

## Landscapes of Relations and Belonging

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Landscapes of Relations and Belonging:

Body, Place and Politics in Wogeo, Papua New Guinea

*Astrid Anderson*

**Landscapes of Relations  
and Belonging**  
*Body, Place and Politics in Wogeo,  
Papua New Guinea*

Astrid Anderson



***Berghahn Books***  
New York • Oxford

Published in 2011 by

***Berghahn Books***

www.berghahnbooks.com

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Anderson, Astrid.

Landscapes of relations and belonging : body, place and politics in Wogeo, Papua New Guinea / Astrid Anderson. – 1st ed.

p. cm. – (Person, space and memory in the contemporary Pacific ; v. 3)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-84545-775-4 (hardback : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-85745-034-0 (ebook)

1. Ethnology–Papua New Guinea–Vokeo Island. 2. Ethnopsychology–Papua New Guinea–Vokeo Island. 3. Ethnicity–Papua New Guinea–Vokeo Island. 4. Geographical perception–Papua New Guinea–Vokeo Island. 5. Vokeo Island (Papua New Guinea)–Politics and government. 6. Vokeo Island (Papua New Guinea)–Social life and customs. I. Title.

GN671.N5A64 2011

305.800957'5–dc22

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed in the United States on acid-free paper.

ISBN: 978-1-84545-775-4 (hardback)

E-ISBN 978-0-85745-034-0

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# Acknowledgements

Since I first read Ian Hogbin's books about Wogeo 17 years ago and started to plan my first fieldwork on the island, many people have helped and inspired me in my work. The Norwegian Research Council, Lumholz-fondet and Nordic Institute of Asian Studies funded my research in 1993–94, 1998 and 1999, and the research was carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and the National Research Institute in Port Moresby. The Institute of Comparative Cultural Research in Oslo should be thanked for facilitating the cooperation with linguist Mats Exter by funding his research in Wogeo in 1999 and 2000. For all the periods of fieldwork I was affiliated to the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. I am grateful to the department and the funding institutions for giving me the opportunity to go to Wogeo. Thanks are also due to Nancy Frank and Frøydis Haugane for the best library service possible, and to Nancy Frank also for improving my English.

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation accepted at the University of Oslo in 2003. Several people have read and commented on my texts during the various stages of the work leading up to this book and should be thanked: Rune Paulsen, Tone Sommerfelt, Heidi Fjeld, Benedicte Lindskog, Trude Bell, Dag Tuastad, Thorger Kolshus, Arne Røkkum, David Lipset, and in particular Arve Sørum, Edvard Hviding, Sidsel Roalkvam and Ingjerd Hoëm. I would also like to thank Signe Howell for important encouragement. I am particularly gratified that in 2003 I got the chance to meet Donald Tuzin and was able to discuss the Wogeo ethnography with him before he died. His generous and inspiring comments on my work have been of immense value.

I am indebted to Jürg Wassmann who gave me the opportunity to publish my book in this series, and I thank him and Verena Keck for inviting me to their seminar in Heidelberg in 2006. Katharina Stockhaus should also be mentioned in this regard, and Don Gardner should be thanked for commenting on my manuscript. Joshua Bell has reviewed this manuscript on behalf of Berghahn Books, and his detailed and conscientious comments have been most helpful in preparing this book, although I have not been able to incorporate all of his suggestions. For all shortcomings I am solely responsible.

Mats Exter, at the time a master student of linguistics at the University of Cologne, joined me for six months of fieldwork in Wogeo in 1999 – a cooperation made possible by Ingjerd Hoëm and Even Hovdhaugen of the Oceania group at the Department of Linguistics, University of Oslo. Mats has made the Wogeo language more intelligible for me, and he has transcribed and translated most of the songs and myths presented in this text. I greatly appreciate all his help – and for eating the food I served him when I tried to be a proper Wogeo woman. In Papua



New Guinea, Ralph Stüttgen should be thanked for providing accommodation and assistance in various ways during field breaks in Wewak.

I also wish to thank my life companion, Rune Paulsen. He introduced me to Papua New Guinea when I first went there in 1993, and we spent one year in our respective field sites, he in May River and I in Wogeo. For his encouragement and company I am eternally grateful. With him I have also been so lucky as to become the mother to two wonderful boys, Eirik and Askil, who make sure everything is kept in a proper perspective.

But I am, of course, most of all indebted to the people of Wogeo Island. Not all of the Wogeos who have helped me in my work can be mentioned by name, but some of them have to be: Niabula, Sanganie, Kanemoeka, Gris, Boarinya, Matarena, Saramoin, Sanum, Bo, Jeda, Kumi, Guria, Min, Ima, Soufa, Kaite, Saboakai, Boanga, Iakena, Marajina, Nunu, Ialoma, Gamuia, Koan, Libaliba, Fein, Bagim, Sako, Tangom, Kenang, Boakie, Jagamoin, Makanga, Sidaia, Jabat, Main, Kamagun, Iangeine, Ganem, Oaiari, Bujon, Sesare, Tamoin, Malo, Gousou, Bareoa, Jangara, Talbul, Munjal, Lala, Mango, Tangarua, Kaiaga, Salam, Singi, Nyem, Gulegule, Kenai and Majeбра. My friends, Medo, Tangina and Saea, have to be mentioned in particular, as should Sarakamot, my young friend and companion in 1999. Bernard Gagin Dale and Tom Fandim lived on the mainland while I was in Wogeo, but we have had many interesting discussions about Wogeo customs – with Gagin also in letters. Marifa and Kulbobo took upon themselves the role as my teacher in Wogeo and told me numerous important stories. Both of them are now sadly dead, but hopefully their voices remain in this text in ways they would have appreciated. In Dab, Maria Sua and Tarere adopted me as a daughter, and I lived with them and their children, Roger, Kijua, Sheila Ia, Boeka and their niece, Moatakia, during all my stays on the island. Parts of the time *bum* Moita also stayed with us. Their patience with me and all my inquiries was admirable and I thank them for their hospitality and the way they included me in their family during the months I spent in Dab.

To all my Wogeo friends who allowed me to take part in their lives – *Kalingó tuka!*

# Note on Orthography

The Wogeo language is spoken by Wogeos and the people of the neighbouring island Koil – according to the 2000 census, 1,624 people. The Wogeos call their language Oageva – the same as the local name of the island. When I started to do research in Wogeo, the Wogeo language was still undocumented. In order to start the work of documenting the language, linguist Mats Exter accompanied me to Wogeo in 1999 as part of his MA project (Exter 2003).

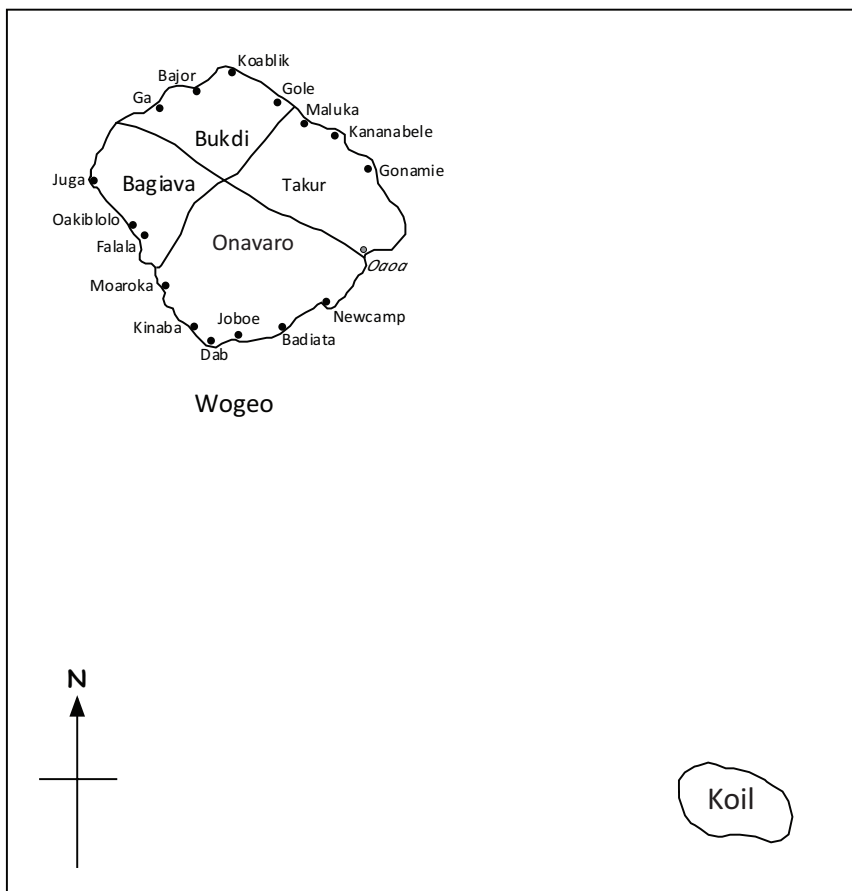
The orthography he developed differs from the one Hogbin used in his texts, and also from the rather unsystematic way Wogeos themselves wrote in the 1990s. In this book I use the orthography suggested by him (Exter 2003; Anderson and Exter 2005). The phoneme inventory of Wogeo is as follows:

	t		k		i		u
b	d	j	g		e		o
f	s					a	
m	n	ñ	ŋ				
	l						
	r						
v							

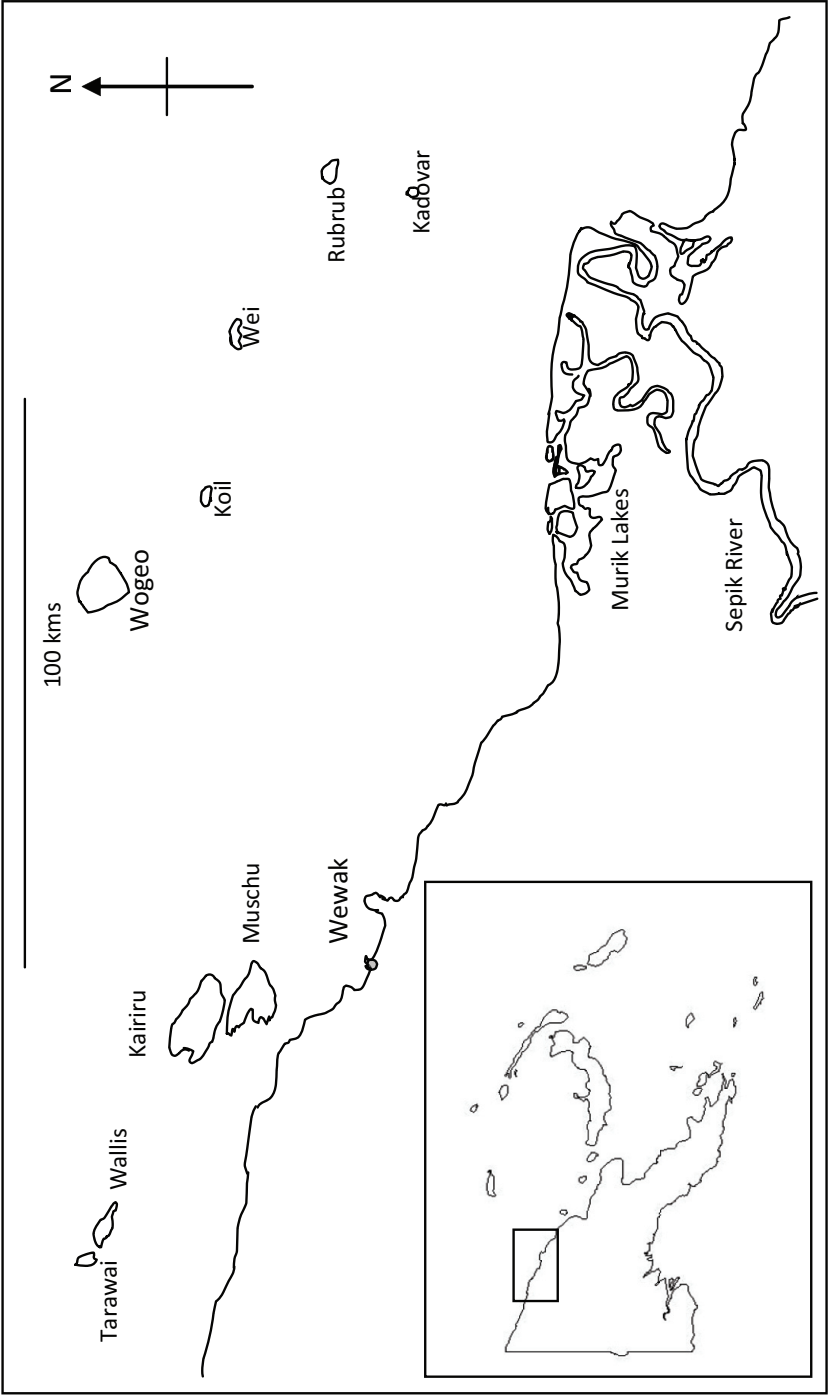
For those familiar with Ian Hogbin’s work from Wogeo, some changes in orthography should be noted. The most conspicuous change is that *w* is replaced with *o*: for instance, what Hogbin wrote as *warabwa* (food festival) is in this text *oaraboa*. Hogbin’s *y* is in most cases changed to *i*, so that *yata* (up) becomes *iata* and *Yamwi* (name) becomes *Iamoe*. In the present text, *y* is only used after *n* – as in *nyonyo* (mother) – a sound that according to linguistic convention (and in the phoneme inventory above) is written as *ñ*. Here *ny* is used. Similarly *ng* is used rather than *ŋ*. What Hogbin wrote as *p* is here written as *b* – for instance *Dab* instead of *Dap*. The *r* (as for instance in *ruma*) is pronounced as a mix of *r* and *l* (to be more accurate, as a ‘voiced retroflex flap in prevocalic position (Anderson and Exter 2005: 16) and as a ‘voiced retroflex approximant’ (ibid.) elsewhere). After vowels, *d* is pronounced as a ‘trill’: the village *Dab* is pronounced *Dab*, whereas the mountain *Ilodab* (the mountain ‘inside of Dab’) is pronounced *Ilorab*. Elsewhere it is pronounced as an English *d*. For a further elaboration on the orthography and the Wogeo language, see Exter (2003) and Anderson and Exter (2005).

In this book I have written all native terms in italics. I have also written the Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinean Pidgin English) terms I use in italics, but always with an indication that the term is in Tok Pisin.

# Maps of Wogeo and the Coast of East Sepik Province



Map 0.1 Wogeo and Koil



Map 0.2 The coast of East Sepik Province

# Introduction

Standing on the beach of Wewak, the provincial capital of East Sepik Province on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, the silhouette of Wogeo Island can be seen on the horizon on clear days. It takes a 2-3 hour ride in a dinghy with outboard motor to get from Wewak to the island, often in rough seas and strong currents. After hours at sea, continuously being washed by salty waves, the beautiful stony beaches of Wogeo are a welcome relief. Big trees lean out over the blue sea, providing a much appreciated shade from the baking sun. Then, trying to come to terms with the fact that the ground is not swaying, you are most likely presented with a fresh coconut to drink. Later, if you are lucky, your Wogeo friends will rub your salty, tired skin with pleasant smelling herbs dipped in water.

The Wogeos do this in order to wash away contamination accumulated in your body as a result of having stayed in foreign places, leaving your body fresh and with the smell of Wogeo. The welcoming ritual places your body on the island cleansed and prepared for wanderings through the Wogeo landscape. The wanderings presented in this text start in the village of Dab, a place of great importance. The stories of many people, alive and dead, are infused into this place, stories of people's origins and their movement within and between places. It is these stories that will form the core of this text.

The purpose of this book is to show how the bodily experiences of dwelling in, and moving through, the landscape of places and people on the island shape the manner in which Wogeos conceptualize and give meaning to their world. My aim is, however, not to present an exclusively phenomenological perspective on the Wogeo 'being-in-the-world'. It will be complemented with a semiotic analysis of the ways these experiences are made manifest in the physical world: in bodies, houses, pathways and places. Phenomenology has been called 'a science of beginnings' (Csordas 1999: 183) and, as such, it is the beginning-point for the analyses of this book.

A house in the forest and paths leading through it is an image used by philosopher and phenomenologist Martin Heidegger (1993[1954]) to describe the salience of 'dwelling' as the basis for how we experience and give meaning to the phenomenal world and, thus, to life in general. We may envisage that we have just moved to a house in a forest. The forest is unfamiliar and may be, lest there are already well-worn paths in it, difficult to manoeuvre in. It is to us nothing more than a forest filled with trees. We need to find landmarks in order to get a sense of direction and to mark out routes that are good to walk. The trees that make up the forest are merely trees, but soon we will start to pay attention to particular trees. If this forest is situated in Norway, we might notice that in an old, near-dead pine a woodpecker has carved out its hole. A birch marks out the point where we should take a turn to the left in order to avoid ending up at a precipice. In the

spring we may become aware that a certain alder is the first tree to sprout. As time passes we look for signs of whether or not the woodpecker has returned after the winter to lay eggs in the hole in the old pine. We wonder if the dead branch on the birch has fallen down since last time and measure the growth of leaves after the early sprouting alder. We might even think about these trees when sitting in the kitchen planning a walk in the forest. When we first moved to the house, the forest became a part of our life. As time passes, the particular trees we have endowed with meaning and histories also become parts of our life as separate entities within that forest and, as time goes by, more and more entities in the forest will be made meaningful. Places can be seen as created in such a manner. By moving through the phenomenal world we attach our experiences and histories to certain sites and, thus, transform these sites into places. Through our movement and experience in it, the indistinct forest becomes a meaningful landscape of places and pathways, and the pathways we follow gather our experience into meaningful life-worlds.

As an analogy we can say that we create relations with people in a similar manner in some contexts. When first joining an unfamiliar social setting – like that of an introductory class at university – the people present are merely an anonymous mass of fellow students. As time passes one notices some of them more than others – one because he dresses in a particular manner, another because she asked the lecturer an interesting question or a third because she asked for a light for her cigarette during a break. These may be the people one starts to talk to, and after a while one has established what we can call a social network. It is impossible to establish meaningful relations with all the fellow students, and one chooses some in favour of others for some reason or another. A social landscape emerges, based on relations to more or less significant others. Through time, the network of relations becomes increasingly complex, and some relations become more solid than others.

Taking these experiential foundations for ‘being-in-the-world’ to Wogeo, I believe useful insights can be gained. The experienced landscapes are centred in places along the coastline of the island with pathways between them, to the gardens in the nearby bush and onto the reef. The interior of the island and the sea are the horizons for these loci of experience at the same time as pathways lead across the island and over the sea to other places and people, turning horizons into experienced landscapes for those who travel along them. Through time, continuous and repeated movements in these landscapes make every part of them meaningful to the people living there.

But these landscapes are not only filled with people’s own subjective experiences: histories of people and events from the past are also imbued in them. Through generations, people’s histories have been attached to the places, and some of these are more or less collectively remembered. To the Wogeos, the meaningful landscapes constitute much more than merely being the result of everyday human experience or the equivalent to history books. The histories infused in the landscape tell people where and with whom they should belong, where they should cultivate their crops and with whom they should maintain particular relations. Wogeos order their social life according to this landscape of history and experience.

Such geographical and social landscapes are not created separately from categorizations and knowledge already present in mind. Due to knowledge we already had when we started to walk in the forest we knew that there existed a bird called a woodpecker that makes holes in trees. We knew that it was dangerous to climb down steep precipices and we knew that eventually all the trees would bear leaves in the spring. We started to talk to the guy who dressed in a certain manner because his clothing signalled that we might share certain likes and dislikes. We knew that it was good to have company while smoking outside during the breaks, and there was a reason why we found the girl's questions to the lecturer particularly interesting.

As Wogeos move in their geographical and social landscape, various categorizations are made relevant. Children accompany their parents to their gardens and learn to whom the trees and gardens belong, from underneath which trees they may pick the nuts they know they like to eat and that some paths are better to follow than others to get to the family's gardens. In the village they learn not to play under the house because it is dirty since the pigs sleep there, they learn to which house they may go to get something to eat, and when visiting other villages they soon know to which houses they may go and rest. In the constitution of social networks, social categorizations are made relevant. Wogeos reckon all people on the island as kin. 'That is why we don't have a word for "friend"', they say. The categorization 'kin' versus 'non-kin' is thus not relevant within the island and 'friendship' based exclusively on mutual sympathy is not conceptualized as a separate category of relationship. Close kin and distant kin are relevant, but not predominant, categorizations since people living in villages close to each other are usually close kin in one way or the other. Categories based in matrilineal descent are relevant in certain contexts, but in daily interaction it is those who share meaningful landscapes (or histories) who are the more relevant 'others': those who follow the same pathways, who belong to places connected by the same pathways and who regard the same histories as significant. The geographical and the social landscapes are constitutive of each other. Places are constituted by histories of people and events, and, at the same time, they provide the means for establishing belonging and relations that continue these histories. People's movements in the landscape constitute pathways between places that become conduits for future movement, creating and maintaining relations and the memory of relations between people.

Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling' signifies the way we are in the world and 'involves a lack of distance between people and things' (Bender 1993: 28). To dwell is in the nature of being – we are 'dwellers' (Heidegger 1993[1954]: 350). To Heidegger, cognition is not 'opposed to reality, but is wholly given over in the total social fact of dwelling, serving to link place, praxis, cosmology and nurture' (Tilley 1994: 13). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (1962), on the other hand, emphasizes the sensing body as 'the existential ground of culture' (Csordas 1990: 5). Bodily movement is essential to how meaningful landscapes are constituted; pathways, as manifestations of bodily movement through time, channel people's social relations in the landscapes of places where Wogeos dwell and belong (cf. Roalkvam 1997: 61). From this perspective, space becomes a product of movement.

However, as Richard Eves has argued in his analysis of bodily movement and space among the Lelet of New Ireland,

[A]ny full conceptualization of space must be coupled with an analysis of, and be grounded in, a concept of space as social space. The movement of the body, which Merleau-Ponty sees as important to the constitution of space, does not exist outside of people's symbolic construction of socially inhabited space and also of the body (Eves 1997: 178).

My phenomenological starting point will, accordingly, lead to an analysis of how Wogeos give meaning to and represent their world, inspired by important theorists in Melanesian anthropology, mainly Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern. The contributions of these two anthropologists elicit what Sandra Bamford has called 'the forward-going momentum' (1998: 159) of New Guinea cultures: 'The "work" of most New Guinea cultures is not centred around reproducing a formalized model of "society" as such, but rather is geared toward creating particular kinds of social relationships' (ibid.).

Alfred Gell (1999: 32) has described Strathern's perspective in her most important work *Gender of the Gift* (1988) as 'idealist semiotics'. As such, the social world she calls Melanesia is comprised not of entities that have external relations to each other and to the interpreter but of internal relations of terms that constitute and give meaning to the entities in the world (ibid.: 33). Even man becomes a sign to Strathern – in the sense that a person can stand for something else than him- or herself, for instance the relation between his or her parents. But rather than seeing entities, such as a person or other singular things or beings, as the primary focus for her semiotics, Strathern places *relations* as the main constituents of her Melanesia (ibid.: 35).<sup>1</sup> As the term 'father' only makes sense in relation to the fact that a man has a child, all aspects of people's social lives are cast in relations to significant others.

James Weiner has argued that in worlds that are relationally based, 'the task confronting humans is not to sustain human relationships but to "place a limit on relationships"' (J. Weiner 2001: 76; see also Roalkvam 1997: 200; 2003; Strathern 1996: 529). In the Wogeo relationally based world, people make various types of relations relevant in different situations rather than finding their place in a predetermined social landscape of groups into which people are recruited on the basis of unambiguous criteria such as unilineal descent and marriage. Strathern (1996) has pointed out that without overarching, indisputable principles that set limits for relationships, social networks in such worlds appear to have a potential for endless expansion. This book is also about how Wogeos place limits on relationships; how they channel flows of sociality by cutting certain connections and facilitating others; how networks are cut or expanded.

People's movements in the landscape and the continuous work of creating and maintaining certain relations create an image of Wogeo sociality as fluid and contextual, but to the Wogeos the landscape also provides a template for the structuring of social relations – or placing limits on relations, to use Weiner's words – that is conceived of as permanent and enduring and in which people need to find



their proper place. This is most of all made apparent in the way Wogeos build and inhabit houses and imbue them with meaning. In every house of significance on the island, the rafters in the ceiling are named and associated with certain pieces of land, names and histories of the people associated with the names and the land. The rafters are fastened in the ceiling corresponding to which part of the village the associated land is located and to which the people having rights in the rafter belong. The villages are conceptualised in both social and spatial terms as being divided in complementary sides or halves, often explained with the image of an eagle with its wings spread out to both sides, and the spatial composition of the house and the rafters replicates this spatial and social organization of the village. Further, the sides of the village are associated with offices of leadership, and the houses with certain matrilineages.

Wogeo named houses are powerful, polysemic and totalizing images: as icons of containment, as microcosms of the geographical and social composition of the villages, as well as images of overarching diagrams of sides and directions. But at the same time they are also part of the realm of concrete experience: they are the place where people dwell. Heidegger (1993[1954]) made the point that in the same manner as building is related to dwelling, thinking is related to dwelling. Our experience of dwelling is the basis for our thinking in the same manner as dwelling is the foundation for building: 'We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell' (ibid.: 350). It is the concreteness and immediacy of houses – the continuous experienced presence of the complex and meaning-loaded image – that gives the house its evocative power, not primarily as it is presented and interpreted by means of language. As Kulbobo, one of my most important teachers of Wogeo *kastom*, stressed, experience is essential to understanding. Hearing words does not properly elicit meaning.

Wagner has written extensively about symbols and the dynamics of meaning formation in Melanesia. Rather than seeing signs as mediators of an arbitrary relation between abstract coding and 'natural percept' (1986b: 24), he argues that meaning is formed in a perceived or experienced macrocosm where signs and signified belong to a single relation (analogy), and that a microcosm of symbols (coding) is formed through abstraction from this macrocosm. There is an ongoing dialectic process of abstraction into such a microcosm and concretization into the macrocosm – the lived and experienced world (ibid.: 14). By naming beings or entities, we abstract a microcosm of symbols (or names, 'if names are symbols and symbols names' (Wagner 1986b: 16)).

If we treat names as merely names, points of reference, then symbolism becomes a matter of reference: a microcosm of names is counterposed to a macrocosm of referents. But if we treat 'name' as a relationship, the microcosm of names is no longer a microcosm; it becomes immersed in a macrocosm of analogic constructions (ibid.: 15).

Meaning is not constituted in the abstracted microcosm: meaning is created in the perception of the relation between name and referent, Wagner states. Meaning is perception, he says (ibid.: 19), and this happens in the experienced and concrete macrocosmic world. The restriction of a symbol to represent a specific entity (the

abstracting half of the dialectic process) cuts the macrocosm ‘into manageable pieces’ (ibid.) for social purposes, allowing us to communicate with symbols in relations to other symbols. But in the other half of the dialectic process, when we focus on the relation between name and referent, the symbolization is concretized in a larger macrocosm of other such analogical constructions. All analogical relations between names and referents are again analogous to each other (for instance by the fact that they are ‘named’). This macrocosm of analogies ‘mediates the microcosmic points of reference by allowing us to ‘see’ resemblances among them’ (ibid.). It is this flow of analogies that makes meaningful metaphors possible, and metaphors are the means of expanding mere reference into meaningful constructions of specific ‘cultural’ worlds. This is how ‘side’ may come to refer to a set of people rather than merely ‘half of the village’ or ‘half of the house’, ‘pathway’ to a history of relations, or a male cult house to a female birth hut.

A metaphor is meditative, inserting an unconventional element ‘in the way of’ conventional reference, so that the new relations comes to supplant, to ‘anticipate and dispose of’ conventional effect. And by constituting ‘its own’ relation in the process, becoming an ‘icon’ of itself, a symbol that shows its own meaning, the trope renders itself ‘apparent’ (Wagner 1978: 31–32).

A house is like a container (*jiraboa*), my Wogeo friend Kulbobo said, and showed me his water bottle. It is like the shell of a hermit crab: without it the crab becomes vulnerable and dies. When saying that the house is ‘like the shell of a hermit crab’, the original and conventional referent (house as concrete structure) is obviated – ‘anticipated and disposed of’ – and the image of the hermit crab shell is evoked. Other analogies are also evoked in the process: for instance that a person without a house somehow is like a hermit crab without its shell, vulnerable without the shell to protect its soft body. It is due to the analogical relation between the two images in a macrocosmic realm – ‘house’ as built structure and ‘shell’ as the shell with or without its inhabitant – that makes it possible to obviate conventional reference and create a new symbolization. Kulbobo used this metaphor to explain to me something about the quite concrete and experienced house. Obviously the metaphor would have been meaningless unless the relation between the name ‘house’ and the actual house was the prime focus, evoking the sensual feeling of being inside a house. And someone who had never actually experienced seeing and sympathizing with a helpless hermit crab without its shell would not have perceived the effect Kulbobo wanted to evoke. In fact, his message may have been made just as well without words by bringing a hermit crab to the veranda of his house and tricking it out of its shell. Such an act may, however, well be likened to communication with speech (cf. e.g. Wagner 1981: 42; J. Weiner 1991: 31) and the image (analogy) used would still belong to a microcosmic as much as a macrocosmic realm. Had we not been able to abstract macrocosmic analogies into a microcosm of which language is a part, our communication about meaning would indeed have been made difficult. We need the macrocosm of experience and meaning to be cut up into ‘manageable pieces’ in order to communicate – whether the symbols used are verbalized or not.

Just as houses most of the time remain unelicited by words and maintain their powerful potential through the ‘total social fact’ of dwelling, the meaningfulness of people’s actions is not necessarily communicated in speech. In Wogeo, a girl’s first menstruation is celebrated with extensive rituals consisting of visits to other villages, ceremonial exchanges of food, and various cleansings and other rituals, but hardly any parts of the rituals are explained or interpreted to the girls or the other participants in the events. It was the experience of the wanderings from place to place, the ritual cleansings, the socializing with other women, and the exchanges of food that rendered the events meaningful (cf. Barth 1975). Similarly, while Wogeo mourners can be seen as embodying a deceased person during funeral rituals as they wander through the landscape that the dead has filled with his or her life, this is not an explicitly stated function of their wanderings. People merely said that they had to make the dead ‘sit down’. But the places they went to during the rituals were the same places as those who would have contributed with food for a ceremonial exchange in the deceased’s name belonged to, and the paths were the same as the deceased him- or herself would have followed in life: the paths that a girl would have followed at a her first menstruation rituals. The mourners were, quite physically, doing for a last time (or ‘undoing’ in the sense of ‘finishing’) acts the deceased had done through his or her life, and, at the same time, embedding his or her relations in the landscape as pathways for others to follow.

Paths are the result of people’s movement in time and become, in this sense, images of the history of movement and relations between places. At the same time people actually walk upon them and, thus, inscribe their own movement and history on them. To follow a path may refer to a range of ‘movements’. The evocativeness of path as a metaphor for how a person has received rights in a place is evident: a path always leads to a particular place. If a child gets rights to a piece of land through adoption, which is common in Wogeo, the image becomes even more concrete: in an ideal adoption the adopted child should be carried along the pathway to its new place hidden in a basket – like food and other items are continuously carried along pathways around the island. ‘Adoptions follow many kinds of pathways’, Wogeos say. One man referred to path as a ‘logical reason’, implying a relation or history that is indisputable or clear – like a path as opposed to unmarked trails in the forest (cf. Hviding 2003: 99). In the more overarching construction of the Wogeo landscape, the experienced movement of the sun and the stars as well as the flow of the water of the Sepik River past the island, create a ‘bad’ downwards path and a ‘good’ upwards path. Accordingly, good things should move upwards and bad things, downwards.

Such analogical capabilities of paths make them ‘the perfect “shifter”, or hinge element, between the microcosm of restricted, value-coding sensory range, and the *realization* of that microcosm in the larger world of contrastingly fuller sensory range’, Wagner (1986b: 21, original emphasis) points out for the Australian Walbiri’s use of paths in their art (drawing on Munn’s (1973) ethnography (see also Roalkvam 1997: 170)). In this process, paths appear as referring to something other than themselves – e.g. the movement of people in time – but may also, since paths are concretizations of these movements, take the position as signified: they are the concrete outcome of movement. ‘If symbols can be shown to function

both as signifier and signified, to embody one or both of these functions, then any particular arbitration of the “innate” versus the “artificial” is obviated’ (Wagner 1978: 27). Paths are particularly apt illustrations of such processes of obviating differences between micro- and macrocosmic realms, and clearly show how a definite division between a microcosm of ‘cultural’ representations and a more ‘natural’ and experienced world becomes superfluous.

The use of the concept ‘obviation’ – to ‘anticipate and dispose of conventional effect’ and, in the process, ‘to render apparent’ (ibid.: 31) – to describe what goes on when metaphors are created, is central in Wagner’s theory (see also Sørum 1991), not only in analysing single metaphors, but also in interpreting more encompassing imagery, such as myths, rituals or construction of houses.

The transformation that takes place in a myth is as surely an instance of obviation as the transformation that occurs in metaphor, and the meaning elicited as unitary. Though we may not be used to considering an entire ‘work’ on the same terms as a single word, this is one of the implications of the concept obviation (ibid.: 32).

Myths and rituals, or house building, can be seen as successions or collections of metaphors and the ‘entire works’ accumulates or condensates meaning (cf. Turner 1967). In such ‘narratives’, a succession of metaphors substitute one another (obviate the latter in creating a new) until the dialectics return to their beginning point (Wagner 1986b: xi). When Wogeos follow taboos, build a house or follow pathways in exchange, these ‘works’ (Wogeos themselves label rituals and exchanges ‘work’: *manif*) channel their experience in certain directions, and, at the same time, invent (or reinvent) the imagery that make meaning appear. When a house is built, it is not only a dwelling that is constructed: the social composition of the village is also elicited and made manifest in the process. The house as a mere construction is obviated and the parts of the house successively come to stand for the offices of leadership, the sides of the village, the matrilineages and the landholders. When the house has been completed and the final food exchange has been held – when the obviation sequence is completed – the house again comes to evoke the conventional effect: that of dwelling (although, due to its enduring and concrete presence, it still contains the images created in the process in the shapes of named parts of the house, and their meanings can still be evoked).

As the mourners at a funeral go through their cleansing rituals, they first take upon themselves to carry with them the deceased by touching the corpse. By temporarily cutting the connections with their ordinary social network, they come to represent the deceased, obviating their own composite personhood. When they wash themselves, the mere cleansing of the body is obviated and the connection to the deceased is evoked in terms of disconnection. Eventually the exchanges of food in the deceased’s name dissolve the compositeness of the deceased and the mourners re-enter their own social network: the obviation sequence is completed.

Repeated ‘inventions’ of such images or obviation sequences conventionalize the images that are evoked. Convention, what makes ‘because it is tradition’ the common answer to my interrogations into the meaning of Wogeo customs, ‘exists

at the level of the image, not that of its verbalized gloss', Wagner (1986a: xv) has written. And all potential glosses of the metaphors do not have to be evoked as long as the image contains them all. The first-time menstruating girl may not be aware of all the potential meanings of the rituals at the time they were performed, but the experience itself (and the continued experience of following the same pathways later in life) provides her with the imagery from which meaning may (or may not) be elicited whenever she is ready. Besides, as important as the girl's own experience during the rituals are the experiences of the other participants – for instance those who gave her food when she visited a place, or her mother who remained in the village and cooked food for the visitors. In the way her immanent sociality is made evident through these rituals (Strathern 1993: 46), the roles of her relevant others are as crucial a part of the rituals as her own. In the same manner as the rituals elicited her own relevant loci of belonging, relations and accompanying obligations, they also elicited these relations for those she is related to. Most of them would also have participated in similar rituals from different positions previously, experiencing the rituals from different angles. According to their experience and knowledge, the various participants would gloss the rituals differently and to different degrees: '[A]ll that is necessary is to retain the image itself' (Wagner 1986a: XV). All that is necessary is to keep on following the pathways, so to speak.

## Place, Landscape and Gendered Bodies

Based on research on Makira Island, in the Solomon Islands, Michael W. Scott (2007b) criticizes the generalizations of the relational and fluid character of Melanesian sociality in the work of, among others, Wagner (1977a; 1986a) and Strathern (1988) – what in recent literature has come to be known as The New Melanesian Ethnography (e.g. Scott 2007a). He uses the concepts of mono-ontology and poly-ontology to describe the foundations for different social arrangements found in Melanesia: the first for the world seen as a fluid an undifferentiated whole that needs to be differentiated and where people are relationally (and cognatically) conceived, and the latter for where humanity is seen to have multiple origins, manifested for instance in unilineal descent groups that each have their own origin stories, rituals and knowledge and where people are seen to have an essence beyond their relational and dividual sociality (e.g. Harrison 1989; 1990). Scott (e.g. 2007b: 27) criticizes The New Melanesian Ethnography for ignoring poly-ontologies that also prevail in Melanesia. Without denying that the Strathernian model of sociality may accurately be used to describe many Melanesian societies, Scott writes about the Arosi from Makira: 'at the core of each Arosi person stands an unchanging matrilineal essence concretely imaged as an unbroken umbilical cord' (ibid.). Whereas a 'New Melanesian Ethnographer' would perhaps interpret this as a part of the composite person that is 'elicited only situationally' (ibid.), Scott argues that the social categories based on matrilineal descent have a real and permanent existence for the Arosi.

In Wogeo matrilineally transferred essence is also important in the constitution of persons, associated with knowledge and the named houses, and by adding matrilineal essence to the emphasis on places and houses as loci for continuity,

Wogeo appears to having some similarities to Scott's ethnography from Makira. Wogeo conceptualizations of their world also seem to be founded on unique and enduring social categories, and the salience of these are, as in Makira, kept hidden from public discourse. Although agreeing with Scott's caution to not generalize a mono-ontology as the foundation of Melanesian sociality, I do, however, believe that there is not necessarily a contradiction between the presence of several ontologically primordial categories and the relational and fluid emphasis of Strathern and Wagner's perspectives. Even though a matrilineage exists as a lasting social categorization for the Wogeos, and an unchangeable essence is at the core of each person, it does not create one exclusive pathway to follow for a person, but constitutes one among a multitude of alternatives pointing in various directions, and always in relation to other aspects of a person's identity and history.

Whereas matrilineal identity is undisputable, people are not predetermined to belong to one particular place. They are defined as belonging to a certain place according to the history that is chosen to be the most significant. The pathways into a place are found on the background of combined images of history and relationships based on filiation, descent, adoption and alliance that are embedded in the landscape. Places and houses in this way become concrete manifestations of histories of relations at the same time as they provide the conduits for the establishment of relations.

At Reite on the Rai Coast near Madang, James Leach has described a similar emphasis on place. Rather than regarding land as something relations work upon to order people and their activities, Leach argues that the constitution of persons and places among the Nekgini speakers in Reite are aspects of the same process: 'kinship is geography, or landscape' (Leach 2003: 31; see also Bamford 2007). Nekgini notions of kinship relations are based on the idea that human beings are grown: kinship is not an expression of growth (an indisputable genealogical connection based in conception), but is the result of being grown on the same land. '[T]he role of the [father] is not to pass on some component of substance to [his son], but – through his work – to establish the conditions for the latter's growth on the land' (Leach 2003: 30; 2009: 188). Shared substance refers not to genealogy but to shared histories of belonging and growth, and knowledge of the histories, names and land associated with the places that create sameness is essential in this – in fact, becomes essence, Leach (2009: 188) argues. Places and people are not only analogies of one another but are consubstantially constituted (*ibid.*: 214).

In the case of Wogeo, persons and landscape are inseparably constituted but still the landscape seems to have a different significance from Reite in the way Wogeos use images of the landscape to create a social order that transcends the living people. They divide the villages and the island in sides that are the main loci for belonging, and they follow pathways to find their place in the landscape and to maintain relationships and alliances. The aim is to fill the proper places with the right people according to the history of the places and in that way to maintain the sociogeographical map, a map that appears to represent an enduring social structure.

The Wogeo matrilineages are different. They are unchangeable, embodied and often tacit parts of each person, made explicit only in certain contexts. The notion of shared matrilineal substance has to be seen in relation to ideas



of gendered fertility and growth. The salience of female reproductive powers in Wogeo is manifested in many ways – in terms of kinship, as matrilineages. All Wogeos belong to one of two nominally exogamic matrilineal moieties known as Kilbong (flying fox) and Taregá (eagle). A moiety is called *tiná*, which means ‘mother’. The Wogeo people further belong to several named matrilineages also called *tiná*, but these cannot merely be seen as subdivisions of the moieties. Some matrilineages are said to have come from the outside, where as others are said to be of Wogeo origin, and the moiety division arrange the lineages in relation to marriage and other ritual relations. The people belonging to the same matrilineage are said to be of ‘one skin’ (*kus ta*), a term often used synonymously with ‘one body’. The matrilineages should not be spoken about openly: they are something that should be kept hidden, mainly because of collective ownership of sorcery. Such hiddenness is possible because the matrilineages are not groups that have to be socially made or manifested, but can be seen as embodied parts of every person born. Since all the members of a matrilineage are ‘one skin’, the actions of one person represent the lineage to which he or she belongs. The matrilineages are not localized in the sense that determine residence, but they are connected to places since they own the named houses on the island. The named houses exist independently of the built structures and are associated with corpi of knowledge and titles. They can be seen as embodiments of the matrilineages but, as built structures, houses do not have to contain the people of the matrilineages that own them in order to endure. Ideally people fill the houses primarily according to the history of the places and not because of their matrilineal belonging.

Accordingly belonging to matrilineages and belonging to places are in many ways opposing aspects of Wogeo social organization. The histories of the places told in public tend to (over)emphasize patrilineal relations, whereas matrilineal relations are frequently elicited as significant in ‘backstage’ versions of the same stories. Many conflicts concerning land rights, sorcery or moral conduct in general are connected to these seemingly discordant aspects of people’s identity. Great effort is put into maintaining a balance between the two. The hiddenness of the matrilineages must be seen in the light of this ‘work’, and an understanding of this effort is essential in any attempt to describe Wogeo kinship and residence, and will be important in this book.<sup>2</sup>

Eric Silverman has pointed out that idioms of gendered reproductive powers are a necessary focus in studies of social formations and ideologies in the region (see also Lipset 1997; Lutkehaus 1995b). He argues that for the Eastern Iatmul of the Sepik River there is ‘a symbolic homology between the gendered human body, the body politic and the cosmos’ (1996: 30), and a similar statement can be made in the case of Wogeo. The anthropologist Ian Hogbin conducted research on Wogeo in the 1930s and 40s and wrote the book *The Island of Menstruating Men* (1970b) about gender and ritual life in Wogeo. An important focus in the book is the male cult. He stated that its underlying theme in the cult was ‘the gulf, physical and social, between men and women. The people sum up the situation in the saying, “Men play flutes, women bear infants”’ (1970b; see also Silverman 1996: 36). This theme is not merely underlying the male cult, but is central to the constitution of Wogeo sociality as such – similar to what Lipset (1997) has called

a 'maternal schema' for the Murik or to the Iatmul gendered homology. 'Mother carries the place' (*tiná vanua ebaj*) goes another saying in Wogeo.

Most rituals concerned with transforming the status of people's bodies in Wogeo evolve around the themes of unmediated fertility and controlled growth. The experience of the unequal qualities of male and female bodies clearly shape the manner in which Wogeos construct their world, but at the same time these inequalities are seen as evoked by human agency in a mythical past. Wagner has argued that Papuans conceptualize the living beings of the world as essentially similar and that the potential for differentiation – the social order – flows 'more or less spontaneously in the world' (1977b: 397). It is man's task to differentiate when necessary and 'keep differentiating against a countervailing pull of similitude' (Bamford 1998: 159). Wagner uses notions like 'flow of analogies' or 'strain of similarities' to describe this process. Human sociality is the flow 'in the first instance' (1977b: 397). Differentiation is 'immanent in man, other creatures and in the cosmos itself' (*ibid.*), and it is man's responsibility to invoke and restrain it. The flow in the 'second instance' is 'fertility, spiritual power and the "knowledge" of the diviner or shaman' (*ibid.*: 398). In Wogeo one man said to me 'Men and women's bodies are the same. Only when women give birth they change.' An important function of ritual life is about differentiation but also about marking out similarities. This is most clearly seen in the wide array of taboo and cleansing rituals on the island that will be an important focus in this book.

Wagner notes that expressions of art – such as music, poetry and painting – may seem to be opposed to 'natural' perception as a more 'artificial' one (1986b: 26). But there is no such distinction between the perception of art and 'everyday' images, he argues. Rather, the perception and creation of art are meaningful acts of 'greater concentration, organization, and force ... within the same semiotic focus' (*ibid.*: 27). Without probing deeper into Wagner's complex language of obviation, this volume will present some important gendered images that have been salient in how Wogeos have represented their world to me – images that may well, like art, be said to be of 'greater concentration, organization and force' than everyday experience.

As rainforest gardeners, trees are a central part of the Wogeo lived landscape and tree symbolism is played upon in many contexts (cf. e.g. Rival 1998; J. Weiner 2001). For instance are the distribution of the offices of leadership and the sections of knowledge they are responsible for, imaged as Cordyline plants (*moanuboa*) standing on the beach, in the village and in the forest. A common image is innate fertility represented as roots that trees grow from and, further, are released from but without which they cannot exist – like flutes played to instigate male growth, rafters that represent the land of the village, poles that a new leader in the village should climb while men of knowledge evoked the power of motherhood to hold them steady, or the tree that the mythical archetypal husband cut down in order to get hold of the girl (his future wife) who had climbed up into it. Trees can, in this sense, be seen as gendered images of a sort: roots represent female values of nurture and innate fertility, and trunks, cut-off trunks in particular, male values of controlled growth.<sup>3</sup> One particularly powerful spell presents an image of the village as a tree rooted in the ground with its branches held steady by vines and



lianas, and this becomes a totalizing image of sociality: the roots representing motherhood and 'rootedness' or 'groundedness'; the trunk and the branches representing growth and prosperity, and the vines, relations to people 'rooted' in other places, including those of exchange.

The experienced difference between male and female bodies is central in Wogeo imagery. *Look around you*, Kulbobo said:

*Everything has a mother. If it were not for mothers none of us would have been here. And if it were not for the ground we would not have been here. Pigs, birds, and men, even fish: all of these have mothers! And from where do they get their food? When you leave your mother, from where do you get your food? The ground! And when I say mother I mean all women: black, white, yellow and green. Even you, even though you haven't had a baby yet. Like Queen Elizabeth carries her crown. This is really important in the world: women carry the ground, mother is the ground.*

Motherhood is associated with the fertile soil, with nurture, peace and safety. 'When you die, you return to mother, to the ground', Kulbobo said. Like the mythical hero called Nat Kadamoanga who, as a foetus, was nurtured in the ground on the sap from the roots of a breadfruit tree, people return to the ground 'mother' when they are buried, and the souls of the dead are made to 'sit down' at the roots of old trees. The island is cleansed like a menstruating woman at the New Year celebration. Houses are also like mothers: they provide safety and containment, and in a good house no one can harm you. Women have good thoughts of peace and harmony that are located in the stomach whereas men have thoughts of conflict and fight located in the head. That is why men do not carry anything on their heads like women do, Wogeos say. 'What will happen when Queen Elizabeth dies and Charles will stand up in her place?' two of my oldest male informants wondered.

Several myths will be presented in this book, and the heroes in these stories are mostly male: the great heroes Onka (Goleiangaia) and Mafofo gave Wogeos the ability to produce an abundance of food and other goods (through overseas exchange), and to put on great exchanges that gave male leaders the means of achieving renown and manifesting their power. Nat Kadamoanga, already mentioned above, was not all that heroic. He made a foolish mistake and stole the magical flutes that represented the original unhindered flow of fertility. By doing this, he attempted to take control over powers that were not his to take. On the other hand, had Nat Kadamoanga not taken the flutes, 'it might have been us men who would have had the hard work of cooking', Wogeo men speculated. The flow of fertility was cut and, thereby, Nat Kadamoanga inadvertently instigated gendered incompleteness as a prerequisite for reproduction. The potential for differentiation, was, however, already present – there were men and there were women. Rather, it was a gendered interdependence and incompleteness that was the result of the theft: analogous beings were differentiated by making evident (abstracting in order to communicate) their 'names' (man and woman) and, thus, restricting their reference to individual bodies – half of a whole became one of a pair (Strathern 1993).

But there are also several heroines in Wogeo mythology. One story tells how the heroine, Jari, dismantled her house and carried it with her in her vulva, together with pots and pans for cooking, before she met another mythical being, married him and rebuilt the house (cf. Hogbin 1970b: 35). Houses as icons of containment, nurture and safety, follow female lines of descent and can be given as dowry. Another myth tells how a house was made from the body of a woman (Anderson and Exter 2005: 55–58). She tricked her son into killing her and the son then fell asleep. Then she summoned birds to make a house from her body, and, when the son woke up, he found himself inside the house. Later he lured two sisters to the house and married them. The relation between the son and his mother was cut short by her death before he married and started his own family (the analogy man as son was obviated and man as husband evoked), but the house as an embodiment of motherhood remained and contained him. A son does not continue his mother's blood and he cannot use his matrilineal identity to openly argue for what he sees as his rightful position in the world, but affiliation to houses as embodiments of the matrilineages still makes matrilineal belonging a salient constituent of the social landscape.

It is in the sense of dwelling that the above aspects of houses become evident, something we might call 'enhousement' as James Weiner does when making the distinction between 'an "inside" of vision and viewing opposed to external space of sound and movement' (2001: 120). But the named houses do not only contain people: they also contain the rafters that represent the land of the village and the histories of the people who have looked after the land. These histories should ideally be based on patrification: 'The side of father is the side of land, the side of mother is the side of blood', Wogeos say. When a named house is built, the rafters that are usually held and controlled by men due to their *platial*<sup>4</sup> belonging and may be seen as images representing male continuity, are brought together with the female house: 'mother carries the place'. As such, houses can be seen as images or signs of both female and male continuity; they become 'androgynous' in that they contain within them 'the potentiality for emerging in particular contexts as predominantly male or female gendered' (Howell 2002: 160). We can say that a relation between male and female, between maleness and femaleness, is contained or nested in the house (*ibid.*). When seeing houses in this manner, the conventional effect (dwelling) is obviated and the house comes to stand for something new: the relation between male and female. Furthermore, the relation between sign and one of the relational components (e.g. the male) may be temporarily emphasized and 'eclipse' (Strathern 1988: 155; see also Howell 2002) the relation to the other relational component (the female), making it appear dominant to the other.

With this analytical focus, the semiotic perspectives of Wagner and Strathern have been found to be of great value in understanding the complexities in Wogeo efforts to create, maintain and balance a proper and gendered sociogeographical landscape, even though it may be poly-ontologically constituted. The inherent and apparently opposing aspects of the social person – place and matrilineage – cannot be properly understood without taking into account the relational character of Wogeo sociality, in spite of the presence of enduring, transcending social categories.

## Wogeo and Ian Hogbin

The above-presented perspectives on place and sociality, on experience and meaning formation, constitute the analytical framework of this book. The aim is to explore how meaning is constituted in a dialogical relation between experience and representation. But in addition to presenting Wogeo life from certain analytical perspectives, the book also adds to an already existing body of ethnography from the island. In anthropology, Wogeo is known through the work of the Australian anthropologist Ian Hogbin (1904–1989) who conducted anthropological research in Wogeo in 1934 and 1948.

Herbert Ian Priestly Hogbin, as was his full name,<sup>5</sup> was born in England but moved to Australia in 1914 as a child (Hogbin and McGrath 1983). He graduated from the University of Sydney, and assisted Radcliffe Brown in expeditions to Rennell Island and Ontong Java in the late 1920s before he completed his Ph.D. at the London School of Economics in 1931 (Hogbin 1961; Beckett 1989). He returned to Australia and was employed at the University of Sydney until he retired in 1971 – apart from the period of fieldwork in the early 1930s. Hogbin also played a role in shaping the Australian policies in Papua New Guinea (PNG) after the Second World War through his work with the Australian Army's Directorate of Research (Westmark 2001: 48). He conducted research in Malaita and Guadalcanal, and in 1934 he went to Wogeo for the first time. He stayed for nearly a year, and returned for a shorter visit in 1948. In the following years he wrote numerous articles about Wogeo on a wide range of topics<sup>6</sup> – most of them published in the journal *Oceania* – but the best known of them, the monograph *The Island of Menstruating Men* about religious beliefs, taboos and notions of pollution, was not published until 1970. Eight years later came the book *The Leaders and the Led* (1978) on leadership and politics on the island, and this book also contained a report from a short visit Hogbin made to Wogeo in 1974.

As I was planning research in the Schouten Islands to which Wogeo belongs, I felt inclined not to choose Wogeo in order to avoid having to measure my own work against Hogbin's extremely detailed and conscientious ethnographic descriptions. But the more I read about Wogeo, the more I became intrigued by Hogbin's vivid descriptions and felt irresistibly drawn to the island. Based on *The Island of Menstruating Men*, I wrote a research proposal about continuity and change in local conceptualizations of gender and pollution, and went to Wogeo for the first time in 1993. I was not sure to what degree the Wogeos would remember the young Australian who had lived there for a year before the Second World War and for some weeks after it. But when I arrived in Wogeo, I found that the reminiscences of Hogbin were overwhelmingly present. During the first weeks on the island, most conversations I had with people were about Hogbin: about his immense knowledge of Wogeo and his doings on the island. As Hogbin (1978) himself noted from his revisit to the island in 1974, he had become a heroic, almost mythical figure to the islanders. People were disappointed to find out that I was not related to Hogbin (initially some thought that I was his granddaughter), but I have nonetheless come to develop a feeling of kinship with the old distinguished anthropologist (cf. Lutkehaus 1995b: 16). My cast of informants

were the descendants of his; I was named after his best informant's wife; his texts have been crucial to most of my understandings of Wogeo culture, and the stories about him are entangled, crucial and enriching parts of my own Wogeo experience. In the late 1970s, Nancy Lutkehaus did a restudy of Manam, the eastern most of the Schouten Islands, where Camilla Wedgewood did research at the same time as Hogbin was in Wogeo. She has noted that '[i]n a restudy the other anthropologist is something more than a text to be dealt with, he or she is another social or personal, as well as intellectual, relationship' (1995b: 17). It should be noted, though, that it has been impossible for me, within the confines of this book, to constantly relate my writings to his. In this I take a different approach from Lutkehaus (*ibid.*) who had an ongoing dialogue with Wedgewood throughout her monograph. In order to let my own data 'speak', I have in many places chosen not to discuss discrepancies between the 1990s Wogeo representations of their world and history and what Hogbin wrote. What has actually changed or been forgotten and what is due to Hogbin's and my different interpretations would, in many cases, be mere speculation. However, his work still constitutes an important part of the ethnographic basis for this text, and also, to use the words that Lutkehaus (*ibid.*) borrows from Bakhtin, as a more or less silent dialogue partner.

As it was for Hogbin, the point of departure for this book is the village of Dab. Before going to PNG, I had, among other things, written a letter to the Catholic Mission in Wewak, the provincial capital, in order to get in touch with people on the island, but I did not receive any reply. When I arrived in Wewak, I was not sure if I could go ahead with my plans at all, but by a peculiar coincidence, one of the first Papua New Guinean men I spoke to turned out to be from Wogeo (Tom Fandim) – I even knew his grandfather from Hogbin's writings. He was most happy to send a message to the island about my arrival. As it turned out, the councillor from the district that Dab belongs to had actually received the letter I had sent to the mission many months earlier, and people there had agreed that I was welcome to do my research. It had been decided (I am not sure by whom) that I was to follow in Hogbin's footsteps and live in the same place as he did,<sup>7</sup> and when I arrived Wogeo I was given a room of my own in the house of Hogbin's main informant's granddaughter. I spent approximately seventeen months in Dab spread over three periods between 1993 and 1999 – the latter two periods conducting doctoral research after completing my masters thesis in 1996 (Anderson 1996). Before continuing to the main chapters of this book, I will give a short introduction to the island, its landscape and its inhabitants, as I know it.

## Wogeo Island

Wogeo is a relatively small volcanic island of twenty-five to thirty kilometres in circumference, about seventy kilometres off the coast of East Sepik Province.<sup>8</sup> The island is entirely covered by rainforest, all the way down to the narrow strip of flat land along the coastline. Travelling around Wogeo by boat, freshly cleaned gardens can be seen on the slopes descending to the coastline. The secondary forest, resulting from centuries of gardening, is clearly distinguishable from the darker green forest covering the mountains that culminate in three peaks five to