

# **ALL THINGS TROBRIAND**

**A portrait of Dr. G. J. M. (Fred) Gerrits'  
Trobriand Island collections, 1968 to 1972**

**Volume I**

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## Abstract

Dr. G.J.M. Gerrits was stationed on the Trobriand Islands as the Medical Officer between 1968 and 1971. In this period he collected approximately 3000 artefacts from the Trobriand Islands and the surrounding region. Approximately two-thirds of these objects are presently held in museums in Europe, Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The study places Gerrits' collection into a historical context of Trobriand collecting encounters and gains insights into ethnographic collection formation, considering various aspects of collecting. These include a collector's multiple motives (Grijp, 2006), the desire to collect (complete) series of objects and unique pieces (Baudrillard 1994, Elsner and Cardinal, 1994) and differences between stable and mobile collecting (O'Hanlon, 2000: 15). The study utilises Gerrits' documentation, the collections of artefacts and photographs, conversations with Gerrits, Trobriand Islanders and other collectors, and draws on the literature on collecting research and publications containing information on Trobriand Island contact history.

Being situated in the 1960s and 1970s, this work contributes an alternative perspective to collecting research which mainly thematises early 20th century and earlier collections. Also, ethnographic collecting has so far hardly been addressed within the extended body of Trobriand Island research. This study helps fill this gap and hopes to inspire further research into Trobriand collecting history.

Gerrits is shown to be probably the only collector within Trobriand collecting who established a comprehensive and well documented ethnographic collection. He included those Western influences which he perceived as being creative and innovative, with specific differences between his collections of artefact and photographs. Two key factors in shaping the

collection are his wish to establish a comprehensive ethnographic collection and his wish to capture and preserve a Trobriand world, which has an element of salvage collecting but beyond that also has an emotional component. Within the colonial context, collecting connected people but also kept them apart, allowing individuals to belong without belonging.

Gerrits' register of acquisitions is shown to be conscientious, but some of its categories to be ambiguous and partially biased. Gerrits' case is of broader relevance here, as these concepts are used more generally in collecting and research. Indigenous agency is shown to be present in the documentation.

Gerrits collected a great variety of object types with significant differences between numbers of objects per type. These differences reflect differences in availability, Gerrits' interests and budgetary limits, and thus the intertwining of agencies. Other circumstances more generally shaped the collection, such as Gerrits' attitudes towards indigenous people and Westerners, and the Trobriand context as a relatively homogenous cultural region with some variety.

Approximately 57 % of the acquisitions came from Kiriwina, the main Trobriand Island, 53 % originate from the surrounding region. Differences between these areas are due to differences between stable and mobile collecting, but also due to differences in material culture (for example different canoe types) and the fact that certain practices had been abandoned in Kiriwina but not in more remote places. Collections from different areas complemented each other to form comprehensive museum collections.

## Preface and Acknowledgments

Every research has its roots in a researcher's personal spheres of interests and histories. Some of my interests and histories should be mentioned here. Objects, made and used by people, have always fascinated me. As a child I would sit under our dining-table figuring out the extension-construction and wondering how and by whom the carved legs had been made. Collecting, anything, never grasped me. Applying categories never took my interest. Yet, questioning classifications has been with me all along, perhaps fueled by growing up between categories in a multi-cultural setting. My father had lived in pre-Second World War colonial Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) which sparked discussions about 'locals' and 'whites' from an early age.

Links to this research are however more direct. Fred Gerrits, the collector discussed in this work, was born in Bandung, Indonesia before the Second World War. Both our fathers worked at the airport of Bandung, albeit in different capacities. It is highly likely that they met. Being with Fred and his wife Nel felt like being on familiar ground.

The more direct history of this research starts with an object: the decorated Trobriand yam store held at the Wereldmuseum (Museum for World Cultures) Rotterdam, The Netherlands. I encountered it while doing an internship for the Amsterdam conservation school at the Museum in Rotterdam. Having read a bit of Malinowski's 'Argonauts' (1922) at university, the Trobriand Islands were not quite new to me. But it was this, large, yet largely dismantled and severely neglected, house that captivated me. Or was it not just the house but also the many labels it had attached, naming all elements of its construction in a handwritten mix of Kilivila and Dutch? Kees van der Meiracker, then curator at the museum shared my fascination for the house and keenly supported my consequent initiatives. My final project for conservation school discussed ethical

questions of conservation of the house, including a day of discussions with invited experts at the museum. For this project I started reading more Malinowski, and, looking into the house's specific history, recovered the collector's name: G.J.M (Fred) Gerrits. Thereafter I completed an M.A. thesis at Leiden University, discussing Trobriand yam stores within Nancy Munn's 'model of value creation' (Wisse, 2006).<sup>1</sup> Working at the museum, together with Kees van der Meiracker, I ensured funding for the restoration of the house and its planned exhibit. Changes in museum policies changed the course of events.<sup>2</sup> After a break of two years<sup>3</sup> I returned to the museum to finalise conservation work without the prospect of an exhibit. During this period I got in touch with Fred Gerrits, initially only to obtain original photographs of the house in situ. At the PAA -Europe conference in Ghent (2008) Belgium, I met Christian Kaufmann. He had been in friendly contact with Fred and Nel Gerrits since their early years in Papua New Guinea. From him I learnt that there was much more than the yam store. Gerrits had acquired a large Trobriand collection, which had never been published or studied in-depth. Gerrits was at first rather overwhelmed by my enthusiastic request to work on his collection, yet after some thought agreed to take me on. Steven Hooper was interested in a Trobriand project and supported my application for this research, to be based at the Sainsbury Research Unit at the University of East Anglia.

I investigated Gerrits' collections of artefacts, photographs and field notes and other Trobriand collections and archives held at the Queensland Museum, and Gerrits' Trobriand collections held at the National Ethnographic Museum

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<sup>1</sup> In Munn, N. 1986. *The Fame of Gawa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> The Wereldmuseum Rotterdam (Museum for World Cultures, Rotterdam) used to be one of the three major ethnographic museums in the Netherlands, along with the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Particularly its Africa and Pacific collections are internationally acknowledged. The story of its tragic decline, being reduced from approximately 130 staff members to about five, is general known among museum professionals and needs not be repeated here.

<sup>3</sup> During which I worked in The Field Museum, Chicago and was involved in the care for its Maori meeting house.

in Leiden and the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, based on information stored in their respective databases. Gerrits and I spent numerous mornings at his home in Queensland in June and September 2013, discussing his collection and how and why he had acquired things. I investigated several other Trobriand Island collections in Europe and Australia. In Europe these included collections at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, the British Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, University Museum of Aberdeen, National Museum of Scotland and the National Ethnographic Museums in Vienna and Budapest. Besides the Queensland Museum in Australia, I researched collections and museum archives at the University of Queensland Museum, the Australian Museum and the Macleay Museum (Sydney University Museums) in Sydney, the National Art Gallery and the National Museum in Canberra, the Museum Victoria in Melbourne and the South Australian Museum in Adelaide. I obtained further information, amongst others, from the Malinowski papers held at the London School of Economics archives, the Massim art collector Harry Beran, and United Church missionaries Ralph and Margaret Lawton. I spent six weeks in Papua New Guinea in July and August 2013, of which four and half weeks doing fieldwork in Kiriwina and approximately 10 day in Port Moresby where I visited the National Museum and Art Gallery and consulted with Linus DigimRina.

My first and foremost gratitude naturally goes to Fred and Nel Gerrits. Thank you both for taking me in, allowing the past to return and the many hours we spent together.

My supervisors Dr. Steven Hooper and Dr. Karen Jacobs made this research possible, encouraged me, gave valuable feedback and tugged me through the last weeks of writing with great care. Thank you so much.

As mentioned above, a number of people have been involved in what, in hindsight, may be seen as the running-up to this research. I am indebted to all of them: Kees van der Meiracker and Head of Conservation Raymond van Leeuwenburg at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, for sharing my enthusiasm for

the yam store and supporting me all along. My previous supervisors, Agnes Brokerhof at 'Collectie Nederland', Amsterdam and Franklin Tjon Sie Fat at Leiden University, for their encouragements and guidance. Wonu Veys, curator at the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden for receiving Dr. Gerrits and me and allowing me to document his Trobriand collection held at the Leiden Museum, and thank you to Christian Kaufman for opening up new perspectives.

The one person who was present in the running-up for this research as well as during this research is Linus DigimRina. I first contacted him with a picture of the yam-store during the final project for conservation school. He responded within hours, saying he had been present as a child when the house was dismantled in Okaikoda-Olivilevi<sup>4</sup>/Kiriwina and had always wondered what had become of it. Linus was a wonderful host during my stay in Port Moresby, introducing me to Nicolas Garnier (Goroka University) and Tom (Mnayola) Talobuwa in Kiriwina. Linus has since been involved, particularly in research on Gerrits' photographs as described in more detail in chapter 5. In Port Moresby and Kiriwina I owe thanks to a number of people. Nicolas Garnier hosted me in his house and took care of my safety during my nearly two-week stay in Port Moresby. Nicolas' and Linus' hospitality will always be a dear memory to me.

My stay on Kiriwina was made into a very special, educative and dear experience most importantly by my guide, interpreter and nearly all-time companion Collin Togumagoma, supported by the hospitality of his wife Nuda. Sister Valentina of Gusaweta, directed me to the Catholic sisters at Waipipi, Rozangela, Atelina and Stefania who put me up me for my entire stay and lent Collin a bicycle every time we needed to cycle across the island. Father Omero the Catholic priest at Waipipi, taxied me and Collin on excursions too far to

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<sup>4</sup> Okaikoda and Olivilevi are adjunct villages. Linus grew up in Okaikoda, the yam store stood in Olivilevi.

cycle, without ever expecting anything in return. I valued his caring presence. Michelle MacCarthy, gave me advice prior to my trip and was lovely to have around while on Kiriwina. The present chief of Olivilevi, Talobuwa, his son Tom Talobuwa and the late chief Maluwa's sons and daughter and other relatives at Okaikoda/Olivilevi village welcomed me and also allowed the past to return (chapter 5). Many other Trobriand Islanders who had known Gerrits and who engaged with Gerrits' photographs and answered my many questions are referred to in the text but are too numerous to be mentioned here. My thanks to them all.

Researching museum collections requires the support of museum staff. I am indebted to all, yet can only mention a few individually: Michael Quinnell, Imelda Miller and various other members of staff assisted me with much dedication at the Queensland Museum. Jill Hassel at the British Museum laid out large numbers of objects on short notice on many occasions. Anna Biro, at the National Ethnographic Museum in Budapest, Gabrielle Weiss at the National Ethnographic Museum in Vienna, Barry Craig and Alice Beale at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide and Raymond Leeuwenburg at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam spent significant time with me in storage and to various degrees let me roam freely in the collections which I much appreciated. Crispin Howarth was most helpful at the National Gallery of Australia.

Others helpfully contributing in various ways were: Harry Beran, Tim Akerman, Ralph and Margaret Lawton. Father Mc Cann and Brother Tony Caruana at Kensington Monastery in Sydney, Robin Leahy/Hodgson and Andrew Connelly Special thanks to the SRU staff members who assisted all along and especially in the last weeks.

Last but not least to be mentioned are 'old' and 'new' friends. Having homes, away from home, in Australia and England was (and is) invaluable. Justin in Brisbane, Claire in Buderim, Natalia, Justin and little Oliver in Canberra, Evelyn in Melbourne and Isla in Sydney all made me feel at home in



Australia. A big thank you also to Peta for hosting me in London. Jill Shackleton has shared her house and garden with me whenever I stayed in Norwich since first taking me in at the end of my first year. From moving smoldering wood chippings to dancing the Lindy Hop, thank you!

Friends in the Netherlands, Rimkje, Eric, Janneke, Hester, Maaïke, Louis, Marieke, Inge, Irene, Peer, Gerry, Johan and Frans all bared with me and gave dear advice. Many thanks to those who answered Frans' call for additional private funding. Liz Scott, in Norwich offered crucial advice at a crucial moment. My partner Marlies offered ongoing practical and emotional support throughout the process. Combining relationships with PhDs can be complicated, it was not easy for either of us. In the end, while I was writing, she sculpted a bronze figure of me holding a Trobriand dance wand, *kaidebu*, and crossing the finish line. I would like to express my special gratitude to my mother, whose financial and emotional support allowed me to get through the final year of writing. Finally, on another note, H. Murakami's (2009) booklet on running and writing has been a lovely support. Additionally, in this revised version of the thesis, I would like to thank my examiners, Dr A. Herle and Dr G. Lau for their motivating comments. Thanks to my brother Robert for helping with dropbox.

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## List of abbreviations

MKB	Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland.
MVL	National Ethnographic Museum, Leiden, Netherlands.
NMAG	National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby, PNG
QM	Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Australia.
WMR	Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, Netherlands.

## Note on spelling

The language spoken in the Trobriand Islands, Kilivila, is an oral language. Individuals may have personal conventions in spelling and Senft (1986) has suggested a consequent system, but there is no official convention. Therefore people transcribe Kilivila in different ways following their own phonetic rendition. Gerrits used Dutch phonetics, hence using 'oe' (pronounced as 'u') for 'u'. I use 'u' throughout this work, except in transcriptions of Gerrits notes. The spelling of village names follows the 1968 Village Census (selected pages copied by Gerrits). Exceptions are Iolautu and Ialungwa, which are more usually spelt as Yolautu and Yalungwa. The sounds 'l' and 'r' are interchangeable in speech and in spelling (Kuluvitu = Kuruvitu Village). Other recurring variations are: Kaileuna and Kaile'una (indicating that the 'e' and 'u' are pronounced separately; Malua and Maluwa (stressing the slight 'w' linking the vowels); 'W' and 'v' and 'i' and 'y', thus *waiola* = *vayola* (war shield).

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## A brief introduction, research questions

Ethnographic collecting generated an immense number of objects now held in museums and private collections, or lost somewhere along their way to the West, that is, Europe, North America or Australia.<sup>5</sup> In 1969, at the same time as the collecting featured in this thesis took place, Sturtevant's estimated four and a half million ethnographic artefacts to have been kept in museums, which O'Hanlon believes to have been an underestimate in 1969 and which had most certainly been exceeded 30 years later at the time of his publication (Sturtevant, 1969: 640, in O'Hanlon, 2000: 1).

This study focusses on one of many people who collected ethnographic artefacts, Dr G.J.M. (Fred) Gerrits, and more specifically on the collections he acquired in the Trobriand Islands and in the surrounding area, stylistically distinguished as the northern Massim. The Trobriand Islands alone, a group of just a few small islands off the south-eastern coast of Papua New Guinea, produced many thousands of the above mentioned objects. Gerrits' 'Trobriand' acquisitions comprise approximately 3000 artefacts (see footnote 6).

Reasons for the large scale of ethnographic collecting are manifold, yet are not the point of concern here. While collecting's large scale has been pointed out and perhaps caused amazement, some of its consequences have only gradually begun to be acknowledged, as exemplified in the following: "indeed, far more of the ethnographic material in the world's museums than was previously

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<sup>5</sup> Westerners, therefore are people of European descent. Ethnographic collecting can broadly be described as the acquisition and preferably documentation of artefacts from around the world, yet particularly from small scale 'tribal' societies.

suspected may have been made specifically for sale to them [collectors]” (Torrence 1993: 468, in O’Hanlon 2000: 03).<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledging collecting’s large scale is crucial because it had important consequences, for example, its impact on Western-indigenous encounters, on artefact production and therefore on the kinds of objects collected (as mentioned above), on local economies in general, also on how the objects were stored and documented after acquisition, and on present collection research. Ethnographic collecting would have been something of a very different nature, if it had taken place on a far smaller scale.

Focussing on a particular collector and a particular place and time contributes to understanding ethnographic collecting (its motives, its intertwining with colonial settings, its various practices, and how collections were formed), yet in doing so one needs to keep collecting’s large scale in mind.

This study presents a portrait of the collector Dr. G.J.M. Gerrits, more particularly of his ethnographic collecting from early 1968 to late 1971, while being stationed on the Trobriand Islands as the Medical Officer. As mentioned above, the number of acquisitions amounts to approximately 3000 objects. Gerrits’ case thus allows us to investigate the particular, at the same time it exemplifies ethnographic collection’s large scale and its significance.

The objective of this work is indeed a portrait, not a caricature. The aim is not to highlight single characteristic features but to present a multi-layered picture of many facets of Gerrits’ collecting. Collections and collectors are at times judged for their quality, as being ‘good’ or ‘poor’, according to certain

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<sup>6</sup> I do not dare to give an estimate on exported Trobriand Island artefacts but they are certainly well represented in museum collections (Chantal Knowles, personal communication, 2015). Most ethnographic museums would have at least a few objects from the region, larger holdings are quite frequent however. A digital database search for ‘Trobriand Islands’ reveals the The British Museum to hold approximately 1400 Trobriand artefacts. Malinowski’s Trobriand collections, held in three different museums, comprise nearly 2500 (Young, 2002: 190). It should be noted that identifying Trobriand artefacts is not straightforward as similar objects occur throughout the wider Massim region (distinguished for its similarity in carving designs) and specific documentation is often either lacking or not accurate.

criteria often related to the artistic quality of the objects. The objective here is not to judge - either Gerrits' collections, or his collecting practices, or indeed its colonial setting, but to describe and understand how Gerrits' Trobriand collections were formed, how Gerrits as a collector was positioned in the colonial setting, and how he can be positioned in the historical context of Trobriand collecting.

Since the 1980s a substantial body of research on ethnographic collecting has developed. Some of these studies utilise ethnographic collections to explore themes such as changes in material culture (for example, Gosden and Knowles 2001; Lilje, 2013; Buijs, 2004). My particular interest in collection formation grew from the realisation that ethnographic collections can only sensibly be utilised in research with a critical understanding of their formation.

While any well drawn account of an ethnographic collector is of value in adding a specific case to the body of collection research, Gerrits' case is particularly interesting as it adds new and therefore refreshing perspectives. Before pointing out Gerrits' relevance for collection research more specifically however, the collector should briefly be introduced.

## The collector Dr. G.J. M. (Fred) Gerrits

Gerrits was an enthusiastic, passionate collector throughout his life, alternately concentrating on butterflies, shells and artefacts, depending on what the particular time and place most readily seemed to offer. His collections are held in various museums in Europe and Australia, in the National Museum and Art Gallery of Papua New Guinea and in private collections, including his own private collection. His artefact collecting comprises items acquired in Sarmi, Dutch New Guinea, the Western and Eastern Sepik Districts and the Trobriand Islands.

Stationed on Kiriwina (the main Trobriand Island), as the Medical Officer, he was responsible for a larger area, including the Lusancay Islands, the

Marshall Bennett Islands, Woodlark (Muyuw), Egum Atoll and Budi Budi Islands. He collected in all these places and thus his 'Trobriand collection', as he refers to it, includes artefacts from this wider area (see footnote 6). Approximately a third of the artefacts Gerrits collected during his Trobriand period was sold to finance further collecting. His core 'Trobriand collection' comprises approximately 1000 artefacts and is held at the Queensland Museum. Smaller holdings of approximately 300 objects each, are kept in Moresby, Basel and Leiden. Gerrits' private collection contains approximately 70 selected objects.

Gerrits was also a keen photographer and produced approximately 2000 black-and-white and 1000 colour prints as well as 1000 colour slides during his period on the Trobriand Islands. He had no training in anthropology, but as an amateur, or simply as a human being, he was interested in the people he lived amongst, interested in their way of life and way of thinking, a circumstance which does not apply to all collectors.<sup>7</sup> He took notes on various 'topics', as he calls them, he made sound recordings of traditional and contemporary songs and magical chants and filmed various events, such as dances and canoe-building. All this material is part of Gerrits Trobriand collection at the Queensland Museum.

His photography is discussed in relation to his artefact collecting in section 6.3. Gerrits ethnographic notes are mentioned in relation to the artefacts throughout the thesis. A full evaluation of possible specific findings in the context of anthropological research is beyond the scope of this study.

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<sup>7</sup> Examples are found amongst academic collectors focussed on establishing evolutionary schemes in the 19th century, as for example Pitt Rivers (Chapman, 1985: 15-43), amongst collectors focussed on pieces of 'art' in general and amongst commercial professional collectors as Groenevelt in the mid-20th century (correspondence with curator V. Jansen, archives *Wereldmuseum Rotterdam*).



## Gerrits' relevance to collection research

The choice of Gerrits' Trobriand collection grew from my work on the Trobriand yam-store at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, which, as I re-discovered had been acquired in the field by Gerrits. Gerrits' Trobriand material has, as yet, not been analysed, made accessible or been published.<sup>8</sup> There are three main reasons for Gerrits' Trobriand collection being of particular interest.

### **A different period in time**

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, whereas ethnographic collection research has produced a large body of work addressing various themes and utilising various perspectives, with few exceptions the majority of ethnographic collection research focuses on collections acquired in or before the early 20th century. Although various forms of collecting such as looting (ter Keurs, 2007, 2011) and commercial bulk acquisitions (Buschman, 2000) have been pointed out, many of these publications favour academic collecting by museum anthropologists, early missionaries and administrators (for example the contributions in O'Hanlon and Welsch, 2000, or Gosden and Knowles, 2001).<sup>9</sup> Gerrits' collecting, being situated in the 1960s and 70s, contributes to broadening this perspective.

It does so because this was a rather different period of time, than the earlier periods mentioned. While the primary concern here is not colonial history, colonial encounters and colonial societies in general are so intensely entangled with ethnographic collecting that neither can really be understood without the other. Papua New Guinea, including the Trobriand Islands, gained independence in 1975 after having had a colonial administration since 1883, first

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<sup>8</sup> Gerrits published an article on burial canoes (Gerrits, 1974) and A. Schmitt (2002) wrote an unpublished report on Trobriand fibre skirts and related artefacts from Gerrits collection.

<sup>9</sup> An exception is Jacobs, 2003.

under the British and subsequently under the Australian flag. While the above mentioned research focus is set in the initial years of this colonial administration (in the case of the Trobriand Islands), Gerrits collected at the end of a period of almost 90 years of colonialism, his case therefore adds a perspective on collecting from a different colonial setting.

## **Documentation and classifications**

The second point of interest arises from the fact that Gerrits conscientiously documented his acquisitions although he was not an academic collector. Gerrits was a medical doctor and had no academic training in cultural anthropology, nor was he a museum professional. He was however convinced of the importance of documentation and of contextual information about artefacts.<sup>10</sup> Not being an academic, his collecting was not informed by consciously and explicitly scrutinised anthropological theories, perspectives or classifications. He did however use various categories which were generally applied in ethnographic collecting, such as distinctions between 'old' and 'new' objects, or 'authentic' objects and 'tourist' objects.<sup>11</sup> Because Gerrits used these concepts without explicitly having scrutinised them, his material allows one to examine internalised premisses of ethnographic collecting and their application in practice in combination with Gerrits' personal preferences and consciously formulated convictions and interests.

Another important feature of Gerrits' documentation is that it contains virtually all the objects Gerrits acquired, not only the portions which are now held in museums and which are the objects usually available for research.

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<sup>10</sup> He was not a 'careless collector', as the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski has been described (Young, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> For example by Harry Beran (personal communication, 2015).

### **A field collector and a 'living collector'**

Gerrits' collected in the field *and* was a 'living collector' who was able to comment on his collecting for this study. The 'scene of collecting' (O'Hanlon, 2000: 12), which includes collecting practices in the field and indigenous experiences, is still a relatively unexamined area as Thomas (2000: 274) points out in the epilogue of the same publication. Conversations with Gerrits', and to a certain extent with Trobriand Islanders who had known him<sup>12</sup>, enabled examination of this 'scene of collecting'. Research in older collections necessarily utilises archives and the collections themselves as sources of information, for example in "uncovering indigenous agency frozen museum collections" (O'Hanlon: 2000: 4). Whereas frameworks such as assemblage theories (Harrison, 2013: 18-22) have been proposed to analyse collections as archeological deposits, these approaches remain limited by the sources they have at their disposal. Insights gained through Gerrits' comments can perhaps not be generalised to earlier historical settings, but they can entice novel questions with which earlier collections can be scrutinised further.

### **The Trobriand Islands' research context**

While the collector thus has been shown to be of particular relevance within collection research, the particular place of collecting, the Trobriand Islands, also makes this research of interest to Cultural Anthropology.

The existence of a vast body of anthropological research on the Trobriand Islands, in one way or another inspired by Bronislaw Malinowski's influential fieldwork (1915 and 1917/1918) is well known (selected examples are Malinowski, 1922, 1932, 1966; Weiner, 1976; Leach and Leach, 1983; Scoditti, 1990; Campbell, 2002a; Mosko, 1995). Anthropological research on Trobriand material culture is

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<sup>12</sup> The main focus is on Gerrits' comments as the brief four week period of fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands did not allow extensive research.

scarce, exceptions being Campbell (2001, 2002a, 2002b) and Scoditti (1990). Until recently, and at the time I embarked on this study, no work had been done on Trobriand contact-history or contemporary society.<sup>13</sup> Since then, three PhD theses have been completed. MacCarthy (2012, 2016) on contemporary tourism on the Trobriand Islands, Jarillo de la Torre (2013) on contemporary Trobriand wood-carvings and Connelly (2014) on Trobriand contact history. Research on Trobriand Island collections is one gap that remains and which this thesis is intended to help fill.

Thus, this study seeks to contribute to the relatively recent and growing body of research on ethnographic collecting and collections, and, being situated in the Trobriand Islands, contributes to the long existent and extensive, yet still growing, Trobriand Island literature. Besides being an academic contribution it hopes to gain broader public interest in ethnographic collecting and collections.

## Research questions, thesis structure

The themes and objectives of this research which have been briefly introduced above and the more specific research questions presented here are discussed and explained in more detail in the theoretical framework (Chapter 1).

The overall objective of this study is to draw a multi-faceted portrait of Dr. Gerrits' Trobriand collecting including three themes: collection formation, collecting's significance for Gerrits' presence in a colonial setting, and Gerrits' position within Trobriand collection history.

Collection formation is a broad theme into which many aspects may be included. The study intends to explore collection formation from an open,

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<sup>13</sup> Trobriand artefacts feature in older publications on Melanesia (for example Seligmann, 1910) and various, more recent publications on Melanesian 'art' (Hamson, 2013). A collector and scholar who has focused exclusively on Massim art and material culture from an art-historical approach is Harry Beran. Norick (1976) produced an overview of Trobriand artefacts based on parts of the Malinowski Trobriand collection.

searching perspective. Several specific aspects however emerged from the literature as well as from Gerrits' accounts which led to the following questions:

- What were Gerrits' (multiple) motives (Grijp, 2006) for, and objectives in, collecting during his Trobriand period?

- Which classifications of artefacts did Gerrits use and how were they put into practice?

- How were the collector's agency and indigenous agencies intertwined and how did this intertwining influence collection formation?

- How did differences between 'stable' and 'mobile' collecting (O'Hanlon, 2000: 15) influence collection formation? How is this distinction related to the collector's and indigenous agencies?

- Was Gerrits interested in acquiring complete sets of artefacts? Which kinds of sets were these? How did the quest for 'unique' objects influence his collecting? (Baudrillard, 1994: 13)

- What were Gerrits' general attitudes and his conduct in the colonial setting and how is this related to his presence in the field as a collector and collection formation? In which way was his collecting influenced by his position as the Medical Officer?

- How is Gerrits' photography related to his artefact collecting, what is the significance of both activities for him?

- How can Gerrits' Trobriand collecting be positioned within a brief history of Trobriand collecting? In what way was it exceptional?

Part I provides the theoretical, methodological and geographical frameworks (Chapter 1). Then, in Chapter 2, a historical context of Trobriand-Western exchange encounters and Trobriand collection history is presented, in which Gerrits is later positioned (Conclusions).

Part II introduces Gerrits' register of acquisitions, presenting the collections mainly in numbers of acquisitions and their classifications and presents first

insights into some of the above mentioned questions. Chapter 3 gives an overview of how many objects were collected in the different locations (islands), how they are distributed throughout their different destinations, and points out some developments over time. These totals are relevant to allow us to calculate the percentages of the totals for different types of objects. Chapter 4 then turns to the types of artefacts Gerrits collected, in what numbers they were collected, which classifications he used and how the register shows them to have been put into practice.

Part III is based on interviews with Gerrits. Chapter 5 describes contexts of his collecting, including his more general attitudes and conduct, the Trobriand setting, the doctor-collector, and his interests and objectives in collecting. Chapter 6 turns to specific acquisitions and acquisition decisions and examines Gerrits photography. The Conclusions draw together, and further develop, the insights gathered throughout the thesis. While a leading thread throughout the thesis is Gerrits' intention to establish a collection of 'all things Trobriand', the conclusions question and attempt to pin down Gerrits' concept of a comprehensive ethnographic collection, his concept of 'all things Trobriand'.

# Part I

# Frames

# Chapter 1

## Research framework

### 1.1 Theoretical frame: literature review, aspects of collecting and collection research

#### **Collecting**

Interest in collecting and collections within humanities and social sciences, whether from a sociological, psychological, economical, art historical or anthropological perspective, developed from earlier standard histories of collecting favouring art collections (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 5; Baker, 2011:xv) in conjunction with a revival of interest in material culture in the early 1980s (O'Hanlon, 2000: 2). Within these strands of research different perspectives have been used to explain the phenomenon of collecting. All of these theoretical frames focus on certain aspects of collecting and use their specific framework to explain collecting in terms of this specific focus. Durkheimian approaches concentrated on the products and effects of collecting as outcomes of wider cultural fields, rather than its motivations. Classical Marxist approaches (Marx himself) saw collecting as the outcome of a particular set of social relations determined by the control over means of production, thus neglecting questions about consumption. Neither of these approaches considered the collector as a driving force in establishing the collection (Shelton, 2007: 22, 23). Subsequent scholars (including Marxist scholars like Baudrillard and Benjamin) and Belk, included or focussed on collecting as consumption, pointing out that the collected objects are withdrawn from their utilitarian context. Belk, for example



distinguishes between book collectors and people who buy books to read them (Belk, 1995: 70, 71). While this is indeed a general and possibly crucial feature of collecting (although some book collectors may actually read their books and old-time car collectors often do want to drive their cars, even if it is not for common use), in the context of ethnographic field collecting this point is relevant for reasons other than merely understanding collecting as a particular form of consumption. Considering encounters between Western collectors and indigenous vendors and societies at large, the fact that Western individuals did not buy the objects with the purpose of using them for their original function gives these encounters a certain quality, or rather, reflects their certain inequality. It is a difference whether one purchases a war shield, spear or fishing net because one needs the shield and spear to fight and the net to fish, or for other reasons, such as valuing them as curious, art or ethnographic specimens. Importantly, this circumstance allowed the creative production of objects in all kinds of shapes and sizes which were not necessarily functional as the creators of these artefacts realised Western collectors to be interested in such varieties, rather than in functional objects.

While some scholars within these socio-economic perspectives neglected individual collectors' motives, and thus are not useful to portray a specific collector as this study intends to do, others described collectors' motives and behaviour as being pathological (for example Baudrillard, 1994: 9; Muensterberger, 1994: 7). Pearce (1992: 68-88) distinguished between systematic, fetishistic and souvenir collectors, equally pathologizing at least a portion of collectors. She later conceded that most collectors combined aspects of all three modes (1995: 32).

This study is not written from a psychological perspective. A note on psychological perspectives should be made however, as it does feature an individual (collector). Psychological interpretations have been criticised as being reductionistic in focussing only on the psychological and describing

collecting as a pathology (Grijp, 2006: 13). This is indeed the case for Baudrillard (1994) and notably for Muensterberger (1994) who situate their arguments within a Freudian framework. Freudian perspectives however intrinsically tend to focus on pathologies (Wilson, 2002: 69). Thus the problem may not so much be the psychological perspective, which I would consider to be quite legitimate, but the Freudian frame. Without immersing myself into speculations about Gerrits, his collecting to me suggests a different psychological function and perhaps motive.<sup>14</sup> It has been pointed out, that classifying and creating an order are essential elements in collecting (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 2). This structuring and 'creating order' may rather have a healing quality and thus be a form of coping or even self-therapy, rather than a pathological symptom.<sup>15</sup>

Within psychology and psychiatry hoarding disorder in fact has recently been proposed as a new diagnostic category and distinguished from collecting. The concern for pathologization within this new diagnostic category motivated research to examine differentiating features between an adaptive, or even eccentric, relationship with one's possessions as found in collecting and an excessive or pathological relationship as found in hoarding disorder (Nordsletten, et al., 2013: 229). Significant differences were confirmed. Crucially, collectors were found to be focussed on certain object categories bound by cohesive themes, their acquisition process to be structured in stages (including planning, hunting, gathering information and organizing), and the level of organisation of storage and display generally to be high, whereas individuals with hoarding disorder were not focussed on a theme and lacked structuring (Nordsletten, et al, 2013: 235).

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<sup>14</sup> See Gerrits' short biography in this Chapter.

<sup>15</sup> I remember an interview on Dutch TV (2008) with the well-known Dutch novelist Anna Enquist in which she described how she found comfort while playing Bach's clearly structured music on the piano after the loss of her daughter, aged 27, in a traffic-accident. This interview inspired above mentioned idea.

Whereas Baudrillard's Freudian interpretations have not proved to be productive, some of his observations are helpful in understanding collection formation and are reflected in Gerrits' collecting. Baudrillard points out the importance of the desire for complete series in the motivation to acquire certain objects. Although genuine interest in particular objects may be present, items are purchased for their position in a series rather than being found interesting in their own right (Baudrillard, 1994: 23). Linked to this, the 'unique object' which is sought after is not so much a symbol of some external factor, "but essentially of the entire series of objects of which it constitutes the final term." (Baudrillard, 1994: 13). Gerrits, as shall be shown, sought a series of different objects based on different criteria, and accepted offers of large amounts of other types of objects, hoping for unique specimens to be among these offers. All of these strategies influenced his collection formation.

Grijp, following Appaduraj (1986) also defined a collection "as a set of objects outside of a utilitarian context, with a personal leitmotiv defining the collection." (Grijp, 2006: 6). Grijp argues for the consideration of multiple motivations for collectors. Following Plattner (1996), he suggests an economic motive (investment), a psychological motive (ego enlargement) and a social motive (social status), to which he adds a cognitive motive (the acquisition and transmission of knowledge). The suggestion to consider multiple motives is helpful and so are the categories he proposes. Yet, possibly more motives and certainly more (subtle) differentiations within these the motives should be sought.<sup>16</sup> This study examines Gerrits' multiple motives for collecting in the Trobriand Islands without a priori pinning down an overruling motive. Whereas Grijp stresses the presence of multiple motives, his analysis is focussed on collectors' motives in their own right. In this study Gerrits' motives are considered as contributing factors to collection formation along with other factors.

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<sup>16</sup> Psychological motives may comprise more than merely 'ego enlargement', for example.

To some extent comparable to Grijp's interest in motives, yet broader in scope, Shelton focusses on 'selfhood'. He states that "collectors cannot adequately be understood through conventional historical biographies like those of Wilson (1984) on Franks,...[or] Macgregor et al (1994) on Sloane,...no more so than they can be made intelligible only through the description and histories of acquisitions." Shelton (2007: 37) following Bann (1994) emphasises the role of objects in fashioning the 'self' and sees the "collector's zeal" as "fundamentally an affirmation of a particular self" mediating particular social, cultural and historical situations. While questioning certain boundaries and considering contextual influences is interesting and relevant, for this study a focus on the fashioning of Gerrits' 'selfhood' would also be a too narrow a path to take. The objective here is to generate broader insights into collection formation and to depict multiple facets of Gerrits collecting and his presence in the field. Presuming a primacy of the 'particular self' over other factors influencing collection formation, as formulating any other a priori primacy is exactly what this study seeks to avoid.

This idea is drawn from Latour's (2005) actor-network-theory. Latour stresses a 'flat' non-hierarchical conception of networks in which power relations are not 'a priori' assumed (Latour, 2005: 165). There have been attempts to apply Latour's framework in collection research, notably in the contributions to Byrne et al. (2012) and Harrison et al. (2013). Similar concepts such as 'distributed agencies' in Chua and Elliott (2013) have also been introduced. My interest in Latour's concepts however was not inspired by its application in collection research, but by Hoogsteyns (2008). To demonstrate the limitations and possibilities of Miller's dialectical approach in comparison to Latour's concepts, she investigates ballet shoes. While in Miller's perspective the dancer and the shoes mutually constitute each other in a binary relationship, in Latour's approach the shoes loose their central role and become

part of, or rather, “participants” (Latour, 2005: 71) in an analysis in which many more ‘actors’ are considered (Hoogsteyns, 2008: 107-136).

In the section on agencies, further on in this chapter, I return to Latour and discuss one contribution, Torrence and Clarke (2012), which attempts to apply Latour and focusses on ethnographic collection formation. While the premisses of this study are inspired by aspects of Latour’s framework, the objective however is not a full Latourian analysis applying or testing Latour’s model.

To complete this brief overview of perspectives on collecting it should also be noted that authors differ in the broadness and universality of their definitions. Thus, for example, Elsner and Cardinal include Noah’s Ark and the Holocaust as examples of collecting (1994: 1-2). Pearce, et al. perceive collecting as a European tradition “which presupposes that the notion of a continuity of ideas and practices from one generation to another over a period of several millennia” (Pearce, et al., 2002: xi). Both perspectives have merits, depending on one’s objectives. Ethnographic collecting is part of a European tradition of collecting, practiced mainly by Europeans and their descendants all over the world.

## **Ethnographic collecting**

A main distinguishing feature of ethnographic collecting, as opposed to other kinds of collecting, is that its objects were made usually in small scale, ‘tribal’ non-Western contemporary societies and (originally) acquired from the people in these societies, often in colonial settings. Ethnographic collecting can be defined more narrowly as collecting ethnographic specimens. In a broader sense it may include collecting objects for various reasons and by various means. Thomas points out some discourses of collection: curiosity (objects as curios), Christian missionary collecting, settler/trader collecting, ethnographic collecting and scientific collecting (Thomas, 1991: 125-184). Various means of acquisition include barter, looting, confiscations, gifts, large scale and small

scale collecting, commercial collecting and academic collecting. One reason to include all these forms is that they all contributed to the collections presently held in museums and private collections. Another reason is that the experience of any collector in the field was influenced by earlier acquisition practices and indigenous people's reactions, such as increased production of certain artefacts and changes in formal qualities, but also, for example, in hiding objects. Collecting was embedded in particular collecting histories and as Gosden and Knowles point out: "Collecting cannot be understood as an isolated activity, but one which was deeply embedded in the overall set of colonial relations pertaining at the time." (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 9). Ethnographic collecting in the narrower sense is relevant here because Gerrits' objective was to establish a comprehensive ethnographic collection, a collection of 'all things Trobriand'. Thus concepts of what ought to be contained within an ethnographic collection, together with Gerrits' preferences within these concepts, shaped the collection and therefore need to be examined. I return to this point below.

Ethnographic collection research may be seen as a separate strand of research, partially informed by considerations about collecting in general, yet largely comprising an own extensive body of works. While most of this research primarily investigates and documents collections and collectors in their own right, some researchers utilise ethnographic collections to investigate broader themes, such as changes in material culture (Gosden and Knowles, 2001), or colonial societies generally (Thomas, 1991).

With the move away from a preoccupation with texts in colonialism studies to "nonverbal, tactile dimensions of social practice: the exchange of objects, the arrangement and disposition of bodies, clothes, buildings," and other aspects (Pels, 1997: 169) ethnographic collections have come to be valued as potential sources of information (O'Hanlon, 2000: 3).

Three examples of research using collections to investigate change in material culture are briefly discussed here. Gosden and Knowles (2001)

compare four collections collected in New Britain between 1910 and 1937 to investigate changes in colonial society, specifically in material culture, using the collections as time-slices (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: xx, 176). Significant differences between the collections, either in types of objects or in their formal qualities, are however not found. “It is ironic that what we thought initially might be major indicators of change, the forms of material culture, were relatively stable” (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 186). Notable is their interpretation of this finding: “This stability is historically embedded and a means of dealing with changes.” (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 187). While this may be true in particular contexts, the similarities in these collections may also be a consequence of similar objects having been sought after and similar objects being offered for sale, despite particular differences in interest which the authors take into account. The authors briefly discuss the introduction of Western goods as an aspect of change, but do not question why these changes are not reflected in the collections they examine. The absence of these objects in ethnographic collections is taken for granted and its consequence for research methodology not considered.

Lilje (2013: 20) examines changes in fibre skirts, skirt production and “Papuan responses... to the changing circumstances” between 1871 and 1975 in collections from Central Province, Papua New Guinea. A focus on these changes and Papuan responses in ‘traditional’ skirts is of limited value however, without relating them to wider changes in clothing, notably the introduction of Western clothing and materials. Again, the absence of Western goods in ethnographic collections is not questioned, thus unwillingly allowing the collection’s frame to shape the scope and outcome of the research.

Buijs (2004) describes changes in East Greenland Inuit clothing and body ornaments and identity from first contacts up to the present. She uses historical collections of Inuit clothing along with other sources, mainly early ethnography, to document traditional pre-contact Inuit wear. Other sources, such as later

photographs and her own fieldwork are used to document later stages in these developments. Here the historical collections are embedded within a broader framework of sources, yet again the nature of these collections remains implicit and is not questioned.

Pels (1997: 168) pointed out that “A new phase in the debate between anthropologists and historians has been achieved by the predominantly anthropological argument that the historians’ inclination to remain close to the ground of a specific archive needs to be countered by more attention to the archive’s cultural construction in past and present.”

Within ethnographic collection research, predominantly practiced by anthropologists (Grijp, 2006), the understanding has grown that ethnographic collections cannot simply be taken to reflect a representative picture of a given place and time. Collections are outcomes of particular historical encounters (Thomas, 1991: 91-93). As Gosden and Knowles (2001: xix) put it: these museum collections are not what their collectors took them to be: partial, but well-documented records of New Guinea societies. Rather they are complete, although particular, outcomes of individual sets of colonial practices.”

Keurs (2007: 3) even speaks of a “major shift in paradigm” in that collections are interpreted as “issues of competition, prestige, possession, jealousy and curiosity”. Despite these understandings, the above mentioned examples show that research utilising collections, including Gosden and Knowles’ research (using collections as time-slices implies using them as “records of society”), at least at times, stays within the historical frame set by these collections.

Congruent with Gosden and Knowles’ (2001) findings it is striking how similar ethnographic collections are despite specific differences.<sup>17</sup> I suggest Gell’s concept of the “prototype”, which he explains as an agent in the creation of a portrait (Gell, 1998: 35), to help understand the formation of ethnographic

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<sup>17</sup> This impression is based on my inspection of numerous Trobriand objects and collections in various museums.



collections. This prototype may be more or less in the foreground in the creation and perception of the portrait (Gell, 1998: 52-52). I do not (necessarily) consider the collector to be an artist and a collection as a piece of art. Yet, ideas about what constitutes ethnographic collections and the conceptual categories underlying them, may be perceived as a prototype shaping collection formation. The questions then become what we may learn about the features of the prototype by examining a collection and to which degree and how the prototype is used by the collector?

Within the large body of ethnographic research various aspects of ethnographic collecting in the field have been pointed out, such as the chancy nature of collecting (Gardner, 2000: 45) and collecting being embedded in indigenous and Western networks (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 9; Gardner, 2000: 39). To my knowledge there has been no larger scale attempt to draw together conclusions and perspectives from such studies to a more general framework. O'Hanlon (2000) did take a step in this direction for the contributions in O'Hanlon and Welsch (2000). O'Hanlon (2000: 12-15), in discussing "varieties of collecting" and their effects on collection formation, points out "two broader axes of differentiation". The first is a distinction between 'primary', 'secondary' and 'concomitant' collecting, the second axis differentiates between 'stationary' and 'mobile' collecting. The first distinction may be useful in accessing differences between collectors and the degree to which collecting was their main objective in the field. Gerrits may be described as a secondary collector because his primary function in the field was his work as a medical officer. Gerrits was an energetic and emphatic medical doctor and an energetic and passionate collector. Both activities intermingled in the field and which of the two was more important to him personally is questionable. It was however the relative intertwining of these two roles that shaped his collection rather than the fact that officially his collecting was secondary to his

position as medical officer. The influence of his position as a medical officer on his collecting is discussed in Section 5.3.

Differences between stationary and mobile collecting can be more closely examined in Gerrits' case because he was stationed on Kiriwina for several years yet also collected on various islands during shorter visits. I return to this distinction throughout the thesis to further examine its possible effects on collection formation.

Two other crucial themes in ethnographic collecting research are indigenous agency and classifications.

## **Agencies**

As a non-native English speaker I was surprised to find the term 'agency', so often referred to within humanities, not to be known outside these specialisms in common language use. 'Agency' in general refers to a capacity to influence the course of events within a given context. As a reaction to earlier neglect in collection research, two realms of agency have been increasingly emphasised within recent ethnographic collections research: 'indigenous agency' (also referred to as 'local agency') and 'object agency'.

A point of unclarity is the question whether 'agency' necessarily includes intentionality or conscious willfulness. An example reflecting this is Lilje's definition: "I use 'agency' [for humans] to refer to intentional, conscious or discursive choices and actions. The term 'disposition' refers to unconscious, taken-for-granted or non-discursive forms of knowledge or ways of being. Having both of these aspects matter because they will affect how one interprets the material evidence." (Lilje, 2013: 37).

The question has particular implications for granting agency to objects, as objects indeed do not act with conscious intentions, but is equally relevant for humans or in fact any other possible agent. Harrison (2013: 7) insists "on the need to uncouple intentionality from concepts of agency" because "indigenous

agency in the past was not necessarily formulated or enacted with direct reference to the question of museum politics.” Whether particular indigenous vendors in the past had a notion of museum politics has no bearing on their capacity to act intentionally for other reasons and thus influence collections’ formations. Harrison points out Latour’s definition of agency as “an ability to make a difference” (Latour 2007: 52-53). Therefore Harrison does include intended and unintended influences and adds: “ we do not deny the importance of intentionality but seek to give dignity and significance to the ways in which indigenous people played active roles in the construction of contemporary museum collection,” (Harrison, 2013: 17). This however implies indigenous agency not to have been intentional.

Intentionality should be uncoupled from agency for a more fundamental reason. For any human being, including collectors and indigenous vendors, conscious intentionality of acts is to some extent blurred and not straightforward. Psychological research (for example Wilson, 2002) has established that humans function with two information processing systems, one that consciously takes in elements of information and consciously combines them, and another which more automatically, unconsciously (not in a Freudian sense) processes the bulk of impressions a person encounters. This second system accounts for by far the larger amount of information processing and decision making. It makes us take decisions and do things, at times without (fully) realising why we do them (Wilson, 2002: 93-117).

The establishment of conscious intentionality in acts is relevant in juridical and indeed political arguments when people’s accountability is interrogated. This is of course a possible path to take when looking at colonial history, in which, as Harrison (above) points out, intentionality is relevant. The purpose here however is not to *judge* actions in colonial settings. When considering influencing factors in collection formation, distinguishing between intentional or not intentional acts is not relevant. Agency, the capacity to influence events,

comprises far more than intentional acts and it is the interplay of these acts, whether consciously intentional or not, that shapes collection formation.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned before, I draw on a few aspects of Latour's Actor-network-theory, using them as a guide rather than as a strict model. The points taken from Latour (2007) are: 1. Anything that has influence within a certain context is an agent or 'actor'. 2. These agencies are relational. 3. They include human and non-human agents alike and no hierarchy is a priori assumed between them. These premisses are appealing because they allow one to view and question one's data with an open and searching attitude.

A point of critique on Latour was that his objectivism ignores subjective experiences. Yet, as Hoogsteyns demonstrated, subjective experiences can also be considered as agents (Hoogsteyns, 2008: 135).

While the intention is to be searching, not every factor can or needs to be included. As mirrored in the theories on collecting in general, collecting can be understood on different levels of generality. Macro-sociological/economic explanations were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Ethnographic collecting can be seen as part of political, economic, academic, art historian, etc. developments in Europe within which ethnographic collecting became an acceptable, expectable, desirable and respectable thing to do. Gerrits' collection may never have come to being, had this tradition not been established. On a mid-level one may situate various contextual factors, such as, the specific Trobriand (colonial) context, Gerrits' position as a doctor, his attitudes and general interests in collecting. On the most specific level are specific events, specific decisions to sell and to buy, or not to sell or to buy, specific objects which in the end led to the formation of the specific collection. This study concentrates on the two latter levels.

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<sup>18</sup> It should be stressed though that this does not imply denying indigenous peoples' capacity for intentionality as was the case in writings imagining Europeans as capable of conscious deeds and 'natives' as determined by their traditions.

The purpose of this section was mainly to position my perspective on agencies. An in depth analysis of either indigenous agency or object agencies is beyond the scope of this study. Gerrits' archives and his account did generate insights towards differentiations within the often used but not well defined concept of indigenous agency. Object agency is briefly considered and pointed out.

## Classifications

The categories Gerrits used in his collecting are an important part of understanding the formation of his collection. The word 'category' has its origin in the Greek 'kategoria' which at the time meant 'statement or accusation'. Its present meaning has shifted to "1. A class or division of people or things regarded as having particular shared characteristics. 2. *Philosophy* Each of a possibly exhaustive set of classes among which all things might be distributed. *Kant believed that he had arrived at his list of categories by a process of abstraction. 2.1* Each of the a priori conceptions applied by the mind to sense impressions. *These fundamental categories are a priori, that is, they exist prior to experience.*"<sup>19</sup>

All these definitions are reflected in ethnographic collecting. Categorising artefacts has included, making sense of the world, trying to understand and comprehend (within evolutionary and diffusionist frameworks), applying (value) statements (in appropriating artefacts as art), and, at times, accusations. It also has meant *creating* an order as well as presuming an a priori order which is out there to be uncovered. Any classification is a statement, what may differ are the attitudes and valuations with which it is undertaken, the knowledge on which it is based<sup>20</sup> and the genuine intention and effort to understand versus the mere need to make statements and to exercise authority.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/category>

<sup>20</sup> For example in biology DNA technology is generating new knowledge which has led to verification as well as rectification of various earlier classifications in flora and fauna.

Some classifications are simply wrong. An example is the Garner-Jones Fiji collection<sup>21</sup> and its diligent but inaccurate documentation by the collector, which has been uncritically used by museum professionals (Ewins, 2007). Another example of an ethnographically wrong, yet historically interesting, classification can be found at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Trobriand dance-wands, *kaidebu*, are displayed together with war shields from various regions (ills. 2.2, 2.3). This is interesting because the eldest *kaidebu* at the Pitt Rivers Museum were purchased in Britain in 1877 and must thus have been collected in the field before this date. Apparently, at the time, the *kaidebu* were associated with warfare. What this assumption was based on is not clear<sup>22</sup> yet it seems to have been accepted knowledge for quite some time, as Malinowski's field-note and rectification from 1915 testifies: "Dancing shields: KAIDÉBU. Used with dance GUMAGÁBU... (Tom says there was no war dance)<sup>23</sup>. The GUMAGÁBU is danced only during the Milamala. (Field-notes: 905).<sup>24</sup> *Milamala* is the festive season after the annual yam harvest. The association of the *kaidebu* with warfare, however, lingers on in the museum and has recently been reinforced by the visiting artist Sue Johnson in a picture depicting a *kaidebu* along with a cactus, titled "Elaborate Defenses" (ill. 2.4).<sup>25</sup>

Below I point out a few important aspects of classifications in ethnographic collection research using Gosden and Knowles (2001) and Torrence and Clarke (2011) as examples. For their statistical analysis and comparison of collections Gosden and Knowles categorised the objects as follows: "These categories (hunting and fishing, warfare, valuables, personal

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<sup>21</sup> It is held at the South Australian Museum.

<sup>22</sup> A general interest in warfare and weapons, and the fact that the object had been labelled as 'shield' may have contributed.

<sup>23</sup> 'Tom' is possibly Tomwaelakwabula of Oburaku. He was one of Malinowski's best informants (Young, 1998: 110).

<sup>24</sup> Malinowski archives at the London School of Economics (LSE), Fieldwork notebooks and notes, written 1915, annotated 1918, ref. no. Malinowski 2/9.

<sup>25</sup> I do not mean to be critical about the Museum's historical displays which I find fascinating but want to point out how assumptions and classifications are perpetuated.

ornament/clothing etc) drew on the typological nomenclature that museums tended to give objects.” (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 70). Additionally they examined “mostly male”, “mostly female” and “ungendered” objects, and “local”, “local exchange” and “long-distance exchange” objects, relying in part on the collectors’ documentation and in part on their own fieldwork.

The first point to be made is that defining categories carefully is crucial if one wants to know what one is actually counting. For the gender categories Gosden and Knowles (2001: 70) note that they did not examine gender as a particular issue, but hope that these loose categories will provide general insights. They use the collectors’ documentation as factual information combined with insights from their own fieldwork. How “mostly male” and “mostly female” are defined remains unclear. Additionally, “ungendered” objects are not factually ungendered but are a category lacking the information to put them in either category. These data will indeed provide general insights, as counting anything will always provide a certain result. Yet it is difficult to value these insights when one does not know what exactly has been counted. Quantitative analysis really only makes sense with well defined categories. It may have been simpler and more interesting to count how many and which objects the collectors categorised and thus perceived as male or female. In this study I focus on Gerrits’ classifications.

The second point to be made concerns the broadness versus specificity of categories. Gosden and Knowles note: “these categories [hunting, etc] are broad and have been tailored to cover what we class as the main categories of objects related to Aware culture in collections” (2001: 70). Gosden and Knowles (2001), as mentioned before, conclude from the comparison of collections that material culture hardly changed. What is of concern here is the influence of the authors’ classifications on their conclusions, as shown here in a hypothetical example. An older collection may contain 100 objects associated with warfare (divided into 80 long spears, 15 shields and 5 small spears) and another collection

acquired say 20 years later may contain 50 weapons (yet this time one long spear, 35 shields and 14 small spears). Taking the particular interests of the collectors into account, as Gosden and Knowles (2001) do, and even considering the variety of types of objects within a category, as Gosden and Knowles (2001) also do, without being explicit about which types of objects are contained in these varieties, the conclusion based on these data is that not much changed. The total number of weapons decreased but is still considerable, the variety of types remained unchanged. Yet, the pattern that begs questioning is only revealed when looking at the specific types. Why have the big spears totally vanished? Why did the number of shields increase? In this case, examining a broad category such as warfare does not reveal much, it rather disguises intriguing patterns, which are revealed when breaking the broad category down into more specific types. Ideally, both, broader and narrower categories need to be investigated in search for possibly interesting patterns. Doing so in detail was unfortunately beyond the scope of this study because of the large number of objects involved, yet an attempt was made to keep this insight in mind.

Finding and presenting interesting patterns in categories is a delicate task. Interpreting these patterns is another task which requires questioning the patterns rather than jumping to conclusions. For example, Torrence and Clarke state: "Although the majority of items are associated with male activities, a significant amount of female body ornaments shows that women were active in the trading." (2011: 45). I do not want to dispute that women were involved in trading, yet the fact that female ornaments are present in collections is no proof of this, as men may have done the trading for them. One needs more specific cultural and historical information to conclude who did the trading. Similarly, it is one thing to conclude that "there is an abundance of ordinary objects in the Papua catalogues" and a "lack of iconic items as in some Melanesian regions were produced for trade with foreigners". But it is something different to



conclude from this pattern that “It is as if people were bartering just what they happened to have at hand or body when they encountered outsiders eager for trade” and “Not surprisingly, the artefact producers and hawkers were quick to seize opportunities to obtain desired trade goods through the exchange of their cultural heritage.” (Torrence and Clarke, 2011: 45) Many of these “ordinary objects” may not have been what one had at hand but what had been produced for sale, or at least with the possibility of sale to foreigners in mind, as it is unlikely that one had ordinary objects at hand in the quantities in which they were collected. Torrence and Clarke (2011) claim to uncover indigenous agency from curios catalogues by treating the catalogues as archeological assemblages. Their choice of categories and their rather uncritical interpretations of the quantitative data are however not convincing. In this study I distinguish between presenting data and possible interpretations, and tend to be cautious with interpretations.

“The science of classification is, in Stephen Jay Gould’s words, ‘truly the mirror of our thoughts, its changes through time [are] the best guide to the history of human perceptions’. And if classification is the mirror of collective humanity’s thoughts and perceptions, then collecting is its material embodiment. Collecting is classification lived, experienced in three dimensions.” (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 2).

The objective of this work is not to uncover ‘collective humanity’s thoughts and perspectives’. The point to take away from Elsner and Cardinal’s quote is that a collection is a material embodiment of the concepts the collector applied. As pointed out in the introduction, Gerrits was not an academic collector and thus applied certain concepts without scrutinising them. Therefore his material allows to examine these classifications as specific configurations of concepts which were and partially still are more generally used in collecting. By scrutinising these categories one gains an understanding of Gerrits’ collection as well as of the nature of these categories.

## **Ethical issues and the impact of collecting**

The ethics of collecting and collecting's impact on indigenous societies have to be assessed within the colonial setting in its local variations. Unquestionably some practices of collecting were less ethical than others and these differences are relevant in present curatorial practices and specifically in controversies around repatriation. To pinpoint certain practices as not being ethical is far from straightforward however. I do not want to dismiss ethical issues and find it important not to silence certain collecting practices, yet I want to caution against judgements which can so easily be made from a present perspective without acknowledging the realities of individual functioning within certain settings. In fact one should differentiate between the ethics and impact of individual collectors, of certain forms of collecting practice in general and the ethics and impact of collecting due to its large scale, for which no one particular collector is accountable. The ideas presented here are meant as general considerations and background information, examining or judging the ethics of Gerrits' actions is not part of this study.

During our first acquaintance (personal communication, 2010) Gerrits mentioned that some of his collecting practices, specifically acquiring artefacts from burial graves, by present standards would be measured critically, yet at the time were acceptable and expected behaviour. In his defence, he added that many of the objects from burial caves were offered to him by local vendors. (Which raises the question of ethical considerations of indigenous actions.) Without involving in a philosophical discussion on the universality or relativity of ethics, two points are to be made about Gerrits' comment. People act and make choices within the particular context they find themselves in and adapt to the contexts they live in. Rather than judging this behaviour, it may be more telling to focus on the cases in which they disagree with general practices or

practice self-restraint (in collecting) because of personal ethical considerations, although the context would allow them to do otherwise.

The second point to be made is that Gerrits' willingness and capacity to reflect on the past, were crucial for me in deciding to want to work with him.<sup>26</sup> This also exemplifies a special focus of this work which comes forth from working with a living collector. Gerrits' present reflections on his collecting, as he shared them with me, are part of presenting his collecting and collection, as much as the practices in the past.

Various specific ways in which collecting had an impact on indigenous societies have been pointed out. Gosden and Knowles (2001: 19-21) for example, examined changes in production and use of artefacts such as Siassi armbands and indigenous trade relations. O'Hanlon (2000: 19) mentions the disappearance of certain artefacts, such stone axes, as well as increase in the production of artefacts for sale and changes in their design. Again, a comprehensive analysis has, as yet, not been undertaken.

Gosden and Knowles point out that "Colonial relations operated on a physical level to join people together, often through the movement of objects..." (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 22). Indeed the interest in acquiring artefacts and the resulting exchange encounters did connect people in certain ways. On the other hand, the self-interest prevalent in these encounters hindered more open, non-instrumental, contacts even for individuals who may have been genuinely interested. Considering the large scale of collecting this did not only have bearing on incidental individual cases but on encounters in general. Perhaps this is the most crucial impact collecting at large had, and the most crucial ethical consideration to be made.

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<sup>26</sup> In fact I remember making this consideration and taking the decision while he made the comment. I also recall an encounter with another collector who still described with some pride how they had loaded the truck with artefacts at early dawn to bypass objections from villagers.

## 1.2 Methodological frame: Gerrit's register, working with a 'living' collector, reflexive research and fieldwork experiences

Besides being embedded in academic literature and utilising Gerrits' collection of artefacts and photographs, this research is based mainly on two sources: Gerrit's register of acquisitions and extended interviews with him. Other documentation in his archives (see Part II, introduction) were additionally examined. The research further involved a brief four-week field visit to the Trobriand Islands, interviews and conversations with other Trobriand/Massim collectors, notably the Reverend R. Lawton and Harry Beran, and examining Trobriand collections in various European and Australian museums. While Gerrits' collecting is placed into a historical context, a comparison of the content of his collection with other Trobriand holdings in museums was beyond the scope of this study.

The two main sources, Gerrits' register and the interviews, are different yet complementary. Gerrits' register was produced in the field while collecting and is thus a contemporary source. The interviews took place in 2013 in Queensland, they present a reflective perspective from a rather large distance in time and place. The combination of the two sources adds to the multi-faceted nature of the intended portrait. Whereas both sources were used to question and clarify each other, the intention was not to strictly verify the information in either source. The sources complement and enrich each other, but are largely both taken at face value.

In the thesis, the register is presented first (Part II) followed by the information gained from the conversations with the collector (Part III). This was a deliberate choice with the intent to exemplify, to a certain degree, the differences between the information gained from the two sources (see 1.1). It is

important to note however that the interviews with Gerrits took place before I had the chance to analyse the documentation in detail as I received much of this material in the period during which the interviews took place. My knowledge of Gerrits' comments invariably influenced my perception of the data in the register; it made me see certain patterns while possibly overlooking others. On the other hand, scrutinising the register led to new, more specific, questions which I regretted not having asked in the first place. Some, but not all, of these questions could be clarified by e-mail later on. Examples are mentioned throughout the following chapters were relevant.

Gerrits' photography is discussed in relation to his artefact collecting. A detailed study of his entire collection of approximately 4000 photographs was beyond the scope of this study, partly because of the size of the collection, partly because of its accessibility. Gerrits had in the past made digital scans of approximately one third of the entire collection. This was the main portion I worked with. Additionally I viewed and took photographs of the colour prints held at the Queensland Museum and briefly viewed the colour slides and the black and white contact prints mainly to gain an impression of Gerrits selection of scans. Which photographs had he not scanned? Unfortunately no prints of the black and white photographs were available. Gerrits never organised his photographs in albums, but did produce a list of captions for the museum, which gave additional insights into how he intended to present the images.

### **Archives: Gerrits' register of acquisitions**

Researching collections generally implies looking at objects - ideally, touching, turning, measuring them, weighing them in one's hands, scrutinizing particular details, sometimes smelling them and usually taking photographs of them. Analysing a collection based on a register may therefore be met with skepticism. However, Gerrits' register is a particularly valuable document for

gaining insights into a collection's formation and into Gerrits' classifications. Importantly, while portions of the entire number of acquisitions went to museums, it is the register which documents virtually all acquisitions and thus allows a quite rare insight into an entire body of acquisitions. It also allows one to compare sub-collections. Which types of objects went to museums, which ones did not? In addition to the quantitative information contained in the register, the hand-written document also conveys a sense of, or feeling for, Gerrits' collecting practices in the field.

Coping with over 3000 objects and their attached information (see Part II) was challenging. At first I intended to (and in fact started to) enter the entire register into an Excel database to then be able to extract various sub-collections efficiently. I found myself facing two problems however. How much of Gerrits' added notes, inconsistencies in labelling and spelling, and corrections was relevant to be kept in a digital version of the book and how? The other, related, issue specifically concerned standardisation of spelling and labelling which was necessary to be able to extract valid sub-collections. Standardisation of village names could be tackled, as I had a 1968 census list of all villages and could figure out which variations in similar names were due to Gerrits' variations in spelling and which were actually different villages. Standardising Gerrits' Dutch/English object names in English would inevitably have meant losing some of his original distinctions. I found it premature to decide which of his distinctions would be meaningful in my analysis and which not. Without having profound knowledge of possible local personal names, making sense of all the creator's names Gerrits had jotted down phonetically as best he could would have resulted in a rather senseless copying exercise. Gerrits' handwriting additionally needed some time to become acquainted with. I was also concerned that extracting from and manipulating the database would not turn out to be straightforward and would leave me with insufficient results after having put considerable time into creating it. Therefore, I chose to count

categories manually. This was a time-consuming and tedious task as it meant going through the 132 pages of the book time and again. I found it helpful to give larger categories distinctive colours, Kitava becoming light-blue, central Kiriwina red, for example. When counting within sub-sets the relevant entries would catch my eye and I could skip the rest. Counting manually turned out to have some unpredicted advantages. While repeatedly looking through the pages of the register, every now and then, I would notice a new detail, a new question or idea of possible patterns would come to mind. Although not expected, I found engaging in the book in this way to bring Gerrits' collecting process closer to me than searching for patterns in typed and extracted lists would have done.

Although I aimed at counting accurately, slight inaccuracies could not be prevented. My objective here however is not an exact statistical analysis. Whether a certain set contains 214 or 215 objects is not crucial, relevant is the relative size of the set compared to other sets. Accuracy is higher, but also more relevant in smaller sets.

While trying to understand Gerrits' classifications, thinking in sets of elements as in elementary set-theory was helpful.<sup>27</sup> Categories take shape according to one's perspectives and objectives, the point of concern being which elements are and are not included in them (see 1.1). Sets are clearcut groups of elements sharing certain features which can principally include, exclude or partially overlap each other. Relationships between certain sets lead to logical consequences for relationships between certain other sets. (For example, if B is included in A, and C has no overlap with A, consequently B and C also have no overlap.) Understanding these relationships allows for a more precise understanding of the collector's classifications.

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<sup>27</sup> While engaging with the register, I remembered having done basic set theory at school.

## **Interviews: working with a 'living collector'**

I had first met Gerrits personally before starting this research during a visit he made to Holland in 2009 in the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. During the first year of this research he and his wife visited the SRU in Norwich. Ever since first contacting him, we have exchanged e-mails until the present. In June 2013 and September 2013, before and after the four-week fieldwork period in Kiriwina, I spent several weeks in Queensland. During the three-week period in his hometown we looked through his documentation and talked about his collecting in a more structured setting. We had installed all his archives concerning the collection in his son's, temporarily unoccupied, apartment and spent the mornings going through his material and talking about his collection and collecting. Then, we would have lunch together with his wife at their home. Besides highly appreciating these lunches, the conversation often entailed the couples' shared experiences in Papua New Guinea and other countries, or growing up in Indonesia (then Dutch East Indies, see chapter 5.2). In the afternoons I would rethink the morning's interview, formulate new questions and copy or make photographs of his material. The conversations resulted in nearly 22 hours of recording spread over 12 days. Approximately 15 hours are actual conversation, the rest is having the recorder running while look for something, listening to his music recordings and having a coffee break. One day's conversations are missing as the recorder did not record. Occasionally I would take additional notes. I did not work with a preconceived list questionnaire, but had a frame of relevant information in mind.

Finding a way to analyse and present the content of the 15 hours of taped interviews was another challenge. I first transcribed all relevant parts of the conversations, which resulted in over a hundred pages of typed text, and determined relevant themes. A complicating factor was that relevant quotes for certain themes were spread throughout different interviews, and often quotes



were relevant for more than one theme. Thus, I numbered the pages of the transcribed text (from 1 to 100), then, similar to coping with the large number of objects, I assigned colours to the themes and encircled the relevant passages in the transcribed text. Finally I made a list of the themes on one page and added the relevant page numbers of the transcribed text to the themes. This enabled me to compose the text (Chapters 5 and 6) and efficiently retrieve relevant quotes.

Gerrits, as mentioned above, was not in favour of being the subject of my investigations at first. Partially, perhaps because he realises that colonialism and certain collecting practices, considered acceptable at the time, are now being scrutinised. A more important reason however is that, for Gerrits, it is the collection that counts. He is keen to present it to a larger audience, but he himself does not want to stand in the limelight. On a side note, this is paralleled in his photographs, which very seldom feature himself (6.3). Yet collection research has moved on (O'Hanlon 2004: 2-3) to an interest in the 'ethnography of collecting' rather than seeing "artefacts as self-sufficient scientific specimens". I put many efforts into explaining the relevance of his account about how and why he had collected for an adequate understanding of his collection. But it was only towards the end of this research that I realised I had not understood his point of view. And it was only after that, as Gerrits expressed his concerns about the data in his register being prone to incorrect interpretations, that I could point out the importance of his explanations, and that my intention was precisely to prevent such misinterpretations.<sup>28</sup>

The value of being able to work with a 'living collector' is core of this work, yet it also had disadvantages and limitations. Being able to speak to Gerrits at length and being able to become acquainted with him, allowed to

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<sup>28</sup> Gerrits commented that the number of bowls originating from certain locations do not represent the number of bowls that were present in these locations, thus not the "real situation". How many bowls he acquired at certain places highly depended on what people in certain places assumed he was interested in and thus offered him and on how often he could visit certain locations (e-mail, 26-05-13)

understand the general context of his attitudes and conduct in the field, importantly, his multiple motives for collecting, his preferences for certain types of object and his decisions in certain cases to include or not to include certain artefacts. The concession one has to make, to some degree, is that the 'living collector' has a say in how he is being presented.<sup>29</sup> In part this happens indirectly as one does not want to picture the person unfavourably or cause any negative consequences, perceived or real, for the individual. In part the person may want to have a say in the content for various reasons, ranging from worries about errors in the information, over not wanting to disclose certain circumstances for personal reasons, to simply wanting to determine the eventual outcome of the work (which Gerrits did not do). There may also be ambiguity in wanting to show and wanting to disclose. Gerrits and I came to an agreement which themes would not be discussed (mainly prices of objects) and we agreed that he and his wife would get to read the parts describing his biography and the parts based on the interviews, in advance. Having these parts read by Gerrits was helpful as it prevented errors based on misunderstandings in the interviews, it did not in any crucial way alter the content of my writing.

### **Reflexive research**

Reflexivity enters this work in two ways. For one, I am conscious of the fact that the outcome of the interviews is a product of an interaction between Gerrits and myself. I formulated certain questions, he chose to tell me certain things and not others. My general strategy was to allow him to take the lead and talk freely, unless he went too far off topic and I felt I was not receiving an answer to my question. Even so, while listening to the tapes, on some occasions, I found I had interrupted him prematurely and wished I could know what he might have said. While it is speculative to imagine how the outcome might have been for

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<sup>29</sup> This may of course also be true for deceased collectors if their heirs have a say.

another interviewer, it should be noted that building a rapport and trust with Gerrits was not straightforward (see below) and acquired care and attention. My rather modest and empathic attitude however, probably contributed to gaining his trust. A more open discussion of his concerns from the start, however, created a better basis for the conversations.

For the other, Gerrits' comments are of a reflective nature, coloured by what he remembered at that moment in time and by his present perspective on events in the past. There is no way to know what he did not remember. The extended period of the interviews however, was helpful in that it allowed us to return to details he remembered after a specific conversation, which he regularly did. His perspectives on the past were from the start part of the picture I wanted to draw, part of understanding the collector and his collection, albeit these perspectives had had no influence on his collection formation at the time. In part these perspectives developed over the years due to various circumstances, in part I invited Gerrits to reflect on his ethnographic collecting. Reflective research is limited in that it is not a direct view on events, but a view from the respondent's perspective. Thus, for example, indigenous agency is mainly described as it is presented by Gerrits in the interviews, which is an account of how he experienced indigenous agency in relation to his own agency. While one needs to keep in mind that this is Gerrits perspective, it is relevant information in understanding collection formation. To gain a less biased perspective, this information, as mentioned before, is complemented by insights from Gerrits' register and by speaking to Trobriand Islanders.

## **Fieldwork experiences**

An earlier plan for this study entailed a broader analysis of Trobriand collections in various museums and a comparison to Gerrits' collection and included a brief four-week visit to the Trobriand Islands. Thus, besides spending several weeks in Queensland analysing Gerrits' collection at the

Queensland Museum and interviewing Gerrits, I also spent several weeks in Australia visiting museums with Trobriand holdings throughout the country. In hindsight, an expanded period of fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands and less time visiting other collections had been preferable, as it had allowed a deeper analysis of the “scene of collecting”. Even so, the visit to Kiriwina was invaluable in gaining a sense of the field and in becoming acquainted with people and localities. For example, Gerrits had mentioned the close contact he had had with the village Wabutuma, from which indeed a relatively large number of objects originated. When asked for the reason he explained that the village was not far from where he lived. Cycling from Losuia (where Gerrits had lived) to Wabutuma I found that Gumilababa Village was far closer however.<sup>30</sup> On my return from the field Gerrits explained that his wife bought her groceries from Kauwa, a man from Wabutuma, and this fact, in addition to the village’s proximity, was the reason for their close contact.<sup>31</sup>

My objective was to meet people Gerrits had known and had either taken photographs of or acquired artefacts from. As with Gerrits’ interviews, I was focussed on gaining descriptions of specific transactions. I showed prints of a selection of Gerrits’ photographs of objects and people, in part to start conversations about artefacts and collecting, in part to learn how people had experienced being photographed. The pictures of artefacts were often not met with much interest, except in a few cases in which elder people explained to their children or grandchildren what certain objects had been used for. Gerrits’ portraits of people were met with great interest, some of the people had died,

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<sup>30</sup> Various people, including Harry Beran, had recommended a bicycle as the best means of transport on the island. As I flew to Kiriwina, taking along a full-sized bicycle was impossible. Thus I chose to buy a folding bike in Australia which I could take along in my luggage. This bicycle turned out to be a novelty on Kiriwina and I ended up spending quiet some time demonstrating how it could be folded. The mother of a small boy especially came by to see the bicycle which her son had described as the ‘umbrella bike’ because it could be folded. I left it with my interpreter who later sold it (for twice the price I had paid for it).

<sup>31</sup> Kauwa had also supplied Dr. Jueptner, Gerrits’ predecessor with groceries, thus the connection with ‘the doctor’ had already been made before Gerrits’ arrival.

but many were still around and early all were recognised by others. First reactions to seeing oneself differed from warm enthusiasm and thrilled shrieks to sad contemplation.

As with Gerrits, I did not use structured questionnaires for the interviews but had a list of relevant themes and questions prepared. I worked with an interpreter who had a good command of English and was interested in the topic of the research. His motivation was pleasant, yet was at times accompanied by a tendency to formulate his own questions. As I do not speak Kilivila I could not have done the work without an interpreter. I did have a basic knowledge of some relevant terms in Kilivila however, which allowed for some verification of the translations, and most people I spoke to knew enough English to communicate in a combination of translation and direct conversation. In a few cases the whole conversation was held in English. I cannot judge to what extent Collin's presence influenced conversations, but I did not have the impression that information was held back because of him. Besides being the interpreter, Collin was also a guide, explaining required etiquette where needed. For example, it was not appropriate to cycle straight through a village, one needed to dismount and walk the bicycle until reaching the open road again.

I usually gave a small compensation for the time respondents invested in talking to me, either money or store goods (sometime on request). This was received contently, I did not have the impression that it in anyway influenced the content of the conversations. Unexpected for me was the circumstance that in a few cases members of the younger generation seemed to have a say in allowing an interview. In one case they claimed money for the interview in advance rather aggressively, in an other case, they tried to prevent the conversation assuming no compensation to be given. In yet another case their consent was explicitly expressed, without me having asked for it. In the first case we decided not to talk to the person, in the second case the old man asked us to come back after the youngster had left. Some of these reactions may have

been aggravated by the short period of my stay in which I did not have the time to become gradually more integrated on the Island. In addition, I lived in Wapipi at the catholic mission. This had been the only practical short term arrangement I could make from abroad. In one case, I heard complaints about the fact that I was not staying in a village (and thus not paying Trobriand Islanders but the nuns). Regarding the short period of my stay, most people, I believe, understood my choice and I do not believe it influenced the content of the conversations.

### 1.3 Dr. G.J.M. (Fred) Gerrits: a short biography

Dr G.J.M. Gerrits was born in 1933 in Bandung, Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). His protected childhood came to an abrupt and harsh end when Japan occupied the Dutch colony during the Second World War and the Gerrits family was traumatically arrested, separated and detained. Gerrits' father was killed but his mother and the children went to the Netherlands after the War.

Alighting the ship on a cold winter's day, young Gerrits promised himself to return to a tropical overseas place as soon as possible. His determination remained strong over the years and although having considered studying anthropology, he chose to become a medical doctor as it would enable him to work overseas more readily. In 1961 he left for Dutch New Guinea as a medical doctor but had to return to the Netherlands sooner than expected in 1963, after the Netherlands had agreed to transfer administration of the area to the United Nations.<sup>32</sup> Dr Gerrits met his wife Nel, a nurse by profession who had attended a *gymnasium*<sup>33</sup> in the Netherlands, in Dutch New Guinea. The couple worked together as medical professionals on many occasions and Mrs Gerrits often and increasingly assisted and participated in Dr Gerrits' collecting activities (interview Gerrits, 08-06-2013).

In 1963 Gerrits was appointed Medical Officer for the Australian Administration in Papua New Guinea. The couple arrived for their first posting in Papua New Guinea in December 1963. Apart from some shorter stays between posts, Gerrits was stationed in three major areas in Papua New Guinea. First, he worked in Angoram (East Sepik District), where the couple stayed for nearly four years. In March 1968 he was transferred to Kiriwina (Losuia Sub-district) in the Trobriand Islands, remaining there for three and half

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<sup>32</sup> Treaty of New York. After the interim administration by the United Nations the territory became part of Indonesia in 1962.

<sup>33</sup> The closest equivalent of *gymnasium* in the United Kingdom is grammar-school.

years until August 1971. Finally, he worked in Maprik (East Sepik District) as Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control Officer, responsible for the provinces of West and East Sepik.<sup>34</sup>

The family left Papua New Guinea in 1977, after PNG's independence (1975). Dr Gerrits went on to work in Nairobi/Kenya for a development organisation of the Dutch government and for the Netherlands Leprosy Relief Association (NLRA). Later he worked in Nepal for the same organisations. In the early 1980s Gerrits and his family settled in Australia. From there he worked as a consultant for the Netherlands Leprosy Relief Association and for the World Health Organisation, in numerous countries in South East Asia and in the Pacific, before his final retirement in 1998 (Gerrits, 2012: 485; e-mail 22-09-2015).

Gerrits' collecting career started during his school years in the Netherlands, where he and his brother Hans collected shells on the nearby beaches. The boys became rather knowledgeable on the topic. Gerrits still recalls a specific shell with some pride, which was in the possession of a classmate, not quite aware of its rarity. Gerrits knew the shell to be an important specimen and managed to acquire it. The shell was later deposited in the Zoological Collection of the Zoological Museum in Amsterdam, where it is probably still held. The passion for collecting shells and butterflies accompanied Gerrits throughout his life, and to a certain degree later intersected with his ethnographic collecting. His pleasure in photography also goes back to his adolescent years in the Netherlands, where he took pictures of animals in Amsterdam Zoo, the challenge being to depict them as if they were free animals in the wild (interview Gerrits, 08-06-2013).

Gerrits' started collecting artefacts in 1961 in Sarmi, then Dutch New Guinea including ornaments, sacred flutes (now in the Queensland Museum) as

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<sup>34</sup> The couple's first two children were born in Angoram, their third child was born during the Kiriwina period.



well as a complete canoe. He then continued to collect in Angoram, his first major post in Papua New Guinea. The Hospital was in need of a boat to enable treatment of tuberculosis patients at Health Posts on an out-patient basis. Gerrits had discovered some of his tuberculosis patients to be good carvers. He obtained their agreement to provide carvings for free, which he then sent to the Catholic Mission in exchange for a speedboat.<sup>35</sup> Gerrits' brother Dr Hans Gerrits, also a medical doctor, lived in the Netherlands and was interested in some of these 'new' carvings. In this period Gerrits and his wife also started acquiring 'old', non-tourist artefacts for their private collection which were sent to Hans for storage. As Gerrits, in the course of collecting, acquired artefacts he found to be of better quality than some of the earlier ones, Hans and he agreed to sell some of the artefacts to finance further collecting. Gerrits learnt from his brother that there was more interest in 'old' artefacts in the Netherlands than there was in 'new' ones, which additionally shifted his focus to 'old' pieces. Gerrits became more and more fascinated by collecting these objects for their beauty and acquired a substantial collection, which in part remained in his private collection and in part is now held in museums and other private collections<sup>36</sup> (Gerrits interview, 08-06-2013; e-mail, 22-09-2015)

In Kiriwina, Gerrits' interest in artefact collecting shifted from being interested in 'old' objects (of art) to gathering ethnographically, that is, aiming at a comprehensive and representative collection with more contextual information, a collection of 'all things Trobriand' in which, as he said, a Trobriand Islander would feel at home. In his last major post in Maprik, his collecting centred around one major object: the ceremonial house in Bongiora (Gerrits interview, 08-06-2013).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Or possibly sold to the Mission and then bought the speedboat (e-mail, 22-09-2015)

<sup>36</sup> The museums include: Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby; Museum der Kulturen, Basel; National Ethnographic Museum, Leiden; Linden Museum, Stuttgart; Quai Branly Museum, Paris; Queensland Museum, Brisbane; Australian Museum, Sydney. I have not ascertained the sizes of these collections.

<sup>37</sup> The data on this ceremonial house were published in Gerrits 2012.

In Kenya and Nepal Gerrits found material culture of less interest for collecting and focussed more on expanding his butterfly and shell collections. Gerrits' period of artefact collecting is thus limited to the period he lived in Dutch New Guinea and Australian Papua New Guinea. In Queensland, after his retirement, he became honorary researcher at the Queensland Museum to document his collections there. Gerrits is a field-collector. He is engaged in managing his collections till the present day but, with the exception of a few objects,<sup>38</sup> never aimed at assembling a collection from other sources than the field. The Trobriand Islands, the field of his collecting featured in this study, are introduced in the following section.

## 1.4 Geographical frame <sup>39</sup>

The Trobriand Islands are at present part of Papua New Guinea's Milne Bay province. Their first recorded sighting by Westerners took place at the end of the 18th century. The islands were named after first lieutenant Denis de Trobriand, who was a member of D'Entrecasteaux's expedition (MacCarthy, 2016:17). In 1893 they became part of British New Guinea, which in 1904 became the Australian Papuan Territory and after the First World War, Australian Papua New Guinea. Culturally the Trobriand Islands are part of what is referred to as the Massim region (more specifically northern Massim) and Melanesia.

Every publication on the Trobriand Islands gives its own description. Hubert Murray's description below remains one of the most picturesque.

*The Islands at the East End.* East, north-east, and south-east of Samarai innumerable islands of varying size and shape are scattered over the seas, from the Trobriands and the Lusangay

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<sup>38</sup> A few were exchanged with the MVL, Leiden (Davies, 2012: 49, 50).

<sup>39</sup> See ill. (1.1 to 1.8)

group in latitude 8° 30', to Rossel Island and Sud Est, 3° farther south. The Trobriands consist of four principal islands, Kiriwina, the largest, Kitava, Kaileuna, and Vakuta, and are thickly inhabited. They are fertile and enjoy a plentiful rainfall, the gardens of Kiriwina being perhaps the best in the territory. Kiriwina, Kaileuna, and Vakuta lie low in the sea; Kitava has a narrow strip of flat country on the coast, but a steep wall of coral rises close to the shore, and the largest part of the island is a plateau between 200 and 300 feet high. All the Trobriand group is of coral formation with a surface soil, generally of no great depth, but lying occasionally in deep, narrow pockets. Yams of various kinds are the vegetables chiefly cultivated.

(Murray, 1912: Chapter 1, page not shown in digital version).

Murray's introduction still largely applies. The islands are densely inhabited, yams are still the most important crop, although in the past years concerns about structurally diminishing harvests have risen. Periods of drought can, as they have in the past, lead to serious food shortages (personal communication L. DigimRina, and several informants on Kiriwina, 2013).

The Trobriand Islands are small. Kiriwina is approximately 25 miles long and between 2 to 8 miles wide (Weiner, 1988: 11). The other islands are considerably smaller. William MacGregor estimated the islands to have had at least 15,000 inhabitants in the late 19th century (MacGregor, 1892: 6, App. A). According to the 2011 census the population of the Trobriand rural district amounted to 37,511. Kiriwina, the largest island, has an estimated population of over 30,000 people. Kitava, Kaileuna and Vakuta, the next three most populous islands together have a population of 5,000 (MacCarthy, 2016: 15).

## Language and society <sup>40</sup>

The language spoken on the Trobriand Islands is Kilivila (also referred to as Kiriwina or Boyowa, Senft, 2011: xvi). English is spoken by many people to various degrees, depending on their education and possible occupations abroad. There are several primary schools and a high school in Losuia. Formal education is in English, yet during my stay (in 2013) several people expressed their concern about the younger generation learning less English in school due to the assignment of local teachers. Tok Pisin, which is one of Papua New Guinea's official languages and the lingua franca in many regions, is hardly spoken on Kiriwina. It is at times used by returned expatriate Trobriand Islanders when wanting to say something to each other without others' understanding (L. DigimRina, personal communication, 2013).

Kilivila is one of 40 Austronesian languages spoken in Milne Bay Province. Kilivila is also used as the generic term for one of the 12 language families into which these Austronesian languages are divided. The Kilivila language family comprises Budibudi (or Nada, about 200 speakers) Muiuw (spoken on Woodlark/Muiuw with about 4000 speakers) and Kilivila the largest group with approximately 28,000 speakers, which is spoken on Kiriwina, Vakuta, Kitava, Kaileuna, Kuiuwa, Munuwata and Simsim. The Muiuw and Kilivila family are divided into several mutually understandable dialects (Senft, 2011: XVI). Although Muiuw and Kilivila are grouped as separate language families there is a gradual shift in language from Kiriwina over Kitava and Gawa to Muiuw (Gunter Senft, personal communication, 2012). Besides local varieties (dialects), Senft distinguishes eight situational-intentional varieties in Kilivila following Trobriand Islanders' typology. One of these varieties is referred to as *biga baloma* or *biga tommwaya*.<sup>41</sup> It is only used very sporadically in everyday speech to indicate the high status of a speaker. It is the language in which the

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<sup>40</sup> See ill. 1.1

<sup>41</sup> Language of the spirits of the dead or language of the 'old people'.

songs of the harvest festival and certain mortuary songs were composed. (Senft, 1986: 124ff; 2010: 9, in Senft, 2011: 44). Gerrits recorded mortuary songs which he could not translate, probably because they are composed in *biga baloma*. Senft mentions that the number of people able to translate these texts is diminishing (Senft, 2011: 46).

Trobriand society is divided into four major matrilineal descent groups (Malasi, Lukuba, Lukwasisiga and Lukulabuta) called *kumila* which are subdivided into a larger number of *dala*.<sup>42</sup> There are hierarchical differences between the 'kumila' and further differences in hierarchy within certain 'kumila'. This results in a system of hierarchical chieftainship which has been the focus of some debate. See Mosko (1995) for a convincing argument for the special status of Trobriand chieftainship. The chiefs of Omarakana village (in northern Kiriwina)<sup>43</sup> of the Malasi *kumila*, *Tabaula dala* are generally considered as the highest ranking chiefs.

Various aspects of Trobriand culture have been described, analysed and debated in anthropology. None of these themes can be reproduced in any detail here. A few prominent features are presented briefly along with related artefacts which are also found in Trobriand collections.

The gardening cycle, the annual yam-harvest, the harvest festivals and the importance of yams as exchange good have been described in detail by Malinowski (1966). Hierarchical differences between the owners of the yams is reflected in the yam stores (see 6.2). Only high-ranking chiefs belonging to certain clans are entitled to decorate and paint their yam stores. Mainly elements of these decorated yam stores are present in Trobriand collections, most frequently the carved and painted gable-boards, *tataba*.

Perhaps the most prominent aspect of Trobriand society is the inter-island exchange system *kula*. Within this network various goods and gifts are

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<sup>42</sup> Different authors use different translations for *kumila* and *dala*, for example, clan and sub-clan (Malinowski and Powel, in Weiner, 1976: 51) or clan and lineage (Weiner, 1987: 35).

<sup>43</sup> The site of Malinowski's and Mosko's fieldwork.

exchanged with partners on various islands in the region. The most prominent exchange items are the *mwali* (armbands) and *soulava* (necklaces) which are individually known and stay in circulation more or less permanently (Malinowski, 1922, Leach and Leach, 1983). These objects were sought after by collectors, but were not readily available. Associated with kula are different sea-going canoes (*masawa* on the Trobriand Islands and the somewhat larger *nagega* on Muyuw/Woodlark). Various elements of these canoes, such as, sideboards, mast-elements, bailers and oars are found in collections. Most prominent are the elaborately carved and painted splashboards (*lagim*) and wavesplitters (*tabuya*).

Trobriand Islanders, women, men and children of all ages, are keen betelnut chewers. The objects probably most numerous present in Trobriand collections, not necessarily for this reason, are related to betel-chewing, notably, lime spatulas, mortars and pestles (ills. 2.11, 2.12) and to a lesser extent, decorated gourds used as lime containers (referred to as lime-gourds). Chiefs owned lime-gourds with additional shell decorations (ill. 2.17).

Presently yams is still an important crop and yam stores are built and used. Kula is practiced but kula visits to other islands do not take place with canoes and kula transactions can also be arranged by other means of communication, such as mobile phones. In consequence kula canoes are hardly, or not, built anymore. Chewing betel is as common a practice as ever, yet mortars and pestles are only needed by elder people who can not chew well, and thus seldom used. The mortars I saw were all 'old' carved mortars (ills. 2.11, 2.12, 3.25). The lime is kept in (plastic) containers of all kinds with possibly a simple stick to apply it. I have seen no gourds and no carved lime spatulas in use.

Woodcarving is widely practiced and an important source of income, yet has wider significances. Carvings at present are nearly exclusively made for an external market (see also Jarillo de la Torre, 2013).

## **Papua New Guinea - a short history**

From the early 16th century onward the region was visited first by Spanish and Portuguese explorers and later by French expeditions (Turner, 1994: xiii). The Dutch annexed the western half of New Guinea in 1828. The Germans claimed the northeastern part in 1884, whereupon Britain claimed the southeastern part in the same year. In September 1888 the British Protectorate became the British Crown Colony of New Guinea, referred to as British New Guinea with Dr William MacGregor as administrator from 1888 to 1895 and as Lieutenant Governor until 1898.<sup>44</sup> He was succeeded by George R. Le Hunte until 1903 and F. R. Barton in 1904.<sup>45</sup> In 1905 Australia took responsibility for British New Guinea, renaming it the Territory of Papua. The Papua Act came into force in 1906 and J. H. P. (Hubert) Murray was appointed, at first as Acting Administrator and then, in 1909, as Lieutenant-Governor of Papua.<sup>46</sup> He stayed in Office until his death in 1940 (Turner, 1994: xiii). As a consequence of Germany's defeat in the First World War, German New Guinea came under Australian military government until 1921, and then became a League of Nations Mandate until 1945 (Brown, 2001: 18-19). Papua and New Guinea were administered separately by Australia. During the Second World War these civil administrations were replaced by the military Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU). After World War II northern New Guinea became a United Nations Trusteeship. However, Papua and New Guinea were joined administratively with reassigned officers. An expanded body of specialised officers was created for, among other things, agriculture, education and medicine. Papua New Guineans were trained for certain positions in all departments and local government councils. A Legislative Council and an elected House of Assembly were established (Brown, 2011: 19). It was in this

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<sup>44</sup> Later Sir William MacGregor

<sup>45</sup> C.S. Robinson was Acting Administrator in 1903, he committed suicide (Turner, 1994:xvi)

<sup>46</sup> Later Sir Hubert Murray

period, and within the expanded body of officers, that Gerrits worked in the country. Papua New Guinea gained its independence in September 1975.

The export of artefacts from Australian Papua and later Papua New Guinea has been regulated since the Papuan Antiquities Ordinance of 1913, which in its various stages developed into 'The National Cultural Property (Preservation) Act' at independence in 1975 (Busse, 2000). It influenced collecting, imposing restrictions on the export of artefacts and artworks, yet, possibly also adding to the challenge of collecting for some collectors.

The following chapter describes Trobriand-Western exchanges and their development since the first encounters at the end of the 18th century in more detail and provides a historical context for Gerrits' collecting.



# Chapter 2

## Historical frame: Trobriand - Western exchange encounters

This chapter describes Trobriand contact history with a special focus on barter, trade and collecting. It introduces several collectors within this chronology and provides a historical context for Gerrits' collecting.

While there is an abundance of Trobriand anthropological literature, historical accounts of the Trobriand Islands are rare.<sup>47</sup> Particularly the significance of the first century of contact with Westerners, following the Islands' first sighting in 1792 up to the establishment of a mission station and British administration at the end of the 19th century, has up to date been neglected (see for example Campbell, 2002a). Archival evidence of this period is scarce, or at least not readily available. While extensive research into possibly existing sources is beyond the scope of this study, the available sources, including artefacts, do allow to argue for the significance of these initial contacts in shaping further developments.

Except for a short but intense period during World War II, the Trobriand Islands did not experience a larger influx of Westerners at any one period of time, nor settler colonialism. There was no gold to be searched for and not

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<sup>47</sup> Campbell's (2002a) introductory chapters give an overview of contact history and also information on the trade in artefacts with Westerners. Connelly (2007; 2014) focusses on the Australian period prior to World War II. Leach (1982) describes contemporary political developments in the 1970s within a brief historical context.

enough space for large scale plantations. In part because of the lack of larger scale colonial impact, the Islands' gained an image of untouched and resilient traditions (for example, Weiner, 1987: 167). Instances of the colonial administration's coercion are seldom mentioned in a Trobriand context and therefore touched me as being poignant. A few cases are highlighted here.

The number of Western residents would have been somewhere around 20 people from the late 19th century onward until PNG's independence in 1975. Other foreigners came along with Westerners, like for example lay missionaries from Fiji in the late 19th century and government school teachers and medical assistants from other parts of Papua New Guinea in the 1960s. Shorter term visitors came regularly. The Islands' appeal of being remote and exotic, yet factually situated within relatively easy reach from mainland PNG and conveniently equipped with a government station, probably contributed to this.

Because there was no larger scale 'white' community, certain effects of settlers' presence were less present. There was, for example, no 'club' for white residents and thus no overt exclusion from such a club. Alcohol was consumed in the private sphere of some Westerners (Gerrits interview, 08-06-13). In contrast to Papua New Guinea's mainland, alcohol is up to date hardly consumed on the Trobriand Islands.<sup>48</sup> Colonial administration's laws and regulations were implemented and felt.

Remarkably, up to World War II a handful of men held the highest positions. Dr. William MacGregor, first administrator, later lieutenant governor was in office from 1888 to 1898, Lieutenant Governor Hubert Murray (later Sir H. Murray) served from 1907 virtually until World War II. On the Trobriand side three high ranking chiefs of Omarakana covered the period. Chief Enamakala was in position when MacGregor first entered the scene in 1890. He

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<sup>48</sup> There are concerns about alcohol and alcoholism being introduced through the more intensive labour migration to mainland PNG. During my stay I saw one man publicly drunk, which was when my assistant expressed his concerns.

died on the 31st December 1899 and was succeeded by his younger brother Tolouwa, who died in 1930. His successor Mitakata died in 1961.

The group of Western residents, albeit small, was representative of the major roles Westerners occupied throughout many colonies: administrators, missionaries and traders.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, anthropologists were well represented. All had their particular interests, ideologies and conduct with Trobriand Islanders. They depended upon one another, criticised each other and complained about one another. They socialised amongst each other, maintained distance to each other and demonstrated this towards Trobriand Islanders, as well as to their audiences 'back home'. Anthropologists were no exception to this, as Weiner implicitly shows when describing her return to Kiriwina in 1982: "My few fellow passengers are tourists, and leaving the plane, we are greeted by islanders hoping to sell their carvings and other trinkets. 'Ah, Anna, you are back!' one of the carvers calls out and jokingly teases me to buy something." (Weiner, 1988: 17). Weiner demonstrates her closeness to Trobriand Islanders by contrasting herself to tourists and interestingly by distancing herself from objects offered to tourists. She implicates a mutual understanding between herself and the carver. The carver, as it seems, did not expect her to buy anything. Yet, 'jokingly teases' may well have been a genuine attempt to sell something and he most probably would have appreciated her buying a carving.

Westerners' interest in artefacts connected them as much as it divided them. A lack of historical awareness is one feature I found many to have in common, ironically, despite the prevalence of evolutionary thinking in some form throughout most of this history, despite the interest in the 'old' and

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<sup>49</sup> The Trobriand Islands may be considered as a relatively clear-cut micro-cosmos of colonial relationships and as such interesting for further research.

‘authentic’ and despite an awareness of change and the arguments for salvage collecting.<sup>50</sup>

The acquisition of artefacts by Westerners was an intrinsic part of various encounters from the very beginning. Early encounters receive special attention in this chapter as their significance has not sufficiently been acknowledged in earlier accounts (for example in Leach, 1982; Campell, 2002a; Connelly, 2007).

Ways in which Trobriand Islanders, individually and collectively experienced colonial encounters and developments have as yet not been assessed in detail but doing so is outside the scope of this work.

## 2.1 Early Encounters

If you should go so far to the Westward as the Louisades there is plenty of yams to be had at cape Dennis, on the north side of the group... Iron hoop is the trade. (article in *The Daily Mercury*, New Bedford, Mass., [USA], March 10, 1853, in: Ward, 1966, vol. 7: 507-509)

In the middle of the eighteenth century French and British interest in the Pacific had intensified and both countries dispatched rivalling scientific expeditions (Macintyre, 2009: 24). The French Revolution and particularly Napoleon’s defeat in 1815 set back French expansion and their presence in the region. In addition, after Britain’s defeat in the American Wars of Independence (1784), Britain turned its attention more intensively toward the Pacific (Macintyre, 2009: 18).

The Trobriand Islands’ first recorded sighting by Europeans, took place in 1792 when B. D’Entrecasteaux’s French expedition sailed along the northern side of the Louisades (Campbell, 2002a: 17). Several islands in the region,

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<sup>50</sup> These points are also reflected in Gerrits’ collecting.

including the Trobriand Islands, were named during this expedition.<sup>51</sup> Denis de Trobriand was first lieutenant of the *L'Esperance*, one of the ships in the expedition (Campbell, 2002: 17, Austen, 1936: 10). It is not clear whether any direct contact took place at the time.<sup>52</sup> It is clear however that not only the islands as a group were named, also specific points were considered. The map used by MacGregor when exploring and further charting the area, shows the northern tip of Kiriwina to have been called 'Cape Denis', presumably after the same lieutenant. What is now Kitava Island was called Jurian or Jurien Island and present Vakuta Island was named Lagrandiere<sup>53</sup> (ills. 1.9,1.10). The places charted by the French. were most probably the places where initial contacts took place. This gives them a far longer history of direct contact with Westerners compared to central Kiriwina, where the government administration and mission stations were later centered, and to Kaileuna Island, situated west of Kiriwina.

Leo Austen, Assistant Resident Magistrate on Kiriwina in the 1930s noted the use of a small iron knife referred to as *kuto* in the Kilivila language, which, as he says, is obviously derived from the French *couteau*. (Austen, 1936: 10). Possibly there had been contact with D'Entrecasteaux's men, in any case thereafter there must have been direct and repeated contacts with French seamen. These contacts are more likely to have taken place around 1800, when French presence in the region was prominent, which then would mean the word 'kuto' and the type of knife to have been in use for over hundred years at the time of Austen's observations. French presence amongst whalers, traders and 'black-birders' in Melanesia throughout the 19th century can however not

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<sup>51</sup> The most obvious example are the D'Entrecasteaux Islands.

<sup>52</sup> Further research may prove French archives to contain more specific information.

<sup>53</sup> Possibly after the French Marine Officer Charles-Marie La Grandière, 1729-1812, who fought against the British in the American Wars of Independence (1775-1784). ([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles-Marie\\_de\\_La\\_Grandière](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles-Marie_de_La_Grandière)).

be excluded, thus, the introduction of both, the word and the object could also be of later date.

Further contacts throughout the nineteenth century, were directly related to Britain's turn toward the Pacific and Australia's subsequent development. A short description of these developments helps to contextualise these contacts and makes it plausible that they were more frequent than generally suggested (as for example in Campbell, 2002: 19).

Reasons for the British choice for Australia are debated (Macintyre, 2009: 28), yet the loss of the whaling harbour Nantucket probably contributed. A colony in Australia offered a good base for southern whaling and thus provided an alternative. A first selection of 759 convicts was delivered in 1788, just five years before the Trobriand Islands' first sighting. By the turn of the century there were around 5000 British residents in New South Wales and there was a busy shipyard on the western side of Sydney Cove (Macintyre, 2009: 41). Especially in the first decades, whaling and sealing contributed more to the colonial economy than land produce. Whaler's vessels were chartered for the transport of convicts and after they had dropped their human cargo went on to search the neighbouring seas for whales. "Merchants brought pork from Tahiti, potatoes from New Zealand, rum from Bengal. They collected and re-exported sandalwood from Fiji, pear-shell and 'bêche-de-mer' from the Melanesian islands." (Macintyre, 2009: 37). Although Macintyre does not include artefacts in his examples, one may presume objects to have been part of this trade.

Few sources are known to mention whalers' trading contacts with the Trobriands Islands. Whaling journeys usually lasted about two years and the crew highly depended on local fresh food supplies. The *Nautical Magazine* (1839: 37-39) notes the Trobriand Islands as a place to get yams for iron hoops

(Campbell, 2002: 17). Captain Bourn Russell's logbook<sup>54</sup> of his whaling voyage on the lady Rowena between November 1830 to 1832 contains mention of the Trobriand Islands.

The American whaler Captain Perry Winslow in 1853 specifically mentions 'Cape Dennis':<sup>55</sup>

If you should go so far to the Westward as the Louisades there is plenty of yams to be had at cape Dennis, on the north side of the group... Iron hoop is the trade" He goes on to give following advice: "I have always made it a rule in trading with the above Islands, to make the officers in charge of the boats buy yams first, and fruit afterward, because if the natives are traded with for fruit they will not bring the yams for sale (article in *The Daily Mercury*, New Bedford, Mass., [USA], March 10, 1853, in: Ward, 1967, vol. 7: 507-509)<sup>56</sup>

Winslow's advice clearly suggests he visited the Islands more than once. It also reveals that Trobriand Islanders were particularly keen on parting with their yams. Unfortunately we know virtually nothing about the actual scale of this trade and its effects on local yam production, on internal exchange relations or on other practices. Coastal villages were (and still are) largely fishing villages, inland villages were the major yams producers and would in some way have been involved in any larger scale export of yams. Inter-village relations, but also chiefs' positions, are likely

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<sup>54</sup> The original manuscript and a microfilm copy are held at the Mitchell Library in Sydney. (Bourn Russell - Journal of the ship Lady Rowena, 1830-1832. Call Number: MLMSS 3532) I accidentally found a reference of this book after having returned from Australia and hoped it to contain a more detailed description. Library staff were so kind to check its contents and found the following: "I have viewed this manuscript and please note that it is not the easiest to read. I found minimal reference to the Trobriand Is. and the following is the information located: p.394, 1831 Sunday Christmas day 25 Dec. 'This evening we are again disappointed in a wind to carry us back to our ground in Dampier Straits. I therefore bore up and run before the wind towards Trobriand Islands a part of the Louisiade...' " "For your interest though unrelated in the earlier part of the Log pages 269-271 was a Letter to the Emperor of Japan re why they burned the villages of the Islanders of Agitana because they wouldn't provide supplies and that this would continue if it happened again on similar islands...." (e-mail Mitchell Library, 25-06-15)

<sup>55</sup> An American-English spelling of the French 'Denis'.

<sup>56</sup> Ward (1967) is briefly mentioned by Damon, 1990: 60.

to have been influenced. The encounters did leave long lasting impressions in oral tradition. Austen (1936: 10) mentions hearing several stories about whaling vessels.<sup>57</sup>

According to Austen (1936: 10) iron hoop was “always eventually acquired by chiefs and their relatives.” On the Trobriand Islands yams are a major staple food but also a major exchange good. Within the Trobriand system every man is obliged to give part of his yam harvest to certain relatives and correspondingly receives yams from others, generally his wife’s brother and other exchange relations. Only chiefs of certain high ranking clans have the right to have more than one wife and thus the possibility to accumulate yam wealth extensively.

Mosko (2009) makes some convincing and crucial observations on the effects of early encounters for Mekeo and Roro. Mekeo/Roro had systems of hierarchical chieftainship connected to sorcery prior to first contacts with Europeans and Mosko (2009) shows both chiefly and sorcery power to have had a “substantial escalation or inflation” as response to the introduction of epidemics and the use of firearms and explosives by early explorers and other more “fleeting” contacts. The Trobriand Islands’ hierarchical system is also highly connected to sorcery powers. I have no evidence of introduced epidemics and the use of explosives on the Trobriand Islands in the earlier 19th century, by the end of the 19th century both had been introduced however. Firearms most certainly were part of the encounters from the beginning. A similar development as Mosko describes for Mekeo may thus apply to Trobriand chieftainship. If this is the case, the effects of the external demand for yams on the Trobriand Islands need to be assessed in combination with the developments described by Mosko, as the two factors would have reinforced each other in the monopolization of power by high ranking chiefs. In any case, high ranking chiefs with their extended possibilities to accumulate yams would

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<sup>57</sup> Possibly archives of 19th century whaling and trading trips contain more information. Austen, to my knowledge did not publish any of the whaling stories, but possibly unpublished records exist.



have been the most likely source of surplus yams and thus the most likely beneficiaries of the trade. The external demand for yams would have motivated further accumulation which required an increase in the number of wives. Also, some chiefs may have benefitted more than others, due to their personalities or the localities of their villages.

Mosko also points out that “the systems subsequently observed and taken as ‘traditional’ by European observers were ones greatly changed by their own [predecessor’s] actions and intentions as well as villagers’s interpretations of and responses to them.” (Mosko, 2009: 262). This may have been the case when MacGregor found the chief of Omarakana to have 19 wives and typified him as paramount chief in 1891. Omarakana, it should be noted lies quite far north and could have benefitted more from exchanges at Cape Denis, than for example villages in the southern lagoon.

Acquiring artefacts most probably was part of these exchange relations, although at present details are unknown. Harry Beran has a clapper spatula in his collection with a scrimshaw and the date 1871 inscribed (ill. 2.6) which indicates this trade.<sup>58</sup> Mosko’s quote about lacking awareness of earlier Western influences, applies equally to artefacts. The artefacts encountered by traders, government officials, missionaries and explorers in the late 19th century, which are the first provenanced Trobriand artefacts presently held in museums, already bore the influences of earlier encounters. Specific research could probably reveal astounding details. Here I present two tentative examples. In most collections one finds wooden clubs, in various sizes, often made of ebony. Steven Hooper (personal communication, 2012) pointed out that the shapes of the handle-ends of some of these clubs probably were influenced by designs of foreign weapons (ill. 2.7). Again, the specific sources of inspiration for these designs would require further research. Clubs with these designs were made

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<sup>58</sup> As Beran (e-mail, 18-11-16) explains, it is always difficult to judge the genuineness of such an object. Yet, I would argue, whether this particular object is genuine or not, its existence suggests genuine objects of this kind to have been made.

and exchanged throughout the 20th century. The second example is a wooden cutlass kind of object (ill. 2.5). I only found these in early collections, suggesting their production to have ceased in latter years. They testify the carver's detailed observation of the original.<sup>59</sup> To what extent the introduction of iron-hoop influenced the quantity and quality of carvings is another unanswered question.

## 2.2 First settlers and explorers

At sunrise, dozens of large canoes, in full sail and crowded with natives, arrived upon the scene. Their canoes here are magnificent, all the seams caulked, beautifully carved.

(Pitcairn, 1891: chapter VI, no page shown in digital version)

By the middle of the 19th century the colony in Australia had substantially expanded and had been divided. Queensland separated from New South Wales in 1859 (Macintyre, 2009: 95). In 1860 sugar plantations were established in Queensland which over the years led to large scale labour import, 'black-birding', from Vanuatu, the Solomons and islands off New Guinea's coast. Expanding the search for gold to New Guinea, Queensland annexed the territory in 1883. The British agreed to a protectorate on condition that Australia covered the costs (Macintyre, 2009: 103-104). By then New Guinea had been divided between the Dutch and the Germans.

From 1880 onward trader contacts intensified (Austen 1936: 10). The traders William Whitten and Oscar Soelberg were among the first to settle on the island sometime in this period, setting up a fishing station on the north-west of Kiriwina (Austen 1936: 10, Campbell 2002: 17). Austen mentions a dance-song, the Bwitteni to have been composed about Whitten. Whitten is said to

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<sup>59</sup> See Jarillo de la Torre (2013: 80, 133) for more examples and a discussion on these "mimetic appropriations" of Western objects.

have introduced tobacco and to have discovered pearls in the lagoon sometime in the early 1890s. Both events had long-lasting impacts. Whitten also acquired artefacts, as testified by his collection held at the British Museum. They are probably the eldest provenanced objects from the Trobriand Islands.

The earliest more detailed description of barter with Trobriand Islanders which I found is given by Pitcairn (1891). W. D. Pitcairn spent two years (1887-88) travelling and trading in New Guinea, embarking as a member of crew on various trading vessels. He visited the Trobriand Islands on a trading trip with Oscar Soelberg.<sup>60</sup> Coming from the east with a stop at Egum Atoll, they sailed on to anchor before Lagrandierre (now Vakuta). His description shows the people of Vakuta to be excited about the visit.

At sunrise, dozens of large canoes, in full sail and crowded with natives, arrived upon the scene. Their canoes here are magnificent, all the seams caulked, beautifully carved, and all the sails apparently new; in fact, the canoes themselves appeared quite new. They were infinitely superior and better finished than any I had yet seen. Our little craft was so completely surrounded by them that it was impossible to drop a potato overboard without the risk of its falling into one of them. What a chatter they kept up! Imagine several hundred native throats shouting at the same time... If anything out of the common attracted their attention they would one and all send up a piercing shriek, which, unless you were accustomed to their peculiar ways, would terrify you. We allowed a few to come on board, but the difficulty was to prevent all of them doing so. I had to keep constantly rushing to the sides of the vessel with a naked sword, slashing at them in order to keep

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<sup>60</sup> Pitcairn mentions Soelberg to be Norwegian. Possibly Norwegian museums and archives contain more information on him.

them in their canoes. (Pitcairn, 1891: chapter VI, no page shown in digital version)

He goes on to describe the barter and gives some general observations on barter in the area:

The whole livelong day, one of us had to sit on the scuttle, keeping a sharp lookout all round the vessel, a naked sword in hand, a loaded revolver in his belt and a couple of Winchester rifles fully primed in the cabin, all ready for use. The remaining two of us were engaged in bartering with the natives for spears, clubs, shields, "chunam" knives, wooden fishhooks, ebony paper-cutters, and even "gods." We also purchased about a ton of yams, which we could easily dispose of at a good profit, in New Britain. Our two native companions, Tokaiakus and Sindiwaia [who had come along from Egum], were unable to speak the language of this part, so we had to do all our business by signs. Tobacco is unknown here, and they would not accept any. Hoop-iron was their great desideratum. Luckily we had some on board. We also did some trading in empty beer-bottles. We first drank the beer, and then exchanged the bottles for Bêche-de-mer. If this method of exchange would only last, the profits of Bêche-de-mering would be enormous. But after a time they got tired of glass bottles. To hoop-iron they were constant. In time, of course, tobacco will become the chief article of trade, but then, tobacco is expensive. Trade tobacco costs in Queensland, 1s. 3d. per lb., then there is the transit, say 1d. per pound, and New Guinea duty of 1s., so it costs you 2s. 4d. per lb. on board. Hoop-iron, on the other hand, is very cheap, and it does not matter how inferior the quality so long as it *is* hoop-

iron. With hoop-iron they can improve their tools and weapons, thus saving them much labour.” (Pitcairn, 1891: chapter VI, no page shown in digital version).

This encounter took place in 1887. Despite Pitcairn’s worries about tobacco prizes, tobacco did become the ‘great desideratum’ for several decades to come. Whitten apparently had not yet introduced tobacco in 1887, or it may have been a novelty in central Kiriwina which had not yet reached the southern island of Vakuta. With the first Western settlers on Kiriwina, the places of these encounters started shifting from Kiriwina’s coasts and surrounding islands to Kiriwina’s centre. Pitcairn’s visit to Egum is interesting as it suggests visits to these smaller islands to have been more common at the time than in later years. Gerrits went to Egum once, which was quite special at the time. His collection contains several objects from Egum and other small islands in the area, which however were partially collected on Muyuw/Woodlark. Gerrits and former Queensland Museum curator Quinell (personal communication, 2013) consider these objects to add particular value to the collection, because they are relatively rare in museums. This may be true, yet their numbers may be higher than apparent in collections as objects in older collections are often without (precise) provenance. Gerrits may have been on the verge of a reviving interest in these more remote places, where more traditional practices had been kept, competition with other collectors might have been less pressing and old and authentic artefacts were still hoped to be found.

The types of objects Pitcairn mentions are interesting. Weapons, spears, clubs and shields are not surprising, especially clubs are present in large numbers in many museums. ‘Chunam’ knives and paper-cutters are probably both lime-spatulas, presumably of different design, they probably constitute the largest number of objects in any Massim museum collection. ‘Gods’ may either have been *mamwala* figures which were, and still are, inserted on the gable tops of yam stores as protective figures or other carved (human) figures. Pitcairn

does not mention how many artefacts were acquired. His description however suggests quite large numbers, and thus an increased production of these artefacts for trade. The account suggests Pitcairn and his companions to have bartered for individual objects or sets of objects, but they depended on, and largely accepted what they were being offered. Pitcairn seems rather more concerned about Vakutans accepting his offers, and seems quite satisfied about what he and his companions acquired. It is interesting that he places the barter in artefacts in the first place and mentions yams and beche-de-mercure only after the artefacts. His account exemplifies how intermingled trade in various products was. It also exemplifies that this barter was a joint venture, with one person keeping watch and the others actually bartering, which in the end asked for a fair division of the acquired goods or profits.

In this period two scholars also visited the Trobriand Islands and collected artefacts. Niolai Miklouho-Maclay, a Russian scholar was highly concerned about Westerners conduct with the indigenous population and spent many years campaigning against black-birding. His published diaries (1982) do not give details of his Trobriand visit but show him to have been there in late 1879 and include a drawing he made of a yam store on Tuma Island. His collection of artefacts is held in the Ethnographic Museum in Leningrad (Beran, personal communication 2012). Otto Finsch's diaries show him to have reached the Trobriand Islands 22nd of December 1884, sailing from Cape Denis to Kaileuna Island and then back, passing Cape Denis, where people come to the shore for trade but he regretfully could not find anchorage and sails on along the eastern side to southern Lagrandiere Island (Archives, Welt Museum, Vienna). He mentions acquiring various animals, but nothing about where and how he traded for artefacts. A portion of his collection is held in the Welt Museum in Vienna, a larger portion in the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin.

One may conclude that Trobriand Islanders experienced various and increasing trading contacts with Westerners over the entire 19th century, and

that scholars were a stark minority within these encounters. Iron hoop and probably a variety of Western items were introduced early on. To what extent iron hoop was distributed throughout the population cannot be said. It most certainly influenced carvings' quality and possibly quantity. The demand for artefacts in the first half of the century is not clear, but from 1880 onward it certainly increased.

## 2.3 British administration

At Kaibola they brought us quantities of maize, roasted on the cob...[and] different kinds of yams with some sugar-cane and bananas. A certain number of men brought spears in their hand, but they said they were for sale. Some 200 or 300 natives camped all night near us... (MacGregor, 1892: 3)

Under British administration governmental regulations and jurisdiction started to be implemented, authority was enforced and missionary presence established.<sup>61</sup> It was a time of cooperation by some and resistance by others. Both sides by then had had experience in Western-Pacific encounters and Chief Enamakala of Omarakana<sup>62</sup> most probably was informed about missionary presence on Muywu/Woodlark (Austen, 1936: 10). For Governor MacGregor his experiences in Fiji and mainland New Guinea were his points of reference for classifying Trobriand chieftainship. Chief Enamakala, who had 19 wives at the the time, had an extended sphere of influence and wealth (MacGregor, 1892). As mentioned previously this powerful position may though, in part, have resulted from earlier encounters with Westerners. MacGregor's account of his first meeting with Enamakala in

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<sup>61</sup> The British replaced some of the French names by local names, thus, Kitava Island, Vakuta Island. Possibly because the group as whole did not have a local name they were further referred to as the Trobriand Islands.

<sup>62</sup> The chiefs of Omarakana are among the highest ranking chiefs on the Trobriand Islands.

1893 reflects initial willingness and first frictions. After a friendly reception and initial gifts by MacGregor, Enamakala presents a pig, for which MacGregor returns a “tomahawk”. The chief however also expects a knife, whereupon MacGregor answers that he does not eat pork and does not want his pig (MacGregor,1894:19). Enamakala was skeptical about the new authority, as is shown by the “many questions” he asked about the positions of Queen Victoria, MacGregor and Reverend Bromilow<sup>63</sup> in relation to himself (MacGregor, 1894: 19). In contrast to him, Chief Pulitari of Kavataria, was prepared to sell a plot of land to the government for a mission station. This placed Enamakala in a difficult position. Later thieving in the mission, allegedly incited by Enamakala, was probably as much an attempt to get a share of goods as a protest against the mission and Pulitari’s collaboration.

MacGregor visited the Trobriand Islands for the first time in 1890 and undertook a more thorough survey of the Islands between 12th and 21st June, 1891. He had empathy for, and a scholarly interest in, local practices. He assessed Trobriand capacity to accept foreign authority and to adapt Christianity within the evolutionary framework prevalent at the time. At first he was confident about this capacity and later disappointed. He did not consider Trobrianders’ capacity in making choices in these matters.

MacGregor was a keen collector and established the Official New Guinea collection as well as a private collection, with the collaboration of his staff (Quinell, 2000). The acquisition of artefacts is not described in detail in the annual reports, but at times referred to or implicated, including MacGregor’s interest in ebony. During his first visit he was met by large excited crowds carrying spears in various villages.<sup>64</sup>

They were all very friendly. And when it was pointed out to them that the Government would interfere in future and punish

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<sup>63</sup> Rev. Bromilow was involved in acquiring the plot in Kavataria.

<sup>64</sup> The quotes refer to Kaibola and Kavataria.



any tribe that molested its neighbours, they protested that they would not fight; that they had no desire to fight, and that they were prepared to sell me at once all their spears. As they were, in most instances, made of ebony, I should gladly have accepted the challenge had it been possible for me to carry them, which was not the case in only a whaleboat with all our stores and baggage. (MacGregor, 1892: 3)

As the crowd of men was very great, I...would not allow any man to approach me with a spear... “ Again he is reassured that the spears are only meant for sale with the argument: “If I were to fight, where should I get my tobacco from.”

(MacGregor, 1892: 4)

These references show Trobriand Islanders to have been well aware of European’s desire for these objects and to have played this out in their conduct.

In August 1894 Reverend Samuel Fellows and his wife Sarah arrived on Kiriwina. Fellows’ transcribed diaries show church attendance (measured in hundreds) and conferring the Christian message, to have been his primary concerns. His good-hearted attitude is perhaps most aptly summarised in a reaction to increased threats towards government and mission: “The hostility is to us as foreigners not to us personally - because they constantly visit me...” (Akerman, 2001: 8, Vol.3.). From the beginning the mission was not confined to Kavataria village. Land was bought in various villages where mostly Fijian lay teachers set up smaller stations. Sarah Fellows set up a school, eventually drawing children away from village life and causing frictions between them and their parents.

Fellows’ collection is held by the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. Yet, there is no single mention made about acquiring artefacts in

his diaries. What he does note, is packing artefacts for others, as if it were one of his routine tasks:

July 26, 1897: "Spent evening fixing Dr B's [Reverend Brown] curios etc." (Akerman, 2001: 35). June 13, 1898: "Governor came ashore this morning....He was greatly pleased with the curios I had gathered for him. He took tea with us and spent the evening in pleasant chat." (Akerman, 2001: 39). November 2, 1899: Field [Reverend Field] left about 2 o'clock this afternoon. I got him a large stock of curios. He took Sallie's cases and Abel's [Reverend Abel] ebony. His visit has done me a world of good. I feel very lonely now he is gone." (Akerman, 2001: 7, vol.3.).

The mention of Reverend Brown is interesting, as it answers Gardner's (2000: 46) question as to how Brown's Trobriand collection was acquired.

In these last decades of the 19th century, collecting on the Trobriand Islands had shifted from merely mobile collecting to stationary collecting. Compared to Pitcairn's barter in 1880, collectors' potential to acquire a variety of artefacts increased. Fellows' account however raises questions about to what extent collections can actually be attributed to their (field) collectors.

Monckton<sup>65</sup> (1921: 92) describes interesting shifts in barter after the introduction of tobacco and the discovery of pearls as he experienced it in 1896.

The Trobriand people acquired so many steel tools from their trade in pearls, that afterwards, the astute German Harry made a good haul in money by purchasing back from the natives - for tobacco - hundreds of axes, adzes, and tomahawks, which he then sold to miners bound for the Mambare, or traders working

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<sup>65</sup> Monckton arrived in New Guinea in 1895 at the age of 23, trying his luck as a trader in gold and pearls. He later entered government service (Monckton, 1921: 1).

at other islands where the steel tools still possessed a very high value...Harry's vessel was loaded with native sago, coconuts, tobacco and a deck cargo of pigs, which he was going to exchange for pearls. (Monckton, 1921: 92)

The political events in this early colonial period, were aggravated by epidemics which spread throughout the region and the administration's response which prohibited village burials. Resident Magistrate Monckton, vividly describes the implementation of this regulation as he orders bodies to be exhumed and re-buried. The village was "swarming like an angry hive of bees" after he made his orders, but the police "mercilessly using the butts of their rifles on the heels and bare toes of the men - made them see reason...". "Before half a dozen leveled rifles" the rotting corpses were carried to the cemetery in baskets. The "stench was appalling" and it was a "sickening and disgusting business, for matter and beastliness dripped the whole time from the baskets, and carriers, police and myself were seized by periodical fits of vomiting" Monckton (1921: 88).

In 1887 shots were fired (without killing anyone) in an attempt to arrest a few men for murder (MacGregor, 1898: 39, Appendix I) and unrest increased. There were rumors about planned attacks on the "government chief", and the mission, yet in various places people fled leaving their spears and shields behind when MacGregor entered a village. Potentially, these were situations in which MacGregor could confiscate artefacts.<sup>66</sup> In the course of these developments MacGregor openly reprimanded Enamakala, made him sit on the ground while he took place on the chief's platform and forbade him to take more wives from the Kavataria district. In 1899 the situation escalated, when an uprising of several villages burned down Omarakana and Enamakala was forced to flee. Fellow's reaction shows the entanglement of interests. Although

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<sup>66</sup> I found no written record of this to have happened, but Fellow's collection contains a shield which is recorded as having been used in a battle, National Gallery of Australia, reg. 7235329.

Enamakala had not been collaborative, after his removal Fellows feared the leaders of the uprising to have free play against him. Perhaps for this reason, but officially because they had supported him in the past against Enamakala, he urged the Government not to respond with punishments, other than rebuilding Omarakana. Governor Le Hunte, who had replaced MacGregor in 1898, had a less authoritarian approach and tried to diminish Trobriand Islanders' "needless fear" of the Government (Le Hunte, 1901: 9). Interestingly, in a meeting with chiefs following the uprising, he made Fijian teachers explain "what had happened to the chiefs and people of the mountains in Fiji, who fought the Government" (Le Hunte, 1901: 9). Enamakala, by then, was severely ill with dysentery and not present. He died on 31st December 1899, without having returned to Omarakana (Le Hunte, 1901: 20), marking the end of a century, the first century of Trobriand Islanders' encounters with Europeans and the initial period of colonial intervention.

In summary, after approximately hundred years of exclusively mobile collecting, towards the end of the 19th century collecting was for the first time undertaken by people (traders and missionaries) who settled on Kiriwina for a longer period of time. For the first time collecting became stationary and also began to be centred on mainland Kiriwina rather than in the coastal areas. Tobacco was introduced and became the major exchange good. In contrast to these beginnings, Gerrits collected on Kiriwina after it had been a centre of colonial presence for nearly hundred years, which certainly influenced the Island's material culture.

## 2.4 Australian administration

Their chins are upon their knees, their hands clasped round their legs, holding their tomahawks and long knives, while they fix me with a grave, unwinking stare. (Mordaunt, 1926: 73)<sup>67</sup>

As Mordants' account above shows, the long ebony spears featured so prominently in MacGregor's earlier account, by the 1920s had made place for "tomahawks and long knives" with metal shafts, indicating changes in material culture. The first years of the 20th century were a period of transitions in administration as well as in key people. In 1905 Australia took over British New Guinea, which from then on was called 'Papua'. Sir Hubert P. Murray ran the territory for most of the time prior to World War II, from 1907 until his death in 1940. He stood for a paternalistic but humanistic policy protecting native interests. Chief Enamakala's younger brother Toluwa, who later gained fame as Malinowski's informant, had succeeded him in 1900. Reverend Fellows was replaced by Reverend Gilmour and his wife in 1903. Gilmour gained renown for introducing cricket to the Island. Following the British administration's advice a government station, Losuia, and a hospital were set up in 1905, conveniently and somewhat symbolically situated between the Mission in Kavataria and a major trading centre in Gusaweta.

Captain Bellamy, the first Assistant Resident Magistrate (ARM) posted in Losuia, passionately pursued two main objectives: combatting venereal disease, which had become epidemic, and planting coconuts, so as to create an income for the colony from copra. He was successful in both, though with

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<sup>67</sup> Elinor Mordaunt was a single female visitor and travel writer. She was carried around Kiriwina in a chair, accompanied by 18 "laughing and singing" Trobriand men, sometime around 1920. As probably the only source, she describes a women's cricket match. "They play like professionals;...bowl overhand and run like the wind...twirling, full skirts" (Mordaunt, 1926: 83).

intrusive measures. Bellamy introduced regular patrols to all villages, taking censuses, checking cleanliness and lining up everyone naked to have their genitals inspected in public (Connelly, 2007: 42). When he found people to be keeping back coconuts, he had houses searched and the coconuts confiscated. Bellamy was succeeded by Ernest Whitehouse, who largely followed up this policy.<sup>68</sup> Following the Native Plantation Ordinance of 1918<sup>69</sup> he also initiated a coconut plantation in the north of Kiriwina for which a large number of trees were cut down and discarded of in the sea<sup>70</sup> (Connelly, 2007: 122). Bellamy and Whitehouse both stayed professionally and emotionally involved with Kiriwina in their subsequent positions.

An important change under Bellamy and Whitehouse was the introduction of taxes in 1921 (Connelly, 2007: 45). Before taxes and with intensive pearling, the lagoon villagers would sell pearls for tobacco to traders and sell tobacco to inland villages for food, mainly yams. The government also bought large quantities of yams from the inland villages for tobacco, to supply mining communities on other islands. For pearling villages, paying taxes posed no great difficulties. Inlanders, on questioning how they should obtain the money, were told they would have to exchange yams with the pearlers for money. The government, always short of money, further intended to acquire yams for tobacco but was faced with a problem when villagers held back their yams and demanded money (Connelly, 2007: 113,114). Artefact production and sale most probably increased and changed through the introduction of taxes as it was a way to obtain the required money. Albeit indirectly, it made the government the beneficiary of this trade. “The Government unconsciously encourages the production of cheap “trade carvings” by the imposition of a tax...much useless

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<sup>68</sup> Although on patrols he would set up a tent in which inspections could take place in private.

<sup>69</sup> The Ordinance allowed plots of land to be designated as communal plantations.

<sup>70</sup> This was an early contribution to what is now severe deforestation on Kiriwina.

and inartistic carving is done, to meet the demands of white traders.” (Silas, 1926: 208).

Assistant Resident Magistrates succeeding Bellamy and Whitehouse, served for shorter periods and measures were relaxed. Especially Rentoul, serving in the late 1920s, is known to have advocated less forceful medical treatments (Connelly, 2007: 86). Rentoul and Austen are notable for their anthropological observations and writings. Anthropological information was a standard part of patrol reports up until World War II. Murray had initiated a course in anthropology for government staff and installed a government anthropologist, F.E. Williams, who held the position for many years.<sup>71</sup>

Charles Seligman visited the Trobriand Islands in 1904 as part of the Cooke Daniels Expedition. Seligman was the first anthropologist to collect on Kiriwina, and possibly the only museum collector. Governor Murray established a collection now known as the Papua Official Collection. He had met Seligman earlier who had instructed him what to collect (Schaffarczyk, 2008). His staff received a budget of to acquire objects for this collection. Weapons seem to have been an exception, as Whitehouse notes confiscating them. Given Murray’s propagation of anthropology one would expect the collection to be ethnographically representative. For the Trobriand objects this is however not the case and consists mainly of a collection of wooden bowls collected by Bellamy (Schaffarczyk, 2008: Appendix Four).

In these first decades of the 20th century Trobriand Islanders made their acquaintance with two new kind of longer-term visitors: the anthropologist, in the person of B. Malinowski, and the artist, in the person of Ellis Silas.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Whether anthropological knowledge was useful for governance was debated by some, as was the extent to which it was considered desirable for natives to keep their traditions. See Young (2001) for the intricate balance Murray and Williams held on this issue. Williams produced some original ethnography (Young, 2001). Although he visited the Trobriand Islands, he does not seem to have focussed on them in his work, possibly because of Malinowski’s presence.

<sup>72</sup> Both were received by Trobriand Islanders with some wonder of their conducts (R. Brudo in Bashkow, 1996: 8).

During his fieldwork Malinowski acquired some 2000 objects (Young, 2000). Malinowski describes trade in general, which not only, as he says “provides the anthropologist with some interesting sidelights on native habits and ideas” (Malinowski, 1966: 19), but may implicitly reflect some of his own experiences in collecting. It shows an instance of local agency and how traders adapted, not only in what they offered for barter, but also in the form of exchanges. It should be noted that, he made these observations before taxes were introduced.

Pearling gives the anthropologist an insight into the difficulty of creating a demand. The only foreign article which exercises any purchasing power on the natives is tobacco. And even this has its limits; for a native will not value ten cases of trade tobacco as ten times one. For really good pearls the trader has to give native objects of wealth in exchange - arm-shells, large ceremonial blades, and ornaments made of spondylus shell-disks... An enterprising firm of stone-cutters...made an attempt some thirty or forty years ago to produce large stone blades of European schist or slate and to flood various districts of the South Seas. These articles were discarded by the natives as dirt. My friend Brudo had one or two pieces of original stone from Woodlark Island polished in Paris. It was not accepted by the natives either. So nowadays each trader keeps a retinue of native workers who polish large axe-blades, rub spondylus shell into the shape of small disks, occasionally break up and clean an arm-shell - so that for savage ornaments civilised “valuables’ may be exchanged. The Trobriander indeed shows...his contempt for the European’s childish acquisitiveness



in pearls as a duchess or parisian cocotte would show for a necklace made of red shell-disks." (Malinowski, 1935: 19-20).<sup>73</sup>

Silas replaced Whitehouse as Magistrate for a while and then set up a studio in which he painted posing Trobriand Islanders.<sup>74</sup> He notes a remarkable aspect of artefact exchange. In need of their valuables during the harvest season, they went back to borrow these items from the traders to whom they had sold the valuables earlier. (Silas, 1926: 106) 'Borrowing' is common practice on the Trobriand Islands, interestingly traders and collectors were included and participated in this system.

This kind of borrowing was part of the more stationary kind of collecting which developed on Kiriwina after the arrival of the first settlers. Whether the possibility to temporarily regain objects influenced Trobriand Islanders' willingness to exchange certain types of valuables is not clear but could very well have been the case. Gerrits mentioned a similar case in which a man came to borrow ornaments, which he had previously sold to Gerrits, for his daughter's wedding (Gerrits interview, 11-06-13). Whether the Trobriand Islanders in either case felt deprived or rather saw this as one of many actions of 'borrowing' is not clear. Silas does not imply them having been or having felt deprived. Gerrits felt a slight unease remembering the case (Chapter 6, 'Reflecting on Collecting').

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<sup>73</sup> Another, rather humorous, example is Raphael Brudo offering peacock feathers as an alternative for the white cockatoo feathers used for headdresses in dances. These also "would not take" (Young, 1998: 96).

<sup>74</sup> His collection is held at the British Museum.

## 2.5 The Second World War

Compared to the massive battles fought elsewhere in the Pacific, Kiriwina was a small side stage of the Pacific War with few casualties (Saville, 1974: 175)<sup>75</sup>. Nevertheless, for a brief period, military presence on Kiriwina was massive. The white population had been evacuated early on, except for an Australian administrator (Saville, 1974: 157).<sup>76</sup> Then, to force Japan back, Kiriwina was chosen as a stepping stone in a large offensive northward to regain Rabaul, which had been occupied by Japan in 1942. It is unlikely that Trobriand Islanders were informed in advance. Had they been informed, they probably could not have imagined what was to come.

During a period of unusually heavy rainfall, in late June 1943, several thousand Americans landed on Kiriwina's beaches with all their gear and heavy duty machinery (Saville, 1974: 142). A first batch went ashore near Losuia, a second batch on Kaibola beach in the north. After these first landings there were 8000 Americans on Kiriwina. At the height of the operation, including Australians, the forces probably outnumbered the Trobriand population (Saville, 1974: 143). In great haste and tense fear of Japanese attacks, an airstrip, a road connecting Losuia and Kaibola and other facilities were built. Kiriwinans, using their axes and gardening sticks, contributed in high degree.

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<sup>75</sup> This section is mainly based on Saville, 1974, and Powell, 1958 (first edition 1948). Saville served as Australian administrator on Kiriwina for several months in 1943. His popular account contains interesting observations. Published in the 1970s, it takes a critical stance towards the war. Gordon Powell, (not to be mistaken for the anthropologist Harry Powell who did fieldwork on Kiriwina in the 1950s) accompanied the Australian troops to Kiriwina as Chaplain. He wrote his account in honour of the soldiers engaged in the operation. Although at the end he acknowledges the "Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels" contribution to winning the war (1953: 176), his account contains the most overtly racist (derogatory, ridiculing, or romanticising) comments I came across while writing this chapter. These should however not so much be taken as typical for Powell, but rather as a reminder of the racism prevalent in the first decades after World War II.

<sup>76</sup> Missionary teachers originating from other islands were not evacuated (Saville, 1974: 175). According to Powell (1953: 53), Reverend John Rundle also stayed on.

Two villages were demolished and the coconut trees along the road, which had been planted just a few decades before on instigation of the administration, were cut down (Saville, 1974: 144). Saville (1974: 151) describes Kiriwinans being highly alarmed by the sight of Spitfires when the Royal Australian Air Force landed.

Trade between troops and Trobriand Islanders was officially restricted <sup>77</sup>, but took place on a large scale, despite regulations. Troops were eager to acquire fresh food, after having lived on army rations for months (Powell, 1958: 34). They “descended on Kiriwina like a swarm of locusts [and] paid almost anything for red banana, eggs, hens, mangoes and other fresh local food. If there was nobody to pay they helped themselves to the food anyway” (Saville, 1974: 144). Neither Powell nor Saville mention the shortage of fresh food this most probably meant for Trobriand Islanders.

Artefacts were exchanged in longer lasting friendly relationships as well as in more one-off barter encounters. An example of building exchange relationships is given by Powell (1953: 50).<sup>78</sup> He describes receiving a banana<sup>79</sup> from a young boy called Modiala, for which he returned a bible. After a while Modiala requested Powell to ask his wife to send a red dress for Modiala’s mother from Australia. After the dress had arrived, Modiala returned with gifts of carved pigs and knives for Powell’s children. Modiala initiated and built this relationship strategically and successfully, quite in line with Melanesian traditions of gift giving. Besides the exchange of goods, a certain acquaintance and emotional bond were involved. It is a wonderful example of local agency in a setting with unequal power relationships. Modiala had no means to enforce any desires he had for Western goods up front, but after he had established the

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<sup>77</sup> Australian military had been given black twist tobacco and price lists indicating how much to pay for food items. (Powell, 1935: 34)

<sup>78</sup> Powell has a tendency to stress Trobriand Islanders’ trading capacities, in other words agency, as is apparent in this, and the subsequent example.

<sup>79</sup> Colin, my interpreter on Kiriwina, showed up for our first appointment with a bunch of banana’s as a gift, which I genuinely appreciated as a very welcoming gestures, despite the fact that in the back of my mind I associated it with a possibly strategic move.

relationship, he could allow himself to become quite demanding and Powell went along with it, probably further than he had initially expected himself to go. Factually however, he could keep the exchanges within his limits. Artefacts, selected by Modiala, were part of this exchange-relationship. Powell does not mention having been interested in collecting artefacts. Had this been the case however, his contact with Modiala would have been helpful.

Acquiring artefacts, or fresh food, generally did not require the building of comparable relationships by Westerners.

The natives became great traders in spite of regulations and it was a common saying that they had all the silver in the island.<sup>4</sup> There was certainly an extraordinary scarcity of it with us. They would make native knives, pigs, grass skirts or model 'lakatois', which we were all very anxious to obtain as souvenirs. Their price would be fixed and nothing on earth would induce them to lower it. The only hope was to barter for something they really wanted. For instance, a native who was asking ten shillings for a basket of banana and pawpaw would not consider accepting a penny less. But when someone offered a box of matches he took it with great glee (Powell, 1958: 55).

The artefacts Powell mentions had been made for sale for several decades, yet their production must have immensely increased with the sudden extreme increase in demand. The implications of this development for various aspects of artefact production at the time and in consequent years have not earlier been noted. Campbell (2002a) mentions a large portion of the male population to have been involved in carving by 1971 as a response to tourism. It has to be added however that the massive Western presence during the Second World War had already initiated a large number of people to be involved in the

production of carvings and other objects and thus influenced the later responses to tourism.<sup>80</sup>

Powell's quote above also gives an insight into Trobriand use of money at the time. Taxes had been introduced just about 20 years earlier, the sum to be paid being 10 shillings, which explains why they specifically wanted 10 shillings. On a side note, interestingly, not only Trobriand Islanders but also Australian soldiers produced 'souvenirs' for the Americans. Rings and brooches were made from scrap metal and perspex, Japanese flags were made and sold for fifty to a hundred dollars, to which Powell adds: "In this respect our boys were only excelled in their enterprise by the natives, whose production of grass skirts seemed to hit a new high every day" (Powell, 1958: 76).

Although women had been involved in exchanges earlier, this apparent explosion in production and distribution of skirts most certainly influenced their production and possibly effected gender relations.

To what extent collecting, the more systematic acquisition of 'old', 'traditional' or 'ethnographic' objects took place is not clear. Saville however mentions collecting himself: "I had always encouraged the carvers to sell me their best pieces, and my hut was filled with intricately carved dancing shields and walking sticks" (Saville, 1974: 150). He makes no mention of his motives and preferences, but is clearly interested in quality and acquainted with woodcarvers:

While we were talking [with Wing Commander Hewitt] the most accomplished wood carver on the islands brought in his latest piece of work. This latest creation was a large model of a Hudson bomber that had occasionally flown over the Trobriands on its milk run. No aircraft had landed on the island yet, so the artist had modeled the Hudson as he saw it,

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<sup>80</sup> A comprehensive investigation of these influences is beyond the scope of this study, but would be interesting and could be undertaken comparing pre-war and post war collections.

distorted by the angle and the distance. It had a disproportionately long fuselage, and one wing was longer than the other. Twists of Pandanus leaf were fastened to the engine to represent the mysterious blur of the propellers. It was a marvelously vivid piece of carving, considering that the artist had only ever had fleeting glimpses of his model (Saville, 1974: 150-151).

Saville offered the carving to Hewitt, who promised him some fine pipe tobacco (which he highly appreciated) in return (Saville, 1974: 151). Unfortunately no mention is made of the carver's name, or what he received for this carving. The fact that Saville gave the piece away, possibly indicates traditional carvings to have been his primary interest. Whether others collected is not clear, but quite likely. Even so, with every American and Australian acquiring just a few 'souvenirs' the sum of exported pieces must have added up to an enormous number. The destiny of Saville's carvings is unknown to me.<sup>81</sup> A portion of the artefacts acquired during World War II must however have found its way into museum collections, partially through the heirs of soldiers. Beran's private catalogue contains a lime spatula (H 948) which he bought from Jack Jenkinson, a soldier in Milne Bay in World War II. Identifying objects collected in the Second World War in museums would require specific research because data on field collectors is often not readily available, especially when the object changed owners more often before entering the museum.

Highly divergent opinions have been voiced about the subsequent effects of World War II for Kiriwina. On one end of the spectrum is Saville's perception: "The island was raped, and its way of life destroyed," (Saville, 1974: 153). On the other end, Weiner's judgement can be mentioned: "Even shortly after the war's end, few substantive cultural changes had occurred." (Weiner,

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<sup>81</sup> I did not come across any objects in museums recorded as coming from Saville, but at the time was not aware of his book. It should also be noted that Saville's popular account may not be entirely accurate.

1987: 26). Putting the question of what ‘substantial changes’ are aside, these effects were more differentiated than either of the quotes suggests. I therefore conclude this section with a few general remarks and my own observations. Improvements in infrastructure, notably the main road connecting Losuia and Kaibola, and the airstrip, made the Islands more accessible and allowed charter tourism in the 1960s. Large scale, open-air events, such as church services, showings of American films and performances of American celebrities such as as Gary Cooper, John Wayne and “white girls”, who were flown in to entertain the troops (Powell, 1953: 77, 109, 111) are likely to have effected attitudes, particularly those of young people. Possibly, these church services had more impact than any earlier missionary effort had had. Encounters on a large scale, witnessing Westerners on a large scale, and Western cultural shows, all contributed to a different and more intensive acquaintance with Westerners and some of their cultural practices.

Quite accidentally I was presented with a specific example while discussing the *kaidebu* (dance-wand) with elderly men in Kwaibwaga. Austen (1945a) noted missionaries to have discouraged the dance because of their heathen implications. The last performances of this dance, except for later performances for tourists, took place sometime in the 1950s (Weiner, 1988; Kwaibwaga interview, 2013; Morris of Yalumgwa interview 2013). When I asked the Kwaibwaga respondents whether it had been missionaries’ influence that had made them stop the dance, they became quite angry and explained that it had not been the missionaries’ influence but their own choice. The young people at the time, including my respondents, had not been interested in learning the old songs and steps an. It is quite likely that the above mentioned experiences during the war contributed to these decisions and to changes in attitudes in the post-war young generation.

Whatever the exact reasons were, in assessing indigenous agency it is interesting that, what is referred to as missionary influence in the literature, was by my respondents experienced as their own decision.<sup>82</sup>

## 2.6 Australian administration, post-independence

You know, we would like to participate, to be part of your world, but all we have to offer is our culture and our carvings.  
(Collin, my assistant, Kiriwina, 08-2013)

After World War II the Australian government substantially extended funding for the colony and the body of colonial officers, with new departments for specialists in agriculture, economy, politics, education and health care. New political institutions, including local government councils, were created and Papua New Guineans were trained as teachers, medical workers and field officers (Brown, 2001: 19). Because not enough medical staff could be recruited in Australia, non-english-native speakers were attracted amongst those wishing to immigrate to Australia. It was in this context that Gerrits came to work in Papua New Guinea. Albeit, he applied for immigration to Australia to be able to work in Papua New Guinea, and did not, as many others, work in Papua New Guinea to be able to enter Australia.

It was a period of structural changes and unrest with growing indigenous participation in politics, which also had an influence on earlier hierarchical structures, notably on the position of high-ranking chiefs on Kiriwina. On Kiriwina particularly the emergence of the Kabisawali movement led by John Kasaipwalova needs mentioning (Leach, 1982: 257).

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<sup>82</sup> There was also mention of some songs having 'bad' contents, which does suggest missionary influence. The men however stressed having made their own choice and were understandably irritated by me implying otherwise.



Crucial for the production and sale of artefacts, particularly carvings, was the relatively high influx of tourists. One of my respondents mentioned that they used to call these tourists 'soldiers' because of their large numbers (Kwaibwaga interview, 08-2013). Between 1962 and 1972, the year in which the main guesthouse burnt down and tourism petered out, charter tours brought in a steady flow of tourists every weekend (2100 in 1971) and commercial carving rapidly increased (Leach, 1982: 256). Gerrits' period of collecting coincides with the peak of this tourist influx.

The influx of tourists also meant changes in the valuations of carvers and their positions in society. Earlier, 'tokabitam' carvers, (those, carving canoe- and yam store boards within a strict system of apprenticeship, with magical knowledge and abiding to particular food taboos (Campbell, 2001), had been the distinguished carvers. Other skillful carvers, notably those in the Kuboma district, producing utilitarian objects as bowls and platters had been less acknowledged. Their increased income in this period led to new possibilities for them and a shift in valuations of carvers in general (Jarillo de la Torre, 2013: 127). Gerrits' collecting and his conception of renowned carvers needs to be understood in the context of this period of rapid and structural changes. It should be noted however, that specific research into the changing positions of carvers from the first encounters with Westerners onward, would probably reveal earlier changes and a more gradual development over the entire period.

While I concur with Jarillo de la Torre's remark that the history of carving on the Trobriand Islands is not in a steady decline in quality as has often been suggested (Jarillo de la Torre, 2013: 130), it should also be noted that the high demand for carvings throughout contact history and the increasing dependence on carvings for an income did lead to the production of carvings of (very) poor quality, probably in all periods. This is also reflected in the attempts of the government to introduce standards and quality certificates in the period discussed here (Jarillo de la Torre, 2013, Appendix)

Besides tourists, numerous collectors sought Trobriand carvings in this period. Only a few examples can be mentioned here. Reverend Ralph Lawton built up a trade in artefacts to finance the United Church Mission and produced two brochures with the types of objects that were available for purchase. One was dedicated to 'art' objects the other to more utilitarian objects. Mrs. Robin Hodgson ran a store in Port Moresby and came on regular collecting visits to Kiriwina. She described covering the island standing on the back of a truck and buying offered carvings from there (Hodgson, personal communication, 09-2013).

Another collector to be mentioned is the Dutch commercial collector C. Groenevelt who collected for the major Dutch ethnological museums throughout Papua New Guinea.<sup>83</sup> He visited the Trobriand Islands several times on request of curator Victor Jansen at the (now) Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. Their correspondence, while Groenevelt was in the field, reveals some interesting details of his collecting practices. Groenevelt was a driven collector with little interest or concern for the indigenous people or their culture. On the Trobriand Islands he was assisted mainly by Dr Horst Jueptner,<sup>84</sup> Gerrits' predecessor as Medical Officer, and through him also had a truck available. Collecting was directed at traditional pieces. The presence of modern elements, such as store-paint on carved elements, was not appreciated. But as Groenevelt assured V. Jansen, it was not a major problem as the paint could easily be removed (Groenevelt, letter (04-03-61, Archives WMR). In Groenevelt's letters I found the only mention of people being irritated by the quest for objects, which he describes as being exceptional. It was when he showed interest in buying earthenware pots that Trobriand Islanders reacted with overt irritation. (Groenevelt, letter (04-03-61, Archives WMR)

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<sup>83</sup> Mainly for the then Ethnographical Museum in Rotterdam, now Wereldmuseum, and for the Museum of Tropics (Tropen Museum) in Amsterdam (see Hollander, 2007).

<sup>84</sup> Jueptner established a private collection of artefacts (Beran, personal communication, 2012).

Present carving practices have recently been analysed (Jarillo de la Torre, 2013). Here just a few impressions of Trobriand Islander's relationship to their colonial past conclude this chapter. In general I found the older generation to have a more understanding and differentiated attitude towards the past. While they realise the past un-equalities, more so perhaps than they did at the time, they also see some things have not improved. Thus, for example, the elderly man I spoke to in Yalaka village (08-2013) who had also sold things to Gerrits, remarked that they had been satisfied with the money they got for their things because "we did not know the value of money at the time". He implied that they perhaps ought to have got more for their artefacts, but he gave the explanation as a matter of fact, with empathy for their understanding in the past and taking responsibility for their decisions, rather than feeling victimised. Others (Olivilevi village, 08-2013) remarked that education, particularly English teaching, and the medical care had been much better in the years before independence. The younger generation, in some cases, showed a much more hostile and skeptical attitude towards the colonial past and in two cases younger relatives prevented, or attempted to prevent me talking to the elders without offering payment.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, the examples of Gerrits' photographs I showed, were lovingly used by some elders to show artefacts, practices, and themselves as young people, to their children and grandchildren, who in all these cases (Chief Puluyasi Daniel in Omarakana, Bomapata in Kwaibwaga and Kimabumyuwa in Yalumgwa (ill. 3.26), (08-2013) looked and listened with interest.

This chapter provided a historical overview of collecting on the Trobriand Islands.<sup>86</sup> It showed that encounters were of short duration but of unknown frequency for most of the 19th century. These first encounters arguably influenced artefact production and other aspects of Trobriand society. Towards

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<sup>85</sup> I did always in some way, either cash or store goods, give something for the time people invested in talking to me, yet did not want to abide to these aggressive demands.

<sup>86</sup> Further research could unquestionably produce a more differentiated picture.

the end of the 19th century contacts intensified and larger number of objects became part of broader trading encounters. With the presence of first settlers and the establishment of the first missionary and administrative stations, Western impact and collecting further intensified. Collecting also changed its focus from coastal areas to central Kiriwina and began to include stationary collecting. This allowed requesting and acquiring artefacts which were not in the first place offered to Western traders such as ceremonial axes. By the second decade of the 20th century a network of trade in yams, pearls, artefacts and tobacco had been established in which Western traders, missionaries, administrators, anthropologists, artists, short term visitors and Trobriand Islanders from inland and coastal villages, men and women, pearl divers and gardeners, carvers and specialists in the production of various artefacts were intertwined (see Silas, earlier in this chapter). Within this system Trobriand Islanders produced Trobriand valuables for Western traders to enable them to exchange pearls, yams and artefacts with other Trobriand Islanders. The system was further intensified with the introduction of money.

Most of the accounts presented here, including Gerrits' account (Part III) mention the relationship (at times tension) between the collector's agency and indigenous agencies. Westerners, especially in earlier accounts (Winslow, Pitcairn, Malinowski) are concerned about the kinds of exchange goods they can offer. In later records (Groenevelt, Gerrits) there is more concern about the availability of old, authentic artefacts.

In one way this history may be read as an increasing Trobriand dependency on Western items. Iron hoop was desired to a certain point, the introduction of tobacco initiated a physical dependency which should not be underestimated, then the introduction of money in combination with tax obligations (and later school fees, etc) further increased this dependency. Today the lack of means to generate cash income is a pressing problem for many. On the other hand, confiscations of artefacts and the searching of houses, as

practiced in the late 19th and early 20th century were later abandoned, which, together with broader political developments, meant an increase of indigenous agency.

The Western interest in pearls and later in yams declined, the interest in artefacts remained in various forms throughout the 20th century until the present. Scholarly collecting (Miklouho-Maclay, Finsch, later Seligman) comprised just a small part of the trade in artefacts, although some administrators and commercial collectors were directed by scholars (for example, Bellamy by Seligman at the beginning of the 20th century and Groenevelt by curator V. Jansen in the 1950s and early 1960s). Malinowski, to my knowledge was the first and only scholarly field collector who stayed in the field for a prolonged period of time and established a comprehensive ethnographic collection of Trobriand artefacts. At the time of his collecting, anthropology had however begun to lose interest in material culture, and Malinowski as a prominent proponent of this development was not interested in a time consuming documentation of his collection (Young, 2000). Moreover Malinowski was assisted by traders in acquiring his artefacts. Gerrits holds a unique position within this context as the only collector, to my knowledge, who established a well documented, comprehensive ethnographic collection, although he was no academic scholar.

Part II turns to a description and examination of Gerrits's collecting as contained in his conscientious documentation, his register of acquisitions.

Part II

Archives

## Introduction

Having provided a historical context of Trobriand collecting, I now turn to drawing an outline of Gerrits' collections and collecting practices using mainly his register of acquisitions. Gerrits' register or 'book of acquisitions' (Dutch: *aankoopboek*) as he calls it, comprises 132 pages with each place for 25 entries (ill. 2.22). In total it contains 3267 Trobriand collection entries. For each acquisition Gerrits noted a registration number, the object type, its local name, the location of origin, the creator's name and whether the object was authentic, 'real' (Dutch: *echt*) or 'tourist', in separate columns. Importantly, the register is not a product of organizing the collection in hindsight. It is a contemporary document which was written in the field while collecting, it grew along with the number of acquisitions. At the time of purchase Gerrits would attach labels to the objects on which he noted relevant basic information. In the evenings at home he then would enter this information into the register.

Looking through the pages of the register one gets a sense of the collector handling his acquisitions, one by one, or at times in batches, with satisfaction or perhaps at times less satisfied. One visualises him entering all these objects into the register with a steady, sometimes hurried, hand, adding minuscule notes here and there which hardly fit into the cells of the table.

Producing the register was an accomplishment in itself and as such the book reflects an essential quality of Gerrits' collecting - his capacity and commitment to conscientiously document his acquisitions. One also gains a sense of the objects themselves as they were purchased, and of the vendors and creators of these objects. Even without analysing the content of the register in detail, a first glance at the long lists of objects with their local names, numerous creators and villages and islands shows an extended 'scene of collecting' in which objects, people and places are all present (in great numbers). Looking

closer, each column appears to have certain features reflecting features of Gerrits' collecting.

Over the years Gerrits produced several other documents to structure his acquisitions and the informations he gained on them. Queensland Museum professionals and volunteers in cooperation with Gerrits further documented the collection held in the Queensland Museum and some of Gerrits' family members, notably his younger son and one of his granddaughters also contributed. Gerrits' wish to have all sub-collections, including photographs, field-notes and artefacts integrated in one document has as yet not been accomplished. Besides the initial register, Gerrits produced a register based on object-types and two major card catalogues, one numerical (using Gerrits' collection numbers), the other, again, based on object types. Both roughly contain the same information. Gerrits provided me with scans of the numerical card catalogue, which I use here to complement the initial register. The cards contain a black and white photograph of the object on one side and short comments and sizes of objects on the other. They are however only available for the portion of Gerrits acquisitions which now comprise the collection in the Queensland Museum. I also obtained the Leiden and Basel Museums' documentation. Whereas Gerrits made the register in the field for his own use, the catalogue cards were made after completion of the collection to accompany the objects. Gerrits' practice of structuring his material in various ways and his attempts to do so over the years is touchingly exemplified by a little box, containing a beginning of a card catalogue and numerous scrap paper notes. At the end of our conversations I asked him whether I had obtained a comprehensive picture of all his documentation. He then, showed me this little box, which he had started making in the field as a first card catalogue but had not manage to finish before leaving Kiriwina. At his new station, new tasks absorbed him and the box was left unfinished. Remarkably, he has kept all this documentation, even this little box. Gerrits' documents as a whole show his



admirable capability and dedication to manage vast amounts of data, systematically and precisely. On the other hand, uncompleted attempts and inconsistencies in the data show the limits of what is doable and the frustrations of coping with such vast material.

Chapter 3 introduces the register in more detail and points out specific features of Gerrits' collection and its documentation. It gives an overview of Gerrits acquisitions in terms of chronology (numbers of object collected per month), places of origin, destinations and the creators of the objects<sup>87</sup>, without however delving into the question which kinds of objects Gerrits collected. This is the subject of Chapter 4, which gives an overview of the types of objects Gerrits collected, relates these to the information on places of origin and destination and analyses the classifications Gerrits used, notably old versus new, and 'authentic' versus 'tourist'.

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<sup>87</sup> Gerrits uses the Dutch word '*maker*' to refer to the person who made the object. An appropriate English translation is not straightforward. While the Dutch word '*maker*' is quite commonly used and does contain an element of creativity and competence, the English word '*maker*' seems to me to be less commonly used and rather to be associated with mere production. While the likeness in their form suggests likeness in associations, this is not the case and thus misleading. The English word '*creator*' on the other hand may be slightly over the top, but it stresses an element of the Dutch word '*maker*' which as shall be shown (Conclusions) is an essential feature of Gerrits' collecting of 'modern' objects. Thus I chose to use '*creators*' for Gerrits' '*makers*'.

# Chapter 3

## Gerrits' register:

### the collection in overview

Pointing out specific features of the kind of information contained in the register is crucial for understanding the data one is dealing with and interesting in assessing Gerrits' practice of collecting. This is the focus of the first section of this chapter (3.1). The subsequent sections then turn to an analysis of the actual information noted in the register.

The register comprises 132 pages. Its content is organised in a table, each page containing twenty-five rows, that is, place for twenty-five acquisitions, and seven columns. The columns, contain the following data: registration number, month of collection, object type, local name of the object, creator's name, place of origin, a column noting E (*echt* = real/authentic or T (tourist). This table comprises the left pages of the register, to which Gerrits added a column for my purposes, noting the place of destination of the object. Gerrits supplied me with scans of these pages, which form the main body of data for this chapter and the next. I briefly saw the original register while assessing Gerrits' archives at his home. The opposite, right pages of the register contain further columns noting for example: the price Gerrits paid, whether Gerrits intended to keep the object for his Trobriand collection or whether it was to be sold (V/C, Dutch: V: *verkoop* = sale, C: *collectie* = collection) and space for

comments.<sup>88</sup> Below the columns of the left pages of the register are introduced separately in more detail.

### 3.1 The register's columns reviewed

#### Column 1:

##### **"No." = registration number - on counting objects**

The registration numbers start with 1701 and end with 5298. The numbering does not start from scratch as Gerrits had already collected earlier on Papua New Guinea and continued his entries from there (Gerrits interviews, 2013). This may be taken as an indication that Gerrits, to some degree, considered his entire ethnographic collecting as one, a theme which implicitly recurred in the interviews (Chapters 5 and 6).

The total number of Trobriand acquisitions can however not simply be calculated by subtracting 1700 from 5298 because several registration numbers were allocated to non-Trobriand collection acquisitions. The final count resulted in a total of 3268 entries.

Gosden and Knowles note some dilemmas in counting objects and chose to resolve these by counting transactions (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: 71). What was counted as an object by Gerrits in the register seems to have been defined by what could practically be labelled (a label attached to) as one object. For example, betel-nut mortars and pestles are registered separately when purchased separately, but registered under one number, with one label attached, when purchased as a set. *Lagim* (canoe splashboards) and *tabuya* (canoe wavesplitters) on the other hand, are always registered as separate objects, with added notes in the sideline indicating entries which form a set.

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<sup>88</sup> Gerrits' sold a portion of his acquisitions via his brother Hans Gerrits in the Netherlands to finance further collecting. The financial aspects, prices paid for objects as well as prices gained were a sensitive issue, with Gerrits as well as in the Queensland Museum. I therefore agreed that these would not be part of my analysis. A few comments are included in Chapter 6.

Batches of smaller objects, like for example a number of small pig-figures, or bracelets are sometimes tied together and registered under one number. In some cases Gerrits added the number of objects contained in the entry, but not in all. Also in some cases objects originally registered under one number were divided between museums, which slightly complicates comparing collections. I stuck to counting Gerrits' entries and were relevant point out specifics.

## **Column 2:**

### **“Mnd.” = Year and month - time of acquisition**

The acquisitions are entered by month, thus the register does not have the character of a diary noting events per day but does still allow to assess changes in Gerrits' collecting over time. Usually the month of acquisition and registration coincide, but there may be exceptions to this. The month noted is the month in which the objects were acquired (Gerrits, e-mail, 2017). In combination with the locations of origin one can largely determine in which months Gerrits undertook trips to other islands and collected there.

## **Columns 3 and 4:**

### **“Voorwerp” = object and “Naam” = local name**

Gerrits noted the type of object he had acquired in a mix of Dutch and English<sup>89</sup> in the 3rd column and its local name in the adjunct column.

It is interesting that Gerrits labelled the Dutch/English column as “voorwerp” = ‘object’ and the Kilivila column as “naam” = (local) ‘name’, thus conceiving the first column as containing the, for him, meaningful description of what (what type of object) he had in hand and the second as merely the label ‘they’, the indigenous people, attach to it. Looking in detail at the entries of canoe prows (*lagim*) and wavesplitters (*tabuya*) however, a shift in this

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<sup>89</sup> Code-switching (mixing languages) is common for anyone functioning multi-lingually.

perspective and Gerrits' use of language becomes apparent. Gerrits starts off indicating these objects as '*canoesteven*' (canoe prow) in one column and as lagim and tabuya in the other. In September 1968 (the sixths month of collecting, and after several lagim/tabuya entries) he enters a batch of several prow-boards in which the initial lagim/tabuya entries are crossed out and replaced by the respectively alternative term. He had apparently mistaken the two labels for each other, then realised his mistake and corrected it. At least by then, he thus must have had an understanding of the specific meanings of lagim and tabuya. Yet for the following 19 months and numerous collected lagim and tabuya, with some exceptions, he adds a minuscule "*dw*" or "*r*" to the Dutch/English term distinguishing between splashboards (*dw*: *dwers* = across) and wavesplitters (*r*: *recht* = lengthwise), noting superfluous information, and clearly not using the local language as distinctive marker. From September 1970 onward however the '*dw*' and '*r*' additions completely disappear, and 'lagim' and 'tabuya' become the only distinguishing markers between the two types of prow-boards. This reflects a change in Gerrits' level of immersion in Kilivila, which is relevant in picturing his presence and his collecting practices on the Trobriand Islands.<sup>90</sup>

Quite arbitrary variations in Dutch/English terms for the types of objects are present throughout the register without any attempt to standardise descriptions. This reflects the fact that the register was intended for Gerrits' personal use and not as a document for others. It also reflects a feature of Gerrits way of working. In the register, as long as he knew what he meant, any term was sufficient and standardization not necessary. Lack of standardization did complicate the analysis of the material. More importantly, it reflects the fact

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<sup>90</sup> The point in time when this change becomes apparent in the book most probably does not reflect the timing of these changes when using the language elsewhere. For one, the process of increasingly thinking in categories of a new language occurs gradually. (This is based on my own experiences in using various languages). The register, as a space in which Gerrits noted information primarily for himself, probably stayed Dutch/English dominated far longer than contexts of communication with Trobriand Islanders did.

that Gerrits did not have a preconceived standard or classification of Trobriand object types before starting to collect on the Trobriand Islands. Some classifications do precede collecting, but some indeed don't and develop during the collecting process (see 1.1). This is also reflected in various additional notes fitted into the cells of this column and other columns in small scribbles. The scribbles provide specific information, which was initially not accounted for. For example, whether a certain object was meant for a chief or made from specific materials, as bone spatulas.

In contrast to the Dutch/English terms, Kilivila terms are applied far more consequently, a lagim is a lagim a kaidebu (dance wand) is always a kaidebu. This may reflect the specificity of Kilivila terms, but also differences in Gerrits' level of competence in Dutch and Kilivila. In some cases more generic terms, for example *kaboma* = wooded bowl and more specific terms are used.

The local language is mostly Kilivila, yet regional differences in language are to some extent reflected in the entries from outside the Trobriand Islands. For example there is a note in the sideline of entries 2401 - 2411: "the people of Bogais (Muyuw/Woodlark) speak Missima language". Languages in the region vary but all belong to one language group (see 1.4). Thus terms used for similar objects may, but need not, be identical or very similar in the whole region. Additionally, many similar types of objects occur but also types of objects which are specific for certain regions. Some objects may have been common in a wider region in the past but their use abandoned in Kiriwina while still being used on more remote places. This, in fact, was one reason for Gerrits to collect outside Kiriwina (Gerrits interview, 2013). It is not quite clear how consequently Gerrits noted regional language differences or applied the terms he had already learnt on Kiriwina. It is even thinkable that vendors outside Kiriwina used Kilivila terms, knowing Gerrits would be familiar with them. In principle Gerrits always asked the vendors what they called the object. With many reoccurring object types he did however, understandably, not keep asking every time and

noted the term he already knew. This may possibly have resulted in missing out on specific information, although I can not point out any acquisition for which this may have been the case. Throughout the register one can not determine which entries are, or are not, based on specific enquiries. A few examples however clearly reflect Gerrits having asked what he purchased and indiscriminately recording the given answer. A spear is noted as 'gai'. 'Gai' however means ebony wood and thus refers to the material of the object rather than to the object itself, which Gerrits at the time, in the earlier stages of collecting may not have realised.

When using the book as a source of data, with some preconceived knowledge of Kilivila object terminology, the combination of the entries in the two columns is often helpful in understanding which specific type of object is meant. This was however not the initially intended function of noting both. Gerrits noted the local terms as part of the information he found relevant for documenting a collection (Gerrits interviews, 2013).

### **Column 5:**

#### **"Makers" = makers, creators**

Gerrits put considerable effort into figuring out who had made the object he purchased and noted the answers phonetically. Occasionally Gerrits noted from whom he had purchased an object, if the creator's name was unknown. The register however does not structurally note who owned and sold the object. Noting creators consequently in itself is a remarkable accomplishment as anyone with some experience in collecting in the field would probably testify and especially considering the extent of Gerrits collection. It also reveals something about the nature of Gerrits' collecting encounters. Gerrits did not merely concentrate on purchasing objects and negotiating prices. He put time and energy into acquiring information and thus engaged in talking with people.

One gets an image of these encounters being social events rather than mere transactions of goods (also Gerrits, e-mail, 2017).

An unknown creator is indicated with a question-mark, a dash indicates the object not to have a creator, at least in Gerrits perception (for example stones or sticks used in magic). An interesting feature of this column is that Gerrits noted whether the creator was dead at the time of purchase as an indication for the age of the object. Deceased creator s are indicated with a ‘†’. The accuracy of this measure, as Gerrits realises, is of course limited. A person aged eighty and still alive in 1970 may have made an object around 1910, which would almost coincide with Seligman’s visit and predate Malinowski’s period of stay. The objects of deceased creators are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Assessing the register, the mere presence of the long list of people reflects the social side of collecting. The register is not only a register of objects; it is also a register of people (and places), albeit the objects do have a primary position. Local agency is not only “frozen in museum collections” (O’Hanlon, 2000: 4), in Gerrits’ register the people are noted by name. Quite typically for his conscientiousness, Gerrits attempted to note a creator for every single object and did not, for example, focus only on noting renowned carvers. Together the long lists of objects and people may be taken to reflect two crucial sides of Gerrits’ collecting: his strong drive/passion to acquire objects and his passion for ‘the’ people. (Gerrits interviews, 2013, Part II).

On the other hand, looking through the long list of names, one is also inclined to question its meaning and usefulness. Gerrits inconsistencies in spelling, which are found throughout the register, complicate assessing the information particularly in this column. While I gained a reasonable working knowledge of Kilivila object types and had a reference list of village and island names, it was impossible (within the frame of this work) to figure out which entries are variations in Gerrits’ spelling and which are actually different individuals. Even having accomplished this task, one would be only at the



begin of making sense of the list names. Who were all these people? Why did they make these objects, why did they sell them? What difference does it make to know all these names? Besides the meaning of their mere presence, these names do have the potential to open up possibly interesting stories, that is, they provide the potential for further research, which may include skilled and renowned carvers but need not be limited to them. An extended analysis of the list of creators was beyond the scope of this study.

### **Column 6:**

#### **“Herkomst” = Origin - location of purchase or location of production?**

Noting the location of origin seems straightforward but is in fact not unambiguous. Most entries have one location noted, in most cases a village or island, occasionally a cave or beach is mentioned, a question-mark indicates the location not to be known. In approximately 20 cases Gerrits noted two locations: the location of purchase and the location of production. Clearly in these cases Gerrits knew the object to have been produced elsewhere and found it relevant to note both. This raises the question how all the other entries must be read. Large batches of entries from one island indicate Gerrits to have visited the place, yet two single objects from Kitava and two from the Amphlett Islands in the first month of his collecting between further exclusively Kiriwina villages, indicate the objects to have been bought on Kiriwina and having come from Kitava, respectively the Amphlett Islands. Gerrits thus tended to note the location of production of the object. But he did not do so consequently. Kiriwina did not produce any clay pots, they were produced on the Amphlett Islands. Yet, in several cases only a Kiriwina village is noted, whereas the clay pot certainly was not produced there, and Gerrits knew so. Besides these inconsistencies in documentation which can be pointed out, Gerrits would not always have known where an object had actually been made. Thus, using the register one can not know for certain whether the location of purchase or

production was noted. The discrepancy between the information aimed at (place of origin), and the information actually gathered and noted in this column is an example how certain concepts and classifications in ethnographic collecting (the importance of the place of origin) could not readily be put into practice because they did not quite fit an ethnographic reality in which objects were produced, transferred and used in various locations for various reasons. It is an example of how Gerrits applied a concept (place of origin) without scrutinising it. Then, finding it not to be straightforward, he adjusted his data partially which led to inconsistencies in his documentation. While he mentioned finding objects' trajectories interesting (Gerrits interviews, 2013), he did not consider to change his documentation (by adding a column, for example) or look into differences in locations of production and purchase more structurally. This would of course have been a time consuming effort, which was not feasible for the numbers of objects Gerrits collected.

### **Column 7:**

#### **"T\E" = Tourist or Authentic?**

In this last column Gerrits noted whether he thought the object to have been made for tourists or to be authentic. How Gerrits defined these concepts more exactly will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. In contrast to the information on creators (deceased or not), the classification in this column was largely Gerrits' decision (Gerrits interviews, 2013). An exclamation-mark after nearly every E s('E!') reflects Gerrits' excitement about these objects.

## 3.2 Number of months and numbers per month

### **Number of months of collecting (Chart 3.2, Vol.II)**

Gerrits and his family arrived on Kiriwina in late March 1968 (Gerrits interviews, 2013). The register entries commence in April 1968, showing Gerrits to have collected right from the beginning,<sup>91</sup> and continue until August 1971, the month in which Gerrits' posting on Kiriwina ended. Another batch of acquisitions is added in March 1972. Gerrits mentioned a return-visit to Kiriwina to sort out loose ends in his collecting and gathering information (Gerrits interviews, 2013). There is a break in the register between July and October 1969. In this period Gerrits' brother Hans visited Kiriwina and Gerrits accompanied his brother on a collecting trip to the Sepik region. In the register July and September each have only 15 entries which may be explained by the fact that Hans Gerrits also collected and the majority of the joint acquisitions in this period went into Hans' collection, or Gerrits may simply not have spent time collecting for himself during his brother's visit. Gerrits noted August 1969 in the register as the period of the trip to the Sepik. Why October has no entries is not exactly clear but is most probably related to Hans' visit.<sup>92</sup>

The register therefore contains: 9 months in 1968 (April through December), 10 months in 1969 (all except September and October), 12 months in 1970, 8 months in 1971 (January to August) and 1 month in 1972 (March). This adds up to a total of 40 months of collecting. Only 1970 covers an entire year of collecting.

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<sup>91</sup> See also Chapter 5.

<sup>92</sup> This detail only became apparent after my return from Australia and I did not attempt to clarify it with Gerrits per e-mail.

### **Numbers of objects collected per month (Chart 3.2, Vol. II)**

The numbers of objects collected per month fluctuate quite strongly between 20 or less objects to round about 150 objects with a peak of nearly 180 acquisitions in July 1970. There is a clear distinction between the first 21 months of Gerrits' stay (1968/1969) and the second period of 21 months from January 1970 onward (including the additional month in 1972). Approximately 33% of the acquisitions were done in the first period as opposed to 67% in the later period. Gerrits' collecting really seems to take off in January 1970. While monthly acquisitions still fluctuate, they never fall below 50 objects and often lie between 100 and 150 acquisitions per month. An exception is only August 1971. The small number of acquisitions in this month is however explained by the fact that Gerrits was packing up and left before the end of the month.

### **3.3 Destinations**

As mentioned in Section 1.3 Gerrits' acquisitions were divided between the National Museum and Gallery of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby, the National Ethnological Museum Leiden (Netherlands), The (now) Museum der Kulturen in Basel (Switzerland) and the Queensland Museum (Australia). A portion was sold, given away or lost/damaged and a portion was kept in Gerrits private collection. Chart 3.1 (Vol. II) shows the percentages of acquisitions in the different places of destination. The Queensland Museum received the largest portion of Gerrits' acquisitions (45%). The Museums in Moresby, Basel and Leiden received more or less equal portions, all just below 10% of the entire collection. Gerrits' private collection accounts for about 2%. Taking these portions together, 71% of Gerrits acquisitions went to museums and are presently still held in these museums.<sup>93</sup> Twenty-nine % of the acquisitions were not kept. This portion includes objects sold to dealers or

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<sup>93</sup> Gerrits' private collection comprises 78 objects of which he has 25 at his home and the remaining 52 on loan in the Queensland Museum.

private collectors, objects given away as presents and objects lost or damaged in transport. Hans Gerrits was responsible for selling the objects in the Netherlands. Although Gerrits tried to keep track of these objects, this was not always possible from a distance and their exact destinations are hardly traceable anymore. As Gerrits commented (Gerrits interviews, 2013) his aim was to create a collection (of objects, photographs and ethnographic information) representative of Trobriand (material-) culture. He needed to sell objects to finance his collecting. The exact mix of Gerrits' motives to collect need not be determined in percentages, yet having kept nearly three quarters of his acquisitions in museums and nearly half (45%) in his core collection (now the Queensland Museum) does indicate that Gerrits collected for many reasons other than gaining financial benefit. The Queensland Museum purchased the collection. It should be noted though that Gerrits had invested considerably in transferring the objects to the Netherlands and had planned to keep the collection himself but eventually concluded that he would not have the space to do so.

### 3.4 Locations of origin

Chart 3.3 shows the percentages of objects originating from various regions.<sup>94</sup> The majority of Gerrits' acquisitions originate from Kiriwina. Including Northern-, Central-, and Southern Kiriwina and unspecified Trobriand/Kiriwina entries, they account for 55% of the entire collection. I chose to distinguish between, what I call, Northern Kiriwina and Central Kiriwina according to the division in the 1968 census brochure. The areas coincide with different axes of travel from the Government Station Losuia, where Gerrits was stationed and to some extent with different carving traditions. Central Kiriwina

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<sup>94</sup> The 'rest' category contains about thirty entries labeled Trobriand Islands or Kiriwina, several question marks, a few entries from different locations like Fergusson, Dobu and Ware Island near Samarai where Gerrits did not collect, but which he considered relevant for the Trobriand collection and a few locations I could not identify.

is situated along the West-East axis, Northern Kiriwina is reached by traveling northwards along Kiriwina's main road. Both areas have villages which are situated in more or less proximity (in terms of reachability and distance) from Losuia, yet as Losuia is situated in Central Kiriwina, this area may be presumed to be the area in which Gerrits' most stationary collecting took place. Southern Kiriwina, the southern part of the long narrow land-tongue reaching south and Vakuta Island, at its southern tip, are presented together (4%) as both are usually reached by boat from Central Kiriwina.

Quite remarkable are the numbers originating from Kitava (9%) and Iwa (11%), which together account for 20% of all acquisitions. The Marshall Bennett Islands, Iwa (11%), Gawa (4%) and Kwaiawata (2%) together account for 17%. I present them separately as they account for a relatively high percentage of acquisitions yet with quite large differences between them. These differences may possibly be explained by their proximity to Kiriwina. Iwa, Gawa and Kwaiawata lie half way between Kiriwina and Woodlark/Muyuw. Iwa however lies much closer to Kitava, Gawa and Kwaiawata lie closer to Woodlark/Muyuw (ill. 1.2, Kwaiawata spelt as Kweawata). They are also related to the frequency of medical patrols to these Islands in which Gerrits participated (see Section 6.1). Kitava with 20 square miles (PNG census register, 1968: 24) and the three Marshall Bennett Islands are small. Gawa is slightly bigger than Kitava, Iwa somewhat smaller and Kwaiawata quite tiny.<sup>95</sup>

What I labeled Western Islands are the smaller islands near to Kaileuna, Munuwata and Kuyawa, and further west, notably Simsim and Kava Island even further west. What I labeled Eastern Islands are the smaller islands south of Woodlark, some of which Gerrits visited only once or twice. They include Alcester Island, Egum Atoll (Yanaba and Egum Islet) and Budibudi (Lauglan Islands).

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<sup>95</sup> Sizes of these Islands are not given in the PNG Census register (1968) as they are accessed together with Woodlark.

A detailed analysis on village level was not done. A first count however reveals significant differences between numbers of objects collected in various villages. In Northern Kiriwina, Kabwaku (53), Kwaibwaga (48), Liluta (51), Mutawa (41), Oboada (55), Obweria (48), Okaikoda (46) and Tubowada (58) all accounted for over 40 objects. In several other villages just a few objects were obtained. In Central Kiriwina, Boitalu (59), Gumilababa (42), Kapwapu (64), Kuluwa (48), Luya (44), Wabutuma (95) and Yalaka (81) have occurrences above 40. The reasons for differences between villages need to be further investigated.

### 3.5 Extending the region of collecting

Gerrits participated in medical patrols focussed on mother and child health-care but also giving general medical support in a wider region (Gerrits interviews , 2013). During these trips he also collected. Larger batches of consecutive objects from various islands in the register indicate when Gerrits undertook these journeys (Table 3.1). Kailenua in the West, Kitava in the East and Vakuta in the South of Kiriwina are all in relatively short reach of Kiriwina. In 1968 Gerrits did not venture further than these Islands, with a possible visit to Kailenua in July<sup>96</sup> and a first trip to Kitava in September, possibly also visiting Vakuta and the Southern part of Kiriwina. In January 1969 Gerrits traveled further away to Iwa and Gawa Islands for the first time. In April 1969 he made a second visit to Kitava and in June he was back in Iwa and once more in Kitava.

In January 1970 Gerrits extended his travels further yet, as testified by the first large entry from Woodlark/Muyuw, including Madau. The entries in March and April 1970 probably reflect another trip to Woodlark/Muyuw, including Madau and Iwa, and for the first time also to Kwaiawata. In May 1970 there is a batch from the Amphlett Islands. This was the only excursion

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<sup>96</sup> The consecutive entry of 13 objects from Kaileuna may also have been acquired on Kiriwina, yet Kaileuna is the nearest to Kiriwina, which makes it probable that Gerrits visited Kaileuna first.

Gerrits organised exclusively as collecting trip (Gerrits interviews, 2013, see Chapter 5). In July 1970 Gerrits undertook an extended trip visiting Kitava, all three Marshall Bennett Islands, Woodlark (Muyuw)/Madau and the smaller and more remote islands, Yanaba and Egum Atoll (8 entries) and Budbudi (Laughlan Islands) (8 entries)<sup>97</sup>. In August 1970 he turned westward again, for the first time since 1968, visiting Kaileuna and this time also including the smaller islands, Munuwata and Kuyawa just south-west of Kaileuna, and SimSim quite far west. The last three months of 1970 show a trip to Iwa and possibly Gawa in October and possibly a combined trip to Southern Kiriwina and Woodlark /Muyuw, including Madau in November/December.

In the last year of Gerrits' Trobriand collecting, 1971, the picture becomes more complicated. February shows Kwaiawata, Gawa and Kitava entries, April to July contain various batches from the Marshall Bennett Islands, Southern Kiriwina and Woodlark/Muyuw. Possibly the April/May entries reflect one trip and the June/July entries another trip. Yet, possibly objects were registered some time after their purchase and the February, April and May entries belong to one trip or were purchased on other locations as their origins. In any case the entries show Gerrits to have been motivated to venture out of Kiriwina until the very end of his stay on Kiriwina as July 1971 contains a large batch of objects from Iwa Island. Gerrits left Kiriwina in August 1971.

The peaks in numbers of acquisitions per month shown in Chart 3.2, largely coincide with peaks in numbers of entries from outside Kiriwina. These peaks reflect a concentration of collecting in the short periods of time Gerrits' spent on these islands which has been described as typical for 'mobile collecting'. The peaks however are not caused by entries from outside Kiriwina alone but by the combination of acquisitions in and outside Kiriwina. The trips did not take up all month and in the period Gerrits was at home collecting on Kiriwina continued.

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<sup>97</sup> Gerrits mentioned having visited these islands only once (Gerrits interviews, 2013).



<b>Table 3.1</b>	
<b>Larger batches of entries from outside Kiriwina indicating Gerrits' travels</b>	
<b>Month</b>	<b>Location and number of entries</b>
<b>Year 1968</b>	
July	Kaileuna (13)
September	Kitava (75), Vakuta (5) Sinaketa (4) <sup>7</sup>
<b>Year 1969</b>	
January	Iwa (15), Gawa (25)
April	Kitava (65)
June	Iwa (40), Kitava (40)
<b>Year 1970</b>	
January	Woodlark (Muyuw)/Madau (75)
March/ April	Woodlark (Muyuw)/Madau (30), Iwa (50), Kwaiawata (30)
May	Amphlett Islands (27)
July	Kitava (20), Vakuta (6), Iwa (29), Gawa (11), Kwaiawata (11), Woodlark (Muyuw)/Madau (23) Yanaba/ Egum Atoll (8), Budbudi (Laughlan Islands) (8)
August	Kaileuna (42), Konia/Simsim Isl. (14), Munuata Isl. (7) Kuyawa Isl (4)
October	Iwa (50), Gawa (19)
November/December	Southern Kiriwina (25) Woodlark (Muyuw) (30), Alcester (6), Yanaba, Egum (5/3);
December	Kaileuna (7), Kawa (9), Mumuata (4)
<b>Year 1971</b>	
February	Kwaiawata (14), Gawa (13), Kitava (11)
April	Iwa (20),
May	Kwaiawata (10), Iwa (15)
June	Southern Kiriwina (25), Woodlark (45)
July	Iwa (65)

### 3.6 Combining origins and destinations

Chart 3.4 shows clear differences between locations of origin in the percentages of acquisitions which were not kept and those which went to museums. From the 'Eastern Islands' (39%), Kitava (38%) Kwaiawata (37%) and Central Kiriwina (35%) relatively many acquisitions (35% or higher) were not kept, compared to the 29% 'not-kept' portion of the entire collection. Northern Kiriwina (29%) and Gawa (30%) however correspond with this average. From Kailenua and the neighbouring islands (20%)<sup>98</sup>, Iwa (21%), Southern Kiriwina/Vakuta (24%) and Woodlark/ Muiuw (26%) relatively smaller percentages were sold or given away.

Northern- and Central Kiriwina and Kitava are the only locations from which Gerrits collected over the entire period from 1968 to 1972 which made me first concentrate on these two locations for shifts in percentages over the years. Looking at the percentages of 'not-kept' objects from Northern- and Central Kiriwina per year, interestingly, one finds a clear decline until 1971. The acquisitions in 1972 were done during a return-visit and thus stand somewhat apart from Gerrits' main period of collecting in the region. (Table 3.2, Chart 3.5).

Table 3.2 Percentages of 'not-kept' objects from Kiriwina				
Year	North Kiriwina	Central Kiriwina	Total Kiriwina	% 'not-kept'
1968	243	212	554	46%
1969	185	97	252	39%
1970	324	260	584	24%
1971	115	230	345	25%
1972	--	--	70	32%

<sup>98</sup> Kaileuna has a percentage of 26% 'not-kept' objects and the smaller islands 15%. Thus the majority of the objects from these smaller islands went to museums, their absolute numbers are quite small (approximately 30 objects) however.

Looking at the sub-collection from Kitava in more detail gives a slightly different perspective. In the years 1968/69, 45% of the Kitava acquisitions were not kept, but from 1970 onward 23% of the Kitava objects were not kept, leaving 75% to museums. Again there is a quite drastic decline in the 'not-kept' portion and correspondingly an increase in the percentage that went to museum collections. Yet differentiating between museums, one finds the majority (nearly 78%) of the Kitava objects in the Museums in Basel, Leiden, Port Moresby and in Gerrits' private collection, to have been collected in 1968/69. This implies that nearly all Kitava museum objects collected from 1970 onward went to the Queensland Museum.

Looking into these distributions for the entire collection for the years 1968 to 1971 (Chart 3.6), one finds the Queensland Museum steadily to increase, the Museums in Leiden and Basel to follow this pattern, with a small decline in 1969. Gerrits' private collection stays relatively stable over the years. Remarkably, the percentages that went to Port Moresby steadily decline, following the line of the 'not-kept' category.

Various factors may explain these patterns. Gerrits initially wanted to keep his entire core collection in Port Moresby but the Museum was not interested as it already held Trobriand collections (Gerrits interviews, 2013). Possibly Gerrits supplied Port Moresby with more objects in the first years to build relationships and enhance his chance for export clearances. In the first years he also allowed more to be sold but then became more and more immersed in building his collection. The fact that particularly the percentages that went to the Queensland Museum increased, is probably mainly explained by a change in interest in Gerrits' collecting. Gerrits became increasingly interested in collecting a broad variety of objects which would represent Trobriand material culture as comprehensively as possible. This change in interest additionally accounts for the decline of percentages of objects which were not kept and the decline of percentages of objects that went to Port Moresby. Gerrits focussed

more on building his collection which implied collecting more 'ethnographic' objects of various utility as opposed to 'art'.

### 3.7 "*Makers*" - creators

As stated earlier in this chapter, the mere presence of a long list of people in the register testifies the presence of the large number of people 'behind the objects', people who created these objects and thus directly or indirectly were involved in Westerners' collecting. While many of these people, for now, remain anonymous, some information on the list's content could be gathered.

Gerrits noted male and female creator's names, and in some cases also indicated the name to be female. I could not sufficiently distinguish female names to make a full count, the majority of the objects however were made by men and sold by men as Gerrits commented (Gerrits interviews, 2013). It is interesting to note that in the latter years Gerrits increasingly noted whether the name was male or female and the female creators indeed seem to increase. This most likely reflects the fact that Gerrits collected proportionally more objects made by women in the latter period.

Cases in which Gerrits did not note a creator are comprised of different groups. Some types of objects were not considered to have a creator, as for example, magic sticks, scraping shells, and garden or yam-store stones which were used in their original form, or at least Gerrits assumed them to be used in their natural forms. Objects from burial caves generally have no creator noted. Sometimes batches of a type of object, as for example lime-spatulas, are registered without creator. Possibly the batch was bought from one vendor and the larger scale of the (bulk-) purchase made it virtually impossible to ask who had made all these objects. It is however meaningful that these batches occur in entries originating from outside Kiriwina, thus indicating a difference between stable and mobile collecting. On the brief visits outside Kiriwina there was less

time to document creators. On his return visit in 1972 Gerrits collected a high percentage of tourist objects for which he did not note creator's names.

Language competence and more detailed knowledge of local names and the people living at the time are helpful in making sense of some of the entries which Gerrits noted phonetically. Anthropologist and Trobriand Islander Linus DigimRina, who was a young boy during Gerrits' period on Kiriwina, made some revealing comments for the portion of the acquisitions from Kiriwina and now held in the Queensland Museum. On the whole he found Gerrits to have made a very good effort in phonetically noting the names (personal communication, 2013).<sup>99</sup>

The following examples are revealing as they show the question Gerrits posed in the field: "Who made this?", by which he meant the individual who had made the object, either not to have been understood accordingly or for the sake of convenience to have been answered in more general terms.

An old dance ornament collected in August 1968 (Queensland Museum: E-15501) is noted to have been made by "*nanumaia*". According to DigimRina this should be *nunumwaya* and means 'women'. Unfortunately we do not know who gave this answer and why. Was it a man (or a group of men) who did not consider the name of the particular woman of importance or simply did not know who had made it and found this a convenient answer? Or were they women, who might have wanted to stress that the object had been made by a woman? Or had the informants perhaps earlier experienced that some Westerners were interested in whether objects were made by men or women?

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<sup>99</sup> DigimRina checked a printed version of the Queensland Museum database. Mistakes in assessing names occurred in Gerrits notes, but also in entering these notes into the Museum's database. Thus the maker of a lime-gourd from Omarakana village (Gerrits register: 3026, Queensland Museum: E13841-0) is entered in Gerrits' register as Iwalela, in the Queensland Museum database as Twalela, and should according to DigimRina be Youwalela. The creator of the head (flower)-ornament (Gerrits register: 4204, Queensland Museum: E15512-0) from Omarakana is noted as Iyewa in the register (with a sign indicating that the person was female) and as Tyewa in the Museum database. Apparently Gerrits' 'I' was more often mistaken for a T. Iyewa, as DigimRina explained, was Chief Vanoi's first wife.

A yam store board from Sinaketa (Queensland Museum E-14021, Gerrits' register 4925, collected June 1971) is noted to have been made by "*Mililuta*", which however means: 'people of Liluta Village'. The answer may imply that the names of the individuals were not known or that the informants considered them less relevant as they were not from their village. In any case Gerrits seems to have missed the information on the origin of the object. Particularly interesting are the answers "*Lomugwo*" (yam store board/ *tataba* from Osapola Village, Queensland Museum E-14026, Gerrits' register 2193, collected October 1968) and "*Lukwasisiga*" (breast/neck ornament, *doga* from Okupukopu Village, Queensland Museum E-138113, Gerrits register 5051, collected July 1971). Neither are names of individuals. The first means 'subjects of the chief', the second is the name of one of the four clans or descent lines on Kiriwina. In the register "*Lomugwo*" is noted with two small crosses (tt) indicating the creators to have died a long time ago. These answers are interesting because they indicate the creators to have been more than one person and, importantly, belonging to certain groups which the informants considered to be relevant. The answers thus reveal local concepts in which the names of individual creators are possibly considered to be less relevant than their belonging to certain groups. Albeit not recognised by the collector (or the museum) these answers also reflect Trobriand agency in supplying information. These are just a few examples which DigimRina pointed out for a portion of the total number of acquisitions. Having the entire register checked by people from the different islands would most probably reveal more such cases, yet could not be accomplished within the frame of my fieldwork.

While most of the creators unfortunately remain anonymous, various people could be identified. The group comprises chiefs of various villages, renowned carvers and people with whom Gerrits had established closer relationships. Two notable chiefs are Nalubutau of Yalumgwa Village. (ills. 2.1, 3.27) and chief Uwelasi of Tubowada. Nalubutau sold Gerrits two entire yam-

store gable fronts. One was sent to the Museum in Port Moresby. The other is now held in the Queensland Museum. Nalubutau was an acknowledged master carver (see also Leach and Leach, 1983: 428). The other entire yam-store Gerrits acquired was owned by Chief Maluwa of Olivilevi Village and was not noted in the register. This purchase is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

A notable renowned carver at the time was Ulisaku of Gawa Island. Gerrits bought several objects which were made by Ulisaku, some directly from him on Gawa, others at other places. The term master-carver is at times applied to skilled and renowned carvers. It should be noted that the term may be used in different ways. In the past, as described by Campbell (2002: 41-49), three kinds of carvers were distinguished. *Tokabitam* worked within a strict system of knowledge and rules of conduct (for example adhering to certain food tabus during carving) and within a strict system of apprenticeship which allowed every tokabitam to pass his knowledge only to one apprentice. These tokabitam are (in the strict sense of the word) labelled as master carvers by Campbell. *Tokataraki* were skilled carvers who had probably not managed to become an apprentice and thus carved without 'magic'. A separate group were the carvers in the Kuboma District, Boitalu Village being particularly renowned, who carved all kinds of utilitarian things like, bowls, platters, etc. In the 1960s, with the relative boom of tourism, 10% of the male population of Kiriwina were estimated to have been carvers and according to Campbell the tokabitam system had largely been undermined (Campbell, 2002: 47). Details of how and when the system changed have, as yet, not been documented; neither has the question been raised to what extent the system was actually abandoned. It may be assumed that this was a gradual process which started with the first larger scale demands for carvings by traders, and later missionaries and administrators, in the 19th century and further developed throughout the 20th century. The 1960s and the 1970s were however a period of clear transition (Jarillo de la Torre, 2013: 122; Chapter 2).

Certain rules for who is allowed to do certain work, as for example, paint yam-store boards, do still seem to apply. When discussing the restoration of the the Olivilevi yam store in Rotterdam with a group of men in Olivilevi (2013), one of the younger men looked at me with earnest concern and said: “But you did not repaint the front, did you?” It was a statement needing confirmation, rather than a question and I could (with some relief) honestly confirm that I hadn’t. His special concern about the paint took me by surprise however, and I missed the chance to ask why this was so important to him. Was it a pure visual concern, or was it, as I suspect, the fact that certain rules apply to who is allowed to do the painting and how.

This chapter provided totals of the number of objects held in different destinations and originating from different localities. An overview of these totals helps to gain a first impression of the composition of the large number of acquisitions. The totals are also necessary to be able to calculate and compare percentages of different objects types in different places of destinations and origins in Chapter 4. This chapter has shown Gerrits’ documentation to be conscientious, but on certain points not to be unambiguous.

Gerrits collected right from the start in Kiriwina and gradually extended his collecting into the surrounding region, suggesting gradual differences between stable collecting and more mobile forms of collecting elsewhere. Peaks in numbers of artefacts collected per months show these peaks to occur when Gerrits collected in the surrounding region. As however most of the acquisitions originate from Kiriwina, these peaks suggest collecting on Kiriwina to have continued over the entire period. The chapter pictured fluctuating numbers of objects being transferred per month over a period of 40 months of collecting and briefly discussed Gerrits’ documentation of the numerous indigenous creators and vendors involved in this process. The register reflects aspects of Gerrits’ manner of working including his admirable energy to gather and process vast amounts of data and objects and his eye for details (as



exemplified in sideline scribbles). It also reflects the intertwining of aspects of Gerrits' agency in applying certain classification (tourist or authentic) and aspects of indigenous agency in providing information, particularly about the creators. The following Chapter describes which types of objects were part of these movements of objects and in what numbers.

# Chapter 4

## Gerrits' register: Classes and types of objects

The previous chapter gave an overview of Gerrits' acquisitions without yet considering classes and types of objects. This chapter focusses on what kinds of objects Gerrits collected and in which numbers. It also discusses the categories of *t* (deceased creator) and *T* (tourist) objects. Special attention is given to the portion of objects that did not go to any of the museums or Gerrits' private collection, the portion labelled as 'not-kept'. Brief background information on certain objects is given, yet this chapter is not meant to be a concise ethnography of Trobriand material culture.

### 4.1 All things Trobriand

Gerrits not only collected many objects but also many kinds of objects. The groupings chosen here to present Gerrits' acquisitions are a mix of functional groups (hunting, cooking), elements of more complex objects (canoes, yam-stores) and objects with similar forms and production processes (bowls and baskets). The groups were chosen to help present the acquisitions in a clear overview, following categories which were readily recognisable in the register. Because of the large numbers of objects it was impossible to analyse them all in detail. Thus, an exemplifying selection is briefly discussed.

## An overview

Table 4.1 presents an overview of the classes and types of objects Gerrits acquired. Some of the main classes contain relatively large numbers of certain types of objects. These are specified below the totals of the class.

Table 4.1 Overview of classes/ types of objects in Gerrits' register (entries total: 3267)							
Object class/ type English/ Kilivila		Type total	% of all entries	Object class/ type English/ Kilivila		Type total	% of all entries
<i>Canoe related total</i>		559	17,1 %	<i>Axes and Adzes</i>		150	4,6%
Splashboard	<i>lagim</i>	194	5,9 %	<i>Tools and materials</i>		135	4,1 %
Wavesplitter	<i>tabuya</i>	141	4,8 %	<i>Fishing and hunting</i>		136	4,2 %
Ornament	<i>sikusaku</i>	58	1,8 %	<i>Weapons (war)</i>		92	2,8 %
Canoe other	--	166	5%	<i>Carved figures/ tourist</i>		111	3,4 %
<i>Main betel chewing</i>		462	14%	<i>Sound instruments</i>		140	4,3 %
Lime spatula	<i>kena</i>	201	6%	Drum	<i>kasosau</i>	52	1,6 %
Mortar & Pestle (set)	<i>kaipita &amp; kaimili</i>	94	2,9 %	Drum (small)	<i>katunemia</i>	44	1,3 %
Mor. or Pest.	<i>k. or k.</i>	81	2,5 %	<i>Dancing</i>		67	2%
Lime pot	<i>yaguma</i>	86	2,6 %	Dance wand	<i>kaidebu</i>	41	1,3 %
<i>Body ornaments total</i>		447	13,7 %	<i>Clothing</i>		98	3%
Combs	<i>sinata</i>	72	2,2 %	<i>Earthenware pots</i>		62	1,9 %
<i>Bowls and platters total</i>		256	7,8 %	<i>Toys &amp; cricket</i>		52	1,6 %
<i>Yam store/ house related</i>		196	6%	<i>Baskets</i>		50	1,5 %
Gable board	<i>tataba</i>	82	2,5 %	<i>Burial caves</i>		29	0,9 %
<i>Ladles and Taro beaters</i>		154	4,7 %	<i>Smoking and other</i>		27	0,8 %

Numbers of objects per type vary to a high degree, from a few hundred specimens to just a few unique items (only the larger groups are specified in

table 4.1. These numbers reflect a combination of Gerrits' interests and the number of objects available. They do not necessarily reflect a specific interest in any of the classes or types. Gerrits interests and the availability in the field can not be deduced from the register alone, the observations made here are partially based on Gerrits' comments (Gerrits interviews, 06-2013). They are discussed in more detail in Part II. Large numbers of objects indicate that the type of object was available in large numbers and Gerrits, for one reason or another, was interested in acquiring them (see also the discussion on the acquisition of bowls, Part II, Introduction). An example are the canoe elements *lagim* and *tabuya* which occur in very large numbers. Other elements, such as bailers (31 items) occur in far smaller, but still respectable, numbers. Unique objects are those, which Gerrits encountered only once, or just a few times, in the field. The canoe protective shields, of which Gerrits collected two specimens (G. reg.nr. 3215 and 3243, now held in the QM and in the MKB) are an example of these unique objects.<sup>100</sup> Smaller numbers may indicate that the objects were not readily available or that Gerrits was not interested in acquiring larger numbers. Certain types of objects were present in the field but hard to obtain (kula valuables, chief's objects, certain mortuary objects, earthenware pots), Gerrits commissioned some of these objects to be made for him, or, in the case of the earthenware pots, undertook a trip to the Amphlett Islands, where these pots are produced, to obtain new pots which he exchanged for older pots in Kiriwina. Baskets and toys are both relatively small groups. Gerrits was not particularly interested in baskets but included an example of every functional type of basket. He was fascinated by toys, yet this collection seems more eclectic; not aiming to be comprehensive but including exemplifying items.

In the case of objects related to betel-chewing, in which nearly all types of objects are present in large numbers, this is not due to Gerrits' having a special interest in betel-chewing. Lime spatulas, mortars and pestles and, to a lesser

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<sup>100</sup> These shields, *vioyayola masawa*, are a smaller version of the war shields, *waiola*.

extent, lime pots were highly collectable items because of their variation in designs and also because they are small and not easily damaged in transport. Especially lime spatulas were produced in great numbers, interestingly the majority of Gerrits' lime spatulas (83, approximately 41 %) originate from Kitava, indicating Kitava to have produced these objects in large numbers. This production may possibly have originated in early contacts with traders which took place on the east side of the Trobriand Islands (see Chapter 2 ). These objects were produced in great numbers, because of their demand, but again, also because of their small size, which required just a small quantity of raw material and relatively little time, yet allowed for a great variety in designs. Mortars and pestles and lime spatulas are perhaps the clearest example of offer and demand and physical features of the objects being intertwined, and offer and demand increasing each other. They were produced in large numbers because they were popular amongst Westerners, and acquired in large numbers because they were available in large numbers.

Interestingly however, not all object types which were desired by collectors were produced in such large numbers. The reasons again are a combination of factors, including physical features of the object, such as the material at time needed for its production, but importantly also aspects of Trobriand society and carving traditions. The large number of wooden bowls and platters, and also cooking utensils, such as stirring ladles and taro beaters, were produced by carvers who did not belong to the 'traditional' system of master carvers. Any person with some carving skills was free to carve these objects. The reasons for other differences between occurrences of artefacts are more speculative and would require further investigations. Weapons, such as shields and spears,<sup>101</sup> had ceased to be used at the beginning of the 20th century. They were however produced throughout the 20th century for sale to

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<sup>101</sup> Not specified in this table 4.1. The spears are the long spears made from ebony mentioned in Chapter 2.

Westerners. Gerrits' collection contains shields, spears and clubs (each group approximately 30 items), some, but not all, with deceased creators indicating them to be old. Shields seem to have been produced and probably acquired more often than the spears. One reason again may be their better transportability, another reason may be the difficulty to gain ebony in the size required. But also, shields, some of which had intricate paintings on the front, were probably more popular because of these paintings, which additionally invited debates on their iconography. By far not all of the shields were painted. Malinowski (1920: 11; also Norick, 1976: 131) mentions the painted shields to have been the exception because they were only used by especially brave men who dared to attract attention in the fight. It was safer to use unpainted shields. To what extent shields for sale were painted is not clear. The designs are quite intricate and only a select number of people would have been able to execute them. Also, the execution of certain paintings was connected to certain rules of conduct, such as food tabus (Campbell, 2001: 60), which may have prevented them being copied on a larger scale. (However for lagim and tabuya (see above) this was not the case) It is possible that searching for painted shields enticed larger numbers of unpainted shields to be acquired than otherwise had been the case. The Dutch collector Groenevelt (collecting around 1960), mentions not finding any painted shields and thus buying unpainted ones (Groenevelt, letters, 04-03-1961). Gerrits commissioned a few shields to be painted, yet these paintings by far do not resemble the paintings on shields in older collections. These shields are interesting as products of certain collecting practices, and indigenous responses to these practices.

### **Not-kept**

The question posed here is: Which types of objects were mainly sold or given away, thus which types of objects were popular amongst dealers and connoisseurs? The question is also relevant as this demand partially influenced

Gerrits' collecting practices. Table 4.2 presents an overview of the not-kept portions per object type in absolute numbers and percentages. The percentages need to be compared with the average percentage (29 %) of not-kept objects in the entire collection. The object types on the left side of the table are all higher than 29 %, on the right side they are all below average. It should be noted that the not-kept portion also comprises damaged objects and personal gifts, this slightly disturbs a clear view on market interests.

Table 4.2 Percentages of objects not kept in museums per type (29% of all entries are 'not-kept')							
Object type	Total type	not-kept	% not-kept	Object type	Total type	not-kept	% not-kept
Walking stick	14	9	56%	Drum, <i>kupa</i>	22	6	27,2 %
Drum small <i>katunemia</i>	44	24	54,5 %	Yam store board, <i>tataba</i>	82	22	26,8 %
Canoe ornament ( <i>sikusaku</i> )	58	31	53,4 %	Clothing	98	25	25,6 %
Dance wand ( <i>kaidebu</i> )	41	21	51,2 %	Canoe various	166	42	25,3 %
Axe & adze	150	74	49,3 %	Combs	72	17	23,6 %
Mortar & pestle, set	94	45	47,9 %	Body ornament	305	72	23,6 %
Lime pot (gourd)	86	39	45,9 %	Taro-beater	47	11	23,4 %
Spatula	201	91	45,3 %	Dancing (excl. dance wand)	26	6	23%
Drum, <i>kasosau</i>	52	23	44,2 %	Mortar or pestle	81	16	19,8 %
Hunting	33	14	42,4 %	Magic	44	8	18%
Splashboard, <i>lagim</i>	194	81	41,8 %	Burial cave	29	5	17%
Pots, earthenware	62	24	38,7 %	Stirring Ladle	107	18	16,8 %
Wavesplitter, <i>tabuya</i>	141	51	36%	Fishing	103	17	16,5 %
Weapon	92	30	32,6 %	Sound inst. excl. drums	22	3	13,6 %

Table 4.2 Percentages of objects not kept in museums per type (29% of all entries are 'not-kept')							
<i>Kula</i> valuables	36	11	30,6 %	Yam store, excl. <i>tataba</i>	114	14	12,3 %
Bowl & platter	256	78	30,5 %	Mortuary ornament	34	4	11,8 %
Carved figure/ tourist	95	29	30,5 %	Basket	50	3	6%
				Toy & cricket	52	3	5,8 %

As expected, certain types of objects were clearly sold more often than others. It is remarkable that more than half of the walking sticks, small drums, *sikusaku* canoe ornaments and dance wands were not kept. In absolute numbers however, these groups are quite small. There was a clear interest in axes and adzes which was even slightly higher than the interest in objects used for betel-chewing. The high percentage (and number) of lime pots is slightly surprising within a predominant interest in carvings, but shows the value of these objects as Trobriand icons. Additionally, possibly a larger percentage of these vulnerable objects were damaged during transport. The percentages of canoe splashboards and wavesplitters are, as expected, above average, but to a lesser extent than might have been expected for these most iconic Trobriand/Massim objects. This may be connected to their size, typically a private collection would contain far more spatulas than splashboards. Interestingly splashboards were more popular than wavesplitters. Amongst the object types of which less than 29% was not kept, the yam store elements (including the carved and painted gable boards) and the stirring ladles, which have elaborately carved handles are notable as one would expect these carvings to have been more popular.

Having provided an overview of the types of objects contained in Gerrits' register the next section examines a particular set of classifications in Gerrits' register, the distinction between old and tourist objects.



## 4.2 Old objects and tourist objects

Gerrits, as mentioned before, marked whether the creator of an object was deceased at the time of purchase with a small cross '†' behind the creator's name and took this as an indication of the age of the object. In a separate column he noted a capital T or E, indicating whether the object was 'tourist' or 'real/authentic' (Dutch *echt* = real). I indicate these objects as *t* and *T* objects, or old and tourist objects, because the cross behind the creator's name points out a feature of the object, rather than being relevant as information about the creator.<sup>102</sup>

The two classifications are discussed under one heading as they constitute two axes, and to some extent opposites in Gerrits' collecting — 'old' versus 'new', and objects 'made for own use' versus objects 'made for tourists/sale' to Westerners. Looking into the content of these categories and how they relate to each other in more detail reveals aspects of Gerrits' classifications.

In addition to the register, the catalogue cards reveal more information on Gerrits' categories. They are however only available for the Queensland Museum collection and can therefore not be used to complete counts of the entire body of acquisitions. Gerrits here also used the terms 'modern' and 'traditional' in addition to 'new' and 'touristic'. Thus there are three axes: 'old' versus 'new', 'made for own use' versus objects 'made for tourists/sale', and 'modern' versus 'traditional'. These distinctions are discussed in more detail in Part II. Several objects of creators who are not noted to be dead, or objects of unknown creators are also described as being 'old' on the cards, which means the percentage of 'old' objects is actually higher than the number of *t* indicates.

A notable feature of the relationship between *t* and *T* in the register caught my attention early on. No individual object is labelled *t* as well as *T*; the two

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<sup>102</sup> I stuck to typing a small *t* instead of a cross as this was more convenient. The small *t* and the capital *T* however also fit as representing a difference within one kind, the old and new within all acquisitions.

sets exclude each other. In other words, no individual old object is considered to be tourist or vice versa, no tourist object is considered to be old. Two points need to be considered here. The information whether a creator was dead or alive at the time of acquisition was given by the vendors. Whether the object was classified as T or E was largely Gerrits' decision, which, it should be noted, principally was taken and registered *after* the information about the creator was gained. It is therefore no rare coincidence that the two sets do not overlap, it is an outcome of choices Gerrits made based on his judgements and conceptions.

Gerrits may have understood 'tourist' objects as those specifically made for contemporary tourists, in which case it would indeed have been highly unlikely for any of the creators of these objects not to have been alive anymore at the time of purchase. The T set however includes objects which were not made for tourists such as the models of yam stores which were made specifically for Gerrits.<sup>103</sup> The T category is thus not limited to objects made specifically for tourists but generally comprises objects which Gerrits perceived as 'not made for own use'. This is also expressed in contrasting the T category to E (real/authentic), which however (because t and T exclude each other and thus every t is part of E) implies that Gerrits did not perceive any objects to have been made for sale in the past. The following examples illustrate this point. The carved pig figure (G 4716, QM E14490) is categorised as "touristic", yet the carved pig figure (G 4345) with a deceased creator is described as "old and worn" and its function as "unknown". Likewise the table (G 3482, QM, E14378) is categorised as "modern" and its function described as "Carved for sale to tourists". Table (G 5061)<sup>104</sup> on the other hand is categorised as "*tokwalu*"<sup>105</sup> and as a "seat". Gerrits noted its function as: "Said to made as a

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<sup>103</sup> They were made by Kauwa from Wabutuma Village. Kauwa supplied the Gerrits family with grocery (see Part II).

<sup>104</sup> In the register it is noted as a small table "*tafeltje*".

<sup>105</sup> The term *tokwalu* was specifically used for carved animal and human figures, at present it is the general term for woodcarvings (see also, Jarillo de la Torre, 2013: 3)

chair ... and used during the repair of fishing nets.” The catalogue card also notes: “made approximately 1940”. (ills. 2.15a-d)

The production of these table/stools was probably initiated by Mrs Lumley, a trader’s wife. She set up a trade in Trobriand artefacts in the 1920s, selling carvings in Samarai and Port Moresby. According to Austen, particularly Boitalu carvers<sup>106</sup> had increased the production of carvings since the permanent presence of a government station (in 1907). “They saw that a table was necessary to the European, and that on it curios he bought were placed” (Austen, 1945b: 196). From 1921 onward Mrs Lumley took an interest in these carvings. At first she exported *tokwalu* (figures) to Samarai where two or three of these figures would be fitted in a base to hold a bowl. Later she instructed the production of pot stands and gradually the table with a base and a top joined by two or three *tokwalu* was developed (Austen, 1945b: 196; see also; Jarillo de la Torre, 2013: 90, 161, 292; Connelly, 2014: 180).

Gerrits’ table (G 5061) is thus a rather old example of these carvings. It is likely to have been used as a stool, yet is clearly of the same style as the new table and was probably made for the Western market. Crucial here is that Gerrits did not perceive this table to have been made for Westerners because of its age, whereas as the same type of object of a later date (G 3482) is categorised as T. It is interesting to note that both *t* objects mentioned above are part of Gerrits’ private loan collection.

In the card catalogue both old and new are noted in several degrees, for example moderately old/new, rather old/new, very old. In the register Gerrits also noted variations in *t* and T categories. ‘? t’ indicates the creator’s name to be unknown yet the person certainly to have died. In twelve cases there are two crosses *tt* behind the creator’s name, indicating the creator to have died ‘long ago’. Whereas in the *t* category there is never any doubt about the creator being dead or alive, whether an object was actually made for tourists is not always

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<sup>106</sup> Boitalu is a village in the Kuboma district and famous for its carvings.

clear. Various notations like E? E/T or E +-, T +-, T? indicate Gerrits not always to have been certain how to classify the object. It reflects honesty in his documentation, not imposing authority on the subject or rather object where he does not know for certain.

The notion of someone having died a long time ago (noted as tt) exemplifies another way in which local conceptions entered the collection's documentation. Whether a creator is dead, is taken as an indication of the age of the object because information about the age of objects is not obtainable in Western calendar-years, either because the time of production may simply be unknown, but mainly, as Gerrits explained (Gerrits interviews, 2013), because time is generally not conceived in 'Western' calendar years. The distinction between a person having died recently or having died a long time ago is generally used in Kiriwina (Fieldwork, 2013). Its presence in the collection's documentation is an example of local agency shaping the collection, and the collector's understanding of it. Incidentally Gerrits also noted a year in which an object was made (G 3061, a splashboard, made in approximately 1920), but in general the age indications do not seem to be connected to concrete ideas about when the object was made and therefore 'old' should perhaps rather be read as not-new, in various degrees. 'New' are all recently made objects, yet again, there is no indication when an objects ceases to be recently made. Notably, in the register there is no separate column to note a object's age. Age was not the type of information which was necessarily required for every object. It could not be, as the information was simply not obtainable. The vagueness in age indications however left space for the collector to make judgments (and for museum professionals and connoisseurs), and contributed to a certain romanticism in collecting. Old objects were valued, but in some way the authentic object was timeless and needed no exact dating.

It should be added though that identical classifications may be used for different objectives. Within an evolutionary framework looking for 'old' and

presumably 'pure' objects (that is objects without signs of Western influences) was functional and essential. Within 19th century romanticism, 'old' and 'pure' were equated for different reasons. In Gerrits' collecting, one may question to what extent 'pure' and 'old' are perceived to overlap and to what extent 'old' has become a value in itself, or of value because there was a Western market and museum interest for it.

The distinction between 'made for sale' and 'made for local use and having been used' is more generally used by collectors (for example, Beran, 2013: 60) and also in research (for example, Lilje, 2013: 46), yet it is not unambiguous.

Gerrits' uncertainties about distinctions between T and E show honesty in his documentation and reflect this ambiguity, but they did not lead him to question the category itself. In collections research 'tourist' objects tend to be seen as a separate category (for example, Phillips, 1998). Certain objects were made specifically for sale to tourists and to some extent, as mentioned above, a 'tourist' category exists. Yet a strict division between 'made for sale' and 'made for own use' may conceal the fact that many objects were made for sale, or potentially for sale, some specifically for tourists, others not specifically for tourists (perhaps even specifically not for tourists), and it may conceal more intermingled trajectories of objects and the intentions of creators.<sup>107</sup> Beran (2013: 60) inadvertently provides an illustrative example. He mentions a betel-nut mortar in his ex-collection carved by the distinguished carver Ulisaku<sup>108</sup> of Gawa. The mortar is carved from black ebony in the shape of human figures with Western clothes and postures. According to Beran, Ulisaku carved for own use and this particular mortar was carved as a gift for Ulisaku's *kula* partner. Carving a mortar as *kula* gift, may be defined as 'made for own use', and Ulisaku may well have carved for local use. In this case however, it is likely that

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<sup>108</sup> Also spelt as Urisaku, the 'r' and 'l' being interchangeable. See also Beran and Tomowau, 2007

the mortar gained value as kula gift because of its potential to be attractive for sale to Western collectors. Gerrits obtained six of Ulisaku's carvings and mentions him as master carver in his card catalogue (G 2295). The carvings include two betel-nut mortars ( G 2220 and G 4424) and a bowl (G 2295)<sup>109</sup> classified as E, and a fork, a spoon and a set of human figures (G 4418, G 4419, G 5229) classified as T. Clearly Ulisaku also produced for the tourist market. Interestingly, only the fork, the spoon and the bowl were acquired on Gawa, mortar (G 2220) and the human figures were acquired in Kiriwina, mortar G 4424 in Woodlark. Ulisaku's carvings and his name thus more often travelled from the small and rather remote island of Gawa to the larger centres of contact with Westerners in Kiriwina and Woodlark. Beran (2013: 65) mentions Ulisaku to have become aware of Western clothes and furniture during World War II and then having incorporated these impressions into his carving for local use. Additionally, the Ulisaku mortar in Beran's ex-collection as well as those acquired by Gerrits all have straight surface bottoms enabling the object to stand on a flat surface. As flat surfaces are rare in Trobriand homes, this feature may generally be taken as an effort to make the object functional for display in a Western environment (see also Austen's remark above, 1945b: 196). The point here however is not to prove objects to have been made for sale in large numbers. The point is to show how classifications and presumptions shaped the understanding of objects and collections.

Besides having different reasons for using certain classification, certain classes may be valued differently. Beran, describing his ex-collection, notes: "To document at least minimally what happens to New Guinea art after contact with the West, the collection included a few objects made for sale to Westerners, in particular a 'zoo' of carved animals, including pigs, a turtle, a tortoise, a mouse and a bowl in the shape of a stingray." (Beran, 2013: 60). It may be implicit, but Beran is not the least positive about these influences of Western

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<sup>109</sup> The bowl, in the shape of a human figure is published in Meyer (1995: 151).

contact. Gerrits, on the other hand is quite delighted and fascinated by some of these innovations. The question rather becomes which innovations he appreciates, and which ones not (Part II, Conclusions). The remaining part of this chapter gives quantitative overviews of different aspects of t and T objects.

### Numbers of t and T objects, their destinations and origins

In total Gerrits collected 443 objects who's creators were dead at the time of purchase and 302 'tourist' objects. These comprise respectively 14% and 9% of the total number of acquisitions.<sup>110</sup> Table 4.3 gives a overview of the numbers of tand T collected per year.

Table 4.3 Total t and T objects per year					
Year	Objects total	t objects	t % of total	T objects	T' % of total
1968	552	80	15%	63	11%
1969	531	73	14%	41	8%
1970	1405	215	15%	116	8%
1971	695	75	11%	36	5%
1972	87	0	0%	47	53%
Total	3270	443	14%	302	9%

Considering the fact that Gerrits was particularly interested in acquiring 'old' objects, 14% may seem quite low. The actual percentage of old objects is in fact somewhat higher, including objects from burial caves for example which have no creator indicated and additional objects which Gerrits labeled as 'old' on the Queensland museum catalogue cards although the creator was not marked as deceased. Although the exact percentage of old objects can not be established, the relatively low percentage shown here probably reflects a combination of the

<sup>110</sup> Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

scarcity of old objects and Gerrits wider interest in all kinds of contemporary objects. Particularly the presence of T objects underlines the fact that Gerrits did not only collect these objects as occasional additions but had a genuine interest in them. It is interesting to note that the percentage of t objects stays relatively stable over the first three years, and that they were obtained right from the start 1968, thus no longer term network building was involved in obtaining them. Notable is also the drop (to 11%) in 1971 possibly reflecting that older objects were becoming harder to obtain, as Gerrits indeed commented (Gerrits interviews, 2013), but also reflecting Gerrits shift in interest to contemporary utensils. Interestingly however the percentage of T objects also drops over the years, and quite significantly in 1971 (to 5%). During his return visit to Kiriwina in 1972, over half of the acquisitions were T objects and not one object with a deceased creator was registered. T objects had not become harder to obtain, but were clearly not Gerrits priority in the last year of his stay on Kiriwina.

As the t and T set and T and E exclude each other, one can distract t and T (together 23%) from the total number of acquisitions and is left with the number of objects which can in principle be labeled as contemporary objects made for 'local use' comprising 77%. Considering the fact that the collection was largely acquired in 38 months and Gerrits was by far not the only collector at the time, it is highly unlikely for all these objects to have actually been made for own use.

Table 4.4 Percentage t and T in Locations of Destination		
Destination	% t in destination	% T in destination
Queensland	10%	9%
Basel	18%	5%
Leiden	11%	5%



Table 4.4 Percentage t and T in Locations of Destination		
Destination	% t in destination	% T in destination
Moresby	16%	2%
Gerrits home	28%	28%
Gerrits loan	19%	0%
Not-kept	11%	14%

The percentages of 'old' and 'tourist' objects in the various sub-collections vary considerably, largely confirming Gerrits' comments on how the collections were established. The Queensland Museum houses an approximately equal percentage of old and tourist objects. The museums in Basel and Moresby, who, as Gerrits explained (Gerrits interview, 2013), received relatively 'better' objects each show a relatively high percentage of old objects and a clearly lower percentage of tourist objects. For the museum in Moresby this may rather reflect a collecting policy focussed on 'traditional' cultural heritage and possibly restrictions of export, for the museum in Basel it reflects Gerrits' perception of what a museum curator would value, as he chose the artefacts for the Basel museum, and because of his acquaintance with C. Kaufmann he wanted to include quality pieces. The percentage of old objects in the not-kept category concurs with the percentages in the Queensland and Leiden Museums. The percentage of tourist objects is clearly higher, than in any museum, but can probably be explained by a relatively high number of tourist objects being given away as presents. Interesting is Gerrits private collection. Of the artefacts Gerrits keeps at his home the 'old' and the 'tourist' objects each comprise 28% of the collection. Together this is 56%, thus more than half of this collection, and much more than the 23% of t and T objects of the entire body of acquisitions. His private collection held as loan in the Queensland Museum comprises a relatively high percentage of old objects (19%) and no tourist objects. These

percentages may be taken to reflect Gerrits appreciation of old as well as tourist objects, albeit in different ways.<sup>111</sup>

## Locations of origins

Table 4.5 Locations of origin of t and T objects							
Location	% of all objects	t	% of all t	% t of location	T	% of all T	% T of location
Kiriwina (north & central)	54% (1765)	275	65%	16%	172	57%	10%
Southern Kiriwina & Vakuta	4% (130)	42	10%	32%	4	1%	3%
Kitava	9% (289)	27	6%	9%	60	20%	21%
Kaileuna & Islands	4% (130))	28	8%	21,5%	4	1%	3%
Iwa/Gawa/Kwaiawata	20% (642)	16	4%	2,5%	24	8%	4%
Woodlark/Madau & Islands	9% (300)	28	6,5%	10%	38	12,5%	13%

To read table 4.5 the percentages given in the columns ‘% of all t/T need to be compared to the percentages of all acquisitions from a certain location, and the percentages in the columns ‘% t/T of location’ need to be compared to the total percentage of t =14% and T = 9% of the entire body of acquisitions.

As most of the entire collection was acquired on Kiriwina, not quite surprisingly the largest numbers of t and T were collected in Kiriwina. Compared to the 54% of the entire collection originating from Kiriwina however, the percentages of t (65%) and also of T (57%) are slightly higher.

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<sup>111</sup> It should be noted that Gerrits’ entire Trobriand private collection is far smaller than the other sub-collections presented here. It comprises 78 objects, of which 25 are kept at his home. Of these, thus seven are old and and seven tourist.

Looking at the percentages originating from the areas outside Kiriwina, interestingly each location is shown to have accounted for either a high percentage of 'old' objects or a high percentage of 'tourist' objects, but not for both. Southern Kiriwina/Vakuta and Kaileuna show high percentages of 'old' objects and very few 'tourist' objects, 21,5% of the objects acquired on Kaileuna and neighbouring Islands, and 32% of the objects acquired in Southern Kiriwina and Vakuta Island are old, whereas only 3 % from both locations are 'tourist'. (Compare this to the 14% t and 9% T of the entire collection). In contrast Kitava, the Marshall Bennett Islands and Woodlark show low percentages of 'old' objects and higher percentages of 'tourist' objects. The contrast is particularly clear for Kitava. Only 9% of all objects from Kitava are t, yet 21% are T , which is more than twice as much the percentage of T in the entire collection (9%) and accounts for 20% of all T objects. The Marshall Bennett Islands account for rather low percentages of both t and T, yet the 'old' objects with 2,5% are far below the 14% t of the entire collection whereas, the 8% T more or less concur with the 9% T for all acquisitions. It is interesting to note differences between the Marshall Bennett Islands. The majority, 15 objects, originated from Gawa, 8 from Iwa and 1 from Kwaiawata. It is also notable that many of the T objects listed under Woodlark/Madau and Islands in table 4.5 actually originated from the Islands: Woodlark: 19, Alcester Island: 16 and Egum and Yanaba (Egum Atoll): 3. The fact that small Islets like Egum and Yanaba produced 'tourist' objects is interesting in its self and underlines that people in more remote areas participated in the trade with Westerners as described above for the carver Ulisaku from Gawa.

## Types of t and T objects

Table 4.6 Number of t and T objects per type of object							
Object type	Total type	t	T	Object type	Total type	t	T
Splashboard, <i>lagim</i>	194	24	1	Tools and materials	135	9	-
Wavesplitter, <i>tabuya</i>	141	27	1	Fishing	103	7	-
Canoe other	166	22	12	Hunting	33	1	-
Yam store (excl. <i>tataba</i> )	114	26	2	Ladle	107	20	1
Yam store board, <i>tataba</i>	82	26	8	Taro-beater	47	3	-
Body ornament		16	6	Toy and cricket	52	5	-
Comb, <i>sinata</i>	72	-	11	Earthenware pot	62	1	6
Bowl and Platter	256	44	17	Weapon total	92	22	10
Spatula, <i>kena</i>	201	23	89	- War shield, <i>waiola</i>	31	8	6
Mortar & pestle (set), <i>kaipita &amp; kaimili</i>	94	27	10	- Spear,	30	8	-
Mortar or pestle	81	20	1	- Club, <i>puluta</i>	31	6	5
Lime pot, <i>yaguma</i>	86	5	19	Carved figure, tourist*	95	5	69
Drum, <i>kasosau</i>	52	18	3	Walking stick	16	1	9
Drum, <i>katunemia</i> (small)	44	19	2	Axe and adze	150	31	4
Drum, <i>kupa</i>	22	6	-	- ceremonial axe		-	3
Dance wand, <i>kaidebu</i>	41	10	2	Mortuary	34	-	1
Music and dance, other	48	2	-	Magic	44	6	-

Whereas no individual object is categorised as being t *and* T, many types of objects do contain t as well as T objects. The set of T objects additionally contains types of objects especially made for tourists. These include wood carvings of animal figures representing pigs, wallabies, fishes, sharks, crocodiles, and a dog, various human figures, a few spoons, forks and ashtrays, and the typical tables/stools with three legs carved as animal or human figures.

Most object types presented here tend to have either relatively more t or relatively more T objects. This difference is especially clear in comparing spatulas and mortars/pestles. Eighty-nine (44,3 %) spatulas are categorised as T, yet only 23 (11,4 %) spatulas had deceased creators, whereas 27 (28,7 %) mortar and pestle sets had deceased creators and only 10 (10,6 %) were categorised as having been made for tourists. The splashboards and wavesplitters contain relatively small percentages, of t objects (respectively, 12,4% and 19,1 %) and only one T specimen each (in both these T cases however Gerrits was not certain whether to categorise the object as tourist). Gerrits thus considered most of the splashboards and wavesplitters to be authentic and to have been made for own use. Interpretations of these numbers are not straightforward. One may state that lime spatulas for tourists were offered in great numbers and Gerrits was interested in acquiring them. Possibly old spatulas were harder to get. Yet the absolute numbers of mortar/pestle sets (27) and spatulas (23) do not differ much.<sup>112</sup> Possibly there were less mortars and pestles being made for tourists or Gerrits was less interested in these.<sup>113</sup> The relatively high percentage of old dance wands reflects that the *kaidebu* dance was not practiced anymore at the time, except for tourist performances (Part II).

It may be pointed out that clothing and baskets (not present in the table) contain no t or T objects. Both are made of ephemeral materials, not many old specimen may have survived and Gerrits would not have been specifically interested in these. They probably were part of the types of objects offered to tourists (remember the skirt production during World War II, Chapter 2), but Gerrits was apparently not interested in these. It shows that Gerrits, albeit interested in certain tourist objects, did not consider T as a category for which he wanted to establish a complete set.

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<sup>112</sup> The 20 (mostly mortars) with deceased creators need to added to the mortar/pestle set however.

<sup>113</sup> I did not consider this question during the interviews and did not ask him later.

This chapter presented an overview of the types of objects Gerrits collected, and tentative explanations for their presences in larger or smaller numbers. An examination of the types of objects that did not enter museums showed certain object types to have been sold more often than others. Spatulas, splashboards and axes/adzes were the best sold in absolute numbers, walking sticks, *sikusaku*, small drums and dance wands showed the highest percentages of not kept objects. An examination of the categories of t and T objects showed that Gerrits was not aware of objects having been made for sale in the past, and shows the ambiguity of these categories. It further showed different locations of origin to have delivered, either relatively many t or objects (Kaileuna Island), or relatively many T objects (Kitava Island), and the smaller remote islands also to have produced tourist objects. Most object types contain either t or T objects and often both categories.

Having presented Gerrits' collections and some of his collecting practices as contained in his register of acquisitions, in Part III we turn to Gerrits' explanations and comments on his collecting practices and examine his collection of photographs.

# Part III

# Conversations

# Introduction

While the previous two chapters looked into Gerrits' collection and the documentation established at the time of collecting, this part presents Gerrits' recent reflections on his collecting, made in response to me and my questions (see also 1.2).

Memories of the past, the current relationship to this past and reflections on this past are entangled in this account and recorded as Gerrits presented them to me and as he came to reflect on this past triggered by my questions. All of these are interesting and relevant in their own way. Gerrits' present reflections are part of his collecting, as are his attitudes, conduct, interests and objectives he had during collecting, and thus add to an understanding of the collector Gerrits and his collection. Gerrits' comments and explanations naturally contribute to understanding the collection and its formation as it has been presented in the previous two chapters. They also exemplify the added value of the collector's explanations compared to archival approaches.

The focus here is the 'scene of collecting' (O'Hanlon, 2002: 12), which as Thomas (274: 2002) concludes in the epilogue of the same publication still remains largely unexplored. The following two chapters present various factors contributing to the collections' formation in the field as they emerged from Gerrits' narrative combined with themes addressed in the literature on collecting.

My initial objective was to gather accounts of specific collecting encounters, presuming, somewhat naively, people readily to remember - and wish to present - their collecting experiences through specific collecting encounters. Occasionally, the kind of accounts I had imagined, did occur. For



example while looking through Lawton's<sup>114</sup> private collection of Trobriand artefacts at his home in Canberra, I spotted a splashboard (*lagim*) high up on a corner cupboard. Lawton took it down and spontaneously started telling me how he had acquired it (Lawton, interview 29-10-2013). Not long before he left Kiriwina, with a good sum of money in his pocket, he saw a few canoes at Losuia jetty, just about to sail back to Kitava. He went on telling, with some pride, what first and second bid he had made (money and necklace) until the owner eventually agreed to sell. These were the kind of accounts I had imagined to gather. Interestingly, they were not the kind of accounts I was usually offered, either by Gerrits or by Trobriand Islanders. I do not mean to say specific transactions were never remembered. In fact, the details recalled, for examples prices of particular objects, surprised me at times. But, collecting and remembering collecting turned out to be so much more than a collection of remembered transactions.

In part the large scale of collecting may be a reason for individual transactions not being readily recalled. More importantly however, remembering collecting is embedded in how one looks back on the past and how one is positioned in the present.

Lawton's memory of his acquisition seems closely linked to his present relationship with the splashboard. Holding the splashboard instantly evokes the story of its acquisition. The narrative takes the audience vividly back in time and space. Besides the certain pride present in Lawton's account, going back in time and space with one's audience presupposes having established a certain distance from the past. One can not *go* back if in some way one has never left. Gerrits' narrative does not once mention a transaction with pride, in fact it hardly mentions details of transactions at all. This may of course reflect him not being particularly proud of any particular transaction or transactions in general,

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<sup>114</sup> Reverend R. Lawton lead the United Church Mission station in Kavataria from 1961 to 1973. He set up a trade in Trobriand artefacts to finance the Mission (see also 2.6). Gerrits' period of stay coincided with Lawton's period.

or if he is, not wanting to show it. It may also be related to his hesitance in wanting to talk about it as explained earlier (1.2). Yet Gerrits' narrative also seems to reflect a different relationship with the past, which does not allow one to step back in time and space as is the case in Lawton's example. Gerrits' comments convey an ongoing distancing from, as well as entanglement with, the past. At times he would stress how long ago it all happened (08 -06-13)<sup>115</sup>, yet occasionally he would slip into speaking about his period on Kiriwina in the present tense, pulling the past into the present, rather than stepping back into it.

One of my first first amazements about the Gerrits collection was, how, by all means, he had managed to establish such a large collection while having a full-time job as a doctor? His straightforward answer instantly rectified my rather idealised image of a collector searching for objects in the field. Many objects were offered to him by people waiting for him to come home from work at his own front door.

Gerrits, in his initial descriptions of his Trobriand collecting stressed two points. One was the 'dilemma with the wooden bowls', which is in fact a wonderful example of the communication between collector and vendors, the interplay of supply and demand and why certain types of objects may be present in collections in large numbers. The Islanders offered wooden bowls and platters in large numbers and Gerrits kept buying them, not because he had a particular interest in bowls or in accumulating them, but because he had an interest in collecting a variety of functional types and designs and was always hoping for unique and out-of-the ordinary pieces. He was afraid of missing out on some particularly interesting piece if he would decline the bowls and they consequently would not be offered anymore. Additionally, buying them was no great burden as they could relatively easily be shipped and his brother could sell them in the Netherlands (08-06-13). The interesting point is that Gerrits kept

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<sup>115</sup> In the quotes throughout this part G = Gerrits, W= Wisse. Where no initial is given Gerrits is quoted. Dates behind quotes without further reference refer to the tape recorded conversations in Queensland.

buying because he had no means to explain what he was interested in, not because of a language barrier or Trobriand Islanders' lack of comprehension, but because Gerrits could naturally not articulate the unknown. What he wanted had no clear shape, he could not know what kind of, in his eyes, surprising, interesting, unique pieces could possibly be offered, so he could not ask for them. He kept acquiring, hoping for a lucky number and increasing his odds by accumulation. Trobriand Islanders of course kept offering the same kind of bowls and platters, because Gerrits kept buying them. The example of the bowls also exemplifies the value of a collector's explanations. Reasons for objects to be or not to be in a collection, or to be there in certain numbers, are manifold and can not be deduced from the collection itself.

The other point Gerrits explained early on, was the difference between his Trobriand collecting and his collecting in other places. Only on the Trobriand Islands did he attempt to establish a comprehensive ethnographic collection: "a collection in which a Trobriand Islander would feel at home" (personal communication, 2009)

# Chapter 5

## Contexts of collecting

### 5.1 First Encounters

Gerrits and his family arrived on Kiriwina in March 1968. They found the doctor's residence to be situated on the hospital compound, a noisy, busy place and unsuitable, especially for a family with small children. They managed to get another house nearby, outside the hospital compound, with a garden and a view over the lagoon. The house was situated on the road leading westward from Losuia to Kavataria, which later turned out to be an unforeseen but convenient circumstance for Gerrits' collecting. People offering things for sale on their way to Reverend Ralph Lawton of the United Church Mission in Kavataria, would pass by Gerrits' home and offer things to him first. G: Those people had to pass us on their way to Lawton, these were many of the people we bought from. So, when I wanted a *lagim* [canoe splashboard], I didn't think, 'let me take a look in Kavataria', no - they'd pass by anyway (06-08-13).

Gerrits arrived on Kiriwina with his earlier experiences in living, working and collecting in Papua New Guinea and his interest in 'old' pieces developed on his previous post. "We came from the Sepik, there we were interested in 'old things', they had masses of old things there." (06-08-13). Gerrits however had no specific prior knowledge about Trobriand (material) culture and society, thus in this respect started to discover a 'new world' from scratch, a point I shall return to in more detail (5.4). He had seen pictures of Trobriand artefacts in a book on Pacific art, but did not indicate which types of objects these had been or if in anyway they had raised his interest. " In Angoram I did buy a big book

about the Pacific Islands, but that was about 'art', purely 'art', it had something on the Trobriand, but not about how they use things, only a few photographs of people paddling, or so." (06-08-13)

An important shift in, or rather consolidation of, his interests in collecting occurred just prior to moving to Kiriwina. As a medical officer Gerrits was allowed a three-months home leave every three years. The Gerrits family spent their time off visiting Europe. Besides seeing family in the Netherlands, Gerrits visited Christian Kaufmann in Basel and was shown around the Ethnographic Museum (now Museum der Kulturen, Basel) and its storage. He was impressed by the quality of the collection and the amount of objects. What he missed however was information about the objects.

Look, it's a fantastic museum, but it also has to mean something to people, an object is just an object, unless you can connect it to people, and in fact the people are far more important. Yes, that was my opinion, and I told them so - that I found it an important shortcoming. It was fantastic, 400 hooks, but so what, who ever sees them, perhaps a student who makes a study on hooks, but they peacefully keep hanging there, what for? One needs something - which can't be done for all objects, but for a selection - which makes an outsider, a visitor have an idea of what it means, and not only comment how beautiful it is, or that is polychrome, or has a patina - that might well be, who cares. (06-11-13).

Trobriand Islanders of course had ample earlier experiences with Westerners being interested in their things or their way of life and sometimes both. Recall the Islands to have been in contact with Westerners for over 150 years by the time of Gerrits' arrival. From the early 1960s until September 1972, when the only hotel burnt down, tourists were flown in with weekly charter flights for a weekend and formed a steady base for the market in carvings. This

period of 'booming' tourism exactly overlaps Gerrits stay, and gained its momentum during Gerrits stay.

Gerrits' initial steps in collecting on Kiriwina can be highlighted in two events. The first took place virtually on the first day after arrival as Trobriand Islanders came to offer their carvings for sale.

On the Trobriands they started bringing us carvings on the very first day. These were old ones and new ones, they had a betel-nut mortar for example - we still have it - as new as can be, but beautiful. They make all kinds of wonderful small things, beautifully carved. Then they brought a small drum, incredibly splendid. So, at first we said - 'beautiful, but the old things, is something left of those?' Only later, gradually, I became more interested in new things as well (08-06-13).<sup>116</sup>

First experiences engrave enduring impressions. It is interesting to note that Gerrits remembers some of these 'first' objects and encounters spontaneously and clearly. It was in these first transactions that he and Trobriand Islanders set their first steps in getting to know each other's interests and possibilities - through the objects offered and through Gerrits's appreciation, his interest to buy and his articulation of further interests.

The other key event was Gerrits' first trip to Kaibola village. He wanted to take the children for a swim, inquired about a suitable place and was directed to Kaibloa Beach, Kiriwina's largest beach, in the north of the Island. As the medical officer he was entitled to a truck and Kaibola, an approximately 20 mile drive, was well accessible since the road had been extended during World War II. Taking a step further back in time and picturing Gerrits' first explorations in a historical context one may recall a very different scene on the same place. It was on Kaibola Beach where Governor MacGregor landed in 1891 (see 2.3) and

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<sup>116</sup> For this shift in interest see 5.4.

was met by hundreds of chattering natives with their long ebony spears, which, as they assured him, were only meant for trade.

Getting off his truck in Kaibola village Gerrits' eyes were caught by a crudely carved figure in the gable-top of a house.

Kaibola was nothing special, a fishing village - only that nice figure there, 'good heavens, what is this!?' 'Oh, our ancestors.' [they said] I didn't even ask to buy it at the time. They brought it to me later on, once they noticed we were interested in these things, I then bought it. Thereafter I never again got to buy one which I had seen in situ (14-06-13).

This first encounter with a *mamwala* and Kaibola villagers is interesting in multiple ways. Mamwala are carved figures stuck in the gable-top, sometimes they are bird figures, sometimes circular discs, more often they are crudely carved human faces, also called ridgepole figures<sup>117</sup> (ill.3.0). Mamwala are protective figures (Young and Beran, 2016: 22). The explanation Gerrits gives in the documentation of the yam store from Olivilevi which included a mamwala is that it represents a wood spirit.<sup>118</sup> This was confirmed by Senft (personal communication, 2003). I could not verify whether these wood spirits are in some way indeed considered to be ancestors or part of an ancestral realm. In the anthropological literature (for example, Malinowski 1966, Weiner 1988) the Trobriand Islands are known for their belief in *baloma*, spirits of the dead, but not for a presence of ancestors in carvings. Gerrits at the time however readily accepted the answer.

Look, we came from the Sepik of course, they said it was an ancestor, ok, that made total sense to us, what did I know [about, were wood spirits], in the Sepik they never worried

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<sup>117</sup> Young and Beran (2016: 22)

<sup>118</sup> Gerrits did not recall this information during the interview, possibly because the yam store and its documentation are not part of his collection proper. It only occurred to me while transcribing the interviews.

about wood spirits, I didn't doubt, not even for a second, that it might possibly be something else, and later on [when buying further mamwala] I didn't ask anymore, because I already knew it. (14-06-13).

Gerrits, who in other cases did question the information he was given, in this case readily accepted it, based on his earlier experiences in the Sepik area which he took as point of reference. Possibly, the example shows anthropology to have overlooked an aspect of Trobriand cosmology.<sup>119</sup> A possible explanation for the explanation given to Gerrits may be that the people in Kaibola knew Westerners to be acquainted with, and interested in ancestor figures and therefore knew the answer to make sense to a newcomer and possibly, to raise his interest, in any case to be easier to explain than the concept of wood spirits, which they rightly assumed, he was not familiar with.

This first *mamwala* is exceptional in the collection as it was the only one Gerrits saw in situ. The further, approximately 30 mamwala he acquired, were offered to him detached from their original place. An exception, not mentioned by Gerrits, is the mamwala on the Olivilevi yam store which Gerrits bought together with the whole house. Similarly, *lagim* (canoe splashboards) were also usually offered detached from the canoe (14-06-13), and one may assume that this was the case for most elements of larger complex objects, mainly canoes and houses or yam stores.

It is remarkable and perhaps typical for Gerrits' preferences (understanding functions of objects and 'authenticity', rather than being interested in merely the aesthetic appeal of 'art',) that it was a mamwala, a crudely carved, weathered figure, and not for example an elaborately carved and painted *lagim* (splashboard), which caught his attention first and which he

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<sup>119</sup> A question in need of further investigation which however goes beyond the scope of this study.



still remembers as the object that sparked his interest in Trobriand (material) culture.

## 5.2 Attitudes and conduct

Contrary to what its title might suggest, this section is not concerned with the ethics of Gerrits' collecting. A short excursion into Gerrits' general attitudes and conduct towards various groups in colonial New Guinea is relevant here for other reasons. In part, to become more acquainted with the collector Gerrits, but more importantly because attitudes and conduct outside and within collecting are highly entangled, sometimes concurrent, sometimes contradictory. It is the combination of the two which constitutes Gerrits' full presence in different colonial settings and exemplifies how collecting was part and parcel of colonial society, how, in Gerrits' case, it shaped relationships with whites and locals and was shaped by them. Specific attitudes within collecting and their influence on particular transactions are exemplified further on (6.1).<sup>120</sup>

A reoccurring theme in Gerrits' narrative is that he went overseas, for practical reasons to New Guinea, to be in touch with the indigenous people. He longed to belong, tended to distance himself from Whites<sup>121</sup> and vehemently

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<sup>120</sup> The more general question, how differences in attitudes are related to different processes of collecting (for example looting versus respectful bargain, and many variations in between) and to what extent these differences led to different collections can not be elaborated here more comprehensively.

<sup>121</sup> Dutch New Guinean and Australian Papua New Guinean societies functioned on the basis of racial divides. Gerrits uses the terms 'Whites' (Dutch: *blanken*) and 'local people or population' (*lokale mensen, bevolking*) or simply 'the people' (*de mensen*) not to reinforce or stress this division but as a matter of fact of the situation at the time. I use these terms in this chapter and partially throughout this work because any politically correct avoidance of them (or placing them between quotation marks) not only signals the author's distancing from these concepts, as it supposes to do, but also distances oneself from the society one is seeking to understand and obscures its reality. Not obscuring this reality seems more important to me than signaling my own distance from racism, which I hope can be taken for granted. In a context in which politically correct terms as Westerners and Europeans have become general practice, presenting Gerrits as using racial connotations runs the risk of him being perceived as a racist. Gerrits was by far no racist. But, reality of course, is far more subtle, than a simple divide between racists and non-racists.

disagreed with some of their attitudes and practices. His parents' generation in Dutch Indonesia, he explained, had felt Indonesians to be dirty and had discouraged close contact with them.

You can blame them for it but those were the generally accepted attitudes at the time, I think many Kiaps [in NG]) had the same [attitude], they kept a distance (08-06-13).<sup>122</sup>

On arrival in West Irian in the hotel Gerrits was asked which income scale he was in, as rooms were allocated according to income scale. At first he did not quite understand the implication of the question and then was taken aback.

Jesus! I really did not need any of that! So down to the cellar I went, that's where the servants had their quarters. I still have their songs on tape. After such an action no White [person] was keen on you, of course (08-06-13).

Reactions to Gerrits' conduct were sometimes harsh, the memory at times painful, but Gerrits, as often, shows understanding for the other's position:

It was not appreciated, and perhaps in hindsight rightly so. But they [Whites] were not what I came for, I had been quite happy without Whites around. It was not quite fair of course, they needed me as a doctor. W: That was why you could allow yourself this attitude? G: Yes exactly. (08-06-13)

He recalls a woman who walked out on him in hospital and complained to his boss because he had asked her to wait for her turn amongst Papuan patients. His boss reprimanded him, but he countered: "Why *should* she?!" G: "and to top it all he gave her a ticket to [ ] to get treatment there." (08-06-13)

In Angoram Gerrits and his wife were asked to become members of the Club. The Angoram Club seems to have had quite a reputation.

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<sup>122</sup> The term 'Kiap' was generally used for representatives of the Australian administration such as district officers. It probably is a Tok Pisin derivation of the German word *Kapitän*.

The centre of social life in Angoram was the Angoram club. It was ruled by the iron fist and Victorian principles of club president Don Bosgard, Imperial Standard Bearer, who had been in residence since antediluvian times. Anyone who spent time at Angoram will remember Don, or Bozzie as he was affectionately known, as Her Majesty's most loyal subject.

(Gary Luhrs, ex-kiap, <http://exkiap.net> ) <sup>123</sup>

G: There was a lot of drinking going on, which we were not interested in anyway, but the key-point was that they allowed no single Papuan in. I told them, I'd reconsider a membership the moment they opened up for them...With such an attitude you make enemies amongst your colour-companions - but then, you hope to come closer to them [local population]. -It *does* work, one can get quite far, especially in individual contacts and when you show interest in their culture - but you never become one of them... I experienced it in West Irian - we were on a medical patrol together - you sleep on a mat as they do, not on a camp bed, you eat from the same small tin plates, you sit together around the campfire - and then you get up for a quick pee and when you come back - their conversation drops dead. It was a step to far, I think. W: Well, as the doctor you also had a certain position of course. G: Yes, I was the boss. But then, on the other hand, most other Whites were not taken in at all - they didn't care for it either, they had their own evenings drinking. (08-06-13)

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<sup>123</sup> <http://exkiap.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=1285&p=7172&hilit>

Friendly contacts with Whites were based on personal sympathies but as Gerrits pointed out choices were limited, particularly in Angoram. "Angoram was a pond of sharks, there were a few nice people and many very vicious ones." (08-06-13)

The situation was different on Kiriwina where there were far fewer Western residents. There was no club and segregation was possibly less felt. The Trobriand context is described in more detail in the following section. Here it should be noted that Gerrits liked the Trobriand Islands and identified with Trobriand Islanders, to the extent that at a certain point he expressed not to want to celebrate his birthday anymore. It should be pointed out that celebrating one's birthday is not a Trobriand practice, but may be described as a key tradition in the Netherlands. Thus Gerrits' wish was quite a statement. The topic came up when we were looking at his photographs of Trobriand dancers and I noted the beauty of their well trained bodies.

G: They are, it occurred to me this week, more like Indonesians.

On the mainland the Papuans seem closer to aborigines. They [Trobriand Islanders] are, how should I say - further in some way - never had problems in connecting to them, well neither had I on the mainland, but somehow relationships were different, one would nearly say that one stood further away from them, not at work or in everyday dealings, but, how should I say - one would less easily dream of being at home in a Papuan family than in an Indonesian one. One shouldn't push this too far of course, at the Ministry in Nairobi I was one of two Whites, didn't even see that the others were Africans, [it was individuals that mattered] oh that's that guy, no matter if he is African or something else." (08-06-13).

Here Gerrits reveals an evolutionary perspective<sup>124</sup> which informed his experience or at least provided him with a frame of reference for his experiences. At the same time he invalidates his evolutionary frame through his own experiences in working with people. Evolutionary perspectives in social anthropology had long been abandoned, but evolutionary thinking was deeply interwoven and widespread in general thinking about racial differences. Gerrits was not exceptional, his case rather demonstrates how deeply these concepts were engrained in general thinking. Gerrits' case also shows that thinking in an evolutionary frame need not necessarily be linked to racism. The relevance of pointing out Gerrits evolutionary frame of reference here is that, although it informed his personal experiences with people, it did not inform his collecting (either in the acquisition of artefacts, or in their documentation). The use of categories as 'old' and 'authentic', which Gerrits did apply, can be traced back to collecting within evolutionary theories. Within this framework, leaving the questions of theoretical viability and practical feasibility aside, these categories were relevant because evolutionary series could only possibly be established with objects not affected by Western influence. By the time of Gerrits' collecting however they had long become detached of their earlier evolutionary theoretical frames.

On the Trobriand Islands Gerrits enjoyed the South Seas idyll of music playing on a moonlit night, as he mentioned while playing some of the Trobriand 1960s string-band music he had recorded (17-06-13). Yet he did not romanticise Trobriand society nor did he feel the need to present Trobriand Islanders in a particularly favourable light. While negotiating the acquisitions of a yam store from Chief Uwelasi of Tukwaukwa, Gerrits asked him about how chiefs asserted their authority.

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<sup>124</sup> This perspective seems not to be based on strictly racial types but rather on stages in social/cultural development.

G: I asked him whether they still used toadfish poison added to betelnuts to kill someone. He said, 'Of course not, nowadays we use agricultural poison.' - An idyllic South Sea island - forget about it. If you had a *too* large pig, a *too* long feather [as head-dress] people would comment 'well, well, you're not a chief', first you'd be reprimanded but in the end a chief could have you killed. People were *afraid*, they did not go out alone at night, afraid of black magic, and they made complaints about each other. (08-06-13) G: There are strict rules as to who is allowed to use certain decorations, that is what I mean when saying it is not at all that idyllic. If you do not stick to the rules you get punished, in the worst case the chief has you killed. But your fellow villagers are prone to complain about you, because if they don't do so they are scared to be punished themselves, or struck by a famine effecting everyone. Call that an idyllic island, it is nearly *communistic* (small laugh)." (14-06-13).

His association with Communism refers to the thoroughly developed systems in the former Eastern Bloc communist countries which forced individuals to spy on each other and report to the particular security agency/secret police force.<sup>125</sup> His comparison to communist systems makes it clear that Gerrits' perception of the less idyllic sides of Trobriand society is not congruent with his earlier mentioned evolutionary framework. In an evolutionary context they would be judged as typical for a primitive society, yet Gerrits rather seems to explain certain behavior as a consequence of living in particular political systems than judging them as being primitive.

Most notably, Gerrits developed a deep appreciation for Trobriand Islanders and their way of thinking through the translations of certain magic

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<sup>125</sup> The 1960s were of course the period of the Cold War and Gerrits clearly sympathised with the West and not with communist regimes.

formulae. One example is the song a grandmother recites for a new born baby. After the period of seclusion of the mother and her newborn baby right after birth, the grandmother takes the child out for the first time.

G: She sings about removing the meshes of the forest-spirits  
'push them away this way, and push them away that way, they  
will never get into your way' - Its nearly poetic, isn't it?

Extraordinarily, extraordinarily wonderful! (09-06-13).

Another example are magic formulae spoken during certain stages of building a canoe to which Gerrits commented: "It is not naive, it is so *very* human" (09-06-13)

As shall be elaborated further on, it may be concluded that, despite Gerrits distancing himself from other Whites, his collecting activities required him to build and maintain relationships with other Whites, whether he sympathised with them or not. The influence of collecting on his contacts to Trobriand Islanders seems more complex. Gosden and Knowles (2001: xix) suggest that people were connected through the transactions of goods. This is true, yet the self-interest involved in these transactions gave the encounters a specific quality. On one side Gerrits' collecting was indeed a means to engage with the indigenous population and vendors presumably were pleased when their products were bought. On the other hand however, collecting, when directed at artefacts which were not offered or otherwise readily available, meant the encounter to be motivated by self-interest, to be persuasive and to be more or less intrusive. This was contrary to Gerrits' wish to belong, to be accepted by the indigenous population and to build relationships for their own sake. There is a certain tension between Gerrits, the man who wished to belong and to be accepted, and Gerrits the collector, who strategically built relationships to acquire objects.

### 5.3 Context and relationships, the doctor-collector

The colonial context on the Trobriand Islands was different from some of the mainland Papua New Guinea settings. Kiriwina was no “pond of sharks” as Gerrits had described Angoram. There were far less Western permanent residents, thus there was also no ‘Club’ and segregation was less evident. The administration, as Gerrits explained, was represented by a group of approximately 15 people in Losuia. ADCs, Assistant District Commissioners or Kiaps, as they are referred to, often stayed only for short periods. This resulted in a highly fluctuating group with many personal changes. The Methodist Mission was led by the longterm residents Reverend Ralph Lawton and his wife Margaret Lawton in Kavataria. Lawton collected artefacts on a large scale to finance the mission. He set up an artefact trade in Losuia, supplied a store in Port Moresby and disseminated two brochures on Trobriand artefacts through which artefacts could be ordered. As elsewhere, Gerrits did not much socialise with the administration or with the mission. He did however exchange objects with Lawton and asked Lawton, who had specialised on the language, to help him with translations. G: The problem with Lawton’s objects was that he did not have their provenance, but I did borrow some of his *lagim* (canoe splashboards) to make rubbings. (11-06-13)

Gerrits was on friendly terms with Mr Butler, “a jovial Australian” and Mrs Lumley,<sup>126</sup> who ran a store and the post office in Losuia. Anthropologists need to be mentioned, yet Gerrits refrained from commenting on them in detail. W: What about anthropologists, were there any around during your stay? G: There was one virtually on every plane coming in (11-06-13)

Short term visitors were frequent, just two are mentioned here. “A lady who owned a store in Port Moresby” with whom Gerrits exchanged artefacts.

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<sup>126</sup> This Mrs Lumley was possibly a daughter of the Mrs Lumley who is said to have introduced the production of Trobriand stools/tables and was involved in the trade of artefacts in the earlier 20th century.



This was most probably Mrs (Leahy) Hodgson. She visited Kiriwina regularly and traded for artefacts mostly from a truck on which she travelled the Island (personal communication, 2013). Harry Beran visited Kiriwina for the first time in this period met Gerrits and bought a few artefacts from him (Beran, personal communication, 2014).<sup>127</sup>

Important in terms of artefact trade was the weekly influx of a group of tourists by charter flights, which was at its height during Gerrits period of stay.

Key figures for Gerrits' collecting outside Kiriwina were, for example, his brother Hans Gerrits and Christian Kaufmann, curator at the Basel Museum with whom Gerrits had (and has) friendly contact and through whom a selection of his Trobriand acquisitions are now held at the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. Roy MacCay, positioned at the NMAG<sup>128</sup> in Port Moresby, was a crucial contact in Papua New Guinea. Gerrits developed a very good understanding and working relationship with him, through which a selection of his objects went to the NMAG.

Trobriand Islanders important to Gerrits' collecting were some of his orderlies at hospital, notably Tosieru and Emassi, who at times acted as middlemen. Furthermore Tobwaki the gardener should be mentioned. Towards the end of Gerrits' stay he introduced Gerrits to various magical chants and practices of black magic. A notable person is Kauwa from Wabutuma who Nel Gerrits refers to as the 'grocery man'. Through him relatively many objects were collected in Wabutuma. Gerrits had good relationships with various chiefs, amongst these were Chief Nalubutau from Yalumgwa (ills. 2.1, 3.27). Nalubutau was a mastercarver and Gerrits obtained several artefacts from him. In obtaining the two entire yam stores he spent several occasions talking to

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<sup>127</sup> Gerrits' period of stay did not, or only very briefly, overlap with Weiner's fieldwork. She arrived in 1972. Jerry Leach was Lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea from 1969 to 1974 and conducted his fieldwork during this period (<http://sova.si.edu/record/NAA.1988-38?q=Folklore&s=0&n=10&i=1#Biographical/Historical%20note>), thus it is likely that his fieldwork overlapped with Gerrits' stay from late 1968 to early 1972.

<sup>128</sup> National Museum and Art Gallery.

respectively Chief Uwelasi of Tokwaukwa and Chief Mawula of Olivilevi on their platforms (see also 6.2). Gerrits was acquainted with Chief Wanoi of Omarakana whom he found to be a person demanding respect. Gerrits did not bow low for him and did not give him a separate glass when Wanoi visited Gerrits' home, as one is expected to do for a high-ranking chief, however he did also not sit and chat with Wanoi on his platform, as he did with various other chiefs.<sup>129</sup>

### **The doctor-collector**

Considerations about how Gerrits' position as a medical officer influenced collecting include aspects relating to being a medical practitioner but also more circumstances deriving from his specific position. The fact that he had a full-time job and thus could not spend all his time collecting, the fact that he had a truck at his own disposal and could use the administration's boat for medical trips to other islands, are examples. When asked how he thought his position had effected his collecting, Gerrits' first reaction was: Well, I also wonder. I do not know. It mattered for transport of course, I had a car and I could go around by boat. Wouldn't have got there otherwise of course. But no, no-one ever came falling on their knees to say gosh gosh [thank you]! We had it once in Angoram, Nel and I did a Caesarean section, it went well. Years later someone came running toward us happily, but it was to Nel the person ran, not to me [smiles] (11-0613).

During our conversations Gerrits pointed out the disadvantage of not being able to collect full-time. G: The problem is, when you compare us to Groenevelt - look, I had a job, I was not stationed there as a collector, everything we collected was much more of an 'opportunity', when an opportunity came you made use of it, for objects, photographs, sound recordings or all at once

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<sup>129</sup> It is interesting to note the difference between the friendly relationship Weiner (1988) described having with Wanoi and Gerrits relationship to the chief.

(08--06-13). Later, when I suggested the unique status of his collection within Trobriand collecting<sup>130</sup> Gerrits responded: "Your conclusion is very kind and flattering, but for me you have to consider of course that we spent a few years there (Groenevelt did not), as a doctor I had a position of trust, which Groenevelt did not have, Fellows possibly had, and Malinowski - I don't know. I spoke the language, more or less, (Groenevelt did not). Through my patrols I had access to the islands outside Kiriwina (the others did not) and I was no mission-man who so much needed to change their thoughts and way of life (as Fellows and Lawton did). Malinowski of course was occupied with getting to know and understand their culture. But it is good to read that our collecting led to a good and accessible collection." (e-mail, 04-02-17).<sup>131</sup>

Other than not being able to collect full-time his position thus mainly had advantages. Gerrits' mention of his 'position of trust' is interesting, especially in comparison to his remark on missionaries. Whereas missionary collecting has been the focus of research because of its distinctive ideological motives in collecting (for example, Gardner, 2000; Thomas, 1991, 151-161), whether and how being a medical practitioner, or Western medical care and its reception in general influenced collecting and collecting possibly influenced medical care or its reception are intriguing questions which to my knowledge have hardly been addressed in collection research so far.<sup>132</sup> Numerous collectors, including administrators, such as, Governor MacGregor, and Resident Magistrate Bellamy were trained medical professionals, and many others, including missionaries did provide medical care to a certain degree. The issue is thus complicated by the fact that individuals acted in different roles simultaneously. A

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<sup>130</sup> See Conclusions.

<sup>131</sup> It is not clear whether my remarks led him to think through his position in comparison to other collectors or he had been

<sup>132</sup> Presumably because of the lack of ideological motives in 'medical' collecting comparable to those in missionary collecting.

comprehensive analysis of these questions is beyond the scope of this study, yet Gerrits' case gives certain insights.

For one, one may question whether and how someone's medical training influenced collecting.<sup>133</sup> For Gerrits the influence was partly present indirectly in shaping his scientific, objectifying way of thinking. Gerrits had an eye for indigenous medical practices and included related objects in his collection as for example the bow and arrow used for bloodletting to which he commented: "It simply works as diversion from the actual pain."(09-06-13). Within his broad ethnographic approach he was not specifically interested in indigenous medical practice however, and clearly not from an ethno-medical perspective. G: I bought the bloodletting bow and arrow and asked how they used it, but went no further than that, well, perhaps I am too cynical, a lot of those things work because one believes in them. If you were to do a real medical study you would have to do it with a double blind test (22-09-13). One may suggest that his training and thinking within a Western medical framework rather stood in the way of an ethno-medical perspective than that it invited it.

Another question to be considered is whether objects were given as return gift or payment for medical services. W: So they did not see your medical services as something for which to give something in return? G: No, no, perhaps they were happy and thankful, hopefully - but then, thinking of it - they were not particularly thankful to teachers either. W: So you always paid [in money] for the artefacts you collected?" G: Well of course, in general we paid what they asked, sometimes a bit more. W: The thought occurred to me because my grandfather [a medical doctor] during the war was given food and valuables rather than cash. G: Yes indeed, but look, nobody paid for it, the Medical Officer had a salary, why would they pay on top of that (08-06-13).

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<sup>133</sup> A more detailed comparison between doctor-collectors may be interesting on this point, is however beyond the scope of this study.

Gerrits thus did not receive things for his medical services and he did not expect such gifts either because he was paid by the government.

It is interesting to compare this to comments in the literature. The Missionary Dauncey, writing about his experiences in the village of Delena (a coastal village somewhat north of Port Moresby) at the end of the 19th century commented: "Payment for medicine and doctoring has always been a sore point with the people of this district. They do not hesitate to pay their sorcerers a pig or anything else they may demand for their attention, but seem surprised when the Missionary suggests that they should contribute to the food supply for the Mission boys and girls as return for doctoring. In early years I have had patients refuse to take medicine I was willing to give them, because I would not pay them to swallow it. Those days are gone, and now some few bring a little present of food for medicine, but it is generally a very little present." (Dauncey, 1913, chapter XIII, digital version, p134, original page not present in the digital version). Ellis Silas, who spent several months on Kiriwina around 1920, makes the following comment on Resident Magistrate Whitehouse's experience in giving medical care: "One native appeared to take the R.M.'s enthusiasm for his work to heart, to such an extent that after the tooth had been extracted he suggested that the R.M. should make payment to him for having allowed the operation to be performed." (Silas, 1926:56).<sup>134</sup> While Westerners either did (Dauncey) or did not (Gerrits) expect returns both Western and indigenous sides felt they were giving, rather than receiving something. In this context and relating to Gerrits' remark about his 'position of trust', it needs to be noted that western medical care was not uncontroversial. Various diseases (in the 19th century) were brought in by Europeans in the first place and the local population was aware of this (Mosko, 2009: 265). Several measures taken against these diseases were by all means harsh, for example public medical

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<sup>134</sup> Crispin Howard and Harry Beran suggest certain objects in the Fellows collection possibly to have been given to Sarah Fellows for her medical services. (Crispin, 2012. Paper presented at the PAA meeting in Munich, 2012). In the light of above quotes this seems unlikely.

inspections to combat venereal disease, or reburials outside the village to combat dysentery (Chapter 2). Even less harsh measures, as temporarily being sent to a leprosy colony on an other island, as Gerrits had to execute (12-06-13), were likely to have been met with resentment. In addition, medical experimentation took place, for example in the form of trials with medicines (Ravenel, 1941: 1218). Thus, whatever benefits Western treatment brought and whatever cultural or practical reasons influenced its reception, possible distrust of Western medical practices was grounded in factual experiences. The question of who was actually giving whom something is not only a question of culturally motivated indigenous perceptions.

In Gerrits' period medical care and the administration/magistrate were not combined in one individual anymore. As mentioned earlier, Gerrits distanced himself from the administration and was drawn to the local population in his attitudes and conduct. Particularly on Kiriwina, with a relatively small ex-pat community, it would have been noticed, also by Trobriand Islanders, that he did not much socialise with members of the administration. On the other hand, Gerrits did have to implement government regulations in certain cases. His personal conduct towards his patients was crucial in building trusting relationships, which he did successfully.<sup>135</sup>

G: Partly it [the relationship] is pure medical, but it is also how one interacts with people. There was a lady with oral cancer, caused by chewing betelnut, she insisted, she did not want to go to Port Moresby. [I said} it kills somebody, I can operate it, but it will look horrid, [she said} 'please do'. Eventually she did die of it. It was the same with children, they [the parents] appreciated when I allowed magicians in, as long as they did not do too crazy things of course, magical chants, go ahead, but

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<sup>135</sup> Linus DigimRina commented that Gerrits was generally much loved (personal communication, 2004)

this was 'kicking against the mission's sore leg'<sup>136</sup> of course, but one developed a different relationship with people which was not merely medical. (08-06-13). G: Leprosy patients were hidden away, because they did not want to leave the Island, they preferred to die at home. In one village [I encountered] women with very infectious leprosy, three of them just had to go to the leprosarium. It caused an enormous commotion, but that was the law, I could have had them arrested by the police, but I talked my head off<sup>137</sup> [to convince them] and eventually they did go. They had to go to a closed community on an island near Dobu for two years until they were not infectious anymore, then they could return. It was understandable that they did not want to go, but they had no idea of the risk they formed for others. (16-06-13).

Gerrits' position as a doctor mainly was helpful in collecting (in combination with his social skills and empathy for his patients and indigenous people in general) in establishing a wide network of contacts. He knew nearly everyone and certainly everyone knew him.

One may suggest that for objects generally offered for sale, which many objects indeed were, Gerrits' position would not have mattered that much. But, in acquiring specific, at times rare objects, these relationships were essential. Medical treatment was not a currency in collecting. Gerrits did not expect it to be and indigenous people were not inclined to perceive Western medical treatment as something requiring a return. The boundaries of the space in which one operated were regulated by governmental rules, by one's personal and professional ethics and attitudes, and by indigenous agency.

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<sup>136</sup> Translated literally from the Dutch original.

<sup>137</sup> Dutch original idiom: "ik heb gepraat als Brugman". Brugman was a Catholic monk known for his convincing speeches in Amsterdam in the 15th century.

## 5.4 Motives, interests and objectives

The theoretical framework pointed out multiple motives of collecting according to Grijp (2006: 13). While analysing Gerrits' account, motives, along with interests and objectives emerged as distinguishable yet related aspects of Gerrits' collecting, relevant for understanding why and what Gerrits collected. The three terms partially overlap and to some extent may be used interchangeably, depending on definitions. 'Motives' here are associated with more general, under-lying reasons to collect, 'interests' with particular themes and topics of interest or preferences in one's approach and 'objectives' with more clear-set conscious goals.

### **Motives in Gerrits' collecting**

Gerrits reflected on the motives distinguished by Grijp (2006: 13) after having read the research proposal of this study. To recall, Grijp distinguishes economic (investment), social (social status), cognitive (acquisition and transmission of knowledge) and psychological (ego enlargement) motives. Gerrits revealed that his collecting has a mixture of these motives (11-06-13). An economic motive was present, with the objective to finance further collecting and thus make the collection pay for it self. It should be noted that this did influence collection formation as Gerrits acquired objects which were suitable for sale in the Netherlands and received feedback from his brother in the Netherlands about which objects sold well. Gerrits does not so much associate himself with the social motive. He regards this motive rather to apply to his brother, who cooperated in exhibitions and even organised a social evening during which he danced in Sepik dress. It should be added that at present Gerrits does appreciate his work being acknowledged and he is disappointed that his Trobriand material in the Queensland Museum has never been exhibited. This



however is rather a wish for (personal) recognition of his work, than a question of social status. Gerrits associates the importance of acquiring or demonstrating social status with 'art' collecting, neither of which he is interested in. The 'cognitive motive' was very important in his collecting. He was interested in gathering ethnographic information and learning about Trobriand (material) culture. Towards the end of his stay on Kiriwina his interest shifted from primarily collecting artefacts to primarily being interested in Trobriand practices. He felt he learnt more about the people through their songs and magical chants than through the objects. In this, to some extent, unconsciously, he followed the path Anthropology had taken several decades ago. Yet acquiring objects never ceased, partially because the Islanders kept offering them. But at this stage Gerrits mainly chose artefacts, or variations of types of artefacts which were not yet contained in the collection. He always asked for basic information about an object (creator, age, place or origin, as documented in the register of acquisitions) and sometimes more. G: "Further it depended on the object. If it was a pipe, it was a pipe, but if it was an object which I did not understand I inquired further, if I had the time of course, but time was often too short." (16-06-13)

Most interesting is Gerrits' reaction to the psychological motive of ego enlargement and personal pride. G; "Personal pride? What personal pride? Well, yes and no. Discovering the function of things, I liked that, for example the fact that pig figures occur on yam stores and were thus not only carved for tourists, ..., but pride, well look, it is not one's own accomplishment, it is being told to you. I would be proud if I were a good sculptor, or a good painter, but this is only gathering. W: "So you do not see yourself as the creator of the collection?" G: "Well, I brought it together of course, but what has that to do with pride?" W: "It was a lot of work..." G: "Admittedly, it was a lot of work, which had its pros and cons, but that's nothing to be proud about. Pride would be if you do something, create it yourself. I could rather be proud of taking one

particularly nice photograph for which I chose the right settings, click, click, click, than on the whole collection. I mean, I made use of certain occasions and happenings, but whether the collection is good or not still has to be seen... perhaps I have a wrong idea about what pride is." W: "I don't think so, it's rather a question of what one values most. Someone else may have been extremely proud." G: "...and very many also not." (11-06-13). Here, but also in other comments Gerrits is inclined to stress his regrets in collecting and the chances he missed rather than point out the chances he did take advantage of. It is also notable that he tends to refer to the information he collected rather than to the objects. On another occasion, for example, he mentioned with some disappointment that museums were interested in the objects and not in the information (12-06-13).

The interesting point in terms of understanding his collecting as well as collection formation in general is that he did not experience and does not perceive his collecting as a creative process, whether this concerns objects or ethnographic information. One may possibly point out some aspects of Gerrits' approach to have been creative (see below, starting from scratch), but the crucial point is that he did not perceive it to be a creative process, not at the time of collecting and not in hindsight. Within collection research collectors have been perceived as 'artists' and collections as 'art' (Grijp, 2006: 281, Carreau, 2009: 35). Besides the fact that collectors may indeed differ on this point and generalisations should be avoided, the fact that a collection was acquired in the field, as Gerrits' was, may be a crucial factor in whether it is the outcome of a creative process. Carreau (2009: 17-18) points out the difference made in the French-speaking museum world between *collecteurs*, field collectors and *collectionneurs*, armchair/private collectors, which reflects this point. The first type of collector is associated with a more ad hoc gathering of objects in the ethnographic field (extracting them from the field), the second with a more systematic, goal-centered approach. While I would not exclude the possibility

of some field-collecting to have had a more creative nature, the situation in the field does generally not invite collecting to be creative, especially when large numbers of objects are collected. Within the limited time of one's stay, there is a certain pressure to capitalise on what opportunities there are. Grasping certain opportunities may of course also be crucial in 'armchair' collecting in the West, yet, having more time creates opportunities for creativity.

### **Ethnographic salvage collecting**

Gerrits' Trobriand collection stands apart from his other artefact collections as the one attempt to establish a comprehensive overview of the material culture of one area. As he explained, on the Trobriand Islands his interest shifted from 'old' and 'rare' objects to include objects of everyday use and 'modern' objects establishing a comprehensive ethnographic collection, a collection "in which a Trobriand Islander would feel at home." His objective is reminiscent of, for example, Adolf Bastian's call in the second half of the 19th century to collect "everything" within a geographical region and present objects according to geographical regions (Young, 2000: 186). This was in contrast to utilising and presenting objects within an evolutionary framework or regarding them as pieces of 'art'.

Gerrits understood knowledge about a society as factual knowledge, which could be gathered and known, partially or entirely. Reaching completeness, in ethnographic information and in types of objects was crucial. Gerrits could be rather frustrated by not meeting this objective, due to time constraints and due to the broadness of the scope of his collecting. He was not interested in, in fact disagreed with, making interpretations of culture, (as he saw anthropologists do) and saw himself primarily as a recipient documenting what people told him. In doing so he aimed at a collection of scientific value, (comparable to his butterfly and shell collections) for which conscientious documentation was crucial. It is interesting to note that Gerrits' approach in

collecting and his perspective on anthropology reflects the break between anthropology and an interest in artefacts at the time. Gerrits' desire to establish a collection of scientific value, unknowingly, yet almost necessarily, led him to an ethnographic approach reminiscent of a period in which anthropology/ethnology and artefacts and collecting had not yet separated.

His holistic perspective of the geographical region is reflected in the exhibit he envisioned which ought to have featured objects along with the ethnographic information on their function and photographs, films and sound-recordings, together creating a comprehensive informative experience of Trobriand culture.<sup>138</sup>

An important motive for Gerrits' ethnographic project was to preserve traditional material culture for later generations in the face of rapid changes, in other words, 'salvage collecting.' Interestingly his main explanation to do so was not to preserve this material for science or as part of human cultural heritage, his main motive was the concern to preserve material culture (as evidence of Trobriand Islanders' history) in the first place for Trobriand Islanders themselves. This is congruent with Gerrits' sympathy and concern for indigenous people as described before (5.4). His objective to establish a collection "in which a Trobriand Islander would feel at home" has different aspects to be considered. Importantly, it reflects Gerrits not only cognitively but also emotionally to have been involved in his collecting. It also reflects his empathy for Trobriand Islanders and a recognition of the fact that objects did have emotional meanings for indigenous people and that objects are important in a sense of belonging and feeling at home. At the same time it also reflects a concept of an unchanging, timeless, set of objects in material culture which at all times would make (any) Trobriand Islander feel at home. Talking about

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<sup>138</sup> Gerrits had hoped the Queensland Museum to organise such an exhibit. Regrettably shortly after the Museum acquired Gerrits' collection in the 1980s, Museum policy was redirected from including Australia's ex-colonies and the Pacific in general to a focus on Australian aboriginals and other ethnicities living in Australia.

changes in society, Gerrits however commented: "Yes, you saw things change, not overnight but gradually, they used clay-pots but they also had masses of Western produced aluminum pots and kerosene lamps, while in the past it had been a small fire." (16-06-13). W: "But the idea of feeling at home implies that things do not change, doesn't it?" G: "That was of course naive on my side. They lived in a changing society, but then, one would have had to include everything."

### **Starting from scratch**

A notable feature of Gerrits' collecting is that he started discovering the Trobriand Islands from scratch without having gathered any specific information about the region in advance. In part this was due to circumstances, as one had only short notice before being posted to a new area and literature in general was not readily available (14-06-13). More importantly however, Gerrits wanted to discover the new region for himself and was not so much interested in reading what others had written about the place before him. W: "So actually you stepped into it totally blank?" G: "Yes, exactly! And its one thing I still don't know, whether it was good or not?" W: "It had its pros and cons." G: "Yes, the advantage is that one steps in un-biased and open-minded, the disadvantage is that one sorts out a lot which others have already done before." (11-06-13). "It was the same in the Maprik area, we found out a lot which had already been documented. But I don't know, I do not like to read first, I like doing it myself, stepping into it with an open mind and doing what I like. And, well, I am no anthropologist, where would I have found literature on Kiriwina? - I could have contacted a museum and asked what is known, I suppose." W: "But that was not what you were interested in?" G: "No." W: "You wanted to do it yourself?" G: Yes, well look, if you want to understand what they do, you need not know what Malinowski thought about it of course. You will discover it yourself when you are there. People like it if you show

interest. You see someone walking by with a large fish-hook and you ask: 'What do you use it for?' He answers: 'I catch sharks with it.' - 'Well, how do you do that?' Sometimes they are in a hurry and tell you to get lost <sup>139</sup>, but in general they enjoy explaining, that's the fun of it of course. ...You know, it was an enormous amount of data one could gather, it was so immense, because everything is new, you are suddenly tumbled under in a new world really, and you don't understand one thing of it, you can look at that, or that, or that, everything is new and different. I believe one can only do it in this way if one stays for a longer period of time, it just costs too much time to find out everything. For example, I was in Kitava, sitting, waiting, and suddenly I saw children with surfboards [at sea]! Good God, how on earth did they come up with surfboards now again? No idea. W: "Did you collect surfboards?" G: "I believe so, not sure however, they were small children of around ten years of age, we probably have them [surf boards], unless they didn't want to sell. We do have photographs of them ( 14-06-13).<sup>140</sup>

In retrospect Gerrits questions his approach at the time, yet sticks to it - it was how he liked it. One may dismiss his approach as not being scholarly (although even such an approach may lead to unexpected discoveries) but despite, or perhaps because of its certain naivety, his approach has a disarmingly human quality which may be valued in itself and is reflected in the eclectic character of the collection. Although Gerrits started from scratch concerning his knowledge about Trobriand culture, he did have concepts in mind, as 'old', 'authentic', 'modern' and 'made for tourists' and he did have earlier gained knowledge about other groups in mainland Papua New Guinea. Elsner and Cardinal's (1994: 1) claim that classification precedes collecting. This

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<sup>139</sup> Gerrits here uses the Dutch idiom "ga vissen", which literally means 'go fishing' but figuratively implies some one to get lost.

<sup>140</sup> In terms of remembering transactions mentioned in the introduction of this chapter it is interesting to note that Gerrits does not readily remember whether he did or did not purchase a board at the time, he does remember taking photographs however.

is thus true for Gerrits' concerning the use of above mentioned concepts, but not for his knowledge of Trobriand material culture.

### **Collecting everything**

Two reasons may be pointed out why the shift in Gerrits' interest to collect broadly and comprehensively occurred on the Trobriand Islands. Both reasons derive from the Trobriand context, to which Gerrits responded driven by his interest for indigenous people. For one, Gerrits increasingly concluded that there were not many 'old' objects available on the Trobriand Islands anymore and thus turned to other objectives (12-06-13 ). For the other, Gerrits found the relatively homogenous cultural and linguistic area (compared to areas on mainland PNG with greater cultural and linguistic diversity) more manageable and therefore more motivating in aspiring a holistic collection (14-06-13). On the Trobriand Islands it made sense to learn the language, Kilivila, as in variations it is spoken in a larger area and allowed for basic communication even on the islands with different languages.<sup>141</sup> Gerrits learnt Kilivila to the degree of everyday basic communication, which he calls *passer*-Kilivila, market- Kilivila, derived from the Indonesian term for market, *passer*. He spent quite a number of evenings conscientiously studying the list of vocabulary Brother MacCann from the Catholic mission had given him and learnt from direct contact with Trobriand Islanders, especially from his assistants and patients at the hospital. The fact that Gerrits was interested in learning the language and put considerable energy into doing so, may be considered as a special feature of his collecting. Albeit it is difficult to pin down specific cases in which his language competence influenced the acquisition of objects, a more direct contact in general would have enhanced success in negotiations, especially when more lengthy negotiations were needed (for example in the acquisitions of entire yam stores) and it would have been helpful in gathering information.

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<sup>141</sup> See Chapter 1 for a brief linguistic description of the area.

Collecting 'everything' had additional implications for collection formation. It implied various items, and types of objects to be included for the sake of completeness and not because of the collector's special interest. Gerrits mentioned that he had not been particularly interested in baskets yet he had sought to collect different types of baskets for the sake of completeness (14-06-13 ). It is important to note that Gerrits preferences for certain objects can not be deduced from the collection itself. The broad approach, along with the large number of objects acquired, necessarily had implications for the extent of detail put into any one type of object or 'topic' even if Gerrits aspired to cover these comprehensively. A few preferences for types of objects should be mentioned, though rather for a comprehensive picture of Gerrits' collecting than because they importantly shaped collection formation. Gerrits was more drawn to carved objects than for example to dress in general or, as mentioned, baskets. He was fascinated by the diversity and beauty of body ornaments and he was fascinated by the technical functioning of certain objects (a multiple-pointed fishing spear), or the technical simplicity yet efficacy and ingenuity of certain objects (a basket to carry a piglet (ill 3.32) ). Gerrits was also fascinated by toys. These were often objects of great simplicity and delicacy with which children could however entertain themselves with great joy. The iconography of the carvings on canoe splashboards and wavesplitters were the focus of his interest for a period, but being frustrated by the fact that every respondent gave a different explanation he gave up on this project.

Gerrits consciously chose to broaden his scope of collecting. It opened up exciting new possibilities but also, eventually, led him to conclude that he had set himself too big a task. An example are body ornaments G: "When I did [collected] ornaments used in dances, for example, well the traditional ones were a limited number, but when you look at what they do now [that is, at the time of Gerrits' collecting] good heavens, you don't only get those things made of paper, but also questions like, what kind of paper do they use, where do they



get it from, then you go much further of course" (16-06-13). Gerrits understood this broadening of his objective to comprise the greatest possible variety of types of objects, as well as variations within certain types of objects. Variations were partially understood as functional variations, thus bowls for various purposes or skirts worn by different people or for different occasions. For certain objects variation in design were considered, for example slight variations in the carved designs on drums or variations in designs in betelnut mortars and pestles and spatulae. Gerrits was however primarily interested in functional variations.

Within the striving for completeness, Gerrits was interested in unique and rare objects. An example of a unique object is the 'hunch-back' a carved wooden human figure. The hunch-back is often found in patients with tuberculosis. Quite accidentally, this kind of figure was mentioned to me on Kiriwina, before I had taken notice of the figure in Gerrits' collection. I asked my assistant and some of his family who were present whether they had examples of creative innovations in carvings, whereupon one of the elderly aunts said that she remembered a carver who came up with the idea to carve human figures with hunched backs. When I asked why, she said he thought Westerners might be interested in them. This is an example of indigenous carvers successfully seeking innovative ways to raise Western collectors's interest (indigenous agency) and to compete with carvers. These figures were not recognised as having been made specifically to raise Western interest however, and therefore did raise their interest. An example of a rare objects is the human mandible which is discussed in more detail later (see 6.1).

Besides the striving for completion for conceptual reasons, Gerrits' emotional involvement in Trobriand culture and collecting was also an important drive in collecting 'everything.' Gerrits commented that this went quite far, it did not only include objects and information, it also, for example, included capturing scents in little bottles (which as Gerrits regrets, did not

work). He wanted to capture and preserve the entire Trobriand world. W: “Was the collection meant to make a Trobriand Islanders at home, or perhaps also yourself? G: “To begin with it was meant for them, but eventually for both.”(16-06-13).

### **What did you not collect?**

Collecting everything did not imply collecting anything. It is in asking what was not included that the contours of what Gerrits thought to be relevant as well as what was conceived as belonging to an ethnographic collection, the ‘prototype’ (see 1.1) in ethnographic collecting are shown (see Conclusions).

It is interesting to note that the question “What did you *not* collect or were you *not* interested in?” is not readily answered, indicating that the question had not been thought through previously. Talking about what he was and was not interested in, Gerrits explained: “On the Trobriands you had all kinds of things of course, there was magic, there was fishing, there was dress. In principle I was interested in everything - and not. For example, everything in fishing, as long as it is linked to what people do, how they do fish.” W: “But then, what not?” G: “Well, just as I say, in principle everything, but only if it conveys something about them. Not just a piece of land in a garden, who cares, or a stone - I was going to say stone, but no, not a stone, because they were imported [from other islands]. But not a coconut tree.” W: “Because?” G: “A coconut tree is the same everywhere. I was no botanist or the like, but then - butterflies - yes, of course [both laugh]”.<sup>142</sup> The beginning of this quote suggests Gerrits to be thinking in categories of objects and topics suitable for ethnographic collection, which could (or could not) be found in certain locations. The Trobriand Islands in this respect were rich in interesting objects and topics. It further shows Gerrits’ interest in everything to be linked to human practice, at least so far as he

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<sup>142</sup> Gerrits collected butterflies independently from his artefact collecting, but was also interested in the use of butterflies, for example as decoration in the hair. he did not go so far as to examine the meaning of butterflies in iconography, for example found on dance-shields.

perceived it to be so. It also shows limits of Gerrits perception on this point. A coconut palm can of course be relevant for all kinds of culturally specific ownership issues and attached taboos. This is the case on the Trobriand Islands where before the British administration ownership of coconuts was a privilege of high-ranking chiefs. Since the colonial efforts to plant coconut trees in larger numbers they may have become more associated with Western influence however, which possibly additionally explains Gerrits' comment that they are the same everywhere.

One major group of objects not contained in the Gerrits collection, as in virtually all other ethnographic collections, are Western produced goods and materials used by indigenous people. The absence of these objects is related to perceptions of authenticity. Yet not all 'modern' elements are excluded. Gerrits found certain appropriations (Thomas, 1991) of 'modern' elements fascinating. Within evolutionary or diffusionist frameworks one may argue that the search for 'authentic' objects, that is objects not influenced by Western contact, was functional in establishing evolutionary or diffusionist patterns. Within an ethnographic objective, the quest for 'authentic' objects and the lack of Western produced things, reveals an essentializing conception of indigenous people, at times mixed with a more emotional desire for the pure and authentic, originating in 19th century romanticism (see also Barnes, 1995). In Gerrits' collecting a quest for the 'old' and 'authentic' is present, partially as response to the market in the Netherlands, partially because of his own fascination for these pieces, which he valued for the beauty of their carving but which he was mainly drawn to because of their ethnographic authenticity. Gerrits was not interested in these objects as objects of 'art'. Gerrits also shows genuine interest in 'modern' and 'tourist' objects. To specify the difference between 'modern' and 'tourist' he explained that all tourist objects are modern, yet not all modern objects are tourist. The *kapi kapi* head ornament (ill. 2.13) is an example of such a modern, yet traditional object.

Reasons to include 'modern' objects (whether made for sale or not) have varied in the history of collecting. Lewis Henry Morgan, working within an evolutionary framework in the mid-19th century, collected 'modern' pieces along with older pieces in order to document the progress of the Iroquois [in North America] (Barnes, 1995: 104). Beran mentions including a few tourist pieces in his collection, "To document at least minimally what happens to New Guinea art after contact with the West, the collection included a few objects made for sale to Westerners, in particular a "zoo" of carved animals, including pigs, a turtle, a tortoise, a mouse and a bowl in the shape of a stingray." (Beran, 2013: 60). Without saying it explicitly, Beran does not value the influence of contact positively.

Gerrits shows an interesting mix of valuations of these categories. At times he can dismiss objects as having little value because they are not "real", that is authentic. In other instances he has genuine admiration for the quality of the carving of tourist objects. He included tourist objects in the collection because he considers them to be part of a representative picture of Trobriand material culture, not to point out progress or decline. In certain instances he does point out Western, particularly tourists' influence as decline. This is the case with *kaidebu* (dance wands) which at the time were only used in performances for tourists. *Kaidebu* are normally carved and painted on both sides, but as Gerrits mentioned (16-06-13), for tourist performances gradually only one side was decorated (the side which was showing outward in the circular dance). It is notable that examples of these one-sided dance wands are not contained in the collection.

Gerrits' valuation of 'modern' elements in traditional use also reflects a mix of valuations. He is fascinated by *kapi kapi* because he sees them as creative innovations. But in part he is fascinated not so much by the content of the innovation but rather by the mere fact of its occurrence, by the question why 'they' do something like this. Thus, a part of the fascination seems to lie in the

the fact that the *kapi kapi* questions or disturbs the concept of an unchanging ethnographic reality which is one of the premisses of ethnographic collecting and an important feature of the prototype (Gell, 1992) which Gerrits is aiming to resemble. In contrast to this example, it is interesting that Gerrits does not consider all modern elements, even within 'traditonal' use, to be fascinating. The modern paint used on the yam store from Olivilevi (now at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam) is not valued positively by Gerrits as is obvious from the documentation he prepared: "the black and white paints are traditional, the red unfortunately modern" (Gerrits' yam store documentation, Wereldmuseum Rotterdam). In part this note may reflect Gerrits' perception of the Museum's expectations, but it also reflects his own opinion. The difference in valuation between the *kapi kapi* and the red paint may be that the *kapi kapi* is perceived as an innovative creation (appropriation), whereas the paint is perceived as an easy substitute for the original and disturbing the object's authenticity. Indigenous reasons for using this paint such as possibly finding the red more beautiful, and the possible relevance of choices in substitutions (blue for black, yellow for red)<sup>143</sup> are not considered. It should be noted that this is not a critique of Gerrits' approach, but an attempt to understand the workings of generally accepted concepts of ethnographic collecting in practice which Gerrits used.

Returning to the absence of Western things in ethnographic collections it is clear that they were outside any category of 'modern' elements included in ethnographic collections. A possible reason is elaborated in the Conclusions. Reflecting on his collection and changes in society, Gerrits described his collection as capturing a moment in time, and added: G: "In this respect you are right, I should have included trousers and laps of cloth, but they [Trobriand Islanders] would have missed those. But actually it is not consequent

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<sup>143</sup> I found this pattern in the use of blue and yellow paints to apply without exception. A further examination of this pattern is beyond the scope of this study but may yield interesting results as black and blue, and yellow and red, are used on the same objects.

[collecting]. W: "Would you have been able to get them?" G: "In a shop of course, I could have."

It is a remarkable feature of Gerrits' interests and objectives in collecting that, while he collected within an ethnographic frame reminiscent of 19th century collecting, when faced with all kinds of 'modern' things in the field, he did broaden this frame. This may in part be due to Gerrits' broader interest in people, it may however also be described in terms of these artefacts having a certain presence, or agency (see also 6.3). Interesting is also his comment that "they would have missed" Western things. Which things were and were not available and which choices Gerrits made in obtaining things, based on ethical or financial considerations, rather than on his interests and objectives, is discussed in the following chapter.

# Chapter 6

## Collecting in practice

The previous chapter provided a context for understanding Gerrits' collecting by describing some of Gerrits general attitudes and convictions, his interests in collecting, as well as the Trobriand context at the time of Gerrits stay. This chapter turns to the practice of collecting in the field and gives examples of how and why various objects were, or were not, acquired (6.1). It presents the acquisition, memory and destiny of a major object, the Olivilevi yam store (6.2) and discusses Gerrits' photography (6.3).

### 6.1 Things desired - things acquired

Gerrits' register (Part II) contains the objects which Gerrits acquired. It does not give an impression of other objects which Gerrits encountered in the field and possibly desired, but did not acquire for various reasons. The register also does not reflect various ways in which objects were acquired: offered by vendors, sought after and waited for over many month, or commissioned? These are the themes addressed in this section.

## **Stationary and mobile collecting**

As explained by Gerrits the majority of the objects were offered to him, either at his home or during his visits to other villages and islands. Gerrits tended to buy many of these objects, even if he may not have been particularly interested in all of these pieces individually. Partially, he bought more than he was particularly interested in, because he did not want to discourage further offers. Yet, particularly during his short term visits to other islands, there was another reason for the tendency to buy what one was offered. On these islands, which he visited for short term medical patrols, the limited time available urged him to acquire what was offered. As he explained, he tended to buy more than he probably would have on Kiriwina, because time was so short and he felt he needed to grasp his chances. "In general I was less likely not to buy something on the [other] islands because I so seldom came there" (11-06-13). There was little time to take decisions and no chance to get back to a vendor on short notice, thus one tended to be less selective. This is in line with the distinction between stationary and mobile collecting as pointed out by O'Hanlon (2000: 15). Considering local agency, this mobile context seems at first sight to have worked in the favor of indigenous vendors. They could determine what they offered and chances were higher that their offers were purchased. On the other hand however the vendors on more remote and smaller islands had less frequent contacts to Westerners and thus less opportunities to sell things, and may, much like the collectors, have felt pressurised to make use of the rare chances, and thus have offered more than they otherwise would have. Both vendors and collectors had less opportunities to build relationships with each other and become acquainted with each other's wishes, possibilities and limitations in exchanges. This did not necessarily mean an increase or decrease



in agency of either party but rather a different kind of exchange relationship for both parties.<sup>144</sup>

Differences between more mobile and more stationary collecting can not fully or readily be deduced from the register or the objects/collections themselves, because they do not, or hardly (but see Chapter 4), reflect why and how objects were purchased. There were different reasons for Gerrits to buy more than he strictly desired in both stationary and more mobile contexts.

Moreover, differences between stationary and more mobile collecting are gradual which further complicates their traceability in archives and collections. This gradual scale is related to the frequency of Gerrits' visits to certain places which is partially, but only partially, determined by the proximity of certain places to Kiriwina. As pointed out in Chapter 3, proximity guided Gerrits' steps in expanding the area of collecting, but did not entirely determine the frequency of visits to certain Islands. Kailenuna (off Kiriwina's west coast) and Kitava (off Kiriwina's eastern coast) are both within easy reach of Kiriwina. Yet Gerrits visited Kitava and even more distant Iwa Island more often than Kaileuna, and collected more objects on Kitava and Iwa than on Kaileuna. This was due to the fact that patients from Kaileuna could more easily reach Kiriwina and thus Gerrits' medical visits were less frequent, but differences in availability of objects may also have been a factor. Besides Gerrits actual behaviour however, proximity and means of transport, thus accessibility, need to be considered as essential factors in assessing the degree of mobility in collecting. Merely knowing that one could come back relatively easily would have influenced choices differently than knowing the place to be beyond easy reach, as for example Woodlark/Muyuw, Egum Atoll and the Laughlan Islands were for

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<sup>144</sup> The (brief) data on differences between places of origin and places of purchase in Gerrits' register does suggest that people from more remote islands did also seek other ways to come in touch with the Western market. Recall the man from Budibudi working on Woodlark/Muyuw, or carvings from Kitava being offered on Kiriwina and the renowned carver Ulisaku's carvings from Gawa being sold on Kiriwina and Iwa (Chapter 3).

Gerrits. Gerrits explained that the islands near to Kiriwina could be reached by smaller boats, but for further travels over the open sea, he needed to use the larger government trawlers. In practice existing healthcare trip routines largely defined Gerrits' travels. The government had a boat the 'Pearl' stationed at Losuia and a trawler stationed at Samarai. The Mother and Child Healthcare team in Losuia undertook a trip once a month, or once in two months, either to Kaileuna and the Lusancay Islands or to Kitava and the Marshall Bennet Islands. The trawler came once or twice a year with the District Malaria Team to visit Woodlark, Egum, BudiBudi and other remote Islands. Gerrits and his team could join these trips (e-mail, 30-11-17).

### **Commissioned and long awaited**

One way in which differences between stationary and mobile collecting do become apparent is in how objects were obtained, notably whether they were commissioned or whether they were long sought after. Gerrits commissioned the production of artefacts in various cases for slightly different reasons. Not surprisingly, the majority of these cases occurred on Kiriwina.

One reason to commission objects was that certain objects of special value in the indigenous context, as for example certain chiefs' regalia, were virtually impossible to acquire. In the register it caught my eye that chiefs' objects tend to have been collected in the latter months of Gerrits' collecting. At first I took this merely as an indication for Gerrits' growing acquaintance with the people and the field in general. While this may not be incorrect, it has to be complemented with the fact that some of these objects were commissioned, which Gerrits only did after having understood that certain objects were impossible to obtain and after having gained an understanding of 'key' Trobriand objects which he wanted to include in his collection. Chiefs' lime gourds (Tab. 6.1) are an example of objects Gerrits commissioned for this reason (11-06-13).

Table 6.1 Chief's Lime Gourds, <i>yaguma guyau</i>				
Month	G. reg.nr.	Village	Creator	Destination
03-1970	3354	Kapwapu, Kiriwina	Kagubotaula (deceased)	Queensland
04-1970	3632	Mulosaida, Kiriwina	Wainoba	Queensland
05-1970	3750	Tubowada, Kiriwina	Towagogula	Queensland
07-1970	3898	Tubowada, Kiriwina	Towagogula	Basel
08-1970	4127	Mulosaida, Kiriwina	Wainoba	Moresby
08-1970	4145	Tubowada, Kiriwina	Towagogula	Moresby
12-1970	4507	Mulosaida, Kiriwina	Wainoba	Leiden

While Gerrits collected many lime gourds throughout his entire period on the Trobriand Islands (see Chapter 4), and lime gourds are amongst the very first objects in his register, it was only in 1970, the third year of his presence on Kiriwina, that he acquired chiefs' lime gourds.<sup>145</sup> The first chief's lime gourd he bought had been owned by the late Chief Kagubotaula of Kapwapu Village/Kiriwina Island and was not commissioned (ill. 2.16). In the following months of the same year Gerrits bought six more chief's lime gourds, three of them made by Wainoba of Mulosaida Village/Kiriwina Island and three of them made by Towagogula of Tubowada Village/Kiriwina. As noted on the catalogue cards both men were the sons of late chiefs of their villages and produced replicas of the lime gourds their fathers had owned on Gerrits request. On the back of the catalogue cards Gerrits gave the following descriptions.

Description for nr. 3632: " Made in 1970 by Wainoba (m/60), the son of Chief Togarai (t). Is exact copy of Togarai's limepot, which is now in the possession of Wainoba. Limepots, well

<sup>145</sup> Chiefs' lime gourds are decorated with shells and beads, while 'ordinary' lime gourds do not have these decorations.

ornamented like this one, were only for chiefs of high rank." (ill. 2.17)

Description for nr. 3750: "This is [a] true copy of the limepot of Weilasi (t), the chief of Tobaada [= Tubowada]. It is made in 1970 by his son, Towagogula." (ill. 2.18).

The descriptions imply that Gerrits saw the original lime gourds. The archives do not explicitly state that Gerrits asked for the replicas to be made. Notably, the Museums in Port Moresby and Queensland received one each from both villages, the remaining two lime gourds (one from Mulosaida the other from Tubowada) were divided between Leiden and Basel. Notable is also that Gerrits did not seem to have commissioned three lime gourds at one time in either village, but apparently went back several times. This clearly was only possible while being stationary. As this example shows, indications of stationary collecting are present in the archives, yet without their explicit mention, either in the archive, or in retrospect comments, it is hard to identify them.

Another reason to commission objects was more of a mix of wanting to acquire certain objects and having developed relationships with certain people and wanting to support them (financially) and maintain relationships. Gerrits mentioned Kauwa from Wabutuma Village, the Gerrits' families 'grocery man', not to have been very good at carving and therefore Gerrits asked him to make other kind of objects. Kauwa made the models of yam stores, one of which is now held at the Queensland Museum (reg.nr. E 15040).

In the following example Gerrits first commissioned an artefact and then, after a long wait, eventually acquired the 'real thing'. Gerrits was interested in objects related to mourning which, particularly in the past, included certain body parts of the deceased (hair, nails, but also certain bones and jaws for which the body had to be dissected) and were kept by certain relatives. The practice had been generally observed on Kiriwina in the past but had been forbidden by the British administration towards the end of the 19th century. In

more remote villages on other islands, as Gerrits discovered, these practices had partially survived. Yet, as one may expect, these objects were not easily available. Gerrits gave the account of the 'mandible' as a response to my question whether certain kinds of objects were principally not sold. He explained that it was not really the type of object that mattered, certain objects were part of exchange or other obligations and could therefore not be sold by the person temporarily possessing them.<sup>146</sup> This was also the case with the mandible from Kudeuli Village on Kitava Island.

G: You know, they keep all kinds of parts of deceased people, more so on the smaller islands, on the larger islands it was gone, it was against the policy of the government of course - one would not think of even attempting to excavate a dead body on Kiriwina, that would really not have been appreciated. In Kitava this was less so, and on the smaller islands they had even more of these things, necklaces of human hair, for example, ... but I knew that they had also had parts of skulls and lower jaws which they used to carry around. That was what I sought after. They did not practice it any more on Kiriwina, but on Kitava they knew about it. When I asked them to make a copy, they produced a beautifully carved thing [from wood] in the shape of a jaw and decorated with 'kaloma' discs. - But what about a real one? [I then said]. Well, it took me two years before I got one. But that was not because it was [officially] forbidden but because the widow has to keep it with her for a certain period of time. After this period, when she is allowed to remarry, she has to give it back to the deceased relatives. So she really could not have given it away. Eventually

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<sup>146</sup> This is also the case with *kula* valuables which, besides having a material and historical value are bound in exchange relationships, and therefore can not simple be sold to an external person by any one individual temporarily owning them.

I got it from a relative with a whole story about what it meant to them (08-06-13)."

In this context Gerrits also reflected on his position in acquiring objects and his relationship to vendors, and gave his perspective on agencies. " I asked for things, but I never could have forced them. If nobody said: 'I've got one', how could I have known what they had. I did not search their houses, or so. All I could do was say: 'If you ever have one, I would really appreciate it.' Sometimes, I believe, the health orderlies helped in spreading requests, who knows. But in principal I depended on them, not the other way round. If they don't offer certain things, you can't know what they have - God knows what they still may have." (08-06-13).<sup>147</sup>

An example of creating a win-win situation are the earthenware pots which were produced on the Amphlett Islands and used on the Trobriand Islands. These were hard to acquire on the Trobriand Islands, as Gerrits explained, because they needed to be imported. Gerrits found a solution by organising a collecting trip to the Amphlett Islands where he bought new pots, which he then could exchange for old pots on Kiriwina. As he explained, on Kiriwina people were happy with the new pots, and he preferred the old ones. This was the only trip he made in the region exclusively to collect (11-06-13).

## **Budget limits**

Gerrits pointed out two prominent examples of objects which exceeded his budget, but which, in hindsight, he very much regrets not having acquired. One was a partially damaged, archeological stone mortar offered to him near Kaibola, the other was a large and beautiful old club from Kaileuna Island.

G: The most stupid thing I did not buy, was somewhere near Kaibola, a guy had found a kind of stone mortar, heavily damaged. I already

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<sup>147</sup> What role the health orderlies exactly played, with or also without Gerrits knowing, remains unclear.

had a [stone] mortar from the Highlands. He wanted something like 35 dollars for it, so I wrote Moresby whether they were interested, but they were not. It was above my budget and it was damaged. But it was the only one I ever got to see there [on the Trobriand Islands], utterly stupid not to have bought it. But then, you have to have some knowledge of these things, and at the time it [archeological objects] did not fit in - although I did collect stone axe-heads. In hindsight I extremely regretted it, but then, it was something the man had set a price for, take it or leave it. (08-06-13).

G: "The only really splendid old club I ever saw [in the field] was from Kaileuna Island. They suddenly stood in front of me with it, patina all over it, what else would you want - '200 Kina please' - Well, come on! I believe I didn't even make a bid. In hindsight it probably was worth it, but it would have used up virtually my whole budget... It was huge, a meter or so, with [carved] decorations and brown patina, splendid specimen, the most beautiful I ever saw, by far. But 200 Kina at the time was a fortune." (08-06-13).<sup>148</sup>

Both examples reflect a combination of certain choices Gerrits made and interests he had. Importantly, he had a certain budget, and when faced with the choice of spending it either on one object or on many others, he clearly chose not to spend the money on one object. This is however not to say that quantity overruled quality as other old and rare pieces were offered for lower prices as well.

In both choices there is an element of Gerrits not absolutely wanting the piece. The club was highly desirable from an 'art' perspective. Yet, Gerrits was not really interested in 'art' and consequently not really interested in connected

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<sup>148</sup> Both, Australian dollars and Kina were in use. In a later e-mail ( 23-11-13 ) Gerrits recalled an amount of 300 Kina, yet the exact price is not relevant here, both amounts clearly exceeded Gerrits' budget.

valuations as having a wonderful patina. Gerrits did recognise the piece as valuable but the price was far beyond his budget.

The mortar was less highly priced, but it was an archeological specimen and Gerrits was not specifically interested in archeology. Notably, the museum in Port Moresby was also not particularly interested. It is interesting that Gerrits also used the fact that he had already acquired a stone mortar on his previous posting as one argument for not buying the mortar. It shows Gerrits, to a certain extent, as having conceived his entire ethnographic collecting as one entity and one piece of work.<sup>149</sup>

The question also arises why certain individuals asked much higher than average prices for certain objects and stuck to these prices. Gerrits suggested that these objects may have been of special value to their owners. Indeed within Trobriand valuations certain objects are considered to be of special value as for example certain heirlooms. However, many of the objects Gerrits bought, presumably for average prices, may have been valued as heirlooms and valuables. To me, these occasional high prices Gerrits encountered suggest that there were other collectors who were, at least occasionally, willing to pay these prices for certain objects (valued on the Western ethnographic art market). One may even further speculate that Gerrits' conclusion towards the latter period of his collecting on the Trobriand Islands, that there were not many 'old' objects left to be collected, albeit correct, may in part have been the consequence of not being prepared to pay these high prices and thus simply not being offered certain objects anymore.<sup>150</sup> As an other example shows, Trobriand Islanders were aware of different Westerners paying different prices. Gerrits thought some of the elaborately carved and mother-of pearl inlaid 'walking sticks' (made for the tourist market) to be very beautiful. Yet, they also were too

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<sup>149</sup> One might place this perspective in a more general context in which indigenous people were/are, in more or less degrees, conceived as one entity.

<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, agreeing to these higher prices may of course have resulted in a general rise of prices towards him and consequently in a less extended and rather different collection.



expensive for him. Gerrits understood this, as tourists anywhere on the world are, understandably, prepared to pay high prices for beautiful souvenirs. But these prices exceeded an ethnographic collector's budget. This is a clear example of indigenous agency in response to differences between Western buyers. It should also, importantly, caution conclusions concerning the (relative) presence of certain objects in collections. One may presume tourist objects not to be prominently present in either ethnographic or ethnographic art collections because collectors did not perceive them as being relevant to their collections. In Gerrits' collection, the prices asked for some of these objects clearly contributed to their absence, including certain tourist objects.<sup>151</sup>

### **Self restriction and denial**

It did occur that owners did not want to sell an object. An example is Chief Maluwa's betel-nut mortar, which Gerrits sought to buy, but Maluwa was not willing to part with (see also 6.3).<sup>152</sup>

There were also cases in which Gerrits felt it was either 'not done' or in other cases simply useless to attempt to buy the object. Gerrits took photographs of late Chief Mitakata's yam store, which had been left to decay in Omarakana Village. Gerrits was naturally interested in these carvings, but as he explained: "It would have been to rude to ask, I took photographs, but look, if it is important as a memory to them, who am I to take it away." (11-06-2013). He felt it to be a breach of proper behaviour, rude and ill-mannered, to ask whether they were for sale. The circumstance that the Chief of Omarakana at the time, Chief Wanoi, was a man of authority with whom Gerrits had a friendly but not informal relationship, and mainly the fact that Wanoi did not offer the carvings, contributed to this decision. Gerrits felt it to be unacceptable to ask for them

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<sup>151</sup> Budgetary influences have been pointed out for Malinowski's Trobriand collections. (Young, 2000:187-188)

<sup>152</sup> Chief Maluwa of Olivilevi sold Gerrits one of his yam stores (see 6.2).

and thus did not attempt to buy them. In terms of acknowledging indigenous agency it is interesting that he felt it would be 'not-done' also because the owner, Chief Mitakata, had died and thus could not negotiate prices anymore. (11-06-20 13).<sup>153</sup>

An object Gerrits admired and took photographs of was an ancient shell with incised carvings which had shortly before been found and had been decorated and integrated in a *mwali*, (*kula* exchange necklace). This shell ornament was, beyond any doubt, not for purchase and Gerrits did not even think of attempting a bid (14-06-2013).

### **Reflecting on collecting**

Gerrits voiced some slight concerns about certain transactions and the consequences of collecting. The one example he gave in which objects possibly had been purchased without the full consent of their owners were some of the toys. Apparently children were not always happy to part with their toys and sometimes the parents seem to have intervened in favor of Gerrits. It should be noted however that the number of toys in the collection is limited and thus these instances were rather exceptional. In terms of agency the example is interesting. Individuals, men and women, were in principle free to decide whether they wanted to sell their personal belongings or not (interview, Yalaka Village 2013). Children seem to have been an exception to this rule.

Another concern, namely that people's material culture was (irreplaceably) being removed, is implicitly contained in Gerrits' recurrent side-comments on the replaceability of objects. Describing the use of a multi-pointed fishing spear, Gerrits recalled the following encounter:

One evening our 'grocery man' came along with a big torch [of burning sticks] to the creek [by Gerrits' garden]. Wak! He caught a fish! It was a spear with which one could catch

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<sup>153</sup> Mitakata died in 1961, thus several years before Gerrits' arrival in 1968.

relatively small fishes, but it also enhanced the chances for a catch, because looking under water the angle of the spear changes [and the larger number of points compensate for this]. Well, what did I want? I wanted a photograph, I wanted to know how they used it, whether there were different types, who used them and whether the piece was for sale? In this case, with Kauwa our 'grocery man' that was no problem because we knew him, and after all he was suddenly fishing in our garden. [So I said,] 'Do you want to part with it?' [he answered] 'With pleasure!' - He could make a new one the following day (11-06-13).

Interestingly, while discussing the hypothetical purchase of Western made clothes used by Trobriand Islanders for the collection, one of the arguments Gerrits voiced against buying them was that the owners could not easily have replaced them.

The last example to be presented here shows a possible difference between indigenous and Western perceptions, the Western observer feeling concerned, while the Trobriand Islanders involved most probably did not feel any unease. On one occasion a man who had sold Gerrits some body ornaments came back to borrow these decorations for his daughter's wedding (11-06-13). Related to this case Gerrits felt some concern about people being deprived of their things due to collecting. The example is interesting as it has a parallel in a much earlier case mentioned by Silas (see also Chapter 2)

Towards the close of the season, the inhabitants of the villages display all their wealth in front of their houses: 'vaygu'a (native valuables) comprising arm-shells, belts and necklaces of pink shell money, stone axe-heads, fishing nets and a selection from their yam and taro crops. Upon one such occasion in Kavataria village the season had not been bountiful, and as sometimes

happens, a number of the men had pawned the axe-heads to traders: they therefore borrowed 'vaygu'a' and tobacco from the traders, being ashamed that the Baloma [spirits of the dead] should discover them in such straitened circumstances. (Silas, 1926:106).

Borrowing each other's things is common practice in the Trobriand Islands, thus while Gerrits' concerns may not be ungrounded, it is quite likely that in this case the person in question did not feel any regrets about having sold the decorations and found it rather natural to go back and borrow them for the occasion.<sup>154</sup>

This is not to suggest that large scale collecting did not have a profound impact on indigenous people and societies. These influences are however complex, multifaceted and intertwined.

## 6.2. Extreme collecting - a canoe and two yam stores

Gerrits collected three large complex objects on Kiriwina which in Were's terms can be qualified as extreme collecting (Were, 2012). A *masawa* canoe and two yam stores. The canoe and one of the yam stores are now held in the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam, of the other yam store only parts were kept. Christian Kaufmann, who was on friendly terms with Gerrits, obtained the yam store front. The carvings from the back of the house are presently held at the Queensland Museum.

The canoe was from Kaibola and was restored under the supervision of health orderly Tosieru's father, and made a short maiden voyage off Kaibola

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<sup>154</sup> I personally experienced this in the daily conduct with various objects on Kiriwina, particularly in the use of mobile phones. After having left Kiriwina I received calls from various mobile phone numbers which slightly confused me, until I realised them all to be from my interpreter Colin using various phones.

beach. Gerrits recorded the magic chants used in the process of constructing a canoe. He also took photographs and made film recordings of the maiden trip. Tosieru mentioned his father and other family members to have worked on the canoe and mentioned the canoe to have been transported by truck from Kaibola to Losuia to be shipped. I suggested the transport to have been quite a spectacular happening. The memory however did not invoke any further narratives (Tosieru, interview August 2013).

The yam store from Olivilevi village is the other large complex object which was purchased by Gerrits and kept in one piece by one museum, the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam (ills.3.24, 3.25, 3.25a, 3.25b). It is discussed here in more detail because in this object various actors' ambitions, desires, hard work, and passionate involvement can be shown to intersect.<sup>155</sup>

Yam stores have a central position on the Trobriand Islands, literally and figuratively. They are eye-catchers in the villages and are important in the yams exchange relationships of their owners. Basically three types of yam stores can be distinguished which reflect hierarchies in Trobriand society. Small yam stores with covered walls, not showing their content, are owned by every common married man. Certain men of renown own larger yam stores with open walls in which the yams can be exhibited. Only high ranking chiefs (of certain clans) have decorated yam stores (Malinowski, 1966:242, Wisse, 2005). The yam stores Gerrits bought fall into this last category.

The initiative for the acquisition by curator R.S. Wassing is not entirely clear.<sup>156</sup> The Museum's wish to acquire a yam store can be traced to curator Victor Jansen, Wassing's predecessor and his collaboration with the commercial collector Groenevelt. Jansen was an ambitious collector, driven by the competition between museums (particularly the Dutch ethnographic

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<sup>155</sup> It should be noted that in this case, I am not only researcher and author, but also participant.

<sup>156</sup> Gerrits himself was not acquainted with the details, Hans Gerrits was not available for an interview due to his age and health condition. R.S. Wassing, with whom I had been in touch while conducting research on the yam store for the Wereldmuseum, passed away in 2011, before I embarked on this study.

museums). In his letters to Groenevelt he expressed his wish for an entire yam store to which Groenevelt responded that purchasing and transporting such a house was impossible. Eventually Jansen more or less gave up: "It is such a pity, that one can not transfer such a complete little yam house to Rotterdam. What a lot of visitors we could attract, if it were advertised a bit." (correspondence Groeneveld-Jansen, letter 402, 14-04-1961, archives Wereldmuseum). Gerrits acquired the yam store in Olivilevi in 1971 (caption black&white negatives, film T 88), the Museum acquired it in 1972 and the purchase was finalised in 1973 (letter from R. Wassing to Hans Gerrits, 05-01-73, archives Wereldmuseum). Because of lack of space it was temporarily stored in an outer courtyard but then soon moved to the museum's newly built storage. During the transport to this new space the roof was partially damaged (personal communication, C.v.d. Meiracker, 2003). It was kept in storage for the following years without ever being exhibited. My involvement with the yam store started in 2003, in the course of which I conducted research on this specific house and Trobriand yam stores in general, recovered Gerrits' documentation, conducted the restoration of the house and finally managed to contact Gerrits. The planned exhibition of the house could not be realised at the time. Eventually, the yam store was exhibited in February 2017 as part of the exhibit titled "Ik kook, dus ik ben" (I cook, thus I am) showing food and eating traditions in different times and places and curated by the art-historian Alexandra van Dongen and the writer

Abdelkader Benali. The exhibit presented classical paintings, antique furniture and the yam store in one space.<sup>157</sup>

Gerrits did not give a detailed account of the acquisition of the yam store in the field but mentioned various aspects.

G: I believe the museum had asked Hans, but I am not sure. He could not tell me anything about it. Well, one did not buy a yam store out of the blue, so how did it go [in the field]. Possibly I had been in touch with them [Olivilevi] before, because I had bought things there before - it is not the most fantastic yam store of course, there are much higher ones there [on the Trobriand Islands].

Word of Gerrits being interested in a yam store easily got around.

G: [I believe] perhaps a boy came to tell me that the village was willing to sell one. W: Maluwa [Chief of Olivilevi] was a very nice person, wasn't he? G: Yes, very calm, a good guy. W: Had you met him previously? G: I think so, I had bought other things there" .... W: It was still being used, wasn't it? G: Yes, it was good. He [Maluwa] had more yam stores, at least two of them were bigger ones, he was a rather high-ranking chief after all. They could have been for different wives, I do not know.... I

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<sup>157</sup> I am not principally opposed to these kind of combinations, albeit as Thomas (2010: 8) pointed out, one should question when "incommensurable things" may be put together. This is not the appropriate space for a critique of this exhibit. I do regret however, that while the yam store physically had a central position in hall, from my observations during the opening of the exhibit, visitors tended to pass by without quite understanding what it was (and often not finding the information-text). I had envisioned an exhibit in which the yam store would be placed in the center of various themes linked to it, as for example the central position of yam stores in Trobriand society, this yam store's collecting history, its meaning for the people of Olivilevi at present, the collector Gerrits and collecting on the Trobriand Islands and Trobriand history in more general, which would have placed the yam store in a truly central position. I was only superficially involved in this exhibit, partially because of being involved in this thesis and thus not having the time, but did advise in and contribute to setting the house up. It should be added, that am not opposed to art-historical perspectives, yet I believe the strong focus on art-historical and visual appreciation in this case to have neglected the yam store's fuller potential, which a cooperation of anthropological, historical and art-historical perspectives could have more fruitfully utilised.

never paid much attention to yam houses as such, who owned them and so. W: You were not that much interested in them, were you? G: Hmm, well, they were there and I found it interesting to see how they filled them, but as a building it self, not that much. The interesting thing was when they did something with it and the magic chants spoken over the stone in it, if one translates that, it says more than the building itself, I think... I did learn a lot from documenting the yam store, and that was interesting (15-06-13).

A main concern for Gerrits was how to transport the large complex objects. The canoe was a great challenge and a lot of work which included getting a flat-bottom army-boat, which could open on the front, for its transport to Port Moresby.

G:...the yam store was much easier, oh yes, that could go in dismantled parts. The roof had to go in one, and I documented how the sticks inside had to be fitted in [these are sticks dividing the inside in compartments into which yam gifts from different people were filled]. But the *liku* [logs] were just a lego-puzzle of course. W: Yes, we could nicely reconstruct that. G: That could not have been difficult I had numbered them. W: Yes, only not everything was readable anymore, it had been written in chalk. G: Yes, that's right, I needed something which was visible but also could be taken off..." W: Was it a big happening in the village when the house was dismantled? G: It was not that bad, probably people like Tobwaki [Gerrits' gardener and later informant] came along to help. The roof needed to be taken off, which you can't do by yourself of course, but the truck I had could open at the back, and it fitted in in one piece. You know, the problem was that we only had a



small place which could be locked, where we kept the things, but that was far too small [for the yam store]. There also still stood an old shed from the war, however, rather broken down, but in there it could be kept dry. So that's where it stood, covered in plastic. Then we needed to get wood to make crates and a construction for transport. But there were no people who knew how to make crates. W: Did you do it yourself? G: Yes. W: The foundation stones are very heavy, how did you transport those? G: Simply lifted them into the truck, with several people, just man power. I bought the whole thing, except for that war 'thing' he had hanging on it, which he used to summon the people together. I believe it was the shell of a grenade, and he did not want to sell that of course. W: Would you have wanted to have it? G: You see, the problem was I did not know exactly what the museum wanted, how authentic they wanted it to be.<sup>158</sup> I did not ask for it [the war trophy], undoubtedly I would have taken it if he had left it there, but for one, it was not traditional, and for the other, he wanted to keep it. He could not replace that of course, he could replace the house. And it would have been 'not-done', to take it along. Look, they can build a yam store within a few weeks, but that was something which belonged to him, perhaps memories of people in the war, I don't know how he got it.

W: Did you take photographs of all his houses? G: Yes, well in overview. The museum got a kind of do-it-yourself kit and photographs to give a good overall picture. W: Was it Maluwa who decided which yam store he was going to sell, or did you

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<sup>158</sup> With 'authentic' Gerrits here means ethnographically authentic, and thus not containing 'non-traditional' elements.

say, 'I would rather have that other one?' G: Well, I had preferred a taller one of course, but look, - [one is faced with the fact that] something is available. W: So he said you can have that one? G: Yes, that is also why I think they came to me, [to tell me] 'we have one available'. And then you can't say, I don't want it. They would say 'get lost!' - and rightly so. W: Did you negotiate about the price? G: Not sure, mostly you did not need to negotiate, because they did not ask that much.

W: Did you dismantle it in one day? G: No, of course not. Attaching all the labels took a lot of time, and untying the roof took about a day. Especially all the sticks inside, that was a lot of work, and I preferred not to cut any ropes. - If I remember well they were not happy with the fact that I also wanted the foundation stones. W: I wondered about that, they used those for the foundation of a new house. G: Yes, they were not happy with that, but well, sold is sold, and Okaiboma<sup>159</sup> is not far from sea, they could fetch new coral stones anytime, it is some work to get it done but not that big an issue. They had not expected the stones to be included, perhaps they do have some meaning in connecting to the ground or ancestors, who knows.

W: You did not further inquire why or offer replacements? G: No, no. (15-06-13).

Gerrits' account reflects a few crucial points. For one, his main concern was how to organise and conduct the transportation of the house which took up quite some time and energy. A combination of agencies becomes apparent. It was Maluwa and the people of Olivilevi Village who were ready to sell a yam store. Gerrits mentioned talking to Chief Maluwa, as well as to Chief Uwelasi of Tobowada, who sold the other yam store, several times before coming to an

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<sup>159</sup> Okaiboma and Olivilevi are adjunct villages often mentioned as one.

agreement. Maluwa's son in Olivilevi recalled Gerrits to have visited several times, with small gifts of food, to talk to the Chief. As explained to me in Olivilevi, a chief's yam store is not entirely personally owned by the chief, but belongs to his matri-clan. Thus, a chief needs to consult with the relevant relatives before selling a house.<sup>160</sup> While Gerrits was having conversations with the chief the issue was not the price (as mentioned above), the chief needed time to negotiate the sale with his people. Gerrits had clearly no say in which house he could acquire. His mention of having preferred a taller yam store reflects his ambition as a collector and possibly a desire 'do well' towards the museum.<sup>161</sup> Once the deal was set, Gerrits however stuck to acquiring the whole thing. Apparently details of which parts were, or were not, to be included had not been discussed. Gerrits assumed the foundation stones to have been part of the deal, the people of Olivilevi had not assumed so. But for Gerrits this was not negotiable and the stones were shipped to Holland.<sup>162</sup> Again, Gerrits uses replaceability, or rather his perception of replaceability, in justifying his conduct (see also 6.1).

The memory of the yam store evoked intense emotions in Olivilevi Village, which I visited several times in August 2013. The successive visits are briefly described here to show the build-up before getting to talk about Maluwa's yam store. On my first visit I encountered a group of young men who were keen to come to Rotterdam to set up the yam store. I explained that the museum had abandoned plans for an exhibit and moreover transport costs would be considerable for a whole group. They responded with great

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<sup>160</sup> Details about who these relatives were and the content of the talks could unfortunately not be documented within the given time-frame.

<sup>161</sup> The fact that it had been impossible for the museum to exhibit an even taller house was apparently not considered.

<sup>162</sup> Notably, and somewhat ironically, the two elements which had complicated the acquisition, the sticks dividing the inside the compartment and the foundation stones were excluded from the exhibit in 2017. The stones were found to be too heavy and moreover there was a risk of them not being stable enough to carry the weight of the house anymore (Wisse, Scholten and Brokerhof, 2005). The installation of the sticks would have been rather time-consuming and was not found essential in the context of the exhibit.

enthusiasm that they would not mind coming by ship if that would spare costs.<sup>163</sup> On my second visit I was introduced to an elderly lady, Chief Maluwa's only daughter, who showed interest in the photographs Gerrits had taken at the time. I was not prepared for what happened next. On seeing the photograph of her late father she instantly burst out into an intensive unconsolable wailing.<sup>164</sup> Everyone present, including myself, were touched to tears. Consequently I learnt that two of Maluwa's sons were also alive and willing to meet me during the next visit. On this occasion the younger son agreed to talk to me about the yam store. On seeing the photographs however the old man also started weeping. This time it was not an intensive wailing, the tears just quietly ran down the old man's cheeks (which was more heartbreaking than his sister's reaction had been). It was not appropriate (as my assistant Collin explained) to continue the conversation and it was agreed that we would return with a proper gift to console the discomfort we had caused. Several days later Collin and I entered the village each carrying a large platter with store-food and offering it with the appropriate words to Maluwa's son. Thereafter we sat down together for a meal of chicken, which had been prepared for this occasion, and started talking.

The dismantling of the yam store and its removal had been an emotional and exceptional happening. Many people had cried as the store left the village. As one of the men in the group explained, the yam store had been a good father to them who had fed them well, so it had been hard to see it leave. (As I understood it, he did not compare the house to a father but actually perceived the house as a good father.) This comment is interesting as it is in line with Mosko's comparison between chiefs and fathers (Mosko, 1995) and the relationships I found between chiefs and their yam stores (Wisse, 2005). Chief

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<sup>163</sup> Contacts had been established earlier on with Linus DigimRina and Olivilevi Village while initially working on the yam store.

<sup>164</sup> Intensive wailing in connection to death is expected conduct on the Trobriand Islands, yet I had not expected such an intense reaction to the photographs, particularly because she had asked to see them.

Maluwa had been a good-hearted man, a chief who bound people to himself by giving lavishly, not by invoking fear. The yam store had been a good father to them because Chief Maluwa had been a good father to them.

The men present, whether young or old, were clearly involved in the yam store's destiny and its present condition without wishing it to be repatriated. They were all in favour of having it exhibited. Maluwa's son however did express wanting the yam store back in the village again.<sup>165</sup>

The Olivilevi yam store is an example of how objects in ethnographic collections, and the shared passion and concern for these objects, can connect people. The Olivilevi yam store has the potential to develop the Museum as contact zone (see for example Brown and Peers, 2003). Museums should cherish the occasions to enhance these connections and involving their visitors.

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<sup>165</sup> The circumstance that the house had not existed anymore, if it had not been bought, was not discussed in this context. The fact is that the house does still exist.

## 6.3 Photography

Before concluding this thesis I turn to Gerrits photography, which was in some ways linked to his artefact collecting but also an independent activity. In any case it was an important part of Gerrits' presence in the field.

Gerrits loved taking photographs.<sup>166</sup> As a teenager in the Netherlands he would visit the zoo in Amsterdam and photograph animals, trying to stage them as if they were in their natural environment (8-6-2013). Compared to his artefact and ethnographic fact collecting, photography was in many ways the activity he enjoyed most, the least restrained by self-imposed objectives or real or imagined expectations of others, an activity which he felt required skillful creation as opposed to mere gathering, and was not pressurised by rival collectors.<sup>167</sup> Staging' and trying to create a reality, an ethnographic reality of Trobriandness, was part of Gerrits photography on the Trobriand Islands which to a certain extent may be compared to his choices in ethnographic artefact collecting, yet similar to his artefact collecting, photography comprised an emotional involvement in trying to capture and hold this Trobriandness beyond an objectified ethnographic construct.

Gerrits took photographs in black and white and in addition also colour photographs or slides. The collection comprises approximately 2000 black and white photographs and around 1000 colour images. Both, his artefact collection as his collection of photographs are thus large. He usually had two cameras with him with two lenses, a standard lens and a tele-lens. He mentioned being

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<sup>166</sup> Much in contrast to Malinowski, who disliked taking photographs (Young, 1998:4).

<sup>167</sup> A comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this work, yet the photographs receive somewhat more attention here than the ethnographic notes as I consider them to be more significant. I viewed most of his photographs, partially provided by Gerrits as scans, and partially as present in the Queensland Museum. I took photographs of the colour prints at the Museum, and took notes of the colour slides which had not been scanned by Gerrits. Prints of the black and white negatives were not available at the Museum, thus, I only viewed Gerrits selection of scans.

envious of people using today's cameras with integral zoom-lenses, as having to change lenses was rather tiresome (9-6-2013). The black-and-white films were developed by himself at home, the colour films were sent to Port Moresby to be developed. Colour photography was relatively costly, thus black-and-white was the standard. Images in colour were however more valued and black-and-white images not considered to have a value in their own right, aesthetically or otherwise.

All photographs were registered and numbered by Gerrits in notebooks with short captions describing their content. Gerrits did, to my knowledge, not keep notes of the circumstances in which the photographs were taken or of details of camera settings. Dates for the colour photographs are not exact as they were registered only after having been developed in Port Moresby, thus some time after they had been taken. Gerrits typed more lengthy captions for the Queensland Museum in English after the Museum had acquired the collection. The captions include location, sometimes the event, sometimes names of people, an approximate date (month) and ethnographic explanations, including Kilivila terms for certain objects (body decoration) or practices.<sup>168</sup> To my knowledge Gerrits did not make albums of his photographs at the time, neither were the photographs cropped or otherwise altered. Gerrits made high quality scans of a portion of the images and more practical smaller (jpeg) files of a selection of these scans. These selections reflect some of his interests and preferences. For example he took a photograph of Bomapota, a young girl from Kwaibwaga, posing with her guitar. While he took photographs of her in a Western dress as well as in traditional attire, his selection only include the photograph in traditional dress (ills. 3.16, 3.17, 3.17a).

Gerrits occasionally gave black-and-white prints to the people he had photographed, but, because of costs, never colour prints. I am not aware of

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<sup>168</sup> A comparison of his original captions and those provided for the museum would be interesting to establish whether there is a difference in what he thought relevant at the time and in hind-sight.

photographs possibly having been part of artefact exchanges, but this is not likely and would only have occurred exceptionally as artefacts were paid for in cash. Giving prints of photographs to the people was a way of sharing the image one had taken. Gerrits photography did, to my knowledge not facilitated or limited artefact collecting.

Gerrits took photographs on Kiriwina Island as well as during medical patrols to other islands in the region. The majority of the photographs were taken on Kiriwina.<sup>169</sup> The photographs of more lengthy activities and certain large scale social occasions are nearly exclusively from Kiriwina, whereas on the other islands snapshots of various individuals prevail. Differences between stationary and mobile collecting are thus also present in the photograph collection.

While the photographs mainly reflect a publicly visible world, there are a few exceptions to this. Gerrits' staged photographs include two kinds of realities. Gerrits staged girls in traditional dress sitting on a canoe on the beach to create a romanticised image which he and his wife intended to use as a cover for some of the music recordings (ill. 3.3).<sup>170</sup> He also staged practices of black-magic and indigenous methods of cure, which were part of Trobriand life, yet which he would otherwise not have encountered. There is a parallel to this in artefact collecting as he commissioned copies of artefacts which he could not acquire (see the example of lime gourds, Chapter 6).

Young (1998: 16) describes Malinowski's and Billy Hancock's (trader and Malinowski's friend on Kiriwina) photographs in terms of Pinney's distinction between "indexical" and "iconic" - Malinowski's photographs being indexical, Hancock's being iconic. Gerrits' photographs have an element of both. The collection contains images of tropical scenery and moonlit skies, and the staged girls in grass-skirts mentioned above. These are iconic images for a romantic

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<sup>169</sup> I did not do an exact count but the Kiriwina photographs clearly outnumber those taken on the other islands.

<sup>170</sup> The plan was never realised.



South Seas idyll. Gerrits commented on these images, with a slight laugh, that Trobriand girls would normally never be sitting on a canoe at a beach in that fashion (11-06-2013). Some of his more specifically Trobriand themes, like village harvest scenes, dances in traditional attire and yam stores being filled, may also be seen as iconic and have probably become more so since. Yet, this was not Gerrits intent, which was rather indexical. There seems however to be a tension between Gerrits ethnographic, indexical intention and his wish to capture Trobriand life and people in his photographs, conveying a more iconic quality.

Dwelling on a comparison with Malinowski's images, one finds that, whereas Malinowski uses only horizontal framings, took no close-ups and characteristically has the camera at the same height as the subject (Young, 1998:17), Gerrits frames his images horizontally as well as vertically. He made many close-ups, usually combining more distanced overviews with close-ups of the same scene. The collection contains images at level with the subject but also often looking down, for example on small children or grown-ups sitting on the ground (ill. 3.4). While 'looking down' probably served the purpose of showing the activity more clearly (as in ill. 3.4.) these photographs implicitly reflect a photographer walking along and standing amongst the subjects and thus a certain observing distance. The photographer is not participating in the activities.

The combination of distance/overview and close-ups serves various purposes. The overview can either be relevant in its self and the close-up showing details, or the overview can mainly be contextualising the close-up. A third procedure was more strategic. When people where posing for him, Gerrits first took photographs from some distance to let them feel at ease, before taking the close-ups. In other cases, when wanting to take photographs of people in villages, he would first take photographs from a distance, and then, when possible, come closer.

## Topics

As may be expected after having become acquainted with his artefact collecting, Gerrits' images cover a variety of scenes and topics, the term he preferably uses for his collection of photographs as well as for his artefact collection. There is an array of ethnographic topics, partially reminiscent of Haddon's instructions on appropriate topics in the third edition of *Notes and Queries* (BAAS 1899: 239-40, in Edwards, 2001: 88): "making pots, smoking, fishing, talking, grooming, inaugurating a new canoe, funerals." This is not to suggest Gerrits directly followed these instructions, he may have followed popular ideas about what was ethnographically relevant and his own preferences within these. When asked whether he had read any directives about artefact collecting, he said he had not (22-09-2013). It is slightly striking though that the collection includes a photograph of a group of smoking men and interestingly, hardly no photograph of betel chewing, which really is an omnipresent practice on the Trobriand Islands. Betel-nuts are featured as an exchange good.

The various ethnographic topics parallel, as Gerrits intended, the themes covered in his ethnographic notes and show artefacts in use or being produced. Thus the photographs illustrate and contextualise the artefact collections. Yet at times, it seems, that it was the events being photographed that led him to gather information on certain themes, rather than having specific interests in mind and pursuing them. Thus, it was the actual observance of mortuary practices, dances, facial paintings in public that led to taking photographs and to further enquiries. While the photographs show stages in production processes (ill 3.4) they never show an entire production process in detail. This is related to Gerrits circumstance and his way of working. His work as a doctor did not allow him the time to examine full production processes in detail.

Gerrits has a fascination for technologies, or sometimes just simply practical solutions which is contained in his collections of artefacts and photographs, yet rather implicitly. In a photograph of a boy

carrying a small pig in a basket (ill. 3.32), I assumed the young boy going about his business to be the main subject, as people overall are his main focus. Yet the close-up (showing the basket) and Gerrits comments reveal otherwise. What fascinated Gerrits was the way the basket was constructed to hold the pig safely in place (80-06-2013).

Artefacts in the field are photographed mainly for three reasons. When they are too large to be readily collected (see also Edwards, 2004:104), to demonstrate their use, or when they are of specific value (as certain *kula* valuables) and for that reason not for sale. He did not take photographs, as he explained, of objects which were in principle available, such as betel-nut mortars, but which in a specific case the owner did not want to sell. This is interesting as it shows that, although he aimed at a comprehensive representation of varieties in design for certain types of objects in the artefact collection, he did not aim at capturing these varieties visually/conceptually. Acquiring the object was paramount to acquiring an overview of varieties in design.<sup>171</sup> He also did not take photographs of the artefacts he had acquired before sending them to the Netherlands. Gerrits used photography to document, or rather illustrate, the functioning of and the production of artefacts. In exceptional cases, as the yam store Gerrits acquired at Olivilevi village, the object is documented in more detail. The yamstore is shown in situ while still complete and while it is being dismantled, without its roof. The construction is also documented in detail, yet not for ethnographic reasons but as a guide for the museum when reconstructing the yam store. The masawa canoe, from Kaibola, is shown during its first and only launching and sailing. Burial caves are photographed to document their content.

The collection contains various overview scenes of land- and sea-scapes, of villages and gardens, usually with, but occasionally without people, and many

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<sup>171</sup> It should be noted though, that Gerrits' quest for varieties was more related to varieties in function than merely design.

scenes of festivities and dances. Among the village scenes, presentations of large yam harvests and the filling of yam store houses are the most prominent. In all these images he is documenting and capturing certain scenes. These images are however not documenting particular visits to places, either on Kiriwina or on the other islands. This reflects the fact that as the Medical Officer he did not have the time to undertake planned visits for ethnographic purposes and as he mentioned in the interviews (08-06-13, see 5.3) he therefore largely depended on taking his chances at the moments they occurred, in photography as well as in artefact collecting.

The impression that remains most prominently in mind after looking through Gerrits photographs are images of people, portraits of individuals, small groups in various settings and large gatherings, people involved in all kinds of activities as mentioned above. Two leading themes seem to be most prominently present: still portraits and action. This is not to say the portraits are static, on the contrary, they convey liveliness, but they capture a moment in time in which no particular action was taken other than looking at (or away from) the photographer and possibly having certain thoughts and feelings.

Some photographs are related to Gerrits' medical work and were taken as documentation. They particularly include images of leprosy patients as leprosy was not very common on Kiriwina and the cases Gerrits encountered needed to be documented.

Photographs of Gerrits himself are rare and not included in the selection Gerrits made. This may in part be due to the fact that he took most photographs himself, but is also clearly in line with his general wish not to be prominently pictured. It also gives the photographs a certain distant quality. Gerrits is the observer not the participant in the photographs (see above). Typically, in the scanned collection, there are several photographs of the view from Gerrits' house, which he much appreciated, but none of him posing before the house, for example. Occasionally photographs are noted to have been made by health

orderlies and Gerrits mentioned one case in which a man grabbed the camera from his hand and started taking photographs himself.

### **Traditional and modern**

Gerrits' interest in the 'traditional', 'old' and 'authentic' as opposed to the 'new' and 'modern' is present in his artefact collections and in his photographs. In his photographs, as in his artefact collecting, he was focussed on the 'authentic', yet the 'modern' is present in different ways. In certain cases the modern is annoyingly present for Gerrits, as for example in an image of a woman beating taro who has aluminum trade-store bowls next to her (08-06-13). In other cases however, it is the 'modern' that seems to fascinate Gerrits. For example in the image showing women carrying various vessels on their heads in the traditional manner, yet the vessels are not traditional ones, but rather a glass bowl, a trade-store water-kettle and a plastic float (previously used by fishermen) (ill. 3.6). Other examples that attracted Gerrits were, a deceased man with a bible inserted into his hands (instead of traditional valuables), and the yam store gable board carvings decorating the interior of a catholic church (3.28). While Gerrits included 'modern' artefacts, such as the *kapi kapi* head decoration made from tobacco wrappings (ill. 2.13), as shall be shown, these were always made by indigenous people (see Conclusions). There are no metal water-kettles, no glass bowls or plastic floats and no bibles in his artefact collection. What seems to have fascinated Gerrits, was thus not the object it self but the context of its use, certain appropriations of Western objects in traditional contexts, which could be captured in photographs.

The 'modern' is also present in Gerrits' photographs as a natural part of contemporary Trobriand life, whether he liked it or not. For example in the images of dance events in which most people are wearing trade-store clothes

(ill. 3.22).<sup>172</sup> Although Gerrits focussed on showing the ‘traditionally authentic’, when taking photographs of daily life and large scale social events it was impossible to single out the ‘modern’. While the aluminum pots are annoyingly present in an image meant as ethnographic documentation and meant to convey a certain Trobriandness, Gerrits was fascinated by people and their lives in a broader sense and thus did not strictly exclude the modern. There are however two sides to this, Gerrits may not have wanted to strictly exclude the modern, but modern elements were so overtly present that it was virtually impossible to exclude them. One might argue that modern/Western objects had more agency in the photographs than they had in artefact collecting. The inclusion of ‘modern’ elements also gives Gerrits’ photographs value as period documents.

### **People: snap-shots, posed images and intrusion**

There is a subtle difference between how the Dutch and the English languages tend to express the production of a photograph. In English one generally ‘takes’ a photograph, in Dutch one rather ‘makes’ a photograph (‘een foto maken’).<sup>173</sup> For Gerrits the value of photography, also in comparison to collecting, lies in the fact that he experienced it as a creative act, while acquiring artefacts was ‘mere gathering’ to him. The two expressions reflect two sides of photography which both may be present. ‘Taking’ a photograph is interesting in comparison to collecting objects in the field. Objects were physically ‘taken’ from the field, ‘taking’ a photograph however ‘takes’ something, yet leaves the physical presence of the subject in place. Interestingly, this ‘taking’ can rightly be experienced as an intrusion by the subject, as an image is, in fact, being taken

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<sup>172</sup> From a present perspective the dresses in these photographs and Gerrits tapes of contemporary string-band music conveys a feel for the 1960ties on Kiriwina.

<sup>173</sup> Although, in both languages both versions are possible.

away, beyond control of the subject.<sup>174</sup> On the Trobriand Islands, particularly on Kiriwina, people were generally acquainted with Westerners taking photographs and in fact rather exposed to it during Gerrits period of stay due to the influx of a relatively large group of tourists every weekend. DigimRina mentioned some villagers to have protested against tourists taking photographs (by swaying a bush-knife in front of the camera) because, contrary to some other villages, they were not paid by the organisers of the excursions for allowing the tourists in and having their pictures 'taken' (DigimRina, personal communication, 08-2013). The example gives an impression of the context in which Gerrits took his photographs, I do not mean to suggest that people were generally opposed to having their picture taken.

Gerrits liked taking snap-shots, where possible without people noticing him taking photographs, but he also asked people to pose for him and enjoyed creating beautiful portraits. He still can be as delighted with a snap-shot capturing a certain scene (ill. 3.5), as he can be with a beautiful pose. To some extent, the black-and-white photographs convey a more direct, human atmosphere than the colour images do. The black-and-white collection contains series of snapshots of incidentally encountered individuals looking at Gerrits (with his camera) with different expressions. The portraits in colour are beautiful but overall less spontaneous and often have additional 'ethnographic' contents, as for example face-paintings (ill. 3.20).

Edwards (2001: 89) points out the snap-shot quality of Jenness' photographs taken in 1911-12. "The snapshot style of photography, a genre of immediacy, predominates. There is a non-interventionist quality. Very few photographs are overtly set up... There is seldom the tension of intrusion..." The 'non-interventionist quality' is what Gerrits aimed at when taken

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<sup>174</sup> A further excursion into beliefs and anxieties of indigenous people towards photography in this light would be interesting but is beyond the scope of this work, as is a further comparison between 'taking' objects and photographs.

photographs unnoticed.<sup>175</sup> Immediacy, however, is present in Gerrits' photographs in posed images as well as in snap-shots. In fact, many snap-shots lack a certain immediacy as the camera is looking down on the subject rather than being at same height. Taking a photograph, may have been intrusive, whether the tension is present in the photograph or not, and posed photographs, as well as snapshots may have been intrusive.

Furthermore, as the following examples show, there is a difference between the subject experiencing intrusion and the photographer's perception of what may be intrusive. Gerrits was aware of the unease people may experience before a camera and thus when having people pose for him, would first take photographs from a greater distance before coming nearer. In some occasions a combination of snap-shots and posed photographs is used. He would first take snap-shots of people from a distance and then come nearer and ask them to pose for him. Sometimes these would be the subjects themselves, sometimes, when for example wanting to take a photograph of a young girl in a village, he would have a chat with the parents first, before taking the photographs. Except for the posed photographs, in general, he did not ask permission to take photographs. Even in the cases in which he did ask, as the medical officer he would have had a certain authority, some people may have clearly declined, others may have not dared to do so, yet others, enjoyed their photographs being taken.

In some cases, with snap-shots, he felt he did not have the time to ask, as the moment he wanted to capture would have passed. The photograph of Kimabumyuwa having her skirt trimmed by her mother illustrates some of these points ( 3.26, 3.26a). Gerrits remembers passing by in his truck when he saw the scene. He jumped out and instantly took the photographs. He felt it was the only way to do it. Kimabumyuwa also remembers the event. It had

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<sup>175</sup> From today's perspective this strategy raises ethical questions.



been a Sunday<sup>176</sup> morning and her mother had been preparing her for church. She had not liked how Gerrits had jumped of his truck, had rushed in, and had taken the photographs. As she said: “After all, I was still an young girl”. On the other hand, she was pleased with viewing Gerrits’ photographs and pleased to show them to her relatives, especially her grandchild. Kimabumyuwa was quite conscious and proud of her beauty as a young girl, the photograph had captured this and enabled her to show it to her relatives. She even mentioned another photograph, on which she looked even better than on the one I had brought along. It was not her picture being taken, it was the way it happened, that had disturbed her. (Kimabumyuwa, personal communication, Kiriwina, 08-2013).

In a different set of cases Gerrits did feel he may have been too intrusive. Before taking the photographs of the deceased individuals surrounded by their mourning relatives (which he did on three occasions) Gerrits had asked for permission, yet even so he felt a certain unease about having taken these photographs. Linus DigimRina mentioned such a photograph, which is related to one of his cherished childhood memories. DigimRina’s mother died while he was a young boy in the period of Gerrits’ stay on Kiriwina. One of the photographs Gerrits took of a deceased person being caressed by his/her relatives, as it turned out, was DigimRina’s mother. As DigimRina recalled, his father kept a print of the photograph Gerrits had taken hidden away in his personal box. As a young boy DigimRina would sneak into the house and take out the picture to look at it without his father’s knowing (DigimRina, personal communication, 08-2013). On DigimRina’s request after my fieldwork Gerrits sent digital scans of the photographs to him by e-mail (ill. 3.31, presented here with DigimRina’s permission). DigimRina did not share Gerrits’ concern about having been intrusive in this case (also not towards his relatives on the

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<sup>176</sup> Gerrits later confirmed that it had probably been a Sunday, as this was his day off, when he and his family went touring over the Island.

photograph), on the contrary, he was delighted with the image of his dead mother. This may indicate a cultural difference in attitudes towards the dead. Yet again, it also shows the manner in which the photograph was taken, to be important than the image itself.

While a certain distant quality has been pointed out (in looking down, in not being present in the images) overall many photographs convey an, at times touching, intimacy. Sometimes this intimacy is there in the image, as in the image of the spouse and other relatives caressing the dead body, and in the fact that Gerrits was allowed to be present and capture the moment. Sometimes it is there in the gesture of a person (dancers, ill. 3.10; man drumming, ill.3.15), sometimes it is conveyed by the subject looking into the lens, or at Gerrits (ills. 3.13, 3.14). Both, artefact collecting and photography were a way to connect, and both had an element of excitement when a unique artefact was acquired, or a unique image taken. Yet, photography was the more intimate way of connecting. In part perhaps because Gerrits experienced creating an image as a creative process in which he was more (pleasantly) engaged, in part because people revealed themselves and were revealed more than in artefact exchanges, and perhaps because taking a photograph captured a moment in time for both. As in his artefact collecting, Gerrits wanted to collect it all, perhaps not only to be able to remember in a distant future, but to keep holding on and to take along (in time and space).

### **‘Sexualising’ and ‘objectifying’**

A number of images in Gerrits’ collection of young women and men are reminiscent of the “belles” and “dandies” genres that Quanchi (2007: 79-81) discusses.<sup>177</sup> There is an element of erotic attraction in some of the images of pretty, bare-breasted girls in grass-skirts, possibly for the photographer and

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<sup>177</sup> In fact there is a photograph within the caption describing one of the young men as ‘the village dandy’. The ‘dandy’ was thus not only a photographic image but a term applied to certain individuals.

possibly for the viewer. I do however not see the point of discussing the extent of sexual - versus ethnographic intent in individual framings as Quanchi does. Besides these two intents there may have been a human intent. Moreover, some practices, as for example the *mweki* dances (ill 3.21), on Kiriwina are (were) overtly sexual, for women and men. Whatever the photographer's motives were to take these photographs, these images show this overt sexuality. This has to be distinguished from sexualised images.<sup>178</sup> It should be noted in this context that sexual contacts or even public intimacies are strictly regulated in Trobriand society, yet, sexuality is not considered to be intrinsically shameful. Besides the often mentioned sexual freedom of unmarried young people, which in fact does require discretion in public, specific dances and accompanying songs are spaces where sexuality is (was) legitimately publicly expressed.<sup>179</sup> To what extent Gerrits was aware of these restrictions and distinctions is not clear. Rather than a sexualizing element, what is more prominently present is a certain tension between culturally induced Western and Trobriand attitudes towards sexuality. The photographs, after all, were taken in the 1960s, a period in which the Western 'sexual revolution' had just begun.

There is an element of "objectification of the subject" as referred to in Quanchi (2007: 86) in Gerrits photography, which is however more obvious in the ethnographic captions than from the images themselves. Gerrits' ethnographic comments about names of certain decorations for example, makes one wonder why he took the photograph? Was he making beautiful portraits or documenting decorations? The numerous images of people in all stages of life, young children, juveniles, mothers with their first-born, fathers with children, chiefs, patients, mourning people, old people and the dead, together convey an intimate and universal humanity which by far outweighs the "belle" and

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<sup>178</sup> A term coined by Thomas (in Quanchi, 2007: 64).

<sup>179</sup> At Gerrits' request I did not show any photographs of the *mweki* dance during my Kiriwina visit. Gerrits was, possibly rightly, worried that the girls on the photographs might be compromised by seeing themselves, or being seen by others, in the dance from a present perspective.

“dandy” stereotypes, possible ‘sexualisation’ and an objectifying ethnographic intent. This impression is in line with Gerrits’ wish to connect to ‘the people’ and his appreciation of, perhaps even awe for, the beauty of the Trobriand Islands and his recognition of a universal human quality in their practices. Perhaps exactly because this quality is shown most clearly in his photographs, as compared to the artefact collections and his ethnographic notes, one is left with an impression of the ethnographic comments being imposed on these photographs, that Gerrits possibly (unconsciously) legitimised his very human interest for people for himself and for others by gathering and documenting artefacts and ethnographic facts. This ‘objectifying’, or rather ‘ethnographising’ may be understandable in a context in which direct human contacts between ‘Whites’ and ‘Blacks’ were complicated and gathering objects and ethnographic facts was a way to connect yet at the same time maintain distance.

# Conclusions

## All things Trobriand?

Having drawn a portrait of Gerrits' Trobriand Island collecting, in conclusion one needs to raise the question of which key insights this portrait conveys?

The study intended to place Gerrits' collection into a historical context of Trobriand collecting encounters, to gain insights into ethnographic collection formation, considering various aspects of collecting mentioned in the literature. These include a collector's multiple motives (Grijp, 2006), the desire to collect series and unique pieces (Baudrillard 1994, Elsner and Cardinal, 1994), differences between stable and mobile collecting (O'Hanlon, 2000:15) and various agencies (Chapter 1). Together, these aspects were meant to create a portrait of Gerrits' Trobriand collecting which enhances an understanding of his collection and (to some degree) of ethnographic collections in general. The study utilised archives (kept by Gerrits and the Queensland Museum), the collections of artefacts and photographs, conversations with mainly Gerrits and to some extent Trobriand Islanders and other collectors, and drew on the literature on collecting research and publications containing information on Trobriand Island contact history.

As described in Chapter 2, throughout most of the 19th century, when ethnographic museum collecting was at its height, Trobriand collecting encounters were limited to visiting traders. Records of these early encounters are rare and not easy to retrieve. The examples found, suggest that these initial contacts formed the base for further encounters, and that they were more influential than they have been considered to be so far. Scholarly collecting in

this period was rare, and limited to short term visits as for example by Otto Finsch and Mikluoho-Maclay. Collecting by administrators and missionary collecting commenced only at the very end of the 19th century, in the person of William MacGregor and Reverend Samuel Fellows. This was also the beginning of collecting by longer term residents, notably the trader William Whitten and Reverend Fellows and his wife. Not all the collecting was done by the collectors themselves. Fellows, notably, collected for the Methodist missionary George Brown and for MacGregor (Fellows, 2001). This fact may very well have contributed to the circumstance that these acquisitions have no exact provenance documented. A notable scholar to visit the Trobriand Islands in the early 20th century, was Charles Seligman. Seligman, however also did not stay for a longer period of time and also depended on others for his ethnographic information and presumably for his artefact collections. By the time the first anthropologist, Malinowski, settled on the Trobriand Islands for a longer period of time between 1915 and 1918, social anthropology was losing its interest in artefacts and losing its link to museum ethnography, and Malinowski, was a profound advocate of this change. The fact that Malinowski established an extensive ethnographic collection without documentation reflects his ambiguous attitude towards artefacts within anthropology, yet possibly also reflects the fact that Malinowski did not entirely acquire his collection himself, but was assisted by his friend, the trader Billy Hancock, and possibly others (Young, 2000: 192).

Museum collecting did not peter out after the Second World War, as the example of the professional collector Groenevelt, commissioned by Dutch museums around 1960, shows. Also, missionary collecting continued on a large scale in the person of, for example, Reverend Ralph Lawton. In neither cases however were the acquisitions documented in any detail.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> This description of the history of Trobriand Island collecting is based on the findings described in Chapter 2.

Within this historical context, Gerrits has a unique position. While collecting in the 1960s and 70s, to my knowledge, Gerrits is the only collector who aimed to establishing a comprehensive ethnographic collection of Trobriand artefacts, of 'all things Trobriand' with an elaborate and conscientious documentation of provenance. In addition he was a long-term resident of Kiriwina, spoke Kilivila, and importantly, acquired virtually all the artefacts himself.

Because Gerrits conscientiously registered the places of origin and approximate ages of objects, the collection can be used as a reference collection. It would therefore be advisable to have the Queensland Museum collection photographed<sup>181</sup> and a comprehensive catalogue made of all the objects held in museums and Gerrits private collection, if feasible, including the Museum in Port Moresby because of its relatively high percentage of older objects.

In this work agencies have been perceived as including all kinds of factors influencing the formation of Gerrits collections, as suggested by Latour (2007), without aiming at a Latourian analysis . Thus Gerrits' and Trobriand Islanders' capacities in determining exchanges have been considered as agencies, as have Gerrits' attitudes and interests, in their own right. One may distinguish between factors on a more general level (such as Gerrits attitudes) and factors which influenced particular acquisitions (such as budgetary choices).

Gerrits' collecting shows a mix of motives, linked to his more general attitudes towards people, influenced by the possibilities and limitations of his position as the Medical Officer in a place with an intensive history of collecting. At the time of Gerrits collecting, artefacts were not confiscated and houses were not searched, as had been done in the earlier years of colonial administration (Chapter 2). Yet the necessity to sell artefacts had grown with the need for cash and the wish for Western goods. Individuals were free to decide whether and when they wanted to sell their belongings, but could hardly have decided not

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<sup>181</sup> Which, as yet, has not been done.

to do so at all.<sup>182</sup> I had questioned whether chiefs had influence on what others sold, and found they had not. It rather became apparent that in certain cases, like selling an entire yam-store (6.2), it was the chiefs who could not decide the sale by-themselves. Gerrits depended on what people were prepared to sell and when. Yet, expressing his wish for certain objects influenced people's decisions. Chief Maluwa, would probably not have offered his yam-store for sale, had there not been interest expressed in it. Maluwa then, decided which store would be sold. Once the deal was set however, Gerrits could insist on acquiring the foundation stones, albeit Maluwa had probably not intended to include them. Agencies, based on interests and calculations, clearly intersected. Virtually unobtainable objects were those objects which were part of ongoing exchange relations (*kula* valuables) or other social obligations (mortuary objects) and therefore no individual person or group of people was free to decide to sell them.

Two key motives intersect in Gerrits' collections which apply to his core Trobriand artefact collection in the Queensland Museum and to his photographs. One motive, the consciously intended one, is Gerrits' aim to establish a scholarly ethnographic collection of Trobriand material culture. The other motive is an emotional desire to capture and preserve a Trobriand world. This motive has a romantic side, but, as has been shown (Chapter 5), is not entirely romantic as Gerrits did not idealise Trobriand society. Both motives aimed at establishing a comprehensive, as complete as possible, collection of 'all things Trobriand'.

The wish to include 'everything', seeking complete series, was applied to the collection as a whole as well as to various types of objects. It led to a large and indeed varied collection, but had the result that no particular theme received in depth attention. This circumstance can however also be explained

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<sup>182</sup> Possible individual controversies about selling objects and the role of middle-men, as Gerrits health-orderlies to some extent were, could not be analysed within the frame of this work.



by Gerrits' position as a medical officer. Gerrits' work did not allow him to be present at every occasion he may have considered to be relevant. He depended on the occasions he encountered by chance when he had the time and on the occasions in which artefacts were offered to him.

Gerrits' scholarly ethnographic collection is reminiscent of 19th century ethnographic collecting which was strongly linked to an essentializing conception of indigenous people. Critique of these concepts has been pointed out (Phillips, 1995). My point here is not to critique this conceptual frame, but rather to gain a more precise understanding of it. This ethnographic frame principally excludes Western influences. Yet, Gerrits collected around 1970 when Western goods and materials of all kinds were in use by Trobriand Islanders in abundance and Trobriand Islanders had long been making things for Westerners. Gerrits, as has been shown, did not attempt to exclude all Western influences from his collection. He was fascinated by some of these influences which he included, and appalled by others which he preferred not to include. His collection of artefacts and photographs thus allows one to explore the boundaries of what may be labelled as a 'prototype' (Gell, 1998) of ethnographic collecting. Gerrits distinguished between 'old' and 'new', 'traditional' and 'modern', and 'tourist' and 'authentic' objects. He shows a slightly ambiguous attitude towards 'tourist' objects, as he clearly was more interested in the 'authentic' but at the same time did appreciate well carved 'tourist' objects and did include them into his collection for this reason. One of his favourite objects, the *kapi kapi* (ills. 2.13, 3.20) made of Western produced coloured paper, falls into his category of 'modern' but not 'tourist' (and thus authentic) objects. Other Western elements in 'authentic' objects and practices, as for example store paint on yam store boards, or aluminum cooking pots are not appreciated. His photographs include images of Trobriand cricket, but no images of football (which is highly popular at present on Kiriwina) and must already have been practiced at Gerrits' time, as one of his captions (TB 22-6)

mentions a 'soccer field'. Gerrits also expressed his fascination for the fact that a bible was laid in a deceased man's hands, just as otherwise his 'traditional' belongings would have been positioned, and took a photograph of it. He would not have collected the bible because in this case the context of its use fascinated Gerrits, not the object itself. While discussing why he had not included, for example, Western trade store clothes in his collection, he mentioned that if he had done so, he would have bought examples of these clothes in a store. Within ethnographic (art) collecting the circumstance that an object has actually been used is taken as an indication for its 'authenticity'. Interestingly, in the case of Western trade store clothes, the question whether they had been used was not relevant. The question of use is relevant for objects made by indigenous people as a sign of their authenticity, that is, that they were not produced for Westerners. The paramount criterion thus seems to be whether the object was produced by indigenous people, preferably for their own use. 'Modern' elements seem to be appreciated and included by Gerrits when the 'modern' elements are incorporated in 'traditional' practices in a, for Gerrits, creative way (kapi kapi, the bible) or creatively appropriated, as is the case in (Trobriand) cricket or also in the carvings decorating Trobriand churches (ill. 3.28). The application of Western paint, the use of Western made aluminum pots and Western clothes were not produced and (for Gerrits) creatively appropriated, by Trobriand Islanders. They are thus not seen as part of Trobriandness and not, or preferably not, included in the collection. It needs to be added that these, or similar essentializing concepts were widespread and are still existent, as shown for contemporary tourists visiting the Trobriand Islands and seeking an 'authentic' experience (MacCarthy, 2016).

Besides being ethnographically interested, Gerrits loved the Trobriand Islands and attempted to capture and preserve this experience in his collection. This comprised not only artefacts but also scents, for examples, which he attempted to preserve in tiny bottles. Besides the matter-of-fact ethnographic

connotation of the title of this work, “All things Trobriand” is also meant to have the connotation of a wonder for the world, as expressed in the song “All things bright and beautiful”. Gerrits expressed and wanted to capture this wonder in making his collection, albeit without the song’s religious implications. Viewing it this way, the tiny bottles, which may at first seem strange, become materialisations of Gerrits’ sympathy for the Trobriand Islands and Trobriand Islanders.

Gosden and Knowles pointed out that “Colonial New Guinea was not made up of two separate societies..., but rather came to be a single social and cultural field of mutual influence, in which all people, black and white, were linked through the movement of goods.” (Gosden and Knowles, 2001: xix). This is true, as has been shown for the yam store (6.2). Yet, this colonial society was also a racially divided society. Large scale ethnographic collecting was a product of this context, and as much as it contributed to keeping this context together, it also contributed to keeping people apart, because the encounters were determined by the need to obtain something, rather than by simply connecting for the sake of connecting, which was not appreciated and in fact virtually impossible. Perhaps ethnographic collecting, as has been most clearly suggested for Gerrits’ photographs (6.3), was also a means for individuals like Gerrits, who wanted to bridge the divide, who wanted to connect and belong, to do so legitimately while at the same time maintaining distance - to belong, without belonging.

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