To Which Bird Do You Belong? : Totemic Belief among the Mari, Papua New Guinea

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1. Introduction

Totemism has been discussed for several centuries by a number of anthropologists, and New Guinea has provided many examples of totemism. The Sepik area, especially, has been considered an area in which totemism is popular, and numerous anthropologists have reported the totemism of the Sepik area since Bateson and Mead conducted research along the Sepik River.

According to folk explanation, each clan or lineage, or other kind of social group, has 'totems' (animals and/or plants or even everyday objects), and these 'totems' are represented mostly by birds. If someone belongs to the lineage of 'cassowary', he would say that he is a cassowary or that he has the cassowary or that he belongs to the cassowary. Those who belong to the same bird are supposed to be 'fellows' who belong to the same 'totemic' division and help each other. The people use this system as a means of finding security in foreign places. When someone goes to a foreign village, he feels safe if he finds a person who belongs to the same 'totemic' division. He finds such a person by asking who belongs to the same totemic group as he. It is expected that every village or every place has someone who belongs to the same totemic division. The system of 'totemism' varies from area to area, but it has been reported generally as 'totemism' and is considered as sharing similar beliefs which exist widely in the area.

Although many anthropologists have reported totemism in the Sepik area, we have little information concerning how the totems are related to the social structure, how the people consider their totems, or how totemism varies from area to area. Since Levi-Strauss questioned the validity of the concept of totemism [LEVI-STRAUSS 1965], few scholars have studied the concept. When they do study it, they report some aspects of totemism but do not discuss the validity of the concept, nor do they try to confront Levi-Strauss.

Levi-Strauss cast doubt on the validity of totemism by stating that various phenomena have been studied under the name of totemism. However, he does not deny the study of totemic beliefs, the value of the study of the relation between the totems and other aspects of the society, or the value of the study of what the people believe about their totemic objects.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the totemic beliefs of the Mari people

who live along the Salumei River, a tributary of the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. I will discuss how the people view their totemic beliefs and why this belief is so widely seen in the Sepik area[1].

2. Totemism in the Sepik Area

As we can expect from the explanation of totemic belief, a similar system can be found within a very large area. Actually, this custom is common in almost all of the villages in the Sepik area, not only on the riversides of the mainstream Sepik, but also in the basin area of the river delta.

Although these systems share the belief that people who belong to the same totemic creatures are considered to be fellows, they vary from area to area, and this variation is extremely large.

Totemism is expressed in each native language and also in Tok Pisin (pidgin English, or Neo-Melanesian). In Tok Pisin, totem is often called *pisin*, which originally meant bird but also means 'totem' [MIHALIC 1971: 156], probably because totem is often typified by birds. *Wanpisin* (*wan* comes from 'one' in English) is the name for persons who have the same 'totems'. They use expressions such as 'he is my *wanpisin*' or 'you and I are *wanpisin*'.

Almost all the villages in the Sepik area have this kind of 'totemic' belief. Bateson was one of the first anthropologists who mentioned totemism in the Sepik area. He reports that the Iatmul system 'appears to be closely allied to what is called totemism', and that each clan seems to have dozens or even hundreds of totemic ancestors. In Iatmul, many everyday objects belong to various clans, and the same species have different names according to the clan to which they belong. The names of these objects are also given to people, and 'all names of persons have some reference to the objects', which are really references to mythology [BATESON 1932: 402–404].

According to Wassman, the totem is used in Nyaura (eastern Iatmul) as a sort of 'marker' or an identifier of places, especially along their migration route. At each place visited during their migration, the clan group founder leaves behind a few men and women. He assigns them an animal, plant, or some other object into which they can transform themselves; thus, each place has its own 'totem'. This system is also represented visually by a form of 'knotted cords' called *kirugu*. Each cord represents one of the ancient migrations and has knots of different sizes tied at regular intervals. Each of the larger knots represents a place along the migration route, and the smaller knots contain the secret names of the 'totems' associated with each spot [WASSMAN 1990: 32–33].

Whiting and Reed described the totemism of the Kwoma people, who live higher up on the Sepik river than the Iatmul. Whiting asserts that 'all the members of a sib theoretically descend from a common totem ancestor. Each of these sibs has a great many subsidiary totems, some of which are claimed by more than one sib. These lesser totems are variously identified with birds, reptiles, fish, trees,

plants, and parts of the human body [WHITING 1941: 6–7]'.

Bowden, who researched the Kwoma recently, explains that each division of the Kwoma has a large number of totems which are the basis of their mythology and most names and most personal names. He disagrees with Whiting and Reed, however, on their assertion that the totemic divisions are ideally exogamous units. He argues that it is and always has been 'correct' to obtain wives from other clans in the same division, although totemism cuts across their divisions [BOWDEN 1983: 28].

Bowden describes that 'each Kwoma clan "owns" a large number of totems made up ... of named and readily identifiable species of plants and animals [ibid.: 26]'. Totemic plants and animals are not the subject of dietary rules in the Kwoma, and there is no prohibition on killing a totem. Individual totems are not owned exclusively by the members of one clan, but are owned jointly and severally by a number of clans.

Bowden disagrees with Whiting and Reed again on their assertion that the totemic divisions are patrilineal 'sibs'. All informants, according to Bowden, emphatically rejected the suggestion that totems could be described as 'ancestors'. People who have the same or similar totems are members of the same totemic division irrespective of tribal, linguistic or even national background. Totemism enjoins amity between 'classificatory' kin. Totemism is also institutionalized in the form of visual art [ibid.: 26–31].

The Kwoma and the Iatmul live in the middle of the Sepik, and they claim that all the villages in the middle Sepik have this kind of 'totemism'. The lower Sepik area also has a vague notion of totemism, although in some areas it does not function at all. The Murik villages, which lie at the mouth of the Sepik, also seem to believe in 'totemism'. According to Schmidt, each village is divided into several totem-clans. Each totem-clan has its own totem, such as pig, eagle, crocodile, various kinds of fish, and so on [SCHMIDT 1923–26]. But the Kakra[2], who live around the Marienberg township, have a very vague notion of totem. It is thought that they once believed in totemism but they have almost lost it, probably due to modernization[3].

One type of totemism exists along the Sepik mainstream and on the slopes of the Prince Alexander Mountains, which lie north to the Sepik River. Tuzin describes the system of the Ilahita Arapesh, who live in the hilly hinterland of the Torricelli Mountains. Each clan in the Ilahita, according to Tuzin, is associated with two natural species, which are primary and secondary totems. In the majority of cases the primary totem is a species of bird, although insects, grasses and other entities may also be identified. People should avoid killing or eating the totems of their own or mother's clan when these are also important food sources. However, the prohibitions do not apply to the cassowary or 'pitpit'. The Ilahita do not believe that they are genealogically related to their totem species. Similarly, clans with the same totem, or even the same name, do not acknowledge that they are therefore related, although in some cases they recognize the coincidence to be a result of a clan segmentation years earlier. In short, the totem is regarded as a

handy marker for the clan, a colorful alternative to its proper name. As an identifier, the primary totem is useful in communicating names over long distances with a slit-gong. If a man has died, the signal for his own totem is sounded, followed by the signal for his mother's totem [TUZIN 1976: 165–66].

Many varieties of 'totemism' exist in the Sepik area. In most areas, they are not allowed to kill or eat their own totems or their mother's totems, but the Kwoma do not have such prohibitions. The Iatmul people believe that the totems are their ancestors. In some areas, people do not consider totems to be their ancestors, and in other areas no myths exist to explain their relationship with the totems. As Levi-Strauss said, a large number of various phenomena have been treated as a single syndrome under the name of totemism. The only shared feature in the Sepik area is probably the notion that those who belong to the same totemic division are supposed to be 'fellows' and are expected to cooperate with each other even though they do not know each other.

In that case, is it insignificant to study totemism or this sort of totemic belief? Or is totemism simply a fictitious concept as Levi-Strauss has claimed? Totemism might be a fictitious concept, but it does not mean that studying this totemic belief is meaningless. What we are studying is not the totemism itself, but a phenomenon which is very similar to totemism. We are studying the meaning of this 'totemic' belief in a certain area, the folk system of this belief, and the reason why this 'totemic' belief is popular in this area.

3. Totemism in the Mari

3.1. The Mari

Most villages of the Sepik Hills area, which lie between the Sepik mainstream and the New Guinea central highlands, also have a sort of totemic belief, although there are a large variety of systems[4]. The Mari language group is an example of a group having such a system. The Mari are one of the Sepik Hills language groups, and there are three villages; Gabit, Mari (which is often called Small Mari to avoid the confusion with the name of language group, Mari. I will use Small Mari as the village name, and Mari as the name of language group) and Mire[5]. They call these three villages in their language *Mosim*, *Murim* and *Tararim* respectively[6]. But the former names are preferred among their neighbors because the language groups are officially called by these names. Gabit is located along the Salumei River, and Small Mari is located southwest to the Chambri Lake, while Mire is a little west of Small Mari[7] (cf. Map 1).

The Salumei River, along which Gabit village lies, has its origin in the Central Range of Enga Province and joins the Korosameri River before it flows into the Sepik River at the point of Mindimbit village, which lies about 20 km above Timbunke, East Sepik Province. The Salumei has three villages along its course; they are, from upstream, Inaru, Gabit, and Yembiyembi (cf. Map 1.). The Mari
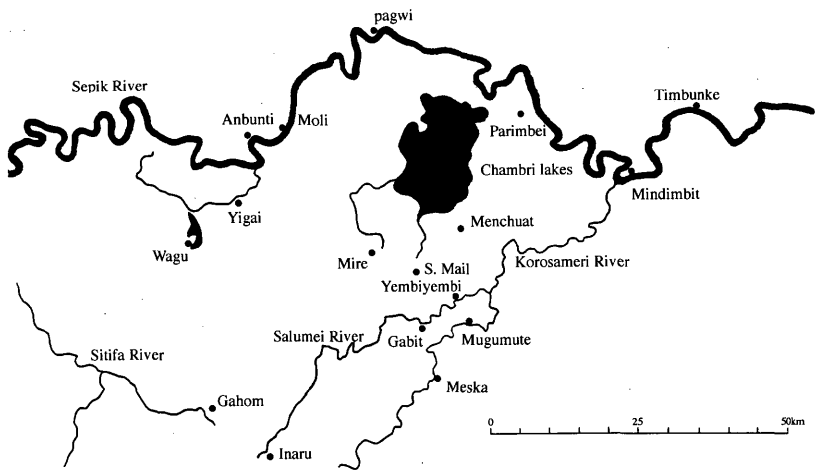
Map 1 Middle Sepik Area

Table 1 The Population of the Mari

	Male	Female	Total
Gabit	20	24	44
Small Mari	41	31	72
Mire	28	24	52
Total	89	79	168

language is in the Bahinemo family, Sepik Hills stock, Sepik Subphylum, Sepik-Ramu Phylum [WURM 1982]. According to their explanation, the people of the Yembiyembi, Menchuat and Changriman (which is often spelled as Sangriman) speak a very similar language to theirs, and the Mari roughly understand their language.

The Mari make up three villages, which were formerly one village located south-west of Chambri lake, where the people of Small Mari still live. According to the people's explanation, they decided to split their village and find other sites in which to live because they lacked food at their original site. Some people left their original village and founded the village of Mire in 1962, while others left the village and settled along the Salumei River and founded Gabit in 1972. The Mari language group has a total population of 168 members; Small Mari has 72, Mire has 52, and Gabit has 44 (cf. Table 1).

The subsistence economy of the Mari is based on the carbohydrates of sago palms, and sago is usually eaten in the form of pancakes. Each family has a sago garden along the river and swamp areas. Besides sago, they clear forests to obtain garden space to grow sweet potato, taro, bananas, and vegetables such as pumpkins, pitpit, and so on. They claim to hunt wild pigs and birds, and they

Table 2 Totemic Birds of Lineages in the Mari[8]

Village	Birds of Lineage	
Gabit	*yaada* (parakeet) *dosi* (crowned pigeon) *inoorsi* (hornbill)	
Small Mari	*yaada* (parakeet) *rugwaara* (flying fox) *inoorsi* (hornbill)	
Mire	*uruus* (cassowary)	*yaada* (parakeet) *inoorsi* (hornbill) *doobu* (eagle)

actually did have two wild pigs during my two month stay in Mari, but there was no evidence of birds.

3.2. Totemism in the Mari

The Mari language group consists of several lineages, and each lineage is tied to certain animals and plants. Birds are especially considered as typical 'totemic' creatures. If someone belongs to the lineage of cassowary (*uruus*), they use the expression, 'I am an *uruus* (we are *uruus*)' or 'I (we) have *uruus*', or 'I (we) belong to *uruus*', and so on. Each lineage usually has several creatures, but birds are considered the main totemic creatures, and the Mari often name other lineages using the name 'bird'. These lineages have no specific names, and they are called 'bird group'[9].

Although similar to clans or lineages, these groups are not exogamous units. The wife will belong to the husband's group once she gets married.

Gabit village has three lineages which are called respectively parakeet (*yaada*), hornbill (*inoorsi*), and crowned pigeon (*dosi*). Small Mari village has three lineages; parakeet, flyingfox (*rugwaara*), and hornbill. The Mire people have cassowary (*uruus*), parakeet, hornbill, and eagle (*doobu*). Individual totems are not owned exclusively by the members of one lineage, but are owned jointly by two or more lineages (cf. Table 2). They say that the lineages that 'hold' a bird in common are not necessarily related consanguineously.

In the case of Mire village, all the lineages are under one 'totemic' bird, the cassowary. Each lineage has another 'totemic' bird besides the cassowary, and they explain that the cassowary takes care of the other birds; parakeet, hornbill and eagle. It is not known why only Mire village has two levels of totemic birds[10].

Each lineage has several animals and plants besides birds, but it usually has one bird, one animal other than a bird, one or two kinds of trees, one kind of snake, and some colors. In Gabit village, lineage A has parakeet, tree kangaroo, eel, cuscus, a kind of tree called *besis*, a tree with edible leaves (called *tulip* in Neo-

Table 3 The Relationship between Each Lineage and Its 'Totems' in Gabit Village

	Lineage A	Lineage B	Lineage C
Bird 1	yaada (parakeet)	dosi (crowned pigeon)	inoorsi (hornbill)
Bird 2	(dove)	rugwaara (flyingfox)	
Other Animals	korwi (tree kangaroo) seebis (eel)	fuaa (pig) mungru (crocodile)	toi (turtle)
Trees	besis (towan) sintapis (tulip)	boadaas	dagaasi
Snakes	bioru	orifas	mitaas
Colors	kurikas (red) green[12]	geekas (white) baaxas (blue)	

NOTE: Towan and tulip are Neo-Melanesian words which stand for kinds of plants.

Melanesian), a kind of snake and the colors red and green[11]. The other two lineages have some similar 'totems' (cf. Table 3).

Lineages B and C have two kinds of birds, but the primary 'totemic' birds are said to be the parakeet and the crowned pigeon respectively, and they say that the primary bird takes care of the secondary, or the secondary belongs to the primary.

4. Folk Explanation of 'Totemism' in the Mari

The Mari people explain that this totemic belief has several 'meanings'.

Firstly and most importantly, persons of the same totemic creatures are supposed to help each other, as in the other Sepik areas. People of different villages and different language groups who have the same 'totems', have to cooperate with each other. When someone goes to a foreign village, he asks each individual to which 'totem' he belongs in order to find someone who has the same 'totemic' creatures. If he finds any, he feels safe even when he stays in a foreign village, for people who have the same 'totem' have to provide him with food and a place to sleep. People in the Sepik area explain that acting as a host is the main 'meaning' of their 'totemic' system and the real reason why it exists.

Secondly, people use the totems as the mark of each lineage. Each lineage has totemic trees, and if you visit someone's house when no one is home, you can put up a cane of your 'totemic' plant to show that you have been there. Or, if you go to someone's garden and pick some fruit or vegetables, you may leave your plant to

Table 4   The Relation between 'Totemic' Groups and Marriages among the Mari

F	M	Gabit			S. Mari			Mire				Else	Total
		Par.	C.P.	Hnbl	Par.	Ffox	Hnbl	Par.	Dove	Hawk	Hnbl		
Gabit	Par.	1				1					1		3
	C.P.	2											2
	Hnbl		1										1
S. Mari	Par.				2	4	1	1					8
	Ffox				5		1						6
	Hnbl						1					1	2
Mire	Par.	1		1				1	1	1		1	6
	Dove												0
	Hawk							2			1		3
	Hnbl	1			1		1	1			1	1	6
Else					1						1		2
Total		5	1	1	9	5	4	4	1	1	5	3	39

cf: Par. = Parakeet, C.P. = Crowned Pigeon, Hnbl = Hornbill, Ffox = Flyingfox

show him that you were there.

    The main totem is usually a kind of bird which is useful as an identifier to communicate names over long distances with a slit-gong. When a man has died, the signal for his totem is sounded and the village can recognize who has died. When they decorate their own belongings they prefer to use their own totemic colors.

    If they hear their totemic bird singing at night, they believe that it means someone of their lineage will soon die. According to their explanation, birds are supposed to sing only in the daytime. Therefore, birds singing at night would be an ill omen and would signify that someone who belongs to the bird will die.

    'Totemic' groups in the Sepik area have often been considered as exogamous units. As we have seen, Whiting and Reed insist that totemic 'sibs' in the Kwoma are ideally exogamous. Bowden, however, disagrees with this assertion, since it is 'correct' for the Kwoma people to obtain wives from other clans in the same totemic division.

    The Mari people have no rules disallowing marriage within totemic groups. In fact, there are some cases of man and a woman in the same totemic group marrying.

    Table 4 shows the relation between 'totemic' membership and marriages among the Mari. Each village has three or four main 'totemic' groups and the table shows who marries whom according to the totemic membership. Among the marriages made among the Mari, the membership of the villages and the 'totemic' groups in 39 marriages are known. Table 4 shows these marriages according to

their village membership and their main 'totemic' birds. Five marriages out of 39 were made within the same totemic groups.

The Mari do not have a rule prescribing that one must marry outside the totemic division. Their rule is that one should not marry close relatives, but there is no definition of closeness. Five marriages made within the same totemic groups must have been judged not to be so close by their standards.

Some totemic birds are owned in common by two or three groups; for example, the parakeet is owned by three groups in each village. These three groups are, therefore, supposed to cooperate with each other, because they share a common bird, but they claim not to be related to each other consanguineously.

The concept of 'totemic group' is very misleading, since some researchers refer to a group including those belonging to the other lineages and not related consanguineously, but others refer to a group of those belonging to the same lineage or clan. Therefore, a definition of totemic grouping must be made to clarify the matter. Bowden uses the concept, 'totemic division' as a group of those who share certain totems, irrespective of their lineage membership or village membership. Totemic division, according to his definition, includes any person who shares specific totems in other lineages and other clans, and even other villages. Therefore, the totemic division is not an exogamous unit. We should focus on the totemic group within the village in order to discuss totemic grouping and the exogamous unit.

Another concept which we propose for our discussion is a group of those who belong to a lineage or a clan and share common totemic creatures. It could be a lineage or a clan, in that they recognize that they have a common ancestor, and quite often they can trace their kinship relationship. I will tentatively use the words, 'totemic lineage' and 'totemic clan' for these groups for operational use. Each village in the Mari has three or four totemic lineages, and they also have totemic divisions cutting across the lineage membership. We might not expect that the totemic division would be an exogamous unit, because it includes those who are in other clans or other villages. In the case of the Mari, if we ignore lineage membership and view the marriages in terms of totemic division, the results are as shown in Table 5. Table 5 shows the relation of the marriages and the totemic divisions irrespective of their lineage membership. It includes some marriages in which the partner's lineage membership was not known. Ten marriages out of 44 were made within the same totemic division.

Totemic division is certainly an important concept in the Sepik area: Those who belong to the same totemic division call each other *wanpisin*, and try to co-operate with each other. But these relations within the totemic division are the results of their attempts at interpersonal relationship, as we will see later, and totemic division, which cuts across totemic lineages and totemic clans, is not an exogamous unit. In any sense, the totemic groups among the Mari are not exogamous units. However, the totemic lineage in the other Sepik areas could be an exogamous unit.

Table 5   The Relation between 'Totemic' Divisions and Marriages among the Mari

F \ M	Par.	Dove	C.P.	Ffox	Hawk	Hnbl	Total
Par.	5	1	1	5	1	4	17
Dove	1						1
C.P.	2						2
Ffox	6			1		1	8
Hawk	3				1	2	6
Hnbl	3		2	1	1	3	10
Total	20	1	3	7	3	10	44

cf: Par. = Parakeet, C.P. = Crowned Pigeon, Hnbl = Hornbill, Ffox = Flyingfox

Bowden claims that totemic division includes those who have the same totems in other clans.   Whiting and Reed mentioned the character of the 'sibs' among the Kwoma, and they do not refer to the members who have the same totems in other sibs.   It is possible, therefore, that the totemic sibs in the Kwoma might be an exogamous unit as Whiting and Reed claim, although the totemic division might not be exogamous, as Bowden asserts.

The Mari have taboos against killing their 'totemic' animals, but they have no taboos against eating totemic creatures, including totemic animals.   The members of each division are allowed to eat their 'totemic' birds.   They are also allowed to eat their 'totemic' plants.

5. Totemism as a Means of Extending Personal Network

The Mari people stress that they receive security in foreign places thanks to their totemic system.   Even if they go to strange places, they are able to find a sort of 'fellow' by asking for their *wanpisin*.   This totemic system seems to have the 'function' to give security to the people and to avoid conflicts with the other villages or other language groups.   In New Guinea generally, and especially in the Sepik area, where a large number of small language groups live in a small area, the people used to fight with each other, and they were unwilling to go to the other language groups unless they had to.   They believed if they did go, they would be killed or have magic practiced on them.   They quite often had fights with the other language groups until they got *Pax Australiana* when they came under the control of the Australian Government some twenty or thirty years ago.   An old man in Gabit village, who is in his sixties, remembers the days when they had tribal wars with their neighbors.   He was speared when he had a fight with the Inaru, who used to live in the upper Salumei, and he still has scars of the spear in his back and the side of his chest.   Table 6 shows the relationship with the Mari and the other neighbors. Only two have been considered as 'friend' groups or villages of the Mari, and the

Table 6   The Relationship of the Mari and the Other Villages

Friendly Villages	Hostile Villages
Meska	Inaru
Yembiyembi	Yigai
	Mugumute
	Wagu
	Menchuat
	Moli
	Changriman
	Gahom

(As for the location of each village, cf. Map 1)

others as 'hostile' villages.

As the people explain, even if someone went to a foreign place, he would feel safe if he found a friend there.   They explain that people of the same totem do not practice magic on their 'fellows'.   Since they got *Pax Australiana*, they have had less strain from magic and wars than before.   However, they probably still have some strain.   They still have tribal wars although these are very rare now.   They still feel nervous when they are in foreign places or with foreign people.   In an environment in which a large number of small groups live in a small area, the people try hard to keep peace with the other villages.   When I mentioned to the people in the Sepik area that their villages were located far from each other, and that the roads connecting them were very narrow and poor, they replied that they would be in danger if they lived too close to other villages because the other villages are their 'enemy'.   Therefore, to avoid conflict with the other villages or other language groups is extremely important for them, and possibly the totemic system exists for the purpose of obtaining security in this sense.

But they have not only negative 'functions' for having totemic beliefs, such as to obtain security and to avoid war and/or magic, but they also have positive reasons; to acquire 'fellowship'.

Having a large number of fellows gives one channels through which he can reach authority.   He not only obtains security in foreign places, but he can also conduct large-scale work with the help of his fellows.   To have a large network of personal relationship is a symbol of being a big man.

When they try to acquire a friendly relationship in foreign places, the totemic relationship is a handy method.   They normally try to get such a friendship by finding common relatives, or common affines, or common friends.   When someone goes to a foreign place, he feels safe if he has any relatives in the place visited. Therefore, if he knows that any of his relatives live in the village where he is going, he will rely on them.   Or if he knows that a woman in his village or in his language group has married into the village, he would say that he knows the woman and if she has any relatives, he would say that they are also 'relatives'.   If he finds none,

then he would try to find someone who knows his friends. Similarly, if he has a friend who is very famous in the area, he would ask if someone knows the friend, and if he finds any, he would say that they are 'friends'. A 'totemic' relationship is one of the easiest ways to develop such a relationship. First, he asks each person which bird he belongs to, and if he finds anyone who belongs to the same totem as he, he will say, 'You and I are *wanpisin*. Now we are *barata* (brother in Tok Pisin)'.

A Gabit village incident illustrates this 'friendship' function. One day a man from Meska village, which is located some 15km from Gabit village, visited his friend in Gabit. He often came to Gabit with some specific reason; to collect canes, to find wild pigs, to buy cigarettes, to sell something to the Gabit people, or to buy something from them. He often visited an old man in Gabit and said the man was his *wanpisin*; that is, they have the same totems in common. When I asked their totems respectively, however, I found that they actually did not have the same 'totemic' creatures. The other people in the Gabit village acknowledge that these two men are 'friends' because they think these two belong to the same bird, but they do not care which totemic group the men actually belong to, once they acknowledge that they are *wanpisin*.

In the Sepik area, where there have been many fights with other areas, it has been very important to avoid conflicts with other groups, to keep friendly relationships, and to establish individual networks with someone in other villages and other language groups in order to get some profit. 'Totemic' belief is one of the handy ways of establishing friendly relationships in such an area. Even when they have no relatives or friends in foreign places, people may try to develop relations by finding a common friend, through affinal relationships, or by finding *wanpisin*. Once they have the friendship, their actual relationship and whether they really share the same totem are unimportant.

Another example illustrates this aspect of the totemic system. I had a chance to talk with a man from a village of Keram River, a tributary of the Sepik which flows into the middle Sepik. Although his village does not belong to the Sepik Hill language family, his language group has a totemic custom. He claims that this totemic belief is widely popular in the Sepik area, in his own language group and in the Sepik Hills area. He explained that the totemic belief existed to find one's fellows in foreign places by asking if there is anyone who has the same bird or the same totemic animals when they visited other villages. If they find none, they would ask if anyone eats a certain kind of bird or animal. If you belong to the division of parakeet, it is usually expected that you are not allowed to eat nor kill parakeet, but are allowed to eat or kill the others. Then you would ask who is allowed to eat or kill birds/animals other than parakeet (the birds/animals must be typical in the area). For example, you could ask who is allowed to eat cassowary. The people who belong to the cassowary division cannot eat cassowary, but the other divisions can. If you find someone, then you could say, 'You are allowed to eat or kill cassowary. Me, too. Now you and I are *wanpisin*, and we are friends'.

In this case, which totemic bird they belong to is unimportant; which totem they do *not* belong to is important. If they have a common totem with someone to which they do not belong, there is still an opportunity for you to make friendships in foreign places. Thus, they are eager to get fellowship. To have a large network of interpersonal relationships is one of the most important things for the men in the Sepik area.

6. Conclusion

Melanesian societies, including New Guinea, are characterized by the absence of traditional chiefs, and are in sharp contrast to Polynesian societies, most of which have traditionally elaborate forms of rank and chieftainship. The Melanesian have no positions of chief with a few exceptions. They have different kinds of leaders, who are locally called 'big-man'. Big-man is not a political office of hereditarily succession like 'chief' in Polynesian societies, but the status of big-man is attained by personal power, the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common people. Big-man is, therefore, not a political title, but an acknowledged standing in interpersonal relations. To become a big-man, one must be prepared to demonstrate that one possesses the kinds of skills that command respect - magical powers, gardening ability, mastery of oratorical style, perhaps bravery in war and feud [SAHLINS 1966: 163–167]. The big-man system is clearly seen in the New Guinea Highlands area. Even though the Sepik area does not have an elaborate big-man system, the political systems in the Sepik are similar to those in the highlands in that one must show one's personal ability if he wants to obtain social prestige, and having a wide range of interpersonal networks is one way to obtain socially high status in the Sepik area.

A large network of interpersonal relations brings many advantages. One can have security in foreign places, as we have already seen. One can also gain status if one has a wide range of interpersonal relations. One will be able to have the help of many people through one's personal network. One can trade and exchange with others through the channel of personal network.

To have a wide ranging interpersonal network gives one a chance to get a socially high status in one's society. One can easily have access to authority with the help of one's fellows. One will get many kinds of merits, and with these merits one can elevate one's social status.

Many aspects of totemism have been discussed so far. I have not argued why this 'totemic' belief exists in the Sepik area. It is beyond my discussion, though I do not accept the logic that the totemic belief in the Sepik area has come to exist because it has certain functions in the society. But from what we have examined, it should be possible, at least, to discuss why this belief is so popular, so widespread in the Sepik area, and why it still exists although many other traditional customs and beliefs have been abolished.

Although the people in the Sepik area, especially in Papua New Guinea, have

kept many traditional customs and beliefs, most of these have been transformed and have lost their original forms. For example, many villages still have *haus tambaran*. They believe that the spirits live in *haus tambaran*. They store sacred carvings and they perform their initiation ceremony in it, and only the care-takers live there. Women are prohibited from entering it. But in some language groups in the Sepik area, the *haus tambaran* has become just a place for meetings, or a sleeping place for the men who have no relatives or who have no women to look after, and in some cases even women are allowed to enter it[13]. Many customs have changed their forms or lost their original forms, as in the case of *haus tambaran*, but the people still keep totemic beliefs.

The Sepik area, in fact the New Guinea area in general, has been very flexible in accepting foreign cultures, the customs or culture of other villages, or other language groups. For example, Mead called the culture of Arapesh 'an Importing Culture' [MEAD 1938]. Forge argued that one of the characteristics of the Abelam is to copy their neighbors' custom, saying that 'a great deal of change in ritual and social organization was typical of the Abelam', and 'the spread of more elaborate initiation systems at least in part motivated by a desire not to have a simple system while one's neighbors had a more complex one'. He also argued that the rituals of the Abelam used to be copied even by their neighbors in other language groups [FORGE 1990]. In an earlier work, I once argued that the custom of 'buying' dances is widely seen in the Sepik area and the people are willing to accept foreign dances from other areas or other groups [TOYODA 1987]. The Mari also have a custom of 'buying' dances from other language groups. They said that they have 'bought[14]' a dance from the Mugumute, who live along the Korosameri River quite near to the Mari[15].

The same would apply to the acceptance of totemic belief. I will not discuss why such a totemic belief exists in these areas, but it is possible that totemic belief has become so popular in the Sepik area through repeated copying of this system. It is probable that totemic belief was copied by their neighbors or even 'sold' to their neighbors for pigs and shellring wealth items, once a certain people began to perform and believe such a system. I posit that once they find a custom which interests them, they would not hesitate to accept it, and I believe that totemic belief has become so popular through copying and 'importing' the system. Our question, then, would become 'why has totemic belief fascinated the people?' or 'why did people want to have such a system?'

I would not argue, like some functionalists, that totemic belief exists because it has a certain function. My contention is, rather, that the reason why totemic belief still exists and has remained popular, while many of their customs and their beliefs have changed their original forms, is because it functions not only to give people security but also to give a way to obtain interpersonal relationships. Or, I posit that it became popular and it still exists widely in the Sepik area because the people have given such a function to totemic belief.

Levi-Strauss insisted that many phenomena which are different from each other

have been considered a single syndrome under the name of totemism. In the Sepik area also, totemic belief varies from area to area. But the people unanimously acknowledge that it exists for the purpose of getting security and of avoiding fights with each other. In addition, totemism gives people an easy way to make personal relationships with others and achieve socially high status in their society. We have not examined why this totemic belief exists in the Sepik area, but if the people have accepted it from others, we can say why this belief has become so popular. Totemism allows one to elevate his social position and to gain social prestige, which the people in the Sepik area think is most important. Achieving high social status and security in foreign places are the reasons why the totemic belief is so widespread in this area and why it still exists while many other customs have lost their original forms.

Notes

1) The fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted for two months from July to September, 1988, and was financed by the research project by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. Although the time devoted to the research was very short, my field experience in the lower Sepik helped me to understand Mari society. The research was conducted with the permission by the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and the East Sepik Provincial Government. I am grateful to the support of these organizations. The draft of this paper was presented to the 3rd meeting of joint studies program of the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka. The program is titled 'The Study of Traditional societies in Papua New Guinea', and is represented by Dr. Shuji Yoshida. I am grateful for helpful discussions with the members of the project.

2) The Kakra have generally been called 'Buna' [LAYCOCK 1975], and I have also used this name, but the native people call themselves 'Kakra', and their neighbors also use this name. I will use, therefore, Kakra as the name of language group, instead of Buna.

3) I have not confirmed whether the Angoram people, who live around the Angoram township along the Sepik River, believe in 'totemism'.

4) I had a chance to visit almost all the villages along the Salumei River, April River, Wogamush River and Leonard Schultze River. At each village I asked about their 'totemic' beliefs and I confirmed that all of them had such beliefs, although the system varies slightly from village to village.

5) Mari is often described as 'Mali' in the official documentary. But I use the description 'Mari' because it is preferred in linguistic description [WURM 1982].

6) The orthography of the Mari language has not been established, and the transcription in this paper is made only for temporary use.

7) Three villages are located near each other, and the villagers say that they can walk from village to village in a day. But if we go by canoe or boat, especially when we carry much cargo, we have to take a roundabout way on the river. For example, from Gabit to Small Mari, we first have to go down in the Salumei River to the Sepik mainstream, then go through the Chambri Lakes; from Small Mari to Mire, it is necessary to go through the Chambri Lakes again (see Map 1). The object of my research was the whole Mari, but it was focused mainly on Gabit village.

8) I have not identified the academic names of these birds.

9) In the Sepik area, in most cases it seems that the totemic unit is a clan instead of a lineage, but in the case of Mari, the language group is so small (the total population of three villages is 168) that relationships within a descent group can be traced. I call the descent group, therefore, a lineage.

10) Some groups in other villages also have two levels of totemic birds, like lineage A and B in the Gabit village. The people could not explain these phenomena, and I posit that they might be the result of adopting. When one does not have any male descendants, one often adopts a boy lest one's totemic lineage should die out. This boy can, theoretically, take over the totem of his foster father together with his original totem.

11) I have not identified the academic names of these plants and animals.

12) One of my informants in Gabit village said that his lineage has two colors; red and green. But I found later that there is no word for green in their language. As for colors, they only have the words for black, white, red and yellow (blue is represented by the same word as black). Red and green apparently come from the colors of the parakeet, which is their primary totemic bird. I did not confirm whether each lineage has had their own color for a long time, but it is possible that their totemic system is very new, when we see that they have no original word for green even though they say that the green color belongs to a lineage.

13) In the village of Gahom, which is located along the Sitifa River, women are allowed to enter the *haus tambaran*.

14) 'To buy a dance' is the expression in pidgin and their native languages, and it actually means to get the right to perform the dance by giving something to the holder of the dance. The custom is widely seen in the Sepik area [cf. Toyoda 1987].

15) The dance was performed only by adult male villagers in the *haus tambaran*, and they are called 'the dance of flute' because they perform the dance to the music of flutes, made of bamboo.

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