

*Part V*

**Lake Sentani: The analysis of myths**

## 16

**Myths and their analysis**

In this chapter a structural analysis of historical and recent Lake Sentani material culture in relation to its mythical settings, is described. This analysis will attempt to get insights in the (historical) relations between person(s) and object(s). Instead of relations *to* the object, the object can be considered *as* the relationship itself (Weiner 1995: xiv). Also, subject and object can be considered as relationally constituted, both internally as well as with respect to each other (Weiner 1995: xiv). This is especially the case in New Guinean societies, where subject and object are inextricably bound up with each other and whose relationship is, according to Weiner (1995: xiv), "constituted through the phenomena of splitting, detachment, and loss [..]." In his analysis of Papuan myths, Weiner (1995) focuses on those myths that deal with lost or detached objects. These objects are destined to complete missing parts of persons. However, they have a voice and a mind of their own and take over the subject. Thus, instead of being incorporated into persons, objects incorporate the person and become the owner (Weiner 1995: xv). These human features of objects come also to the fore in Lake Sentani myths. Moreover, some objects are not only the personification of ancestors, in fact they *are* the ancestors.

**16.1 Introduction**

In order to analyse myths, it is important to know the nature of myths. In general myths are considered narratives that take place in the past and bear reference to the present order. From a structuralist perspective, myths are the products of deductive processes (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 3). According to Lévi-Strauss (1971: 3), two types of deduction can be discerned: 1. empirical deduction and 2. transcendental deduction. Direct empirical deduction is founded on perceptions that develop on the basis of observed experiences and analogies. Indirect empirical deduction is based on inversion of analogies. Transcendental deduction is not founded on observations, but on logical deductions that bear no reference to the external reality. This kind of deduction is based on the mental capacity to combine things with each other (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 3). Mythical constructions are made up of combinations of empirical and transcendental deductions and therefore contain a conceptual universe that can be studied (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 3). In order to comprehend these cognitive processes of deduction, structuralists look for social structures that generate certain myths.

The form of myths shows, universally, striking similarities. In summary myths are: 1. linear. The sequence of events makes up a syntagmatic chain and is bounded by metonymy. 2. The syntagmatic chain of the whole myth is divided into a sequence of episodes. 3. each episode is a partial metaphoric transformation of the other. This implies that each sub-plot refers to similar events and that the whole myth can be regarded as a palimpsest of piled-up metaphorical transformations (Leach 1976: 26). Thus, "myths

can be broken down into 'mythemes' which acquire meaning only when combined in particular ways" (Tilley 1989: 187). Comparison of diverse myths or certain mythical structures with structures from other domains of a society, can reveal the ordering principles and the messages that reside beneath the surface.

Before proceeding with the analysis of myths, it is important to acknowledge the fact that myths are not stable or static narratives. The fact that myths are narratives already indicates their ability to transform. Moreover, this ability is an essential part of them. Myths live, because they are oral traditions pertaining to a social community that is able to incorporate new phenomena. Writing them down and analysing them is therefore somewhat at odds with their structure. A Humboldt Bay informant of F. Kamma (1975: 1), who collected many myths, made this point clear by saying: "In putting down our myths and legislative rules in writing you just kill them".

### 16.2 Lake Sentani origin myths

Several villages of Lake Sentani have their own myths that narrate about the origins of the group and the different clans. In expressing the identity of the group or clan, these myths were extremely important. Each clan had its own myths (Galís 1955; Hoogerbrugge 1967: 6), which narrate about the birth, origin and custom of the ancestors of the Lake Sentani people. These myths were owned by the leaders, the *Ondofolo* (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 6). In the Sentani villages, people called these stories *helé-huba*<sup>47</sup>. Only special, by the Ondofolo appointed women, were allowed to narrate the myths. From childhood these women were trained in memorising and narrating the stories in a plaintive and monotonous manner. Sometimes, the narrating occurred in an old language which is not practised (any longer) in daily life (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 6).

The myths of Lake Sentani can be distinguished in three groups: myths which refer to the **earth**, to **heaven**, and to the **east**. The first group of myths have reference to the people and villages in the central part of the Lake (e.g. the island Adjauw and villages Ifar and Siboiboi), the second group pertains to the villages Obar, Netar and Baberongko. The latter group refers to the people and villages in the eastern part of the Lake, namely Asei and Ayafó. Besides these clan-specific origin myths, there is one myth which, in a more general manner, explains the creation of earth and men.

"In primeval times earth and human beings did not yet exist. There was only darkness, utter darkness. The only existing object was an egg. Then the Northern wind blew (from heaven), touched the egg and broke the shell and out of the egg came a female being named Kani (earth). In the beginning heaven (the sky) hovered over the earth at a very close range. The first human beings could easily climb and descend to and from heaven by way of a huge banyan tree (yowake) with rattan and a rope made of the clouds" (Kamma 1975: 52).

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<sup>47</sup> *Helé* = crying, *huba* = far away, drifted in time (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 6).

The population in the central part of the Lake is considered as the oldest one. The ancestors of these people are supposed to come out of the earth. First the people of Samforo came, a spirit (*uaropo*) had dug them out of the earth. Subsequently, the people of Siboiboi, Ifar and Kabiterau came out of the earth (Wirz 1928: 255). This narrative was recorded by Wirz, who visited the area in 1921 and 1926. A more recent version of this myth was recorded by Hoogerbrugge (1967: 10), who was told that the first people of the island Adjauw, belonged to the Mehuë group. Instead of a spirit who dug them out, the (male) northern wind breaks the shell of the egg, out of which the (female) earth is born. The first ancestor, Mehuë, who resides in the inner parts of the earth, calls his fellow people by means of a drum because they all want out of the earth. Subsequently, the earth opens and the people of Mehuë come out. The sound of the drum, which can be considered as the voice of the culture-hero, probably breaks the earth open (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 11).

The second group of people are supposed to come out of heaven (Wirz 1929; Hoogerbrugge 1967). These people belong to a different clan than the first group.

In order to climb down from heaven, the people used an air-root from the Waringin tree. First the patriarch came down. When the other people wanted to climb down the root broke and they fell down to earth. After having regained consciousness, they settled on a hill-top on the island Adjauw. Later, they went to the mainland and founded the villages Obar, Baberongko and Netar (Wirz 1928: 255).

In Ayafu, the myth of Obar was told slightly different than the previous one.

The people of Obar used to live in heaven. On their journeys they came across a big hole in the sky, through which they could look down on the earth. They wanted to jump down, but first a pot (*ebe*) was made to fall down the hole. The people saw that it did not break. Subsequently a dog was put through the hole. The dog also came alive on earth and he walked away. Afterwards, the people themselves jumped through the hole and came safe and sound on the earth. Subsequently, they founded the village Obar (Wirz 1928: 255).

These myths are similar to one Hoogerbrugge (1967: 7-8) recorded for the Wali and Tojafu groups. In this version the people threw, before descending to earth, a mat, subsequently a sago-pot and finally a dog down to earth. The people themselves, however, did not jump, but climbed via a rattan stalk, which was chopped in the South, down to earth.

In the Lake Sentani societies, the North was synonymous to heaven and male properties, the South was compared with the earth and female characteristics (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 9). Thus the journey with help of the rattan stalk that was chopped down in the South, is already a journey to the earth (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 9). In the three myths, two different methods or solutions, in order to get down to earth, are practised. In the first two versions of the myth, the people throw first a sago-pot and a dog to the

earth before they descended themselves. The sagopot and the dog can be regarded as metaphors for respectively the cooking of food and the hunting for food. These modes of existence were also the major tasks of respectively women and men.

The third group of people claim to have originated from the, mythical, East. The people of the village Asei and mainly the Ongge, Ohee (or Ohei) and Kaigere clans, believe that they came from the east, presentday Papua New Guinea. The Kaigeres consider themselves as originating from Bougainville, the northern island of the Solomon group (Oral communication G. Kaigere 1996). The origin myth from Asei was recorded by Wirz (1928) in 1921-1926, by Kamma (1975) in 1929-1931 and twenty years later by Hoogerbrugge (1967: 15-17) during the period 1956-1963. The three narratives were recorded in Asei and follow the same structure:

"In the beginning a group of people lived in the East. Their village was named Fenemyo-Wauwauyo high in the mountains (the place is located behind Omaka east of the border between Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea). Their high chief was Dohayo. On a certain day he planned to nominate all the ondofo's, and on that occasion they planned to celebrate this nomination. Everybody went to the forest in order to prepare their adornment. Only the son of the Taime's, (mountain-people) could not get what he wanted, because all feathers were already used. His mother then urged him to climb up a banyan tree: "hide there and shoot, but not kill, some birds of paradise." So he did and he got three still living birds. He donned these birds and was admired (because the birds were alive).

All the people had already come together in order to celebrate the occasion by a dancing-feast. Suddenly it seemed as if the earth started to shudder and mountains in the vicinity rumbled. At that very moment a huge snake, Ahakai-Yoblo (or Yabero) came out of the earth. It seemed he was very angry; he crept to the dancing site and crawled there with his body. The mother of the Ondofolo (was the first one) who saw the snake and called the inhabitants saying: "Here is something as big as a mountain". Hearing her voice the people came out of their houses, they saw the snake and became terribly frightened. (At once) they started to collect valuables in order to appease the monster with these gifts. But he was not satisfied with these valuables. Therefore the mother of the Ondofolo gathered all her valuables and adornments and adorned Tame with them and she decorated him as beautiful as possible. His hair was dyed with red colourstuff (mèlè) and the three living birds of paradise she inserted into his hair. She rubbed his body with coconut-oil (mélébu). After that Taime came out of the house and appeared on the site.

Instantly the snake opened his jaws in order to swallow Taime. Then the old men spoke to the snake: "(Better) shut your mouth and straighten your tail, so that Taime is able to sit on it". The snake obeyed and so Taime and the snake left the dancing-site out to the sea. The snake crept into the sea and swam as a ship to the West. The mother of Taime stood on the beach and looked; she remained there and petrified into a rock (nowadays there is still on that spot a coral reef near the village Vanimo). The snake continued to swim and where his body twisted bays and capes came into existence. The snake swam via Sko and Tobati to a place called Nafri (Hebele). There Taime changed his adornments. They went over the hills and arrived at the Lake (Sentani) near Umabo-Kaikiri on the shore. The head of the snake went in the direction of the islet Tasindjau-Yokoba. And after that, the snake disappeared under the surface of the water with Taime on his back.

When all these events had happened all the people, gathered at the dance-site, scattered in every direction. A part of them, the Ohei group, followed the path the snake had taken. In Sko part of them had to stay behind because they had sore legs. Others went further to Tobati-Nafri and from there to the place Umabo-Kaikiri at Lake Sentani, located in the mountains behind the recent village Asei. There they had to fight with the tribes living there. When peace was agreed the people of the East could settle on the shores of the Lake. When they arrived in Yomokoyo-Haliauyo, three groups lived there. 1. Yomoko-Powondo; 2. Toasobo-Kamoto; 3. Wali-Nelelo, with his younger brother Abalendo. Later on the Ohei people of Yomokoyo moved to the island, since called Asei-Ohei. From there the family-groups (clans) split up and this was the origin of the villages Ayafo, Yoka, Waena and Asei-kecil (small Asei)" (Kamma 1975: 60-62).

The only difference between the myths recorded by Wirz and Kamma and the one collected by Hoogerbrugge, concerns the second aliena in which Taimé (or Taimi) cannot find any adornments. In the myth that Wirz recorded Taimi starts too late with his preparations to make decorations (Wirz 1928). In the most recent variant Taimé cannot search adornments because he has ulcers (*kokouwkimani*). He asks his friends to help him, but nobody has any feathers left (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 15). In this variant Taimé is not able to take care for himself and could be regarded as an *initiandus*, he is not yet initiated and therefore is not allowed to wear feathers (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 16-17). The decorations he receives from his mother before being presented to the snake and the ride on the snake could therefore be regarded as his initiation. The fact that he changes his adornments when arriving at Nafri, suggests that he has passed another (initiation) stage before arriving at the Lake and submerges under water.

### 16.3 Ordering principles of myths

In general myths are analysed according three components, the framework, the message and the codes (Greimas 1971: 82). The first component refers to the narrative structure of the myths. A characteristic of myths is the 'reversal of a situation', there is always a 'before' and 'after'. The 'prior' situation has more or less the reversed content of the 'after' situation. The reversals express the 'differentness' of mythical happenings with regard to daily life (Greimas 1971: 82). In the Lake Sentani myths these reversals often correlate with the killing of persons or animals. Often it is the father who is killed by his sons, or the first ancestor who dies. Each time the ancestor orders or creates, he dies. Mothers often die or turn into stone when looking for their dead or departed sons. When animals are killed, lakes and rivers arise. Thus, it seems that in order to start a new fertile life, the old one has to be killed. A second characteristic of myths is that the beginnings and ends of myths take place at different mythological settings than the central part (Greimas 1971: 83). In Lake Sentani myths, most narratives begin with a scene situated in some mythical place (heaven, inside the earth, or the mythical east). The myths always end with life on earth, with traceable ancestors and kin. Thus, the 'before' and 'after' characteristic of myths also applies for the second characteristic.

The second component of the structure of myths are the messages. These are located in the transformations between paradigmatic and syntagmatic orderings. In myths, events alternately occur on these two levels. Instead of paradigmatic association and syntagmatic chain, 'symbol' and 'sign' or metaphor and metonymy are used as well (Leach 1976: 15). Myths as syntagmatic chains, have to be broken down into units that can be analysed in terms of paradigmatic contrasts (Leach 1967: 15). In my MA thesis for Anthropology the myth of Wali and Tojafo (e.g. origin myth from heaven) has been analysed in these terms (Hermkens 1996: 71). The myth can be broken down into three episodes with corresponding opposition-pairs. The first episode takes place in heaven (governed by spirits) and is dominated by human-spirit and man-woman oppositions characterised by conflicts over the sharing of (vegetable) food that results in the killing of the chief spirit. The second episode takes place in heaven (governed by ancestors) and is dominated by the younger brother-older brother opposition, characterised by conflicts regarding the yields of hunting that results in the threat of killing the younger brother's dog. The third episode takes place on earth and is characterised by the synthesis of the opposition between men-women and of its related oppositions like dog-sagopot, which symbolises respectively the male hunting and the female cooking and gardening. Since dog and sagopot landed safely on earth, both men and women can live on earth as well (Hermkens 1996: 71-72).

The third component of myths entails the different codes that can be encompassed by a narrative. The most characteristic features of Lake Sentani myths are the relations between: 1. spirits and men, 2. father and son(s), 3. younger and elder brother, and 4. man and woman (Hermkens 1996: 68, 74). Next to the first ancestor a powerful spirit, who seems to be the father of the first (human) ancestor (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 45), comes to the fore. The ordering of nature, like the creation of Lake Sentani and the origin of fire, are attributed to the actions of this ancestor and the spirit (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 45). The relation between father and son is controversial. The father loves his sons, but in order to create or order things he has to be killed by one of his sons or a spirit. The two brothers are often in conflict, they are jealous on the power and possessions of their father and struggle for the rights of the first-born, for example the most beautiful decorations. The controversy between the two brothers ends when they split up and develop two separate groups. Often one brother stays in the spirit world, while the other settles down on earth. Conflicts between men and women concern presumed adultery, food and not being able to receive (human) children. In short, all powers and capabilities of women with which they can 'harm' men, come to the fore in Lake Sentani myths. Usually, the conflict is settled by the intervenience of some magical or spiritual aid. On a more mythical level, conflicts and relations between men and (mostly) dangerous and powerful women occur. Desirable features like fire and water are guarded by these women. When men, mostly two brothers, try to acquire these resources, one of the brothers or a (eldest) son dies. It is, however, always the men who acquire the wanted resources and subsequently cultivate them. In doing so they empower the women who possessed these natural resources.

Apart from the prior social relations that make up the *social code* of the myths, the *cosmological code* or ordering of the myths is also similar in Lake Sentani myths. According to the Lake Sentani people, the layers of the universe are threefold: the upperworld, resting on tops of the Davonsero (Cyclops) mountains, the human world, which reaches from the bottom of the lake to the top of the mountain, and the underworld (Kamma 1975: 14). Especially in the origin myths this three-fold, vertical division of the world plays a major part. In order to travel from one domain (heaven or earth) to the other (earth or heaven), rattan stalks or ropes made from clouds are used to climb up or down. Also, trees that can grow fast in either direction, are used to establish contacts between heaven and earth.

A horizontal ordering of the narrative is achieved by the *geographical code* that entails the four wind-directions. The horizon, which is the sky-line in the far East and the far West, forms the connection between heaven (the sky) and earth (Kamma 1975: 16). The West is the gate to the underworld, the realm of death. The East is the origin of life (Kamma 1975: 16). Furthermore, the North is associated with both male and heaven, while the South is associated with female and earth. In the Lake Sentani myths these symbolic associations are frequently used. For example when climbing down from heaven to earth, a rattan stalk, chopped in the South is used to climb down to earth. The journey via the rattan is therefore already a journey to the (female) earth (Hoogerbrugge 1967). A geographical and/ or cosmological change, often marks a transformation -and with respect to the content a reversal- to a new episode.

#### 16.4 Relations between myth and design structures

From a structuralist point of view, human creativity is a mental operation that is projected on the external world. These projections encompass a structured order, which is partly incorporated consciously (Leach 1985: 2). The order that comes to the fore in both Lake Sentani myths and designs, is a dualistic and reversible order. In myths dualistic relations between heaven and earth, North and South, East and West, lake and mountain, spirits and mankind, father and son, younger and older brother and other oppositions occur. These pairs are not separated from each other but make up mutual dependent pairs; without the one the other would not exist. Often, the properties of the elements in each pair are reversed to one and another as well. For example, one brother has a good temper, the other a bad one. One gets the beautiful decorations, the other the minor ornaments. One brother stays in heaven while the other lives on earth. Heaven is light while the earth is dark. The North is male while the South is female etc. Next to these binary pairs, the myths reveal other dualistic properties in the sense that there are always two brothers, mostly two women who marry one man, two sons or daughters that are born, which are mostly twins, two sisters that guard the water, two drums that are made, two kinds of decorations or valuables and so forth.

Also, informants consider the world of the Lake to be synonymous to the world of the Sentani people. The Lake with its inhabitants is similar to human life. Fish live *in* the lake, they eat water plants and smaller fish, procreate, live and die. People live *on* the lake, they eat plants, fish, procreate, live and die (Gershon Kaigere: oral communication 1996). Since humans and animals are regarded as having the



same origin and therefore can be regarded as the same (section 17.3), a dualistic order of two differently situated similar beings is described. The world of the Lake is not a reflection of the human world in the sense that it mirrors human life. It is similar to it and can be regarded as being the same, the only difference being the situation and orientation of the Lake world versus the human world. Fish and waterplants live beneath the Lake surface, the people above. The fish live in the water, the humans on the land. Therefore both worlds are the same but inverted to each other.

In Part III a structural analysis of Lake Sentani designs revealed that most designs are ordered by rotation. This motion implies a reversal of one element, thereby creating two similar forms with different orientations. Prominent examples of this principle are the double spiral designs in which black and white spirals simultaneously connect and disperse. An example of the dualistic traits is formed by the *homo-kelew* design (Figure III.10.1), which consists of a two- or threefold depiction of a central rhombus figure with interlocking spiral-arms. The rhombus figures break through a black band, thereby reaching upwards (to heaven?). Their spiral-arms interlock with each other in double spirals connecting the black and white levels of the decoration.

Thus, it may be stated that a dualistic, reversible order figures prominently in both myths and designs. This dualistic mental ordering comes also to the fore in the name-giving of objects (male and female; section 15.6), the distinction between male and female designs, and male and female objects (Section 15.4 and 15.6). It also appeared in more social aspects like the division of labour (male versus female tasks), the regional division of stone-(male) and ceramic (female) production centres, the kinship system that was based on exogamy and an inheritance of titles via a male and a female line. Also, old names had to consist of two parts (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 44), just like the layout of the (old) villages. Early European visitors even mention that there were men's houses and women's houses (see for further similarities between social and mythical structures Hermkens 1996). This dualistic conceptual world is illustrated by a line of a Sentani verse (*akoikoi*), recorded by Hoogerbrugge (1967: 45), in which is sung about God's only son. As an answer, in the chorus it is asked: "has Jesus no younger brother?" (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 45).

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## Relationships between myths, designs, objects and animals

### 17.1 Mythical designs

In the Lake Sentani myths, decorations or adornments have a magical connotation. Both objects and persons are decorated, giving them a special status, since the most beautiful decorations appear to have more appeal and power. Conflicts about who receives the most beautiful ornamentation often occur between two brothers. The correlation between decorations and natural powers comes to the fore in among others the myth of Marwéri (the man who is wearing a loincloth).

Marwéri and his people construct a big house, but having nothing to decorate it with, Marwéri has to travel to heaven in order to finally acquire decorations and ornaments from the man Ondikelew<sup>48</sup>, who lives in the East. "Ondikelew is willing to share his decorations and ornaments with Marwéri. And while the two were discussing these matters thunder and lightning rumbled and shone. Then Marwéri got the rights of thunder and lightning from Ondikelew [...]" (in: Kamma 1975: 65-67).

The fact that Marwéri cannot find proper decorations is related to the principle that decorations and adornments have to be according to one's rank (Kamma 1975: 126). Since Marwéri had magical powers and a supernatural status, his ornaments *had* to be looked for in heaven. If decorations and adornments were used that were not according to the individual's rank it meant that he appropriated pride and a name that could not be proven. In contrast, "using the exact prescribed decoration, was the same as being in power, a proof of one's status" (Kamma 1975: 126). The misuse of decorations was regarded as "a serious trespass against the existing order" (Kamma 1975: 126). This aspect also comes to the fore in the origin myth of Asei, in which at first Taime cannot find or receive ornaments until he has been initiated. Disputes arise when the first-born receives the minor decorations while the younger one receives the most beautiful ones.

Next to humans or spirits, objects received decorations as well. In the myth of Marwéri it was his house that needed to be decorated, so it could express the status of the owner and consequently its own

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<sup>48</sup> Notice that the extension of this name, -kelew, is also used in the lime-gourd decoration named homo-kelew. 'Homo' = drawing, 'kelew' is the name of one of the three components out of which the dowry is made up. This part (kelew) has to be divided inside the house, among kin, and is not visible to outsiders. This in contrast to the 'jakala' part, which means 'clear' and 'light' and refers to the part that is shared outside (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 52). The third component, 'noem' means "dark and secret" and is given directly to the parents of the bride, without anyone else to see. It is therefore directly opposed to 'jakala'. 'Kelew' therefore may refer to the grey, intermediary level that can be seen as a transformation between (in the dowry case) the parents of the bride and the community. With regard to the motif, it could symbolise the transfer between the black and white parts of the design, connecting them in a spiral.

status. In fact Marwéri can be considered as the 'house'<sup>49</sup>, being the father and leader of his kin and uniting them in one house. Hence, it seems to make no difference whether a human body or an object wears adornments (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 46); both are regarded as the same.

The mythical meaning of decorations stands out when analysing the objects themselves. One of the most conspicuous characters of Lake Sentani designs, is the dualistic use of colours. In the Humboldt Bay black is considered as the colour of death or killing; white is considered as a peace colour (Galís 1995). Heaven and the sun visualize light, in contrast to the earth which symbolises the dark. The black and white rows and the lime gourds with homo-kelew designs, could therefore be regarded as heaven-earth oppositions (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 44). According to Hoogerbrugge (1967: 82-87), these oppositions constitute a cosmological dualism, encompassing heaven-earth, North-South, Lake-mountain and so on. The rhombus figures in the homo-kelew design (also described as birds; see Hoogerbrugge 1967; Hermkens 1996), break with their spiral-arms through these oppositions and connect the elements (see also note 44). As such the rhombus figures can be regarded as the bearers of two worlds, together the cosmos (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 19). In various myths contacts between earth and heaven are established via rattan stalks, trees that can grow fast in either directions, or clouds. When wanting to travel to heaven one of the first ancestors (Marwéri) "ordered the clouds to form ropes" (in: Kamma 1975: 66). In the Lake Sentani village Ifar, people compared the spirals with clouds (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 54), thereby confirming the suggestion that spirals form the connection between heaven and earth, North and South, Lake and mountain etc. The local name for spiral ornaments with pointed halves, was *waudjomo*, which means "cloud ending in a point" (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 54).

Except for this cosmological dualism, other oppositions -like men and women, good and evil etc.- could be symbolised by the spiral designs as well. The spiral constitutes the synthesis between the two, making life on earth possible. Both elements are vital elements for life; without the one the other would and could not exist. As such, the spiral ornament can be regarded as a symbol for two similar but albeit different entities and their mutual connection and balance. This suggestion was confirmed by August Ongge and Gerschon Kaigere, who both describe the spiral as a motif which stands for synthesis, unity and balance (Ongge 1993; Kaigere; oral communication 1995). As such Ongge (1993; fieldwork 1996) describes the spiral designs on barkcloth and other objects as narratives of the village life. "Life in the village is like a circle in which the villagers support each other and have a deep respect for the Ondofolo. He works together with other leaders in order to maintain mutual cooperation". The maintenance of balance in the economy of the village is important. Every family has to make a contribution.

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<sup>49</sup> As such the 'house' could be regarded as a kinship structure, organizing the different groups each having its own history and ancestors (Kirch 1997: 190-191).

## 17.2 Mythical objects

In the Lake Sentani myths, diverse objects play a role. Mostly these are drums, but also objects like beads, arrows, axes, canoes, loincloths, barkcloths and stringbags are put on stage. All these objects have their own names and seem to have a magical charm since they are always connected with some mythical ancestor or spirits. In the origin myth of Mehuë (in: Hoogerbrugge 1967: 10-12) some of these objects are mentioned.

"In the old days the earth was an egg. There lived no humans. Due to the northern wind the shell of the egg broke, out of which a woman named Kani (=earth) developed. Mehuë lived in the earth. When he had enough men and women he made a drum named Ghawachu (gha= twilight, wachu= drum). Also he made two stone axes with the names Hechijake (a bird of paradise species) and Hemelam (some kind of tree). And a ring made from shell called Holodjaidai. On the drum Mehuë called his people together, because they wanted to get out. After one person had died, Mehuë and his people got out and settled in among others Ifar-kecil" (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 10).

In this myth it seems that the sound of the drum opens the earth in order to let the people out. Seen in this light the playing of the sacred drums, when performing the temple rituals and initiation rituals of boys, has a mythical connotation. Each time the drums are played, the ancestors speak. This property of drums, having a voice of their own, also emerges in the myth of Feléh and Yukumoko (in: Kamma 1975: 64-65). In this narrative the ancestor of human beings, Feléh, manufactures from a cassowaries hide the skin for two drums, named Bulakoi and Dobongkoi.

"When they went to the East from the West the drum Bulakoi fell overboard (from a canoe) near Sko. Feléh ordered his men to stop and gave the drum the command to come to the surface again. This happened and Feléh said to the drum: "We go now to the West again, but when in the future somebody of the Feléh-clan falls ill and he is going to die, please come to the surface and let all hear the voice of your skin as strongly as possible." After this had been said the drum sank again into the sea and the crew continued their paddling" (Kamma 1975: 64-65).

So, it may be concluded that in Lake Sentani myths, drums (and other objects) accompany ancestors on their journeys, or chose their own way (for example the drum 'who' fell overboard). They are treated like humans -they listen, have a voice and a mind of their own, and receive adornments, just like people.

Next to the axes, which are still used in dowry payments, and beads (see Part IV and section 17.3), loincloths and barkcloths are mentioned as well. In several myths the Ondofolos or ancestors (for example Marwéri) wear loinbelts to protect them against arrows and axes (myth of Kambu and Jako; Hoogerbrugge 1967: 12-13). In the same myth a woman who cannot have children is given a magic potion and is covered with a barkcloth (habana) under which she has to stay. A month afterwards she is pregnant, but she still has to stay under the barkcloth. After she has given birth to the children, the cloth is decorated with two rows of feathers and stored well, since a spirit lives in it (in: Hoogerbrugge 1967: 13). One myth,

pertaining to the Pepuho-clan, reveals the origin of certain motifs that were depicted on barkcloth. According to this myth, two *Holodhonoye*-women (ancestors of the Pepuho-clan) used two kinds of designs on their maro. The oldest sister named Ayokhoi, wore a maro with the luga-motif. Hebeaikhoi, the youngest, wore a maro with the Hakhalu-motif (Ongge 1993). According to Ongge (1993), the first motif explains the division of power in the clan and narrates about the Ondofolo. It is usually this motif that is used for the first child, since this one has the rights of the first-born (see also section 17.1). The Hakhalu-motif symbolises the continuity of life, the past, the present and the future (Ongge 1993).

Thus, in myths only people with a special status, like ancestors, and in daily life only medicine-men and initiated or married women wear loincloths. The loincloths seem to protect the ancestors against dangers and women against their 'nakedness', at the same time indicating their fertility. Thus, both are protected against their specific vulnerability. Also, the loincloth indicates the specific status of the wearer: both the ancestor, medicine-men and women are initiated. It can therefore be stated that these groups have a special relationship. The property that relates the ancestors with the initiated women is the fact that both are the bearers of life. Ancestors are the first creators of contemporary life, without them there would be no existence. Initiated women, wearing maro, are capable of giving birth, of giving life (this is among others expressed by the myth of Kambu and Jako p.133) and are therefore capable of continuing life, initiated by the ancestor. Both women and ancestors are essential for the continuation of life. Therefore, they have to be protected and distinguished from other people. The medicine-men, who occasionally wear a loincloth, can be considered as the guardians and intermediaries for the continuity between ancestral and contemporary life. It is here where the sacred drums fulfill their main role in the communication between the spirit and human world.

Like the tattoos and maro of initiated women, and the loincloths of ancestors and medicine-men, drums are identifiable by their decorated loincloth as well. Thus, the ceremonial drum, which is identified with the ancestor, wears a loincloth, just like the ancestor. Hoogerbrugge (1967: 73) even describes a drum from Ayafo, of which the owner claimed that the batter-head was made of the skin from the belly of the ancestor, who was carved on the handle. In myths, the sound of the drum is considered as the voice of the ancestor. Considering the appearance of the drum and its qualities (sound/voice) the drum is then to be considered *as* the ancestor, especially since each drum had its own name. Therefore, drums do not represent the ancestors or medicine-men, they *are* these persons. The individuality of each drum is enhanced by the variations in decorations and their individual names. Thus, these objects have like people, a name and a sex, and therefore an identity. In the myths their powers and characters become clear. The stories of their actions are revealed and their relationships towards people constituted. People have to be aware of their powers and regard them with the proper respect. Hence, drums are not only mythical objects, they are real living beings.

### 17.3 Mythical animals

In Lake Sentani myths, the animal (next to humans) is one of the expositions in which life reveals and expresses itself (Kamma 1975). Out of mixed couples (spirits with humans) animals are born, often snakes and birds. For example in the myth of Marwéri (in: Kamma 1975: 67), Marwéri's wife Yasi (morningstar), coming from heaven, bore him a son being a snake and after that two more children who were birds. After several events she finally gave him two human sons (a twin), but only after Marwéri had visited and fed (fertilized) her in the appearance of an eagle (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 20-21). Another myth narrates about the origin of animals and humans, both coming from the same human women who married a spirit snake.

"First she gave birth to a lot of grass, then a snake named Mugu, and in quick succession every kind of small and big animals. [...] To the snakes he (the husband/snake) said: 'Don't bite human beings who call you brother, because then you will have nothing to fear. But if they say nothing at all they have to die'" (Kamma 195: 70-71).

Thus, it appears that humans and animals have the same origin and therefore are able to transform themselves into each other since, essentially, they are the same. From the previous myth it also becomes clear that certain animals are related (via kinship) with humans, which explains the food prohibitions that certain clans have on eating, for example, snakes. Eating your snake-brother would imply killing your own kin and is an act of cannibalism as well. Apart from kinship relations between humans and animals, animals are also often the provokers of breaking taboos and subsequent disasters. The origin of Lake Sentani is the result of trying to kill a swine, although it had been strictly forbidden to do so. As a result a roaring river developed that could only be stopped by the death of a boy (the eldest son of one of the ancestors who tried to kill the swine) (in: Kamma 1975: 88-89). The same event happened when two hungry girls tried to spear a fish from a pond, creating a huge flood.

Next to fish and pigs, birds play a significant part in myths. Apart from the cassowary, which has its own myth related to the secret of the sacred flutes and whose skin produces the sound of the drums, small birds often warn the ancestors of coming danger or visitors. Also, the feathers of birds of paradise play a major part in adornments, both in myth and in daily life. Trees, the habitat of birds and snakes, play an important role in the myths as well. They symbolise the tree of life and often form the connection between earth and heaven. Coloured beads, which constitute an important part of dowry payments and other exchanges (Part IV), are supposed to come from trees.

"In the time when the ancestors still lived in the mountains of the East, they had a tree with beads. When going from the East to the West they brought the tree along with them, planting it on a hill in the neighbourhood of Nafri. It was a very large tree with beautiful flowers. Later it started to smell in the area of the tree and it appeared that the tree had started to rot. The people then chopped the tree. Generations later, people discovered beads in the ground when making gardens. These were the flowers of the tree with beads that was chopped down by the ancestors" (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 51-52).

## 18

**Conclusions****18.1 Meanings of designs**

The search for meaning is always a bit arbitrary, since the allocation of meaning is a dynamic process and therefore not unambiguous or stable (Hermkens 1996: 78). In general, the meanings of the designs are related to mythical ancestors and animals, at the same time visualising abstract principles like dualism, unity, balance and inversion. With regard to the meanings of Lake Sentani designs, a distinction can be made between three types: 1. designs as magnifiers of the function(s) of objects, 2. designs as non-verbal expressions and narrators of myths, 3. designs as signs, revealing the relationship between object and society.

The first type of meaning that is attributed to designs is related to the function of the objects on which the designs are depicted. Carvings and designs can be seen as magnifiers of the function of objects. They enhance or invigorate the function and power of the objects. For example, the depiction of fish- and spiral-motifs on peddles and canoes enhances their function, their engagement in the other world, the lake world. The designs on maro's could be regarded as having the same function. They invigorate the fertility of women, symbolising the birth of life and its continuity by means of spirals. The explanation of the 'Hakhalu'-motif, which was frequently depicted on maro, expresses this meaning. "The spiral turning downwards symbolises the descendants from the past, the present and the future" (Ongge 1993).

The second type of meaning concerns the narrating capabilities of designs. In many cases they can be seen as expressions and narrators of mythical narratives. One of the most direct and prominent examples of this meaning of designs, is the spiral-motif called *waudjomo*, which means "clouds that are pointed" (Hoogerbrugge 1967: 54). Hence, in certain contexts, spirals are seen as (pointed) clouds. Since clouds often are the connection between heaven and earth -"The first human beings could easily climb and descend to and from heaven by way of a huge banyan tree (yowake) with rattan and a rope made of the clouds" (Kamma 1975: 52-53)- spirals can be seen as having these properties as well. Constituting the 'bridge' between heaven (white) and earth (black), spiral and especially the homo-kelew designs, visualise the origin myths and the relations between ancestors and spirits.

The third meaning of designs concerns their properties to establish and visualise relationships between different aspects of society. Designs can be regarded as signs, signs for relationships with other aspects of society and its ordering principles. In the previous section it was argued that tattoos, maro and loincloths can be considered as signs for social status and identity. Designs may have these properties as well. The decorations on the drums, and specifically the middle part of the drum, are meaningful in the sense that they identify and personify the object. Thus, like the tattoos, designs on certain objects can be seen as bearers of identity too. In the case of the drums, the designs do not *represent* ancestors, they *are*

the ancestors. So designs are not signs in the sense that they represent some person or item via a marker, in this case the similarity of the design with a loincloth. Neither are they signs that represent, in this case, the ancestor. The drum with its designs *is* the ancestor. The ancestor, however, is also the drum. Hence, there is a continuous metamorphosis between, in this case, the life or world of the ancestors and the world of the people. This metamorphosis is conspicuous in myths, in which objects are treated like humans (and vice versa), receive (animal and human) names and appropriate adornments according to their rank. Thus, humans are objects, objects are animals and animals are humans. This metamorphosis between subject and object is also visible in the design-structures of Lake Sentani decorations. Between fore- and background there is a continuous exchange of roles. There is no stable hierarchical relation between the two. This is especially clear in the double spiral-motif, where black and white spirals, alternately, play the fore- and background of the design. The viewer is captured by this play that never ends. Based on these relations, it can be stated that Lake Sentani material culture is organised around the principle of duality and inversion.

Those who think that some of the ordering principles of lake Sentani people have been revealed may be disappointed, when I state that what these analyses have mainly brought to the fore are my own, western, ordering principles that are constituted in the history of western thought. In my previous analysis of the drum in relation to myths, I have used three different kinds of analysis, based on three different perceptions towards the relation between things and their content. These ways of thinking can be related to three different epistemes that characterize the history of western thought (Foucault 1970: 43, 63-64, 335).

Epistemes	The constitution of the sign	Analysis
<i>16th century, Renaissance episteme</i>	three elements: 1. element that marks 2. element that is marked, the content 3. element that made the marking possible, namely resemblance	Designs are signs in the sense that they represent some person or item via a marker, in this case the similarity of the drum-design with a loincloth.
<i>17th-18th century, Classical episteme</i>	two elements: 1. element that represents 2. element that is represented	Designs are signs that represent, in this case, the ancestor.
<i>19th-20th century, Modern episteme</i>	one element: 1. analysis of being, not of representation	The drum with its designs <i>is</i> the ancestor

Figure 18.1 Three epistemes and the constitution of the sign.



Thus, instead of providing insight in the ordering principles of Lake Sentani people, their way of thinking and its expression in material culture and myths, I have gained more insight in my own cultural ordering principles. The tendency to switch from a representative analysis towards the analysis of being, can also be found in recent archaeological works. For example, Maurice Bloch's (1995: 215) analysis of the Zafimaniry house reveals the same transition from 'representation' towards 'being' as my own. According to his analysis, the Zafimaniry house does not *represent* marriage and society, the house *is* the marriage. The wood are the bones, and the carving of these wooden housepoles honours them, honours the hardness of the heartwood and makes it more evident and beautiful. The carvings are "not representing, they are part of the finishing of a task which could never finish as it should grow forever". They are an "essential element of the material and the social principle on which they occur, they are not referring or signifying" (Bloch 1995: 215).

The major question is whether Bloch and I have been able to distinguish a Zafimaniry and Lake Sentani way of thought, or just one of our own?