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LAND AS A MEDIUM OF SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE:

THE BANABAN CASE

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## Part I: Blood, Land, and Traditional Banaban Culture

### 1. The "Blood and Mud Hypothesis"

The "Blood and Mud Hypothesis" was presented in a discussion of the comparative implications of my paper, "Banaban Adoption (1969a)." The "hypothesis" was an attempt to order material on the symbolization of bilateral kinship in certain small-scale Micronesian and Polynesian societies.<sup>1</sup>

Two symbolic complexes are identified: The first centers on notions of common identity, generally symbolized through "common substance," generally represented by blood. The second centers on locality or land--as rights in land, residence on land, or food from land. "Blood and mud" emerged in the discussion as the rhymed synecdoches for these two complexes which in a number of societies appeared to be involved in the definition of kinship and kinsmen.

The second element in the hypothesis takes off from David Schneider's distinction (1968) for American kinship between kinship as "common substance" (blood) and kinship as "code for conduct"--a code for conduct stipulating enduring, diffuse solidarity.

The hypothesis states that the variability in a number of systems is a variability in the way these four elements are patterned: blood and land, identity and code.

At one end of a range would be systems where rights in land stand with common substance as definers of the status of kinsmen. This is approximated in the Northern Gilbertese case (see Lambert MS.). At this end of the range one would expect "food" and/or "residence" to more directly symbolize the "code" element. At the other end of the range would be cases where the two elements varied so that one was involved in kinship but the other was not.

Occupying the middle of the range would be cases where one approximated the following relationship:

Blood : land :: identity : code

Kinship among the people of Ocean Island (the native name for which is Banaba), in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony, Central Pacific, is in this part of the range.<sup>2</sup>

The central ideas associated with their ideal construct of kinship are diffuse solidarity, continuity, and equivalence. These ideas are symbolized in common blood and land. Kinsmen are referred to as being 'just the same' as one another. Because they are 'just the same,' a person can represent his cousin or his mother at a family gathering (see Silverman 1967b). This sameness of consanguines is conceptualized in terms of common substance-- blood--and/or common interest in land (in the case of Banabans, land on Ocean Island). By "common interest" I mean common identification with an Ocean Island hamlet (see below) and/or the fact that a person can envision circumstances in which he might inherit the land currently belonging to even a remote kinsman: the circumstances are when that kinsman's line dies out.

The term kaititi is used as an expression of genealogical closeness. When X and Y are kaititi, this means literally that if X's line dies out, Y will inherit X's land and vice-versa. People sometimes say, "They are close, they are kaititi," or simply, "They are kaititi."

The point here is that kinship is symbolized in terms of both blood and rights in land. Land functions symbolically in some of the same ways as blood; an assertion of common interest in Ocean Island land is similar to an assertion of common blood. Both land and blood are "natural," essential, and divisible, and it is the passing of title to at least one Ocean Island land from adopter to adoptee with the approval of the 'close kin' that finalizes an adoption.

Although one could imagine various symbolic devices for altering the blood (as in blood-brotherhood), Banabans do not make use of them. But the parent can transfer different proportions of his land to his children. One of the reasons for this is the children's relative fulfillment of the filial role. Thus, whereas blood is one way of conceptually grounding the kinship relationship, land is different in that it both grounds and is a consequence of it; its parceling out expresses the quality of relationships. As symbols, land and blood both function as synecdoches although in different ways. Land expresses the double meaning of utu ('kin,' 'family') as substance and as code. Utu itself is used verbally (utuna) meaning 'to treat as kinsman.' There are situations where two people who are not utu do in fact treat one another as kin; there are also situations where two people who are utu do not so treat one another.

In giving land to another, one gives him part of one's social personality, and self-perpetuation is important to Banabans. There are cases of adoption where someone is adopted 'to replace' someone who has died. The notion of replacement implies that the adoptee receive some kind of title to at least part of the deceased's share of land.

The relationship between land and social personality is partially expressed in the term mwi, 'consequence, remains, trace.' The lands inherited by a person from his father contrast with those inherited from his mother as 'the male mwi' and 'the female mwi,' respectively. "There is also his mwi in the Gilberts," is a common phrase meaning that a Gilbertese adopted by a Banaban still maintains his property rights and relationships in the Gilberts.<sup>3</sup> When some Banabans wanted to make it clear to me that certain children (not their own) were just "staying with them" and were not adopted, they would say of a particular child, "His mwi is with his parents."

Let us consider this kind of situation. A child is residing with a couple but has not been adopted by them. If this continues for a long time, the child and the couple are participating in a kinship relationship even if they are not identified as kinsmen. A phrase to denote this situation is that the child has been "in the arms of" the couple. Their co-residence and the nurturance of the child by the couple stand for the relationship. That land has not passed marks that the element of "identity" has not been established. Thus, to recapitulate, the contrast between identity and code is symbolized at one level by the contrast between blood and land. However, in the contemporary culture at least, this opposition can be overcome at a higher level. Both blood and land can symbolize identity, in contrast with nurturance and residence--and some other elements--which symbolize the code element. One may want to look at this in terms of the marked/unmarked distinction, although I will not spell this out here. The meanings of common substance, blood, may be inclusive of the meanings of both land and nurturance, residence, or other elements which may be invoked at the time. The field is expandable because the solidarity stipulated is diffuse. And the meanings of land may be inclusive of the meanings of nurturance and residence.

This point harks back to one made on page one. Cultures will differentiate out elements of the "blood and mud" complexes in different ways. Yet, even in one cultural system, the situation need not be so simple as to entail a single opposition. An opposition at one level can be resolved at another. But we must return to the Banaban case.

To indicate that a person belongs by adoption rather than blood to the utu of some other people, one might point out, "He ~~has~~ some land of theirs." Banabans speak generally of land as both "the property of the person" and "the property of the utu," but they are not referring to two different kinds of tenure. Title to specific pieces of Ocean Island land is a feature of an individual's distinct social personality, and of his social personality as a member of various utu.

Thus we have "blood and mud," identity and code, and the ways they are distributed against one another.

## 2. Beyond "Blood and Mud"

The identification of land as a symbolic complex in Oceania leads one immediately into a consideration of sea. The land/sea contrast leads one immediately in two (related) directions: sex roles and cosmology.

In the case of sex roles, I can offer no authoritative statements since intensive comparative research has not been undertaken. There is a suggestion of a fairly common contrast between the-male-as-fisherman and the-female-as-gardener. On rocky Ocean Island there was little to garden. Conceptions of sex roles pose a complementarity between the male as "speaker" (the figure with authority, and a representative of the female in assemblies), fisherman, and toddy-collector. The female is coconut-oil maker, mat-maker, and water-getter. The water in question was from highly valued caves and wells to which only women had access. Thus the sea stands as the extractive province of men, while the land in itself is unmarked in relationship to it. But it is the male who goes above the land in collecting toddy (an old myth states, "A woman climbs no tree") and the female who goes below the land in

collecting water.

There is still an apparent asymmetry in favor of the male which brings up a problem more often explored in patrilineal systems: the relationship between the political and economic powers of men and the reproductive powers of women. Thus there was a myth of a heroic trickster born from a pimple on his father's forehead (he had naturally-born brothers). There is currently a tale (which may have been known aboriginally) of a figure from another part of the Gilberts who went to Nauru and taught the people there how to bear children; previously pregnant women had been sliced open, killing them but saving the children.

The sex role direction from the land/sea contrast has already taken us into the area of cosmology. I will not go into many further details of the Banaban situation but should suggest that the contrasts indicated may have been mediated by rain from Heaven as falling both upon the sea and through the land, both to supply the water-caves and nourish the trees.

Another dimension of the land/sea contrast which is suggested by comparison with the Gilberts, and some older and contemporary sources, comes close in a Lévi-Straussian fashion to a culture/nature contrast. I have heard "the male" referred to as "food of the rain, the dew, the sunshine," through his risky activities as fisherman. In the sea lies threat, danger, and forces which Man seeks to control rationally but cannot overcome. The land stands more for the ordered, the controlled, the human, the intelligent, and if the aboriginal Banaban situation was similar to that in the Gilberts, the the mixing of land and sea, and the boundary between them, was charged with a special danger.

It may seem as if I have strayed far from "blood and mud," but the route has taken us right back where we started from. For the contrast between land

as a particular and blood as a particular in the context of kinship partially parallels that of The Land and The Sea as undifferentiated concepts. Blood, land and sea are all natural, permanent, and necessary to life. Land, in relationship to blood, represents the code for conduct which is domesticating and manipulable. Land, in relationship to Sea, is the rational, controllable, and human.

### 3. Beyond Cosmology

We have gone from lands to Land, and Land to Cosmology. The aspect of cosmology which has been tapped is that of its spatial organization. It is time now to consider some aspects of this area in its own terms. For we are dealing with spaces, or localities. I argue here that Banaban culture (and some others also--see Hanson MS.<sup>4</sup>) manifested a degree of "spatialization" or "localization" such that that may have been an organizing principle of the cultural system as a whole.

(a) In the contemporary culture, a common form of greeting is "Where are you going?" and/or "Where are you coming from?" Actual new information is not necessarily called for: "this way," the direction in which one is walking, or "that way," the direction from which one has come, are satisfactory responses in this phatic sequence. But the communication nonetheless has a spatial focus.

(b) There are legends associated with places. The coherence of some legends may be only that they apply to the same place; their temporal inter-relationship is not salient.

(c) Between childhood and reaching the 'warrior grade,' boys spent a good deal of their time on sea-coast terraces, where magic was also performed by men and from which women were excluded. Some village districts (see below)



also had special houses for young men. Menstruating women generally had to stay in ~~spe~~special hut in the household compound.

(d) According to contemporary sources, the names of the village districts formed the basis of the directional terminology.

(e) The relative rank of related descent units (see below) was expressed in the location of sitting places in special structures. The units themselves were associated with localities.

Thus was 'place'central, and the translation of ~~lives~~ lives of social difference into bounded spaces.

#### 4. Land Conveyances

Let us descend from the general to the specific, as a background to further discussion. The inheritance of land on aboriginal Ocean Island was described by H.C. and H.E. Maude (1932:288-91) as follows:

"Both sexes were treated equally as regards the inheritance of land. The eldest son was usually given the largest share of land, but there was no fixed rule, as the parents had far more power than in the Gilbert Islands to leave larger portions of their land to favourite children. The land was generally divided up among the children when they became old enough to fend for themselves, the parents reserving sufficient land for their own maintenance during their old age under the name of te aba ni kara (land for the aged). This aba ni kara was divided up after the death of the parents. The formality of apportioning land among children, known as te katautau, involved the collecting of the various heirs and walking with them around the parental lands, pointing out to them the boundaries of their respective allotments. Usually each child got his share of both the paternal and maternal lands but often it was arranged between the parents that the children should be divided into two

groups, one to receive their land from the father and the other from the mother.

"Should a child be adopted as nati (son or daughter) he would receive the same share as the natural issue under the title of te aba-n-nati (land of the son [child--MGS]) but, unless he was the only child of his real parents, he would receive none of their land [fn. om.]. In the absence of children, real or adopted, an individual's land would be partitioned among his (or her) brothers and sisters or their children should they be dead. Outside the normal system of inheritance by which it was transmitted to the next-of-kin, land could only pass, in times of peace, by means of one of the customary conveyances mentioned below. Some of these customary conveyances, as will be seen, are in payment for services rendered, while others are in the nature of sanctions by means of which offenders against the community were punished by their fellows.

"On an individual being killed by another two lands would normally pass from the murderer to the family of the murdered man under the general title of te nenebo (the blood payment). These lands were called as follows:

1. Kie-na or the mat for the murdered man to lie on.
2. Rabuna-na or the murdered man's shroud.

The largest land that the murderer possessed would be taken as kie-na and the next largest as rabuna-na. Should the murderer also possess a canoe it would be taken as:

3. Bao-na or the murdered man's coffin.

"Land would be claimed by a husband from a man who committed adultery with his wife under the title of te aba-narau (the land of peacemaking). The adulterer would usually flee, because if caught he would have been killed. In his absence his land was taken and his house broken up by the wronged individual,

whereupon he was at liberty to reappear, as it was considered that his offence had been expiated by the conveyance of land.

"On a famine occurring, those who were destitute would go and live with those who had food or were skillful fishermen. These people would look after them throughout the famine and when it was over were entitled to take all their lands under the title of te aba ni kamaiu (the land of life giving). The destitute might continue to use the products of their old land sufficient to maintain them, but in any case the land passed irrevocably on their death.

"Should a betrothed boy break off his engagement to a girl after having commenced sexual relations with her, four or five lands would normally pass from his family to hers under the title of te aba n iein (the land of marriage). One or two lands would often pass on a boy terminating his engagement even though no sexual intercourse had taken place. Should the girl break off her engagement no land would pass. On Banaba it was customary for betrothals to take place at a very early age, often as soon as the child was born.

"Should it be generally considered that certain lands had got into the wrong hands resort could be had to a custom known as te aba ni butirake (land of the asking). A girl would bind wreaths on the old man or woman who had obtained the land in question and he (or she) was then compelled by this custom to give the girl a piece or pieces of land. Should there be no good reason for the binding of the wreaths the old man might satisfy the island by presenting a minute plot of land, but should it be the general opinion that the girl or her family were the rightful owners of certain lands in his possession he would be expected to give them up with a good grace.

"Public opinion would compel a thief, on being caught, to convey land to the owner of the property stolen under the title of te aba n ira (the land for theft). The amount of land which passed under this title would depend

on the nature and quantity of the stolen articles.

"Should an individual kill any tame frigate or other bird belonging to another, one piece of land would be conveyed by the killer to the owner of the bird under the title of nenebo-n te man (the blood-payment for animals).

"Under the title of te aba n tara (the land for looking after), land would be given in return for nursing during sickness or old age. The amount of land given would naturally depend on the circumstances of the nursing.

"Should an individual be on terms of great affection with someone outside his kindred group he would leave him or her a portion of his lands under the title of te aba ni karaure (the land of farewell). It was not considered right to leave more than one or two pieces of land under this title as a token of friendship and should more be devised it would be usually opposed by the next-of-kin.

"Finally, should an individual dislocate his or her arm or leg one piece of land would be conveyed to the bone-setter under the title of te aba n riring (the land for bone-setting).

"This exhausts the conveyances of land customary on Banaba. These conveyances were the chief means by which justice and peace were maintained on the island. Should an individual offend against any social convention for which a transfer of land was considered a fitting penalty, a meeting of his hamlet would be held and the offender ordered to forfeit certain of his lands to the person injured. If the affair was serious and beyond the control of the hamlet a meeting of the village district, or even of the whole island, would be held at which the trouble could be ventilated and appropriate measures for restoring the status quo discussed."<sup>5</sup>

The Maudes' careful remarks need little further elaboration. The use of land as a measure is clear enough, and there is some evidence that large

land holdings conferred prestige. One is tempted to see payments for murder as a substitution of land for blood. It is likely that when conveyances were made to non-kinsmen who performed certain services, or for whom special affection was felt, the recipients were seen as having behaved as kinsmen should behave.

It is worthy of passing note that a boy breaking an engagement would often have to transfer land, whereas a girl would not. This relates to the questions of "asymmetry" raised above.

##### 5. The Descent System<sup>6</sup>

The Banaban descent system was one of the instruments which encoded the fundamental meanings and values of Banaban culture.

As a social institution, the descent system articulated three sub-systems: a system of localities, a system of activities, and a system of people. The localities were five village districts, a number of hamlets, and a few "hamlet coalitions."

The people were kinsmen, related to one another in bilateral genealogies which ideally reached up to the founder of the village district. To oversimplify: A person "belonged" to a particular hamlet because he was descended (by blood or adoption) from its founder. The hamlet founder may have in turn been a descendant of a hamlet-coalition founder, who was in turn a descendant of the founder of the village district. Leaving the hamlet coalition level aside, one ideally had a single village district founder, and the founders of its hamlets were members of a sibling set descended from him. Given bilaterality, any single individual might belong to several units. Note that membership was not contingent upon residence or land-ownership. Even if one did not inherit land in a hamlet or district, it was assumed that one eventually

might inherit through the redistribution of the lands of a line which died through lack of issue.

I have mentioned localities and people, and have begun to indicate something of the relationship between them. I now want to turn to activities. Each level (more or less) had kinds of activities internal to it, and there was also a set of ritual activities which interrelated the village districts and mobilized its sub-units.

To consider the activities roughly in terms of the ascending units they implied (judging from available evidence), first there were the "internal" activities:

(a) Life-crisis rites implicated the hamlet; (b) The use of water-caves was at the hamlet or hamlet coalition levels; (c) The use of terraces was at the hamlet coalition or village district levels; these terraces were near the sea-coast. Frigate birds were tamed there, and some instruction of young men took place. (d) Young men's houses, where they existed, were at the village-district levels.

The internal differentiation of the activities mentioned thus far is not clear. For example, in the contemporary society the "hamlet" involved in gift-giving is differentiated into its component descent lines, which act corporately. Whether this was the case aboriginally is unknown. Similarly, the terraces were primarily associated with districts: was there any kind of internal differentiation other than by individuals and close kin?

I have mentioned life-crisis rites, water caves, terraces and young men's houses. The system of activities which articulated the described units both vertically and horizontally were focused on the 'meeting house,' 'spirit house,' and 'field.' Meeting houses or their equivalents existed at the village district level, and there were some similar structures at the hamlet

level. For spirit houses the situation is more complex, probably as a reflection of the ramification process occurring when the early research was done; for simplicity we can regard them as existing at the village district or hamlet coalition levels. In the spirit houses, food offerings were made to ancestral spirits.

I shall treat together activities focusing on the meeting houses, spirit houses and fields. Hamlets or hamlet coalitions had seats in the meeting houses and spirit houses. Certain activities at the hamlet level took place in these structures; the spatial arrangement is unclear. The activities I want to focus on now are in two sets:

First, focusing on the meeting house and spirit house, there were activities associated with maintenance, and activities which involved greeting visitors and dealing with certain stranded fish and ritual objects, which I shall group together under the term ritual incorporation.

Second, focusing on the fields, there were games and dances which I shall group together under the term ritual amusements.

Each of the activities noted involved a division of labor, and it was the hamlet which had the right to perform some aspect of the activity either exclusively or before others could perform. There was a generalized order of precedence also, a problem we shall return to shortly.

To see how this system operated, let us look first at the Maudes' description of the Tabiang village district spirit house:

"1. The atu (head) was the kawa [hamlet] of Tabiang, which was Nei Angi-ni-maeao's [the village district founder] own kawa. Its duties were to decide when all work connected with the uma-n anti [spirit house] was to be done and the date on which the various feasts were to be held.

2. The 'dividers of the food' were the kawa group of Te Itiatia and Eta-ni Banaba.

3. The 'Cutters of the Eaves' were Te Itiatia, and the fallen ends of thatch were collected and thrown away by Aba-uareke. Te Itiatia also had the duty of holding down the ridge capping during high winds.

4. The 'Thatchers of the Roof' were Te Itiatia, Eta-ni Banaba, the kawa group of Nakieba and Aba-uareke.

5. The 'Plaiters of the Floor Mats' were Te Itiatia and Eta-ni Banaba (Maude & Maude 1932:279)."

The inter-district system was based on the rights and precedence of Tabwewa, one of the village districts. Explanation of its position of primacy need not detain us now. It had to "Open the season" for ritual amusements, in which certain of its hamlets faced hamlets from other districts, and it had special rights in ritual incorporation. Two hamlet coalitions had primacy within Tabwewa; these were called 'The Seashore' and 'The Upland.' The Seashore had ties in the incorporation and amusement activities with two particular village districts; The Upland with the two other districts.

Here is an indication of how the system operated between village districts. I referred above to the division of labor in the Tabiang district spirit house. (Tabiang was the name both of a district and a hamlet in it.) In Tabiang district, according to H.E. Maude's notes, certain stranded fish had to be brought to a special place and the people of the district called. Someone from the hamlet of Etanibanaba ties the fish's head. Then someone from the hamlet of Teitiatia comes with a carrying pole. In carrying the fish, someone from Etanibanaba leads and someone from Teitiatia follows. They arrive in the Upland house in Tabwewa; someone from Tabiang converses with some one from the senior hamlet of the Upland coalition. Activities take place, they return to Tabiang, and food is shared out by certain hamlets to certain hamlets in a certain order (the first share went to the hamlet of Tabiang).



I mentioned the precedence of Tabwewa, and an order of precedence among hamlets. At each level there was a senior unit and (ideally) a senior person: an order of precedence, framed in a division of labor. And an activity at one level invoked the levels beneath it. Thus if District B were senior to District C, and B had a message to send to C, or a visitor to pass on, or a game to organize, a particular unit (hamlet or hamlet coalition) of B would carry the message, etc., to a particular sub-unit of C. There was then the question of who in that sub-unit was the proper person (people). Assuming that some of the current disputes about who has the right to do what occurred aboriginally, it can be easily seen how the position of a unit at any level in this system had to be validated from the outside. Assuming the norms were institutionalized, it was a very fragile system. In the more complex activities, a dispute at the descent-line level might have immobilized the hamlet (at least temporarily), and thus the whole system.

If the division of labor involved seniority, what principles established seniority?

Seniority among hamlets in a village district is, in the ceteris paribus version of Banaban culture, according to the birth order of their founders. The elder sibling, and thus the elder hamlet, is 'the speaker,' that is, the hamlet with the right of initiative and final decision. The second sibling, and thus the second hamlet, is 'the worker,' that is, the descent unit which divides the food in the meeting house and carries messages from the first. The other hamlets have more specific rights and obligation, such as cleaning up the thatch and preparing items for games. The Upland/Seashore contrast noted for Tabwewa district had some counterparts elsewhere; it is an exemplification of the land/sea contrast discussed earlier.

A right may be vested in a hamlet, but the hamlet does not exercise it

in an undifferentiated fashion. There is seniority of descent-lines within hamlets, as there is of hamlets among themselves. The principles structuring the different levels are, however, the same.

It was not always the case that the genealogically senior hamlet, or descent-line, had the right of initiating. According to local histories, the parent holdingga right may have passed by the first child in favor of another. Or the right-holder may have neglected his rights and obligations; he was ignored by the other members of the group, and his rights passed to the next line.

If the senior line is passed by in favor of a junior one, it is disputed whether the switch of rights is final, or whether they revert to the senior line in the next generation. The same problem occurs with regard to sex. In ideal circumstances, the speaker and initiator is a man. If a woman is the elder of a unit which has speaking rights, she should call upon her nearest senior male relative in that unit 'to speak for her.' In one school of thought, the rights stay where they went, thus forming a rule of passi-succession. It is possible that this conflict of principles formed the terms of much of the verve of aboriginal Banaban life.

We have already discussed the general definition of sex-roles. For the conduct of descent unit activities and rights of custodianship over them within a unit, this is proverbially phrased as "the man's right is 'the word,' the woman's right the wells." In some views in the senior line of the hamlet or coalition, inheritance of the speaking rights is in the male line, and the right to wells and water-caves in the female line. In any case, as women could not fish from canoes (and may have been excluded from some meeting house and spirit house activities), men could not enter many if not all of the water-caves.

These are rights which are being exercised on behalf of the unit as a whole; it is what a brother does for his sister, and a sister for her brother. Although there is a division of rights within a descent unit, all the rights in a general sense belong to all the siblings, to the unit as a whole. The rights are in this way vested in the sibling unit (or sibling units), and differentially exercised within it according to various principles, but at a later time can be rearranged within the unit. This is at the level of descent units a replication of the position of siblings as equivalent yet differentiated.

Indeed, the relationship between siblings is the model for the relationship between the hamlets of a village district, and between the descent-lines of which a hamlet (as a descent unit) is composed. In explaining the hamlet system to me, one man who was the eldest of his siblings made an explicit comparison: if there were a family affair, he said, he as eldest would sit inside the house, and his next sibling would carry instructions from him to the other siblings outside the house, who are preparing food and drink for the people assembled. And just as he would defer to a senior-generation cognate ("my time has not yet come"), the lineally most senior person in the descent unit may defer to a senior-generation cognate who is lineally junior. (This may also have been the setting for disputes aboriginally.)

The wary reader will by now have seen the direction of the garden path along which I am leading him. Before I explicate it in a little more detail, one item of legend will be helpful. According to one popular version, the senior village district was not always senior. Another district was senior. But the elder of that district was neglected by his children. When he left his home one day he was taken in by a man of another group, and the elder said that if his daughter did not come to reclaim him before a certain time,

he would give his rights to his new friend. The daughter came too late, and the deed was done. The elders's district became last in precedence where it had been first. But the donor's group was still to be specially honored by the new senior one.<sup>7</sup>

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The descent system was complex, and the population aboriginally probably hovered around 500-800. The units being constituted and interrelated were not exclusive units. They were not economic units. More than anything, I think, they were ritual units, with some political aspects. Rituals function to encode messages about the nature of the world and the actor's relationship to it; about definitions and interrelations. I interpret the descent system primarily as a ritual system. There is evidence that under certain conditions of stress it also functioned as a more diffuse authority system. I would argue that this is a manifestation of "functional flexibility" as well as of a generally low level of differentiation. Bilateral structures have been celebrated for their structural flexibility in concrete circumstances. The notion of functional flexibility may be introduced as a complement.

The fact that categories and contrasts from other parts of the social structure "appear" in it is explained--in functional tautology--by the fact that the business of the descent system was precisely to teach the nature of those categories and contrasts in a symbolically highly charged content.

Consider first kinship itself. As a diffuse solidarity kinship stipulates cooperation and sharing; the descent system projects this onto a more cosmic (if less diffuse) role-differentiated stage. The descent units are ideally perpetual; this feeds into the nature of kinship as an enduring solidarity. Not all kinsmen, however, enact kinship behavior; the system records this fact and its consequences.

Consider second the kinds of relationships enshrined: parent-child, sibling-sibling, brother-sister. The system was a 'permanentization' of those relationships and a spelling out of some aspects of their nature. Third, the contrasts between generations, between age roles, and between different positions in birth order: these are also highly significant in functionally diffuse kindred relations, and other relations. Fourth, sexual differentiation is marked, in a manner similar to its occurrence elsewhere; I note in passing the division in the kindred between the "male side" and the "female side." Fifth, the importance of lineality and collaterality in the kindred is paralleled in the custodianship of seniority rights through primogeniture. Sixth, the cosmological contrast between land and sea--and of course the nature of 'land' itself--is injected into descent unit organization. And seventh, the spatial and temporal parameters of the local world are defined and interrelated, through the identification of localities and the genealogies which provided some form of chronology.

The system was a socialization device; many messages about the nature of the world are packed into a system which is an enacted drama. One may even suggest that ~~the~~ structured tensions among kinsmen which deviated from the ideal pattern were displaced onto the descent system.

In addition to communicating about the social categories mentioned above, the system communicates about value-orientations.

The world that the descent system builds up is one in which one asserts that an organizational ground-plan for social life exists, even if its details are matters of controversy. But it is a world which is fluid to the point of fragility. The positions of people and groups change. And options (rights) must be exercised, lest they be lost. To paraphrase one man who spoke during a recent descent unit dispute: Banaban Custom says, if you have a right and

do not 'touch' it somebody else will. I have elsewhere identified the maximization of options as the Banaban value of highest generality (Silverman 1969b).

In the contemporary society, certain patterns of hierarchy coexist with a strong egalitarian ethic. The expression of precedence is a difficult thing; one is cutting down on the options of others. If this was the case aboriginally, then the "message" of the descent system comes through even more clearly. The descent system patterned precedence in the context of division of labor. It stated that this was necessary for orderly society to exist. But through the legendary transfer of rights, through the game competitions, and through overlapping membership itself, "the first could be last and the last could be first." There was thus a compromise: hierarchy was recognized, but in such a way that the same person could have different status in different units in the same system.

One of the striking features of the Banaban descent system in comparison with some other bilateral systems is that it created and interrelated units which ideally comprised the whole island. Why should the people have "bothered" to do so? Here we go back to Durkheim. The messages were too important to leave them up to individuals to communicate randomly, and the weight of all relevant humanity was put behind them.

It may well be asked: Why should a descent system be called upon to bear such a burden? The answer probably has something to do with history (see Maude 1963), and with two of the symbolic bases of that system: blood and land. The units are associated with areas of land. One is a member by 'blood' or by adoption, and adoption entails the transfer of Ocean Island land from adoptor to adoptee. Blood and land are defined as being about the "facts of life," and thus the message is stamped with a powerful veracity (see Schneider 1968, Turner 1967).

The Banaban descent system was thus really "about" a variety of things, including kinship, the kindred, age, sex, space, time, and values, forged in the setting of "blood and mud."

## 6. Conclusion to Part I

Before the point became common knowledge, beginning anthropology students used to be told that the Nature of Culture was such that if you entered the system at any point, you could reach any other point: The One-Thing-Leads-To-Another Principle. The analysis thus far aspires to go beyond that point. Land in traditional Banaban culture relates directly to concepts of locality, blood, kinship, descent, continuity, rank, value, reward, redress, sex, space, time, nature, nurture, and the 'person.' The route from land to these concepts is a particularly direct one. It is so direct that one may conclude that as a symbol land functioned as a means of exchange or coordinator between the concepts enumerated. It was the "center of gravity"--to use another metaphor--of the Banaban cultural system.

As colonial expansion in the Pacific developed, the major interest of metropolitan powers was in the Banabans' land, since Ocean Island was covered with valuable deposits of phosphate of lime. Thus the focal concerns of colonizer and colonized coincided in one sense. But their "interests" progressively diverged, and now the Banabans are no longer on Ocean Island, but are on Rambi Island, Fiji. Through land the people aboriginally ordered the interrelationships among differentiated domains. Now they have two islands to worry about. How this situation arose, what its implications are, and the relevance of certain other changes will engage our attention in Part II. ~~III~~.