

AN INTERPRETATION OF MAGIC

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Introduction

In my consideration of sorcery, healing, and magic as symbols of life I have a twofold intention. Firstly, I want to describe the traditional religious outlook and practices of the Mararoko people of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea by relating their beliefs and rituals to their quest for a life which is rich and abundant. Secondly, I want to demonstrate that the religions of Melanesia, which are often condescendingly characterized as "magical", enable their members to grasp the significance of human life through processes of magic which may be viewed as symbols of the quest for life. That is, I contend that it is more appropriate to view magic as a philosophy of life which finds expression in ritual processes than as an inferior science or technology. Therefore, I shall use "magic" in an objective sense to describe those processes in which people in their desire for a more abundant life forge symbolic links between different areas of human experience.

For the people of Mararoko the world of nature and of social relationships provides a matrix of symbols in which to express their experience and understanding of human life. From the associations they sense between different aspects of their world they have over generations produced symbols which at the same time interpret experience and themselves call for interpretation in the light of ongoing experience. In this paper I suggest that the various expressions of magic are metaphorical statements regarding the human situation. On the surface it may seem that magic is more concerned with the daily exigencies of life in the Mararoko habitat

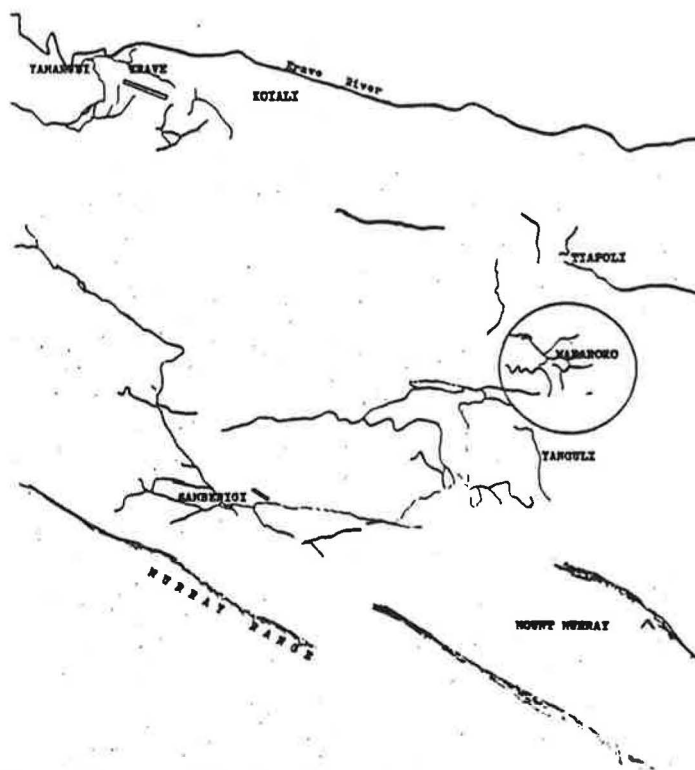
than with the long-term life of the community or the ultimate meaning of life. However, a consideration of magic as symbol, and an exploration of some of the symbols employed in Mararoko magic, point beyond pragmatic concern to an appreciation of human life as opening into and interacting with cosmic life. In treating magic, healing and sorcery as symbols, and in looking at the particular symbols of water, blood, birds and stones which are employed in the processes of magic, I hope to show that the field of magic may be construed not only as the intention of manipulating the world but also as an intention of involvement in life and openness to the world. That is, magic may be considered as a symbol in which people reveal their understanding of themselves and their world, a symbol through which they establish that reality which an outsider perceives as their culture.

Mararoko: People and Environment

The area which I refer to as Mararoko lies five hours walk south of Erave in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Mararoko is the name of one village centred on a communal men's house. It is also the name applied to a complex of six neighbouring villages, including Mararoko, which lie within a half hour's walk of each other, east of Erave and Samberigi, and approximately midway between them. The other villages are Menakiri, Bangarawia, Kengelepe, Waro, and Yaparolo.¹ My work was mostly in Menakiri, Bangarawia, and Mararoko.²

The residents of the Mararoko villages are the most southerly group of over 50,000 Kewa speakers of the Southern Highlands. To the south of them are Sau speakers, to the east Wiru speakers, and to the west Foe speakers, whose languages are not intelligible to most of the people of Mararoko. To the north from whence the Mararoko people came only in the past sixty years or so are other Kewa speaking groups.³ Twenty or more men are associated with each of the six men's houses in the area, and the total population of the area would exceed 600.

Each men's house group includes members of several patrilineal clans which are dispersed throughout the Kewa area. For example, in September 1981, the resident membership of the men's houses at Menakiri, Bangarawia, and Mararoko was as follows:



Menakiri	5 men of the Kerakera clan, 9 men of the Kowikera clan, 1 man of the Melepirepa clan, 1 man of the Porarepa clan, 1 man of the Ripurupu clan.	(who is also accepted as a Kowikera)
Bangarawia	5 men of the Kererepa clan, 8 men of the Kerakera clan, 2 men of the Ripurupa clan, 6 men of the Yetupa clan.	
Mararoko	3 men of the Keperepa clan, 7 men of the Kerakera clan, 2 men of the Manderepa clan, 3 men of the Ripurupa clan, 4 men of the Wanalu clan, 1 man of the Yetupa clan.	

The wives of these men came from eight of the nine clans mentioned above as well as from an additional thirteen clans, of which all but two were Kewa speaking. Wives are sought from outside the clan but generally from within the South Kewa area. The Mararoko regard the Samberigi to the south-west as enemies and tell many stories of their treachery. They call them *lore ali* (the men cut off) and project onto them their notions of non-reciprocal and negative behaviour.

The Mararoko landscape is dominated by limestone ridges, mountains, and streams. From the top of Mount Rogomaya above Menakiri, it is possible on a clear day to see not only Mount Murray (Sumale), south of Mararoko, but also Mount Giluwe which is far to the north near the border between the Southern Highlands and Western Highlands Provinces. In the rain forests surrounding the villages the men hunt for wild pigs, cassowaries, marsupials, birds, and python snakes. The people keep pigs and cassowaries and they follow a pattern of extensive shifting cultivation. Sweet potato is the staple food and is supplemented with taro, yams, sago, bananas, and various green leafy vegetables, wild fowl eggs, nuts, and mushrooms. Of late, cash crops such as coffee, chillies, biksa, and cardamom have been introduced. Some beef cattle and chickens have also been brought into the area and these tend to be used for exchange and festive purposes, rather than as a regular protein supplement. While the food supply is good the people, dwelling at an altitude of around 1300 metres, are more troubled with malaria than are the Kewa-speakers inhabiting the higher regions to the north around Kagua and Ialibu. People from the north speak disparagingly of the Erave area as "ples bilong sik" (the place of sickness).

The South Kewa believe that the physical world of mountains, streams, forests, and settled areas is inhabited not only by themselves, the people (*pamoali* — women and men), in their various social groupings based on clans and villages, but also by spirit beings which have their place in the physical and social environment. *Yakili*, a benevolent spirit, is thought to live on the tops of the mountains and is referred to as "the man on top". Most men over thirty-five years of age can remember the rituals in which they killed possums and pigs and called on *Yakili* to give them health, prosperity, and many children. Many of the South Kewa myths tell of the relationship of sky people and earth people. However, *Yakili* is the only sky being who is referred to today outside of the myths, and even he seems rather remote from day to day life. Like the sun and the moon, which are invoked in Kewa rituals,

Yakili is far away, but his influence is felt in the cosmos and he intimates an aspect of life which transcends the mundane.

While *Yakili* is involved in the long-term welfare of the community the ancestral spirits (*remo*) and the "nature" spirits (*kolapu* or *tapo*) are seen to be more involved in daily affairs. *In life a person is regarded as having both a body [to] and a soul (wasupa)* but at death the person becomes a *remo*. The *remo* maintain a relationship with their living relatives and they are liable, like the living, to act either kindly or harmfully depending on the way in which they are treated. The spirits of the recent dead, angry at being deprived of their familiar life and still mindful of grievances against the living, are most likely to cause trouble for the living. A number of rituals are employed to establish right relationships with the spirits of the recent dead — for example, killing animals so that the spirit might feed on the blood or the smell of the cooking meat, and burning possum fur so that the spirit smelling it might enjoy it and know that he is remembered.

Until the mid-1960s cults directed to the renewal of the life of cosmos and community were practised in the Mararoko area. The long-dead members of clans represented in a men's house shared in these cults along with their living descendants. Stones associated with the ancestors of each clan (*remo kapaa*) were kept in the cult houses and their energy was restored when blood from the pigs killed in the cult was poured over them. In times of sickness, drought, and hardship the elders would decide that it was time to kill pigs in one or other of the several "spirit houses". In these rituals, now rarely celebrated if at all, the ancestral spirits would be offered their nourishment and asked to help the living. I do not think that these rituals can be construed as worship of ancestors. Rather, it seems that the South Kewa notion of the cosmic order includes awareness of an all pervading life-energy which sustains the life of the physical environment and all its inhabitants, both living and "dead". In the various cults there was a recognition of the unity between all things and an attempt by the living to do their part in the renewal of cosmic life. Although the practice of the cults in which the ancestors joined with the living has declined in the area the ancestors are not forgotten. The ancestors were, and are, symbols of the continuity of life and of the tradition which supplies for the lack of individual insight into the reality of life.⁴

The *kolapu* are spirits which live in trees, water, caves, and various places in the forest. These spirits become disturbed and will retaliate if people "break their houses", for example by cutting down the trees in which they dwell, or tantalise them, for example

by eating appetizing food such as meat or eggs before venturing into a place where they dwell. It seems that one can go a long way towards living in harmony with the *kolapu* by respecting their habitations and observing certain taboos. Nevertheless, a fear still remains that they will throw "stones" of misfortune or shoot "arrows" of sickness at an unsuspecting victim. While most people will say that it is your own fault if you find trouble with the *kolapu* they also admit that sometimes the *kolapu* seem to strike without provocation. If the ancestors evoke the identity and security of clan life, it seems that in the symbol of the *kolapu* the South Kewa express their awareness of the human situation as unpredictable and fraught with risk.

In living persons, according to the South Kewa view, there is a body (*to*) and a soul (*wasupa*). Under waking conditions the soul is contained in the body but it may leave the body in dreams or other altered states of consciousness. The seat of the emotions is the liver (*pu*) and the liver may be spoken of as being, for example, bad, bitter, excited, good, lazy, rotting, sweet, or tired. The seat of thoughts and behaviour is the heart (*konali*). The South Kewa have much to say about people's thoughts or intentions (*kone*) which they see as underlying both good and bad behaviour, and as giving rise to the emotional states which are felt in the liver. On the one hand, a person who has good thoughts (*epe kone*) knows how to conduct himself in relation to other people and in relation to the physical environment and the spirits. On the other hand, a person who has bad thoughts (*koi kone*) is, at least, foolish and ignorant of correct behaviour, and at worst, a cause of illness and misfortune for those towards whom he intends harm. These human intentions may be transformed into scientific endeavours (for example, into the work of gardening) or they may be expressed in symbolic behaviour (for example, in garden magic). There is, then, a consciousness of involvement in life and of the ability to enhance or inhibit life by both scientific and symbolic means. In magic the thoughts or intentions of the heart become clothed in symbols yielded by experience and tradition and are directed towards influencing the physical and social environments.

Magic as Symbol

In the experience of the South Kewa it appears that the various aspects of the cosmos as they know it work together and form a unity. It is also a matter of their experience that a person's thoughts and behaviour as directed towards other people and towards

the environment bring about certain responses and repercussions. Within this context magic may be seen both as an interpretation of life and as a response to life. That is, magic is a symbol of life, a philosophy, which reveals how people understand themselves and how they construct their cultural reality. In order to examine magic as symbol I shall discuss and give examples of magic employed in relation to the natural and social environments, focusing in particular on healing and sorcery.

The South Kewa use the term *yaina agaa* (literally "sickness words") for both helpful and harmful spells and for healing rituals. Of course whether a spell is harmful or helpful often depends on the respective viewpoints of its agent and its victim. Magic is employed in all areas of life — for example, to make pigs grow, to ensure the success of gardens, to summon or halt rain, to attract members of the opposite sex, to make bows and arrows accurate, to enhance the hunting capacity of dogs. It seems to me that two understandings of magic are present in these activities which, I should add, are always accompanied or followed by appropriate scientific endeavours. The gardener, for example, employs well tried gardening techniques as well as rituals. On the one hand, it can be seen that the person employing magic is trying to participate in and co-operate with life through the words, actions, and objects which he or she employs. On the other hand, it may be that the person also uses magic as a means of manipulating the empirical world by non-empirical means.⁵ In both cases there is recognition of the relationship between two areas of human experience and an attempt to make that relationship more explicit.

The women of Mararoko hope, of course, that the pigs for which they care will prosper and bring credit to them and to the whole community. Their desire and intention is well expressed in the words which they say as they rub white clay on the pigs:

My pig is like the foam on the Kura River as it speeds on its way,

My pig is like the foam on the Yalo River as it speeds on its way,

The fat of my pig is as big as Mount Sumale,
The fat of my pig is as big as Mount Rogomayo,
The fat of my pig is as big as Mount Wisa.

The fat of my pig is like a white cloud. (Repeated several times).

The cliff goes straight down. (Repeated several times).

The women hope that their pigs will develop layers of fat similar

in appearance to the white foam on the fast flowing streams and in quantity to the size of the larger mountains in the area. The cliff they mention is a white limestone cliff which has the appearance of a side of pork with lots of white fat. Through their symbolic action and words the women give expression to their desire for an abundance of life and their conviction that the rivers, the mountains, the clouds, and the limestone cliffs, which are obvious features of their landscape participate in and are capable of giving forth the life and energy which constantly renew the world. That is, their pig magic reveals how they understand themselves in the world. They are conscious of a life-giving reality in which they participate and they give voice to this in the poetry of their spells and songs. However, their insight into the unity and mutual influence of all things means that they also attempt to manipulate the environment, employing the very metaphors of life which belong to the tradition of their people. There is, I think, a tendency in all religious traditions for metaphors to be too literally applied, a tendency which wants not only to share in life, but also to control life.

While it is obvious that the South Kewa use their religion not only to express their involvement in and openness to life but also to manipulate life, they are not alone in this. For example, it happens too that Western Christians, in their literal interpretation of the Bible or their mechanical repetition of particular prayers, may seek a "certain certainty", an unreal security. Nevertheless, just as one may appreciate the Christian insight into the meaning of life, despite the manipulation of that insight, so too one may appreciate the South Kewa insight into the unity of all life, despite the fact that openness to life often gives way to an urgency to dominate and control life.

Magic is employed as much, if not more, in the field of human relationships, the social environment, as in matters of the natural environment. Magicians will direct excessive rain into the mouths of the animals of the forest. They will pray, invoking the imagery of the bundle of birds' feathers which when opened yields more plumes than one would have imagined, for a bundle of sweet potato runners to produce a good crop. However, among the people of Mararoko, social magic in the form of healing spells and rituals is more in evidence than any other kind of magic. Never does a day go by without speaking to someone who is either carrying out a healing procedure or calling on a specialist to do so. Some kinds of magic are more specialised than others. Everyone knows garden spells and some minor healing rituals. However, rain magic is

restricted to certain men who have been instructed in it, and healing is largely the province of specialists who have been instructed and initiated into its use.

The South Kewa believe that sickness is a symptom of damaged relationships in the world of land, people, and spirits. It is caused by the evil intentions of people or by failure to fulfil obligations towards people or towards the spirits. One may avoid sickness by observing taboos concerning places and spirits and by doing all that is possible to maintain good social relationships. If one has a headache or minor injury there are simple remedies and spells which can be employed for healing, but if one has a more serious illness it will be necessary to consult a specialist who will ascertain who or what is responsible for the illness and how it may be counteracted. An example of the first situation is a man who has been cutting down trees in a new garden area and then develops a cough and chest pains. He himself will realise that the spirit (*sikiali*) from one of the trees has thrown water on him causing the illness. He will heat a stone until it is red, place some leaves and vines from trees cut in the garden area on it, and pour water on it. It is believed that the rising steam will go to the chest of the sick man and heal him. It may well be that some of the herbal remedies and other healing techniques employed by the South Kewa have medicinal value. For example, the people coat scabies with a mixture of clay and local oils, and when the scabies come off they apply a second coating of the mixture, after which the skin appears to be free of scabies, at least for a time. However, in most cases it is more likely that the symbolism of the substances employed is as important as their physical properties. For example, a person with a broken limb is given the leaves and vine of the *runa* plant to chew, and leaves and lengths of vine are used to set the limb. "*Runa*" means "to join" and people have observed that this plant attaches itself to other plants. In the same way, they hope, the sections of the broken bone will join to each other. As a particular accident or incident of illness is never viewed in isolation but always in the context of social relations the use of *runa* may also evoke the healing of fractures in the life of the community.

If a person and his or her close relatives cannot cure an illness they will have recourse to one of the healers. All five healers who regularly practise in Menakiri, Mararoko, and Bangarawia are sons of healers and say that their art has been passed down to them through the ancestors and belongs to their clans. Two of them add that an ancestor purchased some of their healing and sorcery practices from the Kikori people to the south. Some, but not all,

the healers in Mararoko and other parts of the South Kewa area claim they are able to fly like birds and to encounter the spirits of the dead members of their clans. The older men say that in former times young men would be gathered in the men's house and, after refraining for several days from food and drink, although they were permitted to smoke from a bamboo pipe, would be given bark from a certain tree to chew and sap from the *mara* tree to drink. Some could not keep the mixture down and would vomit it up. Those who did manage to keep it down would fall on the floor as if drunk. The men would then blow smoke on them and after a time some would regain their senses. An occasional one would be more affected than the others and would fly out of the men's house like a bird or flying fox with the spirits whistling behind him and making him shake. He would fly around for several hours resting now and again on the branches of trees. During this time he would receive the power to look into people's bodies to see the sticks and stones which enemy sorcerers had projected into them. Henceforth, by eating a mixture of leaves of a wild banana (*warua*), the fruit of the (*dabalo*) tree and wild taro (*mais*) this man would be able to enter the state of consciousness described as being able to fly like a bird. In this state he would be able to communicate with spirits and to discern the causes of illness. Several people have claimed to have seen one or other of the present-day healers flying like a bird.

When one approaches a healer, whom one must usually pay in cash or in kind for his services, the specialist has first to determine the cause of the illness, and he has many ways of going about this. Usually the healer will question the patient about his relationships and obligations — for example to his brothers and to his wife's family — in order to determine if someone might be directing bad thoughts against him. Then he will ask about the patient's recent movements in order to establish if he could have infringed a taboo and drawn the ire of the *kolapu*. One of the healers in Bangarawia goes to the places in the forest where the patient has been recently and listens to the birds. He may hear a bird of paradise which says, "Not here. Leave this place." (Implication: The *kolapu* has not been here.) In this case the healer moves on to another spot. Then he may hear the *ku* bird which says, "He has been here and he has gone." (Implication: The spirit has been here, afflicted the man, and gone away. He is not here to be appeased and so the patient will probably die.) On the other hand the healer may hear a bird which announces that the spirit is in a certain place. The healer would then direct the patient to kill a small animal at that place for the spirit and then to eat the meat himself. Both the spirit

and the patient are thus strengthened by the meat and the disharmony between them is overcome.

If from his enquiries the healer suspects that the spirit of the dead person (*remo*) is causing the trouble he may go away to dream or may induce a trance state in which he would consult with the spirits of his clan and expect to become aware of the spirit's identity. In another approach to divination by dream a healer late in the afternoon blows smoke into a person's eyes and then holds in his heart whatever expression of fear, jealousy, anger, etc. was in the person's eyes as the smoke cleared. The healer then dreams of the person, living or dead, who caused the illness. Healers who blow smoke are called *yasa ali* (smoke man). Certain leaves may be placed under the head to induce dreaming. (In 1982 it cost K300.00 to purchase the knowledge of which leaves to use.) A patient may also be sent away to a particular place to dream and his dream later interpreted by the healer.

The healer, through whatever procedure of divination he has employed, may determine, for example, that a person is ill because he has a debt to a dead person and the spirit of the dead person is thinking evil things about him. The healer will therefore direct the sick person to pay something to the clan of the dead person or, in a recent development among Christians, to give something to the Church. On the other hand he may prescribe that the patient is to kill a pig or a possum for the spirit and to eat some of the meat from it. A meal shared by living and dead is life-giving for both. The healer will probably chant a long spell in which he directs the spirit to leave the places which the patient frequents and to be satisfied with the efforts that have been taken in this regard. One healer concludes such spells by saying:

When the sun goes down let him go with it,

When the moon goes down let him go with it.

The healers have hundreds of cures which employ leaves, barks, fruits, oil, water, and other substances. People using these cures are known as *ripane ali* (tree man). The healers show an appreciation of the modern medicines which are available at the local aid post in Mararoko, and seem to regard these various cures as complementary to traditional medicines. People will go to a lot of trouble to carry patients over the mountains to the health centre at Erave if the aid post orderly, Pime (a Mendi man who has been eighteen years in Mararoko since the aid post was first established), suggests this. The people of Mararoko obviously understand that some of their own remedies and some of the

"government's medicines" have a scientific basis. However, it is clear that many of their own healing practices have their basis not in a rational, scientific consciousness but rather in the intuitive consciousness of symbols. Such practices need to be assessed not by their medicinal effects but according to their effectiveness as symbols of renewed life. Numerous prayers employing the imagery of trees, birds, mountains, and other features of the environment are used in conjunction with herbal remedies, and these prayers summon the patient to renewed participation in cosmic life. The scientific and the symbolic are not necessarily opposed, but are rather complementary aspects of awareness of self, society, and physical environment. Modern medicine's quest for wholistic health has its parallel in the healing magic of primal societies.

The specialist involved in sorcery, either to initiate it or to counteract it, is called *kowi ali* (potion man).⁶ The people of Mararoko have no hesitation in declaring that sorcery arises from bad thoughts and intentions, but nevertheless they see it as a justifiable process for mediating interpersonal and, more often, interclan tension. Those involved will always claim that the sorcery was initiated by the enemy and that they were obliged by loyalty to brothers to retaliate. Sorcery brings intergroup tensions to crisis point and thus facilitates a reconstruction of the social situation. In the sorcery practised in the South Kewa area three types may be distinguished. They are: *neabu* (big wasp), *romo* (poison), and *kaiipi ali* (stone man).

Neabu is the most frequently mentioned form of sorcery in Mararoko. *Neabu* is the name of a large wasp and also the name given to the leavings which are used in this kind of sorcery. Leavings, such as food scraps, nail parings, or an item of clothing of the intended victim, or in the most serious cases hair and skin taken from the corpse of a person believed to have been murdered by the intended victim, are placed in a length of very strong bamboo (*kembele*). The mouth of the bamboo is packed with leaves and the tube is then heated over a fire. People maintain that this causes the victim's skin to become hot and his head to ache, and will lead to either sickness or bad luck. In milder cases, particularly within the Mararoko area itself, this might be all that happens. However, an additional or alternative procedure may be followed. Sorcery which operates between Mararoko and neighbouring areas is an expression not only of a passing indignation or insult but of more deep-seated enmity. It is very often a procedure of revenge. In these instances the bamboo tube will be fastened over the entrance to the *neabu* wasp's nest and it is held that when the wasp has

consumed the contents of the tube the victim will die. If the tube can be discovered and removed there is hope that the victim will recover. Another counter-measure is for the victim to eat some *neabu* wasps with ginger. The idea seems to be that the wasps in the bamboo tube will feel the pain of those which are eaten and will abandon their meal. Usually men who are healers will acknowledge that they also practise *neabu*. They see their practice of sorcery as safeguarding the life of their clan or men's house community by seeking revenge over enemies.

The second type of sorcery makes use of *romo* a powdery substance resembling lime which is placed in a person's food or sprinkled on his skin when he is asleep. Some people say that the bones of dead people are ground up to become a component of *romo*.⁷ The knowledge of how to prepare and use this substance may be purchased for several hundred kina from those who have it. *Romo* may be counteracted by eating a mixture of *ruku* leaves, ginger, salt, and water which will bring about vomiting and so expel the substance. When I was in Mararoko in 1980 a healer in Bangarawia claimed that a man from Ialibu had thrown this powder over a sleeping man and that when the latter went into the sun he became ill. This form of sorcery is employed, or at least suspected, in relationships between Mararoko clans and outsiders rather than within the Mararoko area itself. I have not met anyone who has claimed to have carried out this type of sorcery, although several healers have spoken of their attempts to counteract it.

In *kaipi ali*, the third type of sorcery, a stone is pointed at a victim. Like *remo*, *kaipi ali* tends to be used in relation to outsiders rather than between the clans which are resident in Mararoko. Sorcerers paint the stone and then strike it with a stick as an indication of killing a person. While doing so the sorcerer says, "I am killing a man of the *Yetupa* clan, I am killing a man of the *Koia* clan" and so on calling the names of enemy clans. Should a blue fly be struck and killed in this process, or happen to fall down near the stone, the sorcerer feels assured that he has the power through the stone to kill a man of the named clan. He will then go into the area of that clan and point the stone at a victim who is working in the garden or sitting in a house with the door open. It is said that the person towards whom the stone is pointed will become disorientated and will fall down, perhaps breaking his back or ribs, and probably becoming unconscious. People finding him in this condition will suspect the work of *kaipi ali* and after reviving him will ask him "Where does the sun rise?" If he gives the wrong answer they will realize that he is badly affected and will die.

If he answers correctly they will have some hope for his recovery.⁸ When a man is believed to have died from this kind of sorcery his clan will employ a *kowi ali* to track down the killer. He attaches some of the dead man's hair to a stick (*rialu* — the stick which travels) and the stick leads him to the killer. When the killer is located compensation is demanded. While the healers in Mararoko claim to have carried out this type of sorcery in the past as part of inter-area disputes they say that they no longer do so.

Magic in Mararoko is seen by an outsider to have both constructive and destructive aspects. On the one hand, magic seeks to express an involvement in life and to promote life. On the other hand, magic tries to ward off any threat to life. Life is the value which is sought in magic, but it is the life of a particular group within a particular environment. Life beyond the confines of the group is therefore perceived as a threat to the life of the group. The institution of magic in Mararoko may be seen as a metaphorical statement of the people's experience of human existence. The trust in the natural and social environment evoked by growth magic and healing magic is offset by the fear evoked by taboos and sorcery magic. While human life aspires to openness and creativity it is conscious of being under threat of extinction. Life, both human and cosmic, must be continually renewed or it ceases to be.

Symbols in Magic

Magic may itself be viewed as a symbolic model of communicating a people's experience and understanding of their world. Magic speaks in the Mararoko context, for example, of a sense that the mountains, rivers, trees and people both living and dead all belong together, exerting an influence on each other and together participating in life. It speaks of an ideal of reciprocity in social life which resonates in the interdependence of the natural environment. Magic, though, is an applied or secondary symbol — an institution which has developed out of an appreciation of primary symbols. It is a product of human reflection which has moved a step away from the immediacy of the primary symbols given by nature. Nevertheless, it employs such primary symbols and I shall give attention to four — water, blood, stones and birds — which enable us to grasp something of the understanding of life which is expressed in magic.

I have already noted the use of the names of fast-flowing streams in pig magic and in healing magic. In these instances the sheer energy of water, its speed and its ability to produce white

foam resembling pig fat, appeals to the imagination. Another facet of water as symbol is revealed when people suffering from malaria and people who suspect that sorcery has been worked against them are doused with water to reduce the physical or psychic heat which is causing them distress. In these instances water is appealed to as refreshing and cooling, purifying and regenerating. Water from springs, rivers and rainfall is usually abundant in Mararoko, so much so that prayers to end rain are a frequent feature of Christian services. On the other hand, even a fortnight without rain has a damaging effect on gardens and will occasion recourse to rain magic. It is obvious that water is a condition of life, that it sustains and renews life. As symbol water speaks of the possibility and potentiality of life and the hazards that stand in the way of life.

Throughout the South Kewa area, particularly in the Mararoko villages and in Tiapoli, Koiali, and Kerapi, people employ a special water referred to as *kondo ipa* in the treatment of cuts and sores. This water is collected at a place called Kipiri just above the spot where the stream called Kondoipa comes down the side of Mount Sumane and joins *kana ipa*, a stream which flows around the base of the mountain. The Tiapoli people claim that if a dry leaf falls into the *kondo ipa* it becomes fresh and green again. They drink the water to protect them against sickness and also give it to infants who have been slow to walk to encourage their development. However, the Mararoko people only apply the water to the outside of the body. Tubiame, a Mararoko woman was sent to Mendi Hospital because she was badly burnt on the right side of her face, neck, and ear when a house caught fire. When the doctors wanted to operate she ran away from the hospital and on her return to Mararoko was treated by Yoanes Ambalele of Bangarawia who several times poured the water from Kipiri over her wounds. The wounds healed but Tubiame is noticeably disfigured. People explain that when the *kondo ipa* stream joins the other stream it "makes cement" from the limestone and clay over which it flows. In the same way it is held to cement broken bones and to heal wounds. I expect that the care which people take in obtaining this water for each other also evokes and expresses the desire for the cementing of relationships in the community. The *kondo ipa* speaks to the human hope that despite the disintegrating factors in life people are meant to renew their lives and to find healing.

Water, then, is a symbol with many nuances of meaning, with the capacity of speaking to different situations in the lives of those who employ it. As a symbol it is a reservoir of all the possibilities of existence, but people not able to cope with all its potentialities

at any one time respond to the levels of meaning which evoke their present experience. Thus, in Mararoko water images the lives of the individuals and community not just as they are, but as they might be, offering the possibility of restructuring an existence which is always afflicted with the consequences of the evil intentions of the human heart.

Blood is a symbol which arises not only from the natural environment but also from the social environment. Blood not only sustains the life of the cosmos but it relates one of the ancestors and to kin. It is symbolic of cosmic life and of human and clan identity within that life. The individual experiences his or her life as part of a clan united by the ties, whether biological or sociological, of blood. Blood is a more ambiguous symbol in the Mararoko context than is water, and it is surrounded with many fears and taboos.

A man who kills an animal or bird in the forest is careful not to spill its blood in places where the spirits may detect it. It seems to be feared that if the spirits detect blood from animals which have been killed they will think that men are feeding themselves but not offering to share their food. The hunter is taking life, spilling blood, but he is doing it for his own sake and not for the sake of the whole community and cosmos. As the men of Mararoko are regular hunters they must be constantly mindful of the blood which they shed. Blood from slaughtered animals is usually soaked up in ferns and leafy vegetables and cooked in lengths of bamboo. A woman is careful to bury her menstrual blood. Should she be so careless as to let it fall in the forest it is said that a *kolapu* will eat it and cause her to become extremely weak. Menstrual blood is symbolic of the life-giving role of woman, a role both precious and dangerous in the life of the community. A man is thought to be weakened by contact with menstrual blood, perhaps overpowered by a life potency beyond his capacity. Blood is the very stuff of life and the taboos surrounding it point to its significance as symbol of life and growth.

In taboos blood is avoided, but in the sacrifices which are performed for healing purposes, and in the traditional cults, blood is released in the killing of pigs, possums, and birds, and is offered to the spirits to drink. In these sacrifices the intention appears to be that from life poured out new life may come to the community and the cosmos. As the cult leader in the *Adaalu Ribu* rubbed the spirit stones with blood and local oil he would express the hopes and needs of the community in the following:

Give us many warriors,
Give us many pigs,
Give us many children,
Give us many sweet potatoes, (and so on).

Then he would conclude by saying,

We make this request by the sun,
We make this request by the moon.

In the *Adaalu Ribu* blood is given to the spirits so that they can share life with the living. However, it is poured out not only for the spirits but for the whole of cosmic life, as is indicated by the invocation of moon and sun. In the South Kewa view it is the role of human beings to involve themselves in the life of the cosmos and to co-operate in its renewal. The release of blood in ritual killing and its consumption in ritual meals point to such renewal of life.

In some Kewa myths birds become red by dipping their feathers in blood. Birds, like blood, have an important place in the symbols of Mararoko magic. The shaman, we remember, flies like a bird and from his raised level of awareness he is able to flick stones or sticks of harmful intent into the enemies of his clan. He is also able to "see" the evil that has been inflicted on his own people by enemy magicians. The shaman as mediator between different levels of consciousness has something in common with birds which are mediators between earth and sky. The diviner consulting with birds in order to determine which spirit is responsible for an illness points to man's lack of insight and his need to expand his understanding of life.

In imagination the Kewa see themselves as birds and on festive occasions the men dress as birds with elaborate feather head-dresses and tails of cordyline leaves. Bird feathers are highly valued and are an important item of trade. Certain feathers worn in head-dresses indicate the status of the wearer. Many idioms refer to people as birds. A "cassowary" is a man of high status. A "dead cassowary" is a man who has been killed in battle. To "behave like a bird" is to ignore the usual requirements of morality. Courting and war songs are full of references to birds of various kinds which share something in common with the people to whom they refer. The girl who is sought by the young man may be a "beautiful red-feathered bird in a banana tree" whom he hopes to shoot with his "arrow". One such song goes as follows:

Friend, friend,

A red bird is sitting on the leaf of the *kondo* banana,
The bird whose feathers we put in our hair,
I shall take my spear and my bow and arrow and I shall
shoot this bird.

When it falls down to the ground I shall take the leaf
and the bird's feathers, and I shall put them in your string bag.
Once you have these things in your bag you will feel
sorry for me,

Yes, you will feel sorry for me.

At a certain stage of the all-night "singsings" in the men's communal house several of the unmarried girls will each snatch a feather from the head-dress of the bachelor in whom she is interested. Birds and birds' feathers as verbal and as visual symbols thus provide a means of communication, at times subtle, at times quite blatant.

Birds are frequently involved in healing prayers, in garden magic, and in love magic. They are killed and offered to the spirits in healing rituals. Most animals are bound to the earth but birds are able to reach into the realm of the sky, the home of the sky beings who are known in the stories of the ancestors. Kewa tell of the relationship between sky and earth brothers being disrupted by a failure in reciprocity on the part of the earth brother. It may be that the symbol of birds evokes the situation of reciprocity in which brothers would be united, in which the present limits of human existence would be transcended.

Both helpful and harmful magic make use of stones. Small round stones like marbles, called *koro*, are carried for protection and it is claimed that these grow and give birth to other stones. Each family has a stone called *lugogo* ("close to my head") which is placed on the corner of a woman's house close to where she places her head to sleep. If her husband or child is sick the woman heats the stone in the fire with some other stones for a pit oven (*kawie*, *mumu* in Pidgin). Then in the corner of the house she makes a small oven with hot stones including *lugogo* and cooks a rat which she and the children eat. The husband does not eat the rat, although if he is sick the mother and children will go through the ritual on his behalf.⁹

Round and oval shaped stones, along with unusually shaped stones (such as a stone shaped like a sweet potato), and mortars used in an earlier stage of highlands agriculture, are held to be the way of approach to the ancestral spirits and a source of power for the clan. Stones are used in sorcery of the *kaipi ali* type, and stones or fragments of stones may be directed by a sorcerer into

the body of a victim. By sleight of hand healers will often extract from a person's body the stones of affliction which were causing his or her illness.

In Jungian terms stones, and round stone in particular, are symbols of self, of the psychic quest for wholeness. Stones may evoke such an individual or communal quest in the subconscious awareness of the people of Mararoko. The attributes of hardness, ruggedness, permanence and strength which one perceives in stones may resonate with the hopes of the South Kewa clans for endurance and strength in the life which is theirs. Certainly stones are symbols pointing beyond the immediate situations in which they are employed to a situation of lasting and harmonious relationships between people, land and spirits.

Both Paul Tillich and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur say that symbols are multivalent, that is that they contain the possibility of many interpretations, and that in order to interpret them it is necessary to appropriate their existential significance. No doubt some members of a society grasp, or are grasped by, symbols more completely than others. The healers and song composers of Mararoko, for instance, are more attuned to symbols than the average person. It is these specialists who are best able to reflect on what all apprehend through symbols. They are the philosophers of their society. In exploring magic as symbol, and in considering particular symbols in magic, I have indicated some of the meanings which magic offers to the people of Mararoko. It may be that I have responded out of my particular cultural and religious background more to those messages disclosed by the symbols which bear on my life than to the messages of greatest significance to the South Kewa. It is of the nature of symbols to speak to different people in different ways, to yield the insight or intuition appropriate to the moment. That is why magic can speak to the young scientifically educated person as well as to those whose education is their immersion in the traditions of the ancestors. It is when we take magic too literally, as being instrumentally effective, that we, like some of its practitioners, lose sight of its essential nature as symbol. It has become clear in this discussion that magic expresses the South Kewa experience of human life as participation in the life of the cosmos, and reveals both an openness to total life and a suspicion or fear of being destroyed by life. Magic is at the same time the means of involvement in cosmic life and a means of manipulating cosmic life. Magic as symbol enables people to reach beyond the constraints of ordinary experience into a dimension of ultimacy and totality. It is a rite of passage in which the life of individuals, community, and cosmos is constantly renewed.

Conclusion

Magic, like the "spirit stones" of the Mararoko people, bears witness to the ancestors' search for communion with life and provides a symbolic mode in which people today express their intention of involvement in the world. Our "being in the world" is never a final state but is always in process of creation, and it is symbols which provide the possibilities and impetus for the creation. Symbols provide the fund of meanings which enable each person to interpret his or her experience of life. Magic is one of those symbols, giving expression to people's awareness of the unity of the cosmos and the participation of men and women in its constant renewal. It is a means both of interpreting reality and of constructing reality. Magic in the Mararoko context reveals human life as held in the tension of good and bad intentions, but suggests that beyond such tension lies the possibility of abundant and harmonious life.

NOTES

1. The word "village" is used to refer to the area surrounding a communal men's house. The wives of the men's house residents live in smaller houses in this area and have some gardens close to their houses. However, the women also have gardens in more distant places, while the men have hunting rights in the surrounding forest. In the Kewa language "ada" would be used where I have used "village".
2. Since the early 1960s the Catholic Church has been present in Menakiri, Bangarawia, and Mararoko and the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (first known as the Unevangelised Field Mission) in the other three villages. I worked with the Catholic Church in Erave from 1973 to 1977. During this time I frequently visited Mararoko. In April 1980, September 1980, and November-December 1981, I again spent some time in Mararoko.
3. On the Kewa language see: Karl Franklin, *A Kewa Dictionary* Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978.
4. I use "symbol" not in the sense of a conventional sign, but in the sense of an analogy which is employed in order to express and explore the further reaches of human experience. In this sense symbols function on a personal level to integrate conscious and unconscious awareness, and on the social level to integrate personal experience with the tradition of the

- group. I agree with Paul Tillich when he says that the main function of the symbol is "the opening up of levels of reality which otherwise are hidden and cannot be grasped in any other way." Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p.56.
5. Bryan Wilson is among those who define magic as: "Belief in the possibility of manipulating the empirical world by non-empirical means." Bryan Wilson, *Magic and the Millenium*. London: Heinemann, 1973.
 6. Other Kewa speakers regard the area south of the Erave River as the place of both sorcery and sickness. The area has a higher incidence of malaria than the northern Kewa area. The Erave in their turn think of the people further south in the sago areas as particularly given to sorcery.
 7. People say that in the past fragments of bone from a person who had recently died were ground up and sprinkled on the food cooked in pit ovens for his mortuary feast. Several clans, including those suspected of his murder would be invited to the feast and it was believed that someone from the offending clan would become seriously ill after eating food containing the bone powder.
 8. In 1979 three men from Wopasali were gaoled for carrying out this kind of sorcery which was causing great fear among the people of the Erave and Pangia districts. According to informants they had three stones: a white stone shaped like a bird or shell, a long black stone, and a round black stone. The white stone was daubed with red paint and used with the intention of killing people. It is also said that the black and white stones were employed together with a spell to bring rain.
 9. Women and children may not participate in the traditional cults of the spirit houses or eat the meat from pigs and other animals sacrificed in them. However, a man may have a pig killed for his wife if she is ill. The reverse situation is seen in the *lugogo* ritual.

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