Readings and conversations with Alex Yapua Ari and Holger Jebens

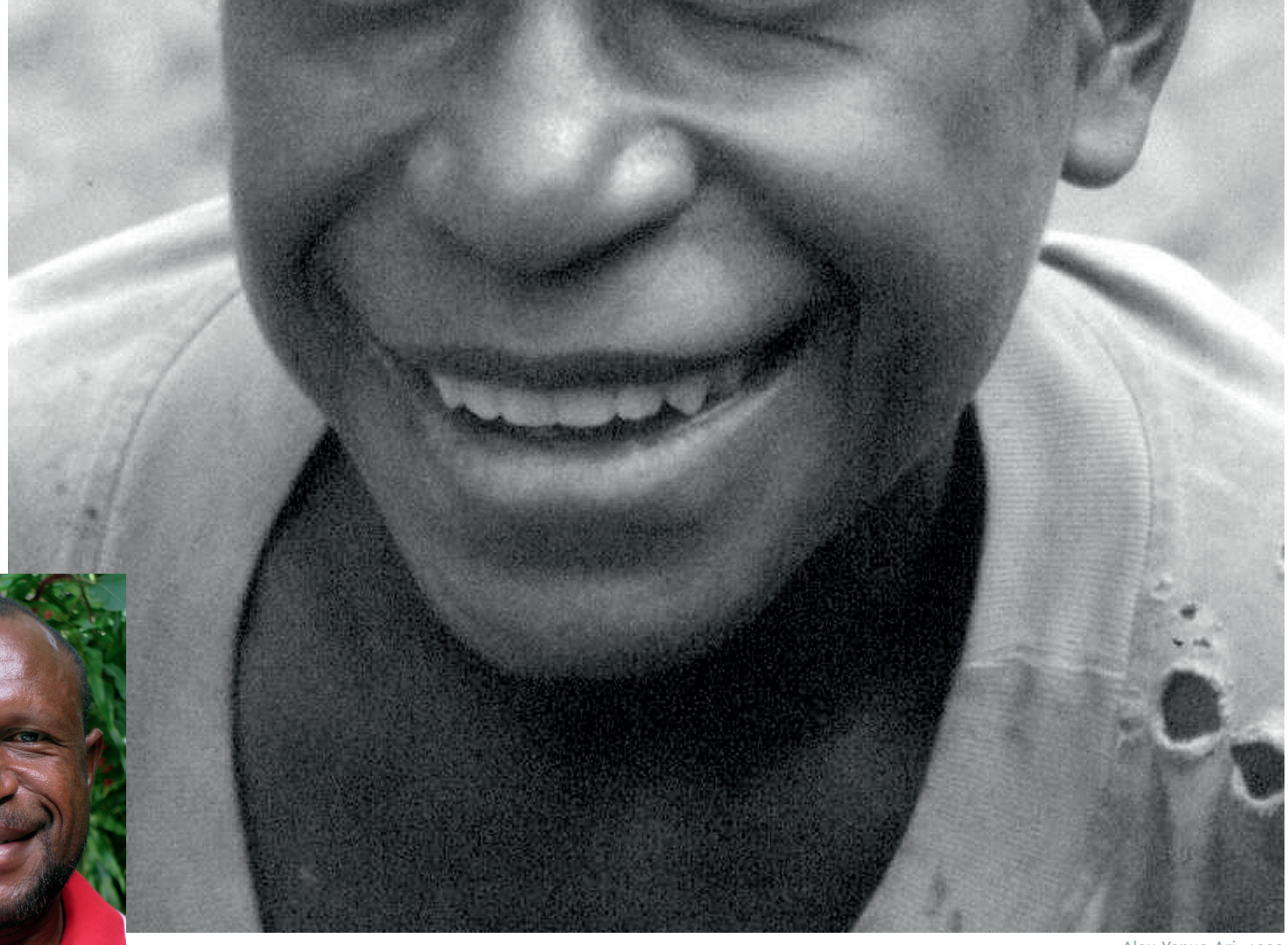
Storibuk Pairundu

Tales and legends from the Kewa (Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea)

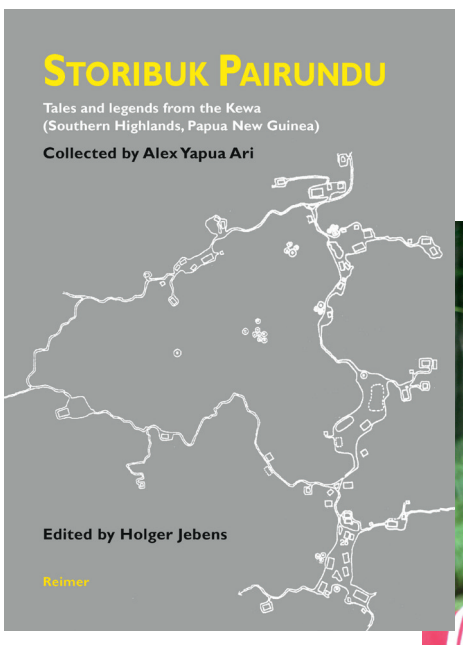
When Alex, a thirteen-year old boy living in a remote village in Papua New Guinea, saw Holger, a young German anthropologist, collecting stories and writing them down, he decided that he could do that too. This led to an unusual collection of tales and legends in which the fabulous follows on from the mundane, and what seems prosaic in one story gives way to the extra-ordinary in the next.

As Alex attempted to imitate the visiting anthropologist, his tales and legends can be interpreted as expressing a kind of 'auto-ethnography'. Yet, they also reflect something culturally specific: a thoroughly pragmatic attitude, a certain laconic tone and at times a dry and compelling sense of humour. It was perhaps this combination that led Alex to tell Holger to turn the stories into a book which might somehow help him to come to Germany and give readings from it.

Far-fetched, even utopian, though this idea seemed at the time, it has now become a reality. Thus, almost thirty years after first meeting the strange visitor from a far-away country, Alex can turn the tables and see this country with his own eyes.



Alex Yapua Ari, 1990



Alex Yapua Ari, 2017

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