Masalai, or Lord of the Land
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[Abstract
The Papua New Guinean tale stages the ogre essentially in the form of an anthropomorphic spirit called masalai. The creature arouses fear among the people because it is difficult to identify, as it can take many shapes. It is unpredictable, may trick its victim into taking the wrong trail or eating some bewitched food. It may reside in trees, stones or holes. It can be a lizard or a crocodile, or a two-headed or ten-headed creature, or it can simply have a big mouth. The masalai is associated with magic. This study briefly considers first some representations of the masalai and the fear it generates. However, in some instances, the masalai possesses a tragic flaw, which makes him vulnerable. The main focus will be on the essential part masalais play when it comes to dealing with the territory they control, which also interacts with the narrative pattern underlying the tales.]

Most of the tales I shall be referring to were translated into English and edited by Thomas H. Slone in One Thousand One Papua New Guinean Nights, Folktales from Wantok Newspaper. About 1200 tales in Melanesian English were collected in Wantok Newspaper from the mouths of tale tellers from all over Papua New Guinea. These people originally came from the Provinces to find a job and stay in Port Moresby. Most of them spend their time between Port Moresby and their village, not really knowing whether they still belong to their tokples1 or the modern city. Other tales are included in a booklet entitled From the Mout h of Ancestors,2 edited by K.A. McElhanon in 1982, being he the second volume of a collection of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Papua New Guinea branch, originally aimed at presenting a corpus for the linguistic study of vernacular documents.

In his introduction to One Thousand One Papua New Guinean Nights,3 Thomas Slone develops an important presentation of the Masalai in a section entitled “Why mourn the disappearance of Masalais?” The term originated from New Hanover Island in New Ireland Province, but similar concepts existed throughout Papua New Guinea before European contact times. The world of spirits being unpredictable and changeable, points of view may vary. C.A. Valentine, contradicting most tales, considers masalais are theriomorphs4, i.e. animal-like in shape. Sekran and Miller contend that masalais “were normally regarded as

1 Tokples: (Melanesian pidgin = Tok Pisin) Village where one was born, in which everybody talks the same native language.
3 See p. xxii-xxvii.
erratic, dangerous and amoral creatures, worthy of fear but not respect⁵. Two kinds of *masalais* can be distinguished, according to Thomas Slone. The first kind refers to anthropomorphic *masalais*. These were probably the obscure, neighbouring people of a tribe, who gave rise to legends staging brief encounters or strange occurrences in the deep forest and conjured up the most extraordinary cannibalistic representations. After the imposition of Pax-Australiana, the anthropomorphic type gradually disappeared. Nowadays, “people may still believe in *masalais*, and people still tell folktales about *masalais*, but the root cause of their conceptualisation is largely missing,” Thomas Slone says. The second kind includes non-anthropomorphic spirits. They are more likely to be associated with rivers, rocks, caverns in the forest, far from any settlement. These are places of bounty, and also hazardous taboo sites, which is probably one of the reasons why villagers have mixed feelings about them.

1 STRATAGEMS

**Just in Case He Were One**

Tapulupulu⁷ is an armless, legless child who lies down all the time. His mother and father go off to the garden and the child lies there on the veranda. A man called Giant comes and asks the child to climb up the coconut tree and get some coconuts; the boy replies he has neither legs nor arms. The giant tells the boy he will give him his arms and legs so that he can get the coconuts. He sits close to the boy and says: “Change place, my arms! Change place, my legs!” and his legs and arms cross over to the boy. The giant falls down and lies there and the boy climbs up the tree. Following the giant’s instructions, the boy picks up two coconuts, husks one of them, cracks it open and grates it, and puts the other one aside for the giant, for him to do the same and go home. The giant asks the boy to come next to him and he pronounces the same words, and the legs and arms cross over to the giant again, and off he goes.

Later in the day, the mother and father come back home and wonder about the coconuts. Tapulupulu explains what has happened: the giant’s call and his suggestion to lend him his legs and his arms, the words he pronounces to have this done, in order to give him the means of climbing the coconut. “Oh, why did you not kill him and keep his arms and legs?” asked his parents. “But he is a great big man,” was the boy’s answer. Then the three of them conceive of a stratagem.

The giant comes back the following day and the same scenario takes place. While the parents are off to the garden, he provides the child with his arms and legs and the boy climbs up to a tall coconut tree, but acts in such a way as to proceed slowly. The giant calls out for the boy to come down as quickly as possible, but he remains stuck to the tree. The father and mother come back from their garden to the village and kill the giant by throwing a log at him. They tell the boy to bring the green coconuts he has picked and send him into the forest to cut up wood to build a fire. They singe the giant, cut him up, boil him and eat him. “The boy kept his arms and legs forever.”


⁷ “Tapulupulu and the Giant” tale n° 69, Dohu section, in K.A. McElhanon, ed, *From the Mouths of Ancestors*.
The giant is introduced by the taleteller as bearing the name Giant; in the rest of the narrative, Giant is called the giant. The confusion between the name and the physical type can be disturbing for the audience. Giant is never associated with food, because he is no ogre. Not only does the giant lend the boy his four limbs, but he also permits him to contemplate the world from above as he is grabbing the trunk of the coconut tree high up in the air. He builds up a relationship with the crippled boy by temporarily offering him his arms and legs, allowing the boy to enjoy the world of able-bodied people. At the first opportunity, the young boy cheats his benefactor by following his parents’ ungrateful advice and keeps the giants’ arms and legs for himself. Not a masalai and not an ogre, the giant is never to recover his arms and legs. The ungrateful young boy participates actively in the building up of the giant’s pyre and eats his flesh. Giant concentrates on himself the inner fears of people when confronted with otherness. The people themselves, represented by the boy’s father and mother are the scavengers of benevolence, friendliness and uniqueness: they are the cannibals.

Yet, there might be another explanation. Even though people in Papua New Guinea avoid expressing ideas about demons, certain unusual circumstances are attributed to their actions. If hunters observe a strange form moving among the trees, or someone falls ill after a stay in the forest and dies, they will think they have had to do with a demon. “If a woman leaves a child unattended, a female demon may substitute one of her own children for it,” says M.J. Meggitt. “The replacement may remain undetected until the demon-child exhibits characteristics such as a withered limb or a crippled gait, a deformed sternum or excessive hairiness, or is obviously moronic.” 8 Tupulupulu might well be one of these creatures, which would explain his unscrupulousness and ungratefulness. At one level, demons symbolize “the basic disjunction between uninhabited forest and settled clan territory, between a world of half-known dangers and one of order and security,” which is largely exemplified in the tale.

The Masalai as a local

The New Guinean ogre has many characteristics pertaining to the Western ogre. Like him, he feeds on human flesh and he is endowed with a heightened sense of smell. Whether in Melanesian or Western tales, the story involving an ogre is reminiscent of David and Goliath’s confrontation in O.T., with a natural propensity for the reader to favour the supposedly weaker one. But some characteristics are specific to the Papua New Guinean sphere. In the great majority of cases, the ogre is a masalai, not just a being eating human flesh, but an evil spirit. He does not hoard gold and keep any treasures of any kind. Transformations with him are natural, as he can turn into another being in a split second.

“The Wild Woman Who Died in a Fire” 10 stages an old ogress named Japetururu and her daughter, who accepts a young man’s proposition on condition he should sleep with her first at her house. There, the young girl tells him about her mother, which scares the young boy. The girl has plenty of time to confide herself because her mother is out killing men from another village. He is horrified and about to scamper when the girl predicts that he will be safe because she will trick her mother by lying to her. When the old woman comes back, she tells her daughter that she can smell the odour of a man, but the girl answers that it is the smell of an old man that she has killed before, which satisfies the old woman. Early in the morning, she goes out to kill some other people in another village while the two young people run away to the boy’s village. There, they call the people to gather. The boy enjoins them to

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9 Id., p. 123.
dig a hole with a platform on top of it. In the meantime, the cannibal woman goes to her daughter’s home and into her room. She sniffs around and smells her daughter and follows the scent to the boy’s village. Thundering clouds announce that the cannibal woman approaches. She is in a fury and says she knows her daughter is among them. The villagers invite her to sit on the platform. She falls into the hole. The people take stones and burning branches and throw them down into the hole. She dies and the people make a great feast. “They sang, danced and were very happy.”

As the ogre represents the authoritative father figure, the ogress stands for the bossy mother. The old woman lives with her daughter, but not under the same roof. When the first opportunity of a relationship with a young man arises, the girl demands that the boy sleep with her before she consents to marry him and follow him to his village. In order to be able to build up a relationship with a young man, she has to shuffle off her mother’s coil, whose power is inherent in her cannibalistic status. The first instance of parting from her mother is materialised by her having intercourse with the first man that grabs her behind her house. Cutting the umbilical cord must be thorough. The old woman is stoned and burned in the trap that has been conceived by the new couple, illustrating the end of cannibalistic behaviours and the beginning of a new era. Classically, matricide is the only way out for the daughter, considering the mother’s behavioural deficiencies. By killing her cannibal mother, the young woman throws off old ways and gains her independence.

Many devices can be used by heroes who want to defeat masalais or by the masalai who aims at annihilating his opponent. There may be transformations from spirit to bandicoot or flying fox or cassowary. There may be lures and traps and tricks of all kinds. A transformation may take place by eating yam, flesh, lizard or snake. In many cases, transformations are beneficial to the masalai. Yet, the masalai is not always invulnerable, owing to the presence of a tragic flaw that can be physical or psychological.

2 MORTAL FLAWS

Weakness in Armpit

The people of Dengop village in the Kabwum area of Morobe Province do not live well because a masalai staying at a place nearby called Sombore hunts for people, kills them and eats them. In “The Masalai of Sombore Time Came,” none of the villagers is spared, except for an old woman who decides to leave the village as soon as she realises that the destruction will be complete. She hides in a cave during the day and tends her gardens at night to get some food. One night, when peeling a cucumber, the knife cuts her and the blood rushes out. She cuts two banana leaves and lets the blood fall upon them; then she ties them up and buries them nearby. Two months later, two baby boys come out of the banana leaves and the old woman names them Ningum and Sangina. They grow big and one day the woman tells them about the masalai, but strictly forbids them to go to Sombore. Nevertheless, they really want to kill Sombore; they make plenty of bows and arrows, then go to the masalai’s home. The masalai transforms its skin into stone and fights with the two brothers but they

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11 Id., p. 270.
13 The knife cuts her: in which the tool is performing the action.
14 The neuter pronoun is used to refer to the masalai throughout the tale.
cannot hurt it. The *masalai* manages to push them back to their old mother, who is now furious with them because they have disobeyed her. She changes into a bird, which the *masalai* wants to eat. To do so, the *masalai* raises its arm and the little brother shoots it in the armpit. The *masalai* instantly dies and the old woman, now a bird, flies away, never to come back.

The ogre is a devastating spirit, some *masalai*, which might have successfully achieved its destructive task by finishing off all the villagers if the old woman had not taken the right decision to retreat at the right time to become the only survivor. As she is too old to procreate and there is no procreator around, magic comes to the rescue and conception of twins arises from her blood being spilt on two banana leaves. Magic is a helper to the *masalai* as well when its skin becomes stone and it is able to repel the two boys’ attack.

In Nordic mythology, Siegfried becomes immortal after bathing in the blood of the dragon he has slain. But a lime leaf gets stuck between his shoulder blades, constituting his flaw; an arrow shot by a malevolent god struck him between the shoulders and he died. The *masalai* is not vulnerable under normal circumstances, but its tragic defect lies in the armpit.

“Brothers Killed a *Masalai* from Tawambo” is a variation on that tale. The story of this ghost-man takes place in Tawambo village on the Finschhafen Peninsula of Morobe Province, a few miles from the village of Kabwum mentioned above. The basic outline is similar and the Tawambo *masalai*’s name, Somambo Songoring, echoes Kabwum’s Songore. At the end of the tale, *Masalai* Somambo dies from three spears struck in his side.

*Masalais* are malevolent spirits behaving like men. Yet, they cannot be fought in the same way as any mortal. Owing to their human origin, they tend to have a tragic defect. The hero of the tale can be described as the one who manages to exploit the *masalai*’s weakness and causes its loss. The twins eventually win against the spirit; yet, by way of compensation, they have to pay for their disobeying their mother, breaking the taboo, and see her vanish in the air in the form of a bird, never to come back again. As the boys go successfully through all initiatory stages, their mother withdraws, in order to allow them to face what the future holds in store for them.

**Fearing Daylight**

Two brothers living with their mother take some food and fire and go marsupial hunting in the deep forest. The mother warns them of a place they must avoid. They come to a tree with numerous marsupials in it (the place to be avoided) and build a hut for themselves. From the tree, the big brother throws marsupials down to the little brother; the brother takes them and singes off their fur in the fire. But he lets the fire die, which means the end of the hunting. Fortunately, they see some smoke rising from a place in the mountain nearby and the big brother tells the younger to go get the fire from there while there is still sunlight. Arriving at the place, he sees some meat in the fire and he eats some of it, thinking it is pork, but it is human flesh that the *masalai* has partially eaten. The elder brother feels tired of waiting. He follows his brother’s path, finds him and helps him finish the meat. When darkness arrives, they climb trees to ensure their safety. Then they see a *masalai* come out of a hole. The little boy is terrified and cries, and the spirit climbs up the tree and throws him down to his death. He begins to eat the boy from the legs upward, but before he finishes his task, the big brother calls out to him, begging him to spare the head; the *masalai* only answers he will eat him too.

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In this tale entitled “A Masalai Killed a Brother”, the spirit cannot endure daylight. When dawn breaks, he runs away and goes back down his hole. The boy returns home with his brother’s head. He mourns with his mother. In the morning they bury the boy’s head near the house. A seedling grows from the grave, becomes a tree and bears fruit. They remove the husks and break the fruit open. There is white meat inside. That fruit is now known under the name coconut.

This tale gives one among numerous versions of the origin of coconut from a human head in Wakunai, North Solomons Province, the correlation between the human head and the coconut being attested throughout Oceania. The edible white part of the coconut may have been termed ‘flesh’ probably because its texture and colour echo human flesh. In the current instance, it refers to the fact that the brothers eat some of the human flesh the masalai has put aside on his fire.

With its many uses in tropical economies, coconut is often called “the tree of life”. The world’s most useful plant was allegedly introduced onto the islands owing to the intercession of a masalai. The course of events turns tragic from the moment the boys have transgressed their mother’s advice.

Self-mutilation

In “A Masalai Tricked a Man”, two friends decide of a meeting place along the trail they are going to follow in the forest to hunt wild game. Mila goes to the meeting-place and meets Puim there; the man is not his friend, however, but a masalai who has taken his appearance. They hunt together until a marsupial that has been shot remains stuck high up in a tree; so Mila looks around for vines, but he cannot find anything that can be used as a rope. His hunting mate provides him with a tendon he removes from his leg, which enables Mila to climb upwards and get the marsupial. Mila becomes thoroughly aware of the substitution when, looking down from the crown of a tree at his companion in the moonlight, he notices “the eyes of the masalai were bright, like the light of a fire.” Mila knows that unless he finds a way to escape, the masalai will eat him. He eventually manages to run away, crashing his way through the forest to his village. The masalai follows him at some distance on account of his missing tendon and might have caught up with the runaway, when suddenly dawn breaks. This causes the masalai’s immediate retreat.

The dead, confined to darkness, do not intrude upon the realm of the living. As it is traditionally the case with vampires, this masalai cannot stand daylight. The tendon Mila was given by Puim to catch the marsupial is a commonplace device in Papua New Guinean tales. Parts of the body can be interchanged easily. In “How did the Hornbill Get a Big Beak?” Hornbill, who has a small beak, tricks his friend Cassowary and his big bill by asking him to lend it to him because, he says, it is as good as an axe and he has to cut a tree. Hornbill never returns the bill and cassowaries must do with a tiny beak. “Why the Kangaroo has Short Legs” tells how the dog convinces the kangaroo to cut off its legs and in “How Kangaroos

18 Id., p. 609.
20 “Why the kangaroo has short legs”, Wantok 89, April 3, 1974, p. 4; in One Thousand One Papua New Guinean Nights, p. 24-5.
Lost their Arms\textsuperscript{21}, Dog tells Kangaroo to dive and shove its two hands inside a clam, but the clam closes its mouth and cuts off Kangaroo’s hands. Man’s or nature’s tools can always be provided to restore a cut-off leg or nose, or arrange a dismantled body with missing parts in quite a mechanical way.

“If you go to this area near Mendi, you will see two stones. One is named Puim that we now call it (sic) Mount Clancy. We call the other one Mila. These are fairly far from town\textsuperscript{22}, the story teller specifies, as a token of truth.

3 MASALAI, LANDLORD

Father, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?

The Enga tale “A Father Fled and a Masalai Killed a Boy: There Is a Pond Where the Masalai Killed the Boy\textsuperscript{23}” concentrates many elements present in the typology of New Guinea tales. In Enga Province, a man and his son, the last dwellers in Kiap Village, are short of meat, so they decide to try and get some. They walk into the forest with bows and arrows and some sweet potatoes for them to eat. They rest at a good spot in the deep forest and build a hut. The father tells the boy to keep the hut while he is hunting around and recommends he should keep the sweet potatoes for them to share when he comes back. The boy does not take his father’s request into consideration and cooks a sweet potato in the fire and eats it. A man comes out of nowhere to see the boy, who tells him that his father has gone hunting marsupials and that he is waiting for him. The man, who is not really a man, but a masalai, takes two pig livers out of his net bag and tells the boy to eat one and give the other one to his father, then goes to hide in the forest to spy on the little boy. The boy gulps down the pig liver with his sweet potato. The masalai knows that he will eat the boy because he has performed some magic upon the liver and the sweet potato and he is now waiting for the father to come and eat his piece because he hopes he will eat both of them. When the father comes back, he sees the boy eating his food, but he already knows that a masalai is lurking around. He decides to leave his son to his doom, preferring to run back to the village. His son tries to follow him but as he has eaten of the masalai’s poison, he cannot catch up with his father. The masalai grabs the young boy and starts eating his liver. The young boy cries for help but his father never turns back.

The father-son relationship is being dealt with from the title of the tale. It starts with a serene description of a father and his son a-hunting in the forest and building a hut at “a good spot.” The boy’s disobeying his father by eating a sweet potato seems commonplace and harmless and is not expected to lead to radical treatment. Yet, when the idea of a masalai roaming about strikes the father, he does not hesitate to desert his son. The moralistic point of view consisting in regarding his decision to flee as a consequence of the boy’s disobedience is not convincing. What the father cannot cope with is the influence of magic in the hands of the masalai that is believed to have haunted the area ever since.

The tale is given a didactic treatment: ignoring other people’s advice and recommendations can be destructive. The notion of dis-obedience runs parallel with the tabu

\textsuperscript{21} “How Kangaroos Lost their Arms”, \textit{Wantok} 105, December 4, 1974, p. 5; in \textit{One Thousand One Papua New Guinean Nights}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{22} “A Masalai Tricked a Man”, \textit{Wantok} 702, before mentioned, p. 609.

\textsuperscript{23} “A Father Fled and a Masalai Killed a Boy: There Is a Pond Where the Masalai Killed the Boy”, \textit{Wantok} 798, October 19-25, 1989, p. 8; in \textit{One Thousand One Papua New Guinean Nights}, p. 718.
“don’t eat the potato inside the net bag” posed by the father, leading the son to his doom. The masalai that gives the boy the magic livers recovers his property by eating the young boy’s liver. The liver given to the boy is ensorcelled, making the boy’s legs heavy when the spirit runs after him. Magic is the masalai’s tool; it enables him to prevail over any human being. The trickster is primarily some kind of magician whose technique consists in convincing protagonists that they are in his power. The boy guilty of breaking the taboo is convinced that the liver he received from the stranger has been tampered with.

Indeed, there is a pond where the masalai killed the boy. The pond is described as arousing strange feelings because “it does not look nice” with the black and white colours of its water conjuring flesh and blood, referring to the spirit and the boy. This is a place that the villagers avoid nowadays because the existence of a masalai in the area has been ascertained. This topological reference makes it clear that the story is real, which the story teller corroborates by putting it down plainly. As is the case with other tales, his name is indicated. But Pius Lungupin also gives his personal address in case some people should require some further information on the tragedy which took place in Kiap village inside Enga Province among Enga people, in which a father forsook his beloved son. Says the taleteller, “If we ignore what other men say, the clothes that we have put on will just burn up.” he adds. To make it clear, he asserts that “this is a true story that comes from my village, Kaiap.”

Premonition

In “Two Men Ignored What the Woman Said and they Died,” the anonymous tale-teller tells a marsupial story. The scene takes place in 1941, he says, in Inangtigin Village in the Telefomin District of West Sepik Province, staging Tibionsep and Dangkalengim, the speaker’s grandfather and his brother, Tibionsep being the elder. One sunny morning, Tibionsep decides to go marsupial hunting on Gugelkot, his favourite mountain, with his newly-wed wife. It gets dark and Tibionsep follows his dog’s barking in the moonlight, leaving his bride in a hut. He comes across marsupials and kills two huge ones.

In the meantime his bride has a dream, in which Tibionsep goes to a village where two giant brothers live; he kills the two brothers. In spite of the wife’s entreaties, the marsupials are cooked in an earth oven and eaten in Bonokbil, where the younger brother has met them. Once on the other side of the Sepik River, enemies butcher them, carry them to their village, cook them in an earth oven and eat them. On hearing the story, Tibionsep’s wife dies.

The details about the many real places and complicated names in the story are so precise that the audience must be convinced that the tale is true. The tale-teller is personally involved in his tale in so far as the main actors in it are his own grandfather and his own uncle. “My grandfather and his brother had [difficult] names!” he exclaims as if to certify his story really took place among the Telefol people. The narration is intricate, including a Shakespearian premonitory dream, bringing about the death of most of the actors in the last act. The two giant marsupials Tibionsep kills are assimilated to the giant brothers in his bride’s dream. The two brothers, who eat the men that have become marsupials after cooking them in an earth oven, are eaten by the cannibal tribe in the same way. The tragedy is the result of the brothers’ not taking into account the bride’s prophecies. The story justifies
cannibalism by blurring the border between dream and reality, the brothers pretending not to know the giant marsupials were real men. The tragedy is the result of the brothers’ spurning the warnings brought about by Tibionsep’s wife’s premonitory dream. The masalai who rules the sequence of events from beginning to end also rules the actors’ destiny.

The twelve brothers

Corpses are expected to rot. This natural process does not disconcert the Highlands people. What is particularly disturbing, however, is that “this process of decomposition, paralleled by the process of establishing the soul among the ghosts of the dead, might be interrupted by an act of necrophagy. This type of cannibalism would (...) short-circuit the correct cycles of exchanges,” explains Andrew Strathern. In the Highlands, flesh is associated with female values, whereas bone has to do with maleness. Flesh may be seen as impermanent because it is lost at death. Yet, the flesh goes down into the earth and constitutes the ‘grease’ of the earth, participating fully in the life cycle. The grease of the earth may also be brought by pigs being cooked in the earth oven. Bones are preserved and might even be taken as relics to celebrate “continuing communication.” They represent “individual claims to soil or claims to power of access to a ghost; they are associated with the jural and political world.” The following tale is concerned with the bones of eleven brothers, who are ressuscitated thanks to the twelfth brother’s attitude when facing the old woman, acting as sole judge.

“The Yamap [Yamaip] Clan [Almost] Finished off the Temo Clan” takes place in the time of the ancestors. Twelve brothers live at a place with nobody else around. One day, the first brother equips himself with bows and arrows and goes marsupial hunting. Two weeks go by but he has not returned home, and his brothers are worried. The second brother decides to go and fetch him, but he does not come back either. One by one, all the brothers go into the forest until there is only one left, the youngest, who is only 16. The boy butchers a pig into two pieces he cooks in an earth oven, eats one piece and ties up the rest, then dresses finely and walks steadily into the forest. He comes upon a clearing where he finds an old white-haired blind woman with her legs and arms completely ruined sitting by the fire in a derelict old house. The young man is moved at such distress, and he offers to help the crippled woman. She tells him how some people passing by spat at her, which is one of the reasons why she has decided to stick to her house. The young boy says his name is Itali Tamban and he explains he is looking for his brothers who have gone astray. The old woman sends Itali to the mountain to get two round stones with two strong sticks for making braces. She then tells him to heat the stones in a fire and tie them well with the braces and rope and she explains he will find his brothers’ bones at the base of a big tree in the middle of which the masalai who has killed his brothers lived in a hole. The woman tells Itali to climb up the tree with the hot stones and throw them down into the masalai’s mouth when he comes out. This happens and the masalai dies.

Murder and cannibalism are punished in this tale. The brothers leaving one by one highlight solidarity within the clan. Kindness is rewarded as well. The relationship between

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29 *Id.*, p. 117.
30 *Id.*, p. 118.
the young man and the resigned old lady is nicely developed from the first glance. She is destitute and the boy helps her out of her misery by offering dignity and respect to her. She feels she can help the young man in his quest, and this gives a new impetus to her dull life. Out of gratitude, she plots the strategy to neutralise the malevolent spirit and gives the boy the right instructions to put an end to the masalai’s misdeeds.

The young boy and the old woman are the representatives of a clan. The tale-teller specifies that Yamaip is the masalai’s clan, Yalipun the old woman’s and Timopop, the boy’s. Nowadays some ceremonials are still being performed there to commemorate this “true” event, which took place between the Southern Highlands and Enga Provinces among Mendi, Huli or Katina People. The Yamaip still slaughter pigs as offerings to the masalai once a year while the Timopop and the Yalipun avoid the place because it is considered taboo and, as such, is forbidden to ordinary men. In 1966, a policeman went there, slept there at night and shot some people in the morning in a frenzy, after which he was shot too. Reality corroborates fiction.

In many cases, long after a masalai has been discarded or eradicated, he plays an influence on the geography of the places he is concerned with as an actor. Some of his deeds leave names associated with anthroponomy and topology, meaning that he plays a great part in the history of the clans and tribes he disrupts. The masalai leaves beyond his tale the traces of his passage in the form of a stone, a wood within a forest, a mountain, a river, which are real and can vouch for the truth and authenticity of the story. A masalai’s concern is essentially territorial, and any infringement upon his domain invariably produces a violent punitive reaction. The punishment must be complete and, as his energy can only be provided by human flesh, the reaction must include the dissolution of the other into his own being through the process of manducation, primarily an appropriation process.

According to the LMMA\textsuperscript{32}, data shows that areas known as belonging to a masalai according to local tales and legends are often rich spawning grounds and nursery sites in which the highest diversity of fishes can be observed, as in Madang. “These areas have already been receiving a type of de-facto protection for thousands of years based on a rich history of traditional practices.\textsuperscript{33}”

CONCLUSION

The tales developed in this study stage the masalai as playing the leading part. At the beginning of each tale, the notion of order prevails, when a disrupting element comes in, in the form of a casual prohibition. No matter how ludicrous the taboo may sound, e.g. don’t eat the sweat potatoes in your possession, the instruction must be strictly obeyed. If such is not the case, the taboo is broken, conjuring up the lord of the site. The result is a confrontation between the spirit and the profaner. If the sacrilegious disrupter wins, the masalai is temporarily neutralised or annihilated, allowing a new deal to take place. If the Lord of the land prevails, the intruder is wiped out and the previous order of the world is restored.

This may correspond to the following pattern:

OLD ORDER $\rightarrow$ TABOO posed $\rightarrow$ TABOO ignored $\rightarrow$ CONFLICT $\rightarrow$ Death of Masalai $\rightarrow$
NEW DEAL $\rightarrow$ SPACE reshuffled $\rightarrow$ MODERNITY

OR

\textsuperscript{32} LMMA: Locally Managed Marine Areas.
\textsuperscript{33} LMMA Network, http://lmmanetwork.dreamhosters.com/whatwedo/masalai
OLD ORDER → TABOO posed (OR obedience required) → TABOO ignored (OR disobedience) → CONFLICT → Death of Masalai’s Antagonist → OLD ORDER RESTORED → Space Unscathed → TRADITION

For the tale to start, a taboo must be posed, and ignored. The old order is restored when the masalai manages to keep custody of the place, remaining the regular sentinel. PNG tales are intimately concerned with the anthronomical and topological dimensions. Village-dwellers must be able to draw the bridge between names and sites. Until recently, tales were, with rituals and ceremonials, the only way to transmit the hereditary message of the clan or tribe, there being no written tradition in Melanesia. The tale constitutes a page in a history book that was never written, but delivered daily, for years, to the same audience, until they knew. When they knew their lessons by heart, they in turn became the heralds of the tribe’s ways and customs. Moralistic conclusions to PNG tales were imported by the missionaries and by Christian awareness of good and evil. They correspond to Western standards, not to tribal ones, at least originally. The land is the tribesman’s primary concern, and any discussion on that topic would arouse passion. A man or woman from a tribe or a clan within the tribe or split into several tribes needs to have a clear representation of his/her affiliation and affine in order to be able to appreciate his/her position when it comes to considering alliances, marriages or territorial disputes. It is crucial that names should be associated with places, the name being attributed to the place and the name of the people who come into possession of it. The masalai plays the main part in these folktales, because he sets the world around him in motion. When the villagers have been almost eradicated, there remains no one but an old sterile woman and her son or daughter. The need to perpetuate the clan implies the destruction of the malevolent masalai or the interplay of some magic act so as to create a new order of the world. On the other hand, the victory of the masalai over intruders of all kinds keeps the land well stocked with game and free from deforestation.

Thomas Slone gives the example of Mendi People of the Southern Highlands Province illustrating the ambivalent feelings the village-dwelling Papua New Guineans experience when it comes to dealing with uninhabited areas. “Their forest is populated by an array of demons, and they generally interpret forest clearing positively, since it deprives the demons of homelands. Yet the Wola [Mendi] would think of the complete destruction of the forest as ‘horrendous’, at least in part because it would represent the elimination of a whole set of resources on which they depend and of which they are intimately aware.”34 The masalai caused many a place to be named after him, as a memory of the tragedies he induced for the sake of collective renewal, individual calling into question and general advancement, under cover of a greedy lust for human flesh.

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