

# Engendering Objects

Dynamics of Barkcloth and Gender among the Maisin of Papua New Guinea

Anna-Karina Hermkens



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Photograph cover: Detail of barkcloth skirt with plaited waist-belt and necklaces  
that visualize the wearers' clan identity.

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*Photo 1. Maisin woman and men performing their dance at a church feast in Sefoa, Cape Nelson, in 2001.*



## Engendering Objects

*This is a story about how we men and women got old in the past and why we are getting less old today. Long ago, our grandparents lived much longer. We used to put coconut oil all over our body, we decorated ourselves with necklaces and armlets, we put rings in our ears, and we wore good clothes, our koefi (men's loincloth) and embobi (women's loincloth), and that's why people would call us 'decorated people'. Because of these customary ways, we didn't die quickly. But nowadays, when we look at our children, they get old very quick, and that's because we left our old way of living. Why did we stop wearing our good clothes? We stopped wearing our koefi and embobi when Europeans brought their things for us to wear. Today, it is only for feasting that we put on our traditional clothing and decorations and dance.*

(Holan Kania 2001)<sup>1</sup>

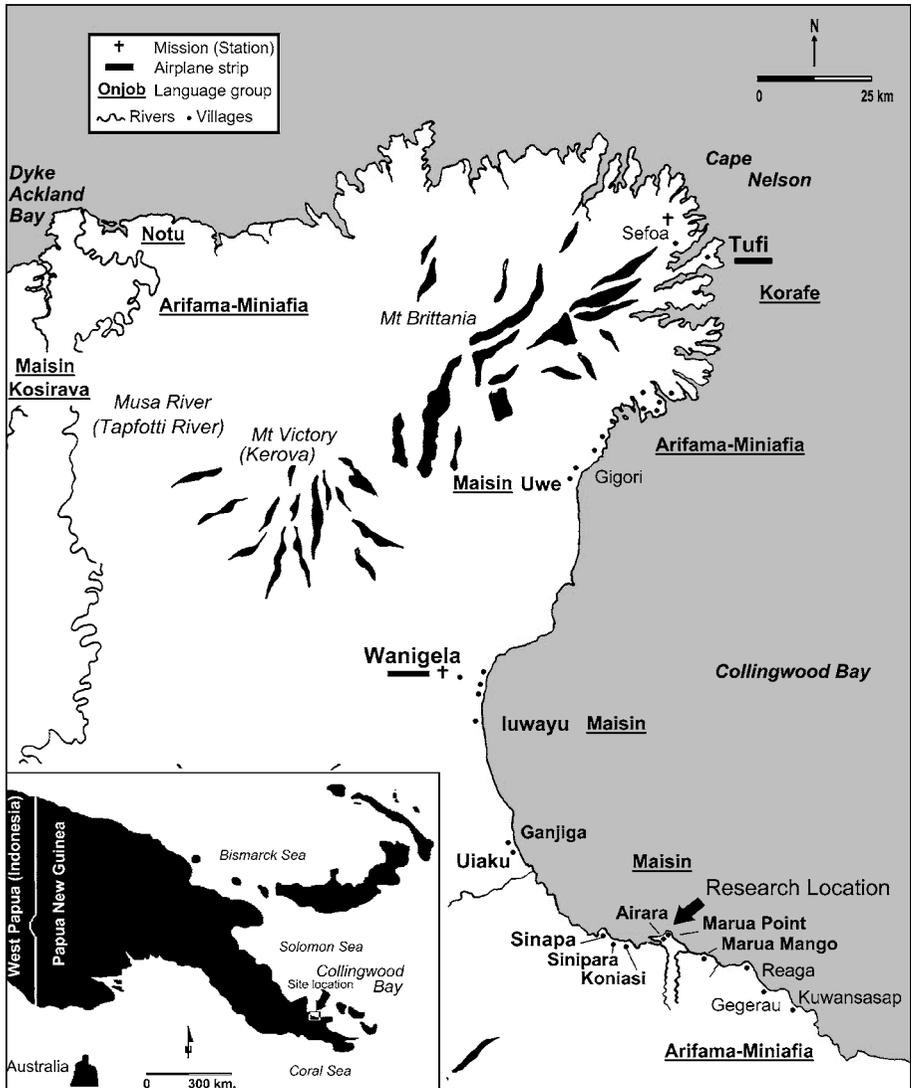
What happened to the 'good clothes' that were so important to Holan Kania? In this study I describe the history of barkcloth as used by the Maisin, a linguistic group living along the shores of Collingwood Bay in Papua New Guinea (Map 1). I follow the ways that Maisin women have been making barkcloth to produce, among other things, male and female loincloths. These clothes are not just garments: as in Holan Kania's narration, they are intertwined with gendered bodies, notions of aesthetics and wellbeing, and Maisin life in general.

Concerned with the way people and things are mutually constitutive, I describe the complex interweaving of barkcloth and identity. Barkcloth is analysed as a thing produced by Maisin women, as well as a subject-like object that structures and defines various layers of identity. These two points of view come together in the main topic of this book, which is concerned with how women's production of barkcloth, as well as its use, contributes to the formation of people's identities in terms of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe.

The two foci that structure my writings deal first of all with the role of women in transmitting and shaping identities through making and designing barkcloth and through its subsequent use and, secondly, with the role of barkcloth in defining people's identities. This twofold analysis reveals how people and things may actually merge, thereby dissolving the subject-object dichotomy and elucidating the dynamics of this relationship in relation to notions of identity. Barkcloth will

---

1 Narrated by Holan Kania, a 70-year-old Maisin man, father of many sons, grandfather of many grandchildren, and elder of his clan. He lives in the village of Ganjiga, one of the ten Maisin villages located on the shores of Collingwood Bay in Papua New Guinea.



Map 1. Collingwood Bay with Maisin, Wanigela, Miniafia, and Korafe villages.

guide us through Maisin past, present, and future and show how this fabric-like material constitutes the lives of Maisin men and women, and vice versa.

### Research Topic and theoretical setting

Being about people and things, the forthcoming chapters are devoted to how people use material culture to identify themselves and others. I tell many stories about the ways things are used in the formation of gender, personhood, clan, and tribal identity, and how things, in turn, can also visualise, construct, and change particular and sometimes conflicting identities. The purpose of this work is to shed light on these allocations and constructions of identity. In following the production

and consumption of one particular type of object, I analyse how these processes of material differentiation work in various domains of social life. The particular type of object is barkcloth, a fabric-like material obtained from the bark of a tree, also denoted by the Polynesian word *tapa* (Kooijman 1988: 15).

Barkcloth, or *tapa*, is made by Maisin women into meaningful things, in particular *embobi* and *koefi*. An *embobi* is a loincloth for women, and a *koefi* is a loincloth for men. Both are made of the inner bark of the domesticated, non-indigenous paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), which is beaten on a wooden log until a smooth and wide piece of cloth is obtained. The female garment is rectangular in shape and wrapped around the hips with a girdle, covering the thighs and the knees. The male garment is a long narrow piece of barkcloth worn between the legs and wrapped around the hips, one end covering the genitals and the other hanging over the buttocks. Among the Maisin, these loincloths are decorated with black outlined designs which are subsequently filled with red pigment. The result is a vivid display of meandering black-framed red lines on the white barkcloth.

Maisin people are not unique in their production and use of barkcloth. While the most well-known area for *tapa* is the Pacific, and especially Polynesia, *tapa* has also been made and used in Indonesia, the Philippines, Africa, and South America. Although many similarities exist in the various techniques used to make *tapa*, there are differences in both its production and use. For example, while Maisin women use wooden beaters, in other areas stone beaters are used to flatten the bark. And while Maisin men and women both wear *tapa* cloths, in other areas *tapa* caps, masks and loincloths are used by one of the sexes only.

In Collingwood Bay, the area of the present research, all linguistic groups – Korafe, Miniafia, Ubir, Onjob, Oyan, and Maisin – have been engaged in the manufacture of barkcloth. As with the Maisin, women belonging to these other groups have been the main producers of *tapa*. Other similarities involve the techniques of production, the use of barkcloth, and also many of the linguistic terms regarding *tapa*.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the particular style of *tapa* designs, with their typical black-edged, red, curving lines, can be found all over Collingwood Bay and up northwards along the Musa River (Mosuwadoga 1977) and the southeastern slopes of Mt. Lamington, in Dyke Ackland Bay, and in Oro Bay (Williams 1928, 1930; Schwimmer 1973; Schwimmer 1979). Both the Baruga-speaking people living in the Lower Musa River area and the inland and coastal Orokaiva people of Oro Bay have similar ways of designing *tapa*, and there are many similarities between their and the Collingwood Bay designs and uses of *tapa*.

Due to the quickly changing socio-economic and political conditions in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the Pacific, the production and use of barkcloth is under threat and in many regions has ceased altogether. Replaced by cotton textiles and Western-style clothes, it no longer has a major function as a garment. Although Maisin *tapa* has ceased to be a garment for daily use, it still has significant

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2 In addition to various customs, many words regarding the production of *tapa*, or *tapa* itself, are identical or almost identical. For instance, the Maisin call their *tapa* trees *wuwusi*, while Miniafia people refer to these trees as *watute*.

cultural value. Today, tapa is predominantly used as clothing during ritual and festive occasions and as a gift in ceremonial and barter exchanges. In addition, it has gained an important socio-economic value as a commodity due to being sold on local, and especially on national and international, markets. In the forthcoming chapters, the significance of these multiple uses of tapa will be elucidated, showing how tapa is intertwined with Maisin people's lives and in particular with their identities, in both past and present. Also, because of the general decline of tapa in Papua New Guinea, Maisin tapa has gained new importance. Today, Maisin women are the main producers of tapa, and many neighbouring and more distant cultural groups who have stopped manufacturing barkcloth, and also groups who have no tradition of wearing barkcloth, wear Maisin tapa as a 'traditional' garment. Maisin tapa is therefore crossing its local boundaries: in addition to its role in creating local identities, it is acquiring new value as a neo-traditional symbol of regional and even national identity.

'Maisin is tapa' was a phrase I often heard as I tried to find my way through the meanings of barkcloth among the Maisin. Indeed, especially in the village of Airara, where I did my research, it was evident that tapa is not just a traditional garment: it provides a link with the past and provides dreams for the future. The cloths and their black-framed, red-filled designs not only provide the foci of this book they also form a major and important line in Maisin society, history, and culture. Here, I build upon the idea that tapa functions as a material form on which people's dialogues and engagement with others, as well as with their environment, are visualised. I focus in particular on gender relations and the identities of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe that are constructed and re-enacted through the production and use of tapa. The main question of my research is:

*How does women's production of tapa and tapa designs as well as the use of barkcloth contribute to the formation of people's identities in terms of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe?*

By 'following the object' and how it is made and used in the 'performance' (Turner 1986) of life-cycle rituals, festivities, and exchanges, this interaction between people and things, and how they are mutually constituted, becomes visible. Tapa and its designs show how gender ideologies and the socio-material constructions of identity are performed, and as such developed, established, and contested.

### *Methodologies*

According to Foster (1995), two divergent ways of thinking have structured Melanesian anthropology. While the 'New Melanesian Ethnography' emphasises the radical differences between Melanesian and Western forms of sociality (for example: Strathern 1990; Mosko 2002), the 'New Melanesian History' (for example: Thomas 1991) highlights similarities generated out of shared histories of colonialism and capitalism (Foster 1995: 2-3). Foster synthesises these two divergent trends in his analyses, arguing that both 'historical' and 'ethnographic' approaches are required in order to understand how people perceive particular rites

as a means of reproduction.<sup>3</sup> He argues that ‘the frames of reference in terms of which Melanesians act are separate in their historical and cultural origins, as the Melanesian Ethnography would keep them’ but that they are ‘conjoined in ways that inform how people think about, talk about, and do what they are doing in the present, as the New Melanesian History would stress’ (Foster 1995: 5). I follow Foster in combining both methods of research in my focusing on the contemporary and historical production and uses of tapa.

By ‘following the thing’ (Marcus 1995, 1999), I do not only address the way tapa is made and used as dress, gift, commodity, art, etc. Issues of identity come to the fore as well since these are, at least in a Maisin setting, very much intertwined with the production and use of tapa in various domains of Maisin life and its exterior setting. In fact, despite following one object only, I provide a multi-sited ethnography (ibid.) as the life-history of tapa is intertwined with those of people in both the past and the present. Tapa is intertwined with colonial and postcolonial travellers, migrations of Maisin people, myths, conflicting claims of ownership, gender relations, and notions of identity. In short, tapa is intertwined with Maisin life. Thus, by following the object, I ‘follow the people’, but also their ‘stories’, ‘conflicts’, and ‘biographies’ (ibid.). This does not imply that I will provide a complete historical ethnography of Maisin culture. My main goal is to show how the production and use of tapa is intertwined with gender, personhood, clan and tribal identity. This implies that several aspects and features of Maisin culture, such as practices of sorcery and healing, the importance of Christianity, and other historical and present-day practices and processes are not discussed.<sup>4</sup> Tapa structures this book as it is the production and use of tapa, in both past and present, that generates the themes of each chapter.

In line with archaeologists, I argue that objects can be regarded as materialised practices of human behaviour and interaction. As such, the study of historical and ethnographic artefacts enables us to gain a better understanding of social relationships. In practice, objects may even reveal relationships between identity and patterns of adaptation, change, and stability (Spector 1998: 146). As we will see, during the past hundred years Maisin tapa has fulfilled many purposes for diverse people. These dynamics become visible when one applies both diachronic and synchronic methods of analysis. By combining various types of research – ethnographic fieldwork, literature, archival, and museum research – synthetic links between written, material, and oral forms of expression can be created. It is with this methodology that I hope to provide insights into the dynamics of identity and the transformation of things among the Maisin.

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3 Mosko (2002) combines ‘New Melanesian Ethnography’ with a historical perspective but remains ‘faithful’ to the main argument of the ‘New Melanesian Ethnography’ by stating that Melanesians have their own specific form of sociality, which deals with issues such as property and commodities from their own, non-Western point of view.

4 See Barker (1989, 1990, 1992, 1993) for an analysis of practices and processes related to the interplay between Maisin indigenous beliefs and Christianity.

### *Theoretical setting*

Ethnographically, this study makes a contribution to Melanesian and in particular Collingwood Bay studies, an area that has been relatively neglected by anthropological scholars.<sup>5</sup> John Barker (for example: 1985, 2004, 2008) has been conducting long-term research among the Maisin, especially in the village Uiaku. Anne Marie Tietjen, Barker's partner, also conducted research in Uiaku (for example: 1985, 1986, 1998). A few other scholars have been engaged in research in Wanigela (Stephens 1974; Underhill-Sem 2000; Egloff 1979; Bonshek 2005), among Miniafia people (Wakefield 2001), and among Korafe tribes in and north of Collingwood Bay (linguist Farr 1974, 1999; and anthropologist Gnecchi-Ruscione 1991). In addition, a few reports have been written about the presence and production of tapa cloths among the Maisin (Anonymous 1973; Barker and Seri 1986; Regius 1988; Bonshek 1989; Tiesler 1993) and in Oro province in general (Schwimmer 1979). Recently, the elaborate barkcloth paintings made by Omie women, living along the southeastern slopes of Oro province's Mt. Lamington, have triggered attention from museums and collectors around the world. No research has been done into the dynamic relationships between Collingwood Bay and/or Maisin, barkcloth, and formations of identity.

One crucial aspect of this study is its critical appreciation of some of the generalised anthropological notions concerning Melanesian gender relations and the relationships between people and things in particular. Instead of placing men and their wealth at the centre of analysis, women and the objects they produce are taken as the point of departure (see also Teilhet-Fisk 1995; MacKenzie 1991; Weiner 1992; Bolton 1996; Walter 1996). However, this does not mean that I ignore the activities and practices of men involved with making and using tapa. I am primarily interested in the interactions between men and women and how dialogues of gender may be revealed by analysing tapa as an object produced by women.

The emphasis on tapa largely derived from the Maisin people themselves, but it was also instigated by my own interest. This choice becomes clearer when one considers that, despite the interest of early collectors and the tribal art market in Polynesian and Melanesian tapa, there are few anthropological studies on tapa in Melanesia. Surprisingly, most of these studies deal with barkcloth made by men, or tapa that is used in male-dominated rituals (for example: Williams 1928, 1940; Meyer 1992; Fajans 1997). It seems that tapa produced by New Guinean women, which in general is not as conspicuous as the items made by men, has been neglected by anthropological scholars. This is confirmed by Kirk Huffman (1996), who points to the 'invisibility' of Vanuatu barkcloth in anthropological studies dealing with this region. Maureen MacKenzie (1991: 21) makes similar remarks concerning the

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5 In this thesis I mainly address New Guinea. Due to European imperialism, the island of New Guinea was divided into a western part (now known as the Indonesian provinces of West Papua and Papua), previously part of the Dutch colonial empire and currently under Indonesian control, and an eastern part (Papua New Guinea), which was divided into a north-eastern German and a south-eastern British territory. This eastern part became an Australian mandate territory before receiving its independence in 1975.

absence of string bags in anthropological studies: 'Wrongly presumed to represent only the feminine in a male dominated world it was not considered worthy of sustained anthropological attention'. The importance of barkcloth as an essential form of material wealth and the locus of women's strategies, power, and agency was made clear by Annette Weiner (1992: 47). It is striking though, that Weiner's and other studies on barkcloth focus predominantly on Polynesian tapa.

In contrast to Melanesian barkcloth, tapa from Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa has been studied extensively (for example: Kooijman 1988; Kaeppler 1995; Teilhet-Fisk 1995; Hooper 1995; Neich and Pendergrast 1997; Geoffroy-Schneiter 2000). Some scholars point to the 'lack of technique' among Melanesians and the 'highly developed technique and sense of quality' achieved by Polynesian tapa artists (Tiesler 1992: 6), who often use a stencilling technique. However, the importance of Melanesian tapa becomes clear when one observes the extended use of barkcloth in this area (Geoffroy-Schneiter 2000: 314). In contrast to Polynesia, where tapa has rarely lost its flat form, Melanesians have been manufacturing three-dimensional barkcloth masks, capes, carrying bags, hats, etc. Their meanings and decorations vary accordingly and overlap, as well as exceed, those of Polynesian tapa.

Within a Pacific setting, one of the major variations entails the gendered ways of making, designing, and using tapa. In contrast to the female-produced tapa of Polynesia, in Melanesia both men and women have been making tapa. For example, in West Papua barkcloth was used in many regions, although produced with different techniques, made from both domesticated and 'wild' trees, and consumed in a manifold of ways. It was made and used in the Bird's Head Peninsula, along the north and south coast, and even in the interior parts of West Papua, although the most well-known tapa comes from Lake Sentani and Humboldt Bay on the north-eastern coast.<sup>6</sup> Across the border in Papua New Guinea, the technique of making tapa seems to have been predominantly practiced along the coastal areas, although it has been made in the highland provinces as well.<sup>7</sup> The Elema people of Orokelo Bay (Gulf Province) were especially famous for their huge barkcloth masks, which were made and used by men (Williams 1924: 39; Williams 1940; Wirz 1934; Neich and Pendergrast 1997: 139-40). On the islands of Manus, New Ireland, and New Britain, tapa was also made and used. In fact, it is mainly the tapa

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6 The use of tapa in West Papua is mentioned for, among others, the Bird's Head Peninsula (Vink 1968; Thoonen 2005), Geelvink Bay and the north-east coast (Bink 1896: 50; De Clercq 1893: 47; Galis 1955: 25; Rosenberg 1875: 89; Van der Goes 1862: 118-19; 160; 172; Coorengel 1879; Van Hasselt 1886: 578; Van der Sande 1907: 38; Wirz 1928, 1929; Peltier 1992; Hoogerbrugge 1995; Hermkens 1996), Mimika (Pouwer 1955: 17; Rawlings 1913: 57; Wollaston 1912), and for some of the mountain tribes (Le Roux 1948: 156).

7 Although sometimes very restricted in its use or manufacture, tapa is mentioned in the western and southern highlands (respectively, Aufenanger and Hültker 1940: 11, 167; Vicedom and Tischner 1943-48: 96-97; and Williams 1940-41; Busse and Araho 1993: 58). North of the Sepik River, barkcloth has been made, among others, by Abelam women (Gardi 1962: 92; Hauser-Schäublin 1989: 104-07). In the interior of Morobe province (Bjerre 1956: 92) and along the coast, especially in the Huon Gulf near Lae (Bodrogi 1953; Neich and Pendergrast 1997: 133, 134), tapa has been made and used by both women and men. And in the Western Province (Chalmers 1903: 120; Landtman 1927: 23; Saville 1926: 55), Gulf Province (Williams 1940: 190, 241-45, 321, 344; Wirz 1934; Neich and Pendergrast 1997: 139), and Central Province (Williamson 1912: 201-03), tapa has also been produced and used.

from the latter area that has received attention from collectors and ethnographers. Famous for their large barkcloth masks are the Nakanai and Baining people of New Britain (Gunn 1997; Neich and Pendergrast 1997: 136-39; Fajans 1997). These masks, and the tapa loincloths worn during dance ceremonies that celebrated birth and other life-cycle events, are made by male craftsmen and worn by men (Fajans 1997: 185; 241-42).

In short, it appears that in West Papua mainly women seem to have been producing the cloth whereas in Papua New Guinea men have been largely involved in its production as well. In most cases where men have been making and/or painting tapa, the cloth is often included in rituals for magic, healing, and male initiation. Further, in those areas such as Lake Sentani and Collingwood Bay where women are traditionally the main producers, we see that, as soon as tapa paintings are commercialised, men enter the production process (Hermkens 1996, 2007c and 2011). So within a broader perspective, we can see that it is the use of tapa that genders it, not the material itself. In a local context, barkcloth may be defined as women's or men's work, or even both, depending on its socio-cultural significance and use. As we will see in the Maisin case, these valuations and uses change. Questions therefore are: how, when, and by whom are objects such as tapa gendered in terms of production, use, and identity?

Studying Maisin barkcloth can reveal new insights into its production and use, and its socio-cultural significance. As Annette Weiner (1992: 47) argues, 'Women are by no means universally the producers of cloth, but their important roles in these activities are found worldwide as is the symbolism of human and cultural production that is associated with cloth and its production'. I take this insight as a point of departure and provide new data and interpretations, revealing the social significance of tapa and also women's roles as the main producers in the reproduction of Maisin life. However, I do not automatically presume that the analysis of objects made by women will reveal domains of female power as Weiner (1992) suggests (see also MacKenzie 1991: 22). In fact, I want to show how the study of 'cloth' reveals dynamics of the, sometimes silent, dialogues that have been taking place between women and men, and between people and things like tapa.

By taking tapa as my point of departure, I also want to contribute to the study of material culture in, especially Melanesian, anthropology. As already argued by others (Bowden 1984: 445; MacKenzie 1991: 22-23; Ter Keurs 2005), objects have up until recently been outside mainstream anthropological analysis despite the interest of scholars such as Boas (1927) and more recently Lévi-Strauss (1982) in bringing objects into anthropological theory and practice.

The anthropological approach to dealing with things has to a large extent been informed by the Western division between art and artefacts (for example: Boas 1927; Fraser 1962: 13; Layton 1991; Miller 1994: 111), a classification that has, in my point of view, brought about distinctive theoretical perspectives and methodological analyses. The first category of objects (i.e. art) has been approached from an aesthetic and/or a communicative viewpoint in which semiotics and structuralism are used to explain these objects of art as cultural phenomenon (for example: Boas 1927; Forge 1979; Schwimmer 1990; Price

1989; Ter Keurs and Smidt 1990; Gerbrands 1990; Layton 1991, 2003; Morphy 1994). In contrast, studies of artefacts have mainly focused on technology, form, style, and/or function. Examples of such analyses are museum and archaeological studies, but anthropologists have also focused on these aspects, placing emphasis on, in particular, the exchange of things and their socio-economic and cultural significance (for example: Mauss 1990; Lemonnier 1986; Judy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002). More recently, anthropologists interested in the study of things realised that this division between art and artefacts is limited, as are the various approaches to it. They offer plural and holistic ways of analysing the relationship between people and the objects they produce (for example: Locher 1990: 34; MacKenzie 1991; Bolton 1993; Miller 1994: 129-30; Gell 1998). In particular, Alfred Gell (1998) paved a new way for looking at things. He advocated the need to step away from the previous aesthetic and semantic analyses of art/artefacts, introducing a new perspective through his argument to analyse 'the agency of things'.

Unfortunately, these classifications have first of all guided scholars to focus on particular types of objects only, and subsequently to analyse them from specific and often limited points of view. For example, an emphasis on objects of/as art has guided anthropologists to study especially male-manufactured objects, claiming that 'primitive man' attributes productions like weaving and pottery to 'inferiors (i.e. women)', while 'arts' such as sculpture were reserved for men (Fraser 1962: 13). Although people working in the Pacific have reacted against this dichotomisation (Teilhet 1983: 46; Weiner and Schneider 1989; MacKenzie 1991; Bolton 1993, 1996), scholars interested in material culture have still tended to focus on the more visual and dominant male 'arts' like sculptures (for example: Bowden 1984; Kuchler 2002; Campbell 2002) or tapa masks (Fajans 1997). Artefacts made by men and used in male-dominated performances have equally received significant attention (for example: Malinowski 1987; Battaglia 1983; Lemonnier 1986; Sillitoe 1988).

The role of objects made by women in New Guinean societies has received little scholarly attention. In fact, Annette Weiner's analysis of Trobriand Island women's skirts and banana-leaf bundles (1977, 1980, 1983, 1989), Maureen MacKenzie's analysis of Telefol string bags (1991), and Lissant Bolton's study of plaited mats made by Vanuatu women (1993, 1996, 2001, 2003) are the major studies conducted so far. These scholars analyse objects that would not be classified as art but as artefacts, objects that are predominantly assigned to female realms of production and use. Weiner tries to demonstrate that women's banana-leaf bundles and skirts, neglected by earlier anthropologists, are in fact important aspects of Kula exchange, representing domains of female power (1980, 1983). Inspired by Weiner's urge to study 'female' artefacts, MacKenzie shows how string bags are complex social products that provide a model for both sexes to explore and comprehend their existence. Bolton's studies show how women, mats, and landscape are interconnected, elucidating the central position of both mats and women on Ambea Island (1996, 2003). She adequately demonstrates how the production of plaited mats is intertwined with women's knowledge, notions about kastom, as well as with agency (2003). As mentioned by Christian Kaufmann (1997: 146), Bolton and also Annie Walter (1996) have 'rediscovered'

plaited mats made by women, thereby acknowledging the importance of these objects in Vanuatu societies. These analyses have contributed significantly to our understanding of how women's objects, however insignificant they may look to an outsider, are important elements in Melanesian societies and reveal insights into the dynamics of local gender relations.

Weiner predominantly focuses on the economic properties of bundles and skirts in exchanges, arguing that these female objects represent women's wealth and power by situating both women and their objects in the cosmological domain of Trobriand society (1983: 20). However, as already argued by Margaret Jolly (1992), such an analysis places women and their objects outside time and history. It fails to address how women's power results from 'the relation between the interior world of the Trobriands and the exterior world in which it is situated' (Jolly 1992: 57). The fact that women control the production and distribution of 'cloth' or other artefacts does not automatically imply that women have a high status and/or power in their society. Somewhat later, Weiner (1994: 397-98) acknowledged that 'this power may be skewed in particular ways ... but the extent of the symbolic density in cloth and women's involvement in its production and control are a measure of how this gender-based power is organized'.

This was taken up by MacKenzie, who emphasised the ontology of string bags as being a construction, a complex social product. She thereby acknowledges that both men and women contribute to its production and social significance. By following the cultural construction of the string bag, she suggests that this object functions as a 'model' or symbol that reflects the social dynamics of gender relations and helps men and women to understand their respective roles in society. Although MacKenzie shows how notions of identity and gender relations are reflected in the making and use of string bags, she does not investigate how these notions might be contested and changed by making and using these artefacts. She ends her analysis by stating that changes in gender relations are reflected in the new types of string bags people carry (MacKenzie 1991: 207). But it remains unclear to what extent string bags have contributed to this change, and as a result, they are reduced to mere reflections of socio-cultural processes.

In following Alfred Gell (1998), I argue that although people produce objects, objects also produce people. As pointed out by Gell (1998), objects are like persons and form part of the socio-cultural processes. In fact, he considers 'art' as a system of action to change the world. Objects have the capacity to influence and change people's actions and thereby 'act' as agents. So objects do not so much communicate as do.

### *Thematic structure*

People and things are mutually constitutive (Miller 1994: 18). According to Michael Schiffer (1999: 3), the nature of human existence is such that we cannot 'abstract "interpersonal" and "social" interactions from human life and study them apart from the artefacts in which they are embedded'. In line with these perspectives, I

take the materiality of human life as a point of departure. This implies people and things are meaningfully intertwined in the historical and daily practice of their co-existence as well as in their respective constitution.

The use of life-histories or biographies reveals how objects are entangled with histories of specific people. Throughout this book, the stories of Maisin men and women and their entanglement with barkcloth will guide us through Maisin past and present. Women's daily activities and biographies will especially provide 'insight into the small details of existence which together add up to what it is like being a woman rather than a man' (Strathern 1987: 17). By following the life histories or 'biographies' (Kopytoff 1986: 66) of both tapa and people in historical and ethnographical settings, these materialities of people's identities become clear. In the following chapters, multiple biographies are revealed in analysing how tapa is intertwined with people's life cycles and their socialities, as well as with colonial and postcolonial agents venturing into Collingwood Bay, such as missionaries and NGOs like Greenpeace.

In following the production of string bags, MacKenzie emphasised the integral relationship between processes of production and consumption (1991: 25-26). In doing so, she adopts a processual approach, wherein both production and consumption, referred to as 'cultural construction', create string bags as social products. However, by ignoring the effects of this cultural consumption on people, she implicitly argues that the 'cultural construction' of things does not affect the realm of people, thereby adopting a dualistic model of people and things rather than the non-dualistic one she strived for (*ibid.*).

By following the 'cultural construction' of tapa, I emphasise the interactions or dialogues that take place between people and things. Claudine de France (cited in Nijland 1989: 92-102) shows how people use material, physical, and/or ritual techniques in order to relate to their environment. As such, it is not so much linguistic communication that creates meaning as the practices of doing. In a similar way, the material techniques involved in making tapa can be regarded and analysed as women in physical dialogue with their socio-cultural environment. Since people, things, and their environment are interrelated and mutually constitutive (Ingold 2000; Kingston 2003: 682), the making and using of tapa simultaneously shapes both the maker and user. This property of tapa, to determine people's behaviour or 'body techniques' (Mauss 1979: 97-123) is more than just physical.

The production of tapa reflects how tapa is intertwined with women's (and men's) minds. Following the life history and technical biography of tapa reveals how the transfer and transformation of gendered forms of knowledge take place. As in Weiner's Trobriand and MacKenzie's Telefol cases, Maisin women and men make use of different forms of knowledge. While men control the narratives dealing with their clan history, women are responsible for the transfer and reproduction of their fathers' and husbands' clan emblems (*evovi*), which are designed and painted on tapa (chapter 3). In doing so, they reproduce the patrilineal clan, and simultaneously they also re-enact notions of gender and gender relations.

The general theme of gendering people through things will also be addressed by looking at objects that inscribe the body with ideas about sex and gender: clothing, ornaments, and tattoos. Clothing is one of the most visual and dominant materialised gender codes in our world (Hendrickson 1996; Barnes and Eicher 1992a, 1992b; Weiner and Schneider 1989). As we will see among the Maisin, wearing an *embobi* is related to norms and values about female sexuality, about how women should behave, and about how they should physically move. It is linked with clan identity and with the life-stage and identity of the girl or woman who is wearing a particular *embobi*. Women's facial tattoos and ornaments such as earrings, necklaces, and bracelets similarly reflect a woman's clan identity and life-stage. These objects and designs show 'how closely social forms and cultural norms can affect the person and personal identity' (Jansen 2002: 7, 1997; Barnes and Eicher 1992a). In addition, they are closely related to ideas about the female body and even constitute its materiality. This will become clearer to the reader when I discuss the use of tapa and ornaments in contexts of self-decoration, such as church festivals, and in the context of life-cycle rituals during which the body is decorated by others. The differences in these practices not only lie in the act of either decorating one's own or the 'other' body but also in the identities that are constructed through these acts and performances (see also Strathern 1979; O'Hanlon 1989; Sillitoe 1988).

As is shown, practices of decorating and performing the body are related to social relationships in which the exchange of things is equally crucial in the establishment of identity. In fact, practices of body decoration, especially within the context of life-cycle rituals, are intertwined with practices of giving. The use of tapa as both ceremonial dress and as a gift exemplifies this. According to Marilyn Strathern (1990: 221), objects actually circulate within relationships in order to make relations in which objects can circulate. This implies that both people and things simultaneously create and are created through the relationships within which they are situated. This view of Melanesian relations and identity is often associated with gift exchange, whereas commodity exchange is identified with Western forms of exchange and sociability (Strathern 1990; Mosko 1992, 2002). However, in following other scholars (for example: Liep 1990: 178; Thomas 1991; Brown 1992: 128; Keesing 1992: 130-31), I feel more inclined to regard this theoretical division as essentialising forms of exchange that occur simultaneously in one ethnographic setting (see Bloch and Parry 1989). Maisin people, like many other Melanesians, have multiple understandings of exchange, using tapa both as a gift and as a commodity in various types of exchanges and transactions. The question is: how do Maisin people conceptualise themselves and their tapa in these contexts of production and use?

## **Engendering people through things**

'Maisin is tapa!' These few words not only indicate the importance of tapa for both men and women; they also indicate how the Maisin identify themselves with this fabric. This implies that people allocate notions of identity to this particular

object. Indeed, the topic of this book – how tapa as an object made by women constructs various identities – emerges not only from an anthropological interest in the relationship between things and people’s identities but also from Maisin people themselves. One of the main sub-questions in my thesis becomes: how do the Maisin relate their identity or rather identities to tapa? In order to answer this question, a historical, ethnographical approach is necessary, but it also requires a deeper questioning of what ‘identity’ is.

For analytical purposes, I make a distinction between personhood or person and the individual self. The first is perceived as a social category in contrast to the individual, which refers to self-awareness or consciousness of the self (Mauss 1996: 12; La Fontaine 1996: 124) and which among the Maisin seems to denote a world of inner feelings and experiences (see also Epstein 1999: 50; White and Kirkpatrick 1995). Here, emphasis is placed upon formations of Maisin social identity in terms of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe. These various social identities are located within each individual. In following feminist and postmodernist scholars, these identities are considered as dialogical and fluid. Identities are created in dialogue with one’s self, with other people, and with the structures that shape society as well as with one’s experiences within it. Depending on the context, the emphasis on one or several of these identities may shift. As is argued by Ewing (1990), people ‘project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly’. Linda Alcoff (1994: 105) emphasizes that these social identities are constructed both in and through mechanisms of power, which are created through discursive and also non-discursive practices. Since people actively engage in these practices, they also reproduce their multiple social identities, although they are constrained by these same practices.

According to Judith Butler (1993: 2; 1999), identities are always performative. ‘Performativity’ is not a singular act but a ‘reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names’ (ibid.). Performativity is analysed as a predominantly reiterative material practice through which discourse produces and visualises the structures and effects they stand for. Thus, people are not only constituted by the act of description but equally, or perhaps even more forcefully, through their material, physical, and ritual acts while engaging with their environment. People’s identity is performative through the particular ways that they act, move, and decorate their bodies in specific times and spaces. Thus, the formation of identity requires a material practice.

The main arenas in which performative acts are played out are events and happenings such as meetings and exchanges. Following Victor Turner (1986), these arenas are analysed as cultural performances in which values, power relations, and identities come to the fore. Especially within Maisin culture, in which non-discursive communication plays a central role, identities are primarily constructed and contested within meetings, dances, rituals, and exchanges. In these performances, people mutually constitute each other and themselves through visual and material differentiation and reference, providing an excellent ground for studying constructions of identity.

Although the performance, for example the prescribed wearing or exchange of *tapa*, pre-exists the performer, the act lends itself to manipulation by the performer. To a certain extent, Maisin women can choose whether they want to portray themselves as a member of their father's or of their husband's clan, and so they can play with their performance of clan identity. Identity is thus performative in the sense that dominant discursive and material practices are reproduced through the body. However, identity also entails a performance and, as such, agency by the performer herself. It is especially through such material practices and performances that certain Maisin identities like gender are constructed and contested.

This emphasis on materiality implies that agency is distributed through a series of objects and acts which are separated in time and space (Gosden 2002). As a consequence, people's identities are not only relational but also 'distributed' in both their social and material surroundings. How then, as Chris Gosden (*ibid.*) questioned, do people maintain a coherent unity of identity? It may be tempting to seek an answer to this question using the concept of gender as being the main organizing tool by which people define themselves and others. Although according to Judith Butler (1990: 279) gender 'cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior "self", whether that "self" is conceived as sexed or not', it does construct a self. 'As a performance which is performative, gender is an "act", broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority' (Butler 1990: 279). Gender thus creates an illusion of a coherent unity of identity – as being either a man or a woman – but then, what does it mean to be a Maisin woman? Is there something 'essentially' female within all women, or is womanhood culturally defined?

### *Gendering Maisin men and women*

So, how does one become what one is or, as some scholars argue, what one does? The answer to this question depends upon the theoretical framework to which one adheres, and this is shaped by the never-ending debate on 'nature versus culture'. Essentialists and cultural feminists believe that women, who can be defined by their activities and attributes in the existing culture, exist as an entity (in Alcoff 1994: 71). In contrast, post-structuralist scholars claim that women as such do not exist, claiming that 'there is no essential core "natural" to us' (Alcoff 1994: 103). Since I believe that social practice has shown that differences among women can in no way be reduced to an essentialist view, I support the view that the construction of specific gender categories is embedded in social discourse (Butler 1993, 1999; Alcoff 1994: 105) and in daily practice. As Butler (1999) argues, women are neither born nor made; they appropriate the cultural prescriptions on sex and as a result 'do'. Since both women and prescriptions are socially and historically grounded, experience itself is neither individual nor fixed but 'irredeemably social and processual' (Fausto-Sterling 2000: 4).

After having been accused of not paying attention to gender issues at all, social sciences such as anthropology and archaeology have adopted the concept of gender without much scrutiny. However, the concept of gender – the socio-cultural meanings and values inscribed on sex (Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998;

Andermahr et al. 1997: 84-86) – has the danger of it being used without a thorough analysis of what these socio-cultural values and meanings are. While gender may shape an illusion of a coherent unity of personal identity in some cultures, this conflation of gender and identity can be absent in others. Likewise, the role of gender in structuring people's behaviour is dependent upon specific socio-historical settings. As Strathern (1990: 61) warned, 'It remains a matter of ethnographic verification whether or not "being a man" or "being a woman" occupies an organizing-representational, systematizing place in the classification of behaviour'. Furthermore, 'the gendering of people, actions and things within cultures is always implicated in differences other than those of sex' (Andermahr et al. 1997: 85). Ideas and representations of masculinity and femininity are constructed in and through distinctions such as ethnicity (language), class, and age, and not only by sex, being either male or female (ibid.).

Alcoff (1994: 107) argues that the 'category of "woman" has to be theorised through an exploration of the experience of subjectivity, as opposed to a description of current attributes'. However, do these 'experiences' provide any insight regarding what it means to be a woman or into how subjects are constructed as gendered beings? The way subjects experience 'their gender' does not necessarily provide any information on how differences are produced and gender is constructed. The opposite is also true: ideas about gender do not reflect the ways in which gender is experienced. However, they are not opposites; discourse and experience are intertwined in a continuous and dynamic process. Throughout this book, it will become clear that gender is 'not deep-sealed at the moment of conception' (Knauff 2002: 26). People's gender is constantly reworked and redefined by their social environment and also by themselves. Therefore, what it means to be a Maisin woman needs to be seen as being embodied in both individuals and groups of people, both in representations and in individual and collective experiences.

So how do Maisin define women and men, or what are the differences between a Maisin woman and a Maisin man? The latter question was put to 37 inhabitants of a small Maisin village in Collingwood Bay, Papua New Guinea. I intended it to be a simple question, an introduction to the rest of the questionnaire concerning the division of labour and gender roles. From my own background, I expected the answers to be focused on the physical differences between women and men. However, I was in for several surprises. Most people had difficulty in answering my question: 'How can I explain a woman and a man?' was one woman's horrified response. Three people even argued there were no differences at all.<sup>8</sup> In total, 28 people were able, sometimes after a long reflection, to tell me about the differences between a *sauki* (an adult woman) and a *tamati* (an adult man). Instead of what I had expected, the majority (89%) of the respondents told me that men and women think and act differently. The differences in thinking concern both the amount and the way of thinking (*mon-seraman*). Only eight people mentioned body features as differences between the sexes, mentioning the presence or absence of breasts and

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8 In total, five non-responses were encountered and one very long answer that ended up miles away from the intended question, having nothing at all to do with the differences between women and men. I must admit, I lacked the courage to ask this person the question again.

beard or the boldness of men. Only four respondents mentioned that the sexual organs of men and women are different. It appears Maisin gender themselves and others not so much on the basis of sex but on other differences.

In addition, material distinctions that gendered people became apparent. Ten respondents pointed out that men are distinguishable from women because they wear a *koefi* (a male loincloth). As several respondents argued, women are women because they wear an *embobi* (a female loincloth). In fact, the four respondents who did mention the sex differences between men and women made immediate reference to the wearing of either an *embobi* by the female sex or, with regard to the male sex, the *koefi*. Another visual 'sign' mentioned was the women's facial tattoo or *ro-bua*, as it is called. As one informant put it, 'A woman has a facial tattoo, and that shows she's a woman!' Therefore, the gendering of people through material things such as barkcloth and tattoos seems to be more important than their biological differences.

Since only women wear *embobi* and have facial tattoos, the link between object and sex seems apparent. The facial tattoo and the *embobi* visualise femininity, while the *koefi* and trousers visualise masculinity. As in many other cultures, these things mark the sex of a person. The linking of the reproductive organs with the wearing of either an *embobi* or a *koefi* by the respondents mentioned above would seem to confirm this. However, the gendering of people by objects is not so clear-cut. *Embobi*, *koefi*, and tattoos mark a particular group of people. They mark women and men but not girls and boys. As such, they also visualise a particular life stage of an individual. Or, as one informant put it, if girls are not tattooed, the difference between young men and young women is not visible. Since girls are no longer tattooed since the 1990s, obviously, there are other visual and physical signs that constitute a marriageable girl and differentiate her from young men. The fact remains that *embobi* and *ro-bua* not only differentiate women from men; they also visually differentiate among females.

So why do the Maisin rarely refer to the biological or 'natural' differences between women and men? Are they too Christian to mention 'private parts'? I do not think so. It appears that, among the Maisin, people's behaviour is much more significant than the so-called 'natural' sexual differences. As a result, I try to avoid 'the assumption of natural difference that Westerners locate in the bodily constitution of men and women' (Strathern 1990: 35) by focusing on how the Maisin conceptualise differences between women and men. These differences are represented in manifold ways, through manifold discursive and material 'symbols' such as barkcloth. The (en)gendering of people and things is addressed by analysing the performative nature of identity, thereby acknowledging people's agency. I do this by describing the production and use of tapa and by examining how Maisin people relate this object to gender, personhood, clan, and tribal identity within their historical, geographical, and cultural setting.

## Maisin setting

Maisin villages are situated along the shores of Collingwood Bay, between the Solomon Sea and the Owen Stanley Range, encompassing Mt Suckling (3,676 metres) and a dormant volcano, Mt Victory (1891 metres). The research (from 2001 – 2002 and in 2004) on which my PhD thesis is based was primarily carried out in the Maisin village of Airara and the adjacent settlements of Marua Point and Marua Mango. These hamlets, as well as the villages of Koniasi, Sinipara, and Sinapa, are located in the south-eastern part of Collingwood Bay, close to the southern border of Maisin territory. During my stay, I regularly visited these latter villages as well as the villages of Uiaku and Ganjiga. Incidental visits were made to Yuayu and Uwe, located in the northern parts of Collingwood Bay.

Maisin people, however, have not always lived on the shores of this beautiful bay. It took several decades, long journeys, and harsh fighting before Maisin ancestors settled on the coast. While one group of Maisin, the Kosira (or Kosirava) people, stayed in their small settlements within the swamps of the Musa basin (Strong 1911: 381), another group decided to travel down to the shores of Collingwood Bay. Departing from their place of origin, the Lower Musa River, these Maisin clans often travelled in pairs down to the sea. They were not the only ones who made this kind of journey. Miniafia- and Korafe-speaking people were on the move as well, and on occasions the three tribes met, fought, became friends, lived together, split up again, and travelled further.

When one makes a similar journey today, the histories of such settlements become visible. Signs of human occupation are revealed by coconut trees, which were planted on the beaches by previous generations. Descendants of these Maisin, Miniafia and Korafe ancestors have also planted their landmarks, coconut trees, and built their houses. Travelling along beaches with swaying coconut palms and among hamlets consisting of sago-leaf rooftops, one easily gets the impression that the shores of Collingwood Bay are fully taken up by settlements. This changes as one moves south and passes the last row of Miniafia villages near Uwe, the most northern Maisin village. Continuing southward, the number of hamlets declines. After spending several hours in a bobbing dinghy, passing the ruined docks of Wanigela, one finally enters Maisin territory.<sup>9</sup>

The most central and largest Maisin villages are Ganjiga and Uiaku, separated from each other by the river Viyova. These two main villages are also collectively referred to as Gorofi, the old Maisin village founded by Maisin ancestors, which was located near the present Uiaku village. In contrast, the southern clusters of villages, as well as their inhabitants, are often referred to as Sibō, which means ‘deep’ or ‘far out’. Travelling ‘far out’, that is south-eastwards along Collingwood Bay, one passes these Sibō villages of Sinapa, Sinipara, Koniasi, and subsequently Airara and Marua, the latter consisting of two hamlets, Marua Point and Marua Mango.

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9 Wanigela consists of twelve settlements with inhabitants who speak Ubir (Austronesian), Oyan (Austronesian), Aisor (Papuan) and Onjob (Papuan). The historical name for Wanigela is Wanigera. In this thesis, the current spelling and pronunciation are used.

Maisin people have created exchange networks with their various linguistic neighbours. These networks were more extended and extensive in the past (see Chapter 2). Today, Maisin barter with Wanigela, Miniafia and Korafe people living along the coast as well as with Biniguni people living inland on the slopes of the mountains. The exchange of tapa plays a crucial role in these networks. It not only enables the acquisition of 'foreign'-produced objects but also creates opportunities to meet potential marriage partners, despite the cultural and especially linguistic differences that exist between the exchange partners.

Maisin villages consist of a homogeneous cultural group of people, although linguistic differences exist as well. The Maisin language combines grammatical features from both Austronesian and non-Austronesian sources and as a consequence has been classified as mixed (Strong 1911: 381). More recently there is a growing consensus that Maisin is an Austronesian language with Papuan influences (Wurm 1982: 66; Ross 1996). The linguistic diversity in Maisin villages derives from the fact that, in addition to Maisin speakers, some clans that live among the Maisin speak Korafe (Papuan) and Onjob (Papuan). On the other hand, Maisin clans live among Korafe and next to Miniafia (Austronesian) clans. It is therefore not surprising that, although speaking different languages, these linguistic groups to a large extent share a similar cultural complex.<sup>10</sup>

Today, about 1,200 Maisin live in the Collingwood Bay area of Oro Province (Population Census 2000), although their number fluctuates due to the movement of people between the villages and towns like Alotau and Port Moresby. In such urban areas, many Maisin have found either permanent or temporary residences, often for work and/or study. Those without work predominantly depend upon the goodwill and money of working relatives to provide for their daily needs, including housing. It comes therefore as no surprise that several young Maisin men have succumbed to criminal activities in order to gain access to money and goods. The lives of Maisin people living in urban areas contrast sharply with those living in Collingwood Bay.

### *Food and surroundings*

Among the mangrove bushes, which especially dominate the central and southern coast of Collingwood Bay, coconut palms mark the stretches of beach where Maisin people have built their houses and villages. Situated at the backs of the villages are swamps, and behind them are gardens and rainforest. While the swamps are dreadful, humid places and a threat to health due to the numerous mosquitoes they harbour, the rainforest is a shady and lush green environment that provides Maisin people with food and building materials. Plots of forest are burned, cleared, and transformed into gardens that predominantly contain bananas, taro, and sweet potato, with additional vegetables such as pumpkin, tomatoes, and green beans. Sibon people also plant tapa trees, known as *wuwusi* (the paper mulberry tree), in

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10 Maisin, Miniafia, and Korafe people share similar social, ritual, and political customs as well as material culture. These similarities are reflected in the language, with many words denoting key concepts and artefacts being similar.

their food gardens, while some Gorofi people manage separate *wuwusi* gardens. Many Airara people take pleasure in enhancing their gardens and garden houses with colourful and fragrant flowers, making them a very agreeable place to work and sleep.

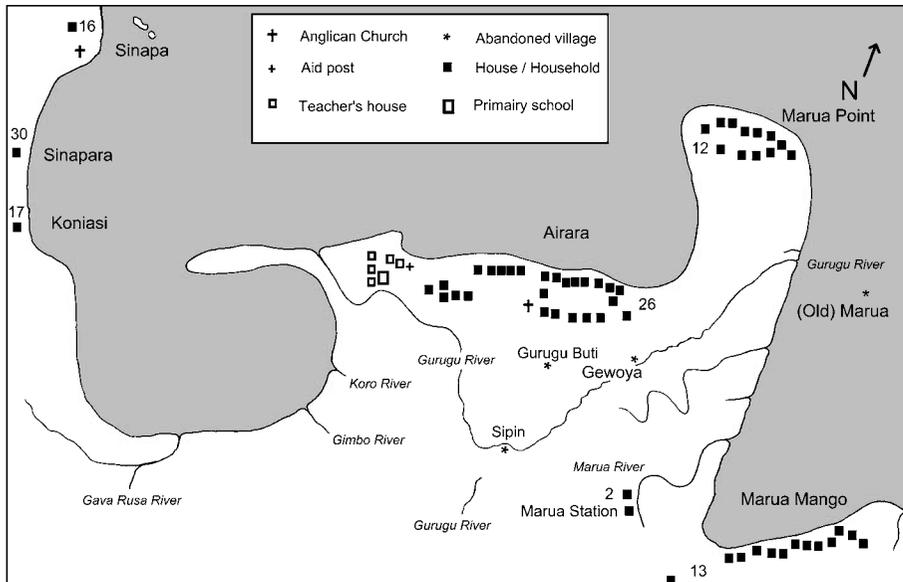
The staple foods are taro in the dry season and sweet potato in the wet season. These seasons are respectively referred to as *yaa ari kindi*, 'sun time', and *borun ari kindi*, 'rain time'. Between May and November, the south-western winds bring dry and cool air accompanied by rough sea and spring tides, while during the wet season the northwest monsoons usually bring heavy rainfalls, causing rivers and the lower gardens to be flooded. Given these seasons, Airara people usually have at least two gardens, one situated on lower ground (medium forest) and one on higher ground. In addition to crops obtained from their slash-and-burn gardens, Airara people process wild and domesticated sago. Wild sago palms predominantly grow in wet and swamp-like environments, while the domesticated sago, lacking the long and painful thorns characteristic of its wild sibling, is grown close to the villages on drier and more accessible ground. People predominantly rely on sago in times of food shortages, although it is an essential foodstuff in most ceremonial exchanges. In Airara, sago (*baya*) is usually 'killed' (*baya naw'i*) – as some Airara men say – by men, although in some instances women might beat and wash it.<sup>11</sup> In a similar manner as pigs are killed and slaughtered, men kill sago. They chop the sago palm down, cut it open, beat and remove the sago fibres – its intestines – wash and squeeze them, and finally bake the sago residue. Once the blocks of sago are wrapped in banana leaves and transported back to the village, the sago is used as a gift or prepared by women in ceremonial or private dishes.

Mangroves and the Solomon Sea provide other food. Airara women are the main suppliers of shellfish and crabs that are collected in the mangroves. This is not a completely hazardless task since crabs are notorious for their sharp and strong claws that might leave one's fingers badly cut. The sea provides Maisin people with their major source of protein: fish. Fishing is mainly done by men, especially deep-sea fishing and fishing with nets. Early in the morning or at night, Airara men go out to sea (but never very far) in their outrigger canoes. Women sometimes go out fishing with lines or throw their lines from the shore, although this seems to be restricted to the Sibon villages as women do not fish in Uiaku and Ganjiga (John Barker: personal communication). Additional sources of protein are wild and domestic pigs – the latter being small wild pigs raised in the village – which are generally only prepared during ceremonies and festivities and as such mainly eaten in the context of exchange.

Due to the relative isolation, Sibon people have no regular access to imported goods such as rice, tinned fish, tea, coffee, and sugar. Some Marua and Airara men have tried to set up a small trading store by buying goods in the relatively nearby cities like Alotau and selling them at a profit in the local villages. While a few men have succeeded in keeping such businesses alive, others have lost their

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11 As I witnessed and was told by informants, if there are no male relatives to beat sago, a shortage of food may compel women to cut and beat sago in order to feed themselves, their children, and other close relatives.



Map 2. Sketch of Sibio villages showing Airara and adjacent villages (not to scale).

profits and goods due to demands from non-paying relatives and to other types of mismanagement of the money and goods. The few remaining stores in Marua and Sinapa have only a small supply of goods. After a trader comes back with new goods, his supplies are commonly sold out in a couple of weeks. The owners are dependent on the small cargo boats that connect Collingwood Bay with Lae and Alotau and, since this connection is neither reliable nor frequent, trading store owners do not regularly travel to buy new supplies.<sup>12</sup> Another consequence of this isolation due to malfunctioning logistics is that fuel prices and also the prices of sugar, rice, and all other imported goods are much higher in the Sibio villages, and to a somewhat lesser degree in the Gorofi villages, than, for instance, in Wanigela or Tufi, where people have easier access to the ‘outside’ world due to the presence of airstrips. In addition, whereas Uiaku and Ganjiga women organise and attend a market twice per week, Sibio women do not regularly sell their garden produce or fish at a market. Instead, Airara women exchange their produce among themselves rather than selling it to each other.

### *Settlement*

As noted previously, the current settlement on the beach with gardens at the back is, according to Maisin people, a relatively recent phenomenon. Travelling down from the Lower Musa River where they originated, Maisin people were not

12 During my one-year stay in Airara, such cargo boats only anchored about five times near Airara. This low frequency is partly caused by the dry season, during which only limited sea transport is possible because of the heavy winds and large waves. Another reason why the owners of these cargo boats did not regularly sail into Collingwood Bay might be the relatively low revenues, as business in this area is far less developed than, for instance, in Milne Bay Province or more to the north in Oro Bay.

accustomed to a coastal settlement pattern. Prior to residing along the shores of Collingwood Bay, Maisin claim to have built their houses further inland, with each ensuing generation slowly migrating towards the coast (Map 2).

Maisin villages (*wakki*) today vary in their settlement patterns and use of space, but all consist of several patrilineal clans, referred to as *iyon*, who live together but also apart from each other. Each *iyon* occupies a particular space in a specific village, which is bounded by certain markers such as coconut and betel-nut palms or other bushes that are known to everyone. Members of the same *iyon* live opposite and next to each other, often with a clearing, called a *varo*, in the centre. In Airara, the central clearing in the midst of each *iyon* runs almost throughout the entire village, connecting the three clans and the church (Map 2).

Airara is the second-largest Sibon village and consists of 26 households and approximately 200 inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> But as in the other Maisin villages, the number of inhabitants fluctuates continuously.<sup>14</sup> Especially men regularly travel between the villages and provincial towns, often leaving their wives, children, sisters, and mothers behind. This seems to have been the case even in the past. Both the missionaries stationed in pre-war Uiaku and Wanigela and the patrol officers visiting Airara after the Second World War reported the structural absence of adult men, leaving predominantly women, children, and elderly people in the villages (Uiaku and Wanigela Mission log books; Patrol Reports 1959-60, 1967-68: 6). In fact, in the 1960s it was reported that 50 per cent of the Airara men were absent, leaving 87 people in the village (Patrol report 1959-60: 3). The people absent were reported to be either away for work or visiting friends, but the education system equally has been forcing many young people to leave their village to continue their education in towns like Popondetta. Naturally, this movement of people between villages and towns brought many changes, in both the cultural and the material life of Maisin people.<sup>15</sup> Among the latter changes was the gradual decline of *embobi* and *koefi* as daily attire, being almost entirely replaced by Western dress since the 1960s. Especially in the relatively small villages such as Airara, this structural flow

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13 Sinipara is the largest Sibon village (30 households and 212 inhabitants), followed by Airara, Sinapa (16 households and 123 inhabitants), Koniasi (17 households with 117 inhabitants), and the two Marua villages (together consisting of 25 households and 171 inhabitants). The Gorofi villages of Uiaku and Ganjiga are the largest Maisin villages, with 80 households and 500 inhabitants and 44 households and 314 inhabitants, respectively (Population Census 2000). The population of the villages seems to have been growing; in 1953, Airara had 88 inhabitants, Sinapa had 79, Sinipara had 123, Uiaku had 426, and Ganjiga had 173 (Patrol Report 1953). In addition to the growth due to better health care, the return of people who had stayed in town after finishing their education in the 1950s and 1960s may also account for this demographic increase.

14 In 2000, Airara had 206 inhabitants (102 males and 104 females) living in 27 households (Population Census 2000). In 2001, I found 26 households and 58 adults (defined as married or formerly married individuals) living in Airara. In June 2004, when I briefly returned to Airara, there were only 24 households in the village due to deaths and people's movements to other villages. In a similar way, the census of 2000 registered 16 households and 110 inhabitants living in Marua Mango (referred to as Marua no. 2 in the census) and 9 households with 61 people living in Marua Point (referred to as Marua in the census). In 2001 – 2002, I recorded 13 and 12 households, respectively.

15 In addition to people moving between villages and towns, people also move among villages. In 2001, I witnessed a complete household moving from Airara to Marua Mango due to arguments. In 2004, several households from Marua Point had moved either to Marua Mango or further inland, settling in their gardens.

of people has caused discontinuations of various knowledge systems. The decline in knowledge among young women with regard to the depiction and meaning of tapa clan designs is but one example (Chapters 2 and 3).

Although small in comparison to the Gorofi villages and even Sinipara, Airara is the only Sibon village with a school and an aid post, and as such it receives students and, if the aid post is staffed, patients from the surrounding villages. The primary school provides education up to grade 6, although in 2001 – 2002 only three grades were taught. In contrast to the school in Uiaku, which is attended by a relatively large number of children and offers grades 7 and 8, the Airara school seems to cope with structural problems such as shortage and long absences of teachers. Both the Airara school buildings and the houses of the school's principal and teachers, which are situated at the Koniasi end of Airara village, have been built and are being maintained by the children's parents. The school and teachers' houses are separated by a large grass field that is used for school events and sports such as soccer, which is practised by both children and adult men's and women's teams. Another sport that is frequently played, especially by the adolescents of Airara and Marua, is volleyball. These games provide a meeting ground for boys and girls, and also for adults and even for different linguistic tribes who meet during the annual Collingwood Bay soccer tournament.

The aid post and the adjacent house for the medic are situated near the school and next to the school principal's house. For most of my fieldwork period, this aid post was not staffed, and people were forced to travel to the aid post in Ganjiga or to the field hospital in Wanigela, which is at least one day's journey by outrigger canoe.

### *Social structure*

As in other relatively egalitarian societies in Papua New Guinea, like among the Arapesh (Tuzin 2001: 127), jealousy, envy, and gossip play an important part in Maisin people's daily lives. Hierarchical relationships mainly exist by differentiating by age and sex. Male elders are highly respected, and the most senior man of a clan is in English referred to as 'chief'. In practice, however, he has no ruling powers since decisions are made by all the men of a clan or a village. Maisin refer to the relationship between elder and younger as *rora-tere*. This 'opposition' structures relationships between people and, as a consequence, their behaviour and expectations. Elders are in general highly regarded and treated with respect. They are the ones who have knowledge about their clan, the land, and their ancestors. They represent the clan, and they are allowed to speak first. All the younger people, and especially tere – the younger brothers – are expected to show respect, learn from the elders, and provide services for them. A similar kind of relationship exists between the two types of clans that make up Maisin society, the so-called Kawo and Sabu clans. The Kawo clans make decisions while the Sabu clans put these into practice, therefore complementing and depending upon each other.

Among women, similar age-based hierarchies exist. Age differentiation between women is labelled as *yei-fin*, whereby the elder sister is referred to as *yei* or *auyei*, meaning 'my elder sister'. Women married into the same clan call each other *auyei*

or *aufin* according to the relative status, which depends upon when they entered the clan and their age. A woman who has just married into a clan therefore calls the women earlier married to her husband's brothers and cousin-brothers *auyei*. It also depends, however, on the kinship relations that may exist between the women married into the same clan. For example, a woman may be called *aufin* by some of the clan 'sisters' because she only married recently into the clan, but if her brother happens to be married to one of her clan sisters' mother's sister, she will have to be addressed using the proper label and referred to as auntie (*yo*), as elder.

Hierarchical relationships exist between a man or a woman and their in-laws. A married woman will never call her sister-in-law by her real name; instead, she will refer to her as *wevi* (sister-in-law).<sup>16</sup> She will display the same amount of respect to her husband's other relatives by using particular language and avoiding their real names in addition to showing behavioural respect by working for her in-laws and making sure they are properly taken care of and fed. In short, relationships of seniority and respect (called *muan* or *sabu*) are intertwined with kinship relations, which are often very extended and complex, sometimes even tracing back to relationships established by the clan ancestor. Everybody knows exactly her or his position with respect to another person, although most will have difficulties explaining exactly how a particular relationship came into being, which sometimes leads to conflicts, especially when ownership of land is involved. The rule of exogamy and a preference for not repeating previously conducted marriages implies that a woman cannot marry into clans that her mother and grandmother got married into. As a result, kinship relationships now exist between all clans and between almost all people.

The most intrinsic and structuring hierarchical relationship among Maisin people exists between the sexes, which is reflected in the kinship structure and the daily division of space and work. Maisin societies are patrilineal and patrilocal, and to a certain extent dominated by men's decision-making. Unlike in many other New Guinean societies, however, men and women no longer live separately, and interaction between the sexes occurs on different levels and occasions, although the division of work and space is an underlying concept that structures their interactions and their activities. Maisin men are considered to be higher up in the village hierarchy than women. One of the most important qualities a Maisin woman should have is showing respect to her husband and other men, both discursively and physically. When foreigners arrive (whether male or female), meetings are held, or communal meals by the clan or village take place, the women sit apart from the men. In most cases, the men sit on one of the elevated shelters and are served by women. When the men have been served, the women attend to the children, and finally they serve themselves at a separate location away from the men. In doing so, they give the best and the largest amount of the food to the men.

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16 Out of respect, people call their affines *rawatamati* (father-in-law), *rawasauki* (mother-in-law), *kauwara* (brother-in-law), and *wevi*, or they use synonyms for their affines' true names. This latter practice is also evident in the way people re-name objects and substances that have to be treated with respect, or are too dangerous to be called by their real names.

While Maisin men are responsible for relatively few productive processes and joint events, such as building houses and fences, making decorations, and organising public rituals and exchanges, women have a tight schedule that structures their everyday life. Early in the morning, the rustling sound of women sweeping underneath their houses with their natural palm-brooms can be heard throughout the village. After having washed and cleaned themselves in the river, they return with fresh water carried in large pans on their heads, dragging their toddlers along. Vegetables are peeled, and breakfast is cooked and served to the extended family before starting the two-hour walk to the gardens. At the end of the day, the women return to the village with heavy string bags filled with garden produce and dried coconuts. After washing and fetching water, they start to prepare dinner for their relatives and in-laws, who have hungrily awaited their return. In addition, women have to chop firewood, collect shellfish, and in the meantime make sure their households are not deprived of female-produced objects such as tapa.

Maisin women are responsible for the manufacturing of barkcloth and the maintenance of *wuwusi*, the paper mulberry tree from which tapa is made. Although both men and women plant *wuwusi*, in Airara predominantly women make sure weeds are removed before they can suffocate the young mulberry sprouts. When the trees are mature enough and an occasion arises which calls for tapa, women cut the tapa trees down and transport them back to the village. As soon as there is sufficient time, they will start processing the trees. After scraping off the coarse outer bark, the arduous process of beating and pounding the inner bark starts. When the cloth is thin enough, it is dried and is then ready for a design of curving black lines. It is completely finished once the red pigment is added. Maisin people prefer the paint on the tapa to be a bright red, and since the pigment turns brownish after time, women tend to wait to apply the red paint until just before the tapa is supposed to be worn, sold, given, or exchanged.

## Outline

The relationship between women and tapa, which is the backbone of this book, is outlined in Part One, entitled ‘Conceiving women and tapa’. In Chapter 1, I describe how women are created through processes of socialisation, which gives insights into how Maisin construct and define identities such as gender. This context, of how Maisin perceive and conceive bodies, is necessary to understand the entanglement between women’s bodies and the tapa that they make. This chapter shows that women’s bodies are not only connected with the production and wearing of designed tapa; in the distant and recent past, their thighs and faces were ‘engraved’ with similar tattoo designs. Chapter 2 follows the biographies of four Airara women involved in the production and use of tapa. The women’s lives and work histories show their individual styles and how these are grounded within and have evolved from the past. By comparing colonial collections with contemporary tapa productions, changes and traditions become apparent, showing how present designs are interwoven with the past. This also reveals the extent to which tapa and women’s identities are intertwined and mutually constitutive.

Part Two discusses ‘Materialisations and the performance of identity’. The four chapters in this part are concerned with how the production and use, or performance, of objects such as tapa are intertwined with clan and other identities. By discussing the constitution of the patrilineal clans and how clans are reproduced through women’s cloth and sexuality, the establishment of male clan identity through women’s work, agency, and the performance of their bodies becomes clear. In Chapter 3, clan designs and their materialised histories are followed, revealing how tapa and other objects contain information about ancestral journeys, land claims and particular relationships between specific clans. This theme, of the cultural reproduction of Maisin clans through objects, is pursued in Chapter 4. This chapter focuses on the significance of life-cycle rituals in marking and defining people’s social – in particular, clan – identities. As is shown, personhood is established through the ceremonial giving and wearing of particular regalia, such as clan tapa. The analyses of life-cycle rituals show how the transition of a person and the person him- or herself ‘is constituted by the matching paraphernalia’ (Fontijn 2003: 27). In addition, the social person is constituted through the exchange relationships in which he or she is situated. While Chapter 4 focuses on these relationships, as well as on the objects that are exchanged in life-cycle rituals, Chapter 5 elaborates on other exchanges that characterise Maisin society. An analyses of Maisin exchanges reveals the significance of women’s agency in the establishment of relationships between groups of people. In contrast to what many scholars have argued for other areas in New Guinea, Maisin women – in their roles as sisters and wives – are not only the ones who produce the major items of exchange but are also the major exchangers. Both formal and informal (daily life, barter) exchanges elucidate the complex relationships that exist between the wife-giver and wife-taker clans and the important role of women in bringing and keeping these two clans together. Moreover, this chapter explains the specific role of tapa as both a gift and a commodity in Maisin exchange relationships. While life-cycle rituals and exchanges, as well as several other forms of exchange, seem to be declining practices, the performance of identity and the exchange of goods in the context of church festivals seems to be increasing. Chapter 6 describes the performance of religious, gender, clan, and tribal identity in the context of these celebrations that commemorate the saints after which each Anglican Church in the region is named. In this context, the performance of identity through body decorations, songs and dances, and the exchange of goods such as food, money and tapa are important elements.

The final part, entitled ‘Colonial and postcolonial appropriations of tapa’, addresses the impact of the commercialisation of tapa on gender and other hierarchical relationships. Chapter 7 follows the various biographies of people who were involved in the collecting and often selling of objects, such as tapa. By following the collecting biographies of four European and Australian men and one Pacific Islander, an insight into their motives and desires, as well as into colonial relationships and interactions with Maisin people and culture, is gained. In this chapter, a relationship among colonialism, gender relations, and practices of collecting is suggested. In Chapter 8, the subsequent commercialisation of

tapa is discussed, revealing the politics of representation in which images of tapa, outsiders, and Maisin men and women collide, construct, and deconstruct each other. The efforts of representatives of the Anglican Church and Greenpeace, in marketing tapa as a means to aid and protect Maisin people's lives, are specifically discussed. These processes are elaborated upon by describing the advent of Maisin men designing tapa and the advent of women as Maisin representatives, both trespassing 'traditional' boundaries. In short, Part Three is devoted to colonial and postcolonial dynamics in the representations of tapa and gender. It is especially in this part that the changing relationships between Maisin men and women will be revisited, as these seem to be interwoven with the commercialisation of tapa and its representation on a global scale.

The final chapter tries to provide a synthesis by summarising the major concepts and findings of this thesis. It is shown how barkcloth is intertwined with colonial history, the here and now, and also the future of Maisin ways and fabric of life. In fact, tapa provides a visual and material space within which both women and men are seen to interact with each other as well as with their cultural surroundings. In particular, it is shown how the gendering of people and things takes place through things. Barkcloth, as an object made by women, constitutes various identities. As such, this artefact, or object of 'art', also embodies these identities.

The particular outline of this book is mainly for heuristic purposes. While the first two parts are largely devoted to descriptions and analyses of somewhat traditional anthropological topics, such as 'socialisation', 'production', 'life-cycle rituals', and 'exchanges', the latter part discusses in more elaborate ways some of the historical processes involved in the appropriation and commercialisation of tapa. This does not imply, however, that I consider the earlier discussed aspects of Maisin culture as static and a-historical or as relics of a pristine pre-colonial culture. On the contrary, I acknowledge that culture is embedded within history and dialogically formed in historical processes of adaptation, acculturation, and rejection (Carrier 1992; Thomas 1994, 1997). It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to provide a complete historical analysis of each aspect of Maisin culture. Emphasis is placed on the dynamic relationships between tapa and formations of identity, by linking past and present practices and performances.

PART I

WOMEN AND BARKCLOTH



*Photo 2. Louisa Joke (36 years) with her second eldest son. Other women regard the elaborateness of Louisa's facial tattoo, which also covers her neck, as a sign of her physical and mental strength.*

## Chapter 1

# ‘Making’ women

*As women, our bodies are different. We do not step over them [men]. We take our embobi [tapa or cotton skirts], bend down, and walk past them.*

(Louisa Joke, married into Tatan clan in Airara village)

The main question of this research is based upon the notion that tapa is believed to manifest ideas about the personal and collective selves of Maisin. The important question that evolves from this notion is ‘who makes these objects and whose ideas are represented’ (Teilhet 1983: 45)? In this chapter and the next, tapa’s main producers are discussed. Among Maisin, women are traditionally responsible for the manufacturing of barkcloth. Even women from the outside, women coming from neighbouring Miniafia or Korafe villages and also women from other areas of Papua New Guinea, are expected to learn how to beat tapa and draw and paint tapa designs. Women invest time and also artistry in the production of *embobi* (female skirts) and *koefi* (male loincloths). As such, these cloths embody both women’s skill and creativity.

Before elaborating on women’s production of tapa (see Chapter 2), I first want to describe how bodies and in particular female bodies are constituted among the Maisin. The constitution of the person (Mauss 1979) and its socialisation into gendered bodies and gendered behaviour needs to be addressed before turning to the processes of making tapa, although the two are intertwined. In fact, material techniques involved with the making of tapa are related to ‘techniques’ (Mauss 1979) of the gendered – and, in particular, the female – body. But what are bodies? Are they natural entities, or are bodies created, and if so, to what degree and by whom? This dilemma of the ‘natural body’ (or essentialism) versus the ‘constructed body’ has inspired many scholars, and especially feminists. In general, the majority of feminist scholars (for example Butler 1993, 1999; Davis 1997) ‘view the body not as essence but as a bare scaffolding on which discourse and performance build a completely acculturated being’ (Fausto-Sterling 2000: 6). However, there is disagreement over to what extent the body is empty and neutral. Some argue that even sex is culturally inscribed on the body, thereby implying that the body is neutral to begin with. Others disagree with this perspective and view the body as a ‘diverse’ and therefore not neutral field on which identities are inscribed and created. So how are Maisin bodies conceived and/or created?

This chapter starts with a description and analysis of how Maisin bodies are conceived, followed by how bodies are gendered into male and female bodies and finally into husbands and wives. This provides insides into gender relations and moreover into how, among Maisin, women are expected to behave and perform.

## Conceiving bodies

In Maisin, as in many other areas of Melanesia, ideas about the ‘construction of the body in utero enjoin primal notions of being and ... reflect important beliefs concerning gender, spirituality, and group organization’ (Knauft 2002: 28). Maisin believe the foetus (*mende*) is created out of a mixture of male substances and female substances. While my informants could not (or no longer?) specify which substances were either male or female, Barker’s informants (1985: 214) stated that the *mende* is created out of semen (*voto*) and mother’s blood (*taa*).<sup>1</sup> But whereas, for example, Foi people believe paternal semen creates the white, hard parts, such as bones and teeth, and maternal blood the soft fleshy parts of a child (J. Weiner 1988: 50-51; 1995: 147), Maisin do not.

According to several informants, a large amount of *voto* is necessary to achieve conception (see also Barker 1985: 214), but the blood (*taa*) of either parent is important in determining the child’s sex and character. As one female informant expressed, if the baby is a girl, mother’s blood was stronger. If the child is a boy, its father’s blood was stronger. Another informant argued that if the child is aggressive, its blood has derived from its *ganan* (warrior side). When the child is easy and contemplative, its *sinan* (peacemaker) side has been dominant in its conception (see also Chapter 3). Although parents are equally happy with a boy or a girl, Maisin emphasise that there must be a boy in the family as ‘a son makes sure your name doesn’t get lost!’ If this is not the case, father’s brothers or even father’s cousins (FFBS) have to give one of their sons. In the clans living in Airara, both types of adoption were frequently practiced. A couple also prefers to have two sons instead of one because having a brother will facilitate the boy’s future work and responsibilities. Girls are needed because they help the mother with her daily and sometimes heavy duties, thereby making life easier for her. In addition, it is believed that daughters, when they marry close by, will take good care of their parents.<sup>2</sup> There seems to be, however, no way of determining the child’s sex prior to or during conception.

In general, Maisin seem not very concerned with how conception takes place, nor do they understand procreation in terms of positing differential male and female parts in the reproduction of the person. This implies that Maisin do *not* divide the internal body up into different gendered parts, as has been argued for Melanesian societies in general (Knauft 1989: 206; 1999: 28; Busby 1997: 270).

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1 John Barker mentions that *voto* may also be located in women’s bodies (2004: personal communication).

2 As a result, parents will prefer their daughter marrying in the same village. In contrast, men prefer to marry girls from distant villages since this will cause less interference with their in-laws, the wife’s parents and her family.

The internal constitution of Maisin bodies is thus mixed but not to the extent that the body contains both female and male parts, which would allow 'a conceptualisation of the person as non-gendered, or rather in Strathern's (1990) terms, as cross-sex' (Busby 1997: 271). Nevertheless, even among Maisin, gender is not self-evident. As is shown throughout this book, it is 'an attribute which must be *made known*' (ibid.), predominantly in various performances. Since performances such as festivities and exchanges are displays of social relationships, gender is constructed within these social relationships.

Likewise, the creation of life involves more than male and female substances or a man and a woman. For instance, in the Dadumu clan one believes that if the parents do not agree with their daughter's or son's choice of partner, the daughter or daughter-in-law will not get pregnant. In a similar way, some girls think they will only get pregnant after they get married, not before. The presence of unmarried, pregnant young girls seems not to falsify this belief.

Moreover, not only parents and marriage come into play when new life is or has to be created. While parents have a dominant voice in the choice of partner, and as such in the conception of babies, other people can use magic (*beta*) either to prevent a woman from getting pregnant or to make a girl pregnant. Boys who are rejected by a girl's parents may refer to this latter practice. Out of revenge for being treated that way, they can use *beta* to make the girl pregnant, thereby making it hard for the parents to refuse him. According to my informants, this kind of magic is not used very often anymore.

Ancestors come directly into play when a woman does not want to have children anymore. She takes the afterbirth to the forest and offers it to the ancestors, saying, 'This is yours!' In this way she ensures no children will be born out of her womb again. Likewise, the health and wellbeing of both the unborn and newborn baby are influenced by actions of parents and others. With regard to the unborn baby, several substances and activities are considered harmful. While conception involves the building up of semen in the mother's womb, too much intercourse during pregnancy is considered harmful for the growth of the child (see also Tietjen 1985: 130). Pregnant women are considered vulnerable, and it is their husbands' duty to refrain from sex and to protect them against too much labour and possible sorcery attacks that may occur when the pregnant woman is left alone. 'His failure to provide adequate care may result in his being blamed for any congenital physical or mental abnormalities that may occur in the child' (ibid.). As Anne Marie Tietjen explained, abnormalities in children are predominantly interpreted 'as the result of vengeance sorcery performed by the angered relatives of the wife as a punishment of her husband' (ibid.). Since the child is regarded as a new member of his or her father's clan, the in-laws effectively attack the most valuable attribute of the other clan, its offspring. Less frequently, abnormalities in newborn babies are ascribed to a rejected suitor (ibid.). So husbands especially have to make sure social relations are balanced in order to avoid sorcery and to protect their wives against spiritual attacks on their unborn children.



Photo 3. Child sleeping in string bag. The container next to the child is made of a calabash and is used to store lime, which is chewed in combination with betel nut.

Like the unborn baby, the newborn baby is equally considered vulnerable to various spiritual and profane threats. If social relationships are bad, harm may be caused to the baby by means of sorcery. Likewise, spirits still pose a threat to the newborn baby, and both mother and father have to protect the child. For example, when a mother leaves the garden, she throws away the stick she used to suspend the string bag which is used for carrying the baby (see Photo 3) in order to prevent spirits from finding it and harming the baby (Tietjen 1985: 127).

An immediate threat for the newborn child is caused by the sexual and daily activities of its parents. Husband and wife have to follow the required sexual taboos. This implies that during the period of breastfeeding, which is practised until the child starts eating food, they are not allowed to have sexual intercourse with each other. If the baby is still drinking *susi* (mother's milk) while its mother has sexual intercourse, semen may enter the child via the milk, which will make the baby weak and sick. Thus, a man's '*voto si*', which was explained to me as 'bad water', pollutes the mother's milk and, as a consequence, infects the child. At the same time, people realise that if a woman gets pregnant again too soon, the first baby is still too little, making it more vulnerable to diseases and sickness. So in most cases couples seem to obey this prohibition.<sup>3</sup>

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3 Naturally, this sexual restriction has consequences for the relation between husband and wife. While lactating mothers have to refrain from sexual activities, their husbands can and are socially allowed to have affairs with other women during this period. Most women seem to accept this adultery and acknowledge that men should be able to 'play' during their wives' breastfeeding period. For some women, however, this adultery, like any case of adultery, is difficult to deal with and may lead to depression, despair, and even attempts to commit suicide.

The baby's father especially has to make sure not to weaken his child through his polluting substances. As a consequence, he should avoid touching or stepping over the mother's or child's clothing and sleeping mat as this will affect the baby's health (see also Tietjen 1985: 127). Just as a woman stepping over a man's legs causes weakness in the man, a man stepping over his wife and breastfeeding child causes weakness in the child. By stepping over them, the husband might spill some of his harmful semen, which might be absorbed by the mother's or child's body, thereby causing the child to become weak and sick and even to die.

In addition to avoiding male substances, the lactating mother has to adhere to certain food prohibitions because Maisin believe that certain foods harbour powers that might be dangerous to the newborn child. According to Tietjen (1985: 128), there are no food prescriptions for pregnant women, but after having given birth, they follow strict regulations about their food intake. Lactating mothers, for example, avoid eating baked foods because, as Tietjen's informants expressed, there is no juice in them for the baby' (1985: 129). Other types of food are avoided because they are believed to make the baby sick. So although a mother's food intake might inflict harm on the breastfed child, women's bodily substances do not. The main question becomes why are male substances and lack of male care considered dangerous for the unborn and breastfed child?

### *Male versus female substances and descent*

The answer to the question why male substances and lack of male care are dangerous might be hidden in the symbolic meanings that can be attributed to respective female and male substances. Female substances that play a significant role in the conception and health of a child are blood (*taa*) and milk (*susi*). Female blood is not considered dangerous for men. The most conspicuous example is the presence of the husband when his wife delivers their child. Likewise, mother's milk (*susi*) is not regarded as dangerous for men. Instead, it is liable to be polluted by male substances that enter the female body through intercourse and through bodily contact with objects that have been in contact with men.

In the Massim area (covering Milne Bay, Goodenough Island, and the Trobriand Islands), the word associated with breast or breast milk is *susu* (Damon 1989: 13). The term *susu* takes on significant sociological content as it is connected with the production of the person, which is richly elaborated sociologically and symbolically (ibid.). Across this region, the term varies and refers among others to the matrilineal clan in the Southern Massim area and to the mother's descent group in the patrilineal societies of Goodenough Island (ibid.; Damon and Wagner 1989). In Maisin culture, which can be regarded as an extension of the Massim cultural area on the basis of certain political and artistic traits (Barker 1985: 50), the term *susi* refers to breast milk. But seen in light of the regional connotation, *susi* might also refer to a mother's descent group.

When accepting this hypothesis, the relationships between male and female substances among Maisin become clearer. Mother's blood and mother's milk then refer to the mother's group, while semen represents the father's group. The conception of a child involves both female and male substances, but as soon as the

baby is conceived, these male substances become dangerous. This might indicate that Maisin life is characterised by a hidden dialogue between the mother's and father's groups and perhaps even between the matrilineal and patrilineal identities that are conveyed on the child's body. When the baby is conceived and born, it totally depends on female substances, which seem to transmit the mother's descent line. But the baby equally depends upon male care. I argue that this male care and responsibility towards the child's health is opposed to the dominant involvement of female substances, and as such it is necessary in order to institute the child into its father's patrilineal group. The exchanges between the father's and mother's groups, which characterise the birth and initiation of a firstborn child (see Chapters 4 and 5), underline this notion that the child has to transfer from its mother's to its father's group. When a pregnant woman, for whom no bride price has been paid yet, leaves her husband and moves back to her family, the child she gives birth to belongs to her father's clan and not to the clan of the child's biological father. Maisin husbands therefore make sure to take care of their pregnant wives as this decreases the possibility they might leave before their husbands have been able to pay the bride price.<sup>4</sup> Or if the husbands and their close relatives are prepared or wealthy enough, they will opt to pay the bride price as soon as possible since this is the major – and, in fact, only – guarantee that the children their wives have given birth to indeed belong to the husbands' clan.

### **Constituting the person**

A Maisin baby is not complete when it is born. As we have seen in the previous section, the baby's identities are in the process of being inscribed on its body. During the course of an individual's life, these identities are constantly reworked and altered by means of various social relationships, practices, and ceremonies. From an analytical perspective, these various identities are inscribed in cultural, spiritual, and social ways.

First of all, Maisin culture and language are inscribed on the baby's body. While it may be obvious that culture is socialised through actions directed onto the body, it may not be so self-evident when it concerns language. Secondly, the baby's spirit (*kaniniwa*), which is believed to be not yet fully attached, has to take root and grow firm in the child's body.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, gender and clan identity are socialised by social and material practices that are directed to the child's and adult's body. Finally, these domains all intersect with the establishment of the child's *mon-seraman*, which may refer to what we call social personhood or person

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4 This risk of pregnant women leaving their husband and clan is not dismissible, especially when the bride price has not been paid yet. For example, I encountered a woman who left her husband while being pregnant with his child because he married a second wife. He thereby not only lost his wife but also his unborn child, who was incorporated and raised in its mother's (MF/MB) clan. On the other hand, if the bride price has been paid and a woman decides to leave her husband, she is forced to leave her children in their father's clan (see also Chapters 4 and 5).

5 *Kaniniwa* also means 'shadow' or 'image'. André Iteanu (1990: 40) refers to a similar concept among Orokaiva people, living in Oro Bay north of Collingwood Bay. They refer to a newborn child as an image (*abihii*) who has no personhood (*hamo*).

Photo 4. 'Method of carrying child on the back. Village of Wanigera. Location Collingwood Bay, Papua' (Percy J Money, 1900 – 1910. Photo acquired by the Queensland Museum on 8 March 1911. Courtesy of the Queensland Museum, EH 9984). The design applied on the *tapa* resembles a clan design named *moti* among Maisin, which means snake (see Chapter 2). By wrapping the baby on its mother's back with this clan design, it seems that the patrilineal clan identity of both mother and child are made visible.



(Mauss 1996; La Fontaine 1996), and with its inner being or self, called *tina terere* (literally: 'stomach inside'). For most people, *tina terere* comes closest to the Western concept of an individual's soul. It denotes one's deepest internal emotions, while one's internal desires or longings are referred to as *marawa(wa)n terere* (literally: 'longings inside').

The inscribing of Maisin culture starts as soon as a child is born. Among Maisin, language is both symbolically and literally inscribed on the newborn baby's body. As Tietjen described for Uiaku, the tongue of a newborn baby is scraped with a clamshell to ensure he or she will learn to speak Maisin properly (Tietjen 1985: 125). The clamshell, or *giu*, often returns in myths and clan ideology as a symbol for the unity and collaboration between the two types of Maisin clans, which are, like the two shell-parts of the clamshell, separate entities belonging together.<sup>6</sup> The scraping of the baby's tongue with this particular object seems therefore to enculturate the baby not only in Maisin language but also in Maisin clan structures.

6 All 36 Maisin clans are either Kawo (chief) or Sabu (warrior) clans (see Chapter 3).

Another object that is used to inscribe Maisin cultural values in non-discursive ways on the newborn baby's body is tapa. The ways tapa is symbolically and physically connected with the newborn baby reflect the significance of tapa as a Maisin cultural object (see also Photo 4). According to some of my informants, the umbilical cord was tied with a piece of tapa cloth before it was cut, although today people also use other items to ligate the umbilical cord. The use of female-manufactured tapa to ligate the most physical bond between mother and child, and as such cut off the female line, seems to have symbolical bearings. Furthermore, Tietjen (ibid.) explains how the umbilical cord and placenta are wrapped in tapa cloth and subsequently taken into the bush. This practice brings us to the second domain: the spirit (*kaniniwa*) of babies.

By burying the tapa-wrapped umbilical cord and placenta deep under the ground or placing them in the branches of a tree, Maisin try to prevent them from being destroyed or eaten by animals. This is important as Maisin believe that 'if the placenta is eaten by fish or animals, ... the baby's spirit will not come properly attached and the child will suffer from madness' (Tietjen 1985: 126). According to some of Tietjen's older female informants, the baby's spirit was believed to reside in the placenta before birth. In order to ensure that the spirit of the child will not get lost when the placenta is brought to the bush, the person depositing the placenta must ensure to take the same route back home (ibid.). Likewise, the baby's spirit has to be guided whenever the mother takes her newborn to the gardens or any other new place. As a young Airara mother explained:

*When we take our newborn baby to the garden for the very first time, carrying it in our string bag, we have to make a small bundle of firewood on the garden track for a baby girl. For a boy, we put small sticks like a spear. This is because girls' work is chopping firewood and for boys spearing fish. When there are side tracks, we block these roads so the baby's kaniniwa will not go on these tracks and get lost. When we go back to the village, we say: 'We are going to the village, so let us all go to the village'. This is to let the baby's kaniniwa know we are going home, thereby making sure it will follow.<sup>7</sup>*

The non-discursive signs which Maisin mothers place at the crossroads show that, in this case, gender is not so much inscribed on the baby's body but rather on the garden track followed by the mother and the baby's spirit. These tokens define the gendered type of labour Maisin men and women are expected to perform and reveal to other Maisin that a mother passed by with either a baby boy or girl. Expectations of the child's future gendered paths, movements, and behaviour are inscribed on the baby's body through other verbal and physical acts.

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7 Both in the village and in town, women will ensure that the baby's spirit follows them. When leaving the bus, for example, they will call the baby's name. There are also women, however, who take their child around without adhering to this custom, both in the villages and in town.

### *Gendering children's bodies*

The gendering of the child's body starts when the baby is shown to the outside world. As soon as the stump of the umbilical cord has fallen off, mother and child come for the first time outside the house in which the baby was born. The mother holds the baby and tosses it in the air several times, 'exhorting to climb betelnut and coconut trees and hunt many pigs if the child is a boy, and to fetch water and chop wood if it is a girl' (Tietjen 1985: 126). This practice may be repeated many times over the first year of the baby's life. According to Tietjen's informants, this tossing 'shows the baby how it feels to move, thus preparing it for the hard work ahead' (ibid.). In fact, it prepares the child's body for the gendered kind of labour and tasks it is expected to perform in its future life. This emphasis on socialising gendered work becomes more prone and visible when the child turns into a toddler.

Little boys and girls are sometimes seen playing together, but as soon as the children reach around four to five years of age, interactions between girls and boys become more sporadic. Girls are expected to help their mothers: fetching water, carrying string bags, doing dishes, taking care of their younger siblings, et cetera. Young boys often wander around, go spear-fishing or practice their spear throwing by aiming at coconut husks, or play with their little self-made wooden boats. Girls are expected to work for their parents, especially for their mothers. In short, the expectations and demands of boys and girls differ sharply.

From a young age onwards, the bodies of girls are trained to do hard work. They thereby develop muscles specifically in their shoulders, arms, and neck that will allow them to carry the heavy string bags. Being not socialised into Maisin ways of work and carrying loads, I had to watch adolescent girls carrying these heavy loaded string bags, which I, although being almost twice as big, was not capable of carrying. It seems that without the proper physical socialisation, girls will not be fit to do the work they are expected to do.

As girls grow older, they are expected to take over more and more of their mothers' work. From a young age onwards, girls are expected to take care of their younger siblings. Girls ten years of age or older help in the gardens, chop firewood, and accompany their mothers foraging for shellfish and crabs. In addition, they are taught how to beat tapa and how to draw and paint tapa designs. Girls of this age, and even younger, already help their mothers with beating tapa and applying red dye on the designs drawn by their mothers. Especially today, now that tapa has become an important economic product, girls are expected to obtain the necessary *mon-seraman* (knowledge and skills) before they marry. As many men stated, the capability of a marriageable girl to produce tapa enhances her chances of getting married. In contrast, 'if boys are good', they go fishing and help in the gardens. Thus, where girls have to contribute to the household and are expected to be obedient, boys can spend their time almost as they please. Besides basic skills such as fishing and hunting, the most important things a boy should learn are related to his future inheritance. He has to acquire knowledge concerning his land-boundaries and learn how to manage his clan land and traditions. Whereas girls' bodies are physically trained to do hard work, to obtain *mon-seraman*, and

to be obedient and are restricted in their movement across time and space, boys' bodies are trained to be swift and to obtain clan knowledge (which is equally referred to as *seraman*) and, in general, are less restricted in their movements. In these ways, work, movement, time, and even space are incorporated into male and female bodies differently.

From young age onwards, interactions between boys and girls are limited. When going to school and back home, boys and girls move separately. This pattern continues in their adolescent and adult lives. Even when dating, a couple in love do not display their commitment in public. They meet in secret, and it is only when they get married that their involvement is publicly manifested and accepted. This necessity of distance between the sexes is especially visible during meetings and ceremonies, where men and women sit apart. In general, men sit on elevated shelters while women sit on the ground. This hierarchical spatial organisation is related to the hierarchical relations between men and women. Young girls learn from young age onwards to show respect (*muan*) towards men.

Gender hierarchy and respect are expressed in the different uses of space. Men sit high, and women sit low; men wash themselves upstream while women's washing areas are located downstream. Moreover, gender hierarchy is expressed through women's physical behaviour. From a very young age, girls are socialised into how to sit properly. While toddlers and boys are allowed to sit in whatever way they want, with either their legs crossed, spread, or folded underneath them, girls from three or four years onwards are told to sit with their legs stretched in front them. When girls cross their ankles or bend their knees outwards, they are often corrected by their mothers or other female relatives. When sitting among women, women might sit with their legs crossed underneath them, a posture which is usually taken on by men while eating or having meetings. But in mixed company, especially when sitting with non-household members, women make sure their legs are stretched out, wrapping their skirts around the legs and making sure the knees (and sometimes lower limbs) are well covered. Moreover, as soon as girls learn the difference between 'good and evil', as one informant stated, they are taught to bend down or crawl when leaving a shelter where men sit. By leaving in this way, thereby not rising above the men, they show respect to the men who remain sitting. In addition, they learn not to walk or crawl over a man's legs since it is believed this is disrespectful, as well as harmful to the man seated (see further pages 62-65).

### *Initiating girls*

In the past all boys and girls were initiated, thereby marking the previous described gender differences, which were more rigid in the past. In addition to first-born initiations (see Chapter 4), boys were initiated, or rather introduced, into their patri-clan's customs and regalia (Barker and Tietjen 1990: 226), while girls were initiated into womanhood by marking their bodies in painful and permanent ways.

Up until the 1990s, it was custom for all Maisin girls to receive a facial tattoo. As soon as girls had either received their first menses or obtained full breasts, their parents would decide for them that it was time to receive this tattoo, called *roi-bua*.<sup>8</sup> The facial tattoo visualised their gender and, moreover, signalled that they were sexually active and marriageable, or married, women. The facial tattoo signalled they were no longer *morobi* or *ififi* (non-sexually active adolescents) but *morobi susuki* (sexually active adolescents). The practice of applying tattoos was, according to my informants, a very long and especially painful process.<sup>9</sup> Today, girls no longer want their faces to be tattooed; consequently, these facial tattoos mark in particular female bodies aging around 30 years and older (see Photo 2).

The facial tattoos were always applied by other women, predominantly relatives of the girl or girls being tattooed. Often, the girls would stay in a group in the tattooist's house and were to a certain extent secluded from the community for the duration of the tattooing process, which could take several months (see Chapter 4). Unlike the other initiations, which foremost establish the patrilineal clan identity of the child, this female initiation was largely a female affair that inscribed girls' bodies with sexuality and gender (see also: Lutkehaus 1995; Thoonen 2005). In addition, *roi-bua* mark not only sexual activity and gender identity but also the characters of the girls being tattooed. According to those involved, there is a correlation between the amount of pain a girl could handle and the elaborateness of her facial tattoo, which is regarded as a visualisation of her strength. As Maggie explained:

*Some ladies, they wanted bua, but when I started they got frightened. The one that got scared, I started on her forehead and then had to let her go. But the girl's relatives started to complain that it is not good to have plain cheeks and a stern with bua! So the girl had to come back and complete her bua. Now she is strong!*

Those girls who were strong and withstood the pain could endure closely spaced tattoos on their faces, chins, upper lips, and especially their necks, while others settled for tattoos on their stern, nose, and cheeks only. I encountered several women who had no or only partially tattooed upper lips, chins, and/or necks because these spots are extremely painful to be tattooed. In contrast, several women mentioned a Koniasi lady who had her neck tattooed all the way to her collarbone and as a result was regarded as a very strong woman. The blackness of the tattoo likewise reveals the strength of a woman. This aspect of tattoos expressing strength impelled one Airara woman to have her face tattooed twice, notably by two different women. Since the first tattoo did not stick properly, she had it done again some years later, this time having her neck tattooed as well. It is generally understood that if a woman is lightly tattooed, she could probably not endure the pain, which impelled the tattooist to stop her work. As a consequence, the woman's bleak facial tattoo expresses her failing strength when she was a girl. However, tattoos, especially

8 Barker and Tietjen (1990) spell tattoo as *buwaa*. I use my assistants' spelling, which is *bua*. *Roi* is plural for *ro*, which means face.

9 See Chapter 4 for a description of the tattooing process and the subsequent 'coming out' of initiated girls.

those made with natural pigments, are due to fade when women grow older. As a result, elderly women's tattoos are sometimes barely recognisable. But this factor did not diminish the importance for young women to obtain a thoroughly black tattoo.

Therefore, the presence and especially the development of physical and mental strength seem to have been among the reasons for applying tattoos. Whereas boys' initiations were foremost concerned with introducing sons into their father's clan customs and emblems (*kawo*), daughters were introduced into the hardships of their future lives as married women through the painful tattooing sessions. Furthermore, the facial tattoos not only prepared them for hardship; they also inscribed their bodies with gender.

Both men and women mention facial tattoos as a distinctive trait of women which differentiates them from men and from pre-sexually active girls. As various male and female informants argued, 'A woman has a *bua*, and that tells she is a woman'. In this sense, the facial tattoos not only visualise gender; they also visualise sexuality. Female initiations marked, both internally and externally, a sexually active, gendered identity. In fact, the tattoos formed the prerequisite for married life. Today this prerequisite is no longer adhered to, which is, according to the former tattooists as well as to others, a bad development. As Christobel expressed, 'These times, girls stay and get married without *bua*. But if they put *bua* on and get married, it is okay. It is not good for me that they get married without *bua*'. Tattooist Maggie equally stressed the importance for girls to receive a facial tattoo before they get married. 'It is our custom that young ladies get their *roi-bua*. Every lady should get a *bua* before getting married. Just recently it stopped, but those ladies that have no *bua*, it is not good'.

Another aspect that was regarded as an important factor in the application of facial tattoos was 'aesthetics'. All five tattooists expressed this aspect of tattoos as a custom that enhances female beauty. Both Maggie and Stella argued that facial tattoos make the girls more attractive. Moreover, as Stella told me, 'Girls without *bua* who get married and have children, they get old quickly and lose their beauty and attractiveness'. Like Holan Kania, who was cited in the Introduction, Stella thereby makes a link between decoration, beauty, and aging. The advent of Westernisation and white people's aesthetics is indirectly blamed for the loss of this custom. As Josephine expressed, '*Ro-five, sa taubangka* [bare faces are not good]! When a girl does not have *bua*, it is no good. With tattoo she looks nice. White skins are okay, but black skin doesn't look good without *bua*'. Middle-aged and older men equally expressed this view. One middle-aged Maisin man living in Alatau and working as a physician argued: 'When a girl has no *bua*, she is despised and looked down upon. She is not pretty. With *bua* she is pretty'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, notions of gender, of what a woman should be able to endure and how she should look, were embodied in the act of tattooing and of having a tattoo.

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10 This informant married a Maisin woman without facial tattoos. So apparently the emphasis on girls having facial tattoos as a prerequisite for marriage and bodily attractiveness does not account for all cases nor for all times, as Photo 1 seems to demonstrate.

It comes therefore as no surprise that only other women could prepare girls for this transition into womanhood.

As mentioned before, today tattooing is no longer practised. The five tattooists interviewed all expressed sorrow for the disappearance of this practice. As Christobel remarked:

*It is from our ancestors who brought up this custom to put bua on girls' faces, so we have to do it. In my time, we put bua on, but in this time we do not put tattoos any longer. That's why the old ladies stopped making tattoos. I cannot force the girls to come and have their bua. But this is our custom! Also, women look nice with bua.*

When I asked Lina why young girls did not come anymore to have their faces tattooed, she said, 'I don't know. Nowadays, they don't want to have a tattoo, so they don't come anymore. It is all up to the girls. They stopped having their faces tattooed. I am sad because the custom is finished. Now the girls have bare faces; they do like white people'. Maggie equally emphasised that 'today, nobody wants to get *roi-bua* anymore. The young ladies, they don't like putting a tattoo on their face'. So it seems this cultural practice is not enforced on the younger generation. In fact, the elderly women as well as the girls' parents leave it to the girls to decide whether they want to be tattooed or not. But why did the younger generation change their attitude towards these facial markings?

According to tattooists Maggie and Josephine, one of the main reasons lies in the lack of strength among contemporary girls, which in their opinion prevents them from having their faces tattooed. The Airara women I interviewed on this subject confirmed this. For example, a young mother of 32 years had obtained a small dot between her eyes, which her younger sister tattooed. But she refused to have a proper *bua* because of the pain involved. Likewise, 28-year-old Lina refused to have her face tattooed:

*When I was young, girls still got their bua, but I didn't want it because of the pain. When I was 15 or 16 years old, both my parents told me I had to get my bua, but I didn't. It was very difficult to say no, but they said: Okay, your worries!*

One of my assistants, a 22-year-old mother, was equally afraid of the pain but also felt it would spoil her looks. 'I didn't want to put tattoo on my face; it spoils my face!' This aspect of tattoos 'spoil the face' instead of making it beautiful was put forward by others as well. Several women with facial tattoos said, 'Girls think *bua* makes their face dirty!' Moreover, a link between tapa cloth and tattoos was made as being mutually constitutive. As several female informants expressed: 'Facial tattoos look good with tapa cloth but not with Western clothes!' Since many young women and girls feel more attracted to the latter style of dress, the drive to make one's bodily appearance complete by obtaining a facial tattoo is no

longer present as well.<sup>11</sup> Tattooist Maggie explained: ‘Today, they like the Western style; they think *bua* spoils their faces. But it is our *kikiki*, it is our custom, so we should not stop it!’ Nevertheless, it seems it is not Maggie’s generation who decides this but her younger female relatives.

When Barker and Tietjen (1990) did their fieldwork in the early 1980s, they concluded that especially girls staying outside the village for schooling or other reasons were prone to miss the initiation. But as we have seen, fear of pain and changing notions of aesthetics seem to have likewise prevented girls from being initiated. These examples do suggest that over time the significance of this custom as a puberty rite has diminished, and it no longer is considered essential for girls’ lives to be tattooed (ibid.). But instead of becoming a marker of cultural identity, as argued by Barker and Tietjen, it seems to me that the tattoos turned into a marker of individual identity. Thus, from being a puberty rite with emphasis on the development of a gendered social and sexually active identity, the initiation turned into a more individualised custom that eventually disappeared when young girls no longer felt the necessity of decorating their faces with permanent images. The individuality embodied in the facial tattooing thus gave girls the opportunity to refuse it, which would not have been possible if tattooing were generally regarded as an essential Maisin cultural feature.

## Making women and men

From the previous section it already becomes clear that various social norms of behaviour and identity are inscribed on the individual’s body. These processes are all directed to create a ‘social person’ (Iteanu 1995: 139; Mauss 1996) who fits into Maisin society, an individual with *mon-seraman*.<sup>12</sup> *Mon* (mind, thinking) and *seraman* (skills) denote the ability to think and do things well.<sup>13</sup> When a child is born, its *kaniniwa* is not yet attached, and it has no *mon-seraman*, either. While growing up, the child’s spirit becomes attached, and its *mon-seraman* is developed. Both *kaniniwa* (spirit) and *mon-seraman* mark a person’s social identity, which is gradually constructed through relationships with others. The child’s social being or *seraman* has to grow through care and the feeding of the child by its parents (Barker 1985: 175-176). But during the course of a child or person’s life, other people are significant in establishing its social identity as well. Maternal uncles, namesakes

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11 In contrast, Korafe women still seem to tattoo young girls’ faces. When staying in Yuayu, I met Pauline, a 22-year-old woman from Tufi who had received her facial tattoo when she was approximately 15 years old, in 1994. Some years after she had received her tattoo, she met a Maisin man and married him. In 2004, I heard rumours of a young girl being tattooed in Tufi.

12 Iteanu (1990; 1995) describes for the Orokaiva people how social relationships, which are marked during rituals, construct an individual’s ‘social person’ or *bamo*. These processes of creating social identity are somewhat similar to the development and deconstruction of personhood among the Maisin (Chapter 4). While Iteanu sees these concepts as profoundly different from Western constructs of the person and sociality, Barker (1991: 342) contests this accentuation of Orokaiva people’s ‘otherness’.

13 *Mon-seraman* is mainly used to describe or denote a person’s social and technical abilities, but the term also refers to the different amount of knowledge possessed by elder and younger people and by men and women.

(*nombi*) from whom the child obtained its name, father's kin, and other relatives all contribute to the child's constitution. These relationships are brought to the fore during performances such as initiations and other formal as well as informal exchanges. But these performances do not only visualise specific relationships; they also continue to define the individual in relation to both people and things.

This process and concept of social personhood can be contrasted with an inner self as expressed in a person's *tina terere*, an individual's deepest and most sincere emotions, and his or her internal desires and longings, *marawawan terere*. The question is how this inner being – or self, as I refer to it – is constituted in relation to one's social person. I want to suggest that they are interconnected and even interdependent, although they might be in conflict as well. Moreover, gender and gender behaviour play a crucial role in how both self and social personhood are constructed and especially lived. This becomes especially clear in how women and men are defined and 'made'.

In the Introduction it was described how Maisin define a woman (*sauki*) and a man (*tamati*), or rather how the two sexes are differentiated. I was surprised by the fact that many people considered this a difficult question. Obviously, it is not so easy to distinguish between the two sexes, at least not in Maisin language. This may be linked to the fact that Maisin have no word for a non-gendered 'person' or 'human'. When referring to someone as a social human being, people say, '*Ero sauktamati*' (You are a person). So people are essentially mixed and always gendered, a notion that is also reflected in ideas about conception. Although Maisin seem to differentiate between male and female bodily substances, both are needed and as such are mixed in order to create a human life, which is essentially gendered.

Although Maisin classify children on the basis of their biological sex as either *teiti* (boy) or *morobi* (girl), this Western type of sex marker is considered less important when defining adult men and women. Several respondents argued that external bodily markers such as facial tattoos and tapa cloth were more significant in differentiating between the sexes than their physical biological appearance. Furthermore, the majority of my respondents said that men and women differ in their amount and way of thinking and acting, both verbally and nonverbally. Although these outward (tattoos, dress, and acting) and internal (thinking) expressions of gender seem to be to a large degree external to the body, they are in fact not. Body decorations, as well as thinking and acting, such as speaking, are related to how male and female bodies should behave. Furthermore, these norms are inscribed on the body. In the next sections, I describe how in particular women's bodies are marked with sexuality and how gendered behaviour and speech are differently inscribed in male and female bodies.

### *Marking women's bodies*

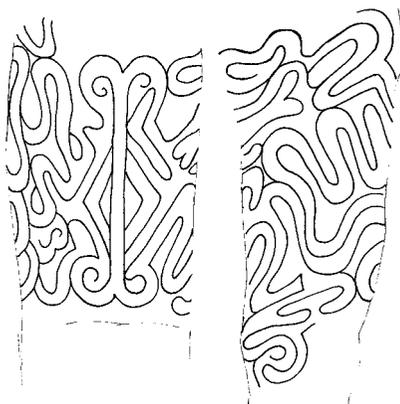
In addition to the facial tattoos that were applied on girls' faces, adult women's bodies were also marked with tattoos. These tattoos, which are called *kasa-bua*, were applied on women's thighs. Today, only very few Maisin women have these thigh tattoos. Only among the old women are there individuals who are able to

show the elaborate curvilinear patterns that were tattooed on their thighs. Whereas the last facial tattoos were applied some 15 years ago, thigh tattoos were probably applied up until World War II. Rebecca Ifugari (83 years) was one of the few remaining women with these elaborate markings. She remembered the application of her *kasa-bua* as follows:

*I was married when I got my kasa-bua. I already stayed for some time when I became tattooed. I got it because it is our custom; I do not know why. Nowadays, young women do not do this. It was the old people's custom. I didn't show it to other people, only to my husband.*

*We would hide in the bush. All the married women would go together in the bush. We would do this when our husbands would be away for some time for fishing or hunting. We would go in pairs, doing each other's kasa-bua. One would lie down, and then she would get up and do her partner's. We would do this in dry season and stay in the shade of the trees. One day we would do one leg; the other day, we would tattoo the other leg. We would do it like this, come back to the house, sleep, and go back next day. We would do a part during one dry season, and the next dry season we would do them again. My kasa-bua goes all the way up. I would lie down on my belly and wear a sort of koefi to cover my private parts. If a girl wants to have her face tattooed, she has to go to women who make roi-bua. As for kasa-bua, everyone can make them. We made them with thorns. We used to cut a small stick with thorns, take the thorns out, leave one thorn on the stick and put two thorns with the remaining one.*

Like the facial tattoos, thigh tattoos were applied while being in hiding and were applied by women on women. However, in contrast to *roi-bua*, *kasa-bua* remained a secret for everyone except for the woman's partner. Even children were not allowed to see their mother's thigh tattoos, and it was only by accident that they would sometimes catch a glimpse of their mother's *kasa-bua*. But despite this taboo on showing one's thigh tattoos in public or even private, Rebecca agreed for me to draw her *kasa-bua*. She argued it was okay for me to do so as 'I am an old lady already, and today nobody wears them anymore'. She insisted though that I would make reference to these tattoos as being hers (see Drawing 1).



*Drawing 1. Rebecca's kasa-bua made by Junice (Wofun clan). The tattoo is applied on her upper-limbs and buttocks. The drawing shows Rebecca's right leg at the back (left) and front side (right).*

Like the other women who were marked with these thigh tattoos, Rebecca obtained them while her husband was away. Some women got them when their husbands went to work on plantations; others, like Rebecca, awaited the time when men would go on collective hunting trips, wherein large areas of grass were burnt to kill small rodents and larger animals, such as pigs. As Rebecca recalls:

*It was a time for Kokodi grasses to be burnt, and all men were going. During that time we went into the bush. We women, we went into the bush and had our thighs tattooed. When we were finished, we went back home. We were in the village when our husbands returned from their hunting trip.*

*The other time when we had our thighs tattooed was when they went to Bwiruru to burn the grass. When they had gone, we went into the bush to have our thighs tattooed. We finished the tattoo and went home quickly. Then the men came home from their Bwiruru trip. They didn't spend the night at Bwiruru but just came home the same day. They brought us pigs and wallabies, which we cooked, ate, and finished.*

But why did women apply these intrinsic tattoos on their thighs? When I asked this question, several male and female informants stressed the aesthetic character of these tattoos. In an interview held with Stella, who applied among others her daughters' facial tattoos and who has a *kasa-bua* herself, this aspect but also the secrecy of these tattoos were highlighted. Even Stella's daughters did not see her *kasa-bua*, only her husband. As Sylvester Moi (Gafi clan, Chairman MICAD) explained:

*Custom-wise, kasa-bua are very important. They are very secret. Nobody is allowed to see them. Boys may not touch a girl's thighs. If they do, they have to marry her. Women's thighs are very private. They are not to be seen. If a husband sees other men seeing his wife's thighs and kasa-bua, the men might fight.*

In contrast to the facial tattoos related to initiation, thigh tattoos were based on personal preferences.<sup>14</sup> Not all Maisin women wanted to have their thighs tattooed. Old Christobel, for example, did not want to have these tattoos because she did not want to endure the pain. After being compelled to have her face tattooed as a young girl, she could somewhat later refuse to be tattooed again. Others, however, felt that the enhancement of their sexual attractiveness was worth the pain involved. For men and women belonging to more recent generations, the enhancement of their physique and the inscribing of their social identity involve less painful bodily decorations (see Chapters 4 and 6).

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14 It could be that thigh tattoos were once equally considered essential in the cultural socialisation of women. However, the few elderly women living today all stressed that it was their own choice to obtain these tattoos or not.

## Dangerous bodies: Female sexuality

The application of thigh tattoos is directly related to the enhancement of female sexuality. It is striking that, although this sexuality is emphasised by both facial and thigh tattoos, it must at the same time be contained in order to prevent conflicts, jealousy, and male weakness. In the past, it seems women had to adhere to several bodily restrictions in order to avoid sexual escapades as well as jealousy from their husbands. As one of my assistants explained, 'In the past, women could not let their hair grow. When women danced, some men would get jealous and beat up their wives. Now, some men allow their wives to wear pants, sandals, tie their hair. Some feel free to do everything they want to do!' Despite these changes, women's bodies today are still to a large extent covered up and restricted in their movements. Whereas men can walk in shorts with bare chests or swim nude, women always have to hold their skirt close to their body, even if they are among other women. Whether they are bathing, canoeing, working in the garden, or sitting, their skirts will always cover their private parts and legs. When getting up, they have to make sure their legs and especially their thighs are not visible. When leaving a group of people, they cannot tower over men and walk over their legs. This is considered disrespectful but also as dangerous since touching a man's leg with one's skirt might make him weak. Next to making a man weak – and not able to outrun enemy spears, as was believed in the past – seeing a woman's upper legs and thighs may result in adultery. As Christobel (circa 80 years old) from Airara village stated:

*It is a custom that women must always hide their thighs. If she does not hide them, men might see them and get attracted to her; they get aroused and want to sleep with her. Other men may therefore not see a woman's thighs, only the husband. They could get interested in her, and this is not good: the wife may commit adultery.*

Warnings against committing adultery appear to have been specifically targeted towards women. As Gertrude learned from the female elders of her father's clan, 'If you go and have sex with your husband's friend, you are poisoning your husband. The water and food you are giving him are not good. Your husband will get sick and die and leave you as a widow. So don't look at your husband's friend!' In this case, a direct relation is made between female sexuality and the negative consequences it can have when it is not properly contained. However, despite the moral condemnation of adultery, especially by females, extramarital sex is something that occurs frequently among the Maisin, although, as may be expected from the warning stated above, repercussions for married women are more severe than for married men.

A married woman who has sex with another man is often physically and socially punished by her husband, his family, and even his clan. As one woman experienced after her affair with another man became public, both her husband and her mother-in-law, who burned all her possessions and chased her away, hit her. Her husband would not let her stay with her own people and forced her to leave Collingwood Bay so she could not see her lover. It was striking that the women I interviewed on this issue all blamed the wife for having seduced

her married lover. Emphasis was placed on *her* role in this affair, not on her lover's part or their mutual responsibility. It was something *she* should have never done. Also in other cases, the woman was held responsible for either committing adultery or for the fact that a man would divorce his first wife to be able to marry her. Quarrels, fights, adultery by the husband, and even women being hit by their husbands are often regarded as cases that are triggered by women. In contrast, men are almost always excused for their behaviour, even when committing adultery or hitting their wives without apparent reason. As a result, the social repercussions for a man committing adultery are far less severe than for the married woman with whom he has an affair. In some cases, men fight due to sexual affairs with married or engaged women, but in general, a married man, especially when he commits adultery with an unmarried woman, will experience no repercussions at all. This emphasis on condemning adultery committed by women is also reflected on a national level. According to Papua New Guinean law, women can be jailed when suspected of adultery whereas men are not liable to be prosecuted (Cox and Aitsi 1988: 35).

Sexuality is, in general, not a public affair. Unmarried and even married couples do not show their affection in public. A man and a woman do not walk hand-in-hand, let alone hug or kiss each other, not even when they have to part for some time and say their goodbyes or when they see each other again after weeks or even months of separation. As Monica stated, 'I feel shy when I see (white) people doing that. In secret or private you can hug or kiss your partner, not in public!' In contrast, non-sexual affection towards brothers, sisters, cousins, and other family members can be shown in public. In addition, same-sex friends and close relatives can be seen walking hand-in-hand and embracing each other in public as well. It therefore seems that Maisin make clear distinctions between affection felt for family and same-sex friends (non-sexual relationships) and affection felt for sexual partners.

The norms and values regarding public behaviour are not static. As two young married women revealed, they would like to show affection, that is love, to their partners in public, but other people's reactions prevent them from doing so. 'If husband and wife touch each other or play a little, people immediately start gossiping and condemning you. That's why we don't do it'. The fact that sexual affection is not to be showed in public, however, does not mean Maisin men and women do not flirt with each other.

The shielding of female sexuality by sometimes several layers of skirts which cover a large part of women's legs might in fact also create a discourse of imagination and sexual attention, as well as play, focused on female legs and thighs. Although the general morality prescribes that women 'are ashamed and also scared to show other men their legs', as one informant stated, women can also play with their sexuality. By wearing only one layer of cloth, which shows the contours of the body, or casually lifting up the skirt and showing a piece of leg, which in the past was sometimes decorated with attractive tattoos, women reveal their sexuality. As several women explained, if men see a woman's upper leg or thigh, they certainly want to have sex with her. In some cases, wives are

actually accused of having lifted up their skirts to seduce other men, resulting in adultery. Lifting up one's skirt is thus regarded as a sexual invitation, which men cannot resist.

In the past, it seems that women belonging to certain clans or villages deliberately lifted up their skirts. As various Rerebin elders (Ganjiga village) stated, women would sometimes open up, or lift up, their skirts in a context of warfare:

*In the past, when women went where there was fighting, and their men lost hope and were about to retreat from the enemy who was spearing and killing them, that is when women started to interfere. That is why women went with them. When they faced the enemy, that is when the women started to encourage their husbands saying, 'Yeah! You did it! You are retreating; the fight has broken you!' The wives would then open up their embobi and say, 'Come and go [flee] inside here!' Because of what their wives had said and done, men would feel very embarrassed. So they would turn around, hold their spears firm, and go forward towards the enemy. This is why women went together with their husbands when there was fighting (Alfred Rerebin, Ganjiga).*

Women's sexuality also means they have to keep their distance from their men. As we have seen in the previous section, women's sexuality is regarded as being dangerous to men in its ability to make men weak. In the past, this fear of women's sexuality forbade them to come near men who were preparing for battle. Women were not allowed to take food to their men, and they had to stay separated from each other. As MacDonald Rarama from Rerebin clan in Ganjiga stated:

*Women had to stay by themselves. If women came too close to their husbands, or brought food, these men would get speared. They would not be able to stand properly and were too slow, so they would not be able to avoid the spears being thrown at them.*

*Women and girls, their embobi are very heavy. And these skirts make men's legs heavy. So they were not allowed to go close to the men. So men and women had to stay separated until the fight was won.*

According to MacDonald, men's weakness derived from getting in contact with women's *embobi*, or rather their sexuality. So women's *embobi* represent not just femaleness; they also entail or embody female sexuality and substances. By touching men with their skirts, women's sexuality would affect men's bodies and their performance as warriors. It therefore seems that women's sexuality, which is either shielded by an *embobi* or displayed by removing the *embobi*, is considered very powerful in either bringing victory or defeat. This illustrates how much women's thighs, and as such women's sexuality, was and still is imbued with a certain amount of danger in their ability to create shame, jealousy, and conflict. By marking their 'dangerous zones' with tattoos, women seem to have been enhancing their sexual attractiveness and as such also their sexual and perhaps

even reproductive powers. Nevertheless, whereas both the facial and thigh tattoos marked and enhanced female sexuality, their *embobi*, or skirts, actually shielded and contained women's sexuality.

Thus, it seems that female sexuality (or, rather, female sexual substances) is regarded as 'a matter out of place' since it can create disorder (Douglas 1966) by causing conflicts and weakening men's physical strength. As such, women's sexuality must be contained, especially in public, but also when, for example, bathing with other women, by wearing specific cloths such as tapa cloths or skirts that cover the locus of female sexuality. Moreover, it has to be contained by specific behaviour. As is shown in the next section, this gendered behaviour not only includes bodily gestures but also thought and speech.

### *Gendered ways of thought and speech*

Among Maisin, thinking – or *mon-seraman*, as Maisin call the mental capacities that constitute knowledge and skills – is different for women and for men. First of all, several male and female informants claimed that men have more *mon-seraman* than women. Second, most people interviewed stated that men's and women's ways of thinking are different. This latter difference is foremost allocated to the act of decision-making, which seems to be to a large extent a male prerogative. As Kiefas explained:

*Men make decisions. Women seek first the opinion of men before acting upon themselves. In our society, being a man means you are a decision-maker. What a man decides to do is what he thinks is best. Women's decision-making, on the other hand, is very limited. Men make the majority of the decisions, whereas women do not have very much to say in what men decide. Women are not used to making decisions on their own. This is the main difference between men and women.*

Although Kiefas and others attribute decision-making and, as such, responsibility to men or husbands, women's roles in this process are not entirely ignored. As Kiefas expressed, 'Men might take their wives' suggestion along in their decision making'. In general, though, men are held responsible for decision-making on a communal, clan, and household level.

The 'ideology' of male supremacy with regard to the capacity to make good decisions, however, is not backed up by everyone. As one of my female assistants argued, 'Men think different from the ladies. But sometimes they also think they are wiser than women. They think that whatever they decide and do is much better than what the women do. They say they are cleverer than women'. When I asked her whether she thought this was true, she replied, 'During meetings men do the talking. That is why they say they are cleverer. Some women are clever as well, but they are shy to speak up in public'. This is partly because men have, in contrast to women, the power to speak up in public. As my assistant explained, 'He has the right to talk to people in public, and to talk to the elders in the village. Sometimes when the husband is away, we can talk to the elder so he can speak on our behalf. But we cannot exercise power over the men! We cannot talk in front

of the entire village!’ So in addition to gendered knowledge and thinking, the act of talking is also gendered, especially to talk in public and to speak out.

In 1999, Maisin women were given the right to speak at public village and clan meetings. They are, however, still not allowed to speak in public on the *varo*, the open space between the clan houses. And in practice, their attendance at and participation in meetings is still limited. Especially for young and middle-aged women, it is difficult to actively join meetings. Elderly women, who possess knowledge about clan histories and land boundaries, are more entitled, as well as less shy, to speak up, and their opinion is even sought for by men.<sup>15</sup> In Airara, most women sit down on the ground surrounding the shelter on which the men sit and discuss. The distance and difference in height (men sit high; women sit low) makes it impossible for women to participate and discuss with the men. As a consequence, women are predominantly engaged with their children, make string bags, chew betel nut, and whisper with their female relatives and friends. This gender-based division of speech, space, and activity is not only visualised during specific occasions such as meetings and ceremonies but also during the daily division of work, reflecting the different status of men and women.

Maisin men and women are, in general, not regarded as equals in either status or power. Men are said to be high up in village hierarchy while women are lower. As several female informants expressed, ‘Men are *wowo* [high position] while we women are *kako* [low position]’. This hierarchy is expressed in the ability to speak in public but also in men’s ability to exercise violence.<sup>16</sup> As Monica stated:

*The husband talks, and when he is angry, he can hit you. As a woman, you have to adjust; you have to listen to your husband. If the husband is good to you, you treat him well. But even if the husband is not good, most women are good to them. Only few women treat their husbands bad.*

Thus, in contrast to men, women regard themselves as not being able to turn against their husbands, either verbally or physically. Various male and female informants stated that it is not good for women to yell or turn against their husbands. It is the women’s responsibility to make sure relationships are peaceful even if this implies they have to be submissive. These verbal and physical aspects of subordination

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15 As explained in the Introduction, there is a hierarchy based upon age. Elderly women are, in general, more respected than the younger ones, both by men and by women. Unfortunately, there were only a very few elderly ladies alive in Marua and Airara at the time of my research, and probably as a consequence, the women attending the MICAD and school meetings in Airara were married women, often aging between 25 and 40 years old. I witnessed one clan meeting which was attended by an elderly lady in order to provide a statement about clan land boundaries. Gorofi women, also younger ones, seem to be more prone to actively participate in meetings (see Chapter 8).

16 Despite the lack of significant gender stratification and related violence, as present in the Highlands of PNG, for example, Maisin women do face domestic violence. Although having repercussions on the relationship between the husband and his wife’s family (especially his brothers-in-law), hitting one’s wife is not uncommon. During my one-year stay, I witnessed one young Ganjiga wife being repeatedly struck by her husband and three Airara women being physically abused. Also, several other women reported having been hit by their husbands.

towards men are most clearly visualised during public meetings. But even in daily life, women avoid talking forcefully to men, or standing taller than them, especially when dealing with men other than their husbands.

It comes as no surprise that male dominance and status derive from their capacities and responsibilities to make the right decisions for their families and clan members. Even Helen, who was born outside Maisin, backed up this gendered division of status and responsibility. 'A man has more power. He has the responsibility of looking after the family. A woman does not have that responsibility. A woman is always under the husband. She follows him'. Thus, the responsibilities ascribed to men, their need or capacity to make decisions and talk in public, empower men. As a male informant explained, 'Decision-making makes a man strong (*forova*)'. But male strength also derives from a man's capacity to be able to provide food for the family and for others.

Both husband and wife are expected to work on garden plots that were created by their communal labour. While complementary, their tasks are also differentiated. Men are responsible for the chopping and burning down of primary forest, although women often make sure their husbands start doing this on time as they know when the old garden is becoming exhausted. This knowledge derives from the fact that, in general, women do most of the planting, weeding, and especially harvesting of crops such as taro, yams, and sweet potatoes. In order to prevent wild pigs roaming and destroying the garden, men are responsible for building a garden fence and, if needed, a garden house. So, while men are expected to provide and protect a garden plot, women cultivate the garden. In fact, several men indicated that their wives did all the harvesting as they themselves had no idea when the crops were ready. The main exception is the large bundles of various species of banana, which are often brought down by men. In addition to the harvesting, women make sure that the foodstuffs are brought to the village by carrying the crops in large string bags, which are suspended on their foreheads. Walking slightly bent over to ease some of the strain that is put on their necks, they are able to carry over twenty or thirty kilos. In some cases, they put a toddler on top of the string bag, as a little child is not able to maintain the fast pace set by its mother. While men depend upon women to harvest these garden crops, women depend upon men for the harvesting of sago, fishing, and the hunting of wild pigs.

The hunting and killing of pigs is men's work. Maisin differentiate between wild and domestic pigs, both in terms of the method of slaughter and in regard to their value. Domestic pigs are small wild pigs that have been fed with scraps of food by both husband and wife. Mature domestic pigs are valued higher than wild ones as they have been fed and taken care of. They are often named and raised with much affinity. As such, these pigs embody the efforts and concerns of the owner to raise it properly. This difference between domesticated and wild pigs concerns not only their respective value; they are also slaughtered differently. While a wild pig's head and limbs are cut off first, this occurs at a later stage with domesticated pigs. According to my informants, this difference is based on the fact that the latter have more fat. Both wild and domesticated pigs are slaughtered

and, prior to their cooking, smoked or roasted by men, just as the sago residue is in general roasted by men. In contrast, women peel the garden crops they harvest and, depending on the occasion, cook them in either tin or clay pots. Thus, in order to be able to give in abundance, men depend to a very large extent on their female relatives as the women have to take care of the crops, harvest them, and prepare the food. As Louisa expressed, 'Men and women are not equal: a woman has lots and lots to do, and she has to take care of the whole family. When the husband is good, he will help his wife, but most of the work is done by women'.

### *On being good husbands and wives*

So what does it mean to be a good husband (*tamati tauban*) and a good wife (*sauki tauban*)? This question was asked of 37 married men and women of Airara and Marua village. All of those interviewed immediately addressed the physical tasks a man or woman was supposed to fulfil. A good husband has to take care for his family and therefore be able to build houses and canoes, clear and make a garden, and build fences. In addition, he has to go out fishing, and ideally hunt, so he can provide his family with protein. A good wife shows respect to her husband and in-laws and takes care of them and her children by chopping firewood, fetching water, sweeping, cooking, and working in the gardens. In addition, she has to make pandanus mats, string bags, and tapa for her family. In short, she has to use her *mon-seraman* to do good work in and around the house. Summarised, definitions of a good husband and a good wife lie foremost in the tasks they perform and the things they make. According to most people, these tasks are less rigidly divided now as in the past. Monica stated, 'Now I see some men sweeping, cutting firewood, but before men never did this kind of work. Maybe that was our custom, that Maisin men did not do that?' Juspud said, 'Before, in the past only some would help their wives. Now we know the Bible, things have changed, and men help their wives more than in the past'.

Although all women supported the view that their husbands should help them more in their daily work, in practice the involvement of men in typical women's tasks, such as weeding, harvesting crops, carrying string bags with garden produce, chopping firewood, fetching water, and sweeping is still fairly limited. As several informants expressed, carrying string bags and especially sweeping are typical women's jobs. It does not look good when others see a man carrying string bags, washing dishes or clothes, and sweeping the place. Nevertheless, everybody agreed that men have become much more helpful. According to several people, Christianisation was an important factor in this change. As Gertrude expressed, 'Before, people relied more on *mon-seraman*. Now the bible is our guide'. Another reason for men's increased help to women is the fact that today men spend less time on fishing and especially hunting, which is often complained about by their wives, who denounce the lack of protein in the diet of their families. The men who spend considerable efforts in providing protein for their families and at the same time make sure to help their wives in the garden and around the house are

often used as an example which testifies of changing attitudes among Maisin men in general.

Male and female virtues are not only allocated in the fulfilment of differentiated tasks but also in social behaviour. As one of my female informants expressed it:

*A good husband always looks properly after his family. He provides them with food, clothing, and a good house. He also has to make sure his family does not get into trouble. He must be a good help to his wife. He has to make sure the family has enough money, by making copra and planting tapa trees. He has to clear the land and plant tapa. A good wife takes care of her family. She does not yell at her husband. Whatever problem comes up, she has to solve it with her husband and family in a peaceful way. She has to be good to her husband's family. A woman is a helper to others, and she should always obey what a man says. We do not marry men; they marry us, so we have to obey them.*

With regard to behaviour, a good wife obeys what her husband says 'so they live happily'. Moreover, as one of the elders of Waigo clan explained, 'She shows respect and doesn't yell at her husband, and that's why they call her a *sauki tauban*'. Moreover, several female informants expressed that 'the wife has to control her husband, look after him, and make sure he does not commit adultery. She has to know where he goes all the time'. Moreover, 'if the husband hangs around a lot, he will cause trouble. So, the wife has to act. She has to watch her husband and vice versa. In that way you maintain your marriage'. Thus, in addition to her domestic duties, a wife has to take responsibility when it concerns her husband's behaviour towards other women as well as her own behaviour towards other men. Adultery committed by either husband or wife is regarded as the greatest danger to a happy marriage, and it seems that women, in their roles as either wives or mistresses, are believed to play a crucial part in its occurrence. Thus, women's sexuality needs to be controlled and contained by displaying the proper bodily and mental behaviour, language, and dress. In this way, the relationship between men and women is ideologically and also practically constituted, thereby determining, to a large extent, the performativity of gender.

## **The performativity of gender**

How do Maisin women become what they are, or as some scholars argue, 'do' (Butler 1999)? In this chapter we have seen some examples of how women appropriate the cultural prescriptions on sex and as a result 'do'. In fact, as argued by Butler (1990: 272), gender is 'a corporeal style, an "act", as it were':

*The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.*

Among the Maisin, we have seen that gender, and in particular the roles or ‘personages’ (Mauss 1996: 12) women are expected to perform, is inscribed in women’s bodies through the reiteration of both discursive and non-discursive practices.

While conception involves both male and female substances that may result in either a boy or a girl, socialisation is to a large extent sex specific. Work, knowledge, and sexuality are inscribed differently in male and female bodies. As soon as a baby is shown to the outside world, its sex and its gender-attributed behaviour are embodied by naming the gendered work it is expected to perform, which is also visualised by leaving either small sticks (for a boy) or a small bundle of firewood (for a girl) on the path which mother and child follow. In fact, it seems that when growing up, girls’ bodies are especially put under strain to apprentice the tasks they are expected to perform. By doing these tasks and also adhering to the norms and values concerning how girls and women should move and behave, Maisin cultural prescriptions on sex are appropriated and acted upon.

Women’s experiences are equally reproduced from the dialectic between the social and the ‘individual’. Since both women and prescriptions on sex are socially and historically grounded, experience is neither individual nor fixed ‘but irredeemably social and processual’ (Fausto-Sterling 2000: 4). Maisin women’s appropriation of gender roles and behaviour becomes clear not only by the ways they act but also in how they think, and moreover in how they experience issues like, for example, adultery.

According to Butler, one can only know one’s own body or self through engagement with and moreover recognition and knowing of another. The ‘other’ is made up of ‘other human beings as much as the material and symbolic scene of otherness that forms what Judith Butler calls its “constitutive outside”’ (Hoogland 1997: 3). Renee Hoogland (ibid.) suggests that people’s sense of their differentiated (corporeal) identities depends upon ‘the radical non-coincidence of the body/subject’ and the inter-implication of self and the other(s). This implies two things. First of all, the body is not a singular entity, and second, the subject is never complete.

As we have seen, Maisin bodies are not singular entities. Among the Maisin, the ‘constitutive outside’ encompasses other people, concepts, and materialities, but also spirits and ancestors. As Bruce Knauff (2002: 27) argues with regard to Melanesia, ‘it is a fundamental axiom of being that self and body are constructed transactional through social relationships and through beliefs in spiritual forces’. In fact, among the Maisin it seems that the process of becoming a person, a social individual, is based upon this dialectic between the social and the self. The process of attaching a baby’s spirit (*kaniniwa*) to its individual body is coupled with its socialisation as a gendered person, an individual with *mon-seraman*, an individual with a (gendered) social identity. From conception onwards, Maisin bodies are scripted with gender and other identities, which change when the person grows older. This does not imply biological aging is synchronic to social aging (Myerhoff 1984: 307). Maisin, for example, clearly distinguish a married and therefore mature woman (*sauki*) from a marriageable girl (*morobi susuki*), even if the latter

is in her thirties or has given birth to a child. Maisin thus emphasise social aging, or rather the development of social personhood or identity, which is marked and formalised during lifecycle rituals. Thus, experience, self, and personhood are indeed 'irredeemably social' as Fausto-Sterling (2000: 4) argues. Moreover, these identities are in progress; they are continually reworked and therefore the body and its social identity, including its self, are never complete.

So in contrast to what Cecilia Busby (1997: 272) claims with regard to gender in Melanesia, Maisin identity is performative. Busby (*ibid.*) argues that gender in Melanesian societies is not 'performative' in Butler's sense but rather a performance. Since in various places in Melanesia identities are applied and stripped from the body during various ceremonies and other performances, gender is in Busby's opinion something that can be changed. As such, she claims, gender is not appropriated and re-enacted upon but is rather a staged role that may change according to the context of performance. Nevertheless, although among the Maisin, identities, such as clan, are effectively changed and performed during the course of a person's lifetime (Chapter 4), gender identity is rather fixed. Despite the fact that conception involves both male and female substances and bodies are essentially mixed, the subsequent scripting of the body and self through discursive and non-discursive practices is sex specific. Moreover, it is forceful. So gender is not just a role that can be discarded; it is appropriated, embodied, and re-enacted through people's bodily behaviour and acts and is therefore dynamic. This notion of gender becomes clearer when discussing how the making of tapa, which is grounded in a specific gendered setting, simultaneously constitutes the women who produce, or to put it in other terms, engender this object.



## Chapter 2

# Women making barkcloth

*Maisin is tapa [barkcloth]. So all women, even those coming from outside, have to learn how to make and design it.*

(several Maisin men, Airara village)

In this chapter it is argued that the making of tapa simultaneously shapes the women who create this object. This process is embedded within the specific setting of Maisin historicity and life. As demonstrated by Tim Ingold (2000) and elaborated on by Sean Kingston (2003), the making of things shapes the maker in their acquisition of skilled practices and is, at the same time, intertwined with forces that interrelate object, environment and maker (Kingston 2003: 682). This implies that people's manufacturing (and use) of things should be regarded as 'an intentional engagement with the world' (Kingston 2003: 704). Importantly, people use different 'techniques' in this engagement (Nijland 1989: 92-102). In this chapter, the emphasis is placed upon the 'material techniques' that people use. The making of tapa – and also the object itself – are analysed as resulting from the reciprocal relationships among environment, people, and things. From this perspective, objects can actually materialise particular socio-cultural understandings, including notions about the relationship between men and women.

The entanglement of people and things becomes visible when describing the various biographies of tapa. As Kopytoff (1986: 66) remarked, objects have different biographies – for example technical and ritual biographies, which are expected to follow a desirable or idealised life path. With regard to Maisin tapa, the specific technical production of barkcloth as performed by women is an example of such a biography. This biography not only reveals the standardised way of beating, designing, and painting barkcloth, it also reveals deviations in this particular life history. Such shifts in the technical biography of tapa are, for example, women using metal mallets instead of the traditional wooden ones, women copying designs from magazines instead of using the 'traditional' motifs and designs, or men entering the tapa production process. These changes are related to various processes and social relationships and, in particular, to individual skills and choices.

By describing the life and work histories of four Airara women, relationships between Maisin people and tapa are elucidated. I question and show how the manufacturing of tapa affects women, both socially and physically. The social, cultural, and economic contexts of this work are introduced, which will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming chapters. Specifically, it is questioned how Maisin women transfer their knowledge concerning tapa designs, elucidating

some of the processes that account for the continuity and the change in designs. I elaborate on tapa production as a particular form of female knowledge, one that is transferred from the past to the present and from one generation to another. The final section of this chapter questions whether the production of tapa can be regarded as a 'performative act' (Butler 1999) in which specifically gender and gender relations are produced and re-enacted.

### **Making tapa**

The production and the consumption of tapa are regarded 'as part of a circular process' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996: 9, 106). Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1996: 37) differentiate between production and consumption in the sense that meaning or values are not embedded in production but in consumption. They regard consumption as the arena 'in which culture is fought over and licked into shape', claiming that choices made concerning consumption 'express and generate culture' (ibid.). However, production can likewise be regarded as a mode of consumption. The production of tapa can be viewed as a practice in which choices are made and contested. It not only results in an object; it also produces people by appropriating (consuming) and innovating cultural techniques and tools, knowledge and ideas.

The production of tapa requires skill, strength and creativity. Moreover, as is shown, it is intertwined with women's bodies, their knowledge, status, and their identity. This relationship between tapa and the female body is fourfold. It is physical, mental, social, and symbolic. The female body is, through the production of tapa, physically intertwined with the material, both in women's appropriation of skills and techniques (*seraman*) as well as in their reciprocal relationship with the handling of the material, which affects their bodies. Since designs evolve out of women's imagination and creativity, women's minds (*mon*) are connected with the making of tapa. The social relationship between women and tapa becomes apparent when one considers how both men and women stress the responsibility of Maisin women for making tapa, both in cultural and economic terms. Finally, due to women's symbolic relationships with the production and applying of the red paint, they are ritually connected with tapa. The work histories of four Airara women and their experiences reveal in more detail how these dimensions are intertwined with women's lives and the making of tapa.

### *From tree to cloth*

One of the first things I asked when arriving in Airara village was if someone could take me to the gardens to show me tapa trees or *wuwusi*, as the paper mulberry tree is known in Maisin.<sup>1</sup> The reason why I was so eager to see them was because in the

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1 In the past, Maisin people also used wild *Ficus* tree species. Maisin informants clearly favoured the mulberry over this 'bush' product. Tapa produced from the *Ficus* genera is much coarser, rougher, and darker (often reddish-brown) than the smooth and white barkcloth obtained from the mulberry tree. Also, it is easier to harvest the cultivated mulberry than to go into the bush and search for suitable trees.

villages of Uiaku and Ganjiga, where I first arrived, there was hardly any production of tapa. Asking around only revealed that the production of tapa was low because they had problems with an introduced creeping weed that was suffocating the tapa tree sprouts. Others argued that it was due to magic that their tapa trees were not growing but dying. As a result, some women had stopped planting *wwwusi* altogether while others had given up their old tapa gardens, stating they would be planting *wwwusi* in newly made gardens.<sup>2</sup> During my almost four-week stay in Ganjiga, I only occasionally witnessed women working with tapa, and as a consequence I feared I would have to change my intended research. So when I arrived in Airara, I was anxious to learn whether tapa was still being produced and how it was manufactured. Fortunately, Airara turned out to be a good place to conduct my research as here the production and use of tapa were very much alive.<sup>3</sup>

So I approached Monica, a cheerful 35-year-old mother of five children with a beautifully tattooed face. Monica happily agreed to take me to her garden and show me the *wwwusi*. The next day, Monica, her husband, and I set off to their garden plot. Because it was still the rainy season and the garden track had turned into a muddy slide, Monica and Clifford decided to paddle up Ganjiga River to Marua Station and walk from there to their plot of land. After paddling along the mangrove shores, we followed the river upstream. Surrounded by a tunnel of mangroves, we finally arrived at the former coconut plantation, where three families had taken up residence.<sup>4</sup> The canoe was moored, and we walked through the old coconut palm plantation and abandoned gardens covered with tall grasses to the Airara gardens.

Every clan has its own plot of land, and by means of certain trees such as coconut and betel-nut palms or other landmarks, each clan and each family knows where its plot starts and ends. Since Monica wanted to cut some *wwwusi*, we went to the old garden first. Monica and Clifford had jointly planted the tapa trees in the old garden, but Monica did all of the weeding and decided when the trees were large enough to cut. In one of the two more recent food gardens, which were cleared about a year and one-half ago, Monica had also planted some tapa trees, but it would take more than a year for them to be mature enough to be used.<sup>5</sup>

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2 In contrast to Sibó people, Ganjiga and Uiaku people in general do not plant tapa trees in their food gardens but make separate *wwwusi* gardens. In Airara, a few people have also planted *wwwusi* at the backs of their houses. In Yuayu and Uwe, only a few people grow *wwwusi*. These northern villages rely on exchange networks with central or southern Maisin relatives to obtain the raw material. Recently, Miniafia people living south of Airara started cultivating mulberry in order to sell the raw material to Airara people, who paint large quantities of tapa and, as a consequence, need many tapa trees.

3 When I returned for a short period in July 2004, tapa was being made in Gorofi and Sibó villages, although the production in the latter seemed much larger. When strolling through Koniasi and Sinapa villages, almost all elderly women and some of the younger ones were making tapa. In Airara, women were equally busy painting tapa as some men were planning to go to town to sell it.

4 As prices have dropped drastically during the last twenty years, copra is no longer produced or sold.

5 In general, people use two or more gardens, of which one is located in a lower area and the other somewhat higher. When heavy rainfall during the wet season floods the lower gardens, they fall back on the gardens on higher ground. In the dry season, they mainly depend on the lower gardens.

Just like Monica, Maisin women in general manage the trees. They are responsible for weeding the area in order to ensure that the sprouts come up and that weeds do not suffocate the fragile mulberry saplings. When tapa is required for feasting, exchange, or money, a suitable tree is sought out. On average, the trees are one and one-half to three years old when they are cut, depending on the required size of tapa. The wider and taller the tree trunk, the larger the tapa cloth will be. Tall *wuwusi* are used for making the long and narrow male loincloth: *koefi*. The broader and shorter trees are used for making the rectangular-shaped female dress: *embobi*.

While Clifford went to have a look at the banana trees, Monica chopped down three *wuwusi*, each measuring about seven centimetres in diameter. She cut off the top branches and leaves and bundled together the tree trunks, carrying them on her head to the river, which I failed to cross with dignity, while she, of course, had no trouble crossing even with these long and heavy trunks on her head. In some cases, women cut several trees and transport them to the village, or alternatively they take them to their garden houses where the process of peeling and beating the bark takes place. Because Clifford and Monica did not have their own garden house (they would sometimes sleep in other clan members' garden houses) and Monica had to go back to take care of her children and her parents-in-law, we carried the *wuwusi* back to the canoe. But first we went to the new gardens to harvest some taro and pumpkin, leaving the bananas that Clifford had harvested and the *wuwusi* in a bush beside the track. Since Monica was carrying a *nonti* (large string bag) filled with foodstuffs weighing at least twenty kilograms, I offered to carry the *wuwusi* during our one-hour journey back to the canoe. Soaked from crossing various streams and the physical exercise, I just managed to carry the tree trunks to the canoe.

After a hazardous sea-faring trip with waves entering the outrigger canoe and twice making it almost sink, Monica and I (Clifford had decided to walk back because of the heavily-laden canoe) arrived in the village in good spirits but deathly tired. It took me about two days to recover from this trip, and because Monica had to go back to the gardens on the following days, a few days passed before she started to prepare and beat the bark. Weeks would pass before she started to design and finally paint the piece of tapa cloth.

Every Airara woman has her own preferred time and space in which to perform the various stages involved in the manufacture of tapa. These are: scraping of the outer bark and loosening it from the wooden core, beating and pounding the tapa (Photos 5-6), the subsequent drawing of the black designs with black pigment, called *mi* (Photos 7-8), and finally applying the red paint, called *dun* (Photo 9). Every stage demands its own time and sequence, and in general various breaks separate each of the manufacturing stages. Consequently, it often takes several weeks before a piece of tapa is finished.

Monica always prepared and beat her tapa bark on the platform underneath her husband's house, which is in fact her working area. While her in-laws, and sometimes her children and husband, often rested in the large shelter on poles (*barè-barè*) next to the house, I would often find Monica working in 'her area',

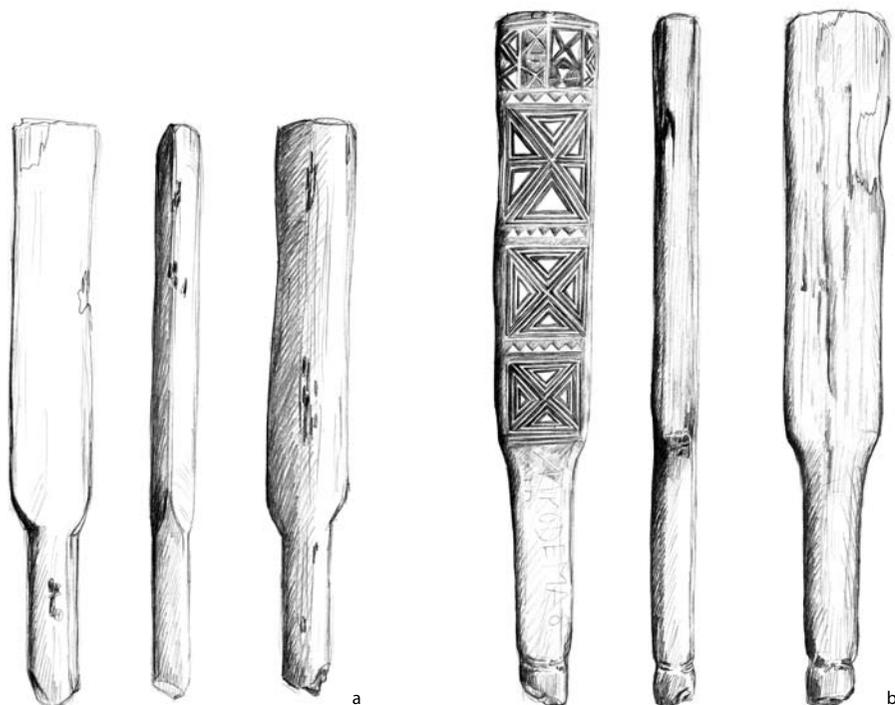
where she would also do the cooking. Monica's youngest child, Christina, would often sit with her underneath the house or play with other children in the area while her older sisters and brother were at school. Clifford, Monica's husband, was almost always away or on his own, going to the gardens to work on his garden fence, taking care of his vanilla plants, or heading for Alotau to do some 'business' such as selling tapa. Although he urges Monica to prepare tapa for these business trips, which always put an enormous strain on her, forcing her to even paint during the night trying to finish as many pieces of tapa as possible, he never helps her with this work.

When preparing tapa, Monica works outside her house, near the platform built underneath the house. Before peeling off the bark, she would scrape the outer bark with a large knife, making it smooth by removing any coarse parts. A steady hand is necessary in order not to cut too deep in the bark, which would leave a hole in the tissue. Making a lengthwise incision makes it possible to peel off the bark from the tree trunk. Using a knife, Monica would carefully loosen the bark from the wooden core, leaving a half-centimetre-thick piece of long and narrow bark ready to be beaten. The remaining cores are in most cases discarded. If the bark is removed from a freshly cut tree, it can be processed immediately; if not, it will be soaked about a day before beating it. The beating and subsequent pounding of the bark might take several hours, depending upon the size of the piece, which determines the size of the resulting cloth. A relatively thin tree about 150 centimetres long and six centimetres wide can be beaten and pounded into a tapa cloth measuring about 130 centimetres long and 70 centimetres wide, which is a common *embobi* size.

As with the other Maisin women, Monica prefers to beat the stiff bark with a thin metal object, such as the blunt side of a large knife or another metal object, referred to as a *fisiga*, because it is heavy and has sharp edges. A few women possess wooden *fisiga*, but these are hardly used anymore (Drawing 2a). Both the inner and outer surfaces of the bark are beaten diagonally in order to ensure that the fibres crosscut each other. If one neglects to do this, the fibres spread in one direction, making the tissue weak and creating gaps. While beating the bark, it is sprinkled with water to make the fibres soft and prevent them from breaking. Maisin women solitarily beat and pound the bark on heavy tree trunks, which are known as *fo*.

As soon as the tapa is sufficiently thin and smooth, the cloth is pounded with the edges of a larger and heavier wooden mallet that, like the tree trunk, is also referred to as *fo*. By using this implement, the fibres are spread out more evenly as the *fo* is heavier and its beating edge is broader. In Airara, I encountered one old lady who claimed to use a shortened war club, decorated with a nice engraved design, as a *fo* (Drawing 2b). According to John Barker, Maisin used to decorate their wooden tapa mallets. Today, except for the old lady I encountered, Airara women seem to use only undecorated ones.

The pounding of the tapa involves a different folding technique of the cloth than the initial beating with the *fisiga*. While Maisin women fold the beaten bark in the middle and turn it while beating, only the outside of the cloth is pounded. Before starting the pounding, the tapa is rolled up instead of being folded. During



Drawing 2. a: Fisiga (43 cm); b: Decorated fo (51 cm). Only the edges of the fisiga and fo are used to respectively beat and pound the tapa (see middle drawings).

the pounding, the women start from the middle and work towards the edge of the tapa. When one section is finished, they unroll another layer and continue the pounding, subsequently unrolling each section until the tapa is completely unrolled. When the shape of the tapa is regular and the 'cloth' is thin enough, the tapa is finished. If not, the tapa is rolled up again and the pounding starts all over again. When a woman starts making tapa, the entire village will know as the beating and pounding of tapa makes a very distinct sound, and one can hear this from far away.

With regard to the various techniques involved in making tapa, women clearly distinguish the beating and pounding of tapa from the subsequent designing and painting. Women may make comments on tapa cloth not being prepared well. The goal is to achieve a consistently thin and smooth piece of cloth. Tapa cloth that is either too thick or too thin in relation to the size of the cloth is considered evidence of lack of skill. Also, when the fibres lack cohesion, one's skill in beating tapa is questioned. To obtain a smooth piece of tapa, one needs to beat and pound the tapa with the correct techniques but also with considerable understanding and reflection as one cannot simply drop either the *fisiga* or the *fo* on the barkcloth.

The arduous beating and pounding require not only skill but also considerable strength. The initial beating of the stiff bark requires a strong arm to beat the bark as efficiently and quickly as possible. Since the beating and subsequent pounding of the bark takes several hours before it turns into a soft and thin piece of barkcloth

(depending on the size of the bark, between two and four hours), one can imagine the strain this puts on one's beating arm, especially since women use only one arm for the entire process.

The physical or bodily requirements for making good tapa are not given. They are reciprocally inscribed on women's bodies while learning and making tapa from a young age onwards. The material techniques used in women's engagement with their environment, in this case, results in particular bodily skills and strength. Moreover, it also affects women's posture as well as their health. All the time while making tapa, women will sit with their legs turned to one side along the *fo* – the wooden log on which tapa is beaten and pounded – and thus having to twist towards the log. In order to relieve their lower backs from this strenuous position, women will sometimes sit with their legs folded beneath them (as in Photos 5-6). During the subsequent designing of tapa, women will always have their legs stretched in front of them with the piece of tapa on their lap. This posture is retained when painting tapa, and it reflects socio-cultural notions on how women should control and place their bodies. A woman sitting behind her *fo* beating tapa or with her legs stretched out designing or painting tapa is an exemplary model of female conduct. These positions, however, place a great deal of tension on the back. Often without any support, women will sit in these positions for hours, straining both back and shoulders. Together with the heavy burdens women carry each day (food, water, wood, and children), it is not surprising that most elderly women have back problems.

The spatial and temporal dimensions involved in making tapa confine women's bodies to particular spaces and specific times. In Airara, most women would beat the tapa underneath their (husband's) house. Most women have their own log (*fo*), which is often placed in this particular area, although some women also work on the porch (*babassi*) of their elevated house. Since the log is rather heavy, it is rarely moved. Nevertheless, women living in households without a *fo* sometimes borrow one from their clan sisters, especially when they have lots of tapa to make. In these cases, the log is temporarily moved to the other household.



Photos 5-6. Monica beating the bark with a metal beater (*fisiga*) on a heavy wooden log (*fo*).

Situated below the house, women making tapa can keep an eye on their youngsters playing nearby. At the same time, they are protected from the merciless sun and are able to benefit from a potentially refreshing sea breeze, as most women beat and pound tapa during the day. Producing tapa at night is restricted to particular clans, meaning that only those women pertaining to clans who have or own this right, or clan emblem (*kawo*), are allowed to beat during the night. Several informants stated that, in the past, all women would make their tapa according to these rules. Today, however, some women have found ways to avoid comments from clans who own this particular *kawo* by beating tapa in their garden house or by claiming relationships with clans which are allowed to beat and pound during the night.

### *Designing the cloth*

In contrast to the audible beating of tapa, the drawing and painting of the tapa designs is not restricted by time taboos. Nevertheless, all women prefer to draw and paint during the day as most households do not have good kerosene lamps to work with during the night. While drawing, women sit with their legs stretched out, holding the tapa on a piece of hardboard, providing a hard base, on their lap (see Photos 7-8).

The drawing of tapa designs requires women to possess completely different skills beyond those needed for converting the bark into tapa. One needs both creativity and technique, especially a steady hand. Maisin men and women refer to these skills, including the beating of tapa, as *mon-seraman*, thereby addressing both the mental (*mon*) and physical or technical (*seraman*) capacities needed to make good tapa. Maisin men and women hesitantly concede that not everyone is as skilled as her neighbour. However, this is never expressed in public. People recognise each other's work and have preferences, but it is said that all women are equally capable of making tapa and drawing tapa designs and that no hierarchies exist between experienced and 'young' tapa designers. However, women uncertain of their skills will often turn their work upside down when more experienced tapa designers come to have a chat and a look. This behaviour was recognised by both men and women and regarded as a token of respect towards the visiting and more experienced woman. In contrast, skilled women will never turn their work upside down when people come around.

Women draw various designs on tapa. As is described in the next section, some of these designs are grounded in the past. In particular, clan designs (called *evovi*), which are owned by the patrilineal clans, have been transferred from the past. Several clan designs that were collected by colonial collectors are still known and used today. An inventory of these colonial collections also suggests that in the past women seem to have drawn predominantly clan designs. Today, more variation exists. In addition to both abstract and figurative clan designs, women create designs that are related to the Anglican Church. These latter designs represent biblical scenes and the Mothers Union's (MU) logo. The MU logo is not only printed on blue calico skirts but also drawn on barkcloth and worn by female Mothers Union members during special occasions (see Chapters 6 and 8). The most frequently produced designs are geometrical designs that are called *a moi*



Photos 7-8. Two stages in drawing a four-panel design on an *embobi*. In the photos, Monica has folded the cloth into four parts, revealing only one of the four panels.

*kayan*, which can be translated as ‘just a design’. I will refer to these designs as ‘general’ designs.

Maisin women deploy two styles of ‘general’ designs, which are the so-called ‘panel’ designs and ‘continuous’ designs. The first style consists of one design that is generally repeated four times on an *embobi* and six times on a *koefi*. The cloth is either folded three times into four parts or five times into six parts, and the same design is drawn separately on each of the panels, often without looking back to the previously drawn panel (see Photos 7-8). This style of repeating one design several times resembles the way clan designs are structured. In general, clan designs consist of four panels that are identical or four panels of which three panels are identical. In contrast, continuous designs consist of one design, possibly having several motifs, that is drawn without panels. Continuous designs that consist of curvilinear and meandering lines, which are often drawn on the cloth without folding it, are called *gangi-gangi*. As continuous designs, *gangi-gangi* (which is the Maisin word for ‘twisted’ or ‘meandering’) flow freely over the cloth and are not bounded by panels. In Airara, these designs are less frequently produced as general panel designs.

All types of designs are drawn with *mi*, a black pigment made from river clay (*yabu mi*) and leaves from a creeper called *wayango*. Sometimes burned coconut husk or the ink of an octopus is added. The ingredients are subsequently mixed with water. This mixture of leaves, mud, and water can be kept for quite a long period, with its odour of decaying organic material becoming stronger each day. The *mi* is applied with a little stick called a *nasa* that is broken off from the dry

filament of the white palm and sharpened to obtain a better drawing point. In general, each woman has her own bowl of *mi* and *nasa* sticks that vary in thickness so as to be able to make both thin and broader lines. Women draw the black lines by either supporting their drawing hand with one finger or keeping the hand from resting on the cloth, only letting the *nasa* touching it (Photos 7-8).

Since I lived close to her, I often witnessed Monica drawing, on her platform underneath the house (see Photos 5-6 and 7-8) or on the shelter (*bare-bare*), and she even tried to teach me to draw with *mi* and *nasa*, although I never reached the perfection and balance she created in her lines and designs. The drawing of tapa designs entails roughly three phases. With a 'general' design, the design has to be first created. This is primarily done in the head, although women would also draw designs in the sand, trying them out without spoiling valuable barkcloth. Before setting out to make a new general design, Monica would think about it and then 'draw' the design with four fingers on the white surface of the cloth. In this way she would visualise her mental image of the design. The four fingers represent the four black lines that will meander and curve parallel to each other, creating three 'veins', of which the central one will be left white and the outer two filled in with red *dun*. If satisfied, she would apply the design with *mi*. All the women I interviewed and witnessed during their work would create a mental picture before starting to apply the design. This implies that women already know in advance what they are going to paint. This is very different from working without preconceived notions about the eventual outcome.<sup>6</sup> As Monica explained, 'If I don't think about the design properly, I will make a mistake and spoil it.'

### Tattoos and tapa designs

It is striking that the designs which are drawn on the tapa surface resemble the facial tattoos that were applied by women on the surfaces of girls' faces. Nevertheless, when I asked whether tapa and tattoo designs are similar, tattooist Lina started laughing: 'I don't take tattoo designs and put them on tapa, nor did I take tapa designs and put them on a girl's face!' Lina's somewhat smirk remark laid bare my naïve thoughts. How could I have thought tattoo and tapa designs are similar? Obviously, at least to the tattooists and tapa designers, this congruence between tapa and facial tattoo designs does not exist. As all tattooists expressed, tapa and tattoo designs are different; both have their own designs. Stella explained, 'A tattoo design, it must fit with the girl's face, making it attractive'. Moreover, the thinking involved with setting up either a facial or tapa design is different. As Christobel stated:

*It is my own thinking (mon). I decide what I want to tattoo. My first facial tattoo (bua), I saw it when I was still learning. So I put this bua on the girl's face; I copied it. But afterwards I made my own tattoo design. Tapa and bua designs are different. Bua come from our own thoughts; they are not copied from tapa designs. Both involve thinking (mon), but it is a different type of mon; it is not the same.*

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6 Two Airara men, who occasionally made tapa because of the financial revenues, used this latter method (see Chapter 8).

This difference in thinking was more clearly explained by Lina who argued, ‘I don’t have to think about the *bu* that I put on the girl’s face as you do with designing tapa. I have to try first. I put it on and look at it. If it looks good, I tattoo the design on her face’. So, in contrast to tapa-cloth designs, which are often thought of in advance before being applied on the tapa surface, the shape of the girl’s face actually determines the design, which, as a consequence, is not premeditated. All tattooists whom I interviewed carefully looked at the girl’s face before applying the tattoo. As Maggie explained, ‘The one on the forehead (*simati*) is the girl’s own design. That is where it starts. The forehead is printed together with the nose, followed by the cheeks. This *simati* design is not the same as on the cheeks. Some faces are big; others are small, which is how I decide how it looks like. I would first use black paint to put the design on. If it looked good, I would start tattooing; if not, I would rub it off and start over’.

When I asked tapa designers about the similarities between tapa and tattoo designs, most women denied there were similarities. However, not all women agreed. As one informant argued, ‘Some women, they look at your face and copy your tattoo design on tapa’. Whether this is actually the case is difficult to determine, especially since this kind of practice was not appreciated at all. Thus, although for an outsider like me, tapa and tattoo designs are part of a similar style system, the Maisin women involved with the making of tattoo and tapa designs stressed that they are not. The main reason is that the surfaces (skin versus tapa) on which the designs are placed are considered essentially different. Another difference lies in the application of small geometrical figures on the tapa surface.

### *Decorating and painting the cloth*

After the mental design has been put on the cloth, the finishing touch is added. Small dots and geometrical figures are applied, which make the tapa design complete. Although tattoo and tapa drawings reveal similar curvilinear black lines, tattoo designs lack the small dots that are so characteristic of Maisin tapa designs. These little black dots accentuate the parts that are going to be left unpainted and those lines and spaces that are to be painted red. They are known as *supfifi* and are applied with a somewhat smaller pandanus-fruit stick. In addition, women may apply small black geometrical figures (*sisimbi*), I-shaped figures (*kane*), and small black triangles (called *boin*). As several women argued, ‘Without *sisimbi*, a tapa doesn’t look good’. When the tapa design is complete, it is hung out to dry in the sun, after which it is put inside a folded sleeping mat. This will keep the tapa smooth and, at the same time, remove folds as if ‘ironing’ the cloth while sleeping on it. In this way, women imbue tapa cloth with a little part of themselves (Choulai and Lewis-Harris 1999: 213). It stays there until sufficient tapa has been prepared or until an order or other occasion appears for which the tapa is needed. As soon as this is the case, the final stage of completing the *embobi* or *koefi* comes to the fore, the applying of the red pigment called *dun*.

*Dun* is made out of three components: the bark (*saman*) of a *Parasponia* sp. tree, the leaves of a *Fians subcuneata*, known as *dun fara* (*fara* are leaves), and water (*yun*). In contrast to the black *mi*, the ingredients for the red paint have to

be boiled. The bark and leaves are put in layers in a cooking pot: first the bark, then the leaves, subsequently a layer of small pieces of bark, and so on until the pot is filled up. Water is added, and a fire is used to boil the mixture for an hour or so. When painting the tapa with the red substance, which is applied with a dried pandanus fruit (*imongiti*), the pot is kept over the fire to ensure that the pigment remains hot. If the paint is applied when it is cold, it will spread out too easily and cause stains. As a consequence, women sit around the fire when applying the red paint. Moreover, since *dun* cannot be kept or re-used, women use the paint effectively, painting as much tapa as possible and sharing the *dun* with female relatives or friends. Consequently, it is a common sight to see several women gathered around a heated pot of red pigment. While painting, the women share not only *dun* but also their thoughts and gossip (Photo 9).

In most Oceanic cultures, the manufacturing of pigment is 'a magico-symbolic process' (Teilhet 1983: 49). Among the Maisin, this was equally the case as in the past the manufacturing of the red pigment, as well as painting with *dun*, was bounded by rules and taboos. Rebecca recalled:



*Photo 9. Applying the red paint (dun) on a panel design with a piece of dried pandanus fruit (imongiti).*

*In my days, men were not allowed to sit near the fire where we would cook the dun. Men were also not allowed to see women put on the dun. Sometimes women would paint on the babassi [elevated porch], sometimes outside. Men had to avoid women painting. Women were not allowed to eat while applying the dun. When finishing working with the dun, they could cook and eat again. The red substance, they respected it and called it tambuta. If they would call it dun, it would turn light, so we had to respect it and call it tambuta (Rebecca Ifugari, 83 years old, Sia clan, Marua village).*

The red paint was mixed and boiled inside the house in a separate clay pot, which was not to be used for cooking food.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, men and small children were not allowed to look at it, come near it, or make any noise when women were working with the dye. The women working with the *dun* had to speak quietly and were not allowed to eat and drink while handling the red substance. Men had to be excluded from the dye's production and use because the presence of men would 'spoil' the paint by making it 'less red' or causing it to 'dry up'. The same thing would occur if one would say the name '*dun*' aloud while making or working with it. When the women had finished their secret work, they would hang the tapa outside to dry, and this would be the first time people saw the cloth and its painted design.

As Mary Douglas (1966) noted with regard to notions of pollution and taboo, mainly external bodily substances become 'matters out of place' and consequently have to be treated in specific ways in order to control them. In the case of *dun*, it seems that this red substance, associated with blood, was such a matter out of place. Women working with *dun* had to follow certain rules. They refrained from eating, had to be silent, and had to rename the substance in order to be able to handle it properly. In a similar manner, both children and men had to adhere to restrictions as they were not allowed to make noise or come near the *dun*. But although *dun* can be associated with blood outside the body, and as such be perceived of as an anomalous matter, it was not the *dun* itself that was regarded as dangerous. Rather, people's behaviour and their bodies provided a danger to the *dun*.

In the past, men and children especially were regarded as dangerous in their ability to 'spoil' the dye or 'to make the blood weak', but women also had to adhere to certain rules in order to prevent weakening this substance. According to Elizabeth Faithorn (1975: 137), this potential danger of both sexes lies in the 'mismanagement of the substances provided by their bodies'. Male substances appeared to have been particularly dangerous for the red pigment. While men could not handle the *dun* at all, women were, and are, capable of handling it properly by obeying certain rules. This notion of male substances as being potentially polluting also resonates through sexual relationships. A man is prohibited from intercourse with his breastfeeding wife because it is thought his semen (*voto*) will enter the child via the mother's milk (*susi*), making it weak and sick with a possibility of death. It is noteworthy that a similar prohibition was told by one of John Barker's

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7 Sorcerers also had their own cooking pots from which no other persons could eat because it was regarded as dangerous. Today, most women prepare the dye in tin pots instead of clay pots, the latter in general being reserved for ceremonial or festive cooking. Generally, I witnessed women using very old tin pots to prepare their dye in, which were no longer used for cooking food.

informants (personal communication), who claimed it was prohibited to have sex before making and applying the *dun* on tapa.

Out of respect and also out of fear of ‘spoiling’ the paint, people would call it *tambuta* or *taabuta*. Interestingly, *taabuta* means red blood.<sup>8</sup> This association between the red dye and blood becomes stronger when one considers that the three ingredients of the red dye (leaves, bark, and water) have to be boiled to create the pigment, and the resulting *dun* has to be applied when it is still warm.<sup>9</sup> This connotation of *dun* as a sign of life, as living blood, also applies to Maisin people’s preference for freshly painted tapa. When the paint (or blood) is just applied on tapa, it has a vivid bright-red colour. After some time, however, the pigment will turn a somewhat dull brownish-red, which is regarded as less attractive. Considering the meandering red lines of the tapa designs, we could interpret them as veins depicted on the cloth or skin, ‘running’ in meandering ways and making life. While the freshly applied hot pigment on tapa may symbolise living blood, the older pieces of tapa may actually refer to death blood. The tendency of Maisin to simply discard older pieces of tapa or to re-use them as, for example, strings to climb coconut palms underlines this symbolism. But whose blood are we talking about, and why are male substances regarded as dangerous in weakening this blood?

The designs depicted on the tapa in the past may help to provide answers to the questions posed above. In the past, clan designs were mostly depicted. Tapa collected around a hundred years ago by Money and Pöch reveals a large quantity of clan designs (see next section) and relatively few ‘general’ designs, as we see today. Clan designs are referred to in the Maisin language as *evovi*. They are often figurative depictions referring to a particular patrilineal clan and its clan emblems (*kawo*) and history. Each *evovi* has its own name that often refers to the clan ancestor and his journey down from Musa River to Collingwood Bay. On the ancestor’s travels, particular leaves, trees, plants, animals, mountains, and other ‘features’ were encountered, and these were incorporated into the ancestor’s emblems (see Chapter 3). These tapa clan designs were, and still are, created and reproduced by women, although men or, more specifically, the patrilineal clan owns them. But if men own the designs, why is the presence of men dangerous for the clan designs’ reproduction?

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8 *Taa* means blood, and *buta* is another word for *mu*, which means red or ripe (for example, *mei mu*, ripe bananas). In addition, one woman told me that her uncle used to call sago ‘*taabuta*’ while squeezing it with water. The sago turns the water reddish, but the association with blood becomes more obvious when one considers that the ‘beating of sago’ is referred to as ‘*baya nawi*’, which literally means ‘killing sago’. Juspud, an elder of the Waigo clan, explained that the act of chopping down a sago tree, splitting it open, and removing its insides was comparable to killing a pig or a human.

9 If it cools down, the *dun* spreads over the cloth and cannot be contained between the black lines. As a male elder put it, ‘The *mi* (black pigment) gives space to the red lines’ (John C. Taniova, 70 years old, Airara village), and the women see to it not to cross the black lines when painting the red ones. Barker (1985) referred to this practice by arguing that the red paint has to be ‘controlled’ by the black lines and, like blood, cannot ‘run’ around freely. The women I interviewed only stated that in order to sell tapa, no stains or red paint should be outside the lines, since this affects the opportunity to sell it.

It seems logical that, if men are regarded as dangerous for the *dun*, that the substance itself was not thought of as being connected to men but rather as a substance associated with and therefore created by women. In fact, it seems plausible that the red pigment was regarded as female blood. This association between *dun* or *taabuta* and female blood becomes even more plausible when we consider that Maisin people believed that the foetus (*mende*) was created out of a mixture of semen (*voto*) and blood (*taa*) (Barker 1985: 214). Both are essential for the conception of a child, and probably also in the production of patrilineal clan designs. If *dun* was associated with mother's blood, it seems that the production of patrilineal clan designs equally entails a significant dose of the 'maternal body', just as babies do. Moreover, even when one considers the possibility that *taabuta* was regarded as a mixture of male (bark) and female (leaves) substances, the association between making and applying *dun*, on the one hand, and the maternal body, on the other, is still viable.

Maisin women, especially in their roles as mothers and wives, can be regarded as producers of life. Both in a biological and a material way, women continue and reproduce the patrilineal clan by means of children and clan tapa. This also explains why children, including girls, were not allowed to come near the *dun*. Having no reproductive capacities, they were not able to produce or rather complete these designs. Ethnographic collector Rudolf Pöch also noticed that it was mainly elderly women who were involved in making tapa (Pöch not dated a; 1907a: 67). Thus, although clan designs embody claims of ancestral patrilineal descent, women's involvement is necessary to actually produce this particular descent. It therefore seems that clan tapa expresses a hidden dialogue between male and female 'substances', which together create a particular *evovi*, and, as such, a clan's ancestral connections and its identity.

For some reason, the ritualised production and the relationship between *taabuta* and *dun* lost its power. Today, men witness women making *dun*, and men can also apply the pigment, although they rarely do so, leaving this work, as well as the beating, to female relatives. The time when the production and use of *dun* was ritualised seems long gone. Rebecca, who was 83 years old when I met her in 2001, witnessed her female relatives making and applying *dun* in the ritualised way but never had practised it herself. Christobel, who was circa 80 years old at the time of my research, only knew about it from her mother's stories. According to John Barker, the ritualised production and use of *dun* was practised until at least the 1930s. It seems likely that the ritual character of *dun* decreased gradually, which may have proceeded differently in various villages. The reasons why this occurred remain unclear, but it could only have transformed due changing gender relations.

As relationships between men and women became less antagonistic (see Chapter 1), it was perhaps no longer necessary to produce and apply the *dun* in a secluded and ritualised manner, as male substances and the presence of children were no longer 'dangerous' for the *dun*. This change, however, must also have been related to the fact that the association between *dun* and blood eventually lost its significance. If one accepts my hypotheses that *tambuta* symbolised the male/female

component in the constitution of the patrilineal clan, the dissolving association indicates that perceptions and ideologies of the clans and their constitution must have transformed as well. The increasing influences and appropriations of Anglican Christianity, schooling, and outside labour opportunities from the early 1900s onwards could have been at the heart of these transitions. For example, the growing importance of the church as a binding element in Maisin societies and people's spiritual lives also reconfigured both the relationships between men and women and the way clans were perceived and organised and how they interacted towards each other (see Chapters 7 and 8). A result of this, and possibly of other socio-cultural transformations, was that men could enter the production sphere of *dun*, which, in the past, had been exclusively controlled by women. Nevertheless, men's involvement with *dun* is still very limited, and they do not reproduce clan designs, which is still the prerogative of their mothers, wives, and sisters.

Since the symbolic connotation between *dun* and blood has almost gone, the prohibition of children making noise and handling the *dun* has vanished. While women now aged twenty and above made their first proper tapa only after they got married, today unmarried girls may help their mothers apply the *dun* and draw tapa designs by themselves. It therefore seems that the transfer of this female form of knowledge – making, drawing, and painting tapa designs – starts earlier than before. In the next section, this and other aspects of transferring the art of tapa-making from one generation to the next are discussed.

## Transferring female knowledge

Wrapped in acid-free paper and tucked away in the drawers of the National Museum and Art Gallery of Papua New Guinea, 55 pieces of barkcloth are stored, collected in the coastal Oro province by the first governor of British New Guinea, Sir William MacGregor. Between 1890 and 1895, MacGregor made short visits to Lower Musa River, Musa River, Collingwood Bay, and Moni River and collected these pieces of barkcloth (see also Chapter 7). I spent two days unwrapping and photographing them, but since I had no possibility of developing the film in Port Moresby, it would take more than six months before I was able to have a proper look at the photographs and the designs on the tapa.

I was in for a surprise. One of the decorated pieces of barkcloth, a female loincloth that had been collected by MacGregor in Lower Musa River (Photo 10), was decorated with the exact same design as one of my female Maisin friends had drawn on a *koefi* (Photo 11) just before my departure from Airara in 2002. Since this design had not been previously published, and I had only developed the film after returning to the Netherlands, Louisa could not have seen the tapa collected by MacGregor. This design therefore must have been part of a (female) Maisin collective memory since their departure from the Lower Musa River area, which according to oral histories happened approximately six generations ago. Or perhaps Maisin women had recently seen the design being worn by Kosirava groups during regional festivities. In either case, I was very surprised to see that a design could persist during more than a hundred years of change.



Photo 10. Barkcloth (women's loincloth) collected by MacGregor in 1894 along the Lower Musa River. Collection National Museum and Art Gallery, Papua New Guinea (M 5017).



Photo 11. Barkcloth (men's loincloth) made by Louisa Joke in 2001, Airara village. Collection National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (RMV 6009-37).

The *embobi* collected by MacGregor and Louisa's *koefi* that was made more than one hundred years later show how the present is grounded within the past. While MacGregor had collected his piece along the Lower Musa River, I obtained Louisa's *koefi* in Airara village. Before Louisa had left Airara to give birth to her fifth child, she had sold me this *koefi* because she needed money for the seafaring trip to Alotau and for the delivery of her baby in the hospital. I remember having seen the design on a *koefi* being made by another Airara woman for her husband on the occasion of an upcoming festival. I was attracted by the simplicity of the design, which consisted of a series of parallel red lines alternating with a row of oval shaped figures. Louisa had probably noticed my liking of this design and made it for me to buy.

The similarity between Louisa's design, which I thought to be a common design used by all Maisin clans, and the *embobi* collected by MacGregor along the Lower Musa River is striking but not unique. Several other designs collected by, amongst others, missionary Percy John Money and Pöch in Collingwood Bay are still in use today among the Maisin. When showing the Money collection to Maisin living in Ganjiga, Uiaku, Airara, and Marua, it appeared that the designs predominantly originated from Wanigela and Uiaku, although a few were also in

use in some of the Sibbo villages. Several of these old designs are almost identical with contemporary ones, but others have been transformed considerably, and only their recorded names reveal the link with present designs. Moreover, not only clan designs were handed down from one generation to another; in addition, the technique and style of general designs were, and still are, transferred from one woman to another. In the following sections, the transfer of knowledge and the techniques involved in the making of tapa are described, revealing how women hold the key to cultural continuity and change.

### *The past in the present*

Louisa's tapa exemplifies how the present is grounded in the past and vice versa. Her design is not an exception; several other tapa designs that were acquired by colonial collectors can also be found in the present. However, these collections also show change. When comparing past designs with contemporary ones, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the styles of designs and the raw materials used in making tapa. First of all, it seems that most of the collected designs were actually clan designs. Second, designs, as shown by 'MacGregor's' and Louisa's tapa, may be used over a wide area. Third, while several designs have hardly changed with regard to style, others have changed considerably or seem to have disappeared. Finally, it seems that over the course of time, emphasis has been placed on using the domesticated paper mulberry tree instead of wild *Ficus* species.

The presence of clan designs in museum collections is reflected in the pieces of tapa whose designs are named (see Appendix 1). Both the names and the styles of these designs suggest that we are dealing with clan designs. Furthermore, among those pieces that have no registered names are designs that are recognised by Waingela and Maisin people as being clan designs. These designs belong not only to Wanigela and Maisin clans but also to other linguistic tribes in Collingwood Bay and even beyond, such as in Oro Bay.

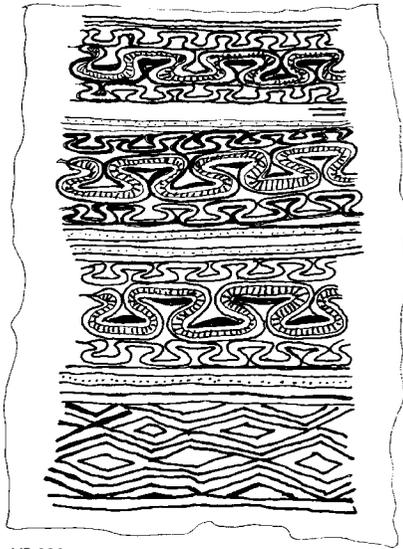
An illustration of the fact that similar designs are widespread over Collingwood Bay and even beyond is the so-called snake design. This design was collected by MacGregor (M5000) between 1890 and 1895, by merchandiser P.J. Black (VB920) before 1903, by Money (E.16335 and E.16336; Photo 4), and also by Pöch (77.663) in 1905 (Drawing 3). They collected this design in Collingwood Bay, Okeno in Oro Bay, and in Wanigela, respectively. In 2002, an elderly Miniafia lady from Reaga village wore a similar design during the Airara Church Day. As she was very fond of the piece she was wearing, which had been made by her now-deceased mother, she offered to make me a new one (RMV 6009-51). She explained the design as being a mother snake and her two children, calling it *motaf*. Her design is similar to the two upper panels on the cloth collected by MacGregor in Collingwood Bay and is almost identical to the one collected by Black in Oro Bay. Among Maisin clans, this snake design is also known (Photo 12). It is claimed by the Mainum clan living at Marua Point and is referred to as '*moti*'. Today, it is hardly used anymore as people prefer to use another design.

Photo 12. An example of the Mainum snake design drawn by Junice Bendo. According to Junice, the piece of tapa was too small for her to draw the design properly, and both the heads and the tails of the snakes are not finished. Included in this example is Mainum's other clan designs: 'star' or 'starfish', called *baroki* or *sesemi*.



So the snake design, noted down by Money as '*mota*' and by Pöch as '*motap*', was and is used over a large geographical area. Since its use today is restricted to particular clans, it may well be that this was also the case in the past. This might even account for its geographical dispersal. As is elaborated upon in the next chapter, Maisin, Miniafia, Korafe, and other groups of people often gave their tapa clan designs, or other clan emblems, to groups they encountered while migrating from the Musa area to Collingwood Bay. The continuity of the snake design informs us how different women, belonging to various linguistic tribes, interpreted and transferred this particular design from one generation to the next.

There are other examples that show how present designs are grounded in the past. Around 1900, merchandiser and shipping agent P.J. Black managed to collect various pieces of barkcloth from the Okeno-speaking people of Oro Bay. Among his collection of decorated barkcloth, some of which he sold to the Australian Museum in Sydney and also to the Museum der Kulturen in Basel, is one piece decorated with a box-like design (VB 928; Drawing 4). This design has many variations, but it is almost identical to the '*kamba*' design used by the Boni clan (a sub-clan of Dadumu) of Airara village.



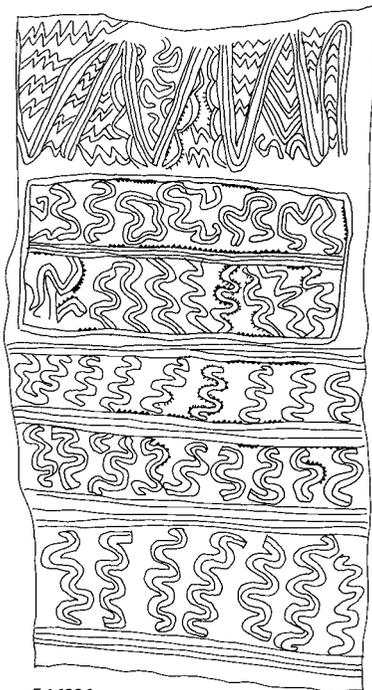
VB 920



77.633



E.16335



E.16336

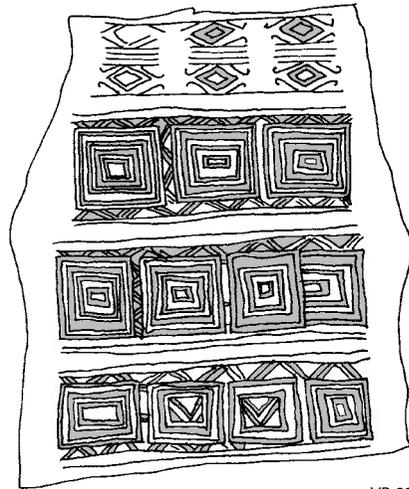
*Drawing 3. Four pieces of tapa collected around the turn of the twentieth century displaying a snake design. Some designs (like VB 920) have three identical panels and a fourth with a different and often simpler design. This part was tucked under in use and was therefore not visible.*

*VB 920: Female dress collected by P.J. Black among the Okeno people of Oro Bay. Acquired by the Museum der Kulturen (Basel) in 1903;*

*E.16336: Female dress collected by P.J. Money. Acquired by the Australian Museum;*

*77663: Male dress collected by R. Pöch. Acquired by the Ethnological Museum in Vienna in 1907;*

*E.16335: Male dress, collected by P.J. Money in Wanigela. Acquired by the Australian Museum in 1907.*



*Drawing 4. Barkcloth collected by P.J. Black. Acquired by the Museum der Kulturen, Basel (VB 928).*

VB 928



*Photo 13. Barbara painting the kamba design that was drawn for her by Christobel Dave, who was the only one who knew how to make this design. Christobel was one of the oldest women of Airara village and possessed a large amount of knowledge that was often unknown to the younger female generation.*

On one occasion when I was conducting an interview with Barbara, a divorced mother living in her father's clan, we came upon the subject of clan designs. And although Barbara could tell me about her father's design, she could not show me what it looked like as she had never seen it. So she asked Christobel, an elderly lady who was born in Dadumu, to draw her father's clan design. Barbara planned to wear the *embobi* during a forthcoming church festival in Airara. And so Christobel drew 'kamba', Barbara's father's clan design, on a large *embobi* (Photo 13). This design is almost identical to the design painted on the tapa that was collected by Black around 1900 (Drawing 4).

In the various museum collections are many more examples of similar designs, as well as reoccurring design names (see Appendix 1). While, in the case of the snake designs, the visual resemblance between 'old' and contemporary clan designs is clear, in other cases designs look very different, although the collected names are identical with contemporary names of clan designs. These visual differences between similarly named designs might be explained by the fact that each woman who makes a clan design may incorporate a certain level of creativity and innovation into her depiction of the design (see also next section). Even within one generation, depictions of one clan design may differ (see also Regius 1988). If one considers the time-gap between the 'older' and contemporary designs – as well as the various groups involved with the creation, exchange, and appropriation of both general and clan designs (see Chapter 3) – it is surprising that there is still so much consistency in both the visual structure of Collingwood Bay (and, to a certain extent, Oro Bay) designs and their attributed names.

An example of a design that has persisted over a hundred years of change but which today, among the Maisin, is regarded as a 'general' design is displayed on a *koefi* collected by missionary Wilfred Abbot between 1889 and 1901 (BM1901.2-23-41). As Maisin informants told me, this simple design, consisting of a series of lines, is called *matayo*. In contrast to, for example, the *moti* design, *matayo* is only depicted on *koefi*. Also, its use is not restricted to particular clans. *Matayo* may be drawn by any clan woman and worn by all Maisin men. A variation of this design was also used to decorate a *koefi* obtained by Charles G. Seligman (BM1906.10-13.316) in 1906, while a more recent example (NMAG1249.07) was acquired by the National Museum and Art Gallery of Papua New Guinea in 1965.

In addition to designs, there are also other features that have changed. Both the colour of the designs and the material, or rather tree species, of which tapa has been made reveal transformations. While today all designs are made with *mi* and *dun*, museum collections show pieces of tapa with only black and only red designs. Several Maisin elders recalled that in the past Maisin would indeed use such designs. In addition to the black and red designs made with *mi* and *dun*, designs were also made with mud (*boboma*) instead of with *mi* and not filled with red paint. These tapa cloths with black designs only were called *gadun*. During mourning, people would wear tapa cloths soaked in this mud (see Chapter 4), and girls who had received their facial tattoos received a completely red tapa cloth to wear which had been soaked (*wamutu*) in *dun* (Chapters 1 and 4). These specific types of tapa cloth were predominantly used during specific rituals, or they were worn during

the performance of specific songs and dances (Chapter 6). For children who were not yet initiated, parents would sometimes spit red saliva obtained from chewing betelnut onto their tapa cloth (Chapter 4).

In addition to the white *wuwusi*, people would also use other trees for making tapa cloth. As in other areas of New Guinea, Maisin used wild (*Ficus*) and domesticated (Paper Mulberry) tree species for making tapa. Both species are represented in the museum collections. However, from approximately 1950 onwards, no tapa made from the *Ficus* genera is present in the museum collections studied. The mulberry used became whiter and softer, indicating that people started to use younger trees to produce tapa.<sup>10</sup> This change with regard to the use of raw material is supported by Maisin informants.

People stated that, up until the 1960s, people used the brown *Ficus* tapa for carrying sago and making blankets. People aged around 40 years or above still remember sleeping under the coarse *Ficus* tapa, or *yoki*, as these tapa blankets were called. For their loincloths they would use the smoother tapa made from *wuwusi*.<sup>11</sup> This change coincided with the advent of the Second World War, which had a large impact on village life and Maisin material culture (see Chapter 8). After the war, the inflow of Western goods increased, and people soon replaced the tapa made from the *Ficus* genera with Western items.

Somewhat later, in the 1960s, people stopped wearing their 'real' *embobi* and *koefi* altogether, replacing them with cotton skirts and trousers. The growing movement of people in and out of the villages due to work and education probably contributed significantly to their replacement by Western clothing. Barkcloth, as Holan Kania told us at the beginning of this book, was only to be worn again during festivities and other special occasions. Nevertheless, this diminished use of tapa as dress has not erased the transfer of particular designs from one generation to another. In fact, the continuity observed in several of the clan designs covers a considerable period of time. Whereas some designs are still in use today, however, others are not. So how did this transfer of knowledge and style take place? And, moreover, who was and is responsible for the creation as well as the continuity or loss of clan designs? Before addressing the latter question (see Chapter 3), the transfer of tapa designs is first addressed.

### *Learning to draw*

The making of objects such as tapa is referred to as *buro seraman*.<sup>12</sup> *Buro* means 'work' and *seraman* refers to the physical capacity to do certain things well. But it is especially with regard to women's work that people use the concept of *seraman*.

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10 As some Maisin said, the younger the tree, the whiter and softer the fibre tissue and fabric will be.

11 In the museum collections of the National Museum in Port Moresby and the Australian Museum in Sydney are pieces of tapa that consist of both mulberry and *Ficus* tapa sewn together with fibre to produce one cloth, as also pieces of white mulberry with dark brown pieces of tapa attached.

12 Working in the gardens and the making of objects by men was sometimes referred to as *buro seraman* as well. 'When men have seraman, they make canoes and build houses. If a man is not *seraman*, he does not have a house to live in and no canoe to travel with because his hands are not *seraman*' (Amelia and Gertrude, Marua).

When women are making mats, string bags, and tapa, it is said they have good *seraman* or *mon-seraman*. When I asked, however, what would happen if a Maisin woman was not able to make these things because she was lacking *seraman*, all the men and women interviewed stated that this would be impossible. Every Maisin woman, whether truly Maisin or married into the Maisin, would have to learn to make at least mats and tapa. A household without these goods was unthinkable since life would be impossible. There would be no place (mat) to sit on, sleep on, or welcome visitors to, no item to give and barter. In addition, no tapa means no money, and the family would be dependent on relatives to make tapa for them to use, give, barter, and sell. Everyone stated that all women could learn how to make these female objects and, moreover, should learn how to make them. Nevertheless, for some men tapa provided a reason for them to get married to a Maisin girl instead of to someone from the outside. Even parents are concerned with their son's choices; as Lancelot expressed:

*I prefer my sons to get married to Maisin girls or women because of the tapa. A Maisin girl can make mats, tapa, and draw the tapa designs. Other girls cannot do this, especially the tapa.*

Since women are responsible for making tapa cloth and tapa designs, they also possess the knowledge and capability needed to teach the next generation of Maisin girls and women how to make tapa. This transfer of knowledge and skills follows particular patterns. The skill to beat and create tapa designs in the specific Maisin style is traditionally handed down from mother to daughter. Knowledge concerning clan designs is likewise passed from mother to daughter but also from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. By describing how women learn and transfer both the techniques and knowledge of making tapa, a limited glimpse into the lives of four Airara women is given. These women are Christobel Dave, Monica Taniova, Louisa Joke, and Helen Dave. They all live in Airara village but have different backgrounds in both their social life and their engagement with tapa. Nevertheless, their stories and experiences are similar to those of other women living in Maisin.

When I arrived in Airara in 2001, one of the eldest women living in the village was Christobel (Photo 14).<sup>13</sup> Born around eighty years ago, she had witnessed how Maisin men were drafted to work as carriers for the Australian and American soldiers during World War II (see Chapter 8). She had also experienced many of the other cultural and material changes that took place during the colonial and post-colonial period. For example, she vividly described how between 1943 and 1944 (Baker 1946) the Mount Goropu volcano behind Uiaku erupted, covering even Airara in ashes. Born to the Dadumu clan, she was nearly given away as a bride to the Rerebin clan in Uiaku. As described by Christobel (see Chapter 5), her cousin (FBS) prevented this, and she then got married to Allen of the Waigo clan. Her husband died several years ago, and since then she has stayed with her son and his family in the Waigo clan.

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13 Christobel died in 2002, shortly after I left Papua New Guinea.



*Photo 14. Christobel designing an embobi underneath her son's house. On this slightly elevated platform she would sit for hours, designing tapa, making string bags, or taking a nap, while in front of her Collingwood Bay would unfold its magnificent view.*

Christobel's knowledge and experience in tapa making was acknowledged by both the elderly and especially the younger women, who would turn to her for advice regarding tapa clan designs. Even women married to the Tatan clan would seek her advice as she was the only person alive who had seen women making and wearing this clan's designs. Christobel had learnt to beat and design tapa from her mother. This had occurred in a very voluntary way and was initiated by Christobel herself:

*She didn't give me tapa to practice on. I saw my mother drawing designs, and that is how I learnt it. She was making a large tapa, and one time, when she went to the garden, I took it outside, looked at the design, and continued where my mother left off. That's when I started putting designs on tapa cloth. When my mother came back, she wasn't angry; she laughed and said, 'Well done!'*

When I met her, Christobel's old and somewhat shaky hands would still regularly draw tapa designs. The somewhat irregular-shaped designs that resulted from her unsteady hand and diminishing eyesight did not, however, decrease their attractiveness to me. In fact, it gave them a spontaneity that is often lacking in designs drawn by younger women.

One of the younger but acknowledged good tapa makers among the Maisin is Monica (35 years old), whose skills in beating tapa were discussed at the beginning of this chapter. She is capable of drawing straight and almost perfectly symmetrical designs on the fibrous and therefore somewhat rough tapa surface. Her mastering of the *nasa* brush excels the skills of many other women. Like Christobel's designs, Monica's designs have a dynamic of their own.

Monica loves drawing barkcloth designs. While other women sometimes tend to make quick drawings because of the monetary necessity to make tapa, Monica always puts much effort and imagination into her designs. If it were up to her, she would spend even more time on making tapa. As she said, 'I really like drawing and painting, and I would like to do this the whole day. In fact, I used to do that, but now I have plenty work to do for my parents-in-law, husband and, children'.

Unlike women married close-by, Monica cannot depend on her brothers and sisters to provide her with help or foodstuffs. Because she was born in Ganjiga village, her parents and brothers are two hours sailing from her current residence in Airara, where she lives with her husband, her children, and her parents-in-law in a large house on the edge of the village, which is part of her husband's clan. Being responsible for the maintenance of the house and her husband's garden, and especially for the feeding of both her own family and her in-laws, she has little time to spend on making tapa. In fact, she has to carefully balance her time and activities to be able to make, design, and finally paint the cloth.

Nevertheless, she cannot always plan and divide her work in advance as she is dependent upon her husband's decisions. As soon as Clifford thinks he can sell another lot of tapa – and there are enough mature *wuwusi* trees to harvest – he will encourage his wife to start cutting the trees and beating the bark. Over a period of some months, Monica will alternate her duties as a mother and wife with beating tapa and drawing designs. But she will not yet apply the red pigment. In order to ensure the paint on the tapa is vibrantly red, she starts painting only a few days before Clifford departs to Alotau. As soon as word has spread that the cargo boat is about to arrive in Collingwood Bay, Monica spends as much time as possible on painting the pieces of tapa cloth. During my one-year stay in Airara, I witnessed Monica painting both day and night for a couple of days on two occasions, desperately trying to finish the cloths in time for Clifford to take them for sale.

As with many of the other women living in Maisin, Monica learned the beating of tapa and the drawing of designs when she was a young girl. As she recalls:

*My mother Stella taught me how to beat and design tapa. First I learned how to beat tapa; the drawing I learned somewhat later. When I was about 14 years old, I wanted to try it, so I got a small piece of tapa and printed a design on it, just like my mother made them. My mother saw it and said it was not bad but I had to try it again. She showed me where to put the dots and the red paint.*

According to both Monica and Clifford, Maisin women have to make tapa. As Monica put it, 'It is our custom, we grew up with it, and nowadays tapa is our living. We make tapa, sell it, and get money with which we can buy things from the trade store'. She also insists that her daughters learn the technique of beating tapa and drawing designs. Linda, her second eldest child, already knows how to beat tapa, although she does not do it as frequently as her mother.

Louisa (Photos 2 and 15) also learnt to beat and design tapa from her mother during the time she was between 10 and 12 years old. She first learned the technique of beating tapa on small pieces of barkcloth, which were initially not very well done, but, as Louisa said, these exercises at such a young age would eventually result in the ability to make good tapa. According to Louisa, when girls are in their late teens or twenties, they no longer have the ability to learn the techniques of beating



*Photo 15. Louisa sitting on the elevated porch in front of her house making mi. She is scraping off pieces from the lump of black clay she obtained from a riverbed far inland, near the foot of the mountains. Her second-youngest son is watching her.*

and drawing tapa properly. She is convinced it is important to teach girls how to make tapa at a young age. Louisa and her daughters were all taught to make tapa as youngsters.

When Louisa created the *koefi* that resembled the piece collected by MacGregor more than one hundred years earlier, her nine-year-old daughter, Martha, assisted her. Martha helped by putting the red pigment on the design drawn her mother. It was Martha's first experience with manufacturing tapa. Her older sister Miriam (aged 12) was already learning how to beat tapa, as shown to her by her mother. This transfer of knowledge from mother to daughter regarding the manufacture of tapa occurred in a similar manner when Louisa was Martha's age.

Louisa's education in drawing tapa designs had started when her mother gave her a small piece of tapa together with some *mi* (black pigment) and a *nasa* to draw with. Louisa's mother had approved of her and encouraged Louisa to design more pieces in order to acquire the necessary skills. Louisa's first real design was drawn on a *koefi*. As male loincloths are narrow and elongated, one can only draw a small design on them, which is subsequently repeated. Consequently, *koefi* designs are easier to create than the large square *embobi* designs, which demand more skill. Like many other women, Louisa did not make her first *embobi* design until after she had received her facial tattoo and got married.

While beating tapa and drawing tapa designs seem somewhat natural to women such as Christobel, Monica, and Louisa, who grew up with it, for some women it is hard to grasp. Helen, who is from a small village near Port Moresby, had to learn the craft of making tapa after she married into the Maisin. At the time she married her Maisin husband, she was already in her mid-twenties. This accounts for her situation, in which, after giving birth to three children, she is still learning how to make Maisin tapa. And unlike Maisin women who learned the craft from their mothers, Helen is being taught by her mother-in-law.

*My mother-in-law showed me how to make tapa designs. She told me to do it like this, put one line with dots, reserve the other for dun, etc. She gave me a small piece,, and she said 'Draw a line from this spot and then put on a design'. So I took the nasa and drew my own design. She liked it and said, 'You've already caught it!' She was very happy to see the design. We put dun on it. And when MICAD (Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development) came, I sold it to them.*

Helen is learning and regularly draws tapa designs, but she does not beat tapa and has never tried doing so. Helen's mother-in-law, Brenda, a 70-year-old lady, still does all the beating.

Although Helen was not born among the Maisin, she is now regarded as a Maisin woman. Her husband stresses that she has to obey and follow Maisin rules, especially with regard to Maisin customs such as showing respect to the in-laws. For Helen, Maisin life is hard, especially in comparison with her previous life outside Maisin, and she still has trouble coping with it. Nevertheless, she stimulates her children to learn the Maisin custom of making tapa. Helen's only daughter, Brenda (13 years old), who was named after her grandmother, is already learning how to

draw designs. Brenda, as well as her brother Joe, experiment on small pieces of tapa, but unlike Monica's and Louisa's daughters, she does not know how to beat tapa. Since her mother cannot teach her this skill, she will have to be taught by her grandmother. Or maybe she will learn it later when she is able to go to top-up school in Uiaku.

### Making tapa at school

In Uiaku, the craft of drawing tapa designs has recently become part of the student curriculum. Each Tuesday, the boys and girls of grade 8 are educated in 'expressive arts'. While the boys learn how to make ornaments (*nomo*), such as necklaces, the girls learn how to design tapa with *nasa* and *mi* (Photo 16). Before starting on the 'real thing', the girls practice the designs on a piece of paper. However, on the day they were encouraged to put their general designs on a small piece of tapa, many of them became nervous out of fear of spoiling the cloth and first tried out their design by drawing it with ballpoint on the palms of their hands, on scraps of paper, or even on their shoes. When I witnessed this first lesson in drawing tapa designs, only three of the 21 girls had prior experience of drawing on barkcloth. In contrast to their rather nervous classmates, they confidently drew the black pigment on the whitish tapa, creating their own design.



Photo 16. Girls of grade 8 during their expressive arts class (2001), designing small pieces of tapa.

Teaching the skill of drawing tapa designs at school is clearly a way of ensuring its continuation (see also Meredith 1999: 55). Especially in Uiaku, the practice of making tapa is somewhat low in comparison with Airara.<sup>14</sup> This decline in tapa production, however, was not the only reason why Franklin Seri, a 65-year-old Uiaku man, took the initiative of teaching expressive arts at Uiaku school. As Franklin put it, 'Tapa is not simply a traditional art that should be continued for the sake of tradition: it is a way to the world!' Although Franklin acknowledged the importance of preserving native arts like tapa and *nomo* by teaching them at school, he also stressed the possibilities of tapa for the children's futures (see Chapter 8).

Due to Franklin's initiatives, the transfer of knowledge regarding the drawing of tapa designs is no longer restricted to women, at least not in a public setting. In domestic spheres, only women seem to be responsible for teaching their daughters – a practice that seems to predominate in Airara whereas in Uiaku the majority of the top-up girls had never designed before.<sup>15</sup> The transfer of clan designs is still the prerogative of women, but this transfer of knowledge and skills seems to become even less important. Due to the monetary revenues of general designs, the drawing of clan designs seems to be a declining practice. Instead, the manufacturing of general designs dominates local production. The young girls' education in the art of drawing tapa designs will also not contribute to a continuation of clan designs as they are only taught how to draw general designs.

### *Styles of identity: creativity and agency in tapa designs*

The various designs drawn and painted on tapa cloth by Maisin women reveal not only changes in material and social/economic culture; they are products of individual women embedded within a particular setting and, as such, tapa cloths also reveal something of women's personal lives and their creativity. The creativity used to change a particular style is considered as a form of agency as the tradition of designing objects in a particular style is in general very pervasive.

In Airara, every woman engaged in tapa painting could tell the maker of a particular tapa from the transparent, individual style. Whether drawing clan or general designs, Maisin women draw from their own experiences and imagination. Even clan designs, which are somewhat rigid, are open to interpretation and as a consequence are drawn differently by individual women. In addition to these relatively minor individual style differences, inter-regional style differences also occur. Airara and Marua women have developed a somewhat different style to women from the more distant Gorofi villages of Uiaku and Ganjiga. When Gorofi

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14 Although in both Sibio and Gorofi villages, people were disappointed in the monetary revenues due to the fruitless efforts of MICAD to buy their tapa, this seems to have mainly affected Gorofi (Uiaku) tapa production. Another reason for the low production in Uiaku was the limited availability of mature *wuwusi*, which was blamed on magic and a creeping weed that suffocated young tapa sprouts.

15 The top-up grades 7 and 8 attract good students not only from the Maisin villages but from the entire Collingwood Bay area as these two extra years on top of primary school are a prerequisite for being able to attend high school in, for example, Popondetta.

women marry into, for example, Airara, their style of design slowly alters until it fits the Sibó styles. Style differences thus exist among the various Maisin villages, especially between the Gorofi (Central Maisin) and Sibó (Southern Maisin) villages.<sup>16</sup> When comparing the Maisin style of designs with their Miniafia and Korafe neighbours, again style differences become visible.

These local, inter-tribal and intra-tribal variations in style reveal the various kinds of information that may be transmitted through tapa cloth. As James Sackett (1986: 269-70; 1990) argued, style can be used consciously ('iconicism') or unconsciously (tradition) to convey information in order to define borders and the identification of other, ethnic groups and to stimulate or restrict interaction with other groups. The variation in choice options is influenced or determined by social factors within the group in which the artist or producer functions. Through social interactions with other groups or individuals, choices can change. But within a certain group and time, choices are specific for a certain group or ethnicity (Sackett 1986: 267). Related to this distinction between intentional and unintentional productions of identity, Polly Wiessner (1990: 108) makes a distinction between individual and group identity that are both expressed and defined in material culture by means of style patterns. This distinction is related to two kinds of social referents that all styles possess in some form, namely styles without a distinct referent ('assertive style') and styles with distinct referents ('emblemic style').

Assertive style is formal variation in material culture that is based on individual preferences. This style pattern gives information about personal identity (Wiessner 1983: 258). The individual variations in tapa designs among Airara and Marua women are an example of such a style pattern. When, for instance, one compares the designs Monica and Christobel draw on their tapa, differences in technique and style of designs are revealed. While Monica's designs are very structured, symmetrical and neat, with the lines always very straight, Christobel wielded an 'easier' or loose style of drawing lines. And while Monica prefers drawing her general designs structured in four panels, repeating the main design four times and thereby enhancing the symmetry of the design, Christobel always draws her general designs in a *gangi-gangi* and often asymmetrical style. When I asked Christobel why she did this, as only a few Airara women draw in this style, she answered that the panel style was related to the ways of depicting *evovi* and, as such, this style of designs was not good for making general designs.

In contrast to these assertive style variations, emblemic style is formal variation in material culture that has a specific referent and sends a clear message towards a defined target group with regard to kinship and identity (Wiessner 1983: 257). This particular kind of variation in style is visible between the various clans, between the Sibó and Gorofi villages, and also between Maisin and non-Maisin tapa designs. The differences in clan design are consciously reproduced and used, as they are intertwined with power relations between clans and land rights. Style differences between the Sibó and Gorofi villages are also consciously acknowledged and reproduced. In a broader regional context, Maisin people,

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16 In Uwe and Yuayu, no *wuwusi* is grown, and only a few women design and paint tapa.

both men and women, boast about their abilities as tapa makers, their barkcloth being exchanged and sold not only in Collingwood Bay but also nationally and even internationally. As a result, the Maisin are very much aware of their tapa productions and their particular styles. The question remains whether women consciously or unconsciously transmit these various identities through their styles of designs. The absence or presence of distinct social referents plays a key role in answering this. Before turning to this question, let us consider the variation of style from a diachronic perspective.

In the previous section, some similarities and distinctions between ‘old designs’, as displayed on tapa collected by colonial agents, and more recent designs were described. In addition, differences between various types of designs were elucidated. The comparison of such styles and types of designs reveals both change and continuity. First of all, the designs displayed on tapa collected around 1900 are all rather loosely drawn in comparison with present ways of drawing lines and applying paint. When showing Maisin women photographs of these old cloths, the reactions varied. While some liked the spaciousness of these rather ‘simple’ designs, younger women often regarded them as being drawn and painted carelessly.

In general, it is fairly easy to distinguish the various types of designs. Clan designs (*evovi*) entail both geometrical and figurative designs and, in general, include more undecorated space. Their way of being depicted is fairly rigid and therefore they change relatively little as generations of women apply the designs on tapa. In contrast, general designs are women’s own creations and, although *evovi* can also be experienced and created by women, general designs involve much more creativity. As a result, the styles of general designs are also much more receptive to change than the rather static *evovi*.

Although symmetrical general panel designs are preferred, much depends on the size of the barkcloth. Small pieces are always decorated with freely floating designs or two general panel designs while larger cloths are often decorated with four-panel designs for *embobi* and six-panel designs for *koefi*. The tapa collected at the turn of the twentieth century from among the Maisin and other tribes in the Collingwood Bay area consists of mainly panel designs (see for example Appendix 1), of which a large part are probably *evovi*, as the names and motifs of these designs seem to indicate (*ibid.*).<sup>17</sup> The *gangi-gangi* designs, and especially the continuous *gangi-gangi* designs, appear to be a very recent development; enabling artists to design and paint pieces of barkcloth that are too small to accommodate a panel design. This development is probably linked with the increased commercialisation of tapa, which makes it worthwhile to decorate even the smallest pieces of barkcloth. This is also exemplified by the fact that *gangi-gangi* designs are drawn on *embobi* or smaller pieces only, never on *koefi*, which are rarely sold through outside markets as their narrow, long size does not lend itself to being a decorative piece of art. In Airara, only a few women draw in the *gangi-gangi* style, and these are mainly elderly women. This is somewhat surprising as one would be inclined to think that

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17 Among the 83 pieces of tapa collected by P. J. Money and R. Pösch between 1901 and 1910, there are 55 pieces that are decorated with a panel design (26 unknown, 1 mixed, and 1 continuous design). The information suggests that among these 83 pieces, 72 are decorated with a clan design (Appendix 1).

elderly women would draw more according to past ways of drawing designs and therefore according to the panel style. But as Christobel's answer already revealed, this style refers closely to the *evovi*, and consequently women like Christobel prefer the rather loose technique of the past combined with general *gangi-gangi* designs. In addition to *gangi-gangi* designs, the emergence of general panel designs, and as such alienable tapa as we know it today, probably occurred in the 1950s, as evidenced by museum collections in Australia and Papua New Guinea. This appearance of general panel designs in museum collections coincides with increased tapa production after World War II, local initiatives to sell tapa to merchants in Tufi and plantation managers in Wanigela (John Barker personal comments), and the development of artefact shops in Port Moresby, which probably encouraged the production of alienable tapa around that time (see also Chapter 8).

### **Tapa designs as forms of non-discursive agency**

In the previous cases, creative choices to innovate a particular style like *gangi-gangi* or the general panel designs were clearly part of a pattern of other collective choices (Douglas 1996). The possibility to earn money by selling tapa not only brought about a new style of designing; it also entailed changes and alterations in the old style of designing. The patching of holes is such an example, which is only done with commercial tapa, or the tendency to draw borders (*kuki*) around the general designs. In the past, designs were not placed within a red frame, but today almost all women, whether drawing a *gangi-gangi* or panel design, start with drawing this *kuki*. Even girls learning how to design tapa in expressive arts class are told to start with drawing this black-lined cadre, and some women started to draw a *kuki* around clan designs.

Although these innovations were obviously accepted, making up Maisin style, other changes were not, and one might wonder how the process of changing particular styles works. As Marilyn Strathern (1999: 133) argued, individuals embody the capacity for invention. 'Inventiveness is only limited by, so to speak, the technological capacity to realise it. People invent, innovate and elaborate on what they think up for themselves and borrow from others'. Also, as Strathern accurately stated, the length of these networks is limiting (*ibid.*), and therefore innovations are limited as well. So inventiveness is not only limited by technological capacities; it is also constrained by the cultural context of production and the prevailing style system(s) in particular.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 83), individual and collective action develops in the dialectical relationship between their social environment, or habitus, and objective events. This implies that individuals can have influence on the use and depiction of specific techniques, motifs, and even objects, which explains variability in a style system. Moreover, artefacts like designed tapa are the result of both conscious and unconscious actions and intentions by social actors. People interact with their social and material surroundings and are limited in their options by an overall structural framework that mediates their choices and actions. The structural layout of this system is, however, beyond their control

since it is determined by the prior existing social and material framework. This structural framework is not static; it is historically and environmentally grounded and changes and transforms over time due to the communal but varying actions of social actors. As with the structural framework or social system, the style system is not only the result of actions towards the pre-existing social and style system itself but also of interactions with third parties whose practices and things are integrated or rejected. The way people see themselves, act, and behave is not only governed by their own core of reference but is also based on reactions to their behaviour by other individuals, groups of people, and even societies.

Among the Maisin, changes in the tapa style system are likewise the result of both conscious and unconscious actions by groups of people and individuals. The Maisin communities, but also outsiders like tourists, are certainly involved in constituting the current style system. Nevertheless, women – in their roles as tapa makers and designers – are the main agents in its continuation or change, as the transmission of both techniques and designs especially entails the use of female forms of experience and memory. The use of memory in the reproduction of tapa styles might suggest a large variation (Küchler 1987), but as we have seen, some tapa designs have resisted more than one hundred years of change. The resemblance between MacGregor's and Louisa's tapa exemplifies just how rigid certain mental templates are. This rigidity might be explained by the fact that Maisin women use both memory and mimicry in their reproductions of tapa clan designs.

Most women have learnt about their father's or husband's *evovi* by seeing it. In such instances, both memory and mimicry play crucial roles. In reality, the transmission of clan designs is today often a combination. Women frequently rely upon their memory with regard to the reproduction of clan designs, but all the Maisin women I interviewed revealed they had learnt the techniques of making and designing tapa through means of mimicry. In some cases, mothers, or mothers-in-law, would make a few remarks. In general, though, the whole learning process is based upon copying from an adult woman the material techniques that are involved in making and designing tapa. Although very limited, the additional factor of communication between women in order to transfer both knowledge and craft results in some variation.

Jack Goody (1987: viii) has argued that 'the processes of communication both within and between generations act in generative ways, creating variants which are not simply substitutes ... of what went before'. As drawn on tapa, clan designs especially undergo such a 'process of subjectification' (ibid.) as each new female clan member memorises and interprets a particular clan design in her own way and draws it using her specific skills. Due to this combination of memory, mimicry, creativity, and skill, variations within a tradition are achieved. This specific transmission of knowledge also indicates that the practice of doing is actually more significant than discursive practices, as emphasis is placed upon body techniques. This coincides with Maisin gender roles in which girls' and adult women's bodies are physically inscribed with specific notions about female behaviour. Thus, not only the production but also transformations in tapa and its designs are intertwined with non-discursive practices in which female bodies especially are involved.

## **Tapa production as a performative act**

In Chapter 1, it was elucidated how the gendering of, in particular, the female body takes place. This chapter has shown how gender-specific conduct is produced and replicated in the production of tapa. This interrelatedness between tapa and women's corporeal styles is grounded in cultural, physical, mental, and symbolic ways.

Although some men are starting to design (see Chapter 8), it is women who predominantly make barkcloth and create its designs. In practice, making tapa is regarded as synonymous with being a woman. As often argued by both men and women, Maisin women have to make tapa! When women do not make tapa, people may question their attitude and, moreover, their identity as a social person by addressing these women's lack of *mon-seraman*. It therefore seems that the production of tapa is not just a gendered division of labour; more importantly, it enacts cultural ideas about how people should socially behave. Women's corporeal styles are seen to be spatially, temporally, and bodily defined through the material techniques used in making tapa.

The creation of tapa does not take place in a neutral environment. Space and time are intertwined with any production since tapa is created through people's actions, 'which become part of the structure of habitual action, shaping the nature of reference between actions' (Gosden 1994: 34). Space and time, however, are gender-specific, and as such they are created, lived, and experienced differently by men and women. As we have already seen in this chapter, the production of tapa creates gender-specific spaces and times, affecting women's mobility, their lives, and their bodies. When beating the cloth, women are grounded to particular spaces, often somewhat secluded from the family house, and, to a certain extent, dependent upon particular times. The sound of beating tapa echoes far away, so women must refrain from beating during occasions such as mourning, and only a few women are entitled to beat during the night. Some women prefer working in the garden where social control is less strong, allowing them to beat whenever and forever how long they want. Women have to plan when they want to spend time on making or designing tapa as during these days they will not be able to go to the gardens and harvest foodstuffs. They have to make sure that enough food is in the house for the entire family so that they can stay at home. Women therefore have to balance their time and their activities. On average, Airara women go four to five times each week to their gardens, leaving one day for communal activities, such as clearing the school grounds and/or attending Mothers' Union activities (always on a Wednesday), and of course most Airara and Marua people acknowledge Sunday as a 'resting' day, although some women take the opportunity to work on their tapa, both beating and designing it.

The particular physical posture of the female body while beating and drawing on the tapa (as well as in the other work that they do) leads to specific medical complaints such as backache. The long and arduous beating and pounding of the bark as well as the physical posture that women have to endure creates strain on women's backs and demands not only skill but also strength and endurance. Likewise, the way that skirts, and especially *embobi*, are worn contributes to a

physical posture that forces the women to sit with their legs out in front of them, thereby straining their backs. These postures re-enact on Maisin notions of gender and especially female corporal behaviour. Since women's thighs are regarded as both seductive and dangerous, women's postures in making tapa are effectively seen as reproducing these notions of gendered behaviour.

The mental connection between women and tapa lies in the fact that women's skills, endurance, and creativity are intertwined with the making and designing of tapa. Their ability to make tapa is referred to as having *mon-seraman*, a concept that also denotes the kind of work a good wife or husband should do. The ritual or symbolic connection between women and tapa equally reveals how the production of the red dye, as well as its application on tapa, is associated with notions about gender and also sexuality. Women's reproductive blood seems to be flowing, especially in clan tapa, thereby contributing to the reproduction of their husband's but also their father's clans (see Chapter 3). Even without this ritual connotation, however, Maisin women are consciously and/or unconsciously not only reproducing but also changing Maisin culture.

The designs that Monica and other Maisin women apply on tapa are grounded in Maisin past and present. Various types of designs are known, and they all narrate, or rather visualise, a different story. Some of these designs visualise the skill and imagination of individual women, embedded within Maisin tradition and style of designing. Other designs tell about Maisin clan ancestors and their travels from Musa River down to Collingwood Bay. Finally, there are visual displays of Christian worship, and consequently these designs are tokens of the religious history and encounters Maisin people have witnessed. These designs are clearly recognisable as Maisin productions, although changes in style and technique are also visible.

So when making tapa, women produce not only an object but also themselves and others. Making tapa is related to ideas about gender identity. These suggest how women should behave, what kind of labour they should do, and what responsibilities they have. Women who do not make tapa are considered lazy and sometimes even bad housewives, as they do not provide for their families by offering the possibility of earning money through the selling of tapa. In this way tapa plays an important role in local sexual politics, in which both women and men depend upon each other. It may be tempting to argue that, due to women's production of tapa, this 'cloth' can be considered as 'women's wealth' or as women's property (Weiner 1989). As we have seen, however, the production of tapa produces specific gender relationships, not 'women' as an individual category.

The creation of things like tapa is not straightforward in the sense that, if women produce and use certain objects, they automatically represent 'femaleness'. Artefacts made by a sexed individual do not automatically correspond with their male or female viewpoints. Things do not simply 'represent an idealised expression of what it is to be a man' or a woman (Strathern 1988: 64). Similarly, artefacts do not mirror society or ideological concepts; they may well incorporate and represent ideas about, for instance, women and men, but this relationship is not straightforward. Deconstructing and translating objects into their contexts and the politics of production illuminates power relations and the actual production of

difference. Thus, discrepancies exist between the gender of the people making and using things and the views that are represented through these things. These latter material settings are internal to our social being and are not automatically visible through the labour or material divisions between the sexes, although these visible 'settings' are also embodied in social beings.

The production of tapa also creates opportunities for creativity and agency. The simple fact that things are made and used in social practices enables people to make small or large alterations to both the styles and meanings of things. That is, the production and use of things facilitates agency. The amount of agency that may be deployed depends on the individuals' subjectivity and on how forceful a style system is. The more the style system and habitus are interlinked and mutually constitutive, the less 'space' an individual may have to inform alterations without being criticised. In a similar manner to the way form and style are reproduced within production, meanings are reproduced in both the production and use of things.

To summarise, the production of tapa creates gendered identities and reproduces gender relations. This shows that doing or making things is as least as important as language. The production of tapa reveals how both men and women deal with, or rather negotiate with, their habitus. By making tapa, cultural notions and concepts are reproduced and, as a consequence, constructed because each agent interprets her cultural legacy in a somewhat different way. In the next part of this book, the reproduction of clan and other identities, through the production and use of tapa, is elaborated on.



## PART 2

# MATERIALIZATIONS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY



*Photo 17. John Christenson, elder of Waigo clan, showing his clan regalia, including lime-stick (gaavi) and lime-container (gengèn). The large white shell (karu), which lies on top of his koefti, is taken in the mouth during specific dances. In the past, warriors would keep them in their mouth while attacking their enemies. The necklace with a shell pendant is made of wakèki, red spondylus shell, which is considered valuable.*

## Chapter 3

# Ancestral travels and designs

*All clans are different from each other: their way of dressing up, gardening, building houses, fishing, canoeing, or making tapa designs. For example, some will wear rattles (gagamu), others small white shells (gorago). We build houses, which forces young girls who enter them to marry Dadumu boys, and Kouma, our elder brother, has the same. That is their Kawo house. As for our canoes, we put a special design on the prow. And also the string bag that I carry, I will not give it to somebody else. It has our evovi, our design on it. And the string bag too will make the young girls come. Some of these, and other things, are not practiced anymore. So this is our tradition. It is ours alone. No one will use it or take something that belongs to other clans. They all have different things that others don't have. That's why I am telling you; this is how we are living.*

(Raymond Jadai, Dadumu (Jorega) clan, Airara village)

At first sight, Maisin villages, which consist of a cluster of mainly wooden and sago-leaf rooftop houses situated on narrow stretches of beach, may appear as homogenous settlements. When one looks closer, however, this view appears to be illusory. Each village (*wakki*) is built upon and structured around one or more clans, called *iyon*. As a result, most villages actually consist of clusters of *iyon* living in each other's vicinity. These clans not only mark and claim their particular space and identity but also provide the most frequent context for joint labour and activities. As will be elaborated upon in Chapter 5, clan members ideally work together and share both food and goods among each other. Ideologically, *iyon* can be regarded as fairly autonomous units which may have little affinity with their neighbouring clans. In practice, however, this ideology is crosscut by ambiguities such as individual alliances and both intra- and inter-clan conflicts. The 36 clans living in the ten Maisin villages are drawn together due to intermarriages, shared histories of migration, and other kinship affiliations.

Maisin primarily differentiate themselves from others but also show affiliations through collective memories in the form of ancestral and totemic names, songs, dances, stories, and inherited clan emblems. In this chapter, I will elaborate upon these clan emblems, mythical histories, and names<sup>1</sup> in order to show how clan identities are constructed and contested through things. I do so despite the fact that this is a somewhat hazardous affair because the very sensitivity about clan emblems gives insight into the ways identities are fluid, oppositional, and

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<sup>1</sup> The reproduction and transmission of clan identity through clan emblems such as decorations (nomo), songs, and dances will be elaborated in Chapter 6.

dynamic. According to Maisin, this chapter is both dangerous and anomalous as it describes clan emblems and mythic histories from various clans in one spatial setting and dimension. Among Maisin, this would never occur as clans are reluctant to share their emblems and histories with other clans. Due to the claims that are inherent in both emblems, histories, and names, these are potentially dangerous in their capability of creating conflict. Therefore, people tend to be careful with their dissemination. Moreover, clan emblems and histories are part of a dynamic process in which clans create their identity in relationship to others. Consequently, clan identities and their materialisations in emblems and histories are not fixed but essentially fluid and dynamic. By writing these materialisations down, one essentially ‘kills’ this fluidity and simultaneously brings various tensions to the surface. My dilemma in this chapter is therefore to describe clan identity without fixing it and to visualise clan identity without causing conflicts. In order to prevent the latter, many details concerning clan emblems are omitted, and many histories are not be told.

Clan emblems, referred to as *kawo* but also as *evovi* or *kawo-evovi*, are specific artefacts, abilities, and behaviour that are connected with a particular clan and its name, ancestor, and history. As such, among the various *kawo* claimed by the clan ancestors and their descendants are both social and material practices. For example, some clans have *kawo* that determine their social behaviour. These clans have to give anything other people ask for (see Chapter 5). Also, their men are entitled to help their wives carry water and string bags and do sweeping, activities that Maisin men in general refrain from doing as these tasks are clearly attributed to women. In general, mainly material practices serve as *kawo*. These clan emblems all belong to the patrilineal clan, but either men or women make them.

In addition to male-manufactured artefacts such as lime spatulas, necklaces, drums, canoes, and houses, clan emblems also entail particular designs that are painted on tapa, called *evovi*. These designs belong to the members of particular clans, in particular to male clan members. But the paintings might also be kept and owned by women, as they are responsible for their creation and continuation. Here I will focus on how Maisin clans are constituted and how their identity is reproduced, changed, and contested in clan emblems. Both men and women contribute to verbal and non-verbal enactments of clan identity, in which experience, memory, and knowledge are transferred in specific, gendered ways.

Harvey Whitehouse (1992: 792) makes a distinction between those forms of (religious) experience that are highly verbalised versus those which rely on non-verbal analogical codification. According to Michael Rowlands (1993: 142), the first form of experience relies on frequent repetitions, conscious verbal exegesis, and the standardisation of sacred rituals. The latter type of experience occurs only sporadically and relies on ‘powerful emotions to produce unconscious memories that become associated in the mind with certain objects, colours and elements of performance’. Examples of the prior form are Trobriand magical rituals surrounding *Kula* exchanges, which entail many formalised verbal chants and spells (Malinowski 1987: 392). In contrast to Trobriand rituals, Maisin ceremonial practices are less highly verbalised. This does not imply Maisin lack any verbal

forms of experience. Maisin, like many other people, rely on both verbal and non-verbal forms of experience.

Maisin people love chatting, gossiping, and telling stories. Fictional stories about how a mother turned into a turtle or dolphin after her son would not help her carry the sea water, about how a man threw his spear into the sea and created the reef, how *kerefun* (a type of shell) and *pfifitan* (obsidian) lived together, and many other tales are frequently told (see for example Barker and Seri 1995). These *kikiki*, which often entail a moral message, are not considered real stories. They are told for entertainment, by both young and old, by both men and women. In contrast, stories that are related to one's clan ancestor and his travels into Collingwood Bay are considered 'real' happenings. The narration of these mythic histories is the prerogative of clan elders. In general, one prefers the eldest male clan member to narrate the clan's origin history because he has the knowledge and right of the eldest living member to reproduce his clan's history and, consequently, identity. Moreover, clans may be uneasy about telling their complete and detailed histories to non-clan members, while feeling uneasy about narrating histories from other descent groups, although they may be aware of their general outline. This secrecy and ambiguity with regard to the transmission of mythic clan histories lie in their political nature.

Clan histories are not just stories. Their narration and the narratives themselves incorporate specific spatial and temporal settings. The name of each clan, founded by one or two male ancestors, and its origin myth determine land rights and custodianship over specific heirlooms and clan emblems. As one of the elders of Waigo clan in Airara village stated, 'These narratives are important because they lay claims on land as being Maisin, as belonging to particular Maisin clans' (John Christenson Taniova, elder, Waigo clan, Airara).

In addition to narratives that are used as repositories of cultural materials and their inherent political claims, objects can have similar functions (see also Rowlands 1993; Kuchler 1987). As Rowlands (1993: 147) correctly remarked, 'Objects can typically become the repositories of clan and personal names, histories and reputations'. The heirlooms and other clan emblems guarded by each clan elder and male clan member, as also the clan designs drawn on tapa, exemplify how objects can be cultural and political repositories as well as personified things that connect the past with the present.

Suzanne Kuchler (1987) examined the relation between memory and material culture and put forward two modes of transmission (see also Rowlands 1993: 141). The first mode relies upon the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another through the curation of specific objects. This form of memory transmission is based upon rigid templates, as the objects that are handed down from one generation to another do not change. The second mode relies foremost on reproduction through memory. This kind of transmission entails more variation as people create objects based upon (collective) memory (*ibid.*). Both forms of material memory transmission are used among the Maisin. The most significant characteristic of these two modes is that each of them is related to a specific sex. Maisin men and women have different modes of memory and knowledge

transmission. Moreover, they have not only differential use of expression but also different access to it (see also J. Weiner 1991).

The reproduction of clan identity through a material transmission of knowledge elucidates the significant position of women. Although clan membership flows through male lines and heirlooms are passed from one male generation to another, one of the most visual displays of clan identity is guarded and created by women. Clan designs on tapa cloth are reproduced by women only. These *evovi* are not only designed and painted on tapa. As Raymond Jadai at the beginning of this chapter related, *evovi* may also be applied on personal string bags (*yati*). Just like tapa, string bags are made by women, and therefore these knotted *evovi* are also made by women. Here I will elaborate upon the symbolic relationship between women and clan designs and how women's manufacturing of these *evovi* reproduces the patrilineal clan.

The first section of this chapter follows the tapa clan designs and how they relate to one origin myth that is shared by all Maisin clans. Subsequently, some of the Maisin clans as they travelled from Musa to Collingwood Bay are followed, revealing how various clans travelled and are affiliated through their shared history of migration. Both clan identity and clan affiliations are materialised in various things, like trees, plants, animals, and artefacts. While these clan emblems and heirlooms, just as clan histories, are transferred from one male generation to another, clan designs drawn and painted on tapa are handed over from mother to daughter and from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. The final part of this chapter provides concluding remarks on the gendered transmission of knowledge and the verbal and non-verbal reproduction of clan identity in particular.

## Following Clan designs

When Maisin from Airara village attended a large church festival at Sefoa near Tufi at Cape Nelson (Photo 18), they demonstrated various dances wearing their traditional regalia. Dressed up in *embobi* and *koefi* designed with attractive meandering designs, having their faces painted and their arms and legs decorated with flowers and armbands, with loads of shell necklaces and feather headdresses swaying to the beat of the drums, the dancers made a colourful and vivid appearance. As Holan Kania said at the beginning of this book, Maisin have a taste for ornamentation and, especially in the past, were addressed as *nomo tamata* (decorated people). For an outsider, the long lines of paired dancers presented themselves as a collective group, as Maisin. Nevertheless, since all Maisin wore a tapa cloth displaying their respective clan designs and had decorated their bodies with matching paraphernalia, the individual *iyon* to which each man and woman belonged was also shown.

Each clan has its own tapa designs (*evovi*) and decorations (*nomo*) (the latter are discussed in Chapter 6). *Evovi* displayed on tapa may refer to various people, landscapes, animals, and things. They may be named after the ancestor, or they can visualise geographical features such as mountains situated in the area – for example, the dormant volcano *Kerorova* (Mount Victory) – and hence be named after them. Whereas ancestors and geographical features are designed in stylised



Photo 18. Maisin people from the Sibó villages performing their dance at the Sefoa church festival in 2001.

ways, animals featuring as *evovi* are mainly designed in a realistic style. Crocodiles, snakes, starfish, and eagle rays are clearly recognisable; both name and design reveal the meaning of these *evovi*. Parts of animals, like a cock's comb and even wallaby ears, are less recognisable. Utensils such as broomsticks, particular lime sticks, and even the lid of a lime container that feature as *evovi* are equally stylised. Finally, *evovi* may also refer to particular ornamentations. For example, the Waigo clan in which I lived uses the ornamental part of a feather headdress, called *kekesi*, as their main *evovi*. When one encounters Maisin dressed up in these tapa loincloths and adorned with their clan and general decorations (Photos 18 and 19), one can only agree with Holan Kania: Maisin are truly *nomo tamata*.

Especially at large festivities, such as in Sefoa, Maisin clans wear their tapa *evovi* and other clan emblems. In doing so, they visually differentiate themselves from other clans and even tribes. Due to a certain level of ambiguity present in the claims each clan lays on certain clan emblems, the wearing of clan regalia may also open up disputes among clans. This tension associated with clan emblems is related to the various ways each clan member, as well as his or her clan, has obtained its clan emblems. Whereas men can only choose from the clan emblems they inherited from their fathers, women can wear their fathers' and their husbands' *kawo*. As a result, women can express affiliation with both groups (see also Chapter 6). A woman, however, cannot pass on her father's *kawo*, including his tapa designs, to her children as the children belong to their father's group and will use his *kawo* and inherit his name and land. This patrilineal ideology is very pervasive. Nevertheless, this ideal is often crosscut by matri-affiliation as an individual may maintain strong connections with the mother's group.

In some instances, people have a preference for wearing their mother's *evovi* – an act that is often contested and liable to cause disputes since the mother's clan may object to this. But on rare occasions, such as the initiation ceremony associated with first-born children, a mother's brothers may also give away one or more of their clan's *kawo*. In some instances, they dress up the child in their own clan *tapa* and other *kawo* belonging to their clan (Barker 1985: 170). During the ceremony it is specified whether the child, when it is a boy, can pass this property on to his own children (ibid.). Another way of obtaining emblems from other clans is through adoption and the creation of alliances, which often entails the exchange of *kawo*. Nevertheless, some of these appropriations of another clan's emblems might be contested. More recent generations may have little or no knowledge concerning exchanges of these clan emblems in the past, and as a result they may object to other clans wearing their *kawo*. During large festivities where various Maisin clans dress up in their regalia, people are extra careful not to cross these *kawo* borders. As a result, they wear their most firmly established clan emblems.

The majority of clan emblems were inherited from the clan ancestor and were passed down from generation to generation via patrilineal, agnatic descent. Other clan emblems were given to and/or exchanged with other clans. When emerging from a hole in the earth, each clan ancestor brought his clan emblems, his *kawo*. Clan emblems can vary from types of magic, social conduct, and fire to drums and dancing gear. The myth dealing with how Maisin came on this earth is one of the few uncontested elements of Maisin mythic history.<sup>2</sup> It describes how each clan ancestor emerged from a hole located near Baraji River in Musa, West of the lower Musa River, each bringing these specific attributes, abilities, and powers.

*Maisin people were inside a hole (jabu gauw) in the ground. Suddenly, through a very small opening, light entered. People were wondering where this light came from. Some of them climbed all the way up, outside the hole. As soon as they came out, they cut a cane and lowered it inside the hole, pulling the people up who were still down there. But not everybody was pulled up. One by one they came, and each person took something with him, an ability or power to heal for instance, or to make people's enemies sick. So each clan brought 'ari kawo', his clan emblems. But only those who had good things were allowed to come up. People with the power to kill instantly were not allowed to come out as the others cut the cane before they had a chance to climb up. So only good people were pulled up; the others were left in the pit (Raymond Jadaï, Dadumu clan; Lancelot Javisea, Wofun clan; and John Christian Taniova, Waigo clan, all Airara village).<sup>3</sup>*

So when the Maisin people attending the church festival at Sefoa dressed up in their traditional regalia, they not only represented their identity as Maisin or their membership in a particular *iyon*. By dressing up in their *kawo*, each individual re-enacted and reproduced the past in which the clan ancestors came into this

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2 See also Eric Kline Silverman's (1997: 102) recordings of a somewhat similar origin myth narrated by the people of Tambunum, an Eastern Iatmul village in the Middle Sepik.

3 Although ancestors bringing lethal powers were left in the pit, magic and sorcery did come to the surface. In fact, these practices play an important part in Maisin life. As with other *kawo*, particular clans are held responsible for bringing sorcery. However, all Maisin may hire a sorcerer.

world. By wearing their traditional regalia, they effectively replicated the image of their *iyon* ancestor when he emerged from beneath the earth at the dawn of time (Barker 2001: 365). As a result, this past was not just remembered but performed. The ancestors were brought back to life and, moreover, by the dancers' performance their identities were reproduced. Tapa clan designs and *kawo* decorations clearly exemplify how objects and designs can serve as 'aide-mémoire' (Rowlands 1993: 144). Their use during ceremonies, dances, and feasts triggers a mythic experience that relies on 'emotions to produce unconscious memories'. Rowlands (1993: 144) posits that 'object traditions, rather than language or speech, serve as the only means of gaining access to such unconscious traces, and they do so by allowing direct re-engagement with past experience in ways that are prevented in language'. Tapa cloths designed with *evovi* are material testimonies of clan identity, narrating in non-verbal ways an *iyon's* history and its spatial and political claims. As such, they are not only an 'aide-mémoire' but also an actual performance of collective memory and identity. Through their materiality, these cloths constitute a link between the past, present, and future of each *iyon* and of Maisin people in general.

### *Chiefs of the up- and downstream*

The Maisin ancestors emerging to the surface symbolise the beginning of space and time. From this moment onwards, Maisin ancestors are identified by their names and emblems as well as by their subsequent travels and settlements in which they produced space by naming the landscape around them. These places are still known and acknowledged today. Time is created by the ancestor's alternating episodes of travel and settlement that characterise Maisin clan history. When tracing back this beginning of time by following the descent line of each *iyon* from the ancestor(s) onwards, clan elders placed the beginning of time between four and seven generations ago.<sup>4</sup> Maisin time and history started as soon as the Maisin ancestors climbed outside, settled around the hole, and made gardens. But this settlement did not last for long.

*While living in Musa, Maisin cut a tree called 'gogumu'. However, they should not have cut it because they could not eat its fruits anymore. Arguments arose, and some people decided to leave. The people who stayed were the Kosira people. They are still living alongside the Musa River today (Raymond Jadai, Dadumu clan).<sup>5</sup>*

Among the people who left this area were the Maisin people. They moved from the tree area to Tafotti River, which is the current Musa River. But unlike their previous settlement, Maisin did not settle together. Instead, two major groups were created. One group of clans settled upstream, the *Wo'o ari kawo* (Chiefs of the

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4 According to John Barker's informants, this would have been three to six generations ago. Barker estimates Maisin migrations started in the mid- to late 19th century (Barker 1985: 70).

5 Informants stated that Kosira people speak proper Maisin. Maisin language has changed due to affiliations with Miniafia and Korafe clans and through people's settlement along the coast.

upstream), while the other group moved downstream, the *Mera ari kawo* (Chiefs of the downstream). In general, all Maisin clans affiliate with either the Chiefs of the up-, or Chiefs of the downstream<sup>6</sup>.

The *Wo'o ari kawo* consists of two major clans, which are both referred to as *IYON*,<sup>7</sup> being Gafi and Simboro. These two major *IYON* encompass several *iyon*. For example, Gafi entails an association of clans such as Jogun clan living in Ganjiga and Wofun clan living in the villages of Uiaku, Sinapa, and Marua. The Chiefs of the downstream, the *Mera ari kawo*, are made up of the two *IYON*, Ume and Rerebin. The latter can, in fact, be regarded as a phratry, and contains, for example, the Waigo, Sia, Tatan, and Mainum clans living in Airara and Marua. The four *IYON* are not exogamous. Marriages between clans associated to one *IYON* are allowed, while marriages between members of each of the *iyon* are prohibited.

The four major clans (*IYON*) have a special status. They are all Kawo. This does not mean they are clan emblems (*kawo*), but it implies they are senior to all *iyon*, which often obtained 'their clan emblems' (*ari kawo*) through these Kawo clans.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, being Kawo implies status. However, although Maisin translate Kawo as 'chief clan', this does not imply the presence of a hierarchical chief system as, for example, present on the Trobriand Islands. Kawo clans only exist due to the presence of Sabu clans. The relationship between *IYON* and *iyon* clans is often based upon this dual categorisation, whereby Sabu clans are meant to pay respect, *sabu*, to the Kawo clans.

This dual hierarchy is not restricted to the relationship between the *IYON* and *iyon*. Among the *iyon*, similar hierarchical differentiations exist. Waigo clan, for example, is Sabu in relationship to the Rerebin phratry, but, in Airara and Marua village, Waigo clan is regarded as a Kawo clan. In contrast, Sia, Mainum, Wofun, and Tatan clans, living in Marua and Airara, are Sabu in relationship to Waigo. So, *iyon* incorporate both Kawo and Sabu clans.

The concepts of Kawo and Sabu are elucidated by the clan emblems, which are attributed to each of these respective clans. Kawo clans are denoted as being *sinan ari kawo*. *Sinan* means alliance, although it is also translated as peace. As such, Kawo clans have as their clan emblem (*kawo*) 'alliance'. In contrast, or rather in completion with, Sabu clans are *ganan ari kawo*, which implies that their clan emblem is *ganan*, meaning 'spear'. These latter clans are also referred to as warriors, although all Maisin, as an informant pointed out, are warriors.<sup>9</sup>

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6 For example, the non-Maisin clan, Kaufea-Kanjaru, living in Uiaku, claims a dual affiliation. As one of their members explained, this clan moved from upstream to downstream due to language problems. Their dual affiliation was expressed by Kaufea's (the younger brother) and Kanjaru's (the elder brother) mother bringing food to the *Wo'o ari kawo* in the morning, while in the afternoon she would prepare food for the *Mera ari kawo*. Today, elders of the Kaufea-Kanjaru clan still claim to have the ability to communicate and affiliate with both *Wo'o* and *Mera ari kawo*.

7 In order to differentiate between general *iyon* and the four major *IYON*, I follow Barker's (1985) method of capitalising the latter type of clan.

8 In differentiating between clan emblems (*kawo*) and status (Kawo), I capitalise the latter form.

9 This distinction between 'peace' and 'war' groups and leaders seems to be widespread in lowland Melanesia (Chowning 1979).

The 'alliance' and 'spear' *kawo* that are attributed to, respectively, Kawo and Sabu clans are characteristic for these clans' functioning and responsibilities. In general, Kawo clans are supposed to settle disputes. They strive for balance, for *marawa-wawe* among clans. Their decisions are put into practice by the Sabu clans. These abilities of respective Kawo and Sabu clans to either smooth strained relationships by means of peaceful talking or by means of fighting is characteristic of Maisin political and social conduct. In addition, the distinction between Kawo and Sabu resonates through other hierarchical relationships as well.

Maisin strive for social-political consensus, balance, and reciprocity, but, at the same time, jealousy and gossip create frictions and disputes. This dualism of striving for alliances (*sinan*) and at the same time heading for conflict is embedded in Maisin ways of social and political conduct. Strangers but also other Maisin and non-Maisin clans are regarded as potential enemies, as *vasaa*. In fact, only after the two Maisin groups broke their fighting spears was peace between the 'Chiefs of the upstream' and 'Chiefs of the downstream' established. It is the Kawo clans' responsibility to make sure these relationships are and remain peaceful and at the same time to take care of their Sabu partners, as in general each Kawo clan is paired up with a Sabu clan. During inter-tribal conflicts, Sabu clans yield their spears and act as the Kawo clans' warriors. Although times of war have been left far behind, in the case of clan disputes Kawo clans may still try (or even be called upon) to settle the frictions. For example, elders of Waigo clan felt responsible for trying to settle a land dispute in their Sabu-*iyon*, Sia. During the meetings held, Waigo elders mediated between the two parties, in this case between *rora* (descendants of the elder brother) and *tere* (descendants of the younger brother) of the Sia clan, and eventually the case was settled.

Hierarchies between the two types of clans and clans in general especially come to the fore during formal meetings. Male elders of Kawo clans have the right to speak first. Men who are *sasabu* have to wait until everyone else has finished speaking.<sup>10</sup> In the past, Kawo clans adhered to certain food taboos. For instance, they refrained from eating chicken and crocodiles because properties of these animals feature as their *kawo*. Today, it is mainly objects that visualise the hierarchical distinction between the two types of clans (Photo 17). Being Kawo does not mean one does not respect Sabu clans. The clans are complementary, and ideally their relationship is one of mutual respect, which is expressed as *muan* or *sabu*.

Characteristics of the Kawo/Sabu distinction echo through other hierarchical relationships. Similar types of relationship and conduct can be discerned between the senior (*rora*) and junior (*tere*) descent groups or lineages (*fukiki*) within one clan and between the older (*yei*) and younger (*fin*) siblings. According to Barker (1985: 175-76), the Kawo-Sabu distinction is also applicable to the relationship between parents and children. He remarks that, although this relationship is very similar, it is not rigid like the Kawo-Sabu distinction but in constant metamorphosis (Barker 1985: 176). I would like to argue that gender relationships more strongly resemble

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10 As explained in Chapter 1, women, especially young and middle-aged women, find it difficult to speak at village meetings. If a woman wants to say something during a village meeting, she will have to pose her question to a male Kawo clan member, who will then bring her point to the fore.

the Kawo-Sabu doctrine than those between parents and children, precisely because of the changing nature of this latter relationship. In contrast, relationships between men and women are defined in rigid hierarchies. Men act as Kawo, *rora*, and *yeyi* while women are *sasabu* to them, displaying behaviour attributed to Sabu, *tere* and *fin*.

In the case of internal arguments, *rora*, the elder, will act as Kawo, as peacemaker. *Rora* of either Kawo or Sabu clans expect to be respected, are considered to have greater skills and knowledge (*mon-seraman*), and are entitled to narrate their *iyon*'s history. When food is shared within the clan, the *rora* is served first, followed by the *tere*. This aspect of seniority as a form of hierarchy equally transcends to the relationships between *yeyi* (the elder brother or sister) and *fin* (the younger brother or sister). As already explained in the Introduction, relationships between those of the same sex are structured through hierarchical distinctions between elder and younger kin. As among brothers (see Barker 1985: 174), the classificatory sisters living in one clan help each other, whereby *yeyi* helps her *finse* (*pl.*), her younger sisters. In return, the younger sisters have to treat their elder siblings with proper respect, which is expressed in language and behaviour.

The Kawo/Sabu and senior/junior traits also extend to relations between the sexes. With regard to certain practices, men, just like Kawo clans and *rora*, are served food first, while women will subsequently serve their children and finally themselves. Likewise, men are entitled to and also claim the right to speak and to speak up forcefully. Even in private, women tend to let their husbands speak first, or they are simply overruled. As one female informant expressed it, 'It is not good for women to talk strong'. Several other gender distinctions are equivalent to Kawo/Sabu characteristics. As within the Kawo-Sabu hierarchy, men are said to be responsible for decision-making while women put decisions into practice. In addition, men are believed to have more *mon-seraman* than women, allowing men to make better and more thoughtful and, especially, long-term decisions. In contrast, women are often portrayed as less structured, thinking short-term only and acting without careful consideration of their actions for the future. These latter features strongly resemble Sabu qualifications.

According to Barker (1985: 176), persons and groups that are Kawo, *rora*, and *yeyi* are thought to evince in different balances a number of qualities, being: '1. *mon seraman* – an ability for clear thought and action; 2. an ability to create social order, to "put peace" and instruct; 3. strength and ability to talk strongly; 4. an obligation to "look after" dependents'. These qualities also adhere to men in general, whose relationships with women, and especially with their wives, are asymmetrical. Wives, like Sabu, *tere*, and *fin*, – and according to Barker (*ibid.*), children – possess opposite and complementary characteristics. For example, in contrast to men, women's *mon-seraman* is believed to be different and even less, while children's *mon-seraman* still needs to be developed. In general, women and children are inferior to their seniors. They are their seniors' dependents, having to show respect, listening to and providing food and labour for them. Thus, the Kawo/Sabu principle of inequality and its modes of conduct structures the various layers of relationships that occur within Maisin life. This dual template ensures

that each individual assumes his or her proper position and, as a result, conduct towards the other.

To a certain extent, these identities and modes of conduct seem fairly fixed. Sabu clans can never become Kawo clans, and one's identity as *roraltere*, *yeifin*, or man/woman seems equally rigid. This, however, is not always the case. Although a Sabu clan can never become Kawo, some clans may affiliate with both types. For example, Kandoro, a Korafe clan living in Uwe, is Kawo among Korafe people. When attending meetings in Tufi, they are allowed to speak first. In contrast, among Maisin clans they are considered Sabu, the younger brother, and as a consequence have to wait until all Maisin clans have done their saying. In a similar manner, one's identity as either *yei* or *fin* may change according to the person with whom one interacts. One's descent from either the elder (*rora*) or younger (*tere*) lineage within one clan is not absolutely fixed. Adoption provides a context wherein men born in *tere* may actually transfer to *rora*. In such cases, positions may become blurred, and disputes may arise regarding the appropriateness of particular claims, such as the wearing and use of *kawo* associated with either *rora* or *tere*. The only exception is one's sex. As a woman, one can never become a man despite the fact that a woman's influence and strength may grow according to her age.

### *Following the ancestors*

As may be expected, Maisin did not stay near Tafotti River. Their departure from this area would mark an episode of travel. Maisin call themselves *vassi*, wanderers, as the clans have a history of continuous migrations, whereby temporary alliances and settlements were repeatedly created and abandoned. As a result, Maisin remember many village sites and encampments in the bush. Also, many *iyon* did not stay together. Internally, clans split up, and sometimes these smaller fractions assimilated with other *iyon*. For example, due to histories of migration, marriages, and various social conflicts, Wofun members split up according to seniority of descent (*rora* and *tere*). Today, lineages (*fukiki*) of Wofun clan live in the villages of Uwe, Uiaku, Sinapa, and Marua.

Analogous to the divergent routes these wanderers took, Maisin clans can be divided into three groups: those who travelled around Cape Nelson into Collingwood Bay by canoe, and two groups who travelled by foot through the bush, some of them arriving in a village near Uiaku, called Gorofi, others near the current village of Yuayu. These three divergent geographical paths are significant in the ways Maisin clans obtained their additional *kawo* by claiming animals, landscapes, trees, plants, practices, and things they encountered while travelling. Thus, in addition to the abilities and powers the ancestors brought to the surface when emerging from the hole, each clan also 'collected' specific attributes during its migration to the coast.

In general, the clans living upstream travelled by foot while the ones living downstream of Tafotti River travelled by canoe. Among the *Mera ari kawo*, however, are clans which travelled by foot, and among the *Wo'o ari kawo* are also clans which travelled by canoe into Collingwood Bay. The clans travelling by foot had to cross jungles and mountains, and many established a manifold of temporary settlements

before arriving at the coast of Collingwood Bay. The clans living in Airara all covered large distances by canoe. But since the clans departing from Musa River had no experience with travelling over sea, their journeys were rather problematic. One of the clans travelling by canoe recalls its journey in the following way:

*While travelling, Dadumu had problems with tying their canoe. They used wayango, but when they came, the waves broke the strings, and they had to pull up the canoe and tie it again. They also had to continue to dig out the canoe. Each time they would have to go ashore, tying the strings and digging out the canoe. When they came to Abagouwa, they left the canoe. Because of the string problem, they couldn't get around Tamara Point without the waves breaking the strings again. That's where they left the canoe and walked across the mountain to Gorofi (Raymond Jadai).*

The majority of Maisin clans travelled in pairs. Moreover, travel partners were often Kawo/Sabu pairs, and therefore specific Kawo clans are associated with specific Sabu clans (see also Barker 1985: 173). For example, Waigo, which is a Kawo clan, travelled with its sub-clan, Sia. Not all clans, however, travelled in Kawo/Sabu pairs, and some Kawo clans even travelled without a Sabu clan to Collingwood Bay. Tatan clan, living in Airara, is an example of a Sabu clan which travelled without a Kawo clan. Instead, Tatan migrated with its sub-clan, Taru, which is *sasabu* or *tere* to Tatan. Unattached Kawo, as Barker (ibid.) calls *iyon* which are not associated with a specific Sabu clan, had to travel through enemy territory without 'spear throwers' (*ganan ari kawo*) along their side. An example of such a Kawo clan is Dadumu. This clan travelled by itself. However, by splitting up into *rora* and *tere*, which each claimed one clay pot of food for themselves, they too travelled in pairs. So although Dadumu travelled without a Sabu clan, by splitting up in two lineages which were positioned towards each other as *rora* and *tere*, Dadumu travelled as a hierarchical pair, just as most other clans did.

Like the Kawo/Sabu pairs, the two Dadumu brothers also created alliances with other Maisin and even with non-Maisin clans. These alliances were not so much structured according to the Kawo/Sabu distinction but according to the subsequent *rora/tere* relationship. Raymond Jadai recalls his ancestor's interactions with a Maisin Kawo clan, living in Yuayu, as follows:

*After our ancestor came out of the hole, they came down and settled. While they were staying, the clan called Imburee came. The Imburee came in their canoes and were in mourning because their young chief had died. Because they had such severe grief, they didn't notice a fishing net, and the outrigger of their canoe went into the net. The Dadumu people had set out this net and were keeping an eye on it, so when Imburee got into their net, Dadumu called out and said, 'Who are you, and what are you doing in my net?' The Imburee people kept quiet until one of their elderly men spoke up and said, 'Big man, uncle, it is us! We were coming and got into your net. We were travelling down when our young chief died, and we are bringing him with us.' The Dadumu man called out, saying, 'Come up here!' And the Imburee paddled their canoes up to him. He quickly put the net back into his canoe and said, 'We are going up to the village!' They went up to their village where the Imburee were housed in a Dadumu clan house, called the crocodile hideout.*

*Dadumu showed them the kawo-house and told Imburee to take their dead chief into the house. 'Sit and mourn; then you can bury him and stay for a while. Later on you can go'. They said it that way, so Imburee took their dead chief into the kawo-house, mourned for him, and laid him to rest. In return for the crocodile's house, the Imburee gave Dadumu a special lime stick. Imburee said, 'I am giving you this lime stick; use this when , and we too will use it. Likewise, we shall build a house in the village like the crocodile house, and you too will build it'. Imburee were staying and staying until the Dadumu people said, 'Imburee, it is time to move on! You were in a situation that you needed help, and we took you in, and you stayed with us, so you will be our younger brother'.*

So, the Dadumu took the Imburee as their younger brother, as *tere*. In exchange for the help received from Dadumu and the right to build a *kawo-va* (clan house) similar to that of Dadumu, Imburee gave one of his *kawo* (clan emblems), a specific type of lime stick, to Dadumu.

In a similar manner, clan designs drawn on tapa may be given and or exchanged. For example, Wofun and Jogun living in Uiaku and Ganjiga consider themselves as brothers. They share one *evovi* as they also share a history of migration. In contrast, Wofun members living in Marua do not use this particular design as they are more closely affiliated with Mainum, Wofun's neighbour in Marua Point, who gave them their tapa clan design, *baroki* (starfish), to mark their special relationship (see Photo 20). In these cases, *kawo* visualise not only clan identity but also affiliations between clans and their specific history of migration. In addition to *kawo* objects and *evovi* designed on tapa, ancestral clan names can likewise be given or exchanged in order to mark a particular historical encounter:

*When Dadumu clan was forced to leave their canoe at Abagouwa, they encountered the people living there. The two brothers of Dadumu, Kouma (elder) and Jorega (younger), were taken up by, respectively, Aborin and Abagouwa fukiki. Aborin told Kouma, 'If you get married, you must name your child Aborin'. The same was said to Jorega. So the Jorega fukiki still uses the name Abagouwa (Raymond Jadai, Dadumu clan).*

The affiliations established through these (short-term) encounters are still remembered today. Raymond recalls: 'A few years ago Abagouwa clan sent an invitation for us Dadumu to come up to them, but none of us went'. In this case, the relationships between these two clans may dissolve, as the mythical and historical bond is no longer renewed. In other cases, relationships between Maisin and non-Maisin clans initiated by similar encounters are sustained. For example, the Kandoro (Korafe) clan, living among the Maisin clans in Uwe village, settled there after having travelled together with Maisin clans. In Koniasi, a Korafe clan called Gaboro lives among the Mon clan to whom they are associated as the younger brother. Interactions between Maisin and Miniafia clans have been equally frequent,

both in the past and present.<sup>11</sup> In summary, particular settlements, travels, and fellowships define each Maisin *iyon*. These circumstances have affected the clans' abilities to establish political and geographical claims, which are expressed in the clan emblems they have gathered.

Whether travelling by foot or canoe, eventually all clans met in Gorofi, present day Uiaku. While staying there, Maisin had to defend their newly acquired assets against the Doriri people, living along Upper Musa River. Although colonial reports also mention how Maisin were forced to retreat into their well-protected, elevated houses (Chapter 7), Maisin primarily mention the successes:

*Long ago, Maisin and Musa people used to fight each other at Gorofi. They used spears to fight, so they threw spears at each other. Musa people have always been the losers and would go back home, to Upper Musa River. They have been fighting for a long time. The reason behind all this fighting was the land. Our ancestors have fought for this Maisin land and won the fight* (Stonewick Bendo, Marua Point).

All Maisin clans have stories that deal with how their ancestors had to fight against these fierce warriors of the Upper Musa. Narratives of how Doriri were defeated are gladly shared, as they portray Maisin as fierce warriors. But these stories tell of Gorofi being not the only fighting ground. More towards the south-eastern end of Collingwood Bay, Maisin likewise had to defend the land they had claimed against the Doriri.

While Maisin were fishing and foraging along the coast, looking for mud crabs and shellfish, they made their way to the south-eastern end of Collingwood Bay. They discovered that this side of the bay harboured plentiful foodstuffs. When returning back to Gorofi, several clans decided to move down south with the intent of settling there. Oral histories claim that these clans settled first in Beria, an abandoned village site just north of Sinapa. From this village, some *iyon* decided to move further down. Crossing reefs and mangroves and travelling up Gurugu River, they eventually settled in Sipin. This village was established inland of the current Airara village, on the southern bank of Gurugu River (see Map 2).

The Maisin clans who travelled to Sipin are grouped together due to their shared history of settlement and migration from Gorofi down to Sibó (Deep End), as this south-eastern part of Maisin land is called. The *iyon* living in Sipin and eventually in Marua and Airara villages are addressed as Mainum-Korereki. Korereki incorporates Tatan, Taru, Sia, Wofun, and Waigo clans, the latter acting as chief (Kawo) clan of Korereki.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of Wofun, the clans adhering to Korereki all belong to the big Rerebin phratry. Due to their collective memories, brought about by shared histories of migration and warfare, Korereki clans share particular narratives and songs, such as the following one:

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11 Uwe is situated next to the Miniafia village of Gigori. Due to their proximity, the inhabitants of the two villages interact frequently. The Nua-Barin clan living in Gigori partakes in MICAD, and the primary school serving both villages is bilingual (Maisin-Miniafia). In Sibó villages, marriages regularly occur between Maisin and Miniafia people.

12 Dadumu clan is excluded from this affiliation as this clan came to Sipin at a later stage.

*At the time when Mainum and Korereki stayed at Beria, the Doriri people came. Doriri were guided by their leader, Nuke. During daytime, three brothers from Tatan clan, being Janten (elder), Boga, and Sumanu (youngest) were working in the gardens when Doriri people came. Nuke, the Doriri leader, hid himself in the bush and shot Janten's father. When he was shot, he called out to his three sons, 'I am not wounding myself; this is an enemy spear!' Janten got up, but because he had two wives who used their poison on Janten because they were very jealous of each other and Janten's attention for the other, Janten was very weak.<sup>13</sup> So his two younger brothers got up, took their spears, and went to Nuke to fight him. While this was happening, Janten sat up, shook his legs, and finally got up, taking his spear and heading for Nuke. However, Nuke only saw the two younger brothers, and he paid no attention to Janten, who was able to get very close to Nuke and throw his spear at him. As Nuke was killed, Janten shouted: 'Fagaga', meaning 'He is shot!' Upon hearing this, Nuke's group was frightened and ran away (John Christenson Taniova, elder Waigo clan, Airara village).*

After having faced the Doriri multiple times in Beria, Mainum-Korereki moved further down along the coast, eventually settling in Sipin village. As Raymond, elder of Dadumu clan, recalls: 'When our ancestor came from Gorofi, he settled at Sipin. Coconut trees were there at Sipin, but they have fallen already. Old banana leaves are still there at the back of our houses, but now there is nothing anymore'. Today there is nothing left of Sipin village. Situated across the River Gurugu, the banks of which are now eroded, the old village is now regularly flooded and has become a playfield for wild pigs in the lush green bush. But the place still attracts Airara men looking for pigs and wild sago. Consequently, it is not just a mythical place. Like other features, sites, and encampments in the bush, Maisin villages and landscape are part of a continually evolving production of space. Through mythical narratives, objects, plants, trees, and even histories of combat, space is claimed and reproduced. Likewise, the establishment of Airara village is grounded not only in a mythical past but also in a colonial and contemporary context wherein relationships within and between various clans and groups play significant roles.

Initially, Dadumu stayed in the village of Sipin, together with Tatan and Waigo clan, which, after some time, moved to the beach and established Airara village.

*Dadumu also moved down to the beach in order to go back to Gorofi where other Maisin clans and some Dadumu people were still staying. However, when they came down, Tatan clan saw the Dadumu people and stopped them. Tatan stopped them from going back to Gorofi because one Dadumu boy had married a girl from Tatan, and her relatives felt bad she would leave them. Tatan said, 'You settle and stay with us', and Tatan gave them a piece of land on their left side while they would give Waigo clan a piece of land on their right side (Raymond Jadai, Dadumu clan, Airara village).*

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13 The capacity of women to weaken their husbands and in particular immobilise their limbs by using poison, or too much sex, is a recurring feature in Maisin stories and perceptions of gender relations (see also Chapters 1 and 2).

While according to oral histories, Airara was established through the settling of the Tatan, Dadumu, and Waigo clans, Marua was established by Sia, Mainum, and Wofun clans. Upon leaving Sipin, these clans first lived together at Gevoja, a village supposedly located at the back of Marua Point, but they were subsequently forced to leave this area due to the rising sea level (see Map 2). Eventually, they established the village of Marua, but once again they were forced to leave, and because Marua Point was too small for all clans, they decided to split up, which resulted in the hamlets of Marua Point and Marua Mango.

The pattern of mobile settlement which characterises the Maisin history of migration probably changed with the advent of colonialism in the area. Around and shortly after the turn of the 20th century, it changed from rather small and mobile settlements inland towards semi-permanent villages along the coast. When MacGregor ventured into Collingwood Bay, only a few villages were situated along the coast. Airara village seems to have been built shortly after the missionaries established a mission in Wanigela. MacGregor initially makes no reference to the village, while the missionary Money mentions having visited Airara somewhere around 1907 (Wanigela log book; Barker 1987: 74-75). It seems likely that colonial presence in the area instigated Sipin villagers to move to the beach.

As Barker (1996: 213) argued, both government and mission identified villages 'as the primary venues of control', putting much effort into defining localities and the people living in them. Moreover, several settlements were actually established through the actions of missionaries and governmental officers. One of the missionaries stationed in Wanigela seems to have urged Imburee clan, now living in Yuayu, to move closer to the mission station and live together with a Rerebin clan in order to facilitate the missionary's visits so that 'he didn't have to wait for the Imburee people' to come for services. Shortly after World War II, the entire village seems to have been moved down to the beach as colonial officers did not want to travel inland anymore. Uwe people told a similar story. At the time the governmental station at Tufi was built, a patrol officer forced two dispersed Maisin clans which were living separated by a lake to settle together in order to facilitate his patrol visits. He appears to have threatened to burn the clans' houses down if they did not comply with his wishes. So they did, and the village of Uwe came into being.

In addition to the alteration of settlement patterns, both house and village layouts underwent changes through the actions of missionaries and governmental officers. James Nogar provides the most conspicuous example of such mission-guided alterations. He compelled the villagers to rearrange their houses while the mission station and entire village were moved to a new and healthier site (ARBNG 1904: 32). Patrol officers similarly contributed to these changes by ordering the clearance of trees and bush near the houses (Chignell 1911: 32), the removal of burial places from the villages to outside the settlements, and an increase in the distance between houses for hygienic purposes (Patrol Reports 1959-60; 1960-61).

Despite these colonial village interventions and inventions (Barker 1996), the location of Maisin clans and their clan members' houses still structure to some extent village layout. Each *iyon* occupies a particular space in a certain village, which is bounded by certain markers like coconut and betel-nut palms or other trees that are known to everyone. In Sinapa, a number of *iyon* (Wofun and Tatan clan) surround a single clearing, called *varo*. The village of Sinipara, which consists of Virani clan, is a single-*iyon* village with enclosed grounds. Koniasi (Mon clan) also seems to be a single-*iyon* village, but it also encompasses Gaboro clan from Kofure village near Tufi. Marua Point and Marua Mango consist of several *iyon* (mainly Mainum, Wofun, and Sia clans) arranged into clusters of closely spaced houses on the sea- and bush (forest)-side of the stretches of beach on which they settled. Although it appears that Airara village is structured by one row of houses built on the seaside and another row built on the bush-side, Airara is essentially divided into three parts. The village is divided in three major *iyon*: Waigo, Tatan, and Dadumu clans. In addition, each clan is organised around its lineages (*fukiki*), which in general live close to each other. The majority of the clan's *rora* (senior group) live near the bush-side of the village while *tere* (junior branch) live near the seaside. In addition, sub-clans tend to live close to their major clan. For example, Tatan's sub-clan, Taru, and Dadumu's sub-clan, Boni, live close to their elder brothers. The main exception is Sia clan. Although Waigo's sub-clan, Sia members live dispersed in Marua Point and Marua Mango.

As already described in the Introduction, however, the current settlement pattern is still mobile as people frequently move to other villages and even clans or decide upon settling in the gardens due to social frictions, kinship affiliations, or other reasons. This (to a certain extent) fluid settlement pattern obviously interferes with the ideology of the existence of rigid patrilineal and patrilocal clan structures. In practice, people's decisions to relocate their households may be influenced but not confined by clan membership.

In short, constructions of settlements are grounded in the mythical past, historical relations, and colonial history as well as within contemporary social and economic relationships. The way people perceive the land around them is related to the routes their ancestors took while migrating down from lower Musa River into Collingwood Bay. Travelling by either foot or canoe, they visited various places and encountered other clans during specific moments in time. These aspects of place and time were incorporated into each clan's history and eternalised in specific clan emblems, *kawo*. Moreover, *kawo* embody not only these experiences of space and time but also the social relations and social hierarchies that developed over time and place and the identity position that was taken vis-à-vis others. In the next section, these materialisations of clan identity are elaborated upon.

## **Materialisations of the patrilineal clan**

In the previous section, the emergence of Maisin ancestors and their subsequent travels into Collingwood Bay have been described. During the sometimes long telling of these histories, it often occurred that adolescent and young men would

sit around us, listening to what their clan elders had to say. For many, these stories were as new and exciting as they were for me. While in this case the anthropologist provided an arena in which these stories were told, clan histories are also (partly) narrated in public, during, for example, disputes over land. In general, though, knowledge of these histories is transferred within one clan. They are ideally narrated by clan elders and passed down from one male generation to another, often from father to son. In addition to these verbal enactments of identity and meaning, there are also non-verbal ways by which the patrilineal clan is identified and reproduced.

Here, I focus on materialisations of the patrilineal clan that were – and are – created by men and likewise passed down from one male generation to another. Previously, it was discussed that while emerging from the hole and during their subsequent travels, the ancestors appropriated various clan emblems. These *kawo* are sites of possible conflict: first, because they are directly related to one's identity, and second, because they are related to specific claims and rights. Claiming a particular emblem is synonymous to claiming a specific (mythic) history and, more importantly, claiming rights to certain stretches of land and other resources and things. As a result, *kawo* not only represent or visualise a particular clan; they actually define clan identity. Since various clans may claim similar *kawo*, the possible conflict inherent in these emblems becomes visible, as the right to use certain *kawo* is strongly intertwined with identity and power.

Material objects and practices that are claimed as *kawo* can be related to 1) the ancestors, 2) particular ways of travelling, and 3) elements from the perceptible world.<sup>14</sup> By discussing the emergence of each ancestor, the first type of *kawo* already has been touched upon. When climbing and emerging out of the hole, Maisin ancestors brought various kinds of abilities, such as magic and healing, but also specific designs applied on tapa and engraved on houses, canoes, and artefacts as well as on objects such as particular types of drums, lime sticks, and necklaces.

The clan designs painted on tapa are elaborated upon in the next section, as women transfer these patrilineal *kawo* from one generation to another. In contrast, the *kawo* designs engraved on houses, canoes, and artefacts such as wooden lime sticks are the responsibility of men. As touched upon in the myth of the two Dadumu brothers encountering Imburee clan, Kawo clans had the right to build chief houses, called *kawo-va*. In the case of Dadumu, who gave Imburee the right to build their house, this *kawo-va* is called *guma beko*, which refers to a (geographical) place where crocodiles (*guma*) sleep. Like other Kawo houses, this house was elaborately decorated with carvings and engravings on various house poles. These decorations often consist of concentric circles and indentations and vary in amount and style from clan to clan.<sup>15</sup> Often, bundles of young sago-palm sprouts, called *kasiro*, were attached as well as these signal a prohibition. In addition,

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14 Naturally, this distinction is purely analytical as the majority of *kawo* are related to the ancestors and to their subsequent travels and encounters with the perceptible world. It is therefore not always possible to attribute a particular *kawo* to one of these groups as they may merge together.

15 Forked pieces of wood (*sion*) and circles (*bumbuki*) engraved at the ends of poles are used on both Kawo shelters and Kawo houses (*kawo-va*).

Kawo houses were built from different material than those houses belonging to Sabu clans. While *kawo-va* were built with bush material, other people's houses were constructed with mangrove wood only.

Today, *kawo-va* seem not to be built anymore, as the last one dates back before World War II (John Barker, personal communication). Also, people belonging to both Kawo and Sabu clans use building materials from both the bush and mangroves. In general, though, elders still remember how their *kawo-va* looked, although in some clans detailed knowledge is lacking as the elders who still remembered the specifics of these houses have passed away. In cases where the memory of *kawo-va* is still detailed enough, clans may prohibit other people from building houses according to the clan's *kawo*. For example, the elders of Imburee managed to block several (recent) attempts by other people to build houses resembling or containing elements of Imburee's *kawo-va*. In all instances, these attempts were stopped, and the builders had to construct their houses in a different way. In addition to these 'mental mappings' of *kawo-va*, some elders have incorporated *kawo* elements, such as forked and decorated pieces of wood, into their houses. Another *kawo* that is still being practiced is the cutting of the overhanging sago-leaf rooftops. Only Kawo clans are allowed to do this. In one case, this rule led to upheaval when a member of a Sabu clan decided to build a house with an iron roof. Iron roofs happen to be cut straight just like the sago-leaf rooftops of Kawo houses. For a long time, this man could not finish this house until, after several meetings, he was allowed to finish it with this straight-cut iron roof as it was decided that modern materials did not fall under the *kawo* prohibitions.

In contrast to *kawo-va*, specific *kawo* stairs that facilitate entrance to either an elevated shelter (*bare-bare*) or a house belonging to a Kawo clan are still being built. Some clans use bipartite fabricated stairs; others use quadripartite ones. For example, the Waigo clan in which I lived was allowed to make double stairs, called *borun ke* (rain legs), just like one of their tapa *evovi*. In the past it was custom that any girl from an outside clan entering the clan's *bare-bare* by using these stairs would have to marry one of the clan men. It was only after some months that I discovered this meaning of my special stairs and realised that the presence of these *kawo* stairs had turned my house into clan property, which had not been the intention since it was meant for village use. Fortunately, none of the unmarried girls who visited me was forced into marriage. This custom that unmarried girls from other *iyon* are forced to marry when entering a Kawo clan house is also known by other Kawo clans, such as Dadumu. A similar dictate also applies to girls wearing, for example, an *embobi* with Sia's clan design, the turtle comb that is regarded by Sia as their *kawo*. In both instances, these girls will have to marry a Sia man.

As with the clan houses, canoes (*ka*) belonging to Kawo clans are also decorated in specific ways. In contrast to Sabu clans, Kawo clans may use forked pieces of wood (*sion*) and engraved circles (*bumbuki*) on their canoes.<sup>16</sup> In addition, these *iyon* may decorate the bow and stern as well as their paddles with engravings and *kasiro*.

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16 According to one informant, only clans pertaining to the Mera ari kawo are entitled to add kasiro to their canoes. This makes sense as mainly clans departing from the downstream of Musa River used canoes to travel into Collingwood Bay.

In this way, canoes belonging to Kawo and Sabu clans are visually differentiated. Since Sabu canoes lack ornaments, Sabu people could claim any canoe without decorations. Therefore, Kawo people made sure to decorate their canoes. This taking of undecorated canoes was mainly practiced in the past, however, as today this is regarded as stealing. As Henri Newton (Tatan clan [Sabu]) explained, 'Due to Christianity, I do not take undecorated canoes belonging to Kawo *iyon*, which was practiced in the past'. As a result of this vanished custom and the general fading visual distinction between the two types of *iyon*, only a few decorated canoes can be found in Maisina. In contrast, more subtle distinctions are still in use.

Various clans have specific ways of tying their canoes, especially their outrigger canoes. These differentiations are intertwined with the technique of building canoes and are consequently less elaborately visualised for an outsider. Nevertheless – or perhaps due to this intertwining of technique and *kawo* – these *kawo* are still generally applied and adhered to. Maisin and also other tribes clearly recognise and attribute these specific techniques to certain clans.

In addition to larger structures, such as houses and canoes, smaller artefacts, such as lime sticks, lime containers, drums, and various specific ornaments can be considered as *kawo*. With regard to betel-chewing equipment, each *iyon* has its own type of lime stick (*iyon*) and lime container (*son*). This comes as no surprise since among Maisin, as in other areas of West Papua and Papua New Guinea, chewing betel nut (*kara*) is practised intensively and intertwined with many social and symbolic practices.

The four major IYON share the use of rather large lime sticks, made from a hard type of wood and often decorated with elaborate engravings and little shells, called *gaavi*, and large round calabashes to put the lime in, called *gengen* (see Photo 17). In addition to the four major IYON, all other Kawo *iyon* share this type of lime stick and calabash. As Waigo members recalled, 'Every elder should have this special lime stick and matching lime container. However, some of them sold their emblems for a few kina, and now their families no longer have these chief regalia'.

Only the male elders of a Kawo clan may use *gaavi* and *gengen*; not even their wives are allowed to use them. During meetings, the elder would draw attention by using the *gaavi* as a rattle, ticking the inside of the *gengen*. When consensus was achieved, he would pass the *gengen* with lime to the men attending the meeting. Sharing lime from one container – and, of course, betel nut –, signalled trust and respect. This becomes especially clear when one considers that sorcerers often use lime to poison their victim, which obviously causes people to be reluctant of using other people's lime containers.

In contrast to the male Kawo elders, other clan members and people descending from Sabu clans have to use common lime sticks (*iyon*) and lime containers (*son*) or use their clan's chewing equipment. Various people use small lime sticks made from wood, bone, and even plastic in combination with medium-sized calabashes that may be used by all clans. In addition, several Sabu clans have the prerogative of using stone lime sticks, made from greenstone originating from Wakioki and claim the use of small, elongated calabash containers (*deuden*) or small, round



Drawing 5. Drum (*ira*) with crocodile mouth (*guma kaffa*) design. In the crocodile's mouth, two dried fruits, called *gagamu*, are attached. The drum is owned by an elder (circa 70 years of age) living in one of the Sibon villages. He inherited this *ira* from his father, who in turn received it from his grandfather.

calabashes (*kapfuriri*) to store their lime in. So the shape of calabashes refers to a particular *iyon* and its status. Currently, more and more people refrain from using calabashes and use plastic containers.

Drums, or *ira*, as they are called in Maisin, may likewise function as *kawo* when they are carved or engraved with special designs. These designs may be similar to those engraved and carved on canoes. Finally, objects such as particular necklaces but also shells and feathers may function as *kawo* (see Chapter 6). Some of these *kawo* objects, such as the crocodile drum depicted in Drawing 5, were passed down from one male generation to another, and consequently have become heirlooms. In addition to the possession of symbolic designs and *kawo* objects that have turned into heirlooms, Maisin elders also keep material objects that were supposedly used by the ancestors.

For example, one of the elders of Waigo clan keeps a necklace (*sa*), which he claims to be from his ancestor Sasaru, who is believed to have travelled down from the Musa area some four generations ago (Drawing 6). Through time, various descendants of Sasaru have repaired the necklace. At the time I saw it, the current owner was repairing the necklace with the intention of selling it, as rumours had spread to the village that a *bariyawa tamati* (foreign man) was roaming the villages for old regalia and handicrafts. The artefact dealer never showed up, and so this heirloom was 'saved' from being sold in order to be able to buy some coffee and sugar. Not all people, however, are so willing to part from their heirlooms.

Objects inherited from one's clan's ancestors, such as necklaces, *karu* shells, lime sticks, and lime containers, are still kept in people's houses, awaiting their time to be passed on to the next generation. These heirlooms, however, are not just passive memorabilia. In times of conflict, these objects may be brought from their hiding places and used to prove a particular claim on, for instance, land. Furthermore, not only Maisin consider these heirlooms as sources of political power. Representatives of the British government were also forced to acknowledge them as viable 'documents' of ownership, as exemplified by the following story. A *karu* shell, believed to have belonged to the ancestor Mokoru, was used as evidence of a clan's claim on a piece of land that was about to be bought by the British government. Since the *karu* shell had once belonged to a Maisin ancestor who had claimed this particular land, the British representatives were forced to acknowledge the ownership and rights of the shell's guardians.



*Drawing 6. Necklace (sa) belonging to the ancestor of Waigo clan, Sasaru, now belonging to one of the elders of Waigo clan. The necklace is made out of two large pig tusks, rows of smaller pig teeth, banana seeds, small shells, and pieces of bone. Dangling underneath the bore-tusks is a pair of gagamu, dried fruits that are also used as rattles.*

The second type of *kawo* are related to the specific way each clan travelled into Collingwood Bay. The particular circumstances and hazards encountered while travelling actually define the claims *iyon* may make. For example, due to their journey by canoe, Dadumu clan claims a series of *kawo* that are related to canoes.

*Because of their journey, Dadumu has the following kawo: they can pull their canoe up and hollow it out again and again. Other clans may not practise this. They have to hollow out the canoe, and after having put the canoe in the water, they may not hollow it out anymore. During their journey, Dadumu tied their canoe in the night. Because of this, they can tie the platform in the night. Also, if you tie a bundle of food with wayango, Dadumu cannot eat it. Because it was their ancestor that used this string for tying the canoe (Raymond Jadai, Dadumu clan, Airara).*

Intertwined with these types of *kawo* are also clan emblems that were obtained from other *iyon* that were encountered while travelling. The exchange of *kawo* during these encounters both visualises and materialises specific affiliations between *iyon*. In some cases, these encounters and the exchange of *kawo* are still remembered, and members of each *iyon* feel free to use the *kawo* they received in exchange. In other cases, these exchanges took place some time ago and have not been thoroughly affirmed afterwards. As a result, members who received this *kawo* are reluctant to wear or use it. As an elder of Taru clan expressed, ‘We were given the right to wear this *evovi* by another *iyon*. They gave it to my father because he grew up and was initiated there. But we did not use it for a long time, and if we would use it today, they would probably make lots of trouble. So we do not use it anymore’.

The third type of clan emblems refers to ancestral landscapes. The *kawo-va* called *guma beko*, which was described earlier, is such an example. It does not so much refer to crocodiles but to a particular geographical place where crocodiles are said to be sleeping. Therefore, this specific *kawo-va* also marks a particular land claim. In similar ways, Maisin ancestors encountered many other types of geographical locations, features, animals, plants, and trees on their travels to which they took a liking and claimed them as their *kawo*. By naming particular landscapes and geographical features, these ancestors also marked their claim on these pieces of land. An elder of Waigo's sub-clan Sia narrated his clan ancestor's name-giving and thus claiming of land as follows:<sup>17</sup>

*Our ancestor Mokoru came to Gorofi village and stayed there. One day, Mokoru went to the bush with one of his in-laws. When walking through the forest, they came across a small mountain. They stood at the foot of this mountain when Mokoru got up and said, 'In-law, this mountain, how shall we call it?' Mokoru's in-law answered, 'My name, we shall give it my name'. 'Okay, your name it will be', said Mokoru. From there the two continued their journey till they came to an area covered with tall grasses. Mokoru got up and said, 'In-law, this tall grass, how shall we name it? His in-law answered by calling the grassland's name. 'Oh', Mokoru said. From there they went on to another place. Mokoru again asked, 'And this tall grass, how shall we call it? Mokoru's in-law responded by calling aloud its name. 'Oh okay!' Mokoru said. From there they went further southeast, and they came to another area covered with grasses. Mokoru asked, 'And this tall grass, how shall we call it?' His in-law answered by telling Mokoru its name. 'Okay, so it is', Mokoru replied. From this area they came to another place. And Mokoru once more asked, 'This tall grassland, how shall we call it?' Mokoru's in-law replied by calling its name, and once again Mokoru responded 'Okay!' From there they went north again along the shores of Collingwood Bay. Eventually they headed for a place inland. They went further inland and stayed there. And when it became dark, they slept there. The next day, they went back home to Gorofi. Mokoru is said to be a great sorcerer. He was a bad man. But he was not only a sorcerer; he was a great warrior too. So people were very scared of him. So it was at this point of time that he obtained a lot of land within Maisina [Maisin land] by putting his landmark on it. That is why this land is ours now (Stonewick Bendo, elder, Sia clan).*

In addition to landscapes, Maisin ancestors also claimed animals as their *kawo*. The main *kawo* of Waigo and other Kawo clans is the chicken. Only Kawo clans are allowed to wear its feathers, and only Kawo clans draw them on their tapa. Other animals that frequently feature as *kawo* are turtles (drawn on tapa and represented in combs), snakes (drawn on tapa), and crocodiles (drawn on tapa and carved on canoes and drums). But engravings of seagulls and drawings of stingrays are also deployed as *kawo*. As with the more widely used chicken and crocodile designs, these animals are not regarded as totems, although clans claiming these *kawo* are not allowed to eat them. Today, these food prohibitions are rarely adhered to.

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17 I have in my retelling of the story omitted names and places to prevent conflicts as different clans may claim the same pieces of land.

As with specific animals encountered, various clans appropriated certain plants or leaves as their *kawo*. One of the main *kawo*, used by mainly Kawo clans is *kasiro*. These young sago-palm sprouts are tied to objects such as canoes and houses in order to claim them and prohibiting others from using it. *Kasiro* is also used to claim certain trees or crops. For instance, when walking along the bush tracks one may encounter betel-nut or coconut palms with *kasiro* tied to their trunk. By tying *kasiro* (or sometimes coconut palm leaves), these palms are claimed and their owner thereby prohibits other people from taking either betelnut or coconuts. So *kasiro* marks a claim and signals a prohibition. This latter function of *kasiro*, becomes especially clear when it is used to mark a spot where someone has suddenly died. For example, when a young Marua man mysteriously drowned, people marked the spot where he submerged with *kasiro*. In this way, it was ensured people would refrain from fishing at, and near this area.

Another plant that is used as *kawo* is the fern, in Maisin language referred to as *siroro*. As two elders explained, 'The ancestors got *siroro* because they were attracted to it. *Siroro* looks nice, so they got it, and it became their *kawo*. We draw it on tapa and use it as a marker to cover coconuts and other things so people know it is ours'. In a similar way, ancestors claimed certain trees. One of the main *kawo* of the Rerebin clan is a tree called *benomba*. This tree with soft wood is used to build canoes. According to the clan's elders, 'It covers everything'. All other clan emblems fall under this *kawo*. When touching this tree, one is not allowed to eat. Moreover, it is used to enforce strength and power. If Rerebin people want to stop something, they 'Stop it with *benomba*'. The perceived power of *benomba* was explained by one of the Rerebin elders from Ganjiga by narrating the following event:

*When a girl was retrieved by her father from her boyfriend's place, and this boy 'stole' her back again, her father got angry. He went to his daughter and told her, 'I am stopping this with benomba!' Thereupon, she stayed with her boyfriend, but she got ill, and her in-laws finally asked the girl's father to fetch her. And so he did. Today she is living in her father's place with the child by whom she was pregnant.*

In short, various objects, animals, plants, and trees are claimed as *kawo*, thereby identifying and defining clans as well as visualising and, moreover, materialising the claims they can make. *Kawo* may refer to the ancestral journeys and even continue to mark the ground, thereby re-inscribing the land with 'some historicised version of the ancestors' journey' (James Weiner, personal communication). Although each *iyon* knows its own clan emblems, general consensus regarding other people's *evovi* and *kawo* is not firmly grounded. Since clan emblems are powerful testimonies of particular claims on land, they are consequently also sites for possible conflict. As a result, other people's *kawo* are in general treated with caution and respect, and in order to avoid contradicting claims, general dissemination of a clan's *kawo* is avoided.

### *Who owns wuwusi, the tapa tree?*

In one particular case, Maisin managed to achieve consensus and avoid disputes by making a general claim for all Maisin *iyon*. This claim dealt with the paper mulberry tree, or *wuwusi*, from which Maisin (and Collingwood Bay people in general) make their tapa. Like other particular tree species, *wuwusi* is subjected to claims. But whereas in the past each clan would claim this particular tree as their discovery, today these claims are increasingly suppressed by the notion that Maisin as one tribe are all inheritors of *wuwusi*.

It's not certain when the Maisin started to cultivate the mulberry tree. Oral histories and genealogies reveal that today we deal with between the fourth and seventh generations of Maisin who left the lower Musa. If Maisin brought *wuwusi* from the earth hole near Baraji River, the cultivation of *wuwusi* must have been in practice more than 200 years ago. In a similar way, it was approximately the second or third generation that left Gorofi, separating the 'Southern' *Sibo* Maisin from the 'Central' *Gorofi* Maisin not long before 1900. If *wuwusi* was discovered by Maisin clans at this point of time, as many proclaim, it therefore has been cultivated for more than 100 years. Whatever the case, historical collections all suggest that Maisin have been cultivating the paper mulberry or tapa tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) well before the first Europeans collected tapa from the Maisin at the end of the 1890s and the early 1900s.<sup>18</sup>

But how came *wuwusi* among the Maisin? Several Airara and also Uiaku people told me that Maisin first discovered this tree when arriving in Uiaku after travelling down from the Musa area. But some people claimed it was discovered in their particular clan land, while others emphasised that tapa originated from Wanigela or even Musa. In many of these stories, the *wuwusi* was discovered growing on rubbish, on *taro gami*, the discarded skins of taro. But in other origin stories a mythical hero is credited with giving Maisin their first piece of tapa. In short, stories concerning the origin of *wuwusi* are varied and, from a historical perspective, often contradictory. In addition, they are sources for potential conflict and, as a result, not gladly shared with others.

In 1985, John Barker already experienced some difficulties when trying to collect these stories. As both he and I discovered, oral traditions regarding the 'discovery' of the *wuwusi* are not gladly shared with others, either inside or outside Maisin boundaries. The reason of this reluctance is the potential conflict that resides in these narratives. Their narration and subsequent dissemination reveal

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18 In addition to the hypothesis of an Austronesian origin of the mulberry tree, it could be suggested that Samoan missionaries introduced the mulberry tree amongst others Collingwood Bay. Between 1871 and 1890, Polynesian pastors settled in the southern part of New Guinea. Around 1890, they settled in Milne Bay, southeast of Collingwood Bay (Wetherell 1980: 130-32). They introduced new weaving techniques (*ibid.*: 139), and these so-called 'Samoan' mats can be found in places like Collingwood Bay. Therefore, it could be that they introduced the mulberry as well. In 1877, however, only a few years after the Polynesian pastors arrived on the south coast, ethnologists noticed the use of mulberry barkcloth (Chalmers et al. 1885: 149). And in 1890, MacGregor collected various pieces of barkcloth made from mulberry trees in Collingwood Bay. Apparently, the mulberry was already introduced and dispersed before the Polynesian missionaries arrived. Also, although the Maisin told me about the origin of 'Samoan' mats, they did not link the mulberry tree to Polynesian settlers.

sometimes competing political claims between factions. It was only after consensus was achieved that Barker would write down all myths concerning *wuwusi* that Maisin clan elders agreed for the dissemination of these stories. By writing down all variants, each was accounted for, and no individual clan could use Barker's writings to enforce its individual claims.

Almost twenty years later, I had even more difficulties in collecting *wuwusi* origin myths. People just flatly denied they existed, refused to tell them, omitted potentially conflicting parts, or gave very abbreviated versions of those narrated to Barker (1987a). On one occasion, in the beginning of my fieldwork in Airara, I was sitting with several men who represented the three Airara clans when I asked if they could and would tell me their stories concerning the origin of *wuwusi*. This question resulted into a profound discussion among the various clan members, and they concluded that they had to consult first with Uiaku and Ganjiga elders so they could give me one coherent story. As elder Raymond Jadai explained:

*There are too many stories about how the tapa came to Maisin. In Uiaku they have got stories that they were the first; in Marua they got stories that they were the first. But the clan elders do not want to make or get into trouble. Wuwusi is Maisin people, so we cannot say Sibó people or Gorofi people own it. It is Maisin!*

Afraid people may lay claims on the *wuwusi* tree, stating it was *their* ancestors that found it, it was agreed that 'the Maisin' discovered the tree, not individual clans. As a result, it seems there is a growing general consensus that *wuwusi* is a product of all Maisin and not of individual clans or a collective of clans.

Only after several months had passed by were some men and women willing to narrate their individual clan histories concerning *wuwusi*. Nevertheless, although these narrators claimed *wuwusi* as being a discovery by or a gift to their clan, they were always cautious not to do so in public and always made sure to stress that *wuwusi* essentially belongs to all Maisin. Obviously, the economic and political stakes involved with the monopolisation of *wuwusi* are too high to allow individual clans making claims on tapa made from *wuwusi*. By telling a particular origin story in which the *wuwusi* is discovered, clans not only claim land rights but also the tree. Since tapa has gained intensive commercial significance in the last 20 years, these oral traditions are potentially powerful means to monopolise its commercialisation. So in order to avoid such claims, Maisin seem to have reached consensus as to who owns *wuwusi*. In these dynamics, individual myths regarding *wuwusi* are deliberately changed to accommodate the current situation. As a matter of fact, individual oral traditions regarding *wuwusi* are losing their relevance as collective interests gain importance. The elders' decision to consult with other clans in order to provide one coherent story reveals the responsive and adaptive nature of oral histories.

As the stories surrounding *wuwusi* exemplify, mythic history is dynamic. Myths and histories are shaped to contemporary social and political contexts, and consequently histories and their relevance change (Silverman 1997: 101). Moreover, the political discourse surrounding the claiming of *wuwusi* shows us how 'mythic history is a mode of ritual politics' (ibid.). What is striking in this

discourse surrounding *wuwusi* is that, by claiming it as belonging to Maisin, non-Maisin are essentially excluded.

It is striking that this local (and even regional) embedded, political discourse is totally absent with regard to wild tapa tree species, such as *Ficus* species. Also, it does not involve the pigments used to draw or paint tapa designs. Only the beating of tapa is subjected to restrictions and claims. Some Maisin clans argue they are the only ones who are entitled to beat tapa during the night or during both night and day, as this is their clan's *kawo*. Women, however, may use (kin) affiliations or other ways to circumvent this prohibition so they can beat tapa whenever they want. Consequently, these individual claims have very little impact on the production or the commercialisation of tapa by all Maisin.

There is one other aspect of tapa production in which a dialogue between clan and Maisin interests comes to the fore: the commercialisation of clan designs. Tapa clan designs, which are claimed by individual clans, are, just as *wuwusi* and tapa in general, increasingly regarded as Maisin cultural property, especially by MICAD adherers (see also Chapter 8). The following section touches upon this issue by discussing the gendered production and transmission of clan designs as drawn and painted on *wuwusi*.

## Drawing the clan

The previous section showed us how *wuwusi* in particular is the focus of clan and Maisin political discourse. It seems that while Maisin clans and male elders try to historically and politically claim tapa clan designs, as well as tapa as a resource, tapa as a manufactured product seems to be associated with women. This becomes especially clear when one considers that in the past only women could handle the red pigment with which tapa designs were drawn or coloured. Moreover, up until today, only women draw their husbands' or fathers' *evovi*.<sup>19</sup>

### *Female knowledge and creativity*

As described in Chapter 2, the skill to beat and design tapa in the specific Maisin style is traditionally handed down from mother to daughter. The clan designs are likewise handed down from generation to generation, from father to son in ownership but, in craft and knowledge, from mother to daughter and from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. This, however, is an ideal situation. Due to various social factors, this transfer of craft and knowledge may be blocked – for example, because relationships between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law are strained. In addition, it seems that the commercialisation of general and therefore alienable designs has had a huge impact on both the production and

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19 In addition to the designs that are painted on tapa, several clans cut the ends of their tapa into fringes, thereby making them into clan tapa. There are several types of fringes, such as *sory*, *fokke*, and *surera*. The shape and number of the cuts of these fringes varies per clan. Also, the right to use particular fringes on either *embobi* or *koefi* is restricted to particular clans. A few Maisin clans have no tapa clan designs and instead use these cuts in the tapa cloth to indicate their identity.

transfer of clan designs, which are, in general, regarded as inalienable. Today, it seems that fewer clan designs are being made, and the transfer of knowledge of these designs seems also to be declining.

When I started researching clan designs depicted on tapa, making an inventory of each clan's *evovi*, I was often surprised by the lack of knowledge my informants were able to display. My interest in clan designs actually triggered an interest of especially younger people in their own clan's *evovi*. It appeared that the younger generation – men and women ranging from their twenties up until their forties – were often unaware of their clan's tapa designs. Although most of them knew their clan's main design, *evovi* related to particular lineages were often not known. Even elderly men had to confess they lacked this knowledge. In contrast, elderly women still remembered these 'old' designs and how they looked even if they did not belong to their fathers' or husbands' clans. Since men cannot draw the clan designs on tapa, they rely on female relatives to keep this knowledge alive. Consequently, it is women's responsibility to make sure this knowledge is passed down to the next generation.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, fragile Christobel had to show one of the younger Maisin women how to draw her father's clan design, the clan (Boni) being a sub-clan of Christobel's father's *iyon*, Dadumu. Being the oldest woman living in Airara, Christobel was one of the few who still has a great amount of knowledge concerning her father's and her husband's *evovi* and also concerning other clans and their designs. During my stay in Airara, she would also teach Bridget, a young non-Maisin woman married into Taru clan, how to draw her husband's clan design. Since all elderly women of this sub-clan had died and no clan tapa had been kept, none of Bridget's in-laws could show her what this design looked like. Christobel still remembered it, and therefore she could tell and show this young woman how to draw it. The result of this interaction materialised in a clan tapa that was not just a substitute for those made and discarded in the past. Based upon the memory of non-Taru clan member Christobel and the subsequent interpretation and craft by Bridget, this clan tapa embodied a new variant on an old theme.

Christobel had apprenticed the skill of drawing from her mother. As with the drawing of general designs, Christobel's mother showed Christobel her father's *evovi*, after which Christobel designed it herself: 'She gave me my father's clan design; I looked at it and designed it myself'. When Christobel got married, her female in-laws showed her the clan design of their husbands: 'My in-laws designed it and gave it to me saying, "This is your clan design; draw it and wear it". So just as the other women living in my husband's clan, I drew it and wore it'. After her husband died, Christobel did not return to her father's clan but stayed with her son and his wife in Waigo clan. She still draws her husband's clan design (see Photo 19), this time not for herself as she does not attend the festivities during which clan tapa is being worn but for younger women who have not (yet) been shown how to make their husband's *evovi*. This younger generation of women in their thirties do know, however, how to draw general designs. But it seems they were not familiarised with how to draw in particular their husbands' clan designs, or in cases where women were introduced to these clan designs, they feel no urge to try them. Born



Photo 19. Christobel showing her husband's *kekesi evovi*. This Waigo clan design is not finished yet; it still has to be painted with red pigment.

in Mainum clan in Marua Point, Louisa's mother had taught Louisa (34 years old) and shown her her fathers' *evovi*, being *moti* (snake) and *baroki* (star). After she received her facial tattoo, Louisa had worn one of them, being the *moti* design as shown in Chapter 2 (Drawing 3 and Photo 12). Although Louisa had worn this particular clan design, her mother had not shown Louisa how to draw it. Instead, she had shown Louisa her father's other clan design, *baroki* (Photo 20).

Soon after Louisa had received her facial tattoo, she married into Tatan clan in Airara village and left her parents and siblings in adjacent Marua village. Having said farewell to her father's clan, she now had to learn her husband's *evovi*. Normally, the mother-in-law or other senior women living in a clan either gives or shows the female newcomer a tapa with their husband's clan design. Due to strained relationships, this transfer of knowledge remains contested, and instead Louisa drew a more familiar clan design. Since Mainum clan gave Tatan clan their star or starfish design to wear, Louisa designed this design, which she already knew from her father's clan and which had been shown to her by her own mother. According to Louisa, she drew this design only once. As other women of her generation, Louisa is not very concerned with designing *evovi*. She prefers designing general designs that, in contrast to *evovi*, can be exchanged for other goods or sold.

Being Louisa's age, Monica displayed a similar preference for making general designs. Like Christobel and Louisa, Monica had learned her father's clan designs from her mother: 'I was already grown up, about 17 or 18 years, when she showed them to me. While she made one of them, I sat next to her, watching her drawing the design. I tried the design she was making on a small piece of tapa, but the other *evovi* I did not try. My mother told me about them'. Soon after, Monica would



Photo 20. Mildred showing her husband's (Tatan clan) and her mother's (Mainum clan) *evovi*, called *baroki* (star). The design is not finished yet; it still needs to be painted with red pigment.

elope with her present husband and move to Airara village. Although Monica tried her first design at a young age, she designed her first proper tapa only after she got married. As Monica explained, 'When I was young I didn't have time to do those things; I just ran around'. This similarly accounts for many other women who designed their first proper *embobi* only after they got married, having learned the skill to do it beforehand (Chapter 2).

Monica was introduced to her husband's *evovi* by one of her female in-laws, her husband's father's brother's wife. 'After I got married, one of my in-laws showed me how to make their clan design'. But despite having made a large amount of decorated tapa, Monica has not tried to actually draw her husband's *evovi* yet, not because it is too difficult – according to Monica it is an easy design to draw – but rather because she spends all her available time on making alienable general designs, which her husband sells to trade stores in Alotau or Port Moresby.

Being a non-Maisin woman, Helen had to learn all tapa skills from her mother-in-law. With regard to her husband's clan designs, Helen is not yet informed. As Helen told me, 'I never talk to her (Helen's mother-in-law) about *evovi*. It is their custom. Maisin women, they are born to do this, so they have to design tapa, but later I will ask her because, if she dies, I won't know it'. This problem concerns not only Helen. Other women of her generation, and especially younger ones, are also not (yet) informed about their husbands' *evovi*, thereby lacking the knowledge to draw these designs properly. Or as we have seen with regard to Louisa and Monica, women are preoccupied with drawing general designs. As a consequence, the transfer and production of clan designs are threatened. Many elderly women possessing this knowledge have died or face their last years, and the younger

generation, of which some possess this knowledge, emphasise the manufacturing of commercially viable general designs.

Clan designs, however, are not only transmitted from one generation to another; they may also be created by a certain generation. Sylvester Moi (55 years old) living in Ganjiga recalled how his stepmother Lovina one night dreamt of a big bird which covered her face with its feathers. She got frightened and chased it away. But then the bird showed its feathers three times, opening and closing them. When Lovina saw it, 'she was so happy. She woke up, and then she told the story to us'. Strangely enough, nobody had ever seen the bird described by Lovina. Regardless, 'she designed it and gave it to me saying, "Since we do not know this bird, and if you are lucky enough to go to school and to other places, you will find a picture of this bird and bring it to me"'. This would mark an ongoing search for this particular bird, which was intertwined with Sylvester's life or, as Sylvester expressed it, with his future:

*When she told me about the bird, I was in grade 1. As I continued going to school, I didn't find anything, but she kept asking about the bird. Then I was lucky to be chosen for boarding school at Wanigela, where I did grades 4 and 5. And every time I would come down for holidays, she would ask, 'Did you find it?' After finishing school, I was lucky enough to be selected for high school in Popondetta. I stayed there for four years. Every time I came down for holidays, she would ask, 'Did you find it?' Eventually in grade 9, I found it in a library book, and I asked permission to take it for my mother. This was in 1961, during Christmas holidays. She was so happy when she saw the picture! Then she said, 'If you are lucky enough to get a job and go overseas, you will make me a picture of a living one. If you make this picture, you have succeeded in your work'. I went to medical school in Port Moresby, and in 1965 I was lucky to be selected as a school representative, and we went to Sydney. We went to the zoo, visited every section, but I didn't find the bird. All my working life, 27 years long, she would ask me about the bird. I visited lots of states in Australia, but I never found a real one. Only after Lovina had passed away, I saw one. This was in 1995, when I was visiting a zoo in San Fransisco. I cried remembering my mother's words. So now this evovi, which is called fimera, is used by us, by Jogung tere.*

The bird of which Lovina had dreamt, and which she had drawn on tapa, appeared to be a peacock. She drew it in 1953 and declared it to be an *evovi* for her husband's clan only. In order to have her design recognised and validated as an *evovi*, however, it had to be approved of by the chiefs. Since women cannot speak up in public or directly address male clan elders, her husband had to plea for her. As Sylvester recalls:

*First, we had to go to Gafi [Jogun is Gafi's sasabu] because Lovina was from Gafi (Wo'o ari Kawo), and her brothers were chief at that time. In addition, she also had to go to Mera ari Kawo to get recognition and approval. She couldn't go herself because of being a woman, so my father went as head of the family. We went to the chief of Rerebin, and my father said, 'This is a dreamt design and has to be restricted to Jogung tere'.*

So *fimera* was only recognised as an *evovi* that belonged to Lovina's inlaws, after it had been accepted by the chiefs of the upstream and chiefs of the downstream. In this case, the creation of *fimera* (literally meaning buttock or ass feathers) was strongly intertwined with a person's life history. Also in other cases, clan *evovi* may have strong meaning and significance for individuals. As Lambert from Tatan clan expressed, 'Our *evovi* "*begati yeta*" (garden track) is not just a path in the gardens. It also means *mon-seraman*, the need to make good choices during important moments in life'. Since Lambert experienced some rough times in Port Moresby and neglected his family for some time, his interpretation of *begati yeta* is strongly connected with his own struggle to do the right thing and to 'keep on the right track'. In these cases, *evovi* have a personal significance that goes beyond being merely a remembrance of the clan ancestor's 'birth' and his subsequent travels.

Since the use of clan designs is restricted to clan members and is therefore in principal inalienable, women's 'free' time is predominantly spent on drawing tapa designs that may serve as alienable 'gifts' or commodities. As a consequence, the creativity involved with drawing these general designs seems to be larger and more dynamic than the drawing of tapa clan designs. Lovina's story was the only case I recorded concerning a recent creation of tapa clan designs. As one male informant living in Uiaku argued, 'The women of today are not creative anymore. Clan designs are just copied. And no new clan designs are created anymore. All designs have their own name, and it is up to the women to create and give names. This is their responsibility!' Although this informant may be right in critiquing women for their lack of creating new clan designs, women are urged by their husbands, brothers, and fathers to make tapa designs that can be sold.

Although clan designs embody properties that seem to make them inalienable, they have been given away and sold since the 1900s. The collections of Money and Pöch, which were acquired between 1901 and 1910 (see Appendix 1 and Chapter 7), contain many clan designs, and also more recently, in the 1960s and 1990s, Maisin have sold *evovi* to foreign visitors and art dealers, as is evidenced by clan tapa sold to the National Museum and Art Gallery in Port Moresby and by the large collection of clan tapa acquired for the Museum of Ethnology in Dresden (Tiesler 1993).<sup>20</sup> In addition, as 'confessed' by villagers, clan designs were also given away to non-Maisin friends during regional festivities such as Church celebrations. Today, most people regret having done this, as the Maisin Integrated Community and Development (MICAD) program and its board strongly urge not to sell or give away clan designs. According to MICAD leaders, the commercialisation of clan designs endangers Maisin clan traditions. They fear a 'selling-out' of Maisin clan customs and identity by allowing clan designs to be marketed. When one takes into account that clan designs represent and moreover define clan identity, this fear becomes understandable. The symbolic meaning of clan designs defines its value, not the object itself, which, as MICAD members argue, is not for sale. It is striking that several women adhering to this prohibition, and of whom some now

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20 In 1992 and 1993, just prior to the establishment of MICAD, Dr Volker Schneider collected 438 pieces of tapa, among which are 46 pieces decorated with clan designs. The latter were mainly collected in the Sibou villages (Tiesler 1993: 22-23).

regret having sold one of their fathers' or husbands' *evovi* in the past, could not explain why MICAD prohibits the selling of clan designs. Apparently, this decision has been implemented from 'above' without much consultancy and explanation to the women who are making these designs. Ironically, the effect of MICAD's prohibition on selling or giving away clan designs has not been the protection of Maisin clan traditions and identity, but it seems rather to have contributed to their decline.

### **Clan materialisations: gendered knowledge and practice**

This chapter has guided us through Maisin mythical past by following how *kawo*, including designs painted on tapa, expressed and constituted clan identities. These designs pointed us to mythic clan histories, revealing how Maisin patrilineal clans are constituted. These mythic histories can be regarded as the cultural construction of space and time. By naming the world around them, clan ancestors claimed mountains, trees, animal species, and things, which were appropriated as *kawo*, as clan emblems. Consequently, history began with the migrations of these ancestors, and by their name-giving landscapes and things were created and effectively claimed (Silverman 1997: 101).

Like clan histories, the names of each *iyon* encode a mode of history, spatiality, and temporality that is crucial for the organisation of social village life (see also Silverman 1997: 101). They determine land rights and custodianship over specific *kawo*. As with the narration of specific histories, the ownership and use of these names is in some cases contested. For example, a Kawo clan living in Ganjiga strongly objects to an Uiaku clan, accusing them of using 'their' clan name. Due to this appropriation, this particular clan may equally lay claims on *kawo* associated with this *iyon*'s name, such as the right to use a large drum, the *ira nombo*, instead of an *ira rati* (small drum), which is part of the attire of Sabu clans. This conflict, which resides beneath the surface of daily life, results from – or causes – envy, malicious gossip, and tense relationships. Like each *iyon*'s mythical history, clan names are related to a particular ancestor and the claims his agnates may lay on the landscapes, animals, and things the ancestor encountered. As has been discussed, these *kawo* can be regarded as materialisations of a particular *iyon* and its identity. In addition, personified objects or heirlooms are likewise related to the ancestor's powers and his subsequent travels. Like tapa *evovi* and clan ornaments, these things are not so much 'aide-mémoire' (Rowlands 1993: 144) but rather 'objects-memoire', materialised memories of a specific mythical and historical past. As we have seen, clan identity is foremost based on the reproduction of these material *kawo* and heirlooms as well as on the clan's mythic history. In reproducing clan identity, both men and women have their responsibilities. Nevertheless, the ways men and women reproduce and therefore memorialise the clan through means of material culture and oral history is different. While both men and women make and embody knowledge concerning material clan emblems, only men narrate clan histories. In addition, women transfer and produce their husband's clan identity in different ways than men.

In general, three forms of artefact transmission can be discerned. Maisin use specific tapa designs, heirlooms, and designs engraved on objects to visualise and perform their identity. As we have seen in this chapter, the production and transfer of these *kawo* is gender-specific. Whereas women control and carry the responsibility of creating tapa clan designs, men are responsible for heirlooms and clan designs engraved on objects, such as canoes, house poles, and smaller artefacts. Since the dynamics involved in creating these emblems are different, the knowledge and especially type of memory transmission involved in creating either clan tapa or clan objects (heirlooms and engravings) is different as well.

It was shown how tapa clan designs reveal a manifold of identities. Although the majority of *evovi* were given by clan ancestors and handed down the patriline, they can also be received from other clans and even from mother's brothers as tokens of a specific affiliation. Whereas the patrilineal clan owns these tapa designs, they are and have to be reproduced by women. In contrast to mythic clan histories and clan objects, tapa *evovi* are made by women and may even stem from women's imaginations. As we have seen in this and the previous chapter, tapa designs and pigments are strongly intertwined with Maisin social and symbolic life. In fact, today Maisin women are the main producers of clan symbols. In contrast to many other Oceanic cultures where women 'rarely portrayed animal and human forms' (Teilhet 1983: 47), Maisin women create and reproduce figurative clan designs, portraying among others various animals, plants, and clan objects. Women are held responsible for the continuation of these designs. If they do not pass their knowledge and craft down to the next female generation, the clan designs and how they should be depicted and produced will disappear. So the survival of a clan's most visual *kawo* and consequently its identity lies in female hands. 'Without children, the family line dies' (Teilhet 1983: 53); without clan tapa, the ancestors disappear as well, and the 'continuity between the present and past is broken' (ibid.; see also Weiner and Schneider 1989).

While women are held responsible for the continuation of clan designs, Maisin men are responsible for the transmission of their clan objects, consisting of heirlooms and objects engraved with specific designs, and their clan's oral history. Specific clan or *kawo* objects, such as special lime sticks, lime calabashes, and drums, are often kept and cherished and passed on from one male generation to another, thereby becoming heirlooms. According to Rowlands (1993: 144), 'objects like heirlooms have their own memoirs, their own forms of commentary and therefore come to possess their own personal trajectories, by Kopytoff (1988) referred to as the personal biographies of things'. The *karu* shell of Moku is an example of such an object. Heirlooms, such as these, are handed down from one male generation to another and embody the integration of mythical and political discourse.

In contrast, tapa cloths with clan designs are in general not kept as heirlooms and are not inscribed with mythical, personal, or political narratives by the women who make them, nor by the those who wear them. In general, they are thrown away as soon as the red colour has lost its brightness and turns brown. Nevertheless,

some people keep them as personal or family possessions. For example, one elder keeps a couple of *embobi* decorated with his clan's *evovi*, which his aunt made some 25 years ago for his wife when she married into the clan. As this elder expressed, 'She gave them, and we are taking care of them, keeping them. The young girls, they don't know these designs, so they have to sit down and copy them!' In these instances, *tapa* becomes an heirloom as well as a biographical object.

The *kawo* canoes and houses, decorated with specific clan attributes such as engravings, make up the third type of objects. Like the majority of heirlooms and clan artefacts, men create these larger objects and their designs, and it is the men's responsibility to transfer this knowledge to the next male generation. Canoes and houses appear to be more permanent than *evovi* displayed on *tapa*, as the latter type of object in general does not have a very long life. Due to the fact that Maisin prefer wearing their clan designs during large festivities, however, *tapa* clan designs are, to a certain extent, alive through their performance. In contrast, the tradition of engraving clan designs on canoes and houses and on smaller artefacts such as lime sticks and drums is rarely practised and, consequently, less materialised.

In addition to the safeguarding of heirlooms and the creation of both small and large *kawo* objects, Maisin men have the prerogative of, as well as the responsibility for, narrating their clan's mythic history to the younger generation. As explained earlier in this chapter, origin myths concerning the clan are not gladly shared with others. This veiling of knowledge is to prevent conflicts. In case of disputes, however, both myths and clan objects are brought out of their hiding place to provide proof of the clan's relationship with a particular ancestor and, as a consequence, with a particular piece of land.

According to the younger generation, elders do not share their clan histories, while the elder generation blames the younger generation for not being interested in the traditional history of their clan. So it seems the two groups are not communicating with each other. Knowledge is also lost due to the fact that younger people often move away from the village for considerable time. When returning to the village in their thirties or older, they have missed out on many events during which traditional knowledge is transmitted, like clan disputes but also ceremonies such as first-born initiations and traditional marriages. Similarly, many young women do not know how to draw their fathers' and/or their husbands' clan designs.

It seems that this loss of knowledge and lack of interest is coupled with the diminishing identity of individual Maisin clans. As the political discourse surrounding *wuwusi* exemplified, there is growing consensus that Maisin should act as one and not as individual *iyon*. This dialectic between Maisin and *iyon* interests seems to be visualised and materialised in the diminishing importance of clan designs and other *kawo* emblems, such as *kawo* houses and canoes, which rarely exist anymore. According to several informants, the fading visual distinction between Kawo and Sabu clans is connected with people's reluctance to manufacture elaborate and time-consuming ornamentations. As one informant put it, 'The Kawo-Sabu distinction with regard to, for instance, feathers will remain, as it is easy

to put a feather in your hair. Decorating a canoe takes considerable time, and many people do not feel like doing this anymore'. So in addition to a general tendency of homogenisation, people's attachment to their clan emblems seems these days to be measured in the amount of time one is willing to spend on creating one's identity. This loss of materialisations also has consequences for the remembrance of specific histories or events.

According to Rowlands (1993: 146), there are strong relationships between representation and remembering. As he argues, objects may be 'essences of what has to be remembered'. This relationship between things and memory has been adequately demonstrated with regard to Maisin *kawo*. As we have seen, the (mythic) past is encapsulated in *evovi*, heirlooms, and other *kawo* objects. As Küchler (1987: 248) argued, 'this is an interpreted and constructed past'. She suggests this is due to the temporary and reproduced character of the (Malangan) objects she analysed. Nevertheless, even heirlooms, which are neither temporary nor reproduced, are subjected to dynamics of history. Although their appearance remains static, their meaning and significance may change. As a result, the memories and therefore identities they might trigger are dynamic as well. The changing significance of the origin myths associated with *wuwusi* most clearly exemplify these dynamics. Moreover, the diminishing use of *kawo* suggests that some histories and identities are no longer worthwhile or necessary to display, and, as a consequence, to be remembered. Before turning to these dynamics of Maisin culture wherein traditions change and disappear, I want to consider more carefully the types of objects discussed so far. We can relate these objects to the two distinctive modes of memory transmission as proposed by Küchler and Rowlands, as well as to gender. As discussed earlier in this chapter, memory is transmitted through either the curation or the reproduction of material culture.

Clan objects that have become heirlooms, such as lime sticks and *karu* shells, are examples of the first kind of memory and knowledge transmission. Each clan object entails a specific history, which is, like the object itself, guarded by the clan elders. This kind of knowledge appears to be associated with men. In contrast, the clan designs painted on tapa are examples of the reproduction of designs through memory so that 'each is reminiscent' of a design seen in the past (Küchler 1987: 239). As is often the case today, the imagery of tapa designs is in general not transmitted from one generation to another through their preservation but through memory. This type of object and memory transmission seems to be associated with women. Consequently, these gendered types of knowledge imply that both sexes have different ways of cultural transmission.

In particular, it seems that men dominate the more conservative forms of material transmission. Heirlooms combined with inscribing practices that deal with particular political claims constitute a typical male form of knowledge. Since most clan emblems, such as engravings, are rarely made anymore, women dominate those forms of material knowledge which are based upon memory and mimicry. Moreover, while men dominate in particular discursive forms of knowledge and transmission, women make use primarily of non-discursive practices. Based upon

his fieldwork among the Foi, living in the southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, James Weiner argues that such sex specific ways of ‘image makings’ are part of an indigenous discourse ‘stipulating distinct male and female existential conditions’ (1991: 11). Whether this accounts for Maisin as well is elaborated on in the forthcoming chapters. In the next chapter, the relationship between objects and identity is discussed in the context of life-cycle rituals.



## Life-cycle rituals and the performance of identity

While the previous chapter described how clan emblems embody ancestral connections, marking the ground and specific objects as clan property, this chapter elaborates on how decorations that are removed from or applied to the body during life-cycle rituals mark the skin, thereby inscribing, among others, clan identity.

Especially in the past, Maisin used to perform several rituals that marked a change of status in a person's life. Such life-cycle rituals can be regarded as 'the way through which people learn to perceive the cause of their lives' (Hinnant 1986: 163). From birth till death, people are guided in their aging and their changing status and social roles – due to, for instance, marriage and death – by these rites of passage. The ritual performances marking these transitions transform self and experience in a regenerative manner and reproduce the existing social order, thereby directly affecting and altering the individual body. During life-cycle rituals, the body serves as a medium upon which social identities are created. Either by means of neglect, mutilation, isolation, or physical labour, the body is stripped from its previous identity and embodied with a new social identity by decorating and celebrating the body. This transition involves pain and often hard labour and is marked by an exchange of food and objects between specific groups. Among the Maisin, the giving of *tapa*, ornaments, and other gifts plays a crucial part. Some of these gifts are given to the person who is initiated while other gifts are exchanged between the groups who are involved in this person's transition and constitution. Thus, relationships between people, and between people and things, seem to be important in life-cycle rituals, but what is the significance of these things? What do they 'do', to speak in Judith Butler's terms?

When discussing both life-cycle rituals and exchanges, marriage is often taken as the initiating and regulatory force in constituting cycles of relationships (for example, Levi-Strauss 1969). Nevertheless, as Annette Weiner (1980: 73, 80-81) and also Cecile Barraud et al. (1994: 35) argue, death or mortuary transactions provide a much better insight into relationships and the values that underscore and are reproduced by these exchanges. I would suggest that in Maisin culture, especially firstborn exchanges and exchanges related to death and mourning are crucial for understanding the totality of Maisin exchanges and their dynamics. In this chapter, I show how body alterations and exchanges related to birth, puberty, marriage, and death are concerned with opening up and subsequently closing relationships. In this process, cycles of exchanges create an individual's

personhood, which, after it has undergone various transformations, is eventually killed, as all its ties with the living are terminated. In the following sections, these underlying values of life-cycle rituals are described and discussed by focusing on the objects that are used.

### **First-born exchanges**

Already before the first child (called *membu*) is born, his or her life is characterised by continuous giving of goods and food. These exchanges enhance relationships between groups of people and mark their respective clan identity, while at the same time the accompanying rites initiate the child and define its new identity. The major actors in these firstborn exchanges are the child's father and his clan, specifically the father's brothers and sisters and the child's mother and her brothers. These two groups of people create an ongoing exchange relationship. The giving of specific food by the father's side to the mother's brothers and the giving of names, clothes, and decorations by the mother's brothers to their sister's child characterise this relationship. Moreover, through these exchanges the child's personhood is constituted.

Gifts of food start as soon as a woman discovers she is pregnant. This is usually after nine weeks or so, and at this point in time her husband's side has to let her family know they are expecting their first child. In doing so, he gives uncooked food and a wild pig to her family. This is called *susi kariga*. When the baby is born, again food is given, which is referred to as *susi roro*.

After the baby is born, the mother stays in the house with her baby for three weeks up till one month. She will reside there until her husband gives uncooked food (*susi roro*) to her brothers, the child's uncles. The child is not allowed to leave the house and cannot be touched or seen by its uncles until this food has been handed over. After the uncles have received the gift, the mother comes out of the house with the baby so people can see it. Soon after, the baby receives a name from its mother's brothers. As soon as the firstborn child starts to eat food, again food has to be given to the child's uncles. This time, however, a piece of baked sago is given to mother's brothers. As the years pass and the child grows up, food that can be spared by the father's family is given to the mother's brothers and their families on a regular basis. This giving of food continues until the uncles perform the first initiation, which is usually when the child reaches around 10 years of age.

The significance of giving food in the initial phase of a child's life, when it is still in the mother's womb or has just been born, lies in the fact that, at these points in time, the child has no social identity yet. Only after the child's maternal uncles have received this food may the process of creating a social identity, which is initiated through the name-giving, be commenced. As described in Chapter 1, when born, the baby's *kananiniwa* (spirit/image) is not yet attached to its body. The act of name-giving is important as, by calling its name each time the mother leaves a new place, the baby's spirit is summoned to follow. Thus, by giving the child its name, the first step in the process of attachment, of establishing a person, is started. This can only be achieved, however, when the child's father has opened up an exchange

relationship with the child's mother's brothers. While the father has to initiate this exchange relationship, the basis for this exchange relationship resides in the link between brothers and sisters. More accurately, it is the relationship between the child's mother and her brothers that establishes the relationships between the child's maternal and paternal side. This is reflected in the types of food and objects that are exchanged and their significance in establishing the child's identity.

It is significant that uncooked food and wild pig are given as these gifts embody in particular the father's labour. So it seems that paternal substances must be given to the child's maternal uncles, who, after having 'given' the child and named it, must be compensated. The fact that wild pig is given – not domesticated pig, which is slaughtered for ceremonial occasions only, thereby embodying the efforts of the household that raised it – indicates this. Similarly, the gift of baked sago, which is usually made by men, embodies the paternal side (of the child), which is once again given to the child's maternal side. Since both pig and sago are closely associated with (killing) humans, one may wonder whether in fact the child's father is not giving an equivalence of 'his' child to those who 'gave' him this human life.

By continuing to give food to the uncles, the social identity of the child becomes each time more attached and clearer. From an 'image' (*kaniniwa*), it turns into either a girl (*morobi*) or a boy (*teiti*). It is only the performance of the puberty rite, however, through which her or his social identity as a particular clan member can become inscribed. Once again, only the child's maternal uncles can accomplish this.

The child's father makes sure to hand over food on a regular basis to the child's maternal uncles, thereby investing in his child by investing in the relationships that constitute the identity of this child. On the other hand, the uncles ideally develop a special relationship with their niece or nephew and eventually initiate her or him into adulthood, thereby constituting her or his clan identity. This marking of a person's social 'growth' is initiated with the giving of *totumi*. During this first initiation, the child's uncles give to the child *totumi* (a necklace made from cassowary feathers) as well as *yati* (a small string bag) containing a mirror and comb. This act of giving from the uncles eventually results in the final part of the initiation, the performance of *kesevi*.

### *Decorating the firstborn child: totumi and kesevi*

Among Maisin, the firstborn child (*membu*) is not allowed to decorate its body. It should not use a mirror, comb its hair, rub coconut on its body, wear necklaces, wear decorated *koefi* or *embobi*, or dance until its initiation. In the past, young, non-initiated children would receive an undecorated *koefi* or *embobi* which, during special occasions, was sometimes 'decorated' with a spittle design. This was applied by one of the parents, who would chew betel nut and subsequently spit the red saliva on the tapa cloth. Today all children are dressed in Western clothes, with trousers for boys and skirts for girls, and, in addition, almost all children receive a shell necklace at some point in time. This latter adornment, however, is prohibited for firstborn children. The practice of decorating the firstborn's body and dressing it

up in decorated *koefi* or *embobi* is the prerogative of the child's maternal uncles, the mother's brothers. They are the ones who have to decorate the child and, moreover, decide when he or she is old enough to receive his or her first decorations.

As soon as the firstborn child is old enough to receive its first initiation, which is generally around 10 years of age, the uncles sit together and say, 'The boy or girl has grown up'. Then they get coconut and call the child. The uncles squeeze coconut in the initiate's hair, comb its hair, and give it *totumi* (a necklace made from cassowary feathers) as well as *yati* (a small, personal string bag) containing a mirror and comb. This initiation is called after the necklace: *totumi*, which is a type of necklace that is also referred to as *roti*. By giving it *totumi*, the child can now comb its hair by itself. When the child returns home, its parents notice the *totumi* and know they have to prepare for the big initiation, the *kesevi*, which completes the transition of the child's person.

Since the child's parents have to prepare large amounts of food and gifts for the child's uncles, it may take another couple of years before the child is finally fully initiated. In general, the firstborn child is between 15 and 20 years of age when receiving his or her final initiation into adulthood. This initiation is called *kesevi*. Only after this initiation has been completed may the child play the drums, dance, and decorate him- or herself; earlier, he or she was only allowed to watch other people dancing. In the past, it was also enforced that only after they had received their final initiation were *membu* allowed to have sex. Abraham, age 33 and born in Kofure village near Tufi, remembered his *kesevi* (or *jirorono*, as it is called in Korafe language) as follows:<sup>1</sup>

*I was initiated by my uncles, my mother's brothers. The elder of my uncles had to make a lot of preparations, as well as my father, who had to do his share of the preparations. We had to make a number of gardens and started raising pigs. On the day I was initiated, my cousin-brothers and cousin-sisters (father's side), who were initiated before me, guided me into the sea where I had a complete wash with salt water. Then I was taken inside the house, where I was seated near the fire wrapped in a mat to make my body hot. I stayed the whole night like that, heated up by the flames and the mat. Next morning, they took me outside and rubbed my body, face, and hair with coconut milk. My uncles started to comb my hair and moulded it in a round shape by putting a red-hot knife on my hair. After that, they put another lot of coconut milk on my body and hair and took me inside the house again. There they dressed me up with all the traditional regalia. I was given a tapa loincloth, followed by the rest of the traditional decorations from head to foot. When they were finished, they took me outside of the house. All the time my cousins accompanied me, holding my hands on both sides and leading me outside the house, onto the veranda, and down to the steps. Before me on the ground was a pig with a string bag of food and my grandmother bending over it. Behind her lay a long line of traditional mats. I had to step on my grandmother's back and down onto the mat with my cousins on both sides. My uncles, all dressed up like*

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1 Maisin, Miniafia, and Korafe initiations, marriages, and other customs, such as tattooing, are to a certain extent identical. Since Abraham remembered his initiation so vividly, I choose to narrate his story instead of similar experiences from Maisin firstborns. Because Abraham's father is clan elder, his son's initiation was performed in a 'traditional' and elaborate manner.

*me and my cousins, had followed me, and the elder called out, declaring that he was initiating me, his sister's eldest son. They seated me on one of the mats with my cousins beside me. Then, my eldest uncle continued with a speech wherein he explained that this was the day he had made his preparations for and that by right he was the one to lead the other members of his family to initiate me. I would become a man now, and I would be free to have a girlfriend and get married. Before this day, I was prohibited to do any of these things or even decorate myself and dance in front of my uncles. For this reason, my uncle had to make this speech and make it publicly known that I was initiated into manhood and was to be looked upon as a young man from now on.*

For the *kesevi*, the father's side has to work hard. A special garden has to be prepared to provide enough food, and goods and money have to be accumulated for the child's maternal side. As a result, it may take several years before the father's side is ready with the preparations for the *kesevi*. As previously described, the initiation involves an introduction of the child into dancing, beating the drum, and the wearing of decorations. During the *kesevi* the child receives its first decorated *koefi* or *embobi* and ornaments. These gifts are given and applied by the child's uncles, the mother's brothers. Maisin informants who underwent *kesevi* told me they had received a tapa with their father's clan design painted on it. This tapa was given by their mother's brothers but had been made by the initiates' mothers. The mother had prepared this clan tapa especially for this occasion and given it to her brothers so they could dress up their sister's child in their brother-in-law's regalia. Consequently, this initiation seems to involve the transition of the child from the mother's to the father's group, which is marked and visualised by the clan tapa given to the child.<sup>2</sup>

The father of the child and his family give large quantities of raw food, pigs, mats, clay pots, clothes, money, and plain or general-designed tapa in exchange for the uncle's gifts and their decorating of the child's body. Before handing over the gifts to the wife's brothers, they are waved in front of the child. Abraham's mother started swaying gifts over her son's head, calling out the names of her brother and other relatives for whom the gifts were intended. Her husband's sisters, who did the same, followed her. This practice of making a declaration stating the receiver of the gift is called *tonton* (see also Photo 24). In some cases, the child is decorated inside the house of its uncles, who subsequently bring the child to its father's clan, where they wait until promises or 'declarations of gifts' (*tonton*) have been made by the child's paternal cousins. This is done by saying, 'We give a mat for our cousin' or 'We give sago for our cousin'. After they have finished, the maternal uncles hand over the child. While the child is taken by the hand by his or her paternal cousins, he or she walks over a clay pot belonging to the father's clan and, after breaking it, enters his or her father's house. This latter performance signals the transition of the child to the father's group as the child's paternal clan identity is defined by breaking the pot.

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2 The other decorations given by the uncles are made especially for the occasion. They do not derive from a possible previous paid bride-price for their sister.

The *tonton* performance acknowledges the contribution of the child's uncles and other maternal relatives for contributing to its (social) upbringing. This relationship between the uncles and their sister's child, however, is not terminated at the *kesevi*. Maternal uncles develop a special relationship with their sister's child, disciplining their niece or nephew. Obviously, this ideal intervention of mother's brother can only be practiced when they live nearby. But even when living further away, maternal uncles may be turned to for counselling or help in times of crisis or disputes. Moreover, even when the child has grown up and married, this relationship with the uncles remains important. In addition to counselling and help, the latter may demand compensation in case their nephew or niece is treated badly. In case their sister's child dies before getting married, they may claim compensation for his or her death. This is in particular the case if the bride-price for their sister has not been paid yet.

The uncles' contribution to the child's upbringing and health is best exemplified by the ways the uncles have to distribute the gifts they received from the child's paternal relatives. The received gifts are partly kept by the uncles, but the majority are distributed among the members of their clan. This distribution has to be done well. If uncles or other relatives are greedy, the initiated child may get sick or even die due to retaliations from dissatisfied 'relatives'. As several informants stressed, if a child dies after it has received its initiation, the 'mother's side is to blame because they didn't share properly!' This indicates that these gifts embody the relationships that constitute the social identity of the child. By not sharing them properly, the child's physical and social constitution is endangered.

Performances vary to a certain extent.<sup>3</sup> Each occasion is special, and although the decoration of the child and the presentation of gifts are essential, the use of space and 'symbols' may vary. Among the Maisin, a child has to break a clay pot rather than walking over his or her grandmother's back, as is practised among Korafe people. The effect of both practices is the same. The specific relationship between the child and his or her uncles is transformed as, by walking over the female relative's back or breaking the pot, there is 'no way back'. 'No way back' implies that the child is physically handed over to its father's clan. The paternal clan *tapa* the child is given to wear also visualises this transition. As a result, the 'maternal' child is symbolically transferred to that of its paternal side.

Although these firstborn rituals are not held regularly anymore, some of the prohibitions are still in place. As informants stressed, firstborn children who are not initiated are not entitled to wear *nomo* (ornaments or decorations) and

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3 I heard different versions of how *totumi* and *kesevi* ideally should take place. According to informants living in Ganjiga and Yuayu, *totumi* does not involve the exchange of food and objects between mother's brothers and the child's father's group. According to some of my informants in Marua and Airara, however, *totumi* is a somewhat smaller version of *kesevi*, equally entailing the exchange of gifts. They referred to the practice of handing over comb and mirror as a separate event that occurred prior to *totumi*. This discrepancy could be the result of the decline in firstborn initiations as many parents are reluctant to do all the hard work involved in accumulating the exchange gifts. Many firstborn children are, as a consequence, not initiated any more, which may account for a decline in knowledge concerning these traditions. Yet *kesevi* has not died out completely. The most recent *kesevi*, which was organised in one of the Sibó villages, took place in Marua in January 2001, just prior to my arrival in Collingwood Bay.

dance, despite the fact that they might never receive their initiation. So why is there a prohibition on decorating the non-initiated body? As *nomo* are closely associated with health, sexuality, and identity, the prohibition of wearing them seems to signal that the development of the individual's social identity has not yet been completed. The described sequence of firstborn rites can only take place when parents and especially the father of the child have prepared enough food and goods to compensate the child's uncles (*mobr*) for their gift. The child's uncles (*ya*) give their sister's son or daughter the 'right' to wear *koefi* or *embobi*, decorate him- or herself, and thereby participate as a 'full' person in festivities and subsequent relationships, including marriage. Thus the child's transformation and the development of its social identity depend upon the (exchange) relationships between the father's clan and the mother's brothers' clan. When this relationship is not materialised and consumed through cumulative exchanges, it seems the firstborn is not able to materialise and consume its aspired social identity either.

### Girls' initiation

Both *totumi* and *kesevi* are performed with the firstborn child only. In the past, however, all boys and girls would receive an initiation into adulthood. As Barker and Tietjen (1990: 226) described:

*The rites usually involved only clan members and their wives and perhaps a few close kin. On an appointed day, clan elders took the adolescent boys of the clan to the river, bathed and dressed them in new tapa loincloths, and then decorated the boys with clan insignia (certain designs on tapa, certain arrangements of shells, some feather decorations, and other details). The women in the group then prepared a meal for clan members. There were no exchanges.*<sup>4</sup>

Whereas these male puberty rites were rather limited, especially in comparison with the previously described *kesevi*, girls underwent a much lengthier and especially more painful transition.

Firstborn girls received *totumi* after which their faces would be tattooed with elaborate curvilinear designs. In general, girls were between 10 and 15 years old when they received their tattoos. Often girls of a similar age would have their faces tattooed together. They would all stay in the tattooist's house until their *bua* (tattoo) was finished. Before the tattooing could take place, the woman applying the tattoos would shave the front part of the girl's hair and the eyebrows (Photo 21). Some tattooists would then draw a complete preliminary design with *mi* or charcoal on the girl's face, while others would design only one part of the face that was tattooed immediately. In both cases, the tattooist would have thought about a design carefully, estimating whether a particular design would suit the girl's face.

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4 My informants in Marua, Airara, and Ganjiga denied that boys had ever been initiated. They argued that the socialisation of boys and their 'initiation' into their father's *kawo* took place during the course of their upbringing, not during one specific event.



Photo 21. Uiaiku schoolgirls showing their facial tattoos (P.J. Money 1908. Courtesy of the Australian Museum AMS 328, Percy Money Photographs V2649). Notice the shaved foreheads and eyebrows, indicating these girls had just received their tattoos. The two girls in the middle have scarification above their breasts. They all wear coconut armbands, kokindi (short necklaces), and short (kauna) and long (buoro) earrings. Unfortunately, their embobi are less visible.

With the girl's head placed on her lap, the tattooist drew the design with *nasa* (drawing stick) and *mi* (black pigment) on the girl's forehead, after which she started tattooing this area with a bundle of thorns applied to a little twig, which were pierced into the girl's skin by tapping the twig with a stick called *kimama*. Probably starting from the end of World War II, the *tata*, as the thorns belonging to the *tata* vine are called, were replaced by steel needles, which were bundled and pierced into the skin. Depending on the thickness of the lines one wanted to create, the tattooist used bundles of three or even five needles. The dye that was used for tattooing was made of various pigments. The four tattooists I interviewed all used charcoal-based pigment that was mixed with water and put in a shell (*giu*). The tattoo wounds were rubbed with a cloth drenched in the black dye, thereby colouring the tattoo black.

In general, tattooists started with the girls' foreheads (*simati*) and noses (*isu*), followed by one cheek (*sirava*) and then the other. In some cases, this was done in one day. In other cases, this initial tattooing took two or even more days. As Christobel, who tattooed various young girls, explained, 'It is very painful, so you cannot do everything in one day. The first day you do the forehead and nose, the second day one cheek, and the third day the other side'. Josephine, one of the youngest tattooists still alive, would tattoo the girl's forehead and nose very early in the morning while it was still cool. When finished, she would dab the girl's face with a piece of tapa, removing blood and applying more dye, and give the girl some rest until late in the afternoon when the heat of the day evaporated. In the early evening, Josephine would design and tattoo one cheek, followed by the other early next morning. Other tattooists preferred to tattoo as much as possible, and, depending upon the girl's strength, tattooed forehead, nose, and one or even

both of the cheeks in one day, followed by the chin (*kafa*). In subsequent days, the tattoo was completed, tattooing in some cases also the neck (*iko*).

After the design had been completed, the girls' swollen faces were given a few days rest. During this time, the wounds inflicted by the tattooing were allowed to heal, which caused the black pigment to come outside. The girls were seated next to the fire, their heads covered with a piece of cloth or *tapa*, which caused their bodies and faces to sweat, thereby cleaning both body and wounds. The girl would rub off the dirt and sweat with a piece of *tapa*, except for the face, which was not to be touched. Due to the heat and sweating, the crusts that had appeared on the tattoo wounds would eventually fall off. Subsequently the whole process of tattooing was repeated up to four or five times, until the tattoo had obtained a thoroughly black look. As one tattooist explained, 'I put the needles where the scars are visible and rub them [again] with charcoal'. If the girls were not strong enough and the tattooing process could not be repeated, the tattoo would remain *basasab*, light, and the tattoo was not considered right (see Chapter 1).

In general, the girls would stay in the house for one to three months, depending upon the duration of the tattooing, which in turn depended upon the girl's strength. The stronger the girl, the faster the tattoo could be applied. While staying in the tattooist's house, the girls helped chop firewood and fetch water and worked in the tattooist's garden, but they were not allowed to show their faces in public. During the entire tattooing process, the girls had to cover their face with a piece of *tapa* or cloth whenever leaving the house. Boys and men especially were not allowed to see the girls' faces and, as a consequence, were not allowed to enter the tattooist's house. In the more distant past, the girls would cover their entire head and a large part of their bodies with a large *tapa* cloth, called *feoki*. More recently, girls would often use a towel (Barker and Tietjen 1990: 223). Barker and Tietjen (*ibid.*) mention that in the past the girls would also have to sit, eat, and sleep behind a *tapa* cloth screen, secluded from the tattooist's family. More recently, they were allowed to eat and sleep with the tattooist's family members, often with their heads uncovered, so the tattooist's husband was, in contrast to other men, able to see the girls' 'unfinished' faces.

When staying inside the house, the girls were not allowed to wash. According to tattooist Josephine, who tattooed 14 girls, 'her' girls were prohibited from washing themselves. They could only wash their legs and thighs and had to clean the rest of their bodies, and especially their faces, by sweating off the dirt while sitting close to the fire. According to my informants, washing the face would spoil the tattoo by making it lighter. Barker and Tietjen (1990: 224, 229) mention that in the past girls were not allowed to wash themselves at all. Occasionally, though, 'tattooists arranged for girls in their care to meet in a hidden part of the bush behind the village' where they would sit around a fire and could sweat and chat together. This communal practice, which facilitated female bonding and the establishment of *communitas*, seems to have been abandoned around World War II (*ibid.*).

Another prohibition to which the initiated girls had to adhere concerned the food they ate. The girls had to refrain from eating certain foods as these would interfere with the tattooing process and the tattoo itself. For example, they were

prohibited from eating crabs, shellfish, fish, and pig. Eating crabs with their vicious claws would cause great pain to the girls. Barker and Tietjen's informants (1990: 224) argued that crabs would cause the girls to squirm during the tattooing as eating these crabs 'induces an unpleasant sense of these bony creatures crawling across one's face'. According to my informants, the girls could only eat taro, sweet potato, bananas, and mangrove 'spaghetti' – the long worms that are also used to feed women who have given birth. Moreover, food and also drinks had to cool down before being consumed. Hot food was believed to infect the tattoo wounds and turn them into sores. This prohibition did not prevent girls from getting infections, which often resulted in facial scars.

### *Performing the initiated body*

After having withstood the painful tattooing sessions, the seclusion, and other restrictions, the girls were ready to, literally, face the outside world as soon as their faces were no longer swollen up and the tattoo looked its best.<sup>5</sup> The tattooist would warn the girls' parents so they could get all the decorations, gifts, and food ready. When the day of the girls' 'coming out' had arrived, the tattooist would wash the girls and decorate them, sometimes with help of her husband (in case he was the girls' maternal uncle) or with help from other relatives. The girls were dressed up in a red tapa cloth and numerous decorations and shown to their relatives and the rest of the community. As Rebecca Ifugari (aged in her 80s) recalled:

*When we were finished having our faces tattooed, a time or day was set to come out of the house where we were hiding. Our parents were told, and they started making preparations. When we came out of the house fully decorated, people were gathered in front of the house. They had come to see us and see our tattoos. We could go out in the open again and walk around in the village.*

*I came out of the house wearing my plaited and coconut armllets, necklaces, waist belts, and a tapa cloth. My Auntie Sailin, who had made my tattoo, decorated me and also pierced my ears, putting kari kauna and buoro [two types of earrings] from the top to the bottom.<sup>6</sup> They hung right down. She put coconut and red paint (gametti) on my hair and dressed me up in tapa cloth. The people who had gathered in front of the house said, 'Rebecca has received a tattoo and is now coming out of the house'. So they came to see my newly tattooed face.*

The decorations were put on Rebecca by her auntie (mother's side), who also had applied her facial tattoo. She dressed Rebecca up with ornaments and a special tapa cloth called *omang*. This is a completely red tapa cloth with a white fringe

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5 In contrast to the female initiations performed in the Ayafat region in West Papua, where girls were tattooed and educated in women's secret knowledge concerning healing (Thoonen 2005), Maisin female initiations seem not to have entailed such discursive transfer of female knowledge. Maisin girls were predominantly physically prepared for their adult lives.

6 *Kauna* are small, disc-shaped earrings made from (red) shells or, more recently, plastic. *Buoro* or *buor* are made of coconut rings, sometimes adorned with coix seeds. In the past, the latter earrings were also worn by mourning widows and widowers.

beneath.<sup>7</sup> Rebecca revealed the following about these loincloths: ‘The *embobi* these girls wore were *omang*; they were completely red! It is a custom to dress up girls with *omang* when they come out of the tattooist’s house. Later, their parents would give them a normal design to wear’, which were often clan designs of the girls’ fathers. The red *embobi* signals the girl’s newly received *bua*. As Ganjiga tattooist Maggie (73 years old) explained, ‘If the newly decorated and tattooed girl is among other ladies, they would not know she just received her *bua* if she would wear a normal *embobi* design. This is shown by the red *embobi*’. Moreover, this *embobi* soaked in red dye might symbolically refer to ‘the blood let during the initiation’ and to the advent of the girl’s (menstrual) blood (Barker and Tietjen 1990: 224) and therefore her fertility.

One middle-aged male informant mentioned that, after the girls came out of the house and displayed themselves in public, by showing their facial tattoos and their elaborately decorated bodies, young boys tried to obtain the *yan sesi*. This flower in a small pandanus binding (*yan*) was tucked in one of the girl’s armllets. The boy who would conquer the girl and sleep with her would receive this *yan sesi*. Seeing the flower, everybody would know whom the girl had chosen and with whom she had slept. If this was indeed practised, the facial tattoos not only enhanced female sexuality but moreover ‘opened it up’, visualising and defining the girl’s new status as a sexually active, fertile, and therefore marriageable young woman. This display (*ovigo*) of their beautified bodies and faces lasted several weeks and sometimes even more than a month, which then became a true burden for the girls. As Lydia and Leonie, both in their thirties, sighed:

*We were decorated from head to foot, and because of these nomo, which we had to wear for one whole month, we couldn’t sleep properly. Also, we were not able to wash ourselves very thoroughly as we were not allowed to remove our decorations. After one month, we could lay off our decorations and finally have a proper wash.*

Obviously, this performance of the female body, with freshly applied facial tattoos and abundant decorations, publicly showed the new identity of these girls. Both tattoos and decorations marked the girls’ transition from *momorobi* (young girls) or *ififi* (non-sexually active adolescents) to *momorobi susuki*, sexually active and marriageable girls. In fact, the prohibition of discarding the decorations reflects the importance of ornaments as markers of identity. By wearing them for a long time, the girls’ new gender identity was not only publicly dispersed but also effectively embodied (see also Thoonen 2005). Moreover, if there was indeed a preference for a tattooist affiliated with mother’s kin, this might have had specific significance. In these instances it seems that the facial tattoo may actually symbolise the girl’s connection with her mother or, rather, her mother’s descent group. The dressing up of the initiated girl with a red *embobi* visualised her new status and identity as a fertile young woman, while her subsequent dressing up in her father’s clan designs

7 According to Barker and Tietjen (1990: 224), these tapa cloths soaked in red *dun* are called *wamatuwi*. According to my informants, *wamutu* (which might be the same as *wamatuwi*) refers to designs applied on tapa cloth that are made with red pigment only.

signalled the girl's identity as belonging to her father's group. From this perspective, the applying of facial tattoos not only implied a transition into adulthood and a marking of gender and even sexual identity but also a transition of clan identity.

### *Maternal connections?*

According to Barker and Tietjen (1990: 221), villagers preferred their daughters being tattooed by close kin, but as only few women applied these facial tattoos, 'people had to settle for whom they can find'. It could well be, however, that this lack of tattooists is a more recent phenomenon. The 29 Maisin women whose facial tattoos I drew, were tattooed by 15 different women living in Marua, Airara, Sinipara, Uiaku, Ganjiga, and Yuayu. And based upon the interviews, it seems that each clan had at least one woman who could make tattoos. This does not imply that girls were initiated by female members of their fathers' clans.

Parents preferably had their daughters tattooed by a close relative. More specifically, as my informants revealed, mothers seem to have preferred their daughters to be tattooed by a female relative of their own. As several informants stated, girls were ideally to be initiated by aunties from the mother's side, preferable by their mother's brothers' female relatives. The 50 Maisin women I interviewed were predominantly tattooed by their mothers or by female relatives from their mother's side.<sup>8</sup> In one particular case, a mother decided to have her oldest daughter tattooed by a female member of the girl's mother's side, while her second daughter was tattooed by a member of the girl's father's side. Thus, the girls' mother made a decision that clearly reflects the significance of the tattooist's identity as belonging to the girls' mother's (brother's) group for the firstborn – which resembles the role of mother's brother in decorating the firstborn child – and the girls' father's group for the younger one. While there seems to have been a preference for the mother's side, however, this was not always practised, and female relatives from the father's side were also asked to apply facial tattoos. In the 1980s, this preference for a tattooist from the mother's side started, according to my informants, to be hampered by the limited amount of practising tattooists, which, as Barker and Tietjen experienced, indeed forced people to settle for the closest tattooist available. Among both the elderly and younger respondents, however, are women who were tattooed by a tattooist from the father's side. So it seems that this ideal of having daughters tattooed by maternal relatives was not always put into practice. Nevertheless, the importance of adult women initiating young girls remains significant.

Regardless of the tattooists' kinship identity, the initiation of girls was a purely female affair whereby adult women initiated young girls into a sexually active and pre-marital stage of life. In contrast to firstborn and boys' initiations, in which both female and male relatives participated, girls' initiations involved a period

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8 In total, 26 women were tattooed by the mother's side (nine women were tattooed by their mothers and two women by their elder sisters), while 15 women were tattooed by a relative from their father's side. Nine women stated merely that their tattoos had been applied by one of their aunties. In at least one case (attributed to the mother's side), the tattooist could be affiliated with both mother's and father's sides. Among the women tattooed by a relative of their father's side are at least four women who were tattooed by their father's brother's wives or by their brother's wives.

of seclusion. Moreover, groups of girls were often tattooed together, and in the distant past groups of girls occasionally shared a hiding-out in the bush where they would sit near a fire, chatting, sweating, and cleaning themselves (Barker and Tietjen 1990). Thus, the initiation of girls clearly expressed an emphasis on female identity and female affiliation whereas firstborn and boys' initiations were much more concerned with the child's (paternal) clan identity.

In addition, whereas firstborn initiations entail extensive exchanges between the maternal and paternal group, boys' and girls' initiations hardly encompassed the exchange of goods, though in the latter case, the parents of the initiated girl would give some food or money to the woman applying the facial tattoos. This difference with regard to exchanges lies in the different relationships involved and the identities being constructed. In firstborn rituals, the social constitution of the child is important, but the transfer of the child's identity from its maternal to its paternal group is even more so. Thus, while the individual is the centre of the performance, it is in fact the exchange relationships between the maternal and paternal group that create the ritual and the child's constitution. In contrast, boys' and girls' initiations were more concerned with the marking of particular identities, not so much with their transcendence from one group to another. While boys' initiations marked their paternal clan identity, girls' initiations were specifically concerned with the marking of gender identity (see Chapter 1). In both cases, the need to compensate, and to establish exchange relationships through which the child was constituted, was not present either.

## Marriages and weddings

Marriage has often been perceived as the most central event in creating alliances and networks of exchange. In Maisin, marriage functions on two levels. It creates kinship and affinal relations (Chapter 5), which are, to a large extent, structured through informal and formal exchanges, but it is also part of life-cycle rituals and exchanges in which the transformation of social identity is paramount. From this latter perspective we see that the affinal relations created through marriage are in fact preceded or structured by cross-sibling relationships. This is exemplified by describing the marriage ritual as well as the ceremonial exchanges that are involved. Before turning to the exchanges that characterise marriage, however, I first describe what marriage among Maisin actually entails.

Marriage in Maisin is called *taa-todi*, whereby, as a Maisin woman explained, *taa* means 'a man comes to marry me', and *todi*, 'I will marry him'.<sup>9</sup> And this is exactly how marriages take place. Men always make the first move. In many cases, I heard women telling me that they agreed with marriage because 'he wanted me'. Or in other cases, the boy or man used love magic to get his way. Love magic, or *tango* as it is called in Maisin language, can be used to make sure the opposite sex falls in love as well. 'If you apply *tango*, the boy or girl will fall in love with you. It

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9 Maisin differentiate between 'a man marrying a woman' and 'a woman marrying a man'. The first is referred to as *sauki itan* (taking or even stealing a wife), while the latter is referred to as *tamati itodi*, which has more a connotation of accepting a husband.

can be very powerful'. 'He or she cannot stay without thinking about you'. Tango is a mixture of special leaves, (coconut) oil, and herbs and is rubbed on one's own body or put in the lime. In addition, special words have to be said to make it work, including the boy's or girl's name. Melinda, for example, believes Cecil used *tango* so she would keep coming back to him even after her parents took her home. 'I was 16 years old when Cecil (32 years of age) came and took me to his village and clan.<sup>10</sup> But my parents did not agree; they said, 'Do you know how to make tapa designs? You don't know how to work, so we take you back'. They took Melinda to her father's village, but Cecil came back for her. 'Cecil used magic to make me want to stay with him. I was 16 years, which was too young, but I ran after him and married him'.

Melinda's case is no exception. Most marriages among the Maisin are settled after elopement. The man wants a particular girl, agrees with her to marry and subsequently goes to her parents' house, 'steals her', and takes her with him. In order to avoid parents looking for their daughter and finding her, the couple hides in the bush or in the gardens. When the parents give up or agree with their daughter staying in her partner's clan, the couple settles down. This 'marriage', which rarely involves exchanges of food and gifts, is called *kievan itan*, which means 'hide and take away'. The advantage of this elopement is that the couple's parents, and their mutual clans, do not have to be consulted prior to the elopement. In fact, the elopement rather enforces acceptance. Ideally, a man consults with his family and clan members whether they agree with his choice of girl. If so, the girl's parents also have to be consulted. This practice of achieving consensus prior to the wedding occurs in the two other types of marriages that are practised among Maisin. These are church marriages and customary marriages.

Church marriage, which encompasses a church ceremony and initiation by the Anglican priest, is always in combination with either elopement (*kievan itan*) or ceremonies ascribed to customary marriages. In case of *kievan itan*, the couple is married afterwards in the church. In the case of a customary marriage, the church ceremony may also be conducted prior to the ceremonies involved with this type of marriage. Customary marriages may be the result of a couple falling in love and subsequently deciding to marry with the consent of their respective clans, or they are arranged. For example, Julie (36 years old) had little voice in the choice of her partner because her parents, and in particular her father, arranged her partner and her marriage. Fortunately, Julie was content with the arrangement as she liked her parents' choice:

*I was 15 years old and still in school when they betrothed me to my late husband. I got engaged and received my facial tattoo. I was happy with this arrangement, and I respected my father, who betrothed me. He told me, 'I am old. You have to*

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10 In general, girls are between 17 and 20 years old when they get married. Men are, in general, older because they have to be able to make their own gardens and perform other tasks in order to provide food and shelter for their future wives and children.

*marry this boy because he is getting a job. So they will pay me, and I eat rice and drink sugar'. He wanted to have it this way before he died. I agreed with his plan because I liked my late husband.*

Whether the bride is 'stolen' or 'given, ideally consensus between the groom and the bride's parents has to be achieved. After the groom practices *kivan itan* and steals 'his' bride, the girl's parents, upon discovering that their daughter is missing, set out in a search party. When the couple is found, the parents either take their daughter back, or an agreement is made for the couple to settle, in which case the groom gives food to the girl's parents. Ideally, however, one of the first forms of exchanges between future in-laws starts when the young man asks permission from the girl's parents to marry their daughter. In order to show his willingness to work for his in-laws and take care of their daughter, he has to work in their garden. This practice is called *adja sasafi* and is considered very hard labour for the boy involved. Today, however, only a few boys work in the garden of the girl they fancy, but in the past a boy 'had to do *adja sasafi*' in order to wed the girl he liked.

Before the bride is settled in her groom's clan, a date is set for her to sweep her groom's and all his relatives' villages. This performance is called *nasa tafun* (broom and dustpan) and may take whole day. She is assisted by her parallel cousins, and after they finish, the girls are given clay pots with cooked food, which they share among themselves and eat in the groom's clan. Subsequently, the bride can settle with her groom, or in rare cases, a more elaborate ceremony is performed, and another date is set on which the bride is 'given' to the groom's clan.<sup>11</sup> Julie, being betrothed by her father, is one of the few Marua women who married this way. She recalls her wedding as follows:

*While I was awaiting my husband's return to the village, I had to go with his people to help them in the gardens, chopping firewood and doing all kinds of other work. I was engaged, so I should not go out with others, and I had to stay away from other boys. I always stayed with the parents-in-law. Anyway, when he came home, all the people from Uiaku, Reaga, and Adjowa (Miniafe) gathered here for the wedding. I was dressed up in customary ways, and so was my husband. I wore my father's evovi, and he wore his. We went for our wedding service (on Sunday) in church. After that, I had to stay some time with my own people. I would stay there for the last time, so I stayed two days with them. The next day we moved to the man's place again. We were in a large group and danced our way to my husband's place and his people. They had dressed me up. I was wearing my father's evovi and also the feathers that I used were his: white cockatoo. When they brought me to my husband's area, we danced towards them, and then two people from my side lifted me up and put me next to my husband on the ground. People came and brought mats and clay pots for me. In the evening I took some armlets and necklaces off, as well as my embobi. After the wedding, I used my husband's evovi.*

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11 In Airara, only two of the 13 couples aged between 20 and 40 years of age got married in customary ways.

Thus, similar to firstborn and female initiations, customary marriages entail the transition of identity through body decoration. Whereas during the first two initiations the body is decorated by people belonging to the child's mother's group and subsequently handed over to the child's father's clan, during the marriage ritual the body is decorated by the bride's father's group and subsequently handed over to the bride's husband and his relatives. The practice of replacing the bride's father's regalia with those of the bride's husband's signal how the transition of clan identity is visualised and embodied through things worn on the body.

### *The performance of marital exchanges*

Although customary weddings are not performed very often, they are still important rituals in Maisin life. In 2001, I witnessed a very elaborate customary wedding between Georgina, daughter of a respected Kawo clan elder in Maume (Uiaku), and Jason, a member of a Sabu clan in Uiaku. Customary marriage involves a series of exchanges between the bride-giver's and the bride-taker's clans, which commences by handing over the traditionally dressed and decorated bride along with food and gifts to her husband's clan (Photos 22 to 25).

Prior to the moment Georgina was brought to Jason's clan, her father's clan had collected her *babu*, the gifts of food and things that accompany the bride to her groom's clan. Many clay pots, mats, pieces of tapa, and food like sago, sugarcane, bananas, taro, pineapples, and betel nut were gathered on the *varo* (the open space within a clan) of Georgina's father's clan (Photo 23). All relatives made their contribution, and their gifts were welcomed with the greeting shout that gave Oro province its name: 'Oro, oro!' The last items that were put on the heap of gifts were the *nasa tafun*, the brush and dustpan that symbolized the work Georgina was going to do for her in-laws to be. In the meantime, Georgina's family decorated her in their clan emblems (Photo 22). When they were finished, the conch shell was blown. Its deep, echoing sound warned everybody near and far that the bride was ready to be taken to her husband's place. She was then brought to her husband's clan by her parallel-cousins from both her maternal and paternal sides, who were also traditionally dressed and decorated. All other clan members and relatives followed the bride, carrying her bride-wealth, her *babu*.

When the procession arrived at the bride-taker's clan, three women came running forward one by one. When confronting Georgina and her relatives, they shouted that they will give money to the bride's relatives for bringing and giving Georgina to their clan. This public declaration (*tonton*) was repeated by three men who also promised to give Georgina's father a certain amount of money (Photo 24). After the *tonton*, Georgina was taken to her husband's house, which she entered after having broken two clay pots and having walked over her female relatives' backs (Photo 25). While Georgina was inside the house, the men, gathered under a shelter that was built for this occasion on the *varo*, discussed the next series of events.

The day after the wedding or in the following days to come, Georgina was expected to sweep and clean her husband's relatives' compounds, including all the neighbouring villages where his relatives reside. In doing so, she demonstrated her

Photo 22. In December 2001, a customary marriage took place in Uiaku. Although her father is considered to be a man who adheres to his tribe's and clan's customs, Georgina married without having a facial tattoo. She was, however, wedded with all other regards and regalia, consisting of an embobi with her father's evovi and armlets, necklaces, and feathers belonging to her father's clan.



willingness to work for the groom's clan, a performance that is usually conducted prior to the marriage. Also, the husband's family paid the bride-price, which is referred to as *wi-jobi* (vagina payment) or *sauki jobi* (woman payment), immediately. As informants stressed, however, usually *babu* and *wi-jobi* are exchanged after the wife has given birth to some children. The immediate giving of *babu* by the bride's side and the *sauki-jobi* by the groom's side demonstrated the status and wealth of the respective clans to all those who had come and gathered to witness the wedding. In cases where these exchanges take place after the 'bride' has given birth, the exchanges related to the *membu* (firstborn) predate the marital exchange. The position of marital exchanges in the totality of Maisin exchanges becomes clearer when following the ways the gifts are accumulated and distributed.

Georgina's *babu* was accumulated by her father's clan and his relatives, as well as by her mother's relatives, including her mother's brothers. Georgina's cross-cousins (*rukakama*) of both her father's and mother's side similarly contributed to her *babu*. Likewise, the bride-price was accumulated by Jason's paternal and also maternal relatives. A bride-price consists of similar gifts as used for the *babu* but, ideally, surpasses its content and amount many times. While the majority of these



*Photo 23. Georgina's babu. Notice the relatively large amount of clay pots and mats and the few pieces of tapa.*



*Photo 24. Tonton performed during the customary marriage of Jason and Georgina.*



Photo 25. Georgina, supported by two of her parallel cousins, is breaking her husband's clay pots, subsequently walking over three of her female relatives' backs before entering her husband's house. In this case, a serious debate took place when Georgina was to walk over the women's backs. Her mother urged it to be her own relatives, not Georgina's in-laws, who would have to support Georgina's feet while walking into her husband's house. Others stressed, however, that it should be Georgina's in-laws. Finally the argument was settled when Georgina's mother claimed that this would be the last time she would depend upon her own relatives. And so Georgina walked over their backs, after having broken two clay pots from Jason's family, which signalled she would not be able to return.

objects and food were given in public, a part of the bride-price was given in secret, this being referred to as *kievi* (hidden, secret). In the evening when everybody had gone, the husband brought these secret gifts of things and food to his parents-in-law, which they could share among the immediate family. In contrast, the publicly displayed bride-price had to be shared among all people, the *roise-siname* (relatives and friends), who contributed to the bride's *babu* or helped the bride and her parents in any other way.

The importance of distributing the bride-price becomes clear when one considers that, if the bride or her child gets sick or dies, her father's group is blamed for not having distributed the bride-price properly among those who

contributed to her upbringing. According to André Iteanu (in Barraud et al. 1994: 34), who described ceremonial exchanges in Orokaiva society, the bride's parents may not eat the pig they receive in return for their daughter but instead must distribute the pig, as well as other food they receive, among their relatives. Since it is believed that the pig *is* the bride's 'social' person, eating the pig would therefore imply eating their daughter's social constitution. Among Maisin, this association between animals and humans does not seem to exist, but not distributing the bride-price well denounces the social relationships that have provided in their daughter's constitution. These relations may then resort to sorcery in order to revenge or compensate for the wrongdoing caused by the bride's father's group, thereby making her sicken and die.

Furthermore, cross-sex sibling relationships seem to crosscut the affinity relationships established through marriage. In this case, the relationships between Georgina's mother and her mother's brothers, between Georgina and her maternal uncles, and between Georgina and her brothers, who are responsible for initiating her firstborn child, (ideally) continue uninterrupted from one generation to the next. In contrast, the affinal relationships arising from a marriage do not outlast the marriage itself (Barraud et al. 1994: 35) as death, and especially exchanges associated with death and mourning, seem to terminate these.

## Death and mourning rituals

The final stages of life wherein ceremonial rites are performed to change a person's identity and status are related to death and mourning. Any death generates 'intensive discussions, interpretations, and transactions which, in turn, generate a particular configuration of responses' (Barker 1985a: 277). Moreover, death has a disruptive and even conflictive connotation. It can provoke emotional and violent outbursts, involving self-mutilation, as well as accusations of sorcery or witchcraft, disrupting social order and peace. In some cases, sorcery or witchcraft may be involved, as for example in Lazarus' case. Lazarus was a young husband with three young children. He had set out in an outrigger canoe to fetch some medicine from one of the nearby villages. He would, however, never make it. For some unknown reasons, he and his three-year-old son ended up overboard, and while his son was rescued by a woman who had heard Lazarus's cry for help, Lazarus himself drowned. According to the villagers, this was clearly an act of witchcraft.

On the day that some young men managed to retrieve Lazarus' body from the seabed, it was carefully laid on pandanus mats (*yan*) and wrapped into several pieces of cotton cloth. In this case, there was no time to prepare barkcloth, which is, as in the past, sometimes used to wrap the dead body in. Subsequently he was tied and wrapped into several mats. His carefully wrapped and tied body was covered with a folded mat. At the same time, the widow had been carried on the shelter (*bare-bare*) and laid next to her deceased husband. She trembled heavily and was clearly in a state of shock. Older women gathered wailing and crying around the *bare-bare*, prevented from joining the widow and her husband's body by some of the men. In the meantime, an older man explained to some young boys the nature of the injuries on Lazarus' body while a few other men prepared a stretcher to carry

the deceased's body. Other men prepared the canoe on which Lazarus' body was transported to the graveyard, just outside the village in the curve of the bay. When the body arrived, the grave had already been dug and covered with cotton cloths and flowers. The body, bound in pandanus mats, was buried and covered with sand. A little hill would mark his grave, on which later a folded pandanus mat was placed.<sup>12</sup> Before closing the grave, one of the male church leaders narrated a prayer from the bible, ensuring that Lazarus' spirit would not stay to haunt the village but find his way to heaven.

In the past, the deceased's spirit (*kaniniwa*) was shown the way out of the village by a warrior who would point a spear in the right direction, showing 'the dead person's ghost its "road"' (Money cited in Barker 1985a: 267). Moreover, a person's spirit was first guided out of his or her house and subsequently out of the village. Up until some 50 years ago, Ganjiga people would perform a dance on the third day after a person had died. The dancers started from the deceased's house, making a lot of noise inside the house, thereby chasing the spirit out. Subsequently, this particular group danced their way to the grave. It was performed by several women and two men (called *sevaseva tamati*), in order to guide the dead person's *kaniniwa* to the grave.<sup>13</sup> When one recalls the way a newborn baby's spirit has to be guided, the relationship between birth and death, but moreover of how Maisin social identity is constructed, comes to the fore.

In Chapter 1, it was already revealed that, when a Maisin child is born, its spirit or image, both referred to as *kaniniwa*, is not attached to its body, and its *mon-seraman* is not yet developed. Through socialisation, the spirit becomes firmly attached to the body, and *mon-seraman* is developed as well. It was described how different expectations and especially the gendered divisions of work, time, and space create distinct social and, moreover, gendered bodies. As is elaborated on in the next chapter, a person's social body and personhood are thus constructed during the course of an individual's lifetime. As we have seen, various rituals may mark the transformations and 'fluctuations' (Iteanu 1995: 138) in a person's identity. But especially the final rite, associated with a person's death, reflects how identity is both constructed and deconstructed. When a person dies, Maisin believe that his or her *kaniniwa* detaches itself from the body, subsequently leaving it permanently. As with a child's *kaniniwa*, the deceased's spirit has to be shown the way – this time not in order to force the *kaniniwa* to keep track with the child's body and the realm of the living but in order to leave the body and the world of the living, allowing the latter to live in peace.

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12 In Wanigela, people cover a woman's grave with a decorated *embobi* and a man's grave with a decorated *koefi*. Maisin used to hang a deceased's person's belongings – his or her small string bag (*yati*) and a decorated tapa loincloth – under his or her house. These items were left untouched until they had totally withered away.

13 According to my informants, this custom was practiced for the last time in 1955. It stopped afterwards because one of the main participants in this group, an old lady, died. Now, it can no longer be revived. The song this group of people would sing while guiding the deceased's spirit to its grave is called 'goiri'.

## *Public mourning*

Of all the life-cycle rituals, mourning rites are inscribed on the body, and on society, most deeply. When a person dies unexpectedly, his or her female relatives try to harm themselves, throwing their bodies on the ground and slapping their faces. In the past it was custom for mourning women to cut their faces with flakes of obsidian. According to one informant, the women would stand in two rows behind each other and, while dancing and singing towards the dead body and the widow, would cut the face and body of the woman standing behind her and vice versa. Also, the mourners would wear a tapa cloth that had been soaked in mud (*boboma*). Today these practices have been abandoned, but women still try to inflict injuries on themselves.

As in all cases of death, several observances or prohibitions have to be taken into account. For instance, if somebody drowns, fishing is not allowed, and the deceased's relatives are prohibited from coming in contact with the area where their relative has died. In case of Lazarus' relatives, this meant they were not allowed to cross the river or to wash and work near the river mouth, which is located opposite to the spot where Lazarus had drowned. In order to ensure everybody lived up these restrictions, *kasiro* were placed at the spot where Lazarus drowned and in front of his relatives house.<sup>14</sup> Everybody was so affected, however, that nobody from Airara village went out deep-sea fishing for several weeks. As Raymond stated, 'The *kasiro* is only to prohibit fishing nearby. But somehow everybody got scared, and they don't go out fishing anymore. If people die suddenly, like Lazarus, we believe that they might get up and scare you away or make strange noises in the water. I used to go out fishing in the night, but now I got scared'. In addition, out of fear of witchcraft attacks, people were also scared of swimming in the sea, and it would take months before village life resumed its normal path.

In general, three public days are taken into account when somebody dies. The close female relatives of the deceased gather together, often crying for hours and even days, and are looked after by their in-laws. Men come together and discuss the deceased's death and how to proceed with the mourning rituals, also discussing politics. Women from supporting clans are busy cooking to feed all people gathered, which, depending on the nature of death and the person's age and status, can be from a few people up to several villages. During these three days of public mourning, the distribution and exchange of food plays a significant role. Every day the deceased's clan has to make sure their contribution of food, cooked in clay pots, is at least the amount of clay pots they receive from other clans. In addition, on the first day they have to provide the mourning relatives and visitors with hot coconut milk (*donbon sije*), which warms their bones and bodies or 'makes the body hot'. While various clan women are busy preparing and cooking food and men are busy organising the amount of pots that have to be prepared in order to be able to make a proper distribution and exchange, the in-laws cook separate pots for the widow or widower and his or her children. The first day, the people in mourning receive only food that has been cooked in its skin, such as taro and bananas. The second

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14 *Kasiro* are young sago sprouts which signal a prohibition, either to get coconuts, betel nut, etc. or, in this case, to go out fishing in that particular spot.

day, they are re-introduced to other types of food and sometimes fish. The last day, this re-introduction is extended. It is the in-law's responsibility to do this task well. If the mourner is not re-introduced to all foodstuffs, he or she may never again eat this 'forgotten' fruit, vegetable, fish, or meat. In case of the widow or widower, this re-introduction is not only restricted to food; all other aspects of Maisin life have to be introduced again.

The first day on which a person dies and on which the body is buried is called *gumame*, death period. This name is also attributed to the entire period in which the public observances have to be kept. During *gumame*, one is not allowed to work in the gardens, clean the village, or make noise, such as beating drums and beating *tapa*. Normally, *gumame* finishes on the third day, which is called *kasu* (smoke). This day is perceived as a sort of celebration. Men go out hunting or fishing, and after the village is swept clean, everybody can go to the gardens and resume his or her normal duties. The beating of *tapa*, however, as well as the playing of drums may only commence after relatives of the deceased have started beating *tapa* again. They have to initiate this particular work.<sup>15</sup>

### *Individual mourning: seclusion and re-socialisation*

In addition to the three days of public mourning, an individual mourning period, called *ro-warō*, has to be taken into account by the partner of the deceased and his or her close relatives. The individual mourning period commences after the public mourning has ended and involves several transitions of the widow's (*kena*) or widower's (*katu*) identity. Often, this starts with the washing of the mourner's body by the relatives, predominantly the mourner's in-laws. Subsequently, the grieving body is neglected, as men and women in mourning do not comb their hair, men do not shave, and both women and men do not decorate themselves. *Ro-warō*, may last from a few weeks up to several years. During this period, the mourner's body is not only placed under the control and guidance of its in-laws; it is also transformed.

Individual mourning is characterised by two phases: a period of seclusion, which in the past could take up to several months, followed by a lengthy period of re-socialisation. Both men and women have to adhere to this isolation and the following re-initiation into society. In the past, when going out during the first phase, widows had to cover themselves with a piece of *tapa* and follow, crawling on hands and knees, an in-law, who would drag a stick in the sand to form a trail they had to follow (Photo 26). After having spent at least one month in isolation (Barker 1985: 268), the mourner would enter her or his second phase of mourning. In this phase, the mourner's body was dressed in a special garment made out of coix seeds

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15 While death observances may seriously affect a widow or widower, in some cases the entire village can be affected by a death. For example, when I left the village, it was two months after Lazarus had died, but the *kasiro* (young sago sprouts) were still standing, stopping people from fishing in the bay. This meant a serious decline in protein for an entire village for several months. In a similar way, the *gumame* period may be extended, which implies that clans or even hamlets are not able to work in their gardens while the necessity to provide foodstuffs for mourners and visitors as well as their own families is compelling.

(Photo 27). Today, widows and widowers wear black or old clothes during both the first and second phase of mourning.<sup>16</sup>

During the second phase of mourning, the widow or widower has to be re-introduced to all facets of life, such as food, work, places to visit, etc. For example, a widow has to be taken to her spouse's grave, a decision which is not hers to make. The guiding and re-introduction into society is done by (distant) relatives of the deceased, the widow's in-laws, and may take from several weeks up to several years depending on the unexpectedness of the death but also on the relationship between mourner and in-laws, as the latter decide when the mourning period ends.

According to Barker (1985: 280), the first period of seclusion has almost completely disappeared, which made him conclude that the transition from 'a symbolic death...to a rebirth upon emergence from the dark place of seclusion' has been lost as well. In the second phase of mourning, 'the transition from infancy upon emergence to maturity' (ibid.) is at the heart of the observances that have to be adhered to. Based upon his research in Uiaku, Barker concludes that 'early reforms urged by missionaries led to the almost complete disappearance of the first transition along with an increased stress upon the nurture and re-education in the second' (ibid.). In Airara, it seems that elements from the first period of seclusion have merged with the second phase of re-socialisation.

As narrated by Julie, who lost her husband at a fairly young age, elements of seclusion, punishment, nurture (by both widow and in-laws), and re-socialisation are combined in the *ro-warō*, the individual mourning period. During this period, the widow especially is under the control and nurture of her in-laws, restricted from joyful contacts with other people and, by means of hard labour for her in-laws, re-socialised into Maisin relationships, practices, and places. These observances are, although less harsh and painful in comparison with the past, primarily directed towards the body. Moreover, they seem to be particularly hard for widows, as Julie remembers:

*When my husband died, I stayed with his parents for one year. I could only stay by myself inside the house. The first two weeks, if I wanted to go to the toilet, I had to wear a piece of cloth over my head. After this period, my husband's cousins, both men and women, introduced me to things and showed me around. Wherever they wanted me to go, they would take me. They would take me to the gardens and show me how to do the work. They showed me how to cut pandanus for making mats so I could make mats for all my in-laws. I made heaps of mats! Chopping firewood was a bit less straining. It only took me two days of work, chopping and giving the firewood to the in-laws. But making all those mats took me a couple of weeks. I had to give them to all the in-laws from Marua to Kimuta. I don't remember how many, but Gertrude thinks I made about 23 mats, all for the in-laws. Also, when*

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16 In the past, each phase of mourning has its particular dress and decoration. After the first period (Photo 26), widows would wear rather heavy barkcloth shirts decorated with coix seeds and little barkcloth caps decorated with coix seeds, while widowers wore over their heads a piece of folded barkcloth which was painted and/or decorated with coix seeds. At various points during the mourning phases, these regalia were removed from the body until the mourning period had ended and the person in mourning was dressed up with a new tapa and new ornaments, signalling his or her mourning period had ended.



*Photo 26. 'A widow in full mourning. She must not go out except when positively necessary, and then only in this way. Village of Wanigera' (P.J. Money. Courtesy of the Queensland Museum, Accession Number: EH 10071-0). The widow has covered herself with a big tapa-cloth.*



*Photo 27. 'Two Uiaku widows' (P.J. Money 1908. Courtesy of the Australian Museum AMS 328, Percy Money Photographs M2068/6).*

*I would see an in-law walking with a pot, I had to get it and fetch water for her. My everyday job was to take care of all my in-laws. The children were staying with me. I was very strong this time! I was not allowed to sit in a group where people were sitting and joking; it was buro beji [big and hard work]! I was not allowed to shout or call out until they gave me permission to do so. In a similar way, I could not read a book until they gave me one to read.*

In addition to the hard labour widows have to perform, chances are that the gardens and all the other property (house, clothing, utensils, etc.) that belong to her and her deceased husband are destroyed or confiscated by her in-laws. This practice, where close relatives of the deceased claim their 'brother's' or 'sister's' 'work', is referred to as *dauvan*.

When Lazarus died, his relatives destroyed his garden and confiscated all the couple's belongings.<sup>17</sup> Lazarus's widow was forced to live with her husband's relatives (her in-laws), together with her young children. Having no gardens, no utensils, no clothing – except for the black clothes she had been given to wear – she remained with her relatives for at least two years.<sup>18</sup> During this period, she worked in her in-laws' gardens and had to perform all kinds of other labour for them. As a result, she was completely dependent on them.

This practice of taking *dauvan* is related to the ceremony that ends the mourning period, thereby completing the series of transitions from death (seclusion) and childhood (re-socialisation) into, finally, maturity. This ceremony, or initiation, is called *ro-babassi*. It signals the returning (or rather, renewed initiation) of the mature individual. During this ceremony, the widower or widow receives an amount of return gifts from his or her in-laws that should ideally compensate the *dauvan* taken earlier. As Barker (1985) already noticed in the 1980s, however, the amount of return gifts during the *ro-babassi* does not always match the amount of objects taken at *dauvan*. The growing inflow of consumer goods and inequality produced by people who benefit from having working relatives in town created situations whereby people suffered severe material losses that were not compensated for. This imbalance, as well as the destruction of gardens, has led to comments and objections by a few people. Because of this, some in-laws do not take *dauvan*, but the *ro-babassi* they have to organise becomes problematic as well in the sense that they have to give what they didn't take. In Airara, the practice of taking and exchanging *dauvan* was considered problematic by only a few people, especially women, who felt compassion with the widow who lost all her belongings.

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17 The only objects that may not be taken from the deceased's house and which remain clan property are *kawo* objects and tapa cloths designed with clan designs. All other objects may be confiscated or destroyed.

18 In the beginning of 2002, Lazarus's widow entered her *ro-warō* period. When I returned in 2004, she still had not received her *ro-babassi*.

### *Marking the end of mourning: emergence*

The *ro-babassi* ceremony, in which the mourner is washed and made beautiful again, signals the end of the *ro-warō* period, in which the mourner was subjected to several bodily, social, and emotional observances. The in-laws, who are responsible for the organisation of this ritual, decide when the *ro-warō* period ends by performing the *ro-babassi*. Julie described her *ro-babassi* as follows:

*That morning, they [Julie's female in-laws] took me out in the salt water where I had my wash. They gave me tapa with my husband's evovi to wear and took me to sit on the mat and on some tapa. There they trimmed my hair and decorated me with necklaces and rubbed my skin with coconut. They gave me the cut off hair, which was folded in a small piece of tapa that had their evovi on it as well. It was with me, with my mother until she passed away [see also Photos 28 to 30].*

In the context of mourning, the stripping and subsequent decorating of the body visualise the various transitions the (social) person is subjected to. Removing decorations and neglecting the body signifies not only a transition but also the removal of an individual's social identity. In fact, this identity is literally stripped from the body. Having no social identity anymore, the mourner is subjected to his or her in-laws, who demand certain labour and behaviour from the mourner. Only when the mourner is granted his or her *ro-babassi* is the individual's social identity inscribed on the body by means of washing, trimming of the hair, and the application of decorations. Julie recalls her transcendence from *ro-warō* to *ro-babassi* as follows: 'After one year of *ro-warō*, I had my *ro-babassi*. My husband's people, his parents, decided for me to have my *ro-babassi*. I was happy again after this ceremony because all the hard work was over'.

In summary, by taking *dauvan* and secluding Julie for two weeks, thereby prohibiting visual and verbal contacts with people other than her in-laws, she was symbolically and socially killed. It was not only her identity as a married woman that was stripped off; her self was denied, leaving only her body to be moulded into a new social form. This moulding took place during her second phase of mourning, in which the transition from child to adult took place. Through re-socialisation by her in-laws, nurturing, guiding her, and making her work for them – although not letting her fully participate in Maisin life by prohibiting (pleasant) interactions with other people – she still did not have an acknowledged self and identity. Julie's new identity as an unmarried or, rather, marriageable woman was socially and materially inscribed on her body during her *ro-babassi*. During this ceremony, both Julie's in-laws and her father's family cooked food in clay pots, which were exchanged, and Julie was given a tapa to wear that featured her husband's clan design. By exchanging food and making return gifts, the social ties between the two clans were once again acknowledged. By giving Julie their clan tapa, her deceased's husband's clan members emphasised Julie's identity as still being part of their clan. Nevertheless, during the *ro-babassi* Julie regained a social identity, and the self that



Photo 28. Abraham undergoing his ro-babassi one year after his wife died. His in-laws decided he was ready to be initiated and took him in the morning out for a wash, clothed him in new clothes (traditionally a tapa loincloth), and started trimming his hair and beard.

had been suppressed during the transitions was made free. As a result, Julie could, to a certain extent, make her own decisions again.

*After my ro-babassi, I stayed some months and then went to Lae. People were angry, especially my husband's family, because one of them should have, in the customary way, travelled with me to introduce me to this place as well. But I went by myself because I didn't have enough money to take my in-laws. I stayed one year in Lae and then came back home. I left my in-laws. I cooked some clay pots, shared them with them, and went back to my people. I know they were not happy because I had rushed things. But now I am with my people [her father's clan] again.*

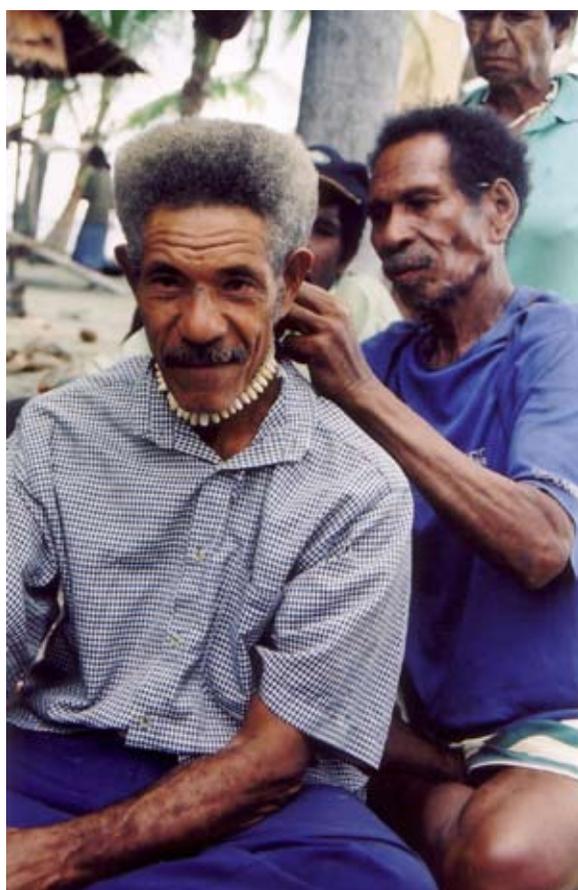
Since Julie was now a marriageable woman, she could choose a new partner. By performing the *ro-babassi*, however, she was not disconnected from her husband's clan. The giving of clan tapa and the exchange of food and gifts visualised the enduring relationship between Julie and her husband's clan. Social ties connected during marriage are not easily broken, and Julie's late husband's clan identity, which was embodied during the transition of marriage, remained, especially for her in-laws, who still regard Julie and her children as their clan members. As Julie explained:

*Remarrying caused many problems, big problems! In customary ways, I should have married someone from my late husband's clan, to my in-laws again. But because I married someone from another clan, we had to make compensation, vina, to them. We have to give them the same amount they paid for my bride-*



*Photo 29. Abraham is seated on several layers of cotton cloth and a piece of tapa that were given to him to compensate the dauvan they took one year earlier.*

*Photo 30. Abraham is decorated with a gerègè (short shell necklace). Subsequently he received other types of necklaces and armbands, and his body and hair were rubbed with squeezed coconut. When this decorating of his body was finished, he received a small string bag (yati) which was filled with a lime container and small notes of money. The ceremony was finished with a meal, offered to Abraham by his in-laws, in which they ate and shared the food together. In front of Abraham lies a bunch of betel nut and areca leaves that were shared among those participating in the ceremony.*



*price or more and some koefi and embobi. We, my new husband and I, have to accumulate this together. However, it's my husband's work to organise this, but he hasn't done this up till now.*

In this case, it seems that Julie was strong enough to act against her in-laws' wishes and demands. It is, however, mainly because she is still living in her father's clan, who share the same village as her late husband's clan, that she was able to remarry without immediately having to compensate her in-laws, and, more important, losing her children. These belong, as Julie herself stated, to her first husband's clan. Other women may not be so fortunate and will have to settle with someone from their in-laws' clan if they do not want to part from their children. For widowers, things are much easier since they can choose any partner they like, unless, of course, they want to remarry a widow whose late husband's clan demands compensation for the loss of one of their members.<sup>19</sup>

### Gendered ways of mourning

In the previous descriptions and analyses of death and mourning rites, it was already clarified that Maisin have gendered ways of mourning. The rites express prevailing notions about the gendered body and related demands of labour, thereby re-socialising men and women into different cultural domains. Moreover, the rites not only mark the ways tasks and roles are divided but also the ways women and men experience their periods of mourning. Public mourning implies hard work for the many women who have to cook and provide food for the mourners and visitors and is characterised by the gendered division of space. While men discuss and organise the practical and performative tasks involved with death, burial, and mourning, women express communal and personal grief by expressive and exhaustive wailing, crying, and self-mutilation. Although women no longer cut themselves with obsidian or 'burn a series of spots from their shoulders to their breasts' during funerals (Barker 1985a: 289-290), they still try to inflict injuries by hitting and throwing themselves on the ground and against hard objects. As in the past, it is in particular the female body that is subjected to destruction and pain.

Importantly, female and male bodies are differentiated with regard to kinship affiliation, age, and health. Not all women throw themselves on the ground in order to hurt themselves. This behaviour seems to be mainly displayed by close female relatives of the deceased. Moreover, young wives and husbands in particular, as well as parents, are prone to take on the most rigid mourning restrictions. In addition, old men and women, especially after having lost a spouse after a long period of illness, may be given a very short mourning period as they already suffered extensively while taking care of the ill spouse.

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19 In the past, Maisin had a custom whereby the widow would remarry one of the widowers from her deceased husband's clan by picking out one of their small string bags (*yati*), which they had all hung outside on her porch while she was sleeping.

Personal experience is further differentiated across gender lines in the different performances expected from women and men during their *ro-ware*. This period of seclusion and social restriction implies hard labour for women but is in general somewhat easier for widowers, although they are equally subjected to the mercy of their in-laws. Both widow and widower might be shamed by taking them out of mourning too quickly. They may, however, also resist being taken out of mourning since, according to John Barker (personal communication), 'a certain prestige accrues to those who mourn a long time'. Nevertheless, the power and influence over the mourning subject is enormous, and depending upon the relationship between the mourner and his or her in-laws, the *ro-ware* period can either be ended too soon or be extremely hard and enduring. In one case, a bad relationship led to a mourning period that lasted several years because the in-laws refused to give the widow her *ro-babassi*, thereby forcing her to follow observances like the prohibition of cutting and combing her hair, participating in feasts, and decorating herself. As a matter of fact, by withholding her initiation, they effectively prevented her from re-entering society as a marriageable woman. In this way, the in-laws took revenge on her, making clear she had been a bad wife not only to their brother and son but also to the entire family and clan.

The taking of *dauvan* enhances the dependency of widows especially towards their in-laws, who may misuse their position and power in demanding extreme labour and prolonging the widow's mourning period. In Airara, a few people, mainly women, complained about the taking of *dauvan*, stating that people should show compassion and love, *marawa-wawe*. In contrast, several men regarded these complaints as 'nonsense' as 'it is custom to do so'. They were not concerned with the widow's well-being, stating that she would be taken care of by her in-laws, and in due time she would just have to make a new garden.

In comparison with the past, in which physical violence and long periods of seclusion were the norm, mourning rites have certainly changed. The periods of seclusion, which are shortened, seem to be integrated into the second phase of mourning. This is visualised by the fact that, unlike in the past, the emergence from the secluded phase is no longer marked by the wearing of elaborate mourning dresses. On a symbolic level, however, there seem also to be certain continuities. Although long periods of seclusion have been abandoned, the 'killing' of the married subject, which is also accomplished by removing and confiscating all personal possessions, and the re-socialisation into a marriageable subject by a period of nurture and re-education are still apparent.

### Death and mourning exchanges

In addition to the rather large exchanges of predominantly food that occur during the three days of public mourning, exchanges between the widower or widow and his or her in-laws take place during the individual mourning period (*ro-ware*) and when this period is ended (*ro-babassi*). I would like to argue that these exchanges symbolise particular relationships and, moreover, symbolically close the relationships between the living and the deceased.

As was described in the previous sections, one of the first practices during the *ro-warō* period might be the taking of *dauvan*. This implies that the widow's or widower's belonging are taken and destroyed by the in-laws, who claim the fruits of their brother's or sister's work. By practicing *dauvan*, that is, by either appropriating or destroying the deceased person's work, the social identity of the deceased seems to be diminished as there are no visible tokens left of his or her work. In addition, this practice also reveals that the relationship between husband and wife, on which this work was based, is initially severed before it is closed in the *ro-babassi* ceremony.

In a similar way, the relationships that have characterised the deceased's life are being intensified when areas that are associated with the deceased are 'closed' for his or her close relatives. By closing certain areas, or prohibiting certain labour or food, the relatives of the deceased are confronted with a prohibition, or a series of prohibitions, that marks their social identity as being a close relative of the deceased. Thus, by closing certain areas, this relationship is (spatially) embodied and consequently actually intensified. Only through the sharing or exchanging of food with the in-laws can these areas be 'cleared' or opened again. The sharing of this food may take place in the village, but it can also take place at the particular place that was closed.

For example, when Lazarus drowned, his parents were not allowed to come near the river mouth as this was close to the spot where he had drowned. While all Airara villagers were prohibited from fishing along the coast of Airara, only the deceased's mother and father were prohibited from visiting this part of the river, which is regularly used for washing clothes and bathing. About one month after Lazarus had drowned, affines and more distant relatives of the deceased organised a communal cooking and sharing of food on this particular spot. They took his parents to this spot, washed together, cooked food, and ate together. After this *suria*, which was meant to 'clear the area', the deceased's parents could again use this part of the river and cross it.

As Iteanu (1995: 142) argues for the Orokaiva, a deceased's debts are settled through the various exchanges that take place when someone dies. This seems likewise to be the case among Maisin. The exchange of food immediately after a person's death brings a large number of groups together, whose relationships with the deceased, as well as with his or her affinal relations, are expressed by the direct exchange of clay pots with cooked food. Subsequently, new relations are negotiated through the confiscating, destroying and, finally, the giving again of food and goods at the *ro-babassi*. The practice of *dauvan*, in which the deceased's garden and his or her other tokens of *mon-seraman* are destroyed or confiscated exemplifies this. Also the various prohibitions, which recall the relationships between mourner and deceased, reveal that all social ties with the deceased are, as Iteanu (1995: 142) argues, initially 'severed' before they are terminated during an 'opening' or lifting-up ceremony. In case of *dauvan*, the *ro-babassi* ceremony, during which the mourner receives (ideally) a balanced amount of return gifts mirroring the goods taken by his or her in-laws, functions as a balancing or neutralising ritual, although

this does not imply a widow's relationship with her deceased's husband's clan is fully terminated (see Julie's case).

So the exchange of goods between the living balances and thereby closes relationships among the living. In addition, the exchange of goods between the living also establishes the returning of the deceased's social identity to its original state. While a child's 'social person' is attached and developed through processes of socialisation – and, in particular, exchange relationships that are marked by puberty rites, wedding and mourning rituals – after death this social person is detached from the social body as its spirit is guided away and all its relationships with the living are being closed.

### **Life-cycle rituals: Constituting the person**

As we have seen in this chapter, in life-cycle rituals the body is handled in uncommon ways. It is neglected or washed, undressed or dressed, stripped from decorations or decorated by others, often a collective of people who are somehow related to the person who is initiated. In these contexts, the individual body becomes a site whereupon culture – or rather, the collective – inscribes its meanings. But this does not imply that the self is neglected or absent at the expense of the collective.

*Inevitably, rites of passage arouse self-consciousness in their subjects and invite profound self-questioning at the very moment when they are pressing their designs and interpretations on the subject, sometimes literally inscribing symbolic codes on the bodies of initiates in the form of tattooing, scarification and mutilation (Myerhoff 1984: 309).*

This self-questioning involves not only the subject being initiated. The collective or 'other' who performs the ritual is in dialogue as well. Rituals are not static, as they evoke constant negotiation and interpretation of the sequence of (ritual) acts to follow. Thus, life-cycle rituals embody in Judith Butler's terminology 'performative' elements for both individual and collective.

When mother's brothers initiate their niece or nephew, they symbolically give a young woman or young man to their sister's husband's clan. In return, they have to be compensated for this gift of life by receiving food, pigs, mats, tapa, clay pots, etc. from their sister's husband's clan. As with the bride-price, these goods and food have to be distributed. The distributors are held responsible for the child's health. If it gets sick or dies, the received gifts have not been distributed well, instigating those who feel neglected to resort to sorcery. It is in this respect that the well-being, as well as the identity of a person, is situated within wider social relationships and, moreover, within acts of giving and receiving.

The bride-price compensates the wife-givers and in particular the wife's brothers for the fact that their sister married and moved away to another clan. Since these gifts are given in return for the bride, thereby symbolising her person, the gifts may not be eaten and kept by her immediate family but instead have to be distributed among all those people who have contributed to her social being, especially her

mother's brothers. Not distributing these gifts properly causes the bride to be barren or makes her and/or her children sicken and even die. If one cannot afford to pay a bride-price, a child is sometimes given instead, thereby compensating the parents for giving their daughter by giving a life in return.

The final acts of exchange between affines take place during and after mourning. The grieving social person is stripped from its social identity and subsequently re-socialised by its in-laws, thereby obtaining a new social identity. In this case, practices of both taking and giving constitute the social person. At the same time, the deceased is stripped from his or her social identity and turns, as upon birth, into a *kananiniwa* (a spirit) again.

Thus, life-cycle rituals can be regarded as the re-incorporation of the individual, either alive or dead, who obtains literally new corporeality. From birth till death, the body is inscribed with various meanings by marking it with external attributes. In several Maisin rites, the subject's past identity is stripped from the body through bathing and the removal of hair (see also Hinnant 1986: 167) and clothing and subsequently inscribed with new identity through tapa dress, decorations, and tattoos. In addition, the exchange of objects seems likewise to constitute the person. So it seems that objects are intertwined with the formation and transition of identity. What, however, is it that objects do?

Depending upon the context and the identity of the giver, things have various efficacies. They may instigate and embody relationships between groups of people or between the living and the dead. Some of the things given may also express transitions and constitutions of social identity. In short, some objects influence the collective – or rather, relationships between groups of people – while other objects seem to be entangled with the constitution of individual people's personhood.

The first type of objects that feature in life-cycle exchanges are often 'bulk' goods, which are meant to be distributed. For example, trade-store goods, money, food, clay pots, mats, or tapa are given, but upon receiving these items, they are distributed over a wide range of people within and outside the receiving clan. These objects thereby connect a people, creating, or 'opening up' relationships.

The second type of objects which effectively transform an individual's social identity are ornaments, clan tapa, and personal string-bags (*yati*). These objects are given to the person being initiated, who, by accepting them and wearing them, not just visualises but actually defines his or her new identity. For example, in firstborn rituals, the giving and applying of ornaments is important. Maternal uncles give their niece or nephew its first necklace to wear. By giving this *totumi*, the mother's brothers give the child a part of its social identity, which is eventually completed and fully transcended during the final ritual, in which the uncles give all the ornaments and regalia necessary to define the child's identity. This identity is most clearly expressed by the giving of tapa. When the firstborn child receives its decorations and clan tapa, the uncles dress the child with its father's clan tapa, which was made by the child's mother, the uncles' sister. Especially in this context, it is significant that the uncles give their in-laws' clan tapa to their niece or nephew. In doing so, they physically cover the child with its father's identity and therefore

acknowledge and constitute the child as belonging to its father's clan. In the context of marriages, clan *tapa* is given to the bride by first her paternal group and subsequently by her husband's group. Receiving these gifts and carrying them on her body signals her transition from one clan to another. Thus, exchanges and the use of objects during life-cycle rituals are not just expressive of social relations; they actually create social relations. The exchange of objects constitutes the person, while individual gifts define the person's gender and, moreover, clan identity.

Today, *totumi* and *kesevi* are rarely practiced anymore. This is mainly because the costs for the father's side are so high and the work involved so large that many parents do not want their firstborns to get initiated anymore. It is not entirely upon them to decide, however, whether the firstborn child receives its initiation. Theoretically, the uncles can put the child's parents under pressure by giving the child its *totumi* without considering the situation of its parents. This act has to be counterbalanced by the giving of food and goods by the child's father's side. This forced exchange seems not to occur, as people seem to take each other's position into account.

In addition to puberty rites, the handing over of a customarily dressed bride seems also to be a rare performance. It is striking that both puberty and marriage rites mainly are concerned with the transformation of either a firstborn's or a bride's clan identity. It thus seems that this aspect of identity formation is regarded less essential in a person's socialisation. Puberty and marriage exchanges, however, also mark the continuation of a particular relationship between two groups, who are brought together by the birth and/or marriage of a sister's child. This aspect of life-cycle exchanges as marking an ongoing, albeit fluctuating, exchange, is also apparent in other practices of Maisin exchange (see next chapter).

The main question that remains is why Maisin no longer perform these life-cycle rituals that used to be relevant for engendering clan identity. It seems that, with the exception of an occasional customary wedding and an even more rare firstborn initiation, the main markers of the creation of social bodies are rites associated with mourning and death. Thus, Maisin rituals appear to be in transition. Specifically, the 'intermediary' ritual transitions in the development of a social person are no longer (or hardly) practiced anymore, although people to a certain extent still live up to prohibitions accompanying firstborn initiations. Nevertheless, an individual's life is no longer marked by a series of rites. It therefore seems that being 'dressed up by others', and as such being ritually marked as a 'social person' and in particular as a clan member, is no longer regarded as essential in a person's life history. Perhaps the individualisation that seems to be taking place in Maisin society, which is exemplified by girls' refusals of being tattooed, has contributed to this diminished importance. If this is the case, this might explain the current importance of self-decoration. Church festivals especially seem to provide a new stage of performance during which not so much clan and life-stage identities but, rather, cultural and religious identities are being developed, performed, and embodied (see Hermkens 2009). The exchanges performed during these festivities likewise reveal the importance of cultural as well as religious identity. In the forthcoming chapter,

other contexts of Maisin exchanges are addressed, revealing the various layers that characterise Maisin exchange in general. While exchanges conducted during life-cycle rituals open up and close relationships between groups of people, other exchanges seem to maintain these relationships. Similarly, while life-cycle rituals only mark a particular life stage, a person is actually socialised during the entire course of his or her life, through other practices of exchange. In the next chapter, these formal and informal exchanges will be discussed.

## Maintaining relationships

*What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay back?*

(Mauss 1990: 3)

According to Marcel Mauss (1990: 11), the *hau*, or ‘spirit of the thing given’ impels people to make a return gift. Following Mauss’ observation, we may ask: What power resides in the tapa given, or why do Maisin engage in exchanges? The answer is: the obligation to reciprocate.

Reciprocal exchanges are crucial to Maisin life and society. As Barker (1987: 179) argued, ‘all social relations amongst Maisin are founded in part upon reciprocal exchanges of such things as food, labour, betel nut, marriage partners, and wealth objects’. Tapa is precisely an important wealth object. In general, anthropologists have only focused on objects of wealth that have significance as gift in ceremonial exchanges. But tapa crosses the boundaries usually ascribed to objects used in exchange. This chapter follows the flow of tapa across formal, informal, barter, and commodity exchanges in order to question the role of women in maintaining relationships. Since a study of exchange should not be limited to a discussion of the movement of a single kind of object, be it either tapa or women (Barraud et al. 1994: 102), I show how both tapa and women are situated in Maisin ideologies and practices of exchange in general since this has often been neglected in anthropological studies.

Scholars interested in Melanesian exchanges have predominantly followed the exchange of women and valuables such as shell necklaces, armlets, pigs, and etcetera: items that are highly valued by both male transactors and ethnographers. The problem with many of these anthropological studies is the neglect of women as subjects in their analyses. It appears that ‘exchange theories reveal strongly enhanced gender biases because the relevant subject matter remains what males exchange between one another’ (Weiner 1992: 12). In general, they ignore female-produced objects and exchanges performed by women, suggesting that these objects and forms of exchange do not play a significant role in Papua New Guinean life. Studies by Weiner (1980, 1992) and Strathern (1990), however, suggest that women and their artefacts do play an important role in the constitution of inter- and intragroup relations. Weiner (1992) argues that traditional theories concerning the segregation of women and men into domestic and political spheres respectively, is at the heart of this distorted view. In addition, this bias is also related to the focus on particular anthropological distinctions and categorisations, which have placed Papuan women on the periphery of social and cultural analysis. As put forward by

Caroline Humphrey and Stephen Hugh-Jones (1992: summary), ‘anthropologists have been more interested in the social and moral complexities of the “gift” and, as a consequence, have ignored commodities and types of exchange such as barter. The analytical distinction made between gift and commodity has thus led to an emphasis on particular objects as well as on particular types of exchange.

In the following sections, I try to provide an overview of all Maisin exchanges and question in particular women’s roles and objects within them. This will reveal the Maisin morality of all exchanges: the importance of maintaining a state of ‘balance’. This state of being or living, referred to as *marawa-wawe*, can only be achieved by acts of giving, taking, and distributing. These are instigated by two main principles: respect and compassion. As is shown, both principles are intimately intertwined with the gender of the giver.

### **Maisin ideologies of exchange**

‘You have learnt our Maisin ways already!’ Raymond said when I brought him some of the food I had received from Julie at the small feast (*ovigo*) she and her father’s relatives had organised. When her mother passed away seven months earlier, Julie’s uncles (her mother’s brothers) did not visit their deceased sister. In order to make sure that Julie’s uncles would feel free to enter their deceased sister’s area and visit Julie, who now lived in her deceased mother’s house, Julie organised this *ovigo*. The feast would ‘clear the area’ and end the prohibitions associated with her mother’s death. By giving this feast, Julie was inviting her mother’s relatives to visit their niece whenever they wanted to and opened up the clan’s *varo* (open space) for dancing and feasting. On the occasion, Julie gave me a clay pot (*wusu*) filled with cooked pork, fish, and vegetables in return for a piece of cotton cloth I presented to her. She could use that piece of cotton as a gift to pay respect to one of her uncles. It is customary when a household receives a clay pot with food that the contents are shared among its members. Since I lived alone, I shared my clay pot with the members of the Waigo clan who had received me as a guest. To Raymond and the other clan members this signalled that I understood their ways of living and the related importance of exchange.

I was more fully incorporated in Maisin ways of life during the next occasion at which a gift had to be made. During a pre-cession on the occasion of the Airara church festival, all clans and their individual households contributed their share. Having my own household, I was urged to prepare and give my own clay pot of food. When I took my pot and set it with the others in the centre of the village, from where they would be distributed among the village clans and visitors, people cheerfully welcomed and acknowledged my contribution by yelling the welcoming shout that gave Oro province its name: ‘Oro, oro!’ Especially my female friends but also my clan elders were proud. I had made my first proper gift, which, as with the other gifts, added to the status of the clan I was living in.

The performances just described show the moral obligation of giving as well as the necessity to reciprocate a gift. Julie gave me a clay pot of cooked food after I had made a contribution to her pre-cession to her uncles. According to Maisin

ways, I could not have kept Julie's gift for myself. It also had to be distributed within my own household, and in particular within my clan, thereby showing both my compassion (*marawa-wawe*) and respect (*muan*) towards them. By giving a clay pot of cooked food at the church festival, I not only contributed to the village's prestation; I also contributed to the respect and prestige my clan received by giving so many clay pots of food. But this prestation expresses something else as well, namely the gender of the gift and the gendered significance it evokes. According to Weiner (1980), gifts made and actually given by women reflect the status and power of women. The Maisin example shown above reveals how women's gifts may reflect the identity, and enhance the status, of their husbands and, moreover, contribute to the prestige of the patrilineal clan. This prestige also reflects upon the female members of this particular clan. Nevertheless, whether they actually achieve power through their gifts is discussed in the final parts of this chapter. In the next section, the principles and values that underline all Maisin types of exchange are discussed in more detail.

### *Principles of exchange (vina): marawa-wawe and muan*

*They showed their marawa-wawe [compassion, love] to me by giving, so I do the same to them; this is vina!*

(Lina Bendo, 65 years old, Sia clan, Marua Point)

The exchanges conducted during life-cycle rituals showed how relationships are opened and subsequently closed, respectively creating and then 'killing' a social person. This chapter focuses on practices of exchange that deal with maintaining relationships and social identities. The ideology to maintain and achieve a state of *marawa-wawe*, which is harmony and balance in social relationships, is closely intertwined with two principles of giving: the concepts of respect (*muan* or *sabu*) and love or compassion (also denoted with *marawa-wawe*).

In Maisin society, the necessity to balance people's actions and gifts plays a paramount role in the constitution of social relationships. Each act has to be balanced by another act. This reciprocal obligation guides people's behaviour in both daily and ritual lives. Maisin employ different concepts to denote these various reciprocal practices, although people do not always agree on the specific meanings of certain terms. In Airara, when discussing exchanges, people would often refer to the concept of *vina*, describing it as 'exchanging' and 'compensating' or to 'pay back'. It means that if someone gives you something or helps you, you are obliged to give a return gift. This return gift has to be at least equal to the received gift and ideally exceed it. It is used in the context of daily life, where people may lend a helping hand to one another, and on occasions such as births, marriages, and deaths. But the concept of *vina* is also used to take revenge on an enemy who has used physical or supernatural force to inflict harm, and in this context, *vina*, or 'to get even', has a violent connotation. In Uiaku, *vina* seems to denote reciprocal obligations between affines and enemies (Barker 1987: 184-86) whereas in Airara, people also use *vina* to describe compensation acts between

non-affines and various clans. In general, each prestation has its appropriate (named) reciprocal response.

If a person helps you in the garden, you give them raw food, but you are also obliged to help this person on another occasion. When (distant) kinsmen contribute goods for a bride-price payment or work on the construction of a house, they have to be compensated by giving them cooked food, which is called *suria*. If people outside a person's kindred and clan have provided substantial help, their shoulders on which the burden was carried have to be washed with pig grease, and they are given clay pots with food and a ceremony, which is called *siva veyodi*. When two men from different clans exchange their sisters, this is called *veyodi*. If a husband hits his wife, her mother's brothers may demand compensation (food or money), and her brothers may seek revenge, practices which are all described in terms of *vina*. Further, if a person falls and his in-laws show their respect by also throwing themselves on the ground, this person has to compensate the in-laws by giving some cooked food or money.

The failure to compensate a 'debt' may lead to the deterioration of relationships between individuals and between clans and signals the antisocial character of the person or clan involved. People who are not willing to lend a hand or who fail to contribute labour or produce certain objects are criticised for being *wakossi* (lazy). Those who hide things away for themselves or give nothing or too little in exchange are referred to as greedy, an attitude that is condemned and may trigger acts of sorcery. At informal and formal occasions, people feel compelled to give. In fact, not distributing goods or gifts may cause sickness and even death.

In contrast, to give in abundance is, depending upon the occasion and exchange partners involved, seen as an act of *marawa-wawe* (love and compassion) or *sabu* (respect), also denoted as *muan* towards the receiving party (see also Barker 1987: 178, 181). Moreover, by giving, the giver automatically receives something in return, namely respect. Simultaneously, one obliges the receiver to equal or even exceed this gift, thereby maintaining the ideal of reciprocity and therefore balance. To give in abundance, however, may also cause embarrassment to a receiver who is not able to return the equivalent.

Although all Maisin people *feel* compelled to give what others ask for, some Maisin clans *are* compelled to give everything, as this is part of their *kawo* (clan emblems). In one such case, a man who was complimented on his outfit by somebody passing totally undressed himself, ignoring pleas of refusal, and threw all his clothes into the arms of the totally embarrassed passing man. With a mixture of annoyance and satisfaction, the man returned home completely naked, leaving the other with no other choice than a shameful retreat. In order to avoid this obligation to give, the younger generation resorted, as a young man explained his outfit, to wearing shabby clothes, leaving valuables such as shoes and watches at home. But even then, people – especially relatives – who are aware of such hidden possessions may come and ask for them, forcing the owner to give. In general, people are thus inclined to have few possessions as this prevents accusations, jealousy, and demands from eager relatives.

The reasons why people feel inclined to give (and to ask) are often based upon kinship relationships. Nevertheless, outside these social boundaries people also engage in exchange. In the following sections, the various contexts and practices of exchange are described in terms of the social relationships and values that generate them.

## **Kinship relations and exchange**

Before turning to the various contexts and practices of exchange, and in particular to the relations that constitute or are constituted by these exchanges, it is necessary to introduce Maisin kinship system in more detail. As we have seen in Chapter 3, each clan is ideologically constituted on the basis of a combination of stipulated and calculated unilineal (patrilineal) descent. The agnatic relatives are linked through a continuous series of male ancestors and descendants, which creates relationships between clan members. Within one clan, several lineages, called *fukiki*, exist. These *fukiki* are often organised in household units. Since marriage establishes relationships between at least two clans, exchanges based upon kinship also crosscut clan boundaries.

The Maisin employ an Iroquois kinship system, based upon the principle of bifurcate merging in which the distinction between father's (*jabi*) and mother's (*jau*) kin is crucial. Since a father's brother (*jabi*) and a mother's sister (*jau*) are regarded as a child's parents, a person's parallel cousins are equally regarded as siblings. If one's own father or mother is older than one's father's brother or mother's sister, these siblings are addressed as *finse* (younger brother or sister). If one's own parents are younger, they are addressed as *yeiye* (elder brother or sister). As between real siblings, exchange relationships between parallel-cousins are unstrained and generalised, and based upon *marawa-wawe*. Foremost, intimate relationships may develop with one's father's brother's children, as these siblings live in the same clan. Relationships tend to be strong especially between male parallel cousins as they not only grow up together but are also instructed in the same body of knowledge related to their patrilineal clan, such as land boundaries. These boys refer to each other as brothers. Nevertheless, close relationships may also exist between cross-sex siblings and cousins.

The relationship between cross-sex siblings is most clearly exemplified by the myth of Embeofoto, which implicitly explains the origin of sibling intimacy (see Appendix 2). This myth, in which brother and sister depend upon each other, work together, and subsequently marry is widespread over Collingwood Bay and beyond (Barker 1987a). It recalls how sibling intimacy is grounded and, moreover, how brother and sister constitute the group, in this case, the clan. Although incest is prohibited among the Maisin, this relationship between cross-sex siblings is still important, not only with regard to life-cycle rituals, but also in daily life.

Cross-cousins likewise maintain a special relationship. Cross-cousins, called *rukakama*, are especially important in ceremonial exchanges. Regardless of personal preferences, *rukakama* are highly respected. As a male informant explained with regard to his contribution to his cross-cousin's bride-price payment: '*Rukakama*

on both sides are important. When I go to my mother's side, they don't hesitate to help me. Maybe because of the distance, the relationship with my father's side *rukakama* (living in Sinapa) is somewhat cooler'. When referring to his *rukakama*, this man was actually only addressing his male cross-cousins. Likewise, when women mention their *rukakama*, they refer only to their female cross-cousins.

In general, there is no preference for a cross-cousin marriage, as is often the case in Iroquois kinship systems. On the contrary, many Airara informants argued that one should not marry one's cross-cousin. One cross-cousin couple I encountered married against their parents' and clan members' wishes. According to Ganjiga and Uiaku people, the Sibó people in particular are not strictly adhering to this prohibition. Nevertheless, in Uiaku and Ganjiga, people also frequently marry their classificatory cross-cousins and, according to John Barker (personal communication), even their parallel cousins. This is possible due to the high rate of village endogamy, which enables Maisin to relate to each other in several ways. According to Barker, the key rule for exogamy is descent group membership and genealogical distance.

The next level of kinship affiliations and exchange are reciprocal obligations between 'same bloods', called *taa-besse* (blood similar). *Taa-besse* are people who are descended from the same ancestor, the same grandfather, or the same parents. They do not form an actual group, but the term describes a specific circle of kin. Barker (1987: 223) argues that this kin circle is based upon cognatic descent. My informants stated, however, that *taa-besse* only refers to children or family belonging to one clan ancestor, one grandfather (*abu*), or to one father and mother. So, although children do not belong to their grandmother's *taa-besse*, they do belong both to their father's (and grandfather's, etc.) and their mother's *taa-besse*. This implies that maternal descent plays a significant role in kinship affiliations. Given the fact that children may turn to their mother's brothers for help and use of land, this comes as no surprise. It also accounts for the fact that, in general, Maisin will not marry their cross-cousins, as these belong to the same *taa-besse*.

When referring to both close and distant relationships, Maisin use the term *ro-sinan* (single) or *roise-siname* (plural). When a man gives one's sister (*ro*) in marriage, an alliance (*sinan*) is established (Barker 1987: 224). In fact, *roise* refers to all close relatives while *siname* denotes more distant relationships such as friends. As a result, *roise-siname* includes everyone: 'there is no one outside' except relatives and friends of the opposite sex. Women when referring to their *roise-siname* are actually referring to their female relatives and friends, while men are referring to their close male relatives and friends. *Roise-siname* may work together on various exchanges. For example, bride-prices are brought together by both close and distant relatives, one's *roise-siname*. Often the organisers of the bride-price carefully note down who gives what and how much so as to be sure they make a similar contribution when one of their *roise-siname* are accumulating a bride-price or when distributions of received goods have to be made. As one male informant explained, '*Roise-siname* help you in paying your bride-price, and when you receive one, you share it with them'.

### *Reciprocity within the clan*

In general, reciprocity can be discerned across generational lines and within generations (Barker 1987: 179). According to Barker, these latter relationships are 'formed around moral imperatives of equivalence between members of the same sex and complementarity between men and women'. Although I agree that the moral necessity for equivalence is essential in Maisin ideology and daily practices, I would argue that hierarchical relations and affiliations crosscut reciprocal obligations, especially with regard to interactions between the sexes. Exchanges are not only gendered (Strathern 1988: xi-xii); they are also hierarchical along gendered lines. Although men and women are complementary in many of their activities, such acts are not neutral. Hierarchical validations and constraints of domination influence especially women's bodies, their work, and their behaviour in exchanges.

Women's bodies, and in particular their sexuality, may in fact be part of specific 'exchange' relationships. One female informant stressed that women may sometimes have to sleep with men who could use sorcery to make women sick. The fear of being poisoned by a man who fancied her would leave a woman with no other choice than to have sex with him. According to this informant, such 'exchanges' happened frequently. In one case, the owner of a garden raped an old woman he caught stealing his garden crops. After he raped her, he gave her the crops she was caught stealing. In addition to these forced sexual exchanges, young people told me that some young girls slept with trade-store owners and other men with access to money in order to get money or goods. Also, it seems that women will sleep with sorcerers in order to make someone else sick. According to my informants, the rape case is unique, but nevertheless it seems that, in addition to labour and goods, women's sex may be used in 'exchange' as well, either for a woman's well-being, her vindictive interests, or as described in the latter cases, for food, goods, and money. 'Exchange' relationships between men and women are essentially unbalanced as men can exert more physical, magical, and economic power. Nevertheless, exchanges always differentiate people, and groups of people, from one another. Further, although exchanges are ideologically meant to balance relationships by avoiding debts, they also create hierarchies and establish, as well as support, unequal power relations. This becomes clear when discussing the exchange relationships between husband and wife and between other household members.

Each Maisin clan consists of several households, which may represent a lineage within the clan. In Airara, 26 households could be discerned. The constitutions of these units vary from a monogamous nuclear composition through to an extended polygynous family unit.<sup>1</sup> Most households, however, are composed of the grandparents living together with their married sons and the sons' spouses and children. Household members often share work, such as working in the gardens, chopping firewood, cooking, and building fences. While in some cases these relationships are very supportive, others may be tense and problematic.

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1 In Airara, only one man was married to two wives. He had married his second wife because his first appeared to be barren. Because he felt compassion for her, as he informed me, he did not send his first wife away despite the fact that she could not contribute to the reproduction of his family.

The relationship between husband and wife is based upon reciprocal obligations that are anchored in their marriage, *taa-todi*. According to various scholars (Malinowski 1987; Sahlins 1972), gifts between husband and wife are the most pure, as no return gift is expected. While the relationship between husband and wife should ideally be based upon *marawa-wawe* (love, compassion) and as a consequence return gifts are indeed not expected, Maisin marriage is not solely based upon this kind of 'generalised reciprocity'. It also involves 'balanced' and even 'negative' reciprocal obligations for both husband and wife (Sahlins 1968). Due to the gender hierarchy, and the involvement of in-laws (from both sides), marital relationships are essentially not equal. Obligations of giving are more demanding for women as they are often subjected to their husband's wishes and those of his close relatives.

Moral obligations of giving also exist between parents and children. As parents feel a responsibility to feed and take care of their children, they expect in turn their children to take care of them at a later stage (Barker 1987: 179). The moral obligation of a son to contribute to his father's exchanges exemplifies the moral obligation of a child to aid his parents and to provide food and labour for them. These exchanges along age lines are not always equal or 'generalised' in practice.

In daily life, exchanges take place between a husband and wife and the immediate family: the affines. A wife works on her husband's clan land, which he has cooperatively cleared with his clan members in order to provide food for their families. In addition, she and her husband may work on garden plots established on land belonging to other clans. Distant relatives or friends may have granted use to their land in order to help a couple, and a couple may work on the wife's parent's land or work in their gardens. In addition to her work in the gardens and the household, a wife has to take care of her husband's parents and provide them with the things they need. In 'exchange' for her labour and care, the husband also gives goods and support to her family. These 'exchanges' are not always without comment. Maisin men repeatedly state that they prefer to get married to girls from a distant village so that they are not burdened by having to provide their affines with gifts of food and money. In contrast, a girl's parents, and often the girl herself, prefer her to marry nearby so that she and her husband can take care of them. For a woman, the closeness of her father's clan may offer protection and a security network in case her marriage fails or is strained by problems.

Problems most frequently arise between the parents – often the mother – and the wives of their sons. The wives have to obey and pay respect to their mother-in-law, who may be very demanding, forcing their sons' spouses to provide a large amount of labour. In such cases, especially when a husband is more loyal to his mother, a wife's life may be extremely hard. In one case, a man seriously beat his wife because his mother had complained to him about her behaviour. Other women I spoke to just endured their mothers-in-law, sometimes by deploying strategies such as keeping silent and thereby ignoring the complaints. Other women are more fortunate and have a good relationship with their parents-in-law or are protected by their husbands. In one case, a woman who was seriously mistreated, being bullied and gossiped about by her mother-in-law, was actually supported by

her husband, who decided to make things easier for his wife by urging his mother to leave his house and stay with his married sister in another clan.

When relationships between women married to the sons of such a household are good, they can share their work and alternate labour. Almost every day, women bring food to their classificatory clan sisters, help them in their gardens, or take care of their clan sisters' children. Both cooked and raw food is given and also clothes and money. Female clan members will ask for goods such as sugar and salt if available. And often they send one of their children to ask for food or goods in other households. However, relationships between these 'sisters' can also be problematic. In one case, a woman was made responsible for almost all the daily activities – such as fetching water, weeding the garden and harvesting crops – for a household consisting of eight adults and several children. Only because her unsupportive 'sisters' did not feel like or were not capable of working in the garden or do the cooking. Such strained relationships may also exist between the various households and *fukiki* (lineages) of one clan. Ideally, however, 'sisters' help and support each other whether living together or in separate households.

Reciprocal relationships are also expected between parents and their children and between siblings. While parents take care of their young children by feeding them, older children are expected to perform labour for their parents and eventually to take care of them when the parents are no longer capable of providing food for themselves. In general, this reciprocity is fairly balanced. Nevertheless, although all children are expected to help and support their parents, in practice it is the daughters and daughters-in-law who provide, and are compelled to provide, most of the labour, food, and support. Since married daughters are not always capable of doing so and relationships between parents and their daughter-in-laws may be strained, this reciprocity is not always evident.

Siblings grow up together and, up to a certain age, take care of each other. Brothers usually maintain ties with their sisters who have married into another clan, a relationship that is marked during life-cycle rituals. Brothers and male parallel cousins living in the same clan especially help each other, for example with building fences and houses. These kinds of male exchanges occur, however, far less frequently than exchanges between female siblings and cousins. Moreover, relationships between male parallel cousins can become strained due to quarrels over land. In such cases, relationships are clearly less supportive, or not at all.

### *Reciprocity outside the clan*

Reciprocity among people belonging to different clans is mainly organised across two gendered forms of exchange: first of all, informal daily life exchanges between primarily female friends, relatives, and affines; second, ceremonial exchanges between primarily male affines. While the first are primarily based upon *marawa-wawe*, the latter exchanges predominantly revolve around the principle of *sabu*. This latter form of exchange is elaborated upon in the next section. First, I want to concentrate on informal exchanges.

Informal exchanges between members of different clans occur almost every day. As with exchanges performed within a clan, this daily reciprocity is mainly maintained by women. Women bring food and goods, such as tapa, mats, string bags, and clothes, to relatives living in other clans. In addition, they exchange labour. If a woman helps a female friend or relative from another clan with tasks such as making or painting tapa or working in the garden, she receives food or other goods in return. Each time someone gives an item or help, this act of giving has to be balanced by the receiver, and so on. This kind of daily reciprocity structures Maisin life and involves especially women. Male friends and relatives belonging to different clans do help each other, but this seems to occur less frequently as it is mainly organised around larger projects. Work parties consisting of various male clan members may be organised if help is needed to build a house or make a garden fence. Young men from different clans may join hunting trips if, for example, wild pigs are needed for an upcoming festivity. In these cases, a more generous act is needed in order to 'pay them back' for their help. In general, this implies cooking and giving food or giving them money. In addition, if in-laws live nearby, a husband may also regularly provide labour for them.

The act of giving in daily life primarily creates relationships between women, both inside and beyond their husbands' clans. Friends (*toma*) are especially important. Since a woman may be married far from her father's clan, friends are often closer than a woman's natal kin, thereby providing an additional social and security network. Female friends may help each other and give food or other things to each other, thereby crosscutting clan and kin boundaries. An advantage of this system of exchange is that, during times of food shortage, these additional gifts of food may prevent people from starving. Also, when help is needed to finish a large quantity of tapa or mats, women will help each other, thereby ensuring the tapa is finished on time to be sold or the pandanus is dried before the rainy season starts. The disadvantage of the requirement to give is that, if asked, one has to give not only goods like sugar and salt but also personal belongings and money.

Although women are the main agents in daily informal exchanges, men are also involved. Husbands take pride in their wives being able to give things, food, and labour to others. As one of them stated, 'It is my duty to make sure my wife can go to our garden and return with her string bag filled with crops. It is not good for other people to see her coming down with an empty string bag and that we have nothing to give and share'. Moreover, men make use of their wives' networks, especially with regard to the making of tapa. I witnessed several times that, when a husband decided to go to town, he would encourage his wife to finish as much tapa as possible. Since these departures are always at short notice, she would call upon her female relatives and friends to finish the job. The joint labour of this female network thus ensures monetary revenues for the couple and their family.

The people with whom a woman most often engages in daily exchanges are her relatives, both her husband's clan members and, if they live nearby, her father's and mother's clan members. If a woman lives too far away from her paternal and/or maternal clan, she has to compensate for this lack of backup by engaging in exchanges and relationships with women living nearby. Monica (Table 1), who,

being from Ganjiga, had married into Airara village, had an intensive relationship with Jacqueline, the widow of Monica's husband's parallel cousin (her classificatory sister) and also Monica's niece. Like Monica, Jacqueline had married some distance from her father's clan. By helping and supporting each other, some of the lack of support from their parental clans was compensated for. In contrast, Gertrude, who had married nearby, experienced a lot of support from her father's clan, receiving all kinds of food (sago, rice, sugar, shellfish, etc.) and clothes. She engaged in exchanges with her parallel cousin's wife and with other female members of her

Day	Food	Work	Things
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I [Monica] gave flour to Elsie (Tatan clan: daughter-in-law of my husband's father's sister Edith).</li> <li>- I got sago to eat from Elsie.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped pulling Giblin's (Tatan clan: Edith's son) canoe down</li> <li>- Louisa (Tatan: female friend) and Elsie helped carry my clay pots.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave a clay pot to Noah (my husband's cross-cousin) for his bride-price payment.</li> <li>- I got a book from Florence (Waigo clan: daughter of my clan 'sister' Jacqueline).</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some potatoes to cook to Cesly (Waigo clan: one of my clan 'sisters').</li> <li>- Cesly gave me sugarcane.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Jacqueline (Waigo clan: my younger clan 'sister') carry her string bag to the canoe.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave a mat to Edith (my husband's father's sister, Elsie's mother in-law)</li> <li>- I got a dress from Jacqueline.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some bananas to Jacqueline (Waigo clan).</li> <li>- Some boys gave us coconuts to eat.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Cesly (Waigo) cook food.</li> <li>- Jacqueline helped me cut down mangroves (for firewood).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some firewood to Flora (Tatan clan: married to my husband's cross-cousin).</li> <li>- Cecil King (my husband's parallel cousin) gave me his sail to use on the canoe.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave shellfish to Melinda (Cecil King's wife).</li> <li>- Amelia (Marua village: female friend) gave me a watermelon to drink.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Charles (Tatan clan: Edith's son, my husband's cross-cousin) paddle a canoe.</li> <li>- Charles helped my husband make a garden fence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some firewood to Jacqueline.</li> <li>- I asked for my paddle, which I had lent to Pricilla (Tatan clan).</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some bananas and potatoes to Naomi.</li> <li>- Cesly gave me a cup of tea to drink.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Jacqueline dish up the food.</li> <li>- Jacqueline helped me wash my cooking pots.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some of my forks to Cesly.</li> <li>- I went to get a machete from Helen (Waigo: clan 'sister').</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some greens to Cesly.</li> <li>- I got a pineapple from Reaga women.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Violet (elder Waigo clan: my in-law) carry her water buckets.</li> <li>- Jacqueline helped with weeding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave a mat to George (Tatan: Edith's son, my husband's cross-cousin).</li> <li>- I got a knife from Edith.</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave a plate of boiled rice to Cesly.</li> <li>- Melinda gave a plate of boiled rice to me.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Helen carry her water.</li> <li>- Melinda helped me sweep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave my string bag to Rose (elder Waigo: my in-law).</li> <li>- I got a small knife to use from Jacqueline.</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave a plate of food to Florence (Waigo: daughter of Jacqueline).</li> <li>- I bought some rice from Lancelot (Wofun, Marua).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped to clean our medical house.</li> <li>- Brenda (Waigo: Helen's daughter) helped to pull up my canoe.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave a small tapa (undecorated) to Violet (elder Waigo).</li> <li>- I got black dye from Cesly to design my tapa.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some bananas and potatoes for the Biniguni girls (visitors) to cook.</li> <li>- Melinda (Waigo: clan 'sister') gave me some greens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Dadumu ladies helped us to cook food.</li> <li>- Jacqueline helped me to chop firewood.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave some of my firewood to Edith.</li> <li>- I borrowed a large knife from Prica (Tatan: daughter in-law of Edith).</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rose (elder Waigo) gave us a piece of wild pig.</li> <li>- I got a pineapple from my cousin at Wanigela.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I helped Jacqueline wash her pots.</li> <li>- Florence (daughter of Jacqueline) came to help me carry my water buckets from the river.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I gave my lime to Lancelot (Wofun, Marua village).</li> <li>- I got some betel nut from Cecil King (Waigo: my husband's parallel cousin).</li> </ul>

Table 1. Monica (Waigo clan) lists some of the things she and her husband gave and received from various people over a period of ten days. She has omitted the work she has done for her parents-in-law, her husband, and her children.

father's clan. The main exchanges, however, took place with her brothers' wives. In a period of ten days, Gertrude and her brothers' wives exchanged food and other things on at least five days. These exchanges reflect the cooperation that is expected between cross-sex siblings and their spouses, as well as the bond of intimacy that exists between cross-sex siblings.

Especially when living close together, brothers and sisters exchange food and labour without expecting return gifts or keeping exact accounts. While sisters may come to their brothers' aid by giving their wives food and things, brothers can come to their sisters' aid when they are ill-treated. For example, upon being hit by her husband for the third time, a woman had gone to her father's clan and village and complained about her husband. Upon hearing their sister's story, her three brothers went to her husband's village and beat her husband up. The case threatened to escalate when the husband's father demanded compensation for his son being beaten up while both the wife's father and her maternal uncles wanted to be compensated for their daughter and niece being hit and for having brought her back to her husband. The case was eventually settled in a meeting mediated by the village counsellor wherein the husband agreed not to press charges against his wife's brothers, thereby compensating his wife's father's demand. The woman's maternal uncles had to be compensated by the giving of food and money. This compensation was to be provided by the husband and, as is normal in Maisin ways, his abused wife.

The case just described reveals how cross-sex siblings remain bonded despite living in different clans and even other villages. The exchanges between siblings also reveal how, through their actions, relationships between two different clans are constituted and may also be affected across generational lines. For example, as we saw in Monica's case, a large number of her exchanges were performed with her husband's cross-cousins (his father's sister's sons) and their wives living in another clan. Thus, these exchanges actually represent the sibling intimacy between Monica's father-in-law and his sister married into another clan. This cooperation between siblings can be regarded as a 'common kinship principle of siblings who, after they marry other spouses, reproduce by exchanging with each other and/or their respective children in order to authenticate intergenerational stability while exercising the power of difference' (Weiner 1992: 16). So, although relationships between siblings may be maintained through the exchange of goods and help, these exchanges also mark the difference between them. The sister always represents the 'other' clan, this being either her father's or her husband's clan. In the event of conflicts, a woman is always caught in between, moving between her father's clan and their interests and her husband's clan. Moreover, it is especially through women, and especially through women's labour, that these exchange relationships are maintained. As a result, even between siblings, exchanges are not equal but unbalanced, thereby expressing gender difference.

## Exchanges between clans

In the previous section we have seen how people can establish and maintain exchange relationships while living in different clans. In addition to these informal exchanges, based upon individual kinship relations, exchanges between two clans can be based upon historical and marriage links. Unlike the informal exchanges described above, which are performed by women, the formal exchanges between clans are usually conducted by men, although women's contributions are essential to their success.

In Chapter 3 it was described how clans exchanged names and emblems (*kawo*) on the basis of relationships formed during their migration from the Lower Musa River area. In addition to the 'incidental' exchange of these inalienable objects, some clans engaged in cyclic exchange relationships with each other, called *kaa-kasie*. When performing *kaa-kasie*, the male members of one clan would decorate themselves and their canoe and then sail to their exchange partners living in another village. The visiting clan members would pretend to attack the crowd gathered on the beach, throwing or raising their spears and shields. In return, the crowd would throw spears and even coconuts at the canoe and its outrigger. When the bow of the canoe was speared or the outrigger was broken, its crew would pull up the canoe and go ashore, dancing and 'attacking' the other clan. After 'peace' had been established and the mock-fight was over, the visiting clan received betel nut, food, and, in some cases, a bride.

In Airara, only the Waigo and Dadumu clans used to perform these exchanges. The Waigo (Airara) and Rerebin clan (Yuayu village) would alternatively paddle to each other's villages but did not exchange brides. The Dadumu (Airara) and Rerebin clans (Uiaku) did however also exchange their daughters or sisters. According to the elders of these two clans, all the families with daughters would come together and decide which girl would be given in exchange. In exchange for having their canoe speared and for the staged warriors' performance, they would receive a marriageable girl from the other clan. These mock fights mirror historical encounters in which strangers were 'greeted' as potential enemies (*vassaa*). Christobel described these *kaa-kasie* as follows:

*Dadumu and Rerebin, they are vassaa [opponents] who did kaa-kasie. I tell you about it. The first to come down was Rerebin. They came down to the Dadumu paddling their canoe while we threw our spears at them and they splashed water back at us. The Dadumu then said, 'Your wife is here; you will marry her!' The Rerebin people were very happy. They started shouting, and they got her. The Dadumu people got food out of their houses, and they feasted until the afternoon. In the evening, the Rerebin went to their canoe and started their travel back up to Uiaku. The girl who was given to them was my Auntie Giga. They dressed her up and handed her over at a place called Beria. She went up and got married to a Rerebin man, so that is how it came to be.*

*Then the Dadumu got their vina by going up to Rerebin. My father cut a big canoe. They carved the front part and engraved it with their designs, their kawo [clan emblem], and decorated it with lots of kasiro [young sago palm sprouts]. This decorated canoe was not to be taken out and used for other purposes. We*

*Dadumu went up to Uiaku and paddled the canoe to the Rerebin lineage. They came down to the beach, throwing spears at us, and we Dadumu threw water at them. We Dadumu kept paddling towards the shore while they did ton-ton [a performance of compensation], offering a girl to us, saying, 'This is your wife; you will marry her! Paddle and come inside [ashore]!' We Dadumu would come closer to the shore and use the pole to come up. When we came ashore, the Rerebin people brought a mat and spread it for us Dadumu to sit on. While seated on the mat, we Dadumu were given food. My father and they ate the food, and then we were sent back home again. The payment for paddling their canoe up to Rerebin was this dressed-up girl. They gave her, and my father married her. This wife was my father's first wife. She gave birth to three girls before she died. But these girls all died.*

So, first Dadumu clan gave Giga, Christobel's auntie, and in return, the Rerebin clan gave Christobel's stepmother to Dadumu. Thus, *kaa-kasie* actually amounted to sister exchange or *veyodi*. As Raymond (Christobel's parallel cousin and classificatory brother) recalls:

*I was a small boy when they went for kaa-kasie. First Bari's sister Giga went up. She was my [classificatory] mother. So when the Dadumu paddled up to the Rerebin, they gave them a girl who was then married to Bari, Christobel's father.*

After Bari's wife from Rerebin died, he married a girl from the Tatan clan, who gave birth to two children, John and Christobel. But now, in order to continue the *kaa-kasie*, the Dadumu would again have to willingly give up one of their daughters. But whose sister would they give? By this time, Raymond was a grown-up man and was put in charge of making a canoe ready. As Raymond and Christobel recalled:

*Raymond: I cut the tree, dug it out, and got the canoe ready. My grandfather said, 'You go and paddle up to Gorofi [Uiaku]. He spoke, and I said, 'We paddle up, and because of vina they will come down. Then who are we going to give?' He said, 'We give Christobel', that is what he said. So I got up and said, 'It is finished! Now she is to be given, and I do not want that! We give her, and when the sea is calm, she sees the smoke rise from here, and she will cry while staying there'. I did not want this to happen, giving sisters to faraway places. That is why I didn't want this, so now it is finished. But the elders got up, and said, 'This is your canoeing enemy (kaa-kasie vassaa)! They will come down paddling, and you will also go and paddle up, and you will carry on like this! When you are ending this, it is no good. Our spirits are in this custom; our images are in it'. They put it like that. But they died, and it finished.*

*Christobel: I was staying in the village when my father betrothed me. He wanted me to get married, but I didn't want to go to Uiaku. I didn't want that place. When they told me, I didn't want to go. They said that at this canoe tonton, I had to go up there [to Uiaku]. But Raymond stopped them from paddling up again, saying, 'You will not go up; it is finished!' So from then on it was finished. For myself, I didn't want to go, and Raymond didn't want me to go to Uiaku either.*

As one Waigo elder expressed it: ‘Raymond stopped the exchange, saying: “It is against the girl’s wish. We should let her decide and stop it now!”’ Although Christobel was prevented being given to Rerebin, and no other girls have been exchanged since, the exchange relationship between the two clans is not entirely closed. When I asked Rerebin about this exchange, one of the elders simply stated that the exchange was still ‘open’. They just need to find a girl to send over, which, as he said, was the subject of recent discussion within the clan.

The previously described sister exchange was a huge performance, but sister exchanges (*veyodi*) may also occur in less conspicuous ways when two men belonging to different clans exchange their sisters. Today, such marriages rarely occur. Although it may happen that two men from different clans marry each other’s sister, this does not amount to the exchange of women. As informants told me, in the past two clans might actually arrange a sister exchange, but more recently *veyodi* occurs more by coincidence when the brother or parallel cousin of a woman fancies his sister’s husband’s sister or parallel cousin. In this situation, no bride-price has to be paid as both men and also their clans have received a bride.

Adoption is the most frequent practice in which a person is given to another family within one clan or to another clan, and occurs most frequently when one of the male clan members or one of the lineages (*fukiki*) has no sons. In such cases, boys are transferred from one brother to another or from one lineage to another. The children are often physically removed from their parents’ house to live in the house of their father’s brother or their father’s parallel cousin in order to ensure that this particular family line remains. In some cases, the boy’s biological parents will receive a girl in return.<sup>2</sup> Children may also be given to another clan. For example, I encountered an unmarried woman who gave one of her own children to the clan who adopted her, while a man offered one of his children to his sister to compensate the large monetary contribution she had made to his bride-price payment. In both cases, a debt was repaid by giving a child. In general, the father of the child will arrange such an exchange or adoption. Only when the child’s father is no longer present and the mother lives in her father’s clan may the mother decide to give *her* child away.

### *Exchange relations between affines*

As soon as the parents of a girl accept the man who wants to marry their daughter, the first move is made in a lifetime of reciprocal obligations that characterise the relationships between the wife-giver’s and the wife-taker’s group or clan. These relationships between affines are imbued with *muana*, with respect. A person does not address his or her in-laws with their proper names but uses appropriate titles to address and therefore respect them. As we have seen, relationships between mothers- and daughters-in-law may become hierarchical and strained. The same is true for other relationships between in-laws. Thus, in contrast to relationships between close kin and friends, which are based upon *marawa-wawe*, in-laws

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2 In 2004, Monica’s husband, Clifford, received from his parallel cousin Cecil King two-year-old Romeo. In exchange for Cecil King’s son, Clifford gave his 13-year-old daughter Vania.

predominantly engage in exchange on the principle of *muan*. As a consequence, a considerable part of this relationship is based on obligatory exchanges, both formal and informal.

The most conspicuous formal type of exchange between affines is the bride-price payment, although formal exchanges also occur in other contexts. The prescribed exchange relationships between in-laws become especially clear when one considers the practice of 'falling down'. When a person falls from a tree or slips and falls into the mud, any in-law immediately does the same and throws him- or herself down. Many Maisin regard this practice as a rather annoying custom, but they have to adhere to it and compensate their 'co-falling' in-laws by giving them some food or money.

Sometimes it happens that the bride-taker's clan does not show the proper respect or help towards the bride-giver's clan. In such cases, the bride-giver's clan can make use of a custom or performance called *waafoti*. They go up to the bride-takers' house early in the morning, make a fire, and wait in front of their in-laws' door until they wake up. The bride-giver's group then hit their lime spatulas against their lime containers, which produces a ticking sound that alerts the in-laws that *waafoti* is being done to them. The in-laws will then come outside, call out bad names to the people sitting on their doorstep, and ignore them by not offering any food or drinks. The wife-giver's group has to endure this humiliation, as well as the hot sun, until the shouting stops and the in-laws give them objects such as clay pots, tapa, and mats. In addition to these objects made by women, pig is given, but no other types of food. By handing over these gifts, the wife-takers have compensated their wrongdoing to the people whose daughter and sister they have received. By insulting them, the bride-takers have created a formal reason why they should hand over these gifts as they have broken the principle of respect, of *muan*. In order to restore relationships with the bride-givers, they should give in abundance. But *waafoti* can also be practised where a widow decides to marry into another clan. Since her late husband's clan is losing a member for whom they have paid bride-price, they can publicly claim compensation from the new husband's clan.

In addition to formal exchanges such as bride-price payments and *waafoti*, many informal exchanges take place between in-laws in order to maintain the relationship established through marriage. In the previous sections, women's roles in maintaining relations between in-laws through informal daily exchanges and labour were discussed. Moreover, in order to maintain this relationship, many other relationships are called upon. This is most clearly shown by discussing the informal exchange relations involved with the accumulation of the bride-price.

The mats, clay pots, tapa, food, shell valuables, domesticated pigs, money, and trade-store goods that are given to the bride's relatives are brought together by the groom (husband) and his relatives, especially his brothers, sisters, and his parallel cousins. His *rukakama*, his cross-cousins, and his *roise-siname* also play a significant part in contributing to his bride-price. Where the bride-price is not paid immediately, the new husband also receives support from his wife, who contributes to her own bride-price by making tapa and mats, acquiring clay pots,

and gathering food for the occasion. If a woman's husband's family is small, she has to do a lot of work to ensure her father's clan receives a proper bride-price payment. In practice, she has to ensure that her relationships with her in-laws are good since they have to make large contributions to her bride-price. By sharing and giving food to her husband's relatives on a daily basis, she is implicitly creating a relationship in which they must contribute generously to the formal gifts her husband has to make to her father's clan and especially to her brothers. If a woman does not share her goods and labour with her husband's relatives, they can punish her by making only small contributions to her bride-price or to the initiation feast of her firstborn. In addition, she will continue to give goods and labour to her own relatives, thereby ensuring that her relationship with her father's clan remains good. Moreover, as soon as one of her brothers is due to pay his bride-price, she also has to contribute to this payment.

Given that the bride's clan has just given a new member to their clan, a husband will have to support his wife and allow her to give goods and food to her parents and family. In addition, from the moment she is pregnant, he will have to perform a series of informal and formal exchanges and finally to pay the bride-price to ensure that his children will belong to his clan. If a sister dies before her bride-price has been paid, her brothers can take their sister's children away from their brother-in-law and his clan. Thus, paying the bride-price secures a man's offspring as his instead of their belonging to his wife's group. In order to do so, he is dependent upon his *roi-siname* and especially upon his wife.

In short, relationships between affines, and especially between the wife-giver's and wife-taker's clans, are characterised by a series of formal and informal exchanges in which a woman's brothers especially play an important part. They not only receive and distribute the bride-price paid for their sister; they are also responsible for the initiation of her firstborn child. The counter-gifts that have to follow from the husband of their sister mark the special, but also fragile, relationship between the wife-givers and the wife-takers. This relationship has to be maintained, and the exchange of certain goods, behaviour, and language is expected and even enforced.

### *Exchanges outside one's clan and kin*

According to Barker (1987: 179), Maisin exchanges are constrained by the divisions and alignments of *iyon* and the four IYON, and the composition of people's kin. As we have seen in the previous sections, this is indeed the case. The obligation to give, however, also crosscuts these divisions and affiliations. As I want to argue, this is due to the morality underlying all Maisin exchanges: the necessity to maintain, or create, a state of *marawa-wawe*, of balance.

The fact that among the Maisin reciprocity exceeds clan and kinship boundaries is most clearly visible when visitors approach and Maisin perform a welcoming ceremony, called *roteri*. During this performance, visitors are greeted like a visiting clan in the *kaa-kasie* exchange. Maisin approach them with their spears raised, thereby threatening to kill the visitors. As soon as it is established that the visitors are friends, the elder shows his lime container, a token of peace, after which

the visitors are offered a mat to sit on, as well as food, betel nut, etc. North of Collingwood Bay, in Orokaiva societies, people employ a similar way of greeting strangers. It seems that, in approaching visitors with spears, they are threatening to kill the visitors' *hamo*, their social person. In order to restore the visitors' damaged *hamo*, Orokaiva give the visitors food (Barraud et al. 1994: 8). In Maisin, this aspect of killing the social constitution of a person is less clear, but there is a similar concept of having to compensate the visitors for having threatened their lives by approaching them with raised spears. Among the Maisin, this act of violence, of *ganan* (spear), has to be balanced by an act of *sinan* (respect, peace). By giving them a mat and food, this balance is restored. In fact, this performance entails the qualities of the Kawo-Sabu distinction. While Sabu, or *ganan*, attacks, Kawo, or *sinan*, makes peace.

The notion of creating balance in 'disturbed' relationships mediates exchanges within descent, kinship, and affinal relationships, but it also structures modes of interaction between people who belong to different clans and phratries or even to different tribes. In most cases, debts are settled by returning gifts of food, labour, or objects, but it has also occurred that daughters have been given to compensate a debt. For example, Holan Kania received a bride as compensation for the help he had offered to the girl's family. As Holan recalls:

*When Europeans came, all jii (village elders) were chased into the bush, and the Europeans took some men as prisoners to carry their cargo. This was still going on when we grew up. We too, we joined them in carrying loads. I was one of the boys among them, carrying loads. One day, I was sitting down, and two men were arguing with each other. One got up and hit the other. So the village elders gave him his punishment, and he had to carry salt bags, two salt bags. 'Because you hit this man, you have to carry these salt bags up to Safia!' The government punished him, and he had to carry these two salt bags to Safia. I was jiwo (a young boy) when this man had to carry the salt to Safia. He took up a girl as well to Safia, and I had to follow them. She was his daughter, his sister's daughter, and her name was Maggie. So they took Maggie, and I went after them. I helped them carrying the salt. We would go on, sleep on the way, and the next day we would walk again. We kept walking, spending several nights on our way until we reached Safia. So perhaps we spent about four or five nights before we reached Safia. We left the salt there, and the others who had joined us went back down again. We went later. When we got home, the Kawo of the village greeted us, so they showed respect, but they were also afraid, what to do for vina? 'What good can we do for this man? He is a young boy and he helped us; this is a young girl that we have. He helped us, so we can give this girl', and Maggie didn't refuse. When they asked her, she said 'nene' (okay), and I married her. They respected me because I had helped them carry the heavy salt bag for a long way. So they gave me their daughter [Maggie] to marry. They respected me, and when they asked her, she agreed. She is not like other girls. I also respected my aunties and uncles, and when they asked me to marry her, I did. And now I have children, lots of children. Now I am old and my living is very good because they take care of me. And I have plenty of grandchildren to look after me. I am happy now!*

In Holan's case, by helping out he showed his respect (*muan*) and, in turn, was treated with respect by Maggie's clan. As Holan put it, 'This is how I got my wife. I have respect for my people. I helped them carrying the salt, and they gave me a wife. We got many children and grandchildren, and now I am living happily'.

In this case balance in a 'disturbed' (unequal) relationship, was restored by giving Holan a bride. By providing help to a clan with whom Holan had no previous affiliation, he opened up an exchange relationship that could only be balanced by a counter-gift. In this case, the gift, Holan's bride, was so large that the relationship was not ended but actually maintained as Holan entered a reciprocal relationship with the givers of his wife.

Another example of how the moral of maintaining balance exceeds the boundaries of descent (clan) and kinship affiliation (both consanguineal and affinal kin) is provided by describing a *siva veyodi* (washing shoulders ceremony). Such a ceremony was organised by Juspud, one of the elders of Waigo clan, in 2001.

Several years ago, when Juspud fell out of a coconut tree in the gardens, young boys carried him all the way down to the village as he could no longer walk. Back then, these boys didn't want to be compensated for their help, but in 2001 Juspud decided something had to be organised to compensate them. So for three or four months, he made preparations for organising a 'washing shoulders' (*siva veyowi veyodi*) ceremony. Especially for this occasion, Juspud, his wife Brenda, and their son Raymond and his wife Helen cleared a new garden. When Milne Bay people heard Juspud was about to organise a *siva veyodi*, they gave him a young pig. Dodo, as the little black-and-white piglet was named, was raised by the family. Helen and her young daughter developed an affectionate relationship with the pig, but unfortunately for them, Dodo was meant to be killed and distributed among the boys who had carried Juspud and the people who would help Juspud in organising this prestation. On the day of the *siva veyodi*, early in the morning, women brought firewood and raw vegetables while several men brought sago which had been harvested several days earlier and fish that was to be smoked with Dodo the pig. Dodo was killed and roasted in a *fana*, a small smoke hut that was built between Juspud's and his son Raymond's houses. Raymond's brother-in-law Christopher, who is married to his sister, and Juspud's brothers guarded the smoking process and divided the meat and fish into 36 pieces, the number of clay pots that were to be used in the prestation. Prior to Dodo's killing, women from all the clans in Marua and Airara had brought food to Raymond's house, which was then peeled, washed, and distributed among the clay pots. Brenda, Juspud's wife, had seen to it that every woman bringing foodstuff and helping out also brought her own clay pot. These clay pots were lined up and filled with vegetables (primarily taro and sweet potato), smoked fish and pig, and *baya sarara* (sago mixed with coconut). As Raymond explained, 'The family of the boys who had helped my father, people who chopped firewood, all the women who have brought food, they all have to be compensated and get fish and pig in return'. While the women guarded the cooking process, the men discussed whether to give the boys who helped Juspud a clay pot of their own or to give them dished-up food. Eventually it was agreed that the boys would be served at one of Juspud's relative's houses, where they would eat

their meal separate from their hosts and the other participants. The latter would receive one or more clay pots of food, depending upon the size of their clan, which they would take to their respective clan and distribute among their households and clan members. The initial distribution of clay pots among the clans took almost an hour and one-half because, as Raymond explained, this is a very important and delicate matter. 'Distributing food is a big thing. You have to make sure everybody receives his or her fair share. Otherwise you get complaints and bad feelings afterwards'. While deciding which clan should receive what, Raymond was assisted by his sister, his brother-in-law, and two clan elders.

'Traditionally', the helpers' shoulders would be washed with pig fat, thereby symbolising the work they had done and the compensation they would receive. But although this part of the ceremony was left out, Juspud's compensatory act was still considered a *siva veyodi*. This event involved many reciprocal relations. Relationships between parents and children, between spouses, siblings, and affines, and between various clans were addressed. Moreover, these reciprocal relationships extended beyond the Maisin, incorporating non-related Milne Bay people. One month after the *siva veyodi* was held, Raymond and Helen set out to Milne Bay with a canoe filled with tapa, clay pots, and pandanus mats in order to thank and pay tribute to the givers of Dodo the pig. In this way all debts were settled, all obligations were fulfilled, and balance was again restored.

### **The gender of exchange**

One of the major debates in Melanesian anthropology revolves around the question whether we are dealing with economic (commodity) or symbolic (gift) exchange values of goods. Several scholars have proposed that these are two separate spheres of exchange (Lemaire 1985: 80; Strathern 1990). Moreover, these two values, inherent in goods, have often been attributed to specific types of exchange or transactions. The gift is related to ceremonial exchanges, which are often related to life-cycle rituals, while commodities are related to barter and market-based transactions. In addition, 'the gift' presupposes reciprocal dependence and is associated with clan-based economies, the constitution of social relations, and social reproduction. In contrast, commodity exchanges are often equated with class-based economies; they presuppose reciprocal independence and are concerned with the relationships between things, their production, and exchange value (Gregory 1982: 10-11; Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992a: 7). These generalisations ignore Mauss's insights that gift and commodity are two ends of one continuum, which is governed by the principle of reciprocity (Mauss 1990). Moreover, the distinction between gifts and commodities has led to an emphasis on particular objects as well as on particular types of exchange. As a result, many studies have failed to provide an account and analysis of objects made and given by women in exchange and of women's roles in particular types of exchange, such as informal and barter exchanges.

While the previous sections revealed how women (in their roles as mothers, wives, and sisters) dominate informal exchanges, this section explains women's (and men's) roles in the production and acquisition of the various types of goods

that are exchanged. So emphasis is placed upon the relationship between gender and objects in exchange.

The 'gender of the gift' (Strathern 1990) and of exchange is most clearly visible in practices of producing and giving different types of food. Food and particularly the handling, cooking, serving, sharing, and eating of food simultaneously differentiate and identify (Jansen 1997a: 87). Specifically, 'rituals of food' reveal notions of other and self and, moreover, express gender differentiation and the construction of gender identity (ibid.).

In a Maisin setting, the social and symbolical aspects of food become salient when considering the gendered nature of the harvesting, cooking, giving, sharing, and distributing of particular types of food in specific settings. A strong correlation exists between gender and certain types of food as well as between gender and the processing of food. Whereas men are associated with uncultivated foods that involve 'killing' and roasting without the use of pots, women predominantly handle and process cultivated foods. This differentiation on the basis of gender also comes into play when food is given (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, gender differentiation and identity are also expressed through the practices of distributing food.

The distribution of food on various levels of exchange corresponds with hierarchical relationships between men and women as well as with hierarchical relationships among men and women. While the men (often seniors) who are organising the event are held responsible for the distribution of all kinds of food (and goods) at highly public and formal exchanges, women distribute these foods at the clan and household levels. For example, when filling clay pots of food on the occasion of a large exchange, women who are closely related to the organiser distribute the prepared crops among the pots while their male relatives distribute pieces of pig and fish among these pots. As soon as the other women who have brought their clay pots have finished cooking, the pots are gathered, whereupon the men in charge, often by consulting their female relatives, decide to whom these pots should go. Once the pots have been assigned to the clans involved, the young women belonging to these clans take the pots and carry them away on their heads. Within the clans, the senior or most respected women who have contributed to the cooking distribute the pots among the households and eventually distribute the contents of these pots, not only among their own family members but often also among the other households within the clan. This reveals the dynamics between and among men and women and the various layers within each exchange.

### *Gender and the production and bartering of objects*

Before objects can be given, they have to be acquired. Objects can be made and consequently given in exchange, or they can be obtained from other people through transactions such as barter or informal or formal exchanges.

The association between gender and gifts comes to the fore when considering the gendered production of many of the goods used in exchange. Cathy Costin (1996: 114), in her exploration of the relationship between gender and craft, argues that 'craft is often integral to gender identity'. A gender-based division of labour obviously contributes to and sustains dominant ideas about gender. Maisin

people clearly distinguish between objects made by men and objects made by women. Male-manufactured objects that are exchanged or given include canoes and necklaces, especially shell-valuables. Artefacts made by women and which are used in different forms of exchanges include barkcloth (both decorated and undecorated), pandanus mats, string bags, and pottery. As described earlier, these female-produced objects in particular dominate both formal and informal types of exchange. Moreover, both women and these objects are part of a regional exchange network in which specifically tapa, clay pots, and string bags circulate.

Maisin women always have to make sure that tapa (*embobi*), mats (*yan*), string bags (*nonti*), and clay pots (*wusu*) are present in the house. It is their responsibility to either make them or obtain them through barter. The manufacture of tapa, mats, and string bags calls for mental and physical skills, *seraman*. The making of these objects is also referred to as *buro seraman*: work (*buro*) for which *seraman* is needed. As Maisin state, all Maisin women should be able to make them. When they do not have time to make these objects themselves or are not used to making them (as in the case of clay pots), they have to barter for them.

Barter is predominantly a female affair. It occurs both between people who know each other as well as between strangers. Sometimes, women barter objects with distant relatives or long-standing female friends who have married into other villages. On other occasions, when women travel around or when visitors come to their village, they likewise take the opportunity to barter their goods. Extended exchanges may also take place, in particular between exchange partners. This kind of transaction demands significant levels of mutual trust and respect since one depends upon the other to make the return 'gift' of the barter at a later point in time. I witnessed Maisin women giving tapa to Wanigela and Biniguni women in order to receive, respectively, a clay pot and a string bag. In such cases, the return goods were sometimes given months later, long after the initial barter agreement had been made. In a similar way, Maisin women would receive clay pots for which they were expected to give tapa sometime in the near future.

Some informants stated that barter is a form of *vina* (exchange), thereby not differentiating between local and regional forms of exchange and between gift and barter exchange. Not everybody included barter within the concept of *vina*, however, stating that barter was like 'buying' (*kumas*) because you know in advance what you are going to receive for your 'gift'. When denoting a barter exchange, Maisin say, '*Tapa tamème na wusu timènanà*', which means, 'We give them tapa, and they will give clay pots'. Despite a lack of consensus about whether barter is *vina* or not, both Maisin men and women generally agree that bartering is mainly women's work, especially when it involves objects made by women. Nevertheless, even the bartering of canoes (*kaa*), which are made by men and regarded as their property, requires the involvement of a woman (wife) because she has to agree to the amount of tapa that is given in exchange for the canoe.

So to obtain a canoe through barter, men have to seek the assistance of their wives and other female relatives as they have to produce a return gift that consists of a certain amount of tapa. The amount of tapa that one needs to obtain a canoe depends upon the size of the canoe. In general, some 20 to 25 pieces of tapa are

required to obtain a mid-sized canoe. If a man wants to obtain a canoe, he will first have to seek agreement from his wife to make the agreed amount of tapa. It may also happen that deals over obtaining a canoe are reached between two men without the direct consultation of the wife who has to produce the counter (barter) gift. In either case, the wife will make the negotiated amount of tapa, often with help of her female relatives and friends. If the amount of tapa is too excessive in relation to the size of the canoe, the contributing women may criticise the deal made by the husband by means of gossip. In some cases, women negotiate to obtain their own canoe by giving tapa to the man who wants to barter it.

The importance of tapa and therefore of women in bartering for objects is also clear when considering how dependent Maisin people are on clay pots. Maisin people have always depended on the barter system with Wanigela women to obtain, in exchange for undecorated or general-designed tapa, the highly valued clay pots that are only manufactured by Wanigela women. Some Wanigela women complain that Maisin women supply inferior tapa in exchange for the clay pots while they themselves give their best pots in return. It appears that Maisin women tend to keep the best tapa in order to sell it. As a result, the commodification of tapa seems to have had an impact on the quality of tapa used in barter.

Dimensions of exchange: Objects	Produced by	Formal gifts made by	Informal gifts made by	Bartered for/ with by	Sold or bought by
Tapa	women	women	women *	women **	women/men
Mats	women	women	women	women	women
String bags	women	women	women	women	women
Clay pots	women	women	women	women	women
Canoes	men	-	-	men/women	men
Necklaces	men/women	men/women	men/women	men/women	?
Betel nut	men/women	men/women	men/women	-	men/women
Money	men/women	men	men/women	-	-
Vegetables	men/women	men/women	women	women	women
Cooked food	women	women	women	women	women
Pieces of pig meat	men	men	women	women	women
Sago	men	men	women	men/women	women
Living pigs	men	men	-	men	men

*Table 2. The gender of making and giving goods in four types of transactions. Although women often know best what can be given, as they harvest the food, take care of the objects, and know what their family can spare, the choice of what to give is often a mutual decision by husband and wife. Moreover, gendered ways of giving do not imply that the object given represents a particular individual. The organisers of each prestation know exactly what each individual or family has contributed, but in the end the pile of goods reflects the communal efforts of the husband's family and clan.*

*Note: women\* (if men agree); women \*\* (bartered by men for witchcraft)*

Although there seems to be a strong correlation between gender and either the production or bartering of objects (Table 2), these products of men's and women's labour are not necessarily denoted as either male or female, nor are they automatically gendered property (see also next chapter) or male or female gifts. But before turning to these ambiguities in the gender of the gift, I first want to consider two other types of gifts or commodities that may be provided by both men and women. These are betel nut and money.

### *Betel nut and money*

'Betel nut', which refers to the areca nut that is chewed with betel, is probably used most frequently in exchanges, both formal and informal. Among Maisin, the chewing of 'betel nut' involves three ingredients: the green, oval-shaped seeds of the areca palm, called *kara*; the fruit or leaf of the betel plant (*erovo*); and mineral lime (*son*), made from burnt shells. It is especially *kara*, the seeds of the areca palm, which are shared and given. Before a meeting can start, bundles of *kara* are given to the attendants in order to create harmonic feelings and a good atmosphere, as the sharing of betel nut is a token of friendship. In a similar way, rituals are often closed by sharing and chewing *kara*. Friends share betel nut, and people often go up to their friends' houses in order to ask for *kara*, and in general also sharing *erovo* and *son*.

Due to the popularity of betel nut chewing, some Maisin took the opportunity to sell *kara* instead of simply giving it to those who asked for it. In Ganjiga/Uiaku, this commercialisation was so successful that it was difficult to go around asking for *kara* as everybody kept it in order to sell it. In 1996, it was decided during a meeting to prohibit the selling of *kara* in people's houses. It was argued that the commercialisation of betel nut went totally against Maisin custom, in which the interaction of asking for and giving *kara* is part of daily exchanges and relationships between people. This new rule, which prohibited the domestic selling of *kara*, resulted in people giving up selling *kara* in their houses, and now *kara* is mainly sold on the market in Uiaku. In Airara, people sometimes (when there is plenty of *kara*) do sell it at their houses, partly because there is no regular market in their village. Nevertheless, they never refuse to give it to someone who asks for it.

With regard to money, Maisin people living in Collingwood Bay mainly have access to money through remittances sent by male and female relatives working in towns. The possibilities for village men and women to earn money locally are fairly limited. Moreover, these possibilities are constrained by gender. Maisin men can either work as one of the two village counsellors; become elected as MICAD board members (who since 2001 have been paid for their work); or work as dinghy operators, crocodile farmers, or as trade-store keepers. While men dominate these more formal village occupations, women's main opportunities to get access to cash are through marketing their wares at local markets. By selling pandanus mats, crops, baked food such as scones and other snacks, and fish, women may earn some money. In particular, Uiaku and Ganjiga women have this possibility as twice per week a market is organised at Uiaku. On these days, women enthusiastically

hurry to the marketplace opposite the school and church area to market wares or to buy them. In Airara, however, the market is too small and infrequent to provide a structural income. Marua and Airara women largely depend upon their own garden produce and upon the informal daily exchange of food with relatives and friends. Sometimes the women gather in front of the school to sell some crops and often snacks to schoolchildren, but these efforts to create a marketplace are not very successful. The most regular marketers of crops are a couple of Miniafia women from Reaga village. They regularly walk along the coast all the way up to Airara, passing Marua Mango and Marua Point on their way. Heavily burdened by string bags full of garden produce, these women market their wares in a mobile way until their string bags are empty, and they then return home.

In general, women (especially young and middle-aged wives and mothers) dominate the market, both as sellers and as buyers, although schoolchildren buying snacks during their breaks are another regular group of customer. Clearly, many women 'turn to vending because it is a flexible occupation that dovetails well with existing cultural rhythms of daily life' (Seligmann 2001: 12). Since they are the producers of the crops and products they sell, they seem to already have rights to them. But as with the fish they sell, which is predominantly caught by men, the remittances are primarily beneficial for the women's entire households. As a result, women not only 'enter the market as an extension of the household task they perform'; they also enter the market as mothers, and therefore one can perceive of marketing 'as part of their care-taking for the family' (Seligmann 2001: 3-4).

Whereas women clearly create and maintain the local markets, men also sell products to outside markets. The harvesting of sea cucumber (*beche de mer*) and also the planting and growing of vanilla are other opportunities for men to get access to money. One of the most important and regularly reoccurring possibilities, however, is the selling of tapa at regional, national, and international markets. This commodity exemplifies how both men and women depend upon each other. While women are the main producers of tapa, it is especially their husbands and others (for example church and MICAD representatives) who collect tapa in order to sell it in towns. In the recent past, Maisin women would sail all the way up to Tufi to sell their tapa, but this is hardly practised anymore, and as a consequence it is specifically the men who control the tapa business (see next chapter). Since the amount of money derived from selling tapa is relatively large, especially in comparison with market revenues, tapa is, alongside money sent by relatives, one of the main sources of income. This implies that when money is part of either formal or informal exchanges, it is often 'tapa money' that facilitates the giving of these banknotes or coins.

All revenues, whether obtained by the husband or wife, are ideally meant for the family. School fees for the children have to be paid, and medicines and also food and clothes have to be bought. Many couples stressed that ideally the wife kept the money, as husbands do not trust themselves with money. This does not mean that women can spend it as they like. Wives have to ask permission from their husbands to buy things, and most of the money is given to the husband, whom they cannot refuse when he asks for it. Thus the way money is used does

not wholly coincide with its gendered production. In the next section I discuss the object that is frequently used to obtain money, tapa.

### *Tapa as gift and commodity*

Tapa features as a gift in formal and informal exchanges and also as a commodity in barter and market exchanges (Table 2). Although other objects also have these dual qualities – since all goods have to be acquired through barter or commodity exchange – tapa exemplifies most clearly how objects embody both gift and commodity values.

In life-cycle rituals, both clan tapa and general tapa are used. As elaborated upon in the previous chapters and sections of this chapter, clan tapa is essentially an inalienable object. In contrast to plain or general-designed tapa, this type of tapa may not leave the clan as it is regarded as clan property. Consequently, it features only as a gift within the particular clan who owns it. On rare occasions it may be given to an ally or to a person with whom one wants to open up and maintain an intimate relationship. Since this clan tapa *par excellence* embodies the identity of its owner, giving a clan tapa effectively incorporates the receiver and wearer into one's own clan. According to Godelier (1999), these inalienable gifts represent the ultimate value of a community. In the case of the Maisin, this would be clan identity.

Circulating around these inalienable gifts are other pieces of tapa (as well as other goods) that are alienable. General-designed tapa appears as alienable gifts in both formal and informal exchanges. In formal exchanges, these pieces of tapa may be given and redistributed, and during informal occasions, general tapa is given to departing guests and to visiting friends attending, for example, a church festival. In addition to these contexts, wherein tapa plays a role in defining identity and mediating relationships, it may also serve as a commodity, as 'payment'.

When Maisin men seek revenge, they may travel to Milne Bay and engage in an exchange with one of the local witches (*yafuni*). By giving tapa and clay pots, the exchange for a person's life is made. As a Maisin man argued during a meeting in which two Milne Bay women were accused of having killed a man by using witchcraft, 'Before, we would give tapa to the *yafuni* people to have somebody killed. When we would give ten pieces, ten people died'. Clearly, reference was being made to the past, but the accused women used this fact in their defence, arguing that Maisin men themselves had 'paid' for this killing with tapa.<sup>3</sup>

Another context in which tapa is used as a form of payment is during church festivals. As will be described in Chapter 6, the monetary value of the tapa increased the cash gift that Maisin people made to the Sefoa church. In other contexts, the commodity value of general-designed tapa is used as a substitute for money. As an example, the Mothers' Union in Airara had bought cotton fabric in order to sell it at a profit in the village. But when it became clear that women were not able to buy it because the fabric was too expensive, it was decided to accept pieces of tapa instead. Women got one metre of cloth in exchange for one medium-sized tapa.

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3 Only men are believed to be capable of dealing and therefore negotiating with Milne Bay witches.

Eventually the tapa was sold in town to pay for the rolls of cloth that had been bought on credit. So, in this case, and also in other instances, tapa was used as the equivalent of money. As a result, tapa can be regarded as a commodity that is not only exchanged for money but that also represents an important monetary value in its own right.

Thus tapa has both gift and commodity values. Moreover, in the previously described context of church festivals and also in bride-price payments and barter exchanges, these values coincide in one type of exchange and even in one artefact. This suggests that, among Maisin, gifts and commodities are not related to distinct spheres of exchange. So how does tapa become transformed from one value into another? In order to answer this question, I turn to the ways in which tapa is produced.

When an object is made, it is often known in advance what the expected biography or life-path of this particular object will be. But in the case of tapa, these life-paths can vary and may be very divergent from what was initially expected. When women decide to create a piece of tapa with clan designs, it is often intended to be worn during festivities, but it may also be used as a gift to a firstborn child, a bride, or a mourner at the 'end of mourning' ritual (*ro-babassi*). When a general design is applied, the tapa may be sold, but it might also be used as a dress for a forthcoming festivity, be wrapped around a dead person's body, or be used as an object for barter, or it might function as a gift in a formal or informal setting of exchange. Often Maisin women will keep pieces of undecorated or unpainted general tapa folded between their mats so they have always something ready to give when an occasion occurs.

When husbands or other relatives go to town or when orders for making tapa from national or international markets are received, the wives will start producing tapa in large quantities. As described earlier, wives will often receive help from female friends and relatives in order to finish their tapa 'quota' on time. This help is primarily based upon *marawa-wawe*. Women who assist with designing and/or painting the tapa are often compensated for their labour with some food; in addition, when they need help, they can expect to be supported in return. This generalised reciprocity thus facilitates the production of large amounts of commercial tapa, which can be sold, as is often the case, by the husband of the assisted wife. Thus the system of reciprocity among women enables particular individuals or households to obtain many pieces of tapa and, consequently, money. As Ton Lemaire observed (1985: 99), this shows how within the concept of reciprocity inequality can be brought into existence through the 'manipulation' of women's labour. The potential inequality brought about by the influx of large amounts of money is, however, levelled by the social demand to give and distribute all goods, including money. Inequality, however, does exist due to the fact that the husband and wife (and the women who assisted with the production of the sold

tapa) have unequal access to the tapa revenues. So the gift of labour embodied in the tapa produced is not returned equally.<sup>4</sup>

Since men predominantly do the selling of tapa, it is mainly men who actually transform the gift value embodied in tapa into a commodity value. In their selling it and bringing the revenues back to the village and household, however, the commodity value of this tapa money is transformed once again. Men imbue this money when given in formal exchanges with *muan*, with respect, while women may give small amounts of money to female relatives in an informal context of exchange, thereby imbuing this tapa money with compassion, with *marawa-wawe*. These transformations of tapa and money from gift into commodity and from commodity into formal or informal gift signal how values of giving change while at the same time the morality of all these values and exchanges is adhered to: the necessity to regulate relationships and create balance. This moral of equality, or rather egalitarianism, constrains individuals' aspirations to accumulate wealth or to differentiate themselves from others. Nevertheless, while this balance and this complementarity are also stressed in gender relations, women's positions towards their husbands and other male relatives are essentially hierarchical. Unlike the informal types of exchange in which women make gifts based upon *marawa-wawe*, women's general attitudes towards men are expected to be imbued with *muan*, with respect.

### Women in between

Returning to our original question, what power resides in the tapa given? 'The spirit of the thing given' (Mauss 1990: 11) is actually the social relationships that structure and are structured through the exchange of things such as tapa. For those who receive this gift, it represents not just the donor but also the social relationships that enabled the donor to give. For the donor, the gift also embodies the receiver since it reflects upon their identity and their social relationships that constitute, for example, the identity of the donor's child or daughter-in-law. This concept of reciprocity, which is instigated by the morality of *marawa-wawe*, ensures that gifts are reciprocated and balance is recreated. In trying to meet their individual interests, however, people constantly manipulate this balance. As a result, the values and order that are constituted and maintained through the system of exchange become endangered.

The values that impel people to give came to the fore when discussing daily informal and formal exchanges. Informal exchanges predominantly take place between women. They are mainly based upon the principle of *marawa-wawe*, on 'love', and take place on an interpersonal level. In contrast to these informal exchanges, formal gift exchanges are organised by men and are mainly instigated by the principle of *muan*, respect. Unlike informal exchanges, these formal gift exchanges take place between groups of people. Formal exchanges, however,

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4 Regularly, tapa money does not even come back into the villages as this money is often misappropriated.

contain various informal levels of gift exchange, as the goods and food received are distributed on a clan and subsequently a household level. These final informal exchanges within a formal gift exchange are performed by women and are often based upon *marawa-wawe*. Thus, within each formal exchange a movement takes place from relationships between villages or clans towards relationships within clans and finally between individual people. Moreover, this dynamic between formal and informal exchanges correlates with a cycle of long-term exchanges and a cycle of short-term exchanges (Bloch and Parry 1989: 2). The first is concerned with 'the reproduction of the social and cosmic order', while the latter is the domain of individual activity (ibid.).

What is striking about the formal exchanges between affines, which are part of a cycle of long-term exchanges, is that although senior men organise these exchanges, receive all the goods, and are responsible for their initial distribution, senior women are responsible for the redistribution among individuals. Moreover, all women actively support and maintain the established, formal, long-term relationships through informal long-term exchanges and short-term barter exchanges. As we have seen, formal exchanges do not end once a particular ceremony has been performed. They are preceded and continued by the redistribution of ceremonial gifts as well as informal daily gifts, mainly made and given by women. This active role of women in gift exchanges and in inter- and intra-clan relationships is also visible in the barter system. Women are predominantly considered to be responsible for obtaining – that is making and bartering for – clay pots, tapa, string bags, and mats. This suggests that it is primarily women who are concerned with the acquisition of gifts.

In their essay on the morality of exchange, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1989: 26) maintain that the activities associated with short-term exchanges have to be separated and are 'subordinated to a sphere of activity concerned with the cycle of long-term reproduction'. This ideological space should exist since 'the maintenance of the long-term order is both pragmatically and conceptually dependent on individual short-term acquisitive behaviour' (ibid.). As showed in this chapter, the maintenance of that order is primarily dependent upon women. Despite their busy lives, they maintain relationships between clans and different groups. By providing and bartering goods, the availability of female-produced objects such as mats, tapa, string bags, and clay pots is ensured. A household without these goods is unthinkable, and both Maisin husbands and wives stress the importance of women making these objects or bartering for them.

Women are regularly seen to move between clans to give food or other utensils to their close relatives (parents, brothers, or sisters living in other clans and even other villages) and to distant female relatives or female friends. These exchanges are important, as they enlarge the social networks that may offer support in times of food shortage and social crises. By creating exchange links among various clans and people, women's exchanges also (at least theoretically) reduce the possibilities for warfare, although women themselves are often also the locus of disputes between male individuals and even between clans. Moreover, by performing these informal

long-term exchanges as well as short-term barter exchanges, the social order that is achieved in long-term exchanges is maintained. Perhaps it is not so surprising that Maisin women are the main agents in the establishment of relationships through the exchange of goods. As Strathern (1999: 36) remarked, 'Women, who pass between clans in marriage, encapsulate the possibility of relationship itself, for they make potential exchange roads between their brothers and husbands'. Moreover, women's abilities to move within female networks enable husbands and also institutes such as MICAD and the Anglican Church (Chapter 8) to make use of women's labour to meet their own ends.

Although women effectively maintain relationships created during life-cycle exchanges, the articulation between the two spheres of exchange is performed within the dialectic and hierarchical relationship that exists between women and men, as well as in the related conversion of values and of the objects used in exchange. This becomes clear when discussing the trajectories of exchange objects. First, objects obtained by either women or men through barter or commodity exchange are converted into gifts in long-term cycles of exchange. As a result, commodities resulting from short-term exchanges such as barter are converted into gifts for use in long-term exchanges. Subsequently, objects in long-term exchanges are converted from gifts based upon *muan* into gifts based upon *marawa-wawe*. These values of *muan* (respect) and *marawa-wawe* (compassion) correspond with gendered levels of exchange. While the concept of *muan* is part of the giving and distributing of gifts on formal levels and therefore performed by men, *marawa-wawe* is often the reason for informal and more intimate levels of exchange, which are mainly conducted by women. Thus, at the end of the exchange cycle, a woman actually transforms the value of the object used in the exchange. From being a gift based upon *muan*, she transforms it into a gift of *marawa-wawe*.

Tapa most clearly exemplifies how one object can be attributed with different values as it moves from one exchange to the next. This implies that its 'identity cannot be reduced to [its] materiality, but is fashioned in the course of the exchanges themselves' (Barraud et al. 1994: 103). Even when tapa is not physically present, it still plays a significant role in exchanges. Due to its commodity value, tapa enables women and men to obtain other goods and money that feature as gifts in informal and formal exchanges. But since women and men have different access to gifts, and in particular to the commodity values of tapa, tapa is also intertwined with the power relations between women and men.

As Strathern (1990: xi-xii) argued in 'The Gender of the Gift', gift giving is not neutral. It is in itself a gendered activity or behaviour. 'Men's and women's ability to transact with this or that item stems from the power this gendering gives some persons at the expense of others, as does the necessity and burden of carrying through transactions'. In this chapter, women's agency in the production and exchange of objects and their roles in mediating relationships have been emphasised but 'in relation to the form that domination takes' (ibid.) in Maisin society. By moving across clan and regional boundaries, Maisin women and their objects are seen to be important actors in the constitution of inter- and intra-

group relationships and the constitution of social personhood. This has revealed an intertwined web of life wherein objects, women, and men play their various parts in the formation and performance of identity. As we have seen with regard to the use and values associated with clan tapa and the diminishing importance of life-cycle exchanges that mark the transition of clan identity, it seems that this particular aspect of Maisin identity is subject to change. In Part 3, these dynamics and tensions with regard to clan identity will become visible when discussing the commercialisation of tapa. This reveals in more detail how gender and power relations are intertwined with the commercialisation of tapa. The next chapter discusses how these described exchanges and also gender and clan relations have been reconfigured in the context of church feastings.



## Chapter 6

# Church festivals and the performance of identity

*When we dress up in our embobi and koefi and wear our nomo [decorations], it reflects the image of our ancestor and what he did when coming up from the jabu gauw [hole].*

All over Collingwood Bay, festivals are organised to celebrate the individual saints after which each Anglican Church is named. These church festivals vary from small, village-based happenings to large regional performances in which objects, dances, food, and money are exchanged. Since every semi-large village has a church, each year several church festivals are held. Anglican Churches are located in the villages Airara, Sinapa, Uiaku, Yuayu, and Uwe. In Wanigela and the various Miniafia and Korafe villages, church feasts are likewise held. During my stay among the Maisin, I witnessed six church festivals and missed about three. These festivals are a combination of Christian worship and traditional dancing and singing. During the service, people dress up in their 'traditional' regalia, sing, and play their drums, alternating with preaching by the priest and Christian hymns sung by the church attendants (see photo 37). Prior to and after the service, dances and accompanying songs are performed by men and women dressed up in tapa and ornaments.

For Maisin people, the festivals not only express dedication to the church; they also embody the spirit of past clan festivities that connected various clans and commemorated the clan ancestors (see also Hermkens 2007a). This chapter discusses how for Maisin people church festivals provide a contemporary arena in which various identities, emotions, and knowledge as well as historical and contemporary affiliations are performed. It discusses the important though changing role of the Anglican Church and the church feasts and shows how the movement of decorated bodies reveals notions about gender. In fact, the exchanges, dances, songs, and body decorations express religious identity as well as gender, clan, and tribal identities. Thus, movements of bodies and objects not only perform culture; they also enact various identities. Moreover, bodies move between past and present affiliations as both ancestors and Church are commemorated. In the context of Collingwood Bay church festivals, it will be shown that human-object relations play a significant role in these 'performative' movements, shaping and altering identities.



Photo 31. Maisin dancers at a church festival in Sefoa (Cape Nelson).

### Clan feasts and church festivals

Although in daily life people no longer wear their tapa cloths, these loincloths still feature as clothing in the context of festivities.<sup>1</sup> Especially during church festivities both men and women spend considerable time in enhancing their bodies with elaborate decorations and tapa cloth painted in attractive black and red designs. These contexts and forms of body decoration visualise *par excellence* Maisin notions of healthy and attractive bodies. The application of tapa cloth and decorations and the adorning of the body and hair with coconut oil, fragrant leaves, and flowers express these ideals (Photo 31). Moreover, they express and define various identities.

In the past such enactments of identity took place during festivities organised by particular clans. Only Kawo clans were able to organise feasts that could last for several days.<sup>2</sup> The most important of such feasts is called *foraga*. This feast involved either two Maisin *IYON* or an *iyon* and a non-Maisin group and involved the building of a *kawo* house at the Kawo's *varo* (Barker 1985: 172). According to Barker (*ibid.*), the idealised accounts of these feasts have 'become somewhat of a mythic charter of the Kawo-Sabu relationship'. While the Kawo clans are seen to have been responsible for the organisation of large-scale feasts such as *foraga*, the

1 Maisin kept wearing their *embobi* and *koefi* for a relatively long time. People gradually stopped wearing the tapa loincloths as daily dress some years after World War II. After the war, Maisin men returning from the battlefields brought Western goods and especially Western clothes to wear, thereby replacing the local types of dress (Chapter 8).

2 One of my informants, from Rerebin clan, claimed that Kawo clans could organise feasts that lasted up to two weeks, called *ira nombo* (large drum), while Sabu clans were only entitled to organise small feasts, *ira rati* (small drum), that lasted for about three days.

aid and support of Sabu clans were essential as they had to collect and prepare all the food. The feast was hosted on the Kawo clan's *varo* and consisted of long rows of exuberantly decorated dancers from the Sabu and visiting clans. The Kawo people remained seated as they would not dance during the feasts; also, they would not eat and share food with their guests as these were considered their enemies or *vasaa*. Consequently, the two groups, although contributing to the same performance, remained separated. According to Barker's informants, the dancing stopped when the elder of the host Kawo had given a speech on the *varo*, which was followed by a speech from the guest Kawo. The feast, which could last for several days depending on how long the accumulated food would last, ended when the guests were given their final gift, pigs and taro, or according to John Barker's (ibid.) informants, clay pots filled with cooked food.

Key elements in these feasts were the relationships between the Kawo and Sabu clans and between the hosts and their guests. The power of the Kawo clans in creating peace by organising the feasts and inviting one's 'enemies' was facilitated by the support of their Sabu clans. The feast implied the clearing of new gardens and the hunting of many pigs in order to be able to feed and accommodate the visiting clans and as a consequence involved months of preparation. Only if the Kawo clans could count upon the full support of their relatives and *sasabu* could they organise a successful feast in which the visiting party was impressed by large quantities of food, especially taro and pigs. In return, the guests would do their utmost to make a lasting impression on their hosts by displaying their most elaborate decorations and performing vigorous dances. As these feasts were competitive, the guests would try to top the prestations of food when it was their time to act as hosts, while the previous hosts would ensure to display a performance that could compete with that of their *vasaa*. Due to the costs and the huge amount of work involved, Maisin people do not wish to organise these feasts anymore. The time, labour, and costs involved are considered a waste and too high. As a consequence, *foraga* and other clan-based and organised festivities as well as initiations and other ceremonial festivities have become rare.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, it seems that church festivals, which pose no strain on specific clans but involve the participation of the entire community, have become increasingly popular. It thus seems that the Anglican Church and the celebration of God and the individual saints have replaced the 'traditional' feasts in which the Kawo-Sabu distinction played an organising and structuring role.

Instead of having replaced them, however, the church festivals can in fact be considered as transformations of these feasts. As argued by Gneccchi-Ruscone (1997: 23) in her article on Korafe church festivals, the changes suggest a superimposition of the Christian God onto pre-existing clan ancestors, whereby Korafe people 'use the ancestors to establish exchange relations with God and his church'.<sup>4</sup> Barker (1985: 348) makes a similar point by stressing that, in Maisin perception, the

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3 According to Barker (1985: 172), the last full *foraga* took place in the 1930s.

4 Miniafia and Korafe people both distinguish two types of clans. In Miniafia, chief clans are called Iwob while the others are called, just as in Maisin language, Sabu. Among Korafe people, the two clans are called Kotófu and Sabúa.

Anglican Church has not replaced the social order but 'has brought the potentialities of the old order to fruition'. The missionaries became *sinan*, peacemakers, to all people and clans, mediating the existing internal and external divisions among the Maisin and between Maisin and their neighbours (Barker 1985: 361). Moreover, it is believed that *sinan* was established between missionaries and ancestors, whereby God was the one to give the ancestors their *kawo* (Barker 1985: 362, 367), which were then handed down to the present generation. The interrelatedness of church, ancestors, and Kawo-Sabu structures is most clearly exemplified by how Maisin belonging to Uiaku and Ganjiga clans turned the Uiaku church into a clan-house on the day of its dedication. By merging their different *kawo* in a fence that was set around the church, these individual emblems became one symbol. As Barker (1985: 367) put it, 'The church became a *kawo-va* and the mission station a *varo* around which the whole community was united as one IYON'.

Church feasts express dedication to the church, but they also embody the past clan feasts that mediated relationships between different clans and commemorated the clan ancestors. Although church festivals are not based upon the hierarchical cooperation between Kawo-Sabu clans, the respective statuses and also the identity of each clan are still being performed. Moreover, as in the past, divisions between various groups of people are mediated and managed through the feast. In addition, church feasts provide an opportunity for both individual and cultural expression, as in general Maisin people love to make music and dance and show their exuberant costumes.

It is rather striking that today the Anglican Church provides a 'space' to do this. In many other congregations, successful attempts were made to ban 'traditional' clothing, dancing, and singing (for example Eves 1996). Within the Anglican Church, there was no policy to convert people in such ways, and it was left up to the local missionary to allow or forbid these practices (Wetherell 1977: 202-205). For example, missionary Jennings, who was stationed at Uiaku from 1917 till 1920, detested dancing, especially when it interfered with the Church's programs or if it was related to the *mangu-via*, the beach dances that provided the main opportunity for boys and girls to meet. He was driven frantic by the 'incessant pom-pom', which was unbearable to him (Wetherell 1977: 204), but although the *mangu-via* are no longer held, the dancing remained. Nowadays church festivals form the major occasion for 'traditional' dancing, singing, and the playing of the drums. Moreover, they also provide a stage for men and women to enjoy themselves, and they are an opportunity to meet potential partners.

### *A church festival in Sefoa*

In September 2001, a church festival was organised in Sefoa, a Korafe village located near Tufi, and people from Airara, Marua, and other villages were invited to join the festivities. In the previous year, Sefoa people had been invited to attend the Church Day in Airara, and now it was their turn to act as hosts. When attending church festivals, Maisin always make sure they look their best. So prior to the festival, people made sure their decorations were in good order. Necklaces and

feathers were checked and, if broken, either repaired or replaced by new ones. Weeks before the festival was due, women were busy making fresh tapa cloths for the occasion.

When the time had come to start the journey to Sefoa, everybody packed their things and loaded them on the big outrigger canoes that would take them to the north end of Collingwood Bay. While many young people left Airara for a football tournament that was held in Wanigela, almost all other inhabitants set out their sails, leaving only the pregnant, old, and sick behind in a desolated village. On their journey, alternating sailing with paddling when there was no wind, the Maisin people stayed in villages along the coast of Collingwood Bay, such as Uwe, which provided an opportunity to visit relatives and friends. While travelling, both men and women were still busy adjusting and finishing their decorations. Finally, after a journey of two to three days, they arrived at Cape Nelson, where they moored their canoes and walked up to Sefoa station, which is located on a small hilltop. Upon arrival, they were accommodated in the many elevated shelters that had been erected for the occasion on the Sefoa mission station. In addition to Maisin from Marua, Airara, Sinapa, Koniasi, and Sinipara, guests from Miniafia villages, such as Reaga, and those living closer to Sefoa had travelled to Cape Nelson. As a result, Sefoa station became a large camping site where all the guests, the clans from neighbouring Korafe villages, and the people who had come home from their urban settings especially for this occasion would meet.

Exhausted from their journey, many took a rest before the feast would commence. The Maisin, who the evening prior to the Church Day had put on their dancing gear and started performing their songs and dances, initiated the feast. Attracted by the beating of the drums, the hosts came to watch the spectacle of long paired rows of Maisin men and women moving to the beat of the drums. Several groups performed their dances spread out over the Sefoa station, and the beating of the drums and singing could be heard long after the sun had set. The next morning a number of Korafe men and women had dressed themselves up and guided the priest to their church where the service to celebrate the church's saint was held. As the number of guests and spectators was too large, many people were forced to attend the service outside of the church. During the service, people who were dressed up in their 'traditional' regalia sang and played their drums, alternating with the priest's preaching and Christian hymns sung by the church attendants. Immediately after the service, everybody got ready for the next event, the prestations of money to the parish church. While the excitement reached its climax, representatives of all guests made their way to the church, guided and encouraged by dancing and singing people.<sup>5</sup> The Maisin clans presented their donation, which consisted of cash and heaps of tapa, as one group, as Maisin. After all donations had been received, the contribution of each group was publicly announced and written on a large board in front of the church. In the early afternoon, Maisin men and

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5 In Wanigela, this performance, whereby dancing and singing groups of people support and encourage other groups to make a good contribution to the local church, is called *bobo*. By guiding them to the church while singing and dancing, the dancers also attract donations from individual people, who by giving a few toea or kina increase the gift made by a particular group.

women dressed up again and, while being encouraged by the Korafe hosts and other spectators, danced and sang till early the next morning. While the Maisin were dancing, the Korafe hosts would watch and both encourage and distract the dancers by pinching, shouting at, and flirting with them. The dancers' strength, as visualised by their composure and skill at dancing, was effectively put to a test.

After having been given clay pots of food the previous days, which each time had been distributed among the many shelters, the feast turned, after almost three days, to its ending. Before the Maisin set off, however, they were given pandanus mats and heaps of raw food such as taro and bananas as well as pig meat and smoked fish. Packed with all these gifts, the Maisin left Sefoa with their outrigger canoes, starting the journey of two to three days back home again.

### **Feasts of exchange**

As has been argued by various scholars (for example: Schwimmer 1973; Kahn 1994; Gneccchi-Ruscone 1997), feasting, dancing, and the exchange of food are important ways to mediate and organise relationships with other groups. The exchange relations of the past *foraga* as well as performances such as *kaa-kasie*, whereby clans would perform canoe mock fights (Chapter 5), expressed political relations between territorial groups. Moreover, as Gneccchi-Ruscone (1997: 28) argues for Korafe *vasái*, the past feasts not only managed relationships among the living but also between the living and their dead. By inviting each other, the hosts were actually inviting each other's ancestors to claim the pigs of the presentation. By claiming the pigs for their ancestors, the Korafe fulfilled their debts towards the ancestors who had provided magical assistance, thereby enabling the dancers to perform with strength. Within this context, building alliances and making feasts not only ensured exchange relations with other groups but also with the ancestors (*ibid.*).

The importance of mediating socio-political divisions through feasting and exchange is still present at the church feasts held today. The alternating performances of dances and the exchanges of food mediate relationships between clans and villages, both among the Maisin and between Maisin and their neighbours. This reflects the ideal to also maintain balanced relationships with non-Maisin people, as was described in Chapter 5. In a context of present-day church festivals, however, it seems that another exchange relation has entered the performance – that is, an exchange relation with God and the church. In the next sections, the objects that constitute these various exchange relationships are discussed in more detail.

### *Food and the expression of relationships*

The giving and receiving of food during church feasts is one of the key elements in the performance. As for many other people in Papua New Guinea, food is not just 'food'. As shown by Michael Nihill (2001), food in Melanesia is synonymous with both sociality and politics. The previous chapters showed how all exchanges, both informal and formal, are based upon the giving and receiving of various types of food. In these various contexts, the giving and exchanging of particular

types of foods (raw, partially cooked, or cooked gifts) were, as argued by Nihill (ibid.), integral to the meaning each particular event or exchange had. In order to understand the significance of exchanging food in the context of church feasts, I will briefly discuss the various types of food used in exchanges.

The importance of food in exchanges reflects the significance of food in Maisin society. As Kahn (1994: 1) argued with regard to Wamira people living further southeast along the coast of Milne Bay province, 'food is an important mode of symbolic expression [...] It is used to convey a variety of beliefs and feelings about things and relationships that are non-food'. This is equally true for Maisin perceptions of food. Food is associated with growth and health, and by feeding children and people in general, their physical but also social growth is accounted for. The feeding of children but also of in-laws and others is intertwined with the social and moral values of sharing and caring (*kaiŋe*) for people. As a Marua woman explained, 'If I see no fire in my friend's or relative's house, I know they have no food, so it is my duty to bring some food for them to cook'.

Within practices of exchange, Maisin people clearly distinguish between raw and cooked food. Uncooked or raw vegetables are often given by a woman to friends or relatives, either out of love and sympathy (*marawa-wawe*) or because, for example, they have helped her working in the garden. In addition, raw food such as sweet potatoes but especially taro is an important part of firstborn, dowry, and bride-price payments. Unlike the informal exchanges performed by women, however, these formal presentations are characterised by men bringing and displaying heaps of taro. The significance of giving raw food in relation to the giver becomes especially significant with the birth of the first child. As was shown in Chapter 4, the baby's growing is accompanied by gifts of 'male' types of food, which are given by the child's father to the child's maternal uncles.

Although cooked food is shared within a household, the giving of a plate of cooked food outside this domestic context is rare and is predominantly practiced between households of the same clan. In addition, cooked food is also given to other clan members and close relatives, but outside this intimate circle of kindred giving plates of cooked food is less frequently practised. This is probably due to the fact that those who do not belong to one's own kindred may easily poison cooked food. When visiting other villages, Airara people stressed eating and sleeping with relatives living in these villages so as to prevent being poisoned by people who meant harm to them. Consequently, accepting cooked food involves both trust and a communal bond between giver and receiver.

Occasions during which food is cooked and eaten together are predominantly related to festivities and life-cycle rituals (see Chapter 4). In addition, communal cooking and the sharing of cooked food also functions as an important mode of symbolic and social expression on other occasions. When somebody is seriously ill, relatives may gather in front of his or her house, cook together, and subsequently eat together. This practice is called *di* and is meant to help the healing process of the sick person. On these occasions, Maisin eat for the sick, not for themselves. Likewise, the communal cooking and the sharing of food between in-laws in order to lift up a prohibition related to a death signals the importance of sharing cooked

food in order to restore balance between the living and the death and also among the living.

On specific occasions, communal cooking and eating with clan and/or non-clan members takes place by exchanging clay pots of food. As each participant contributes to the event by giving and receiving a clay pot of food, fears of sorcery are negligible. This communal cooking and sharing of cooked food in particular shows affiliation between groups of people. Simultaneously it also marks a difference. It differentiates between those who share and those who do not share.

Finally, clay pots filled with cook food are not only directly exchanged but also given. Especially during church feasts but also during life-cycle rituals and other formal occasions, these pots, or rather their contents, are given away. In general, the giving of a pot of cooked food is 'bigger' than inviting people to one's own place to eat. 'When they eat at my place, they might not eat all they want. When I give them a pot, they will finish it. When eating from this clay pot, the receiver thinks about you giving it' (Lambert Tinawe, age 37, Airara). So clay pots with cooked food are valued more highly as the giver signifies his generosity by giving plenty of food and allowing the recipient to eat in private and, as a consequence, in abundance. Moreover, by giving a clay pot with food, the identity of the household is processed in the food as a gift. This is visualised by the fact that women write their family names on the pots to make sure these are returned to them.

So when Maisin attended the church festival in Sefoa and were given clay pots filled with cooked food and, upon their departure, raw and partially cooked food, they actually received more than just something to eat. The clay pots with cooked food signalled the status of the hosts in providing for so many guests, who could all eat in abundance. As the contents of the pots were distributed among the guests and not shared with the hosts, the gift also signalled the division between guests and hosts. In a similar manner, the giving of raw and partially cooked food did not facilitate sharing. The Maisin guests had to prepare these foodstuffs on their way home, or if anything was left, in their own village and then distribute it among their relatives who had stayed behind. This likewise expresses the division between the exchange partners as, once again, the food cannot be shared between them and therefore their relationship seems to be not 'consumed' – that is, not intensified either. In contrast, Maisin people from different clans and villages did share the contents of the clay pots. In these ways, the sharing and non-sharing practices of food expressed affiliations between clans, at the same time differentiating them from their hosts.

The division between the exchange partners and, moreover, the ambiguity of their relationship was also expressed by the fact that the gifts of food were not accepted without comments. Maisin women carefully evaluated the contents of the clay pots and moreover their status, which depended upon the amount of meat and fish which had been added. Clay pots filled with only vegetables were accepted with smirked remarks, which directly reflected the Korafe household that had prepared the food as their names were written on the pots. In a similar manner, the remarks made by the hosts to the Maisin dancers reveal that, beneath the surface of honouring and celebrating their relationship, this relationship between guests

and hosts was also put under scrutiny. This mimics, albeit to a far lesser extent, the shaming practices that were applied during *vasáí*. In these settings, tensions between guests and hosts could result in slanging matches and contamination of the pots of food with dog and pig excrement (Gnecchi-Ruscone 1997: 27). This indicates the fragility of the relations that were established through the feasts.

In fact, building alliances and fighting may actually be closely related. Although the general idea is that by conducting exchanges friendly relations might be established, it also creates 'potential conflicts that lurk beneath the surface of sociality, or actual disputes' (Gorden and Megitt cited in Knauff 2002: 133). When listening to Maisin stories in which alliances between clans were broken due to disputes and fights over women and the illicit use of clan emblems, the fragile balance established through exchanges becomes clear. During the *foraga*, this ambiguity was played out by the lack of interaction between the host and guest Kawo clans. Moreover, this tension could be aggravated by insulting acts of both guests and hosts, as described earlier by Gnecchi-Ruscone for Korafe. In the context of today's church festivals, this is unlikely to occur as, in contrast to the past, the divisions between guests and hosts are subordinate to the main exchange relationship that is being affirmed, the relationship between all participants and the church. This relationship is established and confirmed by the giving of money and, in Maisin people's case, the giving of barkcloth.

### *Money and tapa*

While the hosting group accommodates the visitors and gives them clay pots with cooked food and raw food, the visitors dance and make their cash contributions. During the next church festival, the previous hosts will be guests at someone else's church, and therefore an extended exchange of dance, food, and money takes place. Unlike the food and gifts that are received by the guests and subsequently distributed, however, the gift of money is not distributed among the hosts but handed over to the celebrating church. Unlike the old feasts, during which the hosts would do all of the giving, church feasts compel the guests to make large gifts of money to the host's church.

When Maisin from the Sibó villages attended the church festival in Sefoa, the clans attending the festival together brought a large amount of money to donate to the Sefoa church. They also donated tapa. For the Maisin, the amount of money and tapa given was crucial as it is custom during these festivities that all contributions made by the various attending tribes are noted down and exclaimed in public. Thus, if the Maisin contributed less than the other attendants, they would be publicly embarrassed. Tapa played a crucial part in the Maisin's gift as the amount of money given was increased by a large number of pieces of barkcloth whose value was calculated in Papua New Guinean currency, in Kina. The commodity value of barkcloth thereby enabled Maisin people to make a sufficiently large gift to the Sefoa Church. This was especially important since in the previous year Sefoa people had come down to Airara village in order to celebrate the local church's saint. As a result, the Sibó people needed to restore balance in this relationship by

giving at least the equivalent of what their church had received earlier, and ideally to top it.<sup>6</sup>

This gift clearly expresses people's dedication to God. It is, however, also strongly competitive. During both small- and large-scale celebrations, local and visiting Christians will try to outdo each other in donating money, with prestige falling to those who have given the most and shame to those who have contributed the least. It thus seems that a successful relationship with God and the church is intertwined with the amount of money being given. In a similar manner, the success of a church feast is, to a certain extent, equally dependent upon the amount of food given and the vigour and skill of the dances performed. The cash donated to the church and hence to God, however, exceeds the gifts that feature in the exchange cycles between the guests and the hosts of the church feasts. Moreover, the church has placed itself outside the exchange relationships by not distributing this gift. Instead, it is expected to give an even larger gift in return: peace, 'knowledge that empowers' (Gnecchi-Ruscione 1997: 31), and as pointed out by Barker (1984: 373), social redemption.

So this gift of money is, as argued by Gnecchi-Ruscione (*ibid.*) imbued with symbolic value. In her opinion, 'church day feasts can be seen to involve the superimposition of the Church onto the traditional feasting cycle, with men exchanging gifts of pigs for their respective clan ancestor who, in turn, bring gifts of money for the Church'. Among the Maisin, the exchange of pigs seems to have played a far lesser role than among the Korafe, but like the Korafe, Maisin commemorate and, by decorating their bodies with particular regalia, also embody their ancestors. In the next section, this relationship between body decoration and, among others, ancestral identity is described in more detail.

## Decorating the body<sup>7</sup>

As expressed by Holan Kania in the Introduction of this book, in the past Maisin bodies were decorated so abundantly that people called them *nomo tamata*, 'decorated people'. When looking at photographs taken in the 1900s, we see Maisin people doing their daily work, such as carrying foodstuffs from the gardens and making tapa cloth, dressed in designed loincloths. The visual efficacy of these bodies adorned with decorated tapa (and with regard to female bodies, tattoo images)

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6 Exchange relationships conducted at church feasts are competitive but not necessarily cumulative. Exchanges of dances, food, and money alternate with 'low-key' celebrations of church days. For example, after having celebrated the Sefoa church day in a very large-scale manner, the subsequent Airara church day was celebrated in a relatively small manner, with very few outside guests attending the celebration.

7 Today, practices of self-decoration have changed considerably. Both the abundance as well as the types of decorations have changed. In daily life, personal identity is no longer expressed through tapa cloth and rows of armbands and necklaces but through Western-style clothing such as printed T-shirts and bras. Young girls especially favour the latter items, which, according to the older women, are not appropriate items for Maisin girls and women to wear. One of the most favoured items of clothing among women are the wide and long Mary-blouses, which are worn on top of cotton skirts.

was enhanced during specific occasions. In addition to the previously described *foraga*, warfare and the performance of hunting parties were other, though related, contexts in which Maisin made additional efforts to decorate their bodies.

Identification through bodily display seems to have been an important feature within a context of continued threats of raids and warfare with Doriri warriors from Upper-Musa and the probability of conflicts with other tribes and even other Maisin clans. Percy Money's photograph of six men (see Photo 38) dressed up in their regalia with large *karu* shells around their necks reveals the relationship between bodily decoration and warfare. According to Money's notes, the photograph shows how 'in olden times they bedecked themselves like this for fighting'. Thus warfare not only involved bodily interaction (combat) but also the modification of bodily appearance in order to affect the opponent.

Imagine a group of these large and well-built warriors, their spears raised, their shields covering a large part of their lower bodies, while the large *karu* shells covered mouth and chin, only revealing the warriors' noses pierced with pig tusks, dark black eyes, and large feather headdresses that swayed awesomely with the movement of the warriors' feet and bodies. The enemy must have been visually and mentally affected by this appearance. As Maisin people stress, 'Maisin are warriors'. This particular representation of Maisin, which can be found in both colonial photographs and indigenous oral histories, is still important for Maisin today.

During combat, the top-end of the large, circular *karu* shell (see Photo 38) that was fitted with a piece of plaited string, was held between the teeth, thereby covering a large part of the warrior's face, leaving only nose, eyes, and forehead visible and consequently altering facial expressions. Because these decorations made it almost impossible to identify an individual according to his face or read the opponent's facial expression, these regalia had a disorienting and thereby frightening effect upon the other. This becomes clear when considering the following myth, which deals with how a Maisin warrior was able to defeat the enemy singlehandedly because he appropriated his enemy's decorations and therefore his identity:

*That same day, Doriri people come back again, this time to Garandi gardens to attack the Wo [Wofun] clan. One Doriri man called Gawa comes to fight Wo ari fukiki. They are fighting. However, when earlier that day Maisin warrior Janten had killed Doriri leader Nuke, he had taken all his feathers and clothes. And at this point, when Gawa and Wo clan are fighting, Janten puts on Nuke's headdress and nomo and runs to the fighting grounds. Doriri people think Nuke is coming and believe their victory is near. But it is Janten and instead of throwing his spear at the Wo people, Janten throws it at Gawa. The Doriri turn afraid. They think they are defeated and run away! (John Christenson Taniova, elder Waigo clan, Airara village).*

This mythic history shows how body decorations identified warriors and how, by appropriating another person's regalia and dress, one effectively appropriates that person's identity. According to Strathern (1999: 41), it is efficacy not representation that is the principal effect of decorations. The previous example shows it is a combination of efficacy and identification that is triggered and



*Photo 32. Two Maisin men helping each other with their decorations.*

expressed through regalia. Furthermore, it seems that especially warrior-hood entails the appropriation of another identity, which (unlike, for example, the previously described social identities obtained during life-cycle rituals) could be easily discarded. Today, war and hunting parties are no longer organised, but when performing their dances during church feasts, Maisin men actually resemble their ancestors when preparing for battle (Photo 32). In the following section, the types of ornaments used by Maisin are discussed in more detail in order to apprehend their use and significance. This shows that ornaments are not just trivial accessories applied to the body or skin.

### *Ornaments (nomo)*

Having no elaborate wooden sculptures or other three-dimensional ‘arts’, social and individual expression in Maisin is largely conveyed through ‘body art’. The most conspicuous components of these ornaments are the decorated tapa loincloths, worn by both men and women. In addition to this clothing, strips of decorated tapa cloth are often used as ankle-decorations and draped around the chest, thereby wrapping almost the entire body in these typical red, black, and white tapa-cloth

images. Other components of Maisin body ornamentation include a variety of feathers, such as chicken, cockatoo, and bird of paradise plumes, and an enormous variety of regalia made from shells, seeds, teeth, bones, fur, and fibres. Coconut oil, which is rubbed on the skin, and body paintings complete one's 'traditional' outfit. As is described in more detail later on, the combination as well as application of these decorations is bound by rules. Some of the ornaments may be used and worn by everyone while others are used by particular clans and by specific clan members only.

With regard to body decorations in the New Guinea Highlands, Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern (2002: 148) remark that decorations may consist of 'substances that heighten the contours of musculature', 'coloured pigments', 'items that express emotion through movement', 'shell-valuables and beads', and 'other objects that carry culturally coded meanings'. Among Maisin, these five different attributes are important in body decorations as well. Furthermore, Maisin additionally place significance on items that cover the body with an attractive scent, such as coconut oil and fragrant leaves and flowers (see Photo 33). Also, they take special care of their dress, being *embobi* and *koefi*. These loincloths in particular contain, as we have already seen in Chapters 2 and 3, 'culturally coded meanings' (ibid.) and play a defining part in how bodies of either men or women move and dance.

As related by Holan Kania in the beginning of this book, decorations are connected with Maisin perceptions of bodily health and aesthetics. The first type of body decorations concerns substances used to affect the outer skin of the body itself. By rubbing the skin with squeezed coconut, the body texture is made shiny, thereby enhancing the contours of (healthy and strong) musculature. It also permeates the body with a delicate perfume. Shell necklaces and armllets are also rubbed with coconut oil in order to make them shine.

Colour plays an important part in the decoration of Maisin bodies. This is exemplified by the second type of decorations Maisin make use of, coloured pigments. These are predominantly red, black, and white. Traditionally the red facial paint that is used to colour both face and hair is *gametti*, which is made from the dried seeds (*pfaira*) of the annatto tree species. The seeds are crushed, mixed with water, and usually kept in one-half of a shell, called *giu*.<sup>8</sup> This red pigment is less bright than most chemical pigments, which as a consequence are usually preferred for facial paintings. For black paint, people use *mi*, the pigment that is also used to design tapa, while white paint, called *fwe* (white), is made from lime mixed with water. These pigments are applied with the tip of the finger but also with implements such as cotton buds (Photo 34). Body paintings vary by person and clan. While some people only add rows of small dots on the bridge of their nose and forehead, others paint their entire faces and even have others draw elaborate designs on their backs. The red, black, and white facial pigments resemble the

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8 The molluscs living in these mangrove shells are eaten and as a consequence are regularly collected by women and girls to provide protein for their families' diets.

similarly coloured tapa loincloths. Both pigments and tapa cloth contrast with the brown-skinned body and the more exuberantly coloured ornaments.

Brightly coloured feathers and flowers as well as green leaves not only add colour and scent; they also add a dynamic emphasis to the movements made. This third type of decoration is especially found in the headdresses (*kepfi*) made and worn by Maisin. But small strips of tapa cloth or other fringes that rustle on the beat of the drums are also used to emphasise the movement of the feet.

Headdresses consist of rows of various birds' feathers that sway to the beat of the drums and the dynamic back-and-forth movements of the dancers, especially the males. Feathers (*fi*) are predominantly obtained from cassowaries (*waito*), chickens (*bioki*), birds of paradise (*sesi*), and variously coloured cockatoos (*kèkèjo*). These feathers are grouped and placed in rows at a set place in a lightweight frame made from cane. A *kepfi* usually consists of a row of *jauba* (a combination of cassowary and cockatoo feathers) at the back followed by several *badigara* (torch-like bundles of red and black feathers, sometimes completed with chicken feathers that are placed on top). Subsequently a row of *fi-sesi* (bird of paradise feathers) is carefully placed on the frame followed by several rows of *roi-fi* (literally 'face-feathers', consisting of variously coloured cockatoo feathers, among others) and *karai* (a row of white cockatoo feathers that are cut in shape). The rows of differently shaped, sized, and coloured feathers are completed with a final row of short feathers that is attached on the foremost part of the *kepfi*. Often these are red cockatoo feathers, called *gana*, but people also use other coloured feathers to frame the forehead and complete their *kepfi*.

As with other skills such as the plaiting of armllets and waist-belts, only a few people have the knowledge, ability, and willingness to make these feather headdresses. As with the fabrication of necklaces, this type of work is usually done by men and is referred to as *ininimbi*. In Waigo clan, one of the few men able to make feather headdresses is the elder, John Christenson (see Photos 17 and 34). Several times I watched him making these elaborate and colourful head ornaments for other men living both within and outside his own clan. As John expressed it, 'Those young ones, they do not know how to make them! While I am still alive they should come and ask me how to do it. But they don't'. 'Sometimes', as John argued further, 'this is how our customs get lost'. According to John, both men and women can wear these headdresses according to custom, but as he put it, 'Who is going to make *kepfi* for them?' As a consequence, women predominantly wear smaller headdresses or just add some feathers or plumes into their carefully groomed and oiled hair.

The fourth element that plays an important part in body decoration is shells and beads. Maisin make elaborate use of both locally obtained and traded shells, which are locally transformed into necklaces. But Maisin also trade for complete necklaces. These are mainly *wakèki* and *kerefun* necklaces, which are obtained from people living in Milne Bay. *Wakèki* are necklaces made from red Spondylus shells, which also play an important role in the Kula exchanges. In the past, these were bought in trade stores in Samarai that were run by informal or 'unofficial whites' (Lepowski 2001: 127). Since many Maisin men worked in Milne Bay on copra

plantations, they often returned home with these shell valuables. *Kerefun* and *wakèki* necklaces are considered highly valuable and are still used today in bride-price transactions.

Other types of necklaces such as *jayambèri*, which consist of one middle-sized pearl shell with rows of smaller shells attached to it, are also sometimes obtained via trade. In addition to *wakèki* and *kerefun*, two other types of shell are important for Maisin. These are the white egg cowry shells (Latin: *Ovula ovum*), simply called *fwe* (white), and white single (granular) ark shells (Latin: *Anadara granosa*), called *gorago*. In contrast to *wakèki* and *kerefun*, only particular clans may use these shells. *Fwe* may be used as singular pendants in necklaces, but they are also attached in pairs to armllets and knee decorations. Likewise, *gorago* are mainly bundled and attached to armllets. While both men and women may use these types of shells, the largest shell used among Maisin, the *karu* shell, is worn by men only. This shell pendant hangs on the chest and in the past was taken in the mouth when engaging in a fight. Today this aspect of warriorhood is still visible and tangible when dancers perform the *rabu-rabu*.<sup>9</sup>

Other shell types are worked into *gerègè*, which are very short necklaces that are applied tightly around the neck, *kokindi* (somewhat longer necklaces), and *guri jaya bèra*, long shell necklaces with a bundle of pearl shell fragments attached. Loads of such necklaces – but also other types made out of a variety of shells, fish and animal bones, dog and pig teeth, beads, coix seeds, and black dried banana seeds (*yufi*) – complete the Maisin dancer's outfit. Like the skin of the body, shells, especially pearl shells, are rubbed with squeezed coconut to make them shine brilliantly. All Maisin may wear these types of shells and necklaces, just like the armllets made from coconut shell, called *sifi*, and those made from plied string, called *fukè* (arm)-*jodi* (Photo 33). These armllets are used to hold specific shell valuables as well as flowers, fragrant herbs, colourful plumes, and leaves that adorn the body with natural perfumes and colour. But *jodi* are attached not only to the (upper) arm; they are also attached below the knees (called *kè-jodi*), while larger and more broadly shaped *jodi* are used by women to keep their *embobi* fastened around their waists.

Finally, string bags (*yati*) and decorated tapa loincloths complete one's outfit. Both men and women wear their personal *yati*, in which they keep at least their lime containers, lime sticks, and betel nut, as well as some other personal possessions. The *yati* is hung on the shoulder, in contrast to the big string bags that are carried suspended on the forehead, and often adds another splash of colour to the dancer's outfit.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, despite all these ornaments, one of the most elementary and conspicuous elements of Maisin ritual and festival dress remains the tapa loincloths – especially since these cloths clearly display the most significant 'culturally coded meaning' that is inherent in almost all of the previously described ornaments: clan and also gender identity.

9 The *Rabu-rabu* is often used as an interval between various types of dances and songs.

10 According to one informant, Kawo clans wear these *yati* when attending for example a meeting, while Sabu clans take their spears (see also Chapter 5).



Photo 33. Decorating the body with *tapa*, armlets, white granular shells (*gorago*), and black dried banana seeds (*yufi*).

As Maisin favour the colours to be as bright as possible, they often wear freshly painted and therefore new *embobi* and *koefi*. In this way, the lively red and black-framed designs contrast more strongly with the white *tapa* and the dark brown skin of its wearer, immediately catching the eye of the gazer. Today some men wear short grass skirts (*nua roti*), made of either real grass or plastic, on top of their *koefi*. These skirts, which were probably appropriated from tribes living in the nearby mountains, add dynamism to their movements but also prevent the audience from catching a glimpse of the men's genitals, which are not very well covered by the *koefi*. The rather loosely hanging *koefi* contrasts with the rather tightly wrapped *embobi* and reveals the difference in degree to which male and female bodily parts have to be covered; further, this difference in the two types of loincloths also defines the degree to which male and female bodies may move.

### *Clan decorations*

As we have seen in the previous section, the decorations Maisin may use are manifold. Nevertheless, they are distinctive in their use and significance. As already emphasised, these objects contain culturally significant meanings. In addition to

common decorations, which may be used by all people and clans, some types of ornaments are the prerogative of particular clans and even of specific clan members. As such, they differentiate and consequently identify persons and groups. These clan- and gender-related decorations concern feather headdresses, feathers, shell necklaces, armllets, facial paintings, and of course tapa loincloths.

Dressed up in their regalia, people express their clan ties, the type of clan, their senior or junior position, as well as their male or female gender. All clans have their own *evovi* drawn on tapa. Moreover the amounts and types of decorations (*nomo*) attributed to Kawo and Sabu clans differ. The Kawo clan members are decorated most elaborately. They are entitled to wear large feather headdresses, while Sabu clan members have to settle with single feathers or plumes in their hair and are allowed to only dress themselves up 'halfway'. According to some informants, Kawo clans have actually given particular *nomo*, including tapa designs, to the Sabu clans to decorate themselves.

The Mon and Virani clans living in, respectively, Koniasi and Sinipara claim the right to wear chicken feathers. The two clans are considered one as they travelled together. Their one-ness, or rather complementary character, is expressed during meetings wherein Mon (which means knowledge or wisdom) and Virani (which means speaker) act together. As one Mon member expressed it, 'Mon thinks and passes the message to Vira(ni), who speaks up in public'. Festivities provide another context in which Mon and Virani come and act together. But whereas Mon are only allowed to wear white chicken feathers, Virani are entitled to wear both white and black ones. The latter would put one pair on their *yati* (personal string bag) and one pair through their nose and clutch a pair between the teeth. As one of the elders of Virani recalled, 'When I put these feathers in my mouth, I cannot eat. So I have to eat before I wear them!'

Visual differentiation between clans and among clan members is likewise expressed through other decorations. For example, specific types or designs of facial paintings are reserved for particular clans. Several clans may use red, white, and/or black dots and stripes to enhance their faces (photo 34). But some clans, like Wo-Tatan living in Sinapa village, are entitled to paint their entire face in two colours: one side black and the other side red. As one of the elders recalled, 'When they paint their faces that way, they were not allowed to eat'. During times of warfare, Virani (Sinipara village) would draw their *evovi*, a kind of net, on the cheeks. These traits are, as Maisin say, '*ari kawo*'; they are his or her clan emblems. Wearing another clan's emblems is prohibited. Violation of this custom or rule (*wo-wawa*) results in clan disputes and sometimes even violence. As one man argued, 'If you use somebody else's *evovi* or *kawo*, you will die!'

Other decorations that are reserved for either Sabu or Kawo clans are specific types of necklaces. In general, those that are used by sasabu (members of Sabu clans) are necklaces or decorations made with *gagamu* (see cover photograph), dried fruits used as rattles. In contrast, the approximately ten-centimetre-big white egg cowry shells (*five*) are claimed by Kawo clans. In the past, after Kawo girls had received their facial tattoo, these *five* were attached to their upper arms, elbows, and wrists. Today this custom (*wo-wawa*) is no longer practiced, but Kawo clans are still seen



Photo 34. John Christenson from Waigo clan applying facial paint.

to use white egg cowry shells (*five*) in their traditional dress. Although all Kawo clans may use *five*, differences occur with regard to the amount of *five* used and the way they are worn. For example, Waigo clan is entitled to wear one *five* attached on each arm, which must be tied around the elbows. In contrast, a Rerebin *iyon* living in Uiaku wears armlets with a pair of these white egg cowry shells on both arms and knees. The Virani clan living in Sinipara likewise makes use of these cowry shells. Unlike many other clans, Virani is composed of *rora* (older), *nuka* (middle), and *tere* (younger) branches. Although this three-fold division is expressed during the sharing of food – whereby *rora* is served first followed by *nuka* and then *tere* – *nuka* and *tere* are not visually distinct from each other. Whereas Virani *rora* is entitled to wear white egg cowry shells around the ankle, knee, wrist, elbow, and upper-arm, Virani *nuka* and *tere* wear their *five* around the wrist only.

Finally, differentiation in sex may equally be stressed through the amount and position of white egg cowry shells. For example, Rerebin men are entitled to wear pairs of *five* at the elbow and around the knees, while Rerebin women may wear them on their upper arms as well. So although the amount of cowry shells one is entitled to wear is different for all clans, within clans differentiation exist on the basis of seniority (*rora-tere*) and gender.

In short, people may choose from a complex set of regalia to decorate their body. While some decorations may be worn by all Maisin and are clearly meant to enhance one's attractiveness, other attributes convey additional messages when applied on the body, making statements about clan and also gender identity. So how are these decorations used, or rather, how are decorated bodies performed?

## Performing the body, performing identity

Especially in Melanesia, the skin is covered up and altered with material attributes. Bodies are oiled; painted; decorated with flowers, feathers, necklaces, and other items; tattooed, and pierced (Gell 1993; O'Hanlon 1989; Strathern and Strathern 1971; Sillitoe 1988). Maisin people likewise spend considerable efforts to decorate their bodies. In addition to various ornaments, they take special care of their dress, designed tapa loincloths. In the past but also today, the body is decorated with tapa and other attributes. In these contexts the decorated body reveals ideas about bodily attractiveness, but more importantly it also conveys notions about the roles of men and women and how groups of people and individuals perform these '*personnages*' (Mauss 1996).

In order to be able to understand how culture moulds bodies into order and how they are used as objects of processes of domination and normalisation, performances have to be analysed. In performances, 'body politics' come to the fore, revealing how among Maisin female bodies can represent various identities, thereby revealing a hidden dialogue between men and women. As Kathy Davis (1997: 15) has argued, however, I also take experiences and practices or 'embodiments' into account. As a result, 'the relationship between the symbolic and the material, between representations [performances] of the body and embodiments as experience or social practice' (ibid.) is tackled. In this way, it becomes clear how especially the female body 'is the object of processes of domination and control as well as the site of women's subversive practices and struggles for self-determination and empowerment' (Davis 1997: 7). The main question is therefore how Maisin but especially female bodies are decorated with things like tapa skirts and how these decorated bodies are performed in church festivals. The efficacy of the various decorations, the practice of applying them, and the performance itself are thereby analysed.

According to Anthony Giddens (1991), in our era the body has become just another feature of a person's 'identity project' (Davis 1997: 2). But this emphasis on self-expression through one's own body disregards how the individual body is moulded into social order by processes of socialisation. As we have seen in Chapter 1, these cultural and social processes determine to a large extent the construction and movement of individual bodies. As a result, 'the body surface has been called "the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted"' (Hendrickson 1996: 2). Likewise, Mary Douglas (1970) maintained that the social body teaches the individual body and consequently determines social behaviour. It is, however, not only 'culture' that creates. Individuals appropriate cultural prescriptions and either unconsciously or consciously create themselves through or against dominant discourses and 'others' with which they are intertwined. In these appropriations and enactments, representations of bodily difference across material and narrative discourses, which are used to sustain a certain social order such as male domination, are reproduced and produced by the individual and his or her body. Thus, although performativities of the body/subject are constrained, there are possibilities for proliferation and subversion from within those constraints

(Salih 2002: 50). This becomes clear when analysing how Maisin men and women perform their bodies in the contexts of church feasts.

### *Moving identities*

Men and women move their bodies differently. This is visible in daily life, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, but during dances this difference in movement is especially emphasised. Maisin men dance dynamically, moving their upper bodies back and forth and bending their knees to gain even more swing (Photo 35). In contrast, women keep their upper bodies still, moving only their feet and placing the weight of their bodies from one leg to another in a very subtle way (Photo 36). Thus while men may vigorously express themselves, moving their bodies in dynamic ways, women's body movements are literally contained by their *embobi*. These gendered ways of movement are expressed in the ways Maisin dances are structured.

Usually a group of Maisin dancers is split into two male groups, forming two rows of paired dancers facing each other. A front pair of dancers, called *muni*, guides each row. Thus each subgroup has one pair of *muni* dancing towards and away from the other subgroup's *muni*. Several pairs of dancers follow each pair of *muni*. The last couple in this line of dancers is referred to as *sota*. These dancers form the end of the dancing lines and are the ones who start a new song (*jaru*) and dance. Both *muni* and *sota* dancers have to be very experienced since they determine the direction and to a large extent the mood of the dance. While every able-bodied Maisin man can join the dance, only specific clans (often Kawo clans) may fulfil the positions of both *muni* and *sota*. In addition, these men are usually clan elders.

In contrast to men, who dance very close to their male dance partners (called *toma*), women dance paired at the back and along the sides of the male dancers, thereby having to keep contact with their female dance partners (called *koi*) on the other side of the male dancers. Thus, during most dances Maisin men and women do not so much dance together but rather with their same-sex dance partners.

There are, however, also types of dances that are structured differently and allow much more interaction between the sexes. For example, during *beriko* the male and female dancers line up and dance in a circle. During this dance, the dancers try to pinch each other in order to break the victim's concentration and consequently his or her rhythmic movement. In addition, dancing almost always involves interaction with the spectators, who may shout to and even pinch the dancers in order to get them distracted. The trick is not to get distracted, of course, and to maintain the rhythm of the music and the dance. Seen in the light of past clan feasts, this testing of the dancers' composure may actually symbolise the testing of the ancestors who are embodied by wearing clan regalia. As is shown by Gneccchi-Ruscone (1997: 27), the dancers of the *vasái* thrived on the strength provided by ancestral powers, so any sign of weakness thus exposed a lack of ancestral support, 'making them targets of ridicule'. Although dancers will certainly avoid displaying any signs of weakness as this affects their prestige and gift to the feast, this 'tradition' has another effect as



Photo 35. Two male dancers at a Church festival in Sefoa (2001) acting as *muni* and thereby leading a row of paired dancers following them.

well. The often playful interactions between bystanders and dancers also facilitates intimate contacts between male and female dancers and audience.

Another important dance, which in particular shows Maisin warriorhood, is the so-called *rabu-rabu*. Male dancers slowly commence a heavy and threatening sound by beating their drums. Having the large *karu* shell in their mouths, they will therefore not sing.<sup>11</sup> The beat is slowly increased while the dancers, paired in two groups, move towards and away from each other, bending their upper bodies and knees in a dynamic and somewhat fearful back-and-forth movement, which causes the feathers of the opposing leading men to almost touch each other.

11 Maisin discern at least ten types of songs (*yaru*): sago and garden songs (*didjibo*); moonlight songs (*manguvia*); love songs (*marawawe yaru: foroga*); war songs (*vassaa ari yaru: bebe*); clan-specific songs (*agariri*, only sung by Mainum-Korereki); mourning songs (*sora ari yaru*, sung by both men and women); melancholic or crying songs (called *dorigo*); ghost or spirit songs (*sevaseva*); songs that deal with the giving or taking of food (*siafa*); and finally the so-called *yaru moturan* (real songs). This latter type of song can be divided into at least seven subtypes (*korokoro*, *danedane*, *siremu*, *babaro*, *kairawuri*, *burore*, and *sisiforo*), each of which may again entail different songs. Differentiation in songs is obtained not only through classification or naming but especially by variations in rhythm, words, and tune.



*Photo 36. Two Sibon women dancing at a church festival in Sefoa (2001). The woman to the left shakes a bamboo container filled with seeds (called wauw). The woman in front of her moves a stick decorated with fringes to the beat of the drums. They both wear their husbands' tapa clan designs.*

During this dance, the beat and intensity of the dance movements slowly build up tension until the end of the dance and its drumbeat is achieved. The *karu* shell contributes significantly to this dance, both in its effect of preventing singing – the *rabu-rabu* is the only Maisin dance and piece of music that is solely instrumental – as well in its visual efficacy of expressing threat. In fact, it strongly resembles the ancestors when preparing for war. The earlier described relationship between feast and warfare is therefore not only expressed in exchange relationships but also through the display and use of particular regalia and dances.

In the past, people made sure to adjust their tapa outfit to the particular dance and song that was to be performed. Some dances and songs would call for red-only designs (called *wamutu*), while other types would call for loincloths with black designs (called *gadun*). During my fieldwork, I only witnessed Maisin dancing in tapa cloths designed with red, black-framed clan or imaginary designs. This does not imply that the songs and dances that call for specific colours of tapa are no longer performed. According to a senior male informant, Maisin performed one of these dances when the boat of the environmental movement Greenpeace, the *Rainbow Warrior*, anchored in Collingwood Bay (see Chapter 8). But according

to this man, the Maisin dancers did not perform it correctly as they did not wear the appropriate coloured tapa cloth. Another informant replied, 'It is because we are not singing these songs, and the young ones are not interested in them'. Thus it seems that the correlation between type of dance/song and tapa cloth is fading, leaving only elderly people to comment upon this relationship.

Thus, although these dances are performed within a Christian setting, they express more than people's affiliation with the Anglican Church. The dances enact both time and movement of the ancestors, and the way male and female bodies move and 'play' suggests that notions of gender behaviour, aesthetics, and sexuality are embodied in these performances as well.

### *Individual versus collective identities*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, ancestral descent and clan affiliation is most conspicuously displayed or performed through tapa cloths decorated with clan designs. Likewise, as described in the beginning of this chapter, various elements of a dancer's 'costume' may equally express affiliation with a particular clan, at the same time expressing a person's gender. So both clan and sex determine to a large extent the type and amount of ornaments an individual may use to adorn his or her body. These rules on what, where, and when to wear certain decorations are very strict, and as already discussed in Chapter 5, people are very careful not to use ornaments belonging to other clans unless there are mythic histories that testify to and legitimate their use. As a result, it seems that when Maisin engage in dancing, they in particular express their clan and gender identity.

According to Marilyn Strathern, dance is not an individual activity but a group affair. As a consequence, 'decorations are never seen in isolation'. Moreover, one can consider a group of dancers as a sort of 'clan portrait' (Strathern 1999: 38-40). Since Maisin distinguish themselves from other church festival visitors through their tapa dress and dance, these performances can even be regarded as a tribal portrait.

Thus the identities expressed during church festivities are in particular collective or group identities, despite the fact that each individual has adorned his or her body according to individual taste. Thus it seems that individual identity or the self is actually masked by gender and clan identifications. By wearing either general or clan-specific regalia, however, Maisin do not disguise their identity (see also Strathern 1979: 243). By decorating themselves, Maisin cover up their individual bodies, sometimes up to the extent that the individual is hardly recognisable anymore. But Maisin do not pretend to be someone else, at least not during church festivals. Maisin decorations reveal people's otherwise 'disguised' clan identity, but unlike the decorations described by Strathern (1979: 254), Maisin ornaments are not regarded as qualities or markers of success and wealth. Maisin decorations, and especially clan regalia can be regarded as elements of an individual's social character or *personnage*. The clan regalia, which derived from the ancestors, effectively externalise the social identity of the person wearing them. In fact, by wearing these regalia, clan and gender identities become embodied. As a result, the act of self-decoration and also the subsequent performance are 'performative' as well.

This aspect of self-decoration as being related to one's 'self' becomes especially clear when one considers that people can play with these affiliations. All Maisin can to a certain extent choose whether or not they want to display themselves as clan members or not. In case of the first, people can often choose from several regalia, including tapa designs, as most clans have more than one type of clan decorations. In general, however, only one group of Maisin can affiliate themselves with more than one clan. As daughters, sisters, and wives, women have the right to wear either their fathers' or their husbands' clan regalia. Although there is some discussion whether this is actually the case, most informants affirmed that women could wear their fathers' regalia even if they are married into another clan. The fact, however, is that most husbands will raise serious doubts or even prevent their wives wearing other than their own clan regalia. As one husband expressed with regard to his wife wearing her father's tapa *evovi*, 'She is finished with that clan!' As he explained, 'People will look strange if she starts wearing it. She took them off when she married me, and now she is wearing mine'. Other male informants also shared this negative attitude towards their wives wearing their father's clan *evovi*. In most cases, the wives concerned did not object strongly to their husbands' wishes and often also confirmed that by marrying their husbands they were obliged to wear their designs. But in some cases women did resist this norm and sometimes applied more subtle ways of visually marking their relationship with their fathers' and sometimes even their mothers' clans. Instead of wearing the visually dominant tapa clan designs, they use for example less dominant clan markers, such as particular necklaces (see front cover).

So although performativities of body, identity, and self are constrained, there are also possibilities for proliferation and subversion from within those constraints (Salih 2002: 50). In fact, Maisin women can also play with other than clan affiliations. They can show their commitment to the church by wearing an *embobi* designed with the Mother's Union logo (see also Chapter 8). Since only women can join the Mother's Union, and men's religious organisations, such as the Melanesian Brotherhood, do not make use of logos or regalia, only women can show by means of dress their identity as a Mother's Union member. When attending a church festival, women therefore have to decide whether they want to perform themselves as a member of their fathers' and/or husbands' clan, or as a member of this religious organisation. Within a context of a local church festival, members of the Mother's Union often wear these tapa loincloths with Mother's Union logo designs painted on them. When visiting a church festival in one of the non-Maisin villages, however, women usually wear their husband's clan designs, thereby not only performing their identity as a particular clan member but moreover their tribal identity as being Maisin. Thus, in contrast to men's bodies, women's bodies can actually be perceived of as a site on which various identities are inscribed as well as negotiated by both others and women themselves.

## The female body as a male display

This section has shown how the body is visually and materially transformed from one identity into another through means of specific clothing and adornments. As demonstrated, decorations, the efficacy of being decorated by others or of decorating oneself, and also the performance have various meanings, expressing various identities and sentiments.

The importance of body decoration becomes clear when considering the fact that firstborn children are *not* allowed to decorate their bodies. In this context, decorations are related to the formation of personhood. In other life-cycle rituals, the removal or application of body decorations respectively embodies a removal or transition of social identity. In contexts of self-decoration, the efficacies of the decorations lie not so much in the formation of social identity but rather in the externalisation of this social identity, and to a certain extent the individual self. Thus rituals in which the body is decorated by the collective actually replicate an image of social personhood, while self-decoration externalises and identifies the image of one's ancestor and one's gendered self. Moreover, the decorated body is not only constructed semantically. Due to the performance, these social identities are also embodied. They are inscribed in material ways on the body surface but simultaneously internally and physically re-enacted upon by the self.

Thus decorations of the body seem to be crucial in constructions of identity. Some scholars have argued that decorations are actually communicating to the members of the culture from which they originate (Bowden 1984; Sillitoe 1988: 299). Maisin decorations communicate values of clan and gender identity as well as notions of sexual attractiveness and health. But they also do more than communicate or mediate; decorations define and establish notions of personhood, which are acted and performed within specific sociocultural settings. As a result, they do not represent identity. Body decorations are not symbols that stand for something else; they are manifestations of cultural values, ancestral connections, and specific identities. These manifestations are not static but inherently dynamic.

Especially with regard to life-cycle rituals, we have seen that bodies and personhood are ceremonially reworked and redefined. In these contexts of 'decorating the other', the body figures as a social body on which social identity is projected. The development of a person depends upon the relationships in which and through which the individual is constituted. Clan identity, which is actually negotiated during life-cycle rituals and in particular during the exchanges surrounding these rites (see Chapter 7), is especially important among Maisin. But gender identity is also part of the development and construction of an individual's social person.

Puberty rites visualise the transfer of identity the body/subject undergoes, both with regard to individual status/age and clan identity. The latter transfer is symbolised by the adorning of the body with clan *tapa* belonging to the child's father's clan. In addition, facial tattoos, given to girls up until the 1990s, symbolised their sex, their social age, and their clan identity. Moreover, this initiation, just like that of a first-born child, entails the symbolic transfer from mother's group to

father's group. But whereas boys in general stay in their father's clan from their birth onwards, girls eventually transfer to another clan identity. From her marriage onwards, a woman is expected to work hard for her extended family, including her family-in-law. Although not all couples marry in customary ways, and as a consequence brides may not visually engage in the bodily transition from their father's to their husband's group, women do transcend from one clan identity to another. As a matter of fact, both her body and labour belong to her husband's clan, even after his death. Mourning rituals provide the final contexts in which Maisin bodies are ritually embodied with transitional meanings by addressing the body surface. These rites exemplify the interdependence of the materiality of the body and external materialities or artefacts to communicate cultural and social meanings. Moreover, it is especially the female body that is inscribed with self-mutilation, neglect, physical work, and particular decorations.

In contexts of self-decoration, we have seen that, in addition to general notions of wellbeing and attractiveness, the efficacy of decorations lies in the concept of identification. Self-decoration entails the externalisation of identities, which through the performance are once again internalised or embodied. Decorations not only enhance the beauty of the body; they simultaneously define the way it is able and supposed to move. Consequently, identity and especially gender identity are closely connected with how the body surface is materially dealt with. In the context of church festivals, self-decoration expresses religious identity. But the dances, songs, and body decorations equally express and construct gender, personhood, clan, and tribal identities as well as affiliations between groups that share a similar migration history. Bodies actually move between past and present as ancestors, migration partners, and church are commemorated. In this context, movements of bodies and objects not only perform culture; they also enact various identities as well as (historical) events.

Thus objects such as clothing, jewellery, tattoos, etc. script the body with ideas about sexuality, age, status, and ethnicity, thereby effectively engendering the body. As a result, they can be regarded as 'materialised gender definitions' (Oudshoorn 1996: 10). Clothing, like *tapa*, is one of the most visual and dominant materialised gender codes (Hendrickson 1996; Barnes and Eicher 1992a, 1992b; Weiner and Schneider 1989). As we have seen, wearing *embobi* is related to norms and values about female sexuality, about how women should behave, and how they should physically move. It is linked with clan identity and with the life stage and identity of the girl or woman who is wearing a particular *embobi*. Ornaments such as earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, and women's tattoos similarly reflect specific identities. Although both male and female bodies are decorated with these 'materialised gender definitions', women's bodies in particular are physically inscribed with various and sometimes seemingly conflicting identities.

In contexts of church festivities and other contexts of self-decoration, women's bodies may be actively deployed to express affiliations with their respective father, husband, or even both clans, as well as their affiliation with and dedication to the church. While this dual clan affiliation is made visible in life-cycle rituals

but at the same time dismissed, festivities provide an arena for some women to publicly display both identities or to show their preference for either one of them, or their affiliation with the Mother's Union. What becomes clear is that attitudes and practices towards either male or female bodies are different. To me it seems that the various symbolic notions and decorating practices regarding, in particular, the female body express a dialogue between men and women, or rather between male and female forms of identity and affiliation.

During daily life, in life-cycle rituals, in past warfare, and today during church festivities the female body figures as a social body on which values and identity are ascribed by both others and self. Thus, it is not so much the body surface in general, which may function as 'the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted' (Hendrickson 1996: 2), but more specifically the female body that figures as this symbolic stage on which the gendered 'dialogics of culture' (Lipset 1997) take place. The female body is inscribed most vividly with ideas about social aging, gender, sexuality, clan identity, and notions of proper conduct. Women not only appropriate these cultural prescriptions; they may also try to change them. The possibility for girls to refuse being tattooed or for women to, up to a certain extent, choose their affiliation towards clans and organisations exemplifies how women's subversion and proliferation of *their* identities from within cultural constraints may work. Thus, as Turner argued (1986: 22), performances not only reflect and express specific cultural configurations such as dominant gender relations. They are reciprocal and reflective practices, enabling active agencies of change.

In addition, the performance of church festivals reveals another proliferation of women's agency as well as the changing role of the Anglican Church in Maisin communities. As was already observed by Barker (1985: 530) in the early 1980s, the concept and attitude of respect that structures and maintains the *iyon* and *IYON* is, as he puts it, 'drastically weakened'. As I likewise experienced in 2001 – 2002 and 2004, the authority of senior kinsmen is being broken down. The shouting and cursing of young men against clan elders during meetings and the making of their own decisions and rules without adhering to clan structures or wishes and advice from their elders exemplify this. According to Barker (*ibid.*), the unity and social order can only be maintained through an appeal to the values of *marawa-wawe*, which, as he suggests, is in particular embodied in Maisin Christianity through women's church activities (1985: 350-351; Chapter 8). Where in the recent past the Anglican Church may have effectively functioned as a symbol of unity, today its coherence in Maisin religious thought and activities is weakened by the growing emergence of other religions, such as Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, and Pentecostalism. Several informants expressed concern about the growing importance of these religions in Maisin societies. Moreover, they attributed the dissolving cooperation and unity among Maisin people and clans to the weakening position of the Anglican Church within the local villages. The movement of Seventh Day Adventist adherents outside villages in order to construct their own clusters of hamlets and their refusal to participate in dances and festivities exemplify how the religious and social unity achieved by the Anglican Church is slowly eroding. In

addition, it seems that the Anglican Church has not brought the social redemption people hoped for. In the next section, the arrival of the first Anglican missionaries among Maisin is discussed followed by how the Anglican Church and MICAD are believed to bring both unity and development by providing markets for tapa.

PART 3

COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL  
APPROPRIATIONS OF TAPA



*Photo 37. Mass in Wanigela church, 2004.*

## Colonial collecting: Dialogues of gender and objects

*Or Manua, – perhaps the greatest transformation of all was Manua. She came to us because Samuel Siru, one of the South Sea Island teachers in Collingwood Bay, wished to marry her. Samuel was stationed at Sinapa, a place where we had made very little impression, but Samuel had won the affection of Manua, and he knew and she knew that he ought not to marry a raw heathen; so when he made arrangements with her people about the marriage he said he wanted the young lady to go to Dogura to be trained and taught, so that she could be baptized before they were married.*

(Newton 1914: 266)<sup>1</sup>

The physical and mental transformation Newton refers to was inscribed in Manua's body during her two-year stay in Dogura. At the centre of the expanding Anglican Mission, she would learn all the female duties involved in missionary housekeeping. When brought back to Sinapa by Samuel, she was no longer the young Manua who had just been initiated into womanhood, visualised by her fresh facial tattoo, her fully decorated body rubbed with coconut, and her new tapa skirt (*ibid.*). Decorations, oil, and tapa cloth are an essential part of Maisin bodily strength and wellbeing, but these attributes of Maisin health and beauty were stripped from Manua's body. In Dogura, as Newton so vividly describes (1914: 266-69), Manua transformed from a frightened, dirty, and smelly heathen girl into Sara, a nice-looking, clean, young Christian woman dressed up in Western dress. As Sara, Manua married Samuel Siru, thereupon living with him among others on the Sinapa mission station. Today their descendants are living in Konyasi, Uiaku, and Wanigela villages.<sup>2</sup>

Newton's description of Sara reveals how her tapa cloth was viewed and subsequently discarded as a dirty and awkward thing and how her necklaces and armlets were gradually removed from her body as her spiritual transformation took place. Ironically, Newton's colleagues and other colonial agents were very much interested in these objects.<sup>3</sup> They eagerly collected tapa and ornaments as 'curios',

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- 1 Henri Newton was head of Dogura Mission Station until he became Bishop of the Anglican Church.
  - 2 Sara's grandson Kingston Imani (Koniiasi) said Manua was sent to Dogura to learn how to be a 'house-girl' for the missionaries. Here she met Samuel. When returning to Sinipara, the two met again and married.
  - 3 The term 'agent' is used to state that people could 'surpass the political boundaries that ruled the encounters', contrary to what Legêne (1998: 35) proclaims. Moreover, Indigenous people also worked as colonial agents.

which provided them with information about the people they tried to pacify, convert, educate, make business with, and most of all understand.

This chapter shows the relationships between colonialism and objects such as tapa. It describes the localised and subjective character of colonialism (see also Thomas 1994) as practised by the British colonial government and the Anglican Mission in particular. I elaborate on this localised process of colonialism by describing how the collecting activities of those who tried to pacify and ‘convert’ the peoples of Collingwood Bay were related to these efforts. This elucidates the importance of both objects and gender in colonial encounters and practices.

### **Colonising and collecting Collingwood Bay: Sir William MacGregor**

In November 1884, the Royal British Navy declared South-eastern New Guinea as a British protectorate. This was done in order to protect Australia from further German expansion as the Germans already had colonised the northern part of New Guinea, naming it Kaiser-Wilhelmsland. In 1888, the protectorate was formally annexed by the British government (MacGregor 1895: 165; Waiko 2001: 57). In order to pacify and incorporate its various inhabitants into the colonial system, William MacGregor was installed as the first administrator of British New Guinea, which soon thereafter was called Papua.<sup>4</sup>

While pleading for the rights of the Papuans and trying to cushion the impact of white civilisation, MacGregor also used threat of force and actual force to spread government authority and peace (Joyce 1971: 106, 134). The gradual civilisation of the Papuans that MacGregor desired could only be achieved if the people recognised the authority of the government. MacGregor realised too well that ‘for the indigenous people the clearest symbol of “government” was himself as governor’ (Joyce 1971: 126). One of the mainstays of MacGregor’s rule as an administrator was the establishment of an administrative system linking Port Moresby, the administrative centre and capital of the British colony, with the rest of Papua (Waiko 2001: 29). During his ‘reign’ as an administrator and subsequently as lieutenant governor, ‘MacGregor explored nearly all the navigable rivers in Papua, crossed the island, and climbed the highest mountain’ (Waiko 2001: 29). His extensive patrols went well beyond the limits of his ability to govern. Nevertheless, such explorations established him as the ‘Big Chief’ of British New Guinea that he envisioned (Joyce 1971: 126, 136). MacGregor and his constables, accompanied by bush policemen who acted as mediators, were often the first foreigners to meet various Papuan tribes, including those living in Collingwood Bay (Waiko 2001: 31).

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4 From 1888 to 1895, Sir William MacGregor (1846 – 1919) acted as administrator. In 1895, he became lieutenant-governor. Two years later he resigned and left New Guinea. He was succeeded by George Ruthven Le Hunte (1852 – 1925), acting as lieutenant-governor between 1899 and 1903 (Murray 1912: 87). In 1910, MacGregor became governor of Queensland, Australia, and remained there until he retired in 1914. He died in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1919.



Photo 38. 'Dressed for a hunt. In olden times they bedecked themselves like this for fighting' (P.J. Money. Courtesy of the Australian Museum, AMS 328, Percy Money Photographs, M2070/1).

### *Governing Collingwood Bay: William MacGregor*

For Maisin people, the formal incorporation into the British colony occurred in 1890. In this year, Collingwood Bay was explored for the first time by the foreign administration when MacGregor visited several Maisin and Wanigela villages in the company of Anglican missionary Alfred MacLaren (Synge 1908: 98). In order to achieve peace and order in regions like Collingwood Bay, MacGregor actively used Christian missions. He divided Papua into several Christian spheres of influence. The northeast coast, including Collingwood Bay, was handed over to the Anglican mission. MacGregor 'advised' the Anglicans about mission sites, trying to create law and order through their missionary work (Wetherell 1977: 24-25). It was MacGregor's view that missions contributed to the pacification of the colony by preventing intertribal war and reducing the frequency of homicide, making the work of magistrate and policemen lighter (MacGregor 1897: 92). In addition, he relied upon missionaries to establish schools and basic healthcare, which the state was not able to provide (Waiko 2001: 34; MacGregor 1897: 92). MacGregor urged the Anglicans to set up a mission station in Collingwood Bay. In this way, the colonial government could depend upon the mission to pacify and educate its fierce inhabitants.

The coastal people of Collingwood Bay had a bad reputation that involved not only killing and raiding other tribes but also opposing white colonial interference. Among others, Maisin had been engaged in fighting with Miniafia tribes and

frequently raided their Kuveri neighbours to the south to blackmail them for pigs and women (ARBNG 1899-1900: 22). In general, as MacGregor (1895: 171) described it, Papuans feared the government forces and the local administrator in particular. Maisin were not too scared, however, to plan an assault on the local missionary and his party or to raid a big trading vessel at Sinapa, which could only be prevented by driving off the Maisin by the use of firearms (Chignell 1913: 107). Moreover, Maisin and Miniafia people were not impressed by colonial authority in their region and planned to combine their strengths to launch an attack. In January 1901, the new resident magistrate, Monckton, led a punitive expedition to Uiaku after learning of this plot to attack his administrative forces. When the government police made several arrests and killed three Maisin men (Monckton 1927: 173; Barker 1987: 73), the Maisin were finally brought under colonial rule, and tribal raiding and fighting seem to have ended. As was reported by patrol officers two years later, colonial life was no longer disrupted by 'serious crimes' conducted by Maisin, although they seem to have 'excelled in small offences' (ARBNG 1903: 33-34).

Peace in the area was not yet established, however, since the Doriri people, living alongside the upper Musa River inland of Collingwood Bay, kept attacking Maisin and Wanigela people and vice versa. Doriri people travelled to the coast on hunting trips, thereby regularly attacking coastal villages and/or people working in the gardens. As a result, Maisin and other tribes lived in constant dread of them and always went out fully armed (Money 1906). In early 1905, this situation changed to a certain extent when Doriri, Maisin, and Wanigela people made peace during a ceremony referred to as 'the breaking of the spears'. Since the peacemaking at Wanigela, Doriri seem to have behaved in a friendly manner towards those tribes that were directly connected with the ceremony. But as Money continued, 'they still consider themselves at liberty to attack other coastal tribes and have been guilty of some murders this year' (ibid.).

In order to keep Doriri, Maisin, and other tribes under colonial rule, leading men were appointed as village chiefs or policemen responsible to the resident magistrate in Tufi (Joyce 1971: 165; Barker 1990: 177). MacGregor (1895: 176) was convinced that the system of patrolling armed constables, magistrates, and local village constables 'stamped out' vendetta and murder and pacified the colony. As a matter of fact, this pacification was also brought about by terror: both the Uiaku and Wanigela log books refer to the effects of the system. When the government boat or police patrols were sighted, many Maisin and Wanigela men would flee into the bush, afraid of physical retaliation. According to the Anglican missionaries in charge, the actions of the native police were often extremely brutal, physically harassing the boys and men they suspected for having committed a crime (Uiaku and Wanigela log books). It seems that the government's efforts of pacification, which included punitive expeditions and the confiscation of Indigenous weapons, were specifically targeted at Papuan men.

## Collecting British New Guinea: Sir William MacGregor

*Unless we know the people we cannot sympathize with them, and unless we in some measure feel with and for them, we can only rule by force.*

(MacGregor 1897: 1)

MacGregor wanted to rule by coercion rather than by force, hence his plea to know the people of Papua. This entailed an extensive exploration of both country and people. By drawing their geographical habitat, they were literally mapped into the British colony and subjected to its rule. By collecting their artefacts, MacGregor tried understanding them, but he also wanted to document their culture before it would be affected and changed by white civilisation. MacGregor's 'thirst for exploration and the pursuit of scientific collections' (Quinnell 2000: 82) seems therefore rather contradictory. His duty as an administrator and governor compelled him to change certain ways of the Papuans, such as headhunting, sorcery, and warfare. By interacting and especially trading with the Papuans, during which he gave items such as iron and cloth, MacGregor contributed to the change in their cultural and material ways. But as a collector he was interested in vanishing items like stone axes and war clubs and wanted to collect as many as possible before it was too late (MacGregor 1897: 88-89). This latter idea, as we will see in the forthcoming sections, structured many other people's collecting practices as well. Since coastal Oro province was somewhat outside of the influence sphere of Port Moresby and had not attracted many collectors yet, MacGregor made an effort to collect as many specimens as possible. This attitude is reflected in the relatively large amount of artefacts from this region among his collection. The largest portion (20 per cent) comes from the northeast coast, which encompasses Collingwood Bay (Quinnell 2000: 88).

As Quinnell (2000: 89) demonstrates, 'MacGregor's collection can be seen as a metaphor for the physical reality of British New Guinea that MacGregor himself was exploring and the embodiment in a political sense of the British New Guinea he was governing'. His way of collecting was influenced by his authoritarian and paternalistic feelings towards the Papuans and, more importantly, his wish to pacify them. He could not but reject collectors who would chase Papuans into the bush to be able to search their houses for 'curios'. In one case, MacGregor even confiscated the collection of an Italian collector who robbed an entire village on the northeast coast in such a way and subsequently returned the villagers' belongings hoping to restore peace with their owners (MacGregor 1897: 97). For MacGregor, relationships with Papuans were obviously more important than their artefacts, and it seems that he would not go to extreme ends to get the desired goods. This ethical sensibility is visible in MacGregor's collection. For example, MacLaren (cited in Synge 1908: 100) mentions the Collingwood Bay people as still having many stone axes and clubs but refusing to part with the latter. In line with this statement, MacGregor's collection encompasses almost 200 stone axes but only two clubs.

In exchange for local artefacts, but also for food like fowls, MacGregor would give tobacco, beads, shirts, and iron, the latter being a very wanted item especially in Collingwood Bay. In addition, he would give Turkey red, a red fabric.<sup>5</sup> But this exchange was not only instigated by the foreign collector; Papuans themselves were very eager to get hold of Western goods. As MacGregor stated (1895: 174), 'the Papua is an excellent trader', and in many cases MacGregor or his fellow traders and collectors were not able to leave until they had emptied all their trade stocks.

Since MacGregor was often the first foreigner to encounter particular tribes, exchanges were important in persuading Papuans to trust the government and for the establishment of peaceful relationships. The distribution of tobacco and Turkey red by MacGregor served as a token of peace and was used to initiate communication. During his first travel into Collingwood Bay, MacGregor decided 'the utmost that could be done during this visit would be to convince the natives that we were friendly towards them, and draw them into communication and show them that Europeans could supply them with articles useful in everyday life' (ARBNG 1890-91: 12). The subsequent exchange of things enabled the establishment of relationships in which reciprocity appeared to be an important concept. As MacGregor (1897: 36) noticed, 'Papuans do not give presents. In the rare cases in which they do so, they expect or ask for more than an equivalent in return'. Both Papuans and the government were therefore bound and forced into this system of reciprocity in which the exchange of things not only facilitated communication but was even more so a prerequisite for interaction.

Two years after his appointment as an administrator, MacGregor started to explore the northeast coast of 'his' colony, collecting both information and things from the people he encountered. Between 1890 and 1895, he would visit Collingwood Bay at least five times. At this time, many villages that are known today did not yet exist or were located more inland. The Maisin villages that were situated on the shores of Collingwood Bay and therefore easily accessible for MacGregor's explorations were Sinapa, Uiaku, and Iuwayu (Chignell 1913: 90).

In 1890, MacGregor visited Collingwood Bay and the Maisin villages of Sinapa and Uiaku in company of missionary Albert MacLaren (Synge 1908: 98), who acted as his secretary. As they were the first white men travelling into Collingwood Bay, both colonists and Papuans were sometimes startled by each other's customs. The distribution and exchange of goods and food seems to have structured the encounters, and MacGregor managed to collect various artefacts that were acquired by the Queensland Museum authorities in October 1892.<sup>6</sup> The majority

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5 Turkey red fabric and yarn were exported from Britain all over the world. In the eighteenth century, a Frenchman who had discovered it in Turkey brought the dyeing technique to Europe and subsequently Britain. From 1850 until 1920, British Turkey red dominated the world market. It was made obsolete by the introduction of new synthetic dyes that were cheaper to use (Lowengard 2008).

6 MacGregor's collection was acquired by the Queensland Museum in Brisbane, but sections of the collection were sent to the Australian Museum in Sydney and the Museum of Victoria in Melbourne. After Papua New Guinea received its independence in 1975, part of the Brisbane collection was repatriated to the National Museum and Art gallery of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. MacGregor's personal collection was shipped to Scotland and is currently housed in the Marischal Museum at the University of Aberdeen.

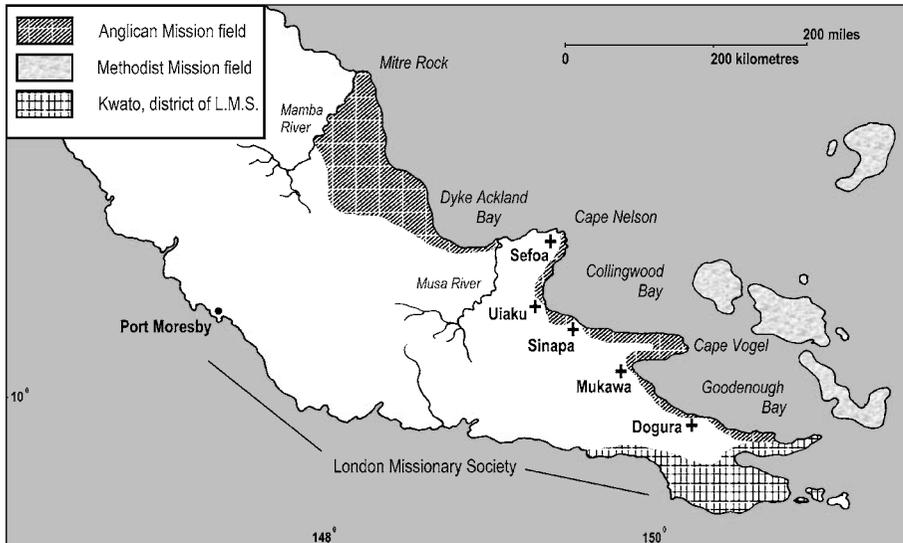
of these Collingwood Bay artefacts consist of adzes, of which a few specimens are specifically attributed to 'Mysina' or Maisin. Other Collingwood Bay artefacts acquired by the Queensland Museum were string bags, lime spatulas, a battle charm, and ornaments such as necklaces and earrings. It is not known if Macgregor collected tapa during this trip as, in contrast to other types of objects, Collingwood Bay tapa was acquired by the Queensland museum only after MacGregor's last travel into Collingwood Bay.

Three years after his first visit, MacGregor re-explored Collingwood Bay but this time in the company of MacLaren's successor, Copland King. In September 1893, the latter joined MacGregor for a fortnight's exploration trip along the coast as far as the Mambare River near the German border (Chignell 1913: 45; Tomlin 1951: 42). Some six months later, MacGregor headed northeast again. During this exploration trip he visited previously unexplored areas and made his first trip onto the Musa River from 3 to 10 April 1894. MacGregor was rather enthusiastic in his description of Musa people and especially their tapa cloth:

*The natives were all friendly as we descended the river and were anxious to trade with us. On the Musa the people excel in making native cloth, many specimens of which were obtained for the public collection, some with very tasteful designs* (ARBNG 1893-1894 Appendix F: 35-36).

His excitement is demonstrated by the large number of pieces he collected. In only a few days, MacGregor purchased a total of 63 pieces of barkcloth in lower Musa River, including two pieces that are registered as being collected along the Musa River. This would be the largest colonial barkcloth collection made among the Musa people as well as in coastal Oro province more generally. The museum authorities acquired these pieces of barkcloth in 1896.

From August till September 1895 (Chignell 1913: 89), MacGregor would make one of his last travels into Collingwood Bay. As before, he headed for Musa and in particular the Moni River Valley, north of Dycke Ackland Bay. Once again, MacGregor was attracted to local cloth as he managed to collect 22 pieces of decorated barkcloth – a rather large amount given he only spent a few days in this area, especially if one compares this with the numbers of cloth collected in Collingwood Bay. Although MacGregor visited Collingwood Bay more often than the Musa and Moni Rivers, he only collected eight pieces of decorated barkcloth, which were acquired by the museum in 1897. It therefore seems that although north-eastern artefacts dominate MacGregor's collection, barkcloth from Collingwood Bay is much less represented. In contrast, the missionaries stationed in Collingwood Bay collected larger amounts of tapa.



Map 3. Mission fields on the south and northeast coast of British New Guinea (after Wetherell 1977: 331). The Kwato district was part of the London Missionary Society (LMS).

### The Anglican mission: missionisation through exchange<sup>7</sup>

In 1890, the first missionary of the Church of England in New Guinea, Alfred MacLaren, accompanied MacGregor on his first trip into Collingwood Bay (MacGregor 1908: xi; Syngé 1908: 98). During this trip, MacLaren was not only introduced to the inhabitants of British New Guinea but also to the area of Christianisation that MacGregor had appointed for the Church of England. This would be the northeast coast of Papua, running from Cape Ducie in Milne Bay to Mitre Rock near the German boundary. The Anglicans divided this coastline into three divisions and areas of extension, of which the second division ran from Cape Vogel to Cape Nelson, this being Collingwood Bay (Map 3).

MacGregor advised that the Anglican Mission station would be most suitable in Dogura, a flattened hilltop site in Goodenough Bay, from which the northeast coast could be tackled. But soon after the first buildings were completed, MacLaren died from fever. And it was Copland King who became the first missionary to be put in charge of this district, trying to continue the work of MacLaren and extend the influence of the Anglican Church along the northeast coast. In 1892, almost a year after MacLaren's death, Copland King started as head of the mission in Dogura (Chignell 1913: 34-35; Tomlin 1951: 37). He made several expeditions, trying to implement law and order by preventing raids in the nearby area. In 1893 and 1895, he made two exploratory trips along the northeast coast, visiting among other places Collingwood Bay.

7 John Barker (1984, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993) has made extensive analyses of the impact of the Anglican mission in Collingwood Bay, and upon the Maisin in particular, by focusing on the interactions and dialogues that took place between missionaries and Maisin. This chapter does not seek to replicate this work but instead focuses on the contexts and motives of colonial collecting activities.

During these trips, King, who might have been encouraged by MacGregor's collecting activities (see also Quinnell 2000: 84), exchanged Western goods for Indigenous artefacts from Maisin and other Collingwood Bay people. As King experienced it, the exchange of things was a prerequisite for establishing relationships with the Papuans. In July 1895, King wrote:

*It was an adventurous and exciting trip. We examined the coast carefully, and landed wherever we could find villages. At Uiaku the excitement of the natives was intense. They waded into the water to meet the dinghy, and kept up a continuous roar of greeting. My boys, who landed with me, thought their time had come; but the natives were only shouting vigorously for iron, in the form of plane irons of which I had taken care to bring a good stock; and when they got me on shore they would not let me off again until I had exhausted the trade bag (Chignell 1913: 90-91).*

In Wanigela, King experienced a similar desire for iron and trade. When returning to Wanigela on his way back from Cape Nelson, King was not even allowed into the stockaded village because he had no iron to trade (Chignell 1913: 91). 'As the Wanigela men told him, a man without trade was no better than a dead man' (Wetherell 1977: 32).

In October 1896, King visited Collingwood Bay once more, this time to explore the site MacGregor had chosen for the next Anglican mission station, Sinapa village. During this visit, King and his colleague Clark met the elaborately dressed chief Wanigera. The missionary party and Maisin people engaged in exchanges, but Wanigera left the trading to his followers since he considered it beneath his dignity 'to trade himself' (Clark cited in Chignell 1913: 94-95). Subsequently the party visited Uiaku, much to the pleasure of chief Wanigera, where they again traded with the local Maisin people, spending quite some time buying 'curios' (Clark cited in Chignell 1913: 96).<sup>8</sup>

Although King appeared to be satisfied with the spot chosen in Sinapa, it would take two more years before the actual building started. In order to get funding for the Collingwood Bay extension, King had to go to Australia to collect money. The results were very poor, but since the Roman Catholic missionaries equally fancied Collingwood Bay and MacGregor again requested information on the church's proceedings, the Anglicans, although having few financial resources, were urged to make haste with their extension. In 1897, King travelled to Sinapa, but he declined this new mission post only a few days after his arrival. He was succeeded by Wilfred H. Abbot (Chignell 1913: 99), a high-spirited and somewhat extravagant missionary who had graduated from Oxford. Having arrived in Papua just a few months earlier together with the new bishop, Stone-Wigg (Tomlin 1951: 50; Wetherell 1977: 67), Abbot became the first missionary to stay in Collingwood Bay.

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8 It is not known what kind of curios Clark managed to obtain in exchange for iron, beads, and items like a looking-glass, nor is it clear what happened to the artefacts that King and Clark collected.

### *Wilfred Abbot (1898 – 1901)*

When Abbot travelled from Dogura to Sinapa to continue his predecessor's work, things were not as Abbot had expected. Abbot found the mission house far from finished; only the pole holes had been dug. The earlier party, who was supposed to have built the mission house, suffered from fever, ulcers, and depression due to the unhealthy and gloomy circumstances. It appeared to be impossible to build a house in Sinapa because the soil was too swampy. And the reluctance of the local people to help the laymen contributed to the sphere of desolation and misery.

Abbot immediately took charge of the situation, and of the Sinapa villagers. Despite the fact that all holes were filled with water and the foundations felt like mud instead of sand, Abbot persisted in getting the mission house built, arguing that 'Sir William MacGregor had chosen the site for us, and he must be right' (Abbot cited in Chignell 1913: 103). By promising a Sinapa chief a nice present 'if he made the people do what they were told', Abbot obtained local labourers. And by shouting at the workers in the few Maisin words he had picked up, he kept them at work. According to Abbot, this shouting was exhausting for himself in particular. But he applied even more forceful tactics to get Maisin to attend service on a Sunday afternoon, which would be their third Christian service after their introduction by Copland King one year earlier.

After literally having driven the Sinapa people into 'church', Abbot performed a service in his surplice and his 'gaudy Oxford hood', which according to Abbot (cited in Chignell 1913: 105) gave a magical effect. 'They probably thought I was an extra special wizard, and a very subdued "sh-sh-sh" went through the crowd' (ibid.). The Sinapa people did have a few previous brief encounters with white people but were now faced with a man who compelled them into exhausting, day-filling labour and strange rituals. Although Abbot is described as an unconventional man whose eccentricities appealed to the laughter-loving side of the local people (Tomlin 1951: 50), the Maisin people were not very charmed by 'Mad Abbot' (Wetherell 1977: 68), as he was described later by his fellow colleagues. Sometime after Abbot had left Collingwood Bay, Maisin confessed to Abbot's successor P.J. Money that they had been on the verge of killing the mission party in Sinapa. Luckily for Abbot and his team, an Uiaku war leader averted the planned ambush at the last moment by refusing to give the signal for his men to attack (Barker 1987: 72). As Barker suggests, this Uiaku chief was probably chief Wanigera, an elaborately decorated man with whom Copland King had made friends one year earlier.

Despite Abbot's confidence in Sinapa and the efforts of the local people in building Abbot's mission house, it proved to be impossible. Consequently, Bishop Stone-Wigg decided to establish a station at Wanigela (Chignell 1913: 106). Initially, the Uiaku chief Wanigera invited the missionaries to set up a station at Uiaku. But because the other men of his tribe objected, the missionaries decided to move to Wanigela instead (Chignell 1913: 107).<sup>9</sup> Thus forced by both nature

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9 Soon after, Doriri raided Uiaku and killed fifteen people, including the mission-favouring chief Wanigera.

and Maisin people, it was in non-Maisin territory that the first mission station of Collingwood Bay was built.

From 1898 till 1900, Abbot 'ruled' Wanigela. Continuing his Sinapa regime of 'clearing grounds' and 'managing' people by threatening with verbal and physical power, Abbot got 'the best out of the native labourers while the Mission Station at Wanigela was being built' (Tomlin 1951: 50-51). Assisted by South Sea Islander James Nogar, he built a church and a school, the latter of which was attended by young male boarders who stayed at the mission station and by village boys, but which was soon made compulsory for all boys and night. Children were instructed in the morning, after which the boarders were put to work on the station, and their fathers, after having done their hunting and fishing, were instructed in the evening (Chignell 1913: 110; Wetherell 1977: 107).

It seemed that Nogar and Abbot competed with each other regarding the vigorous handling of the Wanigela people (Wetherell 1977: 107). Their influence in local village life was clearly felt by some of the arrangements and rules Abbot introduced. The village layout was changed from traditional patterns into rows of houses, and a crude form of currency was introduced (Barker 1987: 72). Furthermore, churchgoing was made compulsory for the men, and adultery was prohibited (Wetherell 1971: 67). Abbot highly valued paternal ethics, sexual morality, and celibacy. He punished those who had 'fallen into sin', but he also tried to protect the local girls from being abused by both South Sea Islanders and white men, including those affiliated with the government station at Tufi (Wetherell 1977: 246-50).

Abbot's regime ended in December 1900 when he resigned after getting into trouble with the bishop. Abbot was blamed for harassing James Nogar after suspecting him of having violated his state of celibacy, which was denied by the latter (Nogar 1901), and he was also blamed for ordering a large quantity of rum as well as trade goods (including axes and metal) from the Burns Philp merchants in Samarai (Anglican archives box 20, file 1; see also Wetherell 1977: 67, 109). Abbot felt the bishop had misinterpreted his actions and the Burns Philp order, as he intended to use the liquor as a tonic only, and the goods were meant for trade with the local people (Abbott c1901). Abbot did not leave Papua New Guinea empty-handed. When he returned to London, he brought a small collection of Collingwood Bay artefacts, including tapa, which he sold to the British Museum.

### Abbot's collection

Under Abbot's rule, an Anglican trade network was established facilitating the trade and circulation of ethnographic artefacts, which, of course, meant an extra income for the confederates involved. It appears that specifically James Nogar, an energetic, determined, and dedicated teacher who lived in Wanigela from 1898 till 1906, was involved with the collecting and selling of 'curios'. Nogar spread not only the Gospel but also local artefacts by selling or rather giving them to a trading partner in exchange for tobacco, axes, and other trade-store goods (Nogar 1899a,b). Nogar was interested in the revenues that trade in ethnographic objects generated, as was his boss, missionary Abbot.

At the time Abbot resigned from the mission, he took several artefacts to London with the intention of selling them to the British Museum. As an Oxford Master of Arts, Abbot must have had a particular way of perceiving the value of the artefacts made by Wanigela and Maisin people. According to his writings to the museum authorities, he had been collecting during his entire three-year stay in Collingwood Bay. It is not known how many objects Abbot actually did collect and subsequently offered to the British Museum, but the museum bought 131 items in 1901. Among these items are 13 pieces of decorated barkcloth attributed to Collingwood Bay. Whether Abbot had been engaged in collecting artefacts as seriously as MacGregor remains unclear, but he seems to have been pretty determined to sell them as soon as he resigned from the mission. Just a few months before Abbot resigned, his mother, to whom he had sent some of his collection, offered them to the museum.

*My son the Rev. W.H. Abbot who is doing pioneer mission work under the Bishop on the N[orth] Coast of British New Guinea has sent home some curious bones & implements of the Cannibals there, & also fine specimen head-dresses in feathers (Mrs H. Abbot 1900).*

A few months after his resignation and return to London, Abbot recommended to the museum that they acquire his collection. He sounds rather desperate and urged the museum to make a good offer:

*I do hope the Museum authorities will take these facts into consideration when making their offer: That I have waited to allow them first pick out of my curios that they are taking all the plums – leaving the poorer specimens on my hands. That I was the first white settler in the Bay & that I have been collecting for three years in the Bay. That I have not yet sold or given away a single article. That several of the clubs especially the white & the knobbly one are the only specimens I have ever seen. That they are the result of three years collecting, on the spot (Abbot 1901).*

A year earlier, the museum had received a donation by Lieutenant-governor R.G. Le Hunte that consisted of three artefacts collected by Abbot in Collingwood Bay. So apparently Abbot did sell or give his collected artefacts to other people as well. Le Hunte, who was MacGregor's successor from 1898 till 1903, approved of the mission and acknowledged its work and importance for the government (Tomlin 1951: 51). Abbot in turn clearly identified with the colonial administration and its representatives, as he had promised Le Hunte to erect government buildings in Tufi. Abbot's gift to Le Hunte seems to embody this intimate relationship between mission and government.

Unfortunately Abbot did not document the villages where he collected his objects. The majority were probably collected during his stay in Wanigela, but Abbot also visited other villages in the area and went on an exploration trip to the Musa River. Although some artefacts have limited information on their particular use, the majority are almost entirely without any provenance or ethnographic information. Abbot's failure to document any details of his artefacts becomes

especially salient when one compares them with the collection of his successor, Percy Money.

### *John Percy Money (1901 – 1910)*

When Money took charge of the Wanigela Mission Station, the village had become 'one of the best organized and most prosperous communities on the north Papuan coast' (Wetherell 1977: 106). As Le Hunte stated in his government report written six days after Money's arrival:

*There is a striking difference between the faces of the Mission-taught children and those of other places such as Uiaku. They look as if they had no more knowledge of savagery or fighting than village children in our own country, yet it is still almost at their doors* (Le Hunte cited in Tomlin 1951: 51).

Money's orders from the bishop were to consolidate this good work at Wanigela and to open a new station among the Maisin in Uiaku (Barker 1987: 73). In this way, the influence and civilisation of the Anglican Mission could be extended among the most unruly and 'stubbornly heathen population' of the area, the Maisin (Report of the New Guinea Mission 1902: 33).

Despite the fact that the leaders of Uiaku had rejected the Anglicans after their debacle in Sinapa and subsequently refused the mission's periodic offer of teachers (Barker 1987: 73), they agreed with Money's offer to build a church and subsequently a school (in 1903) in Uiaku. This was probably due to their experience with the government six months earlier when, during a punitive expedition led by Monckton, three Maisin men were killed (Monckton 1927: 173; Barker 1987: 73). Money's arrival not only coincided with this act of force and violence against the Maisin; it also coincided with a general increase of government activities in the area. The newly built Government Station in Tufi was permanently occupied and ruled by the magistrate and his constables, intensifying colonial influence and activities. Nevertheless, Maisin people gave Money a hard time, as he recorded in a letter to Bishop Stone-Wigg (Money 1905a): 'You do not know what we had to put up with and fight against the first 18 months at Uiaku; the people were overbearing and annoying, they would hardly do a hands turn for us and I thought myself extremely fortunate in getting what I did done'.

As a young Australian layman and a former 'boxer, football coach, winner of bicycle races, and performer on the parallel bar', Money represented the manly vigour of the mission (Wetherell 1977: 59). He was not just in the prime of his life and in good shape; he also had the capacity to act not only as evangelist but also as a 'teacher, architect, carpenter, translator, journalist, photographer' (Barker 1987: 73), archaeologist, and medic. In contrast to his predecessor, Money seems to have been a rather sympathetic and easy-going missionary. Instead of bullying the local people or using force, he actually worked with them and used his wits and charms to keep them motivated. At one point in time he even dressed up as a native and had himself photographed, an act of mimicry that both demonstrates his fascination for native life as well as the distance that existed and was upheld between the two cultures.

Money's fascination and patience with regard to local customs, however, did not extend to all spheres of Maisin life. Money lamented the 'atmosphere of fornication' in Uiaku village and strongly opposed adultery (Money 1907a), widow mutilation, magic, and sorcery.<sup>10</sup> But at the same time he also seems to have admired people's firm belief. After a suspected sorcery attack, he reflected: 'Did they but believe as firmly in the True God as they do in their traditions, witchcraft and sorcery, they would indeed be noble Christians, for they live what they believe' (Money 1904a).

As missionary in charge, Money was responsible for the management of the Anglican organisation in Collingwood Bay. In order to supervise both Wanigela and Uiaku stations (Photo 39), he had to constantly travel between the two mission stations, which are approximately 2 hours apart whether walking or sailing. As a consequence, Money did not stay at either of the main stations for a long period of time, which limited the amount of work he was able to do. In various letters, Money expressed his disappointment about the lack of instructions and support received from the bishop. He felt compelled to defend the work done, which was, in contrast to what the bishop inferred, growing and developing, as Maisin people in particular seemed to be slowly changing their disposition towards the mission (Money 1905a).

Despite Money's frustrations with regard to the lack of Anglican guidance and support, his work in Uiaku seems to have been rather successful. Statistics show that from 1903 to 1909 over 100 students regularly attended the Uiaku school, while church attendance was equally stable as each Sunday about 80 to 90 individuals came to attend the service (Barker 1987: 74). Whether these statistics show an actual acceptance of Anglican practices is difficult to tell. It seems Uiaku 'oscillated between upholding Christian practices when Money was present and abandoning them when he was not' (Bonshek 1989: 19).

Under Money's 'rule', two additional stations in Sinapa and Okein were built, thereby increasing Anglican presence but also missionary work and travel. The Uiaku and Wanigela mission log books (Anglican Archives: Box 25) bear witness to the frequency with which Money travelled by either foot or boat, especially between Sinapa, Uiaku, and Wanigela villages. He seems to have hardly spent more than one week in one place, leaving the responsibilities of teaching and preaching to the South Sea Islander (SSI) teachers. Only occasionally would he take the Sunday's hearer's class and services that were held on each of the stations. In addition, Money ministered to several other scattered villages in the area. In 1907, the Uiaku mission station alone encompassed no less than seven settlements: Gewola (Gewoya), Guruguru, Marua, Airara, Sinapa, Baitebaite, and Uiaku. These responsibilities probably undermined Money's health. By 1903 he had suffered at least three malaria attacks (Bonshek 1989: 19), and in 1905 and 1907 he was forced to leave Collingwood Bay because of serious illness.

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10 Money also mentions practices of infanticide and abortion, although it seems he experienced one case of infanticide only. Taking current Maisin validations of children into account, it seems that this representation of Maisin life is based upon 'Western' presumptions regarding the immoral living of 'heathen' people.



Photo 39. Money in 'The Den', the Uiaiku missionary house (P.J. Money, 1902: 'The Den, taken by flashlight'. Courtesy of the Australian Museum, AMS 328, Percy Money Photographs, M2066/1). Notice the use of Indigenous-designed tapa cloth as tablecloth and Western-designed strips of tapa cloth used as frieze. As Money wrote, 'This house was built of rough materials lashed together with strips of bark. The Den was lined with slats of sago palm stalks. The frieze was of strips of Tappa [sic] with design stencilled on in dye, which was made from Mangrove bark as per native recipe. The native is a boy called Sem from Wanigera who was assisting in translation work at the time'.

### Money's collection

While in charge of Wanigela district, Money collected hundreds of objects for the Australian Museum (Table 5). As a proto-anthropologist, he made ethnographical notes about the items he collected and the ceremonies he witnessed, often mentioning the local names in both Ubir and Maisin languages. As a gifted photographer, he made various photographs of the environment, its people, and their customs. His collection is therefore quite unique, giving an insight into the 'daily' activities of Collingwood Bay life between 1903 and 1910. But someone else might have contributed to Money's collection as well. Annie Ker stayed with Money in Wanigela after their marriage in 1906, and it seems logical that she contributed to his collecting of both data and artefacts, especially since she was the first Anglican missionary to publish a book, called *Papuan Fairy Tales* (1910),

about Wedau (Milne Bay) myths. Money does not refer to his wife's activities or contributions, but in 1934 she donated remnants of Money's collection to the Australian Museum. Among Collingwood Bay artefacts, there are several specimens from Wedau and the Trobriand Islands. It seems likely Annie Ker collected these objects while working as a missionary in Milne Bay.

Money collected foremost for the Australian Museum in Sydney, but he also collected for the Anglican Church. From 1905 onwards, Money was obliged to collect primarily for the Bishop and 'his' mission museum in Port Moresby. Money was not very content with the Bishop's claim upon Money's discoveries and felt his 'wings had been clipped' but offered the Australian Museum duplicates of anything he found, an offer eagerly accepted (Money 1906a; 1906b). In contrast to the bishop, who was convinced 'that a collection was far more valuable in a place like this (Port Moresby) where one could study the natives at the same time', Money 'thought a collection more valuable where it could be properly cared for' (Money 1906b). But he had no other choice than to adhere to the Bishop's wishes. In a letter to Bishop Stone-Wigg (Money 1905a) he wrote:

*I confess that I thought specimens were better in a public museum where they are properly cased & cared for than in one such as ours & therefore send better specimens to the Museum in Sydney. I still think so in spite of what the scientists say, but in future you can rely on the mission being dealt with as you suggest<sup>11</sup> ... You never gave me instructions to buy for the Museum & so I did not do so. If you will tell me what you want for the collection & are willing to pay what the natives want for them, I shall get them for you.*

Not all objects Money collected went into either the Australian Museum or the mission museum. It appears the mission held 'curios' sales at the mission depots in Port Moresby. These sales obviously facilitated collectors of Papua New Guinean artefacts, at the same time providing an income for the mission. As Money (1907b) wrote:

*My dear Lord Bishop, I herewith send one case of curios for sale at the Mission Depots. This case is well packed & could be sent as it is without repacking (case A) ... I am also sending a case 'B' & a package 'C' containing the following articles: 12 headrests, 3 lime-pots, 1 bag, 1 breast-ornament, 1 Doriri breast-ornament, 6 unsorted necklaces, 1 bone lime-stick, 1 broken pot excavated at Rainu (Wanigela),<sup>12</sup> and 8 pipes. Some of the headrests and pipes could be selected for the Mission Museum. The broken pot & Doriri breast-ornament could be deposited there also.*

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11 The scientists Money referred to were members of 'the Major Daniels expedition' who influenced Bishop Stone-Wigg to set up his own museum. Ironically, some of them would, probably due to Money's shipments of artefacts, be able to obtain several pieces of Collingwood Bay tapa.

12 When building the new mission station in Wanigela, Money discovered a prehistoric site in Rainu village consisting of several mounds. Money excavated one of the mounds, digging up a large amount of potsherds. Magistrate Monckton referred to the site as an interesting discovery, revealing 'a quantity of broken and ancient pottery ... of curious and unique design and shapes' (ANBNG 1904). Scientist Rudolf Pösch was equally intrigued and excavated some of the mounds while Money was away.

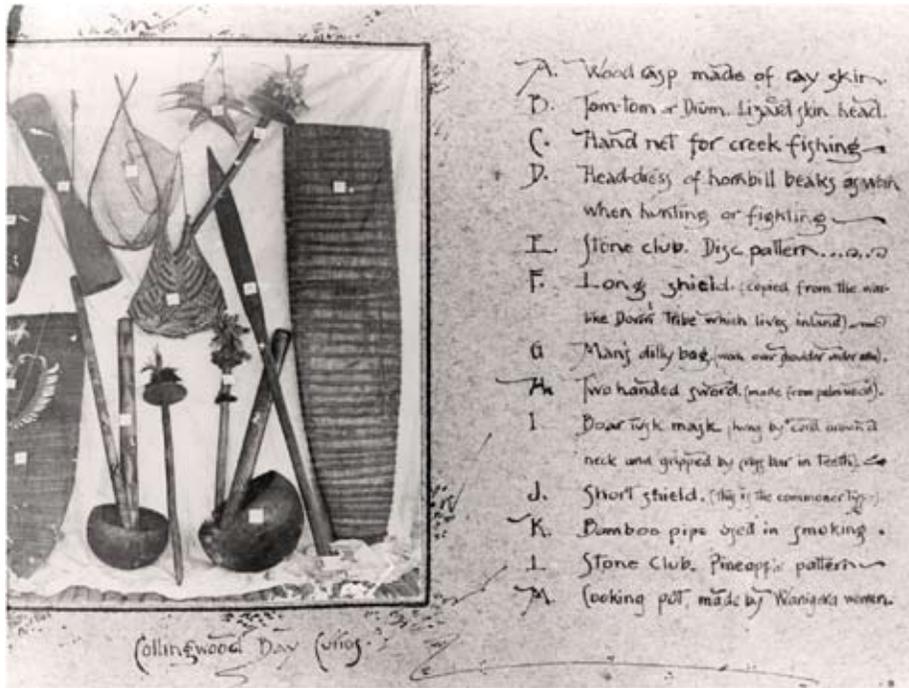


Photo 40. 'Collingwood Bay curios' (P.J. Money, 1902. Courtesy of the Australian Museum, AMS 328, Percy Money Photographs, M2065/7).

Among the artefacts collected for the Australian Museum are similar types of artefacts but also 37 pieces of decorated barkcloth. Eleven of these pieces were collected before 1904, and 17 were collected before 1906 when Money shipped them to Australia. In 1910, the Australian Museum obtained one other cloth, followed by eight pieces that were purchased from Mrs Money, Annie Ker, in 1934. The majority of the tapa was collected in Wanigela, where at that time women were still engaged in the manufacturing of barkcloth. Only two pieces are registered by the Australian Museum as being collected in Uiaku village. Some of the information Money gathered along with the artefacts, however, indicates that several other pieces may have originated from Maisin. Besides descriptions of the designs in Maisin language, the presence of Maisin clan designs on tapa collected by Money likewise points in this direction. Money travelled extensively along Collingwood Bay and made visits to the Maisin villages of Airara, Sinapa, Uiaku, Yuayu, and Uwe. It is also possible Maisin tapa was collected in Wanigela as exchange relations and intermarriages between the two villages have led to the incorporation of Maisin designs and women in Wanigela and vice versa. The incorporation of a Wanigela clan among Uiaku clans and the settlement of a Uiaku group near Wanigela station (Chignell 1911: 215) are examples of the intimate relationship between Maisin and Wanigela people.

As a collector, Money wanted to collect specimens before it was too late, as ‘much that is interesting about the natives of this part may soon be lost’ (Money to the Australian Museum, 1904 in: Bonshek 1989: 19). But Money was not able to collect all the curios he wanted. In a letter to the bishop he complained about the fact that he was not able to obtain ‘certain of their more valuable things. They have some things which they will not part with even though you offer a fabulous price – they are heirlooms’ (Money 1905a). According to Barker (2001: 363), these heirlooms included clan tapa. Yet as we have seen, Money’s collection does include pieces of barkcloth decorated with clan designs (Appendix 1). The heirlooms Money was talking about must have been objects such as stone lime sticks, particular shells, and other valuables that are kept in clan elders’ houses as *kawo*, as clan emblems.

Unfortunately, Money did not write his findings down, so little is known about the things he did not manage to collect. But he made hundreds of photographs of various arts, crafts, games, and customs, thereby documenting pieces of Collingwood Bay culture. He tried to sell these photographs to various museums and institutions all over the world, arguing they ‘are particularly valuable as they are the only ones of the kind in existence, and it will not be long before European influence will affect native habits’ (Money 1910). He did not reflect upon nor see as problematic his own role in initiating the demise of some of these customs. In fact, it seems that by documenting these objected customs, he also preserved them.

Money in particular opposed various practices associated with mourning. But despite rejecting these practices, he documented them by collecting photographs and objects. He collected some ornaments and clothes used in mourning and photographed various aspects of being a widower or widow. These images show both men and women in various stages of mourning, wearing their matching mourning regalia (see Photo 27). The most striking image is that of a widow completely covered with tapa, crawling on hands and knees through the sand (Photo 26). Another example of this ambiguity of Money’s documentation of vanishing customs is related to Money’s collection and destruction of charms.

The mission Annual Report of 1902-03 relates that Money requested to keep certain carved figures as ‘curios’ when men from Wanigela decided to destroy them. These figures or charms were probably used in relation to sorcery, and their destruction was certainly instigated by the presence of the Anglican missionary. Money received the mission’s permission to keep the charms (Wetherell 1977: 177; Barker 2001: 363). In Uiaku, Money had likewise been involved in the destruction of charms, which people had either thrown away or ‘given to the missionaries to destroy’ (Money 1906).<sup>13</sup> So, ironically, some of these ‘tokens of heathen religion’ were actually saved by the missionary who, either directly or indirectly, had instigated their destruction. In general, the Anglican Church was rather compliant with local customs, and there are only a few instances known of Collingwood Bay missionaries destroying local artefacts. On the contrary, missionaries like MacLaren,

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13 The charms that were collected and burnt were brought together by Willy Pettewa (Barker 1989: 75).

King, Abbot, and Money did know the ethnographic and economic value of the Collingwood Bay 'curios'. And even Chignell, who considered the collecting and sending of artefacts to friends as 'a waste of time' (Chignell 1911: 317), collected artefacts, of which 78 pieces were acquired by the South Australian Museum in Adelaide (Bolton 1980: 136).

So Uiaku and Wanigela villages were part of a colonial network that facilitated the exchange and purchase of Papuan artefacts. The network established by James Nogar and Abbot continued during and after Money's stay in Wanigela, not only enabling collectors to obtain Collingwood Bay artefacts without travelling into the bay but also aiding those who wished to venture there.

### **In the name of science**

*Die Technik des Reisen liegt, muss darauf abziehen, die vorgeschobenen Posten der Zivilisation sich zunutze zu machen, da sonst der Komplizierte wissenschaftliche Apparat der modernen Anthropologie und Völkerkunde nicht entfaltet werden könnte.*

(Rudolf Pöch, Kleine Hefte 1)

While MacGregor collected in the name of British New Guinea, striving to build 'a collection representative' of the colony he was governing, and Nogar, Abbot, and Money collected in the name of God, others collected in the name of science. Ethnographic artefacts have, until the ascendancy of functionalism, occupied a privileged place in anthropology (O'Hanlon 2000: 2). Implicated in both anthropological theories and colonial processes, artefacts represented and provided various kinds of knowledge. Things were and still are used to represent, document, categorise, dominate, fetishise, exoticise, and educate people. From the 1900s onwards, several 'professional' collectors obtained Collingwood Bay artefacts by either first- or second-hand collecting. Both methods of ethnographic collecting operated within colonial society, which provided the framework (O'Hanlon 2000: 3). As Pöch remarked, '*die vorgeschobenen Posten der Zivilisation*' (advanced posts of civilisation) were essential for the work of anthropologists and ethnologists. White men, who sometimes resided there for a considerable length of time, initially occupied these spatial and geographical centres of white colonial 'rule'. Their 'stationary' and first-hand collecting contrasts with the method applied by many scientific collectors who engaged in more 'mobile' (O'Hanlon 2000) and sometimes even second-hand ways of collecting information.

From 1904 till 1921, several so-called scientific collectors obtained Collingwood artefacts through the colonial network that connected isolated areas like Collingwood Bay with the capital of Port Moresby, or they travelled into Collingwood Bay, making use of 'advanced posts of civilisation'. In 1904, C.G. Seligmann (1910), as a member of the Daniels expedition, obtained several Collingwood Bay artefacts without having travelled into the bay himself, which were then acquired by the British Museum in London.

A similar way of acquiring Collingwood Bay objects was practiced by A.B. Lewis. During the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition, which was conducted from 1909 to 1913, Lewis became the first American to conduct systematic ethnological field research in Melanesia (Gosden & Knowles 2001; Welsch 1998). Making use of the British colonial network, he travelled by steamer along routes that linked missions, government stations, and mining centres. While Lewis collected a large number of artefacts himself, about half of his Papua collection was brought about by helpful expatriates, missionaries, and other colonial agents (Welsch 1998: 488). His Collingwood Bay collection was also acquired in this way.

On 11 June 1912, Lewis left Port Moresby for a short trip along the east coast of Papua, making brief visits to the Trobriand Islands and Buna Bay, northwest of Cape Nelson (Welsch 1998: 491). Before heading east, Lewis arrived in Samarai, where he met Reverend Ramsay, who had gathered 'a number of things' for Lewis such as 40 clay pots and 181 potsherds from 'Money's' prehistoric kitchen midden in Wanigela (Lewis cited in Welsch 1998: 491). Somewhat later Ramsay sent Lewis another collection that had been collected by his fellow Anglican missionaries at Bartle Bay, Goodenough Island, Teste Island, and Wanigela (Welsch 1998: 487). In total, Lewis purchased 388 Collingwood Bay artefacts from Ramsay, including 90 Uiaku objects (see Table 5).

Ramsay came to Papua in 1900. After having received his training, he worked as rector of Samarai following his ordination in 1904 (Wetherell 1977: 80). He had probably obtained the Collingwood Bay artefacts from his colleagues Money and/or Chignell, either directly or through various other Anglican intermediaries. Anglican missionaries working in Papua regularly met during mission conferences in Dogura or other places. These occasions could have been used not only to exchange information but also to buy, sell, or give artefacts to interested confederates. The mission depots in Port Moresby provided another source for 'curios'.

At the time of Lewis's voyage into eastern Papua, Chignell was in charge of Wanigela, and the latter probably contributed to Lewis's collection. Ironically, the two men actually met when Lewis travelled back from Buna Bay to Port Moresby. On Friday, 21 June 1912, Lewis arrived at Cape Nelson, where Chignell and two women got aboard for a mission conference in Dogura in Bartle Bay. Lewis managed to make nine photographs of 'natives at Cape Nelson station' (Welsch 1998: 244), but it appears he was not able to collect anything. Early the next morning, Lewis and his missionary party left and travelled southeast along Collingwood Bay to arrive in Bartle Bay in the evening. So although travelling through Collingwood Bay, Lewis did not manage to get ashore and collect specimens for himself. As Robert Welsch (1998: 488) states, 'the trip to the east had been disappointing, for he [Lewis] had seen little and obtained almost nothing while aboard the steamer, but he had arranged to buy an important collection from Ramsay'. Among the artefacts assembled by Ramsay and acquired by Lewis are six pieces of decorated barkcloth collected in Uiaku village.

Lewis would not be the last 'famous' traveller in the area. In 1921, Frank Hurley (1925) visited Wanigela and photographed several daily activities and people during his one-week stay (see Specht and Fields 1984). One of the main scientific collectors

venturing into Collingwood Bay was Rudolf Pöch. While Money was temporarily out of Collingwood Bay due to illness, this Austrian traveller and collector of both natural and ethnographic specimens arrived there. From 7 September 1905 till 31 January 1906, Pöch stationed himself in Tufi at Cape Nelson.

*Scientific collector Rudolf Pöch (1905 – 1906)*

*Was die Camera, das Grammophon und der Kinematograf aus diese Dingen machen können, das weiss man ungefähr schön vorher: aber was das Hirn daraus machen wird, ist ungewiss. Da hat man immer noch die Chance dass etwas neues dabei herauskommt.*

(Rudolf Pöch 21/07/1905: Kleine Hefte 1, p. 56)<sup>14</sup>

Doctor Rudolf Pöch (1870 – 1921) developed an interest in African and Melanesian anthropology and ethnography around the turn of 19th century. This interest probably arose and took form during his expeditions to Bombay (1897), where he was involved in research regarding the black plague, and to Africa (1902), where his research focussed on malaria (Szilvássy, Spindler and Kritscher 1980: 743-44). Between these two expeditions, he received training (1900 – 1901) in anthropology and ethnography by Felix von Luschan while working at the Africa-Oceania Department of the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin (Kirchengast & Weiss 2001: 373). Von Luschan was a physical anthropologist who advocated the collection of all things physical, including people, objects, and landscapes, which were thought to reveal something of the people's origins (Kaufmann 2000: 206-07). In addition, Von Luschan stressed the importance of learning local languages as this would reveal 'the religious or mythological, or otherwise important ideas' on which works of art were based (Von Luschan cited in Kaufmann 2000: 206). These ideas on ethnographic collecting clearly directed Pöch's collecting activities in Melanesia.

Pöch's interest in Melanesia resulted in a two-year expedition to New Guinea, which was planned and almost entirely financed by Pöch himself. In 1904, Pöch said farewell to Vienna and travelled to German and British New Guinea, making short visits to Australia, Dutch New Guinea (West Papua), and Indonesia. During and after his travels, Pöch started to write down his findings, many of which were published in short articles (1904 – 1908; 1913).

Interested in specific physical features like dwarfishness among the Kai of German New Guinea (Pöch 1905f) and 'archaic' features among the aboriginal population of New South Wales, Pöch obviously operated within the contemporary scientific notions concerning cultural evolution and diversity. He soon became enchanted, however, by the local inhabitants of Papua New Guinea and developed himself, as a student of Von Luschan, as a 'true' ethnologist, gathering linguistic, cultural, and archaeological data by collecting objects and making sound recordings, films,

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14 'What the camera, sound-, and film-recorder can make out of these things is to a certain extent known in advance: but what the human mind makes out of all this is unknown. There is always a possibility something new arises' (Schüller et al. 2000).

and photographs. In addition, he gathered geological data as well as biological specimens of birds, shells, and reptiles. In this respect, Pöch can be regarded as one of the first holistically oriented researchers and collectors, using 'modern' multimedia to gather his data.

Soon after he came back from his expedition to New Guinea, Pöch was asked by the *Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Vienna to engage in a large expedition to South Africa, from 1907 till 1909. When Pöch returned, he was regarded as an anthropological expert and pioneer due to his fieldwork experiences. In 1919, he became the first Austrian professor in anthropology and ethnology and established the Institute for Anthropology at Vienna University. Unfortunately Pöch died much too early (1921) to publish the majority of his material and the insights he obtained while doing research.

In his letters home, Pöch spoke of the Collingwood Bay people as his '*Papua freunde*' (Papuan friends) and described them as uncritical believers of magic, playful and always engaged in dancing and ceremonies. He wrote that he was in love with them, despite or because of their childlike and sometimes annoying character (Pöch 1905b: 32). His infantile representation of Papuan people reveals the affectionate though hierarchical relationship Pöch maintained towards his 'objects' of study. He was convinced that with the proper guidance these people could be pacified and civilised. According to Pöch, the government stations and not the missions performed this task best (1905c: 49-50). At the same time he lamented the impact of government and missionaries, projecting parts of their laws, politics, and ideas on the tribes of New Guinea. This led Pöch to remark that it is quite remarkable being able to study European culture so far away from home (1905c: 50). As he himself had already expressed it (Kleine Hefte 1), however, '*die vorgeschobenen Posten der Zivilisation*' had enabled Pöch to make his scientific collection in the first place.

## Pöch's collection

The ethnographic collection (see also Kirchengast & Weiss 2001: 373-81) of Pöch surpasses many other and more well-known collections in quantity, quality and diversity.<sup>15</sup> The *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Vienna harbours some 3,700 Melanesian artefacts collected by Pöch (Kirchengast & Weiss 2001: 377). In addition, a small number of Pöch's artefacts are located at the University of Vienna. These artefacts visualise Pöch's broad interest in anthropology and evolutionary science. The New Guinea collection encompasses artefacts from various peoples and from diverse sociocultural and material domains (Table 3). Interested in techniques, Pöch extensively recorded the manufacture of barkcloth, string bags, and fishnets,

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15 While initially the Vienna Court Museum was to harbour Pöch's collection, in his last will Pöch bequeathed his collection to various Vienna institutions. Pöch's entire phonographic recordings and protocols are held by The Phonogram Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences; the Vienna Museum of Natural History has his journals, letters, and cameras for both still and moving photography; the Institute of Anthropology has numerous glass plate negatives, human skeletal remains, hair and tissue samples, and examination records as well as plaster castings; the Austrian Film Archives have various film material, and the Vienna Ethnological Museum has a comprehensive collection of ethnographic objects and photographic glass plate negatives.

Artefacts	Tribe*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Axes		66	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	66
Clubs		20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Shields		3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	4
Spears		10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Obsidian		21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21
Stone tools		7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8
Tools (bone/wood)		12	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	13
Headrest		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Food production		16	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	17
Bowls		4	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	6
Pottery		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	7
Fishery/hunting		10	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	-	27
Medicine/magic		17	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	18
Tobacco/betel nut		9	-	-	-	-	-	1	9	1	20
Tapa beaters		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Tapa material		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	4
Barkcloth		-	1	4	13	6	1	-	10	12	47**
Waist-belts		2	3	-	-	2	-	-	29	1	37
Ornaments		89	-	3	23	1	-	-	164	3	283
“ dancing		2	-	-	-	-	-	62	-	-	64
“ mourning		9	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	74	87
Mourning clothes		8	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	9
Mats		2	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	8
String bags		6	1	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	11
Baskets		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
Music/ horns		4	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	6
Raw materials		21	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	-	31
Carved sticks		3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>342</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>833</b>

Table 3. Types and amounts of artefacts collected by R. Pöch in Collingwood Bay.

Notes: \*1=Korafe, 2=Manu, 3=Koia-Koia, 4=Miniafia, 5=Ubiri, 6=Oian, 7=Wanigela, 8=Wanigela/Maisin, 9=Maisin. \*\*One of the mourning clothes is a piece of barkcloth, bringing the total number of barkcloth loincloths to 48.

Type cloth	Tribe	Korafe	Manu	Koia-Koia	Minia-fia	Ubiri	Oian	Wanigela	Wanigela /Maisin	Maisin	Total
Female		-	1	4	10	2	1	-	4	8	30
Male		-	-	-	3	4	-	-	6	4	17
Unknown		-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
<b>Totals</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>48</b>

Table 4. Amounts of tapa collected by R. Pöch in Collingwood Bay.

collecting both raw material and the end-products. Like other trained ethnologists during this period, Pöch tried to document and record as many cultural traits as possible, convinced, as were many of his colleagues, that he was documenting a vanishing culture.

When he arrived at Cape Nelson on 7 September 1905, Pöch had already spent one-and-one-half years in New Guinea, including three months in British New Guinea. During his five-month residence in Collingwood Bay, he lived in Tufi before returning home to Austria. In one of his letters, he mentioned the support he requested and obtained from the local government officials as well as his main reason for doing research in this particular area. Being the first anthropologist to do research in this area was important for Pöch, as this facilitated his contribution to science (Pöch 1905e: 120).

Being stationed at Cape Nelson, Pöch collected the majority of his material among the Korafe people living in this area (Table 3). Pöch was extremely excited about a dance festival which lasted for ten days and which was organised for him on request of the resident magistrate, G.O. Manning. Dancers from all over Collingwood Bay came to Tufi to perform their dances (see also ARBNG 1905: 44), and Pöch was able to photograph and film 20 different dances from various linguistic tribes with his '*Kinomatographer*' (Pöch 1905d). Among the tribes performing their dances were Wanigela and Maisin people.

But Pöch did not only spend time in Tufi. He travelled to Collingwood Bay and subsequently Goodenough Bay by government schooner, spending several days in various villages, including Wanigela and Uiaku. While visiting these and other villages he collected natural specimens, physical anthropological information, ethnographical artefacts, and data; in addition he made sound recordings and photographs. While his moderate collection of animals such as birds, mammals, and lizards provided insight into New Guinean animal species, Pöch's collection of physical and cultural anthropological data was meant to contribute to a growing insight into the primitive people and cultures of New Guinea.

In Collingwood Bay, he recorded the physical features of almost 60 people, of which the majority were Korafe.<sup>16</sup> When one looks at Pöch's recordings, it seems he was especially interested in deviant or intriguing physical characteristics, including facial tattoos among his female subjects. According to his own writings (Pöch 1905b: 30), he was focused on determining '*protomorphen Merkmalen*' (outstanding racial features) like extensive arm length. This data was supplemented with both Papuan skeletons and skulls, which included various human remains as well as pots 'excavated' in Wanigela.

Although Pöch dedicated considerable time to the collection of natural specimens, physical anthropological data, and even the excavation of prehistoric sites, he was predominantly preoccupied with making ethnographic collections. His films, sound recordings, photographs, and especially his rather large collection of ornaments reflect Pöch's interest in Indigenous dancing and singing and, moreover,

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16 Pöch measured one Maisin person, a young Uiaku woman named Mongassi, whom he encountered and studied in Cape Nelson (AN 190: Museum of Natural History Archives, Vienna).



*Photo 41. Uiaku women making tapa. Photographed by R. Pöch in 1905/1906 (Courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, VF\_24039).*

in body decoration. He collected hundreds of ornaments such as armbands, necklaces, waist-belts, and clothes related to daily life, festivities, and practices of mourning. In line with Von Luschan's field guide, 'art was not treated as a subject in its own right but was included under different headings, such as "Body Decorations", "Processes of Production" and "Religion, Ritual, and Mythology"' (Kaufmann 2000: 206). These subjects are clearly represented in Pöch's collection (Table 4).

Among Pöch's collection of ethnographic artefacts are 48 loincloths made of barkcloth, collected in Wanigela, Uiaku, and other Collingwood Bay villages (Table 3). The entire Collingwood Bay collection consists of 46 decorated and two plain pieces of barkcloth, of which 62.5 per cent are female loincloths. In Wanigela, Pöch had the opportunity to collect a large amount of tapa, which predominantly originated from the Maisin and the village of Uiaku in particular (Pöch nd.a). Pöch carefully documented the Indigenous names of the designs painted on 22 pieces of cloth, which according to Pöch were obtained without pressuring the people. In addition, he collected both raw materials and tools related to the manufacturing of tapa.

In one of his published articles (Pöch 1907a: 67), Pöch wrote that Collingwood Bay was a centre for barkcloth production. According to Pöch, this was probably due to the large amounts of barkcloth trees in the area. Especially among the Maisin, barkcloth was regularly produced. When Pöch travelled by boat to Uiaku village, he heard from far the rhythmic sound of women beating the bark. In Uiaku he witnessed and recorded the manufacturing of tapa, which seems to have been

predominantly a task of elder women (Pöch nd.a; 1907a: 67), and photographed its production (Photo 41). He described the photograph as follows:

*Auf einen grossen Klotz aus Hartzholz ist ein Stück Baumbast gelegt, das sich in einem schon vorgeschrittenen Stadium der Bearbeitung befindet, es ist schon ziemlich breit auseinandergelockt, wird sehr feucht gehalten und ist schon recht mild; die Frau schlägt mit der schmalen Kante des Schlägels darauf, wobei die selbst auf einer Pan-danusmatte sitzt; auch auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite des Klotzes liegt eine solche Matte für eine zweite Arbeiterin. Die beiden, im Hintergrunde stehenden Frauen tragen Baumbastschürzen, die schon bemalt sind; man sieht daran auch, dass mit dem Baum-bast nicht gespart wird und dass er in einer ziemlich luxuriösen Weise vorne herab-hängt. Ein der beiden Frauen lehnt sich an die mächtige Blattwurzel des riesenhaften Urwaldbaumes, der am Eingange des Dorfes steht.*

Pöch's concern with human evolution and the brain in particular becomes especially clear in his analyses of the designs depicted on Collingwood Bay barkcloth. Studying them from a biological perspective instead of from the point of view of art history, Pöch classified the tapa decorations as examples of stylised primitive art. According to Pöch, however, as sharp borders between primitive and civilised art do not exist, it was necessary to understand primitive art before trying to understand civilised art (Pöch c1907). Pöch contested the idea that stylised art is necessarily the most ancient form of art when found among tribes like that of Collingwood Bay. Pöch emphasised the similarities between image and decoration on the one hand and writing on the other, stressing their mutual characteristics of communication.

According to Pöch, the reason why people draw stylistically instead of naturalistically resides in the training of the brain, an evolution that was also expressed in industrial techniques (ibid.). Pöch tried to locate this apparent native emphasis on symmetry, rhythm, and regularity not only in barkcloth designs but also in ornaments like headdresses (ibid.). The importance of industrial techniques is reflected in Pöch's collection of raw materials, tools, and documentation of manufacturing techniques of barkcloth, string bags, and fishing nets, all examples of Von Luschan's 'Processes of Production' (Kaufmann 2000: 206). As such, Pöch's ethnographic collection not only documented a vanishing culture, as Pöch feared, but also contributed to his scientific theories on racial differentiation and human (brain) evolution.

## **Collingwood Bay Collections**

In the previous sections, various colonial practices of government officials, missionaries, and scientists have been described. This provided an overview of Collingwood Bay colonial history and the various interactions that took place between colonial agents and the inhabitants of this area. As we have seen, colonialism was strongly intertwined with practices of collecting. From their first travels into Collingwood Bay, administrators, missionaries, and scientists engaged in exchanges with the Indigenous people they encountered. The collecting of 'curios', as Indigenous artefacts were labelled, not only facilitated interaction and

eventually pacification. Objects like tapa were appropriated and institutionalised, influencing Western forms of knowledge and ideas about the colonised 'other'. In a similar way, iron, beads, peace, Christianity, and the missionary order were appropriated by the Maisin people and the other tribes of Collingwood Bay. Based upon the collecting histories, I suggest that the exchange of goods was crucial in the establishment and shaping of colonial relationships, both between Western agents and local people and also among the various colonial agents.

### *Comparing collections*

In order to compare the various collections, artefacts obtained from Maisin and Wanigela people (Money, Lewis, and Pöch) are compared with objects generally attributed to Collingwood Bay (MacGregor and Abbot). When comparing the collecting activities and collections made by these collectors (Table 5), several observations can be made. First of all, in accordance with O'Hanlon (2000: 12, 15), it seems a difference can be discerned between 'primary', 'secondary', and 'concomitant' collecting as well as between 'mobile' and 'stationary' collectors. While Pöch exemplified the practices of a primary collector, trying to get more insight into human (brain) development by means of his collections, Money's collection exemplifies the characteristics of secondary collection. Although collecting artefacts was important to him, it was not his main goal, as this was Christianisation. 'Concomitant' collections are by-products from other activities (O'Hanlon 2000: 13). MacGregor's way of governing British New Guinea resulted in such a collection (*ibid.*), but Abbot's collection can also be categorised as a 'concomitant' collection, although his collecting activities were far less important to him as they were for MacGregor.

MacGregor, who was a 'mobile' collector par excellence, did not collect as many objects as most of the 'stationary' collectors. The differentiated amount of time spent in Collingwood Bay, however, seems not to have been a measure for the quantity of objects that could be collected. For example, MacGregor collected almost three times as many objects as Abbot managed to sell to the British Museum although the latter spent three years in Collingwood Bay. In a similar way, while Pöch spent five months in Collingwood Bay, collecting 833 objects, Money collected approximately 650 pieces for the Australian Museum during his nine-year residency in the area, although this number is larger as Money also collected for the mission museum. The difference between first-hand and second-hand collecting, which was practiced by Lewis, seems to have no direct relationship with the number of objects collected either.

The types of objects collected by the collectors provide more insight into the various practices of collecting (see Table 5). When looking at MacGregor's collection, his interest in especially stone tools, a local technology that was rapidly

vanishing, becomes apparent.<sup>17</sup> MacGregor seems to have tried to collect artefacts that were related to various domains of Indigenous life. Nevertheless, the number of objects related to women's work is limited in comparison with objects that can be ascribed to men's work. This imbalance in MacGregor's collecting activities may be attributed to the nature of his explorative travels, his interests, as well as gender bias, which is linked to his first-contact way of collecting (Quinnell 2000: 83). MacGregor was confronted most by the absence of women during his ventures into Collingwood Bay. It seems that the villagers, and especially those of the most south-eastern villages of the bay, appeared to be rather shy (MacLaren in: Syngé 1908: 98). On sight of the white foreigners travelling on the government steamer, the inhabitants fled or were very timid. In Goodenough Bay, just south of Collingwood Bay, the women kept in their houses, and in one of the Maisin villages which was visited, 'we saw eighty or a hundred men but no women' (MacLaren cited in Syngé 1908: 97-98). MacGregor likewise noted the absence of women and children during these first (brief) encounters but made efforts to collect women's material when they were present (Quinnell 2000: 87-88). This must have clearly affected the types of artefacts they could collect and consequently the quantity of female objects MacGregor did manage to collect in Collingwood Bay. The gender bias caused by this way of collecting was obviously in conflict with his goal to 'build a collection really representative of New Guinea' (Quinnell 2000: 83).

While Money and Pöch collected a relatively large amount of barkcloth, MacGregor managed to obtain only eight pieces of Collingwood Bay tapa. This could be attributed to MacGregor's main interest in stone tools and weapons. But the fact that he did collect a relatively large amount of tapa in Musa seems to indicate he did not ignore this type of women's work altogether. As mentioned, a factor that could have directed his collecting activities in Collingwood Bay is that contacts with women were initially very limited, and this would have prevented MacGregor from collecting objects made and used by women. Another reason could be that when MacGregor ventured into Collingwood Bay, fewer people had settled in villages along the coast. This changed with the establishment of the Anglican Church, as people were encouraged to settle on the beaches and move closer to each other to facilitate the missionaries' visits. Moreover, missionaries like Abbot, Nogar, and Money may have actually stimulated the production of tapa as well as other artefacts through their 'trade' with Collingwood Bay people. These factors might explain why Macgregor managed to collect relatively few pieces of tapa in Collingwood Bay.

It appears that MacGregor perceived of Collingwood Bay as being one homogenous cultural area despite the different linguistic groups inhabiting this bay. Information concerning the exact origin of the objects is generally lacking. Only a few objects have additional information concerning their origin, and these objects were all collected in Maisin villages. In addition to wooden spears, some

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17 MacGregor's Northern Province collection in the Australian Museum (AM) entails 125 artefacts, major components being 66 ornaments and 31 axes/adzes (Bolton 1980: 57). The National Museum of Victoria harbours 68 artefacts collected by MacGregor in this province, including 25 axe/adzes and 16 ornaments (Bolton 1980: 114).

	Collectors	Mac- Gregor	Abbot	Money*	Lewis	Pöch	Total
Artefacts / context of use							
Canoes/paddles		2	4	4	1	-	11
String bags		6	-	6	3	11	26
Containers/hooks		1	4	1	-	8	14
Headrests		1	4	5	6	1	17
Axes/ adzes/obsidian		198	-	20	9	87	314
Clubs		2	7	2	1	20	32
Spears		10	6	57	-	10	83
Shields/weapons		7	3	6	-	4	20
Magic/charms		4	-	-	-	21	25
Fishing/hunting		2	1	7	-	27	37
Smoking/ betel nut		14	22	15	28	20	99
Tools and knives		2	21	30	21	21	95
Raw materials		2	-	20	3	31	56
Musical instruments		5	4	6	4	6	25
Food production		-	14	5	24	17	60
Pottery		28	-	10	48	7	93
Prehistoric pottery			-	249	181	**	>430
Ornaments		81	20	161	45	434	741
Mourning clothes		3	2	5	-	8	18
Waist-belts/girdles		2	3	6	4	37	52
Barkcloth		8	13	38	10	48***	117
Barkcloth tools		1	3	3	-	3	10
Barkcloth raw material		-	-	-	-	4	4
Mats		-	-	-	-	8	8
Models/toys		-	-	2	-	-	2
<b>Totals</b>		<b>379</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>2389</b>

Table 5. Collingwood Bay artefacts collected by MacGregor (Queensland Museum, Brisbane, and the National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby); Abbot (British Museum, London); Money (Australian Museum, Sydney); Lewis (Field Museum, Chicago); Pöch (Vienna Ethnological Museum).

Notes:

\*The Money collection is larger. The Wanigela and Maisin collections consist of around 816 objects, including excavated shells, stone artefacts, and shells. Among these are objects donated by Mrs Money, Mrs. Lereche (Money's sister), and the New Guinea Mission. This table includes only the Wanigela and Uiaku artefacts donated by Money and Mrs Money to the Australian Museum.

\*\*I did not make an inventory of Pöch's prehistoric pottery collection.

\*\*\*This includes one loincloth that was worn during a mourning period only.

lime spatulas, several axes, a battle charm that was worn as a breast ornament, various ornaments such as armlets and necklaces, two drums, and one stone club disc are attributed to Maisin. The other types of objects that were collected are attributed as being part of Collingwood Bay material culture, not specifically as Maisin or Miniafia or any of the other linguistic groups living in Collingwood Bay. As a result, the tribal origin of these artefacts remains obscure.

In comparison with MacGregor's collection, missionary Abbot's collection reveals a more balanced account of both women's and men's work. On the other hand, his collection seems equally to represent a more haphazard and perhaps opportunistic way of collecting. Like James Nogar, he might perhaps have been interested in the trade itself and/or its revenues. Since nothing is known about Abbot's collecting strategies, however, this might be too speculative. Money, in contrast, seems to have been a more strategic collector, collecting both women's and men's work and trying to document and collect those cultural features that were on the verge of disappearing. His collecting for the Australian Museum signifies his ethnological interest in the people among whom he was living. Consequently his collection reveals characteristics of both primary and secondary collecting.

Especially for a scientific collection, Lewis's collection is probably the most incoherent, as many elements of Indigenous life are not represented. This is obviously related to the way Lewis obtained the collection. Either Lewis chose these objects from a larger collection or decided to buy them all. In either case, however, Lewis's choice or acceptance of certain objects might be indicative of his interests, which seem to have been pottery and especially prehistoric pottery. In contrast, the scientific and especially ethnological interest of Pöch is clearly reflected in his collection. Striving to build a coherent collection, he obtained both women's and men's work. Like MacGregor and Money, Pöch seems to have been specifically interested in stone tools (technology) and in ornaments and tapa dress (body decoration). In fact, when comparing the types of objects collected by all collectors, it becomes clear that Collingwood Bay is foremost represented in their collections by stone tools, ornaments, (prehistoric) pottery, and barkcloth. As a result, the social relationships established between government, missionary, and scientific agents and Collingwood Bay people has foremost been constituted through the exchange of these particular objects. Instead of these colonial relationships being 'a series of experiments' due to the lack of norms and their unpredicted outcome (Gosden and Knowles 2001: 10, 22), I suggest that the exchanges were actually not at all alien, at least not to the people living in Collingwood Bay.

### *Colonial exchanges as forms of barter*

The major objects in exchange between colonial agents and Collingwood Bay people appear to have been stone axes, ornaments, pottery, and barkcloth. I would like to suggest that the emphasis on these objects derived both from Collingwood Bay people and from the collectors. While the collectors' interests in these objects are discussed in the next section, this section explains my suggestion that the collectors' activities were actually guided and facilitated by the people with whom

they engaged in exchange. If one considers the fact that these objects were, and still are, part of extensive local and regional exchange networks, this becomes plausible.

Between 1,000 and 500 years ago, Collingwood Bay was part of an extensive network connecting Dycke Ackland Bay, Collingwood Bay, and Goodenough Island with the Trobriand Islands (Kirch 1991: 151; Egloff 1979: 110-11). The historic and recent isolation of mainland Collingwood Bay and Goodenough Island from the Kula seems to have occurred in the past 600 years (Kirch 1991: 151). Historical Collingwood Bay pottery as derived from the archaeological site in Wanigela appears throughout the Trobriands and on Goodenough Island from about 1000 to 600 years before present (BP: 1950), gradually being displaced by pottery from other areas (ibid.). Additional artefacts in exchange were finished adze blades, obsidian, and shell valuables (Kirch 1991: 155). Although the particular Wanigela pottery disappeared and was eventually replaced by contemporary productions, part of this extensive trade network was still in place after the arrival of the Europeans.

Airara people have said that in the recent past Maisin would go down to Mukawa at Cape Vogel to obtain obsidian and shell ornaments, which Mukawa people had acquired from Goodenough Island. While Maisin manufactured stone blades and clubs by themselves, obsidian had to be obtained from Goodenough Island, the nearest obsidian source in the area. Obsidian – or '*pfifitan*', as Maisin call this volcanic glass – was acquired via the exchange network that linked Collingwood Bay with Milne Bay and indirectly with the Kula circle of the Trobriand islands. *Pfifitan* was predominantly used to shave heads and facial beards but also by women in mourning when they slashed their temples. Missionaries abolished this latter practice, but obsidian was still used for shaving until World War II. After the war, many men returned with metal razorblades, which replaced the obsidian specimens.

In return for obsidian, Maisin would give finished stone blades, pandanus mats, sago, *koefi*, and betel nut. Egloff (1979: 110), who did archaeological fieldwork in Wanigela, also argued that after the arrival of Europeans, Wanigela men still travelled to Mukawa at Cape Vogel, trading pottery for obsidian, shell ornaments, and pigs. The Mukawa people in turn travelled to villages on the southwest coast of Goodenough Island, where they traded pottery for shell ornaments and obsidian (Busse et al. 1991: 19; Egloff 1979: 110). Items such as pottery, shell ornaments, and barkcloth were traded inland with Daga-speaking populations living on the south side of the Owen Stanley Range (Busse et al. 1991: 23).

The stone tools collected by MacGregor predominantly consist of greenstone adzes with wooden shafts. In Collingwood Bay, greenstone was worked into axe and adze heads by Uiaku people who obtained the raw material from a quarry inland at Wakioki, at the base of Mt Suckling (Barker 1996: 213). Finished blades were exchanged between Maisin and part of the network connecting Collingwood Bay with Goodenough Island. Among the Korafe specimens collected by Pöch, some blades were said to originate from Maisin, but the majority were obtained from the Baruga people who delved the stones from the Kumussi River beddings

(Pöch nd.c). Today these exchange networks have diminished, but as we have seen in Chapter 5, barter still plays an important role in Collingwood Bay societies.

Thus, the (pre-)historic flow and exchange of goods but also of ideas and people have shaped Collingwood Bay life, thereby changing Maisin culture in relationship to their adjacent neighbours and tribes living further away inland and along Milne Bay coast both prior to and after the arrival of colonial government and church. In addition to differentiation, these exchanges also created more similarity. Foreign linguistic concepts – for example those related to tapa making but also to techniques associated with sailing – were incorporated into Maisin language, as were various objects and customs. This created a similar ‘culture complex’ throughout Collingwood Bay among Miniafia-, Korafe-, and Maisin-speaking groups of people but also differentiated them from other linguistic groups and those who were not engaged in this exchange network. It is argued that colonial relationships, although experimental because the consequences of the exchanges were difficult to foresee (Gosden and Knowles 2001: 22), were in fact appropriated in local systems of exchange, thereby becoming to a certain extent predictable and structured.

As MacGregor noticed, Papuans do not give presents, at least not to MacGregor or other colonial visitors. And if they do, they want something in return. Thus emphasis is placed upon balanced reciprocity, especially when dealing with strangers. From an Indigenous perspective this makes sense. If there are no relationships to be upheld or if there is nothing to compensate for, why should one give something? I would like to argue that these principles of reciprocity were enforced upon colonial exchanges from the moment MacGregor gave iron, beads, and Turkey red to establish friendly relationships with the local inhabitants of Collingwood Bay. Upon accepting these gifts, Maisin and other Collingwood Bay people accepted Europeans into their network of barter exchange, in which technology especially was given and obtained.

So colonial exchanges were integrated into local systems of barter through which valuable goods, especially technology, were and are obtained and distant relationships were and are created. As we have seen, among the major objects in colonial exchange were axes, ornaments, pottery, and tapa. As in the regional exchange networks, these objects were exchanged frequently, playing a large role in creating relationships between various linguistic groups living in and outside of Collingwood Bay. In addition, they also seem to have played a major role in establishing relationships between our collectors and Collingwood Bay people. In contrast, heirlooms, such as particular lime sticks, seem not to have been given in exchange. These inalienable objects remained within the clans and did not circulate outside Maisin and Collingwood Bay societies. As a result, Collingwood Bay people clearly determined what to give and also what they wanted to receive in return, thereby incorporating our collectors into Collingwood Bay’s regional exchange network.

Thus, in both pre-colonial and colonial contexts, it was specifically the giving and receiving of axes, ornaments, clay pots, and tapa that dominated exchange relationships, both between local people and colonial collectors as well as among

colonial agents. If we look at these objects and the colonial narratives as described in this chapter, Maisin and other Collingwood Bay people clearly determined what to give and to a certain extent what to receive. In fact, the European interest in local artefacts but also in pacification and Christianisation created dependency. In the villages, the predominantly male collectors were subjected to Maisin agency. Maisin demanded and refused to exchange particular goods, refused to help, or even thought about killing the *funa fwei* (white skins) or *bariyawaya*, as Maisin call foreigners. Consequently, it seems that colonial exchange was incorporated into the local barter system. Barter provided a context for Collingwood Bay people and colonial collectors in which things, ideas, and images could be exchanged and appropriated. By appropriating colonial exchange, the 'traditional' barter relations that for centuries had enabled Collingwood Bay people to obtain valuable goods were extended.

Furthermore, the goods given by MacGregor may have been more than just useful. From a Melanesian perspective, the pieces of cloth, iron, and beads may have represented the 'Big Chief' of Papua, MacGregor himself. Chief Wanigera from Uiaku village wore a shirt given by MacGregor's party as a status symbol. In combination with his exuberant Indigenous paraphernalia, this Western clothing signified his chiefly status but also his relationship with the people who gave him this piece of clothing. Chief Wanigera's dress exemplifies how both European and Indigenous things may separate and connect persons. It also illustrates how the exchange of things created relationships with foreigners and their desired goods, which could be used in local politics as markers of status and power. Moreover, it was not only Indigenous people who regarded things as metaphors for persons. Collectors like Pöch likewise related objects to people. Although the scientific linking of technology and society conceives of things not as detachable parts of persons, they are regarded as being synonymous to particular societies. MacGregor's attempt to build a collection of artefacts representative of British New Guinea similarly built upon this idea of objects being metaphors for particular groups of people. As we have seen, however, not all objects were regarded as representative of people; only particular things were given, collected, and bartered for.

## Colonial materialisations

The collecting of objects played an important role in colonial interactions. In fact, it may be argued that a focus on materiality was intrinsic to the colonial project and its failure or success (Rowlands 2005; see also Gosden and Knowles 2001: 6). In Collingwood Bay this materiality implied, as described in this chapter, the exchange of goods, the erection of mission stations and schools, changes in village layout, the introduction of a crude form of currency, and the counting of populations.

The first thing the Anglican missionaries did was to build, or try to build, a mission station, thereby materialising their project and goals. The fact that the Anglican Mission actually relied on the success of such material projects becomes clear when considering the debacle in Sinapa. When the building of a good mission

station initially failed in Sinapa, the mission had also symbolically failed. In a similar way, the missionisation of Maisin people could only start as soon they accepted the building of a church and school in Uiaku. So the materialisations of churches and schools and the changes of village layouts contributed to the (ideological) successes of the missionary project, in particular for Anglican Bishop Stone-Wigg, who urged missionary Money to make haste with the 'expansion' of the Anglican mission by building missionary houses and schools in villages like Sinapa. These buildings did not only materialise the efforts and ideals of the Mission; they also made it possible to keep track of the progress the mission was making. By counting church and school attendants, the missionaries got 'physical' grip on the local people and their commitment to the church and education.

Due to colonial governance and the Anglican Mission, not only were 'new' buildings or materialities placed in a local setting; in addition, local people were forced or encouraged to also change their own settlements. Due to colonial governance and Anglican missionaries, Maisin people finally ended up in ten neatly placed villages along the coast. Both residential administrators and missionaries demanded such settlement near the coast in order to facilitate colonial patrols and inspections (see Chapter 3). Under guidance of missionary Abbot and SSI Nogar, the local village layout in Wanigela was changed from a traditional pattern into rows of houses, although not all missionaries agreed with this change. In addition, all Maisin villages were restructured to create sufficient space between houses and with burial places outside the village in order to improve the hygiene and health of the people (Patrol reports 1948/68).

From the early patrol reports onwards, the population of each Maisin village was counted, thereby making, as Rowlands (2005) argues, the local people 'visible'. Moreover, these counts enabled physical control. For example, in 1960 it was reported that 50 per cent of the Airara population was absent, leaving 87 people in the village (Patrol report 1959-60: 3). The large number of people absent led the patrol officer in charge to have people report when leaving Airara. As he noted, 'This will allow a closer check to be kept on absenteeism within that village' (Patrol Report 1960-61: 3). As with the recording of church and school attendance, this counting materialised Indigenous bodies in such a way that they indeed became visible (Rowlands 2005).

In summary, it seems that Western materialities expressed colonial presence, success, and control. The question remains: what is the significance of collecting Indigenous objects? All collectors stressed the aspect of salvation in their motives of collecting, thereby envisioning local objects as tokens for the (disappearing) culture which had produced them. The previous section demonstrated that these objects were not just tokens of a culture but rather expressions of particular relationships. As argued by Gosden and Knowles (2001: 24), objects were crucial to colonial relationships, and as was shown, the first interactions between the colonial government (in the person of MacGregor), missionaries, and local people were based upon the exchange of objects. The relationships that developed were based upon the exchange of services, labour, goods, and locally produced artefacts. I suggest that the specific artefacts or objects that were collected can be regarded as

tokens not only of particular groups of people and their vanishing culture but also as materialities related to individual persons and their bodies.

### *Tools and ornaments*

Stone tools must have intrigued MacGregor, as his collection of stone adzes surpasses all the other described collections. The availability of stone tools was perceived as a marker for the pristine state these villagers resided in, as civilisation with its iron tools had not yet affected them. MacGregor's collecting of stone tools – '45% of his entire collection comprises men's tools and weapons' (Quinnell 2000: 87) – was instigated by this urge 'to secure collections of the arms, implements, and arts etc. of the natives before it is too late' (MacGregor 1897: 88-89).<sup>18</sup> And indeed, when Pösch travelled into Collingwood Bay about 15 years later, he could not obtain a single shafted adze. Due to the presence of American steel axes, people no longer used their stone adzes, and Pösch could only collect the stone blades, which were discarded or reused for other purposes (Pösch nd.c). Iron axes not only replaced Indigenous items; they also affected the trade between Europeans and Collingwood Bay people. As Pösch remarked, it was no longer possible to trade with '*Holtzeisen*' (hardwood), of which traditional tools were manufactured. The dispersal of iron axes in Collingwood Bay was, according to Pösch, due to the influence of goldmines located near Mambare River close to the German border. As local people were enlisted to work at the mines and traders regularly travelled through Collingwood Bay by boat, iron axes had been introduced and rapidly incorporated, replacing the stone variants (ibid.).

Besides stone adzes or axes, stone war clubs were equally desired items. The collectors' interest in these clubs exemplifies the general European fascination with these stone tools. Already in 1900, A.C. Haddon had published a book on the 'classification of stone clubs in British New Guinea'. This Western interest in stone clubs is also exemplified by other Collingwood Bay collections like those in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. In 1905, this Dutch museum acquired six stone clubs. In addition to two pieces of barkcloth, these clubs make up the museum's entire Collingwood Bay collection.

The stone war clubs, which consisted of a wooden shaft on which a cylindrical stone was shafted and held together by rattan, were, however, less easy to collect as adzes. In contrast to adzes, Collingwood Bay people seem to have been reluctant to part with these clubs (MacLaren cited in Synge 1908: 100). Moreover, they appear to have been rare specimens (Abbot 1901; Money 1905a). MacGregor was able to collect only two stone clubs, Abbot collected seven, and Money likewise collected only a few specimens despite the Bishop's urge to collect clubs for his museum. In a letter to Bishop Stone-Wigg, Money wrote: 'Some time ago you gave me some trade but said I was to buy stone clubs; they are very scarce and I was only able to get two which I sent down last mail' (Money 1905a). In addition, Money managed to collect two specimens for the Australian Museum (see table 3).

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18 MacGregor's personal collection in Aberdeen contains one Collingwood Bay object: a stone axe.

It seems only Pöch was able to successfully collect a relatively large amount of stone clubs, although he collected them from the Korafe people only. With regard to this collection Pöch (nd.d) wrote, ‘Due to the English protectorate, which successfully diminished tribal warfare, only eight disc-shaped and three pineapple-shaped club heads were shafted and ready to be used in warfare’. So the influence of civilisation and pacification had, according to Pöch, affected the use of stone clubs. This seems especially to have been the case in the Tufi area, where the representatives of the colonial government and its police were residing. In Wanigela and Maisin villages, the presence of this colonial law enforcement was less dominant. Instead, the Anglican Mission predominantly ruled these areas. Since the mission was less focused on implementing (forceful) pacification, this may have contributed to the fact that people were not willing to part with clubs. Even the ‘breaking of spears’ ceremony held in Wanigela did not result in a collective discarding of war clubs. As this ceremony had taken place just prior to Pöch’s arrival in Collingwood Bay, he would surely have seized the opportunity to collect clubs in Wanigela/Maisin as well. It seems that although Pöch arrived at a crucial point in time when Doriri, Wanigela, and Maisin people had just agreed to no longer raid each other, this is not reflected in his collection. It therefore seems that Maisin and Wanigela people were still holding onto the few clubs they had, probably because the fear of being raided (by Doriri) was still present. To summarise, the presence *and* absence of objects such as war clubs in collections shows us how objects are interwoven not only with the interactions that facilitated or obstructed their acquisition but also with specific local process and Indigenous relationships.

Moreover, this Western interest in stone clubs arose not just from a general fascination with stone tools as examples of cultural evolution. The large amount of tribal warfare in the region and MacGregor’s efforts of pacification probably directed his collecting activities towards artefacts related to combat and warfare. As Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel (1998: 24) point out in their article on the history of artifact collecting in New Ireland (PNG), ‘in the colonial period, collections of weaponry came to signify the subjugation of Indigenous inhabitants of conquered territories’. This is illustrated by the actions of a resident magistrate of Collingwood Bay, who during a punitive expedition against the Doriri destroyed up to a hundreds spears and confiscated several shields, which were sent to the government museum in Port Moresby (Chignell 1911: 324). One could therefore argue that by collecting weapons, MacGregor’s collection represents in particular the subjugation and pacification of Papuan men. If this is the case, what – or whom – do the missionary collections then represent?

The colonial encounters with Maisin people entailed the collecting of not only weapons but also of artefacts such as tapa and other body decorations, which were closely associated with the people who had used and worn them on their bodies. When comparing the Collingwood Bay collections of our six collectors, the large number of tapa and especially of ornaments becomes apparent. Among the collected ornaments are hundreds of necklaces, armllets, head-ornaments, earrings, and even complete headdresses. In particular, ornaments related to mourning and specifically widow’s regalia – as materialisations of practices that were condemned

by missionaries – feature in the collections. This suggests that the colonial collectors not only physically interacted with people's bodies and lives but also that these colonial relationships were embodied in the 'tokens' they collected. In fact, by collecting body decorations, such as garments and ornaments, collectors appropriated and subsequently recontextualised indigenous bodies, at the same time changing the materiality of indigenous bodies.

### *Materialising bodies*

The notion of 'materialising' bodies, of making Indigenous people visible to the colonial enterprise, was in many other areas put into practice by dressing people (for example, Eves 1996). Although some missionaries, like Henri Newton, preferred Western dress, in general missionaries stationed in Collingwood Bay seem not to have been much concerned with 'dressing up' local bodies. This attitude of not interfering with people's 'native' clothing was to a certain extent characteristic of the Anglican Mission as a whole. Only those living on the station and having married into the mission seem to have worn Western types of clothing, as evidenced by a photograph in the Wanigela log showing Sara Siru wearing a short shell necklace, *kari-kauna* (earrings), and a blouse.<sup>19</sup> Mission boys are reported to have worn red or white calico during specific occasions (Chignell 1911: 89). In fact, 'missionaries who clothed Papuans were the exception rather than the rule; and Anglican missionaries more frequently lamented the desire of Papuans for European clothes than complained about immodest dress' (Wetherell 1977: 202). Only in particular instances were tapa cloths and decorations removed.

The missionaries stationed in Wanigela and Uiaku strongly condemned adultery, often punishing both men and women. In addition, they were also against sexual relations between unmarried men and women, especially when it concerned Christian people 'falling into the heathen custom of sleeping together' (Newton 1902). Both the Uiaku and Wanigela log books regularly mention unmarried couples running off into the bush, which even after they had been settled in the area for almost twenty years, still managed to shock the missionaries in charge. Whenever possible, they would take measures against this behaviour and punish the lovers. Missionary Jennings especially seems to have been strongly opposed to premarital liaisons. As the Uiaku log (26 August 1917) notes:

*Six girls had to be punished today for fornication. One of the guilty boys was Louis, Mr. Jennings' houseboy. He was caned and will be sent back to his home at Wanigela. The six girls will be suspended from Communion for a time, probably till Christmas.*

The girls, however, were not only suspended from Communion. A few days later they 'were ordered to have their heads shaved and to remove all ornaments from their persons' (Uiaku log book: 2 September 1917). Obviously, by removing their hair and decorations, their 'immoral behaviour' was made visible to the outside

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19 Wanigela log: April 1907-September 1916, Box 25, File 4. Sara Siru's photograph was placed between the entries of June and July 1913, with only the heading 'Sara Siru'.

world. In contrast to the caning of one of the boys involved, it seems that this punishment of girls was actually more severe. The pain of being hit (and in the boy's case being sent home) was neither visible nor enduring, while it would take several months for the girls' hair to grow to its normal length. The main reason for this act seems to have been to prevent these girls from attending the *mangu-via*, the moonlight beach dances, during which boys and girls would meet (John Barker: personal comment). The punishment seems to have been an incredibly shaming act, in which the shame was literally worn on the body for several months (see also A. Strathern 1975). Likewise, the removal of personal regalia contributed to this public display of shame and, moreover, dismissal of one's identity. Since ornaments are intimately intertwined with Maisin notions of gender and clan identity, removing these from the body actually deconstructs a person's social identity. So the girls' punishment was not only a temporal alteration of their bodies but also of their identity.

This practice of addressing girls' or women's bodies and their conduct was not entirely incidental. Various missionaries placed emphasis on women, trying to change women's conduct and especially their corporeal behaviour. During a meeting held in the Wanigela Church (Wanigela log: 15 May 1916), missionary Fisher declared that certain customs had to stop, stating:

*That the behaviour of women at funerals and deaths must be modified;*  
*That the puberty ceremony, both in the case of boys and girls, must cease;*  
*That there must be a ... case taken of maidens to prevent sin-behaviour;*  
*That mothers must take more care of young babies;*  
*That women must exercise their influence in the right direction;*  
*That women must try to realize more than they do, the part that Christianity has come to play in their lives.*

Fisher was directly instructing women to act as role models for the Anglican Church and to use their influence to change society as a whole. Women's behaviour, and especially their bodily conduct, was placed under scrutiny; it had to be changed. The bodily changes Fisher urged would refashion women's bodies into silent and clean bodies. If it were up to Fisher, women could no longer wail and mutilate their bodies during mourning and funerals. They could no longer tattoo their daughters' or female relatives' faces as part of the female puberty rite. And women were ordered to take special care of their daughters and other young girls to prevent them from immoral conduct. Although Fisher opposed puberty rites for boys as well, these rites did not entail the profound bodily transformation girls' initiations did. As a consequence, boys' bodies were less refashioned by this ordinance than girls' bodies.

While Fisher worked for physical and moral reform in Wanigela, Jennings, who was appointed as head of Uiaku station, likewise took measures to stop several customs he found offensive (Barker 1987: 76-78). He was equally opposed to mourning practices and against the facial tattooing of schoolgirls, and as we saw

earlier, he ordered girl's heads to be shaven as punishment for sleeping with boys.<sup>20</sup> It thus seems that both Jennings and Fisher tried to reconstitute girls' and women's bodies in particular, 'and through this, their moral constitution' (Eves 1996: 85). This notion of bodily reform as essential for inward or moral reform was central in Christian rhetoric (Eves 1996: 86). Sara's story at the beginning of this chapter already revealed the emphasis placed on physical transformation. Taking care of one's body, and thus being clean, clothed, and confident as well as neat and orderly, was indicative of a disciplined Christian. As Money (1905a) mentioned in relation to health and sickness, 'Care of the body is closely akin to the care of the soul'. But why this emphasis on women? As indicated by other studies concerning missionary practices, local women were often used to implement Christian morals and virtues, after which they could serve as Christian role models (Eves 1996; Rountree 2000). Women in their roles as housewives and mothers provided a means for targeting society as a whole. 'It was thought that when the women and girls had undergone a process of education leading to their moral improvement, this would lead to the moral re-generation of society as a whole, through their example' (Eves 1996: 103). In Collingwood Bay, such exemplary role models of Christian housewives were to be found among the local women who had married into the mission. Consequently, the 'native' skills of Sara Manua and Mary Mamarun, who like Sara had been sent to Dogura to be trained as housewives, had to be elevated.

Not all missionaries in charge of Uiaku and Wanigela station, however, were to the same degree concerned with the reformation of women's bodies. Money, for example, never actually forbade women's howling at a time of death, nor did he oppose facial tattooing. In fact, he made numerous photographs of Uiaku schoolgirls showing their newly obtained facial tattoos and seemed rather intrigued by them (Photo 21). Like his successors, however, Money was equally opposed to various other practices associated with mourning, like widow self-mutilation (Money 1905b) and seclusion (Barker 1987: 74; see Photo 26).

While many of these intended reforms did not take place, as Maisin people were clearly not willing to give them up, some aspects regarding women's bodily behaviour did change. Customs of self-mutilation were indeed abolished, and as argued by Maisin today, the missionaries urged men to help their wives more, thereby easing a bit of the burden that was placed on women's bodies. Moreover, girls and women regularly sought help from the missionaries in order to get rid of unwanted lovers, to prevent an unwanted marriage or possibly abduction (Money 1903), or even to help them move to the mission station in order to prevent male advances.

*The girls of the hearers' class told Mr Money that they were being troubled by the advances of young men, and asked him to write and ask for a lady to be sent so that they can come and live on the mission station. They do not wish to stay in their village (Uiaku log book: 25 October 1908).*

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20 While initially Jennings's relationship with Uiaku villagers seems to have been fairly positive, relations became increasingly sour and stressed, resulting in Jennings's departure in 1920 (Barker 1987: 78).

It thus seems that although attempts were made to change women's conduct in particular, the missionaries also seem to have liberated local women from 'oppressive' gender relations. This relationship between the Anglican Church and the position of women in Maisin societies is still in process. Women are among the most loyal adherers to the church, both through their attendance at Sunday services and their work in the Mother's Union. Moreover, their organisation in the Mother's Union enables them to cross gender, clan, and village boundaries. These dynamics in the context of the commercialisation of tapa are discussed in the next chapter.

### **Colonial collecting: materialising relationships**

Since the first documented encounters between colonial agents and Collingwood Bay people around the 1890s, objects have been continuously exchanged. The majority of Maisin objects collected at the end of the 19th century ended up in museums in England and Australia but also in other parts of Europe, such as the Netherlands and Switzerland, and even in America. Sets of objects were moved around the world, returned to Papua New Guinea, and sometimes updated with more recent collections. During this century of collecting, the paradigms of collecting and representing were shifted, not only by colonial collectors and institutions but also by Maisin themselves.

By collecting material culture, people not only collect physical artefacts. As shown by several scholars (Thomas 1991; Quinnell 2000; O'Hanlon et al. 2000; Meyers 2001), the act of collecting can be regarded as a primary means of producing knowledge. It constructs both society and the identity of those engaged in collecting as well as of those whose objects are being collected. Collected objects are used to represent and incorporate others people's powers and ideologies into one's own, or to oppose them. Anglican Bishop Stone-Wigg, for example, not only set up a missionary museum, urging his missionaries to collect artefacts; he also used these so called 'curios' from areas such as Collingwood Bay to display to his audiences in England the benefits of civilisation and Christianity. At one occasion Stone-Wigg showed 'his' artefacts to a diverse audience, attracting the interest of King Edward VII who fancied the British Museum as a suitable place for their display (Wetherell 1977: 38). The others, however, were far more interested in the contents of a black bag carried by the bishop that contained the bones of a boy killed and eaten during a raid. His jawbone symbolised the savageness of the Papuans and the need for mission work in New Guinea. The audience was told that '[...] there would be more jawbones unless the work of the New Guinea mission was supported' (ibid.).

As shown in the previous example, collecting around the turn of the 20th century was situated in an era of colonialism and nationalism in which artefacts from the colonies were used to present evidence of the evolutionistic discourse of this era, thereby legitimising Western colonialism. In Collingwood Bay, colonialism entailed in particular the pacification and Christianisation of people like the Maisin. Although the collectors in the present chapter as well as their collections are embedded within this political colonial discourse, a close look at

their personal (and often unpublished) writings and photographs reveals a more subjective, localised point of view. Thus a distinction can and must be made between private and public (propagandistic) accounts (see also Edwards 2000). The prior accounts especially reveal how colonialism was not just a political discourse but rather a cultural process with a particular, localised character. The biographies of our collectors provide specific accounts that offer insight into the vanished articulations of colonising and counter-colonial representations and practices (Thomas 1994; 1997). They reveal how colonialism is intertwined with gender issues and the practice of exchanging and collecting objects like tapa.

In their edited volume on 'Gendered Missions', Mary Huber and Nancy Lutkehaus (1999: 12) argue that colonialism was a manly act, while 'the missionary enterprise was gendered as "feminine"'. The way MacGregor ventured into Collingwood Bay, travelling and being aided by Papuan and white men, and moreover, mainly encountering and trading with local men does indeed suggest that colonialism, as put into practice by the government representative, was a manly act. What about the Anglican Mission in Collingwood Bay, however; was this indeed a feminine enterprise? In Collingwood Bay, this seems equally to have been the case. While government efforts were mainly targeted towards pacifying men by either force or Christianisation, it seems that missionary efforts to bring reform were specifically addressed to women. As we have seen, missionaries' 'ideals of domesticity' (Jolly and Macintyre 1989; Huber and Lutkehaus 1999: 12) entailed in Collingwood Bay particular ideals about morality and women's bodily constitution. For some missionaries, this ideal entailed the abolishment of facial tattoos, self-mutilation, and wailing, while for others this ideal meant that mainly 'oppressive' customs such as self-mutilation had to be removed from being applied to women's bodies.

As Sara Manua's genealogy shows, colonialism was not just an abstract power that interfered with people's lives. Colonialism was made up of individual gendered agents, acting and responding to various people, events, and contexts. According to Newton (1914: 269), Sara begged him to let her stay some extra months at Dogura as she was eager to learn more.

Other girls requested the missionary in charge to protect them from advances posed by local or other men or asked them to arrange their marriages. These examples show how missionaries to a certain extent liberated local women in the process of Christianising them, but they also exemplify how local women (but also men) were willing to incorporate new ideas and even used the missionaries to protect their interests and have their desires fulfilled.

This chapter revealed how colonialism in Collingwood Bay was intertwined with practices of collecting. I think it is no coincidence that the main agents involved in the colonial project of pacifying and Christianising Collingwood Bay people and Maisin in particular were engaged in the collecting of objects. The exchange of goods was essential in establishing relationships, both among colonial agents and between Europeans and Indigenous people. The collecting of tapa by Western colonial agents, but also by South Sea Islander teachers such as James Nogar, was part of an ongoing exchange between colonial and local agents and

events. In fact, colonialism implied a dialogue and exchange of both goods and ideas between the various men and women involved.

Akin (1996: 108) argues ‘that there are five major reasons for individuals to collect things: to satisfy a sense of personal aesthetics, to gain a sense of control or completion, to connect themselves with history, for profit (real or imagined), and for “the thrill of the chase”’. These reasons, and also other issues, played a role in the practice of colonial collecting in Collingwood Bay as well. For MacGregor, effective colonisation entailed a familiarisation with the colonised subjects, and one way of knowing these subjects was through the extensive collecting of objects. Since MacGregor wanted to rule foremost in peace, his pledge to know the people of Papua embodied an extensive exploration of both country and people. By collecting their artefacts, MacGregor tried understanding them, but he also wanted to document their culture before, ironically, it would be affected and changed by white civilisation. But by collecting objects from others, we are also ‘collecting ourselves’ (Clifford 1988; Elsner et al. 1994). Indeed ‘collecting and display’ have come to be seen ‘as crucial processes of Western identity formation’ (Clifford 1988: 220).

Stone tools, weapons, and pots were collected as ‘tokens of industry’ (Thomas 1991: 175), or rather as vanishing ‘archaic’ technology. It seems that by collecting stone tools and weapons, MacGregor’s effort of pacifying Papuan men was visualised and, as a result, at least materially accomplished. In a similar way, Money’s collection of charms and other objects related to customs to which he objected seems to have both documented and thereby visualised the change that had taken place exactly due to his efforts of Christianisation. By collecting body decorations such as ornaments and decorated tapa, collectors in a sense appropriated and recontextualised indigenous bodies.

So one can argue that collections of weapons can be regarded as tokens of successful pacification and that collections of magical charms and sticks can be regarded as tokens of successful Christianisation. Would it then be possible to perceive collections of ornaments and tapa as tokens of a successful bodily and, moreover, identity reform? As shown in the previous chapters, Maisin still place emphasis on body decorations. In fact, although the ceremonial contexts of decorating the body are changing, it seems that new contexts such as church festivals have emerged in which various identities are expressed and performed. Thus, although colonial collections harbour many objects that may be directly associated with specific bodies – such as mourning bodies, male and female bodies, and even clan bodies, as is marked by the presence of clan tapa in museum collections – these objects are tokens of an enduring interest of Maisin in performing their various and changing identities.

## Chapter 8

# The commodification of tapa: Gender dynamics and identity

*Maisin is tapa. It is our living! If a woman does not make tapa, her family's life is very poor.*

(Maisin man, Airara village)

The view expressed above is not unique. Both Maisin men and Maisin women argue that women should make tapa, as the monetary revenues from this commodity enable families to buy clothes, soap, medicines, and other immediate necessities and to pay their children's school fees. The economic importance of tapa, and therefore its commodity value, becomes clear when one considers the few alternatives for generating an income after the copra market collapsed. Since the selling of tapa provides one of the few means of gaining access to money, and since it is the women who still predominantly make tapa, households depend on their wives and mothers to produce this special kind of cash item. While women are held responsible for providing tapa, their husbands or other men in the church or MICAD (Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development) often take it upon their shoulders to sell it. Tapa is sold in Collingwood Bay and at markets in Popondetta, Alotau, and Port Moresby. Moreover, through its marketing by international organisations, it is linked to the global market.

The questions that I address in this chapter deal with how tapa became a commodity and, moreover, how Maisin women and men have interacted with this commodification and commercialisation. Since tapa is heavily intertwined with Maisin people's lives and notions about gender and identity, I ask how the commercialisation of tapa influences gender relations as well as issues of *iyon* (clan) and Maisin (tribal) identity. Another set of questions is whether the notion of tapa as property is intrinsic to the object and part of the Maisin ideas of identity, and how this is related to global processes of commodification through missionisation, modernisation, and development. Moreover, to what extent is the moral concept of balance and the social order achieved through long-term gift exchanging and rituals, affected or endangered by efforts to maximise personal revenues by selling tapa?

Foremost, I want to show how the relational dynamics involved with the construction and use of tapa as a commodity, and as property, entail conversions – that is, transformations – of tapa as well as of gender, clan, and power relationships in general. This also reveals the various controversies that Maisin people face

today, which take place between men and women, among Maisin clans, between MICAD and the Anglican Church, and between the Maisin and their outside world. Before explaining these dynamics, I provide a short historical introduction into how Collingwood Bay became situated within a Papua New Guinean context of colonial and postcolonial development, elucidating some of the earlier attempts by Maisin clans to enjoy economic development through mutual collaboration and why these attempts have failed.

### **Roots of commodification**

Several historical events have marked Maisin life and eventually led to the commercialisation of tapa. According to Brouwers et al. (1998: 3), three key events in Papua New Guinea were (1) the first contacts with Australian colonial administrative control, and with missionaries, traders, and scientists (see previous chapter); (2) World War II and the pre- and post-war development of schools, health services, cash crops such as copra, wage employment, and other economic activities such as the establishments of village co-operatives, 'which connected communities, families and individuals to the wider world and to other influences'; (3) 'the period since Independence [1975] during which Papua New Guineans have taken over many of the administrative functions and economic activities previously undertaken by outsiders; but which has also increased numbers of foreign companies'. In the case of the Maisin, these companies involve forestry, mining, and other economic development projects, which have also initiated the advent of national and international agencies in the area, trying to circumvent some of these companies' plans.

The impact of these various periods has been extensive. As we have seen in the previous chapter, colonial administration and administrators as well as missionaries, collectors, and other colonial agents have had a major impact on Maisin life and on gender relations. In many areas, colonial law and education reinforced differences between the sexes by, for instance, projecting patrilineal 'mind-sets' (Brouwer et al. 1998: 4) and providing education for boys and girls separately (Cox and Aitsi 1988: 25). Among the Maisin, however, we have seen that missionaries often protected girls and women from being harassed by both local and foreign men, and missionaries seem to have tried to reform men so they would assist their wives. Moreover, although it seems that women in particular have been the locus of missionary attention because they embodied virtues of motherhood and caretaking, women seem also to have been the agents that incorporated the Anglican Church into Maisin societies (Barker 1984). Nevertheless, with the establishment of the mission in Wanigela and a government station at Tufi, Collingwood Bay was rapidly incorporated into the emerging colonial system. Tax had to be paid, patrol officers regularly visited the villages, and 'by 1915, most young Maisin men routinely left the area to work on plantations or mines elsewhere in Papua' (Barker 2002: 6). Matthew Nonisa of Ganjiga village, having worked on a copra plantation near Samarai, recalled:

*Every day we had to fill three copra bags. We had to cut the coconuts, scoop out the meat with a special knife, cut it into small pieces, and fill the bags to the top. You had to tie them and carry them to the main road where they were picked up by a vehicle, which transported the bags to the station. You were finished with your work as soon as your three bags were filled. Back in those days, only the men were allowed to work at these plantations; no girls or women were allowed.*

Like other Maisin men, Matthew returned to his village after one or two years labour with money and goods. When Japanese forces invaded Buna village on the central coast of the Northern District in 1942, their life was about to change again (Waiko 2001: 110). Soon after the invasion, all able-bodied Maisin men were made to serve as carriers and labourers for the allied forces. Matthew, who was drafted as one of the Maisin war labourers, remembered:

*We were told by the government. The news came as far as Tufti, and the patrol officers and their local carriers informed us about the war. We were not scared; it was a new experience. We signed our names and waited for the boats to pick us up. Everybody was crying when we left because they wondered if they would see us again. We wore our koefi and nomo [ornaments] when we went on this boat. We had to put them in a suitcase, and I never saw my things again. We got uniforms, and after the war we got new civilian clothes, and that was what we were wearing when we came back home, shorts and a shirt.*

When the ships sailed away, only old or sick men, women, and children were left. They had to live their lives without their husbands, brothers, fathers, and uncles for almost two years. As expressed by several women, this was a sad and very hard time. Many families had to rely on women's hands only, with no men to clear new gardens, repair houses, or build canoes. Sago became part of the daily diet, a food crop that is usually saved for special occasions or, as in this case, times of food shortage. Ceremonies such as initiations and other festivities were probably postponed, as Maisin men are the organisers of such events and collaboration between husband and wife and other male and female relatives was needed to perform them.

Meanwhile, the drafted Maisin men from the Gorofi villages had to work on one of the most horrible battlefields of Papua New Guinea, the Kokoda Trail, which runs between the Popondetta area and the capital of Port Moresby, the ultimate goal of the Japanese invaders. They had to carry food and other supplies and also drag wounded soldiers away from the frontline. More than in any other area of combat, Australian soldiers here depended completely on their Papuan labourers (Waiko 2001: 111). Men from the Sibou villages were drafted sometime later and were put to work at other battlefields and projects – bringing supplies to the allied forces while being shot at by the Japanese soldiers – or were put to work at airstrips. While the Maisin men worked for the Australian and, later, American troops, other Papuans living further north and inland were made to work as carriers for the Japanese invaders. The Maisin war labourers I spoke to clearly favoured Americans over the Australian soldiers because they treated the Maisin and other Papuans with more respect and gave them things to eat and wear.

The enormous supply of goods and food from the Americans – among whom there were many black Americans who seemed to be treated with similar respect to the white Americans, with similar access to Western goods (Waiko 2001: 111) – must have had a major impact on Maisin men and awakened their desire to bring to their villages the Western prosperity they had encountered.

As if by a miracle, almost all the Maisin men survived the harsh fighting of the Kokoda Trail. Nevertheless, they could not yet return to their villages. Directly after the war, Maisin men were made to work on a road near Popondetta. When after almost two years they could finally go home, the material and economic life of Maisin would change forever. In addition to Western-style clothing, which was not fully appropriated until the late 1950s and early 1960s, they brought razorblades and many other Western goods as well as foods (sugar, rice, tinned fish, etc.), which became incorporated into daily life. Maisin war labourers also came home with two kina each and were promised additional monetary compensation. Although some tribes did get compensation, the Maisin men who worked as war labourers are, after sixty years, still waiting for the promised money. For the women and the other Maisin who had been living in anxiety and suffering food shortages during their husbands', brothers', and sons' absences, the return of their men with Western goods, food, and money was very welcome.

One of the ways in which Maisin tried to increase access to these Western goods and wealth was through the establishment of village cooperatives. In the 1950s a few entrepreneurs in Uiaku and Yuayu had set up such cooperatives where various Maisin villages, as cooperative members, delivered copra that was subsequently sold to outside markets. It was hoped that the cooperatives would improve the local diet, strengthen Christianity, and bring peace and prosperity to the Maisin (Barker 2004: 444).

The cooperatives did indeed seem to bring peace, as the Maisin leaders on the occasion of the cooperatives' initiation in 1949 ritually broke a club and a spear to signal the end of animosity between rival clans (*ibid.*). Another success of the Maisin cooperation was the new church in Uiaku, which was built using communal copra money (Barker 2004: 445). Being the first iron-roofed church in the area, the building still evokes communal pride in Ganjiga and Uiaku. As described in Chapter 6, the opening of the church (and the simultaneous installation of the first Papua New Guinean priest in 1962) was performed by constructing a special fence representing the local clans. According to Barker (*ibid.*), 'in doing this they signalled, as they had with the ceremonial breaking of the spear and club thirteen years earlier, the new unity of the Maisin people established through cooperative activities and the Anglican Church'.

Nevertheless, as Barker (2004: 445) also describes, the Maisin cooperatives did not enjoy much success, as 'the cooperative leaders had little idea of how to handle shares villagers invested into the ventures or the rare profit that came in'. Moreover, tensions between Gorofi and Sibon villagers eventually resulted in the latter pulling out of this enterprise 'dominated' by Uiaku (Gorofi). Thus, although Maisin clans and villages were ideologically united, the reality of daily practices encouraged separation, especially between Gorofi and Sibon villagers. As one of

the Airara members of the cooperatives explained their withdrawal, 'we pulled out because they were bossing us!' So although it seemed as though the cooperatives and the church had established unity and cooperation among the Maisin, tensions between Sibó and Gorofi people eventually divided this somewhat feeble unity with which the Maisin had hoped to bring prosperity into their lives.

Another way that facilitated access to the outside world and its goods was education (Barker 2004: 445), which was initiated by the Anglican Church. They established elementary schools in the villages of Airara, Uiaku, and Wanigela as well as high schools in Higaturu near Popondetta in 1947 and in Dogura in 1956. While Maisin villages only provided schooling up to grade 2 or 3, the Wanigela boarding school provided schooling for boys and girls up to high school level. As a result, many Maisin children were sent to Wanigela to complete their elementary education. For secondary education, they had to leave Collingwood Bay. With the Anglican establishment of the Holy Name High School, girls could go to Dogura, while boys were sent to the Martyrs' Memorial High School. Boys in particular seem to have left the villages in order to attend high school. In the 1960s, it seems that all Airara boys went to Higaturu, while none of the women I interviewed had gone to Dogura at that time.

The boys had to grow food while staying at Martyrs', which was meant for their own consumption and, sometime later, to pay their school fees.<sup>1</sup> Up until independence, the high schools were run by white missionary teachers. Later these were replaced by local men who had graduated from Goroka's teacher's college in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, which they had attended after finishing Martyrs' High School. According to Barker (2004: 445), the efforts of the Australian Government to prepare Papua New Guinea for independence created many schooling and job opportunities, including for the Maisin. As a result, Maisin men and women contributed to an 'elite labour force', including the country's first doctor and dentist, as well as providing civil servants, teachers, nurses, and business people (*ibid.*).

So again, mainly young Maisin men left the villages, this time for education and employment elsewhere, often in one of the provincial towns far from Collingwood Bay. This 'elite labour force' did – and still does – significantly influence Maisin life in Collingwood Bay. First of all, they provide local relatives with cash, sending remittances on a regularly basis. Second, they contribute financially to occasional ceremonial exchanges such as bride-prices. In doing so, they raise local standards and expectations of these payments. Finally, these 'urban' Maisin may act as mediators, promoters, or obstructers of various projects that are implemented by national and international organisations on the village level.

Today the educational and economic advantages for the Maisin due to Anglican schooling and pre-independence job opportunities no longer exist. In fact, parents in Airara told me the level of education has dropped since independence. Especially in Airara, the preschool has difficulties in running, and the elementary school

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1 Until the 1960s, the boys of Martyrs' wore calico *koefi*. Blue ones for Monday through Saturday and white ones on Sunday. At the end of the 1960s, these loincloths were replaced by trousers.

(grades 1 to 6) is faced with a shortage of teachers and teaching equipment. In addition, many parents keep their children away from school as they are not able to pay the school fees, and several children play truant, as was revealed during the regular parents and citizens (P&C) meetings. The Uiaku school and its attending children seem to do better in this regard. Thus Airara schoolchildren seem educationally deprived. This will prevent them from going to the top-up school (grade 7 and 8) in Uiaku and as a consequence will exclude them from being accepted to high school and further academic education. Naturally, this meagre education influences their future careers and possibilities for employment outside Collingwood Bay. Thus, as soon as the 'elite labour force' generation has settled back into the local villages, which many of them intend to do, there will be relatively few urban Maisin left who are able to provide villagers with cash, shelter when visiting towns, and advice from an urbanite's perspective. The decline of the educational system is one of the many legacies that the period after independence brought for Papua New Guineans.

Other government provisions that have declined since 1975 include postal, banking, and medical services. While in earlier times these facilities located in Wanigela connected Collingwood Bay villages with the 'outside' world, today the post office and the bank have disappeared. Receiving mail from beyond Collingwood Bay may take several months if one is lucky, and most people depend on their own postal system, giving letters to friends who travel. The airfield in Wanigela that was built in 1942 during World War II, is regularly closed down due to disputes between the villagers, who have to cut the grass, and the government or Air Company who have to pay for this service. When I left Collingwood Bay, rumours grew that the company flying around Collingwood Bay was closing down the Wanigela airstrip, favouring Tufi, where an expensive tourist diving resort leads to more clientele and consequently money.<sup>2</sup> Since airplane tickets are too expensive, villagers mainly depend upon the irregular shipping service connecting Oro and Milne Bay Provinces. If they have enough money, they might hire one of the motorised dinghies that are run by a few individuals. In general, though, people are forced to rely on their wooden outrigger canoes. Turning to medical services, the Sibó and Gorofi areas should have their own aid post, but since the provincial government keeps delaying the payment of these medics and the interaction between villagers and the stationed medics is sometimes troublesome, the medics often opt to leave. Villagers are thus mainly dependent upon traditional health services and the field hospital. This hospital is located 'all the way up' in Wanigela and has no laboratory and only limited other facilities.

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2 When leaving Collingwood Bay, I got stranded in Wanigela because the air carrier did not think it was profitable to pick up only two passengers in Wanigela. Instead, they flew directly to Tufi, where a large group of tourists waited for a plane. Many local people complained about the carrier's policy of giving preference to tourist reservations, as well as flights to Tufi, instead of fulfilling their scheduled flights to and from Wanigela. In 2012-13, the Wanigela airstrip was closed while the Tufi airstrip was being extended in order to cater for bigger airplanes.

Although fairly self-supporting in terms of food and housing, the Maisin depend on relatives working in towns to provide them with money. Since bride-prices, school fees, and medical treatments have to be funded, as well as goods such as clothes, batteries, tinned food, and rice, all Maisin need access to cash. Thus Maisin people have repeatedly searched for ways to elevate their position and obtain some of the prosperity their relatives working in towns enjoy. Initiatives to set up coffee plantations, grow vanilla, and launch other projects did not bring the revenues Maisin hoped for and as a consequence did not last long. In contrast, the selling of tapa to missionaries, tourists, and artefact shops, often through the mediation of relatives living in towns, has provided one of the mainstays of Maisin villagers' efforts to get cash. This possibility of tapa as a potential cash product was taken up by Maisin people in interaction with the Anglican Church and environmental organisations. The questions are how these various groups contributed to the commodification of tapa and what effects this commodification has had on the object and on Maisin people's lives and relationships?

### **Painting for Church and Greenpeace**

Maisin individuals have tried to sell tapa since the 1960s; however, these efforts remained family or clan based. Later large-scale marketing and commodification of Maisin tapa have been mainly the result of two organisations: the local representatives of the Anglican Church and Greenpeace.

For the organisation of commercial tapa production, the Anglican Church relied upon the Anglican Mothers' Union (MU), which was established in the early 1950s. This union, which unites a relatively large number of women, provided and still provides the cooperative organisation necessary for producing large quantities of tapa which can then be sold by church or MU representatives.

In the early 1990s, the Maisin came to the attention of environmental activists when villagers launched a public campaign to prevent the national government from permitting commercial logging on their ancestral lands. In their struggle, the Maisin received support from Greenpeace, which actively used Maisin tapa to promote support for the Maisin fight against logging. 'Painting a sustainable future: Maisin art and rainforest conservation' was the headline of an international Greenpeace campaign. It presented the Maisin as a tribal people whose ancestral tapa art could save the rainforest and bring development to their lives at the same time. In this process the Maisin were encouraged through the efforts of one Maisin man who had experience working within a similar organisation in Oro Bay (Barker 2004: 452) to run an 'Integrated Conservation and Development' (ICAD) organisation. According to local aspirations, MICAD (Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development) should have become one of the major buyers of tapa from the villagers.

Both MU and MICAD are Maisin-based and Maisin-run ‘cooperatives’, although the MU is part of a larger international MU organisation. Like the village cooperatives established after the war, they unite Maisin beyond immediate family- and clan-bound affiliation, crosscutting village and even tribal boundaries.<sup>3</sup> But while the MU is ideally a woman’s organisation supported by the local (male) church representatives, MICAD, like the earlier village cooperatives, is run by men despite the fact they initially strived for an equal representation of Maisin people, including women.

MU and MICAD are run independently of each other, and one might hope for collaboration between the two organisations, thereby representing and covering all Maisin people and their spiritual and economic needs. Relationships between them are somewhat strained, however, especially with regard to the marketing of tapa. While the tapa revenues from the MU are meant to support the Anglican priest and the women’s families, the tapa revenues from MICAD are meant to keep MICAD running but are largely shared among the Maisin as a whole through the distribution of medicines, a service the government fails to provide. Thus, although both MU and MICAD are eager to find new markets and thereby potentially compete with each other, they strive for different albeit complementary goals. In the following sections, the politics of gender associated with the Anglican commercialisation of tapa and, more recently, Greenpeace and MICAD is elaborated.

### *Drawings for the Church*

The buying and selling of tapa, which had been initiated by missionary collectors such as P. J. Money, was continued by the work of Sister Helen Roberts. Sister Roberts (1920 – 1992), who was stationed at Wanigela for no less than 45 years, continued Anglican attempts to commercialise and incorporate tapa into the Christian way of life and worship. A few years after World War II, she came to Wanigela as a young woman.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1970s she started to sell pieces of barkcloth to visiting friends and other foreigners in order to assist with costs related to the education of local youths (John Barker: personal comments). Just prior to her death in 1992, she organised to sew the barkcloth cape and mitre of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He received this tapa outfit in 1991 on the occasion of the church’s centenary celebration and wore it at the procession in Dogura. In her house, still there but decaying since her death, one room is adorned with a large decorated tapa, a remembrance of old and soon-to-be-forgotten times.

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3 Other religious groups exist, such as the Melanesian Brotherhood and several youth groups as well as women’s groups and councils in Sinapa and Uiaku. These groups are not as well established in Maisin villages as the Mothers’ Union and are not involved in the tapa trade.

4 Sister Helen Roberts started with translating the bible into Ubir language – one of the Wanigela languages. After her death in 1992, she was buried in front of the church, opposite her house, which was rebuilt after having burned down in the 1980s. Melancholy overwhelms the visitor who comes to her house. It is still furnished as it was but without running water or a flushing toilet since nobody has maintained the water taps and pipes.

The Anglican Church, especially the former priest stationed in Uiaku, tries to open up new markets and outlets to sell tapa, both nationally and internationally. In doing so, it relies on tapa being made by the members of the Mothers' Union.<sup>5</sup>

In 1942, a branch of the Mothers' Union was established in Uiaku, and subsequently ones were established in Airara and Sinapa. Every Wednesday the MU women come together in these villages for prayer and subsequent community service such as visiting and helping sick people. Moreover, the MU has been trying to support income-generating activities. In Airara, the MU managed to finance the buying of several sewing machines, which enable MU women to add sewing to their activities. In addition, each month a special church service is organised, after which a board meeting is held to discuss MU matters. Each year a large regional Ladies Day is organised, where women from all over Collingwood Bay perform songs, dances, and theatre plays. The aim is to provide information and bring problems associated with family life, such as alcohol abuse and adultery, out in the open. The Mothers' Union seems firmly based and fairly well organised. Moreover, this Anglican Church organisation provides an important opportunity for cooperation and communion beyond the immediate family, clan, and even village (see also B. Douglas 1998: 6).<sup>6</sup>

Unlike many of the other MU activities, such as providing help for the needy, the Anglican commercialisation of tapa attracted the involvement of various men who were either invited to give advice to the MU women concerning the selling of tapa or who volunteered. The local board in Airara also includes men. Perhaps not surprisingly, a local man has worked as an organiser/secretary for the Airara Mothers' Union for no less than seven years. He stopped doing this after he was accused of having taken MU funds. Just recently, however, he is once again working in the MU organisation as he was chosen and appointed as treasurer of the Airara board. In addition, one of the male elders of the village was asked to become involved as their advisor/manager. According to one of the MU members, the elder women within the organisation demanded this senior male involvement.

*The old MU members, the older ladies, they decide what we do. They don't listen to the younger women. We wanted to organise ourselves, by ourselves [women only]. But the older women didn't want a young woman to manage MU affairs. So they decided to get him as our manager.*

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5 The Mothers' Union was established in England in 1845 by Mary Summer, a priest's wife. The purpose of the Mothers' Union is to be concerned with the strengthening and preservation of marriage and Christian family life. Among its five main objects are the upholding of Christ's teachings, promoting family life, and helping those 'whose family life has met with adversity' (Leaflet MU).

6 The organisational structure of the MU consists of three levels. At the top are the national (PNG) executives: a national president, treasurer, worker, and trainer who are spread over PNG. Next are the boards of each Anglican Diocese. At a grassroots level, each of the five dioceses is organised around parishes, which all have their own Mothers' Union boards. The Diocese of Popondetta encompasses Uiaku parish, which includes the villages of Yuayu, Ganjiga, Uiaku, Sinapa, Sinipara, Koniasi, Airara, Marua, Reaga, Gegerau, and Kuwansasap. Although Airara belongs to Uiaku parish, it has its own Mothers' Union executive board.

This male interference was thus clearly not appreciated by all members, and both female and male non-MU people expressed their concern at men being involved in the Mothers' Union. As a non-MU woman explained, 'Now he is speaking up to the women; he wants to talk to them. So they see and listen to him talking; this is not good'. As the husband of one of the younger Airara MU women explained further:

*In general, I don't want women to speak up. They will still be put down by our custom. But MU women, they should be independent and run their own organisation. But with the MU, men are running it, and this is a problem. I think women should run it and decide for themselves. Now this man is running the MU, and maybe he has too much control. Maybe he does things that are no good for the women. The other thing is that he comes from a Kawo clan. Women might find it difficult to go against him.*

Thus, despite the conviction by various women and men that the Mothers' Union is essentially an organisation in which women should be independent, men tend to take or are even given control. The fact that the women themselves adhere to the dominant gender definitions is not only seen in the fact that older women are convinced that younger women are not capable of managing MU interests properly. As the female president of the MU in Airara expressed it, men's involvement is welcomed in helping MU women to do administrative work but also because they can travel far easier than most women, as the latter have to take care of their families first. Thus the Mothers' Union, at least in Airara, still replicates dominant gender relations in which men take important positions.<sup>7</sup>

Since a reasonably large group of women (24 members) spread over Airara and Marua villages are organised in the Mothers' Union, this organisational structure provides an extremely good basis for implementing projects such as the large-scale production of tapa for external markets. The organisational advantage of the Mothers' Union through being a 'cooperative' has led the priest, who is based in Uiaku, to encourage Mothers' Union women to produce tapa for Anglican markets. The idea is to get enough money to pay the priest's wages as well as to generate income for the women themselves and their families. So far, however, many projects have failed. Although tapa has been sold, neither the priests nor the women who made the tapa have seen their money yet, as unreliable brokers have taken and probably spent the money.

Although not everybody is very keen on their wives travelling around, the church does provide women with the possibility of travelling abroad to set up trade. For example, the idea of establishing a tapa market in Korea was put forward by Father Edison Kopada, the former priest of Uiaku Parish. Having contacts in Korea, he thought this to be a good opportunity to promote Maisin tapa in this country. In cooperation with MICAD, who sent one of their tapa business representatives, the Uiaku Mothers' Union chairwoman and another female MU member departed for Korea in 2001. The trip was successful in the sense that a fruitful collaboration

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7 So in contrast to what Barker (in press: 22) states, Maisin men are involved in the Mothers' Union and do attend their board meetings.

between MU and MICAD seemed to have been established<sup>8</sup> and that Maisin and tapa were promoted. The goal of the trip – establishing a new market – was not achieved, however, as the tapa prices were too high by Korean standards. Another problem, especially for Uiaku and Ganjiga MU members, was the shortage of tapa trees. As described in Chapter 2, the villages of Uiaku and Ganjiga faced a decline of *wuwusi*, and this affected the amount of tapa the delegation was able to take to Korea. The intention was to create a special Mothers' Union tapa garden, but the land destined for this tapa plantation had still not been cleared when I was there some eight months later. Since tapa trees were still present in the Sibon villages, the next project that I witnessed involved the Mothers' Union women living in Sinapa and Airara.

In February 2002, a delegation of the Mothers' Union visited Airara in order to open the new Mothers' Union year. After being welcomed by women decorated in their traditional regalia, the possibilities for marketing women's – or rather Mothers' Union women's – products were discussed. The Port Moresby delegation, encouraged and supported by Father Kopada, tried to convince the Maisin MU women to send the raw materials necessary for making pandanus mats and string bags to Port Moresby so that women there could make mats and string bags to sell. Maisin women themselves could bring tapa in order to sell it there.

Attracted by the proposal of going to Port Moresby, which would enable the women to control potential revenues of the tapa sale instead of depending upon untrustworthy middlemen, a delegation of MU women took off for Port Moresby in December 2002. The delegation included the chairwoman, who had previously travelled to Korea, as well as several Sinapa and Airara ladies. With heaps of tapa made by themselves and also collected from other Maisin women, they eventually ended up stranded in Port Moresby. Having no money or marketing insights, they depended upon one of the Port Moresby women who had previously visited Airara and who conveniently also happened to run the Provincial Women's Business Association, located in Port Moresby. The trip ended disappointingly when the Maisin women had to use all the revenue from the tapa sold to pay for their airfares back home.

The priest in particular stressed that the Mothers' Union should be able to increase cash revenues through these kinds of projects. Moreover, he wanted to establish various projects within a short period of time in order, as he put it, to change women's positions in Maisin society. According to the priest, several local men opposed his plans and projects, and also relationships between the priest and MICAD were somewhat problematic. During the Ladies Day organised in March 2001, Father Kopada, in addressing the attendees, stressed the cooperation between the two major Maisin cooperatives, MICAD and the church, especially with regard to tapa projects. Almost a year later, he still seemed very optimistic about the possibilities for the Mothers' Union to make enough money to pay for his allowance and to increase the incomes of the families. The projects discussed

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8 The Maisin man travelling with the MU women was not only a MICAD tapa business representative; he was also the chairwoman's brother.

all involved additional burdens for the women, however, and moreover they sadly failed to bring in the cash both the priest and MU women had hoped for. This failure further contributed to the negative attitude several men expressed towards these Anglican projects.

In addition to the additional workload for women and the often poor financial results, Maisin men in particular complained about these Anglican projects with regard to the fact that the few men involved would take their wives 'all over the place'. This communal mobility of women while being 'guided' by a few men was regarded as problematic since husbands could no longer control their wives, and adultery was feared. As a consequence, female MU members can be 'punished' by their husbands and forced to give up their membership.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the problems associated with the Anglican commercialisation of tapa, the 'religious' function of tapa and its presence in Anglican worship is rather successful. The barkcloth cape and mitre of the archbishop are probably the most conspicuous examples, but tapa also plays a role in everyday worship. Almost all Anglican Churches in the area are decorated with tapa, including those in Miniafia and Korafe. Religious scenes are displayed on tapa, as well as the more traditional designs. Bibles are wrapped in pieces of tapa, and the Mothers Union logo is also painted on the *embobi* that are worn by the MU women during the many church festivals that are held each year. Thus, in contrast to Teilhet (1983: 47), who argued that men dominate the important arts and symbols, Maisin women are among the few Papuan women who produce the religious symbols in their communities through their production and designing of tapa. In addition, each year the Mothers' Union of Uiaku Parish organises a 'Ladies Day' where all female members from the various villages and tribes come together for prayer and celebration dressed up in tapa. The involvement of women is therefore rather significant. Compared to men, they are fairly well organised and participate more often in Sunday church services and church activities, both by their presence and through their work. Barker (1984) mentions an ever larger role for MU in establishing the acceptance and incorporation of the Anglican Church in Uiaku. In contrast, the other main Maisin cooperative, MICAD, is mainly organised and led by Maisin men.

### *Tapa against logging*

*Greenpeace is helping the Maisin tribe of Papua New Guinea to resist plans to log over 200,000 hectares of ancient tropical forest. After deciding they did not want logging on their ancestral lands, the Maisin sent a delegation of chiefs to the capital where they met with government and took out full-page advertisements to prevent logging. Greenpeace is working with the Maisin to develop ecologically responsible alternatives, including a successful scheme to market their traditional tapa cloth paintings (Greenpeace Annual report 1997).*

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9 Disapproval from other MU women regarding specific social behaviour might also force women to leave.

Greenpeace's interest in Papua New Guinea and the Maisin people's struggle against large-scale logging derive from the fact that Papua New Guinea harbours the largest remaining rainforest in the Asia-Pacific region and the third largest in the world. As a result, it is an important area for the environmental lobby, which is trying to save the rainforest in order to save the world. The Maisin case served Greenpeace especially well since Maisin and other local communities own most of the forest area in PNG, which encompasses approximately 60 per cent of the entire territory (Filer and Sekhran 1998: 18). In total, local communities own almost 97 per cent of the total land area (E-law 2002). The Maisin people own over 200,000 hectares stretching between the Solomon Sea and the Owen Stanley Range. The Maisin literally fought for the land they claim today. Since the 36 Maisin clans claim various stretches of land spread all over Collingwood Bay, one clan may have a patch of land located in another clan's property. This clan-based division of land, which makes it almost impossible for individuals to sell land, prevented the illegal deforestation of large parts of Maisin land.

Although the rights to these lands have been recognised by PNG law, both the government and national and international companies try to acquire community-owned areas that are of interest for logging or mining projects. When Maisin people had to cope with the threat of illegal appropriation and deforestation of large parts of their lands, their juridical case served as an effective showcase and test-case for all the other PNG communities and others abroad who were – and are- faced with similar implemented 'development projects'. Maisin culture, visualised in their barkcloth paintings, and Maisin nature provided attractive images. The Maisin case made good publicity and was therefore an easy-to-market 'commodity'. In fact, through Maisin tapa Maisin culture became effectively commercialised by the environmental lobby. This relationship between 'Maisin art and rainforest conservation', which was one of the main slogans Greenpeace used in its campaigns, is discussed in the next section.<sup>10</sup>

### Tapa as a green commodity

Greenpeace used Maisin tapa in their environmental 'save the rainforest' campaign, marketing tapa as a traditional and non-destructive art form. Its commercialisation served as sustainable development in contrast to destructive deforestation. Thus the environmental lobby was founded on the commodification of tapa. It was marketed as supporting the rainforest and its tribal inhabitants, who were portrayed as being part of the landscape, living in harmony with 'nature'. This imagery of Maisin protecting their 'ancestral' ways of life by protecting their rainforest is clearly very romanticised and embedded within how the industrialised 'West' perceives the 'unspoiled' and 'natural' world of the Pacific (see Foale and Macintyre 2003). Apparently the commercialisation of tapa would not interfere with efforts to preserve the integrity of both the rainforest and Maisin 'traditional' culture. Nevertheless, the fact that tapa was marketed as the solution for sustainable

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10 In Appendix 3, I describe the events which resulted in tapa being marketed as a 'green' product.

development, 'bridging past and present' (Rice 1998), was not considered unproblematic by everyone. Alan Moore, a New York art critic, commented upon an exhibition of Maisin tapa and Asmat shields in New York as follows:

*To turn these things from artefacts into products, to hasten their commodification, seems almost necessary to protect the habitat of human and animal alike. Still, I fear that when politics and business are mixed, too often they hobble each other. Further, the art-world is presently over-determined as a nexus for moral and political imperatives. Surely there is some better way of carrying these shields [and tapa] into battle in the heart of global capital than waging primitive commerce (Moore 1997).*

To both MICAD and the environmental lobby, however, 'primitive commerce' seemed to be the best way to maintain Maisin people's heritage while at the same time improving their lives. In order to promote tapa as a 'green' commodity, several international exhibitions were organised. The first exhibition of 'green' tapa was initiated in 1995, when Maisin tapa, along with a Maisin delegation, was brought to California and displayed at Berkeley's University Art Museum. As Greenpeace explained, 'the aim was to introduce Maisin tapa painting as an art form to a new audience, to educate that audience about the links between environmental and development issues in Melanesia, and to test a potential market for tapa' ([[http://](http://archive.greenpeace.org/forests/solomons/working.html)] archive. Greenpeace. org./ forests/ solomons/ working.html). Mainly due to Greenpeace's mediation, the aim of establishing international markets succeeded, and Maisin tapa seemed on the verge of becoming a sustainable alternative to logging.

In 1997, the involvement of Greenpeace in Maisin's fight against deforestation reached a climax when the MV *Rainbow Warrior* anchored in Collingwood Bay. Maisin from all the villages came to Uiaku and welcomed the Greenpeace crew dressed up in their tapa loincloths and other regalia. As Lafcadio Cortesi expressed in the diary entry of the MV *Rainbow Warrior*, this united celebration encompassing Maisin from all villages was something special. It brought 'Maisin cooperation and commitment against logging to a new level. People were so excited and honoured that they stepped up their already high level of participation and, as a result, did something that hasn't been done in over 100 years – brought the whole tribe together'. Moreover, the visit 'spurred a cultural revival' ([[http://](http://archive.greenpeace.org/comms/97/ships/rwarrior/diary.html#ps)] archive. greenpeace. org/ comms/ 97/ ships/ rwarrior/ diary.html#ps).

In addition to the large festivities, which entailed dancing and singing for three days, Maisin people welcomed the Greenpeace representatives with a song especially written for this occasion. The Maisin men who wrote this song explicitly made reference to the Maisin as warriors, as protecting their land. It thus seems that Maisin people either instigated or appropriated the idea of Maisin heroically fighting against 'predatory resource extraction corporations' (Foale and Macintyre 2003). This image was, as elsewhere (see Van Helden 2001: 365), used in the environmental lobby campaigns to mobilise resources:

*Peace, give us peace, Greenpeace  
We are about to face a war  
Maisin warriors against Developers  
Of our resourceful land*

*Rainbow and Maisin warriors  
Together we stand to fight the war  
Preserve for us our Melanesian way  
In protecting our land.*

*We stand out proud today  
We have protected our land  
Against developers of our resource  
Through our wisdom*

*Peace, give us peace, Greenpeace  
Conserve our Melanesian ways  
Extend your rays of love, O Rainbow Warriors  
And give us Peace.*

It seems that Maisin people have won their battle against ‘development’ and saved their land for future generations (see Appendices 4 and 5). But how about the development and prosperity that the Maisin people so desperately long for? Did the tapa paintings manage to provide the promised alternative sustainable future, just as they seemingly saved the rainforest? Further, was the unity among the various Maisin clans and villages, as politically and administratively symbolised by MICAD, sustainable?

### *MICAD: Clan, gender equality and the tapa business*

*This land is my land  
This land is clan land  
This land is women’s land  
This land is men’s land  
This land is elders’ land  
This land is children’s land  
This land is Maisin all the way*

*From Uwe village to the Milne Bay border  
From the peaks of Suckling to the ocean water  
From Lake Gorofi to Wakioki  
This land is Maisin all the way  
I go walking into my garden  
I chew my kara [betel nut] and plant my taro  
I make my sago and scrape my dombon [coconut]  
This land is Maisin all the way  
On Sunday morning we have our service  
We feast with wantoks [relatives] and share some tok tok [talking]  
No matter the heat we drink our tea so sweet  
This land is Maisin all the way*

*In the evening I pound my tapa  
To make my koifi or my embobi  
I beat my kundu [drum] and dance till morning dew  
This land is Maisin all the way*

*On Monday morning I go to the market  
To sell my warm scones and use the telephone  
I call my sister because I miss her  
This land is Maisin all the way.*

This lyric, written to the tune of Woody Guthrie's 'This Land is My Land', was composed by one of MICAD's executive board members on the occasion of the opening of the satellite telephone house, which took place during the MV *Rainbow Warrior's* visit in 1997. The satellite telephone, enabling Maisin to communicate with relatives living in the towns as well as with their national and foreign partners, had been donated by Sister Yasuko Shamizu, a representative of a Japanese NGO, JOMAS (Japanese Overseas Missionary Aid). In this song the Maisin are portrayed once again as modern warriors, fighting against developers for the land that is owned by all Maisin: men, women, and children.

Although Maisin people have made a stand against the deforestation of their territory, the claiming of this land by individuals or clans still remains a 'hot' issue. As one middle-aged man expressed it, 'Today these young, educated people, they come and claim the land they think is theirs. They don't think about Maisin, only about their own things. All the Maisin conquered Maisin land, not individual clans. If it comes to that [i.e. claiming land], the *wo-ari-kawo* (chiefs of the upper-streams), who came by land, can claim entitlements to land, not the *mera-ari-kawo* (chiefs of the down-streams) who came by canoe'. Naturally, the man who uttered these words belongs to *wo-ari-kawo*, but his frustration expresses generational as well as clan oppositions and conflicts. These and other hierarchies such as gender are reflected in the problems faced by MICAD.

In the early 1990s, the concept of an Integrated Conservation And Development (ICAD) organisation was introduced to Maisin people by a Maisin employee working in the Australian AID-funded Oro Butterfly Conservation Project in the heart of the Oro Province (Barker 1999: 10). Several Maisin men, who had just returned to Uiaku and Ganjiga villages after retiring from jobs held in town, introduced the concept, which was further encouraged by Greenpeace representative Lafcadio Cortesi. Cortesi had been introduced to the Maisin through his acquisition of a piece of Maisin tapa in Port Moresby. Intrigued with where this piece of art came from, he visited Uiaku. In 1994, during a meeting attended by Cortesi, it was decided to establish some sort of organisation. As a MICAD board member expressed it, 'So MICAD was established. But this was done without Maisin people really knowing what they were getting themselves into'.

MICAD was established in order to prevent large-scale deforestation and promote conservation by operating as a mediator between Maisin villagers and partners such as Greenpeace, Conservation Melanesia (CM), and other outsiders. Although initiated by Maisin people themselves, it was largely influenced by

Greenpeace and Conservation Melanesia (see also Barker 1999, 2008), the latter actually providing MICAD's constitution because there was no time for MICAD itself to write a constitution. According to CM, MICAD was established to 'oversee the Maisin people's collective or individual endeavours to transform their perception of development into reality whilst maintaining the integrity of their local forest environment' (CM report). While CM places its emphasis on conservation, villagers are, in general, foremost interested in development. It is apparent that these points of view will not always be congruent. This dualistic role of MICAD mediating between the environmental lobby and between Maisin villagers' aspirations is also present in the way MICAD is structured and functions.

MICAD is an umbrella-like organisation structured around an executive board of directors consisting of a chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, and secretary, who are elected by all Maisin and who oversee six 'departments', including the management team that operates the satellite telephone, the dinghy operators, and the tapa business enterprise. These branches are run fairly independent by non-executive board members who are chosen by their respective communities. The profits these branches yield are under the control of the executive board. Nevertheless, the major part of MICAD's income derives from overseas donations. This money is spent on keeping the various branches running and on purchasing materials such as solar panels for the telephone as well as medicines for Maisin people.

MICAD should be a neutral organisation, allying and representing all the Maisin people, villages, and 36 clans in an equal way. Nevertheless, due to village, clan, and gender hierarchies, which are intrinsic to Maisin social and political life, this is not the case. As a consequence, the functioning of MICAD is often under much scrutiny.

One of the biggest problems is that many of the profitable and other activities of MICAD are Uiaku- and Ganjiga-based. For example, the satellite telephone is located in Uiaku, and many meetings are held in Uiaku despite the fact that MICAD tries to have meetings in all villages. The geographical distances between the villages combined with high petrol prices do not facilitate the equal participation that MICAD strives for.

In addition, the MICAD executive board are all Gorofi (Uiaku and Ganjiga) people. In fact, they all belong to one of the four main IYON. When I asked a Maisin man why the executive board was primarily made up of men coming from this particular Kawo clan, he replied, 'This clan has educated people in the village, and that is why they are on the board. There are more educated people in that clan. But many of our mothers are from another IYON so...' In practice, however, it seems that this matri-affiliation could not overcome the Kawo/Sabu hierarchy and possible frictions among the different *iyon* and *IYON*.

Due to the Maisin clan hierarchy, it is difficult for others to publicly attack the executive board members or MICAD's functioning in general. Instead, MICAD leaders are attacked and suspected of corruption through extensive gossip and rumour, which in turn makes it difficult for the board members to remain motivated. As one of the executive board members said, 'People accused me of

having taken money from MICAD. They thought it suspicious that I gave food, coffee, and sugar to people. But this is also what they expected from me! In fact, especially the people to whom you give are the ones who are making problems. They are either not satisfied about what they get or are jealous of what other people receive'. Also, the executive board members themselves cannot according to the traditions of their Kawo clan publicly accuse or correct MICAD general board members and field workers. As the chairman of MICAD put it, 'As a chief [Kawo] I cannot blame other people. Not even if they are at fault because they did not do their work well'. As a result, the failure of MICAD or of MICAD branches to live up to people's expectations is likely to be projected onto the executive board.

In addition to clan hierarchies, frictions between Sibon and Gorofi villages interfere with MICAD's functioning. Maisin living in the Sibon villages clearly resent Uiaku and consequently the Gorofi villages of Uiaku and Ganjiga as the centres of all MICAD activities and revenues. The dominant position of Gorofi people on the MICAD executive board, who according to Sibon people favour their 'own' people with the material revenues of development and possibilities for travel abroad, has led to a growing disapproval of MICAD activities. The implementation of national and even international projects and workshops in Uiaku has contributed to these feelings of resentment and especially of not being represented in either MICAD decision-making or activities.

Finally, another hierarchical cultural relationship that goes against MICAD's ideals of equal representation is gender. According to Barker (1999: 23), Maisin people have responded to 'encouragement, or pressure' from outsiders 'to include women representatives in MICAD and to allow women to participate directly in public meetings'. This 'enforcement' of equal gender participation is part of a large international 'gender mainstreaming' policy or strategy, advocated by the United Nations, which focuses on ensuring that gender perspectives are taken into account and that attention is paid to the goal of gender equality in all policies and projects. Organisations such as Greenpeace and local NGOs have incorporated this strategy into their own policies by at least ensuring women's participation in decision-making processes.

This focus on equal gender participation contributed to the involvement of Maisin women in MICAD. Until 1999, four women sat on the MICAD board, operating primarily on the tapa committee, and Maisin women seemed to have been actively contributing to MICAD meetings. Today, however, the involvement of women has changed considerably. When I asked one of these female board members why she had left the MICAD board and subsequently MICAD, she told me, 'They pushed me out. The men did not really want to work with women. Also, it is difficult to talk about your rights with them. They didn't treat us right!' When I asked the board of directors why this female member and other women were not re-elected and were even pushed out of MICAD, they told me they resented her for not showing up during MICAD meetings and being lazy. 'She did nothing for the community', was another comment. As the men stated, 'We do want women on the MICAD board, but they did not do their job right!' It thus seems that the expectations of men and women partaking in MICAD differed. The result of these

tensions and miscommunications is that today women do not hold positions on the MICAD board.

In a similar way, both the Maisin's partners and outsiders encouraged women's participation during meetings. When Lafcadio Cortesi of Greenpeace and Larry Rinder of the Berkley museum visited Uiaku in 1994 in order to discuss an exhibition of Maisin tapa in California to be held a year later, they insisted women should be involved:

*Women do not attend important decision-making meetings and, in general, seemed to me to occupy a distinctly second-class position in the society. Indeed, even though virtually all the tapa artists are women, we had to argue quite strongly for the necessity of having a separate meeting with the women's group and to insist that our translator for that meeting be a woman as well (Rinder 1995a).*

When John Barker visited the Maisin in the early 1990s, ten years after his first fieldwork period, he was struck by 'the presence of women sitting on the elevated shelters with men for both public meetings and dinners honouring visitors'. Moreover, as he continued, 'the women sat apart from men and tended to be quiet, but several made eloquent speeches about the need for Maisin to conserve the rainforest'. At another meeting addressing copyrights of tapa designs, men insisted that the women present put forward their opinion. As Barker recalls, 'The women were clearly nervous, but they did speak (Barker 1999: 23)'. Nevertheless, when he returned in 2000, and when I did my fieldwork in 2001 – 2002, this situation had changed dramatically.

During the village, MICAD, P&C, and other meetings that I attended in Uiaku, Ganjiga, Airara, and Marua, women sat separate from men, often below, near the sides of the elevated shelters on which most meetings took place, and more importantly, only very rarely did women speak up during these occasions. Although in Uiaku I did witness two strong senior women at a MICAD meeting making public remarks, in Airara and Marua both village and MICAD meetings were male-dominated gatherings. As an Airara woman whom I interviewed regarding women's attendance and participation during meetings remarked, 'Most ladies feel shy speaking up. Women are not educated, so that prevents them from speaking. So that is why men make the decisions and we ladies have to follow' (see also Chapter 1). This does not imply women are happy with this arrangement. As a Mothers' Union (MU) member expressed it, 'Some women have better ideas than men. But poor ones! They are never allowed to speak out for themselves'.

This ban on women speaking up in public – and its basis in Maisin gender as well as clan structures – was not fully understood by Conservation Melanesia and other national and international partners that urged equal participation. Although they managed to temporarily bring Maisin women into MICAD meetings, they did not take into account that women are not allowed to verbally cross gender as well as clan boundaries. As one of the Airara MU ladies explained it to me:

*When the CM people came in, Maisin chiefs came together and had a long discussion stating that 'we [Conservation Melanesia] will allow women to say certain things aloud'. But women were not allowed to say everything. A Waigo*

*woman cannot cross clan boundaries. So during a meeting certain women are appointed to talk. If it is in Airara or Marua, we can say it to the men. But if other clans are involved, we respect those men and so we cannot voice our concerns. Only during MU meetings we can say our part, or during communal cooking. And at school meetings, yes, we can talk. During these meetings both men and women can voice their concerns.<sup>11</sup>*

The inherent shyness of young and middle-aged women in particular, having to overcome both gender and clan boundaries, is augmented by men who consider women as not being able to contribute to meetings since their *mon-seraman* (ways of thinking) differ from those of men. To change this attitude obviously involves more than just 'adding' women to meetings. As a 34-year-old Mothers' Union woman expressed it, 'It has been practised for a long time like this, and these chiefs [Kawo], they tend to look down upon women. Now women never speak up about what they want for themselves'. Moreover, if they do so, they are reprimanded by their husbands or simply pushed aside as not having the knowledge to speak, even within a domestic context.

Thus, in addition to the gendered nature of speech whereby women feel shy to speak in the presence of men and the clan boundaries that customarily prevent women from speaking up outside their clan, men also actively suppress women trying to speak up. It therefore seems that from the startf Maisin men felt uncomfortable with the changes brought about in these gender relations, as initiated by CM and MICAD and urged by MICAD's national and international partners (see also Barker 1999: 23). As soon as the pressure from these partners declined, Maisin resumed the 'traditional' hierarchies of talking, in which young and middle-aged women in particular have no voice or a diminished one.

The emphasis on gender equality as part of foreign aid is directly related to the international marketing of tapa. As Barker (1999: 22) argues, 'Indeed, several groups have been attracted to Maisin precisely because they perceive in supporting Maisin tapa cloth an opportunity to support women'. But as we have seen, this desire for gender equality eventually backfired, reducing the position of women to producers of cloth and possible wealth instead of equal decision-makers.

Ironically, the successful commercialisation of tapa is about to end in the same way as women's participation in MICAD's tapa affairs. In its heyday, MICAD was assisted in building up community capacity to manage the tapa business and other activities by a Japanese NGO (JOMAS) and Peace Corps volunteers. In combination with the assistance of Greenpeace, who organised international markets and several international trips, thereby effectively promoting Maisin tapa as a means of sustainable development, the business appeared to be a great success. It managed to finance MICAD activities and simultaneously provided an income for the tapa-producing families. Nevertheless, the second couple of Peace Corps

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11 Even during the P&C meetings, Airara women (i.e., young and middle-aged mothers) rarely spoke, with primarily the attending men doing the talking and making propositions. During one of the P&C meetings, which lasted for more than three hours, only two women spoke up: the wife of one of the teachers and Louisa. Visibly nervous though determined, Louisa spoke up in public, forwarding her opinions and concerns. In general, women listen attentively and discuss matters among themselves.

volunteers who assisted MICAD members in account keeping left earlier than planned, and when Greenpeace left the Maisin on their own, the tapa business declined.

According to many villagers, MICAD should have been one of the major buyers of tapa. The international market collapsed, however, and MICAD now has trouble finding buyers and as a consequence is not able to buy large quantities of tapa from the villagers. Although most Maisin villagers stress the commercial value and importance of tapa, the success of the tapa business has been disappointing and troublesome. There is no tourism, and markets are predominantly beyond reach due to bad logistics. There are no roads, and transport is limited due to high airfares, irregular flights, and the high costs involved with transport over water. Although several individuals have found ways to create their own tapa markets, most villagers depend on MICAD to buy their tapa.

Thus, although Maisin won their court case against the state, protected their lands, and are globally known through exhibitions, television broadcasts, and internet sites, the 'green' tapa has not yet brought the development that people hoped for. It did however bring about other changes.

### **Crossing boundaries: men making tapa – women representing Maisin**

The commercialisation of tapa by the Anglican Church and organisations such as Greenpeace is intimately intertwined with issues of gender. As has been observed elsewhere in the world with regard to the commodification of things, this influences the gendered forms of production as well as gender relations. Tapa as a commodity established not only national and international exchange relationships between various people; it also altered local relationships. The main question in this section is how did this commodification change gender relations in both production and marketing? Below we shall see how men, attracted by the revenues, started to design tapa and women were mobilised in its marketing.

#### *The advent of male designers*

Franklin Seri, the 69-year-old councillor of Ganjiga and Uiaku, is repairing the small holes in a large bundle of designed and painted pieces of tapa. Using the sticky juice of little green berries as glue, he attaches small pieces of barkcloth on the back of the tapa pieces, thereby covering the holes that were created by side-branches and twigs of the tapa tree (see also Photo 42). The pieces of tapa are meant for sale and will be transported to Tufi by dinghy early next morning. Since tourists and other buyers such as MICAD prefer pieces of tapa without holes, Franklin carefully continues his work. The tapa he is patching is made, decorated, and painted by various women. This time, the bundle of tapa does not include any pieces made by Franklin himself. But in being the second man of his village (Uiaku) to start drawing tapa designs, and by teaching girls (attending top-up grade) the art of drawing tapa designs, Franklin still practices it himself.

For Franklin, one of the main reasons to start designing tapa was the possibility it offered for travel abroad. As he argues, 'tapa is not just a simple traditional art; it is a way to the world!'

Franklin's first trip abroad took place when he attended a conference on rural development in Sydney, sponsored by the Melanesian Young Nations in 1976. This time abroad awakened his interest in travelling. It would be another ten years before he was given the opportunity to travel outside PNG again, this time to demonstrate the art and techniques of tapa at the Commonwealth Festival of Arts in Edinburgh, Scotland. Franklin even had the opportunity to hand over two pieces of tapa to Prince Charles and Princess Diana, thereby adding Maisin tapa to the Royal Collection of Westminster Abbey. Many other travels in which he promoted tapa would follow.

But how did Franklin manage to demonstrate this essentially women's work? Educated in Popondetta, visiting his village and parents only during holidays, and subsequently trained as a dentist, Franklin belongs to the previously described elite of educated and urban-employed Maisin. Moreover, unlike many other Maisin men, he is particularly helpful to his sick and weak wife, Amelia, who suffers from chronic bronchitis and injuries inflicted by the attack of a wild pig. In order to relieve her from the hard work that women usually have to cope with, Franklin takes care of her while their married children look after the garden and Amelia's relatives bring food on a regular basis. This situation, where Franklin spends much time in and around the house, enables him to concentrate on drawing tapa designs.

As Franklin told me, he started to design tapa a few years after he married his wife in 1965. It took almost fifteen years, however, before he started to design seriously. At that time he was about 43 years old. This period coincides with the increasing efforts of individual Maisin to market tapa and the first participation of the Maisin at the Pacific Art Festival held in Tahiti in 1985. The possibility of tapa as a means to earn money – as well as seeing the world – must have appealed to Franklin. Taught by Amelia, he tried some designs on small pieces of tapa and gradually improved his skills. When he used a large piece of tapa to put his design on, however, Amelia got angry. Only after she had succeeded in exchanging this piece of tapa for a clay pot and two other pieces designed by Franklin had been sold did Amelia become confident in his skills. In 1986, he could show his skills in Scotland. This opportunity, however, did not appear out of the blue.

In contrast to Maisin women, Franklin had made the effort to register himself as an artist. This act clearly showed his ambition of becoming a registered and therefore known PNG artist, thereby creating possibilities to travel and earn money with his tapa skills. The advantage of his registration was shown when he was one of the two PNG artists chosen by the Cultural and Tourism Office in Port Moresby to represent PNG in Scotland. The festival lasted two weeks, during which Franklin demonstrated how to beat and design tapa. But making tapa was not the only display of traditional PNG culture he performed. Dressing up in traditional regalia and performing traditional dances were also part of his display

and, as such, representation of PNG culture. Two years later in 1988, Franklin was again selected and sponsored by the Cultural Tourism Office, this time to represent PNG at the 5th Pacific Festival of Arts, held in Townsville, Australia. Here he not only demonstrated the art of tapa making; he also sold pieces of tapa to an international audience. But while at these festivals Maisin tapa was predominantly displayed and marketed as a traditional PNG art form, Franklin's next trip abroad would be entirely devoted to tapa marketing.

In 1995, Greenpeace invited four Maisin to attend the opening of an exhibition of Maisin tapa at the University of Berkeley called 'Jumping lines: Maisin art and rainforest conservation'. Maisin people had to select two artists, while two other representatives were invited to discuss and expand the possibilities of marketing tapa. Franklin was chosen as one of the artists to visit California. Although initially Maisin people had decided to send an Uiaku woman, eventually she was replaced by an Uiaku man. Thus Franklin, being the only experienced tapa designer in the party, was responsible for demonstrating the art of tapa making at the Berkeley Art Museum in California. He also supervised the manufacture of an extremely large piece of tapa, which was created out of many smaller pieces (see Barker 2008: 172-73). Each clan had been asked to make a tapa, but six clans refused, probably because they were left out of the party going to Berkeley, and instead Franklin made additional pieces. In addition, he and the other men, all Gorofi villagers, performed Maisin dances and showed off their regalia.

After having shown his tapa art skills in the US, Franklin and also a woman from Airara were invited by the Japanese sister, Yasuko Shamizu, to travel to Japan that same year. During two weeks of travel, Franklin visited five major Japanese cities, where he once more gave a tapa demonstration, displayed tapa, and performed a dance, naturally dressed up in his tapa and matching regalia. Despite being 58 years old, this would not be his last major trip abroad. Eleven years later, in July 2004, Franklin once again represented the Maisin to an international audience. As one of the 120 PNG artists participating, he travelled to Palau to demonstrate Maisin dancing and tapa skills at the 9th Pacific Arts Festival. In addition, Franklin took with him several tapa cloths and tapa products such as hats to be sold at the PNG delegation 'shop' at the festival.

While the aspect of making tapa as a means to see the world is especially important for Franklin, other men involved in designing tapa have concentrated on the monetary revenues that tapa can provide. In Airara, two of the most consistent male tapa designers are Cecil King (age 38) and Lambert (in his 40s). Both claim to have started designing tapa because they felt like doing it, spending some of their free time drawing tapa designs and thereby generating money. As in Franklin's case, their backgrounds influenced their decision to take up designing.

Cecil started designing in 1995, around the same time Greenpeace invited four Maisin people to come to California. In contrast to Franklin, who had learned the skills from his wife, Cecil had been taught by his mother.<sup>12</sup> She taught him his

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12 Cecil's wife, Melinda, who had been very young when she married, did not yet know how to make proper designs at the time her husband started to draw. She learned the skills from the same woman who taught Cecil: her mother-in-law.

first design, and he repeated it several times until he understood it. Now he is also capable of making other designs, but he still draws the first design he learned. Since his mother and his father's first wife are among the most respected tapa designers, his designs fit with other contemporary styles. There is one major difference, however: while most women set up four lines at the same time, Cecil draws his design with one line and subsequently repeats it three times. This technique is totally different and much simpler. This implies that Cecil thinks about his designs in a different way.

Lambert had the opportunity and the time to start designing because of his malfunctioning foot. Having to use crutches in order to walk, he is unable to perform the labour normally ascribed to men such as clearing forest, building garden fences, and all the other types of labour performed by males, almost all of which require physical mobility. In order to spend his time in a rewarding way, he took up designing, which he learned from his mother, who lives with him and his wife, being good tapa artist themselves. As with Cecil's style, Lambert's is equally embedded within local forms. Both have sold several pieces of tapa, thereby making a bit of money for their families and themselves.

In contrast to these two mature, married men, 21-year-old James had aspirations to make huge profits out of selling tapa, and in order to achieve this goal, he started designing tapa as well. James claims that he did not learn to design from his mother but by watching how women in general make designs. Like Cecil, he started in the mid-1990s, which was a boom period in the commercialisation of tapa. But unlike the other tapa designers, both women and men, James intended to set up his own tapa business and sell his tapa in provincial towns. As he explained:

*Each tapa has its secret. My tapa, as well as those made by others, communicates with foreigners in such a way that they will buy it, or find a market for it. Most Maisin are not highly educated and cannot communicate with foreigners properly. Tapa does this for them. If all goes well, tapa will find its way to foreigners and new markets.<sup>13</sup>*

In addition to the men just mentioned, several other men took up designing tapa as soon as they learned this could be an opportunity to travel abroad. When this appeared not to be the case, however, they soon stopped designing tapa despite the possible monetary revenues. Thus it seems that although tapa provides a means to generate income, only some men are ready and willing to cross the gendered division of labour.

Nevertheless, the entire process of tapa making has not been appropriated. The designers just discussed do not beat the bark into tapa cloth, and only Franklin and James apply the red pigment (*dun*). In some cases, men do help their wives with beating tapa or assist in the time-consuming application of the small dots (*supfifi*) that complete any design. Moreover, no men design or paint the clan designs, which are still women's prerogatives.

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13 Obviously, this narrative was not only addressed to me, but it did include me in James's plans to make money out of tapa.



*Photo 42. Monica Taniova is patching holes in a piece of barkcloth using the juice of little berries as glue. This practice is related to the commercialisation of barkcloth, accommodating buyers who want to obtain a smooth piece of cloth without any holes. In general, these small holes, which result from the process of beating the bark, are not restored when the cloth is used for personal use.*

Whereas the production and design of tapa, and especially of clan designs, are still predominantly regarded as female work, men became involved especially in the commercialisation of new products made of tapa. New types of tapa goods include items such as hats, bags, ties, bookmarks, and wallets. The popularity of the sewing machine has probably contributed to the fact that women's groups in particular but also several men have enthusiastically started to sew both undecorated and decorated tapa into previously unknown forms. I was told that men could make, design, and paint tapa caps and bags.<sup>14</sup>

By taking on a new role in designing tapa, several men thus crossed gender boundaries. Attracted by the revenues, a few men started to design pieces of tapa, thereby transgressing the traditional boundaries of this gendered production. This was also made possible due to the fading symbolic meaning of *dun*, the red pigment. The taboos that used to surround the painting of tapa (as described in Chapter 2) have largely been abandoned, thereby making it possible for men to

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<sup>14</sup> The technique of sewing tapa hats and bags, in both Gorofi and Sibo villages, was primarily taught to both women and men by Gideon, a Maisin man living in Uiaku, husband of the first overseas Maisin representative, Frida Ivoki (see next section).

witness and sometimes even participate in its production. Although the number of men actually designing tapa is still very limited, the practice of men entering this traditional women's field of tapa production is significant. The same can be said for women who have become active in its marketing.

### *Crossing boundaries: female representatives*

The first woman to bring Maisin tapa to the attention of an international audience was Frida Ivoki at the Pacific Art Festival held in Tahiti in 1985. Gideon, an energetic Wofun clan member, was interested in the tapa business and in having a Maisin tapa representative abroad. He intended to send Frida's mother to this festival, as in his opinion she was one of the best tapa designers. However, she declined because she felt she could not speak sufficient English. He discussed the matter with the community elders, but they thought none of the designers was good enough, so they said, 'Send your own wife!' And that is what he did. But although she was a great success, no other Maisin women managed to display their tapa skills to an international audience for another ten years.

Despite the fact that tapa making is still primarily a woman's job, all the subsequent festivals were attended by a male Maisin artist, performing the art of tapa making and its use. This provided no dilemma for Maisin people, nor did it for the organisers of these festivals. As Franklin explained:

*Only the tapa indicated the fact of me being and representing Maisin. I predominantly represented PNG. And even if I represented the Maisin, such as in Berkeley, it was both Maisin and PNG. Even while representing the Maisin, I was also an ambassador for PNG in order to retain goodwill. In fact, most foreign people were only interested in tapa and how it was made, not in who the Maisin people are.*

The male monopoly over the representation of Maisin tapa was overruled, however, when outsiders started to insist on including women in these 'tapa' delegations. In the 1990s, through the mediation of foreign organisations such as Greenpeace, the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia (USA), and Sister Yasuko, women were given the opportunity to travel abroad to demonstrate their tapa skills.

The second international visit by a Maisin woman took place in 1995, when the Japanese Sister Yasuko invited Franklin and Edith, the latter living and working in Airara village, to travel to Japan. Following this, the Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) in Philadelphia, a museum creating and exhibiting new work in fabric and experimental materials in collaboration with international artists, gave the Maisin women one of their main opportunities to travel abroad (<http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org>).

Inspired by the Berkeley exhibition in California, two female Philadelphia representatives travelled to Collingwood Bay in order to discuss their plans with the Maisin community and invited three women to travel to Philadelphia. The FWM project and display would focus on the Maisin women experimenting with new ways of interpreting tapa, designing and printing Maisin designs on various kinds of fabric while, at the same time, their efforts could create new ways of generating

money through tapa. As one of the female Maisin participants explained, the goal of printing Maisin designs onto fabric was first of all to keep alive Maisin designs for future generations, even after tapa is no longer used. And second, tapa designs are conserved longer on fabric than on tapa. The Maisin women travelling to Philadelphia were chosen by their community on the basis of their tapa skills and ability to speak English. And so it happened that Frida Ivoki's sister, Natalie Rarama living in Ganjiga, Kate Sivana from Sinapa village, and Monica Taniova (see Photo 42) from Airara village travelled to Philadelphia in the fall of 1997.

Before they left, intensive discussions arose concerning which Maisin designs should be printed on fabric. According to Natalie, the male elders especially talked a lot about this issue. Some thought panel designs should be printed on fabric while others were convinced that *gangi-gangi* designs were more traditional and therefore should be printed on fabric. Eventually, after considerable debate, it was decided that the *gangi-gangi* designs were the most traditional of the Maisin designs.<sup>15</sup> So the women travelling took several examples with them and while working in the FWM workshop created several samples and products.

According to Monica, they had to work hard, making tapa designs on various pieces of fabric. As this was her first trip abroad, Monica mainly remembers the cold and her homesickness despite the fact that the people she worked with and encountered were all very friendly. Showing me the photographs she brought back from Philadelphia, she states that she was very glad when she returned home and would never again travel that far away from her children and Maisin home. The women's homecoming was somewhat overshadowed when several Maisin men and women complained that the women should have printed panel designs instead of *gangi-gangi* designs. Apparently a consensus about what is Maisin tradition had not been achieved after all.

After this workshop, representatives of the FWM came to Maisin in order to discuss how things should proceed from there. They brought several samples of what the women had made in Philadelphia, probably expecting positive reactions. But the people were not very enthusiastic about the cotton material that was used to print the designs on. They especially did not like the coloured backgrounds, including a yellow one, but they liked the colour of the dye as this resembled the red pigment they used themselves. According to Natalie, Maisin women preferred selling tapa rather than fabric. 'They were afraid that tapa would lose its value and be replaced by these fabrics with Maisin prints'. It also seems that Maisin people above all valued the traditional colours of designed tapa: the black-framed red lines on a whitish background. In addition to these cotton fabrics with Maisin prints, the FWM people also showed and discussed plans for making a carpet with Maisin designs and their plans for organising an exhibition with Maisin textiles.

In April 1998, two Papuan leaders and two female artists were invited to visit Philadelphia in order to do additional design work, open the exhibition, and discuss further possibilities for developing and marketing new forms of Maisin

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15 It is interesting that Maisin people see the *gangi-gangi* as the most traditional designs. The museum collections show that tapa collected between 1900 and 1910 predominantly show panel designs (Appendix 1).

tapa designs. The Maisin men travelling were representatives of MICAD: John Wesley of the executive board and Ruben Seri from the Maisin Tapa Business Group. Of the women who previously travelled to Philadelphia, Kate and Monica declined the invitation because of their previous experiences of being homesick. Only Natalie would travel again, this time accompanied by a non-Maisin woman from Tufi who had married into a Maisin clan and apprenticed in the art and skills of tapa making. During this second trip, the two women worked on a carpet with Maisin designs and started to develop umbrella designs. From 23 April until 13 June 1998, their designs as well as those of Kate and Monica were put on display in an exhibition entitled 'Tapa style: Tradition and continuity in the heart of the Maisin tribe of Papua New Guinea' (Rice 1998).

After this second visit, representatives of the Fabric Workshop were supposed to come to Maisin to discuss further plans and sign a contract. But they did not come, and rumours spread that someone, or a group of people, had sent the FWM a letter urging them not to come to Maisin again. According to MICAD representatives, people were not yet ready to deal with such changes, and this was why further contacts and projects were cancelled. In a similar way, MICAD's plans for selling Maisin designs to Patagonia, an American company specialising in outdoor clothing and equipment, were abandoned because there was no support from the Maisin community. As Franklin Seri said, 'We do expose ourselves through our tapa and use it instead of allowing logging. We depend upon tapa to get an income, but we need to do this at our own pace'.

In June 2001, some Maisin again had the opportunity to travel abroad. This time to Canada to meet the Stó:lo, a First Nations group living in British Columbia that had visited Maisin a year earlier as part of an exchange program. The trip was meant to set up exchange relationships, facilitating mutual understanding with regard to environmental and cultural heritage, but eventually turned out to be a film project (Barker 2003). The organisers of the exchange insisted that Maisin should send a delegation of three men and three women. Maisin protested against this request, however, and after long debate decided that only two Maisin women were allowed to travel abroad. John Barker, who took the initiative to set up this exchange, was accused of 'changing the culture' by his insistence, and that of the co-organisers, that the Maisin delegation to visit the Stó:lo in Canada include three women and three men (Barker 1999: 23).

The decision about who was to travel was discussed while I was staying in Collingwood Bay, having been initiated one year earlier when John Barker had made a short visit to Maisin. Complaints concerning having to send women ranged from the fact that women do not own land and so only men were entitled and had responsibility to see the Stó:lo land (Barker 1999: 23) to remarks that women could not represent the Maisin people because they were too shy or did not speak sufficient English.

MICAD decided that those who were to travel had to fulfil the following requirements: They had to speak English; ideally already possess passports; have extensive knowledge about Maisin culture and be able to perform Maisin dances; be community leaders who, having seen the results of deforestation and the selling

of land, could discuss this with the people at home; and finally the delegation should fairly represent all the villages. Moreover, those who wanted to travel had to deposit 500 kina. Clearly these conditions implied, first of all, that only people who had travelled abroad before could be part of the Maisin delegation, and secondly, that only those who had enough money could go. These conditions excluded most women, as husbands and male relatives would not be very inclined to spend such a large amount of money on their wives and sisters. Those women who had passports, such as Monica and Kate, were not willing to go nor did they have the required amount of money. These conditions did open up possibilities for Maisin men. Many were very eager to travel abroad, convincing others about their qualities as Maisin representatives, as Maisin leaders, and as ones who could open up new resources. Some men approached me as a potential financial sponsor, while other Airara men encouraged their wives to produce large amounts of tapa in order to get the money.

Eventually these conditions could not be enforced, as Maisin leaders had to abide by the organisers' wishes to send women. Nevertheless, none of the villages was eager to send a woman. MICAD thereupon instructed the villages of Airara and Marua to select female candidates, a decision that was counteracted by the leading men of these villages. Against MICAD's wishes, they declared that people could choose from four male candidates. This decision evoked a protest from several Airara and Marua women, even among those who had no intention of travelling themselves. By refusing to vote for the male candidates, they protested in silence. Eventually the MICAD board got its way and appointed Gertrude Matau (Marua) to represent the Sibó villages. Ironically, Gertrude was not very eager to go, as her husband was away and she had to take care of the children by herself.

In July 2001, a delegation of seven Maisin travelled to Canada, five men (including two MICAD members who had travelled previously to Berkeley and Philadelphia) and two women (from Marua and Uiaku). Those who remained behind felt somewhat reluctant about the exchange program, as they feared not much good would come out of it. Moreover, when the delegation returned, Maisin women's future participation in projects abroad was seriously questioned, as a love affair between two Maisin participants confirmed the men's fears of their women committing adultery while travelling with other men.

In summary, although one of the first international festivals at which Maisin performed their culture through tapa and dance was attended by a Maisin woman, the majority of foreign trips and exposures since then have involved only Maisin men. In the 1990s, international partners were demanding equal gender participation on such trips, but right from the beginning Maisin people seem to have resisted these demands. In 1995, the Berkeley University museum anticipated at least one female Maisin representative, but eventually four Maisin men arrived. Sister Yasuko had more success and managed to include a Maisin woman in her organised trip to Japan, as did the Philadelphia team. The growing resistance to Maisin women travelling abroad is not only because men themselves are eager to go. Although this attitude does play a role, as we have seen with regard to the Stó: lo exchange, it also seems that men resent the fact that they cannot control their

wives when they are travelling with other Maisin men, a complaint that was also uttered with regard to MU women travelling around. Moreover, it reflects a deep-seated notion that Maisin women are not capable of representing and talking on behalf of the Maisin as a group.

## **Transformations of property**

In the previous section we have seen some of the problems associated with the question as to who is entitled to represent Maisin culture. This section focuses on the question as to who appropriates Maisin material culture. Although these two questions seem to be related, especially from a Western perception that links ownership with rights of use and distribution, among Maisin questions as to who owns tapa and who has the right to display and sell it are not always congruent. Dialogues concerning tapa and property are both local and, due to national and foreign interests, increasingly globally oriented.

But what exactly are we talking about? What does the concept of property denote? From our own perspective, property is associated with capitalism and commodities and based upon the idea of private ownership (Hirshon 1984: 1; Busse and Whimp 2000: 17). This Western notion of objects as property that is transferred between individuals is contested by Strathern (1984: 162; 2000). She argues that the subject-object dichotomy and concepts of personhood underlying this notion of property are not applicable in Melanesian societies. But what about Maisin tapa, which is not only an inalienable object in Strathern's sense but also an alienable commodity, and as such property within a capitalistic point of view?

As described earlier, Maisin distinguish three types of tapa: clan tapa, tapa for people's own consumption, and tapa for selling. Although they are all made by women, the identities and gendered claims that are made through and on these types of tapa differ. As we have seen in Chapter 3, clan designs are owned by clans and its male clan members, and it seems that women have no property rights at all. As Monica's husband Clifford stated, '*Evovi* belong to us. Monica cannot decide what to do with them; it belongs to my clan!' So although a woman has no 'official' rights over her husband's design, she is responsible for its manufacture for either their own or other clan members' use. This rule or ideology of ownership also extends to the *embobi* adorned with clan designs, although women can actually possess these particular tapa. In some cases women have developed a special affinity with a clan tapa because it was, for example, drawn by their deceased mothers or was used during memorable events. These pieces of tapa became significant personal possessions that have transferred from mother to daughter, the imputed meaning making them biographical objects (Hoskins 1998). With regard to clan designs depicted on *embobi*, however, this transfer of property is not continued to the next female generation, as daughters are not allowed to wear their mother's father's clan designs. Maisin *evovi* are regarded as essentially male property, or rather as collective clan property, although individual female appropriations of these male clan designs do take place. Nevertheless, whether given by men or their

daughters, sisters, and wives, clan designs remain essentially inalienable as they stand for intrinsic identities.

The second type of tapa, which in contrast to clan designs is more disposable, is tapa that is used for people's own consumption. This involves tapa with 'general' designs that can be used as clothing or that circulates in gift exchanges. They are intertwined with the identities and relationships of the people using them. As a result, they are not alienable in the same sense as, according to (Strathern 1984: 165), commodities are. As we have seen in the previous chapter and sections, general tapa is also bartered and sold as a commodity to local, regional, national, and international markets. It seems that in these contexts tapa becomes an alienable object. The object received in return, or the price paid, is for the tapa itself, not as compensation for the woman or clan that produced it.

It is striking that the visual difference between tapa as an inalienable gift and as an alienable object is very minor. The major visual differences between the personal use of tapa and practices wherein tapa is 'disposed' of is the fact that when selling, and also often when giving tapa, holes have to be patched, stains are not allowed, and a border (*kuki*) framing the design has to be present. The other difference is that when tapa is for sale, the size of the design determines its monetary value.<sup>16</sup> This is not the case with tapa used in gift and barter exchanges despite the fact that in the latter instances the quantity of tapa may be equated to its monetary value. In formal and informal exchanges, the giving of tapa creates particular relationships and expectations, whereas in barter the notion of 'payment' plays a leading role. The way tapa is used in church exchanges seems to create yet another relationship (Chapter 6). Consequently, it seems that it is not so much the object but rather the type of exchange that determines people's expectations towards each other with respect to tapa. Thus it is the transaction that constitutes property (Strathern 2000: 55).

It has been argued that Melanesians have an 'inclusive' notion of property in which objects reflect and are embedded in relationships between people, whereas Western societies tend to have a more 'exclusive' form in which objects are controlled and associated with the person who owns them (Busse and Whimp 2000: 18). As has become clear in this chapter, Maisin people, including those living in Collingwood Bay, actually live in both of these worlds. Each day they negotiate to situate their daily existence in the capitalistic economy and its 'development' to which they aspire but in reality have relatively low access. Within this setting, Maisin people have both 'inclusive' as well as 'exclusive' forms of property. The main questions are how do these 'conversions' of property take place, and moreover, who is allowed to claim the general decorated tapa within a local and global setting?

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16 MICAD developed a formula in which the size of the design (not of the tapa) determines its price. MICAD pays in general K1.25 per square inch (the equivalent of one Australian dollar), while the Anglican Church manages to offer K2 or even more.

### *Transformations of gendered property*

‘The invisibility of women’s work is a feature of the sexual division of labour in many societies’ (Moore 1988: 43). Among Maisin people, it is striking that although commercialisation has enhanced the value of tapa, it did not make its main producers, women, more visible. The emphasis on tapa as one of the few means of earning money did not so much enhance their status as increase their workload. All Marua and Airara women and men stressed the importance of Maisin women making tapa. That a woman could not or would not manufacture barkcloth was inconceivable or perceived of as extreme laziness, as *wakosi*. Thus making tapa is regarded as being part of a wife’s duties and responsibilities. Only very few men actually help their wives in producing tapa, and even the arduous and time-consuming beating and painting are in general left to their female relatives. Men involved in the production of tapa often restrict their activities to either designing or the actual selling. As men control the majority of the actual tapa trade and its revenues, the identity of tapa as an object made – but more importantly ‘owned’ – by women is changing.

Maisin objects produced by women that are regarded as products of their labour are clay pots, mats, string bags, and tapa cloths. In the past it seems that a woman could take all her pots and other utensils to the house of a man she favoured, thereby signalling that she wanted to become his wife (‘The case of Mary Nogar’ in Chignell 1914: 46; Newton 1908). Today when Maisin women divorce their husbands, they take all their clay pots, tin pots, mats, string bags, and cutlery with them, leaving their ex-husbands in empty houses. Thus women can clearly exercise proprietorship over these objects. According to Strathern (1984: 165), these objects may be owned and therefore disposed of, but they are not alienable, as the labour that produced these objects remains part of the producer and, when given away, this labour has to be compensated for. Although this is the case when women give these objects in exchange, including barter, it seems that general tapa, which can be commercialised, becomes alienated from the women who made it, especially since they are not always compensated for their labour. As we have seen, the revenues from sold tapa often do not return to the wives and sisters who produced it.

Moreover, it seems that in the relatively recent past women could exercise far more control over tapa and could give it away as they pleased. The few elderly and widowed women living in Airara and Marua revealed that they could and can decide for themselves whether to give or sell tapa since it belongs to them. As Lina, a 65-year-old widow put it, ‘I own the *wuwusi*; my brother gave me the seeds, but I took care of them so I own the tapa’. When Lina’s husband was still alive, ‘he could not decide on giving or selling tapa; I did!’ For younger women especially, this is no longer possible.

While string bags, pottery, and pandanus mats in general still belong to the women who make them, men are taking control over tapa destinations and revenues. As a result, today many women cannot give or sell tapa as they please, first needing their husbands’ consent. The young and middle-aged couples (between 30 and 45 years old) whom I interviewed on this topic stressed the commercial value of the general tapa and its importance for the entire family. They argued that both

husband and wife ideally should consult each other before giving tapa away or selling it. Regardless, Monica's husband, Clifford, argued, 'Monica cannot sell tapa without letting me know, but if I want to sell a finished tapa, I can do it without letting her know. She once gave three pieces to MICAD for them to sell, but they didn't pay her, and I am still angry with that'. Clifford is, like other husbands, less strict with regard to the more traditional purpose of tapa as a gift or object for barter. 'If she wants to give tapa to contribute to a mourning (*ro-babassi*) or bride-price payment, that's okay. But if I am here, we should talk about it'. So whereas women can decide for themselves to either give, exchange, or sell string bags, clay pots, or mats, commercial tapa in particular is no longer considered a woman's property but that of her husband.<sup>17</sup> As such, women's production of tapa, and especially commercial tapa, seems to have become alienated from them. It depends upon a woman's age and status, and in particular on her residence, whether, and to what extent she can control her products. If adult women live within their father's clan, they can produce for their own support, whereas women living in their husband's clan are subjected to responsibilities for their husbands and extended family and claims by their in-laws.

Not all women accept their husbands' control over tapa revenues, however, or the monopoly of men in the tapa business in general. As various couples involved in selling tapa stressed, the money obtained by selling tapa is meant for the family. But many men admitted that they do not trust themselves, and as a result their wives often keep the money, forcing the men to ask for money and allowing women to keep track of their expenditures. Despite this precaution and awareness, tapa money frequently 'disappears' in men's pockets and is spent on their gambling or other often uneconomic businesses.

Only very few women actually take control over selling tapa. In Airara, women are mainly only the producers of tapa, but in Ganjiga one vigorous woman, the chairwoman of the local MU branch, actively tries to manage the buying and selling of barkcloth although this is done under the guidance of the Anglican Church, whose former priest, as we saw previously, tried to encourage women to produce tapa for both the church and their families. Another 'strategy' that is used to circumvent men's interference is the direct exchange of tapa for goods that the women want for themselves, such as string bags or clay pots but also modern goods like cotton cloth. The Airara Mothers' Union group facilitated this latter exchange after they failed to sell metres of cotton cloth they had bought in Alotau with the intention of selling it to local village women at a profit. As the cloth was too expensive, nobody bought the material, and it was decided women could 'buy' the cotton by giving tapa instead of money. This did work, and the cotton was soon distributed. Since someone had to sell the tapa, however, the MU women were once again dependent upon a man to sell it in town.

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17 Objects like clay pots are no longer regarded as a woman's individual property if they were bought with money. In these cases male and female informants stated that the object belongs to the family.

To summarise, it seems that on a local level the gendered notions of tapa as a female object are diminishing. The commercialisation of tapa has facilitated the involvement of men in short-term commodity exchanges that were previously dominated by women's bartering. Simultaneously, the proprietorship exercised over tapa has changed. When tapa is used as a commodity, some of the husbands claim rights over tapa, arguing it is their individual possession. Others stress that husband and wife are joint custodians who have to consent before tapa is transacted. If the alienable general tapa is intended to function as a ceremonial or individual gift, then claims of possession change, and women can give it with or without consulting their husbands. If women want to barter tapa for clay pots or other goods, they are equally free to do so. It thus seems that property in Maisin culture is more about the relations between persons with respect to things (see Busse and Whimp 2000: 5) rather than between people and things. As Hirshon (1984: 1) has argued, 'property is a crucial indicator of the balance of power between women and men', but as is shown in the next section, also of power relationships between clans and even between tribes.

### *Cultural property rights*

In addition to individual or, rather, gendered contestations with regard to the appropriation of tapa, discussions over ownership also prevail among larger groups of people and even tribes. So how are cultural property rights claimed at the clan and tribal levels?

As with Maisin land, which it is claimed belongs to all Maisin despite the fact that individual clans hold property rights, tapa trees (*wuwusi*) are likewise claimed as Maisin property. As we have seen in Chapter 3, afraid that people would lay claims to the *wuwusi* tree because *their* ancestors found it, Maisin elders agreed that it was 'the Maisin' who discovered the tree and not individual clans. Even within a regional context, Maisin people claim to be the owners of *wuwusi*.

When travelling with a group of Maisin to Gegerau, a Miniafia village southeast of Airara, we encountered several gardens filled with tapa trees. As one Maisin man married to a Gegerau woman explained, 'They have their own tapa designs, and there are still a few women who can make them. Now they plant lots of *wuwusi*, and their tapa are larger than ours. However, the drawing of designs is hard for them'. It appears that instead of designing and selling the tapa themselves, Miniafia started selling mature tapa trees to Maisin, who subsequently turned them into painted barkcloth. Although Miniafia people clearly have a tradition of manufacturing tapa themselves, the *wuwusi* was claimed by Maisin. As the Maisin people accompanying me argued, 'You will not find any stories about *wuwusi* here! They got the seeds from us'. Moreover, the commercialisation of tapa also affects the value of *wuwusi*. This is especially visible in those Maisin villages where people are faced with a decline in the availability of tapa trees. Ganjiga people complained that *wuwusi* was being stolen from their gardens.

Not only *wuwusi* but also the making of tapa is claimed as belonging to Maisin (see also Regius 1988: 33) or even as being Maisin. Maisin claim to be the founders of tapa making in the entire region of Collingwood Bay. Despite historical data

and museum collections demonstrating that Miniafia, Korafe, and Wanigela people alike have a tradition of making tapa, many Maisin deny this, arguing that ‘tapa is Maisin’, and ‘Maisin is tapa’. In addition to the tapa tree and the barkcloth, which is appropriated as Maisin property, tapa designs as well as pieces of decorated tapa are claimed.

With regard to the commercialisation and appropriation of Maisin tapa designs, two distinctions have to be made. First of all, Maisin elders refused to commodify their clan tapa and clan designs, while they did support the commercialisation of general tapa within a local setting. Secondly, the elders seem to be reluctant to commercialise general designs outside of Papua New Guinea. In both situations, designs are no longer regarded as individual or clan property, but as Maisin cultural property.

Due to the involvement of MICAD, clan designs (*evovi*) are no longer solely regarded as clan possessions; they are regarded as Maisin cultural property that may not be sold or given away.<sup>18</sup> MICAD in particular has urged Maisin people not to sell their clan tapa, as they fear a commercialisation of these designs and, as a result, a commercialisation of the Maisin identity.<sup>19</sup> This fear and the growing disagreement about it among Maisin elders and leaders prevented Maisin from selling their clan designs to the Berkeley Museum, which had showed interest in the acquisition of some clan designs for their collection. This was despite the fact the Museum authorities had promised that the clan tapa could not be photographed or leave the museum.

In addition, the copyrights to Maisin general designs have become a growing issue as other tribes and ethnicities appropriate Maisin designs into their own performances and productions. While various PNG groups have appropriated Maisin loincloths into their ‘traditional’ performances, others have copied Maisin designs onto T-shirts and cotton bags. Apparently Maisin people do not see it as a problem when Biniguni men and people from New Britain wear their tapa loincloths (see Photo 43), but they often complain about people copying their designs onto T-shirts and the like. One of the T-shirts I frequently saw displayed a Maisin design and the words ‘Greetings from Oro Province’, while others featured ‘Greetings from Tufi’. Thus Maisin designs are actually being used by non-Maisin to represent both regional and national identities. The question is, who has the right to appropriate these designs (see also Simet 2003)? Some people believe it is appropriate to use and display Maisin tapa by virtue of the fact that they come from the same province. Others obviously feel entitled to print Maisin designs because they live in or rather originate from the same area as the Maisin: Collingwood Bay. Since some Maisin women have given or sold their designs to relatives in town, who subsequently printed these on cotton items, it obviously matters where the appropriator comes from and if exchange relationships in the form of money and or kinship have been established.

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18 Although clan designs are inalienable, clan tapa has been given away and even sold (see Chapter 3).

19 Miniafia people in Reaga and Kewansasap did not share this fear and were happy to sell both their old and newly made clan tapa.



*Photo 43. Pieces of tapa (koefi) hanging to dry in the sun. When dried, they were painted and subsequently sold to the Anglican Church in New Britain.*

In addition to appropriations within Papua New Guinea, outside appropriations of Maisin tapa designs also occur. The international interest in Maisin tapa did not stop at efforts to market the cloths; people also saw possibilities of marketing the designs themselves. At least three organisations have tried to persuade ‘the Maisin’ to sell some of ‘their’ tapa designs. Greenpeace seems to be one of the first to have addressed this issue. According to John Barker, at an extraordinary meeting, ‘men insisted that women openly discuss their own views concerning a request from Greenpeace Germany to license some tapa designs for use on coffee mugs and t-shirts’ (Barker 1999: 23). This resulted in Greenpeace obtaining the rights to produce some T-shirts and mugs with Maisin tapa designs. Some years later, members of the Maisin community rejected similar requests from Philadelphia and Patagonia. Unfortunately, I do not know if women were involved in this latter decision-making process. Also, the answer to the question of why Maisin decided to object to these projects – which would secure a constant flow of money to the community as well as an American copyright on their designs – is not clear. It could well be that the growing foreign influence in the villages, especially with regard to tapa and women’s position, was felt as becoming too large and disturbing.

What is striking is that the commercialisation of tapa and tapa designs not only implies an alienation of women from tapa (being their property) but also from the general designs they apply. Due to MICAD's tapa business, the value of a piece of tapa is not determined by the attractiveness of the design or the artistic qualities of the woman who made it; the size of the design determines its monetary value. Thus, although on a local level individual styles are recognised, this individuality is lost as soon as the tapa leaves the village or Maisin area. This aspect of de-individualisation also comes to the fore in barter and other regional exchanges, but I think it is noteworthy that foreign appropriators of Maisin tapa designs do not acknowledge the women who made them. This is not only the case where Maisin tapa is used as, for example, covers for notebooks or as decorative backgrounds for websites; it also occurs in places where one would normally expect credit to be given to individual Maisin women, especially since this involves organisations that were so concerned with addressing issues of gender equality. For example, while all visiting artists whose works are represented in the permanent collections of the Philadelphia FWM are registered by their names, the Maisin women are not registered on the museum's website by their individual names. Instead their work is registered as belonging to the 'Maisin tribe of Papua New Guinea' ([www.Fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/collections/artists.php](http://www.Fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/collections/artists.php)). This is remarkable, especially since the FWM encouraged Monica and her female companions to sign their work at the workshop with their personal names. The 'public' registration of their work as belonging to the Maisin coincides with the concerns of Maisin elders and the community at large that people may gain advantage through exposure and recognition of their individual work. In addition, it reveals the notion that tapa belongs to the Maisin collectively.<sup>20</sup>

In short, tapa is at the interface of the local and the global, and at the same time both connects and divides people. At the local level, the question as to whether tapa is claimed as a gendered possession seems to depend on the type of transaction. While women may still exercise proprietorship over tapa if it is used in gift exchanges and barter, as soon as it becomes an item for sale, men claim the product and its revenues. In doing so, the power of tapa to invoke reciprocity and thus create relationships and identify people is lost. This is especially so since a declining amount of tapa (both clan and general tapa) now features in the long-term exchanges that create Maisin social order due to the fact that people prefer selling it. As Sylvester Moi, chairman of MICAD since its establishment, expressed it:

*During the last MICAD meeting [in 2002], several board members expressed the view that few tapa trees had been planted because MICAD had given so few new orders. This signals the fact that the traditional value of tapa is changing towards a commercial value only. Before, people had heaps of tapa in their houses so that they could give them during initiations and other festivities. Now, little tapa is given during such occasions. Also, less tapa is being used in barter. I feel sorry about this,*

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20 For the Berkeley show, Maisin agreed that individual artists should not be revealed to the American public as tapa belonged collectively to the Maisin (John Barker: personal comments).

*especially when I see the tapa hats and bags that are being made. People perceive tapa as a cash-crop, a way to make money. But tapa constitutes an important part of our traditions. This seems now to get lost.*

So although the revenues from tapa may be used as gifts, thus once again mediating relationships between people, it does seem that the commodification of tapa has changed its social values and its significance in creating and maintaining social balance.

From a global perspective, property rights over Maisin tapa designs have likewise divided groups of people from one another. The issue of whether or not to sell Maisin designs to international organisations has become a point of contention between those who are eager to find new ways of generating money and those who are more conservative and want to remain in control. As we have seen, several Maisin leaders clearly feared the consequences of selling designs. Even the possibility of obtaining copyright did not overcome their anxiety about losing control over them. The in-country (PNG) appropriation of designs seems to be regarded as less troubling, as this has up to now not been an issue for MICAD and village debate. Ironically, Maisin have least control over these appropriations.

As Jacob Simet (2003), executive director of the PNG National Cultural Commission, argues, 'We often consider the use or application of our people's Indigenous cultural forms by "foreigners" as being wrong, unfair or exploitative. Yet we fail to see the unauthorised use of these same cultural forms by our own people, as creating the same problems'. Maisin are becoming more sensitive towards PNG uses and misuses of Maisin tapa designs. It seems therefore just a matter of time before Maisin try to make use of the 'Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act 2000', which promises to offer protection of the 'traditional knowledge and cultural expressions' of the Indigenous people of PNG (Simet 2003). As we have seen, however, the dynamics and especially the relationships involved with claims on tapa are complex and not uncontested. As a result, the protection of 'Maisin' tapa and 'Maisin' designs through intellectual property laws, which are often based upon Western notions of property and its relation to personhood (see Whimp and Busse 2000), might actually result in larger contestations, as non-Maisin living in Collingwood Bay will surely respond to these claims.

## **Colliding images**

From the earliest contacts between Maisin and foreigners, tapa was used in exchange, mediating between various people and their desires. The collecting of tapa by colonial government officials, Anglican missionaries, and other travellers implied an extension of Maisin people's regional exchange network. By the end of the 1950s, when Maisin women and men had gradually stopped wearing their *koifi* and *embobi* in daily life, the sale of Maisin tapa commenced. Until the 1990s many Maisin sold tapa on a regular basis to artefact shops or to the Anglican Church, which dispersed Maisin tapa via the Popondetta Diocese into Papua New Guinea and abroad. In the 1990s, Maisin people became overwhelmed by the international attention of national and international NGOs, and especially Greenpeace, which

helped Maisin to defend their lands from being deforested. In this legal struggle, tapa was used to promote non-destructive means of development. In fact, tapa was marketed as a new commodity that could save the rainforest.

And indeed, tapa did manage to save the rainforest and thus protect Maisin people's cultural environment for generations to come, as its use in international campaigns was crucial in achieving goodwill and financial support for the environmental 'crisis'. Its commodification, however, simultaneously affected the traditional values and significance of tapa as well as the relationships in which its production and use are situated. Moreover, it created a new discourse in which both Maisin people as a group and as individuals make claims on this object.

With the commodification, less tapa with clan designs is being made in favour of more with general designs. Further, the local use of general tapa in exchanges seems to have declined as people prefer selling it. Both the prohibition on commercialising clan designs and the large-scale commercialisation of general designs are the result of MICAD's activities. This illustrates how difficult it is to foresee the effects of globalisation on traditional values and products. Clearly the MICAD chairman and executive board had a different future in mind with regard to the commercialisation of tapa.

The decline of tapa in its 'traditional' contexts can be related to the diminishing importance of clan identity in a context in which corporate bodies are needed to engage with the 'outside' world. The mediation among Maisin clans in trying to unite and cooperate in order to obtain prosperity and fight against common enemies seems to have been a re-occurring theme in Maisin history. This was initially symbolised by breaking a club and spear and subsequently by building a church and creating a church fence in which the clans' emblems were represented. The declining production and transfer of tapa clan designs similarly suggests that Maisin people are nowadays less concerned with demonstrating and adhering to their clan identity. Instead the corporative, tribal identity has become more important. This becomes especially clear when considering the appropriation of tapa by Maisin people in claiming that 'tapa is Maisin'.

At the same time, however, these clan identities gain importance within the functioning of the current symbol of Maisin unity: MICAD. As we have seen, MICAD is on the verge of collapse as Sibon villages threaten to pull out of this Maisin 'cooperative'. Some of the problems MICAD is facing are inherent to its 'Western'-based corporative structure, which was applied from the outside in order to conserve the biodiversity of Maisin land. Ronald Martin (1999: xii) suggests the use of 'a territorial strategy concentrating on individual villages or clans with integration of these into larger functional units arising only when local people recognise, of their own volition, the need for such integration'. Among the Maisin we have seen how even this latter strategy failed, however, as the motives and desires of both local people and conservation projects are mixed and, to a certain extent, incompatible. As demonstrated by Flip van Helden (2001) in his study on ICAD projects in the Bismarck-Ramu area of PNG, divergent motives and priorities can undermine the cooperative arrangements between conservation projects and local people. This, as Van Helden argues, attests to the fragility of

the agreement between, in this case, Maisin people and MICAD. The prosperity and development aspired to by Maisin villagers and clan members through the commercialisation of tapa seem to collide with MICAD's and especially MICAD's partners' goal of conservation. So when people say 'Maisin is tapa', this only seems to express a sense of unified identity: the fact is that it covers up a whole network of power struggles as well as claims over property (see also Harrison 1992: 225) – between Maisin and the rest of the world, between MICAD and the Anglican Church, among Maisin clans, and also on a local level between men and women and between husbands and wives. In short, while the commercialisation of tapa required the unification of Maisin clans, it eventually seems to have resulted in divisions within Maisin, as villages and especially clans have again become important units to sustain 'individual' aspirations and claims.

With its large-scale commercialisation, individual property rights over tapa are changing. While other objects still belong to the woman who made them, men are trying to gain control over tapa destinations and revenues. So women are losing their 'monopoly' over this object while their work and responsibility as cash providers for their families have increased. Due to the foreign interest in tapa stressing the importance of women's involvement as the main producers of tapa, gender relations have been put under strain. The processes of integrating women into local decision-making policies and foreign exchanges eventually backfired. Consequently, the social and symbolic transformation, and in particular the commodification of tapa, does not, in contrast to what Teilhet-Fisk (1995: 125) argued, 'reflect a change in gender structure that correlates with social reforms' but predominantly evokes an emphasis on conservative gender and power relations whereby men try to dominate the exchange and revenues of this 'traditionally' female-produced object, thus expanding tapa into hybrid forms of both meaning and use.

This chapter has dealt with many colliding images: issues of conservation versus development, commodity versus 'traditional' values of tapa, and gender mainstreaming versus local gender relations. These dilemmas not only represent dialogues between foreigners and Maisin people. Also among Maisin people, images about the role of tapa and gender relations differ and occasionally collide. Sometimes, however, Maisin men and women do also agree, especially when outsiders try to push for gender equality. For example, when John Barker urged equal representation of women in the Maisin delegation to Canada, he was accused by Maisin men of changing their culture. I heard similar complaints from women about the Summer Institute of Linguistics, whose members urged women to speak up for themselves. As a woman put it, 'This is our way of life. We are not like the women in America. Our husbands are the boss, and they should not try to change this'. As others have observed, 'the whole area of gender in development will not advance a great deal in PNG without the support and commitment of the men of the country' (Brouwer et al. 1998: 1). Naturally, it also takes a willingness of local women to change their ways of life.

## Maisin is tapa

'Maisin is tapa!' Maisin people frequently claim, identifying themselves with painted barkcloth (tapa) in various contexts such as the production of tapa, the wearing of tapa during rituals and festivities, its exchange, and the selling of tapa. But do objects like tapa construct people as well, or are things just used by people in their politics of representation? Intrigued with how things and people are meaningfully constituted, the main question of this book has been: How does women's production of barkcloth as well as the use of tapa contribute to the formation of people's identity in terms of gender, personhood, clan and tribe?

By 'following the thing' (Marcus 1995, 1999), I have addressed the ways in which Maisin tapa is made and used. Despite following one object only, I have provided a 'multi-sited ethnography' (ibid.). Tapa, like any other object, has different 'biographies' – technical, ritual, and social (Kopytoff 1986: 66). Within these biographies, each object is expected to follow a desirable or idealised life path. The description of the technical biography of tapa revealed the standardised way of beating, designing, and painting barkcloth as well as changes in tools and techniques. Such shifts include women using metal mallets instead of the traditional wooden ones, women copying designs from magazines instead of creating 'traditional' motifs and designs, and men entering the tapa-production process. The ritual biography of tapa showed its application with initiated bodies as well as its removal from the body in the context of, for example, marriage. The described exchanges of tapa, in which relationships between various people are created, showed the social biography of tapa. Given these different life paths, tapa is strongly connected with the individual and collective history of Maisin people in both the past and the present.

As we have seen, Maisin decorate, cover, and wrap their bodies in tapa from birth to death. They use tapa as an inalienable heirloom that refers to ancestral connections, as customary and ritual dress and decoration, and as an object in gift and commodity exchanges. In the latter contexts, the exchange of tapa is seen to constitute relationships as well as various underlying identities of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe. It is not only the Maisin who have appropriated this cloth into their lives and goals. From the first colonial agents through to art collectors and representatives of Greenpeace, outsiders have also been collecting tapa and using it for their own purposes. Thus Maisin tapa connects various people – locally, nationally, and internationally – and is a basis for the development of their social relations as well as their identities.

The way tapa is interwoven with gender, personhood, clan, and tribal identity has been analysed by discussing several contexts in which the role of tapa in the performances of these identities came to the fore. These contexts were the production of tapa (Chapter 2), the use of tapa by the patrilineal clans (Chapter 3), tapa as gifts in life-cycle rituals (Chapter 4), tapa in formal and informal exchanges (Chapter 5), tapa as body decoration (Chapter 6), and finally tapa as a collector's item (Chapter 7) and as a commodity (Chapter 8). In order to summarise how, in each of these contexts, women's production and use of tapa contributes to the formation of people's identity in terms of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe, I return to the three thematic parts of this book: 'Conceiving women and tapa (Part One), 'Materialisations and the performance of identity' (Part Two) and 'Colonial and Postcolonial appropriations of tapa' (Part Three).

### **Part One: Women and tapa**

The relationship between women and tapa, which informs the research question, was explained by describing how among the Maisin both women and tapa are 'made'. The biographies of four women making tapa showed how tapa is connected with their personal lives, their struggles, and their dreams as well as with their physical bodies and corporeal styles. For some, the designing of tapa is a means to escape the realities of the daily toil and responsibilities for taking care of others. For those not born among the Maisin, making tapa is part of the process of acculturating Maisin ways of life. All of them also have very pragmatic reasons for making tapa: the selling of tapa provides their families with money.

The making of tapa defines these and other women's identities by the mere fact that tapa results from a human activity that is grounded in a particular tradition. The utilisation and transfer of tapa techniques is achieved through the total immersion of the artist in Maisin reality, and this includes pervasive notions of gender. The specific gendered time and space involved in making tapa and learning about tapa, the arduous beating and pounding of tapa, and the posture of women while making and designing tapa – sitting for hours unsupported with the legs stretched out – are all strongly connected with notions about how women should physically behave and their responsibilities.

Making tapa thus specifically defines the female body, both spatially and physically. As a result, the production of tapa can be viewed as a performative act in which identity, and in particular gender identity, is constructed (Butler 1990; 1993). The production of tapa therefore not only produces an object; it also produces Maisin women, who produce and re-enact Maisin culture.

Moreover, tapa is connected with each of the life phases. It accompanies people from birth till death. Since women's reproductive capacities are so intertwined with the making of tapa – especially when considering the intimate relationship between women and the red pigment they use to paint tapa designs – making tapa actually seems to recapitulate people's ontogenesis, the way they are conceived. As with the creation of children, female-produced substances are essential in the constitution of tapa whereas male substances are often regarded as dangerous in

their capacity to either weaken the child or spoil the paint (referred to as blood) used to paint the tapa designs. In particular, the creation of clan designs, and therefore of patrilineal clan identity, depends upon women. This is striking, as it is generally believed that Melanesian women do not produce the important symbols of their community, as this is seen as the prerogative of men (for example Teilhet 1983: 47). As shown, the engendering of Maisin tapa by women also engenders -in terms of both creation and identity – people.

The simultaneous engendering of tapa and people does not imply, however, that the gender identity of both object and subject is fixed. In contexts of use, tapa is imbued with other identities that through the practice of performance gain new and other significances.

## **Part Two: Materialisations and the performance of identity**

How does the use of tapa contribute to the formation of people's identities in terms of gender, personhood, clan, and tribe? In Part Two, I have tried to show how Maisin, and in particular Maisin clans, use tapa in their 'politics of identity' and how these materialised identities are subsequently applied to the body and performed as well as being exchanged in various contexts.

In Chapter 3, clan designs and their materialised histories have been followed, revealing how tapa and other objects contain information about ancestral journeys, land claims, and relationships between specific clans. In fact, both tapa and landscape can be seen as surfaces on which clan identity is marked. While men control the narratives dealing with these journeys associated with particular landmarks as well as designs, the knowledge concerning the manufacturing of clan designs is in the hands of women. In designing a clan's identity, women are crucial. They control the knowledge of the designs and their manufacture through which the clan itself is reproduced. As we have seen, gendered forms of knowledge, power, affiliation, differentiation and identity are not only intertwined and expressed through particular types of tapa; they are also manipulated through tapa. The prohibition on wearing another person's clan design exemplifies this since this would simultaneously denote a claim on land.

Chapters 3, 4, and 6 have shown how by wearing these tapa clan designs during ceremonies and festivities, a clan's identity is not only performed but also re-enacted as it resembles the ancestors coming from below the earth's surface. In addition, practices of decorating the body both define and express notions of personhood and self. In fact, the body is used as a surface on which clan identity is inscribed. Gender and self are marked on the body through tattoos, ornaments, and specific types of tapa.

Life-cycle rituals entail the decoration of the body by others, who thereby materially construct a new social identity. In contrast, in contexts of church festivities, the body is decorated by oneself, thereby revealing ideas about attractiveness and about the way women use their bodies to identify themselves with their husbands' and/or their fathers' clans. Women thereby identify themselves and at the same time empower these patrilineal clans. In all of these contexts, the applying of clan

tapa on the body surface plays a crucial role. It signals the ceremonial transition of individual identity when applied by others, while in contexts of self-decoration the inner self is 'displayed' on the outside, revealing gender, clan, and even tribal identity. In both practices of applying decorations, the person and his or her transitions 'are constituted by the matching paraphernalia' (Fontijn 2003: 27).

Thus the application and wearing of things like tapa interact with the body in such a way that gender and other differences are created. Since this is a dynamic process, identity itself, even though the things involved appear to be static, is fluid and changeable. Moreover, as Strathern (1990: 273) argues, people are constructed from the vantage points of the relationships that constitute them. This implies that personhood is distributed. It depends upon relationships but also upon objects located in and on the body as well as elsewhere in the material world. The clan identity of a Maisin man is not exclusively constructed by the fact that he actually wears the clan tapa. The relationships that he and his clan members are engaged in, as well as the ancestral claims on land, imbue his tapa and his wearing of it with significance and power.

So things like tapa are not external. The things that surround people and are applied to their bodies are interwoven with their identities (Gosden 1994: 14). In the dynamics of subject formation, identities are mediated and defined through these material structures. As a consequence, the body is not only moulded and created in conceptual and discursive practices (Butler 1999) but also, and perhaps most strongly, in and through non-discursive materialities.

As we have seen, the female body in particular is marked in non-discursive ways. For example, the making and designing of tapa physically marks women's bodies, and the tattoos applied on girls' faces and women's thighs likewise inscribe gender identity, while the wearing of either the father's or husband's clan tapa wraps the female body in particular images of patrilineal identity. In fact, it seems that the Maisin use the female body as a metaphor to express what David Lipset (1997) calls the gendered 'dialogics of culture'. These gendered dialogics are also expressed through the specific domains and values of exchange.

The morality of all Maisin exchanges seems to be based upon *marawa-wawe*: on balance. In order to obtain this moral state, and moreover to order social life, objects like tapa are converted from commodities into gifts and vice versa as they circulate in both short- and long-term exchanges. Moreover, the values of the given objects also change. In formal exchanges, which are primarily conducted by men, the gift is imbued with *muan*, with respect. When these gifts are redistributed on a personal level, which is often conducted by women, these same gifts are imbued with love or compassion, as denoted by *marawa-wawe*. Thus the hierarchical values of gift giving are actually reflections of prevailing gender hierarchies.

These chapters also showed how Maisin women cross clan and tribal boundaries by marrying from one clan or village into another and subsequently exchanging objects such as tapa. By moving across these boundaries of affiliation, women, as both wives and sisters, create relationships between their husbands' and fathers' clans. Moreover, women in particular create individual exchange networks with women belonging to other clans. Women, as wives and sisters, are

obliged to contribute to exchanges performed by both their husband's and their brother's families as well as in exchanges between their clans. As we have seen, formal exchanges do not stop after a particular ceremony has been completed. These are preceded and continued through the daily gifts that are produced and given by women to other women (and sometimes men). Thus women actively and predominantly contribute to the establishment of relationships, although this is not immediately visible in public ceremonies and formal exchanges. Through their activities in short-term exchanges such as barter, however, women contribute to these long-term exchanges as well as to the social order and balance that is established through these exchanges. Thus it seems that men and women have separate spheres of sociability. This concurs with the findings of James Weiner (1991: 11). The gendered memory, knowledge transmission, values, and behaviour associated with exchanges stipulate distinct male and female existential conditions. What happens when either men or women cross the boundaries of this gendered social order becomes visible through addressing the several transformations – the religious and socio-economic transformations – of both tapa and gender that have taken place in both the past and the present.

### **Part Three: Colonial and postcolonial appropriations of tapa**

The colonial and postcolonial dynamics of women's production and the use of tapa were addressed in Part Three. Chapter 7 tried to gain insights into the relationships between colonialism and tapa. As shown, it seems that both tapa and gender played an important part in the colonial encounters between 'Europeans' and Collingwood Bay people. The collecting of objects played an important role in these interactions. In fact, it may be argued that a focus on materiality was intrinsic to the colonial project, its failure or success, and the establishment of relations with Indigenous people (Rowlands 2005; see also Gosden and Knowles 2001: 6). In many areas, this focus on materiality implied changes in village layout, populations being counted, changes in dress, and the exchange of labour, money, and objects. In Collingwood Bay, the Anglican missionaries relied on the success of material projects, such as the building of a good mission station. These buildings did not only materialise the efforts and ideals of the mission; they also made it possible to keep track of the progress the mission was making by counting church and school attendees. In contrast to many other congregations, however, the Anglicans did not systematically alter bodies by changing local dress. Only in specific instances did missionaries remove ornaments from the body. In some cases this was conducted as punishment; in others, such as in Sara Manua's case, it signalled Christianisation. In general, though, the missionary and other colonial collectors seemed to have been more interested in collecting these Indigenous ornaments and cloths.

The artefacts collected by various agents were part of the construction of a British New Guinea, in which Governor MacGregor was a collector himself. They were also part of Anglican attempts to pacify and Christianise local people and efforts of scientists such as Pöch to prove the superiority of Western man, culture, and religion. For collectors such as MacGregor, Money, and Pöch, the idea of

'vanishing authentic cultures' contributed to their collecting drives, legitimating their presence as 'development' since change would be irrevocable. In fact, this denotes collecting as a practice of 'salvation' (Elsner and Cardinal 1994: 1). In the case of government and missionary collecting, this goal of salvation applied not only to the objects collected but also to the people they tried to pacify and Christianise.

I have argued that the colonial encounters with Maisin people entailed the collecting of not only weapons but also artefacts like tapa and other body decorations which were closely associated with the people who had used and worn them on their bodies. In particular, ornaments related to mourning – and specifically widow's regalia as materialisations of practices that were condemned by missionaries – feature in the collections. This suggests not only that practices by government and the Anglican Mission physically interacted with people's bodies and lives but also that these colonial relationships were embodied in the 'tokens' they collected. Thus collections are, like the individual objects themselves, immersed in a particular socio-historical context, relating objects and people's motives, notions, and behaviour in specific and gendered ways.

This latter attribute of tapa as related to socio-historical dynamics and also power relations was further elaborated upon in Chapter 8 of this book. This described how the commercialisation of tapa is grounded in both the past and the present and how tapa as a commodity is linked with the more recent politics of representation and identity. It was shown how tapa turned into a 'green' commodity that could save the rainforest and at the same time bring development to Maisin people's lives. In the new-age discourse of environmentalists, tapa has been used to gain international attention and made into a symbol of the Maisin struggle against extensive logging in their area. The Maisin themselves have been integrating some of this environmentalist discourse in order to forward their concerns to the 'outside' world. In fact, Maisin were associated with – and associated themselves with – tapa in both national and international media campaigns. As a result, tapa has become a commodity that affects the constitution of Maisin identity. In this process, both Maisin men and women are crossing boundaries with regard to definitions of gender. Men have started to design tapa, which before was attributed to women; women are acting as representatives of Maisin, which is traditionally a man's prerogative. So the commercialisation of tapa has entailed a change in gender behaviour and a shift in power relations.

Through the life history of tapa, we have seen a shift from Maisin clan politics towards tribal and even national politics. The communal understanding of all 36 Maisin clans no longer stress their individual claims on the tapa tree exemplify this process, as do the diminishing importance of clan designs and the establishment of MICAD, which ideally should unite and represent all the clans. But the most striking performance of this shifting emphasis from clan towards tribal identity is the statement 'Maisin is tapa' itself, exemplifying the discursive construction of this 'new' identity. The Maisin base their MICAD politics on a sense of tribal identity, something which beforehand hardly existed.

These identity politics are clearly related to the processes of globalisation described in Chapter 8. Seen in this light, the emphasis on tribal unity and identity can be regarded as an organising tool for Maisin to build a vocal and cohesive communal political community in order to adequately deal with these external processes. This constructed unity is becoming increasingly fragmented due to feelings of underrepresentation as experienced by various Maisin villages and clans.

In summary, the commercialisation of tapa has entailed many transformations (see also Hermkens 2007b). It seems that calculating individuals and organisations have diverted one of the main ‘resources of the long-term cycle for their own short-term transactions’, thereby giving less effort and time to the demands of the long-term cycle (Bloch and Parry 1989: 27). This would explain the diminishing importance of tapa in long-term exchanges as well as the diminished frequency of the performance of life-cycle rituals. Moreover, the commercialisation of tapa has encompassed a transformation of gender relations as well as other power relations among various groups of people, such as between the Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development organisation (MICAD) and the Anglican Church and also between Sibon and Gorofi villages and clans. As a result, it seems that the colonial and postcolonial processes that instigated the commodification of tapa have also instigated a fracture in, and a transformation of, local political structures. This demonstrates the complex interweaving of tapa and the dynamics of identity.

In the previous sections, I have summarised the entanglement between tapa and identity by combining two points of view: women and tapa. But how are women and tapa related to these dynamics of identity? Or rather, what are the effects of these dynamics on women’s positions? And what is the ‘agency’ of tapa with regard to the dynamics of gender, personhood, clan, and tribal identity?

### **Women and tapa as performative subjects?**

Since mainly women make tapa, one may question how the production and subsequent use of tapa relates to the position and role of women in constituting relationships and identities. This question obviously addresses the complexities of female representation and agency in Maisin society, which is debated both locally and internationally. The production of tapa has revealed how women themselves, in the act or technique of making tapa, inscribe gender identity. Although women’s creativity may result in certain changes in, for example, style, the style-system and habitus is rather rigid, leaving little room for agency. In contrast, their relationship with the object they produce is more subject to manipulation and change.

Specific forms of tapa consumption seem to alienate the cloth from its main producers, the Maisin women. The colonial collecting of tapa and also the recent commercialisation of Maisin tapa are seen as effectively alienating women from the cloths they produce. This commodification is linked with changing notions of property being inscribed in the cloth. As was described in Chapter 8, the gendered property claims on tapa as a commodity is shifting from women to men. At the

same time, tapa, including clan designs which are essentially clan property, is being appropriated by outsiders, such as museums, as well as by insiders, like MICAD and village elders, as Maisin cultural property. Through these cultural appropriations of tapa as being Maisin, women as individual artists are ignored. This does not diminish, however, their importance in reproducing one of the most important signifiers of Maisin identity, or their importance in Maisin life and the constitution of Maisin clans in particular. Through their work and informal exchanges, women create alliances and relationships between people. As producers of clan tapa, they actually reproduce their fathers' and husbands' clans. Does this imply, however, that tapa gives women economic and political power, as Annette Weiner (1989) argues with regard to Trobriand women's banana-leaf bundles?

The described processes of colonialism, commodification, and environmentalism have shown how women are not only affected in their roles as tapa makers but also as mothers and wives. The increased pressure on women to produce tapa for national and international markets has resulted in increased workloads without direct revenues, as these are usually appropriated by men. The international pressure for gender equality with regard to tapa presentations has resulted in a temporary rise, followed by a decrease, in women's participation in international events and local public meetings. So on the one hand, women support and constitute gender, life stage, clan, and tribal identities by their production and use of tapa. On the other hand, their social and public position seems to be declining because of the increased economic value of tapa. Thus, although tapa is valued as a clan emblem as well as a gift and commodity, it does not give women political or economic power. Only very few women are able to actively take advantage of the limited possibilities offered, travelling abroad to market tapa and thereby gaining some economic and personal profit for themselves.

By following how tapa is made and used, women's roles in transmitting and shaping various identities have been revealed. People and things are dynamically entangled in processes of cultural change and tradition, and tapa seems to influence the lives of both Maisin men and women. As shown, barkcloth contains various dialogues that take place between husband and wife, between social personhood and self, between men and women, among Maisin clans, and between Maisin and other groups of people. But does this mean we can attribute agency to tapa?

### **Tapa as a thing with agency?**

The distinction between people and things is often based on the Western notion that things exist outside the realm of human life, which is, according to Bruno Latour (1993), false. Likewise Strathern claims that, in Papua New Guinea, things do not exist outside people's lives. Distinctions exist between persons but not so much between persons and things (Strathern 1999: 181). Her line of argument is that objects such as tapa 'do not reify society or culture, they reify capacities contained in persons/relations' (Strathern 1999: 14). These social relations are

made manifest through action (Strathern 1999: 16). Among the Maisin we have seen how relationships are created through the production of things like tapa as well as through its use as clothing and decoration, as a gift and as a commodity.

Since distinctions between individuals are established through relations and, in particular, through the positions they occupy in relation to one another (for example, male and female; *ibid.*), and objects play a paramount role in these relationships, things can be considered as personified objects. These objects define personhood because they are separated from the self (for example, Breton 2002: 124) or because they are inseparable and intertwined with particular human bodies. Among the Maisin, the removal of regalia such as clan tapa in the context of Christianisation, marriage, and mourning denotes the removal of a particular identity, while the application of new regalia visualises the ‘transformation’ into another identity. The tattoos that were applied on female bodies exemplify how things can be inseparable from the human (female) body and its constitution. Moreover, objects are not only relational; interpersonal communication entails the use of artefacts that supply information on their own account. Things embody capacities and consequently affect the properties of people.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the production of tapa simultaneously produces women’s bodies, re-enacting notions of gender behaviour and gender definitions. The close association between tapa and women might suggest that tapa is a female object *par excellence*. But in Chapter 3, it was shown how the manufacture and use of clan tapa reproduces clan identity and the clan ancestor in particular. As illustrated in Chapter 6, the wearing of clan tapa does not just represent the clan ancestors; it embodies them. Moreover, it reveals personal affiliation since women choose a particular design to wear. In addition, the giving of clan tapa and its application to people’s bodies in puberty rites, marriage, and mourning ceremonies signals the transformation of an individual’s social identity. But in the context of commercialisation, tapa specifically marks tribal – Maisin – identity. As a result, it contains as well as constitutes many other sorts of identities, which are only revealed in specific contexts of production and use.

This ‘fluid’ aspect of material objects is also remarked upon by Tim Dant (1999: 24), who argues that value is not intrinsic to an object and its production; it may change. Objects are interwoven with people’s lives and are thereby ‘marked for gender and age and as such instrumental in achieving and sustaining relationships as well as personal identities’ (Dant 1999: 29). Since these values or identities are not stable, the significance of objects may also change. As we have seen in this book, the context in which tapa is produced and used is significant since this actually defines its meaning. Moreover, the meanings and values of tapa can be manipulated. Thus things are dynamic entities: their meanings change for the participants in different contexts depending on the specific values that come into play. This implies that ‘the meaning of things’ resides not only in the object. Objects can therefore not be read like texts. Objects such as tapa have to be contextualised and reconfigured within performances and networks of people and things.

This contextualisation and reconfiguration in my description of the various political, ritual, and other instances in which tapa is used showed how various identities are expressed and defined through tapa. In all the described contexts, however, it seems that tapa embodies various dialogues, but in particular those that take place between men and women. It therefore seems that both gender values as well as the social gender order are contained in the manufacture and use of tapa. So, on this basis, one can argue that things like tapa are 'vehicles through which social value is expressed' (cf. Dant 1999: 24; Errington 1998: 4). Alternatively, does the mutual coexistence of things like tapa and the Maisin people tell us something different?

In line with Alfred Gell (1998), I argue that objects can 'act' like persons and be more than empty vessels in which meaning is put from the outside. Artefacts affect the properties of people and, as a consequence, their actions. Moreover, objects may have a social life (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986), and therefore it seems that objects and subjects are similar. This leads us to the question whether objects are, indeed, like persons and persons like objects? As stated by Latour (1993: 142), in 'modern' Western societies 'the human and the non-human' have been divided, thereby categorising other societies as not doing so. It seems to me that that this Western construct, the division between subject and object, does not contribute to our understanding of either the human or the non-human in *all* cultures. On the other hand, without making a distinction between objects and subjects, the materiality and therefore the distinctiveness of objects also remains invisible. Moreover, if objects and subjects are indeed the same, objects would not be able to interfere with people's lives and bodies in such determined ways. So the ability of objects to change people's identities is not located in either a strict division between objects and subjects or in their ability to merge but rather in their mutual coexistence (see also Ter Keurs 2005: 75).

As we have seen in the previous chapters, identity is located not only in the body but also elsewhere in the social and material world. The analysis of body decorations as well as exchange relationships showed us how 'distributed' identity or personhood exists. In fact, I would like to argue that identity *can* only be constructed through things and by relationships with other people.

Since material or visual acts produce what they express only by reference to the accepted norms, which are copied and repeated (and thus performed) in the body and its behaviour, meaningful things cannot exist separately from human beings, just as human beings cannot exist separately from the objects they make and use. Further, these norms, as performed in the production and use of tapa, precede and define identities rather than identities determining or expressing themselves through these norms or representations. This view of social practice and the construction of identity implies an active role for things. Thus discourses not only create objects (Errington 1998: 4); objects also create discourses.

This is exemplified by the role of tapa as a commodity. As we have seen in Chapters 7 and 8, tapa transformed into a commodity – something which can be sold instead of worn or exchanged. According to Igor Kopytoff (1986: 65, 75-76), this process of commodification turns objects into 'slaves', although,

as he argues, this says nothing about the subsequent status of the object. Sold as a commodity, tapa may become a piece of tribal art hanging in an American tourist's house, thereby becoming both art and conversation piece. But even as a commodity tapa has a life of its own. Tapa as a commodity is out of people's control. It first of all created dependency upon itself by becoming a potential income-generating product. But because the markets fluctuate, it subsequently also created disappointment and despair as well as hope. As one young man argued, 'Tapa itself communicates with potential buyers'. By saying this, he advanced his hope that tapa would create its own market, by enslaving or seducing others to buy. At the same time, this utterance is symptomatic of the way Maisin in general deal with the commercialisation of tapa; they wait until other people come forward to buy it. Thus commodities are not simply 'slaves' that undergo processes of social transformation. Tapa has the ability to both enslave and produce people through its ascribed social and economic value, meaning, and/or use. Also, whereas in Western consumerism the manufacturing of commodities seems to be alienated from its individual or social consumption, this is not (yet) the case with Maisin tapa. Although values are shifting, the process of production and the producers themselves are not alienated from the singular use of tapa. This property of tapa to travel within its biography and shift between commodity and singularity endows tapa with the potential of agency (Kopytoff 1986) and there with the potential to construct people's identities.

Returning to the first sentence of this chapter, 'Maisin is tapa', we have seen that this performative speech act depends on a densely woven web of social relations and things that themselves render it intelligible and believable. The phrase 'Maisin is tapa' gains significance through the social contexts of the object's production and use. In a similar manner, just as the wearing of wedding rings materialises and expresses the previous performative speech-act, tapa *is* a series of materialised performative acts. It dynamically defines gender, personhood, clan, and tribal identity in a range of contexts as has been described in the chapters of this book.

In other words, indeed, Maisin is tapa!



Appendices

Appendix 1 – Chapter 2 – Tapa designs

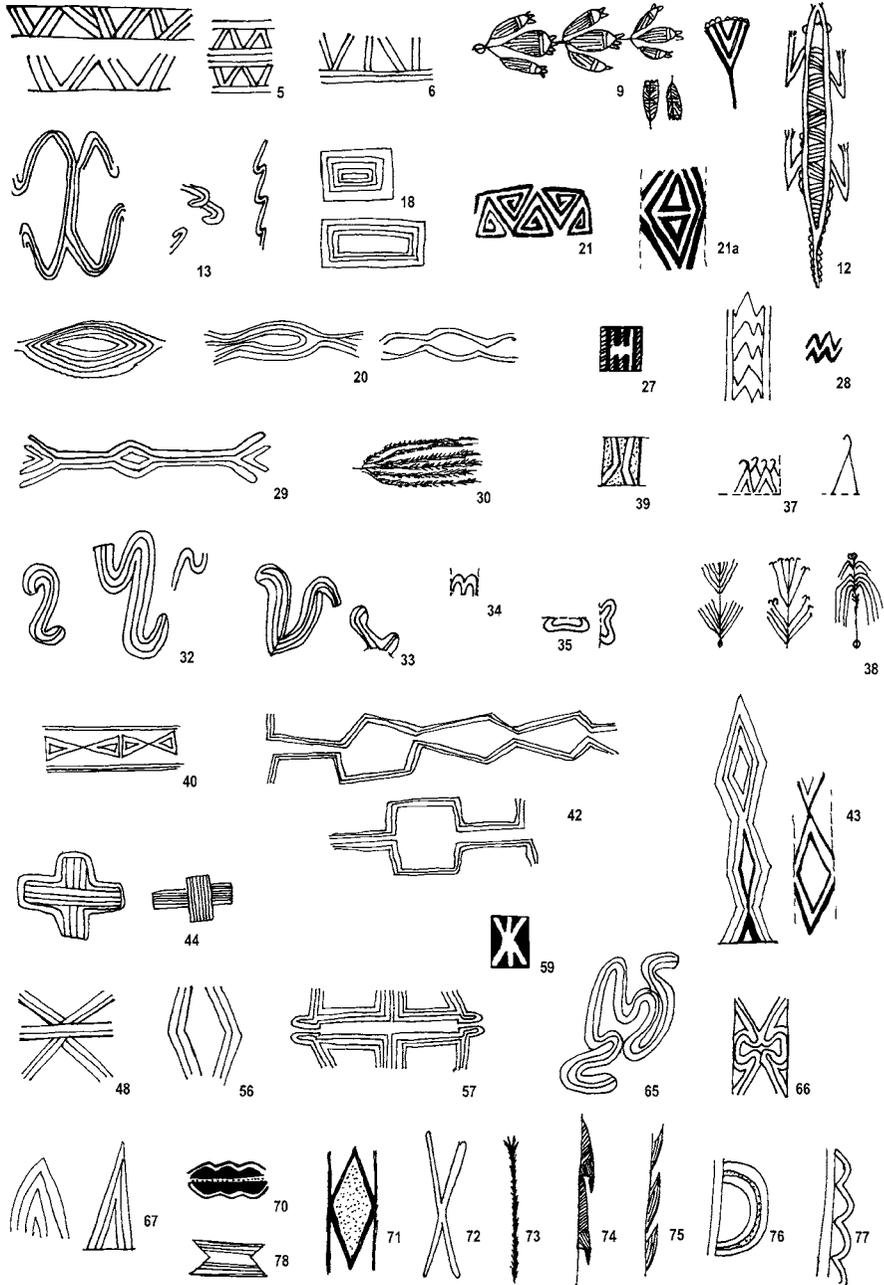


Figure appendix 1. For an explanation of these drawings see next page.

This appendix lists the pieces of decorated barkcloth collected by P.J. Money and R. Pösch in Collingwood Bay. It shows the cloths' origin (village); the type of cloth (a cloak/blanket or a male or a female dress); the structure of the design applied on the cloth (either a panel or a continues design); the name of the design (as noted down by the collector); the motifs applied on the cloth (see previous drawings); and, finally, whether the designs applied on these cloths, based upon their names and designs, may be denoted as clan designs.

Museum Number*	Origin	Type of Cloth	Design structure	Design name	Main motif**	Clan design?***
AM E13154	Wanigela	cloak/ blanket	4 panels	-	20,56	JBW
AM E13155	Wanigela	cloak/ blanket	?	-	?	?
AM E13156	Wanigela	cloak/ blanket	4 panels	-	39	-
AM E13157	Wanigela	cloak/ blanket	4 panels	-	32,65	JBW
AM E13158	Wanigela	cloak/ blanket	4 panels	-	37	JBU
AM E13159	Wanigela	male	6 panels	-	66	-
AM E13160	Wanigela	male	6 panels	-	40	-
AM E13161	Wanigela	male	6 panels	-	13	-
AM E13162	Wanigela	female	mixed	-	44	JBW
AM E13163	Wanigela	female	4 panels	-	57,32	-
AM E13164	Wanigela	female	6 panels	-	5,32-5	JBW
AM E16322	Wanigela	male	6 panels	Orar (latticework)	6	Coll
AM E16323	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Asau (pheasant plumes)	9	Coll; JBW-U
AM E16324	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Uwai (crocodile)	12	Coll; JBW-U
AM E16325	Wanigela	male	7 panels	Babatar (tree)	38	Coll; JBW-U
AM E16326	Wanigela	male	6 panels	Sombub (mushroom)	59	Coll; JBW
AM E16327	Wanigela	male	6 panels	Orar	6	Coll; JBW
AM E16328	Wanigela	male	6 panels	Yanbeb (tree)		Coll; JBW
AM E16329	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Asua	9	Coll; JBW-U
AM E16330	Wanigela	female	4 panels	For Sesebin (pigs ribs)	48	Coll
AM E16331	Wanigela	male	6 panels	Babatar	38	Coll; JBW-U
AM E16332	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Orot (man)	29	Coll
AM E16333	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Orar	5,43	Coll
AM E16334	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Gum (hermit crab tracks)	28	Coll; JBW
AM E16335	Wanigela	male	6 panels	Mota (snake)	33,65	Coll
AM E16336	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Mota (snake)	65	Coll; JBW
AM E16337	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Boin	37,42	Coll
AM E16338	Wanigela	female	4 panels	Kaikas	21	Coll; JBW
AM E37425	Wanigela	male	6 panels	-	21a	-
AM E37426	Wanigela	male	6 panels	similar to MV 77666	27	Coll
AM E37427	?	?	?	-	?	?
AM E37428	Wanigela	male	?	-	?	?
AM E37429	Aieram	female	4 panels	similar to AM E16329	9	JBU

Museum Number*	Origin	Type of Cloth	Design structure	Design name	Main motif**	Clan design?***
AM E37430	Wanigela	female	4 panels	similar to AM E16325	30/38	JBW
AM E37431	Wanigela	female	7 panels	-	5	JBW
AM E37432	Uiaku	female	continues	-	28	JBW
AM E37433	Uiaku	?	?	-	?	?
AM E37434	Uiaku	female	4 panels	-	5	JBW
MV 77659	Wanigela/ Maisin	female	4 panels	Orar	6,48	Coll
MV 77660	W/M	female	?	Jajas	?	Coll
MV 77661	W/M	female	?	Unnan (neckrest)	?	Coll
MV 77662	W/M	male	6 panels	Kogrrereg (chicken), Oroto (rooster)	9	Coll; similar to AM E16329
MV 77663	W/M	male	6 panels	Motap (snake)	32,65	Coll
MV 77664	W/M	male	5 panels	Orar (lattice-work)	6	Coll; similar to AM 16322
MV 77665	W/M	male	?	Jeogar (?)	?	Coll
MV 77666	W/M	male	6 panels	Rangu (sickness of trees or insect)	27	Coll; similar to AM 37426
MV 77609	Ubiri	female	?	Unan (neckrest)	?	Coll
MV 77610	Ubiri	female	?	Wuamo Tu Ton (canoe decorations)	?	Coll
MV 77611	Ubiri	male	6 panels	Kombub (mushroom)	59	Coll; similar to AM 16326
MV 77612	Ubiri	male	5/6 panels	Oter (marsupial)	28	Coll; similar to AM 16334
MV 77613	Ubiri	male	6 panels	Marer (fresh water, crab)	28	Coll
MV 77664	Ubiri	male	6 panels	Wived (anemone)	70	Coll
MV 77893	Maisin	male	6 panels	Waga (cock's comb and gill)	20	Coll; see also AM 13154.
MV 77894	Maisin	male	5/6 panels	Baborod (starfish)	39	Coll
MV 77895	Maisin	male	?	Boin (head-ornament)	?	Coll; see also AM E16337
MV 77896	Maisin	female	?	Sira (parrot feathers)	?	Coll
MV 77897	Maisin	female	4 panels	Dedeoaga (box)	18	Coll
MV 77898	Maisin	female	4 panels	Maiati (?)	5,13,32	Coll
MV 77899	Maisin	female	?	Motar (snake)	?	Coll
MV 77900	Maisin	female	4 panels	Betut (fish)	71	Coll
MV 77901	Maisin	female	?	?	?	-
MV 77902	Maisin	female	?	Mebimbi (male blossom of banana)	?	Coll
MV 77903	Maisin	female	?	Kalego (cloth, calico?)	?	Coll
MV 77904	Maisin	female	4 panels	Waga (rooster)	72,13	Coll
MV 78157	Koia-Koia	female	4 panels	Iran Nan (palm blossom)	73,67	Coll
MV 78158	Koia-Koia	female	?	Iran Nan (palm blossom)	?	Coll
MV 78159	Koia-Koia	female	4 panels	Babadar (tree)	38,74	Coll
MV 78160	Koia-Koia	female	4 panels	Oiag (water plant)	75	Coll

Museum Number*	Origin	Type of Cloth	Design structure	Design name	Main motif**	Clan design?***
MV 78161	Oian	female	?	Kuagimit (part of betelnut, used as head ornament)	?	Coll
MV 78149	Manu	female	4 panels	Kombub (mushroom)	59	Coll
MV 77570	Miniafa	female	?	Binam (ocean bird)	?	Coll
MV 77571	Miniafa	female	?	Oter (marsupial)	?	Coll
MV 77572	Miniafa	female	?	Kaiko (Mt Victory)	?	Coll
MV 77573	Miniafa	female	?	Kum (hermit crab), Fam (tree)	?	Coll
MV 77574	Miniafa	female	?	Kum (hermit crab)	?	Coll
MV 77575	Miniafa	female	?	Marer, Urain (plant or grass)	?	Coll
MV 77576	Miniafa	female	?	Kiru (tattoo on women's stirn)	?	Coll
MV 77577	Miniafa	female	4 panels	Nukir Rongu (insect)	5	Coll
MV 77578	Miniafa	female	?	Kanip (sea cucumber)	?	Coll
MV 77579	Miniafa	female	4 panels	Ken (coconut cup)	76	Coll
MV 77580	Miniafa	male	?	Kaiko (Mt Victory)	?	Coll
MV 77581	Miniafa	male	5 panels	Mamareru (fresh water), Aramoian (tree)	77	Coll
MV 77582	Miniafa	male	5/6 panels	Kuren (fish)	33,78	Coll

*Notes:*

\* AM (Australian Museum, P.J. Money collection); MV (Museum für Volkerkunde in Vienna, R. Pösch collection).

\*\* Motifs (1-69) based upon an inventory of tapa and pottery designs collected by J.P. Money made by Bonshek (1989: 210-234; see drawings).

\*\*\* Design type according to John Barker's informants (1982) in Wanigela (JBW) and Uiaku (JBU) (in Bonshek 1989: 236-237) and deduced from the collectors' information, such as design-names (Coll).

## Appendix 2 – Chapter 5 – The myth of Embeatofu

Once upon a time, people went out catching fish on the lake. It was dry season, and all the people went out. So the little boy and his sister were left alone by themselves. They decided to follow the people who went. As they came closer to the lake where people were catching fish, they came to a cave. In the evening the rain came, but the people didn't bother about the little boy and girl. They jumped over them inside the cave to get shelter for themselves. As soon as the rain stopped, the people went out without looking out for the boy and his sister. The people went all the way back home, leaving the children behind. So they couldn't find their way back home and they decided to sleep in the cave. The next morning, the little boy said: "I better bake us some taro". There were two taro left, so he baked those taro and they ate them on their way back home. The

siblings were struggling hard to find their way back. The little boy told his sister they would keep wandering in the bush looking for a way to find their home. They kept on walking until they had to eat some of those two taro. The brother broke one of the taro and said: “we share this one and keep the other one for the next day”. So they ate one and kept on walking again. They walked some distance and then they stopped. The brother said: “you wait here! I climb this tree and look out for a village”. So the little sister waited at the bottom while her brother climbed in that tree. He looked everywhere, but he couldn’t see anything. But when he looked at the other end, he could see a smoke rise. So he called to his sister “I can see a smoke risen!” And he went down the tree and he carried his sister again and they kept walking to where the smoke came from. They shared their last taro. They came to a lake and stood at the bank, looking out to where they could see a village. And then they looked up and saw Embeatofo floating down. Embeatofo was an old man but on his back a smoke rose and you could even see something like a fire burning. He was floating down when he saw the two children on the lake-bank and he said: “What are you two doing?” The siblings answered: “Oh, we went to catch some fish, but the people went back home and left us. We couldn’t find our way back home and we were just walking through the bush until we came here”. Embeatofo said: “Okay! Where are you going right now?” And they answered: “We don’t find our way home, we only want to take some fire from your back”. “But, this is not a real fire, this is my body where the smoke rises from”, Embeatofo said. “You can get on me!” “But we are afraid!”, the children exclaimed, “we can get burned”. “You cannot get burned”, Embeatofo said. “Jump on my body! And I take you to my place”. So the children got on Embeatofo’s back and set off to his place. As soon as they got to his place, Embeatofo said: “you jump off! “The house is there! You can live there, food gardens are around and the food is ready for you. Help yourselves with this food while I go and look for some of your friends”. While the siblings were staying in Embeatofo’s house, he looked around for more people. Every time he would go out, but he couldn’t find anybody. He would come back and call out his grandchildren, “come down! So I can see you!” The little boy and girl would run down the lake bank and say: “Here we are!” Embeatofo would look at them and say: “Ah, you are growing well! Okay, you go back and I go and look again”. So Embeatofo would go out again and start looking for more people. But every time he went out looking, he couldn’t find any children. So at last he came back and called out to those two again: “Come down and I see how big you are!” So the two would run down to their grandfather saying: “Here we are!” And the grandfather saw them and said: “Oh, now you are big enough”. He told the boy: “you are big enough and your sister is big enough, so you can marry together”. The boy and girl started crying because they are brother and sister and they couldn’t marry together. But their grandfather said they should marry together as there were no other people. They should live together and start a family. So they did that. They married and lived in Embeatofo’s place. They got one son and one daughter. And once again Embeatofo set out and told them he would look for other children. Bu he came home empty handed, called out to

them: “Bring those children down and I can see which you have!” The wife and husband took down their two children and Embeatofo said: “oh, take them back and feed them”! The couple took their children and Embeatofo went out again. He was doing like that until the boy and girl grew up. The next time he came and called out: “Bring those children so I can see them!” When they took them out, Embeatofo said: “Oh, at last they are big enough now to get married just as you did”. So they got married, like their parents, and that’s how they started a family and increased their number (Raymond Jadai, Dadumu clan).

### **Appendix 3 – Chapter 8 – The Maisin campaign**

The Maisin campaign started in late 1986, when a Maisin man discovered documents relating to a multi-million kina proposal by a Japanese company that involved the deforestation of parts of his clan’s land (CM report). Shocked by this discovery, he filed his complaints at the agencies involved. Despite the fact that his clan, and also other clans, had not given their consent, the company went ahead. It ignored the fact that only a few people had signed the lease, and, important for the environmental lobby, that no proper studies had been conducted that addressed the environmental impact of these plans. Both the provincial government and forest department rejected the filed complaints. Since the provincial minister for the forest and the provincial forest officer were both Maisin as well as landowners (CM report), our man not only had to face the multinational company and the government, but also his own people. As he told me, in the beginning only a few people were against these deforestation plans, and in his campaign against the multinational and the government he was intimidated and even threatened with murder, including by other Maisin.

Maisin in the villages of Collingwood Bay initially saw mainly the advantages of selling or leasing their land for the purpose of logging, as this would generate the desired income and thereby economic development. According to Barker (2003: 449), many Maisin felt they were in an economic backwater. They had expected help from the missionaries, but the Mission had not provided the people with plantations and other forms of economic development. So, when the archbishop of the Anglican Church advocated against logging at a Uiaku meeting in 1983, this provoked “an outraged protest from village leaders” (ibid). Similar protests against logging by Maisin living in the cities, who already had access to goods and money, were equally not welcome. Maisin villagers clearly wanted prosperity, which could be provided by allowing logging on their ancestral lands. This attitude changed, or rather seemed to have changed, through various campaigns that were initiated by Maisin and others living outside Collingwood Bay.

In order to bring awareness about the devastating and illegal practices of mining and logging companies to the Maisin people, several awareness campaigns were set up with help of Conservation Melanesia (CM), a Port Moresby-based NGO that

was established in 1993.<sup>1</sup> Conservation Melanesia's mission is to protect PNG's natural and cultural heritage for the future, and improve the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Despite its PNG orientation, Conservation Melanesia's main projects have been based in Oro Province, of which especially the Collingwood Bay, or rather the Maisin project, gained worldwide attention. One of the successes of Conservation Melanesia was to have Collingwood Bay identified by a countrywide biodiversity survey as an area of high priority for biodiversity conservation.

The awareness campaigns set up by Conservation Melanesia followed several articles on logging that had been published in the *Post Courier* and which had stirred up debates (CM report). As an Airara man stated: Before, "the people were split up". But the campaigns, which started in the early 1990s, brought the desired awareness as well as solidarity. "Now everybody understands the danger of mining and logging and everybody is against it". While the Maisin became more unified in their conviction to protect their land against logging, the threats of illegal logging also intensified. This "warranted a delegation of Maisin elders to visit the forest Minister in Port Moresby in July 1994 to call upon the ministry to shelve any logging proposal for Collingwood Bay if Maisin land was involved" (CM report). The 'Maisin people's' view on the matter was published in a statement in the *Post Courier* (PC 6/4/1994), "declaring their intention to protect their land in perpetuity against unsustainable use".

I suspect that a combination of awareness campaigns and the possibility of foreign companies overruling Maisin rights to their land, evoked this warrior-like response from Maisin people, once again fighting for the land they live on, as they had done so often in the past. The publicly displayed communal concern for the environment seems to have actually been brought about by the growing threat of the government overruling the Maisin concerning their ownership of land, rather than an intrinsic connection and concern with the environment (see also Barker 2004; in press). These differences between Maisin people's motives and those of partners like Conservation Melanesia did not initially undermine their communal efforts and cooperation to prevent logging. However, eventually, it would.

In order to fight off the government plans, Maisin people realised the need for assistance as well as internal cooperation. With the help of Greenpeace Pacific and Conservation Melanesia, a Maisin-based ICAD organisation was established, hence called MICAD: the 'Maisin Integrated Conservation And Development association'. MICAD was established in order to cooperatively fight against illegal logging and serve as a mediator between Maisin people and their new partners. While being visited by Greenpeace representative Lafcadio Cortesi and Larry Rinder of the University Art Museum at Berkeley in California, Maisin elders and elite drew up a declaration in which they (Maisin) took stand against the destruction of their natural environment (Appendix IV). Furthermore, it

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1 In 2004, CM's office moved to Popondetta, as was requested by the CM sponsors, in order to be closer to its main working area.

was declared that: “the community will explore, and invites the collaboration of interested parties in supporting appropriate alternative sources of income, such as expanded markets for tapa...”

“The Maisin declaration” was made public in the *Post Courier* in 1995 (*PC* 13/4/1995). One year later, in 1996, the declaration was sanctioned by the state when the government officially excluded Maisin customary lands from timber, or other large-scale, development plans (*PNG Rainforest News* 1996; Greenpeace 1998; <http://nativenet.uthsca.edu/archive/nl/9610/0053.html>). After years of individual struggle, and more recently with help from Conservation Melanesia, Greenpeace Pacific, and the Individual and Community Rights Advocacy Forum (ICRAF), which had been acting on behalf of Maisin customary landowners, the Maisin seemed to have won the battle. As Sylvester Moi, then chairman of MICAD expressed: “We are very encouraged that the government has heeded the Maisin community’s wishes to preserve our forest and land. We are hopeful that this is a first step in the government actively supporting Maisin community plans to conserve our land and develop small scale, community based enterprises that will not destroy our forests and that we can manage ourselves” (<http://nativenet.uthsca.edu/archive/nl/9610/0053.html>). One of the main enterprises that Maisin people, or rather MICAD, established was the Maisin Tapa Business Group, which mediated between local producers of tapa and the international marketing of these cloths.

However, the threat of mining and logging continued. As a spokeswoman of Conservation Melanesia said after the Government’s decision to exclude Maisin lands from plans for deforestation and large scale agricultural development: “It is indeed good news, but this decision is not yet reflected in the draft Provincial and National Forest Plans. The government must be true to its words and take immediate action to exclude Maisin customary lands from the areas proposed for timber and agricultural development in these plans” (<http://nativenet.uthsca.edu/archive/nl/9610/0053.html>).

Unfortunately, the government did not keep its promises. Determined to create a Forest Management Agreement (FMA), some government officials leased around 30,000 hectares in the Collingwood Bay area to two companies who intended to clear the forest in order to develop a palm oil plantation (*PC* 10/05/2002). “The Maisin people did not learn of these dealings until barges arrived in Collingwood Bay carrying bulldozers and other logging equipment in June of 1999” (*E-law* 2002). The Maisin and Wanigela landowners succeeded in getting a temporary injunction to keep the loggers off their land (Conservation Melanesia 2001: 7). Next, the two companies applied to strike out the landowner’s action. The national court dismissed this application in October 2001, after which a full trial was to be held, in which the Collingwood Bay landowners were represented and defended by Australian lawyers. Finally, in May 2002, a judge of the National Court of PNG ruled that the PNG Government had illegally sold, to private development and logging companies, the rights to exploit the customary lands of the Maisin, and Wanigela people. The court cancelled the Government’s leases

and issued an order banning the companies from entering the forest without the written consent of the local people (*E-law* 2002).<sup>2</sup>

#### **Appendix 4 – Chapter 8 – The Maisin Declaration, 29 July 1994**

We, the undersigned leaders of the clans and subclans of the Maisin-speaking people of Collingwood Bay, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, do hereby declare:

*That, we enjoy plentiful food and materials for shelter that nature provides from the land and sea;*

*That, we take strength from and enjoy great pride in our traditional culture – including the clan structure, traditional medicines, ceremonies, and the tapa art form unique to our people;*

*However, we do not only wish to live as our ancestors did. We seek to maintain our heritage, but also to improve our lives and the lives of our future generations. We therefore require better opportunities for education, health, and transportation to name a few. The Government has failed to adequately assist us in developing these opportunities. We require money, information, training, and technical support to develop them ourselves.*

Furthermore, we declare:

*That, insofar as the forest environment of the traditional Maisin lands provides a home for the game that is our food, a source for the pure water that we drink, a site for the cultivation of our gardens, including the tapa trees uniquely suited to the soils of our region, and protection against the ravages of flooding;*

*That, insofar as this land was inherited by us from our ancestors and that we intend to pass it on to future generations;*

*That, insofar as we are aware how other peoples of Papua New Guinea have been taken advantage of by logging interests, who have repeatedly exploited landholders' ignorance, taking all the goodness out of their place and leaving it barren;*

*We firmly and unanimously stand opposed to destructive large-scale industrial logging and to agricultural activity that entails the clearing of large areas of forest in any part of the lands traditionally held by the Maisin people.*

Therefore, we declare:

*That, because we understand that large-scale logging and agriculture will not assist the Maisin people in realizing their aspirations but, on the contrary, undermine them;*

*That, in order to assure a source of cash income that will benefit the entire Maisin community and assure the protection of our natural and cultural resources;*

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2 In 2003, Conservation Melanesia won the prestigious J. Paul Getty Wildlife Conservation Prize for its assistance to the Maisin community in protecting its ancestral lands from threats of logging, oil palm and illegal land deals. In 2004, they were among the finalists for the United Nations Development Programme Equator Prize for their assistance to Maisin people against the illegal appropriation of Maisin land.

*That, to maintain control of our destiny in the hands of our own people;*

*The community will explore, and invites the collaboration of interested parties in supporting, appropriate alternative sources of income, such as expanded markets for tapa, village-based tourism, community-based sustainable, forest management, and the study and licensing of traditional medicinal plants.*

Finally, we declare that:

*Because we fear that, despite our united opposition to large-scale logging or agriculture projects on Maisin lands, the government of Papua New Guinea, which has been receiving requests from logging interests to operate in our area, seeks to transfer control of our traditional lands from our hands to its own by granting permits for timber or agriculture projects on Maisin land;*

*Because we believe that the only way to assure the survival of our heritage and community is through the legal protection of our land;*

*Because we are hopeful that such legal recognition will increase opportunities for creating sustainable development alternatives;*

*We seek to work amongst ourselves, with the peoples whose land adjoins our own, and with government and other parties to set up Incorporated Land Groups and establish property rights and territorial boundaries for the purpose of creating a legally mandated conservation area such as a Conservation Area, Wildlife Management Area, National Park or World Heritage Site comprising and protecting in perpetuity the entirety of the Maisin lands and sea.*

## Glossary

The pronunciation of the ‘e’, as for example in ‘bare-bare’, is ‘è’.

The pronunciation of ‘-n’ at the end of the word is ‘ng’.

bare-bare	elevated shelter, separate from the house
baya	sago
borun	rain
	borun ari kindi rain time (wet season)
buo	work
	buo beiji hard work
	buo seraman work for which <i>seraman</i> is needed
bua	tattoo. See <i>ro-bua</i> and <i>kasa-bua</i>
dun	red pigment, also referred to as <i>tambuta</i>
embobi	women’s tapa dress; also used to refer to cotton skirts
fara	leaf(s)
fin	younger sister; opposite of <i>yei</i>
fisiga	tapa-beater
fo	log to beat tapa on; tapa-pounder
ganan ari kawo	see Sabu; opposite of ‘ <i>sinan ari kawo</i> ’
iyon	clan
IYON	Main clan
jamen	boys
ka	wood; canoe
ka-kasie	canoeing; paddling
katu	widower
kara	betelnut
kasa-bua	thigh-tattoo
kawo	clan emblem
Kawo	type of clan. The senior of Sabu clans. Kawo clans are also referred to as chief clans or: ‘ <i>sinan ari kawo</i> ’, meaning they have peacemaking as their clan emblem.

kena	widow
koefi	men's loincloth
mara !	exclamation of sorrow, compassion
marawa(wa)	longing, wanting
marawawa vita	heart ache; home-sick
marawa-wawe	harmony, balance ; love, compassion
membu	first-born child
mera ari kawo	chiefs of the downstreams; opposite of <i>wo'o ari kawo</i>
mon	mind; thinking; knowledge
mon-seraman	knowledge and skills
morobi	girl
morobi susuki	marriageable girl
memorobi	girls
muan	respect
nomo	decorations like armllets and necklaces
ro	n. sibling of opposite sex; n. face; vi. go
ro-babassi	ritual that ends the mourning period
ro-bua (ro buwa)	facial tattoo
roi	relative
roise	relatives
roise-siname	kinship term that denotes same-sex relatives and friends
roro	elder (descendant of the elder brother); opposite of <i>tere</i>
sabu	respect; see also <i>muan</i>
Sabu	type of clan. The junior of Kawo clans. Sabu clans are also referred to as: ' <i>ganan ari kawo</i> ', meaning they have the spear or warriorhood as their clan emblem.
sauki	adult/ married woman
seraman	skill
sinan ari	kawo see Kawo; opposite of <i>ganan ari kawo</i>
tamata	owner
tamatan	human
tamati	man

tambuta	water
tambun	moon; month
teiti	boy
tere	younger (descendant of the younger brother); opposite of <i>rora</i>
yaa	sun; year
yaa ari kindi	sun time (dry season)
yabi	father
yan	pandanus mats
yau	mother
yei	elder sister; opposite of <i>fin</i>
yo	aunt
yun	water
va	house
varo	open space within a clan
voto	semen
wafotti	ritual in order to demand compensation from the in-laws
wakosi	lazy
wakki	village(s)
wevi	sister in-law
wusu	clay pot, made by women living in the Wanigela villages
wuwusi	tapa-tree
wo	high; fire
wo'o ari kawo	chiefs of the upstreams; opposite of <i>mera ari kawo</i>



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## *Dutch summary*

Deze publicatie, welke gebaseerd is op de dissertatie *'Engendering Objects: Barkcloth and the Dynamics of identity in Papua New Guinea'* beschrijft het leven en de cultuur van de Maisin mensen aan de hand van door vrouwen beschilderde boombastdoeken. Deze doeken – of tapa – zijn op een indringende wijze verweven met het verleden, heden en de toekomst van de Maisin. De voornamelijk door vrouwen bewerkte doeken bieden inzicht in de wijze waarop deze bewoners van de Collingwood Bay hun identiteiten vorm geven en uitdragen – zowel in het koloniale als post-koloniale tijdperk.

De centrale vraag is hoe boombastdoeken, als een vrouwelijk product, op verschillende niveaus bijdragen aan de totstandkoming van identiteit. De dissertatie richt zich daarbij zowel op gender-, persoonlijke-, clan- als tribale identiteiten. Om de wisselwerking tussen object en identiteit te verduidelijken, wordt uitgebreid beschreven hoe de productie van boombastdoeken plaatsvindt en – belangrijker nog – welke rol ze spelen in structuren van voorouderlijke afstamming, levenscyclusrituelen, uitwisselingen en kerkfeesten. Daarnaast is er ook aandacht voor de wijze waarop de commercialisering van tapa verweven is met veranderende gender relaties en clanstructuren.

Doel van dit alles is antwoorden te geven op drie meer algemene vragen: 1. Hoe gebruiken mensen (in dit geval de Maisin) hun materiële wereld om ideeën over gender en identiteit uit te dragen en vorm te geven? 2. Hoe en door wie worden (gender) verschillen geproduceerd en gerepresenteerd? 3. Hoe en door welke processen veranderen deze ideeën over mannelijkheid en vrouwelijkheid? Om deze vragen te beantwoorden is het noodzakelijk om naast de beschrijving van praktijken en objecten ook op een meer theoretisch niveau de interactie tussen gender en materiële cultuur uit te diepen. De conclusies zouden daarmee niet alleen relevant zijn binnen een context van de Melanesische antropologiebeoefening, maar ook in die van de archeologie en gender theorie meer in het algemeen.

De dissertatie verschaft inzicht in het leven en de cultuur van de Maisin vanuit een niet eerder beschreven vrouwelijk perspectief. Door deze invalshoek wordt het belang van vrouwen en vrouwelijke objecten binnen verschillende sociale, rituele, politieke en economische contexten benadrukt. Binnen een bredere, Polynesische, context is de sociale relevantie van boombastdoeken uitvoerig bestudeerd en beschreven. Tot op heden is er echter nauwelijks aandacht besteedt aan de betekenis van boombastdoeken in Nieuw Guinea. De weinige studies die er zijn hebben veelal betrekking op het gebruik van boombast in door mannen gedomineerde rituelen. In deze dissertatie wordt aangetoond hoe vrouwen en hun goederen een essentiële rol spelen binnen deze rituele uitwisselingen. De studie, die in belangrijke mate voortborduurt op de studies van A. Weiner en M. Strathern, laat zien hoe Maisin vrouwen de verschillende ruilsystemen domineren. Daarnaast beschrijft ze ook hoe deze frequente uitwisselingen essentieel zijn voor de incidentele ceremoniële 'performances' en de sociaal politieke verhoudingen.

De dissertatie combineert verschillende bronnen van onderzoek. Naast antropologisch veldwerk bij de Maisin in 2001 – 2002 en in 2004, is er uitvoerig museumonderzoek verricht in Nederland en het buitenland (ondermeer in Zwitserland, Oostenrijk, Australië en Papua New Guinea). Het archief- en museumonderzoek resulteerde in een boeiend beeld van de continuïteiten en veranderingen in boombastdoeken. Hierdoor werd het mogelijk om de productie en consumptie van boombastdoeken in de koloniale, de postkoloniale en de huidige context te vergelijken.

## Het onderzoeksobject

‘De’ Maisin is een linguïstische groep van zo’n 3000 sprekers woonachtig aan de kust van Collingwood Bay in Papua Nieuw Guinea. De 36 patrilineaire en patrilocale clans wonen verspreid over tien dorpen die in vier clusters langs de kust van Collingwood Bay zijn gesitueerd. De Maisin leven met name van de visserij en horticultuur, waarbij de meeste taken verdeeld zijn op basis van gender. De clans onderhouden intensieve en extensieve uitwisselingsnetwerken; zowel onderling als met naburige groepen. De ceremoniële en economische ruil van boombastdoeken heeft hierin een centrale plaats.

Ondanks het ontbreken van een noemenswaardige infrastructuur raken de Maisin steeds meer verweven met processen van globalisering, en hun leven en toekomst beïnvloed door gebrek aan geld, gezondheidszorg en goede scholing. De beschilderde boombastdoeken zijn (naast schenkingen van familieleden die in steden wonen en werken) het belangrijkste middel om scholing, medicijnen, kleding en andere goederen te verwerven. De boombastdoeken zijn daarmee niet alleen onderdeel van de identiteit maar ook een economisch bestaansmiddel – en als zodanig onlosmakelijk verweven met verleden en toekomst van de Maisin.

“Maisin is tapa!”, is een uitspraak die je geregeld hoort. Deze uitspraak suggereert dat Maisin zich vereenzelvigen met dit object. Door de productie en het gebruik van tapa te volgen in verschillende contexten, wordt duidelijk hoezeer de Maisin bevolking en hun cultuur zijn verbonden met deze doeken.

Met name het vrouwenlichaam is verbonden met de doeken die de vrouwen maken, zowel fysiek als symbolisch. Jonge meisjes helpen hun moeder bij het slaan van de boombast tot tapa en zien toe hoe hun moeders de patronen aanbrengen met zwarte pigment (*mi*) en vervolgens inkleuren met rode verfstof (*dun*). Soms reeds voor het huwelijk, maar soms ook daarna, leert een vrouw haar eigen stijl te ontwikkelen. Maar deze blijft altijd binnen de typische Maisin stijl. In het verleden werd de rode kleurstof geassocieerd met bloed. Zowel mannen als kinderen waren niet geoorloofd om in de buurt van dit ‘bloed’ te komen, omdat dit de kracht van de symbolische reproductie van de clan teniet zou doen.

Naast de techniek van het maken van gewone, ‘alienable’, designs, leren jonge vrouwen ook hoe ze hun vaders’ en later hun echtgenoots’ clandesigns (*evovi*) moeten maken. Deze clandesigns, die alleen door vrouwen op de doeken worden aangebracht, verhalen over de oorsprong van de clanvoorouders. De clan motieven zijn ‘inalienable’ en het dragen van andermans clandesigns is dan ook uit den boze.

Het recht op het dragen van de specifieke clandesigns wordt overgedragen van vader op zoon. Een dochter mag haar vaders clandesign tot aan haar huwelijk dragen; daarna zal zij de designs van haar echtgenoot dragen en deze overdragen op haar dochters. Een andere wijze waarop rechten op clandesigns kunnen worden verleend is middels het aangaan van allianties. De meeste clans zijn in paren gemigreerd en gingen vaak relaties aan met groepen die zij op hun reis tegenkwamen. Hierbij werden clanemblemen, zoals tapa clandesigns, uitgewisseld. Een resultaat daarvan is dat heden ten dage verschillende clans en zelfs clans van verschillende tribale groepen dezelfde clandesigns claimen.

De clandesigns visualiseren bepaalde gebergten waar de voorouders doorheen trokken, een specifieke boom of plant die ze op hun reis naar het huidige leefgebied tegenkwamen, evenals dieren en bepaalde objecten die ze gebruikten. De orale tradities die achter deze 'visualisaties' schuilen, worden bewaard door de mannen en ook, via hun lijn, doorgegeven aan de jongere generaties. Zij verhalen over hoe de voorouders van een bepaalde clan naar hun huidige leefgebied zijn getrokken.. Deze verhalen getuigen met name van de strijdlustigheid en heldhaftigheid van de mannelijke voorouders die het huidige leefgebied aan de kust hebben veroverd en verdedigd. Tevens legitimeren ze tot op de dag van vandaag het landgebruik en landrecht van de Maisin en de individuele clans. Met name in een tijd waarin houtkappers en andere 'ontwikkelaars' uit zijn op *hun* aandeel tropisch regenwoud, nemen de oorsprongverhalen en de overgeleverde grondrechten aan belang toe.

Daar vrouwen verantwoordelijk zijn voor het maken en doorgeven van clan designs op de volgende vrouwelijke generatie, zijn vrouwen dan ook niet alleen verantwoordelijk voor het biologische voortbestaan van de clan maar ook voor diens ideologische en materiële reproductie. Vrouwen dragen door middel van hun tapa kunst bij aan het visualiseren én concretiseren van de mannelijke afstammingslijn in een bepaalde clan. Tevens verbeelden zij de reis die de voorouders hebben afgelegd naar het huidige leefgebied, evenals de grondrechten die daaruit vloeiden. De heldhaftigheid van de mannelijke voorouders, die de clandesigns op hun weg tegenkwamen en zich deze toeëigden, wordt iedere keer bij het aanbrengen en het publiekelijk dragen van de clandesigns bevestigd en uitgedragen.

Hoewel boombastdoeken sinds de jaren na de Tweede Wereldoorlog niet meer dagelijks worden gedragen, spelen ze nog altijd een grote rol tijdens rituelen, uitwisselingen en kerkfeesten. In deze contexten wordt duidelijk hoe de identiteit van en de relaties tussen mensen worden geconstrueerd door het gebruik en de uitwisseling van zowel 'alienable' als 'inalienable' tapa. Opvallend is daarbij dat het met name het vrouwenlichaam is dat fungeert als een 'site' waarop dialogen tussen mannelijke en vrouwelijke afstamming en identiteit worden geprojecteerd middels het dragen van specifieke gedecoreerde boombastdoeken en ornamenten.

## Een nieuwe rol

In de jaren '70 werd de productie en consumptie van tapa gaandeweg gecommmercialiseerd. Daarbij is er steeds meer nadruk komen te liggen op de 'gewone' ontwerpen die los staan van de rol en betekenis die de clandesigns hebben.

Aangelokt door het geld hebben nu al enkele mannen hun 'heil' in het tekenen van tapa designs gezocht. Anderen houden zich bezig met de verkoop ervan en zetten hun vrouw en vrouwelijke verwanten ertoe om tapa voor de verkoop te vervaardigen. Als gevolg hiervan is er een duidelijke standaardisatie zichtbaar. Een van deze standaardisaties is het dicht maken van gaatjes in de doeken, het maken van een kader om het design, en wordt de commerciële waarde van de doeken berekend op basis van de afmetingen ervan. Daarnaast worden de motieven ook op T-shirts, mokken en stukken stof gedrukt. Daar het met name niet-Maisin zijn die de boombast motieven op deze wijze gebruiken, is er een lokale discussie over eigendomsrechten ontstaan.

Verschillende groepen in Papua New Guinea gebruiken de Maisin tapa als 'hun' traditionele kledij tijdens festiviteiten. Hierdoor ontstaat de situatie dat gewone en dus ook commerciële Maisin designs als traditionele designs worden gepresenteerd en gebruikt door andere groepen. De verkoop op (inter-) nationaal niveau heeft hetzelfde effect. Maisin tapa kreeg daarmee een 'nieuwe' betekenis, namelijk als visualisatie van een traditionele Papua New Guinea identiteit.

Internationaal is Maisin tapa al op het internet te vinden en wordt het door Greenpeace gepromoot als alternatief voor de verkoop van grondrechten en grootschalige houtkap. Daarbij worden de Maisin gerepresenteerd als succesvolle strijders tegen de machtige houtindustrie. Tapa wordt daarbij gepresenteerd als een goed alternatief om 'tot ontwikkeling' te komen. Deze constructie wordt niet alleen van buitenaf gevoed, ook de Maisin zelf – met name bepaalde mannen – werken hier actief aan mee. Het zijn ook met name Maisin mannen die dit beeld naar buiten brengen en velen van hen omschrijven de Maisin als succesvolle strijders: in den beginne tegen de diverse vijanden, nu tegen de houtkapindustrie. De door Maisin vrouwen gemaakte boombastdoeken worden nu dus niet alleen gebruikt in traditionele contexten, zoals levenscyclusrituelen en uitwisselingen, maar de doeken dienen ook als visualisatie van de strijd die de Maisin tegen de nadelen van 'modernisatie' voeren. In plaats van individuele en clanidentiteit, representeren de boombastdoeken nu ook alle Maisin.

De uitspraak "Maisin is tapa" blijkt dus verankerd te zijn in een dicht web van sociale relaties, mensen en objecten die de uitspraak zinvol en geloofwaardig maken. Maisin tapa blijkt een serie van gematerialiseerde handelingen te zijn die, in Butler's terminologie, "performative" zijn. Maisin tapa verbeeldt niet alleen identiteit, het bepaalt gender, persoonlijke, clan en tribale identiteit.







## Engendering Objects

*Engendering Objects* explores social and cultural dynamics among Maisin people in Collingwood Bay (Papua New Guinea) through the lens of material culture. Focusing upon the visually stimulating decorated barkcloths (tapa) that are used as male and female garments, gifts, and commodities, it elucidates the close relationships between these cloths and Maisin people. The main question is how barkcloth, as an object made by women, engenders people's identities, such as gender, personhood, clan and tribe, through its manufacturing and use. In contributing to the current debates on the anthropology of 'art', this study offers an alternative way of understanding the significance of an object, like decorated tapa, in shaping and defining people's identities within a local colonial and postcolonial setting of Papua New Guinea.

*"Engendering Objects is among the most comprehensive and innovative new works emerging from Melanesia examining the intimate connections between material culture, cultural identity and gendered personhood. Drawing upon extensive ethnographic fieldwork, archival research and examination of museum collections, Anna-Karina Hermkens traces the enduring yet innovative place of tapa (barkcloth) among the Maisin people. Written with warm compassion and immediacy, the book is a theoretically provocative, accessible and compelling portrait of changing life in a Papua New Guinean village society."* – John Barker, University of British Columbia

*"This book makes a most welcome contribution to the study of the materiality by showing how gender is performed in the sensuous terms of clothing, food, and the exchange of objects. Anna-Karina Hermkens accomplishes this with enviable care and intellectual resources, and a prose and ethnography that make the book a pleasure to read."* – David Morgan, Duke University



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