THE LEGACY OF MORO THE SNAKE-MAN IN BARIAI

Naomi M. McPherson
Okanagan University College

IN 1981, when I first arrived to work with the Kabana-speaking people in the Bariai district of West New Britain, Mr. Pore Siko adopted me into his extended family and bestowed upon me my Kabana name and status as a firstborn. It was Pore who told me that to understand the Kabana and who they were, I must learn about firstborn ceremonies. On my second trip to Bariai, Pore added a further layer of complexity when he told me that to *really* know about the ceremonies, I must know the Story of Moro, the snake-man. Clearly, the Story of Moro was much more than an interesting and entertaining example of oral literature (although it is decidedly that). During 1982-1983 (and subsequently in 1985), Pore spent many hours with me recounting Moro's story, primarily in Tok Pisin, and discussing its content. Moro is not construed as either a deity or a spirit; he is decidedly human, born of human parents in a precise geographic location and genealogically related to contemporary people (Pore himself claimed Moro as an ancestor). Moro is also endowed with the rather special powers usually associated with the culture hero as superhuman being, and it is these nonhuman attributes that permit access to forces that lie at the periphery of the human sphere. The narrative tells how, through his various exploits, Moro the snake-man originated pig exchanges and ceremonies in honor of the firstborn child and the dead, ceremonies that continue to define the very essence of Kabananess and encompass complexities of behaviors in which all Kabana engage.[1]

The Story of Moro is both legend and myth.[2] I soon came to realize that there is no special ritual occasion for telling Moro's story; those who wish to

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hear it seek out someone willing to tell it. Although it is rarely recounted in its entirety, even school children seemed to know parts and snippets of the story, so that aspects of plot and events quite unself-consciously entered into their conversations with me as they taught me about themselves and their culture. Thus, while searching out and discussing medicinal plants in the bush with a woman and her husband, I was told how a cordyline plant we saw had acquired its bright red color from Moro, who spat betel juice on it. The fresh-water spring bubbling up through the coral reef and the smooth-sided stone obelisk that jutted out of the reef several meters offshore were also attributed to Moro. Similarly, the stones on the path to a neighboring village were the remains of Moro's father's pig, Kamaia.

In addition to Pore's version of the Story of Moro, I was offered four other variants. These poorly told, truncated stories showed the influence of schooling and one hundred years of mission contact and Christian mythology. Like the Kilibob-Manup myths discussed by Lawrence (1964) and Pomponio and McSwain (this volume), the Story of Moro could be applied to cargo cult ideology, but attempts to do so were dismissed by senior Kabana as the products of overzealous individuals who had not learned the story correctly. The Kabana have never been involved in any cargo cult activities, although they are well aware of such activities on mainland Papua New Guinea and among the Kaliai (Counts, this volume) and the Anêm (Thurston, this volume). Because of Pore's reputation as a man of knowledge and an accomplished storyteller, his version of the Story of Moro is presented here as the most authoritative and complete version of this epic saga.

My analysis of the Story of Moro as presented here owes much to Lawrence's concept of a "total conceived cosmic order," which he defined as "consisting of two networks of relationships . . . of which man sees himself as the focal point: the objective and observable relationships between human beings or the *actual sociopolitical structure;* and the subjective and putative relationships between men, gods, ghosts and other spirit-beings or religion" (1984:31, emphasis in original). The Story of Moro combines these "two networks of relationships" to become a multivocal symbol of Kabana religiosity, By linking the mythical and the genealogical, networks of relationships are forged between superhuman and human, and between past events and present experience. The narrative and the character Moro fit into Lawrence's concept of cosmic time, which includes a "period of remembered events" and a "period of antiquity," the first associated with genealogical time, the latter with the "emergence of the physical environment, totemic ancestors, human beings and their culture" (1965:219). Blurring the boundary between genealogical time and the age of antiquity imbues the

narrative with an aura of veracity, as true events that really occurred, and a sense of immediacy whereby events of the past are linked to the present and thereby impinge on the future. Narrative implies events/action over time, a progression from a beginning, through a middle, to an end. The continuity of the text reflects a temporal flow of events, and it is the continuity of the traditions and experiences in the narrative that makes the story interesting to the listeners. As a firstborn, Moro is symbolic of genealogical time; as a culture hero, Moro is symbolic of the age of antiquity. Myth and history combine in Kabana ceremonial to dramatize and celebrate the human condition as the Kabana experience it.

For this version, I have translated the Story of Moro from Tok Pisin and Kabana into standard English narrative prose. In this instance, translation also includes rendering a text that is meant to be actively performed and presented orally into a text that is meant to be written and read passively; these two formats are fundamentally different in style, presentation, and the manner by which the target audience is engaged. In order to translate from Tok Pisin/Kabana, from oral/acted to written/read, from Melanesian to North American culture, I have taken editorial and poetic license while still, I hope, remaining true to the intent and content of the story. The narrative structure of the myth lends itself to being broken into six episodes, which are presented in paraphrase and followed by descriptive analysis to locate the events of the story within the framework of contemporary Kabana culture and society.

The Story of Moro

Episode 1: Moro and the First Pig Exchange

High on the forested slopes of Mt. Gidlo above the Bariai village of Akonga lived Kamaia, his wife Poposi, and Moro, their firstborn son. While still a boy, Moro originated pig exchanges, working out the details of his scheme alone, in the forest, using baby rats to represent pigs. One day, as the village men rounded up their pigs for slaughter, Moro stopped them and presented his idea. Since Moro was still a child, some of the senior men sneered at his plan and argued against paying heed to a mere boy. But others were intrigued and overruled the dissenters, arguing that it couldn't hurt to see what he had in mind. So Moro instructed them to rebuild the men's house, to plant taro gardens, and to erect platforms to display the harvest. Then they must gather their pigs and stake them in the village plaza. This done, he sent the men off to other Bariai villages in search of more pigs. When the men returned, Moro showed them how to match their pigs to pigs of equal size brought from the other villages and how to

stake the matched pairs in a double line. This done, messages were sent throughout the district inviting everyone to attend the village at Mt. Gidlo for a feast-dance (K: *ololo;* T.P.: *singsing*) and pig exchange. The singsing was a huge success, and, as the sun rose after a night of dancing, everyone who had followed their pigs to the festivities was given a piece of cordyline. The people of Bariai were very pleased with Moro and congratulated him for devising a custom whereby all the people could sing, dance, and enjoy themselves together peacefully When they asked what further plans he had, Moro replied that his brother Aisapel must be super-incised, and that henceforth all male children must undergo this rite.

After the pig exchange, Kamaia (Moro's father) presented a huge tusked pig, also named Kamaia, to his wife's km with the stipulation that they return the pig's head to him.

Commentary

The opening episode identifies the main characters, their relationship to one another, and their geographic location. Kamaia is married to Poposi, a woman from the small village of Bambak, located just a few kilometers from Akonga; Moro is their firstborn child, and he has a brother, Aisapel. The narrative captures the Kabana interest in their own history through the careful recording of places, the movements of people, and the transformations undergone by the characters themselves. The lack of a conventional opening (and closing) as a distancing device gives the story a timeless quality that is anchored in a spatially identifiable present of place names and local landmarks (cf. Kahn 1990; Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991). Pore, the storyteller, further personalizes and anchors the myth in a present reality by claiming a relationship to Moro's lineage and inheritance of the stone artifact used by Moro in the accomplishment of one of his magical deeds (Episode 3). The structure of the narrative presents an explanation for social change and an agent of that change, both of which combine to provide an explanation for the events that follow,

Moro is immediately characterized as different. He is a precocious child, evidenced by his rapid physical and intellectual development and his creation of many customs while still a mere child. Chief among the culture traits that he originates is the *ololo* (ceremonial dance-feasts and pig exchanges). Indeed, this is Moro's major accomplishment, and the myth as told is wholly concerned with the development of key phases of pig exchanges and feasts within the framework of firstborn child and mortuary ceremonies that are central to the Kabana prestige economy and comprise the totality of their ceremonial tradition. To this point Moro has initiated the *ololo kakau* (small feast/exchange), which is the beginning phase of the

lengthy cycle of ceremonies performed in honor of the dead and of firstborn children. Moro is clearly depicted as a firstborn child, and, since all firstborn ceremonies are said to take place "on top of the dead," it is appropriate that Moro begins with the first phase of mortuary work, reconstruction of the *lum* (men's ceremonial house), which has been left to decay since the closure of the previous ceremonial cycle.

Senior men and women describe the men's house as symbolically recapitulating the human life cycle. Once constructed, no repairs are made to the building, and over time it gradually deteriorates: the thatch dries, bleaches gray, and falls out; painted exterior decorations fade; the framework or "bones" become fragile and fall apart. When a new ceremonial cycle begins, the decrepit structure is dismantled and burned, cremated like the corpses that were once buried under it. The new men's house is referred to as an *iriau* (youth; adolescent spirit-being), and like a young man in the prime of his life, the framework of the new building is strong and straight, its exterior or "skin" is fresh and beautifully painted, and its power regenerated and at the peak of its potential. When completed, the "adolescent" men's house is left to ripen and mature while huge taro gardens are planted for the prestations of raw and cooked vegetable food that must accompany any ceremonial occasion. The pigs exchanged live or consumed as pork at ceremonies are primarily female pigs called *gaea aupu*, "pig [of the] hearth/ashes." As Moro ordained, the pigs are staked in evenly matched pairs to be exchanged after the two groups confront one another brandishing war clubs and spears to the accompaniment of drumming and battle songs. The potential aggression is diffused by the exchange of pigs, and amicable relations obtain. Moro has devised a scheme to end warfare and perpetuate peaceful social interactions with other groups through trade and exchange, a theme developed in Episode 4.

Cordylines are a sign of the dead, and this plant symbolizes the relationship between pig exchanges and mortuary traditions. In the bush, wild cordylines indicate areas frequented by spirit-beings and ghosts; in the village, cordylines are cultivated around graveyards as barriers between the living and the dead. Also symbols of autochthonous spirit-beings that dwell in the men's house on ceremonial occasions, cordylines are planted around the men's house to mark it off limits to women and children. During pig exchanges the donor slaps the pig with a piece of cordyline and gives the plant to the recipient with a hearty "This cordyline is for you!" The pig recipient plants the piece of cordyline as a reminder of a debt that must be discharged at some future ceremony.

As Moro pronounces in the story, the final rite of the *ololo kakau* is a blood-letting rite of superincision. In actuality, the blood-rite is an elaborate

and public firstborn ceremonial during which firstborn boys undergo superincision and firstborn girls have their earlobes cut to begin the process of elongation. In this rite the blood of the firstborn boy or girl is "spilled on top of the dead" in the presence of masked spirit-beings. The Kabana thus celebrate the continuity and strength of ancestral essence exemplified by and perpetuated through the firstborn child. As Moro decreed in the story, all children must undergo the blood-letting rite, but only the firstborn is celebrated as a symbol of continuity between the dead and the living. Nonfirstborn children, like Moro's brother Aisapel, are not celebrated in the glorious manner of their firstborn sibling, but are "pulled in underneath the firstborn."

Episode 2: The Death of Kamaia and the Transformation of Moro

> Later, Poposi went to Bambak village to bring back the head of the pig Kamaia for her husband and sons. But her brothers refused to give her the head and sent her back with scraps from Kamaia's front and hind legs and a piece of skin. Enraged by this insult, Kamaia flung the pork to the ground, snatched up his spear, and went to Bambak to do battle with his affines. But Kamaia was quickly dispatched by his wife's brothers, who extracted and cooked Kamaia's liver before sending his body back for burial in the men's house at Mt. Gidlo.
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> During the period of mourning prior to Kamaia's burial, Moro got very hungry for pork, but, as his father had thrown it all away, Poposi offered him some taro instead. Hearing this, Moro's cross-cousin, Kaukave, offered some of his pork. Upon the first bite, Moro's legs fused together; with the second bite, Moro's lower body turned into the body of a snake. Horrified by the realization that he had been tricked into eating his father's liver, Moro tried to throw away the offending meat, but it stuck fast to his hand. Hearing his cries of despair, Poposi came to investigate, and when she saw her son's condition, she hid Moro in a large woven basket. The next day, after his father was buried, Moro told his mother they must leave the area to escape the vengeful wrath of his fathers ghost. And so Poposi put four taro corms in the basket with her firstborn, placed the basket on her head and the child Aisapel in a sling on her back, and the three of them left Mt. Gidlo, traveling west along the coast to Kilenge.
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> No matter how far or how quickly they traveled, the ghost of Kamaia followed them, crying out mournfully for its liver. Attached to Moro, the liver responded to Kamaia's call. The three hurried along as fast as they could to Namaramanga, to Ulo Point, to Kaugo. As they reached Kaugo, Kamaia's ghost was already at Ulo Point and gaining on them. They hurried on to Silimate and then to a place called Aname. Here, with the ghost in hot pursuit, Moro called a halt, and using his father's cassowary bone lime spatula,

he carved a river from the mountain to the spot where they sat. Then he asked his mother to bring a piece of taro and some taro leaves.

Kamaia's ghost arrived at the Aname River and taunted Moro for thinking the river could stop him. Moro invited the ghost to cross the river and devour them all. As the ghost waded into the swiftly flowing river, Moro threw the taro corm and leaves into the water. The taro leaves sank and became a crocodile; the taro corm floated on the surface and became a shark. The two creatures attacked and destroyed the ghost of Kamaia. With the ghost no longer a threat, Moro bade his mother once again carry him, and the three continued on their way.

Commentary

Pigs that are destined from birth for a particular exchange are often named for the person who raised them or for the firstborn in whose honor they are to be exchanged. The pig "Kamaia" does not merely represent the man Kamaia; it substantively is Kamaia, and the dispute over the pig "Kamaia" is a pivotal element that precipitates Moro's travels and his transformation.

Growing pigs, like growing food, raising children, or acquiring objects of wealth, requires a long-term investment of self and substance. The most valued pig is a castrated male tusker that represents years of investment on the part of its "father" or "mother" (cf. Lawrence 1984:134), whose wealth and power are associated with the perfectly curved set of tusks it develops. The recipient of a live boar must return the boar's tusks undamaged, accompanied by one length of the highly valued "gold" shell money, and reciprocate with a boar of equal size and tusk development. Only those who actually grew the pig's tusks and their descendants have the right to wear them as family heirlooms. To keep or display tusks one did not "grow" is to demean their symbolic value and the person whose status they represent. It is an unforgivable insult for which redress is immediately sought in the form of lethal sorcery or open aggression.

Moro's father has raised a huge tusked boar that is his namesake, "Kamaia." By presenting such an illustrious pig to his affines, Kamaia is challenging their ability to reciprocate in kind. But Kamaia's affines immediately counter the challenge by consuming the pig and refusing to send back its "head." Kamaia has his own agenda relative to his affines, which is, in turn, thwarted to his detriment, leaving him no choice but to seek redressive action. Here the role of human agency, particularly the inability to know and control the thoughts of others, is a pivot on which the plot turns. Incensed by the insult, Kamaia furiously flings the offensive cuts of pork away. Kamaia's affines continue their nefarious acts by desecrating his body before returning it for burial in the men's house.

Before the Australian Administration insisted on graveyards at a distance from the village, the Kabana buried their dead in the men's ceremonial house in shallow graves on top of which the men built their fires for warmth and light. For three days prior to the "feast to send away the ghost," everyone in the village observed taboos on such things as work, travel, hunting, and the use of sharp implements. This is the period during which the ghost of the deceased is most dangerous; it hovers near, reluctant to depart the domain of the living, seeking a companion in death or vengeance against whomever caused the death. It is during this liminal time (particularly at dusk) when the dead walk among the living that Moro is pursued by his father's ghost. For Moro to eat his father's liver is more than an act of cannibalism, it is an act of autocannibalism; Moro, like the pig "Kamaia," is his father. The horrific, nonhuman act of consuming himself through his fathers liver transforms Moro into a creature that is half animal and half human: he becomes a snake-man.[3]

To this point, Moro has used his innate intelligence to create and implement cultural institutions and has shown no superhuman abilities. With the transformation of his body through a nonhuman act, Moro also becomes possessed of special powers that are associated with nonhuman beings. He initially manifests these powers by creating the Aname River and by transforming leaves and taro into dangerous water creatures that devour ghosts. Moro thus becomes something other than human by eating nonfood, and, in an inversion of the "feast to send away the ghost of the dead," true food is transformed into fearsome supernatural creatures, which in turn consume something not quite human.

The myth began with Moro creating new forms of social action and relationships based on exchange. Now, with his transformation, social actions and relationships are predicated on the symbolism of the serpent as "an epitome of self-contained generative power" (Young 1987:234).

Episode 3: Moro, the Provider

> Moro, his mother Poposi, and Aisapel wandered on, eventually making camp on the beach. Mother cooked a meal of one boiled taro, gave half to Moro, and shared the second half between herself and little Aisapel. The next morning Aisapel awoke complaining of hunger. Although Mother told him not to concern himself about a worthless child, Moro felt sorry for Aisapel and offered the child the remainder of his own piece of taro. Each night Mother cooked and distributed a single taro; each morning Aisapel awoke complaining of hunger. Moro blamed himself for the boy's discomfort and gave the child his own taro as compensation. On the fourth night, Mother prepared their last taro, and on the morning of the fifth day,

Aisapel awoke hungry and complaining to his mother. “For pity’s sake,” Mother cried, “are we living in a village with our hunger? We have come here, to this uncultivated bush and this infertile beach.” Moro again contributed his uneaten taro to Aisapel.

At noon it began to rain, so they moved up from the beach to seek shelter under the trees, Cold and wet, Aisapel cried for the comfort of their home, complaining of their desolate and uncomfortable existence exposed on the beach. Despite Mothers attempts to keep the boy quiet, Moro sadly accepted responsibility for their predicament and told them to bide their time. That night, as the others slept huddled under the tree, Moro called forth their house and their gardens from Mt. Gidlo.

The next morning, Aisapel was astounded to find that they slept in their own house, and he woke his mother, who promptly scolded the boy and told him to be silent. Aisapel’s pleasure soon wore thin as he recalled the sugarcane that grew near the house when it was in the village. Overhearing, Moro sent the boy behind the house, where Aisapel saw a vast garden replete with every kind of food imaginable. Aisapel forgot his desire for sugarcane and gorged himself on bananas, while Mother harvested taro. Full of bananas and roasted taro, Aisapel wandered off to play, singing to himself about Moro’s prowess. Truly his elder brother was a man of substance who, by merely commanding, caused all things to hear and obey. Mother tried to contain Aisapel’s excitement, waning him not to disturb Moro, whom she now acknowledged as being the source of miraculous regenerative powers. Later, for their evening meal, Mother offered Aisapel some roasted taro, which he refused, claiming he preferred taro boiled in clay pots and garnished with greens. Moro urged Aisapel to have patience, and the next morning Aisapel awoke to find a shelf laden with clay pots and carved wooden bowls. Mother tried to quell Aisapel’s exuberance at this abundance of wealth, but Moro insisted that Aisapel’s comments were of the utmost importance to him and must not go unheeded.

Over time, food scraps began to pile up and Aisapel bemoaned the fact there were no pigs to eat the refuse. Despite Mother’s attempts to quiet the boy, Moro heard and told Aisapel to pick up a small stone and strike it against the rim of a giant clam shell. Perplexed, Aisapel tapped on the shell until Moro called him back to the veranda of their house. As Aisapel climbed the house ladder, he looked back and saw a herd of pigs coming toward them. Overjoyed, Aisapel asked Moro how he had become empowered to call forth pigs by hitting the shell. In response, Moro told Aisapel not to speak of such things but merely to bear witness and thus have faith in his, Moro’s, abilities. Mother pragmatically instructed Aisapel to gather the food scraps and feed the pigs, a chore he did with alacrity.

Eventually, Aisapel rebelled against the daily chore of feeding the pigs, complaining that they had no young women to do this women’s work. “But where,” Mother asked, “would we get young women?” That night, while the others slept, Moro held up his hands once to call forth ten Bariai

women, and again to call forth ten Kaliai women. When he awoke, Aisapel saw twenty young women sitting beside the house. He rushed back inside to awaken Mother, who, even as she chastised him for foolishness, went to look. Speechless with surprise, Mother quickly took the situation in hand and sent the women off to the garden. "Harvest as much as you like," she told them. "We three could not possibly eat every-thing in that garden." While the women were away, Mother wove some blinds to build a room inside the house where Moro could stay, hidden from the women.

Time passed. One young woman wondered where they would find young men to marry. "But, we are married already," another woman said, "to the old woman's firstborn son." "But," countered the first woman, "what sort of marriage could this be? We have never seen our husband, and he never wants our companionship." The other wives pointed out that it was Moro's way to remain apart from them, and it was their wifely duty to obey him.

The pigs prospered and multiplied until Aisapel complained that, even with the help of twenty wives, they couldn't manage. Moro heard and was sympathetic. That night as everyone slept, Moro raised his hands once, and ten Kilenge women appeared; twice, and ten Siassi women appeared. Again Aisapel awoke to a crowd of women outside the house. After quieting the boy's excitement, Mother sent her forty daughters-in-law to the gardens to help themselves freely to the food provided there. The women were somewhat bemused to find themselves married to Moro; they wondered who tended the garden. Could it be Moro who planted and cultivated it, or was the land just naturally a self-generating garden? And so more time passed.

Commentary

The importance of firstborn ceremonials is summed up in the expression *gai aean tatan gergeo lautabe,* which can be glossed as "we eat on top of the firstborn." In addition to the conventional meaning of the verb "to eat," eating in this context also means to receive sustenance, to be a consumer. The phrase "on top of the firstborn" connotes that because the firstborn shoulders the burden of providing sustenance, others are able to share in or become consumers of that wealth. Providers and recipients of sustenance enter into ongoing relations of mutual indebtedness, and those who benefit from "eating on top of the firstborn" express their indebtedness by according the nurturer/firstborn a reputation for strength, value, and selfless generosity couched in terms of renown. Moro is an exemplary firstborn.

The concept of primogeniture is very much associated with notions of a utopian existence, here represented by Moro's generativity. Ideally, the firstborn is an exalted person, above the drudgery of day-to-day toil necessary to

support life and life-style. What Aisapel desires is "the good life": plentiful gardens, shelter, pigs, the comfort and aid of women, and the human social relations implied by the specialty trade goods. Aisapel's longing for the things that make life worth living stirs Moro's compassion, so that through him items of value that contribute to the well-being of others are regenerated. In this capacity, Moro exhibits the qualities the Kabana ideally attribute to the firstborn child as one who cannot refuse a request and as one through whom others receive food and wealth. None of the objects of value are created by Moro in the sense that he is the originator of them, The Kabana do not produce clay pots, wooden bowls, or woven baskets. These are specialty items traded from the Lolo, Siassi, and Kilenge people, respectively (cf. Harding and Clark, this volume; Pomponio, this volume), usually for pigs and shell money Neither does Moro create woman, although he could be credited with setting a precedent for intergroup relations inasmuch as he chooses his wives first from among Kabana and Kaliai villages and second from Kilenge and Siassi, an order of preference that obtains in contemporary Kabana society.

Mother perceives that Moro's wives pose a threat to him, and she constructs a special room inside their house to shelter and protect him from the women, some of whom are disgruntled with their husbands abnormal behavior toward them. Such rooms, called *ele vovo,* "its butterfly," after the swinging doors at the entrance to the room, were constructed in the past to accommodate a mother and her firstborn child. During the weeks of seclusion in the butterfly room, the child lost its newborn appearance and any marks or disfigurements acquired during the birth process, and while gradually becoming more human, severed its relationship with the nonhuman domain. The firstborn emerged from the butterfly room smooth, plump, and light-skinned, to make its debut into society on the occasion of its naming ceremony, the first ceremony in honor of the firstborn child, to mark its transition from the spirit realm to the human social domain. The institution of the butterfly room is used here and later in the story as a symbol of liminality and transformation: it is a place occupied by Moro, who is neither human nor nonhuman; and, as we see in the next episode, when Moro emerges from the butterfly room, he is transformed.

Episode 4: The Feast at Ailovo

> One day a messenger arrived with an invitation for Moro to attend a dance-feast sponsored by his cross-cousin Kaukave. Moro declined, but he promised that his wives would attend accompanied by Aisapel. The next morning Moro instructed the women to load up their cooked taro and wait for

Aisapel at Tavelemoro [Moro Point]. While they awaited Aisapel, the women dressed in their ceremonial finery. Soon they saw a man approaching. His magnificent headdress fluttered seductively in the breeze. He carried two spears and wore a dog's-tooth netbag *(amio)* slung across his chest. Below his knees and on his upper arms, he wore woven fringed bands that held fragrant flowers and leaves, the scent of which wafted before him and captured the hearts of the women. The women realized this wasn't Aisapel--the stranger's skin was light and fair like that of a European--and they murmured among themselves, wondering who he could be. Coming up to the women, the man thrust his two spears into the ground, sat down, and asked if they had eaten yet. "No," they replied. "We are waiting for Aisapel."

"Don't you recognize me? I am Moro. My mother built a room for me alone to dwell in. You, all my wives, must stay outside. You cannot cohabit with me, for if you did, you wouldn't have any food; you wouldn't have anything!"

Moro went on to explain that it was through this arrangement of sexual and residential segregation that he was able to supply them with garden produce, pigs, and anything else they required. If they lived together, he would become contaminated by their female essences and they would have nothing at all. In awe, the women wondered what sort of man their husband could be.

The women were concerned that there was not enough food, but Moro reassured them. In three bites he consumed a huge quantity of cooked taro, more than any human could possibly consume. Having eaten his fill, he told the women to finish their food, after which he gave them betelnut from his huge basket and lime powder from his lime gourd. Later, Moro told the women to bathe with him and get ready for bed. The women spread their mats on the beach, but Moro did not sleep with his wives. He remained apart from them, contemplatively chewing betel throughout the night. In the morning Moro and his wives continued their journey to Kilenge.

Soon they arrived at Saumoi village, where everyone was amazed at this handsome man and his many wives. But Moro refused to stop and speak with them. The people of Potne also inquired about his destination, and Moro replied that he was going on ahead to the feast-dance to which they had also been invited. Finally, Moro arrived at the beachfront of Ailovo village, where he and his wives settled down to await the evening festivities.[4] That afternoon Kaukave sent an invitation to Moro's wives. Moro agreed to send his wives for everyone to see, but he stayed behind and would not enter the village until the evening dancing was under way. Moro's wives lined up two abreast to enter the village. Kaukave instructed everyone to witness their arrival, and, as the women came into the village, the slit gong sounded in their honor. Moro listened; forty times the slit gong cried out,

marking the arrival of forty pigs. When his wives returned, Moro asked who among them had brought forty pigs to the feast. Pigs . . . what pigs? The women knew nothing of pigs. Moro explained to his wives that the cry of the slit gong meant that they would be presented with forty pigs. The women were pleased to be pig recipients but concerned about how to transport the pigs back to their village.

At midnight Moro and his wives gathered at the perimeter of the village and prepared to enter the dance plaza. As they lined up, Kaukave ordered firebrands lit and instructed everyone to stop singing so they could hear Moro's song. Two abreast and singing *apitom* (songs of challenge and war) to the beat of their stamping feet, Moro's wives entered the plaza. At Kaukave's insistence, Moro sang his song twice so that all could learn it and incorporate it into their repertoire. At dawn the dancing and singing ended, and each of Moro's forty wives was presented with a cordyline. Since there was no one to transport them, the forty pigs would remain with Kaukave until Moro could send a canoe and his kinsmen to collect them.

For the remainder of that day and night, Moro and his wives slept on the beach at Ailovo. Refreshed, they began their return journey, traveling as far as Moro Point. The next day they walked as far as the Lela River, where Moro told his wives to rest while he went into the bush to collect betel catkins for them. Once out of sight of the women, Moro abruptly turned and made his way directly home, where Mother and Aisapel waited. From his room, Moro spoke to one of his wives, telling her to wait for a while and then tell the women that Moro instructed them to return home, where their husband awaited them. And so it happened. The women walked on to Potua Point and then to Atavele Point, where they headed inland. They arrived in the village to see Moro's two spears thrust into the ground. When they inquired after their husband, Aisapel confirmed that Moro had been home, asleep, for some time. The women were annoyed that Moro had come home without them, but they said nothing.

Mother told the women how the pigs had frightened Aisapel by crowding around him and nipping at his buttocks and then she sent them off to the gardens to collect food for the pigs. At dusk, as the women fed the pigs, Moro told them to prepare more food for the forty pigs that would arrive soon from Ailovo. Wondering who would bring the pigs, the women once again went to the garden, returning well after dark. The next morning the women awoke to see the forty pigs trussed under their house. They were curious to see who had delivered them, but there was no one. Moro chastised the women and reminded them of the extent of his power to make everything obey his command. He ordered the women to tame the pigs so they could remove and return the restraining ropes. Aisapel protested, claiming that he could not undertake such a long trek alone. That night, as they all slept, Moro held up a truss, told it to return to its owner, and then threw it away. Immediately, all the ropes disappeared from Moro's house

and reappeared on the veranda of Kaukave's house. When Kaukave woke the next morning, he was astonished to see the ropes and wondered how they had got there. Kaukave's wife recognized Moro's work and cautioned her husband not to speak of such matters. Surely, she mused, Moro was something other than human.

Commentary

With the invitation from his cross-cousin Kaukave to attend a feast, Moro emerges from his seclusion in the butterfly room transformed into a beautiful and seductive young man. The armbands, legbands, and dogs-tooth netbag that he wears are items of decorative finery acquired by the Kabana through their local and long-distance networks of trade partners. Dogs-tooth netbags from Madang-Finschhafen, once a highly valued and particularly prized item of bridewealth, were obtained by the Kabana from their Lolo and Siassi trade partners. The armbands *(poipoi sara)* and kneebands *(saea)* are produced by the Lolo people, who weave them from a black vine found only in their mountain domain. These items are still traded to the Kabana in return for coastal products such as fish, sea grasses (a delicacy high in salt), and armlets made from trochus and sea turtle shells. Although dogs-tooth netbags are no longer extant, the Lolo armbands remain one of several valued trade items that are the focus of contemporary firstborn ceremonials depicting parental accomplishments in forging and maintaining relations of trade and exchange.[5]

Also expressed in Moro's finery is his ambiguous relationship with his wives. When he emerges from the butterfly room, he is transformed into a handsome young man whose beauty glows upon his fair skin. The headdress he wears is reminiscent of those worn by the masked dancers who represent the autochthonous spirit-beings called *aulu.* The rhythmic swaying of the dancer's headdress and the potent fragrance of scented leaves and flowers, usually imbued with love magic, are irresistibly seductive to women. But Moro negates the seduction by identifying himself as the women's husband and reiterating the importance of sexual segregation for protecting his male re-creative power from female influences. To avoid being rendered ritually impotent, any man (or woman) involved in ceremonial activity practices sexual abstinence. Moro has taken this behavior to an extreme and forbidden any kind of social or sexual intercourse, a situation the women perceive as being an aberration in marital relations. At first, the women are bemused by Moro's behavior toward them; later, when he leaves them on the beach and goes home without them, they become disgruntled and annoyed with him.

The theme of ceremonial pig exchange as competition is further devel-

oped in this episode. The feast at Ailovo is the *ololo kapei*, or "big feast/exchange," which concludes a mortuary cycle. The host's group customarily sounds the slit gong to mark the arrival of guests and to broadcast the number of pigs they bring to the exchange. Moro's wives enter Kaukave's village in a double line in the same manner that Moro set out when he implemented the staked pig exchange at the first feast. When Moro hears the slit gong, he is disturbed that his wives are to be the recipients of forty pigs, a prestation that is a direct challenge to his ability to reciprocate in kind and thus a slur on his status as a firstborn. Moro takes up the challenge; he and his wives enter the village singing battle songs.

This mythic scene is enacted as part of contemporary ceremonial performance and display Pig recipients group themselves according to men's house affiliation and prepare to enter the dance plaza from the direction of their home village/place of origin. The women and men are dressed in ceremonial finery with white lime powder on their faces as a sign of strength, power, and potential aggression. The men carry spears and war clubs, and the women wave large branches of cordyline plants. They enter the dance arena in double lines, with the men in the lead, followed by the torch bearers, and finally the pig recipients. As they advance, the torch bearers periodically turn and spotlight the pig recipients with their firebrands. The group dances into the village with drums and voices in full throat, trying to drown out the host group's drumming and singing.

As recounted in the myth, Moro is the originator of battle songs. At pig exchanges, *apitom* (sometimes referred to as *ido imata*, "eye of the spear") are mock battles that display group strength and power. The host group and the guest group sing and drum different songs with opposing rhythms and fast tempos, each group attempting to overwhelm and drown out the other. Imperceptibly, the cacophony created by the competition begins to meld as the guests succumb to the host's drums and songs; confrontation resolves into a harmonious rendition of the same song set (cf. Goodale 1985). The very real possibility exists for a fight between the two groups, although nowadays this rarely happens. The arriving group puts on a proud and powerful display, but they always give way to the host's music. In effect, the host group wins the battle by "killing" the guests with an overabundance of wealth, food, and entertainment.

In the myth, Moro does not capitulate to his host's songs, but seduces Kaukave with a new type of music, which Kaukave is eager to learn. While relations between the two seem cordial, the implication is that Moro is not outdone by Kaukave's gift of pigs. Indeed, Kaukave is the cross-cousin who tricked Moro into eating the cooked flesh of his own father, and the battle for supremacy between the two men is nowhere near resolved. It is Kau-

kave's wife, however, who seems truly to grasp the situation when she counsels her husband to be cautious in his dealings with Moro who, she points out, is something other than human.

Episode 5: Finding Shell Money and the Death of Moro

Time passed. Moro explained that he wanted to discharge the pig debt and give Kaukave shell money. Since they had no shell money, Aisapel argued, they should be content simply to repay the pigs. Chastened by Moro's angry response, Aisapel asked what Moro wanted him to do. Moro told Aisapel to fell a special tree, from which he was to construct a canoe. Appalled at the magnitude of such a project, Aisapel protested and accused Moro of being irrational in his expectations. But Moro was persuasive, and the boy went off to do Moro's bidding. He selected a tree, cleared the ground around it, and took up his ax, but, try as he might, he was unable to do more than chip away at the tree's bark. Frustrated, he returned home, where Moro taunted him for being lazy. Incensed at this unfairness, Aisapel lashed back, recounting his efforts and protesting that Moro was mistaken in assuming that a mere boy could do the work of a grown man.

The next morning, the women reported hearing something crash in the night. Perhaps it was Aisapel's tree falling down? Highly skeptical, since he had hardly bruised the outer bark, Aisapel went to investigate and found the tree not only felled, but trimmed of its branches! Convinced that Moro was misleading him and had prepared the tree himself, Aisapel went home. But Moro denied any involvement, pointing out that, with no legs, it was impossible for him to go anywhere or chop any-thing down.

Three days later, Moro instructed Mother to prepare food for Aisapel to take when he went off to work on the canoe. Then he told his wives to go and ensure that the tree was properly positioned for later transport to the sea. Annoyed, the women denied any knowledge of canoe making; Moro should look after it. In response, Moro launched into an angry harangue. Surely women were human beings and not trees; surely they were capable of the thought and understanding needed to undertake the task. But the women continued to disclaim any knowledge of canoe building. Finally, Moro acknowledged that he had checked the tree already.

Aisapel went off to begin carving the canoe, but, try as he might, he made no progress. Near tears with frustration and cursing Moro, he returned home and erupted in a fit of pique at Moro for setting him such impossible tasks. Moro soothed his brother's feelings by reaffirming his belief in the boy's ability to do the job. Mollified, Aisapel returned to the tree to find it had been shaped and hollowed out. Convinced now that Moro was a trickster intent on deceiving him, Aisapel returned home extolling Moro's virtues as a man of extraordinary ability. Ignoring such accolades, Moro told Aisapel that the next day he must turn the tree in order to

carve the prow. Annoyed that Moro continued to expect a mere boy to have the strength of a man, Aisapel stomped off to play.

Later, while everyone slept, Moro instructed the canoe to be completed. The next morning, at Moro's insistence, Aisapel again checked on the canoe. With the exception of the outriggers, it was finished and decoratively painted. Further convinced of his brother's powers, Aisapel angrily returned home, shouting at Moro for his continued deceit and for causing him so much agony running back and forth to do things that Moro had taken care of himself. Aisapel flatly refused to check the canoe again. That night spirit-beings lashed the outriggers, attached the anchor rope, and put the canoe in the sea. At dawn Moro woke Aisapel and told him to go to the latrine. Annoyed that Moro would tell him when he should relieve himself, Aisapel sheepishly realized that he did need to do so. On his way to the latrine, Aisapel saw the canoe at anchor, and, full bladder forgotten, he rushed back to tell Moro. When Aisapel asked who had carved the canoe, Moro responded that no human had done so; it had carved itself. Ecstatic over the magnificence of their canoe, Aisapel innocently wondered who would sail it and where, He was dismayed to learn that Moro expected him to captain the canoe to Kove territory in search of shell money.

Moro instructed his wives to gather and cook sufficient food for the voyage and told Aisapel to choose two men from each of the Bariai villages of Alaido, Mareka, Namaramanga, Akonga, and Bambak for his crew. The women carefully loaded the canoe with cooked food. Despite his protests, Moro convinced Aisapel that he could punt such a large canoe. So Aisapel stood in the place of honor at the prow of the canoe and placed the punting pole into the water. No sooner was this done than, like magic, the canoe began to glide effortlessly away. Feigning surprise, Moro remarked upon how the canoe listened to and obeyed Aisapel. Taking leave of Moro, Aisapel poled down the coast to collect his crew.

Aisapel organized his crew so that one shift punted while the other rested. As they traveled, Moro told Aisapel to go east as far as the Kove village of Silivuti and then turn back. Late on the fourth day, the voyagers arrived at Silivuti, where Aisapel was given two large baskets of shell money, and each crew member was given one fathom of shell money From Silivuti, Aisapel continued west, stopping at Kalapoiai, Poi, Sumalavi, Niukakau, Muligani, Kapo, Arimigi, and finally Tamuniai. At each Kove village they received two baskets of shell money plus a fathom for each crewman. With eighteen baskets of shell money, they departed for home.

Meanwhile, something was amiss with Moro. Upset about their husband's improper behavior toward them, Moro's wives complained among themselves. They grumbled about sitting around idle and about their husband, who did not partake of either social or sexual intercourse with them. They bemoaned their abnormal circumstances: this was no way to live. Moro was aware of the women's thoughts, complaining that their negativ-

ity, brought about by sheer idleness, was making him unwell. So he sent them off to the beach to get some fish for the afternoon meal. At the beach, the women watched in amazement as a large shoal of bonito splashed toward the shore and flung themselves out of the water onto the sand. Laughing, they rushed around, gathering up the flapping fish. A second shoal of fish headed inshore onto the beach and the women scurried around picking them up. When they returned home and Moro inquired if they had caught anything, the women laughed at Moro's teasing; of course they had caught a tremendous number of fish, just as he intended. Moro told them to cook the fish in anticipation of Aisapel's return.

Far away, Aisapel became more and more distressed with a sense of foreboding that something was terribly wrong with Moro. Moro was also thinking about Aisapel as he sent his wives to harvest taro for the return of the voyagers.

All the women set off for the garden except Rimitnga Pelarei. With the excuse that she had forgotten her menstrual belt, Rimitnga headed back to the settlement and entered the old woman's house.[6] Reproaching Moro for remaining segregated from her and her co-wives, she began to tear down the walls of Moro's butterfly room. Surely, she argued, it couldn't matter if he mingled with the women. Down came a wall. Had they not already seen him when they went to Kaukave's feast? Another wall came down. Moro shouted at Rimitnga, reminding her that as long as he remained separate they would want for nothing. Ignoring his thunderous rage, Rimitnga broke down another wall. Now only the butterfly doors remained; she tore away these last impediments. Expecting to see the handsome young man who had attended the feast, Rimitnga looked at Moro and shrieked in horror at his hideous snakelike appearance. Moro exploded with rage and thrashed out with his tail, striking Rimitnga a fatal blow and flinging her away Trailing a plume of smoke, Moro plunged into the sea. The water boiled and erupted into great geysers of steam.

As his canoe rounded Oalasi Point, Aisapel saw Moro plummet into the sea, and he mourned that his beloved elder brother had been brought down. Hearing the noise and understanding its source, Mother raced from the gardens back to the settlement. Moro warned her not to come after him, but to continue preparations for the feast in honor of Aisapel's return, at which time Moro would return to speak with his brother.

Mother and all Moro's wives stood on the shore, lamenting their lost life-style. Moro was gone. They wept and ranted at Rimitnga, reviling her for destroying their good life by disobeying Moro's edict of sexual segregation. But Rimitnga lay dead where she had landed at Moro Maleua in Kilenge. When Aisapel wondered what was to become of them all, Mother could only repeat that Moro had promised to attend Aisapel's *mata pau* before he departed forever.

Commentary

A main theme in this episode concerns the moral imperative to discharge one's debts and obligations. In keeping with the spirit of the story, it is safe to assume that Moro has the required pigs, since his concern is not for pigs but for shell money. This commodity, it seems, he cannot command magically. Through Aisapel's efforts, he must obtain shell money from the Kove, who are regionally renowned purveyors of this wealth. Since Kabana pig exchanges do not accrue interest, Aisapel is quite correct to question Moro's desire to present Kaukave with additional wealth. But Moro's intent is to shame his competitor publicly with a gift of wealth that quite possibly could never be repaid. The prestation of shell money is a counterchallenge to Kaukave, which in contemporary rivalries can be risky business. The Kabana discern a very fine line between legitimate one-upmanship and outright character assassination. The latter does not lend itself to reciprocity, but can result in an attack of lethal sorcery by the offended party.

The business of building a canoe and the voyage to Kove are pivotal events in this episode. Aisapel tries valiantly to accomplish the task, but to no avail. Frustrated, he feels he is being used as a dupe and accuses Moro of being a trickster. The culture hero as trickster figure is evident here, but Moro's persistent confidence in Aisapel's ability suggests that his motive is not to trick, but to propel him through the transition from boyhood to manhood. The transformation of the boy into a man of renown begins with Aisapel's voyage to Kove. Despite his failure to build the canoe, Aisapel's quest for shell money succeeds admirably.

Moro is the firstborn, but his relationship to his brother is inverted in this episode. The voyage to Kove is Aisapel's *mata pau*, a major firstborn ceremonial that formally introduces the child to his or her parents' long-distance trade partners. A new canoe must be specially constructed, decorated, provisioned, and outfitted with a crew of young men who are members of the firstborn's cognatic kindred. Like a firstborn embarking on a first voyage to distant places even today, Aisapel takes the place of honor at the canoe's prow, and his transformation begins to take shape as he assumes command of the canoe and shows his ability as a leader of men. The *mata pau* is a quest, the object of which is to obtain items of value, and Aisapel is the hero in search of the highly valued shell money.

The quest theme implied in the story is very salient to Kabana listeners. In the less peaceful era of their precolonial past, trading expeditions were fraught with danger, and the intrepid voyagers risked their very survival. They traveled into unfamiliar waters containing massive reefs, against which

unpredictable seas and monstrous spirits lured men to their deaths by smashing their canoes. Danger also lurked in foreign territories inhabited by potentially hostile people, infamous for their warlike aggression and powerful sorcerers. Aisapel survives the fickle sea, treacherous spirits, and Kove sorcerers to emerge triumphant with his treasure of shell money he is truly heroic.

While Aisapel is involved in events that will transform him, Moro is undergoing a transformation brought about by his wives, as relations between the sexes reach a critical point. With Aisapel's help, Moro is fulfilling his economic and political obligations, but he is ignoring another more important obligation to his wives. As a category, females, especially wives, are highly valued by the Kabana. Wives provide the necessities of life: they toil in the garden to produce food, maintain comfortable homes, and domesticate and tend pigs. Wives are the source and guardians of a man's wealth; they produce and nurture children. Without women, I was told, life as the Kabana know it would be meaningless and miserable.

Metaphorically, men describe females as autochthonous spirits--beings whose origins and creative power are primal and mysterious. To say that "women are spirits" is to refer to the fact that the female body contains within it the power for creation. Female genitals are the dark and mysterious hidden source from which new life is generated. Thus, another myth tells how the heroine Galiki, a firstborn female, sacrifices her body in the stone oven and is transformed by fire into the several extant varieties of taro so that humans would never want for sustenance. Galiki represents female fecundity and creativity, whereas Moro does not create; he can only re-create.

But woman the creator is also woman the destroyer, her destructive powers manifest in embodied female essences such as menstrual blood, the blood of parturition, and the fluids and bodily heat generated during sexual intercourse. This potential power to nullify men's enterprises and offend spirit-beings "explains" residential segregation of the sexes and the periods of celibacy entered into by men (and women) before and during important ceremonial undertakings. Woman's power is so dangerous that any woman who entered the men's ceremonial house, particularly when spirit-beings were in residence, was immediately put to death. Her jaw bone, all that remained after the spirits of the men's house devoured her, was thrown into the central plaza as a lesson to other females who would breach the male sanctuary and threaten male potency. Women are still forbidden entry to the men's house; the blood of menstruation and parturition continue to be perceived as powerful substances that, if not controlled by women, are dangerous and debilitating to others.

In certain contexts, such as firstborn and mortuary ceremonies, sexual abstinence is required of both sexes, but Moro's avoidance of female sexuality is excessive and exaggerated to the point of aberration. Keesing's discussion of Malaita sexual politics is apposite to the mythic situation portrayed here and to gender relations in general. Like the Malaita, Kabana men have mystified female creativity in an ideology of female pollution, thus placing in the hands of women a potentially dangerous power that can put men's lives and enterprises at risk. Malaita men try as "best they can to police the way women use these powers. . . . Women, in turn, are able . . . to build a counter interpretation of the scheme of things, in which they are pillars of moral responsibility" (Keesing 1982:222). To be human is to be moral, capable of rational thought and understanding, characteristics that Moro acknowledges in his wives when he chastises them for deferring to his expertise on the matter of the tree/canoe. In choosing not to examine the canoe, the women are not denying their capacity to think. They are deferring to a division of labor that defines tree felling and canoe manufacture as men's work. On her own initiative, Moro's mother expresses female moral responsibility by building the butterfly room to protect her son from feminine influences. Moro takes great pains to inform his wives of the power inherent in their femaleness and sexuality, then tries to police those powers himself by enforcing a policy of perpetual sexual segregation. Moro makes quite clear to the women that his proscription against sexual and social intercourse is necessary to maintain the utopian existence he has provided for them.

Moro is ultimately concerned with the potent and contaminating force generated during sexual intercourse that is particularly offensive to spirit-beings and can cause wounds to fester, gardens to wither, magic to fail, and men to waste away. By calling upon autochthonous spirits and representing them in the form of voices such as the bull-roarer or as masked dancers, men participate in the creative powers of the universe and appropriate that power to their own ends. Ideologically, the presence of women on these occasions would anger the spirit-beings and nullify any benefits human beings hope to gain from them.

Moro has created a utopia, but, despite his efforts to control the women, a female violates his edict forbidding carnal knowledge. As would be the case should any woman enter the men's house, Rimitnga is killed for her transgression, and her action clearly condemns females and reinforces gender stereotypes of women as contrary, dangerous, destructive beings who must be controlled and dominated by males. Since women, in the myth as in reality, have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, choosing to protect others from the effects of their feminine essences is a powerful positive

act on their part. It seems paradoxical that Rimitnga chooses to disregard her moral obligation. Superficially, her action is necessary to the further development of the narrative plot and final dénouement of the myth. Viewed from Rimitnga's perspective, however, a deeper explanation is possible.

Concepts of gender and sexual relations are common mythic motifs. In Kabana myth, images of the ideal female and the feminine ideal are firmly grounded in the mystique of the female body and realized in women's social roles as mothers, sisters, and wives; as food producers, procreators and nurturers. **As** a firstborn and a culture heroine, the mythic female, Galiki, is the embodiment of empowerment, self-esteem, and social worth who offers Kabana women a clear and positive sense of themselves as females, social beings, and participants in primal mysteries. Women's bodies and female sexuality are key symbols of the feminine and female identity. As portrayed in the myth, these images of the female are neither trivial nor insipid. Positive and negative, these images inform Kabana womanhood.

Moro, like the serpent motif in Goodenough mythology, is symbolic of "androgynous self-sufficiency and self-regeneration . . . an epitome of self-contained generative power" (Young 1987:234). Moro's self-sufficiency in setting himself up as sole provider and nurturer has usurped vital elements of feminine identity and those female roles whereby that identity is expressed and celebrated. By denying the women his company, by living separately from them and making them pawns in his rivalry with Kaukave, Moro is the epitome of abnormal marital relations. The women fret among themselves that his relationship with them is "not good," that this is "no way to live." They chafe at their enforced idleness and most especially at their celibacy. Moro presents himself (falsely) to his wives in the guise of a beautiful young man and seduces them with love magic. He shares food and betelnut with them. Despite these symbols of sexual intimacy, he refuses the ultimate intimacy, sexual intercourse, thereby denying his wives the positive realization of their feminine potential: children. Moro has stripped his wives of their womanhood, and Rimitnga, determined to regain what is hers by right of her sex, confronts Moro in order to break down the barriers between them. By violating the rules, Rimitnga reappropriates the control over her femininity that Moro so jealously guards. The consequences of her act are the reinstatement of proper--moral--relations between the sexes, relations that are fundamental to the "good life" as the Kabana define it.[7]

Although all firstborns, indeed everyone, should aspire to Moro's generativity and generosity, to do so outside a framework of human interaction leads, ultimately, to failure. An impoverished life is one devoid of moral relations. Thus, Moro invites his own downfall by ignoring what married Kabana

men and women constantly told me: "Without mothers, we would not exist; without wives, we men are nothing; without women, men's work [ceremonial] would be impossible."[8] Moro is the ideal firstborn, generous and providing, a model for all firstborn children. But the ambiguities that Kabana know to exist in the concept of primogeniture, which are part of the dramatic tension they hear in this story, finally climax as Moro's impoverished (deceitful) existence is exposed by Rimitnga. Moro's response to being found out, exposed, is to seek vengeful self-destruction (cf. Young 1983).[9]

Episode 6: Moro's Mortuary Feast

The next night, Moro came and told Aisapel that now he was head of the family. Nothing was lost; the pigs, gardens, and everything else he had provided would remain. He gave Aisapel the magical stone used to call pigs and the Kove shell money, stipulating that Aisapel must quickly repay the pig debt to Kaukave. Moro promised not to abandon Aisapel, but if Aisapel lets him down, there would be no hiding place where Moro could not find him. The next morning Aisapel, Mother, and all the women wept as, far out to sea, Moro moved west across the distant horizon and disappeared.

Aisapel began preparations. He gave gifts of shell money to each of Moro's wives, setting aside the rest to distribute among all the men's houses in every village. The women harvested taro and coconuts to display on ceremonial platforms and they gathered firewood and banana leaves for the stone ovens. They mourned their husband and his regenerative powers; to comfort them, Aisapel talked about Moro. Aisapel related how Moro had designated him head of the family but had forbidden him to marry any of the women, because he was still an untried youth. The women accepted what he said and thought no more of it. Aisapel got out his hourglass drum and sang of his overwhelming grief and his desire to find Moro.

The mournful sound of his drumming carried throughout the area, and men gathered at Aisapel's house to share his loss. They inquired which music would be performed at the mortuary feast, and Aisapel chose music to accompany *aulu* (autochthonous spirit-beings; masked dancers). Aisapel invited the men to drum and sing while they waited for the women to prepare their meager feast of taro and pork. In a few days they would gather again for the next phase of mortuary work when Aisapel would repay Kaukave's forty pigs and distribute mortuary wealth.

Aisapel instructed the women to prepare for the mortuary feast six days hence. Privately, Aisapel worried about whether he would be able to provide the betelnut and other items that every good host should offer his guests. That night Moro visited Aisapel again and reassured him that everything needed would be made available. Then Moro disappeared again.

On the day of the feast, Aisapel presented Kaukave with forty pigs and each men's house group with forty fathoms of shell money. Kaukave effusively extolled Aisapel's ability to outdo everyone in shell money and pigs, and praised him as a "man of renown." Although a mere youth, Kaukave orated, Aisapel had acquired Moro's wisdom and replaced him. But Aisapel was inconsolable and announced his intention to leave and seek out Moro. In the face of their disbelief, Aisapel reiterated Moro's message that, if they sweat and the soot and ashes from the fire cover their bodies, they will have food; otherwise they will starve. Finally, Aisapel told them of Moro's further edict to continue the ceremonial work he had originated because then life would be good. If they forgot the ceremonial, there would be no escape from Moro's wrath.

For two days Aisapel rested from his endeavors while village big-men gathered around him and wept, worried that he would also desert them. Annoyed, Aisapel chastised them for dwelling on Moro's departure and the possibility that he, a mere youth, might also leave. "Are there no men in this little place?" Aisapel taunted. "Now we must live by Moro's words. Look at me, have I not become a man?" Indeed, Aisapel had achieved his maturity, and so Moro departed to Kukul Island.

When Moro plunged into the sea to escape Rimitnga, the snake skin on his body peeled away, and he was transformed into another kind of being. He was much admired by the women of Kukul Island, who pestered him to marry them. Moro refused them; he had left his forty wives because one woman had wronged him. But the women continued to pressure Moro to marry them until he could bear it no longer. Transforming himself into yet another kind of being, Moro left Kukul Island to reside in Madang. There, too, the women were enamored of him and pressed him to marry them. Moro was so adamant in his refusals to marry that the women wondered if there was something wrong with him. Now, the women of Madang had quantities of garbage, and they chose to deposit their rubbish on the spot where Moro sat. Moro's choices of places to go were as numerous as the blades of grass, so he got up from the rubbish heap and left. He has never been seen again, and there is no other knowledge of him. Where has he gone? Now we must provide for ourselves. Everyone says that he is dead. He is not. That's all; the Story of Moro is finished.

Commentary

The Kabana distinguish between two categories of mortuary traditions: death rites and mortuary ceremonies. Death rites, which last for three days, are concerned with performing closure on the dying process of a particular person. On the first day, these rites include preparation of the corpse, formal mourning, burial, the distribution of wealth and raw foods to compensate the mourners, and a final feast of taro and pork. For the next two days,

the village of the deceased observes mortuary taboos during which time the widow(er) or a close kinsperson of the deceased goes into seclusion and composes songs that eulogize the deceased and chronicle his or her idiosyncrasies and life history.[10] The songs are sung by the women who gather to mourn throughout the night of the *arilu* (feast to banish the deceased's ghost). Eulogy songs have a particular style and tempo different from all other Kabana musical forms. Individual mourners can contribute verses of their own composition. Captured in the eulogy songs, the lives of long-deceased people become a part of Kabana folklore.[11]

Whereas death rites are oriented to finishing the dying process and reconciling the living to their loss of that singular individual, mortuary ceremonies are performed for all those who have died since the closure of the previous mortuary cycle. Moro's death is both the origin and occasion for the final phase of mortuary work called *ololo kapei*, the "big feast." Aisapel is the *budua itama*, or "father/owner of the deceased," the person obligated to sponsor the series of feasts and exchanges that must be performed in the name of the deceased. This work requires huge quantities of pigs, taro and other foods, coconuts, betelnut, tobacco, shell money, and other items of value. There is also the expense incurred to compensate the artists who create the masks and costumes worn by the dancers who represent the *aulu* spirit-beings that preside over these affairs. All the resources of husband and wife are called upon, and a successful "owner of the dead one" can make or enhance his and his wife's reputation for renown; a poor performance can be ruinous virtually beyond redemption. The source of much of this wealth is one's progenitors, who had the foresight and strength to provide for their descendants by planting sago and areca palms, clearing garden land, and forging and maintaining a network of trade and exchange partners.

Mortuary feasts take years of preparation and planning, a crucial aspect of ceremonial work that is largely hidden, since it takes place within the context of daily life. Time is telescoped in the myth, and much of the cycle as currently performed is omitted or truncated. For example, mention of taro and other foodstuffs on ceremonial platforms only hints at the several raw and cooked food distributions that take place during the months before the final feast exchange. The distributions of shell money and the pig exchange are given little attention, whereas the crucial role played by women, especially wives, is highlighted when Aisapel presents shell money to Moro's wives. This exchange is analogous to the "pig of *penpennga*," a large pig presented by a husband to his wife during the final round of the pig exchange whereby a man publicly acknowledges his wife's valuable contribution to their joint endeavors. Senior Kabana explained *penpennga* as compensation to a wife for "her aching back and loss of sleep, for the sweat she lost while

building and tending the hot stone ovens, for the smoke that blinded her and the soot that covered her skin." Women "are the backbone of ceremonial work," and without them the whole affair would be impossible.[12] Aisapel's gift emphasizes that the real source of a man's wealth and prestige is women.

Young points out that in "snake-man myths the destruction of [the disguise] causes [the snake-man] to die or seek death in . . . driven resentment" (1987:248), a motif that is replayed in the myths presented in this volume. In the guise of the snake-man, Moro deceives in appearance and behavior, as Aisapel recognized when he called Moro a trickster. When his duplicity is exposed by Rimitnga, Moro's monumental resentment is expressed by his violent and explosive departure into the sea. Moro's vengeance is to doom humanity to a life of hard work and struggle. The burden is lightened, however, in the legacy Moro bequeathed his descendants. As long as ceremonial work is performed, life will be good; if it is not performed, life will be worthless.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Moro

Although Moro is the creator of firstborn and mortuary ceremonies, he has no role and is neither invoked nor propitiated in actual performances. For the Kabana, the link between the period of antiquity and genealogical time is not gods, ghosts, or deities, but the living firstborn child. This link is especially highlighted during the blood-letting rite of male super-incision and female ear cutting during one phase of the mortuary cycle. After undergoing this rite, boys are secluded in the men's house, where Moro's image is carved onto the main support posts. Firstborn girls are secluded in female ceremonial houses *(kailanga)* perched atop a single support post, which is also carved with Moro's image. Kabana elders explained that spilling the firstborn's blood "on top of the dead" is merely a figurative expression--since spirits/ghosts are not called forth from the domain of the dead to participate in any of the ceremonies--expressive of the shared substance of ancestors and descendants. The recent dead are the firstborn's senior kin and represent the child's progenitors, those "of one blood" with whom the child shares inherited substantive essence and upon whom (or on whose ground) that essential substance will be shed. The dead have no other role than as symbols of generation and degeneration acknowledged and celebrated through firstborn and mortuary ceremonies. Ostensibly performed to "raise the name" of their firstborn, the real and acknowledged purpose of firstborn ceremonials is to "raise the name" of the child's parents. The child is merely an exemplar of parental and ances-

tral achievement. Moro, as an exemplary firstborn, symbolically encompasses the concept of primogeniture in the Kabana total conceived cosmic order.

Epilogue

Pore concludes his narrative by emphatically stating that Moro is not dead. Indeed, Moro lives on in this myth and in his creations--the Aname (Amara) River, the stone in Pore's possession that Aisapel used to call forth pigs, the bits of Kamaia's pig transformed into boulders on a forest path, the snake-man figure carved on the central support post of the men's house and girls' ceremonial houses. Not least, Moro lives in the ideology of primogeniture and in people's participation in and performance of firstborn and mortuary traditions. Moro's threat to return and seek out those who neglect ceremonial work should not be construed as a "second coming" or a promise of a new millennium. On the contrary, Moro's warning suggests that some dire, perhaps supernatural, threat to life and life-style would be the consequence of failure to observe ancestral traditions. As the Kabana devote more and more of their time, energy, and resources in pursuit of "modernity" and "development," aspects of firstborn and mortuary ceremonial are being abandoned. As the debate about which phases of the ceremonial cycle should be abandoned in the interest of development, the Kabana contemplate Moro's warnings. Many Kabana men and women, young and old, expressed the view that the loss of their traditions constituted a threat to the Kabana way of life and their unique cultural identity. They feared that the "good life" was becoming a thing of the past and worried about the future their children would face.

Although some people might insist that Moro is alive and well and living in America near the papal city of Roma, for Pore and the majority of Kabana, "Where has he gone?" is a purely rhetorical question. Moro lives on in the retelling of his exploits and the performance of firstborn and mortuary ceremonies. This is the legacy of Moro.

NOTES

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1. Elsewhere I have shown that, ideologically and epistemologically, firstborn child and mortuary ceremonies are central to and definitive of Kabana culture and society (Scaletta 1985; McPherson 1985).

2. The Kabana have three categories of oral literature. *Ninipunga* are highly amusing stories of anthropomorphic animals and insects that are similar to Kipling's "Just So" stories and Aesop's morality tales. Legends, or *titnga,* are historically and geographically true stories that recount ancient battles, patterns of migration and settlement, and the relations between human and superhuman beings. *Apu,* the third class of stories (from *pu,* "base; foundation; origin"), are creation stories or cosmological myths that relate how present empirical and sociocultural realities came into being.

3. The Kabana abhor snakes and kill them on sight, frantically beating them to a pulp, after which they are thrown into the sea. Moro's association with the sea (Episode 5) may account for the classification of saltwater eels as snakes and nonfood. Freshwater eels, by contrast, are classified as fish and considered an edible delicacy.

4. Moro is traveling west from Bariai into Kilenge territory; however. I am unable to locate the Kilenge villages of Saumoi and Ailovo. There is a village on the extreme western tip of New Britain called Aimolo that could be Ailovo renamed or mispronounced, but this is speculation on my part.

5. According to Pomponio, some Mandok still own dog's-tooth netbags, and a type of black vine armlet called *ngas* is also found on west Umboi (pers. com., 1990; see also Pomponio, this volume).

6. In other versions of the story, Rimitnga has forgotten her *kina,* the all-purpose women's tool made from the sharpened shell of a mangrove oyster, or she has forgotten her digging stick. Whether *kina,* digging stick, or menstrual belt, the forgotten object is actually and symbolically feminine.

7. Of all Moro's wives, only Rimitnga is named, a fact that serves to highlight her crucial role in the myth. As Counts points out in the case of Aveta, the woman responsible for Moro's demise in the Kaliai story, "to have a name is coterminous with having respect, honor, and the only kind of immortality available in the traditional belief system" (this volume). Rimitnga, like Aveta. acts morally, refusing to submit to what she knows is immoral and destructive of human relations. Contra Counts, however, who argues that the myth implies Kaliai women must reject gender role stereotypes to achieve recognition, the Kabana myth suggests that women must fulfill their gender role ideal in order to achieve renown/immortality. Perhaps the image of the good wife as submissive and obscure is a (wishful?) male stereotype of the female that Kaliai women, like their Kabana sisters, do not subscribe to, since Aveta, like Rimitnga, rejects this role.

8. Compare the discussion of ritual and work in Lawrence 1964.

9. Pore and other senior villagers related this explosion to the historic destruction of Ritter Island, which disappeared entirely in a volcanic eruption in 1888. Moro's violent departure also explains the origin and placement of two anomalous geological formations: an obelisk of stone that grows out of the coral reef near the village of Bambak and, standing in splendid isolation at

Cape Gloucester, the large conical hill that was the top of Mt. Gidlo, where the story of Moro begins.

10. During a discussion of these mortuary rites with some senior men, I suggested that the "meaning" of the seclusion of mother and firstborn in the butterfly room and that of spouse/kinsperson of the deceased were similar. They agreed with my interpretation and commented that now (at last?) I was beginning to understand. See note 11 below.

11. It is interesting to speculate that, if the Story of Moro is the biography of a legendary big-man and recounts historical events, then the process of creating this legendary hero might have begun with the eulogy songs composed for his mortuary rite.

12. These specific comments were made by Ngaoma Geti in 1982 and echoed by many other senior women and men. I am grateful to Ngaoma, who constantly reminded me that Kabana tradition has many nooks and crannies and who spent hours painstakingly explaining these subtle convolutions to me.