images. But I expect sorcery has its own way of working and I feel it would be awful to live in the village with the idea that someone has wanted to kill me or my family out of hatred or a sense of punishment.

### **What are the two mindsets?**

The holding of two mindsets does cause difficulties. From Australia today, we hear the Australian Prime Minister agreeing that three months of mourning for a dead person amongst Aboriginal communities is 'bad workplace practice'<sup>3</sup>. In PNG extended families exhaust their collective financial resources to send the bodies of dead people back to the villages. Students must leave their colleges because their sicknesses become exacerbated by reports of envious disputes and ritual revenge on them back home in the village. A cargo cult type movement lasting already more than a hundred years holds a deadly shoot out with police<sup>4</sup>. Hospital researchers uncover a traditional interpretation for nearly every patient in the hospital while they are enjoying the benefits of scientifically prepared drugs and treatments<sup>5</sup>. What are the two mindsets we are trying to describe in PNG?

### **The Village Traditional mindset**

The mindset we are trying to describe for Papua New Guinea (with particular reference to the Momase Region) is simply in possession of the field for everyone who takes their point of origin with the village, to the extent that they feel bound to their own traditional village. This would include most Papua New Guineans I believe, although it is possible these days for individuals and families to be estranged from the home village for a very long time, and by kinds of employment that leave little time for reflection on village realities.

This Village Traditional mindset comes from the intense world of the face-to-face village community with its awareness of historical antecedents and various forms of social links and networks. As Margaret Mead and the old anthropologists used to say: These villages represent unique laboratories in

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<sup>3</sup> Today Show on EMTV and Channel 9 Australia, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Front page, *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 1st June 2006. The unconfirmed belief in Madang is that a number of people were killed in the village in a raid by police. A list of 63 women and girls were taken to court and some jailed as 'flower girls' in the same event. The events belong to the context of the Black Jesus Movement of Steven Tari in the Amele District behind Madang. The shameful abuse of this man when captured and the parading of his humiliation on the front pages of the newspapers made him a closely modeled Jesus figure, even to cries of 'Crucify him, crucify him' (editorial, *The National*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2007).

<sup>5</sup> PNG students from Divine Word University have conducted one-on-one interviews with patients in the hospital over the course of the past three years. In roughly 60% of the cases they are spontaneously presented with interpretations of illness which would be classified as deriving from traditional village religious beliefs. The other 40% were simply not greatly concerned with their illness or were successfully recovering.

social engineering and have produced communities which have survived in a robust way for perhaps 50,000 years or more in PNG: 'The work of recording these unknown ways of life had to be done now – *now* – or they would be lost forever' (Mead 1972: 137). Considering that the Christian story goes back no further than 4,000 years and the Internet has a history barely 10 years old, it is well to be impressed with the depth of the perspective which applies in the PNG village.

Robin Horton (1967) has surely produced the most thoroughly argued analysis of 'the convergences of primal religion with the West and science.' We will devote the next section to reviewing his contribution. For the moment we notice that he recalls for us one of the basic keys for interpreting the worldview of the village: Personality is the basic category for interpreting life events.

Since the overriding aim of explanation is to disclose order and regularity underlying apparent chaos, the search for explanatory analogies must tend towards those areas of experience most closely associated with such qualities. . . . The human scene is the locus *par excellence* of order, predictability, regularity. . . . The mind in quest of explanatory analogies turns naturally to people and their relations (Horton 1967: 64f..)

The village person required to take action in response to a set of circumstances goes through a logical process of sorting the evidence and seeking possible suitable theories to find a causal explanation and an appropriate course of action. One extended family I know suffered the loss of ten houses in a village fire. The strangeness of this event quickly went to witchcraft (*sanguma*) explanations. One of the local big men was suspected because he had the motivation in seeking to be custodian of a little grandson. This was discussed for a while until people went back to the preferred explanation that a dead mother who had actually been struck by one of her sons, must surely have put this grave offence before the *sanguma* of another part of the village before she died. The fire was a consequence of this witchcraft.

Later again it was decided that the evidence did not fit this explanation either, and the fire was simply the retribution demanded by the brotherhood (or sisterhood) of *sanguma* from his personal family for the others' having helped the local *sanguma*. The point here for us is of course not the content of the evidence and the arguments, but to see a process of careful argument based on evidence and an acceptable range of ideas. At the same time, if the Critically Methodological viewpoint were to ask for a journalistic account of the fire, it could readily be given: someone let a house fireplace burn unchecked; it was a hot dry season; the fires had finished their work inside the house before being seen from outside. It is just that these explanations do not go to the heart of the trouble and the pain felt by the householders who were left homeless in large numbers.

The Village Traditional view seeks out and propagates accounts of the world for things which are noteworthy and provocative, which answer concerns in

terms of how this affects a personality or which might accord with personalised motives, and this is done in an open-ended manner revised by evidence newly brought to bear. One account of a sickness which I was given began with the medical doctor's view of the complaint, and a review of the procedures and medications which he prescribed. Then the account quickly went to a range of village alternatives: tumbling into the place of a spirit, the warnings of dreams about the jealousies of others, or the effects of *sanguma*—as discerned by the action of a bush doctor, who had emetics and other herbs to prescribe; and then moving into Christian prayer, and the actions of a prayer group. There is a whole menu of interpretations available, perhaps to be called upon one after the other. Although an agreed explanation is desirable, nothing really gets closed off.

There is no doubt that the traditional view suffers at times from bad science, and a lack of the critical methodology modern urban life demands. Storms are not reliably deflected by spells. Witches cannot on demand eat the contents of a tin without opening it. Nor do spells have a direct influence on the malaria parasite or on conception of a child. But many concerns of persons overlap with strictly physical science. Christians too find it quite reasonable to pray in time of storms, barrenness and sickness without wishing to transgress against canons of the scientific method. Christians claim that their activities are essentially following the works and the ways of the Lord, not anticipating them in any causal or predictive way.

In a like manner the Village Traditional view can be put under the category of divination or discernment. The man who shouts at the storm to drive it off is involved in a group exercise trying to see the social and personal connections to be made with this event. So much of what goes under the title of 'magic' is the action of putting an event into the public arena, and trying to read meanings out of it (Gesch 1975). The bad science will be revised, but the meaning for us in the event still remains. These days it is fashionable for young people to come back to the village from the towns and to express scepticism in village events: 'What is the *painankle* speech-maker doing? He is wasting his time if he thinks he can effect some result.' 'Those people think they can affect the weather.' They are betraying a good involvement in village beliefs on their own part, and searching for alternatives in a way that is more political than scientific.

### **The Critically Methodological mindset**

The mindset that we wish to use in contrast to the Village Traditional is usefully presented for us by Robin Horton in his landmark article (Horton 1967). Let us turn to this article now. Horton takes the view that most interaction between traditional and modern takes place on the basis of common sense. 'For all the apparent up-to-dateness of the content of his world-view, the modern Western layman is rarely more 'open' or scientific in his outlook than is the traditional African villager.' (Horton 1967: 186) He charged the anthropologists of fifty years ago that they 'have been unfamiliar with the theoretical thinking of their own culture. This has deprived them of a vital key to understanding. For certain aspects of such thinking are the counterparts of

those very features of traditional thought which they have tended to find most puzzling. Secondly, even those familiar with theoretical thinking in their own culture have failed to recognise its African equivalents, simply because they have been blinded by a difference of idiom.' (Horton 1967: 50) What is said of Africa in this can readily be transferred to talk about PNG.

Some of the basic theoretical positions shared by modern and traditional ways of thinking are that explanatory theory seeks for regularity underlying apparent anomaly, and that theory places things in a causal context wider than that provided by common sense. The tradition does not turn to a religious explanation for everything, only in matters of serious concern, and the most reliable focus for attribution is the social and persons. Common sense does have a role everywhere, and the level of theory varies with context. Thus we get a hierarchy of religious explanations in the tradition. All theory analyses and abstracts the objects of common sense and then tries to put things together for better understanding. There are pluralities of spirits but they can be proposed as collective categories according to the things attributed to them. Analogy and models are used for explanation, but these models are sometimes developed in ways that distort their simple forms. Spirits therefore gather distorted features as models in the effort to join together things attributed to them.

After bringing together science and village tradition on the level of their own theory and methods, Horton proposes the basic difference between the two. 'What I take to be the key difference is a very simple one. It is that in traditional cultures there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets; whereas in scientifically oriented cultures, such an awareness is highly developed. It is this difference we refer to when we say that traditional cultures are 'closed' and scientifically oriented cultures 'open'.' (Horton 1967:155) It is well to notice that Horton speaks of a *developed awareness of alternatives in theory*. This is not the same as saying that the villagers do not know alternative ways of doing things or alternative ideas and theories. It is rather to speak of an attitude to knowledge itself.

I believe this view of Horton is a credible analysis of the relation between the two mindsets. On the one hand it deals with the difference and the factual lack of global experience which is felt in the PNG village. On the other side it predicts a future where the two mindsets will converge onto equal status while holding their differences.

However, Horton has been critiqued for his views, and we must briefly look at these objections as reviewed by Paul Gosselin (2006). Gosselin presents Ernest Gellner's views:

the 'poor savage' living in a monolithic society with no access to alternate cosmologies, that is without contact with other societies having different cosmologies, is practically non-existent. Furthermore, access to cosmological alternatives will not automatically result in the development of a western form of

science. Gellner notes that many traditional societies transcend their common conceptions of the world simply by the syncretistic addition of beliefs from other cosmologies. Nothing is eliminated. Thus, a situation where cosmological pluralism is an established fact cannot, then, be held to be 'modern' or 'scientific' and will not necessarily bring about the development of a critical tradition as required by Popper and Horton. ... The average over-specialized scientist, doing normal research (à la Kuhn), works within one single paradigm (often without any idea of alternate theories), yet we will all admit this still amounts to science! ... Goody proposes the hypothesis that it is the introduction of writing which will be crucial for the accumulation of critical thoughts and alternative cosmologies. (Gosselin 2006)

According to my reading of Goody's article, he is supportive of Horton's view and is explaining the way change will take place. (Horton actually states that historical writings and other cross-cultural exposures form the way ahead for the village in a list of suggestions made at the end of his article, pp.180-186.) The objections of Gellner only emphasise that the alternatives talked about by Horton are in the area of a 'body of theoretical tenets', as he says, not simply practical alternatives.

John Skorupski is interested in the question of explaining the origins of religion from traditional societies to Christianity of these days. He considers the contribution of Horton, 'The intellectualist interest in origins is still present, for the genus is characterised as forms of thought which originate in an attempt to understand and master the natural world; but Horton's method of approach does not encourage us to suppose that any very precise evolutionary story can be told.' (Skorupski 1983:180) Horton declares that he is more interested in explaining the emergence of science and the nature of theoretical thinking. (Horton 1967:51)

The Critically Methodological mindset, under the guidance of the thinking of Robin Horton, thus becomes a human capacity shared between villager and urban scientist looking forward to cross-cultural and multi-cultural experiences which will build on Village Traditional common sense with the canons of method and criticism. On the other hand Horton wants to explain his motive for choosing to live close to the village tradition where he has discovered 'an intensely poetic quality in everyday life and thought, and a vivid enjoyment of the passing moment—both driven out of sophisticated Western life by the quest for purity of motive and the faith in progress.' (Horton 1967: 179) As needful as this purity and faith might be, they must not drive all the joy of life from before their faces.

#### **Need to establish the legitimacy of both existing views**

I would like to give a little time to discussing the utter seriousness of giving space *today* to the views currently held by Traditional Village thinking. I would not like to be taken as presenting Horton's ideas as a call for patience, that

everything will eventually evolve and work out for the best, and that the PNG villager over time will think just like the scientist or the theologian of the towns. One developed Christian attitude to traditional religions at the present time is the call for dialogue. Since the dialogue between Christianity and the traditional village religion these days takes place within the lives and minds of the same persons, it must mean the promotion of the traditional village religion. There can be no dialogue where the motive is the extinction of the partner, or its absorption or subversion. Christians must do all they can to enhance, meet and rejoice in the events of traditional religion, because it is here that the encounter with the Holy is taking place. In this way some amends might be made by way of the revival of cultures.

No stronger case can be made for promoting traditional village religions than that made by George Tinker, a North American Indian, Lutheran pastor and academic. He is also engaged in revivalist practice, which has seen such as the following: a fifteen year old boy inserts hooks into the flesh of his back and drags a buffalo skull around the dance ground for days until the flesh rips open to give him release. He is praying for his father, who is destroying their family by his alcoholic addiction.<sup>6</sup> Tinker makes his case for cultural revival in terms of cultural and religious genocide which North American Indians suffered at the hands of missionaries. He writes,

To state the case baldly and dramatically, my thesis is that the Christian missionaries—of all denominations working among American Indian nations—were partners in genocide. Unwittingly no doubt, and always with the best of intentions, nevertheless the missionaries were guilty of complicity in the destruction of Indian cultures and tribal social structures—complicity in the devastating impoverishment and death of the people to whom they preached. (Tinker 1993:4)

He explains further his views on genocide:

Cultural genocide can be defined as the effective destruction of a people by systematically or systemically (intentionally or unintentionally in order to achieve other goals) destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life. ... In North American mission history, cultural genocide almost always involved an attack on the spiritual foundations of a people's unity by denying the existing ceremonial and mythological sense of a community in relationship to the Sacred Other. Finally, it erodes a people's self-image as a whole people by attacking or belittling every aspect of native culture. (Tinker 1993:6)

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, July 2003, Roger Schroeder of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, witness to the revival.

He even ventures to make the statement: 'Cultural genocide is more subtle than overt military extermination, yet it is no less devastating to a people.' (Tinker 1993:5) He gives the example of Fr Junipero Serra, beatified by Pope John Paul II, but a missionary who oversaw a 70% decline in the population of his flock during his ministry.

George Tinker is giving a warning to all indigenous peoples that loss of cultural and religious heritage can be utterly destructive for a people. What goes under the headings of village religion and magic, belief and ritual must remain unconditionally in the hands of the people, under their control as they develop these cultural goods, free from campaigns to belittle the system as a whole.

For those more inclined to see cultural goods in terms of dollars and cents there is further warning to be taken from contemporary events in Canada.

The Catholic Church in Canada has agreed to pay out nearly \$80 million (£39 million) as part of a billion-dollar compensation package to native Canadian Indians who were said to have been stripped of their culture through the education they received from priests and Religious. ... 'The Government recognises the sad legacy of residential schools,' said Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, in announcing the £1.1bn deal in Canada's House of Commons on 10 May. (Ghosh 2006)

In the Canadian Statement of Reconciliation Tinker's linkage of loss of traditional religious life, land and culture with the destruction of peoples is reinforced by the Government of Canada.<sup>7</sup>

As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices. We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations that were disaggregated, disrupted, limited or even destroyed by the dispossession of traditional territory.

Admittedly the North American situations are about the survival of a minority of indigenous peoples within an overpowering majority which is culturally other, and the compensation question has much to do with physical and sexual abuse of children separated from their families and cultures. However, the Traditional Village mindset derives from a whole way of life with religious and practical dimensions. We must fear systematic undermining of the traditional way of life in PNG. Examples of this are the 'spiritual warfare' undertaken by some churches against Sepik *haus tambaran*, or Christian students who have

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<sup>7</sup> For the Statement of Reconciliation on the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, see <http://www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/english/reconciliation.html> . Accessed: 22nd March 2007.

learnt to say that they cannot speak about traditional religion because it belongs to the 'time of darkness' and they now belong to the Light. Further examples of this are the opening of male initiation ceremonies to the tourist camera whether male or female; and business ideas which despise the '*wantok*' (here, communitarian) principle. These cultural institutions might need to be modernized, but on the owners' terms.

### **Two Mindsets in one body**

When I ask PNG University students to explain to me why sick people turn to bush doctors to discern sorcery and then, without pausing for a breath, seek the latest advances in malarial medicine from hospital doctors, their answers are generally no more profound than to say, 'Because they are there.' For me there is an intellectual conflict in ranking everything from belief in *sanguma*, through bush rituals and biomedical practices, to belief in Christian prayer along the same continuum. The students obviously see good in all the available approaches. As one student said, 'I was so sick at the time, that I would have said 'Yes' to anything anyone wanted to do to help me.' Malaria does have that compelling way about it. The point seems to be that we have only the one body within which to exercise our choices, and in health matters before all, every recourse is welcome and is likely to be prove beneficial. My Australian relatives are very hostile when I seek causes for an illness in social contexts. In PNG this is often the first resort.

What is the body that is being treated with spells to remove dead persons' presences, and that is taking arthemisin to kill parasites? Is it a machine where we tinker with the parts and apply remedies where it hurts, or is it a social voice which scorns the exclusive devotion to scientific purity that Horton speaks of? I have a very difficult time explaining to PNG students that I see how much dead people and spirits are constantly appearing as part of their social world guaranteeing rights, and yet I myself, as an Australian, cannot afford to let myself believe that my dear departed mother has any active directing role in my life. Australian barbecue humour asserts off-handedly that Australian aborigines establish their land rights with a Geiger Counter, meaning that there can be no possible belief in spirit places out of the range of economic scepticism. In health matters in PNG, all the influences converge on the one body which is understood as greater than a machine to tinker with.

This problem of identifying the scope of the human body in its social world is shared by indigenous peoples throughout the world.

The Constitution of Papua New Guinea encourages the thought of combining two mindsets in the one person. 'We, the People of Papua New Guinea ...

- acknowledge the worthy customs and traditional wisdoms of our people— which have come down to us from generation to generation □
- pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.' (Preamble)

There might be two ways of thinking, two worldviews, but they exist in the one person and the one people and must remain alive and honourable. The traditional and reflective methodological views can exist side by side once they agree that they are doing something different from each other. While their same overall goals of well-being might coincide, their views of what this well-being must consist in are quite different.

What are the needs of people? In what does their identity and sense of wholeness consist? What is the remedy when things go wrong? The two mindsets cannot exist as two separate libraries of resources and decisions. As Martin Nakata warns academia in Australia:

‘Indigenisation’ is a strategy that seeks to define a space that is recognisably Indigenous. At the level of knowledge, it works on a premise that if we just keep adding more and more ‘authentically’ Indigenous content in, we will build up a knowledge context that is more representatively ‘Indigenous’ and from this place we will somehow generate ‘Indigenous’ solutions to our problems that are couched in Indigenous meanings. But this is flawed thinking. In the academy, any Indigenous space is always circumscribed by, and in a sense implicated in non-Indigenous systems of thought. To ‘study’ Indigenous knowledges in a Western institution is a very different enterprise from ‘learning’ the deeply embedded cultural and social meanings of these knowledges in their own context. (Nakata 2006:270)

As a conclusion to this article, we will now give a brief sketch of what the world looks like before two mindsets. Nakata urges the legitimacy of space for traditional worldviews working together with critical methodological views. He continues his argument about giving space to the tradition:

If this were to be our starting point then the deeply cross-cultural encounters between different knowledge intersections that emerge every day in communities—in health, in education, in governance and so on—could be approached, not ambivalently as heralding further cultural loss, but more robustly as the source of new sets of negotiated meanings that may or may not look distinctly Indigenous but which connect with older traditions in ways which do not disrupt and alienate people from those traditions but continue them by enriching practices to produce much better outcomes. (Nakata 2006:273)

Let us take a look at various areas of modern life through the two different lenses. In all these areas we have to show that the mindsets are different but that they can inhabit one body in the same era.

**Health**

As recounted earlier, the hospitals of PNG are filled with patients who gladly accept the latest advances in biomedicine, while re-interpreting all that they feel into the field of disturbed social relations. This takes place in the intimacy of the home of the sick person in the village as much as in the urban health facilities. One exemplary story tells of a boy who was bitten by a snake. With great urgency the boy was gathered up in order to rush him to the hospital by car. However, as a matter of even greater urgency, the father insisted that the family drive into the house of a bush doctor to see first whether the snake bite was a matter of sorcery against the father, before turning to medical help. Clearly the father had an awful feeling that a certain someone was taking radical action to injure him and his family. He was not expressing any doubt about anti-venin because there were different problems to take care of in this event.

In a more confrontational way, a hospital patient was suffering from a large goitre. He knew the point of view of the doctors, 'The doctors say I have goitre. That is not true because I know it is the work of my in-laws in Popondetta who are disputing with me.' Even without the element of conflict, patients are in the larger part guided in their curative behaviour more by their belief in traditional matters than by biomedical assertions.

**Wealth**

Papua New Guinea is afflicted by fast money schemes. The infamous U-Vistract scheme run by Noah Musingku has been able to continue for many years, presumably because of ambivalence by some key figures in financial circles in PNG. Most of the participants in this particular scheme are from Bougainville. A Buka man of my acquaintance got in early: he invested K2,000 and soon got K4,000 back; he invested K3,000 and then got another K4,000 back; so finally he invested another K2,000 but got no return on this. He is happy with the feeling of success, although his net profit is only K1,000. At the same time he laughs because he has a clear intuition that it is all fraudulent. When the Ombudsman of PNG, Simon Pentanu, received K90,000 in an early return on his investment, it was a disgrace because he must have been aware of the nature of this pyramid scheme.

There are many other such schemes, barely reasonable in their promises, but of sufficient plausibility to gather cautious investments of K20 at a time from settlement and village households. What is the difference between collecting K20 from everybody to hire a lawyer to get compensation for an eviction from the settlements, or to pay K20 into the fund to re-establish the Kaindi-Wau-Bulolo gold mines for an unbelievably good return?

Recent unpublished research tells of a wealth cult among Christian Pentecostals in Port Moresby. Fast money is a matter of luck, feeling that blessing is running with you. (Laycock 1966, 1967) There are many men and women in the villages and the settlements who can spend 48 or 72 hours

playing cards continuously, and at the end tell of the marvellous luck they had. The fact of a net loss means little in this mood. This is the thinking that fed the cargo cult-type movements: there is going to be a radical reversal of the values of the whole world, and it is going to happen all at once.

A topic for research would be to discover the relation between this kind of venture capital and the thinking of wage earners. Other settlement dwellers scrutinise their pay slips very carefully and see that their pay rate of K1.62 has at last been raised by 4 toea. I cannot say whether the same people who are calculating so carefully can join in the luck binges while in the same frame of mind. I have a feeling that these two things do not go together in the same person at the same time, but they do come out of the same settlement community. They are two different mindsets operating out of the same village body.

### **Politics**

The PNG Elections this year 2007 are looming as a most troublesome time. There are predictions on all sides of impending disaster, of bloodshed from many guns, of widespread corruption and vote-buying. Many steps have been taken to counter-act these threats, but they are all in the realm of being reasonable and identifying the unreasonable.

The village fact is that elections and campaigns are won on the basis of powerful spells. By way of example: A certain priest was an impassioned speaker on Sundays, but sometimes was tongue-tied by his own exuberance. Parish leaders came to me shaking their heads and pointing out that it is a common ability of village personalities to work a spell to frustrate the efforts of others to talk. The priest would remain bound from speaking until the spell was removed in the village. That was also the reason why no kiaps were able to stay long in Yangoru. From the government side, Yangoru was seen as a staging area for young Australian kiaps emerging from bush ready to return home at the end of their tour of duty. (Gesch 1985:213) They were only meant to stay for a few months, but the villagers pointed out that it was because of a tanket planted at the station that no one was able to stay anyway. This was not to deny government planning, but to show the real reason why it was so—these people did not want that kind of development in the district. Politics of all kinds is a prime area for the two different mindsets to work simultaneously.

### **Sport**

I once went to encourage our parish team in playing soccer. I made the mistake of suggesting to others that they should be afraid of the abilities of our team. I was told quite solemnly, 'We don't like to play with Negrie because they have magic to break legs.' When the home team was challenged with this, they replied, 'That is not true, we are good Christians and would not do such a thing. They see us washing our legs with water at the beginning of the game. This is not harmful spells but protective action against the ways of others.' Employing such resources did not change the need for training and exercise.

There are various things you have to do to win at sport in the countryside of PNG. One is the familiar routine of building up one's physical capacity; another is to employ religious techniques which are more result-oriented than Christians would allow.

### **Land**

Knowledge of stories of the creation of the earth has ownership implications in PNG. In Yangoru the mountains were formed by scooping up earth from the plains by the spirits of myth, Konimpo and Rurun. At given locations for some mountain villages, all peoples came out of the ground at these spots. In other places all peoples came out of the spirit woman's birth canal, here at this tiny waterhole. In Riwo, Madang, it was Dudo who created the earth from foam that solidified in the sea, built up, and was then scattered to North, South, East and West as home for all peoples. A village community identifies itself from the dream given to a man who wandered first into this area as he lay down to rest and was told to settle here by a spirit in the dream.

It is upsetting for Christians when expatriate missionaries forbid them from using such simple rituals as not taking a stick for a yam trellis from a spirit place. These matters seem more like cultural purity rather than offences against the First Commandment.

In the light of all these beliefs how can land registration take place? How can the permanent alienation of freehold land from the days of early settlement be tolerated? The two mindsets are at conflict here in legal land matters as nowhere else but it is necessary for the villagers and the lawyers to work out of the two mindsets to make any progress.

### **Conclusion**

It would be possible to develop further illustrations of the working of these mindsets in agriculture, education, family, religion and other fields, but we will end this review of the operation of the two mindsets here. What do we now have to say to the charge that villagers are 'ignorant', 'hypocritical', 'thousands of years behind' when they attempt to live out of two different mindsets at the same time?

I have been living and working in Papua New Guinea for many years of my life. I stay because the land is spectacular and the people are spectacular to match. I have friends and acquaintances whom I find enjoyable, nearly always provocative in their interpretation of the world, breaking open the boundaries of what I thought life was all about. Although I am sympathetic with Reo Fortune's claim that for life in PNG 'it was not enough to say that cultures are different; the point was that they are 'incredibly different,' (Mead 1972: 195) I meet people on the basis that they are the same as me. Robin Horton, an intellectualist, shows that tribal people employ very many rational procedures in their working with religion, procedures which are shared with what we think

of as genuine scientific procedures. This is because the religious worldview and experience is a different experience from science, but the people acting are the same kind of rational people. In this way, my friends in PNG impress me continually that they are at least as reasonable as I am—in this we are the same, but they want answers to other kinds of questions—in this we are very different.

Saying it simply: what is the difference?

The Traditional Village mindset wants to answer the question: how do I work and live so that I stay together with all the people who are of value to me?

The Critically Methodological mindset asks: how do I evaluate with sure knowledge the events of the world I live in?

It is not difficult to live out of two mindsets at the same time.

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