

# Being and 'Non-Being' in Ambonwari (Papua New Guinea) Ritual

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## ABSTRACT

By focusing on children involved in the ritual practices in Ambonwari village, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, this essay compares two types of ritual: that of healing and that of male initiation. Like other life crisis rituals both deal with two dimensions of the Ambonwari life-world, that is with the living and the dead and, in a broader sense, with people and spirits. Though both are based upon the same cosmology there are fundamental differences between them. First, healers in healing ceremonies treat uninitiated children as 'non-beings'. From the perspective of Ambonwari 'selves' or 'beings', children belong to this domain. They exist as extensions of their parents or carers, from whom they cannot be separated conceptually. Second, by examining the Ambonwari concepts of negation I show that healers do not approach the domain of cosmological non-existence: they are not concerned with the cosmogony of the Ambonwari life-world. The male initiation rituals do just the opposite, however. It is only in the male initiation ritual, seen as a cosmogonic event, that young boys are cut off from their parents and 'thrown' abruptly into a state of becoming. Unlike the healing rites, these rituals treat young boys as both Ambonwari beginnings and Ambonwari beings. I argue that Ambonwari initiation rituals are not concerned with symbolic death followed by rebirth, but with states of being. Initiation means that death becomes possible for a child. The initiated boy will now be able to die as an Ambonwari being.

The poetic idea of eternal life on the whole gravitates more toward a cosmogony than toward theology, and what is often put forward as a measure of the soul is not the degree of its perfection essential for achieving likeness and merger with the Creator but rather the physical (meta-physical) duration and distance of its wanderings in time.

Joseph Brodsky, Footnote to a Poem (from *Less Than One*, 1987, pp.203-4).

## Introduction

Ambonwari village, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea has just over 400 inhabitants. It is probably the largest of eight main villages in which about 2000 people speak Karawari. This language is a member of the Lower Sepik Family, belonging to the larger group of Papuan languages (Foley 1986). There are 12 totemic clans and 35 patrilineages, including six with no present members. Each clan holds the name of at least one men's house, though not all of them are built. Residence is patri-virilocal.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I examine Ambonwari healing rites and the male initiation ritual.<sup>2</sup> By following the terminology used by Ambonwari people themselves and by relying on those translations and concepts which emphasize the ontological and phenomenological dimension of their existence, I aim to bring out the essential characteristics of Ambonwari rituals. The main concept of Ambonwari life-world is their concept of *kay* (Telban 1994). As a verb *kay* captures several meanings: to be, to exist, to remain, to stay. As a noun it is used for being, habit, way, fashion, manner, as well as ritual, custom and law. In this paper, I translate *kay* mainly as being. However, one should be aware that *kay* or being is habitualized, fashioned, ritualized, and so on. As Ambonwari do not have a term for an abstract concept of 'body' (Telban in press), being is not necessarily embodied in material flesh, in the case of spirits, for example. *Kay* comes into existence through a combination of personal spirit and 'consciousness' or 'understanding' (*wambung*, lit. 'insideness'), to which I refer also as Heart (Telban 1993, 1994; cf. Harrison 1990, 1993). Though it is an aspect of *kay*, Heart is always able to transform *kay* through self-transformation, while personal spirit, by giving 'light to the being', enables *kay* to exist and act. On the collective level, Ambonwari speak about 'the way of the village' (*im#nggan kay*) and about its origin in 'the way of the ancestors' (*kupamb#n kay*). Whenever I want to emphasize this collective aspect of Ambonwari people, their temporalized life-world which is produced by and which underlies their thoughts, feelings and actions, I use the term Ambonwariness. It is the collective essence 'embodied' in every individual Ambonwari being. Ambonwariness as such is equally inseparable from healing rituals as it is from those of male initiation. I begin my essay with two men's accounts of how, by coming into contact with spirits, they became healers. In the

following section I examine the semantic connection between sickness, death and otherness. This is informed by the healers' own views of their practices, with emphasis on the treatment of children. By critically reflecting upon the work of Sartre I explore various forms of negation as a source of Ambonwari being. I then present a case study of a postmortem initiation, and argue that the male initiation rituals should be seen in cosmogonic and cosmological terms as 'being-towards-being' oriented (my words). 'Being-towards-being' can exist both in individuals and in the community only via its 'being-towards-beginning', that is, only via self-reproduction through children (see Mimica 1993:88). The male initiation rituals are not concerned with 'symbolic death' but with the absolute beginning and with the states of being. By following van Gennepe (1960[1908]), the understanding of symbolic death in life crisis rituals became commonplace in the anthropology of ritual. What emerges from it is a persistent interpretation of rites of passage as focusing on a symbolic transition between death and life. By examining the Ambonwari case, it is possible to shed new light on the symbolism of death in ritual, and to question the universality of van Gennepe's scheme.

### **Becoming a healer**

During my stay in Ambonwari village I was able to observe the decline and later revival of the activities of two village healers: Bonifacio Marmi Sakmari and Tobias Yangi Akawi. There were three main diseases which periodically affected the villagers' health: malaria, tuberculosis and pneumonia. When I arrived, Bonifacio was the only healer and Tobias was still in Madang where he went to earn money by treating the sick. Some five months after I arrived people began to gossip that healing rituals were simply a fraud. They said that Bonifacio treated people just for the sake of money and that he had no real power. The same charge was directed at Tobias upon his return. Someone told me that the healers of the past had their own, different ways of speaking, 'singing and dancing', and that they never charged for their practices as present day healers do. Tobias and Bonifacio charged 2 Kina for a visit and a healing ceremony. In addition, people complained, they usually expected to be offered a large plate of food. A spate of sudden deaths and an increase in the number of sick people, however, changed the attitude towards popular healers. Both Bonifacio and Tobias were in business again.

### **Bonifacio**

Once, when Bonifacio was about ten years old, he went by canoe with other children into the forest. There they made little shelters from leaves. He left them and went to cut sago pith. On his way back a spirit woman (sakima) blocked his path. At first he thought that she was his mother's brother's wife (awayma), but then he noticed her wrinkled dark skin, long nose and protruding eyes. There was nowhere to run. He screamed, but no one heard him. When he tried to run under her arm, she stopped him, took his bush knife from him, and hit him over the head. She grabbed his hair and split his scalp apart. After she had filled his nose, ears and mouth with clay, she dragged him to a nearby muddy hole and threw him in. His friends called him but he could not hear them. When they finally found him they were so terrified by his appearance that they panicked and fled. They paddled back to the village in terror and did not tell their parents what had happened until later. One boy eventually told his mother that Bonifacio had been attacked by spirits and was sitting, muddy and bloodied, in the bush. She went straight to his mother's house. Shortly afterwards the men set off to find out what had happened.

Meanwhile Bonifacio was sitting in the sago forest. Suddenly, he heard footsteps behind him. He thought that the spirits were going to kill him. A man-spirit approached him, looked at Bonifacio and asked him who he was. Bonifacio told the spirit the name of his step-father, whom his mother had married after his father died. He had never known his real father. 'I am your real father, I am Sakmari', said the spirit-man, and took Bonifacio to the nearest stream where he washed his face, mouth, ears and nose. He cut a stick and gave it to Bonifacio to walk with. He was still too weak to walk, so the spirit-man carried him until they heard the voices of the villagers. The spirit put him down and gave him a ginger plant, saying: 'This will be your

strength. Whoever is sick you will be able to treat him with this. If someone or something threatens you, you will have this to protect yourself.' Then the spirit faded away.

That is how the men from the village found him. The spirit also told him that no one would be able to unclasp his hands holding the ginger. This is what happened. It was only later, when his mother held his hands, that his fingers released it. His mother later planted it. He stayed a couple of days in the village. On the third day his step-father took him to Timbunke Health Centre where they stitched his scalp. When he returned to the village, he noticed that the ginger had grown considerably. He tasted it and rubbed his eyes with its leaves. He saw all kinds of spirits and was afraid they would kill him. Bonifacio did not touch the ginger again until the end of his initiation. Only then did he feel strong enough to try it again. At that time one woman was seriously sick. He went to her house and pulled the painful objects out of her skin. From then on people began to call him into their houses whenever someone was ill. For a time he also performed a kind of divination to discover thieves and those who had committed adultery. People became angry, however, because Bonifacio brought into the open many cases which would otherwise have remained unnoticed. This brought too many problems to the village so he stopped doing it. Since Bonifacio got his power he has attended the sick, not only in Ambonwari village but elsewhere too. The scar which runs from back to front over his bald head reminds him and others of the time when he was attacked by sakima (female bush spirit).

## Tobias

Tobias says that he was an ordinary child. After his initiation, when his back was incised in a crocodile design as the way of the village prescribes, he did not return to his parents' house but stayed in a men's house.

Once, while still single, he cut a garden on the land of Bird of Paradise clan (with whom his father and his son exchanged their sisters in marriage), and planted bananas, taro, and sweet potato. According to Tobias, Ambarmari, the spirit of this land, approached him one day and said to him: 'Tomorrow you must get up early and go straight to the garden.' So he did. Near the entrance to the garden he noticed a large plant of ginger growing on the middle of the path. He wondered how it had come to be there. The spirit of the land prompted him with the impulse to pull it out and taste it. At that moment the spirit himself suddenly appeared in front of him. Ambarmari said: 'You have tried the ginger and now you can see me. Are you prepared to help the sick?' Tobias agreed on condition that spirit would be prepared to help him. Ambarmari consented. An old man was sick just at that time. Tobias returned to the village and spat chewed ginger over the sick man's body. When he did this, many things fell out of it: human bones, pig's bones, little arrows, a twisted vine. Tobias finished his work and the sick man slept in peace. In the morning, the old man was fine, talking to his wife, sitting and eating. Everyone congratulated Tobias, saying that he had found a great power.

Since then Tobias always calls Ambarmari whenever he chews ginger in order to treat the sick. Tobias not only treats people in Ambonwari village but has also been to other Karawari speaking villages (Kundiman, Kaiwaria, Meikerobi, Masandenai, Konmei) as well as to Yimas, Alamlak, Amboin and Biwat. He has even spent a year practising in Madang. Tobias says that when he chews this ginger he can see the spirit who made a person sick. Sometimes it is a house spirit, at other times it is a spirit of the bush. After he spreads the chewed ginger over his eyes and sees spirits they tell him about their anger and the cause of the sickness. Occasionally, he sees a bright light, like the glow of a cigarette. If he follows it he usually finds an object under the sick person's skin. These objects include bones, teeth, shells and nails. They are put into water to cool them down, while stones are thrown into the fire to destroy their power. He rubs the skin where the objects were removed so that there is, as he explains, no wound or blood visible. If the sick person is short of breath Tobias searches for a bundle of twisted vine inside or outside the house; this he gives to the relatives to undo. The twisted vine has been winding around the person's spirit, preventing him or her from breathing properly. Sometimes, fearing the spiteful spirits, Tobias prefers to take other men with him when he goes in search of the vine. He then spits the ginger mixture in the ears and under the nails of the patient, to stop the person's spirit

leaving their body. He blocks their major orifices, the mouth and the anus, just by looking at them. With the smell of ginger Tobias can chase away the alien spirit which has entered the body. The spirits either leave immediately or gather together at one place under the skin, where the sick person feels pain. Tobias is then able to pull them out in the form of different objects. If he sees that they have not yet converged in a single site he visits the patient again in the days that follow. In the case of serious sickness, Tobias may have to return three or four times, each time performing a healing ceremony over the patient.<sup>3</sup>

Tobias, like Bonifacio, astutely avoided any suggestion regarding the possibility that he himself conceals those objects between the ginger leaves just before performing the treatment.<sup>4</sup> What is apparent, however, from the practices of both past and present healers, is that they are able to perform an intermediate role, creating a temporary link between people and spirits.<sup>5</sup> To become a healer one has to come in contact not only with spirits of the dead, but also with bush spirits, in particular those of the patient's own clan and land. The first contacts with spirits are usually described in a dramatic way, as we have seen. The spirits supervise the healers' practices and guide them on their healing paths. A healer is called *mari aprar*, 'one who takes sickness away'. There is no special term for healing. People simply say 'they talk, they would like to make his sickness smooth' (*mbu mariawk kus#kan, mari m#nang ak#rp#ngasararin*). As Ambonwari use the same root *ma-* in different contexts and for different purposes to convey notions of death, sickness and otherness, I will explore these connections in more detail by looking briefly at the semantics of *ma-ri* ('sickness'). This is related to their concept of 'death', which depends, for Ambonwari, on a notion of 'otherness'.

### Sickness, death and otherness

The root *ma-* is in opposition to *ka-*, which, as in *ka-y*, conveys life, existence, way, being. *Ma-* is not in opposition to *ka-* in the sense of meaning 'no-life', 'non-existence', 'no-way' and 'non-being' but in the sense of 'other-life', 'other-existence', 'other-way' and 'other-being'. This is best understood through the way Ambonwari use these two roots in the form of prefixes. *Ma-* is used as a prefix of verbs denoting an activity or task performed 'upriver'. *Ka-* is used as a prefix for the same purpose, but 'downriver'. Other Karawari villages exist downriver, as do those *Iatmul*, *Chambri* and other *Sepik* groups to whom Ambonwari trace their connections through marriages, men's houses, totems, myths and legends. In opposition to the familiar places and people who dwell downriver, there are only 'others', the 'hill people', the different ones, both people and spirits, who dwell upriver. Upriver thus connotes unfamiliar places and unfamiliar habits. One might ask, of course, what about other Karawari people for whom Ambonwari village lies upriver? For them those upriver will not be 'other' at all. 'Upriver' and 'downriver', I think, should be understood as relative terms in a wider regional context. For everyone in the *Sepik River Basin* many 'ways of doing things' are familiar and common throughout the whole 'downriver' region until one reaches the Ocean. In contrast, there is always further 'upriver', towards the Highlands, where for everyone from the *Sepik* the 'ways' change and become unfamiliar and strange. For Ambonwari the other 'comes' from upriver (*ma-*), either *Konmei Creek*, *Arafundi River* or the Highlands, and not from downriver (lower *Karawari* and *Sepik Rivers*) where Ambonwari originate. Thus, the same prefix *ma-* which is used for 'upriver' is also used for otherness.<sup>6</sup> Like 'upriver' cannot exist without 'downriver', recognition of otherness cannot exist without recognition of sameness and vice versa. Sameness is either expressed as oneness (*mba-* meaning 'one'), e.g. *apia yam#n#ng mband* ('we are from the same/one house/lineage/clan') or as 'of the same kind' as, for example, *sawya mbam#nd#kiya* ('the shells are of the same kind') and *apia mbam#nd#ki* ('we [young boys] are of the same age'), where they do, act, and become (verb *d#-* or *s#-* meaning all these) in the same way.

As the same root *ma-* is used for the dead we can surmise that the dead are familiar others. Those who most trouble the living are usually the familiar spirits of their house such as a recently deceased father or brother, while female spirits are seldom involved. When someone dies, people say *m#n mar* ('he/she died') which contrasts with *m#n kar* which denotes 'standing' or 'staying' meaning 'she or he is alive'. Death is referred to as *mar kay* ('the way of dying' or 'dead being').

In death, Ambonwari explain, humans cross a bridge; they go through the door to the other side and become Ambonwari spirits. Healers have to deal with two dimensions of Ambonwariness, sameness and otherness, the living and the spirits. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the term for sickness is mari.<sup>7</sup> An old man is called mari-nyar, the one who is about to die is referred to as marar, while a dead man is called mari-k#n (feminine nouns end on -ma). When sick, people say, 'I am sick' (mari ama wapar, lit. 'sick came upon me'), 'I have sickness' (ama mari ngand#k, lit. 'I am with the sickness'), or 'sickness holds me' (ama mari yanga sarinyan). Those who are sick are 'attacked' by others, that is by those spirits who are bad (ma-ma- 'bad', 'other-other'). The sick person is referred to as the one who is in a bad state (i.e. m#n pan maman, 'he is very ill'). Because of their connection with the world of spirits, the sick find themselves in the limen between life and death. Ambonwari healers try to restore the situation by sending spirits to their own side of the 'bridge', while keeping people on the side of the living.

### Healing practices as seen by a healer

While living in Ambonwari I made frequent visits to the sick, accompanying Bonifacio and Tobias on their late afternoon appointments. Their practices were much the same. The healer would come to the house of the sick, chew betel nut with ginger until he began to hear and see spirits. He would enter the house, look around, rub the sick person with ginger, spit over the skin and into the 'openings', the ears, nose, nails and orifices, through which spirits could enter into the person. He would ask those present about the possible causes of sickness attributable to their wrongdoings. Sometimes he would search for a bundle of a twisted kanda vine either under the house or inside the fire place. He would give it to those present to undo it. A thin little stick found inside the bundle signifies that the person would live or die if the stick was broken. He would often enquire about the causes of sickness among close relatives. Occasionally, he would, as the healers prefer to put it, tell those present what the spirits had to say about them. The causes I heard most often were family quarrels, adultery, theft, delaying obligations such as performing a particular ceremony or returning debts, and breaking taboos, for example, cutting trees in the forbidden forest where spirits dwell, not observing prohibitions during a particular period, such as mourning, not observing the taboos which pertain to a certain role such as the mother or the father of the village, and so on. As the following cases demonstrate the sickness of a child is always attributed to the wrongdoings of its parents.

It was already dark when Bonifacio and I arrived at Camilus' house. We stood outside for a while and by coughing acknowledged our presence to those inside the house. When we entered, Bonifacio chewed betel nut which Camilus had provided for this occasion. Bonifacio held a whole ginger plant and chewed its root. He rubbed his eyes with ginger leaves to be able to see spirits. He approached the sick boy and pressed the ginger on his forehead, knees and chest. The leaves of the plant trembled everywhere except on the boy's chest. Bonifacio pinched the boy so intensely that he screamed and began to complain. But then, suddenly, a couple of pig's teeth fell from the boy's chest. Bonifacio again pressed the ginger to the boy's chest. This time the leaves were visibly shaking, a sure sign that the objects were removed. Bonifacio explained that the spirits of the house were angry with Camilus because he did not adequately feed his son. All present admitted that the boy certainly had not had much to eat during the last week, and assured the healer that they would take care of it.

Similar practices were recalled by the second healer, Tobias.

I came to do some work. August's little girl was sick. The day before everything began to trouble her. August sent me a message to come and see her. I arrived at their house at dark, I sat on the ladder for a while and then went in. I checked the skin of his little girl. I extracted something from her skin. Spirits had shot her with a cassowary bone. They had shot her skin, her belly. I held it and took it out. I told everyone that it was a small thing, that they should not worry about it. Why did the spirits shoot her? Because they were angry with August. While he was breaking his old house the spirits got angry with him as he was so slow. They thought that he was wasting time. So they made his daughter sick. When he finally completed his work they were satisfied. Now his child is fine. She walks around and screams. I told him that it was a small thing to do. In

these cases it is clear that the wrongdoings of adults can bring sickness both on themselves and on others who share the household with them. If people want to be cured, they should correct their wrongdoings. In the case of children, however, the healer looks only at the wrongdoings of the parents. The healer has to 'see' into the 'insideness' of people, either with the help of spirits or through people's own confession. But, as Ambonwari say, children do not have 'insideness' or understanding; they still lack Heart (wambung). Children are not conscious beings as they do not understand their actions. They do not know how to do things, they do not mourn at funerals, they eat food by themselves and do not think about its distribution. Children do things wrong all the time. Their activities are not the shared habits of Ambonwari people. Their ways of doing things are often not in accordance with the dictates of village life (im#nggan kay, 'the way of the village'). Lacking the collective and ancestral kay, and not being able to reflect upon them, they have no properly formed kay either. In other words, Ambonwari kay (being) is not simply given by birth, but has to be formed through the awareness of selfhood and by forcibly impressing 'proper personhood' (Poole 1982:103). Selfhood, however, goes beyond consciousness. It captures 'the awareness of an individual as an individual: as someone who can reflect on her or his experience of and position in society, of "being oneself"' (Cohen 1994:65). In Ambonwari this means the awareness of oneself as an Ambonwari male or female who is not an extension of his or her parents anymore but a fully responsible individual. Lacking both selfhood and personhood children are not yet individual Ambonwari beings, and from this point of view, we could say, they are 'non-beings'.

Children who have not passed through initiation or first menstruation rituals are not yet regarded as beings in their own right. At birth and while a mother is still breastfeeding, it is the parents who observe certain prohibitions, not their children. One might ask why are the spirits of the dead regarded as beings, while children who also have their own spirits are not? Why are children's spirits not beings before children are initiated? Unlike children, spirits of the dead have their 'insideness', and conceptually have the consciousness necessary for kay (being, way of existence) to exist. By being conscious ('with understanding') a person can not only perform different activities but can understand them and can form, preserve and transform his or her distinctive habits. Children's 'insideness', however, is not yet formed. Children's daily activities are an inseparable part of the activities of their parents. Children are extensions of their parents' beings. Even when they play, they are watched by their parents, older siblings or other relatives. Children help their parents with their daily tasks. The tasks are those of the parents and not those of the children. When playing, they often imitate the practices of adults. By learning the 'ways' (kay) through practices children construe their understanding; to have understanding then means that they know how to do things. Kay and wambung are united in their association.

Although a child is essential for the reproduction of Ambonwari life-world and although he or she constitutes a unique nexus of social relations reaching way beyond its parents, it is not enough that he or she is simply born. In the eyes of Ambonwari adults small children are 'non-beings' because they do not understand the vital relation between life and death, that is they do not even know how to eat, urinate, have sex, or defecate (Telban n.d.). To exist as an Ambonwari being a child has first to incorporate different dimensions of Ambonwari life-world. Of course, they are not just passive recipients of custom, practices and knowledge (see Toren 1993). Through their own practices and their own understanding, children also induce changes in their parents' (and other adults') practices and understandings. We might say that not only beings influence 'non-beings' but that 'non-beings' too influence beings.

### **Negation as a source of being**

The ability to negate and to formulate the differences between what is and what is not refers to that activity which is called consciousness (wambung). Only the being which questions its own being can define itself. Only through negation can being be revealed.

The acts of negation formed an important part in Sartre's work. Thus in *Being and Nothingness* he writes: 'What being will be must of necessity arise on the basis of what it is not. Whatever being is, it will allow this formulation: "Being is that and outside of that, nothing."' (1956:36, see

also 39). And again later on, he says: 'The necessary condition for our saying not is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunt being... [N]on-being is not the opposite of being; it is its contradiction. This implies that logically nothingness is subsequent to being since it is being, first posited, then denied' (ibid.:43-4, 47). In *The Psychology of Imagination* Sartre's nothingness assumes four different forms: non-existence, absence, existence elsewhere, 'neutrality' of neither existing nor not existing (1950:20, see also Casey 1981:145-6). In terms of both death and cosmological non-existence, Sartre's view is hard to be applied to the Ambonwari conceptualization of their life-world. Ambonwari cosmology generates 'a metamorphosis of reality' (Ricoeur 1981:171). 'Absence and presence are subclasses of reality... non-existence as unreality is opposed both to absence and to presence as reality. Therefore, a theory of absence cannot be extended to a theory of unreality' (ibid.). In short, while for Sartre death means non-existence, for Ambonwari it means existence elsewhere. A dead Ambonwari person has not ceased to exist but exists as the other, acknowledging his or her presence through hither and thither actual appearance. People say that they had seen spirits of the dead, that they had heard their voices, that their canoes were shaken by ghosts of recently deceased, that spirits of the dead make noises on the roof or the floor of the house where they used to live. Up until now I inferred two kinds of negation in Ambonwari cosmology: the first, in regard to death, was a negation of sameness inside one and the same cosmological oneness. The dead are neither 'non-beings' nor are they non-existent.<sup>8</sup> They belong to the domain of otherness. Ambonwari would say that such other beings exist 'elsewhere' (in death, over the 'bridge'). As a positive, *ma-* assumes an implicit negation not of the actual presence of the object or subject, but the negation of sameness. Like Kuranko of Sierra Leone, Ambonwari speak of their dead, especially of those recently deceased, not as remote abstractions but as living presences (Jackson 1989:67).

The second negation is the negation of being a person, and this is related to the absence of 'insideness' in children. Ambonwari say that their children are not conscious beings, that they have no understanding. Since for Ambonwari 'insideness' is inseparable from being (*kay*), they treat their children as nonconscious beings, as not yet being oneselves, who exist only as the consequence of their parents' consciousness, that is, as the extension of their parents' beings. Although very fond of their children, Ambonwari people 'dismiss' them, saying that they have no consciousness (*mbu wambung kaya*, lit. 'they have no Heart') that they just live (*mbu kambra mbu kaykan*, lit. 'they are useless'). Before examining *kaya* (no, not), let me stay with the second negation a moment longer. *Kambra*, which Ambonwari translate with a Tok Pisin term *nating* (nothing, empty, worthless, useless, just, only, simply, merely, for no reason), in my opinion derives from *ka-(a)mbra* which means 'should-ripen' ('ripening being') or 'should-make fire' ('burning being'). The translation is well suited to something unfinished (not 'ripe') or something only fit to be burned. Because they lack wholeness, because something is absent, such objects and subjects are referred to as being *nating*. *Kambra* does not mean, then, nothingness but something that is incomplete or not yet achieved. It either becomes (ripens to) 'something' (*ka-(a)ngg#n-#ng*, lit. 'should-give-ness') or vanishes (is burned) into non-existence, into *kaya*. For example, people talk about 'plain sago jelly' as 'nothing pudding' or 'just pudding' (*kambra karis*), which means that it is plain, there is no meat on the top. There is the absence of that which gives value to the pudding. A dead body is called 'skin nothing' (*kambra ar#m*) which means that there is just skin, that the skin lacks something. There is the absence of a spirit, which together with *wambung* and *kay* has left the skin. When someone talks with no intention of influencing others, for no real reason, or is simply giving a commentary, people say 'he has just talked', 'he has talked nothing' (*m#n kambra m#n kus#r*). All the time one hears people saying 'nothing talk' (*kambra mariawk*) to each other when they want to emphasize that everything is all right, that what the others said or did was fine and that there is no need for apology. So, 'nothing talk' or 'just talk' is unfounded rumour, aimless and without threat (see Mihalic 1971:140). It lacks the argumentative and directed significance, in both positive and negative sense, characteristic of talking in general. *Kambra* can only exist in relation to, and as a consequence of, a previously known 'something', for the existence of which consciousness (*wambung*) and being (*kay*) are

essential. Kambra, emphasizing the absence of the core, is negation from the perspective of what being can and should be, and in the case of children will be later.

The third kind of negation is effected by using the word *kay-a* (no, not, 'no-being'). It does not refer to 'non-being' but to absolute non-presence and absolute non-existence. If there is 'nobody' in the village, people say 'no people' (*yarmas kaya*); people conclude their stories by saying 'it's finished' (*mba kaya*, lit. 'enough no-more'); if they have no food or no pudding in their house they say 'no food' (*am#ng kaya*) or 'no pudding' (*karis kaya*); when people say that children have 'no Heart' (*wambung kaya*) they mean that they are not conscious, that they lack understanding.<sup>9</sup> *Kaya* means absence in its totality or wholeness. The dead are not non-existent. They exist as others. Non-existence at the collective, cosmological level implies non-existence of Ambonwari life-world. Avoiding this is the main concern of Ambonwari men when performing male initiation rituals.

### Postmortem initiation

Healers and healing ceremonies deal with two dimensions of the Ambonwari life-world: one of the living, and the other of the spirits. Healers treat children as not yet formed Ambonwari selves. They ascribe responsibility for the child's sickness not to the child itself, but to its parents. Before children can be treated by healers as individual persons or 'selves', they have to become Ambonwari beings, incorporated into the Ambonwari life-world (when healers treat people from other villages these people are also beings -- though not Ambonwari beings -- incorporated into their own life-world). To enter this world and to sustain it Ambonwari people perform initiation rituals.

For Ambonwari the most salient feature of 'the way of the village' (*im#nggan kay*) is that it embodies and reproduces 'the way of the ancestors' (*kupamb#n kay*). This phrase is often used to refer specifically to those practices which anthropologists refer to as ritual. Amongst these paradigms of the 'ancestral way' are male and female initiation rituals. For Ambonwari, there is no doubt that it is the male initiation ritual which exemplifies 'the way of the ancestors' in its purest form. This ritual involves more people, more time and more resources than any other. It implicates all the most powerful spirits, the most important values, and aims to achieve the most important of ends -- the re-production of ancestral *kay* both in individuals and in the village as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

In presenting a case of postmortem initiation of a male baby, I argue that the main concern of initiation is to bring a 'non-being' into Ambonwari being. In this, initiation is distinct from other ceremonies which deal primarily with people and spirits who already 'embody' Ambonwariness. As I was asked to preserve the secrets of several stories, objects and activities of the main initiation ritual, I present here only a one-day postmortem initiation ritual, emphasizing the pre-liminal period which, though short, is of extreme importance.

Sunggunmari was just a month old when he died on November 28th, 1990. The baby's father was publicly unknown. Some said that he died long ago. Sunggunmari's mother stayed with her lineage and the baby was named by his classificatory mother's brother (mother's father's brother's son who was at the same time mother's mother's sister's son), instead of by his father or his father's brothers. As Sunggunmari had no paternal lineage, his *akay* (mother's father's brother) also acted as *wasamari* (father's father or father's father's brother). Everyone in the house stayed awake the whole night. There were not many visitors.

In the morning, the baby's classificatory mother's brother covered himself with *andaypa* (a woven hood) and carried the body to the men's house.<sup>11</sup> If the boy's father had been known he would have been carried either by *wasamari* (father's father) and followed by *away* (mother's brother), or the father's father would have led the procession and the mother's brother would have carried the body. In either case, both mother and father would have stayed in the house. In an ordinary initiation a child himself would be covered with *andaypa* and in this way protected from the eyes of people and spirits who could harm him on his way to the men's house. Because

Sunggunmari died as an extension of his mother, his 'mother's brother' had to cover himself and had to carry the boy's body as his own extension, as 'himself'.

Someone beat a slit drum in the men's house. 'Mother's brother' carried a bundle of burning firewood which was folded in coconut leaves and tied with a vine. By following the smoke the boy's spirit was able to follow the procession and find its way to the men's house. They circled the men's house, first outside and then inside. Everyone was purified by rubbing their hands with grass and by throwing it onto the roof of the men's house. Someone took red clay and made a mark, a straight horizontal line, first on the baby's forehead and then on everyone else's. People explained that this was a substitution for the skin-cutting ceremony. The man who took the role of 'father's father' took off the andaypa and ate sago pudding brought into the men's house by the boy's maternal lineage.

After staying less than two hours in the men's house, people returned to their houses and took the body to the village cemetery. They said that the boy's spirit had left his parent's house and was now staying in the men's house. During that night a man who had gone hunting returned to the village saying that he saw a spirit of a boy on one of the forest paths. The spirit looked at him and blew the bulb in his torch. The man returned to the village, changed the bulb, and went into the forest again. Again, he encountered the spirit of the dead boy but was careful not to point his torch at him. The same night some younger men saw light and small bubbles on the surface of the water in the creek near the place where the baby had been buried. They said that the boy's spirit had appeared as a crocodile. All these encounters with the boy's spirit were proof that he had become an independent Ambonwari being, albeit only a spirit being. For several days no one washed in the creek at the place where the bubbles had been seen. During the following months the boy's relatives observed the taboos and performed the activities which follow ordinary initiation, as well as those which pertain to the mourning period.

It is obvious that it would not make any sense to perform the postmortem initiation if the purpose of initiation was simply a transformation from boys to men, from children to adults. Gardner has rightly argued that 'the distinction between initiated and uninitiated does not define the distinction between boy and man' (1983:356). The purpose of initiation is rather that boys become Ambonwari beings, that they enter Ambonwariness, and that the Ambonwari life-world reproduces itself. Though they saved Sunggunmari's spirit, they lost him as a person who could continue their lineage, with all the relevant relationships and practices, on this side of the 'bridge'. They also lost one of their future 'dogs', as Ambonwari call the fierce young men who can fight and protect the village (cf. Harrison 1985:420, 1993:102). It is evident that it was necessary to make Sunggunmari an Ambonwari, not simply because his clansmen wanted him to exist forever, but because they could use him to show the spirits and other villagers that they were prepared to stay and live in Ambonwari as Ambonwari. Sunggunmari's clan joined Ambonwari only three or four generations ago, after their village was decimated by sickness. Though they had abandoned their villages and their language, some of the old men had considered returning to their old place. When they tried to build a new men's house there, putting a pig's head into it for the recognition of their old spirits, they were again struck by several deaths. Now, by bringing Sunggunmari to the men's house in Ambonwari village, they demonstrated that they accepted their new identity as Ambonwari.

In an ordinary initiation ritual several boys from different households are initiated at the same time. They form a group of six or more who will always remember the time they have shared during their mutual period of seclusion. Every boy is accompanied by his own attendants. An initiate (called sar-wapuk, a 'sitting-boy' or a 'held-boy') is actually never left in danger of falling into a state of abandonment. First of all he is guided and protected by his wasamari (father's father), warimbar ('dancing partner'), and namesake. These men are more than merely representatives of the initiate. They 'are', in fact, the boy himself (Telban 1994:107). In the pre-liminal stage the initiate is still a 'non-being' who, because of his separation from those of whom he is an extension, is covered with the hood for protection from malevolent spirits. He is also protected by his mother's brother who replaces the mother whose extension the boy is. The mother's brother, however, also becomes the main figure in the aggressive separation of the boy

from his mother. Once the boy is brought to the men's house, his hood is removed and the boy begins to be treated as an independent Ambonwari being. The aggressiveness and violence in a male initiation rituals assist the purpose of strengthening the boys. The initiators threaten their boys: 'Are you women or what? We will make you strong!' Ambonwari men should not be soft. Mother's brothers threaten the boys by shouting at them that they did not listen to their mothers and did not help them when they were asked to do so. They beat them with sticks and throw pieces of firewood at them, saying: 'When your mother gave birth to you she also felt pain'. Then the mother's brothers feel sorry for their nephews and call out for food to be prepared for the boys. The only real and absolute protection that a boy on this occasion gets is from those who 'are' who he is (father's father, dancing partner, namesake). Therefore, he is not an extension anymore. From the moment when father's father removed the boy's hood and took it home, the boy begins his life as an Ambonwari being. Ambonwari initiation is an 'ontological transformation' (Turner 1967:101), it is 'a change in being' (ibid.:102; Durkheim 1915:39). It is the beginning of being oneself. Initiation means cutting off of a 'non-being' which exists only as being-of-parents in favour of a being as being-oneself, the 'seed' of which is already there, in one and the same person.

The initiators now treat a boy as a being, they concentrate on his kay ('way of doing things') and punish his ignorance. They question his understanding (wambung) and laugh at his simplicity and stupidity. Only those who 'are' who he is comfort him and share his pain by allowing themselves to be beaten and harassed. When his skin is scarified his dancing partner (warimbar) offers his own skin too.<sup>12</sup>

It would be incorrect to assume that a boy only needs to become separated from his mother and his dependence upon her, from her body fluids and so on, as many have argued in their studies of New Guinea male initiation rituals. It is true that the aggressiveness of the mother's brother is shocking and hurtful. But for a boy the absence of his father is of equal significance. Being also an extension of his father, the boy has to sever this connection, and through the embodiment of practices and understanding to 'become' a paternal grandfather, who he 'is' anyhow (see Telban 1994). Only in this way will he become a father of a son who will be a 'brother' of his father. The initiate will thus become a 'father' of his own father and be able to secure the continuation of the lineage, clan and Ambonwari life-world. In other words, a man takes over his paternal grandfather's identity (through his names, his marriage paths and by calling him 'elder brother'). The generation of fathers is followed by the generation of sons and then, again, by the generation of fathers. It is only in relation to the past that this duality can be suppressed and 'oneness' thereby constituted. Overall, then, the patrilineage can perpetuate itself only on condition that it divides its 'oneness'; yet the only reason for dividing itself is to maintain its 'oneness' (ibid.). The male initiation ritual is, like the first menstruation ritual concerned with the perpetual dimension of Ambonwariness. It is called kupamb#n kay ('the way of the ancestors/older brothers/big men'), ark#n kay ('the way of grandparents'), or iman(bas) kay ('the way of the man's house(s)'). Ambonwari men emphasize that the boys give the purpose to the whole initiation ritual. They are the future of the village.<sup>13</sup> If Ambonwari men had not brought their children into a men's house their children's spirits would have moved aimlessly, without identities, without homes, without any attachment to the past and to their ancestors and without any expectations for the future. It would be as if they had never existed. On individual level the male initiation ritual thus cancels the possibilities of boys remaining 'non-beings' or of them becoming some other beings (of a neighbouring village, for example). Likewise, on the village level, the male initiation ritual cancels the possibilities of falling into cosmological non-existence.

Initiation, which consists of up to six months of seclusion following several months of preparation, does not mimic the death and rebirth of Ambonwari boys, but the beginning of the cosmos. Boys are brought to the men's house as 'non-beings' (e.g. not yet selves and not yet Ambonwari persons), as the many possibilities in the cosmogonic event.<sup>14</sup> However, once in the men's house, the children are not possibilities any more, or better, they are 'thrown' into a definite possibility. They are treated as beings who are in a process of becoming the Ambonwari

beings. The essence of Ambonwari existence is always 'being-towards-being' which can be achieved only through the 'being-towards-beginning' mode of existence.<sup>15</sup> The male and female initiation rituals in Ambonwari address and depict this core of Ambonwari existence. As even dead boys can be initiated its concern is rather with the re-creation of Ambonwari life-world, which includes both the living and the dead. The initiation ritual does not represent a 'bridge' between two ways of existence, between death and birth, for example. It is the beginning, a cosmogonic event, 'an image of the cosmos as it is not yet but which none the less is on the way to be' (Mimica 1988:78). There should be no mistakes in the performance. If there were, people say, the whole village could be destroyed. This would mean the end of kupamb#n kay and im#nggan kay, the end of both their life and their death, the end of Ambonwariness. For Ambonwari, that would mean that the whole world of others would end as well. Ambonwari spirits are not sufficient for the preservation of Ambonwari existence. Their kay depends on relationships with, and kay of, the living. Only through life can death exist and have a meaning and vice versa.

According to van Gennep, the idea of symbolic death and rebirth is central to rites of passage. It was present, for example, in the initiation rituals of Australian and African societies (1960:75, 81), and was characteristic of Christianity, which borrowed substantially from Egyptian, Syrian, Asiatic, and Greek religions (ibid.:88, 91). After presenting the examples of initiation to the 'fraternity of Isis' and rites of the cult of Attis, he concluded, 'death, the transition, and resurrection also constitute an element in ceremonies of pregnancy, childbirth, initiation into societies with no agricultural purpose, betrothal, marriage, and funerals' (ibid.). Similarly, van Gennep saw elements of death and rebirth in the inauguration of any kind of ritual specialist. Symbolically undergoing the process of death and rebirth was reported for shamans, priests, magicians, sorcerers and the like from different parts of the world (ibid.:108-110). This contrasts with the way two Ambonwari healers, Bonifacio in particular, acquired their power and their ability to assume a mediating role between people and spirits. Healers in Ambonwari did not 'symbolically die' during the time when they achieved their powers, but simply traversed the space, forth and back, between the two dimensions of the same life-world. As dreaming, for Ambonwari, does not refer to 'symbolic death' so neither do other ways of traversing the space between people and spirits. Bonifacio had to enter the Ambonwari life-world first, the world of life and death, before he was able freely to traverse the space between people and spirits. He had to wait for his own initiation before he began to perform the healing rituals. To gain control over 'otherness' (as the clan members in many ways do in regard to their own powerful spirits of their clan and their land) does not yet mean to communicate freely and negotiate with spirits in their daily interaction with people. Only healers achieved this ability.

Interpreting Iteanu's (1983) work on the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea in a recent comparative study of initiation and other rituals, Bloch says that: 'In the initiation hut the children are told that by now they too have become spirits of the dead. This is because becoming a spirit is what the Orokaiva believe happens after death and the children have gone through a process which mimics their "death"...In the initiation huts the initiates are thus symbolically dead and can therefore be considered to have become spirits' (1992:9). Bloch, like Turner, van Gennep and others before him, maintains that 'the representation of life in rituals begins with a complete inversion of everyday understanding...instead of birth and growth leading to a successful existence, it is weakening and death which lead to a successful existence' (ibid.:4). In Ambonwari it seems there is no need to mimic the death of initiates, because initiation means that, by becoming Ambonwari beings, death becomes possible for the boys; death can now be achieved. Bloch argues that the initiate returns from a ritual as a changed, permanently transcendental person to the world of which he previously was a part. In Ambonwari it seems rather that after initiation the initiate enters the world of which he, as a 'non-being', previously was not a part. From then on he will be able to enter the men's house and establish his relationships not only with the spirits of the dead but with the spirits of the clan and of the land as well as with others. Of course, his ability to communicate and negotiate with the spirits lacks that intimacy which the healers achieved. What is important, however, is that the initiated boy will now be able to die as an Ambonwari being.

The notion of 'symbolic death' becomes problematic in the conceptualization of Ambonwari life-world, and I hesitate to apply it to their initiation rituals. First, it would suggest that the male initiation ritual refers to a 'concept' which might be termed 'death-towards-being' or 'otherness-towards-sameness'. In Ambonwari initiation, children are first 'non-beings' (on their way to the men's house) and immediately afterwards they are beings (recognized as such by the men and the spirits within the men's house). By becoming Ambonwari beings they also enter the dimension of their 'others', that is, of their dead. It is not the death as such, but the limen between the two dimensions of the same life-world to which attention is paid in processes such as male initiation ritual, becoming a healer or being sick. Second, if we look from the perspective of the whole, that is Ambonwariness in its totality, we can note that it is not simply death which brings about the end of Ambonwari life-world. If boys remained uninitiated, for example, even if not dead, they would endanger the existence of Ambonwari life-world. Ambonwariness could fall into non-existence. The total destruction of Ambonwariness would be, if not replaced by some other life-world, a fall into a chaotic world, similar to the one which existed before the Ambonwari ancestors formed the village. Before its formation these ancestors lived, but not as Ambonwari beings. Therefore, I argue, on the collective level it is the negation of non-existence which is at the core of a male initiation ritual from its beginning, and not 'symbolic death' followed by 'rebirth' of new Ambonwari men.

### Time, death and oneness

The seeming inversion of life and death in ritual has led many analysts to observe that ritual is concerned also with a reversed representation of time. For Ambonwari, the male initiation ritual creates the possibility of death and of eternity, rather than the symbolic reversal of time. Among Ambonwari death stands neither for the beginning nor for the end. It also does not mean non-existence, 'death and life are truly a part of one and the same "wheel" of existence' (Mimica 1993:91). Death means existence as otherness, that is as both the other being and one who lives elsewhere. If an Ambonwari being 'embodies' Ambonwariness, as I have already argued, it means that Ambonwari cosmology comes into existence at the same time as Ambonwari beings come into existence. Beginning of being is also beginning of 'non-being', beginning of life is also beginning of death, beginning of affirmation is also beginning of negation. From the cosmogonic perspective, with which male initiation ritual is concerned, death does not come before life nor does it come after life. Therefore, death cannot serve as a proof for the reversibility of time. Ritual is *kay*, the way of being Ambonwari, the practice of 'being-towards-being'. It has its beginning, but not its end. As its beginning is an absolute beginning, the practice and its intrinsic temporality can neither be reversed nor cyclicized.

For Ambonwari one's dead father has joined the cosmological oneness of Ambonwari ancestors (which is also here and now), while at the same time he is present as a ghost, as the other. He remains one's contemporary and not simply a predecessor. Moreover, he is also cosmologically 're-embodied' and most obviously represented, by the use of kin terms, marriage paths and names, in his patrilineal grandson. Therefore, he is also a successor. Instead of 'reversal of time' or 'cyclical time' (the two not being the same, see Barnes 1974; Ingold 1986), Ambonwari cosmology promotes the unification, in which being eternal has not much to do with the 'direction' of time as such, but with everlasting now, with duration in a single state of being (Mimica 1988:78) or, we could say, with duration in a single process of 'being-towards-being'. The spirits of the dead, or 'the others', are an inseparable part of this cosmological oneness. Death displaces people from sameness into otherness inside the same oneness, rather than placing them simply into the past. As death is not in ontological opposition to the process of life (Mimica 1988:99) but intrinsic to it, initiates have to 'embody' both at once. Until they are initiated, boys as 'non-beings' cannot join their ancestors nor their successors, threatening the disappearance of the Ambonwari cosmos, of Ambonwariness. By providing life, male initiation rituals also provide beings with death and secure eternity of Ambonwari life-world.

The individual deaths of children, most dramatic and painful for their closest kin, can be 'remedied' by postmortem initiation and the awareness that the ghost of a child will not vanish

but will be around as an Ambonwari other. As boys are not only the future Ambonwari, but also future heirs of clans and lineages, death is meaningful also on a more immediate scale. This became apparent when several deaths struck one small lineage during my stay. When his last son died, Murimari was overcome by grief and pleaded for the deaths of his daughters instead of his son. During the following months he hoped that he would be able to adopt a son, but no one was prepared to give him one. Shortly afterwards Murimari himself got sick and died. His lineage became extinct. Other clan members took the name of the lineage and kept it. Just before my departure, people began to talk about the possibility of 'sending' one of their boys to build his own house under the name of Murimari's lineage and thus to re-create it.

Murimari's ghost would have been very pleased, for it meant that he could survive as a being of his lineage, and not simply as an aspect of Ambonwari oneness. Initiation ritual connects initiates with the other dimension of their life-world, that is with spirits. Connected also with this other dimension are those who are sick or those who make rain-stopping rites, or the two healers when performing their treatments. While dreaming, every person's spirit traverses the 'bridge' between sameness and otherness, between life and death. Entering the world of spirits, however, is not the only means of initiation ritual. In the male initiation ritual ka- and ma-, 'same' and 'other', the living and the dead, merge into oneness, while in a healing rite healers strive to keep them apart. The aim of a male initiation ritual is to capture this entire temporality and historicity in the form of oneness, i.e. Ambonwariness. Children are both the products and producers of such a perpetuation. Their age does not matter as long as they serve the purpose of Ambonwari society which uses them for their own existence. If we see kay as a way of becoming as well as a way of being, we should not forget that this means that it is also a way of a being whose being passes away. As long as becoming 'wins' over passing away, Ambonwari will not fall into non-existence.

## Conclusion

The focus of Ambonwari ritual is kay. In the case of a healing ritual this means that healers try to restore the kay of a person to its previous condition. As the kay of an individual incorporates different collective kay, sickness also becomes a collective issue (of household or lineage, for example), incorporating past and present relationships, including those with their own familiar spirits. In the case of uninitiated children, however, Ambonwari healers address only the wrongdoings and kay of their parents. Children are not yet Ambonwari beings.

Male initiation ritual, on the other hand, is concerned with the formation of beings from 'non-beings' and with the re-formation of the Ambonwari cosmos. In all these cases, what matters is that embodied kay is not something that one simply possesses (like knowledge), but something that one is (Bourdieu 1990:73, see also Turner 1967:102). The central limen between being and 'non-being' is neither the one between adulthood and childhood, nor the one between life and death, but the one between being Ambonwari and not being Ambonwari, between the existence of Ambonwari life-world and its non-existence. That is why Ambonwari also perform rituals on masks, canoes and other carvings when they want them to be spirit-things and not simply useless pieces of wood. They have to install them with 'insideness', give them names, and establish relationships with them. The difference between life and death is the one between sameness and otherness inside one and the same cosmological life-world. Only the male and female initiation rituals initiate beings into this life-world.

By looking at the pre-liminal period of a male initiation ritual, I have shown that the separation of a boy from his parents means that a boy is cut off from the being of which he was a part and which gave him life and existence. Ambonwari discourse deals with such a state of 'non-being', by simply saying that a child has no wambung ('insideness'), no kay and that he or she is 'nothing' or 'nobody'. The initiate cannot symbolically die in the pre-liminal period because he does not exist as an Ambonwari being. What is happening in the men's house, when he is treated as a being is that death becomes possible for initiates, not that initiates are symbolically killed. For a male Ambonwari, autonomous being is only possible after forcible separation from parents. Prior to this, a boy is a mere extension of his parents, lacking selfhood, agency and responsibility.

Lacking Ambonwariness, children cannot die, nor can they join ancestors across the 'bridge' which links living and dead. In this sense, death as an association with ancestors becomes possible only for initiated children. A negation of life, however, should not be equated simply with death. To do so would mean disregarding the wholeness of Ambonwari cosmology.

Ambonwari healers and healing ceremonies, though being part of Ambonwari cosmology, do not address the cosmological aspects of non-existence. They address living and dead, people and spirits, who are both already inside their cosmological world. People say that those healing practices which are part of medical treatment in Hospitals and Health Centres are powerful. But they cannot help Ambonwari people when they are seriously sick, that is when they have so-called 'custom sickness', because medical doctors do not share and do not address the Ambonwari life-world of the living and spirits, while other healers from other Papua New Guinea areas may do so. Ambonwari healing practices do not, however, deal with the procedure which makes children into Ambonwari beings. While healing ceremonies are concerned with a formed Ambonwari being, or with an extension of such a being in the case of children, the initiation ritual is concerned with the making of such a being. This initiated being, however, should not be understood as the final inscribed outcome, or the embodiment of Ambonwariness as something permanent and unchangeable. On the contrary, this being should be seen as a continuous becoming 'wherein forms themselves are generated' (Ingold 1993:157). Embodied in people's understanding, feelings and practices is the conception of society 'based less on the idea of groups -- within which the individual becomes merged with his fellows -- than on the idea' not only of a structure but of a continuous process of 'interlocking, balanced, role-complementarities' (Gell 1975:210). The initiates carry Ambonwariness along with all pertaining cosmological, social and hierarchical characteristics, into the open future. The healing ritual has no such aims, but addresses two dimensions of that life-world in which both people and spirits dwell as consociates who share their intersubjective time. Spirits, dealt with in healing ritual, are in a coeval relation to people. Moreover, healing rituals do not address the village as a cosmological whole, but particular extended families. The initiation ritual, on the other hand, addresses both predecessors and successors, who in everyday life do not share intersubjective time with the collective present, yet are indispensable in the process of formation, preservation and continuation of historicity and the life-world of which present day beings are both creations and creators.

## Notes

1 The fieldwork in Ambonwari was conducted between September 1990 and March 1992 while I was a Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University. I am most grateful for the scholarship and other funding which this University provided and to everyone in the department for their care and support. My greatest debt, of course, is to everyone from Ambonwari, and in the case of this paper, to Bonifacio Marmi Sakmari and Tobias Yangi Akawi in particular. Maia Green corrected some of my English and provided me with some useful suggestions for improvement of this paper. I am particularly thankful to my Ph.D. supervisors Don Gardner and Michael Young for many years of friendship, as well as for comments on this article. Pete Gow, Simon Harrison and referees for Oceania also read an earlier version and commented upon it. The paper was written during my tenure of a Leach/RAI Fellowship at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, and was presented there as the Leach/RAI seminar in December 1995. In 1996 I also presented it at the Universities of Aarhus and Cambridge. Throughout the text I use the phoneme [#] which is heard as [a] in 'about' or as the vowel in 'sir'; the other phoneme is [ng] representing a nasal [n], heard something like the ending in 'thing' .

2 In this paper I am not concerned with Ambonwari female initiation rituals. I discuss the first menstruation ritual in Telban (1994).

3 Due to friendly relationships with their neighbours during the time of my fieldwork, sorcery accusations in Ambonwari were almost nonexistent (but see Tuzin 1974 for the Ilahita Arapesh). There were only a couple of cases when an old Ambonwari man who was very powerful (on both a hierarchical and a personal level) was gossiped about as a possible sorcerer. No one was

actually accused of sorcery, neither in the case of sickness nor in the case of death. Even the stories about sorcery were so removed in time that only the oldest people were able to recall them. They referred to sorcery by *kaprin kay*, translating *kapri* with 'black power' and 'poison'. The well known sorcery called *sangguma* in Tok Pisin had almost no meaning for Ambonwari people, who do not have a vernacular term for it. Some younger men criticizing the unnecessary gossip of fellow villagers, likened *sangguma* to 'talk behind one's back'.

4 While Alfred Gell was among the Umeda of West Sepik Province in 1969-70, people told him that a similar technique was a recent importation (Gell 1975:30). The practitioners from the neighbouring Punda, unlike Tobias and Bonifacio, did not charge for their services.

5 Some fifty years ago Ambonwari did not have healers as they do today. They had a kind of shaman (see Bateson 1932:414-427). Tobias explained the difference between himself and these healers in the following way: In the past all old men walked around together with spirits. They kept these spirit-stones in a basket. A man held this stone, chewed betel nut and began to shiver and tremble. In such a state he would remove all these objects from under the patient's skin. The stones, shells, and teeth would just fall out. He would not pull them out as I do. The power of the spirit-stone would do it. We called these stones 'spirits who want to take sickness away' (*mari aprarin saki*; *mari* = sickness; *apra* = come, take; *saki* = male bush spirit). Then the healer would take ginger leaves and rub the sick person all over his or her body. I do not have such a stone, I have to pull these things out by myself.

6 When two things are the same (two sweet potatoes or two brothers, for example) the 'other' is referred to as 'another one' (*ma-pmban*, lit. 'the other one'), while the 'other' when two things are different (a sweet potato and a bush knife, for example) is called *ma-sand#k#n* ('the other-sits-does/becomes'). People say: 'come another time', *mi masamb#n makuriyara*, where *ma-samb#n* means 'other-later/after'. In spatial terms the same prefix is used to distinguish the otherness of the place: 'he went to some other landing place', *m#n maporan m#n kurar*, in which *ma-poran* means 'other landing place'. This prefix is probably a good indication that spatiality is included, incorporated or inscribed in a person and his or her activities. The 'other' is 'upriver', he or she has spatiality already in his or her being, like those 'downriver' have theirs.

7 The Ambonwari term for a male being (either human or spirit) is *pan-mari* which could be translated as 'very-mortal', 'very-other', 'very-old' or even 'very-sick'. The suffix *-mari* is the most common suffix in both male names (e.g. *Sak-mari*) and masculine nouns (e.g. *apan-mari*, 'widower'). The term for a female being is *awkun-ma* for which, despite many speculations with my Ambonwari friends, I could not find the meaning. Nevertheless, the suffix *-ma* is again typical for both female names (e.g. *Kambon-ma*) and feminine nouns (e.g. *saki-ma*, 'female bush spirit').

8 Existence means concrete being here and now. As contrasted with existence, being is all-embracing and objective rather than individual and subjective (Sartre 1956).

9 The word *kaya* (no, not) is among the culturally and linguistically related Yimas, formulated as *kayak* (Foley 1991:117). Foley says that '[t]his actually means 'don't have', so that the postposition *kantk-* 'with' used in the corresponding positive forms is lacking with *kayak*' (1991:263). Like the Yimas, the Ambonwari do not have a verb for 'to have' but use *ngand#k* ('with') instead. *Kaya* is also not a verb. By translating it just with 'don't have', for which *kaya* is also used, we actually miss its existential meaning which emphasizes the closeness of the relationship between two subjects or between a subject and an object, or between two objects. *Kaya* means 'no-being', the non-existence of something or somebody rather than just 'not-having'.

10 One could ask, of course, why then and how it was possible that the male initiation rituals in Ambonwari were suspended for twenty years or more. Upon arrival of missionaries in the early fifties, who just visited the village but did not stay, Ambonwari not only temporarily abandoned the male initiation rituals but even took their most precious secret objects to a nearby forest to decay in a newly built hut. They were prepared to abandon Ambonwariness and 'exchange' it for some other life-world which, through embodiment of different ways of doing things and different

ancestry, promised a prosperous life. This, however, did not happen, and Ambonwari revitalized their rituals and their spirits.

11 Andaypa, a woven hood made of grass, is used in all important rites which accompany birth, first menstruation, initiation, and death. It also covers young women while walking around during the first months of their marriage. Andaypa also means a shell of a turtle and protects a new born baby from spirits. It protects a widow from the spirit of her dead husband and, at the same time, reduces her influence on the outside world. By protecting young women from the views of others, it also keeps shame off the skin. Andaypa, which are made in different sizes, also protect from rain, sun and cold.

12 During ritual scarification among Iatmul an initiate lies on his mother's brother (Bateson 1958). Among Chambri an initiate lies on a person who is in a special relationship with the initiate and is called tsambunwuro (Gewertz 1982). This relationship concurs with Ambonwari war#mbar, 'dancing partner' (see Telban 1994). In Tok Pisin this relationship is among both Chambri and Ambonwari called poroman.

13 Likewise, a girl gives the purpose to the whole female initiation ritual. She is the future of the village. I would argue that these two rituals complement each other. In a men's house the men tell the boys what they can and what they cannot do and say to women. When a young girl is secluded during her first menstruation ritual she is also told what she can and what she cannot do and say to men. Ambonwariness as oneness includes both male and female dimensions of their life-world.

14 Merleau-Ponty writes: '[T]o be born is both to be born of the world and to be born into the world. The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to infinite number of possibilities' (1962:453). Ambonwari children are already 'acted upon' during their childhood and they 'embody' Ambonwariness just by being 'of the world'. Their 'infinite number of possibilities', however, is during the initiation ritual, in cosmological terms, reduced to a single notion of becoming Ambonwari beings.

15 In his review article of James Weiner's book *The Empty Place*, Mimica says: 'Women, and through them men as maternal uncles, are the possessors of procreation. As fathers, men incessantly have to make their children their own by means of payments, since the maternal matrix of procreation is inalienably the dominant one. Men as fathers do not have...their own original progenerativity to equal the feminine power of procreativity...[W]ith regard to their 'Being-towards-the-beginning', for men cannot take themselves for granted; they have to ardently apply themselves to the task of self-reproduction through children' (1993:88). Ambonwari men try to secure that their children become beings on their own. Once a person is an Ambonwari being, he or she aims to produce new Ambonwari beings. These new beings will then preserve all the previous beings. Ambonwari cosmology is likewise being-towards-being oriented without any obsession with some kind of 'entropy' or millenarian thought. Therefore, from the local perspective, Ambonwari are not seized by a global fear of the end of the world but are concerned with their own village and the preservation of 'the way of the village'. The male initiation ritual is also a preventive measure to achieve such a preservation.

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