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"Call Us Kau, Not Citak"

Constitutive Factors for the Ethnic Consciousness of an Asmat Subgroup

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Abstract. – The names commonly applied to the ethnic group of the Kau until now have been determined by non-emic denotations. Besides this fact, concepts constitutive for the ethnic consciousness of the Kau will be dealt with. They take a significant position in the development of strategies for coping with the social environment in which the group is embedded. These concepts are transmitted through principles analogically coded into mythical motifs. In mythical presentations these ideas are passed on and conserved in a society. This process will be exemplified by means of Kau myths. *[Papua, Asmat, Citak, Kau, mythology, social structure, ethnicity]*

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1 The Ethnic Group Kau

The attempt will be made to reveal contours of traces of a mechanism by which ideas influence social activities. The ideas referred to are passed on within an ethnic group. To illustrate these processes I intend to put my focus on myths. The importance given to mythic traditions in various cultures, for example, by using them to explain the habits and social concepts of the group, indicates one fact: myths contain information which is of vital importance for the society. I propose to discover mechanisms linking data coded into myths to social activities and social consciousness. The knowledge which is passed on can be seen as condensed to an abstract idea or a principle. It is provided with the function of moulding and determining social behaviour. Consequently, mythic traditions give insight into the core of spheres which influence and form a social group.

I propose to describe this by means of an example from a specific ethnic group living in the Asmat region of Papua. One remarkable fact about this group is that no detailed ethnological documentations of investigations exist about it. Linguistic research, however, has dealt more or less marginally with the region northeast of the estuary where the Wildeman River flows into the Eilanden.

The language of the ethnic group in question was mentioned in several scientific articles, these, for example, by Peter Drabbe or Clemens Voorhoeve, associated with barely informative comments. The results of their investigations, however, were regarded as questionable because of the remoteness of this region (see Trenkenschuh 1982a: 14). Summarizing the state of linguistic knowledge, Van Arsdale adds the language practiced here to the four other Asmat dialects: Kawenak, Keenok, Keenakap, and Kaweinag. The regional territories where these four dialects are spoken are demarcated in a map. In contrast to these four linguistic categories, the fifth dialect Kaünak is marked with a "?." The question mark indicates a questionability concerning this dialect category. His comments on this language are vague and he remarks that Kaünak only "roughly corresponds to

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what has been termed as Cicak." He prefers to call it a language and describes the congruency to another dialect as limited to a small number of words. The Kawenak, speaking Asmat, accompanying him on an expedition in 1974 were not able to "carry on a normal conversation" with the "Cicak." They could only understand "isolated words." In Van Arsdale's map the area in which this language is practiced has the two rivers, the Eilanden and the Wildeman, as boundaries to the west. But it is not demarcated to the north or to the east (Van Arsdale 1978: 17f.).

According to Voorhoeve, these five dialects were introduced by P. Drabbe. Based on a well-founded differentiation between languages and dialects, Voorhoeve categorizes four different languages in the Asmat region (1980: 14). Due to the much larger quantity of data at his disposal, he was able to extend the area covered by language districts far into the interior of Asmat. The region allocated by P. Drabbe to the Kaünak dialect is equivalent to one of the language regions Voorhoeve delimits and calls the "Citak Asmat language" (Voorhoeve 1980: vii, ix).

The ethnic group dealt with here populates a region far in the interior of Papua, one of the parts of New Guinea belonging to Indonesia. Today the members of the group see themselves as a subgroup of the Asmat. This ethnic consciousness is one of the subjects I shall deal with in the following.

First of all, three names of the ethnic group this article refers to will be presented and discussed. I shall argue my reasoning for the suggestion to introduce "Kau" as the name for this people and also for the region they inhabit. The name is pronounced like the English word "cow." The spelling corresponds to the local spelling. The most familiar name and that which is commonly used in the local political establishment is Citak Mitak.[1] I was not able to find a well-founded source for this naming. Only once I was told that it was originally the manner in which the Auyu, who live southeast of the Kau, used to call them. As the first explorations to Kau originated from the Merauke district via the region populated by the Auyu, it is very possible, that the name given to them by this neighbouring ethnic group was the first one used to point at them from outside and has been kept until today.

In the Asmat Museum of Culture and Progress objects originating from this region are localized with the name Yupmakcain. In 2007, the director of the museum, Eric Sarkol, believed that his predecessor Yufentius Biakai could have introduced this name (de Antoni 2007c: 13.7.). The reason why I decided to stick to the name "Kau," commonly unknown in Agats, originates in my investigations in Senggo. Senggo is a village in the region with government outposts, a hospital built and run by the protestant mission TEAM, and an airstrip. In the year 2007, I was able to work together with a group of indigenous people transcribing and translating a mythic text there (2007a). Asked how they call themselves and how they name their language, I was told that their name was Kau, and that they call their language "Kau adagum" (2007c: 13.7.). *Atakom* is the Asmat term for "language" (Voorhoeve 1980: 48). Travelling on in this area I posed the same question to local people in Suator, the former Binam, where I met two men from Burbis, Ton Asardo and Bartholomäus (de Antoni 2007c: 8.7.). They informed me that they also call themselves Kau. Returning back to Agats, I confronted Biakai with this information and he agreed to reject the name Citak. He was the one who thought that it had been introduced by the Auyu, but could not say what it meant (see also Konrad and Konrad 1996: 301). He supposed that the name Yupmakcain was the emic name in the north of the region situated around Binam and Mbinamzain (de Antoni 2007b: 7.8.). So his information stands in contradiction to the statements of the men from Burbis. Konrad and Konrad adopted the name Yupmakcain in their publication (1996: 267). They are befriended with Biakai, and Ursula Konrad informed me that she had decisively initiated the usage of this name in the museum in Agats (2007). The fact that Biakai was the one who introduced Yupmakcain as the name for the people living in the territorial region around Senggo would explain both the mentioning of this name in the museum's inscriptions and in the publication of G. and U. Konrad.

Based on information given to me by representatives of the Kau during my research stay in Senggo in 2007, I was able to allocate a geographical territory for their ethnic group. I had enumerated settlements and villages registered in maps and asked them if the inhabitants of those villages belonged to their ethnic group and spoke the Kau dialect.[2] Thus,

1 Formerly also spelled: Cicak, Tjitak, Tjitjak, Tsitjak, or Tyitak.

2 The following villages, so I was told, belonged to the ethnic group of the Kau: Senggo, Kunasuma, Basmam, Tiau, Amazu, Binerbis, Bidneu, Vamu, Ipem, Binam, Vakam, Binamzein, Womin, Sagamu, Buruba, Abau, Komasma, Vou, Imembi, (Jemu is not considered Kau but Kumbai), Patipi, Piramanak, Burbis, Binam, Sagis, Emenepe, Tokemau, Djawok, Asserep, (Aboge is not Kau but Auyu) (de Antoni 2007c: 7.7.).

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I could demarcate the region the Kau considered as belonging to their ethnic group. It covers an area of approximately 2,500 km^2, which would make it about 9% of the total Asmat region.[3]

There are two reasons why this surface measurement should be considered with reservation and there may well be marginal inaccuracies. The first one is the semi-nomadic way of life still practiced in the far north and south regions of the territory of the Kau. For example, the settlement of Piramanak was situated further upriver (Konrad et al. 1981: 7) and moved further south before 1995. Before 1980, Burbis was also located further north than it is today. In the south, the village of Womin moved to a site further north in 1980 (Konrad 1996: 18).

The second reason for an indefinite definition of the territorial area is the extension of areas belonging to villages or settlements along the border. These consist of sago groves or fishing areas owned by members of the clans into which the settlement is subdivided. Rivers can definitely not serve as borders here. They rather represent an infrastructure which connects the groups together. A river region including its tributaries represents an interlinked area, and the jungles separating such territories are to be considered as boundaries separating different regions.

A further fact could give reasons for a possible inaccuracy. The village of Suator is the former Binam. Binam belongs to the villages the Kau from Senggo recognized as belonging to their ethnic group. Suator was taken over by merchandizing immigrants and can, therefore, nowadays hardly be regarded as a Kau village. One factor, which could well lead to a revision of this point of view, concerns the exploitation of the jungle areas around Suator. Here an investigation could find circumstances which, indeed, would support an allocation of these parts of Asmat to the Kau region.

Nevertheless, the following map is based on the ethnic identity as expressed in interviews by the men from Senggo who belong to the ethnic group of the Kau. Even if linguistic criteria are essential for the definition of such a group, the region demarcated here as being the region of the Kau is not the total territorial living space of the Kaünak-speaking population. It is quite possible that Kaünak dialects are spoken far beyond the demarcated territory. This map is not based on the area covered by the spreading of a language or a dialect. It is not designed to demarcate a linguistic group but defines a region populated by a group with an ethnic consciousness.

In addition to the ethnic identity, this map delineates the linguistic characteristics of the population living here, which possibly also has to be ascribed to the inhabitants of the territory situated further to the northeast of the Kau region. Van Arsdale identifies three additional characteristics of the Kau. He enumerates a "rudimentary swidden horticulture," a "relative non-reliance upon sago" as well as a "more mobile life style" (1978: 18).

According to a government census from 1967, the population of the "Tjitjak" area counted 4,879 persons (Trenkenschuh 1982b: 69). This region is only approximately that of the ethnic territory of the Kau as documented here. A more recent census would include those parts of the population which immigrated and settled down here because of economical development, for instance for the exploitation of natural resources, especially gaharu timber. The Kau were outnumbered in Senggo, the district's governmental centre, over the last thirty years. A comparable change occurred in Suator over the last 10 years because of the gaharu trade.

2 Myth of a Culture Hero of the Kau

Two myths of the Kau will be the main source I intend to refer to in this article. I shall describe and try to analyse them briefly. I intend to extract a factor coded into both myths. It is passed on in the stories through storytelling. The concept of a single factor determining the social order, as well as cosmological imaginations of an ethnic group, is the background of the following reflections. It can be defined as a principle.[4] What goes beyond my intention here would be a description of the forms of social life this principle emanates from. This would represent an outstanding research task.

Firstly, two contextual levels concerning the recording of the passage of the story of Agu Ibit, a mythic personality of the Kau, will be illuminated. The first level concerns the time in which the recording was made. It reveals the importance of this culture hero for the Kau. The source of the detailed knowledge of this mythic ancestor, a cassette recording, was produced about 2 years before

3 The total Asmat region is specified by Tobias Schneebaum (1985: 23) as covering 26,725 km^2.

4 These mythic tales of the Kau are something like elementary stones of a mosaic supplementary to the examples of other Asmat regions I already discussed in my dissertation (2009: 37 ff.). In this work, I mainly referred to examples from the Asmat of the Kaweinag dialect region or the so-called Casuarina coast area.

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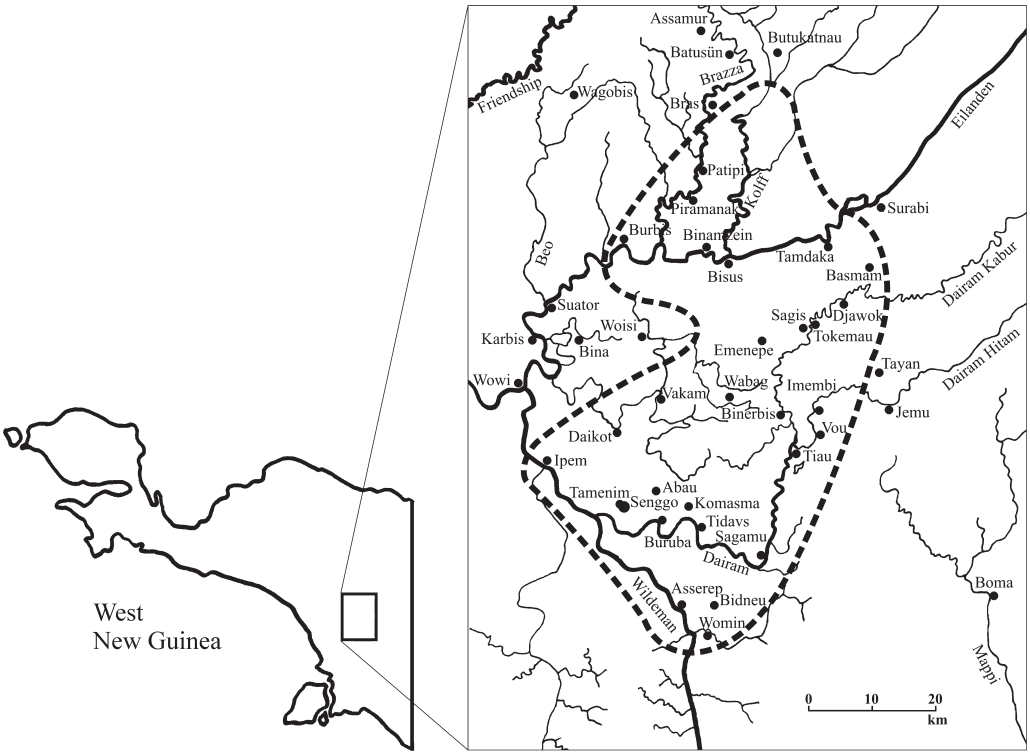

Map: Asmat subregion inhabited by Kau

the 2nd June, 1984, the day I was able to make a copy of it.[5] The original cassette has got lost in the meantime. In November 1981, Josef Haas was stationed in Senggo. He was one of the first Roman Catholic missionaries to stay permanently in this area. The history of Christian mission plays an important role, not only concerning the recording of this evidence but also for its interpretation. Catholic missionaries first entered the Kau region[6] at the beginning of the 1950s. But in 1970 the mission was closed in this area because of "uncontrolled government interference with the mission's schools and policy" (Trenkenschuh 1982a: 14). When Haas was sent to Senggo, the protestant mission TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) had already been established there for several years. They had built a hospital[7] and were running it at that time. Pido, the chief and representative of the local Kau community, had grown up in the traditional life of this ethnic grouping in a settlement called Senggo Lama. According to Haas, the settlement was located on the Wildeman River, approximately one river bend further downstream from the Dairam estuary (Haas 2009). Pido was the war leader, the *zauwaibit* of the local Kau clan community living there.

In earlier times, it was a *zauwaibit* who led the men of his clan into martial attacks. He had to be a fierce and a brave warrior. *Zauwaibit* could be translated as a man who carries his head up, who looks his enemy full in the face (de Antoni 2007b: 18f.). The authority of the *zauwaibit* is passed on to his male descendents if they prove to have the necessary qualifications. First the brothers and then the sons are the possible heirs (de Antoni 2007b: 20ff.). Consequently, a combination of a Big Man and a Great Man system underlies the succession of this position.

5 The audio recording of the mythic text and of an interview with J. Haas referring to it, made shortly after the copy recording, is stored in form of a digital copy in the "Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften" (PhAÖAW, Wien 1, Liebiggasse 5) together with other recordings in the collection "Sammlung de Antoni: West Papua 1984." The recording is archived under the number: D6681, Nr. 25.

6 Dutch M. S. C. fathers were the first Catholic missionaries to enter the Kau region. Fr. E. Zachmann visited their area in those years (Trenkenschuh 1982a: 14). J. Duivenvoorde was the first M. S. C. priest to work here for approximately one year. He started his pastoral activities in 1961 (de Antoni 2010).

7 Dr. Dresser, associated with TEAM; moved to Senggo in July 1971 (Trenkenschuh 1984: 47) to establish a hospital there.

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Pido is considered a *zauwaibit* and is respected as such a personality until today. It was his merit to bring his group down to Senggo Baru, today's Senggo. At that time, the settlement of Tamenim was located here. Pido had to pay a certain amount of goods in the form of axes in order to be accepted in this place (de Antoni 2007b: 31). The people of Tamenim had a different linguistic tradition in comparison with Pido's Kau. Haas knew of their different languages as reported to him in the 1980s, when he was working in Senggo. The Tamenim villagers were regarded as Asmat-speaking Asmat, in contrast to the Senggo people speaking Kau (Haas 2009). In former times, Pido's clan group lived in tree houses. This is one of the reasons why he considered looking for an area where the houses need not necessarily be built so high up. It was dangerous, especially for children who could easily fall down from the terrace in front of the tree house (de Antoni 2007b: 5). His group had settled in the new environment during 1981 and in the following years, when Pido's son Paulus helped Josef Haas and his fellow priest to learn the local language. Pido's advanced age signalled the time for passing on his function in the local Kau community to a new generation. The confidence given to his son by the new missionaries must have been a supporting factor for his own status and that of Paulus. The priests' contact with Paulus waked their interest in the traditional religious imaginations of the people they now lived with. Paulus recommended Haas to contact his father as an expert of the traditional knowledge passed on through generations. A fortnight before he died, Pido recited the details of the myth on tape for Haas. It was Haas who had asked for spiritual texts of the old tradition of the Kau. The first story he was told was the one of Agu Ibit. In an interview I made with Haas in 1984, after I had copied the recording, he mentioned how the Kau people passed by the mission house again and again after Pido's death to hear his voice on the recording.

It was a time of substantial changes which formed the context of this recording, and underlined its importance for the Kau. Pido had had his children baptized, and had converted to Christianity himself a few months before he died. He must have known of the transformation of cosmologic imaginations he and the coming generation would have to cope with. In this situation, determined by the coming changes, he entrusts the myth of Agu Ibit with his weakened voice to Haas.

Trying to transcribe and translate the recording, I was confronted with the same difficulties I was already acquainted with from my work on recordings of mythical songs of the coastal area of Asmat (de Antoni 2007d: 67 f.). Now, after further comparable transcription works in Basim, I am even more familiar to the problems such a work presents to the local Asmat. The technical problems, which all of the collaborators had by listening to only a few words, switching the player to pause mode, and writing them down without forgetting parts of the text, were obvious. Oftentimes, I was not even sure if the wording someone tried to transcribe had been understood. So it took two days until one of the helpful men managed to write down a text. He did this after several attempts with other members of the community with a surprising and convincing self-confidence.

Back at home, I compared the translation we made from this transcription with the remarks on the contents of the recorded verses Haas had made in an interview 23 years earlier. He spoke of Agu Ibit as a great-grandfather present in the sun. The sun is believed to be a man wearing a shining, decorated headband. In this interview Haas spoke of the pearls and corals his arms were decorated with. They could be explained with culturally external associations Haas had integrated into his re-narration. The dog's teeth in the translation, on the other hand, were emic adornment elements. Haas continued by mentioning how bright the decorations shone, so bright that they saw the sun, respectively Agu Ibit, shining. He moved from east to west and submerged. His largeness, but also his beauty, were praised. He appeared in the morning, climbed up the trees, jumped from branch to branch, and illuminated the earth. Then he was asked to prevent rain from coming down. They said "we want to go fishing, we want to collect sago. We want to walk with one another, with our wives, with our children." This description of the content of Pido's narration corresponds with the translation of the transcription I especially have to thank Cornelis in Senggo, in 2007.

The following story of Agu Ibit, the mythic ancestor of the Kau, was narrated by Pido.

1 (Pido): *Agu ibit bup ta piasarem ta tonda bidem*
1 (Pido): Agu Ibit [the ancestor] stepped out of the water onto the land.

2 *piasaradame kibusur tunda bitrem*
2 After a whole night on the river he sits on the top of the Ki-tree.

3 *tinak awa irabadame*
3 He is already sitting on the top of the Tinak-tree.

4 *Asama ima ziamedeme*
4 After going to defecate, he urinates in the morning.

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5 *pamanpiran pamanpiran, yarademe usu busur emen bamet bimin jemedeme*
5 He jumps from one tree to another, turns on the top of the tree to the west.

6 *ura tufu taran atmateme, eba metrem*
6 Afterwards you wear a belt with a shell and a necklace with dog's teeth.

7 *O… o kibusur aeban sine amameteme*
7 He arises with stilted legs and open arms on the top of the Ki-tree.

8 *kio… o bake o… o juagut suan ba aga pimide*
8 Oh Ki-tree open pleasant weather. So the arms can move freely.

9 *iwo der puka giar bena biramin.*
9 A cheerful voice, I am looking for something to eat.

10 *Tiau bas der pirau jiar, pijiar ramin, bup enam jiaramin,*
10 Rain don't pour down. I want to hunt a big rat, a cassowary, a fish in the river.

11 *taut taprauwo dera amus fo… fo bairamin*
11 If a woman is there, I want to pound sago "fo… fo."

12 *taut vam der vawa jok babarlah, faiju au batamar ramin bira.*
12 Another woman says: "I am staying this noon to nurse a child."

13 *vawa zo bawinak pagapra pimanak ba piramin*
13 This noon it is shining bright, want to go far.

14 *Agu ibit ta inim biamusitra.*
14 Agu Ibit gave good weather.

15 *ka ki etem, kuru etem, badam etem, utua etem,*
15 On the top of the Ki-tree, of the Kuru-tree, of the Badam-tree, of the Utua-tree,

16 *usu etem, pambam etem, tinak etan, usu etan, amus etem*
16 wood-trees, Pambam-tree, Tinak-leafs, leaf-trees, sago palm,

17 *tau eberak ka manakda batu fur mute.*
17 leaf of the sago palm. Your eyes beam.

18 *Agu ibit, Agu Ibit, Tanambitda, Tanambitda, manakda tutur marlam*
18 Agu Ibit, Agu ibit, Tanambitda, Tanambitda. Your eyes are beaming all day long.

19 *vawa ementineme teme aran emen ena aba yamuramet arura.*
19 Now you're going from east to west, till you disappear.

20 (Paulus): *Ara kazaun pedek bawin kau.*
20 (Paulus): People can use the story for good or evil.

Agu Ibit was defined by Haas as "great-grandfather." The relational term used by the English-speaking Indonesian Stefanus Supprobo, on the other hand, was "ancestor." Supprobo translated the text in the course of a comprehensive dialogue with Cornelis, who had transcribed it. Besides Kau Adagum, the local Kau-Asmat dialect, he also mastered Indonesian and was, therefore, able to assist in the translation of the text. It was now possible to identify Agu Ibit with the mythical ancestor from which the Kau are descended. He is represented by the sun and is believed to appear in it.

In the 18th verse the term or name Tanambitda is added to the name Agu Ibit. Tanambitda was translated as "male sun." But it could well be a counter name of Agu Ibit. The practice of second names assigned to mythic persons is very common for the coastal Asmat. According to representatives of Asmat, speaking the Kaweinag dialect, this custom has the purpose of achieving a specific balance. A name is supplemented by a "left" name. The mentioning of both names follows a system and also produces a formal equilibrium. The verse of a mythic song can be divided, for example, into two divisions, each of them making use of the opposite name. If the name is mentioned several times in the first half of the verse, the left name will be mentioned in the second half approximately just as often (de Antoni 2009: 172 ff.).

In the figure of the hero Agu Ibit there are opposites confronted with one another and having a new balance as a consequence. This confrontation is combined with merits concerning everyday challenges. Agu Ibit is described as a man enabling community life and accompanying its activities, such as gathering sago or hunting, by providing a suitable weather. He contributes good conditions for a functioning community life. This provision of helpful benefits to the people is one of the essential qualifications, which characterize a culture hero (Mader 2008: 69).

Including all the manifold fields of daily life, the course of a day is introduced as a motive of the story. Four phases of the course of the sun during the span of a day are mentioned in the text. In the 1st verse, Agu Ibit stepped out of the water. In the following verse the rising of the sun is indicated by Agu Ibit's sitting on the top of the tree. The moving of the sun over the sky is described by Agu Ibit's jumping from one tree to another and his turning to the west in the 5th verse. In the 13th verse, his bright shining at noon is made a motive. He goes from east to west and then disappears, as described in the 19th verse. Haas remembered that his presence, reaching from east to west, was associated by Pido's relatives with his knowledge of everything (Haas 2009).

The temporal framework integrates opposite cosmologic levels of life, the life of the living and that of the ancestors, present life with the origin of life. The history of generations melts together in the

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course of a day. Practices, constitutive of everyday life, are pointed to in fishing or hunting big rats and cassowaries in the 10th verse and in the gathering of sago in the 11th verse. So this everyday life is assigned to the integrative function of connecting divergent spheres of life.

The knowledge of these relations, integrating diverse fields of life and enabling a successful mastering of challenges, is reserved for the core of the social group. This is manifested in secret knowledge, passed on only to chosen persons within the society. It is articulated in linguistic expressions reserved only to them. The term of a poetical language is just as misleading here with the Kau as it is in the coastal Asmat region (de Antoni 2009: 46). It is not a language but a set of specific terms, which are only known by the elders of the group. The words belong to a secret sphere, which is only accessible to certain members of the social community (de Antoni 2007b: 11 f.). One of these words with a secret meaning, also applied in the explanations of Pido on Agu Ibit, is the name of the tree "Ki." It is secret. The tree serves the spirits as an abode. Ki is not used in the colloquial language. The rising of the Sun and its climbing over this tree is connected with secrets. This tree is seen as a "root" of Agu Ibit – a connection of his living sphere with our world. He uses it to come down into the world of the humans on earth (de Antoni 2007b: 13). The secret knowledge is reserved for Pido and his clan, so it is also passed on to men who marry into the clan (de Antoni 2007b: 14 f.). Secret words are used, when it is cloudy or rainy and sunshine would be convenient for the plans of the day. A martial attack on another group could have been such a project (de Antoni 2007b: 13). But the secret words with the magic meaning must not be used thoughtlessly (de Antoni 2007b: 16).

The Kau from the Senggo clans consider themselves as descendents of Agu Ibit. His name is, therefore, part of the full name of every member of the group (de Antoni 2007b: 11). He protects his people and helps them in difficulties. Bad circumstances for various projects are embodied by rain. Rain can spoil a feast as well as a planned boat trip to the jungle to gather food or hunt prey. Before a feast or when travelling with the dugout to a jungle area, Pido used to tell his family all about Agu Ibit (de Antoni 2007b: 6 f.). He could rely on Agu Ibit for weather that would make the feast or the excursion possible. Agu Ibit is, therefore, the personified good side of life. They believe him to look after their safety and they can call on him if in need (de Antoni 2007b: 16). He stands in a dichotomous position to the moon, which represents the cruel and hard side of life. The nighttime used to be the time for martial attacks. So during the night, they had to be aware of possible enemies sneaking into their settlement. The moon, therefore, represents the tough and bloody sides of life (de Antoni 2007b: 9 f.).

Another fact could help reconstruct parts of the context in which this mythic personality is bedded. The storyteller and his social function have to be considered. It is remarkable to notice how people still speak about his personality more than a quarter of a century after his death. Pido still is seen as someone who influenced the history of the Kau. Memories of him are stated as explanations for customs of this ethnic group, for instance, those connected to reacting to bad weather. One measure of the respect still shown to him is expressed in the fact that his grave in Senggo is visited regularly and kept clean.

Like Pido, Agu Ibit is esteemed as a *zauwaipit*, as a chief of the group. A high-level prestige is attached to the holder of this position in the society. The bright shining of the sun is considered to have its origin in Agu Ibit's outstanding status in his social group (de Antoni 2007b: 8).

3 Myth of Origin of the Kau

The relationship between the Asmat living in the coastal regions and the ones living far inland is explained in a further myth. It will be presented here in two versions. The first one was narrated by Derek, one of Pido's sons, in the course of interviews I made in Senggo on 6th July, 2007.

Myth of origin of the Kau, the Senggo version:

Two brothers live together in a bivouac in the jungle. The younger one goes out hunting while the elder one stays behind to take care of the hut. During the absence of the younger brother, the dog defecates on his sleeping place. At night, the younger brother comes home from hunting in the forest. "How could you leave this mess here? Why didn't you clean it up? You don't like your younger brother." The younger brother decides to leave his brother. He wants to move to the estuary area. The elder brother, on the other hand, stays in the bivouac. Both of the brothers are Asmat. The Asmat are considered to be descendents of both the younger and the elder sibling respectively. And all are real Asmat, perfect humans (de Antoni 2007b: 2 f.).

The Kau see themselves as descendents of the younger brother, as real Asmat originate from the seacoast. But they also consider themselves related to the Asmat living further inland.

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This tale should be compared to another version of the mythical story Trenkenschuh in 1970 rendered in one of his annotations to a translation of an article written by Zegwaard and Boelaars in 1953. Trenkenschuh tries to identify the Asmat groups named in this article. He is not sure, but he assumes to have found one group he equates with the "Tjitjak"[8] people on the upper Awewetsj (?) and Siretsj River in the "area around the government post of Songgo (?)." In the 1982a publication of this translation with Trenkenschuh's annotations, as quoted here, Senggo obviously is misspelled as "Songgo." Up to now, Senggo is "one of the diocesan limits in the Agats-Asmat diocese" just as "Songgo" is described in the continuation of the annotation.

Trenkenschuh points to the distinction between the language of the Kau and "the three major Asmat dialects." He then writes of the village of Jepem southwest of Agats, which is supposed to originate from the Kau. Here this story is rendered in the original wording, as published by Trenkenschuh with a completion I added to the first sentence.

The myth of origin of the Kau, the Jepem version:

The [village of Jepem was a *jew*[9] with a companion *jew* called] Jipim. Jepem went pig-hunting and asked Jipim to care for their *jew*. They did not, so when Jepem returned they found dog crap and other messes in their section of the *jew*. A fight developed and the people of Jepem came down river past Fos, Jaosaker, etc., and settled on the coast (Trenkenschuh 1982a: 14).

Trenkenschuh unfortunately does not mention where this myth originated, he only introduces the tale with: "The story is told." But according to the context of his notes, he believes it to be a myth explaining the origin of the people of the Jepem. Trenkenschuh supplements his arguments with the fact that now the "Flamingo Bay dialect" is spoken in Jepem and the feasts practiced here are the ones of the coastal people (Trenkenschuh 1982a: 14).

Besides this mythic story, the few remarks Trenkenschuh makes on the knowledge he had of the way the Kau lived in 1970 are worth quoting. "The men wear penis covering but the women dress with the grass-skirt as the Asmat women do. Their dancing is more lively than central Asmat." In this observation Trenkenschuh sees a proximity to the ethnic group of the Auyu living south of the Kau region. He describes the Kau as an "amalgamation of Asmat and Awju." But he states the hypothetical character of this theory by mentioning an un-researched situation of the groups living in this remote interior (Trenkenschuh 1982a: 15).

The comparison of the two versions of this story (see Table) reveals a further dimension of the myth. Transformations of the details of the tale appear and reveal two meanings which are different from one another. Meanings determining their own myth were coded into the story by the group which passed it on. The knowledge, essential for the identity of the group, was saved with such a strategy. These group-specific transformations become visible in a comparative view and they help recognize values important for the group they belong to.

It is the contrast of motive elements the two divergent versions are situated in which makes evident the group's genuine intention translated into the myth. The two different story details, the one from Senggo and the other from Jepem, could be summarized in one single topic: the relationship between both groups.

Concerning the Kau from Senggo, a relation to the Asmat in the coastal areas is emphasized, whereas the version referring to Jepem is dominated by the idea of segregation from the other Kau. The Jepem version describes the two parts as companion *yeu*s. This relationship is changed into its opposite by the end of the story. They start fighting with one another and consequently end as enemies.

In the Senggo version the two are brothers and remain siblings throughout the story. The storyteller pointed to a conclusion describing all Asmat as being related to one another and having the qualification of being "real humans." This would result from their being descendents of either the one or the other brother. The integrative factor characterizes the tale in this version, in contrast to the excluding tendency in the Jepem tale. For each respective group, an essential meaning appears. It was developed in the specific ethnic group, and now should be passed on to its members wrapped into the myth.

The story of the Kau from Senggo reveals two facets of the identity of the Kau. Both of them di-

8 Due to official spelling changes of the Indonesian language from 1972 to 1973 "tj" was changed to "c". It is pronounced like the "ch" in church (Van Arsdale 1978: VI). Tjitjak is now spelled Citak.

9 In the coastal areas of the Asmat a *yeu* (*or yew*), a ritual or men's house is situated in the centre of a village, often on the riverbank. Its function is mainly ritual, and it is divided in two clan-group halves. It, therefore, represents a classical moiety structure of the society. In the region of the Kau a *yeu* was not built in a settlement. A clan used to live in a single house built on trees and poles (see Bogner 1995: 20 ff., 84 ff.). Nowadays, the Kau are forced by the government to live in villages consisting of an accumulation of small family houses, following the model of a Javanese village, with a connecting street in its centre. The further away from the governmental administration centres they live, the more the settlements consist only of a single traditional house.

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Table: Motives in the two versions of a myth of origin of the Kau.

Motives in the Senggo version, divergent to the other version	Motives appearing in both mythical versions	Motives in the Jepem version, divergent to the other version
Two siblings living in a bivouac		Two companion *yeus*
	One part goes hunting	
	The other part should take care of the house	
	Dog excrement in the house	
Younger hunting brother leaves his brother		Fight between both groups
	The hunting part moves downriver and settles on the coast	

minish possible inequalities. First of all, the myth points to the fact that both are siblings and expresses in this way that both of them are perfect and genuine humans, equated with being real Asmat. This puts the brothers in an equal position to one another.

The second fact, which could possibly have an unequal state of both as a consequence, concerns the age of the protagonists. The elder brother has the right to stay in the bivouac. The younger one has to take decisive steps to separate himself from his brother. First, he is the one who goes out hunting, while the elder stays at home. Now he has to leave the bivouac in order to be as independent as the elder brother is, and not to have to serve the other one. Cleaning the brother's sleeping quarters, or providing the brother with a share of the hunting booty without receiving anything reciprocally in return, would bring the power-relation between them out of balance. So this is a story describing the equality of power and might of two groups related to one another.[10]

Hunting is described here as an appropriate way of supplying the community with necessary subsistence. Until now, the Asmat have the knowledge and skills to obtain food from the environment they live in. This also enabled them to remain at least partly independent from the politically and economically dominant part of the population, consisting of immigrants from various other Indonesian islands, especially Sulawesi and Kai. The Kau are able to sell them meat or fish in order to buy the products they require in the stores of the immigrants. Even though the Kau do not have equal rights regarding the terms of trade, the skills they have from their forefathers put them into a more balanced position than they would be in without their traditional knowledge. The motive of the younger brother leaving his older brother in order to remain independent not only points to Asmat groups living in different territories, but also has references to their present environmental living situation.

A symmetrical balance of might and power is the subject of the myth. To avoid having to serve the other brother by cleaning his sleeping bag, or sharing the dwelling without being in a loving relation, the brothers have to live separated from one another. In such independent living conditions both Asmat remain real humans. The living space of the younger brother is the estuary. Here he is a perfect human, independent and self-confident.

Historical migrations from coastal regions upstream, such as from the interior to the estuary, could be derived from the myth in the Senggo version. The myth from Jepem reduces the possible interpretation to a downstream migration and segregation from the original relations, eventually combined with an assimilation with groups living in the new environment. Both versions would postulate the enabling of a real human life by separation from one another. A seminomadic concept would be one of the possible preconditions for such a perfect life. The manner in which the Kau live is adequate to cope with the world they live in. This consequently is one of the meanings the myth passes on. It is also applicable to the situation of living together

10 Siblings with contrasting characteristics are a common motive in myths. It can be interpreted as the attempt to provide an explanation and a causal background for a social status quo (Mader 2008: 44).

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with the immigrants who are taking over the political and economic control of their country. In both versions the myth deals with historically developed facts and a status quo. But this dispute is not achieved by rendering events and processes in a descriptive story but by transforming the history on an abstract level, illustrated in a myth. Here the dynamic of interactions and power constellations is dealt with in the way myths typically deal with history (Mader 2008: 72 f.).

4 Conclusions

The two myths, the story of Agu Ibit and that of the two mythical ancestors, may possibly reveal the causal connections upon which the social life of the Kau is based. For a theoretical reflection on the mythological background of this ethnic group I shall rely on three assumptions.

1. First of all, myths have an essential function in the perpetual construction of social concepts in a society. Ideas coded into narrative elements have the purpose of determining social behaviour. They are of relevance for the individual construction of life concepts.
2. With the second assumption I shall base my argumentation on the moulding function of ideas passed on in myths, outranging the individual field of conceptualizing life. We are dealing here with a knowledge not restricted only to certain individuals but belonging to a specific ethnic group. It is, therefore, necessary to pass these ideas on to all members of the community. This especially concerns those growing into the group as children or those joining it because of a new relationship with members of the society in question. By having accepted this knowledge, specific characteristic practises and phenomena, conventional in the group, are developed and practiced. The knowledge is, therefore, a causal factor for social customs and habits. It is also of importance for the continuity of a specific conception of identity belonging to the group. By passing it on to the collective of the group, the realizations of the coded ideas become part of the corporate identity of the social group.
3. The third assumption refers to a commonness of the group's ideas coded into myths and passed on in them. A single basic idea can be derived from such a common factor of the motives. It is an abstraction of the ideas and is passed into a variety of motives in order to form the basis for a realisation of practises, compatible with a generally accepted social convention. It could be emphasized as a principle forming and characterizing social behaviour of a specific ethnic group.

In case of the Kau this minimal common factor, articulated in both of the myths dealt with here, would be defined with a strong inclusive or integrating specification. It represents a traditional essence of conceptions of the ethnic group it is derived from. In contrast to the Jepem version of the mythic story, such an integrative character of the principle of the Kau becomes visible. Equally, in the myth from Jepem an integrative principle can be acknowledged, if it is viewed in the territorial context in which this village is situated. An integrating strategy, considering the geographical situation they are exposed to, could well be oriented toward assimilation with the cultural practices of the villages surrounding it and a separation from the traditions of their former relations.[11]

The relevance of the identity-constituting function of such a principle for an ethnic group is put to the test in critical phases of change. It is the context of the narration by the storyteller of both myths dealt with here, which is the basis for a classification in such a temporal phase. Taking this contextual dimension of the myths into consideration, the following can be stated: They are exposed to a historic phase determined by comprehensive changes. These moments of change in which the context of the myths are involved, dip them into an illumination, enabling an additional analytic interpretation. By being imparted in this specific situation, a positioning and a certain value is ascribed to the myths which enables the following conclusions.

In years, bringing a significant cultural change, the awareness of the importance of ideas is a motivation to use myths to pass them on. These ideas must be kept alive in order for the continuity of the original identity of the ethnic group to be preserved and saved into a new historic period. The traditional cultural assets of the Kau are the example referred to here. It can demonstrate how a change of the environmental, cultural, economic, and political situation is capable of transforming the evaluation of these assets.

For Pido, witnessing the beginning of the change and the beginning of a new era, the significance of

11 According to this analytic diagnosis both conceptual principles, the one of the Kau in Senggo and the one of the villagers of Jepem, would correspond with the principle already discovered in an Asmat group further south in the coastal region of the Fayit River concerning their integrative specification (de Antoni 2009: 211 ff.).

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the mythic person of Agu Ibit was of an outstanding importance. He was introduced into the mythical knowledge and grew up with the imaginations connected to it. Realizing that he was approaching the end of his life, he imparted the setting of this specific myth to the Catholic priest. He must have realized that the man he trusted would possibly be someone who would influence the future of his clan group. This situation, representing a part of the context of the interview, widened the significance of the myths to that of a last will. The myth's contents and its ideas should be preserved. It would also keep its importance in a time of new social developments, which would be determined by religious concepts derived from entirely different traditions. Christian ideas and concepts only had been introduced in the region inhabited by the Kau in the last few years.

The Christian cosmology implies a dualistic contradictory concept of good and evil, of friend and enemy, which stands in opposition to the ideas rendered in both of the traditional Kau myths quoted here. A change from a society formed by traditional cosmologic ideas to a society more and more also influenced by the intruding Christian ideas had been initialized. This change had been initiated at a time when Pido was an adult and his children were still young. His grandchildren grew up in a social environment already deeply influenced and formed by Christian concepts.

In spite of these changes, traditional knowledge was now recognised as essential for the future of the social group. Questioned on the spreading of knowledge of the mythic person of Agu Ibit in the Kau society, or more precisely on the persons who knew the details of the myth, Pido's sons, first of all, remembered their own childhood. They spoke of excursions with their father on the rivers. Rainy weather was the reason for Pido to tell his children of this mythic hero. These early confrontations with ideas projected into mythic tales were what they now remembered. In the continuation of the interview, the men from Pido's clan were asked if they also passed on their knowledge of Agu Ibit to their descendents. Two men answered clearly and detailed. They also had told their children of Pido and how he had told them of Agu Ibit in specific situations. The importance of passing along the knowledge of Agu Ibit on to the next generations was emphasized in a continuation of the interview on the following day. The children must know of this mythic ancestor (de Antoni 2007b: 9). With these statements they placed themselves in a traditional line to Pido. Not only the children but also the grandchildren now had to be introduced in the traditional knowledge (de Antoni 2007b: 7).

In my interview with Kau men in Senggo, and this is quite remarkable in this matter, I was told of several families and members who had married descendents of Pido and were, therefore, introduced into the personality of the mythical Agu Ibit. They had also been introduced into a secret knowledge attached to the mythic tradition. They now knew the group's secret words, like the name of a specific tree, which was supplied with a magic power to influence weather (de Antoni 2007b: 15 f.).

The importance of the ideas contained in the myth of Agu Ibit was preserved in the generation of Pido's children, even though they grew up in a social surrounding entirely different to the one Pido and his forefathers had lived in. The concept of integration gains its importance by a new exposure to ideas determined by a far more disintegrative principle.

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