

Séminaire du CREDO en visioconférence

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***"Expectations of permanence?
Events and empty houses in the Ok Tedi hinterland"***

Over three decades Telefomin have taken part in large-scale changes associated with mining and Christianity that can be analyzed in familiar cultural, processual and structural terms. My concern here, however, is less to provide a cultural model of change than to argue for an anthropology adequate to the task of giving contingent events their due in understanding transformative change. I illustrate this point with two ethnographic cases drawn from rural Telefomin and the nearby town of Tabubil in Papua New Guinea. In the first instance the unexpected eruption of witchcraft-related violence fractured local communities in ways that had long-lasting consequences. An important part of my argument is that these events owed little to Telefomin culture and were instead tied to the broad-based diffusion of new witchcraft ideologies that found purchase among disaffected "useless" youth. My second case focuses on the evacuation of Tabubil, the township servicing the Ok Tedi mine. As part of the shutdown of the mine during the 2015 El Niño drought, Telefomin and other employees and their families were "repatriated" to rural villages of origin. While disruptive in its own right, the event afforded management an opportunity to declare an end to residential housing and a shift to a post-drought Fly-in/Fly-out policy - triggering a regional diaspora while rendering Tabubil a ghost town.