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# “Blood” and “Line”: Exploring Kinship Idioms of Nguna, Vanuatu

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### Article abstract

This paper gives a substantive description of the symbolic aspects of a modern Pacific society's kinship system. A brief overview of kinship terminology from Nguna, Vanuatu is followed by an exegesis of four key concepts concerning kinship and descent. Ngunesse procreation theory is then introduced and compared with material from Ambae, Vanuatu (Poewe and Lovell, 1980; Rodman and Lovell, n.d.) which raises the question of the meaning of Lounsbury's (1964) classic formal analysis of Crow kinship systems. It is argued that the relationship between the Ngunesse idioms of “blood” and “line” is partially explicable in terms of Allen's (1981) hypothesis that, in numerous and contrasting societies in Vanuatu, the idiom of uterine reproduction gives symbolic form to the conceptualization of not only matrilineal kinship, but other types of kinship as well. Throughout the paper, the more general issue of ethnographic interpretation is addressed.

# 'Blood' and 'Line': Exploring Kinship Idioms of Nguna, Vanuatu

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*Cette étude offre une description des plus substantielles des aspects symboliques du système de filiation d'une société contemporaine au coeur de l'océan Pacifique. Une exégèse de quatre principaux concepts de la filiation et de la descendance suivra un survol de la terminologie de la filiation en vigueur à Nguna, dans l'archipel de Vanuatu. La théorie de la procréation qui y prévaut est ensuite présentée et comparée avec des données provenant de Ambae, dans le même archipel (Poewe et Lovell, 1980; Rodman et Lovell, s.d.); ceci pose alors la question de la signification de l'analyse formelle classique des systèmes de filiation Crow élaborée par Lounsbury (1981). La discussion porte ensuite sur l'explication partielle de la relation entre les mots «sang» et «ligne» en langue Nguna selon l'hypothèse de Allen (1981); celle-ci stipule que dans plusieurs des différentes sociétés que l'on retrouve à Vanuatu, l'idiome exprimant la reproduction utérine donne une forme symbolique non seulement à la conceptualisation de la filiation matrilineaire mais aussi à celle d'autres types de filiation. Il est surtout question dans ce texte d'interprétation ethnographique.*

This paper gives a substantive description of the symbolic aspects of a modern Pacific society's kinship system. A brief overview of kinship terminology from Nguna, Vanuatu is followed by an exegesis of four key concepts concerning kinship and descent. Ngunese procreation theory is then introduced and compared with material from Ambae, Vanuatu (Poewe and Lovell, 1980; Rodman and Lovell, n.d.) which raises the question of the meaning of Lounsbury's (1964) classic formal analysis of Crow kinship systems. It is argued that the relationship between the Ngunese idioms of "blood" and "line" is partially explicable in terms of Allen's (1981) hypothesis that, in numerous and contrasting societies in Vanuatu, the idiom of uterine reproduction gives symbolic form to the conceptualization of not only matrilineal kinship, but other types of kinship as well. Throughout the paper, the more general issue of ethnographic interpretation is addressed.

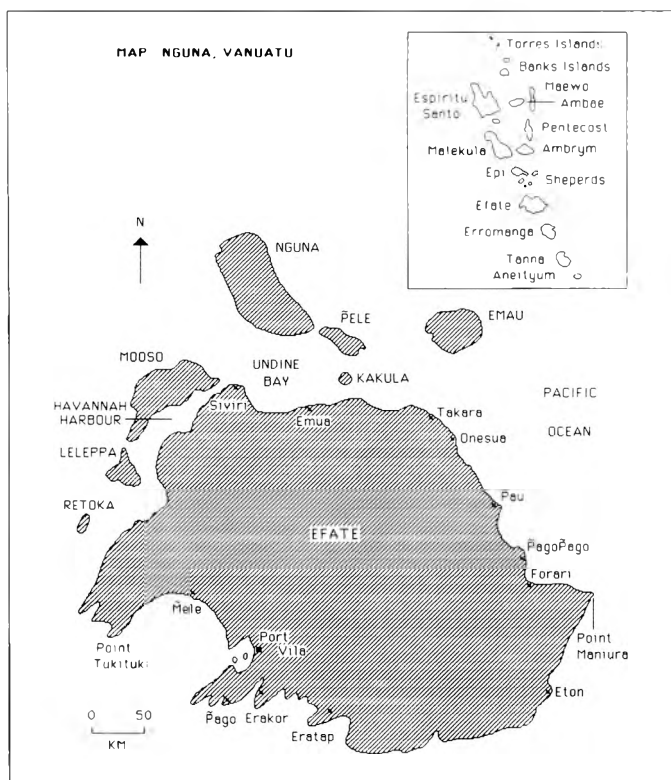
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Nguna is a small, volcanic island measuring some 5 by 10 kilometres and lying about 7 kilometres off the north coast of Efate, the centremost island of Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides/ Les Nouvelles Hébrides). Many of its features make Ngunese society and culture an ethnographic case of some complexity. The people of Nguna struggle to make ends meet under what seem to be increasingly difficult constraints. Population growth combined with the large proportion of land used for growing coconuts is putting pressure on the rest of the land. It is therefore becoming more difficult for people absent for more than a year or two, working in the capital, Port Vila, or elsewhere, to establish and/or maintain solid claims to land back home on the island.

The situation is further complicated and aggravated by the continued attachment of rights over certain plots of land to traditional titles in Nguna's hereditary chiefly system, a hierarchical political structure which has survived massive transformations of Ngunese society over the last century. Along with the advent of cashcropping, accompanied by Christianity, there was a shift from matrilineal to patrilineal transmission of chiefly titles (Espirat, Guiart, Lagrange and Renaud, 1973; Facey, 1981, 1983). Bearers of such titles continue to inherit the associated lands and to dominate in the three power structures which

govern island life: the local church body of pastor and elders; village councils; and the chiefly system itself. Though heavily influenced by Western economics and ideas, Ngunese society is well-grounded in tradition in terms of its organization and structure. It presents us with a complex wealth of terms and allusive phrases having to do with categories of kin and descent groups.

It also presented the ethnographer, working in the politically uneasy pre-Independence period (February 1978 to February '80) with several "taboo" topics. The then seemingly imminent possibility of a drastic revision of land tenure—that all land should return to the "customary (*kastom*) owners"—exacerbated an already substantial degree of distrust by some islanders of "Europeans", especially any who took particular interest in land holdings, ownership or modes of inheritance of land use rights. Consequently, it was not merely imprudent, it was impossible to conduct any but the most general of inquiries into such subjects as land tenure and disputes without jeopardizing the entire research project.



### Ngunese Kinship Terminology

In Ngunese *naviosoana* ("calling") denotes kinship terminology. Kin terms are by far the most

commonly used forms of address and of reference to a person physically present or proximal. In anthropological terminology the Ngunese system is a Crow type, in which the following general "rules" are said to apply [for specifics of the terminology, see the Appendix]:

- 1) F and FB are classed together and distinguished from MB;
- 2) M and MZ are classed together and distinguished from FZ;
- 3) Parallel cousins are classed with siblings and distinguished from cross cousins;
- 4) Patrilineal cross cousins are "raised" a generation (i.e., classed with F and FZ), while matrilineal cross cousins are "lowered" a generation (i.e., classed with Ego's children);
- 5) The accordance of certain terminological equivalences (MB with FZH; FZ with MBW) with the tradition of sister-exchange, known as *lakipiliu*;
- 6) The existence of special affinal terms only for men, which tallies with the great degree of deference with which a man treats his in-laws;
- 7) The extension of Crow terminology over an indefinite number of generations for Ego's father's matriline, i.e., FZD, FZDD, FZDDD and so on are all classed as FZ; and FZS, FZDS, FZDDS and so on are all classed as F;
- 8) The following three reduction rules can be seen to be at work in the system (subject to conditions that will be discussed at length below):
  - (i) half-sibling rule: FS>B; MS>B; FD>Z; MD>Z.  
(one's parent's child should be considered as one's sibling)
  - (ii) merging rule: ♂B...->♂..., and ♀Z...->♀...  
(one's same-sex sibling should be considered as oneself, i.e., a male's brother is equated with himself; a female's sister is equated with herself)
  - (iii) skewing rule (Crow type I): MB...>B.  
(one's MB should be considered as one's B)

In his 'definitive comparative treatment of Crow-Omaha systems' (Keesing, 1975 : 113) Lounsbury (1964) identified a type of kinship terminology that he called the Crow system. He went on to say that this type can be subdivided into sub-types or sub-varieties on the basis of the ways in which the typical Crow feature of "cross-generation equivalence" or "generational skewing" is treated in different ethnographic cases. Simply put, this means that a woman's brother and her son (MB / ZS) are treated as equivalent in reckoning kinship in all of these

systems, although they do not all effect it in exactly the same way.

While some of the intricacies of Lounsbury's argument will be pursued further below, it is enough for the moment that the reader realize that it is this last (#8 above) of his propositions which is most important for the purposes of this paper. In these three "reduction rules" Lounsbury makes assertions about the ways in which people with Crow systems extend the classification of "primary relatives" to more distant ones. In taking this "genealogical" position or perspective, however, Lounsbury and others have tended to focus on the value of such equations from a male point of view. Keesing, for example, finds the skewing rule (#8 [iii] above) meaningful insofar as it equates a whole line of matrilineally related men in general and, more specifically, equates a man (MB) and the likely inheritor (ZS) of his social position and/or legal or political rights (e.g., Keesing, 1975 : 114-115).

As various scholars have already pointed out, some serious failings are entailed in such an approach. Ten years ago Weiner (1979) attempted to shift the emphasis in Trobriand ethnography— it being one of the key cases employed in the debate over the meaning of kinship term equations— away from an exclusive focus on male authority and the brother-in-law relationship. She proposed, and amply illustrated with the Trobriand material, an inclusive focus which would take equal notice of women's wealth and influence, the brother-sister relationship and cultural notions regarding male and female procreative contributions.

In a similar manner Poewe and Lovell (1980) argue that Lounsbury's three "reduction rules" fail to take into account crucial social and cultural features, most especially norms, values and various other sorts of ideological elements such as indigenous procreation theories. In a subsequent section of this paper their critique, which has clear implications for the interpretation of my own materials from Nguna as well as for a revision of Lounsbury's "rules", will be outlined. Before we can address their ideas, however, we need to delve into some of the ethnographic details of the Ngunesse case.

### *Concepts of Kinship and Descent*

There are four concepts in terms of which the Ngunesse conceptualize their relationships with one another: *nakainaga*; *namatarau*; *namavesi*; and *naworawora*. Each of these terms' uses and meanings will be explored.

### NAKAINAGA ("LINE" / MATRICLAN)

These totemic groups, called *nakainaga*,<sup>1</sup> are said to be a human invention, though inspired by the ancestors. Oral narratives tell how certain chiefs called their people together and assigned each person to a clan in accordance with whatever object he or she had brought— octopus, fire-stone, breadfruit, yam or fish, and so on for the feast.<sup>2</sup>

One of these narratives (see Facey, 1988) recounts how this was effected on Nguna by two Nguna chiefs. Another, first recorded in the 1950s (Guiart, 1964), gives the credit to the Efate chiefs, Roimata and Roimuru, and locates the event on Efate. The two accounts do agree, however, on the process by which clans originated and the purpose for which they were created: reduction of a disastrously high level of inter-group hostility and killing. As an ethnohistoric and archaeological aside, José Garanger excavated a site on one of Efate's offshore islands said to have been the home of the great Roimata— Retoka or "Hat Island". In 1967 he found the remains there of some 41 humans, as well as pigs and cannibalized human bones, along with ornaments and artefacts whose 'overall range...is quite surprising' (Bellwood, 1979 : 270-2). The site was carbon dated to A.D. 1265 ± 140.

Today the institution of clanship is recognized throughout central Vanuatu. On Nguna itself, matrilineal membership is widely dispersed. There are 19 clans, and 3 more are recognized but have no living members. The distribution of clans in any given village is fairly wide. In the largest village, Tikilaso, 13 of the 16 clans are represented and there is a substantial disparity in their numbers of members.

People have a fairly accurate idea of how many people there are in any given clan as well as which clans are on the increase or decrease. Those whose clan is particularly small express some dismay at this state of affairs, saying that a small clan is incapable of accomplishing "big jobs", referring to such matters as weddings. While these may be seen as pragmatic advantages and disadvantages of clan-size, other cultural notions concerning reproduction and continuity are involved as well.

For example, of the various kinds of fosterage and adoption in which the Ngunesse engage, there is one which involves the acquisition of a female matrilineal member by changing an individual's clan membership. In this case, unlike other forms of adoption, the person needn't be a young child; but she must be female. In addition, this process does not necessarily entail the creation of a new set of (adoptive) parents nor a change in residence for the adoptee. The essence of this phenomenon is the

desire to ensure the continuity or improve the relative size of a clan which is either on the verge of extinction or dwindling relative to the others.

The adoption consists of a ceremonial handing-over of the girl in which a small prestation in cash, mats and food is made to the giver of the girl. In the simplest instance the giver is the wife of the man who is "buying out" one of his own daughters to be his clanswoman. When married, she will pass her adoptive clan membership to her offspring. She thereby reproduces "on behalf of" her adoptive clan just as, in normal circumstances, she is said to 'reproduce on behalf of her brother' since a man's "line" is considered to end with him. In other words, as a woman's reproductivity allows the continuity of the transmissible aspect of her husband's individuality, so does it at the same time allow the continuity of "line", the transmissible aspect of group (clan) identity. (More will be said about these ideas below.)

The nuclear family is the unit of labour for everyday sorts of endeavours, and the extended family, i.e., the co-resident agnatic cluster, is that for larger jobs such as clearing fields and planting yams. Weddings and funerals, however, call for the participation of one's clan-mates. This will be elaborated on in connection with the concept of *namatarau*.

#### NAMATARAU ("FAMILY" / KINDRED)

The concept, *namatarau*, is expressed in Bislama (Vanuatu's *lingua franca*) as *famli* or, in English, as "family". In some contexts this word is used as synonymous with *nakainaga*; but, in others, a distinction is made between them, as in informants' statement that, 'If it weren't for *nakainaga*, there would be no *namatarau*.' *Namatarau*, then, contrary to Guiart's passing reference (1964 : 102) quoted below, refers to Ego's kindred, all those people who are related to Ego by virtue of "line", that is, all those who were born of any of the "lines" with which Ego identifies. This includes all one's consanguineals as well as those who belong to the matriclans of each of one's most immediate family members, i.e., those of the clans of one's F, FF, MF, one's self (or one's M), plus that of one's spouse, MBW, siblings' spouses and step-parents, if any. As one woman put it, "Whites only keep track of the man's side, but we pay attention to 'both sides' (*taleeva duarua*)."

The major cooperative activity performed in the name of *namatarau* is the wedding. Before a couple may marry they must have the consent of their families, the "side of the woman" and the "side of the man", the two *namatarau maaga*.

All of the people counted as one's *namatarau* are to greater or lesser extent under obligation to appear

at the village of the man or the woman not later than the night preceding the wedding; or, failing that, to send a contribution, in the form of money, mats, yams and/or other food or goods— plates, cloth, and so on. Not to do so would jeopardise one's own future endeavours, and probably those of one's siblings and children as well. Non-participation is noted and not forgotten.

Especially when one is the only available representative of a particular "line" closely related to one of the principals, the pressure to be an active participant is considerable. For example, were the groom's mother's father and his brothers all deceased, but a woman in another village was of their "line", she would feel compelled to appear and make an appropriately significant contribution at the wedding in the guise of stand-in or surrogate maternal grandfather to the groom.

The greatest burden of effort and expense, though, falls on the parents and siblings of the person to be married. The absence of any of them would be very conspicuous and could irreparably damage intrafamilial relations given the preeminent position of the nuclear family as a support group.

#### NAMAVESI ("LINE OF FATHERS" / PATERNAL MATRICLAN)

This term refers to names that may be used to identify or place individuals. As Jean Guiart put it, these names are '...difficult to obtain, and their meanings, though symbolic, are obscure...' (Guiart, 1964 : 102). In his words, *namavesi* also refers to 'anything transmitted patrilineally from one generation to the next' (1964 : 102), including property. More generally, a *namavesi* name denotes one's father's matriclan as a whole.

The significance of *namavesi* can most clearly be seen in the context of address. It is explained in this way: if a man were to call another male by the latter's *namavesi* name, it would be tantamount to saying that the latter was his child. This happens when the former is of the same "line" as the other's father. People say that the one is the other's "child" because his "line" begat him (*pesi a*).

*Pesi* is the action of scooping out a hole in the earth in order to plant or harvest yams. The same term is used for starting a fire by rubbing a grooved stick with a pointed one, an activity said to have formerly been an exclusively male enterprise. *Pesivesi*, which suggests repeated or continuous action, is translated as "to beget".

By using this metaphor of cultivation for the male role in procreation the speaker invokes all the males of his "line" and makes a two-fold assertion: first, on behalf of the men of his matriclan, he claims

responsibility and credit for producing that person; and, second, he asserts the legitimacy of any claim that that group of men might have occasion to make on that person, for loyalty or labour or a say in his actions— in particular, his marriage. Only as metaphoric collective genitors of the individual in this sense are they able to make such claims.

**NAWORAWORA** ("TRIBE" / DESCENDANTS)

The last major concept concerning descent or kinship is *naworawora*. There are many words which relate to this term and through which we can gain some insight into its meaning and connotations:

- wora* = place; vagina [?]
  - pōrae/worae* = to break
  - worawora* = to break into many pieces
  - nawora* = landing place, anchorage; passage; a new shoot that springs up beside the mature plant or tree of any kind (excluding the banana, the new shoot of which is called *suuli*, which is also the term for "grandchild".)
  - naworawora* = tribe, descendant(s)
  - pavakawora* = to propagate, have offspring, reproduce
- (Note that, according to Schütz (1969 : 31-2), *vaka* is a causative affix. *Wora*, then, again appears with the connotation of the creation of new life or growth.)
- navavakaworaana* = descendants

In her contribution to the still lively Ambrym (Vanuatu) kinship debate, Patterson presents an analysis of the meaning of certain terms in the North Ambrym language which are clearly related to this bundle of Ngunese words. She discusses the three meanings of *wor*: first, as a noun, it denotes the pile of stones on which pigs are killed; second, as a pronoun, it means "part" or "section"; and, third, it occurs in a compound (*worgehu*) meaning "some". She then distinguishes *wor* from *wuru* which means "reef passage" and, in addition,

...was the same as the term applied to the local group from which one's mother came and for those kin addressed as *mesung* (MB), *itning* (FZ/MBW), *tubyung* (MBS/FZS), *yaleng wehen* (MBSW/ZD), (male speaking) and *tungwehen/tutu* (MBSW/D), (female speaking).  
(Patterson, 1976 : 97-8)

Furthermore, Patterson learned that,

...*wurunjesul* means 'those who are our passage'; when we are in trouble we take refuge with them; just as a ship passes through the reef

into calm waters we go and 'hide' with them. The dual sense of providing sanctuary and a harbour is nicely expressed in the English verb 'to harbour'.

(op.cit. : 98)

As my translations for *nawora* show, the Ngunese terms and their meanings are very like those Patterson found in North Ambrym<sup>3</sup>. Like *wuru*, *wora* carries both the meaning of "reef passage" as a sheltered place by which one can escape the turbulence of the sea and that of a safe place to which one may return. Hence a child, on being taken for the first time to its mother's natal village, is told, 'Don't be afraid. This place (*wora waia*) is yours.'

I have also listed "vagina", though tentatively, as one meaning of *wora*, as a consequence of this common usage: when distinguishing true consanguineal siblings from classificatory ones, people say, 'They (two) come from one (i.e., the same) mother'. They then further clarify or emphasize by saying, 'They (two) come from one (i.e., the same) *wora*.' Eliciting terms for intimate body parts is difficult; but the expressions consistently offered as translations for "uterus" or "womb", or in answer to the question "where does the child live inside its mother?" are "basket/home of the baby". So it seems reasonable to say that *wora* refers, if not specifically to the physiological vagina, certainly in a metaphoric sense to the vagina as the "path" or "passage" by which people move from their first liquid homes into life and the arms of their kin. As such its stress is distinctively matrilineal, describing the life-giving movement from sea to harbour, from danger to safety, a transition mediated by women as mothers.

Now consider the term *naworawora*. *Naworawora* contrasts with both *nakainaga* and *namatarau*. *Naworawora* is seen as a divine creation, something which has existed since the beginning of time, while *nakainaga* is a human invention with a specific, historical origin (see above).

Secondly, the matriclan bond is thought of as one of common "line", whereas the family tie of *naworawora* is called one of shared "blood". Although it is believed to have a historical moment of inception, *nakainaga* is seen as stretching from the far distant past through the present and on into the future. In contrast, *naworawora* is a way of referring to the filiative relationship that obtains between successive generations.

Lastly, *naworawora* and *namatarau* can be compared. I describe *namatarau* above as referring to one's kindred, all those who are related to a given individual by virtue of their "line" identity. The

Ngunese liken it to a coconut pudding, in which each piece represents a different family but all have the same origin, or to a tree whose branches share a common, central trunk.

When people are asked to explain the difference between *naworawora* and *namatarau* most start out saying that they are different, but soon conclude that they must be the same after all. The confusion lies in the question itself which assumes the existence of entities which are both analytically discrete and structurally comparable. When an individual speaks of being *nawora* of someone, their M or F, or of being *naworawora* of their grandparent, it is in the sense of being that person's offspring or lineal descendant— offspring of offspring. People say, 'We are one / the same blood'. This is not a conceptualization in terms of a group; it is a reference to direct consanguineal ties that link individuals in two or more successive generations. Such immediate kin, however, are also members of particular matrilineal clans; therefore, those ancestors to whom one is *naworawora* are also one's *namatarau* by virtue of clan identity. For example, one is not only the *naworawora* of one's FF, as the "real" child of his "real" child, but one also identifies with one's grandfather as a person of a particular clan and, by extension, with all other members of that clan.

*Naworawora*, then, is an idiom of consanguinity or, more precisely, of filiation. Yet, recalling both the semantic associations of this word— "path", "passage" and "vagina"— and the fact that the duplication of *wora* in *naworawora* indicates a repeated action, the idiom is indisputably one of the successive uterine reproduction of individuals.

### *Idioms of 'Blood' and 'Line'*

The Ngunese material can contribute much to the anthropological understanding of kinship in contemporary Oceania. Of particular interest are the concepts of "blood" and "line", their meaning and the relationship between them.

Lovell (Poewe and Lovell, 1980; Lovell, 1981) has dealt with phenomena similar to those discussed in this paper in the Longana district of Ambae (Aoba), one of the more northerly islands in Vanuatu. In analytical terms Longana society is based on an ego-centred principle of kinship and matrilineal categories and displays a Crow kinship terminology (Poewe and Lovell, 1980 : 74). In Longana insiders' terms it is a society '...[founded] on the contradiction between those of the same substance (*dai*) and those of the same womb (*duwigi*)' (*ibid.*).

In Longana men and women do not distinguish terminologically between their (biological) child and

their (classificatory) "child", both being *netui*. A man or woman may, however, refer to his / her biological child as "my substance" (*daingu*), but may not so refer to the (classificatory) "child".<sup>1</sup> Each parent is believed to contribute equal amounts of "substance"— or "blood"— to his or her children, 50% from the mother, 50% from the father.

This simple detail has a considerable impact on the ethnographer's analysis: 'The fact that each child is first and foremost the unique product of a husband and wife constrains the utility of Lounsbury's three Crow rules' (Poewe and Lovell, 1980 : 89), as I shall explain below.

How does this compare with the Ngunese case? In short, the similarity is close indeed. The operative emic concepts here, as in Longana, are "blood" (though Lovell generally chooses instead to translate this for Longana as the more abstract "substance") and "line", in Ngunese *nadaa* and *nakainaga*.

The Ngunese do not speak easily to "Europeans" of their indigenous procreative theory. Feeling intimidated by the heavy weight of Western "scientific understanding" of the process, they are reluctant to present their traditional understandings. When they do, however, it is clear that theirs is also a 50/50 theory of parental contribution to the "blood" (*nadaa*) of the foetus, along with a 100% maternal contribution of "line".

In consequence, the same types of discriminations are made on Nguna as are made in Longana between "real" and "fictive", "classificatory" or, as Marshall (1983) calls it, "created" kin. There is differential use of possessive pronominal suffixes versus possessive pronominal adjectives, which Schütz (1969) considers markers of the property of being inalienable or alienable respectively. A man refers to his "real" B (*tai*), for example, as *taigu*, using the suffixed form, and he will refer to any other sort of "brother" as *tai aginau sikai* (brother-my-a/one), using the separate adjectival form. Likewise, the terms *pīla* and *tama*, which take possessive pronominal suffixes, are used solely in reference to one's "real" M and F respectively. The other terms for M and F, *teete* and *mama*, are not equatable to these in usage and meaning.

As a result, the half-sibling and merging rules are limited. The first of these, which states that one's parent's child should be considered to be one's sibling, is '...not unconditionally applicable' to Longana kinship (Poewe and Lovell, 1980 : 83). "True siblings" are only those who were born from the same woman as well as fathered by the same man. The three other types of Longana "siblings" are all differentiated terminologically from "true siblings"

and from each other.

The merging rule, stating that a person's same-sex sibling should be considered as that person, is also compromised or, as Lovell puts it, '...constrained not in its 'reading' but in its consequence' (1981). That is, while for many purposes this is descriptively accurate, the rule does not hold when it is a matter of whose *dai* a child is. Even though true brothers or sisters are of identical "substance", their offspring only derive 50% of *their* "substance" from each of their father and mother. Therefore, the child's FB or MZ can only share 50% of his or her BC's or ZC's "substance" respectively. These qualifications pertain equally in Nguna as in Longana as a result of the common procreative proposition that "substance" or "blood" is equally passed by man and woman to his/her offspring.

For the same reason the skewing rule, that MB should be considered as B, has limited descriptive power vis-à-vis both systems. Not only can MB be said to be taken as B, but also the MB/ZS relationship is "akin to" that of the B/Z relationship. This hinges in turn on the *complementary* sort of equivalence that obtains between B and Z (cf. Marshall, 1983, and others in the same volume). Being offspring of the same father and the same mother, B and Z are identical in substance. The ZC, then, is 50% his/her MB's substance. One of Lovell's male informants summed up the import of this in saying, 'When my sister bears children it is as if the children came from my own belly' (*op. cit.* : 84).

Ngunese male informants and their terminology are even more explicit. They say, 'A woman reproduces on behalf of her brother'; and the term for the ZC, *ṗelemata*, implies what Longana men say, *ṗele* meaning "belly" and *mata* "source" or "origin". But here things become complex, as they do in Longana, as we shall see shortly. Men on Nguna do not make this statement in the context of "blood" but, rather, in what appears to be explicitly the context of "line", as in: 'A man's line ends with him. A woman reproduces on behalf of her brother.'

Is this statement about "line", or is it about "blood"? Are Ngunese "blood" and "line" as similar to "blood" and "line" in Longana as it first appears?

Lovell and Rodman (Rodman and Lovell, n.d.) have had their own struggles, differing over the analysis of the nature of *dai* in Longana. They saw a discrepancy between each other's analysis even though their data derive from precisely the same area, often involve the same individual informants in roughly the same time frame and, in many instances, are even based on the same interview questions.

They agreed that "line" (*duvi*) is a lineal principle, a descent category, transmitted only by women to their offspring. As for "substance" or "blood" (*dai*) Rodman found no evidence that *dai* was more than "a dyadic principle of simple patrification" (Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 11). As noted above, Lovell came to a different conclusion: that *dai* is passed by both men and women to their offspring (Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 7).

Rodman and Lovell publicly aired their differences in a 1983 conference paper (revised in 1985) in order to explore the issue of ethnographic perception and interpretation. Their analysis, from Lovell's point of view, pinpointed several impinging factors of the field interview situation (Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 16-27) that might be reason for their difference of opinion and interpretation:

- 1) the interviewer's use of an abstract approach versus elicitation of real persons as examples;
- 2) the impact of interviewee's belief in male over female dominance in Longana society;
- 3) the interview focus or context— in particular, land rights and inheritance being extremely "loaded", "leading" contexts;
- 4) a paucity of interviews with women.

For her part, Rodman proposed another factor, one inherent in the informants' own conceptualizations of *dai*. She suggested that the ambiguity in informants' statements as well as the conflicting interpretations of the anthropologists might be explained with reference to the presence of conceptualizations of *duvi*, the matrilineal principle. Labeling it a "misusage", she described the source of interpretational difficulty as follows:

The dyadic nature of *dai* that links fathers and children is easily distorted to resemble a lineal principle like *duvi*. In other words, we and Longana slip into a usage of *dai* that ties men to their brothers' children just as *duvi* ties women to their sisters' offspring.

(Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 13)

I shall not presume to pronounce on Rodman and Lovell's interpretational struggles except to say that their "unruly dialogue", as they (following Clifford, 1983) call it, is not a product of either confusion or distortion. Of course, whether their Longanan informants have confounded separable concepts, whether interview context and approach have in some instances produced confounding effects, or something else as yet unidentified is at work— perhaps something as "simple" as the relative sex of interviewer and interviewee?— is best left to Rod-



man and Lovell. I will confine myself to my own data to see what light their problem and hypotheses can shed on the Ngunese material.

### Discussion

In short, my conclusion with respect to Ngunese is that the so-called "confusion" is a product of three "culprits". The first and most important of these is the dominance of the idiom of female reproduction. Both "blood" and "line" are significant emic notions and also analytically separable concepts. But in Ngunese conceptualizations it is the latter, the uterine metaphor, that dominates, such that agnatic kinship is conceived of as relationships between successively regenerating progeny rather than those between offspring of a male ancestor.

In the Ngunese worldview both men and women pass on "blood" to their offspring. The latter are therefore *nawora* of their parents, likened to a plant's seedling that will in time supercede its parent. Ngunese informants, however, are more or less purists on this point. Some assert that Ego's grandchildren may not be called this, as they are *nawora* of Ego's offspring rather than of Ego. Others say that Ego's grandchildren are also Ego's *nawora* (or rather, *naworawora*), but of diluted "blood" as compared with Ego's children. (For very similar ideas on "dilution" of *dai* in Longana, see Poewe and Lovell, 1980: 83). One man went further, tracing *naworawora* lineally to two generations descending *and* ascending, i.e., from Ego's grandparent through Ego's grandchild.

These variations in explanation are not a record of informants' mistakes or misunderstandings. They are exactly what they appear to be: variation. The last-mentioned permutation is especially noteworthy. It is exceptional in that it is expressly lineal and therefore distinctively unlike the other explanations. It was offered by an utterly conscientious and reliable informant, one who, not coincidentally, is well versed in Biblical lore, having immersed himself in that literature for decades in the course of assisting in Biblical translation.

*Naworawora*, as described by this individual, is a mirror image of the Biblical "tribe", the inter-generational string of descendants from Adam or Abraham or whoever. This explanation appears to be an extrapolation of a sort in which this informant occasionally engaged. He was a great help in my attempt to bridge cultural gaps; but, in working hard both to see and to assist me to see similarities between "Us" and "Them", he did sometimes extend and change the indigenous concept to more closely parallel the foreign one (and sometimes vice versa). In this

particular case his explanation of *naworawora* is idiosyncratic in the addition of ascending generations. In all other informants' statements *naworawora* refers only to the descending generation(s). This is similar to what Rodman found (though, again, Lovell has a different interpretation of the "facts") in Longana:

A child is his father's *dai*, not the other way around; it is culturally ungrammatical to say 'My father is my *dai*.' Rather, one must say 'My children are my *dai*. I am my father's *dai*. He was his father's *dai*', and so on.

(Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 11)

It is not difficult to see how such a concept, on Longana or Ngunese, might be extrapolated into a "tribe"-like entity. While this is not how most Ngunese speak of, and presumably conceptualize *naworawora*, it is still no "mistake"; rather, it is the work of intellect, actively thinking and seeking comparisons that might provide a bridge between disparate systems of conceptualization. So the second "culprit" in this confusion of explanatory tongues is the thinking person who, by trying to draw ideas closer together than they necessarily are, contributes to variation in his/her conceptual system and thereby adds another level of complexity to the ethnographer's task of translation and interpretation.

The third "culprit" is the polysemy and omnipresence of the concept of "line", something that Lovell also observed in Longana (Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 16-23). This lies at the heart of the analyst's confusion over Ngunese men's statements regarding their sisters' reproducing "for them" or "on their behalf". The reason given for why "child of *mama*" and "child of *mimi*" (a man's offspring and his sister's children) cannot marry is that "they are one", they are "the same blood". This is not a matter of "line", but of 50% shared substance, "blood". A man's ZC is both the clansperson he cannot propagate himself because of exogamy *and* a carrier of his substance. Such statements, then, are two-sided, interpretable equally as pertaining to "blood" or to "line", or to both simultaneously.

But, again, it is "line" that predominates. Another context in which this occurs is when people speak of the "line of chiefs". Once this referred to matriline continuity, as titles passed in the matriline from MB to ZS. But today they do not; they pass instead from father to son (or grandson), shifting to a different clan with each new successor. Yet the metaphor in terms of which the process of succession is described is still that of "line". One senior man pointed out to me that one must distinguish clearly

between a chief's son who, as his *son*, is his *nawora*, and the same man who, as successor to the position of chief, is the *replacement* for his predecessor. Where the latter is the sense intended, the phrase *namata ni naveinawotaana* ("eye/door/source of the chiefship") is used to refer to the new chief, never *nawora ni naveinawotaana* ("descendant of the chief").

This lends further support to the hypothesis that it is the uterine metaphor, the idiom of uterine reproduction, that serves as the primary means of conceptualizing kinship on Nguna. Allen has argued this as follows:

In predominantly agnatic north Ambrym as much as in matrilineal east Aoba [Ambae] or Nguna, the kin who can be most relied upon for succour, support and protection are those linked through a succession of wombs and vaginal passages. In some fundamental ontological way 'real' kinship is uterine kinship and all other consanguineal and affinal connections are of a secondary or derivative kind.

(Allen, 1981 : 30)

There is good reason to question Allen's view of uterine kinship as more "real" or primary in relation to the less real, "secondary or derivative" quality of other sorts of kinship, as others have pointed out (e.g., Strathern, 1987 : 288-289). From the evidence dealt with in this paper, however, it is nonetheless clear that, while agnatic kinship has considerable functional importance today on Nguna in terms of residence choices and the transmission of land-use rights and chiefly titles, there even agnatic kinship appears to be shaped by the idiom of uterine reproduction, being conceived of as relationships between successively regenerating progeny. So, while neither Allen nor I have a viable answer as to why this should be so, it still seems that in at least several different parts of Vanuatu there is evidence that the uterine idiom carries greater force than that of other co-existing idioms of kinship. Moreover, I would suggest that this is a primary factor in the generation of complex inter-relations between "blood" and "line" in the Ngunese worldview. Though confusing to the ethnographer, this is a matter neither of interpretive "mistakes" nor of informants' "distortion" or "misusage", nor of "confusion" in their own minds. It is, rather, simply the way the Ngunese conceptualization of kinship is: historically and socially complex, and under the powerful influence of an idiom of uterine reproduction.

As Rodman and Lovell observe, the ethnographer's interpretive struggle should not include rejection, suppression or "regularization" of either

contradictory evidence or of conflicting interpretations of that evidence; rather, the task in such instances is "to highlight the contingency of anthropological 'truth'" (Rodman and Lovell, n.d. : 5). While the former might well be tempting, to whom and for what would it be worth doing?

#### Notes

1. According to Pawley, in Proto-Polynesian *\*kakai* (the singular form of which was *\*kai*) '...referred to the people of a place, the inhabitants, the local community' (1982 : 43). More close to home, so to speak, he says that *\*kai(n)* evidently had the same meaning in POC [Proto-Oceanic], as it occurs in various MN [Melanesian] languages' (1982 : 43-4), specifically, Tongan, East Futunan, Rennellese, Samoan, Standard Fijian, Arosi and Kwaio. A possible addition to this, I should think, would be the Ngunese form *naka*, as in *naka ni Vila* (a "Vila person/inhabitant") or *naka ni Efate* (an "Efate person/inhabitant").

Even more relevant to Nguna's *nakainaga* (noting that /g/ represents the dorso-velar nasal) is this: 'In PPN [Proto-Polynesian] a *\*kainaga* was probably a land-holding descent group, led by its *\*qariki*, as it still is in Tikopia' (Pawley, 1982 : 44). Pawley also upholds Goodenough's (1955) list of Micronesian cognates which refer to land-owning descent groups, specifically, Trukese, Puluwat and Woleai.

According to Clark (pers. comm.) there do not appear to be any cognates of *\*kainaga* [here again using /g/ to represent the dorso-velar nasal] in Vanuatu, apart from, possibly, the Ngunese *nakainaga*. While this suggests that the Ngunese form may be a Micronesian or Polynesian borrowing, further evidence would be required before a conclusion could be drawn one way or the other.

2. As far as can be determined clan membership did not entail individual or group abstentions or prohibitions vis-à-vis the totemic object, although according to Guiart's (1964) informants from nearby Lelepa island, there may have been a prohibition on uttering one's own clan name.

3. North Ambrym's *wor* looks more like Nguna's *wora*; but North Ambrym's *wuru* certainly appears closer in meaning to *wora* and its apparent derivatives that I have listed. Until corrected by a linguist—which I very happily would be—I am assuming that Nguna's *wora* is cognate with North Ambrym's *wuru*. But, of course, it is more than possible that both *wor* and *wuru* share a common derivation, which would render moot the question as to which is cognate with Nguna's *wora*.

4. Lovell (pers. comm.) points out that, while the Longana do not distinguish terminologically between their biological and classificatory offspring, they can designate the former by adding the adjective "true". This is also the case in Ngunese usage.

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