CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY

Having completed my tapa, I packed it away and have rarely looked at it since. It was time to broaden my research. I was interested in everything to do with tapa: cultural heritage, local uses, and the implications of a growing market for the cloth as a form of "ethnic art." I had hoped to work with my favourite research assistant from 1981 to 1983—MacSherry Gegeyo—but he had since moved to Port Moresby. Community leaders nominated Roland Wawe, a cheerful 25-year-old bachelor who they felt had great leadership potential and would benefit from the experience. It was an inspired choice. I have had mixed success with my research assistants. Many find the work of conducting surveys, helping with translations, and other tasks boring after a while and stop coming. Roland, like MacSherry, had a keen curiosity about his culture. While at high school, he had started writing short plays depicting traditional activities and events. Towards the end of my stay, I joined an enthusiastic audience to watch the youth group perform one of Roland's works: a play about the elopement of two lovers and the subsequent battle between their enraged clans. Roland and I established a good working rapport right from the start. As the research progressed, Roland would often suggest topics that needed further attention and correct some of my more egregious mistakes.

Roland and I proceeded to conduct a systematic survey of households in Uiaku and Ganjiga focused upon tapa. I worked from a questionnaire of 12 standard questions. I asked women whether they grew any *wuwusi* trees in their gardens, who taught them how to make tapa, whether they worked with others when beating or dyeing the cloth, to whom they had recently given cloth, and whether they had sold any cloth recently. The survey progressed slowly, as we made time at each stop for chit-chat, betelnut, tea, and often a small meal. The survey often triggered extended conversations not only about tapa but about past lives and current concerns.

Figure 5.1 Roland Wawe, wearing a headdress he designed himself, with possum fur and bird of paradise plumes. (Photo by J. Barker)

At the conclusion of the survey, we paused to work out a list of the various ways tapa got used in the past and in the present. Old photographs suggest that from the 1920s the Maisin gradually replaced tapa as standard day-to-day clothing for adults with calico cloth purchased by plantation workers. Some Maisin women acquired sewing machines in the 1950s, and by the late 1960s, cheap shorts, t-shirts, blouses, and skirts had become the norm, with tapa worn mainly on ceremonial occasions. We had also learned of distinct types of tapa that used to be prepared for widows and widowers, to cover the heads of girls undergoing tattooing, and for other special occasions. Maisin also used to make large sheets of tapa to use as blankets during the cold nights of the dry season and as shawls to keep off the rain. In the past and to a lesser extent today, the Maisin traded tapa with neighbouring groups for cooking pots, pigs, and seagoing canoes. In the present, tapa remains an essential exchange item in formal prestations like bride wealth payments. On ceremonial occasions, Maisin wear tapa bearing the distinctive emblems marking clan and *Kawo* identities. Most tapa is made to be sold, but Roland demonstrated that even tough strips of old tapa are useful when one needs to tie up a bundle or lash sticks together to make a temporary shelter in the bush.

Armed with this basic catalogue, I began a second, more leisurely swing through the village, casually visiting households in the evenings and setting up longer interviews during the day. Things began in a promising way. People confirmed that tapa had a wide variety of uses and meanings. Among other things, I learned that most clans owned several named designs, not just the most prominent ones that I had seen people wearing on ceremonial occasions. This led me to systematically visit each named descent group to record the names of the designs they owned. Here I hit a roadblock. Often, all that people could remember were the names. Sometimes an elderly woman was able to trace a design on a blank strip of tapa or in the sand for me to photograph, but on other occasions people told me that while they had once possessed more tapa *evovi*, they had forgotten the patterns and even sometimes the names. Documenting the older uses also proved frustrating. Elders could provide descriptions of a variety of abandoned customs, but their information was often vague, and there were many contradictions.

Helpful as they were in filling out my survey, it was clear that people had other priorities with regards to tapa. Once my questions were answered, conversations quickly moved to money matters. The Maisin had exchanged tapa with outsiders for as long as anyone could remember. Towards the end of the colonial period, however, a market developed in Papua New Guinea for artifacts marketed to the (then) large number of expatriates working in the country and increasingly to tourists and overseas collectors of "primitive art."

Maisin tapa quickly found a niche, and by the early 1980s, apart from the rare sale of copra, had become the only local product people could reliably sell for cash or, in the case of the Anglican Church, for credit towards school fees and transportation costs for students heading back and forth to the high schools.

Times had changed from the days of the ancestors, people told me. Now you need cash to survive: to purchase basic necessities like clothing, medicines, and fish hooks; to pay ever-rising school fees and transportation costs for students fortunate enough to attend high schools; and for a few simple pleasures like tobacco or sugar. So villagers were relieved that a market had emerged for tapa. Success, however, brought new anxieties. Villagers were keenly aware that they had very little influence over the market. One could go to great expense covering the airplane ticket and the high freight costs to have a relative take a box of tapa to Port Moresby to sell, only to find that the shop owners were not interested. When they were, people had little choice but to accept the prices they set for the cloth. It wasn't long before the Maisin in town reported that the shops sold tapa for far higher prices than they paid the makers. Even Sister Helen Roberts in Wanigela, I was told by a few villagers, was making "millions" for the tapa she purchased on behalf of the Anglican Church.[1] It was unfair, but what could people do?

A second common complaint turned inward. Over and over again, I was told that tapa "belonged to all the Maisin people." Yet some women sold more and sometimes fetched higher prices, usually because they had relatives in town willing to sell on their behalf but also, in a few cases, because they produced cloths that outsiders considered especially fine and beautiful. Even women who I knew were doing better than others joined the chorus: all Maisin women should be able to sell the same amount of cloth for the same price. Anything short of this struck everyone as terribly unfair.

Reading through my notes on these interviews for this book, I am struck by their moralism. Frustrated as they might feel with the outsiders who set arbitrary prices and bought tapa if and when they chose, villagers directed their harshest criticisms at themselves. The problem, so I was told, is that people are too lazy to find purchasers for cloth, that they have allowed the quality of the cloth to slide, that those who have found success are too greedy to share their contacts with others, and that village leaders who should be working for everyone quietly make deals that benefit their own kin. Whatever success people enjoyed in selling tapa was countered by a keen sense of failure. "We are poor," people insisted. "Look at how dirty the village is. We have no shops, no good roads."

In previous chapters, we have seen how tapa provides a material reminder for the Maisin of the continuing importance of their ancestral culture.

Each piece of *wuwusi* a woman gathers from the garden, pounds into cloth, and decorates recapitulates basic and enduring aspects of life: the daily requirements of subsistence, the importance of kin, and the shadowy presence of spiritual forces and entities. Tapa, however, is also situated in the interface between the Maisin and the outside world. The focus of this chapter and the next shifts to this interface, to the ways the Maisin have adapted as their communities become increasingly integrated within wider regional and international political and economic orders. Compared to many places in the world, this process has, so far at least, progressed fairly smoothly for the Maisin. The people have not been deprived of their lands, sold off their resources for quick exploitation, or allowed their community to feel the scourge of alcohol abuse or gang violence. Yet, as my interviews concerning tapa reveal, the Maisin have often experienced this incorporation as a crisis of values requiring them to confront the very basis of their lives together as a community. This chapter, then, focuses on how the Maisin collectively manage the choices they face as members of a community. In particular, we look at two overlapping concerns—maintaining social order and making collective choices for action—concerns of law and politics respectively.

VILLAGER, CITIZEN, AND CHRISTIAN: THE CHANGING NATURE OF COMMUNITY

It's easy when visiting a village like Uiaku to see it as a world apart. Indeed, older ethnographies presented Melanesian village societies in this fashion, as timeless self-reproducing systems. Local Maisin do enjoy considerable autonomy in the ways they run their affairs, and to a considerable extent they draw upon age-old frameworks of exchange, kinship, and spirituality to do so. Yet, as we've seen, all domains of Maisin life have been deeply affected by the century-long presence of church and state and by the now-routine movements of people and goods between the villages and the rest of the country. What appears to foreign visitors as a "traditional" place would be barely recognizable to the Maisin's pre-contact ancestors. This is not only because of the presence of the mission station, intrusive sounds of radios and English words, or the transformed architecture of village houses. The very understanding of what a "village" is has been utterly transformed.

There is no equivalent in the Maisin language for the English word "community," yet it is clear that most people today think of their villages as communities, that is to say, as moral and political unities. This is a modern development (Barker 1996). People lived in villages long before the arrival of the Europeans, but they did not form communities. Instead they were aggregates of interacting clan-based hamlets allied with various "war" and "peace"

leaders, the *Sabu* and *Kawo* of old. The Maisin clans were recent migrants into the area, and both oral and archival evidence strongly suggest that large villages like Uiaku were temporary arrangements for defence against enemy tribes. Abandoned village sites along the coast, marked by groves of tall coconuts, stand in mute testimony to the ease with which villages split up or were abandoned.

The work of both the mission and the government relied upon the existence of stable populations in permanent villages. The Administration appointed village constables, took censuses, and applied regulations, all of which assumed sedentary populations. The Anglicans also paid little heed to Indigenous forms of political organization and leadership. They built their churches and schools in the centre of existing villages to serve the whole population and in the process created, for the first time, village-wide institutions. Remaking villages into communities was a foundational project of the colonial era. They were the key units both for the regulation of local populations and for the incorporation of formerly autonomous local societies into the colonial system as a whole.

When Anne and I arrived in Uiaku in 1981, six years after Papua New Guinea had achieved independence, foreign missionaries and patrol officers were a quickly receding memory. Yet their efforts had left a deep and lasting imprint in the ways that the Maisin organized and perceived both their community and their place in the world. A few days after I arrived, Gideon Ifoki described how Uiaku was organized. The community, he told me, had three "sides" (*yovei*)—the village, the government, and the mission, each with distinct responsibilities, organizations, and leaders. Village activities included such things as making gardens, arranging work parties to build houses, and planning for major ceremonials, as directed by *Kawo* leaders and clan elders. Government activities focused on public works, such as the construction of medical aid posts, and undertaking economic initiatives for the benefit of the community. Two village councillors, who also represented Uiaku and Ganjiga at periodic meetings of a regional Local Level Government council[2] based at Tufi, provided leadership in the government sphere of interest with the help of committees made up of representatives from across their respective villages. Finally, mission activities included providing support for the priest and teachers and keeping the church and classrooms in good repair. The primary mission leaders were members of the church council, with representatives from across Uiaku and Ganjiga.

Gideon elaborated further. Village activities were organized as need demanded, but government and mission projects unfolded according to a schedule, with two days a week set aside for all members of the community to pitch in. Further, the government and mission "sides" encompassed several

voluntary associations. The former included a youth club, which organized sports meets and dance parties for young people, and business associations. The mission side included the church council, the Mothers' Union, an elementary school Board of Management, and a Parents and Citizenship Association, which aided the school by purchasing badly needed supplies.[3]

It didn't take long to realize that Gideon's portrait of how the village worked was idealistic. Some of the organizations existed in name only, while membership in others waxed and waned. The distinctions between the categories of leaders and many of the activities often dissolved upon closer inspection. The "mission leaders" who organized church festivals, for instance, were at the same time "village leaders" who drew upon their kin networks to provide the needed food and labour. While there was always talk about the need for the village as a whole to undertake various projects, no person or organization possessed the authority on their own to plan or to order people to work. Everything depended upon people's willingness to participate. If they were unhappy with the organizers of some project or merely had more important things to attend to, they simply didn't show up. It was not uncommon for weeks to pass without any community work taking place.

Despite what appeared to me to be obvious contradictions, I found that many Maisin talked about the village in the same terms as Gideon. It was an accurate model of how most people thought things *ought* to work. This is by no means unimportant. In Uiaku, like most places, the heart of politics lies in the gap between what people think ought to be and what they actually experience. Keeping in mind that it is an idealization, we need to dwell a little longer on the three-sided picture of the village (see also Barker 2007).

Taken at face value, the model appears a direct legacy of the colonial period, a time when many Melanesians found themselves in a triangular relationship with missionaries and government officers (Burridge 1960). As the mission and government turned over their powers to Papua New Guineans during the late colonial period, some functions formerly exercised by European officials were passed on to local villagers. The modern village councillor, for instance, combines in his person some of the legal authority of the Native village constables and White patrol officers that preceded him. Yet more is at work here than simple substitution. The various offices and associations on the government and mission sides also reflect the growing integration of Maisin society into wider social, political, and economic networks. All have counterparts in hundreds of other villages where they were introduced as colonial authority expanded. Members of the Mothers' Union and delegates from the youth club regularly travel to the provincial capital for district meetings and

social events. Provincial and national bodies set down rules of organization for their village counterparts and periodically provide small grants and training programs. In turn, the village committees, business associations, and school organizations take as their chief mandates the improvement of the village according to standards established on the outside: rationalized planning and sound fiscal management. For the Maisin, then, the former colonial triangle has expanded outwards from its local setting to bring them into a much wider set of relationships.

In speaking of the three sides of the village, then, the Maisin acknowledge their participation in these encompassing networks. They are not only villagers, they are also citizens of Papua New Guinea and members of the global Christian family. The community forms a nexus for these three networks and identities.

The three-sided model that Gideon and others described suggests that the village, government, and mission "sides" deal with different types of concerns. At a deeper level, however, the distinction implies discrete moral orientations that are somewhat in tension. Morality on the village-side is relational, defined in terms of reciprocal exchanges that ideally lead towards balance and amity. Citizens, on the other hand, are thought of as individuals who pursue their own self-interests within a free marketplace that determines their value according to absolute measures, the most basic being money. Their behaviour is ultimately constrained by a legal code that (in principle) applies equally to everyone. The mission-side presents yet another view of personal morality. While the Anglican Church promotes a strongly communitarian understanding of Christianity that contrasts with the individualism of citizenship, ultimately it too endorses a notion of individualism at odds with the exchange ethic. People should treat each other kindly and generously because, as children of God, their *personal* salvation depends upon it.

The idealized model suggests that the three sides with their distinctive concerns and moral orientations should exist in harmonious balance within the community. Yet rural Maisin do not participate equally in each of the three domains. The actual situation in Uiaku resembles less a triangle with three equal parts than a hierarchy of spheres. The village sphere is by far the most significant for the Maisin. The past century has introduced a new conception of community and an unheralded degree of specialized roles and forms of association. All the same, the degree of specialization is quite limited. People spend most of their time engaged in subsistence activities and meeting their obligations to kin and exchange partners. While they regard them as very important, villagers have only limited time left over for mission and government activities. Inevitably, the reciprocal values that are constantly reaffirmed

in the village sphere tend to shape, although not determine, the ways people think about their roles as citizens and Christians.

This conclusion is corroborated by findings from a study Anne conducted on moral reasoning among Maisin men (Tietjen and Walker 1985). Drawing on a sample of 22 men including village, government, and religious leaders and non-leaders, she found that leaders in all three categories used more generalized and idealized forms of moral reasoning than non-leaders did. Her findings suggest that either leaders are selected for their ability to consider multiple perspectives or that "leadership itself and the role-taking experience it provides" are more important than education, age, or work experience outside the village in shaping moral attitudes (Tietjen and Walker 1985:988). Significantly, the interviews of leaders and non-leaders alike confirmed our ethnographic observations "that the issue of the relationship of the individual to the community is a moral issue of central importance to the collectivistically oriented Maisin" (Tietjen and Walker 1985:982). In contrast, the type of moral reasoning found in some domains of Western society—specifically the notion of individuals making moral choices based upon abstract universal moral principles—did not appear in the interviews.

In the final analysis, "community" for the Maisin is better understood as a project rather than as a place, one which has as its final goal the reconciliation of their identities as villagers, citizens, and Christians. The project reflects the changed conditions of Maisin existence since European contact, their incorporation into wider regional and international systems. That incorporation, however, is far from complete. To a degree unimaginable in industrialized countries, the Maisin remain largely self-sufficient, as much by necessity as choice. While people take their identities as citizens and Christians seriously, their assumptions about the nature of community continue to be informed primarily through their links with each other and thus largely in terms of reciprocity. Reciprocal values are especially central to the ways the Maisin talk about and deal with conflicts and social disruptions, that is to say, in the legal domain of community, to which we now turn.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The legal and political systems that exist in Uiaku today are hybrids of Western and Indigenous forms. Papua New Guinea is a modern democratic state with a constitution, an elected parliament, legal code, courts, and prisons. Every five years, the Maisin vote for a district and a provincial representative to the national parliament. Also, like other citizens, they are subject to the laws of the land. In principle, any adult villager who refuses to pay taxes or violently attacks another can be arrested and punished to the full extent of the law.

Practice, however, is another matter. From the earliest days of the colonial regime, it was recognized that Indigenous societies operated according to conceptions of justice that were often at odds with formal Western notions.[4] Few if any local people, for instance, considered it a crime to raid enemy villages, killing not just the men but anyone they happened across. Generally, the notion of committing a crime stopped at the boundaries of a person's kin and exchange networks. An additional complexity was that local societies often had very different notions among themselves of what types of behaviour constituted wrongdoing. Premarital sex, for instance, was perfectly permissible and even encouraged in some places and punishable by death in others. At the deepest level of difference, however, Western and Indigenous justice systems were and are oriented towards fundamentally different goals. Western law codes formally define offensive behaviours and punishments. If you are found guilty of a crime, you are (in principle) punished with a fine or imprisonment regardless of who you are or your relationship to the victim of your crime. Melanesians, in contrast, concern themselves with breaches in social relationships. An offence, real or perceived, will trigger retaliation, but not necessarily at the immediate offender, as a member of their kin may do. The community as a whole has a strong motivation to mollify those who have been wronged to stop a potential cycle of paybacks. Often the individual who caused the trouble in the first place—other than perhaps feeling shame—is left unpunished (Scaglion 2004).

As it expanded, the colonial regime put an end, at least temporarily, to most tribal warfare and established a legal system that in theory embraced all Papua New Guineans.[5] Practice was another matter. Government officers held authority to try cases, pass sentences, and arrest people who broke the law. But officers were thin on the ground; in a typical year, Uiaku might receive a couple of visits from the Resident Magistrate stationed at Tufi. The government relied heavily upon poorly trained and compensated village constables to enforce regulations and report crimes. Maisin elders recalled one village constable who became something of a tyrant, but generally—judging from patrol records and local memories—most did little more than show up when the government officer visited. In the early 1960s, with the establishment of a local government council for the Tufi sub-district, a local councillor took the place of the village constable. Patrols declined after this point, ending entirely in 1972, eroding the effective legal authority of councillors. The colonial regime had long made adjustments in recognition of cultural differences in the kinds of things Papua New Guineans considered crimes and their responses to them. For instance, the Papuan colonial regime wrote up legislation to deal with alleged sorcery and treated serious crimes like murder far more leniently

than in Western countries. Local communities, however, were left to deal with most conflicts on their own, making use of long-standing practices such as compensation payments. Prior to Independence, the late colonial administration launched innovative experiments in developing a pluralistic legal system, setting up local courts in various parts of the country to deal with regular conflicts (such as theft or adultery) according to local understandings of justice.[6] These are now well established in many parts of the country, but not in Collingwood Bay. Here most conflicts and crimes continue to be dealt with locally, with only the most serious being reported to the tiny police detachment at Tufi. As we shall see, the threat of taking a case to Tufi remains potent in Uiaku but only as a last resort. On the rare occasions it happens, cases often languish for months before a travelling magistrate is available to hear them.

Considered broadly, a legal system is not limited to the ways people handle serious disruptions, conflicts, and crimes. It concerns the overall ways that people maintain social order, including in their daily routines. Such basic rules and expectations of proper behaviour are especially important in small-scale societies like the Maisin that effectively lack police and courts.

Like all people, Maisin maintain social order in their daily lives largely by adhering to shared norms and values. People experience enormous pressure to conform. From the time they can toddle, children are warmly praised for good behaviour such as sharing food and scolded when they misbehave. The nearly incessant gossip that forms a background buzz to village life provides an effective sanction most of the time. Except when they are in their gardens or the bush, the Maisin live their lives in full view of their neighbours. While people are very careful not to directly accuse someone of bad behaviour, which would in itself mark a breach of morality, gossip has a way of getting back to its subjects, forming a powerful check. Little rituals of etiquette also convey moral expectations. If you visit someone, you should bring with you a small gift of betelnut or tobacco; if you pass a group of seated elders, you should bow your head slightly as a token of respect; if you are standing in your canoe using a pole, you should place your feet in the hollowed centre of the log when passing near a village so as to not put yourself higher than others. Not to conform to these customs brings gossip, and gossip, in turn, causes one to feel shamed.

These kinds of sanctions are powerful because they form a kind of common sense, not open to critique. Consider another custom that I think of as the "falling down rule." One day I was standing at the riverbank when a young man poling a canoe lost his balance and flipped over. Because he had his feet positioned in the narrow slit of the hollowed-out log, he was trapped and in danger of drowning. Before I quite knew what was happening, the people

around me flung themselves face down into the water. Only then did a few young men swim out to make a rescue. A few weeks later, the rescued man put on a lavish feast for those who had mimicked his fall. (Since I had not fallen, I was not included.) This all made perfect sense to everyone but me. When I asked my friends to explain the custom, I drew a blank. "It's just the correct thing to do," they told me, obviously puzzled by my simple-mindedness. From my perspective, the custom reflects the deeply held reciprocal reflex that runs through Maisin life. To Maisin, however, it's just the thing one does.

Maisin are very skilled at avoiding conflicts through the simple procedure of retiring to the privacy of a garden shelter or visiting a relative in town until tensions ease. Conflicts do periodically break out into the open, of course. Neighbours quarrel over ownership of a piece of land, couples get discovered in adulterous relationships, or villagers accuse others of stealing food from their gardens or houses. The Maisin repertory of wrongs includes much that Westerners would recognize as crimes in their own society because they cause damage to persons and property. A full listing of the triggers for conflicts, however, would include many actions that few outsiders would regard as crimes in any sense: neglecting to share one's food with sufficient generosity, making a show of one's material advantages, ordering others about, and so forth. At their heart, conflicts in Uiaku turn on a denial of reciprocity. Most conflicts get resolved quickly—the aggrieved parties talk out their differences; elders get involved and arrange for an exchange of food; or else one or the other disputant decides to back off, and the trouble gradually gets forgotten. Occasionally, however, the offence is simply too large to permit a ready solution, or the parties simply cannot let the matter rest and tempers continue to flare. The danger then is that the people who feel wronged may take matters into their own hands and retaliate, setting off a chain reaction of tit for tat that can threaten to turn a small dispute into a full-blown crisis, edging towards the kind of community breakdown we examined in Chapter 4.

Such a crisis threatened community peace towards the end of our first stint of fieldwork in 1983. One night, a boy from Ganjiga slipped into a house in Uiaku for a liaison with a girlfriend. Unfortunately for him, he went to the bed of the girl's mother, who raised the alarm. He was badly beaten by the girl's male relatives before escaping back across the river. A week later, an elder from the girl's clan, accompanied by his infant granddaughter, was sailing on his outrigger canoe past Ganjiga. One of the boy's uncles sped out in a motorized dinghy and cut the ropes holding the canoe together with a machete, causing it to capsize. Fortunately, the old man and little girl were rescued, but they could have easily drowned. In the aftermath, rumours spread that the young

men on both sides of the river were pulling down spears and war clubs from the rafters of their houses in preparation for battle.

Lacking resident police or courts, the Maisin have two options when serious trouble breaks out: they can attempt to resolve the matter on their own or take it to an outside authority. Resolving a conflict internally requires the establishment of a new balance between aggrieved parties to end the cycle of escalating retaliation. Clan elders normally take the leading role. Immediately after the boy was beaten in the case related above, the village councillor from Ganjiga, who was also a senior member of a *Kawo* clan, visited the elders of the clans involved in an attempt to organize an exchange of food. Following the attack on the canoe, his efforts went into high gear to stave off another round of attacks. Another option would have been to convene a village meeting like that described in the previous chapter to deal with sorcery accusations. The aim of such meetings is to allow a full airing of tensions in the community in an effort to repair past wrongs and attain a new consensus. While the main players in a conflict are often subjected to public criticism, they are not punished. Indeed, to punish them would be counterproductive as it would likely be seen as a form of retaliation and thus escalate the conflict rather than resolve it.

People also appeal to extra-village authorities in response to major disputes. Elders remind villagers that, as Christians, people shouldn't fight; they should support one another and trust that God will see that justice is done. It is very difficult to tell how effective appeals to Christian values are. I suspect that on occasion they do give people a way to back down from further confrontations. Yet, when tempers run high, I doubt that people pay much heed. Appeals to the "law" are different because there is always a possibility that someone will brave the long voyage up to Tufi to involve the police and court in a local dispute. People admire the supposed efficiencies of the Western legal system. There is something very attractive in the neatness of clearly defined crimes and ready punishments as opposed to the seemingly endless back-and-forth of village practice. All the same, crossing the line from threatening to take a matter to court to actually doing so is fraught with risk. From the village perspective, involving the police and court may well be seen in itself as a form of retaliation, thus escalating a conflict rather than bringing it to a close.

This is basically what happened in the crisis between Uiaku and Ganjiga. Following the attack on the canoe, the Uiaku councillor sent up a request for the police to intervene. For once, the police boat had petrol, and so two policemen motored down to Ganjiga to make an arrest. People in Uiaku strongly supported the action. After all, the Ganjiga man had attempted murder. The Ganjiga councillor and his supporters saw matters differently. Having worked behind the scenes to reconcile the aggrieved parties, they felt betrayed. At the

Plate 1 Marua beach facing towards Airara village with the heavily forested Mount Suckling (Goropi) rising behind. The two women approaching are carrying clay pots filled with cooked food for a feast. (Photo by J. Barker)

Plate 2 Crossing the river from Ganjiga to Uiaku village. (Photo by J. Barker)

Plate 3 Applying the *dun* (red dye), Ganjiga village, 1982. Prisca Rairiga, in the centre of the photograph, received her tattoo a few months earlier. (Photo by A.M. Tietjen)

Plate 4 Part of a bride wealth gift. A live pig is trussed beneath the decorative tapa cloth. The bananas are a special gift, known as *tonton*. At the time of the marriage, the groom's male relatives promise to give three types of food to the bride's people—this was the third and final installment. The presentation is meant to impress viewers with the generosity of the groom's family. (Photo by J. Barker)

Plate 5 Iris Bogu. (Photo by A.M. Tietjen)

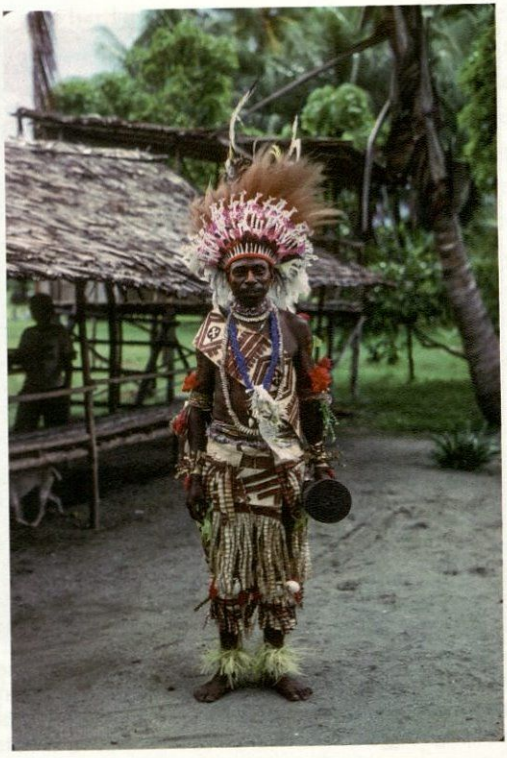

Plate 6 Rufus Yaga, the author's *toma* ("friend") and one of the finest Maisin dancers. His magnificent headdress is composed of bird of paradise, cockatoo, parrot, and rooster plumes, the latter denoting his membership in a *Kawo* clan. (Photo by A.M. Tietjen)

Plate 7 St. Thomas Day church procession, 2007. Fusing Christian worship with cultural heritage, the choir progresses into the church chanting the Anglican liturgy in the Maisin language to traditional drumming patterns. (Photo by A.M. Tietjen)

Plate 8 Maisin dancers greet the Stó:lō delegates, June 2000. Note the clan emblems (*evovi*) on the women's skirts. Women accompany the men's drumming by shaking dried bean pod rattles and branches. The arrival of outsiders supporting the anti-logging campaign triggered a revival of Maisin traditions. (Photo by J. Barker)

time Anne and I left the village, a few weeks later, tempers were still running high. Fortunately, clubs and spears remained stored away. The Ganjiga man who cut the canoe ropes paid a fine and returned to the village. A few weeks later, the long-planned food exchange took place and tensions eased.

Given distance and poor financing, the police and court at Tufi remain mostly theoretical sanctions for the Maisin. Still, my impression during my trips in the 1990s is that the Maisin have become more comfortable with the *ideal* of Western law. This shift in attitude is occurring as people return from working in the towns where reliance upon police and courts is much greater. It is also possible that the Maisin's success in fending off loggers in the National Court increased their regard for the system, at least as a means of dealing with outsiders (Chapter 6). I suspect, however, that the shift also reflects deeper anxieties. Many villagers worry that their communities, particularly young people, are less equal and less respectful of the values of reciprocity than in the past. One hears frequent complaints of petty theft and of fights breaking out between young men high on alcohol and locally grown marijuana. Young men who grew up in town, whose knowledge of Maisin and exchange connections are weak, are especially feared. The idea of throwing such miscreants in jail is appealing, even though it rarely happens.

On the basis of short visits, it is hard to gauge how real these concerns are. My impression is that Uiaku is by and large a peaceful and safe community. It has been spared the domestic violence and gang-related crime that have become enormous problems in Port Moresby and other urban areas. Yet people are anxious. They worry that outsiders wish to steal their resources while leaving them poor. They worry that the social problems in the towns will migrate to the villages. Their greatest concern is that the values that give order to their community are under siege. The good person is one who is generous, who willingly shares all she or he has in support of the community. Yet modern conditions make it increasingly easy for people to avoid reciprocal obligations, to act selfishly. Opting out of modernity is not an option. Villagers are keen to improve their material conditions with better schools, ready access to mass-manufactured commodities, and good medical facilities. How to achieve a better material life without forsaking the reciprocal values that provide security is perhaps the most urgent question the Maisin face today. It is at heart a moral question, one that is most vividly exemplified in the person and actions of community leaders.

LEADERS

The Maisin term for leader is *tamati bejji*, "big man." Maisin big men bear little obvious resemblance to their famous counterparts in the heavily populated New Guinea highlands. They do not own or manage huge pig herds,

organize massive ceremonial exchanges, or boast of their achievements in swaggering orations. In fact, there is considerable diversity in the forms that leadership takes across Melanesia (Chowning 1979). Still, beneath that diversity one can detect some common principles. The key one is a pattern of political egalitarianism.

Maisin big men are like everyone else—only more so. When you walk through Uiaku, you see few if any signs of status. Some of the *Kawo* hamlets have large plazas and houses with trimmed thatch (a privilege enjoyed exclusively by ritually superior clans), but otherwise they look the same as their neighbours'. Most of the time, people go about the same subsistence tasks as everyone else. Apart from traditional ceremonial occasions when *Kawo* leaders dress in their finery, there is no clearly visible difference in rank between people. Leadership emerges when circumstances require or invite it; those circumstances, in turn, shape the nature of leadership and extent to which it actually gets exercised. There are endless gradations in which virtually any person, including women, may be considered "big" for a time. This became clear to me when I conducted a small and quite unsystematic experiment. I took a stroll along the entire length of Uiaku and Ganjiga, stopping to chat with every adult I encountered and asking them who they considered to be the "big people" of the village. Around a quarter of the 30 or so people I spoke with mentioned the village councillor and church deacon. That was the extent of any agreement. Most of my informants named people they turned to for advice, usually elders in their own clans. Several people nominated themselves. At the end of my stroll, none of the lists matched.

The term "political egalitarianism" is obviously relative. Clearly not all things are equal in Maisin society. Women are politically subordinated to men. Senior men and women likewise enjoy authority over their juniors. The most influential leaders emerge from a small subset of the society: middle-aged but still physically vigorous men. Further, belonging to a senior lineage within a *Kawo* clan allows a well-organized and connected man to stage large ceremonies within his own hamlet and thus demonstrate his managerial ability. Finally, men who have been to high school and worked for a time in professional careers are favoured for positions as "government" and "mission" leaders. The Maisin political system is thus egalitarian not in an absolute sense but in comparison to more hierarchical systems such as chieftainships or states, which possess formal offices that define leaders' powers and authority.

To a limited extent, Uiaku today has a hybrid system. While clan leaders more or less define their roles depending on circumstances and their own abilities, the village councillor occupies an official position with formal responsibilities as established by acts of the Papua New Guinea parliament. Yet the degree of

actual specialization is in practice very limited. Village councillors are pa time volunteers. They receive no salary or other support that might give th an independent platform for action. Their effectiveness depends largely up people's willingness to listen to them. Their connection to the "law" and t regional political system gives those who want to use it a bully pulpit fr which to urge villagers to follow certain courses of action. But few coun lors bother. Those who try quickly find that people only follow them to extent that they wish to. They cannot compel obedience. The same is t for leaders working within village or mission spheres of action. The politi process in Uiaku relies largely upon consensus. Leaders, whatever their p tion within the community, are best regarded as managers of consensus rat than as authorities.

The influence that Maisin big men enjoy derives from their reputati among their fellow villagers. People are willing to listen to big men and foll their lead because they have proven themselves exceptionally capable doing the same things as everyone else. They are better gardeners or hunt more generous in sharing food or pitching in when a new house needs to constructed, and consistent in offering sound advice in planning for ma events like a bride wealth payment. This is not to say that men who exceptionally skilled automatically become leaders. I know of several sup gardeners, for instance, who are content merely to meet their obligation their kin and otherwise remain out of the limelight. The people who bec big men are partially thrust into their roles, but they also include ambiti individuals who take pride in their achievements. Just as reputation can up a big man, it can as easily take him down. There are always rivals wai in the wings to move in if a big man's powers flag or if he slips up and ann his followers.

While people recognize that being a village, government, or mission lea requires different skills, they expect their leaders to be "good men" who m their exchange obligations, readily helping out their equals and giving so advice and other aid to their juniors. They also expect leaders to be "stro men who manage situations well so they work to everyone's benefit. Big thus exemplify a dynamic that lies at the very heart of reciprocal mora (Burridge 1975; Read 1959). To be "good" requires that a person be self Big men are generous to a fault. They are usually among the first to bring f to a feast or to pitch in on a community project. They offer sage advice those who seek it, and they consult respectfully with other leading men be advocating a position at a village meeting. But such generosity isn't enti selfless. As they give gifts of their produce, labour, and wisdom, big men b up a network of people reciprocally obligated to them. In turn, these are d

that can be called in when occasions require as, for example, in the organization of a bride wealth prestation.

Ordinary villagers admire and, indeed, are grateful for big men's willingness to assume the challenges and risks associated with making major decisions and pulling people along. At the same time, it worries them. To do what they do, big men must be "strong" (*wenna*). By this, Maisin mean that leaders assume roles in which they stand apart from the group to make decisions. As Anne's study suggests, leaders demonstrate an ability to consider different perspectives (Tietjen and Walker 1985). In brief, they act at critical moments as autonomous individuals, standing apart from the group. The non-reciprocal element in the big man's make-up puts him in the same category as sorcerers or spirits, entities that operate largely outside the moral constraints of community. Big men assume an oversized presence in ceremonial exchanges and other public occasions in part to put these concerns to rest. Still, the more influential a big man becomes, the more intense the scrutiny of his activities and the accompanying belittling gossip. People become concerned that he is using his position to benefit himself and his close relatives or that he is becoming a "big head" who makes decisions without consulting others. There may even be suspicion, especially in the case of older men, that they are resorting to sorcery to eliminate their rivals. Ironically, even hosting an especially generous ceremony may backfire if people feel that the manager is acting overly proud. The political system thus possesses an internal logic that limits the amount of power any individual can accrue. Many factors come into play, but gossip is the greatest leveller.

Modern circumstances make this contradiction between goodness and strength, reciprocity and individuality, especially acute. Since the time of the founding of the Christian cooperatives in the late 1940s, the chief political goal of Maisin leaders has been to improve the material conditions of village life. Three generations of leaders have now worked to get government grants and other forms of aid to build permanent classrooms, restock medicines in the health aid post, and obtain other social services. They have initiated a succession of local economic projects ranging from the planting of cash crops like cocoa to the establishment of tapa cloth cooperatives to bring money into the community. Because such projects require some knowledge of government bureaucracy, business organization, and financial management, villagers have increasingly supported leaders with high school education, who have worked for a time in professional capacities prior to returning to the village. Yet people are well aware of the ease with which money can be siphoned off by those in leadership positions and how projects can be manipulated to benefit leaders' families over everyone else. It is universally assumed by villagers that national

politicians are corrupt, and they fret about whether their own leaders can resist temptation. This predicament exemplifies a persistent tension in contemporary village politics between the reciprocal morality of everyday life and the more individualistic ethic associated with money and "development."

THE POLITICS OF CONSENSUS

Politics, so the old saying goes, is the "art of the possible."[7] In Uiaku, political possibilities are constrained by the ways power is aligned inside and outside the community, by accepted decision-making procedures, and by what people perceive as the pressing issues of the day. In this section, we will consider the first two of these factors, saving the last for the conclusion of the chapter.

The Maisin participate in two political domains: the national electoral system and the village. Every five years villagers vote for a regional and a provincial representative to the national parliament who since 1995 also form a provincial assembly with members from districts elsewhere in Oro Province. The Maisin villages are also represented by three councillors on Cape Nelson Local Level Government (LLG) based in Tufi. While village schools and the small hospital at Wanigela remain under the formal control of the Anglican Church, the national government is responsible for most of the funding and for setting standards. In principle, the government also provides policing and funds various infrastructural and economic development programs. However, the police rarely venture far from Tufi, and funding for most other programs has steadily declined since Independence in 1975. This is a source of great frustration for the Maisin. A common complaint is that as soon as the election cycle is over, members of parliament forget the people who voted for them, preferring to enjoy the easy life of Port Moresby rather than work to improve the living conditions of their poorer rural brothers and sisters. The LLG is also regarded as largely irrelevant, despite the direct involvement of the village councillors and occasional small development grant.

The larger political system thus touches lightly upon Uiaku. In theory, a council made up of the Uiaku and Ganjiga LLG councillors and a small committee representing different parts of the community forms a kind of village government. In practice, however, such councils have virtually no authority and often do not effectively exist. Whatever influence village councillors enjoy tends to come from their leadership reputation in the community. Actual political power in the village is shared mostly between adult married men, although women and younger men are not without influence. They make their opinions known behind the scenes and resist decisions if they feel they are unreasonable or unfair, but they have no formal vote or means of setting political agendas.

The political process in Uiaku turns on the creation of consensus, especially among senior men. Sometimes agreement comes quickly; a course of action seems so obvious or urgent that people have little difficulty arriving at a decision. Most of the time, however, consensus building takes time and much talk. It is not a process that encourages snap decisions. Even once a decision has been reached, a consensus can easily be undermined if one or another of the parties involved changes their minds or new circumstances arise. Finding and maintaining a consensus, then, can be agonizingly slow and, once found, can disappear overnight. The Maisin are well aware of this. Over the years, I have often heard people express envy for what they perceive as the efficiency of decision-making among Europeans where lines of authority tend to be clearly established. Yet among themselves, the Maisin strongly resent any suggestion that an individual has the right to make decisions affecting others without their consent. If someone becomes a bit too pushy, others are likely to respond with the put-down "You are not the boss of me!" (always delivered in English). Even as they complain about the effort required to build and maintain consensus, people also recognize that the system possesses certain advantages. This recognition is partly pragmatic: courses of action backed by strong public approval are far more likely to be achieved than those imposed from above. There is also a near mystical faith that consensus in itself brings both social and material benefits. In the Maisin view, consensus represents a state of being, the elusive condition of social amity, a potent expression of *marawa-wawe*.

There is no clear line between the personal and the political in Maisin society. Most decisions beyond the level of the household require negotiations. Big events like bride wealth or end-of-mourning ceremonies often involve years of careful coordination between clan elders. It is in such ordinary circumstances that aspiring big men first demonstrate their ability to manage the delicate process of finding and maintaining consensus. Leaders draw upon the same skills and networks when addressing political matters at the community level, such as decisions on whether to build a new classroom or where to locate a public building, such as an aid post. However, there are crucial differences between the ways Maisin handle "village-side" affairs between the clans and those that concern the community as a whole. This is partly a matter of scale. With rare exceptions, such as initiation ceremonies for first-borns, "village-side" activities involve far fewer people than community-level affairs. More significantly, there is a shift in the way that consensus is perceived. The most significant commitments are no longer to one's own clan or kin. Indeed, clan loyalty is an obstacle. Political action at the community level depends on forging a consensus that appeals to sources of identity that transcend personal kin and exchange networks.

The means by which leaders attempt to forge consensus vary greatly according to the circumstances, the goal, and the people involved. In general, however, consensus building moves through two phases or, if a matter is especially contentious, back and forth between them. The first phase is one of semi-private negotiations between the parties most involved. These usually occur in the evening after people have finished their suppers and the village is quiet. Although the conversations are private, there is no secrecy about who is visiting whom, and usually people have a pretty good idea why. The aim of these discussions is to reach common positions before moving to a second public phase. If the matter under consideration is fairly routine—like planning a bride wealth ceremony—then the leaders of the groups involved will simply announce the decision to their clans. More contentious matters, however, require the convening of a village meeting to which all of the public is invited. Village meetings may also be called by village councillors or the church council to discuss community-level projects and concerns.

In general, village assemblies are not occasions for making decisions. That should happen well before people start gathering. Instead, they are forums in which positions get refined with the aim of publicly affirming agreement. They are, in short, moments of social theatre in which consensus is not so much made as *seen* to be made. The main protagonists are the senior men who usually do all of the talking. They occupy a central place in view of other villagers, usually on the raised platform of a shelter. Younger married men sit close by or lean against the side of the platform, sometimes quietly conferring with one of the "big people" on top. Elderly men sit a bit further out on the ground but close enough to hear the conversation and to volunteer an opinion if asked or if they feel the need. Further out again, women, young men, and children find whatever shade they can beneath nearby trees and strain to hear the discussion. A good turnout is considered critically important, even if most people do not speak. The more witnesses there are, the firmer the demonstration that there really is consensus.

Village meetings proceed at a leisurely pace. People slowly drift in around the appointed starting time, chew betelnut, smoke, and engage in casual conversation. At some point, one of the leaders will gauge that enough people have assembled and begin to talk. While there are occasional dramatic moments leading to bursts of energetic back-and-forth debate, most of the talk takes the form of speeches, often quite lengthy. I find these quite fascinating. Often as not, the speaker does not directly address the matter at hand but instead contextualizes it in terms of local history and the condition of social relations in the village. (We'll look at an example in the next section.) Often a speaker will preface his remarks by urging everyone on the platform to speak up in

turn. The surrounding audience nods or murmurs when moved by a speaker's oratory or agreeing with his opinions. The talk proceeds at a gradual pace as speaker succeeds speaker. There is a great deal of repetition, but this is good because it demonstrates consensus. If all goes well, by the late afternoon all of the "big people" will have spoken, and the meeting will end with sugared tea and a small meal.

Although all of the men on the platform should and usually do speak, their words are by no means equally influential. People listen most closely to those men they consider to be especially "big." For their part, big men are masters of consensus politics. They have their own opinions and agendas, to be sure, but they are careful not to appear to be imposing these on others. They cultivate their relationships with other villagers, spending many of their evenings sitting on friends' verandahs quietly discussing the problems of the day. By the time an issue gets to a village meeting, big men are careful not to dominate the talk. They instead rely on their associates not just to back them up but to speak for a position as if it were their own, thus contributing to the appearance of agreement between equals.

The political process of consensus building is inherently fragile. It is often difficult to reach agreement and even harder to keep people on board once they do. Yet, for all the challenges, Maisin leaders have a remarkable ability to orchestrate consensus when the stakes are high enough. To do so requires them to appeal to all aspects of people's identities, as villagers, citizens, and Christians. This became quite apparent to me while observing meetings during the early 1980s.

A VILLAGE MEETING

On 28 June 1983, the Uiaku councillor called a meeting to discuss the floundering operation of the village store, the last remaining legacy of the cooperative movement that had started more than 40 years earlier. Although little more than a hut on high posts, the cooperative store was one of the few buildings in the area built almost entirely of imported materials, including expensive finished wood flooring and iron sheeting for the walls and roof. As a sign of their modernity, it gave the Maisin enormous pride, but it was also a constant cause for concern. The store was supposed to earn a profit that could be used for other local projects; however, no matter how high the managers jacked up prices for supplies of rice, matches, kerosene, and other basic goods, the store steadily lost money and much of the time remained closed. The Uiaku councillor was a middle-aged man who had worked for some years in the cooperative development office of the former colonial government. When he took an early retirement to return to the village and care for his aging parents, he took a personal interest in the store and had made its success one of his top priorities.

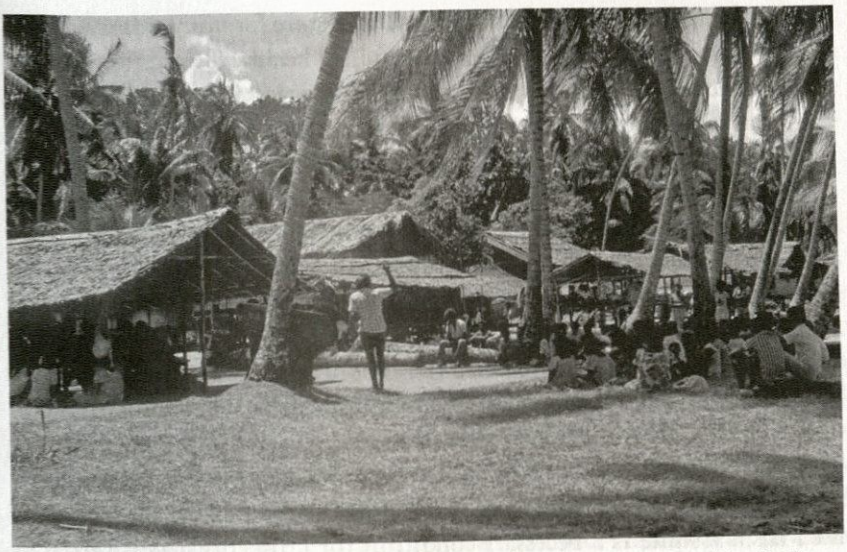

Figure 5.2 A village meeting, Uiaku, 1983. The councillor is making a point using the large blackboard propped up by the palm tree behind him. The senior men of the village are sitting on the shelter platform to his left. (Photo by J. Barker)

The meeting took place in the midst of the festering conflict between Uiaku and Ganjiga described in the previous section. The Ganjiga councillor had played a key role in organizing a food exchange to end the crisis. When the Uiaku councillor called in the police to arrest the Ganjiga man who had attempted to drown the Uiaku elder, the Ganjiga councillor and his followers took personal offence. The conflict between the councillors spilled over into the management of the cooperative store, to which both men had keys. Checking the books one day, the Uiaku councillor was alarmed to find that Ganjiga customers were receiving a dangerous amount of credit. To prevent further depletion of the stock, he changed the lock and called for a meeting. It occurred the next day in a cleared area in front of the store. Most Ganjiga people, including the councillor, stayed away.

During the 18 months I had lived in Uiaku, I had heard a great deal of talk about the cooperative store and its troubles. There was intense criticism of the young men who sold the goods, of the councillors who managed the business, and of the villagers who depended upon the store for basic necessities. Yet complaints rarely stopped there. Villagers had an emotional investment in that small steel shack which in a way embodied a shared history. People spoke nostalgically of earlier days when people worked closely together, church services were well-attended, and everyone pitched in to make

formal exchanges exciting and successful. The store for many was an index of community. Like the body of a loved one, its health reflected the state of social relationships. It was an outward sign of inward divisions, of rivalries, gossip, greed, and other weaknesses. In short, discussions of the cooperative store followed the well-worn path of sorcery talk. Meetings to discuss the store often in turn involved a similar pattern of accusations and confessions, an airing of troubles to allow a healing of social relations. At one meeting I attended, a leader made the connection directly, stating "The cooperative is sick!" He attributed this to incessant gossiping and sniping in village life, which weakened the store.[8]

The meeting of 28 June reflected these concerns. Speaker after speaker denounced the social divisions they saw undermining the store's success. While some of the talk became heated, as we'll see below, the "big people" worked hardest at finding a point of consensus not just to defuse the tensions or plan future actions but more basically to restore the condition of social amity that the Maisin assume is a necessary condition for prosperity. The politics of consensus, as reflected in their speeches, relied on a strategy of blending the three orientations to community discussed earlier in this chapter by appealing to listeners as fellow villagers, citizens, and Christians.

Near the beginning of this meeting, a man who had served as the first store manager in 1965 reminded villagers of the history of the cooperative society:

> Our traditions say we must listen to what elders say and do it. Do it! Do it! The ancestors who came here worked together and made Uiaku's name good. Yet these young ones have not left it in good shape. The ancestors brought their *kawo* [i.e., traditional rights and privileges]. They were strong and fought a lot. When the missionaries came, they gave their *kawo* to God. They gave everything. That was a sign that they retain the traditions. The young ones are growing and we need to teach them what our ancestors did. If you elders had died and we spoilt [the cooperative], it would only be our fault. I am unhappy that you have to see what is happening.... Use your *mon seramon* [good sense]! God told us that things will happen. The strong wind will blow. The famine will come. If the flood must come to spoil the village, it will. If the fight comes, it will. We will argue and stay apart from each other. We know these things happen. So when someone does something bad, don't talk about it. We are Christians, so we shouldn't gossip. When we do bad things, we must go straight to that person and make *marawa-wawe* [i.e., amends re-establishing good relations].
>
> Teach the young ones to speak Maisin properly so they won't get confused when they make speeches. Don't let them spoil this building you started. My fathers, you made this building for us. We have intelligence and education, so must look after it. Now it is not only the *Kawo* [leaders of the high-ranking clans] who talk. The spear *Sabu* [leaders of the low-ranking clans] may talk. You went to the big schools, so you may talk. All the *Kawo* must help each other and work together. I shouldn't say this, but I'm sad so I am reminding you. We should not forget these things. So my talk is finished.

The speech contained numerous allusions with which the audience was familiar. The opening themes of the ancestors giving and keeping their *kawo* reminded the audience of the origins of the cooperative movement in the building of the first iron-roofed church in Uiaku in the late 1950s (Chapter 1). When Bishop George Ambo arrived to consecrate the church, he found it surrounded on three sides by a sacred enclosure made up of criss-crossed branches called an *oraa*. The fence was composed of types of trees individually owned as *evovi* by the *Kawo* clans. The clans thus gave their "traditions to God." When the bishop blessed the church, he likewise blessed the conjoined clan emblems and thus the "traditions were retained." In this way, the clans fused their newly found Christian unity with the enduring traditions of clan identity (Barker 1993).

The speaker now addressed the old men sitting nearby, expressing regret that young people are forgetting their sacrificial act, which happened at the same time as these elders shared their money to found the cooperative. The speaker next asserted that God will send disasters to test the people, with a clear allusion to the flood that had recently damaged Ganjiga. As Christians, the people must resist the urge to quarrel; they must make peace with each other. The main thrust of his speech came at the end. Uiaku has changed. Young people no longer understand the meaning behind Maisin words. Christianity and education have so opened things that even lower-ranked *Sabu* members can speak in public gatherings. Yet it remains key for all the *Kawo* (here meaning both *Kawo* and *Sabu* ranked clans) to work together.

Other men echoed these sentiments and built upon them. The Uiaku councillor then stood up, pointing out that he was not a *Kawo* man but *Sabu* and thus in the old days would not have been allowed to talk. However, he said, "I have been elected as councillor, so I look after this place. We are all like that; when we have responsibility for the church or government-sides, we must do our work." Turning to the problem at hand, he said:

> GC [the Ganjiga councillor] says that I went over him. How? Ganjiga people did not tell me what to do. The trouble was in my Ward so I wrote the note and sent it to [the police].... If this problem goes on all will be spoiled. If we solve it, all will be well. GC says I went over him. I have that right on the Government-side, so he

> shouldn't complain. I don't like how my mother's brother[9] has responded to this. We are adults. We are no longer small boys! We mustn't act like that when we are men and spoil things. We must only do good. That's why I put a lock.... As a man representing the government I have the right to do it! I am the only one. Don't talk about my children or my wives.[10] I am the councillor and you should come straight to me.

In this speech, the councillor claimed a governmental authority. Mission and government leaders should work towards village cooperation and unity; to do so they must make independent decisions for the good of the village. It is inappropriate to gossip about their families, as one might about a traditional village leader, because they act on behalf of the national government and its laws. If people want to complain about how government-side leaders are doing their job, they should confront them directly.

The Uiaku councillor, however, did not intend to claim that government rules trump traditional values. He went on in his speech to argue that GC had failed in his role as a village-side leader by waiting too long to act when feelings began to heat up over the tryst between the Ganjiga boy and Uiaku girl:

> GC was here when that happened. He is *Kawo*, so he should have taken his string bag across [i.e., gone to Uiaku with gifts and sat down in a friendly manner with the aggrieved parents].... What was he doing? He was there when it happened. He is a *Kawo* man and a councillor. If he had solved this problem, these rumours would not go around. It is spoilt because one person is playing. When you split up you will fight with spears again, and it is one person's fault.

In other words, as a high-ranking *Kawo* leader, GC had the responsibility and authority to keep order among his people. Because he did not act quickly enough, the conflict spread. By implication, the Uiaku councillor said that he had no choice but to call in the police because villagers themselves could no longer contain the violence.

These and the other speeches made that day did not resolve differences over the store, which remained closed. All the same, they reflected a wider consensus that the community needed to unite if there was to be any hope of material advancement. At a deeper level, they reflected a common understanding that unity draws upon all three facets of contemporary identity: village traditions, the Christian love of God, and the rule of law. Leaders worked hard to merge the three orientations but leaned, often subtly, towards one side or another. Their work then, as today, has been to build consensus within the evolving values and meanings of community. It is not easy.

THE MORAL POLITICS OF "DEVELOPMENT"

I was often struck by the passion with which the Maisin discussed the cooperative store. There was no denying that the store was in trouble. In the early 1980s, it was the only local source for basic goods such as rice, sugar, tea, matches, and kerosene upon which villagers had become dependent. People griped but tolerated the high prices set by the managers to cover transport costs. They appreciated the convenience of the store and felt pride that it was owned by the entire community. They even put up stoically with extended and frequent closings when storemen failed to show up for work or the stocks ran low. Such inconveniences were frustrating, but what was truly intolerable was that the store always lost money. Periodically, people would invest funds raised through copra or tapa sales or a small government grant to restock the shelves. Villagers crushed through the door on the opening day, hopeful that this time for sure the store would fill its central mandate: providing profits that would be invested in other local businesses. People regarded the store as their best shot at generating money locally to pay school fees, purchase medicines, and, most generally, create a more comfortable and secure material existence. Each time the store closed, its finances in disarray, there was a tangible sense of disappointment verging on despair.

I spent many hours listening to people gripe about the store and other community economic ventures that had also started with high hopes before floundering and failing. The tone of these conversations and speeches was often emotional and moralistic. While villagers castigated working relatives and politicians for failing to support community projects, they saved their harshest criticisms for themselves. The projects failed because people gossiped too much, because the young people no longer respected their elders, because members of clans thought only of themselves instead of pitching in to help the community as a whole. Left unmentioned was the fact that the lack of ready access to markets made it next to impossible for any local economic venture to succeed and that the mass exodus of young people to the towns made it impossible for households to devote as much time and labour to community ventures as in the past. My friends readily agreed that these were important factors when I brought them up—and then they returned to what was for them the salient point: the community was to blame for the failures.

Similar attitudes have been reported from across rural Papua New Guinea, including areas that have enjoyed considerably more success with cash cropping or which have economically benefited from the presence of factories, mines, and other projects (e.g., Errington and Gewertz 2004). Villagers often feel intense shame concerning their "poverty," as reflected in their continued reliance on subsistence agriculture, residence in bush houses without modern

conveniences like electricity, and limited access to cash and the many things that cash buys. The sense of shame is powerfully mixed with a complex attitude of admiration, envy, and resentment towards Europeans and fellow citizens who have had the opportunity to embrace a European lifestyle.[11] Villagers attribute Europeans' economic successes to their supposed superior virtues of organization, self-discipline, hard work, and advanced technical skills (Bashkow 2006; Smith 1994). At the same time, Europeans as imagined by Papua New Guineans evoke disturbing feelings because they appear to operate individually, without regard to kinfolk, and they refuse to share their good fortune without any apparent consequences. These are traits, as we have seen, of sorcerers.

In North America, people tend to think of politics as a pragmatic business. At best, it is a process by which contending interests debate, modify, and commit to various policies; at worse, it is a contest played out by factions and individuals pursuing their own self-interests. This is also true in Maisin society, but as an outside observer one can't help but notice the powerful ways that deeply held moral assumptions condition political discussions. The intense shame many Maisin felt about their standard of living in the 1980s was shaped by their assumptions about reciprocal virtues. When villagers told me that they were "poor" and that the village was "dirty" and "backwards," they were referring not only to a lack of material development—important as this was to them—but also moral integrity. As we've seen, the Maisin equate moral uprightness with the pursuit of balanced exchange. The key concept of *marawa-wawe* entails an idealized state in which people transcend their obligations to each other by achieving a perfect state of balance that is at once material, moral, and spiritual. Despite their best efforts, however, the people were not materially the equals of Europeans (as they imagined Europeans to be) and thus were morally inferior as well. In an ideal world, the rich Europeans and elite Papua New Guineans in the towns would be obliged to share their wealth, to bring the relationship into equivalence. This did not happen, and people worried that the problem lay within themselves (cf. Burridge 1960).

Politics in Uiaku in the 1980s revolved around the conundrums of development. In the meetings I attended, most of the focus was directed at the failings of the community. The moral tone of the speeches, endlessly stressing the need for mutual support, resonated powerfully with speeches I heard at meetings dealing with sorcery accusations: much in the way that social amity produced good health, Maisin supposed that unity provided the essential foundation for prosperity. Political efforts, however, were also directed outwards. Village councillors spent weeks at a time in the provincial capital of Popondetta petitioning politicians and bureaucrats to release funds to support local development projects. Despite promises made by politicians around election time,

government support for development projects usually failed to materialize, and many people were convinced that the government intended to leave them mired in poverty. I got my first sense of the desperation many Maisin felt about their poverty a month or so after I began my fieldwork when a delegation visited one evening to encourage me to entice my supposed circle of American businessmen to "develop" the Maisin lands. I disappointed them. Soon after, however, a representative of a logging company arrived to pitch a scheme to replace the rainforest behind the villages with a massive oil palm plantation. The villagers were ecstatic. Development was about to arrive, and integrity would at last be restored.

Notes

1. Sister Helen lived in a modest house at the mission station by the Wanigela airstrip. When I told her about the rumours, she laughed. She'd heard it all before. It was clear from her meticulous records, which she kindly allowed me to copy, that she was barely breaking even. When she died in the early 1990s, Wanigela ceased to be an outlet for tapa.

2. Local Government Councils were introduced by the Australian colonial government beginning in the 1950s to provide a degree of self-governance to local communities and to encourage village-level economic development. The Maisin received a few small grants from the Council during the 1980s for water tanks to supply village medical aid posts in Uiaku and Airara. In the mid-1990s, Papua New Guinea reformed its system of provincial and local government, replacing the latter with Local Level Government bodies with expanded responsibilities and authority. Like its predecessor, the Cape Nelson LLG appears to have little presence at the village level (May 2004).

3. Since the early 1970s, the national government has formally controlled local schooling in Papua New Guinea, setting the core curriculum while training teachers and paying their salaries. As of 2000, approximately 40 per cent of the schools were at least partially funded and controlled by churches and missions as were two universities (Gibbs 2005). In the two Maisin schools, children receive religious instruction once a week from the parish priest or a local catechist.

4. The word "formal" needs to be stressed here, as there is abundant evidence, despite the efforts to create international legal accords such as the Geneva Conventions, that members of modern nation-states often find it difficult to consider those they regard as enemies as moral beings to be accorded the same rights and considerations as fellow members of their own communities.

5. Given the thinness of the police force on the ground, it is doubtful that warfare was completely brought under control, and many acts of violence within communities certainly went undetected and unpunished. There is also evidence of police committing

their own crimes, sometimes with the knowledge of patrol officers (Kituai 1998). Since Independence, Papua New Guinea has struggled with a resumption of tribal fighting in much of the Highlands, increasingly with imported and homemade guns, and gang violence in the towns and along the road systems (Dinnen 2001; Gordon and Meggitt 1985).

6. Richard Scaglion, one of the architects of the country's pluralistic legal system, observes that "Papua New Guinea has been one of the more progressive of the Pacific nations in pursuing law reform" (2004:95). Efforts have included detailed research on legal proceedings in local communities, much of it carried out by anthropologists, and the introduction of new legislation and legal forms that recognize customary law, the most successful of which have been village courts.

7. The quote is attributed to the famed nineteenth-century German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck also once remarked, "Politics is not an exact science" (*Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 3rd ed., 1979).

8. This same man confided that he also suspected the young unmarried men who worked as storekeepers were sleeping around too much, thus weakening not only their bodies but also the virility of the store. This was not an explanation, however, that I heard from anyone else.

9. The Ganjiga councillor was a classificatory mother's brother to the speaker.

10. The Uiaku councillor had two wives, the Ganjiga councillor had three. The allusion here is to sorcerers, who were known to thrive upon rumour-mongering and gossip.

11. It is important to stress that most Papua New Guineans have had very limited experience of Europeans and other foreigners. Throughout the colonial period, the only European the Maisin saw with any regularity was the priest stationed at Wanigela when he visited the villages for a few hours once a month to celebrate the Communion service. Individual experiences vary. A handful of Maisin hold jobs that bring them into regular contact with foreigners. Rural Maisin's notions about Europeans have been built from their historical experiences, from mostly fleeting personal observations of foreigners in the towns and villages, and from what they hear from other Papua New Guineans. Europeans stand in sharp contrast to local peoples not only because of their light skins but also because they appear so wealthy and powerful, yet never seem to work very hard. They thus present a challenging puzzle that has long preoccupied rural Papua New Guineans (e.g., Burridge 1960). Their notions about Europeans are best understood as constructions built partially from experience and partially from Indigenous assumptions about human nature. As Ira Bashkow notes of the Orokaiva who live in the central part of Oro Province, "[they] project onto their whitemen, from their own evaluative viewpoint, their most pressing moral concerns" (2006:9). This is a kind of Indigenous anthropology, the equivalent of centuries of Western constructions of "primitive" peoples held up as the moral opposite of European "civilization" (Lutz and Collins 1993; Pagden 1982). In the end, both types of projections tell us at least as much about their authors as the people they aim to depict.

CHAPTER 6

CULTURE CHANGE: TAPA AND THE RAINFOREST

Early in 1995, I received a letter from our old friend Franklin Seri, then the Uiaku councillor. After updating me on recent births and deaths, Franklin mentioned he would be visiting Berkeley, California, in a few months as part of a delegation of four Maisin men to promote tapa cloth.

Needless to say, I was electrified. I hadn't been back to Papua New Guinea for eight years and had heard nothing about a visit to the United States in the infrequent letters I had received from villagers. Franklin's letter gave few clues as to what this visit was about, but he did mention that it had been organized by Lafcadio Cortesi of Greenpeace International. I quickly found Lafcadio's phone number through directory assistance. He was delighted that I had called! He had heard many good things about Anne and me from the Maisin and very much wanted us to be part of the current project he was coordinating. That project was to mount a major exhibition of Maisin tapa cloth at the Berkeley Art Museum in collaboration with Larry Rinder, the Curator for Contemporary Art.

The exhibition was intended to be highly innovative in several ways. First, it would showcase tapa as an art form on par with the Western creations that more typically lined gallery walls. Second, the tapa display would be tied to the theme of preserving the rainforest of Papua New Guinea from commercial exploitation, with the Maisin presented as Indigenous stewards of their ancestral lands. Finally, the exhibition would make use of modern multimedia facilities to tell the story of the Maisin in the most vivid way possible and to reach a wide "virtual" audience—a daring idea before the advent of social media. A special website was prepared, full of colourful photographs and detailed articles concerning the Maisin and tapa. Nick Bowness, another close friend of Lafcadio's, prepared a computer kiosk featuring a "virtual village" that allowed visitors to tour parts of Uiaku and to learn about the process of making tapa.