

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

RECOGNIZING POWER:

THE UNDERESTIMATION OF FEMALE POWER  
IN NEW GUINEA BY ANTHROPOLOGISTS

BY

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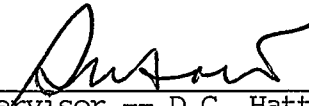
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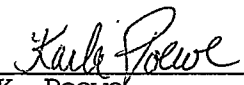
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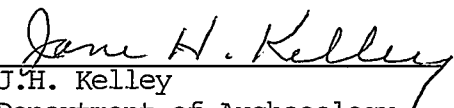
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Recognizing Power: The Underestimation of Female Power in New Guinea by Anthropologists", submitted by Elisabeth Nielsen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis criticizes certain aspects of the approaches taken to male/female relationships in Mt. Hagen and uses Mt. Hagen myths to suggest an alternative perspective to look at these relationships. The aspects which come under criticism form part of what I call the "political paradigm" that underlies even the most sophisticated gender studies as exemplified by the works of Marilyn Strathern, who has made major contributions to our understanding of the relationships between men and women in New Guinea Highland society. It is argued that this political paradigm ultimately represents a model imposed from the outside; it is an ethnocentric 20th century Western view which is unable to come fully to terms with gender relationships in Mt. Hagen.

In the second part there follows a perspicuous display of the relationships between men and women as interpreted by the Mt. Hageners themselves in their oral literature which, for the purposes of this thesis, is treated as a sort of self-ethnography of the Mt. Hageners. The picture of the world that emerges in the myths contradicts the standard wisdom of what gender relationships are supposed to be in the New Guinea

Highlands. Spheres of women's power come to the fore which have been ignored by the ethnographers or seen in too narrow and inadequate a focus.

The third part of this thesis will attempt some explanations of why there is this contradiction. It is argued that women have their own spheres of power that greatly influence and even can countervail to some extent the political power of men. This power of women originates in the spheres of reproduction and production, and thus is partly an existential given. And for that reason it is more diffuse and ethnographically less visible. Men's political power by contrast is precarious; it needs to be created, established and affirmed. Men's political power is dependent on other men; women's power by contrast is an existential given, not in need of ritual proclamation. What I am concerned with is the development of a new paradigm to interpret and understand gender relationships which might prove useful also in understanding social relationships in general.

Though the thesis seeks a new paradigm, its methods is not by any means new. Rather it accords with the most basic and long established traditions of Social Anthropology; its insights are achieved by taking seriously what the natives say about themselves.

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## INTRODUCTION

Political anthropology has been an important, indeed, one might say the most important focus of Social Anthropology. The study of the political structure of societies and power relationships within them has become the entry-point, so to speak, for the understanding of pre-industrial societies. Other areas of social action and interaction, such as production and religion, are usually dealt with in a second phase of the investigation by anthropologists, and treated virtually, as an epiphenomenon, in an almost ancillary fashion to the world of politics.

New Guinea Highland ethnography presents no exception to this rule. But what I would stress is that this pre-eminence of the political domain which is so apparent in Highland New Guinea ethnography, is not so much an objective feature of these societies as it is a folk model or construct. Moreover it is a construct of males in the public and official sphere of the men's houses where decisions about warfare, alliances exchanges and rituals are made.

This 'constructed' world of male power, however, rests on another world in which women are predominant and that is the biological and economic world of



reproduction and production. By its nature, this world is less ethnographically visible and is not periodically affirmed in ritual and public ceremony. It is, one could argue, reduced to unimportance in the public realm by the very elaborate symbolic affirmation of the male world expressed in ritual and ceremony and even warfare. This emphasis on male ritual has the effect of redensring women's spheres of action into an inconspicuous backdrop.

In the course of the thesis I make references to the political 'domain' of men and the productive or reproductive 'spheres' of women. According to Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms (1942) the term 'domain' "implies exclusive possession and control of a clearly defined field, and a title to regard all outside interference or all intrusion into that field as trespass or invasion" (Webster's 1942:342). 'Sphere' by contrast suggests "apartness" and "carries no hint of danger or trespass or interference" (Webster's 1942:342).

The political domain is anxiously guarded by men against intrusion. The pollution complex, one could argue (and it has been argued), is a principal means to exclude women from politics. The oral literature of the Mt. Hageners reveals that men there fend off women's interference or challenges in a decisive manner. It

will, however, be argued in the following pages that this exclusion of women from political power does not mean women do not have any power. Their spheres of power are different and need not be ritually acted out or protected. But they do require a special effort if we are to recognize and understand them, and this thesis is intended as a contribution toward that effort.

## PART ONE

In this thesis I shall discuss the relationships between women and men in Mt. Hagen society in the Highlands of New Guinea. I shall conduct this discussion by drawing on two different resources: first, the ethnographic record and the implicit theoretical frameworks utilized in it; second the oral literary tradition of the Mt. Hagen people, of whom we have an unusually rich record in the collections of Georg Vicedom and Hermann Strauss in their comprehensive four volumes of ethnographic study.

In the first part of the thesis I shall review the relevant ethnographic literature which I shall at the same time critically evaluate. This critical evaluation will serve to illustrate some of what I see as the theoretical shortcomings of certain of the interpretations of the complex relationships between men and women in Highland New Guinea. I will then proceed to a look at these relations as they appear in the oral literature of the people themselves. Thus I shall start with the ethnographic presentation and interpretation of these relations and then I will come to the representations given by the Mt. Hagen people themselves in their literature. While some of the main

interpretations in the first part were the work of women anthropologists, the stories themselves were told by men only and collected by men. It is my intention to use the texts -- which we might in some sense regard as the people's own "ethnography of themselves" -- to raise the possibility that the standard ethnographic interpretations have been colored by issues relevant to the ethnographers' own societies, but not necessarily relevant to New Guinea society. In doing so, I do not see myself attempting to pit the oral literature against the ethnographic record in order to make claims against the latter; I do not propose to treat the literary presentations on the same plane as the ethnographic facts. After all, the one lays claim to a certain facticity and methodological rigor while the other is in effect an artistic or imaginative creation, even though one might certainly argue that each in its own way is a construction.

There are several reasons why such a juxtaposition can be justified:

- (1) Both types of account deal with social structural relationships of Mt. Hagen Society.
- (2) Both are interpretive recreations of these relations and structures, at least to some degree.

- (3) Both are "literary texts", one created or recreated by professional anthropologists, the other created or recreated by male members of Mt. Hagen society.

In part of this thesis I argue that two of the dominant anthropological approaches to the study of relationships between women and men in Highland New Guinea in general, and in Mt. Hagen in particular, are too limited and thus somewhat distorting in their interpretations of these complex relations. Not that these two approaches do not give us insights which are important; but when they seek to extend their insights into other domains they may at best be misleading in their conclusions. The two approaches I have in mind here are what I call the "pollution paradigm" and the "political paradigm". Both views have one basic feature in common: women, in their interpretive schemes, are outsiders, people who do not fit in, who exist in the interstices of the social structure, who are "in between". Thus roughly half of the population in any New Guinea Highland society is relegated to the fringes of the social order, to a sort of Gypsy status. Yet it is a curious ethnographic fact that these 'outsiders' are the real backbone or foundation of the social order. Not only are they the reproducers, but they are also to a large extent the producers of the wealth on which not

only the prestige of the men depends, but upon which the whole political structure rests.

Even though the two approaches share these fundamental premises, their emphases are rather different, or, to put it differently, their deployment of the ethnographic materials follows different dictates, depending on their theoretical framework. One focuses on women as biological, reproductive beings, the other on women's 'sociological' inferiority. For the one, women are an ever-present polluting danger which threatens male purity, strength, integrity, physical well-being, and even life. The other approach focuses on the fact that women are "structurally untrustworthy" because they come from different groups of males. Even though the pollution approach deduces women's polluting power from structural premises within the social setting, the emphasis is, however, on their bodily dangers to men.

While the narrower and thus more easily definable "pollution paradigm" is traceable to a particular important study by Mary Douglas (Douglas 1978), the "political paradigm" is much more diffuse. It is part of our mental landscape and integral to the way we (Europeans) view and interpret societies and social interaction. This is particularly the case in Social

Anthropology due to the enormous influence of Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1956). But it has much deeper roots in our cultural tradition, reaching back even to our Greek and Roman heritage. There in the early formations and developments of city states the important transformation from clan-based to civic-based institutions took place. This transformation was reflected in major changes in law (Maine: 1861, and, hence, in Europeans' very corruptions of society. Durkheim's teacher, Fustel de Coulanges was one of the first important scholars who described and interpreted this process in his The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws and Institutions of Greece and Rome, which he published in 1864 (Coulanges, F. de 1956). Most importantly, at least in terms of the consequences for Social Anthropology, he showed the role religion played in this development. As Talcott Parsons points out:

Fustel gave the classic account of the fusion of religion and civic commitment in the polis; it served as a model for Durkheim's analysis of Australian Totemism. (Parsons et al 1961:645)

But Coulanges did not only show how religion changed with the development from the family based clans or gentes to city-based social organizations, but also how religious beliefs had a formative influence on these

transformed urban institutions. The city, or citivas, became the center of religious activity (Coulanges 1956:134) which, prior to that transformation, had been clan based. However, with the emphasis, on the part of the Durkheimian School, on the function of religion and religious ritual in solidifying group cohesion and solidarity seen as, the importance of religion in the shaping of social institutions was neglected. Since religion and religious beliefs were seen as merely ideology or superstition, they were not studied as an important social force, independent of their political function.

With the acceptance of Durkheimian functionalism by Social Anthropologists, of which the most important theoretical spokesman was Radcliffe-Brown (Radcliffe-Brown 1965), religious and secular rituals became the important focus points for political affirmation and claims to power. All public or semi-public ceremony or ritual thus became "politicized". The public sphere, the civitas, became the center and focal point of society, in contrast to which other social spheres were viewed.

It is this ascendancy of the 'political' which I attempt to sum up in the concept of the "political paradigm" which has been and still is pervasive in many



anthropological works. It is embedded so deeply in our Weltanschauung that we are not aware of it. Significantly, even many feminist writers operate within this paradigm rather than confronting it as an object of study.

Mary Douglas in her important book Purity and Danger (1978) has laid the theoretical foundations for the pollution paradigm which is reflected in many a study of male/female relations in diverse societies. This is the reason why I discuss her views in considerable length. Douglas provided anthropologists with a new paradigm to study male/female relationships one which proved to be very influential in New Guinea Highland ethnography in particular. Hers is basically a functionalist approach: that is, pollution beliefs are seen to do certain important jobs in these societies, the most important of which is their social control function.

Mary Douglas sets out three types of pollution beliefs that characterize different societies:

- (1) "A kind of sex pollution which expresses a desire to keep the body (physical and social) intact" (Douglas 1978:140).
- (2) "Another kind of sex pollution arises from the desire to keep straight the internal lines of the social system" (Douglas 1978:140).

- (3) "A third type may arise from the conflict in the aims which can be proposed in the same culture", that is in societies that hold two or more contradictory principles that govern human behaviour and interaction (Douglas 1978:140).

New Guinea Highland societies are characterized by this third type and I will therefore restrict myself to an explication and discussion of it alone.

In the chapter, "The System at War with Itself" Douglas sets out the conditions that prevail in such societies. Again I will limit myself to those conditions that are relevant to New Guinea society:

a) The distinction between the sexes is also the primary social distinction in these societies. On this distinction rest important social institutions. (Douglas 1978:140).

b) In societies where the "social structure is strictly articulated ... we find pollution ideas enlisted to bind men and women to their allotted roles"; societies with "weakly organized" social structures need no such beliefs. (Douglas 1978:140-1) (Douglas does not explicate what she means by 'weak' or 'strict' in this context.)

c) Societies in which "sexual roles are enforced directly" are likely to be without pollution beliefs. (Douglas 1978:141) Since this point is important in the

contrast Douglas draws with New Guinea Highland societies which do not have the "de facto possibility of coercing women", but on the contrary are guided by the "principle which protects women from physical control" (Douglas 1978:149), I will quote in full the passage of the description of the Walbiri of Central Australia which serve as a contrast for Douglas:

A strict discipline is asserted throughout the community, young are subjected to their seniors, and above all, women are subject to men. A married woman usually lives at a distance from her father and brothers. This means that though she has a theoretical claim to their protection, in practice it is null. She is in the control of her husband. As a general rule if the female sex were completely subject to the male, no problem would be posed by the principle of male dominance. It could be enforced ruthlessly and directly wherever it applied. This seems to be what happens among the Walbiri. For the least complaint or neglect of duty Walbiri women are beaten or speared. No blood compensation can be claimed for a wife killed by her husband, and no one has the right to intervene between husband and wife. Public opinion never reproaches the man who has violently, or even lethally, asserted his authority over his wife. Thus, it is impossible for a woman to play off one man against another. However energetically they may try to seduce one another's wives the men are in perfect accord on one point. They are agreed that they should never allow their sexual desires to give an individual woman bargaining power or scope for intrigue.

These people have no beliefs concerning sex pollution (Douglas 1978:141).

Even though Douglas does not specify what she means by such terms as 'coercion' or 'physical control', the above quotation makes it clear that she means plain brutal force.

However, Douglas points out that it "is important to recognize that male dominance does not always flourish with such ruthless simplicity" (Douglas 1978:142). And yet, she goes on to suggest a "correlation" on the basis of the Walbiri case by stating:

When male dominance is accepted as a central principle of social organization and applied without inhibition and with full rights of physical coercion, beliefs in sex pollution are not likely to be highly developed. On the other hand, when the principle of male dominance is applied to the ordering of social life but is contradicted by other principles such as that of female independence, or the inherent right of women as the weaker sex to be more protected from violence than men, then sex pollution is likely to flourish (Douglas 1978:142).

Douglas does not explain what she means by phrases such as "the inherent right of women as the weaker sex to be more protected from violence than men". Also it is not quite clear what this would come down to as 'principle'. However, what might be implied is that if a society has one important principle, such as male dominance, then, in order to be consistent or not at 'war with itself', the addition of any contrary

principle would create problems of a kind the Walbiri in their rigorous consistency do not need to face. Many societies, including New Guinea Highland societies, do recognize women as the 'weaker sex', but whether they are therefore more protected from violence than men is (so it seems) rather a questionable assumption.

d) Another characteristic of societies with pollution beliefs is that men tend to marry women from groups with which they frequently fight. Thus wives from the start are considered untrustworthy and likely to betray their husbands.

e) Difficulties, which may find expression in pollution beliefs arise in those societies that follow two contradictory principles: the principle of male domination and the principle which protects women from physical control. The latter gives "women scope to play off one man against another, and so to confound the principle of male dominance" (Douglas 1978:149).

f) But the following societies are especially conflict-ridden:

The whole society is especially likely to be founded on a contradiction if the system is one in which men define their status in terms of rights over women. If there is free competition between the men, this gives scope for a discontented woman to turn to her husband's or her guardian's rivals,

gain new protectors and new allegiance, and so to dissolve into nothing the structure of rights and duties which had formerly been built around her. This sort of contradiction in the social system arises only if there is no de facto possibility of coercing women (Douglas 1978:149).

New Guinea societies belong to this last type.

All these characteristics actually boil down to two points. First, these societies are not organized consistently in that they institute contradictory principles. Second, men, while claiming dominance, have, for some reason, not instituted the necessary control over women who then are able to undermine this dominance. In other words, men are lacking the political will to assert their power with the necessary "ruthless simplicity". They have given women too much Lebensraum. It is in these types of societies that pollution ideas flourish.

Thus, to sum up the Douglas position, pollution ideas function to control women which other structures fail to achieve. But while I think Douglas is right in seeing that pollution ideas create control, I think it is too simplistic to say that they control women. To some extent, they also control the men who believe in them and, as a result (I would go so far as to suggest), the pollution beliefs give women a measure of power and

independence. (For a somewhat related point see Meig 1976.)

In the Highland New Guinea ethnographic literature, the group endangered by pollution is usually the husband's group. But perhaps alliance theory and the emphasis on the competitive exchange systems has somewhat skewed the ethnographic representation. After all, the "good wife" is perceived to be the wife who sides with her husband's group. But more importantly, if we can take oral literature and myth as being a fair indication of social relations, as we shall see in the next section, here we have a picture in which women, qua wives and sisters, are frequently depicted as being capable of damaging either group of men. I have always found it curious and somewhat puzzling, that the very bodily polluting powers of women, which give considerable scope to control and manipulate others (including even the power of life and death over their husbands) are, in the functionalist scheme of things, seen as a mechanism or instrument of control over women. While the repressive aspect of the pollution paradigm has come to be taken for granted in anthropology, very little, if anything, tends to be said about the more positive aspects for women: of what powers pollution might give them in their interrelationship with men. It

is usually pointed out how pollution dangers, menstruation huts and seclusion are effective means of keeping women out of the political domain. But in doing this, do they not ipso facto, create another domain from which men are excluded? The positive consequences which such institutions and beliefs might have for women remain largely unanalyzed; indeed, as a result of our tendency to accept the primacy of the public domain of political offices and authority, one might say these positive consequences remain largely unimagined, and hence they remain undiscovered.

Moreover, it seems to me that rather than being a means of control, pollution beliefs might be seen as actually increasing tensions between women and men, rather than making women more pliable. It seems to me, that conflict between the sexes is increased with such beliefs rather than abated. Mary Douglas does speak of the system as being at war with itself, but only in the sense that men have institutionalized two contradictory principles: 1) male superiority and 2) the protection of women from violence.

Pollution beliefs are in this context seen by Douglas as bridging the gap between the two principles, and in particular as acting to overcome the second principle's negative consequences, in fulfillment of the



more general function of keeping women in their places. Thus pollution beliefs are instituted in order to overcome male weakness or inconsistency in formulating principles of how the society is to be governed.

Another problem with Douglas' model is that it seems to "import" a model of human behaviour or institution which is distinctly derived from her own (modern industrial) society. She is in effect taking the model of modern industrial society, or even medieval feudal societies, where an extensive and developed legal system supported in large measure the interest, and even the actual rule of a minute percentage of the population over the majority of the population. This model sees, on the one hand, "rulers and exploiters" and on the other "ruled and exploited". Men in general or as a category are the rulers and women are ruled; men lay down the principles and women act accordingly. Yet, as Vicedom and almost all ethnographers of New Guinea Highland society have claimed, there are at least three strata of men: the small percentage of "big men", the vast majority of ordinary horticulturalists and the small group of dependent "rubbish men". These groups together, hardly constitute a ruling class, not even over women; their status, power, and interests are simply too diverse for this to be the case.

I am not maintaining that women do not have inferior or less valued roles and that they are not, in important respects, dependent on their husbands, fathers and brothers. Nor am I maintaining that they play significant political roles. But what I do want to suggest is that this is not all there is to their social power. It is critical to understand how these institutions are seen from a woman's point of view, and where women's powers lie, if indeed they have any.

Andrew Strathern seems to me to take a limited view in the above sense, when he suggests that men's exploitation of women leads men to accept inequality among themselves (A. Strathern 1979). Yet, Modjeska warns that too much inequality between men undermines their collective exploitation of women, (Modjeska 1982:108). Thus the collective exploitation of women requires men to maintain a proper balance of inequality among themselves. (Exploitation for both A. Strathern and Modjeska means the extraction of surplus value from the productive labour of women which is necessitated by the maintenance of the exchange system.)

Pollution beliefs have received a wide range of interpretations from anthropologists (Dwyer 1978, Sillitoe 1985, Quinn 1977). In most cases they are seen as having some sort of control function. Modjeska

suggests that "it may be that women's influence in marriage arrangements and the threat posed for male interests are factors in the propagation of the extreme ideologies of sexual pollution ..." (Modjeska 1982:66).

Interesting as this suggestion might be, no account or hint is given, of how this function is supposed to work in practice, unless one goes back to the Douglas point about the control function of such beliefs. One may guess that the assumption is that since women have some say in the marriage arrangements, once they are married, they need to be kept under greater control and this job is to be accomplished by pollution beliefs. What is lurking at the back of these views, I suggest, is a version of the 'slippery slope argument', which assumes that if people are given some rights or autonomy, they take it all.

What these accounts almost totally ignore is the fact that men's sexual fluids are polluting too (Faithorn 1975); in Mt. Hagen semen is dangerous to the fetus and the young child while the mother is nursing it (M. Strathern 1972:168). Moreover, a woman can harm and even kill a husband by mixing his own semen into the food she has prepared for him (M. Strathern 1972:168). Yet, so far as I know, men's polluting powers have not been made a subject of detailed investigations.

Lindenbaum, in discussing Fore pollution concepts has suggested that female pollution beliefs function to control population growth (Lindenbaum 1976). Since sexual intercourse is taboo during menstruation and after the birth of a child, such beliefs are seen to function to keep the birthrate down (Lindenbaum 1976). Yet birthrates are generally rather low in Highland New Guinea in any case (P. Brown 1978:102-3). Moreover, women are least likely to conceive during these times anyhow, so one wonders whether these beliefs could possibly have this function. Men, at least in Mt. Hagen, are very concerned about fertility. Almost all important rituals have it as part of their manifest purpose, so why should they institute principles that even further lower the birthrate. I suppose one could argue that this is just another case of contradictory principles, a society at war with itself, but this is not really a very satisfactory answer.

In order to fully understand the significance of Mt. Hagen women's menstrual blood as a pollutant, one needs, I think, to see it within the context of all substances that are polluting to some people at certain times and in certain contexts. As we have seen even semen can be polluting. This raises the question of whether it is the particular substance that is polluting

or of whether the substance is polluting because a reproducing woman uses it.

As I have already indicated, what I call the "political paradigm" also portrays women as dangerous outsiders but for different reasons. The emphasis within this paradigm is on women's interstitial position between two groups of men. New Guinea Highland societies were first studied when group and alliance theories were theoretically prominent in anthropology. Local groups of men, usually clans or lineages, under the leadership of Big Men were seen as being involved in a never-ending quest for prestige expressed and culminating in their periodically-held large exchanges and displays of wealth such as the Moka in Mt. Hagen and the Te in Enga. (The Moka and Te are perhaps the most well known complex and extensive exchange systems in New Guinea. See A. Strathern 1971 and Meggitt 1974.) Women were not only the main producers of this wealth but they themselves became an important item of exchange within that system or at least a means to establish new alliances and/or exchange networks. Moreover, women were excluded from the important fertility rituals which concerned themselves with the supply of progeny, pigs and shells.

I am not concerned here to challenge the basic assumptions of this interpretative framework or the possible inadequacies of this paradigm; my immediate concern is in how women were viewed within the system by anthropologists. However, I might note in passing that this approach is too onesided and inadequate to tackle the complex question of relations between women and men in this society.

In their introduction to Man and Woman in the New Guinea Highlands (1976), Paula Brown and Georgeda Buchbinder point to the ambivalent and "antagonistic relations between the sexes" that are a "prevailing theme" throughout the whole area. (Brown and Buchbinder 1976:1) They generalize that "much of the public activity of men is devoted to the simultaneous wooing and dominating of women, with the aim of impressing both the women and their male relations". (Brown and Buchbinder 1976:1) Even though women as wives make "an important contribution" to the economic and political spheres by producing "food, pigs, children, and goods obtained in exchange for them" these "contributions" are seen by the editors as belonging to the "domestic sphere" (Brown and Buchbinder 1976:7). This trivialization of the "products" on which the prestige

of males in the political arena depends, has deep roots in Social Anthropology.

Evans-Pritchard's most influential study of the Nuer, or to be more precise, of the Nuer political system, is just such a case in point. (Evans-Pritchard 1940) The main focus in that and other African studies was the solidarity and cohesion of the local groups of men whose main preoccupation was seen to reside in their political strategies for power and prestige. Other cultural domains were seen and interpreted as "support systems" for the overriding political system. Concentrating too exclusively on one aspect of a society, namely the political sphere, and by relegating other domains to auxiliary positions and seeing these other spheres only as contributions to the political solidarity of groups of men has led to the neglect of independent in-depth studies of these spheres. I am not maintaining that anthropologists have totally neglected these other domains. Evans Pritchard is again a good example with his complex study of Nuer religion which followed some years later. (Evans-Pritchard 1956) But even these studies, too, were seen too much in terms of the political structure, the solidarity and cohesion of groups of men, rather than the society as a whole.

It is one thing to say that women are repressed by being kept out of the religious ritual domain. It is quite another to say that the political structure makes it inopportune and even dangerous to include women in this domain. One sees the exclusion as an instrument of political repression while the other sees it as a consequence of the very social and political structure. (For some other approaches see Quinn 1977, Kelly 1978, Kelly unpublished MS, M. Strathern 1987.) These two aspects are not just different sides of the same coin; far from it. It is relatively easy to give a functional explanation of a given institution. To give an explanation of why a society has the political structure it has, is quite another thing.

New Guinea Highland societies are generally described as displaying antagonism between men and women. But, to make a conceptual point, in order for there to be antagonism between two groups, both groups must have access to some source of independent power, otherwise there could be no antagonism; that is, if one takes the term in its dictionary usage where it is defined as "the state of being opposed or hostile to another or to each other" (Webster 1970:57). In other words, both partners, to be antagonistic, need to have enough strength or power to oppose or be hostile to the



other. However, there is also a psychological dimension to the term. It could also mean "intense deep-seated dislike or ill-will" implying also "a temperamental or constitutional basis for one's hatred or dislike" (Webster's 1942:296).

It is questionable whether the more psychological dimensions of the term "antagonism" adequately describe or interpret relationships between men and women in New Guinea. Yet if we go back to the earlier definition above, power on both sides seems to be presupposed.

M. Strathern seems to be hinting at this in her interpretation of pollution beliefs in Mt. Hagen:

"Perhaps some of the anxieties which men display about women stem from their misgiving that they have transferred too much power to them.  
(M. Strathern 1972:184)

But, as we have seen, she interprets this 'anxiety' as stemming from women's interstitial role between groups of men. But the quotation is also exemplary in terms of the assumptions which it makes about Mt. Hagen Society. Men are said to be anxious because they have "transferred" too much power to women. The assumption is that only men have access to power which they then either can hold in their own hands or delegate to others, in degrees they see fit. Here, again, the

"political" side of things is the measure and standard for all other domains.

This frame of interpretation not only begs many questions, but, as I hope to show, it is moreover inadequate to explicate the complex relationships between men and women in Mt. Hagen, and the complex of ideas associated with these relationships.

Others have questioned the traditional assumptions. L.L. Langness in his concluding discussion in Men and Women in the New Guinea Highland (Langness 1976:96-106) welcomes the trend towards symbolic anthropology even though he expresses some misgivings about the theoretical foundations of such approaches. Perhaps the most serious challenges come from Elizabeth Faithorn's article "Women as Persons" (1976). She points to several factors that may have impeded the adequate study of women and women's role in New Guinea Highland societies: (Faithorn 1976:86-87)

- First: The extensive use of Pidgin as a field language limits communication with male informants even on the part of female ethnographers.
- Second: Even if the language used is that of the informants it is difficult to get information from women, even if the anthropologist is a woman (who may still be classified as a man in the field).
- Third: Anthropologists have assumed, because of the divisions of male/female domains, that "members of each sex are not fully

cognizant of the general activities, interest responsibilities, and beliefs of the other sex."

Consequently, ethnographers usually consulted women only about domestic concerns, while discussing public and political matters only with men. Marilyn Strathern being a notable exception.

Fourth: Relations between the sexes have been studied by focusing on "sexual segregation, male dominance/female subservience and male purity/female pollution", rather than in the wider context of social relations.

Fifth: By stressing antagonistic relations between men and women, "discord between spouses may have been generalized to an underlying hostility between males and females" (Faithorn 1976:94).

Langness has responded to some of these criticisms by pointing out that women in Highland New Guinea are after all excluded from certain domains, that relations are antagonistic, about which there is agreement in New Guinea Highland Ethnography. But all the same, it seems to me that some of Faithorn's points are well-taken. Take just the last point about the hostile and antagonistic relations between the sexes. True enough, there is a great deal of discord and disagreement between men and women but so also is there between men within the lineages or family groupings. Yet, so far as I know, anthropologists tend not to describe these relations as hostile and antagonistic even though, given the general competitive nature of relations between and

within such groups, there is plenty of observable discord and hostility.

When ethnographers compare the status of women in Highland societies, they generally state that the status of Mt. Hagen women is higher than elsewhere. But there are also dissenting voices that claim the opposite. There has been no dearth of possible explanations in order to account for this apparent difference. However, in any assessment of these arguments one also has to consider the fact that in no other New Guinea Highland society has there been such an in-depth analysis of relations between women and men as that done by Marilyn Strathern among the Mt. Hagen People, to name only one ethnographers. The Hageners are perhaps the only Highland people for which there is such a wealth of detailed analyses available. This is not only due to the extraordinary efforts of Marilyn Strathern and Andrew Strathern who have given detailed accounts and interpretations of the Mt. Hagen People from the early 1960's on, but it is also due to the unusual efforts of the "missionary-anthropologists" G. Vicedom and H. Strauss who made a point to describe, analyze and interpret Mt. Hagen society not only from the time of the first European contacts in 1934 to 1939 but also after World War II.

I am not suggesting here that there is a correlation between female oppression and dearths of documentation. Yet it remains a fact that the relationships of males and females among the Mt. Hagen people have been analyzed in greater synchronic and diachronic depth than in any other Highland society. Moreover, what emerges is a much more complex picture of these relationships than what one gets in the briefer accounts of other societies.

Vicedom was the first to point out that Mt. Hagen women "occupy a higher status" (Vicedom und Tischner II:232) than women elsewhere in New Guinea. He maintains that Hagen women are considered full and near equal members of society. Vicedom compared the status of Hagen women primarily with that of women in the Gulf and Huon Peninsular. Yet even within the Highland region itself the literature in general portrays a considerable male/female antagonism which is expressed in similar ways throughout the Highlands. Women are excluded from important rituals. They are considered dangerous and polluting to males due to their female anatomy. And they are considered less rational and reliable. It is interesting to note, that Hagen women share all these characteristics with other women of the

Highland societies, and still their status is reported to be higher.

Meggitt was one of the first who tried to account for these differences in a systematic fashion (Meggitt 1964). He tried to establish correlations between the status differences and variables in other social relations that might account for the status difference of women in several New Guinea Highland societies.

On the basis of a detailed comparison between the Mae Enga and the Kuma (both neighbors of the Mt. Hagen people) Meggitt suggests that there are "at least two kinds of inter-sexual conflict or opposition - the Mae type and the Kuma type" of which the Mae type is said to reflect "the anxiety of prudes to protect themselves from contamination by women" and the Kuma type to reflect "the aggressive determination of lechers to assert their control over recalcitrant women" (Meggitt 1964:221). While the Mae Enga men have, so to speak, won the battle of the sexes and "have relegated women to an inferior position", Kuma women "fight hard to assert their independence after marriage" (Meggitt 1964:220). While Mae Enga men live in fear of sexual pollution "even though they have won the battle of the sexes, Kuma men show no great concern about this even though among the Kuma there is "deeprooted antagonism between the

sexes". (Meggitt 1964:220) Kuma men try to gain control over Kuma women but "are not always successful in this so that in many respect Kuma women enjoy a relatively high social status" (Meggitt 1964:220). According to Meggitt the Hageners belong to the Kuma type. Meggitt's interpretation of pollution beliefs differs significantly from that of Douglas: he seems to be suggesting that the more control men have over women, the more men have to fear female pollution.

Interestingly, Daryl K. Feil comes to the opposite conclusion about the status differences of women among the Mae Enga and the Mt. Hagen people (Feil 1982). Whereas Meggitt focuses on the relations between groups of men (that is the political structure), Feil in his essay focuses on production. Among the Melpa, as elsewhere in the New Guinea Highlands women are the producers of pigs. However, with the ascendancy of pearlshells as the most valuable exchange commodity, the prime value of pigs which prevailed prior to monetization (or the increased use of shell currency) has diminished, and with it the importance of the value of female labour in production. Shells do not need to be fed. Feil argues, following from this, that the incorporation of pearl shells has "heightened and extended" the "exploitation between the sexes". (Feil

1982:295) While among the Enga both women and men have "a near-equal say" in the decision about the exchange of pigs, among the Melpa women "can exert moral coercion" only (Feil 1982:295) Melpa women have no say over the exchange of pearlshells. While Feil may have somewhat overstated his case, he still provides an important argument in support Marilyn Strathern's attribution of women's lower status to the fact that, economically, they are primarily producers as compared to the higher status of men who are, economically, transactors. (Strathern, A.J. and Strathern, A.M. 1968). Feil, of course would add producers of pigs as compared with transactors of shells (Feil 1982:295).

In her arguments against Meggitt, Marilyn Strathern makes the important point that:

what women do or think, what men do or think about them is as complex a sphere as any other domain of social life. (M. Strathern 1972:x)

She goes on to stress that perhaps a more useful method to deal with complex problems would be to:

"use dialectic, alternatively weighing up positive and negative factors" ... as Vicedom had done in his assessment of the status of women in Hagen. (M. Strathern 1972:x)

The term 'status' can of course take on different meanings, depending on the context of its use. When



Meggitt uses the term in its legalistic sense he leaves no doubt about what he means by women's status: "In jural terms, for instance, a woman remains throughout her life a minor (the ward of her father, brother, husband or son) denied any title to valuable property" (Meggitt 1964:220-221). Yet, when he talks about women's wider social positions in New Guinea Highland societies, he talks in terms of "women's status" as being 'highest' in certain societies as compared with other societies (Meggitt 1964:222). And even though M. Strathern uses such terms as "judicial status", "political status" and "peripheral status" to describe certain aspects of women's roles in Mt. Hagen society, she speaks of the "impossibility of making a unique definition (e.g. as high or low) of women's status by comparison with men's (M. Strathern 1972:290).

Feil too questions whether 'status' is a useful enough concept as an analytical tool to sum up women's role in Highland societies. "The whole concept of status, as an all-encompassing evaluation of women, is perhaps too nebulous to be of much analytical value" (Feil 1978:275). In the same essay he also questions the all too readily made assumption that pollution beliefs about woman have a direct or automatic bearing on her status in all domains of social life. As he puts

it, "Does the view of woman as polluting go with her in every context?" It seems to me that, ever since Mary Douglas' Purity and Danger, anthropologists have too readily made this assumption in the interpretation of such beliefs and social practices. Pollution, repression, and low status are generally all too quickly linked and assumptions or practices in one domain are transferred to another. What is in need of nuanced explanation is treated as being functionally or symbolically interrelated.

It may be opportune at this point to look at the literature of the early ethnographers of the Mt. Hagen People in order to see how they depicted and interpreted women's status in particular, and male/female relations in general.

As I have already indicated in my discussion of Marilyn Strathern, Vicedom tries to strike some balance between the more negative and positive aspects relating to women's status. In one section of his work (Vicedom und Tischner II:227-32) he deals specifically with the status of women in Hagen society. In his discussion he makes the important point that "the status of women is not reducible to one common denominator" (Vicedom und Tischner II:231). He stresses that relations between men and women are easygoing and that women are "treated

as full members" of the society in the daily interactions. As Vicedom puts it: "Zwischen den beiden Geschlechtern am Hagenberg herrscht ein naturlicher Umgang und Verkehr. ... sie (die Frau) wird in der Gesellschaft als vollwertig genommen. (Vicedom und Tischner II:228). But of course, this does not imply complete equality in all spheres. Women have little control over property, and they have no say in warfare and other political matters.

And yet, compared with other New Guinea societies, Hagen women have "an exceptionally high status", as he put it, (eine glanzende Stellung). And if they used their position intelligently they could have considerable influence upon the affairs of men, (Vicedom und Tischner II:228).

Women, he goes on, are not just an exchange item between two groups of men but have a say in the choice of their marriage partners. Vicedom stresses that a woman is not "just used" by her father and kin but is an active decision-maker in some spheres (Vicedom and Tischner II:228).

An important point needs to be made here, one generally not stressed in the literature. If a woman has in large measure not only some say in the matter of her marriage, but also in important ways determines who

her husband will be, then, by the logic of the argument, her political power cannot be inconsiderable, although it is a power which anthropologists have not been inclined to recognize as such. After all, a considerable part of a man's exchange network is made up of affines who also help to determine his prestige. (Vicedom und Tischner 1943-8, A. Strathern 1971, M. Strathern 1972) The steps leading to marriage are the following: when a woman comes of marriageable age, her parents arrange courting parties for her and other young unmarried women, to which the eligible men of the surrounding villages come in order to dance. During these dances the women choose their future husbands in public and in their parents' presence (Vicedom und Tischner II:193-4). If all goes well, the proper negotiations take place, and the wife joins her husband's group. This is not to say that the woman always gets her way; after all wealth has to be exchanged between the two groups, and the husband's group has to pay the bridewealth and her kin have to pay about half the value of the bridewealth to the husbands group. If a woman should be forced into marriage, she has several options that can range from non-cooperation to suicide. Fathers and especially brothers often depend on smooth exchange relations with affines, which can

readily be disrupted by a woman unwilling to cooperate. Moreover, Vicedom points out, forced marriages usually end very soon after the arrangement. The woman leaves and joins the man of her choice. Her father then has no other choice but to start negotiations with her new husband and his group (Vicedom und Tischner II:194).

Thus it seems to me that when ethnographers state that women have no political power, such statements need to be qualified, to say the least. Moreover, when ethnographers report that women have no say in matters of war, this too needs major qualifications. True enough, only men are directly involved in warfare, but a woman can be the cause of war between two groups. Women's "in between" position also makes them the natural mediators and being a mediator between two groups confers a certain power to manipulate. It is a well documented ethnographic fact that warfare in the Highlands is due in large measure to women; it is not just 'over' women.

Vicedom states that in her house and in her gardens a woman rules (Vicedom und Tischner II:229). Men have not much say in that sphere. Even though men prepare the gardens she decides what, when and how much to grow. Even in the most important male domain, the Moka, she has considerable input: not only does she have some

right of control over the distribution of pigs but also of certain valuables, such as shells (Vicedom und Tischner II:229). She can, as Vicedom points out, be part of a Moka chain where she has complete control over her input, but yet she cannot be the transactor: she has to be represented by her husband. One could argue, and it has been argued, that the very fact that she cannot be an independent transactor, demonstrates her inferior position in the scheme of things, as I have pointed out earlier in discussing 'status'. The very fact that she is not a transactor shows her dependency and jural inequality as Meggitt has stressed by pointing to her exclusion as a participant in public affairs (Meggitt 1964:221). But generalizations from one sphere to another have to be made with caution. This is especially true for generalizations from the symbolic domain to others.

In order to make explicit what I mean here, I shall give an example. Marilyn Strathern in her essay "Self-interest and social good: some implications of Hagen gender imagery" (M. Strathern 1981), describes a case in which she took some women in a truck which was owned by several people, (including Strathern herself) to another settlement. The women were riding in the cab of the truck. When they returned, the men of the settlement

were angry and told the women, that their places were in the back of the truck, not in the men's place, the cab. During the argument which ensued, the subject shifted until it became a dispute between the men over the use of the truck for consumption rather than production. At one point a minor big man said he would withdraw his investment in the truck. The others agreed. However, when it came to the actual return of the money, the big man was put into an embarrassing situation. It became clear, that most of the money had in fact come from his wife and sister, who both refused to withdraw their money, which they had paid through the big man.

No one objected or chided the women for taking this position and everybody thought they had a right to defend their interest. The big man and husband was powerless; there was nothing he could do to force the women to withdraw their share which they gave in exchange for use-rights in the truck. He withdrew his small portion of the investment and the women kept their investment in the truck. What is most interesting in this case is that, even though the big man acted as the initial transactor, representing the women's share, neither this action nor his position as a male, gave him the unfettered right to dictate the use of the women's money. He could not withdraw it without their consent.

Their interests as owners overrode his political and symbolic status as a transactor. It seems to me one can reasonably conclude from this example, that the status of a political transactor might not carry quite the weight that is suggested in many a New Guinea Highland ethnography. The right to represent does not necessarily translate into unconditional power which can be generalized into all other domains of social interaction.

Vicedom points out that the very fact that she is considered polluting during menstruation and after the birth of a child gives a woman considerable power ("eine ziemliche Gewalt uber die Manner") which she can make use of under certain circumstances (Vicedom und Tischner II:231). Women enjoy, so to speak, a two-to-three month "maternity leave" after the birth of a child. During this time they stay in a separate hut, cannot cook for the husband, and cannot work in the gardens. As Vicedom states, during this time they are exempt from work. Men have to provide for themselves or depend on other women. The belief in the polluting effect of menstrual blood is thus a double edged sword. On the one hand it precludes women from taking part in certain affairs of the group but on the other, the very fact that men believe it can harm and even kill them, may be seen to give women a



measure of power and independence. They can even use this power to prevent ceremonial exchanges or sacrifice from taking place. (Vicedom uses the terms "Feste und Opfer" and Moka is considered a "Fest" Vicedom und Tischner II:231).

All feasts and sacrifices take place during the Full Moon (Vicedom und Tischner II:231). Not only is women's labour input essential on such occasion as feasts and large sacrifices but men want the women to be present, Vicedom points out. Women can prevent such events from happening as planned by withdrawing into the huts. Vicedom uses here even stronger terms by saying that "Durch die Absonderung durchkreuzen die Frauen oft die Plane der Männer" (Vicedom und Tischner II:231). Even though Vicedom uses the term 'often ("oft") such wrecking of plans probably does not happen that frequently.

Vicedom also points out, that whenever the pressure of her husband becomes too strong, women simply withdraw into the menstrual hut (Vicedom und Tischner II:231). To cite Vicedom: "Wird ein Mann seiner Frau gegenüber zu aufdringlich und lässt sie nicht in Ruhe, so zieht sie sich einfach in die Absonderungshütte zurück, wohin ihr kein Mann folgt." Vicedom is discussing here not only the power pollution gives women in general, but

also the decided or definite influence ("bestimmten Einfluss") they have in economic matters (I suppose he means production and the exchanges, which he just discussed in the prior paragraphs). However, there is a lingering problem: Do women make use of their power, do they withdraw into the menstrual hut with the purpose of withdrawing their services at crucial points? I think the tenor of Vicedom's discussion suggest that women may indeed sometimes withdraw their services even when they do not actually menstruate. But even if this were not the case, men still appear to have anxieties over women's possible polluting powers during ceremonies of exchange and sacrifices, since prior to these events men call in a ritual specialist who performs a rite during which they mark a woman's navel with a white cross or X in order to prevent menstruation. In other words, it seems that men try to gain ritual control over events which they cannot possibly control by any other means. I shall come back to this point later.

According to Vicedom, women also wield considerable power over the life or death of their children and can thereby determine the size of their families. One particular power they do make use of in that they are in a position to kill the newborn "out of revenge", "anger" or simply because they "do not want to bother" (Vicedom

und Tischner II:24). Apparently Vicedom has witnessed such events since he was often present at birth to provide some help in difficult cases. He moreover states that he knew a woman who had practiced infanticide four times (Vicedom und Tischner II:242).

Abortions are also practiced, sometimes with the knowledge of the husband (who then might perform it), sometimes without (Vicedom und Tischner II:235-6). These actions moreover, can be said to be institutionalized in the sense that a woman, if she performs them, has to pay compensation for killing a newborn or for performing an abortion, in the event that her husband finds out that she had an abortion (Vicedom und Tischner II:235). If she does not have the compensation she goes to her kin who will have to provide her with the necessary payment.

Vicedom points out that infanticide does occur but not too frequently. Abortions are performed more frequently or "viel haufiger" (Vicedom und Tischner II:242). Younger couples often do not want children during the first years of their marriage - women seem to be keener about this than men, but the latter also often appear to concur in such practices. The reason for this may lie in the husband's eagerness to build up a pig herd, so that he can enter into the exchange networks. Child care, after all, detracts "from a woman's

potential as a garden worker and pig producer." (Modjeska 89) As with modern yuppies, children, it seems, can be deferred by young, upwardly, mobile Highlanders in New Guinea.

Vicedom points out that while women are totally dependent on men when it comes to religious matters, they are excluded from cults and rituals and there are no female medicine men or healers. That sort of magical activity seems to be the prerogative of men. Yet the very fact that through their sex women do possess a distinct category of powers over which men have little, if any, control. Men, as Vicedom stresses, are dependent on women because of their need of childbearing services (Vicedom und Tischner II:231). In other words, their monopoly over reproduction provides women with some measure of control.

All things considered, Vicedom comes to the surprizingly candid conclusion that women's lot and status are "not worse" than "that of the men" (Vicedom und Tischner II:232).

This evaluation, or rather this "dialectic" of "alternatively weighing up positive and negative factors" might strike the reader as a bit trite and perhaps as trivializing women's plight in New Guinea Highland society. It hardly accords with the picture

one has come to expect of Highland women's status or position. However, that received image of women's status might at least partly be due to the somewhat distorting perspective which later anthropologists brought to the field and by the very research projects they approached the Highlands with. As social anthropologists they were basically interested in the composition and constellation of group formations and their interaction. They were interested in the political organizations and especially the complex and elaborate exchange networks in which men or groups of men defined their status and power. One needs only to taken a cursory glance at the most influential ethnographies to be aware of the slant: Huli of Papua: A cognatic descent system, The lineage system of the Mae Enga of New Guinea, Descent and group structure among the Mbowamb, One Father, One Blood, The Rope of Moka. Since women were generally excluded from direct political action and since they cannot be independent transactors and thus accumulators of this male-centered prestige and status domain and since they were portrayed merely as unimportant producers, it was assumed or implied that women had also no status or power in other domains. But if Vicedom is right, such extensions into

non-political domains, however implicit, must be viewed with the utmost suspicion.

Even Marilyn Strathern's fine study of women in Hagen Society is not free of such assumptions. As Feil cogently points out:

"Indeed, a major criticism of Women in Between (Strathern 1972) is that women and men are portrayed as pitted against each other for the same scarce commodities: power and prestige in the moka. Women are forever trying to imitate men in exchange transactions and are ineluctably locked in a struggle they cannot win. Intersexual antagonism in the moka system emerges from a view that both sexes are seeking the same rewards. But I wonder if this model of inherent competition that A.M. [Marilyn] Strathern adopts is not more a male than a female one? Do women actually share the male view that transactions in the moka arena are of the highest value? (For example, Strathern 1972:152). (Feil 1978:275-6).

Surely Feil would not want to deny that women do to a large extent adopt the values of men in Hagen society and work hard to bring them to fruition in that they raise as many pigs as they can. But what seems to me to be in need of rejection is the suggestion or implication that this would limit any status and power women might possibly have in other domains of the social order, and that such status or power would be unimportant since it

might not directly be related to (or a function of) the political realm.

Before going on to discuss Marilyn Strathern's study in more detail, I would first like to go back and see how Hermann Strauss viewed women's status in Hagen society. His interpretation is based on a more overtly sociological view than Vicedom's.

Strauss raises the problem of women's status in general by posing the question of why, in Hagen mythology, women were depicted as being responsible for such "bad things" as death and the termination of social relations with the Taewamb, the sky people, with whom in former times human beings used to intermarry. He locates the problem at what he considers its root, namely woman's interstitial position between two groups of men, that is her father's group and her husband's group. (Strauss 1962:127) As Strauss states:

"She frequently has to come to grips with the problem of double loyalty and because of this she often becomes the object and cause of fights and arguments." (Strauss 1962:127)

Moreover, since two groups make claims on her which are often enough conflicting, her actions will necessarily often be contrary to the wishes, and perhaps demands, of one of the two kin groups. In the "Myth on

the Origin of Death" (Story 107 in the appendix) this paradigm is cogently laid out. Death came about or befell human beings because a woman acted contrary to the wishes or instructions of her husband. As Strauss points out a woman has to see to it that her husband makes moka with her own kin group. If he does this too frequently, his own brothers will complain that he carries all their valuables and pigs off to his wife's place (Strauss 1962:368). Parenthetically, this actually has the effect of putting the husband in a similar kind of double loyalty. He can never totally satisfy either of the groups which make legitimate claims on him. However, no sweeping conclusions are ever drawn with respect to him being an 'outsider'. Yet it is clear that the married male, no less than the married women, is in a double bind since he has to reconcile the often conflicting interests of at least two groups.

However to return to Strauss, as we noted, he interprets the polluting menstrual blood and the extreme fear men display about it as being ultimately connected with women's "in-between" position. As a wife a woman's fertility is subject to a "foreign" group's control, and hence it is detrimental to the well-being of the in-group and the woman herself has therefore to be excluded



from all its cults and ritual activities and, above all, from all sacrificial meals. As a daughter or sister a woman is not quite as much feared since, through her, the group will be able to enter into exchange. However, by marrying outside she will bear sons who might well fight with her brothers and agnates. In addition, since she will leave her home, she has to be excluded from religious rituals, the group's renewals of creative powers, since she might reveal those powers to outsiders (Strauss 1962:444).

It is a repeated theme in Strauss's discussion that the ideal of Hagen men would be "procreation of children without women as mothers" just as the Taewamb (the Sky people or spirits) created human beings without sexual relations: they simply put people on the earth (Strauss 1962:127).

Strauss further maintains that the religious rituals and cults are "an attempt by males to come close to this ideal" and to gain control over fertility. (Strauss 1962:127) As we shall see, the associated myths tend to bear out this interpretation. It is interesting to note, as Strauss points out, that Hageners never combine "a Tae woman and a Tae man into a pair or couple, even though paring is done in many other contexts" (Strauss 1962:15-17,57) Tae-men or Tae-women

are paired separately, according to their sex. (The Tae people or "sky people" are powerful spirit beings who own the forest and game, and are said to have put people and everything else on the earth and with whom people used to have social relationships of the kind they now have with fellow human beings). Tae men are creatively active without any help of Tae women. Creation and procreation belong to men alone. (Strauss 1962:57)

Thus, according to Strauss, the rejection and exclusion of women is due to their structural position within Hagen society, that is, of being in between two groups of men who do not trust them because they have put them into this position of double loyalty as mediators between and promoters of both groups. Men in the Mt. Hagen are engaged in a never-ending political quest for acknowledgement of power and prestige which is mainly played out in the arena of the Moka exchanges, and in which women not only play a crucial role but are actually part of as an item transferred from one group to another.

Marilyn Strathern has accepted much of Strauss' framework in her detailed book Women in Between. Female roles in a male world: Mt. Hagen, New Guinea (1972). In this work Strathern amply documented this female role in a male world in all its multifacetedness

and tracing out many of its implications. And yet one wonders, with Feil, whether she has not, paradoxically, analyzed it from a "male" point of view. The subtitle "female roles in a male world" is a clue to the analytical perspective. It seems to me, that viewing women as being trapped in between two male groups necessarily over-emphasizes their political dependence while it perhaps gives insufficient emphasis to power and influence originating in other spheres or domains which remain unanalyzed. Marilyn Strathern has criticized anthropologists of a more Levi-Straussian bent for having placed too much importance on the nature/culture dichotomy in the analysis of women's positions in primitive societies. (M. Strathern 1980) She and others point out that this nature/culture dichotomy was very much of a concern of eighteenth and nineteenth century thinking centered in Europe, but has little, if any, relevance to tribal society. In a similar vein, however, one might ask whether Marilyn Strathern has not perhaps herself adopted something of the framework of the 20th century feminists' struggle in European and North American Society, a struggle mainly for recognition in the political sphere, and one which may prove to have little, if any, relevance for the

understanding of women and their relationships to men in pre-industrial societies.

As we have seen, Marilyn Strathern, in common with Strauss, views male/female relationships among the Hageners in terms of the interstitial position of women in a universe of competing groups of males. The Mt. Hageners, like most Highlanders, distinguish between major and minor enemies. Most violent conflict takes place between those clans which consider themselves "minor enemies". But these are also the groups with which one has extensive moka exchange relations and with which one intermarries. "Major enemies" or traditional enemies are farther removed and one engages in little direct contact or confrontation with them. Only occasionally might a big man take a wife from such a group. However, these major enemies still need to be feared; even though one has little direct contact with them, they can still exert indirect and malevolent influence. As Marilyn Strathern points out, one's "affines may be allies, but affines of one's affines may be major enemies" and these "major enemies" may use the closer group as "a road for poison" (M. Strathern 1972:72). Women are considered or suspected to be the transmitters of such poison (M. Strathern 1972:72). The woman as an ideal wife is supposed to further the

interests of her husband's group but an ideal sister is at the same time supposed to further the interest of her own kin. Thus, women are trapped in a role conflict between two interacting and competing groups.

Strathern agrees with Vicedom that although women have "near absolute" rights of control over their crop production, in another domain of production, namely pig production, their control is "more restricted" and "the amount of say" women have depends on their husbands, even though the women are the producers (M. Strathern 1972:23,48). But even here it seems that women have some control over the possible extent of their husbands' wealth, since the reproduction and rearing of the pigs, depends upon her diligence and success as a crop producer (Feil 1978, Poewe 1981).

In Hagen society women in this role as producers are called Kintmen, literally, "servants of men". This role is contrasted with the superior male domain as transactors of valuables, mainly shells and pigs. Like rubbish men, women are considered Karpa, "worthless", since they control no valuables and have no political power. As Marilyn Strathern points out, some of the reasons men give as a justification of women's inferior role is that women are inconsistent, soft-brained, have 'several minds', are incapable of sustained reasoning

and singlemindedness (Strathern 1972:161-3). Men are just the opposite; they are convinced of having all the virtues needed for their elevated position as transactors. However, should a woman display any such male attributes and be strongwilled and decisive, that in itself is considered a bad thing or even a vice.

This devaluation in the sphere of social relations which we find in the anthropological texts is not, however, entirely consistent with the picture that emerges in the oral literature of the Mt. Hagen people. There we frequently encounter strong and determined women who act independently without any negative evaluation of their behaviour. It is to this picture that we now turn.

## PART TWO

In this part I shall deal with the Mt. Hagen oral literature with particular to its portrayal of the relationships between women and men. But before I proceed with this discussion, I will add a note on the origin of the collection of stories which I shall use, and also on their sociological significance. In the third volume of his ethnographic account of the Mt. Hagen people, the German missionary - ethnographer, Georg Vicedom, published 92 stories -- myths, sagas and tales -- which he had collected in the 1930s in Mt. Hagen (Vicedom 1943-8). Vicedom was an inspector of missions at the Ogelberg mission near the town site of Mt. Hagen from 1934 to 1939, at which time the Germans were forced to depart owing to the outbreak of World War II. The Australian government had encouraged missionaries to enter the region after the Lehay brothers had explored the densely populated Highlands. Following the initial pacification, the government established an administrative post in Mt. Hagen in 1938.

Regarding the collection of stories, Vicedom states that the stories were dictated to him and written down by him in the Melpa language (Vicedom und Tischner

III:V). He then translated them into German, seeking to preserve something of the thought patterns and the conceptualizations of the people in his translations. Young men, who were either students or workers at the mission diligently collected stories for Vicedom, but he also received support from older men. The Big Man called Ko, collected and recounted 25 stories for Vicedom.

When Hermann Strauss, a younger anthropologist connected with the same mission arrived in 1936, he was asked by Vicedom to concentrate particularly on the study of the language and the beliefs of the Mt. Hageners. By 1939 Strauss had completed a draft of a grammar of the language of the Mt. Hagen people as well as a small collection of conversations and vocabulary, all of which survived the war. However, a comprehensive lexicon and a collection of texts have been lost owing to his sudden and forced departure in 1939. Strauss returned to Ogelberg after the war and in 1956 he took a long leave in order to write up his contribution and to publish it. By the time his book was published in 1962 he was back at Ogelberg. Strauss does not give an account of how he collected the stories, which he presents throughout his text in different contexts.



Even though the 92 stories that Vicedom collected and published in German have been translated into English (Vicedom 1977), for the purpose of this thesis I have provided my own somewhat abridged translations from the German texts. However, in the Appendix I include only the 34 stories that I discuss in this part of my thesis. Vicedom numbered the stories from 1 to 92. I have retained his numbering system and simply added the 22 stories collected by Strauss on to the end, so that there are altogether 114 stories.

Regardless of whether these text represent a complete body of texts and regardless of whether these texts were told by male and collected and translated, they constitute a comprehensive body of ideas presented to us by the Hageners. Even a cursory reading of the stories makes it clear that they have an independence and authority in themselves. These texts tell us about Hagen institutions that Hageners themselves, if asked, could probably not tell in so many words. What makes them so important to anthropologists is that they are the people's own interpretation of Hagen society, and of how they view their social relations and institution and all the problems and conflicts inherrent in these relations. For these reasons one could regard the stories as a kind of self-ethnography which despite its

perspectivity and limitations, has nevertheless a unique and undeniable authority such that it can stand on a par with that of the professional ethnographic accounts. Both accounts, the native and the scientific have claimed access to privileged knowledge, and because of this, they are not only both limited, but both are essential for a more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of other cultures or societies.

I shall discuss and analyze some 34 stories, all of which deal with or reflect male/female relationships. I shall not, however, be concerned with those stories which depict conflict over women; in such stories women are not the subject of the stories but are merely background material for the story to unfold. It is not that these stories denigrate women, but rather women are just not part of the plot. I have divided the stories I discuss into three groups: 1) "Women in between"; 2) "Women and culture"; and 3) "Women and power".

1. Women in Between:

What is common among all the stories in this category, is that women, in their roles as wives or sisters, have to make a choice as to which group to support, their blood kin or their affines. However, since the nature of the relationships of brothers and sisters is somewhat different from the relationships

between husbands and wives and the dilemmas expressed vary accordingly, I have decided to discuss these two sub-categories separately. First I shall discuss those stories that deal with wife/husband relationships.

Stories 26 and 27 can be seen as examples of ideal states of affairs. In these marriage relations are set up between young men and women through exchange, with no mention of bridewealth, kin or affines. Everything works well and smoothly. While men are depicted as hunters who do some gardening, women are depicted as the providers of the foundations of wealth, agricultural produce and pigs. The men accumulate shells and enter the moka exchange system.

However, when marital problems are depicted, as in stories 56 and 89, wives find no sympathetic receptions among their own kin and have to return to their husbands. What is interesting in story 89 is that the women receives no help from her kin, even though she is in deep trouble, having killed her husband. She is compelled to return to her husband's village, where eventually she is killed in revenge.

In stories 12 and 13, a marriage does not even take place because difficulties developed during the bridewealth exchange. In both cases an old woman was unwilling to part with her pig in order to give it as

pork in exchange to the affines. These stories echo a common complaint men have about women, which is that women do not want to give pigs in exchange, but rather are interested in keeping them for their own consumption or for their own kin. At any rate, women's unwillingness to do as men decree leads to hostile relations instead of new exchange partners. In one of the stories the old woman is killed by the would-have-been husband.

The most interesting feature of stories 42, 60 and 91 is that in all three stories the woman sides with her husband's group against her own, even though there are or were hostile relations between the two groups. In story 91 the woman appears to have no choice since her parents had been killed (and her husband, too, in defending them). Perhaps she has no where else to go.

But stories 42 and 60 are particularly interesting. Here the women actually help their husbands to kill all the people of the wives' settlements, that is, the wives help kill all their blood kin. In both stories, her kin are described as "cannibals". However, from the man's point of view, given the Mt. Hagen marriage system, this represents almost the perfect manner to acquire a wife (along with the wealth and riches which affines bring)

without having to pay either a brideprice or make any future payments: wealth with no strings attached!

In the last two stories of this section, numbers 15 and 83, the women have to undergo a long period of transition from their own group to their husband's group, during which time they are compelled to prove that they are worthy of joining the new group as reliable members.

What the stories in this section so far have shown is that the women have very little room to maneuver, or to play one group of men off against another. Similarly, the women have little choice but to identify with one group rather than the other. In the stories this proves to be the husband's group. The ethnographic record does indeed seem to confirm that most women eventually identify with their husbands and uphold protect their husband's interests.

However, brother/sister relationships present a somewhat different angle not only on male/female relations but also on marriage relations. Story 73 is a case in point. When the sister is abducted by a man, one of her brothers searches for them with the help of a marsupial and rescues his sister. He then gives the sister in marriage to his ally, the marsupial, who pays a handsome bride price. Even though the brother is

here depicted as the heroic rescuer of the sister, by the logic of Mt. Hagen marriage he probably also had his own self interest in mind. After all, when the sister was abducted, there was no bridewealth exchange; the brother then set out to put things aright, which, however, can also be interpreted as being in the sister's interest, since the status of a woman for whom no brideprice was paid is rather low.

The proper payment of a brideprice for the sister and hence the possibility of obtaining a wife for himself appears as a central problem in most of the stories dealing with brother/sister relations. This is clearly the case in stories 77 and 78. In story 77 there is conflict between the siblings to begin with, the sister being very unhappy and not doing any work, which is all done by her brother. Eventually the frustrated brother moves away and the abandoned sister finds a husband. When the brother, many years later, visits them (probably to collect the brideswealth) they try to kill him. He, however, kills them and all their children, takes their valuables and obtains a wife. He thus ends up with the bridewealth.

Story 78 presents such a similar conflict but this time from the woman's point of view. At any rate the woman is the prime actor here. The sister has a lover

(a snake in a lake) whom the brother disapproves of and kills. She, in turn, commits suicide, an action which reduces the brother to the status of a rubbish man, since not only does she deprive him of her female productive labour, but of any female labour since by killing herself she deprives him of a brideprice upon which he was dependent as a means to obtain a wife of his own. He is eventually killed by the water of the lake, that is at the hands of the kin of the lover. As in the previous story, the curious "exchangeability" of wives and sisters is dwelt upon.

The woman of this last story acts independently and in her own interest. She probably could have accepted the authority of her kin, her brother, and followed his dictates, but she instead decided to take revenge on her brother and make life worthless for him, thereby exposing his dependency on her or any other women in his quest for prestige.

In the last two stories of this section, (62 and 69) the sister of the husband kills the wife. No antecedent facts are given which might explain why the sister acted in this drastic manner. The only reference in this regard is the statement in one story to the effect that the sister was a 'bad' woman. In story 69 a man tries to kill his sister in revenge, but she is

rescued by a man whom she then marries. In the other story the brother takes no action against his sister who had poisoned his wife, but instead goes to the underworld to bring his wife back. To accomplish this, however, he needs the help of a woman who leads him there and who gives the wife some of the husband's blood along with her food. This story seems to point out that in the realm of reproduction men cannot restore life or give life, even though they contribute to it. This contribution is necessary but not sufficient. Women are the main actors; one woman takes life, the other gives it, the man remains passive, he can only react and help.

What these two groups of stories have shown so far is that women were depicted as being far more dependent in relation to their husbands than in relation to their brothers. The stories seem to be showing that women are able to act fairly independently in their own interest vis-a-vis their brothers. I suppose the very fact that they marry "out" and thus are freed of any direct dependency on their kin, gives them more room to act more independently vis-a-vis their brothers. Moreover, the very fact that the brother is dependent on the sister's marriage and brideprice in order for his own marriage to take place, gives the women a tangible basis on which to claim some power over him.



## 2. Women and Culture:

In this second category of stories we encounter a very different set of problems in the relations between men and women. On the one hand, women are depicted as being totally dependent on men when it comes to certain spheres of knowledge and social rules, while, on the other hand, they appear as the very originators of culture and a different type of cultural knowledge. In two stories in particular these dual aspects of relations between women and men are combined. Men, in virtue of their political dominance, are the wielders of power and are in control of the violent means to reinforce their power. The ax, without which no man appears in public, embodies both aspects of this political domain, namely power and the use of violence. The ax, however, is also the symbol of his manhood, his sexual control and dominance over women. It is a potent symbol combining into one image his claim to power in the political domain and over reproduction. Yet, as we shall see, his claim to power over reproduction is very limited, if he has any power at all.

I have divided the ten stories of this category into three groups. The first one comprises stories 3, 16, 46, 66 and 108. They all have one basic theme in common, namely the transformation of women into

reproductive, productive and socially knowledgeable and active beings. These stories, then, are paradigms (and perhaps also charters) of women's political dependency on men. The instrumentality used in this transformation is always the ax which simultaneously establishes political and sexual dominion. However, since the ax is also the tool which transforms the bush into gardens (so that women can become the producers of wealth) it also establishes power in that domain and hence also symbolizes that power.

The basic image of this transformation is presented in story 3, a myth about the sun and the moon. A man hits a woman on the head, splitting the skin, so that she bleeds. And, so the story continues, "when the old man wants to visit his wife, he rubs his head with Koetjen-leaves. Then his head shines and we say it is the sun. When the old woman goes about at night and bleeds where the man has hit her, we say it is the moon." The other three stories translate this image into concrete terms. In each story the ax is the symbol of the sexual transformation of women into reproductive beings. The women have no clothing, are unfamiliar with the use of fire, do not know how to cook and only know the most elementary rules of culture. Men appear as the teachers of cultural knowledge. Women by themselves are

shown as incompetent and are completely dependent on men for their existence as social human beings. Even in old age, as story 108 expresses, they have not come to grasp the political subtleties men are capable of. In this story the dead ancestors hold a council to decide whether the oldest son should be killed in the next war because he refused to sacrifice the large pig set aside for sacrifice to them. The wife is asked her advice and opinion in the matter and when she offers it, it is totally disregarded and it is commented that she did not know what she was talking about. Thus while women become transformed into producers and reproducers, competency in political matters and in the use of violence is withheld from her. This story signifies that only the male holders of political power can decide on the legitimate use of violence: since women have no political power, their opinions in political matters are irrelevant.

At this point I want to discuss the second group of stories, 30, 31, 32 and 33, in which women are depicted as being the discoverers, if not the originators, of culture. The use of fire and the invention of the most important tool, the ax, the origin of agriculture (the discovery of the sweet potato) and the discovery of the most important exchange item, the pearlshell, were all

accomplished by women. Mt. Hagen society would have been impossible without any one of these cultural cornerstones. While men have taken control over these items and have become the 'instructors' and dispensers, they were it appears not the creators or discoverers. This taking of control is perhaps most interestingly developed in story 33, which is about the origin of the pearlshell. A woman goes to a lake and discovers that the tadpoles she had seen the previous day had changed into pearlshells. She tells the men about it and they tell her to be quiet. The men go to the lake, with their bows and arrows, and shoot the pearlshells and take them out of the lake. From then on there were no more shells in the lake. The violent action of the men turned the lake 'bad'. On one level this story suggests that the scarcity of the shells was due to the violent appropriation of the shells by men, excluding women from the possession and control over them. (It is an ethnographically well documented fact that in pre-contact times shells were quite scarce. The most common way a man gained and lost the shells was by receiving and having to pay brideprice for sisters and wives in marriage transactions.)

On another level, the story reaffirms men's dependency on women for the accumulation of valuables,

which they acquire through them, either from their labour or through their exchange as bridewealth.

Regarding the third grouping of stories within the category of "women and culture", I would like to discuss three stories, two of these I have already mentioned above. These are stories 16, 46 and 105. They are actually very similar to one another and 16 and 46 are told by the same narrator, the Big Man, Ko. While story 46 is commonly known and is part of the stock of stories of the region, story 16 presents an important fertility myth, kept secret by the Big Man. The fertility ritual based on this myth is performed at intervals of many years. Vicedom notes that it was the most important ritual at the time he was in the region (Vicedom und Tischner III:25).

In story 16, seven out of the eight sisters were transformed into productive members of society. According to the plot, by the time the youngest sister comes to the house the man had already locked the door. She remains outside -- outside the male domain-- outside social control -- outside political control. It is she, the uncontrolled or uncontrollable female force, that becomes the important Kor Nganap fertility spirit who during a thunderstorm appears to the oldest infertile sister to give her important ritual

paraphernalia, not for her own use, but to pass on to the husband, so that men can perform the ritual.

Thus, while men have the authority to perform the ritual and thus to lay political claim to power, the "real power", so to speak, the power to grant fertility lies elsewhere. It is women who have control over reproduction. It is not only a woman who transfers the power, but it is a woman spirit who grants fertility. The powerful symbol of the ax is impotent in this domain of reproduction, if women do not cooperate.

Story 105 adds an interesting twist to this by including the domain of production. A man gives his sister in marriage and the bridewealth for her includes not only the usual valuables but also a bad ax. The term 'bad ax' is here a euphemism for a 'childless woman'. The man furthermore was told not to have any sexual intercourse with the woman. However, with the acquisition of this woman the man became wealthy, literally, overnight. Not only did she bring wealth, but overnight she created a beautiful ceremonial ground, complete with a men's house. Not only did she create wealth, but she also created the setting for the ritual display of that wealth. The condition for this wealth, however, was that she be not domesticated; she insisted on living outside the settlement in the bush. These two

stories not only show the double dependency of men on women in terms of reproduction and production, but also the ambivalence that this double dependency gives rise to.

In the economic realm, if the woman is too much tied up in reproduction, she cannot, as we have seen before, be a top producer and if she is a top producer, she cannot be too bothered with reproduction. Yet not only the procurement of wealth but also progeny are essential if a man wants to gain status and prestige in the competitive exchange system, and for both men are dependent on women. The ideal solution to the dilemma this puts men into seems to be to introduce a sort of division of labour by having at least two wives, one the producer and one the reproducer, as is suggested in story 105. While the ax symbolizes male power in the political, productive and reproductive domains, in the last two spheres its potency remains rather ephemeral if not illusory. While men hold power securely in the political domain, production and reproduction depend on the cooperation of women who may or may not comply with the intentions of men. However, there is I believe a second dimension to story 105.

Fertility and wealth are only granted, it appears, if men do not dominate women totally in either the

cultural and political sphere or the personal and production domains. Women, in order to provide, demand a sphere of autonomy into which men cannot intrude or interfere. Once the man breaches this "taboo", his riches disappear. These only flow freely when he respects the woman's autonomy and personhood. This interrelationship might be referred to as "reciprocal dependence (Poewe 1981:18-20).

Thus not only does woman's fertility elude male control, but more importantly, in spite of all the cultural and symbolic trappings of male domination, male power is significantly curtailed. They are given ritual, that is political, control over fertility as the culturally dominant sector of society but it is only granted conditionally, so to speak, depending on whether he adheres to the social contract. Ultimate or actual control is seen, by implication, to rest with women. And the most important message of story 105 is that physical coercion is not only useless, but has the opposite result: it produces poverty rather than wealth. A woman always has the option to withdraw, as she does in this story when he violates the "taboo".

It is often stated in the literature, that the very fact that men have taken control over fertility rituals from which women are excluded, signifies their extensive



control over women. (Bamberger 1974, Brunton 1980:124, Bowden 1984:457) One could argue however, that the appropriation and control over the fertility rituals just as much exposes their vulnerability (as just indicated); indeed on a more fundamental level it exposes their impotence. Women not only have ultimate control over reproduction, i.e., determining the size of their families, but also of production, i.e, deciding when, what and how much to produce. The appeal of men to some supernatural agency reveals only that they have no real power and control. And even this appeal exposes their dependency, since it is to a female spirit they have to appeal.

It is not an ax-swinging male god who guarantees fertility in both domains, but a virgin female spirit who passes from clan to clan and tribe to tribe to distribute her riches.

### 3. Women and Power:

This last category of stories is characterized by women who not only act independently, and in domains usually reserved for men, but at least two of the stories could be interpreted as challenging men's political dominance. I am referring here to stories 44 and 74. In neither of the two stories mentioned does

the woman get away with her challenge; they are either tamed or killed.

Story 74 opens with an unusual situation in which a woman is described as lazy, making no gardens and staying at home, while her brother does all the work. She even initiates a war by killing a stray pig and arming herself with her brother's weapons. The story ends with her being given in marriage in exchange for a wife for the brother. However, prior to this exchange, she had been changed into a cassowary, symbolizing her anomalous and untamed state for a period. Shortly before her marriage, the brother changes her into a human form and now she follows his dictates. Her adventure into the political domain, of being the appropriator of male labour and power by initiating war (which is a male preserve), ends in her submission to a male world.

In story 44 we have another unusual situation. A woman insists on marrying two men against their will. She bears them a boy and a girl. Yet, all the while the men are afraid of her and secretly reject the food she cooked for them. When she finds out, she takes her children and sister-in-law to her kin, who are cannibals living in a territory which one has to enter via a bridge of human bones. Once there she participates in a

moka in which she exchanges her daughter. (Vicedom comments here that she did that in order to gain a higher rank in the system. However, I would add, one could also interpret this as amounting to a marriage for her daughter). She is obviously a strong and independent woman who challenges the political dominance of men by entering into politics herself and playing male roles. However, at the end of the story she is killed.

There are two further stories 41 and 92 in which a woman either appears at a dance decorated like a man and participates in the men's dance, or refuses to give up the customs of her own kin even though she now lives with her husband's group which follows different practices.

So far, in the stories we have looked at, we have seen that men's political power seems quite secure. But if the above interpretations are on the mark, then it follows that this power can be challenged by strong and independent women.

Stories 43 and 45 could possibly be interpreted as women's challenge to the monopoly on use of political violence symbolized by the ax. I do not want to push this interpretation too far, but at the very least the stories depict women who take over men's roles where men were clearly incapable of doing the required job.

In the one case the sister protects and rescues the brother from certain death and in the other a woman avenges the death of the men in her village by singlehandedly wiping out all the inhabitants of a settlement with an ax, while a scared dog hides in the grass. The dog, who lives with the woman, may possibly represent her weak and ineffective husband.

The last two stories that I am going to discuss, Nos. 19 and 107, again portray weak or incapable men along with strong women. However, these two stories have deeper significance. Number 19 is about the origin of the moka exchange system and the other about the origin of death. I will first analyze story 19. The most puzzling aspect of the story is that it claims to be about the origin of moka, the pearlshell feast. The plot is simple enough. A man finds a piece of shell and a tuft of woman's hair by the river. He then searches for the woman, finds and marries her. The new wife is pleased to discover that she has married a big man who not only eats meat every day, but who also lends out shells and valuables on a daily basis. The man has already two wives and grown sons. One day at a moka or shellfeast, "a pale woman" gains control over the sons and takes them with her. People hold funeral rites for the two sons. But at the same time the father and the

new wife decide to search for them. The new wife leads the way, opening a rock with her digging stick and separating a lake through which they pass. They find the sons, who had wanted to leave the place but did not know how. The wife kills the pale woman. They take all the valuables and pigs and the four return home and celebrate by giving a shell feast, a moka.

The moka is of course an exchange system in which only men can participate as transactors. Some women may enter it indirectly or have influence over the distribution of valuables, but they have to be represented by their husbands or other males. Now, if we look at the actors in the story, they are all women; the men simply react to events; they follow where women lead them. Even the initial search for the third wife was initiated by a woman.

One way of interpreting this story is to see it as an imaginative reversal. What women are not granted in real life (namely political power) is granted them in myth. However, I do not find such an interpretation very satisfactory. First of all, the story implies that men are the presenters of moka exchanges, not women, since the woman discovers that her husband gives moka every day. Second, it is women in Mt. Hagen who usually initiate marriages. Courting parties are held for a

young woman at which she will choose her future husband (see above pp. 30-31). If both groups agree to the marriage, the matter is settled. If they do not, she tries to force them into action by moving in with her future mother-in-law. If all fails, she may use threats of suicide or actually commit suicide. The rate of suicides among women is relatively high in the Highlands, according to almost all accounts (P. Brown 1978:159, 200, 204; Healey 1979 and M. Strathern 1972:281-4). Thus women do have recourse to other than symbolic gratification.

On the surface level it seems to me the story signifies that the moka system has incorporated all exchanges into one system. The story deals with marriage, birth (rebirth), death and warfare. On all these occasions wealth changes hands and eventually all these transaction became part of the moka exchange system. However, I would suggest that on a different level, this story highlights the ultimate dependency of men on women in the exchange systems. Women are the producers and reproducers; it is through and because of them that wealth can circulate. It seems that herein lies the significance of the inactive men and the active women in the story. For while men have visible, public, political power and prestige, women are the unseen

backbone of that power. Men are dependent on the women. Without them, there would be no moka.

One of the most interesting aspects of Mt. Hagen myths is that the belief in the polluting power of women does not surface directly in any of the stories. This point becomes even more significant when we consider the fact that all the stories collected by Vicedom and Strauss were recounted by men. Why this should be so is not altogether clear and it becomes even more puzzling if one considers Mary Douglas' functionalist explanation (in which pollution beliefs function to keep women in their subordinate role, i.e., to control them such that they adhere to their roles). That such an important political 'tool' should find no expression and justification in the myths would be, to say the least, a most interesting omission. One can make some intelligent guesses as to why this omission occurs. Such speculations might range from the point that pollution beliefs are so entrenched and fundamental to the social order, that they need no justification, to the point that pollution beliefs are really not significant at all.

There is, however, one story which does touch on the theme of pollution, but with very different implications than Mary Douglas suggests. This is story

107 about the origin of death. In this story a woman, impatient with her husband's concern to find the correct ritual paraphernalia in order to perform the correct ritual to wipe a boy's faeces off her lap, takes the leaves of the nearest plant to hand and wipes them off herself. When the husband returns with the proper paraphernalia (the bark of a tree that peels itself), he is angry and accuses the woman of causing the boy's and mankind's death because she had inadvertently used the leaves of the plants Pints and Poketa (which are used in Mt. Hagen to wrap the dead in for burial). His bark is now useless and he throws it away. While no menstrual pollution is mentioned and it is not here a female substance that causes death, it is a substance which she uses that brings it about. And more importantly, it is a male child that is the first victim. Thus Mary Douglas seems vindicated. Women are blamed for the worst things that can befall people, namely death, and this in turn is used to keep women under control and in their places (or to put in Mary Douglas' words it contributes to women's adherence to their roles in society).

In a similar manner Strauss interprets this myth as a case of death originating out of woman's contrariness and independent-mindedness in regard to her husband's



injunctions. Death is due to women's 'bad' nature, particularly in not being sufficiently submissive. But are Mary Douglas and Strauss right? Is this all there is to it? I question these interpretations and would argue instead that the woman in the story can be seen to possess powers at least equal to those of her husband, who, it should be remembered, went out looking for a life-preserving plant to save the child's life. While he fusses about, looking for the right ritual paraphernalia, she merely gets on with the job. It is in fact the woman who possesses the power over life and death. The husband is powerless against a strong-willed woman. In this interpretation the death of the child or the woman's action in bringing it about, does not originate in her morally 'bad' character (in the sense that she does not follow or accept male dominance), but out of a position of strength and power in the face of which the husband is powerless. Her magical plant and her ritual turn out to be highly potent and effective. His magical plant and his ritual prove impotent.

However, one could shift the argument of the above interpretation somewhat and add a slightly different dimension. Perhaps the woman acted not so much out of contrariness and disobedience than out of impatience and impulsiveness; she was impatient with the proper ritual

procedures and impulsively just wiped the faeces off her lap. What this suggests is that the imposition of ritual order or the application of his order-creating magic is impotent in the face of her disordering magic, her impulsive creative act. Presumably his magic and ritual would have worked if she had not pre-empted the situation. Yet, would it have done so? The man realizes that his order-creating ritual and magic would remain unfulfilled -- he cannot establish order over her creative powers, he cannot harness her powers to his own ends. This interpretation concurs with my reading of story 16 where men might be granted the right to perform the rituals, but the power to grant fertility or the power over creativity rests elsewhere -- that power remains within the domain of women, no matter how much men may try to get control over it, in order to establish their particular political order.

There is yet another dimension to this story. One could also see it as recounting the origin of infanticide which is practiced by Mt. Hagen women. As we have seen, infanticide is institutionalized in New Guinea Highland societies and among the Mt. Hageners to such an extent that the woman has to pay a statutory compensation of a pig to her husband. If she does not have one she tries to get one from her kin. If a woman

is determined to end the life of her infant, there is little, if anything, the husband can do. Given the pollution beliefs which surround birth, the husband cannot come too close to or into the seclusion hut for several months. This has the effect of giving women virtually total control over the situation.

Perhaps Marilyn Strathern is right in suggesting that men's anxieties about women "stem from misgivings that they have transferred too much power to them" (M. Strathern 1972:184). Perhaps the Walbiri males are right in not having contradictory rules about female/male relations but instead exercise total control and coercion over women.

But Mt. Hageners know that this Walbiri solution would not help, as we have seen. Women have to have some autonomy and respect, otherwise they could withdraw not only their reproductive and productive services but they might even commit suicide. In this manner women can and have wrecked plans between groups of men and the plans of husbands. Even in death, a woman can 'punish' one group or the other. If she commits suicide at her husband's place he has to pay compensation to her kin. If she commits suicide at her kin's place, they have to pay the compensation. Thus not only infanticidal but

also suicide are institutionalized in ways which silently confirm the situational powers of Hagen women.

I started this section of discussion of the stories with the description of the ax as the symbol of male power in the domains of politics, production and reproduction. Men hold power most securely in the political domain (yet even there their power does not go unchallenged) and their power is clearly weakest in the domain of reproduction. In this domain women hold power as securely as men do in the political realm. The very fact that menstrual blood has become such a potent symbol for men, signifies their fear and powerlessness. Men seem to be genuinely afraid of women's reproductive powers in that they diligently avoid all contact with women who have either had a child during the last two months or who are menstruating. (M. Strathern 1972:166-9) Men, through these beliefs and fears are kept out of this domain and this exclusion afford women an independent source of power.

As I have noted earlier antagonism implies antonymy, that is, antagonism can only exist between groups which can draw on independent resources. These resources are bases of power and seem to be located at very different spheres of interaction between men and women, one in political the other in reproductive power,

symbolized respectively by the ax and by menstrual blood.

### PART THREE

#### CONCLUSION

The stories have brought to the fore three spheres of power in which women are dominant or at least hold considerable sway. These are the production, reproduction and pollution. These spheres of power, however, are much more diffuse and less visible than the political power which is held firmly and securely by men. And it should not be forgotten that should a woman decide openly and directly to challenge that political power or the use of political violence, she will be swiftly and decisively dealt with by men who do not tolerate usurpation of their power and authority by women.

It is most likely this state of affairs in the political domain that has led some anthropologists to overgeneralized conclusions about the "powerlessness" of New Guinea Highland women. Yet, it is important to note that even though women are caught up in the interplay of political power between groups of men, this political interplay of men is almost exclusively directed toward other men, and not women. Women do not play a direct

political role in these societies. Political competition with other men is acted out in the domains of the exchange system and the domain of warfare, from both of which women are excluded as direct participants. Not only are women excluded from political participation at the exchanges, but, as M. Strathern points out, "Hagen culture does not stress to any great degree the role of inferiors (women etc.) as an admiring audience for men's exploits ..." (M. Strathern 1978:197). However, the phrase 'to any great degree' does not rule out that women do at least play some role at these functions.

The main point I want to stress here is that in the ethnographic literature in general the inference seems to be drawn that since women have no political power, they have no power at all. It is at this point where the analysis of the oral traditions offers the most telling corrective. Spheres of power of women are depicted in these stories which the pervasive "political paradigm" is unable to accommodate. Women's creative, productive and reproductive faculties are dealt with in these stories both directly and indirectly, and they provide women with spheres of power or dominance which are at least as important as that of men in the political domain. It is a different kind of power, but

power all the same and a power which men seek to gain control over through ritual.

Now we must go further and ask why this power of women, recognized by the men of Mt. Hagen and dealt with as problematic in their literature, has remained so elusive to the ethnographers. It has not, as we have seen, been totally elusive. As I have indicated, the ethnographer Vicedom, for one, had a surprizingly firm grasp on it. But the trend of later ethnographers has been to downplay this side of Hagen Society. One of the main reasons for this downplaying is, of course, that the interaction between men and women has not been analyzed independently of the political paradigm. Surprizing as it may be, there has been no study, to my knowledge, which has focused on women directly and their domains of action independent to that of men. There does seem to be a tendency in anthropology to classify such matters as 'domestic' and thus to diminish their analytical importance. This assumption is, contend, a Western cultural assumption which is imposed over New Guinea society not discovered in it. In pre-industrial societies domains or spheres of action and interaction are not usually as delimited or demarcated as the public and domestic domains are in industrial societies.



It is the essence of the political paradigm that it assumes unidimensionally that there are the powerful and the powerless. It incorrectly reasons that since women are excluded from political power, they have also no power or influence in other domains of social interaction. Pollution power has not been considered to be a serious basis of power of women, independent of men and their power. Rather, in the ethnographic literature it has often been interpreted as just another political tool in the hands of men with which to control women, to relegate them to the fringes and to make them conform to their stations and its duties. (For some different interpretations see Wagner 1977, Weiner 1987 and Young 1987.)

Another reason why women's power has been insufficiently recognized is that this power tends to be diffuse. There is no public display, no ritual or large ceremony to celebrate it, no pomp and ceremony. Yet there is one exception to this. Marilyn Strathern in her essay "The Achievement of Sex: Paradox in Hagen Gender-Thinking" (1978) actually acknowledges the three spheres of power women have access to, although, having done so, she then proceeds to argue them away. It is true enough, she maintains, that men and big men depend on women and low status males for the production of

wealth, yet she also points out, that it "should be clear that this dependency of the big on the small, of a big-man on his supporters, of husbands on wives, is a quasi-domestic one, restricted to the sphere of production" (M. Strathern 1978:197). Here M. Strathern ends up falling in with those anthropologists, who, as I have pointed out earlier, trivialize this important sphere of female power and present it as less important than the public sphere, even though men's political prestige depends at least in part on that production. Men are very much aware of this in their attempts to find the most diligent wives. Yet production is always viewed in the context of what men can do with it, rather than what levers of power it might give to women who are the producers. Women are very much aware of this domain and, as I pointed out in the first part of the thesis, are capable of thwarting the plans their husbands might have.

The second sphere of female power is similarly dealt with by M. Strathern. Male achievements such as "health, vigor, wealth, renown, personal well-being and clan prestige" are said to be attacked by women out of jealousy: "It is basically success which the unsuccessful confront" (M. Strathern 1978:196-7). It is not quite clear why women should attack successful

husbands out of envy since the women themselves usually share in the prestige such status brings and to which they have contributed with their labour. I would suggest that when women do launch such attacks, utilizing their pollution power, there probably are other precipitating factors that bring it about rather than the psychology of envy. As stated, this seems like a sort of New Guinea version of Freudian "ax envy".

The third domain of female power, that of reproduction and fertility is, according to M. Strathern appropriated by males through ritual and the use of color symbolism. She states:

As we have seen, the way in which the (men) admit power as resting with females is hedged with anxiety. Females can be associated with power (symbolized in the colour red) it would seem only under the conditions: 1. It is an ambiguous power anyway, since red also signifies danger; 2. Men have an equal and different, if not superior, source of power (symbolized by the colour white); 3. and finally, it is an attribute which men can appropriate for themselves on occasions (when they put on red decorations. (M. Strathern 1978:196)

What the author suggests here is well documented in the stories, as we have seen: men try to gain control over fertility through ritual means. What she does not however, seem to realize, and what the stories amply attest to, is that ritual control over the very real

power women possess is not possible. It remains impotent, an empty gesture, a ritual proclamation only. Moreover, why should not the very fact that women are excluded from these rituals should be interpreted as a sign of weakness rather than strength on the part of men. Men surely are aware of their impotence in this domain and it makes more sense psychologically, to view them as excluding women for fear of exposure and ridicule rather than as a means of control. (In some of the ethnographic literature there is scattering of remarks by women that could be seen as ridiculing men's ritual obsessions.)

The possibility of there being more than one domain of power in a society is in fact something which has a long tradition in European history. Prior to the modern nation state with its claim as the sole legitimate political power structure, European history was marked by the division and struggle between two quite different kinds of power from the early Middle Ages on, if not earlier. One pole represented (secular) political and the other ecclesiastical power. The latter always claimed to be a power of a different kind, perhaps even of a superior kind, and for centuries struggled to remain independent of the political power, if not superior to it (Toynbee 1934-1961).

One might draw a parallel or at least an analogy between ecclesiastical power in Europe and that of women in Highland New Guinea. Women do have an independent power base outside the political domain on the basis of which they claim a degree of autonomy and independence. One could even argue that this power is more "basic" or perhaps even more "real" than the power which men demonstrate in ceremony and ritual. This power of women is in New Guinea based on production and most particularly on reproduction, it is a sort of power which is always there; hence it does not need to be claimed, proclaimed or celebrated. In this sense, at least, we might grant it an ontological reality.

By its very nature male political power in Highland New Guinea by contrast requires proclamation because it rests ultimately not on the biological facts of reproduction or the sociological facts of production but upon the continued agreement of the members of society as to its existence. Yet does not the very need for proclamation and celebration in the first place reveal a fundamentally "artificial" (in the philosophical sense of artifice) domain -- a make-belief world staged by men, communicated with such extravagance because it has no reality other than its proclamation. Even the large displays of wealth which are staged periodically by big

men in the moka exchanges are in large measure only a "show". Note that the wealth displayed is not really owned or even controlled by one particular man but only displayed under his auspices with the aim of impressing and perhaps out-performing other big men in order to wrest prestige from them. The wealth displayed actually belongs to an entire network of men who can always withdraw their support and join in elsewhere (Vicedom und Tischner I:236-7, II:451-66 and A. Strathern 1971).

Indeed, but not only is the wealth not really "held or "real", but even the decorations men put on are usually not owned but are borrowed from diverse sources (Vicedom und Tischner I:99,113). Men take great pains to collect the decorations and walk around for miles and days in order to borrow them. All this effort goes into the attempt to make an impression for one day, to rig up the appearance of a greatness and power which does not outlast the memories of those who witnessed it. As political anthropologists have repeatedly shown, power in big man societies is ephemeral and illusory (Pospisil 1963, Sahlins 1963). It is like quicksand; it needs to be propped up, staged, exaggerated in oratorical extravaganzas, celebrated so that the name of the man will be remembered until the next staging by another man.

The power of women which the preceeding analysis of the literature brought to the fore, seems, in this light much more substantial indeed. It is always there, it needs no ritual proclamation and assertion. Therein perhaps lies the reason why women have been so invisible to anthropologists in New Guinea Highland society, even though they are present everywhere and at all times.

If fertility rituals can be interpreted as an attempt by men to gain a measure of control over fertility and reproduction, then perhaps in a similar vain one could argue that political rituals are an attempt by some men to secure some measure of control over other men. This ritualized or "acted-out" power in both spheres is essentially hollow. It is neither enforceable nor attainable in everyday interaction and thus is much more elusive than the rituals suggest. Men can only try to influence other men to comply with their plans and wishes. At first sight it seems as if women are in a very different position, that they would have to yield to male power with no question or choice. But, as we have tried to suggest, women have designed or devised their own means to counter, subvert or evade the power men claim to have over them.

Men in New Guinea cannot exert power and control over others; neither other men nor women, such that

they would be compelled to act in their interests, no matter how much ritual effort is expended. Is it possible that the anthropologists have been taken in a bit by the trappings of a show?

If this is the case in Highland New Guinea society, and there is no reason to think otherwise since both the ethnographic and literary accounts seem to add up to this, the term "power" and its extant usages is perhaps not the proper analytical tool for the study and interpretation of big man societies. (Even the term 'big man' connotes too much power.)

The term 'power' in its widest usage "denotes the ability, latent or exerted, inherent or acquired, physical or mental or spiritual, to act or be acted upon, to effect something or to affect or be affected by something". (Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms 1942:636) In this wide meaning of the term it is clear that in New Guinea Highland societies both women and men have power and influence over each other and other things which in turn may determine or at least constrain their future actions. However, in a narrower meaning of the term such as "the ability to control others" (Webster's New World Dictionary 1970:1116), which the meaning of the term power often or usually connotes within the political paradigm, it seems to be applicable to neither



men nor women in Highland New Guinea. Neither men nor women seem to have this kind of authority over others, not even the big men.

There seems to be some evidence, however, in the ethnographic literature that occasionally a man might rise to greater power by means of sheer physical force and intimidation. But these cases remain exceptions which moreover always are reported to have happened in the past (Schafer 1938, Brown 1963 and Salisbury 1964). As a general statement it seems to be the case that men in New Guinea have no such authority and power over others.

For these reasons I suggest that 'overlapping or even countervailing fields of influence arising from exclusive spheres of autonomy might be a more useful concept to discuss the distribution of power in New Guinea society. 'Influence' still connotes power to affect others, but it is more diffuse and indirect than the term 'power' and its foundations in interpersonal psychology rather than physical force are clearer. In this sense, both women and men can be seen to have influence.

The phrase 'overlapping or counterveiling fields of influence arising from exclusive spheres of autonomy' also brings to the fore the crucial point that the power

or influence can derive from different spheres or domains of action and being. While power in social interaction is usually associated with political power, the term influence suggests a more diffuse basis or different bases. If the above concept is used as our analytic lens, then production is not so likely to be put aside as belonging "merely" to the domestic domain; rather this sphere automatically gains more importance, if not equal status to the public political sphere.

This holds equally for the sphere of reproduction in which women necessarily dominate. A thorough investigation of decision procedures, aims and problems in this sphere most certainly has important consequences for and/or effect upon other spheres of social interaction, not least of which is the political sphere. As we have seen, a woman can determine the timing, spacing and number of progeny which has important effects on the status of her group in its political interaction with other groups. Likewise her being bound up in reproduction has an effect on how much produce she can grow and how many pigs she can raise. This in turn has consequences for the status and prestige of her husband in the exchange networks.

Women in Highland New Guinea can neither be forced to bear any given number of children nor to raise any

number of pigs. And there are no more potent factors than these which determine the strength and wealth of local groups. Men are aware of that and this is the reason why they have "taken control" over rituals in both domains in order to act out some measure of ritual power and control in areas where they do not have this control in practice. This is the lesson and corrective which Mt. Hagen self-ethnography in the oral literature offers to anthropologists.

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## APPENDIX

3. The sun and the moon.

A man was hunting casuaries. At home he prepared a fire to cook the meat. While collecting leaves from a tree to wrap the meat in, he fell down into the fire and burned to death. His maternal cousin came for a visit to get some of the casuary meat. There was only one badly burned piece of meat left.. He did not realize that it was his cousin, and wanted to eat it. But it was so hard that he had to make a knife. While bending a bamboo stem he got speared, killed and suspended by the bamboo. Nearby there lived an old man and an old woman. While they were collecting tadpoles and frogs, they discovered the suspended man and got scared. In his excitement the old man hit the woman on the head with his ax, splitting her skin so that she bled. The old woman changed herself into a toad and crawled under a stone and the old man changed himself into a marsupial and climbed a tree. When the old man wants to visit his wife, he rubs his head with Koetjen-leaves. His head then shines brightly and we say it is the sun. When the old woman goes about at night and bleeds where the man had hit her, we say it is the moon.

12. The sky people.

A man went into the forest to hunt marsupials. He found a place where loam had been dug and hides to find out

who had dug it out. After a while, people came down a vine and got some more loam. When only a young woman was left on the site, the man catches her. She tried to free herself by changing first into a tree and then into a snake, but the man would not let her get away. The young woman took him to her village, hiding him in her netbag. She tells her parents she wanted to marry the man. They agreed, but warned her that now she would have to live down on the earth. The parents slaughtered pigs and gave the couple pork to take to the husband's place. The parents told the couple that the next day they would come down to collect the bride price, but demanded that there should be no live pigs. Next day the sky people came down to collect the valuables and the pork. One old woman, however, was not following the instructions and was hiding a little pig in her netbag. When the little pig screamed, the sky people got angry and left with the bride. The bridegroom got so angry that he killed the old woman. Now we cannot see the sky people any more.

13. The Taewamb.

Two men used to go hunting together. One day one said to the other that he should stay at home and watch the settlement. The man who went into the woods discovered

a place where loam had been dug. He decided to hid. Then the Taewamb came to get the loam. When only one woman was left, the man caught her. She tried to get away by changing into a stone and then into a tree, but he would not let her go. She decided to take the man to her village and hid him in her house. Then she told her parents that she wanted to marry the man. They agreed and gave him meat and he returned home. Next day the Taewamb came down to earth. Everything was prepared for a feast and negotiations went on. But an old woman had a little pig in her netbag that screamed. When the Taewamb heard that they jumped up and fled back into the sky. They had never heard a pig screamed before.

15. The Sky Man Nungnung.

A brother lived together with his sister and his dog. Both the brother and the dog were afraid that the sister could be taken from them and thus kept her hidden in a bamboo container. Meanwhile the brother and the dog performed all the female tasks, that is they cultivated the gardens and grew sweet potatoes. One day when they were in the garden they saw smoke rising from their house. The man sent the dog to check. The dog reported that a pale man, dressed like a woman, was sitting behind the house. Both were afraid that the pale man



might kill them all. When the brother and the dog came back home, the pale man said that he wanted to marry Ajamb Waklop, the sister. Brother and dog denied to have such a woman. They cooked a meal and the three ate together. During the night the pale man kept awake by the fire. Next morning the brother and the dog got scared and agreed to the marriage. They slaughtered pigs and the sister went to the river to wash the intestines. Suddenly Nikent appeared and commented on her new status as the wife of the pale man. Nikent told her to depart with her husband and added that he would wait for them by the river. Next day when they came to the river, Nikent shot the pale man and departed with the sister. They stayed overnight at a beautiful place. She refused to eat the meat which he had offered to her. Next day Nikent slaughtered a pig, but she refused to wash the intestines. Nikent got angry and left. She followed him but could not catch up with him. She sat down and began to cry, then she saw Nungnung chopping wood and went to him. He took her to his place where there was an old woman and her daughter. Next day they went to the garden to prepare it for planting, the woman became thirsty and asked Nungnung for a drink of water, he told her to go to the river and drink from the water on this side, but not the good water on the other side

of the river. But she drank from the good water, which was the Urin of Nikent. Next day they went to the field to plant, but it was already planted. The woman got pregnant and had a son who grew rapidly. After a dispute with the mother he took the boy into the men's house. Nikent was there too. Nikent and Nungnung held a fertility rite. Nikent danced on a platform. Nungnung got pigs out of the lake. While Nikent dance the mar-dance, Nungnung performed ritual, blessing the pigs: saying "Sky-Nungnung O! Woman from below Ketlpol! Ku, ku, ku!" They slaughtered the pigs, cooked the meat and distributed it. We still hold that ritual today.

16. The Origin of the Kor Nganap-ritual

Two orphan boys lived with a man and a woman. The man's relatives in Enga were holding a pig feast and they decided to go there. He chopped lots of wood and also brought two stumps and told the boys when all the wood was used up, he would be back. The boys burned all the wood, except the stumps. The older brother wanted to chop them too, but the younger warned him not to do it. But the older did it anyhow and broke the ax while chopping. They both got so afraid that they took their valuables and settled in the forest. One day the

younger brother saw the birds Nikent on a tree eating fruit, he asked the older brother to shoot one of the birds. The older brother shot the bird which flew away with the arrow. Next day older brother cooked some meat and bananas and departed in search of the bird and the arrow. He came to a settlement and went into a house and saw a beautiful woman. She showed him his arrow and the arrow wound on her arm. He gave the woman some of the cooked meat and she liked it. He then makes a fire got a pig and cooked it. He gave her some of the meat and they ate together. The woman went outside and rubbed herself on a banana tree. He watched her and later attached a piece of pearlshell and an ax on the tree. Doing so he thought, next time she will cut herself a vagina. The woman went again and cut herself. Her other sisters came into the house and did the same thing, except for the youngest sister who departed. The brother then took his hat and apron and made clothing for the women. They all went home with him and he gave the three women to his brother and kept the other for himself. The oldest wife had no children and during a fight with her husband she went to the field and cried, during a storm her youngest sister appeared carrying a bird and red cordyline branches and gave her older sister a bundle to take to her husband with the

instruction to open it behind the men's house. He did as instructed and found some red cordyline branches and other medical plants and feathers of the bird of paradise. He planted the plants, killed a pig, cooked and ate it and went to sleep. During the night ghosts appeared and danced and put meat on a platform and distributed it. Next morning the man went behind the men's house, and found traces of dancing. Near the plants he found stones decorated with paint. He then slaughtered several male pigs and called his brother to sacrifice to the Nganap spirit. They gave the heads and pieces of the backs of the pigs to the women. The rest of the meat the men took to the ceremonial ground and cooked. And that is why we now sacrifice to the spirit Nganap.

19. The Origin of Moka

One day a man went to the river to sharpen his stone ax. There he found two pieces of pearlshell and a tuft of woman's hair. He decided to find the owner and went along the river. Near a village he hid himself. Then many young women came to fetch water, when only one woman was left, the man went to her and she took him to her village. He insisted to sleep in women's house to compare the hair. Next day the villagers wanted to give

him a wife, he refused and said he would take one when he returned. After another such incident he came to a third settlement where many young women came to fetch water. One beautiful young woman remained and she gave him instructions telling him to go to the village alone and when they offered him a woman in marriage to keep them waiting; not rejecting, but waiting. The man did as he was told. He refused to marry any woman, except the owner of the tuft of hair he had found. He finally found her and married her and took the meat and valuable and returned with her home to his settlement. Next day she inspected the place and the ceremonial grounds and saw lots of valuables realizing that she had married a big man who loaned out shells and valuables and ate meat daily. The man had already two wives and two sons called Eklimp and Kuklup. They all went to a Shellfeast and Mar dance. At the dance a pale woman got control over the two sons who then followed her. The people then held funeral rites, and mourned the death of the two sons. However, the father and the new wife decided to search for the son. They came to a rock and the woman opened the rock with her digging stick and they entered along a path and came to a lake. The woman again with her digging stick separated the water and they went through it to a land below the water. There

they found a dance ground that belonged to the two sons. The woman hid herself as the father entered the men's house and found his sons who were glad to see him. They said they had tried to get out of the place, but did not know how. During the night the new wife killed the pale woman by burning her hut. The sons and other men were now free. They took all the valuables, pigs and casuaries and went home. Then they made a Shellfeast; and as they did in the past, so we still hold such feast.

26. Etipora

Many boys lived together and spent their time hunting. One day a boy saw the Marsupial Kokleim in the garden eating fruit. He decided to catch it and made a trap. The animal got caught, but he couldn't open the trap. All the other boys helped. Suddenly the trap sprung open and transported the boys to the woods where they settled and lived by hunting and collecting. One day a boy went hunting and brought home a bird. The next day he went bird hunting again, and shoots some birds called Nikent. Then a woman came along the path with sweet potatoes and vegetables. They exchanged the birds for the vegetables. Next day the woman brought plants of sweet potatoes, sugar cane, bananas and vegetables, and

the boys made gardens to grow these things. Then the boy went bird hunting again. He met the girl again and they entered into exchange. After a time the boys had huge gardens. But they had no pigs. When the boy said this to the girl she gave him a male and a female pig. After a time the boys had a house full of pigs. Then the boys said to the girl, but we have no wives, upon which the girl fetched all her sisters and each boy got a wife. They got many pigs, collected valuables, made moka (pearlshell feast) and distributed meat. One day the spirit Etipora heard of a moka and meat distribution, he changed himself into marsupial and called. One man came and tried to kill the animal, but the spirit killed the man and threw his corpse into an abyss. In this manner the spirit killed all the boys, except one. The father went with this boy to the forest to see who killed all the other boys. When they found all the corpses, they took a little finger from every corpse took them home and put them on hot stones. Then they took their weapons and fought in the house. The children of the killed men lived and grew up. One day one of the men went into the forest, saw the man Etipora, who had killed all the other boys. He killed Etipora and threw him into an abyss. All lived happily thereafter.

27. Mengkao

At one time many boys lived together and planted taro in their gardens. But pigs came and destroyed them, and so they decided to build a trap. Next day a large fat pig was caught in the trap, but instead of the pig an untidy man emerged from the trap and asked them to open the trap. They did so, but the trap transported them through the air into the woods, where the boys lived by collecting food. One day a boy decided to build a hunting hut on a tree. As he was up there, a young woman came and talked with him. They exchanged sweet potatoes and marsupials. The boy said she should come every day and bring goods. After that they entered into a regular exchange relationship, and the boy made a garden in the forest. He looked well fed, while the other boys subsisted on collecting. Eventually the boy gave the other boys a half of a pig. He went to fetch sweet potatoes and a bottle of fat, and distributed the food to the other boys. He also told them to plant fields, and build houses and not to be lazy. Later many young women came and they all got married. They brought pigs and good. Thus we call that the story of Mengkao.



30. The Origin of the Sweet Potato

At one time there was no food on earth, that is, people made no gardens, but collected rainworms and other things. They also ate grass. One day an old woman and a girl went to the river to fetch water, they saw a man defecate. After he left, the women saw on top of his feces a sweet potato, they took it home, made a hole in the garden, put the potato in it and covered it with earth. After a while sweet potatoes grew there. Other people came to get plants which they planted and since then people have sweet potatoes.

31. The Origin of Fire

A man and a boy had a dog and one day they all went hunting. Since they had no fire, they ate the meat raw. One day they went to the woods again to hunt marsupials and birds. They hunted and caught a marsupial and took it home. They debated whether to eat it raw or to cook it and they finally decided to eat it raw. The dog had listened to the debate and decided to go to his mother and asked for fire, promising to bring it back. She gave him fire but asked him to bring it back. The dog brought the fire to the people and made a fire. The two men saw smoke, looked, collected wood and stones which

they used to cook the marsupial and ate it. But then the man took the fire back to the village, called all the people together and told them that they had discovered fire. They distributed the fire as an exchange item. When the dog returned to his mother she asked for the fire, but the dog told her that he had given it to the people who took it; she so got angry that he had come without the fire and she hit him until he bled. The dog returned to the people and they asked him who had beaten him. He said my mother did it because I gave you the fire which she had forbidden it. The men said, she was right, but we will give her a female pig. They took a pig and brought it to the settlement of the old woman and told her that since he had given them fire, they were giving her a pig in exchange. Since then there is fire.

32. The Origin of the Ax

An old woman collected vines and an old man hunted marsupials. On their return they decided to cook the meat. The man prepared the meat for cooking and the woman collected the leaves. She returned with some banana leaves, and bend down. The man got so excited, that they had intercourse during which she got a cut on her back. They checked to see what it was and

discovered a Kumbamon ax in the earth. They dug it out and discovered many Kumbamo and Ndimas axes. They took them home and called a meeting of all the men. They showed them the axes and told them how they had found them. They all decided to go hunting so that they could sacrifice to the spirit of the axes. After that they returned to the place and made a ceremonial ground and started getting or making more axes. Then they built houses and settled there to manufacture axes in order to exchange them with other people. That the Rungi people now make axes is due to the two old people. They had discovered the axes and others took over the manufacturing and exchange. When nowadays people are about to manufacture axes, they first hunt marsupials and sacrifice them to the two old people, who have long ago died. Then they go down into the shafts and make axes.

33. The Origin of the Pearlshell

There was a beautiful young woman whom many men wanted to marry. One man was particularly determined to do so. He decorated himself to take part in the women's dance and when he got there he saw the woman in the sweet potato field surrounded by admirers. When she saw him she told the others to stop dancing since a maternal

uncle on her father's side had arrived, whom she would take to her village. There the man gave meat to her parents, and all ate together. Next day the man declared that he wanted to marry the daughter. They prepared a meal and ate together. As the new couple was leaving the parents told them that if they should see a red cloud they, the parents had been killed, if they should see a black cloud all would be well. On their way the couple saw a red cloud and the husband went back to aid the parents, but he got killed and returned to his wife as a spirit. He took her to the top of a mountain, lifted a lemon grass bush and told her to go along the path, there she would find a man and woman who would be her mother and her father and there would also be many brothers. She met all these people, and told them what had happened. Next morning she went down to the lake, crying. When she discovered that the lake was full of tadpoles she told the men about it, who told her to be quiet. Next morning she went to the lake again and saw instead of tadpoles a lot of pearlshell. She went back and told the men about it. They went down to the lake and shot the shells with arrows and pulled them out of the water. Because the men took the pearlshells out of the water, the lake became bad. They had shot

the shells and they disappeared and now there are only big lice.

41. A Woman changed into a Dog

A man had a wife who collected the corpse of human beings, cut off the thighs and cooked and ate them. One day the man heard his little boy screaming. The boy was left alone and cried. The man cuddled the child until he fell asleep. Suddenly, a red dog came into the house and changed into the wife. The man asked the woman what she was doing with the corpse. She got very angry and said she only did what her people used to do; that he did not get upset when she planted the fields and had children. Upon this the man went back to the men's house.

42. The Kaiwamb

An old man and his wife had one son who always was in the woods hunting. One day he caught two casuaries. He gave one to his parents, who gave him a pig in exchange. The parents made preparations to cook the meat, but the fire would not burn because pale man sat nearby. Meanwhile the son who was in the forest saw that there was no fire at his parents' house and decided to return home. When he saw the pale man he shot him with his

arrow. The pale man broke off the arrow and departed. The fire then started to burn. Next day a man came and asked for the son. The parents denied they had a son. The man threatened with cannibalism, if they did not call their son. After his return the son departed with the stranger. They came to a bridge made of human bones and crossed it. On the other side of the river there were people carrying many corpses. At the settlement of the pale man, the son refused to go to the dance ground or into the house. At night a darkskinned woman came to him with a tree, they planted it upside down and decorated it like a man. Then the son spent the night with the woman in her house. The woman gave him instruction on what to do when the villagers would ask him to cut out the arrow with which he had shot the pale man. He should insist on sitting on the lap of the dark woman. The son followed the instruction next day but instead of cutting the arrow, he killed the man. The dark woman and the son then changed themselves into birds, flew onto the head of the men, who tried to kill the birds but instead ended up killing each other. After they were all dead, the birds changed into humans again. They then killed all the women and children by locking them into a house and setting it afire. Then they took all the valuables and pigs and departed. They

destroyed the bridge of human bones after crossing it. At home they killed all the pigs and held a feast. The son took his wife (dark woman) and settled in the forest. There the son roamed around stole pigs and killed many people. One day he went into a region where he had killed many people. He met a widow who wondered why he came to her. He said he was hungry and tired. She invited him for dinner, she then killed him and sang a victory song. People burned his body. Back at home the wife heard about the death of her husband and hung herself.

43. The Kaiwamb

Once upon a time many boys lived together in a house, one of them went into the woods to hunt, but got killed by a pale man who chopped off his head and took it with him. In this manner the pale man killed all the boys and in the end only the youngest boy was left and he went looking for his brothers. While searching for his brothers he saw a marsupial on a tree and as he climbed the tree to try and catch it, the marsupial changed into a pale man who took his ax and chopped off the boy's head. The dog saw the head, took it and went home with it. In the house there also lived a young woman and when she saw the head, she and the dog held mourning

rites. Next day she and dog slaughtered a pig, cooked the meat, cut it up and put it in her netbag. She and the dog went into the woods and as they passed the place where the boys got killed they got to a place where there was a path up a large Araukarie tree and decided to follow the path which took them through a cave into a beautiful country with a village and gardens. The village was at the top of a mountain and the mountain was surrounded by steep sides. The woman sat down at the roadside and the dog hid in the grass. A pale man came along and was carrying the corpse of the many children and adults he had killed, the woman offered him meat and while he was eating she killed him with her ax. In this manner she killed all the pale men that came along. When she only had one piece of meat left, there came a young woman and she killed her too. She took the woman's valuables, decorated herself and went to the village. There in a house an old woman was sitting by the fire and it was not until the next day that the old woman realized that it was not her daughter. The woman then decided to kill the old woman with her ax and after she had killed everyone she took all the bags full of valuables, pigs and casuaries and together with her dog went home. At home they slaughtered a pig and ate it.



The woman and the dog lived there together until they died.

44. Pitlima Kontom

Two men took part in a Mar dance and the women were so taken that they all wanted to marry the two men. The men, however, said that they neither needed nor wanted wives. Most of the women changed their minds when they inspected the settlement of the two men. Only one pale woman insisted on marrying the older brother, they eventually got married and had a boy and a girl, but the men treated the woman badly and did not eat her food since they had a sister hidden in a house who cooked for them. One day the boy made his mother, the pale woman so angry that she hit him. Upon which the boy asked what kind of woman she was since his fathers did not like her and threw her food into the bush and instead ate the meals prepared by his aunt. When the boy told her where the aunt lived, the pale woman visited her and insisted that she and the children come along to her folks' village. At the river Ntimi they crossed a bridge of human bones. They came to a dance place where preparations for a feast were going on. Men came and disputed when to cook and eat their daughters. The pale woman gave her daughter to a man as downpayment of moka

exchange. The boy and his sister lived together in a house. Next day they saw the pale man slaughter men, women and children and prepare them for cooking. The man gave the children a pig to eat in order to fatten them. The boy and his sister took the pig to the sacrificial ground. There a taro fell down from a post and changed into a man. They told him of their plight of having been brought to cannibals. The man told them that he would take care of things. The man tricked the people by urinating so that it rained on the settlement. All three escaped and returned home to the children's settlement. The sister told her brothers what had happened, then the sister married the (taro) man Me Rum and went to his village. The brothers prepared a trap for the pale wife and sharpened their axes. The pale wife returns fell into the trap and got killed. Yet when the men entered the house the pale woman was alive and sat in the house, the brothers got their axes and chopped off her head and threw it into the fire. At night the pale wife returned again and called her husband. He went outside and started walking in fear, but someone followed him. Next day he came back but the pale wife was already there. Then the brothers schemed a different course of action. The younger brother took her netbag and while she followed him the older brother

found a package with her heart in it and burned the heart in the fire and thus the pale woman died. The men threw the corpse into the river, packed their belongings and moved to the village of their sister.

45. Rok Pokapokl

One day a man called Pokapokl changed himself into a frog and decided to give a Mar dance. He had to borrow all the decorations, he also wanted the man called Morok from Kopon to cook sweet potatoes during the dance. He went to Kopon to fetch Morok. The wife was at home, but Morok was out hunting birds, marsupials and wild pigs. Pokapokl told her why he came and the next day Morok returned from hunting his wife told him Pokapokl was here and the reason for his visit. Next day Pokapokl asked Morok to come along, but he refused. They disputed all day long, finally Morok agreed to go along. He decorated himself and said to his wife that he wondered whether he would ever return or whether they would eat him. Pokapokl and Morok departed and came to a field with sweet potatoes and many women including the sister of Morok, who was strong like a man. The sister decided to come along taking with her a big digging stick. They got to Rakopa where there were many fat pigs on the ceremonial ground. Morok saw many skulls of

people who had been killed and was afraid. His sister at first watched the men's house and then she went down to the lake with red water. She hid there. Pokapokl said to Morok let's go to the onion garden, at first Morok refused but then he went along. They lit their torches and went down to the lake. Morok then realized that he was brought down here to be killed. When Pokapokl attacked him the sister rescued him and threw Pokapokl into the lake. Morok and his sister tore down the fences and houses and threw them into the lake on top of Pokapokl, then they set fire and burnt everything including Pokapokl. They slaughtered all the pigs and took the pork and all the valuables and returned home. At home Morok told his sister that if she had not been there Pokapokl would have killed him. He then slaughtered a fat pig and gave the pork to his sister, he also gave her eight pearlshells, then the sister went home. One day Morok fell into a trap in the forest and got killed, his wife and son drowned themselves in the river when they heard the news.

46. The Boys who played the Spear Game

Many boys played together by throwing spears against the Mire tree. A pale man came with Taro and meat and gave them to eat saying that he would come back at night and

sleep with them. The oldest brother Mojoim, hallowed the housepost and all the boys slept there. At night the pale man came but could not find them. Next day they played again, and the pale man came and gave them meat. A younger brother told him where they had slept, but the older brother hallowed a wall and they slept there. The pale man came again and could not find them; saying that he had come to eat them. Next morning the boys played again and the pale man came. Mojoim, the older brother hollowed out the roof beam of the house and they slept there, this went on every day until the pale man got angry and planned to avenge the boys. One day the boys slept in the branch of the Keraip tree and next day the pale man came again and they told him where they slept. He said that tonight he would surely find them, but again he was not successful. Next day he watched the boys, the older brother hallowed another branch of the tree and they went to sleep in it. The pale man came at night, but he was too weak to climb the tree so he went home to fetch his fellow clan men. They tried to bite through the wood, but their teeth broke, then they got their axes but they broke too. Suddenly, there came a terrible storm and the branch with the boys fell into the river and was swept away and was drifted ashore further down the river. Several young women came

to the river to collect wood and one woman took the branch with the boys home to her house. The boys inside started playing the flute, and the girls wondered who played, but could not make it out. Next day all but one woman went to the fields. She wanted to throw away a dead pig. Mojoim left the branch and followed the woman outside. She greeted him and asked where he was going, she showed him the pig. The girls had no fire yet. Mojoim made a fire, prepared the pig and vegetables and cooked the meat. He gave her some cooked meat, and she liked it. She ran to the other women and told them about the fire and the cooked meat. They all came and embraced the boy, but the first girl said that he was hers. Hearing that the other boys left the branch and each woman picked a young man and then they all ate together and settled and made gardens. One day Mojoim went to the garden and asked his wife to bring some food later, she did but got lost and slept in the woods at night. A tall man and a woman came along and took away her meat. They also took the woman into a netbag and went back to their village. There they hid her and gave her meat to eat. In the evening white and red birds of paradise, marsupials and other animals came and the man gave them meat. The pale woman then said to Mojoim's wife to return home and tell her husband not to hunt and

eat birds and marsupials. He could only kill and eat fish and pigs. She returned home and told her husband about the taboo. After a time many birds settled on a tree. One man however shot one of the birds. Next day he built a hunting hut and waited for more birds, but only one huge bird settled on the tree as the other passed. The man shot the huge bird but all the other birds grabbed the big one and flew away with him. The man was sorry about his loss, and went in search for the bird. His wife got angry, saying it was forbidden to shoot birds, but the man went to search for the bird anyhow. He came to a well travelled road and then to a settlement where people were in mourning and when they saw him they performed a war dance saying today they would kill the man. A man came over to him and said: Why are you here, did you come because you killed our man? Then they killed him in revenge.

56. A Woman's Experience in Lake Katla

The wife of the man Mama of Katla was a very bad woman. She always made her husband angry and when he beat her for it she went home to her village but she angered people there so much that they sent her back. When her husband beat her again, she took revenge and jumped into lake Katla. On the bottom she met a man who asked her

what she wanted and she told him why she was there. He repeated his question, gave her a piece of sugar cane and told her to return to her home immediately. She hesitated, but he chased her with a stick, and thus she came to the surface of the lake and people pulled her out. She told them of the spirit she had met in the lake.

60. Kumba

Many brothers lived together. One day they wanted to go hunting and told the little brother to stay at home and watch the pig. He did not want to stay at home so they beat him, but he still followed them. However, he lost his way and came to rubbish man who took the boy in. They both went hunting, but each went into a different direction. In the evening they returned home with marsupials, but the marsupials of the bachelor had no heads. They did that every day. One day the boy met a man who had killed a woman and carried the corpse, he followed the man and while passing a field a young woman gave him a cucumber and vegetables. Then he caught two more marsupials and returned home. The bachelor saw the breadfruit and ate some of it, he asked the boy where he got the vegetables, but the boy denied having seen any human beings. Next day they again went hunting but this



time they went together. They came to a settlement and the boy and the dog hid themselves and the bachelor watched the road then a man came along with a dead woman over his shoulders and the bachelor killed him for having killed people. Several more men came and they all got killed by the bachelor. Finally an old man came who had killed many children and carried the heavy load; the bachelor wanted to kill him but the old man defended himself and they fought for a long time. A young woman sat on a tree and watched, she told the bachelor that if he wanted to kill the man he had to go to the red lake near the man's house, kill him there and rip out the red cordyline tree. The bachelor followed her instructions and was able to kill the man. The bachelor and the boy took all the valuables, casuaries and pigs together with the young woman and returned home. The bachelor gave the young woman to the boy in marriage; he also gave them fat pigs and told the boy to return home to his original settlement. There he should slaughter a big male pig and sacrifice in a sacrificial house the kidneys, the tongue and the small parts. At home his brothers were surprised, they thought he was dead. The boy then killed the red male pig and sacrificed it as told, then the other brother sacrificed too and held a

funeral meal. Later his brothers got killed in a war, but the boy survived. Later he died too.

62. Kawekla of Kopon

Kawekla of Kopon wanted to marry a Kopon woman called Rakop. After a downpayment he took her home. Next day he gave them the bride price of 8 pearlshells and 8 pigs. He killed the pigs and distributed the meat and the next day they slaughtered more pigs and ate together. However, the sister of Kawekla, (a bad woman) washed intestines and poisoned them, and while the husband went hunting his wife ate some of the intestines and died. The husband slept in the woods and dreamt of his wife coming to him, next morning two slaves came and called out, Rakop is dead. He went back to the village and found his dead wife and held funeral rites. Next day the man said that he would go and look for his dead wife, he came to a lake and did not know how to go through it, a girl came and took him down she was his second sister's daughter who were both dead. When he got down, his dead sister asked him what he wanted and he told her of his wife's death and that he was looking for her. She decided to help him. He chopped off a finger and his sister lets the blood drop on some vegetables, the dead wife came and the sister gave her

the vegetables with the blood to eat. The sister asked her why she had died; and she told her that her husband always went to the forest. Then the sister asked whether she wanted to see her husband or not and when she said yes, the sister got her brother who took his wife back to the village. But the husband went hunting again, and lived in a hunting hut in the forest. The little man came and asked him who killed all the pigs, the man denied having done so. But the little man showed him all the bones in his hunting hut and killed the husband in a trap. At home his wife and parents wondered what had happened and sent a little brother to look for him. He found the corpse and they held funeral rites. The wife chopped off a finger and tried to hang herself, but the parents tried to prevent it, however, at night the woman hung herself. They held funeral rites for both.

66. The Mundokitla-Fruit

There were two boys who lived together. One day the older brother went to the garden to fetch sweet potatoes and the little brother stayed at home and cooked himself the vegetables Kitim. The upper leaves were very good, but the lower once was very bitter. In order to get rid of the bitter taste, he went to the older brother's

sugar cane field and ate some hiding the peels. When the older brother came home and saw an ant carrying a piece of sugar cane, he realized that his brother had stole some of his sugar cane. He then asked his little brother to adjust the ashes on the fire so that they could cook sweet potatoes, while doing as he was told the older brother took his hand and put it into the hot ashes. The little brother screamed and went outside and sat on top of the roof. A hawk came and dropped a piece of meat for him, then came the bird Tentepai with fruit from the Mundokitla tree, dropped it and the boy ate some of it. Then he called his older brother and gave him some of the Mundokitla fruit. The younger brother told him how he had gotten the fruit and they went in search of the tree until they found it. The older brother went up the tree and plucked the fruit and the younger brother collected them. Meanwhile, an old man, the owner of the tree sharpened his ax at the river. His leg went to sleep and his foot itched. He thought that this was an omen and wondered whether someone was stealing his valuables, or stole and killed his male pig; or perhaps someone was raping his wife. But his foot continued to itch. When he thought of someone stealing his Mundokitla fruit his foot stopped itching, then he took his ax and went to the tree. When he saw

the boys taking his fruit he tried to kill them but the older boy changed himself into a hawk and flew away and the younger boy quickly hallowed out a fruit and hid himself in it. The old man then collected all the fruit and went home, put them into his house and looked after his pigs. While he was gone, some girls came to the house and decided to play a thread game but they complained that they had no one to show them the main game, the boy inside the fruit heard them and said he would teach them if they helped him out of the fruit. They took him out of the fruit and he told them that he would show them how to play the game, but first they had to lie down and close their eyes so that they could not see how he started the game. The girls complied, laid down and closed their eyes. The boy however, took his ax and hit them, chopping off their heads. After he had done so, he took the Mundokitla fruit and went home. The brothers ate the fruits and lived together.

69. Sister and Brother

A sister lived with her brother and his wife. One day the sister went to get taro and sweet potatoes in the garden and she found a huge taro and rams her digging stick into it, but discovered that it was the wife of her brother who had changed herself into a taro. The

sister went home and cooked the meal without saying anything. The brother went to look for his wife in the garden and discovered that the sister had killed his wife. He planned to revenge the death of his wife. One day he took his sister to the woods to collect vines, there the brother made her cut vines at a very steep place and as she bent over the brother pushed her into the abyss. The sister however did not get killed. In another village a man saw the reflection and went to investigate, he found the sister and took her home to his village. She recovered and they were married. One day they heard of a pig feast in another village and decided to attend, they stayed with the man which was the sister's brother who had pushed her into the abyss. The sister identified her brother to her husband, but her brother changed his appearance and departed. When the visitors realized that the brother was gone, they slaughtered the pigs, cooked them and too the meat. Next day the brother came back and called for his pigs but his wife told him that they were gone. Then he realized that his sister and her husband had stolen the meat and had taken it to their village. At home, the sister and her husband ate the meat. One day her husband went into the forest to hunt birds and he built a hunting hut on a tree, but the branch broke and he

fell down and died. His father looked for him and found him dead so both his father and his wife hung themselves.

73. Kuman Paje

Two brothers went into the woods to hunt marsupials. They took their sister along to carry the food and while they were hunting she stayed in the hunting hut. Suddenly, she heard noises in the woods and getting frightened she ran into the hut, then a man came and forced her to go along with him. She resisted but it was no use and just as they were about to leave they heard whistling in the woods and the man ran away without her. After a while her brothers returned and the cooked and ate marsupials. The next day the brothers prepared to go hunting again and the sister begged them not to leave her alone, she told them that a man was there who wanted to kill her but they considered it as nonsense and departed. After they left the man came again and asked her to come along, when she refused he threatened to kill her so she had to go with him. On the way she broke little trees in order to leave a trace. They came to the top of a mountain where the man lifted a bushel of lemon grass and exposed a path which they followed. They came to a lake with dark water and

there was also a lake with red water nearby and as they came to the first lake, the man threw the woman into the water, pushed her down and left. The woman saw a fish trap which an old man had put there and crawled into it. When her brothers returned home and did not find her, they cried and decided that one should go home and the other should go and look for her. As he came to the mountain with many roads, he did not know which one to take. A marsupial came along and asked what he was doing there? The brother told him that some had taken one of his women and he was looking for her, so the marsupial lifted the lemon grass bush and they followed the same path. As they came to the lake they saw an old man taking fish traps out of the water. The men told him why they were here and the old man told them of a woman whom he had rescue. They went to the house and slept. The next day the brother and the marsupial decided to kill the old man, the marsupial took his spear and killed him, they took the woman and went home with her. The woman then married the marsupial, Watnga, who gave the brothers many valuables. The lived happily until they died.



74. A Man and his Lazy Sister

A brother and his sister lived together. The sister was very lazy and did not do any work at all. She did not even go to the garden, so one day the brother went to the garden to get some sweet potatoes and told his sister to stay at home and while she was at home a pig came to the house and ate the vegetables. When the sister saw the pig she threw a rock to chase the pig away but the pig got killed. Soon afterward the owner of the pig came looking for his pig, and when the sister told him what had happened the owner of the dead pig got angry, went home and incited his brother to warfare. When the woman realized what was happening, she armed herself with her brother's weapons, so when the brother came home from the field and asked his sister why there was a warfare, she told him what had happened. The enemies came and the clan brothers of the brother fought with them. After the brother killed one of the enemies he ran home and buried all his valuables, took his decorations and the sister and went to the garden. There he changed the woman into a casuary, the bananas into wild bananas and the vegetables into weed, and left the territory fleeing from his enemies. On his way he came to a garden where he ate and slept, when a young

woman discovered him he told her he had to flee and the woman took him to her village. The people there were very friendly and gave him sugar cane and the man decided to live there. One day the men went into the woods to make a new field and at first they had to bare trees of branches. The brother climbed up a tree and saw smoke rising from his sister's place and he was overcome with grief and became homesick so he chopped off a finger. When the others asked him why he did it, he explained that he had left a girl at home and up on the tree he saw a dark cloud of smoke rising from her house and he had a great longing for her and that is why he did it. The other men told him not to be said since they could go and fetch the girl. They went to the place and saw the casuary and the brother chased it and told the man who went with him not to kill the casuary, but to catch it alive. Then the brother took off the wings of the casuary and the bird changed into a young woman. The men then took all the valuables he had hidden along with the woman and went home. The brother married a woman from the village and the sister married the villager. They lived together until they were old and died.

77. Pakla Rontopa

A man lived with his sister who was still a virgin. He let his sister lead a lazy life as he tended the garden and chopped wood. One day when he came home the sister cried in despair and would not answer to his inquiries, but continued to cry more. He offered to kill a pig for her, but to no avail. Then he asked her whether she wanted to marry, but he got no answer, the brother finally got angry and left. She was dissatisfied with the man anyhow and had prepared to leave too. She made a long cord and tied it to the doorpost and trailed it as she went along, and since she could not cross the river she sat and waited. Along came a beautiful young man who took her with him as he crossed the river to his village. They got married. She had a lot of children whom she named after useful articles, such as fire tongue, digging stick and blackened mat. Meanwhile the brother wondered where the sister was and followed the cord she had made. He arrived at her house where the children greeted him as their uncle. He was surprised that she had so many impertinent, dirty children. The children told him that their parents were away collecting rainworms. When the parents came home, the sister greeted her brother, they cooked the worms, but

the brother got an upset stomach at the sight of the worms. He could not eat the worms, but hid them in the house and after dinner he went with the husband to the men's house. The sister discovered that he had not eaten the worms and told her husband the next day that her brother declined to eat her meal, so they planned revenge. The invited the brother to go along with them to a sugar cane garden, down a steep mountain side, approachable only by ladder. They went there and invited him to stay in the garden house and he agreed unsuspectingly. They climbed back up the steep side and took the ladder away and then they told him that they were going to abandon him because he had refused to eat the supper. The sister and her husband cursed the place and went home. The brother began to cry at first, but then he prepared for his escape, by cooking a lot of food. At night the spirits came looking for him so he threw out some food, which they fought over and then ate, after they had finish eating the first set he threw out some more. Then a bat came into the house, he caught it and dressed it with his clothes and valuables, after all his food was gone the spirits decided to eat him and he told the spirits he would come out of the house, but instead he threw out the bat and hid himself in the earth oven. When they had eaten the bat they

came into the house but could not find the man thought that they must have eaten him already. At daybreak, the spirits disappeared and the man came out of the house ripped out his hair and threw it around, then he ran away, hiding himself. Next morning the sister and her husband checked to see whether he had been eaten by the spirits or not, they went to the house and saw it empty and his hair all over the floor and were convinced that the spirits had eaten him, they even commented on how glad they were to be rid of him. As they collected food from the garden, the brother climbed up the ladder and removed it and called down to them saying, yesterday you wanted to kill me, but today the spirits would eat you. The brother then returned to his settlement. The sister and her husband did not know what to do, so they slept in the house, but during the night the spirits came and ate them. Later the brother returned to his sister's place and killed all her children, took all the valuables, got himself a wife and lived with her until he died.

78. The tale of the Huge Snake

A young man lived together with his sister. Nearby was a lake in which lived a huge snake. The snake nourished herself on the breast of the young woman, who went every day to the lake and offered her breasts to the snake.

One day the brother watched her and he did not like what she was doing so he went to the lake and killed the snake by chopping off the head. The head of the snake jumped back into the water and when the sister went down to the lake the next day and called the snake, the snake did not come. She looked for her and discovered the body in the water. The sister cried and wailed and hung herself. The brother buried her and lived by himself. He slowly ran out of clothes and food and only near the levetry he could find some sweet potatoes and went home to cook them. Suddenly, there was a movement in the fireplace and the head of the snake appeared, he realized that this was a sign. The water of the lake rose and he got drowned in it, and the land became a desert. The lake became very large but no one lived there. Around it grew lots of food and people collected it. One day a man put fish traps into the lake and caught a huge eel, he took it home and invited his parents for dinner, they also killed a pig. When the man came home to get the eel, it had disappeared so they only had pork at the feast. Later a little girl went into the house to fetch fire and saw a huge snake who had fish skin on her belly and on one side it looked like a snake and on the other like a pig, the girl got scared and ran to the people and told them what she had

seen, they said that a spirit must have come to our house and it was the maternal uncle of the girl. Then they prayed and this they still do today.

83. The Pale Nukint

One day Nukint had stolen a pig. When he met a woman by the river he asked her to come along and cook it. They prepared the meat for cooking and Nukint gave her a piece, but she did not take it. But eventually they cooked the meat together. Nukint then distributed the meat equally between them, but she was still sulking. When Nukint packed his meat and departed she got scared and grabbed her meat in a hurry, packed it together hurriedly and followed him. But she could not catch up with the man. Both stayed the night in the woods, at different places. Next morning she continued to follow him, but could not find him. Finally, she came to a house where an old man and woman lived. They said that they did not see Nukint and told her to forget about him and stay there with them. The woman started to cry when she saw all the dirt in her netbag. The old man said to her that every day someone was stealing something from them and then he asked the woman to watch out. He gave her a big digging stick and she hid in the garden. She watched a woman coming along and took all kinds of

vegetables. She managed to hit the thief, another woman, on the head, but could not retain her. The woman returned to the old people and told them what had happened. Next day they slaughtered a pig and while it was cooking, the old man said to her that it was good that she came with Nukint and asked her if she wanted to go to him? When she said yes, the old man explained to her how to get there. When she got to Nukint's house, she wanted to go into the house, but she saw Nukint's main wife with a bandage around her head. The wife saw her and said to Nukint: "there is the woman who hit me". Nukint got up and took her into the house and the meat that she had brought with her she gave to her man and they ate and lived together.

89. The Woman and the Huge Snake

There were two men who lived together. They heard that the men went daily to a woman's dance and so they decided to slaughter a pig, and took the meat and went there too. When the woman saw the two men she told the others to rest and that she would take the two men to her home. The father was satisfied with the two and went to get some food. The two men gave the parents the meat and next day the parents greased the girl and decorated her and the three went to the men's village. One of the men married the woman and paid the



brideprice. One day the wife went into the garden to get some sweet potatoes and there she saw a huge snake coming towards her and she took her stick and killed the snake. Then suddenly realized that she had killed her husband, the woman started to cry and wanted to chop off a finger, but the husband came back to life again and said: "I came here and you did not recognize me and hit me. I go now to the men's house and sleep there. Go there, but on the way fetch some onions." She did as she was told and when she got to the men's house her husband was there but he was dead. She started to cry and was afraid that her husband's people would kill her so she went home to her parents. At home one day she saw her husband coming, she was glad to see him and embraced him. The husband said, "let's go home together" they left and on the way he gave her meat to eat. They came to the ceremonial ground where the people held funeral rites, when the people saw they the said, that the husband himself went and got his wife. She sat with the mourning people and put on her mourning dress. Later the people killed pigs and held a funeral meal. The woman remained alone, later she went down to

when she got under the lake she saw her husband and all the other dead people, then she knew she had come to the land of the dead. She lived there together with her people.

91. Pint of Mukl

In Mukl lived a man called Pint. He constantly went to the woods and left his parents alone. Once again while hunting, he saw a fire at a distance and told his parents he intended to go there. He slaughtered and cooked a pig, so he could take some meat along with him. Next day he decorated himself and took most of the meat. The small parts he gave to his parents. He also took taro, and his weapons. He got to place where the fire was burning and in a sweet potato field there was an old woman, so he gave her a piece of his meat. Then the woman told him that her daughter Ajampetla was giving woman's dance and encouraged him to go and dance with her. When Ajampetla saw him she told the others to take a rest, since she was going to bring the newcomer, a relative of her father's, to her father. The father offered the guest bananas and meat. The visitor slept at night with the girl in the woman's house. Next day the father said that he could have her as his wife. He slaughtered a pig at the spirit house, decorated the

girl and gave them the meat and the couple went back to Pint's place. On their way there, on top of a mountain, they looked back and saw the woman's settlement burning. They realized that the other suitors had burned down the houses of the parents. Pint went back to check whether her parents were still alive. The enemies were still there destroying the settlement after they had killed her parents. He drew his spear and fought, but a slave killed him from the back. The soul of Pint went back to Ajampetla and said that the men had killed her parents and destroyed the settlement and that he had killed them all. But Ajampetla realized that he was dead since his dress was just stuck on. She started wailing and mourning, but Pint said to her, that they should go on. They came to the top of a mountain and he told her to go down sideways to the other side of the river, there she would find a house. The woman entered the house and he continued to go westward. The people in the house asked her where she was coming from and she told them she came from Pint who had been killed. They all held mourning rites for Pint and a funeral meal. Ajampetla then married one of Pint's brother and had many children. Later on she died.

92. Kutli and Make

There were two men called Kutli and Make. Make was a poor fellow, but Kutli was rich and had many valuables so that he could hold a PearlsheII feast. The woman Moklamb Detltaklamb came also to the feast, but she had decorated herself like a man, and came dancing to the ceremonial ground. She was a stranger and all people wondered who she was. She danced the War dance. Kutli did not know her either; she was very beautiful. He instructed his wife not to let the strange woman get away, so the wife tied the woman with a string and watched her but she got away. Next morning Moklamb Detltaklamb came again, heavily decorated with valuables, feathers and marsupial furs. She danced the War dance again. Kutli said to his wife that today she should tie her closer and hold on to her. The wife did so, but the strange woman got away again at sundown. All the people wondered what kind of a woman she was since she did not act like the other women. Next day, the last day of the feast, Moklamb Detltaklamb came again, dancing the War dance. This time Make gave instructions to his wife to make sure to hold her but she got away again. Make was very sad, covered himself with ashes saying that he wanted to marry her. Next day

he took one of his pigs, slaughtered it and cooked it, he then took the cooked meat and went in search of the strange woman. He came to Kendika and asked the people for her. They said that they saw her but warned him that she was a bad and evil woman, eating human flesh. But he searched further and came to Pojeka where a slave warned him not to go to Moklamb Detltaklamb's village. Make gave the slave the pig's live and continued his search. When he came to a forest near the high mountain Ketlua Letlip, he heard someone chopping wood who turned out to be his maternal cousin. He warned him that Moklamb Detltaklamb was a cannibal and would eat him, but Make explained that when his brother Kutli gave Moka and called him a poor chap he got very angry and decided to marry this strange woman. He gave some meat to his cousin, who cooked him a meal and gave him a pearlshell. Next day Make climbed Mt. Ketloa Letlip and saw a high river which he had to cross, when he got to the river, a casuary came and made a bridge for Make to cross. On the other side he climbed a Pangkep tree from where he could see things. He saw many women in a sweet potato garden who had many dogs with them. One woman after the other came to the river to drink. Finally Moklamb Detltaklamb came too to wash sweet potatoes. Make took a fruit from the tree and threw it on her back, she

discovered the man on the tree. Make told her he wanted her to come with him. Moklamb Detltaklamb told him to stay up there while she went home with the sweet potatoes and that she would come back to follow him. Moklamb Detltaklamb went home, cooked a meal and told the other women that she had a stomach ache due to worms. She went into her house and packed her things and valuables and returned to Make. They crossed the river, stayed over night at his cousin's place and went on home. There the people were surprised that Make got the woman. Kutli then said that even though he already had several wives, he wanted also one of the strange women. Make warned him not to go. He went because he had nothing to loose and did not care about his life. Make told him he had a lot to loose and he should not go. But Kutli did not listen, he slaughtered a pig and took the meat and departed. He met the same people who had warned Make to return home and not to go to the place of cannibals, who would eat him, but he went anyhow. After crossing the river he climbed a tree and saw several women coming to the river. When finally a beautiful one came he threw a fruit at her but did not see her dog. The dog barked and all the other dogs came and killed Kutli. The cousin heard that Kutli had been killed by the dogs and went to get the corpse. He

chopped off a finger and brought it to Kutli's brother. When they saw the finger, they realized that Kutli was dead and they decided to make war, and called all the people together and invited them to join the war. The warriors went to the place where Kutli got killed and surrounded the village of the women and burned down the houses.

105. The Story of the Verschlossene Jungfrau (Strauss 1962:62-3)

A man gave his sister in marriage to Ndepona Nikint. He took her with him to his settlement in the forest, the woman found a bird egg and ate it raw and got pregnant. She was surprised since she had never had sex with a man. She bore a son. Ndepona Nikint fed him and he grew very quickly. The brother of the wife came and asked for the bride price. Nikint gave him many valuables and pigs. Then Nikint offered him his bad ax in addition. The man said yes and Nikint gave him a childless woman. The brother did not know how to transport all the valuables and pigs to his village, so the childless woman said to leave them here and he did so. Nikint told the brother not to hit the woman (have sex). The childless woman refused to go into brother's house and insisted on staying in the bush. He let her

settle there. Next morning he was looking for her and discovered a beautiful ceremonial ground with a new men's house. Then the childless woman said to him that he should get himself a wife. He looked for one, but all he knew was poor and refused. Finally he got a poor woman. However, he gave so many valuables and pigs for her, that many others came to him and offered marriages. One evening he visited the childless woman and did not want to leave, but she said that if he wanted to sleep there he should come back the next night. But the next morning the beautiful ground and the childless woman were gone. He went to Nikint to tell him what had happened. Nikent told him that he had forbidden him to sleep with his bad ax (childless woman), but Nikent gave him the woman again and the next morning the beautiful ceremonial ground was there again. The man lived in great plenty, peace and health. From then on he treated the childless woman with respect.

107. The Myth of the Origin of Death (Strauss 1962:127-8)

About dying and rejuvenation of human beings: There lived an ancient man and an ancient woman and the woman had a son. The boy had to defecate and his feces got to lay on her lap. The woman did not know what to do and could not wipe it away. The old man saw it and told her



to wait until he came back from the woods where he would fetch leaves and bark from the trees which peeled and then she could wipe it off. He said, "I will make it possible for people to shed their old skin and rejuvenate themselves". The woman waited and waited but the man did not return and the feces on her lap stank intolerably, so she grabbed some leaves nearby and wiped herself and threw it away. They were the leaves of the plants Pints and Poketa. In the meantime the old man had collected the things for the rejuvenation of human beings and when he finally got back the old woman said: "my goodness, because you took so long, I could not stand it any longer and so I have wiped it away". The old man got very angry and said: "while I was busy trying to bring about the rejuvenation of people, you already accomplished that they will have to die". He threw away the things he had collected and that is why people have to die.

108. How the Dead Ancestors decided over Life and Death of People (Strauss 1962:165-7)

There was a young woman whose parents had died. She had four brothers and one day the brothers gave her into marriage and they received for her 8 pigs, 8 shells and 8 other valuables. As they were distributing these

things among themselves and the clan, three brothers said they should sacrifice the largest pig to the parents. This pig should constitute the parent's part of the bride price. If we give them nothing, they might cause trouble with the marriage and cause her to come back and we would have to give back the bride price, which is always painful and undesirable. The oldest brother said no, we should keep this large pig in case we need it one day for compensation or to give a large feast. Adding, when you want to get married, are the dead coming back to give you the necessary bride price? Thus the oldest brother decided to keep the pig himself. The newly married woman distributed the meat, according to custom. She got caught by nightfall and had to spend the night in a big spirit house. Suddenly her dead uncle came into the house and asked whether she was there for ever or just passing through. She told him she was just passing through and was on her way to her husband's Kona. Her uncle hid her in the earth oven since many dead people would come for a meeting. When the spirits came they took a piece of sacrificial meat and distributed it and ate it. They said soon there will be war, which of the living men should be killed by the enemies? All did not want to part with men who were making sacrifices to them, fearing not to have enough to

eat. The man whose daughter was watching had not spoken yet. Now he said: "I have four sons, the oldest refused to sacrifice the big pig to me and my wife, but poked fun at us instead. He shall die." Then he asked his wife for her opinion, she did not agree. "Do you think the others will sacrifice to you?" She refused absolutely then the husband said, "you don't know what you are talking about. I will not listen to you." The other spirits agreed with him and the wife said, "then you will have to go and beg the other spirits to give you some of their sacrificial meat. Go and give your oldest son to the enemies. My other three sons I will not give away. When they sacrifice to me, don't you think you will get any of it." The husband said he did not want to listen to her anymore and told her that she has always been contrary. "Do you think a man who did not give us our due from the bride price will later give us decent sacrifices? If he had not poked fun at us and given us our due, he should remain alive. But he did not and so I will carry him to the enemies in the battle." All decided on that course of action. The uncle, the brother of her mother, said to the woman hiding: "Here take a piece of the sacrificial meat and bring it to your brothers. Warn the oldest not to go to war since his father will have him killed." She went to

her brothers and told them not to go to war, since one of them would die. "I have heard mother and father decided to do so. Here is a piece of meat as proof of the truth." But the brothers did not listen to her and when the oldest brother got killed in the fight, the other brothers realized that their sister was right and they said from now on we will never use a pig destined for sacrifice for other purposes. Let us sacrifice and honor the dead so that they may carry our heads in protective manners.