

Chapter 3 Mortuary Feasts for the Dead

Part I

The Feasting Movement

Death is a motif woven into much of the social fabric of Misiman life. Both now and in the past, its very inescapability has been used to strengthen the involvement of the living in their social world. To this day it remains a central theme in almost all important social occasions. Death is used as an opportunity for creating, extending and reaffirming bonds of sociability in the face of the suffering and loss with which it is inevitably associated. (Whiting 1976:135)

Rites of passage and ritual

As an introduction to the more detailed descriptions in this and the following chapter, I will consider first some more general observations about *bobuton*, which comprise the main series of mortuary feasting rituals held on Misima. Then I will address some further underlying analytical notions arising from these observations.

Several patterns or movements can be identified in the series of feasts which constitute the *bobuton*, not the least important being the central figure of the surviving spouse who constitutes the role of chief mourner in many (Massim) societies—the person around whom the whole movement of mortuary ritual and feasting seems to revolve (Macintyre 1989). On Misima, however, the surviving spouse is peripheral (though with very real obligations to perform in their own realm) to the *bobuton* series. Macintyre considers that the mortuary rites on Tubetube are concerned with a dual problem i.e. 'the removal of the dead person from the realm of the living and the removal of the spouse from the hamlet' (1982:2). No such neat dichotomy can be drawn up for Misima, as the spouse usually remains with his or her

own family after the death.¹ Instead, the main burden of these commemorative events is generally taken up by the matrilineage of the deceased who are by definition the *tonyaoma* ('the owners of the dead') and who must carry the burden of the *nak* ('badness').

Within the framework of any particular *bobuton*, a pattern of escalation can be noted. Each succeeding feast gets bigger and better in terms of the number of dead people commemorated, pigs killed, resources expended, workers mobilised, and people fed.² The earlier feasts of *highig* and *iwas* are generally performed to commemorate the death of one person. In order to ensure that all participants in the feast receive adequate pig meat, several sponsors may combine at *highig* to commemorate the same deceased, with each building his own *pwasiu* or platform on which the pigs are displayed. The day of *iwas* may also see several sponsors who *pelabalaba* (combine to help each other) to carry out a feast, but in this case each usually memorialises a different deceased. By the time of *lobek*, the final feast, each sponsor will erect gravestones in memory of several dead at one time, either from his own matrilineage or from that of his father.

At *totouli* (the feast held on the day of the funeral), one or two pigs might be killed, depending on the size of the crowd that gathers. It is rare that no pigs are killed, but it may happen if the family has been caught by surprise and possesses neither pigs nor cash resources with which to purchase pigs. To celebrate *highig*, a total of from two to five pigs may be killed, with the possible addition of a cow, by three or four sponsors who honour the same person. In the case of Sitibeni, the deceased father of a large number of respected male and female community

¹ There is similarly no change in kinship terminology, which is different from what Fortune (1963:37,43 ff) and Macintyre (1989:4), with reference to Dobu and Tubetube respectively, have observed.

members, a total of eleven pigs and one cow were killed in 1979 by several groups. The *highig* feast for Anila, the oldest living female of her clan, saw ten pigs and one cow slaughtered in the hamlet where she had been living in West Siagara, and a further four pigs killed by her sister and her adopted son in the eastern end of the village.

The number of pigs killed for the feast of *iwas* is strictly determined by the number of women who wailed at the funeral, and who must be 'paid' for their work with pieces of uncooked pig meat. On the occasion of a child's *iwas*, if there were few mourners at the time of the funeral, then only one or two pigs might be killed, plus an additional one cooked to feed the workers (as was the case of Sali's daughter in 1983).

From the time a platform is erected—signalling the sponsor's intention to hold a *lobek*—until the final day which culminates in dancing all night and feasting all day, pigs are brought by *muli* (affines) in a steady procession. This may result in about fifteen to twenty pigs and three to four cows being given to the feast sponsors. From this number, some are selected for killing, while others are fattened up for another feasting venture. Fifteen pigs and two cows were killed at Atama's *lobek* by her eldest son—but this is an extremely high number. The blood-encrusted remains of four to seven slaughtered pigs and one or two cows might be seen hanging from a scaffold of wooden slats or vines on any one platform during *lobek*.

Two anthropological contributions seem particularly relevant to an analysis of the meaning of the mortuary feasts and the patterns that result from such an examination. Van Gennep's thesis that each ritual or series of rituals consists of three

² It might be noted at this point that the number of pigs killed is usually an accurate reflection of the size of the feast; the amount of yams, sago porridge, pots of rice and other food stuffs which are cooked are simply the accompaniment to the pig meat.

main parts, i.e. separation, transition, and incorporation (with special emphasis on the transitional or liminal phase), illuminates some aspects of Misima feasting (1960). Rosaldo's moving account of his own experience of the death of a loved one serves to help us understand how mortuary rituals provide support for the deep emotions of grief and loss experienced by Misimans at a time of death (1984).

It is informative to view the whole period of the *bobuton*, given in memory of a particular deceased person, as a processual transition. From the moment of death, there is a separation of the matrilineage (the owners of the dead) from the rest of society. They are marked out as different, and as such they possess transformed identities. Their duties are plain: they must now work on behalf of their dead, and devote themselves to planning and amassing material resources over a number of years in order to remember their dead in appropriate ways on culturally defined occasions.

Their first obvious job is to dispose of the corpse in a Christian form of burial. But an even more important consideration is the feeding of those who come to mourn for, and help with, the appropriate disposal of another clan's dead. The second feast of *highig*, held within a week of the burial, functions to cleanse the local community of the polluting nature of the death, releasing its members to be immersed once more in the normal chores and duties of everyday living. *was* is the third feast, where we find more formalised expressions of affinal indebtedness beginning to enter into the death equation. The *tovelam* brings a gift for his father-in-law, and the women who wailed at the funeral are presented with their payment in the commodity³ of raw pieces of pig meat. This particular burden of indebtedness is thus finished, and a period of years may now pass before *lobek* (final feast) is

³ I use this word in a metaphorical sense to refer to 'the coin of the realm'; in this case, it is pig meat.

celebrated. In recent years, since the fashion of building gravestones and whitewashing them came into vogue, *lobek* has been associated with *simenti*, wherein the cement gravestone is formed up and erected in place. This additional feature requires that extra time and resources be expended beforehand in preparation for the feeding of crowds of visitors, and that the slaughter of pigs be performed on a large scale.

An individual death is not properly 'finished' until the final feast of *lobek* is completed. People are still in the transitional stage, though moving through it step by step as each feast in the series is held. When a clan's duties to their dead are at an end, its members return to their respective roles within society, into which they are incorporated once more. But all does not necessarily revert to normal. Life goes on in much the same rhythm, the seasonal cycle of gardening, planting and harvesting continues, but in the realm of human social life changes have been wrought. Affinal relationships have been confirmed and strengthened through the exchanges that took place in the course of mortuary feasting. Certain key people belonging to the clan have gained or developed a reputation as *topapaan*, and community members at large have worked together with a single focus. They have mourned with those who mourned, and celebrated with those who provided the wherewithal for feasting and feeding on a grand scale.

That leads us to the question—what is 'normal' as far as everyday Misiman life is concerned? Given the inevitability of death and its frequency, it may be that to comprehend mortuary rituals as a special set of procedures—set in train by a death, followed until completion, after which normality is reasserted—is a faulty understanding of ritual. Life has within it the seeds of death; death happens as part of life. It is perhaps more illuminating to interpret Misiman ritual focusing on death as like 'a busy intersection. Rather than a self-contained sphere of deep cultural

activity, ritual can be seen as a place where a number of distinct life processes intersect (Rosaldo 1984:190)¹. As we have seen already, the cultural values by which people live are realised through the process of mortuary feasting. Conversely, the ritual of mortuary feasting derives its meaning from the prevailing social situation—and the behaviour, values and attitudes that underpin that social situation. Death rituals are a part of the continuum of life, a part of the process of living-in-community and fulfilling mutual obligations and responsibilities based on membership in the community and the clan.

While the physical remains of the deceased are disposed of at the time of burial, and once removed from sight, are marked either by a roughly-hewn cross of timber or a roof hastily erected over the site, the memory nevertheless remains and must be put to rest. Mortuary rituals serve to enable this to happen, in spiritual terms as well as in emotional and physical ways.

There was a belief in earlier times that if the spirit of the dead was not properly satisfied with what was done in its honour, it would return to haunt its matrikin. In emotional terms, there is a need for the grief felt at the loss of a family member or respected community leader to be processed and then literally transformed into laughter and celebration and a good time for all. In physical ways, concomitant with the movement of the corpse towards decomposition and decay is a corresponding movement of the living towards sustenance, nourishment, nurture and life.

The sanctions imposed automatically on the community by a death in its midst need to be cleansed and lifted. The *highig*, often referred to as *tuwaliya hi pagapagasisi* ('they are strengthening their bodies') provides the metaphorical washing. This serves as a reminder that grief and sorrow have physical

manifestations, and that the living must be safeguarded lest their extreme sorrow and sadness impinge too much on their health, ultimately leading to sickness and death.

Debts incurred among the women who wailed are sorted out at *iwas*, the third feast. At that time, a general 'tidying-up' of social obligations is accomplished, before resources are gathered together once again in preparation for the final feast of *lobek*, which sets the boundary to each sequence of mortuary feasting.

***Intertwining strands*⁴**

Those who have ever plaited hair, wool, or yarn will understand that the strength of three strands twisted together exceeds that of two. As I have observed and been involved in Misiman society, I have developed an awareness of the complexity of relationships which link the three main social groups, based on kinship, and manifested in action and behaviour: the matrilineage, those affiliated through the father, and the alliances created through marriage. Another way of looking at the society is to view it as a net or a spider web—intricate patterns of interlocking relationships, activated in everyday life but highlighted in the customs and ritual of mortuary feasting.

The *un* (clan) in Misiman society may be defined as an exogamous, land-owning set of unilineally related kin. The word *tutun* (relative) refers to matrilineal kin; individuals receive their clan—the social signifier of identity—from their mothers. Clan membership governs how people act, with whom they interact, and when and how to act, with unwritten rules underpinning all kin relationships. People remain in the clan they are born into. Though they may be adopted by members of other clans,

⁴ I have chosen to use this metaphor based solely on my own observations and insights. It is not something which Misima people talk about per se. For a more complete explanation of this metaphor, see Chapter six.

yet they retain their birthright to land, both residential and garden. Individuals act on behalf of their clan in order to bring honour and prestige to the collective group as well as to their individual name. Clan membership, in turn, confers status and standing in the community by virtue of the group's reputation. At the level of the individual's daily needs, the *un* supplies each person with a ready-made set of relations and relationships, which in terms of life activities inform clan members concerning the links and obligations they have to others. Thus a pool of people is created from whom Misimans can expect cooperation and help in time of need.

Matrilineal kin are the consanguineal family amongst whom one can relax and be oneself. These are the people who will (ideally) offer help without expectation of return or gain, who exhibit the valued trait of *mulolu* (giving). The individual calls on his or her *un* members for help in both daily and seasonal chores such as tending gardens, building houses, or harvesting cocoa. Members of the matrilineage will band together to confront crucial life events like birth and death.

Because the demise of one of its members constitutes a *nak* 'owned' by the matriclan, the responsibility for burying the physical body and celebrating the memory of one of its own automatically falls within the clan's *abalogugui* (province or area of authority). As a consequence, the series of feasts known as *bobuton* must be given. Beginning with *totoulli* on the day of the funeral and proceeding through *highig* and *iwas*, the *bobuton* culminates in *lobek* which—unlike the other feasts which commemorate individual deaths—celebrates the memory of several recently dead clan members with the final action of cementing their gravestones.

Through work performed on behalf of the dead, living clan members pay respect and honour to members of the mother's line who initially gave the

(deceased) person life and the means to the continuation of that life. Garden food resources, pigs, store goods and traditional valuables are collected, displayed, and given away in an effort to acknowledge and pay back the huge debt perceived to have accrued from their ancestors. It becomes incumbent on the clan to meet this debt at the time of a member's death.

However, the generous expenditure of many resources is neither completely altruistic nor is it undertaken purely in response to social sanctions. The Misiman who sponsors a mortuary feast gains prestige and a reputation for being a *topapaaan* (one who feeds others), for this is the Misiman route to becoming a 'big man' in Melanesian terms. Through the successful and generous performance of his feasting responsibilities, a clan member confirms both his right to inherit the land of his forebears along with his fellow clansmen, and to live and take his place as an esteemed and productive member of the community.

Conversely, clan members who fail to sponsor feasts may be denied their inheritance. Individuals are required to share in the work of feasting, either by being physically present and providing labour and garden as part of the *boda* (group) or by financially supporting the venture even while physically absent. Those who take jobs on the 'mainland' of Papua New Guinea are obligated to remember their village and clan ties in visible and tangible ways. They may do this by providing gifts of clothing or plane tickets to relatives, and especially by supplying money to buy store goods, an essential component of mortuary feasting today.

Within the larger grouping of the clan, the *fini* (stomach) represents the intimate cluster of people—siblings born to one mother—from which most help and nurture can be expected. Yet with intimacy comes conflict and tension. Daily frustrations build upon each other, aggravated by the constant, small irritations of

living and sharing together in close proximity. These troubled emotions are transformed into an actual embodied state, as, in cases of illness or death, the ones most likely to be suspected of working sorcery are the members of the immediate family.

When our son Geoffrey was about eighteen months old he reverted to crawling and displaying signs of extreme discomfort. It was suggested by some in the village that Nevenak—our closest neighbour and adopted 'mother'—had worked sorcery on him. She was known and feared for her knowledge of spells, and it was believed that in an anger fueled by envy of the material goods we possessed and were not sharing with her, she had targeted our youngest and most vulnerable child.

On another occasion, we were woken in the night by shouting coming from the direction of the road. As we clustered at the door, straining our ears to hear the words, we saw flickering lanterns in other people's houses as they too were drawn to the noise. The next day we heard that a man, after imbibing too freely, had exploded in anger against his own brother; the offender had grabbed a spear and chased his brother up the road, threatening to kill him.

Another episode involved two girls who lived next door. Because of a disagreement, Lema chased her younger sister Lusa into the bush, pelting her with stones as she fled. Lusa's prolonged cries and wailing issued from the bush where she had taken refuge long after the episode was over and Lema had returned to her tasks.

These instances reveal another side to the intimacy of close living, and to the values of mutual love and assistance on which Misiman society depends. Yet life for Misimans is generally peaceful and smooth-flowing, and people do usually fulfil their obligations, especially amongst the more intimate bonds that tie members of the

same residential group. There is an informal give and take at the daily level.

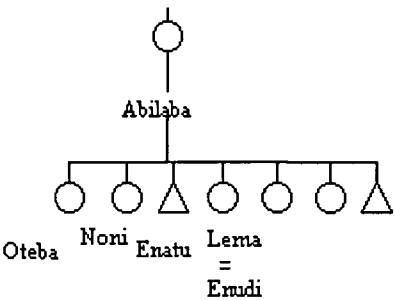
Marriage residence is usually viri-local, meaning that after marriage, brothers tend to live together near their father. On the other hand, female members of the *fini* may live some distance away, so that in practice it is sisters-in-law who comprise the group of women who join their mother-in-law in the daily activities of weeding a garden or harvesting yams

The rule of sons living close to their father is not invariable. However, individual preferences will often depend on the relative strength of each partner in the marriage—in other words, who is given the right to make the choice. Other concerns may be taken into consideration. There may be an aging parent to be cared for, or a daughter-in-law who may not be compatible with her husband's parents. The availability of suitable land for building a house is especially crucial to decision-making. During the early months and years of their marriage, a couple tends to divide their time between both sets of parents until their house is completed, usually built in close proximity to the husband's father.

Whilst Makuta and her husband bore no sons, they nevertheless had six daughters, four of whom remained in the *awan* (hamlet) named after their mother. These four chose to reside near their parents because garden land was freely available there, especially for the three girls who had married men from other villages. The other two daughters stayed in their jobs on the mainland, thus making no extra claims to the land.⁵ The fourth girl, Mabela, who had married a man from the same village as her parents, later moved with her family to her husband's father's land after conflict within her own family resulted in poor relationships.

Abilaba is a Lailoga land owner. Her oldest daughters Noni and Oteba married men from other regions of Papua New Guinea and now live permanently in their husbands' areas. Lema (another daughter) and her husband Enudi initially lived on his father's land, later changing residence and building their house on a small strip of land next to Abilaba. Enudi chose this location because he wanted to lend assistance when needed since his mother-in-law was without a male to support her.

Figure 1. *Abilaba and her children*



Tukasapu's boys have all remained close to him, their wives being mostly from other villages or islands of the Misima-speaking area. There is not sufficient land in the main part of the village for all of them to build adjacent to their father, so the younger sons have moved east of the village and cleared land to create their own hamlet, without asking permission of the land-owners. After Tukasapu's house fell into disrepair, he and his wife also moved to join their sons; they remain there to this day, virtual 'squatters', as they have appropriated land belonging to Tukasapu's father's clan, but have not 'paid' for it through the vehicle of mortuary feasting.⁶

Lute keeps his children around him. His personal power and vindictiveness make him feared not only by his children and their spouses but also by the *towoho*

⁵ Misimans refer to the main island of Papua New Guinea as the 'mainland.' Misima island itself is also known as the 'mainland' by residents of the smaller islands belonging to the Misima language.

⁶ For more about Tukasapu and his family, see p. 247.

(land-owners) on whose land his family members have spread out. He enters into alliances with others of his clan, using land 'grants' to bind them to him. Madili, a distant relative in Lute's clan, told of her need to work extra plots of land in order to have enough yams to help her mother do the *iwas* feast for her dead sister, Jana.

Madili spoke of events as follows:

He (Lute) has been asking me for ages to come and live up here. So he has allowed me to use a large garden up at the river. I share it with my daughter and one of Lute's sons. The other plot I'm gardening is on the other side of the creek, a small piece of land that was being worked by Lute's sister but it got burnt out. But I won't stay here for ever—I have four garden plots that I am currently working. It's too much. I'll just use the two plots Lute has given me until I harvest the yams that I need to help with Mum's work.

But my main garden area is what my father has given me; that's where he cut down trees on his adopted father's land, and planted mango and other trees for his children's benefit.⁷

Madili's account illustrates the mechanism in Misiman society that enables men to provide for their children. If they clear virgin rainforest, then they are able to bequeath that land to their children. Turner notes a contrast between what he calls the 'hard' line of legal descent (through the matriclan on Misima), and the 'soft affectional' side which comes from the father (1974:235). Madili clearly holds her father and what he has done for his children in great esteem. Mauss describes this form of 'giving' as 'pure gift,' one from the heart which need to be acknowledged (1989). Battaglia draws this distinction also when defining selfhood on nearby Sabarl island, stating: 'Within the matriclan, nurture is an expectation expressed in the recognition of shared substances ... a person's self is inscribed within clan limits' (1990:77). By contrast, gifts of nurture from a Misiman father take the form of physical labour as he continues to aid and support the child's growth to adulthood. Through his labour on behalf of another clan member, he builds a bridge to an 'other', defining the 'self' in a different way. He is making an investment in the physical and social growth of the 'other'—an investment that ultimately must pay off. For these

gifts of nurture, he and his line are remembered and acknowledged by return gifts of compensation.

The mother's line constitutes the nurturers, the gardeners who provide both the food and the land on which to grow it for future generations. The father's matrilineage comprises the progenitors, the *topapamasa* (the ones who 'bring into being') from whom the seed has come. The symbolic difference can be seen in the act of planting yams. After completing the heavy work of cutting down the trees, burning away the foliage, and marking out the internal divisions of the gardens, the men dig the cleared ground with digging sticks. Then the women take the seed yams stored from the previous year and carefully deposit them in their 'nests' of small mounds of earth already softened by the action of the digging sticks. The women continue to nurture the yams, weeding and cultivating the garden over a period of nine months until it is time for the harvest. They make many trips to the garden to *yobek* (pull the yams from the ground) and store them in garden sheds or in the rafters of their houses.

There is evidence here of the parallel drawn between Misiman beliefs vis-à-vis human conception and the planting process. The man contributes the 'blood' which causes the foetus to form, while the woman nurtures the child growing in her womb, feeding it so that its bones are shaped and its flesh fattened.⁸

Throughout a person's lifetime and beginning at birth, a certain member of the father's clan will develop a relationship with the individual, giving small gifts called *holhol* (literally, 'pouring'). Traditionally, upon the death of the person, the same lineage would assume the responsibility for digging the grave; in the historic

⁷ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1997.

⁸ Humans become '*tabwa*' (fat) just as plants ripen and grow robust fruit. To be called '*tabwa*' is a compliment, implying health and sleekness of body.

past, a member of the father's clan became the recipient of the cleansed and decorated skull at the time of secondary burial. While these latter two practices are no longer followed, nevertheless it is still customary today for paternal kin to receive compensation. This takes the form of prestations of food beginning on the occasion of the funeral, continuing at later *bobuton* feasts, and culminating in the *hagali* feast. The latter, which is known as *vinapohon* ('payment for the umbilical cord'), acknowledges the role of the father in sustaining and caring for his child, a member of another clan.

Whilst the burden or 'heaviness' of a death lies squarely upon the matrilineal clan members, children may take on the responsibility for their father's death. In fact it is imperative that they be involved in mortuary feasting for members of their father's clan at some time, as this shows the respect and honour due to the group which allows them to live in their midst.

Today, however, much of this is taken for granted. In the case of Tukasapu, referred to above, his sons have large families; they have not succeeded in getting jobs in the gold mine, so as an extended family, they do not have the resources to expend on feast giving. There are enough of them however to form an independent group of their own, so that the need for other social ties diminishes accordingly. Today's young Misiman married couples decry the importance of adherence to custom. The presence of the gold mine has impacted upon Misiman culture, emphasising notions of Western individualism and modernity, along with the material benefits that appear concomitant with those notions.

A further contributing factor to the diminution of customs is the fact of death. In recent years the leaders of the Lailoga clan, who own a considerable amount of land in the village of Siagara, have been decimated—beginning with the death of

Tonowak, the senior leader, and followed in quick succession by the deaths of three of his sisters' sons. For this reason, the remaining clan members live in fear that further reprisals might eventuate if they try to claim back their land and evict the squatters who have not 'paid' their dues.

In January 1998, on the occasion of the funeral of Lenola's ten year-old son who had been paralysed most of his life, Walisa and Abilaba talked about the land:

[Walisa] Those who have grandparents who were the landowners are okay. But the others—they have just made gardens where they like and didn't ask permission first.

[Abilaba] They have just stolen the land, taken it right off us and used it for gardens and plantations.

[Walisa] The younger generation is not being taught properly by the older ones, they are not taught to respect the land-owners. They haven't done any feasts.

Q: What has been the response of the land-owners?

They are just ashamed and embarrassed.⁹

This general preference for viri-local residence after marriage together with a matrilineal clan system governing land rights and inheritance causes constant problems and tensions throughout Misima. As we have seen, a man's male children tend to live and raise their families on land belonging to their father's line. They are members of a different clan to the *towoho* (the land-owning group), the ones with the authority, yet they must interact daily with the *towoho* and are expected to exhibit good behaviour and be respectful to the rightful land owners. This respect is expressed tangibly, primarily through mortuary feasting which acknowledges and recognises the *towoho's* position. Through sponsoring mortuary rites, the children also 'pay' for the right to remain on the land and build a house; having carried out these duties, they then have no fear of being accused of not belonging, or of being told to leave and go back to their mother's land upon the death of their father.

Those who have been absent from their mother's land—as Sedaki the pastor has been for most of his adult life—face a further fear which prevents them from returning to their mother's land, as they anticipate acts of sorcery performed on the grounds of jealousy. Sedaki refused to return to his natal village but instead chose to remain on his wife's land; his matrilineal cousins had been used to sharing the clan land amongst themselves and would not welcome him back for fear he might claim some of his inheritance.

⁹ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1998. Since Lenola's father is Lailoga clan, Walisa was not as overtly critical as Abilaba. He was being polite and respectful towards the family who were the ones affected most deeply by the death.

A good father also wants to provide for his children in material ways. As noted above, a man may clear virgin forest (where no gardens have been previously established) and pass this land on to his own children, rather than to his sisters' children. Any trees he plants may also be left to his own children, though on his death there may be disagreement between the cross-cousins.

On the death of his sister in 1982, Enatu, who has no biological children, 'adopted' her daughters and one son (all Lailoga) as his family. Recently there was a disagreement with his brother's family—cross-cousins from the Manilobu clan—over rights to betelnut and coconut plantations. A prestation similar to *hagali* was accumulated by Enatu and his *boda* (personal network) and delivered to his brother's children as a way of publicly asserting his rights and drawing attention to the other clan's trespass. Through this mechanism, Enatu was able to publicly shame the Manilobu clan members with his generosity, while at the same time compensating them for the loss of future access to those plantations. (See Plate 8.)¹⁰

Having contributed the 'blood' to the child, the father and his line continue to work for the good of the child. Should his child die unmarried, it is the father who is deemed responsible for this loss, and who must give compensation. This is done through the prestation of *powon*. As well as being a compensation payment, *powon* also carries the signification of appeasement, and serves to exonerate the father and his line from blame. At the same time, the father is released from the possibility of accusations of sorcery or negligence directed at him and any anger that could lead to vengeance being taken is pacified.

In this way, a recognised and valued place for the father and his line is built into Misiman social and economic structures. In addition, men are politically more

¹⁰ See more details of this continuing saga on page 170.

significant and publicly conspicuous than women in their roles as head of the household and clan; and by virtue of possessing both authority and decision-making ability, men tend to be the ones to sponsor feasts. For this reason the appellation *tonowak bwabwatana* ('big man') is conferred upon them. 'Big men' hold the official leadership positions in the community, fulfilling the roles of the elected *kansele* (councillors) or *komiti* (Ward Committee representatives).

So it is through the medium of exchange, informed by and predicated on mortuary ritual, that ties with the father's line form a second strand of the cord. But marriage or reproductive strategies underpin both of these strands.

Affinal attachments shape the third strand that is based overtly on marriage ties. These attachments underpin the relationships that provide the impetus, excitement and challenge implicit in mortuary feasting events, as well as determining the network that influences the more mundane activities—gardening, for example. This strand could easily be overlooked as there are no obvious prestations such as brideprice at the time of marriage. Instead, there are reciprocal exchanges of labour, with families of both the bride and groom helping each other in their gardens. And yet marriage ties are indeed 'ties that bind': the strand of marriage alliances is composed of many fibres and gives strength, support and balance to the strands or themes of matriliney and the recognition given to the father and his line.

Marriage determines and increases the number of people with whom a person establishes connections and obligations, and from whom assistance can be requested. However, tensions and often a sense of competition may develop between clans allied by marriage at one level, and between husband and wife—and the daily disagreements they may have—on another. Obligations and

responsibilities worked out through mortuary feasting function to satisfy and pacify the relationships at all levels. But there is a constant juggling for balance, as first one clan and then another seeks to host feasts, to 'give' each other debts, and to pay back those debts.

In a new marriage, the spotlight is on the *tovelam* (son-in-law relationship) who commences the ritual by fulfilling his side of the unwritten marriage contract: this demands that he provide a pig for his father-in-law at the appropriate time. This is regarded as part of the *muli* (in-law) responsibilities. The *tovelam* who brings 'gifts' of a pig and baskets of yams, coconuts or store goods is complying with what is socially and morally expected of him; he is also creating a *vaga* (debt) for his *yawana* (father-in-law). This is counted as a credit balance for the *tovelam*; it is entered as a credit on his side of the ledger of clan accounts and must be reciprocated at a later time when his matrilineage is sponsoring a feast for their own dead.

While the ongoing credit-debit account based on pigs (or cows) exchanged over time continues to exist between clans allied by marriage, there are also other clearly marked responsibilities in the form of particular prestations connected with the dead. A *powon* payment must be made by the surviving spouse of a dead person to the latter's matrilineage. The *powon* prestation mentioned above and this *powon* payment serve the same purpose. They compensate for the possible lack of care that has resulted in a death, and alleviate any anger or threats of harm aimed at the survivor.

The *powon* prestation acknowledges the maternal side while the *hagali* acknowledges the father's side; both are the responsibility of the widow (or widower). She and her line must prepare the yams, cooked food and sago porridge

that will be presented to the *tongamagaman*, the representative of the paternal clan. On completion of this *hagali* feast, the widow arrives at the official end of the liminal period of seclusion and transition she has endured since the death of their partner. She is now fully incorporated into society once again, having paid due respect to both the matrilineage and the father's side of the deceased.

There are other opportunities that enable an in-law to exalt himself and his clan, to demonstrate that they are strong and worthy of respect, and in so doing challenge by implication the strength of the 'opposing' clan linked by marriage. The occasion for these prestations of *kalehe* and *leyau* is predicated on death.

Kalehe (mango) is usually initiated by the *mul* of the deceased and ostensibly provides support in material terms of pigs and yams given to a *tonowak* who is sponsoring the final feast of *lobek*. This is a time of feasting and celebration for the villages representing the clans involved. *Kalehe* confers a debt on the receiving clan, a debt which may take many years to prepare for and to pay back. It is a large undertaking, and not to be entered into without the support, both material and physical, of many kinsmen.

Leyau is also initiated by in-laws; the *tovelam* is often the one who begins the process by hanging a valuable shell necklace above the corpse before burial. This act provides an opener for the action and leads into subsequent public exchanges of valuables and feasting by the two main clans involved. These scenes may be enacted over a period of years, but the time sequence is unimportant; what is of importance is that the feasting and sharing of valuables be reciprocated, emphasising group solidarity and mutual trust as well as cementing relationships and obligations between clans of people related only by marriage.

While the sponsors of mortuary feasts—whether the matrilineage involved in

the *bobuton* series, or the in-laws responsible for *hagali* and *powon* prestations—are mainly male, there exists for women a route to prestige and material benefits for themselves and their children. This is another form of *hagali*; it is given by a woman who chooses to honour one of her husband's relatives, thus showing respect and dutiful *henapu* (obedience) to her husband's clan in whose midst she is likely to be residing. The *hagali* prestation is work done on behalf of another clan, and as such creates a debt which must be repaid. The woman may be given rights to plantations of coconuts or betelnut or even to garden land; these are then passed on to her children and, by extension, to her own clan. In a community composed primarily of her husband's relatives, it is a practical way of providing for her children, who may choose to live on, and raise their families in, that same location.

These are the three strands of the strong cord of Misiman society, representing the ties of obligation and reciprocal responsibility that bind one group to another, providing linkage between individuals and connection between the individual and his-her community. Matrilineal relatives are the family, the clan—the ones to be helped in life and honoured in death. They are the nurturers symbolised by the figure of the mother and providing continuity from generation to generation. The father's lineage represents the life-givers, the ones who work for the well-being of the child who is a member of a different clan. The paternal contribution is acknowledged throughout the lifetime of the child, beginning at birth and ending with the *hagali* prestation predicated on death. For his part the father must also pay *powon* (compensation), for once having taken up the responsibility of caring for the child, he must then discharge it completely and pay in full if the child is 'lost'. When compared with the previous two strands, the affinal thread appears tenuous and of uncertain strength and vigour; this is because marriage rituals and brideprice payments are not wound into the yarn. Yet it is in and through mortuary rituals that

the in-law connection becomes evident. The marriage alliance and its tensions are constructed by the mechanisms of mutual *muli* responsibilities, by obligations of *powon* prestations and by the opportunities that *leyau* and *kalehe* events provide. The marriage alliance constructs the form and shape of mortuary feasting, balancing matrilineal and patrilineal emphases and providing the third strand to the strong cord that binds Misiman society.

In order to understand this cord more clearly, it is necessary to examine death and all that it entails. Death and its associated rituals, taboos and feasts form the lynch pin of Misiman society,¹¹ serving to activate the network of matrilineal, patrilineal and affinal relationships that are of prime importance to the Misiman. Death binds the community together in a cooperative venture—first as people gather to mourn, and then as they work together to prepare the food which they will share. Key Misiman values of respect and honour for the person are exemplified in the rules of etiquette pertinent to everyday routine activities, and to the unwritten conditions for rhetoric and oratory. These values are especially embodied and elaborated in the mortuary rituals and the memorial feasts associated with them. Death provides an opportunity for individuals and their clans to gain both prestige and a reputation for strength. Paradoxically, death and its accompanying feasts not only allow for the expression of grief and sorrow in bereavement, but also enable the whole community to celebrate their oneness and sociality as they feast together on an excess of pig meat.¹²

¹¹ The Massim societies (and matrilineal societies in general) are noted for placing emphasis on mortuary rituals. See Macintyre (1982), Young (1971; 1983), Lepowsky (1993), and Battaglia (1990).

¹² Rappaport (1968) observes in *Pigs for the Ancestors* that pig sacrifices often resulted in community members receiving a large dose of protein just when they were at risk of illness and stress. This is no doubt a contributing factor to the Misima stated purpose for at least one of their feasts, *highig*, described also as

In the following section I will address aspects of the main mortuary feasting cycle which involve the matrilineage.

'strengthening their bodies', i.e. building up and supporting those made weak and vulnerable by their grief at losing a loved one.

Part II

The Feasting Series

It is a Misiman belief that each person, whether a baby or an older clan leader, is a human being, a valued member of the community and the clan. The passing of a *gamagal* (human being) from life into death is marked by a remembrance period, a space of liminality wherein ritual in the form of feasting and taboos resonates with the seemingly contradictory emotions of both grief and celebration.

This transitional period may last for up to five years or more; it is divided into very definite periods of activities, though the intervals between the times of intense action are fluid and depend to a large extent on the availability of resources. During this period, four main feasts—*totoulli*, *highig*, *iwas* and *lobek*—are held in memory of the dead person. Each one is specific in its purpose and function; each progressively expands in terms of effort and resources expended, as well as in terms of the respect and honour that accrue to the sponsor. These feasts, which are collectively known as *bobuton*, can be understood as the 'mainstream' series of Misiman mortuary feasts, the ceremonies which must be carried out.¹³

Additional feasting occasions may be added to the main series at the discretion of the main sponsor. Historically a feast known as *ababvihi* was associated with the secondary burial of the skull of the deceased. When *baku hi palo* is a part of *lobek*, the sponsor's resources, in terms of both people and food items, are mobilised on a large scale and, as a result, the prestige of the feast sponsor, the

toguyau (giver), is vastly enhanced. He demolishes a house, *limi lekaleka*, prior to making a new one, heralding the imminence of *lobek* celebrating the memory of the dead who were laid out in that particular house; this may be as large or small an event as is deemed possible or advantageous at the time.¹⁴

While *bobuton* feasts are the responsibility of the matrilineage of the deceased as their right and duty, a different clan may take up this burden, particularly in the case of children who sponsor a feast for their dead father. Clan members who assume this role are said to *lilihouwa* ('to go in front') or *wewel hi kalapanetan* ('they cross over the water'). They are obliged to *palo bugul* ('unload things')—to give various items including clothing, crockery and baskets to the *tonyaomal*, thereby acknowledging the rightful owners of the dead. The people who take up the burden of another clan's dead are under pressure to do it well, to make no mistakes with the distribution of pig meat and food, and most importantly, to be very generous, ensuring all that there is more than enough to feed those who assemble. If it is performed well and praised rather than criticised and gossiped about, the matrilineage makes a return exchange, offering the other clan rights to land or to plantations of betelnut or coconut. However, if the performance is not to the matrilineage's satisfaction, the luckless sponsors become a target for gossip and scorn.

Powon and *hagali* prestations are also obligatory; these however are the product and responsibility of relationships formed by marriage ties.¹⁵ Their purpose differs however: the former serves as a compensation 'payment' to the dead

¹³ I use the term 'mainstream' because these memorial ceremonies come under the purview of the matrilineage of the deceased. They are the 'owners' of the dead, and the death is their *nak*, 'badness', which must be 'paid for' by the social action of mortuary feasting.

¹⁴ See below for a detailed description of these parts of the feasting ritual of *lobek*.

¹⁵ These are discussed in the next chapter.

person's clan, while the latter, the *hagali*, is given to acknowledge the contribution the father's clan members have made to a person's life.

Chronologically, the feasts are given as follows: (See Table 3.)

Totoulil—accompanying the death

This is the feast held on the day of the funeral; its specific purpose is to provide food for the visitors. In Misiman society, food and feeding provide the means for both showing respect for the person and 'paying' for work done—and attendance at a funeral is categorised as *tuwalali* (work). While the feast accompanying the funeral accomplishes a certain function—that of feeding—it also begins the whole series of feasts for this particular *tomati*,¹⁶ thus giving intimation of more and better things to come.

Depending on the size of the crowd of mourners, one or more pigs are killed, then served together with cooked food to those who may have come from other villages to show their respect by attending the funeral. The feast itself is sponsored by the matrilineal relatives of the dead person. Clan members channel their grief into productive action, immersing themselves in the multitude of tasks associated with the burying of their dead and the feeding of visitors in a manner appropriate to the social standing of the dead person and their clan. The surviving spouse and children are among the chief mourners. Their task is to sit by the body, wailing and crying as each new wave of visiting women coming up into the house reminds them afresh of their grief.

¹⁶ As this is easier than saying 'dead person', I will refer to the dead person as *tomati*, literally 'the one who is dead'. Another expression often used is *toyaomal*, 'the one who is lost'.

Welu's husband Wabeyalu died in 1986. He had no close relatives in the village, so Madili and Asa, children of the dead man's brother, attended to the feeding of the people who came to the funeral. Because of his employment in the gold mine, Asa had access to the cash required to buy rice and other store goods necessary for the feast. They also hosted the *highig* (see below) which followed on behalf of their father.

Gender distinction becomes evident here. Women's work is to mourn in public display, order the cooking pots and supervise the feeding. Men are responsible for digging the grave and killing and butchering the pigs in preparation for cooking.

Totouli carries the meaning of 'one who follows'. The significance of this is seen in the small ceremony that is enacted after a person dies, at which a woman who knows magic speaks words into a coconut and cracks it next to the ear of the *tomati*. This opens the path to the spirit world of Tuma, and at the same time entreats the spirit to depart the world of the living and not linger around its favourite spots (where it might cause trouble for its clan members). Molato enlarges on this theme:

They crack open the coconut next to the dead person's ear—*tanana hi tagapwela*. This opens the spirit's ear. The relatives might need help with gardens. Pigs might get into the gardens and spoil them. So if the relative goes and *ba winwin* ('speaks around') at the gravesite, the spirit will hear and stop messing up the garden. It will help.¹⁷

As part of the ritual, a special clay pot of unpeeled food is cooked and placed next to the body, together with the cracked coconut, a spoon, and perhaps the dead person's plate or cup. The spirit of the *tomati* feeds on the *kakanun* (essence) of this food during its journey to Tuma. This pot of *ligabwayabwaya* (literally, 'big cooking') is given to the person chosen as the *tongamagaman*, a representative of the matrilineal clan of the deceased. The pig killed to feed the

¹⁷ Molato and I discussed this topic on the occasion of Aliti's funeral in 1985.

mourners is also known as the 'follower' and its essence accompanies the spirit on its journey.

Highig—washing away the corruption

Less than a week after the funeral, the second feast takes place. In the interim, village residents and clan members have collected yams from the garden, marshalled pig resources, gathered coconuts, 'worked' sago and built a platform as a work space.¹⁸ A sense of urgency prevails in the compulsion to release villagers from the onerous taboos associated with proximity to a death and the need to complete this initial stage in order to move on. The more important future feasts have yet to be planned, and resources evaluated and amassed in preparation.

The inhabitants of the village or hamlet where the death took place are placed under certain taboos called *panuwa hi bubu*; these remain in force until the time of *iwas*.¹⁹ They are, for example, prohibited from 'burning a fire' (signifying 'work'). Taboos extend to all substantial work in the garden, other than collecting the food necessary to daily living and for supporting the feasting connected with the death. Clearing around the house areas, any sort of community work, and especially the killing of a pig for any purpose other than for the death is forbidden. The only exception to the rule is made when a second death of a person from a different clan occurs in the same hamlet or village area. This death then takes precedence over the first. But while the members of the clan involved in the second death are permitted to proceed with their own *bobuton* rituals, they must at the

¹⁸ I have used quote marks around the word, 'worked', in order to signify that it is yet another direct translation of the Misiman way of referring to the processing of sago.

¹⁹ However in practice today, the restrictions are in force only until *highig*, especially in the wider village area, though the residents of a particular hamlet in which the death occurred may observe more stringent and longer-lasting taboos.

same time acknowledge the one which they have forestalled by the giving of a pig—a gesture known as *lomuya*,

Loud noises are forbidden during this time of restrictions and children are taught to keep (at least temporarily) quiet. In seemingly stark contrast, at the conclusion of the mourning period a conch shell is blown, signalling the slaughter of a pig and the start of preparations for *iwas*.

A rent has occurred in the fabric of society. Led by the *tomati's* clan, the community must now concentrate its collective efforts on beginning to mend that rent. Individual must not concentrate on their own business; death takes first priority in people's minds, and is accordingly embodied in all of their actions.²⁰

Welu's husband, Wabeyalu, died as a result of a fall from a betelnut tree growing close to the sea. Accordingly, that area of the sea was *tawakaus* ('closed off'). Since *iwas* for Wabeyalu was still some time off and people needed to be able to fish in the interim, a pig was killed and distributed with cooked food around the village in order to 'clear' the sea of the polluting aspect of the death. That same day people were able to go net fishing and *tamtam* (fishing by using derris root, a poison thrown into the water to stun the fish).

The first three days after a death are especially critical as there is the fear that the spirit is still around, perhaps wanting to visit its wrath on those who do not adhere to the restrictions or who show disrespect by not curbing their loud voices around the village. Kerosene lanterns hung outside houses burn throughout the night, and a fire is kindled at the gravesite to keep witches' spirits away, spirits that may have been instrumental in causing the death in the first place. Their power is feared as they may

²⁰ Taboos have, in the past, effectively prevented people from conducting individual business enterprises. However with the advent of the gold mine and the need for shift workers to continue working, there has of necessity been a relaxing of these particular taboos.

now prey on the close relatives of the *tomati* who, weakened by grief, are extremely vulnerable. The corpse too is vulnerable, particularly the corpse of a baby or small child; the witches, having stolen the dead one's spirit, may now feed on the flesh. In order to protect both corpse and grieving relatives, a *silawa* (vigil) is kept during the night prior to burial. People gather to sing hymns, displaying a solidarity and oneness with the close relatives as well as providing a bodily barrier to any *topihigelgel* (enemy; literally, 'the one who hates').

Highig is the term generally used in everyday life for 'washing' or 'bathing'. The purpose of this feast is to clear away the immediate effects of the death on the village, so that people are freed to go about their daily business. Another term used is *minamina* ('staying around') or ('keeping company together'). This refers to the oneness ideally expected of the village residents, united as they are with the close relatives of the *tomati* out of respect for them and sorrowing with them. This oneness is shown not only in the community's passive consent and adherence to the taboos now in force but also in more active ways. Groups of young men gather coconuts and join with older men in working sago. Women bring food from the garden and cook for the workers, while at the same time preparing for the feast on the day of *highig*.

This notion of oneness is further amplified by a third term used for this feast—*tuwaliya hi pagapagasisi* which literally means 'they are strengthening their bodies'. There is a recognition that the death has placed great emotional, physical and psychological strain on the relatives and close friends. In addition, it has caused a social rift between them and their peers; the relatives need to begin the movement back to normality and the equilibrium of everyday life. There is a sense in which the whole village, united in common restrictions, combines to show solidarity with those who mourn. Their collective support helps strengthen those who are

weakened through grief and are now physically vulnerable as a result of having lost a clan member.²¹ The sponsors of the feast are able to work off their grief in the intense activity of feeding others; the grief which they embodied is replaced by *gasisi* (hardness and strength). Thus, in addition to relatives, people who were closely connected with the *tomati* may give of their own resources in sponsoring part of this feast, thus by extension demonstrating respect, honour or friendship. By building a *pwasiv* (platform), a close friend²² announces his intention to kill at least one pig; he invites the women of the village to participate by cooking yams and other vegetables together with the pig meat he provides.

At the end of the day, the women bring their pots together, providing a sort of 'pot luck' known as *mwahalahi* for later distribution among those same women and their families. Each sponsor takes responsibility for giving *minamina enona* ('the fruit of the staying') to certain sections or hamlets in the village. The *enona* is comprised of a clay pot of cooked yams, one of rice and one of sago porridge; these three are distributed to the residents of each section and shared out amongst them.

Several individuals may sponsor this feast on the same day, building separate platforms for the pigs that they butcher, and each conducting their own *mwahalahi* (literally 'dish pay-back'). Their individual efforts are coordinated so that every person in the village receives an approximately equal share in the *enona* food and pig meat that is distributed. This serves the practical purposes of division and inclusion—the burden is carried by many, and the many are fed.

²¹ Grammatical possession in Misima is shown in three ways (see discussion above in Chapter two): it is noteworthy that both kin terms and names for parts of the body are inalienably possessed, i.e. the part is an integral part of the whole.

²² Usually males sponsor these kind of feasts.

Iwas—untangling twisted obligations

While most of the restrictions placed on everyday work are lifted at the time of the *highig*, one taboo remains in place: no one in the immediate hamlet where the death occurred is to *bobu hi lib* (to catch or grab a pig). The meaning inherent in killing a pig is that a project larger in scope than daily work is underway. It might be house-building, or major garden work; or the pig may be for the purpose of mortuary feasting in honour of a different *tomati*. Catching a pig signifies that personal status is about to be enhanced, and individual or clan gain increased. According to Misiman thought, it is inconceivable that another project be contemplated when a death²³ is still 'incomplete'. Death's impact continues to be felt—the villagers are still in the transition period, the liminal space, moving from crisis back to normality.

Thus, the term *iwas* signifies 'tidying-up', a clearing away of the effect of the death on the community. It also refers to a balancing of accounts done in a ledger; some of the debts incurred at the time of the funeral must now be paid. The 'work' done by the women who came to mourn and wail over the body before the burial is compensated in the form of uncooked pig or cow meat—known as *vinakahin* (payment for crying).²⁴ In other words, an investment made at the time of the death is now being realised.

Another meaning of *iwas* denotes a theme underpinning much of Misiman social understanding of feasting and death—that of 'unravelling'. The complications and perplexities caused by the death are now beginning to be addressed: the

²³ I am using 'death' here in the Misiman sense of not only the physical death of a human being, but of the obligatory feasts which must accompany it. Death is not a single (or singular) event, but rather a process, as Parkin (1996:88) reiterates in his treatment of Hertz's model of death.

²⁴ This is distinct from the practice reported by Young at Bwaidoka where gifts of uncooked bananas, yams and sweet potato are given on the day of the funeral to those who 'cried'. (Young 1989)

debts are being paid, the taboo against others catching pigs and becoming involved in their own concerns is now finished. The relatives can now begin preparing for the fourth and final feast in this mainstream series.

The feasting ritual of *iwas* is usually carried out between six months to two or three years after the death. Because it requires a considerable expenditure of resources, the timing of the feast depends on *lovivina* (readiness) in two main resource areas—the yam harvest and the availability of pigs. An additional resource is that of the money required for the purchase of store goods including rice, tea, sugar, and tinned meat.²⁵

The primary function of *iwas* is to distribute the compensation payment among the women who came to wail and sit by the corpse on the day of the funeral. At that time the name of every woman who came to mourn was noted down. *iwas* signals that the time has come to make the appropriate payment to the women in the form of a piece of raw pig meat. Once again, *mwahalahi* is carried out, involving the women of the village cooking their own yams together with raw pig meat provided by the sponsor of the feast. This gives every family the opportunity to share in the pig meat, even if the mother or sisters were not involved in the mourning occasion at the time of the death.

The responsibility for this feast lies with the matrilineal relatives, although in some cases the children of the *tomati* may, with the consent or cooperation of the matrikin, carry the main burden of feasting.

²⁵ The wherewithal for this expenditure comes from relatives living on the 'mainland' part of Papua New Guinea. This is their share in the responsibilities of being a clan member, and represents their stake in the village—upon retirement, a good record of helping with mortuary feasting enables the worker to return and take up their clan residential and garden rights. It ensures a welcome from clan brothers in material and emotional terms.

Nalina, a former teacher, is married to a *dimdim* (whiteskin) who has built a 'permanent-building' house on her father's clan land. In the past she contributed a considerable amount to feasts for her father's line, and continues in the present to take the lead in planning and ordering the mortuary feasts for her father, who died in 1997. By so doing, she has earned for herself a reputation as *gasisi* (strong), along with the more practical benefit of retaining rights to the land on which her house is built. This allows her the option of possible future retirement on this land and also enables her children, who work in the *dimdim* world, to retain a foothold in Misiman society if they later decide to return to the island.

Timing for the *iwas* is flexible. It may be held at the same time as *highig* or may take place immediately prior to *lobek*, the next and final feast. Misimans are an extremely practical people who weigh the advantages of using an excess of resources in the present, against the postponing of a feast in order to properly prepare and amass resources. They need to estimate the produce of their gardens, and to take into account the number of debts in terms of pigs which are likely to be repaid at the time of the feasts. It is also necessary to have resources laid aside for contingencies such as a relative's unexpected death for which a contribution must be forthcoming.

This is the first large feast where the onus now falls on the affines—and particularly on the *tovelam*, who must play his part with the backing of his clan members as the support cast. He must prove his own worth and the strength of his clan by helping his wife's father in his endeavours. And there is no more important endeavour than the hosting of memorial feasts.

Prior to the feast day and after the platform for the *tomati* has been built, the *tovelam* and his clan bring a pig, together with baskets of yams, bags of rice and

sugar, cartons of meat and fish and bundles of firewood or coconuts. All these goods are thrown up on to a platform built as a workstation dedicated to the deceased. The activity of gift-giving is carried out with much fanfare and procession, heralded by a man blowing a conch shell. This alerts everyone in the village to the fact that the *tovelam* is carrying out his in-law duties, signifying both that he is a man of honour and that his clan is one that upholds the duties and responsibilities acquired through marriage.

But this giving is not one-sided: by bringing the pig, the *tovelam* has thrown down the gauntlet. He has issued his father-in-law a challenge in the form of a *vaga* which must be repaid at a later date when either the *tovelam* or one of his close relatives hosts a memorial feast.

And so begins the cycle of equivalent exchanges within the context of *bobuton* feasting. These exchanges define the affinal relationship initiated at marriage and are brought to their final conclusion after the death of the remaining spouse when all mutual obligations and compensatory payments are complete.

Lobek—finishing the debts

Lobek signals the 'completion' of a death, the time when interclan debts and obligations incurred by an individual through the death of close matrilineal kin are finished and the slate is wiped clean. This is the time when the matrikin can lay aside the *pulowan*, the heaviness that they have carried—the burden of counting pigs, preparing extra gardens, and planning to meet obligations yet to be fulfilled. This is the time when the clan can rest, having paid due honour and respect to a fellow clansmen and having marked their passing from life with appropriate ceremony and ritual. The villagers can resume normal life, knowing that the fabric of life is whole once again.²⁶

Somewhat appropriately, the term *lobek* carries the meaning of 'going under the surface of the water', signalling the end of the ripple effect caused by a death and a return to peace and well-being for all concerned. It signifies the end of the particular obligations and death-associated activities assumed by the closest matrilineal relative or child; these activities extend to—and incorporate—unrelated residents of the village who, while located on the periphery, have nevertheless been affected by and involved in the events surrounding the death.

Lobek is the fourth and final feast. By far the largest, it requires that resources of one or more clans be mobilised by the key feast sponsors as the ritual is celebrated to commemorate the deaths of several clan members at one given time. Sponsors from one clan may elect to do *lobek* for from one to eight or ten *tomati*, each building a platform for each *tomati* from a different clan.²⁷ While the

²⁶ Yet what is normality? There are always deaths, and there is always 'work' in progress in order that the deaths might be 'finished with'. This emphasises that death is indeed part of life, that as individual threads are mended in one area, fraying begins in yet another.

²⁷ Two sponsors may however commemorate the same dead person, though this is not common.

bulk of the lead-up preparations can be done separately, the sponsors combine on the final day of the feast to kill pigs and cows.

Ideally *lobek* involves the efforts of the whole village. When several men combine to 'do' a feast, their individual *boda* is also mobilised. Practically speaking, these *boda* involve not only people in the immediate village area, but will also 'pull' relations and adherents from elsewhere, thereby providing the large numbers of workers needed for successful feasting.

Lobek serves to affirm the strength of the clan as seen through its individual representatives who sponsor the feast and organise all the associated activities. Clan solidarity and unity become evident. Not only are the clan's own members mobilised to work together and contribute food, but also the networks formed by the marriages of these people are utilised as well. A grand display of cooperation and support results as debts are repaid and new ones incurred in this ongoing cycle of affinal obligations.²⁸

The sponsors arranging *lobek* may be joined by others who still have feasting events to carry out. In July 1995, the Manilobu clan (located in West Siagara) along with their cross-cousins, prepared to do both *lobek* and *iwas*. Abatini and his younger brother Ketu initially decided to cooperate with Ponitu from the Lailoga clan in the tasks of making sago and building platforms. Katen, who had already done *highig* and *iwas* for her father in the main town, realised that this was a good opportunity to combine with her cross-cousins to finish the feasting process in the village where her father was buried. She affirmed that the *pelabalaba* (mutual help between the cousins would ensure there would be enough pig meat to feed all the households involved. Then Seven (from a different clan) and Abatini's sisters

Pewanaka and Nalina decided to join in and work on the graves of their dead grandchildren. They all said, '*Ehei, ta tuwalali pamaisena* (Yes, that's it, let's all work together!).'

Over the last twenty to twenty-five years, the feast of *lobek* has acquired an additional activity which has now become obligatory and is usually carried out in conjunction with *lobek*.²⁹ It is called *simentu*;³⁰ and refers to the cementing of the grave according to *dimdim* (the white person's) religious tradition. A headstone is made, usually in the shape of a cross, and a cement block formed up over the burial site. This activity occurs prior to the final day of the *lobek* feasting and is one of the stages in the many preparations that must be made before the final distribution of uncooked pig meat can take place.

The weeks and months prior to the actual feast day encompass the following activities:

- 1) large gardens are planted and harvested;
- 2) either a new house is built by the main sponsor or a woven sago leaf edging on his old house is renewed as a sign that he is about to host *lobek*. This is called *mwalbobu*;
- 3) firewood and coconuts are collected at various times;
- 4) *pwasiu* (platforms) are constructed to receive the pigs brought in by the *tovelam*;
- 5) pigs are slaughtered and yams cooked at intervals in order to 'pay' the workers as they proceed with the work in hand;
- 6) the *tovelam* and the feast sponsors may voyage to other islands in outrigger canoes in order to *butum* ('ask for pigs');

²⁸ Where two clans are joined by a marriage of two individuals, then the members of one clan regard the other clan, in a general way, as affines.

²⁹ When an old death (of ten or more years) is memorialised, however, the making of the gravestone becomes the opportunity for a separate and additional feast.

³⁰ Erecting gravestones accompanied by an additional feast is not uncommon. Eves (1998:256) notes that among the Lelet, a further feast has been added to their mortuary cycle of feasting called *licimen*, a term also derived from the word 'cement'.

- 7) late-night dancing or singing may be held three or four times each week at the house of the feast sponsor, with the inevitable obligation of catering for those who gather;
- 8) the gravestones are cemented;
- 9) special food is cooked to feed each procession of people who come bearing gifts of live pigs, foodstuffs, and *bugul* comprising plates, clothes, silverware, garden baskets and bowls.

The organisation and planning of all these activities occupies the waking moments of the sponsor almost exclusively. However, plans may go awry at any stage. For example, if there has not been careful reckoning beforehand, the sponsor may find his resources of pigs and yams insufficient for the ongoing feeding of his workers during the lead-up months proving to be a large drain on his resources. Those who have debts may not be able to pay what they owe at this particular time and so the pigs that the sponsor was depending on in his calculations may not eventuate. Inclement weather can impede the mainly outdoor activities associated with the feasting. A death occurring in close proximity will upset even the most well laid of plans.

Co-sponsors may not be sufficiently organised, proving unable to keep up with the agreed-upon schedule of events. This would entail either granting them more time to prepare themselves or proceeding without them—and the latter is not recommended. Given the magnitude of the *lobek* undertaking, it would be impossible for one person—even a *toguyau* ('the one who gives')—to have sufficient resources to adequately feed a whole village. In terms of Misiman values, it is considered inappropriate and even dangerous for someone to put himself ahead of others, for this creates an appearance of pride and self-centredness.

The money required to buy rice, sugar, tinned meat and fish, and other *dimdim* goods—without which *lobek* nowadays would be unthinkable—may be

depleted more quickly than estimated. Delays occur while the sponsor desperately tries to communicate with relatives in paying jobs on the mainland, who are expected to make a contribution.

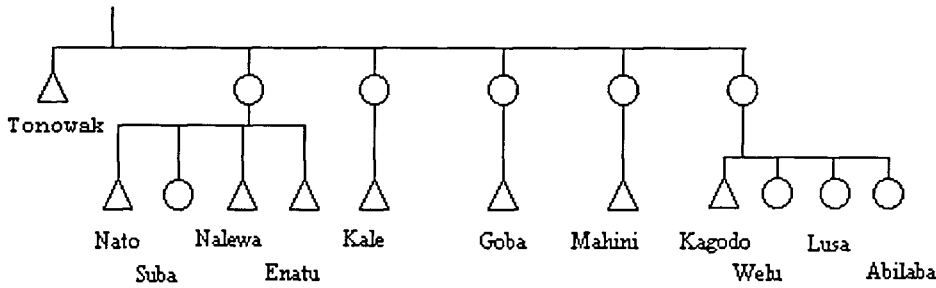
But in spite of occasional drawbacks and delays, the gravestones are cemented in place, the co-sponsors work to a schedule and the final day of *lobek* draws near. Two days beforehand, the *tolau* ('the ones who come down' or those in attendance at the feast) receive portions of uncooked pig meat and cooked food. On the day prior to the feast, village people come together to *tagamatavi*—to celebrate a social occasion and dance all night. Early the next morning, the feast sponsors distribute *bugul* (articles of clothing, baskets, plates and the like) to all who have participated. Exhausted from the exertions of the night, a period of rest and sleep ensues as villagers and guests alike prepare for the final bout of frenzied activity.

The last debts are about to be paid. Each sponsor may kill five to ten pigs and one or two cows. Approximately half of the meat is cut into portions and distributed among the men who were involved in preparing the corpse for burial at the time of death—those who dug the grave, made the coffin or carried it in the funeral procession. Visitors and members of each household in the village also receive portions of raw meat; all focus is on generosity.³¹ The remainder of the meat is distributed among the women of the village who cook it together with yams from their own gardens and then bring it back as part of the *mwahalahi*, which accompanies most of the other feasts. This custom underlines the importance of the social occasion that defines death on Misima.

³¹ The first time I attended a *lobek*: I was most embarrassed to be given a large chunk of meat; I protested that I had not worked for it but was just a spectator. I did not know then the degree to which Misiman generosity extends, nor that the amount given away, no matter to whom, is a form of investment—credit is being built up in the account.

At Siagara village in January 1984, a feast commemorating female ancestors of the Lailoga clan was given. A total of fifteen graves were cemented for the *lobek* and *simenti*. I noted the degree of intensity and constant energy expended on the 'completion' of the deaths.

Figure 2. Sponsors of the Simenti in 1984



Tonowak, the leading elder in the clan and the only surviving sibling of his generation, was ably assisted by Goba and Mahini (two of his sisters' sons) in cementing the graves of two of his sisters and that of another sister's son. The sons also combined their efforts to cement the graves of their respective mothers, Mahini's sister and a mother's classificatory 'sister.'

A third group involved in the work was composed of another sister's son (Kale) together with his father who helped him cement the graves of two of Kale's sisters. A fourth sister's son, Kagodo, came from his residence on another island for the purpose of joining with clan members to cement the grave of his father. A fifth group included Walisa, a Meisoga clan member³² whose focus was on the graves of his father, his father's mother's brother and sister, as well as the graves of two children belonging to the last, all members of the Linawia clan. To sum up, the main feast sponsors who joined in the one *lobek* feast were Tonowak, his sisters' sons—Goba, Mahini, Kale and Kagodo—and Walisa. (See Figure 2.)

³² Tonowak's sister's husband was Walisa's father's brother.

As most of the graves to be cemented were Lailoga dead, the addition of a different clan allowed for the exchange of meat and cooked food between the sponsors of the feast. This ensured that all residents of the village participating in the feast would be able to eat at the feast, rather than being restricted by taboos which forbade clan members to eat the food given in honour of their clan dead. (See following page, Table 1., for the chronological listing of the events which took place during this *lobek*.)

Table 1 The main stages of the 1984 lobek & simenti held at Siagara

In November, 1983	some crosses made, sago brought from Bwagaoia
December 23	Graves tidied and houses of the feast sponsors repaired.
December 26	3 platforms built for Lailoga—2 pigs and 1 cow killed 2 platforms built for Walisa—2 pigs killed 1 cross cemented. The village women all took part in the cooking and doing <i>mwahalahi</i>
December 27	More crosses made; Tonowak's sisters' son and others arrived with supplies to camp at Siagara for the duration, bringing 4 large pigs (by tractor), 4 bales of rice, 5 bales of sugar and supplies of yams and bananas.
December 28	Two enclosures were constructed to hold the pigs for the feast. Coconut trees were cut down and the trunks used for the fences; the leaves were given to the women to weave 12 baskets for use, to be given away during the final night.
December 29	Two long tables were built on which the workers would eat at different times. One small pig was killed to go with the <i>galabela</i> 'payment for work'.
December 30	Tovelam prestation was brought from the husband of one of the <i>toyaomal</i> 's daughters, given to his <i>yavalina</i> (wife's brother)—2 large pigs, 5 bales of rice, 5 bales of sugar, baskets of yams, bananas and taro. Walisa was given <i>mulimuli</i> by his sister's daughter's husband—consisting of 2 pigs, yams and accompanying baskets of <i>bugul</i> . Young men collected coconuts and firewood, while the cement crew made two more crosses and gravestones.
January 2, 1984	The last 2 crosses made; the workers served with cordial and bread at break-time. Another in-law brought a pig and food. The dancing began that night.
January 3	Most of the preparatory work was now done; they waited for more pigs to be brought. An in-law prestation from the husband of a clan 'sister' of Tonowak's wife was brought. The daughter's husband of a 'sister' of the younger men doing the feast brought a pig. Mahini brought all his supplies, including 3 pigs, on a tractor from his village. A third fence was made for the pigs. That night there was dancing; 2 small pigs were killed to feed the dancers.
January 4	The day before the feast saw 2 more crosses cemented in place and 3 pigs killed; excitement heightening. A total of 7 pigs were contributed on this day, accompanied by yams and store goods. Mostly in-laws were involved; some 'giving' a debt, others repaying a debt 'given' to them on a former occasion. ³³ A pig was killed for each platform, and cut up on the platforms. Cooked by the women in <i>mwahalahi</i> , it was then distributed through the village to all those present. That night there was dancing and food served up twice during the night to feed those assembled.

³³ One man, an in-law, brought the pig and threw a spear at the house, signifying a challenge given. If a debt is being discharged the spear will be thrown under the house.

January 5	<p>As the sun rose, the dancing ceased and Tonowak's wife together with some of his <i>gamalok</i> (sisters' daughters) gave grass skirts, baskets, plates, clay pots and fabric to the dancers.</p> <p><i>Bobu howahowa</i>³⁴ was done: 9 small pigs were given together with cooked food and sago to the in-laws who had brought pigs to the feast sponsors.</p> <p>6 cows and 11 pigs were killed. The bulk of this meat was distributed raw among visitors, village members, and, accompanied by <i>ligabwayabwaya</i> and <i>moni</i>, as <i>hinhup</i> (payment to those who brought pigs).</p> <p>People ate at different times of the day: workers gathered together to eat when their particular job was done—whether making sago porridge or cutting up pigs. All culminated in another <i>mwahalahi</i>; everyone joined in the final feasting, a celebration of death.</p>
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People come from far and wide to attend a *lobek* feast. Participants include those who are related to the *tomati* in whose name the feast is carried out, affines who bring pigs and wait to see the grand finale as well as idle spectators. It is a time of display when resources are prodigally expended; the prestige thus acquired celebrates the high honour and esteem in which the *tomati* is held by their clan members. It also reflects on the clan as an entity; clan members feel secure in the knowledge that they have carried their burden of death to the end, that they have 'finished well'. It is a time of reckoning wherein careful record is kept of everything given or received during the feasting time. The *gabogabom* (apportioning of raw pig meat) is carefully supervised by the *tonyaoma*/who makes sure that distribution is seen to be correct and fair and in accordance with the memory of what has been done in the past. It is a time of feeding; individual *topapaan* have acquired a reputation for hospitality, generosity and big-manship through the efforts and resources they have expended on behalf of their dead. It is a time of celebrating life, a time of oneness as people unite to enjoy the feasting and the 'fullness' that follows. The rituals provide a fitting end to being-in-the-Misiman-world.

³⁴ This literally means 'spearing of pigs', but the decision is up to the sponsor, whether he kills them first or gives them away live.

Ababvihi—revisiting the death

In the past, the custom known as *ababvihi* (secondary burial)³⁵ was practised on Misima; however some time between World Wars I and II it ceased to be carried out due to government pressure and concerns over hygiene and sanitation. Macintyre notes that government rulings were reinforced by pressure from Christian missionaries who considered rituals connected with skull preservation to be idolatrous (1987:18). Pisel, a woman in her early sixties, recalled her grandmother digging up a skull and washing off the last remnants of flesh in the sea:

She brought it back from the sea and *patounuwa*, tamed it first, then decorated it. She went and put it in the cave down from the cliff, called *Abasusumiya*, the place of hiding.³⁶

The corpse was wrapped in coconut leaves, bound with vines and buried in a sitting position with the head above ground; dirt was thrown into the hole up to the neck or the ears and an *ulun* (clay pot) upended over the head. After being washed in sweet-smelling leaves, greased with coconut cream and bleached in a fire, the skull was placed in the house belonging to the dead person until the *nuwanak* (grief, sorrow or unhappiness) was 'finished.' Pelen³⁷ considered that this might extend over a period of months or several years, the skull being then given to the *tongamagaman* who was known as *ana tokava* ('its bearer').³⁸ This occasion, as is typical at Misima, would also be marked by a feast and the killing of pigs.

³⁵ Another term for this is *yabuyabutowa*, (Namunu 1983:30).

³⁶ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1998.

³⁷ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1997.

³⁸ According to Whiting, a skull treated in this way could be given to an unrelated person; it then became a 'valuable'. 'The return prestation was food in the form of an *hagali* feast accompanied by valuables.' (Whiting 1976:131)

It is interesting to note the linguistic use of the semi-alienable possessive form of *ana* in this phrase.³⁹ It reveals that while the 'bearer' was not of the matrilineage of the deceased (normally marked by the use of the inalienable form), he could claim a close association by virtue of being a member of the dead person's father's clan. His duty was to take the skull and place it in the cave. The skull was sometimes first put into the *ulur*⁴⁰ which had been used to cover the head of the corpse and tied to a rope which was let down until it hit the floor of the cave, at which time it was believed that someone 'received' it. Each clan had a cave for the secondary burial of their dead.

Parkin (1996:87) considers the phenomenon of second burial to be Hertz's (1960) basic theme in his analysis of death and the rituals associated with death. Hertz held that the corpse, its soul and the deceased's survivors follow parallel paths; secondary burial signalled the final disposal of the corpse, which on Misima also corresponds with the final release of the widow from all restrictions attending on her liminal state. Nowadays the tendency is for a lessening of the taboos filling the transitional gap of mourning, so that the widow is 'free' once she has completed her obligations, first to the matrilineage (in the form of *powon* compensation payment) and secondly to the father's side (*hagali*).

The tradition of the *tongamagaman* still persists: a representative from the father's clan, though of a different lineage, has tasks to perform at birth, throughout life, and at the time of death. At the *yagowau* ceremony, the *tongamagaman* receives a special prestation of food, an acknowledgement of the father's contribution, and a promise of what he will continue to do for the child during its

³⁹ For a discussion of the use of the possessive forms in Misima, refer back to the section entitled, "Language anomalies reveal key themes."

⁴⁰ The clay pot was sometimes broken at the time of preparing the skull.

lifetime. But it is death that demands the most from the deceased's father's clan. In the past, as noted above, he handles the skull and places it in its final resting-place. Tradition holds that the *tongamagaman* should dig the grave, though in practice today this is very fluid. However the obligation to pay back the father's line for all their work on behalf of the member of another clan still exists in the prestation of *hagali*.

There is a sense in which the relatively modern addition of *simenti* to the line-up of feasts sponsored by the matriline can be understood to functionally replace secondary burial. It entails not only a revisiting of the death but a putting-away of the remains, visibly symbolised by the finality, rigidity and whiteness of the cemented and whitewashed gravestone. In a similar way, name taboos operate after two or three generations to erase the individual from general memory—and so there is collective forgetting.

That the skull in early days was a somewhat danger-invoking object can be deduced from Pisel's use of the word 'tame'. Spells were pronounced over the skull to domesticate it, so that it could be safely kept in the house until final disposal. Similarly, there is a sense that until the final feast of *lobek* is completed, there exists an uncertainty and a lack of confidence as to what the spirit of the dead may do. And this is reflected in the taboos, both voluntary and involuntary, that remain in force until *lobek* is complete.⁴¹

Limi lekaleka—demolishing the house

After one or several people have been buried from a particular house, the time is judged right to have a feast associated with the demolition of the house.

⁴¹ See Chapter five for further on the topic of name taboos at Misima.

There is no fixed time when this happens; however, one of the prerequisites is that a new house has already been built and usually lived in for some time. Misimans are extremely practical and wait until the old house has been abandoned because of its sorry state of repair—i.e. posts rotting, roof leaking, and sago bark walls collapsing—before building the new one. *Limi lekaleka* is usually also the signal that a *tonowak* (older man) and his clan are preparing to commemorate their dead by holding a *lobek* or a *simenti*. It is not just a simple act of wrecking a house. According to Misiman custom, this work, like all 'work', requires feeding, and feeding means pigs and yams, and of course numbers of people, who must become involved in the associated requirements of both working and eating.

The men of the village turn out in force for the destruction of the house; at the end of the day they will be fed as payment for their work. The women cook, showing their oneness with the family involved and their desire to participate in a festive occasion as well as benefit from the pig meat distributed among them for cooking. By carrying out *limi lekaleka*, the family are both honouring their dead and at the same time ridding themselves of an eyesore, a broken-down house for which they have no further use.

The destruction of the house may also be accompanied by the burning of the deceased's sleeping mat and lime pot, his most personal possessions which have been preserved for this occasion.

In January 1988, two houses were demolished. One was Itemi's mother's old house by the sea and the other was Deti's house in which his sister had been laid out after death. Itemi had built a platform near the site of his new house; his platform was the location for most of the 'busyness'. Two pigs and one cow were killed for the occasion, and in-law relationships were mobilised as contributions of pigs and food

were brought.

Table 2. Contributions for Itemi's Limi Lekaleka

Name	Relationship to Itemi	Gift
Kuweni	Kuweni's sister's daughter is married to Itemi's son	1 cow
Dadibi	Dadibi's son is married to Itemi's daughter	1 cow
Deti	Deti was repaying a debt of a cow (Deti and Itemi's grandfathers were brothers.)	He substituted a pig, but later will give the cow he owes ⁴²
Geni	Geni calls Itemi's mother <i>talina</i> ('sister')	1 pig

Baku hi palo—singing all night

This feast or series of small feasts is usually associated with *lobek*, the last in the *bobuton* series and the largest mortuary undertaking. Several matrilineages from the one clan join together during *lobek* to feed multitudes of people, killing many pigs and cows and cementing gravestones as memorials to their dead.⁴³

Once *iwas* is completed, the deceased's kinsmen (or adult children) calculate whether in the near future they will have sufficient money and food resources—including pigs—to hold the final feast. Then they will begin a series of evenings of either dancing to traditional drums or modern-day guitars, or hymn singing. On the first and last times in the cycle *hi wona matavi*, ('they sing all night'); a pig is usually killed to mark these occasions and to feed the attendees.

In January 1980, Nibo from the western end of Siagara began the cycle of dancing at his compound. The separate events comprising a successful *baku* were described to me as follows:

⁴² Strict equivalence underlies reciprocal exchanges. Since Deti did not have the money to buy a cow at this time he substituted a pig. This is counted as a *vaga*, or debt which Itemi has to repay. Deti still owes the cow, however; it must be paid back at a later time as and when resources allow.

1. *baku hi lohala*: 'they are sweeping the compound' or *sidai hi aipalo* 'they unpack the drums'. When dancing or singing is featured on these evenings, then the feast sponsor will choose someone as chorus leader (or master of ceremonies) from one of two groups of relatives—either his own *fovelam* or someone from the dead person's father's clan, the clan known as the *topapamasal*.
2. *Baku hi paaweawenuwa*: 'they cause the compound to be covered with green vegetables-flesh'. This involves killing two pigs, cooking them with yams and using the food to feed those who come to dance. This is usually done at the commencement of the cycle of dancing. When Pilikesa initiated the dancing at his house, he used part of the pig meat already cut up from the *bobuton* feast given during the day.
3. *Baku hi loehik*: 'they cut off the compound'. This marks the finish of the dancing cycle but may also coincide with a break in—or suspension of—the evening feasting due to another death occurring in the village and the subsequent imposition of taboos which prevents other large 'work' projects from being carried out. After *iwas* has been held for the other death, the matrilineal kinsmen connected with that death will join in the resumption of the former festivities, signifying that the strict mourning taboos for the village are now at an end and that the dancing can proceed. The sponsors of the *baku* activities, in their turn, will show respect for the newly-bereaved clan and *lomuya* (kill a pig) for them.
4. *Baku hi pala*: 'they unload (the goods onto) the cleared area-around-the-house'. This is the culmination of a period of activity which may extend

⁴³ See above for a more complete description of *lobek* and its place in the *bobuton* cycle.

intermittently for a few years. It occurs on the night before the final feast. There is dancing or singing all night long; those who participate are considered to be 'working' and must be 'paid' by being fed. As morning comes, the big man who has been sponsoring the series of feasts distributes payment in the form of gifts including grass skirts, baskets, spoons, plates and cups to all those who have participated in the festivities.

Baku hi palo is also known as *baku hi halahala*. It literally means 'sweeping the area around the house' and in this figurative usage can be understood as a kind of symbolic cleansing of the death and its impact on both close kinsmen as well as the whole village. Another term used is *sidai hi palo*—'they unload the drums'. Traditionally, and still occasionally today, small drums made of lizard skins are used. Nowadays people more frequently gather for an evening of either hymn singing or dancing to the accompaniment of guitars.⁴⁴

Those who played and danced all night are morally obliged to remain and take part in the work force the following day—slaughtering pigs, butchering cows and cooking food, all tasks that signal the last day of *lobek*.

The people who gather on these occasions look upon the entertainment as an enjoyable change in routine. It is an opportunity for people to meet together socially in an informal setting and to enjoy the feasting that is part of the ritual. It resonates with sociality and the sense of community that is highly valued by people on Misima; true *yaliyaya* (happiness or joy) is found in such a social setting. By separating people from their relatives, sickness and death have posed a temporary

⁴⁴ Guitar strumming is the 'modern' way of making music, which the young people are willing to embrace. Very few people are able to make drums, though for older people it still serves as an icon for these memorial

threat to this deep joy, which normally celebrates connection, the oneness of the community and mutual sharing and support. Misimans overcome this separation by paradoxically using the death event itself to create an opportunity for celebration—thus joy overcomes sorrow, mourning is turned into dancing and life defeats death.

feasting occasions. As far as dancing and music is concerned, Misiman people assert that their 'traditional' dances have been borrowed from Milne Bay peoples in antiquity.

Table 3. Misiman Mortuary Feasts and Related Customs

Sequence of memorial rituals	Sponsor(s)	Recipient(s)	details of events	purpose/function
TOTULIL "follower" held the same day as burial	immediate family/ matriclan relatives	mourners & visitors <i>tongamagaman</i> from the deceased's father's clan (future recipient of <i>hagali</i> prestation)	the funeral feast cooked food & sago porridge given A coconut is cracked in ear of corpse; a pot of food and a pig is set aside.	To feed the mourners. To acknowledge the nurture given by the paternal clan to the deceased's life. To 'open' the ear of the dead to ensure safe passage to afterworld; to accompany the spirit on its journey to Tuma.
The immediate hamlet, garden, or foreshore is <i>tawakaus</i> (closed off).	matriclan	Village inhabitants	Any large-scale projects involving cooperative work & pig-killing, like planting a garden, building a house, feasting, fishing.	To show respect for deceased and his/her matrikin. To remind people of the death and its impact.
Lohu "hang a <i>lohu</i> " day of burial	<i>Tovelam</i> (son-in-law) or other in-law	matriclan	Shell valuable is hung over the corpse.	To show respect for a deceased in-law. To serve as the forerunner for <i>leyau</i> exchanges between the two clans.
HIGHIG "washing" 3-10 days	immediate family/ matrilineal relatives/ close friends	workers who help at this feast visitors village inhabitants	A pig is killed. <i>Mwahalahi</i> ('pot-luck' feast), consisting of cooked yams, with pig meat is prepared. <i>Minamina enona</i> is distributed to all the hamlets.	To 'cleanse' the village from the pollution of death. To express village solidarity with the mourning family and to support them. To thank participants for their help.
<i>Lomuya</i> a token before <i>iwas</i> feast	person desiring to kill a pig and hold a feast unrelated to the current death	matriclan of the deceased	A small live pig and cooked food is given.	To show respect in a tangible way for the deceased and the bereavement his/her relatives have suffered

Sequence of memorial rituals	Sponsor(s)	Recipient(s)	details of events	purpose/function
<i>LAU</i> "coming down" 1-3 wks after burial	surviving spouse	friends & relatives who provided food, water, firewood during the seclusion period	The surviving spouse is ceremonially led wailing to grave-site; mourning clothes are discarded. A small feast is given	To show suitable honour to the deceased. To release the widow(er) from the luni (seclusion) imposed by the tonyaomal. To feed those who helped.
IWAS "untangling" 3 mths - 2 or 3 yrs	matriclan or deceased's children	workers who help at this feast village residents women who wailed at funeral	<i>Mwahalahi</i> ('pot-luck' feast), consisting of cooked yams, with pig meat is prepared. Raw pig meat is distributed as 'payback,' <i>lahena</i> .	To end restrictions prohibiting large-scale 'work'; to open gardens, foreshore. To compensate for the wailing, <i>vinakahin</i> is paid for the 'work' of mourning.
POWON "compensation payment" 6-12 mths	surviving spouse or the deceased's father (if child is unmarried)	deceased's matriclan	Uncooked garden food, large amounts of . (clothes, baskets, material, crockery, cutlery etc.) is given together with pots of cooked food.	To apologise to and compensate the clan for loss of a member. To exonerate the sponsor from guilt and from accusations of neglect in caring for the deceased.
HAGALI "feast" 6 mths - many yrs	surviving spouse and clan (obligatory) female in-law of deceased	<i>tongamagaman</i> (member of the deceased's father's clan, but different lineage) token gifts given to matriclan of deceased	Large baskets of uncooked yams and taro piled in pyramid fashion; some cooked food and specially prepared sago porridge. Money or ., articles of clothing, crockery etc.	To show honour to the dead spouse's memory. To finish the living spouse's taboos. To acknowledge paternal input into the deceased's life. To honour her husband's relatives; to obtain land rights, <i>enovin</i> , for herself and children.
<i>Leyau</i> "valuable" years after burial	<i>tovelam</i> or other in-law	sponsors of the <i>bobuton</i> series	Valuables—stone axes, shell necklaces, money—are displayed and matched by each side on separately hosted occasions. feasting for all participants	To make a return prestation for the <i>lohu</i> hung at the time of burial. To honour a deceased in-law. To reinforce in-laws ties which have been weakened by death.

Sequence of memorial rituals	Sponsor(s)	Recipient(s)	details of events	purpose/function
<i>Kokowan</i> "taboo" close to the time of lobek	matriclan members or surviving spouse or in-laws	invited guests, especially in-laws	A feast is given, which begins with the food which has been tabooed being symbolically 'waved' in front of the sponsor.	To end taboo restrictions which were voluntarily imposed as a sign of respect for the deceased.
<i>Limi lekaleka</i> "house demolition" prior to lobek	sponsors of lobek feast	workers and village participants	The house where the deceased was laid out prior to burial is demolished. A feast is held.	To show respect for the deceased. It is another occasion for gaining prestige through giving food away. To feed the workers.
<i>Mwalbobu</i> "eaves-trimming" prior to lobek	sponsors of lobek feast	workers on the house	The guttering is renewed or a new house for the lobek sponsor. In-laws leave to <i>butum</i> , go and find pigs to contribute to the feast.	To signal the intention of the sponsor to hold a lobek feast. To forewarn those indebted to the sponsor, so they will be prepared to repay the pigs which are owing.
<i>Kalehe</i> "mango" close to the main feast day of lobek	usually an affinal relative of deceased	sponsor of the lobek feast	A procession of dancers, carrying a <i>tapwatapwa</i> , a <i>nabnabwau</i> (platform of yams), a kite-like structure covered with fabric, clothes, money, and 5 live pigs advance in mock battle formation. A <i>kalehe</i> branch is given to <i>bobuton</i> sponsor.	To honour the deceased's memory. To reinforce in-law ties weakened by death. To relieve in-law tensions, and create an occasion for display and gain in prestige and status. To challenge the deceased's relative to make a return prestation.
<i>Baku hi palo</i> "they unload the cleared area" the night before the final feast day.	sponsors of lobek feast	dancers, singers and musicians at the 'party', including visitors and spectators.	Visitors and villagers celebrate with drums or guitars, interspersed with feasting. <i>Bugul</i> are distributed amongst the participants the next morning.	To indicate imminence of the final lobek feast. To display generosity and hospitality on a large scale. To honour the deceased and remember the death. To reinforce the sociality of the community, by providing food and entertainment.

Sequence of memorial rituals	Sponsor(s)	Recipient(s)	details of events	purpose/function
LOBEK "submerging" SIMENTI Cementing the gravestone 3 - 10 years after death	matriclan members or immediate family	workers who help at the feast visitors and village participants <i>tokewa</i> (those who gave pigs)	Pots of cooked yams, <i>moni</i> , rice are prepared and distributed. Many pigs killed and the meat distributed to visitors, those who dug the grave at the burial, and those who gave pigs. The gravestone is erected and cemented in place.	To honour several clan dead on through the display of clan resources. To give opportunity for prestige and status of individuals and clan to be enhanced. To compensate the coffin-bearers. To signal the end of obligations to the deceased, and 'finish' the memory with a tangible reminder.

Conventions used on chart:

- The *bobuton* series of feasts and associated rituals, sponsored by matrilineal relatives, are indicated by CAPITALS, and shading. These are obligatory.
- Other feasting events which must be carried out for each person who dies are shown by SMALL CAPS. These are usually the responsibility of affinal relatives of the deceased.

Chapter 4 Affinal Responsibilities

Death ... forces a renegotiation of existing social contracts through mortuary ritual exchanges involving the kin, affines, patrilineal connections, neighbours, and exchange partners of the deceased. It is also the occasion for renegotiating the contract between the living and the dead. ... the living preserve and honour the memory of the deceased by observing mourning taboos and exchanging with one another the goods and valuables consecrated to the deceased and symbolizing fertility and rebirth. The ancestor spirits reciprocate by bestowing future good fortune upon the living. (Lepowsky 1989:202)

Depending on the resources of the matrilineal relatives of the deceased, and upon their desire to increase their prestige, further feasts, both large and small, may be added to the central obligatory ones. All feasting, however, requires the existence of a substantial body of willing workers called the *boda*, which I have mentioned above and now define as a personal network of supporters and friends connected by marriage, consanguineality or residence and held together by ties of mutual cooperation and responsibility in relationship.

The Boda—Working together

At any given time, each adult person at Misima becomes enmeshed in thinking about mortuary rituals. A person may be involved in mourning his or her own dead, and marshalling resources to meet the exigencies and demands of the next feast. She may be ruminating over the possibilities of doing a *hagali* in order to acquire land for her children. He may be wondering whether his mother's brother or the youngest daughter's husband would be the most suitable person to approach for the pig needed to pay back the debt given last year. Mortuary feasting is a site for social meaning, a site alive with relationships, interrelationships, interlocking passions and frayed emotions. Each person at any one time owes debts of pigs and yams to individuals or groups from other clans and has expectations of receiving help and cooperation from those intimately and intricately tied to him or her through consanguineal, residential or affinal bonds. Each person

experiences the stresses and doubts, the disillusionment and panic that accompany reliance on fellow human beings—albeit close relatives, but ones who are also trying to meet their own obligations and responsibilities. Each person in turn feels the satisfaction of having fed others, of success obtained through killing pigs and seeing the women of the village lend support to his or her venture, a tangible support which is embodied in the long row of cooking pots lined up across the yard at the end of the feasting day.

Because of the ways in which each person in Misiman society is linked with others and the ways in which these connections are played out through the medium of mortuary feasting, the concept of the *boda*, unique and different to each individual, is a significant one. The *boda* is a grouping of relatives and friends with whom bonds of reciprocity have been formed over the years, a subset of kith and kin created through personal reciprocities. These people comprise the personal work force, the ones upon whom an individual can call and from whom he receives help, whether in terms of labour or material goods. Each individual belongs to multiple *boda*, and is obligated to return in kind or through action the debts that have been incurred as members of the networks of others.

So in Misiman society there is a myriad of interlocking relationships; every person's *boda* is different. Each *boda* is mobilised and combines to make the feasting occasions possible; members participate in and enjoy the celebrations that mortuary rituals call forth.

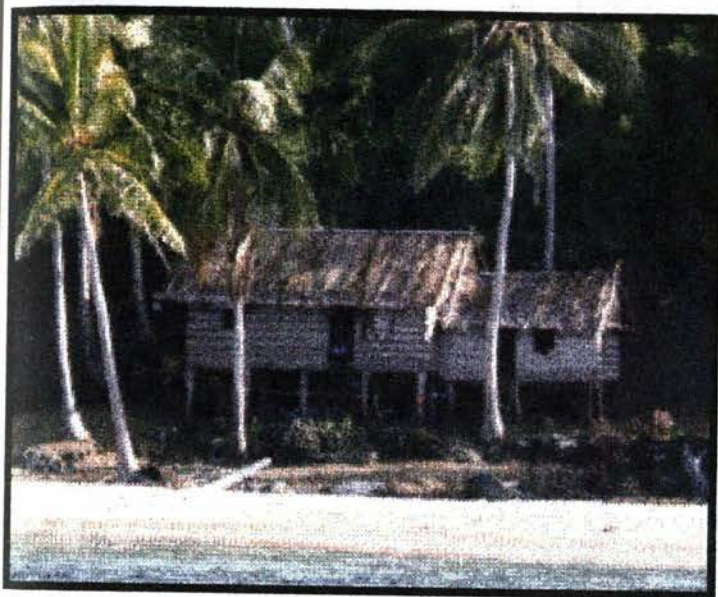


Plate 1 House by the seaside



Plate 2 Feeding and Food

Yagowau

Birth Rituals



Plate 3 Washing in hot scented water

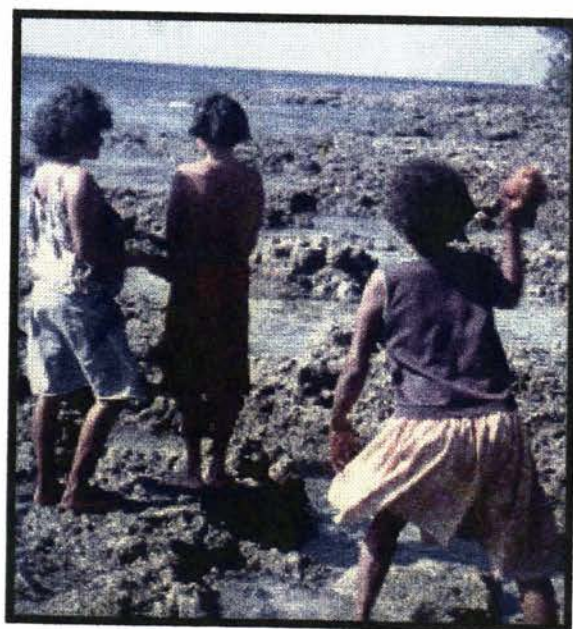


Plate 4 Bathing in the sea

Birth and Death

Death rituals on Misima remember and celebrate those who have left life behind, whereas birth rituals mark the entry of an individual into society for the first time. It is interesting to note the parallels that can be drawn between death rites and *yagowau*, the other major Misiman ritual that celebrates the birth of a *gamaun* (eldest child in a family). I will now proceed to summarise the main aspects of *yagowau*. (See Plates 3-6.)

After a period of seclusion in the house, which corresponds with the period of bleeding associated with birth, the young mother leaves the house and, accompanied by older women, walks down to the seaside dressed only in a skirt. She sits on a *helagi*, the traditional sewn mat made of pandanus leaves, and rubs her body all over with sweet-smelling leaves which have been torn up and then squeezed with water to release their perfume. On completion of this form of cleansing, she rises and is slapped all over her body with branches of sweet-smelling herbal plants that have been dipped in boiling water, wielded by female relatives. She is then led out into the sea where she bathes in seawater, and as she dives under the water, part of a coconut husk is thrown over her head. (See Plates 3 and 4.) When asked for the deeper significance of the birth ritual, Pele gave the following answer:

This is the way we should do it. If we don't, then the baby will not grow well; it will sicken and die.²

So it is left to the researcher to tease out further meaning, and to search for common symbols. Motifs of cleansing, purification and completion can be clearly seen in the birth ritual. It would seem, though, that the significance of the coconut husk is lost in the antiquities of time. We could speculate that the coconut represents fertility, health and connection with everyday life, given the ubiquitous nature of the coconut palm and

¹ See Table 4.

its fruit in every phase of life—from house building to sweeping the floor, from night lights to oiling the skin. But its special significance can be traced to the all-important sphere of food and feeding, since all food is traditionally cooked in coconut cream. Food lacking a coconut flavour is considered bland and tasteless.

Traditionally certain food taboos have been enforced for the young mother. Foods considered to be *gasisi* or strong—such as meat, fish, or the Greater Yam—are not to be consumed until the child had grown to about a year old.³ Salt water is to be drunk each morning; betelnut is prohibited. These taboos were thought to be efficacious in aiding the growth of the child. In addition, certain spells are performed over the child asking for protection during the night time and for an attitude of obedience during its lifetime.

We find that food taboos are similarly present in the context of death rituals but these are generally imposed voluntarily, with the aim of reminding the surviving spouse of his or her grief and the need to continue to respect the deceased's memory. Such restrictions tend also to assist her to remember that she⁴ has been transformed by a death and, by extension, has exchanged her subject status of relatively free agency for that of an object who exists under the *logugui* (rule) of her husband's matrilineage.

A further parallel between birth and death can be noted, but for this we must investigate the rituals and taboos surrounding the surviving spouse in a marriage, whether widow or widower. In this context, Van Gennep's thesis of separation, transition and incorporation is more readily and transparently applied. The event of death separates the survivor from life: it is as if she has taken on death for herself, set apart as she is for a strict period of mourning. In the past she was covered with charcoal (including her teeth) and forbidden to wash. Confined to the dead man's house, she could only venture out to the

² Personal communication, Siagara village, 1985.

³ Prohibitions against sex during this period were also theoretically in force, so it seems that, not surprisingly, this is a particularly vulnerable time of a child's life.

toilet, and then only when her head was covered by a basket and no other person was around. It was as if she, too, like the corpse, had become invisible and lacking in substance. The widow was given black clothes by the *tonyaomal*, she was obliged to wear these until she completed the *hagali* prestation. Today the charcoal is no longer used, having been condemned as a health hazard by the colonial government, and the period of seclusion has been considerably shortened, to perhaps two weeks at the most. However the underlying ideology—of seclusion, separation and the notion of belonging to another — is still very much in place.

After being escorted from the house at a time deemed appropriate by the *tonyaomal*, the widow's first action is to visit the grave of her husband. This is known as *panawanawa* ('caused to walk'). She is then washed with hot water, a cleansing ritual that marks the end of her seclusion and begins the period of transition during which time she may retain her dark clothing but is allowed progressively greater freedom. The widow may now go fishing and visit the garden. She gradually acquires more agency through the performance of duties and obligations carried out in her dead husband's memory.

When a first child is born, the mother stays in the house during the time of the bleeding; she also must creep around with a basket over her head so that no-one can see her. Upon the delivery of her child, the afterbirth is buried under the house and a fire lit over it. This fire is kept burning throughout the time the young mother remains in the house and serves to both dispose of any blood wastes and deter pigs from approaching. Fire is a form of protection that safeguards the woman from the ravages of witches who might feed on both the physical and metaphorical wastes of her body, causing harm to the baby and mother whilst they are in this vulnerable transitional state.

⁴ In this context I will mostly refer to the widow, as statistically the man is more likely to die first.

Similarly, in the past, a fire was lit to signal a death; a lamp is often kept burning at the gravesite today in order to ward off evil spirits and witches. The mourners, like the mother and child, are weakened by their grief and reduced to a vulnerable state.

During the period of 'confinement' for both the new mother and the widow, various friends and relatives from the village assist by bringing firewood and water to her house. This labour will be paid back later at the feast that brings the period of seclusion to an end.

After bathing, the new mother returns to the house where she is dressed in a traditional grass skirt, and shell valuables are placed around her neck. Coconut oil is rubbed into her skin and traditional black and white markings are inscribed on her face using paste mixed with coconut oil. At the same time the baby's father is decorated and his hair cut and combed. At the *hagali* prestation, the widow—like the new mother—is anointed with oil, and discards her 'widow's weeds' to don new and colourful clothing indicative of her new identity. (See Plates 5-7.)

On the same day as the *lau* ('the coming down'), the new mother and the widow both prepare a small feast to which they invite those who helped during the time of their seclusion. The new mother carries a pot of yams and a pot of sago porridge to the *tongamagaman* (a person chosen to be in a special relationship with the child) who is customarily a member of the young father's clan but from a different lineage.⁵

The transition period for the widow is considerably longer than that for the mother of a first child. The new mother leaves the house, performs her part in the purification ritual, and is dressed in new clothes signifying her return to normal life. The end of this transitional period is marked by the token gift of cooked food given to the *agaman* as

⁵ If the father is not known, then there is no gift of food given; there is thus no acknowledgement of the role of the father and his clan in this child's life, and no expectation of nurture and care from them. This is not a good situation, in Misiman terms.

noted above, an open declaration of the contribution of patrilateral kin in a matrilineally-based society. The widow, however, is only progressively released from restrictions over a longer period of time. It is not until she does the *hagali* feast—a much larger and more elaborate version of the food given on the birth of a first child—that she is released from the *logugui* (rule or control) of the matrilineage of her deceased husband.⁶

As already noted, the incorporation period of both the new mother (and father) of a first child and the widow or widower begins with a prestation of food given to the patrilateral relatives of the baby's father and of the deceased spouse respectively. Presented at birth, this gift signifies the contribution of 'blood' from the father's line, and, at the same time acknowledges the role of the father and his line. It is a 'down payment,' compensating in advance for the nurturing care and productive labour which the father and his clan will expend on behalf of his offspring, and serving as a tangible offering of thanks. It serves also as an earnest (pledge or promise) that a prestation which will be given after death. This in fact happens—in the form of the *hagali* prestation given by the widow. The *hagali* acts like a seal symbolising the closure of a lifelong relationship of cooperation between two people and their clans joined in marriage. It has been a productive relationship and in this light it can also be understood as a compensation gift, expressing thanks to the father's line for the sacrificial nurturance undertaken during the lifetime of the person.

The giving of food completed, the young mother and the widow are now both similarly outfitted to start life anew. Changed circumstances have meant growth and alteration through the intimate experience of either a new life or a new death. Identities are changed, with difference predicated in status. Having borne her first child, the young mother qualifies for *nevenak* status. She has now become a respected 'mature' woman

⁶ The *hagali* feast may not be prepared until years after a spouse's death.

rather than just a *yova* (female) or a *vaini* (young woman). She assumes new responsibilities associated with the caring for a child, thus taking on a new identity. The widow, her new status marked by the label, *abuabul*,⁷ can discard certain of her old commitments—ones privileged by her dead husband and his line—and construct a new life for herself.

⁷ She in fact remains an *abuabul*, widow, unless she remarries. The label in itself tends to remind her and others of her dead husband—an enduring relationship in memory.

Table 4. Parallels between Birth and Death Rituals on Misima

Birth		Death
<p>YAGOWAU - birth of first child</p> <p>Period of time - until the bleeding ceases (about four weeks). The new parents are secluded in the house, cared for by matrikin.</p> <p>taboos: no 'strong' food e.g. meat, fish; no betelnut etc.</p>	<p>Separation Seclusion</p>	<p>ABUABUL - death of a spouse</p> <p>Period of time - until the proper respectful time (2-4 weeks). The surviving spouse is secluded in the house, cared for by dead spouse's matrikin, <i>tonyaomal</i>, "the owners of the dead." voluntary food taboos</p>
<p>Period of time - one day. A fire is kept burning underneath her house. The young mother is 'invisible', weak; she has no status, or property, and is unable to function on her own. State: vulnerable to witchcraft.</p> <p>She wears her normal ragged clothes.</p>	<p>Transition LUNI "run aground" (as of a boat)</p>	<p>Period of time – two or more years. A fire is lit at the gravesite. The widow is 'invisible', weak, has no status or property, and comes under the jurisdiction, logugui, of the <i>tonyaomal</i>. She is vulnerable to sorcery and fearful; she owes respect to, and is 'owned' by her dead spouse's relatives. She is covered in black charcoal, cannot cut her hair or wash; she wears black clothes or long grass skirt.</p>
<p>The young mother is washed in hot, scented water and rubbed with a mixture of leaves & coconut cream. She bathes in salt water (cleansing effect); she also drinks salt water. She dons a traditional grass skirt, and paints her face. Her husband is also decorated and his hair is cut.</p> <p>Feasting: Food is cooked and distributed to those who helped during period of seclusion.</p> <p>Sago and cooked yams are given to a representative of child's father's clan, the <i>tongamagaman</i>.</p>	<p>Incorporation LAU "coming down"</p>	<p>Stage 1 The widow (or widower) is bathed in hot water. She may now lay aside her widow's "weeds" (new clothes provided by her caretakers), and is led in a wailing procession to the gravesite of the dead spouse; food is cooked and distributed.</p> <p>Stage 2 There is a progressive release from restrictions - each time she goes to the garden, fishing, shopping for the first time, she gives gifts to spouse's matrikin. <i>Powon</i> or compensation payment for the death of the spouse is given to matrikin. It consists of cooked and uncooked food, and store articles of various kinds (contributed by her matrikin). The <i>hagali</i> feast and prestation comprising baskets of yams, specially cooked sago porridge and plates etc, including money, is given to the widow's dead spouse's father's clan. This person pours coconut oil over her head, completing her release from all restrictions.</p>

Birth and Death

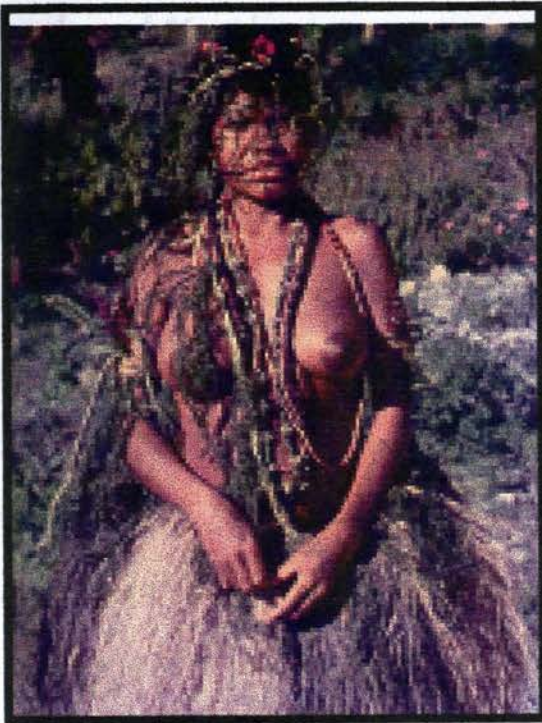


Plate 5 LAU - Once the *yagowau* rites are completed, Sotal is decorated.

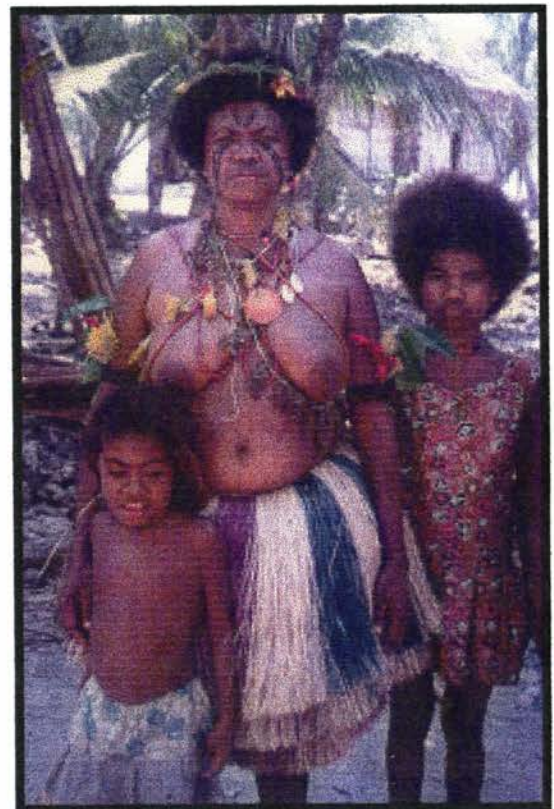


Plate 7 Midenosi's wife did a *hagali* prestation in memory of an in-law.

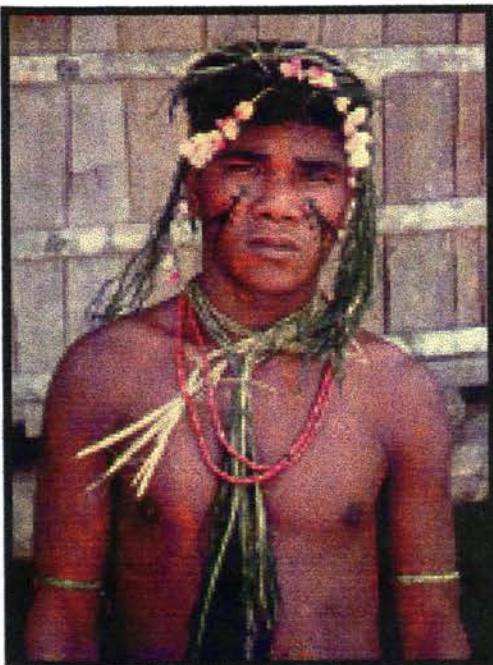


Plate 6 Sotal's husband shares in the final day of the birth rites.

Death and Marriage

Nowhere is the need for mutual help and cooperation more obvious or marked than in the process of mortuary feasting—for on Misima, an individual does not achieve status through his¹ own efforts alone. A reputation as an important person is earned through feast-giving—and this depends predominantly on two things: the ability to fulfil obligations to those to whom the feast-giver is indebted, and the skill to manage resources—both human and non-human—in an open-handed, generous manner. By doing this, a Misiman shows that he or she is the embodiment of the ideal 'good' person, one who can be relied upon to pay his debts meticulously, and in so doing, fulfil his part of the *love/am* relationship, where that is appropriate. She can be trusted to come to the aid of whoever *awanun* ('asks for something'), whether it be a clan relative or an outsider. He can be depended upon to make a grand display and kill many pigs in the course of mortuary feasting, primarily for his matrilineal relatives but also, in certain cases, for his father's relatives.²

It is the marriage relationship, however, that introduces a strengthening and undergirding strand into the cord of Misiman social relations and behaviour. The *love/am* is a key player in mortuary feasting. Without the reciprocal in-law exchanges he initiates there would be little scope for feasting or 'pig killing' on a grand scale. The *love/am* is the real protagonist in the drama of commemorative rituals.

As well as ongoing debts and payments carried out between in-laws, there are certain feasts that are located within the purview of in-law relationships. These are usually held in the time period between *iwas* and *lobek* and have certain functions

¹ Most feast sponsors are male, and so I have predominantly used the male pronoun in this context.

beyond just that of paying honour to the dead of the clan, as we have seen above. *Kokowan* (mourning restrictions or taboos)³ are also a feature of in-law relationships. They are marked by special rituals that entail sacrifices on the part of the person under a *kokowan*, both during the period of voluntary or obligatory restrictions, and at the completion of this time when a feast must be held. The person whose spouse has died is obliged to give two prestations (*hagali* and *powon*) in the deceased's name. Both consist primarily of baskets of uncooked yams given, in the case of *hagali*, to the deceased's father's line, and, for the *powon*, to the matrilineage of the deceased. The performance of a *hagalii* may also be taken on voluntarily, for example when a woman wishes to honour a relative of her husband. By doing this feast she memorialises the name of the deceased and his or her clan and brings honour and renown upon herself, since she is now known as a good gardener and manager of her resources, as well as someone who honours her husband's clan. When *leyau* or *kalehe* is performed, it has the impact of a challenge which is issued by one clan in a marriage alliance and answered by the other. After the various stages of reciprocal feasting, have been completed, there is (ideally) an increase in trust and a further strengthening of the in-law bond.

The rule for all feasting is founded on an underlying principle of reciprocity—payback, in other words. The *tonyaomal* (owners of the dead) are members of the matrilineal clan of the deceased. It is their responsibility to ensure that the right feasts are properly carried out, the right rituals are done in an appropriate manner and the right amount of work and resources are expended. They must also ensure that the right amount of generosity is exhibited throughout the feasting time—in the distribution of

² There are special payments and land-use rights associated with sponsoring feasts for patrilineal relatives—the motives are not entirely altruistic by any means.

meat in particular. To give too much is to shame others who are similarly aspiring to the reputation of *alan bwabwatana* ('big name') and by extension to put oneself under the threat of sorcery worked through envy. To give too little, on the other hand, is to shame one's own clan's standing and run the risk of having people gossip about one's miserliness. There is a narrow line to be trod, and those skilled in the art of estimating resources, balancing relationships and grasping intuitively how well things must be done (and calculating the availability of resources with which to do them) are the ones who achieve a 'big name.'

Hagali—remembering the father's line

As we have seen, when a married person dies, the spouse (if still alive) immediately enters a mourning period. During this transitional time, she or he has certain duties to perform, and by extension is obligated to observe certain taboos. One of the expectations placed on the spouse and her clan is that she perform a *hagali* in honour of the deceased.

While this is the more common understanding of the term *hagali*, it does however have several distinct linguistic usages in the Misiman language. It is the name for the prestation given by a woman who chooses to *laken* ('dig yams') in memory of a dead relative of her husband. The recipient is the same as for that carried out by the widow—specifically, a member of the *tomati's* father's matrilineal clan, but from a different lineage. The components, in terms of food and money, are comparable.

³ See discussion in the next chapter.

Hagali is also a generic term to describe feasting in general and the feasting involved in mortuary rituals in particular.⁴

The place a surviving spouse⁵ enters after the death of her husband is a cultural and personal space of liminality (Maschio 1992:413) elaborated with certain taboos and obligations. Restrictive boundaries are erected at the moment of the spouse's death, symbolised by the requirement of the *abuabul* (widow) to stay indoors, remaining under the jurisdiction of the dead man's matrikin. Her life in this liminal phase can be understood as a gradual pushing back of these boundaries, allowing her more and more autonomy as she fulfills her obligations at each stage. To use another metaphor, she has parted ways with her husband and must now take a different route; she begins a journey through new territory, which although not uncharted, is inscribed with its own culturally derived directions.

When I discussed both birth and widowhood with Walisa, he stressed the need for protection and sheltering because of the fragile state of both the widow and the one who has just given birth. He gave this example:

When Gel's 'small mother' (the younger sister of his mother) died, her matrilineal relatives came from Gulewa and kicked her husband on the head. They kicked him and urinated on him because he had caused their clan member to die.⁶

On another occasion, Pelen informed me that the name for this kind of vengeance is *kuwal*. He told the story of what his mother had observed:

My mother saw it. Her relatives came, they struck the house many times, and hit the children and the widower. They didn't look after the dead one properly. The root cause of *kuwal* is anger.⁷

⁴ The English term 'Christmas' is often substituted for *hagali*, referring to a large celebration or party held at any time of the year and for any purpose, though its specific meaning is also linked to mortuary feasting. The feasting ritual of *lobek* is often held in the December-January break; this enables relatives working on the mainland of PNG to return and participate, both physically and in monetary terms. Hence the identification with Christmas and the etymology of the term.

⁵ The restrictions for a widower are the same as for a widow.

⁶ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1998.

The main duty of the widow (or widower) is literally to embody in herself the memory of the dead. She is the *nuwahikan* (living reminder, literally 'keep in the mind') of her husband, his fame and his life. Decay and decomposition are inscribed on her body in the form of black clothing; in the past *tuwaliya hi gigibe* ('they blackened their skins with charcoal'). Memory is articulated in her demeanour as she submits to the rule of the *tontututun* ('owner of the [dead] relative'). Release, freedom and normality are reconstructed in her body when her obligations are fulfilled. Turner writes of the '[l]iminal entities ... (whose) ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions' (1966:95). The exaggerated feature (black clothing) is 'made into an object of reflection—a multivocal symbol' (Turner 1974:55). In the past, even the teeth were blackened, as a sign of invisibility (Goodale 1995) as well as of identification with the lost person's being (Maschio 1992:416). Tonowak's widow Nevenak recounted the following:

*Lailoga*⁸ said I didn't need to wear black clothes, that I shouldn't carry out our customs and make *powon* and *hagali*, because I was old and sick. But how can I not do that? Tonowak was respected and known everywhere as a great leader. People would expect to see me dressed in black, it is a sign, a reminder of him. When they look at me they remember him and who he was. I want to do it, to illustrate his loving care for me and the way he looked after me.⁹

Turner states that these processes of mid-transition 'paradoxically expose the basic building blocks of culture just when we pass out of and before we re-enter the structural realm (1966:110).' I take this to mean that the liminal stage is redolent in meaning and significance, and that it resonates with some of the basic cultural norms that are valued so highly by Misimans. Underpinning the *abuabul's* obligations is the notion of compensation, of redressing the balance after someone is 'lost'. The concept

⁷ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1998.

⁸ This is the land-owning clan of which Tonowak was the leader during his lifetime. His death left a vacuum—no one is willing or able to take on the leadership. See below for discussion.

of respect for the dead and the clan that gave him birth is neatly weighed against an acknowledgement of the father's role as the progenitor. This also highlights the Misiman ideal of inclusion, the importance of harmony in relationships so that everyone can be equally happy and healthy together, sharing a sense of belonging.

Where I depart from Turner's analysis (based on Van Gennep's original and very valuable contribution to the theory underlying rites of passage) is at the very point of return to normality or the 'structural realm'. For a widow (or widower), the liminal space is her structure, her 'state' where a certain set of cultural conditions applies. She is clearly defined and expected to behave in certain ways during this stage. It is true that she takes a seemingly submissive and humble role and that by donning her black clothes she becomes 'invisible' (Turner 1966:95); yet she has a very real status as an *abuabul* (by which term she will be known for the rest of her life, unless she remarries). She has temporarily lost control of her own life but as a deferential in-law she has always been aligned with her husband's matrikin through her support in their many feasting ventures of the past. While she dutifully and passively follows the path set before her, yet at the same time she is an agent in her own right, as she assesses her resources and the availability of support from her *boda*, and plans and prepares for the future prestations she will make.

The liminal space and its duration depend on the ability of the widow to mobilise her *boda* in order to fulfil obligations to two main groups. When I asked Nevenak's daughter Nalina to explain to me the main thought underpinning the idea of widowhood—of being an *abuabul*—she first of all detailed for me the prestations that must be carried out. Then she said:

⁹ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1997. See below under "The burden of widowhood" for further details from Nevenak's story.

Abuabul does not rule herself, she belongs to the *tontutun* (matrilineal clan of the dead). They must see everything she does on behalf of her husband, and acknowledge her work. Because she has lost her husband, she must pay compensation. That is why she belongs to them.¹⁰

In this liminal state, the widow is not her own woman. She is not an independent entity free to go where she wishes and to do what she wants. Rather she belongs to her late husband's clan until such time as she redeems herself by 'paying back' or compensating the matrilineal relatives of the dead with gifts of food at different stages of her return to 'normality'. She is also required to make prestations of food to the clan of her dead spouse's father, thus acknowledging the contribution of the father's line—a recurrent theme in Misiman mortuary feasting customs.

An initial very strict mourning period of from one to four weeks is prescribed, during which time the widow is under the *logugui* (jurisdiction, rule or law) of the *tonyaomal*. She must *luni* (stay in seclusion) at all times, going outside only when necessary and strictly adhering to custom's demand that her head be covered with an *egowa* (basket) so that during her temporary state as a non-person she is not 'seen' by others. She must also wear the dark-coloured clothing given to her by the *tonyaomal*. More commonly nowadays, after about one week it is time for the widow to *lau* ('come-down'). Accompanied by those who have been taking care of her—and wailing as she goes—she is led to the graveside of her husband. Traditionally during her walk she holds a *helagi* (sleeping mat) over her head and may use a walking stick. She discards these articles as she returns to her house from the grave site, symbolically casting off part of her identification with the dead. Food is prepared for all those who care to join in and witness the proceedings. Included amongst these are her husband's relatives, the *tonyaomal*, as well as some of her own matrikin and perhaps her sons or

¹⁰ Personal communication, Siagara, 1997. For a more complete narration of Nevenak's story, see below under "The burden of widowhood."

their wives. Part of the feast prepared at this time is distributed among neighbours and relatives who brought firewood or water and supported her in her 'confinement'.

However, she is still not free to be her own person. Only by degrees and over a period of weeks will the widow return to her former life and resume her identity and autonomy as a clan member. Yet she has been transformed, she has acquired a changed identity. She is constantly reminded of her dead husband by the burden of obligations that she carries; she constructs his memory, as she in turn is constructed by memory. There is a sense in which the efforts she makes and the gifts she amasses and gives away are deposited as a credit balance for her husband, thereby increasing his prestige and that of his clan.

Generally these restrictions have remained in place, though there have been exceptions in recent times. When Labula's husband Goba died, she was forbidden to don mourning gear by her children, so from the time of her *lau* she wore ordinary clothes. She has not done any of the smaller feasts and presentations to the matrilineage. This has caused some confusion and perhaps some underlying bitterness among her neighbours, all of whom are Lailoga and belong to her husband's clan. Fortunately she has a very open and easy-going personality, loves to tell jokes and is very popular. Everyone knows that it was not her choice to eschew the customary widow restrictions. Her children believe it is not right to impoverish themselves in order to follow the old customs, especially since they themselves are Christian and identify traditional mortuary practices with sin. In a sense, this releases everyone from the reciprocal obligations implicated in Goba's death, for whatever Labula did for the matrilineage would have to be returned in kind by them upon the occasion of her own death.

When her husband died, Tali was left a young widow with two small children. His brother took over the care of the older child while the younger remained with her. Tali remarried a widower but neither of them carried out their obligations to the matriclans of their respective spouses. In response to gossip that has spread about them, they have decided to live in their own hamlet, apart from the rest of the village. They do not join in communal events, nor do they attend church regularly. The child taken by the brother is irretrievably lost to Tali. She has lost all rights to the boy because of the disrespect and dishonour demonstrated through her non-conforming actions.

When the widow returns for the first time to her old haunts, whether it be to the garden, sea, or into the town, she must, at every new bend on her road back to 'normality,' present food and *bugul* to the *tonyaomal*. This is called *niman ununa* ('the oil of the hand'). It literally refers to the grease (coconut cream) that will smooth the way, appeasing the *tontututun* and neutralising their anger and suspicions that she may have caused the death of their clan member, either through neglect or malicious intent. In their guardianship of her, they are careful to allow her no opportunities to visit other men; in the past, too hasty a marriage by the widow has led to vengeful and jealous ex-in-laws burning down the new residence.

At the time Nevenak carried out her *nimana ununa*, she was assisted variously by her brother's daughter Katen, a long-term friend, and her sister's daughters, as well as by more distantly related but same-clan women. The week prior to the event, she had begun her *hagali*, giving baskets of *soksok* ('Malay apple') and *lehi* (betelnut'), with one half going to the *toanaan* and the other half to the *tontututun*. Because she was elderly she wanted to finish the *hagali* before Christmas (it was July at the time) for fear she might die in the interim. For this reason there was a certain urgency to complete this prestation, even though Nalina, the daughter married to a *dimdim*,

would not be present to support and help her with advice and monetary resources. Nevenak and her helpers gathered together one pot of food cooked in coconut cream, and one pot of rice, accompanied by *gaba* (accompaniment), two tins of meat and one of fish. Two woven *egowa* baskets were given, one containing clothing and the other *bugul*. This constituted quite a substantial prestation for the opening phase of *hagali*.

Once she is free of these everyday restrictions, the widow concentrates on preparing for the *hagali*. According to the resources of garden food available to her from her own garden as well as those of her children and clan members, and making due allowances for the obligation to also prepare for *powon*, she may take several months or even years in the planning. As an earnest of her intentions—in other words, a down payment—and as a continuing public display of the respect she had for her husband, she may in the meantime give of whatever excess resources she has. This may include seasonal fruit like bananas, pineapples, nuts or sugar cane. Each item is bundled up in lots of five¹¹ according to custom.

As she plans for the final prestation, she plants extra yams along with some taro. Custom dictates the kinds of food that must be given on specific occasions and the way they are to be presented. For this final prestation, yams, of the Greater Yam variety known as *la*,¹² are *huwa*, built up in a pyramid shape and placed in five large *vegaiyas* (black coconut-leaf baskets). Battaglia (1990) observes that these are specially blackened, to correspond with the blackened skin of the widow; accordingly they resonate with underlying notions of decay and decomposition. Each yam is carefully

¹¹ The traditional Misima counting system was to the base of five. This has been perpetuated approximately in the quantities of baskets of yams and pigs given in connection with the mortuary feasting cycle.

¹² *Dioscorea esculenta*.

inspected for size and shape; the larger, heavier yams are placed at the bottom of the basket, and the smaller ones fitted into the right spaces in the pile.¹³

The first basket (of the five), known as *egowa matana* (the eye of the basket), is arranged as follows:

On the day for her cooking, then they pile up the yams. First they put in the *elogun* (the bottom one), then *labi* (side), then *wasikewa* (waist), *teliton* (third row), *teliluwa* (second row) and finally *pwatan* (top). (Committee 1983:17)

Several of the older women, friends and relatives of the widow, gather together to help with the work. As each basket is finished, it is positioned in a line inside the house in which the dead person was laid out at the time of the funeral. In addition to the foundational five baskets of *la*, two or three other baskets of food crops are called the *lagona* (partner). One is commonly known as *nomasa* ('my appearing'), consisting entirely of *sakaya* (the Lesser Yam), a second basket is of *yawa* (taro) still with its stalks attached, called *vaga* (debt), and a third, *huwawenuwenu*, contains a mixture of different root crops. (Committee 1983:17) These are added to the line to await the coming of the *tongamagaman*. Alternatively, the yams may be placed into one basket supported on its sides by sticks that taper to a point and are tied to the rafters of the house. (See Plates 9 and 10.)

Traditionally it is the *tonyaoma* women who gather to sort out the sizes of the yams and arrange them together so that the yams are set off to best advantage in a symmetrical pyramid-like shape ascending out of the baskets. The widow's own relatives come to do the cooking and supervise the baking of the sago that has first

¹³ The widow and her helpers would be shamed if the pile tumbled to the floor before the presentation was made to the *tongamagaman*.

been boiled into a porridge.¹⁴ Two clay pots of *moni* must be given along with two large pots of yams cooked in their skins—*ligabwayabwaya*—to augment the vast quantity of uncooked yams and taro. One of the *ulunbwana* (pots) is called *hagali* and consists only of *sakaya*, while the other is known as *vinakokowan* ('payment for taboo restrictions'). A pig is usually killed, the primary purpose being to feed the workers who have gathered firewood, scraped coconut and made *moni*. Some cooked food and sago porridge will also be given to certain people to whom the widow wants to express gratitude for their part in giving practical support to her during the period she laboured under mourning taboos.

The likely recipient of this form of exchange is chosen from among village persons who belong to the same clan as the father of the deceased—a person known as the *tongamagaman* or the *toanaan* ('the one who eats'). The food is his to do with as he wishes. While the particular clan is dictated by kin relationship, the selection of the individual representative of that clan is a political one: such questions as "Who do we owe a *hagali* to? Who do we want indebted to us? Who is worthy of this gift?" pass through the minds of the *tonyaoma* as they deliberate and decide. In this way the self-sacrificing role of the father who has fed and nurtured a person from a different clan is acknowledged.¹⁵ This acknowledgement begins at birth and proceeds through until the time of death and beyond, until all obligations are finished with.¹⁶

When the *tongamagaman* arrives, he or she will sit and chat for a while. Misiman etiquette demands that time be taken to enjoy the social occasion; it is considered

¹⁴ This way of preparing sago is specific only to the *hagali* feast: sago is in the usual way made using coconut oil but is coloured green by the addition of certain leaves. It is then laid out on broad, flat leaves and baked in an earth oven, as a slab. After baking, it is broken up and added as edible decoration to the pots of regular *moni*.

¹⁵ Amongst the Ponam (Carrier 1991) prestations were made by a person's maternal kin to the father's siblings, in order to compensate them for their care of the child during its lifetime.

'sinful' to be so focused on the job at hand that traditional courtesies are overlooked. To proceed in haste would reveal both a disdain for the dead and for the work that the widow has done; it would also be a sign of greediness.

As a sign that the prestation has been done well and duly accepted, the *tongamagaman* first places a token amount of money on the *pwatan* (the top) belonging to the main basket of yams, after which the dismantling of the yams for removal to his or her house can occur. In addition, a small amount of coconut oil is poured over the widow's head, acknowledging that the mourning period is now over and that she is freed from all restrictions and obligations to her husband's matrilineal or her patrilineal relatives. On one particular occasion, the daughter of the woman presenting had her hair cut, signifying the acceptance of the *hagali* by the father's lineage and her release from further mourning taboos.

After the removal of the food, the *tongamagaman* distributes it among his relatives and to those he may feel 'in debt' to. But his role has not ended, for he still has to 'pay' for the *gunina* ('bottom of the yams'). This takes the form of *taona*. A suitable small pig (usually a female) is found and given to the *tohagali*, who will feed and care for it until it has piglets. In her turn, she will distribute these piglets to the relatives who helped with the *hagali*. This pig is called *la kenken bobona*—'the pig belonging to the digging of yams'.

In addition to the *taona*, the *galou* might be given one or two weeks after the *hagali*. This is a small exchange (in addition to the pig) consisting of one clay pot of *ligabwayabwaya* and one pot of *moni*.

¹⁶ See Chapters two and three for a discussion of the role of the father, and the metaphorical usage of the 'cord of three' in which I address the obligations that permeate and bind Misiman society together.

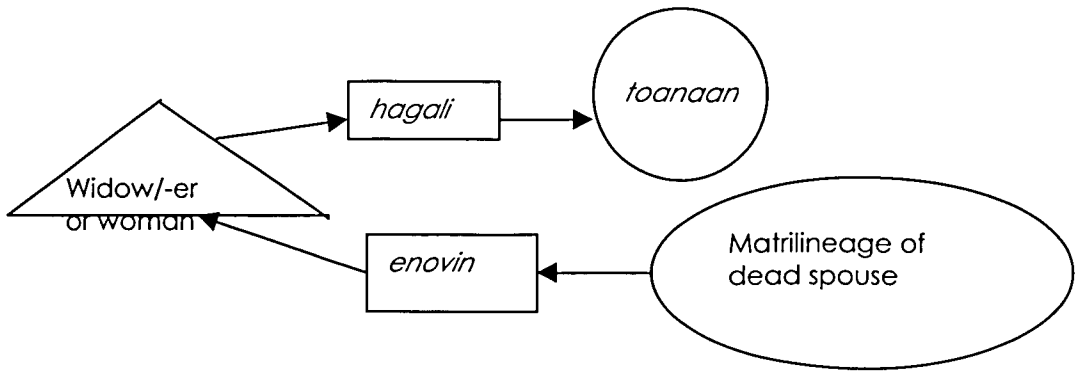
Endless complexities? Indeed yes. This is the stuff of Misima mortuary feasting—exchanges predicated on social relationship, exchanges which construct social reality.

The route followed by a woman who desires to honour relatives of her husband (as well as gain prestige for herself and her clan along with land rights for her children in the process) is very similar to that of the widow.

By providing the yams needed to help her husband and his clan host feasting occasions, a woman indirectly proves herself to be one who respects her husband's relatives, both living and dead. However, through hosting her own *hagali* in honour of her husband's deceased parent or matrilineal relative, she not only enacts this respect in and through the public display of a *hagali* prestation but she also earns rights to some of her husband's clan's garden land. These rights then become part of the inheritance she passes on to her children. Through her hosting of a *hagali* presentation on behalf of their dead, her husband's clan is now indebted to her. The debt must be repaid: the return payment known as *enovin* ('payment for fruit') automatically grants her the right to use their coconut or betelnut plantations.

Berde(1979:172), viewing this mechanism from the Panaeyati Island perspective, notes that the different soil types on that island produce an uneven distribution of traditional gardening land amongst the matrilineages. This situation could easily lead to famine amongst some parts of the population, without the system of exchange underpinning *hagali*, which encourages and allows people to obtain rights to land belonging to other clans.

Figure 3. The Hagali prestation and its expected return



Once transferred, the plantations or land rights then belong to the clan of the person doing the *hagali*. However, should this person be a widower, then his children, who belong to their mother's clan, would not receive a share of the land. A solution to this is for the children to host a *bobuton* on the occasion of the death of their father. Once having done this, the father's clan will honour the children's efforts and make a payment by assigning the land previously given on the occasion of the *hagali* to the children who have honoured their dead clan member.

But the indebtedness does not end there. The woman has set in motion her own set of payments and repayments, for now there is the obligation at some future date for her husband's clan to give a return *hagali* for a dead member of the wife's clan. Berde (1974) also sees these presentations not only as showing respect to the husband's kinsmen, but serving as investments towards future land acquisitions .

The woman in question may have already donned a *boeluv* (long grass skirt) at the time of a particular funeral to signal her intention to work towards a *hagali* prestation. She will plant a special garden of yams that will result in an abundance of yams to give away, assisted by her siblings and friends. An older woman may also be given yams by her son's wife, who in turn is motivated by her own interests because the land given to the older woman will then be passed on to her and her husband. The woman continues to wear her *boeluv* until all the preparations are complete and the

hagali is given away, at which time she will set aside her 'mourning' apparel and be ritually decorated in colourful clothes. Her face may also be painted at this time. (See Plate 7.)

In addition to the piles of yams and cooked food handed over to the *tongamagaman*, the woman may give a small number of clothes or other *bugul* to her husband's matrilineal relatives as a token of thanks for their assistance and as an acknowledgement of their part in raising her husband, the father of her children. She needs to ensure that no one relationship is omitted from the distribution of food.

For Misiman women, the hosting of a *hagali* is the primary route to prestige. In contrast to Lepowsky's (1990) description of the 'big women' of SudEst island who are feast sponsors in their own right, the woman's role on Misima is usually to plant, harvest and cook yams in preparation. She undertakes these tasks on behalf of her husband and in support of his *nuwatu* (will, intention or idea) which then becomes manifest in the mainstream feasts of *highig*, *iwas* and *lobek*.¹⁷ She essentially works with and for her in-law clan. However, for a woman who desires to gain land use rights for her children on the ground where they are living (usually at their father's place) and to enhance her own reputation in the process, the *hagali* prestation provides a cultural route which is already in place. So, as I have indicated, the act of doing a hagali tends to serve many purposes. It can be seen as both a political and politic move utilised variously for the mending of broken relationships, or for pacifying or compensating relatives in a conflict situation.

¹⁷ Nalina and Katen are notable examples of Misiman women who have made a name for themselves as 'big women' (a Misiman term infrequently used). Usually both men and women who have gained a reputation for being feast sponsors are referred to as having an *alan bwabwatana* (literally, a 'big name'). They will have carried out feasts for their own relatives, more specifically for their fathers; they are also distinguished by having independent sources of funds. Nalina had funds accumulated after she had worked for many years as a teacher; while Katen received help from her husband and sons who are employed in various business ventures.

Mabela was one who followed the *hagali* route.¹⁸ For many years she and her husband had lived in her family's *awan* but because of overcrowding and its associated tensions the couple and their two children moved to live with her in-laws in her husband's part of the village. Her mother-in-law helped her give a successful *hagali*, after which Mabela began building her own house on her father-in-law's clan land. Her hosting of the *hagali* feast had smoothed over relationships, giving her the right to make a major move and live permanently amongst her husband's people.

She also gained not just an enhanced reputation but also some real estate. In common with other women who take this route, Mabela acquired the right for her children to harvest betelnut and coconut palms from plantations belonging to her husband's clan. She received these plantations from her husband's matrilineal clan in recognition of her efforts on behalf of their *tomati*.

Datala and Lilo 'did' a *hagali* at the behest of their mother's brother, Enatu. They gave baskets of yams to their cross-cousins (the sons of another mother's brother named Nato) who had been trespassing on their lineage land and appropriating coconuts and betelnut. Enatu had no children of his own, so Datala and her sisters and brother had aligned themselves in his camp, supporting his mortuary feasting endeavours, and in their turn being treated as true *gamalok* ('sister's daughter') and *geman* ('sister's son'). (See Plate 8.)

In this way, mortuary rituals can be 'hijacked' from their context of death and used as mechanisms to manipulate relationships in other areas of life. By virtue of the particular mechanism implicit in *hagali*, land can be alienated. In addition, clan land has become much more tightly grasped and hotly disputed since the mining industry

¹⁸ See the beginning of her story on page 95.

made inroads into prime gardening areas. Despite the fact that generous and much-desired compensation has been paid to the landowners, the fact is that land has been taken away from the rightful owners. The tension and anger already evident as a result of what is perceived to be unfair payouts of land compensation by the mine¹⁹ has been exacerbated, and confused by the customs connected to *hagali*. The concepts of reciprocity and obligation to repay that have hitherto underpinned a Misiman's whole *raison d'être* and have by extension determined how they relate to their fellows, are now judged in some cases to be the very antithesis of what individuals actually want for themselves.

Nalina is a retired nurse married to a 'big man' who has made a name for himself not only through feasting, but also as a long-serving member of the Local Government Council. With reference to the situation on her island, Nalina became quite vocal in her complaint:

They make a burden for us (the land owners). The reason why they are working is to make a name for themselves. The land that my mother gardened has been given to them, because they made a *hagali* for her brother. Two boys from his son's wife's family went and cut betelnut trees on the land. As far as I am concerned, I have no joy in that.

And my *yavalina* (opposite gender sibling's spouse), we forbade her to do a *hagali*. But she did it anyway. I didn't want a share in it. It doesn't taste right, the widow needs all the food now.

These feelings are representative of some of the discordant voices which come from the spectators of the rituals involved in mortuary feasting as they are affected by what they see and experience. The Misiman's lived reality has changed drastically with the opening of the mine, resulting in some, at least, of the island's people becoming unwilling players in a new act of their life drama forged by the capitalistic venture to

¹⁹ Ten years after the mining began, genealogies of the land-owning clans were collected. Because of their claims vis-à-vis clan boundaries delineated movable items including rivers and trees, the clans have been involved in hot disputes following on from vaguely remembered (and misremembered) facts.

which they are now exposed. These elements may ultimately contribute to the unravelling of the traditional threads of the fabric of Misiman society.²⁰

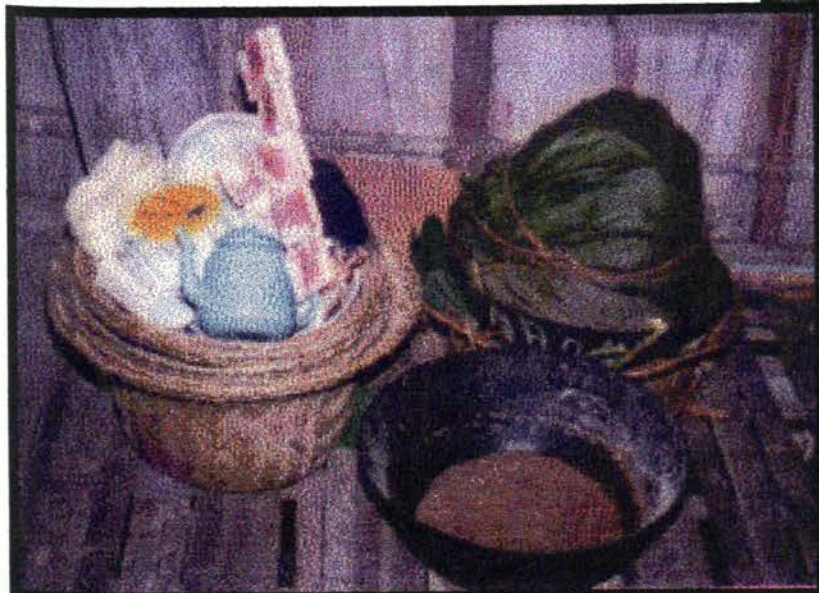
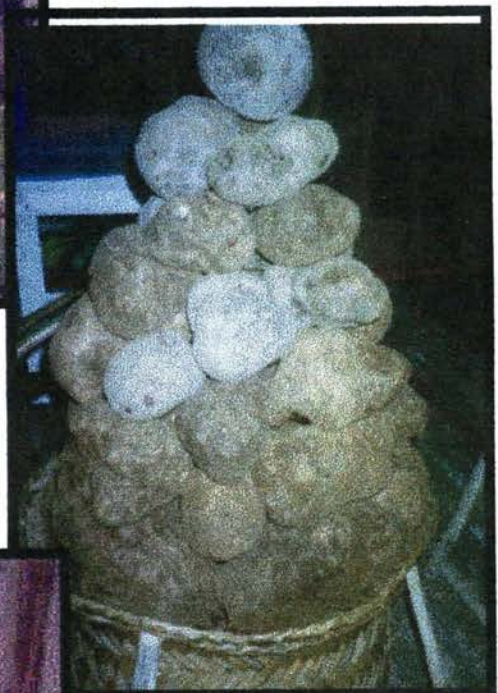
²⁰ See also the opinions from various 'discordant voices' in Chapter six.



Plate 8 Enatu and his *gamalokau* gave a *hagali* prestation to his brother's children to resolve their conflict over land.



Plates 9 & 10 *Vegaiyas* baskets filled with yams are piled up ready for the *tongamagaman* to collect.



A Widow's Burden

Plate 11 Mihelisa prepared a *powon* on behalf of his daughter Gila who had died.

Powon—compensating for loss

Traditionally, death was believed to have two causes— warfare or the use of magic. In the early days before pacification, when one clan or village was warring against another and death occurred as a result, a payment or appeasement offering was made as a peace gesture by the winning side in order to prevent continuing hostilities or feuding. This custom has been transformed into the *powon* prestation. The sentiment behind it and the situation—that of a death—remains the same (see below) but the prestation itself has changed in keeping with the values of today's society.

A clan member passes from this life, thus weakening the clan both numerically and psychologically. The death adds an extra burden, for the *nak* falls squarely on the shoulders of members of the matriclan who must host the series of *bobuton* over the next several years. Thus energy and resources are expended on behalf of their dead. *Powon* serves to redress the balance, to alleviate the burden of the death by the presentation of goods and food to the matriclan. As in the past, *powon* continues to be a public performance. It serves to acknowledge the loss and grief felt by the clan, to atone in some way for the death, and to forestall vengeful acts precipitated by either the living or the dead, whether through sorcery or direct physical action.

Functionally, there are two types of *powon*. I will distinguish between them because Misimans themselves make a point of articulating their difference—and that difference emphasises yet again the importance of reciprocity as the very basis of Misiman society. The *powon* that involves compensation for the death of an unmarried person is characterised by the phrase /*tatahot* ('it goes straight'). Responsibility for the

payment rests with the dead child's father; there is no equivalent payment expected.²¹ The more common type of *powon* is that given by the surviving spouse which does involve a *lahena* (return payment, replacement, substitution, tit-for-tat payment, reaction, or natural consequence).

On the occasion of a death, a human being, and by definition a person of value, who has made an imprint on the social fabric is no longer living. *Powon*, as indeed all the feasts activated by a death, is about the recreation of presence, the evocation of memory. It is a performance predicated on social relations, wherein the central performer, through her actions and bodily dispositions, recreates the identity of the dead (cf. Schieffelin 1998). This identity is not that of an autonomous individual; rather it is a social construct. As the widow/-er or the father, along with their respective clans, perform the duties associated with the giving of *powon*, they remind all concerned of past interactions between the clans, of the present relationship, and of new configurations pertinent to the future. Reality is reconstructed through this prestation, a 'payment' in the form of cooked and uncooked food, *bugul* (things), and money²² presented to the clan of the deceased.

The discussion by Schieffelin (1998:202) on performance is very pertinent at this point in the argument. He asserts that in order to properly understand the notion of performance, ethnographers must investigate the actions and habits of the body, and understand the 'performative relationship between the central performers and the other participants in a cultural event'. He further states that 'it is within these relationships that the fundamental epistemological and ontological relations of any society are likely to be implicated and worked out' (op.cit.:204). So it is on Misima.

²¹ This is in contrast to the *powon* described by Battaglia (1990:770 where children give to their father 'loans with interest', a form of acknowledging paternal nurturing as well as laying claim to paternal residential land.

Underpinning the whole series of mortuary feasts including the *powon*—where there is an overtly expressed relationship between a death and the need for compensation payment—is the fundamental principle of reciprocity.

For the Kaluli, 'everyday modes of moral determination ... were bounded in a sense of reciprocal practice' (Schieffelin 1998:205). Similarly for Misimans, the underlying frame for the society is *lahena* (payback). This marked form of reciprocity, reminiscent of the dictum that pertains to the natural sciences—that for every action, there exists an opposite and equal reaction—is a fundamental of Misiman society, articulating the Misiman way of being-in-the-world.

Where a death concerns an unmarried person, it is the father's responsibility to make the payment. This prestation honours the wife's family and acknowledges them as the *tanyaomal*. The *powon* prestation allows the father to both express his sorrow and apologise for any lack of care for the child. Through his actions in presenting *powon*, he is admitting *no matahikan i nak* ('my care-taking was bad'—I was neglectful). The father's duty is to provide all that the child needs in order to grow to adulthood and become a responsible member of the clan. Instead, he has *payaomal* (literally 'caused-to-be-lost') the person entrusted to him by the maternal clan. In Schieffelin's terms, '(A) performance is always something accomplished: it is an achievement in the world (1998:198).'²³ And so through the ritual of *powon*, the father is able to enact his apology and compensate the clan for having lost its member by the substitution of food and goods. He is working to actively deflect away from himself any blame that might be in the minds of angry relatives.

²² In the past, traditional valuables such as axe-blades were used in the prestation.

²³ I am taking ritual to be in part constituted by performance (Hughes-Freeland 1998), i.e. possessing intentionality, and creativity, and including the participatory nature of spectators as well as the need to examine specific contexts as frames for the performance.

A man who either does not make this payment or is tardy about it runs the risk of losing both his wife's respect and his authority over his other children; he and his clan are shamed, because they have not made the payment appropriate to and demanded by the situation.

In the words of Pelen:

Why do we do *powon*? My caring was bad, I did not look after him properly, so he met with death. The payment is in order to buy or pay for the life of the child. If my wife dies, I didn't care for her properly either. That was her time to die, but even so, I didn't look after her properly.

If I don't do *powon* (for my wife), it doesn't matter.

But they will talk about the *powon* for the child. I would not be able to smack my children. People would say, 'You have lost a child, you didn't do *powon* for it. Don't smack the child.' Later on when the children are grown up you can't do a thing, you can't speak harshly to them. They will say, 'Are you sad that my relative is dead? Don't hurt the child.' So then you will surely have a bad feeling—a hugely big shame. *Powon* is not to be omitted.

In times of conflict then the mother will say, "My companion, you lost my child, have you compensated me?" [This implies that the man has no leg to stand on, no basis from which to argue.]²⁴

Reality is both represented and created in the ritual of *powon*, and sentiments are expressed through the actions taken by the father, the central performer. It thus appears that the father has only temporary and ephemeral rights over his child, rights contingent upon his completing the ritual which expunges his alleged guilt and atones for it. In Turner's (1974) terms, he is still in the liminal phase, still unstructured, having lost both his status as a person and his right to be a self-actuating individual. He is in a similar position to the widow, owing a debt to and owned by the *tonyaomal*, the matrikin of the dead child.

²⁴ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1997.

Mihelisa's daughter Gila was about seventeen years old when she died. I was living next door to her grandparents' house at the time and noticed the flurry of activity—of people coming and going, of lamps being turned up in response to the news of her death. She had died at the medical aid post. Prayers had been offered by a group from the church; in addition, a medicine man had performed his magic—all to no avail. While sitting with the group by lamplight, I realised that urgent talk was taking place between Tonowak, the grandfather on the child's mother's side, and his sister's son, Goba. The discussion centred around two things: how and when could the news go out as quickly as possible so that people would begin to gather? and how and from whom could they obtain lamps to light that gathering? Grief was set aside as plans for the execution of the burial now assumed prime importance.

After the initial *bobuton* feasting was completed, Mihelisa prepared the *powon*. One evening, five girls (three of Gila's sisters and two from her mother's mother's side)—together with Gila's mother—arrived with three 'brothers'. They carried very heavy pots of food and baskets of *bugul*, which they had collected from the hamlet belonging to Mihelisi's family, about half an hour's walk away. (See Plate 11 and Table 5.)

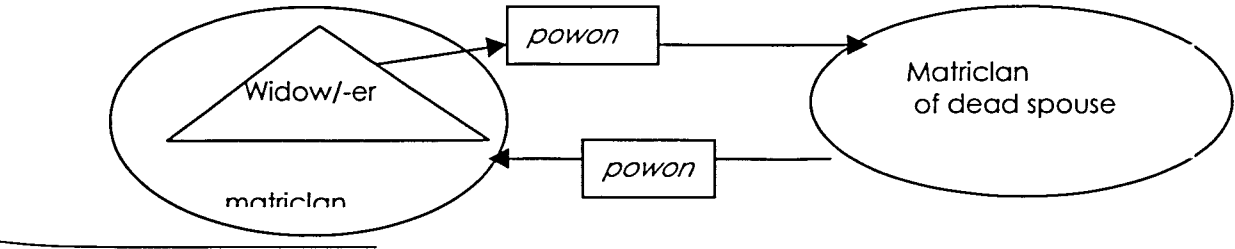
The cooked food was distributed on the spot to members of Gila's clan, as well as to members of her grandfather's clan who were the land-owning clan in the area. Due to a shortage of carriers, the uncooked food was to be picked up some time later.

Table 5. Powon presentation for Gila

Number	Items
3 large clay pots	<i>Ligabwayabwaya</i>
1 clay pot	Cooked food
1 large dish	<i>Moni</i> : sago porridge
1 clay pot	<i>Moni</i>
1 large dish	<i>bugul</i> : plates, dresses, shirts, trousers, fabric
12	<i>Egowa</i> : woven food baskets
2	Small <i>ulun</i> : clay pots
1	Clay pot for storing water
1	Pile of woven food baskets with the top one containing <i>bugul</i> .

The second kind of *powon* concerns the death of a married person and refers to the prestation given by the surviving spouse.²⁵ A pig is killed, food is cooked and *bugul* and money are presented to the matrilineal kin of the deceased as compensation for the loss of their clan member. As with an unmarried child, the clan had entrusted a member into the care of the spouse; that trust had been betrayed when this person was 'lost' to death. Traditionally, a widow or widower who had not adequately compensated the death of her or his partner would be unable to remarry. They would remain within the transitional space, dependent on and 'owned' by the matrilineal relatives of the dead, unable to be free agents with their own subjectivities; rather, they had become objects, still belonging within and circumscribed by the boundaries erected at marriage and reinforced by death.

Figure 4. The Powon Prestation



²⁵ If there is no survivor, i.e. if the widow/-er has also died, then the clan of the first partner to die takes on the duty of making the *powon* payment.

Abeli remarried after his first wife's death and before he had completed *powon*. Now both he and his second wife were elderly, feeling vulnerable and weak, and the weight of the *pulowan* or 'heaviness' of an uncompensated death continued to hang over them. So they killed a pig and gave it to the *tonyaoma* (the Lailoga clan). The *gaba* (supporting and complementary items) were given in lots of ten: 6 clay pots and 4 baskets, 10 baskets containing *bugul*, as well as two additional pots—one of cooked food and one of sago porridge. Abeli and his wife now felt free agents, no longer burdened by the heaviness of unpaid debts. By enacting the ritual and doing what was expected—even though it was long overdue—they had absolved themselves of the 'heaviness' they felt and deflected away any residual anger and blame which they feared might take a very physical shape (the form of sorcery or witchcraft) and attack them in their old age.

Misiman society is firmly based on reciprocity and equivalent payback as a rule of life; it is one of the values permeating all areas of sociality, particularly to be found and relentlessly followed in the area of mortuary feasting. When both partners have died, the clan of the first partner to die must take up the obligation to payback the *powon* presentation they were given previously. In-law scripting, in the form of obligations set in train by marriage and informed by the values of the society, remains in force even after the death of the major protagonists and persists until equivalence on both sides is finally completed. The performance must go on, both in spite of and also because of the loss of the central performers. The spectators (including clan members both living and dead) are not only 'the cloud of witnesses'²⁶ urging the actors on but are actively participating in the play. And they are also the judges, the ones

²⁶ The Book of Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 1 (The Christian Bible).

who evaluate the performance thus constructing and validating the newly formed lived social reality.

The performance of *powon* is built on the solid rock of affinal expectations and obligations. If the deceased is unmarried, the *powon* is paid and the atonement made. The payback is complete. There is no further relationship, no wider circles of obligation and debt as is the case with a married person. This is a significant fact and highlights a strong theme running through Misiman society. Marriage and the alliances created by it informs not only the human need for physical reproduction and clan continuity but is predicated on the desire for sociality, for connectedness, for the interlocking webs of relationships in which Misimans delight.

I want to conclude these sections involving the obligations of the widow/-er by ruminating a little more on the role which these particular players in the death drama adopt, and what it means, not only for the individual mourner, but for the larger backdrop of Misima society.

The burden of widowhood

When he died at the age of about 70, Nevenak's husband Tonowak was both clan leader of Lailoga and a respected lay leader of the church. He was held in high esteem, being known and respected by all throughout the language area. Nevenak's responsibility as his widow was therefore onerous; she assumed the burden of reminding people of her deceased spouse, and of being the living representative of his memory. So while she 'worked' to clear herself of the restrictions placed on her as a widow,²⁷ she nevertheless continued to wear black clothes long past the period when she was legally allowed to don 'normal' clothing. The Lailoga clan, the ones who 'owned' her

and regulated her movements (at least in theory), had assured her there was no necessity to wear black clothes, as she was too old and frail to have to undergo a widow's seclusion with its associated restrictions. But she took pride in her ability to follow all the 'rules,' and was careful to carry them out rigorously. The black clothing, she felt, was an *etotohi* (sign) of the relationship she had lost; it represented a *nuwahikan* (remembrance or memorial) to her husband, and it functioned to remind people of Tonowak and his life.

In observing the boundaries erected by mourning restrictions, a widow also considers practical issues to do with her future life and wellbeing. She normally remains living in her home, in the hamlet to which she was brought when she married and on the land belonging to her husband's clan. She needs to continue to cultivate and maintain a harmonious relationship with this clan; she must be seen to be both atoning for the loss of her husband and honouring him in a public way, showing respect through her actions and circumspect behaviour for him and his clan.

In former times, when it was the custom for her skin to be completely blackened by charcoal, the widow was rigorously watched. She still belonged to her husband and his clan, and could be accused of being unfaithful in more than one sense. She was considered unfaithful to the memory of her husband if she did not submit to expectations and retain the charcoal coating intact; and she could be guilty of unfaithfulness—and be accused of adultery—if she became involved with another man before she 'finished' the death by fulfilling all her obligations. In fact, the blackened skin was a sign of her dutiful submission. As such, it also became transformed into a protective covering, sheltering her from the intentions of any one of

²⁷ For by doing so, she exhibited respect and honour for her husband and his clan.

her husband's relatives who, caught up in extreme grief, looked for vengeance and sought to take out their anger and suspicions of foul play on his widow.

By placing herself under the rightful authority of the *tontutun* clan (lit. 'the ones who own the relative') and working to fulfil the obligations she had towards them, not only did the widow receive protection in her vulnerable state; she also facilitated her own passage towards independence and intentionality. In addition, she made a statement about herself as a member of her clan. As they supported her in her feasting obligations, so did clan members prove their strength; as they assisted her through her endeavours, so they showed their clan's willingness and ability to pay their debts—to 'do the right thing' and to do it well. Psychologically speaking, the transition time and its restrictions and obligations, which requires much planning and forethought on the part of the widow, in fact allows a widow to move beyond the death of her husband. It provides her with a focus, something to work for and towards, something in which she believes and from which she can gain a certain satisfaction and prestige.

Nevenak's daughter Nalina was able to elucidate some of these thoughts. When asked for the main thought or purpose underpinning a widow's role on Misima, she answered by enumerating the feasts which the widow must give before she can return to 'normal' life. With more questioning, the main idea, according to Nalina, appeared to be that the widow doesn't *logugui* (regulate) herself. She isn't in charge of herself, for she is no longer a free agent but belongs to the *tontutun* (the owners of the relative). As Nevenak gradually moves from the status of a widow to a relatively free individual, the matrilineal clan members must be present at, acknowledged in, and compensated at every step of her journey back to 'normality'. Nalina further isolated the notion of compensation as being the main reason for the widow's

activities: because she has *payaomal* ('caused-[the husband] to-be-lost'), she must come under the control of the *tontutun* for a period until she has paid for that loss.

It is interesting to speculate on the world view of reciprocity which underlies these notions.²⁸ We could interpret this worldview by saying that for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. In other words, the law of the Misiman universe is that of payback—a death creates a loss, a loss creates a debt, and a debt sets in motion the elaborate sequences of feasting, and the generous and profligate giving which leads to the clearing of that debt. Misimans say *pulowan ni abubun*, meaning '(the widow) must make the problem-trouble right'. The problem—or rift in the Misiman universe caused by death—must be mended and, for the widow, the completion of her obligations which redress the balance is the *hagali* prestation. Until she carries this out and pays *powon* to the matrilineage, the widow remains under the jurisdiction and authority of her late husband's relatives.

Thus for the Misiman, the primary site of meaning for a widow is found in acknowledging her dependence, as she takes up her role in the ongoing drama of death. It is a very different philosophical viewpoint from that expressed by widows in the western countries: their cry there seems to be, "I must be independent and make a life for myself. I mustn't be a burden on anyone else, especially my children. Leave me alone to make my own adjustments—just give me some time, and support when and if I ask for it."

Having made excursions into the meaning of widow(-er)hood in the Misiman way-of-being in the world, I want to move now to address some of the more formalised

²⁸ This theme has been discussed in a more general way in Chapter two.

ways in which marriage alliances are worked out and performed in practice, with the *tovelam* again as the star performer.

Leyau—hanging the necklace

Death activates many relationships, especially affinal ones. In addition, it provides many opportunities for kin ties to be actualised in a code of conduct.²⁹ A performance of *leyau*³⁰ brings renown and status not only to the clan of the deceased being honoured but also to the *tovelam* and his clan.³¹ Clan members dare to cast down the gauntlet, challenging the *tonyaomal* to a contest wherein each side must muster the support of their respective *boda* in order to follow a prescribed sequence of events. A choreography is already devised and the choruses enrolled in the drama must follow the steps.

A particular kind of *leyau* (shell valuable) is known as *lohu nabwa* (hang-basket). The *tovelam* obtains such a shell valuable, composed of a long length of red spondyllus shells with pearl shell attachment and other decorations, and either puts it into his wife's betel-nut basket or hangs it in the house over the corpse. This is called *tawahikan* (also a term used in another context for hammering a post into the ground). The challenge sets in motion a series of feasts and displays of wealth involving the tangled alliances, based primarily on marriage, which exist between social groups. A man who begins this action must be sure of at least two things with regard to his relationships. He must be positive that his own clan and any trading partners will support him when the time comes for the feasting and exchange of valuables. He must

²⁹ Writing in the context of Polynesia, Feinberg cites data in support of his argument that kinship throughout the Pacific area involves both genealogy and a code for conduct (1981; 1990).

³⁰ *Leyau* refers to this whole exchange process, and more specifically to the shell valuable which begins it.

³¹ A child of the deceased may also hang a *leyau*, though this is not as common.

also be confident that his in-law group, the matrilineal clan of the deceased, has the resources and is willing to meet his challenge. The former is the more important of the two: a man's credibility and reputation is embodied in his ability to activate his *boda* to support him in his endeavours. He will deliberate and discuss the options with his closest relatives and friends, and then hang the *leyau*. Even if there are doubts about whether his in-law clan can meet the challenge, he may still proceed with his *nuwatu* (intention), for by doing this he will enhance his reputation and that of his clan, particularly if the opposing clan does not respond appropriately to the challenge.³²

The *tonyaomal* who accepts the *leyau* now looks for other valuables known as *abalaga* (of which *leyau* is one kind). *Giyam* (stone axes), *gabulita* (ceremonial limesticks carved of wood) and *eloki* (shorter strings of shell) may be borrowed from relatives, friends or trading partners. The *tonyaomal* must find a minimum of five valuables in order to match the initial *leyau* gift. Ikosa elaborates upon this as follows:

Five *giyam* for the shell necklace put down, then afterwards he will look for others, making 10. The number of things they have is 10, and the eleventh is the shell necklace from the son-in-law before ... but (with the contributions of) those who come up into the house, then it might go to 15. So then the son-in-law will take all of them.³³

On a separate occasion the clan group of the deceased, having mobilised their people, bring their valuables in multiples of five and spread them out in orderly rows in the house where the corpse was laid out in burial and where the *lohu* hung initially. This is known as the *howahowa* ('piercing') that marks the first stage and serves as the *lahena* (equivalent) for the *leyau*. The *giyam* and *gabulita* are positioned so that they face away from the people who pick them up. In a return display, the *tovelam* will *yoga* (summon) the opposing clan and will lay out the *giyam* gathered up on the

³² There is always the risk of too much conspicuous display giving rise to gossip about the son-in-law's arrogance or envy. This may result in sorcery.

³³ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1996.

previous occasion, plus however many additional ones he and his *boda* have been able to collect, preferably in multiples of five.

Each display occasion is accompanied by feasting and hosted by the clan which is responsible for the *yao* (spreading out or unrolling, as of a mat) of their valuables. After the return display, the owners of each of the items will carefully count the valuables and identify and collect their own property, with the exception of the original shell necklace. This remains the property of the *tonyaoma* to whom it was given.

The following *leyau* account illustrates the variations which are possible on this general theme.

Table 6. The Leyau between Midenosi and the Lailoga Clan

In 1980, Midenosi brought a *leyau*.

The matrilineal clan responded on the same day giving the following items for the *leyau*.

With it, he also gave the following:

Number	Items
5	<i>Egowa</i> : woven food baskets
5	<i>Mwaha</i> : wooden dishes of yams and pumpkin
4	Bunches of bananas
4	<i>Kaliko</i> : lengths of material
1 pile	<i>bugul</i> : 5 china plates, 5 enamel plates, 1 cup, 4 forks, 3 spoons
1	<i>Helagi</i> : sleeping mat
1	clay pot
1	25 kg bag of rice.

Number	Items
2 clay pots	cooked food
2 clay pots	<i>Moni</i>
1 clay pot	Rice
2	tins of fish
3	small <i>ulun</i> : clay pots
2	clay pot for storing water
1	pile of woven food baskets with the top one containing <i>bugul</i> .

and 1 live pig

And for the pig they gave the following:

Number	Items
2 clay pots	Cooked food
2 clay pots	<i>Moni</i>
1 clay pots	Rice

A display was arranged by the matrilineal kin of Lailoga clan, of which Tonowak was the leader, in response to the initial challenge from Midenosi. As the *howahowa*, a *giyam* and a monetary amount of nine kina were laid down. As the supporting valuables comprising the *leyau* presentation itself, Tonowak gave a *giyam*, his sister's son gave one, another Lailoga man gave two *giyam*, his daughter's husband's relative one, and his wife's sister's son brought a *giyam* as well as sixty-one kina in cash. Midenosi took with him the money, a *giyam* and Tonowak's *giyam*.

Leyau emphasises clan solidarity, providing an outlet for the tension and sense of competition that exists between clans allied by marriage, as well as a chance to test the relationship and the personalities of the main players. A certain trust is exhibited, and as that trust pays off when the valuables are returned and the feasting is enjoyed, then relationships are cemented and subsequently built upon during other times of social interaction.

There is, however, a further response to the *lohu* hung over the corpse, for the *tonyaomal* may prefer not to become involved in the elaborate preparations and stages of display. For him the way out is to find another shell necklace of the same length and redness and present this to the *tovelam*. This is known as *atibinabinaehik*, and refers to the cutting off of the liver,¹ the finishing of obligations. There is a certain shame in doing it this way, although practical considerations must come first. The *tonyaomal* may comment as follows:

You have been squashed. I have blocked your intention (to set the stage for a grand display).

¹ The liver (*ati*) is considered by Misimans to be the seat of the emotions and is used in many idioms. The word *aten*, cognate with *ati*, is used to express knowledge or understanding.

To deflect someone from their chosen path is to upset them, and to upset a person can have physical ramifications for both the initiator of the upset and the one offended. The *tovelam* will receive the substitute for the shell necklace he gave, and feel superior. He will begin to denigrate the one who was not equal to the challenge:

"Well, that's indeed shameful!"

Then the other one (*tonyaoma*) will say, "It's lucky for me that I have prepared a feast of pig meat, here's your share."

Then he will reply, "Well, okay, that's alright."

More complicated *leyau* may involve a longer period of time and several stages, with exchanges occurring on several different levels. The process initiated by the hanging of the *lohu* might be completed at one level, but that very action now creates a lack of balance between the groups related by marriage. This produces a tension that needs to be resolved by reciprocation at a higher level.

When Makuta died in 1981, Jelo of Boyou village—one of the *tovelam* of the deceased—hung a *lohu*. The village of Siagara, where the deceased had resided, replied with a *howahowa* of fifteen items, thus matching the shell necklace. They gave the *leyau* consisting of thirty more items, making a total of forty-five, which were then collected by Boyou participants and taken home. This initial display was followed by two others involving people from three villages, as recorded below:

Table 7. The *Leyau* held by Jelo and his in-laws

Host village	Relationship	Action	Additional items	Total
Boyou	tovelam's village	hung the <i>lohu</i> (shell necklace supplied by Gulewa village)		
Siagara	home village	Gave 15 items as <i>howahowa</i>	30	45
Boyou	Tovelam's village	Brought the 45 items	103	148
Gulewa	people related to <i>tovelam</i>	148	30	178

On the 6th December 1983 the entire return process was initiated by those who had hung the first *leyau*. Selini, Jelo's wife, had hung a *leyau* on the day of the funeral for her mother-in-law. Now she and her relatives laid out *leyau*, other *abalaga* and money, and the relatives of the dead woman who came from Gulewa village collected them. The next step was for Gulewa people to lay out the valuables so that Boyou villagers could collect them. One pig was killed for the feasting done at the time. Selini made the *leyau* of valuables, and a second pig was given to Jelo's clan. Selini summed it up like this:

Jelo has no right now to beat me or be rude to me, or to refuse to entertain my relatives in our house. I have done my part of the exchange and things are balanced once more. He has no right to speak, no basis for his words. I can give my relatives whatever I want and he is not able to say anything.²

There is a sense in which the two groups allied by a single marriage are competing with each other, striving to keep abreast of the exchanges that must go back and forth. Social sanctions of this kind, where the party unable to sustain the level of giving is shamed both publicly and privately inside the marriage relationship, serve to perpetuate the feasting cycle. There is no way to call a halt. Loss of face may result in threats of sorcery being levelled against persons who did not work towards fulfilling their obligations to both the dead and to the living group of in-laws. The reality is that these are the people who gave them the *vaga* that must be repaid at some future date.

All of these events are attended by feasting. Pigs, both cooked and raw, are given by the sponsors to the other group, accompanied by pots of food and sago porridge. Part of the food presentation may be carried away to be distributed to relatives not present on the occasion, while some of the food is consumed in a communal meal.

² Personal communication, Siagara village, 1983.

The *leyau* shell necklaces are also used for other transactions. The most prominent of these is connected with the crafting of a large sailing canoe, usually at Panaeyati island.³ Transactions, exchanges and feasting occur at each major stage of the canoe-building process. Battaglia (1990:122) suggests that *leyau* refers to the process of making sequential payments, part of the process of purchasing a canoe. It was also a 'fame-making strategy for individuals and their "places" amongst the Saisai people', in the same way as it is today on Misima (pp. 123).

Kalehe hi gove—*dancing the mango*

The term *kalehe*, the Misiman word for 'mango', is also given to another feasting occasion predicated on marriage alliances. This reinforces the relationships between clans related through marriage at the same time as it provides an outlet for already existing tensions. It also, however, has the potential to create further social rifts. These potentialities are enacted through the procession and the mock warfare, and are revealed in the presentation of large amounts of yams and many pigs during the course of the *kalehe* celebration. A once-in-a-lifetime performance one would think, given the work and resources employed to successfully complete this enterprise. But as with all other mortuary rituals on Misima, the *kalehe* festival too must be reciprocated

The *tovelam*⁴ uses the opportunity of the death of his father-in-law or of one of his wife's clan members to issue a challenge to the deceased's clansmen. He does this usually when the matrilineage is preparing for the final *bobuton* feast of *lobek*, i.e.

³ Panaeyati islanders who are part of the Misima language group are famous in the district for their specialisation in canoe building.

⁴ This is used somewhat loosely, as like the *leyau* prestation, other relatives may utilise this opportunity to give away resources and obtain prestige.

several years after the initiating death. The occasion allows for much prestige to accrue to the *tovelam*, who has amassed pigs and other possessions and now brings them in an ostentatious display depicting the strength and importance of his clan. This too is an occasion when the *tovelam* must mobilise his *boda*; his clan members and his in-laws, as well as many of his village folk will help him amass the items to be presented and will participate with him in the dancing and feasting that is hosted by the opposing group. It is a further opportunity for an in-law group to show their solidarity and their viability as a group in a visible and physical way, as it is a time of festivity and entertainment provided by two allied groups for the enjoyment of all present. Yet paradoxically it is a reminder that a death has occurred; in the midst of this celebration of life, strength and vitality, the enduring thread of duty and obligation can be detected, predicated on the memory of a particular deceased. The clans remain entangled, intertwined in an unremitting exchange of activities.

In the early times, and even today, sentiments of hostility and competition are embodied in the procession wherein the group supporting the *tovelam* brings five pigs in varying sizes along with pots of food. A *nabnabwau* (pyramid-like construction using sticks and filled with yams) is carried on a small platform and accompanied in the procession by a kite-like structure with lengths of fabric and bank notes attached to it.

Foremost in the group of approaching in-laws are a number of young men who carry a *tapwatapwa*, a solid tree branch with a fork on one end. This is used to challenge the dead man's kin by attempting to push over his house or the platform on which he has laid out pigs for his own feast. In the past, real damage was caused, though today, while a spirit of hostility and competition still underlies the performance, the whole mock procedure is carried out in an atmosphere of excitement and celebration. Other members of the group carry spears and present a warlike

appearance, illustrating the fact that they are from opposing clans linked only by marriage. The challenge goes up:

Am vaga i hewa ei.

"This is the debt you have incurred, going up to you here!"

Pigs are killed and given to the in-law group, and the day ends with feasting and dancing. However, the knowledge that the deceased man's kin now has a huge debt to pay back to their *muli*⁵ remains with them; many years might pass before they are in a position to reciprocate but during the intervening time they must work and plan to that end.

In 1978 Lelomo, a pastor and leader from Gulewa village, brought a *kalehe*⁶ with five pigs and presented it to Itemi, a 'brother' of the same clan. While four⁷ of the pigs were treated as contributions to the *lobek* feast—destined to be slaughtered as and when required—the smallest, called *gabugolu*, was set aside to be fed until it reached a reasonable size. It would then be killed at the same time as the burning of the *kalehe* (the mango branch)⁸ which had been placed in the rafters of the house built for the feast of *lobek*.

Kanolo, Itemi's mother, explained to me the use of wealth and resources. She avowed while she and her son had given up chasing renown and riches, Lelomo had

⁵ Lepowsky defines *muli* for the people of Vanatinai as 'public affinal presentations of valuables to a host at the start of the (*zagaya*) feast', and notes that a successful feast could not be made without these contributions from those related by marriage to the feast sponsor. (1989:220) However, these prestations are part of ongoing exchanges beginning with bride wealth payments, whereas on Misima, marriage is not marked in this way.

⁶ This is the only *kalehe* which I have seen. Unfortunately I was not present when the return feast was done by Itemi in 1992. It is a huge undertaking, and very few people take it on voluntarily.

⁷ The names of these pigs are as follows: *edeba* (very large); *lagis* (large); *senibava* (medium-sized); and *salasala* (small). (Committee 1983:37)

⁸ The cutting of the *kalehe* branch is surrounded by magic. Before the tree is cut, it is shaken vigorously so that any leaves about to fall will drop before the cutting. It is believed that if a leaf falls during the cutting of the main sapling then someone will die, either from the clan of the in-law or from the clan hosting the *bobuton*. Similar care

brought the *kalehe* specifically for two reasons. He had come to 'help', but he had also come to acquire an *alan bwabwatana* (a 'big name') so that people might praise him for the wealth he was displaying.

In January 1988, Itemi, the recipient of Lelomo's *kalehe*, was preparing for *lobek*. As this feast usually requires the building of a new house, Itemi had first to pull down the old one.⁹ Since the rafters of the old house also contained the *kalehe* branch given to him by Lelomo, he decided to combine the two events and stage-manage a feasting occasion that would involve the entire village. The real *gabugolu* had, by this time (ten years later) been used for a different feast—but a substitute was found. Unfortunately, just as it was due to appear, the star performer escaped perhaps somewhat expediently to the bush. So there was a delay in the proceedings while it was found and brought back to the village to play its allotted part. After being struck a lethal blow by a hammer to its stomach, its hair was singed in the same fire as the *kalehe* branch was burnt. Women of the clan and from the neighbouring village area cooked for the accompanying feast, bringing their own pots of yams cooked with pig meat supplied by Itemi, and laying them out for community exchange—the process known as *mwahalahi*.

is taken by the recipient when he stores the *kalehe* in his house. In addition, the axe used is first bespelled; when the tree falls the men shout, beat drums and blow a conch shell.

⁹ See discussion under *limi lekaleka* in Chapter three.

Figure 5. Mutual obligations and responsibilities between social groupings, as played out in mortuary feasting

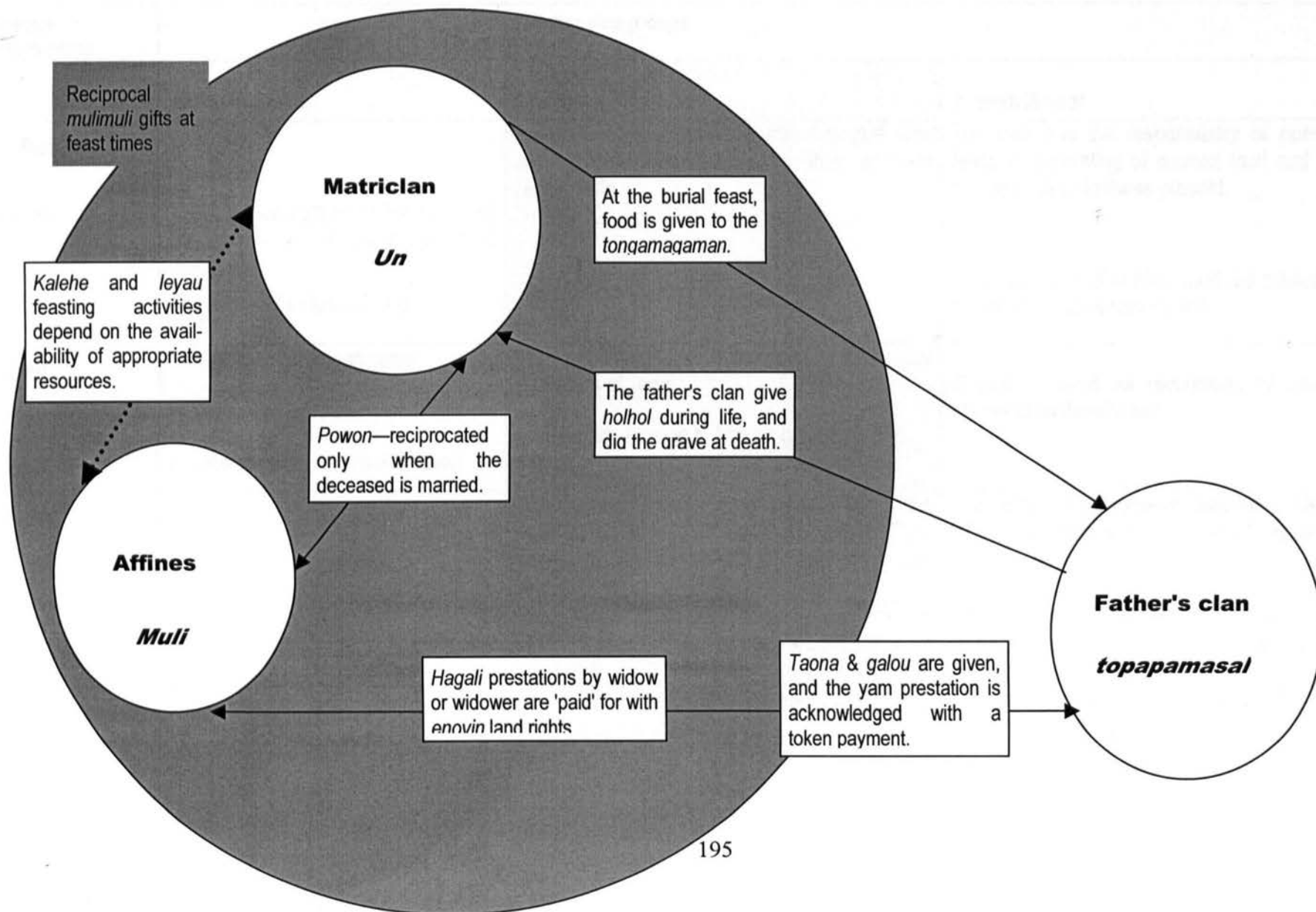


Table 8. The strands of Misiman society and their associated feasts

Feasting opportunities	Relationship groups		
	1. Patrilateral	2. affinal	3. matrilineal
<i>Bobuton series</i>	There are obligations of <i>holhol</i> during life, and duties of grave-digging in death. The recipient of <i>totoulil</i> food	Affines have reciprocal obligations to give pigs and garden food, based on their <i>tovelam</i> relationship.	The clan has the responsibility of <i>bobuton</i> feasting, consisting of cooked food and raw pig meat given to those present. Small amounts of cooked food are presented to the deceased's father's line
<i>Hagali</i>	The recipient of <i>hagali</i> yams A small pig given in return (<i>taona</i>).	The surviving spouse is the sponsor who gives 5 baskets of yams, or a female desiring to honour husband's line. The recipient of <i>taona</i>	<i>Enovin</i> is given as recognition of respect shown to husband's line.
<i>Powon</i>		The surviving spouse is the sponsor, or, in the case of an unmarried child, the father. They give a mixture of cooked and raw food, with <i>bugul</i> .	The recipient of <i>powon</i> prestation, which, where the deceased is married, must be reciprocated
<i>Leyau</i>		The sponsor is usually a <i>tovelam</i> who hangs a shell necklace, thus initiating an exchange of valuables.	The clan is the recipient of the necklace & must respond with the first exchange of valuables.
<i>Kalehe</i>		The sponsor is an in-law who gives 5 pigs, yams, and quantities of <i>bugul</i> .	The recipient of the <i>kalehe</i> prestation, and obligated to return it.

Discussion

In Table 8 and Figure 6, I have attempted to summarise the three strands or groups of Misiman society and the mortuary rituals which each group perform. As I have studied these, I have extricated certain themes and notions pertinent to the characteristics and principles underlying the kind of reciprocity that is commonly found on Misima. These themes serve to pull the threads of mortuary feasting together for me personally, giving more shape and texture to the custom.¹

- 1 All feasting rituals must be reciprocated, with the exception of *powon* given by the father of an unmarried child. This is to compensate the matrilineage for the loss of a member and is described as *tatahot* ('it goes straight', not entailing a future return).
- 2 Each prestation that is given requires a token acknowledgement from the recipient on the spot. This may take the form of a *taona* (small pig) and a small sum of money—as in the case of the *hagali* prestation—or portions of raw pig meat, accompanied by yams and *moni* known as *hinhup*, given to the *tovelam* who brings a pig to his father-in-law. This is part of the exchange and its equivalent must be given when the time comes for the payback.
- 3 The main exchanges occur between the matrilineage and the in-laws. Patrilateral relatives generally play more of a passive part, acting as the recipients in most prestations. They seem to be more a part of the background features of the performance, except in the *hagali* prestation where the father's line comes into prominence.

¹ These patterns would also bear further analysis; however space does not permit in this present thesis to continue these particular lines of investigation in this thesis.

4 An interesting pattern seems to be emerging. The gifts flowing from the matrilineage, whether concerned with feeding the general public or consisting of payment made for wailing, are composed primarily of cooked food—pig meat, vegetables and store-bought goods. These are perishables or consumables, and usually given in the form of 'dead' (in the case of the pig) and 'cooked'. This is the case with all food.

Affines, however, tend to be involved in the giving of (relatively) non-perishable items, bringing live pigs and uncooked yams which can be used either immediately for feasting requirements or kept for a later date. They initiate the display of *leyau* based on shell and other valuables which are non-perishable. So what can be made of this? I hesitate to set up a dichotomy of 'cooked' and 'dead' as against 'raw' and 'living' associated with the matrilineage, but the data does lend itself to some interesting speculation, as summarised below in Table 9.

Table 9. Some characteristics of Misiman exchanges

Matrilineal giving	Affinal giving
Cooked / dead / perishable	Raw / living / non-perishable
Cooked food and pig meat distributed for general feasting.	In-law contributions to feasting of pigs and foodstuff.
Slaughtered cows and pigs, given as payment for <i>vinakahin</i> .	<i>Hagali</i> and <i>powon</i> prestations of uncooked yams.
	<i>Kalehe</i> and <i>leyau</i> gifts of pigs and yams.

5 While not the predominant feature of any feast, cooked food and the associated implicit invitation to eat together and be convivial is a necessary component of all mortuary ritual occasions.

6 The prestation of *powon* is somewhat of an anomaly, a stand-alone, its purpose being one of compensation rather than as a memorial event. Thus the major component is one of relatively long-lasting goods—fabric, clothing, cutlery, plates, and cups. Pigs or pig meat are not generally part of *powon*.

From Table 8 it then appears possible to extrapolate certain general guiding principles for Misiman society based on the three strands of intertwined relationships:

For the matrikin, *mulolu* (giving) is expressed as a nurturing relationship: on the everyday level giving is undertaken without strict expectations of equivalent returns. The burden of mortuary ritual falls on members of the matriclan who must give and distribute generously the food and pigs killed for the feasting occasions.

Patrilateral affiliation is acknowledged by payments which compensate for the 'blood' contributed by both living and ancestral clan members, for the small services rendered during life (*holhol*) and at death, and for the ongoing care that the father provides to his offspring who are members of a different clan.

For affinal relationships, the rule is unequivocally that of equivalent exchanges, with jostling for prestige and status evident at both the individual level in a marriage relationship and extending into the clans allied through that marriage.

Yet however tempting it is to try to determine stringent rules, there are exceptions. *Powon* is strictly a compensation payment that goes to the matriclan of the deceased, and so fits into the category of affinal relationships. Then there are the complexities caused by a *hagali* given by women in order to secure land rights for

themselves and their children. Yet there is one definite principle, as I have shown, which underpins all rules that we might try to construct: that is the overarching principle of reciprocity at all levels and in all circumstances.

Chapter 5 Beliefs and Attitudes surrounding Death

The fact that a ritual is structured and has boundaries makes it manageable for many people to enter and participate. It also becomes a sort of survival memory when things become tough. I... I have realised that virtually every survival and every living of the fuller life has to do with being open to moving ourselves into wider perspective, seeing ourselves in a bigger frame. It is as we see ourselves as part of something bigger, that the vision for both our living and surviving is enhanced. New resources are perceived for survival, not just in added personal support from others but in the recognition that we are part of a great human story, even as we struggle in our own moment and place. (McRae-McMahon 1998:249)

Spirits of the dead

My focus in this chapter centres on the beliefs that inform the process of death and mortuary rituals, and on the attitudes which pertain to and shed light on these practices.¹ Traditionally, death occurred as a result of warfare or sorcery; for this reason, some of the practices and beliefs of earlier times continue to underpin many of the customs of today. In the early days, when one clan or village warred against another culminating in a death, a payment was made by the winning side to both appease the losers and as a peace gesture designed to prevent hostilities developing into a pattern of constant feuding. It was also a way of showing respect for the bereaved family. This custom has been perpetuated in the form of *powon*, where a prestation of raw and cooked food along with *bugul* or *giyam* is made by the surviving spouse's family to the deceased's clan. In-laws are concerned to circumvent any suspicion or accusations of foul play attributable to sorcery arising, so it is important that the *powon* presentation be given as soon as possible after the death.

¹ In the course of this chapter I am narrowing my focus as suggested above; I am not attempting to give an exhaustive explanation of Misima spirituality, whether it be traditional beliefs and the cosmologies that undergird them, or whether it encompass the Christian beliefs and practices as carried out today.

The *bobuton* series is aimed at honouring the dead person and progressively moving him or her out of the memory (and consideration) of the living. Obligations towards the *sevasevan* (spirits of the dead) are met through feasting until, on the occasion of the feast of *lobek* when the gravestone is erected over the bodily remains; the spirit is finally put to rest and committed to Tuma, the place of the dead. At the same time, mourning restrictions and taboos are completed and the survivors are released to resume their everyday lives.

Apart from the mortuary rituals per se, there is another occasion of feasting and celebration which serves to remind the living of all they owe to their ancestors *in extenso*. This is the annual event when the marine coral worms, known variously as *koyatut*, *ou*, or *lamaha*, rise to the surface of the sea, usually on the first night after the full moon in November. In the past, this has been a traditional time of remembering all the ancestors, as the sea worms are believed to signify the presence of the spirits of the dead who come to share in feasting with the living. These worms are a gift from the ancestors in the form of a food source; in return, the ancestral spirits symbolically receive gifts from their living relatives of pigs, *mwaha*, and shell valuables (Namunu 1983:31). This is accompanied by *helagi yaoyao* which consists of a meal laid out on a *helagi* (sewn pandanus mat). The spirits of the dead feed on the essence of the food, while the living wade out into the sea with nets and lanterns, catching the teeming swarms of thin, grey worms which are then cooked and eaten as a delicacy.

Sickness and death

While warfare in its traditional form has ceased, the belief that many deaths and particular types of sickness are caused by sorcery is still very strong

amongst Misimans. Unusual swellings in the body are associated with the working of evil magic: a swollen and unnaturally distended stomach in a corpse is evidence of sorcery, while a swollen knee in a living person may indicate that he or she has stolen and eaten tabooed and be-spelled betelnut.

When a person is very ill, the village people may be called to a *silawa* (watch or vigil) where they sing hymns and discuss the illness and its possible causes. They gather in or around the house where the sick person lies dying, and, for their efforts, are given tea and food during the night-long vigil. In-laws in particular are careful to attend this event, just as they are among the first to disclaim knowledge of any sorcery. People believe that as they talk about the illness and the person who is sick, the actual sorcerer will relent and allow the spell to be lifted or the results to be ameliorated. The presence of people also prevents an *olal* (witch) or *nomnom* (sorcerer) from invading the body of the person made vulnerable by sickness in order to practise further evil.²

If the person recovers, the relatives may kill a pig and give it to the watchers as an expression of thanks. If the person dies, however, sorcery is often blamed. *Tokukula* (magic men) can 'do' magic by talking to food as it is served, or to betelnut as it is distributed amongst friends. Sorcerers are able to manipulate and influence a person's well-being by using fragments of food, bits of hair or spit. *Olal* may attack a person's *kakanun* (shadow or spirit) and are said to 'eat' or consume their essence, by removing parts of internal organs and taking these elements to Tamudulele, the consort of the witches (Namunu 1983:28).

However *tokukula* can heal as well as inflict harm, as they have access to the impersonal and neutral power source known as *mesinana*. When his child was

sick, Pelen bought store goods and gave them to a woman known for her knowledge of magic spells; as a result, the child's health improved.

The possibility of sorcery, and speculation about the perpetrator suspected of having been involved in a particular death is usually quite freely talked about, though no names are mentioned in public. However, on one occasion when there had been several deaths in relatively quick succession in one family, not only was it talked about but steps were taken to 'divine' the identity of the sorcerer. The elderly grandmother of the most recently deceased child took a stick and was led by it to a woman who had previously been sent away from Siagara village for practising witchcraft and was now being accused again. Once she was denounced publicly, however, no further punishment was meted out.

On another occasion an older woman was believed to have been fighting with evil spirits. Over a period of two days she refused to eat, clenched her lips tight, and assumed a rigid position. Then, in the evening, people in nearby houses heard crashing noises: on running over to the house they found her dead, curled in a foetal position. Her 'sickness' was clearly unusual for she had not wasted away from disease. However, her eyes were said to be bulging out of their sockets as if she had been terrified to death. Although the deceased was a member of a prominent family and her funeral drew many mourners, it seems that no steps were taken publicly to avenge her death or even to search for the 'culprit'.

Witchcraft is inherited through the mother. An *o/a* will go down to the sea before the birth of her baby, take the baby out of her womb, instruct it in certain

²Normally witches are female and sorcerers are male, though their mode of operation is similar.

magical rites and then place it back inside. *Ola* have the ability to harness *mesinana*,³ a power connected with spirit beings. According to Battaglia, the people of Sabarl perceive witches to be the 'swallowed ones' or the 'twice born' (1990:64), a similar concept to the way Misimans view the development of witches. Misimans state that *ola* have the ability to change shape; starting with a normal human form their ears and eyes grow larger, string-like flesh hangs from their nostrils, and their skin becomes green. After their metamorphosis takes place, they fly off to the mythical island of Walaya⁴ where they meet their consort, Tamudulele, the king of the witches, who has complete sway over this region. Their purpose in meeting is to both feast on their victims and decide upon who is next in line to be consumed. It is believed that death is caused by *ola* eating the insides of a person's body. Women in particular are discouraged from going to the garden or the bush on their own; *ola* can lie in wait for them, often betraying their presence by a peculiar whistling sound or the throwing of stones.

Kaseni recalled former times:

In earlier times after *bobutons* took place, there were people who would do sorcery—perhaps it was some of the *tokewa* ('those who carried the pigs')—and a death would result. Everyone used to make spells to protect their bodies, and they didn't just walk around and 'hang out'. Nowadays people don't worry about this, it is 'the time of light' and the church is strong; people have been delivered from this. But before, people didn't gather in groups, otherwise the *ola* would eat them. At *bobutons* the *ola* also held meetings to plan who they would eat next.⁵

Even when a person is dead, the *ola* constitute a danger. Lamps are lit and people from the community gather to sing hymns and talk. They *silawa* (keep vigil) throughout the night, particularly if the body has not yet been buried. If a rat or cat is seen, it is quickly chased away, as this may be an *ola* in disguise, come

³ *Mesinana* is understood by Namunu to have the same meaning as *mana* does in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and throughout Polynesia. (1983)

⁴ This place is invisible and believed to be located between Misima and Motolina Islands (Namunu 1983:11). See Map 1.

to eat the body. Babies and young children who have died are particularly vulnerable. In one case, a baby who was stillborn was buried near the house of its grandparents, rather than in the graveyard. This allowed the relatives to watch over the grave, particularly in the period leading up to the second feast of *highig*. The *olal* or *topihigelgel* (an enemy—'one who hates') must be prevented from coming to eat the body, and from obtaining some of the blood with the purpose of using it to kill the mother.

The keeping of *silawa* also provides an opportunity for the villagers to gather together—to share in their grief and to support the relatives of the deceased. People come to sit with the bereaved, to share their sorrow, to help them and to offer comfort bolstered by solidarity and oneness. In this way they provide strength and encouragement, both numerically and spiritually.

Taking part in the *silawa*, while it is a gesture of encouragement and support showing respect for the bereaved, is also classified as 'work' by Misimans; the time for compensation or payment for the *silawa* comes at *highig*. The sponsors of the feast will ensure that the watchers are first given their share of pig meat and food, after which all of the remaining food is distributed among the villagers.

Spirits on the move

The spirit of a living person is known as the *yayaluwa*, which, according to Namunu, is 'the seat of knowledge and understanding, the thinking and reasoning part of a person' (Namunu 1983:4).⁵ The spirit can assume the *kamakama*

⁵ Personal communication, Siagara, 1995.

⁶ The other parts of a person, according to Namunu, are *tuwan* (the body), *kakanun* (shadow), *yana* (breath) and *ati* (heart).

(guise) of an animal or even of another person and is capable of leaving the body at will. A person's *yayaluwa* comes and goes through the big toe. It is believed that if one holds onto the toe after the spirit has left, the latter will not be able to return to the body with the result that the person will die. After death—and on arrival in the afterworld of Tuma—*yayaluwa* are transformed into *sevasevan*, spirits of the dead.

The spirits of witches leave their bodies at night to be transformed in appearance and fly to their meeting place. Spirits of witches and sorcerers tend to remain around the village after the physical bodies' demise. If there is a suspicion that a dead woman may have been a witch, lamps are hung outside the houses until the *highig* is done. This is believed to keep the spirit away, preventing it from entering houses and harming the inhabitants.

The spirit, however, should not be made to feel trapped; it must be encouraged to leave the immediate surroundings. In the case of an elderly woman who died away from her village, as the coffin was lowered into the ground there came the cry '*U yon, u yon!*' ('pull out the coffin nails'). This was duly done after which the coffin was covered with dirt. Who knows what harm the woman might have done if, after her death, she roamed around a village not her own.

The spirit of an *ola*—known as a *gagayumwa* (ghost)—does not go to Tuma. Instead it finds a hole in a cave and lingers on to bother the living. According to Namunu, this spirit becomes an *asaasa* (spirit-being) that grows long teeth and helps the *ola* in their practices by eating the hearts and livers of live human beings (Namunu 1983:22).

Spirits can inhabit and control pigs. They will cause the pigs to eat the gardens, or perhaps take off into the bush and become wild. The sign of this

happening is when pigs eat the garden food but there are no footprints to show where and how they gained access the garden. The spirit of a man may inhabit a pig if his *gan* (sister's son) denied the man's children use of the plantations of betelnut or coconut that he had planted while he was alive. *Uliuli* is the specific term used to describe the possession of pigs by spirits of the dead.

It is believed that the secret power and knowledge of a *tokukula* (lit. 'medicine man') can be transferred to a child or to a sister's son. The spells are done secretly when the child is small and when he is grown, he is able to work magic and duly surprise people. The child itself may not know its own capabilities until it reaches adulthood and begins doing magic.

In reference to the whole range of magical power, Kaseni, a strong Christian believer, commented:

When I was young I scorned these ideas, but now I am old I understand—it is another side to our lives. If it was just something insignificant we would get rid of it, but it is our way, our custom.⁷

Spirits of departed relatives are also able to assist the living. A person might visit his father's grave site to ask for help because his *nubain* (cross-cousin) is not permitting him to use his father's things. By speaking to his father's *sevasevan*, he will enlist the aid of that spirit's *mesinana* so that pigs can magically enter and eat his cousin's garden. When he realises this is happening, the *nubain* will visit the grave site in question and *ba winwin* (talk to the spirit), telling him that he has become reconciled with the deceased's son again and asking him to stop sending the pigs into the garden. Then the spirit will stop.

⁷ Personal communication, Siagara village, 1995.

To facilitate communication between a living relative and a spirit, during the *totoulli* feast on the day of the burial, a woman who knows the magic speaks words over a coconut, then *tanan hi tagapwela*—cracks it open near the ear of the deceased. This not only opens the door to the world of the after-life for the spirit, but it also opens the spirit's ear, so that it becomes attuned to the voice of his-her living relatives—and will be quick to come to their aid in the future.

The dead person's relatives cook an *ulun* of unpeeled food—*anaan ta liliga popokume*. The yams are cooked in their skins, piled high in a cone-like shape and wrapped in taro or banana leaves which are tied in place over the yams. The pot of food cooked specially in honour of the dead is placed alongside the cracked coconut and a spoon or cup belonging to the dead person. As the spirit leaves, it takes the essence of the food with it to eat on the journey to Tuma; it is accompanied by the *kakanun* (shadow, essence) of the pig killed for the feast, who is the spirit's *totoulli* (follower). They follow the road that can be accessed near Balmatana at a place called Panavesuna.⁸ This marks the *abalaulau* (descent) into the spirit world, where imprints made by the dead people's feet can be seen in a rock at the site.

The pot of food cooked in honour of the dead is later given to the *tongamagaman* as a promise that he will be the future recipient of the *hagali* presentation.

It is possible to block the departure of a person's spirit. In 1995, as Tonowak's life ebbed away, Goila took ginger, chewed it and spat it out in order to try to block the road. Tonowak's spirit was already on the way, but his life essence could return. When this tactic is successful, often the person dies (again) shortly

afterwards, but, on occasion, a *tokukula* may use the respite to cure the person's sickness. However, if *gamwanina hi gotomwa* (the inside of the throat has been cut [invisibly by a witch]), no cure can be effected.

The spirit is sometimes able to embrace the living in an affectionate way, to show its love by touching an individual all over their body. This manipulation by the spirit has the effect of making the living feel 'off colour' but not really sick. If persons are *alasevasevan* (possessed by a spirit) in this way, they may shout out and throw themselves around, foaming at the mouth. This has been known to happen especially at the time of a mortuary feast for the dead person.

The remedy is for someone to speak magic words over a *muka* ('mustard') that is normally chewed with betelnut and lime. It is masticated for a short while and then spat onto the affected person; as a result, the spirit departs from the physical body of its victim. But it may continue to hover around, watching with approval as the mortuary feasts are performed in its honour. In earlier times, the presence of the deceased in visible form was facilitated by the skull being exhumed and placed in the rafters of the house.⁹ From this vantage point the spirit was able to view all that took place.

Spirits communicating

Namunu suggests that one definition of the term 'cargo cult' is 'a quest for the acquisition and control of the supernatural' (Namunu 1983:10). *Sevasevan* are associated with the manifestation of cargo cult on Misima and with the

⁸ These are real locations near the village of Hinaota on Misima Island.

⁹ See the custom of *ababvihi* described in Chapter three.

summoning of spirits aided by a spirit medium, known as *losevasevan*—'doing' the spirits.¹⁰

Hess (1980) relates how Buliga, the founder of the cargo cult on Misima, came into prominence or rather notoriety when in 1942 he and his group murdered government officials on the island of Motorina. Prior to that, under the inspiration of a dream, he had encouraged people in Siagara village to keep the graves properly cleaned as a way of showing respect to the ancestors, with the possibility that such respect properly carried out would lead to material benefits. These expectations were based firmly on existing practices of *ba winwin*, enlisting the spirits' aid in everyday matters to do with the living. Buliga declared that a boat would come bringing the European goods which were eagerly desired and anticipated. When this did not eventuate, Buliga decided that the removal of foreigners would create the ideal conditions needed for European wealth to appear. During this 'turn-over' time, the Misiman would also become white and gain the advantages that they perceived the whites to enjoy. In other words, he believed that a white skin would give access to wealth and power (Hess 1982:51). Furthermore, Tuma, a paradisaical place of abundance, was identified with Australia, in the way that a white skin was identified with ancestral spirits.

Cargo cult practices have continued since that time. A large house has been built in the hills south of Siagara village; many adherents from all over Misima come and go at certain times. People buy a 'share' in the 'futures market', an investment that they hope will multiply when the European goods arrive and are distributed amongst the legitimate share-holders. There is also the spiritualist element, the opportunity to speak with ancestral spirits, which Macintyre

¹⁰ Macintyre (1987), in her conference paper entitled 'Christianity, Cargo Cultism and the Concept of

considers to be primary (1983:21). Buliga's sister's eldest son, Veli, has established seances where, for a small sum of money, people are able to speak with the spirits and obtain advice and promises of help—and even be given small items of clothing.¹¹ In this way, as well as through *bobuton*, the dead continue to be recognised as a vital and powerful force in Misiman life.

Macintyre, in her insightful discussion of Misiman spirituality, admits to being mystified by the fact that, on an island where 'Methodism is not a veneer, it is a pervasive and institutionalised belief system', a long-running cargo cult movement persists into the present (1987:4). She estimates that in 1985 about a third of the population were involved in some form of cargo cult practices. I can attest to those activities in earlier years, although currently, because Misima people are enjoying the benefits of 'white society' through access to employment in the gold mine, there is little active interest to be seen. But the way of thinking remains and the worldview, based on aspects of magic and possession of supernatural power which frame that thinking, still persists.

It is interesting to speculate on what the future holds. The gold mine at Misima has impacted upon the life of the people both directly and indirectly. Mining policy has led to the establishment of water supplies, teachers' houses and community halls in the villages, giving a semblance of prosperity. There is a relative abundance of money with which to buy the material possessions associated with 'whiteskins'; this money is provided through the *wantok*¹² system by the three hundred or so Misimans who have been employed in the gold mine.

the Spirit in Misiman Cosmology', refers to this movement as *Losevasevan*.

¹¹ Whiting devotes a chapter of her thesis (1976:247 ff) to the seances orchestrated by a medium in Liyak village.

Economic needs are being met and, as a result, the cargo cult movement is experiencing a lull. But when the mining comes to an end and its infrastructure is dismantled, what then? A generation of Misimans who are used to riding everywhere on trucks and buying junk food in the stores will suddenly find themselves without the European goods they have grown accustomed to. Fuelled by disappointment and disillusionment, a serious resurgence of cargo cult practice could result. It is not without the bounds of possibility that there could be a return to Buliga's violence against foreigners; there could be an outburst of suppressed anger directed at the whiteskins for once again depriving Misimans of the secret of the cargo. By ridding themselves of whiteskins, the road would be open for Misimans themselves to become white and thus be permanently entitled to enjoy the advantages and possessions that have hitherto accrued to the whites.

I have painted (somewhat impressionistically) the background of Misiman cosmology wherein spirits, witches and sorcerers constitute the important figures. I will now return to sketching out the foreground as it concerns the main drama of mortuary rituals and the ways in which Misiman belief in the spirits of the dead in particular guide their actions and behaviour on the occasion of death.

Taboos—living under restrictions

As Turner has pointed out—building on Van Gennep's view of liminality as the 'gap between ordered worlds (where) almost anything may happen'—the

¹² This is the Tok Pisin word for 'one language or people' (literally, one+talk). In other words, it refers to those who are closely related by kin. As used within a group of such speakers, it designates a relationship of kinship and friendship.

time between a death event and the completion of the process entailed in a death is fraught with danger and vulnerability for those who find themselves in this gap (1974:14). It is necessary to hedge such people about with a 'proliferation of taboos' both for their sakes and, as Turner maintains, for the sake of the society as a whole; the taboos need 'to constrain those on whom the normative structure loses its grip' (1974:14).¹³ *Kokowan* is the generic name for the various taboos and restrictions imposed, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, on specific relatives of the dead and in-laws. During the *bobuton* series, any in-law or child or grandchild of a dead person is forbidden to eat the pig meat or other food dedicated to the deceased's memory. They usually refrain from doing so out of fear of physical reprisal: the consequences of eating something which is taboo is traditionally thought to be *tui* (deafness) or *kasiyebwa* (illnesses of various kinds).

Since Misimans greatly dislike feeling that one of their number might be missing out in some way, or might not be participating in the celebration and sense of well-being that comprises a social occasion, *kokowan* presents a distinct social problem. The solution is for several people from different clans to host a feast on the same day.¹⁴ Meat can then be set aside from each of the platforms so that everyone can share in the feasting without fear of breaking a taboo.

Kokowan is usually in operation until the entire mourning period is over and the feasting finished, and applies to both the matrilineal kin and the *muli* (in-law group). Some taboos are voluntary, a self-conscious way of showing respect for

¹³ These are the people who are 'beyond the law' because of their social marginality between the living and the dead.

¹⁴ As Whiting affirms also, prohibitions of this nature actually cause unrelated people to be involved in feast-giving, and thus increase the number of people present and active at any particular feast. '...they (memorial feasts) create bonds between unrelated people and strengthen the feeling of being involved in a total system of giving and receiving.' (Whiting 1976:133)

the dead (and by extension gaining prestige for oneself); other taboos must be strictly adhered to at all times.

The more stringent restrictions are associated with the setting of boundaries for the spouse of a dead person. She¹⁵ is in the liminal period, in transition to a more 'normal' and regulated life. Whilst travelling through this territory, she needs bodily reminders of her state, the fact that she is not her own person but comes under the jurisdiction of her husband's maternal kin.¹⁶ *Bobu kokowan* is a taboo where the widow (or widower) abstains from eating pork until she finds an appropriate *hok*, a huge, fat pig with tusks. Traditionally this taboo remained in force until the completion of the final feast in the *bobuton* cycle by the maternal relatives. However adherence to this custom is tending to break down as there is a general desire on the part of all concerned to end the mourning period quickly. In the past, when a feast was given for the maternal relatives, a *hok* was killed and a *giyam* (axeblade) was presented to the son by the deceased's father sister's child as a prestation from the patrilineal line.

A code of dress restrictions is also customary for the spouse; women intending to make a *hagali* for a dead in-law wore a *tuibwaga* (special grass skirt) to signify their intention. This skirt was made of coconut leaves like the traditional ones worn for everyday wear, but one section was of string only. Alternatively, a *boelu* (an especially long skirt) may be worn. Nowadays, dark clothing is usually assumed by the widow in preference to a grass skirt. When the *hagali* prestation is complete, then the old skirt is burnt and the widow dressed in new clothes.

¹⁵ I am continuing the convention of using the female pronoun for the surviving spouse.

¹⁶ See my more detailed analysis and description of widows in the section on *Powon*.

The kinswomen of the deceased including the deceased's daughters, his sisters and their daughters, have in the past also been hedged about with taboos, though not as restrictively. They wore a different kind of mourning skirt known as *giba levaleva*.

Relatives close to the deceased, especially in-laws, may voluntarily impose *kokowan* on themselves, ostensibly to show the depth of their sorrow and respect for the dead person. But there are other, deeper meanings to voluntarily taking on a taboo. It serves to divert possible accusations of sorcery. This is especially important if the *tokokowan* gave food to a close relative or in-law just before they died—then the food in question will be the one which is subject to taboo. By voluntarily taking on a taboo, other people help to shoulder the load of grief; they too suffer, just as the matriline have suffered from the loss of one of their kin. There is a kinship and a oneness implicit in the relationship, now made explicit in action and behaviour.

Through the public display of feasting, which is the natural accompaniment and completion of a voluntary taboo, the person who has voluntarily taken up a restriction of some kind earns fame and prestige. In addition, because the *tokokowan* has done 'work' on behalf of the deceased of another clan—and all work, whether voluntary or not must be remunerated—they may be given money or a shell valuable for their part in recalling to living memory the name and demeanour of the deceased.

There are two¹⁷ main physical areas affected by the imposition of taboos, namely food and bodily appearance. The body continues to be the site for inscribing and constructing meaning. Long hair and dark-coloured clothes

constitute an appearance of grief, as well as providing a physical reminder of death itself. In its turn, the changed bodily appearance has the effect of reconstituting memory and grief in the individual who has taken upon themselves the load of the *nak* ('badness'). Food taboos, which might include refraining from eating certain 'luxury' items like tinned meat, or drinking coffee, entail a definite sacrifice, especially in Misiman society where food is the epitome of sociality.

In 1980, Teyula ended his period of *kaunkabu*—the taboo against cutting his hair—by holding a small feast in honour of his wife's mother. He also gave plates, forks, spoons, cups, baskets and sleeping mats to the deceased's father's line (in essence, a *hagall*). His son, who represented the matrilineage, then cut Teyula's hair and trimmed his beard to signify both the end of the taboo period and the acceptance of the sacrifice Teyula had made in honour of their clan dead.

Ine's sacrifice was quite major because for ten years he eschewed the consumption of yams in honour of his dead father as he continued to wait for his father's kin to do *lobek*. Although he deprived himself of the staple food of Misiman society (and to do so is to be constantly 'hungry' (Kahn 1980) 'there is method in his madness'. He has drawn attention to himself by undergoing this self-inflicted suffering and, in the process, has spotlighted in a negative way the tardiness of his father's matrilineage, bringing shame and dishonour upon them by implication. His very presence and people's knowledge of what he is doing to remember his father is a constant source of embarrassment and repudiation to the matriclan. Ine's sacrifice provides a fine example of how social relations are embodied and manipulated on Misima.

¹⁷ A third, that of name taboo, will be discussed below.

When the taboo period comes to an end (usually when *lobek* is imminent) a feast is held—and the *tokokowan* calls upon the resources of his clan. They in turn provide pigs and food, which are prepared for the kin of the dead person in whose honour *kokowan* has been performed. The *yavalina* ('spouse's opposite gender sibling') usually participates in the ceremony. A small portion of the tabooed food is placed on a spoon and the act of feeding it to the *tokokowan* is mimed. Prior to passing the food in front of the *tokokowan's* mouth, magic is performed over the food. Then this particular portion of food is thrown away and the feasting can begin.¹⁸ The *tokokowan* can now eat in earnest the food he has proscribed for himself for so long. The act of feeding symbolises nurture, acceptance and the closeness of relationships and oneness that is the basis of sociality on Misima.

Forgetting the names

Another form of taboo is one associated with words. The strongest taboos on names of relatives are found amongst in-laws, with the most important being that of the father-in-law. In the past, his name was never spoken by the *tovelam*, this respect-avoidance behaviour being embodied also in the prohibition against the *tovelam* eating in his father-in-law's presence.

A man will refer to his spouse in an anonymous way, usually by the generic term *natuwau* (my children or family) which is understood in some contexts to signify only the wife. Those a bit more daring will overtly use the term *lagou* (my spouse). A woman, in her turn, will respectfully call her husband *tamala* (our father). The names of a person's father and mother, grandparents and mother's

¹⁸ A similar action is performed by the *tongamagaman* for the sponsor of a *hagali* feast, signifying a release from all mourning restrictions associated with a deceased. See Chapter four.

brother are often not mentioned as well. People prefer to follow the usual Melanesian practice of teknonymy, referring to others by their kin term or an appropriate title such as 'Stephen's mother' or 'our respected elder' or 'the teacher'.

In earlier times, *babala* or *tonowak* were older men whose degree of wealth was calculated by the number of pigs fed each night in the *bakubaku* (yard). Known for their generosity and hospitality, their names were often tabooed out of respect. Nowadays real *tonowakau* and especially *babalau* ('masters') no longer exist.¹⁹

So in practice a man will not mention the names of in-laws belonging to an ascending generation. These include those of his wife's father or mother (*yawana*), her older brothers and sisters (who are also *yawana* because they are elder) or their spouses, her mother's brother's or her father's sister's children's who are *nubainau* (cross-cousins). Each of these relatives is of special significance to the wife and must be shown due respect. Similarly, in the descending generation, a man's own children's spouses' names are tabooed.

There is, however, no explicit penalty for pronouncing these forbidden names in public, other than one of social disapproval. People might indulge in gossip about the offender, thus shaming her. There is however always the possibility of a maligned in-law working sorcery in an angry response to the disrespect shown.

¹⁹ A qualification for being a real *tonowak* or *babala* was to practise polygamy. This proved advantageous when conducting mortuary feasts, as numerous wives meant numerous marriage alliances, and thus potentially a number of groups to call upon for help. However, currently only one or two men on Misima take more than one wife.

These taboos may even extend to everyday words that sound similar to the name. If a wife's relative's name sounds like the name of an island, then the husband may refer to this island in a round-about way, stop to check that the listener has understood, and then continue with the narrative.

Most important however is the taboo which applies to the names of the dead. Not only does the social sanction of gossip come into force in this case, but there are also actual penalties. The dead person's clan members are permitted to mention the name, as they are closely linked with their living dead in the emotional closeness of the matrilineage; but often they too conform to the general taboo out of respect for the departed. It is believed that a person's name carries some of the essence of that person, therefore mentioning the name implies a degree of intimacy of relationship wherein the social barriers of appropriate behaviour based on kin relations are not so marked. Publicly pronouncing the name of an in-law or of a dead person would imply disrespect.

Thus, for expediency's sake, Misimans often have several names. One of these is their 'real' name and this is the name that, when they die, is strictly taboo to everyone in the area. Visitors to the village will know about the taboo and refrain from using the word, even though it may be a common word in everyday use elsewhere. In Hinaoata village, for example, the most commonly used word for fire (*hiwa*) is prohibited. In another village the term *tomati* meaning 'dead person' carries a sound similar to the name of one of their respected dead (Mati), and so a euphemism has replaced it—*toyaoma*, 'the lost one'.²⁰

²⁰ It is interesting to find that this term for a dead person has become widespread now, not just restricted in use to the one village.

When common names like 'fire' are subject to taboo, a new name might be invented or more frequently the name used by another language group or in a neighbouring village will be borrowed. So along with the increasing mobility that missionisation has brought over the last eighty years and with the cessation of fighting, each villager has learned the appropriate occasion to use taboo substitutes. Currently there are at least five words for 'fire'. In many instances, two different words can be used to refer to any one object, often randomly by the same people in the same conversation to indicate the same object.

This practice, of course, extends to languages other than Misiman. I was told of a man who refused to sing the Dobu word sinebwana (big) when it appears in a Dobu hymn because the name of a dead relative was composed of a similar pattern of sounds.

To pronounce a dead person's name is to show not only a lack of honour and respect for that person, but also for his relatives, both living and dead. Vengeance, in the form of injury or damage of some kind, may be inflicted upon the offending person by a *sevasevan* who hears his name 'taken in vain.' On the other hand, if a person who adheres rigidly to custom is close by and overhears the tabooed word being casually spoken, he will insist that a penalty in the form of money, food, *leyau*, or pigs be paid to the matrilineal relatives of the deceased.

It is not uncommon for children to be given their name by sisters, brothers, or friends (perhaps midwives who happened to be present at the birth)—this is known as *valihin* (namesake). When the older person dies, her namesake in the younger generation may be addressed by one of the deceased's less common names. Ancestral names can be perpetuated in this way: while in theory, because of name taboo primarily, the names of people from three or four

previous generations back tend to be forgotten, in practice the custom of naming people after their forebears has impacted on this taboo to weaken it. Masi called his mother's sister's grandson his *valihiri*, this man, in turn, passed on the name to his mother's sister's grandson. The original bearer of the name is now dead. The name of the second in line can only be mentioned by his own clan members; other people call him by his nickname Enatu. The third to bear both names is sometimes referred to as Masi, though usually only by members of his clan.

Names, and those who bore them, are remembered through this custom of namesakes; but generally speaking, names of dead people tend to drop out of use by the third or fourth generation. Mortuary feasting practices also encourage the erasure of individuals from the collective memory, with the final feast of *lobek* emphasising the completion of all obligations to the dead.

There are however two rare occasions on which the name of a dead ancestor might be spoken, the first being when a solemn oath is taken (usually in public), and the second when a *tosawasawa* ('magic man') calls on the name of the spirit in order to ask it to leave.²¹

Name taboos are part of the general respect and reverence afforded the dead by the Misiman; a fear of penalties, and especially of reprisals in the form of sorcery worked by offended matriclan members, serves to validate and enforce this code. Respect for *gamagal* (people) whether living or dead is one of the motivating forces of Misiman sociality.

²¹ The act of the spirit who molests a living descendant is called *alasevasevan*. See above.