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Classification and Contexts: Food Categories on Satawalese Culture

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The Satawalese categorization of food is examined with principal emphasis on the polysemic usage of words in socio-cultural contexts. Major food items on the island comprise three components; vegetable staples (swamp taro and breadfruit), marine animal proteins (fish, shellfish, and the green sea turtle), and coconut. The tripolar relations among these three types of foods appear valid in explaining the Satawalese attitudes and procedures pertaining to food; *i.e.*, everyday meal patterns, food procurement and the associated ritual conduct and taboo observance, and so on. Polysemic use of food categories not only connotes spatial cognition by the people into three distinctive spheres such as seas, taro patches and the heaven which are exclusively controlled by the supernatural deities of the respective domain, but also subsequently native perception of odors; *i.e.*, fishy smell (*ppwoyacch*), that of taro patch (*ppwonngaw*), that related to menstruation and pregnancy (*ppwongosow*) and of sex (*ppwommas*). These distinctions may provide cognitive/transactional bases of opposition between sea/taro patch and supernatural deities/human beings. The odorless coconut is an exception which is neutral and free of these constraints, as it is regarded as food of the supreme deity. Hence, the position of coconut is unique in Satawalese culture. The analysis present here may clarify the environmental and cognitive differentiations related to coconut in Oceanic culture.

Keywords: food categories, context, classification, coconut, Satawal Island.

INTRODUCTION

Among various social anthropological studies of foodstuffs concern focuses basically on either functional or symbolic aspects. An example of the former is the ecological study of pig-killing as the energetic nutritional base of Highland New Guinean populations [RAPPAORT 1968]. On the other hand, inquiries into how a particular item of food is encoded symbolically or conceptually for social and cultural goals has been scrutinized [LÉVI-STRAUSS 1976; LEACH 1964]. Since these polar approaches have remained separate the role of food in any given culture may not be fully comprehended.

In fact, not only does food sustain members of a society, but via, as conceptual

codes, also enables people to intercommunicate and facilitates communication with gods or spirits through food distributions, offerings, and taboo observance.

In this paper I attempt to link the conceptual aspect with biological and physical environment, by analyzing "contexts" as a cue, in which both conception and of the transactions related to food come into being. For our purposes, "context" is defined here, more or less operationally, as the actual settings in which people deal with food, *i.e.*, from daily consumption of meals, feasts, food exchanges, ritual offerings, and so forth. It is a common anthropological finding that the places where food is eaten or offered up, the participants in these gatherings, the kinds of foods prepared, manners, and the values invested in the food all differ depending on context.

When delineating a particular context, the following three factors may provide the analytic framework: (1) space, (2) membership, (3) food and its categorization [cf. FRAKE 1964].

(1) Space

Food is derived from various biotopes such as reefs, swamps, gardens, or mountain slopes. These are usually classified, owned, dominated, or magically influenced by the socio-cultural order, and are thus transformed into social space [EVANS-PRICHARD 1940]. Such an endowment suggests that food, once incorporated into certain cultural contexts, becomes a part of a society's ideology.

(2) Membership

Social and religious restrictions tied to the preferences given to or taboos placed on different foods apply to different individuals within a given society according to their status, roles, attributes, and so on. For instance, in some societies, pregnant and menstruating women are prohibited from eating certain kinds of food, since these are believed to cause illness and, eventually, to result infertility or death of the fetus [AKIMICHI 1981a]. Chiefs are often given the privilege of obtaining the first-fruit of the year as a sign of dignity. Thus the rank, age, and sex of individuals is often closely related to the context in which food is consumed and distributed.

(3) Food category

Turner, who analyzed the symbolism manifested in the rituals of the Ndembu, stated that "There is no single hierarchy of classification that may be regarded as pervading all types of situations." [TURNER 1969: 41]. Here, it should be noted that lexical polysemy is analogously applied to the relationship between the method of classification and the cultural contexts; the lexeme of the language under particular settings varies as the classification does [GREENBERG 1973]. Turner's theme concerning the relationship of classification and context seems to be applicable to various aspects of culture. It is quite possible that a given culture will have unique sets of categories which are superimposed on various situations or context.

In the paper, several sets of food categories in various contexts in a Micronesian island culture are described, the relationship between the conception of and the transactions related to food is delineated, and the significance of coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) in Pacific island culture is discussed.

The ethnographic data presented here were obtained during the author's fieldwork in Satawal, a small raised coral island in the Central Caroline Islands of Micronesia. The island is flat, and the vegetation is relatively poor compared with that on large volcanic islands in the Pacific. Taro and breadfruit as well as coconut are the staples, and most animal protein is derived from the surrounding sea. The island is fringed by narrow reefs and provides relatively unfavorable fishing grounds, whereas uninhabited islands and reefs in remote seas, though only seasonally accessible, offer good prospects for catching turtles and reef fishes [McCoy 1974; AKIMICHI 1986], and thus compensate for the local lack of protein foods. Large sailing canoes are vital for this inter-island voyaging [ALKIRE 1978].

Between October and March east and northeasterly trade winds prevail and the sea is generally rough. For the remainder of the year the wind direction is highly variable, though westerlies prevail during the summer season.

Field study was conducted from May 1979 through March 1980, as a part of the "Ethnographic Research on Traditional Navigation in the Central Caroline Islands," supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Overseas Scientific Surveys from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Japan. On Satawal, joint research was conducted by the author and two colleagues, Shuzo Ishimori and Ken-ichi Sudo (both of the National Museum of Ethnology).

THE STUDY OF FOOD CATEGORIES

It is generally recognized that categories for plants and animals (*i.e.*, ethnobiology) and those for food are not always identical and differ depending on culture and even on particular situations. In this short section, I briefly illustrate basic ideas related to this issue, using several ethnographic examples.

Distinction

ANIMAL MEAT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

In English, livestock such as cattle, pigs, calves, sheep and deer have their own specific names when referred to as meat; that is, beef, pork, veal, mutton and venison, respectively. In these cases, the terms for the animal species come from Old English whereas those for meat or food from Old French [LEACH 1964].

RICE AND FISH IN THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

The Japanese *ine* means a rice plant of the Graminae family (*Oryza sativa*) in the botanical sense. We say that "*Ine* ripens" or that we "harvest *ine*", but never say that we "eat *ine*" or that we are "*ine*-eating people". There are several terms used to describe the different states of the rice crop in Japan: *ine* denotes "harvested rice plants tied in a bundle"; *ei*, "ears of harvested rice plants cut off from haulm"; *koku*, "husks separated from ears"; and *kome*, "hulled rice grain" [WATANABE 1981: 50]. Furthermore, *meshi* denotes "steamed rice", the term being apparently distinct from uncooked rice or *kome*. Finally, *meshi* is also a term for food in general.

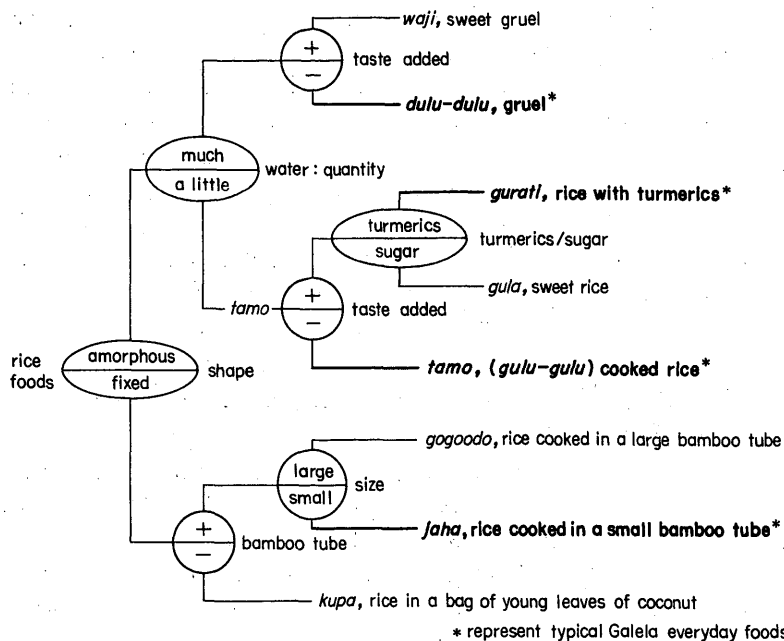


Figure 1. Rice Food Cooking System. Source: [ISHIGE 1980: 319]

In contrast, the Japanese term *sakana* (fish) covers not only the biological category, but also its use as food, raw or cooked, as in the phrase “to eat *sakana*”. Interestingly, *sakana* also refers to food other than fish, e.g., vegetables and meat, when we speak of relish taken with *sake*, or Japanese rice wine. In fact, the term *sakana* originally referred to as a side dish as opposed to a main dish; i.e., *meshi* or cooked rice [ISHIGE 1976].

THE METHOD OF COOKING RICE IN HALMAHERA

It is commonly observed that different names are given to food, depending on the cooking method employed; the Galela-speaking people in northern Halmahera, Indonesia, distinguish eight rice foods, as shown in Fig. 1. These are also ranked into three categories; food strictly for everyday meals, food for ritual or feasts, and that used for either everyday meals or rituals/feasts [ISHIGE 1980: 315–329].

PREFIXES AND FOOD CATEGORY

The Wik Monkan of western Australia put the prefix *min-* on animal foods and the prefix *mai-* on vegetable foods, thereby distinguishing between living things and food, and between animals and vegetables [THOMPSON 1946: 157–168].

Polysemy

PLANT AND COOKED FOOD

Terms used for biological categories are often employed in some contexts to indicate implicitly another meaning.

In Satawalese culture, *woot* denotes taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), one of the staples of the Satawalese, which is distinguished from such rootcrops as *pwuna* (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*), *nikanunu* (*Xanthosoma* sp.) and *fine* (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*) of the same Araceae family. When the islanders address others, saying “*mwongo woot*” (Eat taro), they are never referring to taro in the gardens or to the harvested plant, but to cooked taro. Clearly, the term *woot* indicates not a type of food but food in general on these occasions.

POLYSEMY AND SYMBOL

Among the Melpa in Highland New Guinea the term *kopong* has several differentiated meanings: grease, nourishment, good food which helps the child to grow, father's semen for initial conception and which to contribute to growth of the fetus in the womb, and mother's milk which helps the baby grow until it can eat solids after weaning [STRATHERN 1977: 503–511]. Thus, the word *kopong* is polysemous. It should also be noted that *kopong* implicitly denotes nourishment and fertility in their widest semantic domains.

LINKAGE AND SUBANUN BETEL NUT CATEGORIES

There are yet other cases where polysemy indicates a single term which has quite similar but different connotations, depending on context.

Frake discussed the polysemy of language categories, based on studies of the Subanun in Mindanao [FRAKE 1969]. According to Frake, the term *buga* has four meanings: Areca palm (*Areca catechu*), areca fruit, the embryo inside areca fruit, and nut for betel-chewing. All these meanings can be mutually linked (Fig. 2).

As these examples clearly show, categories of plants and animals are not always the same. In some languages, plant/animal and food categories are strictly dis-

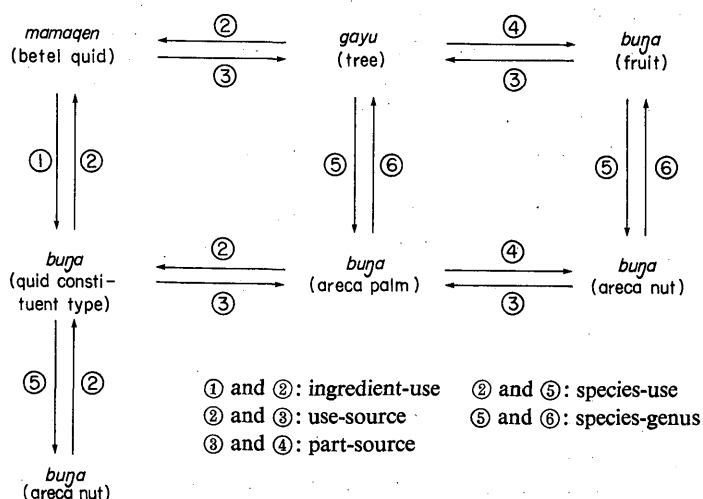


Figure 2. Polysemy and Interlinkage of Categories Labelled *buga* (Subanun).

Source: [FRAKE 1969: 128–134]

tinguished owing to historical, linguistic, and cultural reasons. Very often, plant/animal's food are not classified, but are given different meanings according to context. No definite principles seem to operate.

Thus, inquiries into food categories have multiple implications which go far beyond mere classification. What is important is to clarify semantic polysemy occurring in both food and biological categories, to determine how each set of categories is used distinctively, and to discover what logics or ideas are invested in this process. Below I describe various aspects of food categories on Satawal Island.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF FOOD CATEGORIES ON SATAWAL

Three Components of Food

In Satawal, *mwongo* is the most comprehensive food term and involves all the edible foodstuffs available on the island. *Mwongo* is also used as a verb, meaning "to eat". However, in certain contexts, *mwongo* refers only to vegetable food. We distinguish these two uses of the term by labelling them *mwongo*-1 and *mwongo*-2, where the former denotes food in general and the latter vegetable food. *Mwongo*-2 includes taro, breadfruit, bananas, and other plant foods, as well as imported food, i.e., rice and flour.

The term for coconut is *núú*, for ripe coconut, *rhoo*, and for coconut water, *núú*. Further, several names are given to the coconut according to growth stage. Despite being regarded as one of the staples of the Satawalese and a member of *mwongo*-1, coconut is not included in the *mwongo*-2 category (*vide infra*).

Animal food is derived from both marine and terrestrial sources and includes fish, shellfish, chickens, turtles, dogs and pork. These are collectively referred to as *sániyenyi*, and are generally eaten as side dishes together with *mwongo*, the main dish. Hisakatsu Hijikata who conducted research on Satawal before World War II, reported that *sániyenyi* is used in two ways; to denote side dishes as opposed to the main dish, and to denote the main dish as opposed to side dishes [HIJIKATA 1974: 184]. However, he did not specify what was meant by a main dish and a side dish. For this reason, *sániyenyi* is used in this paper as a covert category referring to animal food.

In summary, food in general (*mwongo*-1) consists of three components: taro, breadfruit and other vegetable foods (*mwongo*-2); coconut (*núú* and *rhoo*); and animal foods such as fish, turtle, chicken and so on (*sániyenyi*).

Food Processing

Several cooking methods are known to the Satawalese, and specific names are given to each cooked or processed food, depending on the method used. Major cooking methods are:

- (1) *Ppwuk* or *ppwuk ráán*: Boiling in freshwater (*ppwuk*: to boil, *ráán*: freshwater).
- (2) *Ppwukuset*: Boiling in seawater (*set* <*sáát*: seawater>).

- (3) *Yappwer*: Baking or broiling on an open fire.
- (4) *Wuumw*: Broiling in an earth oven.
- (5) *Furhaipang*: Frying with oil in a saucepan, which is undoubtedly of recent introduction (*Furhaipan*: a loan word from English "frypan").
- (6) *Yásik*: Salting followed by sun-drying (*yásik*: salt).

A particular name is given to each type of cooked food depending on the cooking method used. For instance, *watappwer* means baked taro (*watappwer*: *woot* + *yappwer*), and *wong yásik*, salted or sun-dried turtle meat (*vide supra*).

When more complicated cooking processes are involved, a particular term is employed. For example, to prepare *yótun*, mashed breadfruit flavored with coconut milk, procedures such as scraping off the skin, slicing, boiling (*ppwuk*), mashing, and mixing with coconut milk are necessary. This prepared food is not, however, simply referred to as *mayippwuk* (boiled breadfruit), but rather *yótun*. Cooking methods for both fish and swamp taro (*pwuna*) are summarized in Appendices 1 and 2, as examples. It must be emphasized that there are a great number of cooking methods that use coconut milk, as shown in these Appendices.

"Raw" and "Cooked"

In Satawal, there appears to be a differentiated use of the verb "to eat", depending on the nature of food item. According to Hijikata, *mwongo* is used when people eat taro and/or fish, whereas *woror* (*oror* in Hijikata's paper) is employed when pigs, chickens, octopi and turtles are consumed. He explained this in terms of the difference in quality or texture of the food; *i.e.*, "soft" or "untearable", and concluded that the term *woror* can be interpreted to mean "to eat by gnawing" [HIJIKATA 1975].

As a matter of fact, all foods are either "raw" or "cooked" when consumed. Even in Satawalese society, raw food is referred to as *mwongo yemas* (*yemas*: raw) whereas cooked food is called *mwongo yómmot* (*mmot*: cooked, *yó*: causative prefix). It must be remembered, however, that the term *yemas* "raw", is not, strictly speaking, synonymous with "not cooked". How then can we explain the relationship between the *mwongo/woror* and the raw/cooked dichotomy? This issue will be examined below, using different food items as examples.

ANIMAL FOOD

The methods of cooking animal meat include boiling in water, baking in an earth oven, broiling, salting, sun-drying, frying, and so on. Cooked food is usually referred to as *mmot*, and the corresponding verb is *mwongo*. But closer examination reveals certain discrepancies, especially regarding the Satawalese' perception of the raw/cooked states of food.

The habit of eating raw fish has been known to the Satawalese just as it has been to the Pacific islanders such as Hawaiians [TITCOMB 1972]. Raw fish is called *yiik yemas*, and to eat raw fish is expressed as *woror yiik*. During the period of the Japanese mandate, however, the term *sasimi* (a loan word from the Japanese *sashimi*;

raw fish) was introduced, and has now almost completely replaced the original *yiik yemas*.

Octopus is never eaten raw on Satawal. But octopus in a semi-raw state is often prepared; *kúús kepan* (sun-dried octopus with their tentacles stretched, using coconut leafstalks) and *kúús yásik* (salted octopus). Interestingly, both are regarded as *kúús yemas*, or "raw octopus". *Woror* is applied when the Satawalese consume either of these two kinds of food. Likewise, pigs and turtles are sometimes salted. The state of these food is also termed *yemas*, and the verb *woror* is used for them. Chicken is never salted.

The verb *woror* is also applied to well-cooked food which appears to be in a *mmot* condition, and hence *mwongo* would be thought to be applicable. For instance, the islanders tend to use the verb *woror* in relation to cooked fish, which has been fermented with salt. When the islanders make a big catch of small fish, such as goatfish, fusilier, and trevally, they salt the fish, cover them with coconut screens and place coral limestone weights on top to prepare fermented fish. The liquid which leaks from this is termed *ráán yóssumwon*, and the liquid in condensed form, as *yóssumwon yásik*. The verb *woror* is used when eating this fermented fish.

Octopus in breadfruit leaf wrapping, which is left for one or two days, and then boiled with coconut milk, is called *kúúsumar* (*mar*: rotten). In this method, the octopus becomes quite tender. Indeed, octopus cooked in this way is called *kúús mmot*. Some of the islanders use the verb *woror* when eating these food.¹⁾

VEGETABLE FOOD

Taro and breadfruit are not eaten raw. These vegetable foods are usually boiled, baked or cooked in an earth oven. The state of these foods is always *mmot*, for which the verb *mwongo* is applied. Some exceptions are ripe breadfruit of the seeded variety, bananas, papaya, pineapples and *yafur* (*Eugenia javanica*). These are eaten raw when they become sweet and soft. The verb used for eating such fruit is *woror*.

When boiled bananas and *yafur* are prepared, the term *mmot* and the verb *mwongo* are applied. Interestingly, the verb *woror* is used for eating ripe bananas, even if these are softer than cooked taro.

COCONUT

The endosperm or copra and embryo of the coconut are usually eaten raw. In this case the verb used for eating is not *woror* but *mwongo*. Incidentally, ripe coconut meat is harder than ripe banana, and is eaten by gnawing.

Thus with regard to vegetable food, eating raw food does not necessarily correspond to the verb *woror*, as in the case of animal food.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE FEEDING BEHAVIOR OF ANIMALS

The feeding behavior of animals is often observed in everyday life on the island; rats gnawing coconut and birds pecking papaya. Although animals, except for

1) I was not able to determine whether *mwongo* or *woror* is used, for cooking pork, chicken and turtle meat.

scavengers, consume their food raw, the verb *mwongo* is used to denote these acts, as in the case of human beings. For example, when bonitos and frigate birds prey on small fish, the verb *mwongo* is used.

However, sharks' predation on men or turtles is expressed by the verb *woror* whereas in the case of small fish, *mwongo* is used. Some Satawalese insist that the verb *kúúw* (to bite) is more appropriate, for sharks do not gnaw but bite. When whales and porpoises prey on fish, the verb *mwongo* is applied. When a land bird, called *mwiy*, pecks ripe papaya or breadfruit, either *mwongo* or *woror* are used. For cats' feeding on rats, *woror* is employed.

The islanders on Satawal were not very clear about whether *mwongo* or *woror* should be used for describing the behavior of coconut crab when it feeds on coconuts, *yafur*, papaya or even lizards. When land crab (*Cardiosoma* sp.) eats taro, the verb *mwongo* is used.

As an extraordinary example, the natives of Satawal believe that evil supernatural beings who live in the forest eat human beings. In this case *woror* is always adopted.

Three important notions can be elicited from all this; first, with regard to food in either raw or semi-raw states, both *yemas* and *woror* are employed equally, even when these foods are processed to some degrees by fermentation, salting or drying. The only exception is coconut, which is always eaten raw except when used as a seasoning after being squeezed to extract the coconut milk. Second, the verb *woror* is sometimes used for food which has been cooked once but not softened. Third, when animals feed on raw food, either *mwongo* or *woror* is used, depending on which is deemed appropriate.

In some cases, the islanders have only a vague understanding of the usage of these two verbs. It should be noted that the verb *woror* is applied to sharks and evil supernatural beings, both of which are feared by men. Hence, the simplest dichotomy between "raw" food/*woror* and "cooked" food/*mwongo* is not applicable in Satawalese culture.

Meal

Daily meals consist of three components: taro/breadfruit, coconut and animal food such as fish, turtle, and pig (Fig. 3). All three components are not always available on every occasion throughout the year. The Satawalese may be compelled to live solely on taro or preserved breadfruit for certain periods, owing to such environmental hazards as droughts and typhoons, or when fishing or entry to the taro patch is banned by the chiefs. Despite a wide range of observable consumption patterns in daily meals, the Satawalese conception of and choices concerning food seem to be standardized.

The most common type of meal consists of a combination of either fish and taro or fish and breadfruit. Such combinations are specifically called *mwongo panúwan* (*panúwan*: a pair). Alternatively, fish could be replaced by turtle meat, pork, chicken or dog meat. When fish and other animal protein foods are not available, the islanders eat breadfruit or taro in combination with coconut meat/juice. The combination

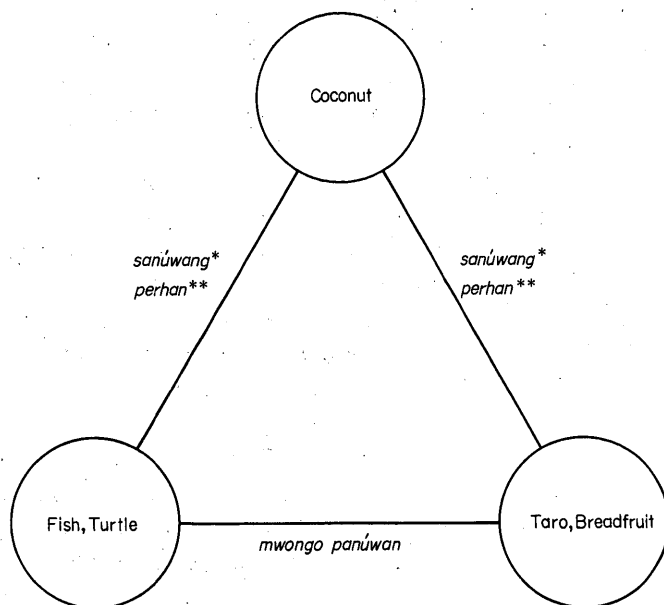


Figure 3. Diagrammatic Representation of the Satawalese Meal

* : a combination of coconut meat and animal/vegetable foods

** : a combination of coconut juice and animal/vegetable foods

of taro/breadfruit and coconut juice is termed *perhan* (lit., fish tail), whereas that of taro/breadfruit and coconut meat is *sanúwang*. (The meaning of *sanúwang* was unknown.) When taro and breadfruit are not available, meals are composed of animal foods and coconut. As in the preceding case, the combination of animal food and coconut meat is expressed as *sanúwang*, whereas that of animal food and coconut juice as *perhan* (Fig. 3).

These findings coincide with Hijikata's observation [1974: 118] that coconut "is eaten as a side dish for taro/breadfruit when fish is not available, and whenever fish is available despite the absence of taro, a staple food for the islanders, it is eaten in combination with fish." The basic food consumption patterns in Satawal emerge from the above descriptions. Satawalese meals are characterized by three components (taro/breadfruit, coconut, and animal food) and by the combination of any two of these three components. A complete set of the three types of food constitutes *mwongo*, in the true sense of the term. It is interesting that any meal accompanied by coconut is designated as either *perhan* or *sanúwang*, regardless of whether the other component is animal food or vegetables.

FOOD, SPACE AND ODOR

Triangular Model of Odor

Previously I have suggested that the odor of food is an important key to the

understanding of the Satawalese perception of nature [AKIMICHI 1981a]. As this notion is crucial in this essay it will be discussed in more detail here.

It is strictly prohibited for Satawalese men to have sexual intercourse the night before they engage in fishing at specific fishing grounds. This taboo particularly governs situations when men go fishing at Wenimong reef, northeast of the island, and at Wenikiy reef, located about 10 km south of the island. On the other hand, women are also prohibited from working in taro patches or in the forest to collect taro and breadfruit if they had sexual intercourse on the previous night, or if they are in menstruation or pregnant. In addition, women are not allowed to take fish and turtle meat with them to eat in the taro patches or forest. Furthermore, they are not allowed to step on discarded fish bones when going to work in the gardens [AKIMICHI 1981a].

This taboo is based on the belief that fish/turtle and taro/breadfruit, are controlled by supernatural beings of the sea and the taro patches, respectively. The supernatural being called *yanú sáát* who controls marine resources abhors the odor of taro and breadfruit. Similarly, the supernatural being who controls taro and breadfruit finds the odor of fish repugnant. Furthermore, these two supernatural beings are believed to abhor the odors emitted during sexual intercourse and the smell of blood associated with women's menstruation and pregnancy.

These odors each have different names. The fishy smell is called *ppwoyacch*, and the smell of taro and breadfruit *ppwonngaw*. The odor of sexual intercourse and of women in menstruation or pregnancy are termed *ppwommwas* and *ppwongosów*, respectively. In these words, *ppwo* means "odor", *yacch* and *ngaw* mean "bad", and *mmwas* means "female sexual organ". (The meaning of *-gosów* was not known)

The Satawalese way of thinking can be summarized by showing these three concepts of odor, *ppwoyacch*, *ppwonngaw*, and *ppwommwas/ppwongosów* in opposition to one another (Fig. 4). When Figs. 3 and 4 are compared, the opposition between fishy smell and the smell of taro/breadfruit seems analogous with the opposing relationship between two food categories: *sániyenyi* and *mwongo-2*. The relationship between the smell of coconut and odors of sexual intercourse or women's blood has yet to be clarified.

Intriguing is that only coconut can be taken as food when men go fishing to Wenimong reef or Wenikiy reef, or when women go to the taro patches or forests to collect food. The islanders explain this by saying that the coconut is esteemed as the food of *Nuukainang*, the supernatural being in the highest heaven. Thus coconut is not an object abhorred by the supernatural beings controlling the sea and the taro patches. It should be noted that the relationships between coconut and *mwongo-2* and between coconut and *sániyenyi* are believed to be complementary in terms of meal composition. However, in terms of smell, coconut is not regarded as being opposed with taro/breadfruit or fish. This is well evidenced by the fact that it is permissible to take coconuts to the taro patches and to the sea. On the other hand, the odor of sexual intercourse or women's blood is obviously in opposition to the smell of taro and fishy smell.

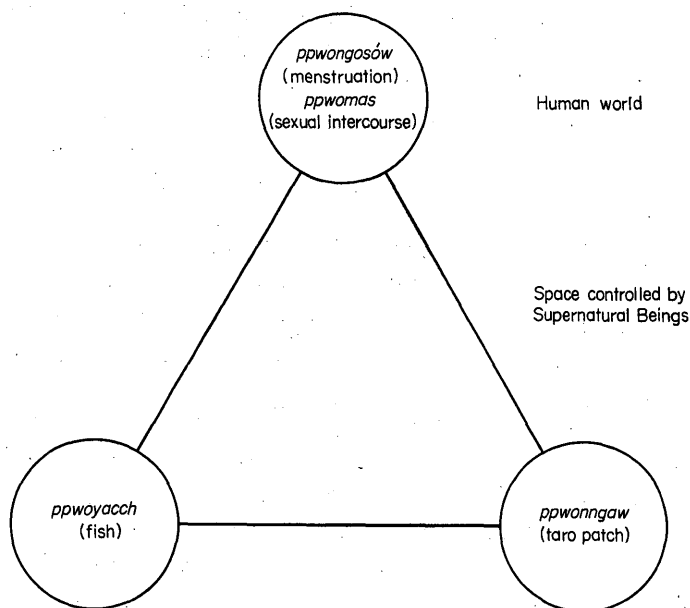


Figure 4. Diagrammatic Representation of the Perception of Odor in Satawalese Culture

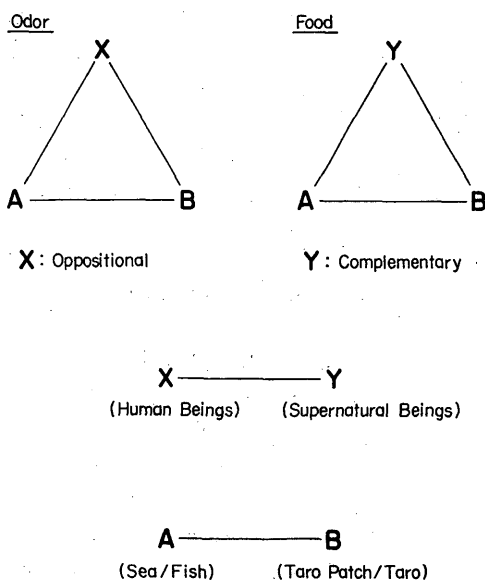


Figure 5. Two Types of Tripolar Model in the Satawalese Culture

Accordingly, it is suggested that in the triangular relationship of food categories, coconut serves as a factor uniting the other two food categories while, similarly, in the 3-way relationship among odors, smells associated with sexual intercourse or

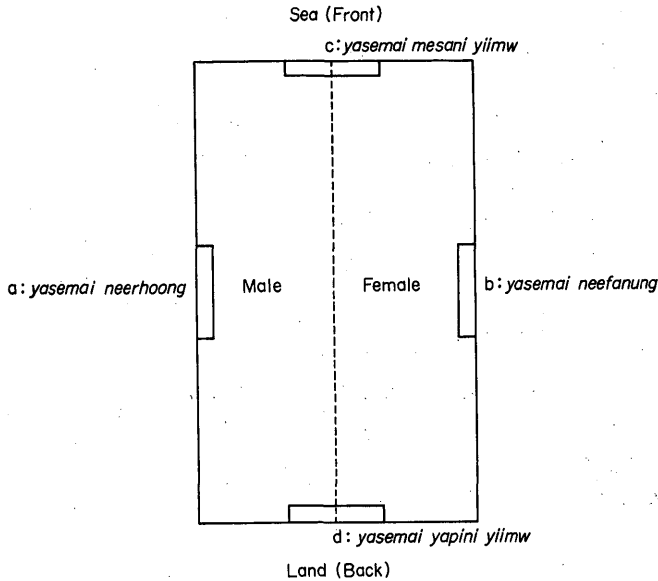


Figure 6. Plan of a Satawalese Dwelling

blood stand in opposition to the other two. Though it was not ascertained if coconut is regarded as having no smell, or if a specific term exists for representing its odor, it might be reasonable to suppose that the smell of coconut, which is inherent in the supernatural being, is, in a sense, in opposition to the smell of sexual intercourse or blood which is inherent in human beings (Fig. 5).

Meal and Space

Usually, meals are taken outside the dwelling house. However, the place where daily meals are consumed varies greatly, depending on the situation. Furthermore, the kinds of people who participate in the meals as well as the categories of food are differentiated according to the space where meals are taken.

Before going into this subject, it is appropriate to touch on the spatial plan of Satawalese houses. It is well known that in Oceania the dwelling house is generally separated from the cooking house (*mwonumw*). The cooking house is built separately and located adjacent to the dwelling house (*yilimw*). The dwelling house has a rectangular, ground-type structure, and one of its shorter sides faces the coastline. The dwelling house is divided into two sections by the longitudinal axis; *neefanung*, the left half and *neerhoong*, the right half (Fig. 6).

The names of the entrance/exit of the dwelling house are also shown in Fig. 6. Names for (c) and (d) indicate that the division between *mesan* (lit., front) and *yapin* (lit., back) correspond to the spatial orientation of the sea-front/inland-back dichotomy.

DAILY MEALS

The people of Satawal have their daily meals outside the dwelling house on the *neefanung* side. This specific place is called *nenien mwongo*, *nenien kutton mwongo*, or *nenien wuis*. Here, *nenien* means "a place", *kutton* as "to seach for", and *wuis* is an honorific of a verb meaning "to eat". In addition, *nenien soiyor* may be used alternatively, which denotes "a place to assemble". In fact men and women are allowed to sit in a circle to share food in the *nenien soiyor*. To denote food eaten in this place, ordinary food categories such as *mwongo*, *sániyenyi*, and *rhooníúú* are used, as described in the preceding section.

One fact best testifies that this area is the most ordinary place for partaking of daily meals. When one walks in the residential area of the island, people eating in the *nenien mwongo* call the passer-by, saying "*Yitto mwongo* (come and eat)". The passer-by usually refuses the offer by saying "*Yinamo* (no thank you.)" However, anyone can participate in the circle. This seems to indicate that *nenien mwongo* is a pivotal place for the islanders to have daily meals.

AT SEA

When men go fishing to Wenimong or Wenikiy they may take only coconuts as food. Naturally, they are prohibited from eating in their canoes the fish they have caught. In this context coconuts consumed as food are referred to as *yuun*. When fishing takes place elsewhere, men are permitted to take any food or *paai*. For example, there is a special term *pain fainikarengááp* for food taken to the *Faini karengááp* reef (lit., "Rock of Bonito") located about 100 km north of Satawal Island.

THE CANOE HOUSE

When men return to the island from fishing the catch is distributed among the islanders, in front of the canoe house. The method of distribution varies, depending on the size of the catch. Nevertheless, Satawalese fishermen have the custom of grilling the fishes they have caught and sharing them among all participants, irrespective of the size of the catch. On this occasion, a fire is made using the coconut husk. The fish is cooked over the open fire.

At this time, the men sit in a circle, their backs facing one another. Each man throws out a piece of cooked fish meat, chanting a magical spell so that the supernatural being controlling the sea will not cause him to become ill. The fireplace for cooking fish is called *fenang*, and the place itself is called *nenien yafiné*. The term *yafiné* also denotes fish which is eaten by men in front of the canoe house. Sisters, mothers and wives of these men also bring cooked taro and breadfruit to this place. Vegetable food thus given is called *yaring*.

THE TARO PATCHES

As stated above, women are prohibited from taking fish or turtle meat to the taro patches where they are engaged in agricultural activities. Only coconut is allowed. However, women are prohibited from eating coconut in the taro patch (*neepwén*), rather they must eat it outside the taro patch (*moroni pwén*) (*moro*: "near", *pwén*: "taro patch"). Coconuts eaten in this particular situation are called *mayuun*.

MENSTRUATION HUTS

On Satawal Island huts where menstruating and pregnant women are secluded are called *yimwanikát* (*yimw*: "house", *kát*: "child"). The longitudinal axis of this hut is perpendicular to the sea-land direction. The sea-side half is called *neerhoong* and the land-side half *neefanung*. Men are strictly prohibited from entering the *yimwanikát* and the border between the daily living area and the *yimwanikát* area is called *siasin*.

Vegetable foods, brought in from outside, such as taro, breadfruit and coconut are collectively termed *ranipwer* (lit., hot water), but the true meaning of this term was not known. Animal food brought to the menstruation hut by men is called *roow* (lit., net). A combination of *ranipwer* and *roow* is called *mwongoi nukunuwuupw* (*nukun*: in the middle of, *wuupw*: abdomen), which implies that the food is eaten by pregnant women.

It has been demonstrated above, that food is labelled differently, according to the different spatial organizations characteristic of the Satawalese: the ordinary residential area, in front of the canoe house, the menstruation hut, the sea and the taro patches. Sets of dichotomic distinctions are involved in these divisions: men/women, sea/land, ordinary/non-ordinary, and human/supernatural. Accordingly, distinctions among different food categories can be seen as being based on these four divisions.

Space and Odor

As is clear from preceding sections, the islanders have developed a system for distinguishing between foods in ordinary and non-ordinary spaces by using different names. The significance of odors is suggested by the existence of taboos which prohibit the transfer of smells from spaces controlled by supernatural beings into the human world, and to the non-ordinary spaces (menstruation hut and canoe house).

When fish is brought to the land from the sea, the fishy smell never vanishes in ordinary space, and the same is true of taro and breadfruit. Inevitably, the odor of food is brought from the sea or taro patches into the human world. What is important in this context is that the attributes of the people who engage in fishing at sea or gardening in the taro patches never change. The islanders are *mwáán* (men) and *rhóópwuut* (women), wherever they are, be it ordinary or non-ordinary space. Food categories change, depending on the space and the situation, but the categories of human beings never do.

However, human beings can transit between ordinary and non-ordinary spaces by means of ritualized conduct. This is reflected in the taboos that prohibit the islanders from bringing the odor of sexual intercourse and blood to the sea or into the taro patches. The islanders are also obliged to follow the custom of bathing when returning to the residential area from the sea or taro patches.

WOMEN AND TARO PATCHES

When a woman goes to work in the taro patches she is required to leave her

residence from the *neerhoong* side. When she come home, she bathes in a pond or, alternatively, at the seashore. After that, she puts the cultivated crops in the cooking house, then changes her waist-cloth on the *neerhoong* side before entering the dwelling house. Bathing at the seashore is not for the purpose of taking on the smell of the sea, but for the removal of other smells. When a woman is not going to garden she can enter or exit the dwelling house freely on the *neefanung* side.

MEN AND THE SEA

When men go out fishing they leave from the *neefanung* side of the house and prepare the canoe and fishing gear in the canoe house. The catch is distributed among all participants in front of the canoe house. Some of the fish is eaten on the spot. The distributed fish is then carried to the various cooking houses. After that the men bathe in ponds and are able to enter the dwelling house from the *neefanung* side. However, if there are infants in the house, their fathers must stay outside the *neefanung* and rub their bodies with *yafur* leaves when they bathe. This conduct is called *ron yafur*, and has the effect of deodorizing the smell of the sea which they bring back with them from fishing. This coincides with the belief that *yanú sáát*, the supernatural being who controls the sea, abhors the smell of *yafur*. When men do not go fishing they are allowed to sleep in the house.

The above-mentioned bathing customs can be interpreted as ritualized acts to prevent returning men and women from bringing the odor of the sea and taro patches into the dwelling houses. Furthermore, when infants are in the dwelling house particular caution is exercised concerning odors in order to protect them from the supernatural beings of the sea and taro patches, which are said to cause illness. Similar instances of these taboos have been reported elsewhere [AKIMICHI 1981a].

The taboo prohibiting fish from being brought into a house where an infant is present is associated with the belief that the odor of fish induces symptoms of diarrhea in infants. The islanders believe that infants can be adversely affected by fishy smells.

SUMMARY

Based on the above findings, various aspects of the Satawalese conception and transactions related to food can be summarized as follows.

Food obtained from the sea is termed *sániyenyi*, and is used as a side dish. *Sániyenyi* is usually collected by men and is subject to control by the supernatural being of the sea. Food derived from taro patches and forest is *mwongo*, and is used as the main dish. *Mwongo* is harvested either by women alone or with the assistance of men. Taro patches are controlled by a particular supernatural being named *yinótopwén*. On the other hand, coconut is harvested by men and is perceived by the islanders as being independent of *sániyenyi* and *mwongo* in terms of food classification. Coconut is controlled by the supernatural being who resides in heaven.

Of these three elements, *sániyenyi* and *mwongo* are in opposition to each other in terms of odor, whereas two sets of food, coconut and *sániyenyi*, and coconut and

Table 1. Space and Food Categories in Satawalese Culture

	FOOD CATEGORIES				
Taro Breadfruit	<i>mwongo</i>	<i>yaring</i>	<i>ranipwer</i>	×	×
Fish Animal Food	<i>sániyenyi</i>	<i>yafiné</i>	<i>roow</i>	×	×
Coconut	<i>núú</i> (liquid) <i>rhoo</i> (meat)	—	<i>ranipwer</i>	<i>yuun</i>	<i>mayuun</i>
SPACE	Ordinary Space (M+F)	Canoe House (M)	Menstruation Hut (F)	Sea (M)	Taro Patches (F)

(M): Male; (F): Female; ×: Prohibited to eat.

mwongo, are mutually complementary. *Sániyenyi* and *mwongo* are eaten either in a “raw” or “cooked” state, and either of the verbs, *woror* or *mwongo* is used, depending on the nature of the food. Coconut is eaten “raw” except when it is used as seasoning, but the verb used for coconut is *mwongo*.

Food categories are linguistically discriminated according to two types of spaces: the ordinary and the non-ordinary. Taro and breadfruit alter their names (*mwongo*, *yaring*, and *ranipwer*) in different spaces used for partaking of meals. Likewise, fish and other animal food change their names from *sániyenyi*, *yafiné*, to *roow*. Coconut has several names: *núú/rhoo*, *yuun* and *mayuun* and, in the menstruation hut and in front of the canoe house, it constitutes *ranipwer* and *yaring*, respectively, together with taro and breadfruit (Table 1.).

DISCUSSION—IMPORTANCE OF COCONUT

Micronesian subsistence bases are characterized by the combination of the cultivation of such root crops as taro and yam, arboriculture of coconuts, breadfruit and pandanus, and the exploitation of various marine resources located in the reef systems and the open-sea.

Besides the availability of resources, a variety of factors, such as whether an island is high or low, its geographical location, rainfall, occurrences of typhoon and drought, soil patterns, reef formation, and presence/absence of a wide lagoon, have all contributed to inter-island or local variations in food consumption patterns [cf. ALKIRE 1960, 1978]. Given that such environmental factors are relevant to certain cultural ecological patterns on each island or groups of islands, it is a precarious undertaking to determine how these are linked with other aspects of culture. The linkage among these factors is clearly more complex than was previously thought.

It must be remembered that similar conceptions with respect to food do not generally emerge in settings which have similar food resources and environments [AKIMICHI 1981b: 359–376]. In this regard, the present findings concerning the coconut merit mention. The coconut is a crop widely cultivated in the Pacific, and

the names for it are shared extensively by the Austronesian groups [BARRAU 1958, 1961].

The following examples will clarify the differentiated concepts and use of coconut in several societies of the Pacific, based partly on data gathered by the author in the field and partially on ethnographic findings.

Palau Islands

In the Palau Islands, in the Western Caroline Islands of Micronesia, the general term for food is *kall*. *Kall* is basically composed of *odóim*, *ongráol*, *kriol*, and *illúmel*. *Kriol* and *illúmel* correspond to dessert and beverages, respectively. Important food categories are *odóim* and *ongráol*.

Odóim involves not only animal food such as fish, shellfish, pork and birds, but also certain kinds of vegetable foods: ripe coconut meat, taro leaves, cooked stalks flavored with coconut milk (*demók*), banana flowers and young papaya meat, and so on. In contrast, *ongráol* is an exclusive designation for vegetable food, such as taro, breadfruit, cassava and rice. Animal food is never included in *ongráol* [AKIMICHI 1980].

Halmahera Island

On Halmahera Island, Eastern Indonesia, meals are generally called *ođo*, and consist of *ino* (main dish) and *sihode* (side dish) [ISHIGE 1980]. The term *ino* also denotes food in general, but when it is used in contrast to *sihode*, it indicates rice, sago starch, bananas, sweet potatoes, and manioc. On the other hand, *sihode* includes vegetables, herbs, fish and mammal meat (deer, wild boar, goat, chicken, and duck). Coconut is regarded by Galelans as a seasoning and drink, and is therefore not included in the *ino* or *sihode* categories.

The Gidra in Lowland Papua

The Gidra-speaking people inhabiting lowland Papua New Guinea, call food *ngina*. Animal food is termed *gwaaji* whereas vegetable food is *ngina*. *Gwaaji* includes wild land animals, freshwater fish, shellfish, reptiles, amphibians and insects. *Ngina*, on the other hand, includes exclusively such vegetable foods as sago starch, taro, yams, bananas, coconuts, greens and even rice and flour [AKIMICHI 1983].

Western Samoa

In Western Samoa taro provides the basis of the local diet. Flesh food consists of pork, fowl, wildbirds, turtle, fish, crustaceans, and shellfish, of which pork is the most desired. With vegetable food, fish is regarded as the staple relish (*inaʔi*). Without such relish, the Samoan use *palu sami* (a small leaf package in which grated coconut, taro leaves and sea water are mixed together for stone-boiling) as a substitute. Generally, coconut enters into a combination with every vegetable food and most marine flesh food except the larger fish. Thus, coconut is important as the substitute of flesh foods when consumed with major vegetable recipes [TE RANGI HIROA 1971: 119-138].

Ponape Island

On Ponape, of the Eastern Caroline Islands, foods prepared for the *kamadipw* feast are distinguished into three: *kenengen uhmw* (contents of *uhmw*), *pilen uhmw* (water/liquid of *uhmw*) and *menin uhmw* (beast of *uhmw*). *Uhmw* here means the earth oven cooking, which is widespread throughout the Pacific. These three components also correspond to food categories in everyday meals, i.e., *kisin mwoange* (lit., a bit of food), *pihl* and *sali*. *Kisin mwoange* includes yam, breadfruit and other vegetable foods whereas *sali* is a side dish and includes pork, dogs, and fish. *Pihl* is a beverage such as water, coconut juice, *sakau* (i.e., kava), and even sugar cane. Though distinguished from both the main dish and the side dish, coconut appears to be generally subsidiary in the Ponapean diet as well as in the political system [SHIMIZU 1982: 186–192].

Yap Islands

In Yap food (*ggaan*) is generally classified into three: vegetable foods (breadfruit, yam, and so on), animal foods (mainly marine foods), and the beverage (water and coconut juice). The relationships are similar to that of Ponape and Palau, but the details are unknown.

Satawal Island

As mentioned in the previous chapters, *mwongo* is the word for food in general, but also refers specifically to taro, breadfruit and rice which are served as a main dish. *Sániyenyi* includes only animal food such as fish, turtle, pork, and so forth, and is used as a side dish. Coconut can be regarded as a third food element independent of both *mwongo* and *sániyenyi*.

It is clear that in Oceania a combination of vegetables and animal food form the basis of food consumption patterns. How should the binary opposition of main dish and side dish be interpreted? The key lies in the status of the coconut in the Satawalese ethno-classification system. The term *wanewan* is used to denote vegetables other than coconut. Coconut is generally called *núú*. The category *yónóngan wanewan* denotes comprehensively both *wanewan* and *núú*. It is quite apparent that coconut occupies a unique position among all plants.

Based on various ethnographic data concerning the status of the coconut in five societies, it seems that there are three ways to handle it in both ethno-biological classification systems and practical meal patterns.

The first is to classify the coconut as one of the main dishes together with other vegetable food. This is exemplified by the case of the Gidra in Papua New Guinea. The second way is to include coconut in the side dish category, as in the case of the Palau Islands, Halmahera Island and Samoa. The third is to give coconut an independent position, distinct from both main dish and side dish, as observed on Satawal and Ponape.

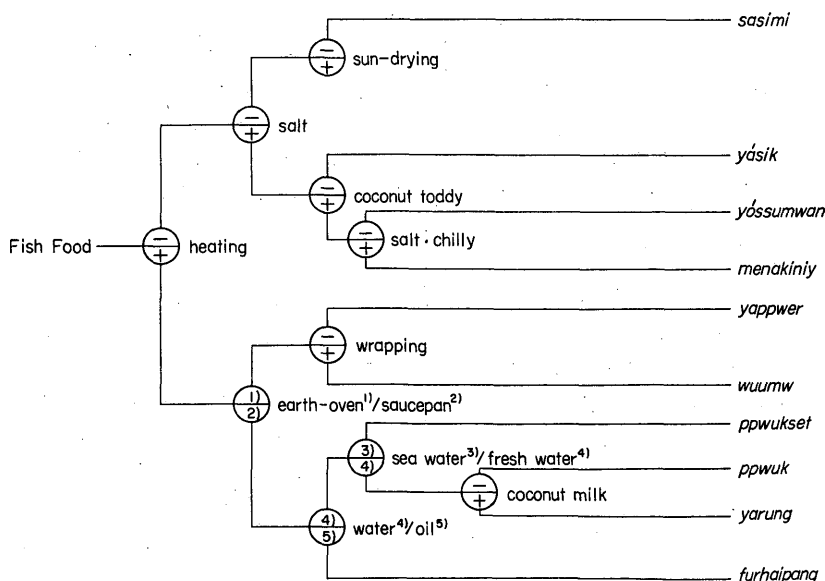
That coconut occupies an ambivalent position in terms of the food classification

helps to explain the tripolar opposition of food categories on Satawal. Among the foodstuffs available in low coral islands such as Satawal, the coconut occupies a major role both as a subsistence item and as an item of tribute to the chief of Lamotrek [ALKIRE 1978]. Although in Ponapean food life coconut is positioned as an element of a tripolar relationship of meal composition (*i.e.*, an item of beverage), it is far less important than in Satawal in terms of the political organization.

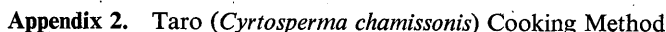
Finally, the position of the coconut and the possible patterns in which it is conceptualized as clarified in this paper appear to be applicable in any society of the Pacific where coconut plays a gradient role in subsistence, from being major item of food to a mere supplement.

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Appendix 1. Fish Food Cooking Method



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