

GENDER AND THE LIFE CYCLE AS INTRA-RELATED PROCESSES IN MELANESIA
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BARIAI OF NORTHWEST NEW BRITAIN,
PAPUA, NEW GUINEA

by

Naomi Scaletta
McMaster University

ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is an exploration of the relationship between concepts of gender, aging and dying in Melanesia. It is argued that age and gender are fundamental principles underlying the Melanesian world view; that the aging process is, at the individual level, an experiential living through of this world view; and, that age both delimits and articulates gender in terms of social and personal identity. The paper begins with a theoretical discussion of the Melanesian world view. Examples drawn from Melanesian ethnography generally and the Bariai in particular, are used to illustrate that world view and its usefulness as a theoretical framework for understanding gender and the totality of the life cycle as inter-related processes.

RESUME

Cet article est une exploration des liens entre les concepts de genre, de naissance et de mort en Mélanésie. L'auteur raisonne que l'âge et le genre sont des principes fondamentaux dans l'univers mélanésien. Le procédé de 'vieillessement' est au niveau de l'individu une vie expérientielle de cet univers, et son âge délimite et articule son genre, en ce qui concerne l'identité sociale et personnelle chez l'individu. Cet article débute avec une discussion théorique de l'univers mélanésien. Des exemples sont généralement tirées d'ethnographies mélanésiennes, et en particulier les Bariai sont examinés pour illustrer cette vue de l'univers et son utilité comme charpente théorique pour la compréhension du genre et de la totalité du cycle de vie comme procédés en relation mutuelle.

INTRODUCTION

As separate topics of investigation, age and gender have been considered from various theoretical perspectives, however, "approaches to each topic have developed without insight gained in the other" (LaFontaine 1978:5). In this paper I will explore the relationship between concepts of gender, aging and dying in Melanesia. Gender and the aging process are cultural categories best viewed as aspects of a complex epistemology pertaining to Melanesian views of human nature and the cosmos from which meanings are derived and to which meanings are in turn attributed.

Melanesian views of the life cycle and gender are decidedly different from our own. Some decades ago W.H.R. Rivers pointed out such differences in his discussion of Melanesian concepts of death. Rivers noted that the passage from life to death was looked upon

in much the same light as the passage from one condition of life to another...death is not the unique and catastrophic event it seems to us, but merely a condition of passing from one existence to another, forming but one of a number of transitions, which began before...birth and stand out as the chief memories of...life (Rivers 1912:218).

Death is not a terminal state, but an aspect of an aging process, a process of interaction between the living, and the living and the dead.

Similarly, gender categories in Melanesia are different from our own. There is increasing evidence in the literature that female and male gender categories are by no means immutable, indeed they are not only mutable but transmutable. In the interaction of daily existence, female and male exchange the dynamic essence of their respective gender; an exchange which may culminate in the neutralization, or reversal of gender distinctions at old age (Meigs 1976).

Throughout this paper, sex and gender are differentiated. Sex is taken to mean the biological male or female; sex is a physiological attribution based on the evidence of genitalia and is thus a purely physical characteristic. Gender is taken to mean the social and cultural attribution of meaning to the categories female and male (Ortner & Whitehead 1981). In other words, gender constitutes an ideology in terms of concepts of ideal female/male values (Poole 1981). While sex and gender are inter-related, gender is not merely an epiphenomenon of sex. By considering gender as an aspect of ideology which operates to "define certain qualities of social concern", it is also possible to examine how concepts of gender "relate to other ideas" (Strathern 1978:173), particularly ideas about the aging process.

Like gender, the life cycle is grounded in human biological facts, but not reducible to them. The aging process is also subject to cultural transformation. During the aging process, "Individuals are

transients through the system; no single individual or cohort of individuals is permanently classified by it" (LaFontaine 1978:13).

It is assumed here that age and gender are fundamental principles underlying the Melanesian world view; that the aging process is, at the individual level, an experiential living through of this world view; and, that age both delimits and articulates gender in terms of social and personal identity. By placing gender within the framework of the aging process and both within the framework of a world view, the question to be addressed becomes: how does the aging process genderize the individual? Exploration of this query must commence with a generalized discussion of the Melanesian world view.¹

THE MELANESIAN WORLD VIEW

My use of the term world view follows that of Geertz (1973) and Ortiz (1972). A people's world view provides a "picture of the ways in which things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society" (Geertz 1973:127). It "provides a people with a structure of reality; it defines, classifies, and orders the "really real" in their universe, in their world, and in their society" (Ortiz 1972:136). A world view is a cultural system, a system of symbols for the imposition of meaning and order to the universe. It provides an 'intellectually satisfying' perspective to reality. Religion and world view are distinguishable. World view defines and expresses reality; religion provides a framework for social action, for living in the world so defined. Religion provides

both an intellectually and emotionally satisfying picture of and orientation toward that reality.... Since religion...carries the added burden of rendering endurable such unpleasant facts of the human condition as evil, suffering, meaninglessness, and death it must be more instrumental than expressive, more thoroughly constitutive of the social order than merely reflective of it (Ortiz 1972:136).

It is not my purpose here to discuss religion per se, only to indicate that world view and religion are separable concepts and that the two fit together, that is, that life as it is defined (world view) and life as it is lived (religion) are reasonably integrated.

There are two basic categories important as organizational constructs in discussing world view. These are space and time, categories which operate to provide a "primary level of orientation to reality.... Space is only meaningful as the distance between two points, and time cannot be understood apart from the forces and changes in nature which give it relevance and meaning" (Ortiz 1972:137). It is of little use, however, to describe a world view in highly abstract and metaphysical terms such as space and time, as this presents great difficulties in exposition and in relating world view to crucially important social concerns such as politics, economics, kinship and so

on. The assertion made earlier that age and gender are fundamental principles of the Melanesian world view is simply a restatement in less abstract terms of the concepts of space and time as basic categories of any world view. Gender is an expression of social and personal space; the aging process is an expression of social and personal time.

Age is a temporal feature of existence extended vertically; gender is a spatial feature extended horizontally. Given that aging implies time, age as a temporal feature of one's existence extends vertically in the sense that it reaches back into the immediate and remote past, that is, from oneself to parents, grandparents, ancestors, to creator beings; and into the future, from oneself to one's progeny, to their progeny and so on. The immediate experience of time as lineal is only a segment of the totality of time as infinity. Gender is a spatial feature of existence in that it is an aspect of a classificatory system defining relations of inclusion and exclusion, hence defining distance and ordering the relations between various categories and the person so defined. The conjoining of space/time constitutes the socio-cultural vortex of meaning; the locus of meaning is the individual situated at the axis of the space/time continuum at any given point.² Space/time or gender/age are perceived as processual and transformational.

A further important characteristic of the Melanesian world view necessary for grasping the processual and transformational nature of the interrelationship of gender/age, is the epistemological a priori postulate of a holistic universe. Holism is best described by the Levy-Bruhlian concept of participation.

Participation is not a fusion of things which lose or conserve their identity at one and the same time; it enters into their very constitution. It is imminent in the individual as a condition of existence. To exist is to participate in a mystical force, essence and reality (Levy-Bruhl 1975:xx).

Participation can neither be explained nor legitimated; as a condition of existence it just is, thereby operating as a principle of explanation in and of itself. Expressed negatively, the law of participation "is not subject to the law of contradiction which dominates our own thought and logic" (Rivers 1912:208). As a principle of explanation, we are able to approximate an idea of participation

only by an effort of depriving this expression of its abstract nature...(it) is not the synthesis or reunion of one thing with another thing, such that while being two they are yet one....[Participation] is simply a complex reality, felt at one and the same time as one and as two without this causing any difficulty (Levy-Bruhl 1975:71, orig. emphasis).

Participation means that entities such as the living and the dead, female and male, although separated in space/time, are in fact, consubstantial.

Entities separated in space and time imply categories and classifications, or a process of differentiation. In Melanesia the categories female and male are often sharply defined, to the extent that female and male spheres of influence are often considered inimical to one another. By drawing these boundaries and reinforcing them symbolically and behaviourally, female and male are imbued with the characteristic tone and value ascribed to their respective gender. If these boundaries were as impermeable as they are ideally portrayed, in principle they would preclude any interaction whatsoever. Bateson's (1958) classic depiction of the naven ceremony is an analysis of a cultural metaphor which both describes the process of differentiation of gender ethos and the means of overriding these differences. While the process of differentiation embodies notions of boundaries, the 'law of participation' suggests that these boundaries are permeable to a point where it becomes difficult to discern where the identity of one thing stops and another begins.

Participation is most evident in Melanesia in the conceptualization of a continuum of relations among human beings, nature and the cosmos. A defining feature of this holistic universe is the belief in all pervasive, undifferentiated life force, not unlike what has been known in the literature for some time as mana.

The idea of mana consists of a series of fluid notions which merge into each other. First, mana is a quality....Secondly mana is a thing, a substance, an essence that can be handled yet also independent....by its nature it is transmissible, contagiousThirdly, mana is a force, more especially the force of spirit beings...the souls of ancestors and nature spirits (Mauss 1972:109).

While there is a large literature on the concept of mana, the term itself has fallen into disuse. The reason for this is aptly explained by Levy-Bruhl who describes mana as embodying "aspects of a single psychic activity" from which it follows that "our philosophical and psychological terminology is cruelly inadequate and continually risks falsifying the description" (Mauss 1972:193,194). The problem with mana, as with the concept of participation, is that it defies logical categories.

If the term mana no longer finds its way into the ethnography, the meaning and content of the term is to be found in essentially synonymous terms such as vital essence or life force. As Newman puts it, vital essence "can mean entity, substance and intrinsic nature" (1964:272,3); it does not have a material form but is present in various material substances. Vital essence is "more than an animating force, it is a life force" (Newman 1964:258). Terms such as vital essence and life force as currently used in Melanesian ethnographies embrace all the features of the concept of mana. Vital essence, like mana, is

also and above all a power, inseparable, it is true, from the substance but not confused with it, and by nature

essentially mystical, that is to say belonging to the supernatural world, to the mythical world, and therefore outside the conditions of the physical world (conditions of space, time and secondary causes).... Because it is invisible it can have an importance, a wealth of powers that one would never have thought of attributing to it if it were visible (Levy-Bruhl 1975:164,165).

The emphasis on personal freedom, individual autonomy and pragmatism that pervades Melanesian social relations stems, I suggest, from the belief that each individual has access to, indeed contains this mystical essence from whence all else flows. Success in love or gardening, trade relations, politics, in all facets of life, is a direct result of individual (or group) efficacy in controlling the source of power, thereby transforming people and things to desired ends.

The Melanesian world view is basically monistic, it postulates a single integrating principle in the universe, therefore, a cosmos in which everything is "believed to be knowable, and, being knowable, controllable" (Ortiz 1972:143). The basic details of monism are "an esoteric mystery for the erudite" (Bateson 1958:246). The continuum of relations is expressed by a sense of pluralism; of "the multiplicity and differentiation of objects, people and spiritual beings in the world" (Bateson 1958:235). It is the belief in multiplicity which is "lay and exoteric" (Bateson 1958:248), and which finds its expression in what Hogbin describes as the "universal practice of magic" (1970:168). Magic is the agency through which metamorphosis of the one into the many is accomplished; it is the agency of control.

The transformation of vital essence is associated with ideas about creation based upon metamorphosis. Generally speaking, creation (of whatever type) is, in Melanesia, a process of metamorphosizing the ubiquitous life force through the magical control of substantive vital essence embodied in people and things. An example of this comes from Fortune who relates that in Dobu, "language is specialized to express the conception of metamorphosis", and creation "is explained by the metamorphosis of some natural thing into another" (1932:94). The theme of metamorphosis is very evident in Melanesian mythology, particularly creation myths (compare Berndt 1962; Counts 1980b; Herdt 1981). Creator beings are usually androgenous, in this sense depicting the concept of participation; through metamorphosis they transform the world of reality; the phenomenal realm becomes differentiated.

Participation-metamorphosis/differentiation-participation; these are the key concepts contained in the Melanesian world view, and they are vastly different from our own cartesian world view, hence descriptively and analytically fraught with problems. Epistemologically, the Melanesian world view is holistic and participatory; the phenomenal realm is created by differentiation through the metamorphosis of vital essence. Reality requires the separation of elements perceived as consubstantial, thus providing the basis for interaction. On the other hand, our cartesian world view posits the existence of separate phenomenal elements which must be

brought together in order that interaction is possible. Melanesian mythic themes emphasize how the differentiation of vital essence into various material substances produces the world of experience; they do not posit an a priori separation of elements which must then be brought together to produce the experiential realm. If the problem in a cartesian world view is establishing and maintaining relations between things defined as formally and substantively other, the problem in a non-cartesian world view is establishing and maintaining differences in things defined as formally and substantively the same.

GENDER AND THE LIFE CYCLE

The life cycle--the process of being conceived, born; the process of growing older, and the process of dying--is not merely a matter of adding years to one's life. The aging process traces the individual's origins in the ancestral life force which provides the dynamic vitality during the era of corporeal existence; the process of dying being that which releases life force back into the ancestral realm from whence it originated. Ancestors represent time in an abstract sense; they inform the temporal dimension of existence and "presuppose a doctrine of immortality" (Fortune 1932:178). The ancestors are symbolically representative of fertility, that is, creation, procreation, production and reproduction. Among the Gahuka-Gama, the great fertility rite Asijo Teho, is referred to simply as "our ancestor" (Read 1952:9). The unnamed power of ancestors is a manifestation of a more generalized force "which people feel to lie behind the continuing order of all things" (Read 1952:10). Similarly, the Huli believe "in the persistence of soul stresses continuity rather than eternity" (Glasse 1965:31); a continuity based on the nurturance of fecundity. The ancestors are "embodiments of the productive aspect of vital essence" (Newman 1964:267), in other words

Vital essence, ghosts and ancestors form a related set in that they are, or were, connected with the individual. Further, they are linked with one another temporally since at death an individual's essence becomes his ghost and ghosts become ancestors with the passage of time (Newman 1964:259).

The life force (vital essence, mana), like the concept of energy in physics, can neither be created nor destroyed; it can, however, be transformed, augmented or diminished. The life cycle from birth through death describes the metamorphosis of the life force as vital essence contained in bodily fluids and articulates gender differences.

The silver thread of continuity which engages the individual concomitantly with the cosmological and experiential domains is the concept of vital essence. At the cosmological level, vital essence is perceived as a ubiquitous life force which, when metamorphosized substantively, is expressed in terms of bodily fluids such as sweat, spittle, blood, semen, or as non-corporeal substances such as soul, spirit, breath. By far the most important, or at least most emphasized

vital essence is that contained in semen and blood. As substantive essence, they are metaphorically related to soul-substance; the acquisition, retention, and loss of these substances being viewed as analogous to the acquisition, retention and loss of soul-substance; this latter being the primary requisite of corporeal existence. Blood and semen are the epitome of the human capacity for procreation and reproduction, and symbolize the values upon which the ideology of gender is constructed.

But the ideology of gender cannot be accounted for merely as a symbolic restatement of social boundaries demarcating male and female based on the biologically different male and female substances. The "symbolic markers of a social boundary", in this instance male fluid (semen) and female fluid (blood), "must be distinguished from the basis of the border itself" (Keith 1980:353). Blood and semen are social and ideological boundary markers, defining differences between maleness and femaleness; but to argue that this is so because these substances are physiological aspects of sexual maturity is to beg the question of gender values.

The individual, like everything else in the Melanesian experience, must be produced, constructed through the controlled metamorphosis of vital essence. Through the control, transformation and nurturance of vital essence, human beings are able to reproduce the necessities of life, and life itself in perpetuity. As embodied vital essence, male and female fluids are attributed positive values inasmuch as they are symbolic of fertility and production; they are attributed negative values as a virtue of the degree of control an individual is able to exert over them. Lack of control is considered dangerous; unchannelled, the life force may turn destructive. It is this lack of control over one's substantive essence which makes it dangerous to oneself, others and social continuity.

Neither blood nor semen are intrinsically dangerous; indeed, if they have any intrinsic value at all, it is a beneficent one. The dangers and taboos which surround actual and symbolic representations of blood and semen are not because these substances are somehow categorically anomalous (for example, Douglas 1970). Taboos are applied and enforced in situationally and contextually specific instances as a means of magical efficacy in dealing with the powerful life force. Individual (and social) growth, development, present state of health and future viability all depend on the control of vital essence. Rites and rituals which delimit or confound gender values (compare, A. Strathern 1979) are all concerned with

the control, stimulation and display of nurturant strength and growth [and] stress the locus of these characteristics in the human body, their connection with reproductive power, and emphasize the achievement of strength and growth by manipulation and control of the body and body processes... (Newman 1964:270).

The striking feature of these ceremonies is "the degree to which they emphasize the human body and its potentialities as the moving force in

the world" (Newman 1964:270, emphasis added). The ideology of gender is constructed in "terms of the separation and articulation of 'natural' substances" which find their focus "within and between human bodies" (Poole n.d.:3).

The foetus and the neo-natal infant are beings analogous to the androgenous being of mythology, containing within them the undifferentiated and latent life force. The process of differentiation begins almost immediately when, based on the evidence of genitalia, the infant is assigned a sexual identity. Sexual identity is a biological fact, the "most given of givens in a person's makeup" and as such it is a permanent physiological status (Strathern 1978:185-186). For Hageners, the Bariai and probably most Melanesians, "anatomical sexual identity is wholly immutable (Strathern 1978:175-176). The assignment of gender identity is "a special case of gender attribution which occurs only once--at birth" (Kessler & McKenna 1978:8).

Classification by the physiological evidence of genitalia does not automatically correspond to gender classifications. The sexual identity of the child as genitally male or female merely identifies the latent potential which must be developed and expressed in terms of behaviours and capabilities associated with ideals of maleness and femaleness. Males and females are produced through the careful nurturance and metamorphosis of vital substances during the developmental cycle. What is manipulated during nurturance is not physiology, but behaviour. While gender may "appear naturally sex-linked" (Strathern 1978:172), the attribution of gender is "attached to ideal notions of what each sex is capable of...rather than to individuals as biological units and thus to the processes of sexual maturation on which rests their physical identities" (Strathern 1978:183). The attribution of gender is much "more than a simple inspection process" (Kessler & McKenna 1978:2).

The ideological construction of gender begins then with sexual differentiation at the beginning of the life cycle. Gender attribution follows as the assignment of meaning to gender categories, meanings based on ideal notions of the values associated with maleness and femaleness. At a broad level of generality, the primary value is the principle of control: the meaning implicit in femaleness is a singular inability to control female substantive essence in the form of blood; that implicit in maleness is the perceived ability to control male substantive essence embodied in semen.

That females do not control their substantive essence and that these substances are intrinsically powerful is portrayed by two perceptions about the nature of females: females as 'polluting', and females as capable of self-growth. As Read puts it (1952:15),

The challenge of the physiological process of growth and sexual maturity in women....growing breasts and...first menstruation [are] signs of a maturing process...without obvious parallel in the boy.

Kaluli males believe that "women attain maturity by themselves but that boys do not" (Schiefflin 1976:124). Hageners "discern different developmental patterns in boys and girls: girls mature earlier but are 'softer' than boys" (Strathern 1978:178). The ambivalence of the idea of control is evidenced here, for where growth and maturity are ideals to be achieved the value of achievement is weakened by females who attain growth 'naturally'.

Because females outstrip males in this regard, a negative valuation is placed upon the fact of female growth. Female growth is uncontrolled, spontaneous; whereas male growth, while slower, is a product of careful control and nurturance of vital substance. As the male child is nurtured toward full male status, he is also learning to control his bodily substances. The positive aspect of control is translated as male superiority, a superiority which "has largely to be achieved and continually demonstrated in acceptable terms....the result of constant striving...in the final analysis, the idea which men hold of themselves is based primarily on what men do rather than what they have at birth" (Read 1952:15). And what males do is control their bodily emissions. The negative aspect of control is perceived as inferiority, femaleness is associated with arbitrary actions, capricious behaviour and conflicting emotions, lack of organizational ability, and the inability to sustain reasoning and single mindedness (compare, Strathern 1972). Control is, however, an extremely ambivalent concept. As a quality to be achieved, the degree of achievement is never certain and the possibility of losing control an ever present reality. Individuals of both sexes do cross the line in terms of gender behaviours; men can become like a woman. "He remains a man but in his behaviour and status, in his interests and concerns, he is also like a woman" (Strathern 1978:188). Woman can become like a man and "evince behaviour which shows a male mentality"....there is no doubt as to physical identity and a female "may be described as having the thoughts of a man though she has the body of a woman" (Strathern 1972:188).

Conception entails the metamorphosis of combined male and female essence--blood and semen. The early years of growth are evidence of the burgeoning life force out of which the child was materialized. The fragility of the life force in children is protected by the parents and the community at large. Here another facet of control comes to light in the form of responsibility, for "nurturance has both a protective and productive aspect...." (Newman 1964:263). During the formative years, the young child must be protected from the fully differentiated hence powerful effects of female and male vital essence. In cultures where death is not an event primarily associated with old age, the dangerous effects of uncontrolled substantive essence is very apparent: the death of children being attributed to their vulnerability associated with lack of development and strength (Hogbin 1970).

At a culturally determined critical phase in the child's life, the initial assignment of gender based on genitalia is further differentiated by the separation of male and female children from their parent of the opposite sex. Boys are taken off to the men's house where they are grown into males (compare, Herdt 1981); girls are left

with their mothers where they will grow into females by virtue of their association with females. Rites, rituals and ceremonials associated with the attribution of gender values have an "operational goals...indispensable to explaining some operative order" (Castaneda 1968:190). The operational goal is concerned with the promotion of growth, the achievement of fertility and "the representation of death" (Rivers 1914:214). The operative order is that of participation, the 'sense of unity of everything'; the active engagement with the mystical continuity of creation and re-creation.

Initiation ceremonies are usually understood as events which mark social and individual changes in roles and status. But as Strathern points out (1978:180),

Promoting growth is a very different matter from marking a stage in growth as endowing persons with a new social status. Future health is ensured; not an effective transition from one state to another as occurs in rites de passage and initiation into associations.

The promotion of growth as part of the process of aging combines both the productive and protective aspects of nurturance. These aspects of nurturance are a primary concern with the Gururumba of the Eastern Highlands where both male and female initiation ceremonies occur. The ceremonies

are similar in their central concern with sexual potency and growth, but they differ in the way in which their concern is manifested. Female initiation celebrates the fact of growth and the onset of reproductive power. Control of this power is not a problem except as it may adversely affect others. In male initiation the principal aim is to induce growth and reproductive power, not to celebrate its existence. Controls are for the good of the initiate rather than the good of others. In initiation, males assume ritual control over the same vital power that is naturally conferred upon females when they menstruate (Newman 1964:266).

The emphasis in the ceremonials is oriented to the magical quality of blood and semen for the promoting of growth. The Kaluli and Sambia perceive blood as dangerously debilitating to maleness. The Kaluli maintain that "male influence is contained in semen...[which] has a kind of magical quality that promotes physical growth and mental understanding...Semen is also necessary for young boys to attain full growth to manhood" (Schiefflin 1976:124). Similarly, the Sambia (Herdt 1981) place great importance on the potency of male semen in nurturing young boys into maleness. In both cultures male growth and fertility are ensured by the practice of ritual homosexuality whereby this vital male substance is introduced into the bodies of young boys. The Kaluli and Sambia exemplify the value and symbolic efficacy of semen as embodied vital essence. They also acknowledge, if only implicitly, the equal or greater power associated with blood as embodied vital essence.

Males are vulnerable to the power of blood. Young Kaluli and Sambia males must be separated from the influence of women lest the power of female substance thwart their growth and development. After separation, boys are cleansed and purified of the blood of birth and 'blood' they may have ingested from suckling or eating food prepared by women. Cleansing and purification are usually phrased in terms of ridding one of the degenerative effects of female 'pollution', rather than in terms of the degree of quality associated with blood per se. What is at stake here is not women as polluting but "womb-blood [as] contaminating because it is dead and therefore antithetical to the 'hot' vital substances in the male body...." (Newman 1964:266). The power in 'dead' substance, I suggest, is perceived as always having the edge over 'living' substance for doesn't everything, in spite of all efforts of control, end up in death?

Cleansing and purification of blood as a category of 'dead' substance is not an activity peculiar to males; it is also performed for females. At the onset of first menses, Sambia girls retire to the menstrual hut where their bodies are purified (Herdt 1981:182). Berndt (1962) also discusses purificatory rites for females similar to that for males: females are rubbed with nettles to remove the effects of 'dead' substance from their bodies. The deleterious effects of contact with 'dead' blood is as dangerous to females as to males.

During menstruation, a Gururumba girl "must not touch herself or eat with her fingers because she can be dangerous to herself" (Newman 1964:263). Wola females (Sillitoe 1979) are exposed to the danger of 'dead' substance in the blood of parturition. A woman must carefully dispose of this blood so that she and others are not adversely affected by its power. During childbirth and menstruation Wola females are looked after by female relatives who supply them with food, water and firewood, but women who assist in these tasks do not enter the hut as they are susceptible to the powerful attributes of 'dead' female substance (Sillitoe 1979:79).

Purificatory rites look to the cleansing of the exterior of the body which has come in contact with vital essences expelled knowingly or not by oneself or others. By virtue of being outside the body, vital substances, either blood or semen, are considered 'dead', and 'dead' things are ipso facto potentially more powerful than living things. It is the metamorphosis of 'dead' substance (ancestral essence) which has the power to create the living, a notion contained in theories of conception. Once growth and fertility have been achieved through such rites, their potentiality must be protected. It is at this phase of the life process that individuals are taught control of substantive essence as inculcated in notions of gender role.

Following Kessler and McKenna (1978:11) gender role may be defined as

a set of prescriptions and proscriptions for behaviour--
expectations about what behaviours are appropriate for a

person holding a particular position within a particular social context.

Gender roles are dependent upon control which is never absolute but always relative. Control as an acquisition can also be lost, weakened or manifested to a variable degree. Females may not be able to control the actual discharge of their vital essence, but the disposition of those substances is within the range of female control. Females are "believed to be capable of manipulating [their] 'natural' powers" (Berndt 1962:89), often to the detriment of others. Similarly, males can control the actual discharge of the embodied male principle (semen), but they cannot always control its disposition and fear being sorcerized because of this.

Control, as a human undertaking, is susceptible to all the vagaries of human error, oversight and fallibility. Control can never be absolute--experientially proven by the fact that people become ill, suffer setbacks in their endeavours, age and die. As the primary defining feature in the differentiation and attribution of meaning in gender concepts, control fluctuates with the inevitable exigencies of daily living throughout the life cycle. "A person's gender does not lie locked in his or her genitals but can flow and change with contact as substances seep into or out of his or her body" (Meigs 1976:406). The degree of control shifts as the individual undergoes the qualitative changes imposed by the aging process. Gender assignment based on genitalia, gender attribution based on the ideal of control over substantive essence and gender role as modes of behaviour which, as magic, provide the means for control are all phases in the process of differentiating the operative world view founded in the concept of participation. The totality of gender concepts are subsumed by the irrevocable march of time experienced as the aging process. Life evolves out of death; the achievement of growth and fertility associated with gender differentiation is a potential realizable only through the expenditure of life force contained in bodily substances. The aging process is essentially the process of dying and as the life cycle progresses, the individual is subject to differentiation of another sort, that of differentiation of the dying from the living.

At death differentiation comes full circle with the reincorporation of the life force in the domain of mystical participation--the realm of spirits, ghosts, ancestral essence, and first principles:

One of the conceptual cornerstones of Etoro cosmology is the view that accretion at one point in the system entails depletion elsewhere. Life cannot be created ex nihilo, and the birth (and growth) of one generation are inextricably linked to the senescence and death of its predecessor. Life and death are complementary and reciprocal aspects of a larger process (Kelly 1976:145).

If the natural substances flowing in the body "are the physical signs of the body's life" (Newman 1964:261), these same natural substances outside the body are physical signs of the body's death.

But for human beings, the physiological aspects of death are not the whole of or even, perhaps, the most important aspect of death. "To the organic event are added a complex mass of beliefs and activities which give death its unique character" (Hertz 1960:27). The unique character of death in Melanesia originates in the metaphysical world view where "the facts of the universe have been classified and arranged in categories different from our own" (Rivers 1912:213). As already pointed out, this world view is based on the concept of participation and differentiation; but even where things are separated in space and time they remain no less parts of the whole, so that by action on the part the whole is affected. This is the basic premise underlying beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery and the practice of magical control. It also indicates that Melanesians "do not possess the same category of individuality as we do" (Rivers 1912:208). Add to this the fact that the concept of participation is not subject to the law of non-contradiction (invaluable to our analytic logic), the problem of semantics, and any attempt to express what must perhaps remain an intuitive understanding of the Melanesian concept of death, fails even as it is undertaken.

Rivers has pointed out some of the semantic difficulties involved in the Melanesian concept of death. In the Melanesian vocabulary

...you will find some form of the word mate...given as the equivalent of dead, and that dead is given as the meaning of mate. As a matter of fact, such statements afford a most inadequate expression of the real conditions. It is true that the word mate is used for a dead man, but it is also used for a person who is seriously ill and likely to die, and also often for a person who is healthy but so old that, from the native point of view, if he is not dead he ought to be....It is clear that it is wholly wrong to translate mate as dead or to regard its opposite toa as the equivalent of living. These people have no categories exactly corresponding to our "dead" and "living", but have two different categories of mate and toa, one including with the dead the very sick and the very aged, while the other excludes from the living those who are called mate (Rivers 1912:211).

Death in Melanesia is the life force metamorphosized; it is the transformational process of aging, lacking in the finality we associate with it; interaction with the dead is an ordinary occurrence and a most important aspect of social and personal relations (compare Lawrence & Meggitt 1965). The Melanesian world view is based on a sense of continuity--nothing really is 'dead', it is simply transformed through metamorphosis into something else. The life force which produced the chrysalis produces the butterfly even though it 'dies' in order to do so: The existence of the butterfly would suggest that it is not dead. As one of Hogbin's informants put it (1970:56), "I know truly from having seen them, that nobody has ever perished even if death has brought changes."

Very little information is available on the sort of changes associated with the process of aging and dying in Melanesia. Concepts of aging and dying are integral to the ideology of gender and differentiated life force. In Melanesian cultures death is an event ultimately beyond personal control in spite of all efforts to do so, and well within the control of others should they desire one's demise. Death is usually associated with witchcraft and sorcery, both of which imply the manipulation of bodily substances outside the body which contained them.

For the Dobuans, death is by convention referred to as women's activity--female witches bring death and destruction. As witches, females are attributed with the ability to project their soul substance outside their bodies at will.

Witchcraft is a woman's prerogative....A witch does all her work in spirit form while her body sleeps, but only at the bidding of the fully conscious and fully awake woman and as a result of her spells....Not only is all that we term accident as opposed to sickness ascribed to witchcraft, but a particular way of causing illness and death is the monopoly of women. This method is that of spirit abstraction from the victim (Fortune 1932:150).

Similar sentiments are expressed among the Gururumba in the equation of witches and female substance in the form of soul-substance. The Gururumba word for witch substance is a derivative of the

...verb 'to steal'....[witch substance] is found almost exclusively in women, remaining latent in some and becoming active in others....Witches...represent strength untempered by nurturance. They emphasize the aggressive-destructive side of vital essence (Newman 1964:259).

This is in accord with the negative value of control discussed earlier in relation to female substance.

Males are equally dealers in death. The power of male substance in promoting growth and fertility has already been discussed. Through sorcery this same power can be magically controlled for maleficent purposes.

The man as sorcerer, has the monopoly of causing sickness and death by using spells on the personal belongings of the victim....Such personal belongings may be the remains of food, excreta, footprints in sand, body dirt, or a bush creeper with a malevolent charm first breathed into it which the sorcerer watched his victim brush against and which he subsequently took to his house to treat further (Fortune 1932:150).

The importance of control as an ideal value is very evident in these examples; operationally the goal is to attain control of one's life, and the life of others. Often the only way to gain control over one's

life and that of others is to make the transition to death as the literature on suicide in Melanesia seems to suggest (compare D.A. Counts 1980; Johnson 1981).

In the best of all possible worlds the process of dying should be a gradual transition marked by physical decay. Hogbin describes (1970) the process according to the Wogeo as one where there should be a gradual slipping away or disintegration of everything. First should go the firmness of the flesh, then the teeth, then the strength of the limbs, then the understanding and finally the breath. Only with the disintegration of the physical body and the final expulsion of breath is the spiritual essence released back into the domain of undifferentiated life force.

Melanesians are somewhat pragmatic in their outlook on life and do not delude themselves that they live a utopian existence. The life force, once differentiated, is vulnerable and efforts at control are fallible. While the above may be the ideal view of the process of dying it is also descriptive of the effects of male/female relations. It is the "infringement of rules regarding menstruation and sexual relations" which is perceived as the "more likely cause of destruction" (Hogbin 1970:145), and death.

Very little information is available on the physical markers of aging, dying and the relationship these have to gender and sexuality and even less on the social and individual attitudes toward the process of aging. And, as LaFontaine (1978:5) points out, the aging process has not been treated very much in symbolic terms. Some clues to the symbolism of aging and gender are offered, however, in a variety of contexts.

The ideal process of death and dying held by the Wogeo suggests that concepts of personal beauty may provide insight into the relation between gender and the aging process. The colour white is associated (among other things) with the spirit realm. An important piece of the paraphernalia used by Hagen ritual experts in the Female Spirit cult is the wood of the pokta tree. The wood is white and the female spirit is most closely associated with this colour. It is a soft wood which splits well and has a smooth skin, its use in the ritual is a sign that people will not die. If another wood with rough edges is used, the people would surely die (Strathern, A. 1979:42). White hair is also a sign of aging and transition to the spirit realm and is related to principles of gender. The Huli (Glasse 1965) believe that if a male sees a menstruating woman his hair will turn grey and his skill will shrivel, that is, he will succumb to premature aging.

A "fine head of hair is...a sign of health and virility" and ceremonies are performed to speed the growth of hair in unmarried boys (Sillitoe 1979:83). Such beautification also serves to attract the opposite sex but subsequent intercourse depletes that vitality. The "hair of a man who is sick and eaten (for example, had sexual intercourse) by a woman is thin and wispy and falls out" (Sillitoe 1979:83).

Beauty is also on the skin. Beautiful, healthy skin is firm and glistens, it is moist, not wrinkled and dry like ashes (Sillitoe 1979; Schiefflin 1976). 'Pollution' sickness manifests in outward signs as dry, wrinkled skin which appears dusty and grey like ashes. The individual loses weight, becomes lethargic, vitality is sapped. The hair drops out and the body wastes away (Sillitoe 1979:85). While this describes the process of aging associated with the loss of male substance through contact with female sexuality and the necessity for procreation, it is equally applicable to females. Women lose vital substance in childbearing and consequently lose their beauty (Fortune 1932).

The process of aging is not a purely negative one. The transition to old age does have its privileges which are associated with the amelioration of gender differences. By custom, elder Dobuan females can relate obscene legends and refer freely to male/female sexual organs in these tales. Words that would be considered highly obscene coming from the mouths of sexually active persons, are not perceived as such from old women. Old women are allowed to speak the unspeakable (Fortune 1932). Among the Gahuka-Gama elder females are allowed to witness the entrance of the Nama flutes into the village, and take part in the stylized singing of the men as they parade the flutes (Read 1952). Old women are self-assured, dignified and given respect among the Wogeo; they indirectly exert a strong influence on village affairs (compare Hogbin 1970; also Goodale 1971). Old men are considered to be very knowledgeable; old people generally should be looked after, given water, food, and have their fires attended (Berndt 1962). The very old are given deference and held in awe of their powers, attitudes which probably stem from the notion that the aged are more nearly spirit personified than human beings.

Sex, gender and age all have biological aspects and physiological markers but the assignment of meaning to these features of human biology is socially and culturally constructed. Among the Arapesh, for instance, old age is marked by the onset of puberty in one's eldest child. Phases in the life cycle of the parental generation are keyed to phases in the life cycle of their children. For it is the child's "springing sexuality which heralds the parents' old age and ultimately their death" (Mead 1971:42). At this time parents are perceived as being vulnerable to the burgeoning vital essence in their children, parental essences having been depleted in conception. Parental sexual activity is considered inappropriate, once their children are pubescent and presumably sexually active. A man retires from active participation in social and economic affairs once his eldest son has undergone initiation into manhood. Conversely, if all a man's children die prior to puberty a man "may not reach the retired list quite as young as he should, and so remain in the field after he has more power than usual" (Mead 1971:46). Unfortunately, Mead did not develop some of the implications of the above as she was primarily concerned with child rearing and developmental psychology. She provides little information on the activities of a male defined as 'old' when his first child reaches puberty--a chronological age of around 35 years. And there is nothing on females defined as 'old' by the same criteria. The relationship between gender, aging and parents and offspring, obviously

has important implications for Arapesh social life as indeed it does for the Bariai.

GENDER AND THE LIFE CYCLE IN BARIAI³

The concept of a life force is expressed in the Bariai word⁴ sulu, 'vital juices'. Both semen (budi) and blood (sing) are substantive vital juices embodying the power for creation and destruction. Conception occurs with a single act of sexual intercourse, during which semen 'fastens' the foetus in the womb. Once fastened in the womb, subsequent and repeated intercourse feeds and develops the foetus by providing it with sustenance contained in the male vital juices. When lactation begins, evident when the woman's breasts begin to swell, sexual relations should cease, otherwise the semen will spoil the mother's milk. This restriction on parental sexual activity is to be observed as long as the woman is suckling the child (a period of three to five years), thus protecting the child from sickness and possibly death as a result of the adverse effects semen is believed to have on breast milk.

The blood of parturition is considered contaminating to males, and men are not present during child birth. In the past women would give birth on the beach, accompanied by female relatives, and the afterbirth was buried or thrown in the sea. The father was permitted to see the infant only after it had been cleansed of the blood of birth. Today women give birth in the mission hospital of Kilege, but males still do not witness the birthing process, nor do they see the child until several days after it is born. If males do not actually witness child birth, they may nevertheless play an active role in the birthing process. The husband and his relatives perform various magical rites to ease the pain and duration of labour, or to avoid or ameliorate complications.

The word pudanga, 'new-born' and its various derivatives express the close relationship between the neo-natal infant and ancestral vital essence. Opuda is the word for the creator being of mythology and for God as it is used in the Catholic Church. Ghosts and spirits are described as being white in colour, and the term puda is applied as a generic term to white-skinned people, who are believed to be spirits returned from the dead. Being light in colour, the skin of new born infants is ghost-like and, like old people, the infant's flesh is wrinkled and emaciated looking.

The Bariai place high value on having a large family. First because children are intrinsically of great value, and are given a great deal of love and affection; secondly, to have a large number of children is to ensure (hopefully) that at least one child will remain close to the home of their parents in order to care for them when they are aged. The expenditure of both material and spiritual resources in producing and providing for a large family takes its toll, recognizable in the aging process. The 'power' (Tok Pisin: paua) of the parents is invested in procreation; with each additional child parental power

decreases accordingly. With each additional child therefore, the visible signs of aging become more apparent; hair begins to turn white, the skin loses its lustre and firmness and becomes slack and dry, physical strength begins to wane.

Eventually the parents' vital juices (sulu) are used up; male essence in semen no longer has the power to set and nourish a foetus; female essence in blood disappears, the womb is dry and no longer able to hold and nurture a foetus. Persons of extreme old age are unable to go to the garden or the bush and have no strength for work. They remain close to their house and are dependent upon others for food, firewood and water. When men and women are at the height of their procreative and productive abilities, they 'carry their children on their backs'; with old age their powers are dissipated and, I was told, they become 'like children again' crying out to others for the necessities of life. The old are, in their turn, 'carried on the backs of their children'.

The Bariai descriptively distinguish several phases in the life process. The term for newborn (pudanga) and the linguistic relationship of this term to spirits and ghosts has already been discussed. The newborn is also identified as male or female based on the evidence of genitalia. The newborn phase is short, and prepubescent, uninitiated children are simply referred to by the gender neutral term gergeo, small child. An adolescent male is iriau, a female, blala; the unmarried but sexually active male/female is iriau/blala ioai maitne; married male/female with no children is eaba/taine ioaina; married male/female with children, eaba/taine ipopo; male/female whose children are married and who themselves may be grandparents are eaba/taine kapei. The word kapei also means 'big', in the sense of big man, eaba kapei, or big woman, taine kapei. It is a term of respect, and does not connote the role of leader associated with bigmanship. The terms maron, Big Man, and nageragera, Big Woman, are applied to males and females occupying the role of recognized sociopolitical leaders. The final phase of the life cycle, extreme old age, is, like early childhood, denoted in the gender neutral term panua mugamuga, 'people' (panua) of 'long ago' (mugamuga). The term for senility, a condition that may accompany extreme old age, is buobuo and also means 'having immature, or childlike, thought processes'.

To be fully human is eababa, and there are two spiritual aspects to the fully human being. These are anunu (spirit, soul) and tautau (essence, substance). The anunu enters the human being while in the womb, its presence confirmed by the first signs of foetal movement felt by the woman. The anunu is that aspect of the self which accounts for dreams. During sleep the anunu leaves the body and travels around, taking part in various activities which the individual experiences as dreaming. Dreaming, or the absence of one's anunu, is basically an uncontrollable activity, hence potentially dangerous to the dreamer. If a person is startled awake while the anunu is away from the body, he/she will lose the capacity for reason and become mangamanga, insane. Some persons, usually elder females and males, are attributed with powers of divination, whereby during sleep they are able to control and willfully project their soul substance into the spirit domain. Illness

is caused by lonely masalai (Tok Pisin, spirit; Bariai iriau) described as unmarried youths and maidens, snatching the anunu of their victims for companionship. During dreaming the anunu of the diviner is directed to the spirit domain in search of the masalai and its captive soul. The diviner will ascertain what procedures should be followed in order to retrieve the snatched soul, thus restoring health to the afflicted person.

The ability of the anunu to leave the body during sleep and enter the spirit domain is also the source of inspiration in the creation of the elaborate masked dancers called aulu. One's anunu brings to the dreamer instructions on the appropriate designs to be painted on the aulu masks, details of the total costume, and the name to be given to the spirit personified by the masked dancer. The performance of an aulu ceremony is a lengthy, expensive and extremely complicated ritual undertaking, the various stage of which reinforce the important continuum of relations between the living and the living and the dead.

The second spiritual aspect of a fully human being is called tautau, which may be glossed as 'basic substance' or essence. A child's tautau is not considered to be fully developed or strong until the bones of the fontanelle (bolabola) have grown together. The ill health or death of very young children is attributed to the vulnerability of the undeveloped tautau. Protection of the vulnerable spiritual essence of immature persons is the object of various rites and taboos.

Rites of protection are purchased by parents from senior males renowned for their knowledge of sorcery. One source of protection is a drink called naselnga. The sorcerer prepares an infusion of various herbs and leaves over which he has performed magical incantations. The concoction is given to the child to drink; the elixir will prevent illness and bring longevity.

Another form of protection is supplied by a rope (naoang) woven of vines and placed on the child's wrist. The child's anunu is captured and held in the weave of the rope; the anunu is fastened, it cannot wander away and become exposed to dangers that would manifest as sickness in the child. While the child wears the naoang, it must remain within the village, and not go to the gardens or do any work. The object of the rite is to ensure health, strength and success in life. How long the child wears the naoang is dependent upon the resources of the parents, as the removal of the wrist band must be accompanied by a large feast and the killing of a pig(s). Should the rope be cut or removed without the appropriate ceremonial feast, the child's future endeavours will amount to very little (he/she will be 'rabis nating'), or it will be plagued by illnesses and quite possibly die.

A final example of protection rites is the natiutiu, and is one usually performed for a first born male child when he reaches adolescence. Like the previous examples, the natiutiu rite is purchased (in this instance the cost is quite high) from a sorcerer. The sorcerer makes an incision on the boy's upper arm, through which is

tied a string of dog's teeth. The rite promotes health, strength, and increased personal power. A person who has undergone this rite is considered to be so powerful that others are taboo from even touching him. Removal of the string of dog's teeth from the boy's arm is the occasion of a large pig feast and dance. The natiuti ceremony secures and enhances the individual's personal power or life force; the boy will survive to an extreme old age. He is immune to sorcery, and the process of dying is the gradual depletion of his life force until his 'bones break' and his anunu/tautau is released to enter the spirit domain.

The process of differentiation and control is evinced in these rites of protection which magically manipulate the vital essence embodied in persons, thus separating it off from the life force contained in the universe at large, focussing it and the potential it contains within and to the advantage of the individual. Parental essence is expended in procreation and production; by investing their material resources in sponsoring these rites for their children, parents are protecting their investment by securing power, success, and longevity for their offspring. Children in their turn will provide and care for the parents when they are aged and dependent, their resources depleted.

Taboos also effectively contain and protect the life force. Although there are spheres of activity ideally considered gender specific, the Bariai have no rigidly defined sexual dichotomy. There are no strict menstrual taboos nor have Bariai women ever been required to isolate themselves in menstrual huts. Blood is potent, however, and proper precautions should be observed. Menstruating women should not enter the gardens as the smell of stale blood will attract wild pigs which will ravage the garden and destroy the taro. Female substance can contaminate (mali) things and persons, and females ought not to step over food, possessions, or persons, and avoid doing so more out of a sense of etiquette and consideration than one of taboo. Menstrual blood can cause sickness and death if ingested in food or drink. Should a woman set out to kill someone (either male or female), she need only take some of her menstrual blood to a sorcerer who will prepare a potion containing the blood. The woman then puts the potion in the food or drink of the intended victim.

I have already touched upon the power for creation or destruction contained in semen as substantive essence; that contained in female substantive essence is equally powerful. Girls develop and mature faster than boys because female blood is hotter than that of males. Sexually active youths are warned not to have intercourse with a menstruating girl; if he does, the boy will also menstruate. Immature males are also warned not to prolong contact during intercourse thus avoiding contact with female fluids which will weaken the youth and stunt his growth.

Taboos are placed upon persons who have recently had sexual relations, in particular the newly married, who are considered to be more sexually active than those who have been married for some time. These restrictions are intended to protect others, not the persons upon

whom they are imposed, from the dangerous powers associated with the smell of sexually active persons. People who have had sexual relations must avoid being in the vicinity of young boys who have been newly superincized, and young girls who have had their ears cut. The odour of intercourse will enter the open wounds causing them to fester and the child to become ill. Once the wound has healed the restrictions no longer apply. The sexually active are restricted from entering the gardens for at least 24 hours, again because they carry on their persons the odour of intercourse which will attract wild pigs to the gardens and likely result in the pigs damaging or consuming the crops.

The power associated with the smell of stale blood and the odour of intercourse is the power associated with vital juices and their relationship with ancestral, hence 'dead', vital essence. Protection rites and taboos serve to set up boundaries which, by circumscribing the life force, contains it in things and people thus making the potential for creation and destruction controllable. Such things as blood and semen are not hedged about with taboos because they are somehow categorically anomalous, or 'dirt out of place'. Rather than being outside of classifications, taboos are a mode of classification, hence differentiation. They impose differences on things essentially the same. Reality originated with creator beings imposing differences upon the singular all pervasive life force. Control is a requisite for maintaining differences and without it boundaries become blurred and reality merges into the original oneness where anything can happen and, as in stories and myths, it usually does. To ignore taboos is to flirt with the possibility of losing control without which an ordered and predictable social existence would be impossible.

The life cycle is a process of weakening boundary maintenance. Conception requires the dissolution of boundaries in order that the separate aspects of female and male essences unite in the creation of a new human being. The aging process is the result of the tensions involved in the controlled separation and controlled unification of the life force. Life evolves out of death and is resolved in death; the aging and dying process is the gradual obliteration of boundaries until they are no longer discernible. Gender distinctions become blurred, the young become old, the elderly become like the children. Eventually the encapsulated life force is released from all constraints and merges once again with the spirit domain. Bariai mourning songs petition ancestral spirits to seek out the ghost accompanying the recently deceased to the domain of the dead, and to beseech the ghost to send back the spirit of the dead person, thus restoring him or her to them once again.

CONCLUSION

The reason that studies of aging and studies of gender have not benefited from insights gained in either is, I submit, because age and gender are viewed as belonging to different analytic categories, thus requiring different explanatory frameworks. Gender was viewed as a constant, an unchangeable fact based on physiological sex. The

analysis of gender was the analysis of cultural variations on a biological theme. Aging was seen as a series of marked stages which people grew into and out of in a culturally ascertained rhythm. The analysis of aging was the analysis of rites de passage and in societies (e.g., Africa) where sociopolitical power was located in a male gerontocracy, it was also the analysis of generational conflict. It is difficult to account for change in a framework that assumes constancy, and difficult to account for constants in a framework that assumes change. Studies of gender and studies of aging/dying thus developed independently of one another.

But gender is more than biology and aging is more than rites de passage. Based on data from Melanesia, I have argued that they are dynamically inter-related, processual and transformational. In order to discuss this relationship it was necessary to examine the epistemological assumptions upon which the relationship is based. To this end I have sketched, albeit in broad strokes, what I consider to be the underlying principles of the Melanesian world view. Examples drawn from Melanesian ethnography generally and the Bariai in particular illustrate that world view and its usefulness as a theoretical framework for understanding gender and the totality of the life cycle as inter-related processes.

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NOTES

1. To talk in terms of the Melanesian world view is, of course, problematic, given the diversity of cultures in Melanesia. I believe that it is possible to infer such a world view exists from the literature on the area. The degree to which individuals in Melanesia are knowledgeable about, or able to articulate their world view and the ways in which these notions find actual expression in various sociocultural settings is a problem for empirical research. My intent here is simply to point out that there are certain underlying and common assumptions which unify the separate aspects of Melanesian cultures.

2. The mental image I am trying to portray here may be likened to a gyroscope; two interlocking circles, one rotating horizontally and one vertically. The individual is located at the point where the two intersect. Ortiz offers another metaphor of the space/time continuum:

the human life cycle might be portrayed metaphorically as a slowly revolving giant cylinder on which are imprinted the generations. Thus to die in a pueblo is not to become dead but to return to the only real life there is; one 'changes houses' and rejoins the ancestors, but one can come back later (Ortiz 1972:145).

3. The Bariai people are located on the northwest coast of New Britain, Papua New Guinea. The Bariai census division is bordered on the west by the Kilenge-Lolo people and on the east by the Kaliai. Rural Bariai is a relatively isolated and economically undeveloped area of New Britain. The Bariai are primarily horticulturalists, and supplement their diet with seafood. Ideally, they are patrilineal and residence after marriage is virilocal. Political and social leadership is provided by men in the traditional role of Big Man (maron). The total population of the Bariai area is approximately 850 people, unevenly distributed in the nine coastal villages. The village of Kokopo, with a population of 202 people, is the largest Bariai village. The people of Kokopo, among whom I lived for three months in 1981, are the primary source of the data discussed here. Information was obtained from persons both young and old, female and male, married and unmarried. I consider the data to be fairly representative, although at this stage of research, hardly definitive of Bariai views on the subject at hand. The fact that I am a female did not severely affect my movements or enquiries. Although I was not permitted to enter any of the three men's houses (Zum), male informants (again both young and old, married and unmarried) described in great detail the activities in the men's house during the ceremonial that occurred while I was in the village. They also took my camera inside the men's house to record these activities on film for my benefit. On three separate occasions when ceremonial feasts were prepared, I was invited to join with

the men on the verandah of the men's house and take part in the food. Village women were excluded. The only restrictions placed upon my being privy to such information considered to be 'male secrets', was that I not discuss it with or show the photographs to, the village women. Women, however, had a great deal of knowledge about male secrets which they too passed on to me with similar admonishments, i.e., that I did not let the men know what we (females) knew.

4. I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Bill Thurston and Mr. Rick Goulden for their assistance with the Bariai language. I am particularly grateful to Rick Goulden for his untiring and invaluable help with the linguistic data contained herein. Any errors in the linguistic material presented here are my own.