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**GARDENS OF BASIMA**  
**Land Tenure and Mortuary Feasting in a Matrilineal Society**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian  
National University**

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**Except where cited in the text,  
this work represents the author's  
own original research**

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**To my father**

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## ABSTRACT

*Gardens of Basima* is an anthropological study of a previously undescribed village society in eastern Fergusson Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. The thesis is therefore a contribution to the ethnographic map of the Massim. It focuses particularly on the social organisation, land tenure, and complex mortuary exchanges of Basima, a matrilineal society with many social and cultural institutions in common with its more famous and powerful Dobuan neighbours. The people of Basima are locally renown for their betelnut, their pigs, and the products of their yam gardens, for which traders from other islands come to barter. However, despite their location on an important Kula trade route between the Amphletts Islands and the Dobu area, Basima people are only very marginally involved in ceremonial Kula exchanges.

The main contention of this thesis is that, being a society composed largely of immigrant matrilineal descent groups, Basima displays a less 'uncompromising' form of matrilineity than had been described for other societies in the region. Structurally, it is highly adaptable. As manifested in clan and matrilineage membership, in patterns of settlement, in marriage and post-marital residence, and not least, as manifested in the man-land relationships of land tenure, the flexibility of Basima society is evident. This is by no means a recent phenomenon indicating a 'breakdown' of some ideal system, but rather an integral property of an adaptive system which loosely unifies a diverse collection of immigrant groups.

An important focus of the thesis is the obligatory and optional mortuary feasts and exchanges (principally *bwabwale* and *sagali*) so common in the matrilineal Massim. While Basima variants of these feasts show structural similarities to those of their neighbours they also reveal some significant differences. Notwithstanding an ostensible sequential ordering of such feasts, Basima people see them as discrete events motivated and staged by their performers to achieve primarily secular objectives. *Sagali* in particular, while nominally a feast that honours the collective dead, is sponsored principally by men to achieve renown. In other words, the main premise of *sagali* is political not eschatological. Likewise, the principles of Basima of customary land tenure are ultimately subject to political manipulation.

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In recent months I have never in my life worked so consistently nor so passionately hard. Yet it embarrasses me to think that Michael Young, *to'esa'esa*, put aside for a time his own work on the biography of Malinowski so as to facilitate the submission of this thesis. His patient, good-humoured and painstaking advice while editing my wild, ambitious, raw, extravagant, and (as people of the Massim say) 'expensive' prose, will always be an inspiration to me. I was also most fortunate to have him as my supervisor for his considerable knowledge and experience of the Massim which he shared with me in his home as well as in his office. To his companion, Elizabeth Brouwer, an *alawata* and another devotee of hard work, I am grateful for a memorable Christmas dinner: I was truly overwhelmed by food-wealth. With Michael's sons, Julian and Rafael, I enjoyed companionable bush-walks and picnics. But it is to Michael Young that I must record my most profound appreciation. While I could not live up to Michael's expectations, I shall remain eternally thankful for his unwavering faith in me. What he instilled in me was discipline, perseverance, diligence: to paraphrase one of his book titles, he 'fought me with work' and for this I am especially grateful: even if it shamed me in the process. *Siule, tamaku, kusebo...*



Plate 1 Oya Nai and Oya Tabu, looking northwest from a Lauoya hill hamlet



Plate 2 Women and children of Wegiliu hamlet collecting sardines after stunning them with *derris* root poison. Amphlett islands can be seen faintly on the horizon



## CHAPTER ONE

### BASIMA: PLACE, PEOPLE AND FIELDWORK

#### Introduction

This thesis describes Basima, a hitherto unstudied Massim society in eastern Fergusson Island of Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. It deals principally with social organization, mortuary feasting and land tenure, topics of perennial concern to ethnographers of the Massim from the time of Malinowski. While essentially an ethnographic report of my findings during fourteen months' of fieldwork, the thesis places that ethnography within the wider context of the abundant literature on Massim societies. I adduce no startling new discoveries (indeed my readers will find variations on familiar themes that have already been elucidated by previous studies in the region), and I derive no startling new theoretical conclusions from my data, but rather confirm what others have found elsewhere. I thus make no special claims for theoretical originality in this thesis. Still, I believe that I have clarified certain questions concerning the topics I have chosen to focus upon: matrilineal social organization, ceremonial mortuary feasting, and the relation of people to land. Where appropriate, I have taken issue with what previous ethnographers have said about these topics in neighbouring societies.

My interest in land tenure is bred in the bone, as it were. Coming from a society where disputes over land are complex, protracted and often bitter, I wished to put my anthropological training to use by gaining comparative purchase on a system of land tenure that was not too dissimilar to that of the Trobriands. From this perspective Basima was a perfectly logical choice in that it offered another matrilineally-based system that was geographically close to and culturally cognate with the Trobriands. Yet it promised to be uncomplicated by population pressure or the influence of hereditary social rank.

Another good reason for studying land tenure, of course, was the very fact of its contentious nature as an issue of social and political importance in contemporary Papua New Guinea - indeed, in Melanesia as a whole. My own interest focussed on the phenomena of land rights and their transfer and of land claims and their justifications. Basima did not disappoint me in this regard. Despite an apparent abundance of land for subsistence gardening, disputes were not infrequent and I was

able to investigate in depth a number of cases that occurred during my stay. Basima proved to have an unexpectedly flexible system, notwithstanding the apparently rigid system of rules based on an ideology of matrilineal descent, succession and inheritance. I was to find, however, that the apparent rigidity of matrilineality was itself illusory, and ultimately I was impressed by the toleration and elasticity of the social system as a whole. A simple and plausible explanation for this lies in the very constitution of Basima society: it is largely composed of groups whose ancestors migrated from elsewhere in the region, most of them probably within the last 150 years or so. Hence Basima society evolved a flexible system of land tenure to accommodate a gradual influx of newcomers.

### **Theoretical background to land tenure**

In this section I sketch briefly the basic theoretical parameters within which I conducted my study of Basima land tenure. I might point out at the outset that it was no particular work of anthropology that inspired me to pursue this topic, but rather the concrete problems besetting descent group land transfers in my own village of Okeboma. The obvious - even blatant - deviance from stated rules spurred me to a serious consideration of similar contradictions and associated tenurial dynamics as described in the anthropological literature. Among the studies by earlier anthropologists that influenced my understanding of such matters were: Malinowski (1935a), Reay (1959), Brookfield and Brown (1963), Meggitt (1965), Hogbin (1967), Epstein (1969), Freedman (1971), Silverman (1971), Crocombe and Hide (1971), Crocombe (1974), Lundsgaarde (1974), Weiner (1976), James (1978), Hutchins (1980), Fingleton (1985) and Rodman (1987). In what follows I shall selectively cite a few of these authors in order to outline the theoretical framework I eventually adopted.

One of the starting points of my research was the questionable status of the concept of land ownership itself. This issue greatly preoccupied me, and after many false starts I came to agree with others that it was not property itself that was owned but *rights* in property. Suffice it here to allow Crocombe to summarize the initial problem and its conceptual solution:

Although it is not property, but rights in relation to property, that are owned, popular usage speaks of property itself as being owned. Alternately, some people speak of rights as being held and use the word ownership to refer to the holding by someone of a cluster of important rights. But as rights in land are held at so many levels and are so widely distributed, particularly in tribal



societies, use of the word ownership tends to oversimplify a complex reality and to prevent understanding the true nature of the relationships involved (1974:9).

'Rights' presuppose relationships of person to person as well as of person to land. The simplest approach to this set of problems, perhaps, is to ask, as Hutchins does with respect to Trobriand land tenure: 'When one asks, "Whose land is this?" there might truthfully be as many as four different answers, each in reference to a particular relation between man and land' (1980:42). But we immediately encounter other problems: those concerning rights held by corporate groups and those held by individual members of such groups. Most authors settle on the notion of 'ownership' as applying to group held rights only; Hutchins, for example, uses 'ownership' in the context of 'relationship to all lands associated with his/her *dala*' (i.e. matrilineage or sub-clan). However, as he correctly pointed out, 'this relation itself does not constitute any individually exercisable right with respect to any lands' (1980:22).

Malinowski had already put the issue more clearly in 1935, though many today would contest his use of certain terms such as 'legal title'. Defining land tenure for the matrilineal Trobriands, he writes:

On the one hand, it is a system of actual and effective uses vested in the gardening team. On the other hand, it is a long list of legal titles expressing various claims, most of which carry with them some privileges, at times some burdens. The purely formal, legally valid and mythologically founded titles which ... are vested in the sub-clans of emergence or sub-clans of rank, do not always go parallel with the uses of land ... The essence of the complication in the Trobriands lies in the circumstance that land tenure is legally vested in the sub-clan, while its effective economic use is in the hands of a group of people in which the men only are bound together by ties of kinship, but which also includes the wives of these and their children (1935a:378).

Thus, the other important issue that came to preoccupy me was the problem of ownership at group level in relation to the pragmatics of use or usufruct at the individual level. Both the group as a notional entity and the individual members of that group would hold separately defined rights to a particular piece of land. However, not all individuals are equal, and certain persons may hold and exercise more rights - through kinship status or political influence - than others. This posed another ideological paradox that I sought to investigate in the land tenure system of Basima.

The question of control of or authority over land soon converges on issues of 'rights of use'. Weiner, for examples, states:

People identify themselves with their own land, but saying 'this is my land' does not have the same meaning as 'I control this land'. It is *dala* identity which is corporate; the history of the land for as long as the *dala* lasts is corporate, but the actual control of land is ego-centred and the use of land is diverse (1976:166-167).

The problem remains, in Basima as in the Trobriands and elsewhere in Melanesia, that it is from customary sanctioned usufructory arrangements that permanent title to land may be gained through a variety of means and strategies. These introduce flexibility, essential if a tenurial system is to adapt to social or environmental changes. In the last analysis, perhaps, we can agree with Clarke *et al* (1994:10) when they assert that: '... traditional principles of land tenure are, and always have been, political. Their function is not to be true but to be useful, to gain benefits for an individual or group or to permit adjustments in the distribution of land.'

### **Basima: location and environment**

Basima is located on the northeastern side of Fergusson Island, tucked into the eastern foot of the towering twin peaks of Oya Tabu (or Mt. Kilkerran) at 2070 [*sic*] metres and Oya Nai at 1864 metres.<sup>1</sup> Fergusson is the largest of the three main islands comprising the D'Entrecasteaux Group in Milne Bay Province, the other two being Goodenough to its northwest and Normanby to its immediate southeast. According to the geologist Davies,

Fergusson Island, about 50 km long (from east to west) and 30 km wide is roughly rectangular.... The coastline feature large bays in the west (Seymour) and north (Hughes) and smaller bays in the southeast (Sebutuia and Gornwa).... In the southeastern part of the island an area of plain and low hills (up to 60 or 100m in elevation) is flanked to the east by two volcanic cones, Lamonai and Oiau (1973:4).

Most of the settled areas in Basima are located along the coast and on the hill slopes as high as 200 metres above sea level. Scattered areas of grasslands spot the predominantly rainforested coastline, particularly along the Basima-Duduna border<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These heights are given by Davies (1973:4). The other figures, as shown in Map 2, are from a map of the National Mapping Bureau of Papua New Guinea with a scale of 1:100,000. See also Lauer (1976:6-8) for additional information on the physical features of the Island.

<sup>2</sup> Geological surveys reveal this area to have economic potential in the form of base metals and gold (Davies 1973:13). Between 1986 and 1987, an attempt was made to test-mine two areas: one between the mouths of Meibulibuli and Nieila rivers and the other at Cape Vinall, the northerly point between Gameta and Wadalei (see Map 2). The test-mines were abandoned soon afterwards and no further work has been done since, though an exploratory camp was set up in early 1990 on a site about a kilometre inland from the mouth of Awetoa river. This raised hopes among landowners of a possible source of wealth.



and immediately to the north of Lauoya and towards the neighbouring area of Ulua (see Map 2).

Basima experiences a broadly similar climate to elsewhere in the south Pacific, with little seasonal variation. However, the months of October to February are regarded as 'wet' months with northwesterly (*otala*) the dominant wind. March to September are considered to be 'dry' months dominated by the southeasterly wind (*bolimana*), which blows strongly and creates rough seas. The cultural implications of these winds and their associated periods are further elaborated in Chapter Four.

Although I have no annual rainfall record for the Basima area, the nearby Mission Station of Salamo and the Esa'ala District Headquarters provided records for 1986. In that year Albert and Mitchell (1987) reported that Salamo recorded a rainfall of 2633mm and Esa'ala one of 2272mm. It is interesting to note that at Salamo, the minimum monthly rainfall was in December (c.120mm) and the maximum in June (c.300mm); while at Esa'ala August was the driest month (c.160mm) and April the wettest (c.260mm). Overall the driest months at Salamo were January, February, March, June-July and December. At Esa'ala the driest months were January-February, June-July and November-December. While it is clear that there is, overall, little seasonal variation in precipitation, it is also clear that there is marked variation between Salamo and Esa'ala which, although separated by Dawson Strait, are only a few kilometres apart. On the basis of their figures Albert and Mitchell note that rainfall in the area shows a bimodal distribution. That is, there is a '1st wet' (March, April, May and June), a '2nd wet' (September, October), and a 'Dry' (November, December, January, February, March). The '1st Wet' represents, in their words, 'the main time of rain and it falls during the transition between the dry & the S.E. Monsoon. The '2nd Wet' is a lesser peak of rain and falls at the end of the S.E. Monsoon. A dry period occurs between the peaks of rain' (*ibid.*: iv.2).

These authors also noted that in the smaller islands of the region, such as the Amphletts, rain is usually scattered and dry periods may last for up to two weeks. Given further local variation on the eastern coast, simply stated, Basima weather is characterized by fairly high but irregular rainfall, mainly sunny days with high humidity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My own simple method of recording the days that had rained and those that had none for each month of 1989 (the full year that I spent in Basima), roughly confirmed the general wet and dry seasonal pattern. My count gave April as the wettest month with 18 days, followed by March and

### Early reports concerning Basima

Basima first enters Western records in 1892, when the Administrator of British New Guinea, Sir William MacGregor mentioned it in his *Annual Report*. In January he was touring the area by ship, having visited the missionary William Bromilow at Dobu, where the year before the latter had founded the headquarters of the Wesleyan Mission in the Papuan Islands.

The Rev. W. Bromilow and the principal chiefs of Dobu and Baio [i.e. Bwaiowa] joined the inspecting party on the 8th January. The first district visited was Basima, on the north-east coast of Moratau [i.e. Fergusson Island]. The different tribes presented themselves without arms, and seemed to be settling down into quieter habits. They had manifestly heard about the order of things (1893:XVII).

The Administrator's exploration party included J.P. Thomson, the Government Surveyor, who elaborated somewhat on his impressions of the area:

The southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kilkerran [i.e. Oya Tabu], from the seashore to its central section, is fully populated.... Although steep and apparently inconvenient for habitation, the face of the mountain overlooking Hughes Bay is occupied by villages situated from 500 feet to 1500 feet above the sea... (Thomson 1892:24).

A more colourful though still tantalizingly brief description of Basima is given by Bronislaw Malinowski, who made fleeting visits to the Basima coast in 1917 or 1918 during his investigation of the Kula trade. His comments appear to reflect the fears and prejudices of his Trobriand companions, and it is from their point of view that he sees the places and people of 'The Koya' (i.e. the mountainous islands of the D'Entrecasteaux). In the following passages, Malinowski visualizes the Dobu-bound Trobriands canoes skirting the Basima coast after leaving their Kula partners in the Amphletts:

They now approach the broad front of Koyatabu, which with a favourable wind, they might reach within two hours or so. They probably sail near enough to get a clear view of the big trees standing on the edge of the jungle, and of the long waterfall dividing the mountain's flank right down the middle; of the triangular patches under cultivation, covered with the vine of yams and big leaves of taro. They could also perceive here and there smoke curling out of the jungle where, hidden under the trees, there lies a village, composed of a few miserable huts. Nowadays these villages have come down to the water's edge, in order to

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January with 13 and 12 respectively. Figures for the remaining months were as follows: May (7), June (8), July (2), August (5), September (no record), October (7), November (7) and December (7). Of course, this crude form of reckoning does not distinguish between days of persistent rain with heavy cloud cover and predominantly sunny days with brief tropical downpours.



supplement their garden yield with fish. In olden days they were all high up on the slope, and their huts hardly ever visible from the sea.

The inhabitants of these small and ramshackle villages are shy and timid, though in olden days they would have been dangerous to the Trobrianders. They speak a language which differs from that of Dobu and is usually called by the natives 'the Basima talk.' There seem to be about four or five various languages on the island of Fergusson, besides that of Dobu. My acquaintance with the Basima natives is very small due only to two forced landings in their district. They struck me as being physically of a different type from the Dobuans, though this is only an impression. They have got no boats, and do the little sailing they require on small rafts of three or five logs tied together. Their houses are smaller and less well-made than those in Dobu. Further investigation of these natives would be very interesting, and probably also very difficult, as is always the case when studying very small communities, living at the same time right out of touch with any white man.

This land must remain, for the present anyhow, veiled for ourselves, as it is also for the Trobriand natives. For these indeed, the few attempts which they occasionally made to come into contact with these natives, and the few mishaps which brought them to their shores, were all far from encouraging in results, and only strengthen the traditional superstitious fear of them (1922:290-291).

While not entirely 'right out of touch with any white man', the next anthropologist to visit Basima was Reo Fortune in 1929. He crossed from his field base on Tewara Island which together with its neighbour Uama is easily visible from the Basima coast. Fortune spent a month with Basima people (a few of whom still remember him) and made basic observations about their social organization and how it differed from Tewara and Dobu (Fortune 1932).<sup>4</sup> In some of the chapters to follow I compare his observations of Basima with my own.

In the late sixties Peter Lauer from The Australian National University, an ethnologist with an interest in material culture, made a brief visit to Basima from his field base in the Amphletts where he was studying pottery manufacture.

### **Reports on local economic development**

There appear to have been no attempts to introduce any kind of economic development into Basima until the 1950s and 1960s. Earlier than that, efforts were presumably made by Australian colonial officers to encourage the planting of coconuts as a potential cash crop, as happened almost everywhere in the Eastern

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<sup>4</sup> Tabumadou, the oldest woman in Basima who was probably born about 1915, recalled that 'Mista Poten' (i.e. Fortune) had his first hut built at Lower Tapwana before moving to the hamlet of Ugwa. She was then an unmarried young woman (*sasaba*) who helped collect sago thatching for Fortune's first hut. During my fieldwork Ugwa was an abandoned site.

Division or Milne Bay District from the 1920s onward. But forever handicapped by the absence of roads and poor anchorages, Basima men's interest in copra production was inevitably short-lived. In the late 1950s, an enthusiastic Basima agricultural officer attempted to revive interest in cash crops, and encouraged his people to make land available for the cultivation of coconuts and cocoa as cash crops. These plantings can still be seen standing within grounds of the Community School.<sup>5</sup>

During the late 1960s geologists traversed the slopes of Mt. Oya Tabu, making reconnaissance trips to report on the area's potential for mineral resources. Villagers in 1989 also claimed that a Mr. Becker and a Mr. Gibbs, who were patrol officers at Esa'ala in the early 1970s attempted on separate occasions to determine and to formally register land boundaries and land ownership. A majority of the people objected to this exercise, mainly because many of the alleged landowners had made false claims. Eventually the whole exercise was abandoned.

At the time of my fieldwork, Dominic Albert (who happened to be a sister's son of the local agricultural officer) was employed by the Department of Primary Industry to coordinate a provincial government initiative called the Small Islands Project. He experimented with cardamom plantings on the hill slopes of Lauoya. They have grown well, but owing to the lack of transport and marketing facilities the project is stillborn. A cattle-raising experiment was also begun some years ago at Yaya Point (Yopulia) by a Basima man after he had secured a loan from the Agricultural Bank at Alotau. That project too ultimately failed and the cattle wandered off into the hills and became feral. Occasionally, men hunt and kill one for a feast or for special occasions such as Christmas. Attempts to provide Basima with easier access to markets have also met with little success. In 1970 a wharf had been built at Yaya point by students of Wesley High School at Salamo. By 1989, however, only a handful of thin blackened posts remained standing in the water: relics of yet another failed attempt to bring development to the area.

### **Churches and Schools**

After establishing the first Wesleyan-Methodist Mission station on Dobu Island in June 1891, William Bromilow embarked on further expansion of his mission.<sup>6</sup> By

<sup>5</sup> While most of that land belongs to Masawana's *susu*, the coconut trees remain the personal property of their respective planters.

<sup>6</sup> As elsewhere in the D'Entrecasteaux, Basima knew of Bromilow as 'Salagigi'. A Molima informant told me that Salagigi was the name of a notorious Dobuan cannibal who, prior to the arrival of



the end of the 1890s, together with his South Sea Islands catechists, he had covered almost the entire coastal areas of the D'Entrecasteaux Group and set up mission stations in numerous locations (see Bromilow 1929; Young 1977; 1980; 1991). According to Basima people, Salagigi first established a mission in the village of Ulua where the present church building stands. It was, however, left to the first local converts together with one of Bromilow's Samoan assistants to found missions in the neighbouring areas of Ulua. Basima now boasts of two small Methodist-cum-United Church mission hamlets: one at Gobayawe in Basima proper and the other located just behind Wegiliu village in the Lauoya area (see Map 2). Both have pastors who are from Basima.

Some fifty years after Salagigi's arrival at Dobu, Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) established their own mission at Pwepweula. Their evangelization of the people, while persistent, has had little apparent effect on their lives. This is reflected in its relatively low membership and the fact that SDA influence is limited to the immediate neighbourhood of Pwepweula.

In the early 1960s, Fr Langlands of the Sacred Heart Catholic Mission based at Budoya (founded in 1950) opened the Catholic Basima mission with a church and school; this station is known as St Michaels' (McGhee 1982:83). Permission to establish this station at Adagwasisi was obtained from Souda, then a village elder residing at Watotaeta hamlet.<sup>7</sup> Catholics now actually predominate in Basima, largely because it was the Catholic Mission which built Basima Community School, though this is staffed and administered by the Provincial Education Board. Nowadays Basima can boast of a number of permanent buildings: the church, two school classrooms, three staff houses, a health sub-centre and also two nursing staff houses.<sup>8</sup>

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Bromilow, invaded neighbouring areas in search of human victims. However, Bromilow himself explained that he was given this name after Dobuans discovered that he could remove his teeth (1929:130; also Young 1977:143 n.29). Susanne Kuehling, currently a graduate student at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University, who has just completed eighteen-months of fieldwork in Dobu, confirms that *sala* = teeth and *gigi* = to take out something, hence 'the man with removable teeth' (personal communication, December 1994).

<sup>7</sup> During my fieldwork, Fr. Jim Moore was in charge of the Budoya Mission from whence he made regular patrols to visit the other Catholic missions on Fergusson Island.

<sup>8</sup> Two of the staff houses were initially built by the Small Islands Project in order to house the project co-ordinators based in Basima between 1986 and 1991. The arrangement was that one of the houses would go to the school and the other to the health sub-centre, but it appears that the school teachers have commandeered both of them.

Children from Duduna, Basima, Lauoya, Ulua and Gameta now attend Basima Community School, which offers classes in grades of one to six. Not infrequently, certain grades are not taught in a particular year, due to the unavailability of teachers or the ineligibility of the age-groups of the children to be enrolled. Most of those children who graduate to secondary school level attend Hagita High School near Alotau, which is also a Catholic agency. To date only two male students from Basima have entered national high schools. One of them (who is currently majoring in anthropology and whom I happen to teach) will graduate from the University of Papua New Guinea at the end of 1995. This student will be the first Basima person to achieve a University degree.

In 1970 the Catholic Church built an impressive health sub-centre comprising two buildings, a clinic and a staff house for the nurses. As well as Basima and Lauoya, this medical facility serves all of the surrounding areas and occasionally admits patients from Wadalei and Bosalewa on Fergusson and from the offshore islands of Uama, Sanaroa and the Amphletts. In addition to the services provided at the clinic, the nurses also make monthly visits to all these areas either on foot or by boat. Basima has two motorized dinghies: one donated by the Catholic Church to the health sub-centre, the other given to the people of Basima by their former regional Member of Parliament, Johnson Maladina.

At the mouth of the Meibulibuli river is the site of the latest Mission to arrive in Basima. This belongs to the Church of Jehovah's Witness, which came in the early eighties. Little can be said about the activity of this church for its members are rarely seen engaging in house-to-house proselytising. I did not conduct a survey of church membership, judging from Basima people's church attendances and their engagement in their respective church activities, the Catholic Church commands the largest membership, closely followed by the United Church. Adherents of the churches of Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah's Witness are comparatively few in number.<sup>9</sup>

As in many if not most rural areas of the Massim, Basima involvement with Christian churches is comparatively low-key. After a century of Christian teaching most people would unequivocally declare themselves to be Christian, but that does

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<sup>9</sup> Rumour has it that the Church of Jehovah's Witness has yet to make a single convert. There is only one married couple (of indeterminate nationality) living in seclusion and presumably doing some biblical work of their own. I never met them, though I called at their large and beautiful house at least twice.



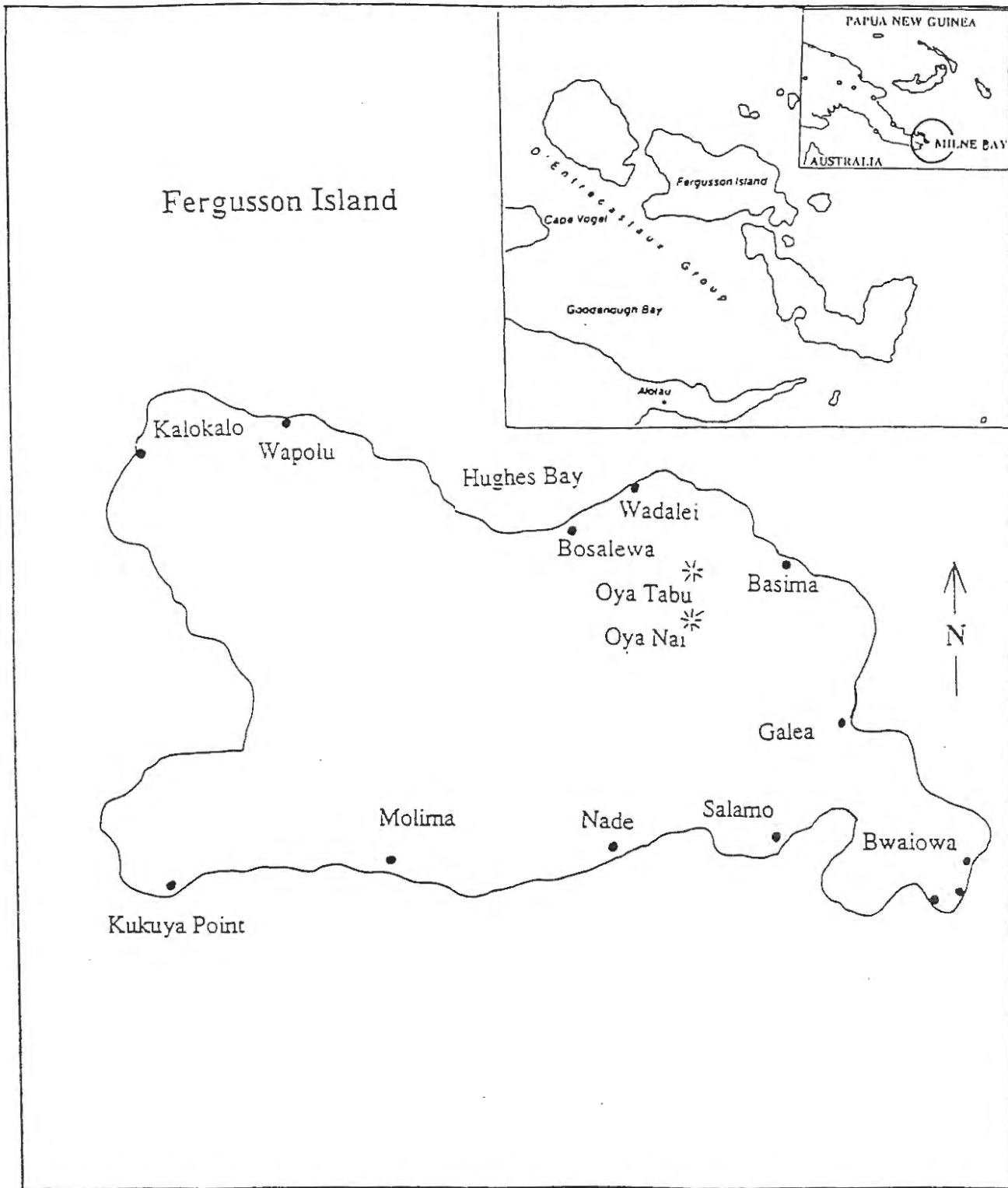
not mean they have abandoned all their non-Christian beliefs and practices as zealous missionaries would wish. Basima people respect the Sabbath by not working in their gardens, and most welcome it as a rest day; there is a fairly routine attendance of church services, most of which last for an hour or two from midday. Other festivals in the Christian calendar are observed, especially Christmas and Easter. For example, a United Church custom common in the area is that of itinerant carol-singing at Christmas (in Dobuan it is called *wali sakowasi*). Parties of up to a few dozen people travel from house to house and from village to village, singing carols for small gifts. Christian prayers and rites are commonly spoken or performed at life-crisis events such as burials, more rarely at marriages. Christian observances such as the above are now part of the everyday, taken-for-granted, life of Basima people. They do not indicate a stringent adherence to Christian faith, however, and most people give them little thought.

Save for its effect on the language of Basima (see below) and on the lives of a few committed catechists, it is clear that the Churches have had no profound influence upon people's traditional practices such as gardening methods (including magic), fishing, mortuary ceremonies, inter-district exchanges, and not least, beliefs concerning witchcraft and sorcery. It goes without saying that certain Christian concepts fitted well with indigenous notions and social values associated with, for example, sharing, generosity and respect for authority. To claim that Basima people have *faith* in the Christian God is an overstatement. It would be more correct to say that they *fear* and respect God due to his alleged omnipotence.

### ***MeBasima: the people of Basima***

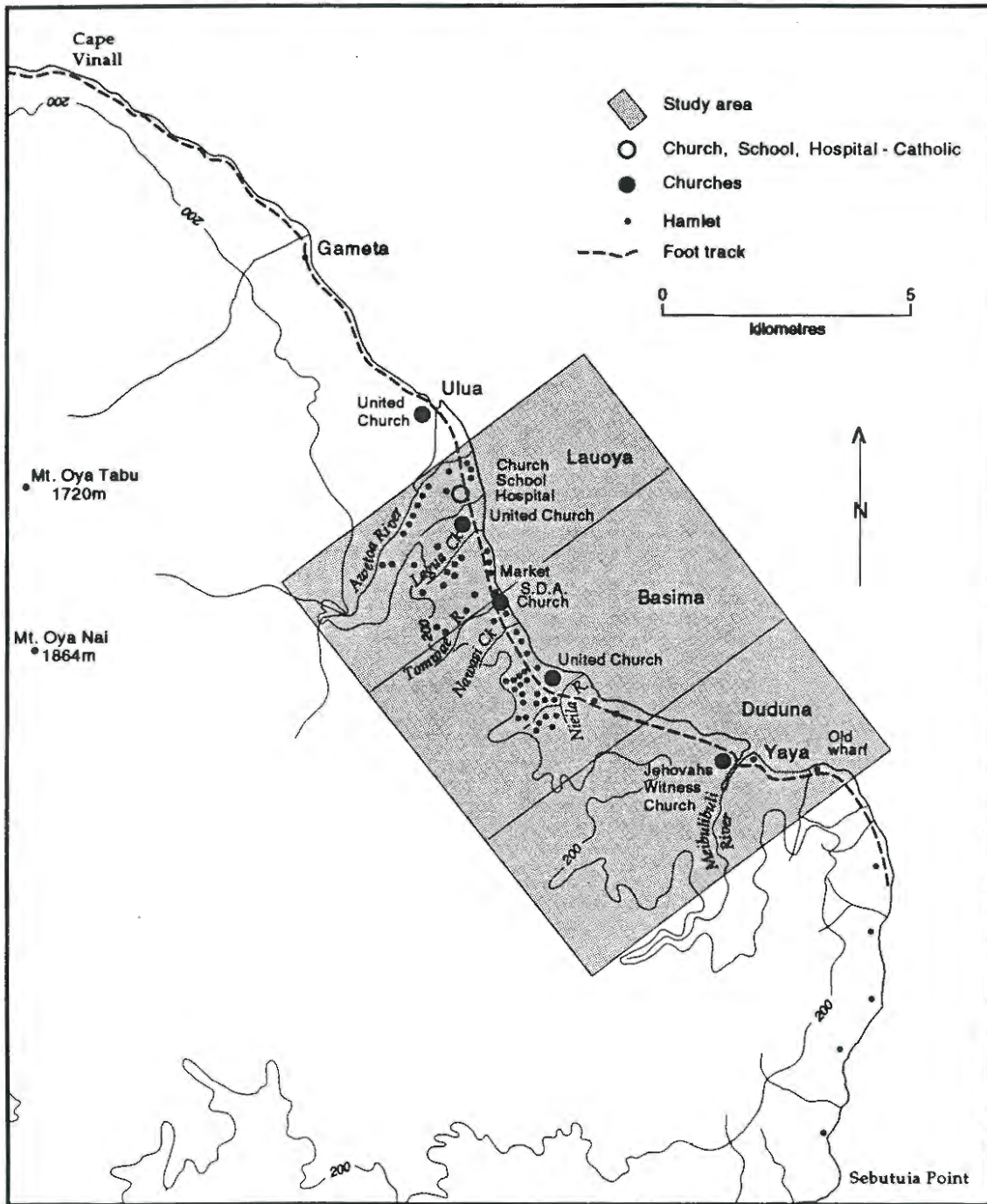
Strictly speaking, Basima is a territory bounded by a number of physical features. The littoral from the hamlet of Pwepweula and southwards as far as the hamlet of Aleia (i.e. between the rivers of Meibulibuli and Nieila) forms the coastal boundary. The territory stretches inland into the hills for an indeterminate distance beyond the highest inhabited areas, which are at about 200 metres (see Map 2). One may also define Basima more broadly as a social and cultural unit that comprises the following five neighbouring areas (which are nonetheless indigenously recognized as distinct territories): Duduna, Basima, Lauoya, Ulua and Gameta. This is the order from south to north (see Map 2).

According to the 1990 National Census Survey, Basima, Duduna, Gameta, Urua [*sic*], Wadalei, Gareia [*sic*] and Sebutuia plus sixteen other census units have all been



Map 1. Basima and its neighbouring districts on Fergusson Island





Map 2. The three Basima districts of the study area.

placed within the East Fergusson census division. Assuming that Lauoya comes within the Basima census unit, Basima recorded a total population of 555 in 1990 (287 males and 268 females).<sup>10</sup> My own Basima census figures collected during fieldwork were, however, derived from three areas only: Duduna, Basima proper and Lauoya. My total for these three areas, that is, the maximum population unit of my study, was 657 (344 males and 313 females). The discrepancy between the national census figures and my own might be attributed to my omission of five two-household hamlets located between Yaya point and the northern point of Sebutuia bay. There is bound to be a further discrepancy owing to the fact that there is never a constant number of absentees; these are usually young people working in urban centres, some of whom have not returned for many years.<sup>11</sup>

As I have defined it, the Basima cultural unit comprises all of the above census units: Duduna, Basima proper, Lauoya, Ulua and Gameta. I shall refer to these five social and geographical units simply as 'districts'. People of these named districts in fact see themselves as territorially distinct from the others, although they all share the same culture and speak the same language, the latter internally differentiated by only minor differences of accent. Further subtle distinctions between them are derived from the way people speak about themselves and from the activities they engage in based on their separate territorial locations. Ulua and Lauoya, for example, were said to have been traditional enemies, whilst Lauoya and Basima proper were allies, though the latter is still distinguished from Lauoya according to traditional territorial boundaries. The territorial distinctions which people make between these areas largely agree with their present-day administrative organization within the local government council system of 'wards'.

To the south of Basima are the Galea people who occupy the shores of the tranquil Sebutuia bay - a recently-abandoned timber-logging site. Around the point to the

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<sup>10</sup> This information was given to me by the Department of Milne Bay in August of 1991. Duduna census unit had a total population of 276 (142 males and 134 females), Gameta had 206 (98 males and 108 females), while Urua had 181 (81 males and 100 females). I am grateful to Manoa Panta and the then Provincial Minister for Finance, Mr. Kaigabu Kamnanaya, for their kind assistance.

<sup>11</sup> My own census figures are derived from my genealogical diagrams for Basima, Duduna and Lauoya. While determining the number of living family and *susu* members, however, I did not create a special category for absentees. According to Allen *et al* (July 1994:154-155) absentees in this area fall within the range of 10-14 percent of the population. The same source gives a total Basima population of only 510 (*ibid.*: 173). Again, a different definition of Basima's boundary is likely to be the cause of this discrepancy.



north, beyond Gameta, lies Wadalei and Bosalewa of northern Fergusson. Looking east towards the open sea lie the tiny islands of Tewara and Uama, the former uninhabited since the early 1970s when its small population moved to the latter. To the north of Tewara and Uama are the five inhabited islands of the Amphletts; these islanders continue to make fine pottery, a 'monopoly' industry first described by Malinowski (1922:282-88) and exhaustively studied by Lauer some fifty years later (1970a, 1970b, 1973, 1974 and 1976). Less than 80 km to the north of the Amphletts lie the populous Trobriand group of islands.

According to their oral histories and narratives (*tetela*) Basima is a fairly recent settlement for the great majority of its resident groups (matrilineages called *susu*). With the exception of two aboriginal (*tutupawa*) groups whose origin is said to have been holes in the ground within Basima territory, most local groups are immigrants (*wagawaga*) from neighbouring islands and other districts of Fergusson.

#### **Galeya: the language**

Basima people speak what linguists have defined as Galeya, a language belonging to the Dobuan Family, one of the forty or so Austronesian languages of Milne Bay Province belonging to the so-called Papuan Tip Cluster (Lithgow 1976:446). '[T]he language of Galeya is spoken in the northeast of Fergusson Island from Gameta, Basima and Duduna to Sebutuia, and inland in the villages around Galeya [a village site located in the heart of Sebutuia bay]' (*ibid.*: 459).

According to my limited knowledge of the dialectical boundaries of Basima, I know for sure only that there is very little variation in accent and vocabulary between the five areas of Duduna, Basima, Lauoya, Ulua and Gameta. Wadalei and Bosalewa to the north are quite different in speech, and I found it difficult to converse with them in the language of Basima. However, the speech of Galeya and Sebutuia villages to the south are more comprehensible, albeit with notable differences of accent.

While I have little doubt about the correctness of Geleya's classification within the Dobuan Family I would, however, enter a word of caution concerning the method whereby a limited word list is used to determine cognate relationships. It came to my notice during fieldwork that a number of what one might call 'archaic' items in the Basima vocabulary are present-day usage in Kilivila (i.e. Trobriand language), both semantically and phonetically. Furthermore, when eliciting local terms for certain concepts, Dobuan words were given unthinkingly in most instances, even though a

Galeya (Basima) word existed. Whether this is due to an active preference for Dobuan words (given that they have been widely employed in the region since the turn of the century at least) or, what might be part of the same process, because Basima words are being forgotten through disuse, is quite unclear. But more persistent enquiries can usually elicit 'original' Basima words. It does seem clear, however, that the language of Basima is being gradually 'Dobuanized', an understandable phenomenon considering the role of Dobuan as a missionary *lingua franca*. My point is that the spread of the Dobuan language within the last century has tended to erase 'indigenous' vocabularies, and I suspect that linguists are sometimes content to accept a modern Dobuan form instead of searching for the 'indigenous' term. It would be interesting to know, for example, how closely related, *before* Dobuan influence confused the issue, the Galeya language was to Wadalei to the north (which is now classed with yet another distinct family in Yamalele), Bosalewa (now classed together with Dobu), and the Trobriands (or Kilivila) (see Lithgow 1976: Map 2).<sup>12</sup> My argument here converges with that of Filer (1990) on the confusion which has resulted in central Sepik ethnography owing to conventional linguistic classifications, from family to phylum level, being appropriated by anthropologists to define cultures and culture areas (e.g. Sepik-Ramu Phylum and Ndu Family within which 'Abelam' is located) when it is quite evident that there is much greater cultural heterogeneity than such labels assume.

In addition to their mother-tongue of Basima (Galeya) which is strongly influenced by the *lingua franca* of Dobu, many people can speak a little English, and quite a few of the old men can speak Motu and Pidgin. Such men are those who worked as indentured labourers in the 1950s and 1960s, or had cleaning jobs in white men's homes in Port Moresby during the colonial era. A few of them had World War II experience when working under ANGAU, though the war itself had no direct impact on eastern Fergusson. Of course, everyone in Basima understands Dobu, and in addition a majority can understand some Suau, Kilivila (Boyowa) and other neighbouring languages, though their speech in these is not fluent.

### **Basima and Government**

Except for Lauoya which has been placed under Basima, the above four census units are deemed council wards whose elected representatives are councillors (sometimes

<sup>12</sup> Lithgow himself comments frankly on the shortcomings of this method used in earlier work on Milne Bay languages (1976:446-448).



mistakenly - or ironically - referred to as 'presidents'). Twenty-one council wards of eastern Fergusson constitute the Dobu Local Government Council (LGC), which meets rather irregularly at the administrative centre of Esa'ala District. Esa'ala is situated on the western end of Normanby Island opposite Dobu Island. The Assistant District Commissioner (ADC) based at Esa'ala coordinates the general government and administrative functions.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the LGC area forms the constituency of East Fergusson which elects a member to the Milne Bay Provincial Assembly in Alotau. At the national level, Basima people are also represented by two Members of Parliament, one representing the Esa'ala District constituency (i.e. the eastern half of the D'Entrecasteaux), the other representing Milne Bay regional electorate. They cast their votes for both separately during national elections.

The task of the Basima councillor is primarily to execute provincial and national administrative functions as relayed to them by the ADC in Esa'ala. These tasks are varied and range from convening meetings in order to explain government and provincial policies, to organizing village projects such as the construction of a market place and school classrooms. The councillor also adjudicates disputes within the community. If all else fails, he should ensure that wrong-doers are taken to the district court at Esa'ala. The election of ward councillors occurs annually unless the incumbent resigns. This office is not restricted to elders; indeed, young men are generally better equipped for the role, for they are more likely to speak fair English and to have a better understanding of modern administrative functions. They should also demonstrate good personal conduct and a measure of public speaking skills. Francis, a young man in his mid-twenties, became the Basima councillor in 1991-92. His predecessors (Ambrose and Wakeke) were at least ten years older than him. Not infrequently, these village officials extend their sphere of influence to include church activities and, if need be, matters relating to the clinic and school.

### **The Fieldwork**

The information presented in this thesis was collected during fourteen months' of field research (November 1988 to January 1990). I returned for an additional visit of two weeks in December 1992-January 1993. The study was carried out under the auspices of The Australian National University and funded by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB).

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<sup>13</sup> Council wards are also categorized as census units within the East Fergusson Census Division.

In addition to the reasons given in the introduction to this chapter, my choice of Basima as a field site was influenced by more 'romantic' considerations. I had heard of Basima during my childhood as a mysterious, distant place endowed with an abundant supply of betelnuts. Its location at the foot of the awesomely-named Oya Tabu ('Forbidden Mountain') of Massim-wide renown further added to its attraction. I was frankly curious to visit the place. Ethnographically, it seemed an ideal location to study customary land tenure since its relative remoteness from administrative centres such as Esa'ala and Alotau would presumably have softened the impact of many Western institutions. Furthermore, Reo Fortune's classic and seminal work on Dobu social organization and its tantalizingly brief comparisons with Basima indicated the need for further investigation. These reasons, together with the area's relative proximity to my home island of Kiriwina (or Boyowa as Basima people call it) made me opt for Basima in the end. I did so with the full encouragement of my supervisor, Dr Michael Young, who was also curious about the area.

Towards the end of October 1988 I arrived at Basima after catching a Provincial DPI boat (MV *Dawata*) from Esa'ala. At the kind invitation of Mr. Dominic Albert, the assistant co-ordinator of the Small Islands Project, I stayed with his family in their new house at the Community School. After a week I moved to the nearby beach hamlet of Watotaeta when a villager, Bobby Souda, generously offered me his house for temporary accommodation. Thereafter I moved back to the school grounds where I occupied a teacher's house during the end-of-year school holidays. After about a month I returned to Watotaeta hamlet where a house had been built for me. I remained there for the remainder of my fieldwork period. Watotaeta is a small Lauoya hamlet of five houses built next to a small creek and almost directly on the beach. It is centrally and conveniently situated close to the Basima health sub-centre and school to the north, and the market to the south. In 1989-90 Watotaeta had a total of twenty residents (see Chapter Two).

As a student of anthropology, the most fruitful method of collecting information I had been taught to employ in the field was that of participant observation, a method which derived ultimately from Malinowski's work on my home island during the First World War. Living among Basima people I found it convenient and congenial to stroll across to my nextdoor neighbours and join them in order to chew betelnut and chat. Alternatively, I would receive them on the verandah of my own house where we would discuss whatever topics I had in mind to enquire about.



Of course, in addition to this casual mode of learning by 'total immersion', I also used more formal methods of investigation. Thus, in house-to-house interviews in each hamlet, I conducted censuses and surveys on everything from residence, marriage and divorce to educational level and land use. I employed six assistants (two boys and four men) to help me with the main house-to-house census.

Together with key informants I worked out and drew up genealogical diagrams for all of Basima's households and matrilineages. I drew maps of settlements and gardens, took photographs, and tape-recorded stories, songs and feasting events. And, of course, I learned the language of Basima. My supervisor's visit for a week in July 1989 sharpened and realigned the focus of my data collection.

I admit there are many things I did not learn, and some domains of Basima knowledge I did not enter. For example, I was unable to determine the exact boundaries of matrilineage land, for there were always at least two opinions on such matters. Although I recorded two *sagali* feasts in considerable detail I felt some things had escaped my attention, for despite my 'total immersion' in the field I lacked the confidence to participate fully, for I feared derision at the mistakes I would surely make.

I must confess, too, that the most important area of Basima knowledge that remained closed to me was that of magic. Again it was partly a matter of lacking confidence, but also a profound shyness about intruding into matters I knew to be very personal. Of course, I asked general questions about magic, namely, the circumstances and occasions of its use; its possible outcomes and consequences; the names of practitioners; its inheritance and transfer; the myths which explain magic and the taboos which surround its use. In fact I covered every conceivable aspect of magic except that which is most important of all for Massim people: the actual magical spell or formula. For a number of reasons I was worried about encroaching too directly on what I knew to be people's most intimate and secret possessions. It was not simply that I was afraid of the embarrassment of being refused (for I suspect that many of my friends would have taught me their spells if I had only asked); it was rather that I could not act the part of the impersonal, 'objective' anthropologist in probing sensitive areas of belief that I knew would raise questions about my own sincerity as a fellow Massim islander.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fortune touched on the problem when he enquired of Basima people why they treat their seed yams in a different way to Dobuans. He writes perceptively (and wittily): 'I brought out this difference

In the course of my investigations I made frequent visits to other Basima hamlets, though my visits to other districts (including Bosalewa and the Amphletts) were largely determined by the occurrence of some public event that I felt I should observe. As I am familiar with basic yam gardening methods, I made frequent visits to the gardens where I assisted in various tasks and endeavoured to learn Basima gardening techniques and crop lore.

During field work, and also in retrospect, it seemed that except for the times when I was working on my own or talking with people on matters completely unrelated to my work, I would experience my 'foreignness'. I was after all in indigenous terms a stranger (*wagawaga*), doing something which Basima people found hard to comprehend. Despite my 'adoption' by a matrilineage of Watotaeta I did not feel I 'belonged', and the sense was heightened by my role as a visiting anthropologist. I never felt completely comfortable with this role any more than my hosts did. (To this day, I suspect, Basima people are still bemused by the question as to *why* I had to study their ways.) The majority of them knew me as a university teacher (*mesinali*) from Boyowa, an educated fellow-islander. It helped initially, perhaps, that my wife and two small children accompanied me to Basima and remained for about six months before returning to Boyowa. After that I was on my own in the field.

There were also contradictions within the role of participant observer that I found frustrating and even stressful. It was uncomfortable to try to join wholeheartedly in people's activities while at the same time to try to remember to remain detached in order to observe. This was particularly the case during major ceremonies which might require my involvement. It was easier to be either a participant or an observer. Either I joined in and learned their way of gardening, feasting and so forth, or I stuck to my notebooks, cameras, and tape-recorder and became a lame chronicler of the proceedings. In fact much of my notetaking was done after the event, back in my own house over a pot of tea. Usually a group of men, among them a few trusted informants, would sit around and help me in the recall of specific details. Sometimes respite from the discomfort of the double role I played was provided by semi-educated Basima youths, recently returned from working or schooling abroad. They

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with one Dobuan and two Basima men present. They treated the subject as delicately and with the same type of reserve as a non-militant but friendly Protestant and a non-militant but friendly Roman Catholic might possibly treat the topic of intercommunion' (1963: 282). As a Trobriander, I felt I was on similarly uneasy ground whenever I discussed magic with Basima people.



find the demands of their elders irksome and are apt to assume attitudes of aloof indifference. Joking with them had its compensations.

Since I was more of an observer than a participant I am aware that what I have presented in the body of this thesis may not accord fully with the views of Basima people. As I have indicated, the fact that I did not enjoy the luxury of being a complete participant, my role as observer accentuated my status as an outsider and this in turn deprived me of the full opportunity to attain an 'insider's' comprehension of Basima ways and worldview. This ultimate failure of empathy is reflected in the shortcomings of my ethnography in that it does not present a rounded emic view. On the other hand, however, my etic standpoint enabled me to gain, within a reasonably short period of time, a general understanding of the overall dynamics of the social system.

Yet it was through 'participatory' incidents such as the one described in Chapter Eight, when I was obliged to confront the local headmaster over a land issue, that I learned a great deal about the operation of customary land tenure. Such opportunities would have been missed had I remained an observer and simply asked questions about hypothetical cases. Involvement in actual cases enabled me to use them as a point of entry into the discussion of land tenure principles. I initially thought that my inadvertent participation in this case was outside my terms of reference for effective fieldwork, but it paid investigative dividends in the end. Moreover, having shown that I could be a 'useful' participant, people were rather more willing to take the time to answer my tiresome questions.

Encouraged by Malinowski's famous example (see 1922: Introduction; 1935a: Appendix II), I wish to add here a further note on my fieldwork experiences as a Trobriand Islander. The first day after my arrival in Basima was a Sunday and I was able to seize the opportunity of addressing a majority of the population after the morning church service. Dominic Albert called the meeting in front of the school classrooms. I explained in a general manner that I had come to live in Basima for a year or so in order to study the community's way of life. The headmaster elaborated on my theme and stressed the importance of this kind of work: 'recording the history of the people', as he glossed it. In introducing myself I had said that I was from the

Trobriand Islands. '*O-o-o, Boyowa tona* [He is from the Trobriands]', I heard them murmur.<sup>15</sup>

Within a matter of days I was introduced to a number of people who claimed origins in Boyowa. About a month later one of them became *siagu* ('my brother', as of the same matrilineage) and informally adopted me into his group, thereby allowing me access to some of their property, especially betelnut palms, though there was also a vague allusion to some land if I should need it. I thus became 'one of them', albeit in a limited sense, and 'my brother' Masawana saw it as his duty to protect my interests as long as I lived there. Thereafter, generally speaking, my relations with people in other groups were on equal terms.

As any anthropologist soon discovers, his or her social relationships within the field in part determine access to information; they both enable and constrain. Because I was now regarded as a member of a particular matrilineage in a particular hamlet, it meant that I acquired the various relationships, projects and problems of my adopting group vis-a-vis other groups. Inevitably, I came to rely on the people of my hamlet and matrilineage for information and access to many other things. Although I had many good friends belonging to other groups living in other hamlets, it became apparent that my access to such people was more limited. Thus, many of them were afraid to visit me too regularly in case they were suspected of begging for *dimdim* (i.e. whiteman's) goods, not least precious stick tobacco. This restriction was almost as bad as my being unable to elicit information from young unmarried women simply because I was a married man. My acceptance (by one group at least) as a Boyowa or Trobriand Islander modified my status as a stranger, but by the same token it constrained my freedom in other ways.

Furthermore, because the Trobriands is only a day's boat trip away it was not difficult for my own relatives to visit me fairly regularly, once a month or so. This had its disadvantages. While such visits alleviated homesickness and provided the opportunity to forget my immediate surroundings and to catch up on the latest news from home, they brought extra demands. When my Boyowa relatives learned of my

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<sup>15</sup> Although 'Trobriand Islands' refers to a place and a people well-known in the anthropological literature there are other names in use, even among Trobrianders themselves (see Leach, J.W. 1983:127). For example, linguists have called its language Kiriwina (Lithgow 1976) and latterly Kilivila (Senft 1986). However, its neighbours traditionally referred to the Trobriands and its people as Boyowa, Boiowa or Bweyowa. Basima people use Boyowa. My own varied usage generally depends upon context and whether the perspective I am using is that of Basima or that of linguists or anthropologists.



presumably unlimited access to betelnuts, they felt that they could exploit the convenience of my location. In fact, of course, my access to betelnuts was not as unlimited as their imaginings, and there were many disappointed expectations.

Finally, I did not find it particularly difficult to learn the language of Basima and within a few months I had achieved a reasonably accurate conversational command. (It was, however, my firstborn four-year old son who first began to speak the language well.) To my delight, I encountered many Trobriand words, enough to persuade me of the truth of certain Basima groups' claims to have migrated from the Trobriands between five and eight generations ago. To this day, however, I judge that I achieved only about 70 percent proficiency in the Galeya language.

### **Synopsis of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The present chapter has introduced Basima as a place and a people in their ethnographic, linguistic, provincial and national contexts. It also describes the conditions and circumstances of my fieldwork.

Chapter Two deals with basic principles of Basima social organization, especially the two major social groupings (totemic clans and matrilineages) according to which Basima people identify themselves. This chapter also explores the flexibility which underlies ostensible matrilineal solidarity. This flexibility, I argue, is by no means a recent phenomenon indicating a 'breakdown' of some ideal system, but rather an integral property of an adaptive system which loosely unifies a diverse collection of immigrant groups. It attests to the dynamism of group affiliation in matrilineal societies.

Chapter Three is a development of the previous chapter and its topics remain under the general rubric of social organization. Basima patterns of settlement, residence, marriage (and divorce) are examined, and further information on the matrilineage (*susu*) is adduced. Normative rules governing these institutions are discussed, but just as important are exceptions and apparent 'anomalies' since they signal the elasticity of the social system.

Chapter Four focuses on the cultivation of the most important crop of Basima, the yam, which features most prominently in feasting. The myth of origin of yams and the methods and general lore of yam gardening are documented and discussed in detail.



In Chapter Five I describe a social and cultural phenomenon so common in the Massim that it is impossible to ignore. This is the ceremonial mortuary feasting around which so much social life is planned and constructed. Notwithstanding an ostensible sequential ordering of these feasts, I have presented them as Basima people perceive them, that is, as distinct events motivated and staged by their performers to achieve a variety of objectives. Chapter Five deals with those ceremonies (*bwabwale*) which are directly related to individual deaths.

Chapter Six presents another kind of mortuary feast which involves external, inter-district relations. Like *bwabwale*, though of wider scope, *abutu* is a ceremonial mortuary exchange designed to lift mourning restrictions placed on the relatives and exchange partners of a deceased person. In order to set the proper context for this analysis, I first review Basima's trading relations with its neighbours. This also entails a substantial digression on Basima's limited participation in Kula exchange.

The broad topic of mortuary feasting is continued in Chapter Seven, in which I describe the most important and spectacular feast, *sagali*. This invites comparison with analogous mortuary feasts in other Massim societies. I argue that while this is a feast which nominally honours the collective dead of the sponsoring *susu*, the principal motive for sponsoring a *sagali* in Basima is to achieve renown. In other words, the main premise of *sagali* is political not eschatological.

Chapter Eight presents data on customary land tenure. I elucidate the basic principles of tenure operative at two levels: the ideological, rhetorical level of group (*susu*) ownership and the pragmatic, applied level of individual use rights. Several detailed case studies illustrate various contentious issues concerning land use and payments for land use, inheritance, land transfer and alienation; they also portray the considerable authority of the *susu*'s 'land manager'. An implicit theme of the chapter is the flexibility of land tenure in Basima, a necessary adjunct of a fluid society composed largely of immigrant groups.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TOTEMIC CLANS AND MATRILINEAGES

#### Introduction

The social organization of Basima, as Reo Fortune (1963:280) correctly informed us more than sixty years ago, is based on matrilineal descent groups called *susu*. The similarity of this matrilineal organization to that of the Dobuan-speaking area to the immediate south will become evident, though there are some important differences which I shall examine below. In this chapter I describe the basic structure and ideology of the Basima *susu*, though first it will be necessary to examine a larger social grouping, *unuma*, which I have called the totemic clan. The relationship between *susu* (matrilineage) and *unuma* (clan) is somewhat problematic, as we shall see.

According to Fortune's description, the Dobuan *susu* is exclusive and definitive insofar as affiliation is concerned. The Basima *susu* is more flexible, especially at clan level. Basima society allows *susu* fusion through a social mechanism called *siwalolo*. As I shall show below, through this means numerically smaller and more recently-arrived *susu* become incorporated into larger, more established ones. Since the great majority of Basima *susu* groups are immigrants who have settled in their present locations only within the last six or seven generations (one hundred-and-fifty years or so), I suggest that this important historical factor has played a significant role in determining the flexible or mutable nature of Basima clans and matrilineages, and indeed of Basima society as a whole.

#### Clans and Clanship

Basima people are internally differentiated into five totemic clans. Put another way, every Basima person belongs to one or another of five clans. They are called *unuma* or *boda*.<sup>1</sup> These two words are used interchangeably by Basima people. As in Dobu, they may be loosely translated as a 'group or gathering' in any location and at any given time. Since their use is with particular reference to the highest order of social

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<sup>1</sup> Chowning defines the Molima *boda* as 'nonunilinear groups composed of all known descendants of a single ancestor' (1962:92). Unlike Molima, Basima clans are unilinear in recruitment.



grouping, however, I translate them by the conventional term clan. For convenience I shall henceforth restrict my usage to the term *unuma*, as I suspect *boda* is borrowed from Dobu. It should be noted, however, that the word *unuma* is also found in the languages of Goodenough Island, where it also refers descent groups, albeit the patrilineage (Young 1971:25).

Totemic clans in Basima are conceptualized as larger than *susu* groups since they have an 'umbrella-like' relationship to them; *susu* are conceived of as being 'inside' or 'within' (*sinaene*) clans. Hence, in terms of their internal structure and membership one or more matrilineages constitute a clan. The clan is the highest level of social grouping notionally based on kinship and descent criteria. Thus clan membership transcends *susu* grouping and also the major geographical and traditional division between Lauoya and Basima districts, for people from these districts belong to the same five clans. Their distribution is not equal or uniform, however.

The clan in Basima is notionally (perhaps even ideally) exogamous, though it is not so in actuality and people would certainly not go out of their way to avoid intraclan marriage. The operative rule seems to be that one may marry someone from one's own clan so long as he or she is not a member of one's own *susu*. Strictly speaking, then, the clan does not regulate marriage. Nor does the clan regulate property relations. Common property (land, trees, names of persons, magic etc.) is confined to the *susu*. Clans are not property-owning groups at all (unless names and totems are regarded as symbolic property). Basima clans are not corporate groups, therefore. Indeed, they are not strictly speaking groups at all, which is why I have chosen to call them 'social categories' in most contexts since they do little but differentiate and classify people according to totemic emblems. Time and again I was reminded that people's understanding of clan membership was based on the simple fact of matrilineality rather than clanship as such. The affiliation to certain totemic birds and animals are ideological factors which, in the last analysis, are the only concrete images supporting the clan's notional entity as a social category. None of the five formal clan names are likely to be known outside the Basima area, though as we shall see, their principal 'bird names' are recognized throughout the Massim. Four clans have names whose meaning escapes me altogether, while the fifth, Mwadiawa clan, has the alternative name of Wakeke, white cockatoo. In this single instance, the totem is not only used as an alternative name of the clan, but further confirms the significance of totemic icons as the most important bonding factor of clanship.



Given these parameters of clanship it would have been unlikely for the members of any given clan to be able to trace descent from a single ancestress (cf. Macintyre 1983a:26). This I found to be the case. People were more at ease and articulate when discussing their *susu* membership and ancestry than when discussing their clan membership. Genealogical pedigrees of *susu* are not very deep (five or six generations on average) and although *susu* histories (*tetela*) reach back to places of origin, they do not, in any of the instances I recorded, tell of *unuma* origins or clan ancestors (as distinct from *susu* ancestors). One might deduce that deep genealogies are unimportant to Basima people given their organizational fluidity. Likewise, the fact that *tetela* are not concerned with clan origins is a clear indication of their relative unimportance. Sites of emergence from the ground are relevant only at *susu* level, more specifically the origin of 'indigenous' *susu* groups as described below.

If there are any common bonds between the men and women of a clan, it is the totemic symbols and clan names which are matrilineally inherited. Such common bonds are occasionally realized through the support given to fellow-clansmen during mortuary ceremonies. But on investigation such co-operation between (say) two *susu* of the same clan proves to be because they regard themselves as 'linked' through common origin, albeit of place and not putative ancestry. In such cases they regard themselves as 'sister' *susu*.

On this rather puzzling matter of the relationship of clan to matrilineage, *unuma* to *susu*, none of my informants would risk embarrassment by attempting to explain the origin or even the criterion for membership of the various *susu* that constituted a clan. Nor would they presume to explain an inter-relationship between clan membership and *susu* membership, except to indicate that certain *susu* come under or 'inside' a certain clan. If there is any trace of the origin of a *susu*'s linkage to a clan, it is in the historical phenomenon of adoption by which one *susu* becomes incorporated into a larger one and subsequently assumes membership of the adopting *susu*'s clan.

Finally, it is necessary to mention an empirical anomaly associated with clan membership. In a society that abides by the matrilineal principle of descent, every person is born into, or conceptually affiliated with the clan of his or her mother. Logically, then, all the children of one mother should belong to the mother's clan. However, I came across a few individuals who claim affiliation to two clans, and a few others who claim affiliation to clans different from those of their own siblings.

Masawana identifies himself with Etonouna clan whilst all other members of his *susu* identify themselves with Yoana clan. Masawana (so he claims) shares the same totemic clan as his wife and children who, of course belong to a different *susu*. Whether this is a genealogical anomaly or a mistake by Masawana, was never made clear to me. Masawana himself stubbornly refused to explain. His own mother's brother (*oana*) along with other close kin claimed that he is without any doubt a Yoana clansman. I could only conclude from Masawana's indifference that the matter was of no significance to him. But the case is interesting in that it indicates how little importance clan affiliation (as opposed to *susu* affiliation) might have for a Basima person.

If discrepancies or uncertainties of affiliation indicate that clan membership is a rather rarified concept with few practical consequences, they throw into relief the absolute certainty of *susu* membership. Such discrepancies and anomalies cannot occur at *susu* level where solidarity and co-operation between members of the group are far more pronounced and important. Except in cases of gradual fusion formalized through *siwalolo*, *susu* membership is unambiguous and mutually exclusive. So far as land is concerned, common clanship counts for nothing; common matrilineage membership counts for everything (see Young 1992:9).

Table 2.1 Population by District and Clan

DISTRICT		CLANS (UNUMA)					Total
		Manawana	Aenatala	Mwadiawa	Etonouna	Yoana	
BASIMA	<i>hills</i>	32	21	53	23	6	135
	<i>coast</i>	36	32	11	47	18	144
	sub total	68	53	64	70	24	279
LAUOYA	<i>hills</i>	65	7	1	50	59	182
	<i>coast</i>	49	0	16	77	54	196
	sub total	114	7	17	127	113	378
	<b>total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>657</b>
		28%	9%	12%	30%	21%	

The numerical count of clan membership presented in Table 2.1 was derived from genealogies collected from existing families in Lauoya and Basima districts in 1989. These figures exclude deceased members and children born after March 1990. The hills/coast distinction indicated within each of the two districts is not a very stable one. As shown in the following chapter, the general shift of population from hills to coast that occurred following pacification during the 1890s has been reversed in certain areas. In any event, the table clearly shows that there is an almost equal



distribution of population between hills and coast, that is, between those hamlets situated inland and those situated, like Watotaeta, virtually on the beach (see Map 2).

To cite Fortune on Dobu, 'The locality is not a totemic unit (1963:34), and it is evident from this table that the five totemic clans of Basima, too, are dispersed. Although they are not localized, there is a slight tendency for some to be more firmly associated with certain areas than others. This pocket concentrations of certain clans is probably a result of change of residence associated with land claims based on ambiguous tales of *susu* origin, and fusion of *susu* whereby one adopts the clan identity of another. Thus, the general geographical distribution of major clan locations within the two districts gives a weak indication of the corresponding clan territoriality, though since clans are not landowning categories its territoriality is denied in practice.

### Clan Totems

A most significant feature of clan identity is its totemic emblems or symbols, *manua* (birds) being the principal icons. In addition to giving the actual name of their clan, when asked, Basima people would usually name their inherited *manua*. These are primarily birds (*manua*) and secondarily snakes (*mwata*) or hopping insects (*digwa*). The latter creatures are not often mentioned, presumably because they are of much less significance than the birds.

An informant from the clan of Manawana claimed that their two snake totems of *dadabwa* and *sisimala* may be used for magical purposes. The former is often mentioned by Manawana garden magicians in their incantations so that the harvested yams are blessed with a potency to fill one's stomach for a long time, thereby diminishing the desire for food. While the *dadabwa* snake is commonly found in gardens, it is not unusual to find it coiled among the yam heaps in one's yam hut. For Manawana people (and their children as well), one would do well to leave it undisturbed. Similarly, *sisimala* (a large snake that inhabits swamps) is also mentioned by Manawana magicians when performing a particular garden rite. This spell is said to be very powerful and can be dangerous, such that if the performer fails to speak it properly, the potency of the magic will 'backfire' upon him and paralyze his limbs. When performed correctly, the magic should deter thieves and other intruders from entering one's garden. Any intruders would likewise suffer paralysis. Members of other clans occasionally make scornful references to the



sluggish character of the *dadabwa* snake vis-a-vis Manawana clansmen: '*Manawana adigei*!' meaning that it ridicules the name of Manawana.

The question '*Eto manua?*' ('What bird?') in the appropriate context directly refers to one's clan. As elsewhere in Fergusson and Normanby, *manua* is a synonym for clan. It may also be extended to one's *susu*, albeit more rarely. This is because those *susu* groups which belong to the same clan are expected to share the same totemic bird. But quite unlike Dobu, though similar to Molima, Basima people do not regard their totem birds as clan or *susu* ancestresses (cf. Fortune 1963:31-32; Chowning 1962:95). While it is logical to deduce that totems should be considered as ancestresses (since one's totem is matrilineally inherited), people never pressed the point. Ancestresses are usually identified by names which are exclusively used by *susu* members, though in some cases they are forgotten altogether. Basima people do not treat very seriously the idea that other clansmen and women are 'brothers' or 'sisters', as is the case in Dobu (Fortune 1963:35) or Duau (Schlesier 1970:45). After all, clan members frequently intermarry and marriages between clansmen and women are not regarded as incestuous.

Basima people show as much reverence for their father's clan totems (even more after his death) as they do for their own matrilineally-inherited ones. As an informant emphatically put it to me: 'If it's my father's [totem], I will have to respect it, because that is *my father*!' This blunt assertion of respect for father's totems implies a prohibition on harming them and it is especially forbidden to eat them, as it is one's own. Such interdictions become more pronounced when the father dies. As a result, one often hears '*tamagu*' or '*tamada*' (my father or our father) in reference to one's father's bird or birds, instead of calling them by their vernacular names. To do so would cause shame for it is an act of disrespect to one's dead father's *susu*. Note, however, that if the father's totem bird is referred to by name the people most offended are his close *susu* kin, and not the broad category of his fellow-clansmen.

As shown below, most clans are represented by more than one bird, though the first on each list is judged to be the most important. In their listed order of significance, the totemic symbols for the clans are birds (*manua*), snakes (*mwata*) and hopping insects (*digwa*). I cannot claim with absolute certainty that this order of significance is valid for all Basima clans, though since I only found out about snake and insect totems long after I had been informed about birds, it is a reasonable supposition. *Manua* is quite often used as a generic term for any totemic animal, whether or not it

is actually a bird. (Analogously, one *susu* that claims an ancestral connection with a particular kind of fish refer to it their 'pig'.) The formal clan names (Etonouna, etc.) are largely unknown outside Basima, so when visiting other places in the region Basima people would use their main bird totems to indicate their clan identities (i.e. Siae, Bunebune, Wadaeia, Gewala and Kaokao). With the possible exception of the first, these bird totems are known throughout the greater part of the Massim (allowing for language differences, of course, though even so the names are commonly cognate forms).

Table 2.2 Basima Clans (*Unuma*) and their Totems.

TOTEMS	CLANS ( <i>UNUMA</i> )				
	Etonouna	Yoana	Mwadiawa	Manawana	Aenatala
<i>Manua</i> (birds)	1. <i>siae</i> (black satin bird) 2. <i>magawau</i> (hawk) --	1. <i>bunebune/malasi</i> (dove) 2. <i>kunkum</i> (black pigeon) 3. <i>binama</i> (hornbill)	1. <i>wadaeia</i> (white cockatoo) -- --	1. <i>gewala</i> (paraquete) 2. <i>magisubu</i> or <i>bwebwa</i> (sea eagle) --	1. <i>kaokao</i> (crow) -- --
<i>Mwata</i> (snakes)	1. <i>dagudagu</i> (green python) --	1. <i>dubwa</i> (large ground, brown python) --	1. <i>sisineta</i> (tiny, black & red-bellied snake) --	1. <i>dadabwa</i> (small lazy snake) 2. <i>sisimala</i> (large snake & lives in swamps)	1. <i>etala</i> ( <i>boa</i> constrictor) --
<i>Digwa</i> (hopping insects)	<i>mwanege</i> (giant green grasshopper)	<i>bilolowaga</i> (small brown grasshopper)	<i>tatayowa</i> (praying mantis)	<i>siwawabula</i> (grasshopper - burrows under ground)	<i>dimasese</i> (tiny, noisy, green grasshopper)

As in other areas of the Massim, Basima totems are notionally 'linked'. In Dobu for example the linked totems are 'a bird ancestor, a fish and a tree' (Fortune 1963:36; see also Seligman 1910:435 and Thune 1980:146-150).<sup>2</sup> In Basima as elsewhere, there is no obvious logic to the manner of their linking. Put differently, the

<sup>2</sup> According to Susanne Kuehling, nowadays Dobu people do not recognise any other totems but birds (*manua*). Despite Fortune's positive statement that 'Each village has a set of linked totems, a bird ancestor, a fish and a tree' (1963:36), her informants strongly denied it was true (personal communication).



particular combinations of birds-snakes-insects for each clan seems to be quite arbitrary and people are unable to explain them.

Certain individuals have their own particular bird totems for magical purposes. These are invoked by their 'owners' for assistance in achieving a desired goal. They are not necessarily, and frequently are not, clan totems as misconstrued by one observer in regard to totemic usages in the northern Massim area (Baldwin 1991:74). I cannot claim more information concerning the knowledge, uses, and magical or ritual significance of the totemic animals enumerated above, other than what I have already mentioned for the Manawana clan's snake totems.<sup>3</sup> Except for the respect accorded to bird totems (and to certain snakes) there was no suggestion of respecting hopping insects or of possible magical uses of other totems.

### **Susu ideology and structure**

In Basima, as in Dobu, Duau and Tubetube, the term *susu* literally means 'breast' or 'breastmilk'.<sup>4</sup> It clearly connotes the idea of matrilineal succession through a body-part or body substance unique to women; furthermore, it signifies motherhood and maternal nurturance especially during gestation and lactation. By implication fatherhood is of lesser importance. Thus *susu* is an apt metaphorical way to refer to an exclusively maternal origin: one which, in Basima and throughout the southern D'Entrecasteaux, creates the strongest feelings of affiliation and belonging. For any individual in these societies, one's *susu* provides one's primary social identity. First and foremost one is the child of one's mother's group; all other means of personal identification are secondary or contingent.

<sup>3</sup> Roheim reported as follows of Northeast Normanby Island (probably Sipupu, a village near Me'udana):

The sea spirits are called *sesegani* whose wives are secular witches. A man would call for *sesegani* in their garden fertility incantations. They are the people from the under world. People [dead people?] taken by *sesegani* do not go to Bwebweso. Their client is Tau Mudurere. They are 'overseers' of garden[s] and when confronted in the gardens they appear in the form of the *dadabwa* snake (1948:289-290).

If the snake is killed, the garden would be inevitably spoilt. It normally lies under leaves in the garden and goes away at harvest. The significance of this particular snake in Sipupu garden magic no doubt agrees with the way Manawana clansmen of Basima invoke, respect and fear it in addition to its being a totem of their clan.

<sup>4</sup> See Fortune 1963, Chapter I. For analytical accounts of matriliney in Northeastern Normanby Island see Thune 1980; for Tubetube Island see Macintyre 1989; and for southern Normanby Island see Young 1992. The composition of *susu* groups in all these areas is strikingly similar.



A secondary idiom of identification is that of 'blood', *daya*, which is said to be transmitted through both parents (cf. Chowning 1989:98 on Molima). It thus gives rise to a somewhat restricted notion of a bilateral 'kindred', for one shares blood with one's siblings and one's children as well as with one's parents and their siblings (but not their spouses). One's own spouse, of course, will have inherited a different *daya*. People do not form groups on the basis of *daya*, however, and it appears only to be a way of indicating closeness of relationship. There was even some doubt among my informants as to whether one's parents' parents (*tubu-*) shared *daya* with ego. Still, it was clear that so far as marriage was concerned, one should not marry anyone of the same *daya*.

As exogamous units matrilineages also regulate marriage. Yet I recorded a few cases of marriage within the *susu* which have been reluctantly accepted. In the marriage survey I conducted, three marriages were agreed to be pronounced 'incestuous' (*nai-ubuta* - literally, marriage within one's own 'stone circle', hamlet), though this does not necessarily mean intra-*susu* marriage. The most blatant case of *susu* incest, however, was that of a mother's brother who married his own sister's daughter (*oana*). (This should have called for dire supernatural sanctions but no-one was willing to discuss it, and the husband in question had long since died.) Another case involved a man who married, as his second wife, a woman from his own *susu*, albeit a quite distant matrilineal relative, whose genealogical connection could not be traced. The third case was that of a couple whose fathers shared the same residential hamlet (*ubuta*), though they did not belong to the same *susu*. In the few hamlets containing more than one *susu*, the fictive kinship of 'brothers and sisters' based on common hamlet residence usually discourages marriage, though as in Dobu (Fortune 1963:9), sex may be tolerated within the hamlet.

The structure of a Basima *susu* appears to be simpler than that described so well by Thune for Duau (1980: Chapters III & IV), though there are many similarities. The most obvious point of contrast, however, appears to be the doubtful existence in Basima of what Thune calls the 'unlocalized *susu*' (*ibid.*: 135). In other words, Basima people do not appear to recognise the distinction that Normanby Islanders make between 'small' (*gidalina*) and 'large' (*sinabwana*) *susu*, nor do they have *susu* of such a size that a single one may 'own several branch hamlets usually located in different hamlet clusters and occasionally different villages' (*ibid.*). While it is true that *susu* members are dispersed to some extent by marriage, a *susu* nucleus or 'core' in its maternal hamlet (*natala*) will not claim to belong to the same matrilineage as

another *susu* nucleus in another hamlet. In short, the notion of a single *susu* owning 'several branch hamlets' seems foreign to Basima. Genealogies are accordingly very shallow (between four and six generations). Of course, this does not preclude members of, say, a Bosalewa or a Molima immigrant *susu* visiting Bosalewa or Molima and claiming ancient (but genealogically unspecific) matrilineal ties with people in these districts of their *susu* origin. But they would not, to my knowledge, say that they were calling on members of their own *susu*, though the ideological model of *susu* membership may well be in their minds as they sought hospitality appropriately given to 'fictive' kin.

### **The origins of Basima *susu***

Passing through the D'Entrecasteaux archipelago on his way to the Trobriands, Malinowski was impressed by the varied scenery that lay before his eyes. His later comments on the Dobu area, however, are tinged with the trepidation doubtless conveyed by his Trobriand friends. Thus he writes: 'And in the past these lands and seas must have been the scene of migrations and fights, of tribal invasions, and of gradual infiltrations of peoples and cultures' (1922:40). Most Basima histories of *susu* origins suggest that Malinowski was quite right. Young writes even more graphically of the *tetera* he collected in south Normanby Island:

The land had been witness to a fraught and fragmented human history, one torn by wars, blown by hurricanes, drowned by floods, burned by fire, blasted by drought... These stories evoke a screaming, tragic geography of hunger, killing, cannibalism, sorcery, fear and flight. Yet people survived, and in the peaceful denouement of their *tetera* there is often a quiet satisfaction: 'We are here today' (Young 1992:27).

Basima stories that recall *susu* origins typically refer to migration from nearby islands and other districts of Fergusson; not infrequently they allude to warfare. A large majority of *susu* groups in Basima have immigrant status, and today there are arguably only two groups which can be accurately described as indigenous, aboriginal or autochthonous.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is remotely possible that there are three *tutupawa susu*. In January 1993 I was told by two or three Basima men of a third such group called Piosia, whose location they said was somewhere in the higher reaches of Lauoya district. However, I am skeptical about the existence of this 'indigenous' *susu*.

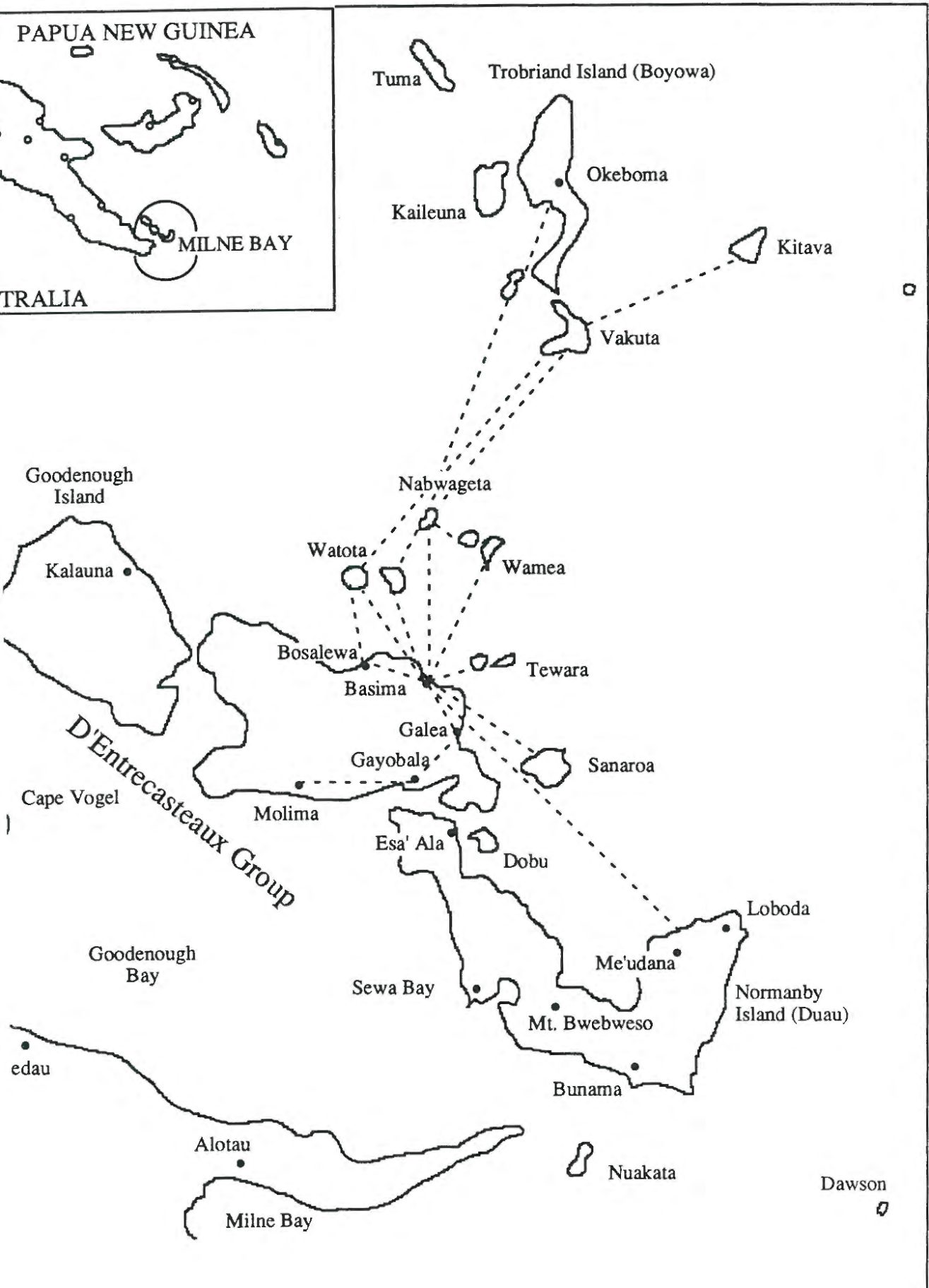
People make a clear distinction between immigrants, strangers or guests (*wagawaga*) and autochthones or aboriginals (*tutupawa*).<sup>6</sup> *Wagawaga* are people who claim their origins from elsewhere; *tutupawa* are people who claim origin from the land of Basima itself. These latter claims are asserted by pointing to particular sites of emergence in the ground (*gola tanoa*), usually on a hillside. This dichotomy between 'guests' or 'strangers' and 'aborigines' or 'autochthones', however, is usually ignored during discussions about land claims as immigrant origin can be a sensitive matter. While 'aborigines' may relish such reference as indicating security of a status which guarantees their claims to land, immigrants quietly resent being reminded their more recently acquired status. Again, while the presumed security of *tutupawa* rights to land presents itself as an historical reality, it is something of an illusion. Not all their general claims are actually owned, in the strict sense of the word (see Chapter Eight). One informant of mine from an immigrant *susu* even perversely denies the existence of *tutupawa susu* groups at all.

As in Dobu, the *susu* in Basima is the largest (indeed the only) corporate kin group; it is exogamous and may or may not form a local residence group. Senior members of a *susu* should be able to trace descent from an original ancestress, recite the group's migratory routes and its historical vicissitudes or, in the case of the autochthonous *susu*, their post-emergence history. Such tales, as illustrated below, may also include the group's subsequent claims to areas of land, beaches and to village locations. *Susu* are identified by and named according to their origins, so it is not unusual to find two or more different groups having identical places of origin. *Tutupawa* or aboriginal *susu* do not have special names either and are only identified by their ancestresses. Table 2.3 indicates the origin of the thirty *susu* of Basima. They are listed under the names of the respective clan categories (*unuma*) with which they identify or are associated. A clan may be composed of a maximum of twelve *susu* and a minimum of one; the average is six.

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<sup>6</sup> According to one informant, the term *tutupawa* implies the occasion of the first ancestors' emergence from the ground, though he could not offer a literal translation of the word. *Wagawaga* reduplicates *waga*, meaning boat or large canoe, and is used also of guests or visitors such as one's Kula partners.





MAP 3

Showing migratory routes of the immigrant (Wagawaga) susu groups into Basima

Table 2.3 Places of Origin by *Susu* and Clans

		UNUMA				
		Etonouna	Manawana	Mwadiawa	Yoana	Aenatala
S	Galea	Galea	Itua	Bosalewa (x2)	Pwalupwalu	
	Tutupawa	Gayobala	Tewara	Boyowa (x3)	Inedoga*	
U	Molima (x5)	Weulu		Galea		
	Watota Is.	Bosalewa		Oyawabu		
S	Duau	Sanaroa		Tutupawa		
	Wadalei (x2)					
U	Bosalewa (x2)					
	Wamea Is.					
<b>Total</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

\* This is an extinct *susu* (i.e. *susuamata*), said to have existed in the hills of Lauoya district.

The great majority of names shown in the table are places on Fergusson Island (Molima, Gayobala, Galea, Oyawabu, Wadalei and Bosalewa) or nearby islands (Wamea, Kwatota, Sanaroa), including Normanby (Duau) and the Trobriands (Boyowa) (see Map 3). The remaining two *susu* are *tutupawa* whose origin is Basima itself. When more than one *susu* is indicated as originating from the same place (e.g. Molima x5), this refers to the number of *susu* in Basima claiming origin from that place. Although *susu* sharing places of origin tend to relate to each other through some sort of fictive kinship relationship as 'sister' *susu*, in only two or three cases do they share the same hamlets.

I now present several *tetela* to exemplify the kind of histories of origin claimed by Basima *susu*. As ideological constructs, these stories may be held to represent what members of a group consider important to remember about themselves. They are quite obviously charters in Malinowski's sense (1926; 1935a).

#### *Tetela of Wegiliu hamlet*

Wegiliu is a large hamlet of four-owning *susu* and a total population of 52. The first or founding *susu* was one of the two *tutupawa* groups of Basima. The other three *susu* of Wegiliu are *wagawaga* who arrived later: two from Molima and one most recently from Bosalewa.

The Wegiliu *tutupawa* group is headed by Ruben (or Kiwona). He is in his late twenties but as the eldest male he is the recognized leader of his *susu* and has overall

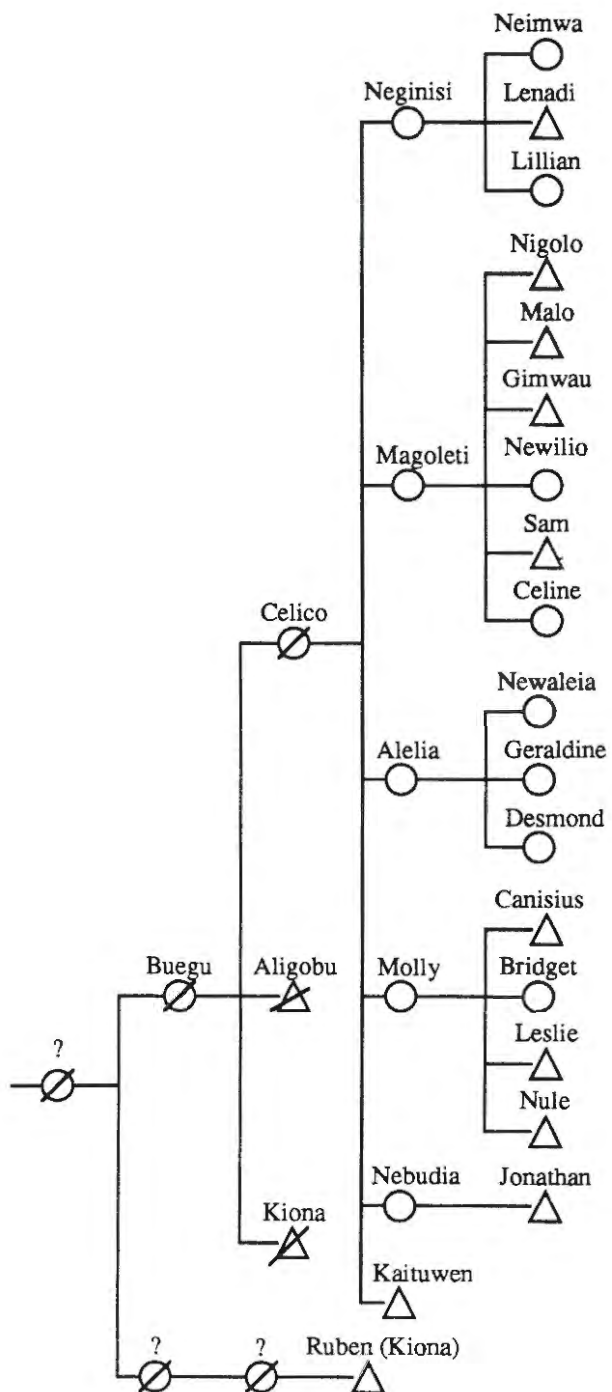
authority over its lands, most notably the large gardening area which surrounds the ancestral spot of emergence. In 1989 this *susu* numbered twenty-four members with an equal number of males and females. Eighteen of them (eleven males and seven females) were between one and seventeen years of age, while the rest (one male and five females) were between twenty-five and thirty years old, all of them married. Except for the leader, all are the direct descendants of one female called Buegu, the 'grandmother' of the *susu* (see Figure 2.1 below). The names of earlier female ancestors are beyond recall. Despite its indigenous or autochthonous status, this *susu* has continually faced challenges over its land claims from bigger and more powerfully assertive matrilineages. This problem was particularly acute during times when the *susu* was reduced to no more than one or two females (only females, of course, can regenerate a *susu* and transmit its rights to land). In what follows I gloss the *tetela* as told to me by Kiwona's eldest 'sister', Magoleti.

The ancestresses of this *susu* emerged from a hole in the ground at the base of a tree called *dewawa* at a place called Watobo or Bilolo in the foothills of Lauoya, at some 150 metres above sea level. An area of land within a radius of 200 or more metres from the spot forms the group's *lutete*. After several subsequent relocations within the vicinity of Bilolo, the group eventually settled at a site they called Iyomwalala. (The abandoned site of this hamlet is marked by several remaining betel palms and a single coconut tree.) At about the time of their settlement at Iyomwalala, there was endemic warfare between the neighbouring communities of Ulua and Lauoya. In one of their successful raids the men of Ulua burnt down and destroyed the homes of Lauoya people. The houses of Iyomwalala were also burned, and the *susu* was left with only two young survivors, a brother and sister pair. These children survived on wild root crops and fruits. While on one of their foraging trips, a man from the *susu* of Pwaepwae hamlet came upon them. After some persuasion to overcome their fear and mistrust of him, the man took them home and looked after them. The children eventually grew to marriageable age and married each other. One day the foster parents showed the young couple their place of origin at Watobo (near Bilolo) and, leaving Pwaepwae, they returned to live there.

At Watobo they bore children and cultivated a local variety of taro crop called *malagita* which grew to abundance. Three generations later, one of the children of this *susu* cultivated a variety of yam (*D. alata*) called *yamsa*. After one of their excellent harvests they held a feast to commemorate their kinsmen who had been killed in the early wars, and they invited the *susu* of their foster-parents to join them. By that time their number had increased, so some of them moved to nearby hamlets such as Didinetala and Iyomwalala, whilst others remained at Watobo. As time went by some descended to the beach, to the present-day hamlet of Wegiliu, for the sake (it is said) of salt and the sea breeze. Their move to the coast and occupation of what is now known as Wegiliu hamlet established an original claim of residential ownership in itself. It was at Wegiliu that they witnessed the arrival of the first *wagawaga* immigrants.



**Figure 2.1**  
A Skeleton Genealogy of Kiona's *Tutupawa Susu*



It is noteworthy that the narrator of this *tetela* likened the initial emergence from the ground of her *susu* and its subsequent expansion to the growth of a mushroom (*giabwa*). Thus, conceptually, the *susu* began from a single ancestress and 'grew upwards' (*i-esususaila*), 'mushrooming' into a large group. The interesting point here is that genealogical expansion is here conceived of as 'ascent' rather than 'descent', in contrast to the orthodox idiom of kinship studies in anthropology.

There appear to have been two further migrations into Wegiliu: one from Molima, which arrived via the coast (though whether by canoe or on foot is not remembered), and the other from inland over the mountains. The two groups coming from Molima belong to Etonouna clan, though they are distinct matrilineages. The first arrivals were the ancestresses of Negwedia, a woman in her mid-thirties in 1989. She claims a strip of Wegiliu's residential hamlet based on an established *ubuta* stone circle (see Chapter Three). This group was closely followed by another which is currently represented by three elders: Gisa, Mwaiwaga and Meduwau. This Molima *susu* now occupies a large part of Wegiliu and lays claim to some of its surrounding alluvial land.

Some time elapsed, so it was explained, before the second wave of migrants came from behind the mountains. This comprised a large *susu* belonging to the clan of Mwadiawa and is currently headed by Wakeke, the Basima councillor in 1990. They had come into Basima from behind Oya Tabu, from a place called Itua. However, its migration history begins in the Trobriands, in the island of Kitava. From there it moved to Vakuta (Auta in Basima language); then it crossed the sea to Watota in the Amphletts, and then moved to Bosalewa (in northern Fergusson). From there it proceeded over the mountains to Itua, from whence it moved yet again down to Lauoya hamlet. Before settling at Wegiliu, where it currently dwells, this *susu* stayed first at Ugwa after permission had been granted by Kiwona's *tutupawa susu*.<sup>7</sup>

Securing permission from and gaining acceptance by the original settlers prior to an immigrant group's settlement in a hamlet was apparently achieved with relative ease. During earlier times (presumably the late nineteenth century) permission was not required as new arrivals were few in number (many apparently coming in ones and twos) and the established owners had sometimes even invited them. Consequently, portions of garden and residential land were willingly allocated to newcomers, which they now assert rights to. Such costly hospitality (as time would prove it to be) can be attributed in large part to the security that numbers provided against the headhunting raids of Dobuans and Bwaiowa people.<sup>8</sup> The original settlers

<sup>7</sup> Ugwa happens to be the second hamlet in which Fortune stayed when he visited Basima in 1928. It is now abandoned though there are many signs of previous occupation.

<sup>8</sup> Bwaiowa generally refers to the peninsula of southeastern Fergusson Island which points towards Dobu. It includes the villages of Waluma (Numanuma), Deidei, Budoya (Catholic Mission) and Sawaedi. Tu'utauna (or Tautauna) is another, perhaps archaic, name for the Bwaiowa region (see Map 1).

presumably lacked the numbers for effective defence and would have welcomed newcomers.

*Tetela of three susu originating in Boyowa*

Stories of origin of *wagawaga* groups are not unlike that of the *tutupawa susu*'s narrative given above, except of course that their origins lie outside Basima. The *tetela* are structurally similar, however, and take pains to record names of places rather than names of people. Here I give the more detailed history of a *wagawaga susu*, that of the *Watotaeta susu* which 'adopted' me. I choose this one both for its comprehensive detail and because it is the one with which I became most familiar. It will be seen, however, that this particular *tetela* refers to and even mingles with the *tetela* of two other *wagawaga susu* deriving from Boyowa. I recorded it from Pulikapu and Taigwa, the latter a woman.

The *wagawaga susu* of *Watotaeta* originated in Boyowa (Trobriands), along with three others, whose *tetela* are entwined with this one. It is currently headed by Masawana, or Kauboi, a man of about 35 years of age. The oldest member of the *susu* during my fieldwork was Pulikapu (or Boikota) who was Masawana's mother's brother and predecessor, died in 1992. Masawana's *susu* had only six living members, two of whom were females. The skeleton genealogy shown in Figure 2.2 indicates the meagre count of surviving members. Of the five immigrant groups from Boyowa, three appear to have left Boyowa on the same voyage, albeit in three different canoes. Where exactly in Boyowa they came from and for what reasons they left are no longer remembered; such facts are probably unimportant now.<sup>9</sup>

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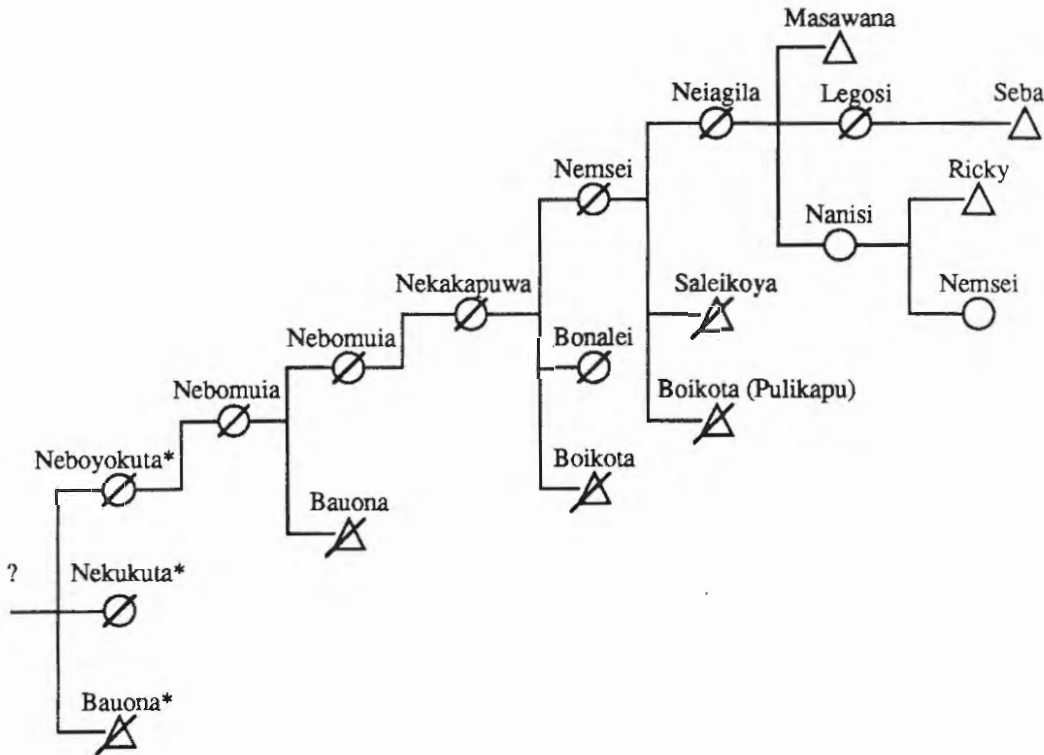
<sup>9</sup> Young (1992:27) comments as follows on the *tetera* of south Normanby Island:

*Tetera* are of varying length and narrative complexity. While this is sometimes due to the narrative skills (or lack thereof) of their tellers, it is also likely that the content of some of these histories has been forgotten or lost. It would be unfair to give less weight to the more impoverished stories, for all *susu* are deemed to be equal. Still, an impoverished *susu* history might well reflect a long-term demographic decline, since there would be fewer *susu* members to learn and transmit their *tetera*.

The remarkable thing about Masawana's *susu* history, perhaps, is that it is not 'impoverished' despite evident 'demographic decline'. Nevertheless, some selective forgetting is inevitable in each generation.



Figure 2.2  
A Skeleton Genealogy of Masawana's *Wagawaga Susu*



\* These, according to my informants, were the original ancestors (and ancestresses) making the sea voyage from the Trobriands via the Amphlett islands to Basima.

Of the three canoes carrying the Boyowa migrants only two were named, and these names are used to differentiate the two groups that sailed in them.<sup>10</sup>

The ancestors' journey from Boyowa went like this. The first canoe, called 'Sumweduyu', was led by Bauona with his two sisters, Neboyokuta and Nekukuta. These were Masawana's ancestors. The second canoe called 'Bwawabwawa' was led by the unnamed ancestor of Diou (or Balagia). Setting off from Boyowa, the two canoes passed the island of Yawebune, then on to

<sup>10</sup> I was told that there had been other Boyowa migrants who had gone to live in other places on Fergusson Island, such as Galea and Bwaiowa and also on the nearby islands of Tewara and Dobu. Some people on the island of Uama (inhabited today by the people of Tewara) claim origin from the island of Vakuta in the southern Trobriands.

Gabuone islet, and then to Legumatabu.<sup>11</sup> They halted at each of these islands to rest. Sailing on, they reached the island of Nabwageta (or Tuboa) in the Amphletts. At Nabwageta, the old woman Noboyokuta was left behind; she later went over to the island of Gumana (or Urasi) and lived there until she died. But the canoes made for the Basima coast.

Meanwhile, the unnamed third Boyowa canoe belonging to Wasana, an ancestor of Lautua (also named Wasana), had overtaken the first two and rested temporarily on the island of Yabwaya (or Dilia). This canoe was said to have come from Auta island (i.e. Vakuta). Like the other two canoes, this one also sailed for the Basima coast and eventually beached at Emosina, at the mouth of Aweyote river. Thus their present general claim to the land around the mouth of the river.

The canoes of 'Sumweduyu' and 'Bwawabwawa' likewise continued their journey towards Basima via Gumana island. Although 'Sumweduyu' led initially, 'Bwawabwawa' took the lead after the former was overturned by strong winds. However, disaster was averted when the crew quickly righted the canoe, and it caught up with 'Bwawabwawa' just as it was about to reach the Basima shore. Consequently, both came ashore at the same time at a spot called Etupwa, about 500 metres south of the Aweyote river. On the foreshore at Etupwa scattered rocks can be seen which commemorate the canoes and some of the possessions brought from Boyowa which have now remained petrified on the shore.<sup>12</sup>

The crew of 'Bwawabwawa' moved inland, initially settling at a place called Wagua but later continuing further inland to their final settlement at Lauoya hamlet in Lauoya district. There they laid down the ancestral stones they had carried with them: slabs of slate-like stone called *wewela*.

The crew of 'Sumweduyu' slowly moved southwards along the shore to a nearby spot called Yawaginai. [At the time of my research this was a small hamlet occupied by their descendant Pulikapu and his children.] Gradually they moved along the coast towards a spot between the present hamlets of Watotaeta and Yawadobu. From there they turned uphill until they reached Gabuone (or Yuida) where they settled temporarily. For some unknown reason, however, they went further up to Ipwawa [nowadays a burial ground] and settled there. It was at this site that Nekukuta gave birth to two children. The first-born, a girl, was called Nebomoia and her younger brother was named after their mother's brother, Bauona.

Masawana's *susu* brought with them from Boyowa certain things which are now considered as ancestral customs, relics or possessions (*weweia*). Among them were *uweuwe* grass (*ketanei* in Kiriwina), the *tawetawe* plant (*tuwatau* in

<sup>11</sup> These are coral islets between the Trobriands and the Amphletts (see Malinowski 1922:322-23). Fortune (1963:219) mentions Gabuwana (*sic*) as a tiny island to the south of the Trobriands on which Kasabwabwaileta, the legendary Kula hero of Tewara, was marooned by his jealous kinsmen.

<sup>12</sup> Although the petrified possessions were not specified as food crops, this event is identical to one in the Kiwiwiole myth from Kalauna in Goodenough Island, in which food crops brought back from Muyuw (Woodlark Island) turned to stone after Kiwiwiole's canoe turned over at the mouth of a river (Young 1983:180). Kuehling collected a similar story of yams (i.e. *bebai teterina*) from Dobu (personal communication).

Kiriwina) and *tube*, breadfruit. Similarly, the crew of 'Bwawabwawa' brought with them the following: *wewela* (slabs of stone which require the owners to make a feast before they can be moved); *bweye* (a tiny creek, the source of which they carried in a coconut shell); the *kwaïou* plant (*riga* in Kiriwina) and *a'amawe* grass (*kukwewelu* in Kiriwina). [These plants can nowadays be seen on the hillsides and plateaux of Lauoya.]

Precedence is an important principle throughout Melanesia; it is no less so in Basima. I shall mention in the appropriate place how these Boyowa groups came to lay claim to their present gardening and residential lands in Basima, but here I make the more general point that *tetela* such as the above legitimate a group's existence and serve as a documentary resource on which land claims are based. People say that the Basima coastline and foothills up to an elevation of about 150-200m were mostly uninhabited before Europeans came. So when the immigrants first set foot on Basima soil and then toured its uninhabited areas, this gave them opportunity to lay claims to land on a 'first-arrival' principle of precedence. Such claims typically included beaches, hills, valleys, rivers and temporary resting places. Some of these 'resting places' became more permanent and developed into what we can now see as the scattered hamlets of Basima.

What I have tried to illustrate above is the way Basima matrilineages view themselves and construct and maintain their historical identity in opposition to other such groups. Group identity is crucial in almost all domains of social and economic life: gardening, feasting, mortuary ceremonies and not least, the question of land use and ownership. The role one plays in ceremonial events, for instance, is heavily dependent upon one's identity as defined by group affiliation. Although, as I have shown, clan identity is not so clearly defined, there is no denying that Basima people do have strong allegiances towards their own matrilineages (*susu*). In the case of the three Boyowa *susu* whose histories are outlined above, since their settlement in Basima they have developed patterns of mutual co-operation in major ceremonies. They are all affiliated with the same clan: Yoana (or Bunebune). They also share gardening land. These commonalities aside, the three groups are not genealogically related and are set apart as distinct *susu*, though they may refer to each other as 'sister' *susu* (at least for two of them), by virtue of their common origin.

### ***Susu* leadership**

Unlike the amorphous *unuma* (clan) which lacks any recognized leadership, a *susu* possesses a kind of heritable leadership governed by the principles of seniority and matrilineal succession. The use of the term hereditary in reference to *susu* leadership



can be misleading, however. Succession to leadership is by no means automatic, and sisters' sons do not invariably succeed mother's brothers. The elders of a *susu* will select by consensus and groom an aspiring leader on the basis of certain qualities. Most of the desirable qualifications can be achieved by conscientious individual effort to demonstrate such things as wealth in pigs and betel and sago palms, proven ability as a gardener, outstanding generosity as a host and as a nurturer of children. When a man consistently demonstrates such qualities the title of *to'esa'esa* (wealthy and respected man) is tacitly bestowed upon him.<sup>13</sup> There are many men in Basima with this status, more in fact than there are *susu* groups, so one cannot refer to them all as *susu* leaders as if they occupied a titled office. In contemporary Melanesian idiom, *to'esa'esa* can be glossed as 'big man'. *Alawata* is the corresponding term for 'big woman'. There is no general term for *susu* leader, and recognition of the headship of a *susu* and of the authority attached to it is largely confined to the *susu* concerned. An exception occurs, however, when the *susu* claims ownership of large gardening areas (*laotete*). Then the *susu* leader is referred to as *tolodebana* (see Chapter Eight).

It is necessary at this point to contradict Fortune's statements regarding 'chieftainship' in Basima. He wrote:

There is one chief-supreme in title, over thirty villages - a degree of titular authority utterly foreign to Dobu and to elsewhere in Fergusson. The chief in Basima is only a titular chief, however. He works his garden with his own hands and receives no tribute. But he is generally recognized in all villages, and wears more ornaments than is allowed to anyone else (1963:281).

I find these statements very puzzling, as nothing resembling a 'titular chief', whether supreme or not, is found in present-day Basima. My informants, moreover, were adamant that none ever existed. Presumably, Fortune's use of 'chief-supreme' refers to the titular leadership of the whole of Basima ('thirty villages' would be a plausible estimate of the number of hamlets in 1929); he therefore could not be referring to *susu* or clan leadership. However, there are not - and to the best of my knowledge never have been - any matrilineages in Basima which were 'noble' and ranked above the others such as to provide a 'chief-supreme', such as the Tabalu of the Trobriands. Indeed, nowhere in the matrilineal D'Entrecasteaux have such chiefs been found.

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<sup>13</sup> I use the conventional spelling of this term with glottal stops as it appears in the written Dobu language. It has the same meaning in both Dobu and Basima.

It is just possible that Fortune misconstrued the term *guyau*, which may be rendered 'chief' in Basima, as in the languages of the Trobriands, Tubetube, Panaeati and elsewhere. But to call someone a *guyau* in Basima is more of a respectful compliment than the recognition of a title of hereditary leadership. *Guyau* is often used to address men who are locally renowned for their wealth, gardening industry or *une* (Kula) trade, but it does not imply hereditary office or political authority for that matter. In its everyday usage *guyau* is synonymous with *to'esa'esa*. Even *susu* elders or hamlet headmen are not usually referred to as *guyau* or *to'esa'esa*, unless they possess the qualities associated with these terms. Conversely, the leadership of a *susu* is therefore not a necessary criterion for one to be recognized as *guyau* or *to'esa'esa*, although it might well be an advantage.

Fortune refers to the Basima chief as 'only titular' and visibly distinguished by the ornaments only he is allowed to wear. This kind of exclusiveness was not evident during my own fieldwork, although there were individuals who characteristically tuck leaves and flowers into their armlets or hair. A few of the *to'esa'esa* wore the traditional pandanus-sheath genital-covering which signified their status as respected and powerful elders. Again, there are certain *to'esa'esa* who possess the knowledge and skill to construct decorated yam huts called *sanala* (see Chapter Four). Fortune (1963:281) refers to them (though not by name) as resembling the yam houses of the Trobriands rather than those of Dobu, but in comparison with the *bwema* (or *liku*) of Boyowa the *sanala* of Basima are smaller, saddle-backed and less elaborately constructed. Nevertheless, a decorated *sanala* is the visible sign of a *to'esa'esa* or *guyau*. It indicates its owner's ability to build specially designed storage huts associated with the magic of abundance and 'anchoring'. They contrast with the ubiquitous *sabeyowa* yam huts built by the majority of Basima people.

Contradicting Fortune, my informants emphatically denied the previous existence of any chief (*guyau*) who may have had authority that transcended *susu* or hamlet boundaries. The closest approximation to this kind of leadership was a traditional war leader. One of the coastal *susu* belonging to Manawana clan alleged that, some four generations ago, they were led by an aggressive leader who controlled a two-kilometre stretch of the coast. This was the result of his acclaimed valour as a



warrior (*to'etogaga*) during battles with Bwaiowa raiders.<sup>14</sup> It was manifestly not an inherited position.

A further general point of clarification needs to be made with regard to Basima leadership. Hereditary leadership is ascriptive, whether or not it also implies the notion of rank. Bigmanship, on the contrary, implies achieved leadership. There is a tendency in the anthropological literature to treat ascriptive and achieved leadership as mutually exclusive (see for example, Sahlins 1963). Leadership of the Basima *susu* is ascriptive only in the sense that one has to be a member of the matrilineal group in question and of the senior generation. Birth order and age are therefore the only ascriptive aspects of *susu* leadership. But there are also the necessary individual attributes, as mentioned above, that qualify one for leadership. Gender is not necessarily an ascriptive aspect of leadership, for while men are typically preferred over women as *susu* leaders, women may assume leadership in the absence of a mature and suitably qualified man.

Not infrequently, a leader of a *susu* is chosen by a group of mature male members. In addition to their personal qualities, the candidates ought to be well-versed in the knowledge of the *susu's* land and its boundaries, in the history of acquisition and transfer of rights to land. They should also be married, of proven gardening skill, capable of organizing a *sagali* distribution, and show an openhanded generosity towards children (the last being a special mark of the *to'esa'esa*).<sup>15</sup>

The following case of succession to leadership within a *susu* illustrates some of the points made above. This particular *susu*, belonging to Etonouna clan, was headed in 1989 by an old man, Lison Tobweu, who was probably in his late sixties. Though a widower, he was well respected as the 'land manager' (*tolodebana*) of his *susu*: that is, for his knowledge of his group's history and his effective control of its land.<sup>16</sup> It was agreed, however, that Lison's sister's son (*oana*) would assume leadership when the time was right. In early 1988, however, the heir-apparent suffered an episode of mental illness which rendered

<sup>14</sup> Lithgow writes of the notorious Dobuan invasions of old: 'The present Dobuans tell me that their grandparents used to raid all the adjacent coasts of Fergusson and Normanby Islands' (1992:29). See also Bromilow (1929:125,143) for references to Dobuan raiding.

<sup>15</sup> Thune notes of Loboda concerning the admirable characteristics of a generous man that one of 'the higher forms of praise a man can receive is being complimented for looking after children...' (1980:86). Michael Young (personal communication) states that it is the mark of a true leader in Kalauna 'to be willing and able to feed widows and orphans'.

<sup>16</sup> I have borrowed the apt term 'land manager' from Weiner (1976). As custodian of his *susu's* general and specific land holdings, the leader allocates use rights to individuals both within and outside of the *susu* (see Chapter Eight for further discussion).



him invalid. As a result, the old man along with a number of capable young men of the *susu* met to decide on a substitute. There were two clear contenders, Dominic and Francis. Both were married and were sufficiently knowledgeable of the group's land boundaries, and both understood the duties and obligations incumbent upon any *susu* in the performance of exchange ceremonies for marriages, deaths and so forth. Both were also industrious gardeners. In short, both men were equally qualified to lead the *susu*, though Dominic was several years older than Francis.

However, certain historical factors had to be taken into consideration, as the currently-constituted *susu* is an amalgam of two older *susu* with different origins as immigrants. The two candidates belonged to what used to be the two distinct matrilineal groups: Dominic's originated in Molima and Francis' came from Wamea (or Domdom) in the Amphletts (see Map 3). Dominic's Molima *susu* had arrived in Basima first and it established a hamlet high in the hills. Warfare was prevalent at that time, subjecting the recent coastal settlements to the fear and insecurity of constant harassment. In an act of sympathy, Dominic's group offered a haven to Francis' Wamea *susu* which had initially settled where the present coastal hamlet of Dagimwaneia stands. Accepting the offer, Francis' group joined Dominic's in the hills in the hamlet of Pwaepwae. Gradually, by a process I shall describe in the following section, Francis' *susu* became merged with Dominic's *susu* and they have since lived together as if they both shared common ancestors. However, their separate origins have not been forgotten, and these historical facts of *susu* amalgamation would ordinarily tell against Francis when questions of precedence and seniority arise. He was, therefore, most likely to be considered the second choice of leader. Dominic, needless to say, was initially willing to agree to his better chance of succession, but he subsequently withdrew his candidature. The reason was that he was fully employed by the Department of Primary Industry, and as a government employee he was at the mercy of his department's decision as to where in the Province, year by year, he might be located.<sup>17</sup> This could mean long absences from Basima which would render him almost useless as a *susu* leader. This left Francis as the most likely candidate for the succession.

The case of Masawana, head of Watotaeta hamlet, was a more typical example of leadership succession in matrilineal Basima. Masawana had simply succeeded his own mother's brother. When Masawana himself retires or dies, the leadership should pass to Seba, the only son of the elder of Masawana's two sisters. Although Seba was only sixteen in 1990, it was nevertheless expected that Ricky (the eldest son of Seba's mother's younger sister) would eventually succeed to the leadership (see Figure 2.2).

In the latter example, we see that leadership succession followed the ideal, that is, from mother's brother to sister's son (*oana*), and it will perhaps eventually continue by a similarly straightforward adelphic succession. In the former example, there was an initial attempt to do the same thing. However, unfortunate circumstances

<sup>17</sup> As mentioned in my introductory chapter, during 1989-90 Dominic was stationed at Basima for the Provincial Small Islands Project covering the eastern part of Fergusson. In February 1990, he was reported to have been moved to the DPI station in Rabaraha, on the north coast of the mainland, for at least two years. More recently I heard that he had left the DPI to become a teacher at Hagita High School near Alotau.

prevented the preferred line of succession, doubly so in that mental illness and the constraints of government employment disqualified the two preferred candidates. This case is particularly interesting in that historical factors were taken into account in determining seniority. Even so, the matrilineal principle of succession was upheld.

### ***Siwalolo and susu amalgamation***

I have already alluded to a process of 'fusion' or 'amalgamation' of *susu* groups which sometimes occurs in Basima. Typically, it happens when a smaller, more vulnerable and usually more recent immigrant *susu* is 'adopted' and gradually assimilated by a larger, protective and better established *susu*. It is thus a process which occurs in historical time, as the incorporated *susu* does not immediately lose its original identity. Indeed, as we saw in the case of Dominic's preferred nomination for the leadership of his *susu*, the adopted segment of the *susu* retained its junior status. In this sense it had not yet become fully assimilated to its host matrilineage. Such internal distinctions based on precedence or seniority clearly persist, then, though they would not have any importance beyond the *susu* concerned. This presents a united front to the rest of the world.

The phenomenon of *susu* amalgamation has significance for a better understanding of the origin and demise of some Basima groups. Fusion has a two-pronged effect: the adoption of one *susu* by another simultaneously increases the size of the adopting *susu* (and logically the clan of the adopting *susu* if its clan was different to that of the adopted *susu*), while at the same time reducing the size of the other. Adoption and fusion of *susu* therefore affects the composition of *unuma*, and this might be one reason why some clans seem to be in decline while others are increasing in size (see Table 2.3).<sup>18</sup>

In what is a gradual process, there is a tendency for small *unuma* categories to be conceptually assimilated by larger *unuma* categories as adopted *susu* relinquish their

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<sup>18</sup> The phenomenon of clan adoption is perhaps not so uncommon in the D'Entrecasteaux. Hamlet sites in Dobu are closely connected with *manua* (i.e. bird-ancestor clans) and wherever 'adoption' at clan level occurs, it is preferable to be adopted by one's own clan, that is, people of the same bird totem (Kuehling, personal communication). Fortune noted that in what he called the 'locality' of Edugaura, Doilua was predominantly a White Pidgeon village (i.e. hamlet), but had 'an adopted Sulphur-crested White Cockatoo infusion' (1963:32). In another part of Fergusson Island, the contentious issue of land ownership of the Wapolu gold mine site between sub-clan leaders of the local Malekwa clan is, at least in part, centred around the question of 'adoption', relative seniority and precedence (Digim'Rina in Young 1987:86).



old totemic symbols and *unuma* name in favour of those of the *susu* with which they have become joined. In effect, adoptive *susu* change their totemic allegiance over time. This phenomenon of fusion might help us understand some of the peculiarities of Basima's clanship.

Before pursuing this matter, I need to introduce the concept of *siwalolo* as this is the means through which *susu* become amalgamated. *Siwalolo* has at least three meanings easily distinguished by their contexts of use. What might be called its primary meaning is the act of ceremonial washing (usually in the sea) to remove the pollution of death following a burial. The metaphorical or secondary meaning of *siwalolo* refers to a payment that is made to those who are soiled or polluted by contact with the corpse. Thus, in an institutional sense *siwalolo* refers to the mortuary payment for onerous burial services performed by one *susu* for another.<sup>19</sup> The services, grave-digging and corpse-carrying, are such that the 'owners of the dead person' (i.e. the *susu* for which the services are performed) incur a strict obligation to repay them. The payment, *siwalolo*, is in the form of a pig, yams and Kula valuables, and is conceived of as washing off or cleansing the dirt of burial. The workers who are contaminated by death through their services have the right to demand *siwalolo*: the repayment is their due. Indeed, to avoid the risk of humiliation through being unable to meet such demands, a prudent *susu* will usually carry and bury its own dead rather than allowing members of other *susu* to do so.

On analogy with *siwalolo* in the context of burial, the merging of one *susu* with another is also achieved by providing services. Typically a smaller *susu* gives unconditional assistance to a bigger and more established *susu*. Typically too, the smaller *susu* will have been dwelling for some time strategically close to the larger, previously established one. There may be close proximity of residence and some common use of land. The services which the smaller group typically performs include helping its host *susu* with mortuary obligations (*bwabwale*), its feasts for renown (*sagali*), its marriage exchanges (*poala*), and so forth. One can imagine such a supportive and economically symbiotic relationship developing over a period of time. The host *susu* and the more recent immigrant *susu* may well continue in this manner - one performing ceremonial and economic services for the other - for anything up to three generations. The arrangement might not have been articulated in

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<sup>19</sup> In Dobu, *esiwe* is 'washing' or 'bathing', while *siwalolo* is 'to wet' a plant or object. (Kuehling, personal communication).



so many words, so there might not have been any verbal negotiation; instead, the two parties allow the material exchanges gradually to pave the way for amalgamation. Sooner or later, however, the larger and more established *susu* will probably decide to incorporate formally the more recently arrived *susu*, though there will be no question at this early stage of incorporating it into its totemic clan as well.

To accomplish fusion a formal *siwalolo* feast has to be arranged. As it was explained to me (since I had no opportunity to witness one), the leader of the adopting *susu* makes a public announcement concerning the forthcoming fusion. This formal announcement is referred to as *utuloi*; its etymology is not known to me. This pronouncement is understood to mean that the smaller *susu* will eventually submerge its identity into that of the adopting *susu*.

The *siwalolo* feast is one of yams, pigs and betel-nuts. The leader of the adopting *susu* may firmly allocate areas of land to the new members there and then. Usually, however, such deliberations are deferred until later. What is more important is for other *susu* in the district to recognize officially the merging of the two *susu*.

Of the two historical types of *susu*, autochthonous and immigrant, *tutupawa* and *wagawaga*, the latter are understandably far more likely to become fused with other *wagawaga susu* than are the original *tutupawa* groups. Each recently-arrived immigrant group obviously faces a great deal of uncertainty as to where it should settle, with whom it should live alongside, and from whom it should learn about local land boundaries. On the other hand, one might imagine that in the past large immigrant *susu* adopted smaller, dwindling autochthonous groups. This might occur when the numerical superiority of an immigrant group threatens the original authority of an autochthonous group over its residential and garden land. Such a circumstance, although still tacit, seems to be occurring in Tapwana, a large hill hamlet consisting of three immigrant *susu* (two from Bosalewa and one from Sanaroa), all belonging to Manawana clan. The first *susu* to arrive is currently the smallest, and the last to arrive is the largest and growing rapidly. *Sususaila* means 'susu expansion or growth', but it refers also to the gradual usurping of authority and control over land that occurs when one *susu* in a large hamlet grows at the expense of other occupants of the hamlet. *Sususaila*, then, implies a threat on behalf of the burgeoning *susu*, and this is currently occurring in Tapwana to the dismay of the smallest *susu* from Bosalewa which is finding its autonomy undermined with regard to land matters, despite its historical claim to be the first *susu* to arrive.

Amalgamation or incorporation clearly operates more conspicuously at the *susu* level than at the clan level. After all, there is a public feast to demonstrate its accomplishment. Fusion at the clan or *unuma* level occurs tacitly and without announcement; moreover, the result may not be definitive. I shall now give an example of a *siwalolo*-sponsored fusion which unambiguously occurred at the *susu* level followed by a more ambiguous fusion at the *unuma* level.

The *susu* to which Titus Abedi belongs was originally of Yoana clan. As previously mentioned, before settling in Basima, this *susu* dwelt at Itua behind the mountains of Oya Tabu and Oya Nai, though its place of origin was Bosalewa, and before that Kwatota, Vakuta and Kitava (see above). When they descended to the hamlet of Lauoya they found it was predominantly occupied by a *susu* of the Mwadiawa clan. Subsequently, the *susu* from Itua provided supportive services for the original Mwadiawa *susu* which eventually won them acceptance and they were formally incorporated into the Mwadiawa *susu* of Lauoya through a *siwalolo* feast. Despite this, Titus Abedi claims that his *susu* is still entitled to identify itself as either Yoana or Mwadiawa so far as *unuma* affiliation is concerned. This became obvious when I discovered that a man of the same *susu* still claimed identification with Yoana, the original clan, whereas his very own brother claimed to belong to Mwadiawa. Thus, although they both unquestionably belong to the same *susu* (now merged with their larger host) they appear to have made their own choices as to which of the two clans to belong to. In the light of this and other inconsistencies of clan membership, it would appear that there is a degree of individual option.

Masawana of Watotaeta hamlet (cited earlier) appears to present another example of individual option, though *siwalolo*-sanctioned fusion cannot be blamed for the discrepancy in his case. As I have already noted, he is adamant that he belongs to Etonouna clan while all other members of his *susu* identify with Yoana. Such discrepancies seem only to be acceptable at clan level, and only insofar as they do not affect one's unambiguous *susu* affiliation.

In its overall effect, the mechanism of *siwalolo* provides further avenues of choice in that the social horizons of both parties to the amalgamation are extended. Notionally, an individual's rights and privileges concerning residence and land use (and even choice of marriage partner) are expanded. While it is conceivable that the practice of *siwalolo*-sponsored fusion creates some flexibility within the otherwise ascriptive rigidity of clan affiliation, there are clearly other gains and losses from the point of view of the *susu* that is being assimilated. The benefits for the adopting *susu* include the guarantee of support for its ceremonial activities and hence a more powerful political presence in Basima. But the ultimate benefits to the smaller *susu* of merging with a larger unit (protection and security of access to land) must be balanced against the surrender of autonomy and the possible - and even likely - eventual loss of identity. Insofar as incorporation gradually erases the identity of the demographically-vulnerable *susu* it is perhaps understandable that some of its



members might claim the right to retain their original clan membership, if only as a token protest of their residual difference. But not all is lost when one *susu* contracts to merge its identity with another. For as long as the act of incorporation is acknowledged (that is, for as long as the *siwalolo* feast is remembered), previous links to groups outside Basima, previous affinal obligations, and not least the personal names owned by the adopted *susu* can all be retained. One might then suppose that some degree of separate identity is also retained.

### **The Dynamics of Basima Social Organization**

In this chapter I have described Basima clan formation and found it to be a local variation of a Massim-wide system of clanship which classifies people according to totemic affiliation. I have called Basima clans (*unuma*) social categories rather than groups, since they are in practice non-exogamous, have no estates, and 'own' no property other than names and bird or animal emblems which confer a nebulous identity on human members of the clan. As elsewhere in the matrilineal Massim, the institution of totemic clanship can be seen as a largely ideological means of expanding the ubiquitous matrilineal system of social identification to embrace every single person in the region (see Young 1992:8). In the past, in Basima as elsewhere, common clanship was doubtless important in allowing ties of fictive kinship to mitigate potentially hostile relations with strangers. Thus, members of the same totemic clan category could extend protection and hospitality to one another. With this putative function undermined by pacification at the end of the last century, clanship is arguably of lesser importance today. It survives, however, and must still be deemed to have a role in regulating social relationships within the local community and beyond. I have shown how totemic clan membership is no longer (if it ever was) immutable, and that in some circumstances there is a degree of optation or choice regarding affiliation. Broadly speaking, this phenomenon contributes to the flexibility of Basima social organization which is also evident at the *susu* or matrilineage level.

In this chapter I have also introduced the Basima *susu*. The description is incomplete for one cannot fully understand the *susu* without considering additional parameters given by residence or propinquity, marriage and affinal relations, inter-*susu* exchanges occasioned by marriage and death, and not least, land tenure. All of these social institutions help define the *susu*, which does not live by matriliney alone. The



remaining chapters of this thesis will, each in its own way, add to the discursive definition of the *susu* and help flesh out the skeleton I have given above.

On a comparative note, it is time to invoke others' characterizations of the *susu*. Fortune's for Dobu (strictly speaking Tewara) has been criticized by Carl Thune for being too rigid and idealized. I would concur with his general comments:

What was missing more than anything else from Fortune's account was a sense and concern for the considerable variation found within the southeastern d'Entrecasteaux area, temporally and geographically, from hamlet-cluster to hamlet-cluster and even from hamlet to hamlet. The picture he presents is, in many respects, an ideal. It is, indeed, exactly the picture which emerges from asking the southeastern d'Entrecasteaux people what should be done rather than what is actually done (1980:47-48).

With only six months' field experience of the area, Fortune (despite his phenomenal command of the language) was scarcely able to observe all the variations of behaviour and complexities of a social system in action (we should recall, too, that the population among whom he worked numbered fewer than fifty individuals). He was not able, in short, to observe and account for many 'exceptions' to the normative rules his informants told him. Understandably, then, Fortune tended to reduce almost everything he witnessed to 'the social pattern', with the resulting idealization and broad generalization that Thune criticizes. Much later, when he came to revise his book for a second edition, Fortune appears to have had second thoughts, and in his 'additional notes and appendices' he is more generous in allowing personal idiosyncrasy and 'human nature' a part in the explanation of certain aberrant or deviant 'patterns' (see for example his new Preface). He tried, in other words, to readjust the 'ideal picture' along the lines he had alluded to in his first edition:

Human nature, always wider in its potentialities than the limited expression it can secure in a social code, breaks through the code; on the whole, however, the code holds strong (Fortune 1932; 1963:92).

We cannot be more succinct than this. However, one must accept these so-called peculiarities of human nature as part and parcel of the system or 'social code'.

I suspect that Thune himself is also inclined to 'idealize' his picture of Loboda *susu* on the basis of his analysis of northeast Normanby Island *tetela* and other narratives:

Where, as in Northeast Normanby Island, matrilineages are small and localized and where no compromise with the starkly defined principles of matriliney is allowed, hence where no alternative crosscutting principle of social organization exists, centrifugal [*sic*] forces run rampant, political organization

beyond the matrilineage is impossible, and a tendency for society to fragment into the smallest possible units is inevitable (Thune 1980:47).

While there are certainly large elements of truth in this statement, I would dispute that this claustrophobic and overdrawn picture might apply to Basima matrilineages. They are, it seems to me, far more open and flexible, less inward-looking and 'uncompromising' in their adherence to matriliney. This is so if only because of their diverse origins as immigrants, and the consequent need for mutual adjustment (of which *siwalolo*-fusion is the most conspicuous expression). Moreover, there is an 'alternative crosscutting principle of social organization' in the way the residence pattern works (see Chapter Three). But it is Thune's more general depiction of Loboda as a society without history, endlessly repeating the same patterns because it is unable to break free of the 'centrifugal' force of matriliney, that I find quite inapplicable to Basima.

Thune also writes of 'the real tragedy which Northeast Normanby people see in attempting to live a life in such an uncompromisingly matrilineal universe' (1980:13-14). I sensed no such 'tragedy' in Basima perceptions of their world; again, perhaps this is because neither they nor I saw their matriliney as 'uncompromising'. We shared a common 'matrilineal' perception of the world, if such exists, because I too was brought up within a system that anthropologists (e.g. Richards 1960:246-248; Fox 1967:104-107) have described as having 'a problem' or a 'matrilineal puzzle'. I cannot engage this issue here, but 'uncompromising' matriliney certainly overstates the case for Basima as it does for the Trobriands.

Models of central Massim social organization such as Fortune's and Thune's are too static. They both appear to deny historical change, and Thune's argument concerning the matrilineal encompassment of the individual seems to deny that any change is possible from within. With regard to Basima, I would argue that indigenous forces for change are possible. Discrepancies in role behaviour and exceptions to normative rules need to be examined (and not tidied away) so that a more complex model can be constructed to account for the dynamics of Basima social organization. Such a model must take into account, for instance, the immigrant origin of so many Basima groups and hence their historical interaction with other *susu* groups, not to mention exogenous influences from beyond the region. Essentially, it is an historical, diachronic or dynamic model that is called for. The ahistorical, synchronic or static model that Reo Fortune devised for Dobu is inappropriate for Basima - and probably for contemporary Dobu as well.

Variations and idiosyncrasies in belief and behaviour such as I have described provide flexibility and therefore the adaptability of a people coming to terms with their ever-changing social environment. I therefore regard Basima as a healthy society in being able to accommodate change through flexibility of structure. The social code on the whole may 'hold strong' despite behaviour that would seem to subvert or deny it. Perhaps they merely punctuate it, however, and to ignore or deny the extent of variation from the norm is tantamount to portraying an ideal artifact without life or dynamism.



## CHAPTER THREE

### SETTLEMENT, MARRIAGE AND RESIDENCE

#### Introduction

Settlement, marriage and residence, the subjects of this chapter, are interlinked in an empirically observable way. What I understand as settlement in this context is the arrangement of Basima hamlets 'on the ground', including their location, spacing and general social composition. I do not have a great deal to say about settlement as such, for the historical factors which created this pattern in Basima are largely unknown and beyond recall. That is to say, the present settlement pattern is a consequence of an accumulation of factors, some of which are the result of human choice and intention, others quite fortuitous or accidental. We cannot hope to know all of the factors which produce a particular observable pattern, as for instance, the specific location of a Basima hamlet in relation to its physical and social environment. I have assumed however that choice is a component of flexibility, and that variation is also patterned. As Edmund Leach put it:

The divergences of individual behaviour from any standard norm are not then the result of moral error or of unenlightened self-interest, but arise simply because different individuals, quite legitimately, fill in the details of the ideal schema in different ways (1971:299)

The importance of marriage in a society like Basima cannot be stressed too strongly. Together with the matrilineal descent group, marriage is literally what creates Basima society. Descent and marriage are mutually dependent, of course, as the global anthropological literature has taken great pains to elucidate during the past fifty years. In Basima (as in Dobu and Duau) the *susu* is created and maintained by marriage, and *susu* members spend much time and effort cultivating affinal relationships and meeting the obligations they create. Given the enormous importance of marriage, then, I might have approached it from a number of different perspectives. The one I have chosen is simply that of its empirical relationship to settlement.

Typically, all but the largest hamlets are owned by a single *susu* and shared with in-marriage spouses and children of the marriages, a situation common to the eastern and southern D'Entrecasteaux. So settlement in Basima - the arrangement of people

on the ground - has to be seen in terms of the *susu* groups' residence ideal (and practice which differs somewhat from this ideal); this in turn is influenced by marriage, and affinal considerations. I therefore discuss the processes of courtship that lead to marriage and the social patterns of marriage. This then logically leads to a discussion of post-marital residence and an attempt to typify it. After a brief consideration of adultery and divorce, I turn finally to a critical discussion of Fortune's conflictual model of Dobu society, assessing it in the light of Basima ethnography.

### **Settlement pattern**

As we have already noted in Chapter One, the numerous hamlets (approximately sixty) of Basima are scattered along the coast and foothills of the two traditional districts of Lauoya and Basima (Map 2). Since the introduction of local government by the colonial Australian administration, Basima and Lauoya together form Basima council ward. Its immediate neighbours to the north are the wards of Ulua and Gameta, while the ward of Duduna is to the south. The distinction between the two districts of Lauoya and Basima is a conventional one based, so it is said, on the fact that in the pre-contact past they were traditional allies who fought against neighbouring districts such as Ulua and Gameta.

The districts in this area resemble what Thune called 'hamlet-clusters' in northeast Normanby Island (1980:6-8), though they are not differentiated by dialect. Writing of the late seventies, Thune notes that: 'Inter-hamlet cluster and inter-village ties have become more frequent, intensive, and important' (*ibid.*). In the Basima area this may in part be attributed to a division of labour based on district (or ward) communities in order to tackle modernizing projects. Working parties are now convened on a district-wide basis that transcends the *susu*, the hamlet and the immediate neighbourhood. For example, in 1989 the regional school inspector based at Esa'ala ordered people to build four classrooms within a period of two weeks. This was after the headmaster had threatened to close the school if people did not demonstrate their commitment to it by constructing classrooms. To expedite the work, the respective village councillors assigned the task of building one classroom to each of the four districts: Lauoya, Basima, Ulua and Duduna. Two weeks later all four classrooms were ready.

Thune has suggested that some Northeast Normanby Island *susu* exploit ecological differences by having 'branch hamlets located in different zones such as when one



hamlet is located in a coastal hamlet-cluster and another in a mountain hamlet-cluster' (1980:137). This allows considerable flexibility in choice of residence. As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, Basima *susu* are all 'small' and very localized by Normanby standards, and do not have 'branches' in other hamlets (though one might presume that they have 'rumps' in their places of origin). What Thune describes, however, may well apply for a time to unmarried youths and girls of Basima, who are constantly changing residence, often to exploit what one might call the sexual (rather than economic) environment of different locations. They often switch between their mothers' and fathers' places, in each of which they are likely to have relatives to make them welcome. But married couples tend to maintain more permanent residence.

### **Hamlet and household**

Hamlets in Basima are typically small, often roughly circular in physical layout though a few form a rough rectangle. A hamlet may comprise a single household (e.g. Etupwa hamlet) or as many as ten (e.g. Wegiliu hamlet) . The average is three households. There is no special term for the group formed by the household, though people may refer to it using the same word for house, *wanua*. An even more general, all-purpose word is *welai*, which depending on context can mean home, hamlet, village, place, or even district and country. One's natal or 'mother' hamlet is called *natala*. The Dobuan term *asa* is also commonly used. Each household has at least one yam hut (*sabeyowa*) located either at the rear of the house or in the previous season's yam garden.

In the majority of cases, members of a household live together under one roof, though it is not unusual to find one or two members living in a smaller, separate hut. They remain members of the household by virtue of sharing work tasks, garden produce and meals with other members. Such huts are commonly occupied by single young men or aged widows or widowers (cf. Thune 1980:163). There is no special term for the nuclear family (of husband, wife and their young children) which generally forms the core of each household. Frequently, however, a household will also include other relatives: an unmarried sibling, perhaps; a widowed parent of one of the spouses; a foster-child or two, and the odd short-term visitor. For example, my neighbour Masawana's household comprised his own family of his wife and children, his wife's unmarried sister, and his mother's brother's daughter's son (his *tubuna*).



The household in Basima is an economic unit which shares food and the work needed to produce it.

Ideally, and most often in practice, the hamlet is owned by a single *susu*, though members of other *susu* usually live in it too. The latter are predominantly the in-marrying affines, *waiwai*, whom Fortune referred to in Dobu as 'Those-resulting-from-marriage'. The largest hamlets, such as Wegiliu and Tapwana, are owned by more than one *susu* (see Table 3.1). It is necessary to distinguish, however, between *susu* ownership and *susu* presence, for not all the *susu* found living in a hamlet are owners. Although the word 'represent' is rather too formal, it might be said that in addition to the owning *susu*, one or more other *susu* are represented in a hamlet, though the representation may imply nothing more than that a person (together with his or her spouse) joins the owning *susu* for a time. Examples will be given below in the section on residence.

Table 3.1 Hamlet Ownership by *Susu*

Number of Hamlets	Number of <i>Susu</i> as Hamlet Owners
49	1
6	2
1	3
1	4
2	0
59	-

Hamlets are settled and eventually abandoned for a variety of reasons. Individuals may establish new hamlets according to their own wishes so long as they do so on their own land. Of course, approval from one's own *susu* leader or elder is generally required, and no hamlet is ever founded in a social vacuum or simply according to whim. Hamlets expand and contract with the developmental cycles of households and the *susu*; such temporal processes change the social composition and perhaps the physical configuration of hamlets as well. In the most dramatic instance, when someone of importance dies his or her relatives may abandon the hamlet altogether. As we shall see in Chapter Five, the death of a father obliges any of his children who were residing with him to vacate his hamlet.

### *Ubuta and dawa*

A long-established Basima hamlet is typically surrounded by large fruit trees: chestnut, breadfruit, mango, coconut and betel palms. Close nearby there is usually a source of fresh water in the form of a small stream or creek. But the most significant historical and cultural features of a Basima settlement are man-made ones. They are the constructions of heaps of flattened slabs and smooth round river stones located near the centre of the hamlet or, more commonly, by the doorsteps of dwelling houses. These stone platforms are called *ubuta* and are a local variant of the stone sitting circles to be found throughout the central and southern Massim (see Seligman 1910:465-466, plates lvii & lviii; Young 1971:22-24; Thune 1980:156-158).<sup>1</sup> In a hamlet containing more than one *susu* there are also linear rows of stones called *dawa* which demarcate the residential boundaries of the constituent *susu*.

*Ubuta* stone circles mark the original spots on which the owning *susu*'s first houses were built. They are thus significant historical monuments, testimony to a *susu*'s identity and its original claim to settlement within the hamlet. An *ubuta* is a physically substantial legacy of its owning *susu*'s association with the site and concrete evidence of its right of occupation. In addition to their 'documentary' significance, as it were, *ubuta* were also traditional symbols of abundance. They were respected as 'anchors' of abundance (*auna*) and guarantees of prosperity for the hamlet and its owning *susu*. It is said that magic (*niboana*) was frequently placed underneath the *ubuta* stones and *dawa* 'walls', further enhancing the respect with which they were regarded. This magic is expressly intended to counteract malicious 'foreign' magic by which other people might seek to attract the hamlet's yams. As in Dobu, Goodenough and Sabarl Islands, yams are believed by Basima people to be sentient and mobile, and to be susceptible to the influence of crafty magicians from other Basima hamlets and neighbouring districts (cf. Fortune 1963:83; Young 1971:101). It is also claimed that wallaby magic (*nabweta*) was made with the help of some of the round stones of the *ubuta* and *dawa*. *Nabweta* magic was purportedly designed to attract wallabies to the yam gardens of one's rivals or enemies, where they literally 'eat up' (*si-sanaoi*) the tubers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thune describes them as 'low stone platforms' (*bolu*). He outlines similar prohibitions with respect to *bolu* as are found in Basima (see 1980:157-158, fn. 96).

<sup>2</sup> From personal experience in the Trobriands, wallabies can destroy yam gardens by uprooting and scattering the tubers and occasionally nibbling them (especially *Dioscorea alata*).



Traditionally, I was told, *ubuta* were highly respected. Neither women nor children were permitted to sit on them or crack coconuts on their stones. Nor should women leave their possessions, such as baskets of food, on them. Only hamlet elders and men of importance (to'esa'esa) were supposed to sit on the *ubuta*. If these observances were disregarded, it is said that famine (*botana*) would befall the hamlet.

Times have changed, however, insofar as reverence for these monuments is concerned. It is not uncommon for a householder to build his house over his own *ubuta*; it then becomes a convenient fireplace for cooking. (In 1989 Masawana's new house was built over one of his two *ubuta* in Watotaeta hamlet, and his previous house had been built over the other.) There is, one might imagine, some disrespect in making such mundane use of an *ubuta* as cooking food on it. Likewise, I have often seen visitors to a house being received on the stone circles, especially those *ubuta* which are immediately beneath the front porch of the house. Both men and women leave their baskets of food and other possessions on them while they sit and talk. There does not seem to be any lingering reverence accorded to the *ubuta*, except perhaps for those of renown garden magicians. I suspect that the decreasing respect shown them today is in large part due to the decreasing number of garden magicians. People also say that Christian teachings have had some influence in reducing respect for *ubuta*.

### **Courtship and trial marriages**

Marriage in Basima usually involves two individuals from different local *susu* whose union obliges their respective groups to exchange food and wealth. Marriage initiates a string of exchanges which continue until death and even beyond. Principally, the exchanges are between *susu*, though this does not preclude (as it did in Dobu) non-*susu* members from participating. Such events as marriage, death and feasts of personal renown, *sagali*, consume huge amounts of energy and resources, so the participation of others is desirable and is justified by affinal relationship, hamlet co-residence, or simply by being 'friends' and neighbours.

The common practice in courtship throughout the central and southern Massim is for single young men to visit their lovers by climbing into their rooms at night (e.g. Seligman 1910:502; Fortune 1963:10). Hence, girls remain in their parents' houses



awaiting suitors who move around at night wooing or 'prowling' (as it is nowadays called in English). Ideally, if every suitor has a sister of courting age, the absence of brothers from their parents' houses provides the opportunity for other boys to visit each other's sisters. This ideal arrangement minimizes embarrassment and hostility between the boys concerning their sisters. Unlike the Trobrianders among whom the brother-sister taboo is observed very strictly, Basima people do not necessarily avoid knowledge of their sister's amorous affairs. Brothers may even assist a sister's suitor by putting in a good word for him. They are also disapproved of between close patrilateral kin, such as with one's father's sisters or father's sister's daughters.

As in Dobu, it is said to be good for young boys and girls to have many lovers while they are in their adolescence. Despite this, my observations in Basima suggested that most soon paired off and kept the same lovers for long periods. It is also said that marriage nowadays occurs somewhat more easily than before. While an interest in marriage is initially expressed by the lovers concerned, their parents' approval and that of their mothers' brothers is almost essential and usually awaited.

Prospective in-laws on both sides, especially both sets of parents, are respected by the couple. This respect is commonly expressed through avoidance. This avoidance of potential in-laws is fairly subtle; neither strictly observed nor overtly breached. Thus when a boy departs his lover's house, he ensures that he leaves early - before daybreak - lest the girl's mother or father sits in the doorway and blocks his exit (cf. Fortune 1963:22). Any confrontation with the girl's parents while departing her house means that marriage must ensue. Even after the marriage ceremonies that are purported to have brought them closer, there remains a social barrier between affines. The protocol of such an intricate relationship between a young husband and his in-laws is similar to that of neighbouring Goodenough: 'His relationships with affines are unequal ones and although they may develop warmth and friendliness too, they are never entirely free from elements of shame and embarrassment' (Young 1971:43).

If the lovers have privately expressed interest in marriage it is then up to their respective parents to consult one another. Ideally, it is the boy's relatives who make the initial move although the bride's kin can also take the initiative. A bunch of yellow betelnuts and either a portion of pork, a brightly-coloured imported leaf skirt (*malabwaga*), a large fish or even a possum is presented to the immediate kin of the bride. This is called *anaegigi*: 'to bind the relationship'. The intended message is

clear to the recipients and the proposition is discussed as soon as possible. If the gift of betelnuts is accepted and chewed and a similar gift is returned immediately, it means that the proposition has been accepted and the next formal step towards marriage is to follow soon. If, however, the betelnuts were not chewed and the bunch is returned intact, the marriage proposition has been rejected.

The first and preliminary marriage ceremony takes place about three days after the couple's union as wife and husband. Although they can be referred to as being 'married' after this (*ta si nai*, 'already they married'), it is not regarded as fully complete until a major exchange (*poala*) has taken place. This exchange occurs up to a year or so later, and it confers full social recognition on the marriage.

Marriage in Basima, as in Dobu, is an institution that creates inter-group exchanges. Fortune stated that 'Marriage is merely economic exchanges between groom's kin and bride's kin' (1963:26). But it is more than that of course, and people do not marry simply so that their respective *susu* can exchange goods. What is indeed true, however, is that people see exchange as a social obligation which they must perform and fulfil as part of a social process; that is, the major events of their own lives demand it. In meeting such obligations they also stand to gain local renown. Marriage, like death, is thus an opportunity to enhance the status of one's group.

The 'engagement' period (*elawelawe*) in Basima is similar to what Fortune (*ibid.*) refers to as 'betrothal' in Dobu; it is also similar to the 'trial marriage' of young Kalauna couples (Young 1971:51). *Elawelawe* in Basima refers to the period preceding the formal exchanges. It extends from six to eighteen months, during which time the couple live apart from each other until the formal exchanges have been completed. Thereafter they are allowed to live together in either of their parents' homes. Nowadays, however, the couple are permitted to live together prior to the formal exchanges if they have been married in a Christian ceremony. (In 1989, for example, Robert and Clare were living in the latter's father's house prior to the formal marriage exchanges because they had already been married in the church.) Even so, the major marriage exchanges must still be made as their social and economic value greatly exceeds that of other matrimonial rites such as modern church marriage or the preliminary gifts of betelnuts, fish and possums (*anaegigi*).

It is said that the *elawelawe* period is a time of assessment of the worth of incoming in-laws. They are literally on trial. The two *susu* concerned as well as the respective domestic groups of both the bride and groom have an interest in the character and



capabilities of their prospective new affine. Thus, if the bride's kin judge the groom's performance to be unsatisfactory they may delay the formal exchanges and even call off the marriage altogether. Conversely, the bride's performance is also carefully monitored by her in-laws, and if she is suspected of 'laziness' they may hesitate to approve the final exchange. However, most 'trial marriages' are seen through to their completion with the formal *poala* exchange eventually taking place. There are a few young husbands who are employed away from Basima and whose wives await them. Such husbands return at least once a year to visit their families. A few 'trial marriages' do not survive such circumstances and they are called off.

Traditionally, the groom would have had a 'father' (*tama-*) nominated from among the bride's kin to ensure that he provides unflagging service in his in-laws' gardens and goes without food for most of the day. This 'father' is supposed to report back to the rest of the bride's kin concerning the performance of the groom. It is on the basis of such assessments that they will decide the urgency and strength of their commitment to the forthcoming marriage exchange. As described by Fortune (1963:25), the groom works strenuously in the gardens of his in-laws without food and water while his parents-in-law relax and 'guffaw' in the shade of large garden trees. The same is said of Basima bride-service, too, but it is also said that the bride or the groom's own sisters take pity on him and come to his rescue by hiding food in nearby bushes and then sneaking up to tell him. On the excuse of going to the bush to urinate, he will help himself to the hidden food and water. The in-laws contribute very little to the garden work and it is fear of such arduous demands on the groom that, it is proudly claimed, discourages men from neighbouring villages such as Ulua, Gameta and Galea from marrying Basima women. But Basima men too dread this initial period of intensive hard work exacted by their parents-in-law. Joas, an informant of mine, recalled his ordeal when he was made to carry single-handedly a large pig (about fifty kilograms) down the hill for his affines. He did it during the *elawelawe* stage of his marriage as part of the test of his worth. It should be noted that nowadays, while the principle of brideservice is retained, its more arduous ordeals have been curtailed, and there is little more than a general obligation to provide assistance imposed upon the groom. Even so, young married men continue to take upon themselves physically demanding work for their affines, like helping to build huts, making gardens, hunting together for pigs and so forth (cf. Young 1971:52-53).



Returning to *elawelawe* procedure, the groom is expected to kill a possum or cuscus or, alternatively, to catch and cook a large fish. The bride will then place it in a basket and together with the groom take it to her kin while it is still hot. It is important that the dish remains warm for this has a symbolic significance. The temperature of the food represents the desired 'temperature' of his relationship with his in-laws. Before this ceremony he had maintained a very cool or 'cold' relationship with them, expressed by avoidance and acute embarrassment. Now it is time to warm it up. Thus, the hot dish symbolically rids both parties of embarrassment and cold restraint. This does not mean, however, that all expressions of respect and all traces of embarrassment towards the bride's parents are to be done away with, nor should it be assumed that an overt joking relationship takes its stead. (It is indeed very rare in Basima to see in-laws establish any formal kind of 'joking relationship' as it is understood in the anthropological literature). The presentation of hot food is referred to as *bwaladi ana gietoitoi* ('their bodies for warming'): that is, to warm up the relationship between the son-in-law and his wife's *susu*.

Soon after the receipt of this gift from the groom, the bride's kin acknowledge it with a bunch of yellow betelnuts or a stick of black twist tobacco. These suffice as tokens of appreciation of the groom's gift. They indicate that the major *poala* exchange can take place in the near future. Like the groom's 'warming' gift, the bride's kin's return gift will comprise a few possums or a large fish. This return prestation is also carried by the bride who, together with her husband, present it to the groom's kin. This too is said to 'warm up' her relationship with them and it concludes the preliminary marriage exchange between the two groups. The principal recipients of the prestations on each side are both sets of parents and the mothers' brothers of the bride and groom. They in turn share the gifts with adult members of their respective *susu*. Affines of both *susu* are often included in the redistribution. These gifts in effect secure assistance from their recipients for the forthcoming major marriage exchange.

In contrast to the marriage exchanges of Dobu (Fortune 1963:26), which exclusively concern the contracting *susu* and expressly deny any involvement of affines ('Those-resulting-from-marriage'), those of Basima actively involve the affines of both *susu* together with close clansmen and neighbours. As far as the non-*susu* members are concerned, such exchanges are opportunities to return favours and meet economic obligations owing to the principal *susu*. The willingness of several parties to assist makes Basima marriage exchanges communal, multiple-*susu* affairs, so much so that it is difficult for an observer to work out the configuration of groups involved. The

atmosphere of Basima exchanges also contrasts with that described by Fortune for the *susu*-exclusive marriage exchanges of Dobu. In Basima the in-marrying individuals of a *susu* are not supposed to leave the hamlet (as they are in Dobu), but are instead expected to assist with many of the necessary tasks, such as grating coconuts, chopping firewood, cooking pots of yams, singeing and butchering pigs, etc. While *susu* members may try to undertake many of these tasks themselves it is laudable for the *susu*'s affines to be fully involved. It nevertheless remains the *susu* elders' task to preside over the distribution of the wealth and food.

Before describing the climax of Basima marriage exchanges, I shall first present an actual case of marriage involving courtship and other initial procedures. What has been described above is based on information elicited from informants. It doubtless idealizes the reality. The case that follows should therefore enable us to see what is actually done in Basima in the historical, ethnographic present of 1989.

I first heard about Francis' (or Mokaikewa's) courtship of his present wife in August 1989, about six weeks before their marriage. It was following one of the fortnightly string-band parties at the Gobayawe United Church mission that his nightly trips to Nawasi, his lover's hamlet, ended. On October 4, at about four in the morning and drenched with rain, Francis left the party with his girl-friend for the latter's home. Most people already knew about the couple meeting frequently since Francis' divorce from his first wife about four months previously. The rest of us returned home to sleep at about five in the morning.

At nine o'clock Francis was knocking on the wall of my hut. He had come to inform his father that he had been confronted by the adopted grandfather of his lover while attempting to leave her house. Marriage procedures were to ensue. Francis's father, who was temporarily living apart from his wife due to marital problems, was then sharing my house with his brother and myself. As a close friend, Francis decided to inform me of what had happened. Grinning from ear to ear, Francis raised both hands and made a cross sign with two of his fingers pointing towards his chest. Realizing my failure to understand, he simply uttered as he pointed to the woman behind him: '*Siagu, yo ko ta yanai.*' ('My brother, I have married'.) I recognised the blushing woman as Neiawa.

Soon afterwards I learnt the rest of the story from him and his father's brother. After spending about an hour with his girl-friend, Francis had decided to leave. Day was dawning and Tomainua (mother's father's brother and foster parent of the young woman) was already seated on the steps of his hut. When Francis tried to descend the steps he came face to face with Tomainua. That was it: Francis would have to marry the woman. He therefore remained in the house until full daybreak when the entire community learned that he was now married to Neiawa. Soon after sunrise, Francis and Neiawa proceeded to the hamlet of Francis' mother with a large fish carried by the bride. This was the first initiative of a preliminary marriage exchange. The fish had apparently been caught by the son of the bride's foster-father earlier that morning. On receiving the fish from Neiawa and her son, the mother immediately understood what had happened. From there, the couple came to Watotaeta to wake us up and inform Francis'



father of the event. Francis' younger brother was quickly sent to catch a fish to repay the one received by their mother.

After Watotaeta, the couple moved on to the hamlet of Wayo to inform Neiwawa's 'brother' and other matrikin of the bride. This was to alert them as to their responsibilities in the ensuing marriage exchanges. Later in the day the couple returned to Francis' mother's hamlet at Dagimwaneia to collect the large fish caught by his young brother. The bride carried it to her foster-parent's hamlet where she presented it directly to her foster-grandmother. That was the end of the day's events. The return gift of fish sealed the initial contracts of marriage.

Both parties must now prepare for the major marriage exchange to come. The groom, as in Dobu, will be helping his own *susu* as well his affines to make gardens. The same may be said of the bride. In fact, soon after this brief initial marriage ceremony, the bride was working with her mother-in-law, accompanying her frequently to the gardens and elsewhere. In the meantime, the couple were living apart in their own hamlets. It is said that until the major exchanges of food have been made and their hut built by the groom, they should continue to live apart.

Comparing the above example with ideal procedure, we see that the initial prestations of gifts (*anaegigi*) made to seek the approval of both sets of parents and mothers' brothers did not take place. Instead (though in customary fashion), the foster-grandfather simply confronted the groom as he was about to leave the bride's house in the morning, thereby initiating the first phase of marriage. On the very same day, the initial reciprocal exchange of gifts of fish to formalize the engagement took place; at the same time the respective kin were informed of the couple's sudden marriage. It was already common knowledge in the community (not least of the parents and matrikin) that the couple were courting. Francis' father's brother had casually mentioned to me the young woman, whose diligence in gardening he praised. In fact he urged his brother (Francis's father) to ensure that they did get married. Other than this kind of discussion, there appear to have been no meetings held by either the bride's or groom's kin concerning the marriage. There were no gifts-of-consent presented to either of the two parties prior to the confrontation on the house step. But although the ideal procedures pertaining to courting and engagement were not closely followed in this instance it did not greatly matter, for the outcome was the same. Although it occurred much sooner than usual, the above exchange was referred to by my informants as *bwaladi ana gietoitoi*, 'body warming'.

To summarize Basima marriage exchanges. *Anaegigi* is the first exchange that 'binds' the couple and commences the period of engagement or trial marriage called *elawelawe*. Towards the end of this period, the affinal relationships are 'warmed' by



another exchange, *bwaladi ana gietoitoi*. This sets the stage for the final, confirmatory exchange of *poala*.

### Confirming marriage

A marriage in Basima is said to be fully established only when the final major exchange has taken place between the two *susu* groups concerned. This clinching exchange is called *poala*, though the return prestation is sometimes also referred to as *bwabwale*. It should be noted that *bwabwale* is also the term used for the main mortuary ceremonies, especially that which releases the principal mourners from their taboos (see Chapter Five). The similarity between a marriage prestation called *bwabwale* and the death exchange of the same name is that the gifts designated *bwabwale* in both instances (comprising pork and savoury dishes of yams) are to be consumed only by the mothers' brothers and sisters' children of the newly-married couple and/or the deceased. Furthermore, both prestations are made by a *susu* and are given to their opposite numbers as exchange partners. Their exchange relationship was initially created at marriage and it ends with the deaths of the husband and wife.

As in the Trobriands, there is no indigenous concept to express 'brideprice' in Basima. Rather, the social and economic procedures that seal a marriage are expressly governed by reciprocal exchanges of wealth and food (cf. Malinowski 1932:76-80). Wealth (*une*) here includes yams, pigs, clay pots, and shell valuables. In the Trobriands, the groom's kin give clay pots and shell valuables together with yams whilst the bride's kin reciprocate with yams, pigs and betelnuts. But the wealth given by the groom's kin is never conceptualized as a 'payment' for the bride. Instead it is seen as an obligatory component of a prestation to perpetuate an instituted social process. Superficially, the groom's kin principally provide the valuables in exchange for yams from the bride's kin. This initial exchange made at marriage, however, continues throughout the lifetime of this marriage and is severed only by divorce or death. In fact, Trobrianders do it so frequently that it becomes an annual exchange: *urigubu* is but an aspect of these marriage exchanges. Thus, at each harvest the wife's kin (usually brothers and fathers) allocate yams to their sister's or daughter's household and in return receive a stone axe blades, clay pot or a whole pig from the yam-receiving household (sister/daughter with her husband). In effect, what the parties are doing is simply fulfilling matrilineal, patrilineal and/or affinal obligations while at the same time allowing the 'internal' and subsequently 'external' flow of

valuables to prevail.<sup>3</sup> Yams, when stored away in special yam houses, are conceptually endowed with exchange values and motives. From such a perspective yams are considered as valuables and not merely as items for consumption. They are conceived to have intrinsic value which confers status and renown upon the owner. To realize or gain this renown, one has to inject these valuable yams into the existing 'internal' and 'external' nexuses of exchange.

Basima people view their marriage exchanges along similar lines. The principal items of exchange are yams, pigs and shell valuables (and as essential accompanying gifts, yellow betelnuts). There are hardly any allusions to bridewealth or brideprice, though they well know that other peoples in Papua New Guinea pay enormous sums in cash and kind for wives. People do not raise wealth or earn cash to pay for wives. Marriage exchanges are understood to be a reciprocal exchange of wealth and food, and are never regarded in the sense of 'wife-takers' paying the 'wife-givers' for the bride. Further, a prestation is not given in the hope of gaining different wealth in exchange (as in barter), but rather to invoke obligations that bind the recipients by a debt which they must, in turn, repay in the future. In short, for Basima, both parties simply exchange food and wealth in a more or less balanced way, backed by the obligations to give and receive, and it is these which formalize marriage (cf. Mauss 1969: 10-11).

A similar ideology is expressed concerning death ceremonies. While one makes prestations to release mourners and fulfil other mortuary obligations, one achieves status by meeting an obligation, and whenever possible, outgiving the other party. It is not material wealth that is to be gained, then, but the intangible status of *to'esa'esa* and renown (*yoyouna*). These are the rewards for one's demonstrated efficacy in fulfilling social and economic obligations.

Like the initial gifts made at the pronouncement of their 'trial marriage', a *poala* prestation can be initiated by either party: the bride's or the groom's kin. The recipients must, however, reciprocate in full as soon as possible. Both parties,

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<sup>3</sup> My use of 'internal' and 'external' exchanges refers to inter-matrilineage/subclan (*dala*) and inter-district exchanges that occur in the Trobriands. Internal exchanges include, for instance, the circulation of stone blades whose histories are recited and verified at marriage and death ceremonies. In my view, this nexus of exchange has few, if any direct links with the more elaborate nexus of exchanges in Kula. There is, however, some degree of indirect interaction between Kula and internal exchange circuits as several anthropologists have demonstrated (e.g. Weiner 1976:180-183; Campbell 1983:206-207, 219; Macintyre 1989:147).



particularly the primary representatives (parents and *susu* members of the bride and the groom), must be present at each of the prestations. These are usually made within the hamlet of the receiving *susu*, ideally that of the bride's mother's brother. As in a *bwabwale* mortuary ceremony (see Chapter Five), the *poala* prestation made by the groom's kin is cooked and presented within the maternal hamlet of the bride. The groom's kin bring raw yams to the bride's hamlet and cook them there, slaughter their pig there, and present them both to the bride's kin. It should be noted that pig meat is usually presented raw after being singed and butchered. Except for interdictions on certain individuals relating to death, this *poala* gift is not restricted with regard to its consumption by the recipients. Of course, the donors cannot eat of it as the yams come from their own gardens, apart from the fact that it is their own contribution. Tradition also insists that it would be shameful to eat of one's own prestation in such circumstances.

Thus the scenario is generally that the groom's kin are the donors or sponsors of the *poala*, while the bride's kin are the recipients of the *poala*. But because the prestation is made in the bride's hamlet, her kin are, in a sense, hosts of the entire ceremony as owners of the venue. It is from this premise that the *poala* receivers, as hosts, are themselves obliged to cook a reasonable amount of food for the guests and sponsors. This is called *emwau* and is not regarded as a reciprocal of the *poala* prestation. Strictly speaking, the *poala* is to be shared by the *susu* members of the bride; after all, they are the ones who will have to repay the *poala* in the near future. However, as mentioned above, other affines of the bride's *susu* are not precluded from taking home a share of the *poala*. Like the *susu* members, they are expected to contribute in turn towards the forthcoming return of this prestation. The *poala* is therefore received by the bride's *susu* as a debt to be repaid. But in so doing a marriage is officially and now almost wholly confirmed.

In May 1989, a *poala* prestation was initiated by the parents and mother's brother of the groom. (The groom was Iale, son of Yalekwasi from Topolu hamlet of Lauoya hills. And the bride was Bouma, daughter of Kubidi from lower Tapwana). Eighteen pots of cooked whole yams, three pots of flour pudding, six pots of cooked taro pudding (*mona*), a whole pig and five bunches of yellow betelnuts were presented to the bride's kin at her maternal hamlet, Tapwana. On the same day the bride's group provided a moderate *emwau* dish for the groom's kin and other guests. But a slight controversy arose, with accusations from the groom's people that the bride's kin failed to provide a pig. The bride's kin retorted by saying that a pig would be forthcoming when they made their reciprocal prestation. By tradition and customary practice, the bride's kin were in the right. I suspect that the groom's group's protest was hasty and unfair. The bride's kin had provided an *emwau* dish that was quite sufficient to feed all of the guests, and it met the expectations of normal marriage feast



procedures. The return prestation was indeed planned for later, though it was not made while I was in Basima.

It is expected that when the bride's kin and supporters make a return payment of the *poala*, they will provide the exact type and quantity of food received from the groom's kin. Above all else, at least one pig must be presented. These foods are to be cooked in the bride's own hamlet and carried to the groom's maternal hamlet. In the meantime, the groom's people will have been cooking plain whole yams, uncreamed by coconut oil. This is also called *emwau* and is to be shared by all the bride's kin, other guests and non-*bwabwale* eaters from the groom's side. As mentioned earlier, any food designated as *bwabwale* is 'restricted' or 'tabooed'. *Bwabwale* implies that it is to be consumed only by those matrikin who stand in a relation of sister's children and mother's brothers to whom the *poala* was given. In this instance, it is only to be eaten by those individuals who are the groom's mother's brothers and sister's children.

This prestation from the bride's kin concludes a somewhat protracted marriage exchange and fully institutes the marriage. The various stages of marriage ceremonies occur separately and their food-wealth prestations are not expected to be reciprocated the same day, week or even year. The reciprocity is usually delayed. Hence, in any year (that is, a full yam gardening season), marriage ceremonies may occur as often as death ceremonies as each marriage and death is, in common wisdom, accomplished within a span of about three years. Within these three years or so, the various stages represented by a prestation from one group followed by a counter-prestation from its opposite number are slowly but surely accomplished, thereby fulfilling a particular group's obligations while at the same time instituting the social, economic and political reproduction of the society.

### **Polygamy**

In the second edition of *Sorcerers of Dobu* Fortune wrote, without further comment, that polygamy in Basima 'is common amongst the leading men' (1963:281). This is certainly not the case today, and I have doubts about its alleged prevalence in the past. Of the 129 marriages I recorded in 1989-1990, there was but a single case of polygyny in Basima proper, and I heard of only one more case in the adjacent village ward of Gameta. Basima people agree that while polygynous marriages are acceptable they seldom occur. Several people expressed some disapproval of them, arguing that they are prone to jealousy (*edineia*), disharmony and instability. In

addition, polygynous marriages are far more demanding than monogamous marriages in so far as they impose extra economic obligations towards affines. For a man to take a second wife, therefore, is tantamount to putting his 'name' and reputation at risk. In the single case of polygyny in Basima, the husband struggles to spend an equal amount of time with both wives, and do his utmost to work in both of their gardens. Inevitably, perhaps, at least one of his wives feels aggrieved, and she once complained to me about her husband's deficient support in tasks such as fencing, planting and the provision of yam sticks.

Basima people assert that having more than one wife is by no means a prerequisite for 'bigmanship' and renown. Nor does polygyny necessarily enhance one's wealth and status within the community. It is, rather, more an indication of one's ability to woo more than one woman through the power of one's love magic. This is an accomplishment no doubt admired (whether secretly or not) by other men.

With regard to the single case of polygyny, both wives seem to work co-operatively for each other's matrilineage feasts, apparently free of jealousy and animosity (that is, despite their husband's alleged negligence towards one of them). In an *abutu* feast hosted in 1989 by the *susu* of one of the women, the other wife gave a whole pig to her co-wife as part of the latter's contribution towards the feast. Quite often both women were to be seen together on occasions such as feasts and communal gatherings, almost as if they were siblings. Not infrequently both visit each other's household and share some of the other's chores in gardening.

Hence, while polygyny may enhance the ego of the husband it does not necessarily make him a big man (*to'esa'esa*). The majority of Basima man do not aspire to marry more than one wife. An alternative strategy for gaining a new wife is simply to divorce the old one (see below). There were, however, a few abortive attempts to contract polygynous marriages. But in all cases, the first wife simply left her marital household for her own natal hamlet, allowing the new woman to move in.

### **Post-marital residence**

The pattern of residence after marriage is not easy to characterize simply. It is fairly flexible and sometimes unpredictable. Fortune depicted Basima's post-marital residence as virilocal ('wives reside in their husbands' villages'), contrasting it with the 'bilocal' or 'alternating' residence of the Dobuans (1963:280). But as my statistics on residence reveal, this simple characterization is inadequate. First, there are



terminological problems. Fortune's pronouncement of a 'virilocal' residence rule (which might well approximate what people told him) does not indicate by what rule husbands reside: whether in their mothers' or fathers' hamlets, for instance. Following Barnes (1949), I propose to use four basic compound terms, as defined below. Although cumbersome, these descriptive terms are far more accurate than the ones (patrilocal, matrilocal, virilocal and uxoriocal) in earlier use.

1. *Matri-virilocal*. The married couple lives in the husband's mother's hamlet, i.e. in the maternal hamlet (*natala*) of his *susu*. One might also term this form of residence avunculocal (or avunculo-virilocal), since the couple join the husband's mother's brothers. This is the ideal for Basima men since it means that they are hamlet 'owners' too, dwelling on their own residential land and surrounded by their own *susu* land and trees. This proves statistically to be the commonest pattern, accounting for just over one half of the total number of marriages (see Table 3.2).

2. *Matri-uxoriocal*. The couple lives in the wife's *natala*, that is, among her own *susu*. She is a hamlet 'owner' and the husband is the outsider. This is also a very common option, accounting for almost a third of all cases.

3. *Patri-uxoriocal*. The couple lives in the wife's father's hamlet, presumably the latter's *natala*. Since it is forbidden for a child to remain in his or her father's hamlet after his death, a couple would only be living patri-uxoriocally while the wife's father is still alive. This residential option is usually a temporary one therefore, and one that very few couples follow.

4. *Patri-virilocal*. The couple lives in the husband's father's hamlet, that is, on the assumption that the father is living in his own *natala*. The same qualification applies as for patri-uxoriocal residence: if the father dies the couple should vacate the hamlet. Again, this is an uncommon option and likely to be temporary.

Table 3.2 Post-Marital Residence

<i>Type of Residence</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Matri-virilocal	66	52
Matri-uxoriocal	42	32
Patri-virilocal	5	4
Patri-uxoriocal	8	6
Neolocal (Missions)	7	5
Other (ZH)	1	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>99.8</b>

It is clear from the above table that Fortune's statement that Basima practice 'virilocal' residence is only half-right, with almost half of all couples residing in the wife's place, matri-uxoriocally. I shall now examine the post-marital residence



patterns obtaining in four hamlets during 1989-1990. To illustrate the range of options I shall also look at some of the 'anomalies' occurring in these same hamlets. All are culturally acceptable, it seems.

### 1. Watotaeta

Of the four married couples whose families make up the residential core of this hamlet, only one is dwelling matri-viril locally. This is Masawana, the hamlet 'owner', and his wife, who are living in the former's own maternal hamlet. One of the other three couples is living patri-viril locally, and the remaining two are living patri-uxoril locally.

The most interesting, and somewhat unusual residential option in this hamlet is exemplified by Banaki, a widower. He has lived in Watotaeta since he was a young man, and though he does not belong to Masawana's *susu*, he might be described as living matri-viril locally. The circumstances of his choice of residence are as follows. About three generations ago, members of Banaki's *susu* came down from their hamlet Salewe in the hills and helped Masawana's maternal grandfathers to build several large seagoing canoes. In acknowledgement of their valued assistance, the owners granted them a strip of Watotaeta hamlet and the right to reside there. Although that particular strip has since been washed away by floods, the right of residence nonetheless remains, and Banaki has since lived there before his marriage about forty years ago. At one stage Banaki wished to return to his matrilineal land at Salewe, pleading that he did not feel secure whilst living on land belonging to another *susu*, but the Watotaeta owners prevailed upon him to remain, assuring him that he could live there until his death. That was exactly what happened. After my departure from the field I learned that Banaki had died. His body should, in theory, have been taken back to his own matrilineal land for burial. In Banaki's case, then, residence was ultimately justified not by matrilineality nor by marriage, nor yet through patrilineal affiliation, but rather by long-term inter-*susu* co-operation and friendship.

### 2. Wegiliu

This is a large hamlet comprising four owning *susu* and 52 residents. Of the nine married couples living in Wegiliu four were matri-viril local; two were living matri-uxoril locally; two were living patri-viril locally, and the remaining couple was living patri-uxoril locally.

In January 1990 Mwaiwaga and his brother Joas, following incessant arguments with residents belonging to other *susu*, were in process of abandoning their maternal residence for their wives' *susu* hamlets. That is to say, they were about to take up matri-uxoril local residence. Even while they were living matri-viril locally in their own *susu* hamlet they had for several gardening seasons used land belonging to their wives' *susu*. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret their proposed move of dwelling place as an instance of alternating residence.

In another example from Wegiliu, Negwedia and her husband made gardens on both the husband's *susu* land and her own, even though their plots were a considerable distance from each other. In order to give adequate attention to both gardens (and not necessarily to follow any tacit rule of alternate residence) they established dwelling huts in the maternal hamlets of both the wife and the

husband. The whole family alternated temporarily between these two hamlets on an almost weekly basis. The two previous gardening seasons, however, had seen them residing matri-uxorilocally in Wegiliu. Although this form of alternating residence may superficially resemble that described by Fortune for Dobu, it is in reality quite different, since the bi-local residence of Negwedia and her husband was maintained during a single gardening season only, and not - as in Dobu - throughout the duration of a marriage.

### 3. Nawasi

There are two owning *susu* in Nawasi and 16 residents. Of the four married couples two 'owners', one from each *susu*, were living matri-viril locally. The third married couple is living patri-viril locally and the fourth took up residence in the following manner. Owen and his wife are living in the hamlet of his sister's husband. He took up residence as a brother-in-law following his sister's marriage to the hamlet owner. After his own marriage he was allowed to remain there, bringing his wife to join him. Basima people see nothing wrong with this option; it would be quite acceptable in the Trobriands too.

### 4. Waluwete

The landowning *susu* of Waluwete belongs to the clan of Yoana, and their place of origin is Bosalewa, some five hours walk to the northwest of Basima (see Map 1). In this hamlet of 37 residents there are eight married couples. Of these, three are living matri-viril locally and five matri-uxorilocally. Thus, somewhat more *susu* 'sisters' brought in their husbands than did 'brothers' bring in their wives. If Owen of Nawasi had followed a more usual choice of residence he would also be living in Waluwete with his wife. Waluwete also illustrates how a sizable Basima *susu* of some 54 members can be dispersed by marriage. More than half (i.e. 31) of the total membership of this *susu* were, in 1989, living elsewhere, scattered throughout Basima and beyond. They were largely accounted for by eight male and ten female members, most of whom were living in their spouses' hamlets with their children. (More will be said about Waluwete in Chapter Seven for it was hosting a *sagali* in 1988-89).

## Residence: a summary

From this sample of post-marital residence in four Basima hamlets we see some concrete instances of configurations suggested by the figures in Table 3.2. Thus, both matri-viril local (or avunculocal) and matri-uxorilocal marriages are the most common options, with a definite tendency for the former to prevail. This is what Fortune indicated by his assertion that the Basima 'rule' of post-marriage residence is 'viril local' (*ibid.*). Matri-viril local residence might well be expected in a matrilineal society as it most easily guarantees men access to group support and land rights.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Basima men also frequently make residence choices on the basis of their paternal and affinal relationships. It is thus quite acceptable to reside with one's 'fathers', who can be just as supportive as one's mothers brothers. Furthermore, one may have good reasons for



living elsewhere - based on affinal or extended kin relations, or on some economically-symbiotic relations with *susu* groups other than one's own - which result in residence with hamlet owners who are neither matrilineally, patrilaterally nor even affinally related.

My general point is that the residence pattern in Basima is not as clear-cut as in many other societies (but cf. Molima for similar variability [Chowning 1962:94]). If there is any conclusion to be reached concerning Basima's post-marital residence pattern, I would declare it to be fairly optional and not predetermined by one's matrilineal or patrilateral allegiances. The statistically confirmed preference for matri-virilocal marriage is not necessarily a rule; it is more like a favoured option. Inter-*susu* assimilation (as described in Chapter Two) and inter-*susu* economic relations are some of the other factors by which one may justify residence in a hamlet other than one's own *natala*. Nevertheless, the matri-virilocal and matri-uxorilocal options occur most frequently in practice, and together account for 84 percent of all cases. If there is any simple ground rule it is that at least one marriage partner must be a hamlet 'owner' on the basis of his or her *susu* membership. Speaking for the majority, then, one lives in a hamlet either as an 'owner' or as an in-marrying affine.

It is, however, possible to find such anomalies as a woman residing in her husband's sister's husband's hamlet, or a man residing in his wife's father's maternal hamlet or his wife's brother's wife's hamlet. One may even find 'alternating residence' of a sort, though it is not the institutionalized form that Fortune described for Tewara and Dobu. These are all choices, acceptable and available to any Basima couple to take up depending on need or personal inclination. Basima people live comfortably with such options and see nothing wrong in pursuing them. Once more, the flexibility of Basima society is inscribed in the variation in residence patterns that it allows.

### **Adultery and divorce**

Adultery is generally disapproved of and wherever possible it is prevented; there is no 'high appreciation' of it as Fortune claims for Dobu (1963:92). I did not carry out an intensive investigation of adultery and divorce, but simply living in the community helped me to understand why adultery is regarded a serious offence. As in Dobu in certain instances, the traditional punishment for adultery was said to be



severe: execution of the man by the offended husband or his kinsmen.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, matrikin of the murdered adulterer would have often felt obligated to avenge him. An adulterous woman would either voluntarily move out of her husband's hamlet thereby initiating divorce (*saila*), or she would be forced by the husband and his *susu* kin to leave the hamlet, again terminating the marriage. Her continued presence in her husband's hamlet brought shame to him and his *susu*. The normal practice nowadays is to report the matter to the local authorities, the village councillor and his *komiti*. The perpetrators are then brought before the gathered community, usually on Fridays, for a public 'court' hearing. If the accused person (or couple) is found guilty of the offence, he or she is usually sent to the government centre at Esa'ala where sentence is decided by the district magistrate.<sup>5</sup> In all cases of adultery known to me, the offence occurred between married people; none was between a married and a single person. Of the five cases of adultery that I enquired about, four ended in divorce.

Table 3.3 Marriage and Divorce in Basima, ca. 1985-1990

	<i>Basima</i>	<i>Lauoya</i>	Total
Divorced at least once	37	39	76
Widowed at least once	33	49	82
Presently married	48	81	129
<b>Total Marriage Instances</b>	118	169	287

Table 3.3 presents figures on divorce I recorded when collecting census information on 287 Basima marriages, existing between about 1985 and 1990. I have tried to standardize for the fact that a few women had been divorced several times, though their several marriages were not recorded on the genealogies. Still, the general pattern is fairly clear for this five-year period: divorce is not difficult and remarriage is easy. As in Kalauna on Goodenough Island, marriages in Basima might be said to be 'brittle and unstable' (Young 1971:55). Following calculations recommended by Barnes (1949) also used by Young, the frequency of divorce in Basima is almost 30 percent.

<sup>4</sup> See Fortune's reported case of an intra-*susu* feud resulting from a scandalous adulterous affair between a man and his sister's son's wife (1963:61).

<sup>6</sup> On several occasions I personally assisted the complainants by writing their submissions presented to the Esa'ala police and magistrate.

It is interesting to note that while Fortune stressed the high rate of divorce in matrilineal Dobu, Young's figure of 33 percent for Kalauna suggests that marriage instability is common also in the patrilineal western D'Entrecasteaux. My own calculations for Basima are comparable to Young's for Kalauna; that is, roughly a third of all marriages end in divorce. Basima people also give similar reasons for divorce, among which adultery, the desire to marry someone else, neglect, and laziness in gardening are the most common grounds (cf. Young *ibid.*:55). The high rate of divorce and subsequent remarriage is commensurate with the view that divorce does not carry any social stigma. Indeed, people feel that when a marriage relationship has turned sour, divorce is an advisable solution.

Of the five cases of divorce I witnessed during fieldwork, two were actually revoked and marriage was re-established (*si-nailima*) after a period of separation lasting about four months. Of the remaining three cases, involving six different individuals, four (three males and one female) managed to remarry within a short period. As in Dobu and Kalauna, divorces also result from husbands' long absences away from home on contract labour employment. Absence opens the way for neglected wives to engage in adulterous affairs and seek new spouses (see Fortune 1963:277; Young *ibid.*: 54).

Table 3.4 Remarriages in Basima, ca. 1985-1990

	<i>Basima</i>	<i>Lauoya</i>	Total
Divorced & Remarried	22	28	50
Widowed & Remarried	19	17	36
Total	41	45	86

The above table shows the number of remarriages occurring over a five-year period. It should be noted that of the partners of the 287 marriages I recorded, 76 had been divorced at least once. Of these, 50 remarried while 26 individuals did not. This is an indication of the fact that being a divorcee in Basima carries no stigma. There were 46 widows and widowers who did not remarry during this period (i.e. more than those who did). This may be explained by their advancing age or by their need to observe mourning seclusion, or by continuing emotional attachment to the dead spouse.



### The celebrated solidarity of the Dobuan *susu*

Fortune's sociological analysis of the structural conflict in Dobu society between the matrilineage or *susu*, on one hand, and the family or 'marital grouping' on the other, is well known. He convincingly showed that the high rate of divorce in Dobu was principally due to the solidarity of *susu* siblings, to whom marriage partners were regarded with suspicion as outsiders. Alternating residence was a compromise solution whereby spouses took turns to live among their own matrilineal kin - among whom they felt most at ease. The chronic friction between the two forms of grouping (*susu* and marital) was thus played out in residential terms and given expression in sorcery and witchcraft fears. The chronic suspicion between 'village owners' (co-resident *susu* members) and 'Those-resulting-from-marriage' (in-marrying affines) provoked not only sorcery fears but also acute jealousy within the marital unit. Thus, married couples constantly suspected one another of taking advantage of opportunities for 'village incest', whereby the spouse who happened to be living in his or her own *susu* hamlet would conduct affairs with co-resident 'sisters' or 'brothers'. Such a situation in which *susu* solidarity overrides marital solidarity, according to Fortune, undermines any genuine attempt by couples to secure the fragile condition of their conjugal life. 'Under Dobu conditions', in Fortune's phrase, the *susu* mostly wins out and married couples are the losers. Hence, one finds numerous instances of divorcing husbands and wives leaving their spouses' villages to seek the comfort of their own, or, if the intensity of their emotional state warrants it, even resorting to suicide. Fortune demonstrated this general Dobuan pattern by providing several examples of marital friction leading to divorce and suicide attempts (1963:48-52). In summary, he argued that:

...sister-brother solidarity with an artificial extension of the sister-brother relationship does not work with the husband-wife solidarity very well under Dobuan conditions. One solidarity tends to gain predominance. Then friction tends to occur between the two groupings. This friction is expressed in sorcery and witchcraft terms as well as in terms of jealousy, quarrel, attempted suicide, and village 'incest' (1963:8)

In this section I address some of these issues from a Basima point of view. But before commenting on Fortune's account of the dialectics of Dobuan *susu* and marital relationships I must first point out that I have spent little time on firsthand Dobuan ethnography. While I have visited a number of Dobuan villages (hamlets in my parlance) and speak almost fluent Dobu, I cannot claim to have closely observed Dobuan village life. My critique of Fortune in what follows derives mainly from my



perspective as an ethnographer of Basima. I also realize that there is a time gap of almost three generations between Fortune's study of Tewara/Dobu and my own of Basima; much has changed in sixty years, not least anthropological knowledge and perceptions. Nonetheless, there are undeniable social and cultural similarities between Dobu and Basima which make comparison possible. They differ little in the social forms of marriage and matrilineal descent groups; they share myths and legends and a great many magical and ritual practices; they speak closely related languages; and not least they share geographical proximity. As a close neighbour, Basima is to a large degree culturally in tune with Dobu.

I have already mentioned how the Basima hamlet is typically owned by a single *susu*, such that in-marriage outsiders co-reside with hamlet owners. Thus of the 59 Basima hamlets 49 are owned and occupied by a single *susu* (see Table 3.1). This appears to be the Dobuan ideal, too, though Fortune did not offer any statistics, and in reading him we must allow for his rather narrow use of the term *susu* (comprising 'a man, his sister, his sister's children, and his sister's daughter's children' [*ibid.*: 3]). According to this limited definition several *susu* occupy a hamlet: 'In reality, each village is a small number of *susu*, from four or five to ten or twelve, all claiming a common female ancestress and unbroken descent from her through females only' (*ibid.*). It is clear, however, that modern Dobuans (like Basima people) would call the whole group thus defined a single *susu*.

Fortune himself put his finger on an important difference between Dobu and Basima which alleviates some of the tensions and conflicts peculiar to Dobu. He does so more clearly and forcibly in the first edition of his book, where he stated that Basima 'organization' (by which he means simply their 'patrilocal' residence - altered to 'virilocal' in the second edition) 'throws into strong relief one of the great weaknesses of the Dobuan culture' (1932:280). He claimed that the 'social concomitant' of this residence pattern is 'a feeling of security' in a Basima hamlet that Dobuans are denied by their bilocal residence and 'unbreakable' *susu* (*ibid.*).

As we have already seen, although Fortune's statement that Basima residence is patrilocal (or virilocal) is strictly inaccurate (a third of all couples live matrilocally), he was correct on the important point that Basima do not alternate residence; they are not bilocal like Dobuans. This is the crucial issue, for it means that Basima people have found a way of compromising with their matriliney that does not require them to spend equal amounts of time in their spouses' hamlets. This in

turn would suggest that the *susu* is weaker, less 'demanding' and accordingly more tolerant of the countervailing pull of marriage ties and the nuclear family.

Looking now at the evidence from Basima, one finds that relations with affines are highly valued. *Waiwai* are respected rather than feared, and in the more sensitive relationships respect is overtly expressed through avoidance and embarrassment. Affines are mutually obliged to assist and support one another in gardening tasks, marriage and mortuary ceremonies. Differences arising between *susu* members as hamlet owners and their marriage partners as incoming affines are always a possibility, of course, but they do not appear to dominate social life to the degree Fortune claimed for Dobu. I suggest, too, that such differences as do arise are not as starkly realized in Basima, and that the possibility of conflict in Basima is therefore greatly attenuated. Respect for affines is positively sanctioned and this in itself does much to minimize hostility. Similarly, quarrels within the hamlet are greatly discouraged by other residents lest they undermine the co-operative efforts required for feasts and ceremonies.

Moreover, it is necessary to remain on general good terms with one's in-laws for they are one's exchange partners in all life-crisis ceremonies. It is through such exchange partnerships that mortuary and marriage ceremonies derive their point and meaning. It is thanks to these exchanges that debts and credits are created which stimulate production, generate status and renown, and simultaneously allow the flow of goods that maintains the society. The insular kind of group existence implied by Fortune is ultimately dysfunctional, and it is perhaps not surprising that Tewara seemed barely to be surviving at the time when Fortune was doing his fieldwork.

Although affines may sometimes be suspected of witchcraft and sorcery, such fears are by no means confined to them. In Basima one is generally wary of what food to take from whom and polite refusals are in order whenever a suspected sorcerer or witch is offering it, whatever their relationship to oneself. Such people may even be members of one's own hamlet, if not perhaps members of one's immediate *susu*.

I recorded in Basima tales of aggrieved husbands killing adulterers. One man was allegedly speared to death by a wronged husband, who thereafter ran amok (see also Fortune 1963:xv). Other adulterers survived attempts to kill them. There is no question that sexual jealousy sometimes leads to violent confrontations between men. And as elsewhere domestic arguments are part and parcel of Basima people's lives. However, they are never perceived to be instigated or encouraged by the



'solidary *susu*', nor are such quarrels viewed in terms of the incompatible demands of *susu* and marriage. It would be seen to be an individual decision whether one chooses to commit suicide or murder an adulterer. At the heart of such ructions is the pride and 'name' of the individual who is being insulted. Of course, the *susu* together with the community as a whole tacitly approve the 'justifiable homicide' of an adulterer. It is justice done. Concerning suicide in Basima, only one successful case occurred during my fieldwork (see Chapter Five), and I was told that attempted suicide was not very common.

The larger issue is that *susu* solidarity in Basima is neither as strong nor as impervious to outside influence as Fortune presented for Dobu. In Basima, it appears, a person's *susu* is less all-encompassing, less oppressively demanding. While there is no denying the importance of *susu* identity for a person's social existence, there are other groups (including his or her domestic group) that contribute to one's identity and status, and which make comparable demands of obligation. The idea that one must restrict one's loyalty and direct one's best efforts to one group only would seem absurd to Basima people. But observations on the way Basima people relate to their *susu* groups and their affines suggests that Fortune's structural conflict between the 'village *susu* group' and its 'marital groupings' is something of an overstatement. Thune somewhere suggests that Fortune had neglected to take into account historical circumstances. Thus, in 1929 Dobu was adversely affected by problems such as labour over-recruitment, depopulation and the concentrated attention of the Methodist Mission. Fortune does not factor these into his model of Tewara social organization.

There is a final point to be made. Fortune's dichotomous 'solidarities' of *susu* and marital grouping appear to be tenable only when the hamlet is small and occupied by a single *susu*, as were those of hamlets of Tewara. Today, however, there is no village on the island of Tewara as the inhabitants voluntarily moved to the neighbouring island of Uama in 1974, when they established a single hamlet called Diu. In 1987 the population was estimated to be twenty-five individuals. Although this is fewer than lived on Tewara in Fortune's time, Diu is probably larger than any of the hamlets to be found there then. Such a multiple-*susu* hamlet doubtless permits intra-hamlet marriage and consequently a more complex social



composition. Fortune's model for Dobu no longer applies, I suggest, to the people of Tewara who have recomposed themselves in exodus.<sup>6</sup>

To restate my general proposition, the basic model of matrilineal groups in the eastern and southern D'Entrecasteaux holds for Basima too. However, Basima social organisation, based on the inter-relationship of *susu*, is demonstrably more flexible and 'open' than elsewhere in the region owing to the influx of numerous immigrant groups. Although these groups appear to conform to the same model a process of adaptation and assimilation has necessitated some flexibility in group structure and residence pattern. This flexibility displayed by Basima people in their institutions of settlement, marriage and residence is an historical as well as a cultural and social phenomenon. The 'uncompromising matrilineage' of Duau (Thune 1980; 1989) and 'the triumph of the *susu*' in Tubetube (Macintyre 1989) are phases which must be tempered and qualified Basima.

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<sup>6</sup> Albert and Mitchell (1987:5) list eight different abandoned hamlet sites on Tewara. Three were located on the beach: Mole, Nedilaya and one unnamed. The five sites in the interior of the island were (from west to east): Ubuwagai, Guyaboga, Abigigita, Tanobwela, and Dilikayaiya. Some of these names appear in legends presented by Fortune, though not all of the following places were hamlets, however: Laiyaiya, Tanubweiala, Tribut, Pwosipwosimo, Kedatete, Magisewa, Mwaniwara (1963:220); Dilikaiai, Mwatuia, Guiaboga, Kubwagai, Kwatobwa, Gadimotu (1963:268). Despite having their own names Fortune usually refers to hamlets by their totemic names, such as Red-parrot, Green-parrot, White-pigeon (e.g. 1963:48). This unfortunately renders them difficult to identify.

In June 1989, Michael Young and I visited Tewara to inspect Fortune's old hamlet site, guided there by several Tewara men from Diu on Uama. It proved to be in a narrow saddle almost on top of the 100 metre high island. The site was almost completely overgrown by trees and bushes, though a few thin aged betel and coconut palms indicated its previous occupation. The Diu villagers (one of whom claimed to remember 'Mista Poten') named the site as either Abigigita or Tanobwela. I am of the view that Fortune opted to use totemic names for hamlets at the expense of their proper names in order to emphasize '*susu* solidarity' which is the leitmotif of his thesis on Dobuan social organisation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **BAYATA: GARDENS OF BASIMA**

In this chapter I seek to present a brief ethnographic account of the way Basima people create their gardens, both physically in relation to their seasonal and natural environment, and symbolically and aesthetically according to the mythical heroine Didiwaga's prescriptions. They cultivate both major types of yam: the 'lesser yam' (*Dioscorea esculenta*), which they call *tetu*; and the 'greater yam' (*Dioscorea alata*), which they call *watea*. These are not only Basima people's major subsistence crops but also the most socially significant crops. As we shall see in later chapters, they are used for feasting and in marriage and mortuary ceremonies, and it is the produce of yam gardens that are publically displayed and exchanged when groups and individuals compete for prestige and renown.

Supplementary crops are the common taro (*duyu*; *Colocasia esculenta*), plantain bananas (*bwai*), sweet potato, tapioca, sugar cane, pumpkin, cucumber, pawpaw and so forth. A wide variety of local greens are also cultivated in addition to the edible wild tulip. Except taro and bananas none of these vegetables enter the ceremonial arena of food exchanges and distributions. In view of its cultural importance, therefore, I dwell on yam gardening in this chapter at the expense of less significant economic pursuits such as fishing, hunting and harvesting of fruit trees and palms. Chapter One and Appendix II provide an overview of these secondary economic pursuits.

#### **The seasonal cycle**

Usually, Basima people rotate their yam gardening activities on lands surrounding their residential hamlets. This is readily understandable as many people reside on their own maternal land, and therefore the arrangement is both socially and geographically convenient. Affines are invariably permitted to garden on land belonging to those they have married. Occasionally, and depending on propinquity they might make a garden or two on their own maternal land while continuing to reside in their affine's hamlet. The same can be said of the children (*labalaba*) of male landowners who reside on their 'fathers' land.



As mentioned in Chapter One, Basima people reckon their gardening seasons according to two major seasonal wind patterns: *bolimana* (southeast), roughly speaking from May to September, and *otala* (northwest) from October to April.<sup>1</sup> *Bolimana* is referred to as the 'wind of plenty' (*auna*) while *otala* is said to be the 'wind of dearth' (*botana* or *asai*), the lean period. In relation to local gardening practices the former is the wind of 'harvest' (*tai*) while the latter is the wind of 'sowing' (*dauna*). In addition, *otala* is regarded as the 'wet wind' as it occurs during the wettest season of the year; in contrast *bolimana* is the 'dry' wind. And since *bolimana* is generally gusty, which prevents fishing activities, its notional 'dryness' is also semantically extended towards indigenous dietary habits; that is, people eat their yams 'dry' without the supplement of marine food. Broadly speaking then Basima gardening seasons are distinguished by the contrasting concepts of planting and harvesting, windy and calm, dry and wet: all summarized in the broad local idiom of *bolimana* and *otala*.<sup>2</sup>

There is no absolute distinction between one stage of gardening activity and another and activities cannot be definitively assigned to particular months or weeks. Each activity usually and sometimes necessarily overlaps with the next in terms of timing. Conventional Western notions of time-reckoning by months are not effective guides to the Basima gardening calendar. For example, the planting of yams (*dauna*) might be done as early as October and as late as January; however, any yam planting done earlier or later than these extremes is deemed anomalous and thought to be unproductive. Similarly, the time of yam harvest can be as early as May or as late as July, and during the same period people would be clearing bushes for new yam gardens, particularly in the months of July and August. Hence, as long as the activities fall within the broad temporal range of the two seasonal winds, reckoning by months has little significance.

Basima people do not have as many names for months as do Trobriand Islanders, whose seasonal gardening calendar was described in detail by Malinowski (1935a:52-55 Fig.3) and Austen (1938-39). On the subject of seasons and months my informants began by providing a generic term for moon (i.e. *wetai*) and stars

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<sup>1</sup> Compare with the major winds of *lahara* (southeast) and *laurabada* (northwest) from the Motuan area, and likewise the Boyowa winds of *bwalimila* (southeast) and *yavata* (northwest).

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that a similar binary opposition also appears in the design of decorated yam huts called *sanala*, described in the final section below.

(*ubwana*). Some denied that there were names for particular months of the year; others believed there were, but thought them to be of no particular significance. One informant suggested that the month for weeding yam gardens, which he said is roughly around April, is called To'ala'alaguna ('carriers-?'). Other informants added that this month (or period) is characteristically known for its heavy downpours.<sup>3</sup> The first informant also mentioned that a month called Moli indicates the time of yam harvest, roughly June. The star constellation (Younua) and the cry of a certain bird (*kabwaku*) were, however, said to indicate certain stages of gardening such as yam planting.<sup>4</sup> The appearance of Younua constellation about the month of June (Moli) signals the time to harvest yams. This constellation is said to have a leading star at its head, dubbed *tonidoe*, 'bearer of the flag [pandanus streamer]'. Its appearance reminds people to harvest as quickly as they can as it does not remain in the sky for long. People say that as soon as *tonidoe* 'sinks', it is time to clear the bush for new gardens, which is generally around the month of October.

For tardy gardeners, the 'sinking' of *tonidoe* is particularly regretted for it means that any yams left in the soil are 'lost'. Not only does the period of harvest lapse with *tonidoe*'s descension but it is thought to presage a period of continuous rain. Yams left unharvested, therefore, rapidly germinate which renders them useless both as storable food and as yam seeds.

Like most subsistence societies in the humid tropics, Basima people practice 'slash and burn' or shifting cultivation, the general features of which are now well known.

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<sup>3</sup> I noted (in Chapter One, n.6) that the wettest month in 1989 was April with rainfall occurring on eighteen days.

<sup>4</sup> I did not pay much attention to star names and the astronomical identification of Younua escaped me. Fortune provides more detailed information on these constellations for Dobu, though his information on Kibi is deficient.

Three constellations, Kibi, Pleiades, and Yuyuna [*sic*] (tail of Orion), are the only stars singled out by the natives for naming. The garden calendar is closely connected with their annual passage across the sky. Clearing the bush takes place when Pleiades is in the north-eastern at an angle of about fifteen degrees above the horizon. This is about October. Before harvest is due Pleiades, followed by Orion, sinks in the south-west to northeast .... Then Pleiades rises in the north-east over Woodlark Island - and it is harvest time. Clearing and planting follow again when Pleiades climbs somewhat (1963:223; also cited by Roheim [1950:190]).

In Basima, another star constellation called To'ala'alabawe (literally, 'pig carriers') is likened to people carrying a pig. This group of stars possibly refers to Pleiades; they are characterized by their brightness and are commonly seen.



It would be quite mistaken to assume, however, that garden arrangements and methods of tilling the soil of all 'slash and burn' cultivators are identical. Even within the Massim there is much variation, some of it obvious and some of it quite subtle. One finds significant differences between societies within the region with regard to how the soil is prepared, why gardens are oriented and divided this way or that, how yam stakes are planted and so on. One also finds much variation in the working practices, beliefs and aesthetics associated with local methods of crop cultivation.<sup>5</sup>

Before proceeding to a physical description of Basima gardens I shall briefly summarize some aspects of land use, the rights involved, and the choices available to gardeners in relation to their land tenure system. A more detailed discussion of land tenure is reserved for the final chapter. As availability of land for cultivation is not a serious problem, there is little deep concern over whether one permanently owns land or has guaranteed access to it. There is currently a good deal more land available than people actually need, discounting rugged and uncultivable land areas. My own rough estimate of the area of Basima territory (excluding Gameta, Ulua and Duduna) is 100 square kilometres or 10000 hectares. Since this is inhabited by a population of about 650 people, we derive a crude ratio of 1.5 persons per square kilometre or 15 hectares of land per person. But such gross statistics are quite irrelevant to the local system of cultivation and tenure, a system which, although determined partly by its physical environment, is determined largely by its social environment as manifested in group and individual relationships. The method of cultivation is extensive rather than intensive, and the tenure system does not strictly and equally divide land between each and every individual landowner, nor among *susu* groups. Land 'belongs' to everyone through group affiliation, and the temporary individual 'owners' hold it as custodians (a subject to which I shall return in the last chapter).

The fallow period varies between six and fifteen years. Thus certain large gardening land areas (*laotete* or *sena*) are favoured and may be subject to relatively intensive use. This may be due to convenience of location and soil fertility, as well as to land tenure arrangements influenced by relations of kinship and marriage. Both the *laotete* of Bonu and Yaulesa (names of particular areas of land), for instance, were re-cultivated in 1989 after an unusually short period of only three years. This does

<sup>5</sup> Contrast, for instance, Kiriwina (Malinowski 1935a) and Woodlark (Damon 1990) in the northern Massim, and Dobu (Fortune 1963) and Kalauna (Young 1971) in the D'Entrecasteaux; see also Allen *et al.* 1994.

not imply a practice of intensive cultivation (for the same soil is not being used); it rather illustrates an individual's or a group's preference as well as the common practice of making new gardens adjacent to previous plots. It is not always necessary to leave the previous gardening area (*laotete*) for another one though individuals may do so if they wish subject to their *tolodebana*'s approval.

*Bayata* generally refers to gardens currently under cultivation but its more specific meaning is the practice of laying out criss-crossing dividing logs within a garden. Table 4.1 below presents a schematic outline of the Basima gardening cycle, showing principal activities and the division of labour according to gender.

Table 4.1 The Basima Gardening Cycle

Months ( <i>wetai</i> )	Winds ( <i>yaina</i> )	Main Activities	Main Workers
June-July	<i>bolimana</i> (south-easterly)	<i>talai</i> or <i>otanoa</i> (bush cutting)	men ( <i>lalamwa</i> )
July-September	<i>bolimana</i>	<i>lofia</i> (burn & clear debris)	men & women
October-January	<i>otala</i> (north-westerly)	<i>dauna</i> & ' <i>ali</i> (planting & fencing)	men & women
December-February	<i>otala</i>	<i>diliga</i> (cutting yam stakes & staking)	men
February-May	<i>otala</i>	<i>lo'ili</i> & <i>pwaowa</i> (weeding)	women ( <i>ya'ule</i> )
May-June	<i>bolimana</i>	<i>tai-watea</i> (yam [ <i>D. alata</i> ] harvest); <i>sanala</i> & <i>sabeyowa</i> (yam hut construction)	men & women; men only
June-July	<i>bolimana</i>	<i>tai-tetu</i> (yam [ <i>D. esculenta</i> ] harvest)	men & women

Monthly periods shown are approximate, and the annual cycle is principally differentiated by the two major winds as described above. These major stages of gardening describe the progress of peoples' gardens throughout the year. Another and even more general distinction people make concerning their gardens is between what they call *bwanau* and *didiaba* stages: young and old, premature and mature. *Bwanau* actually refers to the young and premature yam nodules as opposed to the matured, subsequently wrinkled yams (*iala*) which have been lying in the yam huts for a time. The *bwanau* stage covers the period from planting through to the formation of the young yam nodules in about April or May, which is the period prior to the yam-harvest. *Didiaba* refers to the period from the harvest in June through to the storage of yams in the yam huts and beyond (August to November). *Didiaba* also refers to



gardens of the previous yam season, and thus to the post-yam harvest. A *didiba* garden is characterized by such residual crops as tapioca, bananas, sugarcane, pawpaw trees, arrowroot and sweet potatoes.

### The origin of yams

As this discussion of Basima gardens will necessarily revolve around the cultivation of yams, it is appropriate to begin with a myth concerning the origin of yams and their subsequent fate in Basima. The ways in which Basima people organize their garden practices and the solemnity with which they treat yams are frequently justified by a charter myth, *Didiwaga na gwainua* ('Didiwaga's design'). *Didiwaga* is the woman who first possessed yams in Basima, but it is also the name of the place where she lived. Because the myth is rather long, I have divided it into two parts. The first part focuses on the activities of *Didiwaga* in Basima and all named locations are within Basima and Lauoya districts. The second part refers to *Didiwaga's* subsequent travels and the dispersal of Basima's wealth (*une*) throughout the D'Entrecasteaux. Although the narrator begins by asserting that *Didiwaga* eventually took all her wealth to the Trobriands, the conclusion of the story reveals that it eventually remained within the D'Entrecasteaux, especially Fergusson and Normanby islands.<sup>6</sup>

#### Part I: *Didiwaga* and the repository of Basima wealth

*Didiwaga's* place of residence was *Tabune Sipana* [otherwise *Didiwaga*]. Her yams were *mwalaudana* and *duduwasi*, and her water was *Gwedaba*. Down below was her water and her place was directly above it. She lived there and gardened well.

While she was gardening on her land, there was a man named *To'anaulo* with his wife *Nealebo* who were living not too distant. Their place was *To'abwa*. While *Didiwaga* was gardening *To'anaulo* was wholly preoccupied with netting freshwater prawns (*onaona*), such as *yoba*, *gigia* and *sesea*. [This is an implication of deficient yam gardening knowledge].

One day, finding a shortage of prawns on his side, *To'anaulo* ventured further towards *Mwagua* creek. Although it was raining heavily that day *To'anaulo* threw his net (*bwabwala*) into the creek and stood shivering in the shelter of a

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<sup>6</sup> *Abedi Gilele*, a man in his early forties, married with two wives, narrated this version of the myth of *Didiwaga*. According to him, this is simply a general version of the myth covering the main points concerning wealth and gardening in Basima.

rock overhang with his basket (*kwapa*) tucked under his arm. [Didiwaga's hut was apparently just above the bank of Mwagua creek.]

Meanwhile Didiwaga was peeling her yams. She stood up and flung the refuse into the creek below. Before she could sit down, she thought she saw someone by the creek. Indeed it was a man.

"*Ei*, you, where have you come from and what is your name?" Didiwaga asked in surprise [She had believed she was living alone in Basima].

"I am To'anaulo. What have you been doing all this time while I was netting freshwater prawns?" To'anaulo replied, equally surprised.

"There, climb up and come over here," Didiwaga invited him.

He climbed up and stood there watching her closely as she put more firewood beneath a boiling pot of yams. She eventually served them and To'anaulo was amazed when he realized that the yams were of the highest quality: *gumanomta*, *yamsa*, etc. He thought to himself, "This woman must be a great gardener." They both ate and in return he gave Didiwaga all the freshwater prawns he had netted, then he walked back home empty-handed.

At home he spoke to his wife. "*Ei*, one day we should go to Waewa" [a spot next to Didiwaga's place].

His wife replied, "Yes, let's go to Waewa for I have almost finished all the *nipo* strings here [for weaving armlets]. Let's go and weave our armlets and find some food there."

So they left for Waewa. While Didiwaga was dwelling up above, To'anaulo and his wife were living at the head of Waewa. However, one day To'anaulo decided to deceive his wife.

"You stay at home while I go and look for freshwater prawns," he said.

He headed towards the creek, but as soon as he was out of sight he made a diversion towards the home of Didiwaga. He remained there for the entire day. After Didiwaga had cooked and given him yams to eat she asked him:

"You, have you got spouse?"<sup>7</sup>

"Yes, I have a spouse," he replied.

On another occasion, after they both had eaten to their satisfaction, Didiwaga put the leftovers (*sepena*) into a food basket (*wataga*). He took them home and gave them to his wife Nealebo.

"You here, where have you come from?" she asked.

"Ah, while I was looking for freshwater prawns I came across a woman over there. This woman, when she cooks her food there are only yams: *gumanomta*,

<sup>7</sup> In Basima language, the term *mwane*- is used for either husband or wife depending on the gender of the speaker, so the most accurate translation is 'spouse'.



*sepesedi*, *yamsa*, and the like. But she does not cultivate the land, nor even cut the bush (*talai*). Instead, after surveying her plot she goes home. Then after nightfall, the trees simply fall to the ground as if chopped down by men. They remained like that drying, and when they are dry Tagabwaitana<sup>8</sup> will appear and give heat to the debris to burn the garden. She does not even clean up (*lopia*) the remaining debris herself. All she does is chant *lopia* spells and everything is done for her. And the same thing happens at harvest. The yam huts construct themselves and the yams themselves move into the huts. All these activities, though, happen only at night and never during the day. So this is what she told me in the end: 'You and your spouse should come here and live with me.' We should go and live with her, as Didiwaga said."

In the next sequence, however, it appears that To'aulo and Didiwaga went to the garden during the daytime, and manually did the planting themselves.

And so they went up and lived with Didiwaga. By then To'aulo had lost interest in fishing for prawns. Instead he constantly accompanied Didiwaga to the gardens. She cut the yam seeds and planted *mwalaodana* [another locally favoured yam cultivar]. Meanwhile, Nealebo, who was frequently left behind at home, was growing jealous and resentful. It was beginning to look like a polygynous marriage (*ewayaya*).

One day she could not contain herself any longer. She got up and burnt all the houses down, including the various yam huts of Didiwaga: the hut of *yamsa* she burnt, *nekula*'s hut she burnt, the hut of *watea* she burnt - all went up in flames. In the garden, Didiwaga felt something was amiss. She felt sick and disturbed in the stomach. She turned to To'aulo and said:

"O To'aulo, what have you done. Now your spouse has burnt all my huts down." She ran home and yelled at Nealebo angrily while at the same time giving orders to the [sentient] yams.

"*Ei, watea, wateboau edamuna*, take it to Kikiyawe at Boyowa. *O, ah malabwaga, aisola, kedona watea, wediwedi, watea wete kikinegu, dagaile.*"

[*Watea* is the generic term for the more valuable *D. alata*; *wateboau* literally means 'witch-yam'; *malabwaga* is the colourful and highly-valued, dyed banana-leaf skirt, an important item of exchange from Boyowa before *mwali* and *bagi* came to Basima. The other words refer to local yam cultivars. With this harangue, Didiwaga banishes Basima's wealth.]

After her harangue, Didiwaga picked up the *malabwaga* skirt, the yams of *doa*, *aisola*, *kedona*, *watea*, *wediwedi*, etc., and took them all to Boyowa. Since then the people of Boyowa have had more wealth (*une*) than Basima people. Didiwaga took them thence, though their origin was here. Didiwaga spoke to Basima people as follows:

"If a person works hard at cultivation (*iesineuma*) he shall harvest plenty. Yam seeds must be cut; one part (*ipina*) he must discard, the other he must plant.

<sup>8</sup> I cannot give a precise etymology of this word and do not know whether it is associated with supernatural beings of the garden such as Nabelita. However, *egabwaitana* in Basima means 'dying embers'. *Tagabwaitana* probably refers to a supernatural 'fire' or 'embers' which appear when summoned by Didiwaga.

the other he must plant. Those who plant whole yams will deplete their seeds quickly and end up using yams stored in *gisisina* structures [i.e. feast yams]."

## Part II: The dispersal of Basima wealth

As the day dawned, Didiwaga took hold of the lightning (*aiaila*), 'string' and sugarcane (*gwetu*) she got. Then she said:

"From here I shall leave Didiwaga and search for a new place of my own"

She descended and turned to We'ama, then to Duduwe, then to Gilodo, and then to Wadaeia. [These are all places within Lauoya]. At that point her hands grew tired so she laid down the sugarcane (*gwetu*). Moving on further her hands again grew tired so she put down the lightning at Yae. Continuing her journey, she arrived at Wayo, where she swung the 'string' across to Ulua at a small place called Mabo.

From there she went underground and emerged at Kwatota Island [one of the Amphletts] at a spot called Budibudi. She lived there for a while. But this did not satisfy her as the continuous 'resounding of her previous home' (*awalolo ia wayala*), disturbed her still. She thought, "Where shall I run to, for I can still hear the sound of my home?". She then cut a canoe and called it *Keke Itomulimuli* ('Not Steady'). But that was still not enough for her. "I must get away from this place quickly, for I cannot bear this continual reminder of my home."

So, she cut a *madawa* tree [rosewood] and built a bigger canoe. She loaded her yams: *tokotoko* she loaded, *bowau* she loaded, *edamuna* she loaded, *sikeke* she loaded, *yawa* she loaded. Then she set sail and headed for Dutoi point in Duau. However, once within the waters of Duau, her canoe overturned and sank and turned into stone. Most of the yams (*D. alata*) including *tetu* (or *siakutu* [*D. esculenta*]) disembarked and spread throughout the Duau area.

Only a few of the *tetu* and *watea sapilina* (*D. esculenta* pieces) reached the shores of Dobu and Tautaua [Bwaiowa district]. People discovered them there: "Let us get these pieces!"

The Duau people got the better part of *watea*, though they left behind the 'eye' (*matana*) part of the yam. And when Gayobala people [inland of Salamo] got down to their shores, they got the *matana*. They said:

"*Gate sai bebeina, niatu siegumwarina ta gate kwatea tuwesubwa, sa'alana si gusu ya sena. Ta da ewa be ta da tauya.*" [They have finished all the real yams but this bit of *watea's* 'tooth' we shall take home.]

In the meantime Didiwaga had somehow reached Daubutu in the Gayobala area, and she resided there. That is why some of the best *watea* come from Gayobala these days, as on Duau. But its origin was here in Basima.

As we have seen, To'anaulo's wife Nealebo does no gardening; she only weaves armlets. Her name has come to mean an indigent and lazy person, and today any woman who does not garden is referred to as *neabisina*, derived from stay-at-home Nealebo. "*Kakae ida alawata*": 'She has not achieved the status of an *alawata*'

(renowned industrious woman). As Didiwaga said, "*Abega iesineuma maetamo nabagula*": 'Whoever works hard shall later have yam seeds'. Those who follow the advice and garden design instituted by Didiwaga will harvest good yams and store yam seeds properly.

It is interesting to note the myth's thematic contrasts and binary oppositions: fishing (or armlet weaving) versus gardening (entailing the moral contrast of lazy versus hardworking); possession versus loss of wealth (entailing another moral contrast of poor versus wealthy); male versus female roles, etc. This is not the place to engage in a detailed structural analysis of the myth, however, though it will be readily obvious that Didiwaga is what Young has called a 'resentful hero', and the myth itself is remarkably similar to some from Kalauna on Goodenough Island.<sup>9</sup> I simply note that these contrasting notions are important in Basima people's thinking about their own gardens, yam wealth and productivity in comparison to those of their neighbours. Moreover, the features of Basima gardening presented below are believed to be the legacy of Didiwaga, whose 'teaching' explains and justifies the way people arrange their gardens.

#### ***Otanoa*: 'slash and burn'**

As soon as allocations of garden plots (*tanoa*) have been made, people form loosely knit groups on the basis of residence, kinship (*susu*), marriage and friendship, or some combination of all these factors.<sup>10</sup> Members of such garden groups cut each other's plots. Quite commonly individuals precede the cooperative group by clearing a corner of their *tanoa* and leaving the remainder for the group to complete. Sometimes individuals single-handedly clear their own *tanoa*. There is no standard size for a *tanoa*, though the range is from approximately 1500 to 5000 square metres, with the average *tanoa* about a third of a hectare. Sometimes a *tanoa* as small as 2500

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<sup>9</sup> In particular: the myth of Vatako (Young 1983a:36-40), which concerns a 'lazy-gardener' who spends all his time fishing and mending his fish nets; the myth of Kiviwiwole (*ibid.*: 178-187), whose canoe overturns causing the food inside to sink and turn to stone; the myth of Kawafolufolu (*ibid.*: 228-235), whose quarrel with his brother Wameya [*sic*] over yams leads to the latter taking all the yams away to Oya Tabu. As a resentful heroine who leaves her place after being insulted, Didiwaga resembles Vineuma, Kiviwiwole's stone grandmother (*ibid.*: 184). But as a teacher of yam-cultivation, Didiwaga resembles Kawafolufolu's mother, Ninialawata, who gave birth to yams and then taught her human sons how to plant and care for them (*ibid.*: 235).

<sup>10</sup> As in Dobu, *tanoa* refers to recognized bounded garden sites not under cultivation. When *tanoa* plots come under cultivation they are called *bayata* (in Basima) and *bagura* (in Dobu), hence 'gardens'.



square metres may be shared between several family members. In such instances, however, the plots may be additional to larger individually-owned gardens. In 1989, a *tanoa* plot in the gardening area (*laotete*) of Gwaoya was shared between Kinodi, her husband and her father's sister's daughter's son, each of whom had separate small garden plots elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

After clearing the undergrowth, individuals proceed to chop down larger trees or alternatively, debark and burn the base of the trees to kill them. It is then left to the sun to dry the cut bush ready for burning (*gabumu*). Quite often the women's role during the cutting phase of *talai* is confined to providing dishes of food for the workers during rest breaks or upon completion of the work. While men and youths normally carry out the bulk of this task, children are never totally excluded from participating. It is deemed virtuous for them to learn such tasks from an early age. Nowadays of course, men use store-bought steel bushknives and axes for cutting the forest and undergrowth.

Determining boundaries between adjacent *tanoa* is not always easy. The main natural markers which people look out for are purplish-red cordyline plants called *pinosi*, granite river stones previously placed at the corners of *tanoa* plots, large trees and small creeks. Of course, *tanoa* owners themselves have intimate knowledge of the boundaries of all plots adjacent to their own.<sup>12</sup> Another kind of marker not immediately clear to the stranger is the terrace-like lines left behind from previous gardening seasons. These linear marks in the soil are a legacy of the divisional logs (*lewalo* and *bayata*) placed in the gardens. This is particularly true for *tanoa* plots located on slopes where the soil washed down by rain has been trapped by the logs and accumulated along their top surfaces, thereby forming miniature terraces at the bases of these logs. It is also standard practice for women to pile soil at the base of

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<sup>11</sup> Such an arrangement is not uncommon and is also found elsewhere in the Massim region (see Battaglia 1990:93).

<sup>12</sup> In discussing the allocation of *baleku* during *kayaku* (*sic*) in the Trobriands, Malinowski writes that the chief or headman merely identifies one of the *baleku* by name or location, while the rest and especially those adjacent to the first-mentioned are identified by saying " 'I-sekeli' he follow ... 'I-sakaywo' he follow there," and so forth (1935b:27-28). The point is that Basima people simply remember the general features within a *laotete*, such as a plateau, swamp land, rocky ground, etc., which are relative to one's claim of ownership or use rights concerning a *tanoa*. As in the Trobriands, there is no specific name for every *tanoa*, though some may be named after mythically significant rocks, large trees, creeks and the like. That is to say, it is the larger gardening areas called *laotete* (*kwabila* in Boyowa) which have definite names, and within them certain significant features may also be named.

the dividing logs called *lo'ili*. This prevents soil erosion. These miniature terraces, however, only become visible after the slashed bushes have been burnt and the debris cleared. Before I proceed to describe the layout of Basima gardens, however, let me introduce an influential person in gardening activities.

### ***Toigeta*: ritual leader of the garden**

The terms *toigeta*, *siobwala* and *toi'ana* all refer to district gardening specialists whose ritual role is to lead the people in their major gardening activities and inaugurate each phase of yam cultivation, from cutting the bush to harvest. During my fieldwork Diou of Bolousu hamlet was acknowledged to be the principal *toigeta* for the Lauoya district. Like his counterparts in Kiriwina (*towosi*) and Goodenough Island (*tokweli*), he uses magical incantations (*niboana*) and observes special interdictions or taboos.<sup>13</sup> This specialist is accorded immense deference from his fellow gardeners.

The first person to cut down the first bit of the bush of a garden plot has to be the *toigeta* equipped with his magical chants, generically referred to as *niboana* (cf. Bwaidoga *nibogana*, of which Jenness and Ballantyne [1928] give several examples). This inaugurating act is symbolic and therefore does not involve slashing of the entire garden plot. Thereafter the people are allowed to cut their own *tanoa*. Similarly, the *toigeta* also initiates burning of the gardens (*gabu'uma*) which is the next stage, and others then follow suit. As the task of *gabu'uma* is generally assigned to women, the *toigeta* can, if he wishes, appoint his wife or his sister to conduct this task were he unable to do so. He has to chant the magic into a small bundle of herbs first, and then instruct the women to complete the task. It is also said that if the wife or sister of the *toigeta* had begun the ritual since the *lopi*a (clearance of remaining debris after the burning of the garden), she would be allowed to oversee the following rituals up to the period before harvest (Plate 3).

The next major stage, *dauna*, is the planting of yams, and once more the *toigeta* chants his magic and plants the first yam in the centre of his garden. Other gardeners follow his example and plant their first yam seed in the centre of their plots, subsequently radiating the rest outwards to the periphery of their *tanoa*. The same

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Malinowski's (1935a:67) detailed account of the role of the Trobriand garden magician, *towosi*; also Young's (1971:147ff; 1983a:228) account of the analogous Kalauna role of *toitavealata* or *tokweli*.

routine holds for the pegging of yam sticks (*diliga*). The *toigeta* initiates and the others follow. Any individual who plants ahead of the *toigeta* is said to be risking the fertility and propagation of his yams, for it is the rule of Didiwaga that the *toigeta* must lead them in all major phases of gardening.

Next comes the stage of *lo'ili*, which is an activity dominated by women. Accordingly the *toigeta* charms the magic bundle and instructs either his wife or sister to carry out the relevant rites. For *lo'ili* the women organize themselves into groups and go through each garden carrying out the 'soil re-enforcement' task while weeding (*pwaowa*) at the same time. This is done by piling extra soil onto the yam mounds which have been reduced by rain, as well as heaping additional soil at the base of the *lewalo* logs so as to counter soil erosion.

Finally, the *toigeta* inaugurates the yam harvest with his magic. Before people can harvest their yams they must, yet again, wait for the *toigeta* to present a formal oblation of selected yams to the 'lord of the soil', Nabelita. This is a token of appreciation of Nabelita's support in providing a good harvest. Without this final rite, Nabelita will cause the next season to bring a poor harvest and hunger.

Apart from a recognised *toigeta* and his two womenfolk, no other person is allowed to perform this role. The *toigeta* is therefore the overall ritual leader of gardening and yam productivity. He is greatly respected for his ritual work and for his wealth of magical knowledge, usually inherited from his mother's brother. A father may also transmit it, so such knowledge is not necessarily confined to the matriline.

### ***Lewalo* and *bayata*: layout of the gardens**

As a Trobriand Islander whose early socialization imparted a joy in gardening and an appreciation of the good care and growth of yams, my first impression of Basima gardens was tinged with misgivings about people's methods and attitudes. I initially judged them to be flippant, careless, even amateurish gardeners. Of course, this was entirely due to my own cultural prejudice, but it took me some time to understand and appreciate the aesthetics of Basima gardening, an aspect which I first thought was unique to the Trobriand Islands.<sup>14</sup> Below is a description of the Basima way of

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<sup>14</sup> This prejudice of mine regarding the care of gardens was earlier noticed by an American field supervisor (Battaglia 1990:92). Although I am willing to admit that it is personal, it is a prejudice I share with many other Trobrianders. It is not just wishful thinking, however, that of all the Massim societies I have come to know, Trobriand gardeners are quantitatively far more productive. This has much to do with the stimulus and incentive of annual yam festivals. Nevertheless, Trobriand people





Plate 3 A garden cleared and burned for planting during the *lopia* stage



Plate 4 Men building a *sabeyowa* yam hut. On the hillside behind are yam gardens ready for harvesting

constructing and laying out a new garden plot (*tanoa*), though I cannot claim to have learnt all the relevant knowledge of gardening in Basima. It is undeniable that Basima gardeners take much pride in the way they arrange their gardens. They are also concerned about their reputations as successful gardeners; a poor gardener is despised and often referred to as 'lazy' (*yomuyomu* for a man, *neabisina* for a woman).

As in Boyowa, Basima people lay out logs and sticks to demarcate boundaries and also to facilitate garden work. They say that it is much easier to assess progress by completing a task in one part of the plot then moving to another, instead of unsystematically working all over the entire plot. Random or sporadic attempts to work the entire plot, rather than a small area at a time, results in an uncompleted task. This work practice is also despised, being attributed to laziness.

Given Basima's undulating and sometimes rugged topography most gardens are to be found on hillsides. Below is a plan of an ideal Basima garden (*bayata*) indicating the relevant divisional logs used to demarcate the various sections of a yam garden. It should be noted, however, that not all gardens have all of the features represented in Figure 4.1. The arrangement of *bayata* and *lewalo* is said to have been instituted by Didiwaga, a further legacy of her authority over yam cultivation. It is, people claim, an indispensable aspect of gardening, and negligence in this respect would inevitably bring a poor harvest. "*Eguma Didiwaga nagwainua a wate, maetamo ea gesawene atai.*" ('Should we ever dispense with Didiwaga's instructions, we will not have a good yield'). Basima people constantly bear in mind the threat of Didiwaga's sanction while tending their gardens.

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are willing to concede that some places, like Duau or south Normanby Island, also produce some of the biggest and best yams (*D. alata*) in the Massim. Still, it was as if the Didiwaga myth confirmed my cultural stereotype, for it came as no surprise to hear Basima people lament the loss of their wealth to Boyowa.



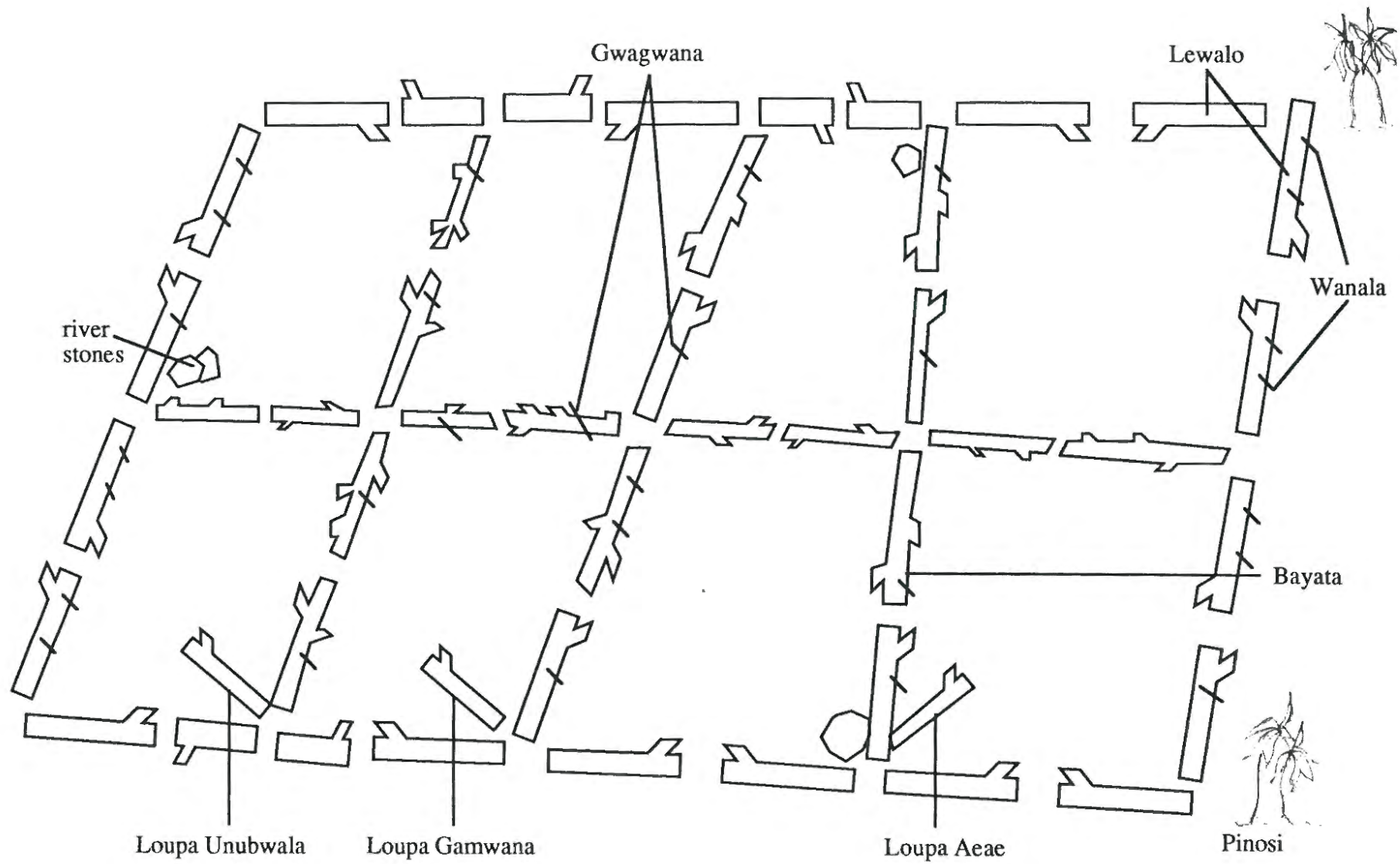


Figure 4.1 An ideal plan of the layout of a Basima garden



In laying out *lewalo* and *bayata* logs, people do not always need to judge for themselves where to place them. They first search for boundary indications of previous gardens, such as the mini-terraces mentioned earlier; some of these will indicate top and bottom of an old garden plot. Where a prominent river stone is located along a perimeter line it may indicate a *loupa*, marking either the central axis or one of the internal subdivisions of the garden plot. Corners (*unubwala* and *aeae*) are usually indicated by a purplish-red cordyline plant. Indeed it is with these cordylines that the *toigeta* begins his magical incantations.

The majority of gardens are rectangular in form but it is not unusual to come across a trapezium-shaped plot. The logs that demarcate boundaries between individually owned garden plots, and also the logs that indicate the perimeters of a *tanoa*, are called *lewalo*. Short, stout sticks (*wanala*) of about thirty centimetres long are placed alongside the *lewalo* to prevent them from rolling down the slope. The logs that crisscross a garden plot, internally subdividing it into a grid-like structure are called *bayata*. Alongside them smaller sticks (*gwagwana*) are inserted as supports; they also help to prevent soil erosion. Thus the *bayata* logs subdivide a *tanoa* whilst the *lewalo* logs define its perimeter and size (see Figure 4.1).

Along the outer sides of the *lewalo*, at least six principal yam sticks (*umwala*) are pegged down.<sup>15</sup> Holding the *umwala* in place is a shorter stick (*gimwane*) pegged slanting at an angle of about forty-five degrees (see Figure 4.2). Two horizontal 'crossbar' sticks (*aetuana*) are tied between the *umwala* uprights to join them all together. These two *aetuana* sticks run parallel to each other, the upper one being about a metre-and-a-half above the ground, the lower one at waist level. According to tradition the lower *aetuana* must be thinner than the upper one. A space between two of the *umwala* sticks is strategically selected and left clear of *aetuana* sticks. This serves as the entrance to the garden, called *madi*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Malinowski's description of the magical post of *kamkokola* placed at strategic corners of a Trobriand garden (1935a:59).

<sup>16</sup> The information in Figure 4.2 was provided by an old man, Banaki, and later confirmed by some of his peers. I personally did not see any *bayata* plots having such a feature. More usual, however, were heavy fences surrounding one or several *bayata* plots built annually to prevent pigs from destroying the crops.

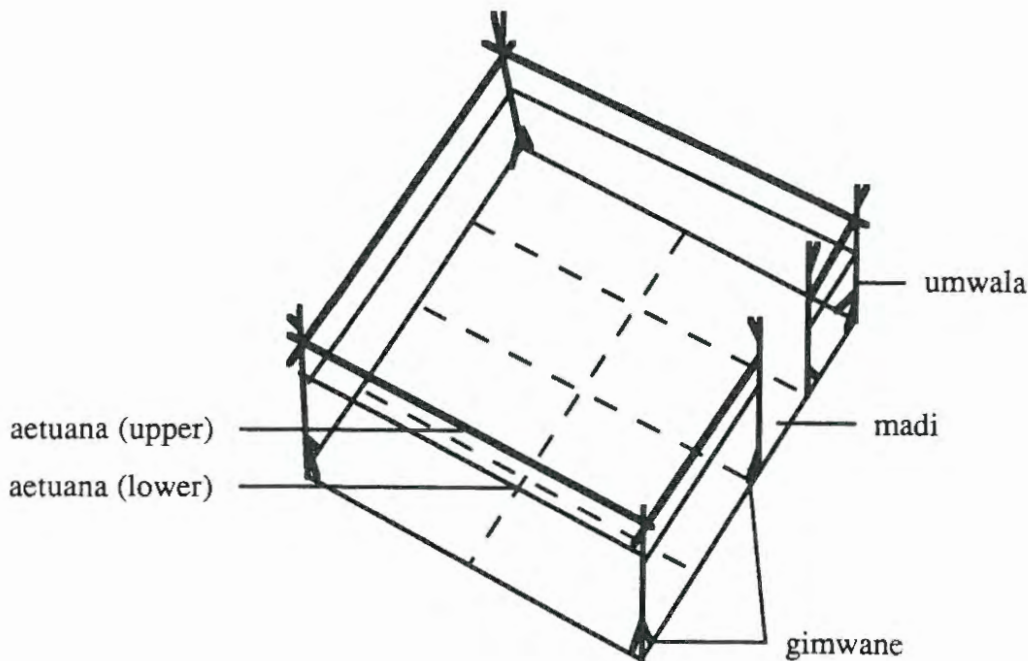


Figure 4.2 Showing the layout of *umwala* and *aetuana* structures

A further physical feature of a Basima garden is its internal subdivision. Depending on its size, it can be conceptually divided into halves, quarters or eighths; the larger the garden the more such subdivisions it will have. *Loupa* or *unuwota* are two terms used interchangeably to refer to the subdivision of a garden plot. A *loupa* log, which has no practical function, is a single marker log placed alongside the *lewalo*. It is adjacent to, but radiating away from, a *bayata* log (see Figure 4.1). If, however, the garden is very small (say about 30 x 50 metres, or 1500 square metres) a *loupa* marker is not required. A *loupa* may also be placed between two small adjacent plots belonging to two different gardeners as a boundary marker. When a garden plot is large, say 60 x 80 metres (4800 square metres), at least three *loupa* are required. Accordingly, the upper *loupa* is referred to as *loupa unubwala* ('-body[?]' *loupa*), the centre is called the *loupa gamwana* ('stomach' *loupa*), and the lowest one *loupa aeae* ('foot' *loupa*).

Discounting drought and other natural disasters, where there are more than one *loupa* they serve as indices of higher yam yields. For instance, if one produces forty baskets of high quality yams, people will assume that it is as a result of having two or more

*loupa* divisions - a large garden. Sixty baskets of sizeable yams may be the favourable yield of three *loupa*. If a garden is located on a slope, corners are easier to designate than those of gardens made on flatter land. All corners of a *tanoa* are called *soi*, but where gardens are located on a slope, the upper corners are specifically referred to as *unubwala*, and the central section *loupa gamwana* ('stomach'), whilst the lower corners of a plot are called *aeae* (a reduplication of *ae-*, the word for foot). Although there seems to be an analogical connection between the garden plot and the human body ('foot' and 'stomach'), I never once heard people make it explicitly.

When laying out the *bayata* and *lewalo* logs, it is important to ensure that the upper and lower ends of the logs are placed in the required way. Thus, the base of a *lewalo* log must always start from the corners of the plot. Whereas the base of the *bayata* logs must always be placed against the perimeter or central axis of the garden (Figure 4.1). Although there is an inkling of some kind of symbolic opposition in the configuration of these divisional logs, I failed to fathom its significance. All Basima people can say is that it is a tradition laid down by Didiwaga.

### ***Bagula*: seeds and their inheritance**

Although yam seeds (*bagula*) are owned by individuals they belong notionally to, and should remain within, his or her *susu*. Every able-bodied person should have his or her own yam seeds whether inherited or acquired through various other means.<sup>17</sup> Ideally, a man's yam seeds should always be inherited by his sisters' sons or, lacking any, by his sisters' daughters or even by his sisters' daughters' sons. The rationale is clear: to maintain *susu* wealth by keeping the inheritance of yams seeds within the group. Yams seeds are the property of a *susu* and should therefore circulate only among its members.

Yam seeds, it is claimed, are never inherited by sons from their father. Should it occur and become public knowledge, gossip (*loai*) would subject the son to great shame (*mayamaya*). The gossip would amount to a public expression of disapproval. Of course, it is quite legitimate for mothers to allow their sons to inherit their yam seeds. Yet there are ways around such a seemingly rigid rule, whereby sons may inherit at least some of their dead father's yam seeds. When a man dies it is naturally

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<sup>17</sup> Although *bagula* is often used to refer to yam seeds, strictly speaking it is the term for any seed used for replanting, including cuttings, banana suckers, saplings, fruits seeds, etc.



expected that his seeds will go to his sister's son. The sons, however, face the onerous task of providing a substantial prestation of food (*bwabwale*) for their dead father. Cross-cousins call one another *dibe-* (see Appendix I on Basima kinship terminology). Their relationship is generally friendly and uncompetitive. After their mother's brother's death, the sister's sons begin to address their *dibe-* as *natu-* (children); reciprocally, the dead man's children address their male cross-cousins as *tama-* (fathers). The sister's sons may sympathize with their cross-cousins (now their *natu-*) for the burden of *bwabwale* that they have to bear. So the sister's sons may legitimately pass their mother's brother's seeds to his own sons.<sup>18</sup> The logic of this is that the sons may now use their dead father's seeds and plant a bigger garden in order to make a large mortuary food prestation (*bwabwale*) for him. They may keep the seeds after the harvest but must make a substantial prestation of yams to the sister's sons, their *dibe-*. Basima people assert this as the ideal and most solemn way of making *bwabwale* prestations for one's dead father. But everything depends on one's *dibe*, for it is entirely the cross-cousin's prerogative to allow (or disallow) this kind of social arrangement (see Chapter Five on 'redirected *bwabwale*').

### Spirit beings of the garden

In making comparisons between Dobu and Basima concerning their horticultural magic, Fortune mentioned three supernatural beings people evoke for their assistance: Yabowaine, Nabelita and Bunelala (1963:281; see also Roheim 1934:130; 1946; 1948:281-299). I was given two principal names in Basima: Bunelala and Nabelita, both associated with gardening. Bunelala is said to be the chief or 'lord' of the gardens (*tanoa naguyau*) and gardening activities, particularly those pertaining to seed yams of *watea*. At each harvest a gardener should heap some yams in the centre of his plot as a gift to Bunelala in appreciation of his supervision. Sinitu, a bush spirit (*totoa* or *tokwatokwa*) is another who is summoned for assistance in the magical spells (*nabwasua*) that are sung over yams. A gardener's misapplication or infringement of the magical procedures brings sores and illness induced by Sinitu; likewise eating one's own produce, especially from those gardens that have come under Sinitu's *nabwasua* (see below). Nabelita, the other supernatural

<sup>18</sup> In Dobu, as in Basima, cross-cousins are obliged to remake their relationship after the death of the key person (father or mother's brother) who linked them. Fortune (1963: 37-38) describes the changes of status and associated changes in kin terms after the death of one's father. Battaglia (1990:78-79) discusses in detail this kind of relationship among Sabarl Islanders. Her reciprocal term *nubaiu* for the cross-cousin relationship is cognate with Dobu *niba-*.

associated with the gardens, is said to live on a coral atoll called Bwanou, beyond the island of Tewara towards the east. His companion and messenger is a large blue fly (*nabugala*), dubbed 'his dog' (*na-kedewa*). Like a witch, he is believed to have an insatiable appetite for fresh corpses which he exhumes after their burial.<sup>19</sup>

Extra large yam gardens are necessary for a *susu* to repay mortuary debts or to stage a *sagali*. But in the very act of making a large garden for a death feast, the *susu* may be obliged to suffer yet another death within their group. Whether with tacit group consensus or not, the female witches of the *susu* are said to fly off to Nabelita to make a deal with him. They ask him for yam seeds in return for a corpse from their own *susu*, which they promise to deliver at the end of the harvest. When this pact is sealed the women return home and secretly distribute the yam seeds to their brothers and other *susu* members for planting. Although the brothers are aware of the source of the yams and the dire consequence of the pact, it is too late for them to object. An agreement has been made with a powerful supernatural being. (Failure to fulfil the agreement will result in an additional death in the group and a poor yam harvest in that particular season.) Towards the end of the harvest, Nabelita sends his 'dog' messenger to check whether anyone among the *susu* has fallen ill. If there is a seriously sick person, the blue fly would return to inform Nabelita. An imminent death promises fulfilment of the agreement. Nabelita then keeps his ears pricked for the sound of the grave-digger's digging sticks breaking the soil. As soon as the corpse is buried, he snatches it and takes it home to Bwanou.

Insofar as yams, yam seeds and personal garden magic are concerned, the restrictions are especially severe for an adult male gardener. In addition to general ritual assistance from *toigeta*, each gardener has his own magical spells. These personal

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<sup>19</sup> The similarity between Nabelita of Bwanou and Tau Mudurere of Numu as reported by Roheim for Normanby Island (1948:281-299) is striking. In Roheim's account, Tau Mudurere ("Man's pubic part tattooed") inhabits the underworld called Numu, although some versions claim that Numu is an island (which concurs with the notional location of Basima's Bwanou). Tau Mudurere is said to be the chief of Numu, a *wasawasa* ('*esa'esa*) and 'owner of yams'. He possesses magic for gardens, yams and canoes. He causes epidemics. As subjects, he has two kinds of spirits serving him: *Kasanumu* (spirits of the underworld), and *Sesegani* (sea spirits). All witches (*werabana*) of Duau (Fergusson too for that matter) are said to be his wives. Indeed, they are wives of all the Numu spirits. Witches go down to Numu in search of *huyowana* (happiness) or to get yams and betel, or bring back sickness to people. In exchange for the good things they receive they are obliged to give the 'souls' of their own kinsmen to Tau Mudurere. He eats them. A visit to Tau Mudurere means death in the mundane world, just as a visit to Tau Mudurere's son, Bokunopita, means 'happiness' for the witches. The magic and yam peelings they gather from Numu come from the *Sesegani* spirits who are in charge of yam productivity. It is the names of these spirits that people invoke in their own garden incantations.

spells are strongly associated with the garden supernatural beings, especially Bunelala and Sinitu. Basima people maintain that this is one of the reasons why a man and his wife must never eat yams from the husband's own yam garden. According to my informant, Meduwau:

The yams are full of *niboana* or *nabwasua* [magic] - if he [male owner in particular] eats them, he will have big sores, lose weight, and get sick. Also Sinitu will be angry, as he is also in charge of the magic used for those yams. He [gardener] can only eat from his wife's yam garden because *niboana* was not used in her garden. The wife cannot eat from the husband's because, according to Didiwaga, her husband's yams are hers too.

On the other hand, children can eat from their father's garden for as long as he lives. Unlike their parents, the magical spells do not refer to the children as 'owners' seeking assistance from the supernatural beings. This magic is said to be the main reason why after harvest, a Basima man, is obliged to give his subsistence yams away to other relatives to consume, as he cannot eat them (see the last section on yam categories below). He may give them to his children, his parents, his siblings, affines or his exchange partners. In return he is reciprocated with yams from other gardeners. However, when he gives such yams to his sisters they should ideally pass them on to their affines (husbands' *susu*), which in due course should necessitate a further, albeit low-keyed exchange of yams.

### ***Dauna and diliga: planting and staking***

According to Didiwaga's instructions, *watea* yams ought to be cut into pieces (*matana*, 'eyes') before planting. *Tetu* yams are exempted from this rule. To plant *watea* yams whole, however, is to risk 'losing them all'.<sup>20</sup>

Digging sticks are used for both planting and harvesting yams. A stick of about one-and-a-half-metres is sharpened with a steel bushknife and used for that purpose. Both types of yam (*tetu* and *watea*) are planted at the same time. Where group co-operation is involved, the garden owner normally proceeds to distribute the seeds. He is followed by the helpers with their digging sticks; they break the soil and subsequently insert the seeds into the yam mounds. Not infrequently, individuals handle both tasks at the same time. Most often conjugal families undertake the entire gardening tasks. Thus, the husband helps the wife plant her garden and vice versa.

<sup>20</sup> This, however, contradicts Fortune's claim that in Basima the *kwatea* (i.e. *watea*) were not cut into 'eyes' as in Dobu (1963:281).



Once again, after the planting is over it is left to the women to tend the gardens and rid it of weeds and any other remaining debris.

While women are carrying out such tasks, men are supposed to remove old yams (especially the *wekwaguyona* type) remaining in the yam huts and give them to the women, it is said, so as to finally consume all yams from the previous harvest, to finish the 'old' and wrinkled yams (*iala*) in anticipation of the fresh ones (*bwanau*). This occasion is called *eapweia*, and this ceremonial consumption of old yams customarily coincides with the gardening stage of *lo'ili*. There was no suggestion that the 'old' yams might contaminate the 'new' if they were to remain in the hut, nor was there any explicit notion of rejuvenation or fertility symbolized by the new yams replacing the old. The ceremonial consumption of *eapweia* is simply another part of the yam gardening cycle which people perform with respect.

In the meantime fences for the gardens would have been completed and men would have begun to cut stakes for the yam vines. *Diliga* refers to both yam stakes and the activity of staking. As in the Trobriands, sticks for this purpose come in a variety of lengths and thicknesses. Larger and healthier yam vines require longer and stronger yam sticks to withstand gusts of wind. As a rule, when they are staked all yam sticks must lean towards the two highest peaks of the island, Oya Tabu and Oya Nai, which loom just to the north of Basima territory. This particular orientation is ensured regardless of whether the garden is on a slope or on the flat. Once again, I do not fully understand the significance of this gardening tradition, though the fact that the name Oya Tabu features in yam magic throughout the D'Entrecasteaux clearly suggests that the mountain is associated with vigorous yam growth and large tubers.<sup>21</sup>

The sticks are staked next to the yam mounds and when the vines grow up they are trained to climb their assigned stake. As a rule, *watea* yams (*D. alata*) start from the right side of the *diliga*, whilst *tetu* (*D. esculenta*) start from the left side, coiling towards the right and then spiralling upwards, following their natural tendency.

The ultimate purpose of gardening is to provide for one's own and one's dependents' sustenance. However, even within Melanesia, societies differ greatly in the rules and

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<sup>21</sup> In Kalauna, for instance, the most famous and highly-prized variety of yam (*D. alata*) is named Oyatabu [*sic*]. It is the child of Ninialawata and gives its name to a system of yam magic (Young 1983a:228).

conventions they follow concerning the distribution and exchange of garden produce. The actual producers are not necessarily the consumers, and in many instances their own garden produce goes elsewhere than to their own households. A classic example in this area is the delayed exchange associated with the concept of *urigubu* in the Trobriands (cf. Malinowski 1922:63-65; 1935a:91, 189, 190-192 & 209); Weiner 1976:104, 204-207). Basima people likewise claim that a man must provide a substantial portion of his garden produce (especially yams) to either his elder siblings, his parents, or even his own children. As mentioned above, Didiwaga had instructed that one must never eat yams from his own garden. Failure to take heed of this injunction is said to result in chronic sores covering one's body as well as to render one's yam seeds unproductive. It is therefore usual to observe Basima people giving away one or two baskets of yams to friends and neighbours at each harvest; these are reciprocated within a few days.

### Harvested yams in their huts

The most obvious sign the yams display when they are ready to be harvested is a colour change in the leaves; around the beginning of May their yellow deepens to brown. By then the southeast wind, *bolimana*, is reaching full strength, starting as a cool breeze early in the morning and building momentum as noon approaches. Although both types of yam are planted at about the same time, *watea* tend to mature more quickly than *tetu*, so they are harvested about a month earlier. The change of leaf colour also signals the time to construct yam huts (Plate 4).

These are of two types, though nowadays only a few elderly specialists construct distinctive saddle-backed *sanala* yam huts, whereas almost everyone builds the ordinary, undecorated kind called *sabeyowa* (Plates 5 and 6). The *sanala* yam hut is built within the hamlet, close to its owner's house. The *sanala* doubtless asserts the authority of the owner within the hamlet and even the district, proclaiming him a wealthy and respected *to'esa'esa*. In 1989, I counted only three *sanala* yam huts in Basima, one of which was already in a very dilapidated state. In view of their traditional significance it is as well to refer to the symbolism of their decoration.

As it was explained to me by Balaia of Salewe hamlet, the symbolism appears to depend upon a series of oppositions. Thus, where the two gable boards meet at the roof's apex, a carved, leaf-shaped piece of wood joins them. One side of this piece is painted black and the other is painted white or red, if not left plain (see Plate 5). It nonetheless depicts 'light' in contrast to the black, representing 'darkness', of the other





Plate 5 *Sanala*. A decorated yam hut in Salewe hamlet



Plate 6 Ordinary yam huts at a garden site



side. The dark side represents *otala* (the time of dearth and hunger) and the light side represents *bolimana* (the time of plenty). The two halves also represent the two dominant peaks of Oya Tabu (represented by the 'light' half), and Oya Nai (represented by the 'dark' half). Other symbolic features of the *sanala* yam hut's structural design included *waga* (canoe) and human sexual organs. The myth of Tauhau and his 'brother' Kaiwa (alias Kasabwaibwaileta) is also said to be associated with the gable designs with symbolic connotations of marriage, adultery and divorce (see Fortune 1963:230). Insofar as only *to'esa'esa* build and own them, the notion of *guyau* or 'chiefly' status is also clearly associated with the *sanala*.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting that in Basima, as in the Trobriands, yam huts (signifying wealth in yams) are public symbols of individual and group status.

Ordinary yam huts can be built in less than a week, and as soon as they are completed people form groups and help one another to harvest their yams, though a few individuals carry out the task single-handedly. It is during the harvest that each gardener begins to segregate the yam yield into different categories: yams for seeds, yams for feasting, and yams for immediate consumption, both for household members and domesticated pigs.

It is necessary to take a closer look at the interior of yam huts so as to locate the various categories of yams differentiated by Basima people. The yams are arranged in a manner commensurate with their use and destination. The seed yams to be planted next season are set aside in a corner of the yam hut. The prized large yams (*taginapwana*) are placed in various heaps (*oita*), each being set aside for a particular category of relative: sisters, parents, etc. All the recipients are subsequently informed of where exactly within the yam hut their heap of yams lie. This is very important, as whenever the need arises recipients can, without the gardener's formal consent, help themselves to yams from their designated heap. However, it is deemed appropriate to do this only for feasting purposes (not for daily household subsistence), and a recipient would inform the yam hut owner or his wife with words to the effect, I need these yams for *sagali* so have come to get them.

A standard *oita* is about waist high with a base circumference of about three metres. In local idiom, a squatting person on the other side of the *oita* must be completely hidden. On average there would be four or five different *oita* to be found in a single

<sup>22</sup> Fortune notes that the 'decorated yam houses resemble those of the Trobriands, and are not found in Dobu or elsewhere in Fergusson Island' (1963:283 [1932:281]).

yam hut, though a poor harvest might yield only two or three. A very good harvest, people say, would yield as many as seven heaps of prized yams in the hut. These heaps, of course, exclude yam seeds which are kept separately; their sizes vary considerably but they are generally much smaller than the prize yams.

Basima people estimate that one *loupa* or major garden division should produce two *oita*. A *loupa* is usually about twenty metres of the garden's length and some ten to fifteen metres in width; it should produce about twenty full baskets (*ela*) of prized yams. One basket normally contains some six to eight yams, though of course the number will vary according to the sizes of the individual yams.<sup>23</sup> Hence, Basima people calculate that a two-*loupa* garden should produce from forty to fifty baskets of yams, which would make about four *oita*.

Not all yam huts are located on the periphery of the gardener's hamlet; some are located in the gardens. Wherever they are, however, they serve the same practical and social purpose. Ideally, a yam hut contains the following categories or classes of yam heaps:

*Taginapwana*: Such *oita* characteristically consist of the best and biggest yams which are usually given as prestations during marriage feasts (*poala*), mortuary feasts (*bwabwale*), and major memorial feasts (*sagali*). An average *taginapwana* yam measures up to 30cm in length and 12cm in diameter. There may be as many as four different *taginapwana* yam heaps in a yam hut, depending on the number of recipients for whom the owner is gardening.

*Bagula*: Sometimes *bagulidi* is used to mean 'yams as seeds'. This *oita* consists of yams set aside as seeds for the coming season. As a rule no one may touch this *oita* except the gardener as it is for exclusive planting purposes.

*Wekwaguyona*: This *oita* consists of good quality yams which are somewhat smaller than *taginapwana*. Sizes vary of course, but a *wekwaguyona* would measure up to 14cm in length and 6cm in diameter. These yams are specifically set aside for the gardener's sisters, mothers, fathers and his or her own children. Hence, the consumption of *wekwaguyona* is confined to immediate family members, including one's own household. (The yam producer and *oita* owner cannot eat them however.) Even so, only a particular type of *wekwaguyona* yams are selected for household consumption. This is one with a prominent 'forehead' (*se'alina*). Moreover, these are the yams which gardeners give away to women when they undertake gardening tasks such as *lo'ili* (the co-operative work of mounding the soil). I mentioned above how such gifts by gardeners to women at this stage ceremonially ends the consumption of yams from the previous harvest.

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<sup>23</sup> An average *tetu* (*D. esculenta*) measures up to 30cm in length and between 4-10cm in diameter. Generally, however, *watea* (*D. alata*) are longer and fatter.

*Didina*: This is the fourth and least important of the classes of yam heap seen in a yam hut. It consists of the smallest yams, those rendered socially insignificant. They are used for immediate family consumption, pig fodder, or might casually be given to sisters and mothers along with some of the *wekwaguyona* yams. Yams in this heap never appear in public display in ceremonies and festivals.

As can be seen, the main sociological distinction between these yam classes is based on the roles they play in the fulfilment of kinship obligations (*taginapwana*), in the sustenance of one's household (*wekwaguyona* and *didina*), and in the reproduction of one's gardens (*bagula*). Taken together, these categories represent a Basima person's social existence. That is why those who dislike or neglect yam gardening (*yomuyomu* and *neabisina*) are despised as incomplete social beings. It is a truism that the way people organize themselves in pursuit of their main subsistence activities reflects their social and physical environments.

In this chapter I sought to present a brief ethnographic account of the way Basima people create their gardens, both physically in relation to their seasonal and natural environment, and symbolically and aesthetically according to the mythical heroine Didiwaga's prescriptions. The activities I described were centred around the most valued, prized and coveted root crop in Basima: the yam (both *Dioscorea alata* and *D. esculenta*). The mythical 'loss' of yams is seemingly compensated by Basima people's knowledge of and pride in yam growing, and by their struggle to retain the 'fame' of yams, whereby to assert their social status in feasts and other ceremonial events. This struggle for prestige (both for individuals and their *susu*) is typically conducted through yam displays and yam prestations during mortuary feasts and *sagali*.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### ***BWABWALE: FEASTING THE LIVING FOR THE DEAD***

#### **Introduction**

In the D'Entrecasteaux, as indeed throughout the Massim, mortuary ceremonies are of immense importance (Damon and Wagner 1989). In this chapter I examine Basima practices associated with death, focusing particularly on ceremonial mortuary feasting and exchange. The general term *sagali* (great feast or distribution) is common in the Massim; likewise, cognates of the smaller and more specific mortuary feast called *bwabwale* are also found throughout the D'Entrecasteaux. Thus, *bwabwale* (Basima, Molima, Duau and Goodenough), *bobole* (Amphletts), *bwobwore* (Dobu) (see Chowning 1989:108; Thune 1989:165-7; Young 1989:28; Fortune 1963:194-5). The similarity of these terms leads to a tempting assumption that the mortuary ceremonies they refer to are basically similar. This cannot be taken for granted, however, and there is in fact considerable local variation in form and content. That is, although the Basima term for general mortuary activities, *bwabwale*, corresponds to a particular stage of mortuary ceremonies in Bwaidoka of Goodenough Island and Molima in south Fergusson, for instance, it has different connotations. *Bwabwale* in Basima is cognate but not identical to *bwabwale* in Bwaidoka and Molima, each of which also differ.

Massim ethnographers beyond the D'Entrecasteaux have recently viewed mortuary ceremonies as forming sequences of death-related events: 'transitions' (Hertz 1960) from, say, phase A through to phase Z (e.g. the contributions of Campbell, Montague, Damon, Macintyre, Lepowsky and Liep in Damon and Wagner 1989). This point concerning a series of various but sequentially linked mortuary ceremonies is valid, though from this perspective the data from Basima are ambiguous to say the least, and appear to differ somewhat from many of those already reported from the Massim. In Basima, *bwabwale* is used not only to refer to mortuary ceremonies but is also found in the contexts of marriage, inter-group exchange relations and food prohibitions. Thus, although *bwabwale* primarily refers to relations between the living and the dead, its broad semantic field encompasses group exchange of many kinds, not simply those following death.

This chapter examines the concept of *bwabwale* in detail; it also presents Basima mortuary ceremonies as discrete events, though with structural similarities and thematic continuities. This is not to deny that there sometimes occur a series of connected mortuary events and themes that typically, as in the Massim area generally, culminate in a major feast (*sagali* or *soi* and their cognates) which involves the participation of outsiders and is primarily motivated by the sponsors' desire for renown. I deal with Basima *sagali* in Chapter Seven. In this chapter, however, I limit myself to the presentation of two mortuary ceremonies staged by Basima people: *daweluwelu* and *bwabwale*. The latter is considered to be mandatory for every death. The former is an optional ceremony for the 'owners of the dead', and when it does occur, it provides an opportunity for the 'children' of male deceased to make a *bwabwale* prestation. The rationale of all such feasts is to fulfil social obligations between affinally-related groups. I begin with an account of death in Basima, noting comparisons with Fortune's descriptions of similar events in Tewara.

#### ***Eto muya?: The cause of death in Basima***

Between November 1988 and February 1990 seven deaths came to my notice; six were of adults and one was of a baby. Shortly after my departure three more adults and a youth were reported to have died. Thus, between November 1988 and June 1990, there were eleven deaths in all. Deaths in Basima do not occur without explanation of their possible causes. Of the seven deaths I witnessed or investigated, two were unanimously agreed to have been due to old age; one was suicide caused by taking the poisonous *derris* root; two were blamed on witches; and the last was said to have been due to prolonged bronchial disease (*sowa*), probably tuberculosis.

The suicide case was a consequence of a young woman's despair over her love-magic-inspired infatuation with her cohabiting lover of only two weeks, who blatantly neglected her. One of the witchcraft cases involved a male victim from the Amphletts who was married to a Basima woman. He was an affine of the chief sponsor of the *sagali* to be described in Chapter Seven. The victim was said to have failed to return to his island immediately after the *sagali*, and thus neglected to share with his kinsmen the pork and yams he had received. This was considered reason enough for his death, which occurred only a week after the *sagali*; he had been 'executed' by the enraged, envious witches from his island village. The baby's death was blamed on its mother's mother's sisters (maternal *tubunao*). They bore grudges against the mother or mother's mother, so the death was speculatively thought to



have been revenge on the witches' part. The baby's *mamayauna* (spirit or soul, literally shadow) was snatched away one night as the child lay at its mother's side, and subsequently drowned in a nearby river.

It is common belief in Basima that corpses do not remain in their graves after burial. Instead they are alleged to be exhumed and carried away by witches. Such beliefs are common throughout the Massim (cf. Roheim 1948; Lepowsky 1981:455ff, among many others). Although sorcery (*balau*) is said to exist, I was given few stories about it and I learned very little about its prevalence. It is witchcraft (*bowau* or *baita*) that is evidently feared much more and discussed with far greater frequency. It is a craft practiced predominantly by women, though a few men were alleged to possess some of its secrets. The most notorious male witch was also a renowned curer. Together with their female counterparts, male witches are believed to work maliciously at night as members of a secret coven. People told me tales of seeing 'transparent' witch-figures dragging corpses out of graves or even out of houses prior to burial. As we have seen, although old age and diseases like tuberculosis are clearly recognized by Basima people as causes of death, they still attribute many deaths to witchcraft.

Concerning necromancy, Fortune reported as follows: 'In Basima the custom of interpreting the cause of deaths by reading signs on the corpse is practised. In this way the provocation for the sorcery or witchcraft that killed the deceased is interpreted' (1963:280-1). In the first edition of *Sorcerers of Dobu* he names this practice *etomuia* (1932:281); but since he omitted the word from his second edition it would appear that he'd had second thoughts about its meaning. *Etomuia* is not the technical term for the practice, however, but a query about the cause of a death. It should be transcribed as *Eto muya?* - literally, 'What illness [is it]?' *Muya* refers to major diseases and epidemics, as opposed to ordinary, everyday illnesses. The technical term for the practice mentioned by Fortune is *wae*.

The three *wae* signs depicted by Fortune are indeed the most frequent according to modern informants. Their names, together with their referents as causes of death by sorcery or witchcraft, are as follows: *Bawe* ('Pig Wallow: The deceased died of owning too many pigs'); *Bayata* ('Garden: The deceased died of owning too good a garden'); and *Yodu* ('Fire sticks for cooking: The deceased died of eating something without distributing it to others') (see Fortune 1932:281). An additional *wae* sign not mentioned by Fortune is described below. Traditionally, those who read the *wae* would remove the stone slab covering the grave and read the marks or signs on the



corpse; they would also check to see if the corpse was holding anything. I was told that if it was found to be holding a pig's tusk then death had been caused by having too many pigs; if it was a yam then death had been due to greed and lack of generosity.

Although I did not witness a *wae* rite myself in 1989-90, informants still spoke as if it were practiced, though towards the end of the conversation they would admit that it not done as often as before. During my brief revisit in January 1993, however, I witnessed a burial which included a *wae* rite of another kind. After the burial a handful of ashes from a fire were neatly sprinkled on top of the burial mound by the younger brother of the deceased. That night he returned to check the grave for signs of disturbance. He found the ashes had been strewn all over the mound. The meaning of this, according to the brother, was that eventually their entire *susu* would be wiped out; hence, it was a dire warning and prediction rather than an explanation for the cause of death.

I was told that those who read signs on the corpse are not exclusively the sister and sister's children of the deceased (as was the case when Fortune witnessed it). The deceased's brothers and mothers' brothers may also be readers, but no others. In short, it is the minimal *susu* or the smallest unit of mutual trust.<sup>1</sup> At death, moreover, only *susu* members are supposed to approach, touch and carry the corpse. As we shall see, however, an interesting exception occurs under the rubric of *kakae mata ipina* which legitimately allows the sons to touch their dead father.

### **Mourning and burial duties**

A death in Basima attracts a variable number of mourners. Sometimes the immediate mourning is confined to members of the household alone. Deaths of important men (*to'esa'esa*) and women (*alawata* or *sineuma*) invariably attract many mourners. In this section I describe a burial that I witnessed in Pwaepwae hamlet in December 1989. The deceased was a respectable old woman and news of her death attracted as many as seventy mourners to her funeral: a large number by Basima standards. They were composed of her matrilineage (*susu* members), her clansmen, affines and unrelated neighbours and friends. The affinal category included the dead woman's children's spouses and in-laws, and their children as well. When I joined the rest of

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare the people of Kaduwaga in the Trobriands who extend the recruitment of 'trusted investigators' of corpses to clan level (see Montague 1989:41-42).

the mourners at Pwaepwae, the corpse (except for the head) was already wrapped in several cotton sheets and placed on a pandanus mat on a stretcher. One end of the stretcher rested on the doorway, the other facing the verandah so that it slanted towards the ground. A very similar arrangement can be seen in Fortune's photograph from Dobu (see 1963: plate vi [bottom]).

The sister, daughters and daughters-in-law of the deceased seemed to be the most active mourners whose wails were louder than everyone else's. After a lull in the crying, it would resume as each new relative arrived from a distant place. The daughters who sat beside the corpse kept it protected from flies. By eleven o'clock in the morning, only a few low groans of grief could still be heard. The sister of the deceased was in the centre of the hamlet doing a slow dance (*elele*) while uttering a few sentences recalling the good times and the generosity of her sister.<sup>2</sup> In her hand she carried an old basket of her sister containing a few of her personal possessions.

As the other mourners rested under the shade of betel palms and on the front porches of the few huts, five men began digging a round hole for the grave (*ali'ali*) some forty metres away from the deceased's hut. This was in the centre of the hamlet at the foot of a small grove of betel palms.<sup>3</sup> The hole was about eighty centimetres in diameter and a metre and a half in depth. The five grave-diggers were all from the deceased's clan of Etonouna. The closest relative among them was the dead woman's sister's son; two others were classificatory sons from the same *susu*, whose origin was Molima; the most distantly related grave-diggers were from *susu* originating in Bosalewa and Kwatota. 'They are distant relatives (*semao*)', my informants said, in explanation for these two clansmen's participation in the work of grave-digging. The assumption is that the Molima, Bosalewa and Kwatota *susu* of Etonouna clan are 'kinsmen' because they migrated into Basima at the same time and settled side-by-side.

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<sup>2</sup> *Elele* is a dance performance made to farewell the deceased. A number of phrases are used to describe the dance: '*Sielele*', '*Silokaioni*' and '*Sisuyetune*', all of which mean 'They are dancing to farewell the deceased'. In a *lomasala* performance, however, a similar dance ritual is referred to as *lotete* (cf. Weiner 1988:38, photo 11).

<sup>3</sup> All the burials I witnessed were in the hills, in traditional burial places in the maternal hamlets (*natala*) of the deceased. Even people dwelling in coastal hamlets may be returned to maternal hamlets in the hills for burial. Where a *susu* buries, indeed, is a good indication of where it believes its original Basima settlement to have been.



As we see from this instance, grave-diggers and buriers are related maternally to the deceased. Preferably they are members of the *susu*, but in any case from the same clan (*unuma*). There were no food or wealth transactions whatsoever made between the affines and the 'owners of the dead' on the day of the funeral, certainly none which could be likened to what Fortune described as payments for the 'sextons' in the form of *bwobwore* or *kunututu* (1963:194). Hence, the buriers' payments were not clear to me on this occasion, though I was informed that they would eventually be given food as compensation. (I return to the problem of payment for mortuary services towards the end of the chapter.) Those involved in any way in the handling and carrying of the corpse need to bathe (*siwalolo*) in the sea to avoid getting an aching body and falling sick. *Siwalolo* is especially necessary for those corpse-carrying individuals who themselves are not members of the *susu* of the deceased (as explained in Chapter Two). Like burial, corpse-carrying is considered an onerous task, having significant social implications; hence, the carriers must be cleansed and compensated.

Basima graves are usually round and deep. Traditionally, it was said, they were L-shaped, so that the corpse could be made to sit upright with legs extended into a horizontal chamber. The rationale of sitting upright is said to be that it enables the corpse to hold in its hand a tangible symbol of the cause of death. As we have seen, this then allows the readers of *wae* to determine the cause of the death. In modern burials, as in this one, a straight-sided, metre-and-a-half-deep hole was dug. The corpse was wrapped again in mats and another sheet and slowly lowered into the hole. The now rigid corpse was first of all forced into a sitting position, so that her knees were almost touching her chin.<sup>4</sup> Normally a Christian service is held at this point followed by the final communal wail from the mourners. The service, however, did not take place (but there were no rumours of anyone preventing it). The hole was not filled. Instead, a large slab of slate-like stone was placed over it. Loose soil was then spread over the slab and the surface trampled upon.<sup>5</sup> A circular line of stones

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<sup>4</sup> In February 1989, a corpse was wrapped in a similar position in a basket (*kwalisi*) and carried up to the hills for burial.

<sup>5</sup> Chowning noted a similar burial arrangement for Molima where 'A large circular stone cap was put on top, but the body was not covered with earth' (1989:105). The stone slab would suggest that Basima people used to practice a form of secondary burial in the past, though I failed to investigate this matter. No cave burials or 'pot burials', for instance, came to my notice (see de Vera and Young 1980 for a brief review of the Massim literature).



was made around the rim of the grave, and between these stones croton cuttings were planted together with some young betel plants, thus marking the grave.

By common practice, the corpse must be made to face the deceased's place of origin. If he was an immigrant (*wagawaga*) then he must be made to face his *susu's* district or island of origin. If he was an autochthone (*tutupawa*) of Basima, then he must be made to face his *susu's* site of emergence. Belief in Bwebweso as the land of the dead does not appear to be so strong in Basima as in the southern D'Entrecasteaux (cf. Fortune 1963:12, 143, 181ff; Roheim 1946, 1948); Thune 1989:156). Like Molima, Basima people do not appear to have any firm ideas about the 'fate of the soul' (Chowning 1989:112); indeed, mortuary rituals are comparatively secular in that there is very little overt concern with the passage of the deceased's spirit.

Following the old woman's burial in Pwaepwae, young male members of the *susu* climbed all the betel palms in the hamlet and ceremoniously distributed the nuts. This not only completed the burial but also marked the commencement of a taboo placed upon the entire hamlet. Its fruits could no longer be harvested and its residents had to vacate the hamlet. They would remain away until the *bwabwale* ceremony. On this occasion no food was cooked for distribution to the mourners, and there was no formal post-burial meeting. Soon after the distribution of betelnut everyone left the hamlet in a sombre mood. Restrictions concerning major gardening work, noise, festivities (*mwamwadu*) were confined only to this small hamlet. Normal activities went on uninterrupted elsewhere.

During the distribution of the betelnut, the dead woman's maternal kin discussed the possibility of staging a *daweluwelu* ceremony for her (see below). There was also a suggestion that, having been a respected *alawata*, she should be honoured by a performance of mourning songs called *lomasala*. But 'the owners of the dead' decided not to commit themselves to the expense of a *daweluwelu*. As it happened this decision served them well, for the very next day the dead's woman's own sister's son - a married man with several children - also died, supposedly killed by witches. The *susu* (which numbered no more than fifteen people) was greatly shaken. The man was duly buried, and at the funeral meeting it was again mooted that a *daweluwelu* mortuary ceremony be held together with a *lomasala* performance (see below). Both deaths could thus be celebrated. This time, however, it was the local Catholic catechist who objected most strongly to the proposition. He had attended the burial to give a Christian funeral service. He argued that the *lomasala*

performance was unchristian and therefore not an appropriate way of honouring the dead man who was considered to be a devout Christian. Despite some opposition, the pastor's view prevailed.

### **A digression on mortuary 'sequences'**

As Wagner states after summarizing the available information on the sequencing of Massim mortuary ceremonies:

The concerted symbolic and social activity that serves to 'construct' this typical sequence is, however, rather different in content and conception, if not in feature, from one society to another, and underlying similarities in format can easily conceal, as well as reveal, details of variability (1989:258)

But it seemed to me that 'variability' was not the answer to the unreliability of the so-called 'sequence' of mortuary ceremonies in Basima, and I felt obliged to question the validity of the very notion of 'typical sequence'. It was already clear that not every death need be treated to a 'series' of ceremonies - indeed, that perhaps very few of them were. Moreover, it later became apparent that Basima people themselves did not view their three or four identifiable and discrete death-related ceremonial exchanges - namely, *daweluwelu*, *bwabwale*, *abutu* and *sagali* - as necessarily forming a sequence or series. They did not, for instance, say 'First we do this, then we do that, then we do this, and finally we do that'. Rather, they say 'We have to do *bwabwale*, and we may do *daweluwelu* first, and very occasionally we do *abutu*, and if we are really ambitious we do *sagali*.' In short, the notion of a customarily motivated 'sequence' is not at issue. With the exception of the obligatory *bwabwale* they are speaking of options, and not of 'series' at all. Insofar as there was any semblance of a sequence or series it was in the eye of the anthropologist.

Concerning the 'optional' ceremonies, whether they are held or not depends upon a variety of contingencies, social, economic and political. To mention just a few of the questions the 'owners of the dead' must ask themselves: Are the necessary garden and pig resources available? Will there be sufficient support from kinsmen and affines? What other ceremonial event will have to be postponed or foregone to accommodate this one? What other current activities in the community will impinge on the ceremony and perhaps weaken its impact? In short, the prospective hosts or sponsors have to conduct some sort of cost-benefit analysis before they can be sure it will be worth their while.



I wish to conduct my analysis of Basima mortuary ceremonies in a way that takes into account the underlying motives of the actors, their strategies, pragmatic ends and purposes. This tack takes me away from culturally-defined 'sequence' (if indeed it does exist), except insofar as the actors themselves view their prestations as strategically linked to one another. For instance, in what another ethnographer might identify as 'the first stage' of Basima mortuary sequence (i.e. *daweluwelu*), I find an almost self-contained ceremony. It is only notionally linked to the *bwabwale* ceremony that follows several months later. Most importantly, prestations made in the context of *daweluwelu* must be repaid on the occasion of other *daweluwelu*, so these two mortuary ceremonies cannot be linked 'in series' through their exchange transactions.

### Meanings of *bwabwale*

Before describing Basima mortuary ceremonies in detail I shall first clarify the several meanings of *bwabwale*. We shall see that *bwabwale* are relatively 'unmarked' prestations made between groups and individuals. As at least one of the contextual definitions below indicates, some *bwabwale* prestations may have no immediate relevance to death.

In what is probably its most important sense, *bwabwale* refers to those prestations of food made by children (especially 'sons') towards their deceased father's closest maternal kinsmen. This is commonly viewed as a tribute to the dead father. Most people will try their utmost best to fulfil this duty in honour of the deceased. In fact it is this kind of *bwabwale* that occurs at almost any kind of mortuary ceremony, including *sagali* feasts, *bwabwale* proper, *daweluwelu* and *abutu* ceremonies. There were many times when a son of a dead man would, without notice, slaughter a pig and unceremoniously present it to the deceased's uterine kin. A pig alone might be given, without yams and without any support from his own maternal kinsmen (cf. Fortune 1963:194). The reason, as always given, was that he was doing *bwabwale* for his dead father.

The receipt and subsequent consumption of *bwabwale* food prestations is strictly limited to sisters' children and mother's brothers of the deceased: in local parlance, the *giauna*, those few individuals who shared an *oanao* (MB/ZC) relationship with the deceased. *Bwabwale* food is taboo to every other maternal kinsmen of the deceased, as well as to parents, siblings and offspring (including those in classificatory categories), and not least, to all affines. As noted by Chowning for the



Molima, namesakes (*na'esana* in Basima) are also prohibited from eating *bwabwale* (1989:101). While namesakes are regarded as being closely related (usually patrilaterally) to the deceased, they do not necessarily come from the same clan. Their special relationships through their names, however, implies deference between them, and it is possible for a man to acquire use rights in land belonging to his namesake's *susu*.

Basima people say '*agu bwabwale*' (meaning 'my prohibition') in referring to those things identified with, or presented in honour of, their deceased kin. Anything designated as *bwabwale* places it in a restricted category: one cannot consume it, view it, touch it, nor pass through it (if it is a spatial domain like a hamlet). Although there are no supernatural sanctions as such, the *bwabwale* interdiction - as elsewhere in the Massim - is nonetheless strictly observed. The sanction is public opinion: fear of the shame that would result if one failed to thereby respect a dead kinsman. This shame (*mayamaya*) is said to remain 'unwashed' on oneself forever. Not even a feast or food prestation would restore one's dignity, for they would only draw further attention to one's breach. Though it may seem like an ordinary kinship obligation it is one that is permanently embedded in Basima people's conscience. One's shame at eating *bwabwale*, for instance, is ultimately insulting to one's uterine kin and also one's paternal kin. It is a shame that would cause the severance of any social contact with one's deceased father's *susu*. The shame would be accentuated by the gossip (*loai*) from members of the community concerning one's failure to exercise restraint and show respect. A dead father's kin, property and hamlet are not infrequently referred to as *tamagu* (my father) or *tamada* (our father, inclusive), which itself connotes taboo, avoidance and respect. As such, they should all be left alone.

Similar mortuary-related prohibitions are widespread throughout the Massim (see examples in Damon and Wagner 1989; also Fortune 1963:196, Lepowsky 1981:211). Breaches can have severe consequences. To cite just one very early ethnographic example, Seligman wrote of the Tokunu (Alcester) Islanders:

Upon this island a man may not eat pig from his dead father's settlement, nor coconuts, yams and bananas from his dead father's garden. If these rules were infringed the belly and face of the offender would swell up and he will die; the same rule applies to the dead man's brother's children (1910:730-31).

Similarly, Molima people dread infringing *bwabwale* taboos which are regarded as 'dangerous', and certain relatives of the deceased (the *valevaleta*) can 'become sick' should they partake of the food (Chowning 1989:101).

Another context of *bwabwale* prestation also entails the notion of prohibition. This is not within a mortuary context, though there are similar connotations of danger. For example, a girl and her brother (who had collected shellfish together) were prohibited from any further fishing activities after the girl had been stunned by a poisonous shellfish. This restriction remained upon them for months, but was lifted when they prepared a savoury dish and presented it to their mother's brother. This prestation was also called *bwabwale*.

### *Daweluwelu*

The *daweluwelu* ceremony offers what might be called a first option for a *bwabwale* presentation. This cryptic statement needs to be explained, and I can best do so by introducing at this point the main categories of persons involved in any mortuary-related feast (including *sagali*). There are usually three main social categories that contribute food towards the feast. Two main lots of food move in roughly opposite directions: they are called *bwabwale* and *emwau*. The network of reciprocity has to be viewed diachronically in order to understand its full significance. The groups and categories involved in these exchanges are as follows:

*Toniwelai*. Also called *toniasa*, these are 'owners of the place' or 'hamlet owners'. In the context of a mortuary feast they are also 'owners of the dead'. At the death of a *to'esa'esa* or big man, this group would be led by the eldest son of the deceased's sister (*oana*). Without one, a brother of the deceased would fill the role. The *toniweiais*' contribution of cooked yams and pork to the ceremony is called *emwau* (literally, 'uncreamed cooked food'). *Emwau* is the dish that can be partaken of by almost everyone who attends a mortuary feast.

*Labalaba*. This kinship category consists of all the children of a male hamlet owner, including adopted children and those from previous marriages. It is from the point of view of his *susu* that they are classified thus, and Fortune refers to a *labalaba* male (son) as 'Boundary man' based on the fact that *laba* means 'boundary' (1963:14). The food and pigs *labalaba* contribute towards mortuary feasts is technically called *bwabwale*. This is notionally a prestation made in honour of their deceased father. The only people who can consume this prestation of *bwabwale* are those in the category of *giauna*: that is, all those who called the dead man *oana*, together with the children of the daughters of the deceased's sisters (*tubunao*). It is their particular uterine kinship relationship (*oanao* and *tubunao*) that qualifies them to be *giauna* - 'bwabwale eaters'.

*Waiwai*. This third category comprises all the affines of the deceased, Fortune's 'Those-resulting-from-marriage'. Most of them would be members of the *susu* of the surviving spouse. *Waiwai*'s contribution to a *daweluwelu* feast is also called *bwabwale*. Unlike the *labalaba*'s contribution, however, it is placed at the disposal of the host for general distribution to the mourners. *Waiwai-bwabwale* is therefore incorporated into the heaps of food called *emwau*.



If it is to be held, a *daweluwelu* mortuary exchange occurs immediately after the burial. It primarily involves two opposing groups; the deceased's *susu* and the surviving spouse's *susu*. If it had been the death of a child, however, the food and wealth exchange would be between the child's mother's group (its own *susu*) and the child's father's *susu*.<sup>6</sup> The host group comprises the entire *susu*, not simply the local hamlet members, so those who reside elsewhere come to join their kinsmen in their maternal hamlet. Despite the distances that normally separate them, they are all regarded as hosts and 'owners of the village' (*toniwelai*).

A feature that distinguishes a *daweluwelu* from other mortuary ceremonies is an event called *lomasala*. It occurs in no other Basima mortuary ceremony, just as the dancing festival (*ewesi*) uniquely characterizes a Basima *sagali*. *Lomasala* is exclusively a female activity, a sequence of songs that is dedicated to mourning the deceased. The lyrics are archaic and is almost unintelligible to the performers and listeners alike. Nevertheless, some lines allude to the mythical themes of bringing back yams to Basima after they had been lost to Muyuwa and Boyowa (see Chapter Four).<sup>7</sup> In my view, *lomasala* is a symbolic attempt to secure the return and 'anchoring' of prosperity in Basima, using the deceased as the messenger or medium of communication with the spirits that control such things. The singers also recapitulate the good deeds of the deceased as a prosperous and generous person (*esa'esa* and *alawata*).

An elderly, fully-tutored, female lead vocalist starts off a verse with a quavering note and the chorus follows. The tone is very sad and even frightening when heard at night. Informants say that even the bravest man would not dare leave his hut at night to relieve himself, such is the scary atmosphere created by these weird and uncanny songs. I never had the opportunity to witness a live performance, although during the *daweluwelu* feast to be described below I managed to persuade the women to perform in broad daylight for my own recording.<sup>8</sup> A *lomasala* performance is

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of brevity and clarity I shall centre the description and discussion of these exchanges around the deaths of adult people only. Similarly and for the same reason, when speaking generally I shall only use 'his' and 'he' to represent the deceased.

<sup>7</sup> I was reminded of a Trobriand *yawari*, the mourners' singing activity that takes place the first night after burial. This Trobriand mourning ritual of singing usually conveys a light and pleasant mood; the songs are now replaced by Christian hymns. Campbell glossed this activity as 'crying' for the deceased, but in my view this characterization is misleading (1989:48).

<sup>8</sup> In the opinion of the only lead vocalist, *lomasala* is on its way to extinction simply because she has no successor. Tabumadou, who must be in her nineties, is now the last lead vocalist. She confided to



considered an important part of the ceremony whereby the performers ought to be paid with food and pork at the end of three consecutive nights of singing. Their payment has to be made by the matrikin of the deceased following the last performance.

### ***Daweluwelu: the actual and the ideal***

I now present a brief account of the only *daweluwelu* ceremony that took place during my fieldwork; it was held in Miapapala hamlet on 19 January 1989. The death was that of the young woman of Manawana clan, mentioned above, who committed suicide by drinking an infusion of *derris* root fish poison. Her body was discovered in her hut by her relatives on their return from a nightly *sagali* dance at the hamlet of Waluwete. By mid-day she had been buried in the centre of the Miapapala, one of the highest in Basima territory. The organisation of the ceremony fell upon the shoulders of Tayagila, mother of the deceased, who had by then assumed the title of *toadi* as a result of her daughter's death. (This is not a proper kinship term, and there is no reciprocal. Similarly, the father of a dead child is called *apwesa*; a widow is called *newabula* and a widower *umala*.) Although Tayagila was undoubtedly the principal *toniwelai* or host, she was closely supported in deliberations over food distribution by her brother, Gomgom, the mother's brother of the dead woman. Gomgom and his sister's children were *giauna*, the specially designated category of 'bwabwale eaters'.

Food brought by the *susu* and others was heaped in the centre of the hamlet beside the deceased's grave. A wooden frame, two metres square, was set on the ground so that it encompassed the grave which occupied the northwest segment of the frame. Yams of both types, *tetu* and *watea*, were piled beside the grave which took up a good half of the space inside the frame. Lengths of sugar-canes were used as stakes around the perimeter of the frame. A string upon which taro corms were hung tied the sugar-canes together. Several flowers were thrown around the grave itself. In the meantime, some of the men and boys had singed and cut up the two pigs that had been killed for the ceremony. One was provided by Gomgom, the other by 'fathers' of the deceased. Smoked cuscus meat was also fortuitously available on the day. Contrary to the ideal procedure of *daweluwelu* food prestations (see

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me that a grand-daughter had been groomed by her to take up the task, but unfortunately she married a man from Galea, half a day's walking distance to the south of Basima. Without practice and continual tutoring it is most unlikely that her knowledge will survive.

below), there was no clear distinction between food for the mourners and food specifically allocated for *bwabwale* prestation.

The principal hosts (mother and mother's brother of the deceased) each made a short speech, the mother first. In typically humble tones, both apologized to the mourners for the little they had to provide, but begged them to accept it with grace. As the brother said:

I am alone without brothers to provide support. Also I have yet to grow up [into a big-man] and, in fact, we live here without one. We are all but 'babies' (*meiameia*) still. Ridicule us if you will for our shortcomings, but please understand our position of being without any supporters.

Speeches constitute an important part of mortuary ceremonies and festivals, including those of marriage. Each time a speech is made at such ceremonies the content of the speeches is directed more towards the exchange partners present. The speakers are mostly concerned with how much food had been provided, whether there is enough for everyone, and whether the exchange partners have been properly reciprocated.

After the speeches, the mother's brother of the dead woman distributed the food by calling out the names of recipients. The first recipients were said to be individuals, as noted by her maternal kin, who had provided most help to the dead woman when she was alive. However, the first two individuals happened to be the oldest women who had led the *lomasala* performance. The remaining eight recipients of the *daweluwelu* food were all men belonging to four of the five Basima clans. They were exchange partners of Gomgom and there was no clear kin relationship between them. These gifts of small pieces of pork together with, at most, a basketful of yams and one or two taro, were given to particular individuals as either repayments (*mais*) or as gifts (*gita*). The latter would be reciprocated at future *daweluwelu* feasts).

After the first distribution of food, the hosts then began the *emwau* food distribution to include every mourner who had attended the funeral. The *giauna* once again called out names of individuals, and to the sound of conch shell blasts a group of young boys and girls rushed over to the heaps of food and each ceremoniously carried a yam or taro corm to the recipient. This done, the master-of-ceremonies then turned towards the remaining food which was designated *bwabwale* in honour of the deceased. It had been provided by the deceased's father's maternal kin. In fact it was the largest heap of food with the largest portions of pork. As a *bwabwale*, it was



officially received by the master-of-ceremonies himself (mother's brother of the deceased) also on behalf of his sister's children. This ended the *daweluwelu* and people slowly left for their homes, the majority of them heading down towards the coast.

To summarize, the order of distribution began with the *lomasala* performers (who received the largest portion), followed by a few male exchange partners (whose gifts were either repayments or new credits), followed by the mourners in general and finally the recipients of the *bwabwale* proper. The last allocation was fittingly left to the end since the recipient was not only the master-of-ceremonies but a *giauna* as well.

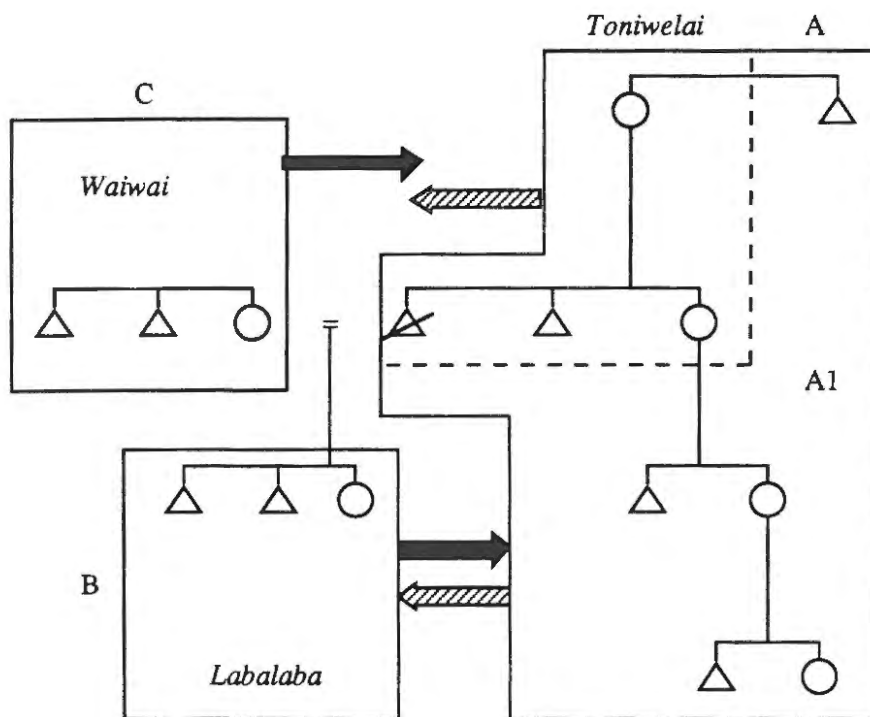
I shall now refer to the ideal configuration of a *daweluwelu* food distribution. This throws light on the way Basima people perceive a *daweluwelu* mortuary ceremony and what they would normally expect of it. The modest size of the *daweluwelu* I witnessed was explained by the fact that the deceased was a young woman who, although cohabiting with her lover, was not yet married; no formal marital exchanges had taken place. I was told that had the *daweluwelu* been for a married person (and especially so for a *to'esa'esa* or *alawata*) a much larger performance and food distribution would have been arranged.

First, we must note that in the *daweluwelu* I witnessed there were no prestations made by *waiwai*. Obviously, this category was irrelevant since the deceased was unmarried. But in a *daweluwelu* made for a man his father and classificatory children (*labalaba*) play a significant role. We must distinguish between the *bwabwale* prestation made by *labalaba* and that made by *waiwai*. The difference between *labalaba-bwabwale* and *waiwai-bwabwale* prestations is their destinations and their purposes. The former is a tribute made by the 'children' to honour their dead father; they deliver it as '*bwabwale* proper', to be officially received only by the *giauna*. In addition to being an undeniably affectionate gesture to their father's memory, it also forestalls any accusation from the maternal kinsmen that 'We never ate your father's *bwabwale*'. This is a serious insult. It amounts to a charge that the worthless sons received everything from their father but gave nothing in return. (Although what is given as *bwabwale* is usually reciprocated). Figure 5.1 below shows the ideal *bwabwale* prestations made between relevant categories at the death of an adult man. The A group represents the *toniwelai* ('owners of the dead' and hosts), within which A1 represents the select group of '*bwabwale* eaters' - the *giauna*.



B represents the children of the deceased (*labalaba*), and C the immediate affines (*waiwai*) of the deceased.

Figure 5.1 Showing the primary categories involved in mortuary exchanges, and the ideal *bwabwale* prestations which requires repayment from the kin of the deceased



➔ = *Bwabwale* prestation which must be reciprocated in future

◄◄ = Reciprocal prestations to the present *bwabwale* prestation

A = Maternal kin of the deceased as 'Owners of the Dead'

A1 = '*Bwabwale* Eaters' (*giauna*) as a select group within the 'Owners of the Dead'

B = *Labalaba*, children of the deceased

C = Immediate affines (*waiwai*) of the deceased

Sometimes, however, *labalaba* may be exempted from making a *bwabwale* prestation. For instance, if a son helped to carry his father's corpse to the grave, or if he were to have made a substantial contribution towards his father's *susu's sagali*, he can be exempted. But such exemptions are at the discretion of their fathers' brothers. In January of 1993, Dyson's 'father' died in his isolated hamlet. His body had to be carried around the side of the hills up to the hamlet of Bolousu where the deceased's elder brother lived. In addition to the carriers from the *susu* were Dyson and a patrilateral parallel cousin, both 'sons' of the deceased. As *labalaba* they initially bore the brunt of the coffin's weight. Because of their important role in this emergency their exemption from making a *bwabwale* was gratefully and publicly announced by the 'owners of the dead' immediately after burial. This was deemed a just compensation for the burden they had already borne. Despite this exemption, Dyson and his 'brother' went ahead and made a light meal of coconut-creamed yams the very next day. This, however, was specifically to allow them to participate in a *sagali* which was being held in Basima at the time (see Chapter Seven).

There is a mortuary concept in Basima called *kakae mata ipina*, which literally translates as 'no-eye-half' (i.e. 'without the other eye'). *Ipina* is the symmetrical side of any whole, as in bivalves, moieties, or even a side in a game of soccer. In the mortuary context it is a metaphor for ritual obligations which exist between two *susu* groups following a death. The two opposing 'sides' have initially come together in marriage, where their respective groups maintain, in Campbell's phrase, 'a specific exchange relationship' (1989:69). They emerge in opposition again at the death of one of the married pair. One side is obliged to give food (*bwabwale* prestations) to the other as an act to release mourners from their interdictions resulting from death. However, that food has to be reciprocated on a similar occasion.

However, the concept of *kakae mata ipina* implies that if the deceased does not have rightful '*bwabwale* eaters' (*giauna*) present at his funeral, the sons can then be allowed to touch the corpse of their father, despite the fact that they belong to another *susu* altogether and would usually be forbidden. In this circumstance, after touching the corpse, and having emerged from the house with a spear in hand, they pierce the ground which signals that there shall be no *bwabwale* for the deceased. This does not mean that the sons refuse to make a *bwabwale* for their father; rather it means that there is no point in making one when there is no *giauna* present: *Bwabwale, kakae ana toea* ('There are no eaters of *bwabwale*'). This is due to the fact that the deceased has no mother's brothers or sisters' children to act as the *giauna*.

'Outsiders' possibly can do so, but they cannot be made surrogates for the culturally-ordained *bwabwale*-eaters. After all, such prestations have an important bearing on the provision of land use rights, residential rights and certain property, and only the *giauna* who are uterine kin of the deceased can grant these rights to the *bwabwale*-givers, who are in fact the sons of the deceased. This is another of those few occasions whereby the sons or non-uterine kin of the deceased would be allowed to come close enough to the corpse to touch it.

Mortuary transactions impinging upon land use rights that intersect matrilineage boundaries are common throughout the Massim. The examples below will illustrate the point (cf. Hutchins 1980:26-27). Writing of the Panaeati Islanders, Berde (1974) was emphatic in that mortuary ritual earns a hardworking man the right to return to his father's residence, or a woman's children's rights to the land of their father's matrilineage. In Vanatinai, Lepowsky observed that: 'Generous affinal contributions at *zagaya* may advance the cause of land purchase but do not result in alienation of land from the deceased's matrilineage' (1981:230). Young made a similar observation among southern Normanby Islanders. Although the *labalaba* will never permanently 'own' their deceased father's land there is, however, an arrangement called *alaupa* which legitimizes their continued use and access during their lifetime. Thus, should they wish to do so, 'it is obligatory for them to provide the largest contributions, consisting of a pig or two, many yams, rice, tinned fish, tea, sugar and tobacco', at the *bwabwale* feast of the deceased (Young 1992:15).

Ordinarily, a *bwabwale* prestation is made from one *susu* 'side' to the other; but if the latter side cannot receive it for reasons stated above it becomes a one-sided affair and must be forfeited. Thus, *kakae mata ipina* can be understood to mean 'there is no other half or opposition'. In this circumstance, the children's obligation to make a *bwabwale* prestation lapses.

Without intending to devalue *bwabwale* prestations, their main purpose seems to be the actual exchange between groups. The procedural rituals surrounding a death to some extent disguises this principal motive. The exchanges have a competitive edge as one group strives to free itself from economic obligation while at the same time placing others in its debt. This is done for its own 'name' (*yoyouna*). While the concept of *kakae mata ipina* might, however, suggest that the ritual practices are more important than the affinal exchanges, closer investigation reveals that this particular exemption of food prestation is restricted to the children (sons especially)



of the dead man, and does not include the deceased's affines. Indeed, the *bwabwale* prestations intended to release the principal mourners during *bwabwale* proper ceremonies principally provided by the affines (*waiwai*) must proceed as expected. This also includes the initial affinal *bwabwale* prestations that are expected during a *daweluwelu* ceremony, if it happens to be staged. Hence, affinal exchanges at death remain despite the approved imposition of *kakae mata ipina*. *Bwabwale* from the affines is given directly to the *toniwelai*, and it is he who determines the distribution of this food. Affines have no further say after placing it at his disposal in the centre of the hamlet. After all, their prestation will be reciprocated at a later date.

### ***Emwau and labalaba bwabwale***

There are, to summarize, two principal parties contributing food to a *daweluwelu* and a *bwabwale*: the maternal kin (*susu*) of the deceased and the maternal kin (*susu*) of the surviving spouse. When the deceased is a man, the latter category can be further subdivided into *waiwai*, the affines proper, and *labalaba*, children.

Food designated as *emwau*, provided by the *toniwelai* and added to by *waiwai*, can be viewed as a 'free' or unencumbered. There is no fixed obligation for recipients to repay it. There is only the general obligation for others to provide similar *emwau* on the occasion of their own *susu*'s deaths. Whenever a death occurs people are morally obliged to suspend their other activities, no matter how pressing and important, in order to pay their respects to the *susu* that has suffered a loss. The *emwau* dish acknowledges that respect shown for the *susu* of the deceased; one might imagine that it also encourages mourners to attend a burial or subsequent mortuary ceremony. There is no worse embarrassment for a *susu* than having a death without the attendance of mourners from outside. (Though deaths of newborn children may be exempted due to their short and socially insignificant existence.) To be without mourners implies that one's deceased kinsman was despised in life for lacking generosity. Speaking of a person's stinginess one may warn: 'Surely no one will mourn for you when you die'. This is fully intended to embarrass the other and to encourage them to act with more generosity.

In contrast to *emwau*, the *labalaba* prestation is considered a calculated gift, and one that must be repaid. If they are wise, *labalaba* will take the opportunity of *daweluwelu* to make *bwabwale* for their dead father. It is the most favourable option from their point of view. The hosts or maternal kinsmen of the deceased are anxious to see whether the *labalaba* are going to make a *bwabwale* prestation. Anxious,

because a substantial prestation will necessitate a major reciprocal gift of food and pigs. If the children of the deceased were to place their food contribution in the centre of the hamlet next to the *emwau* food it can be assumed by hosts and mourners at large that the *labalaba's* prestation is not a *bwabwale* for their dead father. Rather, it is there at the disposal of the *toniwelai* host to be distributed as he will to the other mourners. This means that the *labalaba-bwabwale* proper is still forthcoming. In the common wisdom, the *labalaba* have been unwise in deferring their *bwabwale* thus. A conscientious and strategically wiser *labalaba* would seize the opportunity of a *daweluwelu* ceremony to end their onerous obligation as soon as possible. If the *labalaba* do make their *bwabwale*-proper prestation on the day of the *daweluwelu* they must avoid placing it with the *emwau* at the centre of the hamlet. They must keep their prestation quite separate and take it directly to the host's house (presuming he is also a *giauna*). This clearly signifies a *bwabwale* proper prestation, one made in honour of the *labalaba's* dead father and only to be eaten by the *giauna*.

The other immediate option is to delay the *bwabwale* prestation until the *daweluwelu* distribution is over, and to present it on the following day. The maternal kin of the deceased (i.e. the *giauna*) are obliged to reciprocate in future, much as they would for the *bwabwale* prestation from affines (*waiwai*). Appropriately, they would reciprocate at a *daweluwelu* sponsored by the current givers of *bwabwale* when they have a death to mourn.

There are some differences, however, between the way the two categories of affines (*waiwai*) and children (*labalaba*) deal with each other and conceptualize their prestations vis-a-vis the hosts. Mourners who have no close relationships to the deceased and are not members of any of the three categories involved in the death are, in theory, excluded from any practical involvement in the mortuary events. It is notionally an affair between the three categories only: 'owners of the dead' (*toniwelai*), the affines of the dead (*waiwai*), and the children of the dead man (*labalaba*). Whatever the affines present to the hosts at *daweluwelu* ceremonies is remembered and taken into account. Although moral and sentimental aspects of such support is acknowledged, the groups concerned must still bear in mind that this is an affinal prestation which must be reciprocated on the appropriate occasion. As there is no doubt that a death will eventually occur in another's *susu*, there is little concern that the recipients will default.

### Redirected *bwabwale*

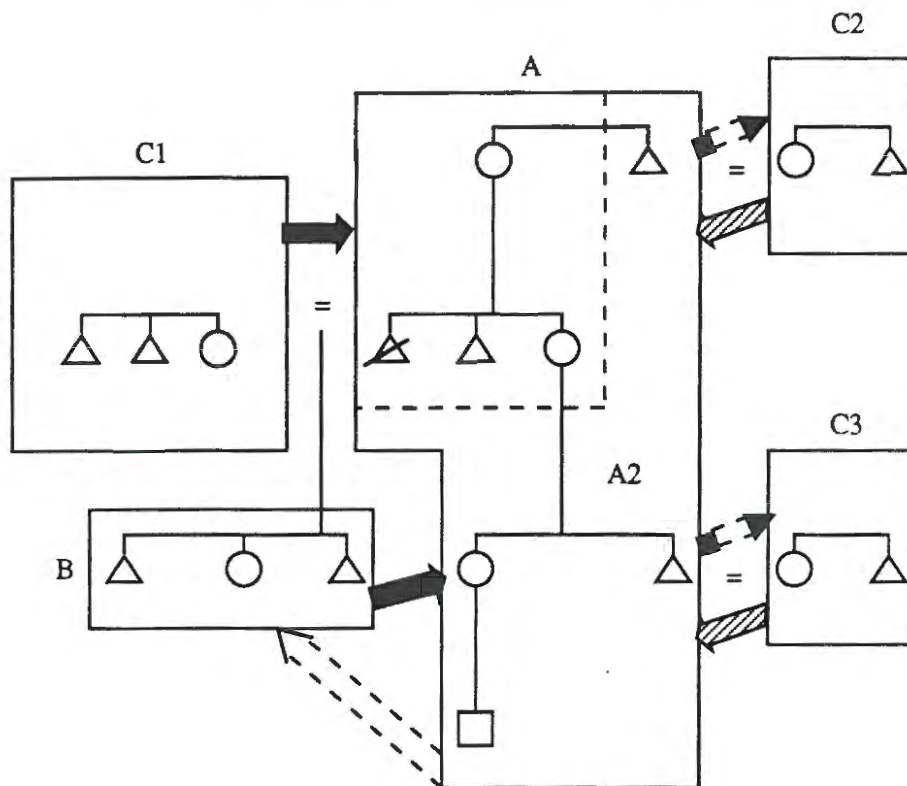
Another interesting aspect of *daweluwelu* is the possibility of redirecting prestations. A redirected *bwabwale* usually has its origin in the *labalaba-bwabwale* prestation made by the children of the deceased. As a general rule, any food harvested from the gardens of the deceased is prohibited for consumption by the parents, siblings, children and affines of the deceased: that is, by the immediate *susu*, the *labalaba* and the close *waiwai*. The prohibition (also called *bwabwale*) includes fruits and nuts of trees within the vicinity of the deceased's gardens, graveyard area and maternal hamlet. Hence, depending on the proximity of the deceased's hamlet and grave to crops of his *susu* members, the latter can be tabooed also. Not infrequently, my casual offers of betel nut from the local market were refused by my informants and co-residents. They would first of all enquire from whom I had bought the nuts. Having established the vendor and their place of origin, they would then tell me whether it was alright for them to accept my offer. If it had come from the land of one of their deceased patrilineal kinsmen, a flat refusal would ensue: 'That is a *bwabwale* to me!' They would rather ask for a nut from some other person present whose nuts were *bwabwale*-free; if not, they would remain without betel altogether.

It is acceptable, indeed desirable, for the children to present a *bwabwale* consisting of crops from the gardening land of their dead father. The sons might have been the actual producers of the crops, though cultivated on their father's gardening land (*tanoa*). In this case the *bwabwale* prestation is prohibited to the entire *susu* group of the deceased ('owners of the dead'), including the category of eligible *bwabwale*-eaters or *giauna*. Apart from the fact that the *bwabwale* food had originated from one's dead father's *tanoa* and is therefore taboo to *labalaba*, it is also axiomatic for Basima people not to eat of yams from their own individual gardens. (This can be rationalized by having used the magic of Sinitu, 'lord' of garden magic.) By traditional usage, they should eat yams only from others' gardens, usually in casual exchange for what they produce from their own land (see Chapter Four).

Thus, when food of this nature - from the gardens of the deceased - is received as *bwabwale* from the 'children of the dead', the hosts redirect it towards their own affines, that is, those other than the deceased's.



Figure 5.2 Showing a redirected *bwabwale* prestation from the children of the deceased, one that does not require repayment from the kin of the deceased



- ➡ = *Bwabwale* prestations made during the ceremony  
 ➡ (hatched) = Delayed reciprocal prestations of presently received *bwabwale* prestations  
 - - ➡ = Deceased's yam seeds given to *labalaba* for their *bwabwale* prestation  
 ■ ➡ = A redirected *bwabwale* prestation originally from the children of the deceased  
 A = Maternal kin of the deceased and hosts of the *daweluwelu* mortuary ceremony  
 A2 = 'Eaters of *bwabwale*' (*Giauna*) who however, redirected the present *bwabwale* prestation to their own affines  
 B = *Labalaba*, children of the deceased and 'givers' of the redirected *bwabwale*  
 C1 = Immediate affines of the deceased whose present *bwabwale* prestation will be reciprocated in future  
 C2 = Affines of the deceased's mother's brother who may be the recipients of the redirected *bwabwale* but must reciprocate in future to the *giauna*  
 C3 = Affines of the deceased's sister's children who may also be recipients of the redirected *bwabwale* but must reciprocate in future to the *giauna*

Figure 5.2 shows the relationships between A as 'owners of the dead' (*toniwelai* who are hosts, and A2 as *giauna*, the primary recipients of *bwabwale*); B as *labalaba* or 'children of the deceased' (givers of *bwabwale* proper); and C1 as immediate affines (*waiwai*) of the deceased. However, in this case, C2 and C3 become givers of the pseudo-*bwabwale*, or in a broader social field, recipients of a redirected *bwabwale* proper. In such situations, the main choices of recipients are usually the affines of the deceased's mother's brother (A2) and/or sister's son (A3). In time, the hosts (more specifically, *giauna*) will receive a reciprocating gift at their own affines' *daweluwelu* ceremonies. Such a *bwabwale* prestation, whose crops originated from the gardening land of the deceased, does not require a return gift from the 'owners of the dead'. In other words, the *labalaba* do not expect their *bwabwale* prestation to be reciprocated. After all, the crops came from the recipient's own *susu* land. Although they will not eat the food it would still be officially and acceptably received as a *bwabwale* proper made by the deceased's children. By investing it in one or more of the other affinal networks, they can expect later returns of a similar kind from *bwabwale*-free (i.e. taboo-free) soil. This course of action satisfies everyone: the *labalaba* (having met their *bwabwale* obligation), the *toniwelai* (not needing to worry about reciprocating the *labalaba*'s prestation), as well as the re-assigned 'bwabwale eaters' who feast upon the food. Quite conveniently, other affinal exchange relationships are thereby revitalized through the redirection of what for others is forbidden food.

As explained above, this redirection is an extended prestation, now embracing a broader social field whose equivalent return is delayed by weeks or months. The *toniwelai* will nonetheless eventually receive a repayment for their redirected *bwabwale* and can eat it, just as if the food was the original *bwabwale* coming from *labalaba*. It should be noted, however, that this return gift for the redirected *bwabwale* is still considered a *bwabwale* for the deceased, whose beginning can be traced to the *labalaba*.<sup>9</sup> The interesting aspect of redirected *bwabwale* is the way it brings in its wake a series of affinal exchanges that would otherwise remain latent.

Although they cover a much wider social field, similar arrangements occur in the Bwaidoka *bwabwale* of Goodenough Island (see Young 1989:193). Generally speaking, *bwabwale* in Bwaidoka entails food prestations made to the buriers from the 'owners of the dead' together with their helpers and *valevaleta* (kindred of the

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately I do not have a Basima term for kind of redirected exchange.

deceased who are under taboo). However, the 'owners' may direct the *bwabwale* by a series of shorter or longer routes via exchange partners to augment the final amount of food the buriers eventually receive. In Basima, the return gifts of food transactions that occur in mortuary feasting is either for immediate distribution and consumption amongst the 'owners of the dead' or, a further redirection towards other exchange partners which also serve to sustain existing exchange relationships between affines. But the underlying proscription that obliges a *susu* group to propose extended exchange undertakings is the pervasive notion of *bwabwale* as taboo. It is this that promotes and sustains some of the exchange cycles internal to Basima, just as *niune* in Goodenough exchanges compels the movement of food beyond more than one stage and activates wider exchange networks (see Young 1971:69-70; 1983c:395-396). Whether it is motivated by supernaturally-sanctioned taboos or not, it appears that the redirection of food to affines (in Basima) or enemies (in Bwaidoka) encourages competition between groups.

Although Basima death ceremonies are notionally honouring or celebrating the dead, they are most explicitly (and most importantly in my view) providing for the living by stimulating production and competitive exchange. This pragmatic feature, I suggest, is the most important aspect of *daweluwelu* and *bwabwale* mortuary ceremonies. What they create is not simply obligations concerning the reciprocal exchange of food, but also reciprocations of respect and worth. This less tangible reciprocity of social obligations to honour relationships (between affines principally) is manifest, expressed and witnessed in the tangible form of food prestations. This is why it is important to give only the best food. I do not mean to downplay the purely material, economic aspects of food given in such prestations, but I want to emphasise that such material prestations are but the outward expression of the moral qualities of the *susu* which it is intent upon displaying: its worth, honour, integrity and prestige. The success or failure of a *susu* to meet its social and economic obligations is at issue in every single mortuary ceremony. Figure 5.1 inadequately illustrates the situation with regard to *bwabwale* prestations. All one can show are the prestations that evoke obligations which are entailed by specific, historical exchange relationships.

Deaths present opportunities for groups to cancel their debts, balance their social and economic obligations, and revitalize existing exchange relationships by further gifts. It is through such specific exchange relationships that hosts, affines and *labalaba* alike can hope to gain prestige by outgiving their opposites. This is where the



competitive aspect of mortuary exchanges is tolerated and even encouraged. Competitiveness is a feature of affinal exchanges elsewhere in the Massim region (cf. Roheim 1932:124 for Normanby, Fortune 1963:195-200 for Dobu, Weiner 1976:61-120 for Kiriwina, Lepowsky 1981:222 for Vanatinai or Sudest). In terms of its broadest social significance, then, a *bwabwale* prestation can be seen as a competitive exchange of food between affines on the occasion of the death of individuals whose marriage has hitherto bound the groups together as exchange partners.

### **Releasing the mourners**

*Bwabwale* mortuary feasts normally occur between six months and a year after death, in contrast to *daweluwelu* which occurs within a day of the burial. A *bwabwale* feast, when spoken of as such, refers to the release of mourners from their unkempt appearance and food restrictions. Summarizing data on the 'second stage' of mortuary ceremonies from across the Massim, Wagner acknowledges that it 'usually includes a rite of washing the widow/widower or other principal mourners, removing them from confinement, or lifting some, or all, other restrictions upon them' including 'long-held food taboos' (1989:258).

In Basima a widow (*newabula*) is expected to remain under taboo for four to six months, though not necessarily in total seclusion. An ankle-length, plain, coarse skirt made from coconut leaves (*seniu*) is compulsory attire for widows. Her face is supposed to be covered in black charcoal, but usually two dashes (*saba*) of black charcoal across both sides of her cheek suffice nowadays. Beads made from nuts are strung around her neck, or she wears the traditional plaited bark rope (*mwagula*). Additionally, she is not allowed to chew proper betelnuts, but may substitute them with tiny young coconuts. Certain foods, notably a local variety of banana, coconut-creamed vegetables, including taro, yams, and nowadays also tinned meat and fish and rice, are prohibited to her. She is also forbidden to adorn herself with anything colourful, and must ideally remain without bathing until the day of the *bwabwale*. Finally, she is not allowed at any time to go anywhere near the residential hamlet and graveyard of her dead husband.

The widower (*umala*) is also expected to observe the same dietary restrictions, while allowing his beard to grow and his hair to become bushy. He similarly neglects his daily ablutions. I should point out, however, an observation I made in early 1989. A widower whose spouse had died only the week before was frequently to be seen

loitering around the hamlet with a clean sarong, a new betel basket and well-groomed hair. He chewed proper betelnuts with us and I saw that his body glistened with coconut oil. Given the sensitivity of the situation, I felt too embarrassed to enquire about his deviance from what I had been told was normative widower's behaviour. People indicated to me, however, that his behaviour was indeed scandalous. On the other hand, the fact that his children continued residence in their father's hamlet after the death of their mother was of no great concern; according to my informants that was acceptable. It is only after a father's death that children must return to their maternal hamlet.

The parents and sisters of the spouse of the deceased observe similar restrictions. It is indeed quite common to see 'mothers' of the deceased (who are then called *toadi*) adopting the same restrictions as the widow. Like the widow, 'mothers' are released and modestly compensated for their self-mortifying mourning.

During my fieldwork five *bwabwale* feasts were held in Basima (of which I witnessed three), though unfortunately none of them were directly related to the deaths that had occurred during my stay. I might add that *bwabwale* prestations do not always involve the organisation of the entire kinsmen. As noted below, there were many occasions when a man would kill a pig and present it to his 'fathers' (patrilateral kin) to honour his own father: *tamana bwabwalena* ('his father's *bwabwale*'), it is said. However, these individual prestations do not effect the release of the principal mourners from their mortuary restrictions. Mourners are only released at a formal *bwabwale* ceremony.

#### ***Bwabwale* at Mwadawala hamlet**

The biggest *bwabwale* I witnessed was one held in November 1988 at the hamlet of Mwadawala in the foothills of Lauoya district. The hamlet consisted of no more than three houses belonging to a *susu* whose clan affiliation is a mixture of Yoana and Etonouna clans. The principal mourner was the widow, whose husband had died some seven months before. She was also from the clan of Etonouna, and her matrilineage was the sponsor of the *bwabwale* feast. It was the first time since the death of her husband that the widow was permitted entry into what had been her formal conjugal hamlet. Except for the mother of the dead man, the other notable mourners belonged to the widow's matrilineage; they were the main purveyors of food as well as being affines (*waiwai*) to the deceased.

The *bwabwale* proceeded in the following manner. By eleven in the morning, large clay pots on open fires were steaming and bubbling with coconut cream as women hurried to complete peeling the long whole yams which were to be boiled in them. The women of both groups (affines and *toniwelai*) were cooking their contribution for what appeared to be a feast of cooked food in remembrance of the deceased, though it would at the same time release the mourners from their restrictions. The affines (*waiwai*) together with the dead man's children (*labalaba*) occupied one end of the hamlet. The maternal kin of the deceased (*toniwelai*) occupied the other. As the hamlet was very small, there was no clear physical distance between them, in fact some of the pots stood on the imaginary boundary separating the two categories. Although the *bwabwale* was being sponsored by the maternal kin of the surviving spouse (as givers), it was staged in the deceased's hamlet. Hence, as customary, it was being hosted by the matrilineage of the deceased, the *toniwelai*.

A large *bwabwale* pig (the only one) was presented by the *waiwai* to the 'owners of the dead' and was carried over to their side of the hamlet. After the food was cooked, about midday, a man pierced the pig's heart with a long sharpened metal rod. Having singed it, the deceased's maternal kin butchered the pig, dividing it carefully into named portions (see Figure 5.3).<sup>10</sup> As it was a *bwabwale* prestation, consumption of the pork was restricted to MB/ZC. At approximately three in the afternoon, a sudden wail of mourning shattered the cheerful atmosphere. This was initiated by a brother of the deceased and quickly taken up by women as the now openly grieving widow was led to the centre of the hamlet by her eldest daughter. Each holding a slim wooden spear (*gita*), they began an impromptu mourning dance, moving to and fro, uttering low lamenting cries. These spears were carried as mementos of the deceased. The spears reminded the children and their mother of the pigs he had hunted and killed for them. Until the *bwabwale* ceremony and the release of the mourners from their shabby attire, these spears must remain with them. They also serve to remind the sons (*labalaba*) and affines (*waiwai*) of an outstanding *bwabwale* obligation owed to the *susu* of the deceased. In fact, after the *bwabwale* ceremony they were customarily broken and discarded, thereby signifying the end of their mourning duties and *bwabwale* obligations.

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<sup>10</sup> Pigs slaughtered for feasting are never cooked in the earth oven (*umula*) prior to distribution. Instead, they are typically butchered raw after being singed. Recipients are given raw portions of pork which they take home to be smoked for further preservation, though pieces are usually boiled for immediate consumption (See Appendix III).



Meanwhile several mats had been laid out on the grass in the centre of the hamlet. The widow and her daughter were soon joined by a couple of the deceased's sisters as well as the mother of the deceased (*toadi*); all sat in a row facing the rest of the people. These were the principal mourners who had been under stringent dietary, dress and other restrictions; they all wore coarse grass skirts and had neglected their appearance and cleanliness.

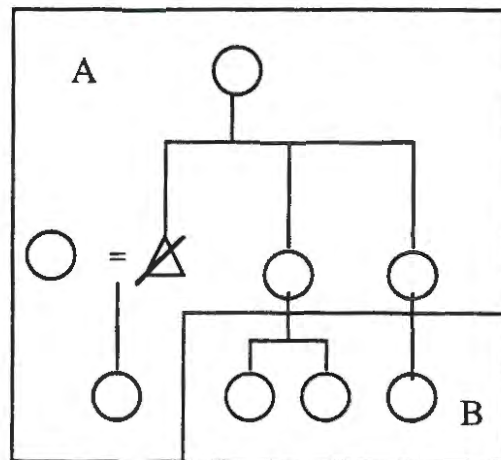


Figure 5.3 The disposition of principal mourners:  
A, the released principal mourners and B,  
daughters of the deceased's sisters (*oanao*)  
who cut off the widow's *mwagula*

The above Figure shows that the principal mourners were all women representing the three categories: *waiwai* (widow), *labalaba* (daughter of the dead man and his widow), and *toniwelai* ('owners of the dead' [mother and her two daughters]). Strictly speaking, none of them was eligible to partake of this *bwabwale*. Notwithstanding, the mourners were paid by the brothers and other maternal kin of the deceased. Their gifts were called *itawana*.

Several minutes after the women had been seated in the centre of the hamlet, three daughters of the deceased's sisters proceeded to cut off the widow's and deceased's mother's *mwagula* necklaces and cleanse their bodies of all mourning attire. Like the spears, the *mwagula* ropes and other mourning paraphernalia were discarded in the bush behind the hamlet. They have no further significance once the ritual terminating the mourning restrictions is over. For ease of description, I shall focus on the widow

(*newabula*) alone, though the other women simultaneously underwent an identical rite of mourning release. One of the sister's daughters severed the *mwagula* around the widow's neck, trimmed her hair with scissors and picked and fluffed it. Using several soft, fresh *naiwa* leaves, which were first of all dipped in water, she wiped the black charcoal dashes off the widow's face. The sister's daughter then oiled the widow's hair with fresh coconut cream and tucked a few hibiscus flowers just above her ears. With prepared betelnut paste, she lightly brushed it across the widow's dry lips and smeared two additional strokes across her cheeks in place of the black charcoal dashes. This signified her resumption of washing, self-decoration and chewing proper betelnuts etc.

After this cleansing ritual, each of the three women mourners were given a cleaner and a shorter grass skirt than the ones they were wearing. In place of the *mwagula*, the deceased's sister's daughters tied a shell necklace of minor value called *samakupa* around the women's necks. As a valuable, it is considered a payment to the mourners, but it is also a sign of their restored youthfulness. For *samakupa* is usually worn by young people and generally considered to enhance beauty and youth.

Immediately after this a younger brother of the deceased presented some formal gifts to the women. This presentation is called *itawana*. The dead man's younger brother presented them with cash and cloth: a K2.00 note to the widow, a K1.00 coin to the deceased's mother, and a 20t coin each to his sister and the daughter. Pieces of brand new calico were given to each of them too. These gifts were given by the brothers of the deceased in appreciation of the women's respectful dedication to mourning.

Finally, the mourners were seated in the front of one of the houses while a brother of the deceased took a piece of yam and ran it over their lips. Each woman took a tiny bite, signifying her resumption of eating 'good' food and simultaneous release from her food prohibitions. The yam used for this purpose came from the *emwau* dish and not from the *bwabwale* dish, of course, for the women were not allowed to partake of the *bwabwale* food belonging to the deceased. The *emwau* dish was shared out among the *toniwelai* (who had provided most of it), the affines (*waiwai*) and visitors such as myself. This uncreamed food is for everyone to share.

## Comparisons with Dobu

Fortune's description of the Dobuan *bwobwore* (1963:193-196) is very similar to my own observations of *bwabwale* and the severing of *mwagula* in Basima. Unlike the *daweluwelu* and *sagali* feasts, *bwabwale* is celebrated for every death that occurs. Each death is mourned by a number of people who express their own and owning *susu*'s loss by a lengthy period of deprivation, and subsequently these mourners must be released from this state. It is the primary function of the *bwabwale* ceremony to accomplish this.

The detailed description of Basima *bwabwale* presented above will be seen to have few significant differences to previous accounts from the D'Entrecasteaux (cf. Fortune 1963:193-97, Chowning 1989:108-113 and Thune 1989:163-170). Fortune devoted several pages to a description of Dobuan *bwobwore* and *sagali* (1963:193), though it must surely be on the basis of his observations on Tewara. According to Fortune, the main mourners of a dead man are his widow and her maternal kin. As in Basima, the status is conspicuously signified by the 'neck rope' (*mwagura*) donned by the widow together with a long coarse skirt which falls below the calf. The formal removal of the 'rope' from the widow's neck and the trimming of her skirt occurs during the final *bwobwore* feast. Insofar as the exchange is concerned, it seems that the 'village *susu* of the dead' (the deceased's maternal kin) do little on the day of *bwobwore* except provide a modest amount of cooked food for the mourners (*siudana*); they receive the rest from the maternal kin of the surviving spouse. This includes the *bwobwore* prestation as well as the *kunututu* (*ibid.*: 194).

The general role of affines as mourners and their subsequent prestations of *bwobwore* food to the 'owners of the dead' is found to be the same in Basima. However, a deeper observation is perhaps necessary. The gift of *bwabwale* food in Basima is either made immediately after burial (when it is termed *daweluwelu*) or delayed for six months or more (when it is termed *bwabwale*). The *kunututu* payment is not found in Basima, as it would presumably occur during the *daweluwelu* ceremony. Fortune notes that these payments, both *bwobwore* and *kunututu*, are made for the 'sextons'. That was not clearly the case in Basima. Rather, it is understood that any *bwabwale* prestation is partaken of only by a select group, principally the sister's children of the deceased. However, this corresponds with Fortune's observation for Dobu that it is the deceased's sisters' children and mothers' brothers who bury the dead. The difference, then, is that a Basima *bwabwale* is given



to the deceased's *oanao* not because they performed the task of 'sextons', but simply because of their specific relationship as maternal kin to the dead person. As such they are designated *giauna*. It is quite conceivable that one or two of the *giauna* may have been involved in grave-digging, particularly sisters' sons of the deceased. But this is not the main reason they will be given *bwabwale*. I am not suggesting that grave-diggers are not compensated for their task, but rather that the *bwobwore* and *kunututu* of Dobu need not be construed as a payment for grave-digging duties as such. Like *bwobwore*, *kunututu* may be seen as a special prestation made by the dead person's affines (*waiwai* and *labalaba*) to the deceased's *susu* group generally.

I do not intend to downplay the importance and responsibility of burying a dead person, and these were correctly emphasized by Fortune. Indeed, in Basima the primary duty of burial rests with the immediate male *susu* members of the deceased. Burial may have more serious implications only if a grave-digger comes from another *susu*, since it would inevitably entail costly food repayments for the service. These repayments wash off the 'stench' from the corpse which conceptually causes illness to buriers and carriers of the corpse who are not *susu* members of the deceased.

In Dobu the buriers, whom Fortune styled 'sextons', are therefore not randomly selected but chosen from among the deceased's own *susu*. Thus, at the death of an adult male, it is the duty of the deceased's sisters' sons to bury the corpse. Though Fortune was not explicit, I presume that the same class of relatives are also responsible for the burial of an adult female as in Basima. If the deceased was a child, it is the primary duty of its mothers' brother and/or mothers' sister to bury. From Fortune's account, it is quite clear that the buriers or 'sextons' ought to be members of the same *susu* as the deceased. But their service is compensated by the maternal kin of the surviving spouse at the end of the day: 'The payment of yams to the sextons is called *bwobwore*, and of armshells, *kunututu*.' (Fortune 1963:194).

Fortune was emphatic that affines and patrilineal kin are not allowed to go near the corpse. Instead they are placed in an obligatory position to pay for the services rendered to the deceased and his or her *susu*. Such a scenario suggests a configuration of two basic sets of workers: grave-diggers who are matrikin of the deceased, and a set of mourners who include *bwobwore* and *kunututu* givers. The latter group is basically composed of the maternal kin of the surviving spouse, who are affines of the deceased.

This too has been recognized as the underlying group configuration in Basima, though what sets it apart from Dobu is the payment of the 'sextons'. Otherwise, burying responsibilities were observed to be the same in Basima. I suggest that if we focus on the motives of the prestations, however, this payment to the sextons might be seen to be an obligation-invoking gift which establishes the forthcoming exchange between the groups and categories involved and sets the scene for competitive inter-group giving.

The point to remember is Fortune's insistence that the initial 'payment of yams .... is called *bwobwore*'. Although this is only a 'small *bwobwore* of cooked yams' partly intended to repay the sextons for their labour, it is accompanied on the same day by a 'large gift of uncooked yams' displayed in the village of the dead (1963:195). These prestations, once more, come from the maternal kin of the surviving spouse. I am inclined to think that in reducing them to mere payments for mortuary services Fortune misconstrued the motives for Dobu *bwobwore* prestations. At any rate, my understanding of Basima *bwabwale* prestations differs on this point.

Fortune identified at least two main categories or groups of individuals in a *bwobwore*. These categories interact with each other in accordance with their particular kinship relationship to the deceased. Fortune points out that the 'mourners' or 'givers' of food, who are theoretically the 'village *susu* of the surviving spouse' are reciprocated for their prestations at the death of the surviving spouse. This delayed reciprocity is crucially important and Fortune might have taken a step further in his observation of such prestations. For I suggest that in the final analysis, these death exchanges can easily be discerned as affinal exchanges of food between the two parties concerned, namely, affines of the deceased on the one hand and matrikin of the deceased on the other. Fortune could then have shown in conclusion that the essence of Dobuan *bwobwore* is an exchange between two groups of affines, whose exchange relationship began with the marriage of the couple (cf. Campbell 1989:69; Liep 1989:230).

Concerning the payments made to the mourners, I cannot reconcile the Basima term *itawana* with Fortune's *kunututu*. The closest Dobuan term that I came across was *taona*, gifts to principal mourners, but I never heard the term *kunututu* used in Basima, and suspect that it was used by Tewara Islanders from whom Fortune probably learned it. It is possible, however, that there is a Trobriand source for the Tewan-Dobuan term *kunututu*. To my certain knowledge, at least two Tewara *susu*

trace their origin from Auta (Vakuta) Island. In the Trobriands *kulututu* or *kunututu* is a payment made by kin of the surviving spouse to the kin of the deceased. Sometimes it is a payment made by the father of the deceased together with his maternal kin to the maternal kin of the deceased. Such a payment comes from the affines and/or patrilineal kin of the deceased. *Kulututu* payments do not have to be repaid. They have connotations of exculpation for suspected sorcery and negligence towards the deceased. It is a formal way of communicating an apology while at the same time denying responsibility for the sorcery that may have caused the death of a member of another sub-clan (*dala*). In effect, a *kulututu* payment humbly states: 'Here is the compensatory payment for my negligence in not providing enough protection from malevolent forces for your dead kinsman'. *Kulututu* consists of valuables such as stone adze blades, clay pots, and (nowadays) cash, made to the maternal kin of the deceased (cf. Weiner 1976:74). If the *dala* can afford to do so, it is appropriate to give a tract of land (*baleku*) instead of the above valuables. This is one of the instances when a group may permanently surrender its claims to a piece of land. To a limited degree, it is similar to what Fortune reported of Dobuan *kunututu* in that it is given by the affines to the maternal kin of the deceased, and that it is not repaid. No equivalent to Tewaran-Dobuan *kunututu*, however, is to be found in Basima, though it may be deduced that such a payment is made in terms of *bwabwale* food prestations. The Dobuan *bwobwore* prestation of cooked and raw yams require a reciprocal prestation from the recipients (then 'owners of the dead') at the death of the surviving spouse (see Fortune 1963:193-195). And it is the same understanding of Basima food prestations that they are to be reciprocated. Fortune's representation of *kunututu* gifts of food and valuables as a *payment* to the grave-diggers is therefore misleading.

There is an aspect of Basima *bwabwale* prestations from which we might draw parallels with Dobuan *kunututu*. *Bwabwale* in Basima cannot be consumed by every member of the maternal kin of the deceased; as we have seen the only designated '*bwabwale* eaters' are sisters' children and mothers' brothers - the *giauna*. In the instance of *bwabwale* I described above, it was the deceased's sisters' daughters who released the mourners from their taboos. Like the Dobuan 'sextons' (ideally sisters' children of the deceased), they are members of the '*bwabwale* eating' category, as matrikin. In short, it might appear that the sisters' children are 'rewarded' with *bwabwale* food (or *kunututu* valuables in the case of Dobu) for their ceremonial services. But I cannot be certain that Basima people see it in this light. Rather, it is deemed a right and a privilege to carry out such tasks as well as to eat of *bwabwale*



due to their specific *oanao* relationship to the deceased. I am inclined to suspect, therefore, that Fortune misinterpreted *kunututu* and *bwobwore* as 'payments' to the sextons (sisters' sons). And I suspect that these 'payments', were not for burial duties at all, but were an acknowledgement of the fact that sisters' sons are the foremost male representatives of the '*bwabwale* eating' category. The ethnographic parallel in Basima indicates that the sisters' daughters who released the female mourners were performing an obligation deriving from their kinship status, for which it seemed unthinkable that they would need to be 'paid'. The prestation from the deceased's affines is made to release the mourners and thereby officially terminate the marriage between the deceased and the surviving spouse, thus allowing the widow to remarry if need be. The fact that this food can be consumed only by the *oanao* (or *giauna*) category is indicative of their status as a 'select' category of individuals assigned to specific, privileged tasks on such vital occasions as death. In this light it is by virtue of their close kinship relationship to the deceased that they are given *bwabwale*, and not as a 'payment' for the services rendered. If it were not so, then *kunututu* payments should be given to all those who performed the task of burying, for instance. That was not the case, however, as only the deceased's sister's children were privileged to receive gifts: not as payment for services, I repeat, but in recognition of their close uterine relationship to the dead person.

### Conclusion

At first glance, *daweluwelu* appears to be the first stage of a possible series or sequence of mortuary feasts in Basima. It is comparable to mortuary ceremonies described for other Massim societies, for example, '*Matailuwana*: food for tears' in Bwaidoka (Young 1989:185), '*Yawari* - crying' in Vakuta (Campbell 1989:48-49), '*Libu*' in Kiriwina (Weiner 1976:64ff), '*Burial feast*' in Duau (Thune 1989:159-163), '*BugalMayaumate*' in Tubetube (Macintyre 1989:138-141), to name a few. These have all been designated the 'first phase' of a sequence or the 'first stage' of a series of mortuary feasts or exchanges. With respect to *daweluwelu* in Basima, however, I contest this designation.

I have shown that for Basima *daweluwelu* is but a mortuary option; to that extent it is dispensable and even an unnecessary luxury. How then can we conceive of it as the first of a series of mortuary feasts? If it is performed (with or without *lomasala*) it does not automatically lead to the 'second' stage of *bwabwale*. The latter must be done anyway in order to release the mourners of their restrictions, whether or not

there is a 'first' stage. Likewise, although *labalaba* may be grateful for the opportunity of the *daweluwelu* to unburden themselves of the obligation to make *bwabwale* for the *giauna*, they do not themselves determine whether a *daweluwelu* for a dead man shall be held or not. Again, the debts incurred by any *bwabwale* prestations made during a *daweluwelu* should be repaid (insofar as they are of the kind that must be reciprocated) at other *daweluwelu* ceremonies, so it is not as if such debts link *daweluwelu* with *bwabwale* ceremonies, in 'series', as it were. The fact that they should be reciprocated at other *daweluwelu* might be conceived of as isolating, rather than linking, *daweluwelu* and *bwabwale*. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, Basima people themselves do not speak of *daweluwelu* (or any other mortuary feast) as if it were a 'stage' or 'phase'. They speak of it entirely as a discrete, albeit optional event.

From the sum of these perspectives, can there be any meaningful sense in which *daweluwelu* is a 'first' stage of anything, leading to a 'second' stage? I suspect, that for Basima at least, the problem is misconstrued. *Daweluwelu* is not a death ceremony that every death requires. If it is optional, then what is its purpose if not for the 'owners of the dead' or *toniwelai* to make a statement and perhaps stake a claim for renown? If they should feel that it is an unviable enterprise, the option will not be taken up and *daweluwelu* will not be held. I witnessed the option being rejected on two occasions in December 1988. Pragmatic considerations won against any proposal that it 'ought' to be done.

I would argue that mortuary ceremonies such as *daweluwelu* and *bwabwale* are principally arenas or avenues for exchange between social groups and categories. The groups and categories are mainly two sets of affines whose linking, pivotal person has died, thereby ending the marriage which joined the groups and formed an exchange nexus. Following the death, that particular nexus has to be re-sorted and eventually terminated. On one level, this is the chief significance of mortuary feasting. The exchanges which inaugurated and sustained the marriage are reciprocal and equal, despite the competitive element. Likewise at death, when the matrilineage suffering the loss compensates the affinal matrilineage for their profoundly respectful work of mourning, the transactions balance. The 'owning' *susu* deprived by death and the 'affinal' *susu* which expresses the respectful grief must still be seen to be equal; in simple terms, the former must strive to be generous, the latter must strive to be respectful. Thus, the political implications of death entail inter-group prestations which must outweigh any notional, customary ordering of mortuary

ceremonies. It follows that Basima people use deaths as occasions to maintain and reproduce their *susu*'s name, reputation and prestige with respect to other *susu*. What the mourners go through is but a tacit, symbolic effort to 'make real' and elicit the due exchanges of food and wealth.

To insist that these pragmatic considerations were the only motivations, however, would fail to acknowledge Basima people's emotional responses to death. Spouses, friends and relatives who have spent half or more of their lifetimes together have every reason to mourn with passionate intensity. That affection, love and remembrance exist is proven by the *bwabwale* taboos that people observe. Even after the formal transactions which release the mourners from such burdens the ache of loss may remain. However, this too can be subtly accommodated in exchange relations, and memorials such as *sagali* give scope for its expression: just as it does the striving for prestige and renown.



## CHAPTER SIX

### UNE AND ABUTU: INTER-DISTRICT EXCHANGE

The purpose of this chapter is to describe Basima's trading and exchange links with neighbouring districts. In addition I discuss (a) the items for which Basima is locally renown and which attract traders from other communities; (b) the types of transactions occurring between Basima hosts and their visitors and the social relationships that underpin them; (c) Basima's limited involvement in Kula, including an account of present-day Kula traders and their activities. Finally, I describe ceremonial mortuary exchanges based on trade partnerships, namely *abutu*.

#### Inter-district trade with Mesalu<sup>1</sup>

One of the characteristic cultural features of the Massim is its widely ramifying trade and exchange network.<sup>2</sup> I do not distinguish here between trade and exchange at the inter-island or inter-district level, largely because it serves no particular analytical purpose and because the people of the area themselves do not distinguish them. For many if not most islanders, inter-district or inter-island trade and exchange is referred to by some cognate of *kula*, *kune*, *une*, *niune* etc. Many have argued that the 'utilitarian' trade of subsistence items and material resources underwrote and facilitated ceremonial exchange, the most salient example of which is Kula (e.g. Malinowski 1922; Fortune 1932; Uberoi 1962; see J.W. Leach 1983:5-6). However, in view of Basima people's merely token involvement in Kula, it is beyond my purpose here to debate the precise relationship, past and present, between Kula and inter-district exchange.

Basima people refer to Kula trade as *une*, which is also the term for the general class of traditional wealth, including shell valuables, decorated *malabwaga* skirts from

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<sup>1</sup> Mesalu is a generic term for 'Islanders'; thus *Me* (people of/from), and *salu* (islands). Dobuan and Bwaiowa people also use the same term in the same contexts to mean 'people of other islands'.

<sup>2</sup> So much has been written about Massim trade and inter-island exchange that it would be quite pointless to cite more than a handful of key references: see Tueting (1935) for an early survey of the literature; Malinowski (1922); Belshaw (1965); Macintyre's bibliography of the Kula (1983) for a comprehensive listing until 1983; see also recent monographs such as those by Munn (1986), Battaglia (1990), Damon (1990) and Lepowsky (1993), and unpublished PhD theses such as those by Berde (1974), Campbell (1984) and Macintyre (1983).

Boyowa, pigs, canoes, clay pots, sago bundles and large yams. Any kind of trade which involves the transfer of these items is called *une*. Trade in subsistence food and items of lesser importance is called *etutupalowa*. The same term is used for exchange between Basima and other islanders or among Basima people themselves, as in the twice-weekly market held at Dagimwaneia on the sea-shore.

Basima is not a maritime community such as Tubetube, Panaeati, the islands of the Calvados Chain, Budibud, Gawa, Kitava, Kaileuna, Dobu - or closer to Basima itself - Bwaiowa or the Amphletts. In pre-contact times, Basima people were oriented to the land rather than the sea (they did not even dwell on the coast), and it is only some of the more recent immigrant groups who have canoe-building skills. Obviously unimpressed what he saw or heard, Malinowski remarks almost scornfully of Basima people: 'They have got no boats, and do the little sailing they require on small rafts of three or five logs tied together' (1922:290).

Today most Basima men living on the coast make small canoes (*kewou*), and one Basima man is well-known in the area as a boat builder. My informants were unable to confirm Malinowski's observation about raft-making and they denied it with bewilderment and indignation. Not too long ago, however, if they wanted a seagoing canoe (*epoi*) they would either have to purchase it from one of the islands directly or pay for the services of specialists in Sanaroa or Tewara to build one. Basima people, in short, were not seafarers. However, its strategic geographical location with respect to overseas traders within the vicinity (especially those of Amphletts and Bwaiowa), as well as its reputation for being a reliable source of food and betelnuts, make Basima a convenient port of call for traders. Most of the trade Basima people engage in, in other words, is brought to their very doorstep.

During my fieldwork, Basima received visitors from Boyowa, the Amphletts (i.e. Gumana, Nabwageta, Kwatota, Yabwaya/Dilia and Wawiwa), Tewara, Sanaroa, Galea, Bwaiowa, Dobu, Salamo, Molima and the Masimasi area (i.e. Bosalewa, Wadalei and Mokai). All of these visitors were seeking one or more of the several principal goods or commodities for which Basima is locally renowned: pigs, yams, betelnuts and sago. While the goods sought are much the same for most visitors, the context of exchange varies depending upon the relationship between the transactors. Sahlins' (1965) social distance model is of some relevance here.

Three 'degrees' of transactional relationship between visiting traders and their Basima hosts can be identified. The first can be described as an impersonal

transaction whereby Basima people exchange their goods for valuables (or cash) on the spot without any need to prolong the trade relationship. The parties are effectively strangers to one another. This kind of exchange in the Kula area is what Malinowski called *gimwali*, which he described as 'bartering pure and simple' (1922:189), 'with haggling and adjustment of equivalence in the act' (*ibid.*: 363).<sup>3</sup> The second type of transaction also involves the exchange of subsistence goods for other goods, valuables or cash, but unlike the first type, it is based on or develops into a protracted or even permanent trade partnership. Trade friends of this kind remember one another, and each time they return the visitors moor or beach their canoes closest to the houses of their Basima partners. They present gifts to their hosts and remain for a few days before filling their canoes with the things they had come for. Such relationships are fairly casual, however, and only rarely do they involve any discussion of Kula. It is the third kind of exchange relationship which embraces Kula (*une*), and it is consequently viewed as more 'serious' and weighty, involving as it does long-term Kula partnerships (*muli*). In the process of doing Kula partners also exchange commodities such as vegetables, betelnuts, clay pots and fish.

These are the three degrees of trade relationships as I observed them between Basima people and their overseas visitors. In practice, the three kinds of transactional relationship may occur within the same group of visitors, as different individuals may have different relationships with individual hosts (or none at all). In other words, in a single visit, one man might exchange goods with Basima non-partners, give to and receive gifts from Basima trade friends, and also do Kula with a long-term Basima exchange partner (*muli*).

It should be noted that, conventionally, many of these transactional relationships invoke extended-kinship and affinal ties, even if they are putative. Thus, relations through marriage with non-Basima people provide an obvious basis for partnership, as do putative matrilineal connections with *susu* members living outside Basima. Again, the Massim-wide principle of 'bird' totem quasi-kinship also provides possible links with visitors who are erstwhile strangers.<sup>4</sup> Exchanges based upon the premise

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that *gimwali* in Kilivila language is a verb. The noun is *gimwala*. Thus, *agimwali* ('I purchased it'), and *besa gimwala* ('this is for sale/purchase/barter'). Although it is the verbal form that has passed into the anthropological literature, I merely remark that its use as a noun is ungrammatical to a native speaker.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the Massim region, one of the conventional ways of assessing an outsider as a friend or visitor is the identification of his or her bird-totem in the lines on the palm of the hand. This supposedly confirms or denies the person's totemic clanship and hence his or her quasi-kinship



of fictive kinship involve kinship norms and morality which to some extent undermine or weaken the principle of strict equivalence. A scenario of overseas 'relatives' bringing items such as marine food, mats and clay pots and receiving in return yams, sago and betelnuts is conducted within a friendly yet kin-obligated ethos. That is, while there is a measurable exchange of goods, the question of debt and repayment is not directly mentioned. It is politely ignored if not quite overlooked. To remind hosts or visitors of the need for equivalence would be unseemly; conversely, any failure to reciprocate without good reason is a breach of kinship etiquette, even if the kinship is fictive.

Some examples of trade or exchange partnerships follow. Masawana has a partnership with his sister's husband, Maiwina of Yabwaya Island. Their exchange may accordingly be seen in terms of both *susu* and affinal obligations. In another exchange partnership with Sylvester of the island of Uama, Masawana claims their common totemic clanship as its basis. Masawana also receives gift-bearing visitors from Boyowa and he reciprocates on the basis of his vague ancestral origin from there. Similarly, after repairing his overseas canoe, the old man Tobweu made a trip to Galea where he visited his clansmen with gifts of betelnuts and yams and returned with counter-gifts of tradestore goods. Bobby and his brother Koleli also receive visitors from Kaileuna (Boyowa) because the latter were once Kula partners of their dead father, Souda. Again, Tomainua and Ambrose receive visitors from Nabwageta Island based on their close Kula ties. Tomainua and Ambrose (as other Basima men too) have gone to the extent of adopting some of their Amphlett partners' children so as to enable them to go to school at Basima Community School. In so doing, further quasi-kinship ties can be expected to develop from the adoptions.

Everyday examples of trading (*etutupalowa*) in Basima might involve, say, a Wadalei man bringing mats for betelnuts, or Mesalu traders seeking yams and betelnuts Amphlett for their fish and clay pots. Nowadays, however, cash has become a common factor in transactions for pigs and betelnuts. Boats and dinghies frequently call at Basima to purchase them. A large Basima pig can fetch upwards of K200 to K300, which by general consensus is still cheaper than those to be found in Dobu, Bwaiowa and Boyowa. Men from Dobu and Bwaiowa come in search of pigs especially during the Christmas period when *sagali* festivals are being sponsored by

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relationship to local clans. While Basima people are fully aware of this practice, however, they do not appear to use it as a basis for establishing exchange partnerships.

government employees who have returned to their villages for the holidays. Lacking goods to offer in exchange, such men use cash to purchase Basima pigs. But they depart with betelnuts and yams from their Basima counterparts.

Typically, when a canoe or boat arrives the visitors come ashore and inform the first person they see of their wishes: for pigs, yams or betelnuts, for example. Within a short time the word spreads throughout the nearby hamlets, and the visitors sit and wait for trading to begin. This kind of trade is fairly impersonal; the visitors stay no longer than their transaction requires, usually a matter of hours only (until Basima people have brought betelnuts from the hills, or suitable pigs have been bargained over).

Betelnuts in particular have become the best and most reliable source of income for Basima people. During my fieldwork I assisted some Basima men with the transportation of betelnuts to Losuia, the government station on Kiriwina, on three different occasions. On one of these trips the several Basima traders collected a total of K402.60, all but K5.00 of which (for the sale of a woven mat) came from the sale of betelnuts. Altogether, thirty-one individuals had shipped their betelnuts; the highest amount earned by any one person was K32.00 and the lowest was K6.00. Of the K402.00 collected, K32.26 was spent on food and various other items such as lime gourds, woven belts and Trobriand baskets. There were no transport costs to the Basima men as the boat was a government-owned one. On our return to Basima, the rest of the cash was distributed to those who had shipped their betelnuts. On another occasion, one man received a total of K112.00 from the sale of betelnuts alone. The rate was ten toea (10t) for five betelnuts at that time.

During the eight months between November 1988 and June 1989 Amphlett Islanders made at least twelve different trading trips to Basima, mainly for food. Mesalu gave clay pots filled with fish and Basima people reciprocated with yams, betelnuts, tobacco and rice (Plate 7). In my own case, having received two clay pots containing fish from two Mesalu men, I reciprocated with tobacco, rice, kerosine, sugar, clothes and cash.

Kaileuna visitors from Boyowa who visited Basima during my stay had a string of exchange partners in various places including the Amphletts, Gameta, Lauoya and Basima. They had come with tradestore goods, cash and coloured Boyowa skirts (*malabwaga*). In return, they received at appropriate places sago, betelnuts, clay pots and even *bagi* necklaces from their own Kula partners.

There were also visits made by others in yet other contexts. The appearance of a group of visitors from Salamo was a fairly rare event, though it occurred twice during my fieldwork. On one occasion they came demanding a pig from a particular Basima man as a repayment (*mais*) for a pig given to him some years before. When they were informed that the Basima man they were seeking had died, they rather discourteously redirected their demand to the deceased's son. After about an hour of deliberation the son quietly told them that they were not going to get their pig from him. So they left empty-handed. On a later occasion they returned with cash and were then successful in purchasing a pig.

Some Molima and Kukuia people (of southwest Fergusson) also visited Basima during my stay. They came with cash and secondhand clothes to exchange for betelnuts, baskets (*kodo*) and clay pots (Basima being a redistribution point for Amphlett pots). These visitors had arrived in a fleet of three large seagoing canoes. Two of them were making their maiden voyages, so their owners took the opportunity to request pigs according to the traditional custom of *lauwaya*.<sup>5</sup> They only succeeded in getting one pig from a Basima *to'esa'esa*. In addition, they left with a number of clay pots, baskets of yams, imported Boyowa skirts and betelnuts. The pig was given and accepted in the context of a continuing debtor-creditor relationship, and at some later stage the Basima pig-donor will visit Molima to be given his return. In the meantime, he enjoys the reputation of a *to'esa'esa*: one who can afford to give a *lauwaya* pig to overseas trading partners.

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<sup>5</sup> The practice of soliciting gifts for a new canoe is common in the Massim islands. After a big-man has commissioned and launched a seagoing canoe, he sets sail with his crew and calls at various places, especially villages where his Kula or other exchange partners live. Upon arrival, conch shells are blown and a spear or a paddle with pandanus streamer attached is placed outside the house of a local big man. This is a challenge to release a large pig for the visitor. The accumulated pigs of such a voyage are eventually taken home for a celebratory feast for the new canoes. Some of the pigs are debts, and to recoup them the donors can either build new canoes of their own to make reciprocal soliciting voyages, or they can visit the debtors to request repayment for the purpose of, say, a *sagali*. See Malinowski (1922:163-165) for a description of the Trobriand version of this practice called *kabigidoya* (more generally known as *kevu* in Boyowa); see also Chowning (1960) for the Molima and Berde (1979:180) for the Panaeati versions. In Bwaidoka on Goodenough Island it is called *wakaefuefu*, though nowadays the canoe-owner does not accompany the maiden-voyage (Young 1983c:401-402).



Table 6.1 Inter-district Exchanges between Basima and its Neighbours

	Basima		
	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Context of Exchange</i>
Amphletts (Watota, Nabwageta, Gumana, etc.)	pigs, yams, betelnuts, sago, <i>bagi</i> necklaces, cash money and modern goods	Fish, turtles, <i>mwali</i> armshells, <i>kodo</i> baskets and clay pots	<i>abutu</i> , Kula, kinship and 'friendship' & barter
Uama and Sanaroa Islanders	<i>bagi</i> necklaces, yams, sago, sago thatching & cash money	fish, shell fish, <i>mwali</i> armshells, canoe building skills, canoes, & cash money	Kula, kinship relations, 'friendship', barter & <i>abutu</i> .
Galea	betelnuts, clay pots, yams	modern goods, cash money, yams	kinship, affinal, barter & 'friendship'
Bwaiowa & Dobu	<i>mwali</i> armshells, pigs, clay pots & betelnuts	<i>bagi</i> , modern goods & cash money	Kula, 'friendships', kinship & purchase by cash
Masimasi (Bosalewa, Wadalei, Mokai)	cash money, yams, sago & betelnuts	mangrove house posts, <i>kodo</i> baskets, mats & clay pots	kinship, 'friends', affinal & barter
Boyowa (Trobriands)	pigs, <i>bagi</i> necklaces, betelnuts, coconuts, sago & clay pots	modern goods, cash money, <i>mwali</i> armshells, Boyowa grass skirts, baskets & taro bundles	extended kinship, Kula partnership, 'friends', purchase by cash & barter
Molima (Kukuia)	pigs, betelnuts, sago, Boyowa grass skirts, & clay pots	pigs, modern goods & cash money	<i>lauwaya</i> , trade partnership & 'friendship'
Salamo	Pigs & betelnuts	cash money & ( <i>bagi</i> ?)	impersonal exchange & ( <i>lauwaya</i> ?)
Other	betelnuts, clay pots & pigs	modern goods & cash	'impersonal', mainly purchase by cash

Table 6.1 summarizes the content and context of Basima trading with visitors that took place during my fieldwork. It will be seen that the predominant transactions were of vegetable food for fish, pigs for cash, and cash for betelnuts.

Exchanges between Basima hosts and overseas visiting traders are ideally reciprocal and measured according to rough standards of equivalence. Measurement of yams, fish and betelnuts is often by the basketful, large *kodo* baskets in the case of yams, smaller *kwalisi* baskets in the case of fish and betelnuts. Although both baskets are woven from coconut leaves, *kodo* are much finer and more durable baskets that women carry on their heads to and from the gardens. Although a few Basima women know how to make them, most are imported from Masimasi. Everyone can make the crude *kwalisi* baskets, however, and they take less than 20 minutes to weave. They

are disposable and usually given away with their contents. With regard to their exchange, a *kodo* basket of yams is equivalent to a *kwalisi* basket of fish. Likewise *kwalisi* baskets of betelnuts and fish are equivalent. (A basket of betelnuts contains about two bunches, the same amount that fills a 5 kilogram rice bag - which is also frequently used as a container.) Again, a giant turtle is considered to be the equivalent of a medium-sized pig. An everyday, medium-sized, clay cooking-pot filled with small fish is deemed to be the equivalent of a *kodo* basket of yams; but note that it is the clay pot (as *une*) rather than the fish which is being exchanged for the yams. Finally, following one of the basic rules of Kula, a *bagi* (necklace) from Basima should be exchanged against a *mwali* (armshell) from the Amphletts.

### **Kula in Basima**

Malinowski (1922:291) was quite correct in his observation that Basima was only a stopover for overseas Kula traders from Bwaiowa and Kiriwina. Fortune's comments on Basima in *Sorcerers of Dobu* make no reference to Kula; presumably his stay was not long enough for him to witness any Kula activities. It was left to Lauer in the late sixties not only to confirm that Basima was a stopover venue for Kula traders, but also to indicate that local people actually engaged in Kula: 'Basima men were said to visit [for Kula]: Bwaio [i.e. Bwaiowa], Dobu, Gumawana [Gumana], Kwatoita [Kwatota] and Nabwageta Islands' (1976:16). The lack of any record, until Lauer, of Basima people's involvement in Kula suggests that it is fairly recent.<sup>6</sup>

Not only is there minimal Kula activity in Basima but the generally poor opinion held by their Kula-trading neighbours does little for Basima's reputation. An elderly, renowned Kula trader from Gumana Island described to me Basima participation in Kula as one of *gimona* (i.e. *gimwali*) type: that is, a direct exchange, as in barter, which he regarded as inept and 'not really Kula' (cf. Malinowski on similarly scornful criticisms Trobrianders made of 'bad conduct in Kula' [1922:189-190]). Another man from the neighbouring island of Waiwiwa was somewhat kinder, excusing Basima Kula by saying that they have only just begun to learn it. Bwaiowa people to the south concur that Basima people were traditionally uninvolved in Kula.

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<sup>6</sup> Basima also features on Lauer's list of active Kula communities (*ibid.*: 30). Given Basima people's minimal involvement in Kula it is hardly necessary to address the vast corpus of literature on Kula in the Massim. In addition to Malinowski (1922) and Fortune (1932) the standard ethnographic works now include Uberoi (1962), Weiner (1976), Leach and Leach (1983), Munn (1986), and Damon (1990), to list only published books.

A few Bwaiowa people welcome Basima's limited participation because it provides them and their Amphlett partners with a convenient link which is easy for them to manipulate. It also saves them the trouble of having to travel to the Amphletts for Kula purposes and vice versa.

In many respects Basima people share such assessments of their Kula by their neighbours. Some of the Basima Kula traders spoke of the 'softer' and more generous Bwaiowa people in releasing *bagi* to them as opposed to the 'hard' Amphlett Islanders. Not only are the latter slow, indifferent and 'stingy' (and therefore untrustworthy in their reciprocating obligations towards their Basima Kula partners), they are also 'men of grease' who did not always fulfil their promises to return *mwali* (armshells). 'Mesalu take our *bagi* but don't come back with *mwali* for us,' Basima men complain. Nevertheless, the Kula traders I interviewed were quite serious about their Kula and spoke of it with pride. There were a total of thirteen individuals who claimed to be involved in Kula, three of whom were women. The youngest Kula participant was Francis, a twenty-five-year-old man who became Basima ward councillor in 1991. Evidence for his participation was the possession of a *bagi* (which in Boyowa terms was his *kitom*), though he eventually lost it to a Boyowa man in an ineffectual attempt to Kula.<sup>7</sup> Of the thirteen Kula traders, only six of them were active while I was there, one being a woman. Even so, only three men demonstrated their enthusiasm by travelling to nearby districts, receiving Kula partners and negotiating with other traders in the hope of expanding their Kula.

I shall now give some examples of the Kula activities of these Basima men. Abedi, in his early forties and residing in Bwau hamlet, is one of the most active Kula men. He claimed that three particular men were the pioneers of Kula in Basima, beginning with his own ancestor:

Kiwona *tubugu* [presumably his great, great grandfather], Masiaina of Basima-proper, and Sam. They started it. My *une* originated from my father's father, Wenoli, who passed it on to my father, Siwediwedi, and he in turn passed it on to me. The excitement of *une* appeared only recently, especially in my

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<sup>7</sup> *Kitom* has various cognates in the Kula ring, such as *kitomwa* in Dobu and *kitoum* in Muyuw (or Woodlark) and Gawa (see the relevant essays in Leach and Leach 1983). In its narrowest sense, *kitom* refers to *mwali* or *bagi* articles which are unencumbered and have no further Kula obligations to fulfil; they are therefore privately owned by individuals. Owners of *kitom* have the option of either entering their valuable into an existing or new Kula path, or simply keeping it for themselves, for possible use in internal, intra-village exchanges. There are local variations in the practical application of the concept of *kitom*. In Basima, however, this regional concept is known only to those few people actually involved in Kula.



generation. Real Kula was restricted to the people of Auta [Vakuta], Gumana, Tewala and Bwaiowa. We were then living in ignorance (*mwagemwagema*). The Amphletts gave us *mwali* and we give them betelnuts. We then take the *mwali* down to Bwaiowa people and exchanged them for *bagi*. But this was very recent.

At the time of the interview, Abedi claimed he had partners in the following places: (a) in Boyowa (Morosisi at Kavataria village, Kwewayaya at Tukwaukwa village, and Moserota at Okeboma village); (b) in the Amphletts (Beabea at Nabwageta and Togila at Kwatota); (c) to the south in Bwaiowa (Tokulabuta at Deidei village); (d) in Dobu (Wasaelo and Sineiya); and (e) in Duau (Teibili of Siaus village).

An old man, Tomainua, is another active Kula trader whose long history of involvement with the colonial government included service as a village policeman and under ANGAU in World War II. Thereafter he captained several government boats in various locations in the Papuan region. He explained his relatively late induction into Kula in this way. He began immediately after his return to Basima from his last assignment as skipper of a government trawler. Through his friendship with a Dobuan (Silikataguiou, now deceased), he was given received two *bagi* articles, both of the *kitomwa* category. Once again, through his earlier friendship with Kula men from Nabwageta in the Amphletts, he injected the articles into their established paths (*enau*) and ever since then he has remained in the Kula. At the time of my interview he was in possession of two highly reputable *bagi*, one of them the renowned *Kasanaibeubeu* (or '*Asanaibe'ube'u* as Dobuans would have it) (Plate 8). Tomainua's elder brother, Kwaledi, is another well-known *une* man in Basima, though I was not able to collect the details of his Kula activities.

Another active Kula trader is Wakeke who inherited his Kula in both directions, Amphletts and Bwaiowa, from his mother's brother, Todiki, after the latter had become deaf and senile (he finally died in 1993). The *abutu* exchange to be described in the following section was directly related to the strengthening of Wakeke's *une*, for he had inherited another partnership from his second mother's brother, Iaudobila, who died in the mid-eighties. This partnership had to remain latent, however, until the path had been 'cleared' by a mortuary ceremony.

Joas is yet another active trader whose Kula began with marriage gifts from the Salamo area of southern Fergusson. (Kula articles received in such contexts are, I might add, foreign to Basima marriage exchanges.) When his sister's daughter married a man from Begasi village, his *susu* gave various items as marriage gifts to



Plate 7 Mesalu traders from Nabwageta loading betelnut on a Basima beach



Plate 8 Tomainua, an active Kula trader with a *mwali* (armshell) and a *bagi* (necklace). The medals he is wearing were awarded for his service during World War II

Joas' *susu*. Among them was a *bagi* which Joas took and inserted into a Kula path which links him to partners from as far as north Kiriwina. Among the benefits of his *une* participation, Joas receives taros, yams and warm hospitality whenever he sets foot in the village of Liluta in Boyowa. In addition to gifts for his *muli* he also takes along with him betelnuts which he sells at Losuia.

From all these examples one can deduce that, viewed comparatively, Basima Kula is very 'direct' in the sense that most of the traders deal only with their immediate Kula partners. They 'play fair' if only because they are ignorant of the stratagems of more experienced players. While the same can be said for other areas of the Massim where there is only marginal participation in Kula, it is clear that Kula competition in Basima is weakly developed. Basima traders are not very knowledgeable about the histories of famous Kula articles or Kula paths, and their ignorance of the subtle calculations and strategies involved in the main arena of Kula exchange precludes them from full participation. Basima Kula traders are 'small players' who prefer to see their involvement in terms of friendship and reciprocal gift-exchange. Few of them would contemplate mobilizing resources for the sake of Kula. The closest thing to this in Basima is the ceremonial exchange called *abutu*, which I now turn to describe.

### ***Abutu*: doing Kula for the dead**

Occasions for death ceremonies in Basima are many, and they intersect with so many other activities and social domains that it has proved impossible to discuss them under a single rubric. In the preceding chapter I discussed two types of death ceremonies which concern the matrilineal 'owners' and affines of the deceased. I suggested that the mortuary exchanges were best viewed in terms of inter-matrilineage transactions which ultimately reasserted the respective *susu*'s strength and status in relation to each other. Following the same line of argument I present below another death ceremony, *abutu*. This is a form of *bwabwale* which occurs in an inter-district social context.

The Basima institution of *abutu* is contingent upon a death (or deaths) yet is differentiated from other death ceremonies by its connection with *une* or Kula. Quite unlike the intensely competitive *abutu* of Kalauna people (Young 1971), Basima *abutu* is more akin to *sagali* - though on a considerably smaller scale - in that it links Basima people to outsiders through ceremonial food exchange. But because it does



so (nowadays at least) only through the medium of *une* partnerships, not everyone nor every *susu* is in a position to sponsor an *abutu*.

As we have seen above, those few Basima people who are *une* traders occasionally receive partners from overseas: from Amphletts, Boyowa and Bwaiowa in particular. Usually, those overseas Kula partners who call into Basima by canoe or motor-dinghies, pull their vessels onto the beaches of their trading partners. It is their privilege as valued visitors and guests to do so. At the death of a Basima Kula trader, however, his partners are temporarily banned (*etoboda* or *gagali*) from landing their canoes or boats on the beach belonging to the *susu* of the deceased. As described in the previous chapter, a deceased's *susu* members must prepare a *bwabwale* feast to remove interdictions imposed on the mourners. *Abutu* likewise provides the means to remove the interdiction placed upon overseas visitors so that *une* trading can be resumed. This was probably its more general rationale and function in the past, even before the advent of Kula in Basima. One might imagine that an *esa'esa* would 'close' a beach or landing place in honour of a prominent, recently deceased person of his *susu*, and subsequently 'open' it by holding an *abutu* exchange with a visiting trade partner. Thereafter the beach would be in use again and the way would be open for normal trading transactions to take place. The principle is similar to that of *gwara* in Dobu whereby outsiders enter a hamlet to remove mortuary taboos (Malinowski 1922: 346-347; but cf. Fortune 1963:198, where he insists it is called *yadiyadi*).

However, the decision of a Basima man to stage an *abutu* instead of (or in addition to) an ordinary *bwabwale* is, nowadays at least, due to the deceased kinsman's previous involvement in Kula and his successor's desire to continue it. *Abutu* is arranged as follows. Usually an overseas *muli* of the deceased together with his heir (i.e. the inheritor of his Kula trade links) meet together and agree upon a suitable date, some months hence, to lift (*-egege*) the ban on overseas visitors so that *une* activities may resume. The two principal partners and organisers of the *abutu* are called *toniabutu*. Staging an *abutu* involves the following considerations, not necessarily in this order of priority: (a) the need to fulfil internal mortuary obligations as in *bwabwale*, involving food exchanges between 'owners of the dead' and mourners (principally affines and *labalaba*);<sup>8</sup> (b) the obligation to honour the

<sup>8</sup> The configuration of inter-group exchange relations as described in the previous chapter is, to an extent, deployed also in the *abutu* exchange ceremonies. Although the major exchange partner in an *abutu* is an overseas *toniabutu* (i.e. as if it were on a one-to-one basis), the members of the Basima group pool their resources so their own *toniabutu* can effect a direct exchange with the overseas *toniabutu*.

deceased through the formal *bwabwale* distributions, and in so doing release the mourners from their prohibitions; (c) the need to lift the ban on overseas trading partners so that *une* activities may continue; and (d) to provide a special trading opportunity for visitors and hosts to exchange food and other goods.

Given the rarity of *abutu* feasts (one every few years), I was fortunate to be able to witness one in May 1989. The two *toniabutu* were Wakeke of Wegiliu village and Maiwina from Wawiwa in the Amphletts. The *abutu* was in memory of Iaudobila who had died a few years before. He was Wakeke's mother's brother (*oana*) and Maiwina's father's father (*tubuna*). This meant that although they were previously related as *dibe* or cross-cousins, following Iaudobila's death Wakeke and Maiwina became 'father' and 'son' to one another (cf. Fortune 1963:38). Iaudobila's son (Maiwina's father), originally a Basima man, lived uxorilocally in his wife's island after marrying a Wawiwa woman (Maiwina's mother). It was because of their residence in different districts that Iaudobila and his son could establish a Kula partnership and open a path between Basima and Wawiwa. Iaudobila's death brought a temporary suspension of the partnership, but both Wakeke and Maiwina had known for some time that they would succeed to it. As it happened, Maiwina's father died in Wawiwa shortly afterwards, so the way was now almost clear for the two younger men to activate the Kula path between them. First, however, the matter of the customary ban (*etoboda*) on the dead man's beach had to be lifted. Thus the decision of Wakeke and Maiwina to stage the *abutu* in order to 'clear the path' for their Kula as well as to honour the deceased. The *abutu* would simultaneously serve as a *bwabwale* for the deceased and, by lifting the taboo on the beach, reinstate *une* activities.

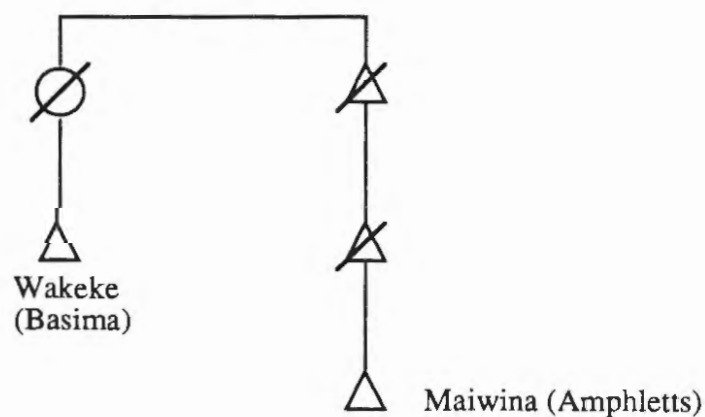


Figure 6.1 The kinship relationship between the two *toniabutu*

In May 1989 the *abutu* was held during a five-day period in Wegiliu hamlet (the largest in Basima, comprising four owning *susu*). Preparations for the feast, such as accumulating yams and building huts within the hamlet for the overseas visitors, had begun some five months before. Wakeke, the Basima *toniabutu*, was the principal figure behind the mobilization of kinsmen and fellow-villagers. The seven sleeping huts constructed for the visiting Mesalu each represented a principal food-giver from the four *susu*. These men had also constructed tall yam-containers (*gisisina*) which, together with long baskets of yams (*yobawe*), stood in front of their houses. In addition to its owner, those who contributed yams to fill each *gisisina* were other members of his *susu*, his affines (*waiwai*) and his children (*labalaba*). All of these contributions were at the disposal of the Wegiliu *toniabutu*, Wakeke.

The first day of the *abutu* was spent receiving guests who arrived late in the afternoon aboard a fleet of five seagoing canoes. Only people from the islands of Yabwaya and Wawiwa came. The expected participation of Nabwageta people was prevented by a death in their village. The fleet came under the leadership of Maiwina, the overseas *toniabutu*. The islanders had brought many fish which they had caught on their way to Basima, four huge turtles (*wayowayo*), ten large clay pots (*noyo*) and two *mwali* valuables. On the second day, the *abutu* ceremony commenced with the exchange of *bagi* and *mwali*, the presentations of which were ceremoniously signalled by conch-shell blasts. Much cooking was done on this day. Whole yams were creamed with grated coconut and boiled in clay pots, as befitting the extravagance of a major feast. Maiwina sorted the gifts he had brought with him in preparation for the following day's exchange. The main distributions of pork, yams, sago and betelnuts were made by Wakeke to the visitors on the morning of the third day. Almost simultaneously, Maiwina made his return of fish, giant turtles and clay pots. Roughly speaking, the giant turtles were measured against pigs, while the clay pots containing fish were reckoned against both yams and sago bundles. The accounting was by no means precise, for not only were the *toniabutu* themselves now 'father' and 'son' to one another, but their respective supporters from Basima and Wawiwa were mutually linked by a variety of ties, though mainly as affines and trade partners.

On the night of the third day dancing similar to that of a *sagali* festival took place. The fourth day was a rest day in which the parties had time to sit, talk and chew betel. They discussed *une* and other activities while more yams were being cooked





Plate 9 Nanisi making a clay pot at Watotaeta hamlet



Plate 10 The four large turtles which Maiwina presented to Wakeke following the 1989 *abutu*

'to feed the guests', as they said. This, of course, was also a demonstration of the hosts' abundant yam supply, a testimony to the renown of the gardens of Basima.

The fifth day concluded the formal activities of *abutu* with a further Basima prestation of yams and a pig, together with a final exchange of *mwali* and *bagi* valuables. (These Kula articles had been concealed until the very last day so that the two *toniabutu* could proudly 'surprise' one another with them.) One of the four pigs given (together with a *bagi*) was hung on the side of yam containers (*gisisina*). This was directly given to Maiwina by Wakeke. Of the five pigs given to the Amphlett Islanders, two were donated by Susan, Wakeke's mother's sister and a respected *alawata*; one of the pigs belonged to her co-wife, Bomali. Maiwina and his people used the day to take stock of their gifts and load them into their canoes ready for the voyage home. By the end of the *abutu* it had been generally agreed that Maiwina and his fellow-islanders had received somewhat more than they had given. Accordingly, a month later Maiwina returned to the beach of Wegiliu with another four giant turtles (Plate 10). These not only paid off his *gita* (debt) to Wakeke incurred during the *abutu*, but also some outstanding debts from previous exchanges with other Basima men.

The essentials of *gita* repayment are explained in Chapter Seven, though I should note here that those made in the context of *abutu* operate at two levels. The first and principal level is that between the two *toniabutu*, in this case Wakeke and Maiwina. Both gave and received gifts on behalf of their followers (Basima and Amphlett participants, respectively). What is received in the *abutu* should be reciprocated more or less on the spot, provided the appropriate resources are at hand. If not, the recipient accepts the gift as a *gita* (debt) to be repaid in future. *Gita*, we should note, means 'spear', so it is as if the recipient is reminded to repay (*maisai*) by the 'wound' inflicted by a spear. On the second level, the reciprocal exchange is between the *toniabutu* and his supporters. We have seen that the respective supporters provide yams, pigs and sago on the one side, and fish, turtles and clay pots on the other. Although they are channelled through the two *toniabutu* who make the prestations on behalf of their supporters, it is the *toniabutu* who accept the responsibility for their repayment (*maisai*). In other words, the *toniabutu* now owes his supporters. For instance, when Wakeke received a pig from Lelewai (an affine of one of the owning *susu* of Wegiliu) for the *abutu*, he reciprocated with one of the giant turtles Maiwina brought to Basima a month after the *abutu*. But it should be added this was the second turtle Lelewai received, for he had been given one by Maiwina (via Wakeke)

during the *abutu* itself. This one was in settlement of a debt of yams (*gita*) that Maiwina had incurred about a year before when Lelewai held a large feast to celebrate the completion of his *sanala* yam hut. Thus, the first turtle was to cancel Maiwina's debt to Lelewai; the second was to cancel Wakeke's debt to Lelewai for his *abutu* pig.

From a slightly different perspective, *bagi* and *mwali* articles changed hands between individual Kula partners, whereas all other *une* goods - pigs, yams, turtles, baskets of fish and clay pots - were channelled through the hands of the *toniabutu*. In their turn, the *toniabutu* redistributed them to their respective supporters in accordance with the quantity and quality of their individual contributions to the *abutu*. In addition to members of Wakeke's *susu* and Lelewai (mentioned above), contributions came from the three other owning *susu* of Wegiliu. For example, Mweiwaga, as leader of one of these *susu*, was given a turtle, fish and clay pots in return for his group's substantial yam contribution to Wakeke's *abutu*. Wakeke himself received a giant turtle on behalf of his *susu* and a *mwali* from his partner Maiwina.

Wakeke thus accomplished his multiple objectives. He met his obligation to honour his deceased *oana* by staging a *bwabwale*; he released the mourners of their interdictions; and he 'cleared the path' for his *muli* and himself to conduct Kula trade. Not least, in the eyes of Basima people Wakeke gained considerable respect and prestige (*yoyouna*) as one who had successfully staged an *abutu*. All of his personal ambitions were - for the time being at least - favourably met by this *abutu* venture.

It is clear that *abutu* provides an opportunity for Basima people to participate directly or indirectly in overseas exchange. It provides a context and a nexus which allows a flow of wealth from internal exchanges to be directed towards external partners, and vice versa, such that different kinds of goods can flow back and forth. To the extent that *abutu* connects internal and external exchange networks, it also and at the same time nourishes extended or 'fictive' kinship ties between Mesalu and Basima. This too is one of the social benefits of *sagali*, to which I turn in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *SAGALI*: FEASTING FOR RENOWN

#### Introduction

In this chapter I present an account of *sagali*, the largest and most spectacular feast staged by Basima people. I begin by defining *sagali* and offering a general description of its structure, organization, purpose and its relationship to other mortuary ceremonies. After presenting a short myth about *sagali*, I analyse in some detail a particular *sagali* event that I witnessed, and consider various problems associated with the sponsorship of *sagali*: the requisite leadership, the nature of the gifts given and received under its rubric. Finally, I consider *sagali* in its comparative aspect, indicating how Basima *sagali* differs from other great feasts (often of the same name) elsewhere in the Massim.

Fortune described *sagali* in Dobu as a 'the culminating mourning feast' (1963:250). For Northeast Normanby Island Thune also defined it as a mortuary feast which collectively honours 'all *susu* mates who have died since the last *sagali*' (1980:227). In Basima, honouring the dead is certainly not the most conspicuous element of *sagali*, and it is perhaps doubtful whether it should properly be termed a mortuary or mourning feast at all. There is no doubt that the purpose uppermost in the Basima sponsors' minds is the winning of prestige and local renown. *Sagali* is the most conspicuous and the most difficult entrepreneurial achievement possible for Basima men. In the final analysis, *sagali* feasts are organised by ambitious men for their 'names' and to win the admiration of their fellows for their skill in orchestrating inter-personal exchanges. Based on the principle of reciprocity, the *sagali* is linked in time to other *sagali*, in Basima or neighbouring districts, through the credit-debt relations which constitute the economic 'engine' or driving-force of the institution. Since it brings so many different kinds of exchange relationships - not least those of marriage and death - under its banner *sagali* would appear to be Basima people's attempt to encompass and express their entire social milieu in the idiom of this one exchange.

### Types of *sagali*

In what is understood to be its most general sense, *sagali* simply means distribution. As a major exchange institution, however, *sagali* is a local version of the 'great' feast found throughout Papua. It can be observed throughout the D'Entrecasteaux as a ceremonial feasting event involving a massive pooling of resources, the nightly entertainment of guests, and a lavish spectacular, culminating distribution of vegetable food and pigs by hosts or sponsors (led by one or more big men).

*Sagali* in Basima can be referred to by several descriptive names which indicate minor variations in its staging. These names generally refer to particular physical features of the feast. For instance, the chief sponsor of the *sagali* I witnessed in 1989-90 insisted that *sagali* 'proper' (such as his own) require *watea* yams (*D. alata*) to be pre-eminently displayed. When other root crops such as *tetu* (*D. esculenta*), bananas and taro are also displayed then the feast should be called *lopwatapwatai*, not *sagali*. Such fine distinctions are disregarded by most people, who tend to use *sagali* for all such feasts. But it is worth describing the technical 'varieties' of *sagali* as local experts understand them.

*Talabwa* is another name for *sagali* that refers to a prominent feature of the feast, the platform (cf. Molima *talaboo* for 'the main yam rack' of a *sagali* [Chowning 1989:115]). Every *sagali* requires a large, decorated platform upon which yams and pork for distribution are arranged, and from which the *sagali* sponsors make their speeches (Plate 12). There is normally a good deal of magic associated with the building of this platform. It is usually built in the centre of the sponsoring hamlet, as I witnessed on two occasions in Basima. A Bwaiowa man told me the central location of a *sagali* platform was due to the traditional practice of burying the hamlet owners there, but my Basima friends countered that while this was true for Bwaiowa and Dobu it was not the case in Basima. The point here, however, is that a *talabwa* feast is said to demand the highest platform, one which looms over the houses of the hamlets. Strictly speaking, too, only yams of the very best quality (such as the smooth and hairless *salasala*) should be displayed at a *talabwa* feast, and the conch-shells (*bwegigi*) must be blown each time a pig or a substantial yam contribution is brought into the hamlet.

Technically, *talabwa* is the term for the horizontal beam which forms the central axis and main support of the platform. This log is also metaphorically referred to as *waga*. It has an upturned end (*abuyuna*, 'nose') like the point of a canoe, and the

whole log forms a kind of 'hull', a symbolic reference, perhaps, to the canoe-cum-platform's role as a 'container' of food wealth. A *talabwa* log is carved from a specially cultivated tree nominated *sigwasigwa*, that is, the one to be ceremonially felled for a *sagali*. After the feast, the chief sponsor or Host will instruct one of his kinsmen to cut off the 'nose' of the *talabwa* log and solemnly put it away on a high shelf of his hut, to remain there until a post-*sagali* feast is made.

As already mentioned, *lopwatapwatai* is the name for a *sagali* feast that features a particular kind of food display. The term is a reduplication of *pwatai*, which is a small coconut-woven yam basket, commonly carried by men. A major *sagali* is called *lopwatapwatai* only if the display of root crops includes *tetu* yams and *duyu taro* (*Colocasia esculenta*), as well as *watea* yams. However, my observations suggest that people use *sagali*, *talabwa* and *lopwatapwatai* almost interchangeably regardless of their supposed differences. Another kind of *sagali* feast which I neither witnessed nor learned very much about was also said to involve the display of *watea* yams only and no other crops; this was called *numanuma*, though most of my informants agreed that it was so long since it had been staged that it had gone out of existence. *Emusasai* is yet another name given to *sagali* festivals. Its etymology is not known to me.

In January 1993, I was introduced to yet another name for *sagali*. *Ata'ata* appears to be similar to both *talabwa* and *lopwatapwatai* in that it permits a display of both *watea* and *tetu* yams. As a term *ata'ata* is probably derived from the second magical spell which should be chanted before planting the first posts of the cooking huts of the feast. Concerning the 1993 *sagali*, one knowledgeable informant told me:

This *sagali* is like the one you saw at Waluwete in 1989. But it should be called *ata'ata* and not *talabwa* as the sponsors are trying to do. After all, the yams they have accumulated are a mixture of *watea* and *tetu*. The platform should have been a bit smaller and shorter, and it is not required of them to blow conch shells while cutting the posts for the platform, or when bringing yams and pigs to the feast.

To avoid any confusion in what follows I shall use only the term *sagali*. These ethnographic details aside which concern only a few Basima people, there are what one might call analytical differences between *sagali*. For instance, the degree to which mortuary exchanges take place in the *sagali*. I shall return to this point below, but foreshadow it here. Hosts and their affines and children sometimes incorporate *bwabwale* exchanges, thereby using the *sagali* as a venue for the settlement of outstanding mortuary obligations. Such prestations appear to be opportunistic 'add-



ons' rather than integral to the structure of a *sagali*, and I am convinced that they play a secondary role to the political objectives of the feast. This is notable in that the competitive, incremental gifts to individuals that characterizes *sagali* differentiates it from somewhat similarly-structured death feasts such as *bwabwale*. While the former emphasizes inter-personal food exchanges the latter stresses inter-group ones; person-to-person prestations are a feature of *sagali*, while group-to-group prestations characterize *bwabwale*.

### Categories of contributors

A *sagali* is typically initiated by a 'big man' (*to'esa'esa*)<sup>1</sup> with the support of his matrilineage. It is convenient to refer to the principal sponsor or *tonisagali* ('owner of the *sagali*') as Host with a capital letter, to differentiate him from his followers and fellow-*susu* members, the hosts. Sometimes the Host is referred to as *tonidoe* ('owner of the flag') and likened to the leading star in the Younua constellation, mentioned in Chapter Four. The Host's role in the *sagali* is pivotal, as we shall see below. The owning hamlet members and other matrilineally-related kin (ideally belonging to a single *susu*) are referred to as *toniwelai*, 'owners of the place' where the *sagali* is being held, though I shall simply call them hosts. They may also be called *tonisagali* since they are the chief Host's main supporters by virtue of their *susu* affiliation. As *toniwelai*, moreover, they rally under the banner of *susu* solidarity in order to pool their resources for their subsequent redistribution by their leader. Notwithstanding this, it is their personal exchange relations with which they are primarily concerned.

The primary supporters and exchange partners of the host *susu* are their affines (*waiwai*) and children of male members of the *susu* (*labalaba*). In other words, the categories of people involved in a *sagali* are the same as for *daweluwelu* and *bwabwale*, and will be familiar from my descriptions in Chapter Five. Since the hosts or *tonisagali* constitute a single *susu* it is therefore a group; but the other contributors to the *sagali* constitute only categories defined from the standpoint of the hosts: affines (*waiwai*), children (*labalaba*), and a residual category of friends, distant relatives, and exchanged partners, the most prominent of whom are called *dagula*.

Something more needs to be said about the role of these categories of persons in *sagali*, beginning with *labalaba*. All the sons of the male hosts are expected to contribute to the feast. *Labalaba* are likely to belong to different *susu*, so their

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Roheim (1950:180) for further detail on the definition of *esa'esa*.

participation in *sagali* thereby brings other *susu* into the feast. The yam contributions of *labalaba* are called *unumwawa* if the *toniwelai* or host father is still alive. In other words, sons who contribute to a *sagali* in support of their living fathers call their contribution *unumwawa*. This must be repaid, either at the finale of the *sagali* or at a later date at the *labalaba*'s own *susu*'s *sagali*. Especially large *unumwawa* prestations, however, may be reclassified as *bwabwale*. Thus, the father and his *susu* may decide to accept it as a *bwabwale* prestation, which relieves them of the obligation to repay it. This is clearly a desirable outcome for the *tonisagali*. It also enables the son to be excused his obligation to do *bwabwale* for his father after his death. A substantial *unumwawa* obviates the need for it.

This is an interesting exchange mechanism for it underlines the political and 'secular' aspect of *sagali* as feasting for renown. Since the persons in whose names *unumwawa* gifts are made are not yet dead, such prestations correspondingly minimizes the eschatological aspect of *sagali* as feasting in memory of the dead. The *sagali* hosts (including the fathers whose sons are contributing *unumwawa*) are only too happy to receive their contributions; after all, the more food on display for distribution, the greater the fame of the event. In the Basima *sagali* I witnessed in 1993 three of the twenty yam-filled structures (called *gisisina*) were classified as *unumwawa*. These had to be repaid, either at the *sagali* finale or on later occasions.

Other *labalaba* whose fathers are dead may use the *sagali* as an occasion to make their *bwabwale* if they have not already done so. Such contributions to the hosts are openly referred to as *bwabwale* - tributes to deceased 'fathers'. The hosts are delighted to receive such prestations for they do not have to reciprocate; the sons were merely fulfilling their obligations.

Like the *labalaba* category, affines or *waiwai* have diverse *susu* affiliations. *Waiwai* includes all of the in-laws of the hosts, of whatever generation. In view of their number, their contributions to the *sagali* are of enormous importance, perhaps equal to that of the sponsoring *susu* itself. *Waiwai*'s contributions are called *poala* (cf. Chowning 1989:114), and may be either a repayment (*mais*a) of a previous gift, or a new prestation (*gita* or *sabwaeta*). The latter may be regarded as an obligation-creating prestation, one which reawakens a dormant exchange connection between affines. The term *poala* has unequivocal connotations of marriage and the economic obligations between affines. As we saw in Chapter Three, the final, formal food exchange which fully establishes a marriage is called *poala*. It is usually given by the

groom's kin to the *susu* of the bride and reciprocated by an equivalent return called *bwabwale*. In the *sagali* context, *poala* is also a gift from one set of affines to another, whether as a new credit or as the settlement of a debt. As in marriage exchange, *poala* in *sagali* must be repaid.

*Waiwai*'s contributions are also stored in wooden *gisisina* structures. Usually it is the brothers-in-law, husbands of women belonging to the host *susu*, who construct the largest *gisisina*. An average-sized *gisisina* contains about eighty baskets of yams; the largest may hold about 150 baskets. Ten of the twenty *gisisina* structures constructed in the 1993 *sagali* were presented by *waiwai* to the hosts as *poala*. These all represented debts (*gita*) to the hosts, placing upon them the obligation to repay their affines at later *sagali*. I should note, however, that of late there has been a tendency to settle such debts within the context of the immediate *sagali*. Some Basima people say they deplore the introduction of this arrangement, but that it is one favoured by their Galea neighbours. One of my informants was very critical of the immediate repayment of *poala*, as most of the food displayed in the *sagali* is then retained by and redistributed among 'themselves', thereby leaving little for other participants who are not affines. He said: 'The guests have to get their feast food indirectly from their own relatives or go home empty-handed. This is shameful.' Such a change in which *sagali* becomes predominantly an affinal exchange must surely be counter-productive to the *to'esa'esa* who sponsor them with aspirations of attaining greater fame.

The final category of participants comprises friends, distant relatives and other guests. Their contributions to the *sagali* are based on exchange partnerships of various kinds that they happen to have with the hosts, as clansmen or other fictive kin. Among these, a small number of big men and women are referred to as *dagula*, literally 'feather(s)', which clearly alludes to their prominence (big men and women who attend *sagali* invariably wear one or two feathers in their hair). *Dagula* may make contributions of huge baskets of yams called *yobawe*; but very rarely do they present pigs to the hosts. More usually, they present small gifts of yam-filled baskets as reminders to the Host that he still owes them yams or pork or both. The Host should therefore reciprocate during the finale of his *sagali*. In the 1993 *sagali* I witnessed, five of the six large *yobawe* baskets were presented by *dagula*. In their characteristically mock-humble way, Basima people said that these *dagula* were only 'helping' their friends. But since this kind of 'help' does not go unnoticed it carries with it a very firm message that the *dagula* expect to be repaid.



### ***Maisa and gita: essence of exchange***

To distinguish the various categories that interact within a *sagali* according to a simple dichotomy of 'contributors' versus 'recipients' of food would be entirely misleading. Most contributors to the feast also become recipients during the final distribution. Moreover, owing to the principle of incremental giving what the contributor receives from the Host at the end of a *sagali* is not only a return gift (*maisa*) but a new debt (*gita*) as well. Conversely, one's contribution to the Host may be seen as an obligation-invoking prestation (*gita*). Apart from the food which the hosts cook for their affines at the *sagali*, the major prestation given by the Host to his affine may be seen as a debt-settling gift (*maisa*) together with an 'extra' which represents a new obligation-invoking prestation (*gita*). The relationship between contributor and Host (or hosts) expressed through this reversible debtor-creditor food-exchange partnership is thereby perpetuated indefinitely, which indeed, is as it should be between affines. Large *gita* prestations are made to *dagula*, of course, for they are the main conduits of the *sagali*'s fame.

Let me elaborate on the key concepts of *maisa* and *gita* which play such an important role in the operation of *sagali* feasting. It should be noted first that there are two other terms which elderly Basima men use interchangeably with *gita* in a *sagali* context. These are *sabwaeta* and *aga*. In its everyday usage *sabwaeta* refers to the small, round, woven head cushion which women place on their heads before carrying baskets of yams. *Aga* is clearly a cognate of Trobriands *vaga* and Muyuw *vag* (Damon 1990:92), meaning an 'opening gift' in Kula, though in Basima *aga* can also denote an 'incremental' prestation given with *maisa* to exchange partners. As we have seen, *maisa* means repayment (to repay is *emaisa*), and the term is found in other Massim societies in the context of Kula, where its meaning is very similar if not identical (Thune 1980:211; Macintyre 1983:109).

*Gita* is the generic Basima (and Dobuan) term for spear as an offensive weapon. Its use in *sagali* is illuminatingly metaphorical. If it does not actually kill, a spear wound is a painful reminder of a debt of vengeance. Until it is repaid, a victim bears some sense of shame and failure. Thus when a Host gives a basket of yams or portion of pork to someone at the *sagali*, the recipient accepts it as an obligation-invoking prestation; but as a *gita*, a spear, the gift also hurts and the recipient is jabbed, as it were, into thoughts of vengeance and payback. He must normally wait for the next *sagali* for the opportunity to make his repayment, but should he die

before that his debt will be transferred to his heirs. Recipients or inheritors of *gita* cannot be coerced into settling their debts, however, and the only effective sanction is shame-inducing gossip and ridicule which 'gnaw' at one's reputation and worthiness as a person.

*Maisa* prestations in *sagali* are usually augmented with extra yams or a portion of pork; this incremental portion being the *aga* or *gita*. Thus every *sagali* prestation is ideally a *maisa* and a *gita* simultaneously, containing a debt-cancelling component and a debt-creating component. If, for instance, I had at a previous *sagali* presented a *gita* in the form of a half-pig to the current *sagali* Host, I might expect him now not only to present me with the return payment (*maisa*) of a half-pig, but also an increment of a *gita* in the form of another half-pig: that is, if the Host wishes to maintain our exchange partnership he will give me a whole pig. Later still, at a *sagali* of which I am a host, I shall have to repay the new debt, and therefore I may choose to give my partner another, somewhat larger pig. *Maisa* plus *gita* therefore have the potential to escalate indefinitely, though of course various contingencies place limits on the extent of inflation. One partner may simply be unable to repay, or does so with exact equivalence (i.e. without *gita*); the inheritor of a debt may well be satisfied to repay it merely, without attempting to inflate it with *gita*.

My informants were quite emphatic, however, that the only way to repay such debts is through *sagali*. Individuals occasionally complained to me that gifts they had previously given as *gita* in *sagali* were still owed to them, awaiting settlement in another *sagali*. Since it is deemed unethical to ask debtors to settle outside the context of *sagali*, and since *sagali* are few and far between, the creditors are simply obliged to wait for a capable and competitive *to'esa'esa* to emerge and stage a *sagali* that will provide the venue for repayment to them as *waiwai* or *dagula*. Of course, not only the Host's debts are repaid at his *sagali*, but also those of his fellow *toniwelai*; likewise, their affines may use the opportunity to repay their debts through the avenue of their brother-in-law's or father-in-law's *sagali*.

Not every *sagali* meets everyone's expectations of adequate repayment. As we shall see, the 1988-89 *sagali* did not pass without ignominious rumours to the effect that the Host had failed to settle all his *maisa* debts. Such rumours worked against his own purpose in staging a *sagali*, for the verbal praise of his achievement was weakened by gossip about his shortcomings.

The concept of *gita* is reminiscent of the competitive food exchanges of neighbouring Kalauna on Goodenough Island, where men try to settle conflicts and redress wrongs done them by 'outgiving' their rivals in *abutu*, aptly glossed 'fighting with food' (Young 1971). Yam debts incurred in *abutu* are, especially if they are inherited, referred to by Kalauna people as *hiyo*, or spear (*ibid.*: 196). But it is the combatative idiom of fighting and warfare in Kalauna *abutu* that is so striking, and although Basima people do not exchange food so competitively and aggressively as do Kalauna people there is, in the concept of *gita*, an appreciation of an underlying antagonistic element in *sagali* food prestations.

It is also interesting to compare the term *gita* to the Trobriand concept of *basi*, which similarly means 'to spear' or 'to pierce'. In Trobriands Kula it is legitimate and commonplace to present a partner with an article of lesser value than the one he is expecting as a kind of temporary token. It assures the waiting partner that the clinching valuable (*kudu*) to the one which is owed will soon be forthcoming.<sup>2</sup> The article of lower value is called *basi*, implying that the 'wound' is still open, hence the Kula path too is still open despite the delay in reciprocation. We may also note that the same concept is found in Dobuan Kula, where *logita* is the verbal form: 'spearing'.

Clearly, exchange relations in any society are better understood if we heed the idioms by which people express or explain them. Thus, fighting and the accoutrements of war make compelling metaphors for competitive exchange as in Kalauna *abutu*. I am not, however, suggesting that *sagali* in Basima is (or was ever) a surrogate for war. I firmly believe that warfare coexisted with ceremonial exchange of various kinds and that its idioms were accordingly influenced by war.

Finally, in Basima there is a quite literal use of spears to 'remind' people of a debt that is owed. After the death of a reputed hunter, his hunting spears are kept by his widow and daughters until *bwabwale* has been made for him by his widow's *susu*. When it is completed the spears are broken and discarded, just as the taboos on the widow and other close mourners are lifted ceremonially. So long as she kept them, the deceased's spears served as a reminder to the widow's maternal kin of their obligation to the maternal kin of her dead husband.

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<sup>2</sup> See Campbell (1983:236-242) for a detailed classification of Kula valuables from southern Kiriwina.



### ***Bwabwale* prestations in *sagali***

This is perhaps the appropriate place to consider the role of *bwabwale* prestations in *sagali*. It is often said that one of the reasons for staging a *sagali* is to 'clear away' some of the outstanding mortuary obligations held by the *susu*. *Bwabwale* prestations are made before the finale, and quite separately from other prestations such as *poala*. There are also contributions from affines and *labalaba* which are considered to be *bwabwale* rather than contributions to fulfil affinal obligations. For instance, during the 1988-89 *sagali*, the contribution made by the wife of the Host to her husband was initially designated *poala* (an affinal wife-to-husband gift), but subsequently it was redesignated *bwabwale* because the father of the Host had died not too long before. The rationale for this was that the Host would ultimately use his wife's contribution as a *bwabwale* for his deceased father, and which he would present to the latter's matrilineage. Following this decision, the Host's wife's contribution was not placed on the platform with the other heaps of yams.

Another example of a death-related prestation made during the 1988-89 *sagali* concerned a ceremony called *edapweia*. Strictly speaking, this is even less to do with the objectives of *sagali* than *bwabwale*, yet we must note that it can be brought under its rubric. At the death of a man, his widow and children should leave his hamlet (providing they are living there) for their own maternal hamlet (*natala*). Only after the *bwabwale* for the deceased had been made by the children can they elect to return to their father's hamlet. Meanwhile the maternal kinsmen of their father are still regarded as 'fathers' by the deceased's children or *labalaba* (cf. Fortune 1963:36-43). I describe later what I observed of an *edapweia* ceremony on the day of the finale of the *sagali*.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Sagali* myth of origin**

Basima people tell a myth to account for the origin of the principal form of dance at *sagali*. This myth also purports to explain the sequence of magical spells which are essential for the proper staging of a *sagali*. Without them, it is said, the *sagali* would surely fail and the Host would just as surely die. In its basic form the myth is

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<sup>3</sup> Chowning also reports that Molima *sagali* 'almost peripherally' allows the *valevaleta* - which includes the children of a dead man - to return to the deceased's hitherto tabooed hamlet (1989:117).

probably fairly widespread in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands.<sup>4</sup> The Basima version of this myth goes as follows:

A long time ago a young boy of Lauoya named Binasai (though usually referred to as Amoamo, meaning orphan) was abducted by spirit-people of the bush, *tokwatokwa*.<sup>5</sup> Whilst their captive Binasai learned that they possessed a dance which they performed only on special occasions. With the help of a sympathetic female *tokwatokwa*, he hid himself in a woven rain mat (*ile*). One day the men began to perform the *ewesi* dance to celebrate their capture of a 'pig' (i.e. Binasai himself). While the *tokwatokwa* men were dancing Binasai peeped cautiously through an opening in the mat and observed all the necessary steps and rituals associated with this special dance. After he had learnt the dance, the boy seized an opportunity to escape his captors and ran home with his new-found knowledge. On reaching home, however, he was surprised to see his parents and kinsmen in the midst of preparations for his own *bwabwale*. They assumed that he was dead. After convincing them that he was still alive, he taught Lauoya people the *ewesi* dance. As soon as Binasai's people beat the drums at the inaugural dance, the tune resounded throughout the land, permeating the forests, crossing the valleys and drifting up to the hills. It was heard loud and clear by the *tokwatokwa* who were enraged that their sacred dance had been stolen by their captive. They lamented their loss and cursed Binasai bitterly. To console themselves, they vowed that whenever an ordinary human stages an *ewesi* he must observe all the rituals and prohibitions, and he must perform all the incantations for every stage of the dance. This goes for the ritual of the entire *sagali* too. Failure to observe these would inevitably bring the *tokwatokwa* to beat the sponsor to death. This is the explanation given for the strict adherence to the ritualized procedures and numerous prohibitions on diet and conduct.

Thus, according to the myth, although the theft of the *ewesi* dance brought down upon Basima people a 'curse' which puts them at risk if they fail to observe *sagali* procedure to the letter, its spiritual origin also greatly enhanced the importance,

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Young (personal communication) has recorded versions from West Fergusson and Goodenough. These variants tell of a man's theft of a dance drum from the spirits (*balauma*). He escapes with it to his village where he teaches his own people. Although the spirits are angry they accept the loss of their secret; but henceforth they haunt men's dance festivals demanding the scrupulous observation of ritual procedures. The Basima version differs only in that it is a dance rather than a drum that is stolen by the hero and in the manner by which he tricks the spirits.

<sup>5</sup> *Tokwatokwa* are said to inhabit large trees and rocks in the forest. They are also said to be small in stature and not visible to ordinary people. Government patrol reports concerning Fergusson Island in the mid-fifties recorded some local beliefs in *tokwatokwa* in a way which suggested that the Australian patrol officers were unsure whether they were real people who had somehow managed to evade contact. They inhabit the mountains, one officer was told, and 'had never appeared for census or come down to the beach'. They are 'shorter than the coastal people.... build their houses in trees and use bows and arrows for hunting'. A road connecting Gaiobala [Gameta?] and Wadalei was reported to be feared by the villagers who warned that people using it should travel in groups, as arrows had been fired at solitary people walking along the path. Gidoni, an interpreter based at Esa'ala, gave another view of *tokwatokwa*, saying 'that they are not real people... [but] the same as fairies' who 'live in all uninhabited places and some of the [village] men are supposed to have powers.... to communicate with them' (Patrol Reports M.B.D. 1956/7, Esa'ala S.D. by P.O. Thomas: Patrol to West Fergusson, 23/6 to 28/7/1956).

spectacle and power of *sagali*. The Host, the main organizer of a *sagali* feast, is most at risk from the vengeance of the *tokwatokwa*; accordingly he must scrupulously observe a number of food taboos and other prohibitions. These will be described below.

### ***Sagali at Waluwete***

In the sections that follow I shall outline the first of two *sagali* that I witnessed in Basima. The inauguration for this took place in November 1988 and its culminating feast, or finale (*une*), took place on 6th January 1989. The previous *sagali* had been held in 1985-86, and the one that followed (which I also briefly witnessed) finished in January 1993. This sequence would appear to indicate that *sagali* in Basima are staged at intervals of approximately three years.<sup>6</sup>

Waluwete hamlet is situated on a ridge top in Lauoya district at an altitude of about 200 metres. The dauntingly steep climb to the top became the bane of those obliged to carry food and pigs to the hamlet. A relatively small hamlet consisting of only eight households, at the time of the feast the population was 37, comprising 21 males and 16 females (see also Chapter Three). The hamlet is owned by a Bosalewa *susu* belonging to Yoana clan and its leader was Edeleni Duli, whom I introduce below. Adult *toniwelai* numbered ten: eight of whom were married (five of them women) and two of whom were widows. Thus, although there were only three married male resident hamlet owners, there were at least nine young, unmarried sister's sons. As stated in Chapter Three, more than half of the total membership of the Waluwete *susu* was living elsewhere. The actual hamlet is oval-shaped and its houses dot the fringes of the site; its centre is unoccupied except for a cluster of giant, ageing tulip trees. A small trade store operates within the hamlet. It belongs to *susu* members and is managed by the young men of the *susu*. Waluwete offers a splendid vantage point for a view of the outlying islands of Tewara, Uama and the Amphletts.

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<sup>6</sup> If every one of the 30 *susu* in Basima were to hold its own *sagali* (a highly improbable eventuality) it would therefore take some 90 years to complete a full 'cycle'. However, Basima people do not talk about 'cycles' or even ideal sequences of *sagali*. Obviously, only a few *susu* in any one decade, say, would have the numerical strength, the requisite leadership and the necessary resources to stage a *sagali*. Moreover, unless there were substantial debts to be repaid the motivation would be lacking.



### *The Host and his ritual prohibitions*

It is imperative that the Host of any *sagali* be a fully-tutored person well-versed in the incantations and rites associated with *sagali*. Its success is believed to depend upon the ritual knowledge of the sponsor and on his scrupulous observance of a number of prohibitions or taboos. And yet its success relies no less on practical, organizational procedures. The Host or sponsor must show great qualities of leadership to manage these by inspiring his followers. The success of the *sagali*, then, requires the full co-operation of all his lineage members (*susuyao*), affines (*waiwai*), children (*labalaba*) and, to a lesser extent, other supporters (*dagula*). Without the concerted efforts of many people the *sagali* is doomed to fail.

The *sagali* I witnessed in Waluwete was hosted by the leader or headman of this hamlet, Edeleni Duli. As he told me, he first announced his intention of staging a *sagali* in late 1987. His kinsmen, affines and other fellow hamlet members discussed the matter and a consensus was reached that the *sagali* could be held late the following year. The men conveyed this information to their womenfolk, and together they prepared yam gardens for the sole purpose of provisioning the *sagali*. Having gathered a general idea as to where he might find extra yams and pigs, the Host began to plan strategies for calling on these resources so that they would be available for the final distribution of his *sagali*. By harvest time (mid-1988) he had already begun to observe food restrictions and other interdictions related to the ritual duties he was obliged to undertake before, during and after the feast. I shall refer to these in their appropriate contexts below.

Edeleni Duli was the Host (*tonisagali*), leading actor (*tonidoe*), main organizer and master-of-ceremonies. He was a member of Yoana clan and his matrilineage originated from Bosalewa on the other side of Oya Tabu. Edeleni was one of two sons, though his brother was dead; there were no sisters. After one or two unsuccessful marriages he married a woman of a different Bosalewa *susu*, who also happened to belong to Yoana clan. This wife bore seven children, three of whom (two sons and a daughter) were married at the time of their father's *sagali*, though one of the married sons lived in Duau.

Edeleni had held community office as elected local government councillor of Basima ward and as chairman of the Basima community school board of governors. As a respected elder he had participated on numerous occasions in the adjudication of land disputes, marital conflicts and the like. By 1988 Edeleni must have been in his

late forties or early fifties. He was known to command a wealth of knowledge of the magic incantations and ritual procedures required for *sagali*. In short, he was a leader worthy and proficient enough to warrant an aspiration to sponsor a *sagali* which would confirm his status as a big man and *to'esa'esa*. Tragically, however, Edeleni died suddenly in March 1990, just 14 months after the completion of his *sagali*. (While it consolidates *to'esa'esa* or *guyau* status, Basima people believe that big men risk death when they stage *sagali*: evil often befalls the ambitious.)

Before and during the *sagali*, food prohibitions (*eabuya*) are in place in the sponsoring hamlet, mainly in order to conserve food. But none are more stringent than those of the Host himself. He is under taboo, and is consequently something of a tabooed and even 'sacred' person himself. For several months leading up to the *sagali* a Host's diet should be restricted to fire-roasted vegetables such as bananas of a certain type, tapioca and sweet potatoes: all admittedly 'poor' food. The important rule is that he should not partake of any vegetable food or meat of a kind that will feature in the finale of the *sagali*. The explanation I was given for the dietary prohibitions observed by the Host is that without them the success of the *sagali* would be jeopardized. The principle is that of 'sympathetic magic'. For instance, should the Host eat pork this would induce those who attend the *sagali* to consume more than usual, leaving none to carry home. Similarly, should he partake of boiled yams (especially those that have been coconut-creamed) people would also be encouraged to eat excessively and have no yams to carry home. One important measure of a *sagali*'s success is an ample surplus of vegetable food and pork to be carried home after the visitors have eaten their fill. Thus the Host should set a ritual example to his fellow *toniwelai* by abstemious eating and by depriving himself entirely of those foods he will later give away. His fame and renown (*ana yoyou* or *ana tupu*, in Dobu) are at stake. Were there to be nothing to carry home, people would say: '*Tonina na-bawe iea*' (He ate his own pigs himself). To be accused of amassing food only to eat it oneself (including of course one's own kinsmen and supporters) is a dire and shameful insult to any feast sponsor. It spells the defeat of one's ambitions for renown.

The Host observes other restrictions. He is not supposed to do any gardening or engage in general community activities, such as those to do with church, government or school. He should not bathe nor even wash his face.<sup>7</sup> The supposed consequences

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<sup>7</sup> Edeleni told me in December 1988 that he had not bathed since September and that he would remain unwashed until the *sagali* was finally over in January, a total period of five months.

of bathing is that any pigs brought prior to the *sagali* finale would die and rapidly decompose. Together with his wife the Host must also ensure that the firewood and fire used to roast his food or light his rolled tobacco must come only from within his household. From any other household source they would be 'contaminated'. In more recent times a Host has been permitted to eat rice (so long as it is not creamed). He is also allowed to drink tea with sugar and eat plain biscuits; he may also chew betelnuts and smoke twist tobacco.

### *Preparations for the inauguration*

Ritual preparations for a *sagali* are just as important as logistical and practical preparations. The Host of a *sagali* is under constant pressure and understandably anxious concerning the success or failure of his feast. Fears of magical sabotage by envious rivals are common. The rite of *maseduya* is a preventive measure. Two special logs are cut in the bush and placed in the Host's hut where he chants *maseduya* over the them. The logs are instructed to ward off any sabotage attempts by rivals, enemies or witches.

It is also important that the *sagali*-hosting hamlet be cleared of weeds and debris. To this end, the Host recites a spell called *muyuwa bubuyuwa* before the women begin cleaning the hamlet. Special huts have to be built both for key contributors from other hamlets and for cooking purposes in case of rain. Before the first post of the first hut is planted the Host must recite an incantation called *kae ana 'ata'ata* (literally, 'foot of the platform').

The rituals which the Host must perform as a pre-requisite for the staging of the night-long dances (*ewesi*) are indispensable. Without them the event is deemed incomplete - perhaps even dangerous in view of the alleged supernatural sanctions of the bush spirits, *tokwatokwa*, led by Sinitu (see Chapter Four). It is the festival dance that attracts non-contributing visitors and guests to a *sagali*. Basima people claim that the dance attracts additional admiration from outsiders, though it may be tinged with envy of Basima dancers. Their reputation as carefree dancers was noted earlier by Fortune: 'The Basima... are great dancers, for ever dancing. The dour Dobuans despise them - "the root of laughter they"; and the men talk freely in public with the wives of their friends' (Fortune 1963:250).



Prior to the inauguration of the *sagali*, a substantial amount of yams had been carried up to the hamlet. Most of the regular carriers were women, specially clad in their traditional attire of new coconut-leafed skirts (*seniu*) with hibiscus flowers tucked in their hair. They also adorned themselves with aromatic herbs (*wane*) tucked in their oiled armlets (*ama*). Yams flowed in from contributors from all over the districts of Lauoya and Basima. Waluwete is situated on the border of the two districts, and to instil some order into the transportation of yams from each area it was arranged that certain days be allocated to certain groups of hamlets. For example, hamlets A, B and C would bring in their yams today followed by hamlets D, E and F tomorrow, and so forth. The task was more arduous for those coming loaded with yams from the coast, as the narrow and slippery path up to Waluwete was a real test of strength and endurance. Relatives and friends who lived on nearby islands hired small diesel-powered boats or used their seagoing Kula canoes to sail to Basima.

The yam carriers did not often chant songs on their way to the hamlet, though the atmosphere of social excitement on the day of the finale reminded me of Boyowa yam harvest festivals. Sometimes, however, when still some miles away youths sang joyful songs that conveyed also an element of aggressive challenge. This encouraged the carriers to move with energy and speed. Unlike their Molima neighbours on such occasions though, affines (*yehena* in Molima) do not 'clown, praise or deride' or otherwise jokingly abuse their in-laws or their property (Chowning 1989:116).

#### *Inauguration of the dance*

By early morning of the opening day, pots of whole yams were already boiling. It is interesting to note the layout of these cooking pots as it signifies the contributing categories involved. There were four different cooking categories set separately within the respective sections of the hamlet. The affines (*waiwai*) of the hosts occupied the northern end, which was the entrance to the hamlet. Next to them but towards the centre was the *labalaba* category - children of male hosts. The yams which they cooked were eventually presented to their 'fathers' among the *toniwelai*. Although technically a *bwabwale* presentation it was a 'light' one. Next to the *labalaba* pots were those prepared by the hosts, *toniwelai*. This food was notionally to be given to the other categories of *waiwai*, *labalaba*, *dagula* and any other visitors. 'Notionally', because certain people present had to be careful not to partake of some of this food in case it happened to have been harvested from the gardens of dead relatives. But such wariness is essential whenever people gather for a public

feast. Towards the southern end of the hamlet, a small section was set aside for cooking pots prepared by special friends, *dagula*, of the *toniwelai*.

The hosts were actually involved in three major cooking activities. The first was between six and seven in the morning which was for a light 'breakfast' to be eaten by the hosts themselves. The second meal was prepared between eight and nine, and was allocated to the categories of affines and *labalaba* of the hosts. These recipients actively assisted in the food preparation. The third occasion of cooking was about mid-day, when a total of 76 steaming pots of yams of various sizes were prepared. Among them were ten pots of *mona* (coconut-creamed pudding), one of them a flour pudding prepared by a woman. These were served to the visitors at about four o'clock in the afternoon. No pig was slaughtered for this opening ceremony.

Dances are inaugurated at the opening ceremony after everyone has eaten. Before the distribution of food, however, the Host publicly invited the dancers to prepare themselves. Men and women headed for the creek to bathe. Women changed into clean skirts made from dried coconut fronds (*seniu*) while others dressed in colourful Boyowa banana leaf skirts (*malabwaga*). A few of the young female dancers wore spondylus shell necklaces (*bagi*). Men donned pandanus sheaths (*suiga*) and pandanus waist belts (*waila*). They placed aromatic herbs such as *emwata* into their woven armlets (*ama*) and they rubbed their bodies with sweet-scented coconut oil (*bunama*). They then added a couple of black strokes of paint (*saba*) across both sides of their faces. This completed the dancers' regalia for the occasion.

The bigger (*sinawa*) and smaller (*didiola*) drums had their handles decorated with pandanus streamers (*doe*) which swayed through the air when the dancers vigorously swung the drums to the rhythm of the dance.

Soon after the distribution of the pots of food and when the people had eaten to satisfaction, the Host signalled for the enactment of the *dibwaya* ritual. This guarantees that the *ewesi* dance will begin. Without it, according to the myth, the dance would be aborted and the Host would be thrashed by the *tokwatokwa* bush-people. A tiny branch of *yalemugi* or *oliyolo* plant is planted in the centre of the dancers' circle by a young man of the Host's *susu*. This is a gesture of appreciation and a commemoration of the origin of the traditional dance initiated by Binasai, the Basima youth who stole it from the *tokwatokwa*. Indeed, the magic spell that had been earlier chanted over the branch by the Host was intended to appease the watchful *tokwatokwa*. This spell certifies the Host's authority, as a knowledgeable

big man, to practice the ritual skills required for any *sagali*. His failure to perform them correctly would not only reflect badly on his aspiration to be acknowledged a *to'esa'esa* but would invite violence at the hands of *tokwatokwa*.

Burying the *yalemugi* branch in the centre of the dance circle also symbolizes happiness and festivity (*mwa'asana*). It is said to be an invitation to people from far and wide to come and share the entertainment. Having completed this, one of the dancers ritually spat out a chewed betel mix onto the drums, thereby concluding the ritual and opening the dance festival.

At exactly four-thirty in the afternoon, the male dancers began by humming a tune to the beat of the smaller drum. They then moved into a circular formation, holding their drums in one hand and beating them with the other. The feverish atmosphere that the vibrant bodies of the dancers generated pulsed through the crowd in the hamlet. Shouts and screams ensued as the pigs squealed and dogs barked. It had been almost three years since the last *sagali* dance in Basima and people were determined to enjoy this one. As the drum beats became more rapid the men moved inwards to the centre, coming then to an abrupt end with the dancers' uttered '*oosh...oosh!*' This brought the first dance beat to an end and the dancers moved back to their original circular formation, only to repeat immediately the same sequence. The female dancers in *ewesi* take on a subordinate, albeit decorative role. They line up on the periphery of the circle of men and follow them as they weave in and out of the centre.

Quite unexpectedly at this point, one woman began a slow, sad mourning wail akin to the sound of a death befalling a village. This was an old woman lamenting the fact that the majority of the dancers were young unmarried men. She was reminding the audience that there were few strong leaders and elders among the *toniwelai*. Someone explained to me that the gist of her message was: 'As most of our elders have died we now remain leaderless, hence the *sagali* you are witnessing is a *bwabwale* for those who have died'. For this old woman, at least, the *sagali* was a memorial for her *susu's* dead.

The same, somewhat monotonous, dance continued throughout the night and was repeated almost every night until the finale of the *sagali* two months later. The youth of Basima welcome the opportunity the dance festival presents to find partners for the night or for longer term 'friendships'. And if circumstances are favourable, some



may find marriage partners by the end of the festival. On the occasion of the Waluwete *sagali*, however, only one such marriage resulted.

### *Construction of the platform*

As the dancers left to rest their weary bodies after the inaugural night's dance, the hosts together with some of the affines and *labalaba* remained to assist in the next event. This was the felling of a *sigwasigwa* tree which had been specially cultivated beside the hamlet to be used for an occasion such as this. It was to serve as the central beam of the *sagali* platform, the *waga* or *talabwa*. The tree was tall and straight, about 10 metres high and 30 centimetres in diameter. Before it was felled, the Host conducted an important rite. He approached the base of the tree, patted it and sprayed betel from his mouth while chanting a lengthy spell called *waine sinelugeya* or *tai kwasinaligu*. As the tree was felled the small crowd of onlookers broke into a loud chorus of cheers while a boy blasted on a the conch shell; women screamed, yelled and skipped around in a rather frenzied dance. The Host Edeleni then chanted the second part of the spell called *todebadeba odadabwa*. This ritually 'blessed' the main beam of the platform, *talabwa* or *waga*. Edeleni then 'measured' the felled tree trunk with his outstretched arms. After debarking the log, men carried it into the centre of the hamlet. The construction of the platform (*watala*) could begin.

Another important rite and incantation had to be performed by the Host when the main upright post had been planted in the ground. This is referred to as the *bawe aena* ('pig's leg') post. *Bawe aena*'s key role in supporting the *sagali* platform symbolizes the influence of Sinitu, the leader of the *tokwatokwa* and 'spirit guardian' of the feast. The Host chants the magical spell of *giledebi tutuwena nalolo* which summons Sinitu and informs him of the intention of staging a *sagali*. The impressive *sagali* platform can be interpreted as an iconic representation of the feast itself, while the *bawe aena* post represents its solid anchorage and a secure foundation for abundance. The message of the spell chanted by the Host is that a *sagali* cannot proceed without the support of spirit beings; as the original owners of the *ewesi* dance and the numerous protective rituals they must be acknowledged and shown deference if the *sagali* is to be a success.

Surrounding the platform tall cylindrical structures or 'large yam racks' (called *gisisina* or *mwalakudila*) were built to await the yams which would be displayed in them. Once the platform had been erected some of the yams and taros belonging to

the Host were placed upon it. Throughout the following month women of the hamlet spent at least half of their time carrying yams from the gardens to the platform.

It took the workers one whole week to finish building the platform. Its completion ended the need for outsiders to attend the hamlet during the day. However, the hosts were still required to work hectically day and night in preparation for the finale. It became particularly onerous for the women as the dancing continued night after night and they were kept busy cooking for the dancers; this was after they had also cooked for the workers during the day.

A week before the finale of the festival was to be held youths and young unmarried men were rallied to carry live pigs to the *sagali* hamlet. It was an arduous but socially rewarding task, and the carriers were fed yams and pork at the end of the week. This pork came from two pigs that died after being carried to Waluwete just two days before the finale. Sabotage by jealous female witches was suspected, perhaps even members of the sponsoring *susu*.

As more and more pigs were brought into the hamlet, cheers together with conch shell blasts and drum beats welcomed them. The two largest and most talked-about pigs were brought into the hamlet the night before the finale. Unlike the smaller pigs which were slung on poles, these were so heavy they required specially-constructed wooden frames to enable them to be carried uphill. The owners of the pigs (a father and his son) were accompanied by a man who spat a chewed betel-mix over the two pigs after they had been set down. The covert reason for this rite was to protect them from further acts of sabotage by witches. One of the huge pigs (together with an impressive amount of yams) was being contributed by a non-resident member of the Waluwete *susu*, and hence a uterine kinsman of the Host. His pig would be distributed at the finale to cancel his outstanding personal *gita* debts. The other massive pig was being donated by the first pig-owner's son, who was contributing it by virtue of his *labalaba* status to the *tonisagali*. It was an instance of *unumwawa*, the prestation which a son makes to his father in anticipation of *bwabwale*.

Following the inauguration of the *sagali* there had been various and perhaps inevitable rumours about the uncertainty of its completion. The Host had admitted to delays in arranging for yam contributions from affines, friends and 'sons', especially those living outside Basima. He was still in the middle of negotiations for yet more pigs. Speculation was running hot that the feast might never reach its planned conclusion. Fortuitous and uncontrollable factors also added to the anxiety of the

Host and his *susu*. During November and December of 1988, a man and two women had died in Basima. This meant that the formal proceedings of the feast had to be suspended for a time to show respect to the matrilineages which had suffered losses. The nightly dances were temporarily halted, but were resumed a few weeks later after permission had been granted by the *susu* of the dead. Christmas and New Year celebrations also intervened, which had a somewhat diluting effect on the mounting fever of the *sagali*. Still, the Host was determined to complete his *sagali* shortly after the New Year celebrations.

Alas, when all seemed set to arrange for the finale the young woman referred to in Chapter Five committed suicide immediately after New Year. A further delay seemed imminent. Fortunately for the Host, however, the maternal uncle of the dead girl generously announced that the Host could proceed with his *sagali* without observing the quietness (*mwamwadu*) customarily demanded after a death. The finale was accordingly set for January 6th. This was to be the day for which the *tonisagali* had planned and worked so hard for more than a year.

### *The finale*

Like Molima (Chowning 1989:116), Basima people refer to the climax and concluding distribution of a *sagali* as *une*. As we saw in the previous chapter, *une* is a cognate of Kula and *kune*, though in this context it simply connotes the wealth of yams and pigs and the gain of such wealth through exchange.

At about nine o'clock on the night before the finale the first beat of the drums signalled the last of the nightly dance performances. Women and men were again dressed in a festive manner (as described above) while more elderly people went on with their interminable betel chewing while critically comparing previous *sagali* with the present one. Much talk centred around the question of whether one's outstanding *gita* would be properly reciprocated, and whether the *mais*a would be incremented to create another *gita*. To increase the excitement of the event it is in the interests of the Host to keep everyone guessing about his intentions. The dancing continued to a monotonous beat for the rest of the night. At least six different songs were sung and danced to. At dawn the drums ceased and the dancers retired to their huts to rest.

The day of the *une* began and the hamlet was soon teeming with people and massed with food. At least half of the platform had been piled with enormous yams, taros



and bananas of a superior type (*ba'aba* and *yalumia*). A total of twenty-two cylindrical structures (*mwalakudila*) were filled to the brim with yams. Some of the yams protruded through the walls of these racks, flamboyantly exposed for everyone to witness. In addition to countless smaller baskets of yams, there were twenty-three of the long baskets called *yobawe*. These were hung underneath and along the sides of the platform. Of all these contributions, a total of fifty-four baskets were donated by the *labalaba* category. At least thirty individual affines had contributed to the feast with yams and pigs.

After their slaughter, six large pigs at a time were lined up together on their horizontal poles waiting to be singed. Their heads were made to face east and the buttocks westwards. Six sisters' sons of the Host took charge of singeing the pigs (Plate 13). After the first lot of pigs had been singed the Host conducted a butchering rite called *edaiya labwa*. He selected one of the pigs and made an initial, symbolic cut while chanting a spell. The young men then began to butcher the pigs. Before the pork could be loaded onto the platform, however, the Host was required to recite another protective spell called *muyuwa bebeuta*. As each of the portions of pork was carried up onto the platform a young man blew the conch shell, signaling the gravity of the occasion (Plate 14). The majority of pigs were cut into halves, thirds or quarters, which indicated the Host's calculated intention of repaying his larger debts (*mais*) and incrementing them with *gita*.

Just before 3 p.m. distant cries mingled with cheers approached Waluwete hamlet. I had not been warned of this event. It proved to be a son returning to his dead father's hamlet. He had been working in Lae and had not participated in the making of his father's *bwabwale*. The son was being carried on the back of a man, and besides the wailing son walked his mother in a similar state of grief. A group of men carried a large pig wrapped in a pandanus mat; two seated men were also being carried on top of the pig. Following this tableau was an even larger group of people, the majority of whom were maternal kinsmen of the returning son. Each carried a gift of *edapweia* that was eventually presented to the *susu* of the dead father. This included a large clay pot, six enamelled dishes, two pillows, several sleeping mats (*sita*), a great number of baskets of yams, and the large pig. As the cheers and drum beats subsided the *sagali* Host came forward and formally received the grieving son in a gesture of acceptance which would allow him to become a resident of Waluwete once again. To complete the ceremony the Host led the son (who was still being carried on another man's back) through the entire hamlet (Plate 11). This symbolically released him of



Plate 11 *Edapweia*. The son being carried into his dead father's hamlet during the *sagali* at Waluwete



Plate 12 The *tonisagali*, Edeleni, is standing on his completed *sagali* platform a week after the inauguration





Plate 13 Sisters' sons of the *tonisagali* preparing a group of six pigs for singeing at the finale of the *Waluwete sagali*



Plate 14 *Toniwelai* loading butchered pigs onto the *sagali* platform at *Waluwete*



the prohibitions that had prevented him from entering the hamlet following his father's death. Obviously, not every *sagali* will witness an *edapweia*, but it was interesting that this relatively fortuitous ceremony should be conducted on the same day as the finale and brought within *sagali*'s rubric, 'almost peripherally' as Chowning remarks of similar occurrences in Molima (1989:117). It clearly added to the spectacle of the day's events.

The *une* began at about five in the afternoon (though many people privately grumbled that this was too late). The Host opened the distribution ceremony with a modest ten-minute speech made from the top of the platform, flanked by his main workers and supporters. Predictably, the Host's speech referred to his *susu*'s poverty and the small size of his *sagali*. It is probably ubiquitous in the Massim for feast sponsors to portray themselves as humble and poor and barely able to meet their obligations. The heavy irony reserves judgements of abundance and success for the audience to make.

As the speech concluded, the workers on the platform began throwing betelnuts down into the crowd. The audience, in turn, must try to catch them or dodge them, for the throwers really do aim to hit particular people. I was interested to observe that in spite of its abundant supply, betelnuts did not feature so prominently in Basima *sagali* as they do in Trobriand festivals.

After the preliminary betel-throwing drama, the long-awaited moment arrived when the Host began the allocation of vegetable food and pork to particular individuals. He started by paying off his larger debts, as indicated by the biggest portions of pork and yams. Recipients included his *waiwai*, his *labalaba*, and more distant relatives. Having thus repaid some of his principal debts from the top of the platform, the Host then descended to the ground with his helpers. Here were the *mwalakudila* racks and *yobawe* baskets, and also uncontained heaps of yams. Each time the Host quietly announced the name of a designated recipient, a young man walking beside him (in this case a sister's son) repeated it loudly to the audience. Blasts of the conch shell followed. If the gift was intended to discharge an obligation and thereby cancel a debt, it was expressed in an idiom such as the following: '*Diapi 'ala eeee! Oteta anagusu!*' This translates as 'Diapi's food, eeee! For the chopping-off of the carrying pole!'. This is a metaphorical reference to the poles by which pigs and *yobawe* baskets of yams are carried to the feast. Such a 'carrying-pole' gift was once presented as *gita* to the current Host. Thus, he says in effect, 'I now cancel the debt I

owed you.' If pork is being given it is usually held aloft for everyone to see as the recipient comes forward to take it.

Half-way through the distribution controversies arose which momentarily threatened to spoil hopes of the *sagali's* success. The recipient of one gift announced by the Host refused to go to the platform to receive it. It was not immediately clear whether he was protesting the inadequacy of the prestation, but it transpired that the would-be recipient believed the gift had been improperly designated. It should, he protested, have been given simply as *gita ana emaisa* (that is, the *maisa* repayment of a previous *gita*), and not, as stated by the Host, a *gita* or *sabwaeta* which tried to put him into the Host's debt. How could he be given a *gita* without the *maisa* first being repaid? Another man refused to come forward because he felt that the *gita* he was being called to accept was too large; it would surpass his ability to repay. This was a not unwelcome rejection as far as the Host was concerned, for it meant that he had over-estimated his partner's capacity for challenge. The Host could be seen to be generous, and it was not his fault if the recipient deemed the gift too extravagant. However, one other instance of rejection was not so favourable to the Host. He had intended to repay a *gita* to a young man, the son of an elderly *to'esa'esa*. According to the protesting young man, however, the Host's repayment was smaller than the gift he had received from the young man's father on the occasion of a previous *sagali*. The young man and his father therefore rejected the Host's *maisa* as they claimed it was blatantly inadequate. Of course, this contention embarrassed the Host, as it was doubtless intended to do.

Thus, a few people left for home somewhat disgruntled. To this extent, the Host had failed to satisfy everyone, a fact which had some bearing upon his own reputation as a big man. In the cautious judgement of one informant whom I asked about the success of Edeleni Duli's *sagali*: 'It went well, though he might have done better if he had distributed more cleverly and shown a bit more strength.'

Apart from these blemishes, the entire event was agreeably accomplished. It ended on a high note and the majority of people went home happy. (I remember quite vividly how on the following day as I was carrying out my census survey every household I visited offered me large chunks of pork, so much so that I soon felt sick at the sight of them.) Indeed, some people did not complete the task of carrying their yams home until fully a week later. But again, while everybody was undoubtedly well-fed by the Host this was not the only - or even the principal - gauge of his

success. He had to have been seen to unequivocally cancel all his debts and also to perpetuate his exchange relationships by making incremental prestations. This is perhaps the ultimate mark of a *tonisagali's* excellence and success. The Host of this particular *sagali* seemed to have fallen a little short of that goal. In all fairness, however, few *to'esa'esa* do manage to achieve this ideal of the perfect performance.

While the *sagali* is over for the visitors, the Host and other *toniwelai* have yet other tasks to perform. The women are again required to sweep the hamlet clean after the Host has chanted a spell called *mwaniwala*. The rationale for this rite is that during the hectic period of feasting and dancing people have trampled plants and displaced stones, thereby disturbing the hamlet's original landscape. The hamlet has been defaced and to a degree contaminated, so the *mwaniwala* spell which initiates the sweeping is intended to restore the hamlet to its original spiritual condition.

Following the *mwaniwala* rite the Host must perform an even more important one called *watuwatu nekeneke*. This involves planting within the hamlet two special banana suckers of the local *debwaneta* cultivar. The stated purpose of this rite is to 'anchor' food within the hamlet. When the *sagali* participants and visitors left with their gifts of food, some yam magicians among them may have done sorcery to deprive the hamlet owners of any hope of growing yams in abundance in future. The Host performs his rite not only to counteract the malevolent intentions of rivals, but also to 'anchor' and perpetuate the hamlet's prosperity.<sup>8</sup> Technically, the spell is called *tulutulu*, and the Host is required to chant two sets of magic formulae as he plants the two symbolic banana suckers: one to anchor the hamlet's prosperity, and the other to ward off *otala*, the fateful northwest 'wind of hunger'.

Finally, there is the task of dismantling the *sagali* platform.<sup>9</sup> Surprisingly perhaps, this does not call for any magical incantations from the Host. A few days after the feast had been concluded, the platform was taken apart and its main component logs carefully stacked at the edge of the hamlet. About an arm's length of the main beam (*waga*) was chopped off. This was the end-piece shaped like the nose of a canoe

<sup>8</sup> The *manumanua* rituals of Kalauna are similarly designed to anchor prosperity in the village (see Young 1983a); in turn these resemble the *vilamalia* ('village prosperity') rites described by Malinowski for the Trobriands (1935a:219,476).

<sup>9</sup> Fortune reported of Tewara: 'Long after *sagali* the long platform built round the central graveyard stands ....' (1963:199). See also Schlesier (1983:221) who, two months after the *sagali*, noticed that the platform in Me'udana, Duau, was still standing. The one in Waluwete, in contrast, was pulled down within days of the finale.



(*waga abuyuna*). It was stored away safely in the house of one of the Host's sister's sons as a relic of the *sagali*. The significance of this act is said to be that whilst the *waga abuyuna* is resting in the hut, members of the *susu* must cultivate a large garden of taro. When the taro has matured, they should harvest it and prepare pots of taro pudding (*mona*). This is eaten by members of the hamlet and others who assisted them in the making of their *sagali*. Pigs should also be slaughtered so as to mark the conclusion of a great event.

During my return visit to Basima in January 1993, I asked after the 'nose' from the *sagali* platform I had seen three years before. The 'owners' were quick to inform me that it was still in one of the hosts' houses awaiting a concluding feast. At least three previous *sagali* feasts have yet to put on the final *mona* feast, so one is inclined to suspect that the display and disposal of the 'nose' of the *waga* or *talabwa* does not rate high in feasting priorities and that it has little or no direct bearing upon the success of the *sagali* and the prestige the hosts gained from it.

#### **A summary: the rationale of Basima *sagali***

As described above, the most conspicuous defining features, both physical and social, of a Basima *sagali* are: a platform (*watala*), yam containers (*gisisina* or *mwalakudila*), the dance (*ewesi*), pigs, yams and other prestige foods, the Host (*tonisagali*) and his matrilineage supporters (*toniwelai*), the *susu's* affines (*waiwai*) and children of male members (*labalaba*), prominent friends and exchange partners belonging to other districts (*dagula*). The following table attempts to summarize the exchange transactions and services between individuals belonging to different categories of participants in a *sagali*.

Figure 7.1 Transactions ideally occurring between major parties during a *sagali*

GIVER	RECIPIENT				
	<i>Tonisagali</i>	<i>Susu</i>	<i>Waiwai</i>	<i>Labalaba</i>	<i>Dagula</i>
<i>Tonisagali</i> (chief sponsor)	--	leadership for the <i>sagali</i> ; provides opportunity for individual members to clear their debts ( <i>maisa</i> ) or create new debts for others ( <i>gita</i> ) - (e.g. <i>waiwai</i> , <i>labalaba</i> , <i>dagula</i> , etc.)	<i>maisa</i> & <i>gita</i> as marital ( <i>poala</i> ) prestation; his own <i>waiwai</i> and <i>tonisagali</i> strive to outgive each other here	<i>maisa</i> of <i>unumwawa</i> , or relieve 'son' or 'daughter' of future <i>bwabwale</i> obligations provided the <i>unumwawa</i> he received was substantial enough	<i>maisa</i> & <i>gita</i> (it is imperative that <i>tonisagali</i> cancels his debt and provide a new one to this various men and women of consequence)
<i>Susu</i> (matrilineage members of <i>Tonisagali</i> )	assistance towards overall organization of the <i>sagali</i> as members - e.g. accumulation of food-wealth and construction of the platform	--	<i>maisa</i> & <i>gita</i> as a <i>poala</i> prestations	<i>maisa</i> to <i>unumwawa</i> received, or relieve 'son' or 'daughter' of future <i>bwabwale</i> obligation if the <i>unumwawa</i> prestation was substantial; and <i>gita</i> maybe given too	<i>maisa</i> & <i>gita</i> (time for individual hosts to settle their debts ( <i>maisa</i> ) with other individuals and endeavour to create ( <i>gita</i> ) debts for others)
<i>Waiwai</i> (all affines to hosting <i>susu</i> )	<i>maisa</i> and/or <i>gita</i> called <i>poala</i>	<i>maisa</i> and/or <i>gita</i> called <i>poala</i>	--	none (not applicable - as both categories are not the hosts)	none (not applicable)
<i>Labalaba</i> (children of male hosts of the <i>sagali</i> )	<i>unumwawa</i> (as <i>gita</i> or <i>maisa</i> ) or fulfilment of outstanding <i>bwabwale</i> obligation, if 'father' is dead	<i>unumwawa</i> (as <i>gita</i> or <i>maisa</i> ), or fulfilment of outstanding <i>bwabwale</i> obligations, if 'father' is dead	none (not applicable - as both categories are not the hosts)	--	none (not applicable)
<i>Dagula</i> (individual exchange partners of <i>Tonisagali</i> & members of hosting <i>susu</i> )	<i>yobawe</i> baskets of yams, or small gifts of yams as reminder to <i>tonisagali</i> of his debts	smaller gifts of yams to remind hosts, as individual partners, of debts owed to <i>dagula</i> individuals	none (not applicable)	none (not applicable)	--

The essential principle of a *sagali* is that of reciprocal exchange, though the main emphasis of the event is on giving rather than receiving, and much of the exchange is delayed rather than simultaneous. *Sagali* is realized through the aspirations of an ambitious Host to gain prestige through a successful accumulation and redistribution of wealth in the form of yams and pigs. The food wealth is made to flow through established inter-personal, debtor-creditor exchange networks. The continuity of these networks of exchange relations, of which the sponsoring Host is the centre, is maintained through incremental prestations, such that measurable extra gifts (*gita*) are given in addition to what is owed from previous *sagali* festivals. Recipients are then in turn obligated to repay the *gita* at future *sagali*, an obligation which ensures that the roles and direction of giving and receiving are reversed, thereby perpetuating exchange relationships in time. Inter-personal exchange relationships, it should be noted, are not restricted to particular affinal or kinship relations but open to many. Indeed, a man has as many exchange partners as he can afford.

The designation of the majority of contributions to a *sagali* as *poala* indicates their affinal source. This reminds us of the *poala* marriage exchange between the *susu* of the bride and the *susu* of the groom (Chapter Three). And this in turn reminds us of the two-sided *bwabwale* mortuary exchange between the 'owning' *susu* and the 'mourning' *susu* (Chapter Five). These exchanges are between groups rather than individuals, whereas the converse is generally true of *sagali* feasts. The *poala* that one witnesses in *sagali* is not predicated on the opposition between two *susu*, but rather between two individuals: husband versus wife, 'father' versus 'son-in-law', Host versus wife's brother, and so forth. While it may be the case that these individuals are representing their *susu*, the food debts involved are incurred by the individual person alone and he or she remains responsible for their repayment.<sup>10</sup> Edeleni Duli explained one of the *poala* prestations at his *sagali* thus: 'This is *maisai* from my wife. She is repaying what I gave her brothers when her *susu* made a *sagali*. But because it is coming from her, it is *poala*.'

Mortuary practices, religious beliefs, ritual, magic and mythology each play a role in *sagali*, though I maintain that they are secondary to its social and political role in providing an arena for big men to enhance their status and for exchange partnerships between various categories of persons to be re-affirmed. In its dramatic form, *sagali*

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<sup>10</sup> On the understanding, of course, that debts incurred within *sagali* are inherited by members of one's *susu* after one's death, particularly siblings or sister's sons.



is a legacy of the young hero Binasai's acquisition from the *tokwatokwa* bush spirits: from this point of view every *sagali* is the re-enactment of a myth (cf. Roheim 1934:127). The integration of *sagali* into Basima culture seems complete, and to a moderate degree it accords well with - and is sometimes used to serve the ends of - obligatory mortuary prestations.

From another perspective, Basima *sagali* can be distinguished from related exchange institutions - mortuary feasts (*bwabwale* and *abutu*) and marriage feasts (*poala*) - by its sheer scope. The fame its hosts seeks is a geographical one (see Thune 1989:168-170). It is also much more than simply a grand affinal exchange, as it tends to be in Dobu (Fortune 1963:200) and Molima (Chowning 1989:117). Basima *sagali* reaches beyond marriage relations and beyond Basima itself to big men in other districts. The opportunity it gives for ambitious individuals to manipulate their kin and affinal relationships is an opportunity to convert food wealth into prestige and thence into local political power. This, of course, is true for most major feasting or exchange ceremonies to be found in Melanesia.

### ***Sagali* as secular competition**

The features of Basima *sagali* as I have described them in this chapter accord generally with those reported from other Massim societies.<sup>11</sup> Structurally and organizationally there is a great deal of similarity throughout the region. As Chowning warns, however, 'there exist both more variety and more uniformity than appear on the surface. The use of cognate terms throughout the region at first conceals the differences in application' (1989:126). In this concluding section I wish simply to focus on two aspects of Basima *sagali* that seem to me to differentiate it somewhat from some of the other *sagali* described by previous ethnographers. One aspect is what one might call the secular tone of feasting for renown in Basima; the other is its competitive aspect. These are varying emphases rather than absolute differences, however.

As I also argued for *bwabwale* in Chapter Five, Basima *sagali* is not a stage in an ideal sequence. Nor is it the culmination of 'smaller', 'preliminary' mortuary feasts as ethnographers have found for other Massim societies such as Dobu, Loboda, Molima, Vakuta and Tubetube. There is an empirical difference, too, in the extent to

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<sup>11</sup> See the essays in Damon and Wagner (1989), notably Thune on Loboda *sagali*, Chowning on Molima *sagali*, Macintyre on Tubetube *soi*, Lepowsky on Vanatinai *zagaya*, Montague and Campbell on Kaduwaga and Vakuta *sagali*. Also Battaglia (1990) on Sabarl *segaiya*. The list could go on.

which *sagali* in these areas commemorate or honour the dead. My own observation of the way Basima people speak about and conduct *sagali* encouraged me to see it as only tenuously related to death. Just as there was very little attention given to the despatch of the deceased to Bwebweso (or anywhere else) in the burial ceremonies, so there was no reference (that I could detect) to the dead person's spirit in *bwabwale*; the stated reasons for doing it were entirely social and cast in terms of respect for and obligation to the *susu* of the dead.

Likewise, the attempt to see Basima *sagali* as a death feast runs into obvious difficulties. In the two *sagali* that I witnessed, allusions to the dead of the hosting *susu* were very few. As I documented them above while describing *sagali* at Waluwete, such allusions amounted only to the way *bwabwale* prestations can be sometimes conducted under *sagali's* rubric, the way *labalaba* may use it as an occasion to re-enter the hamlet of their dead father, and the way in which the old woman wailed about the current lack of leaders and elders in the *sagali*-hosting hamlet. The last example was the only event to indicate that the collective dead of the *susu* were being remembered by anyone. Moreover, Basima people do not make any general claim that the dead are present to watch over and enjoy the proceedings held in their honour, or that they consume the spiritual essence of the food prepared for a *sagali*. Prayers are not said to them, nor sacrifices made to them, and they are not (to my knowledge) invoked in the spells of the master-of-ceremonies or *tonisagali*. All these hypothetical transcendental or eschatological aspects are, one might say, conspicuous by their absence. Thus Basima *sagali*, other Massim people might judge, are scandalously secular and blatantly unconcerned with the spirits of the dead - even apparently neglectful of their memory. Finally, like Molima (and unlike Loboda), the deceased's kin group in Basima does not seem to try ritually or symbolically to 'reconstitute itself in the face of death' (Chowning 1989:123).

If Basima *sagali* is so concerned with the living rather than the dead its secular orientation seems to be associated with two other features: its big-man focus and its competitiveness. These are not necessarily dependent variables, however, as *sagali* in other societies may stress one or another but not all three.

As in Molima, Basima claim that 'a *sagali* should only be attempted by actual or aspiring headmen' (Chowning 1989:114). The organizational demands of *sagali* require an aspirant *tonisagali* in Basima to be already a man of substance. He would otherwise lack credibility and find it hard to command the necessary support from

his kin and affines. Usually such persons have connections as exchange partners that transcend not only their immediate matrilineage but also clan and district boundaries too. At previous *sagali* he attended he will have been given food-wealth by *tonisagali* as indebted prestations. Or he might have inherited them from his mother's brothers. In large part, though, it is to repay these that he decides to sponsor a *sagali*. In other words, he would not even contemplate staging one if he were not already to some extent a *to'esa'esa*, one who had won the notice of his big-man counterparts in other hamlets and other districts. To have got so far along the road to *sagali* implies not only big-man status, in Basima terms, but also an ambitious and highly competitive spirit.

But while the aspirant *tonisagali* can always count upon the support of his *susu* members, he needs his affines (and the affines of his entire *susu*) just as much. They too are obligated to support him. It is true of Basima as of Vanatinai that:

No host could make a successful feast without major contributions of labor, food, pigs, and ceremonial valuables from the matrilineages to which she or he is related to by marriage. The affines must support the host or face public shame (Lepowsky 1989:221).

In some Massim societies, antagonism and hostility between affines can be overtly expressed (as in Dobu and Molima) while in others it is disguised by covert scorn and ridicule (as in Basima). Concerning the competitive aspect of exchange between hosts and affines, it is worth quoting Lepowsky again concerning the 'public affinal presentations of valuables to a host' at a *zagaya* which are called *muli*. 'There is a competitive flavor to *muli* presentations that is not normally acknowledged publicly. Affinal matrilineages tried to outdo the *muli* they received when hosting a previous feast' (1989:221). Lepowsky goes on to point out that elsewhere in the Massim, too, 'affinal exchanges with a competitive edge are a major feature of mortuary feasts' in the Trobriands, Dobu, Normanby Island, Bartle Bay, Wagawaga and Panaeati (*ibid.*; see her text for full references). She might well have added Molima and Basima too.

While admitting that 'competitiveness underlies these exchanges' in Molima, Chowning says it is 'muted', though she makes a different connection than I am making here. For Molima the mutedness is because they value leaders who are 'playful, like a child' (*ibid.*: 118). For Basima, the competitiveness is muted, I suggest, because one's closest exchange partners are affines, and affines in Basima do not appear to allow the same kind of ritualized, joking aggression as in Molima.



On the other hand, neither does Basima *sagali* have the same coercive potential as the Kalauna festival with which it may also be compared (see Young 1971: Ch.11). The competitive aspect of the Goodenough festival is very prominent, and Young argues that it is simply another arena for 'fighting with food' and 'food-giving-to-shame'. While the structure of the festival is very similar (i.e. comprising categories of sponsors, exchange partners, and other contributors) and the objectives of individual leaders in seeking renown for themselves and their descent groups is also similar, the finale of a Goodenough festival appears to stress the redress of wrongs: the sponsors give food coercively to shame their traditional enemies and those who have wronged them. Basima *sagali* does not allow for this, perhaps because so many of the exchange partners are related as close affines whom one cannot afford to offend in this way.

How much competitiveness can affinal relations in Basima tolerate? Perhaps their tolerance is in part a function of the strength and solidarity of the *susu* (weaker in Basima, I maintain, than in Dobu or Duau). The predominantly matri-virilocal residence pattern of Basima would tend to confirm this, suggesting that affinal relations are less strained and less competitive than those of Dobu, for instance. We should recall that Fortune (albeit only in the first edition of his book) attributed Basima's virilocal residence with at least two benefits: 'far less disorganization from the black art, as well as far less disorganization from brittle marriage' (1932:280). Again: 'The social concomitant of this [i.e. virilocal residence] is a feeling of security in a Basima village that is never found in a Dobuan [village]' (*ibid.*).

At any rate, it is outside the field of strictly affinal relations that Basima *tonisagali* pin their best hopes of gaining greater renown. He is able to activate exchange pathways that are further afield than his everyday kin and affinal domain of influence. In Basima, they are conspicuous *dagula*, just as in Tubetube they are 'honoured guests' (Macintyre 1989:144). When they have redeemed their debts to affines (or alternatively kept them on hold) Basima *tonisagali* present *gita* to the big-men of other villages, the *dagula*. Such acts carry their fame abroad.

It is the incremental tactic of *gita* that introduces a very real competitive element into Basima *sagali* (in theory the increments should inflate as they do in the Hagen *moka* [Strathern 1971], but in practice ceilings are soon reached). The competitive spur of *gita* is possible because such inflationary gifts are given to individuals first and foremost, rather than to the groups they may represent (though of course they are

distributed among such groups for consumption). *Gita* would be less likely to be repaid if they were solely a group responsibility; after all, the 'spear' wound which they metaphorically inflict can best be felt by individuals.

It is consistent with Thune's overall account of the initiative-stifling Duau *susu* that *sagali* as he understands it is predominantly a *susu* enterprise in which the *susu*'s fame is the main issue. Thune gives individual sponsors or *tonisagali* scant attention, and then only to applaud their momentary success in breaking free of the tight embrace of the *susu*. Accordingly, despite the 'frenetic' distribution that occurs at the Duau *sagali* (Thune 1989:170), the element of direct competition seems to be muted along with the individuality of the leading sponsors. In this respect, as I have mentioned in Chapter Three, the Basima *susu* is far less suffocating and 'uncompromising' than Thune describes for Duau, and there is correspondingly more scope for individual initiative. Chowning makes a similar point when she argues that Molima's lack of corporate unilineal descent groups allows *sagali* to be viewed 'as the accomplishment of an individual rather than a group' (1989:118). But Basima men must still work within the milieu of a society in which it is the women who transmit group identity. To paraphrase Weiner on the Trobriands (1976:231-33), Basima men are destined to seek their measure of immortality through perpetuating individual (as opposed to *susu*) identity. *Sagali* offers them the greatest scope for this.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PRINCIPLES OF LAND TENURE

Any piece of customary land in Papua New Guinea exists not only in a physical landscape but also in a social geography. In that social geography, the land moves from one person or household to another or, at times, from one group to another. Conceptually, the land is seen to be portable... Or, to use another metaphor, the land is a theatre with a large cast of characters, who have different roles because of the social history of that particular piece of land. Some characters play a leading role, others have a very minor part; some are corporate, others are households, others individuals. Further, the cast is subject to change as some characters drop out and others join the play, the plot and purpose of which also change over time (Clarke *et al.* 1994: 11).

#### Introduction

The last chapter dealt broadly with the attempt of Basima men to achieve local fame - and even individual immortality - through the enterprise of *sagali*. In this chapter I return to more basic matters; indeed, matters concerning land might be supposed to be the most basic of all. Basima *sagali* could not be conducted, any more than Trobriands Kula expeditions could be undertaken, without a sound productive base in the land, *the* most valuable resource in Melanesian societies. Moreover, the sentimental attachment to land is so important that, as Rodman put it, 'Landlessness is a cultural impossibility' (1987:158).

In Chapters Two and Three I suggested that Basima social organization allowed a degree of flexibility insofar as group affiliation, marriage and residence were concerned. I attributed this flexibility to the fact that the majority of Basima *susu* groups are relatively recent immigrants. This observed flexibility is similarly reflected in the practices of Basima land tenure, such as the way land rights are claimed and deployed by individuals in practice despite the prevailing dogma of inalienable, collective 'ownership' of land. To resolve ostensible contradictions between what people say and what they do, I shall discuss land rights as they operate at two different levels: those of the *susu* as a corporate group, and those of individual members of that group.

It is necessary to define clearly the distinction between group rights and individual rights. In some lights it appears to me to be also a distinction between ideological, rhetorical or sentimental rights on the one hand, and pragmatic, practical rights on



the other. The social complexities of 'ownership' are sometimes such that paradoxes and contradictions in man-property relations are revealed whenever there is disputation over land and the rhetorical, ideological claims of groups are woven into the pragmatic claims of individuals. Hence, when I speak of Basima land tenure principles as being dynamic, I am referring to the dialectical discourse which evolves when different expressions are deployed according to whether the perspectives are those of groups or individuals. Ironically, it is this very dynamism which provides for continuity amid the apparent contradictions.

Group rights are commonly indicated by the plural possessive prefix *ma-*, for example, *ma-welai* ('our hamlet or home'). As there may be numerous rights of use and control over a particular piece of land, a group's 'right of attachment' can be conceived as the principal or basic rights (e.g. rights of access, see below). I use 'attachment' here as a weaker, less loaded term than 'ownership'. Second is an individual's 'use rights' pertaining to a more specific level. Such rights are commonly indicated by the use of the singular and exclusive possessive prefix *gu-*, for example, *gu-tanoa* ('my plot or tract of land'). Such expressions of claims to property are, however, broad and inherently ambiguous. In fact most can be understood only in their context of use. Ideally and in theory, a group's 'right of attachment' is an ahistorical claim that covers a large and usually ill-defined land area (*laotete*).<sup>1</sup> An individual's 'right of use', in contrast, is an historical claim that refers to a well-defined tract or plot of land of modest size (*tanoa*). The various forms of ownership of rights to crops and trees will be examined below in the appropriate context.

As I have already suggested, 'attachment' is perhaps a more satisfactory term to denote a *susu's* relationship to its land than 'ownership'. Whenever I speak of 'ownership', however, I am expressly referring to the ownership of rights rather than to the ownership of property. I regard 'ownership of land' as a misleading concept and even a misnomer, though along with 'landowner', these English terms are so thoroughly entrenched (in modern Papua New Guinea no less than elsewhere) that it is almost impossible not to use them. I do so cautiously, however, and whenever I am obliged to use 'land ownership' or 'landowner' let it be understood that I mean 'land-

<sup>1</sup> There are in fact several terms which can be used for a recognized area of land. Thus *laotete*, a reflex of *tete*, the basic term; *i-atala*; and *sena*, though the last is really a general term for 'side' (i.e. territory), denoting a group's possession of land (more usually described as its *i-atala* or *laotete*). One might recall from Chapter Five, however, that the proper term for 'side' in Basima language is *ipina*, *sena* being, I suspect, a borrowing from Dobi. For convenience, I shall henceforth use *laotete* for 'large gardening areas'.

right-ownership' and 'land-right-owner' respectively. It is probably even more accurate to speak of 'land-holdership', and thus 'land-right-holders', since the notion of custodianship is pervasive in Basima, as throughout Papua New Guinea.

Writing of the Tolai, Epstein comments: 'what distinguishes land from other forms of property is that it rarely vests exclusive rights of ownership' (1969:121). Indeed, the recurring conflicts one witnesses during land litigation are over the propriety of one or more rights and very rarely over ownership of property as an exclusive relationship. The notional ownership of all possible rights in a property is an infeasible ideal. In practice no one person may ever 'own' (in the strict sense of the term) every conceivable right concerning a piece of land. A *susu's* 'right of attachment' to a piece of land is simply one (albeit a fundamental and elementary one) of the many possible rights inherent in the land conceived as property. Individuals hold other rights which also constitute the land as a notional property: rights to allocate, rights to cultivate, rights to harvest only certain crops and fruits, and so forth. Grasping such distinctions is, I believe, the first necessary step towards understanding customary land tenure principles in Melanesia.

### **Basic principles and the terminology of tenure**

In Basima, hamlet land or site of origin (*natala* or *welai*), cultivable land (*tanoa*), forests, hunting and foraging grounds (*uda'a*), and large areas of *susu*-owned land (*laotete*), all form the territorial basis of group identity and ultimately its rights to an area. A number of such bounded, identifiable areas collectively constitute both a *susu* group's property and its space. The oft-expressed concept of *ma-welai* ('our [excl.] place'), indicates one's origin and group affiliation. A group's and ultimately an individual's attachment to land as a source of belonging is a crucial factor in people's lives.

As we saw in Chapter Four, general terms for cultivable land are *tanoa*, while *bayata* refers to a currently cultivated plot of land. *Tanoa* is a very important term in Basima land tenure as it encompasses notions of individual ownership (i.e. holdership), especially usufructory rights. Ideally, land is held (*siai*) by the *susu* group at the level of large gardening areas (*laotete*). But at the level of the smaller cultivable plots (*tanoa*), a number of which conceptually constitute a *laotete*, rights of use and control are held in practice by individual persons. This raises some complex issues of ownership as the contradictions alluded to above arise between group ownership (a

rhetorical or sentimental attachment which may be largely symbolic) and individual ownership (involving exploitation and practical control).<sup>2</sup>

Rivers and creeks (*bweye*), hills and mountains (*oya*), plateaux (*abatau*), swamp lands (*dumiya*), stretches of beach or sea shore (*badeia*) including owned beach (designated *anieda*), are all said to be owned, held, or looked after by a particular *susu* group: '*di-eni*' ('theirs'; i.e. 'they own it'). The possessive may be said of any of these things: *ma-oya*, *ma-dumiya*, *ma-welai*, *ma-anieda*, and so forth, thereby expressing the group's right of attachment, control, authority, and implied ownership of these properties and spaces. Likewise, hamlets are owned by a *susu* group by virtue of original settlement and precedence vis-a-vis other *susu* groups. Larger hamlets comprising several hamlet-owning *susu* groups all 'hold' (*siai*) rights to recognized sections of the hamlet. These divisions, as I explained in Chapter Three, are characteristically marked by stone circles (*ubuta*), stones arranged in lines (*dawa*), and not infrequently by a mere space (*bauya*) between dwelling huts.

Large trees (*ewa*), creeks and rocks (*daula*) are the principal markers of land boundaries (*laba*) and testimony to a group's claims to the land. Claims are often also backed by tales of *susu* origin (*tetela*), and overtly confirmed through use and the demonstrated authority to allocate use rights. Inherited economic trees (e.g. for canoe making), and palms and plants within a group's land are technically referred to as *uma*, which connotes rightful inheritance and matrilineal continuity. They are similarly claimed to be owned by the group and held temporarily by individual members of the *susu*, as custodians of a collective property.

One's relation to these various properties is usually expressed and validated through deliberate claims to a piece of land. Such statements range from the simple and clearly defined claim made by an individual to a betel palm or a yam garden plot, to the more complex, intricate and comprehensive claim by a group to large and vaguely defined land areas, *laotete*. Quite often, claims to a newly planted or previously cultivated garden, or even to the perennial crops planted on it, do not

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Crocombe calls the former, (i.e. group rights), especially in regard to larger and more ambiguously-bounded land areas, 'symbolic rights'. He asserts that such rights 'may serve important psychological and social purposes' as well as granting 'rights of identification' for the members (1974:6). Malinowski earlier noted that such rights commonly grant members with 'rights of citizenship' (1935a:344). And other anthropologists have referred to such rights as 'primary' or 'direct rights' (Williams 1987:178).



necessarily imply full and complete land ownership, if by this is meant exclusivity. In Basima language, such claims expressed as '*gu-/ma-*' ('my/our') do not in themselves always express entitlement to exclusive ownership of the land in question, but rather state the claimants' current rights to exploitation: for example, *gu-bayata* ('my garden'), *ko gu-magi* ('that is my betel'). In many instances, such claims may only indicate use rights or 'tenancy', specified and yet conditional kinds of ownership of rights which are only temporary and hence historical.

*Toni-* and *tolo-* are substantive prefixes indicating 'he/she/those who own or control'. For example, *tonitanao* means 'owner(s) of cultivable land'; *toniwelai* means 'owner(s) of the hamlet or place'; *tolodebana*, 'manager and custodian of a *susu*-owned *laotete*'; *na-bayata*, 'his or her cultivated garden plot'; *na-beloino* 'his or her authority or control'. *Tonitanao* and *tolodebana* are terms in everyday use and are frequently used when people state their claims over land and related property. I shall discuss them more fully below. The distinction between them is not always obvious, since a *tonitanao* (plot owner) can also be a *tolodebana* having overall authority over his *susu*'s *laotete*. But the converse is also true, since a *tolodebana* must also be a *tonitanao*.

To return briefly to the terminological problem, 'ownership' does not, in my view, convey the same meaningful information as some of the related Basima terms concerning land tenure. For instance, '*ya-siai*' ('I am holding it', loosely meaning 'in possession'), is generally used by people to express their temporary and conditional 'man-thing' relationship to a tract of land. 'Ownership' used in these contexts give a false impression of fixity and contractual agreement. *Ma-tete*, *ma-welai*, and *ma-tanao*, no doubt imply a generalized form of collective ownership or possession of a piece of land, place, and garden plot, respectively. However, these terms are still saturated with indigenous ideas concerning man-land relations, and carry potentially ambiguous contextual meanings. They can be easily misconstrued. For instance, *ma-tete*, literally means 'our land area', referring to the speaker's group's 'ownership of a right or rights' to a large area of land. The reference is to the *current relationship* between a person or a group and the land concerned - and not land as a discrete property that is exclusively 'owned' in the strict sense of the term. It should be understood as referring to one or more (a 'bundle' of) 'rights' that are conceptually inherent properties of the 'thing' called *laotete*.

*Tolodebana: the custodian of susu land*

The general rule regarding inheritance of rights to land follows the matrilineal descent principle: all land and other immovable property must remain within the *susu* by being transferred through or between members of the *susu* only. As head of the *susu*, the *tolodebana* is by custom the principal custodian of all *susu* land. As he grows older, he gradually relinquishes all his authority of the *susu* land to any of his sisters' children and/or classificatory mothers' children; it is their right and privilege. None should go to his own children. Where there is no capable male in the group to take care of *susu* land, the eldest or most capable female will assume leadership. Outsiders, including children of the male landholders should, in theory, have no active role in these matters. They have their own *susu* groups, after all, and hence their own land to inherit. In practice, people generally adhere to this strict principle of matrilineal inheritance, though they will bend it when necessary. Once again, the flexibility manifested in residence patterns and *susu*-formation plays an important part in Basima land tenure.

The very fact of its flexibility, of course, allows the Basima system of land tenure to persist through the generations, despite its apparent contradictions. Groups and individuals never owned the land exclusively, but were, and still are, only custodians of it. It is through their custodianship (as individuals on behalf of the group) and their social, political and economic actions (or inactions) that lead to the continuation (or discontinuation) of their 'hold' on the rights concerning the land itself. That is, individuals as leaders or spokespersons for the group control and deploy the various rights with respect to members and non-members. Whether the group's 'hold' (*siai*) of these rights is continually protected or lost largely depends on the effectiveness (thus 'action' or 'inaction') of the individual leader.

Before proceeding to further discussion of group rights I shall describe in general terms the role of the head of a *susu*, especially in regard to land matters.<sup>3</sup> Later sections of this chapter will further elucidate his role. This person is said to be in

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<sup>3</sup> The *tolodebana*'s role as head of the *susu* and custodian of its land closely resembles that of the Tolai *lualua* as head of a local descent group (*vunatarai*). According to Epstein, his most important responsibility is, '... to protect the estate against the claims of others. His success in this respect depends upon the extent of his genealogical expertise as well as his knowledge of the boundaries of each parcel of land, how each came to be acquired and marked out, and the various transactions to which it has been subject' (1969:127). Further, 'The *lualua* has the power to transfer rights in the land to persons who are not members of the *vunatarai*' (*ibid.*: 130).

charge (*na-beloino*, 'his authority') of the *susu* land, thus his title *tolodebana* (literally, 'owner-head'). One might describe his role as the principal custodian of the *susu* land and other properties pertaining to it. Despite his authority he is never regarded as being the single exclusive 'owner' of all the *susu* land. Rather, it is an office of caretaker (*i'ita'isi*, 'look after') that he temporarily occupies. His rights and privileges concerning *susu* land use are in theory no greater than those of any other *susu* member. However, he has a political advantage by virtue of his office as long as his authority within the group is accepted and unchallenged. Even so, it is his moral duty and obligation towards the group and its descendants to ensure that his powers are not abused. It would constitute an abuse, for instance, if he were to authorize the alienation of any part of the *susu's* land. It is possible, then, for a group's rights to an area of land to be placed at risk despite the ideology of group ownership since its management and deployment is in the hands of particular individuals, especially those influential persons who make decisions as to how the land is used and whom should be permitted to use it. My informants insisted, however, that important decisions concerning the transfer of land to other *susu* groups (or individual outsiders) require the endorsement of all senior members. Let us now take a closer look at some of these constituting land rights of the matrilineage.

### **Land and the *susu***

Under this general heading I consider group rights. As the most significant social and jural entity in Basima, the *susu* is appropriately asserted to be the corporate 'landowner' (*toniwelai* and *tonitanao*). As we saw in Chapter Two, the conceptually larger clan categories, *unuma* or *boda*, do not 'hold' land. It is a truism in Basima that statements such as *kodi toniwelai ai'aila* ('they are the authentic landowners') can refer only to the *susu* group. An individual member of the *susu* group is simply one of the landowners by virtue of his or her membership in that group. In theory, therefore, individuals have no exclusive ownership (again, in the strict sense of the word) over land as it belongs to the *susu*. Members 'use' it but can never 'own' it exclusively, since land survives *susu* members.

It makes good sense, then, that a group's special relationship to the land it calls its own is immutable, non-transferable, and inalienable, for it is principally from the group-land relationship that the *susu* derives its identity, belonging, power and prestige. But there is another side to the picture. For immediate subsistence use, to grow the food to sustain the *susu*, it is up to individual members to exploit the land.



Except in the most abstract sense, the group itself does not 'use' the land it is said to own. Nor need an individual's use of the land necessarily benefit the group as a whole (as might be the case in a co-operative society, for instance, whereby all harvests would be centrally stored and subsequently redistributed).

I have already noted that Basima *susu* groups do not necessarily reside permanently on their matrilineally inherited land. Indeed, the dynamic nature of Basima land tenure can be linked to the dynamic structure and organization of Basima *susu* groups which, as we have seen, are manifested in inter-marriages and group adoption followed by fusion: processes which recruit new *susu* members while disengaging and distancing others. Individuals 'displaced' in this way can and do lose their original land rights but they can just as easily gain land rights elsewhere. This is understandable in light of the fact that land is never owned exclusively as property, but rather that it is rights pertaining to the property that are owned. As such they can be transferred, lost and gained elsewhere through individual actions and manipulations. For instance, continuous residence with *susu* land-right holders who are one's affines, and regular use of their land, may eventually guarantee usufructory rights in garden land and, not uncommonly, permanent residence rights in the *toniwelai's* hamlet.

### Mythological charters

In as far as a *susu* group's claims to areas of forest, land and beaches are concerned, tales of origin (*tetela*) are the most vital asset in validating them. In Chapter Two, I showed how there were arguably only two aboriginal groups (*tutupawa*) and many immigrant groups (*wagawaga*). The *tutupawa* groups' claims are characterized by and associated with their 'holes of emergence' (*gola tanoa*, literally, 'hole ground'). They refer to their lands as 'our *tete*': large tracts of land which their ancestors had initially 'walked upon', and on which they had 'broken the twigs' (for bush tracks), 'laid down rocks', planted particular prominent trees including cordyline plants, and which they had generally cultivated.

Such are the legacies that constitute the *tutupawa* groups' claims of identity with the land. However, it was quickly apparent during my investigation that many tracts of land, especially gardening land (i.e. *tanoa*) in Basima were not claimed by them. This doubtless provided the latitude for immigrant groups to explore new grounds and lay their own claims to vacant lands through cultivation or, simply by trekking over them and naming specific areas in the same manner as the indigenous *tutupawa*

groups. These subsequent *wagawaga* claims are called *gabū* (literally 'burn', implying cultivation), a term which connotes an immigrant claim, thereby identifying a group's immigrant status in contrast to a *tutupawa* claim associated with *gola tanoa*. A 'burn' claim, then, is an historically relatively recent one, made to what is deemed to be land previously unclaimed. Thus, by virtue of its *tetela*, the narrative tales of emergence or migration in relation to the land (involving the accurate identification of major land boundaries such as hills, creeks, large trees, bush paths and prominent rocks), a Basima group asserts its ownership to the land.<sup>4</sup>

### *Economically useful trees*

In theory, all economically useful trees on the land belong to the landowning *susu*. I refer to those which people use for food, building materials for houses, for canoes, ceremonial drums, medicines and so forth. Among the most commonly used are betel (*magi*), coconut (*niu*) and sago palms (*kuyapi* or *labia*), breadfruit (*daewa* or *tube*), chestnut (*yapwa*), black palm (*esiala*, for house floor) and rosewood (*madawa*, for canoe dugouts) etc. Medicinal plants are usually secret personal property, their use being a matter of individual not public knowledge. Similarly, planting of perennial trees and palms ensures that they remain the property of the landowning *susu*. After all, at the death of the person who planted them the trees remain on the *susu* land and their ownership (as opposed to rights of use) thereby becomes non-transferable.<sup>5</sup> 'Outsiders' such as children (*labalaba*) of male members of the *susu* have no right to inherit them nor to plant trees on their fathers' land. In principle, any attempt to do so would be futile, since the ownership of the trees would ultimately revert to the landholding *susu*.

In addition, after a father's death such property would be ritually forbidden to the children; they can neither harvest nor consume them. But again one finds that there are legitimate arrangements to sidestep such rules, and *labalaba* can indeed plant

<sup>4</sup> Wassmann writes of an ancestral migration of the Nyaura Iatmul of East Sepik Province:

During this journey, always in the tracks of the crocodiles, possession was taken of tracts of land, parts of the bush, lakes, and watercourses, and villages and hamlets were founded. The land taken and the villages founded at that time determine their present claims to possession (1990:24).

<sup>5</sup> The same principle has been noted throughout the Pacific, especially where cash-crops are concerned. To cite just one example, Maude writes of Tonga: 'Land cannot be borrowed for planting coconuts ... and palms on an allotment are the property of the land holder, regardless of who planted them' (1971:120).

perennial trees or plants on their fathers' *susu*'s land. A conscientious son would be wise to plant trees on the periphery of his father's gardening land or away from the latter's garden yam hut sites, which are designated as non-cultivable spots of a *tanoa*. It would be most unwise, however, to plant economic trees within one's father's residential hamlet since one must scrupulously avoid it after his death. In other words, trees planted by sons on the father's gardening land can be legitimately owned by the sons and harvested by them even after their father's death. The sons' ownership, however, amounts only to a right to harvest the trees. It is also temporary and nontransferable and is revoked after their own deaths.

In theory, 'outsiders' have no right to plant perennial crops on land other than their own. While it appears quite clear that members of the landowning *susu* do have the prerogative and unquestionable right to plant additional perennial crops such as coconuts, betel and sago palms (of which it is said *dimanena etoupa*<sup>6</sup>), exceptions occur. Despite the truism that all trees planted on a *susu* group's land ultimately remain the property of that *susu*, non-members may still be allowed to plant perennial fruit trees on lands other than their own. In such situations the issue is how the harvesting of the fruits is to be arranged, or more precisely, who should and should not be given the right to harvest. In order for a non-landowner to enjoy the fruits of a tree he has planted, he must present the first fruits (of betel nuts, coconuts or whatever) to the *tolodebana* of the land. This seemingly simple gesture implies (and is confirmed by *tolodebana* or *tonitanoa*) that the fruits harvested thereafter may be retained by the planter for as long as he or she lives. After the planter's death, the palm reverts to the landholding *susu*. The planter's sons may inherit the use or right of access to such trees only by making further explicit payments to the landowning *susu* at the death of the planter. This is not regarded as part of *bwabwale* however (see Chapter Five).

The difference between a *susu* group's claims to economically useful trees and its claim to land is that, being less permanent, trees can be said to be owned (in a strict sense), whereas the *susu* is custodian only of the land it claims. Members' ownership of the trees is only by virtue of their legitimate association with the land upon which the trees stand. Again, as land is notionally comprised of multiple rights to its various culturally-recognized properties contained within it, by practice and common

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<sup>6</sup> Literally, 'his/her own hands planted'. This is said with reference to trees planted by oneself, whether on one's own *susu* land or elsewhere. Such trees are distinguished from those one has inherited from one's own matrikin, which are termed *uma*.



knowledge, not all of these rights are owned by the group itself. Indeed, some of them belong to individuals from outside the group, as we shall see below. Having said that, however, it can be stated that a *susu* generally does hold the great majority of rights that constitute its land.

### *Hunting and fishing rights*

Uncultivated virgin land (including gullies and ridges) and the remoter tracts lying beyond gardening land is called *uda'a*. It contains wild fruit and nut trees for foraging as well as providing hunting grounds for netting (*puwali*) wild pigs. Access to such exploitable zones is not restricted to those *susu* associated with them through their traditional *tetela* but is open to all citizens of Basima.

Similarly, the littoral is available for all to use except when schools of sardines (*mwayausa*, *lausemo* or *anuta*) appear immediately off the beach. Permission is then required from the *tolodebana* prior to their communal netting or stunning. Creeks that run beside a hamlet obviously belong to the hamlet owners; however, any of the hamlet's residents can fish in them or trap freshwater eels (*esipo*) and freshwater prawns (*yoba*). Likewise, excepting certain food-yielding palms and trees such as sago, breadfruit, coconut and betel, most other trees within the hamlet are free for anyone to harvest or use for building materials and gardening needs. Nevertheless, all plants and trees (whether cultivated or not) on the hamlet land belong to the landholding *susu*, and it is therefore a matter of obligatory courtesy on the part of users (if they belong to other *susu*) to surrender a portion of whatever they harvest to the *tolodebana*. In the case of protein resources, this would preferably be an animal or large fish. This signifies deference and acknowledgement of his *susu's* ownership of the land, beach or creek from which the game or catch was taken. This obligatory gift is called *yotula* (see below).

Although certain rules must be observed there is no sanctioned restriction on the use of such *susu* resources by non-members, so long as they are from Basima.

In 1989, an *ad hoc* fishing 'club' comprising five young men presented a large turtle (*wayowayo*) to Masawana, since he had the authority (*na-beloino*) over a particular fishing area adjacent to his beach (*anieda*) in which the young men were fishing. This was a *yotula* presentation: a 'tribute' to the leader in recognition of his *susu's* attachment to the area.

Even non-Basima visitors can fish almost anywhere following a simple verbal request acknowledging the *tolodebana's* authority.

In April 1989, a group of Koma villagers from Boyowa (Trobriands) fished along the shores of Watotaeta after seeking the *tolodebana's* permission. Although the Koma villagers did well to ask, it seemed almost redundant since the leader of their party was once a Kula partner of a deceased kinsmen of the current *tolodebana*. The Koma leader had previously made a feast for a deceased sister of his Basima Kula partner. In return, as I was told, the Kula partner granted him rights to harvest fruits and nuts (especially betel) from his land whenever he needed. (To me this seemed a more generous granting of privileges than are normally awarded to outsiders.)

### *Residence and land rights*

Rights of residence on hamlet land is no guarantee of unrestricted access to the garden land of the hamlet-owning *susu*. Thus, a *susu* in the process of being adopted and assimilated by a more established *susu* (see Chapter Two) will be granted ownership of a certain section of the hamlet by the 'parent' *susu*. But that does not mean its members are free to garden, or establish dwelling places, wherever they like on the owning *susu's* land. In time, additional rights will usually be granted by the 'parent' *susu* during the formal *siwalolo* feast. Until then, there will be some uncertainty as to the extent of the incoming *susu's* rights of access to their host's land and permission must always be sought from the *tolodebana*. Where adoption by *siwalolo* does not in fact occur, there is no doubt that the land remains firmly in the possession of the original holders.

To illustrate these principles I present a case of land-right contention concerning Dominic versus Tomwailesi. (Dominic, it will be recalled, provided in Chapter Two a case of *susu* leadership contention in the hamlet of Pwaepwae.)

Sometime in 1987 conflict arose between Dominic's *susu* of Etonouna clan and Tomwailesi's *susu* of Manawana clan. According to Dominic, both *susu* groups are very close to each other due to their previous co-residence, and their members even refer to one another as 'brothers' and 'sisters'. Many generations ago, the site under contention, called Suwabuya, was originally occupied and exclusively held by Dominic's *susu*. Tomwailesi's *susu*, which arrived in Basima some time later, was then invited to join Dominic's group and was awarded a section of the hamlet. Subsequently, the more recently-arrived group constructed an *ubuta* (stone sitting circle) which legitimated its claim to the section of the hamlet on which it was built. With ensconced co-residence, Dominic's group provided land for cultivation, but this was only for use by Tomwailesi's *susu*. That is, apart from their *ubuta* (a residential claim), ownership rights to land and trees within the vicinity of the hamlet remained in the possession of the parent *susu*. Tomwailesi's *susu* could certainly use them, but only with the express permission of Dominic's group.

Needless to say, recent immigrant groups had the choice of remaining with their hosts or leaving them to settle elsewhere. Tomwailesi's group eventually left its host *susu* in Suwabuya after they had learned of the existence of others of their

clan living further up the hills in the hamlet of Tapwana. As no other land had been permanently awarded to Tomwailesi's group by Dominic's *susu*, there was little concern over what they left behind in Suwabuya. Their *ubuta* by custom remains their permanent entitlement to residence in that section of the hamlet. Likewise, Dominic's group, which had initially awarded Tomwailesi's *susu* the right to reside and build their *ubuta* in Suwabuya, cannot revoke it, though it would of course lapse if Tomwailesi's group were to become extinct.

After Tomwailesi's group had left, Dominic's *susu* also abandoned Suwabuya. Some members headed inland to the hamlet of Pwaepwae, while others descended to the coastal hamlet of Dagimwaneia. Since then, Suwabuya had remained uninhabited and in 1989 it was overgrown with grass, shrubs and trees.

The recent problem began this way. Believing it was within their rights, Tomwailesi and his mother cleared a small area of land, built a hut and planted bananas within the close vicinity of their *susu*'s original residential site as marked by their *ubuta*. A few days later, Dominic's 'sister' (mother's sister's daughter) noticed Tomwailesi's activity and reported to Dominic. He in turn consulted other senior *susu* members, and on the following day he and his 'brother' Kanisis went to the site to determine the extent of the alleged transgression. They saw that Tomwailesi and his mother had exceeded their rights by planting on land belonging to Dominic's *susu*. While Tomwailesi had a dormant right to use land in the immediate vicinity of his hamlet section (as defined by the ancient *ubuta* built by his ancestors), he needed to seek permission from Dominic's group before doing anything. This he had failed to do. During the following weeks, Dominic and Kanisis planted several sprouting coconuts, in such a way that not only was further planting by Tomwailesi and his mother impeded, but that the demarcating line (*laba*) represented by the coconuts was shifted in the brothers' favour. Thus, Tomwailesi's newly-built hut now appeared to be on Dominic's side of the boundary, which suggested that although Tomwailesi and his mother had planted bananas within their rightful *ubuta* area, their hut and the plot of land they had cleared were on Dominic's *susu* land. Having thus demonstrated their overriding authority and the protection of their rights, the two brothers went home.

Soon afterwards, Tomwailesi's brother uprooted one of the young coconuts and smashed it against the platform of the newly-built hut. In a matter of days there was an unpleasant stench of decomposing coconut flesh. This was a clear indication of Tomwailesi's group's disgust and agitation, and a signal that they were disputing the other group's claims. As soon as Dominic and his *susu* discovered the uprooted coconut they summoned the village councillor and proceeded to press their claims against Tomwailesi's group. It was quickly revealed that Beledi, Tomwailesi's elder brother, was the perpetrator. Each group was represented by its respective elders, and occasionally one or two of those involved in the dispute were asked to confirm or deny their actions. At the conclusion of the litigation the councillor awarded the disputed land to Dominic's group.

Nevertheless, Tomwailesi and his group retained some of the cleared area as it fell within their *ubuta* rights; Dominic's group conceded these claims. But owing to the embarrassment they suffered over their transgression and their perceived loss in the litigation, Tomwailesi's group abandoned any further attempt to complete their plans. Of course, Dominic and his brother had no further need to continue planting coconuts; their action in doing so was merely



to demonstrate their claims and their authority over the transgressed land by laying out a demarcation line. Once this was achieved and their claim had been acknowledged and protected, there was no need to emphasize the point.

Talking to Dominic some months later, I was told that the trouble might have been avoided if Tomwailesi or his mother had had the courtesy to consult Dominic's group concerning their plan to return to their old settlement. In fact, Dominic asserted that Tomwailesi could indeed, if he wished, go back and live there and cultivate the land. 'Among other things, he is our grandfather's namesake (*na-esana*),' he said. The mere fact of sharing a bit of Dominic's *susu* identity in this way obliged the latter to respect Tomwailesi's project. But as Dominic summed up the matter: 'Fine, there is no question that they have their *ubuta* in Suwabuya, but the land where it is sitting is ours.'

Dominic's remark reveals the limits of acquired *ubuta* rights, especially for new settlers. They may consist of no more than the right to reside, to own the stones of the *ubuta* and to gain, with permission, the privilege of using their host *susu*'s land. In this case, Tomwailesi's group overstepped their rights, causing themselves inconvenience and humiliation. In the final analysis, however, both groups simply managed to restate the extent of their original rights.

What I have discussed so far is Basima *susu* rights with respect to land at a corporate group level. In passing and where necessary I have indicated individual rights for purposes of comparison. Rights at the group level are claimed to be 'inalienable', indicating a permanent man-land attachment to a defined land area validated by *tetela* tales of origin and precedence. I now want to turn to the individual Basima person's use rights and discuss their vicissitudes within the tenurial system.

### **Pragmatics of land tenure principles**

The individual level of use rights is the level at which, according to local conceptions, 'land is seen as moving relative to people - that is, a movement against the backdrop of society rather than geography' (Hutchins 1980:23).<sup>7</sup> In other words, land as a physical entity endures, but rights to use, and the authority to deploy the rights to use, move from individual to individual, and occasionally from *susu* to *susu*. One might view this as the 'applied' or use level, from which one can observe the dynamics of land tenure principles in action. Such principles act as guidelines which channel the movement of land (i.e. man-land relations) 'against the backdrop of society', in Hutchins' phrase. This pragmatic, operational level entails the use of

<sup>7</sup> My definition of 'use right' follows Hutchins':

When a person holds a garden in his hand, whether or not he is an 'owner' (member of the 'owning' *dala*), he has the right to garden the plot himself or to delegate the gardening of that plot to someone else through a variety of arrangements. This relation will be referred to as 'use right' (1980:23).

group property by group members with their various individual needs and priorities. One must also take account of persons who are 'outsiders' or 'different' (*inaga* or *dumadumana*) to the landholding group. Use rights is for them the right to cultivate and harvest after permission from the *tolodebana* (as land manager of a *susu*) has been granted. As I have noted, this right does not entail exclusive ownership and in a majority of cases is understood to be only temporary.

I have alluded to a tacit notion (which is nevertheless understood by everyone) whereby every citizen of Basima and Lauoya has the right to cultivate, hunt, fish and otherwise have general access to any territory within these two districts, regardless of whichever *susu* actually holds the land. One might refer to this as a 'citizenship privilege'. Such prerogatives are increased or enhanced, as it were, by closer association with the land through geographical propinquity occasioned by a variety of social means: membership of the landholding *susu*, marriage into that *susu*, continued co-residence with the landholding *susu*, or simply by maintaining social and economic relations with the landholding group through exchange partnerships. Yet these very means also allow the possibility for original landholders to be divested of their rights if they are absent for prolonged periods and cease to occupy their land.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, there seems to be a general moral obligation between Basima landholders, such that there is reciprocal general access to allow one another to meet their needs.

Despite this, of course, any *susu* group's fundamental ownership of the land must be respected and acknowledged by others. The first step of acknowledgement is to seek permission (*sida*), a crucial matter of etiquette and good citizenship. Once permission had been granted to cultivate a garden, say, it is also wise to show good will by giving small gifts to the *tolodebana* during the gardening season. These are not simply economic payments ('rent') for use of another's land, but a means of acknowledging ownership of the principal rights and custodianship of the land; they are also a means of securing further use rights. Obviously, too, gifts enrich the relationship between the landholder (*tolodebana* or *tonitanao*) and the current user. Sometimes, depending on the frequency and quantity of such preliminary gifts, they may offset the need for the final gesture of appreciation: that is, a compensatory gift

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<sup>8</sup> See Reay 1959:81; Crocombe 1974:12; and Thune 1980:141-142, for similar instances elsewhere in Melanesia.

(*yotula* or *matana*) which is usually made after the yams have been harvested. A standard *yotula* gift may be between one and five baskets (*kodo*) of yams.

*The case of the negligent headmaster*

I had an opportunity during fieldwork to observe the concept of *yotula* in action. The case presented below demonstrates the intricacies and contingencies of *yotula* gifts. It is especially interesting in that it involved an outsider, whose ignorance or neglect of *yotula* obligations highlighted them more starkly.

Masawana is the principal landholder and *tolodebana* of the land on which Basima Primary School is built. For three consecutive yam seasons the headmaster (a non-Basima man) had been gardening on the land, but Masawana had not received any *yotula* payments from him at harvest time. To make matters worse, the headmaster had neglected to ask Masawana's permission (*sida*) following his first and only request four seasons previously. Permission to garden should have been renewed each year; there is no such thing as a once-and-for-all granting of permission for consecutive yam gardening seasons.

In April 1989, Masawana complained bitterly to me about this treatment, and he urged me to write a letter to the headmaster stating the traditional obligations of *yotula* in respect of land use rights. In the note I sent to him, I requested that the headmaster acknowledge the authority of Masawana as a *tolodebana* by making some modest payment in the customary form of *yotulā*. Initially, the headmaster consented to this request, but he subsequently changed his mind and opted instead to take the matter to the village court.

Masawana and I were consequently called upon by the Basima councillor to explain publicly the reasons for our note. We obliged and explained the *yotula* obligations as we understood them. Everyone appeared to approve of our efforts, though they all remained silent, knowing that it was a sensitive matter involving food (*ea*). What bewildered me, however, was a calculated remark from the councillor (apparently a personal friend of the headmaster), to the effect that *yotula* is not compulsory. Indeed, if a non-*susu* member fails to make *yotula* payments to the *tolodebana* concerned, the latter is normally disinclined to demand *yotula*. (It is embarrassing for anyone to do so as it smacks of 'begging for food', which is incompatible with personal and group pride.) I was also to learn later that sometimes *yotula* may be overlooked and will not be expected by the landholder. But this is tolerated only when the landholder and the land-user are on cordial and equal terms, or if preliminary gifts were large enough to offset the need for *yotula*. In this case, however, there seemed no reason whatever to neglect the *yotula*, especially since the headmaster had failed to seek permission to garden on Masawana's land for three consecutive seasons.

There was another, more cogent reason for the silence of people in the meeting and for their unwillingness to openly support our arguments. It was common knowledge that the headmaster was a *balau* (sorcerer); his wife, moreover, was rumoured to be a notorious witch in her home village. Thus, people's fear of the consequences of openly siding with Masawana and myself was quite understandable. Nonetheless, we were both confident of being in the right.



Many people said so on the way home and again once we were in our hamlet. Even if the headmaster did not comply, at least the *tolodebana* had legitimately asserted his authority as the principal custodian of his *susu's* land.

The councillor then attempted to cajole Masawana into withdrawing his request for *yotula*. The latter stood his ground, however, and renewed his demand for acknowledgement from the headmaster. The resentful headmaster reacted angrily. 'Right, Masawana,' he said. 'I will pay you your *yotula*. I will cease gardening on your land, and when my present yams mature, you can harvest them for yourself.' Of course, these words were meant to shame the landowner for demanding *yotula*.

Two weeks later the headmaster formally presented Masawana with an amount of food considerably larger than expected and well beyond the usual amount for *yotula*. He gave a pig worth K50, a carton of tinned fish, five baskets (*kwalisi* not *kodo*) of yams, four bunches of bananas, K12 worth of rice, a block of black twist tobacco and K65 in cash. The amount was extravagant and certainly intended to humiliate Masawana (see Young 1971 on 'food-giving-to-shame'), though considering that three years had elapsed without any *yotula* payments at all the amount was not so unreasonable. The goods were shared among Masawana's *susu* members, together with their children and affines, in front of Masawana's house. As an honorary member of the *susu*, I was also given a share of the food (though in view of my own involvement in the dispute I received it with some personal embarrassment).

A few days after the unprecedentedly large *yotula* distribution, Masawana killed and cooked two of his hens and presented them to the headmaster in an act of reconciliation. This was also to forestall any gossip (*loae*) by the headmaster's friends regarding Masawana's demand for *yotula*. It was not meant to match the headmaster's extravagant *yotula*.

### *Procedures of sida and yotula*

As we saw in the case involving Dominic and Tomwailesi, seeking permission (*sida*) is a crucially important factor in Basima. Disputes over rights of use and rights to harvest generally arise only if *sida* is neglected. I present below another case in which the rule concerning *sida* was ignored or overlooked.

After the establishment of Basima Community School in the early 1960s a teacher cleared an area along the boundary of the school for his yam garden. Apparently he had been improperly granted the right to cultivate by someone who falsely claimed that the land belonged to him. When the true landowner found out he confronted the false claimant. A heated argument broke out which ended in a brawl. Confronted by these complications, the school teacher desisted from further gardening activities. The real landowner pursued the matter through the village court and retained his ownership claim. Conflicting claims of *tanoa* ownership are not uncommon. The teacher had correctly adhered to normal procedures and protocol. Clearly, the issue concerned who actually possessed the right to grant use rights. Supplication had correctly been made and permission had been granted, though unfortunately by one without legitimate authority over the land concerned. Still, although the teacher was the

blameless dupe he should perhaps have taken more trouble to confirm the rightful ownership of the *tanoa* plots surrounding the school.

Securing a right of use from a *tolodebana* or *tonitanoa* may be done in several ways and for different reasons. The underlying principle is that use rights are only valid for a single yam-growing season (*didiaba*). After the payment of *yotula* to the *tolodebana*, representing his *susu*, the right to use lapses. Again, it needs to be stressed that every citizen of Basima has a nominal right of access to any land in the district for subsistence purposes regardless of to whom it belongs. In theory, one need only to seek permission (*sida*) from the landholding *susu*. Thus, in general terms, use rights are privileges granted to petitioners by landholders to be enjoyed for a limited period. Transfer of ownership is not an issue in such circumstances, and one does not need a *tetela* myth to validate current or previous use rights. An accurate recollection of food tributes, *yotula*, given to *tonitanoa* by the user should suffice.

The general obligation to allow any Basima person use rights in land is related to the fact that not every person can possibly own a *tanoa* plot in every *laotete* (major gardening area) which is being exploited during any one yam gardening season. As each consecutive season rotates from *laotete* to *laotete* it is only to be expected that while a person may have exclusive rights of ownership to certain *tanoa* in a *laotete* he will have none at all in others. Where there is none, permission from the *tolodebana* for a *tanoa* within that *laotete* is then required. Having been asked, it is the general social obligation of the landholders to comply and to provide for such individuals. Despite this, as one might well imagine, under some circumstances permission is refused. It remains the prerogative of *tolodebana* or *tonitanoa* to grant or withhold permission, so that the general privilege of access is by no means a guarantee that one may garden on the land of one's choice. Much will depend on the applicant's past record of meeting customary obligations. Decisions may also be made according to the leader's whim or personal antipathy towards the applicant.

The authority of a *tolodebana* is usually demonstrated at the beginning of a new gardening season when individual gardeners are seeking plots of land for cultivation. As head of the landholding *susu*, he has overall authority over the entire *laotete*; individual right-owners from within his *susu* and those from other *susu* have only conditional authority over their individual *tanoa* plots. This is acknowledged in the timing of the right to cultivate one's own *tanoa*. *Tonitanoa* must first of all consult the relevant *tolodebana* to ensure that he is intending to garden on that particular

*laotete* for the season. If he declares that he is not, the individual *tanoa* owner will simply have to forfeit his right to cultivate his *tanoa* and garden elsewhere. In other words, the *tolodebana's* right to open or close a *laotete* to cultivation overrides a *tonitanoa's* right to use his own plot on that *laotete*. In this instance, too, the claims of *susu* ownership overrides the individual's rights.<sup>9</sup>

It is a further indication of the authority of the *tolodebana* that no other member of the *susu* may grant land use rights to outsiders. Only the leader's permission is held to be legitimate. Were other members of the *susu* to award such rights to outsiders, the recognized *tolodebana* has the authority to abrogate them. *Susu* members can grant them only after prior consultation with their *tolodebana*.

By the fact of their birthright *susu* members do not, of course, pay *yotula* to their *tolodebana*, though as we have seen they are still required to seek permission from him before cultivating crops and planting perennial trees. Failure to do so may result in the *tolodebana* exercising his right to uproot one's crops or fell one's trees. Were a *susu* member tardy in informing his *tolodebana* of his intentions, the latter may have the courtesy merely to reprimand, and such matters are usually settled quietly and without recrimination.

#### *Encapsulated tanoa*

For tangled historical reasons which cannot now be unravelled, the distribution of *laotete* ownership between Basima *susu* is not tidy. Indeed, given the haphazard nature of immigration into the area, the growth and decline of landholding groups and the slow but inexorable redistribution of land which is occurring all the time, it would be very surprising if there was a neat geographical congruence between *laotete* areas and their owning *susu*. Nor is it the case that every *tanoa* plot within a

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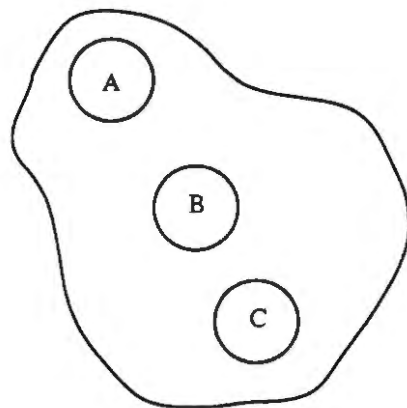
<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to compare a Trobriand 'land managers' powers with those of his Basima counterpart. It is my impression that the latter's are far greater. A case occurred in 1989 at my home village of Okeboma (Trobriands) which highlighted this issue. A principal custodian (*tolikwabila*) of a large area of land (*kwabila*) unilaterally denied anyone access to gardening plots unless they first made *yotula*-type payments (*kekeda* in Kiriwina). This caused a furor, for as in Basima, *kekeda* are usually made only after the harvest. Land custodians from other *dala* denounced the demand as 'shamelessly selfish' (*M-mwasile!*). Not only had the custodian demanded *kekeda* payments to be made in advance of cultivation, but he attempted to set fixed rates which included valuables such as clay pots and cash. It was conceded that while the *tolikwabila* had the authority to allocate rights to use, he had exceeded them to the point where 'citizenship privileges' to land use rights were being ignored. Facing mounting pressure from everyone the *tolikwabila* relented and withdrew his unreasonable demands.



*laotete* belongs to the *tete*-owning *susu*. This complication of what I call 'encapsulation' has implications for permission-seeking from *tolodebana* and for the payment of *yotula*.

Figure 8.1 is a schematic representation of three *tanoa* within a *laotete*. Let us suppose that the *laotete* is owned by *Susu X*, led by *Tolodebana X*. Members of this *susu* have ownership claims to *tanoa* A and C, but not to the encapsulated *tanoa* B, which belongs to one or more members of *Susu Y*.

Figure 8.1  
A representation of a *laotete* (or *i-atala*) with three constituent *tanoa* plots



Any number of historical scenarios might account for this situation, but the commonest appears to be through the mechanism called *gabū*, literally 'burn', which involves pre-emptive clearing, burning and planting. This is said to be the most secure method of acquiring a plot within the *laotete* of another *susu*. The circumstance may come about as follows. A *susu*, particularly in the early stages of its growth, might find it unnecessary or impossible to cultivate all the land within the *laotete* to which it has made a nominal claim through precedence. Some potential *tanoa* within its *laotete* are therefore left unclaimed under the general 'umbrella' claim of *laotete* ownership. A more recently-arrived *susu* (or a single individual outsider) may then opportunistically yet quite legitimately claim one or two *tanoa* plots within such a *laotete* through *gabū*, that is, by clearing and burning the forest preparatory to planting a yam crop. This was presumably the simple procedure whereby the majority of immigrant *susu* came to lay claims to *tanoa* within the

established *laotete* claims of the autochthonous groups. Gradually, the autochthonous or established *susu* were obliged to recognize the de facto claims of others to *tanoa* within their own *laotete*.

Individual landholders who claim ownership of encapsulated plots are also referred to as *tonitanao*, even though they do not own the surrounding land. A *tonitanao* of one or more such plots must follow the same protocol with respect to the *tolodebana* of the *susu* group which owns the *laotete*; that is, he must seek his permission to plant on his own plot in any one gardening season. When it is a matter of granting use rights for a season to someone else, the owner of the encapsulated plots must be rewarded by *yotula* gifts. However, the *tanoa* owner does not need to share his *yotula* with the *tolodebana* of the *susu* on whose *laotete* the plot is located, for his claim of ownership is quite independent and presumably legitimated by some historical means.

A *tolodebana*'s authority in certain instances also supersedes that of the *tonitanao* of encapsulated plots.

In the 1989-90 gardening season, a group of *tanoa* owners attempted to cultivate their individual plots in the *laotete* called Yaulesa. It happened that they neglected their obligation to consult the appropriate *tolodebana*. They had already begun clearing when the *tolodebana* became aware of their disrespectful behaviour. He responded (with uncharacteristic severity) by felling several trees on the cleared gardens, impeding further progress. This signalled his anger and firm intention to prevent any further gardening. The gardeners moved to other plots elsewhere, abandoning the ones they had already cut. Although the *tolodebana* was not gardening in the Yaulesa *laotete* himself during that season his approval was still deemed to be essential.

#### *Additional rules concerning use rights*

Use rights can also be acquired through 'friendships'. Providing the respective *tolodebana* give their consent, friends (*wesegu*, 'my friend') may find it convenient to exchange *tanoa* with one another for a couple of seasons, not necessarily consecutive ones. That is, the first may offer his friend a cultivation right to his *susu* land one year, and the following year or even later the other will return the favour. Such exchanges cancel the obligation to make *yotula* payments.

Although it is much easier to gain use rights by the fact of being an affine, a hamlet co-resident, or through a patrilineal relationship to the landholders, permission from the *tolodebana* is required in all cases. Since anyone without land of his own within the *susu*'s holdings is generally considered to be an outsider, after permission has

been granted *yotula* must follow. However, *yotula* can be waived by *tolodebana* if one had already substantially assisted the landholders with their marriage, mortuary or other feasts. Frequent social and economic support to landholders certainly eases the granting of use rights in land other than that of one's own *susu*. Occasionally, continued assistance may eventually win the concession of a plot of land, which then becomes a permanent asset of one's own *susu*. That is, the *tanoa* becomes effectively alienated from the original owners.

There is yet another way of granting use rights to outsiders. As mentioned in Chapter Five, one's cross-cousins are termed *dibe-*. Despite the prohibition against acquiring use rights within one's dead father's *susu* land, one might be invited by one's *dibe* to garden in their own *tanoa* (that is, on different plots to one's dead father's). To accomplish this, the sister's sons return the dead mother's brother's yam seeds to his sons. In normal circumstances sons are not allowed to inherit their father's yam seeds, but at the express invitation of the dead man's sister's children, the sons are allowed to inherit them indirectly and use them. Through such ploys sons of the deceased may be allowed to gain temporary rights to their father's *susu* land and also as we have seen in Chapter Five, to make a *bwabwale* feast for him by using his *susu*'s resources.

### **Outsiders and the inheritance of *susu* land**

As use rights are in theory accessible to all citizens of Basima, garden land owned by a *susu* frequently 'moves' temporarily from one person to another and (sometimes permanently) from one *susu* to another. While the great majority of *susu* groups transmit land rights between their members in normative, predictable fashion, there are exceptions. I shall examine two partly hypothetical instances below, in which the principles of inheritance appear to be 'bent' such that land is allowed to 'move' outside the owning *susu*. This situation differs from alienation, however, as I shall show in the following section.

The first case involves my Watotaeta host Masawana and his *susu*, whose genealogy is depicted in Figure 2.2 of Chapter Two.

Masawana's *susu* claims a large area of land within the Lauoya district. To its members' knowledge, they had only ever lost or alienated one portion of this land to another *susu*. In 1989, however, another portion was in danger of being lost to another *susu* as a result of their failure to reciprocate the latter's mortuary prestations. Their meagre numbers is a matter of considerable concern to them, not only for their continuity as a group but also for the adequate protection of



their *susu* land rights. As leader of this depleted *susu*, Masawana expressed a melancholy fear that one day his group would become extinct. It is some small consolation that there is a sister-*susu* which, by sharing their place of origin, also shares some of the land as well as constantly providing mutual assistance in feasting. While somewhat ambiguous, this sister-*susu* relationship is real. For while both groups recognize their distinctiveness as separate *susu*, at the same time they allow mutual access to one another's land and respect one another's rights and privileges with respect to cultivating it. These rights are warranted by their common origin and simultaneous arrival on Basima shores as recounted in their composite *tetela* (see Chapter Two).

Masawana's *susu* was led by Pulikapu until the early 1980s. By 1989 he was in poor health due to tuberculosis (which eventually caused his death in 1991). He had seven children (four girls and three boys), and two sons had reached the age of maturity. His sister's son, Masawana, had fully taken over from him and assumed leadership of the *susu* by the mid-1980s. In 1989 he was in his mid-to-late thirties with three children (two girls and a boy), all of whom were immature. The heir apparent is Seba, aged about 15 in 1989, who is the only son of Masawana's dead sister. He had still to acquire full knowledge of *susu* history and land boundaries. There are only three other members of the *susu*: Masawana's living sister and her two young children (a boy and a girl).

In view of the large area of land held by the *susu*, its two elders frequently expressed concern over the lack of a more mature male heir. While it seems clear that Seba will eventually succeed Masawana as the next *tolodebana*, he has much to learn. But Seba is impatient to leave Basima and work as crew on a boat; he also manifests an obvious dislike of garden work and seems to lack any enthusiasm to learn *susu* lore, particularly that concerning land matters. In short, his elders do not have much faith in Seba as heir to the task of *tolodebana*, one expected to be a reliable custodian of the *susu*'s land.

By local standards, the age gap between Masawana and Seba is large enough to allow outside groups to encroach on their land should Masawana die and there be no custodian to protect it. The fear that outsiders would compete for their land is not unrealistic; Basima history shows that individuals and groups can acquire land by concocting genealogies and encroaching on land managed by youthful or inexperienced leaders.

Consequently, before he died, Pulikapu took steps to hand over some plots of land directly under his control to his own children (*labalaba*), his sons in particular. His reasons were that his children were older than Seba and knew the boundaries and the histories of transactions concerning the land. It was wise, he believed, to hand over the custodianship to his own children, albeit temporarily, until such time as the heir apparent and his immature 'brothers' and 'sisters' were ready to take over. In the meantime, while his children were looking after this land, they had the right to cultivate and harvest crops and trees. The death-related prohibitions remained, however, preventing the children from harvesting certain of their father's crops after he died.

This was not a case of the transfer of 'ownership' from one *susu* to another. It was a well-intentioned and temporary transfer of rights, in the name of 'custody' or 'looking after' (*i'tai'isi*). It did not restrict nor otherwise compromise the original owners' right of access to and ownership of the land. Nor did the original owners need to repay Pulikapu's children for their custodianship. Their reward lies in the fact that they will be allowed to use this land during their

lifetimes. Clearly, however, they will inherit the land by default if bad fortune befalls their cousins and Masawana's *susu* does indeed die out.

It is inherent in such arrangements that depending on the political manoeuvring of individuals and the long-term relations between caretakers and legitimate heirs, the land can be lost or retained. Land in Melanesia, as Rodman cogently notes, may be gained or lost through the 'inaction or actions of others' (1987:158).

We have already seen how children can sometimes retain rights to their fathers' *susu* land by making *bwabwale* prestations. This requires the invitation and co-operation of their cross-cousins, the rightful heirs. Although the following case also involves a father-son inheritance link, it is somewhat different in that the father in question was married to an outsider from Maiwara, near Alotau, who had no matrilineal connection with anyone in Basima, thereby depriving her children of local matrikin.

By 1988, the couple had a two-year-old son. Curious about the future of a child without maternal kin in Basima, I asked the father about the chances of his son remaining in Basima and inheriting some of his own land. Marriage with outsiders is still quite uncommon so there are few precedents on which to base customary procedure. Any conceivable rule must flatly contradict the matrilineal principle of land inheritance.

My informant offered the following scenario concerning the possibility of his son being accepted by his *susu* and ultimately being allowed to inherit his land. If the son wishes to remain in Basima, he will have to work closely with his father's relatives. The father would also seek permission from his *susu* for his son to acquire the right to use his land for as long as he lives. For this to be granted, his relations with his father's group should ideally remain on equal terms, as if he were a matrilineal member of the group. They would have reason to be wary for the son might invite some of his maternal relatives from elsewhere to come and live with him. This is a very remote possibility, however, if only in view of the fact that they reside near Alotau.

We may note here that this arrangement favouring a son who would otherwise remain landless (in Basima at any rate) would never be permitted in the case of a daughter. Daughters may never be allowed to inherit land of their father after his death. In addition to the axiom that they are outsiders insofar as the rule of inheritance goes, there is the likelihood that any land thus granted to a daughter would see it pass eventually to another *susu* (her mother's), thereby alienating it from her father's group completely. Thanks to protracted occupation and use, her sons could gain control of the their mother's father's land. Such hypothetical situations are contemplated and articulated by Basima people, so they are fully alert to the dangers

of allowing women to inherit land belonging to their fathers. Women have access to use rights in such land only while their fathers are alive.

All this aside, my informant was fairly confident that his son would be able to inherit some tracts of his land (though certainly not all) providing he gave full social and economic support to his father's *susu*. This would be crucial. (It would also be tantamount to the boy's adoption by the father's *susu*). As we have seen in other contexts, supportive relationships between affines or other non-matrilineal kin can sometimes influence and redirect the normative rules of inheritance. Principles are there, but they are not inflexible. Such elasticity seems essential to the survival of the Basima system of land tenure.

### **The alienation of *susu* land**

A general assumption concerning land tenure in small-scale societies is that alienation of collectively-owned land is culturally proscribed and virtually impossible. Basima people, too, consistently press this point. When I asked a close informant a series of questions about the possibility of him alienating some of his inherited *susu* land he responded cautiously. Our dialogue went as follows:

**Q:** If you were the *tolodebana* of your *susu* would you be able to sell off some of your *susu* land to an outsider?

**A:** I would have to consult with the whole group before I could pass any of our land to other people.

**Q:** What if you simply went ahead without your *susu's* approval?

**A:** I don't think that's possible because the land belongs to the group as a whole.

**Q:** If you did go ahead in your own way, though, would other members object?

**A:** Yes, they would certainly object unless there was a very good reason.

**Q:** Have you ever heard of any cases where land was bought or sold and thereby lost according to some kind of traditional arrangement?

**A:** No, I haven't heard of any.

As other fieldworkers have found, this kind of response to direct questioning is common. People generally prefer to talk about the ideal pattern (cf. Crocombe 1974:13). In the course of investigation of land right transfers in the past, however, one is confronted with instances of groups forfeiting land through warfare, group decimation or extinction, in compensation for homicide and so forth. Thus one



discovers that land alienation occurs after all, and not so infrequently at that. It is not unusual to hear people talk about land that was originally theirs, but had now passed to another group. But how did this happen and under what circumstances, and why did the owners allow it?

My informant said that people would most certainly object to the transfer of *susu* land 'unless there was a very good reason'. There are indeed some very good reasons to be found in Basima which are not necessarily predictable by the tenurial system, but which stem from fortuitous circumstances that oblige people to alienate their land. They recall what Crocombe termed 'subsidiary principles', the existence of which 'makes it possible for individuals to manipulate the system to their individual advantage' (*ibid.*). In other words, people are apt to promote the viewpoint of group ownership and group solidarity, leaving in the shadowy background those self-interested manipulations which contradict the ideal patterns. Researchers too are apt to dismiss 'exceptions' in their search for normative schema.

In further conversation, my informant denied any knowledge of land rights being given as compensation for a crime against another group. He also denied land rights were ever transferred in payment for vital services rendered to others. The same informant, nevertheless, volunteered that land alienation would necessarily result from group extinction (*susuamata*). Suffice it to cite three examples so as to show that given the circumstances land can be alienated by landowning groups.

When a *susu* becomes extinct its land rights are usually inherited by the *susu* that had been supporting the last genuine owner in all aspects of his or her life, but most notably in mortuary feasts he or she had been obliged to sponsor. Most commonly it is a sister-*susu* (i.e. a matrilineage of the same clan) which stands in the most favourable position with respect to the inheritance of land. Sometimes the last member of the moribund *susu* may declare this transfer of rights prior to his or her death. Failing that, the supportive sister-*susu* can easily assume ownership of these rights following the death of the last person. The takeover would be approved and endorsed by everyone, however, only if their supportive prestations had been consistent and publicly witnessed during previous mortuary feasts. Another important factor is close proximity of residence and *tanoa* locations, as the following case evinces.

The *tanoa* in question was within the *laotete* of my Pwaepwae informant's *susu*, up in the hills of Lauoya district. His *susu* had been aware of the imminent extinction of a *tanoa* owner's *susu*, and accordingly helped the last surviving

owner in mortuary and other feasts. When he died they simply took over his land, which in most people's eyes was legitimate. This *tanoa* now belongs to them, and in 1988 my informant used it as a trial plot for cardamom as a cash crop.

The second case also demonstrates the vulnerability of matrilineal inheritance rules and attempts that individuals may need to make to preserve them in spirit. The transfer of land in this case is still in progress and has not yet been concluded. Hence an element of uncertainty concerning the outcome remains, since the proposed transfer may yet be opposed.

A large section of the hamlet of Wedalala called Awedawe, located on the beach of Lauoya district, belongs to Maibala's *susu*. The only child of his mother he was the only surviving member of his *susu*; another 'mother' (his mother's sister) was barren and left no issue. This *susu* effectively became extinct when the two women died. With their deaths the title to Wedalala hamlet and the stretch of land running directly inland came under Maibala's sole authority. Maibala's wife died in early 1989 leaving him with eight children to look after. His obvious concern is who will inherit the *susu* property as 'next of kin'. Despite matrilineal expectations (practically void in this case) his children could inherit those rights, for all decisions concerning bequeathal were now in his discretion alone. But such decisions are not made overnight and Maibala gave much thought as to whom should succeed him. Among several possibilities Maibala decided to bequeath the *susu's* land titles to Mathias, a young fellow-clansman and co-resident who is married with two children. Mathias had resided in Wedalala for some years and had given much support to Maibala in his various endeavours. This, in Maibala's view was reason enough to favour him as an heir to his *susu* residential and garden land. It seemed a clear, straightforward and quite legitimate case of land transfer according to 'subsidiary principles'. Not everyone thought so, however. Another Manawana clansman who has residential rights to another section of Wedalala (thereby implying past support of Maibala) has indicated his intention of contesting Maibala's choice. While it is now up to Maibala and Mathias to decide between them whether the other clansman be given some of the land, the behaviour of this individual counts against him. He hardly resides at Awedawe and spends much of his time travelling to and from Alotau and Port Moresby. Maibala's eldest son told me that the threat this contender poses should not be taken too seriously, that Mathias' position as heir-apparent was secure in the eyes of the majority of the community. He agreed, however, that any challenge would upset Mathias if it was made shortly after Maibala's death.

In a third case of alienation, land was given as compensation for a mortuary service: namely, carrying the corpse of a member of another *susu* under somewhat unusual circumstances.

Land ownership rights at Wayo are currently held by Abedi's *susu* but were previously held by Masawana's group. This land is located at the edge of, yet within, a larger *laotete* still held by Masawana. About three generations ago a woman of Masawana's *susu* named Ganiuna was married to Aliawedu from a *susu* of the Etonouna clan. When the husband learned of his wife's infidelity, he took her to their garden at Wayo and chopped off her head, leaving her body

beneath a breadfruit tree. Some members of Abedi's *susu* found the corpse and carried her to her *susu* hamlet for burial. In addition to their plans for retribution, the aggrieved *susu* (Masawana's) invited the corpse-carrying *susu* (Abedi's) to a lavish feast of yams and pork. Both groups worked hard for an excellent yield at the next harvest and subsequently feasted together. It was at this feast that the elders of the dead woman's *susu* announced to Abedi's *susu* that henceforth the *tanoa* plots of Wayo belonged to them.

In short, the original owners alienated their land at Wayo. Two important factors influenced this decision. First, of course, was the need to compensate Abedi's *susu* for their act of carrying the corpse of a kinswoman. Second was the customary prohibition against a landholding *susu* from gardening ground on which a *susu* member's blood had been shed. It was therefore quite appropriate for Masawana's group to give away that piece of land when they could no longer use it.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the basic principles and general cultural features of land tenure in Basima. Part of my focus has been the ambiguity of the concept of group ownership of land, usually conceived of as ahistorical, permanent and inalienable. I challenged this assumption in various ways: by discussing individual rights in land versus the corporate rights of the *susu*; by proposing weaker formulations of land 'ownership', and by showing how land may be acquired, lost or alienated.

I cannot claim, however, that this is a complete account or that I have fully represented Basima people's conceptualizations of land and tenure. The notion that there are complementary and analytically distinct types of ownership rights (collective and individual) is my own recognition of an existing and yet tacit indigenous phenomenon. It is fair to state, however, that the distinction between collective or group land ownership (which is conceived to be permanent) and individual or personal land use (which is conceived to be temporary) is explicit in Basima discourse about land. There is a dynamic between the two which is, as I have amply illustrated, culturally constituted.

<sup>10</sup> In Dobu and Duau there are prohibitions relating to the shedding of blood (*rara*) of *matrikin*. These appear to be of less concern to Basima people and the only case I came across involving a prohibition relating to bloodshed within the *susu* warranted a different explanation. A man had murdered his wife on a beach near Wedalala hamlet which connects the regular coastal path. Since then, the *susu* members of the murderer have been prohibited from walking along this section of the path or beach. The prohibition did not extend to the *susu* whose member had been killed. (see Roheim 1950:164 for brief accounts of such taboos).

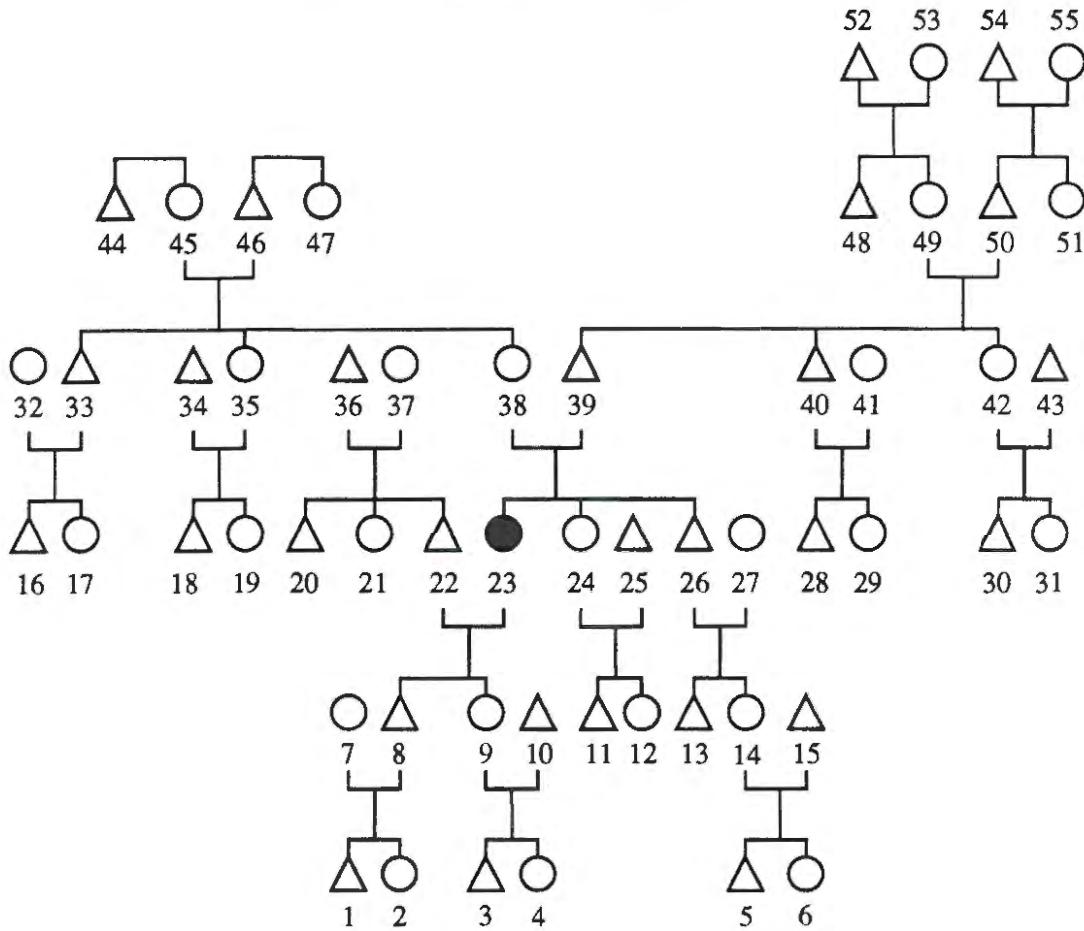


The bedrock ideological principle of Basima land tenure is matrilineal transmission. Notwithstanding this principle, it is true that one can never predict with absolute certainty the ultimate ownership or social destiny of any piece of land. Transmission is always subject to the influence of social and political circumstances of groups and individuals especially when viewed between generations. Whatever they may say in normative mode, Basima people appreciate the fact that custody of the land cannot be permanently guaranteed, though this is not to suggest they would concede that the ideology of permanence and inalienability is merely a convenient fiction. The conceptual solidarity, permanence and ahistorical status of the *susu* is necessary to their whole social order, and the ideology of perpetual corporate land ownership is essentially linked to it.

But history intervenes in any ideal social order, and we have seen how land can be gained and lost through a variety of contingencies and even through the working out of contradictory social obligations. Land, after all, is a property that is intimately tied to the processes and vicissitudes of social and political relations. These too necessarily influence the relative permanence or impermanence of rights to land, as I have demonstrated in some of the cases presented above. Finally, of course, groups as well as individuals eventually cease to exist, and so too therefore do their rights and titles to land.

An implicit theme of this chapter has been the flexibility of land tenure in Basima. I see this as a direct function of the flexibility and 'degrees of freedom' of the social organization. While Basima does display a coherent and fairly orderly social system, exceptions to normative rules are tolerated. These should not be read as undermining or subverting the social system, but rather as providing it with its dynamism and resilience to change. Likewise, the elasticity of land tenure is evidence, I suggest, of its adaptative capacity to cope with continuous change. Not only has the system responded to the changes wrought by colonial rule and Christianity in recent generations, but we may also visualize it as having been constantly challenged by the frequent influx of immigrant groups into Basima.

Kinship terms when EGO is female



- |            |             |            |               |
|------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| 1 = tubu-  | 16 = dibe-  | 31 = dibe- | 46 = tubu-    |
| 2 = tubu-  | 17 = dibe-  | 32 = yaya- | 47 = tubu-    |
| 3 = tubu-  | 18 = nu-    | 33 = oa-   | 48 = tubu-    |
| 4 = tubu-  | 19 = sia-   | 34 = tama- | 49 = tubu-    |
| 5 = tubu-  | 20 = sia-   | 35 = sina- | 50 = tubu-    |
| 6 = tubu-  | 21 = ewa-   | 36 = lawa- | 51 = tubugwao |
| 7 = lawa-  | 22 = mwane- | 37 = lawa- | 52 = tubugwao |
| 8 = natu-  | 23 = EGO    | 38 = sina- | 53 = tubugwao |
| 9 = natu-  | 24 = sia-   | 39 = tama- | 54 = tubugwao |
| 10 = lawa- | 25 = sia-   | 40 = tama- | 55 = tubugwao |
| 11 = natu- | 26 = nu-    | 41 = sina- |               |
| 12 = natu- | 27 = ewa-   | 42 = yaya- |               |
| 13 = yaya- | 28 = nu-    | 43 = oa-   |               |
| 14 = yaya- | 29 = sia-   | 44 = tubu- |               |
| 15 = lawa- | 30 = dibe-  | 45 = tubu- |               |

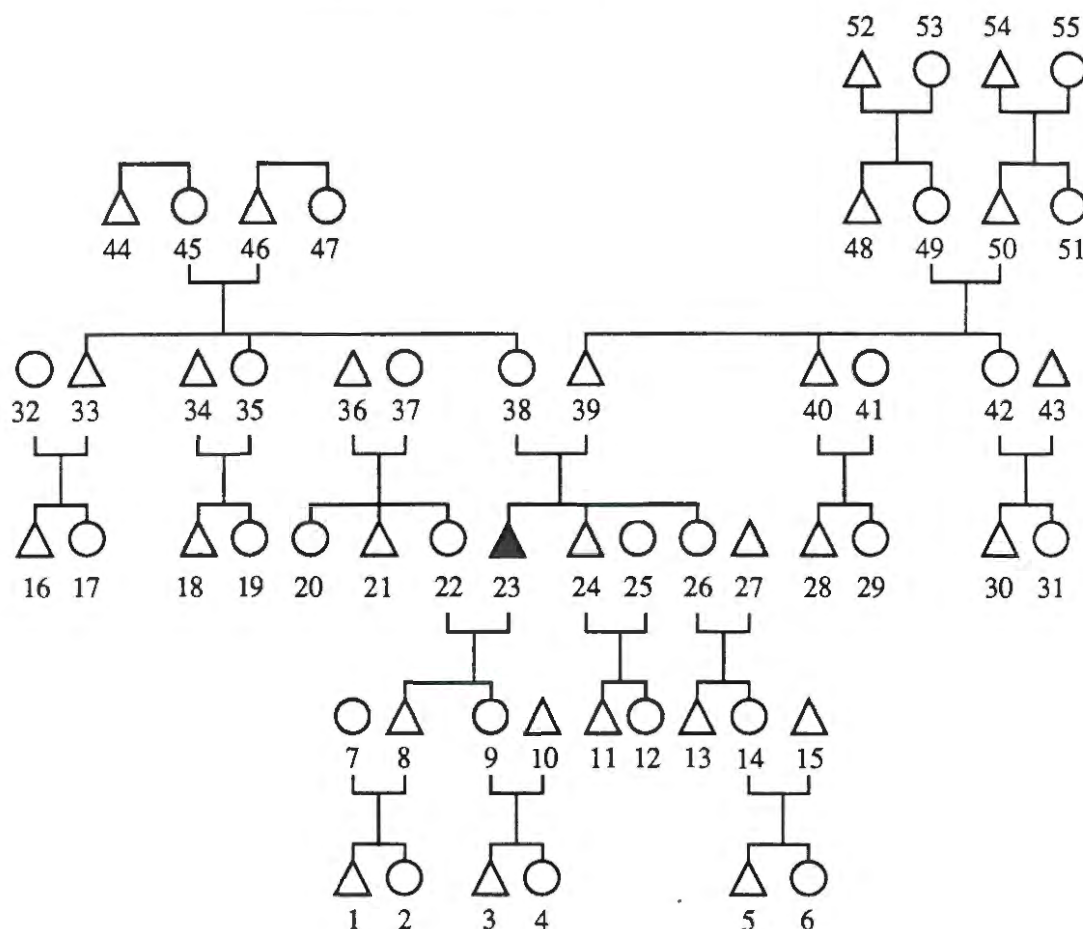
After father's death:

30 becomes tama-  
31 becomes yaya-

After mother's brother's death:

16 becomes yaya-  
17 becomes yaya-

Kinship terms when EGO is male



- |            |             |            |               |
|------------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| 1 = tubu-  | 16 = dibe-  | 31 = dibe- | 46 = tubu-    |
| 2 = tubu-  | 17 = dibe-  | 32 = yaya- | 47 = tubu-    |
| 3 = tubu-  | 18 = sia-   | 33 = oa-   | 48 = tubu-    |
| 4 = tubu-  | 19 = nu-    | 34 = tama- | 49 = tubu-    |
| 5 = tubu-  | 20 = sia-   | 35 = sina- | 50 = tubu-    |
| 6 = tubu-  | 21 = ewa-   | 36 = lawa- | 51 = tubugwao |
| 7 = lawa-  | 22 = mwane- | 37 = lawa- | 52 = tubugwao |
| 8 = natu-  | 23 = EGO    | 38 = sina- | 53 = tubugwao |
| 9 = natu-  | 24 = sia-   | 39 = tama- | 54 = tubugwao |
| 10 = lawa- | 25 = sia-   | 40 = tama- | 55 = tubugwao |
| 11 = natu- | 26 = nu-    | 41 = sina- |               |
| 12 = natu- | 27 = ewa-   | 42 = yaya- |               |
| 13 = oa-   | 28 = sia-   | 43 = oa-   |               |
| 14 = oa-   | 29 = nu-    | 44 = tubu- |               |
| 15 = lawa- | 30 = dibe-  | 45 = tubu- |               |

After father's death:

30 becomes tama-  
31 becomes yaya-

After mother's brother's death:

16 becomes natu-  
17 becomes natu-



## APPENDIX II

### NOTES ON HUNTING AND FISHING TECHNIQUES

#### ***Puwali*: wild pig-netting**

To a limited extent, hunting by traditional methods is still practised in Basima. This may be attributed in part to the vast area of uninhabited, rain-forested hills in the immediate hinterland. The youth of Basima-proper also happen to be enthusiastic hunters. It would be misleading to suggest, however, that hunting contributed significantly to the diet, and only occasionally does wild pig (*bawe uda'a*) and possum (*gwedai*) feature in household menus and appear in the local market for sale.

When men speak of hunting in Basima they are invariably referring to pig-netting (*puwali*). This is done with the assistance of dogs. Although I saw only three different pig nets during my fieldwork, I was persuaded that there were many more hidden inside men's storage huts. *Puwali* are stoutly made of twisted plant fibres and measure about four metres in length and almost two metres in height. Traditionally there was a good deal of magic associated with their manufacture and use. Pig hunting is exclusively a male activity. A team of men armed with spears (previously black palm, nowadays sharpened metal rods) would set off into the hills together with their dogs. While primarily in search of wild pigs, along the way they would also trap and kill any possums or large birds they encountered. A specialist *puwali* hunter generally leads the group; he is not only supposed to be experienced in dealing with vicious boars but also to be knowledgeable concerning the magic of enticement. This magic purportedly attracts pigs to the net and then calms or tames them. However, I did not manage to collect detailed information on hunting skills or hunting magic.

#### ***Bani*: fishing**

Over half of Basima's population inhabits the coastal strip, living almost directly on the sea-shore. Fishing is therefore an important activity, and a variety of techniques - both traditional and modern - are employed by men and women, young and old alike. The months between October and March are agreed to be the best, mainly because the northwest season (*otala*) brings prolonged periods of calm sea. However, it is during the low tides (*lodau*) of the southeast season (*bolimana*) that groups of

woman collect shellfish of various kinds. A favourite is spiny sea anemone called *kauwedo*. After collecting a number of them, women scrape off their spikes and crack them open to extract the slimy meat. This is gathered into a bowl and a tasty soup is prepared which Basima people regard as a great delicacy.

I observed the following techniques employed by Basima people in their fishing activities.

a) *Bani*: This is the general term for any kind of fishing activity involving the use of nylon fishing line and steel hooks. Both men and women participate in this kind of fishing, though only men go out to sea in canoes to do so. Most people, however, are content to swing their lines from the shore or from the edge of reef platforms. Baits commonly used are octopus, squid, hermit crabs of a certain kind, and small fish.

b) *Pililisi*: This word is probably Dobuan (*pili* = run; *lisi* = pull). In conventional fishing terms, *pililisi* is the trawling technique using a line and baited hook. It is usually men who practise this since it involves paddling out by canoe to deep water. Unlike *bani*, one needs to slowly paddle to and fro, trawling the bait to lure the fish, hopefully a travely, barracuda or tuna.

c) *Gelasi*: This is the term for the technique widely known as spear-fishing with the aid of diving goggles: hence *gelasi*, a corruption of the English word 'glass'. The spears (*gita*) are usually made of a black palm shaft with a sharpened metal spike attached to the tip. This technique is suitable for both night and day depending on weather conditions and the phases of the moon. A calm sea on a moonless night is preferable for night diving. Waterproof torches with batteries have also found their way to Basima. In addition to diving for ordinary fish, certain Basima men have developed an efficient method of trapping turtles (*wayowayo*) at night. It requires a wire loop attached to the tip of a strong metal spear. After looping the neck of the slow-moving turtle, the spear is twisted and the point thrust into its neck. After some twenty minutes of struggle, the turtle weakens and can be dragged to the shore.

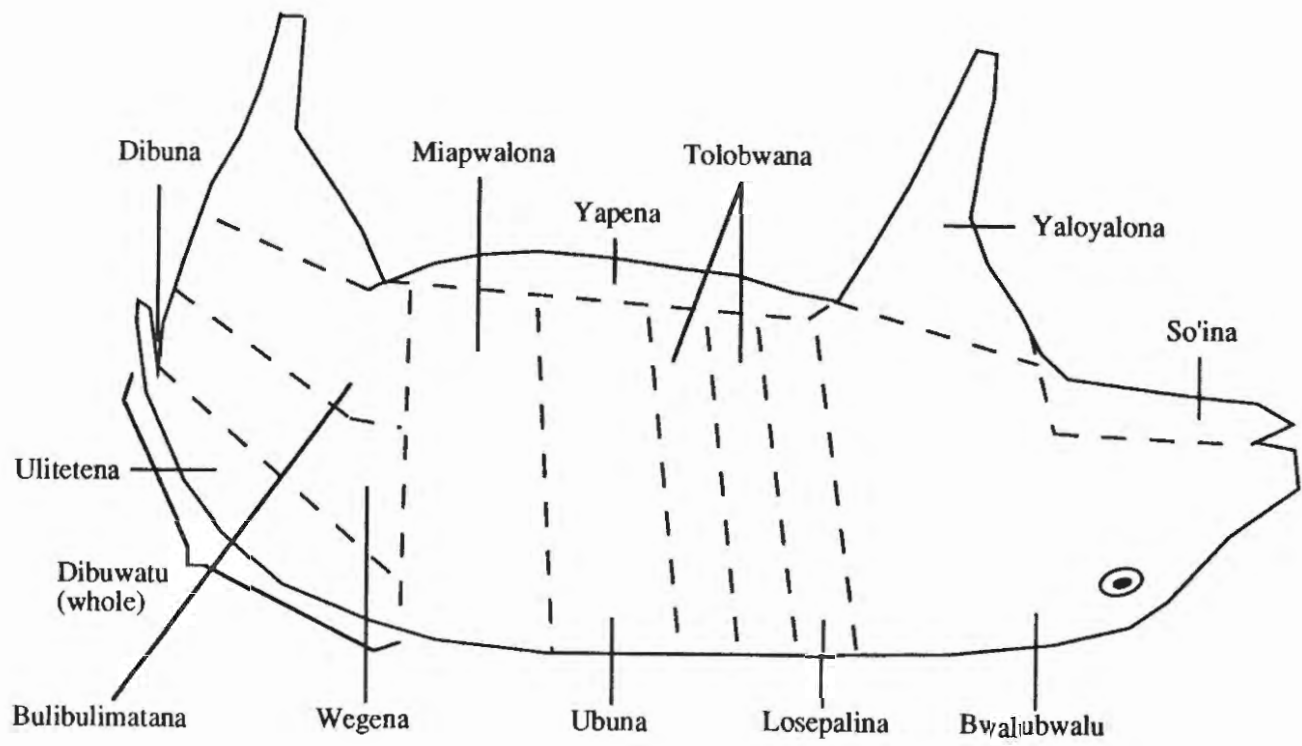
d) *Tuwa*: The use of poisonous plant juices to stun fish is very common. The juice is usually that of the derris vine (*tuwa*) and it is extracted from the roots by pounding. Whole schools of sardines (*mwayausa* and *kanadu*) may be targeted. Men, woman and children would gather and surround the school of fish, then dive down to anchor the pounded *tuwa* root in several strategic places. Within half an hour or so, the

stunned sardines rise to the surface and the people simply move among them with their dishes, baskets and other receptacles.

e) *Gomana*: This is the generic term for fishing net, though it more specifically refers to fairly large rectangular nets suitable for netting large fish. Quite commonly, *gomana* nets are thrown around the reef edges, into reef passages and open pools on reef platforms.

f) *Bwabwali*: These nets are smaller than *gomana* and are usually triangular as they are woven around a neatly carved Y-shaped branch of a tree. During the *otala* period, large shoals of sardines (*mwayausa* and *lausema*) drift along the shores. Men sit and wait for large travelly fish (*getula*) or the long-nosed, streamlined garfish (*kwaduwa*) to chase the sardines closer to the shore. The men confront them head-on, dipping their nets into the school and scooping the sardines out of the water. In addition, boys and men throw their lines into the seething shoals in the hope of catching the larger travelly. If more than one of these is caught, the largest one may be given to the 'owner' (*toni'anieda*) of the beach or shoreline where the sardines are being fished. *Bwabwali* nets are also used to scoop freshwater fish and prawns from the creeks. After recent flooding (*yadua*) caused by heavy rain, men and boys wait until the creeks have subsided then walk along their backs with *bwabwali* nets, scooping up the trapped prawns (*yoba*, *sesegani*) and other small fish. These are preferably roasted or they are simply added to vegetables in the cooking pot.





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