

**Firstborn Child and Mortuary Traditions  
in Bariai, P.N.G.**

**Primogeniture and Primogenitor:  
Firstborn Child and Mortuary Ceremonies  
Among the Kabana (Bariai) of West New Britain,  
Papua New Guinea**

By

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## ABSTRACT

Birth order is an unexceptional biological fact. The concept of primogeniture—the elaboration of ideas, beliefs, and customs pertaining to the firstborn child—is a cultural construct, a distinct sociocultural phenomenon that requires explication. My intent is to show that where a concept of primogeniture is found, this concept has important sociocultural ramifications and theoretical consequences that have been relatively ignored by anthropologists.

This dissertation provides detailed theoretical and ethnographic coverage of the significance of the concept of primogeniture among the *Kabana of West New Britain, Papua New Guinea*. The concept of primogeniture and the singular importance of the firstborn child in Kabana culture are explored within the context of the complex series of ceremonials that Kabana parents must perform for their firstborn child. Because the firstborn child is a product of its progenitors and all firstborn ceremonials "take place on top of the dead", firstborn ceremonials overlap with and culminate in mortuary ceremonies. Firstborn child and mortuary ceremonies comprise the totality of Kanana ceremonial and provide a

framework for an understanding of the Kabana view of their universe, their place in it, and the principles that give order and meaning to their lives. The descriptive analysis of these ceremonials results in the accomplishment of two major objectives: The first is to explore the concept of primogeniture and explain the significance of this concept in Kabana culture and society. Secondly, the descriptive analysis of firstborn and mortuary traditions among the Kabana fills a lacuna in the ethnography of Melanesia by providing a detailed study of a hitherto undescribed people and their culture.

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My predoctoral studies and research were undertaken while I was a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at McMaster

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anthropological fieldwork, all of which are exemplified in the kin term gloss "what is she on about".

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Thus the sum of things is ever being replenished,  
and mortals live one and all by give and take....and  
in a short space the tribe of living things are changed,  
and like runners hand on the torch of life.

Lucretius  
*De Rerum Natura*, ii.75

## INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the theoretical and ethnographic coverage of the concept of primogeniture, a sociocultural phenomenon hitherto neglected by anthropologists. Within the anthropological literature, there are abundant references to the special nature of the firstborn child, and we are familiar with, indeed take for granted, the role of the (usually male) firstborn as the natural inheritor of lineage group real property, various roles and statuses, ritual regalia, names, sacred and secular knowledge. We are also familiar with the importance of birth order position as a fundamental element in the social construction of kinship systems and the politics of seniority and sibling rivalry. The firstborn is also mentioned in ceremonies and rites for children which have been a major focus of anthropological study since the inception of the discipline, and these celebrations have been labelled life crisis events and analysed according to the Van Gennepian tripartite *rites de passage* model. None of these concepts prepared me for the overwhelming significance of primogeniture among the Kabana who live in the Bariai Census District of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. The purpose of this document,

therefore, is to explicate a particular situation: namely, the significance of primogeniture in Kabana society and culture. I take the concept of primogeniture to be a distinct sociocultural phenomenon that requires explanation, rather than assume that the concept of primogeniture is a natural or unexceptional outcome of the biological fact of birth order.

The concept of primogeniture and the singular importance of the firstborn child in Kabana culture are most graphically expressed in the complex series of ceremonials that are performed *only* for the firstborn child. But all firstborn ceremonials, the Kabana say, "take place on top of the dead", and this comment led me to enlarge my concern with primogeniture and firstborn ceremonials to include the notion of primogenitor and mortuary ceremonials. Firstborn child and mortuary ceremonies comprise the totality of Kabana ceremonial and this totality defines, dramatizes and celebrates the human condition as the Kabana view and express it.

The detailed exploration of these ceremonials results in the accomplishment of two major objectives. The first is to explain the concept of primogeniture and its significance in Kabana culture. Since ceremonies for the firstborn and the dead impinge upon virtually every aspect of Kabana society and culture, and are necessarily the day-to-day concern of all adults,

the descriptive analysis of these traditions accomplishes the second objective, which is to provide an ethnographic report of a heretofore undescribed people and their culture. An explication of the complete complex of Kabana firstborn and mortuary ceremonials provides a framework for an understanding of the Kabana view of their universe, their place in it, and the principles that give order and meaning to their lives. My ultimate interest, therefore, is to explore, within the context of firstborn and mortuary ceremonials, the "total conceived cosmic order" (Lawrence: 1984) as it is perceived, expressed, and perpetuated by the Kabana.

One of the most fundamental cosmological and social issues for every human being and for every society, is continuity. In any society, continuity is dependent upon the reproduction and replacement of "certain elements of value. . . human beings, social relations, cosmological phenomena such as ancestors, and resources such as land, material objects, names, body decorations" (Weiner 1980: 81). The Kabana ceremonies are expressly concerned with life (the firstborn) and with death (mortuary). They focus on mortality (discontinuity) and the quest for immortality (continuity) for both the individual human being and the social whole. The Kabana do not conceive life and death as polar opposites, nor as points on either end of a continuum.

The relationship between the two concepts is one of oscillating cyclicity. The natural progression of life and living leads inevitably to decay and death, a necessary precondition for the continuity of life. For the Kabana, these essential cultural concerns are embedded in and expressed through ceremonies performed by adults in honour of firstborn children and the recent dead. The Kabana ceremonies are concerned with death, decay and loss, and with new life—the generation, degeneration and regeneration of elements of value. The Kabana ceremonials effectively bracket and make salient the interlude between life and death, the two fundamental phases in the human and social life cycle, an interlude that is filled with the business of living one's existence meaningfully.

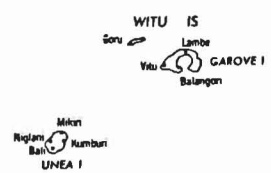
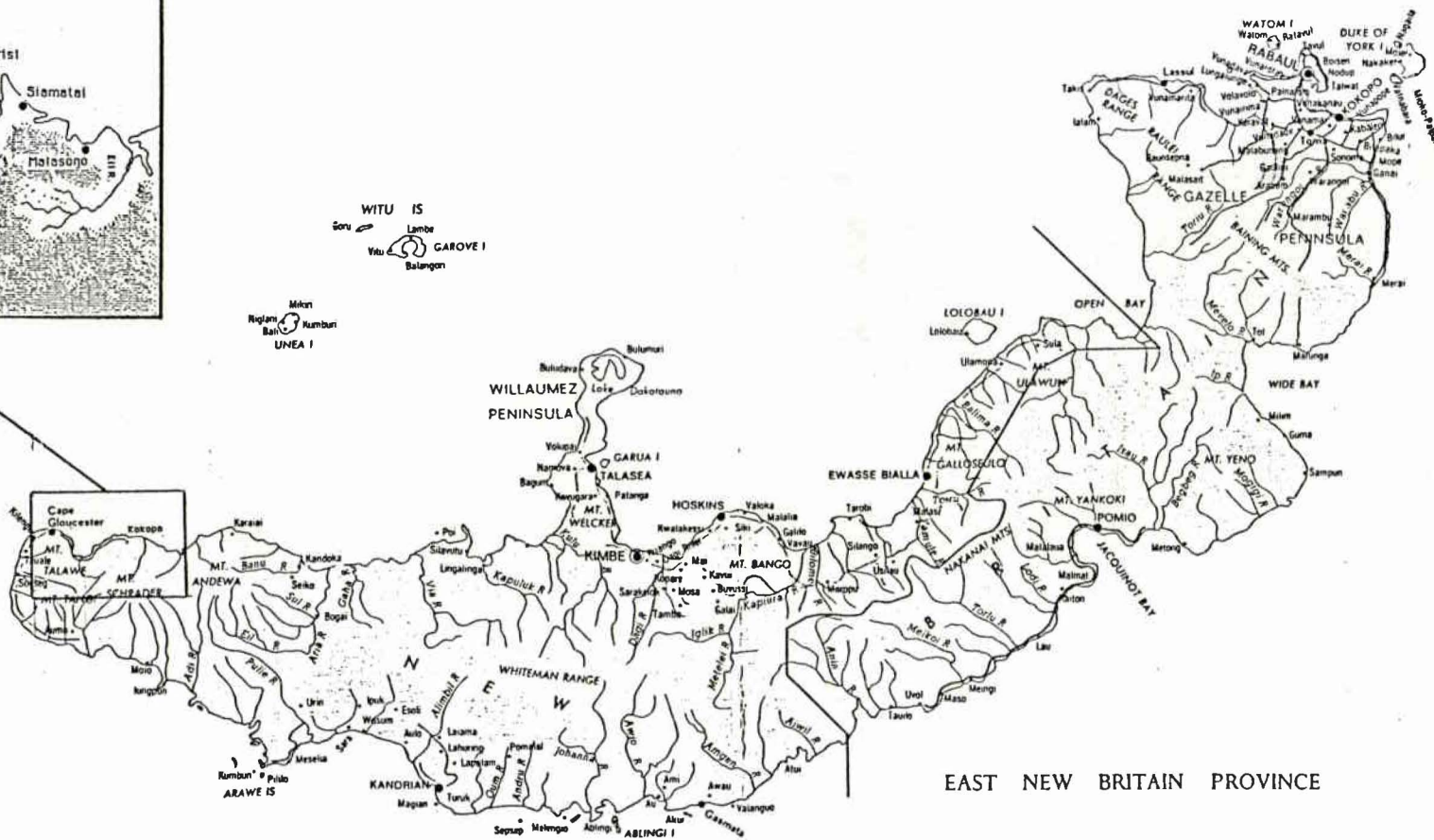
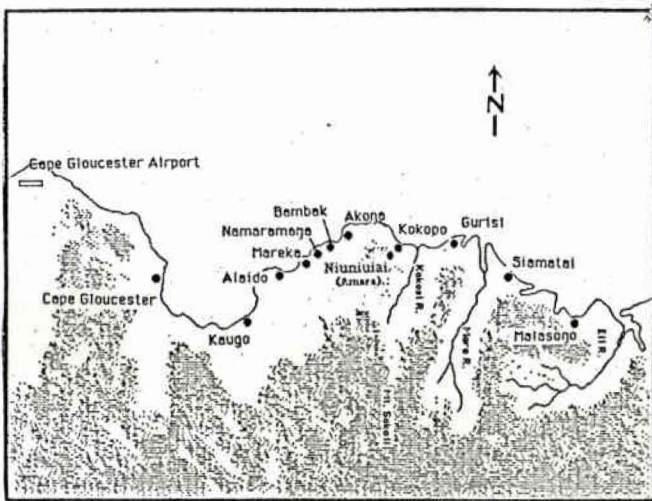
In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I present the ethnographic setting for the data discussed herein and the theoretical and methodological considerations that inform my analysis. Chapter One is a discussion of primogeniture in general terms and in Kabana culture, particularly the relationship between the firstborn and the concept of renown. Chapter Two provides the general features of the Kabana system of human relations, their views on marriage, procreation, and the firstborn as the creator of parenthood, all of which provide a context for understanding the



ceremonial complex. The complete series of ceremonials performed for firstborn children is the subject of the next three chapters: Chapter Three deals with the postpartum phase, Chapter Four with the minor ceremonials, and Chapter Five examines the major ceremonials. In Chapter Six the emphasis shifts to focus on mortuary ceremonies and the relationship between primogenitor and primogeniture. In the final chapter, I draw together the various filaments of my descriptive analysis of the Kabana "total conceived cosmic order" and the significance of the concept of primogeniture to that world view, and conclude with a discussion of primogeniture as a sociocultural phenomenon that warrants further comparative research by anthropologists.

### The Ethnographic Setting

Since more specific details will emerge as this document evolves, this brief section serves, in a very broad way, as a preliminary introduction to the Kabana and their environment. For heuristic purposes, I assume throughout this document an ethnographic present tense based on things as they were at the time I completed my fieldwork in 1983.



WEST NEW BRITAIN PROVINCE

EAST NEW BRITAIN PROVINCE

The Bariai Census Division is located on the north-west coast of the island of New Britain. With an area of 14,000 square miles, New Britain is the largest island in the Bismarck Archipelago. The Island itself is comprised of numerous inactive and active volcanos covered with a rich and lush tropical forest. During its colonial history, New Britain was governed by the Germans from 1884-1914 and, at the end of World War 1, by the Australians who held their colonial mandate from 1914 to 1975, when Papua New Guinea became an independent nation state. During the Second World War, New Britain was invaded in 1942 by the Japanese and in 1943 by the Americans who subsequently ousted the Japanese Forces. Despite this continuing contact with outsiders, the people of Bariai, as a group, have been much less affected by acculturation processes than, for example, the Tolai people of eastern New Britain (*cf.*: Epstein 1969).

The Kabana are culturally related to the Amara-speaking people who formerly inhabited the interior of Bariai, to the Kilege and Lolo people in the Kilege-Lolo Census Division on their western boundary, and to the Lusi in the Kaliai Census Division to the east. Economically, the Bariai area is a relatively isolated, undeveloped area. Copra is produced as a cash crop. It is primarily produced on a contingency basis, to pay for school taxes, personal

finer and the like, or when someone wishes to acquire such things as a transistor radio, western style clothing, or foodstuffs that are sold in the towns and local trade stores.

There are no motorized land vehicles in the Bariai area, and even if there were, there are no roads for such vehicles to travel upon. There is a small airstrip in the Kilege District, with weekly flights to Lae on the east coast of the New Guinea mainland. Local travel is accomplished primarily on foot, by outrigger canoe (with or without a motor), or by the government workboat which sporadically plies the waters between Cape Gloucester (50 km by sea to the west) and the Provincial capital at Kimbe (200 km by sea to the east). The rapid growth of Kimbe Town in the past decade or so, has had virtually no effect on the Bariai area or its people because it is so distant from them. Cape Gloucester in Kilege is the administrative centre and the "urban" hub closest to Bariai, and offers a small health clinic, a local bank branch (that was usually out of cash money), a postal station, two trade stores, and little else save governmental administration offices and the permanent construction houses of the people who are employed by these businesses and institutions. Since I left in 1983, village correspondents tell me that Cape Gloucester has undergone some development with, among other

amenities, the addition of a branch of the Copra Marketing Board which is intended to provide the population with a more accessible market for their copra so that more effort will be put into cash cropping as a viable route to economic development. They also tell me that a forestry operation producing wood chips has been built and begun operations on the eastern boundary of Bariai. Both these developments and their impact on the people of Bariai will be the object of my future research.

The Kabana depend for their subsistence upon slash-and-burn horticulture with taro, yams, and sweet potato as staple foods. There is no shortage of land, and gardens are located in low-lying riverine areas and high on the volcanic slopes of Mt. Uris and Mt. Sakail behind the villages. During the drought which afflicted the area in 1982-83, the Kabana also made use of an impressive array of wild and semi-cultivated "famine" foods.<sup>1</sup> I also learned, during this 'bad time', of the importance of the sago palm as a dietary staple, a ceremonial food, and item of trade.<sup>2</sup> Unlike other West New Britain areas (e.g. in Kaliai, Kileje), there are no longer any interior, mountain or 'bush' populations and the people of Bariai are all coastal dwellers. As coastal dwellers, the Kabana are also fisherfolk, and supplement their diet with a wide variety of seafoods, including seaweeds. Domesticated animals

include dogs, chickens and pigs. Dogs are kept only for hunting wild game, primarily wild pig and cassowary. Chickens are kept for their meat and eggs, although neither find their way into the diet with any frequency, since the village pigs and dogs usually get to the eggs first, and are notorious for devouring baby chicks. Domesticated pigs, females and castrated boars, are raised as a source of wealth and are consumed only at feasts which necessarily accompany ceremonies performed in honour of firstborn (**lautabe**) children and in honour of the dead (**burua**). Given the number of firstborn ceremonies and the number of people who are staging a mortuary ceremony at any time, and the success of the hunt for wild pigs, pork is a frequent addition to the diet.

### The Research Site

This document is the product of 16 months field research in the Kabana village of Kokopo. The research site was suggested to me by Drs. David and Dorothy Counts who, since 1966, have conducted ongoing anthropological research among the Lusi in the neighbouring district of Kaliai. With the exception of the German ethnographer, Friederici (1912), there has been no anthropological research undertaken among the people of Bariai. During 1908,

Friederici was part of an expedition to West New Britain undertaken for the dual purpose of collecting artifacts and recruiting plantation labour. Friederici's primary source of information about Kabana language and culture was a Kokopo man named Kabui, whom Friederici met in Madang and hired as a servant. Kabui travelled with Friederici to Singapore and from him, Friederici compiled a large wordlist and grammar of the Kabana language (see Goulden:1982). My research in Bariai thus fills a gap in the ethnographic record of New Britain and, by extension, of Papua New Guinea.

The actual choice of the village of Kokopo as my permanent place of residence throughout the research period was made for me by Dr. David Counts in consultation (by mail) with one of his Lusi informants, Mr. Markus Geti of Kandoka village in Kaliai, and this man's cross-cousin, Mr. ŋauma Geti, in Kokopo village. Kokopo was chosen because it is the largest (population 190, my 1983 census), and most centrally located of the ten villages on the Bariai coastline (see Map). It was assumed, correctly as it turned out, that the larger population and central location would permit a more representative view of Kabana life. The village was also deemed a good choice because it is the only village from Cape Gloucester to the provincial capital at Kimbe that has a permanent construction wharf. This amenity would make access in and

out of the area (especially in case of emergency) much easier. While the wharf does in fact exist, in view of the transportation problems in the province its presence did not make access much easier. As the province continues to develop the wharf will be a decided asset to the area, but during my stay it served primarily as a convenient point from which to fish with hook and line. The final reason for choosing Kokopo was the availability of water. The Kakasi River is a few minutes walk east of the village and offered excellent bathing and laundry facilities. An underground spring, appropriately called **Makinkin** ('mosquito'), located a short distance behind the village, provided cold, unpolluted drinking water that was perfectly delightful.

As I became more familiar with the total area, I was convinced that Kokopo was an excellent choice for my research. I visited all the villages in the district at least once, some more frequently than others. Besides Kokopo itself, my most frequent interaction was with the two nearest villages to the east and west, Gurisi and Akona, respectively, and the Amara village of Niuniuai which is located slightly inland and west of Kokopo. Over time, I came to know the name, place of residence, and kinship affiliation of just about everyone in the ten Bariai villages.

With 100 years of missionization, and the broadening of their



intellectual horizons through colonial government, and more recently through access to formal education and increasing national involvement in global economics and local socioeconomic development, the Kabana expressed concern that the 'ways of their ancestors' were being lost. The Kabana are very proud of their traditions, and welcomed the opportunity that my presence among them offered for the gathering and recording of their traditions in as much detail as they could provide.<sup>3</sup> As my work evolved, it became evident to me, indeed, was stressed by the Kabana themselves, that if I were to know and understand anything about the Kabana and their world, it was necessary that I know about the complex of traditions surrounding firstborn children and the dead. And, if I were to translate Kabana culture to others, that it was best translated from the perspective of these ceremonies.

### Speaking of Language

The name Bariai, besides designating a political and geographic district, has been used by Chowning (1978b: 296) to distinguish a particular language family on the northwest coast of New Britain. The Bariai language family is a sub-grouping of the Siasi branch of the Austronesian language family that includes, in West New Britain, speakers of Kove (Kove District),

Lusi (Kaliai District), Maleu (Kilene/Lolo District) and Kabana (Bariai District). Within the Bariai area proper, there are approximately 750 speakers of Kabana, and some 100 speakers of Amara, "an unclassified Lamogai Austronesian language possibly related to the languages of the south coast of New Britain" (Thurston, personal communication). Amara speakers are located in the villages of Malasogo, Siamatai, Niuniui, and Kaugo (see Map). Although I also worked with these Amara speakers, the bulk of my data was obtained from Kabana speakers. In the interests of specificity, I shall henceforth refer to the people among whom I lived and worked as the Kabana, in lieu of the more inclusive geographic, political, and linguistic label, Bariai.

Research was conducted in Tok Pisin (shown in italics in the text), the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea, in which I attained a high level of fluency, and in the indigenous language, Kabana (shown in boldface in the text). I did not become fluent in Kabana, an ideal, I believe, few ethnographers achieve in so short a period of time. I did learn a good deal of the language with the able assistance of my Kabana hosts, and my linguistic colleagues, Rick Goulden and Bil Thurston, both of whom, since 1975 have been engaged in recording and analysing the numerous languages in northwestern New Britain (see Thurston 1976, 1982, 1984; Goulden 1982).<sup>4</sup> Everyone in Kokopo village, indeed, within the Bariai area, speaks and understands Tok Pisin. The children in the

village grow up learning Tok Pisin and Kabana simultaneously as their *first* languages. Tok Pisin is a real language, rich and expressive, and not a broken or bastardized form of English as it is so often characterized. Tok Masta ('talk master') is a better example of a pidgin English, although it is best categorized as a pidginized form of Tok Pisin. Tok Masta reflects the colonial experience in Papua New Guinea in general, and in many instances is the form of discourse still used by white expatriates in communicating with non-English speaking Papua New Guineans. Tok Masta underscores class and ethnic differences; fluent speakers of Tok Pisin, by contrast, are considered *wantok* (those who share 'one language'), and are more readily accepted and integrated into the community.<sup>5</sup>

Although it might have in the past, the use of Tok Pisin did not limit my research to particular groups of persons, such as elder, male, ex-plantation labourers, neither did it limit access to the more esoteric or complex concepts of Kabana society and culture. Indeed, the bilingual nature of my research added depth to my understanding of the Kabana world view, especially those native terms and concepts necessary to an analysis and interpretation of the topic at hand: firstborn child and mortuary ceremonies.

### Theoretical Considerations

Typically, anthropologists work among and study people whose world view does not presuppose a Cartesian metaphysics as does our own world view. Rivers (in Slobodin 1979: 213), for example, noted that in the Melanesian world view, "the facts of the universe have been classified and arranged in categories different from our own". Similarly, Levy-Bruhl (1975:71) struggled with the notion of "participation" in Melanesian metaphysics which he described as "simply a complex reality, felt *at one and the same time* as one and as *two* without this causing any difficulty" (original emphasis). While the concept of participation may not have caused any difficulty to those whose metaphysics allowed such a concept and whose framework of knowledge was based on its logic, it did present analytic difficulties for the anthropologist who insisted on fitting these alternate world views into the procrustean bed of a scientific model based on Cartesian logic.<sup>6</sup>

Lawrence and Meggitt (1965: 7) defined religion in Melanesia within the concept of world view as, "the total cosmic order that a people believes to exist". For the purposes of scientific analysis this total cosmic order was broken down into two categories, empirical and non-empirical, the latter reduced to "three analytically separate but functionally interdependent

systems"(*ibid*). In the same volume, Valentine states that "[t]he distinction between the material and non-material or between bodily and spiritual essence is absent or unimportant in Lakalai thinking" (1965:195 n.7). Valentine then proceeds with an analysis of Lakalai religion implicitly based on distinctions between the empirical/non-empirical. This kind of theoretical and methodological approach in anthropology has led to what Keesing (1982:4) labels "cultural cryptology"; the breaking down of sociocultural systems into discrete bits—ecology, kinship, religion, politics, economy, and so on—in order to discover the "coherent structures implicit in the conduct of social life". The reconstruction of these basic bits of sociocultural reality into a coherent and logical format imposes on the subject culture a logical orderliness that is purely an artifact of the analysis. Once deconstructed from the context of daily existence these reconstructed coherent structures seem to have little relevance to 'things on the ground'. In the final pages of his book, Keesing (1982: 219) thus enjoins anthropologists to "work toward a theory that takes into account the way cosmological schemes operate to infuse human life with meaning, and preserve a logical structure, but at the same time shows how these schemes are anchored in political and economic realities [sociocultural realities in general] and serve ideological ends".

Since Einstein and the theory of relativity, our own world view has

changed dramatically. The universe is no longer conceived as comprised of discontinuous elements which interact mechanistically like so many automata, but "as a harmonious indivisible whole; a network of dynamic relationships that include the human observer and his or her consciousness in an essential way" (Capra 1982 : 47). As a result of our changing world view, the models used to define our realities and gain knowledge of our universe are changing also. Less constrained by models that reduce the complexity of human life and society to the level of "cultural cryptology", contemporary models attempt a holistic approach more conducive to the social scientific study of human complexity.

A holistic model attempts to understand reality as an integrated whole, where the parts of that whole cannot be reduced to smaller, discrete units. Such a model recognizes the basic inter-connectedness of things and events, and studies *relationships* among phenomena rather than attempting to delimit and define the phenomena *per se*. Science, Bateson (1979:18) tells us, no longer attempts to define things as they are (or seem to be) but as things are (or seem to be) in relation to other things, and the ultimate unity of those relationships is the "pattern which connects" (p.9). Relationships are processual and dynamic. A scientific model which is holistic thus seeks to understand "the meaning and significance of things [and events] rather than

prediction and control" (Capra 1982: 35).

This kind of approach provides a means to avoid the dilemma of "cultural cryptology". If we do not isolate cosmology from economics or politics, we are not faced with the necessity to provide an analytic bridge to show the mutual relevance between the two spheres. If we assume at the outset that cosmology does infuse human life (which includes, of course, politics, economics, religion, human motivation and passion . . . .) with meaning, in a logical or self-consistent way, and does serve ideological ends because reality is a dynamically integrated whole, the problem then becomes how to describe and analyse a world view in action.

This methodological problem has been met head on by Lawrence (1984) in his ethnographic account of the Garia cosmos where he is concerned to present an ethnographic account of the total conceived cosmic order of the Garia. Lawrence notes (p.5) that the Garia do not "make an ontological distinction between" the realm of human beings and that of spirit beings , or what Europeans call the "natural and supernatural or transcendental". Lawrence continues:

My aim is to demonstrate not only how these two realms are, or are believed to be, constituted but also how they impinge, or are believed to impinge on each other in everyday social behaviour, land tenure, local organization, and sociopolitical control.... Ideally, because the Garia do not conceive its human and

superhuman realms as spatially or intrinsically separate, I should examine in turn each of the foregoing problems simultaneously in both realms. Yet this is methodologically cumbersome...[therefore] I follow anthropological convention and even though it is artificial in this instance, present the two realms as if they were discrete (*loc cit*).

We must grant that it is methodologically cumbersome to describe and analyse a sociocultural domain "in the round", especially when the medium for presentation is decidedly lineal. Nonetheless, by utilizing his concept of the Garia "egocentric security circle" as a means both to organize and analyse his data, Lawrence successfully avoids the shreds and patches approach characteristic of cultural cryptology where "artefact is so often misrepresented as fact" (Lawrence, personal communication), while at the same time retaining the contextual flavour and essence of Garia cosmology, and what it means to be a Garia.

The Kabana world view is not founded upon the epistemological presuppositions characteristic of Cartesian logic; it is founded upon the logic of participation. Participation, as Levy-Bruhl (1975: xx) defined it,

is not a fusion of things which lose or conserve their identity at one and the same time; it enters into their very constitution. It is immanent in the individual as a condition of existence. To exist is to participate in a mystical force, essence and reality.

A cosmology founded on participation does not imply an inability to discern or create systems of classifications based on the logic of difference. What it



does imply is that these differences are not mutually exclusive categories, but are mutable and consubstantial; the boundary between entities might be permeable to a point where it becomes difficult to discern where the identity of one thing stops and another begins (*cf.* Meigs 1984). As Loeliger (n.d.: 68) pointed out in his critique of the study of religion in Melanesia, "the analytic tools of Europeans are useful but . . . European analytical divisions impose divisions on material which does not inherently have such divisions." Because, as Bateson notes (1958:3), any culture is "really an elaborate reticulum of interlocking cause and effect . . . impossible to present . . . simultaneously in a single flash, [the analyst] must begin at some arbitrarily chosen point". Rather than impose artificial analytic divisions that misrepresent the complex logic of Kabana cosmology, I use Kabana ceremonials as my point of entry into Kabana cosmology and as the means to elucidate how they are dynamically related to various other aspects of Kabana sociocultural and cosmological reality.

As Lawrence quite rightly points out in the passage quoted above, this can be cumbersome and does present some methodological difficulties, not the least of which is that we cannot possibly know everything about the sociocultural milieu that we study. We are, however, in a unique position for saying something about other cultures given that, as a rule, anthropologists

embark on the study of cultures distinctly 'other' than their cultures of origin and are forced to learn to discern and understand different patterns of relationship if only to relieve their own cognitive dissonance. Thus, Rosaldo (1980:xi) writes that she is not concerned to capture "timeless essence nor a 'point' in time" in Ilongot social life, but to document "certain partially consistent themes in Ilongot activity and thought . . . inferred from adult discourse . . . thereby making accessible some of the terms in which Ilongots have understood their fellows' motives and made sense of themselves". She goes on to point out that "[t]he focus and style of my presentation reflects the difficulties I found in discovering what is orderly in Ilongot experience of their social world and in appreciating its pattern" (*loc cit*). Similarly, Weiner (1976:8) states that she is unable to confine herself to "the terms of traditional anthropological categories", as these are "inadequate to accomodate the multiple layers of significance informing people's words and behaviours".

Bateson (1958) chose the *nayen* ceremony through which to represent and interpret crucial aspects of Iatmul society and culture. Schieffelin (1976:1) chose the *Gisero* ceremonies "as a lens through which to view some of the fundamental issues of Kaluli life and society". And Lawrence (1984) chose the concept "ego-centric circle" as the medium through which to view

Garia life and society. The Kabana identified for me their traditional ceremonials for firstborn children and for the dead as the pervasive textual theme that permeates their personal, cultural and social existence. Since these ceremonies are the primary concern of adult women and men as they live their present existence, plan their future, and remember their heritage, they serve in this document, as a lens through which to gain an understanding of the "elaborate reticulum" of Kabana reality. These ceremonies serve both as a framework for the organization of the data to be analysed here, and as the phenomenon to be analysed.

From the perspective of their metaphysics, the Kabana ceremonials are ultimately concerned with the death/life continuum, the processes of generation, degeneration and regeneration. In order to show how this metaphysic is fundamental to the way Kabana individuals actually live their lives, I have adopted a generalized model of the human developmental cycle as framework for organizing the data that will be presented here. The psychosocial development of the individual, Fortes (1974: 82) reminds us, is "integrally bound up with a three generation cycle": the child, the parents, the grandparents. In my view, the tripartite nature of the developmental model can be extended to describe a cosmic cycle, as opposed to a lineal progression, whereby child=future time, parents=present time, and

grandparents=past time. This approach permits an analysis that integrates both the ego-centric and the societal perspective (*cf.*: Weiner 1980: 82). This developmental model is inherently processual, the present is a product of the past and produces the future, and assigns priority to "a space-time framework that is structured around the reproductive and regenerative cycles culturally/symbolically defined in the societies we study" (Weiner 1980: 74). The descriptive analysis of the Kabana ceremonies encapsulates a dynamic and cyclic world view basic to Melanesian systems. In such systems, as Weiner (1980: 74) points out, "both the life cycles of human beings, including the cosmological domain, and the life trajectories of material objects of exchange are given priority as organizing principles." As will be seen, the death/life continuum, so crucial to the Kabana world view, is expressed in the series of ceremonies that honour the firstborn child and the dead and focus upon the central cultural concern with the processes of generation, degeneration and regeneration.

### The Data Base

Herdt (1981: 10) has provided the definitive statement on ethnographic data collection: "Ethnographers collect their data, of whatever sort, by respect of their particular relationship to particular people . . . . We, like

those we study, are human beings; our data represent the communications that arise from that *inter*subjectivity." An ethnographer's relationship with the people she or he is studying among is based on trust, and as Herdt (p.11) also pointed out "we would be arrogant, and worse still, self-deceptive, were we to believe that tribal people communicate information to just anybody, under just any conditions." In order to learn and understand the Kabana and their way of life as thoroughly as it is possible for any outsider to do, I, like Herdt (p.11), had to "stop being a tourist", live with the people I was studying, participate in their lifestyle, and earn their trust. This I did.

In the centre of one of the village hamlets, the villagers constructed a house for me, a house made of bush materials like their own. I lived alone despite the fact that any number of young women would have been happy to live with me and continually offered to do so. I maintained this modicum of privacy not just for my own sake, but also to ensure that when individuals shared their private knowledge with me, they had a private environment in which to talk with me. As a female, I observed cultural traditions that prohibit females from entering into or witnessing the secrets of the men's ceremonial houses. This only amounted to a physical limitation, however, as Kabana men took my camera and taperecorder into these private domains in order to provide me with a record of the activities there, the only provision

being that I did not show the photographs to village women. My gender did not limit my access to male secrets, about which Kabana men were meticulously forthcoming. Much of my understanding of men's house activities, the spirits that inhabit the men's houses during ceremonials, and other male lore that is not openly accessible to females was acquired during hundreds of hours of private discussion with individual men or groups of men who visited my house for that purpose. Further understanding of these things was supplied by adult women who, in some instances, were more knowledgeable about them and able to provide a deeper exegesis of the meanings imputed to them than were the men. On more than one occasion, a child was sent to summon someone's wife to provide a point of order or interpretation to our discussion of ceremonial, particularly those ceremonies that included the manifestation of spirit entities and pig exchanges.

I had immediate and unrestrained access to the female domain. I accompanied women to the gardens and to the reef, and was included in their daily round of activities. Women undertook to teach me the language, and such things as how to prepare and cook food properly, to build a stone oven, and they welcomed my presence as a participant observer in that most intimate and private of any female undertaking childbirth (see Scoletta 1984b).

Knowledge and understanding is never acquired whole cloth. My knowledge of the ceremonial complex and my understanding of its importance to the Kabana way of life was acquired over the duration of my fieldwork experience, in bits and pieces that often seemed to me to be unrelated until some other aspect of the total complex was revealed as a result of my questioning, my informants' cogitations on the subject, or the spontaneity of a given set of events or circumstances in the day-to-day life of the village. Although I am not in fact a firstborn child, that status was bestowed on me within my adoptive kindred, a condition that automatically necessitated my active participation in Kabana society and culture in order for me to fulfill the requisite expectations and obligations. My description of the ceremonies is based on my having participated in and witnessed the majority of them either in whole or in part, from the preparatory stages to final execution. Descriptions of those ceremonies that I did not witness, and of those that are no longer performed, were supplied to me by a variety of informants. These are included in the text in the interest of completeness. My understanding of the ceremonies in their multiplicity is a development of my desire to know, and my hosts' desire to have me know, what was going on and why, and is based on our ongoing dialogue about these matters throughout the 16 months I lived among them.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **The Concept of Primogeniture**

This dissertation is intended, among other things, to stimulate interest and comparative research into the fascinating concept of primogeniture by demonstrating the pervasive significance of primogeniture in Kabana culture and society. By a concept of primogeniture I mean all those ideas, beliefs and customs that focus on the firstborn child. I begin this chapter by briefly discussing references to the firstborn and the idiom of primogeniture in the literature from Pacific societies, particularly Papua New Guinea and New Britain. These sources suggest that the concept of primogeniture has important sociocultural consequences that, with the exception of Fortes (1974, 1978) and Firth (1956-57), have not been developed fully by anthropologists. This leads to a discussion of the contributions made by Fortes and Firth to the study of primogeniture. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the concept of primogeniture, and the relationship between the firstborn child and the concept of renown in Kabana society and culture.



### The Pre-eminence of the Firstborn

The unique nature of the firstborn, particularly a male child, is deeply ingrained in the ideology of our own Judaeo-Christian heritage, delimited once and for all, in the Book of Exodus (13:2,12):

"Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast: it is mine....thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the Lord's".

The special status of the firstborn is also evident in the cultures of China, India, and Africa (see Fortes 1974, 1978). With the exception of these two articles by Fortes, and one by Firth (1956-57) wherein the authors discuss the concept of primogeniture among the Tallensi and Tikopia respectively, there has been no attempt by anthropologists to view the category of primogeniture systematically, as a unique sociocultural phenomenon requiring analysis and explanation.

Scattered throughout the literature on Pacific societies are references to the importance given firstborn female and male children, which suggest that the concept of primogeniture is a pervasive theme in these cultures. In

Papua New Guinea special mention is given to the firstborn among the Iatmul (Bateson 1958), the Gnau (Lewis 1975), the Hua (Meigs 1984), the Sanio (Townsend 1971), and in New Ireland (Powdermaker 1933), Manus (Mead 1968), Bougainville (Oliver 1955), in Buka (Blackwood 1935), as well as in Polynesia among the Tikopia (Firth 1956-57)

For example, Oliver related (1955:77) that the Siuai of Bougainville have a special term (*simiri*) to designate the firstborn child. Although the Siuai do not ritualize the various phases of the developmental process, the idiom of primogeniture is expressed in the "belief in the primacy of the First-born and the superordination of older over younger family siblings [which] carries over into other groups based on sibling-like ties of relationships". The importance of the firstborn, and an indication of the tenacity of the concept of primogeniture is evidenced by Nash (personal communication, 1984), who tells me that in Bougainville (now North Solomons Province), the firstborn "holds a position of authority and is honoured in infancy and childhood by a number of introductory rites." Nash also advises me that among the Nagovisi of Bougainville, the ideology of primogeniture plays an important role in "emergent social hierarchies based on relative age,

sex, and rank".

In the Siasi Islands, Pomponio notes (1983: 146) that "[m]ost of Mandok ceremonial life pertains to first accomplishment feasts for firstborn children." The Mandok ceremonies mark three aspects of the child's life cycle: physical/personal development, introduction to socio-economic activities, and moral/spiritual development. Pomponio also points out that although the child may be too young to participate in the ceremonies, "[t]he important factor. . . is that the child is publicly acknowledged to *have the right* to engage in those subsistence activities which are crucial to Mandok survival: fishing and trade" (*op cit.*: 147 , original emphasis).

Lewis (1975) discusses the specialness of the firstborn among the Gnau in the Sepik area of Papua New Guinea. He notes that with the birth of the first child a marriage is formally established and it is only after the birth of the first child, that the bridewealth is redistributed. The Gnau provide a special feast marking the firstborn's entry into society and special payments, made only for a firstborn child, are given over by the child's father's kin to the child's mother's kin. With the birth of their first child, various taboos and restrictions are imposed on Gnau parents, and when the

firstborn reaches puberty the parents and their cognatic kin must contribute to and perform elaborate ceremonies for the child. Gnaou explanation for the special status of the firstborn parallels that given by the Kabana: the firstborn is a product of the parents' combined essential substances when that vital essence is at its most potent level. Procreation depletes the finite store of substantive essence each human being has access to, hence each subsequent child contains less and less of these vital substances. I shall have occasion to elaborate on this notion later. It will suffice at this point to note that in his study of "the syndrome of primogeniture" in African societies, Fortes (1978: 147) also draws attention to the importance of vital essence when he notes that,

In one way or another we meet with the notion of parental vitality being depleted by the growth of their offspring and we find ambivalent attitudes associated with this belief focussed in symbolical taboos and/or injunctions imposed on relations with first borns.

The concept of primogeniture and the celebration of firstborns, either separately or in conjunction with mortuary ceremonies, is present in many New Britain societies: the Lakalai ( Goodenough 1955; Johnston 1973;

and Valentine 1961); the Kove (Chowning 1972, 1978a,); the Lusi (Counts and Counts 1970, Counts 1980), the Kilenge (Zelenietz 1980; Zelenietz and Grant, personal communication), the Vitu (Blythe 1978), and the Tolai (Epstein 1969). Only Chowning and Johnston have paid more than passing attention to ceremonies for firstborns in New Britain, and only the latter has focussed specifically on primogeniture as a cultural idiom.

Chowning notes (1972, 1978a) that the most important Kove ceremonies, those honouring the children of important men (Kove: *mahoni*; 'esteemed person', 'bigman'), are the primary ways in which a 'bigman', his lineage, and his men's house acquire prestige and renown. Such a Kove ceremony is merely a "pretext for her father's acquisition of renown . . . . [the father's] motive in holding the ceremony is only secondarily to honour his children" (1972:5). The Kove ceremonies focus more attention on female as opposed to male children, a factor which Chowning finds surprising given that Kove society is "a society with patrilineal descent groups". She explains this anomaly by pointing out that the Kove, "by their own admission . . . took over this and most of their other ceremonies from other groups, [thus] they do not bear much relation to other aspects of Kove society" (pg. 5), and she cites the

Kilenge as the likely source of the ceremonies. In my opinion, Chowning has dismissed, too readily, the important role of such ceremonies in Kove society, and the Kove's admission that the ceremonies are borrowed from other West New Britain people. I had several opportunities to discuss these ceremonies with people from Kove, Kilenge and Kaliai (see Note 1) all of whom agreed that their rights to perform the ceremonies had been purchased from the Kabana, who are the acknowledged originators of the total complex. As Chowning notes, the seafaring Kove "are well located on the various trade routes which end up on the north coast of New Britain" and that they serve "as middlemen and carriers of goods to all of northwest New Britain" (*op cit.*: 4,7). As I discuss later, the complex of firstborn (and mortuary) ceremonies throughout West New Britain has been and continues to be, a key factor in maintaining the traditional New Guinea/New Britain socioeconomic trade networks that Harding (1967) predicted would disappear in the 1970s. That "girls receive more ceremonial attention than boys" (*op cit.*: 5), should have alerted Chowning to the fact that there is more at stake here than the acquisition of renown by patrilineal descent groups.

Johnston (1973) states the case quite clearly by noting first the

important relationship between ceremonies for firstborns and the acquisition of prestige and renown among the Lakalai. He points out (1973:91,92) that "[o]ne of the main bases for respect, authority and power in Lakalai is seniority . . . . Nowhere is the cultural value of seniority in Lakalai institutionalised more clearly than in the ceremonies reserved for the firstborn child throughout his [or her] life." In the conclusion to his article Johnston reiterates that, in Lakalai society

seniority appears to be the least subject to change and reduction in influence. Comparative data from other Melanesian cultures dealing with the relative stability of seniority and other power bases in the face of acculturation, would be a welcome addition to the literature (*op cit.*: 96).

The same point has been made by Jackson (1978: 342, original emphasis), who notes that anthropologically it is of interest to realize that "birth-order distinctions *retain* cultural significance even when the corporate character of modern society renders sibling status unimportant for the inheritance of property and succession to office." Closer attention on the part of anthropologists to the cultural concept of primogeniture could provide valuable insights into the sociocultural relationships that operate between

and among West New Britain peoples, and help to explain why these traditions have tenaciously retained their integrity despite internal and external pressures to curtail or modify them (e.g. Chowning 1978a, 1972; Johnston 1973, and in East New Britain, Epstein 1969). On the other hand, we need to know why in the Yitu Islands these traditions have not survived acculturation pressures (Blythe, personal communication 1984). Such studies could provide valuable insight into the processes of social change and acculturation.

Once the importance of primogeniture as a sociocultural phenomenon in various cultures is recognized, another puzzle presents itself: there is no intrinsic reason why the firstborn should be set aside for special treatment. The biological fact of birth-order is an unsatisfactory explanation for the elaborate cultural baggage associated with primogeniture. To say that the firstborn is special because it is the first child simply begs the question. Chowning (1972,1978a), for example, makes clear that while the Kove ceremonies are overtly touted as being oriented to honouring the child, the Kove acknowledge that it is not the child *per se* that acquires renown and prestige but her father and agnatic kin, however, she gives no explanation as to why this is so. It is unclear in Johnston's short article, whether it is the



firstborn or the parents/kin who acquire the prestige, although I suspect that it is the latter. Neither author seems particularly concerned with why the firstborn should be the focus of ceremonials that ostensibly bestow honour and prestige on the child, while in reality they bestow honour and renown on the parents.

Firth (1956-57: 46) addressed the question of why the Tikopia perform ceremonies that ostensibly honour the firstborn child, when in fact the ceremonies are associated "with the rank and prestige of the father and of necessity also his economic resources" (*op cit.*: 38). He suggests that an "explanation must lie in some theory of representative status, whereby the first child serves as exemplar. . . . [Since] the child is a passive element . . . the symbolic content though ostensibly directed for his benefit is, in fact, an appeal to other, mainly adult interests" (*op cit.*: 47). In Firth's "theory of representative status . . . one child stands as exemplar for others, a surrogate for "childhood" of the family or even a wider social group" (*op cit.*: 49). While this may answer, in part, the question of why the firstborn is celebrated, it opens a further question, namely, why an exemplar as representative of the family/social group should be necessary, particularly when the Tikopia are a

ranked society and the children so honoured will be inducted into positions of status and prestige that they would have to fill anyway, given the rules of inheritance (Firth: 1956-57: 44).

Firth's "theory of representative status" is a more valuable explanatory framework when applied to the Kabana ceremonies for firstborn children (and for the dead) than when applied to the Tikopia. The Kabana overtly and vehemently maintain that the purpose of firstborn ceremonies is to "raise the name of the firstborn" and that in order to do so, the child's parents must acquire huge quantities of wealth which, when expended at the ceremonials, reduces the parents to a state of impoverishment. Kabana parents constantly denigrate themselves, pointing out their reduced circumstances and labelling themselves as *rabisman* (T.P.: 'person of no consequence', 'worthless', 'powerless') due to their lack of wealth. The paradoxical nature of this self-effacement is further confounded, among the Kabana at least, by the covert acknowledgement made by all, that it is not the child but her/his parents who acquire renown and prestige. Further, Kabana firstborn children do not inherit or otherwise occupy roles or positions of status and prestige simply because of their seniority or because ceremonies have been performed

in their honour. Unlike the Tikopia, whose emphasis on primogeniture "represent[s] the induction of leading children of rank into the position of eminence which they will have to fill later in life" (Firth 1956-57: 44), the Kabana have no formal system of ranking, institutionalized offices, statuses or roles to be inherited or otherwise occupied by firstborns or, for that matter, any other category of persons. Although Kabana firstborns have certain reciprocal rights and duties as a function of their seniority, they are not otherwise revered or privileged in any formal sense.

How then to reconcile the pre-eminence given firstborns and the dead in a ceremonial context? *Prima facie* the Kabana ceremonies appear to be *rites de passage* to mark the transition of children (or the dead) from one socially defined stage to another. However, the Kabana ceremonies are performed *only* for firstborn children. This raises the question that, if *rites de passage* have the important social and cultural functions that anthropology has conventionally attributed to them, then why are only some children celebrated? Malinowski (1962: xxxiii-xxxiv) pointed out "how dangerous [a] label is that of *rites de passage*" and how seductive is Van Gennep's "formal scheme" wherein "various rites [are] lumped together because of their formal similarity", thus blinding us to various other essential aspects of these rites and their cultural significance. One of the

problems with the *rites de passage* model as Firth points out (1956: 49) is that "theories dealing with ceremonies for children usually assume that *all* children (of the same sex) "pass through" the same series, and ignore the theoretical questions posed by any omissions". Recognition of omissions, Firth goes on (p.49), "raise[s] some general questions of interpretation". Firth, however, is loathe to give up the *rites de passage* model, and explains that omissions "make sense" if the firstborn is considered an exemplar for the childhood of others. In such a circumstance, there are no omissions since everyone passes through the same series of ceremonies either in person or by proxy. Also, according to Firth, the Tikopian ceremonies for firstborn children

do not serve primarily as mechanisms of transition nor do they ease the individual's passing from one state of equilibrium to another. They celebrate his having made the achievement, enlarged his experience, and now being of the company of those who have had the experience. They are marks of the maturation of the Tikopia individual (*op cit*: 49).

If this is the case, why then do most of these ceremonies take place when the child is too young to undertake the achievement that is celebrated or to participate in the ceremony in any capacity other than as a "passive element" as Firth already pointed out (p.47).

Firth's "theory of representative status" and the concept of the child as

an exemplar or surrogate for others, permits him to retain the *rites de passage* model that is, as Malinowski noted, so seductive an analytic framework. The Kabana firstborn child is indeed viewed and treated as an exemplar of others and in Kabana firstborn ceremonials, the child is a passive element. But these ceremonies are not *rites de passage* which function to acknowledge or to produce changes in the social status of children, induct them into social adulthood, or to enlarge their repertoire of shared experience. On the contrary, I argue that the Kabana firstborn ceremonies are akin to what Richards terms (1956: 151) "maturation rites of assumption", or what I would view as celebrations of the assumption of adulthood by the child's parents and the concomitant public recognition of the ongoing process of social and personal maturation.

The Kabana situation differs from those described by Firth and Richards in that it is the progressive maturation of adults, not children, that is being celebrated through the child. In order for the parents of a firstborn (or the kin of the dead in the case of mortuary work) to perform a firstborn ceremony successfully, they must produce vast quantities of food and material wealth. They must, therefore, have mastered the skills needed for basic subsistence and for the production of surplus. In terms of material wealth, they must have entered into a wide network of trade and exchange, successfully

manipulated the complicated system of debits and credits, and successfully forged and maintained an extensive network of human relations. The ability to hold a ceremony is dependent on these abilities. The actual acquisition and redistribution of these valued items by those performing the ceremonies acknowledges the reciprocal self-interest and moral obligations which structure social relations. For the Kabana a 'true' human being is a social being, a status that can only be achieved, demonstrated, and maintained within the complex context of ceremonial work for a firstborn child. As I elaborate later, it is more important to have a firstborn child than to be a firstborn child and the exigencies of biology are socially manipulated to ensure that everyone has a firstborn child.

Firth's theory of representative status is useful for an understanding of why the firstborn child is singled out for special treatment and, as I have suggested and will elaborate later, the concept of the firstborn as exemplar is applicable to the Kabana data. However, while Firth's contribution provides an insight into an important aspect of primogeniture, the concept of primogeniture is a much more complex phenomenon. In order to explore these complexities further, I turn to the work of Meyer Fortes, who provides an excellent and, to date, the most detailed analysis of primogeniture.

Fortes became interested in the phenomenon of the firstborn some

forty years ago while working among the Tallensi, and references to the firstborn in Tallensi society can be found in his major monographs ( e.g. Fortes: 1945,1949). His "fascination with the theme of the firstborn" resulted in two major articles: *The First Born* (1974), where his intent was to compile "a composite picture, a paradigm, of the critical features of *customary*—as opposed to *idiosyncratic*—recognition of the significance of first birth in tribal societies" (*op cit.* 93, original emphasis) and, *The significance of the first born in African family systems* (1978), where he applied the paradigm as a framework for the comparative analysis of primogeniture in Africa. After thinking about and researching the topic of primogeniture for forty years, Fortes relates that " it is frustrating to find how often this [primogeniture] is overlooked in the literature, even where there are obvious indications that it is significant" (Fortes 1978: 144).

Earlier I referred to Fortes' view (1974: 82) that the psychosocial development of the individual is "integrally bound up with a three-generation cycle", of which the three interconnected phases can be labelled: 1) infant/child; 2) marriage and parenthood; and, 3) grandparenthood and the dependency of old age. He goes on to point out that the "crucial feature" of the developmental cycle "is the conjunction of successive generations . . . [which] obviously comes into existence, once and for all, with the birth of a

first child" (*ibid*). There is no question that giving birth is both a transition and a crisis situation from the parents' point of view (*op cit*: 97; see also the anthropological studies of childbirth, e.g. Jordan 1983; Kay 1982; Poole 1982a ). Giving birth is a major personal and social *rite de passage*, and, perhaps because researchers are enamoured of this "clever label" (Malinowski 1962: xxxiv), research, as Fortes points out, has tended "to focus on the relations of parents and children from the situation of the latter" (1974: 97). Based on the anthropological data and his own research among the Tallensi, Fortes suggests (*op cit*: 98) "that it might be rewarding to look at the filio-parent relationships from the parent's situation, turning the model upside down, so to speak." Following Fortes, I examine the parent-child relationship among the Kabana from the perspective of the parents; turning the model on its head is rewarding indeed.

I have already raised the question of why the firstborn should be singled out for preferential treatment and discussed Firth's contribution to resolving this query. Summarized briefly below are Fortes' contributions and insights into the question of why the concept of primogeniture is so important.

As the anthropological data shows, parenthood is a desired status for a multitude of ideological, legal, and social reasons. Behind the desire for



parenthood lie "notions that parenthood is proof of the attainment of social maturity, which implies full male potency and female fecundity" (Fortes 1974: 89). Marriage is necessary for the legitimation of parenthood, and in many African ( e.g. Tallensi, Nuer ) and Pacific societies, such as the Kabana, a marriage is not considered formally established until the union has produced the first child. Marriage is a tenuous institution. It can be "annulled by lawful divorce in many societies [but] parenthood, like birth itself and death cannot be annulled" (*op cit.*: 87). The status of parenthood, "is uniquely achieved with the advent of the first born", subsequent offspring merely increase the status of parenthood quantitatively; only the firstborn creates parenthood (*op cit.*: 83). This is a critical phase in the developmental cycle for, with the achievement of parenthood, there is a major shift in the "outlook of the parents and in the expectations entertained of them and the status conferred on them by society" (1978: 135). The firstborn child signifies the progress of the parents along the path to full maturity. The parents "are moved from the status of filial dependence to one of independence tied to responsibility for offspring—that is to say oriented towards the future not the past of the family" (*ibid* ).

The firstborn is also the founder and head of the new filial generation, thus ensuring the continuity of the family and of society, and the individual

through whom others forge important affinal and cognatic links. Fortes reports that among the Dogon, the filial generation is considered to be reliably established with the birth of the third child, a notion shared by the Kabana who have a term for firstborn (**lautabe**), for second born (**atange**) and one term for third and all subsequent children (**ketngo**).<sup>7</sup> In addition to being the founder of the next generation, the firstborn is burdened with "the pivotal status connecting successive generations" (Fortes 1978: 146). Because the firstborn is symbolic of the demise of the parental generation, its destroyer as well as its inheritor, Fortes associates the inevitability of sibling rivalry and of intergenerational conflict with the "initial fact of the birth of the first born" (*ibid*). These conflicts and tensions are controlled or contained, he suggests, by the variety of customary prescriptions, proscriptions, taboos, rites and ceremonies which focus on the firstborn child. As is the case with the Kabana, among the Tallensi "the status of the first born, female as well as male . . . . is dramatized in a series of eloquent customary practices and beliefs" (1974: 84).

Finally, Fortes also points out that a firstborn is desired as proof of the achievement of maturity through parenthood. While this is the case, Fortes does not distinguish between sexual and social maturity, and does not note that the two are not the same thing. I emphasize, with Lafontaine (1978:

11), that it is important to "distinguish between adulthood as the presence or absence of sexual activity, and full social responsibility as head of a domestic group." I argue that the birth of a first child merely marks the parents' sexual maturity and signals their embarkation on the road to full, social maturity and responsibility, rather than their achievement of that status as a *fait accompli*.

In addition to marking their sexual maturity, procreation also initiates a progressive drain on the vitality of the parents, the end result of which is senescence and death. In Pacific ethnography the inter-relationship between loss of vital essence through sexual activity/ procreation and the processes of aging, dying and death have been treated, for example, by contributors in Jorgensen (1983-84), Herdt (1982), Counts and Counts (in press) and by Meigs (1984). What Fortes terms the "mystical potency", or vital essence, associated with male vigour and female fecundity and its depletion as a result of procreation is also a basic premise in the metaphysics of some African cultures (1974 :92). Among the Kabana, it is not only reproduction—sexual intercourse, conception, and giving birth—that depletes parental vital essences. The activities of production necessary for the care and rearing of children also constitute an additional and progressive drain on parental vitality. Paradoxically, then, the desire for children, the

achievement of sexual maturity and social status through parenthood, and the inevitable loss of mystical potency/vital essence signals the concomitant "extinction of parental authority and autonomy" (*ibid*), all of which is personified by the firstborn. The Kabana firstborn carries a heavy symbolic load since this child is the miracle of life created (generation), the personification of a desire for immortality (regeneration), and at the same time the child is a reminder of human mortality (degeneration).

This creates a situation which, Fortes argues, is at the root of the sociopsychological problem of intergenerational strife between fathers and firstborn sons and of sibling rivalry, a problem resolved among the Tallensi, at least, in the custom of sending the firstborn to be fostered by kinsfolk at a distance. Such customs surrounding the firstborn serve to contain potential rivalries that would be threatening to the integrity of the family and society. He also notes that among the Tallensi and other African groups, the quest for immortality in the face of human mortality rests squarely upon the parent/firstborn relationship. For the Tallensi, immortality means achieving the status of ancestor, and it is the firstborn, in fulfilling his obligations to his dead parents, who "ideally confers immortality on the parent" (1974: 91). Conversely, for the filial generation, the ancestors and their benevolent assistance and interventions, are only available through one's parents (*op*

*cit.*: 84). The psychosocial conflicts engendered by the firstborn as usurper of parental status and as the in-place heir and replacement of the parental generation are ameliorated within the context of a cosmology that connects the two generations in a relationship of reciprocal self-interest.

I could find no evidence of such intergenerational rivalry between Kabana parents and their firstborn children, nor was there any overt rivalry between a firstborn and his/her younger siblings, although in other Melanesian cultures where primogeniture is an important cultural concept, sibling rivalry is evident (see e.g. Barlow 1984; Lipset 1984). Nor, in Kabana society, are the dead elevated to the status of ancestors. There is no ancestral cult, and the dead do not have a prominent role in the affairs of the living. Kabana mortuary ceremonies are not magico-religious institutions for the propitiation of the spirits of the dead. The Kabana do not posit, as, for example, do the Kwaio, a "noumenal world controlled by the spirits behind the visible one they so imperfectly control . . ." in order to provide a framework of ". . . explanation for failure and success, life and death" (Keesing 1982:243). Such eventualities the Kabana place squarely within the realm of the behaviour of living human beings and human control (see Scaletta, 1985). The dead do not play any important role in religious or daily affairs; they are not depended upon, worshipped, or otherwise propitiated in a formal

institutionalized sense. Although not for the reasons Fortes suggests, the pivotal status of the firstborn child connecting successive generations is an important part of the concept of primogeniture in Kabana society, as will become apparent as this document evolves.

"The crucial feature [of primogeniture] is the identification by nomenclature and by social and ritual custom of the first born as distinct from the oldest surviving son or daughter" (Fortes 1978: 144). Undoubtedly, where there are special linguistic terms and customs applicable to firstborn children, the analyst should be alerted to the fact that primogeniture is an important cultural concept. However, I take exception to Fortes' notion that primogeniture means the actual, biological first child as opposed to the eldest surviving child. If the concept of primogeniture is as important as Fortes perceives it to be, and as I argue it is among the Kabana, confining the concept to an actual rather than surviving eldest imposes undue limitations. This does not allow for the fact that some individuals are infertile, hence childless, nor does it allow for the real problem of infant mortality. If firstborn children are ideologically and sociologically their parental replacement and inheritor, and the only individuals through whom Tallensi parents can achieve the status of ancestorhood, what happens to parents whose firstborn has died or to childless couples? How do they achieve the

status of jural adulthood and religious ancestorhood? Given the sociocultural elaboration of primogeniture in societies where it exists at all, these concerns cannot be left to the vagaries of biology or fate. The ideal of primogeniture must be manipulated to fit the actualities of reality. Among the Kabana, the concept of primogeniture is so crucial that single, newly married and childless couples adopt a child in order to ensure that they do have a first child. In cases where the firstborn child dies in infancy or childhood, the second born child will be elevated to the status of a firstborn. I show that for the Kabana, the crucial feature of primogeniture is *having* a firstborn child regardless of that child's actual birth order, rather than *being* an actual firstborn child.

Briefly restated, Fortes saw the regular and distinctive features of primogeniture as follows. The firstborn is 1) the creator of parenthood; 2) the individual whose existence formalizes crucial affinal and cognatic relationships and through whom those ties are reckoned; 3) the founder of the filial generation and the head of that group; 4) the designated heir; 5) the embodiment of psychosocial conflict both inter- and intragenerationally; 6) the harbinger of mortality; and, 7) the key to immortality. Add to this Firth's contribution—the firstborn as exemplar—and we have an impressive list of reasons for why the firstborn is singled out, given preferential treatment,

accorded a unique status, and is both the subject and object of taboos, restrictions and ceremonial celebration.

I would add to this list one final reason from the Kabana situation for the importance of ceremonially celebrating the firstborn. Weiner (1976:61) characterized Trobriand mortuary ceremonies as a medium for "spectacular visual communication". Lewis (1980: 35) argues that "to limit ritual [ceremonial] to its communicative aspect would exclude and falsify its significance to those who perform it. Ritual is not done solely to be interpreted: it is done . . . to resolve, alter, or demonstrate a situation." Kabana firstborn and mortuary ceremonies are a forum for spectacular visual communication, for they not only demand the acquisition and expenditure of large quantities of wealth, they also necessitate the overt and ostentatious display of that wealth in a public forum. A good deal of the complexity and intrigue of the Kabana ceremonials is that, like the *kaika* entertainments of the Maring, these displays provide a forum for the exchange of information among those participating, that "can hardly be communicated in any other way" (Rappaport 1968: 193), given various other aspects of the culture. The Kabana are individualistic, and fiercely egalitarian. They place high sociocultural value on the concept of personal renown, while at the same time maintaining that no individual should raise him or herself above another. In



any other context the open invidious display of relative status would be negatively sanctioned, usually in the guise of an illness or death caused by sorcery.

For the Kabana, performance of ceremonials is the only means to achieve the desired ends of social personhood, selfhood, and renown. They are also a forum for the exchange of information about personal achievements, and for the demonstration of relative status in a culturally approved manner. Renown is a relative concept, something for which anyone can strive, but which not everyone achieves in like measure. As will be seen, ceremonies for firstborn children (and the dead) provide a means for all adult Kabana to achieve and display a culturally valued end—the acquisition and display of renown— while at the same time preserving their ethic of egalitarianism by promoting the firstborn (or dead) as exemplar.

### The Firstborn and the Concept of Renown

The silver thread of continuity that links the Kabana individual concomitantly with the various aspects of the larger cosmological and experiential processes is the concept of "mystical potency" (Fortes 1974: 92), expressed in the Kabana term **sulu**, 'vital juices, vital essence, life force'. Vital essence does not have a material form but is present in various

material substances, such as blood, semen, breath, and bodily wastes. It is manifest in male potency and female fecundity and is transmitted from generation to generation through reproduction and production. For the Kabana, creation, in the dual sense of procreation and production, is a process of transforming the ubiquitous life force by channelling the substantive vital essence contained in people and things. Through the control, transformation, and nurturance of vital essence human beings are able to reproduce life itself, and to produce the necessities of life, in perpetuity.

Kabana cosmology, like that of the Etoro, is founded on the assumption that "accretion at one point in the system entails depletion elsewhere. Life cannot be created *ex nihilo* and the birth (and growth) of one generation are inextricably linked to the senescence and death of its predecessor. Life and death are complementary and reciprocal aspects of a larger process." (Kelly 1976: 145). It is upon a wider display of this basic metaphysical principle, accretion at one point equals depletion at another, that the Kabana ethic of egalitarianism is founded. Since everything and everyone is part of a totality, the gains of one individual necessarily are made at the expense of another, and this the Kabana consider immoral. The Kabana do compete for excellence and to earn renown, but they do so within the acceptable framework of firstborn ceremonials where material gain is accomplished through the

expenditure of personal resources and not at the expense of others, and where, furthermore, the material benefits achieved are not realized by those who achieved them, but are redistributed to others. The goal for which the Kabana aspire is to have a reputation for renown, and it is this reputation for achievement and largesse, and not vast quantities of material wealth, that parents have to show for the expenditures of self and wealth they make in order to perform the ceremonies.

The individual, like everything else in Kabana experience, must be produced, created through the controlled metamorphosis of ancestral essence. A child is the product of the combination of life force contained in the vital essence in the blood and semen of its parents, which the parents received from their parents, the child's grandparents, and so on back into antiquity. The life force, like the concept of energy in physics, can neither be created nor destroyed, it simply exists as a condition of the universe. It can, however, be transformed, augmented or diminished.

The embodiment of the life force in any individual is finite. When young Kabana women and men reach sexual maturity, their life force is considered to be at its highest and most potent level. This vitality is evidenced in their physical beauty and strength, a fact much commented on by their elders. The bodies of young people are robust and rounded, their skin is lustrous, and their

eyes are clear and bright. The vital essence contained in their bodies and bodily substances is whole, at the peak of its potential; it is 'hot', the heat and power of sexuality, fertility and fecundity. A newly married couple is, in theory if not in fact, virginal. They have not wasted their potential power for creation in casual sexual liaisons. Once married, the couple's relationship is also characterized as 'hot' with the power of sexuality, the heat of their bodies during sexual intercourse (**gogod oanaoana**, 'their chests are hot'). This heat is powerful in that it has the potential both to create and to destroy. Anyone engaging in sexual intercourse, especially the newly married, must, for example, stay away from the gardens for 24 hours or risk damaging the crops. They must not be in the vicinity of children who have been recently superincised or had their ear lobes pierced, as the heat and smell of intercourse that pervades sexually active persons will cause the open wounds to fester, the child to weaken and perhaps to die. Those who have recently engaged in sexual intercourse must not participate in various activities, such as hunting, fishing, gardening rituals, and trade expeditions, for their presence will cause these endeavors to be unsuccessful. The power of their sexuality nullifies the power and efficacy of magical spells and incantations, hence they are forbidden to be involved in such matters.

The power of creation is evidenced in the couple's ability to generate

new life. A firstborn is the product of combined and undiminished parental power and the firstborn child both contains and represents the full creative potential of its parents. Because the vital essence or life force of each parent is finite, and a certain amount is used up with each child conceived and born, second, third and subsequent children contain less and less of parental vital essence (compare Lewis 1975; Meigs 1984). The developmental cycle, from conception through death, is dependent upon others (e.g., parents, kin) expending their resources (strength, power) on one's behalf. Production and reproduction require the acquisition and the expenditure of personal, social, and material resources. By expending their life force in bringing forth progeny and in the production of life's necessities (food, shelter, knowledge) to ensure the survival of their offspring, the finite life force of the parental generation is diminished, and the unrelenting process of aging and dying takes its toll.

The Kabana assert that the necessary conditions for the existence of human life are three: the **tini**, 'physical body, skin'; the **anunu**, 'persona, reflection, shadow'; and, the **tautau**, 'life force, vital essence, spirit/soul'. While the body, persona, and life force are necessary for human life, the necessary and sufficient conditions for 'humanness' require the addition of a fourth component: socialization. As in all human societies, Kabana children

are exposed to the processes of socialization—the acquisition of culturally appropriate values, attitudes, and behaviours—virtually from the moment of birth. Becoming socialized is an essentially passive, unconscious process, and may or may not be fully successful, evinced by the presence of individuals in all societies who transgress, ignore, or otherwise act counter to the socially approved way of doing things. As Lewis (1980:197) points out, it is true that ego can and does learn "certain rules of recognition" that assign other individuals to positions relative to ego, for instance, mother's brother. But, as Lewis goes on to note (pg.197), "[t]o know the terms for the positions and the rules to decide when they are occupied by persons does not entail any knowledge of the nature and extent of the relationship between them." In other words, simply to know that one is part of a particular network of relationships does not necessarily imply that one is aware of the full extent of the responsibilities incumbent on the individual to these others, or that ego is capable of living up to those responsibilities. Just as sexual maturity does not imply social maturity, being exposed to the socialization process as a child does not imply the ability to carry out fully one's social responsibilities as an adult. This simple realization is at the heart of the Kabana ceremonies performed in honour of the firstborn child.

Later, I discuss the skills and behaviours young people are expected to

have mastered by the time they reach sexual maturity and the age of marriage. This period prior to marriage is, so to speak, their apprenticeship, when as dependents of and under the tutelage and guidance of their elders, they learn the techniques of social survival and thereby gain 'strength'. In this way, adolescent 'power' waxes while at the same time, parental 'power' wanes. The birth of their first child is evidence of the parents' combined power for creation and an event that concomitantly bestows upon them the status of parenthood, a status that can never be annulled or rescinded. Parenthood also brings with it the inescapable bonds of responsibility and the anxiety of inexperience (Fortes 1973: 97). When I enquired of young Kabana adults who had one or two children, what ceremonial work they must next undertake for their firstborn and what it entailed, they invariably responded that they were not sure what should be done and how, because, although these young parents had witnessed other ceremonial work and participated in it, they had *not actually done the work themselves*.

Children and young adults are passive recipients of information about the mechanics of their society and their place in it, which is, as Bateson (1979: 132) argues, a process of "learning about the 'self' in a way that may result in some 'change' in the 'self'." This is what Bateson (*op cit*) terms "characterological learning" where ego learns about the self through

interaction with others who occupy positions relative to ego. With the birth of a first child, young adults begin to enter into new relationships and interactions. By entering into these external relationships with relevant others, they begin to "learn the contexts of life", the "pattern that connects" self and other, individual and society dynamically (Bateson 1979). Prior to involvement in ceremonial activity, the Kabana individual is a part of the various relationships into which she or he was born. With involvement in ceremonial work, the individual enters into active exchange relationships whereby she or he begins to know about the full range and extent of multiplex relationships. Ego begins to change as the boundaries of the self expand to include others in a network of reciprocal obligations. It is through the extension of the self as a participant in the dynamic interactions between self and other in a multiplicity of relationships that the Kabana individual begins to acquire renown.

The concept of renown means essentially to be named again, to be praised or exalted by others because of personal achievements or accomplishments. Renown cannot be inherited, it must be achieved. In Melanesian societies, "renown is more than accumulating and giving away wealth. Renown comes from utilizing capital in such a way that loyal ties are mobilized, obligations created, prestige enhanced, and authority exercised in



*traditionally accepted ways*—above all, in the staging of special kinds of feasts" (Oliver 1955: 362, emphasis in original). It is these many facets of personal renown that inextricably intertwine the concepts of renown and personal power, particularly in societies such as that of the Kabana, where status and authority are not formally institutionalized.

The Kabana are fiercely egalitarian and explicitly espouse an ideology of equality in such oft heard phrases as: "No individual should place his or her head above others; we have no king or queen, every man is a king, every woman is a queen." Power, for the Kabana, is the right to personal autonomy, to empower one's existence; power is not viewed as a means for control over others. Indeed, the Kabana perceive the coercive use of personal power as evil, and a gross breach of moral rectitude (see Scaletta, 1984a). Individuals who attempt to use their personal power as a means to control others are subject to social sanction in the form of a potentially deadly sorcery attack. Power is the ability to balance one's own personal autonomy and self-interests and the personal autonomy and self-interests of others.

This ideology of egalitarianism is based on the democratic premise that all individuals have equal access to resources. These resources include food, pigs, material items of wealth such as shell money, and labour—one's own and that of one's kin. In theory, if all have equal access to resources,

then *ipsa facto* no individual can excel. In fact, equal access to resources does not guarantee equal ability to utilize those resources. Some individuals can, and do, make more and better use of them. Kabana women and men do compete for power and renown, a competition based on the necessity to control one's own resources better than the next person. Competition, however, can only take place within the larger context of co-operation, or, conversely, co-operation provides the context for competition. In small-scale, unstratified societies, the individual cannot exist outside the context of social relations and the moral obligations inherent in the structure of human relations. In Kabana society, the locus of experience is social, and social relations do not exist in the abstract, but always and only in connection with someone or something else. Through the dynamic inter-relationship between competition and co-operation, each individual has a collective identity as a member of society and constructs a personal identity as a unique individual. He or she gains renown.

Power, prestige, renown, and shame are all relative, conditional concepts and like the concept of relationship are not "internal to a single person....*All* characterological adjectives are to be reduced or expanded to derive their definitions from patterns of interchange" (Bateson 1979: 133).

For the Kabana, this pattern of interchange whereby individuals become defined as having more or less renown relative to others, takes place within the framework of ceremonial work. The ceremonies are what Harding (1967: 250) calls institutions which invoke a countertendency to the closed household economy, thus spreading socioeconomic relations beyond the individualistic interests of the self-sufficient household group. Renown, like pride, "is conditional admiration provided by spectator, *plus* response by performer, *plus* acceptance of admiration...." (Bateson 1979:134 orig emph), and so on, in a continual cycle of self-validating interactions. Because renown, prestige, and power are personal qualities conditional upon the response and admiration of relevant others, they can only be validated through public display.

In discussing the concept of power in small scale, unstratified societies, Colson (1977: 384) notes that in such societies, "power...is seen as underwriting individual prowess, acumen and skill; but at the same time is associated with maintaining the status quo." Since success made evident "was seen as altering relationships", Colson (*op cit*) argues that the status quo is maintained by minimizing individual claims to success. The egalitarian Kabana maintain the status quo by not only minimizing claims to renown, but also by disclaiming any success whatsoever by deflecting these personal

attributes onto the person of one's firstborn child or the collective identity of one's dead kin. As exemplars of a renown they have not earned, firstborn children and the dead are not a threat to the requirement of equality: they are socially and politically powerless. But, as exemplars of the power and success achieved by others through them, firstborn children and the dead are powerful symbols of the most highly valued and most limited resource in Kabana society: renown. The firstborn is accorded respect and deference by all, because this child is the embodiment of the renown of its parents (genitors) and ancestors (progenitors). To injure, insult or otherwise disparage any firstborn is to directly challenge the integrity, worth and power of those whose claim to renown is personified by that child.

Renown, in Kabana society, must be achieved through the performance of ceremonial work in honour of one's firstborn child, and individuals who do not undertake this work are labelled persons of 'little consequence' (**borabora**; T.P.: *rabisman*). Persons who are childless are, by definition, of little consequence, since they have no child for whom to perform the required work. The achievement of renown and the firstborn as a vehicle through which to accomplish it are so important that the widespread practice of adoption (**sauga**) ensures that no couple need be childless, and that everyone has the potential to acquire renown.

Children always are adopted within the extended cognatic kindred and may be from the kindred of either the adoptive mother or father. In this way the child shares common descent with its adoptive parents ( **sig kelede**, 'one blood'). Parents who had adopted out one or more of their children, also explained to me that, by giving their children to known kinspeople to raise, they were confident that the child would be well and properly cared for, whereas if a 'stranger' were allowed to adopt their child, they would constantly fret and worry about their child and how it was faring.

Although children are adopted at any age, the formal process of adopting a child as a firstborn usually begins before the child is born. The couple, or unmarried individual, approach the pregnant woman and her husband to make known their wish to adopt the unborn child. The pregnant couple have the right to refuse the adoption request but only rarely exercise it, since refusal to allow the adoption of one's child is considered a selfish act. Once the pregnant couple agree to the adoption, the adopting couple seal the agreement by painting a red ochre X or cross on the pregnant woman's abdomen. This 'marks' the child as their own and, since the painted X is highly visible, publicly announces the pending adoption. From this point, until the child is weaned, the adopters provide the pregnant couple with food. The food is a product of the adopters' vital essence and 'strength' which is transferred

to the foetus. Through the medium of the food, the child is 'grown' by its adopting parents whose essence is transferred to the child through the food ingested by the pregnant woman. The adoption is finalized when the child is weaned, and the adopting parents give five fathoms of shell money to the natal parents to both 'pay' for and sever the connection between the child and its natal kin (**ketnga tud**; 'the cutting of the breast/mother's milk'). Because the adoption is within the extended kinship network, the child retains generalized rights and obligations of kinship *vis-à-vis* its natal kin. Bonds of sentiment between an adopted child and its natal parents are expressed in the reciprocal term **babu**; the adopted child refers to its new parents by the terms for 'my mother', **tnag**, and 'my father' **tamag**, and they in turn refer to their adopted child as **natug**, 'my child'. All the rights (e.g., inheritance of land) and obligations (e.g., filial/parental duty) between parents and children, are transferred to the adoptive parents. The rearing of the child and the necessary ceremonial work in honour of that child are henceforth the responsibility of the adopting parents.

A child adopted as a firstborn retains its position as firstborn regardless of how many 'natural' children its adopted parents should later produce. The food given to the child's mother by the adoptive parents was a product of and contained within it the adoptive parents' vital essence. The

adopted child is already 'one blood', or of common descent with its adoptive parents, and the food they provided also contributed more of their vital essence to 'grow' the foetus *in utero*. The exchange of wealth for mother's milk finalizes the transaction that makes the child a product of its adoptive parents' vital essence: the child is a true child of its adoptive parents. In this way, children who are not the firstborn of their parents, but second, third . . . tenth born, can become firstborn children; and, if their parents have adopted a firstborn child, children who are the actual firstborn issue of a marriage become second born and may be adopted by others for a variety of reasons which will not be gone into here.

The complex relationship that exists between the firstborn child and the concept of renown, and its corollary, personal *cum* social power, is made more salient in the Kabana practice of adopting in order to have a firstborn child. Adoption ensures that anyone and everyone can have a firstborn child and, therefore, that everyone in this society characterized by an egalitarian ethic, has the requisite social vehicle through which to acquire and display renown. Despite the ideology surrounding and underscoring the importance of firstborns, the major importance of the firstborn is pragmatic. In principle, any child, regardless of its birth order or who actually conceived and gave it birth can become, through adoption, a true firstborn. Any married couple can

produce through adoption a true firstborn; the first child of combined parental vital essence. The ideology of the firstborn is easily accommodated to actual exigencies.

There is no intrinsic value in being a firstborn. This value is culturally defined in the concept of primogeniture, and easily manipulated in the custom of adoption. It is significant to note that since what is valued is *having* a firstborn (or parenthood), rather than *being* a firstborn, and adoption ensures that all individuals can have a firstborn, then any individual regardless of his or her birth order can aspire to the achievement of renown.

In this chapter, I presented the syndrome of primogeniture in general theoretical terms drawn from studies by Fortes and Firth. I then introduced the concept of primogeniture in Kabana culture, giving particular attention to the relationship between primogeniture and renown. Kabana firstborn ceremonies presuppose complex social relations both in their preparation and performance. In the next chapter, I provide information about the structure of human relations, the institution of marriage, procreation, and the creation of parenthood in Kabana society.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Human Relations: Kinship, Marriage and Procreation

In Kabana society, the basic tenets of social life are founded upon the moral obligations inherent in the structure of human relations, and the moral obligations of kinship comprise a framework of ideal social values and mores which provides a guide for action and against which behaviour is judged. In this chapter I discuss some general features of Kabana kinship, marriage, procreation and the creation of parenthood. These topics provide contextual background for the descriptive analysis of Kabana firstborn ceremonials in the following chapters.

#### The Structure of Human Relations

In the beginning, alone on a mist covered stone located high on Mt. Sakail, the Creator Being **Upuda** (**pu**, 'origin, base'; **da**, possessive suffix 'our') took a sturdy branch of the **sasa** tree, cut it in equal halves and from one piece he carved the first woman, from the other he carved the first man. **Upuda** breathed life into his creations. From the wood shavings, **Upuda**

created the forest, all the creatures that inhabit the forest, and all the creatures that inhabit the sea. Then **Upuda** removed himself from his creations. The first man, **Ato** ('messenger') and the first woman (unnamed), prospered and they had many sons, some say fifty. Each son was the head of his own ceremonial house in which he kept the particular ceremonial regalia that **Ato** specially gave to him. **Ato** ruled over his many offspring and their families and was a stern taskmaster and disciplinarian. Eventually people became disgruntled with **Ato** and his autocratic ways and plotted to kill him. The murder was accomplished and in its wake followed social upheaval and warfare among the sons. Some of the sons joined together as protection against others, amalgamating themselves within one ceremonial house, other sons and their ceremonial houses were totally eliminated. Warfare was endemic and to save themselves and their families, the ceremonial house groups fled the original settlement and founded new settlements scattered throughout New Britain, and in Bariai.

Kabana genealogies are six generations deep. Ascending and descending generational categories include **gau** ('ego, myself'); **tna-** and **tama-** (M, F), and **natu-** ('child'); **tibu-** (MM,FF, CC); **asasa-** (FFF,MMM, CCC); **gaba-** (FFFF,MMMM, CCCC); **sese-** (FFFFFF,MMMMM, CCCCC); **ae- blak** (FFFFFF **[Ato]**,

MMMMMM, CCCCCC); **Upuda**. The most all-inclusive category of kinship ego can claim membership in is referred to as **sig kelede**, 'one blood', or **tibu kelede**, 'common grandparent'. We of 'one blood' or, of a 'common grandparent/ancestor' are metaphorical expressions of the way in which the Kabana conceptualize kinship relations. Despite a patrilineal bias, Kabana social structure, like that of their Kilege neighbours "is characterized by an overlapping system of descent categories and organizations established on the basis of cognatic descent" (Zelenietz and Grant 1984). Ego is recognized as belonging to or having the right to claim membership in any **sig kelede** that she or he can trace a descent relationship through genealogical connections of "shared blood", that can go back four generations, through either his/her father or mother.

The founder of a **sig kelede** is the husband/wife dyad. It is they who first settled on and cleared virgin territory, thus laying claim to particular parcels of land. By clearing the land, planting gardens and trees, these ancestors laid the foundation for the well-being of their future progeny, and because the land, and the trees planted on it, are named after the original settlers, the ancestors also laid a claim to renown. A person's name never dies; renown becomes synonymous with the cultivated land and trees which

only exist as resources because of the 'strength', or vital essence (the 'blood, sweat, and tears'), invested in it by progenitors and perpetuated through the descendants of that ancestor. As with the Kwaio, Kabana ancestors "serve as crucial points of reference in terms of which the living trace their relationship to one another and the land" (Keesing 1982:84).

Following Zelenietz's discussion of a similar social unit found among the Kilege, the Kabana **sig kelede** is an unnamed, "non-localized, non-discrete" cognatic descent category, or ramage, whose membership "never gathers in whole, or even in large part, to act as a group. . . . ramage exist to control and exploit particular resources, and to delimit resource use" (1980: 82). The idiom of cognatic descent makes it possible for any individual to claim membership in a number of ramage provided they can establish with validity a common ancestral connection. Each ramage is unnamed but is associated with one or more named 'men's ceremonial houses', **lum**. In the past, the men's ceremonial house was where all the deceased members of that men's house were buried, hence **lum** is also the term for 'graveyard', 'place of the dead'. The men's house is named after and owns the particular tract of land upon which it is built. Ideally, all those who can claim descent from the men's house founder have rights of membership in, and

usufructuary rights of access to the resources of that men's house. In fact, men's house membership is determined by the activation of those rights through local residence on the land associated with the men's house, the use of its resources, and participation in men's house activities.

Every Kabana village contains one or more hamlets. Each hamlet consists of numerous **luma**, 'women's houses, married quarters', and is organized around a men's ceremonial house, whether or not an actual building exists. Kokopo, for example, has four hamlets, three men's houses and a total of 45 'women's houses'. The fourth hamlet's men's house is not represented by an actual structure since there are too few surviving descendants (one nuclear family) of that men's house to justify maintaining a building. When, or if, a sufficient number of persons activate their rights to membership (as 'one blood') in that men's house, a building will be erected. In the meantime, members of the defunct men's house are given a place of their own inside another men's house where they are automatically members based on the bonds of shared blood.

The interior of each men's house is spatially divided into a number of named sections, each section representing a group of agnatic and non-agnatic cognates or enates, persons who trace membership in the men's house group

through females (cf Lawrence 1984: 45). Each section in the men's house is headed by the most senior male, that is the eldest surviving male, of that cognatic group. Members of a men's house actively reside on land belonging to the men's house, and communally exert control over its resources, including inherited ceremonial artifacts and designs (**mosi**) which are used during the ceremonial personification of various spirit beings (e.g. masked dancers **aulu**; bull-roarer **tibuda**). The men's house membership acts as a group, under the tutelage of the senior men, to ensure the proper and timely performance of ceremonials in honour of their recent dead. The success or failure of these ceremonials reflects on the overall renown and prestige of the particular men's house whose firstborn or collective dead are being honoured.

Kabana kinship terms denote a basic human relationship differentiated in terms of age (**kapei**, 'big, elder'; **kakau**, 'little, younger') and sex. Ego refers to all persons in the first ascending generation as 'my mother', **tnag** or 'my father', **tamag**; in the second ascending as 'grandparent' **tibug**, and so on. Ego refers to persons of the same generation as cousin/sibling: **liug**, 'my sibling opposite sex', **tadig**, 'my sibling same sex', or **leg sil**, 'my cross-cousin'; members of the first descending generation are **natug** 'my child', and the second descending generation are 'my grandchild'

### **tibug.**

The basis for locating oneself within the universe of kin-based relations is the parent/child relationship. This is the first relationship any individual experiences and the one from which all other relations are defined. By ascertaining what sort of relationship exists between one's parents and a particular other, ego is able to define his or her relationship to other persons within his/her egocentric kindred. Kabana kinship nomenclature does provide a separate reciprocal term for mother's brother and sister's child (**oa-**; MB/ZC), but this is a formal term, rarely used in practice. The more common form of MB/ZC address/reference being simply **tama-/natu-**; 'father/child'. The MB/ZC relationship does have connotations slightly different from the father/child relationship, however, it carries no special ritual or ceremonial obligations.

The Kabana system of kin reckoning and relations can be rendered schematically as follows. The maximal cognatic descent category, 'we of one blood' (**gai sig kelede**), is at least four generations in depth (FFFF/MMMM). Thus, for example, those who trace their descent from FFFF constitute a **sig kelede**; those who trace their descent from FFFeB, or from FFFyB each constitute a different branch of the **sig kelede**. Reckoning the **sig kelede**

from the fifth ascending generation expands the category of 'one bloods' quantitatively to include all those who are cognates of FFFFF, and relative to the issue at hand, any individual can and will use a fifth generation cognatic connection to validate his/her claim. The preferred rule of marriage is for ego to marry within this four generational maximal category, but outside the minimal category; thus spouses should be second generation cross-cousins, **silsil**, (MMMBSS/FFFZDD).

Neither the ramage nor the men's house group demarcates a marriage universe, that is, they are not endogamous or exogamous social units *per se*. In choosing an eligible spouse, the Kabana stress, first, that a potential spouse should be someone to whom ego is related by 'shared blood' (**sig kelede**). Marrying within the category 'one blood' ensures, as one informant succinctly put it, that by virtue of the bonds of shared blood, "your spouse has your best interests and welfare at heart". Spouses protect one another from danger by being ever watchful of each other's interests and also protect each other's personal belongings and detritus, so these do not fall into the wrong hands where they might become an effective medium for sorcery attacks. On the other hand, the bond of 'shared blood' between potential spouses ought not to be 'too close', with the degree of closeness defined as any individual of the



opposite sex with whom ego shares a common grandparent. In more formal terms, spouses should be chosen from among that category of individuals who stand in relation to one another as second generation cross-cousins.

Post-marital residence is ideally virilocal, although the idiom of cognatic descent permits a wide range of choice in residence, affiliation and alliance. When a woman marries, she retains her rights to membership in her natal kindred, rights which she transfers to her children. When a man marries, he is given rights to his father's land, or if he prefers he can take up residence in his mother's natal area and exercise his rights of access to the land of his maternal kindred. Ideally, marriages should follow a limited form of "sister" exchange, thus a woman should marry a man (MMBSS; **silsil** 'cross-cousin') of her mother's patrikin in her mother's natal village. In this way a woman "takes the place of" her mother, lives virilocally in her mother's natal village, and claims her mother's matrikin and patrikin land rights and obligations. If there is no daughter to marry back into the mother's natal village, the woman's matrikin will adopt her last born child (male or female) as a "replacement" for the woman they have lost. This process of adoption called **tisau kuru**, 'they pull compensation, replacement', ensures that the

woman's birthrights in her natal cognatic kindred are transferred to and perpetuated through a child of her blood. The child is said to "eat of the land of its mother" (**ian itna ele tano**).

While the preferred rule of marriage can be simply stated as cross-cousin marriage or a form of sister exchange, the Kabana do not conceive of themselves as being divided in terms of a moiety system with wife-givers and wife-takers balancing the system. Although ideally a woman's daughter marries back into her mother's group, only one daughter should do so. The Kabana consider it "wrong" and verging on incestuous for a second daughter to "follow" her sister and also marry back into her maternal kindred. One such marriage occurred while I was in the village, and caused great consternation as well as stress and (initially) ill-feeling between the two sisters. In this instance, a woman's elder daughter (firstborn child) married her MBSS, her second daughter chose to marry a young man who was a cross-cousin and classificatory sibling of her sister's husband. As siblings, these two men are considered to be the same person, thus both sisters symbolically were married to the same man and each sister felt that the other was coveting her husband. This also confused the kin relations between the four young people who were simultaneously siblings and affines, thus

complicating the close bonds expected of siblings/cross-cousins as persons of "shared blood" (ego's cognates), and the more formal respect relationship of affine (spouse's cognates). The consensus was that the second sister should have married someone from a different cognatic descent group within her natal village, or someone from her father's mother's village, so that she and her children could "eat from the land of her fathers".

### Marriage

The status of parenthood, "comes into existence, uniquely, once and for all, with the birth of the first child" (Fortes 1974: 82), and "the necessary qualification for legitimate parenthood" is marriage. In this section I discuss marriage, procreation and the achievement of parenthood in Kabana culture and society. Most anthropological accounts of the life cycle end the birth to maturity phase at the point where the individual marries and has at least one child. With the birth of the first child, the married couple have left behind the childhood phase of the life cycle and entered into the adult phase. They are accorded the status of adult, and are assumed to be fully responsible and participatory members of the social group (*c.f.*: Hau'ofa 1981: 127-129), their presence assumed in the description of various social activities and events.

While marriage for the Kabana does constitute a *rite de passage* from the childhood to the adulthood phase of the life cycle, it does not confer upon the married couple the status, prestige and knowledge required to be fully responsible, functioning members of society. Marriage marks the beginning of a twenty year period of learning, by participation, the rights and obligations of social and personal adulthood. Without marriage, or more accurately, without a spouse, full social adulthood is not possible.

The Kabana recognize that females attain physical maturity earlier than males. They attribute the priority of female maturation to the fact that female blood is 'cool', whereas male blood is 'hot' and explain the difference in terms of an agricultural metaphor. When taro is planted in soil that is cool and damp it grows rapidly and produces large, well-rounded corms; taro planted in soil that is dry, hardened by the heat of the sun, does not grow quickly and the corms are longer and less rounded. The female body is soft, moist and cool; the male body is hard, hot and dry; like the taro planted in a swampy area, females mature more quickly than males.

Included in the Kabana description of female anatomy is a 'tube', or 'rope', a vessel like an artery, that connects a woman's breasts with her womb.<sup>8</sup> A woman should not marry and/or become pregnant until her breasts

'fall' and touch her chest. This is an external indicator that the 'rope' connecting her breasts and womb has relaxed, and that her pelvic structure is sufficiently developed and flexible to carry and deliver a baby. The Kabana hold that a nubile girl who conceives while her breasts still 'stand up' will have a difficult pregnancy and delivery, and is, moreover, likely to die during childbirth because her pelvic bones are too rigid to permit the passage of the child through the birth canal. Thus, while the onset of her menses marks the fact of her fertility, in Kabana thought it does not follow that she is capable of successfully realizing it. Kabana boys are old enough to marry when they have pubic and facial hair. The presence of axillary hair growth is also an external indicator of internal maturation; his semen is more than 'just water', it is strong enough to nourish a foetus. When a young man begins to shave, he is mature enough to marry. He is at the peak of his physical development and potential, 'strong' enough to raise and maintain a family.

Choosing a spouse is a serious matter. In the past marriages were arranged since parents and elders felt they were more experienced in the pragmatics of such matters, their perspective unclouded by the demands of a burgeoning sexuality which afflicts the young. Nowadays, young people choose their own spouses, otherwise, the traditional criteria for choosing a

spouse and the various stages of getting married and setting up a household remain virtually unchanged. The most important criterion in choosing a partner is that she or he be 'strong', i.e., someone who knows how to work hard and is not lazy. The ideal husband is a young man who has proven his ability as a provider by clearing, planting, fencing, and harvesting his own gardens. He is obedient to his elders, assists them with gifts of food and labour, and shows his willingness to learn the necessary skills of social life by accompanying his male kin in the demanding activities of accumulating shell currency (**bula**), pigs, and other objects of material wealth. The ideal husband has an even temperament, is a skilled conversationalist and story-teller, and knows the value of laughter.

Young men who do not exhibit these qualities are referred to in Tok Pisin as *bilas bilong ples*, 'village decoration', or, in Kabana as **gareso**, a species of sea bird. This large bird hovers on the up-draft along the shoreline looking for bits of food exposed by the tides, expecting to find its food lying on the beach, free for the taking without any work on its part. Young men who are lazy are like the scavenging **gareso**, village decorations who are unlikely to be considered the best choice for a husband or son-in-law. Such men who do marry are thought to have acquired a wife through the use of love magic

(**borou**, 'sorcery, magic'), which effectively clouds the woman's mind so that she becomes obsessed with the young (or older) man and insists on marrying him (sometimes with threats of suicide if her kin are reluctant to contract the marriage).

Similar qualities of excellence are looked for in marriageable young women. A woman must be 'strong', a hard worker, someone who knows how to garden, cook, and maintain a household with all that this entails. As a young girl she must have learned the business of tending a pig herd, and the skills necessary for the production of material wealth such as mats and shellmoney. She, too, should be obedient to her parents and elders. Unbidden, she should graciously look after guests with food, water, and other amenities during their stay, for this is evidence that she has concern for the welfare of others, (**ilolo isasat uduanga**) she 'thinks on', 'has respect for' others (compare the Garia concept of *nɔnɔnɔnɔ* in Lawrence 1984). The metaphors, 'free-loading sea-bird' and 'village decoration' are never applied to females, only to males, probably because, from my observations, to be female and lazy were mutually contradictory states of being.

A young woman who has reached the age of marriageability should be, like her male counterpart, chaste and modest, or at least discreet.

Premarital sex is neither condemned nor condoned. Promiscuity, however, leads to gossip and a negative reputation for both men and women, which might reduce their options in obtaining an appropriate marriage partner. Promiscuity is also considered to be one cause of female barrenness. Young adults are encouraged to marry in order that their sexuality be channeled legitimately and fruitfully.

When, to the satisfaction of his parents, a young man has mastered the skills that are necessary to maintain a household, his parents undertake to obtain a wife for him. Usually the young man has made known whom he would like to marry by discussing the matter with one of his mother's or father's brothers, who speak to his parents on his behalf. The young man's father visits the parents of the chosen woman. It is exceedingly bad etiquette among the Kabana to state the purpose of your visit immediately upon arrival at your destination. Immediately guests present themselves, the host provides food, drink, smoking materials, and areca nut, during the consumption of which hosts and guests exchange the latest news and views. At the appropriate time, the host enquires of his guests why they have honoured him with a visit, what burden they carry that perhaps he can assist with. According to the rules of etiquette for contracting a marriage, the



young man's father addresses his host as **leg sil**, 'my cross-cousin', (thus applying a kin term that connotes kinship and demands a relationship of mutual obligations), and acknowledges that he is indeed burdened. He goes on to relate that he has a son who has mastered the skills to provide for and protect a wife and family, but this son has no wife. There follows a lengthy discussion of the relative merits of the boy, of the importance and benefits of marriage, and of various marriageable girls. Eventually the man enquires whether or not his host's daughter has been betrothed, and if not, perhaps she would consider marrying his worthless son. The young woman's father confirms that she is not betrothed, promises to consult with her as to her wishes in the matter, and instructs his guest to return the following morning for a reply to his petition. That evening the woman and her parents discuss the young man (his attributes and familial background) and the girl is given the opportunity to accept or reject his proposal in private. If she accepts, her parents agree to arrange the matter for her.

Next day the young man's father returns for the decision. He is advised that the girl is willing to marry his son, and he is told to return the next day with his wife and son. Next day, after the usual social amenities are observed, the young woman is summoned by her parents and instructed that

she should speak out in the presence of her family and their guests regarding her inclination to marry the young man. She addresses the young man as **leg silsil**, 'my [marriageable] cross-cousin' and asks if indeed he wishes to marry her, whereupon he replies that he does, but that the decision is hers to make. She then states that they will be married, for she has watched him and, in her eyes, he is a man. The two young people are now officially betrothed, and although no public proclamation is ever made of the betrothal, everyone in the village and beyond has been aware of the meetings and their purpose.

Neither during these preliminary arrangements, nor at any other time is the subject of bridewealth raised. For either party in the arrangement to discuss or quibble about the amount of bridewealth to be given over is to effectively shame or insult the other party. If the bride's family mentions the bridewealth they are insinuating either that the groom's family might not have the wherewithal to provide an adequate bridewealth, or that they have an inflated notion of the prestige and worth both of themselves and their daughter. If the groom's family raises the question, they are asking the woman's family to define their worth and value as individuals in terms of material wealth, i.e., to brag. An individual should never have to make known

his or her value through self-praise; indeed, besides being in bad taste, it is extremely dangerous to do so. The Kabana are very aware of the relativity of social distinctions and that to raise yourself up is *de facto* to put someone else down. This shames the individual so denigrated, and the person who causes others to be shamed is open to sorcery attack as a negative sanction for breach of moral obligation. Others should know your value and worth, and act accordingly.

Once the marriage is arranged, the bridegroom's parents begin immediately to gather the 'bridewealth', **garebo**. Nowadays, this wealth may include Papua New Guinea currency, but for the most part is made up of traditional weath items: 'gold' shell money, black shell-money, one or more pigs, several clay pots, carved ironwood 'Siasi or 'Tami' bowls, woven Lolo baskets, pandanus mats, canoe paddles, spears, special paddles for stirring taro pudding, one or more dogs. Most of these items are not manufactured by the Kabana and must be obtained from trade partners. The Kabana exchange shellmoney, pigs and pandanus mats for clay pots and ironwood bowls from the Kilege, whence they come from the Siasi Islands; woven coil baskets from the Kilege's neighbours, the Lolo; red ochre and, in the past, obsidian from Volupai in the Kove District; and dogs from Unea, in the Vitu Islands.

These are the trade networks and items of exchange which Harding (1967:187) predicted would reach their "final demise within a decade, if not sooner" due to the destructive effects of acculturation on cultural organization. This has not been the case, and the trade routes and items that circulate throughout them continue to be a vital part of the socioeconomic organization of the Kabana and other cultural groups in West New Britain (cf. Chowning: 1978b; Counts 1979).

The parents of the bridegroom activate their network of trade and exchange partners (**sobosobo**, 'kin'; T.P.: *bisnis*, 'relatives') as they begin to gather together the necessary bridewealth for their son's marriage. Each parent first approaches his or her cognatic kin to make known their needs, call in debts owed them, or to negotiate new debts for the needed items. They next visit their long distance 'kin' or trade friends again following the same procedure. All the individuals thus contacted may not, of course, have immediately available the means to pay their debts or meet the new requests, so they in turn contact their trade friends calling in debts owed them, or incurring new ones to pay those owed, and so on. The necessity to collect bridewealth (or wealth for firstborn and mortuary ceremonies) for one individual activates a wide ranging network of social and economic relations.

When one considers that there are any number of people preparing to marry, or sponsor firstborn or mortuary ceremonies at any given time in the district, it can be appreciated how much time, energy and material wealth are being continually expended to meet these eventualities.

While the groom's parents are accumulating the bridewealth, a process that might take a year and longer, the betrothed couple spend much of their time in service to their respective future in-laws. The bride-to-be can spend days or weeks at a time in the company of her future mother-in-law, working in the garden, harvesting food and preparing meals, carrying firewood and water, and in general relieving her mother-in-law of much of the toil associated with daily chores. A solicitous and hard-working daughter-in-law is a delight all women look forward to as a welcome respite and hard-earned rest in their middle years.

Some women take more than full advantage of the labour of their daughters-in-law. One mother related to me how for weeks her daughter had worked from dawn until after dusk, while the girl's future mother-in-law led a life of leisure. When she saw how over-worked her daughter was, she sent word that the girl was needed to assist her own parents in their gardens. When the girl returned, she was given a much needed break from her heavy

work load. The groom also works for his father-in-law, taking over the grueling chores of cutting and clearing garden plots, and of cutting and carrying the trees for garden fences, house posts, or canoes, harvesting coconuts, and producing copra. In addition to the services they perform for their future in-laws, the young couple are also occupied with preparing new gardens of their own, and tending the garden the young man has previously planted. Since married couples live in their own dwelling separate from their parents, and a wife will not join her husband until he provides her with her own house, the groom is also busy building a new house in readiness for the day when he will bring his wife to live with him.

When the bridewealth has been accumulated, word is sent to the parents of the bride, advising the day when the bridewealth will be delivered to them. On the allotted day, the groom's kin enter the village in a long procession so that all may see the wealth they carry as they make their way to the house of the bride's parents, where the wealth is displayed on the veranda. On one such occasion, the groom and his family, who were from the village of Gurisi, arrived in Kokopo at late afternoon with the bridewealth for a woman who is a firstborn child. They entered the village from the east in single file. At the head of the procession were two men carrying a large trussed pig on their shoulders. Behind them came two more men, one at

either end of a pole which was heavily laden with shellmoney. They were followed by a long line of women, some carrying clay pots inverted on their heads, others with rolls of pandanus mats, woven baskets, or carved ironwood bowls. Young men brought up the rear carrying canoe paddles and great quantities of areca nut slung over their shoulders. This, I was told, made up only half of the bridewealth that would be given over. There was 20 fathoms 'gold' shellmoney, 50 fathoms 'black' shellmoney, 1 large female pig, 30 pandanus mats, 10 clay pots, 4 woven baskets, and 6 sets of carved and painted canoe paddles. The procession walked to the western perimeter of the village and then, with the village population following behind them, back to the eastern end of the village where they deposited the wealth at the bride's home.

When this was completed, everyone sat down to smoke, chew areca nut, and enjoy a visit while awaiting the feast of cooked pork and taro pudding that the bride's family had prepared. Just before dusk, the food was distributed, and the groom and his kin returned to their homes. The bride does not go with her husband at this time, but remains behind until the day of her wedding feast, at which time she and her husband are officially and publicly married (see below). The bride's parents store the bridewealth away; it is not distributed until after the birth of their daughter's first child.

For the Kabana, the provision of bridewealth does not imply that the woman is a commodity whose worth can be measured in terms of culturally valued material items. Females are not considered chattels and a married woman does not become the property of her husband. In her discussion of bridewealth in Buka, Blackwood (1935: 99) notes that "it is a wife, as distinct from a woman in her capacity as an individual, that is purchased . . . . She is not thereby prevented from being a person with rights of her own in the community". Similarly, Firth notes (1963: 456) that, "a wife in Tikopia is a free agent, in no sense the property of her husband to a greater or lesser degree than he is hers". Within the framework of Kabana concepts of gender, males and females are not the same, they are decidedly different, but it does not follow from this that gender relations are inherently unequal or characterized by notions of dominance and submission. In discussing gender relations with me, mature Kabana women and men continually emphasized that gender relations are based on parity. They found it ludicrous, indeed hooted with laughter, at the suggestion that females were in any sense second class citizens. This is reflected in the less formal Kabana reciprocal term for 'spouse', **ag arag**, which is glossed as 'my part', or 'a portion of my self'. Given that a wife is a 'portion' of her husband's self or being, it does not make sense to the Kabana that a part of one's self should be lesser than



oneself, for that is to demean the totality of the self.<sup>9</sup>

While mature married couples emphasize the balanced, complementary and interdependent relations that obtain between husbands and wives, they also recognize that the early years of marital relations are difficult and often volatile due to the arrogance and selfishness of youth, and further complicated by the 'heat' of sexuality which clouds the mind with jealousy and suspicions that can erupt in wife-beating, marital breakdown and in some instances, attempted suicide. When a young bride is officially taken by her cognatic kin to her husband's village, she takes with her gifts of wealth including shellmoney, clay pots, pandanus sleeping mats, baskets, carved iron wood bowls and a variety of other items necessary for setting up a household. This wealth is not part of the bridewealth that was received for the woman. It is called **iduduga**, 'she enters inside' [her husband's village], and is wealth "given" to her by her maternal and paternal kin (a debt her parents must repay). It is the bride's own personal wealth, over which she alone has rights of disposal. Older married couples gave two reasons for the custom of endowing a young bride with her own wealth. First, and most importantly, the wealth gives the young woman autonomy and a certain independence from her husband. If she wants to give her things away or make a contribution to a kinsperson who is short of wealth for some purpose or

other, it is entirely her prerogative and her husband has no say in the matter. She has the wherewithal to meet her obligations to give to kinspeople without making claims on her husband and his kin; she thus has 'strength' and is not shamed by being dependent on her affines as a source of wealth. Her personal wealth, and the fact that she is now officially the usufructary "owner" of the gardens in her husband's area that were her mother's and in which she has laboured since she was old enough to do so, also gives her leverage during arguments. Kabana women maintain that without this wealth an angry husband can thoroughly shame his wife by demeaning her as a dependent, a person who "sits on his hand", and lives off his "strength". Persons who "eat from the hand of others" are shamed as rubbish (**borabora**). A woman with an endowment can retort that her husband has done nothing for her, since all that she possesses has been supplied by herself and her kin, not his, and that he, too, "eats from her hand".

A second reason why it is imperative for a young bride to have her personal wealth pertains directly to the potential for violent arguments in fledgling marriages, and a desire to avoid embroiling the two affinal groups in contentious disputes. When people are upset or distraught they are likely to destroy their personal belongings as an expression of their anger, or in the case of suicide attempts, as notification that they are "going away" (cf.:

Counts 1980). If an angry wife destroyed her husband's property, he and his kin would demand that it be replaced, since the property was not hers to destroy. A woman's kin avoid becoming indebted to her affines by providing her with personal property which she can dispose of, or destroy, in any manner that suits her.

All Kabana women take with them into marriage their own personal wealth. The quantity and quality of the wealth she brings with her is not a set amount, and the procession which accompanies her to her husband's village may be small and pass unnoticed by others busy with their daily affairs. The situation is somewhat different when the bride is a firstborn child. Organizing the wealth and the procession to bring a firstborn to her husband's home may take several days of preparation, and has moments of high drama. I shall return to this topic of endowment and the redistribution of bridewealth as it pertains to firstborn daughters when I discuss the complex of firstborn ceremonies.

Depending on parental resources, bridewealth might be received some weeks or even months before the actual wedding day, since the bride's parents are again required to provide a wedding feast of cooked pork and taro for the

groom's kin, and all those who attend the marriage. On the day of the wedding feast, determined by the availability of parental/kindred garden produce, pigs and material wealth, the village is a hive of activity. A female pig is slaughtered and butchered, with various pieces of pork distributed among the bride's female kin who cook it in their stone ovens. The women are also busy preparing taro which is wrapped in banana leaves and baked in the stone ovens. The men busy themselves collecting ripe coconuts for making coconut cream, drinking coconuts, and great quantities of areca nut, betel pepper, and tobacco. Young men go to the bush to collect decorative leaves and flowers, and to cut lengths of bamboo out of which they will construct the long bench required for the marriage ceremony.

By late afternoon all is ready and the food is removed from the stone ovens. The taro is removed first and taken to various of the bride's 'fathers' (e.g., FB, MB) for the final stage in preparing taro pudding, a favoured feast item. Each man fills a large ironwood bowl with the cooked taro and stirs in the coconut cream with a paddle used specifically for stirring taro pudding. When the taro pudding is ready, the pork is removed from the oven and a portion of the meat, carefully chosen according to the relationship between

donor and recipient, is laid on the top of each dish of taro pudding. The food is then carried to the public plaza in front of the 'men's house' of the bride's patrilineal kin. One of the bride's senior male kin (e.g. MB, FB, FF, MF) distributes the taro pudding and pork allocating one dish of food to each lineage in each men's house in the village, and one each to the senior male cognate representing the men's houses in other villages with whom the bride and her family are affiliated. These men take the food and distribute it among their respective men's house membership, giving a portion to each male head of household, who in turn shares the food with his wife and children. After everyone has received and eaten their food, the actual marriage ceremony begins.

The bride is gloriously bedecked in her wedding finery. She has a new fibre skirt made of dried and shredded sago frond shoots that have been dyed in bright primary colours, dyes which nowadays come from the trade stores in town. Her upper arms are laden with incised trochus shell armlets (**mase**), and armlets made of tortoise shell (**mase pon**) which support flowers and fragrant leaves. Flowers, variegated leaves and strings of shell money adorn her neck. Her whole body and her face are covered in paint, red on the left side

and black on the right side. The groom also wears decorations, although they are not so lavish. He wears woven armbands (**poipoi sara**), made by and traded from the Lolo people in the mountainous area of Kileje. He, too, has stuck flowers and scented leaves in his armbands and wears splotches of red paint on his temples, or on his forehead between his eyes and down the bridge of his nose.

These colours worn by the bride and groom carry a variety of symbolic meanings. Black, for example, is associated with death, mourning, anger, sadness; red is associated with heat, blood, life and happiness. When worn by a bride, I was told, black is symbolic of the sadness felt by the woman and her family, sadness because she would soon be leaving them to take up residence with her husband. It also indicated mourning for the 'death' of her childhood, the leaving behind of her 'carefree' existence as a single woman, and with it her unmarried female age-mates. Red is symbolic of the blood that was spilled when the bride's mother gave her birth, and when as a young girl, the bride had her ears pierced and elongated. It is also symbolic of the woman's fertility and the blood she will spill giving birth to the children she and her husband will have. The 'heat' of intercourse is also represented in the

red paint she wears, as is the happiness that people wish for her and her husband in their marriage, and the happiness they will all derive from the children of the marriage. Red signifies the joy felt in the knowledge that the cycle of life is unfolding as it should, as it has unfolded in the past, and through the young couple, as it will continue to unfold in the future.

Embarrassed at being the centre of attention and by the fact that everyone knows they will 'sleep together' (engage in sexual intercourse) on this night, the two are led to the centre of the plaza in front of the men's house, where the young men have placed the long bamboo bench they constructed earlier. The bride is led over to the bench by a female cross-cousin/sister (**sil/silsil**; FZD,MBD) where she sits on the extreme right end. All her single female age-mates form a line standing beside her. The groom is led by a male cross-cousin/brother (FZS/MBS) to his place on the extreme left end of the bench, and all his age-mates line up beside him. The bride and groom are each requested by their respective cross-cousin, to move over so that he or she can sit down; the next person in line follows suit, and then the next, each requesting that everyone slide over to make room for them to sit. Gradually, the bride and groom are pushed ever closer together,

until they are squeezed up against each other by the crowd of young people sharing their bench. At this point, a great cheer is raised by all the on-lookers. The bride and groom are officially married.

More food is brought out and distributed as before. This time a special plate of taro pudding, with a length of shell money placed on top, is given to the female and male cross-cousins who led the couple to the bench and instigated the process of pushing them together. Besides being cross-cousins/siblings to the married couple, these two persons are important trade and exchange partners (**sobosobo**) upon whom the couple will depend as a source of assistance in obtaining wealth and labour, and for support in times of conflict. Individual plates of cooked taro with small pieces of pork on them are then distributed to everyone present, and the whole assembly eats together.

Later in the evening, someone, usually a grandparent, will announce that it is late and time to sleep, and the gathering disperses as people go off to their homes. The bride and groom retire to a little house that has been prepared for them. Around midnight, the married couple are 'inspected' by two of their 'small mothers', a mother's or father's younger sister. With a torch



made of dried and tightly wrapped coconut fronds, the two women enter the bridal chamber to see how the newly weds are sleeping. If one or the other is lying with his or her back turned, or if they have both turned their backs to one another, this suggests to the 'inspectors' that the young couple might not be compatible. If this is the case, the two women wait and check on the couple again the following night, and if there is no change, they will check on the third night. If the situation persists, the newly-weds are asked by their 'mothers' about their marital relationship and whether they wish to continue it. Should they reply that they do not want to be married to one another after all, the marriage is effectively annulled from that point. If, when checked by the women, they are lying face to face in each others arms, they are considered to be compatible, and the marriage a success. Next day they are gently teased that they should continue to sleep in this way until they expect a child.

### Procreation

Sexually mature females and males are believed to be innately fertile. There is no concept of male sterility and infertility is solely a female

condition attributed to female interference with physiological processes or breach of morality. There are only two explanations for a woman's failure to conceive. First, the woman may have 'drunk rope', that is, she might have consumed an infusion made from the bark of a particular vine which causes permanent sterility. Second, she may be believed to have committed adultery. A woman who has had sexual relations with more than one man will be unable to conceive because the semen of one man will 'kill' the power and sustenance contained in the semen of the second man. If a woman is promiscuous or engages in adulterous affairs, she will not conceive. The potency of male semen is adversely affected by contact with the semen of any other men contained in the bodies of sexually active women. If a man's semen is not 'strong' it will be unable to nourish the *fœtus in utero*, and his wife will not conceive or she might miscarry. If a woman's blood is not 'strong', it will wash away the embryo and semen at her next menstrual cycle. Ultimately, conception depends on the 'strength' of the woman's blood and the man's semen, and their morality. It is this relationship posited between adultery and non-conception that is the source of jealous quarrels between newly married, childless couples mentioned earlier.

The Kabana are fully cognizant of the relationship between sexual intercourse and procreation, but they do not view reproduction as simply an epiphenomenon of biology. For a married couple, pregnancy and birth are culturally defined and socially organized processes which transcend and give meaning to a biological event (see Scaletta, 1984b). The Kabana perceive marriage as a partnership and, as married couples explained to me, spouses must work together, honour and obey each other, and jointly manage their affairs and resources. Thus, spouses say of each other 'what's mine is yours also' (**leg danga kelede eau togo**).

Pregnancy is the result of multiple acts of intercourse. Initially, a single act of intercourse is required during which embodied female vital essence (blood) combines with embodied male vital essence (semen) to 'fasten' the 'child' in the womb. In subsequent acts of intercourse, semen provides nourishment, thus contributing to the growth and development of the embryo held fast in the womb by the woman's blood. In addition to sexual intercourse, conception is also dependent upon the couple's social intercourse, the quantity and quality of the time they spend in each other's company in their day-to-day work and leisure activity. A woman confirms to

herself that she is pregnant after she has missed two menstrual cycles, provided she is confident that her social and sexual relations with her husband warrant such a conclusion. If she considers the totality of her marital relations insufficient for conception to occur, she waits until she has missed her third menstrual period before sharing with her husband the fact that she is pregnant. There are no public announcements or special ceremonies to mark a woman's first pregnancy.

Once pregnancy is affirmed, the couple will continue to have sexual relations until the woman experiences foetal movement. By this time, the woman's breasts are swollen with the beginning of lactation. These are signs that the foetus is fully formed in the womb and able to continue to grow on its own. Once the woman's swollen breasts and darkened nipples indicate the availability of mother's milk, sustenance from semen is no longer required since the foetus will continue to be nourished *in utero* by the mother's milk. Semen is considered inimical to mother's milk; it will taint the milk thereby causing the foetus, and later, the nursing child, to become ill. The existence of the 'rope' in the Kabana description of female anatomy provides an explanation for how semen can affect mother's milk. The couple

should abstain from sexual relations from this culturally defined phase of foetal development until the child is weaned, a period of three or more years.

A child is a product of its parents' vital substances, the 'life force' contained in the blood and semen that conceived and nourished it in the womb, and of the parents' sexual and social relationship. A child is a real part of the parents' physical and sociopsychological being. Because of this, throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing, particularly for a firstborn child, parents must monitor their activities and observe various taboos so that their child is not affected adversely. Expectant parents must avoid particular areas in the surrounding bush that are known to be inhabited by bush spirits (**iriau**; T.P.: *masalai*). These spirits can invade an individual's body and be transmitted to the foetus/child from the parent, and, since the 'spirit' or 'life principle' (**tautau**) of the foetus/child is weak and undeveloped, the spirits can cause the mother to experience false labour, miscarry, or cause the child to be stillborn.

There are various food taboos to be observed by expectant parents. For example, certain species of fish that live hidden in rocks or the crevices of coral formations, or octopus and crab should not be eaten by either parent as

this would cause the foetus (or newborn) to suffocate. Similarly, an expectant father should not go diving or fishing underwater, or pile his coconuts in a heap as this, too, would cause the child to suffocate. A pregnant couple is forbidden to eat any food cooked in the stone oven, again because the consumption of such foods would cause the foetus/child to smother. In times past, pregnant women were forbidden to eat any food except taro and *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber) that had been cooked in boiling water. Nowadays, pregnant women are expected to and do crave the sea cucumber, and they are constantly given large quantities as gifts by neighbours and kin. All foods cooked in or with coconut products were taboo because coconut oil would cause the child to be fretful or sickly. The taboo on coconuts during pregnancy and immediately afterward is founded on the symbolic connection in the set of triads: females: coconuts: males; and, mother's milk: coconut milk: male sperm.<sup>10</sup>

For the Kabana, as in many societies, the actual process of giving birth "is characterized by a high degree of non-public intimacy, since it has to do with bodily functions and bodily displays" (Jordan 1983:8) and, as such, it is a private event. The social organization of the Kabana system of childbirth does

not lend itself readily to observation. A woman will tell no one that she has begun labour until she knows that the time of delivery is imminent. She then advises her husband, who in turn alerts those close female kin that his wife wants to attend and assist her at the birth. For Kabana women, childbirth is almost a clandestine process (see Scaletta 1984b, for a detailed case study of childbirth).

The blood of parturition is symbolically a 'hot', dangerous substance which can cause all those who come into direct contact with it to sicken and quite possibly to die. Because of the quality of danger inherent in the blood of birth, women do not give birth in their houses, since anything under or in the house would be at risk of contamination from the blood of parturition actually or symbolically seeping through the floor-boards. It is also forbidden to give birth in the gardens since the smell of blood will attract wild pigs to the site and they will ravage the food crop. Women prefer to give birth on the ground, the most favoured place being on the beach.

Although they remain nearby, ready to fetch and carry whatever the midwife, **berber taine aea** (<**ber** 'to split'; **berberia** 'to squat'; **taine aea** 'of women'; the term comes from a description of the position assumed during childbirth) or birth attendants require, men are not welcome during childbirth. Besides the risk of contamination from the blood of parturition,

the women say they would be 'shamed' (*maeamaea*) to have men witness this most intimate of female bodily functions. In addition to men and young children, any female who has not given birth is also forbidden to witness the event. The women claim that the hard work, the pain and duration of labour, and the sight and power of blood would so frighten a young, inexperienced woman that she would 'drink rope' so that she would never have to go through the travail of childbirth. Giving birth is mature women's work—all males, as well as the young and uninitiated females are excluded.

Birth attendants are always from the category of kinswomen called mother and/or sister. The attendants lend their 'power'—their experiential knowledge, their knowledge of procedures, and their personal and secret repertoire of magical spells—to the woman giving birth. As kinswomen, they have in common the culturally-valued and sociologically significant bond of shared blood. They have a vested interest in the well-being of the mother and infant, a bond that is strengthened by the blood of birth being spilled on their hands. The birth attendants are compensated for their work by the woman's male kin (father, brother, husband) and will continue to receive gifts of food and shell money at the various ceremonies performed for the child over the next several years.

Upon the birth of their first child, the child's mother and father have



achieved the status of parenthood and enter into that phase of the human life cycle called adulthood. Adulthood is associated with a shift from filial dependence to independence and personal autonomy, and with the ability to participate competently in adult social life. All too often adulthood is considered to be a function of chronological age, the outcome of childhood learning. This is not necessarily the case, indeed, adulthood requires that childhood expectations must be outgrown. Like the process of socialization that children experience, adults in Kabana society must be socialized into adulthood in order to learn to become fully responsible, competent adult members of their society. Children are human beings, only adults are 'true' human beings.

For the Kabana, the definitive criterion of a 'true' human being is having personal autonomy. Following Strathern (1981: 174), autonomy is here taken to include such notions as "self-sufficiency, privacy, the person as a self-governing agent". The Kabana conceive personal autonomy as the freedom to empower one's existence, a freedom based on the principles of reciprocal self-interest, self-regulation and self-help. Like most small-scale, unstratified societies, Kabana society is based upon the structure of human relations, relations which do not exist in the abstract, but always and only in connection with someone or something else. The locus of experience is

social. As Nachman observes (1982: 200) communities of this type "derive their existence from the moral obligations of members to one another." Among the Kabana, the autonomy of selfhood is tempered by moral constructs so that individual self-interest is channeled in terms of the social good (*cf.* Strathern: 1981) As Strathern notes (*op cit.*:174) for the Hageners, the unique self becomes a social person, by engaging "the mind in enterprises, in purposefulness". Poole (1982b:103) has defined personhood as those "attributes, capacities, and signs of "proper" social persons which mark a moral career (and its jural entitlements) in a particular society." He goes on to point out that personhood is an ideological construct involving concepts of human nature and that it is through the "self's *appropriation* of cultural constructs of personhood" that "the particular human actor experiences himself as, and demonstrates to others that he is, the person that he is supposed to be" (*op cit.*: 104; original emphasis).

In Kabana society, the cultural constructs of personhood and adulthood are embedded in the complex of ceremonials for firstborn children and the dead. Kabana adults learn to become socially responsible, moral persons by investing their self-interest in purposeful enterprises: the preparation and performance of these ceremonials and rites. It is through these ceremonials that Kabana parents achieve the status of socially responsible adults,

demonstrate that status to others, and become identified as proper social (moral) persons. These concepts and others are developed in the following chapter where I discuss the complex of ceremonials parents perform in honour of their firstborn child.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Firstborn Ceremonies: The Postpartum Phase

While individual life commences at birth, in Kabana society the birth of a first child marks a significant threshold in parental social status and personal identity. This chapter is concerned with that phase of the complex of firstborn ceremonials which, for heuristic purposes, I have labelled "the postpartum phase". The postpartum phase begins immediately upon the birth of the first child and ends after the child's formal naming ceremony. The basic thrust of this chapter is to show how and why, when their child is born, parents are stripped of any identity other than that of "parent", and how they begin to re-acquire an identity, become re-named (reknown), as social persons. This and other themes are continued in Chapter Four, entitled "Small Work", to signify that the firstborn work is on a relatively smaller scale than the firstborn work discussed in Chapter Five, "Big Work".

#### Preamble

Before commencing my discussion of the ceremonies, I should make several explanatory points. None of the responsibilities discussed below is

applied to parents before, during, or after the birth of second and subsequent children, nor to those children. Second and later born children become subject to the demands of the ceremonial complex only when they, themselves, give birth to their first child. There are no ceremonies for second and subsequent born children, therefore any and all references to children in this chapter should be understood to mean a firstborn child. Although both male and female firstborn children are honoured, the Kabana point out that ceremonial work for a female firstborn is more elaborate and expensive than that for a male child. Given this factor and others—the majority of ceremonials that I witnessed were for female firstborns, the majority of my data about ceremonials was received from firstborn females, or parents whose firstborn is a female—I discuss the ceremonials from the perspective of a female firstborn, using the feminine pronoun. However, all references to children, "she" or "her", should be understood to mean firstborn female and male children unless otherwise specified.

As in all Kabana ceremonials where large feasts and wealth exchanges are vital components, the timing of firstborn ceremonials is contingent upon the availability of garden produce, pigs of the appropriate size and number, accumulated material wealth, and, in some cases, upon the seasonality of semi-cultivated and wild foods. Parental motivation is also a factor. Some

parents are less conscientious than others in carrying out these duties, thus long periods of time can elapse between performances. The sequence in which I present the ceremonies, while not wholly arbitrary, should not be taken to mean that the ceremonies must be performed in this order. There is no specific sequence that must be adhered to in performing the ceremonies for their firstborn (although there is for mortuary work), and parents will perform a particular aspect of ceremonial work if and when they feel they are in a position to meet the proper requirements. Given the number of ceremonials, the various contingencies determining their actual performance, and information from Kabana parents who have completed the firstborn ceremonial complex, I have calculated that it can take a married couple fifteen to twenty years to finish the work. Some parents never complete their work for the firstborn, an eventuality that affects their relative quotient of renown.

Finally, all firstborn ceremonies are contingent upon accumulated wealth since it is here that wealth is redistributed. It should also be noted that wealth must be produced in order to perform the ceremonies; ceremonies are not held in order to dispose of surplus goods. No ceremony can take place without food, which is redistributed either raw or cooked or both, hence food is a crucial component of all ceremonial work. In addition to

food, pigs and shell money (**bula**) are the two most important wealth items redistributed. Shell money is the traditional social and commercial currency of the Kabana, and other West New Britain peoples (*cf.* Counts: 1970; also see Epstein: 1969). It is appropriate at this point to discuss cultural values and attitudes invested in these particular items of material wealth.

### Objects of Value and the Value of Objects

Underlying the socio-economic and symbolic value attributed by the Kabana to shell money and other objects of value, is the principle of embedding wealth and value in others for future exploitation which in turn is based on the premise that all expenditures (investments) must be compensated (exploited) at some future time (*cf.* Weiner 1980). Expenditures can be such things as giving knowledge in the teaching of skills, spells, stories; the performance of special tasks such as carving, the manufacture of masks, ceremonial dances, tools or implements; the expenditure of one's own labour in gardening, house building, ceremonial work, and any number of undertakings the object of which is to provide assistance to others. Individual expenditures on behalf of others can take the form of material items, time and labour, or simply moral support in times of conflict or personal distress. All expenditures must be compensated, either in kind or

with material wealth, and anyone who does not recompense others quickly gains a reputation as a free-loader, a person on whom others are reluctant, if not unwilling, to waste their time and energy, since there is little chance of recovering one's investment.

Investing one's time, energy and resources on behalf of others is the royal road for the acquisition of wealth, particularly shell money. The Kabana have a metaphor **bula imata pade**, 'shell money/it's eye/ again,also', by which they mean that shell money has eyes that see all. To have 'eyes that see' is an attribute definitive of human life. The metaphorical all-seeing eye of shell money implies that shell money is imbued with human-like sentience, and because it "knows" those who deserve to own it, eventually it will "see" its way into the hands of the deserving individual. Those who have earned the right to own shell money shall have it. This basic premise and its importance to the Kabana way of life is illustrated in many of their Æsop-like morality tales (**ninipu**). One such tale highlights the moral obligations of the younger generation to their seniors and the importance of giving in order to receive. Paraphrased unmercifully, the tale goes as follows.

The tale has three main characters: an elderly grandfather, Akono the orphan and his several age-mates, and the beautiful young woman Galiki, a firstborn female. Because of his extreme old age, grandfather is unable to



provide himself with food, and spends his time in the village, sleeping in the men's house. Young Akono and his age-mates, all unmarried, spend their time (as all young men are wont to do) in pursuit of idle pleasure and fishing on the reef. Each day they return to the men's house where they cook and eat their fish. When their grandfather complains of hunger, they laugh and present him with fish bones, picked clean of meat. Taking pity on the old man, Akono gives his grandfather the fish he has cooked for himself. Time passes and the young men continue to give grandfather fish bones, while Akono continues to give up his fish to grandfather. One day grandfather goes to the forest where he comes upon the beautiful Galiki amusing herself by the river. On his next trip grandfather takes Akono and shows him Galiki. Akono is smitten with desire and wants to marry Galiki, but since he is an orphan, he is thwarted by his lack of means to pay the bridewealth. Grandfather tells Akono that he should not worry, he can marry Galiki with the bridewealth grandfather will provide for him. Grandfather tells Akono that because he was the only boy who showed proper respect and caring for his grandfather, now, grandfather will repay Akono in his time of need by contributing bridewealth. In due course the marriage takes place and Galiki is brought to Akono's village where Akono's agemates are sitting in front of their houses, each hoping that he is the one chosen to be Galiki's husband. They watch, dumbfounded, when Galiki

goes into the home of Akono, and complain bitterly that she is to be this seemingly insignificant man's wife. They do not understand the source of Akono's good fortune, but Akono and grandfather know.

This simple tale, told to delight and entertain children and adults alike, portrays the concept of reciprocal self-interest inherent in the moral obligations of human relations, and what happens when self-interest becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end. The adage, "it is better to give than to receive" is an integral part of Kabana social commerce, for it is only through giving (investment) that one can expect to receive (exploit) a return.

Since human relations are moral obligations, and since the primary moral obligation operative in Kabana society is to give, for that is the only way to receive, there is no such thing as a "pure gift" ( Mauss 1970; McLellan, in press; Weiner 1980). When a Kabana gives someone a "gift" of wealth, he or she is accomplishing one of two things: either discharging a previous debt; or, since a "gift" of shell money (or pigs, or food) can never go unaccepted, the giver is placing the receiver in a position of indebtedness (moral obligation), thus challenging the ability of the receiver to reciprocate the amount given. The giving and receiving of indebtedness does not imply that the two parties to the transaction are in a position of superiority/inferiority relative to one another. Only when the individual who is indebted is unable or unwilling to

repay his debt does his or her status decrease relative to the other person. In this way, the competition for renown is subtly carried on.<sup>11</sup>

There is no "interest" received on investments of wealth, and wealth cannot be amassed simply by contributing, for example, ten lengths of shell money and expecting to receive back twenty lengths. If A contributes a length of shell money (or any item of value) to the cause of B, in due course B repays A the original amount. Since invested wealth does not earn "accrued interest", large quantities of wealth are earned by the hard work invested to establish, maintain, and sustain a large network of reciprocal relationships. Potential sources of wealth are consanguines, spouse's consanguines (ego's affines), and non-Bariaai, long distance trade friends, but before being able to take advantage of (exploit) those sources, an individual must invest in the relationship something of himself and his resources. This is what the Kabana mean when they discuss the "hard work" entailed in finding shell money and pigs, and it is only through hard work that the right to expect, or the right to request, contributions of wealth is earned. While all have equal opportunity to acquire wealth through hard work, all do not succeed equally. Those who have accumulated, or have access to large amounts of shell money, are, *ipso facto*, those who have renown. The giving and receiving of shell money (pigs and food) is an appropriate way to incur and discharge an indebtedness, and

the balancing of debits and credits takes place in public, at ceremonials, so all can "see" and judge the strength and beneficence of both giver and receiver.

The distribution of wealth (shell money, pigs, food) at firstborn ceremonies is accomplished for the express purpose of investing wealth in others for future returns and for discharging previously accrued obligations to others. These are the obligations of kinship which the parents incur at marriage and upon the birth of their first child. It is this child, who, by virtue of shared blood with its parents and their respective consanguines, creates new (affinal) bonds of kinship between the two groups, and through whom those bonds and the moral obligations inherent in them are recognized, affirmed, and substantiated. The child is a product of, and a living representative of, the combined vital essence of its progenitors who, generation upon generation, expended themselves (reproduction) and their resources (production) to ensure social and human continuity and well-being. Firstborn and mortuary ceremonies are celebrations of life, for, as the Kabana point out, human existence is only possible because the ancestors lived and died on one's behalf. When ego traces his/her genealogy, from Creator Being to self, he/she is tracing an ongoing social and cosmic order: if this or that grandparent had not lived, then ego would not now exist. The redistribution of

wealth at ceremonials is made in recognition of this fundamental fact. It is only because ancestors existed, and in living out their existence provided, through production and reproduction, the necessities of life which the contemporary generation now enjoys, exploits, and perpetuates through replenishment.

The wealth redistributed at ceremonials thus represents two principles: first, the giver would not be in a position to give, were it not for the wealth—physical, mental, material (e.g. land and its products) and human (kin)—that he/she inherited from ancestors; and, second, since this wealth is only possible because of the expenditure of ancestral substance, these expenditures are compensated for by the giving of wealth to the living representatives of those ancestors. These two principles sum up the moral obligations inherent in kinship relations, exemplified in the person of the firstborn, and the ideal cultural values inherent in the concept of primogeniture.

As a product of generations of ancestral essence substantively embodied in the parental blood and semen that created the child, gifts of wealth at ceremonials are made to both the father's and mother's line. It is the child's maternal kindred, however, who receive the largest portions of wealth, since the maternal kindred represents the all important principle of

female fecundity and creativity. Females, as a category, are highly esteemed by the Kabana, and both women and men were quick to point out to me that "without mothers, we would not exist"; "without wives, we men are nothing"; "without women, men's work (ceremonials) would be impossible". It is wives who provide the necessities of life: they toil in the gardens to produce food, they maintain comfortable homes, they feed and tend pigs, they are the source and guardians of a man's wealth, they produce and nurture children. Women are life givers and life sustainers. Without females, particularly wives, male ceremonial would be impossible; indeed, life as the Kabana know it, would be meaningless and miserable (*cf* Dosterwal: 1976).

The overwhelming amount of wealth redistributed at firstborn ceremonials is given to the child's female and male maternal kin, in honour of the female principle these individuals represent. The wealth is given explicitly to 'buy the blood of the mother': the blood/vital essence expended by the mother (her mother, her mother's mother. . . .) in creating the child, the blood spilled in delivering the child, and the "blood, sweat and tears" she expended in nurturing and rearing the child. The wealth also compensates the child's mother for the expenditures of her self that she makes in furthering the interests of her husband (and his kindred), interests which she has taken on as her own.

In the case of a female firstborn, even more emphasis is placed on the importance of gifts to the maternal line. It is the child's grandmother who produced the child's mother and properly trained her for her role and status as a woman and wife. It is the woman's affines (particularly her husband) who stand to benefit from her skills, knowledge and fecundity. Witness the firstborn daughter, who in her turn will become a 'true' woman, perpetuate bilateral lineages by producing grandchildren who are the joy of the senior generation, and who is the nexus through which numerous relationships are made possible. All of these concepts of moral obligation are embedded in the importance the Kabana place on the acquisition and redistribution of wealth items and firstborn ceremonials.

### The Postpartum Phase

As soon as possible after their first child is born, the parents must select, from outside their **sig kelede** ('one blood') thus, outside their men's house membership, another married couple to fulfill a vital role as ceremonial exchange partners throughout the total complex of ceremonial work the parents must perform for their firstborn. The couple chosen are also young, newly married, and have or are expecting their first child. The two couples enter into a reciprocal exchange relationship in which each is

responsible for carrying out crucial aspects of the ceremonials for each other's firstborn. The two sets of parents refer to one another reciprocally as **mos** or **baulo**, and to each other's firstborn as **mosmos** or **baulo**. The term **baulo** is borrowed from the Kove language and has virtually replaced the Kabana term **mos** in common usage, and since there is no suitable English gloss that would convey the structure and meaning of this relationship, I shall therefore use the term **baulo** (to be understood as a plural noun always referring to a married couple) throughout the balance of the text.

The **baulo** relationship is initiated when a couple are pregnant with their first child and formally contracted after the birth. Having decided which married couple belonging to another descent category they want to be their **baulo**, the couple send their **baulo** a medium sized female pig that has not yet delivered a litter, and five fathoms of shell money. The pig used to contract the **baulo** relationship is named **gaea iapa aea pauloga**, the 'pig of first pregnancy', or **gaea bitga baulo**, 'pig for marking the **baulo**', and the shell-money accompanying it is called **gaea iuui**, 'tail of the pig'. A young expectant couple is not likely to have a female pig of the appropriate size or the five fathoms of shellmoney readily available to present to their **baulo**, and it is necessary for them to obtain the wealth from their kin. Husband and wife turn to their respective cognates to obtain a pig, and to solicit



contributions of shellmoney. This is the first large acquisition and expenditure of wealth undertaken by the young couple and through it they enter into the vast network of trade and exchange, debits and credits, since the pig and the shell money eventually must be repaid to those who contributed them. A wife solicits assistance from her cognates (who are her spouse's affines) and a husband solicits assistance from his cognates (who are his spouse's affines). In this way wives and husbands become indebted to their respective affines (**sobosobo**; T.P.: *bisnis*), all of whom are consanguines of the firstborn child to whose ceremonies they are contributing.

The wealth is solicited in private but handed over in public on a day specially allotted for compiling the wealth and delivering it to its destination. Both affinal groups get to see who, in their opposite number, is giving what and how much to the cause of their mutual firstborn. The husband and wife pool the received wealth and in effect pool their mutual indebtedness; throughout their lives they will work together to extend their wealth and to repay their debts to one another's affines. While affinal groups compete among themselves to "give" wealth (create indebtedness) to their opposite number through contributions to the ceremonies for the firstborn child they have in common, they are equally united in their desire to

accomplish these ceremonies properly and with *elan* in the eyes of extra-familial groups.

The **baulo** relationship extends this internal system of reciprocal indebtedness between affinal groups to take into account a category of people outside the affinal/cognate sphere or relations, i.e., outside the firstborn's egocentric kindred. The Kilege equivalent of the **baulo** (the *lekmas*), stipulates that this individual should ideally be a close kinsman (but not a husband/wife pair) so that there would be "less transfer of wealth and better care of the child could be expected" (Zelenietz and Grant 1980: 108). Contra the Kilege, the Kabana **baulo** must not be close kin, that is someone within the 'one blood' descent category of either of the firstborn's parents. Since the **baulo** are the source of food and labour and the recipients of large amounts of food and wealth (that must be reciprocated), to chose close kin as one's **baulo** suggests intragroup greed and selfishness and, because close kin are forgiving, to open the way for skimping in terms of food and wealth, and thus for fabricating accounts of one's largesse and worth. This would make the renown achieved by the parents through the ceremonies open to question. The role of the **baulo** will become more evident as the discussion of firstborn ceremonies evolves. Suffice at this point to indicate briefly some major aspects of the **baulo** relationship.

The **baulo** relationship is based on competition, and is characterized by a high degree of formal respect between the two couples, and between a firstborn child and his/her **baulo**. To be chosen as **baulo** is, essentially, to be issued a challenge by another kin group. All labour, food, pigs, and material items of wealth "given" to the **baulo** must be reciprocated by them when they perform the ceremonies for their own firstborn. **Baulo** unable to "give" in return exactly what was received are effectively shamed and demeaned. The **baulo** are concerned in one capacity or another with all ceremonies performed on behalf of one's firstborn child. They are responsible for redistributing food, for collecting and preparing the ceremonial regalia and for dressing the child in this finery, and they accompany the child through various aspects of the ceremonies and rites. In this the **baulo** require a great deal of assistance from their own cognatic kindred, since they, too, are young adults not likely to possess the requisite labour capacity, knowledge, wealth and finery. Upon being selected as someone's **baulo**, each **baulo** couple select persons from within their own kindred to assist them with their responsibilities. These assistants, called **baulo paurega**, must also be compensated with food and/or shellmoney for their work on behalf of the **baulo**. The **baulo** choose these assistants, some from the wife's cognatic kindred, and some from the husband's cognatic

kindred, thus incorporating an ever larger number of relations of investment and obligation between and among people who may or may not be resident in the same village, relations which have as their focal point one firstborn child. The full extent and complexity of these relations can be grasped by considering that in Kokopo village alone, there were twenty firstborn children whose parents were at various phases of completing the total ceremonial requirements.

Because of the extensive nature of the work and wealth involved for persons who are **baulo**, no one ever takes on the chore of being **baulo** for more than one firstborn. Anyone who did assume such supererogatory behaviour would be open for criticism as a braggart and as someone who is overtly demeaning the strength and worth of others, a claim to superiority that promotes negative social sanctions on the claimant, usually in the form of destructive sorcery.<sup>12</sup> If any part of the ceremonial complex is accomplished without the presence and assistance of the **baulo**, this means that the **baulo** do not receive the requisite "gift" of food or wealth for participating in the ceremony and can lead, at best, to a heated altercation between **baulo**. This situation is most likely to occur when parents ignore or avoid performing a particular ceremony for their firstborn, in which case their **baulo** might subject them to a public harangue, shaming them and their

behaviour (and through them their kin). At worst, breach of **baulo** obligations can lead to the total and irreparable severance of relations between the two **baulo** couples, resulting in feelings of distrust and anger that can persist for many years. The **baulo** have a vested interest in the firstborn and they, like the child's parents, must be compensated for any insult, injury or omission of duty pertaining to the firstborn. In this regard the firstborn has a staunch supporter and defender outside the kindred.

The proper relationship between **baulo** couples is one of formal respect and circumscribed behaviour. Ideally, they ought never to be involved in personal conflicts nor shame one another in word or deed, although conflicts do occur (see below p. 245). **Baulo** ought not to engage in gossip about each other, and should not listen to or contribute to the gossip of others about one's **baulo**. Informants stated the case by saying that **baulo** can do no wrong; they can appropriate one another's belongings for any length or time without permission and one has nothing to say about it. If the **baulo** damage those belongings, one must swallow one's anger.

The **baulo** relationship is based upon the necessity for balanced, delayed investments in terms of labour, food, pigs and wealth. By carrying out the responsibilities incumbent on the **baulo** role, and by performing firstborn ceremonies with the assistance of the **baulo**, both **baulo** couples

acquire prestige and renown. Despite being a relationship based on the exchange of wealth, **baulo** never assist one another with "gifts" of wealth outside their mutual concern with firstborn ceremonies. In other words, an individual would never go to his/her **baulo** counterpart to solicit a pig, food, or shell money needed to meet a particular obligation in another context. For example, **baulo** do not assist their opposite number by making contributions to bridewealth. **Baulo** are always the recipient of one's largesse, never the source of it. To seek assistance of one's **baulo** is to expose personal weakness, admit the paucity of personal resources and sources of wealth, and this would be demeaning to the party seeking such assistance. The **baulo** are competitive exchange partners, not trade friends. The appropriate place to seek assistance is from siblings and cognates; to go elsewhere admits the shameful condition of "being without kin".

Finally, it should be noted that once the **baulo** fulfill their reciprocal obligations within the context of the firstborn ceremonies, they have no further responsibilities to one another. The relationship of respect, however, pertains throughout their lifetime. The same relationship that obtains between **baulo** also obtains between **baulo** and the firstborn child for whom they carry out their ceremonial responsibilities. The **baulo** relationship is not inherited, although the firstborn children of **baulo** might choose to be one

another's **boulo**.

### Creating an Identity

For new Kabana parents, marriage and childbirth are definitive signs that they are no longer "children" but have entered into the adult phase of the life cycle. Rather than gaining a new identity as adults, the parents are stripped of their individuality and become identified by and through their firstborn child. This stripping of parental identity is accomplished through teknonymy, and through the various taboos on food, behaviour, clothing and decorative finery that are imposed on and observed by the parents until such time as they complete, in the name of their child, the work that results in lifting the variety of restrictions that they (and their child) are subject to.

Upon the occasion of the birth of their first child, the new parents are reduced to the status of social non-entities similar to that of the initiand in a Van Gennepian sense, but with one major difference. The parents, as initiands, do not become social adults as a function of others carrying out rites and ceremonies on their behalf as is the case in *rites de passages* performed for children (for example, Herdt 1981). Kabana parents must perform their own transformation and recreate themselves as social adults. Their progressive transformation begins immediately after the birth of their

child when parents become nameless.

In their discussion of Kilege naming practices, Grant and Zelenietz (1983:179) point out that names are "synonymous with social identity" and are the "idiom through which people discuss status [thus] establishing one's name means demonstrating one's status." Earlier I noted that gaining renown is the ultimate Kabana social value to be acquired through ceremonial works and that renown means essentially to be *re*-named, to become *re*-known, according to personal achievements or accomplishments. In order to be renamed, one must first be divested of the old name. This relationship between name, status, renown, and the firstborn child is made salient in the Kabana practice of teknonymy.

All parents of a newborn child are addressed and referred to as **aipina**, 'parents of a new born', a term which acknowledges the achievement of parenthood and expresses the intimate bond between the child and parental identity and social status. The parents have no status or identity beyond that of parents of a newborn. They are referred to as **aipina** until their child is formally named. At the naming ceremony (discussed below), the child is given several names, names which for the Kabana, as for their Kilege neighbours, are the property of particular social units and signify membership in the social unit which owns that name. Naming thus establishes "a place for the



name-carrier in the social structure" (Grant and Zelenietz 1983:180). Once their child is named the Kabana parent is no longer known or referred to as 'parent of a newborn', but as the mother or father of X, where X is the name of their firstborn child. The naming ceremony establishes the child's membership and place in various groups and social units and establishes the status and identity of the parents through the child, whose name they carry.

In addition to becoming "nameless", parents and their firstborn are also divested of the right to wear anything (clothing, paint, feathers, leaves, flowers) that is red or yellow in colour, a restriction that does not apply to any subsequent children the couple may have. Besides being aesthetically valued for their brightness and beauty, the colours red and yellow carry a heavy symbolic load, as will be seen. All Kabana enjoy wearing these colours, but once their first child is born, parents and child are forbidden to wear these colours and other finery until they have earned the right to do so. After the birth of their child, the parents are expected to give away anything they own that is red or yellow, an expectation that is fulfilled within hours after childbirth by a visitation from kin and agemates who liberally help themselves to anything and everything the new parents own that bear the taboo colours.

Informants gave two reasons for why parents are stripped of their

finery. Because parents must earn the right to wear various items of finery and colours by performing the ceremonies which remove the taboos on them, the fact that parents do (or do not) wear such finery is a highly visible public sign, easily interpreted by all, that the couple have (or have not) made the accomplishment associated with the ceremony. Such finery contains information about parental achievement and renown, information which, as noted earlier, in this ideally egalitarian society where renown is minimized and never overtly acknowledged, cannot be communicated in any other way. The second reason is also related to the minimization of renown and the transference of renown from oneself to one's firstborn. Parents claim that in order to 'raise up the name' of their child, they expend all their resources and thus are reduced to penury. Being stripped of their finery at the birth of their child graphically represents to the parents and others, the reduced status of the parents and how throughout their adult life they are of no consequence because they expended themselves in honour of their child. Informants also stressed that the birth of a first child presaged the inevitable loss of physical beauty and strength, and the decline into old age. The wearing of dull coloured, old and dilapidated apparel by new parents reinforced the fact that vitality and beauty were becoming a thing of their youthful past. Even after they have earned the right to wear finery, and do wear it on special occasions,

most parents continue to wear old, faded clothing and to denigrate themselves, choosing instead to draw attention to their rundown house and clothing, their lack of visible material wealth, and the smaller number of gardens they cultivate, in order to emphasize how they have been impoverished as a result of the sacrifices they have made in order to do the work for their firstborn. In my experience, after this disclaiming of any honour for themselves, parents invariably launched into a lengthy retelling of the ceremonial honours they had heaped upon the head of their firstborn. In this roundabout manner, the firstborn is indeed an exemplar of parental renown.

From birth until the child is able to walk, parents of a firstborn are also subject to various food and behaviour taboos enjoined upon them because the child is not only a product of their combined vital essence, but is in fact an extension of them: parents and child are physically, psychologically and socially consubstantial. Based on a concept of homeopathy, similar to that of the Hua described by Meigs (1984), the Kabana hold that what parents do, what they eat, and what they experience, directly affect the child. Conversely, what affects the child also affects its parents (and kindred). Until the child's neck and back are 'strong' (capable of supporting the head), the child's **tautau** ('life force, vital essence, spirit/soul') is weak, the

relationship between "body and soul" is tenuous. Parents ought not to go beyond the village perimeter where they might encounter bush spirits (*iriau*) which could enter their bodies and through them expose the infant to the power of the spirits which the child is too young and weak to combat. The spirits 'snatch' away aspects of the infant's life force thus causing the child to sicken or die.

Parents cannot eat the meat from domesticated pigs that are all black, all white, or black and white. Although domesticated, the Kabana believe that black pigs and white pigs are the familiars of bush spirits and receive food from them. White and black are associated with death and mourning, and they are the colours used by sorcerers to indicate that they have achieved their nefarious goal and killed their victim. The black, white, or black and white pig is associated with the malevolent powers represented by its colour. If parents eat these animals they expose the child to the kinds of danger symbolized by the colouring and marks of the pigs. Parents do not eat any fish whose habitat was the deep sea beyond the reef, such fish live in and are subject to the underwater pressure of the deep seas and eating them transfers this pressure to the child and would cause the child to suffocate. Certain birds were also taboo to parents. The sea-eagle (*gareso*) mentioned earlier is forbidden, since eating it would pass along to the child the negative

traits, such as a lack of industry, that are attributed to the bird.

Kabana adults who are now in the over fifty age group, told how, when they had their first child, food restrictions were so numerous that they were reduced to eating only sweet potato boiled in water and other less valued, 'garbage' (T.P.: *pipia*) foods. As a consequence they lost weight so that their skin became loose and 'slack', their eyes were lustreless, and they were always hungry. Their child, however, prospered because of their observance of taboos, which as all Kabana know and understand, are imposed for the benefit of the child's health and well-being. Many of the traditional food taboos are no longer observed since western medications have become available through the local health centre, which the Kabana feel are adequate to combat most childhood diseases. Young people are grateful they needn't observe the full spectrum of traditional food taboos, while older women and men approve the demise of food taboos claiming they were too hard on the parents. The taboo on parental sexual intercourse until the child is weaned still obtains today, since western medications are not deemed capable of curing the adverse effects of semen on mother's milk.

All such taboos come into play upon the birth of the first child, and are specifically oriented to promoting the health and well-being of the child. Parents express their moral obligation to the child, and control over their

own self-interests through observation of the taboos. Parental self-control and physical degeneration are lauded by others who admire the physical health and well-being gained by the child at parental expense. That the child flourishes is an important indicator that its parents are evolving out of the egocentricity of callous youth, and demonstrating their ability to be responsible for and to others.

Although not practiced in the past forty years, similar notions of parental denial in the interests of firstborn, were part of the rationale given for the custom of segregating mother and firstborn for several weeks after the birth. Like their mothers before them, contemporary Kabana women give birth in private, in lean-to huts built specially for the purpose or in buildings that sit on the ground and nowadays, once the child is born anyone, including men and boys, is free to visit, admire and hold the newborn infant (see Scaletta 1984b). Older women related that this was not always the case. In times past, when a woman entered the birth hut to deliver her firstchild, she and the infant were not seen by anyone until the child's formal naming ceremony, which might take place weeks or months after the birth event.

After the blood of parturition had ceased to flow, the mother and her firstborn child left the birth hut and were secluded in a section of her usual dwelling that had been partitioned off with a screen woven from split

branches of coconut palms. The room was called **ele bobo**, 'her butterfly', after the butterfly-like swinging door at the entrance to the room. Neither mother nor child were seen by anyone except the woman's own mother, who entered the room to deliver the food (boiled sweet potato), firewood, and water provided by village women and female kin. The new mother came out of the room only at night, secretly, in order to bathe and relieve herself. Other women sat and visited with her through the screen of walls, but none saw her or the child. Neither the new mother nor the new father could smoke or chew areca nut.<sup>13</sup> Such was her existence until the child was named.

The Kabana, perhaps more honestly than most, acknowledge that a newborn infant is far from beautiful, that it appears emaciated, with skinny arms and legs and 'slack', loose, skin; its face is the wizened visage of an old person, and its head is often misshapen from the pressures exerted on it during the birth process. A neonate is helpless, infirm, incontinent, and in the case of Melanesian babies, its skin is pale, 'white', like a spirit of the dead. In short, the Kabana say that newborns look like the very old when they become decrepit and near death, and in the case of firstborns, this is in direct contradiction to the ideal of beauty and well-being the child exemplifies. Mother and child, therefore, were kept from view until the child had lost its newborn appearance, its body filled out and plump and any of the marks and

disfigurements acquired during the birth process had faded. The infant's skin lost the 'whiteness' of the neonate, but because of the lack of exposure to light, retained an aesthetically pleasing light almond colour much valued by the Kabana as a sign of beauty. Conversely, in the ideal image of the parent of a firstborn, the mother became thin on her restricted diet and her appearance unkempt, since she was forbidden to comb or cut her hair and could wear only drab colourless clothing. Her lack of physical activity and her meagre diet combined to make her thin, listless, and lethargic. Although Kabana women did not draw the analogy, I viewed the 'butterfly room' as analogous to a cocoon wherein the neonate was transformed into a beautiful butterfly. The "ugly-ducking" newborn became a smooth-skinned, plump, healthy, altogether beautiful and charming infant, who made its debut into the larger society on the occasion of its naming ceremony.

### What's in a name?

We all have a very intimate attachment to our own name, since we associate our sense of self, our ego, and identity with our personal name. In Kabana society, a "rose by any other name" would not smell the same. Names are not only labels useful for addressing and referring to individuals. As the concept of renown suggests, names are integrally related to self-identity and



having a "good" name or a "bad" name implies much about a person's reputation and status. In their discussion of Kilege naming practices, Grant and Zelenietz (1983) highlight several important points concerning naming that are also applicable to Kabana naming practices.

Whereas Kilege names are owned by individual men's house groups, Kabana names are owned by the more inclusive descent category, **sig kelede** ('one blood') representing the child's matrikin and patrikin. The names make "a social statement about the child's identity" and affirms that child's "commitment and relationship to that group" (Grant and Zelenietz 1893:181). Unlike the Kilege, perhaps, the name of a Kabana firstborn child (e.g. Aisiga) also identifies the parents (e.g. Aisiga **itna**; 'Aisiga her mother') and their relationship to the child's consanguines, who are affines of the child's mother and father.

In contrast to the Kilege, where the right to bestow names "alternates between the lines of the father and of the mother" (*ibid*), the right to bestow names belongs to both maternal and paternal lines. Kabana children receive four names at their naming ceremony: two bestowed by its maternal kin (for example, the child's MM, MMeZ, or MF chose the names owned by the infant's matrikindred); similarly, two names owned by the patrikindred are chosen (for example, by the child's FF, FFeB, FM). These four names place the child

within the network of cognatic kin and affirm the child's rights and obligations relative to both its maternal and paternal kin.

The names bestowed by the child's maternal kin are taboo to the child's paternal kin (and *vice versa*) since, from the perspective of the child's father, these are the names of his affines. Affinal relations, in contrast to the close bond of consanguineal relations, are circumscribed by a lack of intimacy, and to speak the name of one's affine is to be overly familiar and disrespectful. To say the name of an affine in the presence of that affine or any of that affine's consanguines implies a shameful intimacy between self and affine. The person who 'calls' the name of an affine must 'buy' his shame, and the shame he has caused the affine, by giving over to the affine a gift of shellmoney. The two sets of names the child receives ensures that, in addressing or referring to the child, the child's kin will not utter names they must taboo out of respect for affines. Mothers and fathers refer to and address their children by the names bestowed by their respective consanguines and never use the child's affinal name.

Children are never named after their parents. They are named after and become the namesakes of deceased kin, usually a great-grandparent, grandparent or a parent's sibling. This ensures that the names and renown of the deceased are never lost, but are perpetuated through the child, and,

hopefully, that the child will become "like" its namesake, manifesting and exhibiting the qualities and characteristics that earned the previous owner(s) of the name renown. Among the neighbouring Vitus, Blythe (1978: 150) reports that "[t]he name giver becomes the sponsor of all the exchanges given on behalf of the [firstborn] child as he or she matures". No such special relationship is set up between namer and named among the Kabana or the Kilege. Among the Kilege, it is the "food-handler" (Zelenietz and Grant: 1980) who has special responsibilities in ceremonies for children. For the Kabana, the responsibility for the firstborn's ceremonials belongs to the parents and their senior maternal and paternal kin, and the **baolu** who hold a key role in the proceedings.

Every Kabana individual has numerous names. They receive a minimum of four names at their naming, and since some of these names are likely to be the names of persons who are affines to the child's consanguines, hence taboo to them, other names are substituted for the tabooed names. Or, since children are named after deceased kin, individuals who taboo the names of the dead to show their respect for their deceased kin substitute yet another name for all those who bear the tabooed name. In addition, all individuals over their lifetime acquire nicknames. Nicknames are bestowed on an individual for any number of reasons, for example, to mark a behavioural or personal

idiosyncrasy, to mark an accomplishment, to mark a physical characteristic such as limping, or a disability such as deafness, or a speech impediment. Some nicknames are used affectionately and jokingly in public, others, usually derogatory, are never uttered in public or in the hearing of the individual so named, since this publicly shames him or her and may result in a demand for compensation to remove the libellous slur. In addition to these names, all Kabana have a Christian name which is entered on the child's baptismal certificate and is chosen at birth by their parents or the mission personnel. There are no name taboos associated with baptismal names, and these names are a popular substitute for those that are traditionally taboo.

Finally, names make statements about an individual's status or change in status. All firstborn girls carry the name **Galiki**, and all female heroines in myth and legend are called Galiki. The name Galiki is widespread throughout West New Britain and knowing that a woman is named Galiki informs others of her status as a firstborn, of the respect and privileges others are expected to show her and that she must show others because of her status as someone's firstborn. Chowning writes (1978a: 213, n.8) that among the Kove, "*Galiki* is the nickname given all girls in seclusion" and she argues that since Galiki is the name of mythical heroines, this fact "suggests that the seclusion was once more closely connected with marriageability." While

this may be the case among the Kove, it is not so with the Kabana. Galiki is not a nickname, it is a proper name given only to firstborn girls. All Kabana girls (regardless of birth order) are secluded when they have their ear lobes cut and stretched (as are boys when they are superincised), but all Kabana girls are not therefore renamed Galiki during their seclusion. Only a firstborn girl has the right to be named Galiki. Also, a girl's ear lobes are cut and elongated as part of Kabana mortuary work, during the **ololo kapei**, the 'big ceremony'. Depending on the contingencies referred to earlier and the timing of mortuary work, a girl may have her ears cut years before or years after she reaches puberty. Ear-piercing (and male superincision) and seclusion have no relationship to puberty rites to mark sexual maturity, hence this rite has nothing to do with a Kabana girl's marriageability except insofar as elongated ear lobes are a sign of beauty, seductive to the opposite sex.

In the past, the Kabana say, the name Galiki was once an adjective applied to all firstborn children regardless of their sex. A **galiki**, they say, is an exalted person, analogous to our notion of a queen or king. A **galiki** is someone who does not, since they need not, work; everything is done for them, honour and respect are heaped on them by others. Ideologically, a **galiki** (firstborn) is beyond the drudgery of the day-to-day toil necessary to support life and life-style, an ideal all can dream of but which is pragmatically

unsupportable in Kabana society. The negative obverse of the **galiki** ideal is expressed in a food taboo that is observed by all parents of a newborn child. Until a child is able to walk, parents are forbidden to eat the wallaby (**duadua**). The Kabana have nicknamed the wallaby **galiki**, because its front legs are very short and atrophied from lack of use, and these useless appendages result in the death of the wallaby. When running from the hunting dogs, the wallaby rears up on its hind legs with its short front legs dangling impractically. Without the assistance of its front legs the wallaby tires quickly, and drops down on all fours, at which point it is an easy kill for the dogs. The message to people who would sit on their laurels is clear. If parents ate the wallaby, their child's limbs would not grow straight and strong, they would grow crooked and become atrophied like the wallaby's. A mother should never step on the tracks of a wallaby as this will cause her child to sicken and die.

As an ideal concept, **galiki** also connotes the epitome of beauty, health, and wealth. The Galiki of myth is always physically beautiful, and bedecked with finery and wealth representative, of course, of the wealth and standing of her kin. As an exemplar of the status of others, Galiki (real or mythical) must be given the respect her status demands. Any insult or injury, whether or not intentional, she (or any firstborn) suffers must be

compensated with payments of pigs or other wealth to her parents and kin by the offending party. To insult or injure a firstborn is a direct insult and injury to those whose renown she exemplifies and cannot go unchallenged by her kin, who might call upon the powerful and destructive presence of the **tivuda**, 'bull-roarer', to make the challenge and to exact compensation. While in the presence of a firstborn, others ought not to engage in physically violent behaviour in case the child is inadvertently injured; others ought not to offend a firstborn's sensibilities by arguing or raising their voices. Anything a firstborn expresses an interest in or a desire for should be given over immediately, and any requests made in the name of a firstborn also should be honoured without argument. These are some examples of the meanings inherent in the ideology of primogeniture and the name Galiki, meanings which apply to all firstborns, although nowadays Galiki is only a female name.

Social status and changes in that status are also marked in other names. The word **akono** means 'orphan', and it, too, is used in mythology as the name for male heroes who are always last born children. Akono never has the wealth, beauty, honour and status of a firstborn, and must depend on his wits, not his kin (as an orphan, the implication is that he has no kin, a distinct social disadvantage) in order to survive and prosper in a harsh world. In mythology, Akono always wins out over his stupid senior sibling (the

firstborn), and the message of the myth seems, to me, to emphasize the Kabana ideal that success and renown must be earned through industry and intelligence, and the firstborn son, because he accepts parental renown for his own, never develops his own character, an eventuality that leads to his downfall in the long run. Like the wallaby's front legs, the firstborn's character development seems to be atrophied, a condition that can result in death. Akono is only used as a male name in mythology, or as an adjective, "he/she is an orphan"; boys are never named Akono.<sup>14</sup>

Besides Galiki, Akono, and **aipina**, 'parent of a newborn, unnamed child', the Kabana employ other terms as names to designate a person's social status and role, and the sorts of behaviours expected of them in that role. These are **aimara**, **asape**, **beget**, and **aso**, all four of which are associated with death and mourning. When a child dies, the child's parents again become "nameless" and are referred to as **aimara**, 'parents whose child has died'. When her husband dies, a woman becomes "nameless" and is renamed **asape**, 'widow'; similarly, a man whose wife dies becomes **beget**, 'widower'. If a woman or a man does not remarry after the death of their spouse, they retain the name Asape, 'widow', or Beget, 'widower' for the rest of their lives. Affines are categorized by the term **sobosobo**, and when a person dies the dead person's consanguines (ego's affines) are recategorized as **aso**, which indicates that



ego and alter have certain rights and obligations to one another by virtue of their relationship to a dead person. The terms **aimara**, **asape**, **beget**, and **aso**, are used as names until the individuals so named have fulfilled all the obligations they have toward the dead person and his/her kin. The discharging of obligations to the kin of the dead constitute the bulk of the rites associated with mortuary work.

Kabana names are much more than convenient labelling devices. They situate the individual within a network of relations, mark group membership and the rights and obligations incumbent upon a person by virtue of that membership. Names carry information about status, prestige, personal renown and the renown of others, and are the embodiment of self-identity. Without a name, a Kabana individual simply does not exist. All Kabana children are named in a public ceremony of greater or lesser magnitude. If the membership of any particular men's house has several babies born around the same time and requiring names, these children will be named together in a single group ceremony. Naming ceremonies for children who are not firstborns are small affairs that often pass unremarked by all but the immediate family.

For a firstborn, the naming ceremony is the first occasion for the coming together of the child's matrikin and patrikin (those who share 'one blood') from all over the district. The number of people who attend the

naming is directly related to the renown of the firstborn's two sets of grandparents: the more renown they have, the more people who attend in recognition of their reputation, and conversely, a large attendance enhances the renown of the child's grandparents and parents. A feast of cooked pork and garden produce must be provided by the child's parents, although it is the child's paternal and maternal grandparents who provide the bulk of the food since their son and daughter have had little time to grow the requisite amount of food or to acquire a female pig of the appropriate size and age. The young couple also depend on their kin to assist them in accumulating the shellmoney that must be given over to their child's cognates. The pig and the shellmoney are debts incurred by the young parents which they must eventually repay. Repayment takes place when those who contributed wealth make known that they are in need of that wealth to meet their own ceremonial responsibilities. Debts are never repaid gratuitously and some debts may be outstanding for years.

All Kabana ceremonials take weeks or months of time-consuming, often tedious, planning, organization and preparation. This crucial aspect of ceremonial performance is largely hidden, since it takes place within the context of daily life: people work daily in gardens but they also plant extra gardens of taro, sweet potato, cassava, banana trees, areca palms, and

monitor the maturity of sago palms, coconuts, pitpit (*Setaria edule*) and other foodstuffs in expectation of the requisite feasts. People spend long hours socializing and visiting, but they also talk about the necessity to perform a ceremonial, when it should be done and for whom, thus quietly making known the fact that requests for wealth will be forthcoming. Additional time and energy are expended in making pandanus mats and baskets, in arranging to acquire carved ironwood bowls, pigs, shellmoney, and other wealth items for redistribution.

With few exceptions, notably mortuary work, Kabana ceremonials take one day to perform. The actual process of naming the child, for example, is an event that rarely takes longer than twenty minutes to accomplish and is the last function of that day. The assymetry between preparations, which are low-profile, primarily individualistic and integrated with daily activity, and performance which is highly visible, non-ordinary, and public, has resulted, anthropologically, in an analytic approach to ceremonial and ritual as something separate and apart from the mainstream of day-to-day concerns. For the Kabana, ceremonial performance is clearly a "special" event, culminating months of work and worry. Ceremonial preparation is not, however, a separate event but an integral aspect of daily life for all Kabana adults.

In speaking about or discussing ceremonies, the Kabana invariably locate the importance of firstborn ceremonial in the expression **gaiean tatan gergeo lautabe**, 'we eat/cooked food/child/firstborn'. The meaning of this expression is transparent: all those who attend receive plates of cooked food provided by the firstborn. Further discussion of this saying revealed a less transparent idiomatic meaning, for when attempting to explicate this expression to me, women and men would explain that "we eat on top of the firstborn". Besides the conventional meaning of the verb "to eat", eating in this context means also 'to receive sustenance', 'to be a consumer'. The phrase 'on top of the firstborn', connotes that it is only because the firstborn carries and fulfills the burden of providing sustenance (food, wealth) that others are able to share in (become consumers of) that wealth. Prestige, renown, and esteem are predicated on being generous and solicitous of the well-being of others and are expressed in the ability to provide an abundance of wealth, especially food. Those who benefit from this largess express their indebtedness by according the nurturer a reputation for selfless generosity couched in terms of renown. The naming ceremony marks the first occasion when a unique configuration of individuals (the child's cognatic kindred) comes together as a consequence of their common bond—the firstborn child, because of whom and through whom they receive

sustenance for some years to come. The obligation to pursue and to accord renown begins at this point.

### The Naming Ceremony

All Kabana ceremonies are concerned with and predicated upon the redistribution of wealth which, in the case of the naming ceremony, includes food, shellmoney and a pig. The child's resident female kin spend the day of naming preparing and cooking food, while her resident male kin concern themselves organizing shellmoney for public distribution. By late afternoon, these preparations are complete and the naming ceremony can begin. The women open the stone ovens and carry the cooked food, followed by the men carrying shellmoney draped on a pole, to the veranda of men's house of the child's father. The delivery of this wealth to the men's house alerts all that the proceedings are about to start, and everyone begins to drift towards the men's house.

The child's cognatic kin separate themselves into two gender groups. The women stand in front of the men's house, as though defending the building from the men, who face them across the open plaza. The child is carried to the forefront of the women's group by her 'small mother' (mother's/father's younger sister). The men, as a group, call out to the women: "Who is this

child? Is the child called...[a name is given]?" The women reply with a resounding "No!", and the men try again with the same question but a different name, which is again denied by the women. On the third try, the name put forth by the men is accepted by the women, and acknowledged by a brief tattoo on the slit-drum at the door of the men's house. This procedure is repeated with the women calling out false names which the men deny, until on the third calling the men accept the name proffered by the women, which is also acknowledged by the slit-drum. (The slit-drum is the 'voice' of the men's house, a voice which only cries out when a child is named, to announce the death of a member (female or male) of the men's house and, in the past, to signal enemy attack.)

The official naming of the child is thus finished, but there is another small rite, unobtrusively performed by the woman holding the child. The woman who presents the child can be either a mother's or father's younger sister, there is no special emphasis given to concepts of patri- or matrilateral kin, since the child belongs to both. The emphasis is on the female principles of procreation, production and nurturance. Prior to the child's naming, it is forbidden for anyone, particularly a 'mother', to hold the child and eat at the same time, and if a 'mother' inadvertently does so, she is immediately reminded of her *faux pas*, whereupon she spits out the food.

During the naming, the child's 'small mother' holds in her hand a piece of cooked food, usually taro. When the naming is finished, she "feeds" the taro to the child by placing it against the child's mouth, and after this gesture of nurturance, the woman eats the piece of taro. She 'eats on top of the firstborn', an act acknowledging the sustenance others receive from (in the name of) the child. Naming bestows an identity and status upon the child (and its parents), and "taking food prepared in the name of a child signifies that the recipient recognizes and accepts the child's social status" (Grant and Zelenietz 1983: 180). This small but highly significant behavioural interaction between the child and the woman holding her is not given special prominence. It takes a few seconds to perform once the child's names are called, and may be lost in the general melee as the crowd breaks-up and child's paternal kin prepare to distribute the feast and shell money.

Two men carry the shell money to the front of the men's house where a senior male member of the father's men's house counts out the total amount of shell money and loudly proclaims the name of each recipient and the amount given him or her. The largest amounts, usually multiples of ten lengths each, are given to the child's mother's kin especially her mother's mother, mother's eldest brother, mother's father, mother's sister, or persons so classified. Other, smaller "gifts" of shellmoney are also made to various

persons who have expended themselves on behalf of the child or her parents. The 'all-seeing eye of shell money' thus recognizes and finds its way into the possession of such persons as the child's birth attendants, the woman who held the child at the naming, the men who held the pole of shell money, the man who publicly called out and distributed the shell money, the man who killed and butchered the pig, the women who contributed firewood and food to the child's mother during her postpartum confinement. It should be noted at this juncture that women, on their own behalf, both contribute and receive shell money, and the wealth a woman receives in a distribution is her own property over which she alone has rights of disposal. Although she may (and usually does) contribute her shell money to her husband's ventures, the final decision about where and when that wealth is used is at the woman's discretion.

After the shell money distribution is completed, the feast foods are brought out for distribution. As with the marriage feast, each men's house in the child's village and each senior male representing men's houses in other villages, receives cooked food and a portion of pork to be taken away and redistributed among their membership. The number of people who 'eat on top of the firstborn' thus increases, as does the child's (parental) renown. The relationship between renown and gifts of food, sharing, open-handedness,



general largesse, finds its way into idioms, those which discredit a reputation: "When have I eaten the pig of their firstborn"; and those which elevate a reputation: "Many times I have been warmed at the fire [feast] of their firstborn".

The food distribution marks the end of the naming ceremony. Feasts are not usually communal events, in the sense that all who have gathered for the feast do not sit down and eat in one another's company. When representatives of each visiting men's house receive their portion of the feast, the food is divided up among the women who must carry it, and the visitors depart for their home village. When they arrive home, the food is redistributed among themselves and others in the village, and only then, in the privacy of their homes, is the feast eaten. At the host village, by the time the last plate of food is given out, there are few visitors remaining. They have received their wealth and taken their leave. When all visitors are gone, the child's father sends a plate of food to the child's **baulo** (who have no role in the naming), and the child's paternal kin retire to their houses to eat in privacy, if there is any food left. Sometimes there is nothing, but this is as it should be, indicative that the parents have given their all, unselfishly, in honour of their child.

As the first of many events in honour of the firstborn, the child's

naming ceremony demonstrates several of the features Firth and Fortes attributed to the concept of primogeniture. Previously a non-entity, the child receives a name and an identity which positions and confirms the child's place and status in particular social groups. Through teknonymy, parental identity and status are also re-established relative to their child, who represents and is an exemplar (Firth 1956-57) of parental status and renown. The role of the child as exemplar is evident during ceremonial performance, when the child's parents remain in the background as non-participants in the actual public event. Parents are providers rather than consumers of wealth. The parents have accomplished the requisite preparatory stages and solicited the support of others (consanguines) to present the child and their work in public.

The firstborn creates and forges important affinal and cognatic links (Fortes 1978). At the naming ceremony, parents acknowledge the responsibilities incumbent upon them by virtue of those links and demonstrate their ability to meet their moral obligations to others in gifts of food and wealth, thus indicating that they are becoming socially responsible, mature persons. As consumers, recipients of the wealth reciprocate with respect (renown) for the parents' firstborn child. The naming also recognizes,

publicly, the achievement of parenthood, a status that cannot be rescinded or annulled (Fortes 1974), and simultaneously recognizes the changing position of parent's parents who, with the advent of their child's firstborn, achieve the status of grandparenthood. The firstborn not only connects successive generations, it also creates generational categories and is the definitive criterion for locating individuals within the categories so created. These aspects of primogeniture are demonstrated within the context of the naming ceremony, and are restated and reaffirmed in future ceremonials honouring the child.

In the interim between marriage and the naming of her first child, the woman's parents remain in possession of the total amount of bridewealth received for their daughter. Should the marriage not produce offspring, their daughter's marriage can be annulled with little difficulty, and the bridewealth received by her parents must be returned to the groom's family. Since it is the birth of the child, not the receipt of bridewealth which legitimizes a marriage and irrevocably creates parenthood and grandparenthood, statuses that cannot be annulled, the redistribution of bridewealth received for a firstborn female is best understood at this juncture.

### Bridewealth and Firstborn Females

Just as shellmoney has 'eyes to see' its way to those who deserve it, so too, it 'sees' those who hoard it and do not send it on its way to those who have a right to it. If wealth is not distributed when and as it should be, those who have a claim to it might decide to sorcerize the recalcitrant kinsman on the premise that, if the man does not meet his obligations in life, his kin will meet those obligations for him upon his death. The bridewealth others should have received will be received as part of the compensation they are entitled to at the death of their kinsman. Wealth, besides being a source of well-being and prestige, can also be the cause of death if not handled appropriately by those who possess it.

In principle, the bridewealth amount for a firstborn female is delivered in full to her parents. In practice, as I mentioned earlier, a portion of the bridewealth may be outstanding at the time it is formally delivered. If the bridewealth is redistributed before the balance due is given over, this cancels the outstanding amount and the bridewealth is considered complete. The obligation not to hoard the wealth but to redistribute it as soon as possible after their daughter's first child is born is so strong that parents often redistribute the partial bridewealth received and thus forfeit any outstanding amount.

The bridewealth received for a firstborn female does not belong to the woman's parents and they receive no share of it (cf. Meigs 1984:10); neither is it used to make up the bridewealth the woman's brother(s) requires to obtain his own wife, as is often the case in African societies (cf. Fortes 1949). The woman's bridewealth is not a source of profit to her parents or her brothers; to use this wealth to further their own interests is an indication that they do not have the wherewithal or 'strength' to produce wealth on their own, but must 'sell' their firstborn daughter for profit. For the Kabana, as for the Hua, "the broad underlying principle seems to be that anything that is the [first] child's or is done in the child's honor must not be a source of profit to the adult" (Meigs 1984:108). Kabana parents greet the birth of their daughter's first child with some relief, for they can at long last, relieve themselves of the burden of their obligation to distribute her bridewealth. Parents get ready for the redistribution as soon as their grandchild is born. They publicly announce the day they will 'cut the bridewealth' (**tiket garebo**), and since all 'work' requires food, they prepare to feed all those who come.

The redistribution of bridewealth for a firstborn differs from all other transfers of wealth (except death compensation). As discussed earlier, the wealth given at ceremonial exchanges is always in repayment for goods and

services already received and the exchange is a non-profit transaction premised upon constantly fluctuating relations of ongoing indebtedness. As 'one bloods' the woman's matrikin and patrikin have a right to a share of the bridewealth, however, there is no set amount of wealth that any kinsperson ought to receive. How much anyone receives depends upon how much an individual wants to receive, and is calculated according to how much and what, that individual brings to the redistribution. Upon their arrival, all who want or expect a share of the wealth, give over items of value, such as an amount of shellmoney, a clay pot, a carved ironwood bowl, and so on, to the woman's father. Who contributes how much and what type of wealth is kept track of carefully by the father and his advisors. Bridewealth transactions differ from other exchanges in that, on this occasion, the amount of wealth an individual gave to the father is returned to him or her that same day, with one hundred per cent. profit.

When all contributions have been received by the father, the actual distribution takes place. Those who contributed one (or five, or ten) length of black shell money, receive two (or ten or twenty) lengths of the black shell money. They thus receive an immediate return of their investment plus one hundred per cent. profit, the profit coming from the bridewealth. If the contribution is a clay pot or an ironwood bowl, the same principle obtains: the

contributor receives back a pot (not the same one however) plus an additional pot or bowl as profit, or the contributor might request a set of oars, or a basket in lieu of the pot they contributed. Because of its relative rarity and high value, the amount of 'gold' shell money received for bridewealth is less than other types of shell money, and the amount of profit realized at the distribution is only fifty per cent.: thus, one length of 'gold' shell money, only earns one and a half lengths of gold shell money, the half-length profit coming from the original bridewealth.

Far from being a source of profit to the parents, the bridewealth redistribution, more often than not, depletes parental resources and requires them to become more indebted to their own cognates. Although the bridewealth for a firstborn child is a great deal more than that received for subsequent daughters, it is rarely enough to cover the amounts that are redistributed. The difference is made up from the available wealth the parents have on hand and by the father soliciting contributions, which must be repaid at some future time, from his cognatic kin, his daughter's paternal kindred. (The bridewealth for non-firstborn females is substantially less—one pig, 35 fathoms of 'black' shell money—and is informally distributed with no profit added among the bride's 'mothers' and 'fathers'. Parents might keep ten fathoms of shell money as recompense for their hard work in raising

their daughter.)

The largest proportion of the bridewealth is expected to go to the bride's maternal kin, to 'buy the blood', and it is they, therefore, who make the largest contribution to the redistribution. In addition, maternal kin are expected to arrive 'heavy', carrying wealth which they contribute to the woman's **dudga**, the personal wealth she takes with her into marriage. Although when contributed these items are specifically stated as being a contribution to the woman's **dudga**, this wealth is not given separately as a gift to the bride, but is exchanged, at the going rate, for shell money or other items that are part of the bridewealth. Very close maternal kin (such as a mother's brother, mother's sister, mother's mother/father), however, do present the woman with true gifts of shellmoney and other valued items. These items are handed over to the woman's father with the statement, **vula/tabla imatemate**, 'shellmoney/ironwood bowl (it) dies', indicating that the item is a gift for which no repayment is expected, the transaction is completed. The contributions intended as the woman's personal wealth are set aside until the next day, when she and her belongings are taken officially to her husband's village.

Although the woman has been residing in her husband's village for some time, until the birth of her child there is always the possibility that this



might not be a permanent arrangement. Barring unforeseen circumstances and the vagaries of human personality, parenthood confers an aura of permanency on marital ties. The birth of her first child legitimizes her marriage and the redistribution of the bridewealth formally recognizes both her and her husband's new status as married adults and parents. On the day following the bridewealth distribution, the woman's kin acknowledge her new alliances with her affines and the shifting locus of her self-interests and responsibilities by officially bringing her to her home in her husband's village.

Strongly represented by her maternal kin, the woman's family gather up her personal wealth and other belongings and, followed by the rather distraught young woman, they head off to her husband's village. In expectation of their arrival, her affines prepare food and other refreshments. When the woman and her kin arrive, they leave the wealth at the woman's own house, and until the host village is ready to present their guests with cooked food, everyone passes the time visiting with friends and relatives. As always, the removal of cooked food from the stone ovens signals that it is time to attend to the business at hand. Again, as is the norm in anything pertaining to their firstborn, the parents are non-participants who remain unobtrusively in the background. The woman's personal wealth is gathered up and taken to the open plaza in front of the home of her husband's mother

where it is laid out on mats for all to see. A senior maternal kinsman (usually a mother's elder brother, mother's father, and sometimes a mother's elder sister's husband) then commences to harangue the host village. His young kinswoman's attributes, her obvious fertility, and the contribution she is and will continue to be to her affines, make up a large part of his diatribe. Because she is a firstborn child with all the prestige and renown accorded that position, he lectures her affines on how properly to treat her, warning that ill-treatment will draw the wrath of her kin and the demand for compensation. Finally, he turns to the displayed wealth and calls out the various items and the total amount of shell money. These, he proclaims, are the belongings which his kinswoman brings to her husband's home, they are hers, and she alone has rights of disposal over them. None of her husband's kin should ask for these things, nor should her husband take them to give to his kin. He makes particular reference to the 'gold' shell money as something that no one, under any circumstances, should attempt to obtain from the woman; this is special wealth that ensures the woman's independence and provides her with a certain material security. (Ideally, she would never dispose of the 'gold' shellmoney but retain it as an heirloom that gets passed on to her firstborn child and that child's firstborn, and so on.)

His harangue completed, the wealth is gathered up by the women and

taken inside his kinswoman's house. The host villagers distribute plates of food, and the woman's kin prepare to return home. They leave as a group, accompanied by the woman, who, when she reaches the outer perimeter of her husband's village, stands weeping until the last of her family is out of sight. The firstborn daughter is well and truly married: her kin have received bridewealth for her, she has proven her fertility, and her firstborn has been formally invested with a place and social status in various groups. Approximately twenty years after her birth, her parents have completed their work in honour of their firstborn, and now turn their attention to assisting her and their other children as each in turn embarks upon the arduous cycle of ceremonial responsibility in honour of their own firstborn.

The postpartum phase of firstborn work is completed. Major firstborn ceremonies take years of planning and preparation. In the meantime, numerous minor ceremonies, oriented to the child's developmental cycle and first accomplishments, are the focus of parental attention. These minor ceremonies are the subject of discussion in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Firstborn Ceremonies: 'Small Work'

The Kabana distinguish between firstborn ceremonials that require 'small work' and those that require 'big work' and it is from these categories that I derive the labels minor and major ceremonials. The difference between the two types is one of relative scale. Minor ceremonials usually do not require the exchange of pigs, cooked pork, or shellmoney; there is no large assembly of witnesses/kin from other villages; they are often spur of the moment, that is, contingent on circumstances and available resources; and, finally, none of the key participants is dressed in ceremonial finery. The minor ceremonials are accomplished by the time the child is approximately four years of age, and ideally, they follow the order of precedence in which I discuss them below. It must be recalled that not all parents accomplish all ceremonials although those who do not do so, suffer no overt sanction for their failure. The fact that they do not accomplish the work reflects on their strength, ability, and implies a lack of respect for the traditions handed down from their progenitors. They are said to have no personal power and, since personal power is a crucial component of renown, their reputation for renown

suffers. Herein lies the covert basis for the differential assignment of renown.

### THE MINOR CEREMONIALS

The postpartum phase ended with the naming ceremony which established the child's status as someone from whom others receive sustenance. The minor ceremonies celebrate "firsts" in the sense that they mark the first time others receive a particular food or consumable in the name of a firstborn child and, in some instances, concomitantly mark "firsts" in the child's physical development. The gifts of food also serve to release the parents from some of the taboos they have been observing since the birth of their child and the new parents begin to re-establish themselves as social persons and acquire an identity as "real people". A major theme informing these minor ceremonies is the concept of continuity: elements of value generated in the past are perpetuated in the present and invested in the future.

#### Areca nut

In the past, parents of a firstborn were forbidden to consume areca nut until their child cut its first tooth, at which time the parents distributed

large quantities of areca nut, sprouted coconuts, and taro stalks for planting to mark the event. Although the taboo on areca nut is no longer observed by new parents, the distribution of coconuts, areca nuts and taro in honour of their child on the occasion of its first tooth still obtains. Preparation begins with the construction of a large platform (**kapkabo**) adjacent to the child's home. Built by the child's 'fathers', the platform is about three metres square and over a metre high, and it is here that the nuts and taro stalks are displayed pending distribution. Unmarried males and young boys are commissioned to climb areca palms and cut large 'hands' of the nut and to collect sprouted coconuts. The boys tie the nuts in bundles which they sling over poles for transporting back to the village. Each afternoon during the collection process, a procession of exuberant young males returns to the village two by two, their carrying poles laden with the nuts collected that day. The taro gardens are harvested by the mother's female affines. The taro corms are separated from the stalks and delivered to the child's mother, who spends her time cooking the taro which she distributes each night to the young men and the women as recompense for their labour on the child's behalf. The severed stalks of the taro, sprouted coconuts, and areca nuts are displayed in an ostentatious heap on the platform.

When sufficient quantities are collected, the nuts and taro stalks are

distributed under the supervision of a senior male member of the father's men's house. Woven baskets loaded with sprouted coconuts, taro stalks and areca nuts are counted out and delivered to each men's house in the village. At the men's house, the contents of the baskets are shared out among the households affiliated with that men's house. Additional portions are shared out and set aside to be delivered next day to those persons in other villages who are affiliated with each particular men's house. The largest individual recipient of these goods is the child's **baulo**, who receive their portion last, usually after dark, when it is delivered to them by the child's 'small mother' (MZ/FZ). The **baulo** redistribute the nuts and taro among their own kin, particularly their **baulo paurega**, those persons whom the **baulo** have designated to assist them with their responsibilities in future ceremonial work for the firstborn.

Kabana informants are quite clear about the symbolic content of the relationship among taro, coconuts, areca nuts, and the child's first tooth. Taro is food *par excellence*, it is the staff of life. The sprouted coconut is analogous to the 'sprouting' tooth, which, as it 'cuts' through, causes the gums to be inflamed and bleed. When chewed with lime powder and betel pepper, areca nuts produce an excess of brilliant red spittle which is symbolically associated with blood. The areca nuts thus represent the blood spilt when the

child is cutting teeth. The sprouted nuts, the red of blood, the taro stalks, and the firstborn all symbolize regeneration, growth and continuity.

Under no circumstances should the blood of a firstborn be spilled, and when it is, compensation must be paid. In this instance, compensation is made by the parents to the community at large in the form of food: taro stalks and coconuts. The sprouted coconuts and taro stalks are seedlings ready for planting, and contain within them the promise of future food and wealth for those who received them in the name of the child. So, too, the child is likened to a seedling, the budding tooth indicative of growth and development, the fruits of which will be realized in future distributions of wealth.

### First Hair Cut

A fine head of hair is aesthetically pleasing, a sign of beauty and well-being. The Kabana wear their hair short and well-groomed, only permitting it to go unkempt when they are in mourning. Long, unkempt hair is worn as a mark of respect for the dead, and is symbolic of how the death of the person has impoverished the mourner. It is forbidden for parents and their firstborn to have their hair cut from the time of birth until the child is able to walk. By this time, with their long, untidy hair and their lack of fine,



colourful clothing, the parents are indeed a bedraggled sight, but this, too, is a sign of parental respect for the firstborn and of how parents impoverish themselves in honour of the child. Firstborn ceremonies are celebrations of life but, as the Kabana point out, death precedes and is a necessary prerequisite of life: progenitor, genitor, primogeniture. The death/life continuum is a constant theme in firstborn and mortuary ceremonies, a theme expressed in this instance by the long hair worn only on two occasions: to honour the dead and to honour a first child.

The hair cutting ceremony requires a distribution of cooked vegetable food, preferably taro, to the **baulo** and to each men's house from which it is redistributed according to the same procedure discussed above. The child's first haircut usually entails shaving the head bald since the Kabana hold that this will encourage the hair to grow back thick and luxuriant. The child's same sex **baulo** is responsible for the hair cutting rite for which she receives one length of shellmoney. Often the haircut is a symbolic gesture, and the **baulo** simply cuts a lock of the child's hair. This removes the taboo, and the parents can now cut their own hair and the child's whenever they wish. The ceremony can be quite unobtrusive and villagers might not know it occurred until they receive plates of cooked food presented them in honour of the child's first haircut.

Hair contains aspects of a person's vital essence, is an extension of the self and thus is an ideal medium for directing sorcery against the person to whom it belongs. The moral obligations and reciprocal self-interest characteristic of the **baulo** relationship is affirmed within the hair-cutting rite where each **baulo** couple has access to this intimate aspect of their opposite number's firstborn. If, however, the child's hair is cut without the knowledge and participation of the **baulo** and the requisite gift of shellmoney and food, this is cause for a dispute between the parents and the **baulo**. The **baulo** relationship is based on reciprocal obligations, and it is the **baulo's** rightful role to carry out this and other matters pertaining to the child for which they have a right to be recompensed in gifts of food and wealth. To deny this relationship is an insult to the **baulo** and indicative of parental selfishness. Parents who do not involve the **baulo** are ridiculed as miserly and closefisted (**imogul buda**; 'his guts/insides [are] rotten'), and their trustworthiness, as persons who can be depended upon to fulfill the moral obligations inherent in human relations, is suspect. It is less shameful not to do the thing at all than to do it without one's **baulo**, hence, some parents might never distribute plates of cooked taro but all parents get their **baulo** to perform the first haircut.

### First Harvests: Fish

This small ceremony is called **ia ituatua**, 'fish (its) bones'. The ceremony recognizes the first presentation of fish others receive in the name of the firstborn and takes place when the child's father is fortunate or skilled enough to spear or net two very large fish ( e.g., grouper, tuna). The fish are delivered to the child's female **baulo** who bakes them in the stone oven. When the fish are cooked, the **baulo** distributes one among all the women in the village. The second fish she delivers to the men's house, where it is consumed by all the village men. After the fish is distributed, the firstborn is carried to the men's house by a same sex **baulo**, where, if the child is a female, she remains outside or, if a male, he is taken inside the men's house. Using wet red paint (**pulo**), a senior male paints a representation of a fish skeleton on the child's back. The red fish skeleton depicted is highly abstract, the paint is merely applied to trace the child's spine and ribs, and takes a very few minutes to accomplish. Once completed, the **baulo** carries the child back to her mother who promptly bathes the child to remove the paint.

The symbols in this brief ceremony reiterate key concepts imbedded in the idiom of primogeniture. Fish bones are all that remain after eating and represent the gift of food which is eaten 'on top of the firstborn'. This

concept is expressed by the fish bones painted on the child's back: she 'carries/takes care of others on her back'. The colour red is associated (among other things) with fertility, life, and happiness, all of which people receive and enjoy in the name of the firstborn.<sup>15</sup>

### First harvests: nuts and bananas

Food-bearing trees of all types are a source of wealth, and the more one has the wealthier one is. Trees, especially nut trees and sago palms, take a long time to mature, and the produce enjoyed today is, in fact, the result of labour invested by one's industrious parents and grandparents. Those who do not plant many gardens and trees are referred to as **malaiŋa**, 'lazy'; 'selfish', and if one doesn't have an abundance of trees, it is because one's ancestors were lazy and inconsiderate, and didn't think of their descendants and provide for them. The huge distributions of tree fruits made in the name of the firstborn child thus do not celebrate any accomplishment on the part of the young child or her parents. They are displays of the strength, power, wealth and foresight of the child's (usually deceased) progenitors, attributes to which the child is heir as well as being their product.

Like coconut and areca palms, nut trees, banana trees, breadfruit trees and sago palms are individually owned by the person who planted them. Trees

are inherited bilaterally, and only those who have rights of ownership in the trees may harvest the fruits. Thus, when a man or woman plants a tree, in principle all his or her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren have the right to share in the fruits of that tree. While particular trees might be bequeathed by the original owner to particular offspring, in general immovable property is inherited by the firstborn child. She, or he, does not have exclusive, private ownership of trees, since her siblings (and cross-cousins) also have rights in them. Her role, as legatee, is to oversee the property, to ensure equitable access to the fruits by all who have a claim on them, and to act as arbiter in any dispute over the use and ultimate disposal of the property. One senior man, for example, who had rights of ownership in and wanted to harvest a sago palm belonging to his mother's brother, first sought out and asked the permission of his mother's brother's firstborn daughter, who ultimately granted him permission to process the palm. She could have refused him, and the matter would have ended there. However, to be less than generous and open-handed would have been contrary to the ideal expected of a firstborn and would have caused her to lose prestige in the eyes of others. When the palm was completely processed, the woman was the recipient of a "gift" of sago flour.

The tree fruits displayed and distributed in the name of the firstborn

are **pud** (bananas), **agal** ( the Tahitian chestnut *Canarium polyphyllum* ; T.P. *galip*), **ua** (nut sps. *Inocarpus fagiferous* ; T.P.: *aila* ), and **mama** (sago palm; the flour processed from the sago palm).

According to their seasonal availability, the nuts are harvested, displayed on the large platform, and distributed to each household in the village. The largest amounts of nuts and bananas are given to the child's **baulo** since they must redistribute these goods among their helpers and kin in other villages. The distribution of bananas, which are usually planted in large numbers by the parents in anticipation of this work, is not constrained so much by seasonal variability as by parental industriousness.

Bananas are not considered 'real' food, the kind of foods that 'stick to the ribs', still hunger pangs, and make one feel satisfied and replete until the next meal. These are 'snack' foods, eaten between meals, or as garnish with 'real' foods like taro and sweet potato. Bananas are not included in firstborn work because the fruit/food itself has any intrinsic value. It is the whole plant and the symbolic meanings attributed to it that constitute the relationship between bananas and the idiom of primogeniture. About ten months after planting, the banana "tree" produces one flower bud stalk at the center of the leaf cluster. The flower bud is red and shaped like a heart, indeed, the Kabana call this red bud **pudikoko**, 'banana it's heart' (also, in

anatomy: 'pig heart'). As the stalk matures it lengthens and turns downward (sps. *eumasa*). The red bracts of the bud curl back and fall off, exposing double rows of flowers each of which produces a hand of bananas. The stalk continues to elongate, always with a red bud on the end. The plant produces only one stalk of bananas during its cycle, but each stalk has many 'offspring'. The fruit is harvested by cutting down the whole plant, and the plant regenerates itself by sending up new shoots through the stump. A second species of banana, which sends its flower stalk straight up, exudes a bright red sap when the plant is cut—it 'bleeds'. The red sap is likened to blood and the fruit is forbidden to all children and to all post parturient women. The power inherent in blood is too strong and will cause young children to sicken and new mothers to bleed profusely. Similarly, the colour red, the red banana flower, the power of blood and femaleness, come together in another related context. The only part of the pig women are forbidden to eat is the heart, **pudikoko**.

The concept of the one producing many, and the colour red are what is important here. A single stalk produces many bananas; a firstborn is singular, but as the beginning of a new generation she represents the many who will comprise future generations and trace their descent from her. As Gell pointed out (1975: 319), the colour red "is an indication, a natural sign, of being in a

state of growth. Red things in nature (the red suckers of sago palms) are manifestly in a process of maturation." The red bud 'heart', and the red sap 'blood' of the banana symbolize growth, maturation and regeneration, concepts inherent in the female principle and personified by the firstborn.

Like bananas, nuts are not "real" food. **Agai** (Tahitian chestnut) are a favoured treat, and the huge amounts received from the firstborn are hung on lengths of fibre string and slung from the rafters to dry and preserve them for later consumption. The large flattish **ua** nuts must be leached in boiling water for several hours, then roasted or boiled in coconut milk before they can be eaten. In times of plenty, **ua** nuts are a treat; during hardship times these nuts are an important famine food. While they were in season during drought in 1982-83, **ua** nuts comprised virtually the totality of our daily diet.

Whereas bananas and Tahitian chestnuts are distributed only as raw foods, **ua** nuts are distributed both raw, in the manner discussed above, and cooked. On the evening of the raw nut distribution, everyone in the village and any visitors on hand, gather for a marathon of storytelling in honour of the firstborn (**tikado gergeo ele ninipuna**; they do/child/her/storytelling). The child and her parents sit in the middle of the large circle of people who assemble at the dance plaza in front of the father's men's house or the child's home. From sunset to sunrise, those men and women who wish to do so take



turns telling myths and fables (**ninipu**), legends and origin stories (**apu**), and accounts of historical events (**peluga**). Throughout the night the child's parents keep their guests supplied with tobacco and areca nuts, and at midnight, they present everyone in attendance with a plate of cooked **ua** nuts, after which the story telling continues until dawn.

In addition to their entertainment value, these stories are a mode of communication and a vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge. The Kabana, like their Kaliai neighbours, "consider the stories to contain historical, cultural, or sociological truths" (Counts 1982:158). The firstborn is too young to benefit from or appreciate the stories. As is the case in all firstborn ceremonials, it is others who benefit by the work done in honour of the firstborn. They are entertained, their own repertoire of stories is increased by hearing new or embellished stories, and they learn aspects of their cultural traditions and history.

Since nut trees take so long to mature and bear fruit, nuts are a gift from the past, from previous generations who took the time and trouble to plant and care for the trees knowing that in all probability they would not live to reap the fruits of their labour. Producing trees, like procreation, is an investment in the future. One's primogenitors are the source (**pu**; 'origin, basis, source') of one's strength (**ura**; 'strength, power'). The firstborn is also

a product of previous generations who by living and dying gave her the gift of life which she in her turn will give to others. She is a gift who gives gifts. This theme of continuity is evident, too, in the story-telling marathon when ancestral knowledge and lore are passed on to the new generation.

### First Harvests: sago palms

Throughout Melanesia sago production was an important subsistence food. With the increasing availability of store food and cash cropping activities, however, "in parts of island Melanesia and in New Guinea, sago has been relegated to, or even below, the status of a famine food" (Connell and Hamnett 1978: 233). The importance of sago in New Britain, as both a regular dietary item and a famine food, has been neglected by researchers, for as Connell and Hamnett observe (*op cit.*: 233), "there appear to be no contemporary references to sago production in New Britain, although there, too, is has been used for food in the past." The lack of attention given sago production in the northern coastal area of West New Britain is due, in large measure, to the fact that sago palms are grown in any quantity only in the Bariai Division, a fact that was painfully evident during 1982-83, when people from the Kilege-Lolo, Kaliai, Kove, and Vitus Islands Districts of West New Britain came to Bariai to trade and exchange for sago flour, the only

available food in the drought-stricken province. Sago flour, unlike other foods in this tropical environment, can be stored for up to six months before it begins to turn rancid, and it is the storage potential of sago flour that makes it a valuable trade item (cf Connell and Hamnett 1978).

The Kabana process sago flour for ordinary domestic consumption, for feasts, exchange, and for famine relief, and they harvest the fat sago beetle grubs which infest the rotting trunk of the fallen sago palm. Some Kabana (and this anthropologist) cannot bear to eat sago grubs, however, the majority of people consider roasted sago grubs a gourmet treat. Although food (flour and grubs) is the most obvious and important product of the sago palm, other parts of the palm are also used by the Kabana. Sago palms are planted to claim virgin land as well as to mark the ownership of land plots, and they are viewed as a source and significant indicator of the wealth of their owner. Women produce their traditional fibre skirts (for their own use and for trade) from the newly sprouted sago leaf spathes which they shred, dry and dye; similarly processed, but undyed sago leaves are used as menstrual pads. Fresh, bright yellow-green sago spathes are used to construct the long 'skirts' that adorn the masked spirit dancers (**aulu**), to decorate the special support posts used when constructing a new men's house, and the carved posts that support the ceremonial house (**kailaga**) built for firstborn girls, and they are

a favoured item of personal decorative finery, finery which is the focus of a major firstborn ceremonial).

The Kabana do not adhere strictly to a sexual division of labour but, as is the general rule throughout Melanesia, the production of food is primarily a female responsibility. Sago processing, however, is often the exception to the rule. Throughout Bougainville, "sago production is almost exclusively a male activity" and in the Siwai District of Bougainville, "women take no part in the production" of sago (Connell and Hamnett 1978: 234; in the Sepik see also Williamson 1979). Sago processing is arduous work. The palm is felled, the outer bark split and peeled back to expose the inner pith which is pounded and then leached to separate the flour from the pith. Sago work parties leave the village before dawn and rarely return before dusk with the fruits of their labour. Although it is primarily, but not necessarily, men who chop down the palm, Kabana men and women share the work involved in processing sago. But this was not always the case.

The Kabana relate that sago processing once was women's work. In the past, the story goes, women would band together to form a communal work party and spend several days, all day, cutting and processing sago palms while their menfolk stayed behind in the village. One day, the men decided to visit the women where they were leaching sago. Instead of finding the women hard

at work along the river bank, the men found them at leisure, beautifully outfitted in their best finery and obviously enjoying themselves talking, laughing and singing. Unobserved by the women, the men returned to the village intent on chastising the women when they returned that evening without sago flour. Instead of returning empty-handed, the women came home with an abundance of sago flour. The men immediately jumped to the conclusion that the women were meeting their lovers in the bush, and these men were processing the sago flour in exchange for sexual favours from the women. Henceforth, the men proclaimed, women would not leave the village to process sago, this work would be a male responsibility. Of course, the women were not meeting their lovers in the bush. The sago was processed for them by powerful spirits, who, insulted and angered by the men's jealousy, refused to perform this same service for the men. It is due to the jealous stupidity of men that sago processing is now backbreaking men's work.<sup>16</sup>

Since this mythic event, sago processing among the Kabana has been and continues to be a female activity performed by males. Kabana men express this state of affairs in the idiom **tikado tue**: **tikado**, 'they do/make'; **tue**, 'clam', and the traditional female all purpose tool made from the shaped and sharpened half-shell of this bivalve. Sago processing is the time when men 'use the tools of women' and do women's work, and Kabana men rue

the day that masculine foolishness saddled them with this tedious, hard work.

Once processed, the sago flour distribution is done according to the same principles outlined above for nuts and bananas, and honours the child's initial involvement in the production of a particular food. The distribution does not take place until the child is old enough (post eight years) to participate in the strenuous work of leaching the sago pith (*iporo mama*, 'she washes sago') and then only when there is sufficient sago available for distribution. The sago flour distribution might be delayed for years if parents do not have access to a plentiful supply of sago palms or the necessary garden produce to feed the work group who assist them in processing the amount of sago flour needed to meet their obligations. Before the coincidence of these contingencies, the child is forbidden to be involved in the production of sago flour even to the extent that she (or he) must remain in the village and not accompany the work parties. If the involvement of the child in sago processing is not followed with gifts of sago flour to each household, parents are liable to gossip, ridicule, and the wrath of their *baulo*. Once the distribution is made, the firstborn is free to participate in sago production whenever she wishes.

As will be seen, this is the first example of several restrictions on firstborns that prohibit their movement and/or involvement in various

activities, restrictions that can last for many years if the child's parents do not have the wherewithal to do the ceremonial work required to remove the restrictions. The taboos also reflect the double indemnity of being a firstborn: they ought not to work because they are firstborn; because they are firstborn they do not work. Ideally she is like a 'queen' who, unlike less regal personages, should not work since others as recipients of her largesse on other occasions, are obligated to reciprocate by ensuring her needs are met. The restrictions qualify and enforce this view by demanding the child be a non-participant. On the other hand, the enforced idleness of firstborns is equally indicative of the notion mentioned earlier that firstborns are, more often than not, useless, unskilled and lazy. They atrophy like the front legs of the wallaby. The fact that sago palms take so long to mature, means that some firstborn children are well into adolescence before they can prove themselves as capable workers of sago.

One final aspect of the importance of sago and primogeniture should be made here, since it contains a theme that will recur in other ceremonials. This is the death/life continuum. The developmental cycle of trees, especially coconut and sago palms, is a key metaphor used by the Kabana to describe the human life cycle. It takes about fifteen years for sago palms to mature, at which point they produce a flower stalk. The Kabana judge the ripeness of

sago by the presence of the flower stalk and the palm must be processed during the peak flowering stage. The sago palm flowers only once and if the palm is not harvested the flower goes to seed, the palm begins to rot and eventually dies without having benefitted anyone. The palm is killed, "cut down in its prime", in order to reap the bounty it contains (as are banana plants). Sago palms are associated with the multivalent meanings of red (life/death, blood, females, fecundity, happiness, anger) and white (life/death, mourning, warfare, males, semen) colour symbolism. The Kabana process two types of sago palm. The wild sago (**mama mud**) is covered in needle sharp spines, has red pith and produces pinkish-red flour; the cultivated sago (**mama takuri**) has a smooth, spineless trunk, white pith and flour. Both species send out red coloured suckers. The symbolism of red, connoting growth, maturation and regeneration, and white (or yellow) connoting death, mourning, and primogenitors, is prominent in all firstborn ceremonies.

Like trees, human beings begin as 'sprouts' which mature slowly. At the peak of their potential they 'flower' and begin to produce offspring, and, as their strength and productivity decline with old age, they shrivel, dry, and eventually die. Tree fruits and children perpetuate the species and the legacy of their progenitors. The celebration of the firstborn (as "first fruit", the



epitome of health, wealth, productivity, and continuity in mortality) in conjunction with sago production poignantly expresses this developmental metaphor. Individual human beings and individual sago palms pass this way but once, and both expend themselves in order to provide sustenance for others. The sago palm and the firstborn exemplify the death/life continuum: death; regeneration; life; maturation and decay; death.

### Discussion

I began this chapter by noting the importance of the firstborn as someone from whom others receive sustenance, and that these minor ceremonies celebrate the notion of "first fruits". For the first time, in the name of the child, others received areca nuts, coconuts, taro for planting, two types of nuts, bananas, sago flour and fish. The ceremonies also marked phases in the child's development: her first tooth and, when she walks, her first haircut. And having successfully performed the work associated with these phases, some taboos observed by the parents are discontinued. Productivity yields food which sustains life, and procreativity ensures continuity. But production and procreation also deplete strength and vital essence, conditions which ultimately end in death.

The concept of primogeniture in its totality is focussed upon the theme

of discontinuity and continuity, death and life. This theme is personified by the firstborn and represented in the combined meanings attributed to plant and colour symbolism: sprouting coconuts, single stalks with many offspring, sago palms cut down in their prime, nuts that are gifts from previous generations, the red of blood and chewed areca nuts, the red 'heart' of the banana, the red suckers and 'red' or white flour of the sago palm, the red fish bones.

With the exception of the fish, and possibly the bananas, neither the firstborn nor her parents actually produced the foodstuffs and consumables that are the focus of these ceremonies. These items were available for redistribution as a result of the strength, selfless foresight, and self-interests of the child's progenitors. The child is an exemplar of familial ('one blood') achievements and the celebration of these achievements through the child perpetuates their renown; their names are never lost or forgotten. The child's "pivotal status connecting successive generations" (Fortes 1978: 146) is clear in these ceremonies. She perpetuates the renown of previous generations and is the precursor for the achievement of renown as a new generation of adults evolves. The renown of previous generations is celebrated in the minor ceremonies, and that of 'new people' is celebrated in the major ceremonies which are the topic of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Firstborn Ceremonies: "Big Work"

While the expenditure of energy and wealth required for the performance of the minor ceremonials is anything but small, it is only a fraction of that required for the performance of the major ceremonials. These ceremonies require for their proper performance, one or all of the following wealth items: raw and/or cooked food, predominantly taro; pigs or cooked pork; shellmoney and/or other forms of material wealth. In contrast to the minor ceremonies where the wealth redistributed in the child's name originated with the child's progenitors, the wealth in the major ceremonies is produced by the child's parents, her genitors. In these ceremonies the new adult generation perpetuates the legacy of the past in activities of procreation exemplified by their firstborn, and in activities of production and the regeneration of items of value. By so doing they also "use themselves up" through the expenditure of their strength or vital essence, and they use up various material objects of value such as foodstuffs, pigs, and so on. Parents thus enter into that phase of the life cycle associated with maturation, the processes of aging and dying. The cosmic theme running throughout these

major ceremonies is that the processes of generation and regeneration result in degeneration and decay.

There are twelve different ceremonies in this category and the child must be resplendently decorated in traditional finery for all but one of them. A contrast with the child's glorious splendor and the ultimate seriousness of firstborn work, is provided by the ragtag "finery" and boisterous, often lewd behaviour of the transvestite clown. Since gardens, pigs, finery, and, to a lesser degree, clowning are so crucial to the performance of the major ceremonies, I begin this chapter by exploring their significance in more detail.

### Gardens

Given that the Kabana are subsistence horticulturalists and absolutely no activity, from informal visits to major ceremonials, takes place without food prestations, gardens (**dadaga**) are crucial for life and life style. There is no shortage of land in Bariai, and when the soil must lie fallow, new plots of land are available for clearing and planting. Most gardens are located high on the slopes of the volcanic mountains (**Sakai** and **Uris**) that rise up behind the village, some are located in low lying areas near rivers where the soil is more wet and muddy (**panapana**). Ideally, everyone should have three gardens:

one in the process of being cleared and fenced, a second planted not yet productive, and a third fully productive garden from which day-to-day subsistence is harvested. Most have two gardens (type two and three), the minimum number deemed necessary to provide insurance against weather, blight, and the ravages of wild pigs. Old gardens, called **balim**, that have been harvested and left in fallow, are regularly gleaned for previously missed or late maturing produce. Parents who have ceremonial work to perform must have more than three gardens at any one time.

The production of food is primarily a female activity and Kabana women generally are responsible for gardening. Cutting down the trees on a virgin site and building the fences that enclose the gardens, are solely male activities, however, men often assist their wives with all facets of gardening. Despite all complaints about the intensive labour involved in sago processing, the one positive feature of this foodstuff everyone agrees upon is that the work invested that day yields an immediate same day result—a meal of cooked sago flour. Gardens are subject to more or less controllable contingencies (e.g., wild pigs, sorcery, weather, inadequate garden magic) but it takes many months of ongoing labour before a newly cleared garden results in the satisfaction of a plate of cooked food.

A successful garden is the result of three interdependent factors:

labour, knowledge of all aspects of horticulture (e.g. weather, soil types, drainage, degree of sun and shade, pests, growing seasons, and more) and garden magic. To begin a new garden, a married couple first chose a site and mark out the perimeters of the garden by clearing a narrow strip of growth along the outer border, leaving the large trees to provide shade and landmarks. This completed, the husband applies a protective spell around the cleared edges of the garden. This type of magical lore is handed down from father to (eldest) son and is not shared by brothers; younger brothers might be given such knowledge by a father's or mother's brother, or they might purchase the spells from renowned garden sorcerers. The spell is performed on a species of vine, the particular type of vine utilized being known only to the man who owns the spell. The vine is collected, cut in short lengths and soaked in a solution of red paint over which appropriate spells are said to make the garden productive and to protect it from sorcery and wild pigs. Each piece of the bespelled vine is planted at intervals around the perimeter of the garden with the expectation that the spell will 'run', like the runners of sweet potato vines, and enclose the garden with its productive/protective potency. Once the magic is applied, it must rest undisturbed, in order to 'take', and it is taboo (**ikubu**) to visit or otherwise go near the garden for one week.

When the week is up, the husband and wife team return to their garden

to begin the arduous work of cutting trees and clearing the underbrush. Work groups of unmarried men or close kindred are often commissioned to help with this heavy work, for which they are recompensed by the owners of the garden with plates of cooked food at the end of each working day. At some future time, when the young men who worked for the couple are collecting bridewealth in order to marry, they might receive a contribution of shellmoney or other wealth in recognition of past services. By working for others, young men further their own self-interests and invest in their future well-being.

The cleared plot is left for six to eight weeks to allow the brush and trees to dry out, and then the garden is burned off, 'cooked' (**titatan dadaga**, 'they cook [the] garden'). When the ground is cool enough, the husband and wife team clear away the ashes and debris, working from the centre outward to the perimeter, leaving only the charred trunks of the fallen trees undisturbed. Other trees from the surrounding forest are cut down, their branches cut off, and laid in place to mark out the boundaries (**but**) between adjacent gardens, walkways (**ampalaga**) between gardens and plots, and the sections (**moe iuaro**) within a garden, each of which will be planted in a different crop, e.g. taro (**moe**), sweet potato, cassava, sugar cane, pitpit, and so on. The garden is ready to be planted but before this occurs, powerful garden magic must be

applied.

Both women and men have inherited (or purchased) knowledge of greater or lesser magnitude pertaining to garden magic. For the most part, sorcerers, who are renowned for their efficacious garden magic, are employed to perform the necessary rites and spells. Magical lore is powerful knowledge, and is expended in words carried on one's breath, an aspect of a person's vital essence. Garden sorcerers are given one length of 'gold' shellmoney to purchase their knowledge and to compensate them for their loss of breath/essence (**iud** 'he breathes'; **malul** 'power'; **gan** 'because of'; **matemate** 'the dead'). On the appointed day, the owners of the garden(s) and the sorcerer with his paraphernalia (which is carried and taken care of by his wife) congregate in the garden to share a meal provided by the garden owners who cooked it in the stone oven the previous night. The purpose of the feast is to call the spirits of the dead (**iud malu**), the original owners of the land, to participate with their living descendants in consuming the fruits of their land and labour. The spirits of dead ancestors are attracted to the site by the smell of cooked food; the living consume the actual food, the dead consume the essence (smell) of the food. Once they are attracted to the site and to the company of their ancestors, the sorcerer then performs special chants to inform the spirits of the new gardening enterprise being undertaken by their



descendents, and to solicit their assistance to protect the garden and to make it productive.

The dead are represented by a tree trunk effigy called a **burua** ('the dead one') laid out in the centre of the plot. Two digging sticks are placed on either side of the 'head' of the effigy and gifts of native tobacco, areca nut and lime powder, are laid beside it. A special bundle representing the crop and consisting of one taro stalk, a stalk of lemongrass (**ogju**), some red leaves from a banana plant species (**lapelape**), and the black-red leaves from the plant called **bonbone**, has been prepared beforehand by the garden owners who soaked them in a mixture of red paint dissolved in the juice of the secret vine referred to earlier. The bundle is planted by the sorcerer at the head of the tree trunk effigy. Using a similar bundle of leaves and taro stalks over which he has performed his own secret spells, the sorcerer sings his magical spells, which honour the spirits of the dead and enjoin them to take up residence in the garden in order to protect it against 'evil' influences and to permeate it with their fecundity. In addition to calling upon the protective and productive assistance of the dead, the sorcerer also calls upon the 'spirit/essence' of all the taro in Bariai and neighbouring areas (Kilege-Lolo, Kaliai etc.) to come and proliferate in the garden. Next, for each section of the garden, the sorcerer is given a bundle containing a stalk of each crop to be planted in that section,

which he takes to the river where he washes and bespells the base (**pu**, 'origin, source') of each plant in the bundle to remove any impurities that might later affect the crop. Each plant is then separated out and planted in the centre of the plot near the effigy. These special bespelled plants are the very last to be harvested, thus ensuring that their special powers infuse the garden for the duration of its productivity. When the sorcerer completes his work in each section, the garden is again left undisturbed for a week in order to let the magic 'take'.

When the week is up, women complete the planting while men construct fences to keep out foraging pigs. Until after the first harvest, it is forbidden for anyone to cut firewood, cook food, or to be loud and boisterous in the garden as these behaviours will cause the magically secured power of the spirits and the 'essence' of the taro to run away and result in an unproductive or low yield garden. Any individuals who have recently engaged in sexual intercourse, especially the newly married, are forbidden to be present during the execution of the rites, since the 'smell' and 'heat' of sexuality nullifies any form of magical power.

Eight to twelve weeks later the newly planted crop should be well established and the sorcerer returns to the site for the second phase of garden magic. He walks up and down the rows of taro, stroking the leaves of

each plant in an upward motion while chanting spells to make the taro 'stand tall'. If during this process he finds the taro afflicted by blight or insect infestations, he will also perform spells to remove these afflictions from the crop. Crop damage, even that caused by pigs and insects, might be caused by a sorcerer attempting to ruin the garden owners. Such interference can be divined by the garden sorcerer who, if powerful enough, can reverse the sorcery and cause it to backfire onto the perpetrator's crops. Another six to eight weeks later, the sorcerer performs the third and final stage of garden magic. He arrives at the garden with a large bundle of short sticks that he has bespelled with his own special vine juice/red paint solution. While again chanting magical spells, he plants a stick in the ground at the base of taro plants to make them grow quickly to maturation. Within four to six weeks of this last effort, the taro should be ready to harvest.

A garden must be properly 'opened' with a feast before actual harvesting begins in earnest. Husband and wife harvest a sufficient amount of taro which they cook into taro pudding (*sapala*), a favoured food, and distribute among every household in the village. A large bowl (*tabla*) of taro pudding with a length of shellmoney on top is sent to the sorcerer who performed the garden magic. This pre-harvest, "first-fruits", distribution acknowledges the sorcerer's expertise, thus increasing his renown as

someone who knows excellent garden magic, and shares the wealth that the garden owners have realized because of his expertise. If this distribution is not made, the garden owners are liable to ridicule as miserly, selfish individuals who keep to themselves the profit they earned as a result of the work ('on top of') of others. The biggest danger to such unthinking individuals is the sorcerer, since sorcerers who know how to make gardens flourish, also, by definition, know how to kill/destroy crops with blight, plagues of insects, or by sorcery that affects wild and domesticated pigs with an insatiable and destructive desire for garden crops. An insulted sorcerer might also use his knowledge against the ungrateful individual's future enterprises. When the garden has been properly 'opened' the couple are then free to harvest the garden when they will, and the women are now free to chop up and use for firewood, the large trees not consumed by fire when the garden was burned.

Food is essential for the maintenance of life and for maintaining an appropriate lifestyle. The interdependence of the dead and the living informs this vital aspect of Kabana life. Food is produced on land originally owned by one's ancestors, who laid claim to that land by clearing the primary forest and planting various kinds of long-lived trees on the virgin territory. In addition to the land, the living descendants also received from their progenitors critical knowledge of food production, including magical lore.

The inseparability of the death/life continuum is expressed in the feast of cooked food shared with the dead in a new garden, in the magical incantations which attract the spirits of the dead to the garden and solicit their beneficence, and, most graphically, in the tree trunk effigy of the **burua** (the dead one) located at the centre of the garden and representative of all one's deceased ancestors. Symbols of fertility, of the life-giving essence of blood, and of death are all present in the red paint solutions used throughout the magical rites and on the base of the stalks from which new taro corms will grow. The necessity to produce garden yields beyond the level of subsistence needs for distribution at major ceremonials for the firstborn further reinforces the ongoing celebration of the death/life continuum. Over-production is an investment in the future, production of subsistence needs is merely a sustaining of the present.

The foods distributed at the major ceremonials are primarily cooked foods and this introduces an additional connection between the living and the dead: fire. In their pre-colonial past, the Kabana buried all their dead in shallow graves in the men's house. On top of these graves, the men built their hearths (**aupu**), and eventually the fire reduced the corpse to ashes and a few bits of bone. All ceremonies for the firstborn and for the dead are referred to as **gai ala nan diŋa**, 'we go because of the fire'. Fire is hot, and the Kabana

associate hotness with the negativity of illness, anger, the colour red, the passion of sexuality, and death. As with all symbols, the meanings imputed to them are both positive and negative relative to their contextual juxtaposition. "Fire is quintessentially the means of converting natural substances to human use" (Gell 1975: 248). Fire is beneficent as evidenced in garden preparation, where fire was utilized to 'cook' the site to make it suitable for planting and to provide valuable fertilizers. Food is converted to human use by the heat of cooking fires. Women perform magical spells on the smaller stones which they gather in the bush and use to construct their stone ovens, incantations which attract the spirits of their dead ancestors to the cooking hearth (**aupu**) to oversee the cooking process and ensure that the food cooked is good. Fire both consumes and renews, and it is this which makes fire so meaningful as a symbolic vehicle of the death/life continuum expressed throughout firstborn and mortuary ceremonies.

### Pigs

Fire, femaleness, food production, animal husbandry, and social personhood are all part of the complex pragmatic and symbolic significance of pigs as key elements in firstborn and mortuary ceremonials. Domesticated pigs constitute the single most valued wealth item to the Kabana. Pigs

represent the epitome of achieved personal power and renown; pork is food *par excellence*. Although pigs are a valuable source of protein and fat, what I want to emphasize in the following is that the real socioeconomic value of pigs is that their very availability for food or wealth depends on the productive interdependence of the wife/husband team.

The care and feeding of pigs is solely the responsibility of wives and unmarried daughters. Females are taught animal husbandry from a very early age, and as noted earlier, one criterion for choosing a "good" wife is the woman's conscientious attention to raising pigs. The Kabana say that any man without a wife is truly disadvantaged. Without a wife to feed, tend, and domesticate them, pigs would become feral at best or, at worst, die. Either circumstance would render the pigs useless as accessible food/wealth. A man is perfectly within his rights to beat his wife if she is negligent in her duty to care for their pigs, and if beatings do not convince her to change her behaviour, her husband will divorce her forthwith.

Unmarried males are analogous to feral pigs. Like wild pigs who forage in other people's gardens, single males do not eat from their own gardens but depend upon their female kin to feed them. Like wild boars that impregnate female village pigs in the bush, unmarried males are wholly concerned with 'trying to seduce females', by enticing village women into the

bush. Wild pigs (**gaea sagsag**) are destructive, aggressively dangerous, of value to humans only when they are transformed by fire into cooked pork. Similarly, unmarried males with 'wild eyes' (**iriau imata sagsag**, 'youth his eye wild') are of little constructive value in themselves or to society until they are transformed into men and husbands by their wives. Just as women feed and tame pigs (**gaea mud**, domesticated pig) in order to domesticate them, thus transforming them into objects of value, women as wives domesticate males by feeding them and providing them with a home, thus transforming males into men and persons of value (**araga imata mud**, 'man his eye tame').

As an ideal category, food production for both human and animal consumption is a female domain: it is women who cultivate, collect, prepare, and cook food. In fact, men do assist with gardening chores, feed pigs, and they can cook and do so willingly if circumstances require it of them. It is only females, however, who cut and carry firewood, and tend the household hearth (**aupu**) which is the heart of domestic life and from which comes comfort, companionship, warmth, and cooked food. Within this context, fire is strictly and definitively gender specific: men are dependent on females for their cooking fire. If a man's wife is away and his hearth fire dies or there is no firewood, he solicits firewood and a burning ember from a close



kinswoman rather than search for firewood in the bush or start a new fire with friction sticks or matches. The ashes and partially consumed bits of charred wood in the cold hearth are like the ashes and bits of charred bone that remain of the dead 'cremated' in the men's house hearths (**aupu**), and, just as life is regenerated through female procreativity, so too, females relight the fire necessary to make edible the food that sustains life.

Like gardens, growing and domesticating pigs requires a long term investment of labour in order for the animals to reach the necessary size and degree of tusk development for future ceremonial distributions. There are three broad categories of pigs used in ceremonials: female pigs, castrated boars without tusks, and castrated boars with tusks—pigs that have had their upper canines knocked out to allow the lower canines to grow in a sweeping upward curve that eventually curls back around until the tusk grows down through the lower jaw bone to form a complete circle. On average it takes upwards of three to five years to produce a medium sized pig, and a minimum of ten years to produce a pig with tusks that have grown full circle. It is this long term investment that makes pigs the ultimate form of wealth and prestige since they are walking indicators of the strength and ability of the wives who feed them, keep them domesticated, and who protect them from death at the hands of irate villagers whose gardens the pigs might have

ravaged and from irresponsible youths who occasionally treat themselves to a feast of roasted suckling pig in the privacy of the forest. A married couple's pig herd is made up of animals individually owned by the wife and the husband, and both women and men trade and exchange pigs. The size and extent of the network of pig indebtedness in which they are involved is a measure of their ability to 'find' wealth and sustain long-term exchange relations. That parents have a pig(s) that they have grown themselves or acquired through trade to exchange or distribute as cooked pork at their firstborn's ceremonial attests to their individual and joint worth as persons of integrity, worth, strength and prestige.

The exchange of live pigs and/or the distribution of cooked pork begins with the major firstborn ceremonials, gathers momentum at mortuary ceremonies, and culminates in a massive pig exchange at the **ololo kapei**, when firstborn and mortuary ceremonies are performed concurrently. The pigs exchanged live or consumed as pork at ceremonies are predominantly female pigs called **gaea aupu**, 'pig [of the] hearth', and range in size from medium to very large. Equally important are the huge male tuskers called **gaea doge**, 'pig [with] tusks'. Male pigs without tusks can be substituted for the required female pig, but there is no substitute for a male tusker because of the wealth and power associated with pigs' tusks. Tuskers might be

exchanged live (but only for tuskers of equal size and tusk development) or they might be butchered, cooked and distributed as pork. Even if they are exchanged live, the pig's tusks must be returned with one length of 'gold' shell money to the original owner of the pig. The fully developed pig's tusks represent the owner's achieved strength and prestige which he or she has earned by investing years in growing the pig, and even though the pig has long since been eaten, the achievement is attested to and displayed in the form of the boar's tusks worn as an item of personal adornment. Only those who actually grew the pig's tusks have the right to display them. Anyone who displays tusks they did not grow or that belong to someone else, demeans the value of the tusks which, concomitantly, demeans the value of the person who grew them. This is an unforgivable insult for which redress is immediately sought in the form of death by sorcery. Great care is taken to ensure that pig's tusks are not damaged when the pig is killed and butchered, and to ensure that the tusks are returned intact to their original owners. The value of shell money is as nothing compared to the value of pig's tusks, since anyone with any ability at all can accumulate shell money or manufacture it, but only those with special talent and strength can sustain the investment required to produce a pig with perfectly circular tusks. Pig's tusks are treated as family heirlooms, and the tusks that adorn the firstborn display

familial renown and power for which the child stands as exemplar.

### Decorative Finery

The Kabana enjoy beauty for its own sake and are at great pains to beautify themselves and their environment. The concept of beauty is perhaps the most culturally relative of all human concepts. Whereas we consider gleaming white teeth a pleasing personal attribute, the Kabana consider white teeth an embarrassment and black teeth a sign of beauty. While I was stunned and awed by the profusion and tremendous variety of orchids in the forest, the Kabana consider orchids as exotic as I consider dandelions, and they spent hours admiring the daisies and tulips pictured in my books and magazines from home. The beauty we perceive in orchids and tulips is not intrinsic to them. For us, tropical orchids are beautiful because they are rare in our non-tropical environment and, since they must be expensively imported or carefully cultivated by experts, when we give or receive them on very special occasions orchids represent an ostentatious display of wealth. Similar demonstrations of wealth, prestige, and the leisure associated with wealth are embedded in the beauty we assign to gold, diamonds, furs, cars, luxurious homes, suntans, and designer clothes. In this regard, our concept of beauty has much in common with that of the Kabana, since for them also, things of

beauty are not intrinsically so. They are beautiful because of the cultural values attributed to them.

Beauty might well be in the eye of the beholder but only if the beholder is able to interpret what is seen. Things of beauty are symbols of wealth, power, and prestige that make statements about cultural values and about those who possess and display such things. Pig's tusks are culturally defined things of beauty not only because of the aesthetic appeal of their perfect form, their colour, or the feel of warm, smooth ivory, but also because they demonstrate culturally meaningful information about individual achievement and worth that cannot be communicated in any other way. Other such items of personal adornment include woven and shell armlets, dog's teeth, flying fox teeth, feathers, fur, leaves, flowers and paint.

Strathern points out that decorative finery conveys messages through the act of display, and what is displayed is "the sum of individual effort . . . wealth, strength and power" (1979: 244). Earlier I noted that when their first child is born, parents are forbidden to wear anything that is red or yellow, to cut or dress their hair, to wear "nice" clothing and various types of ornamentation. These taboos effectively reduce their social and self-identity to that of non-entities, persons who have not demonstrated their capabilities, their wealth, strength and power. Parents must earn back their right to wear

various items of personal adornment by performing firstborn ceremonials. By performing the ceremonials, they are gradually (re)constructing their social identities as competent, participatory members of society and their self-identities as individuals of strength, power and prestige. The right to wear certain items of personal adornment is earned by accomplishing firstborn ceremonial work and the finery worn or not worn by parents is indicative of their level of achievement.

Whatever the aesthetic value, items of decorative finery are culturally meaningful symbols of achievement that graphically demonstrate achieved status differential in this ostensibly egalitarian society. In wearing decorative finery themselves, or displayed on the person of the firstborn as their exemplar, parents are actively soliciting admiration and the accordance of prestige from others. Prestige and renown must be earned, but these conditional concepts can only be awarded in a pattern of interchange between the individual performer and spectators who respond to that performance (*cf.* Bateson 1979; Strathern 1979). But as Strathern notes (1979), it is only the opinion of the audience, and not the individuals in that audience, that is modified in this interactive process. What is altered is other's opinion of the individual performing the display, which in the Kabana situation is the child's parents. In ways similar to Strathern's account (1979:

256) of the decorated dancer in Hagen society, the decorative finery worn by Kabana parents and their first born affects how the audience thinks about them and this affects parental relations with others, indicates their state of inner resources and strengths, and points to the possibilities of their future destiny.

My intent, to this point, has been to provide a general explanation of the cultural meanings attributed to decorative finery and I shall defer further discussion of specific adornments until such time as they appear within their ceremonial context. There is, however, one important category of finery that deserves closer examination at this stage. This category is made up entirely of various species of plants in the families *Codiaeum* (crotons), *Cardyline*, and *Dracaena*. The Kabana group all these plants together in a single named category called **more**, or *tanget* as they are known throughout New Guinea in Tok Pisin. For ease of presentation, I shall use the term croton when discussing this category of plants.

Crotons come in a wide variety of leaf shape and size, and in many shades of red, yellow and green. As Keesing has noted (1982: 179), plants in the croton category are used throughout Melanesia both as a vehicle for colour symbolism and "as a symbol of continuity and permanence...since the leaves, kept dry, are rot resistant and last for many years, and the plant takes root

easily and lives for many decades". Red and yellow coloured crotons in Kabana culture are intimately associated with concepts of continuity and permanence, as well as the conceptual obverse, discontinuity and impermanence. Crotons are heavily loaded symbolic vehicles expressing the death/life continuum and are profusely present as finery at both firstborn and mortuary ceremonies.

Crotons, the Kabana say, are a mark of the dead. Crotons guard the roads travelled by spirits of the dead, and are used as barriers between the living and the dead. They are planted in graveyards and around the men's house to mark the latter off limits to women and children. Red crotons called **namo** are associated with aggression and death in battle, and when someone receives a knotted **namo** he knows his kin will soon call upon him to assist them in a fight. Crotons are also the mark of autochthonous spirit beings which dwell, on ceremonial occasions, in the men's houses where they are represented by masked dancers or by 'voices'. The plants grow naturally in various places in the bush where these powerful spirits originally manifested themselves to mortals.

One of the most important crotons used at mortuary ceremonies, pig exchanges, and as firstborn finery is the **natem more** (*Cardyline terminalis*?). In the mythic past, this croton was a green colour, but was



changed to its current solid, very dark red colour by **Moro**, a half-man half-snake culture hero. **Moro** effected the transformation when he covered the plant with the blood-red spittle of his chewed areca nut. Areca nuts, as I will discuss later, are the origin of the **aulu**, the autochthonous spirit-being represented by masked spirit dancers. Entire small shrubs of red/green and yellow/green variegated crotons called **more gagaraba** and **more tabaki** are part of the masked spirit dancers' costumes, but only those that grow on the specific site where the spirit first originated are used in the costume. Masked spirit dancers are only brought forth at mortuary ceremonies, and the women who dance on these festive occasions do so while waving branches of these targets in their hands.

Another type of red striated croton is named **more andewa** after the volcano of the same name in the Kaliai District, on whose peak humans and spirits once dwelt together harmoniously, until a spirit woman was insulted by her human mother-in-law. The altercation between the two women resulted, in Kaliai mythology, in the separation of the human and spirit domains, and Mt. Andewa is now the home of spirits of the dead, barred to the living (see Counts 1980 for the complete myth). Although Kabana spirit entities do not go to Mt. Andewa when they depart the domain of the living, the Kabana know the myth of the mountain and cite it to explain why the

croton **more andewa** is so named. This is a wild croton never cultivated by humans, but it grows in such a way as to appear as though it were cultivated; nothing else grows where this croton grows, the base of the plants and the immediate environ are always tidy, the ground weeded bare. The peculiar growing habits of this plant are attributed to the spirits of the dead who obviously tend them. This plant, the Kabana say, marks the route taken by the recently dead as they leave the village. As the spirits pass by they break the plant: a broken leaf signifies that a child has died, a whole stalk broken off signifies an adult has died. Persons who have been away for a time, check these plants for breakage as they return to the village to see if there have been any deaths while they have been away.

Long, narrow, yellow/green striated crotons called **more molomolo** are important props in rites for the termination of mourning taboos. A widower, for example, out of respect for the memory of his wife, does not travel the paths he and his wife walked together. After a "decent" interval and when he has the required mortuary compensation due his dead wife's kin, the widower will re-open the path by retraversing the route, strewing branches from the croton **more molomolo** in his tearful wake.

The list of plants in the category croton is lengthy, and only a few more will be mentioned here in order to illustrate my contention that the

significance of these plants lies in their use as vehicles for colour symbolism, particularly the colours red and yellow. The croton category includes other plants whose leaves are described as follows: yellow/green or red/green crotons (*Codiaeum*); the "Red Edge" (*Dracaena*), a long tapered green leaf with a defined red border; the green/white/red variegated "Firebrand" (*Cardyline terminalis*); the "Zebra" plant (*Acanthaceae*) which has a yellow spikey flower, a dark green leaf with the "spine" and "ribs" of its skeleton defined in yellow stripes; various types of small red, orange, or yellow leafed plants (*Coleus*); a plant which is green on top, with a reddish-purple underside (*Calathea insignis*); the green with yellow striped topside and reddish-purple underside leafed plant (*Rhoeo discolor*); the long white variegated leaf of the aspidistra (*Aspidistra lurida*); and finally, the green leaves and red flowers of various ginger species, which are symbolically 'hot' plants. In addition to the yellow flower of the Zebra plant, the brilliant red hibiscus with its long yellow-tipped stamen, and the sweet smelling, whitish-yellow frangipani are the flowers primarily used as finery. One final plant should be added here, and this the **bonbone** (*Impatiens hastii*) referred to earlier as one of the plants in the garden sorcerer's bundle. The leaf of this plant is small, round in shape and such a dark red colour that it is almost black. Besides being used as an important ingredient

in magical bundles (the black of sorcerers, the red of fertility) and as decorative finery, the leaves of this plant, when crushed and cooked with coconut oil, produce a very black dye which the Kabana apply to their hair to make it blacker, hence more attractive and seductive to the opposite sex (the concoction also reputedly kills head lice).

I have already discussed the many symbolic meanings the Kabana read into and interpret from the colour red: happiness, anger, war, blood, death, femaleness, sexuality, regeneration, life. White is the colour associated with breast milk, semen, coconut products, as well as taro, which the Kabana consider the supreme source of human sustenance and the most highly valued of all foods. White in these contexts is the ultimate symbol of nurture. But white is also associated with aging, decay and decrepitude, death, mourning, malevolent sorcery, fear, aggression, purity (of thought and action), regeneration and continuity. It is quite clear, as Turner points out (1967: 61) that an "attempt to polarize the symbolic values of red and white is artificial and constrained", since each colour participates in the meanings of the other relative to their context or juxtaposition.

The Kabana are not so clear about the colour symbolism of yellow, nor why, with red, yellow is taboo to firstborn and parents alike until after the appropriate ceremony is accomplished. The Kabana linguistically differentiate

the colours red (**sig**), yellow (**eagonga**), and white (**bodebode**). Turner suggested that, although in many languages red and yellow are differentiated linguistically, "yellow is often regarded as ritually equivalent to red" (1967: 60). I would extend this observation and contend that although linguistically, and for that matter visually, differentiated by the Kabana, yellow is also a ritual equivalent of white. What I wish to argue, and I feel confident the Kabana would agree with me, is that yellow is substituted for white in contexts where the symbolism of white is a crucial aspect of the overall meanings imbedded in and portrayed by ceremonial.

The most important concept portrayed in firstborn and mortuary ceremonies is the death/life continuum; death and life are both antithetical and complementary, they participate in one another's meanings, and sum up the human condition. The colourful plants used as decorative finery are resonant "sacred symbols" and, as Geertz argues, the meanings "stored" in sacred symbols "relate an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality: their peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level, to give to what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import" (1973: 127). These cosmological principles are represented in the many shades of red, red/green, yellow, yellow/green, and orange leaves of crotons and flowers that adorn the

firstborn as exemplar of regeneration and continuity, that adorn the men's houses, graveyards, the **aulu** spirit-beings and dancers at mortuary ceremonies, and that are intimately associated with creator beings and culture heroes who were the source of culture (ethos/aesthetics) and society (nomos/morality).

### Transvestite Clowning

Transvestite clowning performed in honour of firstborns is a rambunctious buffoonery of morality and aesthetics. Transvestite clowning is a category of symbolic inversion, or more appropriately, "aesthetic negation" (Babcock 1978: 20). In her excellent overview of the diverse perspectives on cultural inversions, Babcock (1978) has broadly defined symbolic inversion as "any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political." Since Babcock has provided an excellent overview of the various analytic perspectives brought to bear on the forms and functions of cultural inversion, I will not repeat her efforts here. No matter how symbolic inversion has been treated analytically, such analyses spring from the assumption that there is a classification, "order", which is reversed or

inverted symbolically to portray "disorder", and that the inversion serves to demonstrate or otherwise reinforce the *status quo ante*: "order" While this is a useful analytic paradigm for attempting to untangle the complexity of cultural inversions, there is a tendency to artificially dichotomize classificatory systems into exclusive dualities in order to make the inversion "work" in some logical sense.

Bateson (1958), for example, told how Iatmul women who normally live a sedate, unobtrusive and rather colourless existence, dress in the very finest of male attire during the *nayen* first accomplishment ceremonies. He explains this form of transvestism by suggesting that the women are in a "situation unusual for them but which is usual for men", and concludes, therefore, that the women have "contrived a transvestite costume, and this costume has been accepted by the community as appropriate to these abnormal conditions" (p. 200). Women, who find themselves in situations normally defined as "male", thus (must) take on the trappings of males in order to deal with that situation. While Iatmul women "wear the smartest of male attire", Iatmul men demean themselves and "wear the filthiest of female garments", specifically those worn by widows (p.14,15). Bateson maintains that in this transvestite costume, a male is shaming himself, and expressing his contempt for those (i.e., females) who are able to express their grief

readily at mourning rites. Bateson concludes his discussion of transvestism by pointing out that what the women are really doing is "celebrating the achievement of a small child", and, "since *nayen* behaviour is the conventional way in which a *mbu* [MB] congratulates his *laua* [ZC] upon any achievement, there is no doubt that this behaviour, distorted and irrelevant as it may seem to us, is yet understood by the *laua* as a form of congratulation" (p. 203). The *latmul* example makes it quite clear, as Ortiz argues (1972: 152) in another context, that there is no single factor that "can stand by itself to explain numinous phenomena like these." Symbolic inversions are more, or less, than the expression of logical opposites.

Whatever else transvestite clowning (**sega**) might be, to the Kabana it is theatre, part of the intent is to entertain, to make people laugh, to invest the formal recognition of a firstborn accomplishment with an aura of congratulatory celebration, a point also made by Epstein (1969: 235) regarding Tolai clowning. Life (and death) is a serious business, and my understanding of transvestite clowning in Kabana culture is that it serves to remind people that these weighty matters are indeed too serious to take so seriously, hence the injection of a lighter note in the proceedings. Both women and men perform clowning behaviour; however, with one exception, all instances of transvestite clowning that I witnessed were performed by



women. Female clowns dress in a bedraggled, bizarre assortment of male attire, carry real spears or imitations made of a long sapling, and smear their faces (as opposed to decorate their faces) with red and white paint. They parody the aggressive stance and spear-throwing attitude of males in warfare, chase people around, tell off-colour jokes, graphically imitate sexual intercourse, and generally reduce the appreciative crowd to helpless laughter. Male (but never female) clowns have been known to remove all their clothing and strut dramatically through the village to the tune of ribald jokes about their sexual prowess and equipment and the Kabana version of "wolf-whistles".

Clowning is not a required part of any ceremonial, people are free to perform or not as they wish, although there are two women in the village, renowned as "characters", who wouldn't miss an opportunity to perform. In general, clowning is associated with actual accomplishments on the part of a firstborn, for example, the child's first excursion to the reef, the successful completion of a first long distance voyage, the child's first dance, and in the case of firstborn boys, the first wild pig he kills with his own hand. If someone creates a new song that particularly moves or pleases someone else, this person will perform clowning as a form of appreciation for the song writer. *First or novel accomplishments, subtly change the individual who*

accomplished them: they are 'new people' the Kabana say, no longer the persons they were since they are enlarged by their experience. Clowning is a joyous celebration of achievement and of the 'new person' who is evolving through active personal achievement.

There is no special category of people who perform clowning, and anyone belonging to the child's extended kindred can take on the role. There might be only one or as many as ten or more clowns who perform on any given occasion. Clowning is "work" that someone does on another's behalf, and like everything else, this work must be recompensed. Indeed, some people grouched that frequent performers only did so in order to get paid. Clowns are paid in shellmoney or such things as a new length of cotton for a wraparound skirt. Since the clowns have made a public spectacle of themselves, spoken the unspeakable, and done the not done, the payment received is defined as wealth to 'buy their shame' and embarrassment. Non-payment would imply public disapproval of the behaviour and the clown's sense of shame would rise to a level that might be unendurable to him or her.

I embarked on this discussion of pigs, gardens, decorative finery and transvestite clowning because all these things are vital components of firstborn (and mortuary) ceremonials and therefore, some background explanation of why this is so is of immediate importance. The preceding

explanations and interpretations will obviate the necessity for redundant explanation, while at the same time they set the stage for further elaboration of these important items when they turn up in their ceremonial context. This said, I turn now to the series of major firstborn ceremonials.

### THE MAJOR CEREMONIES

As noted earlier, the difference between the 'small work' of the minor ceremonials and the 'big work' of the major ceremonials is one of relative scale. In the minor ceremonials, the bulk of the items redistributed in the name of the firstborn were not necessarily produced by the child's parents. The gifts of food and consumables are in actuality gifts from the child's progenitors who had the foresight and industriousness to provide for their descendants. Similarly, the knowledge and cultural lore shared at the story-telling are gifts from the ancestors, passed on to the child and through her to the community. In the minor ceremonies, there were no pigs or cooked pork, very little shell-money, and excepting the red fish bones painted on the child's back, decoration was not part of the proceedings.

The major ceremonies are 'big work', requiring actual parental expenditures in the production of huge taro gardens and of pigs, which they either raise themselves or must obtain by becoming increasingly involved in

relations of indebtedness in the exchange network. This is indeed hard work in terms of labour, planning and execution, and although the actual performance of the ceremonials in this category varies in terms of grandeur, the definitive criterion of major ceremonials is the presence of one or more of three items of value: pigs, taro, and shellmoney. Decorative finery takes on a more important role both as a medium for presenting the firstborn in an aura of splendor and as symbols of status. Many of these ceremonies are named for a particular item of finery that parents are forbidden to display as personal adornment until the ceremony is completed. As it was for the minor ceremonies, my discussion of the major ceremonies is presented according to the order in which they ideally should be performed.

### The Pig of Tears

Until they are able to walk, infants are in constant close physical contact with their mother or other caretakers, and it is probably for this reason that Kabana babies rarely cry. When they do cry, the Kabana interpret this behaviour as a sign of distress, that the baby is hungry, uncomfortable or unwell, and they act immediately to satisfy the child's demands. Children learn from a very early age that demands accompanied by tears are a highly successful ploy for getting one's way. Tears, like blood, are a form of

embodied vital essence. Crying depletes vital essence, thus to shed tears is to lose vital essence and to diminish one's self. Anything that diminishes the firstborn, whether insult, injury, ritual loss of blood, or tears, also diminishes the child's parents and compensation must be paid to them to redress the situation.

Part of the ideology of the firstborn is that she/he should never want for anything and, if the child expresses the slightest desire or interest in something, that thing should be given without hesitation to the child. On the other hand, the firstborn is the source, not the recipient of wealth, and when the child is given a gift, this is interpreted by the child's parents as a slur on their ability to accomplish the work for the child. A gift to the firstborn implies that the parents have been slow to fulfill their ceremonial responsibilities, and that the giver is 'trying', that is, challenging parental ability to do so by giving the child something that others have not yet received in the name of the firstborn. It is this covert challenge to parental achievement, in combination with tears both as a loss of substance requiring compensation and as the accepted medium through which young children communicate their desires/demands that inform the ceremonial, **mata isul aea ketja**, 'the cutting of [her] tears'.

In this semi-private ceremony, an immature female pig that has not yet

had a litter is given to the child by one of her parent's siblings (MB, MZ, FB, MZ, or someone so classified) who have witnessed the child's crying. To this point there has been no pork distributed in the name of the firstborn, and the child's crying is interpreted by others as a demand on her part to eat pork, an indirect way of informing the parents that others have not yet received pork from the firstborn and think that it is time they did. The donor of the pig has proven his or her ability to provide the firstborn with pork. The live pig given to the child is a debt her parents must repay, it is a reminder to the parents that they have not provided pork, and it is an open invitation, really a demand, for them to prove their ability to supply pork in the name of their firstborn. The seriousness of the challenge to parental strength is somewhat ameliorated since it is one of the child's "parents" who has given the pig. The fact remains, however, that the donor is also an affine to one or the other of the parents, and challenges from one's affines are serious matters.

The pig is not cooked and distributed as pork. It becomes part of the parents' herd, and they may use it to repay another individual to whom they are indebted for a pig, give it to someone else, thus placing that recipient in a position of indebtedness to the parents, or use it in another firstborn ceremony. No matter how it is used, the parents remain indebted to the donor until they are in a position to reciprocate with a pig of the same size and sex.

This pig debt is best repaid in the same format, that is, to "buy the tears" of the original donor's firstborn.

### The First Wearing of Clothes

All children go about naked at least until they are able to walk, at which point gender distinctions begin to make a difference. From the time they are toddlers, parents provide some sort of clothing in order to conceal little girls' genitals. Little boys, on the other hand, might not wear any clothing until they are six to eight years of age. The reason why little girls (all females) must cover their genitals was explained to me as follows:

Females are like autochthonous spirits. Female genitals are the dark and mysterious hidden source of creation; it is from female genitals that new life is brought forth. The origin of autochthonous spirits is equally mysterious, they sprang full blown from the dark and mysterious womb of the earth, whereupon they showed themselves to humankind and instructed them in the proper procedures for celebrating the creative life force of the universe. In the mythic past, these spirits would manifest themselves and take up residence in the men's ceremonial house for these celebrations. For reasons long since forgotten, the spirits no longer actually manifest themselves at celebrations, only their power is present, represented, for

example, by masked dancers (**aulu**) or the voice of the bull-roarer (**tibuda**) which are worn or manipulated by living men. While the power is real enough, the fact that it is manipulated by men is kept secret from women and children. If women knew that it was in fact men who wore the costumes, produced the voices, and acted out the behaviours and demands of the spirits, the men would be shamed in the eyes of the women, and more importantly, they would be breaking the covenant of secrecy that their ancestors entered into with these spiritual powers. The spirits would retaliate by removing their powers or by destroying all of humankind. Of course, adult women do know the secrets of male spirit representation, but just as males have a vested interest in maintaining the "secrecy", so, too, women have a vested interest in not exposing the "secrets", since all consider the power of the spirits to be real and necessary to the affairs of humankind. If access to this power was withdrawn from humans, the effects would be disastrous.

The "secret" of spirit representation is not a secret at all, in the conventional definition of the term. It is, more accurately, a mystery in the religious sense of the word, a mystery which contains the inexplicable origin of the universe and the life within it. This is a mystery that cannot be resolved nor denied, it can only be celebrated. Autochthonous spirits and human beings share a common origin which is enshrouded in mystery, but the



spirits are a more pure representation of the original creative power. By calling upon the power of these spirits and representing them in the the form of voices or masked dancers, human beings reassert their participation in the creative powers of the universe and appropriate that power to their own ends. The secret lies in the ontological mystery itself, not in the supposed secrecy surrounding the representation of spirit-beings by men.

When the Kabana say that "women are spirits" they are referring to the fact that the female body contains power for the creation of new life. The facts of biology aside, how this is possible remains a mystery. Males contribute to the creative process, but cannot themselves accomplish it. Females contribute to the creative process that brings forth representations of the autochthonous spirits, but cannot themselves accomplish this act. Males nourish the embryo by providing sustenance in the form of semen; women nourish the spirits by providing their representatives with cooked food. Women and men both know that men produce and manipulate the masked spirits; women and men both know that sexual intercourse produces a child. The fundamental mystery of creation, whether of spirits or of human life, remains. If women "knew" that males produced and moved within the costumes representing the spirits, men would be feel shame for their arrogance in purporting to understand and control the mystery. If women's

genitals are exposed, the mystery of life is demeaned by its association with the heat of human sexuality and mundane human passions.

A woman would feel shame if her genitals were exposed, and men would feel shame if a woman exposed her genitals. The spirits, men say, are the creators of ceremonial work and women are the "backbone" of that work; without the spirits ceremonial would make no sense, without women the ceremony would not be possible. Men must respect females and their power for creation just as they must respect the spirits and their power for creation. And, just as the spirits should not be exposed as males in disguise, thus diminishing the glory of both humans and spirit beings, so women's genitals should not be exposed to show the source from which all people originate, thus diminishing the mystery of creation and human sexuality.

The relationship between females and various types of spirits is portrayed in myths. In one myth, for example, Akono is pursued by a woman who wishes to marry him. The woman is not a "true" human being but a spirit woman, and if she can seduce Akono she will kill him and take him to live with her in the domain of the dead. Akono suspects that the woman is a spirit, but he is attracted by her beauty and does want to marry her. He decides to test her reality. He paddles his canoe a sufficient distance offshore and calls the woman to join him. The woman wades out to him, but

in order to get into the canoe she must lift her leg over the prow and in doing so she exposes her genitals. Akono is instantly alerted to the fact that since no human woman would expose her genitals, this woman is not human and if he doesn't kill her, she will devour him. Akono kills her by throwing the hot stones from the hearth on his canoe bed into her mouth, thus "cooking" her humanlike form and transforming it back into its spiritual form whereupon she returns to the land of spirits.

This test of the reality of a female is also applied to shapeshifters who take on the appearance of females in order to harm someone. When a woman suddenly turns up in a man's garden or where he is working alone in the bush and makes known her desire for sexual intercourse, the man will test her reality by tricking her into stepping over some obstacle. If she does so, and shapechangers apparently don't realize the ruse, she will expose her genitals and the danger of her true spirit being. If she modestly avoids the obstacle, she is a real human female, and the liaison might be accomplished.

A far more serious event that actually occurred in the village illustrates how the female/spirit being analogy finds its way into practical human affairs. It was the following event that prompted the enquiries and led to my understanding of the ideas I have related here. Because of the drought we were experiencing and the resultant barren gardens, many families joined

together to produce copra for cash to buy food. The government boat picked up the copra and the several young men who would sell it, and took them off to the copra marketing board at Kimbe. The men were gone for over two weeks. When they returned, the wife of one young man complained to her husband that another young man who had remained behind had tried repeatedly to involve her in an adulterous affair. The husband confronted the man with the accusation, which was denied. Cooler heads did not prevail and within a very few minutes the entire village population took up sides with one or the other young man, and the whole situation erupted into violent arguments and fisticuffs. The village constable attempted to restore order by rushing from one group of combatants to the next while holding up a small Papua New Guinea flag, demanding, in its name, that they cease and desist. The constable was ignored and the fight raged until the village catechist rang the bell for evening vespers.

The fight was the topic of conversation that evening as we relaxed around the fire. The constable's behaviour had struck me as ludicrous and I asked what he had been trying to accomplish by waving the flag. Any altercation, it was explained to me, from fisticuffs to all out war, can be stopped cold if a woman enters the fray, removes her fibre skirt and throws

it on the ground, thus exposing her genitals and shaming the combatants both for the behaviour which caused her to remove her skirt and for seeing her genitals. All men should respect women as they respect the spirits, and in the presence of females and spirits men ought not to participate in behaviour that offends their sensibilities. It was further explained that we all ought to respect and honour the flag of our country by observing proper behaviour in its presence. Therefore, by showing the flag the constable was attempting to stop the fight by shaming people into behaving themselves in the same manner as does a woman who removes her skirt and exposes her genitals in order to restore proper behaviour. The constable had intended the symbolic meaning of the sign "fibre skirt" to be carried over onto the sign "flag". My informants said that the constable's efforts did not work because the young people who were fighting did not recognize the flag as a sign with the same symbolic meanings that are attributed to women's skirts and the exposing of female genitals. Had a woman thrown down her skirt, they said, the young men would have interpreted the symbolic meaning of this sign correctly, and the fight would have stopped immediately.

All of the foregoing illustrates why Kabana females, regardless of their age, must cover their genitals, and since none of these beliefs apply to male genitals, it matters little (beyond personal embarrassment) if a man's

genitals are exposed. Because little girls wear clothes early and little boys do not, the ceremony marking the first wearing of clothes is slightly different according to the child's gender. For the firstborn male, the ceremony marks his first wearing of a loincloth (**malo**); for a female child it marks the first time she wears the long yellow decorative leaf called **dalme**. Regardless of the firstborn's gender, the child's mother is taboo from wearing the **dalme** leaf as an item of personal finery until this ceremony is accomplished.

The parents are required to provide a feast of cooked taro, and a female pig that has not had a litter, or if none is available, a mid-sized male pig will do if it has no tusks. The pig is not distributed as part of the feast but must be given to the child's **baulo**, whereupon it becomes their own pig, a part of their accumulated wealth. The child accompanies the pig when it is delivered to the **baulo**, who are responsible for providing the loincloth or **dalme** leaf and other finery, and for dressing the child. The child is dressed by its same sex **baulo**. A girl is dressed in a new multicoloured fibre skirt, with **dalme** leaves inserted in the waistband at the back, so that they stand up and sway prettily when she walks. She might also be draped with shellmoney necklaces and "daisy-chains" made from leaves, and with flowers in her hair. A boy is similarly attired with the exception of his loincloth, which is made of

barkcloth (**nables**) and wrapped around his waist and between his legs in the traditional manner. The child does not wear any painted decorations.

In late afternoon, when the child is dressed, her **baulo** carry her back to her parents who remove the finery and set it aside to return later to the **baulo**. At dusk, the parents' female kin deliver bowls of cooked taro to each men's house in the village. The members of each men's house share the food among themselves, and the men eat together, each from his own allotment. No food is distributed formally to individual households but the women and children do not go hungry. Some men set aside a large portion of their food and summon one of their young sons to take the food home to his mother and siblings. Other men simply eat their fill and take the remainder home to their family themselves. A separate bowl of cooked taro is delivered to the **baulo** after all other distributions have been made, and the **baulo** redistribute this food among their kin who helped them in supplying the decorations and dressing the child.

The food distribution marks the end of the ceremony. A male child is now free to wear a loincloth/clothing, although he usually doesn't wear anything with any regularity until he is older. A female child is now free to wear the **dalme** leaf for decorative finery, as is the mother of the firstborn.

### The pig of first decorative finery

This ceremony, called **dildilŋa**, is the first occasion when the child is painted as well as decorated in other finery. Once again, the parents deliver a female pig (also called **dildilŋa**) to the **baulo**. The pig is killed and cooked by the **baulo** and their helpers (**baulo paurega**), and later distributed to the mens' houses as above. The decorations that adorn the child are quite elaborate, and it might take the **baulo** several hours to dress the child. This is the first time the child wears paint, and the paint is considered the single most important feature of the finery.

A girl child wears a fibre skirt and a boy child wears a loincloth, but with this exception both genders are similarly decorated. The child's whole body is covered in paint: red paint on the left side, black paint on the right side, with a line of white paint traced around the hairline. This is the same design worn by a bride, by boys when they are superincised, and is associated with the bull-roarer spirit (**tibuda**) which is called up to avenge a wrong done to a firstborn. The back of the child's waistband is loaded with a cascade of red, green and yellow crotons, which form a sort of bustle. A profusion of the red croton, **more natem**, is inserted to stand straight up in the midst of the bustle. Seen from the front, the child looks like she is surrounded in an aura of red. A large white feather, similar to that adorning



the topknot on the head of the masked spirit dancer (**aulu**), is placed in the child's hair. Worn criss-cross from her shoulders, strings of gold shellmoney, adorn her chest.

When the decorations are complete, the same sex **baulo** carries the child to the men's house, where if a male, the child is taken inside, or if a female, she remains in the arms of her **baulo** outside the main entrance to the building. All the child's male kin are gathered within the men's house; the rest of the village and all the child's female kin gather outside in the dance plaza in front of the house. Inside the men's house, the men set up a great clamour, shouting, whistling and blowing on pan pipes (all sounds associated with spirit 'voices'), and rattling the walls and roof of the house. Eventually, the **baulo**, who still holds the child, is seemingly forcefully ejected from the men's house (or away from the doorway) and the **baulo** runs at top speed through the gathered crowd. As they run past, the child's female kin throw down gifts in honour of the occasion at the runner's feet—pandanus mats, taro stalks, kilogram bags of rice, tins of fish, short lengths of shellmoney, coins—gifts that others in the crowd scramble to acquire in a boisterous free-for-all. The **baulo** takes the child home to its mother, the decorations are removed and the ceremony is over. The child's parents deliver cooked food to the men's houses and the **baulo** distribute the cooked pork, everybody gets

their share and returns home.

I witnessed this ceremony on two different occasions in two different villages, once for a female and once for a male firstborn. Both children were about four years of age and neither had the slightest idea what was going on, and became upset with the attention they attracted, the necessity to stand still during the decoration process, and with the boisterous obscene antics of the transvestite clowns. The noises emanating from the men's house, the mad dash away and through the excited crowd frightened both children and reduced them to howling tears. All in all, the ceremony was highly successful, and a great time was had by all except the sturdy little exemplars of parental renown.

### The First Trip to the Reef

The massive reefs along the Bariai coast are an abundant source of food. Among other things, women collect *bêche de mer*, octopus, sea urchin, spiny lobster, and various species of edible sea-weeds valued for their salt content. Men set their nets for the fish that feed on the reef at low tide, or they dive with spears to get large fish, rays, small sharks, and sea turtles. The reef is also treacherous, canoes can be smashed on the sharp coral and their occupants drowned, there are stone fish and sting rays with poisonous

barbs, and there are dangerous spirit beings (*iriau*, T.P.: *masalai*) that inhabit the reef. Like most things, the reef is normally benevolent but may be malevolent if not treated with proper respect.

Until the parents are prepared to celebrate the child's first excursion to the reef, the firstborn is forbidden to accompany anyone to the reef. The child's first trip to the reef (*ila siaeai*, 'she goes (to) reef') takes several months of preparatory planning. Her parents must be able to provide a large feast of cooked taro in honour of the child's return from the reef. In order to have sufficient taro for the feast, parents must plant either a garden larger than is needed for their own subsistence requirements, or a second garden of taro specifically for the feast. A special garden for the feast must be prepared according to all the steps discussed earlier. The child's first trip to the reef is also the child's initial sea voyage for which her father must build or commission someone to build two or three new outrigger canoes to carry the child and her entourage to and from the reef. Old canoes simply will not do for this special event. Canoe building is no small undertaking. The proper type and size of tree must be located, felled, trimmed and dragged from the mountain forest to the beach. The log must be carved and shaped, the outrigger and outrigger bed made and attached, and new paddles and poles carved. All of this takes time and labour and the child's parents must be able

to compensate those who work on their behalf with food and shellmoney. When the canoes are ready, they are decorated with crotons, flowers, and flowing fringes made by shredding newly sprouted sago palm spathes. It is the responsibility of the **baulo** to accompany the child to the reef for which he or she receives ten to twenty fathoms of shellmoney.

Reef fishing is done at low tide at night, preferably during the full moon, and by the light of flaming torches or kerosene pressure lamps. The child's first trip to the reef is also made at night during the full moon. The firstborn, her **baulo**, the other men and women who make up the entourage, and whoever else in the village wants to fish the reef that night, leave for the reef in the predawn hours around 3 a.m. When the firstborn goes to the reef, the men set their nets for a red-skinned fish called **mabili**. Women walk on top of the exposed reef using their flaming torches to search in the coral crevices for lobster, octopus and other types of reef dwellers.

The full moon paints the world in a surrealistic glow that is bright but devoid of any colour save the deep black of shadows and the silvery white of solid objects. From the village, this unearthly atmosphere is enhanced by the barely audible sound of the disembodied voices of the reef fishers, and the sight of their brilliant firebrands floating above the water like giant fireflies. The mind plays tricks. Solid objects seem to be insubstantial entities that

change their shapes and shift their positions; shadows seem to be solid, immovable objects that weren't there in the light of day. No one sleeps during the night of the full moon, it is a time to visit, exchange stories and news around the hearth fire while cooking and eating the catch as it is brought in from the reef. When the firstborn goes to the reef, her female kin spend the night minding the stone ovens where the taro is cooking, and all wait expectantly for the canoes to return.

As the firstborn's catch comes in out on the reef, the fish are cooked on the hot stones of the hearth constructed on the platform of each canoe. While the fishing is going on, the **baulo** is occupied with decorating the firstborn in finery that is only slightly less resplendent than that of the **dildilga** described above, as the child is not painted although splotches of red paint are applied to her face and forehead. When the sun begins to show the first faint fingers of light on the horizon, and the tide begins to turn, the expedition starts back to the village.

The canoe carrying the firstborn leads the returning flotilla. The child in all her decorative finery is stood in the prow of the canoe or on its platform so she (he) is visible to all on shore. As they return, everyone in the canoes sings **marige**, vibrant and lively songs of triumph that are sung about, and to welcome, the returning tide that will cover the reef once again,

replenishing the life that proliferates there. The firstborn and her entourage return triumphant from the reef, with a large catch of cooked fish ready for distribution. The whole village is gathered to witness their return, and as the canoes reach shore several transvestite clowns, brandishing spears, shouting obscenities and battle cries, rush the canoe occupants to splash them in sea water or attempt to immerse them entirely. The clowns dance and jostle in a crowd around the firstborn as she is carried ashore by her **baulo** and they spit a fine spray of seawater on the child as she passes by. The **baulo** return the child to her parents, who remove her finery and dry her off.

All the fish is taken to the child's father's men's house where it is redistributed with the cooked taro to all the men's houses in the village, whence it is shared among the individual households of each men's house. The **baulo** also redistributes the 10 to 20 fathoms of shellmoney he received from the child's parents among the crews of the canoes that were part of the firstborn's entourage, to compensate them for their work in manning the canoes and in setting nets for the fish. When the cooked fish, taro, and shellmoney distribution are complete, the ceremony is over and the firstborn is now free to go to the reef at any time.

On one occasion, the child's first excursion to the reef was the source of a conflict between **baulo**. In this instance, the firstborn was a boy about

twelve years of age, who was taken to fish the reef by his father without his **baulo's** knowledge and with no ceremony. When someone told the boy's **baulo** (nothing occurs unnoticed or undiscussed) that the child had been taken to the reef, the **baulo** was furious and went to meet father and son when they returned to shore. The **baulo** rebuked the father as a *rabisman*, a man of little worth and pride, whose insensitivity was evident in his flagrant disregard of the **baulo** role and the way things ought to be done for a firstborn. The **baulo** was insulted for having been left out of the proceedings and thus returned the insult by berating the child's father as a person of no strength, who did not have the wherewithal to prepare a taro garden or accumulate shellmoney in order to honour his firstborn. After this display of insult and injury the **baulo** stomped off to his house.

Later that day, the father's mother-in-law, one of the oldest women in the village, visited the **baulo's** wife to attempt a settlement of the breach. The two women discussed the breach, each apologizing for the behaviour of their respective menfolk. The child's grandmother insisted that her son-in-law was wrong to ignore firstborn custom and thereby shame the **baulo**. The **baulo's** wife emphasized that her husband was equally wrong to make a scene and publicly chastise the old woman's son-in-law. Throughout their lengthy discussion the old woman continually pressed upon the **baulo's**

wife a one kina coin, insisting it be taken as compensation to 'buy' the shame she felt as a result of her son-in-law's poor conduct. The **baulo's** wife (herself the child's female **baulo**) was severely embarrassed by the whole situation, and kept refusing the money. Eventually, the old woman won out and the breach was settled when the wife accepted the money. When the **baulo** later turned up at home, his wife threw the money at him and vehemently reprimanded him for his behaviour which had caused the old woman to feel shame for herself and her grandson. She reproached her husband for behaving in such a manner toward his **baulo**, that he was a 'small man' for not rising above the situation and ignoring the breach of expected behaviour. A **baulo**, she reminded him, must be respected and no matter what a **baulo** does, one has nothing to say about it and no overt action should be taken. Severely denounced by his wife, the man picked up the coin and wandered away to sit by himself on the veranda of the men's house. The incident was over, but the behavioural breach by both men was not forgotten. Publicly, their behaviour to each other was exemplary, giving no indication that a breach had ever occurred. Their private relationship, however, remained strained for some time.



### The Pig of Red Paint

As Strathern notes for the Hageners, many of the objects worn as decorative finery are "material assets with which transactions are made with others" (1979: 254). Since "transactions with others are accomplished through the medium of the wealth, assets and skills" (p. 250) that an individual brings to bear on a situation, these objects thus demonstrate the achievement of successful transactions with others and the differential between the potential all have to achieve and a particular individual's realization of that potential.

The Kabana do not produce material objects, such as bowls, baskets, pots, dog's teeth or flying fox teeth headbands, for trade. They acquire these culturally valued items in exchange for pigs, the most valued commodity in the archipelago, and with other valuables, such as shellmoney, cassowary feathers, pandanus mats, and women's fibre skirts, that are either unavailable to, or not manufactured by the people with whom they trade. Productive specialties are complementary. In the Vitiaz Straight area, "such goods as pots, net bags, bows and arrows, bark cloth, and black pigment move from the mainland to the islands and New Britain. In return come red ochre, pandanus mats, and obsidian" (Harding 1967: 246). Trading, Harding notes (*op cit.*: 182) is a transaction that goes on constantly and rather inconspicuously, for

"trade, after all, is mainly an activity of the household. It is therefore a part of private rather than public affairs." If, as Harding correctly points out, trading is a private, domestic affair as opposed to a public, extra-household affair, then for an individual to be accorded with renown and prestige by others for an ability to forge and maintain trade relations and transactions, one's abilities in this sphere must be demonstrated publicly.

The Kabana accomplish this by celebrating the firstborn in ceremonies which focus on a particular item of decorative finery that is an object of trade. The ceremony of the pig of red paint, and the two ceremonies which follow, acknowledge parental achievements in conducting long distance trade relationships. The items of decorative finery worn by the firstborn at these displays are either objects received in trade, or objects used to trade.

The first of these ceremonies is called **pulo budisiga**, the ceremony of watery (**budi**) red (**sig**; also 'blood') paint (**pulo**). The ceremony itself requires that in addition to a feast of cooked taro, the parents deliver to the child's **baulo**, one large male pig (without fully developed tusks), a pig they might have received (and therefore must return) as a weanling and raised to size, or one that they solicited from a trade partner. The child's **baulo** are expected to kill and cook this pig for distribution at the feast, and the **baulo** are now indebted to the parents for a pig of the same size, sex, and value. The

giving and receiving of pigs and other wealth items is not a static procedure, but a continually operating process of investment management based on transactions of wealth in the network of exchange relations.

The **baulo** are also responsible for decorating the firstborn. In this instance, the child is covered from her hair to her toes in a watery solution of red paint. Criss-crossed on her chest she wears strings of the highly valued "gold" shellmoney. The waistband of her fibre skirt holds a plethora of red, yellow and green crotons, and her armbands are loaded with long red feathery flowers (*Salvia splendens*). The ceremony is finished when the feast is redistributed in the manner already discussed and the decorated child is led through the village and returned to her parents.

In addition to the symbolic values of the colour red which I have already discussed, the red ochre paint that covers the child was an important item that the Kabana traded to the Siassi Islanders for items of similar value, such as black pigments, or in conjunction with larger items such as pigs, for carved ironwood bowls, or the finely built canoes that only the Siassi are deemed to manufacture with such expertise. There is not an abundance of red ochre to be found in the Bariai area, and the Kabana acquired most of their supply by exchanging shellmoney for supplies of red ochre (and obsidian) brought by the Kove from the Volupai region of New Britain. The

ceremony of the red paint thus necessitates, in this one commodity, involvement in a wide ranging network of trade and exchange. The achievement is displayed for all to see in the person of the firstborn, lavishly covered in red paint.

Nowadays, red paint comes out of a bottle purchased at trade stores, but the ceremony is still performed. I submit that although red ochre is no longer an item of trade, other commodities, such as pigs, ironwood bowls, and shellmoney are still crucial items of trade and, therefore, the ceremony does not celebrate the acquisition of red paint *per se*, what it celebrates is the continuing importance of trade and trading networks to Kabana sociocultural organization. While red paint is no longer an item of trade, the trade and exchange network continues to flourish as a vital aspect of sociocultural life and as a means for achieving a reputation for renown. That parents have been successfully involved in this network is the basic message portrayed in the ceremony of red paint. The ceremonial performance with cooked taro, pork, and the child decorated in predominantly red finery, displays that accomplishment publicly and achieves the desired end—soliciting admiration, respect, and renown from others.

### The Pig of the Armbands

The particular item of finery in this ceremony is **poipoi sara**, a type of woven armband that is made by the Lolo people who live in the mountain area of the Kilege District. The Kabana exchange such things as fish, sea turtle and trochus shell armlets, and in the past, salt, with the highland Lolo for these armbands. The armbands are woven from the natural fibre of a small vine species, and are black in colour with a full fringe on the bottom of the intricately woven band. They are primarily, but not exclusively a masculine adornment as most Kabana women prefer to wear incised trochus shell and tortoise shell armlets, objects that are exclusively female adornment and never worn by Kabana men. For men, the Lolo armbands are about 8 to 10 cm in width and are worn high on the arm; for women the armbands are narrower, about 5 cm in width, and are worn, as are all female arm decorations, just above the elbow. These armbands are highly prized and much admired by the Kabana, who do not know how to make them and, even if they did, the particular vine they are woven from grows only, apparently, in the forests of the Lolo area.

The ceremony of the armbands is again oriented to participation in trade relations, successfully accomplished and displayed in the material wealth displayed on the firstborn. This item of finery, an armband that can

only be woven by the Lolo from a vine that only grows in their particular environment, is clearly a productive speciality. It is exchanged for other speciality items. These highland people with no access to the sea receive shellmoney, fresh and smoked fish, and in the past, a safe supply of sea salt. While it is true that the Lolo now have safe access to the sea and can buy tinned fish and salt at trade stores, the fact remains that the Lolo are not fisherfolk and have no skill at fishing or seafaring and, according to the Kabana, have a deep fear of the ocean, a common enough syndrome for people who live in the mountains. The Lolo cannot buy trochus or tortoise shell armlets at the trade stores: these are manufactured by Kabana women; nor can they buy shell money nor do they have a supply of shells from which to manufacture shell money. Trade between the Lolo and the Kabana continues today in these coastal specialties for the unique armbands (and baskets) woven by the inland Lolo people. The ceremony of the armband thus celebrates this particular trade network and the commodities that are transacted.

For this ceremony the parents send one large female, or tuskless male, pig to their **baulo**, who is responsible for cooking it in anticipation of the feast of cooked pork and taro, with the taro, of course, supplied by the parents. The same sex **baulo** is also responsible for decorating the firstborn.

The ceremony of the **poipoi sara** that I witnessed took place in a neighbouring village, and was performed in honour of a firstborn girl who was about sixteen years of age. The young woman was extremely reluctant to participate but did so tearfully. As a firstborn, she had little choice in the matter. We arrived in the village at late morning, and while the men and women that accompanied me went to visit kin and assist with the cooking, I went with the **baulo** for the dressing of the firstborn. I shall describe this decorative process in some detail as it highlights certain slowly changing aspects of firstborn ceremonials.

The dressing process began with a bath, and the **baulo** took the girl to the river and assisted her with her ablutions. When they returned, the **baulo** spread a large newly made pandanus mat on the ground for the girl to stand upon while she was being decorated. All the ceremonial regalia was also placed on the mat, with flowers and leaves in ironwood bowls filled with water to keep them fresh. The girl's hair was shaved back about 2 cm along the hairline all round her head so that the paint applied to this area would be visible. This particular hair style was the way the Kabana traditionally wore their hair (and is still the way in which corpses are prepared for burial), but the fashion has lost favour with the younger generation of adults who consider it a fashion characteristic of "bush" as opposed to "town" dwellers.

The young woman was mortified when her **baulo** began to shave her hair, and began to cry quietly, not stopping until the whole ceremonial process was ended and she was back into her day-to-day clothing.

Once her hair was shaved, the **baulo paureña** assisted in applying black and red paint to the girl's hair. Red paint, purchased from the trade store by myself and given as recompense for informants' services, was rubbed into the left side of her hair and face, and black "paint", which was actually the carbon out of dead D-cell batteries, was put on the right side of her face and hair. These paints are much preferred to the red ochre and black pigments that were used in the past, as the red is redder and the black is blacker and the colours show up much more brilliantly against brown skin. Yellow paint is also required, and since none was available, it had to be produced in the customary manner. The ingredients are a ginger species (**eago**) that produces a saffron yellow root, and coconut oil. The yellow ginger root is shredded, added to grated coconut meat and the two ingredients are wrapped in a banana leaf and baked for several minutes on the hot coals in the hearth. This releases the oil from the coconut meat which mingles with the ginger juices, and when wrung through a piece of coconut bast, the combination produces an oily yellow paint. The yellow paint was drawn in a band around the girl's head where her hair was shaved with stripes drawn perpendicularly at intervals



down her forehead, temples, and at the nape of her neck so that she appeared to be wearing a fringe. Two leaves from the species of croton called **more boro** (**boro**, bird sp.) were split almost in half down the mid-rib, and attached to her hair to hang in an inverted V, one over each ear.

When this phase of the decoration was completed, the **baulo** began to wrap the girl's waist in several lengths of cotton and a strip of pandanus which serve as the waistband that supports the sections of her fibre skirt. Traditionally, fibre skirts were the only item of apparel that women wore, but like all young women today, this girl wore an undergarment, in this case a pair of soccer shorts, and throughout the process kept her arms held to cover her bare breasts. At dances that accompany mortuary feasts, all young women cover their breasts either with a blouse draped around their neck and down their chest, or they wear a brassiere. Young women are embarrassed to show their breasts, exhibiting a sense of shame that older women and men find somewhat puzzling since women have always gone bare-breasted. The senior generation attributes this whole phenomenon of shame to the missionaries who insisted that people cover their bodies modestly. The senior generation also thinks that the oddments of clothing used by girls to hide their breasts detract from the overall aesthetics of women's decorative finery.

After the waistband was on, the colourfully dyed sections of the fibre skirt were inserted to form an apron in front and back, leaving the sides of the thighs exposed. Then quantities of red, yellow and green crotons, ginger leaves, and the red, pink and green striated leaf called **kekeke** were inserted at the back of the skirt so that they completely covered her back, and from the front, framed her in a bower of foliage. Next, the **poipoi sara** armbands were placed one on each arm, and these are loaded with the red feathery flower (*Salvia splendens*), a variety of colourful coleus leaves, long yellow **dalme** leaves, and other leaves that exude a heady perfume.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the girl's whole body was covered with the oily yellow paint, then fragrant leaves were dipped in water and the water sprinkled on the young woman to make her skin glisten and shine. The total effect was one of glowing health and vibrant beauty, only slightly marred by the girl's tears. As soon as the decorative process was finished, the **baulo** accompanied the girl back to her parents' home, whereupon the girl immediately removed her finery and went to the river to bathe. When she returned she had her cropped hair wrapped in a towel turban which she continued to wear for some weeks, until her hair grew back.

The whole affair had taken all afternoon, and when the firstborn was dressed (and undressed) plates of pork and cooked taro were distributed to each men's house, and to those visitors who represented affiliated men's

houses in other villages.

During the inevitable discussions that recap, critique and assess any event, the issue most often referred to in this ceremony was the firstborn's obvious distress and embarrassment. Young children, because of their ego-centric naivete, are considered immune to feelings of shame and the young woman's parents were criticised by other adults for not having performed this ceremony years ago when their daughter was much younger, thus saving her from public embarrassment in her own eyes. At the very least, they should have substituted one of the firstborn's younger siblings as her proxy, thereby accomplishing their ends through similar means. Many adults questioned the necessity to perform the ceremony at all, citing the firstborn's unhappiness as yet another reason to curtail aspects of traditional work. The young woman's age-mates, self-consciously empathized with her situation and sentiments. They took this opportunity to criticise ancestral ways and customs so at odds with their vision of contemporary life, and many expressed their resolve not to adhere to such old-fashioned, non-productive customs when they were adults and parents. In general, this event led to discussions about substituting any child for a firstborn, about discontinuing altogether these kinds of ceremonies, about customary and contemporary ways of doing things, and they contributed to the resolve of the younger

generation to eliminate ancestral traditions. The issue that prompted all this was simply the young woman's feelings at being the subject and object of such a display, and it is perhaps in such seemingly insignificant things as sentiments experienced and witnessed rather than structural stress that enhance or inhibit the processes of social change.

### The Pig of Sago Fronds

In the minor ceremonials, I discussed the pragmatic and symbolic importance of the sago palm, and the distribution of sago flour that parents must accomplish in order to remove the taboo that prohibits their firstborn from being involved in sago flour processing. This next ceremony also focusses on the sago palm and the firstborn, and is called **tianga buru**, 'they eat [the pig] sago fringe'. In this instance, parents must provide a feast of pork and cooked taro in order to remove the taboo on themselves and their child that prohibits them from wearing sago fringe as an item of decorative finery. As before, the parents present their **baulo** with a medium to large sized male pig without tusks, and the **baulo** and their helpers cook the pig and decorate the firstborn. The child's parents and kin occupy themselves with preparing and cooking taro.

Sago flour, besides being a source of food, is also an item that the

Kabana trade and exchange with people who do not grow sago, such as the Bali and Vitu Islanders and the island dwelling Kove. The Kabana use sago frond fringes to decorate new houses, newly carved posts that are destined for the men's house or the seclusion house of a firstborn (**kailaga**), for women's fibre skirts and menstrual pads, and as personal decorative finery. Sago fronds are also used to make the full-length skirts of the masked dancer's costume (**aulu**). Other groups, such as the Kove, who have purchased the right to produce this masked spirit dancer from the Kabana, use banana leaves, crotons, or coconut fronds to manufacture the dancer's skirt.

Palm trees produce new leaves by sending out a tightly packed spathe straight up from the crown of the palm. As the shoot matures, it gradually unfurls its leaves and curls gracefully downward. Sago fringes are made from the newly sprouted, unfurled spathes which are about a metre in length. The outer casing of the spathe is split open to expose the mid-rib of the branch which is broken in half down its length. The immature yellow-green leaves attached to the split mid-rib are thinly shredded so that they hang from the mid-rib in a long fringe. When women make their fibre skirts, the fringe is dried in the sun, boiled in dyes, cut in appropriate lengths, and then woven into a narrow waistband. When used for **aulu** skirts or decorative finery, the fringes are not dried but are used fresh in order to get the full effect of their

bright yellowish colour.

For the ceremony of sago fringes, a male child is dressed in a loincloth of barkcloth and a female child is dressed in a fibre skirt, otherwise the firstborn is decorated the same regardless of gender. Only the child's head, including the hair, is covered with red paint, the rest of the body is unpainted. Sago fringes are tied around the child's upper arms, wrists, ankles, and below the knees, and a girdle of sago fringe is tied around the waist. At the back of the skirt/loincloth is a cascade of red, yellow and green crotons, and yellow **dalme** leaves. At her neck, the child wears a collar of scented yellow and green leaves that is like the croton collar or ruff that adorns the **aulu** masked spirit dancers. At the ceremony I witnessed, the child's **baulo** also decorated himself with sago fringes like the child's. He also wore a dog's teeth headdress tied around his forehead, a set of circular boar's tusks as a necklace, and carried a war club (**ba**). He painted his face with his personal totemic designs in white lime powder, designs that represent a named source of power (**mirmir**) that protect one in battle, and that are also used to curse an enemy. The **baulo** and firstborn finery combined to produce an effective aura of powerful aggression, beauty, prestige, prosperity, and of course, parental achievement, all basic ingredients in the concept of renown.

### The Pig of New Eyes

"The principle is that trading voyages are directed to those places where the leader or members of an expedition have "friends". Where there are no "trade roads" (social connections) there is no trade" (Harding 1967:19). In previous ceremonies, objects of material wealth that are either received or given in trade were displayed as firstborn decorative finery. The purpose of this next ceremony, called **mata pau** ('eye new'), is to introduce the firstborn to his or her parents' long distance trading friends (**sobosobo**, 'trade partner, affine'; T.P.: *bisnis*). Until parents are prepared to hold the feast and wealth distribution in honour of the child's first voyage to those areas where her parents' trade friends live, the child is forbidden to go to those areas. Adolescent firstborns, for example, were denied parental permission to attend soccer matches, youth club dances, or visit Kimbe Town, because their parents were not in a position to provide the necessary feast and distribution of wealth in honour of the child's 'new eye'—her return from viewing new places.

Ideologically, the firstborn is her parents' replacement and perpetuates their genealogies and, as such, she formally inherits and perpetuates both her mother's and her father's long distance trade relationships. Her siblings also inherit these relationships, but their inheritance is not formally celebrated.

When the firstborn's younger siblings are old enough to accompany their parents on trading voyages (or participate in youth club activities), they are introduced as a matter of course to parental trading friends and the relationship is extended to include these children. The formal introduction of the firstborn to parental trading friends takes many months, even years, of planning and organization, and requires an enormous amassing and expenditure of wealth. None of this preparation applies to non-firstborns, although if parents are sufficiently wealthy, they might kill a pig and distribute pork among the men's houses to mark the occasion when one or more of their other children return from visiting their trade partners for the first time.

Trade friends, as the Kabana term **sobosobo** implies, are categorized as affines, but although some trade friend alliances are true affinal relations based on contemporary intermarriages, most Kabana adults were hardpressed to trace their affinal relationships with their trade friends. These relationships go so far back in time that the original marriage alliance upon which the relationship was based has been lost. Inherited from generation to generation, the relationship itself remains intact. The origin of the relationship, which is of little immediate concern relative to the continuity, substance, and meaning of the relationship itself, is lost in the mists of antiquity.



In the less peaceful era of their pre-colonial past, trading expeditions were fraught with danger and the intrepid voyagers risked their very survival. The Kabana travelled into unknown waters containing massive reefs inhabited by powerful spirits, and into the unknown territories of potentially hostile strangers renowned for their warlike aggression and powerful sorcerers. If they survived the unpredictable sea, and were not lured onto the reefs by spirits that inhabited the coral and smashed their canoes and drowned (ate) the crews, when they reached their destination, the presence and protection of their trade friends would (hopefully) ensure their survival and the success of their enterprise in the foreign village. Nowadays, although outboard motors have mostly replaced the sailing canoe, and warfare is a thing of the past, the dangers of long distance trade still obtain. The sea and weather are as fickle as ever, the spirits inhabiting the reefs are just as treacherous, and every foreign village has its share of men renowned for their knowledge of lethal sorcery. Trade friends, both as a source of wealth and personal protection remain a necessity.

Having numerous trade friends and the personal and material wherewithal to accommodate them, is the stuff upon which renown is built and maintained. A person of renown is a person with abundant resources; a person who is openhanded, generous and hospitable. This necessitates a constant

supply of taro, sweet potato, coconuts and other foodstuffs, areca nut, and tobacco, not to mention ready access to the items of wealth being solicited, in order properly to meet one's obligations to visitors. It also necessitates a hard working, genial wife, for it is she who works the gardens, and trudges back and forth to them to collect the food she cooks and serves her guests at least twice a day. When visitors are on hand, cooked food should always be available. A wife should also be a skilled conversationalist, able not only to hold her own but also to entertain and amuse her guests graciously. A man without a wife is virtually unable to participate in the competition for renown. Acquiring renown is not simply the amassing and distributing of material wealth, it is also the fine art of managing human relations with finesse, alacrity, and above all, generosity. Those who have experienced the largesse of their host/trade friend convey the name and reputation to people their trade friend might never have met, in areas where they have never been. In this way, women and men who are pre-eminently successful in the complex art of managing human relations earn the title **maron**, 'person of renown'. Wealth is assessed not on the basis of what or how many objects of value he (or she) has stashed in his house, or on the basis of a large pig herd walking around that others can see and count, but on the basis of how much wealth he has access to; in other words, how many people are indebted to him. Renown

is assessed on the basis of how well any individual manages his or her relations of indebtedness.

Every Kabana adult has trade friends in villages throughout West New Britain; some have large numbers of trade friends. This network of trade friends is a major source of wealth. The more extensive the network, the more access one has to wealth, and, conversely, the more there is a demand on one's own wealth, since the relationship is reciprocal over time, although it is never fully balanced. Dyadic human relations of whatever type, and especially formal relations of trade and exchange, are always characterized by a residual indebtedness. It is extremely difficult to portray whole cloth, the non-linear, supremely dynamic nature of these relations of trade and exchange, except by means of a simile.

Envision a placid body of water with boundaries that stretch beyond one's field of vision. Consider one item of value required by the parents for a firstborn ceremonial—a length of shellmoney, or a pig, or human labour—as a single pebble. The request for this item is represented by the pebble being dropped into the pool of water causing a small wave that encircles the asker and the person solicited. This latter individual makes his or her own request of someone else, who makes it of someone else, and each transaction constitutes another pebble dropped into the pool causing a series of

overlapping concentric circles. Every individual is simultaneously meeting his obligation to contribute wealth to the cause of (several) others as well as soliciting wealth for his own (several) ceremonial obligations. Multiply these transactions by the number of ceremonials for firstborns or the dead, and the number of individuals who are solicited for wealth and in turn solicit it elsewhere, and the number who receive wealth distributions and must redistribute it elsewhere, and the placid pool of water is awash with a network of interconnected indebtedness that is expanding and contracting and which, like a circle, has no discernible beginning or end point. Such is the Kabana network of exchange relations, founded upon moral obligations inherent in human relations—obligations to give, to receive, to supply mutual aid—and managed, over time, according to varied reciprocal self-interests as these are perceived by the participants.

The introduction of the firstborn to her parents' trade friends encumbers both her parents and their trade friends with massive debts so that both parents and trade friends are able to display their ability to acquire wealth. With the exception of the **ololo kapei**, where the firstborn and the dead are ceremonially honoured simultaneously, the child's **mata pau** is the single most ambitious and expensive accomplishment that parents will undertake. Large quantities of all forms of wealth—pigs, shellmoney, clay

pots, ironwood bowls, food, pandanus mats, and more—are exchanged during the planning and execution of this ceremony.

The first phase of the project begins with the parents paying a preliminary visit to their mutual trade partners along the coast of West New Britain, and in the Bali-Vitu Islands. This requires a canoe and a crew to man it, as well as provisions for the voyage. Every canoe has a 'captain', **toa itama**, 'punting pole [its] father/owner', (T.P.: *baskru*), who is the owner of the canoe. Captain and crew are usually members of the child's kindred. These men must be compensated for the use of the canoe and for their time and labour expended on parental behalf. To this end, the canoe captain is given 15 to 20 lengths of shellmoney, of which he keeps a share and distributes the balance among the crew. In addition, the parents also have a **malolo** ('helper, assistant') whose responsibility is to provide tobacco and to keep the crew supplied with rolled smoking material. This person also receives 10 to 15 lengths of shellmoney, of which he keeps an earned share, and distributes the balance to those persons from whom he solicited the tobacco. The helper and many of the crew are young unmarried men, and expeditions of this sort are one way they are able to earn shellmoney to put toward the bridewealth they need to acquire a wife. Before leaving the village, parents are indebted for approximately 30 lengths of shellmoney, in

addition to which they must supply whatever food, areca nut, and coconuts that will be consumed on the voyage.

For the child's parents, the purpose of this initial voyage is to alert their trade friends that the ceremony will take place, to set the approximate date when the firstborn will visit the trade friends, and to present the trade friends with various items of wealth that will be exchanged or traded in kind when the firstborn arrives. Theoretically, the parents could have trade friends in every village in the Kilege-Lolo, Bali-Vitu, Kaliai, and Kove Districts, and they could plan their voyage to include a stop at each village in every district. Pragmatically, this would be unmanageable, and parents usually choose to visit one or two of their most important (renowned) trade friends in each district. Parents might make the initial contact with their trade friends in a single voyage that could last several weeks, or they might opt to make several individual voyages, returning home between visits. For each trip they undertake, parents re-incur the costs of the canoe and crew discussed above, and the amount of wealth they have invested in this ceremony increases accordingly.

Depending on the number of trade friends to be contacted at this initial voyage, the parents must bring with them pigs, quantities of clay pots, pandanus mats, ironwood bowls, shellmoney and other smaller items, such as

cassowary feathers and tibia (favoured by the Bali Islanders), baskets, canoe paddles and poles, and so on. The child's mother and father acquire these items by soliciting them from various individuals in their respective kindreds, to whom they become indebted. The child's cognatic kindred thus contributes to the honour of their mutual firstborn, but this is not gratuitous, for the item and amount of wealth they contribute must be repaid to them, item for item and in the same quantity (with no accrued interest), at the feast honouring the child's return. It is also in their own self-interest for kin to make contributions to the cause of the firstborn, for the renown and honour that are bestowed upon the child also increases the renown of all those who are her 'one blood'. Those who contribute wealth, it should be recalled, might not have the requisite item on hand, so that they in turn must go to their own trade friends to obtain wealth objects, to whom they are then indebted for those objects.

Having organized the canoe and crew, and with the appropriate kinds and quantities of valuables in hand, the parents' next step is to secure the co-operation of the elements. To this end, they contract the services of various of their senior male kin who are proficient in the art of weather sorcery. These men apply their expertise to calm the sea, to intercept inclement weather and send it elsewhere, and to stave off the buildup of

storm clouds by creating conditions that prevent the accumulation of moisture. Having done all that is humanly possible to influence positively these essentially unpredictable phenomena, and human endeavours are notoriously fallible, the parents set off to visit their trade friends.

When they are almost at their destination but not yet in sight of the port of call, the entourage puts ashore on a deserted beach to freshen their general appearance and mentally gird their loins for the important transactions and interactions that will follow. Sorcery also plays a part in this phase of the preparations. In this instance, spells are performed (particularly by the unmarried contingent) to enhance personal attractiveness, and to enshroud the individual in a protective blanket of magic to counteract and nullify any attempts by persons in the host village to undermine the visitors and their intentions. Protective magic is performed on crotons, especially the red croton **more natem**, which some visitors (especially visiting sorcerers) tie on their wrists. The croton bracelets are an overt display of personal power and arcane knowledge, and a warning that nefarious activities are likely to rebound onto the perpetrator. Those individuals, such as the parents, who have a great deal at stake in the negotiations with their trade friend, also perform spells that will affect the trade friend, and make him (or her) generously amenable, and thus unable to



deny any of the requests that are put to him by the visitors. As the Kabana quite rightly point out, one cannot know the inner thoughts and self-interested motives of others. One can only attempt to influence the thoughts and motives of others so that others are convinced their own self-interests are best served by accomodating ego's own. Magical spells thus cause a trade friend host to be predisposed in favour of his visitors' needs.

When the canoes of trade friends are spotted out at sea, their pending arrival is always greeted with ambivalence, since trade friends invariably want something—the repayment or loan of a pig, shellmoney, and other items of wealth that the host might not have or might have other plans for—and they constitute a drain on the resources. While in the host village, visitors must be fed, given tobacco, areca nut and betel pepper, drinking coconuts and whatever else they can cadge or cajole out of their host. In addition, a host and his wife must entertain their guests, that is, accompany them to the best bathing spot, spend time exchanging news and views, telling stories and jokes, seeing to their general comforts, and so forth, all of which necessitates that any other plans the hosts have made are put in abeyance. Hosts cannot go off and leave their guests to fend for themselves, such behaviour is both rude and insulting to guests. The business that brings trade

friends together is important to them both and the negotiations entailed are often lengthy and tedious. These convoluted transactions, combined with the royal treatment the guests receive, often add up to the visitors overstaying their welcome, as distant and not particularly loved relatives are wont to do.

When a man (or woman) arrives at the village of his trade friend, he must beach his canoe and alight on the beachfront property that belongs to his trade friend. To do otherwise is to trespass on the land of other members of the village who might not be so hospitable and might take umbrage at such a disregard for personal property. Similarly, once ashore, the visitor must go directly to the dwelling house of his trade friend, for to visit anyone else upon arrival is a breach of etiquette and an insult to the trade partner. A trade partner's house is a "safe zone", its immediate environs, particularly the base of the ladder leading onto the veranda, have been ensorcelled by the host so that anyone with less than honourable intentions toward his guest will be struck down with some more or less dangerous malady. Other host villagers who wish to exchange news and pleasantries, or simply inspect the strangers, do so at a distance from the house and never climb the ladder onto the veranda where the guest sits. Immediately upon his arrival, the visitor and those among the canoe's crew who are his kin are welcomed by the trade friend and given refreshments. These initial rules of decorum observed, the

visitor and his crewmen are taken to the men's house where they are given a place to sleep and to store their belongings in their host's section of the men's house. The host also moves out of his wife's house and into the men's house, and the visiting trade friend's wife and any other women and children travelling with him are billeted in the house of their host's wife (wives).

Over the next several days, the parents and their trade friend host organize the firstborn's upcoming visitation. The parents give the wealth objects and the pig they brought with them to their trade friend, and they set a tentative ceremonial date, usually at the end of the next year's monsoon season. This allows time for both the trade friend(s) and the parents to accumulate the wealth that will be exchanged, and to plant one or more gardens beyond that required for their immediate subsistence needs, in order to have an abundant supply of feast food. In the meantime, the other members of the expedition are also engaged in conducting the business of exchange with their own trade friends/kin in the host's or neighbouring villages. When all negotiations are completed to everyone's satisfaction, the trade friends supply the parents and their accompanying flotilla with food and other necessities for their return voyage, and the visitors depart the village.

Departures, like arrivals, are greeted with ambivalence. Guests are home-sick and happy to be returning to the comforts of their own homes and

the familiarity of their own ways and routines. Hosts, too, are glad to see their guests leave, as they were a drain on the hosts' material and psychic resources, and a disruption of their routine as well. On the other hand, both parties have enjoyed the challenge of negotiations, the companionship, the comradery, the exchange of news, and the updating of information about events (births, deaths, marriages, divorces, illnesses, conflicts) in the lives of mutual kin and acquaintances. Departures, like death, constitute a loss, an end to the good times recently shared, and an acknowledgement that death in fact might intervene before the friends can share one another's company again. For all concerned, the relief of leaving is tempered by an overwhelming sense of loss, and departures are traumatic, tearful affairs.

The parents complete all these initial arrangements and negotiations with each trade friend that their firstborn will visit. And, during these preliminary visits, trade friends are the recipients of parental wealth—pigs, pots, bowls, baskets, shellmoney—which will be repaid as "gifts" to the firstborn when she arrives. Trade friends do not simply put the wealth away in anticipation of having to repay it in a year or two. What the trade friend received in one hand might well go out the other hand to fulfill any number of obligations, or the wealth might be loaned to kin who have need of it to meet their own particular obligations. Wealth is never hoarded, for this is the sign

of a poor man, a miser. Wealth is continually circulated, for this is the sign of a rich man, a man of generosity. Hence when the time comes near for the firstborn to arrive, the trade friend is not likely to be in possession of the wealth he originally received from the parents. He must, in turn, visit his kin and trade friends to call in the wealth owed him in order to have on hand the pig and wealth objects that he gives the child. The parents have challenged the trade friend's ability to accumulate wealth by presenting him with wealth. The challenge lies in whether or not the trade friend is able to meet the largesse of the parents and reciprocate in kind and quantity, on demand.

When the appointed time comes, the firstborn sets off with her parents to visit the trade friends previously contacted. All the expenses of the canoe, crew and supplies for the voyage are again incurred by the parents. At the village of each trade friend, the firstborn is received royally with feasts and hospitality. And, when she leaves each village, she and her parents leave with the large female pig and the other wealth objects that the host trade friends received during the initial preparations for the visit, plus whatever additional wealth the trade friend wishes to give his guests, thereby increasing their future indebtedness to him. By managing the feast and presenting the firstborn with wealth, each trade partner thus displays publicly his/her own capabilities, earning the admiration of others and a

reputation of renown.

By the time all trade friends are visited in turn, and the firstborn's flotilla heads home again, the child is laden with gifts of numerous pigs and wealth objects. She has also been introduced to various important places and landmarks on the coast and the reef and instructed in the legends and history relevant to them. As the canoes near the shore of the child's home, the whole village turns out to witness their arrival. The firstborn is greeted by garishly dressed and painted female transvestite clowns, who shout obscenities and chant battle cries while brandishing spears in a mock battle. The clowns fill their mouths with sea water which they spray (**tigerna**) all over the firstborn (and whoever else gets within their range), thus "blessing" the accomplishment of her first long distance sea voyage and her 'new eye'.

Over the next few days, the parents prepare the feast in honour of the child's first visit to her trade friends. They give (indebt) a large female (or tuskless male) pig and five fathoms of shellmoney (**gaea iuui**, 'pig [its] tail') to one of the child's 'parents' (MZ, FZ, MB, FB), who are responsible for cooking and distributing the pork among the village men's houses. In addition to the cooked food and pork, parents also redistribute shell money to compensate those who earlier contributed wealth or services to the success of the child's voyage. The canoe owner and crew, the helper in charge of tobacco, the

transvestite clowns, the sorcerers, all receive payment for their services at the public distribution of shellmoney held on the feast day. Debts incurred by the parents, both for the child's first voyage and for any other obligation in the past are repaid to their kin at this time also. The parents do not redistribute the pigs and other wealth objects in public at the feast. These items are given to others privately, usually when those others are preparing to depart after the feast, or the parents themselves deliver this wealth over the next several days to those whom it is owed. The **baulo** are not involved in the child's first visit to trade friends, but they must be acknowledged with a gift of a large bowl of taro pudding and one fathom of shellmoney. The feast that accompanies the pork can be any kind of cooked food (sago flour, sweet potato, cassava), but the **baulo** must receive taro pudding, the most important feast food of all. As always, once the public distribution of wealth and feast food is completed, the ceremony is finished. The child may now travel freely to the areas where her trade friends live, although when in the area she must observe proper etiquette and avail herself of the hospitality and protection of her trade friends.

#### Taro and the Distribution of *Fitpit*

Although taro has been an important part of firstborn ceremonial,

either as feast food or as an item of distribution, taro *per se* has not been the primary focus of the ceremonial. There are two major taro distributions in honour of the child, the first to be accomplished is called **liliu daga**, the second called **otga dadaga**. In between these taro distributions there occurs a third ceremonial called **tabual**, the edible *pitpit* (*Saccharum edule*). The three ceremonies are performed in sequence—**liliu daga**, **tabual**, **otga dadaga**—due, I submit, to their pragmatic and symbolic interconnections. In this section, I combine my discussion of the first taro distribution, **liliu daga**, and the distribution of **tabual**, the edible *pitpit*, and reserve discussion of the second taro distribution, the **otga dadaga**, for the next section.

The word **liliu** means 'to wash, bathe' as in the act of bathing to cleanse one's body. The word **daga** is the generic term for 'genitals' and is also used as a non-specific common noun, 'something', as in that "something" (an object) belongs to so and so. Informants are unclear as to why the first taro garden distribution is called **liliu daga**, 'the act of washing genitals/something', beyond the fact that it has always been called thus. The symbolism in this and the **tabual** ceremony strongly suggest that the two ceremonies are indeed concerned with human genitals, particularly female genitals, and concepts of reproduction and regeneration.



In order to accomplish the large distribution of taro required for the **liliu daga**, parents must prepare and plant one or more gardens of taro beyond their immediate subsistence needs. Preparations begin a year in advance, usually at the end of the monsoon season in April or May. During the dry months from May to October, parents undertake the arduous chore of clearing virgin land for the taro garden (see previous discussion of gardens) in addition to planting and maintaining the gardens from which they obtain day-to-day sustenance. When the rains begin again in November, the new garden should be ready so that it may be planted and fenced when the monsoons begin to let up in April. Taro is always planted in early April, when the soil is still very wet, thus providing the taro with ideal growing conditions. By June, when the dry season has taken hold of the land and rain is infrequent at best, the taro is well established.

During the wet season, wild *pitpit* also establishes itself and begins to send out shoots at about the same time the taro is being planted. It takes about six months for taro to mature, and the garden is ready to harvest in late August or September, the actual timing of the harvest determined by the maturity of the wild *pitpit*. When the wild *pitpit* has produced its long, densely packed seed heads, this is an indication that both the *pitpit* and the taro are ready to be harvested. The *pitpit*, because it is wild, is not as

easily monitored as cultivated plants whose growth can be observed daily in the gardens. Hence, when the brilliant red flowers of the ginger species **namane** burst into bloom, this is a sign that the wild *pitpit* is mature, and people make special forays to areas where it is known to grow in order to harvest this delicious vegetable. Taro is thus linked with the developmental phases of a particular species of ginger which produces a red flower, and of the wild *pitpit*, which produces red, yellow, or white fruit.

The taro garden produced by the child's parents is harvested by the **baulo** and their assistants, the **baulo paurega**. If the firstborn is a female, both the child and her mother are outfitted in a new fibre skirt that is dyed in a single colour, red. This is the only finery worn and, if the child is male he is not decorated at all, only the mother is dressed in the special red skirt. Both mother and firstborn (male or female) accompany the **baulo** to the garden, with the child being carried to and from the garden by his or her same sex **baulo**. The entire garden of taro is harvested that day by the **baulo** and company, who pull up the whole taro plant, complete with stalk attached to corm.

When the garden is completely cleared out, the taro is taken to the village and deposited at the home of the **baulo** who are responsible for distributing the taro. Like the distribution that marked the eruption of the

child's first tooth, the gifts of uncooked taro are accompanied by quantities of areca nut and sprouted coconuts. In contrast, however, to other food distributions, the taro is not sent to each men's house in the village whence it is shared among each head of household. In this instance, the **baulo** make two separate distributions. From the largest portion of the yield, the **baulo** keep a large share for themselves, and redistribute the balance among their own kindred in the child's and other villages. To complete the distribution, the **baulo** send bundles of taro, areca nut and sprouting coconuts to each village where the bundles are given to every newly married couple who have not yet conceived or given birth to their first child.

The **liliu daga** taro distribution reiterates the symbolic motifs of femaleness, fertility, and regeneration, met with in previous ceremonies. Taro is the *sine qua non* of human sustenance. Taro grows well in a cool, moist environment that produces rounded, well-formed corms. Females are plumper and mature faster than males because female bodies are soft, moist, and cool, whereas male bodies are hard, hot and dry. **Daga**, 'genitals', particularly the blood contained in female genitals, are the source of new life created in and by the heat of sexuality. Females reproduce human kind, and as gardeners, females produce taro, the most important foodstuff that sustains human life. All of these themes find symbolic representation in the

**liliu daga:** the red skirt of the mother and female child; the red flower of the ginger plant, itself a symbolically 'hot' substance, and the mature taro. The symbolism of fertility, regeneration and continuity is again represented in the red 'blood' of areca nut and the sprouted coconuts that accompany the distributed taro plant. All these concepts are made particularly salient in the special presentation of these items to childless, newly married couples. The distribution of taro provides corms that can be consumed as an immediate source of sustenance, while the severed taro stalks and sprouted coconuts later planted by the recipients promise future food resources.

In all other firstborn ceremonials, the child's parents remain behind the scenes and do not participate in the actual public display; only their child is accorded centre stage, and only the child is decorated in finery. In this and the next two firstborn ceremonials, the mother, but never the father, is given prominence. The child's mother is part of the proceedings and she, too, is decorated, even when her male firstborn is not. The inclusion of the mother in these ceremonies adds further credence to my argument that these ceremonies celebrate the female principle, women as producers and reproducers. The creative and sustaining power of the female principle is manifestly evident in the woman's firstborn child and her abundant taro gardens.

The ceremonial distribution of **tabual**, *pitpit*, might take place within days after the taro distribution, since both *pitpit* and taro reach maturity at the same time. In order to accomplish this distribution, parents must prepare one or more gardens of cultivated *pitpit*. Cultivating extra gardens of *pitpit*, plus taro gardens for the **liliu daga**, plus the gardens for daily subsistence needs, may prove too much of an undertaking for the parents in one growing season. Hence, parents might defer the distribution of cultivated *pitpit* until the following year, and sometimes for several years.

In the past, before such things were available at trade stores, *pitpit* was one source of yellow dye used for body paint and to colour women's fibre skirts. Yellow is also associated with **Leleki**, a cannibalistic autochthonous spirit with masses of long straggly hair that is indigenous, the Kabana say, to the Bali-Vitu Islands. According to Kabana mythology, **Leleki** floated across the sea and came ashore on the beach of an Anêm village in the Kaliai District, where the Anêm killed it, putting an end to the danger its cannibalistic appetite posed to human beings. Along the beaches of West New Britain, the memory of **Leleki** lives on, however, in the substance of a plant that grows profusely at the high tide mark. The plant, called appropriately enough **Leleki itae**, the 'excrement' (also, 'fæces, residue, ashes') of **Leleki**, looks like a large leek with a pale yellow multilayered bulb and long flowing

green leaves that float on top of the water at high tide, just like the hair of **Leleki**. This plant was also a source of yellow dye.

Since **Leleki** is not indigenous to the Kabana area, and people consider it a highly dangerous malevolent entity, it does not have a large role in the Kabana repertoire of spirit representations. However, some kin groups have purchased or inherited through intermarriage with Bali-Vitu Islanders, the right to represent **Leleki** in yellow paint on the exterior walls of their men's house and the seclusion houses of their firstborns, or as special designs painted on their dead prior to burial. The overwhelming symbolic message in the colour yellow is that of a maleficent power that brings illness and death. **Leleki** itself devoured human beings, and some human corpses are painted with the yellow paint derived from the 'excrement of **Leleki**' plant. Those who use the yellow designs are obviously powerful enough to control or use the power associated with them. The yellow designs painted on the walls of men's houses and firstborn seclusion houses portray a warning to stay clear of the powers which reside there, and those who disregard the warning sicken with jaundice or are plagued with boils.

Earlier I suggested that the colour yellow can be regarded as substitute for the colour white in contexts where the meanings attributed to white are a crucial component of the symbolic meanings embedded in a particular

ceremonial. White and yellow are associated with death, malevolent forces, and other equally negative concepts, as well as the more positive concepts of nurturance and continuity. The full complement of positive and negative meanings are juxtaposed once again in this firstborn ceremonial, re-emphasizing the pivotal position of the firstborn between past and future generations, the individual through whom the death/life continuum is exemplified.

Since the birth of their child, both parents and firstborn have been forbidden to wear the colour yellow which, as I have indicated, is associated with the **leleki** plant and with *pitpit*, this latter closely associated with the all important taro. It is the successful production and ceremonial distribution of cultivated *pitpit* made in honour of the firstborn that earns parents and child alike the right to wear yellow. Presumably, by the time the parents have the strength and ability to accomplish this ceremony, they are deemed sufficiently mature and powerful to manifest and/or protect themselves against the powers symbolically associated with yellow.

For the *pitpit* distribution, both mother and firstborn (male or female) are covered from head to toe in yellow body paint, and both might have a design of white painted on their faces. They are elaborately dressed in predominantly yellow and red foliage. The child is more splendidly arrayed

with yellow **dalme** leaves and red feathery flowers (*Salvia splendens*) in her armbands, and with a ruff-like collar of red, yellow and green crotons around her neck, similar to that worn by the masked spirit dancers (**aulu**). The child may also display large quantities of wealth in the many strands of shell money worn criss-cross over her chest, and in a set of boar's tusks she wears as a necklace. The ceremonial distribution of *pitpit* follows much the same procedure as the preceding taro distribution. Accompanied by her mother, the child is carried to the *pitpit* garden by her same sex **baulo**, where the **baulo** assistants harvest the entire crop. Upon their return to the village, the **baulo** retain a portion of the harvest for themselves and share the balance among each men's house in the village, where it is in turn shared among each household affiliated with the men's house. Newly married, childless couples receive a special presentation of *pitpit* delivered to them by the **baulo**.

### The Second Taro Garden

Aptly named **otja dadaga**, 'the coming out [of the] garden', the second taro distribution is truly a stupendous undertaking. In addition to the garden from which they obtain their daily fare, the child's parents must clear and plant at least four large gardens (by which is meant gardens larger than that



planted for subsistence needs) of taro. The intensive labour in clearing and converting a virgin plot of land into a garden has been discussed and need not be reiterated here, except to note that the amount of labour in this gardening venture increases enormously, and that it might take parents several years before they have adequate land prepared to plant in taro.

The second ceremonial distribution of taro requires a minimum of four gardens planted simultaneously so that all the taro matures at the same time. One garden is for the **baulo**, a second is for the child's matrikin, a third is for the child's patrikin, a fourth is reserved for the women in all ten Bariai villages. The clearing out of the gardens and distribution of the crop takes place in two stages. In the first stage, both the mother and firstborn are decorated in finery similar to that used in the child's ceremony of the 'first armband' (**poipoi sara**) with the addition of red body paint instead of yellow. They accompany the **baulo** and their helpers to the gardens. At the gardens, the **baulo** and their workforce harvest all the taro gardens except the one set aside for the women. From the garden marked for themselves, the **baulo** keep a large portion of the taro and redistribute the balance among their assistants and other kin. The taro corms from the two gardens marked for the child's cognatic kindred are redistributed by one of her senior male agnates among all the men's houses in the village, and among all those who represent

affiliated men's houses in other villages. The second stage takes place some days later when, on the allotted day, the female population from all ten villages in the district congregates in the child's village. The women are taken to the garden marked specially for them, whereupon they harvest the entire yield of taro. Each woman is entitled to keep whatever amount of taro she has reaped.

The successful accomplishment of this particular horticultural feat culminating in the firstborn ceremonial display and distribution of the fruits of their labour, concomitantly removes the taboo on wearing the colour red that was imposed on parents and firstborn since the child's birth. Some parents never accomplish this taro ceremony, and never earn the right to wear red. One man in his early fifties has not performed the **otŋa dadaga** for his firstborn son, who is now married with a firstborn son of his own. This man is renowned for his energy and ability to work and accumulate wealth, and for his knowledge of and adherence to ancestral customs; in short, he is a highly respected senior male. Despite all his excellent qualities, he and his wife have been unable to gather the wherewithal to perform the **otŋa dadaga** and thereby earn for themselves and their firstborn the right to wear red. They now consider themselves too "weak" to ever be able to do so because their strength and vitality have degenerated over the years of raising their family.

Their firstborn son, however, can earn the right to wear red by accomplishing the **otŋa dadanga** for his own firstborn child.

### The Feast of Taro Pudding

This is the last (but one) of the firstborn ceremonials, and it can only take place after the parents have accomplished the above production and distribution of taro for the **otŋa dadanga**. Called **anŋa misi**, 'food cooked' this is a feast of cooked taro and pork prepared by the **baulo** and distributed to their assistants, the **baulo paureŋa**, to recognize and compensate them for the contributions and labour they have made to the **baulo**. Without their assistants, the **baulo** would have been unable to fulfill their role in the child's ceremonials. The feast must be cooked taro and pork, all of which is prepared by the **baulo**, but which was produced by the child's parents. The taro the **baulo** cook is the taro they harvested from the garden grown specially for them at the **otŋa dadanga**. The pig is one that the child's parents had given to the **baulo** some years before in anticipation of this final feast.

The firstborn's mother must be reciprocated for this pig on the day of the feast with 15 to 20 lengths of shell money. Although the intent of this feast is to fete the **baulo**'s kin with cooked food and pork provided by the

firstborn, those who partake of the feast "purchase" their gifts of food by making contributions of shell money to the **baulo**. Careful records are kept of who contributed how much shell money, as these contributions are debts incurred by the **baulo** that they eventually repay to their kin. When all the shell money is accumulated, the men join the various lengths together to make numerous single lengths of one fathom each and this wealth is displayed on the child and presented to the child's mother as her return on the pig given the **baulo**.

The firstborn is brought to the **baulo** to be dressed in decorative finery comprised of all the wealth items she has earned the right to wear in previous ceremonies. In addition, the firstborn is draped in the shell money collected by the **baulo**. When the feast is ready for distribution to their kin, the **baulo** take the child back to her parents. Beautifully decorated and laden with wealth, the firstborn is presented to her mother, along with a large ironwood bowl of the most special feast food, coconut cream and taro pudding. On top of the taro pudding is the five fathoms of shell money called **gaea iuui** ('tail of the pig') that accompanied the pig the parents presented to the child's **baulo** when the **baulo** relationship was contracted between them, years ago.

## Discussion

With the exception of the **ololo kapei**, which is treated in the following chapter, the repertoire of Kabana ceremonials in honour of the firstborn is completed. In the introductory chapter, I suggested that these ceremonies are not *rites de passage* that function to precipitate or acknowledge changes in social status. Rather, I argued that the planning, preparation and performance of these ceremonials is the way in which Kabana adults learn to become fully competent, participatory members of society and compete for renown. On average, the complex of firstborn ceremonials takes twenty years to accomplish and when completed most parents are mature adults in their early forties (**araga/taine kapei**; 'man/woman senior, eldest, big'). Their firstborn might be entering into marriage or might even have given birth to her own first child.

Prior to the birth of their firstborn, young people are classified as **iriau/blala sapa**, 'youth/maiden empty, nothing'. They are adolescents with no personal autonomy, dependent upon and under the control of their parents and elders. With the birth of their first child, parents begin a new phase in their life cycle as 'new people', **panua kakau papapau** ('people, younger/small, [emphatic adjective] newest/truest'). In the postpartum phase, parents were stripped of any identity other than that as parents of a

newborn (**aipina**). They became known by and through their firstborn, the exemplar and product of their creative and procreative powers. This is a phase of proto-adulthood when, as heads of their own household and with a dependant of their own, the young parents gradually shift their position from one of filial dependence to one of independence and responsibility for themselves and others. The shift from adolescence to proto-adulthood is not sharply demarcated, it is merely evidenced by the birth of the first child. The young parents remain dependent upon their elders and ancestors, a dependency highlighted in the minor ceremonials which focus on the redistribution of wealth in the form of foodstuffs and consumables (e.g., sago palms, tree fruits) made available to the parents by the child's progenitors. The minor ceremonials emphasize the firstborn's pivotal position marking the continuity of successive generations—the past grandparental/ancestral generation and the present parental generation.

In the major ceremonials the emphasis shifts to the child as exemplar of actual parental accomplishments and a concern with the parents as 'true/real people', **panua tautauga**. Through these ceremonies members of the 'new' adult generation become more knowledgeable about and more heavily involved in meeting the demands of social relations. They use their strength to provide more and larger gardens, to acquire numerous pigs and other wealth

items, and to encompass an ever widening network of social obligations. By doing this, parents gradually develop a new identity as competent adults and display that identity at ceremonials in honour of their firstborn, displays which earn them the admiration of others who reciprocate by according the parents with a reputation for renown.

Throughout my discussion of firstborn ceremonials, I have stressed the underlying motif of these celebrations as one of a continuum of inter-related concepts—death/life, discontinuity/continuity, generation/regeneration, production/reproduction. Parents contain within them the creative potential of the vital essence or life force of their progenitors which is realized and perpetuated through the parents' ability to create new life. The firstborn child thus constitutes a link between the dead and the living, proof of the continuity of life despite the discontinuity engendered by death. But the child is also the harbinger of parental demise, for even as parents ensure the future by procreation they are themselves diminished; reproduction depletes parental vital substances. These losses are further compounded by the expenditure of parental strength and substance not only in the production of life sustaining necessities, but also in the production of ceremonial wealth above and beyond subsistence needs. Parents produce their first child as a result of and at the apex of their creative powers, and from the moment of

conception parental powers begin to dwindle and the loss of power/substantive essence takes its toll in the processes of aging and decay which result ultimately in death.

The firstborn child is what Poole (1984) considers a "symbol of substance", and the concept of primogeniture in Kabana culture encompasses a social and cosmological continuum that describes "an ideological sense of perpetual order". The cosmic continuum comes together in what Weiner (1980: 72) argues is a "world view in which the processes of reproduction and regeneration are perceived as essential cultural concerns". For the Kabana these cultural concerns are embedded in the concept of primogeniture and projected onto the person of the firstborn child who exemplifies the processes of generation, degeneration and regeneration of elements of value: human beings, social relationships, material resources, names, decorative finery, foodstuffs and so forth. The cyclic, processual nature of the way in which the Kabana perceive their perpetual social and cosmic order can be represented in the tripartite model below:

Generation

Progenitors  
Ancestors  
Past Time  
Future Oriented  
Life > Death

Degeneration

Genitors  
Parents  
Present Time  
Becoming Past  
Living < > Dying

Regeneration

Primogeniture  
First Child  
Past in Present  
Becoming Future  
Death > Life



Within the context of Kabana ceremonial, the concept of life (in the guise of the firstborn, column 3) and the concept of death (in the guise of deceased kin, column 1) are given a sharp pre-eminence, as well they might be, since these are the two most important events that bracket human existence. However, concepts of life and death abstracted from those doing the living and dying mean nothing. The Kabana, it would seem, recognize this fact and both the firstborn and the dead whom they elevate and honour are passive elements, mere exemplars of the concepts life and death. More importantly, the ceremonies are oriented to the ongoing processes of living and dying (column 2), to the generation, degeneration and regeneration of elements of value, thus producing an actual, as opposed to an ideal sense of perpetual order and continuity.

From an egocentric perspective life begins at the moment of one's birth and ends at one's death. But birth is not simply the generating of life, it is the regenerating, the "generating again", of life out of death. Ceremonies in honour of a firstborn child celebrate regeneration and continuity. As such, they also celebrate death as the necessary prerequisite for life and as the ultimate condition of life. The firstborn is a product of her ancestors, her progenitors, realized through her genitors. She carries the essence of their being in her blood, and she in turn extends this essential substance to future

generations at the expense of the present generation. The cosmic continuum pivots around the firstborn and the dead, comes full circle, and culminates in the conjoining of work for the dead and work for the firstborn at the **ololo kapei**. In order to explore this relationship further, I take up the topic of ceremonies for the dead in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Primogenitor: Death Rites, Mortuary Ceremonies and the Firstborn

All firstborn ceremonies, the Kabana say, are events that take place "on top of the dead". If there were no dead, there would be no life and the celebration of life as exemplified by the firstborn, could not occur. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the most important of all firstborn ceremonies takes place within the context of mortuary ceremonies, as part of the grand finale at the **ololo kapei**, the 'big feast/celebration'. It is here that male children are superincised, and female children have their ears pierced and elongated. Blood is precious, it contains the life force of past, present and future generations, and cannot be treated lightly. Since the child is a product of ancestral blood, the blood shed when the child's body is cut is ancestral blood and must be spilled on 'top of the dead'.

Although mortuary traditions are by definition concerned with death, they are not necessarily concerned with the dead, *per se*. I thus distinguish, as do the Kabana, between two categories of mortuary traditions. The first is the category I label death rites which includes preparation of the corpse,

mourning, death compensation, and burial. Death rites are performed by the living for a particular deceased individual. These rites are oriented to finishing the dying process of the deceased and to reconciling the living to their loss of that singular individual. The second category of mortuary traditions I have labelled mortuary ceremonies. Mortuary ceremonies are performed *in the name of* the recent dead, but not for the dead; they are performed by and for the living. The several deceased honoured at mortuary ceremonials are, like the child honoured at firstborn ceremonials, exemplars of the interests and preoccupations of others who perform the ceremonials. Mortuary ceremonials include the (re)production and (re)distribution of sociocultural and material elements of value, the building of the seclusion houses for firstborn children, the razing and "resurrection" of the men's ceremonial house, and the (re)creation of the autochthonous spirits that reside in the men's house and preside over the firstborn/mortuary ceremonials.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of Kabana concepts of life and death as a contextual prelude to their complex of mortuary traditions. This is followed with a discussion of Kabana death rites and the three days of death. I then turn to the series of mortuary ceremonials and conclude the chapter with a discussion of the **ololo kapei**, the 'big feast' which, over

several weeks of feasting and dancing orchestrated by the contemporary generation of adults, brings together the firstborn, the recent dead, spiritual beings, and elaborate competitive exchanges of live pigs.

### Concepts of Life and Death

Earlier I noted that the Kabana assert three necessary conditions for the existence of human life: the **tini** 'physical body', the **tautau**, and the **anunu**. The term **tautau** can be glossed as 'spirit', 'soul', 'vital essence', 'life principle', or 'essential substance', and the term **anunu** as 'reflection', 'shadow', 'mirror image', or 'persona'. None of these English words, however, captures the many shades of meaning implied in the Kabana terms. Furthermore, the glosses are conceptually loaded terms in English so that settling on any one translation (e.g., **tautau** = 'soul') bends the reader's mind to assume a configuration of meanings that fit uneasily at best, or not at all, within the meanings of the Kabana terms. In order to avoid this translation problem, I refrain from using an English gloss and use the native terms **tautau** and **anunu** in this discussion.

The **tautau** is contained in but not by the body, its locus being the stomach or liver which also serves as the focal point for such emotions as fear, love, hate, anger, (e.g., **imogali oanaoana**, 'his innards are hot'; i.e., 'he

is angry'). The **tautau** permeates the body and, like the notion of aura, extends to an undefinable distance outside and around the body. It is considered impolite to sit or stand too close to another person, for this is an invasion of personal space and an act of shameful familiarity. Similarly, it is forbidden for anyone to step over an individual and his/her belongings, as this encompasses and appropriates aspects of that person's **tautau** and will cause him/her to become ill. In addition to the physical body and its immediate surrounds, aspects of one's **tautau** also pervade one's personal belongings: one's bodily fluids and wastes; one's partially consumed food and drink, betel spit, tobacco; one's footprints, body heat, breath, voice, glance, hair and nail clippings. Any one of these can be appropriated by others and used to sorcerize the person to whom they belong. Marrying a 'one blood' or having trustworthy trade friends are but two examples of how one ensures protection for one's **tautau**.

The **tautau** has no substance but is contained in substances. The physical body, **tini**, or 'skin', 'outer covering', 'husk', incorporates the **tautau**. It is this intangible and mysterious principle of life that enters the foetus just before birth, causing the unborn infant's eyes to open so it can see the 'road' it must travel as the birth process begins. The **tautau** is an animating principle and the phrase **imata geragera**, 'her eye sees', is used to convey

the concept of 'alive'. No one knows or really cares from whence the **tautau** originated, and no one knows what becomes of it after death.

The **anunu** ('reflection', 'shadow', 'persona', also 'ghost') is also an animating principle, associated with that aspect of human life pertaining to thought, speech, rationality, knowledge. It is tangible in the sense that it is possible to 'see' a shadow, or a ghost, and to witness the external manifestations of 'persona' in individual behaviours. The **anunu** is also responsible for the dreaming state. Dreams are out-of-body experiences in which the **anunu** leaves the sleeping body and exists on another plane of reality where it interacts with the **anunu** of other dreamers, spirits, and ghosts. Ghosts are the **anunu** of the dead. People should never be startled out of reverie or sleep as this will sever the connection between **anunu** and body. Loss of one's **anunu** causes one to become temporarily or permanently deranged. Either condition is recognizable by the individual's asocial, non-rational behaviour and/or speech. The degree to which an individual's **anunu** is socially evolved can be ascertained by objective criteria such as speech and behaviour patterns.

This tripartite schema of body, **tautau**, and **anunu** is necessary for human life. The necessary and sufficient conditions for 'humanness' require the addition of a fourth element: socialization. Children become human when

they are capable of reflexivity, a condition the Kabana associate with the ability to feel shame as a result of word or deed. The socialization process begins but does not end at adolescence, it continues throughout adulthood, culturally channeled and molded by firstborn ceremonials.

The **tautau** is a uniquely human attribute, Pigs, dogs, and birds, for example, are not human (although they might be human shapeshifters) because they do not have a **tautau**. They do have an **anunu**, hence they are animate beings that cast shadows, have reflections and are capable of limited learning—they can know their owners, the road to the gardens, their names, their homes. Although animals are not human beings, neither are they, as a category, opposed to the category 'human'. There are degrees of humanness. Animals, especially dogs and pigs, are located on the outer limits of what it means to be human and are characteristically the epitome of asocial behaviour.

The Kabana do not have a term that can be glossed as embracing the concept 'life'. The term for 'human being' is **eababa**. However, in describing both human beings and animals as 'alive', one says **imata eababa**, 'its eye [is] human', or **itin kemi**, 'its skin [is] good'. Having a 'good skin' also describes as 'alive' such inanimate things as plants and trees. The word **mate**, can mean 'finished' in the sense that a transaction is completed. It may also be



glossed as 'mortally wounded', 'terminally ill', 'unconscious', and 'dead'. All of these conditions may or may not be permanent; deadness like aliveness is a matter of degree. Only animate beings can be referred to as **mate**. Plants and trees that are dead are described as **misi**, 'dry', 'cooked'. This term is also descriptive of human beings, especially the aged and the ill, whose skin becomes dry and lacklustre, their bodies shrivelled and bent, their **sulu**, 'vital juices', used up.

The Kabana hold that it is both natural and necessary that all things—human, animal, vegetal—must die. In the best of all possible worlds, human death should occur as a function of extreme old age. In this case, death is the result of, and brings closure to, a socially productive and moral life span. Dying, like living, is a social process *par excellence*. The expenditures of the life force in generation and regeneration bring about degeneration. As Kelly (1976: 145) put it for the Etoro: "accretion at one point in the system entails depletion elsewhere".

Depletion of one's strength is a condition marked by the physical indicators of the aging process such as loss of teeth, loss of body fat and 'vital juices', white hair, deteriorating eyesight. Aging (and death) are associated with 'hotness', a heat which dries the body and 'cooks' its vital fluids resulting in a loss of fertility and productivity for both women and

men. The faded bloom of life is reflected in the eyes and skin; the eyes no longer 'see', the skin is no longer 'good'. As people age they become more spectators than participants in social life. The physical debilitation of the elderly prohibits them from taking part in the demanding activity of finding pigs and shellmoney. Their spheres of activity become circumscribed, and they become dependant upon others once again. They have given over their knowledge and experience to their children so that their mental strength is also depleted, a condition referred to as **buobuo**, 'having immature or childlike thought processes'.

Ideally, all people should achieve extreme old age, with death occurring as a result of their 'bones breaking'. This is a "good death" (*cf.*: Counts 1976-77), the culmination of a good life, for persons who survive to extreme old age are, by definition, those individuals who have lived a morally correct life (*cf.*: McKellin, in press). However, there are few Kabana who live to die of extreme old age. The most senior adults in the village could remember only one person, a woman, who died as a result of her 'bones breaking'. She was a true **maron**, 'esteemed person', a woman of renown, strength and integrity. With very few exceptions, most deaths in Kabana society are classified as bad deaths caused by sorcery. Death by sorcery is a bad death because the practice of sorcery is in itself a dreadful thing and because sorcery entails a

negative judgment upon the behaviour of the victim by relevant others. A bad death is a morally wrong death because it is incurred as a result of a breach of morality either on the part of the deceased or a member of his/her family. A bad death, like a good death, is not strictly a biological issue: it is a moral issue (see Scaletta, 1985, for a detailed discussion of the dying process).

For the Kabana, the process of dying is characterized as a loss of personal autonomy and the freedom to empower one's existence, both of which are basic attributes of a 'true' human being. The dying person becomes dependent upon others, while at the same time, the dying person becomes socially disaffiliated, less involved with life and the living, more involved with her own dying and with the dead. Physically, a person who is dying has dry, ashen, lacklustre skin (like dead plants); her eyes film over and become opaque (like the eyes of a neonate, unsocialized infant); her nose becomes 'sharp and stands up'; her breath has the decayed odour associated with putrefaction; her body is 'heavy', incapable of independent movement; and she no longer looks at or 'sees' those around her. The necessary and sufficient condition for human death is the absolute absence of the **tautau**, at which point the dying person's 'eyes are no longer human' and she ceases to breathe. With the irretrievable separation of the **tautau** and the body, death is a *fait accompli*. The dying person becomes 'the dead one', **burua**, her corpse

referred to as **ipat sapa**, an 'empty container'.

Although the person has been defined as 'not living', **mate**, the dying process is not finished until three days after the death during which time the formal rites of mourning, death compensation, and burial take place. At the end of the three days, the deceased's dying process is finished and the dead one is categorically 'dead', **matemate**.

#### Death Rites: the three days of death

As soon as death is pronounced, a young man is sent to beat the slit-gong at the deceased's men's house in order to announce the death to the community. The slit-gong can be heard for some distance, the significance of its mournful tattoo unmistakable, and those who hear it return immediately to the village to participate in the mourning rites. Two young men (**ato**, 'messenger') are sent off, one to the east and one to the west, to carry the news of death to the neighbouring villages where other runners relay the message until the whole district is advised.

It is primarily elder females and senior kinswomen of the deceased who prepare the body for viewing. The corpse is washed, dressed in new burial clothes, personal decorative finery, and her hair trimmed back about ten centimetres all round the head (see above pp. 254). The deceased is

removed from the place of death to a suitable outbuilding, one large enough to accomodate the mourners, where the body is laid out on a new pandanus mat in the centre of the room, and covered up to the chin with a length of new cotton material. Another length of cloth is placed over the mouth and nose to protect the mourners from the odour of death. The eldest son, a brother, or some other senior male kinsman, paints the face of their dead kinswoman with the red and white designs of her kin group. Every death is treated in this manner, regardless of the age or gender of the deceased. If the deceased is a small boy who had not been superincised, this operation will be performed on the corpse by one of his senior male kinsmen.

While the corpse is being laid out, her/his resident affines go to the gardens of the deceased where they harvest all the food growing there; they **otŋa dadaga**, 'clear out the garden' in the same manner as took place for the firstborn. In addition to garden produce, the coconuts, areca nuts, bananas, tobacco, are also 'cleared out'. In short, the deceased is stripped of all 'her/his belongings' (**ele pil**). As soon as the death is announced, all the village women go to their gardens and to the freshwater spring, to collect sufficient food and water to last them throughout the three days of death.

For the rest of the day of death, the village residents come to mourn their dead compatriot formally. When they enter the mourning house, the

mourners begin to weep and decry their loss. As they approach the corpse they throw down beside or on top of the body, items of clothing, utensils, plates, crotons, taro stalks, which are snatched up by those mourners already present. These gifts to the dead, and through her to the mourners, express the donors' grief and how the loss of this individual has *rabisim*, 'beggared them'. Their prestations made, the mourners prostrate themselves across the corpse to weep and lament the loss of a sister, a mother, a wife, a companion. As the first day of death wears on, mourners from other villages begin to arrive, and the home villagers gradually remove themselves from the scene to prepare the food they will feed the mourners and to allow the newcomers their time to grieve.

Both women and men participate in the work of mourning (**bibita**, 'vigil, death watch'), although it is primarily women who keep a constant vigil over the dead one, weeping and expressing their grief in 'songs of mourning', **taŋdaga**, until the corpse is buried. On midnight of the first day of death or, if this is not possible because all the participants have not yet arrived, on the third night of death, there is a special death dirge sung only by men, **tikado borou keoŋa**, 'they do sorcery keening'. For two or three hours, the cognatic and affinal kinsmen of the dead, take turns singing their privately owned magical spells. The secret spells lose their inherent power once made public,

consequently, the power of the man who held those secrets is diminished. By making public their secret powers, the deceased's affinal kin place themselves in a position of vulnerability. Conversely, the cognatic kin of the deceased show their lack of intent to avenge the death by diminishing their power to do so. (This does not completely eradicate the possibility that the death will be avenged, however.) Mourning continues unabated throughout the night and the following day.

This second day of death is taken up with the collection and redistribution of **kuru**, 'death compensation', the designation of the **budua itama** 'owner/father of the dead', and **taeaga**, 'burial'. During the lifetime of the deceased numerous individuals are linked to one another as 'affines', **sobosobo**, by virtue of their relationship to the deceased. The death of the person through whom this network of relations was forged and maintained does not sever those relationships. These relations are transformed into affinal relations based upon the mutual connection these affines now have relative to the deceased individual, a transformation reflected in kin terminology. Affines, **sobosobo**, become **aso**, 'persons affinally related to a particular deceased'. Compensation payments are made between **aso**, the direction of payment going from those who are affinally related to the deceased to those who are cognates of the deceased. Such payments are

intended to 'buy the worry/grief' of the deceased's kin and to 'cool their anger' in order to ward off the possibility of revenge against the affines of the dead.

Earlier I noted that the redistribution of bridewealth differs from all other transfers of wealth except one, death compensation. Mortuary payments made at the time of death follow the same procedure as that for bridewealth distributions, as in the following example. Upon the death of a woman who was a widow, the dead woman's sons and their agnates were responsible for making mortuary payments to their mother's consanguines and cognates. When the dead woman's affines arrive for the mourning rites, they make contributions of shell money to the woman's eldest son (for which he is now indebted to them) to assist him in accumulating the necessary amount of wealth destined to be redistributed among the woman's cognatic kindred. As was the case with bridewealth, mortuary payments are transactions where one's investment of wealth is returned immediately with a profit. Those who are entitled to receive compensation contribute an amount of shell money and at the redistribution, receive back the amount they contributed plus one hundred per cent. profit, the profit coming from the contributions made by the woman's affines. Whereas at the bridewealth distribution, it was the bride's maternal kin who should and did get the largest amount of wealth as compensation for maternal blood, mortuary payment differential is based on



gender. If the deceased is a female, the death 'belongs to the women' for they have lost one of their own; if a male, the death 'belongs to the men'. At the death of the above mentioned widow, it was her female cognates who received the largest amounts of shell money as compensation for her death. Regardless of the gender of the deceased, all women who come to mourn for the dead are given gifts of raw food, sugar cane, drinking coconuts, banana and taro stalks for planting, and crotons, as recompense for the emotions, tears, and songs they contributed so that the deceased was properly mourned. The source of these gifts of raw food is the gardens and trees owned by the deceased, the 'belongings' of the dead that were harvested earlier by her/his resident affines. These 'belongings' are imbued with the deceased's 'substance' or vital essence, and thus are returned to those with whom the deceased shares substance, her 'one bloods'.

In addition to death compensation, it is also necessary at this time for the family of the deceased to designate one individual as **budua itama**, 'father/owner of the dead one'. This man (but sometimes, woman) is responsible for organizing and properly carrying out all future mortuary work for this particular deceased. Mortuary ceremonies are numerous, costly in pigs, shell money, other wealth objects, and garden produce, and they might take more than a decade to complete. To be chosen 'owner of the dead one' is

to be issued a challenge by the family of the deceased, since failure to do the mortuary work in a reasonable length of time and in a properly opulent manner shows up the 'owner of the dead one' as a *rabisman*, a 'person of little consequence, strength'. Simply to be chosen as 'owner of the dead one' is to be shamed, as the person chosen is always one with whom the deceased or her family have been in conflict. The person selected as 'owner of the dead one' is presented with a large female pig, two clay pots, three large ironwood bowls and 15 to 20 lengths of shell money, by the family (or spouse) of the deceased. All of this wealth must be repaid, and is the first in a long string of debts and responsibilities incurred by the 'owner of the dead one'.

By midafternoon of the day following the death, mortuary transactions are complete, and all who came to mourn the dead depart the village of the deceased to return to their own homes—visiting mourners do not participate in the actual burial of the dead. Two young men, kin of the deceased, are commissioned to prepare the grave site. The corpse is wrapped in the pandanus mat upon which it was laid out for viewing, and carried by male kin to the grave site. The procession to the grave from the house of mourning is led by the deceased's spouse or a sibling. All those who participate in the work of burying the dead will be compensated for their work on behalf of the dead during the distribution of shell money at the **ololo kapei**. In the past,

the dead (men, women and children) were buried in shallow graves inside the men's ceremonial house. The men built their hearths on top of the shallow graves, 'on the breast of' the dead. Nowadays, the dead are buried in a graveyard adjacent to the village and burial rites at the site are conducted by the village catechist who reads prayers from his catechism and leads the gathering in a short funeral mass. At the conclusion of the service, those who have gathered take one final look at the face of the dead and, after throwing flowers into the grave, return to their homes. The young men fill in the grave, and erect on the 'breast of the dead', a small **palata** or 'lean-to' consisting of four poles and a roof, to shelter and mark the grave.

Only twenty-four hours (or less) have elapsed since the death was announced and the burial of the corpse. After the corpse is buried, the spouse (or a sibling) of the deceased goes into seclusion and village activities cease altogether as people sleep off their exhaustion and observe the taboos associated with a new death for the next forty-eight hours. These taboos forbid any kind of work, travel to the gardens, bush or reef, hunting or fishing, and the use of sharp implements such as knives or axes. Until the **arilu**, 'the feast to send away the ghost', the deceased's **anunu** ('shadow, persona, ghost') is still in the vicinity. Ghosts, by their very proximity and not necessarily out of malicious intent, can addle peoples' wits, thus activities during this

period are likely to be done poorly and will have to be done again, or they are likely to be dangerous. The presence of a ghost causes everyone to be accident prone, liable to injure themselves with a knife, fall out of a canoe, trip and break a leg. One man, for example, decided to ignore these taboos of the newly dead and went off to hunt wild pigs. He did track down a wild boar, but the pig turned on the man, severely goring him and killing one of his hunting dogs.

On the third day after death, women from all over the district gather at the village of the deceased for the feast to send the ghost away. At midnight, the women gather in the house where the corpse was laid out, where they will spend the night singing songs commemorating the deceased. The keening songs **tandaga**, in their entirety, are one long epic that traces events in the life of the deceased, highlighting her personality, habits, accomplishments, idiosyncracies, and the circumstances of her dying and death. The songs have a particular style and form so that anyone who wishes to contribute their special memory of the deceased can do so. The songs in honour of the deceased, and the expressions of grief by the women, are intended to draw the ghost near the dwelling, mollify its disposition, and prepare it for its departure from the living. At dawn the songs of mourning cease; the ghost is banished with the night by the rising sun. Normal activities can resume. All

the women who sang throughout the night, are gifted by the family of the deceased with a feast of cooked food—pork, sago flour and taro, portions of which they share with their husbands and children when they return home. Sending forth the dead, like bringing forth new life in the birth hut, is women's work; men remain nearby for support, but they are non-participants at this crucial and final life cycle event.

Death is life transformed just as life is death transformed; the two concepts are not opposed, since together they describe total existence. The rites and ceremonials associated with death and the dead are the same as those associated with life and the firstborn. At this phase of mortuary work, the similarities are evident in the customary seclusion of the deceased's spouse, if he or she is living, (if not a close sibling, or a child). In the past, like mother and firstborn child, the surviving spouse was secluded inside a 'butterfly room' (**ele bobo**). Nowadays she/he is simply 'locked in her/his house' (**ele luma iloko**), emerging only at night to perform bodily functions. While in seclusion, the bereaved has no visitors, sees and speaks to no one, except the person who brings her/him a small amount of food once each evening. Out of respect for the dead, the spouse must taboo tobacco, areca nut, eat nothing but 'rubbish' food, plain boiled sweet potato, and drink only water. Food and water are supplied in very small quantities, so that the need

for bodily elimination is minimized. Needless to say, the bereaved also loses a good deal of weight on this meagre diet, a further indication of how the death has impoverished the survivor.

Before being locked in the house, the spouse is dressed in mourning regalia. Her (or his) skin and hair are blackened with soot, the hair twisted into long tendrils from which dangle globules of soot blackened grease from the pig eaten at the feast to send away the ghost. The widow is dressed in 'widows weeds', an undyed fibre skirt made from dried coconut fronds; the widower is dressed in a similarly drab loincloth. More common nowadays is for the bereaved to wear a black cotton sarong. The widow(er) wears a braided necklace (**nagolnana**), made from a garment of the deceased, which has a small pouch attached containing some personal belonging of the deceased, perhaps a lock of hair or a piece of tobacco. Like parents of a firstborn, the bereaved spouses are stripped of their personal identity; they are forbidden to wear anything but their mourning regalia and no colour save black; they cannot cut their hair; they have no name other than that of 'widow' (**asape**), or 'widower' (**beget**); their social relations and sphere of activities are circumscribed. Unlike parents of a firstborn, who must forge relationships and earn an identity (become re-named) through their own efforts, a widow(er) is dependent upon her 'affines by death', her **aso**, to

forge those important human relations. Rather than breaking asunder the various human relations that were reckoned through the deceased, a death simply transforms those relationships into obligations between the kin of the dead (**aso**), obligations exemplified initially by the bereaved spouse.

How long the widow(er) remains in seclusion, wears the black of mourning regalia and goes unkempt, and how long she is forbidden to leave the area around her house, hamlet, village, to enter the gardens, go to the reef, or participate in ceremonial activities, depends upon her **aso** and their 'strength', since they must remove these taboos with appropriate feasts and gifts of wealth. The length of time a bereaved spouse remains in seclusion varies according to the whim and wealth of the **aso**, and might be one week, one month, or longer. For the 'coming out' of seclusion, the **aso** must prepare a feast of cooked pork and taro to be redistributed among all the men's houses in the village. Some weeks after seclusion is ended, the taboo preventing the bereaved spouse from entering the gardens is lifted by the **aso**, who escort the widow(er) to a new garden they have prepared for her. This garden replaces the one that was 'cleared out' at the death of her spouse. Mourning regalia is worn for at least a year, its removal requiring yet another feast of cooked pork and taro, at which time the bereaved is given a haircut and taken into the sea to be bathed by one of her female **aso** to remove the trappings of

grief.

Not all taboos are obligatory, many, such as tabooing a food particularly favoured by the deceased, are self-imposed and may last a lifetime. Nor do all taboos require such expensive ceremonials for their removal. One widower in the village, for example, did not attend the weekly village moot for almost a year after his wife died, since it would sadden him to do so. His wife was a vital, active participant in village affairs and he stayed away out of respect for her memory. When he decided to discontinue the taboo, he entered the public plaza after everyone had gathered there and, weeping profusely, threw down one length of shell money to "re-open the road" of his wife. When other roads that have been closed by taboo are re-opened, this is done with similar displays of grief and with gifts of wealth —shell money, woven baskets, crotons, tin plates, cups—thrown along the path, gifts of wealth that are picked up by whoever is handiest. Whether obligatory or self-imposed, permission to break the taboos and the accompanying gifts of wealth must come from the **aso** of the bereaved.

The taboos imposed on the spouse or immediate consanguines of the dead go into effect on the day of death. Obligatory taboos, such as seclusion, the wearing of mortuary regalia, and taboos that circumscribe the activities and movements of the bereaved are removed in the fullness of time at the



discretion of the **aso** of the bereaved. On average, it will take twelve to eighteen months before a widow(er) is completely free of all taboos, and once more a full participant in social life. The observation of self-imposed taboos, entered into voluntarily not only by a spouse, but also by the family, relatives and friends of the deceased, will persist as long as an individual wishes to memorialize the dead in this fashion.

These taboos, while occasioned by a death, are different from the formal rites of death and the mortuary ceremonies later performed in honour of the dead. Death rites begin when the death occurs and include the preparation of the corpse, formal mourning, death compensation and burial. They last for the three days of death which end when the corpse is buried and the spouse (or a sibling, or child) of the dead enters seclusion. The death is 'finished', and this particular **burua** 'dead one', has joined the ranks of the recent dead. Mortuary ceremonies in honour of the recent dead are separate from death rites, and might not take place until some years after death.

### MORTUARY CEREMONIES

During an individual's lifetime, ego is part of a vast interconnected network of reciprocal relationships, reckoned through and exemplified by ego's firstborn child. When ego dies, these multiplex social relationships are

not discontinued, nor is the cohesion or equilibrium of society placed in any jeopardy. Throughout her/his lifetime, ego has invested wealth and value in others. Weiner points out that, embedding wealth and value in others is a "primary mode of self-expansion" (1980: 82); for the Kabana this process is also the primary mode of self-definition and takes place within the framework of firstborn ceremonials. Ego's self and relationships between self and others are exemplified by her/his firstborn child. Ideologically, the firstborn child is ego's natural replacement and, upon the death of her/his parent(s), those relationships become in fact, as opposed to only in principle, the responsibility of the firstborn. Weiner argues ( p.79) that the process of replacement "is not an automatic procedure . . .but is preceded by explicitly defined transactions" over long periods of time. The process of embedding value in the self of some other "contributes to the eventual replacement of one's own self . . . . and for the regeneration of social relations beyond one's own lifetime" (p.79). Although personal loss and bereavement are deeply felt by the Kabana, sociologically, they do not perceive of death as a potential source of disorder. For the Kabana, death does not create a rent in the social fabric that must be reknit through mortuary ceremonies. The whole concept of primogeniture is concerned with continuity, and the automatic replacement of the dead in the person of the firstborn assures social and ideological

continuity despite the social and personal losses incurred when any one individual dies. The concept of replacement, Weiner emphasizes, "should not only be thought of in terms of individual (or group) relations, but the transaction must also be understood as an aspect of the larger reproductive system in which the accumulation, circulation, and replacement of elements of value, along with the buildup and replacement of individuals only occurs through constant attention, nurturance and 'feeding'" (p.80). Kabana mortuary ceremonies thus are not vehicles for the building of new relationships or for the rebuilding of previously existing ones. Social relationships remain intact through the concept of primogeniture and the actual person of the firstborn. Within the generation, degeneration and regeneration continuum, Kabana mortuary ceremonies, like those of the Trobriands, transform the apparent negativity of death and decay into a "positive resource for the regeneration of equivalent social relations" (Weiner 1980: 81).

Among the Kabana, the three days of death rites are concerned with finishing the dying process of a particular deceased person. Mortuary ceremonies, on the other hand, are concerned with all those recently deceased members of a particular men's house. The 'recent dead' are those whose death occurred after the last cycle of mortuary ceremonies was completed. The Kabana do not worship or propitiate the dead, nor do the dead become

ancestral deities. Mortuary ceremonies do not immortalize the dead, since their "immortality" is imbued in their descendants who contain the vital essence of their genitors and primogenitors. Death rites perform closure on the life of a specific dead person. Mortuary ceremonies celebrate the continuity of life. The real burden of these ceremonies falls on two classes of people; the parents of firstborn children, and the **budua itama**, the 'owner of the dead one'. The nature and content of role 'owner of the dead one' as an exemplar of the deceased person is crucial to understanding Kabana mortuary ceremonies and I begin my discussion of mortuary work by examining this role in more detail.

### The Owner of the Dead One

In the previous section, I pointed out how the accumulation and redistribution of wealth as death compensation is a transaction that parallels the accumulation and redistribution of bridewealth. The parallels between marriage and death do not stop with this initial transaction.

The rules of marriage, it will be recalled, hold that ego marries within the **sig kelede**, that is, a spouse is someone with whom ego has 'shared blood' within the maximal cognatic kindred but outside a minimal three generational kindred. Through marital ties, distant cognates become

reciprocal affines (**sobosobo**). These affines, particularly the groom's immediate consanguines, contribute to the bridewealth payment (**garebo**) which is later redistributed among the bride's cognates ('one bloods'). When a woman dies, her affines again contribute to the compensatory wealth (**kuru**) given over to her cognates, and reciprocal affinal relations become **aso**, 'affines in death'. Bridewealth and death compensation are formally similar transactions different from all other transfers of wealth in that the amount received by the woman's natal kindred is determined by the amount each kinsperson contributes, plus one hundred percent profit. When the woman married, her consanguines and cognates contributed to the personal wealth (**dudŋa**) the young bride took with her when the marriage was finalized after the birth of her first child. Since it was the birth of the child that irrevocably legitimated the marriage, the bride's personal wealth (**dudŋa**), rather than the bridewealth, formally marked her transition from her natal kin to her affinal kin. Upon her death, the woman must be returned to her natal kin, and this is accomplished when her affinal kin select one of her natal kin as the 'owner of the dead one' to whom they symbolically return the deceased by presenting this individual with wealth called **dudŋa**. Since the dead woman has always belonged to her 'one bloods', a connection that was not rescinded even upon her marriage, she must be 'returned' to her 'one

bloods' upon her death; her return, like her departure, is marked by the wealth (**dudja**) that accompanies her movement. Her death belongs to her 'one bloods' and it is they, not the woman's affines, who must carry out the necessary mortuary ceremonies in 'honour of their dead'.

For heuristic purposes, and at the risk of oversimplification, I shall use a specific example based on an actual death to further explicate the situation and the role of the 'owner of the dead one' in mortuary work. In this instance the deceased is a senior female, survived by her husband. In life, the woman was a member of an extended cognatic kindred of 'one bloods'. Relations based on 'shared blood' are perpetual, originating with one's progenitors, through one's self as genitor and extended into the future through one's offspring who are extensions of one's self. The continuity of these blood relations is celebrated at mortuary work. The dead woman is returned to those with whom she has 'shared blood' and the 'owner of the dead one' is responsible for carrying out the ceremonials in her honour.

After her death, others referred to the dead woman's husband as **more itama**, 'owner of the croton', the croton being a symbol of the dead/death. At the death of his wife, the widower, or 'owner of the croton', selected as 'owner of the dead one' a man who was the dead woman's cross-cousin/brother, that is, the dead woman was a FeZD/Z to the man chosen as 'owner of

the dead one'. The deceased woman and the 'owner of the dead one' are 'one bloods' at the fourth ascending generation, but members of different minimal patrilineages. Just as the woman's departure from her natal kin at her marriage was formalized with **dudŋa**, the wealth she received from her cognates and took with her when she entered her husband's village, her return to her natal kin after her death was formalized with a payment of wealth (**dudŋa**) made by her affines to her natal kin. This wealth, consisting of a large female pig, two clay pots, three large ironwood bowls and 15 to 20 lengths of shellmoney, was given over by the dead woman's husband as the 'owner of the croton' to the 'owner of the dead one', a 'one blood' of the deceased.

Formally represented by the widower, the affinal kin of the deceased woman challenge the ability of her 'one bloods' to perform these ceremonies by selecting one of her kin as representative of that kindred, and presenting him (or her) with **dudŋa**. It is the dead woman's natal kin, not her relations by marriage, who must accumulate and redistribute wealth to others on the occasion of her death. The affines of the deceased do have a vested interest in the performance of these ceremonies, however, since they, too, are distant cognates or are cognatically related to the deceased (through her children) and have certain rights and obligations by virtue of their blood relation to the

deceased. The **more itama**, 'owner of the croton' (the spouse of the deceased), gives over the **dudga** wealth to the 'owner of the dead one' both to challenge his/her ability to accomplish the ceremonials but also to assist him/her in doing so. Throughout the ceremonial cycle, the 'owner of the croton' and his family must provide the 'owner of the dead one' with a constant supply of food so that the latter has the 'strength' to perform the mortuary work. As one 'owner of the dead one' phrased it, "I must grow the wealth and do the work in honour of my dead sister; my sister's husband [the 'owner of the croton'] must 'grow' [i.e., feed] me and 'buy' [compensate] my work."

The 'owner of the croton' (the widower) is an exemplar of the dead womans' affinal kin and the representative of the men's house into which she married. The affinal kin thus return the deceased to her 'one bloods' by 'bringing' (**dudga**) the death back to a member of her minimal cognatic kindred, exemplified by the 'owner of the dead one', who is a member of the men's house into which the deceased was born. Everyone who is a 'one blood' of the deceased has a right to a share of the wealth redistributed at the ceremonials that honour the deceased, but not all those who have 'shared blood' are members of these two men's houses. Since the dead woman belongs to a complex network of 'one bloods' that, through marriage and descent



affiliate her with each and every men's house in the district and even beyond the district among neighbouring people, mortuary ceremonies are not merely transactions between the men's house group into which the deceased was born and the one into which she married, but extend beyond any minimum definition of affinal and consanguineal kin to encompass large numbers of people and vast expenditures of wealth. And it is this that makes mortuary ceremonies the lavish phenomena that they are.

The extensive nature of kinship relations and the rights and obligations inherent in those relations is formally represented by a third role crucial to the performance of mortuary ceremonies. This is the role of the **karei itama**, 'the basket [its] father/owner'. The dead woman is a member of men's house (A) by birth, she became a member of men's house (B) through marriage. Upon her death, the woman's affines, members of men's house (B), give death compensation (**kuru**) to the woman's cognates who are members of many different men's houses (A, B, C...), and they bring the dead back to her natal men's house, (A). Men's house (A) 'raise the name' of their dead by accumulating and redistributing wealth in the name of the dead to all those who have a right to a portion of that wealth because of their rights based on 'shared blood' with the deceased. The other men's houses and their interests are represented by the 'owner of the basket'. This individual is selected by

the 'owner of the dead', who formally contracts the relationship by sending a large plate of taro pudding and a length of shellmoney to the 'owner of the basket'. In the example cited here, the 'owner of the dead one' chose as the 'owner of the basket', a young man who was both his and the dead woman's grandson (FZDSS). The 'owner of the basket' was a 'one blood' of both the deceased and the 'owner of the dead one', but he was a member of yet a third men's house. The obligations between the 'owner of the dead' and the 'owner of the basket' are, in many respects, analogous to the **baulo** relationship between parents of a firstborn. The 'owner of the basket' is a vital source of assistance to the 'owner of the dead' in carrying out the ceremonies in honour of the deceased, and is also the person through whom various redistributions of wealth are made to those who have rights to such wealth because of their 'one blood' kinship to the deceased. The full range of the 'owner of the dead one' and 'owner of the basket' relationship will become more evident as the discussion evolves.

Mortuary ceremonies are highly competitive events. The competition is entered into when the deceased is symbolically returned to her natal kin in the presentation of wealth (**dudga**) made by her affines to the 'owner of the dead one', who represents the natal kin ('one blood') of the deceased. The competition is not between two categories of kin, i.e., between persons who

are affines or cognates relative to the deceased, since the Kabana have no such neatly dualistic system of relationships. The challenge lies in whether or not the 'owner of the dead one' and the men's house into which she was born are capable of producing and redistributing wealth to all those with whom the deceased has 'shared blood' and who are affiliated with other men's houses. The competition is between the natal men's house of the deceased and all other men's houses.

Many years might elapse between the return of the deceased and the ceremonies that honour him or her. The decision to begin a new cycle of mortuary work is based on two criteria: the total number of recent dead belonging to the men's house, and the number of firstborn children belonging to that same men's house who have not yet been superincised or had their ears pierced. If both these categories number more than five each, the decision to begin mortuary work is likely to be taken and preparations begin.

Given that there are at least five, and possibly as many as ten recently dead, plus as many firstborn children in any one men's house, everyone affiliated with that men's house participates in the organization and execution of the mortuary ceremonials since it is the reputation/renown of their men's house *vis-à-vis* all other men's houses that is at stake. When to begin a new cycle of mortuary ceremonies is a group decision, proposed by the

elder members of the men's house and supported (or not, as the case may be) by the total men's house membership, including the women, whose opinion is solicited and expressed within the men's house by their menfolk.

Mortuary ceremonies, like firstborn ceremonies, are not held to dispose of stockpiled wealth. The wealth in food, pigs, and objects of value that is redistributed at mortuary ceremonies is specifically acquired as ceremonial performance is required, and not before. When the previous mortuary cycle was completed, the autochthonous spirits were sent away from the men's house, the drums were silenced, and the men's house itself was allowed to fall into ruin. Mortuary ceremonies are celebrations of life and each time a new mortuary cycle is begun, the autochthonous spirits, the drums, and the men's house are resurrected. The cycle begins with the 'scattering of the ashes' of the dead.

### Scattering the Ashes

Since the dead are no longer buried and cremated inside the men's house, the ceremony to 'scatter the ashes of the dead' **ikado diga itae** ('he does/works the fire [its] excrement/remains/ashes') has become the ceremony to raze the lean-to that was erected over the grave site of the deceased. Each 'owner of the dead' (hereafter simply 'owner') is responsible

for smashing the lean-to (**igoro aea moe**, 'he smashes/ breaks the pandanus mat') that has shielded the breast of the dead. The pandanus mat here refers both to the shroud in which the deceased was buried and to the lean-to that was built over the grave.

Since it marks the beginning of a new cycle of mortuary work that includes a number of the recent dead belonging to a particular men's house, this ceremony might not occur for some years after the deceased was buried. In order to accomplish this first ceremonial, each 'owner' must plan at least a year ahead by planting a large taro garden to accommodate the required distribution of cooked food, and he must have available one female 'pig of the ashes' (**aupu**). A kinsmen or 'one blood' of the deceased is commissioned to dismantle and burn the lean-to, for which he receives the pig and a large dish of taro pudding from the 'owner'. In addition, the 'owner' must send a plate of taro pudding to all those men's houses with whom the deceased was affiliated through 'shared blood'. The 'gift' of taro pudding announces to the recipients that the men's house of the 'owner' has commenced a new mortuary cycle.

It is important to note that although it appears that the person who tears down and burns the lean-to is "paid" for his work with the pig and taro, this is only partially true, since the recipient of the wealth (A) is now indebted to the 'owner' (B) for that pig. When the men's house that (A) belongs

to begins its mortuary cycle, (A) will "pay back" the pig by (1) commissioning (B) for some aspect of mortuary work on behalf of (A), or (2) by presenting (B) with a pig during the final pig exchange at the **ololo kapei**. In fact, (B) might have been chosen by (A) to do this work because the deceased person (D) had an outstanding debt to (B) for a pig for which (A), as 'owner of the dead one', must honour. By involving (A) in some aspect of the mortuary work for (D) and "paying" him a pig for that work, (B) repays the pig debt between (A) and (D) by indebting (A) to himself (B). Relations of indebtedness never really cancel one another out, they simply change hands. It should also be noted at this stage, that all exchanges of wealth are the receiving and repaying of indebtedness and are exchanges that take place among persons who are related by descent or 'one bloods', i.e., cognatic kin. The notion that one shares with kin (agnates) but exchanges with non-kin (affines) simply does not apply to the Kabana situation. In the above example, where (D) is the deceased, (A) might be a ZDS/grandchild of the deceased and (B) might be a FZS/sibling of the deceased (D) and a grandparent to (A). While (A) and (B) are 'one bloods', they belong to different men's houses, hence the competitive nature of mortuary work is phrased in terms of competition between men's houses whereby individuals invest or embed wealth and value in others, value which the investor has every intention of extracting or exploiting at some

future time. The Kabana situation as I have presented it throughout this document, supports Weiner's contention that,

"the 'expectation of reciprocity' /s realistically evaluated and calculated" (1980:74, original emphasis), and therefore that,

"the transactions that occur between "close kin" should be called neither "gifts" nor objects "freely given" in the sense of the nonexpectation of a return. The rules of reciprocity can be characterized neither as "generalized reciprocity" nor "balanced reciprocity" for these rules are based on mechanical models that take no account of the passage of time, the strategies played out, and the future expectations of reclaiming and replacement" (p.80).

When each 'owner' has destroyed and burned the 'house/pandanus mat' that covered the breast of the 'dead one', all the men of that men's house gather to plan future ceremonial work. The meetings are organized by the eldest member of the men's house, who calls the meeting together by lighting a fire at the door to the men's house (**tila gan diga**; 'they go because of fire'). The meeting goes on continuously for several days and nights, during which time the various responsibilities for the upcoming mortuary work are meted out. The first order of business is to determine when the next phase of mortuary work will begin so that everyone in the men's house can plan their gardens so that food is plentifully available at the same time. As will be seen below, the rebuilding of the men's house, the building of the firstborn

ceremonial seclusion houses (**kailaga**), and the involvement of the autochthonous spirits, requires numerous pigs. The responsibility for providing those pigs falls on individual members of the men's house, particularly the parents of firstborn children and on the several 'owners of the dead', each of whom is commissioned to supply a pig for a specific purpose. When all these arrangements are made, the decrepit men's house is pulled down and burned. Until the new men's house is constructed, the men build a temporary men's house, a dwelling that is simply a larger and unadorned version of the 'women's houses' (**luma**) where the ceremonial regalia and carved support posts from the old building are stored.

The old building is symbolic of the degeneration and decay of the aging process that the living experience and that the deceased have fully accomplished. From the closure of the last mortuary cycle, the men's house is left to decay. No repairs are made to the building and it becomes decrepit over time (like human beings): the thatch dries and bleaches grey, painted external decorations fade, and the framework or 'bones' begin to fall apart. The men's house degenerates and when a new cycle commences, it is finally dismantled and burned, cremated like the corpses it once housed. The ashes of the dead are scattered in the sense that the power inherent in the men's house and the lives of those who give it meaning, is diminished by the loss of those



deceased members. The whole cycle of mortuary work, however, is a display of the strength, power and ability of the living, characteristics they have as a result of their 'shared blood/essence' with their deceased kin/ancestors and which is perpetuated through their firstborn children. The life cycle and the cosmic continuum waxes and wanes, and in a very real sense, hangs in the balance at this point where beginnings and endings meet and cancel one another out. The beginning of mortuary ceremonies recapitulates the forces of decay characteristic of aging and realized in death, whereas the ceremonies themselves are a process of regeneration; life is rebuilt and reasserted, arising anew, like the mythical phoenix, out of the ashes of the dead.

Fire both consumes and renews. The first sign of regeneration is evident in the first mortuary feast in honour of the dead, called **bude**, 'coconut oil' the key ingredients of which are sprouted coconuts and cooked taro. Although I shall discuss this and all other mortuary ceremonies in the third person singular, it should be recalled that there are at least five 'owners of the dead' belonging to a single men's house who are preparing *at the same time* for the ceremony under discussion. The amount of wealth and the numbers of people/households involved produces a rather staggering display of power that 'raises the name' of the dead in whose honour these

displays are held. Like firstborn ceremonies, ceremonies for the recently dead are the means through which others, i.e., the 'owner of the dead one' and, by association, the men's house that represents the 'shared blood' of the deceased, acquire renown.

### The Feast of Taro Pudding

Preparations for the coconut oil ceremony begin at least one year in advance. As a first step, each 'owner' constructs a fenced enclosure, several metres square, either adjacent to his own home or to the temporary men's house. The 'owner' commissions his (and his wife's) kindred to contribute their own coconuts and to collect his own mature coconuts and carry them to the enclosure where they are stored until they sprout. While these people work on his behalf and contribute their own coconuts to his cause, the 'owner' immediately compensates them with plates of cooked food from his own gardens, although he must at some future time "repay" the coconuts to those who contributed them. By the same token, the 'owner of the dead' is fulfilling his obligations to the 'owner of the croton', hence the latter compensates the former with a constant stream of gifts of food, so that the 'owner' has the 'strength' to accomplish his obligations. The arrangement makes a good deal of pragmatic sense, for if the 'owner' and his family are busy growing gardens

and cooking food for others, they certainly don't have the time or energy to plant and tend an additional garden for their own subsistence needs.

It takes hundreds of coconuts to fill the enclosure, and as the labour involved is more often sporadic than intensive, being contingent on the available free-time of those who assist in this work, it might take weeks/months before the enclosure is filled. While the coconuts are being gathered and stored in the enclosure, the 'owner' begins the process of clearing and planting a new taro garden. By the time the mature coconuts have sprouted, the new taro garden is ready to be harvested, and the 'owner' again commissions his kindred to bring in the taro crop.

The 'owner' must distribute taro pudding to every men's house in every Bariai village with whom the 'dead one' is affiliated, a procedure the Kabana call 'counting the kin [aso] of the dead one'. From each men's house, the 'owner' selects one person who is related to the deceased by 'shared blood' as the representative the maximal cognatic kindred in that particular men's house in each village. As there are ten villages in the Bariai District, each of which has at least one and as many as three extant men's houses, there will be a minimum of ten representatives of the maximal kindred who receive taro pudding in the name of their common kinsperson, the 'dead one'. Each representative is advised of his/her role as recipient of this wealth and of

the day they should arrive at the village of the 'owner of the dead' for the feast of taro pudding.

The feast of taro pudding begins with the formal opening of the enclosure that contains the coconuts. The 'owner' selects yet another kinsperson (**aso**) of the deceased to break apart the fence, and pays this person one small female 'pig of the hearth' (**apu**) for doing so. On the appointed day, the representative from a men's house in Gurisi village, for example, arrives at the village of the 'owner' accompanied by his minimal kindred. This delegation of the deceased's kin (**aso**) goes directly to the house of the 'owner' where they are given a portion of the coconuts and then set to work grating the nut meat and producing coconut cream. The 'owner' and his family cook the taro in stone ovens. When the taro and coconut cream are ready, the **aso** bring the coconut cream to the 'owner' who prepares the taro pudding by stirring the coconut cream into large ironwood bowls of cooked taro. The visiting delegation is presented with these several bowls of taro pudding, whereupon they return to their own village and redistribute the feast among all the households affiliated with their men's house. Over the next several days, the procedure is repeated village by village, until all those who are 'one bloods' of the deceased but who belong to different men's houses have partaken of the feast of taro pudding. When the feast of taro pudding for

all the recently dead in a single men's house is completed, everyone in the Bariai district has received food in the name of the 'dead one' and his/her natal men's house.

Finally, the 'owner', who has accomplished this feat of strength and display of wealth in the name of the dead, is recompensed for his work by the 'owner of the croton', the surviving spouse (and/or children) of the deceased. The family of the deceased gives the 'owner of the dead one' sprouted coconuts from which to make the coconut cream for his own gift of taro pudding. They also give a pig to the 'owner of the dead one', which he kills and cooks. The pork and taro pudding are redistributed by the 'owner' among his family who, as 'one bloods' of the deceased are entitled to a share of the wealth produced in the name of the dead and who must be compensated for their labour in (re)producing that wealth on behalf of their dead kinsperson.

The symbolic themes in the feast of cooked taro are the same themes that were represented in the firstborn ceremonial that marked the eruption of the child's first tooth: the white colour (decay, death, nurture) of taro and of coconut meat and milk; taro as food *par excellence* (sustenance and wealth); sprouted coconuts as seedlings (regenerating) containing the promise of future wealth from mature (degenerating) fruits; and fire (death, heat of sexuality, regeneration) that consumes, renews, and transforms raw

(unusable) substances into cooked (usable) substances. The apparent threat of annihilation associated with the mortality of humans and the using up of material objects is defeated; life is regenerated out of decay and death. The men's house sponsoring the mortuary ceremonies thus gives notice that the strength and recreative powers of its members are not diminished by death and decay. Their regenerative powers are evident in the vast amount of food/wealth they produce for this feast. Their confidence in their future abilities is made manifest in the symbolism of sprouted coconuts and in the simple fact that the sprouted nuts are consumed and not planted.

#### The Cornucopia of Raw Food

This covert statement of power, strength and confidence in their ability to achieve is realized in the second food distribution called **nage**. The term **nage** has no English gloss, and refers to the ceremony itself, from preparation to completion of the raw food distribution, to the challenge inherent in the distribution of this wealth, and to the 'basket' that contains the wealth. The **nage** can be likened to a cornucopia overflowing with an excess of abundance. The cornucopia is a gigantic 'basket' (**nage**) made out of woven coconut frond mats that are sewn together in sections and lashed to support poles along its length and breadth to produce a basket that some

informants described as being "as big as a house". The basket is filled to capacity with all types of raw food, e.g., taro, sugar cane, bananas, coconuts, areca nut, sweet potato. Each 'owner' in the men's house sponsoring the mortuary work is responsible for producing one such cornucopia of raw food. The **nage** should take place in the year following the **bude** feast of taro pudding discussed above when, as soon as the **bude** is completed, the 'owner' replants his taro garden using as "seed" the stalks cut from the taro that was consumed at taro pudding feast. Every household associated with the men's house assists in the preparations for the **nage** by planting extra foodstuffs.

When it is time to harvest, each 'owner' and his/her family construct the **nage** basket and as the harvest comes in, the crop is loaded into the basket. Each 'owner' selects a representative of the deceased, a 'one blood' who is affiliated with a men's house in another village, as the recipient of the cornucopia and, on the appointed day, this individual brings his kindred to collect the wealth of raw food. Singing **apitom**, 'songs of war/competition' that are unaccompanied by drumming, the representative leads his kindred into the host village and directly to the home of the 'owner' where the cornucopia sits waiting for them to carry away—if they can.

The 'owner of the dead one' (and by association his/her kindred, men's house unit) is demonstrating his strength and power in this massive display

of wealth. The recipients of the wealth are challenged to match this feat of productivity by being presented with the wealth, a challenge which they are expected to meet in kind when they in turn perform mortuary work and select some individual from the host men's house membership who is a 'one blood' of the deceased whom they are honouring. At a more mundane level, the physical strength of the recipients is also being called into question since they are expected to lift the basket up on its support/carrying poles and bodily carry it away with them. The cornucopia is so laden that most fail this test of muscle, as it is intended they should, and the basket must be broken apart and the foodstuffs loaded into smaller, more manageable baskets. The quantity of food is so large, that the representative and his kindred must make several trips back and forth in order to transport the 'gift' of food to their own home. One man gleefully related to me how, when he was the 'owner', the amount of food he produced for the **nage** in honour of his dead kinsman was so great that, when the recipients carried it off in their canoes, the over-loaded canoes foundered and sank just offshore. This man had "killed" the recipients with an overabundance of food.

Once they do get the wealth home, the recipients redistribute the foodstuffs among all the households in their village. Since all the 'owners of the dead' in the sponsoring men's house accomplish this feat at the same



time, when the food is finally redistributed by the recipients, everyone in the district has been the recipient of wealth produced in the name of a particular deceased and his/her natal men's house membership. Like the firstborn, the deceased is a source of sustenance and everyone eats "on top of the dead".

The promise of future wealth and the burgeoning strength and power of the sponsoring men's house was symbolically represented in the sprouted coconuts at the feast of taro pudding. The promise was made more difficult to achieve because the source of that wealth—the sprouting, germinating nuts and their 'essential substance', the nurturant white coconut cream or **bude**—was consumed. The continuity of life, the ability to regenerate human and material resources, is realized and displayed within the context of the **nage**, the production and distribution of all types of raw food displayed in the abundantly overflowing cornucopia. By producing and displaying this wealth to 'raise the name of the dead', the 'owner of the dead one' and his/her men's house are (re)establishing their ability for achievement and perpetuating extant, mutually obligatory relations of self-interest between donors and recipients. The recipients of their largesse recognize the achievement by accepting the "gift" along with the obligation to reciprocate in kind, and by according the donors with a reputation for renown. Transformed by fire into food, thence transacted as "gifts" given in 'the name of the dead', these

material resources were further transformed into renown, a non-material but equally substantial resource, which can and will be drawn upon and exploited.

### The Resurrection of the Men's House

The ideological and actual focal point of mortuary ceremonies is the men's house **lum** (also 'graveyard'). The beginning of a new ceremonial cycle is marked by the final demise of the structure which is demolished and burned (cremated), its ashes scattered. The next phase of mortuary work following the accomplishment of the preceding **nage** and **bude** feasts is the rebuilding of the men's house on the original site.

Construction gets under way after the men have located and prepared the appropriate posts and poles that comprise the main framework of the structure. The trees and vines used in construction are cut, peeled, shaped, carved and stockpiled in the bush until the day specifically allocated for the reconstruction to begin. Although the men belonging to the men's house supply and prepare the construction materials, they do not erect the building. This is accomplished by men who belong to other 'men's houses' in the area, individuals who are 'one bloods' of the firstborn child or the deceased in whose honour the ceremonies are held. Each different component of the building is erected by a different work group, and the head of each work group

is "paid" to erect a specific component of the framework. A pig and/or other wealth is given as payment for this labour to the head of the work group, and he in turn shares this wealth among his helpers. The pig/labour exchange does not constitute a kind of balanced reciprocity whereby both sides of the transaction cancel one another out. The person who receives the wealth is indebted for that wealth to the person who gave it to him, despite the fact that it has been expressed as compensation for labour. The recipient of the wealth redistributes it among his assistants and they in their turn are indebted to him for the wealth received despite the fact that their contribution of labour is what has entitled them to a share of the wealth in the first place. The person chosen to erect a post rarely involves himself with the actual labour; he should be 'strong' enough to be able to call upon the labour of others to work for him. The covert nature of competition is exemplified in the construction process. The host men's house as a unit, is challenging the ability of those chosen to erect posts by involving them in a process that requires the co-operation and labour of many other individuals. A man who is given a pig to perform this work, but who does not have a sufficiently large network of individuals who 'owe' him assistance, is unable to accomplish his task. The reputation of the man and his kin suffers accordingly.

As the new men's house will be the centrepiece of firstborn and mortuary work, it is up to each child's parents and each 'owner of the dead one' (with the help of their kin) to provide this wealth. Each 'owner' and each father of a firstborn is assigned the responsibility for producing a particular part of the men's house and for providing the pig that will compensate those who put that part in place when construction begins. When all the fathers of firstborn children have been assigned a house post, remaining house posts are assigned to the 'owners of the dead ones'. If there are house post assignments remaining these are allocated to other men in the men's house unit. One of the reasons for waiting until there is at least a combined total of ten firstborn children and recent deceased before commencing a new mortuary cycle is to ensure that each house part is associated with a particular firstborn or deceased individual.

The men's house is constructed around two main support posts called **kadaga araga**, 'posts male', which are about ten to twelve metres in height and are erected, one behind the other, about three metres apart in the centre of the building. The 'male posts' support the centre ridge pole (**udud**) and give the men's house its characteristic vaulted roof. These two 'male posts' are associated with the firstborn and each post is the responsibility of one set of parents of a firstborn child. After the two fathers prepare the posts, they

commission a craftsman to carve and paint the post with the father's/child's ancestral motif—a crocodile, a snake, the half-man half-snake culture hero, a sea turtle—figures that represent the father's/child's personal power. This power is perceived as autochthonous, originating in the womb of the earth, and individuals inherit these powers bilaterally, from both their mother and their father. The 'male house posts' might, therefore, be carved in honour of a firstborn female child and the carving might represent a spirit power the child has inherited from her maternal kin. If this is the case, a maternal kinsman of the firstborn is commissioned by the child's father to carve the motif since only those who own these designs and emblems have the right to represent them. The carving is done in a remote and secret part of the forest where powerful spirits are known to reside so that the carving will be both powerful and beautiful. Throughout this process, the child's father supports the carver with food and labour (e.g., helps with gardening). When the carving is complete, it is wrapped in a pandanus mat so that no unauthorized persons (women and children) can view it.

Four other house parts, the ridge pole or **udud** and three smaller ceiling beams called **udud inat**, 'child of the **udud**', are associated with the firstborn. The ridge pole is about two-thirds of a metre in diameter and usually about three metres in length. The ridge pole is not carved or

decorated, however, after the beam is dressed, a hole at either end of the beam must be aligned and drilled to a depth of about 20 cm. When the beam is raised, the holes fit over the pegs carved at the top of the 'male house posts'. The 'child of the **udud**' beams are carved and painted with spirit representations, usually in the form of sea creatures and birds. These beams are about 15 cm in diameter and run the length of the structure. They are placed one on either side and one on top of the ridge pole and lashed in place so that the beautifully painted carvings extend beyond the front exterior wall and are visible to all. None of the other posts that comprise the main framework are decorated. These other posts must be located and selected according to their diameter and height from the correct tree species, and must be as straight as possible.

The raising of a new men's house is an occasion when virtually the total population of Bariai gathers in one location, since each man chosen by the host men's house to erect a post also brings with him a coterie of his kinsmen (and their wives and children) to provide the necessary labour. Others who are not actually participants in the construction come simply to be a part of the occasion and to partake of the feast distributed by the host village at the end of the day. As I discovered when a new men's house was erected in the village of Gurisi in 1983, the construction process is an

exciting and breathtaking sight, not lacking in moments of drama and danger.

With the exception of two pulleys and some heavy gauge sisal rope, this men's house was constructed without benefit of modern tools and equipment. Work begins with the digging of two foundation holes, each about a metre and a half in depth, one for each of the two 'male house posts' (**kadaga araga**). The father of a firstborn who has commissioned the post, and will pay a pig to have it stood up, must also pay a pig to a different work group to dig the hole and to fill it in when the post is in place—each post thus 'costs' the parents of a firstborn two pigs. When the holes are ready, the two posts are pushed and pulled into place. At least four very long guy ropes are attached to the top peg of the post and once the base of the post is pushed into the hole, the post is pulled upward by the ten or twelve men on the end of each rope, while simultaneously it is being pushed up by other men who stand underneath it as it clears the ground. Once the post is centred in the foundation hole and standing perfectly straight, all the while supported by the men exerting tension on the guy ropes, the work unit that dug the holes works frantically to fill in the holes and tamp down the ground firmly around the base of the post. If a rope should break, or someone should slip and loosen his tension on a guy rope, the delicate balance exerted to hold the post in position would be upset and the post would come crashing down upon those underneath or near it,

crushing them like ants.

The next step, after the two 'male posts' are erected, is to build a scaffold at the top of and connecting the two posts. This job is done by young men who shinny up the posts, where they cling to the top and receive the bamboo poles and vines from which they build the scaffolding. Like flag pole sitters, the young men cling to the top of the posts while working quickly to lash together a bamboo platform between the posts. When the platform is built they have a more substantial base on which to stand to complete the rest of the scaffolding. Again, this is highly dangerous work, for, if the vines used for lashing break or are not lashed properly or securely, the structure could collapse, toppling the workers to the ground. The most important part of the scaffolding is the struts that hold the two pulleys in place; these must be strong and secure as they must bear the weight of the ridge pole as it is winched up to the top of the posts. When the scaffolding is complete and the pulleys in place, the ridge pole is brought into the village.

All the posts and beams that will be erected that day have been brought to the construction site, except the **udud**, which is carried ceremoniously from the bush into the village. This huge piece of green wood is extremely heavy, and an extensive framework of bamboo is built around it to provide the twenty or so men who transport it with a hand hold that will enable them to



lift it up onto their shoulders. The centre beam and its framework are decorated in fresh sago frond fringe, and since this beam is associated with a particular firstborn child, it is also decorated with the child (in this instance a girl about twelve years of age) who perches on top of the beam and is carried triumphantly into the village with the beam. Those who carry the beam, and later, the work unit who winch it up and settle it on the pegs atop the two posts are paid a pig; this particular beam also "costs" the parents of the firstborn two pigs.

Winching the ridge pole up the ten metre high posts and fixing it in place on the pegs is the most delicate and dangerous of all the construction jobs. The beam is laid at the foot of the posts where the winch ropes are attached to it. The young men who built the scaffolding come down, and five other strong men take their place on the scaffolding at the top of the posts where they will receive the beam. The beam is winched slowly up the length of the posts until it reaches the scaffolding platform. When it clears the platform, the men awaiting it must get down on their hands and knees and get under the beam so that it rests, still supported by the pulley ropes, on their backs. At a signal, the men struggle upright to lift the beam with their backs and place it over and onto the pegs on the two posts. When the beam for the Gurisi men's house went up, the men were unable to fit it onto the pegs—the

holes in the beam had been drilled too far apart. The beam had to come down. After lengthy discussions and not a few recriminations about slipshod workmanship, the problem was solved. Guy ropes were attached to the top of the posts and the men on the ground were able to pull and hold the posts the required extra few centimetres apart while the beam was again hoisted up and muscled into place.

Erecting the two 'male house posts' and the centre beam is the most difficult and dangerous stage of the construction process. The work crews who go up the posts, especially the crew that lifts the ridge pole onto the pegs, are comprised of close kinsmen, usually persons who are cross-cousins or classificatory siblings. As 'one bloods' each member of the work crew can be confident that his work mates are as concerned for the safety of the others as they are for their own safety. Although these men are close kin, each man is from a different nuclear family, in this way if an accident occurs, the family will lose no more than one of its sons. Firstborn males are never sent to do this work in case they are killed—too much has been invested in the firstborn to risk his life in such a venture. Until the very recent past, the men maintained that powerful spirit-beings erected the framework of the men's house and all women and children were sent away from the village on the day the spirits entered the village to erect the

structure. If there was a fatal accident during the construction process, the dead man was buried immediately at the base of the 'male posts'. When the women returned to the village, they were told that the spirit-being had devoured the dead man and they were forbidden to mourn the dead man, who, for all intents and purposes simply ceased to exist. Nowadays the women are not sent from the village during construction, and it was this change in custom in permitting the presence of females, in combination with the usual presence of spirit beings and spirits of the dead hovering around the site, that many of the eldest men blamed for the difficulties experienced with placing the centre beam atop the posts. Although the women did not leave the village, they stayed away from the construction site, and if they had to pass the site for any reason, they walked by with their eyes discretely averted. Many of the female elders were as discomfited about being in the vicinity while the men's house was going up as their male counterparts were with their presence.

Once the ridge pole is in place, the three decorated poles called **udud inat**, 'child of the ridge pole' are lashed in place; one on top of and one on either side of the centre beam. These poles run from the front of the building to the back and are arranged so that the carved and painted figures on the end of the poles extend beyond the centre beam and overlook the plaza in front of

the men's house. With the two main house posts (**kadaga araga**), the ridge pole (**udud**), and the three decorated poles (**udud inat**) in place, the framework for the walls and ceiling is quickly completed. The men's house members first dig the holes and erect the studs for the walls, however, the four large corner posts (**pada**) are anchored in place by a guest work unit who are paid one pig for their contribution. Two poles called **kuduke ele ladoga**, 'road of the rat', are attached on top of the wall studs on each side wall to support the light ceiling beams and the work unit who fastens them in place receive a pig. Next the light ceiling beams called **bisiga burua**, 'basket of the dead one', to which the roofing thatch will later be attached, are put in place. The ceiling beams are attached to the ridge pole at the apex of the building in the form of an **X** over the centre beam with the tails of the **X** sloping downward and fastened onto the top of the side walls. The top of the **X** must be cut away, so that the ceiling beams form an inverted **V** from the centre beam; /°\ . It takes five men and costs five pigs to erect these 'basket of the dead one' ceiling beams. There is one young man commissioned to fasten the two beams at the front of the centre beam, a second to erect the back two beams, a third young man to trim the front beams, a fourth to trim the back beams, and a fifth to trim all the other beams. These five young men are not advised in advance that they will be required to accomplish this job,

but are selected on the spot by senior members of the building under construction. The five chosen are always young unmarried, betrothed, or newly married men and the pig each receives is, of course, a debt he must repay eventually. The young men are chosen specifically so they will be recipients of this debt and therefore will be drawn into relations of reciprocal obligation to other persons.

The framework or 'bones of the men's house' (**lum ituatua**) is now complete and the women bring out the massive amounts of food and pork they have spent all day cooking. All the food is placed on display in the centre of the plaza in front of the new building where it is distributed by the host men's house among all the members of guest men's houses. After the food is distributed, the hosts present shell money to those individuals who were responsible for erecting a specific component of the new building. These individuals, in turn, redistribute the wealth they receive among those men who made up the labour units that actually did the work. When all the food and shell money have been distributed, the guests prepare to depart. Those who received pigs truss the beasts onto poles and carry them away. Although a single individual has received a pig, all those who worked for the recipient have a share in that pig. At some future time, the pig recipient will be required to kill the pig for some ceremony or other, and the man will meet his

obligation to all those who assisted him by contributing their labour during the men's house construction by presenting them with a portion of pork.

Over the next few weeks, the men's house members work to complete their new building. They construct the walls, floors, sew the sections of thatch for the roof and tie them in place. When the building is complete, they meet to decide what type of decorations should adorn the exterior of the building. These decorations might be either designs painted on the exterior walls or carved posts that stand on either side of the front entrance way. Both types represent totemic spirits or mythic figures that are the owned designs of the paternal kin of a firstborn children whose blood will be spilled 'on top of the dead' at the upcoming mortuary ceremonies.

Before reconstruction, the Kabana say that the building was like an old man; its framework (bones) was fragile and weak, its exterior (skin) faded and dry, its power (membership) diminished through decay and loss. The new men's house, when it is completed and decorated, is referred to as an **iriau**, a 'youth'. Like a young man in the prime of his life, the new building's framework is strong and straight, its exterior is fresh and beautifully decorated, its power is regenerated and at the peak of its potential. Young adults, however much potential they contain, only realize that potential by expending it, a process that results in personal maturity and the concomitant

effects of the aging process. This phase of the human developmental cycle, from youth to adult maturity, is also reflected in the new men's house and the next phase of the mortuary ceremonial cycle does not begin until several months later. In the interim the new building is left to mature—the brilliant green of the thatch and the green wood of the framework weather, age, and dry to a ripe brown colour.

#### Female Seclusion Houses

While the new men's house ripens and matures, the parents of firstborn female children begin construction on the ceremonial houses (**kailaga**) in which the girl will be secluded during the ear piercing ceremony. The seclusion houses combine the features of 'women's houses' (**luma**) and the men's house (**lum**). The house itself is about two metres square by a metre and a half in height, and constructed according to the same design as are women's houses, that is, it does not have a vaulted ceiling. In other respects, the house is like the men's house, and is referred to as a 'female men's house'. It is constructed up top of a single carved and painted post (**kadaga**) about three metres high, it has highly decorated exterior walls, and two carved and painted poles (**udud inat**) extending beyond the eaves over the front entrance. As with the construction of the men's house the firstborn's parents are

responsible for having the seclusion house built but they do not build it themselves. The parents commission others, notably their daughter's male cognates, to acquire the materials and to construct the house. Again, like the men's house, construction is done in stages.

The first stage is finding and preparing the single support post. For this a number of the child's kinsmen spend a day in the forest looking for a tree that is suitably straight and the appropriate height and diameter. After the tree is felled and dressed, the men build a bamboo carrying cage around it, decorate it with sago frond fringe, and carry it back toward the village. As they leave the bush and walk along the beach, the work unit is met by the firstborn girl and her parents. The girl is hoisted up onto the post and carried with it back into the bush at the perimeter of the village where the post will "sleep" while it is being carved. The post is carved and painted with a representation of a spirit (e.g., fish, dugong, snake, crocodile, shark) or mythic figure that is the owned design of the firstborn's patrikin. The small clearing in the bush where the post is carved is a spot where powerful forces reside. The forces that inhere there will imbue the carver with efficacy and power, which he in turn transfers to the carving. The spot is neither secret nor sacred, but while the craftsman is at work, no one should go near the area in case the powers are disturbed and dissipate. All the men who found



and carried the post are feasted that day with taro and pork supplied by the firstborn's parents. Throughout the carving process, which takes about a month, the parents also keep the carver (an agnate of the child's father) supplied with areca nut, tobacco, drinking coconuts, and each afternoon the child's mother takes him a plate of cooked food. They will also present him with one or more lengths of shell money when next they distribute wealth in the name of their firstborn.

While the support post is being carved and painted, other kinsmen are busy collecting the materials for building the house itself, and kinswomen are collecting sago fronds and sewing them into sections of thatch. When everything is prepared, the seclusion house is erected in relatively short order. The parents commission one of the child's male cognates to dig the foundation hole and stand the post up. The man receives a female pig (**aupu**) for his labour, a pig that at some future time he will share (as pork) with those persons who assisted him in raising the house post. Other work units made up of the child's male cognates build the struts that support the floor and put the wall studs in place. Once these are erected the two carved poles (**udud inat**), representing spirits associated with the child's matrikin, are secured one each on top of the side walls, after which the walls and the thatched roof are completed. Everyone who assists in the construction of

the seclusion house will receive gifts of shell money at some future distribution of wealth made by the parents in the name of their firstborn.

Finally, the exterior walls of the seclusion house are decorated with painted designs. These motifs and the colours depicting them are privately owned, inherited designs which belong either to the child's mother's kin or her father's kin and which only they and the child have the right to display. The decorations on the exterior of the seclusion house might be only be those of the child's patrikin, or only those of her mother's kin; sometimes maternal designs are depicted on one wall and paternal designs on another. The child will be secluded in the house for several days after she has had her ears pierced so that she is protected from the contamination (*isima*) that exudes from sexually active persons. The young men who build the house, especially the one who paints the motifs on the walls of the house, must not be sexually active, as this will nullify the protective power built into the house. The final stages of the house are completed by young unmarried men who presumably are chaste and virginal or who, at least, have not engaged in sexual intercourse for some time.

Mortuary ceremonies are held by each 'men's house' unit to 'raise the name' of their recent dead' and their firstborn children. The new 'men's house' has been resurrected, its presence fills the hamlet with eye-catching

splendour. Scattered throughout the hamlet, at the front of the home of each firstborn child, is the equally splendid presence of a seclusion house. One final "presence" is required at mortuary ceremonies. These are the autochthonous spirit-beings (**aulu**) who inhabit the 'men's house' and oversee the ear-piercing and superincision rites, and are represented by masked dancers.

#### Autochthonous spirit-beings

The generic term for 'spirit-beings', **antu**, covers two major categories of non-human entities: **antu sagsag** or **antu tiburiai**, 'wild spirits' or 'spirits of the bush'; and, **antu lum iloloaea**, 'spirits of the men's house innards/guts' [i.e., substance]. There are a large number of named wild spirits that inhabit trees, stones, rivers, and various other places in the forest. Most of these are shapeshifters and, according to their nature, can be either benevolent or malevolent. There are only four 'spirits of the men's house' (hereafter referred to simply as spirit-beings)—**naboeou**, **leleki**, **tibuda** (bull-roarer) and **aulu**—and each is "called up" or manifested for specific purposes.

The **naboeou** spirit-being can be called upon to be present for any firstborn ceremonial, especially for the superincision and ear-piercing rites

for firstborn children, if the parents so desire and if they have the right to perform **naboeou**. Male children cannot be buried without having been suprincised and the **naboeou** might be invoked to reside in the men's house to mark the death of an unsuperincised male child and to oversee this rite as it is performed on the corpse. This spirit-being does not have a public physical presence. It only has a "voice" produced by the men with whistles, flutes, pan pipes, and by calling or singing into the half shell of a coconut thus producing a haunting and reverberating sound that carries for some distance. The **leleki** spirit has already been discussed and it is primarily associated with death and mourning, the yellow paint that decorates the corpse, and which is sometimes used to decorate the female seclusion houses if the parents have the right to use the yellow **leleki** designs. The Bariai right to represent the **naboeou** and **leleki** spirit-beings at mortuary and firstborn ceremonials was purchased (or inherited through intermarriage) from non-Bariai people (the Kilege and Bali-Vitu respectively) by their ancestors and these two non-indigenous spirit-beings will not be discussed here. Only the **aulu** and, the Kabana claim, the **tivuda**, are indigenous to the people of Bariai and I shall discuss these two spirit-beings in more detail.

### The Bull-Roarer Spirit-Being

The **tibuda** or 'bull-roarer' and the **aulu** are autochthonous spirits, the essence of their power is the same creative and life giving power that inheres in the earth which is the mother of all creation and the constant source of sustenance for all earthly creatures, including human beings who contain that power because they were created by it. This creative power is, of course, invisible but its presence is evident in all material substances. In order for human beings to appropriate that power for their own use the power must manifest itself in some material object which can then be captured, contained and manipulated by human beings. The spirit-being called **tibuda** first manifested itself in a "voice" contained in a piece of wood representing its tongue.

As is the case in many Melanesian cultures, the **tibuda** (hereafter the bull-roarer) first manifested itself to females who thereby became the 'owners/mothers' of this spirit-being. According to Kabana mythology, the bull-roarer first manifested itself in the following manner. One day some village women were cutting firewood in a mangrove swamp. One of the women swung her axe into a fallen **bana** (ironwood) tree and a fragment of the wood flew off emitting a humming sound. The women were so taken with the spirit voice that they decided to keep it. They took it back to the village

and hid it from the men and, on special occasions, they invoked the voice of the spirit and honoured it with feasts of pork. Each time the spirit sang in the village, all the men were made to run away so they would not see the secret of the women's power. This went on for some time, until one day when the men were running from the village because the spirit was coming, an old man tripped and fell down. When he fell his lime powder gourd landed on the ground, spilling his lime powder and breaking his lime powder spatula. (To spill one's lime powder is a metaphor for exposing one's genitals.) The old man was incensed and insulted, and exacted his retribution by enjoining the other men to assist him in stealing the bull-roarer from the women. From that point on, the bull-roarer has been the property of males, and all females must run and hide when men invoke and feed the spirit.

The bull-roarer became the property of men because of an insult to male sensibilities for which males demanded retribution by appropriating the spirit-being for their own use, and the control over female access to that spirit-being. This spirit-being continues to be associated with fights, disputes, injury, and insult, especially as these pertain to a firstborn child, and it thus is an avenging and somewhat dangerous spirit-being. To insult or injure a firstborn is, in fact, to insult or injure that child's parents (kindred), and such an eventuality cannot go unremarked. Retribution must be exacted if

the child's parents are to save face. The bull-roarer was called up on one such occasion while I was in the village and I relate this instance for two reasons: it illustrates the important values attached to the firstborn as an exemplar of the renown of others; and secondly, it illustrates the tenacity of the ideology of primogeniture despite the fact that redress is available within the context of the adopted (Anglo-Australian) legal system and local courts.

The background to this incident took place within the context of an attempted rape. At the neighbouring village, several unmarried girls had constructed a 'girl's sleeping house' (like those for single boys), a sort of girl's club, where they could meet, eat, sleep and generally enjoy the comraderie of their age-mates beyond the purview and demands of their siblings and parents. The house was built near the beach, within the perimeter of the village, but distant from any other dwelling. One evening several young unmarried youths sneaked up on the girls and entered their house whereupon the boys attempted to force the girls into the bush for sexual intercourse. Some girls escaped and fled to the village, some were carried off, but in the event none were actually raped. The girls reported their experience to the village and named the boys involved. One girl who had had her clothing ripped off, was so distressed and ashamed that she

attempted suicide. The method she used would not have been fatal and she only succeeded in frightening everyone else and making herself exceedingly ill. The boys had fled and did not return until late the next afternoon. When they did return they were quickly called to account for their actions and a meeting held to discuss the incident. Emotions ran high, and suddenly an aggrieved and irate kinsman of the girl who had attempted suicide accosted one of the boys, striking him in the face and throwing him to the ground. The boy, about seventeen years-of-age, was a firstborn child and, regardless of his culpability in the incident, under no circumstances (including parental disciplinary measures) should a firstborn be struck.

The next day, the boy's father came to Kokopo village and reported the incident to his elder brother, that is, the firstborn's senior 'father' (FeB) and asked him what to do to redress the insult to his firstborn. The father and his family had lived away from the village for some years and had only returned the year before. He reported to his elder brother that during all the years he had lived in towns, he had worked hard at his job, supported his family well and saw that his children went to school to acquire an education. He had been respected in his urban community and none of these "strangers" (non-Bariai) had ever insulted him as he had been insulted by the assault on his firstborn child by "kin" (Kabana). As the man had only recently returned to the village



where he was still getting re-established, he had very little in the way of traditional wealth—shell money, pigs, established gardens—and could not afford to sponsor the necessary and appropriate retributive action. The man's elder brother, in the interests of family honour and because he was also the firstborn's 'father' (FeB), took on the responsibility for avenging the insult by calling up the bull-roarer. This man explained his decision to me thus:

Why have these people used my child in such a way that his blood is shed? Why? Because they are challenging me. Truss a pig for the **tibuda** to come and eat! Then everyone will know I am a man of strength, a wealthy man.

In ten days time, the bull-roarer would enter the village to "wash the blood" of the injured firstborn and to avenge the insult to his father(s).

The firstborn's parents make known their intent to avenge the wrong through the bull-roarer by presenting the offending individual with the biggest pig they can obtain, thus demonstrating their wealth and challenging the recipient to reciprocate with a different but equally huge pig as recompense for their treatment of the child. The offenders must come up with a suitable pig within the time period set for the appearance of the bull-roarer (in this case, within ten days). The pig was reciprocated, but the offender had to request that the child's father extend the time period an extra four days as he did not have such a pig and would have to travel some

distance to a trade-friend from whom he could obtain one.

When the offenders arrived in the village with the pig, the huge beast was securely fastened underneath the house of the firstborn's elder father, pending the arrival of the bull-roarer the next day. On the morning the bull-roarer arrives, all the men of the firstborn's hamlet/men's house go to the bush to clear an expanse of forest where the spirit-being will reside and from whence its voice will be heard. They also build a hearth and prepare the stones for the oven where the pig will be cooked for the spirit-being. They prepare the bull-roarer by cutting lengths of bamboo and vine (both about six metres long), to which they attach the bull-roarer and twirl it in great arcs to produce the unearthly hum of its voice. Any father who wishes his male children to witness the bull-roarer must present a pig to the spirit-being, and until the father has the wherewithal to pay a pig, his sons are forbidden to participate in this event. If the firstborn who is being avenged is a female, one of her brothers will act as her proxy, since no female is allowed to view the bull-roarer.

Each family group within a men's house unit has its own bull-roarer(s), of which there are two kinds: a **tibuda taine**, 'female bull-roarer' and a **tibuda araga**, 'male bull-roarer'. The bull-roarer is carved from ironwood, a tree species with reddish wood that does not rot and which termites cannot

attack. The bull-roarer is thus indestructable and very strong, attributes appropriate for the purpose for which it is used. It is carved a few centimetres thick, rounded on one end and tapered to a point at the other where a hole is drilled to affix the vine that is attached to the bamboo poles. A female bull-roarer is short, measured from the fingertips to the elbow and has a high pitched feminine "voice", just as women have a higher pitched singing voice than do men. The male bull-roarer is much longer, measured from the fingertips to the shoulder, and has a deep masculine "voice".

When all the preparations are made, a runner (**ola**) returns to the village to advise the women that the spirit is arriving in the bush and they must hide. The women, children, and all those males (regardless of age) who have not seen the bull-roarer before, lock themselves in their houses and cover over the windows. The bull-roarer cries in the forest, gradually coming closer and closer to the village. While the women and children are hiding, the men (the spirit-being) take the pig and the firstborn back to the forest where the spirit resides. As the entourage departs the village, the spirit's voice recedes into the sultry forest. The 'runner' returns from the bush and advises the women it is safe for them to come out, the spirit-being has departed.

In the bush, the pig is handed over to the firstborn's **baulo** who is responsible for butchering and cooking the pig, for redistributing the pork,

and for decorating the firstborn in paint and finery. The firstborn's father merely orchestrates and sponsors the proceedings, he does not, as befits his image of power and strength, actually do the work. The pig is butchered and the organs set to boil while the carcass roasts in the stone oven. There is a special dish prepared on this occasion, a kind of blood pudding made from mixing the blood that settles in the chest cavity of the dead pig with pulverized red ochre. The mixture is placed on banana leaves, hot stones are added and the "pudding" bakes inside the wrapped leaves. At noon, the bull-roarer cries again (a weird and ethereal sound as it is heard in the village) making known its desire to consume pork. The men then set about to share a meal of blood pudding and boiled innards of the pig. Later in the afternoon, the **baulo** decorates the firstborn in finery that includes shellmoney, a dog's teeth headband, a boar's tusk necklace, and colourful crotons. His body is covered in paint; red on his left side and black on his right side and the mark of the bull-roarer (a three-toed foot) is drawn in red paint on his back. Just before dusk, the bull-roarer again prepares to enter the village and the runner advises the women and children who, this time, leave the village altogether.

Led by the firstborn and with the bull-roarer in full cry, the procession of men make their way from the forest into the empty village. When it

arrives in the village, the spirit-being demonstrates the power of those who own it by destroying property belonging to the kin ('one bloods') of the firstborn. It uproots small trees, breaks branches of larger trees, rips thatch from roofs, breaks verandas and ladders, and generally leaves a trail of destruction in its wake. As the spirit-being makes its way through the hamlet, it makes huge three-toed footprints to mark its presence and its passage. When this display of anger and power has run its course, the men and the firstborn return to the forest with the spirit-being. The runner goes in search of the women to give them the all clear signal so they can return to the village. The bull-roarer continues to cry in the forest until the sun sets, after which the men will feed the bull-roarer a meal of essence of pork.

The feast of pork and cooked food is distributed among the senior representatives of each men's house in the firstborn's natal village, among representatives from men's houses with whom the firstborn is cognatically affiliated, and to the representative of the 'men's house' of the person who insulted the firstborn. These representatives then redistribute the food among the individual male heads of households within their men's house unit, who share it with their wives and children. The pig was given to the bull-roarer, and the bull-roarer "eats" the pork. Under cover of darkness and hidden within specially woven coconut frond baskets, the men bring the meat

to their families. This meat is called **tibuda itae**, "the excrement of the bull-roarer". All pork that was "eaten" by a spirit-being must be transported to the women's houses only after dark, hidden from view, and it must be eaten quietly in the privacy of the house and cannot be reheated. The spirit-being, for all that it has eaten its fill, is attracted by the smell of cooked pork and if the meat was reheated, the spirit would be attracted to the women's houses by the irresistible essence of pork, thus placing the women in jeopardy of the powerful spirit. Since the spirit has eaten the pork, it is a *contradiction in terms for the pork to be displayed publicly, and the public secret of the mystery of the spirits is maintained by the observation of the rule that all pork from the spirit is consumed by each family group in the absolute privacy of their homes.* The rule is enforced by the threat of sorcery, and it is said that any man, woman or child who breaches the rule will be fatally struck down.

The bull-roarer comes at dawn and goes at dusk, and when it departs the insult to the firstborn has been avenged. This particular case is interesting in that it highlights the dilemma of men who have migrated to the towns for some years and then renounce urban life to return to their villages. In this instance, the father of the firstborn had been away from the village for most of his adult life. When he returned he had immediate rights of

access to garden land and property where he could build his house, but having been away for so many years, he did not have an established network of social relationships, that is, persons with whom he was connected through relations of obligation and indebtedness. His social welfare system was non-existent. While he was re-establishing himself and preparing gardens for his subsistence needs, he was very much dependent upon his one and only elder brother to provide him with labour and food. Although the incident with his firstborn son was hardly intentional, had he not been able to redress the insult, he would have been labelled as a *rabisman*, a "person of little consequence". The man's firstborn son is also considered to be the son of his elder brother and the elder brother was able to meet the challenge to their reputation by sponsoring the invocation of the bull-roarer spirit-being. The reputation of the two brothers and their firstborn was salvaged and enhanced, but at some cost to themselves. The eldest brother is short one very large pig and the other foodstuffs of the feast, plus the shell money that is paid to all those who assisted in manifesting the spirit-being, and the boy's actual father is indebted to his elder brother for this same wealth.

The men with whom I spoke who had been away from their villages for some years and then returned, expressed their reasons for returning in terms of their concern to establish their children on their ancestral lands and

within the social welfare system provided by the network of kin and reciprocal obligations. They did not want their children to be landless urban dwellers with no operative kinship relations. By returning to the villages, however, these men run a risk of failure because they too have an undeveloped social network and an undeveloped subsistence base. They are dependents on the largesse of others until they become re-established and, as in the situation related here, re-entering the system of customary ways of life and meeting its demands can make or break them in the eyes of the community. In this case, the man was able to meet the challenge of traditional ways. Some returning migrants are disinclined or find it too difficult to participate fully in the traditional way of life, and they become more and more marginal members of the community. One such individual who often expressed to me how difficult it was for him to re-enter village life, eventually left his wife and children in his village (and dependent on others) and returned to the towns.

Let me return to the young man, the firstborn whose behaviour created the situation and the necessity for redressive action on the part of his family. It is noteworthy that the invocation of the bull-roarer in no way exonerated



the young man for his behaviour. Ceremonies and rites performed in the name of the child do not effect changes in that child, they affect the reputation of the child's parents. Attempted rape is severely sanctioned by the Kabana and the youth was "tried" by public censure at the public moot for his crime against the girl. Her parents extracted a payment of shell money to compensate the girl for the assault on her person and for the shame this caused her and themselves. In addition, he was brought before the local magistrate's court where he was also fined, as was the man who precipitated the fight and struck the firstborn. Regardless of provocation, brawling and fisticuffs disturb the peace of the community and are liable to fines levelled by the local court.

This introduced legal system, however, in no way takes into account the insult to the young man's father, that is, the breach of ideals and values associated with primogeniture, a concept thoroughly embedded in Kabana culture and society. This case illustrates some of the difficulties the modern legal system has in trying to deal effectively with a breach of traditional social values and mores. In the court system, only the young man is culpable for his crime of attempted rape. The father, who was insulted and diminished in stature and reputation because his firstborn was injured, has no recourse to compensation from the courts for they do not recognize this sort of crime

against the individual. Until and unless the Kabana completely discard their way of life and the ideals and values that give it meaning and substance, the modern legal system will remain an inadequate means for redressing what the Kabana define as crimes against the person. The Kabana recognize this fact and it is for this reason, they maintain, that the customs of their ancestors, such as the avenging bull-roarer spirit-being, must be retained in tandem with more "modern" laws and ways of doing things.

### The **Aulu** Spirit-Being

Like the bull-roarer, the **aulu** spirit-being is invoked to preside over work for the firstborn, specifically the rites of ear-piercing and superincision, and to preside over work for the dead. In contrast to the bull-roarer, the **aulu** is associated with happiness and well-being. Although it is an exacting spirit-being, with stringent laws that must be observed during the period of its incarnation in the men's house and one that consumes much wealth and many pigs, it is never invoked in anger. The areca nut is the medium through which this spirit-being first manifested itself to a human being, and that human being was the marginal Akono, the 'orphan' (see above pp. 148). A truncated version of the story of Akono and the origin of the **aulu** goes as follows.

One day, all the men, women, and children of the village except Akono, went to the reef to fish and collect shellfish. Akono wanted to collect freshwater crayfish and to this end wandered upstream along the banks of the river Urue near the village of Akona. Halfway to the headwaters of the river, Akono spotted an areca palm laden with red-skinned nuts. Impelled by his desire to possess the branch of red nuts, Akono climbed the palm where he saw that the nuts were clustered around a 'mother' nut. Akono plucked all the nuts from the branch, dropped them to the ground and began his own descent. Halfway down the palm, Akono looked down and saw that on the ground where the red-skinned nuts had been, the base of the tree was surrounded by magnificent **aulu**. Frightened, Akono enquired of the figures if they would devour him when he reached the ground. The **aulu** shook their heads to indicate no, and began to sing and dance around the tree. Akono went down and the spirits taught him their songs and dances. Out on the reef, the villagers heard the songs and, knowing Akono was the only person in the vicinity, they returned to investigate. When Akono saw them coming he 'pulled' the **aulu** from the forest and hid them in the men's house. That night, when all the men were gathered in the men's house, Akono instructed them to tell their wives to make preparations for a feast the next day. Although Akono gave no reason for his instructions, he was obeyed and the feast was

prepared. When the feast was ready at late afternoon of the following day, Akono went to the men's house and brought the **aulu** out of hiding into the men's house plaza where the spirit beings began to sing and dance. The villagers were frightened of the creatures and cried out to Akono in fear that they would be devoured. Akono assuaged their fears, saying the creatures were not evil, they were beings through whom everyone would benefit. Thus reassured, the villagers put on their most beautiful decorative finery in honour of the **aulu**. For three days and three nights the villagers feasted, sang, and danced with the **aulu**. On the morning of the fourth day, the celebration ended, and Akono sent the spirit-beings back to their origin place. There they stayed until they were again 'pulled' from the forest to the men's house where they would reside while participating in celebratory feasts and dances. And so it goes to this day.

The myth tells how the **aulu** spirits first manifested themselves to human beings through the medium of red-skinned areca nuts. Areca nuts are the fruit or 'offspring' of the areca palm, and in the myth there was one 'mother nut' surrounded by other nuts who were her children. Based on this original materialization, there are two categories of **aulu** spirit beings, the **itna aulu** or mother of the **aulu** and her male offspring called **aulu iriau**. The myth contains more than a hint of female parthenogenesis for, although

Akono was instrumental in the 'birth' of the **aulu**, he had no part in the creation of the fruit from which they sprang, full-blown. The female principle and associated concepts of fertility and procreation are represented in the 'mother' figure, and her singularity as a female without a male counterpart is symbolically and terminologically made evident in the name given to the female **aulu** spirit-beings. They are called **Asape** or 'widow' thus representing a widowed mother with male offspring, the youthful spirit-beings, or **aulu iriau**. The widowed figure of the spirit-being and her singularity is represented by one male masked dancer dressed in widow's weeds, a skirt made of dried and faded coconut fronds. Her unmarried male offspring, who are always represented by a pair of masked dancers, wear a skirt made from the brilliant yellow-green leaves of freshly sprouted sago frond spathes. Together, the two categories of spirit-beings which are reincarnated during mortuary ceremonies, encapsulate the concepts of death and decay and of life and regeneration.

Once the first **aulu** spirit-beings made themselves manifest to human beings through Akono and the red-skinned areca nuts, they became accessible to all other men through dreams. In the dreaming state, as noted earlier, the dreamer's **anunu** ('self, persona') leaves the physical body and interacts with the **anunu** of other dreamers, with ghosts (**anunu**) of the dead, and with

spirit beings, **antu**. Only men can 'resurrect' the **ulu** spirit-beings, bring them from the forest into the men's house, and represent them publicly in the masked figures, and only men can dream of a new pair **ulu** spirit-beings. The man who dreams the spirit-being has the right, indeed the obligation, to 'pull' that spirit and represent it physically in the accoutrements of the masked dancers when next he honours his dead kin or sponsors the ear-piercing or superincision of his children at mortuary ceremonies.

Although it would appear that males have appropriated totally the creation and representation of **ulu** spirit to the exclusion of the original female principle of creation as portrayed in the myth, this is not the case. All men who dream of spirit-beings undergo the same dream experience. The dreamer, while wandering through an ethereal forest, suddenly finds himself face-to-face with a pair of **ulu** figures accompanied by their 'mother', an old, widowed woman. The old widow (**asape**) speaks to the dreamer, telling him that she has brought her 'sons' to him so that he can be their 'father/owner' (**ulu itama**), bring them into the men's house (from one plane of reality to another) and honour them at feasts. She then instructs him to memorize the particular finery adorning the spirit-beings so that he might reproduce it faithfully. She tells him the name of the pair, and makes him note the name of the exact spot upon which they stand (their autochthonous

origin place) a spot that corresponds with a named place in waking reality. The dreamer then awakes.

Every pair of **aulu** is created and named by a female, the 'widow' figure in myth and dream, and has a father' who 'owns' and *re*-creates it. Each pair of spirit-beings so owned and recreated is different from all other pairs. It has its own name, its own decorative designs and finery on its head and topknot, and its own named place of origin. These names, designs and items of finery, called **mosi**, are the exclusive property of family groups and inherited by both female and male children from their father and their mother's father. Anyone who uses the owned designs of others will be killed by sorcery, that is, they are "killed because of **mosi**". During mortuary ceremonies, the children of the 'father of the spirit-being' pair shed their blood on 'top of the dead' in the presence of the **aulu**. The child, the dead, and the spirit-being are bound with the bond of shared blood (essential substance). The child thus becomes the 'owner' (inheritor) of the spirit-being who presided at her/his blood-letting and has the right to 'pull' that spirit-being to preside over the same rite for her/his own children. The **aulu** spirit beings thus were (and are) mysteriously created and presented to human beings through females, and they were (and are) mysteriously re-created and re-presented by males. Both females and males inherit rights

of ownership and representation of particular spirit beings, hence, the Kabana say that the **aulu** "follow men and women". Any woman who wants her spirit-being, rather than her husband's, to preside over the superincision/ear-piercing of her child can 'pull' her **aulu** from her natal group and bring it into the men's house of her husband.

The woman must first seek the permission of her paternal kinsmen and of her husband and his kinsmen. Permission is *pro forma* since the woman 'owns' the spirit-being and therefore the right to have it present at ceremonies in honour of *her* child cannot be denied her. When it is time for the spirit beings to make their appearance (discussed below), the woman's kinsmen bring the **aulu** (its mask and decorative finery) from her natal village to her husband's village by sea. Just before they reach the village but are still out of sight, the men put ashore and two men are dressed in the spirit-being mask and costume. In full regalia, the masked spirit dancers stand in the middle of the canoe as it approaches the shore of the woman's village. The spirit-being arrives out of the sea from the direction of its origin place.<sup>16</sup> When the spirit-being comes ashore, it steps over a large male pig lying at the entrance to the men's house and the pig is then taken inside to be slaughtered and eaten by the spirit-beings. This is the pig of **mata pau** ('new eye') that, as with the firstborn **mata pau** ceremony, marks the



spirit-beings first sight of its host village. Once spirit-beings are pulled by a woman from her paternal kin to her husband's men's house unit, they remain with that woman in her husband's men's house. In future when the spirit-beings are manifested, her paternal kin must come to her village to recreate the spirit-beings and "take care" of them during the ceremonial period.

Each set of agnates (and enates) within a given men's house unit owns at least one and usually several pair of **ulu** spirit-beings. Among these agnates one will be the 'father of the spirit-being' (**ulu itama**) and this individual might be the father, father's elder sibling, or grandparent of a firstborn child who is to be honoured or, he might be the 'owner of the dead one' on top of whom the child's blood will be shed. As befits their status as sponsors of the ceremonies, that is, as providers and not consumers of wealth, the 'fathers of the spirit-beings' do not recreate the spirit-beings, they consign this work to others who are called **sig itama**. A **sig** is a pole used by men for supporting/carrying burdens on their shoulders, and a **sig itama** is the 'father/owner of the carrying pole'. An **ulu sig itama** is the support staff (in both senses of the word) of the spirit-beings—the individual who builds the mask, the individuals who supply all the decorative finery of the costume, and the individuals who wear the costume at the dance.

The 'father of the spirit-beings' can choose whomever he likes to be the 'father of the pole', but he chooses among men whom he knows are hard working and not lazy, and who are excellent dancers. Since the sponsoring men's house unit has more than enough to do organizing the ceremonies and providing the wealth of food and pork that is consumed, with the exception of single men who dance inside the costume, very few among their number are chosen to be the 'father of the pole'. Those chosen to be 'father of the pole' are persons who belong to other men's house units, usually a kinsman of the firstborns or dead who are being honoured, thus, the wealth provided by the sponsors goes, unselfishly, outside the immediate men's house unit and is redistributed among other groups.

At the end of each mortuary cycle, the spirit-being costumes are dismantled and burned. Thus, the first responsibility of the new spirit-being support staff, is to recreate the spirit-being mask. From its base to the tip of its feather topknot, the conical mask is over one metre in height. The mask fits over the dancer's head and rests on his shoulders so that he is able to see through the mouth of the mask. The 'father of the spirit-being' selects one person to recreate the mask according to his instructions. The mask builder is given two to four weeks to assemble and dry the various materials out of which the mask is constructed. These include a particular type of cane that

is used for the framework, elongated ears, and nose of the mask, the coconut bast for the 'skin' of the mask, the vines used to lash the framework together, and the large bristly fungus that sits atop the mask as its 'hair' and into which the feathers of the topknot are inserted. The actual construction of the mask itself only takes a few days, during which the artist resides in the men's house of the 'father of the spirit-being' being supported with food, areca nuts, tobacco, drinking coconuts and so on. Once the mask is put together, with its elongated ears, long nose, and slightly bulging eyes and mouth attached, the coconut bast skin is painted by the artist (nowadays with purchased pigments, if available) according to the designs and colours particular to that spirit-being and owned by its 'father'. Three basic colours, red, black (or blue), and white are used on the mask to paint its mouth, eyebrows, eyes, and the stylized 'tears of the spirit-being' (**aulu imata sulaea**) and the designs (**namir**) on the back of its head. The full mask is always painted in white so that the black and red stylized facial features and designs will be sharply contrasted. The mouth, eyebrows and tears, for example, might be painted a solid red and outlined in black, or in black and outlined in red. When the mask is painted, its topknot ('hair') is attached to support the brilliantly coloured feathers of various species of birds and a tall plume of rooster, eagle, or cassowary feathers.

Later, when the costume is donned by the dancers, a ruff made of red, green, and yellow crotons is fastened around the base of the mask and this hides the framework that supports the mask on the dancers' shoulders. Several croton plants are inserted at the back of the mask, and when the spirit-being dances, these crotons and the long feathered plume sway and bend to the rhythm of the dance. The more pronounced the swaying, the more admired the dance. The long sago frond skirt extends from the mask's shoulders to drag on the ground, thus hiding the dancers' feet and sweeping away their footprints as they dance. During the dance, the skirt sways seductively with a soft rhythmic swishing sound. The spirit-beings always dance in pairs. The two men in the costumes hold the mask with their outside hands and link arms underneath the skirt in order to keep the spirit-beings joined and to synchronize their dance steps. Figure 1 is a sketch of the completed **aulu iriau**; this particular pair were dreamed and created in 1982.

The **aulu asape**, or 'widow spirit-being' is constructed in the same manner as the other the 'spirit-being youths' who are her 'sons'. Her mask, however, is shorter, shaped like a rounded square with the top two corners of the square curved upwards to produce two topknots or 'heads'. As noted earlier, the skirt of the widow figure is made of dull, dried coconut fronds. The widow figure dances alone, outside the circle of dancers, and with a



Fig. 1. Aulu Spirit-beings

different dance step than that being done by the paired spirit-beings. Sometimes the widow spirit does not "dance" at all, but prances and parades around the plaza, rushing spectators and frightening children who impede the progress of the dancers. As the mother of the spirit-beings, the widow figure "looks after her children" by demanding gifts of food and wealth for them. She will approach someone's house and place a basket on the veranda thus demanding food; or she will walk around with a big stick over which the people she approaches will drape hands of areca nut, bunches of tobacco, or cotton sarongs. Under her voluminous skirt, the widow figure also smuggles into the men's house the new fronds and leaves that are used to repair or replace worn out parts of the spirit-being costumes. The widow figure is unpredictable and easily angered, and parents use this figure to discipline their children, exacting good behaviour by threatening them with the wrath of the widow spirit-being. Human widows and widowers are similarly portrayed to children as ogres, presumably because of their unkempt appearance and the marginality of their social position. For this reason, young children are particularly nervous around persons who have long hair and beards.

Although I have discussed autochthonous spirit-beings and the recreation of the **aulu** and its representation by masked dancers at mortuary ceremonies, the actual creation and public appearance of these spirit-beings

does not take place until the beginning of the final phase of the mortuary/firstborn work. While the men's house matures, the members of that men's house occupy themselves with producing massive gardens of taro and collecting the mature coconuts that will be consumed over the several weeks/months of the mortuary ceremonies. When the taro is ready, it is harvested and stored on ceremonial platforms beside each house in the hamlet, and the coconuts are lashed to poles about four metres high and erected beside the taro platforms. The platforms of taro and poles of coconuts make an impressive display of wealth and strength. In addition to the foodstuffs, the men have been seeking, among their trade friends and kin, the shellmoney they will transact with others, and the pigs that they will 'feed' the spirit-beings. When these final arrangements are made, the final phase of the mortuary ceremony is begun with the official opening of the new men's house.

### Opening the Drums

The hourglass drum (**abam**), like the flute, pan pipe, whistle, and the slit gong, is the voice of spirit-beings. At the end of each mortuary cycle the spirit-beings are sent back to their origin place, and the drums which are their voices are silenced. After senior female members of the men's house

unit have swept away the debris from inside the new building and around its immediate environs, messengers are sent to all villages in the district to mark the day everyone should appear for the ceremony that removes the taboo enjoining silence on the drums.

The 'opening' of the drums (**namo louloua**; 'come/allies friends' [to the feast/dance]) marks the beginning of the feasting and dancing that continue throughout the mortuary ceremonies. Each 'owner of the dead one' selects a kinsman of the deceased (**aso**) to come and remove the taboo on the drum so that the voice of the spirit-beings can cry/sing in the name of that deceased kinsperson. The man selected as lead drummer is a member of the deceased's cognatic kindred who belongs to another affiliated men's house, and he will receive a small female 'pig of the ashes' (**aupu**) from the 'owner' for performing this act on behalf of his dead kinsman/woman. On the appointed day, each drummer, accompanied by numerous members of his cognatic descent group, arrives at the village of the men's house unit sponsoring the ceremonies. Each drummer group waits at the perimeter of the hamlet of the men's house unit, and at a signal, all the drummers begin to drum and sing as they enter the hamlet from the direction of their own villages. When they reach the dance plaza in front of the men's house, they stop and play for some minutes, until one group at a time, they enter the men's house. Once they are



inside the men's house, the drumming ceases and the men are feasted with cooked taro after which they prepare to leave. As each drumming group leaves the men's house, they plant crotons around the perimeter of the structure in honour of their deceased kinsperson and to represent the numerous pigs that will be transacted during the mortuary ceremonies to follow. The lead drummer is presented with his 'pig of the ashes' (**apu**), and all those who opened the drums that will sing 'on top of the dead' return to their home villages.

Several days later a similar ceremony is performed to remove the taboo on dancing that also went into effect at the close of the last mortuary cycle. This opening of the 'dance plaza' (**melemele**) in front of the men's house follows the same format as that for opening the drums. The 'owner of the dead one' chooses a different kinsman of the deceased (**aso**) to come with his lineage members to drum and sing in the dance plaza, while their female kin dance. The women are not dressed in dance finery, although they dance with crotons in their hands. At the end of the afternoon, the dance ends and the guests are again feasted with cooked taro. The man chosen to remove the taboo on the dance plaza is given his 'pig of the ashes', the members of his dance group again plant crotons around the perimeter of the men's house, and they all depart for their home villages.

The removal of the taboos on drumming and dancing marks the beginning of the final phase of mortuary work which includes the 'small pig exchange' (**ololo kakau**), the superincision/ear piercing rites for the firstborn (**tiket gergeo lautabe**) and the 'big feast/pig exchange' (**ololo kapei**). However, this final phase might not actually commence for some weeks, during which time the men construct the **aulu** spirit-being figures and gather together all the pigs that will be eaten or exchanged during the celebration. These are pigs that each man's wife has grown and raised in expectation of this work, plus pigs that are owed to him, and pigs that he has solicited from trade friends and kin. When it is time to gather the pig wealth, each man sends a plate of sago flour with a length of shell money on top to each individual who has promised or owes him a pig. The sago flour and shell money is a reminder of a debt owed (**tipapeiga bun**) and that it is now being called in. The man who is owed the pig might later follow his "reminder" and collect the pig debt himself, or those who receive the "reminder" might themselves bring the pig to the man owed, whereupon etiquette demands they remain in the host village until the ceremonies are finished. Throughout the days and weeks that the pig wealth is accumulated and the **aulu** figures are being constructed, drumming and dancing continues both during the day and throughout the night. When the **aulu** are constructed, they are 'pulled' into the public dance plaza

where they join the dancing.

The whole village gathers in absolute silence around the perimeter of the dance plaza to witness the arrival of the spirit-beings. The moment that the masked dancers exit the men's house and make their spectacular appearance in the public plaza is charged with solemnity, emotion, and not a little awe at their magnificence. The pairs of **aulu** that have existed for some years, are led from the men's house by their owners (**aulu itama**) to the centre of the dance plaza. Each pair of spirit-beings carries a short stick with a piece of shell money draped over it, and each in turn is led to the front door of a house. This is the house of the family of the deceased in whose honour the creatures are appearing. The spirit-beings drop the piece of shell money at the door as a gift to the bereaved family. This gift is a form of death compensation (**kuru**) called **mogali** ('innards, guts') intended to show that the spirit-beings also 'feel inside' themselves the grievous loss felt by the family of the deceased. The **aulu** only appear at ceremonies in honour of the recent dead and thus are the personification of death. As the spirit-beings make their appearance and solemnly circulate to the homes of the recently bereaved, people weep quietly in memory of lost loved ones.

When the long-time resident spirit-beings have completed their homage to the dead, they are led to the perimeter of the dance plaza to await and

greet the new **aulu** figures—those who have been dreamed and created, and are making their debut appearance. The new **aulu** that appeared in 1981 (see figure 2 above), were dreamed and created by a man in honour of his deceased brother and the ear-piercing rite for his daughters that would take place 'on top of' his dead brother. Two of the dead man's sons were designated to 'call' the spirit-beings from their origin place in the forest where they had been dreamed and subsequently created by the dreamer. The two men exited the men's house and walked across the plaza to a sand spit on the beach. One man raised a large trumpet conch (**taule**) and sounded three long blasts. As the third blast faded away, absolute stillness descended on the gathered crowd, the village, and the forest—no child cried, no dog barked, no birds called. It seemed as though all of creation waited in reverent silence for the spirit-beings to appear. In a very few minutes the creatures, unescorted by humans, emerged from the bush some distance down the beach and, walking in the edge of the surf, slowly made their way toward the awaiting village. When the spirit-beings come abreast of the two men who called them forth, the men take up their position, one on either side of the pair and lifting a strand of the sago skirt, they walk with the spirits into the dance plaza. As the spirits enter the plaza and walk toward the men's house, they are silently greeted by the family who owns them with small **mata pau** ('new eye') gifts

(mats, baskets, bits of shell money, crotons) thrown at their feet which the spirit-beings step over, leaving them to be claimed by others. The spirit-beings continue to advance and as they come abreast of the other spirit-beings, these latter fall into step behind them, and all the spirit-beings proceed to the men's house. At the entrance to the high stockade (**silasila**) that shields the men's house from view, the new spirit-beings step over a female 'pig of the ashes'. The pig is taken inside the men's house where it is butchered and cooked as the first of many pigs the spirit-beings will consume while in residence. All the spirit-beings re-enter the men's house and the crowd disperses to prepare for the dance that evening after the spirit-beings have consumed the feast of pork prepared in their honour.

From the time the spirit-beings take up residence in the village until they are sent back to their origin places, everyone must show the spirits proper respect. There should be no disputes, no voices raised in anger or exuberant play, no raucous behaviour. Children should not play in the vicinity of the spirits in case some plaything or projectile comes in contact with the walls of the men's house or its enclosure. The spirit-beings will demand a payment of shell money for any infraction of these rules. Anyone who engages in fisticuffs and strikes another, or any man who beats his wife will be

chastised by the spirit-being widow figure who will demand payment of a pig as compensation for such flagrant breach of etiquette and respect for the spirit-beings.

The village remains subdued for some hours after the spirit-beings have re-entered the men's house enclosure. The public appearance of the spirit-beings is an awesome occasion, as these creatures are exemplars of powerful non-human forces which have been called into being by humans who caused them to come forth from their spirit domain into the domain of human existence and human enterprise. As personifications of an undifferentiated autochthonous power, the spirit-beings simultaneously represent creation and destruction, the life/death continuum. The spirit-beings are *memento mori* whose presence saddens people reminded of their deceased kin and of death itself. But the creatures are also 'youths' at the peak of their productive and reproductive capacities, their very presence holds the promise of continuity and thus denies the finality of death. The first public appearance of the **aulu** saddens people, but they are gladdened by the beauty of the creatures and within a few hours everyone is engaged in preparing themselves to dance, sing, and feast with the spirit-beings.

After the spirit-beings have consumed their essence of pork, the men begin to gather in the dance plaza for the dancing. The men carry their drums

and gather in the centre of the plaza around a fire made from burning embers brought from their home hearths. The fire serves to keep off the night chill, as a convenient means to light their tobacco and as a source of heat to warm the lumps of beeswax which are the tuning devices on a drum's lizard-skin tympanum. When the men are assembled and the drums tuned, one man begins the set by singing the opening words of the refrain, after which the other men join in with their voices, and the voices of the drums. As soon as the drumming begins, the men are joined by the women who dance dressed in their most elaborate finery. When the men and the drums are in full throat, and the dance plaza is filled with dancing women and girls, the several pairs of spirit-beings emerge from the men's house enclosure to dance with the women. The spirit-beings and the women dance in a circle around the men who are standing in a circle around their fire. Circling them all, prancing and parading, bobbing and weaving, and usually going in the opposite direction, is the spirit-being widow.

The music and dance repertoire that is special to the **aulu** follows a specific structural format. The dance starts off with a very fast beat and dance step called **girigiri**. This lively beat is intended to get people into the spirit of the dance, to *kirapim bel* (T.P.: 'get them fired up'). Having accomplished this, the drums shift into a steady but upbeat rhythm called

**bauga itautau**, or 'the substance of the song'. When people are beginning to tire, the rhythm called **lou** speeds up slightly so they will shake off their tiredness, and later still the rhythm again becomes quite fast, **rombolele**. By the small hours of the morning the drummers and dancers are tired and the music slows considerably to 'pull' or exaggerate the dance steps. This is called **katkatga**, to 'cut' or 'fold', aptly enough, as people are ready to fold from exhaustion. Two or three hours before dawn, the rhythm changes again and becomes **lauga tike**. The term **lauga** means to 'return/bring back' and **tike** is a term that connotes a repetitive alternate rhythm of three long beats followed by three short quick beats. This rhythm, alternating slow/fast/slow/fast, is intended to 'open the dancer's eyes', and get them moving briskly again and the dance step is accompanied by shifting the eyes from side to side, and turning the body slightly to the left and right. When people are moving quickly again, the rhythm shifts to a slightly faster beat called **siasi**. As dawn breaks, the rhythm shifts again, gaining momentum and the spirit-beings perform **kikioka** where the pair splits apart and bow in front and in back of one another like 'scissors', a performance that delights everyone. After this show of good humour and playfulness on the part of the spirit-beings, the rhythm again changes back to the lively quick step of the opening **girigiri**, to get people going and to end the night of dancing on a



flourish. As the final **girigiri** gathers momentum and the sun is fully risen, the spirit-beings dance away into the men's house enclosure where they will be fed and will rest until after noon, when the whole process will be repeated.

Throughout the days and nights of dancing, the 'father of the spirit-beings' keep the drummers, dancers, and spirit-beings supplied with areca nut, tobacco, food, drinking coconuts, and if the spirit-beings demand it, with pork. For this work, the 'father of the spirit-beings' commissions various men in his kindred to act as his 'helpers'. These men supply the tobacco, areca and coconuts, and hand it out to the drummers and dancers. It is the music, dance, and the crowd of people that make the occasion successful. If no one is drumming, or if too few women are dancing, the spirit-beings are insulted and refuse to appear; if the drumming and singing is haphazard and discordant, the spirit-beings stamp their feet in annoyance.

No one comes to dance without reason; dancers must be recompensed for their presence and their contribution to the success of the dance feast. A strong and wealthy man has any number of persons in whom he has invested and upon whom he can draw (exploit) to supply these amenities, he need not supply them himself. However, he does become indebted to those who supply material assistance and must repay them in kind when next they hold an

**ololo**, or will present them with gifts of shell money at some later ceremony. In addition to these 'helpers' the 'father of the spirit-beings' must, like any good father or person of stature, look after his 'children' the **sig itama**, who dance inside the **aulu** costume and who constantly repair and replace the sago frond skirt. Being a masked spirit dancer is hot, heavy, arduous work, and any one pair of **aulu** are manned by several people who take turns inside the costume. These men, for the most part, are cognates of the 'father of the spirit-beings' but are members of different men's house units. The successful appearance of the spirits and the beauty of the dance depends on others but in the final analysis the success or failure of the total performance either enhances or decreases the reputation of the 'father(s) of the spirit-beings' and by association, their men's house unit. For this reason, whatever the spirit-beings demand, it is given to them immediately and no matter how many pigs the 'father' of the **aulu** has allotted for exchange purposes, he must have on hand additional pigs to satisfy the spirit-beings' insatiable taste for pork.

As the days and nights of dancing continue, people from all over the district begin to arrive to participate in the feast, and to bring the pigs they owe or have promised to the sponsors of the **ololo**. As each group arrives with a pig, the trumpet conch is sounded by a man of the host men's house to

mark their arrival and the number of pigs they bring with them. The pigs are tied underneath the houses of the 'owner of the dead one' in whose name the animals will later be exchanged at the **ololo kakau** and the **ololo kapei**—the 'small' and 'large' feast.

### The Ololo Kakau

The 'small feast' is the first of two formal pig transactions and is called **budua iaupu ilado**, 'the dead one's/pig of the ashes/it runs'. As noted earlier, each 'owner of the dead one' in the sponsoring men's house unit has engaged the services of a man as the 'owner of the basket' (**karei itama**), a man who is a cognate of himself and his deceased kinsperson but a member of a different minimal lineage and men's house unit. All the deceased in whose honour the mortuary ceremonies are held belong to the sponsoring men's house and are, of course, related by kinship. Each 'owner of the basket' is a kinsman of a deceased being honoured and in whose name he is the 'basket'; therefore; all those designated as 'owners of the basket' are also distantly related to one another. They are all **aso**, 'affines through death', and the 'running of the pigs of the dead' is an exchange between these men ('baskets') whose relationship to one another is defined by the fact that each is related to a deceased individual in the sponsoring men's house. Their actual relationship

as kinsmen might be so distant (i.e., well outside the maximal cognatic descent category) that they do not consider themselves related at all. This exchange of pigs thus initiates or re-establishes ties of obligation between distant kin whose primary connection is that their deceased kinsperson is related to each other deceased kinsperson. Thus, individual (A) is 'owner of the basket' for his deceased kinsman ( $D^1$ ) and individual (B) is 'owner of the basket' for his deceased kinsman ( $D^2$ ); ( $D^1$ ) and ( $D^2$ ) are agnates, therefore, at some level individuals (A) and (B) are also kinsmen.

As each 'owner of the basket' arrives for the 'running of the pig of the ashes' he brings with him a pig to be exchanged and gives it to the 'owner of the dead one' who stakes the pig under his house. On the day designated for the exchange, the pigs are staked to small saplings erected in a double row in front of the men's house. If there are ten recent dead being honoured at this mortuary ceremonies, the pigs will be staked in two rows of five each so that each 'owner of the basket' is paired with another 'owner of the basket'. The pigs that are staked for the exchange must be as nearly the same size as possible, so that the exchange is perfectly balanced. Since the pigs are highly uncooperative while being tied up and some reshuffling must take place to ensure that pigs of equal size (value) are staked opposite one another, it might take several hours to complete the staking, and the ceremony usually

takes place in late afternoon.

Each 'owner of the basket' leads a group of his kinsmen towards the displayed pigs, entering the dance plaza from the direction of their home village. The 'owner of the basket' and his group are decorated with splotches of red paint on their faces, with white designs representing their personal spirit powers (**namir**), or with splotches of lime powder on their foreheads. These are emblems of death, warfare, and powerful aggression, and the men make their approach to the accompaniment of drums and songs of war and carry war clubs and brandish spears while assuming the stylized spear throwing stance. As they reach the staked pigs, each 'owner of the basket' is met by his opposite number's 'owner of the dead one' (and his group of kinsmen) who leads him to the pig he will receive in exchange for the pig he contributed. The 'owner of the dead one' takes the hand of the 'owner of the basket' and 'pulls' him to the pig. The 'owner of the dead one' then strikes the pig with a branch of croton leaves and loudly proclaims, "This croton [pig] is for you", and the 'owner of the basket' claims the pig by slapping it with white lime powder. When each set of staked pigs has been given and received in this manner, each proud new owner of a pig unties his prize, drags the beast unceremoniously away, and ties it under the house of the 'owner of the dead one'.

Several things have taken place at this exchange. Despite the fact that the 'owner of the basket' supplied a pig and received a pig of equal size and value in exchange for that pig, the pig he received is a different pig and thus represents a new transaction. The two distantly related kinsmen, as 'owners of the basket', are now more closely connected by virtue of the fact that they have entered into a transaction and exchanged pigs, although neither is indebted to the other since the exchange is balanced. The possibility for new, amicable relationships between groups who have the potential for hostility (as evidenced in the display of power and aggression as the groups approached one another for the exchange) is provided in the name of the recent dead. The deceased and the men's house unit who sponsor the pig exchange are credited with a reputation as persons of wealth, prestige and power, who bring their resources to bear in the interests of promoting well-being and harmonious relations among others. This is not done without cost to the various 'owners of the dead one', for although their various 'owners of the baskets' supplied the pigs that were exchanged, the 'baskets' must be recompensed for this work. All the while they are in the village pending the pig exchange, each 'owner of the basket' is supported with food and other amenities by the 'owner of the dead one' who has commissioned his services and his pig. And, when the work of the **ololo kakau** exchange is completed, the 'owner' compensates

the 'basket' by giving him a pig called **gaea more ipulaka**. The term **pulaka** refers to the new, unopened shoot at the top of a plant, and this pig, rather than being payment to the 'basket' for services rendered, is in fact a 'new [sprouting] pig/croton debt' given by the 'owner of the dead one' to the 'owner of the basket'. In this way the relationship which was initiated between the two men because they are both related to particular deceased individuals who are related to one another, becomes a relationship of mutual indebtedness in its own right between the two men. They are no longer **aso**, 'relations through death', they are now **sobosobo**, 'kin, trade friends' or, as it is phrased in Tok Pisin, *bisnis*.

The 'running of the pigs of the ashes' thus serves to bring together distant cognatic kin of the deceased who belong to different men's house units in a relationship characterized as "we who have exchanged pigs in the name of a dead kinsman"; it permits the initiation or re-inforcement of relations of obligation between men who are cognatic kin, one of whom belongs to the deceased's men's house unit and the other to another men's house unit with which the deceased was affiliated. By sponsoring this pig exchange in the name of their recent dead, the host men's house unit brings together men in many other men's house units and through the medium of the exchange publicly forges relations of obligation between and among them all.

The host men's house unit also publicly displays the numbers of persons and groups that comprise that men's house unit's far-flung social network of reciprocal obligations, hence this exchange demonstrates the extent of the strength, power, wealth, and resources the men's house unit has available to it for future exploitation.

All of these relationships and potentialities already existed to some degree when the deceased persons being honoured were alive. That is, the deceased (D) when alive included within his/her social network individual or group (A), (B), (C)...and so on, where the minimum relation between (A), (B), and (C), for example, was simply that each was related to (D). At mortuary ceremonies, transactions take place between (A), (B), and (C) in the name of (D). When these transactions are completed, (A), (B), and (C) have forged relations of obligation between and among themselves, relations that exist in their own right and no longer need be reckoned through a third party, (D). The losses occasioned by death, rather than causing the breakdown of relationships are, through mortuary work turned into "a positive resource for the regeneration of equivalent social relations" (Weiner 1980: 81). The deceased is the medium through which social relations are both generated and regenerated among the living, thus death not only permits but also necessitates the continuity of life.



### The Firstborn: Ear-piercing and Superincision

The firstborn is the embodiment of continuity. The concept of an integrated cosmic order regenerated perpetually through the processes of generation and degeneration is expressed in this final firstborn ceremonial when the child's substantive essence (blood) is spilled on the dead in the presence of the **aulu** spirit-beings. This ceremony takes place within a few days after the **ololo kakau** and the 'running of the pigs of the dead' discussed above.

Until the last two decades or so, all children, regardless of gender or birth order had their ear lobes cut and elongated to shoulder length, and all male children were superincised. Nowadays, only the rite of male superincision remains an absolutely inviolable necessity for all boys, and it is rare to find anyone younger than about 25 years-of-age who has elongated ear lobes. The Kabana consider(ed) stretched ear lobes a sign of beauty, but say they were disabused of this by the mission which did not approve of the practice and considered the process rather gruesome and the result unattractive. The mission did support the custom of male superincision on the basis that it would promote cleanliness and prevent the boys from becoming sick. The Kabana claim, therefore, that the rite of male

superincision will never become defunct because it is sanctioned by ancestral custom and the Catholic church. Elongating ear lobes, on the other hand, is a custom that has succumbed to the pressures of acculturation and an imposed aesthetic, and nowadays young people of both genders simply pierce their ears in the same fashion as do western youths. Kabana boys no longer go through an ear-piercing rite at all, they are only subjected to superincision. Although the elongation process has been curtailed, the ear-piercing rite continues to be an important tradition and all Kabana girls experience this ceremony.

The firstborn child is the focus of the ear-piercing and superincision ceremony, and I shall treat this aspect of firstborn/mortuary work from the perspective of the firstborn child. It is the firstborn who is feasted, decorated, secluded in the ceremonial house (**kailaga**), and introduced to the **aulu** spirit-beings. Non-firstborn girls and boys have their ears pierced or their foreskin superincised at the same time as the firstborn but with little fanfare—they are simply "pulled in underneath the firstborn". When the parents of a firstborn perform this ceremony for their child, the father's elder brother (who has already accomplished this ceremony for his own firstborn) will contribute one pig to the spirit-beings in the men's house and thus is entitled to have the rite performed on all his firstborn's younger siblings. The younger siblings, as a group, also spill their blood 'on top of the

dead'. Or, if the 'owner of the dead one' has already performed the blood-letting rite for his own firstborn, he will take this opportunity to perform the rite for all his other children at this time, if he can afford to do so. Given all the contingencies determining when firstborn and mortuary ceremonials will take place, the age at which any child undergoes these rites varies considerably. Boys might be as young as four and as old as fourteen years-of-age (especially non-firstborns) when they are superincised; girls might be as young as six and as old as eighteen when they have their ears pierced. Biological age is not a factor in the performance of these rites. The rites themselves are not perceived by the Kabana as puberty rites, and any attempt to interpret them as such would be a gross distortion of the data and the meaning of the rites.

At this point in the cycle, the firstborn female seclusion houses (**kailaga**) have been ready since the mortuary ceremonies began, the drumming and dancing have continued everyday from noon until dawn since the **aulu** spirit-beings made their appearance, and the exchange of the 'pigs of the dead' between the 'owners of the basket' has taken place within the context of the **ololo kakau**. Two or three days after the 'small feast' is completed, work for the firstborn and work for the dead conjoin when the child's "body is cut" so that her/his blood will "spill on top of the dead".

The ceremony begins at noon of the designated day when the parents take their firstborn and a huge male pig with full tusks to the child's **baulo**. As in all other firstborn ceremonials, the parents do not publicly participate in the actual performance of the ceremonial, they remain behind the scene as befits their position. The child's **baulo** are responsible for decorating the child in her/his finery, for accompanying the child through the various phases of the ceremony, and for providing the feast of pork in honour of the child when she/he comes out of seclusion. The pork the **baulo** provide is the large tusked boar they received from the child's parents (for which the **baulo** are now indebted) as "payment" for their work on the child's behalf.

During the afternoon, the **baulo** decorate the firstborns and prepare the feast for that evening. The children are bathed and have their hair trimmed back several centimetres around their heads in the manner described for the firstborn **poipoi sara** ceremony and for the corpse prior to burial. Their bodies are covered from hair to toes with red paint on the left side and black paint on the right side, with yellow or white paint applied to their heads where the hair has been shaved back. Boys are dressed in loincloths made of barkcloth, and dog's teeth headbands, boar tusk necklaces, shellmoney necklaces worn criss-cross over their chests, and armbands loaded with a profusion of crotons, scented leaves and flowers. Finally, their hair is

covered with small brightly coloured feathers, and a headdress of several long feathers at the top of their heads.

Girls are dressed and painted the same as boys except for their skirts. The girls are first dressed in one layer of the traditional fibre skirt worn by females. Over this skirt goes another skirt made entirely of a variety of colourful crotons, scented leaves (that have been steamed in banana leaves to make them more pungent), and the red striated banana plant leaves (**lapelape**). The predominant colour of the skirts is red. Several of the colourfully dyed sections of fibre skirt cut in various lengths, are inserted in the back of the leaf skirt waistband to produce a bustle. Finally dozens of long colourful leaves are inserted in the back waistband so that they stand up and surround the child in a profusion of foliage.

By late afternoon, the children are dressed and taken back to their parents and the feast of taro and pork prepared in their honour is redistributed. A large portion of the pork is taken inside the men's house for the spirit-beings, and the rest of the feast is redistributed among everyone in the village in the usual manner. By dusk everyone has eaten and the men gather in the dance plaza with their drums to begin that evening's dancing. All that night until dawn the next morning the beautifully decorated children dance and sing with the women, the men, and the spirit-beings. When the sun

has risen above the horizon the next morning, the dance ends and the spirit-beings seclude themselves in the men's house stockade. The firstborn children are led to their seclusion houses by their **baulo**: girls are taken into their seclusion house and firstborn boys are taken into smaller, less elaborate seclusion houses called **popou**. The children will remain in seclusion until late that afternoon when they will be incised.

The child's parents and kin weep and cling to the child expressing their distress over the minor ordeal and loss of blood that the child will endure in a few hours. They express their distress by divesting themselves of their worldly goods (as occurs during death rites), throwing pots, utensils, mats, baskets, clothing and other possessions, onto the ground by the seclusion house. The child steps over these items enroute to her seclusion house, thus infusing them with her essence, and all the by-standers (who are standing-by for just this purpose) scramble to grab up this discarded wealth. If the parents are wealthy enough they might drag forth one of their female pigs, hold it on the ground for the child to step over, kill it, and then present it to one of the child's close maternal kin (e.g., MB, MZ, MM): parental distress knows no solace when pig wealth is discarded. The child is then escorted to his/her seclusion hut by their **baulo** where he/she is taken up and inside the house by the chaste young man or woman who will remain with the child as a

'guardian' (**mamato**). All the children undergoing the blood-letting are now called **aidimidimi**, a term which a Kabana high school graduate glossed for me as 'initiate'.

The Kabana explained to me that the spilling of the firstborn's blood 'on top of the dead' is merely a figurative expression, as the 'spirits/ghosts' of the dead are not called forth from the domain of the dead to participate in this ceremony. The calling up of named 'spirits/ghosts' of the dead is "another kind of work", and that work is primarily to enlist their assistance when someone is using the magic/sorcery spells (i.e., for garden magic, love magic, curing, sorcery) that were inherited or purchased from these named deceased individuals. Informants also explained to me that the dead were buried (in the past) in the ground inside the men's house, so that the term **budua**, 'dead one', also means 'the ancestral ground' in which the deceased was buried, and that the crotons planted around the men's house represent the deceased who are buried in/have been returned to that ground and are now "growing out of it", i.e., regenerating. The Kabana do not worship the dead, nor do the dead become ancestral deities and mortuary ceremonies are held in the name of the recent dead, not an amorphous category of "the dead". The recent dead are the child's senior kin and represent her progenitors, those 'one bloods' with whom she shares inherited substantive essence and upon whom

(or upon whose ground) that essential substance will be shed. The dead have no other role than as symbols of generation and regeneration. The most important actors in this drama are the spirit-beings, the living humans who 'pulled' the spirits into the realm of human enterprise, and the firstborn. As the Kabana explained it, the power of the spirit-beings is brought together with, and by, the power of human beings and the two powers come together at this firstborn ceremonial so that the child too is infused with this power and parental enterprises will be successful and flourish. The name of the firstborn (his/her parents) will be 'raised up', they will gain renown. The combination of spirit-beings, the recent dead, parents, and firstborn describes a perpetual cosmic order: an autochthonous creative force—> generation—> degeneration—> regeneration. The children, as "initiates", are being introduced into this ongoing cycle of death and life, living and dying.

Several hours later, in late afternoon, the children are brought down from their seclusion houses and their decorative finery is refreshed in anticipation of the upcoming incision rites. Non-firstborn children, who do not undergo seclusion, are also decorated at this time although much less lavishly than their firstborn counterparts. When ready, the children are carried by their same sex **baulo** to the front of the men's house where the **aulu** spirit-beings await them, and where the child's blood will be spilled 'on



top of the dead'. The crowd gathered to witness or participate in the incising exudes a mood of tense excitement and dismay that the children will feel pain.

New pandanus mats are spread on the ground and the children stand in a line on the mats. Their kinsmen hold small ironwood bowls of white lime powder which they slap on the child's back and chest while calling their personal protective powers (**namir**). For the person that owns it, a **namir** is a power that when invoked through the medium of lime powder and applied to the skin, protects the person from danger by making him strong and powerful. It can also be invoked and directed against an enemy as a deadly curse. The child will be weakened as a result of the open wound and loss of blood and the **namir** his/her kin invoke and place on the child's skin will give him/her strength to overcome the weakness and the power to ward off dangerous influences. When the 'laying on of lime powder' (**asubago**) is finished, the children are cut.

A boy is superincised 'on top of' his 'small mother', a father's or mother's younger sister. The woman gets down on her hands and knees and the boy stands between her legs and leans backwards until he is lying on her back. (Or, the woman will sit and hold the seated boy between her legs.) His legs are spread and placed on either side of the woman's knees. The boy's father

holds his legs and the boy's other 'fathers' (FB) hold his shoulders, and the child is immobilized. The ironwood bowl that contained the lime powder is placed under the boy so that his blood will drip down into it and not flow away uselessly (T.P.: *nating*) into the dirt. The man chosen to cut the child inserts a small, concave and smoothly sanded piece of bamboo under the foreskin so that the cutting instrument will be prevented from injuring the glans penis. Before cutting the boy, the man says a spell (**nakoeakoea**) on the razor (in the past a piece of obsidian was used) so it will cut true and make a clean incision with little blood flow. He spits a fine spray of ginger juice on the boy's penis/foreskin to anaesthetize it and with a smooth even-pressured stroke cuts the top of the foreskin. After the incision is made, the boy's penis is wrapped in a croton to form a trough through which the blood flows into the bowl. The boy is then helped to his feet, assisted to sit on a log, and a burning ember is placed on the ground between his feet to heat the wound and facilitate the drying process.

The man who does the cutting is not a specialist. A father will chose a close kinsman, perhaps an elder brother or a father, to perform this rite and the only criterion the father considers when making his choice, is that the man's hand does not shake. The man who wields the razor is "paid" one length of 'gold' shell money as compensation for having the child's blood spilled on

his hands. He in turn "pays" the other men who helped hold the boy still. The child's 'small mother' receives three lengths of black shellmoney and the bowl that caught the blood as compensation for her role in the proceedings and to assuage her concern for the child's blood ( her shared blood) having been shed.

The firstborn girl goes through basically the same procedure when her ear lobes are cut. She stands or sits and is supported by a 'small mother' (FZ, MZ) who holds her while the incision is made in her ear lobe, and a small ironwood bowl is held under the ear to catch the blood. After the incision is made the large pincer from a freshly killed crab is inserted into the cut. As the crab claw dries, the pincers open and gradually stretch the ear lobe. When the crab claw is fully extended it is removed and replaced by thick, tightly rolled tubes of coconut fronds. When the ear lobe is stretched sufficiently, the tubes of coconut fronds are replaced with increasingly large rings of bamboo, until eventually the elongated ear lobe almost touches the girl's shoulder. Nowadays, girls choose not to have their ear lobe elongated, and the ear-piercing rite is accomplished quite quickly by pushing a sliver of bamboo or a sharp sago palm spine through the ear lobe. Although the incising and stretching process is now defunct, all the traditions surrounding this rite as I have described them for male superincision still pertain.

When all the children have been incised, firstborn girls are carried to

their seclusion houses (**kailaga**) and firstborn boys are carried inside the men's house. Non-firstborn children are simply taken home to their mothers. The firstborns remain in seclusion for one to two weeks, until their cuts are healed. Each firstborn child is attended by his/her **mamato**, 'guardian'. The guardians are young men and women who are either married and expecting their first child, or have a nursing infant, they thus are persons who are not sexually active hence they are not contaminated by **isima**, the 'smell/heat' that results from sexual intercourse. This is a particularly potent contaminating force which, if the children are exposed to it, can enter their bodies through their open wounds and cause them to become severely ill: the wounds will fester, swell enormously, be extremely painful and slow to heal. The children are placed in seclusion to protect them from exposure to this contamination and their uncontaminated guardians prepare and deliver all the food and drink the children consume. Girls come down from their seclusion house and boys come out of the men's house only once each twenty-four hours under cover of darkness so they may urinate, defecate, and bathe in the sea. The children are given food and drink usually only once a day in the evening, and then in small amounts so the need for bodily eliminations is kept to a minimum. When the children do come out at night, girls cover their heads and boys cover their penes with a pandanus mat in the event that

they inadvertently meet with a contaminated person, and to hide the wound from view as sorcery, like the evil eye, can be transmitted on a glance.

The firstborn girl, in her little house balanced atop a high pole and attended by one female guardian, is decidedly isolated. The firstborn boy is less isolated in the men's house. Although each boy stays on his own bed in that section of the men's house that is the exclusive domain of his agnates, there are other firstborns and their guardians within sight and speaking distance, and they are visited by senior men who, because of their age, are assumed not to be sexually active and thus uncontaminated. The men (and the women) who belong to the men's house sponsoring the mortuary/firstborn work, are also uncontaminated by sexuality (or should be) as they abstain from intimate contact with the opposite sex in order to avoid the weakening effects caused by loss of vital fluids and the contaminating effects of sexual "heat", so as to ensure the success of their enterprise.

While inside the men's house, the boys are shown the "secret" of the **aulu**. They are shown the spirit-being mask and various other components of its material manifestation, and witness the men dressing in the costume. The "secret" of the **aulu** that is imparted to the boys, is simply that the costume is worn by men. The boys are enjoined, with dire threats of sickness or death by sorcery, not to put about the "secret" to females or other boys who have

not yet been privy to the "secret". Although the rite of superincision and the presence of the **aulu** usually always coincide, I must emphasize that the right to know the "secret" of the **aulu**, or any other spirit-being manifestation, such as the bull-roarer, is *not* dependent on the fact of superincision. Boys who have not been superincised may view any spirit-being if his father wishes him to do so and if he has the wherewithal to present the spirit-being with a medium to large size pig. The boy enters into the presence of the spirit-being 'on top of' the pig, and without the gift of wealth the boy is barred from the presence of these creatures. This applies to each type of spirit-being, and having earned the right to the secret of the **aulu**, for example, does not earn the boy the right to view the bull-roarer—superincised or not, the boy's father must pay an additional pig thus opening the way for his son to view the bull-roarer or the **naboeou**, and so on. As I pointed out in my earlier discussion of the bull-roarer, boys in their teens who had been superincised but whose fathers could not afford to honour the bull-roarer with a pig, were forbidden to see the spirit and made to run away from the village with the women and children when the bull-roarer entered there.

The crucial importance of superincision (and female ear-piercing) for all children but especially for firstborn children, is the relationship between

this ceremony and parental renown. Based on numbers of pigs, amount of garden produce, and shellmoney they must provide, this is the most expensive firstborn ceremony that parents undertake in the name of their child. No matter their other accomplishments, parents who do not accomplish this ceremony are irredeemably **borabora**, 'rubbish', a label that is also applied to the child who is referred to **daga buligaliga**, 'genitals/something; unimportant', or in Tok Pisin as *samting nating*. To refer to someone privately or publicly in the heat of anger as **daga buligaliga** is the most heinous insult that can be heaped upon his/her head. For the parents to accomplish this ceremony and for the child to undergo it, is the most prestigious of accomplishments. I know of only one senior man who others claim did not perform this ceremony for his firstborn child. Apparently, the boy was sent away at a very young age to be schooled by missionaries in Rabaul, and the boy rarely returned to the village and as an adult in his thirties never visits his home. As an elder in the community, the father has much to say about village life and customs, however, when he attempts to press his point of view or make claims that go against the will of others, these men have, in my presence, dismissed his bid for superiority by saying, "Who is he to talk? He is nothing, his son is **iut doidol** (an 'unsuperincised penis')".

While the boys languish in the men's house, they are lectured by senior men about how properly to comport themselves as members of the community. The boys are not instructed so much as they are harangued about the necessity to take part in community work in order to keep and enhance the reputation of the community (i.e., the men's house, hamlet, village, the District). They are told they must respect and fulfill their obligations to kin as this network of social relations is the source of their wealth and well-being. They are directed to respect and revere their wives since a wife is the source of one's children, and the key to any man's success.

These instructions are very general, and the boys for the most part are prepubescent, unconcerned and probably unaware of their own sexuality, and the talking-to the elders give them cannot be considered as formal instructions in esoteric male lore for initiating males into manhood. First, the majority of males never experience this talking-to because they are not firstborn children and thus have been returned home where they are cared for by their mothers, rather than to the men's house for the healing process. Secondly, except when a spirit-being is in residence and the boy's father has not paid the wealth that permits the boy to view it, the boys have never been forbidden to enter the men's house or to hear and participate in what went on inside this male domain. The men's house is a place where boys interact with



their elders and where they learn what men do and how they behave or misbehave, but it is not a sacred domain. Boys are expected to come and go in the men's house so that they will be in the company of men and learn, by association, about male activities and ancestral customs and history. And third, boys are never considered men until they are married (wives 'tame'; they make men out of males) and have their first child, furthermore, they are not considered socially competent adults until they are well into the ceremonial cycle for their firstborn and only when the cycle is completed are they fully mature adult members of society whose opinions are at least listened to and carry some weight.

Young boys (especially, perhaps, a firstborn) may well need to be exposed to a harangue about the benefits of hard work and virtuous behaviour while they are somewhat traumatized by their superincision experience, since boys are notoriously frivolous and self-centred at least until they marry. Girls, on the other hand, are instructed in their roles as females and take on responsibility from a very early age, and there is no felt necessity to formally or informally instruct a group of young girls in the ways of womanhood at this ceremony. This is further borne out by the elevated isolation of the firstborn in her seclusion house.

It is for all these reasons, plus the fact that young adults become "real

people" and socially competent members of society through the performance of ceremonies in honour of their firstborn, that I argue this particular ceremony is not an initiation rite. I argue this despite the fact that all the children who undergo this rite are separated from all other children who do not, and the firstborn male and female are further separated from their ritual peers. The firstborn is singled out because he/she is a firstborn and has always received special, separate attention as the sole exemplars of parental renown. All the children are removed from contaminating influences, the firstborn more spectacularly than the others, in order to protect their health and well-being. They remain apart until they are healed, but this period of separation cannot be construed as a liminal period, since there is no conception of the child as an initiand undergoing a transition from one status position to another. Therefore, when the firstborns emerge from their seclusion period, this emergence is not a formal phase of reincorporation into society and a new role or status. The Van Gennepian analytic framework simply does not work when applied to firstborn ceremonials for, in the final analysis, the Kabana do not have "initiation rites" for children. From the time a Kabana woman and man marries, her/his life is a continuous "rite of passage" from maturity to death, their development marked only by their accomplishments displayed at firstborn ceremonials in honour of their child,

the physical effects of the aging/maturation process, and the social-psychological costs and benefits of acquired wisdom and renown.

### The Ololo Kapei

The firstborn children remain in seclusion for one to two weeks. Exactly how long they are in isolation is contingent upon when the children's men's house is prepared to hold the final pig exchange. The 'bringing out of the secluded children' (**tipapot aidimidimi**) serves notice that the **ololo kapei**, the 'big feast/pig exchange' will begin the next morning. By this time, the feast/dance has continued unabated for several weeks.

During their final afternoon in seclusion the firstborns are again decorated in the most elaborate finery. The firstborns' **baulo** distribute among all those at the **ololo**, and to the **aulu**, a huge feast of taro and pork. When the feast is distributed, the girls are brought down from their seclusion house and accompanied by their **baulo**, are taken to join the firstborn boys at the gate of the men's house stockade where inside, the **aulu** await them. As the spirit-beings emerge, each firstborn takes hold of a strand of sago skirt on his/her **aulu** pair, and the child is brought into the centre of the dance plaza by the spirit-being. For the rest of that afternoon until dawn next day, the firstborns dance with their **aulu**, either holding its skirt, or dancing in

front of it with a lighted torch. When the sun is over the horizon, the **aulu** retire to the men's house and everyone prepares for the 'pulling of hands'—the presentation of the 'pigs of the croton', **gaea imore**.

Of the events that take place at mortuary ceremonies this is the most straightforward, yet the most subtly complex of all, a paradox summed up neatly by the Kabana in one sentence that encapsulates the essence of this event: **tikol ibun ga ti bora more kapkabu**, 'They repay their [pig] debts and they rubbish/give [pig] debts of the ceremonial croton'. Two basic principles are involved in this transaction: First, relations of exchange only take place between ego and persons classified as members of her/his cognatic stock; wealth or self is never invested or solicited outside "the family" (**sig kelede**) for it is kin who are eminently exploitable; non-kin are beyond the realm of reciprocal moral obligations and outside one's reach and control. The repaying and "rubbishing" that takes place is therefore among kin, persons with whom ego is allied from birth through the bonds of descent and shared blood. Anthropologically it is of great interest that among the Kabana at least, these transactions in wealth are not a medium for establishing alliances between heretofore separate, potentially hostile groups (affines). They are transactions whereby one kinsman invests in another kinsman for the express purpose of exploiting that investment in his

best interests at some future time. This suggests that the anthropological concept of reciprocity and the functions attributed to that concept warrant further analytic attention (*cf.*: Weiner 1980; McLellan 1984).

Secondly, many of the debts that ego holds are debts of long-standing, others are more recent. In choosing to repay a particular debt and not another, ego walks a very fine line, risking censure, the possibility of embroiling himself and his agnates in a fight, the possibility of alienating a past source of wealth, and not least, the possibility of damaging his reputation by becoming known as someone who reneges on his obligations. On the other hand, he has everything to gain if he manages the situation with astuteness and finesse.

While this seems straightforward enough, it is the members of the men's house sponsoring the mortuary feast who must give and repay the pigs, and since the ceremony is held in honour of their deceased kin, it is the deceased's cognates who are entitled to be repaid a pig, that is, to be recipients of the largesse of the deceased's men's house unit. A successful mortuary ceremony is (among other things) one where every line of cognatic kin in every men's house with whom the deceased are affiliated receives a pig. Where a man owes a pig each to two members of one lineage, he must choose which man is to get the pig. Although his debt to one man might be of a

longer standing than to the second man, if the second man is more closely related to the deceased then he should be presented the pig. The foregoing applies to each man (and woman) who belongs to the sponsoring men's house unit, they are all concerned with their own particular network of indebtedness. There is, however, an additional factor in these pig transactions. When a parent dies, his/her assets *and* liabilities are inherited by his/her children; while children inherit parental trade friends and the source of wealth this entails, they also inherit the obligation to repay any debts that were outstanding to these persons when their parent(s) died. Sons and brothers of the deceased in whose name the mortuary ceremonies are being sponsored must look not only to their own debts but first and foremost, they must repay parental pig debts.

Ceremonial performance demands the sponsor have large quantities of wealth, and a mortuary ceremony is a statement about the combined strength and wealth on the part of the sponsoring men's house group and a challenge to other men's house groups to meet or exceed this display of excellence. If the persons who sponsor the ceremony are indebted to others, these others have a right to expect repayment. If the deceased has outstanding obligations to others, these others have a right to expect that these obligations be met by those sponsoring the event in honour of the deceased—for aren't these same

sponsors claiming an ability to produce wealth in great quantities in order to "raise the name" of their recent dead at mortuary ceremonies?

These are the kinds of considerations that inform the repaying and assumption of pig debts at this final phase of mortuary work. The men's house as a unit has spent hundreds of hours in organizing who among each deceased's kindred in which men's house should be the recipient of a pig; individual sets of agnates have spent as many hours deciding who they will repay and indebt; and, individual men look to their personal obligations. And they have all spent weeks and months negotiating the acquisition of these pigs from their kin and trade friends. During the preceding two or three weeks, people from all over the district arrive with the pigs which are the accumulated wealth of the men of the sponsoring men's house unit, and each pig is staked and displayed under the house of the individual man whose wealth it is.

All these arrangements are made well in advance of the scheduled pig transaction, and they are made in secrecy. Like ourselves, the Kabana do not talk about the source and amount of their assets, or how much and to whom they are indebted, preferring to let others judge for themselves on the basis of performance and display. However, specific persons have been elected to be the recipients of a pig that is "owed" them and these persons are quietly

advised of this fact. (Those who will receive a new debt are not advised of this by the man intending to 'rubbish' them.) A messenger (**ato**) is sent by the man giving the pig to each pending pig recipient with a covert invitation to "come and dance with the croton [pig]". The notification that one will be the recipient of a pig is made in this hidden manner in order to avoid disputes. For example: Individual (X) is intending to meet his obligations by repaying a pig to individual (Y). Individual (Y) has his own network of indebtedness and someone within that network, individual (Z), might feel that individual (Y) has owed him (Z) a pig for long enough and if (Y) is to be the recipient of a pig, that pig by rights is owed to (Z) who will forcefully and publicly claim it. So while (X) is quietly advising (Y) that he will get a pig, (Z) is quietly trying to find out if (Y) is indeed to be the recipient of a pig so he (Z) can be on hand with his kinsmen as support to claim the pig. Although the messenger does not of his own initiative advise others about who is to receive a pig, if (Z) asks the messenger whether or not (Y) is to "dance with the croton", the messenger is forthcoming: "Yes, (Y) will be given a huge pig", and (Z) thus plans his appearance at the **ololo kapei** accordingly.

On the night before the pig transaction is to take place, all those who are to receive pigs (and those who think they should but have not been invited to receive one) gather at the perimeter of the hamlet and prepare to make a



grand entrance. Of all the spectacular events I witnessed during mortuary ceremonies, to me this event was one of the most dramatic and thrilling. It is dark, the only light comes from the flickering flames and embers of small fires around the dance plaza. All the men of the host men's house (plus many of their kin, fellow villagers, and guests) are gathered around the fire in the centre of the dance plaza where they have been drumming, singing, and dancing since the firstborns were brought out of seclusion by the **aulu**. All the **aulu**, resplendent in fresh new sago frond skirts and crotons, dance in pairs among the women in the circle around the men. At its side, each pair of spirit-beings is accompanied by one of the young people representative of the lineage to whom it belongs and who were incised under its auspices. Each pair of **aulu** is preceded by the women and girls who are its 'owners', the women equally resplendently decorated in their finest paint, feathers, and colourful skirts. The women and girls dance in twos and threes while holding crotons which they wave up and down to the rhythm of the dance. Immediately in front of the **aulu** pair is one person (male or female) who holds a flaming torch made from tightly wrapped, dried branches of coconut fronds. At regular intervals all the dancers turn and dance in the face of the **aulu**, while the torch bearer raises and lowers the flaming brand to "light the eye of the **aulu**", thus honouring the spirit-being, then all the dancers turn back and

continue their dance around the drummers. This is the scene into which the pig recipients and their supporters make their grand entrance.

The pig recipients group themselves according to their men's house affiliation and prepare to enter the dance plaza from the direction of their home village. The men and women of each group are also dressed in ceremonial finery. The men apply white lime powder to their faces as a sign of strength, power, and potential aggression and they carry spears, war clubs and large branches of crotons. When they are ready to make their entrance, the group forms itself into a line. At the head of the line and the first to enter the hamlet are the men, some carrying drums and others carrying weapons, then comes the torch bearer, followed by the pig recipient(s), who is followed in turn by the women. The group dances into the village with drums and voices in full throat, singing and drumming as loudly as they are able in order to drown out the host group's drumming and singing. As they advance, the pig recipient is honoured by the torch bearer and the dancers who, as they dance into the plaza, turn and "light his eye" with the flames and crotons they carry.

This is a mock battle, the "battle of the drums" and is an overt display of group strength and power. The host group and the group making its entrance are drumming and singing different songs at different and very fast

rhythms, the object being for each group to attempt to overwhelm the other. The competition continues for some minutes after the guest group has fully entered the dance plaza, as each group tries to out do the other in drum and voice. Imperceptibly, the cacophony created by the competition begins to harmonize as the guest group succumbs to the host group's drums and songs and the two groups conclude their confrontation by joining to produce the same music. The very real possibility exists that, in their enthusiasm or because the confronting group might have a real reason for a dispute, fights will occur between the two groups, but, nowadays this very rarely happens. The arriving group puts on a proud and powerful display, indicative that they are strong and that they ought not to be trifled with, but they always succumb to the host's music (as well they should, since they are guests at the ceremony). They are feasted by the sponsors and are recipients of wealth given them by the sponsors. In short, the host men's house wins the "battle" by 'killing' their guests with an overabundance of wealth. The confrontation resolves into harmonious celebration.

The new group, having been "subdued" by the host group, are now **loulou**, 'friends, allies, those who warn of impending enemy attack'. The invitation that was proffered when the mortuary ceremony first began with the 'opening of the drums' (**namo louloua**) is fulfilled. The two groups join

forces; the men enter the circle of drummers and add their voices to the song, the women enter the circle of women and **aulu** to add their numbers to the dancers. This drama is repeated as each new group of arrivals makes their entrance until each men's house unit in every village has displayed their strength, confronted their host with their potential power for aggression, and succumbed to the host group as their 'allies'. It takes several hours before every group has made a suitably elegant appearance, and when the "battle of the drums" ends, two or three hundred people have gathered to sing and dance together.

The drum dance continues without let up throughout the night. The pig recipients are honoured at the dance by the man (woman) who will be presenting the pig next morning. The pig donor and his family dance in front of the recipient, leading him (or her) with a flaming torch, periodically turning and honouring him by shining the light in his eyes. Any secrecy surrounding who might be receiving a pig is now exposed to public knowledge and those marked to get a pig are fair game to those who wish to make a claim on that pig. All the potential recipient can do is hope that this knowledge was kept from a potential claimant so that the man arrived unprepared (without many supporters/kin) to claim the pig, and that his display of power and support at the 'battle of the drums' will be sufficient to

discourage any impromptu claims by a claimant. Those who will be impoverished as the recipients of new debts are not advised of this "honour", and when they are pulled to and presented with a pig, it will be a complete and not necessarily happy surprise to them. Those who receive the new debts, are given the **more silsilga**, the 'croton [pig] of the men's house stockade' (the strength/wealth of the men's house).

Besides fulfilling their obligations to repay debts and obligating others to them by giving new debts, this night is also a time for settling old scores, outstanding disputes, and insults. This is the presentation of the **more malmalaea**, the 'croton [pig] of my anger', and this transaction takes place in lieu of (fatally) sorcerizing a person who has done one a disservice, or insulted one in some fashion. There are two ways in which the object of one's anger is notified that he is about to receive his comeuppance, and they are done symbolically, without any direct confrontation between the two protagonists.

The actual 'pulling of hands' and presentation of pigs takes place in the morning after the sun has cleared the horizon. In the pre-dawn hours (i.e., at the last minute) the person angered and seeking redress commissions his son or brother to sound the slit gong at the entrance to his men's house. The slit gong (**kure**), it will be recalled, is the 'voice' of the men's house and cries

only when a child is named (signalling increased strength of the men's house membership), to announce a death, or to announce an impending or intended attack/warfare. While the drums and dance continues, the sound of the slit gong interjects itself, alerting everyone that a minor drama of nerves is about to unfold. As the slit gong is being sounded, the aggrieved individual sends a brother or son to the object of his anger with a gift of white lime powder and several leaves of native tobacco. The bearer of gifts presents these items with a pleasant, "Here! brother, these are for you to enjoy and share among your brothers". The man has no choice but to accept the gifts, but he does so while demurring: "Thank you, brother. But I did not come to receive such gifts, I came to share in your happiness [add to the success of the feast/dance]". The gauntlet has been thrown down and is accepted by the man who, rather than consume the gifts, shares the tobacco among his kin (supporters) and slaps the lime powder on his forehead and on his armband (the **poipoi sara** armband that was the focus of a firstborn ceremonial), a sure sign of aggression.

The aggrieved man might choose a flaming torch as another way in which to "shame" the man who has angered him. As people dance and rhythmically wave these torches, bits of hot embers and sparks fly off. At some point in the dancing when the object of his anger has joined the circle

of drummers, the angry man will dance holding the flaming torch of coconut fronds. Each time the dance circle comes round so that the aggrieved is near his target, he will jostle the man and cover him in a shower of sparks from his torch. The angry man continues to dance, ignoring his antagonist who is frantically brushing the hot sparks off his skin.

These competitive dramas take place incidentally within the melee of drumming, singing and dancing. No one, however, has missed this meaningful interchange and everyone is aware of the fact that a heated dispute exists between the two protagonists. On the morrow, the aggrieved man will secure his coup by presenting the man who offended him with a huge tusked boar, thus shaming him with the opulence of the gift and challenging the ability of the recipient to reciprocate (eventually) with a pig of like value.

Finally, there might be yet another interchange that takes place before the 'pulling of hands' and the 'running of the pig of the crotons' next morning, and it is in many ways the converse of the above kind of encounter. As mentioned, there are some men (and women) who feel they are entitled to receive a pig in the name of their deceased kinsperson, or the repayment of a long-standing pig debt one of the sponsors owes him (or her). Because they were not notified that they would be given a pig, they express their displeasure and demand a pig at the dance by performing **sega** ('transvestite

clowning, buffoonery'). Such a person(s) dresses in a parody of ceremonial finery and dances in such a way as to ridicule, and to generally harrass and disrupt the glory of the dance. In contrast to the **sega** performed in light hearted humour to honour the accomplishments of the (parents of a) firstborn, this performance is presented in half-fun-whole-earnest. The fun aspect is the note of hilarity that always accompanies a clowning performance and the sheer enjoyment of the audience. Clowning is work that must be recompensed and the clowns are earnest in their expectation of being reciprocated for their efforts, the payment in this case is the pig they feel they should have been elected to receive. The overt, aggressive, and confrontational nature of this demand is tempered by the context of clowning in which it is presented, but this does not mean that the demand is frivolous or that it can be ignored by the persons to whom it is directed. The pig must be given over next morning, and each member of the sponsoring men's house unit has on hand, or readily available to him, one or two extra pigs to meet just such a "face-saving" eventuality.

As the sun rises, the dance sequence begins the final **girigiri** set during which the **aulu** exit the dance plaza with a flourish and enter the men's house stockade to rest. When the set is complete, the exhausted crowd, weary and hoarse from days and weeks of dancing and singing, retire to



partake of the food provided by the women of the host men's house unit. An hour or two later, the men again take their positions and begin drumming and singing, the **aulu** re-enter the dance plaza and everyone joins in the dance once more. The 'running of the pig of the crotons' starts.

Each member of the host men's house unit who is presenting a pig dances with his supporters (men and women) in front of the person (and his/her supporters) who is to receive a pig. All the donors dance with large bundles of crotons in their hands which the dancers flaunt in the eyes of the pig recipient. The pig recipients are **aso**, cognates of the deceased and the crotons are those which the **aso** planted around the men's house when they came to 'open the drums'. These crotons represent the deceased in whose honour the pigs are given and they represent the pigs, or more accurately, the ongoing transactions in pigs/objects of value, and the reciprocal moral obligations inherent in those transactions.

The pigs are scattered throughout the hamlet, staked securely under the houses of the donors. At the end of each refrain of the song, the drums and dancing stop, and a pig giver shouts out the name of the pig receiver, grabs him by the hand and pulls him across the plaza to where his pig is staked. Both men are accompanied by their respective supporters, the pig donor's supporters running by his side, whooping in exultation and brandishing

spears—to present someone with a pig is, after all, the supreme act of one-up-manship and the donor has the competitive edge. The recipient is accompanied by his kin who merely follow him *en masse* thus putting up a show of moral and physical support which promises that the challenge to reciprocate will be met when next they sponsor a mortuary ceremony. The pig giver pulls the pig receiver hither and yon around the plaza until they finally arrive at the designated pig. The pig giver slaps the pig heartily with the croton he holds, gives the croton to the pig recipient and loudly proclaims, "This croton is for you!" whereupon the recipient claims the pig as his own by slapping it with a handful of lime powder. The pig recipient and his kin untruss the beast and haul it away to where they are billeted at the house of a kinsman in another part of the village.

Sometimes there is no pig available to present to someone who has been invited to 'dance with the croton. The pig the donor has marked for this person might have died from some illness or become feral and disappeared in the forest. In cases such as this, the recipient's hand is pulled and he is taken to where the pig should have been staked, whereupon the donor hits the house post with his croton and gives it to the recipient, who puts lime powder on the post and accepts the croton. The croton in this instance, is called **more irago**, a croton with 'withered leaves' and is a chit representing an I.O.U. for

the dead pig. Someday, for what might appear to an outsider as no apparent reason, a pig of the 'withered croton ' will be delivered to the holder of the chit.

After each pig is accepted, the drums and dancing start up and the whole procedure is repeated again and again until all the pigs have been presented. Those who have their 'hands pulled' as the recipients of a new pig debt, are reluctant to be presented with a pig and put up a small show of resistance. As each man receives his pig, he and his supporters fall out of the dancing, and as the presentations continue the crowd of dancers gradually diminishes.

When the crowd has thinned enough to permit maximum visibility of the proceedings, the man who has a score to settle presents the 'pig of anger' to his antagonist. When the music stops, he loudly calls out the name of the object of his anger, grabs him by the hand and leads him to the huge male tusker specially marked for him. Rather than leading his antagonist more or less directly to the pig, as is usual, the pig giver leads his antagonist a merry and embarrassing chase around the village, going from house to house and around in circles, all the while exclaiming (sarcastically) that he is looking for an appropriate pig for a man of such (self) importance. The pig recipient is of course humiliated by the mockery, the undignified chase through the

hamlet, and by the huge pig that is eventually presented to him with maximum display, triumphant shouts, and resounding smacks of crotons on the part of the donor. But a 'gift' given cannot be refused, and the man humbly slaps the pig with lime powder and accepts it (no doubt inwardly seething with anger and shame).

Another form of competition for prestige and renown takes place through the firstborn. If a man's hand is pulled and he is presented with a pig in the name of his firstborn, this is both a blatant insult and a serious challenge to his reputation on the part of pig donor. The pig, of course, cannot be refused but the father of the firstborn may take immediate redressive action by taking the pig to the child's **baulo** loudly and dramatically instructing him to kill the pig and distribute the pork among all the men's houses. By consuming the pig, the father is demonstrating his wealth and strength, indicating that he has access to so many pigs that he can afford to express his wealth by feeding pork to the village. If the **baulo** does not kill the pig and distribute the pork as quickly as the father would like, the father sends him a burning ember from his hearth fire as a covert reminder that the slur on his firstborn's reputation is still walking around on four feet for everyone to see and comment upon, and that it must be eliminated now. Killing the pig and distributing the pork is an effective means of parrying the

blow to one's reputation and the competitive edge will be reclaimed by the insulted father at the next opportunity to present pigs. The man who insulted the firstborn will have his hand pulled and be presented, as in the preceding situation, with a **gaea malmalaea**, 'the pig of my anger', probably a huge tusked boar.

Each deceased, it will be recalled, was returned to his/her natal men's house unit with a symbolic 'gift' of wealth from the 'father of the croton' to the man selected as the 'owner of the dead one'. The 'owner of the dead' repays this pig by 'pulling the hand' of the 'father of the croton' and presenting him with a croton [pig]. This particular debt is now cancelled out entirely. However, the 'father of the croton' is also indebted to the 'owner of the dead one' for all the work the latter has accomplished on behalf of the deceased. The 'father of the croton' thus 'pulls the hand' of the owner of the dead one' and presents him with a large pig. This is the pig of **peŋpeŋa**, which compensates the 'owner of the dead one' for all his work and all the wealth he has expended throughout the mortuary ceremony in order to make it gloriously successful. The pig of **peŋpeŋa** is slaughtered and cooked by the 'owner of the dead one' and with this pork he feasts his family in recognition of their unceasing contributions of labour and of wealth to his enterprise.

Finally, each man in the sponsoring men's house 'pulls the hand' of his

wife and presents her with a pig called **taine aea pegepege**. This pig is a true gift from a husband to his wife, given in appreciation and recognition of the fact that without her valuable contributions the ceremony could not have happened, let alone been successful. His wife has indebted herself to her cognates in order to assist her husband in the accumulation of pigs and other items of wealth that he needed to compensate all his helpers (e.g., the masked spirit dancers and other assistants). His wife has produced the huge gardens of taro, and every day of the mortuary ceremony she has prepared and cooked the food which supplied the hundreds of meals that were provided to all the guests. Every afternoon his wife has dressed in her finest ceremonial attire and danced until dawn in honour of the **ulu**, and then spent the rest of that day preparing the food that her family, the visitors, and the **ulu** will eat that day and evening. Men say that ceremonials are "men's work" but they also say that "women are the backbone" of ceremonial work and without wives the whole affair would be impossible. The pig of **pegepege** that a man gives his wife is intended, men say, to compensate the woman for "her aching back and loss of sleep, for the sweat she lost while building and attending the hot stone oven, and for the smoke that blinded her and the soot that covered her skin". A wife, when she receives this pig, cooks it and shares the feast of pork with her family, thus compensating them for assisting her. If a man

does not have a pig to give his wife, he gives her the pig he received as his **peŋpeŋa** from the 'father of the croton'. The feast of pork he intended to provide his own family can wait, since it is more important that his wife be given the recognition she deserves and the opportunity to feast her own kin.

The 'pulling of hands' and the giving and receiving of pigs takes several hours to accomplish and it is well into late afternoon when the last hand is pulled. The only ones who remain in the dance plaza are the drummers and the **aulu** spirit-beings and, when the pig transactions are finished the drummers form a line, drumming and singing, to lead the pairs of **aulu** in a parade around the village. As they circle the village, men and women laden with gifts—sugar cane, bananas, coconuts, areca nut, taro pudding and pork, baskets, clay pots, ironwood bowls, carved canoe paddles, and much more—fall into place behind them to be part of the spirit-beings' last dance. The mortuary ceremony is ending and the **aulu** will shortly be sent away. All departures are small deaths, and people weep quietly, saddened once again by the memory of their deceased loved ones, and saddened by the departure of the **aulu** and the end of the joyous festivity and wealth of food that all have enjoyed as a result of the presence of these spirit-beings. The parade completes its circuit back at the starting point in front of the men's house and the drummers lead the **aulu** inside the enclosure for the last time. The

gifts of wealth are taken by the men and they too disappear inside the men's house.

The masked dancers divest themselves of their costumes. The feathered topknot is carefully removed, wrapped up and hidden for safe keeping in the rafters of the building. The skirts, croton collars and the supporting framework are heaped on the ground in the enclosure, and each mask is stood up on a pole in that area of the men's house that is the special place of each 'owner/father of the **aulu**'. Anyone who wishes to purchase an **aulu** mask, because they have been smitten by its elegant beauty, may do so. In this way people from Kilege or Kove purchase the rights to call forth the **aulu** at their own ceremonials. If the masks are not taken up by anyone, they too are relegated to the heap of defunct costumery on the ground. At this point, the men redistribute the feast of taro and pork and all partake of the pig of the **aulu**. After the men have eaten and shared tobacco and areca nut, they hide the taro pudding and pork in their large baskets so that undercover of darkness the feast of the spirit-beings can be transported home to their wives and children.

Before they leave, however, the **aulu** must be sent back to their origin place. To accomplish this, the material form of the spirit-beings is transformed into its immaterial essence. The costumes and masks are set



alight in a huge bonfire, and the physical manifestation of the spirit-beings is transformed back into its non-physical essence and, transported on the smoke and heat of the fire, the autochthonous beings return whence they came.

The mortuary ceremonies are finished, the spirit-beings are gone, the drums are silenced, the new men's house is allowed to fall into decay. The spirit-beings, the drums and the men's house will not be resurrected by this particular men's house unit until they next sponsor mortuary work in honour of those who have died since this ceremony ended. The exhausted guests gather up their belongings, truss their pigs to carrying poles, and return to their homes, from which they have been absent for weeks. When they arrive home, they will plant the crotons they received at the pig transactions and as the plant takes root and grows, it symbolizes wealth received, debts incurred, and obligations that were generated and regenerated 'on top of the dead'.

At the sponsoring men's house, all that remains to be done is to dismantle and burn the firstborn seclusion houses. This is the responsibility of the child's parents who must pay a pig to the man they select to tear down the house and set it alight, and they must provide a feast of pork in honour of the occasion. Needless to say, the child's parents (and everyone else in that men's house unit) are utterly impoverished—they have little food left in their gardens; they have no pigs—and this final ceremony must be postponed

until they are able to recoup their assets. The seclusion houses that were built while I was there in 1981 were still standing (although fallen into ruin) when I left the village in 1983.

### Discussion

I began this chapter with a brief overview of Kabana concepts of life and death, and pointed out that the Kabana do not perceive of life and death as mutually exclusive, logically opposed categories, but as a continuum. What is crucially relevant to the Kabana is the inextricably inter-related process of living and dying. Living one's life meaningfully is much more important than merely being alive (see Scaletta, 1985), and it is through living and dying that one generates new life (reproduction) and that which sustains life (production). This life process exacts its toll, however, and the generation and using up of one's self and resources results in decay and loss. The ultimate realization of this process of degeneration is death, and the expression of particular and personal losses occasioned by death are acknowledged and mourned during the three days of death rites.

Although living results naturally and necessarily in dying and all living things die, death is not the end; death is an integral aspect of life, and through death, life is regenerated. The continuity of life is ensured in the

processes of generation and degeneration whereby self and resources are not simply built up and used up, but are invested in others to be reclaimed and exploited by one's self during one's lifetime and by others after one's death. This whole process is epitomized by the concept of primogeniture and exemplified in the person of the firstborn as the focus of one's investments. The firstborn is the link between successive generations, between life and death. During mortuary ceremonies this link was demonstrated and celebrated when the child's life force, the substantive essence of past, present, and future generations was spilled on the dead in the presence of autochthonous spirit-beings.

Kabana mortuary ceremonies celebrate the continuity of life in the name of the recent dead; they do not celebrate death nor do they immortalize the dead. Mortuary ceremonies do not forge links between the living and the dead, such conceptual linkages, as I have pointed out, are symbolically and practically accomplished within the meaning and context of primogeniture. The dead, in whose name mortuary work is accomplished, link the living with the living and once those links are formalized 'on top of the dead one', the dead are just that, dead. As celebrations of life regenerated, mortuary ceremonies remember the dead and honour them as the source of ongoing relations among the living. The dead will be remembered as loved ones,

respected and honoured for their contribution to the perpetuation of life and society.

Remembering the dead and being saddened by personal loss is a very different thing from being dependent on the dead or immortalizing them as an amorphous category of ancestors or deities whose whim and whimsy must be swayed and propitiated by the living in order for life and society to be perpetuated in an orderly and meaningful fashion. The Kabana do not worship their ancestors, nor do they endow the dead with supra-empirical powers that they did not have in life. In life, those now dead invested themselves in others. At mortuary ceremonies, the dead serve as links between the living who regenerate elements of value in honour of the deceased and who, in the name of the deceased, invest these objects of value in others. The Kabana invest in the living not the dead, since the dead *qua* dead are no longer exploitable except insofar as they are the source of ongoing relationships among the living. Thus, (A) and (B) enter into relations of reciprocal self-interest and moral obligation by giving or receiving wealth in the name of a mutual deceased kinsperson. The relationship between (A) and (B), is (re)created through the deceased (D), but once formalized, the relationship is no longer dependent upon the third party (D) but exists in its own right between living individuals (A) and (B).

The recent dead have been well and truly honoured, and at mortuary ceremonies the "torch of life" has been handed on and "the sum of things is ever being replenished . . . by give and take" (Lucretius). Once those who have living memory of the dead are themselves dead, those memories fade, and those who lived and died in the distant past become simply 'people of long ago' (**panua mugamuga**). But the legacy of their living and dying lives on, immortalized in a perpetual personal, social and cosmic order and the ongoing processes of generation, degeneration and regeneration.

## CONCLUSION

My purpose in this document has been two-fold: first, to explore the concept of primogeniture as it exists among the Kabana and, second, to address a lacuna in the anthropological literature by providing a general ethnographic account of Kabana culture and society. It will be evident, at this point, that the concept of primogeniture is so central to the Kabana that to treat this concept as an analytic category separate from its broad ethnographic context would have been impossible. My descriptive analysis of primogeniture has necessitated, to a greater or lesser degree, the discussion of a variety of aspects of Kabana society and culture: social relations; concepts of gender and gender relations; marriage and procreation; subsistence techniques; concepts of value and the value of things; trade and exchange relations; the concept of renown and competition in an egalitarian society; concepts of life and death; myth, magic and sorcery; relations between human and non-human beings; and, not least, the context and meaning of ceremonial.

As Fortes points out (1974) special emphasis on primogeniture is found in societies that are economically diverse (nomadic, pastoralist, horticulturists, sedentary agriculturalists, industrial); in societies structured according to the principles of patrilineality, matrilineality, and bilaterality; in societies with all types of political organization; and in large scale societies with elaborate social and political organization. Anthropologically, it is of interest to note that the concept of primogeniture cross-cuts analytic categories, such as kinship or political organization, that are traditionally the basis for constructing typologies. In Papua New Guinea, for instance, the concept of primogeniture is found in highland societies (e.g., the Gnau, Hua, Sanio), river delta societies (e.g. the Murik), island societies (e.g., Bougainville, Mandok), and coastal societies (e.g., Kabana, Kove, Lakalai) thereby cross-cutting a distinction so often made in the Melanesian literature between "beach" and "bush" societies.

Based on his Tallensi data, Fortes (1974) discerned several regular and distinctive features of primogeniture that could be used as a framework for comparative research and applied this framework to the analysis of primogeniture in African family systems (1978). My analysis of primogeniture and its cultural significance among the Kabana has benefited from this original and ground-breaking study by Fortes. By way of conclusion,

I compare and contrast what Fortes views as the regular characteristics of primogeniture with the Kabana case.

The crucial feature of primogeniture, Fortes argues (1978:144), is "the identification by nomenclature and by social and ritual custom of the first born as distinct from the oldest surviving son or daughter." This is an extremely important point that should serve to alert researchers that primogeniture has some special significance in the culture under study. After all, birth order is an unexceptional biological fact, whereas the ideology that surrounds the firstborn is decidedly a sociocultural phenomenon. Among the Kabana, there are birth order terms for the firstborn (**lautabe**), second born (**atege**) and all subsequent born children (**ketga**), terms that are different from those designating the numerals one, two and three (**ede, rua, tol**). All firstborns are **galiki**, and Galiki is a name bestowed only upon firstborn girls. In addition, the Kabana have a system of teknonymy whereby parents are referred to and addressed as "the mother or father of X", where X is the name of their firstborn child. The Kabana also have an elaborate complex of beliefs and customs that focus only and on none other than the firstborn child.

Contra Fortes, however, the definition of "firstborn" need not be limited by the necessity for this child to be the actual surviving first issue of a union. As I pointed out, the concept of primogeniture is so central to the



Kabana that the vagaries of biology and the exigencies of fate are socially manipulated to ensure that everyone has a 'firstborn' child, a **lautabe**. Children are adopted, either before or after marriage, and that child is the 'firstborn' regardless of the fact that adoptive parents might later give birth to the first child of their union. The adoption is premised on the concept of 'shared blood' and by feeding the mother, the adoptive parents establish a *real*, not merely jural, kinship between themselves and their **lautabe** based on the concept of shared substance and on nurturance. If the firstborn child dies before parents have completed the ceremonial cycle in honour of the child, the second born is promoted to the position of firstborn and the ceremonies are completed. As I pointed out in this document, it is much more crucial to *have* a firstborn child, than to *be* a firstborn child.

The 'firstborn' is the creator of parenthood. The status of parenthood is desired as proof of sexual maturity and, as the anthropological literature attests, is the necessary prerequisite for jural majority and the political, legal and social benefits of adulthood. Parenthood is an achieved status that cannot be annulled and, as I have argued from the Kabana data, parenthood is an acquired status of singular importance that far outweighs the importance anthropology traditionally assigns to the sociological function of marriage. Marriages are fragile and easily dissolved by divorce; the alliances forged

between groups by virtue of marital bonds are only as strong as the union that created them.

This leads to Fortes' third point, that the firstborn is the individual whose existence formalizes crucial affinal and cognatic relations and is the individual through whom those ties are reckoned. This is clearly evident in the Kabana case, where social relations and the moral obligations that structure human relations are calculated in terms of shared substance. Affines and cognates are connected through the firstborn child in a network of reciprocal self-interests that take as their focal point the child the two sets of kin hold in common. And, among the Kabana, it is within this co-operative network of kin relations that competition for renown is waged.

The basic idea to be grasped in this context is that the firstborn is a "symbol of substance", a term I have adapted from Poole (1984). Substances such as blood, semen, bones, and spirit, Poole argues (p.192), are imbued with symbolic meaning the analysis of which permits the exploration of "the symbolic linkages among images of birth, death and rebirth...and how these cultural constructions are projected inward on the person and outward on a social and cosmological landscape to fashion an ideological sense of perpetual order." Among the Kabana, the firstborn is a symbol of substance *par excellence*, she is both the product and perpetuator of these vital

essences, and the ideology of primogeniture in Kabana extends to include the concepts of generation, degeneration and regeneration at all levels of abstraction—the individual, the societal, and the cosmological.

Although Fortes did not use the term "symbol of substance" he did note the cultural importance attributed to vital essences, or what he termed "mystical potency", and the belief that procreation depleted these forces—offspring are produced and cherished at the expense of parental powers and vitality. Based on this key concept, Fortes noted several additional characteristics pertaining to primogeniture: 1) the firstborn is the designated heir of parental wealth (and one might add, well-being); 2) the firstborn is the embodiment of psychosocial intragenerational conflict among members of the filial generation of which the child is the founder and head, and intergenerational conflict, a source of stress in filio-parental relations; 3) the firstborn is the harbinger of parental mortality; and 4) the firstborn is necessary to ensure parental immortality. Derived from his African data, Fortes labelled these insights "the syndrome of primogeniture" and assumed the origin of the syndrome of primogeniture in terms of Freudian psychology—particularly in regard to sibling rivalry and rivalry between parents and a firstborn child (e.g. 1974: 99; 1978: 147)—and argued that the structure and function of the beliefs and behaviours associated with the

syndrome of primogeniture is the way in which society contains and controls these potentially destructive libidinal drives.

I was unable to discern, among the Kabana, the kinds of psychosocial stress that Fortes isolated among the Tallensi. The Kabana do hold that procreation plus production deplete parental resources, and as I have shown, these resources are invested by parents in their firstborn child, but the Kabana do not therefore jealously guard themselves or their achievements from being usurped by their child. The firstborn is not in competition with its parents, nor is she/he denied political or social independence as long as her/his parents are alive. Every child is able to aspire to pre-eminence through the performance of ceremonials in honour of her/his firstborn, regardless of parental status, and adult children are not constrained by parental achievements and power or lack of same. Certainly, having successful or unsuccessful parents is a benefit or bane to children, but in the final analysis a reputation for renown is not inheritable and must be achieved through the individual realization of one's own capacities.

Neither was I able to discern among the Kabana, a pattern of latent or manifest sibling rivalry such as Fortes reports for the Tallensi:

As brother, and head of the sibling group he [the firstborn] is himself the target of ambivalent attitudes of deference to his seniority, mixed with competitive claims of sibling equality and familiarity. Sibling

rivalry is regarded as normal, though focussed particularly on successively born siblings who are assumed to hate each other (1974: 87).

Siblings, especially sisters, are for the Kabana the most important and perduring source of sustenance, be it moral support, labour, food, or wealth. The Kabana recognize the close bond and shared interests that exist between siblings and, therefore, the potential of the sibling group to combine their resources in order to attain, maintain, or enhance their level of achievement. My earlier discussion of the two brothers who called forth the bull-roarer to avenge a wrong done to the younger brother's firstborn child is one example of this combined potential. For this reason, same sex siblings (especially brothers) should not spend over much time in one another's company or sit in close proximity to one another. The assumption is that the siblings are joining forces, an eventuality which might give them a competitive edge over others. Fortes argues that sibling rivalry is "intrinsic" and "universal" and, in Africa, "these built-in tensions [are] most obviously made explicit in . . . avoidance and segregation customs" (1978: 147). Customs that circumscribe Kabana sibling relations are not designed to protect the siblings from each other, they operate to protect the interests of others *vis-à-vis* the sibling group.

The firstborn, because she is a firstborn and because of her seniority, is accorded respect by her younger siblings but, although she is the head and

founder of the sibling group, she is not given any formal authority over her siblings. Such an eventuality flies in the face of the Kabana ideal of egalitarianism, and firstborn or not, any one who attempts to control others for his/her own aggrandizement will be severely sanctioned. Successively born siblings are not "assumed to hate each other". This does not preclude, of course, the possibility that siblings will enter into disputes or that sibling groups will break apart as a result of irreconcilable differences. I am merely arguing that legitimate authority is not vested formally in the firstborn and therefore, among the Kabana, sibling rivalries are not the forum for power struggles (but compare Barlow 1984 and Lipset 1984). Competition for renown and prestige take place within the culturally approved forum of firstborn ceremonials and, to paraphrase an observation made by Rappaport (1968 :28), in any truly egalitarian society, such as that of the Kabana, there are as many "bigmen" and "bigwomen" (**maron**, 'person of renown') as there are men and women whose capabilities permit them to be 'persons of renown'.

The glorification of the firstborn is not lost on their younger siblings. A ten year old girl (the fifth of six children) visited me frequently to look at magazines and to admire the flora and fauna and life style of my culture that were pictured there. One time, while gazing at a picture of robin feeding its young, the girl pointed to the fledgling that was being fed and commented to

me that this bird was the firstborn. It was receiving parental attention and sustenance, the other fledglings were not. Some parents expressed to me that they made a conscious effort to treat all their children equitably because they were aware of the possibility that younger siblings resented the attention and honour bestowed on their elder, firstborn sibling. Other parents simply accepted this differential as the way things are and expected their younger offspring to do the same. Most parents did form a particularly close, affectionate bond with their last born child and these children are noticeably indulged and their childhood prolonged.

This brings up another point that Fortes notes (1978:141) but does not include in his "syndrome" of primogeniture, and one which is a part of the Kabana conce and should be taken into consideration in any analysis of primogeniture. This is the concept of ultimogeniture, the lastborn as "closer of the womb". Most Kabana parents remarked to me that their firstborn child was lazy, inconsiderate, and had no 'strength', despite (or perhaps because of) the work and wealth invested in them by their parents. As one Kabana parent put it: "Firstborns are useless; if you want anything done, such as gardening, daily chores, or expect a return on the expense of the educative process, you should look to your second, third, or subsequent children, for they are firstclass". These statements are in direct contrast to the ideal image of the

firstborn as a person of renown, prestige, authority, wealth, beneficence, and beauty.

Interestingly, the ineptitude of the male firstborn and the intelligence and worth of subsequent male siblings finds expression in Kabana morality tales (**ninipu**). The hero in these tales is always **Akono**, which also means 'orphan'. He is the youngest brother (the last born) of a group of siblings, and it is he who acts intelligently and morally and thus survives the trials, tribulations, and temptations that result in the downfall or death of his senior siblings. Jackson (1978) has drawn attention to the fact that in many cultures the culturally projected stereotypes of eldest/youngest, firstborn/lastborn are inverted in folklore and myth. This inversion points to a contrast between status position and personal capabilities, an awareness of the discontinuity between dogma and reality, or as Jackson puts it (p. 357) "the problem of achieving continuity or identification between what is socially necessary and what is individually possible". The problem, Jackson maintains (p.357), is resolved in myths where the two sets of ideas "are polarised, then crossed over, in order to achieve a simulcrum of a 'fit' between them....[these fictions] allow man to attain a vicarious mastery over his social universe." The problem that Jackson has isolated is also a part of the Kabana concept of primogeniture and a first child is rarely the ideal of the



stereotypic firstborn, and one way the Kabana at least acknowledge this paradox (if not resolve it) is through myths and folktales that assign the orphan/last born Akono with abilities not assigned to such marginal persons in reality. As noted earlier, I have not elaborated on this aspect of primogeniture as this would entail a lengthy analysis of the lastborn in reality and in mythology, taking me far beyond my main concern with primogeniture. However, the lastborn is the obverse of the firstborn, and concepts of ultimogeniture must necessarily be included as one of the characteristics of the concept of primogeniture.

My comments thus far have seemingly strayed far from Fortes' views on mystical potency, sibling rivalry, intergenerational rivalry. But this is not the case, for although the Kabana concept of primogeniture does not promote or result in these kinds of psychosocial conflicts, similarities can be found in other societies where primogeniture is important (see Barolow 1984; Lipset 1984). From the perspective of comparative research Fortes' characteristics must be generalized to take into consideration relations between and among elder/younger siblings and between parents and offspring as they are defined and constrained by the ideology of primogeniture. Whether or not concepts of primogeniture originate from or cause Freudian psychosocial conflicts as Fortes asserts they do, is a question for empirical research. It cannot be

assumed that primogeniture and such psychosocial conflicts are causally related or that the sociocultural elaboration of primogeniture is merely an elaborate superstructure functioning to mystify psychosexual drives.

This brings me back to what Fortes labels "mystical potency", or what is commonly referred to in the Melanesian literature as vital essence or life force. I have demonstrated how the firstborn is a symbol of substance and as such, links successive generations and constitutes the link between the living and the dead. Fortes maintains, and this study supports his assertion, that where primogeniture exists there will be found beliefs that mystical potency or essential substances are finite and depleted through reproduction and, I would add, production. The firstborn is the cause of parental decline and mortality and in the Tallensi case at least, the source of parental immortality since it is only the firstborn who can perform the necessary rites to ensure deceased parents of their ascension into ancestorhood. As I have demonstrated, the Kabana have no cult of the ancestors and are not concerned with a "hereafter".

Kabana concepts of mortality and immortality are bound up with the firstborn as a symbol of substance and with the generation, degeneration, regeneration continuum. Besides being a symbol of substance in the sense of substantive vital essences, the firstborn child is also a symbol of substance

in the sense that she represents the very "stuff" of her parents—their capabilities, accomplishments, their personhood and their self-respect. The Kabana theory of conception clearly indicates that grandparents (primogenitors), parents (genitors) and firstborn child are consubstantial, and firstborn ceremonies reinforce their consubstantiality. Parents *are* their firstborn, they invest their wealth and self in the child and the child is an exemplar of who and what its parents have proven themselves to be. Because the Kabana view the firstborn and its precedants as consubstantial, and because parents invest themselves in the child, the child is a resource embodying all that is the parents; a resource which they intend to (and do) exploit in their own interests. (Even the Tallensi case could be recast to show that parents invest in their firstborn child with the calculated intent of exploiting this investment after death in order to ensure they achieve the status of ancestors.) The concept of renown and the competition for relative status is the key feature of the ideology of primogeniture in Kabana culture and I have endeavoured to make this clear. I suggest that where primogeniture is an important sociocultural phenomenon it will be very much involved in concepts of and competition for renown, power, and prestige and that therefore, the relationship between the firstborn as a symbol of substance, and concepts of value and renown should be appended as a likely

characteristic of a concept of primogeniture.

Finally, I return to the first and crucial feature that identifies the concept of primogeniture, the fact that the firstborn is the subject of social and ritual custom. Fortes notes (1974) that he spent his "formative years" in the field of educational psychology, later entering anthropology by way of his study of the developmental cycle of the family among tribal peoples. Specifically, Fortes was interested in the developmental cycle of the family from the perspective of parenthood as it is "uniquely achieved with the advent of the firstborn" (p. 83). His studies led him to "realize what a central place the status of the first born holds in human social organization...[and] to see in a new light the conclusion of modern psychology and psycho-analysis to which Miller [his mentor] gave such prominence about the relationships of parents and children and of sibling and sibling" (p. 83). The conclusion to which Fortes is referring, is the epistemological foundation of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, namely, the assumed universality of the Oedipus complex and the causal effects of this complex on the nuclear family (and society), particularly as it pertains to father/son conflict. Fortes saw the Oedipal conflict as the key to understanding the "syndrome" of primogeniture and the special taboos, prohibitions and customs that (universally, he argues) devolve on the firstborn:

What is more, these customs and beliefs also give symbolic recognition to the ultimate sources of these inter and intra-generational tensions. They acknowledge the ineluctable fact that the continuity of society depends upon the eventual demise and replacement of the parental by the filial generation, and... enable the take-over to be dramatically legitimised at the crucial time of the parents' death, in revealing symbolic actions (p.147).

Clearly, Fortes has combined the Oedipal complex of Freudian psychoanalytic theory with the Van Gennepian model of *rites de passage* to arrive at his explanation of the special ceremonial and ritual customs surrounding the firstborn. I have already argued (although psychoanalysts might wish to construe my data and conclusions differently) that, no such psychoanalytic conflicts are evident in the Kabana situation. The point I wish to reiterate here is that the Kabana ceremonies for firstborn children and for the dead are not *rites de passage*.

All theories are based on epistemological assumptions. Van Gennep's model is based on a biological truism—maturation causes change; and on a metaphysical assumption—change is inherently destructive and thus must be contained and controlled in the interests of social order:

Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked upon as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings....For every one of these events

there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined...so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury (Van Gennep 1960: 3).

Van Gennep assumed that despite differences in detail, all ceremonies/rituals fit the "pattern of rites of passage" (p.191) and therefore all ceremonies functioned universally to affect or affirm various life crisis events. This claim to universality combined with, as Malinowski observed (1962), the "formal simplicity" of the model is extremely seductive, and the model itself has been subjected to little criticism or refinements since Van Gennep first published his study in 1909. I have argued throughout this document that despite an explicit focus on firstborn children and the dead and an implicit concern with the developmental processes of generation, degeneration, and regeneration, the Kabana ceremonies are not *rites de passage*. My argument is based on two primary considerations.

First, *only* firstborn children are the focus of such ceremonies. Firth (1956-57) raised the question that if ceremonies have the important sociological functions attributed to them, then why do only some children and not others pass through the series. Firth astutely points out that anthropologists have ignored the theoretical questions posed by such omissions (p.48). However, Firth is loath to give up the *rites de passage*

model and therefore explains these omissions with a "theory of representative status" whereby "one child stands as exemplar for others, a surrogate for the "childhood" of the family or even a wider social group" (p.49). Firth manages to accommodate anomalous features within the framework of the *rites de passage* model.

Firth's theory of representative status and the notion of the firstborn as exemplar provided me with a valuable insight into the ideology of primogeniture in Kabana society and I have adapted the notion of the child as exemplar. I depart from Firth (and Van Gennep) in assuming that Kabana ceremonies are *rites de passage* whereby others undergo stages of transition by proxy. I have shown conclusively that the Kabana ceremonials do not "function" to facilitate or mark the changing status of children into social adulthood or of the dead into ancestral deities. I have argued instead that the ceremonies are the medium through which young adults learn to become responsible, competent participants in their society. The ceremonies are, in this sense, a model for the processes of adult socialization, but this model does not fit the *rites de passage* tripartite "pattern", and this is my second reason for rejecting the model. The adults who are being socialized do not go through the three stages of separation, transition and reincorporation.

Having decided to reject the *rites de passage* model, I was presented

with the analytic problem: What are these ceremonies all about? Here again, both Fortes and Firth provided me with a clue to answering the puzzle. If, as Firth suggests, the child is an exemplar, the next logical query is: an exemplar of what? In his study of the family Fortes pointed out quite correctly that in studies of filio-parental relations "The accent is on the filial generation, with parenthood as the dependent variable" (1974:83). The results of this concern with children is evident in the plethora of anthropological studies that focus on the socialization of children, and the corresponding lack of studies that consider the socialization of adults. In fact, we seldom perceive that such a process occurs at all. Since Fortes was interested in parenthood and not children *per se*, he simply turned the model on its head and undertook to examine the filio-parental relationship from the perspective of the latter, holding children as the dependent variable. I have followed his example here.

When I asked my Kabana informants what their ceremonies were all about, they replied unanimously and without hesitation, that the ceremonies were performed in order to "raise the name of the firstborn". They then qualified their exegesis by pointing out to me that it is really the parents whose name is raised, it is they, not the child, who gain renown. Questions about ceremonies for the dead elicited a similar answer—they were performed to "raise the name of the recent dead"—but were qualified



somewhat differently as ceremonies that maintain or enhance the achieved reputation for renown of the *living* individuals who performed them. The ceremonies had nothing to do with the firstborn or the dead *per se*, these two categories of persons were exemplars of individual renown and the medium through which that reputation was to be acquired, displayed and maintained in a culturally appropriate manner. A reputation for renown once achieved, must be continually revalidated if it is not to erode. Instead of looking at the ceremonies from the perspective of what was being done to whom and why, I inverted the usual model and looked at what was being done by whom and why.

The data itself and informant exegesis determined my approach, and the insights provided by Fortes' inverted model and Firth's theory of representative status assisted me in formalizing the analysis. My analysis suggests that anthropologists should not be seduced too readily by the *rites de passage* model. The Kabana data present a counter-argument to the assumed universality of the form and function of ceremonies and rites. Examining ceremonial from the perspective of who is doing them rather than from the perspective of whom they are being done to, can further anthropological understanding of the meaning and context of ceremonial, the sociocultural environment in which it occurs and, most importantly, of the people who perform it in celebration of their complex humanity.

Fortes' fascination with primogeniture prompted him to a comparative study of the topic using as his paradigm the characteristic features of primogeniture that he discerned from his Tallensi data. My analysis of the Kabana data has benefited from and elaborated upon Fortes' paradigm. In recapitulating and discussing Fortes' features characteristic of the syndrome of primogeniture I have gone beyond what he considered those features were all about. As noted in chapter one, evidence exists in the anthropological record for the importance of primogeniture in other Melanesian societies. Unfortunately, this fascinating topic has been relatively ignored by researchers and where noted has not been treated as a distinct analytic category that warranted anthropological investigation and explanation. It is highly unlikely that the concept of primogeniture is developed in the same fashion and to the same degree in other cultures as it is among the Kabana. However, it is equally unlikely that the Kabana situation is culturally unique. Based on the Kabana data and my analysis of primogeniture, it must be assumed that where a concept of primogeniture is found, this concept has important sociocultural ramifications and theoretical consequences.

## NOTES

1. The drought during 1982-83 lasted 10 months and affected the entire northern coast of New Britain. The drought became so severe in West New Britain, that the Provincial Government spent thousands of Kina on famine relief, shipping water (especially to the Bali and Vitu Islands), rice, tinned foods, fresh fruit and vegetables to needy villagers throughout the province. People in the Bariai District survived the drought in better shape than others in the province because they had an abundant supply of sago palm ripe for processing. During this 'bad time' there was a constant stream of **sobosobo**, 'trade partners/kin', from the Kove, Kaliai and Kilenge Districts who came to purchase, barter, or exchange for sago flour and areca nuts with the people of Kokopo and Gurisi villages. Starvation was never a real possibility in Bariai, although eventually the signs and symptoms of malnutrition became evident, especially among the children.
2. Connell and Hamnett (1978: 233) point out that with the exception of a brief reference in F. Panoff's unpublished PhD thesis, *Maenge Gardens: A study of Maenge Relationship to Domesticates*, A.N.U., 1972, "There appear to be no contemporary references to sago production in New Britain." I intend to address this particular omission in the ethnography of New Britain in a future article on the sociocultural importance of sago palms in the Bariai District.
3. I am aware of the ethical problems involved in recording oral tradition, in particular, the fact that oral accounts of migration and genealogies are used by the owners of the tradition to negotiate claims to political authority and land ownership. Once written down, these claims are in effect 'etched in stone' and are not as amenable to negotiation and might, indeed, lead to formal litigation at some future time. My Kabana hosts are very much aware of this. Our work on oral history is far from complete and will not see the light of day in print until and unless our final result is acceptable to the people of

Bariai. For an excellent treatment of the ethical and research problems in the recording and analysis of oral traditions in Melanesia and some viable solutions to those problems, see Denoon and Lacey (1981).

4. Rick Goulden is currently engaged in writing a doctoral dissertation (University of Toronto) which addresses the issue of the influence of Melanesian languages in the ontogeny of Tok Pisin.
5. Muhlhausler (1974:37), points out that "pidgin languages are not unsystematic simplifications of the standard European language, but have a structure of their own and have to be learned. Nevertheless, a fair number of Europeans do not realize this and the language in which they address their servants is not the pidgin that is used among the natives. The latter in the case of New Guinea Pidgin [Tok Pisin] is an adequate tool of communication among the many speakers of New Guinea languages. Knowledge of Pidgin is equivalent to having access to modern life and being able to take part in all activities of full citizens and Pidgin is increasingly becoming a symbol of national unity."
6. Levy-Bruhl concludes his *Notebooks* by noting that language is a major obstacle in the study and explanation of mystical experience and participation since "...our philosophical and psychological terminology is cruelly inadequate, and continually risks falsifying the description."
7. These are special linguistic terms not related to the Kabana terms used for counting, thus, one = **ede**; two = **rua**; three = **tol** and so on. Compare Townsend (1971) who relates that the Sanio name their offspring by birth order terms, terms which are also used for terms of address and reference in Sanio kinship nomenclature.
8. The Lusi-speaking Kaliai of West New Britain also ascribe to this concept of a 'rope' as part of female anatomy (Counts and Counts 1983). The people of Kangwha District in rural Korea similarly describe a "milk rope" which the foetus holds onto and sucks on for sustenance

while in the womb (Sich 1981: 66). For a detailed discussion of the Kabana system of childbirth see Scaletta 1984b.

9. In his article "Sonjo Bride-Price and the Question of African 'Wife Purchase'." (1960), Robert Gray argues that "In many African societies, bride-price can hardly be analysed throughly without revealing its integral position in the exchange system, which would make it clear that wives are dealt with economically like other commodities" (p.56).
10. The Lusi, like the Kabana, maintain that semen, when it enters breast milk, is detrimental to the health and well-being of the nursing infant. Counts and Counts (1983) relate that according to Lusi conception theory, coconut liquid is analogous to both mother's milk and 'father's water' or semen; the production of mother's milk is stimulated by the woman drinking coconut liquid; and "coconut liquid is used as a substitute for milk in feeding children whose mothers are unable to nurse them because of illness or pregnancy" (p.52). The Counts go on to note that among the Lusi "... other relatives—especially mother's brothers—establish their ties of kinship by providing food for the child. The preferred food gift from mother's brother to sister's child is the drinking coconut. Men bring these coconuts to their sister starting soon after she has given birth. . . ." (p.52). It would appear that the father's water::coconut water::mother's milk analogy only goes so far in the Lusi scheme of things. The Kabana, however, extend the analogy to the point that new mothers ought not to drink coconut liquid at least until the child's back and neck are "strong", that is, until the infant is capable of sitting up unassisted; nor should an infant be given coconut liquid in lieu of breast milk until the child is about one year of age.
11. As Bourdieu (1982: 11) points out, "To make someone a challenge is to credit him with the dignity of a man of honour, since the challenge, as such, requires a riposte and therefore is addressed to a man deemed capable of playing the game of honour, and of playing it well. From the principle of mutual recognition of equality in honour there follows a first corollary: the challenge confers honour. . . .It is a chance to prove one's manliness . . .to others and to oneself. A second corollary is this:

he who challenges a man incapable of taking up the challenge, that is, incapable of pursuing the exchange, dishonours himself."

12. Zelenietz and Grant (1980:108) note for the Kilege that, "By initiating his children separately over a period of years, a man can institute *lekmas* relationships with several men."
13. Counts and Counts (1983: 50) relate that "Areca nuts. . . are associated by the Lusi with masculinity. . . and with male sexuality. . . illustrated in the saying that a woman whose husband gives her a double areca nut will bear twins, and in the taboo prohibiting a woman who has recently given birth from chewing areca mixture." The Kabana extend this metaphorical relationship so that areca nut is associated with male *and* female sexuality, especially those attributes associated with femaleness: blood, fecundity, (pro)creation, and growth.
14. Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of the lastborn is beyond the scope of this document, but see Barlow 1984, Jackson 1978, and Lipset 1984.
15. This ceremony is reminiscent of the story of Akono and The Fish related earlier, however, I neglected to enquire of my hosts whether they viewed the story and the ceremony as being in some way meaningfully related to one another.
16. The Kabana story of why men process sago reminiscent of one found throughout Papua New Guinea, including the Kabana (see p. 363), which relates that women were the original owners of the bull-roarer complex, and that men stole from the women the responsibilities for its ritual care and performance, responsibilities from which males cannot extricate themselves without losing face in the eyes of females. One wonders if New Guinea men regret the day they involved themselves in women's affairs, as is the case for Kabana men in regard to sago processing.
17. Leaves that are scented are a favourite medium for love sorcery since the spell is inhaled with the perfume.

18. Compare Pomponio's account (1983) of the calling up from the sea of the same type of spirit-being in Mandok.

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