

LIFE AT THE END: VOICES AND VISIONS FROM MT. HAGEN, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Markers

With the approach of the year 2,000 various ideas of the world's end have arisen throughout the Pacific. Some of the signs or markers of this event as conceptualized by Papua New Guineans have recently been examined in the book *Millennial Markers* (P. Stewart and A. Strathern 1997a). These signs include historical events that are not seen simply as events in sequence occurring because of particular causes, but as indicators of what will take place in the future. Introduced notions by missionaries have intertwined with pre-existing indigenous ideas of divining the future through examining historical events. Also, the idea of *the end of history* arises through a mixed processing of Christian and indigenous notions which, owing to incongruities, leads to considerable confusions. Perceptions of markers (signs) of the millennium (end of the world) are directed by (1) material and spiritual images of the millennium (2) competing visions of millenarianism, such as whether Christ will return and initiate the millennium or that the Kingdom of God will first be set up on earth before Christ actually returns and (3) contradictory ideas of church teachings, e.g., Catholics often seem to stand outside of these notions of world's end yet in Mt. Hagen a new indigenous sect of charismatic Catholics holds all night prayer fellowship meetings in which they sing in tongues and experience physical possession by the Holy Spirit in a manner reminiscent of the prayer services held by the local Pentecostal Churches.

Technology is also seen as a marker of the End Times. Computers have been seen by some Melpa speakers in Hagen as »evil« devices that carry coded information about individuals that can potentially be used to harm or control people. This control through coding is also expressed by the Urapmin who have predicted that the code number 666 will appear in a bar code fashion on the foreheads of the followers of the Antichrist as a mark of ultimate control over the individuals so affected (Robbins 1997). This Urapmin idea appears to be a variant of that reported in Pentecostal circles in London that computer technology would be used to imprint the Mark of the Beast »under the skin of unsuspecting citizens« (Thompson 1996: 148).

The Antichrist is a Biblical marker of the End times. In Kwaio (David Akin, personal communication) and Hagen (A. Strathern and P. Stewart n.d.a.) the image of the Pope (not a particular Pope, but the robed authoritative figure itself) is that of the Antichrist whose image will appear on monetary notes at or near to the time of the rapture (i.e., the removal of the faithful from the earth prior to its destruction) as a sign of the Catholic Church holding the world monetary system in its control. One of our informants, Mande-Kele, declared that the Antichrist would give people a piece of paper enabling them to buy goods in stores. This version of pre-millennial dispensationalism corresponds to the image of the Pope as Antichrist exported from England to America with the Pilgrims (Thompson 1996: 88).

Changes in ecology are seen as one of the main markers of End Times, as among the Huli, Duna, and Ok peoples who believe that various environmental changes are indicators that the earth is altering and is losing its fertility and capacity to support life (P. Stewart 1998, Morgan 1997). Among these peoples there is a complex intertwining of indigenous and Christian notions, to be discussed in a later section of this paper.

The physical body is another marker. As mentioned previously, the number 666 appearing on the skin is believed to mark the followers of the Antichrist. In Hagen, the imagery is of people's hands and skin becoming ›dry‹ (i.e., lacking ›grease‹ or fertility) in the End Times. The Huli and Duna say that the rates of growth of the younger generation mark that times are out of joint. The Huli idea is one of precocious maturation (Frankel 1986: 24), while the Duna say that boys are stunted and enter into sexual activity too early. The idea of moral decline here has many parallels in European literature, as in Horace's lines (Carmina III, 6, 46–48):

Aetas parentum, peior avis, tulit
nos nequiores, mox daturos
progeniem vitiosiore

The age of our parents, worse than theirs,
bore us, more wicked than they; and soon
we too will produce our offspring, still more flawed.

These are just some of the markers that New Guineans point to as proof that the predictions in *Revelations* will shortly become realities (A. Strathern and P. Stewart 1997).

During 1997 on the first night in our Hagen field house (located in Kuk in the Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea), we heard distant drums being beaten and Christian songs being sung to the traditional tunes of the Hageners that might have been heard 30–40 years ago at a traditional funeral. These were the charismatic Catholics holding a prayer fellowship meeting in one of the nearby houses. On other nights we heard the Assembly of God (AOG) prayer meetings which were amplified via loud speakers late at night into the small hours of the morning. On the last night in the field house, we were awakened at 3:30 a.m. by a parade of worshipers winding their way through the village

settlement speaking in tongues, clapping their hands and vigorously praising Jesus and his Power while praying that evil be cast out from the community. Our field house was circled by one of the senior local women, Elizabeth, who was speaking in tongues (»Ra pa pa pa«), stamping her feet, and clapping her hands. On the morning of our departure, we asked Elizabeth what had been going on. She explained that she and others in her church were praying that we would be saved from the evil actions of rascals and thieves who are more numerous in these End Times and who prey on innocent people such as ourselves. She told us that those who are faithful must pray frequently and be prepared for the rapture. The loudest voice that we had heard that night was that of a local youth, Yu, who is an assistant to the Pastor in one of the nearby AOG churches. Yu is described by senior men in the community as a gifted (shamanic-type) person who receives dreams and visions from God about the presence of demonic forces and is able to heal the sick.

The ability to receive dreams and visions from God was one of the main foci of our 1997 research trip to Mt. Hagen in addition to further exploring the notions of millennial markers that had developed in the minds of two women who had been interviewed in 1995 during the filming of »A Death to Pay For«, produced for the BBC.

Voices

One of these women, Mande-Kele, is a Hagen women who grows coffee in addition to keeping her garden and pigs. She is one of several co-wives of a local Hagen man, Ru-Kundil. In 1995, she said, »It is true that heaven and earth will come to an end ... old people and young people are all involved in talking about this. This talk is to be found in the book *Revelations* which is the last book in the Bible. It is true that the land will finish and the sky will finish and this is because there are so many bad things happening among us. Mostly it is because people drink beer that drives them to do bad things. As for the women, they are demanding more and more clothes to wear. In English, I know that you speak about this as women wanting to have expensive things and wanting to be »fancy« women – these women want to turn into white women. Sometimes these women even wear men's trousers and by these means they lure men into sin. This is like how it was between Adam and Eve in the place of paradise before. The Serpent which was the serpent of Satan came with a good attractive appearance and presented itself to the woman. The woman sinned while Adam was not looking. My own view is that we should live quietly and continue to pray. What we should do is be very, very quiet and make our suggestions softly into people's ears and speak to each other quietly into each other's ears about this matter too. What they say is that as time goes on the money will not be sufficient for us – then the world will come to an end and that is why those of us who have taken Jesus into our lives have got to continue praying very hard. It is going to happen that a bad country will look after us. If that happens we will not be able to travel and eat and walk about in the way that we want to in a free manner.«

She went on to say: »Papua New Guinea has been called a Christian country and we want it to remain so. If another country comes to govern us we shall suffer pain. We keep on praying that no other country will come and be our government.«

For Mande, the notion of a bad country taking over PNG, money being scarce, and the uncertain fluctuating prices of coffee were all signs of the End Times when Jesus will return. Mande explained that before she joined the Church (AOG) she used to fight with her husband, Ru, all the time.

She said, »I was always fighting with him. I would take an axe and say I was going to kill him. I used to beat all my other co-wives with a stick and tell them never even to look at Ru, not even out of the corner of their eye. Don't you ever look at what Ru is doing, don't ever even call Ru's name, that's what I said. I only wanted him to go around with me. I wanted to be the only one who looked after him. Just me by myself, not the others. The other wives said to me ›but we are married to him as well, why should we let go of him like this? We have the right to sit down and talk with him, we have the right to sit down and eat with him.‹ But I just carried on beating him, both the wives and Ru. I hit them with knives and axes, and they used to say, ›what is it with you, how can we stop you from behaving like this?‹«

»Sometimes I would say true things and other times I would just tell lies about what was happening, but then I joined the church and where did all these words of mine go to? They just flew away. Now I only do true and honest things, and I am very ashamed about what I did before. All those things that I so recklessly did, I am terribly ashamed of. Ru is another human being, why did I do this to him? Now when he speaks, I stay very quiet and I respect what he says. And I obey what he says. If he wants to give something to people, I just agree. I follow all his wishes. When I pray I say that I sinned when I beat Ru and cursed him in the past. I did not realize that God had given a good man to me. In my human way I did all these bad things to him, not realizing that God with his precious blood had created everyone. So now I pray like this and I think with my deeper understanding. And I say ›God I want to be like you, friendly and good to everyone‹. So now I have become extremely quiet and well behaved. I never pester anybody and I never ask them for money. I just cook food and I look after people and I invite guests to come and stay with me. I cook tea for them and give them sweet potatoes to eat and look after them well. Now I say to the other co-wives, ›fine you can go around and eat with Ru, because I am with God now.‹«

»When some of us go to the church or just listen outside it, the pastors ask if there is anyone who wants to join. This is what they did with me, they asked this, and said anyone who wanted to join the church should put up their hand. And on one occasion I did put my hand up. They used to tell stories of people whose lives were bad, and I realized that this applied to me. And so they said, look a woman is taking Jesus into her life, she is changing herself, and the pastors came and prayed over me, and so I gave up all the things that I had been doing. In the Lutheran and Catholic churches the pastors tell people from time to time to decorate themselves. That is a practice of theirs. But in my church and the SDA church this is forbidden. We are forbidden to wear beads, or feathers, or fine

clothing or pearl shells at our necks, anything like that is taboo. They say we should not handle those things at all, we must just worship quietly in the church. So we don't know what to do about that and we are quiet and obey the pastors, and just look at what other people do. Anyway, we decide to obey them. They tell us that we should not be proud of our own skin and not show off in that way. They say that decorating oneself and displaying oneself around like that is the work of Satan. Yes, they say that doing those kinds of things belongs to Satan and we should not follow those ways.«

»I used to smoke cigarettes, chewed betel nut and wore beads around my neck. I wore long marsupial tails between my breasts. I did all kinds of things. But then I just decided to give it all up. I decided that I was doing these things for the sake of my body, but I was spoiling my soul. I just went around decorating myself, wearing bead necklaces and bangles on my arms. I did this without a thought in my head with regard to making prayers about anything. I used to smoke and chew betel and decorate and I looked at myself in the mirror and I thought how big all the decorations were. I saw that the decorations were beautiful and I went into the women's dance and jumped up and down. That's how I used to go around. I never said a single prayer, and whenever I saw anyone making one I simply kicked them aside and asked them, »what are you doing all that for?« I used to take part in the women's dance all day long and come home at night with not a care for my soul, or whether it would go to heaven. And people used to ask me »so you are going around behaving like that, but where are you going to put your soul at the end of it all?« And so I finally decided that I was really wasting my time and I must change my ways. So I put all these things behind me and gave it all up.«

When we asked Mande in 1997 to discuss again the End Times coming she emphasized that »*true life* is not to be found in material things but in God.« Signs of the End Times coming were again expressed in terms of women wanting to be »fancy« women – wearing their hair combed out and dressing up more. All of this produces sin because men are weak and easily fall into sin. The women who are indicated in these actions are not the local women so much as those of a different ethnicity who want to make the local men admire them. Mande explained that the Pastors say women did these sorts of things in the past and the Bible speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah and a time when bad angels came down to earth and married »fancy« women and produced children and that's why God destroyed the earth. Mande said that the earthly women thought that the bad angels were real men, i.e. men like their own *local* men. This reflects the tensions that exist in the environment of multiethnic relationships and crossing over of boundaries – here, the earthly realm and the heavenly realm. Community violence and disputes increasingly arise as people from different areas are brought together. The collapsing of »proper« boundaries seems to be an indicator of the impending world's collapse.

Mande told us that the End Times are truly close at hand and that the earth will finish in thunder and earthquakes. She and those in her church fast frequently so as to be ready for the moment when God returns. This will occur when only a few people have money to play cards (a sin) while others won't have money at all. The Antichrist will be among the people and he will offer his number to the people. Mande had a variation of the 666

and said that the number is 366. She said, that people who have this number will be able to take it to the stores and get things for free.

Another sign of the End Times coming is what Mande calls ›Ground Place Power‹ (GPP) (*Möi kona paua*) (P. Stewart and A. Strathern n.d.). This power that she speaks of is the power that arises out of development processes around them as signs of the End Times. Mande told us that the GPP is very great in places of white men and many bad customs and behaviors come from this and that Jesus will need to come back to stop this GPP from rising up. She said, »that is why we spend all of our days in church, Monday to Sunday. Many people are urging people to join the church because the world will end soon.«

Mande explained that dreams come to her and others. Both Satan and God can bring these dreams and a person has to be able to distinguish between the two sources. This notion that dreams and visions are given to the people is prevalent in Hagen. Mande recounted one of the dreams that she said God had given to her.

Mande's Dream

I had a dream last night. Did that have something to do with me coming to see you two today? [i.e. to talk to us about her church life]

I was in church.

I have a sister [called Nuin] and she's in Moresby. She's big headed. She came to me [in the dream]. She plays cards and chews betel nut. In the dream I saw her looking far up into the sky and she was crying, crying, crying, her tears were falling down. Tears were streaming down her cheek. She had a netbag on, hung around her neck and dangling down her frontside. [This is the way that many women carry their netbags when they are empty. Usually the bags carry food, pigs, or infants suspended from the woman's forehead and they dangle down their backs.] She was looking up to the sky and crying.

The sister's netbag was filled with her sins. It was heavy on her. She was crying because she saw that her sins were in front of her obvious to everybody. [The netbag is symbolically very important for the women of New Guinea. It is the container of everything they produce and reproduce. Here the sinful sister's netbag is not worn from the forehead full of the products of useful labor but rather it is worn in front and filled with the products of ›incorrect‹ action. This is another instance of the common theme running through all of Mande's discourse of the traditional ›virtuous‹ life versus the modern (white) unproductive, sinful life.]

And so her sin was revealed and at the same time Jesus came to me – the two things go together.

I saw her crying while we were holding our church service and I asked her ›why are you crying, is it because we are here holding our church service and you are not in with us?‹ And then my sister said, ›there is a white man looking for you; your white man to whom you are married is looking for you‹. I (Mande) said, ›I don't know of any white man that I'm married to but anyway, you say he is coming to look for me here‹ [In 1995, Mande

had said that after joining the church she was no longer jealous of her husband's co-wives. Perhaps this is because she now has a co-husband in the form of Jesus.] And I saw this white man coming with very, very, long, long hair in ringlets. [Even though Jesus is described as white his hair is worn in the older traditional manner of long ringlets prevalent in Hagen among women – or perhaps the image is simply one of long flowing hair.]

So I went off into a corner [to provide privacy]. If this person wanted to speak to me the other people might hear what he was saying to me. Then this person came down and was right there looking at me. He took no notice of the other people in the space. I took my hand and put it on his knee and said, ›oh you were looking for me were you – why are you looking for me?‹ He had a pair of long socks which I held on to and he said that he had come to look for me.

This was almost at dawn because we were so late coming back from the church.

It was really in the time of night and I woke and it was already light. This I think was Jesus coming to look for me and he found me and now I have Jesus and I think that I have really seen Jesus in this dream. I'm very, very, thankful to God that he has given this vision to me. And I think that I really will be able to go to Heaven and I won't join in the earthly power [GPP].

The other woman who was interviewed was Yara, the daughter of the big-man Ongka. Yara has three children by her husband, who has taken a second wife. One of her children is grown up and preparing herself for marriage while the other two are still young. In 1995 Yara expressed resentment toward her father for not allowing her to go to school and learn to read and write as her brothers had been allowed to do. She said that the talk of the End times is in the Bible according to the people who teach about it but she is unable to read and make an evaluation of the truth of this talk.

In our discussions with Yara in 1997, she was certain that the world's end is at hand and her anxieties about being unable to read have shifted their focus to the powerful image of the ›Book of Life‹ which has her name written in it along with all those true believers who are to be saved at the return of Jesus. This is detailed clearly in a dream sequence that she said God gave her.

Yara's Dream

She was going along the banks of a river, going and going in a difficult place [a pilgrimage]. There she came to a place where there was a permanent materials house and she came to a place where there was a man who was reading names in a very large book. He looked up and he saw her. She said that her name is Sarah, it used to be Yara. He asks her, ›what is your name?‹ She said, ›when my mother bore me she called me Yara but when I was baptized my name was changed to Sarah. My name will be in your book.‹ She

stayed silent. [It is a common practice for New Guineans to take a Biblical name at the time of their Baptism and to stop using their parentally given name. People want to be called by their new names because that is the name that will be written in the ›Book of Life‹ which is their entrance code for Heaven.]

He said, ›your name is Sarah.‹ He called it and she realized her name was in his book. As he called out her name she went into his house. [Here we see that her Baptismal Christian name serves as the password into the house of God. The roll call of names may also reflect the election lists which allow a person to note if their name appears on them.] Yara continued her story, saying that many people were coming and going in the house, it was the last Judgement and the people were being divided up. She went alone into the wilderness place by herself and cried and sang a hymn and said, ›Oh Lord, this is the End Time, what am I going to do?‹

In the dream she awoke and said, ›Oh I've seen a dream of the End Times‹, and then she truly awoke and she was making a prayer to God. With her *noman* (mind) she thought, ›I know how the last times will be – I must behave myself when the End Times come. That's the meaning of the dream that God revealed to me.‹ We ask God to give us dreams and show the way, giving moral advice.

Yara described the chronology of the End Times, saying that »In 1998 the Antichrist will come. Some good people will be taken up at that time, the time of rapture. Their bodies and spirits will be taken up. Others [sinners] will be cast into fire. In 1999 God will return and judge people close to the year 2,000. The Pastors say this. The Pastors in their sermons tell us that this is going to happen but only God really knows. The Antichrist is a man. He will ask those who believe in God if they do and he will try to kill them with an axe. Those who do not believe in God will be taken by the Antichrist.«

Yara closed her interview with the following:

»Signs of Satan are all around us,
brothers killing brothers,
fathers killing daughters,
fathers and sons fighting.«

When listening to what will happen at the actual End Times we were told that great earthquakes will shake the earth and fire will consume those who are outside of the church (the unfaithful). After these events God will replant the earth with human seedlings. These seedlings or cuttings are said to be the faithful whom God, like Noah, has selected in order to repopulate the earth after the End Times destruction has occurred. The concept of humans being retained to serve as planting materials is expressed in the indigenous notion of *mbo*, which is central to Melpa notions of origin, descent, continuity, regeneration, and condensed power. These people's term for themselves, as the first Lutheran missionary-ethnographer Georg Vicedom noted (Vicedom and Tischner 1943–8), is *mbowamb*, the

›planted people‹, the people who have been planted in the earth and therefore belong to it. Sweet potato vines and taro shoots are *mbo*, materials that can be taken and transplanted from one garden to the next and therefore ensure the continuity and the regeneration of their life form. It is interesting that the predominant image here implies the agency of a gardener who takes the materials and purposively re-uses them, planting them in ground conducive to their growth and caring for them. Further meanings of the term convey its symbolic density:

- wamb mbo* = kinsfolk, those with whom an element of descent is shared
- peng mbo* = the round, bast-covered, human-hair wig formerly worn by men, in which spirits of dead kin were held to lodge
- pokla mbo* = the sacred tubs, built at ceremonial grounds to mark the performance of a *moka* exchange festival, in which magical stones and substances to draw in wealth and maintain fertility were buried. The tree or shrub planted in the tub is the *pokla*, branch or cutting or seedling, taken from elsewhere.
- kor-nga pokla mbo/ui mbo* = two terms for sacred or magical stones that might be placed on the *pokla mbo* as a lodging place for spirits or used in healing practices. These stones could be prehistoric mortars or representations of humans. The mortar's cup-like shape was described as the place in which the *kor* or spirit could live. *Ui* means ›to come‹ and refers to the habit of spirits to manifest themselves by ›coming‹ to people at a time of their own choosing (A.J. Strathern 1969). The mortar as *mbo* thus resembles a nest, known as *mi-manga*, a ›mi-house‹, where *mi* also can refer to an origin place, a place of creation.
- mema mbo rondoromen* = ›they transfuse blood‹. The blood taken from another body is transfused into a hospital patient to renew the patient's life.
- ik mbo wuō* = a teacher, one who implants knowledge gained elsewhere into a new mind and thus reproduces it.

The wider notions involved here are clear. There is a combination of continuity with renewal, always through transmission of a sacralised power from one context to another.

Themes

Some of the themes that are found throughout these narratives of world's end include:

1. Multiethnicity, boundary crossings, and witchcraft (*kum*)

There is an awareness that multiethnic relationships produce conflicts both at the personal and community level. With greater possibility for movement of people from different areas across boundaries that are much more permeable than in pre-colonial and

colonial times, senses of self and identity are put into question and challenged in new ways. Often neighboring peoples such as the Chimbu are described as thieves and rascals. The notion that more cannibal witches are present in Hagen than previously and that these witches are possessed by Satan is also described partly in multiethnic terms (P. Stewart and A. Strathern 1997b and n.d.b.). The Queen of the witch community is said to be from neighboring Chimbu, people with whom Hageners have frequent disputes. Chimbu and also Enga women who marry Hageners are stigmatized as being more violent and less able to integrate with the Hagen community. It is true that women typically move at the point of marriage to their husband's community and must learn to adjust to the expectations and demands of not only their husbands but also their affines. Often women find it difficult to cope, especially if they are married to a man who has paid an acceptable brideprice but who is not their own choice. Such problems are likely to be all the greater in cases where the wife is from a distant place, and has to struggle, perhaps physically, to assert herself without the benefit of support from nearby kin.

Incoming wives from elsewhere are likely to be seen as more grasping and insistent than local women, for the reasons just given. They thus become susceptible to stereotyping that associates them with disorder, greed, instability, and damaging conflict. Greed is the central symbol that drives this complex of notions. Since the Antichrist is also linked with this idea of greed and grasping after material advantages, and the Antichrist is seen as coming from the outside, there is a further tie-in between the Antichrist, witchcraft, materialism, and certain people of ethnicities other than the Melpa themselves. The Simbu (Chimbu) people to the east become representative of this sense of otherness because they belong to a different Province from the Hageners (Melpa), unlike the mid-Wahgi people who share the same provincial center of Mount Hagen town. In Port Moresby, the national capital, Simbu people have for long competed with the Melpa and others for employment, and the Melpa have been at pains to distinguish themselves from them in the eyes of coastals. Yet the Simbu are also in another sense Highlanders, sharing an identity in the broader sense with Hageners. It is this ambiguity, perhaps, that has led to the notion that Chimbu is the headquarters of the witches.

Greed is not simply projected onto the outside, however. It is also felt to be at work internally, because of the heightened influence of Satan in the world generally. People therefore have the problem of *dealing with* Satan's influence, and one of the locally significant ways they have developed to counteract greed is fasting.

2. Coping with the unthinkable

There are a number of ways in which the Hageners are dealing with the End Times notion. These include fasting, seeking to strengthen the *noman* or mind, and prayer.

a. *Röng mi roromen* (fasting) is the counterpoint to greed. Greedy actions (GPP) are the cause of the earth's decay. Fasting is thought to reduce some of the immediate effects of GPP by means of reestablishing an equilibrium of sorts between over-consumption and

personal sacrifice. The notion of fasting is one that overlaps with two indigenous notions: (1) *Mowi*, the prohibition on the consumption of specific types of food that one adheres to while participating in particular rituals (e.g. the prohibition during the *Amb Kor*, Female Spirit, cult ritual on the consumption of sweet potatoes that have been cooked in ashes, or the expression of grief through the avoidance of a particularly favorite food that had been shared with a friend who has died. (2) *Mi*, something that is taboo. This word is used to describe the total avoidance of food that Mande and others routinely enact as a new kind of prohibition, invoking the solemnity and power of the concept of *mi*, or origin-substance. The act of fasting is thought to prepare the individual for the time when Jesus will return as well as quelling the evil powers that exist in the surrounding area. The *mi* is also the sacred substance of the Hagen people and is represented in the case of the Kawelka by the cordyline plant which is often planted at a garden's edge as a sign of taboo to ward off thieves who might desire some of the planted crops. One might equate the action of fasting with the setting of a taboo sign on the body as a warning to cannibal witches (the workers of Satan) who attempt to consume human flesh. Fasting is clearly seen as an act with both performative and expressive efficacy, just as food prohibitions (*mowi*) are. A refusal to ingest life-sustaining substances asserts the strength and bounded integrity of the body itself and its dedication to a cause. The *mi* is the most powerful force of protection as well as of rightful punishment for wrongdoing. All of these ideas are creatively brought together in the symbolic work of constructing the notion of fasting in a new context. (We may perhaps *contrast* these ideas with the notion of the mortification of the flesh, since the notion that is being developed seems to be one that is strongly embodied, and not dualistic.)

b. The *noman*: Seeking to strengthen one's *noman* or mind is thought to be a means by which a person will become a 'better' Christian and one who will be seen by God as worthy of salvation (A. Strathern and P. Stewart 1998). At the end of Yara's dream narrative she explained that both the mind (*noman*) and the body would go to heaven. Thus, these earthly preparations anticipate the day of 'rapture', when whole persons will be 'caught up' and transported to Heaven.

The ideal of obtaining a strong *noman* is an indigenous one that determined what a person could expect to obtain during life, but the *noman* was not thought to survive after the death of the person, whereas in the new Christian eschatological scheme which Yara develops it does. It is important to stress here again that we see in these statements individuals attempting to work through and to refashion indigenous notions of the person and the distribution of aspects of personhood across the boundary between life and death. Cultivating a strong *noman* is connected further with fasting, since both imply the subjugation of desire (greed) and its subordination to the acquisition of ritual power, making the ritualized body apt for entry into Heaven, a proper *mbo* for God to take.

c. Prayer (*Atenga rui* and *mawa iti*) allows Christian Hageners to ask God to help them obtain a strong *noman*, through 'proper' actions as well as the opportunity to ask for assistance in warding off evil deeds that might befall them or their kin or fellow church members. The non-Christian usage of *mawa* is that of asking a person who stands in a

more powerful/prestigious position to the supplicant, such as a trading partner, for something. Such asking is technically outside of the coercive context of ceremonial gift-giving, since it is not necessarily part of a *moka* sequence governed by debt and investment. However, if A acts as supplicant and makes *mawa* for something from B, B can later do the same, reversing the order of superiority and re-establishing equality. With God this cannot be done, since God is always superior. *Mawa* is an appeal to his *noman*, as it is in the case of a friend or partner too, but God's *noman* cannot in principle be swayed by magic or rhetoric. Strengthening the human *noman*, correlatively, means making it more like God's. In any case, *mawa* remains a privileged form of asking God to forgive sins or provide a source of well-being that constitutes another resource for people dealing with the threatening and uncertain aspects of their lives in the shadow of the End. *Atenga rui* is the term for invocations of ghosts that in the past accompanied pork sacrifice, requesting release from sickness, help against enemies, the acquisition of wealth goods, or the fertility of crops and people. Christian prayer is also described in general as *atenga rui*, but there is a new stress in it on *mawa*, with the sense of dependency on God and an inability ritually to control the cosmos, a recognition of the idea that ›man proposes, God disposes‹. We will compare this later with the pre-Christian ritual management of the cosmos.

d. *Ur Kumb*: Dreams and visions and the prophecies inspired by them are another way of thinking about the unthinkable. If humans cannot manage the cosmos, they can manage their own bodies by fasting and thereby achieve some privileged access to the knowledge of what is happening and what will happen, of the evil demonic powers that are supposedly abroad in the world and of the coming actions of Jesus in the Parousia (*Yesu yand omba*, ›Jesus will come back‹). Individuals such as Yara and the young male pastors have cultivated a reputation for this kind of power in order to claim a position of leadership, not by virtue of making things happen but by virtue of knowing and revealing the secrets of what will happen and recognizing the signs of events that are already happening as a dispensationalist skill.

e. *Nda*. (Perhaps/we don't know) The ultimate means of coping with the uncertain future projected into the imagination by Christian beliefs in End Times, is the caveat that was frequently related to us – that they don't know exactly when the earth will finish, ›Pastors say it may be in 2000/2001 but only God knows for sure.‹ The superiority and inscrutability of God is here called into play almost as a protective device, but also as a warning to sinners to repent quickly because the End could happen prior to 2000 rather than after it. Pastors play on both ideas – that Jesus is coming soon, since the signs suggest this, and that his arrival may be delayed, for reasons best known to Himself since all is in God's plan, and in particular it cannot be computed when the Gospel will have been preached widely enough. The attempt to get everyone converted is made *because* of the putatively impending End but also itself *makes the End possible*. In other words there both is and is not ritual control over cosmic events. The ritual of preaching the Gospel may bring about the End, but there is no human ritual for renewal of the cosmos.

3. Cyclicity, Ritual and the Cosmos

PG, the Power of God, has made a fundamental difference to the relationship between ritual and the cosmos. Indigenous rituals of fertility and regeneration envisaged rituals and sacrifice as ways of directly influencing the state of the cosmos or the prosperity and health of people. It is true that ghosts, ancestors, and the ›big spirits‹ (*kor ou*) such as the Female Spirit, were seen as having their own capacities for volition and choice, and required sacrifices in return for granting people's wishes or releasing them from sickness and infertility. In this sense, then, they were superior and not in people's direct control. Nevertheless, there was a strong emphasis on performative efficacy, on carrying out rituals as the means of restoring and regenerating fertility by symbolic enactment. It is this idea of performative efficacy that is altered by the idea of God's Power. Efficacy is replaced by ›asking‹, *mawa*, and cannot be ›acted out‹.

This notion of efficacy was even more highly developed among the Duna people of Lake Kapiago in the Southern Highlands Province than among the Melpa. The Duna, like the Huli, had an elaborate entropic notion of the processual decline of the ground over a period of fourteen generations. But they also had a vigorous and equally elaborate vision of counteracting this entropy by means of ritual practices known collectively as *rindi kiniya*, (*Huli dindi gamu*) straightening or renewing the ground. They saw their landscape as not only dotted with shrines to various spirit powers but also as traversed at large by two grand ritual trackways, the *kirao hatia* and the *hambua hatia*, in the first of which a virgin's menstrual blood was carried from one end of the Duna area to the other and finally given as a libation to spirits in a sacred site among the Huli people to their south, while in the other the body parts of a young, fertile Oksapmin man, captured and sacrificed, were distributed along a parallel pathway that also ended at the same place among the Huli, known as Kelokili to the Duna (Gelote to the Huli, both names referring to the base or root of a large *Ficus* tree perhaps associated with a chthonian creatrix figure, see Frankel 1986:21). These Duna notions of a regional landscape of mobile, sacred power that required management, propitiation and regeneration correspond to the circulating cults of renewal in the Western Highlands, the Female and Male Spirit cults predominantly. Such cults were means whereby an image of climatic and ecological renewal on a regional, trans-local basis was constructed. The adoption of Christianity has done away with this image and replaced, it with one that is both more global and more local. Each local congregation attempts to intercede with God and protects itself from evil, a process that is known to be replicated globally.

In the indigenous ritual universe of the Duna there was an inbuilt cyclicity, tempered by ritual action. This idea was not clearly present among the Melpa, although their idea of a short-cycle need to re-stimulate fertility each generation corresponds to the Duna's idea of a fourteen-generation pulsation. In both cases the cosmos was seen as ritually socialized, through human actions. In the Christian vision, there is a horizon of finality, different perhaps from the indigenous notions of cyclicity. In the merger of contemporary ideas in Hagen, however, we find that the ›gardener image‹ of the renewable *mbo* has been inserted

to preserve the cyclic version of time. The gardener is God, not a human, and the image clearly recognizes the shift in the balance of power between people and the deity. By the same token people are no longer in control of the co-ordinated ritual reproduction of the landscape, and there is no exact concordance between their social alliances and the reproduction of the earth's power of fertility. The ritual gap, again, can be closed only notionally by reference to God's Power and His Plan for the world, which humans cannot even know in detail. At the center of faith there is, therefore, an aporia, leading to a pervasive sense of uncertainty and contradiction.

4. Contradiction, category collapse, and the struggle for access to knowledge

a. Both Mande and Yara spoke of the types of sinners other than witches. These are rascals, prostitutes, and thieves. These characters are also boundary transgressors, like people from different areas, and their influence can easily penetrate into and pervade community life. Christian prayers are used, as we have seen, to make a symbolic or sacred protection against such influences. The sense of collapsing boundaries and confusion of categories re-informs the sense of the impending end of the world.

b. Another category confusion is generated, according to Mande, by local women attempting to be like white women. Her remarks reveal the ambivalence of attitudes generally towards whites and other outsiders – such as ›Japanese‹. Whites represent both GPP and also the Power of God (PG). The imitation of white women and the relationship of this process to sin is a marker of GPP. In one image Mande spoke of people in Japan being very rich in material terms but lacking Jesus in their hearts, so that they lacked ›life‹. One can see sentiments of this kind as an attempt to achieve a feeling of parity with whites, or superiority towards some of them, through an assertion of spiritual vision vis-à-vis material values, a sophisticated twist on earlier attempts to achieve parity by *becoming* wealthy, as in the 1968–72 red box money cult in Hagen which has subsequently been repudiated as a Satanic form of activity (A.J. Strathern 1979–80).

c. Ambivalence continues in the attitudes towards money, and it follows from the theme of GPP, to which money belongs. Only the followers of Antichrist will have money in the end times. In the 1995 imagery of Mande the insufficiency of money supplies was to be a sign of the end. In 1997, she spoke more definitely of money itself being a source of wrongdoing, since what is ›fancy‹ is also ›expensive‹ and a marker of sin. Yet in the end ordinary money would also be obliterated and replaced by a special coding of the Antichrist, just as Christians would use their name-codings in the Book of Life to get to Heaven.

d. The question of access to ›knowledge as power‹ is also crucial. Mande relies on what the Pastors say and the idea that all is in the Bible. Yara, who was concerned about the questions of access and evidence in 1995, by 1997 announced herself as a dreamer and

also an interpreter of dreams for others. Dreams could give her a leadership role and also replaced literacy as a source of knowledge as power. The male pastor – neophyte, Yu, was also spoken of as having not just dreams but *visions*. We expect the significance of dreams to continue to grow in the next months and years. Far more local people are becoming pastors now than in the 1980s – it is a popular career choice – and people are likely to develop the rhetoric and dreaming capacities to enter into these positions and maintain the quest for ›knowledge‹.

e. History as Sign again. As time goes on, *everything* becomes interpreted as a sign, in a process of semiotic overdetermination. What the point of ›saturation‹ in such a ›heavy‹ symbolic arena will be is unclear, but clearly the millennium is fast becoming a ›symbol that stands for itself,‹ as history is ›swallowed‹ by signs.

f. The GPP which encompasses development and material wealth is a particularly strong sign of the End Times. It strikes at the heart of the Hageners' sense of self worth and identity which is so intimately integrated with the actual ground – working the gardens and producing pigs – the traditional means of gaining respect for women in Hagen. Urban development, the inflow of cash, and women wanting to be clean and wearing ›fancy‹ dresses are all incompatible with the close day-to-day, hands-in-the-dirt, experience of the traditional Hagen women.

g. At the broadest level, we suggest that what the images of world's end express is confusion, ambivalence, and contradiction of categories in historical experience, a recognition that history can no longer be appropriated and incorporated into existing structures, but has instead fundamentally shifted these structures in a kind of tropological tornado that places them into the ›eye of the storm.‹ While we were in Hagen in August 1997 this sense of crisis was heightened by the fact that it never once rained. We were told that a five month drought had left crops in a ruined state, which we saw with our own eyes. Also, a plague of worms had destroyed large areas of gardens throughout the region and unseasonably cold, frosty weather had destroyed gardens in the higher altitude areas such as Tambul and Kandep, driving people to evacuate their homes in the famine. These climatic shifts were all seen as signs that the end of the world is close at hand and nearly every woman showed us the ruined produce of her gardens – some explicitly saying that these are the signs of the end at hand. The ecologically induced disaster totalized in the form of the landscape itself the sense of End Times and provided an apparently direct confirmation of the prophecies in the Bible, linking the experience of a shortage of food and money to the idea that World's End was at hand.

5. Globalization – Localization

The two main female informants whom we have cited in this paper, Mande and Yara, belong to the Assemblies of God church and attend local services, but the Lutheran, Catholic and Seventh Day Adventists also have active congregations in Hagen. Particularly noticeable to us were the Charismatic Catholics since they tended to conduct their

fellowship meetings in the early hours of the mornings awakening us with their songs and drumming. These Charismatic Catholics are in direct competition with the fundamentalist churches such as the one that Mande and Yara are members of, and share common features such as speaking in tongues and prophesying that the end of the world is close at hand, practices that are not parts of mainstream Catholicism. Damian Thompson, however, notes that »The new Catechism of the Catholic church states that before the Second Coming, »the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the belief of many believers« ... [This] new Catechism allows room for the belief that the Church is now passing through the prophesied tribulation and, by implication, is entering that ill-defined period known as the Last Days« (1996: 185–6).

These notions of End Times are ones that are preached globally. We have been detailing here some of the ways in which the Hageners localize these concepts and intertwine them with indigenous ideas of self, life, and death. The Charismatic Catholics in Hagen need not have derived their notions directly from their own parent Catholic church in Mt. Hagen town. More probably they picked their ideas up from the local context of fundamentalist/charismatic movements in the Protestant churches and developed their own twist – hillside vigils, a new kind of drum made from kerosine cans, night services, and singing in tongues to traditional melodies. Local taboos and practices may become enmeshed, however, with wider ones as the next example shows.

The *mi* (taboo) imposed upon the body in the act of fasting is an individual action to guard and ready the *noman* for the End Times. It takes on a more expansive meaning when it is engaged in as a group activity. Recently one of Papua New Guinea's newspapers reported that the United Church of PNG gave its support to Prime Minister Bill Skate's proposal that a National Day of Fasting be observed in conjunction with raising money to combat drought-related food shortages. The Church's General Secretary promoted the Day of Fasting as »a step in the right direction for PNG as a Christian nation ... [saying that] Skate's call was a spiritual fight which Christians should take up ... [and] ... as a Christian nation we believe we can overcome situations by fasting and praying« (National 11/11/97).

Here we see the use of fasting as a Nation-strengthening device, called for by one of its mainline churches and by its Prime Minister, to show solidarity for the sufferings of its local communities. Symbolic actions of this kind act as suspension bridges between local and wider senses of identity, and it is certainly significant that religion is more and more being harnessed for the purposes of identity-building both locally and nationally. Global patterns thus realize themselves only through their local mutations and appropriations, while by the same token the local is transformed more towards the global when it reaches the level of the nation.

Envoi: PMT, 1 & 2

Thompson (1996: 142, 347) speaks of the condition of pre-millennial tension (PMT) observed by scholars of millennial movements in Britain (the phrase was coined by

Andrew Walker of King's College London). It is a phrase that aptly applies also to the Hagen congregations, and to the situation observed by Donald Tuzin among the Ilaḥita Arapesh (1997: 126–156). If so, we can only speculate what PMT2 may be, post-millennial-tristesse. Here we suggest two possibilities, given that events are likely to be interpreted within existing frameworks of ideas while also posing challenges to such frameworks. One possibility, of course, will be to reiterate the coping strategy that comes from accepting the Power of God (PG): God decided that the time was not right after all, and numbering systems are human, not God-made (as in the Anglican hymn: A thousand ages in thy sight/Are like an evening gone/short as the watch that ends the night/before the rising sun.) The other possibility would be to re-emphasise aspects of indigenous agency, the Power of People (PP): people's prayers, fasts, vigils, drumming, singing, in short their rituals, had kept the Antichrist at bay and/or had persuaded God to wait a while. The two possibilities correspond to the existing tension between the fervid fear and expectation of an imminent future beyond control (dispensationalism) and the equally fervid wish to know it and exercise control over it (post-millennarism).

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