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# The legacy of the German language in Papua New Guinea

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

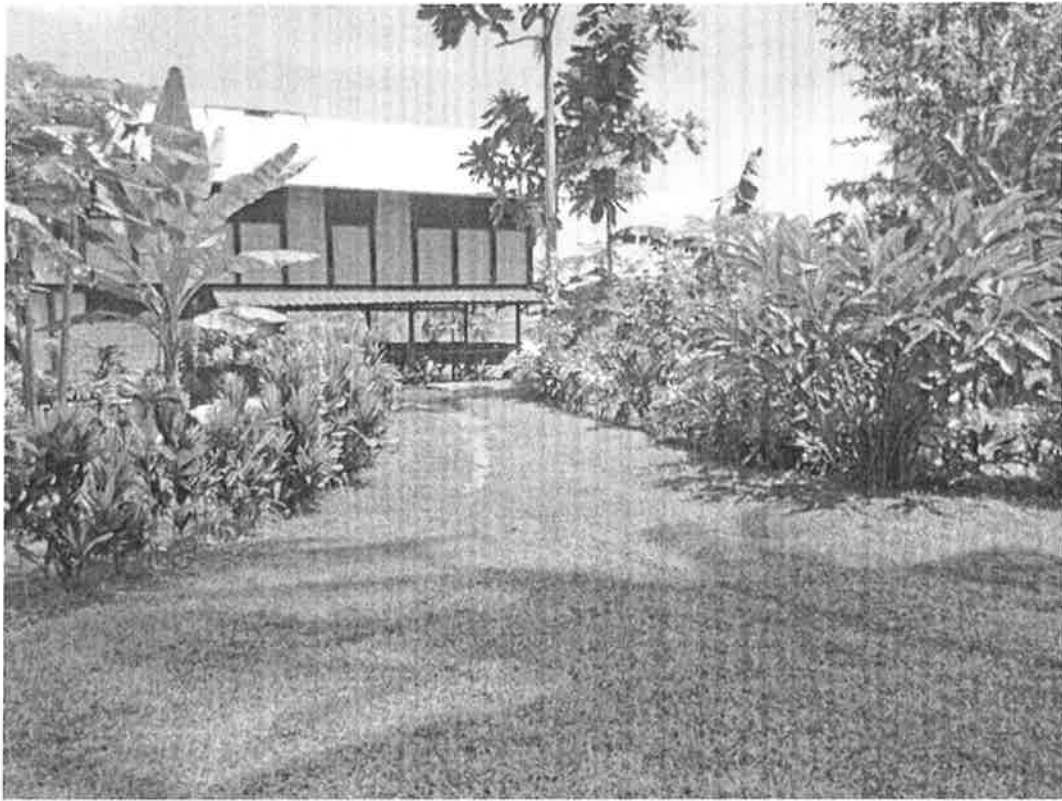
German colonial rule in the western Pacific began formally in 1884 when unknown to them, people in north-eastern New Guinea (Kaiser Wilhelmsland), the archipelago around the Bismarck Sea, and in the next year, almost all of neighboring Micronesia were proclaimed to be under German “protection”. This act changed ways of living that had existed for tens of thousands of years and laid the foundation for what eventually became the modern state of Papua New Guinea. This proclamation was made in German, a language that was then unknown to Melanesians and Micronesians.

Today the German language is again mostly unknown to most Melanesians and only a few visible traces of any German colonial legacy remain. There are no old colonial buildings, no monuments outside of a few small and almost hidden cemeteries, and no German Clubs or public signs in German. In this century there has not even been a German embassy. But it is impossible to step out in New Ireland (the former “Neu-Mecklenburg”), for example, without being confronted by a twenty-first century reality that is in part a creation of German colonial rule. Species that were introduced by the Germans still retain their German name, from clover, *Klee* in both German and the local Nalik language to pineapples (German *Ananas* / Nalik *a nanas*). The best rural road in the country, the Bulominski Highway was started by and named after the last German governor of Neu-Mecklenburg and a mountain range is known as the Schleinitz Range. Locals have names such as Gertrud, Helga, Gustav, Guenther, and even Adolf and the language spoken by the locals—Tok Pisin, is one peppered with German words that became the lingua franca in German New Guinea because of widespread mobility under the Germans.

Shopping in Kavieng, the provincial capital founded by Germans as Käwieng, is popular, from where the island of New Hanover can be spotted on a clear day. The best prices are at Chinese shops, many of which are still owned

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, information presented here comes from interviews and recordings made in Germany, Papua New Guinea, and Australia from 1979 to the present. I wish to thank the many people who so patiently answered questions and were willing to *tok stori*.



Klee (clover) garden in New Ireland (Neu-Mecklenburg)

by descendants of people brought out under Germans. At the other end of Neu-Mecklenburg/ New Ireland, cotton grows wild. It was part of an experiment that died with the Australian invasion.

In some villages it is difficult to acquire plots of land for gardening because of the large plantations surrounding the villages on land alienated from customary clan ownership by German colonial governors and which even today are controlled by foreigners.

The German colonial legacy is an ever-present background, but at the same time invisible and not part of conscious thought. The German legacy is rarely discussed and for most people not particularly controversial. Today the positive aspects of that time are usually emphasized, such as the beauty of the town of Rabaul (Simpsonhafen) before its destruction by volcanic eruption, the introduction of Christianity, and new technologies such as the wheel and iron tools. There is even a religious hymn giving praise for “living in a new day where we have wheels for travel, metal for tools, knowing the world knows us and we know the world”. Negative attitudes towards colonialism are usually reserved for Australia, the more recent colonial master, with unfavorable comparisons often made between the slow pace of development in the Australian era



Bulominski Highway in New Ireland (Neu-Mecklenburg) (photo by Cláudio da Silva)

and the much greater development during the much shorter German era. Germany seems to have won the colonial popularity contest by losing its colony long before decolonialization could ever be even conceived of.

Language is the most palpable expression of culture, especially in Papua New Guinea, which with over 830 languages has more languages than any other country in the world. Since language is an important ethnic and cultural marker, this paper examines the visibility of the German language in Papua New Guinea in four historical periods, from 1884 to the present, using it as an indicator of the legacy of German colonialism, of the tenacity of this legacy, and of what Kößler has correctly called German colonial amnesia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Reinhart Kößler, "La fin d'une amnésie? L'Allemagne et son passé colonial depuis 2004," *Politique Africaine* 2, 102 (2006): 50–66.

## 2. The German language in the German colonial era (1884 – 1914)

### 2.1 German in government and business

Until 1899, German New Guinea was administered directly by the Neuguinea Compagnie, so that business rather than ideology governed language policies. Melanesian Pidgin English, the ancestor of today's Tok Pisin, developed on multi-ethnic sailing ships and spread quickly among "blackbirded" (indentured) Melanesian workers, who spoke many different languages and came together for the first time on plantations in both English and German colonies. Most German plantation and other commercial owners and employees already had a good command of English and found it much easier to use a pidginized English when speaking with indigenous and Asian people rather than trying to waste time and resources to teach them German. Some even argued against allowing indigenous people to learn German because it was such a useful secret language for Germans to use amongst themselves.<sup>3</sup> In addition, many prominent business people in the colony, most notably "Queen" Emma Forsayth-Coe, were non-Germans, speaking English or other languages and having no vested interest in what was for them a foreign language.<sup>4</sup> The situation was made even more complicated by the many Chinese and Malay speakers brought as artisans and craftsmen to the Bismarck Archipelago during this time.

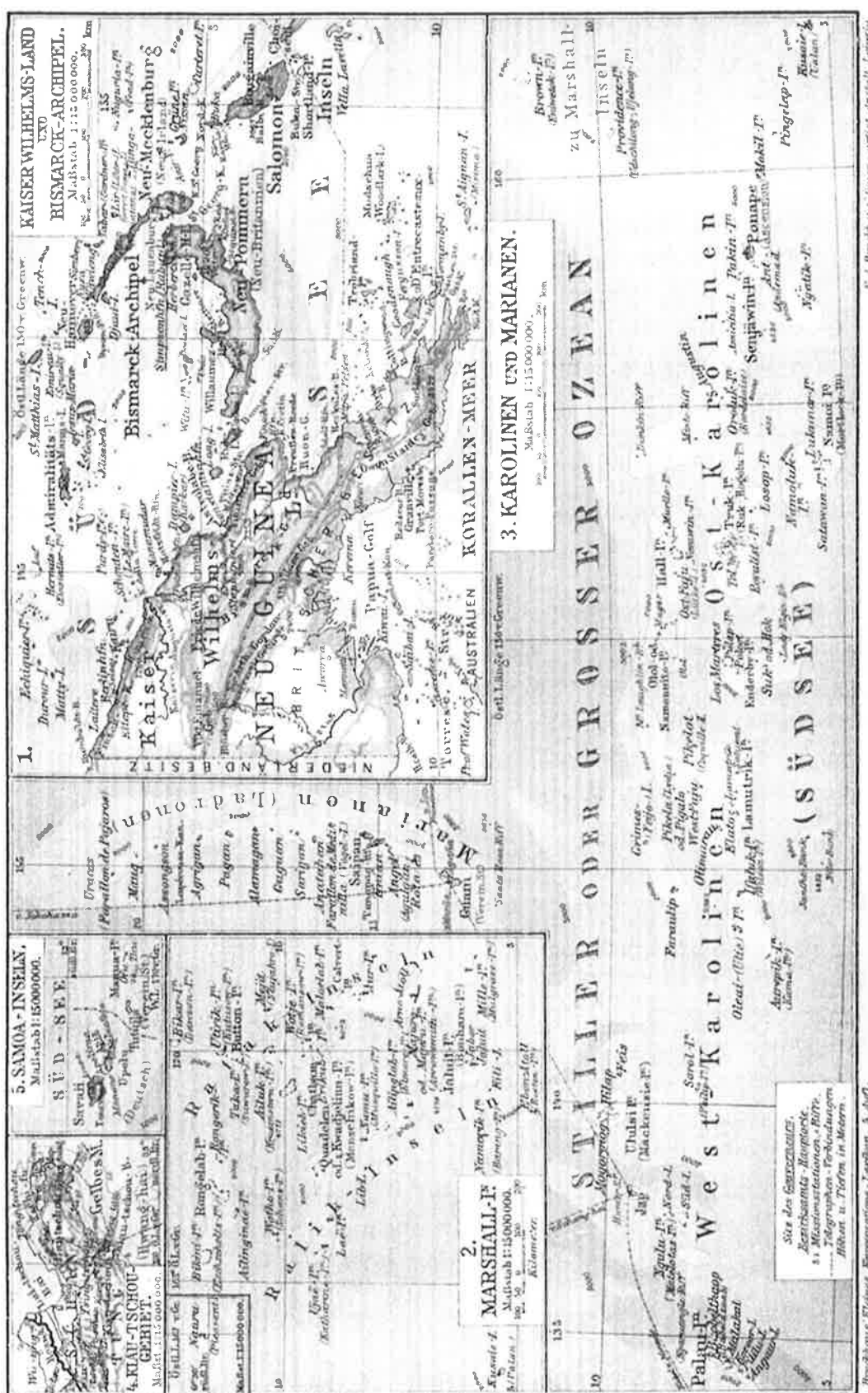
Bureaucrats and jingoists in Berlin had a different opinion. In 1897, for example, the German Colonial Society lobbied the government to take over the colony and subsidize mission schools following a government curriculum that encouraged the learning and use of German.<sup>5</sup> German was, of course, the language of administration once the government set up a colonial administration in 1899. Increasing attempts were made to foster the German language among Chinese and Melanesians. Just before the colony was lost to the invading Australians,

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Mühlhäusler, "Tracing the roots of pidgin German," *Language and Communication* 41,1 (1984): 35.

<sup>4</sup> See R. W. Robson, *Queen Emma: The Samoan-American Girl who founded an Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century New Guinea* (Sydney/New York: Pacific Publications, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Schnee, *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1920), 308. original print edition digitalized by the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main, accessed May 1, 2007, [www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/Bildprojekt/Lexikon/Standardframeseite.php](http://www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/Bildprojekt/Lexikon/Standardframeseite.php).



### Map of German New Guinea

the colonial government was drafting legislation to expand German-language education in the areas under its control.<sup>6</sup> This legislation was never enacted.

## 2.2 German names

During this period German geographic names were introduced throughout the island and coastal parts of the colony. In general these were used in places where there were no appropriate indigenous names. Often these words were used for large geographic entities that were too big to be a concept in the geographically small Melanesian cultures of the time, such as Neu-Pommern (today's New Britain) or Kaiser Wilhelmsland (the northern part of the island of New Guinea). At other times German was used for the names of rivers or mountain ranges spanning different language groups, each of which might have a different name for the same thing. Settlements and towns also tended to be given German names, even if there was an existing local name (such as Herbertshöhe for Kokopo).

At the same time that places were being given German names, German missionaries were baptizing an increasing number of Melanesians, often with new German names of saints or Bible personages. This followed a custom found in many Melanesian societies, where people are known by different names to different people, depending on their status or mother tongue, and where these names can be added to or changed with little or no ritual.

## 2.3 Education and access to the German language during the German colonial period.

From the very beginning, education was mostly in the hands of Christian missionaries, who saw their role as bringers of European civilization as much as of religious truth. According to the *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, when World War I began, there were 56 Protestant and 189 Catholic schools for indigenous students.<sup>7</sup> Education was limited to basic literacy, religious instruction, and vocational training. It was usually in one of the languages chosen as regional lingua franca for missionary purposes. The medium of instruction was Kâte and Jabêm in Kaiser Wilhelmsland and Kuanua, (the language of the Tolai people

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<sup>6</sup> Mühlhäusler, "Tracing the roots of pidgin German," *art. cit.*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> See Schnee, *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, *op. cit.*

of Neu-Pommern / New Britain) in the Bismarck Archipelago, but in a few schools, German was taught, especially to older students. The transfer of technology, new species, and religious training at these schools resulted in many loanwords from German into Tok Pisin and vernacular languages, many of which remain today, as with the examples of *Klee* and *a nanas* in Nalik.

There is evidence that in at least a couple of these schools, students used what Peter Mühlhäusler has called a pidgin German amongst themselves as a common language.<sup>8</sup> This does not seem to have been a systematic language, as there is much variation in the data he presents. It is more like the kind of German one sees in classes of German for foreigners, where students do not yet have a command of German structures.

In contrast to the many mission schools, the *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon* lists only two government schools for indigenous people in German New Guinea when World War I began, one in Simpsonshafen (Rabaul) and the other in Micronesia.<sup>9</sup> These seem to have been quite effective at teaching communicative German. In 1979 I met Mr ToUrapal, a Tolai elder who had attended the school as a boy and was still able to speak in German quite effortlessly.

## 2.4 German-speaking residents

During the first few years of the colony, when it was under the control of the Neu-guinea Kompagnie, only a small number of Europeans came to the colony. At the time of its handover to the German government in 1899, there were only 400 white people in the colony. This grew to 1427 in 1913, of whom all but 400 were from Germany or other German-speaking countries.<sup>10</sup> Only one-quarter were female, and many of them nuns, so it is not surprising that many European had marriages or other relations with local women. In 1913 the government counted 281 “mixed-race” persons (*Mischlinge*)<sup>11</sup>. Of these many, but not all, would have been German-speaking and some were able to register themselves as German citizens. Many were educated in German at a Protestant school in Sat-

<sup>8</sup> Mühlhäusler, “Tracing the roots of pidgin German,” *art. cit.*, 35–36.

<sup>9</sup> See Schnee, *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Although possibly considered pejorative elsewhere, in Papua New Guinea mixed-race is normally used in English to describe persons with mixed heritage, including persons with two indigenous heritages. It is therefore used in this paper with this non-pejorative Papua New Guinean connotation.

telberg in Kaiser Wilhelmsland or at the Vunapope Catholic Mission near the colonial capital Herbertshöhe near Simpsonshafen (Rabaul).

#### 2.4.1 The Unserdeutsch mixed-race children at Vunapope

The mixed-race children at Vunapope have proved to be a much more cohesive group than those at Sattelberg. Even today they remain a community, while the descendants of the Sattelberg children have been assimilated into Papua New Guinean or Australian society. The descendants of the Vunapope children are linked by Unserdeutsch (also known as Rabaul Creole German), the only known creole German to have arisen in the German colonial empire.

In 1898 the Vunapope Catholic Mission opened a school and “sanctuary” specifically for mixed-race children. Under the leadership of Bishop Coupé, an effort was made to use this to raise a critical mass of Catholic young people of the colony but isolated from indigenous culture who could form the nucleus of a Christian society in the Pacific.<sup>12</sup> Besides caring for abandoned children, the missionaries went to villages looking for mixed-race children to take to the orphanage so they could be given a European and Christian education and be kept away from the “vile habits” of their indigenous mothers (Janssen 1932:150, author’s translation). Children in stable families were also brought to the school by their German fathers who wanted them to have a European education.

Although we do not know with any certainty how the creole developed, we do know that few of the children spoke German at home, and most of the ones old enough to speak already spoke Tok Pisin.<sup>13</sup> Adult children of the first generation interviewed in 1979 say their parents told them that the creole developed as the children played with language, replacing words in Tok Pisin sentences with German words as older children told stories to younger children in the evening. This may have been a way of circumventing the teachers’ and dormitory supervisors’ rules that the children were forbidden to speak anything except German or it may have been a way of relieving the stress of having to speak grammatical Standard German all day with teachers.

Examples of Unserdeutsch constructions are given in Appendix 2. Certainly, while most of the vocabulary of Unserdeutsch is German, many of the structures

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<sup>12</sup> Horst Gründer et al., *Christliche Heilbotschaft und weltliche Macht. Studien zum Verhältnis von Mission und Kolonialismus. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 114.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold Janssen, “Die Erziehungsanstalt für halbweisse Kinder,” in *Pioniere der Südsee*, ed. Josef Hueskes (Hiltrup: Missionare Hlst. Herzen, 1932), 150.



show an obvious influence of Tok Pisin and the Austronesian languages of the area. For example, many speakers distinguish between “inclusive we” (you and me, Tok Pisin *yumi*) and “exclusive we” (we but not you, Tok Pisin *mipela*) made in Tok Pisin and Austronesian languages, as in the following two sentences, where *uns*, Standard German “us”, is used for “inclusive we” and *wir*, Standard German “we”, is used for “exclusive we”:

- 1) Uns            bis    neben    Salzwasser.  
     we:inclusive are next.to saltwater  
     “We are next to the ocean.”  
     (Tok Pisin: Yumi klostu long solwara.)
  
- 2) Wir            alle    geht    Rabaul.  
     we:exclusive all    go    Rabaul  
     “We (but not you) are going to Rabaul.”  
     (Tok Pisin: Mipela go long Rabaul.)

Word order is also similar to Tok Pisin, with strings of serial verbs and interrogatives usually at the end of a sentence, as the following example shows:

- 3) Du    laufen    geht    wo?  
     you run    go    where  
     “Where are you running to?”  
     (Tok Pisin: Yu ran i go we? Standard German: Wohin läufst du?)

At the same time some features of the language are undoubtedly the result of either imperfect second language learning or teasing others for poor language learning, as they are similar to the grammatically reduced forms of German used with guest workers in Germany or to the popular youth slang current now in Germany known as *Kanak Sprak*.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, *Unserdeutsch* quickly became the in-group language among the children, used in everyday situations when they were not with teachers. As the oldest of these pupils neared the end of their teen years, the nuns matched them up for marriage and most went to work as couples for the mission’s many plantation, shipping, and other commercial outlets. The young couples usually spoke

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<sup>14</sup> *Kanaka* is a pejorative word for indigenous people often used by the German nuns to their students speaking Tok Pisin or behaving in a Papua New Guinean way (*Kein Pidgin, ihr seid keine Kanaken!* “No Pidgin, you’re not kanakas!”). It is therefore ironic that a way of speaking with reduced verbal and other marked grammatical features currently popular among German youth is called *Kanak Sprak* (see Füglein 2000), with *Kanak* becoming a synonym for “cool”.

Unserdeutsch together, so their children grew up with Unserdeutsch as a first language, acquiring Standard German when they went to the Vunapope School, often as boarding students like their parents before them.

Older persons interviewed in 1979 and 1980 reported that Unserdeutsch played an important part in helping this small community establish an identity in the racially stratified society of colonial New Guinea. They had been denied any knowledge of their Melanesian heritage, although a few of them did maintain occasional contact with their indigenous extended families. At the same time, they were not allowed full entry into white society. The use of their own variety of German helped them to establish an identity that was of Melanesia but with German roots and a feeling that they were socially and educationally above the Melanesian masses. For this reason it was used as a symbol even by those who spoke and used Standard German fluently.

### **3. The German language in the interwar years (1921–1941)**

In 1914 Australian troops invaded German New Guinea, proclaiming in poor Tok Pisin “God save him King”. This de facto absorption of German New Guinea into Australia became official in 1921 with the legal announcement of what was now to be called the Territory of New Guinea as a League of Nations mandate under Australian administration.

#### **3.1 German in government and business**

Although the Australians changed little in the overall pattern of colonial administration, the language of government immediately became English. With the end of the war and the signing of the Versailles Treaty, most German plantation owners and business people were deported to Germany, with plantations usually being given to returned Australian veterans, who understandably had no interest in maintaining German as a language of business. Germans and their language no longer had a presence in public life outside of the missions.

### 3.2 German names

Of 39 prominent German geographic names in the Territory, 58% were changed to English or indigenous names.<sup>15</sup> In general, where there had once been an English name, such as New Britain and New Ireland, this was restored. Names associated with the German imperial family were usually changed to indigenous names (e.g., Kaiserin-Augustafluss to Sepik River and Friederich Wilhelmshafen to Madang), although the tallest mountain in the Territory, Mount Wilhelm, avoided being renamed. Surprisingly, the Bismarck Sea and Bismarck Archipelago were also left unchanged.

There was no objection to German personal names, however. As most Lutheran and Catholic missionaries were German, German baptismal and personal names remained popular.

### 3.3 Education and access to German in the interwar years

In spite of financial problems facing the Lutheran mission as a whole, German was still used at Sattelberg, where the Lutheran Church had a school for the children of missionaries, mixed-race children, and an occasional local child. As this was a centre of missionary activity and the home of training for Kâte-speaking church personnel, it can be assumed that German had a presence in this area that lasted until the Japanese invasion in 1941. But given the mission's strong emphasis on Kâte as the church's lingua franca and a medium of expression for the Melanesian *Volk*, there was no formal teaching of German.

The Vunapope School continued to teach German as a subject, but was required by the new Australian administration to adopt the official policy of using English as the medium of instruction in all other subjects. Former pupils interviewed in 1979 and 1980 reported that this policy was not always followed, as many of the teaching brothers and nuns could not express themselves well in English. There was also a shortage of textbooks in English, so even if the teacher spoke in English, often the textbook was an old one in German.

German remained an important language in the Vunapope Mission as a whole, as all missionaries came there from central Europe. Tolai choirs were taught to sing in German, especially at Christmas, but, as in Sattelberg, there

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<sup>15</sup> See Craig Alan Volker, "The German language in Papua New Guinea," in *Language in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Toru Okamura (Tokyo: Kuroshio, 2007), 107–125.

is no evidence that there was any attempt to teach indigenous persons communicative German.

### 3.4 German-speaking residents during the interwar years

After the Australian administration deported almost all non-missionary Germans, few had the means or desire to return to the Territory. By 1933, only 377 German citizens were in the Territory, all but 96 of them missionaries.<sup>16</sup> Even the German Club Rabaul had only 20 German members in 1932, far outnumbered by the more than 100 Australian members.<sup>17</sup> Without a critical mass of speakers, German was rarely heard outside of mission environments.

Among the mixed-race community on the mainland of New Guinea, some German fathers were successful in obtaining German citizenship for their mixed-race children and brought them to Germany. Children who were of only European ancestry tended to assimilate into the new Australian colonial society.

Lutheran mission personnel faced increasing hostility from the Australian administration in the 1930s as many of its workers became Nazi supporters, even founding a branch of the Nazi party in the New Guinea mainland coastal town of Finschhafen. With the outbreak of World War II in Europe and the Australian declaration of war against Germany, the Australian government deported German Lutheran missionaries and their families to Australia for internment.<sup>18</sup> Catholic missionaries, who had shown little or no interest in Nazi involvement, were left alone.

#### 3.4.1 Unserdeutsch mixed-race community

The Unserdeutsch community remained more cohesive, helped by the fact that many families lived on isolated plantations on New Britain, coming together for special occasions with former schoolmates who were also Unserdeutsch speakers. Most continued to use Standard German in their contact with European staff at the Vunapope Mission. The period between the wars was probably the

<sup>16</sup> See Reichsstelle für das Auswanderungswesen. Deutsche Evangelische Kirche, Evangelische Zentralarchiv Berlin. 5/2906 Neuguinea. 20.1.1936.

<sup>17</sup> Christine Winter, *Looking after one's own: The Rise of Nationalism and the Politics of the Neudettelsauer Mission in Germany, New Guinea and Australia (1922–1933)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, Germanica Pacifica Volume 9, 2012), 180.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ibid.*

time of the greatest stability for the language and its speakers. Racial barriers and acceptance into the ruling European society were, if anything, more difficult under Australian rule, causing the establishment of an intense social life within the mixed-race community itself. At the same time, accounts speak of the Australians permitting the missionaries to take any mixed-race children they found into their care, whether they were in a caring family relationship or not. One woman spoke of how her mother was found playing near her home on New Hanover by nuns, who simply bundled her into a car and took her to Vunapope on New Britain. This was in spite of her Chinese father and New Hanover mother being married and not consenting to her being taken. Her mother never saw her parents again. Actions such as this increased the number of children at the Vunapope orphanage, and as a result also increased the number of Unserdeutsch speakers.

## **4. German in the decades leading to Independence (1945 – 1975)**

World War II brought modern violence to Papua New Guinea on a scale never before seen, as it experienced an often brutal Japanese occupation, American carpet bombings, and a bloody Australian counter invasion. It also brought a reappraisal in Australia of the importance of its northern neighbor and the debt owed by Australians to the “fuzzy wuzzy angels” who had supported Australian troops and helped prevent a Japanese invasion of Australia.

### **4.1 Education and access to the German language during the post-World War II years**

In the aftermath of World War II, Australia joined the Territory of New Guinea, now a United Nations trusteeship, to its Territory of Papua under one administration. New areas of the country were opened to the outside world and school systems expanded significantly.

However, Papua New Guineans did not have renewed access to learning foreign languages other than English. After World War II, rebuilding the education system was part of an effort to tie Papua and New Guinea more closely to Aus-

tralia<sup>19</sup>, so there was little incentive to open up the world outside Australia to indigenous students. The education system remained rigidly divided along racial lines, so that while white (and sometimes mixed-race) children at the “A schools” following an Australian curriculum sometimes had the same opportunity to study German or French that their Australian counterparts had, the few Papua New Guinean children who attended post-secondary “T schools” for indigenous students were not given an option to study this or any other foreign language except English.

Two primary schools with boarding facilities were opened during this period that taught in German to the children of German-speaking expatriates, one operated in the Eastern Highlands by the Swiss Evangelical Brethren Mission and the other, the Kathrine Lehman Schule in the Wau highlands area of Morobe Province, operated by the Lutheran Church. Neither was open to indigenous children.

## 4.2 German-speaking residents after World War II

After World War II most Germans in Papua and New Guinea were missionaries. Although the German Catholic missionaries who survived the war years tended to stay back, they were often replaced by American and Australian staff after they had retired. The Lutheran Church rebuilt its mission and school system, expanding it far into the New Guinea Highlands region. It relied heavily on German staff. While the German language was not used in public, these German missionaries were very visible; in many areas they provided the only educational or health services available. In this way, although Papua New Guineans had little access to the German language, they often did develop a very positive attitude to the German people.

### 4.2.1 The Unserdeutsch community after World War II

After World War II, as the Vunapope Mission and schools were rebuilt, American nuns were brought in as teachers to reinforce English as the language of the school. Children were prohibited from speaking German either at school or in the dormitories, even with German staff. German was no longer offered as a subject and the teachers emphasized an Australian identity. Day scholars living near

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<sup>19</sup> Lyndon Megarrity, “Indigenous education in colonial Papua New Guinea: Australian government policy (1945–1975),” *History of Education Review* 34, 2 (2005): 43.

the school might still use German and Unserdeutsch at home, but this was strongly discouraged by teachers, who went to the pupils' homes to tell mixed-race parents not to speak German to their children any more. An indication of new attitudes of mixed-race confidence after the war can be seen in one respondent's story. After one such visit from a teacher, the respondent's mother was furious and said that as a German she did not have to do what "an uncultured Australian" asked her to do. The father of this family reacted by making his children speak Standard German instead of English at home. But given the lack of German instruction, even though this respondent and his siblings speak fluent Standard German as well as Unserdeutsch today, they are unable to read or write the language.

In the 1960s, mixed-race and Chinese residents of New Guinea were allowed to register as naturalized Australian citizens, thus ending the stateless status most had. This move allowed their children to be sent to Australia to attend boarding school at the government's expense, immersing them in an English-speaking environment with only one annual visit to their parents at Christmas. Understandably, this had a negative effect on their ability to retain Unserdeutsch. While this change in status opened up new avenues for these children, it still did not mean the abolition of racial barriers at home. One of these barriers was the inability to join social and sporting clubs. The Unserdeutsch community and their supporters, including a few white Australians, decided to form their own social club, the Ralum Club, in Kokopo (formerly Herbertshöhe), near Rabaul. This quickly became a meeting place where Unserdeutsch was often used amongst the emerging mixed-race middle class. This meant that even as their children in Australian boarding schools had fewer opportunities to speak Unserdeutsch, adult members of the community had more opportunities to socialize in the language.

## 5. German after Independence (1975 – 2016)

Papua New Guinea was granted independence peacefully from Australia in 1975 and has remained a democracy within the Commonwealth since then. In the constitution adopted at Independence, special mention was made in different sections of English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu, and, as a group, the many vernacular languages of the country. No mention was made of German or the German colonial period.

## 5.1 Ties with German-speaking countries

One year after Papua New Guinea achieved independence, both the Federal Republic of Germany<sup>20</sup> and Switzerland<sup>21</sup> established diplomatic relations with Papua New Guinea. This was followed in the following years by the German Democratic Republic in 1978<sup>22</sup> and Austria. Of these, the only one to open an embassy in Papua New Guinea was the Federal Republic of Germany, which it then closed in 2000. Today all these countries are represented only by honorary consuls and the European Delegation to Papua New Guinea, whose website states that the UK and France are the EU countries providing the most aid to Papua New Guinea.<sup>23</sup> Trade between Papua New Guinea and Germany is not significant; “there are currently no major German companies located in the country” according to the German Federal Foreign Office webpage for Papua New Guinea.<sup>24</sup>

Although the German ambassador in Australia is accredited to Papua New Guinea, ceremonial affairs are usually handled by the honorary consul, a long-time German resident of Port Moresby. This was so even at a ceremony marking the centenary of the 1914 Battle of Bita Paka near Rabaul, an event that resulted in the transfer of German New Guinea to Australian rule. There is therefore no significant governmental or commercial link between independent Papua New Guinea and its first colonial master.

## 5.2 German names today

Unlike many other countries achieving independence, Papua New Guinea did not rename geographic names inherited from the colonial era. This means that

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20 See Auswärtiges Amt, “Papua Neuguinea,” March 2015, accessed May 10, 2016, [www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes\\_Uebersichtsseiten/PapuaNeuguinea\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes_Uebersichtsseiten/PapuaNeuguinea_node.html).

21 See Jean-Marc Crevoisier ed., “Bilaterale Beziehungen Schweiz–Papua-Neuguinea,” *Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten*, accessed May 10, 2016, [www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/vertretungen-und-reisehinweise/papua-neuguinea/bilatereale-beziehungen-schweizpapua-neuguinea.html](http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/vertretungen-und-reisehinweise/papua-neuguinea/bilatereale-beziehungen-schweizpapua-neuguinea.html).

22 Siegfried Bock, et al., eds., *DDR-Außenpolitik: Ein Überblick. Daten, Fakten, Personen (III)* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 180.

23 See Delegation of the European Union to Papua New Guinea, “Papua New Guinea,” accessed May 10, 2016, [eeas.europa.eu/delegations/papua\\_new\\_guinea/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/papua_new_guinea/index_en.htm).

24 See Auswärtiges Amt, “Papua Neuguinea,” March 2015, accessed May 10, 2016, [www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes\\_Uebersichtsseiten/PapuaNeuguinea\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes_Uebersichtsseiten/PapuaNeuguinea_node.html).



the German names that had not been changed by Australians at the end of World War I remained the same. The one exception is New Hanover, which in recent years has been referred to more often by its indigenous name Lavongai. On many maps today both names are mentioned. A list of significant geographic names of German origin and their current names is given in Appendix 1.

Even though German names have been retained, they have acquired a local significance, and their foreign origin is rarely given a thought. Almost every university has a “Bismarck Club”, for example, but by this is meant a club for students from the Bismarck Archipelago, without any reference to the German politician. Similarly, for New Irelanders away from home, the Boluminski Highway is something to be nostalgic about, not a remembrance of German domination, but as something uniquely related to New Ireland. These names are an unconscious legacy of colonial rule, without any reference to outsiders or their language.

### 5.3 Education and access to German

For many years after independence, students could learn German at Lae International High School, a private school attended by both expatriates and wealthy Papua New Guineans. This was the only access indigenous Papua New Guineans had to the German language. When smaller student numbers required a downsizing in staff and curriculum offerings in 2003, German was dropped. At that time about twenty students were studying German, about half of them Papua New Guinea citizens. Since German is not taught at any other high schools or at the six universities in the country, there is now nowhere in Papua New Guinea where German can be learnt.

This contrasts sharply with neighboring Indonesia. The website of the German embassy there describes a vibrant cultural and educational scene with an active German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and a Goethe-Institute in Jakarta with a branch at a university elsewhere on Java offering many opportunities to learn German.<sup>25</sup> It states that about 27,000 Indonesians have studied in Germany since 1945, many with German scholarships. The corresponding number for Papua New Guinea would be much smaller. There is no Goethe Institute in Papua New Guinea, which is theoretically within the region of the Jakarta Goethe Institute, and no office organizing scholarships or information for Papua New Guineans wishing to study in Germany. There is no facility in the

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<sup>25</sup> [www.jakarta.diplo.de/Vertretung/jakarta/de/07\\_20Kultur/0-Kultur.html](http://www.jakarta.diplo.de/Vertretung/jakarta/de/07_20Kultur/0-Kultur.html).

country for applying for German student visas, which in recent years have become very difficult and expensive to get.<sup>26</sup> The German language is therefore inaccessible to Papua New Guinean students and has no presence in their academic planning.

Education in German for expatriate children has also almost completely disappeared. In the 1990s, crime levels on the New Guinea mainland, especially in Morobe Province, worsened in the midst of serious economic problems. Due of this and also because of a localization policy aimed at replacing foreign mission workers with Papua New Guineans, the number of foreign mission staff declined. As a result, the Lutheran Kathrine Lehman Schule for the children of German Lutheran missionaries in Wau closed in the 1990s.

Of the two schools teaching in German for the children of missionary families after World War II, only the Swiss Evangelical Brethren Mission school remains open. The mission has a policy to keep its school open as long as any of its workers are in the country with children. It usually has less than a dozen students at any time, only a few of whom are from the Swiss mission itself and none of whom is indigenous.

#### **5.4 The Unserdeutsch and other German-Melanesian communities after Independence**

Like other mixed-race and Chinese residents of New Britain, many members of the Unserdeutsch community became worried about possible violence in the months leading up to Independence. While that did not happen, most did choose to retain Australian citizenship rather than opt for Papua New Guinean citizenship at Independence. In many cases their children, having gone to school or university in Australia, had already decided to stay and make a new life there. Increasingly, more moved to Australia until today there are less than a dozen speakers of Unserdeutsch in Papua New Guinea itself.

In Australia, most speakers and their families live in or around the Brisbane-Gold Coast area in south-eastern Queensland, although there are smaller groups in Cairns and Sydney. Today not more than 120 persons speak the language, the youngest of whom are in their fifties, as English has become the dominant home language of all but one household. With increased social mobility and much

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<sup>26</sup> Applicants must appear in person at the German consulate in Sydney for fingerprinting and an interview, but to do this they must first obtain an expensive Australian visa, which is normally not given to persons travelling to Australia to apply for a visa to a third country.



Unserdeutsch reunion in Brisbane with German New Guinea flag

more relaxed attitudes about racial categories in both Papua New Guinea and Australia, most younger and middle-aged persons have married out of their community and are well integrated into either Papua New Guinean or Australian society. Among the youngest generation in Australia, nostalgia is more likely to be expressed towards Papua New Guinea than to Germany. Some who have grown up in Australia even speak Tok Pisin because of their friendships with other Papua New Guineans there. In Brisbane the community meets once a year for a community picnic. As a result of visits by linguists associated with the University of Augsburg documenting the language and history of the community since 2014, there has recently been a renewed interest in the Unserdeutsch language by its speakers in Australia and an awareness of its unique position as the only recorded creole language with a German base. A Facebook group for Unserdeutsch speakers has become popular in the community, including among younger persons who no longer speak the language.

In Papua New Guinea itself Unserdeutsch has become the first Papua New Guinean language to become moribund through emigration to another country, as there are too few speakers distributed over too many areas to constitute a critical mass to keep the language alive in the country. A few individuals keep a Ger-

man or Unserdeutsch identity through family ties and Facebook connections to friends and family in Australia, but this is not enough to keep a language or community alive. When asked how he practices speaking German when there is no one left on his island to speak Unserdeutsch to, one of these few speakers left said he speaks with his flowers every morning, as no person on his island will be able to understand what he says.

In this respect they are like other groups of Papua New Guineans with German heritage. While several individuals from other mixed-race communities are active politically or professionally, their Australian and middle-class Papua New Guinean identities are stronger than any German heritage. Certainly, there is no public awareness of a German community in Papua New Guinea. The only real awareness of a German-Melanesian connection is among older Unserdeutsch speakers living in Australia, who are, as one speaker said, “the last drops of Germany in the Pacific Ocean”.

## 6. Conclusion

In 1884, German became the official language of a colony that, together with British Papua, eventually became the Independent State of Papua New Guinea. German colonization was short, but had a lasting effect on the people of this part of Melanesia.

Many of the foundations of this modern nation state come from Germans and their colonial empire, and many basic modern structures and social patterns come from the German *guttaim bipo*. Many customs, in fact, are still even called by their German names, like the colorful arches of flowers (*Bogen*) at the entrances to Lutheran churches during church festivals. Names of German origin, such as Boluminski Highway, Mount Hagen Town, and Mount Wilhelm, are thought of as local names and a focus for local pride, not nostalgia for, or even memory of, the time of the German colonisers. The invisibility of the German language and culture is symptomatic of the almost non-existent engagement by Germany itself with Papua New Guinea today. Tok Pisin and Chinese, not German, are the linguistic legacies of German colonial rule.

In Papua New Guinea today, German has same position it had in 1883, the year before the German colonial rule started. It is the language of a few foreign sojourners, learned by their partners and the occasional Papua New Guinean person coming to Europe. As in 1883, it is no longer a language of Papua New Guinea, and Germany itself is faraway, exotic, and inaccessible. The strongest nostalgia for the German engagement in Papua New Guinea is in Australia, the country that took the colony away from Germany, among the small Unser-

deutsch community, German-Melanesians who have nearly all left the country their great-grandfathers tried to colonize.

**Appendix 1 Major geographic names of German origin**  
(German data from Dotlan (2005), Moran (2004), and Schnee (1920))

German name	modern name	changed?
Adelbertgebirge	Adelbert Range (Madang Province)	no
Alexishafen	Alexishafen (Madang Province)	no
Berlinhafen	Aitape (East Sepik Province)	yes
Binnenhafen	Binnen (Madang Town)	no
Bismarkarchipel	Bismarck Archipelago	no
Bismarkgebirge	Bismarck Range (Eastern Highlands Province)	no
Dallmannhafen	Vanimo (Sandaun Province)	yes
Finschhafen	Finschhafen (Morobe Province)	no
Französische Inseln	Vitu Islands	yes
Friedrich		
Wilhelmshafen	Madang Town	yes
Hansemannküste	Sepik coast (northern New Guinea coast)	yes
Hagenberg,		
Hagengebirge	Mt Hagen	no
Hatzfeldhafen	Hatzfeldhaven (Madang Province)	no
Herbertshöhe	Kokopo	yes
Kaiserin-Augustafluss	Sepik River	yes
Kaiser Wilhelmsland	northeastern New Guinea Island	yes
Konstantinhafen	Erimba (Madang Province)	yes
Neuhannover	New Hannover (New Ireland Province) (also known as Lavongai)	no
Neulauenberg		
(Neu-Lauenberg)	Duke of York Islands (East New Britain)	yes
Neumecklenburg		
(Neu-Mecklenburg)	New Ireland	yes
Neupommern		
(Neu-Pommern)	New Britain	yes
Ottilienfluss	Ramu River	yes
Potsdamhafen	Gabun? (Madang Province)	yes
Preussen-Reede	Lae	yes
Sattelberg	Sattelberg (Morobe Province)	no

Schleinitzgebirge	Schleinitz Range (New Ireland Province)	no
Schouten-Inseln	Schouten Islands	no
Schradergebirge	Schrader Range (Madang Province)	no
Seeadlerhafen	Lorengau (Manus Province)	yes
Simpsonhafen	Rabaul Town (East New Britain Province)	yes
	Blanche Harbour	yes
St. Matthias-Inseln	St. Matthias Islands (New Ireland Province)	no
Stephansort	Bogadjim (Madang Province)	yes
Stoschberg	Suilik? (New Ireland Province)	yes
Varzinberg	Vunakokar (East New Britain Province)	yes
Weberhafen	Nonga (East New Britain Province)	yes
Wilhelmsberg	Mt Wilhelm (Simbu Province)	no
Willaumezhalbinsel	Willaimetz Peninsula (West New Britain)	no

Translations of German geographic terms:

Archipel = archipelago	Hafen = harbor	Küste = coast
Berg = mountain	Halbinsel = peninsula	Neu = new
Binnen = inner	Insel(n) = island(s)	Ort = place
Fluss = river	Kaiser = emperor	Preussen = Prussia
Französische = French	Kaiserin = empress	Reede = road
Gebirge = mountain range		

## Appendix 2 Representative examples of Rabaul Creole German sentences and phrases

1	Schtor	wo	alle	Boi	komm.
	Store	where	plural	indigenous. come man	
	“Store where the indigenous men go.”				

*Alle* = Tok Pisin plural marker *ol*

*Schtor* and *Boi* from English “store” and “boy”

2	Maria is	mehr	klein	denn	Des.
	Maria is	more	small	than	Des.
	“Maria is smaller than Des.”				

*mehr + denn* = English “more” + “than”

cf Standard German comparative with adjective + -er: *kleiner*

- 3 Mein                      Bein                      is                      wie                      ein  
Hols.  
my                      leg                      is                      like                      a  
wood

My leg has fallen asleep. / My leg has pins and needles.  
from a Tok Pisin idiom

- 4 I                      war                      gegangen                      fi                      such.  
I                      was                      gone                      for                      search  
I went looking for them.

*fi*, from Standard German *für* “for”, as complementizer, analogous to early Melanesian Pidgin *fo*

cf Standard German *um* (direct object) + *zu* + verb

- 5 Haus fi                      Tom. De                      Stov fi                      wir is                      gel.  
house for                      Tom. The                      stove for                      we is                      yellow.  
Tom’s house. Our stove is yellow

*fi*, from Standard German *für* “for”, as possessive

cf Standard German *von* “of”

*Stov* from English “stove”

*Gel*, from Standard German *gelb*, with consonant cluster simplification

- 6 Maski,                      i-un-du                      / uns                      geht                      Flantage.  
Never.mind                      I-and-you                      / we.exclusive go                      plantation  
Never mind, we (including you) / we (excluding you) will go to the plantation.

Tok Pisin inclusive / exclusive “we” distinction, cf Tok Pisin *yumi* / *mipela*  
*Maski* from Tok Pisin

*Flantage* from Standard German *Pflantage* with consonant cluster simplification

- 7 Du                      laufen                      geht                      wo?  
You                      run                      go                      where  
Where are you running?

Tok Pisin-like serial verb construction, (Tok Pisin *ran i go we*)  
 As in Tok Pisin and English no distinction between locative and directional  
 where,  
 cf Standard German *wo* “where at” and *wohin* “where to”

- 8 De Chicken war gestohlen bei alle Raskol.  
 The chicken was stolen by plural criminal

The chicken was stolen by the criminals.

English-like passive: copula + participle + *by* + agent,  
 cf Standard German *werden* “become” + *von* “from” + agent + participle  
*Chicken* from English,  
*Raskol* from Tok Pisin *raskol* and PNG English *rascal* “criminal”  
*alle* = Tok Pisin plural marker *ol*

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