Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew J. Strathern. 2010. "The appearing and disappearing world of the Bogaiya: a corner of Papua New Guinea cultural history." In Kenneth A. McElhanon and Ger Reesink, A Mosaic of languages and cultures: studies celebrating the career of Karl J. Franklin, 399-407. SIL e-Books, 19. [Dallas]: SIL International. http://www.sil.org/silepubs/abstract.asp?id=52526

22

The Appearing and Disappearing World of the Bogaiya:

A Corner of Papua New Guinea Cultural History

Andrew J. Strathern **Pamela J. Stewart**[1]

ABSTRACT

Classifications of the languages spoken by people in corners of the regional landscapes of the Papua New Guinea Highlands have exercised the attention of linguists interested in the long-term cultural history of the Highlands. The population known as the Bogaiya or Bogaia near to the Strickland River in the Southern Highlands Province are a case in point. Linguistically, affinities between their language and that of the Duna, their neighbors across the Muller Range, have been broached. In cultural terms, through our own fieldwork among the Aluni Valley Duna and in Yeru close to the Strickland, we have also found a range of ideas and ritual practices that link these particular Duna and the Bogaiya, especially practices relating to a Female Spirit figure, the Payame Ima. Duna language and culture features can also be linked with their more populous southern neighbors, the Huli. The Bogaiya conceptually appear or disappear in different ways according to how they are situated in the classifications of linguists and anthropologists. And in their own historical world, forces of recent change brought about by the building of an airstrip and a mission have accelerated a process of their assimilation into the sphere of the Duna. Such processes of shifts in cultural and linguistic identities have probably also formed part of the histories of populations in pre-colonial times, causing discrete groups to appear and disappear, leaving their traces in ethno-historical narratives and traditions.

Classifications make entities appear and disappear, in accordance with the criteria applied. Historical processes do the same: named groups, for example, emerge and merge with one another according to political conflicts and

[1]Prof. Strathern and Prof. Stewart are a husband and wife research team who have conducted research in the Pacific, especially Papua New Guinea, for many years. A number of their publications can be found at their webpage: URL (www.pitt.edu/~strather).

competitions. How do we put these two different dimensions together when considering a category like that of the Bogaiya (Bogaia, Pogaia), a tiny language group on the fringes of the Southern Highlands Province in Lake Kopiago District in Papua New Guinea?[2]

The Bogaiyan language has been at the center of some linguistic discussions in the constant classificatory jockeying by linguists regarding the languages of the New Guinea Highlands area in general. In political and cultural terms, there are obvious historical relations between the Duna speakers, who abut at their far western end onto the Muller Range where Bogaiya settlements are found, and the Huli people to the south-east, administratively centered on Tari, and well-known in the literature as vigorous warriors and orators, with a complex social structure based on a combination of cognatic and agnatic principles of descent and kinship. In some early classifications, the Huli and Duna languages have been placed broadly together, along with Enga language forms. In other terms—on grounds of shared pronouns and their putative significance for deep historical relations of common origins—the Duna language has been linked more closely to Bogaiya. Are these classifications mutually exclusive? Is one capable of being shown to be true as opposed to the other, or do they reflect different aspects of either truth or speculation, or estimates of probability, on the part of linguists? And what difference does this make for other modes of analysis? If the Duna and Bogaiya languages are especially linked together in genetic terms, this suggests that their long-term cultural histories should also be closely linked. On the other hand, if Duna and Huli are seen as linked together, the Bogaiya become a small isolate, a linguistic, and potentially a cultural, curiosity on the fringe of the Highlands.

Among linguistic experts on the so-called Papuan or non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea, there has been considerable discussion on issues of this sort, stemming from the pioneering classificatory efforts of Stephen Wurm and his professional collaborators at the Australian National University. Wurm and his fellow-workers quite early on noted many classificatory difficulties surrounding the use of lexicostatistical methods and their assumptions about borrowing and non-borrowing of vocabulary items between areas. Wurm and McElhanon (1975:145) succinctly indicate the problems resulting from what they called "the almost ubiquitous presence of varied influences of languages upon each other on virtually all levels which can reach a magnitude unrealized in the framework of the lexicostatistical method and in the basic principles of genetic linguistics in general" (1975:145). They go on to mention that even pronouns may be taken over from one language to another and raise the question of languages that may have to be viewed as "mixed." They cite Andrew Pawley in an earlier paper (Pawley 1969), who argues that ignoring certain features of languages in favor of others simply to produce a clear classification "provides no adequate basis for the reconstruction of linguistic events, nor does

[2]The Bogaiya language is one that we have been interested in, especially in relation to the Duna language, for many years. We have collected language materials during our fieldwork in these areas within the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Two of our major works on the Duna people are the books, *Empowering the Past* (Strathern and Stewart 2004) and *Remaking the World* (Stewart and Strathern 2002). For a map of the area see Stewart and Strathern 2002:5.

it give an adequate picture of linguistic relationships" (1975:147). They proceed to make a modified restatement of the case for using genetic classifications, based on a suite of criteria including "typological and structural criteria" (1975:149, a view attributed particularly to McElhanon). They then summarize a range of detailed methods of assessment that include both lexical and structural considerations. Interestingly, a small number of vocabulary items are preserved in their scheme as diagnostic of shared genetic relationships: among verbs, especially those for *eat* and *say/speak*, and among nouns, those for *arm*, *bone*, *female breast*, *ear*, *eye*, *fire*, and *louse*, and less significantly, for *mother*, *skin*, and *water* (1975:150). Among structural criteria, "the structure and typology of verb forms are particularly important," as well as the functions of the verb forms (1975:150). They go on to re-establish tables of degrees of putative relationship between languages.

In the sphere of "loanwords," Wurm et al. (1975:937), note the work by McElhanon and Voorhoeve, finding Austronesian loanwords "far in the interior of the New Guinea mainland," a feature going with the general feature of extensive borrowing of vocabulary between languages (1975:938). Moreover, "instances of languages undergoing changes quite rapidly under the influence of other languages can be observed today in the New Guinea area" (1975:938), and this raises again the question of "'mixed' languages" (1975:939).

Another methodological approach to issues of language interrelationships can be found in Harland Kerr's detailed study of correspondences and parallels between forms in the Wiru language of Pangia in the Southern Highlands Province and the languages around it, notably Kewa, the language area where Karl Franklin worked. Wiru has been classified as an isolate (like the Oksapmin language). Kerr, however, shows with exact examples numerous correspondences between Wiru and a whole range of other Highland Papua New Guinea languages especially those of the West-Central family in the East New Guinea Highlands Stock (Kerr 1975:277). He refers, inter alia, to "the bipolarisation of the personal pronoun system" (1975:278) and "the benefactive construction" (1975:279) as evidence of very old genetic relationships between Wiru and languages outside of the ENGHS. He also notes correlations between the Wiru enclitic *–pe* as a question marker, and the same in Kewa, and compares this to *–te* in Binumarien (of the Eastern Family, 1975:280). There follows a detailed delineation of vocabulary correspondences, including numbers with the Melpa language of Mount Hagen, e.g., Wiru *ibini* 'name', Melpa *mbi*; but also with Enga, e.g., Wiru *lene* 'eye', Enga *rengge* (1975:280). The treatment is convincing, both at the surface lexical level, and in terms of reconstructed proto-forms and processes of transformation ("relics"). The upshot is not to reclassify Wiru, but to show that, isolate or not, it does clearly belong to the general set of Highland Papua New Guinea languages (1975:292).

In much later reconsiderations in the volume *Papuan Pasts*, Pawley (2005) reviews the "chequered history" of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum, while Malcolm Ross (2005) makes an extensive case for classifications based on pronouns. So the debates continue.

Standing back from the details of these immensely meticulous computations of relationships, we can ask two questions: first, "How would things look if, instead of concentrating on genetic relationships, linguists were to focus on the sociolinguistic contexts of what are dubbed processes of *borrowing* and *loan words*?" And, second, "How do all of these observations (and the question just posed) bear on the question of the Bogaiya?"

The linguists whose work we have briefly alluded to here have all recognized the existence of processes whereby extensive correspondences occur as a result of borrowing. But what is the meaning of the term *borrowing*? We are actually dealing with social relationships of travel, trade, ritual transmissions, marriage, political alliances, the passage of folk-tales, alterations in leadership patterns, and the like. Borrowing is not what is happening; social exchange is what is happening. The concentration on genetic relationships has to do with setting up hypotheses about prehistoric migrations of peoples. The concentration on social exchange, by contrast, has to do with understanding the flow of practices, as well as people, across landscapes, in shorter time scales. When something is borrowed, it has generally to be paid back; but this is not how it happens with loan-words. They are simply passed on, along with the practices that explain why this happens. Presumably, both sides may borrow. The direction of borrowing is likely to reflect relations of power or dominance between the groups involved.

To the Bogaiya, then. First, in linguistic terms, their language has been linked especially to the Duna language via the pronoun systems of the two languages. Reliance on this correspondence leads to the creation of a set consisting of Duna and Bogaiya—separate from other languages. On the other hand, looking at putative borrowings, we find Duna can be linked with Huli, presumably because of the kinds of social exchanges over time that we have noted. In fact, some ritual complexes of activities traversed the Huli and Duna areas (see, e.g., Frankel 1986, Goldman 1983, Stewart and Strathern 2002, Strathern and Stewart 2004). These would have provided ample occasions for vocabulary and other linguistic transfers.

Linguists, faced with classificatory problems, have recognized the existence of dialect chains running across areas. A similar concept is needed for the passage of commonalities in cultural and social terms. While an exclusivist model of relationships might suggest that the Duna be linked *either* with the Bogaiya, *or* with the Huli, an inclusivist cultural-chain model suggests instead something that corresponds to all the ethnohistorical evidence we have, i.e., that there is a continuum running from the Huli to the Duna to the Bogaiya and vice-versa. The Duna groups with whom we have carried out fieldwork, in the Aluni Valley, represent the specific link with the Bogaiya, primarily via correspondences in ritual practices.

In *Remaking the World*, we discuss in detail ideas about a powerful female spirit, the *Payame Ima*, which are in part shared between the Bogaiya and the Aluni Valley Duna. We write:

> Given the prevalence of stories about the Payame Ima and people's continuing concerns for her in the Aluni Valley, it is possible that the traditions regarding her have entered the Duna area geographically and historically via the Bogaiya people, with one point of confluence at Yeru, near the Strickland [River] and another the pathways over the high Muller Range at the back of Hagu [a mountain settlement where we had one of our fieldwork houses] which lead down to the very sparsely settled Bogaiya area (Stewart and Strathern 2002:95).

We go on in this passage to point out that

> certainly, fundamental ideas about the ground, human and pig sacrifices, witchcraft, assault sorcery, the idea of *rindi kiniya* [ritual complexes of action to forestall the decline of the earth and its resources], and the concept of the Payame Ima, the female spirit, are all found clearly among the Bogaiya" (2002:95).

Detailed accounts given by Bogaiya informants indicate that these correspondences are quite specific and reflect shared cosmological ideas about spirits in the landscape. Most particularly, among the Duna, all origin stories and stories about powerful nature spirits or ancestral figures have a directional or geographical dimension. Spirits are said to travel between areas, revealing themselves to people at one point in the landscape and giving them magical powers of access to wealth items such as pigs and shells. It is in this idiom that people may be referring to the passage of ideas and practices across language and dialect boundaries, including numerous traditions of passage between the Oksapmin area west of the Strickland and the Duna (and Bogaiya) areas. Cultural practices and spirits are seen as *mobile*. Their movements constitute what we have called *ritual trackways* (see, e.g., Stewart 1998). The great salience of ideas about the *Payame Ima*, persisting in the contemporary context among the Aluni Valley Duna, may therefore be a marker of historical connections with the Bogaiya. Over in Horaile to the east of the Aluni Valley, where Charles Modjeska worked, it is possible that ideas about the *Payame Ima* are less historically entrenched than among the Aluni Valley groups. This in turn may be related to different places of origin of groups. The Aluni Valley groups tend to trace their ancient origins either to some point in the Valley itself or to Yeru, right down by the *Strickland* River, near to the homeland of the Bogaiya. Yeru may be an interchange area between the Bogaiya and the Duna, and was said to have had its own language separate from either Bogaiya or Duna. Fragments of "Yeru speech" were related to us in the field. These seemed to suggest that Yeru speech was a variant of Duna, while the Bogaiya language is less closely tied with Duna. It is possible that Yeru speech represents the kind of mixed language that the linguists, whose work we discussed above, have mooted as a valid object of study in New Guinea: mixed, that is, with elements of both Bogaiya and Duna in it. Origin myths of groups in the Yeru area suggest links both with Bogaiya territory and with Oksapmin.

The upshot of these observations is that (1) cultural practices show close interrelationships *between* the Duna speakers of the Aluni Valley and the Bogaiya, and (2) Duna and Bogaiya elements have historically come together and mingled at the place Yeru, which several of the recognized named descent

groups/categories in the Aluni Valley consider to be an important origin place for themselves, a point of dispersal from which people migrated uphill.

These suggestions also indicate that the whole idea of "the Bogaiya" depends on isolating a particular collection of groups and practices and naming them as a separate entity. The pioneering field observations of Paul Sillitoe (1994) support such a *notion*. Sillitoe refers to the Bogaia (his spelling) as a "vulnerable population" (sub-title of his *Oceania* monograph). His study is a typically painstaking and meticulous account of population, demography, land use, and genealogies in the area. In the course of his discussion, he makes several observations pertinent to our theme here:

(1) The "Bogaia" as such were "discovered" by Operation Drake explorers in the late 1970s, who published their findings in media headlines. They were probably contacted previously by earlier patrols (Sillitoe 1994:3).
(2) The Bogaia think that they are threatened by a type of sorcery from their Oksapmin neighbors, and they in fact suffer from a variety of diseases that reduce their population numbers (1994:1).
(3) The Bogaia live in a corner of the landscape where four other cultural/linguistic formations abut on them (Ok, Hewa, Duna, and Tsinali/Tsinaliy). Sillitoe refers to this situation as a "cultural cocktail" (1994:19).
(4) The Bogaia have no name for themselves (1994:19). (The term Bogaia in fact appears to be the name given by linguists to their language.)
(5) At Yeru they interact mostly with the Duna and the Oksapmin people, whom they call Kora (1994:20).
(6) Kin connections resulting from marriages indicate the strongest connections with the Kora and Duna areas (1994:20).
(7) The basic 'corporate social groups' are called *say* (= Duna *tse* 'base, origin'). These groups persist as named entities over time, but people reside very fluidly. Although there is a patrifilial preference, people can also affiliate with their mother's *say*. There is no correlation between *say* membership and residence patterns (1994:23–24).
(8) By our own observations—in addition to those of Sillitoe—some of the *say* names listed by Sillitoe, relate to groups found at Yeru (e.g., Iypaluma, Songuwa, and Kusuwkusuw) (1994:24).

From the account of Bogaiya social structure noted in (7) and (8) above, it is quite evident that Bogaiya and Duna social groups overlap, not only in their general form, but also specifically as named entities. The Songuwa (Songwa), for example, are a group whose members are found variously in the parishes of the Aluni Valley and whose origin story carries cosmological significance for ritual trackways that traverse the Duna area and also link the Duna to Ok (Kora) (see Stewart and Strathern 2002: 22, 25–33, 121, 152, 160–61, 166). Aluni Valley Duna groups also have origin stories linking them to Kora with ancestral marriages but also by way of narratives of ancestral spirit figures (*tama*) who

travelled from Kora and founded local groups in the Aluni Valley (e.g., the origin story for Haiyuwi parish, Stewart and Strathern 2002:23).

In spite of these links with Kora, the Bogaiya fear the Oksapmin people, and Sillitoe refers to both physical and sorcery raids as the background to these fears. From the Bogaiya viewpoint, the sorcery raids may have been seen as quite physical in themselves, if the sorcery in question is the same as the kind the Aluni Valley Duna recognize as tsuwake tene: a form of assault sorcery of a classic type, in which the marauding sorcerer or sorcerers acting together are said to waylay a victim in the bush and then open up the victim's insides and place rubbish and leaves within the body (for details, see Stewart and Strathern 1999). The Aluni Valley Duna declared in the 1990s that this type of sorcery was practiced only by bands coming from Oksapmin, sometimes placing young women in front of the attackers in order to entice men away from their usual pathways and so make them more easily vulnerable to the sorcerers' onset. These Duna fears match those of the Bogaiya as reported by Sillitoe. The Duna were also concerned about tsuwake kono witchcraft, mostly said to be exercised by females. In the precolonial past (prior to the 1960s) women found guilty of witchcraft might be forced to hang themselves. Such fears and concerns therefore could lead to a reduction of the population, in a kind of feedback loop. Deaths would spark fears of witchcraft, accusations could be made against suspects, and these if found guilty might be forced to commit suicide. Aluni Valley Duna felt that Yeru was a source-place of witchcraft influences, along with Oksapmin. Women from these places, or with ancestry from these places, were likely to be suspected of witchcraft. At the same time, Yeru was seen in a sense as also a source-place of cultural practices and meanings in general, via the general origin narrative of the Songwa (Songuwa/Tongua in other transcriptions) and the narrative of how people ceased to be cannibals and began to eat pigs instead, also woven into the Songwa story (Stewart and Strathern 2002: 28-38, esp. p. 30). The Songwa, Kopetei, and Poli, relatively small remnant groups incorporated into the higher altitude Valley population, are the locus of rich malu or origin narratives, encapsulating many aspects of Duna cosmology, and also linking the Valley Duna to the Bogaiya. The same holds for the narrative chains of stories about the powerful female spirit, the Payame Ima (detailed in Stewart and Strathern 2002: 93–110).

In short, Duna and Bogaiya traditions meet in Yeru. We cannot say what the directions of transmission of those traditions may have been, but there are indications in people's own stories that certain motifs have come from the Bogaiya into the Duna area via Yeru. Bogaiya may have been a cultural interchange area, as Sillitoe notes. It may also have been a fertile place for the generation of new and complex mythical narratives. Such a suggestion makes the Bogaiya "appear" again as culturally salient, even as they "disappear" demographically through disease in low altitude areas, where soil fertility is poor and people are widely spread out.

Thus far we have been explaining ways in which the Bogaiya have either appeared or disappeared according to classifications and the cultural history of the past. In 1999 we observed a contemporary process that threatened to make

the Bogaiya disappear even as they themselves attempted to survive. A mission station was established at Egali, near to Yeru. The missionary family had an airstrip built there and set up a health clinic as well as an instructional center. Large numbers of Bogaiya abandoned their scattered dwellings and built houses close to the new station. They bought store food when they could and also beer smuggled in from time to time. Numbers of Duna people also came down to Egali and mingled with the Bogaiya settlers. The Bogaiya began to adopt the Duna language instead of their own. The missionary was frustrated because he had come to learn the Bogaiya language in order to translate the Bible into it and found a congregation there. The apparent abandonment of their own language in favor of the language of the more numerous and predominant Duna population was thus a source of existential confusion for the missionary, although not, it seems, for the Bogaiya themselves. They were a small, vulnerable, and poor population. The mission and its airstrip was a source of goods and medicines, which would enable people to survive. If, in the process, they shed aspects of their culture and/or language, this transition was not too bothersome, since the two languages and cultures (Bogaiya and Duna) are, as we have seen, quite closely related. This process of assimilation, as well as the contrary process of splitting off, has probably been repeated many times over in Papua New Guinea cultural history. That the latest episode of this process in the Bogaiya/Yeru/Duna interchange area is also adventitiously a result of a kind of globalization—i.e., the arrival of an American missionary and an airstrip—is just another twist in the rope of history. It would be interesting and rewarding to add to these notes and queries about the Bogaiya by conducting archaeological excavations in Yeru to try to discern traces of earlier twists in the earth.

Returning also to the issues of mixed languages and loanwords discussed earlier, have the Bogaiya just been going through a phase of intensive borrowing? Or have they been creating a mixed language? Or have they simply been making themselves disappear as a cultural entity while ensuring their physical survival? Time will tell.

References

Frankel, Stephen. 1986. *The Huli response to illness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldman, Laurence. 1983. *Talk never dies.* London: Tavistock Publications.

Kerr, Harland B. 1975. The relationship of Wiru in the Southern Highlands District to languages of the East New Guinea Highlands Stock. In S. A. Wurm, ed., *New Guinea area languages,* Vol. 1, *Papuan languages and the New Guinea linguistics scene*, *Pacific Linguistics* C-38:277–296. Canberra: The Australian National University.

Pawley, Andrew. 1969. On the internal relationship of Eastern Oceanic Languages. Paper presented at the Conference on Oceanic Prehistory in Fiji, August 1969.

Pawley, Andrew, Robert Attenborough, Jack Golson, and Robin Hide, eds. 2005. *Papuan pasts. Cultural, linguistic and biological histories of Papuan-speaking peoples. Pacific Linguistics*, 572. Canberra: The Australian National University.

Pawley, Andrew 2005. The chequered career of the Trans New Guinea hypothesis: Recent research and its implications. In A. Pawley, et al., eds. *Papuan pasts,* 67–108. Canberra: The Australian National University.

Ross, Malcolm. 2005. Pronouns as a preliminary diagnostic for grouping Papuan languages. In A. Pawley, et al., eds., *Papuan pasts,* 15–66. Canberra: The Australian National University.

Sillitoe, Paul. 1994. *The Bogaia of the Muller Ranges, Papua New Guinea. Land use, agriculture and society of a vulnerable population. Oceania* Monograph 44. Sydney: University of Sydney, Department of Anthropology.

Stewart, Pamela J. 1998. Ritual trackways and sacred paths of fertility. In Jelle Miedema, Cecilia Odé, and Rien A. C. Dam, eds., with the assistance of Connie Baak, *Perspectives on the Bird's Head of Irian Jaya, Indonesia: Proceedings of the Conference, Leiden, 13-17 October 1997,* 275–289. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Stewart, Pamela J., and Andrew Strathern. 1999. Feasting on my enemy: Images of violence and change in the New Guinea Highlands. *Ethnohistory* 46(4):645–649.

Stewart, Pamela J., and Andrew Strathern. 2002. *Remaking the world: Myth, mining and ritual change among the Duna of Papua New Guinea.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Strathern, Andrew, and Pamela J. Stewart. 2004. *Empowering the past, confronting the future: The Duna people of Papua New Guinea.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wurm, S. A., and K. A. McElhanon. 1975. Papuan language classification problems. In S. A. Wurm, ed., *New Guinea Area Languages,* Vol. 1, *Papuan Languages and the New Guinea linguistics scene. Pacific Linguistics* C-38:145–164. Canberra: The Australian National University.

Wurm, S. A., D. C. Laycock, C. L. Voorhoeve, and T. E. Dutton. 1975. Papuan linguistic prehistory, and past language migrations in the New Guinea area. In S. A. Wurm, ed., *New Guinea area languages,* Vol. 1, *Papuan languages and the New Guinea linguistics scene. Pacific Linguistics* C-38:935–960. Canberra: The Australian National University.