

SYMBOLIC INCEST AND SOCIAL INTERCOURSE: KULA AND COMMUNITY IN KIRIWINA

For Malinowski, kula exchange was an institution 'paramount in the tribal life of all the people that participate in it' (Malinowski 1968: 409). Mauss (1970) echoed this, treating the Kula Ring as the organising focus of Melanesian life. Such a perspective became dominant but involved a fetishization of the Kula Ring which effectively prevented its study as an integral part of particular social systems.

With the exception of Uberoi's Politics of the Kula Ring (1962), anthropologists have concerned themselves more recently with the societies through which the kula vaygu'a (valuables) pass. Unfortunately, they tend either to dissolve the ceremony into constituents easily studied as part of a particular social system or to pass over kula as irrelevant. Brunton (1975) concentrates on kula exchange in the Northern Trobriands or, more particularly, the Kiriwina District, on the assumption that this region 'somehow "plugged in" to the Kula Ring rather late' (Brunton 1975:553). At the same time, in treating the vaygu'a as 'scarce resources', he fails to see beyond their economic significance. Weiner and Powell dismiss kula as an inter-island phenomenon with no intra-district import. Weiner claims that her concern with the 'internal exchange structure' (Weiner 1976:24) of Kiriwina precludes the necessity of integrating kula transactions into her analysis. Powell sees kula merely as a means of emphasising 'the disjunction both political and economic between the various major districts' (1965:98) and of maintaining 'social intercourse between adjacent areas' (ibid).

Yet kula cannot be reduced to either an exchange of commodities or a means of communicating between societies. The ceremony penetrates deeply into social life. Children are named after vaygu'a (cf. Malinowski 1922:504); kula and funeral ceremonies are closely linked (cf. ibid 489-493, 513-514); interaction with spirits is mediated by kula gifts (cf. ibid 512-513) and, as will be shown, vaygu'a distribution is a function of political alliances.

This essay brings Malinowski's 'generalist' approach into accord with the careful fieldwork done in Kiriwina District by Powell and others. A Tabaluan ritual called youlawada expresses such a synthesis. It is a ritual in which a Kiriwinan commits symbolic incest with his clan-sister on Kitava. In this way his matrilineage is able to use the inter-island kula mechanism as a means of consolidating authority and guaranteeing the perpetuity of its rule over its community.

The social system of Kiriwina District involves a distinction between biological and social paternity. The husband of a child's mother is not recognized as the father of that child. Instead, the child is said to be the product of a spiritual intercourse between the mother and a member of her matrilineage (Malinowski 1932: Ch.V11; Wilson 1969). The biological father is merely a member of another matrilineage who has contracted through marriage to raise his wife's kin's child in return for annual payments of urigubu or tribute.

The attempt to 'shift' paternity from the biological father to the mother's brother necessitates an elaborate division between the natural and social aspects of a person. The continuity of Kiriwinan matrilineality depends on: 1) the recognition that jural rights and status devolve from the mother's brother and not the father; and 2) a careful distinction between women who are marriageable and those of the mother's sub-clan who are suvasova or taboo (Leach 1969; Powell 1969a). A violation of either tenet would result in a direct challenge to the hegemony of matrilineality and a major confusion of property rights, chieftain succession, and the like. In essence, the sub-clans which own certain villages would find themselves displaced by the sub-clans of their women's husbands.

Trobriand cosmology defines people in terms of 'totemic nature':

Humanity is divided into four clans (kumila). Totemic nature is conceived to be as deeply ingrained in the substance of the individual as sex, colour, and stature. It can never be changed, and it transcends the individual life, for it is carried over into the next world, and brought back unchanged into this world when the spirit returns by reincarnation. This four-fold division is thought to be universal (Malinowski 1932:416).

Social standing and related jural powers are a function of spiritual consanguinity with the matriclan. Land, power and ritual status can only be shared or inherited by members of one's own matriclan.

Sexual intercourse, child-rearing, and other acts which focus on the physical rather than the social body are tabooed for members of the same clan group and are relegated to the domain of inter-clan activity. 'Neither the begetting nor the bearing of children is part of the Kiriwinan marriage contract' (Powell 1969a:201). The only role the husband is seen to have in relation to his wife's child is that of training and cleaning its body until it is old enough to achieve full status as an adult member of its mother's brother's matrilineage.

Suvasova, the 'supreme taboo' (Malinowski 1932: 416-451), prevents the collapse of the distinction between a person's social and biological character. The act of incest, by asserting the dominance of the biological, profoundly threatens an order founded on the subordination of sex to politics.

Trobriand norms link incest with death. In 'The Incest Myth' (ibid: 456-474) the brother and sister die as soon as they copulate on their sub-clan's land: (Malinowski 1932:465). The proper response of a couple when discovered in incest is immediate suicide (Malinowski 1926: 77-78; 1932:432, 435). To the child of an incestuous couple his father and his mother's brother would be the same person. Incestuous conception thus symbolically transfers the right to inherit name and status from the matriline to the patriline. The act of incest is an eminently political act. To counter it, tradition equates incest with death rather than with a new birth. The Tabula sub-clan, which rules Omarakana and several other Trobriand district capitals, understands its political power to be the result of mythical sibling incest. Suvasova prevents a new ascendancy.

The separation of what Powell calls 'ontogenetic' (biological) and 'phylogenetic' (social) kinship relations is the most significant gesture in Trobriand culture, and Trobriand social practice is generated from the gap between the two poles of the individual's life. Leach (1958) maintains that a young man, in moving at marriage out of his father's village and into that of his mother's brother, extends his primary experiences of family into another context. This theory, however, does not take into account the complete discontinuity the Kiriwinan feels between the father's family and the mother's brother's sub-clan group. Initiation into the matriclan is characterized not so much by a physical movement from one village to another as by an experience of the radical disjunction of the self in its relation to the biological family and to the social family (Powell 1969a). The Trobriander does not, as Leach suggests, live between two villages within the same world; it seems much more appropriate to say that he lives in two worlds-- often within the same village.

Thus the life of a Trobriander runs under a two-fold influence -- a duality which must not be imagined as a mere surface play of custom. It enters deeply into the experience of every individual, it produces strange complications of usage, it creates frequent tensions and difficulties, and not seldom gives rise to violent breaks in the continuity of tribal life. (Malinowski 1932: 6).

Anxiety about the nature/culture division is most pronounced at those interstices in which the two spheres threaten to merge. The overdetermined character of this opposition is most pronounced when a person has died and his spirit has abandoned his body to the process of decomposition. Mortuary ceremonies, as Weiner (1976) has demonstrated, restabilize the balance of power and status by providing for an elaborate public reassessment of 'the strengths and parameters of each man and woman's network of relationships' (ibid: 8).

While children maintain no jural ties with their father, they owe him a debt for nursing them through that period of their lives in which their biological selves had not yet given way to their social personae. The debt is paid off in a repulsive, though symbolically efficacious, way. The dead man's sons dig up his body after a few days of interment and rip the bones out of the putrid flesh. With these bones they make utensils and ornaments for themselves and their sisters to use in eating and courting. While dividing flesh from bone the sons 'suck some of the decaying matter' (Malinowski 1932: 133) from the bones and swallow it. This act of cannibalism, and the subsequent employment of the remnants for eating and courting are announced as compensation for the father's earlier services: 'It is right that a child should suck the father's ulna. For the father has held out his hand to its excrement and allowed it to make water on his knee' (ibid). In the ceremony the children, who have been cleansed and purged of their 'physical' selves through the agency of their biological father, return the service by disposing of the abandoned matter left behind by his released spirit. In the process they mark the difference between their jural status and that of their father, for by eating his flesh and using his bones they are demonstrating that their relationship with him is purely on the biological, non-jural plane. The sons' eating of the flesh of their father is the strongest possible statement of the jural division between their clan and that of the father. It is appropriate that they should 'eat of' the father's body while their sisters merely 'eat from' it, since they stand to gain the most from renouncing matrilineal transmission and claiming jural descent from their father.²

The matrilineal kin of the dead man relegate all duties of burial and mourning to the wife and children, and pay them a great deal in the way of valuables and food for their services (ibid: 136). Both the mortuary and the urigubu payments are rewards for acknowledging that the only relation between father and children is non-social; urigubu pays the father for treating his children as physical (hence non-kin) beings, while mortuary payments compensate for the wife's and children's renunciation of any right to inherit from the father's estate. While the sons are being paid to eat and bury the dead man, his matrilineal kin keep as far from the body as possible. They must avoid bwaulo, 'a form of material exhalation, issuing from the corpse and polluting the air.....innocuous to strangers, but dangerous to kinsmen' (ibid: 128). To inhale bwaulo or to touch the corpse of a matrilineal kinsperson is to involve oneself with the corporeal remains of a spiritual relationship. Like sleeping with one's own sister or eating one's own

excrement³, bringing oneself into any immediate contact with the corpse of a kinsperson is to subject one's own identity to the destructive ascendancy of the biological.

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The careful coding of kinship relationships effected through taboos and reciprocal payments would undoubtedly work quite well in maintaining the dominance of matrilineality over patrilineality if everyone married and resided according to the code. If such were the case, all males on marriage would move into their matrilineage's village. There would be no contention over the role of chief since its rank is fully shared by all members of a guyau (ruling) sub-clan' (Powell 1960:129)⁴.

However, a strict adherence to matrilineal, patrilineal, avunculocal norms would, as Powell (1969b) suggests, lead to the eventual collapse of exogamy and the development of isolated endogamous groups incapable of 'the dispersal of the total population to optimal advantage in relation to resources' (ibid : 595). This is avoided. Despite the ideal of prescriptive patrilineal exchange, there exists in practice a preferential system (cf. Needham 1962 : 111-118; Maybury-Lewis 1965: 215ff) which condones marriage with all but the women of one's own sub-clan. The consequent wide range of real and potential marriages binds the multiple sub-clan groups of Kiriwina into a closely-intertwined network of affines, and hence allows inter-group participation in communal labour, warfare, and the like. The 'openness' of the preferential rule makes for a proliferation of sub-clans however, and with that proliferation comes a substantial increase in the number of fields of possible inter-group status rivalry.

This rivalry centres on the inheritance of chieftainship, and is particularly vehement between the traditional ruling sub-clan, the Tabalu, and other sub-clans which, though subordinate to the Tabalu, are sufficiently rich and powerful to own and control villages within the Kiriwina District. The traditional mode of linking villages and sub-clans - chieftain polygamy - means that a Tabalu chief raises the heirs of a rival matrilineage. The struggle between sons and heirs over the power and land of a chief, which is aggravated by the fact that sixty percent of Kiriwinan married men live outside their sub-clan's village (and hence in the villages of their fathers - Powell 1969a : 183), is a serious threat to both the dominance of the Tabalu sub-clan and the system of matrilineality itself. A successful bid by a son to usurp the inheritance of a nephew would mean that the continuity of matrilineal transmission of land and rank would be broken.

If there were not a means of maintaining the sub-clan rivalries within the parameters of the matrilineal kinship system, Kiriwina and the other Trobriand districts would have discarded Tabalu superordination long ago. Yet, there is nothing within the intra-district system which can explain the power of the matrilineal mode of transmission to pass authority from one Tabalu matriclan person to another. The suvasova taboo, based as it is on a strict patrilineal marriage rule, could not prevent usurpation by forbidding kinswomen to the usurpers because of the large number of women available from other sub-clans. Further, the divorces which break all affinal ties between two feuding groups (Malinowski 1932 : 10-13) would destroy the grounds of any charges of incest levied towards the successful rebels; there would be no marital ties left between the two groups to

complicate matters. Urigubu and mortuary obligations would go the same way as the oppositions on which they are based. The group taking power would discard them along with all other markers of the old relationship between itself and the Tabalu. The complexity of intra-district relations has made the direct application of social norms to the pragmatics of social life problematic if not impossible. The power of the Tabalu aristocracy, which depends on the maintenance of those norms for its continuity, becomes equally problematic when viewed from within the social order.

The patrilateral asymmetry of the Trobriand marriage 'prescription' is merely an ideal which is in fact undermined in social interaction by the number of available alliances with different sub-clan groups. The fact that Kiriwinan structures of inter-clan relationships are modelled on that ideal forces us to look beyond the limits of those relationships for an institution powerful enough to enforce the model. The north-west branch of the kula exchange, which links Kiriwina with Kitava to the east and with a number of villages and islands to the south and south-west, provides Omarakana and its vassal Kiriwinan villages with a pattern of the proper relation of kinship alliances and political authority.

The position of Omarakana in the kula system enables its ruling sub-clan to use kula exchange as both metaphor and means for the distribution of authority and the gathering of allegiance. The group which controls the kula exchange between Kiriwina and Kitava is provided with a multitude of soulava (necklace)-giving partners within the district and a single source of mwali (armshells) to the east. The chieftain of the Tabalu sub-clan and his maternal kin, as toli (collective owners -- Malinowski 1922 : 117ff) of the only uvalaku canoes in their district, thus hold control over the collection and distribution of vaygu'a in the district they rule.

The chief of the Kiriwina district (henceforth referred to as To'uluwa, who was reigning chieftain during the period of Malinowski's fieldwork) and a selected crew, consisting largely and probably exclusively⁵ of matrilineal kinsmen (ibid : 119-120), sail to Kitava where they collect mwali from their kula partners. On return, the chief reciprocates for gifts of soulava by distributing his share of the mwali to 'headmen from all the dependent villages' (ibid : 472) and to commoners from both those villages and his own.⁶ In each instance, 'gifts are brought to the man of superior by the man of inferior rank, and the latter has also to initiate the exchange' (ibid : 473). The chief's son gives soulava to his father and receives a pair of armshells in return; a chief of a subordinate village offers a magnificent necklace and suggests tauntingly that To'uluwa has not the wealth to return a mwali of equal value (ibid); and an elder wife whom the chief has inherited from a brother is given a set of mwali gratis. It is evident that the ceremonial exchange acknowledges a particular relationship existing between the parties.

Recognition that the 'armshells are conceived as a female principle and the necklaces as the male' (ibid : 356) and that 'when two of the opposite valuables meet in the kula and are exchanged it is said that these two have married' (ibid) illuminates the nature of the symbolic interaction. By offering to marry their maleness to the female principle of the chief and the sub-clan he represents, the rival chief and the physiological, though not jural, son are entering into a relationship with the chief and his

matrilineage which not only cuts them off from the possibility of inheritance, but also places them in a servile relationship to him and to his matriclan. The debts arising from this rather undesirable wedding are paid in the performance of the obligations owed to the chief's sub-clan by its vassals; they are expected to provide the Tabalu sub-clan with food, labour, and military support in return for:

the tributes and services given to a chief by his vassals ... the small but frequent gifts he gives them, and the big and important contribution which he makes to all tribal enterprises (ibid : 193).

The marital nature of the kula transaction is reinforced by the fact that the chief 'never receives a gift with his own hands' (ibid : 474). The soulava given by the vassal is the quintessential expression of the degrading role played by the husband in his relations with his wife's kin, and consequently must not be allowed to pollute the distribution of spiritual authority.

The chief's role as distributor of mwali effects an intriguing reversal, arming him against a particular threat from rival sub-clans. Since the chieftain enters into formal political relations with his vassal sub-clans by engaging in polygamous marriages with their women, he is placed in a subordinate relation to those groups by his role and obligations as a sister's husband. However, his political function as distributor of mwali minimizes the inferior status inherent in the role as child-rearer by transforming him into the symbolic wife's brother of all those who receive armshells from him. There would seem to be some truth then in Lévi-Strauss' assertion that:

in the Trobriand Islands ... who receives a wife from each of the sub-clans, is regarded as a sort of 'universal brother-in-law' (Lévi-Strauss 1969 : 44).

He is, however, right for the wrong reason. The continuation of his statement effects a confusion of domains which, in its subversiveness, would horrify the Trobriander:

Political allegiance and the presentation of tribute are no more than just a particular case of that special relationship which in this part of the world places the wife's brother under obligation to his sister's husband (ibid).

The wife's brother is, of course, under obligation to his sister's husband because the latter has 'held his hand out to (the sister's child's) excrement and allowed it to make water onto his knee'. The role of chief is a highly revered and spiritual one which is diametrically opposed to the degrading role for which urigubu payments are rendered. The chief is the 'universal brother-in-law' through his political function as distributor of mwali, which transforms him from a dabbler in child's excrement - the sister's husband - into a guardian of spiritual concord - the mother's brother.

The duality of the chief's role as both the individual who is husband to his wives and the leader who is brother-in-law to his vassals is obvious in his relations with his sons. His sons become his maternal nephews as regards his political functions, of which kula leadership is the quintessence. They are thus allowed to accompany him on trips to Kitava until they

come of age themselves to enter into kula partnerships. Then, whereas all but the chief's sons receive their first soulava from their mother's brother, the chief's son is given his by his father. Instead of using the mwali that he receives for his soulava from a new partner as a means of establishing another relationship with a southern partner, as would a commoner's son, the chief's son gives his mwali back to his father in return for a second soulava. Only then can he trade the soulava for a mwali with which to engage a southern partner (ibid: 279-280). The first soulava is given by the father in his political role as mother's brother. Yet when the son returns the mwali he is not returning it to the 'same' person, since to give a female to one's own maternal uncle would be to suggest incest. Instead the son is giving his physiological father a 'wife' in order to establish the social difference between the two as members of different clan groups.

The dual position of the chief's son as both son and maternal nephew is paralleled by the wife's roles as both wife and sister's husband. We noticed earlier that the chief acknowledged his political debt to his eldest wife by giving her a pair of armshells without first having received soulava. This dual incongruity, the granting of mwali to a woman and the giving of a vaygu'a without reciprocation, can only be understood in light of the Janus-like position of the wife in her familial and political roles. As ordinary wife, she links the chief to her matrilineage as a husband and a rearer of children. However, the chief's role as distributor of mwali radically alters her persona. Since the chief is mother's brother to her clansmen, she, as a person who affinally links the chief's sub-clan with her own, must be considered politically to be in the relation of sister's husband to the chief. To 'uluwa's gift to his inherited wife politically formalized the new relationship; by giving his wife a 'wife', To'uluwa recognized her role as sister's husband and gave her a political position in his chieftainship. Her marriage with To'uluwa's mwali granted her full status in the political kinship system.

The dualities and inversions which mark kinship relationships with the district chief seem to centre on his role as distributor of mwali and locus of inter-clan political relations. Kiriwinan politics are calqued onto kinship relations, but the relationship between the two domains is not one of direct analogy. Political organization is ordered by a model of prescriptive patrilineal matrilineal marriage rules which is embodied in the chief's role in collecting soulava and distributing mwali. The degree of play evident in actual affinal associations is countered by a ceremonial system in which all political subordinates are married to 'women' of the ruling Tabalu sub-clan and are hence bound to give basic service to the 'children' of the chief. Thus the chief gives a sort of political urigubu (consisting of ritual gifts and 'spiritual' or ceremonial maintenance) in return for tribute, work, and military service. The kinship model operative in kula ceremonials is actually opposed to that which regulates quotidian marriages. This results in a dual set of kinship classifications affecting all those brought into both marital and political relations with the chief; sons are treated both as sons and nephews; wives as both wives and sister's husband's; and wives' kin as both wives' kin and sisters' husband's kin. The Kiriwinan kula succeeds in mediating between 'ideal' forms of social interaction and actual practice and, because of this capacity metaphorically to convert theory into praxis, becomes the locus of political behaviour.

Whereas kula relations between the Tabalu chieftain and representatives of subordinate clans are characterized by a rather formal 'marriage ceremony' in which reciprocity is immediate, the kula exchange between the Tabalu and their partners on Kitava is marked by a violent ceremony called the youlawada and a considerable delay between the time when the soulava are given and that when mwali are returned. When the Tabalu delegation reach Kitava they carry their soulava inland to the village of their partners.

On entering the village, the party march on briskly without looking to right or left, and, whilst the boy blows frantically the conch shell, and all the men in the party emit the ceremonial scream called tilaykiki, others throw stones and spears at the kavalapu, the ornamental carved and painted boards running in a Gothic arch round the eaves of a chief's house or yam house (Malinowski 1922: 486).

They then present the male vaygu'a, eat food which is tabooed on their southern uvalaku, and visit friends and relatives in nearby villages. Later, the Kitavans visit Omarakana, but they bring no mwali. Instead, To'uluwa and his tolu sail back to Kitava where they collect mwali which they pass on to their vassals (ibid: 280 and 471-472). Whereas the Kiriwina distribution takes place between members of different clans, the Kiriwina-Kitava ceremony, like the Kiriwina-Sinaketa form, occurs between members of the same clan, the Malasi.⁸ Whether or not it can be shown that the ruling sub-clan of the unnamed village with which To'uluwa and his men engaged in kula exchanges was Tabalu, the act of exchanging 'women' with members of the same clan group is incestuous.⁹ Further, whereas all the groups who exchange vaygu'a in Kiriwina are linked into a political unit, Kitava and Kiriwina have little in common besides participation in the same quadripartite clan system and in the kula ceremonial. There is virtually no trade (Malinowski 1922: 481), and the marital alliances between the two districts seem limited to those in which Tabalu women seek prestige (Malinowski 1932: 70; Brunton 1975: 551-553). The only political aspect of the chief's kula interaction with his Kitavan partners would be that of an inter-district alliance between ruling cliques. Brunton shows that the northwestern kula links Kiriwina, Sinaketa, and Vakuna, district capitals ruled by Tabalu, into a chain of kula alliances, (cf. Brunton 1975: 551 and map). Malinowski implies in his description of Kitavan youlawada that the ceremony is performed throughout Kiriwina (Malinowski 1922: 486). We can assume therefore that there are two routes by which soulava come to Omarakana. One, which we have already described, is through acknowledgements of vassalage. The other, which is a correlate of the ceremony on Kitava, is through interdistrict, 'endogamous' relations between Tabalu sub-clan members. The mwali that 'leak' out of the system at Omarakana or Sinaketa to Kavataria or the Amphletts would be those given by a Tabalu to a partner of another sub-clan who would pass the vaygu'a on to non-Tabaluan partners. The rest would pass from Tabalu to Tabalu, acknowledging a community transcending district borders.

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The fieldwork on the 'intra-Tabalu' kula is virtually non-existent; Malinowski never attended a Kitavan youlawada, never went to Kitava with To'uluwa to collect mwali, and never witnessed a youlawada ceremony in Omarakana. Later fieldworkers have not treated the subject. A myth - 'The Incest Song' - provides some clues, however. In this myth, (Malinowski: 1932: 454-474) a brother and a sister of the Malasi clan copulate with

each other on the beach of Kumilabwaga (Kiriwina Island) and die. After their death a mint flower sprouts 'through their breasts' (ibid: 457). A man of Iwa dreams of this couple and canoes to Kitava and Kumilabwaga in search of them. When he finds their bodies he cuts the upper part of the plant away, leaving its roots intertwined with the bodies of the lovers. He then learns the magic which the brother had used to make his sister lust after him, and takes both the plant and the magic back to Iwa by way of Kitava. At Iwa he tells his people, from whom the Kitavans get their mwali:

I have brought here the point of magic, its eye
.....The foundation, the lower part...remains in
Kumilabwaga.....If an outsider would come here for
the sake of the magic, he would bring a magical
payment in the form of a valuable....For this is
the erotic payment of your magic....For you are
the masters of the magic, and you may distribute
it. You remain here, they may carry it away...
for you are the foundation of this magic (ibid:
458-459).

Malinowski claims this myth relates the origin of the most important systems of love magic operative in the Trobriand Islands. Although he does not link the myth with mwasilā, or kula magic, he does note the parallel functions of the two (ibid: 336). The narrative, however, clearly states that kula exchange sprang from the same violation of the suvasova taboo which generated passion magic. The medium of kula magic is the sulumwoya, or aromatic mint plant. These common features are appropriate to the common function of the two forms of magic; love magic produces an overwhelming passion which leads to intercourse and marriage (ibid: 474) while mwasilā 'makes the man beautiful, attractive, and irresistible to his kula partner' (Malinowski 1922: 335-336). It thus makes the partner soft, unsteady in mind, and eager to give kula gifts' (Malinowski 1968: 407). Oddly, the Kiriwinans practice mwasilā before they leave Omarakana to give soulava to their Kitavan partners. Evidently, they wish the recipients of their gifts to engage in some sort of irrational act of passion. During overseas kula expeditions travellers are not allowed to eat a certain kind of red fish (ibid: 336-339) which is seen as being somehow both inimical to and necessary for the working of mwasilā. Trobriand islanders paint themselves to look like these fish when they travel to the Amphletts or to Dobu, yet they believe that if they eat the fish they will become old and ugly. Malinowski writes 'these ideas hang together somehow, but it would be unwise and incorrect to put them into any logical order or sequence' (ibid: 338). The Trobrianders explain the concatenation of mwasilā, red fish, passion, and taboos in 'The Incest Song'. The red fish swim in the water in which the two siblings copulated. When young men

...come and bathe in the Bokaraywata and then return to the beach, they make a hole in the sand and say some magic. Later on in their sleep they dream of the fish. They dream that the fish spring and come into that pool. Nose to nose the fish swim....When there are two, one female, one male, the youth would wash in this water. Going to the village, he would get hold of a woman and sleep with her. He would go on sleeping with her and make arrangements with her family so that they might marry (Malinowski 1932: 458).

These fish cannot be eaten by the young. The dream of the red fish

swimming nose to nose is put to the same use by seekers of love magic as is the dream of the two siblings committing incest by the man of Iwa who discovered love magic. To link the male and female red fish with the Malasi brother and sister is not gratuitous. Just as the plant which springs from the bodies of the lovers must be separated from its roots which lie in incest, so must the power to passion, which emanates from the fish, be taken not from the fish themselves but from the water in which they swam. To eat the fish is to involve the roots in love magic; it is to commit incest. Yet these fish are not tabooed during youlawada (ibid:487).

The youlawada presentation of the Kiriwinan soulava involves an attack on the kavalapu of the chief's lisaga (house and yam huts). These decorations mark the chief's status as collector of urigubu tribute from matrilineages with which he has affinal bonds. The Tabaluan attack on the kavalapu suggests an attack on the institution of marriage itself, and the fact that the 'damage is not repaired as it is a mark of distinction' (Malinowski 1922: 486) suggests that an aspect of Tabalu status is derived from an opposition to inter-clan marriage.

The anomalies involved in the delivery of male soulava to the Malasi of Kitava suggest that the youlawada is a ceremonial re-enactment of the original act of sibling incest which enabled the Malasi to become 'masters of the magic.' The Kiriwinans act like 'husbands' to their Kitavan partners, but they are not given 'wives' in return for their sexual attentions. Instead they must wait until their soulava are carried to Iwa and exchanged for mwali (Malinowski 1922: 480). Yet, when they are given female vaygu'a the gifts are not given in the form of 'marriages' as on Kiriwina. The mwali passed from clansman to clansman are treated as 'sisters' that cannot be taken as wives but must be given to men of other sub-clans in return for allegiance and service. The kula path which leads from Iwa through Kitava to the several Tabaluan villages on Trobriand Island unites all men of the Malasi clan into a single family which distributes its vaygu'a women in exchange for service and power. Kula between clansmen in different districts cancels the distance between the Malasi villages and transforms the 'here' of the myth to any place where the Malasi exchange their mwali for 'a magical payment in the form of a valuable... the erotic payment for magic'.

For you are the masters of the magic, and you may distribute it. You remain here, they may carry it away...for you are the foundation of this magic.

The youlawada is more than just a manipulation of symbols which allows the Tabalu to give their own kinsmen gifts emblematic of biological involvement. The transformation of a kinship system, which, by definition, revolves around sexual and physiological involvements between members of different clans, into a political system capable of distributing status, power, and authority, necessitates a moment at which lowly biological alliances are converted into high status social alliances. The youlawada presentation, in which the Tabaluan inserts his 'male principle' into a myth which displaces incestuous passion and replaces it with a desirable kula commodity, is the symbolic interface at which kinship as marital alliance becomes kinship as a model for political behaviour. In symbolically sublimating his desire to take a sister as wife and instead passing on to members of other matrilineages, the Malasi converts sex to status, passion to power.

In using the kula ceremonial as a means of transforming itself into the universal wife-giver of a political kinship system, the Kiriwinan Tabalu have turned a traditional activity which looms 'paramount in the tribal life of all the people that participate in it' into a powerful and virtually omnipresent means of maintaining its political hegemony. The kula system is understood by the Trobrianders through the same images with which they view their own models of kin relations. Violations of kula principles, particularly that of the uni-directional, opposed travel of the mwali and soulava, are expected to bring about the same results as violations of marriage rules. These violations are seen as integrally connected with the collapse of culture into nature. The Tabalu, by uniting the distribution of status and power with the exchange of vaygu'a, succeeds in mobilizing an already overdetermined set of traditions, practices and images in support of its clan superiority.

Both Leach and Powell recognize the traditional role of kinship systems as moderators of sub-clan rivalries. However, the inherent instability of a status-dependent, matrilineal social system, suggests that intra-district custom lacks the power to maintain the traditional system. The Kula Ring, however, flows through the district and carries with it not only objects of great veneration but also opportunities to struggle for individual prestige in an arena as old as time and (apparently) much greater than the cockpit of intra-district politics. Its politicisation assures the perpetuity of Tabaluan rule. It would be much easier for a Kiriwinan to kill a chieftain than it would for him to turn away vaygu'a and kula partners. Fortunately for the Tabalu, the Kiriwinan vassal finds great satisfaction in exchanging his freedom for the opportunity to carry the dung of his chieftain's children.

Glen Bowman.

NOTES

1. It is interesting to note that in the battle for superior position between the empowered Tabalu sub-clan and the underling Kwainama, the son of the Tabalu chief, himself a member of the latter sub-clan, attempted to degrade the chief's nephew and potential heir by accusing him of committing adultery with his wife. The son was consequently exiled from his father's village and relations were broken off between the two groups (Malinowski 1932: 10-13). Later, Powell, following up the still active feud, discovered that the sons of the exiled Kwainama man were claiming that their father should have inherited the chieftainship because, as missionaries had declared, patrilineal descent was the only proper mode of inheritance (Powell 1960: 130ff).
2. It should be noted that the only funeral Malinowski describes is that of 'a man of consequence' (ibid: 127). If this man had high political status, like chieftainship, to pass on to his heirs, the necessity of 'cutting off' his sons would be aggravated. The severity of the described ritual cannibalism could well be determined by the value of the status the sons were renouncing.
3. In an inter-clan dispute, Si'ulobubu told To'uluwa, a chief whose superordination he was renouncing, to 'kumkwam popu' ('eat your own excrement'). This insult was made more serious by the addition of To'uluwa's name to the epithet which resulted in the form in which the insult is deadliest' (ibid: 377). This verbal dissolution of the chief's name in his biological processes was considered so serious that the feud could only be ended when Si'ulobubu's clan allowed To'uluwa's people to kill him for uttering it. Further information on the Trobriander's

extreme measures for keeping ingestion and excretion out of social space is available in Sexual Life of Savages XIII, i. In this section the smells of excrement, bwaulo, and the sea witches who threaten kula transactions are linked (ibid: 379).

4. In fact, even in actual intra-sub-clan relations, the chieftainship is very rarely contested. It is considered to be a difficult job with little reward, and is hence as often refused by a chosen heir as it is accepted (Powell 1960: 125-129). Rivalries over the chieftainship are exclusively between sons and nephews of the chief; i.e. between sub-clans.

5. There is good reason to believe that the chief's companions are solely members of his matrilineal clan. Aside from the assertion that veyola (matrilineal kin) have rights over all others to the use of the boat, (Malinowski 1922: 120) Malinowski suggests matrilineal exclusiveness by mentioning those persons who do not accompany the voyagers. While discussing the taboo status of the village while its chief and his companions are away delivering soulava, Malinowski mentions a sexual indiscretion of 'one of the favourite sons of To'uluwa (the chief), called Nabwasu'a, who had not gone on the expedition' (ibid: 484). Such exclusion from a cherished activity of a 'favourite son' would appear to be inexplicable were it not mandatory. He also mentions that commoners, whom he distinguishes radically from chiefs and other persons of authority (ibid: 52), join members of other villages in requesting mwali from the Kiriwinan chief during a sort of status distribution (ibid: 473) in which the other villagers, having accompanied the chief on his collection voyage, don't have to participate.

6. The chief's companions also return with mwali, and it can be assumed that, like their chief, they distribute some of it to members of other sub-clans within the village and district and save some to give to Tabalu partners and others in Sinaketa. There is not enough data to confirm whether their distributions also function to assert sub-clan status.

7. When Malinowski speaks of Kitavan mwali he always attributes its presence in Kiriwina to a trip by To'uluwa and his crew to Kitava (Malinowski 1922: 280, 471-472). He does not chronicle a single mwali presentation by visiting Kitavans, and unless we assume that there is a second sort of mwali exchange in Kitava which is not under the control of the Tabalu (which seems unlikely) we will have to attribute Malinowski's statement that the Kitavans are 'ambidextrous in the kula and have to fetch and carry both articles overseas' (ibid: 488) to his oft-evinced wish to make all kula transactions fit within a single all-encompassing pattern.

8. I assume that since there is a Malasi clan of Kitava there must also be a Tabalu sub-clan which rules the main village. As I can find no data to confirm this assumption, I will throughout the paper refer to the Kitavan partners of the Kiriwinan Tabalu as Malasi.

9. The Malasi clan has 'the reputation of being the most persistent exogamy breakers and committers of incest' (Malinowski 1932: 432).

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