

Introduction

Mi kaikai saksak ya ('I am eating sago') or *mi tanim saksak nau* ('I am stirring sago now') are two of the phrases I heard most often while I was living and working in the Bosmun area. Whenever I visited people or passed households on my way to other destinations, the residents would use food-related phrases almost like expressions of standard greeting. I was consistently welcomed by being given information about a household's current food situation. Even if no one was preparing or consuming a meal at the moment I passed by, I would receive greetings such as: *Mi no kaikai yet* ('I haven't eaten yet'), *Mi kaikai pinis ya* ('I've finished eating'), or *Mi wok saksak pinis na mi kam* ('I just returned from sago making'). Also, when listening to conversations in the beginning, I repeatedly heard the phrase *No ken hait na kaikai* ('Don't eat in secret'). As my fieldwork proceeded, I realized that Bosmun use food-related statements such as these to enact a kind of "transparent personhood" that is at the heart of local configurations of relatedness and empathy. My book aims to cover the conceptual convergence of food sharing and empathy by illustrating how Bosmun engage in "empathetic foodways" in order to keep or sever kin-ties and social relationships in general. With the ethnographic example of Bosmun, I hope to be able to offer a novel contribution to the emerging variety of "local cultures of relatedness" (Carsten 2000: 1) that have come to the fore in recent theorizing about kinship.

The present account is based on my twenty-three month experience in northeast Papua New Guinea. Bosmun live alongside the banks of the Lower Ramu River, in a region belonging to the Madang Province. The Ramu River, locally called Xoaam (the Bosmun generic term for any larger river), rises in the highlands of the Eastern Bismarck Range and flows into the Bismarck Sea between Cape Purpur and Venus Point. With a length of 720 kilometers, it is Papua New Guinea's fifth largest river (Rannells 2001: 149). Bosmun territory lies approximately fifteen kilometers south of the Ramu estuary, in the vicinity of a tributary named Mbur, which flanks the main river on its western side (see map 0.1). My first fieldwork was carried out from September 2004 to October 2005. John Hickey¹ had asked the people of Daiden, a Bosmun place situated directly at the banks of the Ramu, whether they would take me in, which they fortunately did. Shortly after my return to Germany, I had the chance to take another six-week trip to Papua New Guinea on an interdisciplinary project, and so I returned to Daiden in April 2006. This time I was accompanied by the psychologist Bettina Ubl who was interested in exploring children's

perspective-taking and the development of a “theory of mind” (Ubl 2007; A. von Poser & Ubl forthcoming). In 2008, my husband and colleague Alexis and I stayed in the town of Madang for four months, teaching anthropology at Divine Word University. Although our academic work took up a fair amount of time, there were still opportunities for shorter trips to the Ramu and for people to visit us in town. My last visit to Papua New Guinea was in 2010.

Personally, “going back to the field” in 2006 was certainly more crucial to me than the other returns, since I had to find out what kind of imprints I had left on people’s lives. Upon my arrival, I was delighted to see that our bond was still strong. Even though I had left the people of Daiden just a short while before, our reunion was marked by jointly remembering and narrating the experiences that we had shared during my first fourteen months there. We recalled bright as well as sad or trying moments, including one particular incident I was explicitly told to write about. One day, as Kopri, my *saate yap* (‘father’s younger brother’) said, this incident would become a *raarnjanini*, an ‘ancestral story.’ As I had initially declared a particular interest in people’s lives and their present and ancestral customs, he and several others felt that I should be the one to write down the incident and that this detail should not be missing in my book. This was also the point in time at which I began to comprehend what food-related action meant to the people of this place. Below, after recounting this incident, I outline the theoretical body of my book, introduce my conversation partners, and describe my research methods.

Sharing Bananas after a Raging Fire

About four weeks after my arrival, a fire broke out in Daiden and within less than fifteen minutes seven households, two partially completed buildings, and a recently built birth-house were destroyed by the flames. A single household consists of a cooking-house, a sleeping-house, a resting platform and one or more utility buildings where tools and firewood are stored. All of the inhabitants were at work or visiting relatives when the fire took place, so nobody was injured. Nevertheless, the damage left thirty-nine former residents suddenly homeless. Because the wind blew from another direction, my house survived undamaged despite being close to the point of origin of the fire. This was particularly important as all my equipment was stored in this building. Otherwise, I do not know whether I would have continued doing my research.

It was a strange situation. I was relocated unexpectedly without actually having moved myself. The fire had turned my location into a part of the periphery, whereas before it had been situated adjacent to a densely populated part of Daiden. Now I had to face a sudden void instead of the lively spot it had been before. Still, I think the fire marked the time when the people of Daiden and I formed a relationship of mutual concern beyond formal friendliness. Before I

describe the situation after the fire, let me share a few impressions that always come to mind whenever I reflect on my initial time in Daiden.

Right from the beginning the people of Daiden gave me a house to live in by myself. They had agreed that Seres, a young unmarried man who later became my *nduanj* ('brother'), would provide the house and, during my presence, would live with another brother of ours next door to me. Having "my house" was indeed reassuring since going into the field was a new experience for me and the first weeks were really overwhelming, if not arduous at times. I had to cope not only with hundreds of eyes following me all the time, but also with how quickly people spoke Tok Pisin. In addition, the people of Daiden had a clear picture of what a *waitmeri* ('white woman') was. When I went to a household, for instance, as I did to introduce myself to each family and to survey the residential structure, people would often say that I should come back another day. When I asked if they were busy at the moment, they answered that they did not have a chair for me to sit on. They would have to find a chair first in order to make me feel comfortable in the way they presumed would be appropriate "for people like me."

People constantly worried about my physical and emotional well-being. There was, for instance, regular talk about my loss of weight using startling descriptions, of which Tok Pisin has many (I never got badly ill during fieldwork and losing weight was a natural adaption to the tropical climate). People usually said to me: *Bifo yu save karim as na nau yu kamap bun* ('At the time of your arrival, you carried your bottom and now you look like a bone'). When I add the detail that in everyday Bosmun speech such comments are usually accompanied by much laughter, such a portrayal might appear impolite to outsiders. From Bosmun perspectives, however, it is quite common to identify people by means of their physical traits without insulting them. Let me give another example that shows the emotional support I was offered. I once received a letter from my parents and suddenly started crying. Nothing serious had happened. They just wrote to me about what was going on at home and that they missed me. Once this episode of self-pity was over, I heard three women sitting on the platform next to my house crying. When I asked them why they were crying, they answered that my pain would fade away if I were not crying alone. A shared feeling would relieve my sadness, they anticipated.

I appreciate people's commitment to welcoming me into their lives. In some ways, however, their care for me was going to restrict my independence regarding the work I had come to do. It took me a while to convince the people of Daiden that I had enough strength to walk the distances required to reach other Bosmun places, which I considered important for getting a broader perspective on things. Moreover, I had to communicate that "white people" do not only like canned food and that I would instead be looking forward to tast-

ing local and fresh foods. Nevertheless, I have to admit that in the beginning, people's desire to avoid overwhelming me with their normal way of life suited my moods to some degree. Frequently they suggested that I should go back to my house to have a rest. Of course, I also sensed that they were not quite ready to let me come closer. They did not really know who I was or what I expected from them. In a similar manner, I kept myself somewhat distanced because of some challenging distractions like adapting myself to the tropical environment and managing the initial intense flow of information. Thus, I did not hesitate to take the recommended breaks.

After a month of the people of Daiden and I cautiously coming closer to one another, a fire flared up in the early afternoon, dragging us into a short, distressing scenario. A woman had dried fish on a grill over an oil-drum, and while she was occupied with something else, the flames in the drum shot up, passed over to the sago roof of her kitchen, and spread to the other houses. Due to the searing heat, most of the people, including myself, became petrified with shock. We just stood and stared. The fire disappeared as promptly as it had appeared and came suddenly to a halt before reaching another house standing nearby. The fire's destructive force had left behind a field of glowing embers that would not cool off until the next day, granting an eerie light that lasted throughout the night until dawn. As the anxiety lessened, people started to walk around the remains of their dwelling sites hoping to find anything important that might have survived. Some of them did so in silence, some of them in tears. Around sunset, people finally sat down and I joined them. Meanwhile, the news had spread and relatives living elsewhere were coming by to emotionally support those affected by the fire. The loss of a house is not only a material but also an emotional loss for Bosmun since it evokes memories of the deceased who had once contributed in some way to the house. An older woman, for example, mourned over the wooden plates that her father, a skilled carver, had once made for her during her childhood. She had used these plates from adulthood onward, and they had been a significant part of her cooking-house.

Above all I remember two laments. The first was from a woman of Ndene-kaam, another Bosmun place about half an hour's walk from Daiden. She had come to look after her daughter, who had become a widow only recently. A year before, the daughter's husband had been killed by a crocodile. The woman mourned for her daughter's children, who had lost first their father and now the house that their father had built. She expressed her grief by calling out all the names of her beloved in a sad, melodic way. Over and over, she repeated her pity and everyone listened. I spent the night outside with them, listening to these expressions of grief. Looking back, this was the beginning of a deeper tie between the people of Daiden and me. I did not want to leave and nobody told me to leave.

The second lament that I bear in mind was from the father of the man who had died in the crocodile attack. The older man had gone to Madang and was supposed to come back the next day. During the night some people talked about his probable reaction, predicting that he would turn up in rage. No one took special notice of me. I turned into a listener, as did the others who had come to see the tragedy with their own eyes. The next morning, we heard the man's voice from afar. His weeping combined with expressions of anger silenced everyone. He did not immediately approach the area where his household had stood. As he came nearer, he stopped moving, just staring at what was left and then called his dead son's name. Many times he pointed at the burned house posts, declaring that it was his son who had provided the wood and had shaped the posts for his parents' home. After more than an hour, the man came closer and ultimately joined his wife, who had already taken a seat next to the now empty plot.

Three days and nights the people simply sat beside their burned homes. Eventually, I went back to my house, but I did not feel good being alone. I sat on the floor and glanced at a huge bunch of bananas, a gift a woman had brought me some days before. Suddenly I felt ashamed. I had so many bananas, too many for me alone, whereas those people outside had lost almost everything. I began thinking about giving them the bananas, but felt awkward because those bananas were far from being sufficient for thirty-nine individuals and their accumulated relatives. Finally, I decided to walk over and share the bananas anyway. Moving from family to family, I distributed two or three bananas to each without saying anything. In view of the disaster, I had nothing to say. A week later, when all those who had lost their homes had been taken in by relatives and had started to clear up the burned ground, I had a conversation with Seres about the incident. He told me that people were talking about my behavior and had come to the conclusion that I possess a personal trait, which they call *ramkandiar*; that is, looking after others and helping them if they are in need, but—and this is crucial—without asking them.

I refer to the phenomenon of *ramkandiar*, which appeared to me to be the most fundamental moral value in Daiden, as 'watching others and being watched.' In Bosmun understandings, "watching" is not confined to the visual sense alone. "Watching" correlates with drawing one's own conclusions about one's observations. The term *vaas*, which Bosmun use to say that they 'see' or 'watch' something or someone, implies that they 'think-feel' of / into something or someone and that they reflect on something or someone. To 'think-feel' can be glossed by the Bosmun phrase *vut mon*. My interviewees also described it as 'to think of someone who is worried' or 'to feel sorry for someone,' since this is what "good people" should always do. The locus of one's intentionality and one's actions are the intestines, called *mon*. As a verb, *mon* also means 'to do / to act.' The term *vut* denotes heart palpitations as well as

all other pulsations that people feel in the human body. A woman, for instance, pointed to her temples, her neck, her hands, and the part between her ankle and heel to explain *yut* to me. Thus, it is the whole body that is ‘thinking-feeling’—with the belly at its center. *Ndiar* (‘the willingness to make peace / to mediate’) refers to any positive behavioral quality in Bosmun moral theory. More than anything else, it is expressed through the sharing of food. Someone with *ndiar* is said to perform *tip yaaon* (‘virtuous / sociable behavior’). Someone who lacks *ndiar* is said to perform the opposite, referred to as *tip yaakak* (‘bad / unsociable behavior’). *Ramak* (from which *ramka-* in *ramkandiar* derives) literally means ‘eye’ and implies that people should use their eyes to watch others and sociably respond to them if they see them in troubled states. That was what I had done, Seres concluded: I had anticipated that people must be suffering from hunger—and without asking anybody—had shared the bananas among them. I expressed my doubts regarding the insufficient amount of my food distribution. Seres smiled and declared that this was not what had mattered. It was the first time that I heard of *ramkandiar*. In retrospect, this dialogue with Seres paved my way for understanding the grounds of Bosmun sociality and how, in general, the sharing of food may relate to empathy in a place such as Daiden.

Making Kin through Foodways and Empathy

This section introduces three theoretical themes in order to build the conceptual framework in which my ethnographic data is anchored: *kinship / relatedness*, *foodways*, and *empathy*.

Kinship / Relatedness

Based on his observations among the Reite on the Rai coast of Papua New Guinea, where “[p]eople share substance, and are therefore kin, because they have grown in the same land,” Leach (2003: 30) dismisses the conventional genealogical model upon which so much of anthropology’s study of kinship has rested. He contends that to map links between individuals in a kinship diagram and “say that this is a kinship connection is meaningless” (Leach 2003: 30) in terms of understanding Reite relationships. Rather, kinship comes into being through creativity as manifested in the relations between persons and places. Bamford (2007, 2009), too, draws on a non-genealogical approach to explain kin conceptions among the Kamea of Papua New Guinea. She writes that, despite her “repeated attempts to anchor intergenerational relations in a procreative bond, Kamea were quite insistent that parents do not share any kind of physical connection with their offspring. Kamea do have a means of tracing social relationships through time, but this is not seen to rest upon ge-

neological connections; instead, it eventuates from the ties that people form with the land” (Bamford 2007: 6).

Relating in a more general way to the shift in recent theorizing about kinship, Leach says: “whereas in the past one might have looked for the structure of society in kinship categories, now it is the life-cycle, and particularly the ascription of identity and relatedness through activities, which takes narrative prominence. . . . One way of understanding this move is to say [that] this is because the agentive, creative aspect of people’s interactions seemed to be missing from earlier understandings of kinship” (2003: 23).

Carsten (1997) makes a similar point about the dynamics of kinship in *The Heat of the Hearth*, her ethnographic case study on the Langkawi in West Malaysia. She argues that people do not consider each other kin because of notions of shared blood—as assumed in Euro-American folk understandings of procreation. Rather, Langkawi “become kin to each other through living and eating together” (1997: 27). Based on the data of how Langkawi themselves build and recognize relations, Carsten takes a fresh conceptual approach to the study of kinship “as a process.” This approach might also be paraphrased with what Weismantel has described as “making kin” among the Zumbagua of Ecuador, where “[e]very adult seemed to have several kinds of parents and several kinds of children” (1995: 689), depending on how many ties he or she had built through particular experiences of feeding and caring. Carsten, in particular, draws her inspiration from the work of Schneider (1984). In *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, Schneider showed that a distinction between the biological and the social had been set a priori in the anthropological study of kinship, leading to the reproduction of “the ethnoepistemology of European culture” (1984: 175) in the representation of other societies. In pointing to the idea that people elsewhere may not give primacy to relationships as resulting from sexual reproduction, Schneider triggered a general rethinking of classic kinship analysis (Carsten 2004: 19–20). To convey her approach, Carsten advocates the use of the term “relatedness” in order to indicate “an openness to indigenous idioms of being related” (2000: 4) and suggests that, as ethnographers, we should, first of all, ask ourselves: “how do the people we study define and construct their notions of relatedness and what values and meaning do they give to them?” (1997: 290).

My ethnography is concerned with exactly these questions: how is kinship made known in Daiden, how is it emergent from specific social practices, why and in what ways are ties kept or undone? Bosmun do acknowledge ties in genealogical terms, but these ties may easily become hollow if they are not “activated” in the right way. In order to convey how the “making of” kin works in Daiden, I need to analyze people’s foodways as they relate to the phenomenon of empathy.

Foodways

In an anthology about food and gender, Counihan (1998: 1) states that “foodways” are “an effective prism through which to illuminate human life.” She defines foodways as the “behaviors and beliefs surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food” (Counihan 1999: 6). In my definition of the term, I wish to stress that foodways also implies the emotional assessments that people make of food-related behaviors and practices. I assume that foodways offer vital clues to personhood. Much has been written about personhood in anthropology—ranging from Mauss’s ([1938] 1985) classic essay published in 1938 to more recent theoretical reflections and ethnographic illustrations.² Bosmun personhood, as I explore it, conflates aspects that have been split conceptually, for instance, by Harris (1989), who splits these aspects into three distinct analytical categories. She claims that we should differentiate between the social, psychic, and biophysical aspects of our existence as social actors, which she terminologically translates as “person,” “self,” and “individual”; yet, she admits that these components can be interrelated differently in different localities (Harris 1989: 599–604).³ In Bosmun subjectivity, social, psychic, and physical states are held to be deeply interwoven. The medium through which such putatively distinct categories such as “person,” “self,” and “individual” are articulated is food. Of course, food (*amarees* for ‘cooked food,’ *ximír* for ‘raw food’) is recognized for its nutritional importance and seen as vital to maintaining people’s bodies. However, as we shall see, this biophysical necessity is so deeply linked to the social and emotional realm that feelings of hunger may be ignored or downplayed in situations in which different codes of conduct need to be acknowledged.

The role of food has been a rewarding topic in anthropology for decades, in approaches ranging from structuralist (e.g., M. Douglas 1966, 1997; Lévi-Strauss [1964] 1969, 1997) and symbolic (e.g., Kahn 1986) to more experiential and phenomenological approaches (e.g., Eves 1998), and it continues to be an issue of anthropological interest (Alexeyeff, James & Thomas 2004; Counihan & van Esterik 1997; Manderson 1986b; Mintz & Du Bois 2002; Watson & Caldwell 2005; Whitehead 2000). This may certainly be traced back to the fact that “[n]ext to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one with which much of social life is entwined” (Mintz & Du Bois 2002: 102). Scholars have analyzed how people’s foodways relate to politics and to power on local levels (e.g., Young 1971) and global levels (e.g., Watson & Caldwell 2005), how they relate to the subject of gender (e.g., Counihan & Kaplan 1998; Kahn 1986), to the body (e.g., Counihan 1999; Meigs 1984), to memory (e.g., Holtzman 2006; Sutton 2001) and to socialization (Tietjen 1985), how food taboos express status in kinship relations (Paulsen 2003), how food words become person-referring avoidance terms

(Stasch 2002: 338–339), how food is classified in and across cultures (e.g., Pollock 1986; Wassmann 1993), and how food marks cultural boundaries and their transcendence (Haines & Sammells 2010).

Bosmun foodways are not just political, economic or social. They also entail emotional and intentional meanings and might therefore be understood as what Mageo (2011: 76) calls “enacted empathy.” The way Bosmun perceive action bears resemblance to the Lelet of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea where “actions display intentionality” (Eves 1998: 36). This holds true elsewhere in Papua New Guinea (e.g., Fajans 1997: 119; Kahn 1986: 1, 39; Manderson 1986a: 13, 17; Schieffelin 1976: 47–48) and in other parts of the Pacific (e.g., Alexeyeff 2004). Barlow (2001: 86–91), for instance, writes about the food-based empathetic communication in the mother-child relationship among the Murik in northwest Papua New Guinea, where mothers enthusiastically respond to their children’s efforts to assist in procuring food and thus give them social recognition. Furthermore, Murik children “repair hurt feelings and relationships by offering food” (Barlow 2001: 90). A similar meaning is ascribed to action, and more particularly to the gestures of giving among the Sabarl in the Louisiade Archipelago of Papua New Guinea. Battaglia (1990: 56) talks of “enactments of emotion.” Sabarl exchanges of food and other gifts are “statements of trust and sentiment”; the “giving of oneself emotionally generates many of the ‘unofficial texts’ of social relationship: the perennial small gestures of ‘empathy,’ ... the shows of tolerance for and sensitivity to the moods and ‘soul searchings’ ... of others, the expressions of sincerity and gestures of politeness—all of which are taken as serious measures of the person as someone worth ‘remembering’” (Battaglia 1990: 56).

What makes the Bosmun case of particular interest for a discussion about food and empathy is not only that the sharing of food expresses people’s tolerance for and sensitivity to the states of others, but that people who share food feel justified in inquiring into their consociates’ lives, on the one hand, and that they allow their consociates to inquire into their own lives, on the other.

Empathy

Fundamental to the notion of empathy is the assumption that one is able to comprehend the “subjective experience of another from a quasi-first person perspective” (Hollan & Throop 2008: 387). The term is derived from the German word *Einfühlung* (literally: ‘feeling into’) made prominent, especially by Vischer (1873), in nineteenth-century philosophical debates on aesthetics. *Einfühlung* became the intellectually recognized way to contemplate an art object and thus to detect its ultimate soul and beauty (see Jahoda 2005: 154). Apart from *Einfühlung*’s importance in the sphere of art, Lipps (1903a, 1903b, 1906), its other major proponent, also prompted its significance for interper-

sonal and psychological processes. Psychologist Titchener (1909) translated it into English as ‘empathy’ in his lectures on experimental psychology (see Jahoda 2005: 154–159, 161). According to Strauss, psychologists have basically argued that empathy consists of a cognitive and an affective component. Cognitively, empathy is the “awareness of another person’s feelings,” whereas affectively, empathy is “an emotional reaction to another’s feelings” (Strauss 2004: 434). While it is theoretically intriguing to distinguish the cognitive and the affective aspects of empathy, one should not think that there are separate processes at work (see Engelen & Röttger-Rössler 2012; Walter 2012).⁴ I believe that the attempt to arrive at a genuine awareness of another’s feelings (via cognitive empathy) cannot succeed without emotionally acting and reacting (via affective empathy) in appropriate ways.⁵

Whereas considerable attention has been paid to food as an anthropological category, this has not been the case with “the ethnography of empathy” (Hollan 2012: 70). Hollan and Throop (2008: 385, 388–391, 396) argue that this may be partly ascribed to Geertz’s (1984) critique of anthropologists who, in claiming to be empathetic, were instead actually projecting their own ideas onto observed social phenomena (see Robbins & Rumsey 2008: 416–417).⁶ Indeed, drawing the line between projection and empathy is not that easy. As Lohmann critically remarks, “projection is often, and arguably always, a part of empathetic experience, and one that can improve as well as diminish the accuracy of empathy. Though projection of our own thoughts and feelings onto others typically creates inaccurate impressions, it is only through knowing our own volition, motives, and reactions that we are able to model what these must be like for others” (2011: 109). Yet, projection is subjective and static, whereas empathy is intersubjective and processual. Empathizer and empathizee engage in an “ongoing dialogue” (Hollan 2008: 476) that allows them to gain an accurate perception of another’s states. This also means that one has to continually revise and reformulate one’s own assessments of the other. As Hollan points out, “[t]his concern with accuracy, the willingness, indeed the necessity, to alter one’s impression of another’s emotional state as one engages with the other and learns more about his or her perspective, is what distinguishes empathy from simple projection—the attribution of one’s own emotional reactions and perspectives to another” (2008: 476).⁷

Geertz’s unmaking of empathy, as suggested by Hollan and Throop (2008: 385), has had its effects. In their 1986 review on the anthropology of emotions, Lutz and White, for instance, only briefly address empathy. Drawing on R. Rosaldo’s (1988) claim that understanding of others is created through experiencing similarities,⁸ they conclude that empathetic sensitivity becomes possible by “walking in the other person’s shoes” (Lutz & White 1986: 415). In another anthropological collection that focuses specifically on ethnopsychologies in the Pacific (White & Kirkpatrick 1985), discussions of empathy

seem to be equally muted. Only Black (1985: 249–253) pays explicit attention to it, seeking, in his contribution, to explore an attempted suicide within the context of a Micronesian’s psychological world. Local concepts of empathy are not analyzed, however, as the parties involved in the empathetic encounter are taken to be the ethnographer and the people “investigated.” Black notes that:

[A]s ethnographers, we are heirs to a long tradition of fieldwork in which the ability to comprehend (intuit may be a better word) the emotional life of people is virtually taken for granted. I am referring here to the notion of “empathy” which is widely regarded as a prerequisite for successful participant observation. Whatever else is meant by this very slippery term, it always connotes an identification between ethnographer and “native.” This identification is built on past learnings at the same time that it is used to develop further learnings. And most if not all of these learnings have to do with feelings. (1985: 249)

Black’s notion of empathy is basically in line with that of Halpern (2001), a bioethicist, who critically reexamines the early twentieth-century rise of objectivism in medicine that led to a condemnation of judgments as based on emotional assessments. Halpern situates herself in the following way: “Writers on empathy either base empathy in detached reason or sympathetic immersion. Against these models I describe empathy in terms of a listener using her emotional associations to provide a context for imagining the distinct experiences of another person. Therefore, empathy is a form of *emotional reasoning*” (2001: xv; emphasis added). In praising the cognitive potential of emotion, Halpern (2001: 11, 41, 50) defines emotional reasoning as “emotion-guided activity of imagination” that involves the process of “associational linking.” Black and Halpern both distinguish empathy as mutual sensitivity occurring between at least two individuals (Black 1985: 292; Halpern 2001: 41). Moreover, both relate empathy to the realm of imagination or association and to the accumulation of emotional knowledge. Thinking of it as evolving out of continual learning and interaction, Black (1985: 252–253) situates empathy theoretically between the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition and hermeneutics. Thus, empathy emerges primarily as a method applied by the sensitive fieldworker to produce successful intersubjective encounters and scholarly outcomes—the method whose feasibility Geertz once contested.⁹

Hollan and Throop (2008: 389–390) claim, however, that anthropologists should not only be aware of empathy’s role in a fieldwork situation but should also pay attention to how empathy is marked and articulated cross-culturally. What about empathy in local “hermeneutic circles” and what about the variety of peoples’ interpretive modes? To my surprise, Bosmun daily discourse turned out to be a hermeneutic circle, encouraging multiple voices to overlap

and to coconstruct social reality and subjectivity ever anew. This is a fact I methodically had to take into account, a point that I elucidate later. What kinds of feelings, intentions, or desires to associate with whom, why, when, and where is not the same everywhere. In Bosmun subjectivity, the realm of imagination and association is layered with meanings that are inextricably linked to people's foodways. Moreover, as several scholars have recently shown, the assumption of being able to gain an accurate understanding of other people's states does not hold sway everywhere: there are people who doubt that empathy is possible, and there are people who, although not doubting it, are not allowed to either speculate about the states of others or reveal their states to others because of sociocultural proscription (e.g., Feinberg 2011; Groark 2008; Lepowsky 2011; Lohmann 2011; Mageo 2011; Throop 2011). This assumption has recently been referred to as "the doctrine of 'the opacity of other minds'" by Robbins and Rumsey (2008: 408). Although I often heard people in Daiden say, *Mi no save long tingting bilong em* ('I do not know what he / she thinks'), I did not interpret such statements as a credo for a generally assumed "opacity of other minds." For I realized that achieving others' quasi-first person perspective is deemed possible among persons who have built mutual trust—the prerequisite for developing openness to others (Mageo 2011: 86)—through long-standing food-related experiences. Partners in commensality commonly make efforts to understand the other and commonly show approval of "being understood" (Hollan 2008) by the other. Moreover, Bosmun anchor positive and negative empathy in social space and thus create a "landscape" (Hirsch 1995a) of familiar and unfamiliar places: partners in commensality expect benevolent empathy to define interpersonal life in the familiar places of shared households, whereas negative empathy is thought to prevail in places unfamiliar to them.¹⁰

Indeed, empathy is not only about "understanding others," but also about "being understood," referred to by Hollan (2008: 481) as the "flip side of what we normally think of as empathy." Even if I try to walk in the other person's shoes and even if the other and I have shared some crucial experiences, my empathetic attempt will only succeed if the other provides me with the "appropriate cues for understanding" (Hollan 2008: 484) and if he or she is open to engage in the actions and discourses that I consider central (see Wikan 1992: 471). Therefore, anthropologists should also explore "the ways in which people in different times and places promote or discourage understanding of themselves" (Hollan 2008: 475). What about the "appropriateness and possibility" (Throop 2008: 406) of empathetic self-expression according to prevailing cultural rules? On Yap in Micronesia, for instance, a person who fails in self-governance is called a "papaya" that has "ripened" (Throop 2008: 414). The papaya's exterior skin and color mirror its interior state. People know from the exterior whether the fruit is ripe or unripe. A critical Yapese virtue

is to conceal one's interiority and instead show an "opaque exterior." If someone is described as a "papaya that ripened," it is meant in a pejorative sense (Throop 2008: 414, 415).

Although Bosmun do not use the image of a papaya, this transparency would perfectly suit their notion of a virtuous person. Concealing one's interior—a Yapese ideal of self-management—is what renders a person in Daiden highly suspicious and malevolent. One is expected to show transparency, even if this means to express, for instance, states of anger or jealousy which, at least according to other ethnopsychologies (including Western psychology), are interpreted as rather negative feelings. Also, to pretend that one is detached in view of another's turmoil, as among the Toraja in Indonesia, where people only turn to the other once the other has calmed down (Hollan 2011: 201), does not correspond to the Bosmun ideal of a good person. Rather, as among the Sabarl, "an openness to exchanges of feeling and thought is the precondition of meaningful social interaction. . . . The channeled person—one who is physically, intellectually, and emotionally 'open' to engaging in the flow of relations . . . reflects health in society itself" (Battaglia 1990: 57). Such a model of the relational person or the "relational self" (Kirmayer 2008: 461), as one may alternatively call it, is based on the primacy many Melanesian societies give to the value of relationality in shaping cultural imperatives (see Robbins 2004: 13) and in defining personal identities (see Stasch 2002: 347). The idea of the person as evolving out of social connections was prompted probably most significantly by M. Strathern, who proposed what since has been taken up repeatedly because of its persuasive point of view: "Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm" (1988: 13).¹¹ According to the specific relational order of living together in Daiden and according to my interpretations of *ramkandiar*, emotions and intentions are to be seen less as inner bodily states, as propagated by Western psychology (Lutz & White 1986: 429), than they are seen to result from people's engagements with others. People in Daiden consider themselves related to many others and acknowledge that those who belong to the same familiar place coshape their feelings and thoughts by engaging in the premise of "watching others and being watched."

Coming back to how notions of empathy and food merge conceptually in Daiden, I finally need to address the question of how well-being is defined in Daiden. Concerning general discussions about empathy beyond the particularities of a single ethnographic case, one of course also needs to ask how well-being is defined elsewhere. Only by answering this question may we know how to successfully and (ideally) positively empathize with others in Daiden and elsewhere. To answer briefly for the moment: it is the foodways that I describe in this book that cause or spoil well-being in Daiden and that

have to be taken into account when pondering people's empathetic approximations of others' states.

Encountering Bosmun Relationality

I now describe the context in which I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork. I first present those people who are usually called the anthropologist's "informants," "interlocutors," or "friends in the field," followed by a discussion of methods, ethical considerations, and limits that evolved during my time in the field. In this section, I call people by their real personal names. I think everyone in the Bosmun area knew whom I met on the most regular basis and thus there is no need for anonymity when introducing them in a very general way. However, in the remaining parts of the book, when it comes to more detailed knowledge and to individual opinions, I have opted for anonymization. I feel compelled to do this since I cannot really anticipate people's reactions when reading their names in descriptions that deal with rather personal scenes of their lives.

People "Looking through Bamboo"

Ethnographers' informants, also called "interlocutors" or "friends" according to the situation of engagement, are sometimes addressed with kinship terms too, if a family has decided to care particularly for the visiting anthropologist and if the anthropologist has agreed to it. This was the case with me, as the wider Bosmun community obviously felt more comfortable being able to identify me concretely in the web of their local, intra- and interfamilial relationships. According to Bosmun perspectives, one must have a social identity, and therefore I became socially integrated.

After two months in Daiden, people of other households started to talk about me as the "daughter of Nungap and Samar" (see figure 0.1 and figure 0.2). Their son Seres had provided me with a house and they lived next door.



Figure 0.1: Nungap. The photograph was taken by my husband Alexis during one of his visits to Daiden. Note in the background that the wall of the house is made of bark, a material that is rarely seen these days.

It is interesting to note that none of them referred to me in this way at the beginning; rather, “outsiders,” that is, people outside this nuclear family core, were the first to refer to me as such. Nungap himself, who eventually became my *saate* (‘father’), only became ready to talk with me as the fourth month of my stay with him and his family began. A cautious yet friendly and socially well-respected man, he later explained to me that he did not want to disturb my conversations with those “people who came knocking at my door right from the start.” I think maybe it was due to his unintrusive behavior that I personally attuned to him as a paternal figure.

In my affirming response to people’s suggestions that I should become a *ngangir* (‘adopted child’) of Nungap and Samar, a core group of “consociates”—in Geertz’s sense—emerged in due course. “‘Consociates’ are individuals who actually meet, persons who encounter one another somewhere in the course of daily life. They thus share, however briefly or superficially, not only a community of time but also of space. They are ‘involved in one another’s biography’ at least minimally; they ‘grow older together’ at least momentarily, interacting directly and personally as egos, subjects, selves” (Geertz 1973: 365). For convenience, I refer to the people central to my understanding of Bosmun life as informants, conversation partners, or consociates, or I call them “brothers,” “sisters,” and so on. Yet, these terms appear either too technical or inadequate to aptly describe the individuals with whom I interacted and the quality of our interactions. Even if people classed me as a “daughter,” for example, everybody knew that due to my profession I would ask questions a “more typical daughter” probably would not. Likewise, to call those people “friends” seems difficult to me since, as I suppose, there were differences in the ways we perceived each other and our relations. There were some people whom I considered friends and some I did not, though I met with both in a polite manner. How would they perceive me? In rethinking the idea of friendship cross-culturally, Bell and Coleman have pointed to the social situatedness of ethnographic fieldworkers:

After all, the development of some form of friendship is inherent within anthropological practice. Fieldworkers usually have to establish cordial and even close



Figure 0.2: Samar. Samar kneading sago fibers.

relations with informants if they are not to become like ethologists, observing interactions while remaining aloof from close social contact. The ambiguity and complexity of the fieldwork relationship offer us, however, some initial clues to the questions to be posed by any comparative study of friendship: Do both sides of the cultural “divide” understand the relationship in compatible ways? (1999: 2)

Apart from the subjective and experiential level of interpersonal contacts, there are cultural directives that may not be disregarded (see A. Strathern 1996: 90). In the Bosmun context, friendship is connected to the issue of gender. To speak of Bosmun males as my friends would fail to capture real local life. In their view, to develop a bond of “spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment or affection” (Carrier 1999: 21) without becoming sexually attracted in some way is said to be impossible between members of the opposite sex. A male’s *xue* (‘friend’) is male and a female’s *xue* is female. Male and female are always considered potential spouses or at least sexually active and generative partners. A display of friendship is only allowed between opposite-sex members who are either related by kinship or who are separated by a fact such as a major age difference so that sexual engagement is unlikely.

To avoid any misunderstandings and to best comprehend the people who let me learn along with them, I wish to think of them in a way that can also be read as my personal tribute to each of them. According to a Bosmun saying, I introduce them as the people who were inclined to “look through bamboo” for me. Such a person is referred to as *rongo maankat mot / mes* (*rongo* stems from *rone*, which means ‘a type of bamboo’ of which public flutes are made, *maankat* translates as ‘to visually permeate,’ and *mot* and *mes* denote ‘man / male’ and ‘woman / female’). When Bosmun say that one “looks through bamboo,” they have in mind that one is able to visually permeate the diaphragms of a bamboo. A bamboo’s so-called diaphragms are its inner walls, which have to be removed first in order to make proper use of its tube-like shape as a water container, a cooking device, or a musical instrument. This metaphor is a common expression to refer to knowledgeable, sociable people, to people of great renown. It is a metaphor on wisdom but hints also at a notion Bosmun have about human perceptibility in general. At certain stages or situations in life, people are believed to be capable of broadening their perceptual spectrum and transcending the given borders of time and space. A person can be in one place but he or she might also hear what is talked about in another place or at another point in time. It happened a few times that someone said to me that we would have to be careful when talking about S., for instance, since S. was commonly held to be such a person; S. would definitely know what we were talking about. People who wish to achieve this potential have to ‘climb the *ngaape saar*,’ which is the ‘ladder’ (*saar*) of particular, tree-dwelling spirits called *ngaaper*¹² (plural of *ngaape*). This ladder actually refers to the many vines that are scattered around in the forest. The tree-spirits are said to climb

those vines in order to reach their houses (treetops). The leaves and barks of various vines are the major source for an extensively practiced herbal consumption. Men and women rely on different herbal substances. When humans (*memkor*, plural of *memok*) “climb this ladder,” they consume herbs that enhance their physical, social, and perceptual capacities and skills.¹³ Apart from this perceptual connection, “looking through bamboo” fundamentally marks the potential of sociability that a person may accumulate.

According to Bosmun sensibilities, a person should never claim by him- or herself to be able to “look through bamboo.” Someone who does so is not taken seriously. It has to be an ascription by others who, by observing this person’s behavior, come to recognize him or her as sociable. Very few and mostly old people reach that status. The key ideal is that one aims for sociability by exhibiting it in concrete action that is watched and assessed by others. From my living with the Bosmun of Daiden I can state with certainty that none of them would ever express pride in themselves; at least, not in the realm of everyday interactions. There are, of course, realms of expertise where a man or a woman might show proficiency, as in instructing novices during phases of male and female liminality, but it is highly unusual to boast. However, telling others that they were supportive in providing knowledge and in offering intellectual acumen is common. Accordingly, it would be appropriate for me to ascribe the trait of sociability and knowledgeability to those who helped me in breaking up the many walls that I often saw in the bamboo’s interior, rather than taking personal credit for this.

Those who became part of my circle of consociates were mainly prompted by the fact that I agreed to my integration into the family of Nungap and Samar. A “family” in the Bosmun social universe is not confined to its nuclear parts but extends far beyond into a vast sphere of extended kinship. Everyone in such a sphere has, in turn, his or her own set of relationships. I usually benefited from these alternative sets as well. Hence, many individuals (not all of whom are named here) fostered my understanding. I came to think of every single person as the center of a unique relational network. Below, I roughly describe my central encounters in 2004/05 and give a brief statement of what made those encounters unique for me. In introducing other key consociates, I also indicate how they relate to “my nuclear family” (by using standard kinship abbreviations). Readers may trace the relationships with the help of the kinship diagram (see figure 1.5), which accompanies chapter 1 and provides a schematic overview of the possibilities of being kin-related in Bosmun life.

In 2004, Nungap and Samar were in their late fifties. In the beginning, Nungap and I treated each other with politeness yet also with reservation, which steadily changed into mutual, cordial sympathy as we learned more of the other. With Samar, the woman who became my *maame* (‘mother’), things were different. She accepted me with immediate spontaneity, with a balanced

combination of warmth, calmness, and directness. If I made a cultural mistake, such as politely greeting her in the early morning hours and asking her where she was off to, she would wait only once or twice before telling me straightforwardly not to ask her. Then, she would explain to me that a woman who sets out in the morning to check the prawn traps she has put in the water the day before has to stay focused and must not be drawn into a conversation. Otherwise, the prawns will not go into the trap. In Samar's presence I felt least of all like an anthropologist, even though my encounters with her were among the most prolific for my enculturation and my anthropological investigation. The couple had three sons and three daughters. Two of the children were under twenty and three were over twenty; the eldest was over thirty years old and one son and one daughter were already married with their own children. The married son lived in a house nearby with his wife and a child. The married daughter lived in her husband's household in another part of Daiden. She and her husband came to visit their eldest of three children, who was living with Nungap and Samar. Their other children also spent most of the time with Nungap and Samar. That household was further complemented by Nungap's younger, unmarried brother Kopri (see figure 0.3) and another classificatory brother of Nungap, by two teenage daughters of a deceased brother of Nungap, an adult son of one deceased sister of Nungap, and three adult



Figure 0.3: Kopri and Nambindo.

sons of another deceased sister of Nungap, one of whom had a wife and five children. Whenever visitors came to one of the members of this household or whenever its members went to visit others—regularly visiting one’s own biological and classificatory kin is quite common—I took the opportunity to participate in these encounters. Due to the sympathy that this constellation of kin radiated toward me, I easily gained insights into the vibrant life of an actual Bosmun household. Later, I also delved into the lives of other households, but I did this via the relations that “my family” had within their span of extended kinship.

I consider it a good choice to have used the social position I was offered for three reasons. First of all, in a small-scale societal world like that of Daiden, everyone is linked to everyone else in some way or another. Therefore, it made no sense to concentrate “on isolated individuals, but on persons-in-interaction” (Wikan 1990: xxiii). Below, I return to this emically derived methodology.

Second, I felt people’s urge to mark my social identity (see Hess [2009: 17] for a similar experience during fieldwork in Vanuatu). In Bosmun understandings, it is common to clearly know one’s own and others’ social commitments. This made it easier for all of us. Who, for instance, would take a break to sit down with me when I needed to revise specific data? Who would allow me to observe regular activities on a daily basis? Who would canoe the Ramu or old riverbeds with me? Who would lay down his or her work to walk with me to other places? I walked quite a lot but never alone. Since I was afraid of the forest-dwelling poisonous and nonpoisonous snakes, it comforted me to have a few people with me should something happen to me. Apart from that, walking with people through familiar places is a method of investigation, as Meinerz (2006: 12) has shown for the Hinihon of the Adelbert Range in Papua New Guinea, where walking is the key “notion of being alive.” At the Ramu River, canoeing has a similar connotation. Bosmun are highly mobile on ground and on water. Since canoeing was a novel traveling experience for me and the Ramu is inhabited by crocodiles, I was glad especially in the beginning to canoe with people who were particularly aware of my natural unsureness on this terrain. In due course I had to canoe with many different people, such as when traveling to Madang, which meant crossing the Ramu every time, and I always felt secure since everyone seemed to be concerned about me.

Third, since a central aim was to look at interpersonal dynamics, I thought it would be most instructive to concentrate on a concrete field of interpersonal relations. Thus, for example, I came upon what could be called a type of “mediated trust.” Put in another way: each time I met “new relatives” in other Bosmun places, the reception was as if people already knew me. To my surprise, they were very well informed about several details of my life in Daiden and about my interactions with others. They knew everything that my core family knew of me, and they, too, embraced me with a sympathy that I already

knew from the others. I had not asked for such a preintroduction but it facilitated my work. It was as if the level of trust that I had achieved with my daily conversation partners became automatically extended through what they told my nonregular interlocutors who lived in other households and other places respectively. I later observed that other social strangers similarly become attuned as long as a family member knows him or her and can define him or her as a good-natured person. This I call “mediated trust.”

Mbandu (see figure 0.4), a widow above the age of thirty and mother of seven children (and the FBSSW of Nungap and the MZD of Samar), was the first person I considered a potential friend. She considered me a potential new family member since, as she later revealed to me, she wanted to give me a local personal name of her clan. She lived in the household next to Nungap and Samar’s, but, for personal reasons, had to leave Daiden after two months, and thus both of our expectations took another direction. Mbandu was among the first to accompany me to other Bosmun places, and it is from her that I learned to speak Tok Pisin well. She fervently did what I had asked of her: she interrupted and corrected me whenever I made mistakes and thus my Tok Pisin quickly improved. I also learned from her about the cultural rules of widowhood and how to cope with them from the perspective of a still young and passionate woman who was struggling to overcome her fate. After she had left Daiden, the frequency of our encounters ceased but the intensity of our talks whenever we did meet did not.



Figure 0.4: Mbandu. Mbandu is carrying a son of hers on her shoulders in the typical way children are carried in Daiden.

Kermban (see figure 0.5), the forty-year-old mother's brother of Mbandu's late husband, who was a FBSS of Nungap, introduced me to the intricacies of the Bosmun local language. He showed great enthusiasm about saving the local language for future generations. Kermban had worked with the Bible Translators of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, who are well known in this and other parts of Papua New Guinea and who had started to study the Lower Ramu languages in 2002 (Harris & Harris 2002, 2004). Inspired by his experience with the Bible Translators, Kermban was inclined to work with me, too. After about nine months in Daiden, I could follow and comprehend conversations spoken in the local language, but I never reached the point of speaking it confidently, other than building simple sentences. This was not due to any unwillingness to communicate. People often confirmed that I am a *meri bilong toktok* ('woman who likes to chat'), which, in Bosmun understandings, is a sign that one is seeking sociable contact with others. The predominant usage of Tok Pisin these days made it an impossible enterprise for me to learn the Bosmun vernacular fluently because people themselves constantly switched into Tok Pisin. Verbal communication therefore predominantly took place in Tok Pisin, although I continued asking people for words, idioms, and meanings



Figure 0.5: Kermban. Kermban (also called Adam Sangam) looking at the dictionary that resulted from the meetings where I learned the basics of the Bosmun language. Yanzon, his sister's son's son, shares our joy.

stemming from the local language. Kermban and I compiled a preliminary wordlist and distributed it in the Bosmun area in 2008 (A. von Poser & Sangam 2008; A. von Poser 2009). Whenever I returned to Daiden, I was able to easily evoke this vocabulary. Apart from the data relating to his local language, Kermban would also share his ideas with me about what Bosmun men of former, premissionary times were supposed to aim for during their lives. He is the youngest son of a highly renowned man who had died some years before and who had passed on to him his memories on lessons taught before proselytization changed the world order that had existed in the first half of the twentieth century.

Kermban's sister Kaso (see figure 0.6), a woman in her sixties and married to a FBS of Nungap as well as Ndombu (see figures 1.1, 3.3, and

4.1), Kaso's same-aged sister-in-law and Nungap's FBD, belonged to a circle of elderly and middle-aged women who guided me through topics regarding Bosmun female agency, identity, youth, and maturity, and female material culture such as the production of net bags, bast skirts, and clay pots. In 2010, Ndombu was no longer part of our circle; she had died in 2008. The other women were my adoptive mother Samar, Ndoor (see figure 5.1), a former wife of Nungap's MFFZSS, Nzoum, Nungap's FFBSD, and Ndaat, Samar's FFZDD (see figure 0.7). From time to time, Tepe, a younger sister of Ndaat, Sete, Ndaat's BD, and Samndo, Ndat's ZD who was married to a younger brother of



Figure 0.6: Kaso.



Figure 0.7: "Jealous Women." Ndaat is playing a string-figure game that tells of two women who fight with one another because they are caught up in jealousy.

Nungap, joined us. While walking or canoeing to other places, during which time I also learned a lot, my most frequent female companion was Nambindo, the FBDD of Nungap and Kopri (see figure 0.3). Whatever I saw or heard while on my way to visit people, I recapitulated in this particular circle of women. Apart from the informal conversations that spontaneously took place whenever we saw each other, meeting those women became a regular matter in the period of 2004/05, and on my returns they were already prepared to sit down with me again. Depending on the topic chosen, we would come together once or twice a week. Sometimes we would also spend several days consecutively, and they appeared dedicated to conversing with me until I felt content with the outcome of our conversations.

Exploring issues of femaleness turned out to be one of the easier projects during my fieldwork. In Bosmun gender configurations, I failed to reach the status of a “gender-neutral ethnographer,” and therefore the fact that I am female endured in my personal encounters with both men and women. Only once, for example, was I allowed to enter a men’s house. This was when a new one was opened in Ndoŋon, another Bosmun place, in August 2005. Opening a men’s house is a festive occasion during which male and female dancers enter the new building together. By shaking its posts through exaggerated dance, the stability of the construction is verified. After people had invited me to do so, I went with the dancers. Following my own ethics, I did not insist on people disclosing their male- or female-related (and secret) knowledge to me, since I felt uncomfortable putting pressure on people for the purpose of intellectual discourse. The only definite suggestion that I made to both men and women was that I would be looking forward to noting and recording everything that would help me make sense of social phenomena that were yet unintelligible to me. I remember one man expressing his pity by declaring that “if I were Peter or James or Marcus,” he would have loved to give me a deeper insight into male concealments but “since I was Anita” and since people had decided to regard me as a *vunsi mes* (‘a woman of their place’), as he would emphasize, this was not possible. Sometimes, the consequence of this taxonomy led me to moments of frustration because certain matters remained clouded and incoherent to me. On the bright side, it gave me experiential insight into how women feel when being excluded from male spheres and when excluding men from female spheres. On the whole, however, I felt honored; the more so as several men had declared in my presence that they were going to treat me like a *mbi*, a sister, which in Bosmun subjectivity is a woman’s best social position. This is also encoded in a dance that I saw in 2005 that depicts a brother protecting his sister from her husband’s assault (see figure 1.7).

Still, men provided me with important insights. My most regular male conversation partners were Nungap and Kopri. Kopri was also my key male companion when moving about. As a former game hunter, he was also a *save fes*

(‘a well-known man’) in more distant places beyond Bosmun terrain. Whenever we left familiar grounds, such as when walking to Kayan on the coast or to Giri further up the Ramu, people of the areas that we passed usually greeted him amiably. Nunḡap and Kopri assisted me almost every day. Since both belonged to the generation of elders in Daiden, men from other households—from other families and other places—would commonly gather in Nunḡap’s *haus win* when communal matters had to be discussed (a *haus win* is a normal part of every household and serves as a ‘resting platform’ during the hottest daytime; it is stilted, roofed, and without walls so that breezes can easily come in). Thus, I was frequently able to win their visitors over for spontaneous as well as organized group discussions. Yanu (see figure 3.2), a man in his mid forties, equally supported my enterprise. This relation was facilitated mainly through his sister Ndaat who, as I said, was one of my closest female tutors. Yanu was one of the last men who had learned from the elders how to beat the local slit-drum (*mbin*). The signals of a *garamut*, as people refer to the slit-drum in Tok Pisin, are a major means of communicating messages of various kinds. The slit-drum signals reach other places and announce socially relevant messages such as the death of a person, the seasonal arrival of eels, a fire outbreak, or that one is seeking another’s assistance in sago making. In asking Yanu about the signals that were carried from time to time to and from Daiden, he also provided me with sociocultural meanings.

My paternal guides Nunḡap and Kopri, as well as Yanu, instigated my connections in Ndoḡon, especially during the second half of my first stay at the Ramu. In Ndoḡon, I most frequently met with Pendame, a widower with two adult sons, and his brothers, as well as with Amok and her husband Njivi. Pendame was a classificatory FZDS of Kopri (Kopri had been fostered by another family than Nunḡap and he therefore had somewhat different classificatory kin). Through his higher education and occupation, which had brought him to Europe, discussions with Pendame sometimes turned out to be different from those that I had with people who had not experienced life beyond the borders of Madang Province. With great passion for his ancestry and local customs, Pendame gave me an idea about his views on a life that combined modern with traditional elements. Amok, a woman probably in her mid seventies and a classificatory sister of Nunḡap, made me aware of the intensity that the sharing of food can create in the realm of kin-relations where an exact bond of genealogical descent is no longer traceable.

When discussions turned to the deeper levels or secrecies of local knowledge, the men in general remained reluctant to elaborate, and everyone advised me to ask old Kose of Ndenekaam (see figure 0.8), who had been born prior to World War II and whom everyone considered “the last cultural expert.” Whenever I went to see him and his family, he would also gather other men of his social network around him, such as Ngamndai and Njagne, to whom he had



Figure 0.8: Kose.

formally passed the custodianship of his clan-specific knowledge, called *yaam* (or *xaarak*, literally translating as ‘to know / to understand’),¹⁴ before personally abandoning it. As the village recorder of the Rom, Ngamndai also helped me to prepare a first census. On my second trip to the Ramu, I saw Kose again but was surprised to see how much he had aged since my last stay. In 2004/05, he had no longer been agile, but was still spirited. Sadly, Kose died shortly before Christmas 2006. He had been a FZS of my adoptive mother Samar, around seventy-five years of age when I first arrived, and the eldest man of the Rom clan-association into which I was socially integrated. Whenever

we met, his affectionate reception made me feel immediately comfortable. He was a humble man of powerful authority. His second wife Ngiri, Ndaat’s mother-in-law, equally welcomed me, and in 2008 she shared with me her last memories of him.

In relation to my ethnographic goals, however, there was a difficulty when meeting Kose. After a long history of proselytization, sometimes by different congregations in the same places, individuals or groups all over Papua New Guinea see themselves confronted with several “pathways to heaven” (Jebens 2005). This was also the case with Kose. During the last years of his life, he became convinced by a lately rising form of Pentecostalism that local cosmologies were evil and that if he were to talk about them he would bring damage to himself and to others. Catholic proselytization in the area has been more “moderate” compared to other regionally operating congregations such as Seventh-Day Adventism (see Josephides 1990). A woman who also favored the Pentecostal perspective told me that Kose’s death had coincided with the building of a new men’s house. The spirit that guarded this men’s house was to be blamed, she concluded (the same spirit that had guarded Kose’s life for almost all his years). Once Kose even showed me a flyer on Islam that someone had brought from town and asked me to tell him more about it. To my knowledge, Islamic ideas have not spread on the north coast up to now, but Pentecostal ideas have. At least one family in Ndenekaam promoted Pentecostalism as an alternative to Catholicism, which had become the key religious ideology in the region in the mid twentieth century. It took me a while to real-

ize that it was not just because I was female that Kose would conceal certain issues (for he was reluctant to share all kinds of information) but because he had decided to fully condemn the spiritual worldview of his ancestors. Still, he continued to invite me to his home even as he noticed the nature of my exploration, which included an interest in ancestrally shaped visions of the world, and I kept visiting this lovely old man from time to time. The reception that he and his family gave me whenever I passed his household was endearing, and in these encounters I observed as much about Bosmun foodways as I did in my encounters with others. Another reason for not consulting Kose and others for their cultural expertise on clan-specific knowledge was that questions relating to this type of knowledge were leading me directly into the sphere of Bosmun political and economic contestation. I now turn to the methods I applied and how I adjusted them to people's responses. I also say more about contested knowledge and limiting conditions, and how I eventually chose the subject of this book.

Methods and Limits

I went to the field ready to apply the common methods taught in anthropological curricula, such as participatory observation in daily and non-daily activities, collecting linguistic information, genealogical inquiries, recording life stories and myths, and of course conducting interviews (mostly of a semi-structured and open-ended type) with individuals and in groups. My technical equipment was quite simple in comparison to the kind of technical devices that are available now. I relied on a cassette recorder and a film camera, and on my returns I upgraded my equipment by taking a digital camera with me. When spontaneous narrations unfolded, I decided not to disturb a speaker by quickly running away to get the recorder. I instead wrote down matters and asked people to reevolve the subject of a conversation at another occasion. Such recapitulations always took another direction when I taped them after the first dialogue unless I raised questions I was able to formulate on the basis of the information that I had gained in the earlier conversation. All data I observed I wrote down on paper, usually in the evenings or at nights, and often in the company of people who came to sit with me. I enjoyed this because, in between my reconsiderations of a day, we would chat and share betel nut and tobacco. I began transcribing recorded conversations and stories while still in Daiden, but due to the quantity I had to continue later, when I was back in Germany.

I also took text materials with me that I had found through archival searches done prior to my actual fieldwork. In preparation for the first visit to the Ramu, I had looked for earlier published data that would give me at least some preliminary facts about my potential fieldsite. The most detailed accounts I found

were in the works of the German missionary and ethnographer Georg Höltker (1937a, 1937b, 1940, 1960, 1965a, 1966, 1969, 1975) and the British anthropologist Beatrice Blackwood (1950, 1951; see Knowles [2000] and Lutkehaus [1988] on Blackwood's anthropological work in general). Höltker and Blackwood were the first to live among Bosmun with the aim of studying their cultural life. Independently of each other, they each came for a short visit in 1937. Höltker stayed there from January to February and was accompanied by Father Much of the same congregation—the SVD congregation (Societas Verbi Divini / Society of the Divine Word)—which by then had established a certain degree of familiarity with the local population (Höltker 1937b: 965–966). Blackwood stayed from October to December. Neither Höltker's nor Blackwood's ethnographic enterprises were based on the intensive ethnographic fieldwork principles that I was able to enact due to my academic education several decades later. At their time, a firm methodology was still in the making; Malinowski's (1922) articulation of the appropriate empirical principles had been published only fifteen years before. Still, Höltker and Blackwood produced data of great value. Kose remembered both visitors. His stories about Blackwood were especially entertaining. He saw her when he was a young boy, and once she offered him something to eat. But since she was among the first white women he ever saw, he ran off in fear. This was his major experience with Blackwood and I shall never forget his chuckle. In Kose's presence, I felt something like a direct historical connection, which has now unfortunately been lost.

My aim was to discuss Höltker's and Blackwood's findings with the descendants of those people who had encountered my quasi-predecessors. I did not pretend ignorance of what Höltker, for example, wrote on Bosmun boyhood and male initiation practices (1975) or on the construction of secret cult-houses (1966). All his articles are stored in the library of the Divine Word University in Madang, with some of his material already translated into English (done himself in manuscript form). Bosmun can reach the town of Madang via a six-hour PMV ride (PMVs are Public Motor Vehicles that make up the regular transport system on Papua New Guinea roads). One Bosmun man who had gone through higher education told me that he knew of Höltker and what he had written on Bosmun women's fights (1969). On one of his next trips to town, he would go and visit the library again to check the other articles, he said to me. After all, "times are changing" and he was hoping that the following male and female generations would benefit from a higher education in the near future and thus gain access to alternative economic and intellectual worlds.

I used Höltker's texts in the following way: I never discussed his findings on manhood with women nor did I show them the pictures included in his materials that related to exclusively male topics. I also waited until later in conversa-

tions to bring up the topics he described. I first attempted to gain an idea about local and gender-dependent sensitivities. Only then did I suggest translating what Höltker had written in German. Prior to that, however, I would briefly describe the topic we were probably going to delve into so that the people who spoke with me could tell me whether they would want to discuss it with me or not. I would say, for instance, that I probably would have to say the names of certain spirits connected to secret spirit houses. Men's reactions were always that I could say them but only as I translated the material to them. In this way, I touched on facets of *yaam*, that is, clan-specific knowledge. The best way to define this term and its ideational substrate is to say that it refers to a type of knowledge that can be used to gain political, economic, and magical power. To have *yaam* is to have knowledge of certain myths and their secret aspects, such as the names of spirit entities, of secret ritual practices and magic spells, of melodies and chants, of the connections with the ancestors and thus of land rights. However, to have a lot of this knowledge is considered dangerous because it can cause envy in people who might subsequently react with an attack of death sorcery.

Let me give an example of the contested facet of *yaam*. Early on, I investigated the distribution of land and land rights. Initially, I wanted to explore whether Bosmun trace land ownership via the mythical pathways that traverse many social landscapes in Papua New Guinea and beyond (e.g., Rumsey & Weiner 2001). I wondered if local senses of place and belonging depended on stories of apical ancestors who, by traveling from place to place, created landscapes of physical distinctiveness and social meaning. One day, I sat with a man of a certain clan who made a drawing and put the names of all sections of land in it as well as the names of the land-owning clans. I did not keep my investigation secret, and thus two men from another clan came for a visit the following day. I showed them the drawing since its maker had told me to discuss it with the others. He was aware what I still had to learn: in the Bosmun area it is best to sit with at least two or three discussants and usually more. Only through their agreement may knowledge become valid. As we looked through the information that the drawing contained, the men were noticeably surprised that a man from another clan had given the "right picture" of the existing clan-land boundaries. They murmured: "*Em tru, em stret*" ('This is true, this is right') and reacted as if they had assumed the opposite. In this and in similar situations I realized that part of my work was becoming politicized. Moreover, at the time I arrived, people were involved in a land dispute with a neighboring, sociolinguistically different group. A twisted situation hence evolved for me: on the one hand, several people would not tell me about land ownership by the clans. On the other hand, the same people declared that I should definitely explore this issue since my report would help them to resolve the land dispute with the opponent group. In view of this, I started to think

about shifting the angle of my study since I personally felt some stress about becoming involved in a land dispute. I did not eschew situations of conflict in general, nor did I close my eyes when verbal or physical fights occurred. Yet, telling me that once my book was finished, people would use it as proper evidence in political and legal debates with contesting groups, I became reluctant. I feared being unable to collect all the relevant data on which such a legal decision could be based, including data from neighboring groups and from all the current and future factions.

People's relationships to land are a part of my account and I trace a number of mythical pathways in the Bosmun landscape. I do not answer questions concerning rightful land boundaries but instead situate the study in a context in which land, or more precisely its outcome—food, is explored as a source for individual and collective identity. Over time, it became clear that I would focus on food and on emotional knowledge in interpersonal encounters, which is not concealed but shared and necessary to uphold sociality. Owing to the emerging nature of my investigations, people became more relaxed. Now, I could also better deal with the fact that people never knew the “full story” when talking to me. Whenever I recorded a mythical narrative, story tellers would add: *Mipela save hap hap tasol* (‘We know it only partially’). Furthermore, mythical narratives were never recapitulated in exactly the same way. It turned out that “trying to find a single, authentic meaning of any myth is like looking for the end of a rainbow” (Lohmann 2008: 113). Variations always existed. Sometimes, details were omitted and sometimes they reemerged in different narrative contexts. Sometimes the sequence of events also became reversed.

This did not, however, conflict with my notion of myth or my methodological use of it. I see myth in the following way: first of all, myths “set horizons on behaviour” as A. Strathern and Stewart (2000: 68) tell of the myths and folk tales of the Highland Duna of Papua New Guinea. Myths are also “instruments through which dimensions of human actualities are enframed and grasped” as Kapferer (1997: 62) says in his study on Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhists. After all, I am convinced, as Tuzin (1997: 157) was, that “mythical knowledge must originate in experience of some kind.” Everyday Bosmun life experience basically and essentially centers upon eating and not eating together and sharing and not sharing food with others. This is also at the center stage of all mythical narratives that I heard. Myth and actual life experience are linked in a continuous flow of mutual influence and counterprojection (Tuzin 1997: 158). Since foodways define Bosmun interpersonal sociality so notably, they are unequivocal in mythical narrative, whereas other aspects, such as the names of certain places and spirits that are connected to intellectual hegemonies and political legitimacies, are not. These aspects, however, are not at stake in my analysis. I should also note that elements in myth make sense to some people but not to other people, thus leading to different interpretations. In fact,

“myth users can ignore or draw upon certain [...associations] in a variety of combinations for particular purposes” (Lohmann 2008: 124). My interpretations of Bosmun myths will, of course, always remain subject to discussion since they evolved at particular points in social time and social space.

People’s decisions to reveal certain matters to me were also dependent on what the outside world (including the readers of my book) would think of certain local practices. Head-hunting and eating enemies’ brains, for instance, were common practices in premissionary days. Missionaries believed them to have ceased by 1930/32 (Höltker 1975: 556). Although my conversation partners proudly spoke of their ancestors and of raids that served to keep intruders away, they usually explained to me that head-hunting was “cannibalistic.” In using the English word “cannibalistic,” which had been introduced by missionaries and colonial officers, they implied the judgment that head-hunting was wrong. As a matter of fact and current local perspective, head-hunting belongs to Bosmun past history. As it is past history, people see no reason to conceal it. In fact, it appears to me that classifying certain practices of the past as “cannibalistic” has historically emerged as a way to affirm one’s belief in today’s Christianity. Despite the fact that people now distance themselves from many practices of the past, these practices continue to fill individual and collective imaginations. It is as if stating what they are no more helps to sharpen what they are now. On many occasions, people wished to inform me about how customs used to be in the past. In December 2004, I wrote in my field notes: “Although many things are no longer observed, the past is very present through the medium of narration. As I participate in the mourning situation of [named person], people constantly come to me in order to explain to me how it used to be. I hardly get around to observing because there is constantly someone around me telling me how it used to be” (Field notes, 02.12.2004; my translation).¹⁵

I also came to realize that what is secret or public, male or female, right or wrong knowledge, changes over time and is a question of appropriate revelation at any particular time. Men would say about certain issues: *Ol meri i no save* (‘Women do not know [that]’), and women would say: *Ol man i no save* (‘Men do not know [that]’). Yet more than once, the versions I came upon in conversing with both sides turned out to be different. Once, I had an interview with men about a story that, as they said, “only men talk about.” To my surprise, they began to recount the story after an elderly woman joined us. Later, I learned that due to her postmenopausal state she was not considered an excluded category of woman. Sitting amid the men, she spoke to them in a soft voice whenever they asked her for confirmation of certain details concerning the story. Knowing things does not mean that one can reveal them simply, and revealing things does not mean that it is knowledge that is considered true knowledge. Likewise, one has to keep in mind that what is classified as secret on one occasion can turn out to be public on another.

This brings me to the aspect of appropriate revelation, which also influenced my method of interviewing and conversing with people beyond the artificial atmosphere that automatically arises in the context of a prearranged interview. I soon became aware that it was best to adjust my research methods to the fact that being Bosmun is being relational. To invite an individual for a conversation was possible, and people did come to me or let me come to them. However, it almost always turned out to be the less productive (though personally never disappointing) way compared to delving into subjects with groups. Verbally construing realities in a relational mode also made it easier for me to follow people if they referred to their affines (their spouse's biological and classificatory parents and elder siblings) whose names they must not pronounce. Among consociates, I regularly heard someone requesting of the other one: *Yu kolim nem! Mi no inap kolim* ('You say the name! I must not say [it]'), which the person addressed immediately did since one usually has knowledge of the other's relatives.

My conversation partners seemed to enjoy speaking in multivoiced settings. I guess that such multiple speakership grounds in the local epistemological stance that treats reality as best understood through plural intersubjectivity, that is, the merging of as many subjective opinions, assessments, mutual affirmations, and corrections as possible. This was also imminent in political decision-making processes. A decision made by one alone had no power. It was treated as if it had never been uttered. On frequent occasions I saw that experiences of all kinds were told and retold among family members. In a repetitive (though not boring) style, each member narrated events anew, with his or her personal emphases and remarks, which in turn were taken up by the next narrator who continued to further entwine the story. Everyone was allowed to bring in personal views. Children were also allowed to take part in the continuous evoking of reality by means of overlapped commentary; yet only those who had begun to share food with others voluntarily (read: who had gained mental maturity from an emic point of view) were treated as serious conversation partners. Interruptions regularly occurred in Bosmun talk. This contrasts, for example, with the Yapese, who regard interrupting others as an act of devaluation (Throop 2011). Bosmun reactions to being interrupted while talking showed that overlapped speech was actually appreciated. Single speakers constantly encouraged others to overlap by providing them with what is called "conditional access to the turn" (Schegloff 2000: 5) in the literature on linguistic turn-taking. That is, by intentionally slowing down their voice or by searching for words, they invited others to take over or whisper add-ons. I think that this is well captured in the version of a story I have chosen to present in the appendix to this book as exemplary of how Bosmun story-construing operates. Even the elderly, people of high social recognition, usually allowed the younger ones to interrupt them. In the style of formal speech, Bosmun

collaborative constructions of talk are produced “chordally” and not “serially” (Schegloff 2000: 6), that is, people most often speak simultaneously, not one after the other.¹⁶

Even when I recorded an individual’s life story, people were most expressive when they were in the company of one or two conarrators. There is so much more information that people release in joint narration and conversation, and I was surprised to see how much they knew about each other and how much they let others know about themselves. The story that a woman gave me about her husband’s sexual affair with another woman, for example, was coauthored by her four kinswomen and they knew exactly how the betrayed one had reacted and what she had done to win the husband back. She herself said that the others knew exactly how she had felt. Children also construed realities and stories relationally. I remember a group of male youngsters around the age of ten to twelve who frequently came to visit. On one of those visits, one of the boys wished to tell me a joke, the group said. They all sat down together and the boy began to tell the joke happily and swiftly but before making the point, he slowed down and stopped and looked at the others who immediately encouraged him to continue. He hesitated until another boy went on talking. Finally, the boy who had started the joke brought it to end by interrupting his conarrator.

Before describing the chapters to come, I would like to state how I tried to express my appreciation for people’s support. I did not pay informants directly with money. When someone traveled with me to town or back, I paid for the food on the road and PMV fares. From time to time, I traveled to Madang and stayed a few days to call home, to restock what I personally needed in the field, and to make photocopies of my handwritten field notes (which were suffering from being exposed to the tremendous humidity in the Lower Ramu area). If I asked someone to stay in town until I was prepared to go back, I made sure that he or she had a place to stay with relatives living in town and I helped with the provision of food. In the beginning, I traveled with either Kermban or Nzu (see figure 1.6), a man above fifty and Nungap’s MFBSDH, who, as the local magistrate of Daiden, had to travel to town regularly. Later, Yaron (see figure 3.2), married to the eldest daughter of Nungap and Samar, accompanied me. It is common that a Bosmun woman does not travel or walk alone to places beyond the Bosmun area. Usually, a male relative accompanies her. If not, women travel in groups of female friends and kin. In keeping to this cultural code of Bosmun traveling, I not only learned about people’s senses of social insiderness and outsiderness, but, like my adoptive family, I also felt comfortable in terms of personal security. At the end of my first stay in Daiden, I contributed a certain amount of money for communal purposes, and I bought rice and canned tuna for my farewell party. Whenever I had longer sessions with my conversation partners, I asked a “sister” to cook meals for us with ingredients that I provided. From time to time, I gave people small gifts such

as salt, sugar, pencils, paper, bandages, batteries, and teabags from Germany. I had brought with me teabags of various sorts (and my mother kept sending more teabags while my fieldwork proceeded); they became temporarily famous (as did my mother), and whenever I returned people remembered them in particular. In appreciating people's help in the way described, I hope to have established a kind of reciprocity that they may accept.

The Chapters

In chapter 1, I sketch the ethnographic frame of Daiden in a general way. I place Bosmun in a historical context, and I provide details about the area and the languages that are spoken. I describe the physical environment in which Bosmun social action is embedded, and I outline the most elemental structures of relatedness.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 address discussions about "moral," "emotional," and "embodied and emplaced" foodways. The separation into these themes should not be understood as a conceptual differentiation that Bosmun make (as I said, aspects of "person," "self," and "individual" are emically conflated), but rather as my attempt to structure the Bosmun material I was able to gather in an approachable way. I have also organized the chapters' beginnings in similar ways: they all start with local myths that feature ideals or failures of food-related behavior and empathetic responding, followed by analyses of actual interpersonal life.

In chapter 2, I introduce "moral foodways." I elaborate on the idea that the planting of sago palms (from which the staple diet, sago starch, is obtained) is an act that anchors people in a social grid of interpersonal dependencies and ties them to a piece of land. I advocate a notion of morality that is thoroughly tied to sago making; the term morality is meant to refer to the "rules for behaviour" and "anticipations of the consequences of keeping to, or breaking, these rules" (A. Strathern & Stewart 2007: xiii–xiv). In order to get a sense of Bosmun rules for behavior, I delineate socially appropriate ways of preparing meals, of offering food to others, and of talking about food-related activities, thereby showing that such activities are empathetic acts themselves.

In chapter 3, I focus on "emotional foodways." I turn to Bosmun life-cycle events and show how foodways are used to mark significant emotional moments in a person's life trajectory. I discuss interpersonal relationships: how they start, how they are maintained, how they are evaluated, and how they come to an end. The main themes touched are courtship and marriage, sexual reproduction and parental care, death and mourning. The central idea pursued in this chapter is that all the phases that emotionally challenge people are enacted in specific food-related ways.

In chapter 4, I explore "embodied and emplaced foodways." I pay attention to what makes a place familiar, what the prerequisite is for creating a

social as well as an embodied sense of belonging from Bosmun points of view. This, in turn, facilitates an apt understanding of Bosmun configurations of malevolency, including sorcery. I conclude the chapter by stating that a person who displays benevolent empathy in his or her encounters with others largely avoids being accused of sorcery. Empathy, thus, is not only to be seen as a moral obligation but also as a strategy of protection.

The book ends with a conclusion in which I present a short summary of my findings and a perspective on how alternative visions about relatedness have recently begun to alter Bosmun sociality.

Notes

1. John has been given a local name—Tongri—and is regarded as a *vunsi mot*, ‘a man who belongs to the place of Bosmun.’ On behalf of the Catholic Church, John arrived in 1963 to work on development and education projects. He later joined the Australian administration and finally went into politics. In 2008, he was appointed Minister of Agriculture. At the time he was teaching in the coastal town of Bogia (opposite to offshore Manam Island) he met Sam Mbamak, a Bosmun boy, whose father was dying of cancer. Sam had to leave school in order to return home and John took pity on him. Finally, John adopted Sam and his siblings and is now married to a Bosmun woman.
2. See Carrithers, Collins & Lukes 1985; Csordas 1994b; Goodale 1995; Köpping, Welker & Wiehl 2002; Lambek & A. Strathern 1998; Morris 1994; Shweder & LeVine 1984; A. Strathern & Stewart 1998; M. Strathern 1988; White & Kirkpatrick 1985.
3. A benchmark study evidencing such distinctive configurations of embodied subjectivity is found in M. Rosaldo’s (1980, 1984: 145–148) analysis of Philippine notions of the self. Another groundbreaking work is Lutz’s ethnopsychological investigation among the inhabitants of Ifaluk in Micronesia: “On Ifaluk, as elsewhere, the body’s structure and well-being are seen to be involved in an inseparable and systematic way with psychosocial well-being. What we might call ‘the emotional mind’ of Ifaluk ethnopsychology is solidly embedded in moral and social life, on the one hand, and in the physical body, on the other” (1985: 52).
4. I think of empathy as the (innate) ability that all humans share: we “think-feel” as Reddy (2001: 15) has described the way in which we perceptually frame our worlds. We do it in cognitively and emotionally blended ways. Reddy (2001: 15) approves of what Barnett and Ratner (1997: 303) have called “cogmotion” to refer to the merged nature of thinking and feeling. In contrast to rationalist philosophy grounded in Cartesianism, it is now being acknowledged that emotions are not simply inner bodily states detached from thought, intellect, or reason but are states that significantly co-influence human cognition (Ciompi 1997; Damasio 1994; Halpern 2001: 11, 67; Reddy 2001: 15).
5. There is also biological evidence for mutual affective intelligibility. Kirmayer (2008: 459), for instance, hints at the “built-in” interactional phenomenon of “sensorimotor synchrony,” also known as the “chameleon effect,” which automatically links us with others via unintentional imitations of others’ attitudes, gestures, postures, or facial expressions. Neuroscientists have also exposed a “neural basis of intersubjectivity” (Gallese 2003) that exists in animal and human brains, a basis that attests to the premise that empathetic understanding is possible. So-called “mirror neurons” (e.g., Gal-

lese 2003; Rizzolatti & Arbib 1998; Stamenov & Gallese 2002) discharge in certain parts of the brain through the observations we make of others' actions, a neural activity that the brain would normally perform if we were to carry out those same actions ourselves (Gallese 2003: 174). The neurons of the observer implicitly, automatically, and unconsciously "mirror," copy, or simulate, the neural activity of the actual agent, allowing "the observer to use his / her own resources to penetrate the world of the other without the need of explicitly *theorizing* about it" (Gallese 2003: 174; original emphasis). As Fuchs (2008: 195–196) sums up the major findings of the current neuroscience trend, mirror neurons also discharge if the observer imagines or imitates an action. Furthermore, the neurons are only activated if the observer watches the actions of a living organism (not of a machine), and if they are goal- or object-related actions. According to Gallese (2003: 176–177), a mechanism similar to that which matches action observation and action execution seems to be at work; this could explain the assumed capacity of mutual emotional intelligibility. For a critique on the recent mirror neuron theory, see Hickok (2009).

6. In fact, Geertz himself proved his objections to be correct if, for example, one reads "Deep Play" (Geertz 1972) critically and follows some of his opponents, like Crapanzano (1986).
7. Empathy is substituted by projection whenever the knowledge that one has gained of the other overwhelms oneself (Hollan 2011: 203–204). Put yourself in the position of someone who listens to the misery of another one or put yourself in the position of someone who has suffered misery and listens to another's happiness. In both cases, one might feel overwhelmed at times. In order to cope with the emotional overflow, people start to project, that is, they imagine others in a way that does not necessarily match the others' true dispositions. Projection is thus only an intersubjective dialogue to a limited extent.
8. In his article *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage*, R. Rosaldo (1988) tells of his initial incomprehension of Ilongot head-hunting (in the Philippines) as a practice to cope with rage born out of grief for a deceased loved one. Only when his own wife dies in an accident does he come to understand people's rage in the face of death.
9. Other disciplines locate empathy in a similar way, especially in the healing or counseling professions (Gassner 2006; Halpern 2001; Katz 1963), where empathy is understood to play a crucial role in defining the relationship between caregivers and their patients. Elsewhere (A. von Poser 2011a), I have argued that the very idea of empathy as a means to intellectually manage emotions in an effort to approximate the perspective of another may well have led to scholarly preoccupation with empathy and methodology. As a result, attention has been drawn away from local expressions of empathy.
10. Different from sympathy or compassion, which are motivated by positive feelings, altruism, and the intention to care for others (see Buchheimer 1963: 63; Halpern 2001: 36; Katz 1963: 8–11), empathy also involves "gut-wrenching experiences" (Briggs 2008: 452). In gaining knowledge of another person, one may also exhibit an anti-social stance if he or she has decided (for whatever reasons) to "misuse" his or her knowledge. Divorced couples are a good example: during the time they lived together they might have gained knowledge of the other's weaknesses and might have helped the other to overcome them. After divorce, they might make use of this knowledge to hurt the other. Several authors corroborate that negative intentionality, manipulation,

and even cruelty or sadism are grounded in the empathetic approximations of others' states (e.g., Hollan 2011: 195; Kirmayer 2008: 461; Lohmann 2011: 107; Strauss 2004: 434). In *Ästhetik*, his book on the perception of art, Lipps (1903a: 139–140), too, pointed to the different facets of empathy: he talked of “accord” (calling it *Einklang*) as a form of “positive empathy” (*Positive Einfühlung*) and of “discord” (*Missklang*) as a form of “negative empathy” (*Negative Einfühlung*).

11. Other enriching and sometimes revising elaborations have followed. LiPuma (1998: 56), for instance, argued that everywhere in the world “individual and dividual modalities or aspects of personhood” coexist, and A. Strathern and Stewart (2000: 55–68) made a similar point when they proposed to address the person in the Mount Hagen area of Papua New Guinea as a “relational individual,” following sociocentric benefits as much as egocentric benefits (see also A. Strathern & Stewart 2007: xiv–xv).
12. Male and female tree-spirits dwell in the forest in similar ways as humans dwell in their residential places. A *ngaape* is primarily perceived by its smell or the sounds it produces. However, people have a clear idea of what this tree-spirit looks like. If it becomes corporeal, it resembles the human body but with extraordinarily long fingers and toes. A *ngaape* is a spirit of two minds because it sometimes helps and sometimes hinders people. It has, for instance, a strong influence upon human spatial orientation, especially in the deep forest.
13. People consume herbs from childhood onward. There are prescribed amounts and durations of consumption. Magic is also involved. An incorrect usage of herbs, for instance, was always given as the explanation for why children are *bikhet* (‘stubborn’). There was never any thought of there having been a pedagogic error.
14. The word *yaam* is also a male personal name. Bosmun have a system of avoiding the personal names of certain in-laws—one’s spouse’s biological and classificatory parents and elder siblings. If a speaker wants to use the word for ‘to know / knowledge’ but has an in-law whose name is Yaam, then he or she has to use the word *xaarak* instead. Many words in the Bosmun language have double or triple meaning, and often the word for a material object or a feature in the physical environment is also a male or female personal name.
15. I wrote my field notes in German:

Obwohl vieles nicht mehr eingehalten wird, ist die Vergangenheit enorm präsent durch das Erzählen. Als ich an der Trauersituation von [namentlich genannter Person] teilnehme, kommen immer wieder Leute auf mich zu, um mir zu erklären wie es früher war. Ich komme kaum zum Beobachten, weil ständig jemand um mich herum ist, um mir zu erklären wie es früher war. (Feldnotizen, 02.12.2004)
16. Bosmun turn-taking may also be compared with what Feld has described as “lift-up-over-speaking” in the context of the Kaluli, which is:

a good amount of interlocked, quickly alternating or overlapped speech. ... Like fire sticks laid in contact, the voices of Kaluli speakers ignite with a spark; they interlock, alternate, and overlap, densifying and filling any interactional space-time gaps. The Western normative concepts of individual speaker turns, floor rights, and turn-taking etiquette, notions rationalized in both speech act philosophy and conversational analysis, are absent from Kaluli conversation and narration. What might be heard as regular “interruption” is not that at all, but rather the collaborative and cocreative achievement of ... “lift-up-over speaking.” ([1982] 1990: 251)