

PETRA M. AUTIO

HARD CUSTOM, HARD DANCE

**SOCIAL ORGANISATION, (UN)DIFFERENTIATION AND NOTIONS OF POWER
IN A TABITEUEAN COMMUNITY, SOUTHERN KIRIBATI**

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To my daughter Oili Raakel Maria

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NOTES ON NAMES, CITATIONS AND TYPOGRAPHICAL CONVENTIONS

Names

The names used in this work are, as a general rule, pseudonyms. The only exception is when I quote stories by story-tellers, thereby acknowledging those sources. Though pseudonyms are the usual custom in social scientific writing, I decided on using them only after some deliberation. I feel that in certain contexts it would probably have made more (Kiribati) sense to use real names, and I surmise some may find it strange or even be offended by not seeing their name in print. However, in other contexts I am less sure of people's personal preferences and, most importantly, in still further contexts I deem the protection of people's identities important. Therefore I opted for consistency in this regard, using pseudonyms throughout the work. I hope this resolution is understood by those concerned. The first time I use a name in a given context it is followed by an asterisk (*) to indicate that it is a pseudonym.

Citations

Unless otherwise indicated, quotes from people are from my written fieldnotes. Quotations from transcribed audio and video tapes are marked using the following indicators:

- Medium: At = Audiotape; Vt = Videotape
- Date and location
- Gender and age of the focal individual: M = Male, F = Female; age in numbers; '~' denotes approximate age

Thus for example "At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M~60" would refer to a recorded interview, story-telling session or event as follows: Audiotape 7A, recorded April 18, 2000 in Buota village, Tabiteuea North, focal person male, approximately 60 years of age.

All transcriptions and translations from Kiribati language are my own, if not otherwise specified.

Typographical conventions

- *Italics* are used for non-English words and for emphasis, as well as in ethnographical vignettes which I have wanted to separate from the main flow of the text.
- Underlining is used to draw the reader's attention to particular portion of a text which is being analysed.
- '[?]' in a translation means that it is tentative, either because an original recording was obscure (when transcribed from a tape) or I have otherwise been unable to ascertain the meaning of a word or phrase.

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Petra Autio

1. INTRODUCTION

On my third day on the island of Tabiteuea, Southern Kiribati, my host brother accompanied me on a visit to the Island Council Office in a village about six kilometres south of Buota, the village I was staying in. We had been cycling on the main road close to the lagoon, and on the way back, I asked my host brother if he could take me the ocean side of the island. He appeared a little embarrassed because he had to refuse my request, and he explained something about it being tabu¹, and about the custom, katei. I did not quite understand him, and he continued in English: “it is not my job to take you there”. Later his mother confirmed that it was indeed tabu. He could cycle with me in the other villages but not on the path leading to the ocean shore. Once the appropriate person had taken me, I would have no problem in going there.

* * *

*Tetaake^{*2}, a dance teacher, was explaining a verse of a dance song. He had told me that the protagonist of the song was a song or dance composer, an expert. “His words to people are that he will strike other experts with his dancing or singing. This man is more skilful than all the others in making songs and dances. This man is a giant, a striking giant. Nobody is even with him.”*

* * *

The first mwaie (Kiribati dance event) I attended was a dress rehearsal for an upcoming important celebration. All the dancers from the village participated. After the dances had been performed, a heated argument ensued. I was not quite sure what it was about, though I picked out something about the number of claps in one of the dance songs. Certain that an argument like that was about ‘something more important’, I enquired about it later. I was told that the disagreement was indeed about the number of claps, that one of the elders thought the dance should be performed in a slightly different way. I was not satisfied with the explanation; something must be held back from me, I reckoned. Or could dancing be that important?

* * *

The day that the thatch of the Buota village meetinghouse was to be renewed, two women came to our house to borrow the meat mincer. Both had brought some cooked swamp taro (bwabwai) with them, and in turn they used the mincer to grind the bwabwai into a soft substance. Then, with the help of coconut cream they formed the

¹ I will be using the Kiribati spelling ‘*tabu*’ of this common Pacific concept instead of the English ‘*taboo*’, except when using it as a verb (‘to taboo’). When referring to the concept specifically in its Polynesian form, I will use the appropriate form (usually ‘*tapu*’).

² An asterisk (*) after a name indicates that it is a pseudonym.

substance into a ball about ten centimetres in diameter; food called *te manam*. Once they had finished, my host-sister-in-law took the bicycle and hurried to take the mincer to a third woman, who had come the previous night to ask if she could borrow the appliance on this particular day.

A meat mincer is not an everyday item, but that morning it was needed in all the households belonging to the two clans (*iinakis*) that were to perform the restoration of the meetinghouse. Each participating household was to bring a prescribed amount of certain prescribed foods: the *manam*, two young coconuts, a loaf of bread and a pandanus dish called *te roro*. These foods were then exchanged between the clans and redistributed among their respective households. As a result, the representatives for each household took home a *manam* ball, two young coconuts, a loaf of bread and some *roro* wrapped in the leaves of an *uri*-tree.

The four passages above, constructed from my notes taken during fieldwork in the Central Pacific state of Kiribati, each say something about the importance of being different from, or being the same as, others. The first passage refers to the fact that in Buota, people are differentiated with regard to certain tasks; taking me to the ocean shore was not up to my host brother. The second concerns a context in which people – seemingly unambiguously – strive to differentiate themselves from others: dance songs and dancing. The third however, while also dealing with dancing, points to the importance of the value of unity, of everyone being the same, through an incident where this value was threatened. The last excerpt introduces a central framework of practice in Kiribati society: the meetinghouse, *maneaba*³, which will feature centrally in this dissertation. The episode itself describes the (from a Western common-sense, utilitarian point of view irrational) exchange of identical objects, which illustrates the need for people to be the same.

In all societies there are ways and contexts in which people are socially and culturally differentiated, and ways and contexts in which they are not. Yet in southern Kiribati, the

³ The orthography of Kiribati language is not well-established, and the word for meetinghouse also appears in the forms *mwaneaba* and (rarely) *m'aneaba*. The differences in the Catholic (C), Protestant (P) and Government (G) orthographies, as they are called, mainly concern the spelling of [a] sound as in pronounced in a 'mark', after certain consonants (b, m) and the use (or not) of double vowels to indicate relative vowel length, though in practice there is inconsistency within the variants as well. The alternative spellings are 'bwa-'/'mwa-' (G), 'b'a-'/'m'a-' (P) or 'ba-'/'ma-' (C); [a] sound as in 'man' is spelled as 'a' in all three variants. Old Protestant orthography uses 'ñ' for the nasal consonant [ŋ, ng], but this is fairly obsolete.

In this work I retain the original spelling in direct quotations and otherwise I aim to follow the Government orthography, but make an exception with the word for the meetinghouse, which should in fact be *mwaneaba* (G). However, I employ the spelling *maneaba*, because it is a classic topic in the literature, the overwhelming majority of which uses the form *maneaba* (see e.g. Tabokai 1993 who otherwise employs G).

co-existence of two opposing ideals – of being different or the same – seems particularly pronounced, not least because both are often present in the same institution or framework of practice. As I got to know the community, certain contradictions I encountered were intriguing enough to redirect my study from the original research question (see below). For, on the island of Tabiteuea, one finds a powerful chief representing a society where chiefs are forbidden, hierarchically organised clans in a democratic meetinghouse institution, and intense competition between dancers who are supposed to be ‘even’.

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION, UNDIFFERENTIATION AND POWER IN SOUTHERN KIRIBATI

This is a study about social differentiation and undifferentiation as seen through the meetinghouse (*maneaba*) institution and dancing (*muwaie*) in the village of Buota, originally called Temanoku⁴, which is located on the island of Tabiteuea in southern Kiribati, Micronesia. Based on data gathered during fieldwork in Kiribati 1999–2000, I will examine the ways in which people are presupposed, made or aspire to be different from others, and ways in which they are presupposed, made or aspire to be the same as others. I will approach the issue particularly with reference to local notions of power. I see the ideas and practices producing sameness and difference being guided by the opposing principles of differentiation and undifferentiation.

The idea of social differentiation in general is a common denominator in divergent discussions about rank, hierarchy, stratification, inequality, authority, dominance-subordination and so on. The opposite kinds of socio-cultural formations have varyingly been called egalitarian/egalitarianism or equal/equality. It has been argued that such formations have too often been taken for granted as the original natural condition of mankind, and therefore requiring no further explanation (Flanagan 1989, 245, 261). In addition, ‘egalitarian’, ‘equal’ and the like are highly problematic terms because of their links with individualism and other ideological connotations within common Western thought, which considers the original state of humankind forever lost and relegates any

⁴ The original name of this village was Temanoku, and the name of its central meetinghouse was Atanikarawa (‘the head [i.e. chief] of heaven’). The village had a special relationship to a village on the island of Nonouti, called Buota, whose *maneaba* was called Te Ririire. The accounts vary somewhat, but at some point the villages exchanged names and the names of the meetinghouses. One account suggests that this was to commemorate the help the Tabiteuea village received from the village Nonouti at the time of a famine in the beginning of the 20th century (Geddes 1977, 378), or it might have been to commemorate or strengthen the tie between the two villages. The official name of the Tabiteuean village now is Buota and the name is used in most ordinary contexts, though the name Temanoku comes up in some stories or songs. By contrast, both ‘Atanikarawa’ and ‘Te Ririire’ are still in everyday use for the central *maneaba*.

claim to the contrary to the role of false consciousness (see Robbins 1994). Compared to hierarchies, egalitarian social forms and the ideas that structure them used to receive less serious attention (Sather 1996, 70; Flanagan 1989, 245-246), but lately a number studies have shown that egalitarianism is not a pre-cultural given but something that is actively constructed (see e.g. Robbins 1994; Sather 1996; Woodburn 1982). The case of Tabiteuea Meang, the northern district of Tabiteuea, to be discussed in this study, likewise indicates that 'being the same' is not mere absence of differentiation.

With the alternative concept of undifferentiation I want to develop the idea of culturally constructed non-hierarchical social forms. The case of Tabiteuea Meang indicates not only that 'being the same' is not just lack of differentiation but that it is also an active practice. The way I use this term, undifferentiation is (1) is always in terms of something, (2) is assigned meaning (and value) and (3) can, though not always, be an active practice, in which case it (4) entails a recognition of pre-existing difference. The last point underlines the difference between the concept of undifferentiation and the concept of equality in the way Louis Dumont (1986, 266) defines the latter as incommensurable with the recognition of difference. Occasionally I use the more commonsense term 'sameness' to describe an undifferentiated state, though the word suggests identity, rather than the conditional identification which seems to be at stake (see Robbins 1994, 58 and below; cf. Dumont 1986, 266).

In line with most contemporary research, it is presumed in this dissertation that forms of differentiation and undifferentiation co-exist in all societies (see e.g. Helliwell 1995; Flanagan 1989). The juxtaposition of differentiation and undifferentiation brings out the matter of perspective: two elements can be 'the same' in terms of one thing and 'different' in terms of another, or on different levels of abstractness or inclusiveness. (In other words, I do not use the words presuming one aspect to define the totality of an element – see Robbins 1994, 58–59.) Thus differentiation and undifferentiation are always matters of the meaning given to the elements compared, rather than objective conditions.⁵

⁵ This also points to the need to distinguish between ideologies and practices (Flanagan 1989, 248), to separate culturally constructed notions from objective conditions or people's perceptions of the latter (Sather 1996, 71; Woodburn 1982, 431–432). In particular, the terms 'egalitarian', 'equal' and the like have lacked precise definition. James Flanagan (1989, 248) distinguishes the 'equality of opportunity' from 'equality of outcome' (see also Robbins 1994, 32–33). James Woodburn (1982, 431–432) reserves the term 'egalitarian' to refer to a conscious ideology. Building on Woodburn, Clifford Sather (1996, 71) specifies that 'equality' and the concomitant adjective attribute 'egalitarian', which refer to a culturally constructed notion, is different from equality, which refers to "objective conditions of existence". Likewise, Sather distinguishes between hierarchy and inequality as a complex of ideas and ideals versus material conditions interpreted as unequal in some respect (Sather (1996, 71–72).

Making use of existing analyses of both hierarchical and egalitarian structures, it is possible speak of both social and cultural differentiation and undifferentiation (cf. Jolly 1994; Flanagan 1989, 248). There are many possible units and variables of differentiation: the difference between whom or what, for example, or the difference in terms of what. The differentiation considered is usually between people – as individuals, groups or categories – but it may also refer to relationships between cultural categories or concepts, as in Louis Dumont's (1998 [1966], 1986) seminal work, in which the concept of hierarchy comes to have a particular meaning (see below). From another angle, one can consider difference in terms of age, gender, wealth, prestige, value and power in its many forms and definitions, to name but a few.

For the purposes of this work, it is useful to distinguish two kinds of difference.⁶ Firstly, there is the kind that has, at least since Lévi-Strauss, assumed to be a universal cultural structure, though its nature has been debated: the binary opposition or dual symbolic categorization, where the two terms are understood in relation to each other; oppositions such as man:woman or pure:impure. Their relationship is commonly perceived as complementary or as hierarchically complementary. Secondly, there are differences which are not perceived, in a given ethnographic context, as binary or complementary, like differences in appearance or wealth. What the significant differences are in each case are culturally determined, as are the ways value is attached to one side of a pair, or to the difference as such. Some of the differentially valued distinctions may then become the bases for differentiated social structures.

The analysis of social orders based on binary oppositions or dual categorisations has been linked to the way in which the relationship between the two terms of such a pair has been understood. Louis Dumont and his followers posit a relationship of hierarchical opposition between the paired elements: the opposed elements are differentially valued, and the more valued pole encompasses its contrary, to which it stands as a whole stands to its part. On one level the terms are opposed, on another, they form a whole. The less valued, encompassed pole can become higher but only on a lower level of ideology⁷ (Dumont 1998 [1966], 239–245; 1986, 46, 119, 227–228, *passim*; see Parkin 2003 for the development of this idea in Dumontian thought). While Dumont in his controversial applications of the concept (Dumont 1998 [1966], 1986) argued for the unavoidability of

⁶ The philosophical distinctions between different logical types of difference, such as Dumont (1971, 70, 77–78) makes between different kinds of opposition (complementaries, contradictories and contraries), or gradable / ungradable distinctions (Parkin 2003, 112–113) are beyond the scope of this discussion. For a review of anthropological understandings of binary opposition, dual symbolic classification and hierarchical opposition, see Robert Parkin (2003, Ch. 2–3).

⁷ In Dumont's (1986) conception, ideology is the total configuration of representations, ideas and values common in a particular society.

hierarchy in the above sense, the hierarchical opposition can also be understood on an analytical level as one type of logical structure, a particular kind of relationship between the elements of an opposition, without necessarily claiming its universality (see Parkin 2003, 217).

On a more ethnographic level, some of the critical, if also endorsing, comments on Dumont concerning the nature and use of binary oppositions, have been based on Austronesian ethnography (see Jolly & Mosko 1994; Toren 1994). Whereas Dumont (1998 [1966]), in his study of the extremely hierarchical Indian caste system, presented an all-encompassing and systematic hierarchy, ultimately guided by one supreme value, James Fox (1990, 1994) and Margaret Jolly (1994), for example, have asserted that social structures can be informed by multiple notions of, and competing claims to, value.

James Fox (1994, 1990) prefers the notion of 'precedence' to 'hierarchy' when it comes to the study of Austronesian societies. He demonstrates an order or orders emerging from a plurality of categorical oppositions, in which value does not have to be permanently fixed to either pole. The oppositions are culturally given linguistic categories, which can be complementary and asymmetric and function recursively in many contexts or levels of signification (1994, 87, 98; cf. Jolly 1994). According to Fox (1994), in Austronesian societies the assignment of value, or rather, mark/markedness, in an opposition can be strategically used and contested to make claims to hierarchy – or contribute to its dismantling.⁸

Furthermore, Glenn Petersen (1993), in his discussion of politics in Pohnpei, Micronesia, shows how the sets of values and practices that constitute 'hierarchy' and 'equality' are not necessarily internally consistent. Aspects of both values and political practices can overlap and contradict and are dependent on the context (Petersen 1993, 337–338). By implication, in order to understand social differentiation it is necessary to examine many contexts or 'frames' of action (Bateson 2000 [1972]). On the other hand, the ways in which values and practices are defined and combined always develop in particular cultural contexts and historical circumstances and contacts (Poyer 1993). The existence of an ultimate value seems to remain a matter of empirical investigation in each society.

Jolly (1994) reminds that that values are always enunciated and contested by people in particular social positions, and therefore cultural-ideological and the socio-political structures cannot be kept strictly separate (cf. Dumont 1998 [1966], 66-75). Such a

⁸ After this dissertation had been submitted for pre-examination, a whole collection of essays discussing the concept of precedence in the Austronesian context was published (Vischer 2009). *Precedence: Social Differentiation in the Austronesian World* is of obvious relevance to this work but at that point it was no longer possible to properly engage its papers in discussion.

situation might arise, for example, in a contestation over chieftainship, where potential successors each assert their right to leadership by invoking different cultural values (cf. Fox 1994, 98-99).

These analyses, then, build on the idea that social differentiation is structured by cultural values and ideas; in this study it is assumed that undifferentiation is equally so. Theoretically, one can perceive both vertical and horizontal differentiation, but it could be argued (as Dumont would) that to assign a meaning is to assign a value, and therefore differential meanings construct vertical differentiation (see also Parkin 2003, 218). The reverse condition of undifferentiation can be seen as the assignment of the same meaning, i.e. value. Therefore it becomes evident that non-hierarchical social forms also “result from the consideration of value” (cf. Dumont 1986, 279).

In the regional context of Oceania, particularly Polynesia, social differentiation has been intimately linked with local notions of power and authority. In broad terms the organisation of many traditional Polynesian societies was based on the idea of divine power (*mana* – life force, efficacy, potency, fecundity; see e.g. Firth 1940; Shore 1989), which is transmitted from the gods to the people in order to reproduce their society. The amount of power decreases with distance from the source of power (gods), forming an order of precedence from the gods to the divine king, to lesser chiefs or nobility and finally, to commoners (cf. Hocart 1936). The divine power from ‘the outside’ or ‘above’ alone, however, was not enough for legitimate authority, which also depended on power from ‘the inside’ or ‘below’, implying the need for certain personal abilities or political skills (Sahlins 1987; Valeri 1985a; Marcus 1989).⁹

While a great number of these studies have been historical, it has been argued that as long as one takes into account the possibly radical changes that have occurred in content, these notions continue to have significance and relevance when trying to understand contemporary societies and cultures (Shore 1989, 166–168; Marcus 1989, 206–207). Scholars of the region have also written on the construction of social differentiation in contemporary Pacific societies, where the interplay of the same cosmological ideas (like *mana*), though sometimes transformed or in new contexts, is evident (see e.g. Duranti 1992; Toren 1990, 1995a).

On the other hand, the undifferentiated aspects of social organisation have also been highlighted in some cases. For example, Christina Toren’s work (1990) shows how relations of hierarchy and of egalitarian ‘balanced reciprocity’ interact in Fiji, and argues that in Dumontian terms, neither value can ultimately encompass the other (Toren 1994). In particular, some small atoll societies, such as in Tokelau (e.g. Huntsman &

⁹ This kind of duality is connected (but not entirely analogous) to the distinction between ritual/non-coercive and political/coercive power (e.g. Dumont 1988 [1966], 66–79; Clastres 1989; Hocart 1936; see below).

Hooper 1996) and in Tuvalu (e.g., Besnier 1996; A. Chambers' contribution on Nanumea in Geddes et al. 1982; K. Chambers 1984, 116, 233) in Polynesia or Sapwuahfik (Poyer 1993) in Micronesia, are described as decidedly egalitarian, while simultaneously combined with the existence of chiefs or hierarchical aspects of social organisation.

In discussions of stratification, Micronesia¹⁰ has most often been likened to Polynesia (Riesenberg 1968, 111; Keating 2000, 306 fn. 14), and Kiribati society and culture are commonly recognised as having had strong Polynesian influence, not the least because of historical connections with Samoa (though emphasising these connections should also be understood as part of indigenous ideology; see Ch. 2). When discussing Tabiteuea, the relatively egalitarian atoll societies exhibit certain important similarities, whereas many of the other comparative Polynesian as well as Micronesian examples become useful in an inverse way.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to throw light on a conspicuous *absence* of chiefs, as well the *presence* of one particular chief. Kiribati culture shares with other Oceanic cultures the idea of increasing differentiation from a point of origin, forming an order of precedence (Fox 1990, 2006a [1995]) with its connection to divinely-derived power. Yet in Southern Kiribati in particular these notions are accompanied by other ideas and take a specific form which makes it an interesting case in the Pacific comparative perspective. One of the crucial points to emerge is the idea that a differentiated order being proportional to the amount of power does not mean that undifferentiation would in turn indicate an absence of power or authority.

Social scientific discussions about power and authority use these and related concepts in a variety of ways. Though terms vary, a distinction is commonly made between ritual and political power – implying spiritual and temporal authority respectively (e.g. Dumont 1998 [1966], 66–79) – and non-coercive and coercive power (Clastres 1989); A.M. Hocart's (1936) corresponding distinction is between 'precedence' and 'authority'. Notably, political power can be used interchangeably with 'domination', 'coercion' or

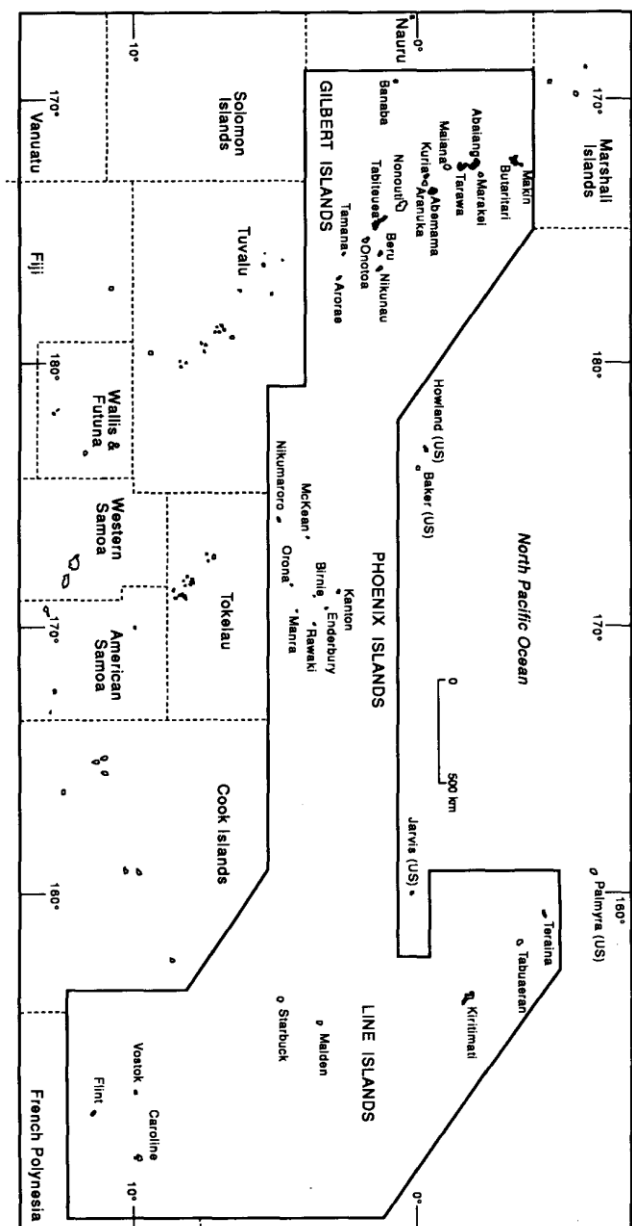
¹⁰ The division of Oceania into Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia on a cultural basis, with concomitant generalisations about social differentiation, have long been recognised as problematic (Keating 2000, 306) but the discussions are too extensive to be reviewed here. Debates have particularly concerned the Polynesia/Melanesia divide, with its initial ideal-typing of the chiefly societies of the former and the 'big men' societies of the latter (Sahlins 1970 [1963]), and its empirical critiques (e.g., Douglas 1979; Keesing 1985; Godelier 1986; Godelier & Strathern 1991) as well as historical and ideological considerations (N. Thomas 1989; Tcherkézoff 2003). In all this, Micronesia has mainly remained something of an aside, being probably the smallest "nonentity" (Hanlon 1989) of the three (but see Hanlon 1989; Rainbird 2003; Tcherkézoff 2003, 179–181). However, with criticisms and qualifications taken into account, the division may still function as a convenient shorthand description of certain societal and cultural traits, with the main interest lying now in the diversity within regions as well as the complexities of differentiation within single societies. In this work, for example, useful parallels will be also be drawn with certain Melanesian societies, despite the fact that the 'big men' logic is alien, even antithetical to Kiribati culture.

‘subordination’. In this work I mainly confine the discussion to the former, ritual or non-coercive kind of power, emphasising local notions concerning symbolic reproductive power. Towards the end of this work, however, I bring in some discussion of authority, which I have chosen to consider mostly as it is played out in a particular social arena, dancing, and as defined in a way that fits local conceptions.

One way to conceptualise authority is to see it as the right to speak (e.g. Du Bois 1986). The relevance of this definition in the Kiribati context becomes evident from descriptions of the meetinghouse (*maneaba*) institution (see e.g. Geddes 1977, 379-380; Latouche 1984, Ch. 4; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]; Tabokai 1993). In the present work, speaking is also understood metaphorically to include, for example, composing and performing songs and, further, to include other forms of expression in addition to words. I also make use of the insight that in addition to having – in most cases – sense or meaning, words (or other signifying action [cf. Farnell 1994, 1996]) have social consequences (Austin 1975 [1955]). These are however always contingent on the social relationships of the particular speech event (cf. Du Bois 1986).

This study aspires to participate in the ongoing discussion in political anthropology about forms of social differentiation and the ways in which these are informed by cultural values. On the other hand, with my particular foci – the meetinghouse institution and dancing – I hope this study makes a contribution to comparative regional discussions about socio-political structures and notions of power in Oceania. In dealing with the absence of chiefs, this study aims to complement the body of existing literature, much of which concentrates on chiefly societies. Finally, the examination of dancing both as part of the socio-political organisation and as a site of power, connects this work not only to Oceanic studies but also to general anthropological discussions of dancing.

REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI



Map 1. The Republic of Kiribati in the Central Pacific (Van Trease 1993a, xix).

KIRIBATI INTRODUCED

Kiribati is a Central Pacific state situated on the Equator between 3° north and 12° south latitudes and 168° east and 153° west longitudes, in the region commonly known as Micronesia. Kiribati consists of three island groups: Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands, and a solitary raised coral island, Banaba (see Map 1). The land area – 810.5 km² – of the altogether 33 atolls is spread over a vast ocean area corresponding to roughly one third of the United States. Apart from Banaba, the islands are low-lying coral atolls and table reef islands, with a thin, infertile top soil and volatile fresh water supplies (a fresh water lens under the island). Rainfall varies both regionally and seasonally, being the greatest in the northern Gilbert Islands and the Lines, and the smallest in the southern Gilberts and the Phoenix Islands, which are prone to periodic droughts (e.g. F. Thomas 2003, 3; Catala 1957, 2-3; Sachet 1957).

Before Independence in 1979, Kiribati was part of the British Colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (for the area's colonial history see Macdonald 1982; Van Trease 1993b).¹¹ Kiribati people are referred to as "I-Kiribati" and the language as "Kiribati", though the colonial "Gilbertese" is still sometimes used for both the people and the language (see e.g. Uriam 1995). A third term is the pre-colonial indigenous name of the Gilbert Islands, "Tungaru", which some writers have preferred when discussing society and culture (see e.g. Latouche 1984; Brewis 1996). In this work I have opted for "Kiribati" as the usual term for the society, culture as well as language, because in my experience it is in line with the common current usage in Kiribati, even though it is anachronistic in some contexts. 'Gilbertese' will be used occasionally, either when citing a source using that designation, or where it is relevant to emphasise either the location in the Gilbert Islands or the colonial context.

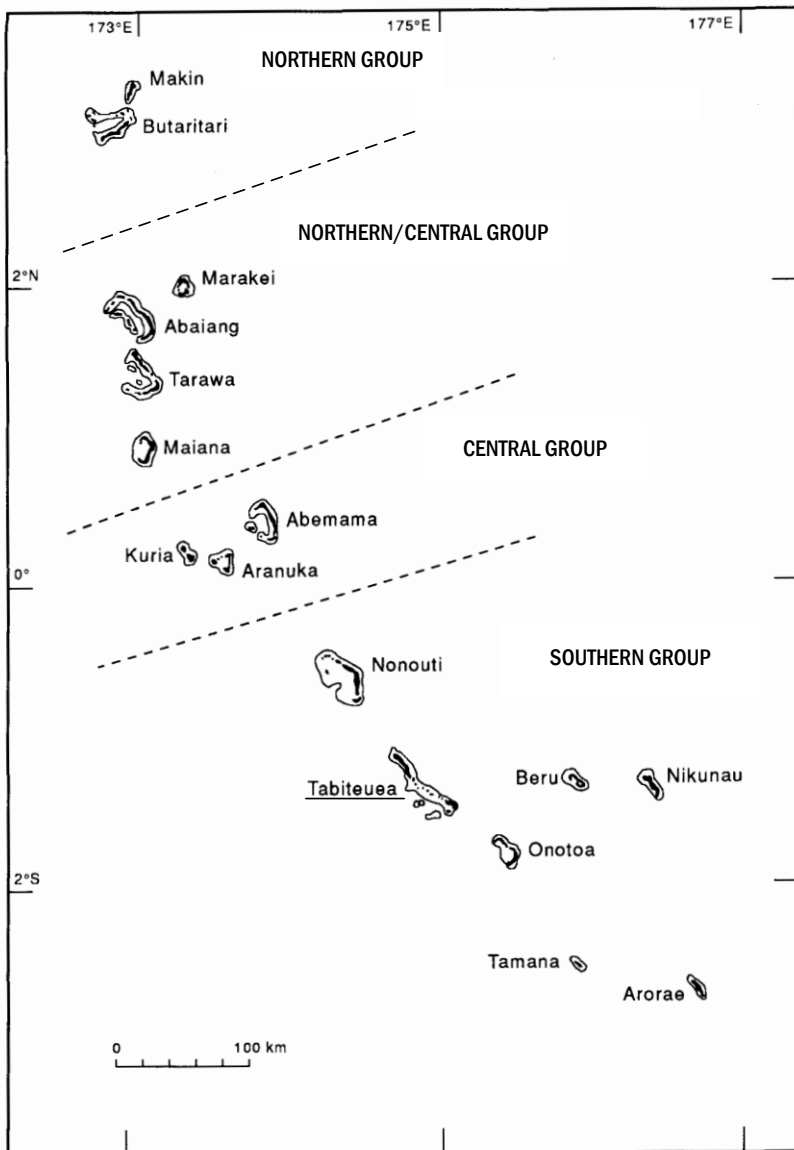
The Kiribati language belongs to the Austronesian language group, the Micronesian subgroup. Vocabulary shows important Polynesian influence, though the greatest lexical similarity is with Pohnpeian (Gordon 2005).

The current (2009) population in Kiribati is likely to be around 100,000. The Census taken just after fieldwork for this study was conducted in 2000 gave the population as 84,500 (Kiribati 2000 Census), and the Kiribati Census 2005 came up with 92,500, but some under-enumeration is likely (see Demmke et al. 1998, 3-5) and population growth

¹¹ The Ellice Islands with their Polynesian population broke off in 1978 to become the state of Tuvalu. Tuvaluans used the indigenous name of the Ellice Island group for the state. Kiribati opted not to use Tungaru, the pre-colonial indigenous name of the Gilbert Islands, since a new one, Kiribati (pronounced 'Kiribass', a the local rendering of 'Gilbert'), was felt to better represent the whole nation state, which came to include the Phoenix and Line Islands as well.

has been rapid. The majority of the country's population is living in the Gilbert Islands chain (see Map 2), and altogether there are people living on 21 of the islands.

GILBERT ISLANDS



Map 2. Gilbert Islands grouped according to their traditional polities. Reproduced with modifications from the map in Van Trease (1993b, 4).

The Gilbert Islands are narrow chain crossing the equator in a northwest-southeast direction. The people living on three of the northern Line Islands and one Phoenix Island originate from the Gilberts.¹² The population of ca. 8,900 (Kiribati 2005 Census, 3) in the Line group has resulted from plantation labour in the early and mid-20th century and resettlement since the 1980s (Langston 1993). There was an unsuccessful attempt to resettle the Phoenix Islands in the 1930s and a subsequent relocation of the settlers to the Solomon Islands (see H.E. Maude 1937, 1952; Knudson 1964, 1977); nowadays there are only a handful of people on Kanton, mainly to keep up the infrastructure.

Banaba (Ocean Island) is considered somewhat distinct from the rest of Kiribati, its history shaped by eight decades (1900-1980) of phosphate mining, which has left the island a desolate rock of stone pillars, with a population of ca. 300 (Kiribati 2005 Census, 3). Most indigenous Banabans were resettled to Rabi Island in Fiji after the Second World War, after the in-all-but-name dispossession of their land, which was also being irretrievably eroded by the mining (Macdonald 1982, 94–111; on relocation, see Silverman 1962). Banabans are connected to Kiribati by kinship, linguistic and cultural ties, but tend to emphasise their cultural and political distinctiveness.¹³ Interestingly, a recent link between Banabans and other I-Kiribati is the import of the traditional song composition knowledge (*kainikamaen*) from the Gilbert Islands to the Banabans on Rabi, now also used for political ends within Fiji (Kempf 2003).

One factor strongly characterising Kiribati, common throughout the Pacific, is the contrast between the capital region, the southern half of Tarawa island, and the so-called outer islands. Due to internal migration induced by far greater possibilities of wage work, there are about 40,000 inhabitants in South Tarawa (Tarawa Teinainano) (Kiribati 2005 Census, ix). In the main, however, the population of most of the outer islands has remained fairly stable over the past 20 years, despite the nation's high birth-rate (though the Total Fertility Rate has dropped from 4.5 births per woman in 1995 to 3.5 in 2004–2005 [Kiribati 2005 Census, 15]), so Tarawa has absorbed most of the population growth.¹⁴

¹² According to archaeological and linguistic evidence, Teraina and *Tabuaeran* in the Line chain were inhabited several centuries ago by Polynesians of unknown origin (Langston 1993, 203–206).

¹³ The cultural similarities and differences are a contentious and a politicised issue; some Banabans would like Banaba to become independent of Kiribati. For a classic account of traditional Banaban social organisation, see H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1932; for a present-day (and partly indigenous) perspective see King & Sigrah 2004, Sigrah & King 2004.

¹⁴ The Census taken in 2005, however, showed some interesting demographic developments in the 21st century. Between 2000–2005 there was a marked increase of population in the Line Islands, particularly Kiritimati and *Tabuaeran*, due to revived migration from the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati 2005 Census, 27). Proportionally speaking, it was Kiritimati Island which had the highest population growth rate (8.0%); South Tarawa's growth rate slowed down markedly from the period 1995–2000 (from 5.2 to 1.9%). While the population growth in Kiritimati (8.0%)

Kiribati economy is based on both material and non-material resources. Everyday livelihood outside South Tarawa builds on subsistence agriculture and fishing; the main exports (and sources of cash income outside Tarawa) are copra, fish and seaweed. On the other hand, Kiribati receives proceeds from granting fishing licences to foreign vessels in Kiribati waters, development aid, and dividends from the trust set up in 1956 for royalties from Banaba phosphate mining¹⁵ (Kiribati National Statistics Office n.d.a, Economic statistics). Overseas migration rates from Kiribati to the developed Pacific rim countries are minimal, but around the turn of the Millennium, there were close to 1,400 seamen and fishermen working on mainly German and Japanese vessels, with their remittances making a significant contribution to the economy despite their relatively small number (Borovnik 2006).¹⁶

Kiribati is a predominantly Christian nation. Protestant Christianity was introduced first by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the 1850s, and two decades later by the London Missionary Society, largely with Samoan pastors (Etekiera 1979; Macdonald 1982, Ch. 3). The Catholic Order of the Sacred Heart from France arrived in the late 1880s, though some Gilbertese converts, who had worked as indentured labourers elsewhere in the Pacific and returned home, had already prepared the ground (Etekiera 1979; Macdonald 1982, Ch. 3; Sabatier 1977 [1939], Part II). Today too, the main denominations are Roman Catholic (55%) and Protestant (36%).¹⁷ The Mormons, the Baha'i, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals and other tiny groups comprise the rest. Historically, the relationship between Catholic and Protestant

and Tabuaeran (7.4%) makes sense in the light of wage-work opportunities (in e.g. tourism) in the former, and the availability of relatively good (compared to the Gilbert Islands) farming land in the latter, Makin – one of the outer Gilbert Islands – with the growth rate of 6.9% is something of a statistical curiosity (3).

¹⁵ The Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund (see Asian Development Bank 1998, 50-54). That its proceeds are controlled by the Kiribati Government is a matter of contention with the Banabans.

¹⁶ According to Asian Development Bank (2002, 242 [Table A25]), almost one third of all households in Kiribati received remittances from seafarers; Borovnik (2006, 157) estimates that remittances benefit 17% of the population. Based on the information I got from the South Pacific Marine Services and Kiribati Fisheries Services (who contract the seamen to merchant and fishing vessels respectively), in 1998 there were 1,400 Kiribati seamen working on German and Japanese ships, who sent home about 9.4 million AU\$ in remittances, but Maria Borovnik's (2006, 153–154) more detailed study shows that with informal remittances included the figure is likely to approach 13 million AU\$, which still excludes the value of commodities brought home by seamen. In the same year (1998) the value of Gross Domestic Product was 62 million AU\$ (constant prices) (Kiribati National Statistics Office n.d.b).

Very recently (2008) it has been reported in the news that the number of Kiribati seamen on German ships has dropped drastically, from a peak of nearly 2,000 marine employees to around 900. Problems with alcohol abuse, health issues and incidents of Kiribati seamen involved in criminal activities have made German shipping companies more reluctant to employ Kiribati seafarers (Bataua 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d). How this effects the economy remains to be seen.

¹⁷ These figures are from 2005 (Kiribati 2005 Census, 37). Corresponding figures from 2000 are not available but in 1995, Catholics comprised 54% and Protestants 38% (Kiribati 1995 Census, xi). So during the ten years the numerical strength of Protestants compared with Catholics has decreased slightly.

churches has been antagonistic; nowadays relations appear polite but distant. Catholics tend to predominate numerically in the northern islands, Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) in the southern.

Whether Catholic or Protestant, the Christian religion is an important factor in most I-Kiribatis' everyday lives. A great deal of social and economic activities centre on the churches, and Christianity has in profound ways become part of the Kiribati culture, even if in certain contexts Christianity and 'custom' (*te katei*) are understood as opposites.¹⁸ In most contexts, however, Christianity is seen as compatible with, and even part and parcel of, the distinctively Kiribati way of life, the Kiribati custom (*te katei*).

THE KIRIBATI CUSTOM

As in so many other Pacific countries, or indeed worldwide, there is in Kiribati a consciousness of one's own culture and way of life as something distinctive and valuable. Occasional references to a pagan past or to obstacles to economic development notwithstanding, considerable pride is taken in *katei ni Kiribati* – Kiribati 'custom(s)', 'culture', 'tradition(s)' or 'way of life' (see e.g. Itaita 1979), mentioned in the first ethnographic vignette. The Kiribati word *katei* consists of two parts, the causative prefix *ka-* and the word *tei*, which means 'to stand'; *katei* could be translated as 'to make stand'. In other words, to behave properly, according to custom, is conceptually to 'stand well'. In addition, in Kiribati 'standing' also refers to dancing, suggesting the significance of this activity in the culture.¹⁹

While in some contexts *katei ni Kiribati* is perceived as a relatively unproblematic basis of identity and as something shared by all Kiribati people, *katei* is also the medium to discuss cultural change on the one hand, and the cultural differences between the Gilbert Island islands on the other. Each Gilbert Island is seen to have some of its own customs, and its inhabitants to display certain personality traits, occasionally giving rise

¹⁸ These are generally contexts in which the word 'custom' (*katei*) is used to refer specifically to pre-Christian spiritual beliefs and practices or other pre-colonial activities which are emphatically condemned nowadays, like traditional warfare.

¹⁹ Structurally the word *katei* resembles parallel concepts in many other Austronesian languages, but the distinction from them is equally interesting. For example, *akamaori*, *fakatonga* ja *vakaviti* referring to Maori, Tongan and Fijian culture or indigenous ways of life respectively, likewise have a causative prefix (*aka-*, *faka-*, *vaka-* cf. *ka-*) but followed by a word referring to an indigenous person (*maori*, *tonga*, *viti*). In other words, where *akamaori* makes a person a Maori, *fakatonga* a Tongan and *vakaviti* a Fijian, *katei* makes a person stand. This underlines the importance of the idea of 'standing' in Kiribati culture.

Another type of related concepts is glossed with some (pidginised) word of English (e.g. *kastom*, *kastam*). It is also common to talk about "the way of the land" or something to the effect, perhaps in opposition the (perceived) Western lifestyle ("the way of money").

to misunderstanding and disapproval but perhaps more often to good-natured (if somewhat provincial) stories and anecdotes. The obverse side is the regionalism with regard to one's home island, fostered by regionalist national politics (in which resource allocation is based on island quotas), and also, for example, by inter-island sports competitions, though mitigated by the fact that many people have roots in more than one island.

Katei, like parallel notions elsewhere, consists of both cultural practice and representation (Autio 1999; A-L. Siikala 1997; J. Siikala 1997, 32).²⁰ The concept of *katei* can be used to represent and discuss Kiribati culture and traditions on many levels and also in politically motivated ways, though I did not often encounter the latter during fieldwork. Instead, I found the concept evoked in a number of everyday contexts, as 'proper manners' and 'custom'. In everyday life *katei* is a set of, to a large extent, conscious and often very concrete rules about moving, bodily comportment, speaking, eating and behaving as a woman/man/relative/guest should. Thus, these explicit and implicit rules ideally prescribe the ways in which people should be the same and different.

Considered in terms of social differentiation and undifferentiation, *katei* is an instrument for both: working to maintain appropriate difference as well as sameness. Meetinghouse customs, which are to be discussed extensively in this work, illustrate well both the maintenance of distinction and the imposition of unity. Particularly, perhaps, *katei* can be seen as a regulatory mechanism preventing unacceptable differentiation. For example, in most circumstances in Kiribati it is considered inappropriate for an individual to set himself above others or to draw attention to herself; such behaviour is quickly denounced (*e kantiroaki*; 'he/she wants to be looked at'). On the other hand, custom(s) regulate the differentiation of kin groups.

While I hold that *katei* can in general be construed as an instrument of (un)differentiation, this appears particularly salient on the Gilbert Island discussed in this work, Tabiteuea. Tabiteuea, besides being popularly understood (like all the Gilbert Islands) to have its own distinctive custom(s), is associated with *katei* in specific ways (see below).

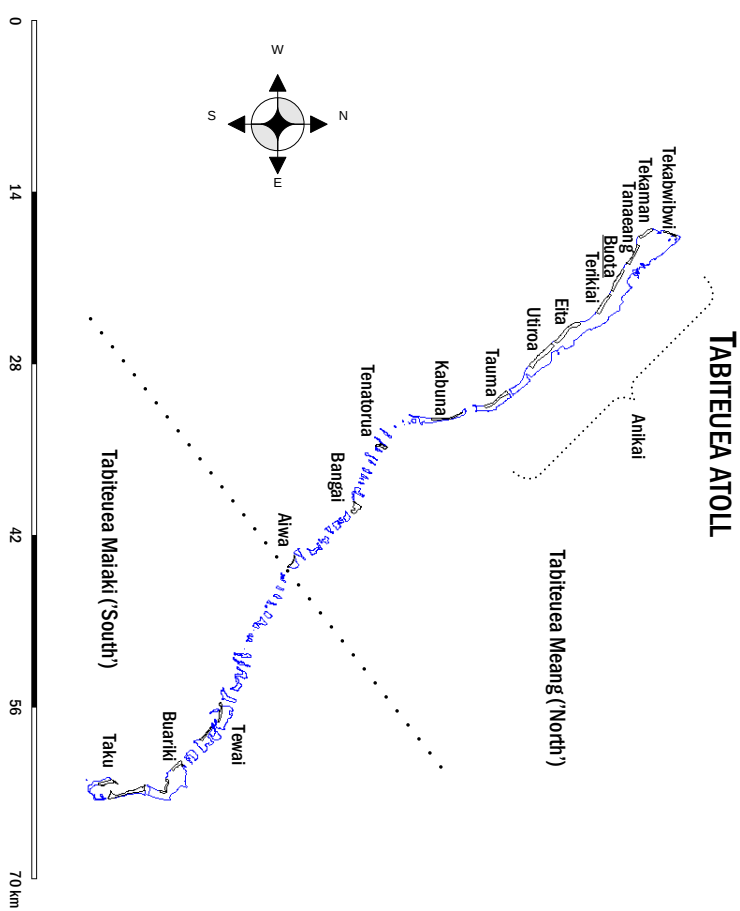
²⁰ In the 1980s and 1990s in particular, there were extensive discussions about the formation of these kinds of self-conscious representations of culture and the power relations involved in the Pacific context (see e.g. Keesing & Tonkinson 1982; Feinberg 1994, 1995; Feinberg & Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995; Jolly & Thomas 1992; Sahlins 1993a, 1993b, Thomas 1992a, 1992b, 1993). The politics of cultural representation in colonial and post-colonial situations were related to the wider discussion about the use of representations of culture and history within the context of older nation states and nationalism, which was sparked off by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* 1991 [1982] and Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's *Invention of Tradition* (1983) (for attempts to assess these discussions see Autio 1999; Bababdzan 2000; Inoue 2000). While the Kiribati *katei* could be approached from this point of view, it would not be particularly relevant with regard to the data I have on *katei* on the local level.

TABITEUEA AND ITS NORTHERN DISTRICT

Tabiteuea is one of the southern outer Gilbert Islands. It is situated approximately 175° east longitude and a degree south of the Equator. The island is long and narrow: 72 km in length, the width varying from a few metres to two kilometres. Tabiteuea has the largest land area of the Kiribati islands after Kiritimati atoll and, since 1970, it has been divided into two administrative districts, North (Meang) and South (Maiaki). The locus of this study, Tabiteuea Meang (Tabiteuea North) comprises a long strip of land called Anikai, and some 25–30 small islets (Atimakoro) on the eastern side of a lagoon, only three of which (Tenatorua, Bangai and Aiwa) have a village and permanent residents (see Map 3). The division into Anikai, the Atimakoro and Tabiteuea Maiaki (Tabiteuea South) or Tabonteaba was also a traditionally recognised geographical and political division (Geddes 1983, 4, though Geddes uses the term Abamakoro [usually translated as ‘islands’; lit. ‘sections of land’], for the Islets, which I learned to know as Atimakoro [lit. ‘sections of stone’]).

“Tab North”, as the island district is called for short, had a population of about 3,400 at the turn of the Millennium (Kiribati 2000 Census); by 2005 it had grown to 3,600 (Kiribati 2005 Census, 3). There are eight villages on Anikai, to which the village of Kabuna is connected by a causeway. The remaining three villages are on islets only accessible by a boat. Buota is the third village from the northern end of Anikai. The administrative centre and the island Council meetinghouse are located in the village of Utiroa.

In Tabiteuea North about 60% of the people are Catholic; the percentage of KPC adherents on this island is less than 30. There are also some regional differences in the distribution of the two main denominations. Some of them can be traced back to the violent religious conflicts in Tabiteuea in the 19th century: while the conflict was not between Catholics and Protestants, it eventually led to their juxtaposition (see H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1981; Luomala 1982). Today Tanaeang village, together with its southern neighbours Buota and Terikiai form the Catholic stronghold; Tanaeang is home to the Catholic Father administering the island. Utiroa on the other hand is home to the Kiribati Protestant Church Bishop for the Southern Gilbert Islands.



Map 3. Tabiteuea atoll, showing villages and the division into administrative districts. Source of the map base: Kiribati map Server <<http://map.gov.ki/tiki/tiki-index.php>>.

TABITEUEAN CUSTOM AND ITS HARDNESS

In the parochial yet affectionate stereotyping of the various Gilbert Islands, Tabiteuea is associated with custom (*katei*) in two particular ways: firstly, Tabiteueans are known for their faithful adherence to *katei*, and secondly, there is a notion that in Tabiteuea *katei* is 'hard'. Hardness as an attribute can characterise custom in general (i.e., not just Tabiteuean custom), but it is in Tabiteuea where its hardness is conspicuous and emblematic.

While Kiribati culture in general is quite formal (e.g. Talu 1985, 6), Tabiteuea is known across Kiribati for 'holding the custom' (*taua te katei*); in other words, for formality and a certain cultural conservatism. In comparisons between islands, the Tabiteuean adherence to *katei* is seen, for example, in the maintenance of meetinghouse customs in all their elaborateness, in menstruation *tabus* or in the position of women (as perceived from a Western-influenced perspective) with regard to their invisibility in public life or relative lack of freedom. There is also a sense of 'taking care of custom' (*e kawakinaki te katei*): a common response to deviation from the norms: "he/she does not know the custom" (*e aki ata te katei*), is a particularly serious reproach in Tabiteuea.

Furthermore, the custom itself in Tabiteuea is known, in the eyes of both locals and people from other islands, to be especially 'hard' (*matoa, matoatoa*).²¹ "Custom is hard, isn't it?" my host sister-in-law said sympathetically, when I could not at first go to my own farewell party – arranged 300 metres down the road – because the custom (*katei*) of invitation had not been properly followed. "Custom is hard," said a female teacher who had grown up elsewhere but married a Tabiteuean, recounting her initial exhaustion in the face of the requirements to perform all the traditional women's work in the household on top of her wage work. "Custom is hard" (*e matoatoa te katei*) was indeed a standard phrase in reference to cultural rules and the demand to conform to them, such as the marriage custom (*katein te iein*), according to which girls are expected to retain their virginity until marriage; the general attitude towards those who fail to do so is harsh.

In the context of *te katei* hardness has several meanings. The Kiribati words (*matoa, matoatoa*) themselves have the same double (both concrete and abstract) meaning as the English counterpart: hard as 'solid' or 'tough' and hard as 'difficult'. Hardness refers

²¹ In Kiribati the meaning of an adjective can be intensified or strengthened by reduplicating the last syllable(s) of the word. Thus the denotation of *matoa* and *matoatoa* is the same, only *matoatoa* is stronger, 'very hard'. Another example would be *bareka*, 'dirty' – *barekareka*, 'extremely dirty'.

primarily to the force with which custom constrains an individual, who must comply with it instead of according to his/her will. Secondly, custom is hard both in the sense that it is demanding to conform to and in that non-conformity has serious consequences (the latter exemplified by the marriage custom mentioned above).

The possible conflict between what a person would like to do and what the *katei* dictates is often explicitly recognised. *Katei* generally prevailed, and people appeared painfully aware of thereby forsaking their own aspirations, while still preferring it this way. It was as if, much as people wanted to go against custom, they not only felt that they could not, but indeed in the end would not have wanted to – but it was hard. “[It is] just the custom you see,” said the two ladies who could not organise a feast as they wished because in the particular circumstances it would have been against the custom; “it is hard,” they told me, otherwise there would not have been a problem; it was “just the custom”.

In Tabiteuea I also frequently encountered the idea that work and the of way life in Kiribati are hard, often in opposition to either Western countries or to the northern Gilbert Islands, where more abundant rainfall and better soil make traditional subsistence easier. Even food in Kiribati is harder than in the Western countries, as Nei Ruuta*, a 35-year-old Tabiteuean woman, pointed out tongue-in-cheek. She was sharing her breakfast with me, and we were having swamp taro (*babai*) – which is coarse and hard even after long cooking – and rather dry cooked fish a little before noon. Ruuta said, “You Westerners eat soft food in the morning, don’t you? Here in Kiribati we eat hard food in the morning.”

However, despite these (to a Western mind) perhaps negative connotations of constraint and austerity, hardness also has a range of positive connotations. A winning football team is ‘hard’; they are tough, one might say in English. A culturally more distinctive usage concerns dancing: good dancing is hard (on the concept of hardness in the context of Kiribati dancing, see Autio 2003; see also Ch. 7 in this work). Hardness furthermore connotes endurance and continuity. Continuity, stability, persistence and the like are actually expressed with the word *teimatoa*²², literally ‘to stand hard’.

In other words, ‘the hardness of custom’ is an idiom of social control,²³ which also refers to the integrity and persistence of custom. Hardness is valued, which makes it on the whole a positive attribute, despite its felt consequences. People in the harder conditions of the southern islands are known to work harder, and Tabiteuea is both

²² “Solidity, stability, firmness, constancy”, “to be solid, unshaken”, “lasting, persisting” (Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *teimatoa*).

²³ Bradd Shore (1982, 221–225) has proposed the idea of Samoan culture as control. The idea might not be foreign in Kiribati. See also Lundsgaarde 1966, 6.

feared and admired for its hardworking, proud people, who are as quick to turn to their knives as they are hospitable (two other popular stereotypes), and who hold on to the hard custom.

KIRIBATI STUDIED

To a wider western audience, Kiribati – then Gilbertese – society and culture first became known from the writings of two long-time residents of the country: Sir Arthur Grimble (1921, 1957, 1969 [1952]; collected papers published 1989), a colonial officer, and Father Ernest Sabatier (1977 [1939]), a Catholic missionary. Both were insightful ethnographers, even if not professional anthropologists, and Sabatier also produced a comprehensive Gilbertese-French dictionary (later translated; see Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971). Grimble's work was complemented and continued by a younger colonial officer who later became a renowned historian of the area, Henry E. Maude (e.g., 1968, 1980, 1991a [1963]). He also worked and published in cooperation with his wife, Honor C. Maude (e.g., H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1931, 1932, 1936–38, 1981, 1994).

In both the early writings and the academic anthropological research, begun in the 1950s and 1960s, the main areas of interest have been kinship and socio-political organisation, and oral tradition. As part of wider regional debates, there has been a lot of discussion of Kiribati kinship: kin groups and their historical transformation concerning rules of descent and inheritance, as well the terms for kin groups and relatedness (see Goodenough 1955; Lambert 1966a, 1983; Lundsgaarde & Silverman 1972; Geddes 1977; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]). Similarly, socio-political organisation on the whole has been a topic of comparative interest within Oceania (e.g. Sahlins 1957, 1970 [1963]; Goldman 1957, 1970; Howard & Kirkpatrick 1989; Peoples 1993).

In the Kiribati context, kinship and socio-political organisation has often been approached through the meetinghouse institution: *te maneaba* is a spatial representation of social organisation and functions as “an index to social groupings”, to borrow a phrase from Arthur Grimble (1989, 202). The word *maneaba* also refers to the actual buildings: the rectangular meeting halls of which there are hundreds around the Kiribati islands, where each social group (e.g. clan or village) has – or in some places, used to have (see below) – a designated sitting area on the meetinghouse floor. *Maneaba* entails a form of governance and a code of conduct (*katein te maneaba*) which, while not equally meticulously adhered to in every situation, nevertheless are distinct and recognisable.

The *maneaba* institution has gone through significant changes along with the society as a whole, not least as a result of colonisation by Europeans, though the pre-colonial

history of the *maneaba* institution was also far from stagnant (the traditional institution being the result of interaction between indigenous meetinghouse organisations, with one originating in Samoa, introduced between the 14th and 17th centuries depending on Gilbert Island). Perhaps the major change in the 20th century was the broadening of the concept from a kinship and land-based organisation to encompass the meetinghouses of associations based on religion, education, (wage) work and other voluntary affiliation. In this study the *maneaba* will figure prominently, as it is pivotal to the question of differentiation/undifferentiation in Kiribati, both in its traditional and more modern forms.

The topic of the *maneaba* is so central that it is likely to be touched upon in any text concerning Kiribati; texts specifically about *te maneaba* include those by Arthur Grimble (1989, Part 2), H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 1980), Henry Peder Lundsgaarde (1970a, 1978), Jean-Paul Latouche (1984, Ch. 4), Nakibae Tabokai (1993) and Kazuhiro Kazama (2001). Much of the scholarly writing on *te maneaba* has been concerned with what Henry E. Maude (1991a [1963], 54) called “ethnohistorical reconstruction”: describing the institution in its traditional, ‘complete’ – and ideal – form (see e.g. Grimble 1989, Part 2; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 1980; Latouche 1984, Ch. 4; Hockings 1989). This tendency has recently been criticised by Kazama (2001, 84), who, firstly, points out that the first ethnographers, Grimble and Maude were already describing a bygone institution (but, it should equally be mentioned, were well aware of it; see Grimble 1989, 197–198; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 53–54), and, secondly, expresses incredulity at the fact that some scholars doing fieldwork as late as the 1970s still chose to restrict their accounts to the traditional *maneaba* and disregard the 20th century changes (Kazama 2001, 88).

As Kazama (2001, 88) notes, some texts do deal with more recent kinds of *maneabas* as well (notably Lundsgaarde 1970a, 1978 but also see Geddes 1977 and Tabokai 1993), and Kazama’s (2001) own paper is an assessment of the contemporary *maneaba* institution in a southern Tabiteuea village. The question then becomes one of a dialectic of change and continuity (how much change is too much for there to be any continuity?). Whether one wants to endorse or to deny continuity, understanding the traditional *maneaba* system is essential for understanding the contemporary institution.

In traditional district or village (*kaawa*) *maneaba* organisation, the social groups indicated are ‘clans’ and ‘lineages’, each of which has a section of the meetinghouse reserved for it. The Kiribati term for such a group, as well as its sitting place in the *maneaba*, is *boti* or, as it frequently appears in Tabiteuean parlance, *iinaki*.²⁴ A related

²⁴ Literally *iinaki* means a row of thatch, which is used in the demarcation of the sitting area (*boti*) of a clan (*boti*)

concept is *kainga*, which, however, underwent significant changes when colonial rule and Christian churches were established on the Gilbert Islands. In pre-colonial society, *kainga* was the most significant corporative kin group as well the ancestral land parcel of that group; in other words, *kainga* also had both a social and a spatial referent. *Kaingas* held land (the principal ancestral estate as well as other land parcels) together and organised much secular as well as ritual activity, and one or several *kaingas* together had their *boti/iinaki* in the district *maneaba*. A *kainga* was in turn divided into smaller family units (*utu*, *mweenga*) (see Lundsgaarde & Silverman 1972; Geddes 1977, 1983, 28–32; Tito et. al. 1979; Iobi 1985; Uriam 1995, 9–16; cf. Goodenough 1955).

Changes to *kainga* organisation and the reasons for them have been described elsewhere (Geddes 1977, 386–388, 1983, 35–39 regarding Tabiteuea; Lawson 1989, 138–139); the outcome, briefly, has been that *kaingas* no longer function as corporate units, households now being the key groups. From the present day point of view, *kaingas* are primarily named localities which have, to a varying – and debated (see Lundsgaarde & Silverman 1972, 107 and cf. Goodenough 1955, 73; Geddes 1977, 389; Kazama 2001, 102–104) – extent, some remembered connections to ancestors and to the *maneaba*. Village areas on each island are (as they were before) divided into named *kainga* land tracts, which extend across the island from the west to the east (though sometimes a distinction is made between *kaingas* as primary residential land and other, forest lands). In the village where I worked in Tabiteuea Meang, the names of *kaingas* commonly featured in everyday discourse as names of localities, some of them with recognised connections to particular *iinakis* in the village *maneaba*, though the latter became more evident in the study of narratives.²⁵

As pointed out, and related to the decline of the *kainga*, the traditional kinship-based *boti/iinaki maneaba* organisation has been said to have lost much of its significance (Grimble 1989, 197–198; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 53–54; Geddes 1977, 388; Lundsgaarde 1978, 67–68; Kazama 2001). *Boti/iinaki* continue to be recognised social

along with other markers (Luomala 1965, 34–35; Uriam 1995, 19). Because of this, *iinaki* might be understood in a slightly more concrete way, but essentially, its meanings are the same as those of *boti*. In this dissertation, both Kiribati designations will be used: because *iinaki* is the more commonly used term in Tabiteuea, I prefer it particularly when referring to my own data, but since much of the ethnographic literature and published narratives uses the term *boti*, the latter will be used as well. When the standard anthropological term ‘clan’ is used, it should be remembered that in the Kiribati context it entails the fundamental conjunction of a kin group and the place where its members sit in the *maneaba*, which is subsumed in both *boti* and *iinaki*.

²⁵ This brief overview of *kainga*, intended as background information for later discussions, does not do justice to the extensive discussions on the subject in Kiribati (let alone comparatively – *kainga* is a near-universal Austronesian concept, frequently referring to some form of [land-based] kin group and/or kin group land, such as the Tikopian *kaiya* or the Samoan *aiga*). Generally this topic would be beyond the scope of this study, though from the local perspective of Buota village the relationship between *kaingas* and the *maneaba* institution will be discussed more in Chapter 3.

categories, but the extent of knowledge about them and the importance thereof, as well as their functions in the *maneaba*, seem to vary greatly from one island and even one village to another (see also Iobi 1985, 34, 36; cf. Tabo 2003²⁶). On the other hand, there is likely to be variation within a community, beginning with the suggestion that older people are more likely to be knowledgeable.

In contrast, on a more general level the *maneaba* institution thrives everywhere in Kiribati. In the course of the 20th century, island Councils, churches, schools, the Parliament, work co-operatives (*makoro*), clubs and so forth began to have their own *maneabas*. It has been noted that because of its essential place in Kiribati culture, the *maneaba* institution has been able to accommodate new social forms as well (Lundsgaarde 1978, 68; Tabokai 1993, 28). The *maneaba* institution continues to index social groups, now of various kinds and on different levels of social and political organisation, from kinship and locality to religious and other institutional affiliations. The *maneaba* is both a venue for their numerous functions, and a vital symbol of the groups, as well as of Kiribati communality in general.

I wholeheartedly agree with Kazama that the present *maneaba* system should be studied and described by anthropologists, and hope the present work is a step towards that end. Furthermore, the focus should be on what there *is*, not on what there no longer is or has been forgotten. The above-mentioned wide variability across Kiribati localities in the significance of the traditional social categories of the *maneaba* (*boti/iinaki*) means, however, that the results of a study of a *maneaba* are not necessarily easily generalisable, particularly as they pertain to these categories. The question in a large-scale comparison – which as such would be beyond this study – would then become whether there is some systematization in the variability. The second question would be whether the present differences relate to the patterns of difference that are well known within Kiribati scholarship, namely, the meaning of the *maneaba* in Kiribati culture, which has never been uniform.

The southern Gilbert Islands are where the traditional *maneaba* institution evolved into its most complex form and where the *boti/iinaki* system has had the greatest significance. Therefore one might expect *boti/iinaki* continuities to be a part of the social

²⁶ A participatory study, part of a region-wide project initiated by the Asian Development Bank, managed in Kiribati by the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific, assessing community perspectives on governance in three Kiribati communities (in Butaritari in the north, in South Tarawa in the middle and in Onotoa in the south) in the early 2000s (Tabo 2003), suggests the overall strength of the traditional *maneaba* system in the two rural target communities. For the southern island community, the study also implies the continuance of the *iinaki/boti* system (see Tabo 2003, 255-260), but since the study is on a fairly general level and its focus elsewhere, it does not provide the kind of detail needed to draw conclusions on this matter.

structure, as varied as the knowledge and importance of the traditional kind of *maneaba* might be today.²⁷

The regional differences in the role of the *maneaba* are related to the issue of differentiation. On the whole, Kiribati society has been described as ‘democratic’, meaning that it has been governed by senior males representing their kin groups or districts, who form a decision-making body in the *maneaba*. However, differentiation in the traditional socio-political structure increases as one moves north through the Gilbert chain (Peoples 1993, 7; Uriam 1995, 4–8; Lambert 1966b, 1978). Simply put, the greater the social differentiation and the likelihood of chieftains, the smaller the significance of the *maneaba* and *boti/iinaki* institution.

In the literature it has been customary to divide the Gilbert Islands into three groups by comparing traditional socio-political structures: northern, central and southern Gilberts (e.g. Grimble 1989, 151; Tito et al. 1979, 24–25; Uriam 1995, 4; Van Trease 1993b, 4–5).²⁸ In the northern and some central islands there have in the past been either temporary or more permanent chiefs: occasional successful warrior-leaders and, in some cases (the best known on the twin islands of Butaritari-Makin and on Abemama and its vassal islands Kuria and Aranuka), high chiefs (*uea*) ruling for longer periods, and even social classes (see Roberts 1953; Lambert 1966b, 1978). By contrast, the socio-political systems of southern Gilbert islands, Tabiteuea included, have been distinctly characterised by the *maneaba* governance and the insistence on the right of each land-owning, male head of his kin group to participate in it on a level footing. The social systems in southern Gilbert Islands in general have been described as “true democracies” (Grimble 1989, 151; Uriam 1995, 4).

The meaning of democracy, however, is roughly the same as it was for the ancient Greeks: the equality of all free (senior) men. On all islands vertical differentiation in terms of seniority and gender is taken for granted (even though gender is a less straightforward case) (e.g. Lundsgaarde 1966, 96, 98–101). Age seniority commands respect (*karine*) for both men and women, and younger people are expected to obey those older than they are. Much like in Tokelau, for which Judith Huntsman and Anthony Hooper (1996, 49–50) describe similar kinds of age differentiation, young people are reluctant to offer their views in the presence of their seniors, particularly on Kiribati culture.

²⁷ Tabo (2003, 255–260) again does not provide enough details (see fn. 24), but is not in contradiction with this suggestion.

²⁸ There is some variation in the definition of the groups – islands from Maiana to Marakei have alternatively been included in the central or the northern group. Since Abemama, Kuria and Aranuka to the south of them as well as Butaritari and Makin to the north used to form socio-political entities of their own, it might make more sense to speak of four clusters of islands. See Map 2.

Women, on the other hand, play sharply differentiated but complementary roles in relation to men, in terms of life sphere and division of labour as well as expected behaviour (on Kiribati women, see Brewis 1996). In the traditional view women are valued but considered subservient to men, under the authority of their fathers and husbands²⁹, and traditionally have had little or no say in the *maneaba*, i.e., the public. While the latter situation has been changing, particularly in the church context and in (semi-)urban Tarawa, comparatively speaking women still tend to have little access to either traditional or modern public decision-making processes (Tabo 2003, 247, Ngaebi, Russell & Tamuera 1993; Rose 2006, who points out, however, that the political significance women tends to remain hidden because ‘political activity’ is too narrowly defined), in conservative Tabiteuea particularly so. Overall, as will also be seen in the course of this work, in the day-to-day life of an outer island village, coercive power mostly rests with mature men, and with the Council of Elders (*Boowin Unimwaane*) that they comprise, though there are contexts where – usually mature – women have decision-making power as well (Ch. 4, 6), and the male gerontocracy is also not entirely uncontested (see Ch. 7). My general focus, however, is more on value and symbolic power than on political or coercive power, and with a multiplicity of differentiating and undifferentiating structures, which take particular forms on the southern islands.

Anthropologists and other researchers who have done work in the southern group include Henry Peder Lundsgaarde (1966, 1970a, 1970b, 1974, 1978) and Jean-Paul Latouche (1984); specifically on Tabiteuea, Katherine Luomala (1965, 1966, 1980), William Geddes (1977, 1983) and recently Kazuhiro Kazama (2001, 2006) (see also Goodenough 1955, 1990). Bernd Lambert’s (1966a, 1966b, 1978, 1983) work largely deals with Butaritari-Makin, but the data it provides concerning chieftainship (*uea*), is relevant also when chiefs are in absentia.

The other major subject besides social organisation dealt with here – the preservation and ethnohistorical analyses of oral tradition – has become a joint concern both for outside researchers and I-Kiribati people themselves.³⁰ Collections of orally transmitted tradition have been published in English (H. C. Maude and H.E. Maude 1994; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991), in the vernacular (Russell 1979; Botaki n Taetae ni Kiribati 1990; Ainati & Timea 1997; Rikian Tungaru n.d.) or both languages (Koru & Sullivan 1986); Jean-Paul Latouche’s (1984) work contains narratives in Kiribati and their translations

²⁹ Though not, *per se*, sanctioned by the custom, domestic violence against women, which is sadly common, is often tacitly expected (Brewis 1996, 46-50).

³⁰ Local accounts of history and contemporary society are also significant. Such have been provided by the writers in *Kiribati: Aspects of History* (1979) and *Kiribati: A Changing Atoll Culture* (1985), as well as in several essays in a volume on contemporary politics edited by Howard Van Trease (1993a).

into French. Kambati Uriam (1995) provides a thorough ethnohistorical analysis of the whole corpus of oral narratives. In addition to the narratives I collected during fieldwork, these published collections provide important material for this dissertation.

Besides narratives, one important form of oral tradition is songs. Song texts have been analysed by P.B. Laxton (1953; see also Laxton and Kamoriki 1953), Katharine Luomala (1976), Mary Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989) and by this author (Autio 2008). Many of the songs analysed have been dance songs, and it could be argued that dancing (*ruoia*, *mwaie*, *bwatere*) is the most significant art form in Kiribati, though in the last analysis a rigid separation of dance from choir singing, marching and other “movement systems” (Kaeppeler 1985) is not always useful.

Kiribati dance has also thrilled outside observers at least since Robert Louis Stevenson (2004 [1908]) and there are a few scholarly descriptions of it as well. Over half a century ago, P.B. Laxton and Te Kautu Kamouriki (1953) produced a movement-by-movement, line-by-line analysis of a dance and its corresponding song. The most comprehensive study of Kiribati dance, with descriptions of several types of dance and concomitant music, was conducted in the 1980s by the ethnomusicologist Mary Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989; Lawson Burke 2001). Tony and Joan Whincup (2001) have more recently documented dancing as well as people’s experience and interpretations of it through both photography and interviews (see also T. Whincup 2005). While recognizing the significance of dance groups, however, the studies by the Whincups and Lawson approach the subject largely, though by no means wholly, from the individual actor’s point of view. Generally speaking, I employ a more structural approach, and consider dancing as an integral part of the local social organization as a whole (see also Autio 2003). Further, my interest is more on *dancing* as a practice than dance as such.

FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is based on eleven months of field research conducted between September 1999 and the beginning of October 2000 in Kiribati and Fiji, with a month of preliminary library research in Hawaii in February 1999. Most of the data used in this dissertation was gathered in Buota village, in the northern district of Tabiteuea. At the time of my fieldwork there were, with some variation, about 370 inhabitants in Buota, living in 74 households (see Ch. 5 for details), though the community extended beyond the boundaries of geographical location, particularly to South Tarawa.

My entry into the field was a long and tardy process. Before going to Kiribati, I had spent three weeks in Suva, Fiji, where I had been able to establish some contacts with Kiribati. With the help of I-Kiribati people in Suva, I had a place to live once I reached

South Tarawa, being kindly allowed to stay at a Youth Centre of Kiribati Protestant Church, near their headquarters in the village of Antebuka. Using that as a base, I proceeded with background research in the Kiribati National Archives, meanwhile meeting various government officials and learning the rudiments of Kiribati custom and language. One purpose of the background research was to establish which outer island I would go to, and to arrange for a place to stay once there. In the end I had to stay in Tarawa for much longer than expected, because of delays in getting a residence permit. Eventually, I went to live with relatives of people whom I had met in Fiji and Tarawa. Though going to one of the southern islands had also been part of the preliminary plan, this established connection was the main reason I finally chose Tabiteuea North as my field site.³¹

My initial research questions had concerned the meaning of place(s) and forms of cultural representation in view of migration or the lack of possibilities thereof. As I examined Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony documents in Kiribati National Archives in Tarawa, there did emerge a conspicuous discourse of 'land-hunger': of overpopulation and a constant need to find new lands for the Gilbertese to resettle in.³² This was evidenced not only in the colonial officials' correspondence but also in the documents of Gilbertese themselves which demonstrated their purchasing or wanting to purchase land outside the Gilbert Islands. As I had learned before fieldwork, the need for emigration/resettlement was direct in the least ecologically favorable southern Gilberts, where I was heading. Despite all of this, however, as I finally arrived in Tabiteuea, my research took another direction.

Now living with a family and engaged in a small community, the differences in everyday life – in my own position as well as in broader material and cultural ways – between Tarawa and Tabiteuea became concrete. For a Finnish person, a Westerner, the lack of privacy was at times challenging, and as a woman, I could not move as freely as I had envisioned. Though concessions were made for me, I felt the latter fact restricted my work. Yet as my understanding grew, it became apparent that following the more

³¹ I made a number of misjudgements during the arrangements. As my stay in Tarawa lengthened frustratingly, I was offered two places to stay and had to make choice, thus unwittingly upsetting the other party, not to mention breaching the custom. What is more, in my need to finally get to Tabiteuea, my host-family-to-be did not have much time to prepare for my coming. It was only due to their kindness and patience that I was able to begin fieldwork in Tabiteuea. Due both to the hold-up in Tarawa and for personal reasons, my fieldwork was somewhat shorter than would have been ideal.

³² The documents include the General Correspondence (1947–1960) files of the Office of the Resident Commissioner of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC), originally from the Western Pacific Archives, now in the Kiribati National Archives (KNA). E.g. KNA, GEIC F48/4/1 Lands. Colonisation. General; GEIC CF48/4/1 (Confidential) Lands. Colonisation. General; GEIC F48/7/1 Lands. Colonisation. Settlement in Fiji. Chief Lands Commissioner B.C. Cartlands' 1952 *Memorandum on Land-hunger in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony*, however, is critical of the equation of 'land-hunger' and 'surplus population'.

restricted, customary paths was usually the most profitable in terms of data collection. As is typical in fieldwork, living with a family was invaluable both professionally and personally. I was introduced to settings that would have been inaccessible had I lived on my own, and learning how to behave in a way appropriate to my position as my host-family's guest (*iruwa*) probably taught me more than anything else I experienced during fieldwork. At the same time, I was allowed to share their life to a much greater extent than a Western guest could generally expect.

My dependence on my host family also directed my research concerns; things occupying my host family occupied me as well. An additional contributing factor to this state of affairs was that I was not able to hire an interpreter cum research assistant, as I had planned. As I will recount in the course of this work, there were two things which I continually encountered in Buota which came to dominate my fieldwork and to transform my research questions: the Story of Kourabi and dancing (*mwaie*). The former is inseparably tied to the Buota village meetinghouse, the key institution structuring the community. The latter, on the other hand, was simply what people were doing and talking about when I arrived in Buota, and it was only reasonable to explore the subject. (Neither was it inconsequential that the dancing and songs, as well as the story, were fascinating.) As I kept learning more about the community, the timeliness and the greater relevance of the new topics became apparent, sidelining my original questions, which were not salient in community discourse.

The empirical data I gathered in the course of participating in my host family's routines in turn affected my theoretical concerns. My interest in social differentiation – and what seemed to constitute its opposite – as well as in notions of power developed as I tried to understand the phenomena in which I was taking part. Both the Story of Kourabi and, through it, the meetinghouse and the village community, as well as the dance, presented me with puzzles which became even more apparent after fieldwork, as I became defamiliarised with things which I had taken as given in the field. Why was it self-evident that, as a friend put it, “dancing causes disorder”? Why was everything distributed so meticulously evenly? And above all, why was it that the main ancestral figure in the history of the village had no descendants?

THE APPROACH AND COURSE OF CHAPTERS

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the ways in which forms of social differentiation and undifferentiation intertwine in Buota community through two contexts connected by local notions of power: the meetinghouse (*te maneaba*) and dancing (*te mwaie*). Even if the initial choice to concentrate on these two particular

issues for examination was largely due to the circumstances of my fieldwork, they are contexts in which the conjunction of the contradicting principles of differentiation and undifferentiation are played out in interesting ways.

In an analytical sense, the *maneaba* and dancing are examples of different orders. The former is the key institution and a representation of community on many levels, and allows for the examination of a host of community practices. The latter is one of them, but it is also a significant domain in its own right. Thus the *maneaba* is a structural element of the society, whereas dancing is more an emblematic – but not entirely parallel – practice. The meetinghouse institution, kinship and social organisation in general (the first as integrated into the latter two) have been important topics in anthropological and related research on Kiribati. On the other hand, Kiribati dance, occupying a central place in the society and striking in its intensity and distinctiveness, has also attracted attention. Rarely, however, have these interests been combined.

Assessing the study of art and aesthetics in Polynesia, Adrienne Kaeppler wrote in 1989 that it was time to move on from isolated studies of art on the one hand and the social structure on the other. According to Kaeppler (1989, 211), it was time

to illuminate how objects, architecture, songs, dances, poetry, and oratory are parts of society and the structure of social reality; how they provide a basis for understanding the nature of society; how artistic and aesthetic structures are social structures; how art and aesthetics communicate meanings on different planes; how symbolic action is social action.

A focus on the *maneaba* allows me to explore the social organisation of a community comprised, as it is, of complex interrelations of different kinds of social units and the cultural ideas structuring these relationships. I will discuss differentiation and undifferentiation in terms of the relationships within and between categories of social units: kin-based groups, households, dance groups and the community as a whole. These relations are only analytically separable; in practice they converge, often in the *maneaba*, both in the specific Buota village *maneaba* and the institution in general. The examination of the *maneaba* also unfolds the cultural categories that structure its – and the community's – organisation. I will be examining the mythical history of the local meetinghouse as well as current meetinghouse practices and customs more generally.

The dissertation is organised so that I begin with the examination of myth, history and ideals, gradually moving towards the present and current practice. It has been argued that in Oceanian societies 'society' and 'cosmos' are not conceptualised as separate realms, as they commonly are in Western thought (Coppet & Iteanu 1995). Therefore each society should be considered as "a socio-cosmic whole", ordered by locally perceived cultural distinctions (Coppet & Iteanu 1995, 18). In the study of Austronesian societies, the analysis of mythical narratives has been an important way to consider the relationship between cosmology and social organisation (e.g. Boulan-Smit 2001; Toren

1995a; J. Siikala 1991; Howard 1985; Valeri 1985a). In Chapter 2 I will attempt this by a close reading of the foundation story of the local *maneaba* – the Story of Kourabi – meanwhile placing the story in the intertextual network of Kiribati oral tradition. I use the story in two ways, seeking to interpret it as well as using it as a stepping-stone into descriptions of traditional Kiribati society, paying particular attention to the notions of power that the text(s) convey. The data used here are drawn from narratives – including stories I collected as well previously published ones – and ethnographic descriptions or projections of the traditional, pre-colonial Kiribati (Tungaru) society.

Chapter 3 continues the analysis of the Story of Kourabi, but also moves towards the present. The focus in the chapter – as in the story – shifts to the Buota village *maneaba*, whose foundation is at the same time the foundation of the Buota community. I will describe the division of the community into *boti* or *iinaki*, kin groups which are the basic traditional units in the *maneaba* and which can for ease of expression be called ‘clans’. Based on narratives and data from participant observation, I discuss forms of differentiation and undifferentiation between clans by looking at different kinds of ‘work’ (*mwakuri*) that they do.

The attention to current practices in Chapter 3 draws attention to the fact that clans are not the only kinds of social units in the village and that more often than not, the acting corporate unit is the household – the topic of Chapter 4. The relationships between households are governed by ideas of (un)differentiation, which diverge from those structuring clan relations. I will be showing how the two kinds of organisation intersect in practices taking place in the *maneaba*. These relations together form a significant social entity represented by the village *maneaba*: the village community.

In Chapter 5 I adopt a more general, non-localised perspective onto the Tabiteuean *maneaba* institution by looking at *maneaba* customs. The data for the discussion in Chapter 5 comes mainly from participant observation in a number of different *maneabas* around the island.³³ I consider the customs particularly in their spatial and bodily aspects; the arrangements of bodies in space also communicates ideas of divine power. This topic likewise connects to comparative concerns within Oceania, since there are a number of studies of the spatial and bodily construction of differentiation, frequently in the context of meetinghouses (e.g. Keating 1999, 2000; Duranti 1992;

³³ In fact, most of my experience of more formal *maneaba* occasions comes from villages other than Buota, because I was often invited as a guest of honour (*iruwa*) to feasts elsewhere (such invitations are frequent to any foreigner as well as to visitors such as MPs). In Buota I was first and foremost the *iruwa* of my host family, which often allowed me to see *maneaba* practices from the point of view of participants other than the *iruwa*, whose role in the *maneaba* is quite strictly delineated (see Ch. 5). *Maneaba* customs were, however, remarkably similar everywhere in Tabiteuea; meetinghouse gatherings in South Tarawa were less formal.

Toren 1990, Ch. 5; Shore 1982, Ch. 5).³⁴ In this section I describe and analyse formal customs in feasts (*bootaki*), of which there are various kinds, but which all belong to the same kind of frame of action (Bateson 2000 [1972], 186–190); in other words, with certain assumptions about the social relationships between the participants.

Dancing is a particular bodily practice taking place in the *maneaba*, belonging to yet another distinct frame of action, presupposing particular social configurations. As a social practice, dancing can be examined from several perspectives. Firstly, it is practised in competing groups, which have their internal social organisation but which on the other hand are part of the community organisation. Chapter 6 examines both the social relations internal to the groups and those between the groups, as well as the position of dance groups within the village community. Secondly, dancing is necessarily social in its performance,³⁵ which involves several categories of people: traditional Kiribati dance is enacted to singing or chanting and clapping by a group of people, in front of an audience. Chapter 7 presents an extended case study of four dance celebrations, in which the overlapping and cross-cutting relationships of dance groups, performances and the village community are played out, thereby illustrating various forms of social differentiation and undifferentiation.

The principal theme in this part of the study is examination of the ways social differentiation, undifferentiation and authority come to be constructed in traditional dancing. In the concluding section, I bring this specific focus into discussion of the community more broadly, to consider the configuration of forms of differentiation and undifferentiation and notions of power in the southern Kiribati society as a whole.

³⁴ For reasons of space, in this work the comparative remarks on communal meetinghouses are limited to this chosen aspect. Communal meetinghouses are significant in many Pacific societies; for example, Richard Parmentier (1985, 842) writes that in Belau (Palau), “The meeting house [...] stands metonymically for the order of Belau culture as a whole”, which would probably apply in many other places as well and as such would merit a much wider discussion (see also e.g. van Meijl 2006 [1993] and H. Siikala 2003 on Maori meetinghouses).

³⁵ While I make use of some of the insights of performance theory (e.g. Bauman 1984; Bauman & Briggs 1990), I use ‘performance’ and ‘to perform’ in a concrete sense, not as analytical concepts. For example, a dance performance is understood as the actualization or instantiation of a particular song and its choreography.

2. THE ANCESTOR WITHOUT DESCENDANTS: DIFFERENTIATION AND NOTIONS OF POWER IN TABITEUEA

CHIEFS ARE FORBIDDEN: MYTH, HISTORY, CONCEPT

Any discussion of social differentiation and power in Tabiteuea undoubtedly begins with the name of the island. According to a Tabiteuean belief, summarised by Moarerei T. Kirion and Bureieta Karaiti (1979, 10), Tabiteuea was the first island to be created. There grew a tree called *Te Uea-ni-kai* ('Tree of Kings'), inhabited by many spirits, all of whom desired to become high chiefs. However, Nareau, the creator-being in Kiribati mythology, then banned anyone from becoming chief. The name of the island is said to derive from "*E tabu te uea*", usually translated into English as 'kings are forbidden'. This etymology was frequently cited to me by Tabiteueans and non-Tabiteueans alike. The myth introduces the Kiribati concept of *uea*, perhaps more accurately translated as 'high chief', and goes on to state that, in Tabiteuea, the *uea* is *tabu*.

While this short account does not lend itself to deep analysis, it is nonetheless very descriptive of Tabiteuean polity. That the outcome of the story is that chiefs were forbidden can easily be understood as a mythical explanation or justification for historical conditions. What is perhaps more interesting is that the spirit inhabited a *tree* (*kai*), which is one of the common conceptualisations of origin and differentiation of social systems in Austronesian societies (Fox 2006a [1995], 231), including Kiribati. Yet in this case growth, an emerging diversity, was curtailed.

A similar process is apparent in the story which is to be analysed in this chapter. The Story of Kourabi, an origin narrative accounting for social organisation, is of great importance to Buota village. In Austronesian societies generally, notions of origin and descent structure social differentiation (Fox 2006a [1995]). Fox (2006a [1995], 231) goes on to suggest that these shared structures of origin and patterns of social transformation highlight the very real differences between various Austronesian societies. While Kourabi's story exhibits some of the same social and cultural forms as the origin structures and modes of transformation discussed by Fox, Kourabi is in one sense quite an exceptional ancestor: he did not have descendants.

Another paradox in Kourabi's story is that it tells of a *uea*, a high chief, on an island where chiefs are expressly forbidden. Yet instead of being the exception proving the rule, the story was used to affirm the value as well as practise of forbidding chiefs. The Kiribati concept of *uea* is intrinsically linked to a particular clan, Karongoan Uea, which has ritual precedence, but essentially no political authority over other clans. In his Introduction to *The Story of Karongoa* (1991), Henry E. Maude (1991b, 5) notes that

only in a few cases did a Karongoa leader become high chief in a political sense. This did occasionally happen on the islands of Tarawa and Abaiang, but Abemama in the central Gilberts, in particular, and the two northernmost islands of Butaritari and Makin (which formed one political unit) had powerful dynasties ruled by *ueas*.³⁶ In cases where there were temporal *ueas*, they shared some attributes with their Polynesian colleagues in that ordinary people had to observe *tabu* when dealing with the chief, for example.

The most important insight gained from the comparative perspective used here is the idea of *tabu* as an indicator of power. The Kiribati concept of *tabu* appears to have significant parallels with its Polynesian counterparts (*tapu*, *kapu*) though perhaps because of the relative lack of chiefs, it has not received much attention. Even if the effect (and habitual translation) of Nareau's decree was that chiefs are 'forbidden', *tabu* also refers to sacredness. Members of the Karongoan Uea clan are associated with forms of such ritual power, and power can be seen as both a prerequisite and an outcome of social differentiation in Kiribati. By analysing Kourabi's story the *Uea* in this chapter, I examine Tabiteuean ideas of social differentiation in the light of local notions of power.³⁷

Kourabi's story is a local one in more than one sense, and he is first and foremost a local hero, even if he is known outside Buota village and Tabiteuea. (Kourabi's origin was elsewhere, but in the context of Kiribati oral history, that is more the norm than an exception; he also had pre-existing links to Buota.) Furthermore, Kourabi's story is not about a universal origin; it is about a local, new beginning (cf. Bellwood 2006 [1996]), a fundamental change and a reorientation of an existing local system. The story also seems to be unique in its pivotal issue. While the protagonist, Kourabi, is mentioned in some other accounts of Tabiteuea, none of them makes reference to the peculiar absence of progeny (cf. Geddes 1977, 379; Roberts 1952; Lawson 1989, 114–117); on the contrary, some of them refer to descendants though, revealingly, Roberts (1952, 320) uses the phrase "reputed descendants".

Nonetheless, the story exists within the wider corpus of Kiribati oral history and cannot be understood without some knowledge of other stories; there are frequent intertextual references to people who feature in other stories, myths and songs and who are part of genealogies. Therefore I make references to other stories insofar as they throw light on Kourabi's story. Many narratives exist in several variants, some of which

³⁶ As in many other places around the colonised world, consolidation in the nineteenth century of previously more contested chieftainships was partly achieved with the help of newly-introduced firearms (Tito et al. 1979, 24–25; Macdonald 1982, 9, 28).

³⁷ In analytical terms, in this chapter I understand power to be the potency for social reproduction. I follow A.M. Hocart (1936, 5) in assuming that traditional governing institutions – and therein the relationships to the governed – were (are) "an organisation of life", and the existence of a conception power in this particular ethnographic context is presupposed.

are more authoritative than others (see Uriam 1995), but different clans and localities also have their own stories. Since my aim is to examine an account from, and of, a particular place, I rely, when possible, on versions told by storytellers from Buota. Local sources lacking, I use published ones from other places, pointing out relevant discrepancies between different versions. The final sense in which Kourabi's story is uniquely local is that it is of great importance to Buota village, attested to in the way I received it.

Kourabi was a real person whose bones have been preserved and who lived, based on Kambati Uriam's (1995, 170–171) estimates, in the fifteenth century (cf. Roberts 1952, 319). Both native and foreign cultural historians have examined Kiribati oral tradition for its historical content and found it to provide, with reservations, important information about the past (Grimble 1989, 255–267; H.E. Maude 1991a; Uriam 1995). My purpose is different in that I am treating the Story of Kourabi and other mythical traditions as cultural rather than historical accounts. From this perspective the story is mythical, not in the sense of being untrue, but in the sense of providing information about cosmology.

Along with previous scholars working in the region, I contend that the interpretation of myths can provide a basis for reflection on the cultural concepts organising social and political life. This approach has been applied by, for example, Alan Howard (1985) in his study of Rotuman kings. To a similar end, Jukka Siikala (1991) has analysed mythical narratives from the Southern Cook Islands, showing how cosmological structures have been replicated and transformed in the structure of society and in the course of history. For me the story is interesting in two ways: because of its relationship to the cultural order and because of the concrete continuities it exhibits with present day socio-cultural structure (the topic of next chapter) of Buota village, and perhaps more widely, of Tabiteuea. Thus, in terms of its centrality to my research, I view the story as a window, or multiple windows, onto traditional Kiribati society. Certain sections offer points of entry into discussions that go beyond interpretation of the story itself to describe traditional Kiribati culture, and I make use of these to highlight central ideas concerning power. Myth is like a totem – good to think with.

Analysis is divided into two chapters. The present chapter examines early sections of the story, addressing historical background and concentrating on the protagonist, Kourabi. I begin with general contextualisation and go on to outline, through local ideas of power, forms of social transformation: the beginnings of a paradigm. Discussion of the second half of the story, in the following chapter, dwells on resultant social structure and present-day practices, focusing on a particular place, a *maneaba*.

STORY OF THE STORY

From the very beginning of my time in Buota, Tabiteuea, life was filled with references to Kourabi, or as he is often politely called, “the Elder” (*te unimwaane*³⁸): his bones in the casket hanging from the ceiling in the central *maneaba*; the Path of the Elder and the customary introduction to the village (see Ch. 3), as well as mentions of other outsiders’ interest in Kourabi’s story. Clearly the Story of Kourabi was of particular importance to the village and, considering it a good starting point, I told my host I was interested in hearing it in full. My innocent request, however, began a long chain of events, the end result of which was handed to me a few weeks before my final departure from Tabiteuea.

Right from the start there was a problem, because the person who had always told the story in the past no longer lived on the island and no one else was considered sufficiently knowledgeable or authoritative to narrate it. Therefore my host father relayed my request to the Council of Elders (*Boowin Unimwaane*), which represents the village, and eventually the Council decided that they would tell the story together. While there were a few casual jokes about putting together money to fly me to meet the storyteller, the Council gradually became convinced that the story was their joint responsibility, because it was “Buota’s thing” (*ana bwai Buota*). It was truly ‘their story’ (see Uriam 1995, 109). Also, some people had not been happy with the way the storyteller had spoken to another researcher several years earlier. So a couple of elders (*unimwaane*) were put in charge of preparing the story, which was then submitted to the Council for discussion and revision. Amidst the usual concerns of life, this took months. Nonetheless, before my departure from Buota, I was given the story, in writing rather than narrated. I was trusted with it in the expectation that it would be published in my dissertation.

Particularly in the beginning I was not expected to participate in the preparation of the story or even be present at the meetings – apparently several in the course of about eight months – where it was discussed, though in the end I did become more involved. While not expressed in so many words, it was obvious that the elders wanted to give me a finished product, rather than observing the process of producing it. I learned of what had been discussed in these meetings second hand, and in snatches of informal discussions in other contexts, as the whole affair roused some interest in the village. Partly by chance and partly because of my changed social position in the village, I came to participate in

³⁸ The noun ‘elder’ and its plural form ‘elders’ – *unimwaane*; alternative spellings *unimane*, *unimchanges* induced by the medium of writing, power *ne*, *unim’ane* – as well as the corresponding female honorific, ‘elderly lady/ladies’ – *unaine* – are some of the native Kiribati concepts frequently used in the ethnographic literature without translation, both for the singular and the plural. Both the terms indicate a respected status. In this work I use either ‘elder’/‘elders’ or ‘*unimwaane*’ for males, considering them synonymous, and in a similar manner (elderly) ‘lady’ or ‘*unaine*’ for females.

last stages of the process, towards the end of my fieldwork; I had come to have a place in the community as the guest of a local family, and as a temporary foreign resident with a varyingly conceived researcher's role.³⁹ My presence in the meetings was no longer minded and in the end it even became natural that I assist the Elders with the paperwork. What did not change was the Elders' concern that the story they gave me should be correct and finished – this was the main concern in the two Council meetings that I was able to attend.

When the chosen elders had completed their preliminary work, several months after the initial request, the papers containing the story were delivered to our house, even though the matter was yet to be discussed in a Council meeting. As it happened, by this time I was able to be present in the next meeting, when the story was examined. As the discussion was prolonged, it was decided that another meeting be devoted to the story the following week. During both meetings, I mostly stood aside when content was being discussed, but became involved in practical matters: fetching the papers, marking some of the corrections on the manuscript as requested by the elders, and offering to type up the finished version. At the end of the second meeting the manuscript was ready on three hand-written pages, with marked corrections agreed upon in the meeting, which were then given to me.⁴⁰

When the story was finished, the meeting continued with further discussion about what I was going to do with it. People were concerned because, from their perspective, previous researchers had just come to get stories from them and then disappeared, never to be heard of again, and the people of Buota do not know what happened to their tales. They hoped things would be different this time. I had explained in this and other contexts that I was going to write 'a book' (*te boki*, i.e., the dissertation) to earn my PhD degree (*beeban taokita*); the story had been given on the condition that it would be in it.⁴¹ This way it would circulate, making it even more urgent that the story they gave me be correct and finished.

³⁹ While some saw me as a researcher or doing some kind of school work, for others I probably was just a somewhat helpless foreigner whom my host family was looking after.

⁴⁰ In effect, Kourabi's story was never actually narrated to me, and hence was not recorded on an audio or video tape; it was only given to me in written form. Neither were the discussions recorded on a tape; the description that follows is based on my written notes. I deemed it out of place to ask if I could record in the meetings, given the sensitive nature of the matter and my own position.

The typing-up, though useful for me, was also an effort to reciprocate in a small way that I think was natural and even expected by the community; people were used to seeing me write (carrying a notebook around and at our house), and my notes had been helpful to the Council in a small task in the past.

⁴¹ Thus this work pertains directly to the issues of the ownership and control of ethnographic materials (see Jaarsma 2002), even though there is no space to elaborate on the topic here. I consider repatriation, that is, sending at least the completed dissertation (with the Story of Kourabi included) and other publications to Buota, an important obligation, and it was also agreed upon. In the discussion the question was also raised whether I was

During the days following the meeting, I wrote up the final version and typed it with my manual typewriter, making carbon copies: for the Council, the village and for me. Afterwards I noticed that a sentence was misleading in light of the elders' work and partly contradicted an observable fact. I went to see the chairman of the Village Council and showed him the problematic section. He agreed with my observation, and suggested my host father, a dependable elder, devise an unambiguous wording for the point in question. The key issue for the chairman was to make the correction to the copy in my possession, since it was meant for publication.

The ethnomusicologist Mary Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 113–120) relates a similar incident that took place when she visited Buota in the early 1980s, likewise illustrating, besides Kourabi's importance to Buota, a concern with giving a visitor a carefully prepared and verified item of knowledge. Lawson was interested in a song which had been composed to defend the right of the people of Buota to Kourabi's bones, as a response to challenges made by the people of another village (Lawson 1989, 119). Because the song contained information about Kourabi's genealogy, it was deemed necessary that the village elders, who had been the original source of the information, collectively give that information to the researcher. A *maneaba* meeting ensued, but eventually the elders were not able to agree on the details of the history. The elders decided to discuss the history amongst themselves to reach a consensus, and then give the result to the researcher in writing. This they did, delivering a genealogy to Lawson just before her departure (Lawson 1989, 120).⁴²

However, what happened during my fieldwork as well as apparently during Lawson's visit, also attests to pivotal issues in Kiribati oral tradition that go beyond a local peculiarity: the object-like nature of knowledge in general, as well as the inherent constitutive tension between individual and communal authorship and ownership in Kiribati oral tradition, particularly stories. Kiribati oral tradition exists in several forms: for example specialist knowledge and skills (*rabakau*), songs (*kuna*), magical formulae (*tabunea*), genealogies (*riki*) and stories (*karaki*) (for the various narrative traditions, see Uriam 1995). Such immaterial possessions have an object-like quality: privileged knowledge, stories, dances and the like are perceived to be 'held' (*taua*-) and can be

going to earn money with my book, and if so, would I give some of that money to Buota. I explained that I had never heard of anyone at our Department having made money with his/her dissertation, but if I did, I agreed part of that money would rightly go to Buota. Though beyond the scope of the present text, the background story of the story would merit a longer discussion, where one could consider, for example, power relations in the process, the ethnographer's role as the scribe, or changes induced by the medium of writing.

⁴² The result was Kourabi's genealogy, tracing his descent from an important ancestor named Akau (Lawson 1989, 120), who will also be discussed below. Pertinent to the point to be made in this chapter, the genealogy was from the early ancestor down to Kourabi, but not from Kourabi down to the present.

‘given’ (*angana*-), ‘taken’ or ‘fetched’ (*ana*-), regardless of whether they happen also to exist in a written form. According to Uriam (1995, 35), Kiribati oral tradition exists in two modes: the fixed, sacred form whose circulation is limited, and a free, secular form known generally in the community. In the former mode, items of oral tradition are valuable and carefully guarded individual or family property (which can be given out as a valuable gift, be requested or unfairly assumed), as various observers of the Kiribati society have found, in line with observations made in many other parts of the Pacific. However, concentrating here on stories (some remarks about knowledge will be made in Chapter 6), it seems that the value of the secret and the sacred is partly dependent on that which is allowed to circulate freely. What is more, there has always been an important communal element in the transmission of some stories.

Discussing narratives locally considered historical, Uriam (1995) notes that certain mythical and/or historical stories (generally parts of the most authoritative traditions) have been known to wide audiences on different islands. Narratives belonging to lesser individual clans have been kept more secret because of their concern with descent and thereby land ownership (Uriam 1995, 81–83). However, even someone possessing a clan story must give away something so as not to be accused of lying (Uriam 1995, 84). Uriam (1995, 84) points out that telling stories in metaphors is one way of sharing them without revealing anything of importance. In other words, one needs to strike a balance between giving out and withholding information.

The more widely circulating (hi)stories require public verification. According to Henry E. Maude (1991a [1963], 7, 9) and Kambati Uriam (1995, 107), traditionally one factor in the reliability of Kiribati oral narratives was that they were publicly recited with the possibility for the audience to question and amend them. Uriam (1995, 107) sees this as “perhaps the most important feature of the Gilbertese transmittal process”. Uriam (1995, 21 fn. 3) quotes an elder from Beru Island saying that collectors who have listened to stories in people’s private houses instead of the *maneaba* may have received “unpolished and false” traditions (for me too, some *unimwaane* opined that a person telling the story in private could lie as he pleased).⁴³ The aim of the exposure of a story or knowledge in the meetinghouse, a kind of cross-referencing, was to have as historically accurate a narrative as possible. Another, sometimes greater purpose was to maintain the stability

⁴³ Martin G. Silverman (1962, 430) tells about a similar attitude when doing fieldwork among the resettled Banabans in Rabi Island. When Silverman was collecting genealogies, the Banabans disapproved of his initial method of working with a few individuals, and preferred public descent group meetings be held instead. This was because a person only had the right to speak of his own line of descent, and if discussed privately, there was on the one hand a fear of making mistakes if recounting someone else’s descent, on the other, of others possibly manipulating genealogies to their advantage.

and cohesion of the community, which could lead the chroniclers to modify the stories to that end (Uriam 1995, 107).

The interplay between the individual and the communal element can also be seen in Kourabi's story; in this case the communal played the decisive role. While being in the somewhat unusual situation of lacking the storyteller, the joint revision of the story by the Council was an extension of an old practice, not a new one. A novelty, though not unheard of (see Lawson 1989, 119–120), was that the story was put down on paper and was never actually narrated to me by a story-teller, and that there was the explicit hope that it be published. The *unimwaane* held their meetings because they wanted the story to be as accurate as possible, even if the person credited with the best knowledge of the story was absent.

There was also a growing sentiment of the story being the story of Buota village, rather than one kin group only. The communal element in the authoring is relative in the sense that only a small part of the population belongs to the Council, part of which was absent because of duties elsewhere, and which, demographically speaking, is not representative of even the adult population (no women are included). Furthermore, in practice a handful of senior elders dominated the proceedings. Of the twenty-something men present in the two last meetings, six to seven addressed the whole *maneaba*, with the younger men's participation limited to a few questions. In a local sense however, the Council is acknowledged as representative (men representing their households and in some cases kin groups; see Ch. 4 for village social structure), and this was the standard manner of making any decisions concerning the village as a whole. In short, the Council of Elders as representatives of the whole community legitimately assumed responsibility for the story and the reputation it could bring Buota elsewhere.

The Council sought accuracy by, in essence, cross-checking the story from various sources – first the appointed *unimwaane* and ultimately the whole Council. It was an accountable task since, once finished, the story would be the authoritative one henceforth. When the prepared manuscript was about to be discussed for the first time, one *unimwaane* called upon the Council to really think over the story carefully so that it would be correct and right, because “you will sign it”, as he said. “It will be used (*bwainaki*), [...] those [versions] from previous times will not be good”. The pending publication led to an even greater concern for reliability, for not only were they giving the story to me but also to an audience in Kiribati as well as abroad.

These concerns could be seen in the processing of the story. Some parts were edited to ensure that the story did not contain conflicting information, either between local sources or with known stories from elsewhere. The assembly was not unanimous on all points, but a consensus was reached. In general, it is the task of the Council to see to the stability and unity of the village. Furthermore, in taking communal responsibility for the

story, the Council's stand was not unlike that of the traditional chroniclers described by Uriam (1995, 107-108). Still, for the Council, ensuring the harmony of the story with both internal and external knowledge was an integral part of getting the story right, not a political concession. This is also one expression of the value of 'meeting well' (*booraoi*) – of being compatible, uniform, even, equitable, in agreement – which will be encountered several times in the course of this work (cf. Uriam 1995, 49–50, on telling stories as 'conversation').

Another concern in the process was that because their story also was aimed at a wider world, it was important that it be understood. This meant that in some cases they deliberated on the precise wording. There were debates about some ancient words, the meanings of which were not familiar to everyone. For the benefit of intelligibility some words were replaced by more contemporary ones, and, for example, the size of an object came to be described in metres. Some, however, were opposed to modern words, maintaining that they would be oversimplifying. As one *unimwaane* said sarcastically: does everything need to be spelled out? Balancing between archaic usage and intelligibility to an outside audience, agreement was eventually reached by consensus.

Once the story was finished, no more commentary on it was offered. I was to leave soon but, more importantly, there was no need to discuss it any further. There had been extensive debate, but the deliberations and differences had been part of an incomplete matter, and one internal to the community, not for the world to see. The Council had now completed its work; the result is below.⁴⁴ The Kiribati version is reproduced here exactly as it was in text I was given; the translation into English is mine.

The story is presented in vernacular Kiribati and in English in parallel columns. The English glosses are as close as possible (though, inevitably, the glosses have resulted from my interpretations). This often results in awkward English. I do make some concessions to readability, such as introducing the verb 'to be', which does not have a single Kiribati equivalent but is in many cases included in a word (e.g., the word 'child' includes the meaning 'to be a child of'; similarly, many words function both as nouns and as verbs). I have also changed the word order in the English version, when retaining the Kiribati order would render the text incomprehensible. As I begin to analyse the story further below, I will present a freer and more readable translation, but there the reasoning behind my interpretations will hopefully be apparent. (Finally, the story can be found in both languages in a more readable form in the Appendix.)

⁴⁴ People generally saw my work to be finished as well when I had received Kourabi's story; more than one commented on how I now had nothing more left to do in Buota.



Photograph 1. *Unimwaanen Buota*, Buota elders outside Atanikarawa meetinghouse in August 2000. Not all *unimwaane* were able to be present for the photo.

THE STORY OF KOURABI (*KARAKIN KOURABI*)

N.B. Kiribati language has two types of genitive expressions: independent genitive pronouns and suffixed genitive pronouns. The difference in their meaning is significant, but cannot really be expressed in proper English. The independent genitive pronoun indicates ordinary possession. The suffixed genitive pronoun indicates a closer relationship or an integral connection between the possessor and the possessed. According to Stephen Trussel (1979, 160-162), a possessive suffix added to a noun is used when the object possessed belongs to the following categories: body parts ('his nose', 'leaves of the tree'), family relationships ('my mother'), what Trussel (1979, 161-162) terms "intimate possessions" (e.g. loin cloth, land and canoe – obviously culturally determined), states of mind and feelings ('your cry', 'their sorrow'), positional relationships ('beside you'), and nouns formed from verbs ('our going').

I want to maintain the distinction between the genitive forms because in some cases it is relevant to the interpretation, which means resorting to 'pseudo-English' expressions. A phrase using the independent genitive pronoun, like *ana unimwaane Teinai*, 'Teinai's elders', would in the Kiribati word order be glossed as 'his elders Teinai'. As the meaning would change completely in the English, I have translated independent genitive pronouns as [s]-genitives (i.e. "Teinai's elders"). Expressions using the suffixed genitive pronoun, like *natin Teinai*, 'Teinai's child'/'the child of Teinai', I have glossed in the following manner:

natin Teinai = 'child-of-Teinai' *maneabana* = 'maneaba-of-his' ('his maneaba')

Karakin Kourabi

1 *Kourabi bon natin Teinai ma Nei*
 2 *Teuia ma ana unimwane Teinai ake a*
 3 *mena i nanon maneabana are i*
 4 *Tabontebike i Nuka i Beru. Ai ngaia*
 5 *are e atongaki Kourabi bwa te nati ni*
 6 *karianako, te nati*
 7 *n bwaboia ke te nati*
 8 *Taneaba.*

9 *Teinai ma Teuia bon tibutorun*
 10 *Akau ma ngaia are natiia ae*
 11 *Kourabi bon te tibu muamwano iroun*
 12 *Akau are e tekateka ni maneabana are*
 13 *Atanikarawa i Temanoku*
 14 *i Tabiteuea Meang.*

15 Rikirakena iaon Beru

16 *Ngke e bungiki ao e koro-butoaki*
 17 *ma ni kabaneaki raoi arona ma*
 18 *ni katokaki i aon ana 'ati ni kana'*
 19 *are kanoana bwa te un, te makuri ao*
 20 *te mauri.*

21 *Ngke e nooria tinana are Teuia bwa*
 22 *e a tia raoi arona*
 23 *ni karaoaki ma ni wantongaki irouia*
 24 *tibuna ma ana karo ake i aon*
 25 *Beru, ao e a tuangaki iroun tinana*
 26 *bwa e na butia Teinai bwa e na nako*
 27 *ni kawaria kanoan Akau ake i*
 28 *Temanoku i Tabiteuea Meang.*
 29 *E katauaki ana bubuti ao e a mananga*
 30 *mai Beru nako Tabiteuea Meang*
 31 *nakon te kaawa ae Temanoku.*

32 *Ngke e a kaneneia te maneaba ae*
 33 *Atanikarawa, ao e taetae Obwaia*
 34 *nakoia natina ake Beiatu, Taoroba,*
 35 *Kobuti ao Naibwabwa ni kaangai:*
 36 *Taraia bwa te tabo are e bakarereia iai*
 37 *ao kam kamaua naba.*

The Story-of-Kourabi

Kourabi was truly the child-of-Teinai with Ms Teuia with Teinai's elders who were in the *maneaba*-of-his which is in Tabontebike in Nuka in Beru. Like this [it is why] that it was uttered [that] Kourabi was a child of make-all-appearing-at-the-same-time [?], a child of the-maker-of-sweet-scent, or the child of marked-land [?].

Teinai and Teuia were truly great-grandchildren of Akau, and that who was the child-of-theirs, Kourabi, was truly the great-great-grandchild of Akau, who sat in the *maneaba*-of-his which is Atanikarawa in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North.

The growing-up-of-his on Beru

When he was born and his umbilical cord was cut, and for the manner-of-his to be finished well and to be placed on his 'initiation stone', the contents-of-its being courage/anger, work and well-being.

When the mother-of-his, who was Teuia, saw that the character-of-his was finished well to have been made and educated carefully by the grandparents-of-his and his parents who were in Beru, and he was informed by the mother-of-his that he would ask Teinai if he would go to visit the descendants-of-Akau, who were in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North. His request was accepted, and he set out from Beru to Tabiteuea North to the village of Temanoku.

When he was passing by the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa, and Obaia spoke to the children-of-his, who were Beiatu, Taoroba, Kobuti and Naibwabwa, like this: "Look, for the place which he goes directly to, and you will make room as well".

38 *Ngke e a roko i tabon te maneaba mai*
 39 *maiaki ao e a borio naba ni kaea*
 40 *tanimaiaikin te maneaba i maeao*
 41 *te boua n nuka.*
 42 *Ai ngaia are e teirake Beiatau ni*
 43 *kamwawaa mwaina n tekateka irarikin*
 44 *tarina are Taoroba n tanimainiku*
 45 *ao Kourabi e tekateka imwina i*
 46 *Tanimaiaiki.*

When he came to the corner-of-the-*maneaba* from the south and he went toward the lagoon to reach the southern-side-of-the-*maneaba* to the west of the post-of-the-middle.

It was Beiatau who stood up, to make room before him, to sit next to his sibling who was Taoroba on the eastern side, and Kourabi sat after him in the southern side.

47 *N tikuna irarikiia*
 48 *tibuna ao a kabanea*
 49 *arona n te aro are*
 50 *e a riki bwa te aomata ae Tabu*
 51 *ma ni kamaraia*
 52 *ao n aki iein.*

During the stay-of-his at the side of the grandparents-of-his, and they finished well the-character-of-his in a way that a human being came into existence who was *Tabu* and *kamaraia* [causing ill luck or death; a sorcerer] and is not to marry.

53 ***Arona irarikiia***
 54 ***Tibuna***

**The-ways-of-his beside
the grandparents-of-his**

55 *Inanon tikuna irarikiia tibuna*
 56 *ao a rang ni maiti kakai ma kamimi*
 57 *ake a riki n ana tai ni maiu*
 58 *n aron aikai:*

During the stay-of-his beside the grandparents-of-his and very many were the miracles and wonders which came into existence during his time of life in the manner of these:

59 *1.) Ngke e wenewene ao e kainnaoa*
 60 *uningan atuna ao*
 61 *e a ti butokaurake naba i aan atuna*
 62 *wakan te kai ae te ibi ao are e a reke*
 63 *naba bwa uningana are e*
 64 *rang ni mweraoi iai.*

1.) When he lay down and he longed for a pillow-of [for]-the-head-of-his and just getting ready to blossom under his head was a root-of-the-*ibi*-tree and it resulted in the pillow of-his [with] which he was comfortable indeed.

65 *2.) N te tairiki teuana ao e a bo-rara*
 66 *bwa e kabuebue te tairiki anne ao e*
 67 *taku: Tera ngke e reke te bwai are N na*
 68 *kamwaitoroai iai. Akea bwa*
 69 *e a oro naba te ang Maeao ae korakora*
 70 *ma ni kakoroa te ati n ari teuana ae*
 71 *abwakina tao 1.5 meter ao e koro i on*
 72 *te kainga ae Tebunnanti ao e anaki*
 73 *irouia kain Buota bwa ana*
 74 *bwai ni kamwaitoro.*

2.) One evening and he was overheated for it was hot that evening, and he thought: What if a thing were found that I would make myself cool with. Behold!
The hard western wind hit to cut away a [select piece] of stone [?], whose length was perhaps 1,5 metres and it was cut on the *kainga* of Tebunnanti and it was fetched by the people of Buota to be his thing-to-make-cool.

75 *3.) Ngke e tebotebo i nanon neina, ao e*

3.) When he bathed in the pond-of-his, and he

76 *a manga taku: Tera ngke e*
 77 *a riki naba te bwai teuana i aau*
 78 *are N na toka iai n tebotebo be aonga*
 79 *n aki bo ma te bokaboka. Ao akea bwa*
 80 *e a riki naba ana ati ni katoka*
 81 *i aana ao are e a tebotebo ma n aki*
 82 *bo ma te bokaboka.*

thought yet again: What if a thing
 came into existence the underneath-of-mine,
 which I would mount on to bathe so that I would
 not come into contact with mud. And behold,
 there also emerged his stone-to-mount-on
 in the underneath-of-his, on which he bathed not
 coming into contact with the mud.

83 *4.) Ngke e a kara ao e a manga*
 84 *kainmanoa ekona ao e a roko naba n*
 85 *aron ake mai eta. Te kamimi bwa ekona*
 86 *anne bon te Ri ni wae man te*
 87 *nimoimoi ni wae nakon te bubua ni wae*
 88 *ae abuwakina 1.5 meter are*
 89 *a uotia naba bunnanti bwa ekona.*

4.) When he was very old and once more he
 longed for a cane-of-his, and it also came in
 ways, which are from above [?]. The marvel is that
 that cane-of-his was truly the leg bone from the
 knee to the ankle,
 whose length was 1,5 metre, which
 a crowd of spirits brought to be the cane-of-his.

90 *Te kanaanokawaki bwa akea ngkai*
 91 *rabwatan uningana ao okona bwa a*
 92 *bue n te bata are a kakawakinaki iai.*
 93 *Ana ati ni kamaitoro ao ana ati ni*
 94 *katoka*
 95 *a teimatoa n tiku rabwataia ni*
 96 *karoko boong aikai.*

[It is] saddening that now there are no
 bodies-of-his-pillow and of-his-cane for they
 burned in the hut in which they were taken care of.
 His stone-to-make-cool and his stone-to-
 mount-on[,]
 the bodies-of-theirs stand hard to remain
 until these days.

97 **Arona imwin matena**

Ways-of-his after the death-of-his

98 *Ngke e a bon kara*
 99 *be e a tawa kunna ao e a mate ao*
 100 *a baireia unimwanen Buota ma*
 101 *kaina ni kabane bwa*
 102 *e na aki taunaki rabatana ao a katikua*
 103 *n te bata teuana ni kabanea raoi*
 104 *irikona iai. Imwina a karau ni kaitiaki*
 105 *riina ao a booti ni*
 106 *kawakinaki i nanon te bwaro teuana*
 107 *ae atongaki bwa te Rawati ao a*
 108 *katinetinea inanon maneabana ae*
 109 *Atanikarawa bwa nnena ni maeka*
 110 *i nanon rooro ma rooro.*

When he was truly very old
 for the skin-of-his was bleached and he died, and
 the elders of Buota's decided with
 all people-of-its [Buota's] that
 the body-of-his was not to be buried and they put it
 in a hut to finish well
 flesh-of-its. After that they carefully cleaned
 the bones-of-his and they put them together to be
 taken care of in a basket
 which is called *rawati*, and they
 hung it up inside the *maneaba*-of-his of
 Atanikarawa for it to be place-of-his to live
 during generations and generations.

112 **Tinetinena ni Maneabana ae** 113 **Atanikarawa**

Hanging-of-his in the maneaba-of-his of **Atanikarawa**

114 *Ngkana e a mwebuaka n tiku ni*

If he is in discomfort in staying in

115	<i>maneabana ke</i>	the <i>maneaba</i> -of-his or
116	<i>e na karaoaki Atanikarawa ao ngkanne</i>	Atanikarawa is to be repaired, and then
117	<i>e a karuoaki irouia kain te Katanrake</i>	he is taken down by people of the te Katanrake
118	<i>nakon maneabana ae Tekiakia n ana</i>	to <i>maneaba</i> -of-his of Tekiakia on his
119	<i>kainga ae Kabubuarengana.</i>	<i>kainga</i> of Kabubuarengana.
120	<i>Kaokana nakon Maneabana</i>	Returning-of-his to the <i>maneaba</i>-of-his
121	<i>Ngkana e a tangiraki okina nakon</i>	If the returning-of-his to Atanikarawa is desired
122	<i>Atanikarawa</i>	
123	<i>irouia kain Buota ao a na</i>	by the people-of-Buota, and these things are
124	<i>riai ni kabouaki bwaai aikai:</i>	appropriately to be made-new:
125	<i>1) Oon te maneaba Te Matantongo</i>	1) The fence-of-the- <i>maneaba</i> Te Matantongo
126	<i>2) Inaai ake a inrake</i>	2) The <i>iinais</i> [mats] which are oriented towards
127		the ocean side
128	<i>3) Inaai ake 4 ake inaia taari</i>	3) The <i>iinais</i> which are the <i>iinais</i> -of-the-same-
129	<i>ake 4 ake</i>	sex-siblings of whom there are four, [and] which
130	<i>a in nako iang</i>	are oriented towards north
131	<i>4) Ngkana e mka rauna</i>	4) If the thatch-of-its [Atanikarawa's] is worn out,
132	<i>ao e na kabouaki naba ma ngkana e</i>	and it is to be renewed as well but if it
133	<i>bon maiu ao ti bwaai</i>	truly is in good condition, only those things of
134	<i>ake 3 ake a na kabouaki.</i>	which there are three are to be made-new.
135	<i>Ngkana a tia raoi ni bobonga bwaai ni</i>	When all the things are finished well to be used
136	<i>kabane irouia kain Buota ao</i>	by the people-of-Buota and
137	<i>a tia raoi naba aia mwakuri kain te</i>	the people-of-Te-Katanrake's works are finished
138	<i>Katanrake ao e na koteaki te bong</i>	well too, and a day will be appointed
139	<i>teuana irouia I-Buota ma kain</i>	by Buota people with the people-of-
140	<i>te Katanrake are e nang tebokaki iai</i>	Te-Katanrake in which he will be bathed
141	<i>ao ai bon ana bong naba n okira</i>	and that is truly also his day of returning to
142	<i>maneabana ae Atanikarawa.</i>	the <i>maneaba</i> -of-his of Atanikarawa.

LINES OF POWER: THE KARONGOA CLAN

The story begins by placing Kourabi in relation to his forefathers, establishing Kourabi's high-ranking and prestigious descent. As intertextual references, the names mentioned connect him to the first Kiribati clan (*boti/iinaki*) to be founded, Karongoa, and consequently, to a source of power.

Kourabi was truly the child of Teinai with Ms Teuia with Teinai's *unimwaane* who were in his *maneaba* which is in Tabontebike in Nuka in Beru. (Lines 1–4)

[...]

Teinai and Teuia were truly great-grandchildren of Akau, and that who was their child, Kourabi, was truly the great-great-grandchild of Akau, who sat in his *maneaba* which is Atanikarawa in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North. (9–14)

The opening paragraphs confirm Kourabi's position within the leading clan (*boti/iinaki*), to which Kourabi has two connections. Other narratives, to be cited shortly, will show that the mention of the Tabontebike meetinghouse in Nuka in Beru indicates that on his father Teinai's side, Kourabi is descended from the first-born in an original group of siblings, who are the ancestors of Karongoa. On both his father's and his mother's side Kourabi is descended from Akau, who was the third-born member of that sibling group. The latter two links are emphasised over the first connection, because the descent from Akau, whose story will also be summarised below, places Kourabi in a specific relationship with the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa in Temanoku (Buota), in Tabiteuea, and because Akau is of special importance to Temanoku/Buota village.

The Karongoa clan, to which the names link Kourabi, holds the claim to precedence in Kiribati. In Kiribati the notion and value of precedence is expressed in the concept of 'the first thing' (*moanibwai*). To be *moanibwai* entails the right of first speech, as well as the general recognition of precedence, of being the first. Furthermore, Karongoa is the founder of the *maneaba* institution in the Gilberts (see Grimble 1989; Latouche 1984; H. E. Maude 1991a [1963]; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991). Karongoa, specifically its eldest branch Karongoa Uea, is called 'the first thing' (*moanibwai*) and it has the highest ritual status of all clans (*boti/iinaki*).

There are many versions from the different Gilbert Islands of how the world came to be (see Uriam 1995, 119-127 for the narrative traditions and their differences), but in the Karongoa narrative tradition Samoa (*Taamoa*) was the first earthly place to come into existence, and the Karongoa clan emerged in conjunction with it. After Nareau, the creator-being in Kiribati mythology, had organised the world, Samoa emerged and there grew a tree called Kaintikuaba ('Tree of Lands') inhabited by the ancestors of various Kiribati clans. This tree was eventually burned down due to mischief and the people were dispersed – an event called 'The Breaking of the Tree of Lands' (Uruakin Kaintikuaba) – and migrated to the Gilbert Islands.

From the outset, the world of men⁴⁵ was differentiated. *The Story of Karongoa* (1991) tells that Te Kai-n-Tikuaba

⁴⁵ Kiribati oral history can be divided into three periods according to the nature of the protagonists: spirits (*anti*), spirit-people (*antimaamata*) and people (*aomata*) (Maude 1991a [1963], 6; Uriam 1995, 53–55). There is no precise agreement as to when the age of spirit-people ended and the age of people begun, but according to H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 7), it is usually considered to have begun with the arrival of the first migrants from Samoa to

[...] was the backbone of the Father of Nareau, Rikin-te-atibu ['emergence of a stone', 'stone created']. It grew to be a tall tree, and the first root, that is the chief root, turned back again to the trunk, and there came forth Tematawarebwe (his real name was Tanentoa, and his name when he seized Beru was Tanentoa ni Beru). All the people of his tree had their places on the tree. There were those at the top of the tree; those on the side facing east; those on the side facing west; and those on the trunk. [...]

(*The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 23, emphasis added)

According to *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 24), those on the western side of the Kaintikuaba tree were the ancestors of Karongoa, and on the trunk there lived a band of siblings: Tematawarebwe, who was the first born and also called Tanentoa, his brothers Kourabi I⁴⁶, Akau, Baretoka, Buatara, and their sister Nei Ariki. In the end, the people living on the trunk destroyed the tree because those at the top had insulted them. According to *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 72), Tanentoa and Kourabi I (in other versions, other Karongoa members [Uriam 1995, 134]) are the ones burning down the tree, causing the inhabitants to scatter. Narratives from different islands or families vary as to whom they describe as living on the tree, why it was broken, as well as the other events which took place in Samoa, but Kaintikuba is the centre of most of the stories.

Kaintikuaba and its destruction and other events are metaphorical ways of discussing the life of the Kiribati community in Samoa, and its disintegration caused by internal disputes (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 7). In his introduction to a collection of Gilbertese oral traditions, H.E. Maude (1994, xvi) notes how a tree is a powerful Kiribati symbol of the unity of a community (also see Luomala 1985). The Kiribati word and concept of 'tree', *kai*, is complex, however; its other meanings range from 'branch' and 'stick' or any elongated object to 'a person', 'method', 'dance', 'punishment' and 'victory' (a discussion of *kai* in Chapter 6 aims to further unpack the concept's complexities). In the present context the primeval tree in Samoa illustrates nicely the Austronesian origin-structures discussed by James Fox (2006a [1995], 231): an original unity dividing into multiple origins. To begin with, there is an order of precedence, followed by a process of genealogical differentiation, which is structured by elder/younger opposition and, to a lesser extent, male/female opposition (see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]; cf. Fox 2006a [1995], 237–238). This is at least the ideal process; once migrants settled on the various Gilbert Islands, the process became more complicated, diverged on different islands, and also other ideals came into play.

the Gilberts.

⁴⁶ As a rule, if namesakes do not have distinguishing epithets, I will leave the oldest one as it is, and mark the representatives of subsequent generations with Roman numerals II, III etc. Kourabi's case is an exception however, where I reserve the name without the ordinal to the protagonist of the Story of Kourabi, who would actually be Kourabi II.

The latest estimate places the historical migration from Samoa in the thirteenth century A.D. (Uriam 1995, 168; cf. Grimble 1989, 268–294 and H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 7; 1994, 137;).⁴⁷ The Gilbert Islands are likely to have first been settled 2,000–3,000 years ago from Northern Vanuatu (Bellwood et al. 1995; Kiste 1994, 10) as part of the migrations of Austronesian-speaking peoples, and the migration to and from Samoa are examples of the many movements that probably followed the initial settlement. Some legends, as well as modern archaeological and linguistic evidence, indicate firstly, that the Gilberts were already populated before the arrival of the people from Samoa, and secondly, that they were populated by the same people who had previously left for Samoa (Grimble 1989, 268–294; Kirion & Karaiti 1979, 10–11; Uriam 1995, 60). Thus, from another point of view, conquerors from Samoa arriving in the Gilberts were returning to the islands (see Uriam 1995, 60).

The significance of the migration from Samoa is obvious in that some families can trace their genealogies to this time, and many Kiribati people consider their families to have originated from Samoa (Kirion & Karaiti 1979, 10). This origin is prestigious, and being able to trace it is a claim of precedence (see discussion on Akau below).⁴⁸ Uruakin Kaintikuaba and the subsequent migration to the Gilbert Islands are constitutive events in Kiribati history in that they are the origin of the overall social system in the Gilbert Islands. As the Karongoa people migrated to the Gilbert Islands, they established their rule, which included the *maneaba* system, through warfare and marriage alliances on most islands, incorporating features of the existing social system (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]; Uriam 1995, 140–144).

The arrival of the migrants from Samoa in the Gilberts again shows some common Austronesian themes. One can conceptualise an encounter between ‘people of the land’ and ‘people of the sea’. According to Uriam (1995, 23, 57–58), the indigenes were dark-skinned people who had dark-skinned gods; the invaders and their gods were fair-skinned. When the dark-skinned and the light-skinned deities appear together in oral tradition, the setting is usually one of competition or battle, from which the dark-

⁴⁷ According to Uriam (1995, 163), genealogical sequences are the most reliable way to date events in Gilbertese oral history. Earlier estimates by Sir Arthur Grimble and Henry E. Maude used a twenty-five-year span for a generation in the genealogical timing of events (Grimble 1989, 275; Maude 1991a [1963], 7, fn. 7). Grimble (1989, 268–294) had dated the migration from Samoa to 22–25 generations from the 1920s [25–28 generations ago], therefore as late as 1500 A.D. Maude (1991a [1963], 7, fn. 7) revised this to 18–22 generations back from 1930 [21–25 generations from today; ca. 1400 A.D.]. Uriam (1995, 166–167) deems 30 years per generation to be more accurate, and places Uruakin Kaintikuaba 21–25 generations back from the year 1900 (168) [24–29 generations from today], which times the event between 1200–1300 A.D.

⁴⁸ Therefore, while the literature agrees that the historical connections are real, highlighting them is part of local ideology, placing value on ‘Samoa’ as a Kiribati cultural construct (an origin place).

skinned most often emerge as victors (Uriam 1995, 25). Thus the settlers' or Karongoa's history only presents one side.

Of the original settlers, two are pertinent to Kourabi's case, Akau and Tematawarebwe. After the disintegration of the tree, Tematawarebwe (Tanentoa), the eldest or the chief root, left Samoa with Kourabi I and Buatara; Akau went his separate way (see below). Tematawarebwe eventually settled on the island of Beru in the southern Gilberts. There, in the village of Nuka, Tematawarebwe established a meetinghouse called Tabontebike, which was constructed from the logs of the meetinghouse that Nareau the Creator had built in Samoa, as its copy (Latouche 1984, 221–229; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 25–26). Descendants of Tematawarebwe acquired the highest ranking place (*boti*) in Tabontebike, Karongoan Uea, which was later occupied by Kourabi's father, Teinai, as Kourabi's story recounts.

The apical ancestor: Tematawarebwe the first-born

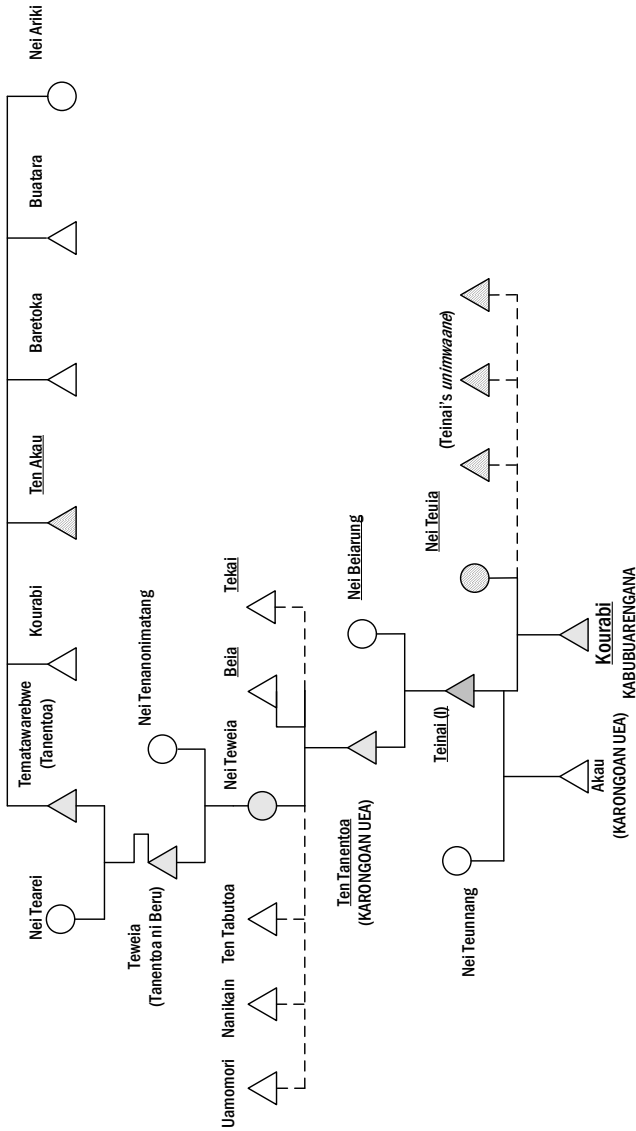
Teinai (Kourabi's F) not only occupied the Tabontebike *maneaba* but was in the leading position there. This is implied by the use of the suffixed genitive pronoun – “Teinai who was in his *maneaba* [*maneabana*] of Tabontebike” – but narratives and genealogies published elsewhere (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991) specifically reveal that Teinai had inherited his place in Tabontebike in a direct line from its founder. Tematawarebwe was Teinai's great-great-grandfather (Kourabi's FFMFF): Tematawarebwe had a son named Teweia – also called Tanentoa ni Beru – whose daughter Nei Teweia had a son named Ten Tanentoa, who inherited what became the leading *boti*, Karongoan Uea. Ten Tanentoa was a Nati-ni-buoka ('child of help', see below), meaning that his paternity was attributed to several men: Uamomori, Nanikain, Ten Tabutoa, and the culture heroes

LEGEND FOR GENEALOGIES

	Female.		People through whom descent is reckoned are shaded in gray.
	Male.	<u>NAME</u>	Capitalised names are those of <i>boti</i> / <i>tinaki</i> (clans).
	Relationship of descent.	<u>Name</u>	Underlined names are links to other genealogies.
	Relationship of sibship.		
	Relationship of marriage.		
	Consecutive marriages (earlier one above).	⋮	Conjectured/uncertain relationship.
	Relationship of a 'helping' father to the mother of the <i>nati ni buoka</i> .		People mentioned in the Story of Kourabi are marked with diagonal stripes.

Figure1. Legend for genealogies.

KOURABI’S DESCENT FROM TEMATAWAREBWE



Genealogy 1. Kourabi's descent from Tematawarebwe. Siblings and spouses not relevant in this context have been omitted from this chart.

Beia and Tekai⁴⁹. Kourabi's father, Teinai, was the eldest son of Ten Tanentoa and Nei Beiarung (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 21). Therefore, through his father's mother Nei Teweia, Teinai was a direct descendant from the eldest branch of Kaintikuaba. It is noteworthy that here the headship of the Karongoan Uea clan has passed on through one female link in the chain; even with a strong patrilineal and primogenitural ideal and preference, female links are recognised as legitimate, particularly under special circumstances (see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 25–27; cf. Grimble 1989, 210–215).

However, Teinai's son by his first wife Nei Teunnang, Akau II, inherited the *boti* of Karongoan Uea over Kourabi, who was the son of Teinai with his second wife Nei Teuia. As will be discussed below, Kourabi then followed other ties in establishing his title. Before that, however, the Story of Kourabi tells of another issue that strengthens Kourabi's status.

Children of many fathers

Kourabi was truly the child of Teinai with Ms Teuia and with Teinai's elders (1–2) [...] This is why Kourabi was called a child of making-all-appearing-at-the-same-time, a child of the-maker-of-sweet-scent, or the child of marked-land. (4–8)

Kourabi's standing is further enhanced by his being the son of not only Teinai with Teuia, but the son of Teinai “with Ms Teuia *and* with his *unimwaane*” in the Tabontebike meetinghouse.⁵⁰ The *unimwaane* “helped in his being begot”, as one of the Buotan elders said sarcastically, when the Council was deliberating how explicit the wording should be. In Kiribati mythology, for a child to have several genitors is not considered supernatural, but an element with special social significance. Namely, ‘a child of many’ (*natin karianako*) can inherit land or other possessions such as knowledge or skills from all his fathers (H.E. Maude 1991b, endnote 14, 20). Several jointly begot children, also called *nati-ni-buoka* (lit. ‘child of help’), can be found in Kiribati mythology: in Kourabi's line, Kourabi's grandfather (FF) Ten Tanentoa mentioned above, Kourabi's grandmother Nei Beiarung, and Obaia I had been ‘children of many’.

Other names for a child of many fathers are *nati-ni-kauatabo* (‘child-of two places’), *natin bwaboia* (‘a child of the maker-of-sweet-scent’) and *natin Taneaba* (‘a child of

⁴⁹ Beia and Tekai are usually spoken of together (Beia-ma-Tekai), almost conflated into one person, although some narratives describe things they did separately. According to Uriam (1995, 22, fn. 5 and 43, fn. 16), some oral traditions indeed suggest that Beia-ma-Tekai would have been one person, Beiamatekai (see e.g. Grimble 1989, 280, 282 and cf. 225). On the other hand, Grimble (1989, 282) cites information according to which there would have been three generations of Beia(-ma-Tekai).

⁵⁰ The Story of Karongoa (1991, 49), identifies one of the elders as Kourabi's father, but in Buota it is clear that Kourabi was ‘a child of many’, fathered by all the *unimwaane* in Tabontebike *maneaba*.

marked land'; see below); the last two of which are used in the story. I was told that the terms, 'a child of the-maker-of-sweet-scent (*natin Bwaboia*)' and 'a child of sweet-scent' (*natin Boiarara*), refer to a liaison between a person and someone other than his or her spouse: when someone goes to meet his/her lover, they will make themselves attractive with, for example, flower-scented coconut oil. Yet in the context of 'children of many', the child is not born out of wedlock but is legitimate.

The last designation given to Kourabi is *natin Taneaba*. While I cannot ascertain the correct translation, I have tentatively translated it as 'a child of marked land', from *tane* 'mark, trace, print' (Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *tane*) and *aba* 'land'.⁵¹ It would then refer to a piece of land acquired in inheritance from the other fathers; a land marked for the purpose.⁵² Being 'a child of many' then was a favourable position, indicating Kourabi's status within his father's family. It might also imply that Kourabi would have been entitled to land elsewhere, but what eventually came to be utilised in his search for inheritance were his kinship ties to Akau, Tematawarebwe's brother.

The twofold ancestor: Akau the younger brother

Teinai and Teuia were truly great-grandchildren of Akau, and that who was their child, Kourabi, was truly the great-great-grandchild of Akau, who sat in his *maneaba* which is Atanikarawa in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North. (9–14)

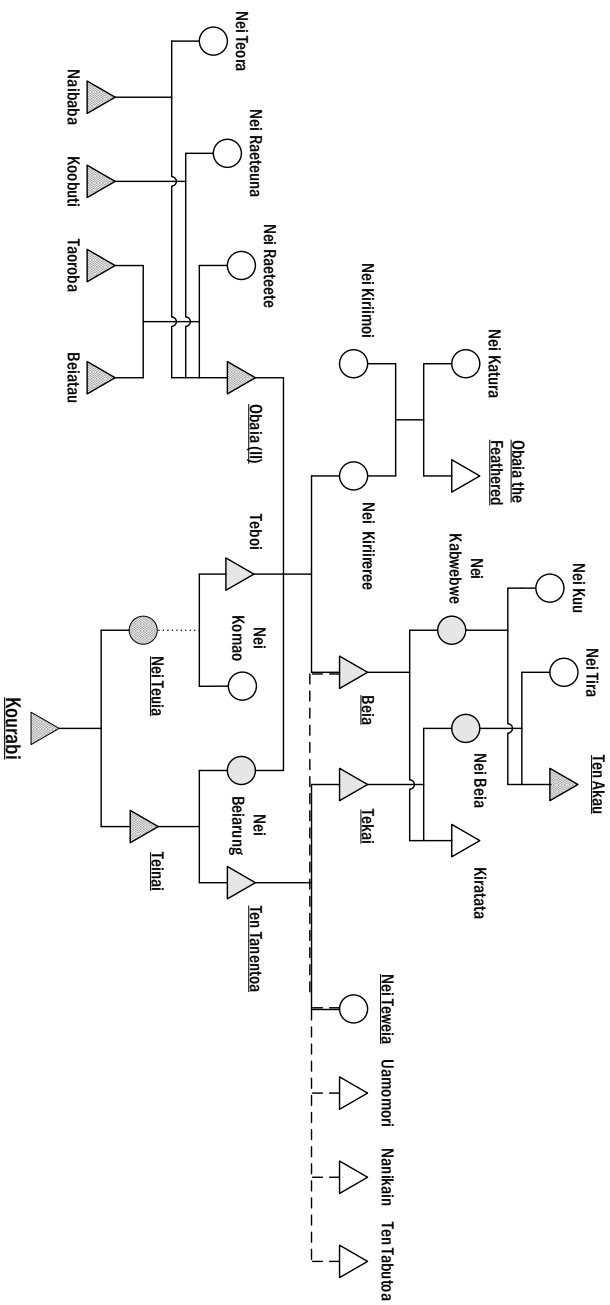
At the end of his voyage from Samoa, Akau settled in Temanoku (Buota), Tabiteuea. At Akau's arrival, the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa was presided over by Obaia the Feathered, the establisher of Atanikarawa (the origin of the *maneaba* will be described in the next chapter), who was the grandfather (MF) of the Obaia in Kourabi's story.

Akau was the light-skinned stranger from Samoa, arriving, as a dance song performed by Buota dancers in 1999–2000 chronicles, surfing the waves in his canoe, water dripping from the sails, talking war. Akau successfully claimed the lands of Obaia the Feathered when Akau's grandson Beia (in some accounts, Beia with Tekai) married Obaia's daughter Nei Kirirere (*The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 93–94; H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1994, 198).

⁵¹ Furthermore, in the discussions about the story, the word also appeared in the form *Taneabaki*, where the ending *-ki* could be a suffix indicating passive voice, but not necessarily so.

⁵² Here the concept of *nati-ni-buoka* bears resemblance to the custom of *tinaba*. In *tinaba* a woman provides services or sleeps with her husband's elderly male relative and gains a grant of land or other property in return (Grimble 1957, 100–108; 1989, 177–194). Much detested by the European colonisers, *tinaba* was eventually made a punishable offence, though apparently the custom was not easily erased (see Grimble 1957, 100–108).

KOURABI'S DESCENT FROM AKAU



Genealogy 2. Kouwabi's descent from Akau. Showing Kouwabi's descent from Akau through Teinai and Nei Teuia, as well as the descent of Obiaia and his sons from Akau. Siblings and spouses not relevant in this context have been omitted from this chart.

Beia and Nei Kirirere or both Beia and Tekai with Nei Kirirere are attributed a number of children in the contexts of different narratives. According to a story in Henry and Honor Maude's (H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1994, 198) collection, the first-born child of Beia-ma-Tekai and Kirirere was Teboi, who married Nei Komao in Onotoa. Conjecturally, Kourabi's mother Teuia could be their daughter because Teboi is mentioned as having gone to Onotoa, and Teinai is said to have married Tauia in Onotoa (*The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 49). The younger Obaia, who was in Atanikarawa to meet Kourabi, was the son of Beia and Nei Kirirere and therefore Teuia's FB. Obaia, then, was a descendant of both the original landowner (Obaia the Feathered) as well as the usurper (Akau). Beia and Kirirere also had Nei Beiarung, who married Ten Tanentoa, Teinai's father. Therefore Teinai too was a descendant of Akau.

In fact, Kourabi's parents were cross-cousins, children of (half-)siblings.⁵³ Their common grandfathers were Beia-ma-Tekai, though versions vary as to whether they were both grandfathers to both or if there were others 'helping' them. According to *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 93, Genealogy 7), Beia was the father of Nei Beiarung (Teinai's M and, conjecturally, Teuia's FZ), Tekai was the father of Ten Tanentoa (Teinai's F). Ten Tanentoa, whose mother was Nei Teweia, had been a 'helped child', fathered by four other men in addition to Tekai, including Beia. Beia and Tekai, for their part, were sons of Kiratata of Tarawa, with his first and second wives respectively. In turn, Beia and Tekai's mothers were both daughters to Akau with his first and second wives respectively; in other words, they were half-sisters. Consequently, Kourabi through his FMFM and MFFM, was doubly descended from Akau.

The relevance of mentioning Akau in Kourabi's story was not at first evident to everyone in the meetings which focused on the story, especially since by the time Kourabi arrives in Temanoku, Akau is no longer there. One of the elders who had been preparing the story explained, however, why Akau should be in it:

"Akau is the essence [oi] of the whatsit [...] he is the first distinguished [one ...], the first to come into existence after Samoa, and from him the people of Buota originate. [He is] the fore [part] of the tree [kai]."

Thus the significance of emphasising Kourabi's descent from Akau is twofold, confirming Kourabi's connection to both Samoa and to the particular location of Temanoku in Tabiteuea. Akau's origin in Samoa brings prestige to his descendants, both

⁵³ By later standards, Teinai and Teuia would have been far too closely related to marry, but, according to one of the *unimwaane*, "in those days they did not care", "there was 'no kin[ship] in those days'" (see also *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, fn. 18). The exogamy rule is usually expressed by saying that the "fourth generation goes free", meaning that third cousins are allowed to marry. Teinai and Teuia would have been half first cousins: Beia-ma-Tekai or in some accounts Beia alone was grandfather to both.

Kourabi and the people of Buota. The elder's explanation underlines Akau's precedence, status as the first, in the last sentence also by using the key metaphor of the tree [*kai*]. On the basis of this comment, it seems that while Akau is younger in relation to Tematawarebwe, Akau has local precedence: he is the first for Buota and is *their* link to Samoa; hence the stress on Kourabi's connections to Akau.⁵⁴ Kourabi is linked to Temanoku, the meetinghouse and the land through Akau's conquest of them, but also through his mother to Obaia the Feathered (Kourabi's MFMF), which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In addition to the status of precedence derived from Samoa, the importance of the Karongoa membership, through both Tematawarewbe and Akau, is that it afforded Kourabi a certain access to power.

Karongoa clan and power

The Karongoa clan is associated with several kinds of power, to which its members are privy. In general, a high-ranking clan or a chief in general has more *mwaaka* (alternative spellings include *maka*, *m'aka*, *mwaka*), or, power, than others. *Mwaaka* is possibly a cognate with *mana* (Lambert 1978, 87) but there seems to be very little discussion about the Kiribati concept. Arthur Grimble (1989, 213) defines, in passing, *maka* as the power emanating from an ancestral deity (*anti/antimaaomata*). Bernd Lambert (1978) writes about an attempted coup and the ensuing struggle over succession of the chiefly office in the northern Makin-Butaritari chiefdom. Most men fought for the former chief's eldest brother and his son (against the outsider), because they "had power to hold the office (*nakoa*) of chief because it surely belonged to them" (Lambert 1978, 87).

A form of power explicitly linked with Karongoa is *kamaraia*. Literally, *ka-maraia* means 'to make or to cause magical charm/sorcery/evil spell/curse/bad luck' and refers to a person with ominous supernatural powers. On the other hand, Uriam (1995, 7) translates *kamaraia* as 'sacrosanct'. In the first Gilbertese-English dictionary Hiram Bingham translated *kamaraia* as "place which when visited is said to occasion death", "capable of producing death miraculously" (A Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1953 [1908], q.v. *kamaraia*). According to Bingham, *marai*a was suffering resulting from disrespect or ill-treatment of the gods (q.v. *Marai*a) – or the chief, says Lambert (1978, 83). According to Arthur Grimble (1989, 115, 219), the head or a senior member of Karongoa Uea *boti* (*iinaki*) was considered *kamaraia* and anyone daring to contradict such a person would be met by a curse or sudden death. The leader of Karongoa wore a headpiece, an amulet made of young coconut leaves called *bunna ni kamaraia*. As will

⁵⁴ In the incident involving Lawson, summarised above, what the elders deemed relevant was also Kourabi's descent from Akau.

be discussed below, the chief had acquired his *kamaraia*-power from the gods while being inaugurated ('made' into a chief). For example, the famous Beia-ma-Tekai (or Beia alone, Beia Te Kamaraia) were known to be *kamaraia* (e.g. Grimble 1989, 225).

Uriam (1995, 6–7) gives an interesting example of the *kamaraia* nature of chiefs in historical times, when changes were taking place in societies ruled by *uea*. As intermarriage between the royal clan and others increased, the rule of the *unimwaane* – Council of Elders – was accepted, and the high chief became more a representative of the people and a symbol of authority. This *uea* was *kamaraia* "because of the *unimwaane* who elected him" (Uriam 1995, 7).⁵⁵ Stories, too, can be *kamaraia*. Uriam (1995, 129, 130) notes that the canonical Karongoa stories were *kamaraia* to people who tried to challenge or change them. On the other hand, during my fieldwork an occasion where someone had told a story that did not belong to his kin group evoked the comment that the person would be *maraiia* for doing so.

On certain of the Gilbert Islands, notably Maiana and Marakei, Karongoa Uea is given another name, the Sun clan (Grimble⁵⁶ 1989, 222), which likewise places the clan close to a source of power. The Sun cult predates the migrations from Samoa; therefore it seems that the conquering, chiefly clan became associated with one of the oldest indigenous deities. One of the dark-skinned gods was called Ancestor-the-Sun (*Te Bakatibu Tai*). Interestingly, Uriam (1995, 23) reports that it is not agreed whether this deity was in fact the Sun or the pandanus tree; in the latter case it would be confined to Tabiteuea only, where it is called *Te Moa ni Kai*, 'the First Tree'. The confusion, however, might be logical, given the close association of the sun with fertility.

The sun, together with the moon, is frequently evoked in fertility rituals as well as *tabunea* (magic) for procuring success in agriculture, fishing or love (see examples in Grimble 1989). Through its link with the sun, the Karongoa Uea clan, too, is associated with fertility. The sun and the moon were particularly central to rituals concerning the fructification (see photo in Grimble 1969 [1952], 224–225) and harvest of the pandanus. At least in the northern Gilbert islands, the first portion of the first fruits of the harvest from all clans were Karongoa's due (Grimble 1989, 17). The Karongoa Uea clan also performed a ritual meal in time of famine. In the supplications for fertility and an abundance of harvest there are several words used for the reproductive power: various derivatives of *mari*, 'fertile', 'fruitful', 'abundant' (*kimarimari*, *marika*, *marikarika*) as well as *maiu* ('life') and *mauri* ('wellbeing', 'health', 'safety').

⁵⁵ This suggests a fundamental fusion of the *maneaba* and the valorised idea of 'the community'; I will return to this point (Ch.3; see also Ch. 5).

⁵⁶ Arthur Grimble himself was adopted into the Karongoa clan (see Grimble 1969 [1952], 196–210).

Other forms of power which people sought to acquire by ritual means were *un* ('courage'/'anger') and *mwakuri* ('work', i.e. the ability and stamina to work). These, particularly the first one, will be encountered in the discussion of initiation rituals below.

Common to the different kinds of power is that they are ultimately derived from outside the society. They stem from a supernatural source: spirits, ancestors, the sun. With the possible exception of *kamaraia*, the powers are not exclusively attributes of Karongoa but can – to a lesser extent – be acquired by others by ritual means. While examples of *kamaraia* and *mwaaka* would seem to indicate that they inhered in the chiefly line (being primarily qualities of Karongoa members or the chief and his kin), power had to be actively conferred even on those of highest rank. As will be discussed later in the chapter, the transfer of power seems to take a structurally similar form regardless of the status of the supplicant. The respective initiation rites for men and women can be interpreted as ritual processes for procuring power from the spirits, and in principle they everyone underwent them, including Kourabi.

His growing up in Beru (15)

When he was born, his umbilical cord was cut, and to finish well his manner, he was placed on top of his initiation stone (*ati-ni-kana*), the contents of which were courage/anger, work and well-being. (16–20)

Male initiation is referred to as 'finishing one's manner' (*kabanea arona*, and once finished, *e a tia arona*, 'one's manner is ready') or as 'making' (*karaoa*). *Ati-ni-kana*, literally 'stone of food', is a reference to the traditional education of boys which has been described by Arthur Grimble (1921, 37–41; see below). As mentioned, 'making' is also connected to chiefly status and will also be discussed in more detail below. Before his departure from Beru, Kourabi was 'finished well': he was educated and blessings were bestowed upon him in order to make him a worker and a warrior.

DUALITIES AND TRANSFORMATION OF POWER

When his [Kourabi's] mother, who was Teuia, saw that his character was finished well, and he had been made and educated carefully by his grandparents and his parents who were in Beru, and he was informed by his mother that he should ask Teinai if he [Kourabi] should go to visit the descendants of Akau, who were in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North. (21–28)

When Kourabi had been initiated into the warrior status, it was his mother, Teuia, perhaps seeing that Kourabi was not to inherit Karongoa *iinaki*, who took the initiative to ensure an inheritance for her son. She suggested to him that he ask his father Teinai for permission to go to Temanoku in Tabiteuea North. Kourabi is the prototypical younger brother who is sent abroad to acquire lands when overridden in the succession

order by the elder one (see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 20, 30–31; cf. J. Siikala 1991; Fox 2006a [1995], 237–238).

His request was accepted, and he set out from Beru to Tabiteuea North to the village of Temanoku. (29–31)

Literally, Kourabi is encouraged to “visit” his kin in Temanoku in Tabiteuea. In the Kiribati language the word ‘to visit’, *kawara*, can connote paying respect, or petitioning for or receiving something; in other words, it includes a particular relationship between the two parties (visitor and visited). When Kourabi was told to visit the descendants of Akau, it implied that he was to claim land from them (see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 20, 30–31; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 73, 93–95). This in turn contains a possibility of waging war in order to get the land; in some accounts (e.g. Roberts 1952; Carmichael & Knox-Mawer 1968, 40 photograph supplement 28–29) Kourabi is referred to as a warrior.⁵⁷

So Kourabi sailed westward, and arrived in the village of his ancestors in Temanoku:

When he [Kourabi] was passing by the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa, Obaia spoke to his children, who were Beiatau, Taoroba, Kobuti and Naibwabwa, like this: ‘Look, in the place he goes directly to, you will make room as well’. (32–37)

When he [Kourabi] came to the corner of the *maneaba* from the south and he turned toward the lagoon to reach the southern side of the *maneaba* to the west from the middle post. It was Beiatau who stood up, to make room before him, to sit next to his sibling who was Taoroba on the eastern side [of the *maneaba*], and Kourabi sat in the southern side after him [Beiatau]. (38–46)

This short paragraph describes the transfer of power, while not in so many words, and also establishes the *iinaki* organisation in Atanikarawa, as will be discussed in the following chapter. On the one hand, when Kourabi entered the *maneaba*, he did what an I-Kiribati would still do today: since he had relatives in the village, he sat down in their *iinaki*. On the other hand, he thereby seized power from Beiatau, who would have inherited Obaia’s position by right of primogeniture.

Because of his genealogy, Kourabi had two options. While on one level Kourabi was the adventurous younger brother, on another he conflates the elder/younger contrast, being a descendant of the first and the third of the original brothers. *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 76–77) tells us that members of the Karongoa clan enter the *maneaba*

⁵⁷ A 1984 magazine article by Batiri Bataua about the ritual concerning Kourabi’s remains was titled “Bath of Bones for Kiribati Warrior” (Bataua 1984). Unfortunately, I have not been able to access the whole article. Also, in some versions of the story, Kourabi is associated with the warrior brothers Kaitu and Uakeia (see also Geddes 1977, 379; Lawson 1989, 114), who are central figures in Kiribati oral history, largely responsible for the initial dissemination of the meetinghouse (*maneaba*) institution in the Gilberts (e.g. Latouche 1984, 435–440; Uriam 1995, 17 and *passim*).

of Tabiri-ni-karawa ('a piece of heaven', i.e., Atanikarawa) from the northern side, at the *iinaki* of Tekokona, which is the sitting place of Karongoan Uea. Had Kourabi followed the way of Tematawarebwe the first-born, Kourabi would have entered the *maneaba* on the northern side. Kourabi by contrast came "to visit the descendants of Akau" and he "turned toward the lagoon to reach the southern side of the *maneaba*". He was "following the way of Akau" and therefore entered from the southern end of the meetinghouse (*The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 76-77). It seems to have been the more favourable option, because Kourabi's position with that group was higher than it would have been within the eldest branch, even more so if his mother's suggestion in the story implies that there was more land to be had by following Akau's path. Kourabi's choice illustrates the leeway and the potential for calculation an individual might have in choosing his 'sitting place'.

As Kourabi was approaching, Obaia ordered his sons to make room for Kourabi, at whatever spot he might choose. Exercising his right as a descendant of Akau meant that Kourabi chose the senior *iinaki* in this *maneaba* – that of Obaia. Obaia's first-born son Beiatu had to make room for him: to stand up and move to sit next to Taoroba, while Kourabi sat in his stead beside Obaia. Emphasising Kourabi's warrior aspect, one could interpret this section of the story as a metaphorical way of describing defeat in a battle (cf. Uriam 1995, 84). In the story from Buota, however, Obaia takes the initiative in the reorganisation of the *maneaba*, which (re)constructs the event as an accommodation rather than invasion, granting more agency to the locals. According to a Buota elder, Obaia's position is called *katautau*, for which Sabatier gives the translations 'consent', 'will', 'permit'; 'to arrange' to 'adjust', among others (Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *katautau*). Rather than being defeated, the people of Temanoku actively appropriate the power of the high-ranking outsider (cf. Douglas 1994).

It is instructive to compare Kourabi's arrival with yet another common Austronesian motif, the stranger-king: an outsider incorporated into the local social system and becoming a god-like chief (see Sahlins 1987; Fox 2006a [1995], 232–233). On the other hand, though Kourabi enters the local social system from the outside, clearly he is not an unrelated stranger: he is already connected to the place with multiple kinship ties. However, it has been argued that while a chief is considered powerful because he is an outsider (from the sea/gods), that alone is not enough to constitute legitimate leadership. The would-be king must, to some extent, also be 'of the people' or 'of the land' (e.g., Howard 1985; Valeri 1985a; Marcus 1989). Kourabi's case seems to be analogical with what Valerio Valeri (1985a, 92), in his discussion of the Hawaiian legend, has described as the political actualisation of the stranger-king: the Hawaiian practice of sending potential heirs to the throne to grow up in foreign courts. On return, they were

already both locals and strangers, insiders and outsiders, embodying both aspects of power from the outset.

In the last analysis, however, the dual nature of sovereignty can only be realised through a transformation. What appears to be a common denominator in the analyses of chieftainship in the Pacific is that, for the transformation to take place, there has to be an exchange in the fundamentals of life: in sacrifice, sex or the consumption of food. (Ideally, perhaps in more than one of them, as in the case of a cannibal victim; see Sahlins 1983 and Valeri 1985a.) The classic warrior-conqueror consolidates his status by marrying the chief's daughter, or into the local ruling clan; from the locals' point of view, the stranger-king is domesticated and his power apprehended through the gift of a woman, as Sahlins (1983; 1987, 82, 97) argues for Fiji. The gift requires a counter-gift; there must be an exchange of substances. According to Sahlins (1983; 1987, 96–103), in Fiji the conqueror must offer himself, either by proxy or literally, as a sacrificial (cannibal) victim: a cooked man for a raw woman. He is incorporated into the society through the exchange: first fruits of the land (a virgin girl) for a whale (represented metonymically by a whale tooth) from the sea. Thus the binary oppositions of outsider/insider, sea/land can also be expressed as, or coincide with, a male/female dichotomy, which is eventually transcended. To put it in other terms, this allows for the fulfilment of the reproductive power embodied by the king-to-be, ensuring the fecundity of the land and the people.

In this regard the story of Kourabi's ancestor Akau is one variation of the common theme: a conquering outsider who marries his grandson (Beia) to the daughter (Nei Kirirere) of the original landowner (Obaia the Feathered). Kourabi, as doubly descended from not only Akau, with whom the most significant tie to Tabiteuea is quoted, but from Beia and Nei Kirirere as well, embodies this duality, but also adds another layer to it. He too comes from the sea and disrupts the local order of succession. It is the absence of the final transformation that distinguishes Kourabi from the common Austronesian pattern of the stranger-king.

During his stay at the side of his grandparents, they finished well his [Kourabi's] character (*arona*) in a way (*aro*) that a human being came into existence who is *tabu* and *kamaraia* and who is not to marry. (47–52)

Kourabi's fate is in dire contrast with that of the stranger-king: he does not marry at all. The reference to Kourabi's bachelorhood has more drastic implications than is immediately apparent in the English translation. In the Kiribati language *iein* refers both to marriage and having sexual intercourse for the first time: someone who has not 'married' is a virgin. *N aki iein*, not marrying, then means having no sexual relationships at all; the raw woman cannot be exchanged for a raw man.

Hence there will also be no children. The reason for this interdict was also directly expressed by one of the elders at some point: “because chiefs are *tabu*” (*bwa e tabu te uea iai*). On an island where no chiefs are allowed, it is crucial that Kourabi is not to have offspring. Had Kourabi married and had children, his incorporation into the society would have instituted a hereditary chieftainship. Barring Kourabi from having sex *per se*, though, would not preclude this. In Kiribati adoption is frequent, and, for example, the childless high chief (*uea*) of Abemama, Tem Binoka, preserved the office by this means (Roberts 1953, 273–274, 275). Here, however, no adoption took place. Neither are other, structurally equivalent, methods of transformation and incorporation, like sacrifice or consumption of food,⁵⁸ implemented. There are no exchanges in embodiments of reproductive power, of life for life.

The absence of a union of complementary elements has two important consequences. While Kourabi does become a *uea*, his accommodation into the society remains incomplete and the powers bestowed on him are not fully brought to fruition. Interestingly, both the partial integration into the local society and the partial lack thereof are achieved through an intervention in his reproductive power. Namely, the wording suggests firstly that Kourabi’s celibacy is brought about in connection with his *tabu* and *kamaraia* nature. Three things are at issue: firstly that Kourabi was *made tabu* and *kamaraia*; secondly, that this entailed his not being allowed to marry and as a consequence, nor to have children, and thirdly, that he was made *kamaraia*. Kourabi had already been “finished well” in Beru, initiated into manhood, work and warfare. In Tabiteuea, his manner was again “finished well”, now by his grandparents, but this time in a way (*n te aro*) that resulted in a human being who is *tabu* and *kamaraia*, sacred and capable of producing curses or even death. Comparing these two instances of ‘finishing well’ or ‘making’ throws light on the nature of power, of *tabu* and of Kourabi.

Because the ritual ‘making’ of people reveals what to my mind is a crucial, indeed the key feature in Kiribati ideas concerning power, I will next risk digression in order to describe the ritual processes in some detail.

POWER IN THE (UN)MAKING

‘Finishing well’ (*kabanea arona*) and ‘making’ (*karaoa*) were quoted earlier as expressions for the process of male initiation. ‘Making’ also has a particular meaning of

⁵⁸ In this ethnographic context, the consumption of food (or drink) can be seen as equivalent to sex not only analytically and ritually, but also in more mundane contexts. In Kiribati the connection is fairly straightforward, for example in that the ability of a young, unmarried woman to exercise restraint in her consumption of food is seen to be indicative of her chastity.

blessing, charming, or protecting someone with magic. In principle all males went through the ordeals of initiation in order to become hardy workers and brave warriors. However, some men either became chiefs when ‘finished well’, or they were ‘finished well’ a second time to become chiefs. In either case it is the making which makes someone a chief. The processes of being ‘made’, or ‘one’s manner being finished’, refer to acquiring some kind of supernatural power: in the first case, to making men brave warriors, and in the second, to making certain men chiefs.

One important quality of a chief, and one associated with the first clan, Karongoa, and especially its leaders, is to be *kamaraia*, to possess potentially destructive supernatural power. This power from above/outside is passed down the genealogical line. Of Kourabi’s newly acquired qualities, *kamaraia* is part of his status as a Karongoa member. Yet Kourabi was *finished well* to be *kamaraia*, and it seems that other Karongoa members, at least some of them, had also to be made in order to become *kamaraia*.

The earlier mentioned Beia and Tekai who in particular were known to be *kamaraia*, had also had ‘their manner finished’ in order to be such. A song by the Buota composer Riino Tetaubuki tells how “Beia and Tekai both emerge on top of the ‘stick/skill of cursing’” (*kai ni marai*) and that “their manner is finished by their father Kiratata and their mothers Nei Beia and Kabwebwe”. (At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M~60). *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 38) gives a slightly different account, referring to Nareau as having been the one who gave the brothers their sacred head amulet (*bunna ni kamaraia*), and Akau anointing them with the juice of a young coconut “so that they might be *kamaraia*”. In other words, power was not a substance of the lineage or part of the structural position per se, but had to be actively transferred, whatever the method.

Based on the information available on the making of men in general – the male initiation rite – it seems justified to make certain inferences about the process of making or finishing well someone’s manner to be chief and *kamaraia*. Male initiation in traditional Kiribati society has been described in detail by Arthur Grimble (1921), and some references to ‘making’ chiefs in narratives and songs seem to indicate that the processes were, if not identical, at least similar in certain essential aspects. What is striking too is how the process shares many structural features with female initiation.

Comparison of female and male rites of passage is problematic, as the former are still practiced, except for the longer period of seclusion, while the latter practices had probably already ceased by the end of the nineteenth century (in the 1920s they were described to Grimble by people who were already great-grandparents). On the other hand, Grimble’s description of the traditional education of girls (1921, 41–44) sounds remarkably similar to that of today, with the probable exception of magical spells, which

used to be performed for girls as well as boys. Despite the historical differences and the discrepancy in the data available, quite a few parallels are apparent.

Making men and making chiefs

The process of making men was about the making of *men*: a gender-specific rite of passage of young men into adulthood. During a succession of ordeals called *kanna ni maane* ('food of [adult] men'), the boy was to acquire the desirable qualities of an adult man: the aim was to make him courageous/angry (*un*), hardworking (*mwakuri*) and healthy (*mauri*), and he had to learn stamina and restraint. This education could also be referred to as the boy being made courageous/angry (*ni kaunaki*). According to Grimble (1921, 27, 37–41), *kanna ni maane* usually took place between 20–25 years of age and marriage could only occur after it was completed. The timing depended on the growth of axillary and pectoral hair, which was considered a sign of the youngster's sufficient maturity. As a small child, the boy had been allowed to eat as much as he could, and become plump, but from around the age of eight, his food had been strictly regulated in quantity (Grimble 1921, 37). At the time of *kanna ni maane*, his food portions were increased. Conversely, his hair, which had been allowed to grow freely ever since its ritual cutting at the age of two, was cut at this point (Grimble 1921, 38).

Kanna ni maane consisted of several stages. One part of the initiation was called *ati-ni-kana*, in which the boy sat on a stone by a fire, enduring certain painful trials. After three repetitions of the *ati-ni-kana* ceremony, the initiand underwent a period of seclusion of between two and five years. For this, a small hut was constructed on the eastern (ocean) side of the island for him, where he was to stay until the thatch began to leak (Grimble 1921, 40). The location of these events is significant because the east is considered a source of power.⁵⁹ According to Uriam (1995, 11) the hut could also be on the ancestral dwelling land (*kainga*).

During his seclusion the young man was not allowed to see any women and could leave the hut only to perform the increasingly demanding tasks set to him by the overseer of his initiation, who was usually an elder of his father's family. When the thatch was about to leak, the guardian put the boy through further severe trials of

⁵⁹ While there is no space here to go into details, in the Kiribati lagoon islands conceptions of place are characterized by a series of analogous binary oppositions: east (*mainiku*) : west (*maeao*) :: ocean (*tanrake*) : lagoon (*tanrio*) :: forest (*buakonikai*) : village (*kaawa*) :: (on an analytical level) wild : domestic :: nature : culture :: male : female (cf. Fox 1994). East is dangerous on the one hand and powerful on the other. Many rituals and, for example, song composition with the help of spirits, were supposed to take place on the eastern shore. Power in the east is possibly related or derived from a short distance to the sun – one particularly favourable position of the sun (together with the moon) was the eastern sky, and sunrise or the time just before it (*te karangaina*) a favourable time for rituals.

strength. When he had passed the tests, and the thatch could no longer hold water, the young man returned to his family as a warrior. Often marriage followed his return almost immediately (Grimble 1921, 39–40).

Now, compare this to an excerpt from the story of Rairauena (the name stands for ‘the overturning of his chieftainship’ [Lambert 1978, 85]), told by Riino Tetaubuki of Buota (At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M~60), who describes how the protagonist was ‘made’.

Then Tei Mauri procreated with Rakentai. Their first-born was Rairauena the Warrior; then Mangkia and Naatanga. And they had one sister, Nei Tiringaatuntaai. When this child got older, the one who was the first-born, he [Tei Mauri] was about to plan his making. This man, Tei Mauri, said to his wife Rakentai like this: “We will not make him [or: he will not be made] here in Tabiteuea because it is *tabu* on Tabiteuea”. But we will go to make him in Tarawa. And they launched their canoe. And they boarded it with all their children, and they then went to reach Tarawa. When they arrived in Tarawa, they first went to Upper Tarawa. They landed in Upper Tarawa, and they also named that place where they landed ‘Tabiteuea’. This name has then truly stayed there to this day, Tabiteuea.

When they came up to the land, they put up a hut for that child of theirs, his hut for enclosing him, in order [for him] to be made. He truly stayed inside it all the time, until it was broken. They put up a second [hut]. He was inside it until the second one too was broken. It leaked as well. They put up a third hut. And when the third one stood ready, one man arrived from Tarawa. Rairauena the Warrior was enclosed [*kakoaki*; literally ‘tightened’], for he was to be made courageous and angry (un). For he wanted to fight with him. The name of this man was Bwebwentekaai. [...]

At that time this man Rairauena tried to suppress his desire [*taona nanona*, lit. ‘press down his inside’] so as not to fight, because his manner was not finished, and to wait until his third hut leaked, it was broken. And then his manner was finished, to have been made.

(At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M~60)

The reference to ‘making’ being forbidden on Tabiteuea means that Tei Mauri and Rakentai aspired to their first-born son becoming a chief. In another version of the same story I acquired, Rairauena’s mother “was busy thinking about his child for he would come into existence as [become] [...] a *uea*” (At13A/170600/Antebuka, S.Tarawa/M~83). At least as far as the enclosure, we seem to be dealing with the same procedure as described by Grimble. Rairauena is enclosed three times, as if reiterating it in order to enhance his positive qualities and bestow more power upon him than other initiated men (though if any man going through the normal initiation procedure does not pass the tests in the end, another hut would have to be constructed for him too; Grimble 1921, 39–40). Uriam (1995, 11) estimates that Rairauena the Warrior’s initiation lasted 8–12 years.

It is evident, both from Grimble's description of male initiation and the story excerpt, that acquiring (supernatural) power in the process of making entails – requires – that the initiate be enclosed. In addition to being physically shut up in a hut, the young man is enclosed figuratively: restricted in his food rations, in contacts with other people, indeed in everything he does down to his thoughts. During his seclusion, which might take between two and five years, he was to do every task his grandfather ordered, and in performing his duty, says Grimble (1921, 40),

he must walk straight to the task, turning his eye neither to right nor left, pausing at no impediment, wincing at no hurt, and shrinking from no danger. Every time he wished to leave his abode, he must ask the old man's leave, perform the permitted work, and return to his tutor. Nothing in the nature of amusement was allowed him; he was instructed to put away all soft and frivolous thoughts, and think only of deeds of strength, the day's task, the valour of his forebears, and all things befitting a worker and a warrior.

As a ritual process, making brings to mind Polynesian rites of wrapping and binding, where a person or an item is made *tapu* and powerful by literal or figurative tying (Valeri 1985b, 300–302; Shore 1989, 151–156; e.g., wrapping a statue in cloth, Babadzan 2003; the sacred maiden institution, see below). The similarity is particularly evident in the Kiribati word used for the ordeal in Rairaeana's story: literally 'tightening' (from *ka-ko*, 'to make tight'; passive voice *e kakoaki*). Yet the correspondence of 'making' with wrapping or tying is not dependent on the lexical resemblance but rather on the structural features of the Kiribati practice as a whole.

The way Rairaeana's story continues, along with the explanation which Riino inserted in his story-telling, illustrates both the idea of making *tabu* and the particularly Kiribati emphasis on the control of the power thus acquired. It should be recalled at this point that before his making was complete Rairaeana the Warrior felt the urge to fight Bwebwentekaai, the man who came to the scene:

At that time this man Rairaeana tried to suppress his desire so as not to fight, because his manner was not finished [...]

And that lady who was his mother, Rakentai, made an incantation over him [*kaewea*]. She made an incantation over him so that he would not be cursed [for transgressing a *tabu*; *raaka*]. In case he would leave for war or something...

– If you are made and your making has truly been finished well, you should have an incantation performed over you for you are not to be cursed [for transgressing a *tabu*]. You are not to break your *tabu*. If you have been delivered from evil influence [*eweaki*], there are no problems because the incantation has been performed over you. That's how it is.

(At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M–60)

Apparently, when under his *tabu*, Rairauena had not quite managed to suppress his desire to fight, and had perhaps broken the *tabu*, as his mother had to take action to fix the situation. In any case, the story goes on to narrate that Rairauena subsequently

left to search for that man, whom he wanted to fight [be *un* {courageous/angry } towards], Bwebwentekaai. He did not stand in front of him [Rairaeana], for he ran away because he was afraid. His [Rairaeana's] mother spoke thus: "Oh your desire [*nanom*] is without any counterpart [*toa-ra*; 'bad-companion'], if the person perhaps does not want to fight. And you come and want to fight with him. If the will-to-fight [*kan-un*] is strong inside you, and they are afraid of the movement of your *Koronimatang* there, but there are lands which are to the north from here. – *Te koronimatang* is a stick [*kai*] of war [i.e., a weapon]. So Rairaeana the warrior heard the voice of his mother and left then in his canoe to reach Marakei. [...]

(At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M-60)

After this, according to the story as it was told by Riino, Rairaeana visits two islands to recruit companions to join his expedition. As suggested by his mother, his party then continues north to the islands of Butariritari and Makin, where they "strike from one end to the other", killing all the inhabitants. When they are resting on the beach after their feat, a canoe arrives, carrying Rairauena's father, mother, sister and his two brothers. Rairaeana's will to fight has not yet been satisfied; he announces that he will kill them. But, the story continues,

[h]is mother was angry (*un*) with him and talked like this: "It just doesn't end, the thing [?] inside you which is the will-to-fight, does it? If that's how it is, kill me first. And kill your father, and go ahead, kill your same-sex siblings and your opposite-sex sibling. It truly cannot end, that thing [?] in you, which is that will to fight. If it cannot end, they will be afraid in lands which are above in the north. This Rairaeana obeyed, and he left then with those two men, Tei Naura and Terikaura. They then left, and went to reach Marshall Islands.

When they arrived in the Marshalls, they struck from one end to the other, and it was finished. They returned to the middle of the Marshall Islands, and they set up their village of the *uea* there. It is said that to this day, people in that village know how to speak Kiribati, in the Marshalls. [...]

(At 7A/180400/Buota, TabNorth/M-60)

Rairauena's story does not address the question of marriage, but it too provides an example of someone who in the end could not become a *uea* in any of the Gilbert Islands. Rairaeana leaves for the Marshalls because he cannot not control his will to fight. His younger brother Naatanga then becomes the *uea* of Butariritari in his stead (Lambert 1978, 85). The interpretation rising from the story told by Riino would be that Rairaeana's failure to become the *uea* at home was the result of his having broken his *tabu* during initiation. Bernd Lambert (1978) gives another explanation. He cites Arthur

Grimble's manuscript⁶⁰ which suggests that Rairauena was initiated in a method which produces an overly contentious disposition: a warrior "almost beyond rational social control" (Lambert 1978, 85). Whatever the reason, Rairauena's story reveals an essential prerequisite for legitimacy of chieftainship: the *uea*'s ability to control himself.

To sum up: in order to 'finish well' someone's 'manner' as a man or a chief, the candidate must first be separated from society and then 'tightened' (restricted in most aspects of his being). During this time he is under *tabu*. He is expected to learn to control himself, to work hard and to acquire power: courage/anger (*un*), and/or *kamaraia*, and well-being (*mauri*), i.e., reproductive power. These ideas of enclosure and control are also apparent in female initiation, even though the latter, to my knowledge, is not called 'making' or 'finishing well'.

Making women

The rite of passage for girls, *Te moan teiao* ('to stand outside for the first time'), which takes place when a girl first menstruates, illustrates the ideas concerning female reproductive power. When Nei Kabwebwe* had her period for the first time, Nei Teiti* living in a house nearby, was the first to notice. She observed: "Nei Kabwebwe is about to have the women's illness [*aoraki n aine*, a euphemism for menstruation]. She has not been seen for a while [...] and their *buia* [residential building with no walls] has been enclosed". Indeed, I saw later that the sides of the neighbours' *buia* had been covered with two coconut-leaf mats (*iina'i*), a sheet and two pieces of cloth. Through a slit in the curtains I saw that Nei Kabwebwe sat inside, making cord by rolling a bundle of coconut husk fibres against her thigh, joining them into a string (work known as *boo-binoka*), and she had a piece of cloth tied around her stomach. From what I had been told I knew that she would be given very little to eat or drink, and the cloth was to help her manage with little food and to keep her stomach flat. In another context, a young woman reminisced that during her *teiao*, she was only given a little dried pandanus (*tuae*) – which she, having grown up in urban Tarawa, did not like – copra, and coconut toddy mixed with a little coconut oil, a combination which nearly made her vomit. Nei Kabwebwe performed her duty diligently, nearly fainting as she emerged from the hut a few days later, weak from having eaten so little during her "sitting" (*tekateka*), as the proceedings are called.

⁶⁰ Grimble's manuscripts have since been published in Grimble 1989. Grimble (1989, 167) describes a particular method of initiation mentioned by Lambert, which is said to derive from Rairauena the Warrior's grandfather (FF) Rairauena the I-Matang, who migrated from Samoa.

Nei Kabwebwe was seen moving about in the yard on the fourth day after her period had begun, and that evening she dressed up in a new skirt. She had also had her ears pierced and been given pendants. There was to be a small festive gathering of some family members and a few neighbours. A special meal had been prepared for her, whereas others would have usual festive food, including pork. On Nei Kabwebwe's tray there were cooked pandanus fruit, *bunia* (a type of coconut with juicy, chewable fibres), pieces of swamp taro (*bwabwai*), rice and two grilled fish. Tiaon*, a boy of about twelve had been invited to share the food with her, and to be her *kaitara*, (a [complementary] counterpart, lit. *ka-ai-tara*, 'to make to face each other', also 'opponent').

In the classic pattern of a rite of passage, at menarche a girl is separated from the society. She is secluded in a house with walls or screens, usually for three days.⁶¹ Girls, too, must learn restraint in several aspects of life, eating being one of them. To facilitate limiting food intake and reaching the slender beauty ideal for young women, her waist is bound with a piece of cloth (*e kabaekaki nuukana*, 'her waist is wrapped'). During the seclusion it is vital that the girl not to be seen by others, and even more important, for her not to see others, especially men. She must learn to work: whilst sitting she makes coconut cord. She is not to speak to anyone but the elderly lady, usually a female relative, who is overseeing the rite. The girl will sit throughout the liminal stage; hence the designation of the proceedings as 'sitting' (*tekateka*), and the woman administering the ritual as *tia katekateka* 'the one causing to sit'.

Here it is worth noting, in view of later discussions, that in the Kiribati context the significance of the *teiao* ritual lies not only in that the girl is standing *outside* but in that she is *standing* (*tei*), and equally in that when standing outside, she is made to *sit* (*tekateka*) inside. Being 'outside' is in itself a powerful metaphor of the asocial, dangerous, yet potentially powerful, but I suggest that in the Kiribati case the potential for power also inheres in the idea of standing. Sitting on the other hand connotes the containment of this power, for example in the legitimate context of marriage, where a person, but especially a woman, is said to 'sit' (*tekateka*) with his/her spouse. The notions of standing and sitting, and their binary opposition, are also used in other contexts, dancing – also called 'standing' (*tei*) – included.

The restrictions involved in 'making her sit' are meant to both protect and restrain her. In her liminal state, she is standing outside society, which makes her susceptible to dangers and bad influences, but also dangerous to others and society itself. To an extent this is true of subsequent menstruation as well, which likewise is called 'standing outside' (*teiao*). During her later periods a girl or woman is no longer required to

⁶¹ The girl should sit three full days; half days or Sundays do not necessarily count, as a friend told me – when her first menses began on a Saturday night, the feast was not held until Thursday that the feast.

actually sit in a house (“walking is open” [*e a uki te nakonako*], described a male elder), but she is subject to restrictions, though today their extent varies according to the religious (Christian) considerations of the family; whether they ‘hold the custom’ (*taua te katei*) or ‘hold the religion’ (*taua te Aro*).⁶² In traditional practice, the relationship between a menstruating woman and others, particularly men, is marked with *tabus*. The woman has to sleep on a separate sleeping mat, and her food has to be cooked and eaten separately. Men in particular are forbidden to eat food cooked by a menstruating woman. The traditional reason for the avoidance was that the touch of a menstruating woman could destroy or weaken the power of a man’s tools and weapons, as well as expose the man himself to dangers. At the same time, *tabus* protected the woman, who became vulnerable to evil spirits and other dangers (Kambati Uriam, personal communication 6.2. 2007).

Today, such beliefs are renounced by many. Nonetheless, transgressing the *tabu* has its consequences for a girl as well. If a girl’s *tekateka* has not been conducted properly – if she eats more than she is supposed to, or looks at boys from behind the curtains – she will become either greedy for food (*buuabeka*) or promiscuous. This is proven post-facto. If a girl later elopes, rather than awaiting a proper wedding as a virgin, otherwise acts improperly or becomes overweight, it can be put down to a flaw in her *tekateka*. The *tia katekateka* is also considered at fault. A 24-year-old woman, sharing her teenage experience with me, remarked that people would not want a *tia katekateka* for their daughter whose previous protégées had eloped or behaved unchastely. In other words, later acts showing some lack of control can be interpreted as the result of an unsuccessful sitting ritual.

After three days the girl returns to take her new place in the social structure. New attire and taking part in a meal – eating is now ‘open’ for the girl (*e a uki te amwareke*) – mark the girl’s re-integration to society. While she has been sitting, relatives and neighbours may have gathered to the house for celebration. There are differences in the extent of such celebration,⁶³ though the ritual itself seems to be more or less universally conducted. The few *teiaos* I saw were low-key affairs.

⁶² This is an example of a context where custom (*te katei*) and Christianity are contrasted.

⁶³ For present day Christian I-Kiribati this tradition is somewhat ambiguous, as it used to involve magical practices (*tabunea*). Protestants have resolved this by making *te moan teiao* an occasion celebrating a girl’s step into adulthood without *tabunea*. After the three-day ritual proceedings there can be a large feast, with guests and *unimwaane* making speeches about the girl’s new adult status and the importance of obedience (*ongotaeka*, lit. ‘to hear word’). For a Catholic family the festivities (if any) would be small: a few neighbours might gather. I was told that if a Catholic participates in a *teiao* feast, he or she must go to confession before taking Communion. Tellingly, on one occasion a boy from a Catholic family who acted as the *kaitara* for the initiate had to keep his guardian in the dark about it.

Marriageability is part of her new status, and traditionally, this was often the time when a girl would marry, though this rarely happens today. In any case, tight control over female sexuality continues until marriage, after which it changes form. As has frequently been pointed out in the literature, pre-marital sex is strictly forbidden (in pre-colonial times, breaking the norm meant risking death) and still labels the woman a 'leftover of the generation' (*nikiranroro*), which is the lowest adult social status in a community (Lundsgaarde 1966, 100; Brewis 1996, 32). While attitudes may have somewhat eased off, the display of blood on the sleeping mat to prove virginity at marriage continues to be the high point of a wedding ceremony (for a description, see Brewis 1996, 28–30). The only generally, if not universally, accepted alternative to this is marriage by elopement, though it requires a formal apology from the families concerned.

Marriage means the fulfilment and legitimization of sexuality, culminating in children. In marriage, making love becomes "the national pastime", as Arthur Grimble put it (though not specifically referring to marriage) in a 1919 memorandum (Kiribati National Archives, KNA GEIC 32/V/6, B, 21). This does not, however, mean an unleashing of female sexuality or power in a more abstract sense. The woman is expected to comply with her husband's will, and is not to move around alone without his permission (also, according to Alexandra Brewis [1996, 42-45] women are expected to be passive in sexual activity). The restraint is explicitly manifest in menstruation *tabus* and, on the other hand, inversely in the relative freedom of postmenopausal women (in turn reflected in dance style; see Ch. 7). The most intriguing semantic connection between the connotations of power in the idea of standing is that in marriage, the couple and especially the woman, is said to 'sit' (*tekateka*). Yet 'sitting' is not just about restriction, however, because there is a widely-shared idea in Oceania that passive posture implies authority.

In traditional society, if a girl did not marry right away, the *teiao*-ritual could be followed by another, longer period of seclusion. The girl would then spend a year to eighteen months in a *ko* (or *kako* [Uriam 1995, 10], causative of the same word, see below), the same root as in the phrase 'Rairauena the Warrior was tightened'. Girls' (*ka*)*ko* has been translated as a 'bleaching house', since the purpose of the seclusion was to obtain a light skin (Grimble 1921, 42-43). Another Kiribati term for such an enclosure is *te roki* (e.g. Grimble 1921, 44), which nowadays usually refers to a bathing hut. During her time in the *kako/roki*, she was not doing any work, apart from learning magical spells (Grimble 1921, 43). This is in direct contrast with *teiao*, in which work is central. However, not all girls went through the *kako* stage (Uriam 1995, 10 fn.5).

According to a narrative about Karongoa members' traditions, reproduced by Jean-Paul Latouche (1984, 369–373) with explanatory comments, politically significant marriages (of the first-born or the chiefly line), are referred to as "the inside of *te roki*",

as opposed to “the outside of *te roki*”, the marriages in the second/younger line. This would seem to suggest that only girls destined for politically significant marriages, or perhaps marriages into the Karongoan Uea clan, were subjected to the *kako/roki* period.

The initiation of Kiribati girls, with or without the longer period of seclusion, resembles one type of ritual binding, the so called ‘sacred maiden’ institutions (see Shore 1989, 156–163; Ortner 1981, 371–373), but at the same time diverges from them in illustrative ways. A connection can also be made to a more general western Polynesian custom, of which the sacred maiden is an example and an emblem: guarding the chastity of high-ranking girls (Ortner 1981, 371, 373). According to Ortner (1981, 371, 375–376), a systematic concomitant of this control which men should have over their daughters and sisters is their beautification and the enhancement of their sexual attractiveness, in the hope of a marriage benefiting their natal kin group. The traditional beautification practices frequently combined seclusion or restraint of the girl, typically in an effort to keep their skin light and fatten them (Ortner 1981, 375–376).

The similarities are found in the general form the customs take: a symbolic binding and a possible ritual seclusion. The differences concern ideals and some of the implications for social structure. The similarities to my mind justify the interpretation that the Kiribati girls’ initiation represents “the binding of a selected individual’s reproductive capacities in the interest of more abstract and general forms of societal and cosmic regeneration”, as Bradd Shore (1989, 159) has summarised one of the key aspects of meaning in the Polynesian sacred maiden institutions. According to Shore, this cosmological idea is associated with other connected elements and ideals, namely that the girl is not to spend any productive energy in everyday work, and is to consume large quantities of food; that her beauty is ideal when she is corpulent, and her skin light and shiny. Comparing contemporary practices and ideals, there emerge certain systematic differences between Kiribati and Polynesia. In Kiribati, the corresponding elements to those mentioned by Shore would be the practices of directing all productive energies to a specific work and of the consumption of strictly rationed food, and the ideals of slimness and flat belly, and that of light, shiny skin. Except for the last one, these elements are the reverse of the Polynesian case. However, rather than random differences, they appear to be variants of the same thing, that is, manifestations of (re)productive power.

The extinct practice of *kako*, where the girl was not supposed work, is interesting in this regard and to some extent contradicts the interpretation given above. Importantly though, in Kiribati, in addition to the differences in the beauty ideals, most of the beautification, or *kako* period, was separated from the main seclusion ritual, and was only spent by some girls. Not enough is known about who they were, but if they were

connected or to-be-connected to the first clan, one might speculate an explicit connection⁶⁴ to the Samoan institution of *taupou*, with emerging differences lying in the distribution of the practices in the society, and therefore social structure. *Taupou* is a ceremonial female status linked to an important chiefly title. A daughter, sister's daughter or other close relative of a high-ranking chief, the *taupou* was the leader of the village girls' organisation, and acted as a representative of the village (Shore 1981, 196–197; Grattan 1985 [1948], 108–111). In the light of the exclusiveness of *taupou*, one could hypothesise that *kako* has been a means of social differentiation. With the cessation of the *kako*, and the generalised variant of the ritual binding practice becoming the only one still practised in Kiribati, differentiation is no longer an issue but, rather, undifferentiation.

One of the intriguing links between *teiao* and *taupou* institutions is that in formal speech *taupou* is called “the sitting maiden” (Shore 1989, 157) or “the sitting/immobile virgin” (Shore 1982, 232). Here, sitting connotes immobility and thereby, together with formidability and ideal beauty, high status (Shore 1989, 157–158; see Ortner 1981, 375–376). In Samoa *taupou* provides a model of purity for an ideal female (Shore 1981, 196–198). She was to remain a virgin until marriage, and her virginity used to be publicly assessed after the consummation of the marriage (Shore 1982, 232), in the same way as in Kiribati. Her chastity reflects on the village as well (Shore 1981, 197), in that she could be seen as a chiefly person embodying the society.

In the hierarchical Polynesian societies, the model of the *taupou* may to an extent be generalised to all high-ranking girls, whose pre-marital virginity is valorised and therefore a family aspiration, whereas in lower-ranking families, the virginity of girls is far less of an issue (Ortner 1981, 371, 373). In Sherry Ortner's (1981) analysis of gender and sexuality in Polynesia, the ideal of virginity is connected to the high status of women as ‘sisters’ and their valued position in their natal kin group. Bradd Shore's (1989) comparative analysis shows though that these are primarily western Polynesian idea(l)s; in eastern Polynesia the emblematic relationship is the sexualised conjugal one rather than the desexualised siblingship (Shore 1989, 165).

In western Polynesia the interest in virginity, even if it exists as a more general ideal too, is a distinctively aristocratic trait. By contrast, in Kiribati *teiao* as well as the definite expectations of chastity concern by and large every young woman. The *taupou* institution differentiates between girls, *teiao* undifferentiates. Whereas *taupou* duties carried out by an aristocratic young woman represent and reproduce Samoan society

⁶⁴ While a historical connection is possible as well, there could be an ideological connection in that since Samoan origin is considered prestigious, emulating Samoan (or what are seen as Samoan) customs could be perceived as an attempt to partake in that prestige. This is conjecture, however.

with its ranked titles and chiefs, *teiao* represents and reproduces a society without chiefs. However, rather than everyone being commoners, Tabiteuans all are nobles. What is demanded of (virginity), and given to (honour), only chiefly girls in these Polynesian societies, is every girl's obligation and its potential reward in Kiribati. It seems that inasmuch as the Kiribati institution concerns the harnessing of an individual's reproductive capacities in the interest of societal and cosmic reproduction, this binding is more extensive in both intensity and social scale.

In Samoa, if a girl remains a virgin until marriage, it is not her own self-control which is accredited, but her kinsmen's vigilant control over her (Ortner 1981, 372–373; Shore 1981, 199). In Kiribati too, a father's and a family's close guard (*tatauo*; Kirion 1985a, 67) over unmarried virgin daughters is a crucial responsibility. Yet in Kiribati the girl is also responsible for her own virginity (Brewis 1996, 28); her self-restraint is assigned great importance; self-control is one of the main lessons of *teiao*. Interestingly, (self-)control is perhaps the key shared feature of male and female initiation so, seemingly paradoxically, the rites differentiating men and women make them in some respects similar.

Overall Kiribati society is not characterised by the brother-sister relationship as in Samoa, though on the islands of Butaritari and Makin in the northern Gilberts the brother-sister relationship does have particular significance (Lambert 1983). In western Polynesian societies a woman's status as a 'wife' and a 'mother' tends to be lower than her status as a 'sister' (Ortner 1981; Shore 1989; for Samoa, see Shore 1981 and Tcherkézoff 1993). This has led Ortner (1981, 386–393) to conclude that a Polynesian woman does not gain status by marrying and having children but, on the contrary, loses it, though Tcherkézoff (1993, 63), for example, criticises this deduction. In Kiribati a woman definitely gains status by marrying (particularly if she has retained her virginity until then) and having legitimate children (Brewis 1996, 31, 34 and passim; see Lundsgaarde 1966, 99–101).

In brief, at menarche a girl becomes capable of symbolic as well as physiological reproduction, and this potential must eventually be taken over by the society. *Te moan teiao* recognises a girl's sexuality and provides a ritual lesson about the constraint placed on it: sitting. During this *tabu* state, the reproductive power of the woman, expressed through the desire for food and sex, is to be controlled. When outside society and not controlled, female reproductive power is potentially pollutive, but once it is contained and transformed through marriage it is empowering and of benefit to society.

The key structural feature in 'making', i.e. initiation into manhood or chieftainship, and in the initiation into womanhood, is a type of binding, a literal and figurative enclosure and restriction. Tightening makes *tabu*, indicating the presence of power, and the crucial thing is for it to be controlled. Instead of power one might talk about potency,

which in the case of men takes the form of *un*; for women the power is fairly explicitly sexual; for both sexes, the ability to work is central. Learning self-control is essential for men, chiefs and women alike, and transgression of *tabu* has negative consequences.

It seems that the ritual process was brought to closure by bringing the initiand into contact with the opposite sex. The initiation was timed right before the age considered suitable for marrying. For a girl, this was when she reached sexual maturity; boys married in their mid- to late twenties.⁶⁵ The final stage of making a man or a woman was contact with the other sex either in marriage or, more iconically, in the presence of the *kaitara*. (One could speculate whether the custom of *kaitara* arose as girls began to marry later.)

The conclusion of the rite can be interpreted as an unbinding and the lifting of the *tabu*. In the case of men one could ask whether it was that female reproductive power/sexuality was considered explicitly polluting, like it was (is) during menstruation, and whether the pollution would have rendered the sacred/marked into the profane/free (cf. the Polynesian concept of *noa*), which would be similar to some Polynesian cases. However, it is perhaps the empowering aspect of female power which is emphasised more (though it does not have to exclude the pollutive aspect), given the importance of sexual activity in Kiribati ideas of marriage (Brewis 1996, 42–43) as well as the overall parallel between the practices of men and women.⁶⁶ When the *tabu* is lifted, the newfound adult (or chief) is drawn further away from the source of power, and his/her power diminishes, but at the same time it is a realisation of his/her reproductive power in the sense that only then he/she is free to exercise the power he/she does have.

It can be questioned whether the introduction of the female element is the only way to remove *tabu* and to transform male potency into practice. Kourabi's not marrying after his first initiation had been of no consequence and, on the other hand, in the case of chiefs in general, there are no references to their marrying in connection with their 'making' (but if the chief-in-the-making was already married, the chiefly initiation would have required separation from the wife with a reunion at the end of the initiation). Kourabi's story points in this direction, precisely in that it is an exceptional case.

⁶⁵ As the beginning of a boy's initiation was linked to the growth of his pectoral and axillary hair, it is not impossible that this might have been interpreted as a sign of sexual maturity (see Leach 1958).

⁶⁶ Some ideas of pollution are implicit in that in Kiribati the traditional preparation for important and/or ritual activities, including warfare and dancing, could require a preceding period of celibacy (for a contemporary example, see T. Whincup & J. Whincup 2001, 61). I, too, heard about the rule that one should abstain from sexual intercourse before a dance performance but, interestingly, from a woman, without any indication that applying the rule would depend on the dancer's gender.

BINDING BUT NOT UNBINDING: REMAINING *TABU*

This long detour into initiation has revealed things that throw light on Kourabi's story. In it, Kourabi is bound for the second time, this time in a particular way (*n te aro*) – made *tabu* and (thereby) *kamaraia* – and this is linked to the fact that he is not to marry. The Story of Kourabi illustrates the empowering force of female sexuality in an inverse way, as Kourabi's imposed celibacy limits his chieftainship. It is not only because he had no offspring, and no hereditary office was established, that Kourabi could be constituted as a chief (*uea*) on an island that defines itself in terms of forbidding chiefs. It was also that his power was never freed, never transformed into a more mundane but usable form. As Sahlins (1987, 90) writes, "male power can have no issue of effect until it is encompassed by the woman" (see also J. Siikala 1990 on the female element in the Cook Islands chieftainship).

Kourabi's destiny has far-reaching cosmological consequences. Without a woman, Kourabi does not become involved in the reproduction of society; the power he acquired is not channelled into societal reproduction. Or does it reproduce the structure of a chiefless society? Here is someone who acquires power during his lifetime, but the power is not transformed through a woman and thus remains partially at least outside the society. Conversely, remaining outside, power is not lessened by becoming profane, as it would within the society. Kourabi is mighty also because his power is transcendent.

In a way Kourabi offers himself as a sacrificial victim after all, not just by proxy but in an all but total way: he relinquishes his reproductive power quite literally.⁶⁷ To put it in Freudian terms, he is symbolically castrated.⁶⁸ The same motif in another form can be found in a Cook Islands myth, related by Jukka Siikala (2004), where a greedy chief eventually becomes the victim of his own aggrandisement. The Cook Island chief was a huge man, also known for his extremely long penis. He never went fishing but instead sat on the beach, and every time someone came back from a fishing trip, the chief claimed a part of the catch. As a chief, he was entitled to a larger share than any commoner, but he constantly demanded more than his share, his *tu'anga*. Finally, an enraged villager killed the chief by strangling him with his own generously sized genitals. In the story the chief is grotesquely punished with the embodied symbol of his own power for demanding more than his due share (J. Siikala 2004).

Thus even in a chiefly society like the Cook Islands, power is kept in check: while people have shares (*tu'anga*) of different sizes, usually according to principles of precedence, they nevertheless set limits on power. In fact, in any society there are likely

⁶⁷ It is as if Kourabi is separated to be sacrificed but eventually is not; his total offer is not accepted.

⁶⁸ An in-depth Freudian analysis of the story, however, would be beyond the scope of this work.

to be measures taken against leaders' abuse of power (see Rayner 1993; cf. Boehm 1993). Only in Tabiteuea, there is by default much less tolerance towards would-be-chiefs, so preventive measures are taken before such a situation could develop.

Power in his things

Yet Kourabi is not deprived of all power.

His ways by the side of his grandparents (53–54)

During his stay by the side of his grandparents, there were very many miracles and wonders, which came into existence in his lifetime in the manner of the following: (55–58)

- (1) When he lay and longed for a pillow for his head, a root of the *ibi*-tree was just getting ready to blossom under his head, and it resulted in his pillow and he was comfortable indeed. (59–64)
- (2) One evening he was overheated for it was hot that evening, and he thought: What if a thing were found that I could make myself cool with. And behold, the hard western wind hit to cut away a select piece of stone (*ati n ari*)⁶⁹, whose length was perhaps 1.5 metres and it was cut on the *kainga* land of Tebunnanti and it was fetched by the people of Buota to be his thing-to-make-cool. (65–74)
- (3) When he bathed in his pond, he thought yet again: 'What if a thing came into existence under me, which I would mount on to bathe so that I would not touch the mud'. And behold, and under him emerged his stone-to-mount-on, and on which he bathed and he did not come into contact with the mud. (75–82)
- (4) When he was very old and once more he longed for his cane, and it also came in ways, which are from above.⁷⁰ The marvel is that this cane of his was truly the leg bone from the knee to the ankle, whose length was 1.5 metre, and a crowd of spirits brought it to be his cane. (83–89)

Kourabi's reproductive power is manifest by the many wonders which took place in his lifetime. When he needed a pillow, the roots of an *ibi*-tree sprouted to produce one; when he suffered from the heat, a crowd of spirits brought him a stone to cool on; a

⁶⁹ Translation of the phrase is problematic; my attempt is 'a select piece of stone'. *Ati* is a 'stone'; Katharine Luomala (1966, 169) translates *te ari* as 'a token piece' in a context where a portion of a catch is separated for a particular clan. *Tia arin kana* is a taster (of food, *kana*), a ceremonial function is a *maneaba* not unlike a 'king's taster' (see next chapter). *Ari* as a noun is usually 'eyebrow'; as a verb 'to measure', 'to compare'; and *kabo ari* means 'choosy', 'meticulous'; *arin nano* is 'beloved' (Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *ari*, *kabo ari*). In all cases the word *ari* seems to connote particularity: something which is very particular in some respect, fine or carefully weighed.

⁷⁰ I understand this as indicating that the cane, like all the other wondrous things ('also'), came 'from above', that is, from the spirits. The meaning of the sentence is not however completely clear to me, e.g. the use of the plural form (*aron ake mai eta*) is confusing. Another, more tentative interpretation would be that 'above' is an intra-textual reference – 'earlier in the story' – in which case it would mean that the cane came 'in the same ways' as the objects described above.

bathing stone emerged at his need. And when he aged, the spirits brought him a cane, which was an extraordinary, 1.5 metre-long shin bone.

Kourabi's items either emerged miraculously or were brought by spirits, pointing on the one hand to fertility and, on the other, to a source of power outside the society. The sprouting *ibi*-tree in particular is a strong image of fertility. Also, while in Western common sense stone might be the very antipode of life, this is not necessarily the case in Kiribati, where stones have particular significance; either way, stones epitomise power more generally (see below).

The origin of the cooling stone and the cane is outside the human realm, with spirits. There are two words referring to spirits. In the phrase "and behold, the hard western wind hit to cut away a stone" the word translated above as 'wind', *ang*, also means 'will' or 'spirit' (as in 'the spirit of the times'; or 'the spirit of dancing', which a Kiribati dancer may experience in performance; see Ch. 7), referring to an impersonal and non-quantifiable element. The name of the *kainga* land, onto which the wind brought the stone, Tebunanti, means a 'crowd of spirits'. It is this crowd of spirits which, in the last paragraph, brings the cane. *Anti* for their part are individual spirits, even though they are not mentioned by name here; unlike *ang*, the word *anti* can take a plural form.

One distinct feature of Kourabi's things is that they remain his. In the Kiribati language version this is underlined, though not entirely systematically, by the use of the suffixed genitive pronoun, indicating an inalienable relationship to the object. The suffixed form is used for Kourabi's pillow, pond, and cane though not for the "thing to cool on", i.e. the stone. More to the point, his things are not (re)distributed, in a way characteristic of an Austronesian chief – or a big-man, though there the logic is somewhat different – which again points to the incompleteness of his chieftainship. In addition to being without a woman, there is no exchange to found a relationship between the would-be chief and his people, as when the prototypical chief redistributes the benefits received from the gods in sacrifice (also cf. Clastres 1989, 42).

Nonetheless, because Kourabi plainly is not wholly dispossessed of power, one could ask whether the power that he does have could be constituted by the very absence of the female element (particularly if the Kiribati making of a chief is a reiteration of making him a man, rendering him doubly male). This is how Mark Mosko (1992) has described ritual chieftainship among the Austronesian-speaking Mekeo in Papua New Guinea. While according to Mosko the Mekeo chiefs represent an extreme instance of an acting agent externalising parts of himself in relationships with others, typical of Melanesian ideas of personhood and sociality, he suggests something similar might be at play in the case of a Polynesian chief. The Mekeo ritual chief differs from the commoner in that in his ultimate externalisation, he expunges all female elements, redistributing them, whereas the Mekeo commoner is always left with both male and female blood. In effect,

the chief is *reducing* himself in an ultimate way, which is in seeming contradiction to Sahlins' model, among others, of the Polynesian chief *extending* himself to encompass the whole society. Inasmuch as the Polynesian chief also needs to (re)distribute (either the blessings or himself; see Sahlins 1983), externalisation is part of his chieftainship too (Mosko 1992, 712–713). In Kourabi's case the absence of the female element means there is not enough to distribute. Kourabi neither encompasses the society nor is encompassed by it; he remains outside it.

Nonetheless, Kourabi's things are of importance to the society.

It is saddening that now there are no bodies (*rabwata*) [i.e. material remains] of his pillow and his cane, because they got burned in the hut in which they were kept. The bodies of his stone to-make-cool and his stone to-mount-on continue to exist (*a teimatoa n tiku*; lit. 'stand hard to stay') to these days.⁷¹ (90–96)

The following paragraph switches the viewpoint transiently to the present day, the narrative voice commenting on the fate of Kourabi's items from the present-day perspective. The 'bodies' or 'material remains' (*rabwata*) of Kourabi's things are significant. Usually glossed as 'body', *rabwata* appears to have a range of possible meanings pertaining to a relation between a whole and a part, or a thing and a representation: the main part or essence of a thing, or a manifestation or proxy of a thing.⁷² Kourabi's story recounts that some of his items were destroyed in a fire but, importantly, some of them have been preserved. As one Tabiteuean storyteller from another village put it, stories which leave traces (*mwiina*) are better than those which do not. It is typical of Pacific societies that knowledge and history become embedded in stones, paths, and other places (see e.g. Parmentier 1987; Morphy 1995; Anna-Leena Siikala 1998; Toren 1995b). The bodies that remain – Kourabi's stones – prove that the story is true and, as permanent manifestation of his power, verify it.⁷³

⁷¹ The stone to-make-cool is in the Atanikarawa *maneaba*. The stone to-mount-on is, I was told, in Kourabi's pond in the forest. The pond, however, has not been cleared for years, and is all but overgrown by vegetation. Older people told me they used to bathe in the pond.

⁷² For example, in a meeting which all male household heads (*atu*) were supposed to attend, it was sufficient to have the wife or child (or son- or daughter-in-law) present, because then the 'body' (*rabwata*) of the household was there – here there is also the semantic play with the ideas of head and body. According to Uriam (1995, 25), in pre-colonial Butaritari and Makin islands, dead chiefs had monoliths erected for them, as their 'body' (*rabwataia*), which was set up and dressed with leaves.

⁷³ A story-teller, narrating the story about the warriors Kaitu and Uaakeia visiting Tabiteuea North, explained this succinctly. The story is proved true (*koaua*), because the stones that Kaitu and Uaakeia set up on the islet of Teabuaroa still stand there.

Power in the bones

His ways after his death (97)

When he was truly old for his skin was bleached and he died, the elders of Buota with all its people decided that his body was not to be buried and they put him in a hut to finish well its flesh. After that they carefully cleaned his bones and they put them together to be kept in a basket called *rawati*, and they put it hanging inside his *maneaba* of Atanikarawa for it to be his place to inhabit generation after generation. (98–110)

The most significant body to remain is that of Kourabi himself. The treatment of the body and its final repository also indicate his special status, though they can be read as examples or extensions of common ways of showing reverence to ancestors. Here again it is the *tabu* which sets him apart from ordinary ancestors.

Kourabi dies an old man, and Buota villagers decide that he will not be buried. Kourabi's body is left to decompose until all the flesh is gone and the bones can be cleaned, and the whole skeleton is gathered in a basket. In this way Kourabi's bones are preserved in the same manner as his father Teinai's, which lie in a basket kept in Teinai's *maneaba* Tabontebike in Beru (*The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 49, 51; Latouche 1984, 331).

These baskets holding Kourabi's and Teinai's remains are not any old baskets; the story calls Kourabi's container *Te Rawati*, which, according to Sabatier also refers to a place ('shelf', 'attic') where ancestral bones are kept (Gilbertese–English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *Rawati*). Another, more common word for such a basket is *te abi*. *Te abi* is also a container of wisdom and knowledge; a mythical vessel in which items of knowledge and skill (cultivation, navigation, dance, martial arts etc.) were lowered down from heaven to the island of Marakei (Teweariki Teaero, personal communication 25.4. 2001; see e.g. Hughes 1957). In other words, a *rawati* or an *abi* is a vessel of power. *Te Rawati*, where Kourabi is maintained, is suspended from one of the beams supporting the roof of Atanikarawa meetinghouse.

In Kiribati, as well as elsewhere, bones of the deceased have been considered to contain the power of that person. Hence the widespread practices of preserving and revering one's ancestors' bones and, respectively, of distributing those of one's enemies in order to appropriate their power (for a Hawaiian example, see Valeri 1985b, 338–339 and Sahlins 1995, 146). In traditional Kiribati society, preserving ancestral bones was not uncommon, though usually only skulls were kept (Grimble 1921, 44–48; 1989, 21–24, 65–79). Based on Grimble's descriptions of traditional proceedings at death, and relations to ancestors, the remains – skulls or mummified bodies – seem to have been treated certainly with respect but at the same time with considerable familiarity. Uriam (1995, 12) remarks, however, that some skulls were considered especially powerful,

maka and *kamaraia*, and they would be hung in a basket either in the house or the *maneaba* of the *kainga* group.

The de-fleshing and preservation of Kourabi's bones is in line with general traditional Kiribati practices concerning the dead, but also marked by his special status. The ordinary ancestor was engaged in the social life and space of the living, offered tobacco and carried around.⁷⁴ Kourabi, however, remains as *tabu* after death as he was in life, if not more so. Laying eyes on the bones, let alone touching them, is *tabu* and only allowed to a particular kin group (see next Ch.). The enclosing of his bones in the *rawati* is the final wrapping (cf. Shore 1989; Valeri 1985b, 300–302), imposing the ultimate *tabu*.⁷⁵

There is, then, power in the bones, and the question becomes whether, or to what extent, that power can be appropriated by the living. In some societies, the possession of sacred and powerful objects is a source of power, and a way of passing it on. Such function would be served by royal regalia,⁷⁶ or the 'things that are too valuable to exchange', things (objects, knowledge) that are kept by the Melanesian 'Great Men' (Godelier 1998). By contrast, Kourabi's bones cannot be said to be owned by anyone. The *rawati* which conceals them hangs from the rafters in the southern end of the meetinghouse, which is to this day called 'the sitting area/clan of the chief', *Iinakin Uea*, but none of the subsequent members of *Iinakin Uea* have become *uea*. *Iinakin Uea* is divided into five subsections, as Chapter 3 will detail, and to be more precise, *Te Rawati* hangs above Kourabi's home *iinaki* Kabubuarengana.

This comes back to the question of succession or rather, the lack thereof. The story does not address the succession of Kourabi or his *iinaki/kainga*, Kabubuarengana, as a whole – how it came to have subsequent members. In real life the practical flexibility of the *kainga* and *iinaki* system would have allowed for succession by a younger brother, daughter, adopted grandchildren or other members of the *kainga* group. Kourabi had neither children nor any other kind of successor, because there was no institution, no office to inherit. There is no line of chiefs down which the chiefly power in the bones or elsewhere would have been passed.

I did not attempt at the time to pursue the issue of succession outside the story, partly for the practical reason that it took almost my entire fieldwork time to get the story itself.

⁷⁴ Grimble (1921, 47–48) even relates a case from Maiana, in which the mummified body of a family member was taken to see a dance.

⁷⁵ According to Valerio Valeri (1985b, 301), in Hawaii the wrapping represents man's control of the divine and the taming of its potentiality. Kourabi however, while constrained by the wrapping, can never be completely encompassed, because the sacrifice (or its structural equivalents) of the ancient Hawaiian temple rituals are lacking. Tellingly, in the Hawaiian case, the analogical relationship to that between the wrapper and the wrapped is that between a man (king) and his wife (Valeri 1985b, 301–302).

⁷⁶ I thank Professor Jukka Siikala for pointing this out to me.

While this was an inadvertent oversight on my part, the omission could perhaps be due to it being no major problem in practice. On the other hand, the fact that the genealogy given to Mary Lawson also ended with Kourabi might indicate that his descent was less relevant than his ancestors: after all, that genealogy had been used to prove Buota's right to Kourabi, by proving Kourabi's connection with Akau.

On an intra-village level, there is also one possible reason for a deliberate non-inclusion: no one is singled out as *the* ancestor, from whom present-day members of Kabubuarengana are descended; therefore, no one in Kabubuarengana can claim particular status due to his descent. If the members of *Iinakin Uea* could not have received it through a hereditary line, the succession pattern becomes irrelevant. In particular the omission from the story may indicate the irrelevance of lineal succession – or the relevance of the lack thereof – to the subsequent status of the *kainga/iinaki*.

The distinction between the succession of Kourabi's *iinaki* vis-à-vis those of Obaia's sons was made with a grammatical form. There is a video filming from the early nineties, in which one of the village elders describes the *iinakis* in Atanikarawa. Pointing at each of the *iinakis* of Obaia and his sons in turn, he says for each, "here all his descendants [*kanoana*] sit", using the suffixed genitive pronoun for 'his descendants' (*kanoa*, lit. 'contents'). For Kourabi's place, he uses the independent genitive pronoun, his words being "Kourabi's descendants [*ana kanoa Kourabi*] all sit over there". A similar instance of using the independent genitive pronoun where one would expect the suffixed is used for distinguishing a Catholic Father, i.e. priest (*ara tama*, 'our Catholic priest'), from a biological, adopted or classificatory father (*tamara*, 'our father').⁷⁷ In both cases the different genitive form indicates a different type of relationship between the possessor and the possessed.

Yet like Kourabi himself, his *iinaki* and its members do have some power, translated into practice in Kabubuarengana's prestigious status of the Answerer – the second speaker – in the *maneaba* (see Ch. 3). I see three possible interpretations, which do not necessarily exclude each other.

Since Kourabi's power is not passed on lineally, one possibility is to see a 'lateral' and spatial transmission. Rather than passed *down*, authority is 'contagious'; transferred from the bones or from the sitting place. Unlike Polynesian chiefs who embody the power in their corpulence or their genitals (see Shore 1989, 138-139, 142; Sahlins 1987, 15-17), elders of *Iinakin Uea* have spatialised power. However, to the extent present members of *Iinakin Uea* can appropriate power, it is effectively decentralised.

⁷⁷ As another, but more tentative example, I heard someone refer to her child with the independent genitive pronouns (*au nati*) instead of the suffixed genitive from (*natiu*). In my understanding, she might have been the biological but was not the social mother, as I did not hear her referring to the child on any other occasion as hers.

Kabubuarengana is certainly differentiated from the other subsections of *Iinakin Uea* in its privileged position as the second speaker, but given that its precedence is based on proximity to the bones, the proximity is also limited in an important way. While closest to the bones, people of Kabubuarengana are nonetheless tabooed from touching or even seeing them. The handling the bones is the prerogative of another sub-section within *Iinakin Uea*, the *iinaki* named Te Katanrake. There is a ritual division of labour, to be discussed in the next chapter, which in this case prevents power from concentrating in one place.

For the most part, however, power remains outside society. It is not channelled into societal reproduction and only enters into circulation in a limited way. Reflecting the issue vis-à-vis Pierre Clastres' (1989) discussion of South-American chiefs, it could be said Kourabi does not participate in the exchange of women or goods. Insofar as Kourabi is viewed as a metonym of the present-day Kabubuarengana group, it is only words that circulate. Thus much of this *uea*'s power transcends society. Conversely though, by staying outside, power is not lessened by becoming profane. Like the gods' power, it is also stronger *because* it is transcendent.⁷⁸

SUMMARY: DIFFERENTIATION AND ITS CUT-OFF POINT

Handing over the foremost story of the village was not to be done lightly. The story that goes with the Story of Kourabi illustrates, on the one hand, its continuing importance, as well as the process that led to the present form of the narrative. On the other hand, the metanarrative concerns the local concept of knowledge and knowledge as a form of power, as well as showing the interplay of collective and the individual authorship and ownership of oral tradition. In this case there is a strong emphasis on the village community, which will also be seen in other matters in later chapters. A key concern in the proceedings was to bring forth a completed, accurate and consensual Story of Kourabi. The story itself has been examined in such detail in this chapter in order to throw light on Kiribati notions of power, which have been taken more abstractly to represent the power of social reproduction, and of social differentiation.

The social systems in southern Gilbert Islands in general have been described as being characterised by relative equality between kin groups led by senior male heads, but Tabiteuea in particular is known for an explicit ban (*tabu*) on chiefs. This does not mean that there is not an idea of chieftainship; on the contrary, there is no need to forbid something that does not exist. The notion of differentiation by genealogical seniority is

⁷⁸ I owe the idea of transcendence in this context to a discussion with Jukka Siikala 2.4. 2007.

clearly present, expressed in the metaphor of the primeval trees in Tabiteuea and particularly in Samoa, which is generally considered to provide the origin of Kiribati social organisation. Initially, Kourabi too exemplifies this, as the beginning of the story outlines his connections to the principal clan, Karongoa. The story also describes the importance of a local order of precedence, of occupying the land. It is Kourabi's double connection to Akau, an in-marrying conqueror of the land, that leads him to Temanoku/Buota. In choosing this path Kourabi is encouraged by his mother, suggesting the active role women can take in issues of land and politics, which is also illustrated in Rairaeana's story, when Rairaeana's mother suggests her hot-headed son should travel to the Marshall Islands.

Akau, for his part, exemplifies another common principle of Oceanic chieftainship: the need for a transcendence of certain dualities of power. Even when the preconditions for power exist, in order for power to be realised there must be a transformation and moreover, the full realisation of power can only occur in a relationship. Coming to, and establishing himself in, Temanoku/Buota, Akau overcame two basic dualities: outside:inside and male:female. In Kourabi's case it is the lack of transformation of the latter duality which reveals its importance.

In Kiribati, one form of empowering transformation can be perceived in the notions of 'making' or 'finishing well'. They are general terms referring to a kind of supplication and a claim for power from the spirits, be that well-being (*mauri*), courage for the warrior (*un*) and strength to work (*mwakuri*), or the ability to destruct (curse) (*kamaraia*). Though the first three local forms of power are needed for the good life of any man, making also has the potential to produce social differentiation.

This potential for differentiation comes into play in Kourabi's story. What distinguishes Tabiteuea, and most of the histories of other Gilbert Islands as well, is that the differentiation is only allowed up to a point. It takes its most drastic form in Tabiteuea, where the emerging chieftainship is cut short – castrated as it were. Kourabi, a key figure in the history of Temanoku/Buota, Tabiteuea, does become a *uea*, but in the analysis of his story, Kourabi proves rather to be a case in point, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of the concept of *tabu*. Namely, it becomes apparent that chiefs in Tabiteuea are 'forbidden' – impossible – only as a practical outcome of their being *tabu*.

On arrival in Buota, Kourabi is already both an outsider and an insider. He is a member of the Karongoa clan, which has privileged access to divine power (i.e., above) and arrives from the sea, but he also has pre-existing ties to the land (i.e., below). In following the path of Akau, Kourabi makes a choice which emphasises the land, but at the same time this means that he subjects himself to his grandparents (*tibu*). It is the grandparents who are decisive in the process of making where they have the authority to

bind or loosen. Inadvertent biblical connotations aside, this idiom points to a key metaphor in Kiribati rituals, namely, ‘tightening’.

In the foregoing analyses, ‘tightening’ or ‘enclosing’ emerged as the common structural denominator in rituals for the appropriation of power. Making someone a person of power, a *uea*, was seen to be in essential aspects a reiteration of the general male initiation, and was in turn discussed together with female initiation. In fact, all three types of rituals can be interpreted as dealing with power in its different forms. For the women-to-be, the primary form is sexuality – for men to be and especially chiefs-to-be it is aggression, which for the latter contains a potential for political power. Kourabi’s case showed that these forms of power from sexual to political potency are conjoined, and might be seen as manifestations of the same, more abstractly understood, reproductive power. The traditional initiations not only differentiated children into men and women; they also undifferentiated among and between genders in the imposition of the same ideals: the ability to work hard and, above all, (self-)control and responsibility. Even differentiating some men into chiefs played upon the same themes. The most important Kiribati notion regarding power to emerge from these discussions was that for power to be positively valued, it needs to be controlled.

Whether making men, chiefs, or women, the ritual procedure involves ‘tightening’ or ‘enclosing’ ([*ka*]ko-) the person: a period of seclusion marked with the strict regulation of various aspects of behaviour, in other words, actual as well as figurative control. Consequently, the person is made *tabu* (becomes subject to *tabu*). The *tabu* restricts but also protects the person: power needs to be domesticated, in order for it to be appropriated into benefiting the society, but also simply because unrestrained divine power is too dangerous for humans, being the source of death as well as life. Immobility then, is the condition of power. Being *tabu* is a very ambivalent state, because a certain degree of freedom is required for the utilisation of power, for the transformation of cosmological power into political power. Consequently, equally crucial to this ‘tightening’ aspect of the ritual process is the loosening.

In loosening one can perceive both qualitative and quantitative change. In the gendered rituals I have discussed for Kiribati, the realisation of power, a qualitative change, is brought about by the union of the sexes: marriage, which is supposed to follow the period of seclusion and constraint. For the chief however, this would not be a total removal of the *tabu* but a matter of degree: the chief should be *tabu* enough to have power but free enough to rule. If the chief-to-be is tightened twice, he would accrue more power – and some *tabu* restrictions would continually be needed. Thus the position of the chief would always retain certain ambivalence.

The quantitative aspect – the ambivalence and the variable extent to which chiefs are *tabu*/free – relates in the comparative perspective to the question of “the duality of

sovereignty” (Sahlins 1987, 90) or “the diarchic arrangement” (Valeri 1982, 10; see also Valeri 1990) of leadership. Sovereignty requires both a passive and an active component/side. Passivity is associated with the divine, superior rank, stability/immobility and peace; activity with the worldly, inferior rank, mobility, freedom to act and violence (Valeri 1982, 10). The pair can also be connected to the dichotomies discussed earlier e.g., sea/land, above/below, male/female, elder/younger.

In some societies balance between cosmological and political power is reached by dividing chieftainship between two persons, a passive and an active one: in Samoa, a divine – sitting – chief and a talking chief, i.e., orator (see e.g. Shore 1982; 241–249); in Hawaii, a sacred, peaceful king and a profane, conquering king (Valeri 1982, 10–11). Alternatively, the two components can be identified with one individual at different moments during his (her) life time, at different stages of a process or transformation, or at different levels of the society (Valeri 1982, 10–11; 1985a; Sahlins 1987, 90–91). Christina Toren (1994), on the other hand, shows that in Fiji the dual nature of chiefship is linked to a permanent tension between hierarchy and equality in Fijian society. Also, whatever the terms the duality is expressed in, in different societies the two sides of the opposition can be differentially emphasised or valued (Howard 1985, 58).⁷⁹

The proportions of divine passivity and worldly but effective activity seem to be variable and create ambivalence elsewhere too; there are examples from around the Pacific of high chiefs effectively prevented by *tabus* from doing a number of things – he “just sits” (Sahlins 1987, 91; see also Shore 1982, 244) – their capacity to rule depending on personal abilities (Marcus 1989), historical circumstances and the society’s valuations. Chiefs may even be bound to the extent that they have virtually no political power as in the case described by Joel Robbins (1994) of the Kalauna chiefs in Melanesia, whose position is mirrored in public feasts where the chiefs literally have to sit still (Robbins 1994, 47). In such a case, the chiefs remain marginal to, or even outside, a society (cf. Clastres 1989).

The qualitative change, on the other hand, does not take place for Kourabi; without the complementary female aspect – be it in the form of a woman or some other embodiment of reproductive power – he remains entirely *tabu*: powerful but unable to utilise the power. Significantly, this is effected by his grandparents, by their refusal to unbind. Thus it could be said that here the people of the land have the final word, though not without cost. The prohibition of marriage is a refusal of reciprocity (cf. Clastres 1989, 42), which means that there is no counter-gift either. Kourabi’s things remain his own; he

⁷⁹ For example, according to Alan Howard (1985, 58), in Rotuma the primary source of legitimate authority resides in the people of the land, whereas in more stratified Pacific societies, like Fiji or Hawai’i, the divine power might be the more critical form.

does not (re)distribute the fruits of his power to the society. Though the people of the land are acting partly to their own loss, however, this is how it should be, for in Tabiteuea, the *uea* is to be *tabu*.

When Kourabi dies, his power is embodied in his bones. Bones are gathered, but can their power be appropriated? There are no descendants to claim them, so power is not passed on lineally. However, one could envisage some kind of lateral and/or spatial transmission through the shared sitting place (*iinaki*) and the bones themselves. Given that Kourabi's *iinaki* may, depending on the context, comprise either Kabubarengana only, or the whole southern end (*Iinakin Uea*), and that only Te Katanrake has the privilege to touch the bones, the power is effectively decentralised. On the other hand, at least part of his power remains transcendent, out of reach of mortal men, since it was never completely transformed into an enforceable form.

This chapter has moved at the level of cultural ideals. From myth, oral history and early ethnographic accounts there emerges a picture of the traditional society and its practices which in the final analysis is somewhat conjectural. Examining practices which have ceased, combined with projections from present-day practices onto the past, is problematic. Nevertheless, it has been presupposed here that the stories and the normative descriptions of historical practices can be used to distil cosmological ideas about power and differentiation. Cosmologies are ideal by nature, and while inconsistencies may exist, they are not complicated by what people actually do. In the next chapter, as the Story of Kourabi goes on, I take a step towards the present and the complicated world of practice.

3. *///AKS* AND THEIR WORK: (UN)DIFFERENTIATION AND DECENTRALISATION IN THE MEETINGHOUSE

This chapter continues the analysis of Kourabi's story, from the point where it ceases to be an account of the past and becomes an account of certain prescribed practices in the present.⁸⁰ At the end of the foregoing analysis, Kourabi's remains lie in his 'dwelling place', the *rawati*-casket suspended from the roof of the village meetinghouse in Buota. It is this meetinghouse, a *maneaba*, named Atanikarawa or Te Ririere, which is the focus of the latter half of the story. Accordingly, in this chapter, meetinghouses in general and Atanikarawa in particular are the stage on which social relationships are played out. As regards differentiation/undifferentiation, the 'work' that various groups do in, and for, the meetinghouse becomes the key notion.

ON MEETINGHOUSES (*MANEABAS*)

According to Father Sabatier, the word for Kiribati meetinghouse, *maneaba*, derives from *mane*, 'to hold' or 'surround', and *aba* which means both 'land' and 'people' (Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *Maneaba*; see also Tabokai 1993, 23). A *maneaba*, then, is a building that holds the⁸¹ people of the land. A *Maneaba* is an obvious symbol and representation of a community, be that community local, religious or other. The traditional prototype of a *maneaba* is the village district *maneaba*, which is divided into *boti/iinaki* sitting areas occupied by kin groups (clans), by extension also called *boti/iinaki*. This traditional *maneaba* institution, comprising *iinakis*, is the focus of this chapter, but historical changes will also be discussed.

⁸⁰ There is change in the Story of Kourabi from the past tense into the present tense: the paragraph 'His ways after his death' begins with the past tense conjunctive *ngke* ('when') but the following paragraph 'His hanging in his *maneaba*' begins with the present/future conditional *ngkana* ('if').

⁸¹ I use the definite article for *the* people deliberately. When the word *aba* is used to refer to people it is used in the definitive plural.



Photograph 1. Atanikarawa meetinghouse (*maneaba*) in Buota village, Tabiteuea Meang.

The district *maneaba* building is something one is bound to notice when entering a village. It is difficult not to resort to superlative clichés when describing *te maneaba*. Though meetinghouses vary greatly in size, many village *maneabas* are awe-inspiring structures in their sheer size. There are several types of *maneaba* buildings, for each of which proportions (length/breadth/height ratio) and the number of posts are prescribed (H.E. Maude 1980; Hockings 1989, 203-205, 207) – but a structure of, say, 35 x 28 metres, rising up to 20 metres in height is impressive, considering that it can be built without a single nail: with wood, coconut husk fibre, pandanus and palm leaves and stones as the only materials; not to mention a building double that length. The basic floor plan of a meetinghouse is rectangular, and the form of the roof, supported by posts, is basically the same in all *maneabas* (see Photograph 1). *Maneabas* do not have walls, though, like Atanikarawa, they are often surrounded by a fence. *Maneabas* are usually built on the lagoon side of the island, the longer sides of the rectangle facing north-south.

The *maneaba* is awesome also in that in the traditional view it is sacred, and brings a curse upon anyone daring to offend it with improper behaviour; in other words, it is *kamaraia* (Grimble 1989, 119; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 11). Grimble (1989, 119, 200-201) attributes the sanctity of the *maneaba* on the one hand to the presence of the Karongoan Uea clan with its ritual duties and therefore, by proxy, the presence of the sun in the *maneaba*. On the other hand, Grimble (1989, 289–292; cf. H.E. Maude 1991b, 4) traces the sacredness of the *maneaba* back to its Samoan origin and its role as a temple where members of Karongoan Uea served as priests officiating for the Polynesian war god Rongo, known for his appetite for human sacrificial victims. According to H.E. Maude (1991b, 4), however, the pre-Gilbertese *maneaba* was a place where enemies were sacrificed by Karongoan Uea but on the whole was not a temple. H.E. Maude (1991b, 4) maintains that the *maneaba* was sacred by virtue of being a sacrificial site but also by virtue of Karongoa's ancestor-god.

On another level, it can be maintained that it is the community, as an ideal, which makes the *maneaba* sacred. This is firstly implied in the notion of the sanctity of the elders (*unimwaane*), who represent the community. According to Baranite Kirata (1985, 77–79), the words of *unimwaane* have supernatural authority: to defy their orders is to risk becoming cursed. Uriam's (1995, 7) comment, quoted earlier, about historical chiefs being considered *kamaraia* because of the elders who chose them for the duty, points in the same direction. Secondly, in the analysis of *maneaba* practices in Chapter 5, there emerges a valorised idea of the social whole, and I would argue that the sanctity of the *maneaba* is fundamentally rooted in the whole cosmology. Karongoan Uea's important role, however, categorises the *maneaba* as a social institution, which has been the key concern of a number scholars of Kiribati society and culture.

The social system and the particular buildings do go together. From one point of view, *maneabas* are inseparably tied to particular buildings; spaces demarcated by a physical structure of wood, thatch and coral stone are divided into sitting areas of the particular kin groups present in that village. More than that, meetinghouses have names and histories: an identity, which again transcends the building. Even when a new *maneaba* structure is built to replace an old one, the identity of the meetinghouse may not be lost. Despite the striking concordance in the arrangement of clans (*boti/iinaki*) in most Gilbert Islands *maneabas* (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 14), the social organisation is always meetinghouse-specific. The building, on the other hand is not dependent on the sitting order, which can be different if another set of people gather there.

From another point of view, the *maneaba* is an abstract constellation of social groups, which is not tied to the building in that the same sitting order, indicative of the same groups, might be observed elsewhere too: for example if the people of a village gather amongst themselves in some other *maneaba* than that of their own village. In this sense the *maneaba* is like the Samoan *fono* organisation (see e.g. Shore 1982, 77–81), not surprising considering the Samoan origin of the *maneaba*. It also has another origin, however; there were meetinghouses in the Gilberts before the arrival of the migrants from Samoa, even if there was no *boti/iinaki* institution (Lundsgaarde 1978, 67–68; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 11; Uriam 1995, 17). One might ponder whether the dual origin has influenced the nature of the *maneaba* institution, but in the absence of further information it must remain speculative.

There is a persistent duality in the way in which the *maneaba* as a political institution has been characterised. Aspects of it, both hierarchical and democratic (with the gender and age reservations referred to in the Introduction), have been discussed in the literature, but rarely together, and their simultaneous existence has largely been overlooked. What is more, both kinds of features have tended to be taken as self-explanatory. My intention is to examine these features in detail and see how they are constructed in myth, history and practice, by looking at these different features as forms of differentiation and undifferentiation in order to unravel the complex ways in which they come together.

The history of *maneaba* and *boti/iinaki* organisation is a history of increasing differentiation; the same history of which Kourabi's ancestry was part. H. E. Maude traces this history and the concomitant development of the *maneaba* system in his classic study *The Evolution of the Gilbertese Boti* (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]), which continues to be the authoritative text on the subject (though questioned recently by Kazama 2001). H.E. Maude begins with the arrival of the mythical ancestor Tematawarebwe to Beru Island and the construction the first Gilbertese *maneaba* of Tabontebike, later inherited by Kourabi's father Teinai, followed by the establishment of

boti/iinaki divisions there (for the story of the construction, see *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 25–26; Latouche 1984, 221–229). The institution then spread with the Samoan migrants and their descendants onwards from Beru, as they migrated to and invaded almost all the Gilbert Islands, though it also incorporated autochthonous inhabitants in various places. The same clans (*boti/iinaki*), whose ancestors occupied Tabontebike, can be found on most Gilbert Islands, and their sitting places are located in most *maneabas*, but *maneabas* may have localised versions of the pan-Gilbertese scheme, and there are also two other principal types of *maneaba* and *boti* organisation (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 14; see H.E. Maude 1980). In the case of Buota, the local modification is highly significant.

H.E. Maude (1991a [1963]) discusses four ways of *boti* (*iinaki*) formation: partition by the founder of the *maneaba*, conquest and subsequent reallocation, fission due to population growth, and consent or invitation. Formation of *boti* is accompanied by distribution of land, though not in any straightforward way. Land rights, ownership and inheritance in Kiribati are a complex subject which has been studied – though in a later, colonial, context – by, for example, Henry P. Lundsgaarde (1966, 115–149; 1974). Here it should be recalled that traditionally a distinction has been made between two kinds of lands: *kainga* as the ancestral home site and synonymous with a kin group, and *buakonikai* or forest lands (Uriam 1995, 10) though sometimes *kainga* lands are understood to stretch the across the breadth of the atoll.

OBAIA THE FEATHERED’S ARRIVAL AND THE FOUNDATION OF ATANIKARAWA

The particular *maneaba* to be discussed in this chapter, the meeting house called Atanikarawa (‘head [i.e., chief] of heaven’), enters Kourabi’s story with the description of his descent from Akau:

[...] Kourabi was truly the great-great-grandchild of Akau, who sat in his *maneaba* which is Atanikarawa in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North. (Lines 11–14)

Oral tradition tells us that Akau was not the original master of Atanikarawa; he was the newcomer, the conqueror, as described earlier. Originally, the meetinghouse had belonged to Obaia the Feathered, maternal grandfather of the Obaia in Kourabi’s Story. The *maneaba* was a gift from Obaia the Feathered’s father on Obaia’s return from the mythical land of Onouna. Obaia the Feathered’s father was Taukarawa, who lived in the heavens (*karawa*); his mother was Nei Terere, who issued from the top of a tree called Te Uekera, which had grown on Tarawa from a branch taken from the Kaintikuaba-tree

in Samoa.⁸² Obaia the Feathered is so called because of the wings that were constructed for him out of frigate bird feathers. Ten Obaia's travels to the mythical land of Onouna are well known in Kiribati mythology and there are at least four previously published variants (Latouche 1984, 137–141; H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1994, 104–108; 195–198; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 74–76).

In Onouna, Obaia married Nei Katura and had two children by her, Nei Kirirere and Nei Kirimoi. Eventually Obaia left, wanting to return to his father in the heavens, but Obaia's brother, Tabuariki the Wind, who had already given him trouble on the way to Onouna, intervened. The story-teller Bauro Teteki from Buota narrates that, in Onouna,

Obaia was starting to think about returning. He informed the woman who was his spouse: "You know, I'll be going. But Kirimoi will stay with you to make you overcome your longing. And I will take Kirirere with me in order to make me overcome my longing." He put the girl on his back, to hold on to him with her hands, and they flew away. But Tabuariki the Wind saw them, and hurled himself against them.

Obaia returned to Onouna, since his flight was not successful, because Tabuariki threw himself against him again. And so Obaia fetched a giant clamshell, and put it on his back. And he put his child, the girl, into it. No matter, he [unclear] was seen at that time and he was to be feared more because he was very high up ardour [unclear]. But he, Tabuariki, threw himself at Obaia again. They did not come to their village [in the heavens], for Obaia was beginning to fall. And Tabuariki threw himself against him, and so Obaia's entry into the heavens did not succeed. Obaia descended, and he then resided in Temanoku, in Buota. He did not come into the heavens, and so he sat in the village which was Temanoku of old, on his *kainga* of Kabubuarengana.

Obaia truly sat with his child, Kirirere. She was then married with Beia, Beia te Kamarai. [...]

(At 6A/230200/Antebuka, S.Tarawa/M83)

Obaia left Onouna, carrying one of his daughters, Nei Kirirere, in a giant clam shell strapped on his back, and because he could not return to his father in the heavens, he settled in Temanoku, on the island of Tabiteuea. The first place where Ten Obaia landed in Temanoku was the *kainga* of Kabubuarengana, where he then 'sat', i.e., dwelled, with Nei Kirirere (At 6A/230200/Antebuka, S.Tarawa/M83). Concerning the landing site, the variants given in *The Story of Karongoa* and by Jean-Paul Latouche (1984, 137–141) differ in an important way, to be discussed below. At Akau's arrival from Samoa, Obaia the Feathered occupied Atanikarawa, and it was his group – Kabubuarengana – that Akau took over or was appropriated by. Obaia's daughter Nei Kirirere later married

⁸² It was the fourth branch of Kaintikuaba that became Te Uekera; it was Baretoka's, who was the brother of Tematawarebwe's and Akau's brother, the fourth-born in the original sibling-set of Karongoa.

Akau's grandson Beia⁸³, as mentioned earlier. In different narratives, this couple are parents to several important characters in the stories: Nei Beiarung (Teinai's M, Kourabi's FM); Rakentai, who became the wife of Tei Mauri and the mother of Rairaeana the Warrior; Obaia II, who succeeded his grandfathers in Atanikarawa and features in the Story of Kourabi.

When Obaia the Feathered received the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa from his father, it was first lowered down from the heavens (*karawa*) to the ocean side of the atoll, to a place nowadays called *Ruo-mai-karawa* ('descend from heaven') or, tongue-in-cheek, *Tara-karawa* ('watching heaven', referring to the people gaping at the building coming down from the skies). There, east of Buota village in the woods (*buakonikai*), most of the foundation stones remain to-day. Somewhere at the boundary of myth and history, Atanikarawa was moved to the lagoon side of the island, to the village, as a-matter-of-course: "because it was in the woods", "very far away" from the village and on the ocean side, as a Buota elder described it to me, it had to be moved. Subsequently, there have been at least two buildings on the present site, the latest built around 1944.⁸⁴ Based on the location of the Karongoa n Uea's sitting place, Atanikarawa would be a Tabontebike type of *maneaba* (see H.E. Maude 1980 for the different types and subtypes, and Grimble 1989, 209).

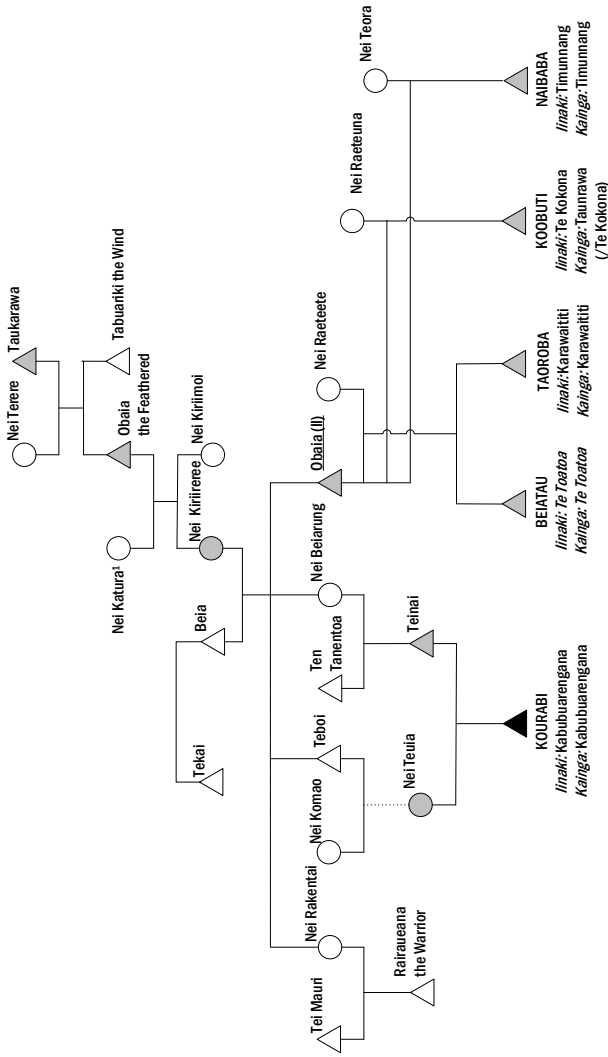
Though frequently referred to as Atanikarawa, the official name of the meetinghouse today is Te Ririere, because of the name exchange with the village of Nonouti. The original name of this village was Temanoku, and the name of its central meetinghouse Atanikarawa. After Temanoku had exchanged names with Nonouti, it became Buota and its meetinghouse Te Ririere. The official name of the Tabiteuean village is now Buota and the name is used in most contexts, though the name Temanoku comes up in stories and songs. By contrast, both names of the *maneaba*, 'Atanikarawa' and 'Te Ririere', are in everyday use with Atanikarawa probably the more common one.⁸⁵

⁸³ According to the variant in *An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition* (H.E. Maude & H.C. Maude 1994, 198), Nei Kirirere married both Beia and Tekai (Beia-ma-Tekai).

⁸⁴ A photograph of the Atanikarawa building preceding the present one is in H.E. Maude 1980.

⁸⁵ I am not familiar with the Nonouti usage of the names; Kambati Uriam (1995) uses the names Temanoku and Atanikarawa to refer exclusively to Nonouti village and its meetinghouse.

FOUNDERS OF ATANIKARAWA MEETINGHOUSE



Genealogy3. Founders of Atanikarawa meetinghouse. Siblings and spouses not relevant in this context have been omitted from this chart.

¹ *The Story of Karongoo* (1991, 75) gives Nei Kaanti as the name of the woman whom Obaiia married in Onouna. However, a version from Tarawa (An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition; H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1994, 195–198) is in agreement with the version from Buota that in that Obaiia's spouse is named as Nei Katura. The Tarawa version mentions a third daughter of Obaiia and Nei Katura, Nei Manrei.

KOURABI'S ARRIVAL AT ATANIKARAWA: THE RECONFIGURATION OF POWER

The founding history of Atanikarawa as a social institution is partly described in the Story of Kourabi, where Kourabi's arrival establishes a new social order as well as a new distribution of power. One function of the story is to explain the origin of, and to legitimate the existing *iinaki* organisation. It is not uncommon to refer to an *iinaki* by the name of the founding ancestor (see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 17 fn. 28). In describing the re-partitioning of the *maneaba* between Kourabi and Obaia's sons, the story thus describes the foundation of present-day social organisation of the community. To reprise,

When he [Kourabi] was passing by the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa, Obaia spoke to his children, who were Beiatau, Taoroba, Kobuti and Naibwabwa, like this: "Look, for the place he goes directly to, you will make room as well." (32–37)

When he [Kourabi] came to the corner of the *maneaba* from the south, he turned toward the lagoon to reach the southern side of the *maneaba* to the west of the middle post. It was Beiatau who stood up, to make room before him, to sit next to his same-sex sibling who was Taoroba on the eastern side, and Kourabi sat in the southern side after him [Beiatau]. (38–46)

Seeing Kourabi pass, Obaia requested his sons to make room for Kourabi, in the place of his choosing. At his father's command, Beiatau moved out to share the eastern side with Taoroba, and the original four *iinaki* became five. The *iinaki* which Kourabi occupied, the whole southern end, became subsequently known as *Iinakin Uea*, the *iinaki* of the high chief. The position and identity of the *uea* of a *maneaba* as well as those of the first speaker (*moanibwai*) are key issues in the interpretation of this part of the story.

According to Jean-Paul Latouche (1984, 57), the *uea* of the *maneaba* can be either the first occupant of the land or the builder of the *maneaba*. In a way, the default value is that the *uea* is the head or *Karongoan Uea iinaki*, in case it has a sitting place in the *maneaba* (though in some *maneaba* types it does not; see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 14). For example, according to Kambati Uriam (1995, 8), in the southern Gilberts the synonymous expression *boti n uea* refers to the Karongoan Uea clan. In Katharine Luomala's (1965, 35) account of the Tabiteuean *maneaba*, *Iinakin Uea* refers to the holder of the right of precedence ('the first thing', *moanibwai*), which as a general rule, is Karongoan Uea. This is not surprising, given that the Karongoan narrative tradition is the canonical text of Gilbertese oral history (Uriam 1995), and Uriam (1995, 83) notes that the structure and content of the *maneaba* traditions in the southern islands work for Karongoa's benefit. The Atanikarawa tradition, however, presents a partial challenge to Karongoan Uea.

The course of events at Kourabi's arrival suggests that Karongoan Uea, though present in the *maneaba*, might not have been the *uea* even before Kourabi's arrival. The first occupant of the land had been Obaia the Feathered; the place where he first sat had been the *kainga* of Kabubuarengana. Kabubuarengana had also given the name to his *iinaki* in the *maneaba* that he founded. This *iinaki* was the one Akau had successfully taken over as well as been incorporated into by marriage, and from the Story of Kourabi we learn that this *iinaki* was in the southern end of the meetinghouse. By Kourabi's arrival, the *iinaki* had been inherited by Obaia the Feathered's and Akau's common descendant, Obaia II. What happened was that Obaia repartitioned the *maneaba*: he allocated a new place to his eldest son Beiatu, subdividing the *iinaki* that had previously been Taoroba's alone.

Of the four ways of *boti* formation described by H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 14–24), new *boti* were created by fission when the leader of a sizeable *boti* divided it between his descendants (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 20), but the crucial question is: who had the right to make rearrangements that affected the whole *maneaba*? When a *maneaba* was first founded, it was the founder who allocated *iinakis* to the different kin groups (16). Later, the *uea* of the *maneaba* could appoint a place to a group previously without a *boti*, by inviting them or by consenting to a plea (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 22). At conquest, it was the conqueror who assumed the right of re-allocation (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 16). That the usual 'ueaship' of Karongoan Uea was contested in this *maneaba* is already indicated by the fact that Obaia II re-allocated the *iinakis*, for this would have been done by the *uea* of the *maneaba*.

When Kourabi arrived at Atanikarawa, it was Obaia II who spoke. As noted in the previous chapter, his position was one of giving permission and making arrangements (*katautau*). The situation resembles the formation of new *iinaki* by invitation or consent, though strictly speaking it is Beiatu's *iinaki* which is new, Kourabi entering by right to the existing *iinaki* of Obaia and Akau. Katharine Luomala (1966, 166), in her discussion of the *maneaba* in Tekaman village, Tabiteuea, suggests that it was possible for an *iinaki* to invite a high-ranking person or family from another *iinaki* to join its own in order to enhance its status. Such an invitation, combined with the founder's right to re-allocate places, makes the arrival of the 'stranger king' appear an active appropriation of outside power (cf. Geddes 1977, 379). Had Kourabi entered as a subjugator, he would have been the one to make the new arrangements.

Another thing to indicate Kabubuarengana's status before Kourabi's arrival is that the place was about to be passed on to the eldest son. Before Kourabi's arrival, Obaia had divided the four *iinakis* between himself and his sons: Beiatu had stayed with his father (on the southern side of the meetinghouse), and Taoroba (eastern side), Koobuti (northern side) and Naibwabwa (western side) had been allocated their own *iinakis* and

kainga lands. From *The Story of Karongoa* we know that the Karongean Uea clan had come to inhabit the northern end, as the *iinaki* Te Kokona; in other words, Te Kokona – in Buota it is usually called Taunrawa, which may be the name of its ancestral land (*kainga*), though conversely, the land parcel was sometimes called Te Kokona – was the representative of Karongean Uea clan in Temanoku/Buota. Thus Koobuti, who was the third son (the oldest son by Obaia's second wife Raeteuna), had been chosen to the Karongean Uea position. Koobuti occupied a prestigious seat then, due to its precedence as well as the relationship to the sun, a source of power, and its prerogative to *kamaraia*.

The significance of primogeniture line, of Beiatu's position over Koobuti's, should not be over-emphasised, however: patrilineality as the general principle is a strong ideal (see Grimble 1989, 203, 210–215; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 25) but several scholars have stressed the flexibility of the Kiribati *iinaki* system since an individual also has a right to sit in his mother's or wife's *boti*, and adoption offers another means of manipulation (see e.g. Geddes 1977, 374; Goodenough 1955; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 27–28; Lundsgaarde & Silverman 1972). Why Koobuti occupied the Karongean Uea seat is not evident. There is a tentative matrilineal connection: the information I have of Koobuti's mother Raeteuna's descent, mentioned to me by a story-teller, is that she was from the hamlet and *kainga* of Taunibong. Taunibong *kainga/iinaki* is part of the *iinaki* Koobuti inherited, though not its principal section. Nonetheless, it seems safe to conclude that Kabubuarengana at the southern end was a(nother) position of power in Atanikarawa. Kabubuarenga was the *iinaki* of the founder, Obaia the Feathered, and then the usurper, Akau. According to *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 77), because of Akau, the southern end of the meetinghouse can also be called Karongoa, logically enough emphasising Karongoa's role. From the local perspective, however, it could be that Akau's arrival contributed to Kabubuarengana's *pre-existing* high status, instead of Kabubuarengana just deriving it from the incoming Karongoa member, whether the *uea*'s seat originally or not.

Be the power constellation before Kourabi as it may, after his arrival the southern end unambiguously was *Iinakin Uea*, as it is today. Yet Kabubuarengana's status as the principal seat within *Iinakin Uea* is *not* accompanied by the right of first speech (*moanibwai*) in Atanikarawa (cf. Luomala 1965, 35). For it is the Karongean Uea representative, Koobuti's group, who has the first and the last word in Atanikarawa. Kabubuarengana is the Answerer, the second speaker. Interestingly, the *Iinakin Uea* itself restricts its own scope of operations. It was the original head of the southern *iinaki*, Obaia II, who made Kourabi chief but also *tabu*, thus leaving Kourabi's chieftom only partially realised. The question about fixed order of precedence between in the southern and the northern end, or their principal sections Kabubuarengana and Te Kokona/Taunrawa does not seem as relevant here as the fact that the two positions

counterweigh each other in a precarious equilibrium. Power becomes decentralised, and its location ambiguous, or rather transient, dependent on the ‘work’ that the *iinak*is do (see below).

RIVALLING ARRIVALS

The equilibrium-cum-ambiguity of power is likely to be particularly pronounced in the land of the *tabu uea*, but it does not appear wholly exceptional. A similar constellation of power is at least hinted at when the Stories of Kourabi and Obaia the Feathered are compared to the canonical stories of Karongoa, despite the latter contradicting the former, and what is more, doing it in a way that seriously questions the local position on precedence with regard to the land.

Firstly, there is an interesting discrepancy between the story from Buota and two published Karongoa variants of Obaia the Feathered’s story.⁸⁶ In the story quoted in the beginning of this chapter, as well as in another variant I received from Buota, Obaia the Feathered landed on the *kainga* land of Kabubuarengana. In the *The Story of Karongoa* and in the version in Jean-Paul Latouche’s (1984, 137–141) compilation, which was collected from Karongoa representatives on Nikunau island, it is maintained that on his arrival at Temanoku, Obaia first stayed in the North, in Te Kokona, and took control over whole Temanoku (Latouche 1984, 141; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 76).⁸⁷ This amounts to a claim that Te Kokona – Karongoa Uea – was the founder *iinaki* of Atanikarawa meetinghouse, but the tradition from Buota is unambiguous about the precedence of Kabubuarengana.

⁸⁶ A third variant, from Tarawa, is in the An Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition (H.E. Maude & H.C. Maude 1994, 195–198).

⁸⁷ There are also differences concerning Obaia’s parentage and his wife’s name, but these are not relevant to the interpretation here. According to *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 74–75) Obaia had two fathers, Taukarawa and Taubibita, both from the heavens. For its part, the variant in Latouche (1984, 137–141) says that Obaia’s mother was Nei Tabera, not Nei Terere. In one sense they almost amount to the same person: the daughter conflated with the mother. Thus, according to Latouche (1984, 137), Nei Terere was the daughter of Nei Tabera with Tearikintarawa; *tabera* also means ‘top of a tree’. Sources from Buota place Nei Terere ‘at the top of Te Uekera tree’; *The Story of Karongoa* (1991, 74) narrates that she “came forth” from the tree. In the Karongoa variants, Obaia’s wife in Onouna is given the name Nei Kaanti (causative prefix *ka-* and *anti*, ‘spirit’), daughter of Ten Tebike and Nei Arobanga; not Nei Katura. On the other hand, in the second variant in the Anthology of Gilbertese Oral Tradition (H.C. Maude & H.E. Maude 1994, 196), Nei Katura is the daughter of Karebanga and Nei Anti (‘spirit’). In the latter variant, Obaia has a third daughter, Nei Manrei. Cf. Genealogy 3.

There are also some schematic differences between the stories. In the Karongoa stories Obaia does visit the heavens after Onouna and before going to Tabiteuea, and was told the names of his lands in the heavens. These names Obaia then gave to the *kainga* lands in Temanoku (Latouche 1984, 138–139; *The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 75–76).

One could see here a textual battle: the hegemonic tradition attempting to write over a local history. True enough, but the situation is not a straightforward coup. Consider the Karongoa account of Obaia's *maneaba*, in this story called Taribi-ni-Karawa ('piece of heaven'), i.e. Atanikarawa:

This is the *maneaba* of Obaia. If a man is a true member of Karongoa, he will enter at the north end of the maneaba, following the first steps of Obaia and the first steps also of Beia and Tekai. Akau, who is Marukau, first entered the south end; and therefore if a member of Karongoa is following the way of Akau he should enter at the south, but the true member of Karongoa enters from the north. (The Story of Karongoa 1991, 76)

The name of the boti at the north end is Tekokona: this is for the Uea of the maneaba. If a stranger who is a member of Karongoa enters, then that boti is called Karongoa. And the name of the boti at the south end is called Kabubuarengana: he who sits there is the first speaker and the first to lead in the Games and the Speaker about visiting. This boti became important because of Kourabi who came from Beru to Abinaki⁸⁸ at Taribi-ni-Karawa, for he followed his ancestor Akau. This seat can also be called Karongoa.

(*The Story of Karongoa* 1991, 77, emphasis added)

Things that are in accordance with the tradition in Buota are, firstly, that Akau, and in his footsteps, Kourabi from Beru, entered at the southern end of the *maneaba* and, secondly, that the southern end was called Kabubuarengana and the northern end Te Kokona, though for the latter the name Taunrawa is commonly used in Buota. Furthermore, Kabubuarengana did become important because of Kourabi, but without the implication that previously it was of no importance. The underlined parts, however, stand in explicit contradiction with the Buota tradition. Firstly, in line with Karongoa's version of Obaia's story, Obaia is said to have entered from the northern side of the *maneaba*, which is called Te Kokona. Secondly, it is said that Te Kokona is for the *uea* of the *maneaba*. This certainly works to Karongoa's advantage. However, thirdly, and most intriguingly, Kabubuarengana is said to be the first speaker. In effect, Karongan Uea claims the *ueaship* in Atanikarawa but cedes the right of the first word (*moanibwai*) to Kabubuarengana.

Again it makes sense that *The Story of Karongoa* emphasises Kourabi's Karongoa ancestry, extending its influence to Kabubuarengana. At the same time the first paragraph of the excerpt does stress that a "true" member of Karongoa enters from the north, as Akau and Kourabi did not. In other words, instead of the hegemonic narrative

⁸⁸ I have not encountered this name anywhere else and I am tempted to speculate that something has been lost in translation, and a Kiribati word might have been mistaken for a name. In Kiribati language, *abinaki* would be the passive voice of a verb *abina* formed from the word *abi*, basket. The expression then would mean 'to be put in an *abi*-basket', i.e. 'Kourabi who came from Beru to Taribi-ni-Karawa to (eventually) be put in an *abi*'.

locating power in a single site – its own, it reverses the roles of Kabubuarengana and Te Kokona.

In both traditions one may detect a kind of self-censorship. Kourabi's power is curtailed by his own group, and while he becomes the *uea*, he does not claim the right of first speech. *The Story of Karongoa*, on the other hand, which effectively appropriates Obaia the Feathered and his *maneaba*, does not recognise Kourabi as *uea* but does give him the right of first speech. Thus neither tradition fully exhausts its potential for power nor attempts to create a centre. The self-censorship implies that the centre and the ultimate power are located elsewhere.

Finally, it should be noted that the juxtapositions and distinctions emerging from the narratives, as well as practices, are contextual and segmentary. Karongoa may be set against other clans; within Karongoa its branches are differentiated, particularly so as to place Karongoan Uea in opposition to the others. Karongoa may then appropriate Kabubuarengana as its own, or separate it as 'not true' Karongoa. Within Atanikarawa in Temanoku/Buota, Kabubuarengana and Te Kokona/Taunrawa are contrasted or rivals, but Temanoku/Buota as a whole stands as one against other places. A similar pattern can be seen in the organisation of 'lower level' and 'higher level' *iinakis*, to be discussed shortly.

***IINAKS*, LAND AND SUCCESSION IN TEMANOKU/BUOTA**

A discussion of *iinaki* arrangements by no means only concerns ceremonial positions: 'sitting down' can be a conquest, accompanied by a takeover of lands (see H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 16). The (re)allocation of *iinakis* meant distribution of some land in the first place and possibly other property. According to H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 29), as the founder of the *maneaba* partitioned it, he allocated each clan its piece(s) of residential land (*kainga*). Within each *kainga*, dwelling locations would then in turn be pointed out to its subgroups (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 31; Tito et al. 1979, 21). *Iinakis* also had other property, both material and immaterial, such as fishing rights and canoe crests. Not all land was managed by *iinakis* though. The forest (*buakonikai*) lands were distributed within the smaller family groups (*utu*), independent of *kainga* lands and the *maneaba*. The pieces of land were, and are, inherited individually by both men and women, though the kin group or a sibling set could hold usufruct rights – of which there were various kinds – in common (Tito et al. 1979, 21-22; on land inheritance, see e.g. Grimble 1989, 58–61; Lambert 1983; Lundsgaarde 1974).

Kourabi lived on the *kainga* land parcel called Kabubuarengana, which had been Obaia the Feathered's and Akau's *kainga*. Beiatau lived on the piece of land named Te

Toatoa, Taoroba on Karawaititi, Koobuti on Taunrawa/Te Kokona and Naibwabwa on Timunnang. These *kainga* bear the same names as the corresponding *iinaki* in the *maneaba* (except possibly in Taunrawa/Te Kokona's case, where I was unable to ascertain if one name had originally referred to the *iinaki* and the other to the land *kainga*, since both names were used interchangeably for both the *maneaba* position and the land).

Considering the brothers and Kourabi to be representatives of their respective *iinaki* groups, it is possible then to posit five kin groups, which are in possession of certain land areas. Eventually, the founders pass away, and the four brothers are succeeded by their descendants; Kourabi's *iinaki* is provided with continuity by virtue of the presence of his bones. With the passage of time and population growth, the groups, lands and sitting places in the *maneaba* have been subdivided or new *iinaki* formed, with new places allocated to junior lineages (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 20–22, 28–30).

Such segmentation or branching, however, is always a historical process (see J. Siikala 1991, 79), and its actual course in Buota is not known to me. Rules and practices of descent, succession and inheritance in the Kiribati/Gilbertese society have been topics of various studies (see e.g. Geddes 1977; Goodenough 1955; Lundsgaarde 1966; Lundsgaarde & Silverman 1972, H.E. Maude 1991a [1963]). To summarise the discussion, patrilineal succession is preferred, but the system is very flexible, and a person has other paths to follow too, and so *iinaki* succession comes closer to ambilineal. The whole system could even be described as bilateral in the sense that a person has potential memberships in more than one *iinaki*, and though he can only exercise one at a time, these potential rights used to make for potential allies (see Geddes 1977, 374). Individual land inheritance combined with several kinds of land rights further complicates the process.

In the literature on traditional (pre-contact) Kiribati society the relationships between the *maneaba* sitting place, land area and kin group seem rather straightforward. A colonial order that all dwellings be located by the road appears to have broken these connections, as part of the population had to move away from their own *kainga* land in order to fulfil the directive (see Geddes 1977, 386–388; 1983, 35–39). Yet the break was not absolute, since the *iinaki-kainga*-people relations had been growing more complicated over time, if for a different reason. Situations where not all descent group members were able to live on the ancestral *kainga* arose earlier as well, resulting in some people having to live on forest (*buakonikai*) or on other, non-*kainga* lands (H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 34). H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 36) demonstrates that even if initially the same person – the founder of an *iinaki* – held a *kainga* and certain forest (*buakonikai*) lands, in the course of only a few generations a large share of the forest lands would have

passed to members of other *iinaki* and been replaced by lands from elsewhere because of the different types of ownership and inheritance.

Today, there are 13-16 *iinakis* in Atanikarawa *maneaba*, as each original *iinaki* has segmented into 3-5 *iinakis*. Many of them bear the same names as the various *kainga* land parcels. However, the historical developments have meant in practice that today many people do not live on the *kainga* corresponding to their *iinaki*. For example, the senior elder of Kabubuarengana *iinaki* had his house and lived on the *kainga* land of Te Toatoa, which is next to the *kainga* of Kabubuarengana. The principal elder of Te Toatoa lived on the *kainga* land of Teere. On the other hand, the leading elder of Tekatanrake had his house on the Tekatanrake *kainga*, but was temporarily living on another *kainga*, where he and his family could take care of his wife's elderly mother. There was another house on the Tekatanrake *kainga*, but its occupants belonged to yet another *iinaki* of the *maneaba*. Nonetheless, the connection between land and meetinghouse has not disappeared, shown by the fact that in cases where an *iinaki* and its original *kainga* land have different names, they are occasionally used interchangeably (see also H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 29–30; cf. Kazama 2001, 102–104).

According to Henry E. Maude (1991a [1963], 29-30), when an *iinaki* (or a *kainga*) was subdivided or a new *iinaki* (*kainga*) formed, due to population growth, the new *iinaki* recognised the precedence of the older *iinaki* (*kainga*) and its head (see also Tito et al. 1979, 12, 24; Iobi 1985, 34). The value of precedence is uncontested, but the order is not unambiguous. Katharine Luomala (1966, 177) notes that “each family and clan, even each subdivision of a clan” strives to distinguish and advance itself. Bernd Lambert (1983, 193), discussing Butaritari and Makin islands, even refers to cases where segmentation occurs due, for example, to disputes in property (presumably land) rights, though the more hierarchical social system of these northern Gilbert Islands might make them a less valid point of comparison. Overall, while on the one hand there is realpolitik encroaching on the ideals, on the other, there are also other values which modify the value of precedence.

INAKI FLOORPLAN IN ATANIKARAWA *MWANEABA*

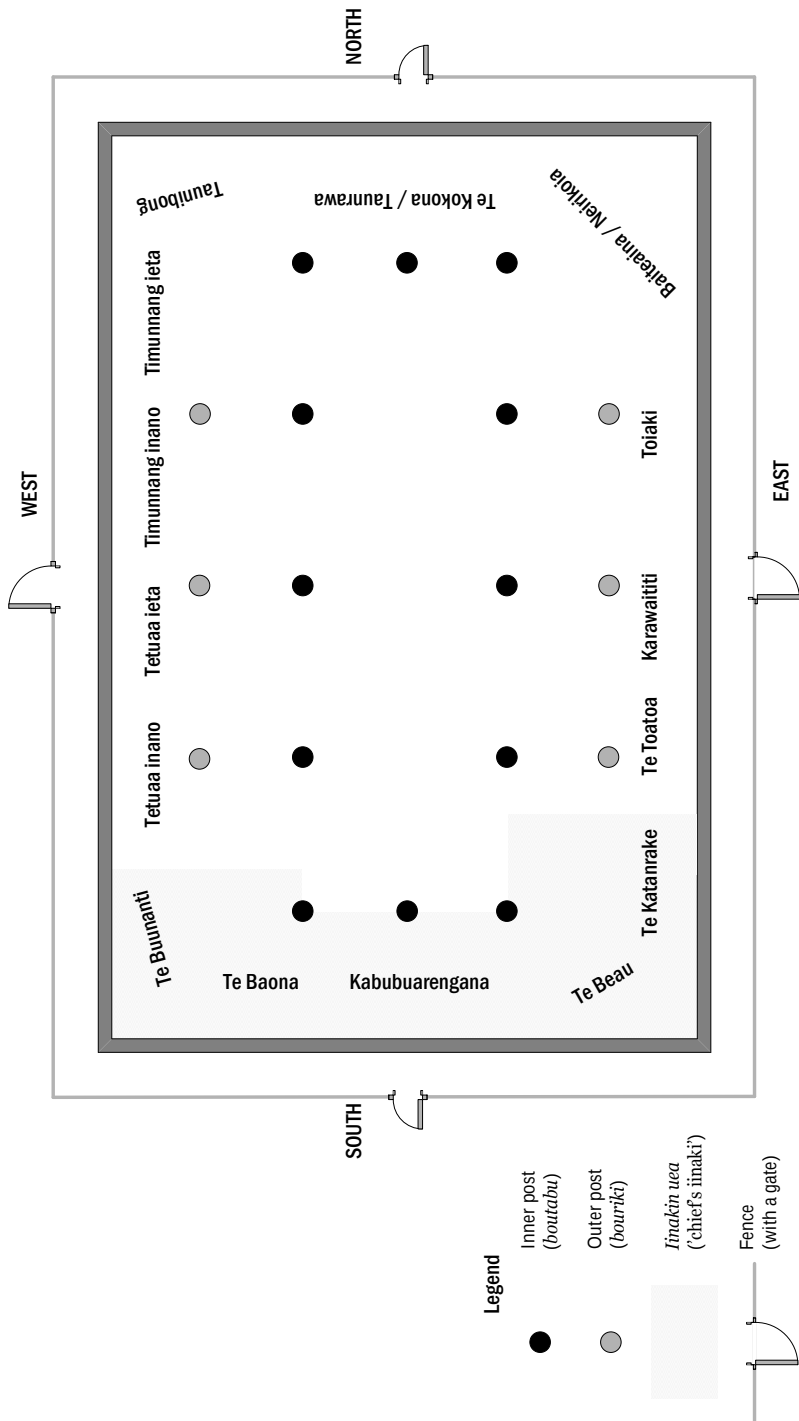


Figure 3. Floorplan of Atanikarawa maneaba, showing the *inakis* which have resulted from the segmentation of the original five *inakis*.

UPPER-LEVEL AND LOWER-LEVEL *IINAKIS* IN ATANIKARAWA

The original five meetinghouse sections and the corresponding kin groups, as well as their subdivisions, are both called *iinaki*. I find it useful to refer to them as ‘higher-level’ and ‘lower-level’ *iinakis*; the anthropological terms that come closest to describing them are ‘clan’ and ‘lineage’, but in addition to not conveying the connection to the *maneaba*, the unilineal connotations of these two terms are perhaps too strong. The system could perhaps be perceived as a form of segmentary organisation, beginning with an ancestor but with the segments at each generational level not equal but differentiated, though not necessarily in a straightforward way. There is a ritual order of genealogical precedence, but this order is affected by other issues as well, as the impact Kourabi had on Atanikarawa demonstrates.

Returning to the Story of Kourabi, the relationships between the individuals in the narrative come to represent and prescribe social relationships between the *iinaki* groups. The lower-level *iinakis*, named after the residential *kaingas* of the five founders, are senior to others within their section: Kabubuarengana (Kourabi’s *iinaki*) on the southern side, Te Toatoa (Beiatau’s) and Karawaititi (Taoroba’s) on the eastern side, Te Kokona/Taunrawa (Koobuti’s) in the north and Timunnang (Naibwabwa’s) in the west. Describing Atanikarawa’s organisation, William Geddes (1977, 380), refers to them as “chief *iinaki*” and the less prominent ones as “service *iinaki*”. Geddes’ terminology illustrates the fact that *iinaki* tend to be defined in terms of their ‘work’, though from my point of view the chief-servant analogy is not entirely apt (see below).

The principal division established by Obaia and Kourabi has not lost its significance. The larger sections are associated with certain duties, some of which are referred to in the Story of Kourabi. Therefore, today the organisation of Atanikarawa is two-tiered: the meetinghouse is divided into (i) five *iinakis*, following the accommodation of Kourabi into the division made by Obaia and his four sons and (ii) 13–16 *iinakis* which have resulted from the segmentation of the original five *iinakis*. I rarely heard the names of the lower-level *iinakis* used in public discourse; occasionally those lower-level *iinakis* with particular tasks (i.e. the principal *iinakis*: Kabubuarengana within *Iinakin Uea*, Te Toatoa in Beiatau’s *iinaki*, and so on) were named, but quite often they were referred to by the designation of the upper-level *iinaki*, and the particular referent was implicated by the context. On the whole, the way in which the divisions are referenced is significant.

Four of the upper-level *iinakis* are commonly talked about with reference to their founders. The members of Obaia’s sons’ *iinakis* can be referred to as ‘Beiatau’s relatives/people’ (*ana koraki Beiatau*), Taoroba’s people (*ana koraki Taoroba*) and so forth; their descendants hold the places today. Kourabi’s and Obaia’s *iinaki* is generally called *Iinakin Uea*, instead of naming the founders, again marking the distinction

between Kourabi's group and those of others by means of language, as in the absence of the possessive suffix in the word 'descendants' (*kanoa*).

Probably the most common way to talk about positions in the meetinghouse referred to the 'sides' of the *maneaba*. People are either 'facing from the south' (Tanimaiaki), 'facing from the east' (Tanimainiku), the north (Tanimeang) or the west (Tanimaeao), referring to the southern, eastern, northern and western sides of the building.⁸⁹ The division does not exactly fit the mathematical sides of the rectangle – the division was described by referring to rafters and stones – and both Tanimaiaki and Tanimeang extend a little to the eastern and western sides.

Tanimaiaki (southern side) can be used virtually synonymously with *Iinakin Uea*, Tanimeang (northern side) with 'Koobuti' relatives' (*ana koraki Koobuti*), and Tanimaeao (western side) with 'Naibwabwa's relatives' (*ana koraki Naibwabwa*). Two brothers sat in Tanimainiku (eastern side), though Tanimainiku can occasionally refer just to the older ones, Beiatu's group. All the designations based on cardinal directions and on the names of the founders are in fact context-dependent: they can be applied on both levels, either to the whole side or only to its senior section. It was only the occupants of the southern end of the meetinghouse that to my knowledge were not talked about as 'Kourabi's people'; they were either 'people of Tanimaiaki' (*kain Tanimaiaki*) or 'people of Kabubuarengana' (*kain Kabubuarengana*).

These expressions are in keeping with the Kiribati tendency for indirect speech, but in this case one of the consequences is that differentiation of *iinakis* is seldom explicated in speech. Thus discourse about the *maneaba* has an undifferentiating function.

Figure 2 is a tentative representation of the *iinakis* in Atanikarawa at the turn of the millennium. In practice the layout was less clear. Information from different contexts was not consistent, and the practice of using the names of *iinaki* and *kainga* interchangeably was confusing to me. The figure is mainly based on the information given to me by the elders of Buota in a meeting. I asked the elders to name all the *iinaki* and point out their boundaries, which they did, in most cases pointing at rafter beams (*oka*) or in some cases stones (*atibu*) as the limits of an *iinaki*. Each original *iinaki* (of Obaia, his sons and Kourabi) or 'side' of the *maneaba* identified the *iinaki* in their part of the *maneaba*. There was a consensus on the original *iinakis* of Obaia, his sons and

⁸⁹ Some phrases using cardinal directions are confusing to a non-native speaker. 'Tan-' is a prefix meaning 'to face', thus *tanimaiaki*, would at first glance be taken as meaning 'to face south', but it in fact means the opposite: 'facing from the south', i.e. only by implication facing north. This is because when the words for cardinal directions are used by themselves – *maiaki*, *maeao*, *meang*, *mainiku* – they include the prefix *mai-*, 'from', when it is only the stem of the word which refers to the direction and can also be attached to another prefix. In a similar vein, 'nako *mainiku*', does not mean 'to go east' but 'to go from the east, by implication meaning 'to go west'. Cf. J. Siikala 1991, 59 for movement in cardinal directions in the Cook Islands cosmogony.

Kourabi, but the subdivisions and exact boundaries seemed to be subject to some discussion. In the end, I was unable to elicit definite conclusions and have therefore opted not to mark the precise limits of the sitting areas (cf. Kazama 2001, 104–105), even if there is an attempt to indicate the approximate relative length of the *iinakis*.

An additional point of interest is that the account given here differs somewhat from the account given by William Geddes (1977) a quarter of a century earlier. Some of the names and boundaries of *iinaki* are not the same, and there are more *iinakis* in Geddes' figure than in this one.⁹⁰ My failure to adequately establish the division, and the differences with the earlier account, may well be related and both perhaps indicate the same wider issues. All in all I am faced with similar inconsistencies in information as faced by Kazuhiro Kazama (2001) in his study of the *maneaba* of a South Tabiteuean village, though I see several issues here besides the possible loss of knowledge emphasised by Kazama.⁹¹ My main concern here is that in Buota people had (literally) a working knowledge of their own *iinakis* at least, though it is likely that detailed knowledge of them was unevenly distributed.⁹² As the latter half of this chapter shows, contemporary *iinakis* do function in Buota.

Besides a possible lack of knowledge on the part of the inhabitants and communication problems between myself and informants, there are other potential explanations as to why a neat, exact and unanimous *iinaki* division consistent with the

⁹⁰ Some of the differences concern demarcation. In Geddes figures there are 'posts' but they are marked at the edges, and so it is not clear whether they refer to the wooden *boua* posts or the *atibu* stone pillars supporting the roof. As mentioned, to me the *unimwaane* pointed out stones (*atibu*) in some cases but mostly rafter beams (*oka*), which is consistent with the information given by Katharine Luomala (1965, 34–35) and Kambati Uriam (1995, 19). Some of the names Geddes gives I encountered as names of *kainga* land tracts, which might be due to the interchangeable use of the names (see Maude 1991a [1963], 29–30), or they might refer to further subdivisions of *iinaki* or *kainga*. I do not see why this should be seen as evidence of people's "confusion" about the matter as Kazama (2001, 102) suggests (though he too recognises in a footnote [102, fn. 13] that there might be no confusion after all).

⁹¹ Kazama (2001, 105) found that in the village he studied, the traditional *maneaba* system, *iinakis* and their connections to *kainga* lands are poorly known, of little relevance and likely to be further forgotten in the future. As pointed out in the introduction, there can be real differences between villages as to the extent of people's knowledge in these matters, so essentially one cannot extrapolate from one village to another. Admittedly though, reading Kazama's article some years after my fieldwork, his interpretations challenged mine, and I recognise that I might well be theoretically and/or ideologically predisposed to stress continuities. Nonetheless, I am basing my main argument on data about what people did in terms of *iinakis* more than on what they said (or did not say) about them, which reflects my approach, naïve as it may have been, during fieldwork.

⁹² As Chapter 2 detailed, the people speaking at the meetings like the one where the *iinakis* were named, were mature men, leaving quite a large proportion of the population outside the discussion. Had I asked young people about *iinakis*, I suspect answers would have been hard to come by, either because of lack of knowledge or of boldness to speak, though no-one appeared to have difficulties in knowing where to sit in the *maneaba* (see Hoëm 1995 about the socio-cultural distribution of knowledge in Tokelau, showing that it is a multifaceted issue). However, in the circumstances (likewise outlined in Ch. 2) I asked the elders how they wanted the information about *iinakis* to be conveyed, and they preferred the communal approach.

earlier version did not emerge in the meeting with Buota elders. There may have been demographic developments, or the lower-level *iinakis* may simply be of a more contested nature or relatively unstable. If a neat and universally-agreed-on system did exist – and one may ask if it ever did – there might have been among the elders situational unwillingness to impose one’s opinion upon others as well as a general unwillingness to articulate differentiation.

First, as much as the confused ethnographer wished that someone would take the lead and sum up the information, it is logical enough in the context of a southern Kiribati meetinghouse that no-one did; this should become more evident during the course of this work. Attempts to assume a position of authority over other ‘independent’ (see Ch. 5) men are highly disapproved of, as would be claims of knowledge over someone else’s descent affiliations (Silverman 1962, 430). Second, there might be a general unwillingness to articulate differentiation, to which the indirect speech about the *iinakis* also points. In any case it is no accident that the most easily identifiable *iinakis* were those that had a particular ‘work’ (*mwakuri*) assigned to them.

‘WORK’ AS THE NOTION OF DIFFERENTIATION

The brief description with which this dissertation began recounted an incident from my first week in Tabiteuea North, when my host brother could not take me to the ocean side, because it was not his “job”. When I understood from his and his mother’s explanation that it was “tabu”, my guess was that it had to do with land rights, though his cryptic wording had left me somewhat puzzled. The puzzle was solved two days later.

That morning the head of my host family told me that in the afternoon I was to go to meet someone on the ocean side, and I should have 3–4 sticks of tobacco to give to this person. Around three p.m. a middle-aged man arrived at the house. After he had received some tobacco, I was advised to go along with him. Two young women of the house accompanied me; we mounted bicycles and followed him. We set out along a path towards the ocean side, but after only a hundred metres or so, the man braked, dismounted his bicycle, diverted from the path and leant down to do something. The women suggested that I go closer, but before I had time to do that, one of my companions said “it’s finished”. I only had time to register one half of a giant clam shell on the ground.

We got on our bicycles again and continued nearly a kilometre towards the ocean side. We stopped about 50 metres from the beach, where there was another clam shell. Our guide lifted the shell, and placed a few sticks of tobacco and matches under it. He said something in a quiet voice; I was able to make out the wish for well-being and good luck

(*tekeraoi*). The three of us then walked to the beach, and the man talked and my host sister-in-law functioned as an interpreter, explaining things in simpler Kiribati, with the occasional English expression. Our guide told me that the place was now ‘open’ (*uki*) for me to visit. He then proceeded to tell me about Kourabi; this was the first time I heard about him.

The beach where we stood was the place where Kourabi’s bones, which are kept in the *maneaba* close to our house, are bathed if need be. The first place where we had stopped was where Kourabi used to live (*tabo ni maeka Kourabi*). It is *tabu* to defecate or urinate at that site, and *tabu* for women to enter when they are menstruating. The second place where we left tobacco belonged to the culture hero(es) Beia-ma-Tekai (see fn. 49). My escort also pointed towards the forest, indicating a place called Ruo-mai-Karawa, where the *maneaba* (now housing Kourabi’s bones) had stood earlier, after it had been brought down by spirits from the heavens. He told me that I was not the first foreigner he had brought to the place and told about Kourabi.

Back at the house I learned that the man who had shown us the place was the person whose job it was to take me there. I asked if that piece of land belonged to him, but it did not. It was just his job to take people there. The *tabu* on visiting Kourabi’s places before being correctly introduced to them applies to any outsider, including I-Kiribati who are not from Buota. Coming from another island, my sister-in-law had also been taken there when she arrived as a newly-wed wife, though by another elder of that same kin group (*iinaki*). It also dawned at me that the *tabu* did not apply to the whole ocean side, as I had thought. In time I learned that this particular path to the ocean side was the ‘Path of the Elder’ (*kawain te Unimwaane*), that is, Kourabi.

The man who took me to the path was a representative of Taunrawa *iinaki*, or Tanimeang as it is frequently called. It is their work (*mwakuri*) to take newcomers to Kourabi’s places, as part of their work as representatives of the village. It was often said that “Taunrawa’s (Tanimeang’s) work is the village”, which meant that they summon meetings and chair them, inform villagers of important matters, and act for the village in relations with outsiders. These tasks differentiate Taunrawa from other *iinakis*; other *iinakis* do other work. The last chapters of Kourabi’s story refer to some of these.

Tasks indicated in the story are practices related to Kourabi and the Atanikarawa building. Another set of duties have to do with meetinghouse conduct and village governance, in Atanikarawa as well the village in general. Some tasks are only performed on certain ceremonial occasions; others are part of the more everyday life of the village. Besides organising the functioning of *iinaki* groups as units *vis à vis* one another, the notion of work is one of the most important idioms for social differentiation.

Picking up the story where it was left at the end of the previous chapter:

His hanging in his *maneaba* of Atanikarawa (112–113)

If he is in discomfort in staying in the *maneaba*, or Atanikarawa is to be repaired, then he will be taken down by people of the Tekatanrake to his *maneaba* of Kiakia on his *kainga* of Kabubuaengana. (114–119)

This short section makes reference to several issues. Kourabi continues to be accorded the respect due to an ancestor, and his well-being and wishes⁹³ taken into account. Construction work would be a disturbance and potential disrespect, for if men were to work on the roof, they would be above Kourabi. Secondly, when necessary, Kourabi would be taken down by members of Te Katanrake *iinaki*. Te Katanrake is part of *Iinakin Uea* and they are the only ones allowed to see and handle Kourabi's bones; it is their work. Thirdly, the section names Kourabi's *kainga*, Kabubuaengana, as well as his own *maneaba* there, Te Kiakia. As Kourabi's home *iinaki*, it is the work of Kabubuaengana to welcome Kourabi to Te Kiakia and host him there.

Should Kourabi be moved to Te Kiakia, he cannot be returned to Atanikarawa without proper measures, as the next section describes:

His restoration to his *maneaba* (120)

If his returning to Atanikarawa is desired by the people of Buota, these things are appropriately to be renewed: (121–124)

- (5) The fence of the *maneaba*, Te Matantongo
- (6) The *iinais* which are oriented towards the ocean side
- (7) The *iinais* which are the *iinais* of the siblings, of whom there are four, and which are oriented towards north
- (8) If the thatch of the Atanikarawa is damaged, it is to be renewed as well but if it truly is in good condition, only these three things are to be renewed. (125–134)

When all the things are finished well to be used by the people of Buota, and the work of the people of Tekatanrake is completed well too, one day will be pointed by Buota people with the people of Tekatanrake, in which he will be washed and that is truly also his day of returning to his *maneaba* of Atanikarawa. (135–142)

Once Kourabi has been moved away from Atanikarawa, he cannot be returned without the meetinghouse being refurbished. The important elements of the meetinghouse to be renewed are the coconut leaf mats covering the floor, the fence, and the thatch. A description of these practices below will shortly show the division of labour: the tasks are partly the responsibility of certain *iinakis*, partly of the whole village. In the latter case, the work required is divided equally between all the households. Restoring Matantongo – the fence of the meetinghouse – is one of the communal duties, in which all

⁹³ Kourabi has been believed to let his wishes be known through dreams.

households participate. The gates in the fence, one on each side of the rectangle, are seen to by the *iinakis* of the respective sides.

The earth floor of the meetinghouse is firstly covered with mats woven from coconut leaves, *iinai*, which are spread crosswise in an east-west direction. Making these crosswise *iinai* mats is work performed by the whole village. Secondly, the story mentions “the *iinais* which are the *iinais* of the siblings, of whom there are four, and which are oriented towards the north”. There are four longer *iinais*, which are set lengthwise in the middle of the meetinghouse. These four lengthwise *iinai* mats are then the responsibility of Baiatau’s, Taoroba’s, Koobuti’ and Naibwabwa’s *iinakis*.

Preparing new thatch as well as rope for fastening it down is the duty of the whole village, or to be more precise, all households with female members, as both thatch and rope are usually made by women. Fastening new thatching on the roof (*ka-toka-rau*), however, is only to be done by the descendants of Koobuti and Naibwabwa, that is, Tanimeang and Tanimaean *iinakis*.

Kourabi’s imminent return to Atanikarawa occasions a ceremonial procedure known as the ‘Bathing of the Elder’ (*Tebokan te Unimwaane*). It is a rare and festive occasion during which Kourabi’s bones are bathed in the ocean and then brought back to Atanikarawa. It is something the village is famous for and attracts people not only locally but from other islands and even abroad. The ritual definitely took place at least in 1984 (Lawson 1989, 114), though according to what people told me, it may also have been carried out in the early 1990s.⁹⁴

In the context of the bathing ritual, the Story of Kourabi only mentions the Tekatanrake group, which is only to be expected in light of their special responsibility for Kourabi’s remains and Te Rawati. Prior to that, Kabubuarengana had been named as Kourabi’s home *kainga*, implicating the *iinaki* as well. Interestingly there is the repeated phrase “with people of Buota” (*kain Buota*) or “Buota people” (*I-Buota*). Emphasising of the role of the village community as a whole may partly be contextual: the entextualised version of the story which I received was authored by the Council as a representative of *kain Buota*, and this took place in the *maneaba*.

During the ritual procedures surrounding the bathing, various *iinaki* have their prescribed duties, described to me by a Kabubuarengana elder. In particular, the lower-level *iinakis* within *Iinakin Uea* are allocated different tasks. People of Tekatanrake do

⁹⁴ People were vague about the year, and as I have found no other references to a later bathing, I am inclined to think people were reminiscing about the 1984 event. The 1984 bathing is featured in Bataua (1984), and probably in the two photographs by Teweiariki Teaero’s (n.d., 21) work, which was published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the independent state of Kiribati (1989). The photo of the ritual in Carmichael & Knox-Mawer (1968, 40 photograph supplement 28–29) does not have an exact date; for a description of an even earlier event, see Roberts 1952. If there has been a bathing in the 2000s, the news has not reached me.

the actual bathing of the bones; Kourabi's home *iinaki* Kabubuarengana welcomes him back from the ocean side; Te Beau tastes the food before it is given to Kourabi (*tia arin kanan Kourabi*, see fn. 69): "like the ancient kings in Europe, who had someone to taste their food in case it was poisoned" (cf. Luomala 1966, 169 and Uriam 1995, 22), I was told by the elder.⁹⁵ Te Buunanti, for its part, is responsible for the rope by which the casket holding Kourabi's bones hangs from the ceiling, and Taunrawa (*tia tara-rietata*), from its position at the opposite end, observes the proper elevation of the casket when it is hoisted back up.

The examples from the bathing ritual point to the way in which power becomes decentralised within *Iinakin Uea*, Tanimaiaki. Even though Kabubuarengana is the principal *iinaki* section, whose precedence is recognised, its differentiation is limited. Proximity to, and contact with, the source of power is restricted: those who sit closest to the bones are not allowed to touch or even see them. Work is divided, whereby the other subdivisions are differentiated too, and get their share of the power.

Some duties which are not mentioned in the story concern meetinghouse conduct and village governance in a more everyday manner. In these Taunrawa/Tanimeang has a major role. As an example, when the Tabiteuea Meang football teams had returned from the annual tournament in Tarawa and were staying in Atanikarawa as guests, it was, as usual, Tanimeang's work to inform everyone about the feast that night. One of the younger men of Tanimeang was cycling through the village, meandering past all the houses. He stopped at our house too, and told us that each household should prepare a tray (*turee*) of food for the evening, and that the main item ('head') of the tray should be a corned beef tin, or if that could not be managed, a chicken.⁹⁶ On other occasions he might not stop but just call out from his bicycle: "meeting of elders at ten o'clock" or some similar announcement as he passed by each house.

In the *maneaba* in particular, Taunrawa is the 'first' (*moanibwai*) – they are the people who always speak first, commence and chair activities and represent Buota to outsiders. Kabubuarengana, usually referred to simply as "Tanimaiaki", has the first reply

⁹⁵ I was told that at the grand feast that follows Kourabi's restoration to the *maneaba* after the bathing, guests give presents (usually money) both to the village (in which case it is received by Taunrawa acting as the village's representative) and to Kourabi, i.e. to Kabubuarengana. In this context Te Beau receives the money on their behalf, retains part of the money, and then distributes the other part to the members of Kabubuarengana.

⁹⁶ A *turee*, 'tray' – as opposed to a 'plate' (*raurau*) or 'bowl' (*boora*) – is an assortment of food laid out on an aluminium tray or a round, plastic one with a cover. There are starches, usually rice and *bwabwai*, perhaps a buttered slice of bread; fish; a chicken or a tin of meat as the 'head of the tray'; preferably some vegetables and some little extra. People go to lengths to provide variety. If people do not have a garden of their own, they can visit relatives who do, and make a 'non-refusable request' (*bubuti*) for papaya, chinese cabbage or pumpkin for their *turee*, or cook leaves of the *buka*-tree in coconut cream. If possible they might buy tinned mixed vegetables or ketchup or bake a simple cake or a custard pie.

in the order of speaking.⁹⁷ Te Toatoa's work is done whenever there is a meal in the programme. While the young men of Taunrawa visit the representatives of each household in turn to take the offered plate, bowl, or tray into the middle of the *maneaba*, the senior elder of Te Toatoa stands and announces the name of each contributor. Some other tasks of different *iinakis* in Atanikarawa are mentioned by Geddes (1977, 379–380); Jean-Paul Latouche (1984, 57–59) discusses *maneaba* roles in general; numerous detailed clan privileges and assignments are described by Grimble (1989, 219–230) and H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 57–59). Not all *iinaki* have particular assigned tasks but may assist one of the chief *iinaki* (Geddes 1977, 380). In view of these 'service *iinakis*', Katharine Luomala's (1965, 35; 1966, 196) expression "worker-clans" is, in my understanding, used to refer to those *iinakis* which do have a particular task or 'work', not the assistant clans who help out more generally.

'Work', then, singles out the foremost of those *iinakis* which are high in the (somewhat ambiguous) order of precedence. When an *iinaki* does its work, this constitutes a heightened moment of differentiation (cf. Keating 2000), where the order may vary according to which group's turn it is to perform. The work idiom may appear partly as a way to talk about this vertical differentiation, making it appear horizontal and stressing its functional character. There is a reluctance to explicate differentiation, though this is also part of the overall local tendency towards indirect speech, and I am not sure what the connotations of 'work' are for a native speaker. Katherine Luomala (1965, 35) might reference a similar quandary when she remarks that *mwakuri* is a "word of many connotations". I am also aware that interpreting the expression as an attempt to deny or downplay hierarchy would be in concordance with Western ideology (see Robbins 1994). By contrast, when moving on to discuss concrete practices in Buota, what seems to be taking place in this Kiribati case is active work, which is done precisely because differences are recognised.

Work for Kourabi

The maintenance of any house with a thatched roof requires periodic renewing of the thatch (*rau*). It had been settled on earlier that the roof of Atanikarawa was in need of repair. The time at the end April had been chosen because a feast (*bootaki*) was to take place in the *maneaba* in May. 'Kabuna-*bootaki*', as I will call it for short, was an annual event marking the friendly relationship between the villages of Buota and Kabuna, which

⁹⁷ According to William Geddes (1977, 380), Te Toatoa, Karawaititi and Timunnang can speak after this, and Timunnang should round off the discussion. I did not observe this, though it might be just because the order after Kabubuarengana was not explicated to me.

is an islet village joined by a causeway to the southern tip of Anikai. The location of the *bootaki* alternated between the villages. In the year 2000 it was Buota's turn to host the visitors from Kabuna, making it a good time to refurbish Atanikarawa.

Before the construction work could begin, Kourabi had to be taken down and moved to his other *maneaba* called Te Kiakia, or Teitoingaina by its other name, as the story makes clear. Climbing on the roof the constructors would be above Kourabi, which would not only be disrespectful but also violate his *tabu* nature. Moving the *rawati* containing Kourabi's bones and receiving it on the *kainga* of Kabubuarengana involved two groups: Tekatanrake and Kabubuarengana.

Repairing the village meetinghouse required the efforts of the whole village, though two *iinaki* groups played the main role. All households contributed materials: the Village Council had ordered that each household which had capable female members (55 households in all), should make one fathom of coconut fibre string and two rows of thatch (*rau*: processed pandanus leaves fastened to a pole). The work of putting the new thatch in place, *Katokarau* (*ka-toka-rau*, lit. 'to make thatch rise on top'), is allocated to Tanimeang and Tanimaeao groups, or the relatives of Koobuti and Naibwabwa.

Moving of the Elder (Tabekan te Unimwaane)

The morning that the Elder (*Unimwaane*), i.e. Kourabi, was to be transferred to his smaller *maneaba*, preparations started early. Cooking was going on in the households of Kourabi's own *iinaki*, Kabubuarengana, and at the last minute someone was sent out to buy two sticks of tobacco and matches. Kabubuarengana group was to welcome (*butimaea*) Kourabi and his carriers from the Tekatanrake group, whose work it is to take care of the casket.

Te Kiakia, or Teitoingaina, is a small meetinghouse, some twelve metres in length. It stands on the *kainga* of Kabubuarengana, where Kourabi's dwelling (*mwenga*) used to be located; now only some of the Kabubuarengana *iinaki* members live on that land. Men from Kabubuarengana sat in Teitoingaina waiting to welcome Kourabi and had started playing *kanetita* (a local version of canasta), a very popular card game for four players.

I saw Kourabi's basket being carried down the road from Atanikarawa and I hurried back to Teitoingaina. The distance between the two *maneabas* is less than one hundred metres, and on arrival at the small *maneaba* I saw that the casket had been put on a pandanus leaf mat (*kie*) which had been spread on the more rudimentary palm-leaf

iinai mats covering the floor. A *kie* is refined type of mat, woven from thin⁹⁸ strips of pandanus leaf, on which only clean things and people can be placed. Conversely, it would be unthinkable that a sacred object like the basket (*rawati*) of Kourabi be placed on bare *iinai* mats, on which people walk with their dirty (*bareka*) feet.

Three Tekatanrake men were working to hang the beautifully decorated casket from the ceiling. They got the coconut fibre rope over the ridge beam (*kanoan taubuki*), then two men lifted the casket as a third pulled the rope. After some measuring they left it hanging just under two metres above the ground. This done, the men sat on a *roba* mat (another type of pandanus mat, somewhat coarser than a *kie*, but considered appropriate for seating people), that had been laid out for them on the western side of the meetinghouse. While the building was small and only had one row of posts, the *roba* was placed just far enough from the edge to be ‘in the middle’ (*i nuuka*), i.e. where honoured guests and elders are seated (for a discussion of the socio-spatial layout of a *maneaba* gathering see Ch. 5). In fact, only the oldest man in the group sat entirely on the mat; the younger men stayed behind, barely on the edge. Being younger, they did not want to put themselves forward.

As a gesture of welcome, the Tekatanrake men who had moved Kourabi were first ‘made to smoke’ (*kamokoa*), i.e. offered tobacco, matches and some tobacco ‘paper’ made from patiently thinned and smoothed pandanus leaf. They quietly prepared cigarettes, crumbling some tobacco with a knife on to their palms, pouring it into to a slip of pandanus paper and rolling it up. All the men smoked (most Kiribati adults do [Brewis 1996, 18]) for a short while. They did not finish their cigarettes at one go⁹⁹ – and besides, the ‘feeding’ (*kaamwarake*, lit. ‘to make eat’) was beginning.

Members of Kabubuarengana placed food bowls and tins in front of the movers, requesting them to eat. Before they began, the head of Kabubuarengana said “we’ll bless our food”, followed by a short prayer. The movers were served rice, tinned fish, doughnuts and sweet hot tea (*ranbue*, from *ran*, ‘water’, *bue*, ‘hot’). Members of Tekatanrake ate ‘in the middle’ of the *maneaba* (see Ch. 5) on the *roba* mat, and soon after people of Kabubuarengana started to eat in the northern end of the *maneaba*. The food in itself was simple but the meal complete, sufficient to be served to a guest: it

⁹⁸ The thinner the strips the finer the mat. The thinnest (ca. 3–4 mm) strips of pandanus leaf are used in a dancing ‘mat’, *kabae* or *be* (the same term as for a lavalava made of cloth); they are used by both men and women in the sitting dance (*bino*) and by men in standing dances as well, and sometimes on other very festive occasions. For different types of pandanus mats, see Koch 1965, 113–115, 156–169, tables 9–11 and 29–36.

⁹⁹ Introduced by the first traders, tobacco quickly became one of the most desirable of imported goods and also started to serve ceremonial purposes, as in this case when a smoke is offered to guests as a gesture of welcome, or when a visitor gives a block of stick tobacco as a gift to the hosts. Smoking generally is a social activity; a cigarette gets passed around in a group, everybody taking a few puffs. It would be rare for anyone to smoke a cigarette all by himself/herself, especially at one go.

contained a starchy food (the rice), a protein food (the tinned fish) and a sweetened drink (*mooi*; the tea). The meal was also accompanied by doughnuts. It was not feast food, but satisfactorily met the requirements of a welcoming (*butimaea*). The welcomers were eating rice, salt fish, doughnuts and *te roro*, a dish made of sheets of dried pandanus fruit (*tuae*) softened with coconut cream.¹⁰⁰ When the men of Tekatanrake had finished their meal in the middle, the food bowls were brought back and added to the meal of Kabubuarengana's representatives. After everyone had finished eating, more tea was served, and four of the men started playing *kanetita*. The Elder had been moved.

Placing the thatch (Katokarau)

The renewal of the thatch of Atanikarawa took place the day after the respected *Unimwaane* had been moved. The materials requested earlier from all Buota households had been brought beside the *maneaba*. Each household had left their contribution inside Matantongo, the fence, on the side where their own *iinaki* was located.

As noted in the extracts with which I began Chapter 1, on the morning of the *Katokarau* two women from Tanimeang appeared at our house carrying some cooked swamp taro (*bwabwai*). They had come to our house to grind the *bwabwai* with a meat mincer, after which the mincer was hurried to a third person, who also had requested to borrow it. The mincer was needed for a food item called *manam*, cooked and ground *bwabwai*, formed into a ball with the help of coconut cream (*raniben*). A mincer is not a standard household item so a few were loaned from one house to another. *Katokarau* involves an exchange of food between Tanimaeao and Tanimeang, and a ritual welcoming of the workers of one *iinaki* by the members of the other. Each household in both groups was to prepare the same foods; beside *te manam*, *te roro*, two drinking coconuts (*moimoto*) and two loaves of bread were required. For welcoming the workers of the other *iinaki*, all households in the two *iinaki* were also to prepare two plates of food and two flower garlands (*te kauue*).

When I went to Atanikarawa at noontime, some women – and a couple of men – of Tanimeang and Tanimaeao were making mats called *baakateke* from coconut leaves. A *baakateke* is like a sturdier version of *iinai*, three coconut stems woven together to form a 'mat', in which the leaves nearest the edge were left unwoven. *Baakateke* were to be placed on top of the new thatch on the roof ridge.

Young and able-bodied men actually placed the thatch, which involves climbing up onto the roof and balancing along the ridge. *Maneabas* have no walls, but the roof

¹⁰⁰ I was told that *te roro* had been made by people of Tanimaeao (the *iinaki* of Naibwabwa), but I do not know if it was just by chance or ritually prescribed.

reaches low (ca. 1.5 metres from the ground), and on the longer sides (usually the eastern and western) are relatively gently sloping. Northern and southern ends are steeper, next to impossible to climb (on *maneaba* construction, see Hockings 1989; H.E. Maude 1980). In fact, on this occasion it was only the ridge-capping, not the whole thatch, which was renewed. According to older ethnographic accounts, ridge-capping is a significant work phase in the building of a new *maneaba*, demarcated and demanding its own rituals (on ridge-capping rituals see Grimble 1989, 121–126; H.E. Maude 1980, 27–32).

In the *Katokarau* work there is a prescribed order in the proceedings, which I observed, and which later was explained to me in more detail by one of the men who stayed behind. Men of Tanimeang are the first to climb on the roof. They ascend from the eastern side of the *maneaba*, and when they have reached the ridge, they start working from the southern end, finishing in the middle. There are three stages to the process. First, the beams called *kai ni kabaraaki* (or, *kai-ni-ririka*, Hockings 1989, 183, 184, 215) are set. They are wooden staffs thrust through just under the ridge beam, to hold the thatch, which comprises two layers: *te rau ni kabo* ('thatch to make meet') placed along the sides and tied with the coconut string, and *te rau ni kamino* ('thatch to make spin'), placed sideways on the first layer. Lastly, the *baakateke* mats are placed on top. When Tanimeang have finished the first stage, setting the *kai ni kabaraaki*, men of Tanimaeo start to climb up on the western side. The men of Tanimaeo work their way from the northern end to the middle, in the same three stages as Tanimeang. First, one nimble man from each group had to climb up the roof to fasten a rope, which helped others to climb. Once there were men up on the roof, the thatch and *baakateke* were pulled up with the help of ropes.

Meanwhile, in the *maneaba*, women, and men who were not able to climb, were preparing the food. People had brought in the required items, Tanimaeo gathering on the western side, Tanimeang near the north-east corner. Each side had a pile of husked young coconuts (*moimoto*), and the bread, *te manam* and *te roro* wrapped in leaves were collected in big plastic basins and quickly woven coconut leaf baskets (*bwabwa*). In addition to the above, there was food waiting to be served to the workers, the familiar cluster of bowls covered with plastic plates, some dishes under a cloth, teapots with a mug hanging from the spout, thermos flasks and other containers. Flower garlands, sprinkled with coconut oil, were waiting for the workers to descend from the roof.

The work took place in the middle of the day (cf. Grimble 1989, 121–126; H.E. Maude 1980, 27–32). In about an hour the capping was over, and the men of Tanimeang climbed down first from the western side at 2.40 p.m., entered the *maneaba*, and sat on the Tanimaeo side. Soon afterwards they were followed by Tanimaeo people, who descended on the eastern side, entered, and sat where Tanimeang had its place. On both



Photograph 3 – top right. Men of Tanimaeao working on the roof of Atanikarawa maneaba in Buota, placing the thatch. **Photograph 4 – bottom right.** Men of Tanimaeao working on the roof of Atanikarawa maneaba in Buota, placing the thatch. **Photograph 5 – top left.** Men of Tanimaeao eating a meal, hosted by Tanimaeao. **Photograph 6 – bottom left.** Men of Tanimaeao eating a meal, hosted by Tanimaeao. **Photograph 7 – next page middle.** Food distributed among member households of Tanimaeao. **Photograph 8 – next page bottom.** Food distributed among member households of Tanimaeao.

sides the welcoming took place in a similar manner. The workers were served by the other *iinaki*. On each side one of the *unimwaane* who had not climbed the roof acted as a host, and the serving was mainly performed by women. The welcoming rituals were going on separately on each side, the welcoming of Tanimeang proceeding without waiting for the other side to descend, and the welcoming of Tanimaeao beginning as soon as they had come down from the roof. The groups sat forming a circle around the collections of food dishes. On each side the workers were first served tobacco. Then one of the women from the welcoming *iinaki* moved around the circle of men, and sprinkled talcum powder on their necks. Each worker was adorned with two flower garlands, one placed around the neck and one on the head. The Tanimaeao male host asked one of the



Tanimeang workers to say grace, after which Tanimeang commenced eating; the Tanimeang host just invited the Tanimaeao men to eat. Using the plates, which had been covering the food and spoons placed in the bowls, the

workers ate. When they had finished eating, they smoked and drank some more tea.

After the meal the group was invited to take food home (*uota-* +poss. suffix, 'one's load', 'that which is carried'): the drinking coconuts (*moimoto*), the bread, *te manam*, and *te roro*. The men stood up and carried the full basins and *bwabwa*-baskets across the *maneaba* to their own side. Once there, the food was further distributed (*tibatibaaki*) within each group. Representatives of each household were to take an equal amount of food with them. There were some freshly woven *baakateke* mats left, and the food was placed on them and divided into as many equal piles as there were households. Once the food was divided, most people took their share (*tibanga*), gathered their own empty dishes and went home. One group of four started playing cards, surrounded by a few onlookers. I stayed on



to discuss the details of *Katokarau* with one of the *unimwaane*. No one stayed long, however; after 4.30 p.m. it was unanimously stated, “It is evening” (“*e a bong*”), a characteristic utterance meaning that one should the return to one’s house before nightfall (an acceptable reason to depart from company from about 4 p.m. onwards).

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION, UNDIFFERENTIATION AND THE DECENTRALISATION OF POWER

The non-articulation, uneven distribution or even a possible scantiness of knowledge of the present *iinaki* system does not directly correlate with its significance. The ritual work in *Tabekan te Unimwaane* and *Katokarau* illustrates the functional *iinaki* division in the Atanikarawa meetinghouse as well as in the village as a whole. *Tabekan te Unimwaane* concerns the relationships between two subgroups within *Iinakin Uea*, *Katokarau* the relationships between two upper-level groups, each event shedding light on certain principles of social organisation.

Tabekan te Unimwaane illustrates differentiation, complementarity and decentralisation of power. Kabubuarengana and Tekatanrake groups are differentiated in a very concrete way: they do different things. The members of Tekatanrake took down, carried and re-positioned the casket. Kabubuarengana people received and welcomed Kourabi home into his *maneaba* and presented the movers with tobacco and food. Here each *iinaki* had its specific work, both of which were needed. In order for Kourabi to be spared discomfort during the construction work in Atanikarawa, Kourabi’s own *iinaki* was to have him in their smaller *maneaba*, but they could not move him themselves. The people of Tekatanrake, the only ones with the right to see and handle Kourabi’s remains, therefore performed the work, for which Kabubuarengana thanked them. In other words, the tasks were complementary, though asymmetrical in that Tekatanrake performed a service to Kabubuarengana, the head *iinaki* within *Iinakin Uea*.

The nature of the service involved, however, blurs the asymmetry; here, differentiation serves to decentralise power. Power in this chapter has mainly referred to the traditional Kiribati conceptions elucidated in the previous chapter, according to which certain people, places and objects may have power of divine origin. Access to this power enhances the status/rank of a person or a group. Considering proximity to Kourabi’s bones as a source of power on space and time axes, power again is elusive. Kabubuarengana is permanently closest to Kourabi, in this instance actually welcoming the bones onto its land; the people of Tekatanrake only get brief moments with him, but they come closer than anyone. Power, understood as closeness to the bones, comes to be divided within the different sections of *Iinakin Uea*, preventing its concentration. In the

sense that no one can really keep the bones, power ultimately remains outside the society.

In *Katokarau* the most distinctive feature was symmetry: there were two groups and identical kinds and quantities of work and food. Men of the two groups performed the same tasks in setting the thatch in place, moving as mirror images of one another. The welcoming ceremonies afterwards were practically identical as well. Each group had prepared the same precisely prescribed types and amounts food, to be exchanged with the other group. The ‘sameness’ has important implications as such, but I argue that it is particularly relevant in relation to an initial difference.

The exchange in *Katokarau* was symmetrical and non-competitive (cf. Forge 1972, 537, 539) – stipulating the types and amounts of food exchanged effectively precludes competition. Giving the same – or making equal contributions – is on the one hand part and parcel of the traditional procedure in the *maneaba*. H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 57) for the Tabontebike *maneaba* in Beru¹⁰¹ and Katherine Luomala (1965, 40) for Tabiteuea (with Tekaman village’s *maneaba* as the primary referent) describe the prescription of the amount of food and other goods which each *boti* was to bring to the *maneaba*. Nakibae Tabokai (1993, 27) has noted that “providing more or less than what is actually requested is abnormal to the *maneaba* system.” It should be noted, though, that the required amounts were not automatically given but the result of negotiations between elders (Luomala 1965, 40; H.E. Maude 1991a [1963], 57; see also Chapter 4 in this work), and this was where, according to Luomala (1965, 40), competition did come into play in selecting who had the most say in deciding the amount of food to be contributed.

Sameness, however, is not the premise or the cause for the equal contributions, it is the end result. The initial picture is differentiated: Tanimeang is the first ‘thing’ (*moanibwai*) and has precedence over Tanimaeao, just as Koobuti was older brother to Naibwabwa. As these two groups got on with placing the thatch, Tanimeang did begin its work first, but from that began the painstaking work of undifferentiation. Step by step each group performed the same duties, thereby levelling, unmaking the differences that were.

A comparative example of exchange of identical objects is provided by Joel Robbins (2003). The Urapmin of Papua New Guinea resolve disputes by exchanging as identical things as possible. According to Robbins the sole function of such a ritual is the confirmation of the mutual recognition of the disputing parties; in other words, of the social relationship between them (Robbins 2003, 21). If in the Urapmin case there was a

¹⁰¹ In the original Tabontebike *maneaba* in Beru, two principal *boti* negotiate three important matters: (i) date of the ceremony (ii) the number of *inai* (iii) the amount of food each *boti* was to bring (H.E. Maude (1991a [1963], 57).

broken relationship that needed to be mended, in the *Katokarau* event a relationship needed to be transformed. *Katokarau* was strong statement about the sameness of the two participating groups, all the stronger because of their initial difference.

In her study of the spatial construction of hierarchy in Gau, Fiji, Christina Toren (1990) distinguishes two kinds of social relationships in the community: hierarchical ('up/down') and balanced reciprocal ('facing each other'). She argues that egalitarian relations or balanced reciprocity between the households in the village is transformed into a hierarchy in the *yaqona* (a drink made from the root of *Piper methysticum*, known as *kava* in many Pacific countries) ceremony, where hierarchical relations are manifested in the ordered distribution of the drink as well as the sitting order. If one would like to apply the same terminology, one could say that in the *Katokarau*, there was active work towards undifferentiation, by which the (conditionally) hierarchical relationship between *iinakis* was transformed into an egalitarian relationship. The practices in *Tabekan te Unimwaane* on the other hand, worked to reproduce the (conditionally) hierarchical relationship between the groups, but the work itself caused power to disperse. Somehow, both events result in hierarchy being cut short.

In addition to the groups performing the thatching, the whole village was involved in *Katokarau* by providing the materials for it: thatch and string. All the households took part in the production of the materials in equal measure; households belonging to Tanimeang or Tanimaeao were not exempt despite their particular responsibility in the capping. Supplying and processing pandanus leaves and coconut fibre for the thatch and twine was not allocated to any particular part of the community; instead, the work load was divided equally between all households in the community. It was nobody's 'work' because it was everybody's work. This relates to another social formation implicated in this affair, namely, 'the people of Buota' (*kain Buota*). In this particular event two issues contribute to the importance of the village community as a whole. Firstly, the village meetinghouse is a symbol of the village community, and its maintenance the concern of the whole village – as is also evident from the story. Secondly, the work had been undertaken because of an upcoming event in which the village community acting as a unit was to receive a visit by another village.

Within *iinakis* too, duties were measured equally between households. Households belonging to Kabubuarengana evenly split the cost of Tekatanrake's meal and tobacco; the same effort in acquiring drinking coconuts (*moimoto*) and the specified foods was required of every household in Tanimeang and Tanimaeao. Nor was any household excused from sending its capable men to take part in the project. Likewise, at the end of *Katokarau*, the food was distributed evenly between all participating households. It is apparent, from the roles played by the household in the events described in this chapter

that it has an important role in the social organisation of Tabiteuea and in the following chapter I turn to examination of households as social and symbolic units.

4. “PEOPLE OF OUR VILLAGE, WHICH IS BUOTA”: THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY AND HOUSES AS SOCIAL UNITS

A VILLAGE BY THE ROAD

Nowadays, if you wanted to visit Kourabi’s village, you would be likely to approach it from the south, at least if you had flown in from Tarawa. The airport of Takea is in Tauma village, just north of the causeway connecting Anikai to the islet village of Kabuna, so from there you have to head north. Hopefully, you would get a ride on a moped or in the back of a pick-up truck, since it is well over ten kilometres to Buota. The main road runs along the western coast of Anikai. You would first pass through Tauma, and then Utiroa, where the Island Council Office (*te aobiti*) is located in the administrative centre in the hamlet of Bakokoia. Next is the village of Eita, home to the government-run secondary school, Teabike College. The school compound spreads out on the eastern side of the road at the southern end of the village, a hamlet called Ruarei.

Eita continues for a few kilometres; then you would cross the village boundary to Terikiai. Terikiai is a long village, and home to ‘JSS’, the Junior Secondary School. At the northern boundary of Terikiai, if you insisted, the driver would let you down, even though he would probably wonder why you wanted to walk in the midday heat. Thus, the easiest introduction to Buota is made by walking or cycling northward from the neighbouring village of Terikiai.

Imagine a cloudless day, some time in the first year of the new millennium.¹⁰² The sun is blazing down from its equatorial height, and the coral road shines white before your eyes. You head north, and after passing the stone on Buota’s southern border, you step onto the land *kainga* called Te Nanora. The first house is on the forest (i.e. ocean or eastern) side of the road and belongs to Arobati*. Next to it on the same side there is the fenced health clinic (*te oo-n-aoraki*) with the resident nurse and her husband, and the clinic watchman’s family. The next two buildings on the eastern side are uninhabited (though still referred to by the name of the former household head), the third is Teitiniman’s*; the first house on the lagoon (i.e. western) side is Teaataua’s. On the ocean side there is one half-finished building and then Uriam’s* house. On the next, almost uninhabited stretch of land (*nukamotu*), there is only the small roofed platform (*kiakia*) where a bachelor lives by the lagoon.

¹⁰² What follows is a general description, not an account of my first arrival in Buota, at which point I was not familiar with the village.

After the *nukamotu* the settlement becomes denser, the houses closer to each other. This hamlet was occasionally called Bareaatau, after the land *kainga*. On the eastern side there are three houses in a row, on the western side a small meetinghouse with a house at both ends. Moving on to the *kainga* Buunanti, there are two houses on both sides of the road, though the owner of one of them resides in Tarawa and another is only inhabited part of the time.

Walking through a narrow *kainga* with only two houses on the lagoon side, you enter the *kainga* of Kabubuarengana. A household can be seen on the far right; beside the road there is a well. Teitoiningaina, Kourabi's smaller meetinghouse, is located after that. If you turned right at the corner of the next house, you would step onto the 'Path of the Elder', Kourabi's path, and eventually reach the ocean side. But if you stay on the main road, next you will cross the narrow *kaingas* of Te Toatoa – on which the house I lived in was situated – and Te Katanrake.

You would already have seen the formidable structure of Atanikarawa rising on the lagoon side. It stands on the *kainga* named Karawaititi. The area around the meetinghouse is covered with coral rubble and lined with flat rocks. Matantongo, the wooden fence, stands about halfway between the rim of rocks and the building itself. The southern side of the *maneaba*, through which Kourabi entered, is shaded by a big breadfruit tree. There are residential houses both across the road and behind the *maneaba*.

If you want a brief relief from the midday sun, you can follow Kourabi's footsteps and step inside the *maneaba* for a moment. If no meeting is in progress, you can admire the building as well as the relics. The stone on which Kourabi refreshed himself can be found near the south-west corner, in the *iinaki* of Te Buunanti. Hanging from the rafters close to the middle of the southern side is the casket. It is decorated with strips of patterned leaves and cowry shells, and a giant turtle shell is aligned over it with ropes.

You could exit the *maneaba* from the northern end, where Taurawa, the representative of Karongoa, has its *iinaki*, and then return to the road. There are quite a few houses in the vicinity of the village meetinghouse. This is the central part of Buota village. Soon after the village meetinghouse is the Protestant church compound (*te oo* ['fence'] *ni Kamatuu*), and about half a kilometre down the road, the Catholic compound. Behind the stone church there is the Catholic church *maneaba*, Ireland ('Aireran' in local pronunciation), named after the church's patron saint St. Patrick, where many formal dance rehearsals (*koroun*) were held (see Ch. 7). On the other side of the road are the pre-school building and the copra store house.

Then there is again a more sparsely populated strip, though there are some houses east of the road. When you see the monument commemorating the arrival of Christianity on the forest side, you have entered the large *kainga* of Routa. Routa is a hamlet with

close to twenty households, and their own local *maneaba*. After covering about four kilometres and seventy some households counting from the southern boundary, you reach the comprehensive school grounds with the teachers' residences on the right. Betero's* house opposite the school is the last one on the lagoon side, and there is one more uninhabited house by the school fence on the ocean side. The last house of the village, Ieremia's*, stands on the ocean side, bordering the village of Tanaeang.

Buota can be fittingly envisioned as a four-kilometre long string of houses along the main road. Moving past residential houses and copra enclosures, meetinghouses, the church compounds, the pre-school, the copra storage and so on through the village, you practically see everything there is to be seen. The road is seldom more than a hundred metres from the lagoon beach, often much closer, and most if not all the houses are located within the same distance from the road to the east. Most residential and meetinghouses are either by, or at least visible from, the road.

Because of the oblong form of the village, the road is a site of social action. If the passer-by is able to see most of the houses, though not all the people, householders who are at home are certainly able to observe all passers-by. In order to walk across the village without pausing you would have to turn down a number of invitations to rest, smoke or eat. The road is where people are seen going about their business, giving rise to invitations to socialise as well as to speculation and gossip. At the very least someone walking along the road would be questioned as to his/her destination. When people see a passer-by or meet someone on the road, rather than greeting them with a "*mauri*" (a standard greeting wishing health and good life to the other person), they more often ask, "Where are you going?". Usually it is a purely rhetorical question, to which an appropriate reply is, "I am going here" or "...over there" – or "I am going north/south" (the last being about as informative an answer as the former ones, since there is only the one road, running in a north-south direction). Passing a house in the morning you might hear the question, or rather a statement, "*ko a mananga?*" ('You have departed?'), and returning in the afternoon, correspondingly, "*ko a oki?*" ('You are returning/back.'). To reply, you would merely call out "*eng!*" ('Yes.').¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Occasionally, however, the supposedly rhetorical inquiry seemed to turn into a minor power struggle. There could ensue an exchange of questions and answers, with A trying to extract more information from B, who tried his/her best to offer as little information as possible by giving evasive replies.

A: "Where are you going?" (*Ko naera?*)

B: "I am going north" (*N na nako iang*)

A: "Where are you going to stop?" (*Ko na toki iia?*)

B: "In Tanaeang [village]"

A: "With whom?" (*Iroun antai?*)...

My feeling is that such a grilling would be most likely to occur in a situation where A is older or otherwise in a position of authority in relation to B; e.g., B is a child – or an anthropologist.

In the string there are three tighter clusters of houses. In the south, there is the hamlet of Bareaatau, while Routa is the centre of northern Buota. Beginning around Kabubuarengana, the hamlet in the middle has three focal points: the village *maneaba*, and the Protestant and Catholic Churches. Atanikarawa *maneaba* is the formal centre of the village, but there is no village square or market. Outside the meetinghouses, there are few places where people might get together informally, except when the young adults gather by Atanikarawa to play volleyball or a traditional ball game named *te boiri*.

There are stores: there were altogether thirteen 'businesses' (*bitineti*) at the time, operating in residential houses. Most of them sold basic cargo items like rice and sugar, home-made coconut syrup (*kamaimai*), salt fish or baked buns. But in order to buy tea from Nei Teitu* or buns from Nei Barauri* you would have to know that they run a *bitineti*, since usually there is no visible separate structure containing the shop, though you might make an educated guess from the big pile of coconuts by the house (coconuts can be used as money, since their monetary value as copra is fairly stable). Once you ventured in the yard, there might be other customers lingering about, leaning against in the house platform (*buia*), smoking and gossiping.

HOUSES AS SOCIAL UNITS

The 'Houses' (*auti*) discussed here are social units: households, not buildings; households may and often do have more than one building. The Houses were referred to in several ways. Often they were simply called *auti* (from the English 'house'), sometimes the indigenous term *mwenga*. As a married couple 'sits', their dwelling can also be called *tekatekaia* (from *tekateka*, 'to sit'), which appears to be an older designation (see Tito et al. 1979, 12). Yet another term for a household, *roo*, is perhaps the most apt. Household as *roo* (fee, tuition, tax, salary) is the unit that lives and works together, pays taxes levied by the Village Council, attends to communal duties and receives the occasional benefits together.

Individual Houses were named after the household head. In most instances this was a male, but about 15 % of Houses were headed by widowed or divorced women. In general, the relationships within a household are ordered by age and gender. Wives are expected to comply with their husband's decisions. Nevertheless, the impression was that the senior woman, usually the wife of the household head, has considerable authority as well as autonomy in running the household and allocating work (also see Geddes 1983, 57). The senior woman of the House also seems to play a significant role in seeing to the observance of custom (*katei*) in the household, particularly in ensuring the chastity and overall proper conduct of its young women.

Economic functions are central to Henry P. Lundsgaarde's (1970a, 249–250) definition of a household in the Gilbert Islands. Lundsgaarde has argued that the Gilbertese household is not a family (*utu*) unit, but a social group whose membership is based on consanguine kinship or contractual arrangements, such as marriage or adoption. A household is the smallest functional subgroup of the society, whose members co-reside and co-operate to achieve economic goals (249–250). This requires some amplification, though, in that, conversely, co-operation in the attainment of economic goals is not necessarily bound up with residence. Close kinspeople, *utu*, working in Tarawa or as overseas seamen, participate in the household economy by sending money – a ubiquitous feature of virtually any small Pacific village. On the other hand, the overseas seaman's contributions may vary depending on his residence during the yearly leave. If he does not go to his outer island home village for his short holiday, but stays in South Tarawa with relatives there, he is likely to be obliged to contribute money to that household as well. Thus economic co-operation depends on kinship as well as residence.

More to the point, the economic sphere does not exist as such, devoid of symbolic values (see e.g. Sahlins 1976), and below I propose to look at the Houses as symbolic units which are attributed certain cultural meaning and value within the context of the village community as a whole. Next I will give a demographic snapshot of the village, because I think the issues of household composition, residence patterns and mobility serve to highlight my argument.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION AND MOBILITY

Before describing the Houses, it should be noted that not everyone who actually resided in Buota is included. It is very common, and in some cases the policy, that priests, nurses, teachers, government officials and the like do not work on their island of origin. Unless they have land on their island of assignment, they are *iruwa*, guests. Teachers usually live in the school compound and nurses adjacent to the health clinic, and their residences are not included in the House count.¹⁰⁴ 'Workers' (*taani mwakuri*) as they are called, are not as a rule expected to participate in communal duties (it is their work to be guests [*iruwa*]; see Ch. 5). If, however, a worker is married to a local resident, the household might participate.

¹⁰⁴ Even when their home is on the same island, they might stay in the compound during the week and go home to the village in the weekends.

HOUSE OCCUPANCY IN BUOTA VILLAGE BETWEEN NOVEMBER 1999 AND SEPTEMBER 2000

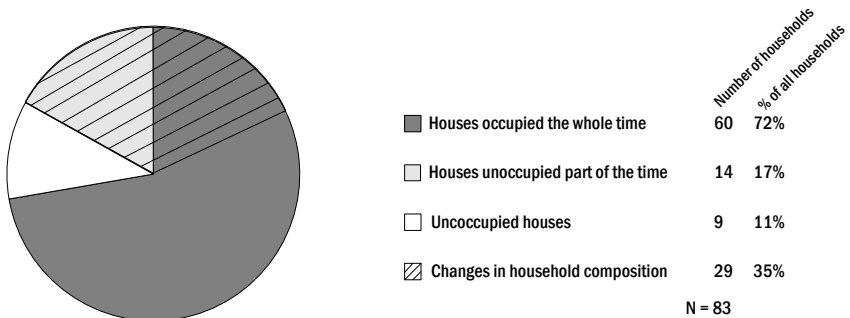


Chart. House occupancy in Buota village between November 1999 and September 2000.

In Buota there were altogether 83 Houses which were named after the household head, but nine of them were unoccupied throughout the fieldwork period. Of the remaining 69, one fifth (14) were only occupied part of the time, and in 40 % of the inhabited total there were changes in membership. At any given time, most would-be occupants of empty Houses were working and living in South Tarawa or some other place – one in worked in administrative hamlet of Bakokoia and another was training on another island to be a ‘missionary’ (*mitinari*, a lay clergyman/catechist in the Kiribati Catholic Church; allowed to marry). Then there were those who were temporarily staying in a relative’s house either in Buota or some other village or island. Therefore quantitative data on household structure necessarily applies to one fixed point in time, not necessarily the whole period. Should one walk through Buota now, some years later, the village might appear quite different in terms of who lives where. Below I also try to give a feeling of the kinds of demographic changes that most often took place, in addition to the natural fact of people being born and dying.

Described in structural terms, about 30 % of Houses were inhabited by a nuclear family: parents and their biological or adopted children. Some of the couple’s children might not live in the same household as their parents but rather with grandparents or other close relatives in the same village or elsewhere, or go to school on other islands. A three-generation household would typically consist of a senior couple and some number of their unmarried and married children, the children’s spouses and children’s children; only occasionally, it seemed, a more distant relative. However, the actual inhabitants at a given time may vary.

In other words, not only were Houses emptied and re-occupied; there was also fluctuation within individual households. People went to work in Tarawa or came back; children went to and from school elsewhere; a daughter’s family came to stay for a

month with her parents; a young woman came to stay with her husband's aunt. It is usually the young people who move around, or else the elderly (*kara*). For example, an elderly widower stayed with each of his children's families in turn, who in this way jointly supported their father.

One of the major factors contributing to the mobility of adults is circular labour migration, which is a practice lasting more than a century in the Gilbert Islands (Connell 1983, 41; see Macdonald 1982, 54–59). Formerly linked to the phosphate islands, Banaba and Nauru, today the main destination is South Tarawa. The seamen working on international vessels represent circular migration in multiple senses of the term; they are relatively few in number but their significance is substantial. Otherwise international migration is on a small scale, most the few people involved going to Fiji or New Zealand. All in all, work migration patterns appear remarkably similar to what they were thirty years ago, as reported by Geddes (1983, 21–27; see also Knudson 1977). One effect of migration has been, then as now, that the island and village population has remained fairly constant without a great decrease in the birth rate (Geddes 1983, 20); the effect has not been so drastic as to skew the population structure – as in some Pacific island nations, where most of the working-age population is away. Nonetheless, on the level of individual households, migrations bring about concrete changes.

An examination of post-marital residence patterns of young adults (*roronrikirake*, lit. 'growing generation'; approximately 18–35 years of age) is informative. Nearly half of the 31 young couples had their own independent household, and were recognised as 'Houses' by the village community. Yet the couple did not necessarily stay there the whole time, but might spend time in the household of an older relative, usually from the husband's side, in which case they were considered part of that House. As a point of comparison, a young Samoan couple will not be considered as having a 'house' until the male spouse acquires a title, regardless of whether they live in their own house or not (J. Siikala, personal communication 30.1. 2008). In Buota, little over half of young married people lived under another household head, again the majority of them under an elder relative of the husband, usually his parent(s). All three single mothers lived with one or both of their parents.

The majority (70%) of the *roronrikirake* couples lived virilocally, either with the husband's parents or independently in the same village. This was not always clear-cut: one young couple lived at the husband's father's household in another village but occasionally stayed for weeks or months at the wife's parents' household in Buota. Thus the terms virilocal/uxorilocal as well as dependent/independent are here used in describing different options or time periods, not fixed categories. The ratio of dependent/independent couples was about the same for both viri- and uxorilocal groups. Ideally, the young couple should mainly stay in the husband's parents' household (based

on the patrilineal and patrivirilocal ideal or emphasis in the Gilbert Islands see Goodenough 1955, 75; Grimble 1989, 210–215; Lambert 1983, 186–188, 194; Lundsgaarde 1966, 90; Uriam 1995, 10). Too long a residence at the wife's parents' house “looks bad in the custom” (*e tarabuaka n te katei*), as one young woman said, concerned for a male relative of hers. This was one of the customs that was said to be particularly ‘hard’ in Tabiteuea. Also, when a young husband is away, it is proper for his wife to stay with his parents or other relatives in the meantime.

Briefly, the residence arrangements of young families were in some flux. In addition to circular labour migration, there was alternation in the dependence/independence of a household as well as its viri-/uxorilocality. Lundsgaarde (1966, 92) has noted that post-marital residence patterns reflect the availability of family lands; on this large island they can be fragmented and scattered, sometimes necessitating rather widespread family distribution. In this regard flexible living arrangements are functional. However, movements also took place within the same village, in which case the distance to a particular piece of land was probably not an issue.

It is crucial to note that people only moved between Houses connected by ties of kinship – other situations would be highly exceptional. At issue here are the relations between Houses as corporate groups, in this situation also including affinal members of a household (dependent household members), whereas affinals (*butika*) in general are clearly distinguished from consanguineal kin (Lundsgaarde 1966, 84). Where kinship connections existed, both adults and children seemed to move between Houses with ease. Nieces, nephews and sisters-in-law immediately found their position in the household, its work and routines (see also Geddes 1983, 56). During fieldwork I noticed that any relative staying at my hosts' house was immediately at home, also adopting the attitude of the host(ess) towards me, the *iruwa*. People participated in the work, ate the same food, and children were treated the same as all the other children of the house. That one may ask for food in another House or, indeed, begin to cook food at will seems to be the mark of family ties between two Houses¹⁰⁵, since one of the important tenets of Southern Kiribati social life is that one should not accept food from non-kin, unless one is a formally invited guest (*iruwa*). Thus kinship is an important factor determining the relationships between individual Houses.

¹⁰⁵ According to Tevita Ka'ili (2005), discussing Tongan as well as wider Oceanic conceptions, genealogical connections are central in organising space and establishing sociospatial ties. Food, nourishment, is important in nurturing these ties, not only relating to land as the valued source of that nourishment but also when people move between places (Ka'ili 2005). Thus, providing kinspeople with food as they move between Houses (over shorter or longer distances) could perhaps be seen to relate to the same ideas that are summarised in Figure 2 in Chapter 3. I thank Dr. Nancy Pollock for drawing my attention to Ka'ili's text.

As a result of the practical flexibility in residence choices and the upbringing of children, adoption, extended visits, as well as circular migration and secondary schooling, changes were a feature of individual household composition. This observation somewhat contradicts those Geddes (1983, 59) made, though it might be that the differences have to do with the definition of ‘visiting’ and ‘joining’ a household, which in Geddes’s survey may have had more formal definitions, whereas I primarily considered *de facto* participation in work and meals, and the position of the person or couple in relation to the community as a whole (see below), as defining factors in household membership. In addition, in this context Geddes did not consider the effects of circular migration on individual household structure, as I have done. What certainly is in agreement between the earlier study and my own is that the movements take place all but exclusively between households connected by kin ties (see Geddes 1983, 59).

In any event, the impression I have is of *de facto* flux against the background of the basic structure of the village, which remained the same. While people moved, the Houses were stable. I argue that in relation to the village community as a whole, the Houses as the social units comprising it were equal in status and obligations, irrespective of who lived in them at given time. This can be seen in the way communal work is allocated. In the following section, a description of the kinds of work that the households do shows the Houses as constituent units in the village social structure, both independent of and interwoven with the *iinaki* structure.

THE VILLAGE PREPARES FOR A VISIT

The organisation of the village in terms of households as well as the way in which this interweaves with the *iinaki* organisation can be observed in the preparations for the visit of Kabuna villagers to Buota – the same event that affected the timing of the restoration work on Atanikarawa’s roof, described in the previous chapter. Additionally, the arrangements are a good example of work undertaken by the village community as a unit, since the Kabuna-*bootaki* in itself was part of a particular kind of relationship, *bo*, between two village entities.

Bo (‘a meeting’, ‘contact’) is a publicly recognised social relationship between two individuals or communities. *Bo* as an institutionalised friendly relationship has been described by Henry P. Lundsgaarde and Martin Silverman (1972, 98–99) as a continuing relationship between friends, arising in “a particular circumstance, such a travelling together or an unusual act of kindness” between non-kin. The relationship entails a “kinship code for conduct”, i.e. people will behave towards each other as if they were kin, but for a friendship to be *bo*, it also has to be mutually and publicly recognised as such.

Lundsgaarde and Silverman (1972, 99) also note that the relationship endures after the initiating parties have passed away, and that it may involve their families. Lundsgaarde and Silverman describe a *bo* relationship between individuals, but such relationships also exist on the level of groups. In addition to the abovementioned kind of *bo* of two villages, there is, for example, a *bo* relationship between the islands of Tabiteuea and Maiana. Such institutionalized friendships are not unique to Kiribati and have been described elsewhere in Oceania, for example, in Palau (Belau) (Parmentier 1987, 97).

The Buota-Kabuna *bo* relationship had been established some years previously. Its inception apparently took place when people from Kabuna came to Buota for the occasion of bathing Kourabi's bones, though nobody seemed to remember exactly. The *bo* relationship between Buota and Kabuna villages entailed an annual general meeting (*maungatabu*) and a feast, fundraising for a common goal, and some other joint activities.

In April 2000 I accompanied some of the village elders (*unimwaane*) to Kabuna, where dates and programme for the visit were jointly decided. The next month, the visitors were to leave from Kabuna for Buota on a Tuesday, and the main 'content of the festivities' (*kanoan te bootaki*) was to take place on Wednesday. Thursday was reserved for the general assembly and Friday for the farewell.

The next morning, as the sun was reaching its full strength, I was standing by the wooden shelf (*baobao*) storing domestic utensils and washing the breakfast dishes, when the village messenger came to tell me that I was wanted in the *maneaba*. I finished, dried my hands and did as I was bid. Entering the meetinghouse, I saw about a dozen *unimwaane* holding a meeting (*bowi*). They wanted me to tell everybody what had been decided with Kabuna people about the time of the *bootaki*. My companions from our visit to Kabuna were also present, but since they had seen me take notes at the meeting, they thought I would be the best person to recount the decisions. So I did, leafing through my exercise book for the right notes. I stayed on to follow the meeting.

Now that the date for the festivities was known, preparations for the *bootaki* were discussed. The renewal of the thatch of the meetinghouse, which in any case needed to be done, was to be carried out in a few days, well in time for the event. The first item in the meeting was the preparation of new cross-wise (from east to west) *iinai* mats for Atanikarawa's floor. All the households, beginning from the southern end of the village, were listed and counted, with a view to establishing which had women to do the weaving – about 55. It was decided that one mat per household would be enough and a date was set for the *iinais* to be brought in. The talk then turned into the *bootaki*'s main item, dancing (to be discussed in Ch. 7).

The date for bringing in the *iinais* coincided with the village's joint dance practice. From early in the morning on that day, there was traffic on the road as people

approached the meetinghouse with their contributions. A rolled-up, twenty-metre long mat is heavy, and many were carried by two men on a pole between them. Some used a moped, bicycle or hand cart to transport the *iinai*, and a couple of men carried the mat roll alone, on their shoulders. Later that day, in the *maneaba* after the dance practice, a check was run to see whether all households had delivered their mats. The village secretary called out the names of – this time – women, beginning from the southern end of the village and proceeding in order:

– Maaria Arobati*?

– This here.

– Taakuaua*?

– This here.

– Teitu*?

– This here.

If the lady was not present herself but the mat was there, someone else pointed at the reel calling out ‘this here’. In this way the House was present through its contribution.

...

– Tabita Tannang*?

– This here.

– Kiritina*?

– This here.

Finally the secretary went around the *maneaba*, counting *iinais*, and concluded that everyone who was supposed to bring an *iinai* had brought it. The *unimwaane* decided that the *iinais* would not be spread until the day before the *bootaki*; otherwise stray dogs or pigs might soil the brand new mats.

Food for the *bootaki* was next on the agenda. The chairman informed the meeting that the village would be divided into three sections (*makoro*), each of which would have responsibility for the food for the guests of honour invited to the feast on Wednesday. The southern section (*te makoro ae maiaki*) would be “from Arobati to Tawita*”, approximately the first 20 inhabited Houses counted from the south. The next 20 Houses also referred to by the names of the household heads (“From Teiraoi* to Teimone*”) formed the middle part (*te makoro ae nuuka*), and Houses “from Boubou* to the north” comprised the northern part (*te makoro ae meang*). Responsibility for the morning meal was allocated to *makoro nuuka*, because the middle part is where the meetinghouse is located and is closest to it. The northern *makoro* was to take care of the lunch, and the southern *makoro* would prepare the dinner.

For the entertainment of visitors in the late evenings and nights, it had been decided that videos would be shown. There ensued a small argument about whose television and video equipment (*taamnei*) would be used. Two households in the vicinity of the

meetinghouse owned a TV and video equipment. Irritated, the *unimwaane* from one of them pointed out that their equipment had already been used three times a row in different village events. Because loaning the equipment should be 'even' (*booraoi*), it should be the other's turn. After some reassurance it was decided that the two sets of equipment would each be used for one night.

It was also decided that in the evening before the main event each household was to bring a bowl of food. The hot drink for that evening would be provided from village funds. In addition, each household was required to prepare a *bwabwa* basket with two loaves of bread, two *buatoro* (baked swamp taro pudding)¹⁰⁶, two *roro* (dried pandanus fruit and coconut cream) and ten pounds of fish.

A week later, on the morning when the people of Kabuna were to arrive, a low-pitched sound was heard; someone was blowing a conch to summon villagers to the *maneaba*. The new mats had not been spread yet. People were slow to arrive, and when I entered the *maneaba* half an hour later, there were only a few people. Deciding not to wait any longer, three men began unrolling the mats. The mats varied slightly in length, but there were clearly enough to cover the floor, with three mats to spare. Now all that was left was to wait for the visitors to get there.

The first transportation (*bao*) bringing Kabuna villagers, a bus, arrived at half past eleven, and more people kept arriving throughout the afternoon. They unloaded their sleeping mats and bags, and settled in the southern half of the *maneaba*. The people of Buota were to occupy the northern half. Most of the Buota residents were busy preparing the required food for that night, but some *unimwaane* were present, engaged in a card game with one of the Kabuna elders. The majority of the hosts arrived in the evening, and took places in the northern part of the *maneaba*.

By half past seven, everyone had arrived at the *maneaba* and the programme could begin. A couple of junior men of Taunrawa (Tanimeang) *iinaki* began moving among the people of Buota collecting the bowls of food one by one. Meanwhile Teimone*, the senior *unimwaane* of Te Toatoa (Tanimainiku) *iinaki*, was standing. The collectors began from the southernmost House and proceeded in (rough) geographical order to the north. "Arobati here!" one of the collectors called out, showing the food container to Teimone. "Arobati is thanked" replied Teimone, in this way announcing the name of the provider to the whole *maneaba*. The collector then placed the food in the unoccupied middle part of the of the Kabuna side. Another collector brought the food dish of the next house: "Teitiniman here!" "Teitiniman is also thanked," declared Teimone. So they went on,

¹⁰⁶ *Te buatoro* is actually like a cross between bread and a heavy pudding, baked into loaves. Different main ingredients can be used: swamp taro (*buatoron te bwabwai*), flour and coconut (*buatoron te ben*) or breadfruit (*buatoron te mai*).

House by House, the collectors criss-crossing the northern half of the building, picking up the bowls and presenting them to Teimone. With the thanks to Ieremia, the head of the northernmost household, all the food had been collected.

In addition, two thermos casks and a cauldron filled with drink were carried onto the guests' side. Three women from Kabuna began redistributing the food bowls among their villagers. On Buota's side, *unimwaane* (and the anthropologist, as a family guest) took their places by the inner row of posts supporting the roof, and their food, prepared by their families, was placed in front of each. Teimone blessed the food, and eating commenced on both sides. The evening (ext)ended with videos and card games.

THE UNDIFFERENTIATION OF HOUSES

The village as a ribbon, with houses observable from the road one after the other, was not only the way the village unfolded visually; it was also a social configuration, which was frequently manifest when the village community (*kaawa*) acted together as a body. If the organisation of Buota community in terms of kinship (i.e., the *iinaki* system) was spatially represented in the sitting arrangement in the meetinghouse, the organisation in terms of households was analogical to the spatial layout of the village. The distinct feature of the latter organisation was undifferentiation. In order to illustrate this, I have selected several salient issues from the description of the *bootaki* provided above: the imperative of even distribution of work, the significance of enumeration, the interchangeability of Houses and the attribution of equal value to the Houses. Throughout, the village emerges as an important social unit as well.

The village of Buota quite frequently acted as a single body and as such expected an equal input from all the households, irrespective of their resources. In addition to providing crosswise mats, thatch and rope for the meetinghouse, all Houses were required to participate in bingos and other kinds of fundraising activities, to cater for visitors to the village, to support the island's football teams and fulfil any of the other frequent community obligations that might arise. It was imperative that the work needed to be done by and for the village was allotted evenly between all the households. The same principle applied to occasional benefits like tobacco received from a visitor (*iruwa*) (two blocks of tobacco, 40 sticks each would yield one to one and a half sticks per household), or the possibility to do wage work. The ideal was that burden and rewards should be *booraoi*, distributed evenly.

The ideal of *booraoi*, also noted by Kazama (2001, 95) in connection with *maneaba* practices in Tabiteuea South, implies both equity and unity. 'To meet well' (from *bo*, 'to meet', 'contact', 'fight') refers to a relationship, and can be variously translated into

English as ‘even’, ‘equal’, ‘equitable’, ‘uniform’, ‘harmonious’, ‘same’, as well as the respective nouns. In its connotations of unity it bears resemblance to the Tokelauan ideal of *māopoopo*, unity (Huntsman & Hooper 1996, 41–42) and in some contexts appears to be invoked in a similar manner by the village elders (see Ch. 7), though *booraoi* is concerned more with evenness and uniformity which then are the prerequisites for unity. In Kiribati economic life *booraoi* as a pronounced emphasis on “equality and conformity” has been associated with at least the islands of Tamana and Tabiteuea North (Geddes et al. 1982, 10), but nation-wide politics are also strongly guided by the same value. At the national level *booraoi* often finds its expression in island quotas, which are strictly proportional to the population on each island (see e.g. Connell 1983). On the other hand, *booraoi* is an aesthetic value, encountered in dancing (Ch. 7), and in clothing practices, where it is manifest in the ubiquitous popularity of uniforms (Autio forthcoming 2010). Eventually it will be suggested that the economic, aesthetic and other aspects of life cannot be separated; beauty is politics (cf. Sahlins 1987, 17–18; J. Siikala 2004).

As pointed out in the previous chapter, providing an equal amount is a taken-for-granted, unquestioned norm in the *maneaba*, part of the *maneaba* context, to the extent that Nakibae Tabokai (1993, 27) has characterised the *maneaba* as a “mono-culture” or “mono-class” system. What I want to do here is to probe, not the existence or importance of the norm and practice, but the reasons and rationales behind it; in short, to ask the question “why?” At least in Buota, ‘mono-’ can only partially describe the village *maneaba* system – something which Tabokai (personal communication 19.9.2000) has indicated as well. Instead, the Buota *maneaba* organisation combines two different conceptions: the distribution of power or value, and two kinds of dialectics between sameness and difference.

In the practices described in this chapter, the corporate units that were put on the same level were the Houses. Whether the household head was male or female, the House occupied by a newly-wed couple with their first-born or an elder in his sixties with his extended family of ten, the Houses were all treated in the same way in their relationship to the village community as a whole. The corporative nature of the organisation is seen in that in most cases it was irrelevant which household member(s) actually performed the work; for example food was usually prepared by women. In the case of the *iinai* mats, the name called out was that of the senior woman of the House (wife of household head/herself the household head), probably because the task had been specifically appointed to women, though the *iinai* was equally likely to have been made by younger women of the house. Nevertheless, with the exception of gender-specific tasks, the work required of all Houses in Buota did not depend on *iinaki* or any other kinship affiliation, household size, age or generation of the household head, wealth or other status factors.

In contrast to the differentiated duties of the *iinaki*, the Houses performed undifferentiated tasks.

The undifferentiated order of Houses also contrasts with the order within a household, where kinship norms of seniority apply. This opposition is evident with regard to the post-marital residence of young couples. For example, a young family lived neolocally when I arrived in the village. They fulfilled village obligations as an independent household. Later the husband left to work in Tarawa and the wife with their three children moved into an older male relative's household in the same village, leaving their marital House empty. During this time, the wife participated in the village tasks as part of her uncle's house. At the end of my stay in Kiribati, I met the whole family in Tarawa, where the wife and children had moved to accompany the husband. In other words, if and when a young couple lived on their own, they had the same status as the more mature households. As far as the village community was concerned, they would be considered their own responsible unit with equal rights and duties. If a couple stays more or less temporarily in a given household they contribute to filling the community obligations of their hosts. Age and generation did not play a role in the relationships of House to the village community and between Houses as they did in the internal relationships of a house.

That the communal duties and rights did not depend on the identities or attributes of the particular persons living in a House is underlined by the fact that the frequent changes in household composition and occupation pattern of the village, due to residence arrangements, circular migration and other mobility did not affect the organisation of village work. As far as the village community was concerned, the Houses were 'interchangeable': an immigrant household could replace an emigrant one virtually regardless of the membership composition of either of them (the interchangeability does not apply to *iinaki* duties, which are specific to an *iinaki*). Thus the Houses had an identical status in their relationship to the community as a whole.

From the above account of the preparations for the *bootaki*, one can see that there were exceptions; in a few instances the same was not required of every household. While there is a real danger of extrapolating from one's own common sense, I venture to say that the exceptions to the rule of assigning identical or at least comparable tasks to all households, were in this cultural context considered practicalities. For example, weaving *iinai* mats was so strongly considered women's work that it was not expected of bachelors or other households without working-aged women. This was accepted as matter of fact. Though the argument is somewhat circular, to my mind the tacit acceptance suggests that such factors were considered neutral practicalities, since everything else pointed to the crucial value of dividing work evenly: only (culturally

defined) self-evident practical matters could come into play when work was to be divided.

Affluence was a practical matter when it came to the use of items like the VCR or stereos that were the prerogative of only a handful of families, so lending such items would not concern everyone. In the lending of the VCR equipment, distance and problems of transport were a decisive factor; the other households owning the same appliance were further away. It was nonetheless just as important for the use to be even (*booraoi*) among those whom the community's request concerned.¹⁰⁷ When it came to things that could be required of everyone, well-off households were treated no differently from others.

The contributions should not be beyond anybody's means (Tabokai 1993, 27), but it does not mean that they were equally easy for every household to put together. It can be noted here that while the amounts were decided on jointly by the Council, according to Katharine Luomala (1965, 40) this is where there can be competition over who has the most say in the decision. With regards the Kabuna *bootaki*, food for one evening and a *bwabwa* for Kabuna villagers were required from all households, and a tray from the three parts of the community. Similar obligations did not necessarily present themselves once a week, but occasionally they might arise for several days in a row, and they might occur alongside contributions to the church, work co-operative or some other organisation. In practice the recurrent requests for food meant that households with small resources sometimes had to struggle to put together a complete meal or the contents of a *bwabwa*-basket. The problematic food stuffs were those one had to buy: rice (not obligatory, but preferred), bread and the like. Even those better-off sometimes complained that the recurrent requests are 'a waste of money' (*kabane mwane*), but meeting them is a matter of honour.

Katharine Luomala's (1965) examination of "Humorous narratives about individual resistance to food-distribution customs in Tabiteuea, Gilbert Islands" reveals that ambiguous feelings towards *maneaba* obligations are also part of a continuous tradition. The narratives analysed are classic trickster stories, where the protagonist shirks his community responsibilities or fulfils them by deception, but manages to get away with it.

¹⁰⁷ In general households who owned such things (often acquired by a seaman in the family) were, at least implicitly, expected to share with the community. If someone asks to borrow a generator (used for lighting at night) or video equipment because they are having a *bootaki* (feast, gathering) occasion, one can hardly refuse, unless the equipment is already needed elsewhere. In the literature it has been noted that the custom of virtually irrefusable request, *bubuti*, has the effect of levelling differences in lifestyle caused by wealth, although, as Geddes and others (1982, 85) point out, the issue is in fact quite complex, since resorting to *bubuti* is an admission of dependence and therefore shameful. See the discussion on the value of independence (*inaomata*) in the following chapter (Ch. 5).

For example, when a food contribution to the *maneaba* is required, the trickster conjures it up from food scraps and excrement hidden under a nice surface. The trickster stories describe asocial behaviour which is condemned in the everyday life of the society but on another level admired and envied. According to Luomala, humour is a way in which people are able to express resentment at otherwise inviolable community obligations.

In real life the obligations are inescapable; for example Katharine Luomala (1965, 33) and Nakibae Tabokai (1993, 27) have pointed out that only by fulfilling the community's requirements can one be a real inhabitant and a sovereign participant in *maneaba* affairs. It all boils down to having land, which Luomala's interpreter expressed succinctly: "If a person doesn't have land he can't bring food to the *maneaba*, and if he can't bring food, he can't be in the *maneaba*, and if he can't be in the *maneaba*, a person is just nobody; so you have to have land" (Luomala 1965, 33). Being a participant in *maneaba* affairs concerns only the male household heads, however, and the somewhat older ones at that, and only indirectly involves the other members of the households. What I think does concern the household as a unit is the value derived from the ability to produce food (cf. Tabokai 1993, 27–28), and the risk of shame at in the case of failure to do so. To be self-sufficient is a fundamental aspect of being independent (*inaomata*); 'selves-sufficient' would be more accurate though, since it is the corporative group again rather than an individual which should be able to fend for itself. Therefore, while many might consider the requests hard and prefer they were fewer, it seemed that the community's demands were invariably met by all households.

Thus the relationship of each House to the village community as a whole was the same, and no differentiated order emerges. The undifferentiated organisation of Houses was confirmed time and again by enumeration. The enumeration of the Houses – i.e., households – of the village was a recurring item in the meetinghouse, whether it was implicated in the ceremonial presentation of food or a more mundane recital of names. It might be in order to plan communal work, to find a suitable person to do something, to check if each household had done a task assigned to all households or whether a representative was present in the meeting. It can be seen as a practical solution, the road through the village serving as a mnemonic device, but I will be suggesting below that it is both an undifferentiating and value-attributing practice, particularly when food was concerned.

Whatever the reason for enumeration, the occupied Houses were listed by naming the household heads; one function of the listing was to establish which Houses were occupied at a given time, since there was variation. The sequence of Houses in the enumeration was always the same: the order of Houses along the road from the southern to the northern end of the village. There is no value differential between the north and

the south, unlike between the east and the west,¹⁰⁸ so this geographical order of Houses has no implications of precedence. The listing might well be a practical choice because that was precisely the point: that no other considerations of value were to determine the order.

The same underlying neutral geographical principle was applied if Houses were to co-operate in a given task. Depending on the nature and extent of the work, it could be assigned to larger units (*makoro*), typically two or three. These were formed from households based on location. The Village Council would decide on the boundaries of the *makoro*, depending on the current occupation status of Houses, so that each part included about 20 inhabited Houses. Then the Council would assign the responsibilities for each *makoro*. Within each *makoro* the work would again be divided equally among the households. Here the principle of undifferentiation is evinced first on the level of *makoros* and then replicated on the level of Houses. Even when the distribution of work load is channelled through groups of households, the evenness is ultimately meant to be effected in relation to the village community as a whole.

The meticulousness striving for evenness, either between Houses or *makoro*, or between Houses within a *makoro*, is evident in that while some competition occurs when contributing festive food, the main item of a tray of food ('head of the tray', *atun te turee*) might be prescribed: whether a tin of Ox & Palm Corned Beef, a chicken or perhaps both. To cite another example, all households of a *makoro* whose turn it was to host meetinghouse guests from Maiana, were obliged to send a representative to sing for guests under the penalty of a fine.

CHURCHES AND WORK CO-OPERATIVES

The level standing of Houses was a key concern also in two more permanent kinds of higher-level social units within the village, namely, the churches and voluntary work co-operatives (*makoro*; an alternative designation would be *mronron* [see e.g. Geddes et al. 1982, 99–102; Geddes 1983, 158–177], but I never heard the latter used). The religious organisations, i.e., the Catholic and the Protestant churches, had certain differentiated tasks for a few individuals, including lay members in committees. However, both in the churches and the co-operatives the accountable units in communal work and fundraising activities were the Houses, and the division of tasks between them *booraoi*.

¹⁰⁸ In James Fox's (1994) terms east and west form a categorical opposition, in which the two sides can be either marked or have value attached to them.

The overwhelming majority (90% of households) in Buota belonged to the Catholic Church. There were four to five Protestant households and three that professed the Baha'i faith. The Protestant minority was an active and tightly knit group, perhaps precisely because of its size, and they were also organised as one co-operative (*makoro*) for fundraising (*karikirake*). The Baha'i practitioners, to my knowledge, did not in practice form a group to the extent of holding devotional meetings or otherwise acting jointly. The Catholic congregation was strong but, because of its size, there was more variability in the levels of activity of its members. Within the Catholic Church there functioned three work co-operatives (*makoro*), raising money for the Church. These named groups were formed on the same geographical logic as the temporary village *makoros* described above, grouping Houses from south to north, but functioned on a permanent basis. In addition there was a lay Catholic group called *Taangan Nei Maaria*, most likely to be a local chapter of the Legion of Mary, whose purpose was chiefly spiritual.

Religious groups aside, at the time of fieldwork there were four 'pure' work co-operatives, *makoros*. Twenty-one Houses belonged to the largest *makoro* I knew, five to the smallest. This kind of *makoro* membership was elective and not bound to a geographical location, even if many co-members were neighbours as well. The activities of at least three of the *makoros* centred on a canoe or a boat which they had either jointly purchased, or were working towards getting. While the co-operatives were geared towards earning cash in general, two were in such early stages as to still be paying off the canoe. One of the *makoros* had raised money for the church before the canoe project; when the loan for the canoe was paid off they surmised possible profits would be distributed among member households; "fundraising truly for ourselves" (*karikirake bon ibukira*), as one of the members said. All work for the *makoro* was divided equally among its member Houses.

The co-ops raised money by producing local goods either for sale or to be used as prizes in bingos and raffles. The indispensable canoe was used for fishing, and the fish was then sold either fresh or salted and dried. Women wove pandanus mats and made coconut fibre cord, which most often became bingo prizes, along with, for example, dried shark meat. Organising bingos was perhaps the most popular kind of fundraising activity. The *makoros* also sold their labour: they could produce the materials of a house – wood, thatch, rope – and build it to order. Orders were probably rare, but such a building 'voucher' – for example for an unwall platform house (*buia* or *kiakia*) – could also be the main prize in a raffle.

The *makoro* work co-operatives are informal and not to be confused with Bobotin Kiribati Limited (BKL), formerly the Co-operative Wholesale Society, or the Kiribati Co-operative Society, which are government-owned public enterprises (see Asian

Development Bank 1998, 75, 227; 2002, 86). It appeared that the *makoro* co-ops in Buota had been founded relatively recently, but different forms of co-operative ventures have been present in Tabiteuea at least since the Second World War. Geddes (1983, 158–177) reports two kinds of co-operatives in Tabiteuea North in the 1970s: the initially government-encouraged, registered co-operative societies, and informal co-ops called *mronron*. Even if Geddes (1983, 158) noted that forms of co-operative activities in Tabiteuea were fewer than on other Gilbert Islands, the turn-of-the century *makoro* co-operatives appeared to be just one of a number of different kinds of co-operative fundraising endeavours, which have been tried out under different names and with different goals, perhaps with somewhat different organisational/shareholding principles and activities.¹⁰⁹

The village was also divided on the same geographical basis into three groups in an organisation called Kamweengaraoi (causative prefix + ‘home’ + ‘well’), concerned with the well-being of homes/families, sanitary conditions of houses and so on. However, Kamweengaraoi did not appear active during my time in Buota.

VILLAGE COMMUNITY AS A SOCIAL UNIT AND THE *//NAKS* OF THE VILLAGES

The importance of evenness is to be understood in the light of the ultimate point of reference of the undifferentiating practices: the village community. It was often talked about as *kain ara kaawa ae Buota*, ‘people of our village which is Buota’. This notion was invoked for various purposes, and was also an ideological expression stressing the unity of the community. Obvious from the examples above, the village community is a significant social unit, which also acts as a corporate group: it engages in social relationships and has property. At the time described, Buota village owned a generator and had some funds, which could be used to cater for visitors. Buota’s relationship with Kabuna is an example of a particular kind of friendly relation, implying mutual rights and obligations; another specific relationship exists between Buota and the village of Temanoku in Nonouti Island, bound together by the name exchanges. Apart from these particular relationships, however, Buota also stands in certain predefined relationships to the other villages of Tabiteuea Meang.

¹⁰⁹ Other examples would be the above mentioned church fundraising groups or the joint fundraising activities of Buota and Kabuna villages. One change in the activities has been that co-operatives are nowadays less likely to engage in retailing, which was common in the 1970s; since 2000, copra price subsidies have only been paid directly to the producers, not to co-operatives (Asian Development Bank 2002, 103 and fn. 56). Apparently the Government as well as agencies like the Asian Development Bank would prefer the development of private businesses. The *makoro* and church activities, however, are on such a small scale as likely to be considered part of the private sector (see Asian Development Bank 2002, 101).

In fact, more generally there are delineated relationships between all the village communities of Tabiteuea Meang. The relationships between the twelve villages are twofold. On the one hand, the relationships at this upper level of social integration are analogical to the undifferentiated relations between Houses within the village community. The villages stand in a relationship of 'competitive equality', regularly competing with each other in sports, for example and, implicitly at least, in dancing. Island-wide football tournaments or other sporting competitions often take place in conjunction with Easter, Independence Day or other celebrations. As with households within a village, villages can also be divided into *makoro*-like groups based on geography (see Ch. 7).

The villages are also subject to equal benefits and demands from the island as a whole – represented by the Island Council and its *maneaba* or some other island-wide body – such as wage-work opportunities or hosting the island's football teams so that during the training season they stayed with, and were provided for, in each village *maneaba* in turn. In other words, this island-wide order is undifferentiated. These relationships between villages and their relation to the larger social whole is part of the neat segmentary organisation formed of social units at different levels, where relationships are undifferentiated: households, village districts, island district and the central government (see Lundsgaarde 1970a).

On the other hand, however, there is another order as well, which is differentiated. Early on in Tabiteuea I came across an *iinaki* division of the villages of Tabiteuea Meang, encompassed by a dual organisation. When the villages of Tabiteuea Meang got together in a *maneaba*, each village had its *iinaki*, its sitting place in the *maneaba*. In other words, the representatives of the different villages observed a particular sitting order irrespective of which *maneaba* they gathered in for a meeting or a feast. This division has not been described much in the literature, though William Geddes (1977, 375, 1983, 30) and Henry P. Lundsgaarde (1978, 73) make a reference to an island-wide *maneaba* system in Tabiteuea North. Examining this system more closely contributes to a more nuanced picture of the North Tabiteuean social structure.

The island district of Tabiteuea Meang is firstly divided into two 'shares' (*tiba*): Tabiang, which includes four villages, and Taboiaki, which includes eight. To my mind significantly, the sections are not called *makoro* and they do not adhere rigidly to geographical principles of allocation, although admittedly, there are only three exceptions. Yet the names of the 'shares' (*tiba*) belie a division based on locales. In another context, H.E. Maude (1980, 47 fn. 39) mentions the names Tabiang (presumably from *tabo*, 'place' and *-iang* 'north') and Taboiaki (*tabo* and *-iaki*, 'south') as designations for the northern and southern end of the *maneaba* respectively, but Maude's informant had used the terms in a meaning different from the one described

here for present-day Tabiteuea. In Tabiteuea Meang the naming of the division obviously contradicts the idea of cardinal directions both in terms of the *maneaba* and on the island. Taboiaki, located on the northern side of the *maneaba*, includes most villages from the northern end of the island, and Tabiang, on the opposite side, most villages from the south (cf. the diagram below with the map of Tabiteuea [Map 3] in the Introduction). Moreover, a geographically defined *makoro* would imply an even number of villages on both sides.

Secondly, within each *tiba*, each village has its own sitting place, *iinaki*. Each section is differentiated at least so as to have its 'first' (*moanibwai*) – a village with the right of precedence: Temanoku/Buota for Taboiaki and Tauma for Tabiang. Their precedence is due to being the first one to be founded in that group of villages. Within Temanoku/Buota, the *iinaki* of Tanimeang is the *moanibwai*, in the same way as it is in the village *maneaba* and the village in general. As for Tabiteuea North as a whole, both Temanoku/Buota and Tauma claim to have been founded first and thus to be *moanibwai* of the whole island. According to Geddes (1977, 375), Tabiteuans stem from a common group of ancestors whose instructions guide the *maneaba* system. The origin stories of Buota, however, make no reference to such a group but rather emphasise singularity. The differentiation in terms of the age of villages did not appear to be articulated beyond *moanibwai*; or at least its expression in differentiated functions was limited to the first speakers Buota and Tauma.

This sitting order was frequently observed where North Tabiteueans assembled in a *maneaba*. In addition to Island Council meetings, it was applied, for example, when the Kiribati Protestant Church congregations of the island met.

The origin of this village *iinaki* division appears unclear. Interestingly, island-wide *maneaba* organisations with Island Councils as the administrative bodies were established by the colonial government (Lundsgaarde 1970a, 256), and the division of Tabiteuea into two administrative districts quite late in the period, 1970. On the other hand, the Tabiang/Taboiaki division did exist at least in ca. 1944, since a song about Atanikarawa *maneaba* composed around that time makes reference to the division and Buota's precedence in it. And to my knowledge the story of a precedence dispute between Buota and Tauma comes from (pre-colonial) oral tradition (Luomala 1965, 40 also mentions Buota and Tauma as traditionally paired rivals). The present Tabiang/Taboiaki scheme coincides with two of the three traditionally recognised parts of Tabiteuea, namely, Anikai and the Islets (Atimakoro). It is also conceivable that originally the scheme included the whole of Tabiteuea (Anikai, the Atimakoro and Tabiteuea Maiaki/Tabonteaba) and the three villages of Tabiteuea Maiaki have just been dropped from it; or that it originally comprised only Anikai, and the three Atimakoro villages were accommodated later. Moreover, while the Island Council meetings follow this

THE TWO *TIBA* AND THE *IINAKI*/POSITIONS OF THE VILLAGES IN TABITEUEA MEANG

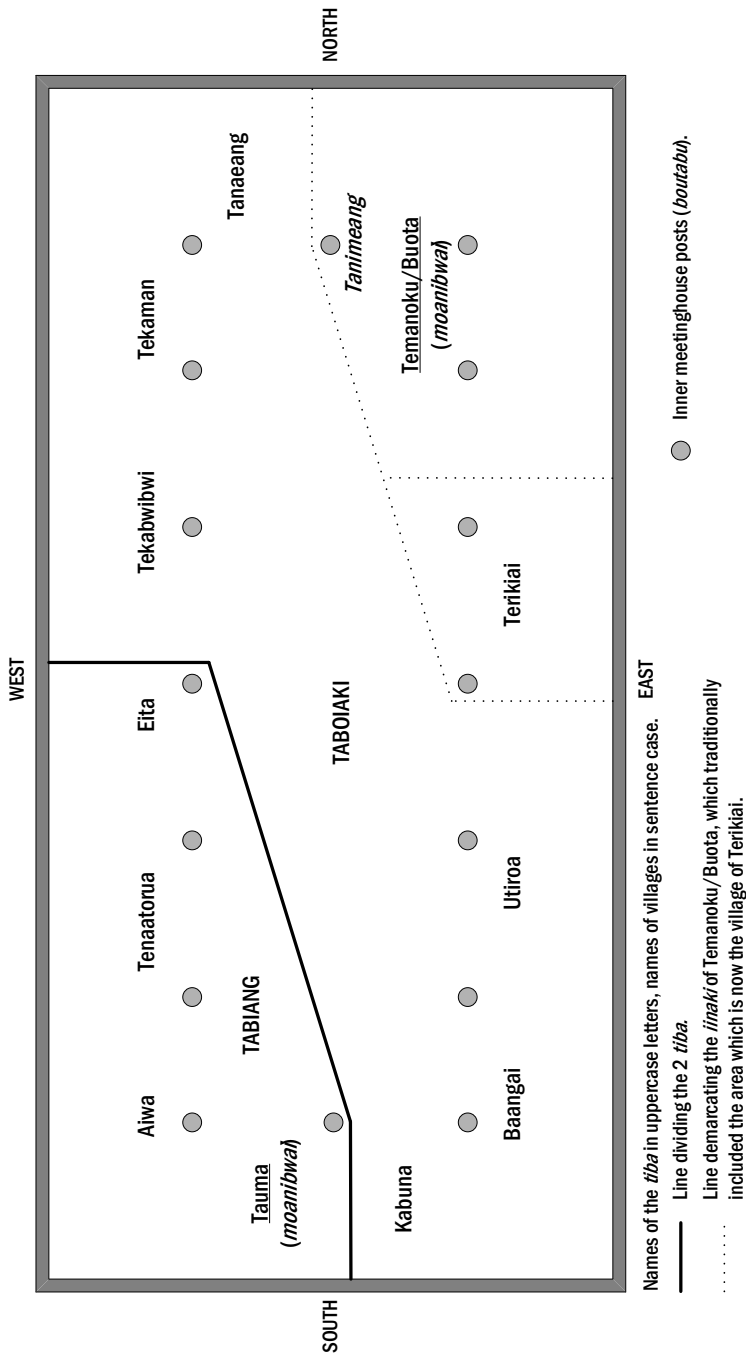


Figure 4. The division of Tabiteuea Meang villages into two *tiba* and the *iinaki* positions of the villages in a *maneaba*.

sitting order, it is separate from the administrative entity in that it can be used on other occasions too.

Broadly speaking, the words *iinaki* and even *boti* are also used as generic terms for a sitting place in the *maneaba*. In other words, they can be applied without the clan connotation; a circumstance which I have not come across in existing literature. While the Protestant congregations in their island-wide gatherings adhered to the Tabiteuea Meang *iinakis*, the Catholics observed another *iinaki* order when they got together in the central Catholic *maneaba*, Euankerio in the village of Tanaeang. When Euankerio – one of the biggest¹¹⁰ *maneabas* built with Western materials (tin roof and cement floor) in the whole country – was constructed, sitting places (*iinakis*) for the village congregations were allocated according to the amount each village had contributed to the construction. There were, furthermore, sometimes more than one possible seating. “What’s the manner of our sitting?” asked one of the elders before the meeting of the island’s football committee – which was managing and supervising the male and female teams representing Tabiteuea Meang in an inter-island tournament – referring to the positions in which the participants from the different villages should be sitting.

JUNCTURES OF SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE

Considering meetinghouse practices in Buota village as well as in the island district of Tabiteuea Meang, one can discern several social configurations at and between different levels of social structure. They are formed by the manifold, partly intersecting relationships between Houses, kinship-based *iinakis*, villages and the *iinakis* of the villages, and are guided by distinct concerns with ‘being different’ and ‘being the same’. The distinctions I am making are analytical; in practice the different social grids intersect and become interwoven. Nonetheless they entail divergent assumptions about the distribution of power/value.

This chapter has pertained to power as symbolic reproductive power, which brings prestige and value to those who can manifest it. Food has been assumed to be an important expression of this power. In addition, in Kiribati the ability to provide food presupposes ownership of land, which is the ultimate form of wealth and source of traditional value. The status achieved this way does not in itself imply authority or political (coercive) power, which depend on other factors such as age. The aim has been to link this mode of attributing value to the modes discussed in the previous two chapters.

¹¹⁰ An estimated 42 by 39 metres.

Within Buota village, the intersection of two kinds of social grids is most tangible in the public presentation of food in the *maneaba*. The contribution and presentation of food in Atanikarawa *maneaba*, described above, is the standard practice. Each and every House has performed the undifferentiating work of preparing same amount of food. In the ceremonial presentation junior men from Taunrawa *iinaki* fetch the food, and the head of Te Toatoa *iinaki* thanks each giver publicly; in other words, they act according to the differentiated duties of the *iinaki* organisation. Yet the order of presentation was not derived from the differentiating *iinaki* organisation. Instead, the Taunrawa men collecting the food proceed in the undifferentiating order of Houses from the south to the north, seeking out the representatives of each household. Checklisting the Houses along the road might be practical, but there is no reason why it would be more practical than collecting food in the order people were sitting in thereby avoiding zig-zagging through the meetinghouse.

Apparently, this order of presentation is relatively recent. Taukai*, an elder in his early sixties, told me that in reality there is a particular order in which food is fetched. “There is the first thing [*te moanibwai*]”, which in this instance is Kabubuarengana, and “there is the second”. This would concur with Katharine Luomala’s (1965, 35) brief reference to the collection and exhibition of food in the *maneaba*, as well as with Father Sabatier’s early 20th century description of *maneaba* procedures:

One clan supplies heralds who announce what the shares of food will be; another family is responsible for distributing the food. The portion of honour belongs to such and such family and in sharing out the food a fixed order of precedence is strictly followed. The least mistake or the slightest forgetfulness is taken as an insult. (Sabatier 1977 [1939], 100)

Thus, previous *maneaba* practices included more differentiating elements than today – even though it is interesting to note Kabubuarengana’s position as *moanibwai* in this context instead of Taunrawa, and its balancing or restricting effect on differentiation. In the present situation, while the heralding duty of Te Toatoa and the distribution task of Taunrawa continue, the distribution pattern reflects another kind of order. This evolution of food distribution practices might relate to the overall strengthening of Houses as corporate units instead of the traditional sub-units of *iinakis* (*kaingas*). Yet this order – the House organisation – is no less symbolic for being the result of a later development.

In the present situation, two social configurations, or ways to organise the same people and attribute value to the social units they form, contradict and intertwine. While the different kinds of *iinaki* work differentiated people, the duties of Houses undifferentiated them, made them the same. On the one hand, the two *iinakis* with their ‘work’ are part of the social system in which *iinakis* are initially accorded different values according to the genealogical position or other status of their founder, though certain

practices curtail or transform the emerging hierarchy. The Houses on the other hand are not, *a priori*, put in an order of precedence or arranged according to other status factors. When the village community is looked at as a consisting of households, they all have the same status to the extent that households are interchangeable. Their equality is emphasised by the strictly geographical order of listing and presentation of the Houses in communal contexts, which works to confirm and renew the social order of the village community as consisting of units of equal status.

In this context 'equality' requires further definition. It is the Houses as corporative social units that are considered equal, not individuals and not even the household heads. When Houses are viewed as constituents of an *iinaki*, there are twofold relationships between them. On the one hand, preparations for the thatching demonstrated how the obligation of providing food was evenly divided between the Houses, just as they would be in a *makoro*. On the other, there is the traditional genealogical differentiation, 'lower-level *iinakis*' ('lineages') and possibly even *kainga*, ranked in order of distance from the common ancestor. On the level of individuals, the placement of members of an *iinaki* in a meetinghouse *vis à vis* one another, during the public recognition of their contribution as at other times, reflects differentiation according to age and gender. The latter kinds of differences are also presumed when Houses are viewed as constituting the village community directly, without the intervening level of *iinakis*; sitting arrangement conforms to the *maneaba* custom, and in general, it is the older male household heads who hold the political power.

As social units the Houses are considered no less in the same position within the *iinaki* system as well. Insofar as food is an expression of reproductive power, I argue that the public thanksgiving in the meetinghouse recognises that power and in this way attributes value to the Houses and proclaims it. Households as symbolic social units are attributed certain value irrespective of who resides in a House at a given moment. It is noteworthy that it is the traditional kinship-based *iinaki* system which acknowledges and subsumes the more recent household organisation, and in this way encompasses it at a higher level of social integration. In so doing, the system of differentiation is simultaneously affirming and denying itself.

The relationships between the various village communities within the island district are likewise twofold. The villages are on equal footing when it comes to the obligations to the island community. In the *maneaba*, however, the social whole is differentiated according to precedence, albeit it is not extensively articulated – but neither is it in the kinship-*iinaki* system. Thus here too difference subsumes sameness on another level of social integration. While the island community is not as tightly integrated as the village, a similar pattern of difference and sameness appears to be formed on this level of social organisation as well.

The sameness of social units becomes concrete in the contributions and the work that the units performed for the higher-level social entity: the same for all the Houses, or all the villages, respectively. It is clear from the above examples that the community and parts thereof acting collectively go to great lengths to ensure the even distribution of the expense and trouble caused by community obligations. The flipside of this is that, from an individual House's point of view, the demands placed on it are frequent and unyielding – hard. But why is sameness so important? I argue that it is not because the units are the same – have the same or equal status – but on the contrary, it is because they might not be.

One thing to note is that here 'the same' is considered in absolute terms *vis-à-vis* Houses, not in terms relative to their size or, for example, economic means. Insofar as such practices are considered 'equal'/'egalitarian', equality emerges as culturally defined. After all, from another point of view the practice could be considered more equal if contributions were proportional to the economic means of a household, or the number of its members. As a point of comparison, in Tokelauan institutionalised sharing (*inati*), equality is understood in absolute terms *vis-à-vis* individuals, even if the distributions and contributions take place between and by groups (also called *inati*) (Huntsman & Hooper 1996, 76–83). As the *inati* groups, into which the village is divided, have various compositions and the number of their members vary, the faithful adherence to equality leads to complex calculations and divisions of goods (and yet, Huntsman and Hooper [1996, 83] point out, people sometimes use the system in ways which mean the outcome may well not be absolute equality).¹¹¹ Thus the apparently very similar insistence on sameness or equality in these two cases has somewhat different implementations and social corollaries in each.

In Kiribati one consequence of the insistence on sameness is the preclusion of competition. It follows that it is not possible for any level of group (House, *iinaki*, village) to try to gain prestige by giving more than others. In the *maneaba*, competition is in most cases ruled out. Nor can an *iinaki* demonstrate an already existing differentiated status, as it would if contributions were proportional to rank. It also

¹¹¹ The units paralleled here are Kiribati households and Tokelauan *inati* groups. However, as Kiribati and Tokelauan are both Austronesian languages, the resemblance of the terms *iinaki* (Kiribati) and *inati* (Tokelauan) would seem to invite the comparison of these two units. Yet descriptions of present-day *iinakis* (see Ch. 3) and *inatis* (see Huntsman & Hooper 1996, 76–83) indicate that their social functions are quite different, though questions of allocation are pertinent to *iinakis* as well (and traditionally even more so). This would make a comparison too complex to be undertaken within the confines of this work, and a linguist would be needed to determine whether the terms are cognates. Since *iinaki* refers to a row of thatch (made of pandanus leaves), it could be related to the word *iinai*, 'coconut leaf mat', both referring to covering (the ending *-ki* could again possibly but not necessarily be a suffix indicating passive voice), or similarity in form or material but this is entirely speculative.

follows that neither can anyone gain less prestige than others. When value is attributed to Houses, even junior households claim the same status as the more mature ones insomuch as they make the same contributions. In that sense *maneaba* practices elevate rather than suppress them.

Giving 'the same' does not always mean the same thing, however. When Tanimeang and Tanimaeao brought exactly the same contributions to the *maneaba* after the thatching, I suggest it was the recognition of the pre-existing difference in their traditional status/value/power that necessitated the levelling request for the same items. In the case of households I suggest that in terms of traditional value they were by contrast on a level plane to begin with, as their reproductive capacity was acknowledged in and by the traditional system, and no other considerations were allowed to come into play. One can perceive active undifferentiation in socio-economic terms though, since there were real differences in the material resources of the households. Regarded as a matter of traditional value, it was nevertheless an attempt to restrain any emerging difference. In brief, for the *iinakis*, contributing the same worked to transform an existing difference. For households, contributing the same pre-empted the threat of an emerging difference.

All this sets the stage for my eventual conclusion that 'being the same' is a prerequisite of the unity and harmony of the community, which is the prime orientation. However, this ideal state of affairs is under threat, and the restraint of differences requires constant reworking. The reconciliation of difference and sameness and thereby the reproduction of the community as a unified whole is also negotiated in spatial and bodily practices in the *maneaba*. These can be examined through the notions of 'sitting' and 'standing', which, as I suggest in the following chapter, position meetinghouse practices in more general Kiribati modalities, in ways-of-being-in-the-world.

5. SITTING PROPERLY: SPACE, LANGUAGE AND THE BODY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDEAL COMMUNITY

“Move up, move up!” (keerake, keerake), the Speaker calls out. Another feast (*bootaki*), is about to begin in the meetinghouse (*maneaba*). Well before the *bootaki* is due to begin, there have been people in and around the *maneaba*, making preparations or just waiting for the event to start. The Speaker directs his words to the latter, the guests of honour (*iruwa*) who have arrived early and remained on the sidelines, perhaps smoking or lying down – they should now take their places by the inner row of posts (*boutabu*) supporting the roof of the *maneaba*. Once all the guests, dignitaries and elders have taken their seats in the front row, the Speaker further prompts them to note that the *bootaki* is about to begin: “sit properly!” (*tekateka raoi*).

In this chapter I examine the ways in which sameness and difference are created in *maneaba* customs. I will be looking at feasts (*bootaki*) organised in *maneabas*, events like the one about to begin in the opening scene of this chapter, because in Tabiteuea *bootakis* tend to be formal, with a wealth of distinctly customary practices. Tabiteueans’ reputation of ‘holding the custom’ appeared well-deserved, when a series of reprimanding addresses followed a village *bootaki* during which the chairman had failed to stand up while speaking. Taukai* began by saying that it is out of respect for the *maneaba* that when you discuss (*taetae n ikawai*; ‘mature talk’), you should stand. Other elders echoed him. “Don’t you know the Tabiteuean custom [...] the *maneaba* custom?” said one. “We stand. [It is] truly the custom,” continued another.

The profession of custom by these elders does not mean that no changes have occurred in Tabiteuean *maneaba* practices. Older ethnographic descriptions by Luomala (1965, 1966) of Tabiteuea (and e.g. Sabatier [1977 {1939}], Grimble [1921, 1989] and Maude [1991a {1963}] in general) make this clear; an example cited earlier related to the order of presenting food, and in this chapter certain changes will become apparent when looking at the seating of people during feasts. In people’s understanding, however, the custom is continuous enough, and furthermore, it is actively maintained in, and by, the various practices, as well as by the commentary on them and their possible changes. The opposite of change is not changelessness but continuity, which is a dynamic process. *Bootakis* are an important and to some extent emblematic context for this.

Bootakis are also heightened moments of sociality. If the community, both as a local community and as a value – the social whole – is spatially represented in and by the *maneaba*, then it gets a temporal manifestation in a *bootaki*, a feast. The *bootaki* practices mark, and mark off, time, space and bodies. This differentiates and undifferentiates, meanwhile organising social relations within the community and the

community's relations to its subjects as well as to the outside, ultimately valorising the community.

The opening scene of a *bootaki* described above is not from one particular occasion but a compilation from several, containing phrases and procedures that I can with confidence call typical. This, and descriptions of actual events later in this chapter, are based on observations of over 40 formal feasts in which I participated and/or observed in different *maneabas* in various Tabiteuea Meang villages. In many ways all *bootakis* were very similar, even if the contents of the programme varied. A *bootaki* can be arranged for a number of reasons: the inauguration of a *maneaba*, a child's first birthday, Easter, for welcoming people or bidding them farewell – but their form and code of conduct is by and large the same. In addition, *bootakis* arranged in residential houses – which I attended on numerous occasions ranging from the feast for a new-born baby (*bakanibuto*) to funerals – even if often less formal, shared many of the verbal, spatial and bodily customs typical of *maneaba* gatherings.

Discussion in the preceding chapters concerned the constitution of the local community and the articulation of difference and sameness in terms of corporative groups. In the preceding chapters the expression 'sitting' has had many abstract or metaphorical referents: dwelling, group or community membership, and representation. The members of the community, however, not only act corporatively, with individuals as representatives of their groups, but also corporally, and most of the time what people do in a *maneaba* is sit: cross-legged on the floor, upright, palms on knees; leaning an elbow against the knee, slouching, or relaxed, resting against a post. There are some situations in which people stand, too, as when addressing the 'people of the *maneaba*' (*kain te maneaba*). Besides this vertical up-down contrast, the *maneaba* space is also horizontally organised in terms of 'up' and 'down', independently of the division into sitting areas, *iinakis*.

All in all, knowing where, how and when to sit (*tekateka*) and stand (*tei*) in the *maneaba* is of utmost importance. Body postures, alignments and directional movements in the meetinghouse express and construct social relations as differentiated or undifferentiated. From an inverse perspective, in these practices the individual body becomes socialised and encultured.¹¹² Ultimately the community is constituted of, and

¹¹² Marcel Mauss' (1979 [1935]) classic essay on 'body techniques' notwithstanding, explication and theorisation of embodied forms of culture has been an important trend in anthropology for the past couple of decades. Much work builds on and/or criticises Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concept of 'habitus' (for critical readings, see e.g. Farnell 2000 and Moore 1994). For the purposes of this work, what is relevant in the embodiment discussions (see e.g. Csordas 1994; Farnell 1999; Lock 1993) can be summarised in Christina Toren's (1990, 7) contention: much of what we learn is inscribed in and made manifest in our bodies rather than in words.

by, these sitting and standing individuals in a multitude of discursive, spatial and bodily practices, particularly in the context of the meetinghouse.

Following Elisabeth Keating's (1999, 2000) studies of the Pohnpeian feasthouse, it is possible to see location and movement in space, body position, gaze, language, food sharing and other material practices as sign systems, which interact to construct social relations: to differentiate or undifferentiate, as the case might be. According to Keating (1999, 2000), the various sign systems combine and interact, and may both confirm and contradict one another. The resulting constellation of social relations is not fixed and immutable. Furthermore, the relative statuses in a given situation can be negotiated or contested (Duranti 1992; Keating 1999).

Many studies of the use of language, body and space in the construction of status relations in the Pacific, including those by Keating (1999, 2000) have concerned hierarchical societies (see, e.g., Duranti 1992; Toren 1990; Shore 1982, Ch. 5), laying emphasis on the spatial, bodily and discursive construction of *difference*, be it according to age, gender, hereditary rank or something else. Yet, as Christina Toren's (1990) work illustrates, even in pronouncedly differentiated societies hierarchy need not be the only ideology or social form and the expression of hierarchy may not always be the desired goal. Bradd Shore (1982, Ch. 5), in giving the socio-spatial layout of a Samoan meeting (*fono*), points out that even if the model offers the means for an exact expression of hierarchy, it is usually left intentionally ambiguous or vague. What is more, the processes of signification by language, space and the body are equally capable of expressing and producing *sameness*.

ARRANGING AND ATTENDING FEASTS: THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF A *BOOTAKI*

A Kiribati feast, *bootaki*, is closely linked to the concept of *iruwa* (*irua*) or guest(s). 'One who arrives by canoe' (*i-ru-wa*; see Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *irua*), the *iruwa* is a visitor: someone who does not own land on the island, a stranger or non-kin, or in one particular sense, an affine. Conceptually, then, *iruwa* are in opposition to kin group or community: to 'us'. Traditionally as well as in the present, *iruwa* have been treated extremely well and their well-being is of utmost concern, whether they are hosted at home or in a *maneaba*; all guests are guests of honour. Similar conceptions exist on other Pacific islands. In Samoa, for example, the special vocabulary used to address and speak about chiefs is also used for strangers (Pratt 1984 [1893], 39). The concept of *iruwa* can take many institutional forms, from the treatment of one's in-laws at home, to an island-wide affair where each village in turn hosts a group of guests in their *maneabas*. The arrival of an *iruwa* is a cause for a feast (*bootaki*) while, conversely, a

bootaki is usually a reason to invite *iruwa*. *Iruwas* are needed for an event to be festive – their arrival honours the event and bestows prestige.

Therefore, when a *bootaki* is arranged for some other purpose than honouring a particular guest or guests, guests of honour are invited. In principle anyone can be an *iruwa*, but people commonly invited as such are church office holders, government dignitaries, Council office workers, teachers and nurses. Men and women alike can be *iruwa* (e.g. Tito et al. 1979, 14). The fact that government and church employees tend not to work on their home islands means that they are often *iruwa* in the strict sense of the term: they have no land on the island. This however is not always the case. Someone invited as an *iruwa* because of his or her status (an Island Councillor, for example) might well be from the same village. Such cases draw attention to the contingent and shifting nature of the ‘guest-community opposition’. An alternative way to conceptualise the social organisation of a *bootaki* is to look at the socio-spatial arrangements.

When a *bootaki* is arranged in the *maneaba*, there is a categorical opposition of two kinds of participants: people who sit ‘in the middle’ (*i nuuka*) and others. ‘Sitting in the middle’ means sitting by the innermost rows of posts (*boutabu*, from *boua*, ‘post’, and *tabu*: ‘sacred posts’) encircling a square-shaped area called ‘the middle’ or ‘centre’ (*nuuka*). In a small building there is only one row of posts, but if there are two rows, the posts of the outer row are called *bouriki* (from *boua* and *riki*, ‘origin’, ‘come into existence’, ‘family’, ‘offspring’). The space is conceptualised in vertical terms: people move ‘up’ to the posts, and at the end of the feast, they retreat ‘down’.

There are several types and sizes of *maneabas*, some of which differ from this description. In some *maneabas*, the *boutabu* row runs down the exact middle of the building, the posts supporting the main ridge beam (see H.E. Maude 1980, 23, and photographs on pp. 14, 22; Hockings 1989, 219, 221, 223¹¹³). In such a case, people would not sit by the *boutabu* but by the *bouriki*. I also recall a *maneaba* where there were no posts at all, just the stone pillars (*boua*) supporting the roof at the edge. In all *maneabas*, however, the conceptual division between the centre and the rest of the space is retained.

When a *bootaki* is in progress, two kinds of people are expected to sit in the middle, in other words, by the *boutabu* row: the guests of honour (*iruwa*), and those community members who would sit there in other circumstances as well. The latter class of people includes senior men (*unimwaane*) and church office holders like priests, catechists (Catholic lay preachers locally called *mitinaries*) and church committee members – unless the office holders have been invited as *iruwas*. High Government officials or other

¹¹³ Hockings gives the name *boutabo*, which I think is erroneous.

dignitaries happening to be present would also sit by the sacred posts. Any such people though, especially if they are not local, would quickly be invited as *iruwa*.

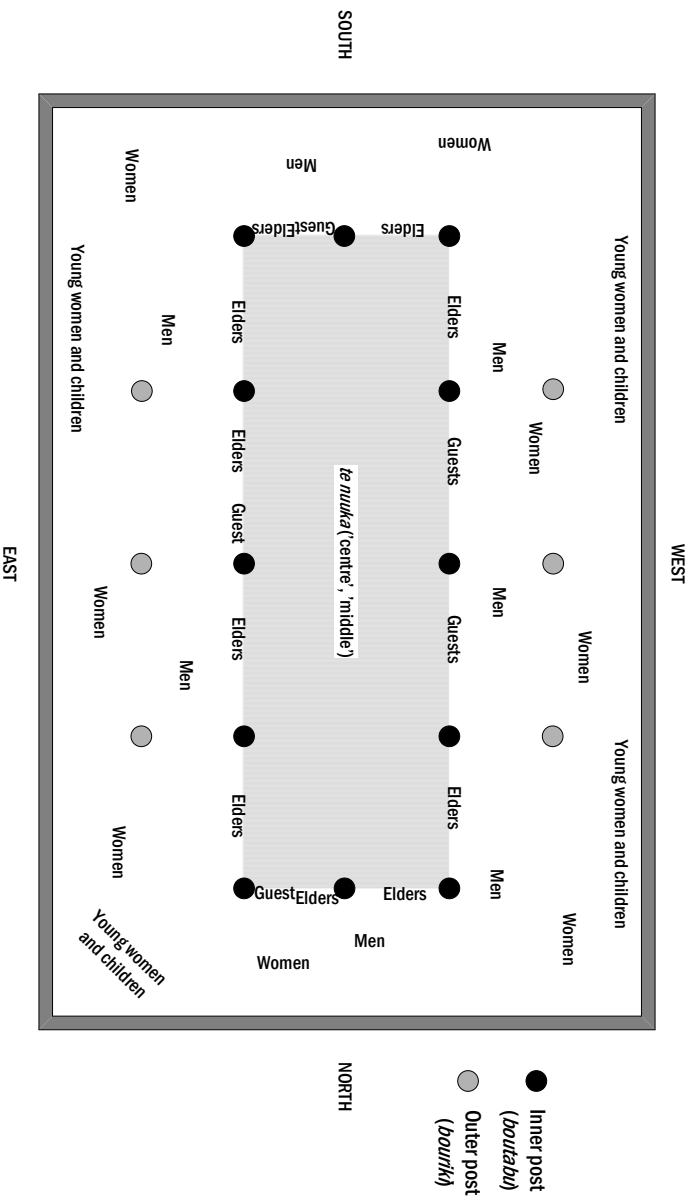
In many *maneabas iruwa* traditionally sit by the posts in the middle of the western side, but there are other, occasion-specific arrangements as well. If an *iinaki* or a household has a guest of its own (as opposed to a guest of the whole *bootaki* or community), he or she would sit by the posts in that *iinaki*, beside the *unimwaane* of the group. While on a general level one can simply speak of hosts and guests, in some cases establishing the *iruwa*'s actual host can be a subtle issue, including where the guest sits and who serves his or her food.

People not in the middle are the other members of the community or group hosting the *bootaki*. They are not expected to behave as formally as those by the front posts, though neither to disturb the programme. Younger men might sit attentive behind the front row; *unaine* (old ladies) might deliberately take a freer position further back. Young women and children would be closest to the edge of the building, babies sleeping, children playing or running outside. The spatial arrangement reflects the age and gender hierarchy, though not in a very precise way: in a small *maneaba*, the space between the middle and the edge would only be a few metres wide, but figuratively at least, the younger ones' place is by the 'offspring's posts' (*bouriki*).

One of the changes which has been going on for a while already is that there are more women and younger men sitting in the middle than used to be customary, even in Tabiteuea, known for its conservatism. Government and Church officials sometimes, and teachers, nurses or other professionals frequently, are now women or young men. Depending on the occasion, they are invited as *iruwa* or otherwise considered eligible to sit in the middle, though it does not mean that they would boldly assume the same status as their elders. Here the basic spatial arrangement by age and gender within an *iinaki* is cross-cut with education and/or position with e.g. government or church.

The people – particularly women – behind the front row often do not just sit, even if they perform their tasks while sitting on the floor. They are, however, the people on whom the efficient operation of the *bootaki* depends: they have been cooking food, preparing 'trays' and *bwabwa*-baskets of food, plaiting flower garlands. Young men have helped: boiling water for tea in a cauldron, carrying heavy loads or climbing trees to fetch young coconuts if they are offered to the guests. Everything to be served to those in the middle needs to be ready by the time the Speaker of the *bootaki* requests it.

FLOOR PLAN OF A MANEABA DURING A FEAST (*BOOTAK*)



The Speaker plays a key role on the public side of a *bootaki*. The Speaker of the *bootaki* is called *tia babaire* ('chairman'), *M.C.* (using the English term) or *bira* (from 'whistle'). He directs proceedings, announces programme items and gives instructions to hosts and workers. The Speaker may either be chosen for the occasion or hold the office in that particular village. He does not act of his own personal accord (as a private person) or as a leader but as a representative of the host community. This is particularly evident in cases where the chosen Speaker is fairly young, that is, not necessarily considered an elder (*unimwaane*).

ELEMENTS OF A *BOOTAKI*

Though *bootakis* are arranged for various purposes, their programmes usually have the same key elements. The order of the elements is not fixed and not all are necessary, but common to all *bootakis* is that their time is highly structured. All *bootakis* have an opening and a closing, a meal and some formal speeches, which may include gift-giving (*marooroo*). Additional items are entertainment (*kamataku*), rests (*motirawa*) and a morning or an afternoon snack (*kabuki*). An example of a *bootaki* programme is as follows:

- Opening the feast (*kaukan te bootaki*) and welcoming those present (*butimaea*)
- Main meal (*kaamwarake*)
- Entertainment (*kamataku*)
- Speeches and gift-giving (*marooroo*).
- Rest (*motirawa*)
- Speeches and gift-giving continued (*marooroo*).
- Afternoon snack (*kabuki*)
- Closing (*kainaomata*)

The order might vary slightly: for example there may be entertainment or speeches before the meal as well, or the rest take place immediately after the meal.

Welcoming guests

The Protestant congregations of Tabiteuea Meang were celebrating Easter together in Utiroa village. Easter Sunday had begun with a church service, after which people proceeded to the maneaba in the church compound. In fact, many of those present – the Pastors, their families and active parishioners from the twelve villages – had already been living in the maneaba for several days, in order to be able to participate in events on Holy Thursday and Good Friday as well as in the Protestant Women's Association's (RAK) bootaki on Holy Saturday. As everyone assembled in the maneaba on the

Sunday, there was commotion for a while with people slowly taking up their places either in the middle or somewhere in the back. By noon, everything began to be in appropriate order for the bootaki to start.

The people sitting in a line by the inner maneaba posts were the pastors and elders from the different village communities, the main guest of honour, who was the wife of one of the island's two MPs, and myself. I was there as the guest of the Buota village pastor; the MP's spouse was sitting in the iinaki of Utiroa village next to the Bishop (also seated in Utiroa), though she may have been considered the guest of the whole bootaki. Throughout the event, including the accommodation arrangements, the Tabiteuea Meang villages' sitting order (Taboiang-Taboiaki division) was being observed. Accordingly, I was sitting at the northern end beside our village Pastor and the husband of the village nurse. Also present was the Air Kiribati representative from our village, a man in his late thirties, whom the Pastor repeatedly asked to come forward to the row of posts. Eventually, the man came forward, but stayed just a little behind the rest of us in the middle. The same applied to the young female Pastor from one of the southern villages, who at these island-wide Protestant events always sat respectfully behind the elders and other Pastors, perhaps less than half a meter but just enough to be noticeable.

The Speaker of the feast was the Pastor of the congregation in Terikiai village. He stood up and spoke, opening the bootaki. "The powder, the sweet-smelling!" (te bauta, te boiarara) the Speaker then called out. A female Pastor and another women got up, one holding a bottle of talcum powder and the other a spray deodorant. They walked behind the backs of the people sitting in the middle, stopping at each guest and elder to 'powder' them: the Pastor sprinkled talcum powder on each person's neck with one hand and smoothed it on with the other; her assistant sprayed deodorant on everyone's back and under their arms.

A bootaki is a marked event, time set apart from the flow of everyday life, a particular frame (Bateson 2000 [1972], 186–190) of action. The frame 'this is a maneaba bootaki' is evoked in several ways. 'Keying' (Goffman 1974)¹¹⁴ is performed firstly by assuming a

¹¹⁴ Building on Bateson's work, Erving Goffman introduced the notion of 'keying' as the way in which frames are evoked and switched. According to Goffman (1974), there are primary frameworks within every society which people generally use to make sense of their experiences. Keying is the process by which other (by implication secondary) frames are evoked. Goffman (1974, 43–44) defines keying as "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants as something else." Since the basic or primary frames are culturally defined, and more than one might be employed simultaneously (see Goffman 1974, 25), the distinction (at least in a priori terms) between primary and secondary frames is not very helpful. Instead, a more constructive way to make use of the notion of frames is as a way of conceptualising different kinds of action, and the closer examination of particular frames seems worthwhile.

particular spatial arrangement. Secondly, fairly obvious discursive means are applied when the *bootaki* is opened with a welcoming speech and frequently a prayer or a song. An important element in the opening speech is thanking the guests for coming; their having put aside their duties and busy schedules is a theme repeated in other speeches held by the hosts. Inasmuch as a frame is metacommunicative discourse about the relationship between speakers, as Gregory Bateson (2000[1972]) defines it, the key social relations in a formal *bootaki* are posited between the community and its guests.

The greater or more important the feast and the more elaborate the welcoming of the guests, the more distinct in general is the framing of the *bootaki*. A child's first birthday (*moan koroniriki*), for example, is an important event, often marked with great festivities if the family has the means to arrange them. When the adopted grandchild of the Buota Catechist had her first birthday, all the Catholics in Buota worked towards making the *bootaki* a grand occasion. It took place on a Saturday in July.

The Catholic Church maneaba of Buota was decorated in the usual way with bows of coconut leaves: a string had been tied between the sacred posts at a height of two metres, encircling the centre of the maneaba, and green and white (i.e., very young) coconut leaf trims had been tied to it in sets of three.

The guests of honour were sitting under this decorative line on the western, southern and northern sides, as there were quite a few of them: the Catholic father and two nuns, the Catechists from other Tabiteuea Meang villages, the Protestant Pastor of Buota represented by his wife because he had been obliged to attend another bootaki, the Chief Councillor of the island, the nurse from the village clinic, teachers from the primary school at the village border. The airline agent was also represented by his wife, as Saturday was one of the two days he worked with the incoming, bi-weekly flight from Tarawa. The birthday child was sitting on her mother's lap, also by the posts. I had promised to videotape the occasion, but as I resided with a prominent parishioner, I would be sitting with him when I had the time. He sat with the other Catholic elders of Buota by the posts at the north-eastern end.

Incidentally, it was that flight which delayed the beginning of the bootaki. It was late and, carrying the special birthday cake that had been ordered from Tarawa, the bootaki could not begin until its precious cargo arrived at the maneaba. Some people, myself included, did not mind the hitch, since it allowed us to pop in at another maneaba to watch a dance dress rehearsal, before returning to help at the birthday bootaki. The iruwases, however, had already arrived, and were sitting by the posts, waiting patiently. Outside the maneaba, there were a lot of women and young men at work, arranging the food, getting ready for performances and making other preparations. Meanwhile some of the guests had offered to sing a few songs to pass the time. I sneaked back to the dress rehearsal once more, and came back just in time to

film the ‘powdering’.

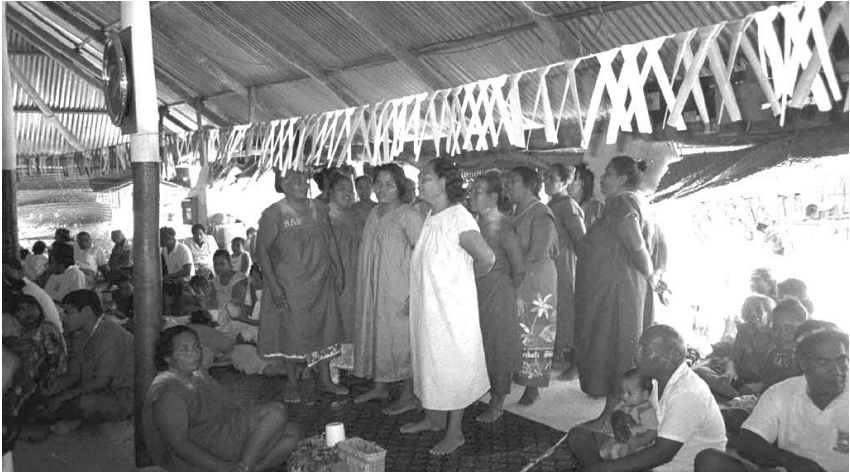
With Buota villagers filling the eastern flank, the maneaba had got crowded, except for the middle part between the inner posts. Then a group of young women came in dancing, accompanied first by a drum, then by a guitar and a song composed in honour of the birthday child. The women and girls were wearing a uniform outfit made of new cloth. Moving in a taubati, a dance of reportedly Samoan origin, the women formed a line in front of the guests, and at the end each of them took the flower garland that she had been wearing, and placed it on the head of the iruwa in front of her. The garlands had been plaited that morning, and sprinkled with coconut oil to prevent them from withering and to enhance their lovely perfume. The dancers then regrouped outside the maneaba, in order to dance the cake in next.

The spatial location in the middle, as well as the welcoming practices, the speech, powdering and flower garlands, set the guests and elders apart from other people and elevate them to a higher status. The *iruwa* in particular become the centre of attention, but the community’s elders are also temporarily set apart from the rest of the community, as its ‘other’ – defamiliarised (cf. Robbins 1994, 46–48).

The location by the inner posts signifies the highest social status. Thus in principle all guests and elders are of the same status, but, left to people’s own discretion, women or younger people may choose to communicate their recognition of their lower status. Along the highest row, however, there is no differentiation: no-one can sit in the area inside the inner posts (*nuuka n te maneaba*).

While some people of their own accord may opt for a lower position, the welcoming honours are equally applied to everyone in the middle. In other words, the ceremonial reception of guests is not differentiated, as it would be in places like Samoa. The powdering is a way to honour the sitters and to make them comfortable; it serves to mark them off from the rest of the people and mark their high status, as do the garlands. A key attribute of both the flowers and the talcum powder is the scent.¹¹⁵ In addition, the shiny white of the talcum powder might be considered attractive; in dancing it has become a substitute for white shark sand on the skin as beautification (Laxton & Kamoriki 1953, 64; see also T. Whincup & J. Whincup 2001 about the use of shark sand [142] and the white *tumara* shell belt against a black dance skirt [89] as dance adornments). During the welcome, discursive, spatial, visual and olfactory means are employed to signify the high status of the people in the middle.

¹¹⁵ It is also possible that good smells are, or traditionally were, considered to protect against evil spirits (see Brewis 1996, 9).



Photograph 9. A *bootaki* arranged by the Protestant Women's Association (RAK). A village RAK group is singing. The customary coconut leaf bow decorations are seen in the foreground.

The all but universal custom of decorating the *maneaba* with coconut leaf bows on a string between the *boutabu* serves two purposes, both marking off the guests sitting under it, as well as the centre part of the *maneaba* (*nuuka n te maneaba*).¹¹⁶ The centre of the meetinghouse is marked off spatially by the decorative line as well as by behaviour: it is forbidden, or rather, *tabu* to enter the middle (*e tabuaki te nako nuuka*). The centre may only be entered in order to perform a specific task or play a role which involves going into the middle: for example, addressing everyone in the *maneaba*, bringing food and drink, dancing or giving and receiving gifts. If a meetinghouse is small and crowded, people might be forced to sit past the posts, but care is taken that an empty space remains in the centre. I would argue that, except in the sense of not belonging to a kin group, the middle is far from being a neutral space, as Lundsgaarde (1978, 71) writes; on the contrary it is highly marked.

The guests and elders, in return for being honoured and treated, commit themselves to the *bootaki* and its spoken and unspoken rules. Once the *bootaki* has started, the people in the middle are expected to stay in their places, to 'sit properly', to be alert and observe the programme and its formalities. During a *bootaki* it is the duty of the hosts to provide the *iruwa* with the best; the *iruwa* for their part are obliged to remain attentive, to be present. Those who participate in the *bootaki* in other roles, not as guests but as workers, have more freedom, moving about (even sneaking out to watch dance going on elsewhere). Even at quiet moments in the programme, the people in the middle cannot leave their places, lie down or be lost in thought. They are bound to their positions,

¹¹⁶ One is reminded of *rabu*, a coconut leaf tied around a tree so as to taboo it from others (see Grimble 1989, 7-8)

immobile, thereby resembling (in a somewhat less extreme form) the *kaiwabu* sponsors of Kalauna exchange feasts described by Joel Robbins (1994, 47-48). If they wish to stand up, for example to address the gathering, or enter the empty centre part of the *maneaba*, they must request permission from the Speaker.

Ideally, male *iruwa* and elders sit upright, cross-legged, with their palms resting on their knees. Based on my observations, women sitting by the posts, and particularly wives accompanying their husbands as guests, tend to withdraw, sitting slightly sideways or behind the line of men. Women also sit cross-legged, sometimes with one leg stretched out if they are not directly facing the middle.

When someone is moving in the *maneaba*, he or she is in danger of insulting (*matauninga*) the sitting people. One should not be higher than other people – that is, should not be standing when others are sitting. In particular, one should not stand or walk in front of sitting people or cut across people's line of eye contact when they are talking. Many times however, moving in the *maneaba* cannot be avoided; tasks like powdering, indeed, require that. In such a situation, one should pass behind people's backs when possible – though in a crowded meetinghouse this usually means walking in front of somebody else – and when in front of sitting people, one should at least stoop. This is common etiquette in the Pacific (see e.g. Toren 1990, 98 on walking *lolou* in Fiji; Keating 2000, 308 for Pohnpei).

The list of guests of honour in the above *bootaki* illustrates the kind of people that tend to be invited as *iruwa* to feasts. Anyone can be invited as an *iruwa* to a *bootaki*, but typical guests of honour are representatives of churches, officials or salaried workers. Indeed, unless one has a regular cash income, being invited as an *iruwa* can be a financial burden, because guests are expected to give a gift to the hosts (see below).

Feeding guests

Soon after the opening ceremonials, the Speaker often begins to talk about the upcoming meal, about “proceeding to the part which is after this”, as an oft-used *bootaki* phrase goes. With the possible (even likely) exception of *bootakis* with dance performances (*muwaie*), the meal is the high point of the programme. While the meal is being prepared for serving, there is some empty time, waiting, which can be filled in, for example, with singing. Somebody, or maybe a small group, volunteers to sing in order to pass the time – most commonly, they offer to sing three songs (*tenikora*). As they stand up to sing, someone from the crowd or one of the guests usually approaches and powders the performers. Hopefully though, the gap (*marena*) is not too long since, ideally, the main meal should be served at noon.

The Kiribati Protestant Church New Year celebrations were held in Tekaman village. Transportation from other villages had been arranged, but the pick-up truck was late, so that we did not make it to the church service. Instead, we were just in time for the meal. The Protestant parishioners from Buota and I entered the church maneaba, where people from Buota were occupying the north-eastern end, observing the Tabiteuea Meang sitting order. I was invited to sit next to Ioane, the Buota Pastor, by the inner posts, and not long after I had sat down, the Speaker announced “Two minutes, ladies!”, giving a forewarning to those tending to the food.*

Ioane’s wife Nei Kaitinano, sitting behind the front row, placed a tray of food and tea pot behind Ioane, within easy reach. Ioane moved the tray, pot and utensils in front of us both. When everyone sitting in the middle had a tray in front of him or her, the speaker prompted everyone to sing a song together, in lieu of the usual grace. “E nako te kai”, the Speaker added, an idiomatic expression meaning in this context something like ‘go ahead and eat’ (a clear signal that people may begin). On our tray there was rice, swamp taro, a whole cooked chicken, a tin of Ox & Palm Corned Beef and some pork; pumpkin and pineapple contributed colour, and in addition there were cabin biscuits.*

We ate, and when we were full, there was still food left over. Others seemed to have finished eating too; some were smoking. The Speaker declared “The plate falls”; in other words, permission was given to return the trays to the sides of the maneaba. Behind us, women and young people gathered around the trays and started eating. For those of us in the middle, the bootaki programme continued.

Food is important and a matter of pride for the organisers, because the care and effort taken is a token of their affection for their *iruwa*. A household would serve its own *unimwaane* and any of its invited guests; the duty of providing food for the guests of a community or a group would be divided equally amongst its member households. At mealtimes, the food should be placed in front of all those sitting in the middle at the same time, and the Speaker may, half-jokingly, give a warning one minute before service to those responsible for the food. That allows time to prepare the trays but also grants permission to bring them up to those sitting by the posts; this cannot be done in advance either. Similarly, when the guests and elders have finished eating, the people from the back of the *maneaba* cannot fetch the dishes nor partake of the food before permission is given. It is not until the speaker announces that ‘the plate falls’ (*e baka te raurau*) that the plates can be moved down to the sides and the remaining food shared by those sitting in the back rows.

That some care is taken that food is served at the same time to everyone in the middle is in stark contrast to differentiating food or drink sharing practices, which are common in more hierarchical societies. In the Pohnpeian feasthouse, for example, food is served

in a hierarchical order from the highest-ranking titleholder to the lowest, and the amount and kind (quality) of food also signify status (Keating 2000, 310). The serving of kava (*Piper methysticum*) is another example; in Samoa, Fiji and Pohnpei alike, the drink is served in order of rank. Kava has not traditionally been consumed in Kiribati, but it has been introduced very recently. According to Kazuhiro Kazama (2006, 95), kava (in Kiribati called *nangona*, from the Fijian *yagona*) drinking in Kiribati tends to be informal, and no other obvious order was observed in serving except that *iruwa* were served first.

Serving a 'tray' of food is one mark of an event of note. Another more recent way of serving food at an important feast is a buffet, where people fetch their own food from a table. Serving food from a buffet changes the social configuration somewhat. Most of such feasts I attended took place in Tarawa, but there were a few in Tabiteuea North as well. These occasions had an air of deliberate extravagance and seemed to have an association with Tarawa. Sometimes there was a concrete link to Tarawa with the serving of food stuffs which had been imported from there, like the cake in the first-birthday party described earlier. To my mind not coincidentally, food at that birthday party was served from a buffet table. A buffet was also the method of serving at another first-birthday party, held in Terikiai village, just south of Buota.

Bauro's first birthday took place in a small maneaba, maybe ten metres wide, so the organisers had decided not to try to cram the food tables into the middle of the maneaba. Instead, tables borrowed from the nearby Junior Secondary School had been placed beside the maneaba, inside the fenced area. The tables had been covered with brightly patterned cloth from a new roll, and bluish-green plastic food basins had been placed on it.*

Food was plentiful. There were two kinds of raw fish (oraora) – one with coconut cream and the other with tinned mixed vegetables – and of course fried fish. There was a whole roasted pig and four kinds of pork curry; rice, swamp taro, and the often taro-based sweet and heavy foods te buatoro and te bekei;¹¹⁷ a vegetable mix in coconut cream, made of cabbage, tree leaves, pineapple and probably sugar. The hot drink (ranbue) was tea seasoned with sugar and milk powder, the cold drink (maitoro) – though still pretty hot since the water was recently boiled – was water sweetened with coconut syrup.

Prayers had been said, but nobody moved before the Speaker announced that the guests and elders were 'independent' (inaomata), that they could stand up and fetch food. When they had got their food and were eating, a few teenage girls stood around

¹¹⁷ *Te bekei* is mashed *buatoro* mixed with coconut cream. See fn. 81 about *te buatoro*.

the table, fanning flies away, and also serving more food or drink, when a guest wanted seconds.

There may be a greater variety and ‘finer’ food on a buffet, but more important than what is served is how it is served. Compared to the buffet, serving the food on a tray placed in front of guests without their having to move, emphasises, firstly, the simultaneity of serving – no-one is placed ahead (or above) the others – and, secondly, the immobility of the *bootaki* participants. When food is on a buffet table for people to fetch for themselves, they cannot leave their places at will; they have to wait to be made ‘independent’ (*inaomata*). They need to be given a temporary freedom to move.

When people fetch their food from a buffet table, they cannot do it simultaneously, so an order unavoidably emerges. In the *bootaki* just described, this was left random, or rather, at people’s own discretion: all guests and elders were invited to the table at the same time. In some cases, however, an order of self-service was explicated. For example, at the first birthday party arranged in Buota, the Speaker announced after the grace that the two nuns and the Catholic Father should take food first “...and our Sisters, please begin [lit. ‘open’] first. The Father and the Sisters and after them all the *iruwa*” (Vt4/010700/Buota, TabNorth/M~55).

Interestingly, there was another way in which some people could be treated exceptionally, differentiating them from others. At some buffet events, waiters carried food bowls past certain guests and elders so that they could take food without having to stand up and go to the table. In my interpretation, this was a way to mark their particularly distinguished status. In a common Pacific conception there is a connection between high status and immobility or passivity (see e.g. Shore 1989, 150; Marcus 1989, 187–188).¹¹⁸ Getting up to fetch food means some loss of dignity, even if it entails greater freedom. At Bauro’s birthday, the girls taking seconds to some guests could be seen as alleviating the temporary diminution of status.

Therefore I suggest that serving food on trays placed in front of sitting people is the ideal way of serving. It allows for the status of guests and elders to be maintained and the *bootaki* to flow uninterrupted. It is a decidedly *ideal* way in the sense that in practice there always are status differences even among the honoured people in the middle. Serving food on trays at the same time for everyone is above all a strong statement about the way world *should* be.

¹¹⁸ This is part of the same complex of ideas that was discussed in Chapter 2 as the dual nature of legitimate chieftainship. There the emphasis was on the need of a ruling chief to have an active aspect as well as this passive one.

Delivering speeches

While the name for the next crucial element of a *bootaki* can be translated as ‘discussion’ (*marooroo*), it is actually formal speech-giving. There may be ‘discussion’ before the meal, but usually the afternoon is the principal time for it. *Marooroo* includes both speeches and gift-giving. The people sitting by the posts take turns in speaking. When someone wants to speak, he or she usually stands up, at the same time calling out “Sir, chairman!” or “Forgive me chairman, for I will speak again”, in this way requesting permission to speak. The chairman then gives up the floor; “send forth [fire away]!”, and the speaker begins by addressing the whole *maneaba*: “our friends this afternoon”, “people of the *maneaba*”. When the person speaks, the chairman or others sitting by the posts may comment “hear, hear”; “it is true, it is true”; “thank him”. The speech-giver typically ends with an apologetic or self-deprecating clause like “that’s all I can speak, it ends here”; “I think I will stop here. Forgive me”, or simply “Thank you, that was all”; “to you [i.e., the floor is yours], people of the *maneaba*”. Saying this, he (or, more rarely, she) sits down.

The first birthday party at the Catholic maneaba in Buota had proceeded to the marooroo. Taukai, a member of the church committee in his early sixties, had risen and was standing with his hands behind his back.*

This is truly one maneaba in our village, which is Buota, in the Catholic faith, and we have named this place, Ireland, [because of] one who is known in that place, whose name is St. Patrick. [...] we want to reveal to you all our friends [...] for this is the voice of our village which is Buota, and to be connected with our Catechist, who is Taumoan with his wife [...] and the child and her mother who adopted her. If we look around at all things, we think that there is the word of gratitude [feel grateful] because of our people.

[...] your things are health, peace and prosperity. How is it, we’ll stop there.

(Vt4/010700/Buota, TabNorth/M63)

Taukai turned sideways and leant on a post with one hand, and sat down, holding the hem of his lavalava together with the other to keep it from falling improperly, and turning further sideways. The Speaker said, “Oh he is thanked, he is thanked, we’ll clap. The applause of being happy”. People in the maneaba applauded.

Kiribati *maneaba* oratory is a well-known but little researched topic. Particular *unimwaane* may be noted for their oratorical skills; the translation of a fragment of a speech above does not do justice to this speaker. The speeches are formal, and there are certain recurring phrases, but an actual analysis of the structure and vocabulary of

maneaba speeches is beyond the scope of this study.¹¹⁹ Therefore the discursive constitution of community cannot be discussed in any detail; here I merely want to raise a few salient issues.

One thing to emerge from the few sentences of this particular speech is the emphasis on community, ‘we the Catholics of Buota’. Since fewer than ten of all inhabited households were not Catholic, the Catholic community was easily equated with ‘people of our village which is Buota’.

On a more general level, the metadiscursive properties of the customary expressions are noteworthy. Some speeches are quite general, usually concentrating on thanking people (either the hosts, or probably more frequently, the guests); others relate to the occasion at hand (expressing hopes that the baby will grow up healthy and obedient; wishing good luck for a journey; celebrating the Easter message). The recurrent phrases, particularly at the beginning and the end of a speech, make the speech and the event in which it takes place recognisable (as well as making all speeches appear to some extent alike) as ‘a *bootaki* speech’ and ‘*bootaki*’. In this way, I suggest, the speakers’ phrases as well as those of the audience are part of the metacommunicative framing of the event.¹²⁰

The important issue common to all *bootaki* speeches is the bodily and spatial dimension, as well as its relation to the discursive dimension. Firstly, people stand up while speaking, and resume the sitting position once they have finished. ‘Standing’ (*tei*), like ‘sitting’, has many abstract and metaphorical referents in addition to the concrete meaning.¹²¹ In interpersonal relations, the meaning of standing both as an act and an idea is formed in a dynamic relation with that of sitting; sitting and standing are context-dependent indicators of relative status and power. In the *maneaba*, several issues come into play: firstly, as a rule one should not be (vertically) above people who are sitting –

¹¹⁹ With the exception of Martin Silverman’s (1977) study of a Banaban meeting in Rabi Island – which discusses a quite specific kind of meeting dealing with the situation of the Banabans as a dispossessed and relocated community – to my knowledge not much linguistic or other formal analysis on *maneaba* speeches has been conducted. Such an analysis would enable, for example, the consideration of the extent of formalisation and its relationship to authority (cf. Bloch 1974). As data the analysis would require good quality audio- or preferably video recordings.

¹²⁰ In a couple of *bootakis* I attended the discussion seemed to slip outside the *bootaki* frame, for example when announcing the results of fundraising – as such a common *bootaki* item – led to a discussion about money. While I could not follow the discussion, one party was clearly annoyed and the other tried to calm him, and the tone seemed to diverge from the other speeches. This observation however is mainly based on feeling and cannot be substantiated.

¹²¹ ‘The way a person stands’ (*tein te aomata*) is her/his complete physical, mental and moral posture. ‘To stand well’ is also to know and observe the custom, since custom ‘makes one stand’ (*katei*; *tei* with the causative). In some contexts ‘standing’ connotes group membership and representation; an MP is one who stands (*tia tei*, pl. *taan tei*). One important shade of meaning is activeness. For example, institutions ‘stand’ when they function, and when the school term starts, the school ‘stands up’. See also the discussion of girls’ puberty rite (*teiao*) in Chapter 2; the meaning of ‘standing’ as dancing will be discussed in later chapters.

hence the crouching walk. Secondly, the passive sitting in the middle indicates on the one hand high status in relation to those who are in the back and have to move to cater for those sitting; on the other, submission and obedience to the rules of the *bootaki*. Standing in the middle, then, is a highly marked position in relation to sitting, and in standing, the speaker assumes a position higher than those who are sitting there.

This is a very ambiguous act, both considering the *maneaba* context, and the inappropriateness of setting oneself above others or to drawing attention to oneself which applies in most everyday circumstances and generally gives rise to reproach (*e kantiroaki*; 'he/she wants to be looked at'). Standing and speaking in the *maneaba* obviously captures general attention, and furthermore, as indicated above, standing is a position of authority/power. The ambiguity is reflected in the apologetic and/or self-deprecating tone at the beginning and the end of the speeches. The speaker must indicate that he recognises he is taking a liberty, so to speak, when standing up.

Here then the different modes – bodily, spatial and discursive – send out partly contradictory messages. Standing both as a body position and a spatial location on the vertical up-down axis indicates high status. Using discursive means, however, the speaker seeks to signify low status. Although just an isolated example, the content of Taukai's speech also fit this model in its strong foregrounding of the community as a whole, while detracting from the individual.

Giving and acknowledging gifts

In addition to the speeches by guests and elders, during the *marooroo* guests give gifts to the host(s); in some contexts the word *marooroo* may primarily refer to the gift giving. At the end of a speech, a guest might state that he or she wants to "shake hands with" the Speaker. Apart from describing the gesture he or she is about make, the phrase is a kind of euphemism for giving a gift (of money), implying that during the handshake, the guest will thrust a banknote or more commonly an envelope (*te tinaniku*) containing money into the Speaker's hand. The guest generally walks over to the Speaker and either encloses the gift in the Speaker's hands while shaking it, or first shakes the hand and then hands over the gift. The gift is often immediately announced: "And this one, an envelope as well ... fifty dollars [...] from the teachers of the Taunibong Primary School," or something to that effect, praising the giver.

The gift can also be stick tobacco,¹²² or if the guest comes from South Tarawa, cigarettes or chewing gum; on one occasion at least I saw a bale of cloth given.¹²³ An

¹²² In some contexts not discussed here (even though to insist on an absolute separation between different kinds

invited guest is usually expected to give a gift to the hosts, and depending on the event, he or she may receive a basket of food (*bwabwa*) at the end of the *bootaki*. These, however, are only parts of a whole set of exchange transactions that take place during a *bootaki*, involving giving and receiving money or tobacco, food in different forms, words and time. A thorough analysis from a social exchange theoretical point of view would require all these transactions to be examined together, which would go beyond the purpose of this chapter. Here I will only describe some aspects that I find relevant in terms of the bodily and spatial construction of social relations and values; the act of giving and the public ceremonial acknowledgement of the gift (*[ka]tekerai*).

Buota village was hosting a bootaki in Atanikarawa maneaba marking the return of Tabiteuea Meang's men's and women's football teams from the annual inter-island football tournament in South Tarawa. Both teams were the iruwa of this bootaki, and they had been served trays of food. In the marooroo the players had been commended for their effort and for wanting to represent Tabiteuea. As one of the speakers said, the players had set aside their own desires and put Tabiteuea first; even now, back home, the players, who would surely rather have been with their parents, had nevertheless stayed in the maneaba in Buota.

One of the island's MPs happened to be on the island and had been invited to the bootaki. A little after the women's team had performed three songs, he stood up and apologised for being so busy and having arrived in the middle the meal. At the end of his speech, he gave a gift on behalf of the players to Buota village. One of the young men from Tanimeang came forward to receive the AU\$100, and then spoke to the maneaba: "Buota! Here is the thing from the Minister. Let's clap." "One after the maua; maua nako ti a nako e!" and the audience clapped once. "Two after the maua" – the audience clapped twice – and "Three after the maua," and the audience clapped three times. In step with each clap, the young man made some movements, which set the people laughing. When the gift had thus been greeted, one of the elders replied to the Minister that there was nothing to apologise for; instead, he thanked the Minister very much for coming despite his various obligations.

The series of claps led by the young man from Tanimeang is called *tekerai* (lit. 'struck well'; 'success'; 'congratulation') or *katekerai* (causative form of the same). The

of *maneaba* events would be foolish), stick tobacco is the most appropriate gift and has a particular signification. I refer to cases where the tobacco is presented as a gift when visiting or arriving as a newcomer and/or making a request. To take a similar example, when I arrived to the Buota village to do fieldwork, I presented the Village Council with stick tobacco, asking permission to conduct research in their village.

¹²³ Kazuhiro Kazama (2006, 97) reports that since *kava* (*nangona*) was introduced to Tabiteuea South some time around 2003, and rapidly appropriated, it could also be given as a gift. Before this, cash and tobacco were the only gifts to be reckoned with.

(*ka*)*tekeraoi* is a ceremonial acknowledgement of the gift. Basically, either the Speaker, who has received the gift, or someone appointed by him, asks the people in the *maneaba* to clap in a certain way (there is plenty of variation with the number, style, rhythm and pattern of claps; even accompanying chants are possible); three claps is the basic formula (“three claps after the *maua*”). While not mandatory, the part that the audience appreciates the most is when the conductor of the (*ka*)*tekeraoi* then makes small, dance-like, funny or suggestive movements in step with the claps.

In fact, the (*ka*)*tekeraoi*s tend to be small performances; a potential form of art and entertainment particularly at feasts where plenty of gifts are given, and accordingly plenty of (*ka*)*tekeraoi*s are called for. At such events, the Speaker may delegate the task of conducting the (*ka*)*tekeraoi* to a different person every time, and the conductors seem implicitly to compete for the approval of the audience – seeing who is able to entice the greatest howl of laughter. The (*ka*)*tekeraoi* is performed in the middle part of the *maneaba* and has similarities with dancing and other performance genres on the one hand, and clowning on the other.

As in dancing, in the (*ka*)*tekeraoi* the movements are, on the conceptual level, accompanied by the community: the people of the *maneaba*. Inasmuch as the claps structure and control the movements, as I have elsewhere (Autio 2008, 190) argued they do in Kiribati dancing¹²⁴, it is the community which steers the activity at hand; it is the community which acknowledges the gift. Besides being a public announcement and thanks, which give prestige to givers, thus momentarily differentiating them, the (*ka*)*tekeraoi* reasserts the status of the *iruwa* and the relationship between *iruwa* and the community.

There is a clowning aspect in the performance: the solemn, monotonous claps prescribed by strict etiquette are turned into delightful tomfoolery with gestures, which may, for example, resemble or parody dance movements or be sexually suggestive. Furthermore, these movements are performed in the *tabu* middle section of the *maneaba*. Nonetheless, even if viewed as clowning, the (*ka*)*tekeraoi* takes place within the structure, in a tightly prescribed position allocated to it. It could be described as ‘conservative clowning’, which affirms the values of the society rather than trying to subvert them (Mitchell 1992, 24).¹²⁵ Even if the conductor is moving in the centre of the

¹²⁴ Kiribati traditional dancing can be described as movement from one position to another, so that there is a pause at the ‘extreme’ of the movement, that is, at the moment when an arm or head is in the precisely correct position (see also Lawson 1989, 37). As the tempo increases, as it does as the performance goes on, the pause becomes highly transitory but nevertheless is there. “This pause and body position usually coincides with, and is timed by, a clap. In this way claps mark the limits of movements and thus control the dancer/the dance” (Autio 2008, 190). See Chapter 6 for a description of Kiribati dance style.

¹²⁵ I want to stress that here I only refer to the (*ka*)*tekeraoi*s; I do not mean that all Kiribati clowning could be

maneaba, (s)he is not doing so freely, as the movements are delimited by the clapping; that is, (s)he is restrained by the community. By voluntarily submitting itself to the community, clowning here valorises it.

Entertaining guests

In a *bootaki* it is also desirable to provide the guests with some entertainment (*kamataku*), most frequently singing or dancing. Songs can simply be performed by a group of some of the hosts, but for major *bootakis* a choir (*kuaea*) or several could be hired; a choir performed, for example, at the first-birthday party in Buota. In 2000, there were three popular choirs in Tabiteuea North, and at the biggest festivities one could see all of them performing. The choirs were all all-male, and typically sang locally composed songs accompanied by guitars and ukeleles. Some of the *kuaeas'* numbers also included dancing.

Uouo is a form of entertainment where a group from the hosts' side sings while the *iruwa* eat. Its purpose is to soothe, make eating a pleasant experience (the root of the word *uouo* is in 'carrying' and 'rocking', and apparently it can also be a lullaby [Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *uo*, *uouo*]).

Traditional Kiribati dance (*mwaie*) requires a lot of rehearsing and is an intensive performance. Unless just a solitary dance, if *mwaie* is performed it tends to give the *bootaki* an atmosphere of its own, and have a particular social configuration; *mwaie bootakis* will be dealt with extensively in the following chapters. Less emotionally charged, more common forms of entertainment are other kinds of dances, like the Polynesian *tamure*, Samoan *taubati* or dance to Western pop-music. The music for these comes from a CD or a tape. The performers are usually young adults or children from the hosting community.

Twist on the other hand, like that part of the programme at Bauro's first birthday, is not really a performance; *iruwa* are invited to take part. At Bauro's *bootaki*, the *twist* music was by the popular Kiribati pop-singer Bata Teinamati, and as it started sounding from the speakers, one of the hosts, a man, invited one of the female *iruwa* to dance, and a woman invited her spouse, and the pairs began a relaxed disco-type of dancing in the centre of the *maneaba*. I stood up and went to powder the dancers, as is customary, sprinkling talcum powder on their necks, and then an acquaintance from the neighbouring village asked me to dance too. This time the dancing only lasted for one song. More often perhaps, *twist* belongs to the more informal part of a gathering, when

explained in this functional way. There are other types of clowning, the meaning of which may be quite different.

Kiribati and Western pop, rock, disco or other light music is played and people dance for hours (see Brewis 1996, 10).

Resting

Sometimes there is a small structured break in the *bootaki* programme during the afternoon, after the meal or in the course of the *marooroo*. The Speaker explicitly announces that a ‘rest’ (*motirawa*) will take place. He might say, as the Speaker in Bauro’s birthday *bootaki* did: “You are independent [*inaomata*]. You can lie down, go outside...” The participants can retreat from the front row, lie down for a while or stretch their legs outside; it is now permissible. The rest might last, for example, fifteen minutes, but it varies; at one farewell party the rest lasted an hour or so, during which time some people were playing cards and the principal guests of honour were taking a nap. At this point, however, the *bootaki* is not over yet, so when the Speaker states that “the *bootaki* stands up” (*e teirake te bootaki*), the participants have to obey. They take their seats by the posts and sit alert again, as the programme is resumed, until the end of the *bootaki*.

Someone sitting by the sacred posts cannot leave the *bootaki* early without publicly asking for permission from the Speaker. Though extreme, and referring to a particular *iruwa* institution, there is still a grain of truth in Alaima Talu’s (1985, 4) description of an old custom whereby travellers from Tarawa to Butaritari had to stop in Abaiang where they were received by each village in turn for weeks or months.

The visitors, whether they liked it or not, had to stay and could leave only after repeated, carefully worded and well-timed requests to do so, and when the people of Abaiang then allowed them to leave. (Talu 1985, 4)

In a similar vein, if one wants to leave a *bootaki* before it has ended, one should ‘ask for her/his space’ (*mawa*). Generally I would not have dared, but there was one *bootaki* at which the afternoon programme somehow came to an impasse: the speeches were over and perhaps a rest had been announced unnoticed by me, since some people had started playing cards. I together with an elderly lady were the only *iruwa*, and we sat there bored, nobody paying us any attention. Finally the lady, sitting next to me, patted my leg and said, “It is evening, let’s go. We will excuse us (*karautaeka*; lit. ‘soothing word’)”. She then stood up and asked the Speaker for permission to leave, explaining that “It is evening, and I and this lady here [referring to me] ask you, we ask for our space (*mawara*)”.

The Speaker replied graciously, but asked that we drink before we leave, and indeed, just as he was talking, a teenage girl entered the *maneaba* carrying a tea pot full of freshly brewed hot tea. In addition, some home-made doughnuts were served. After this afternoon snack (*kabuki*) we took our leave.

Ending the feast and restoring independence

As the *bootaki* is getting closer to the end, thanks are in order. If they have not already done so in earlier speeches, now at the latest *iruwa* thank their hosts for the hospitality they have enjoyed, the food and the entertainment. Perhaps more importantly, the hosts will once again thank their guests at this stage. Then, as explicitly as it began, the *bootaki* ends.

The church fund-raising event was drawing to a close. The result of the fund-raising competition had been announced and a raffle had been conducted (money had been raised by selling raffle tickets); food had been served, songs performed, fine words spoken. Video equipment stood nearby, ready to serve as late-night entertainment, and it seemed as if the Speaker hastened to end the bootaki so that the relaxed part of the programme could begin. He spoke, taking some steps forward,

"[...] this evening for us, how is it? They are truly independent, how is it, how is it now; the bootaki has ended. The independent [person] is independent. [The person] sleeps, [the person] lies down... Thanks for this evening." (Vt3/300600/Buota, TabNorth/M39)

There is a clear ending to the *bootaki*, in which the speaker gives the people back their independence, *inaomata* (the act is called *kainaomata*, 'to make independent'). In this context, the speaker may variably use one or more of a few phrases, which illuminate the nature of *bootakis*. He may announce "the independent [person] is independent" (*e inaomata te inaomata*). This seemingly redundant proposition restores independence, gives people back their right to do what they want, or perhaps more accurately, to no longer have to submit to someone else's orders.

The re-establishment of independence at the end of the *bootaki* can also be interpreted as lifting the *tabu* which has bound people during the *bootaki*. In addition to asserting that the independent are again independent, a common announcement is "*e a bara te bootaki*". It means "the feast has ended," but also more literally, "the gathering of people is untied."

If on the other hand, if people are going to stay in the *maneaba* after the formal programme, and spend some time there instead of going home, it is declared: "the middle is open" (*e a uki te nuuka*), that is, no longer *tabu*. People can choose a place in the middle for a game of *kanetita*, VCR equipment might be carried into the centre and the children can rush close to it. They no longer need to observe the *tabu* which defined their relationship to the *maneaba* during the *bootaki*.

At the end of some *bootakis*, before the *iruwa* leave, they are given baskets of food (*bwabwa*). The *bwabwas* can also be delivered (*nikiraki*) afterwards to the guests' homes. All the *bwabwa* baskets given at Bauro's first birthday *bootaki* contained two loaves of bread, two *buatoros*, grilled fish as well as fresh red snapper (*Lutianus gibbus*),

locally called night fish (*te ikanibong*). The *bwabwas* for the *iruwa* in the Kabuna-*bootaki* discussed in the previous chapter were similar: they likewise contained two loaves of bread, two *buatoros* and five kilos of fish, and in addition, two dishes of dried sheets of pandanus fruit with coconut cream (*te roro*). As always, all the *iruwa* received the same kind of *bwabwa*, with the same contents.

CONSTITUTING AND REAFFIRMING THE COMMUNITY

The preceding descriptions of *bootaki* events have hopefully relayed a sense of ‘the *maneaba* custom’ (*katein te maneaba*), of formality and etiquette, which was to my mind remarkably similar across different *maneabas* in Tabiteuea North and different kind of events. The *maneaba* custom consists of a range of discursive, bodily, spatial and material practices, and in these, I suggest, the community is constituted. What I mean by ‘community’ here is not only a particular local community but community as a social whole in the ideology of southern Kiribati society. Different *maneabas* and communities may each have the own specific organisation (*iinaki* systems), customs and fashions, but here I have concentrated on features that were widely shared in Tabiteuea North, regardless of place or type of community (local, Catholic, Protestant).

The different practices comprise various sign systems which convey information about the community through hearing, sight, smell and touch/feel. The messages interrelate; they may confirm and strengthen or contradict each other. From the practices one may, on the one hand, discern an ideal model of community, on the other, the subtleties and negotiations of real life social relations. From the spatial arrangements, body positions, decorations, talk, food sharing and performance described above, I want to make out the basic layout as well as sum up the ways in which the different sign systems produce sameness and difference on the level of the ideal as well as of practice. Then I will draw attention to the notion of ‘independence’ and its surrender during the *bootaki*, and how these are related to the *tabu* and significance of the centre of the *maneaba*. This brings the discussion back to the notion of community as the social whole.

Hierarchical organisation of space

Expressed verbally in idioms, by the locations and positions of bodies in space as well as visually by decorations, the *maneaba* space is hierarchically constructed both vertically and horizontally. The vocabulary of *maneaba* behaviour charts horizontal up-down dimensions: people move ‘up’ to the sacred posts towards the middle, and food dishes ‘fall’ down from the row of posts. The vertical up-down dimension is expressed in body positions: sitting, standing, walking stooped.

ORGANISATION OF MEETINGHOUSE SPACE IN TERMS OF 'UP' AND 'DOWN'

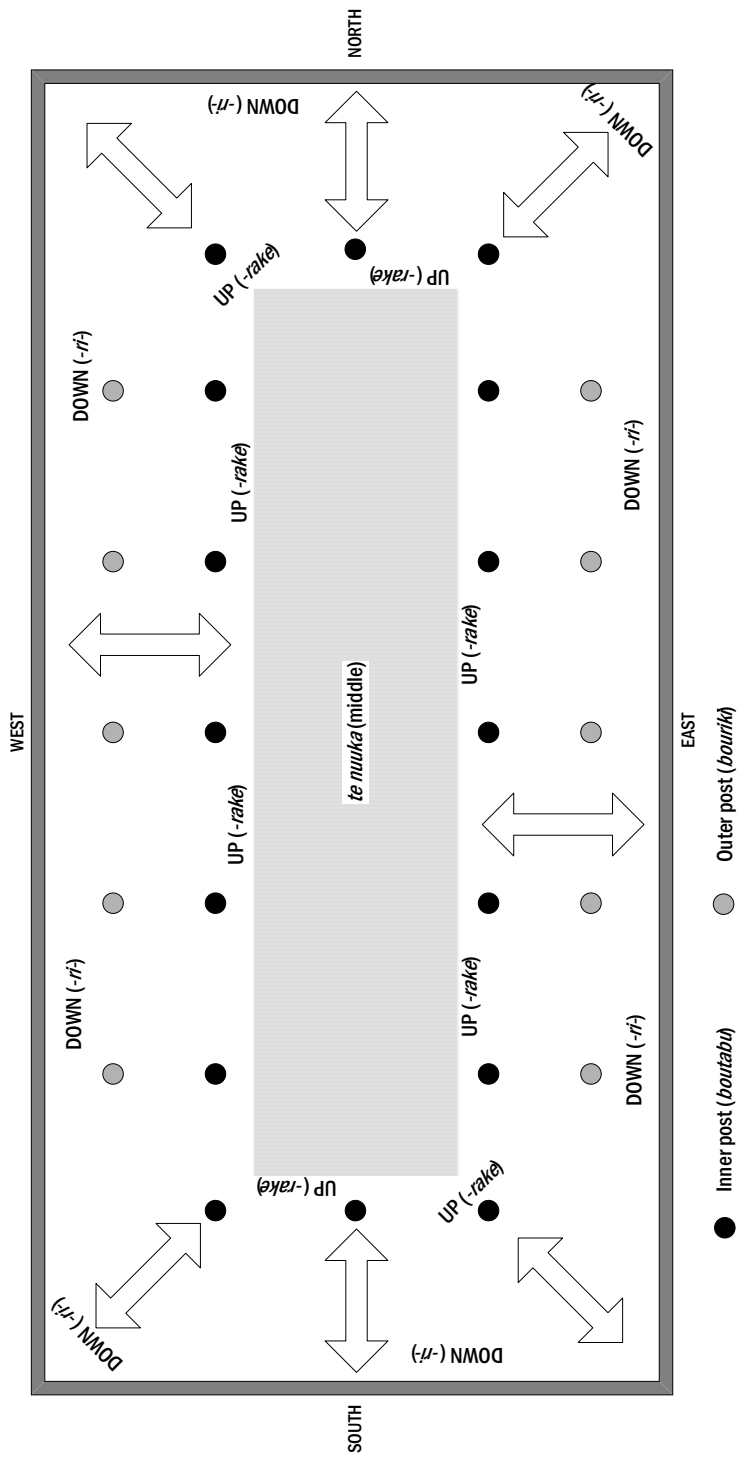


Figure 6. The organisation of meetinghouse (*maneaba*) space in terms of 'up' and 'down'.

The crucial and typically Kiribati feature of the organisation of meetinghouse space is that the middle (*nuuka*) is set apart and above – made *tabu*. The middle is encircled with the coconut frond ribbon, and left empty, restrictions applying to entering the area. The whole middle area is the ‘apex’ of the hierarchical space, though one cannot really speak of a high *point*, since there is no differentiation within the *nuuka*. This is logical in view of the lack of chiefs; the spatial organisation of meetings in chiefly societies tends to be more differentiated, with the ‘highest’ places reserved for chiefs (see Keating 2000, 307–308 for Pohnpei; Shore 1982, 80 for Samoa), or indeed also defined by them, as in Fiji (Toren 1990, 110).

Producing sameness and difference ideally and in practice

In a Kiribati *maneaba*, guests and elders occupy the highest place, the line encircling the middle. Behind the people in the middle, the locations of people (ideally) signify their lower status in a graded way, according to age and gender. Thus the space is differentiated, but at the ‘top’, the organisation is extremely decentralised. One of the most important features of a Kiribati *bootaki* is that the treatment of *iruwa* (or everyone in the middle; the elders sitting there could be conceptualised as temporary *iruwa*) is so emphatically even. In principle, *all iruwa* are seated in the highest place, by the posts. *All iruwa* are powdered during the welcoming, and possibly decorated with flowers. *All iruwa* are served food at the *same* time, and in the end, if the occasion warrants it, *all iruwa* are given a food basket with the *same* contents. While sitting location, powdering and garlands, as well as speeches praising the *iruwa*, differentiate them from other people, at the same time such practices effectively undifferentiate among the *iruwa*, giving them all the same status.

This contrasts with, for example, Samoan practices, despite the historical links between the two countries and their institutions. The serving of ‘*ava*, which is a key element in a Samoan welcoming ceremony (Grattan 1985 [1948], 40), is highly conscious of rank, even if it is not aimed at setting everyone present in a precise order of precedence; the drink is served in turns in such an order as to show respect alternately to the guests and the hosts. Untitled visitors, however, are not served ‘*ava* at all, and a party without titled people would not have a ceremonial welcome in the first place.¹²⁶

Yet obviously, the contrast is not that simple. The I-Kiribati have no titles, but as described above, *iruwa* tend to be a select group. In principle, however, there are no

¹²⁶ An early Samoan dictionary gives such group the name *fa’aosofatai* and defines it as “a travelling party without a fine chief or lady, who thus provoke the people to sit quietly, and not receive the visitors hospitably” (Pratt 1984 [1893], 112).

limitations on who might be invited as an *iruwa*, and an incomer does not have to be a professional or a dignitary for a welcoming *bootaki* to be arranged.

It should also be borne in mind that the undifferentiated order, indicated by the seating arrangements and the identical treatment where all the *iruwa* or the people in the middle are placed in the same status, the highest possible, is the *ideal* social configuration. In practice not all 'people in the middle' equally assume the highest position. By subtle means, adjusting location in the graded space (sitting behind others) or body orientation (sitting sideways, not facing the middle) some *iruwa*, women or young men, may choose to communicate their recognition of their lower status, negotiating their places between the middle and the edge, or their modern and traditional positions. On the other hand, serving food from a buffet sometimes leads to differentiating treatment of some *iruwa*, either by extending them an invitation to begin or by serving them individually, which places them above others.

Speech-giving is an ambiguous activity and may entail opposing signs. In general, standing while others sit differentiates a person. It also means rising above others on the vertical axis, and assuming a position of authority. In their speeches however, younger people in particular seek to lower themselves with verbal acts that are in contradiction with their body position.¹²⁷ Belittling themselves and apologising, they put themselves down by means of language, thereby trying to undifferentiate themselves.

There are also, however, practices capable of differentiating. During the exchanges the status of the participants is communicated in several ways. When a guest gives a gift of money, and his (or her) name is announced along with the sum, he (or she) is elevated momentarily above other guests. Gift-giving in the 'discussion' (*marooroo*) phase of a *bootaki* is one context in which competition is acceptable, and people who give money can even ultimately be arranged in a ranked order according to the sum they have given. At the end of the *bootaki* all the *iruwa* are nonetheless replaced in their shared status as equals. The identical contents of the *bwabwas* are a tangible, material sign of the same status of all *iruwa*. In other words, the gifts of money by the guests potentially differentiate them, but the (counter-) gifts of food by the community undifferentiate them. Thus differentiation by means of money is possible and even encouraged but only because (i) it takes place in the limited time-frame of the 'discussion' (*marooroo*), as opposed to the *bootaki* as a whole (ii) probably also because it can be construed as a selfless act of honouring the notion of community. Ultimately, however, these practices are subservient to the undifferentiation of the guests (by means of food).

¹²⁷ My general impression is that experienced and recognised orators might do this less.

The *(ka)tekerai* performed to thank the donor contains partly contradictory signs; the clowning aspect creates ambiguity. The auditory signs (claps) are contradicted by the bodily movements. While aimed at the gift and by extension the giver, in the end the *(ka)tekerai* performance appears rather to highlight the community, the receiver rather than the giver of the gift.

All in all the various sign systems of body, space and language have the potential to express and produce both sameness and difference. Albeit – or because of – trying to communicate an ideal, the *bootaki* customs strongly emphasise sameness. This undifferentiated order cross-cuts the *iinaki* organisation; on the semiotic level, the sign systems of the *maneaba* customs interact, co-operate with and oppose those contained in *iinaki* work. Differentiated though they are in a restricted way, *iinakis* are further actively undifferentiated by most of the *maneaba* customs. Nevertheless, when an *iinaki* (i.e., a representative thereof) is doing its ‘work’, it constitutes a “moment of hierarchy”, to use Keating’s (2000) phrase.

“The independent man is independent”: Autonomy and its surrender

The restrictions implicitly placed on *iruwa*, and the phrases explicitly used to close a *bootaki*, or when people have to move, refer to a key notion in southern Kiribati ideology: independence (*inaomata*); the honorary participants of a *bootaki* are perceived to temporarily lose or give up their independence.

To describe the concept of *inaomata* very simply: it contains the idea that each adult man who owns land and is the head of his household (or *iinaki*) is ‘independent’ or ‘free’, as *inaomata* (*ina-aomata*) is usually glossed in English, and does not have to take orders – or help – from anyone else. The notion of independence is particularly strong in Tabiteuea, where in traditional *maneaba* governance the senior male leaders of kin groups (*iinaki*) had the right to participate equally in decision-making.¹²⁸ William Geddes (1977, 1983), on the other hand, while not mentioning the concept of *inaomata*, has argued that in Tabiteuea the more ‘individualist’ tendencies in traditional social organisation were strengthened in the twentieth century because of historical changes leading to the central role played by households as units of governance. Importantly, not everyone is independent even in Tabiteuea: women, children, and young people (and

¹²⁸ There also exists a stereotype of the “individualistic and quarrelsome Tabiteueans” (Lundsgaarde 1966, 52), though Lundsgaarde (1966, 52–53) regards this as an indication of ecological (as opposed to psychological) differences.

formerly, the occasional landless slave; see Uriam 1995, 7) are expected to comply with the rulings of mature men.

Being *inaomata* has both an individualistic and a social side. On the one hand, *inaomata* signifies something fundamental about a person, building on the idea of a “real or true human being”, *aomata* (Uriam 1995, xi; see also Itaia 1979, 122; Tabokai 1985, 183). Sometimes *aomata* is specifically a *Kiribati* person, as opposed to other, non-Kiribati people (see also Lundsgaarde 1966, 14). In the expression *e aomata te bun ni moa* – ‘egg is hatched’ as opposed to an unhatched egg – *aomata* seems to mean something alive, an existing being.

According to Father Sabatier (Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *ina*, *inaaomata*, *inaomata*) the prefix in the word *inaomata* is *ina*. He translates *ina* as “physical appearance, distinctive feature, deportment, particularities”. Seen this way, *ina-aomata* is a person bearing the distinct mark of a human being, comporting himself in the manner of a true human. *Inaomata* is an essential(ly) human being, has the defining features of a living human being. He has everything that a man needs, he is not dependent on anyone, and therefore need not (cannot) take orders from anybody. By the same token he is not to offend others’ independence. An attempt to force a decision on an *inaomata* is to infringe on his essential humanity.

However, part of this humanity is its social nature. The orientation to, and importance of, self-sufficiency is only possible in kinship relations, as ‘selves-sufficiency’. The link between independence and kinship is illustrated in customs concerning food, in particular that one should not indifferently accept food from a non-relative lest it be thought that one is unable to fend for oneself. When offered food, people will often thank the potential giver and say ‘I’ve just eaten’, ‘I’m really full’ or ‘it’s sufficient’ (*e a tau moa*), regardless of when they have last eaten. To be sure, people sometimes accept a drink or food, but make it clear that it is exceptional, that they are deliberately breaking a rule.¹²⁹ As surely as children are always fed when with kinfolk, they are taught not to eat at other people’s – non-kin – houses: “If they offer you food, you say this: ‘We have eaten’”, a mother instructed two three-year-olds who were going over to the neighbour’s to play. In this way, as part of the ‘non-unilinear unrestricted descent group’ women and children are also independent – independent of non-kin. All in all (*in*)*aomata* does not denote the individual in the common Western psychological sense but the individual as a

¹²⁹ Sometimes the distance needs to be deliberated; when is a relationship close enough? One time when I was going to another village to observe dancing, it turned out I would get a ride if I could leave right away. The problem was that I had not yet had lunch. It needed to be considered whether I should eat before going; some people I would be visiting were distant relatives of my host family. Eventually it was decided that if I got hungry, I could ask them for something to eat.

part of a kinship network. It implies a kind of corporative independence or 'group autonomy' (see Helliwell 1995, 360).¹³⁰ However, only the (male) household head can metonymically represent the independent group and be labelled *inaomata* by himself.

Returning to *bootakis* and *maneabas*, it is this independence that the people sitting in the middle – *iruwa* and *unimwaane* who, as heads of their households, are the most *inaomata* – surrender. They temporarily relinquish their right to do what they want; during the length of the *bootaki*, possible rests aside, they obey the rules and do not act without permission from the Speaker (who, it should be remembered, is literally just a speaker, representing the community). Because of this sacrifice, it is the guests who are thanked in *bootaki*, as they have given up something very valuable. Giving up independence has two important concomitants: firstly, the people become *tabu*, and secondly, they submit to a higher authority.

Tabu and the centre of the maneaba

Concomitant to the voluntary loss of independence is that the people are rendered *tabu*: they allow themselves to be bound by the rules and restrictions of the *bootaki*. Respectively, the act of 'making independent' at the end of the *bootaki* lifts the *tabu*, as some of the ending phrases imply. The *tabu* concerns both the centre part of the *maneaba* (*nuuka*) and the people who are in contact with the centre.

For the people, being in the middle and bound by its *tabu* means a loss of freedom but a gain in status. All the guests and elders have the same *tabu* relationship to the centre and, as discussed above, their status, ideally at least, is the same. The metaphorical and concrete immobility is the price that they pay for the highest position available, and also another shared sign of their high status. Other people in the *maneaba* are not bound by the *tabu* of the middle part and consequently have more freedom, even though they cannot enter the middle either unless performing a specific task.

In Kiribati the concept of *tabu* does not have a single paired opposite, such as *noa* is to *tapu* in many Polynesian societies. Instead, there are several ways of expressing the same idea ('open' – *uki*; 'loose', 'untied', 'free' – *bara*). As is well known, *noa* (like *tapu*) has a variety of meanings and connotations, but one generalisation is that it refers to an unmarked state as opposed to the marked state of *tapu*. In the context of *bootakis*, the regained freer state of a person is referred to as *inaomata*. *Inaomata*, however, only

¹³⁰ *Inaomata* seems to be an indigenous concept of the kind that has been called 'autonomy' in the literature, where one of the key concerns has been the relationship between autonomy and equality or egalitarianism (e.g. Gardner 1991; Helliwell 1995). Relevant to the discussion at hand, however, is the ultimately subordinate position of *inaomata* in the hierarchy of values.

refers to people (as individuals or a group), and being *inaomata* is unmarked strictly only in relation to the *bootaki*. In other contexts, *inaomata* is a marked state, in relation to women, young and subordinate people who are not *inaomata*.

The idea of the middle part being *tabu* during a *bootaki* is particularly implied in one of the phrases used to close a *bootaki*; declaring the middle part of the *maneaba* 'open' (*e a uki te nuuka*) echoes the widely shared notions about lifting a *tabu/tapu* as 'unbinding' (see Ch. 2; Shore 1989). Given that *tabu* indexes power, the middle part of the *maneaba* (*nuukan te maneaba*) is a location of power of ultimately divine origin. It appears that the conception of the sacred centre of the *maneaba* has endured despite all the other changes that have taken place in the *maneaba* institution (cf. Kazama 2001). John Hockings (1989, 235), an architect studying traditional, pre-European architecture in the Gilbert Islands, describes the centre of the *maneaba* in the following way:

The remaining¹³¹ central space was known as nanon-te-maneaba (inner-maneaba). An alternative term was nuka-n-te-maneaba (centre-maneaba). The split between the central maneaba space and the perimeter space, marked by another low stone border, was definite and formal. No seating was ever permitted within the central area and it was used exclusively for ritual performance.

The *bootaki* practices described in this chapter, indicating the continuing significance of the *maneaba* centre, were alike whether the *maneaba* was of the more traditional village type (where, too, historical changes have occurred) or a church *maneaba* (by definition a relatively new type of meetinghouse); one constructed entirely of wood, stone and leaf, or one constructed with cement and corrugated iron. It appears that these kinds of practices, learned as much in the body as in the mind, have been slower to change than for example the *iinaki* organisation and customs, which were greatly affected by colonialism and which, according to Kazama (2001), are all but forgotten in many places. It seems that by protecting the centre of the *maneaba*, people are protecting something which is of fundamental value to their society.

I am arguing that the protection is discernible in practices across the island but, coming as no surprise, it was in Buota where I heard it put most explicitly into words. On one occasion during the many days that the football players spent in Buota's Atanikarawa *maneaba* before the main *bootaki* described above, some playing children strayed into the middle part while a meal was being served to the visitors. The two three-year-olds were running and playing with a ball, oblivious to adults' orders and disapproving looks. "Whose children are running in the centre of the *maneaba*?"

¹³¹ Hockings (1989, 235) describes the *maneaba* space with a tripartite division: the ground the *maneaba* stood on (*te marae*), extending to the fence surrounding the building and covered with coral gravel (*atama*); the area between the eaves and the bouriki posts (*aan-te-boti*, 'under the *boti*'), and the centre.

someone demanded. Finally the mother of one of the little girls went to fetch them both, giving each a light smack on the way. After the meal one of the elders, Taukai*, stood up to speak out about what had happened, to say a few “words about Atanikarawa”:

Guests are eating [...] and there are children who think they are independent [*inaomata*], playing in the middle [...] running [...] they do not know the custom [*katei*] of the *maneaba*. [...] The *maneaba* should be taken care of [...because it is] the head of the village.

At the end he made a request (*bubuti*) to the village Chairman, asking him to see to it that during the next meal customs were more faithfully followed.

Taukai's speech makes reference to the status of the *maneaba* as the self-evident and self-conscious symbol and embodiment of the community. While it is all but redundant to name the centre of the *maneaba* a representation of community, I suggest nonetheless that when the *tabu* of the middle is violated, what is at stake is the *maneaba*, and thereby community itself. In this light the multitude of spatial, linguistic and bodily practices related to the centre (*nuuka*) in *bootakis* can be read as time and again valorising community, the social whole.

Community

This social whole is, I suggest, also the higher authority to which the *iruwa* and elders submit themselves during the *bootaki*, relinquishing their independence and self-determination. In *bootakis*, community constitutes and reaffirms itself both against the Other and by encompassing the Other. Community is, on the one hand, built in relation to specific outsiders, the *iruwa*, who are not of the land. In a *bootaki* the strangers are set apart, but on the other hand, they are brought under the same authority, and thus made a part of the community. In this way the strangers are tamed and their power appropriated. Community needs its Other, so if no ‘real’ strangers are available, *iruwa* will be invited from amongst members of the community. The elders likewise are both a part – indeed the core part – of the community, but simultaneously set apart from the rest of the community.

In a *bootaki*, community is constituted as differentiated, but only to an extent. Gender and age hierarchy combined with newer differentiating properties, such as profession, are reflected in and reproduced by the spatial organisation. While the status of the people highest in this differentiated order, the male elders, is made apparent, they are equally strongly undifferentiated amongst themselves. Moreover, analogously to the Melanesian Kalauna case (see Robbins 1994, 48–49), the community tolerates the high status of the elders only because they are made immobile, restrained from exercising

their power; because they are – like Kourabi – *tabu*, and – like Kourabi – partly set outside the community.

Sitting is one way in which the elders and guests, and for that matter, everyone in the *maneaba*, express their submission to community; sitting as a body position, an idiom and as a way of being, a modality, which becomes meaningful in relation to its opposite, standing. Standing in a *bootaki* is narrowly prescribed, restricted to giving speeches and performing (e.g. singing, dancing). (People carrying out duties like serving food, where they might have to walk, are not ‘standing’ in this sense.). In a *bootaki*, sitting is a prime mode of undifferentiation. Therefore, in this context ‘standing’, as differentiation, is highly significant too, and not without ambiguity, as speech-giving showed.

Put in another way, standing implies authority, but the authority cannot be unequivocally assumed by everyone. Contact with power (being in the middle) again raises a person’s status in the traditional value system but does not automatically confer authority, particularly in the case of those for whom the elevation is temporary, in the context of the feast only (typically young people, women). Even those who in general do have authority – that is, the right to stand up and speak – (male elders) – tend to downplay it.

However, there is one particularly significant form of ‘standing’, which takes place in the *tabu* centre part of the *maneaba* without any hesitation, namely, dancing (*muwaie*). Dancing, as a domain where striving for differentiation is accepted, has the potential to challenge community ideals of undifferentiation, and definite limits on differentiation. A solitary dance in a *bootaki* may function at its face value, as entertainment, but once there are more dancers, and a greater part of the community is involved in the dance production, the social organisation of the *bootaki* becomes more complicated. The added element of dancing tends to gain a momentum of its own, with its own roots in and consequences for the community, to which I will now turn.

6. PEOPLE OF OUR DANCE: KNOWLEDGE, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND GENDER IN DANCE GROUPS

“Men oh, truly look / for the lightning and tremble of the lyrics of this song triumph!”

“Watch, our song cries out”

“Behold, behold, behold / for they swing playfully at the mention of his name”

These opening lines from three different dance songs say something essential about dancing. In each the protagonist of the song calls upon the world, his audience, to watch him: “men oh, truly look!” In a cultural environment where it is generally reproachable behaviour to ‘want to be looked at’ (*kantiroaki*), this clearly belongs to a specific frame of action. In Kiribati the frame of action for dancing (*mwaie*) and other performance is highly competitive. This is reflected in dance songs, which frequently refer to dancing on some level, praising one’s own performance and the knowledge it is based on and, conversely, mocking the opponent and his/her performance.

Wanting to be watched and praising oneself represent a will to differentiate oneself from others, in contrast with the curtailed differentiation and active undifferentiation of groups (*iinakis*, households, villages) and individuals described in the previous chapters. The existence of competitive domains of action in a society where competition is in many contexts ruled out is not surprising.¹³² Rather, what I am interested in is, firstly, who are the people in Buota who engage in these activities? Secondly, given that dancing appears not to be governed by the same principles of (un)differentiation as described earlier, what then are the forms of differentiation and undifferentiation in this particular domain? Thus, in this chapter, after a general introduction to Kiribati dancing (*mwaie*), I examine the social configurations in which dancing takes place.

STYLE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN KIRIBATI DANCING (*MWAIE*)

The type of dancing to be discussed here – usually called *mwaie*, though sometimes *bwatere* and occasionally *ruoia*¹³³ – is distinctly Kiribati, even though it has been

¹³² It even makes (Western) sense in accordance with so-called ‘safety-valve theories’. In addition to competitive dancing and singing, games and competition in sports are also very popular in Kiribati. I take the existence of competitive, ‘differentiation-oriented’ frames of action as given, without speculating on their *raison d’être*, assuming that in all societies there may be various domains governed by different, even contrasting principles.

¹³³ Depending on the context *mwaie* (alternative spellings *maie* and *m’aie*) can refer to any type of dancing, but the Kiribati type is the most common referent. *Bwatere*, from the Tuvaluan word *fatele*, is another generic word for dance/dancing. *Bwatere* is more often used by Protestants, in order to avoid connotations the word *mwaie* might have to aspects of pre-Christian dancing, like magic or what the missionaries saw as indecency. *Bwatere*

influenced by other musical and performance styles.¹³⁴ *Mwaie* is dance performed for an audience: one or more principal dancers are accompanied by a group which sings or chants, and claps. A dance choreography is always created for a particular song, so dancing is inseparable from poetry and music. The paramount importance of song texts is one of the features that Kiribati dancing shares with other Micronesian and Polynesian performance traditions (Kaepler 1976, 195, 199–200),¹³⁵ as is its rootedness in social organisation, competitiveness and the arduous training required. Yet despite (or because of) the commonalities, dancing and related genres (like so many other aspects of culture) in the Pacific offer a wealth of diversity, in which Kiribati dancing stands out with its own distinctive style.

The most striking visual characteristics of Kiribati traditional dance are the air of extreme restraint and the almost angular movements. Movements of the upper torso and the head are emphasized; some dances are performed in a sitting position. Rather than moving continuously, the dancer moves from one position to another (even if this takes place rapidly as the tempo accelerates). The transitory pauses are timed by the clapped rhythm. Mary Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 37) describes Kiribati dancing as consisting of “poses, slow movements between poses, and abrupt movements leading directly into them.” The correct execution of the choreography is paramount; the dancer never improvises. Ideal dance is ‘hard’ (*matoa*), which implies the positive attributes of strength, endurance and restraint (Autio 2003).

Kiribati dancing is remarkably unisex compared to much Polynesian dancing, for example. In certain dances women perform pelvic movements, which are gender-specific and something of an exception to the typical angular poses, though requiring the same exactitude and control. Yet the movements of the hips and the behind notwithstanding, men and women dance similarly and also dance the same dances (cf. Knudson 1964, 124; cf. Lawson 1989, 33, fn. 12). In all dances the precise execution of positions and motifs is paramount and the dancer is controlled by the choreography (*kai*) down to her/his expression, yet dancing must not appear jerky. Here some gender differences in style do

can also refer to the types of standing dance influenced by Tuvaluan *fatele*. *Ruoia* can be used as a generic term but more often it refers to a particular dance type (one of the forms exhibiting greatest continuity with pre-colonial types which is still practiced).

¹³⁴ Some of these changes are common throughout Oceania, due to similar (if far from identical) experiences of colonisation and missionisation. For example, as a result of Western musical influences there has been a general shift from chanting towards more melodic music, as Pacific music came to incorporate pitch intervals, diatonic scales, and Western harmonies (see Kaepler 1980, 134–135; Lawson Burke 2001; Szego 2001). On the other hand, features of dance and music also travel between islands. In Kiribati dancing the present widespread convention of repeating the song 2–4 times with the tempo increasing each time has been borrowed from Tuvalu.

¹³⁵ Adrienne Kaepler (1976, 199–200) characterises the dancer in Polynesia and Micronesia to be usually in the position of a story-teller, whereas a Melanesian dancer is often impersonating a spirit.

come into play: as the dancer balances between gracefulness and the demonstration of force, men clearly display more strength, even aggression.

The composition of songs and dance movements are skills practised by experts, as is the teaching of dance. Dancing is learned and practised in groups led by acknowledged dance and music experts, and always in implicit or explicit competition with one another. The groups in which dancing is practised, and the knowledge of their leader-experts, are two important and interrelated aspects of dancing (also noted in scholarly studies, e.g., Lawson 1989; Lawson Burke 2001; Whincup & Whincup 2001).

From a historical perspective, ‘dance groups’ as such are a relatively new phenomenon. Apparently in pre-colonial times dancing – like so many other activities – was practised primarily within a *kainga* or a larger descent group. While precise information is lacking, the ethnomusicologist Mary Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 101; Lawson Burke 2001, 6) deduces that a descent group had its own performance specialists: a ritual composer (*tia kainikamaen*, see below) and his assistants. The dancers were recruited from the composer’s *kainga* or related groups (Lawson 1989, 102).

The changes induced by the colonial rule and the Christian church, however, led to the severing of the connection between dance performance and descent groups (Lawson 1989, 139). Due to enforced administrative measures concerning the locations of dwellings, among other factors, *kaingas* eventually ceased to function as corporate kin groups in general, the organisation of dancing included. Furthermore, Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 138–139) points out that as some of the educational duties of kin groups or families were taken over by church and government schools, the latter also assumed responsibility with regards dance teaching. According to Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989;



Photograph 10. Kiribati dancing (*mwaie*); a dance type locally called *kateitei*.

Lawson Burke 2001), most contemporary dancing takes place in groups belonging to particular institutions, such as schools, church and civic organisations, or else in unaffiliated, even semi-professional performance groups, which are most common in South Tarawa (Lawson 1989, 162–164). A very popular event in South Tarawa, news of which is also awaited with excitement on outer islands,¹³⁶ is the *Reitaki*, an annual event where performance groups from different government ministries and other large workplaces such as the hospital and the telecommunications company, compete in dancing and singing.

The dance groups in Buota were not part of the descent groups, and not attached to any institution. Yet they appeared quite different from the South Tarawan performance groups Lawson discusses, and describing them as ‘unaffiliated’ would be somewhat misleading, given their intricate connections to kinship and locality. Thus one of the purposes of this chapter is to describe the dance groups in Buota: how were they created and who belonged to them? As elsewhere, forms of expert knowledge (*rabakau*) are integral to the creation and operation of the groups.

KNOWLEDGE(S) AS THE FOUNDATION OF A DANCE GROUP

Accounts of Kiribati dancing have emphasised the role of a body of inherited ritual knowledge concerning song composition and dance performance (*kainikamaen*), and the role of its practitioners (*taani kainikamaen*; sg. *tia kainikamaen*) – in many ways rightly so. My viewpoint differs from this for reasons to be explained, but in order to understand Kiribati dancing it is necessary to give an at least brief account of *kainikamaen*.

Kainikamaen primarily refers to the art of song composition with the help of spirits. In myth, the art originates with the spirits: in one variant the protagonist learns it in the land of Mone, the underworld, and brings it with him to the world above (Laxton & Kamouriki 1953, 69–70); in another it is lowered it down from the heavens in a basket (Hughes 1957). Apart from the ritual composition process, the *tia kainikamaen* also knows, for example, words and phrases which are intrinsically powerful in a song text, either capable of harming one’s rivals or protecting oneself from rivals’ magic. Specialised knowledge also includes rituals and magic formulae to strengthen the performance, enhance the beauty of the performers and so on. Rather more than a

¹³⁶ There is no television broadcasting in Kiribati, but the songs are played on the national radio, and, with any luck, someone may film the dances and later the videos will circulate. In the last couple of years, quite a few video clips have found their way onto Youtube on the Internet, where expatriate I-Kiribati may enjoy them.

collection of technical particulars, *kainikamaen* is “power-knowledge”, the apt phrase coined by Wolfgang Kempf (2003) in his discussion of song composition in the Banaban community in Rabi.

The traditional *tia kainikamaen*¹³⁷ did not work alone but had assistants (*rurubene*), who were hierarchically organised on different levels according to the extent of their knowledge (Lawson 1989, 200; Lawson Burke 2001, 6–7). Nowadays, for religious reasons, many holders of *kainikamaen* do not invoke spirits or use magic, or if they do, they might refrain from talking about it. Lawson Burke (2001, 11) has argued, however, that regardless of whether or not spiritual assistance or magic is used, people still consider certain words powerful in themselves, and in the dance songs the power of one’s dance/song/knowledge is frequently enhanced by references to magic.

Kainikamaen, however, is only one strand of knowledge applied in dancing, albeit traditionally or ritually the most significant. The skill of designing movements for a song-- choreographic skill - is known as ‘cutting *kai*’ (*koro-kai*). *Kai* is the same word that means, among various other things, a ‘tree’, first mentioned in connection with the ancestral tree in Samoa (*Kai-n-tiku-aba*) in Chapter 2, as bearing significant symbolic value. In the course of the present chapter the various meanings of *kai* and the connections between them will be further analysed; in connection with skill in dance design, *kai* refers to the dance as a series of movements, and could be glossed as ‘dance’ or ‘choreography’.

Dance instruction (*katei*, *taratara*) is recognised as a separate area of expertise; knowing how to dance is not the same as knowing how to teach it. This can be illustrated with an example from a school dance competition (discussed in Ch. 7). Planning their programme, one of the groups agreed on a dance that one of the class-room teachers had learned on another island. She, however, only ‘gave’ the dance to the students. In other words, she taught them the song (*kuna*) and the movements (*kai*) but once the group had learned them by heart, they were trained by their dance teacher (*tia katei*). “I just hold the *kai*, I don’t know how to watch (*taratara*)”, she explained, referring to the process of watching over the students to ensure they execute the movements correctly.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Alternative terms for a composer working with spirits are *tia kamaen*, *tia ototo*, and *tia kario* (Lawson 1989, 201). According to Lawson (1989, 201) very few would now identify themselves as *tia kainikamaen* but would call themselves *tia ototo*, which no longer bears connotations of pre-Christian religious practices. It also seems that the designation *tia kainikamaen* is sometimes used neutrally and has narrowed to mean only ‘composer’.

¹³⁸ These distinctions are analogical and partly correspond to the indigenous notions that Kiribati people use to take dance apart analytically, even if the elements are inseparable in an actual performance. In a dance performance there are a number of analytically separable strands:

- The song (*kuna*; includes the melody) and the song text or lyrics (*mwanewe*).
- The choreography or dance movements (*kai*) which are always specific to a song and follow the song’s reiteration pattern.

Song composition, movement design and teaching are all strands of expert knowledge (*rabakau*), valued property ‘held’ (*taua*) by individual people in accordance with the object-like quality of knowledge. One individual may hold one or several kinds of expertise. Some are specialists in a narrow field, such as teaching a particular type of dance. As with other expert subjects – such as fishing, *bwabwai*-cultivation, massage or bone-setting – knowledge about dance composition and performance often includes the appropriate magic and rituals (see Uriam 1995, Ch. 3), though for many their use nowadays is surrounded by similar ambiguity as *kainikamaen*.

Both the societal significance of expertise (of some individuals possessing “better-than-average knowledge and skill” [Oliver 1989, 1115] on a particular subject), as well as its traditional association with the spiritual realm, is common throughout Oceania, though both the importance of the supernatural element and the extent of institutionalisation has shown variation (e.g. Oliver 1989, 154, 1115–1116). In Polynesia, in particular, the connection between knowledge and supernatural power (*mana*) was (is) strong (Shore 1989, 149–150). In Kiribati too the origin of various strands of skills and knowledge is attributed to spirits (Uriam 1995, 32, 38) and the performing of the task was (is) accompanied by an attempt to summon the power of the spirits or ancestors known to have been skilful in that particular art by means of magic (Uriam 1995, 33). I would argue that while these ideas are still likely to be influential, their effect is quite difficult to assess; the present-day importance of dance-related expertise lies foremost in its continuing capacity to organise social relations.

Performance-related knowledge is the foundation of a dance group. A group is formed around a leader who has this kind of knowledge, and he or she typically has assistants. The group may include specialists of various kinds; for example contemporary composers are usually, though not necessarily, affiliated with a performance group (Lawson 1989, 201). Various people occupying different roles may hold some knowledge concerning music and dance. In Buota it turned out that it was the dance teachers, *taani katei*, who led the groups and played the key roles. The transmission of all this knowledge, not only *kainikamaen*, is essential to the continuity and reproduction of a dance group. The continuity, for its part, is an asset in competition between groups.

Knowledge is not transmitted freely (indeed it is often noted that sometimes knowledge can be so jealously guarded that people take their own to the grave with them, even though it is more desirable to pass it on as inheritance), with competition between

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- The clapping of the song (*uboana*) - each song is accompanied by clapping in a particular configuration.
 - The reiterations of the song (*okina*) – each song is sung in a particular way in which strophes can be repeated in complex patterns.

(See Autio 2008.)

different groups being one reason to safeguard knowledge. For the same reason, however, it is desirable to pass it on to a select few, because continuity assigns prestige to a group. This requires loyalty and the recognition of seniority within the group. The continuity and unity of a dance group depend on the loyalty of both the assistant teachers and the students.

DANCING AND EVERYDAY LIFE

It was pitch-dark. In the house a pressure lantern was burning, creating a soft circle of light in the night. In typical Kiribati fashion, the house had no walls, and the earth floor was covered with coconut leaf mats (iina). Sounds of singing and clapping were carried out into the otherwise silent night. The noisy generator of the neighbouring house had been switched off; it was already late, maybe 10 p.m. 'People of our dance' had gathered to practice dancing (mwaie) in Tetaake's house. The sound fluctuated. Sometimes Tetaake sang alone. His voice was that of an old man's, not loud and sometimes frail, but always in tune. At other times, those not participating in that particular dance and those who had just come to watch accompanied him in the song and at times took over the singing. Occasionally the singing and clapping grew louder, more excited, more animated. Finally people were singing at the top of their lungs, clapping their hands until they were tender, and the song ended in delighted laughter.*

Normally, dancers practiced a particular dance twice in a row, and then it would be the turn of the next one(s). When all the dancers were resting, there was talk – mostly about dancing – and laughter. When someone 'stood', that is, danced, very little was spoken.

"One more time."

"Like this."

"Like this?"

"Follow the clapping."

(Such comments would have mostly been addressed to me, especially the last one, as my body struggled to make the movements in the right way. In the beginning I was very poor at imitating movements. As for adult Kiribati dancers, they seemed to learn the sequences of movements very quickly; they were practicing to be more nikoniko, 'beautiful', 'elegant', 'in good form'.¹³⁹)

Around 11 p.m., I returned from the practice with the two young women from our house. I think we were all exhausted. When we got home, everybody else was asleep.

¹³⁹ The appraising words *niko* and *nikoniko* are usually used to refer to either a canoe or a dancer.

The house was dark, there was only a dim light from the 'the bottle lamp' (taura te bwaatoro), a glass jar with a wick and kerosene. I went to brush my teeth, and my host sisters-in-law started drawing water from the well for their bath. Children and guests were expected to take 'a bucket bath' (tebotebo) at sundown, before the evening meal, but young women were usually too busy preparing the meal and bathing small children to do it. It was only after the children and men¹⁴⁰ had eaten that they had any time of their own. With the training going on, it was only after the dance practice that they could find the time to bathe. As they were finally able to refresh themselves in the quiet, secure darkness, I climbed onto the house platform, about one metre off the ground with posts supporting the roof, no walls. I rolled open my pandanus sleeping mats, dropped down the sides of the mosquito net and tugged the hem under the edges of the mat. I tried to sneak under the net without being accompanied by mosquitoes, a refreshing breeze gently rippling the net.

The above description illustrates, on the one hand, how dancing was subjected to socially and culturally shaped practical constraints, and on the other, the commitment to dancing and one's dance group. While children could practice in the afternoons, especially during school holidays, adults had to finish their day's work before they could devote themselves to dancing. Young married women, who formed the core of dancers, did much of the daily work around the household. Children had to be tended, food cooked, mats woven for the community bingo, the arduous task of washing done – no matter how important an impending dance event. But if work could seldom be ignored because of dance, likewise dance could not be ignored because of work, and so the dancers practised in the evenings, long into the night – night after night. Women were obviously tired (I was too, even if my work usually was less physical). Sometimes someone simply dozed off while waiting for her turn to practice, only to climb up and 'stand' (*tei*; i.e., dance) again after a while.

There were also material considerations, like lighting. This was not necessarily a question of money, for one of the students or their parents could bring kerosene or a working pressure lantern. The islands are dependent on monthly deliveries by the cargo ship (*kaibuken kaako*) and the fuel ship (*kaibuken bwa*). At the time of the two significant dance events, Christmas and an ordination feast held in January, there was a shortage of most imported goods, such as rice, sugar and kerosene, because neither ship had arrived on time. Some evening practices had to be cancelled because there was no kerosene for the lamp. The importance of dance was mirrored in the fact that somehow,

¹⁴⁰ And, at our house, the visiting anthropologist, though after some months women started accompanying me at meals.

when the need was greatest, some kerosene always miraculously appeared from somewhere, even if the island had officially been out of all fuel for weeks.

THE TEACHER AND HIS PEOPLE

Despite the various practical, material and socio-cultural limitations, people were committed to practice dance and committed to their dance group. Essentially this means remaining loyal to one's dance teacher. The dance group with which I was affiliated was led by Tetaake. He was called *tia katei*, 'the one causing to stand', i.e., a dance teacher. But not only did he teach dance; he also composed songs (*kuna*) and designed the series of movements (*kai*) accompanying a song – in short, he choreographed the dances. Thus he was also a *tia kainikamaen* (composer; 'the one making *kai* supple') – or, if a term without connotations to the spirits or magic was needed, a *tia ototo* ('the one to compose') – and a *tia koro-kai* (choreographer; 'the one cutting *kai*'). In a word, Tetaake was our 'trunk' (*boto*), the source of knowledge and the foundation of the group. Tetaake was a man of many skills, not just dance-related, a hard worker despite his occasional health problems, and a man much respected by those who knew him.

Tetaake was in his early seventies at the turn of the millennium. He is *kain* Butaritari, from one of the northern islands and from a high-ranking¹⁴¹ family possessing knowledge about dancing. Tetaake taught the dancing style from the north, *Kainimeang*. He was not a stranger (*iruwa*) in Buota though, because on his mother's side, he can trace descent from Nei Rakentai, the sister of Obaia II who lived in Atanikarawa at the time of Kourabi's arrival in Buota. Tetaake had come to Buota in the 1950s. He had begun teaching dance in Tabiteuea because of the reputation he had gained in Banaba. When working there in the phosphate mines Tetaake had successfully taught dance to government workers in a Banaban village. In Banaba Tetaake had made friends with a man from Buota, who knew of Tetaake's teaching skills and recommended him to Buota elders. The elders of Buota had asked him, then a young man, to teach dance in their village. Tetaake established himself in Buota as a *tia katei*, and was already teaching the third generation of dancers from some families.

Tetaake lived on a *kainga* next to Atanikarawa meetinghouse, and quite a few of 'his people' lived in the vicinity. 'Tetaake's people' (*ana aomata Tetaake*) or 'People of our dance' (*kain ara mwaie*), as they frequently referred to themselves, were those to whom Tetaake was teaching dancing and those he had taught in the past who now assisted him

¹⁴¹ The islands of Butaritari and Makin, it may be remembered, were formerly governed by a high chief (*uea*) and with an explicitly hierarchical traditional social organisation. See e.g. Lambert 1966b, 1978.

in the instruction. In addition, the strong sense of ‘our people’ included those taught by Tetaake at one point or another, and in most cases, the families of the students. This group practiced at his house, and when preparations for a dance event were at their height, those living close to the teacher trained almost every night.

Despite being the centre of the group, Tetaake was not one to draw undue attention to himself; he preferred to stay in the background. He did not necessarily participate in the actual performance events, and part of the teaching was done by his assistants. There was Nei Kauae*, an experienced and skilful dancer who had taken up teaching, and Arobati*, a middle-aged man. There was also Tetaake’s wife Nei Aoniba*, who was known to be especially good in ‘watching’ (*taratara*): watching if students executed the movements correctly and correcting them if needed. The assistant teachers were given a great deal of responsibility for the teaching, even if Tetaake had the final say. For example, when Tetaake was asked to instruct a group of dancers from a school in Eita village (see Ch. 7), Arobati, Nei Kauae and Nei Aoniba played a significant role in the teaching. There were some training sessions at Tetaake’s house, but often the two women, Nei Kauae and Nei Aoniba, were given a lift on a moped to the school, where they held rehearsals for the students.

There were also a few other group members who seemed to have a greater than lay knowledge about dancing, and therefore some authority within the group. The local policeman and his wife were apparently among that number, and at least they were regulars; often hanging around in training sessions even when they or their children were not practising. Nei Ruuta* and her husband Toatu* were also frequent visitors to Tetaake’s house. They lived by the lagoon just across the road, and often came around for the evening practices. Nei Ruuta would practice her dance with Tetaake’s daughter, and Toatu often accompanied her to the training. He participated in the singing or talked with Tetaake. Two of Nei Ruuta’s and Toatu’s three children – their youngest was still a toddler – also practised dance under Tetaake’s guidance, but children generally trained during the day.

Similarly, the young mothers, who lived in Routa and Taunibong hamlets in northern Buota were more likely to come in the daytime because, unless accompanied by a husband or other male guardian, it is not considered safe for young women to travel after dark. They were still nursing and usually took their babies with them. If the child could not be appeased while her mother danced, Nei Aoniba’s niece came to rescue, taking the baby in her arms and walking around to sooth her. A few dancers from other villages also came during the day because of the longer travelling distance. Children and teenagers were able to train during the day, since feasts with extensive dancing were often timed so that they coincided with school vacations. This also allowed for the participation by those who attended secondary school elsewhere and came home for the

holidays. Of the group's youngsters, who altogether numbered about 17, many were children or grandchildren of the assistants and other active members of the group.

Dancers could come and go to throughout the day; Tetaake was usually available to teach, assisted by Nei Aoniba, and their daughters, who helped in the singing. Not infrequently, more people gathered there in the late afternoon, joined by people who were just hanging around, having sneaked in for a chat and a smoke. When the sun no longer parched Tetaake's yard, and shadows were getting long, the rehearsing party broke up, with enough time to get home before dark.

The time after sunset was mainly for adults. In the evening there was also more time for socialising. If you passed by in the evening during periods of intense dance training, you would be likely to meet some or all of the active members just described, among others. A woman who might have danced in the past, a seaman on holiday or Tetaake's people from nearby houses, could stop in and stay to pass time, watching, singing and socialising. Someone would cut pieces from a tobacco stick, wrap them in a thin strip of dried pandanus leaf and pass the cigarette around. Sweet tea with boiled coconut toddy might be made and served (at least to the men, and me as the guest). Between the training rounds there was talk about dancing: who danced with whom, who danced which dance and who was the teacher, and whose child was the girl who had danced that song in the public dress rehearsal (*koroun*).

CONTEXTUALISING THE ACCOUNT

I had been drawn into the world of dancing less than a week after my arrival in Tabiteuea. Under the guidance of my host family, I was kindly but firmly directed first to watch dance training and then take part in it. Not that I objected, but it means that my account of dancing is necessarily marked by my membership in a group, and by my membership in this particular group led by Tetaake. This, then, is a situated account, and while I feel confident in generalising about certain aspects of dance groups, my knowledge of them is primarily based on one group, of which I was a member. The 'people of our dance' became an important framework before I knew anything else about dance groups or dancing in general.

A further biasing factor is that my arrival in Tabiteuea North in November 1999 coincided with a period of particularly intensive dance training. Two major dance events – on a North Tabiteuean scale – were expected at Christmas and in January. Dancing often takes place around Christmas but the upcoming feast in January was a singular event: a local man was to be ordained into the Catholic priesthood. The ordination (*katabu*) was to be extensively celebrated with festivities, including dancing. *Katabu* in

all its aspects was a major event in the predominantly Catholic village of Buota, and this rare occasion had even impelled some middle-aged Catholic women to learn to dance for the first time. However, dancing was not limited by religion – some Protestants and representatives of other religions also took part.

During this time dancing was high on the village agenda, perhaps exceptionally so. Even if dancing is important overall, there were also several months when dancing was not at all central to village life and little, if at all, discussed. The somewhat exceptional nature of that time may have led to my over-emphasising the significance of dancing and the role of dance groups in the village social organisation. During that time period, group feelings, the ‘we-ness’ of groups, high team spirit as well as joint activities besides dancing were certainly at a peak. Yet throughout fieldwork, the importance of dance was evident, along with loyalty to one’s dance group and to one’s dance teacher. Membership in a dancing group is supposed to be a lasting commitment, enduring from year to year and passed on to one’s children, though reality sometimes conflicts with the ideal.

I became aware of the ‘territoriality’ and intense feelings attached to dancing during a practice session sometime in the first week or so. I was left perplexed when a little girl approaching Tetaake’s house during practice was chased away with a stream of angry words, of which I caught “*tiaki ara koraki!*” I understood this as ‘not our relative’; however, *koraki*, can also refer to a member of virtually any kind of group of more or less permanent nature. As I had been so generously accepted into the group, it was hard at first to understand that not everyone would be welcomed to practice. It was my introduction to the world of dance groups. In the world of dance groups, training sessions are regarded as ‘secret’, and prying into other groups improper (see Lawson 1989, 342–343).¹⁴² It is not until the public performance that the group wants to draw attention to itself, displaying its talent in an attempt to surpass all others.

¹⁴² Retrospectively I wondered whether I was overly careful. Conducting her study mainly in South Tarawa, Mary Lawson attended practices of other groups, while being a member in one. This caused some awkwardness, but was accepted due to her status as a researcher (Lawson 1989, 342). I compellingly felt that my presence at practices of the other groups would have been inappropriate and perhaps also incomprehensible. I have later concluded that in the circumstances my carefulness probably was the better solution. After all, I had not originally meant to study dance, rather it became a focus due to the Christmas and Katabu dances. While most people knew I was there to conduct a study, in their minds it was not connected to dance in the beginning. Secondly, during that intense ‘dance period’, the situation was indeed too strained. Compared to Tarawa, the relatively small size of the village further accentuated this. At a later stage, when my focus had shifted and people were aware of my research interest in dancing, I conducted a survey (N=23) among the adult dancers in Buota. It turned out to be regarded by most as a fairly neutral activity. I thought first that this was despite my affiliation with one of the groups, but in retrospect the fact that people were able to place me in the scheme may have been an alleviating factor, though having been longer in the field by then I was also more accepted and my knowledge of language and custom had improved.

I realised that there were other groups besides Tetaake's, and that the relationships to the other groups were characterised by fierce competition and near hostility.¹⁴³ This realisation was followed by the understanding that there was no chance of being a neutral observer. My initial naïvete soon changed into a strong consciousness of the 'groupness' – the 'us against them' – of dancing and its political nature, as well as of my own position as a member of a group.

THE OTHER DANCE TEACHERS IN BUOTA

During my fieldwork, there were three other people besides Tetaake in the village coaching dancers and more or less competing with each other. With the exception of three young girls, Buota dancers were taught by one of the four dance teachers in Buota. The configuration of who competed with whom was not fixed however. It had a sensitive history and there were also further developments during my stay.

The other teachers, two women and one man, were younger and had at some point been taught by Tetaake. Nei Eritabeta* was a woman in her mid-forties during my fieldwork. I heard that at one point she had been taught by Tetaake, but had then begun teaching on her own. Nei Eritabeta in particular was considered Tetaake's opponent (*kaitara*; ka-ai-tara, literally 'to set opposite', 'make to face each other', 'make to look at each other'). Nei Barauri* was somewhat older than Nei Eritabeta. A few years previously there had been some dispute and she had broken off from Tetaake's group, and some students had followed her. Teweia* at forty-something was the youngest. He coached a group of young boys in the same dance that he had previously danced himself, as well as one other dance. With the events of that year, the opposition of Tetaake and Nei Eritabeta became more salient. As the year progressed, the situation polarised, when, during the later developments, Nei Barauri and Teweia aligned themselves more with Nei Eritabeta.

Nei Eritabeta is *kain Tabiteuea* who grew up in Buota. She taught dance, but also designed dance movements. She had a well-known song-maker Baitongo* on her side; while he in actual fact composed choir (*kuaea*) and not dance songs, this seemed to balance Tetaake's multiple skills. Nei Eritabeta taught the dancing style typical of the southern Gilbert Islands, *kaimatoa*. The fact that Tetaake represented another school of dancing, *kainimeang*, brought additional momentum to this competition.

¹⁴³ I do not know the identity of the girl who was chased away; at the time I did not know that many people in the village. Thinking back on the incident afterwards, I have conjectured that the girl may have been the sister of a dancer (whom I came to know later) in a competing group.

In Buota these four dance teachers, (*taani katei*; sg. *tia katei*)¹⁴⁴ were the central personae in dancing: the hub of discussions and gossip. As far as dancing was concerned, the village was divided into the different dance teachers' 'people'. As the gatherings at Tetaake's showed, a teacher's 'people' included more than those who happened to be performing that particular year. Some of them had danced at one time or another, or they simply belonged to a family who was unequivocally affiliated with that teacher. During the period of active dancing, it was as if people in the village were taking sides whether they themselves danced or not, though presumably this was not universally the case.

Nineteen households in Buota could unambiguously be counted as 'Tetaake's people', and an equal number of Houses belonged to the three other groups put together. The majority (14) of Tetaake's households were in the southern half of the village. Only the assistant teacher Nei Kauae and a few others lived north of the Catholic Church. In addition, there were a few dancers from households where members of other groups lived too. Tetaake was also teaching, or had taught, people from eleven families from four other villages on Anikai from Tekabwibwi to Eita. These dancers, however, did not participate in dance events in Buota, and in the island-wide occasions they represented their own villages. Dance group membership as such does not have to follow village boundaries. Similarly Nei Eritabeta had some students from at least one other village. In Buota, many of 'Nei Eritabeta's people' lived in the northern parts. Nei Barauri's small group was concentrated in southern Buota. Teweia's group was likewise small, with no apparent regional base though its students mostly came from the central area.

NECESSARY COMPETITION BETWEEN THE GROUPS

As already stated, the dance groups were in intense competition with one another. Dancing as an activity is predicated on competition. The word for 'opponent', *kaitara*, also implies complementarity. If no rivals exist, they are created, as noted by Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 351); the Gilbertese resettlers in the Solomon Islands divided their only village into two halves so that they could compete in dancing (Knudson 1964, 119). Another example comes from the Banaban community on Rabi Island, Fiji. Wolfgang

¹⁴⁴ In Tony and Joan Whincup's (2001) work, the term *tia katei* is translated both as 'dance teacher' and 'dance leader'. In Lawson Burke's (1989, 373) account the term *tia katei* is only used a couple of times, referring to a 'coach'. Generally Mary Lawson Burke's work (1989; 2001) emphasises the role of the *taani kainikamaen*, though the *tia kainikamaen* is not necessarily a leader of a group, of whom she speaks separately. Discussing the leaders of dance groups, Lawson does not mention if a particular Kiribati term was used for them. Undoubtedly, there can be local variation as to which terms are used. In Buota, it was evident that the *taani katei* rather than *taani kainikamaen* (or *taan ototo*) were the 'trunks' (*boto*) in this social practice.

Kempf (2003) recounts how the heightened political consciousness led to the creation of a dance group to represent the community to the outside world. Soon after, another group was formed, questioning the first group's monopoly to represent the Banabans (Kempf 2003, 38). *Kaitara* is a necessary counterpart in dancing, as in the meal after a girl's puberty rite (*moan teiao*), when she needs a boy to sit opposite her as her *kaitara*. Besides the idea of rivalry and competition, the concept implies that things need their opposites, that there should be a balance.

The competition then, is built-in, and does not depend on whether the dance event in question is a formal competition. It is the audience, the community, who evaluates and judges the order of superiority. While the dancers want to *niko*, 'be beautiful and good in form,' in the end it is the honour of the teacher, the *tia katei*, which is at stake. The winner is not announced but is talked about; the reward lies in the renown and the prestige. Traditionally, it was believed that victory was indicated by death, illness or other harm befalling the other group's *tia kainikamaen* or other key person. A smaller sign would be some blunder or lack of vigour in the other group's performance (Lawson 1989, 297; Lawson Burke 2001, 4).

Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 291–302; Lawson Burke 2001, 4–5) has described in detail various kinds of more formal competition, both in the past and at the time of her research. According to her informants, explicit competitions traditionally took place either between descent groups or villages, in which case they were called *kaunikai*, or between individual dancers, in a form called *uaia*. In the latter case, however, a dancer's performance was seen to indicate the skills of her or his dance teacher (*tia katei*) (Lawson 1989, 373).

Interestingly, Tony and Joan Whincup report from their interviews with I-Kiribati that traditional competition was more commonly between individuals and that there has been a shift of emphasis to competition between groups (T. Whincup & J. Whincup 2001, 118; T. Whincup 2005, 125–126). However, this seems to apply on the level of an individual dance: the subject of evaluation used to be more the skill of the individual (*niko*) than the skill of the whole row of dancers. (In the latter case an important criterion is *booraoiness*, uniformity of the row, as will be seen in the next chapter.) Nonetheless, as mentioned, even when the individual dancer is evaluated, the evaluation reflects on her teacher and group rather than valorising/disparaging the individual.

At times the dancing I witnessed in Tabiteuea displayed features of both *kaunikai* and *uaia*, even if there were no announced competitions in those exact forms. According to Lawson Burke (2001) such occasions are rare, and she in fact observed that the more intense competition had shifted from dancing to choir singing (*kuaea*), in which case it is called *kaunimwanewe*. Lawson Burke (2001) found that many composers (*taani kainikamaen*) preferred composing *kuaea* to dance songs. A yet more recent

development, perhaps, has been competition between groups performing both dancing (*mwaie*) and singing (*kuaea*); such is for example the *Reitaki*, and a school competition to be described in the next chapter.

An important difference between the traditional and the modern kinds of formal competition is that at the latter there are appointed judges who may give points and then declare the winner. Yet even in these case, the judgement of ‘the people’ (*aomata*), the community, remains critical. Finally and most importantly, most dancing takes place outside formal competitions in various kinds of events but always attended by implicit competition.

The competition is still no laughing matter, even if deaths are no longer attributed to it. Apparently, the pre-colonial *kaunikai* competitions could be a replacement, complement or prelude to actual warfare (see Lawson Burke 2001, 6; cf. Lawson 1989, 295). There is in any case a fairly straightforward metaphoric connection between dancing and warfare, noticeable in dance songs. Dance songs provide one of the few contexts where it is permissible, indeed expected, to proclaim one’s own superiority and mock the opponent. Interestingly too, many songs – 9 out of the 24 dance songs I have analysed in depth – directly concern the opposition between dance groups by speaking in metaphoric ways about dancing itself. On the one hand, the songs celebrate the power of one’s knowledge and the relationships within one’s group: the song/dance, continuity, endurance, hardness. On the other, they deride the opponents and their song/dance and wish them to the bottom of the ocean. Not infrequently the metaphors in the songs are those of war.

In Buota, my impression was that dancing was the most important form of performance. There were no active choirs in Buota at that time – one, founded by a seaman on holiday, practiced for a while, but then its founder had to return to work – and understandably, the choirs from other villages did not rouse heated feelings in Buota, even if they undoubtedly competed with each other. In Tabiteuea Meang in general, dancing did seem to attract the most attention, though during my fieldwork Buota was probably the most active village in terms of dancing. For example, in major dance events with dancers from six local villages, performances from Buota outnumbered the others.¹⁴⁵ One reason for the great interest in dancing might stem from presence of so many competing teachers in one village.

¹⁴⁵ Buota provided close to one third (29%) of all the performances.

PRECEDENCE, UNITY AND CONTINUITY WITHIN THE GROUPS

Social relations within a dance group are organised by an idea of precedence based on the possession of knowledge. Both the knowledge and the social organisation may metaphorically be described as a ‘tree’ (*kai*). On the one hand, the *kainikamaen* knowledge is conceptualised as a tree (*kai*), the different schools being its various branches (see Lawson 1989, 220–222). While knowledge concerning teaching is of a less ritual nature, it is equally crucial to the formation of a dance group, and is reflected in the group’s structure.

On the other hand, a performing group is a tree: its leader, the *tia katei* in Buota’s case, is the ‘trunk’ (*te boto*), the assistant teachers and students are the branches and leaves.¹⁴⁶ *Boto* is the source of knowledge, which flows from the trunk like the sap of a tree. As the mythical Kaintikuaba tree in Samoa represents the original kin group, and in examples from many other Austronesian cultures (Fox 2006a [1995], 233; 2006b [1996], 5–9; see e.g. Boulan-Smit 2001), the tree signifies an order of precedence where the trunk comes first. The assistants stand in a hierarchical relationship to the source (*te boto*, trunk) of their knowledge. The unity of a dance group depends on the junior members recognizing the seniority of their *boto*. The ideals of recognising seniority and remaining loyal was expressed succinctly by a young woman who told me that an assistant dance teacher should not teach on his/her own before his/her *boto* has passed away.

Unity is an important quality and ideal of a dance group, as is continuity. A successful teacher will attract students “generation after generation”, as a line in a dance song goes. In addition, for the dance group to persist over time, the knowledge held by the *tia katei* needs to transcend the individual *tia katei*. Tetaake knew this, and had been training assistants, not only to ease his work load but to ensure the continuity of his group. Like a *tia kainikamaen*, a *tia katei* has apprentices; taking Nei Kauae as an example, a good dancer might gradually begin to assist in teaching, learning how to instruct. As with song composition, knowledge about dance instruction is passed on in a controlled manner from the specialist to his or her supporters.

In traditional society, knowledge was property which was to an extent interchangeable with land, and inherited in a similar manner (see Uriam 1995, 39), usually by one’s chosen descendant. However, there were regular exceptions to this, and knowledge could

¹⁴⁶ The word for a traditional composer’s assistants, *rurubene*, has the word *ruru-*, ‘to tremble, shake, shiver, vibrate’, as its stem. I do not know the meaning of *-bene* in this context. Speculatively, *ruru-* might refer to the trembling of leaves of a tree, a frequent theme in dance songs, where it signifies, simply put, the power of the dance.

also be exchanged, given as a gift or solicited (*bubutied*) by a non-relative.¹⁴⁷ In contemporary Kiribati society, knowledge concerning performance seems almost as likely to be passed on through some relationship other than consanguineal kinship. In 1985, Mary Lawson conducted a survey among contemporary composers (see Lawson 1989, 266-273). In 23 cases (out of 28) where there is information about the source of their knowledge, eleven composers were trained by consanguineal kin: usually a father or a grandparent. In two cases the teacher was a stepfather. Interestingly, four were affinal relatives. The remaining six were taught by elders of no apparent relation. Considering that, at least traditionally, affines (*butika*) were clearly distinguished from consanguineal relatives (Lundsgaarde 1966, 84), it can be said that ten of the composers received knowledge from a non-relative. The situation concerning dance instruction in the Buota dance groups seemed to be similar; to my knowledge, neither Arobati nor Nei Kauae were closely related to Tetaake.

Knowledge seems then to be transmitted at least partly independent of kinship, forming a kind of genealogy of its own. The relationships within a group, between the master and the apprentices, are ordered by a similar logic of precedence as that underlying the kinship system, though in this case referring to the extent of knowledge and experience, not genealogical or biological age. Apprentices to dance teachers gradually gain more knowledge provided that they remain attentive and loyal to their teacher. However, despite all this, precedence, unity and continuity are ideals: reality does not always follow suit as the case of Buota shows.

DIFFERENTIATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF DANCE GROUPS

Having been told that one should not go over the head of one's teacher, I was at first surprised to learn that the other teachers in the village had initially been trained by Tetaake. If a group is supposed to pull together and stay united, why had some members broken away while Tetaake was alive and practicing? Information from other places, though sporadic, later revealed that the dance enthusiasts in Buota were not deviating from the norm to an exceptional degree. For example, the competing performance groups in South Tarawa described by Lawson (1989, 163), were the result of a similar process of conflict and bifurcation. I also heard of cases from other places, where people

¹⁴⁷ A non-relative might receive property in exchange for services, especially for taking care of an ageing person when his/her children would not (Uriam 1995, 39, fn.7; Talu 1985, 9-10). Soliciting knowledge (*rabakau*) (with the formal *bubuti* request) involved the risk of being cheated. In this case the extent of transmission would depend on the exchange relationship; if the master were not happy with the gifts or services rendered by the disciple, he would become politely evasive and eventually fall silent (Uriam 1995, 39).

had changed from one teacher to another, attracted by the reputation of the second; in other words, had not remained loyal to their *tia katei*. Because of this element of choice, a teacher has to keep on attracting dancers “from generation to generation”. If continuity was automatic and conflict-free, there would be no need to emphasise it.

It also seems that friction inside a group of some sort or other can at worst lead to secession. Contrary to what has been written about *iinaki/boti* and *kainga*, the groups which result from subdivision in this manner do not necessarily recognise the precedence of the older teacher.¹⁴⁸ From Tetaake’s point of view, the others were both junior, and had broken off and begun teaching independently without his approval. From the younger teachers’ viewpoint, the situation probably looked different, and they saw their actions as justified.

Bearing in mind the aspect of complementarity in the concept of *kaitara* and the juxtaposing logic of dancing – though without attributing any direct causal relationship – it is possible that Tetaake’s lengthy domination of the local dance scene contributed to the establishment of competing groups. Tetaake did have at least one *kaitara* from a neighbouring village, though competition with her was not very explicit during my fieldwork. Certainly, had there been no competing teachers from within the village, *kaitara* would have been found somewhere, but one can still speculate whether some kind of a power imbalance in the village had precipitated the split.

Both facts remain: that the continuity of a dance group is an important ideal and that divisions do occasionally take place. The relationships within a group should be characterised by unity and connectedness and relations between groups by juxtaposition and competition but, apparently transformation from the former into the latter kind of relationship is possible. This dual nature can in fact be seen as inherent in the Kiribati concept of ‘tree’ (*kai*), whose translation now proves to be only partial.

Other writers have noted that the tree is a symbol of common origin, unity and connectedness (see Lawson 1989, 223; H.C. & H.E. Maude 1994, xvi). My analysis confirms this, but suggests that this does not exhaust the symbolism of the concept *te kai* in the context of dancing. The Kiribati word for ‘tree’, *kai*, has a plethora of meanings (also noted by Lawson [1989, 225], but her conclusions are different), ‘tree’ and ‘stick’ probably being the most common concrete references and, with a suffixed genitive pronoun, ‘a person of/from a place’ (*kain Tabiteuea*). Abstract meanings include ‘skill’ and ‘method’ – the meaning of *kai* as ‘dance’, as in the series of dance movements (choreography), belongs to the same class – and both ‘punishment’ and ‘victory’.

¹⁴⁸ One interesting point to examine would be whether *iinaki* (or previously *kainga*) resulting from subdivisions always or unconditionally accept(ed) the seniority of the older group; cf. Lambert’s note (1983, 193) on Butaritari and Makin about kin group segmentation occurring because of property disputes.

Furthermore *kai* is used as an auxiliary word in various expressions as well as for emphasis or as an interjection. Instead of just listing its many possible English glosses (for those, see Gilbertese-English Dictionary 1971, q.v. *kai*¹⁴⁹), I find it useful to examine how the word *kai* is used in dance songs, particularly because of the ‘self-referential’ nature of many of the songs, where the main, if not exclusive theme is dancing itself, particularly the competition inherent in it.

In the 24 dance songs (performed by dancers from Buota in 1999–2000) I analysed, the word *kai* appeared in some form 23 times. Twelve occurrences of the word *kai* are idiomatic (such as *kai te tangare*, ‘something magnificent’) and other expressions where *kai* has no apparent translation and seems to be used for emphasis (e.g. *kai e a koro*, ‘*kai* it is finished!’). One of the idioms, *kai ni katiku*- (‘perch’ or ‘a tree of resting’) is quite common in songs (four occurrences in this material). *Kai ni katiku*- makes reference to a metaphorical ‘tree’ as a home, a nesting tree: a safe place or person (woman; wife) (Kambati Uriam, personal communication 25.8.2003). Of the remaining eleven occurrences, four refer to a (metaphorical) tree, which ‘sways’ in the wind, ‘sprouts’, or ‘is being surrounded [by trees]’.

In four songs *kai* is used as a weapon: ‘*kai* for hitting’ (*kai n oro*, *kai te oro matoa*), ‘*kai* for hurling’ (*kai ni kaminomino*) and ‘*kai* for dancing’ (*kai ni mwaie*), which – according to Tetaake’s explanation of the song – stands for a weapon of war. In a nation-wide popular song about culture hero Teraaka’s fishing trip, *kai* refers to the fishing rod, which ‘stands’, ‘bends’ and ‘swings’ – the protagonist using it with extraordinary skill – in which it resembles the usage of a weapon.

Additionally, a tree is referred to ten times by a metonym (leaf, branch, flower, sprout, [tree] top) and twice by the name of a tree species. Thus tree is obviously a common symbol in the songs. According to the local expert explanation, the tree in the songs can symbolise, for example, knowledge, woman or dancer. The ‘weapon’, however, is a common symbol as well, occurring, in addition to the *kais*, three times by the names of traditional weapons, which, I suggest, also refer to the Kiribati concept of *kai*. The

¹⁴⁹ In the dictionary Father Sabatier distinguishes five separate meanings of the word, though one could postulate connections between them. The four more restricted senses he gives are *kai* (1) as an inhabitant, member, or person/people of something (place, institution) (2) as an adverb *kakai* (the frequentative of *kai*) ‘easily’ (3) as the name of a bird, crane or heron and (5) as a verb ‘scratching sand for shellfish’. As to the bulk of implications, Sabatier divides the meanings of *kai* into four categories: “(1) wood (2) instrument (3) pain (4) chastisement, punishment...” Sabatier’s second category includes the figurative meanings of *kai* as a method, system, manner, rhythm. The fourth category includes such meanings as ‘punishment’, ‘victory’ and ‘revenge’. In addition, Sabatier lists over a hundred idioms and expressions using the word *kai* (and undoubtedly there are more, including ad hoc expressions). In short, *kai* is complex concept, the word itself having contradictory meanings (e.g. victory and defeat) and so ubiquitous as to almost lose meaning. Yet several of its meanings are too significant culturally to be ignored.

weapon in the songs signifies dance or knowledge; a song typically proclaims that the dance (being performed as the song is sung) is so great that it strikes down its opponents.

In sum, the word and concept *te kai* was either used or referred to (by a metonym or ‘species’) altogether 42 times in the 24 songs. Discounting the emphatic and idiomatic uses of the word (12), two-thirds (20) of the remaining occurrences pointed to a ‘tree’ and one-third (10) to a ‘weapon’. In this light, conceptualising either dance-related knowledge or a social group in terms of a *kai* gains additional shades of meaning. While I still think the metaphor is a ‘tree’, *kai* entails the idea that a branch of that tree can be broken off and used as a weapon— even against the tree.

One could then visualise a genealogical tree of dance experts passing on knowledge as inheritance, in which the junior branches are subordinate in relation to the trunk (*te boto*) from which the sap flows; a tree as an image of continuity and unity. Sometimes, however, branches break off before the trunk dies, no longer submitting to the authority of the base. The knowledge acquired by that time is turned into a weapon. Stretching the metaphor somewhat, one could also postulate that like the pandanus¹⁵⁰ tree which can be propagated from any branch or stem-cutting (and is never propagated from the seed) and preferably from a cutting that has begun to grow adventitious roots (Catala 1957, 53; Stone, Migvar and Robison 2000, 20), junior teachers can grow aerial roots and attempt to plant themselves elsewhere.

Therefore the Kiribati version of the common Austronesian metaphor of ‘tree’ entails not only the idea of a common origin and precedence (Fox 2006a [1995]; 2006b [1996], 5–9), and the possibility of emphasising either unity (the common trunk) or separateness (the branches) (Boulan-Smit 2001), but also the possibility of a radical break and opposition. While the formation of new groups through bifurcation could simply be seen just as exceptions or deviations from a norm, it is also possible to conceive of an alternative pattern of emergence of a group:

continuity → break → separation → opposition.

Continuity, unity as well as the potential for separation and opposition depend on, besides the teacher and his assistants, the students of the group. The twofold logic of continuity and opposition also became concrete in the relationships between individual student members of the groups.

¹⁵⁰ Traditionally pandanus (*te kaina* is the generic term; there are over three hundred named species; *A Gilbertese-English Dictionary* 1953 [1908] [q.v. pandanus] lists 174 names for pandanus fruit) was the most important tree of the islands, both economically and ritually. The primeval First Tree on Tabiteuea was a pandanus (Grimble 1933–34, 97; Uriam 1995, 7), and, according to a variant from Makin, so was the Kaintikuaba Tree (Grimble 1933–34, 85).

GROUP COMPOSITION AND THE AUTHORITY OF WOMEN

Inheritance of knowledge is an important medium of a group's continuity, forming a kind of genealogy of teachers. While not nearly all dancers learn teaching knowledge (let alone *kainikamaen*), an equally significant continuity nevertheless lies in the student composition of a group. Not only is it desirable that a student of dance should remain loyal to his or her teacher; his/her children and other close family should follow in his/her footsteps. Members of a group do not have to belong to the same descent group, nor be related to the teacher, though of course they may be. The composition of membership, however, is not divorced from kinship. It seems that in the absence of descent group or institutional affiliation, the groups depend on kinship (among other factors) for their continuity in a new way.

While dancing did not take place in descent groups sharing land rights or a sitting place in the *maneaba*, in many cases membership in a dance group followed a kinship link either to the teacher or to someone who was or had been taught by the teacher.¹⁵¹ Yet in a village of four hundred people, kinship connections are more common than not between residents; kinship links therefore existed between members of different dance groups. In addition, it was also apparent that many other factors could, and had, come into play in terms of group membership, such as residence, marriage, the reputation of a teacher, some conjunction of events or pure chance. The question then becomes, which or what kind of kinship links, if any, were important in the formation of dance groups.

People who belonged to the dance groups also belonged to other kinds of groups: households, *iinakis*, work co-operatives, churches and so on. Membership in these groups overlapped and cross-cut, sometimes in unexpected ways. People from different dance groups could be in frequent everyday interaction in other arenas. Belonging to several groups, each with a different principle of belonging is neither surprising nor rare in itself (rather, it is a standard feature of a differentiated society, but in a small-scale society the criss-crossing is probably more salient – see Besnier 1995, 33–34 for a similar description of a Tuvaluan village). What made it puzzling was perhaps the intensity of the dance relationships and the fiercely oppositional language of dancing.¹⁵²

I was initially perplexed by what seemed to be closely associated people publicly competing with each other. There were, for example, siblings who danced in opposing groups. Examining such unexpected cases proved to be very informative about dancing

¹⁵¹ The latter connections were more obvious to me. Also, it has to be remembered that one of the teachers originally came from another island, albeit with kinship connections to Buota.

¹⁵² Niko Besnier's (1995, 33) characterization of the Nukulaelae community might well refer to Buota: "Groups constantly emerge and disappear, and some manage to monopolize an enormous amount of time, attention and resources, even surpassing in importance, for a brief moment, the most fundamental social institutions."

in general as well as dance groups. My knowledge of the existing kinship relations in the village is far from complete, but to the extent possible, I examined the intersections of kinship, residence and dance group. Not surprisingly, no exact ‘rules of descent’ or pattern for belonging to a dance group could be discerned, but certain emphases did emerge.¹⁵³

By and large whole households or extended families were associated with one dance group, but there were some exceptions to this. When under-aged siblings from the same household danced in different groups, it was usually put down to the age structure of the village. It is important that people performing a dance together belong to the same age group (*roro*) (Lawson 1989, 33). If a child did not have age mates to dance with in the group with which his or her parents were affiliated, he or she might join youngsters of the same age group taught by another *tia katei*. This seemed not to be of much importance; it was only when they grew up that dance grew more serious, and they would return to the appropriate teacher. It could happen though that through this kind of arrangement, someone stayed on in the other group and eventually became ‘so-and-so’s person’ – ‘it came about that [she is] so-and-so’s person’ (*e reke bwa ana aomata Tennawa*).

However, siblings being in opposing dance groups is not necessarily coincidental, as the case of Nei Auti* and Nei Nimanoa* illustrates. Their mother, Nei Kaingateiti* had long been taught by a particular dance teacher, but married into a family associated with a competing teacher. Nei Auti lived with her parents and other siblings, whereas Nei Nimanoa lived most of the time with her paternal grandparents. The grandmother (Kaingateiti’s HM), some of her children and daughters-in-law, as well as Nei Nimanoa have been taught by the competing teacher. Kaingateiti herself continued to dance with her own teacher, who also teaches Nei Auti. (See Figure 7 Case 1.)

Residence plays a role, though in this case Nei Nimanoa might also be adopted by her grandmother.¹⁵⁴ A significant issue here is the authority of women in the formation of dance groups. Kaingateiti’s mother-in-law would have authority over the younger female residents of their house in general, but, on the other hand, Kaingateiti did not give up her dance group affiliation at marriage. The same case can be made for the dancers from Buota, who had grown up locally and danced as children. There were many cases in which a woman belonged to the dance group with which her husband was associated. Yet

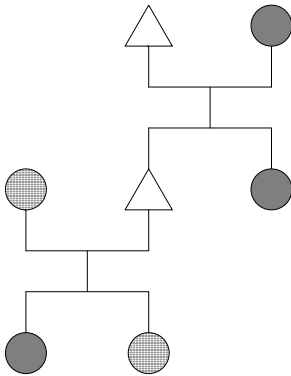
¹⁵³ It should be pointed out that this is a picture of the dancing community at a particular point in time. The earlier changes and those described in the next chapter will demonstrate the dynamic nature of the configurations.

¹⁵⁴ Whether or not she was formally adopted, I do not know. A formal adoption involves transmission of property and has to be registered in the Lands Court. There are distinct forms of adoption and fosterage; they differ in the shares received by the adoptee at inheritance (see e.g. Lundsgaarde 1970b).

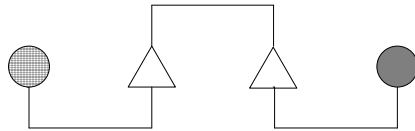
significantly, in all of these cases the woman either had not danced as child, or had grown up on another island (which is common, as most couples live virilocally).

AUTHORITY OF WOMEN CONCERNING DANCE GROUP MEMBERSHIP

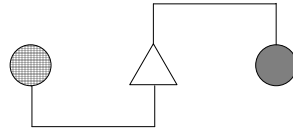
Case 1. Mother-in-law / daughter-in-law



Case 2. Sisters-in-law: the wives of two brothers.



Case 3. Sisters-in-law: A man's wife and his sister.



Case 4. Divorce / re-marriage: consecutive wives.

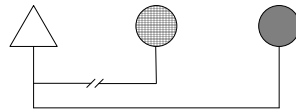


Figure 7. Authority of women concerning dance group membership. Showing affinal relations and dance group boundaries, reflecting the authority women have in choosing dance group membership. The grey and plaid figures represent membership in opposing dance groups.

What these cases seem to indicate is that in dancing, even younger women have more say than they normally do. To cite other examples, there was a pair of brothers whose wives belonged to opposing dance groups (Figure 7 Case 2); a man whose wife and sister were in opposing groups (Figure 7 Case 3), and a man whose first and second wife belonged to different groups (Figure 7 Case 4). The sisters-in-law were in their early twenties; the consecutive wives were middle-aged. Both cases imply that the choice of the group membership had been left to the women. Depending on other circumstances, however, one's age does still matter in these decisions. A young woman who had not danced before would most likely have to follow the will of her husband or parents-in-law, but an elderly woman could make decisions not only for herself but for junior relatives or relatives-in-law as well.

As an interesting aside, in the above instances the boundary of a dance group coincided with an affinal link.¹⁵⁵

DISPLAYING UNDIFFERENTIATED REPRODUCTIVE POWER

Dancing, then, is a domain where women have important say both as teachers and as dancers or dancers' parents. Women also predominated numerically among the performers: about 80% of dancers in the dance events in Tabiteuea Meang 1999–2000 were girls and women, among dancers in Buota slightly fewer (see Table).¹⁵⁶ Yet dancing is far from being considered a 'women's activity' or girlish; dancing is an important public arena in the society as a whole.

When studying the sociology of dancing in Buota a further interesting fact emerged: from the examples above it is obvious that many of the dancers were married women. In fact, in Buota all dancers over the age of 20, who with one exception were women, were, or had been, married (*iein*).¹⁵⁷ General observation of dancers from other villages confirmed this was not exceptional. While there were dancers of both genders and of all ages up till middle-age, the majority of dancers in the Tabiteuean events were children (boys and girls) and youngish women. As a rule, these women were married. This appears to contradict in an interesting way Lawson's (1989, 403–404) contention that principal dancers would almost always be unmarried, because the spouse, out of jealousy, would forbid that. In Lawson's explanation, jealousy is mutual, both spouses forbidding the other to dance. Male jealousy seems to have been of greater concern, however, for even in Tarawa it was more common for male dancers to be married (Lawson 1989, 403).

AGE AND GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF BUOTA DANCERS 1999-2000

		AGE years					
GENDER		-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	Total by gender
	Female	3	14	11	11	2	41 (76% of grand total)
	Male	5	7	1	-	-	13 (24% of grand total)
	Total by age group	8	21	12	11	2	54

Table. The dancers (excluding me) from Buota village November 1999–September 2000: breakdown by gender and age group.

¹⁵⁵ This would provide an interesting implication, if dancing competition is conceptualised as exchange.

¹⁵⁶ I witnessed around 185 dances during my stay in Tabiteuea Meang. In the 171 cases where I had recorded the information concerning the dancers' gender, 80% were female.

¹⁵⁷ There was one unmarried 24-year-old woman, who practised but in the end did not perform in an actual dance event that year.

The cause for jealousy is that an individual is considered to be at her/his most attractive – particularly sexually – when dancing and doing it well. This is not because dance style or movements are sexually expressive or flirtatious; a majority of them are not even gender-specific, unlike the strongly gendered and sexually explicit movements in much Polynesian dancing (e.g. *tamure*). For example, Kiribati dancing generally lacks the supple wrist and arm movements typical of female dancing in places like Tonga and the Cook Islands. The unisex movements in Kiribati bear more resemblance to male dancing from some parts of Oceania. However, sexuality and dancing are connected at a deeper level, where the seeming contradiction between men forbidding, and those encouraging, their wives to dance becomes understandable. Sexuality is a societal concern, not only a personal matter.

At the level of individuals this explanation would make sense in Tabiteuea as well, particularly in terms of the husbands' attitudes towards their wives: a married woman would not dance against her husband's will – though the same would apply to most activities – nor would she be likely to dance in his absence. Furthermore, it was precisely this kind of customary control by husbands and their kin of the wives in the community that was described as 'hard' in Tabiteuea. Nevertheless, it is already obvious that in Tabiteuea Meang a lot of men allowed their wives to dance, and what is more, encouraged them to do so: a couple of women told me they had been 'made to dance' (*kamwaiea*) by their husbands. How can it be that some spouses vehemently forbid their companions to dance, to the extent of making it appear the normative practice, while others equally strongly insist on their spouses dancing? I suggest that this apparent contradiction actually represents two sides of the same coin: the ambiguity of (female) reproductive power.

Discussion of the Story of Kourabi and ideas concerning the reproduction of the society showed that the reproductive power of female sexuality is essential but dangerous, feared as well as valued. Hence the ambiguity of female sexuality and the need to control it with *tabus*. In the Kiribati conception, this female power potential, particularly in its ambivalent aspects, is immanent in 'standing' and has its most pronounced manifestation in menstruation, 'standing outside' (*teiao*).¹⁵⁸ Female sexuality needs to be 'bound', channelled into the construction of the society, which is symbolically done by 'making her sit' (*katekateka*) at the time when a girl is 'standing outside' for the first time, and subsequently by *tabus* (the containment of sexuality is

¹⁵⁸ The everyday miracle of childbirth is probably the ultimate manifestation of female sexuality; but no longer as a mere potential, having been consummated, it is much less ambiguous. Menstruation – sign of not being pregnant – is the potential lost; the power, which should be channelled into reproduction, set loose and is therefore dangerous.

also implied in marriage as ‘sitting’). Dancing, I argue, is another form of ‘standing’, and indicative of reproductive power.

The obvious semantic link is that the word for ‘standing’ (*tei*) is frequently used to refer to dancing. “Who is going to stand next?” (*antai ae e na tei nange?*), was the usual question when deliberating who was going to dance next in a training session. Here *tei* is figurative: even if in most dance types dancers are on their feet, they ‘stand’ before the audience even when they are performing a dance in a sitting position (*binō*). Designation of a dance teacher as ‘someone who makes [another person] stand’ (*tia ka-tei*) points to the deeper and metaphoric meanings of the expression when applied to dancing. “Who makes you stand?” (*antai ae e kateiko?*) and “By whom do you stand?” (*Ko tei iroun antai?*) are ways of asking who someone’s dance teacher is. Further, *tei-* as a noun, with a possessive suffix (‘my/your/etc. posture, position’) denotes on the one hand a dancer’s pose, and on the other, a person’s posture in the holistic sense of referring not only (or not necessarily) to the physical body posture but also to the person’s whole physical, mental and moral outlook. In other words, the connections are deeper than just homonymy or linguistic coincidence.

I suggest then, that dancing is a position of power, and that dancers embody and represent the reproductive power of the society. As a manifestation of power, however, dancing women are precarious, entailing the risk of that power escaping control (e.g., causing a spectator, other than the husband, to fall in love with her). With the capacity of female power to be either of benefit or of detriment to society, both responses to it – letting someone dance or forbidding her to do so – become understandable.

Yet having said that, I suggest that despite women more obviously representing ambivalent power, there is a similar logic underlying male dancing so perhaps this is less a matter of gender than something else. The discussion of Kourabi also showed that in Tabiteuea male reproductive power, associated with leadership, is likewise ambiguous and bound by *tabu*. The comparison of (defunct) male and still operative female initiation rites revealed significant similarities in their structure, particularly in their emphasis on ‘binding’. Analogously, in dancing the ideal for both genders is control: to show that one has power by the need to restrain it.

Interestingly then, Kiribati dancing as an activity undifferentiates between genders, rather than differentiating them – as many Polynesian dances (e.g. the *tamure*) do. While the unisex nature of dance movements may appear to contradict the idea that a dancer is considered sexually attractive while dancing, the possibility of sexual attraction may be the reason for the unisex, undifferentiating nature of Kiribati dance: the gender differences, representing both the possibilities and the dangers of reproductive powers, need to be worked upon and transformed into more neutral similarity.

Thus, even as these cultural notions attend to genders and the differences between them, 'gender' may not be the primary issue here. In his discussion of gender in Samoan society, Serge Tcherkézoff (1993) analyses the hierarchical distinctions in Samoan ideology (in the Dumontian sense) in the relations between men and women as brothers/sisters and husbands/wives. He concludes the former to be a higher-level distinction encompassing the latter but that it is not in itself about 'gender' in the Western sense of male-female relations but about the title system. As Henrietta Moore (1993, 200) puts it in her comment, in Samoa men and women as 'husbands' and 'wives' are responsible for sexual reproduction, whereas men and women as 'brothers' and 'sisters' are responsible for social reproduction. In the light of this distinction between social as opposed to mere sexual reproduction one can say that, in Kiribati, social and cosmological reproduction require *controlled* sexuality.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Kiribati, unlike Samoa, sexuality does in an important way represent the power of social and cosmological reproduction, *but only if it is controlled*. Restraint is the key issue: sexuality being implied in the need to restrain it. In dancing, which is a performing art, this is done by containing and even undoing gender differences. Therefore, seemingly paradoxically, sexuality is displayed through its control, through minimising the sexual differences.

There seem to be two issues underlying the greater number of women and their relative authority in dancing matters. On the one hand, the display of female sexuality or reproductive power in dancing is connected to fundamental themes in Kiribati society, having to do with societal/cosmic reproduction, and therefore significant in its own right. On the other hand, in and by the subdued, well nigh asexual nature of this display, the female reproductive power is made similar to male reproductive power which, while also manifest in sexuality, more commonly takes the form of courage/aggression (*un*), and tending towards or aspiring to political power. Inasmuch as the typically female form of power is thus actively undifferentiated from the male forms, do women also become more able to exercise that power?

SUMMARY: THE GROUPS AND THE DANCERS

Kiribati dancing takes place in competing groups, which in Buota were formed around performance specialists called *taani katei*, dance teachers. While these specialists had knowledge about song and dance composition to varying degrees, it was primarily in their capacity as teachers (*taani katei*) that they figured in the local discourse. The art of song composition (*kainikamaen*) was less central; in many if not most cases the composer was not personally involved and might even be unknown, as quite a few of the

songs danced during the year had not been locally authored. I have suggested that the skill to teach dance, while perhaps having fewer supernatural elements, was nevertheless a crucial kind of knowledge and, as such, power which gave authority to its bearers. In Buota the four dance teachers were the central personae and their role for the local dance groups was pivotal.

Dance groups directly involved over half of the households in Buota, and indirectly even more people. Fifty-four dancers from Buota performed publicly in the dance events arranged between December 1999 and May 2000, but in addition there were the dancers' families, former dancers as well as supporters and sympathisers. Dancing was one of the bases on which social groups were formed in Buota, along with kinship, village community, locality, religion and work. The principles by which people belonged to dance groups cross-cut some of the other principles of group formation, even if the composition of dance groups to an extent reflected the kinship network and residential arrangements in the village. Dance group constitution was affected by the population structure at the time, and by coincidences, but also by one more systematic factor: women played a greater role in the constitution and affairs of dance groups than in the other types of groups.

Particularly for the dancers who practiced to be principal performers in an event, dance groups and dancing as an activity were significant commitments, and dancers could go to great lengths and lay aside personal comfort in order to practice dancing. While little over a half of the dancers were children and teenagers, nearly an equal number were ordinary adults, almost all of them women; the same women who cooked food and wove *iinai*-mats for the *maneaba*, worked for the church and the co-operatives, besides taking care of household chores. I did not perceive any specific restrictions as to who could dance, however; the number and gender distribution of dancers is likely to vary from one year to the next, so the near absence of adult men could have been coincidental.

Group relations

Social relations within a group and between groups are mostly patterned in contrasting ways, but at times the patterns may merge. The internal relations of a dance group ideally follow a classic 'trunk-tree' model of precedence: differentiation according to possession of knowledge ('elder-younger'). A single group, however, presents an incomplete image of dancing: a competing group is necessary for balance and completeness, as the concept *kaitara* implies. Between groups, a situation of 'competitive equality' (Woodburn 1982, 446) prevails, where differentiating oneself from others is the goal.

The competition of relative equals is, on the one hand, between the leaders of groups and, on the other, between the groups as the extensions of their leaders – the branches connected to the trunk form a whole – and as corporations. Like an Iban traditional war-leader (Sather 1996, 78–81), a dance group leader is as free as any other to attract followers. Unlike this type of Iban authority, however, a dance group leader's authority is not only or straightforwardly based on his or her personal qualities but also on inherited or acquired knowledge. With regard to performance-related knowledge, people are not quite on an equal footing, given that some families possess knowledge that others do not; but given the possibility of transmitting this knowledge outside of kin ties, no one who is committed enough is excluded either. On the other hand, requiring knowledge from a relative likewise requires considerable commitment to dancing (or composition or whatever the particular art in question) as well as to the person with the information. The source of a group leader's knowledge does reflect on a group's status, particularly if it is a branch of *kainikamaen* ritual knowledge, known to have been passed on. Yet it seems the achieved aspect of the status of a leader and his group have greater emphasis (all the more so if no *taani kainikamaen* are involved), and the primary aim is to demonstrate their power in performance (see Ch. 7).

The configuration of competitive dance in Buota had, however, another aspect as well, due to its historical development. While it is questionable how much this can be generalised – there are a few pointers to similar situations in other places (Lawson 1989, 163) but not enough details are known – one may posit a theoretical model, which applies to the situation in Buota. Such dance group bifurcations would have a different logic from that generally governing the branching of kin groups, where seniority of the 'trunk' continues to be acknowledged by the junior party. Dance group splits, if initiated by the younger party (an assistant teacher) without the consent of the senior, are antagonistic and at the least end in a state of competition: the branch cut out and turned into a sword. In such a case, the parties might well perceive the situation differently: the senior teacher seeing a younger one as a foolish upstart, the latter seeing herself/himself as a rightful contender or an equal competitor. Here the logic bears some resemblance to that of a 'predatory expulsion' as an Austronesian mode of societal transformation (Fox 2006a [1995], 239), albeit more voluntary on the part of the 'expelled'.

Gender matters

Besides being overtly competitive, another factor to distinguish dance groups from households, *iinakis* and other kinds of groups is the more visible role of women. Women can lead dance groups, like Nei Eritabeta and Nei Barauri did in Buota, as well as being apprentices, assistants and influential members in groups. Women play a significant role

in the formation and continuity of dance groups. In practice the influence can be seen, for example, in that women tended to remain loyal to their dance group at marriage, as revealed by an examination of dance group boundaries. Women also have authority regarding the dancing of junior members of the household. So not only the female dance experts but also women in general had autonomy and authority in dancing, perhaps more than in other contexts, even though this depended on a woman's age and her position in the household.

A related but different question is the numerical predominance of women among performers, which could equally well result from male dominance. Judging by other studies of dancing, as well as the occasional Kiribati dance videos I have seen (some commercial but lately frequently on the Internet), adult men dance more often than appeared on the basis of the one-year experience in one village and island. Nevertheless, it is possible that women somehow more noticeably represent certain societal values, though in the end the positions of women and men are quite parallel.

I have argued that Kiribati dance is a display of reproductive power in the cosmic sense: a display of a characteristically Kiribati nature. On a mundane level, a person – man or woman – is considered to be at his or her most attractive when dancing; a good dancer appeals to the opposite sex in the audience, even in potentially dangerous ways which might lead to infidelity. This is despite the fact that dance movements as such are not, in my understanding, considered sexually insinuating.¹⁵⁹ The connections between dancing and initiation rites suggested furthermore that what is at stake is more than the sexuality of an individual. The earlier discussions of the rites, in connection with Kourabi's story, showed the significance of female reproductive power in the cosmology. Comparing dancing with initiation, along with the shared notion of 'standing', the restrictions placed on a dancer are analogical to those placed on an initiate.

The extremely controlled character of Kiribati dancing, like the control of an initiate, applies to both women and men. In addition to the requirement of restriction and precision for both sexes, the movements and poses are in the main the same for both sexes. Paradoxically, while dancing is *the* circumstance to display sexuality, it is also the circumstance where gender differences are made to all but disappear in the unisex movements. On the other hand the strong undifferentiation of gender makes Kiribati, or certainly Tabiteuean, sense: both female and male sexuality, the latter in its link with

¹⁵⁹ From a Western point of view, Kiribati dance movements are certainly not seductive, but what is considered erotic is culturally determined. Yet my impression was that ordinary dance movements are not considered sexually explicit. Regular dancing is in contrast to the dance style old women may exhibit when they spontaneously stand up to dance, which does contain sexually explicit body language, not only to my Western eyes, but judging by the audiences' reactions, in Kiribati eyes as well (see also Brewis 1996, 10). Neither appear the names of dance positions (Laxton & Kamoriki 1953) to have sexual connotations.

leadership, are under *tabu*. Either kind of power uncontrolled is detrimental to the social order.

This ambivalence concerning the display of power may also be connected to the interesting finding that as opposed to the half-professional performance groups in Tarawa, in Tabiteuea many women continued to dance after marriage, or even only began dancing as married women. This was despite the fact that spousal jealousy was an equally present factor and a husband's authority over his wife even stronger than on many other islands. Besides complementing the picture of contemporary Kiribati dancing by presenting a local, outer island village-level perspective on it, the fact that married women (and men) dance indicates the inherent value of the practice, which may overcome jealousy on the individual level.

Reflecting the cosmological significance of dancing, dance groups are not only about the social organisation of dancing; I suggest they are not unaffiliated hobby groups but an important institution in themselves. In the chapter to follow, through a discussion of actual performance events, I hope to further demonstrate that dancing was a significant aspect in the structuring and constituting of local community in Buota.

7. THE DANCING IS ON! CONFLICTING LOYALTIES AND EQUIVOCAL AUTHORITY

As I noted in the previous chapter, when I first arrived in Buota the dance groups of the village, overseen by their dance teachers (*taani katei*, sg. *tia katei*), were preparing for the two important dance events that were to take place around the turn of the millennium, Christmas and a Catholic ordination feast (Katabu; lit. *ka-tabu* ‘make sacred’). For the dance teachers – Tetaake, Nei Eritabeta, Nei Barauri and Teweia – the events were occasions for enhancing their reputation and status. In the village the dancing was the impetus for a range of activities and numerous discussions. What is more, there were heated disagreements in public about dance, which initially perplexed me. How could a single clap or hand position give rise to such zealous fights? In fact, as I was to learn, dancing (*mwaie*) and fighting (*un*) are generally associated with each other. Dance quite literally causes trouble, as one of the dancers put it (“*E kamangao te mwaie, ke*”; *kamangao*, ‘to cause disorder’).

Against this background, the next dance occasion four months later brought new surprises: the visit of Kabuna villagers to Buota in May and the dancing performed at the visit’s principal *bootaki* created far less, if any, excitement, and no overt conflicts, though these later developments were a spin-off from the events around the New Year. Finally, at the fourth major dance event during my fieldwork, intense feelings resurfaced in July when dancing was on again, this time crossing both village and dance group boundaries.

In examining these connections, differences and similarities, the purpose of this chapter is to explore why there were fights about dancing. The competitiveness of dance and other performance has already become apparent, and it has also often been noted that the I-Kiribati are avid competitors in all kinds of games and sports, unlike in economic or political affairs, for example, where competition is shunned (e.g. Sabatier 1977, 88–89; Lawson 1989, 356–357; Lundsgaarde 1966, 112). I will be arguing, though, that the arguments did not stem from any abstract cultural or psychological quality of competitiveness but from social relationships in dancing and the village community.¹⁶⁰ In order to do so I describe the sequence of dancing episodes and compare them in terms

¹⁶⁰ The zest for competition in performative arts (particularly dancing and singing), sports and many other activities is a common phenomenon in the Pacific. Typically the competitiveness is part and parcel of the organisation of a society into units of some kind, be they kin groups, territories (hamlets, villages, islands), or some other kind of category, sometimes even largely for the purpose of competition as with the division of the Gilbertese village in the Solomons. Competitive activities are pivotal to, for example, the ‘sides’ of Tokelauan villages described by Huntsman and Hooper (1996, 83–90) and the dual organisation of Ma’uke in the Cook Islands described by J. Siikala (1991, 72–73); Niko Besnier comments in passing that on the Tuvaluan atoll of Nukulaelae “[c]ompetition between rival groups has also been known to bring the community to the brink of civil war” (Besnier 1995, 33).

of their social configurations, appearances and resolutions. I finish by discussing authority, and community as the social whole.

When discussing the social configurations of performance I make use of the idea that speaking, both in the literal and metaphorical sense, is a significant form of social action. To cite a simple example, in Kiribati society differentiation and undifferentiation are also played out in speaking practices: in the *maneaba*, all mature men have the right to speak, but the initial order of speaking with the First Speaker (in Buota this is Taunrawa *iinaki*) and the Answerer (Kabubuarengana *iinaki*) reflects and reproduces the differentiated aspect of the *iinaki* organisation. By metaphorical I mean that ‘speaking’, ‘talking’ and ‘saying’ are also to be understood in a more general, metaphorical sense, extended to include purposeful as well as unintentional non-verbal communication practice. How the world is and how it should be are not only said but also done, implied, gestured and danced.

Attention to ‘speaking’ leads to questions of authority: what kind of speech and, particularly, by whom, is considered authoritative? Authority could be seen as constituted by the social relations in question (who is speaking to whom) as well as the form and content of what is being said. I have elsewhere (Autio 2008) analysed Kiribati dance performance in terms of its form and content as comparable to ritual speech, in which, according to John Du Bois (1986), self-evidence and authority depend on the relationship between the ritual speech form and the social constitution of the speech event (cf. Bloch 1974). In this chapter I mainly consider speaking and talking in general, not specific utterances, but I will employ Du Bois’ (1986, 323, *passim*) distinction between ‘prime speaker’ and ‘proximate speaker’. The starting point, however, will be local ideas of what it means when ‘people speak’: in other words, that talk within the community about dance performances determines their value, and that the singing accompaniment is a metaphor of this kind of talk.

In this chapter I consider it necessary to relate my own role in the proceedings for several reasons, one of which is transparency. Because I was a member of one of the competing dance groups – I was treated and had chosen to conduct myself accordingly – my account of what happened is clearly positioned. As a member of Tetaake’s group, I was identified with the team he led during a school event, even though this was in principle a separate activity from training his ordinary dance group. Secondly, while my experiences in practices and performances cannot claim to represent the personal experiences of I-Kiribati dancers, they do reflect salient principles of dancing, as well as its general importance locally. Thus my status as a Westerner and a guest, my incorporation into the community, and the way I was used in the competition between dance teacher make sense in the context of Kiribati dance.

Throughout November and December 1999, all four of the Buota dance groups were engaged in intensive training in order to outdance the others in the forthcoming dance events. As noted in the previous chapter, the first was to be part of the annual Christmas celebration, gathering representatives from six Anikai villages to perform dances in the Catholic meetinghouse in Tanaeang, and the second was the ordination of a local young man into the Catholic priesthood. Preceding the ritual and festivities of the ordination itself, the event was to be celebrated with three days of traditional dancing from the same six villages.

During this time, there were several dance-related activities going on. There was the almost nightly training, and the making of the skirts and adornments: the ‘things for dancing’ (*bwaai ni mwaie*). Whether weaving a bra from thin pandanus leaf strips, or making a wide collar by threading together tiny plastic beads, this work is both time and patience consuming. Perhaps most characteristic of this practice period was the endless talk about dancing. Not only between dances at the practices, but whenever ‘people of our dance’ met, talk soon turned to the various details of dance and dancing – from the positioning of hands to the places of dancers in the row (*un*) – for which my rudimentary language competence was not sufficient. The details were clearly significant but why? Furthermore, the pre-Christmas atmosphere was one not only of excitement but also of suspicion; the tension first broke out in public when the people of Buota gathered for one of the joint public ‘dress-rehearsals’ (*koroun*) after weeks of training in relative secrecy. A dancer’s first public appearance performing a dance is called *otinako*, ‘coming out’. Despite the two forthcoming events being Catholic, in practice they concerned almost the whole village¹⁶¹ – and the village as a whole. The *korouns* were held for the dancers to be seen (*a na nooraki*) to determine whether they danced well enough to represent the village at Christmas and Katabu.

THE COMING OUT: DRESS-REHEARSALS (*KOROUN*)

By definition, a *koroun* is a public occasion where the representatives of the different dancing groups ‘come out’. Dance practices can be held in any convenient location but *korouns* take place in a *maneaba*, where issues are made public, known for the community. The word *koroun* itself comes from *koro* (‘to cut’, ‘incise’, ‘finalise’, ‘finish’) and *un* (‘a row of dancers’, ‘anger’, ‘fight’, ‘ardour’). Previously, the ‘cutting’ – finalising the row of dancers – was more literal: according to Bwere Eritaia (personal

¹⁶¹ There were only four to five non-Catholic families in the village, and as pointed out in the previous chapter, there were dancers of other religious persuasions too.

communication 14.9.2000), traditionally, almost everyone practiced dance but only some would be chosen – in the *koro-un* – to represent each age cohort. The contemporary *koroun* is a time when the dance performance in its various aspects – the choreography (*kai*) and its implementation, the song (*kuna*), the clapping and singing (*uboubo, anene*), uniformity of the row (*booraoi te un*), adornments (*bwaai ni mwaie*) – can be seen and evaluated by the community in the *maneaba*. If the performance is not polished enough, a new *koroun* can be held after some more practice.

As a process, *korouns* are not unlike when a story (like that of Kourabi) is subject to public scrutiny in the *maneaba*. Dance is evaluated jointly and communally – more communally than stories in fact, since here women are present and actively involved – though as in all village matters, the Council of *unimwaane* tends to act as the representative and guardian of the community. There was no need to limit the number of dancers; the village elders and the community as a whole merely wanted to ensure that their dancers had practiced well and would not embarrass their home village in front of the other Tabiteuean villages. In some cases, however, representing the village would turn out to be problematic.

The second *koroun* anticipating the Christmas dances was typical. It took place on a Sunday ‘after the prayers’ (i.e., the church services). The scheduled time was extended; at noon some people were still practising at Tetaake’s house. Around 1 p.m. people went their separate ways to collect their skirts and adornments. On arrival at the Ireland *maneaba* around 2 p.m., there were some groups of four playing cards and children running about. By half past two the *unimwaane* had stopped playing canasta and enough



Photograph 11. In a *koroun*. The singing group, consisting of members of the village community, is watching a group of boys perform a sitting dance (a modern *bino*).

people had arrived for the occasion to begin. In the Ireland meetinghouse, the *iinaki* division of the village *maneaba* was generally followed and at least some had taken their places accordingly. To get started, people were summoned for singing to the southern end of the building.

The general spatial layout of people in these performances differed from that in an actual performance. With the exception of one sitting dance (*bino*), the singers – most of the villagers – sat in a group at the southern end of the *maneaba*, the dancers forming a row in the middle of the meetinghouse facing south (and the singers). Usually the singers are grouped behind the dancers, but on this occasion it was important that the dancers faced the singers, in order to be better seen. The only dance to be performed in the usual formation was a traditional *bino*¹⁶² performed by two adult women. Accompanying a sitting dance, the singer-clappers sit lined up behind, and facing the same direction as, the dancers. Sitting dances performed by children were subject to the same kind scrutiny from the front as the standing dances.

Roniti*, a man in his late twenties, acted as the conductor (*bira*), whose appellation comes from his use of a whistle. The lead singer was Baitongo* who, aside from being a song composer, had a very agreeable voice. The lead singer begins the song and is joined by others on the second line. One of the elders kept track of the dances, calling out the name of the next song, in an order apparently agreed upon in an earlier discussion of the Village Council.

The occasion still had a somewhat unfinished, informal air about it. Not all dancers had the full regalia; two teenage girls made some mistakes in their dance, cut it short, and one ran out of the *maneaba*, giggling in embarrassment. As one dance was about to begin Roniti blew his whistle and called “ready-steady-go” (*maua nako tia na-ko e!*), which is supposed to be followed by four claps, in a pattern of three – rest – one:



This time the claps, however, were out of time, and resulted in an uncertain patter of sound. Everyone burst out laughing. “The rain fell”, commented some, amused

¹⁶² In my experience, *bino* can refer to any dance which is performed in a sitting position, but there is also a ‘proper’ *bino*, which has a prescribed musical structure and is one of the oldest and most traditional dance forms, even if many *binos* have parts that have been composed in a modern style of music. Even without knowledge of the musical structures and styles, a proper *bino* can be distinguished because it begins differently from most of the standing dances and modern *binos*: instead of a “ready-steady-go” phrase (described shortly), it begins with someone calling out a cue (“*akeia*” or “*akekeia*”) followed by a call “*au bino*” (‘my *bino*’). See Lawson 1989, 42, 50–52.

(At2/121299/Buota, TabNorth). The conductor summoned singers anew with “*na-ko e!*”, this time successfully. Baitongo then began and was joined by others.

One of the purposes of the village *korouns* was very practical. Everyone needed to know all the songs performed by the village; the lyrics, tune as well as clap patterns, which are an integral part of the composition. In fact, at the Christmas and Katabu dances, Buota would join forces with two other villages in accompanying the dancers. There was also a separate occasion when people from the other villages in this group (*makoro*) came to Buota in order to practice the songs together. The *korouns*, however, were an intra-village affair; the dancers would still be representing Buota.

Yet in addition, *korouns* raised, and sometimes enabled the expression of, more profound concerns. The frequently amicable atmosphere of a joint practice could sometimes hide underlying tensions or plainly evaporate. A couple of times a heated argument developed in a *koroun* between, as I later gathered, representatives of different dance groups. Some of the older men and women shouted angrily at each other, in what clearly were serious disputes. I only partly understood what was being argued about – this being early in my fieldwork and my language skills limited – so I inquired about the topics afterwards. I was told that one argument had been about the number of claps at a particular point in one of the songs; another concerned the position of hands in that song. Even when the reasons for the debates were explained to me, I found them hard to believe at first. There was bound to be something more in it than I could understand and then people were willing to reveal to me. While this may well have been so, my thoughts were only indicative of my Western commonsense perception of dancing as an innocuous pastime: dance, I thought, could not be that significant as such; there simply had to be something else behind it.

Arguments over details, however, were right at the heart of matters. Firstly, there being more than one way of performing a dance was problematic in itself. Secondly, these seemingly minuscule differences, a clap here, a tilt of the hand there, became signifiers of dance group identity. The *booraoi*ness, or uniformity and unison of the row of dancers, is an important criterion in the aesthetic evaluation of dancing. This criterion was especially crucial in this instance, where the dancers were to represent their village community. As became apparent in Chapter 3, *booraoi* is a key value in the village and all the more so now that village was to appear in front of the whole island, and at Katabu, in front of a number of off-island, possibly even overseas guests. The village community, in the form of their representative body of *unimwaane*, wanted their representation to be even and unified; any disparity in the tilt of the hands would spoil that.

Fulfilling the ideal was complicated because there were three dances with students from different teachers, though not all the dances were controversial. The contentious dances were those three in which representatives of different dance groups danced

together. In the *korouns* it became apparent, that while the choreography (*kai*; the series of dance movements) was supposed to be the same for everyone in each of the three dances, the teachers had taught the dance in slightly dissimilar ways. One clap more or less is in fact quite significant since the clapped rhythm defines the timing as well as the limits of the movements (see fn. 124; Autio 2008, 190). The divergence in the pose of the hand may result from a variant interpretation of a *kai*, which can be influenced by the tradition of the particular school a *tia katei* belongs to. In general, Tetaake was teaching according to *kainimeang*, Nei Eritabeta and Nei Barauri according to *kaimatoa*. Certain positions of hands typical of *kainimeang* are not allowed in *kaimatoa*. Thus, for example, whether the hand is held with the palm flat and facing up, or tilted slightly sideways, can be a critical marker of group identity, not to be surrendered easily. In this case too, differences came to signify the competing groups, in addition to each side considering its way correct. The interests of the dance groups and the *taani katei* were directly opposite to those of the village community: they wanted to distinguish themselves from the others. And even if they in principle had endorsed the community ideal of *booraoi*, none of the teachers was willing to submit to the others' authority. In this way the fights in the meetinghouse were indeed about that particular hand alignment in that particular part of that particular dance.

No wonder then that before each performance of one of the controversial dances, one of the *unimwaane* urged the dancers to "make proper its [the dance's] *booraoi* and its vessel [i.e., formation of the dancers]" ("*kaoina booraoina ma ni baona*") (At3A/121299/Buota, TabNorth/M-60). That time, indeed, no major disagreements developed, but at the last *koroun* before Christmas there were again lengthy and fervent arguments, and angry words shouted between protagonists. Apparently some kind of temporary consensus, but no final solution, was reached. Another incident, whose significance I was only to grasp later, also took place in the last *koroun*. In one of the dances containing students of two teachers, the dancers moved forward – ostensibly according to the steps of the choreography. They moved forward with such verve that they ended up amongst the singers, who had to give way.

ROUND ONE: CHRISTMAS DANCES

The first dance feast proper took place between Christmas and New Year. The location was Euankerio, the Catholic meetinghouse in the village of Tanaeang, north of Buota. Tanaeang is the centre of the Catholic faith in Tabiteuea (see Luomala 1982 for the history), and Euankerio is the *maneaba* for all Catholics in Tabiteuea North. At the turn of the year, Euankerio was the scene of various church events related to Christmas, New

Year and the upcoming ordination. In typical Kiribati fashion, most of the officials and committee members of the Tabiteuea North Catholic Church from other villages were living in the meetinghouse for this whole period.

The two-day event began the day after Boxing Day with truckloads of dancers and spectators arriving in Tanaeang from other villages. There were some fifty dances altogether, all performed twice, requiring almost six hours of dancing on both days, one dance after the other. The six villages participating in the *mwaie* had been divided into two sections (*makoro*), north and south, for the purposes of the event. Like the temporary groupings of houses within Buota village, the division was geographical, following the order of the villages along the road: Eita, Terikiai and Buota comprised the southern *makoro* and Tanaeang, Tekaman and Tekabwibwi the northern one.

Dancing was arranged so that first each village from the southern half presented one dance at a time. Within the southern *makoro* at least, a geographical order was followed in this too: dancers from Eita began, as it was the southernmost, then Terikiai and Buota last. After that the floor was handed over to the northern villages, who presented their three dances, and then returned to to the south. While in most dances the dancers were from a single village, in each group the three villages joined forces in singing and clapping. The southern group danced at the southern end of the *maneaba* facing north, the northern at the northern end, facing south.

In Kiribati dancing, the arrangement of the dancers and the accompanying singers varies according to dance type (see Lawson 1989, 33-35), but in all dances the singers are an integral and necessary part of the performance. In some dances the members of the accompaniment also perform choreographed movements, which is why it would be more accurate to talk about the dancers as “principal dancers” (as Lawson Burke does), in order to distinguish them from the accompanists. In most dances the distinction was clear enough, however.¹⁶³ Generally speaking, singers sit or stand behind the dancers, who form a row. In the sitting dance, *bino*, the singers form queues behind the dancers; in some the singing group is shaped like a horseshoe. A common formation in standing dances is where the singers form a round group behind the dancers, some having their backs to the dancers. This shape is used in dance types called in everyday speech *kateitei*

¹⁶³ The distinction was particularly clear in these ‘village type’ dances, like those during Christmas and the ordination, when the accompanying group consists of potentially all villagers, who are not necessarily members of any dance group and perhaps have only practiced in a *koroun*, if at all. When all the accompanists belong to the same performance group, which has trained together, as in the competition to be described later in this chapter, the situation is a little different. Similarly, in ‘village dancing’ I did not see any dancers positioned at the sides of the dance row (*un*) (dancers called *moanikaura*) or other niceties described by Lawson 1989, 383–385. In the formal competition at Teabike College, to be described below, more attention was paid to the roles of lead singers and other details.

and *iobuki*, which were the most popular kinds in Tabiteuea North.¹⁶⁴ In a dance performance called *kamei* (when the principal dancers are men) or *kabuti* (when the principal dancers are women), the singers stand in radial rows behind the dancers and have a choreography of their own involving clapping, stomping, and body percussion. In Tabiteuea North only the villages of Eita and Tauma were skilled at this type.

During the Christmas event, the guests of honour (*iruwa*) were sitting in an unusual place, in a crosswise (east–west) row in the middle of the *maneaba*. This was so that they could better watch the dances. When dancers from the southern makoro were performing, the guests sat facing south; when the northern side was due to perform, they turned to face north.

Common to practically all dances is an appearance of extreme control and restraint. Movements are angular shifts from one position to another, which women especially may perform with grace. Singing in most songs starts slowly and then tempo accelerates, sound level rises, enthusiasm and excitement grow on each repetition – there is a multilevel pattern of reiterations, specific to each song, of the strophes of the song (*kuna*) and the corresponding dance movements (*kai*), with the whole song usually repeated 2–4 times (Autio 2008, 191–192).

The first day of Christmas dances by Buota performers went without incident. I did experience the effect of missing claps, as the accompanists forgot that there should have been three claps in between the three reiterations of the song (*kuna*). As a result, I mixed up my choreography (*kai*). I managed to explain the claps to the conductor before the second performance, but I was embarrassed. Later I was assured that it had not been my fault but the accompanists', and that I had not brought shame on our *tia katei* because of that.

Except for me, all performers from Buota on the first day were children. There was a tendency to have the youngest children start the dances and then proceed in rough age order (though this was never strictly so). Dancers of the same *un* typically belong to the same age cohort, for the row to look even. Nevertheless, it is the custom to have guests dance (*kamwaiea iruwa*) first. I was also their Westerner (*I-Matang*¹⁶⁵) whom they were somewhat showing off. Furthermore, were I to appear somewhere in the midst of my own age group, with my limited experience I would compare unfavourably with the native dancers. So I was the first to dance from Buota. When it became obvious that not

¹⁶⁴ 70% out of the ca 180 dances I watched during fieldwork were of this kind. I want to emphasise that these terms are not very technical and only describe certain aspects of the performance. Technically different types of dances are distinguished by the musical structure, pitch repertoire, the presence of Western harmonies etc. See Lawson 1989, 37–52.

¹⁶⁵ The word *I-matang* refers exclusively to someone with a white skin. Originally, it meant 'person from the land of Matang', a mythical land of fair-skinned gods and ancestors, somewhere in the west.

all dancers would have time to perform that day, it was decided that dances be continued the next day.

The second day was more serious, with more adults dancing, and emotions ran higher. Those dances where there were students of more than one teacher were in the programme. Then, after one such dance, a quarrel broke out. One of the dancers and a member of the opposing group yelled at each other, insults were thrown about and the dancer ended up in tears. The quarrel was taken seriously: it was discussed in (and probably had given occasion to) a meeting of the Village Council (*boowin unimwaane*) on December 31.

Before that, however, directly following the dancing, our dance group held a small feast (*bootaki*) to celebrate the end of the Christmas *mwaie*, which all in all had gone well. “We’ll get our watchamacallit” (*ti na karekea ara mena*), Tetaake said, meaning that we would put together a little something in terms of food and maybe a video or two. In addition, our people were looking forward to a performance of *tamure*, Polynesian dancing, which had been promised by one of the women. That same day all households were required to supply food for a *bootaki* that was held in Atanikarawa *maneaba* for the island’s football team, so general cooking was going on at Tetaake’s house. In addition, ‘people of our dance’ from other households brought food with them. Videos posed a problem, since fuel had run out virtually across the whole island and petrol was needed for the generator in order to power the fluorescent lamp and the video and stereo equipment. Tetaake’s younger daughter and I took bicycles and headed north to see if we could find some petrol anyway. There was no one home at the house of the first retailer on the way, and the second fuel vendor had no petrol left. At the third place we stopped, we were first told they were out of fuel too, but after hearing where we came from, we got our canister filled. Both the *tamure* performance, for which music came from a tape, and an all-nighter of videos were thus secured.

The day of New Year’s Eve, when the world reached by mass media was focussed on the approaching millennium, the topic of the day in Buota was – again – dancing. Nobody talked about the end of an era, made doom-day prophecies or worried about the Y2K; the dispute, the *boowi* and other dancing-related matters were of much more interest. Not that the millennium would have gone entirely without notice, as a party for ‘casting out the year’ was arranged in a house opposite Atanikarawa, by one of Tetaake’s neighbours. The meal was not served until midnight, but otherwise it was a typical *bootaki*. A pig had been slaughtered earlier that day, and those not cooking passed the time playing cards or watching videos, which had been borrowed from next door. The canasta was suspended some minutes before midnight and the abundant bowls of swamp taro (*bwabwai*), rice, pork, fish, Ox & Palm ground beef with noodles and other dishes were brought in. Taukai was asked to say grace, and eating commenced. The

elders present then noticed that Tetaake was not there, and sent someone to invite him. Alas, he could not join the gathering, because there was dance training going on at his house.

ROUND TWO: DANCING AT THE ORDINATION FEAST

The early part of the year climaxed in the Katabu (ordination) dances. It was expected that there would be even more dancing than at Christmas, and the event had finally been scheduled to begin on Wednesday so that there would be three days for dancing before the ordination on Saturday. Each day there was action from early morning until late at night. The days began and ended with practising, except the final day, which ended in an aftermath involving the exhausted but still excited dancers.

Day One of the *mwaie* arranged in connection with the Katabu began early, as any day of a dancing event would. It is light about six a clock in the morning and at 6.30 I could already hear clapping from Tetaake's house nearby. A woman in her mid-twenties from a neighbouring village had come to practice, taking her five-year-old son with her. She was still practising when I went to the house a little later. Some other students had also arrived. Each group or individual danced through their dance in turn, others helped Tetaake in singing and clapping.

I practised, too. The village elders had decided that I would be the first dancer from our village, so I was to dance on this first day. Tetaake wondered if I would be able to learn an introductory sequence of movements (*katauraoi*; 'make ready', 'prepare'): a series of movements conducted during the four commencing claps of a dance. I practised those, and then also the additional movements for ending a dance, *motika*. I grasped them reasonably well, but, said Tetaake, I should not perform them if I was not sure I could do them correctly. If one makes mistakes, people will laugh, which is bad. Before I returned to our house to prepare myself, Tetaake engraved on me the seriousness of this. "Don't you make mistakes!" he said. If people were to laugh at me, he would be ashamed (*maamaa*). It is a bad thing if people laugh, he repeated, people will think that he is a bad teacher. When students dance, it is the teacher's honour which is won or lost.

Nei Aoniba, assistant teacher and Tetaake's wife, ordered that a group of teenagers were not to go and watch the dances but stay behind and practice. Their turn to dance would not be until the following day, so they continued training in the all but empty village. Nei Aoniba also advised me to come back early to practice another dance, which they wanted me to perform with my host sisters-in-law and which I had not quite mastered.

Transportation (*te bao*) was provided for the villagers by the Catholic community. It had been said that *te bao* would leave from the southernmost house of the village at 7 a.m. It was already around eight o'clock by then and I expected the car to come any time, so I had thought of going by bike. However, the mother of my host family thought it would be better to go in the vehicle, as there was no-one to bicycle with me. I agreed, and in fact I had enough time to take a wash and have breakfast before the pick-up truck arrived at our house.

"The transportation came!" someone announced. There was a short moment of fuss. The four children, aged between three and eight, were still in the middle of getting into their better clothes. "Hurry yourselves!" Dancing adornments, the heavy dancing skirt and other necessary items were hurriedly put together and we rushed to the vehicle, which was waiting on the road; not even halfway through the village, the back of the pick-up truck was already getting full.

We climbed to the back and at first I found a place to sit in the middle. As the truck proceeded through the village and more people got on board at almost every house, I soon had to stand. To fit in as many as possible, only a few people sat down on the floor; among them small children and an old lady, *unaine*, wearing a dancer's head decoration. Most younger people were sitting on the sides and the floor was soon filled with cardboard boxes, buckets with the faded text "Dripping 20 kg" on the side – with all likelihood containing the 'things for dancing' – rice sacks put to new use, bags, tea pots, food. One big coconut leaf basket contained several blackened dancing skirts. At almost every stop people emerged from their houses, carrying bags, buckets and babies with older children running ahead, though sometimes people would call out from a house to those in the car that they would bicycle up later. "It goes!" those in the back would inform the driver, who then drove on.

Eventually, people waiting for transportation had to be told that the truck was full and would be making another trip. Many of those in the vehicle were not going to dance themselves, nor even had anyone from their house dancing; they were coming to watch. I was standing in the back with Nei Ariki*, a 22-year-old mother of three who belonged to our dancing group. We were holding on to the shoulders of those sitting on the sides. The truck drove slowly, but the coral road was bumpy enough for it to be difficult to maintain balance.

As at Christmas, dancing took place in Euankerio in Tanaeang. It is the largest meetinghouse built from 'things of the Westerners' (*bwaai n I-Matang*) in the whole of Kiribati: an estimated 42 metres in length and 39 in width. It has a cement floor, and wooden posts support a tin roof. Most of the functionaries of the Tabiteuea North Catholic Church had now been living in the meetinghouse for some weeks; from the outside the *maneaba* also looked inhabited. The officials and their families had brought

their sleeping mats and cupboards (*kabate*) for storing food, clothes were hanging on the wire fence and some people were cooking on fires just outside it.

People got out of the truck by the meetinghouse. Bags, pots and buckets were handed down to those already standing on the ground, children jumped out and the smaller ones were lifted down. Most people headed for the eastern side of the *maneaba*, where Buota's sitting places (*iinaki*) were. One of my host brothers was living in Tanaeang, close to the *maneaba*, however, so I first followed the members of my host family to his home. The dancing would not begin for a while yet.

A little later I went to the *maneaba*. People had spread pandanus mats and plastic covers on the floor to sit on and sat waiting. Children were running around, playing, and someone came to inform us that children needed to be told that going into the centre of meetinghouse was forbidden (*'e tabuaki te nako nuuka*). Around midday Ioteba*, one of the Catholic Church committee members from Buota walked around with a megaphone, asking *unimwaane* to move forward to sit by the posts, as the honoured guests (*iruwa*) would soon arrive. Eventually guests came, and sat on pandanus mats laid out for them on the floor by the western row of posts. Everything was ready for the dancing to begin.

The participating villages were divided into the same two groups as at Christmas. The southern *makoro* was to begin the event, but unlike at Christmas, Eita did not go first. In fact, it had been decided that I, even though dancing from Buota, would begin the whole event. Eita was next and then Terikiai, and this order was followed throughout the day; on subsequent days the order was not so strictly adhered to. That first day, dancing began at 12.30. I did perform the opening movements (*katauraoi*) and the concluding sequence (*motika*), but when I made the opening movements, people laughed. I was frightened, and immediately after my performance asked others if I had made the dreaded mistake. I had not, I was told; people had laughed because an I-Matang had done something that not all I-Kiribati can do and they were ashamed.

Soon after the dancing had started, the guests of honour (*iruwa*) were brought some food. Unlike in a typical formal feast, the meal was served and eating commenced without further ado, while the dances went on uninterrupted. Had there been fewer dances, the programme would probably have been interrupted for the meal, but here dancing was the priority. The ordinarily cherished *iruwa*, while served as was their due, faded into the background.

"The powder, the powder, the sweet-smelling!" Before each dance, the dancer(s) stood in front of the singers, waiting for the singers to gather together and maybe warm up with an additional, not-so-serious song. During this time, a couple of the guests got up with a bottle of talcum powder or a spray deodorant or both, and went to 'powder' the dancers. They sprinkled talcum powder on the dancers' necks, their bare feet, sometimes dusted some on their cheeks; deodorant or occasionally perfume was sprayed on their

backs or chests. After each dance, usually the M.C. called out, “applaud, applaud”, and a few people would clap their hands lazily a couple of times, only the *iruwa* were really paying attention and diligently applauding. Most people were already waiting for the next dance; the quality of a performance is not measured by applause but in numerous discussions taking place afterwards.

It was hot, as ever, the equatorial sun shining outside, heating the corrugated iron roof. Each dance took several minutes and was repeated twice, and in a close-up, one would have seen drips of sweat on dancers’ foreheads and trickling down their cheeks. I at least felt my clothes sticking to my skin. It was noisy. Sounds echoed in the space, and as the afternoon went on, it all seemed to grow louder: deafening, if one paused to actually listen. It was not just the singing and clapping. Besides dressing up and adorning the next dancers, people on the sidelines of the *maneaba* were doing other things: feeding or disciplining children, taking a nap, talking, laughing. Sometimes adult singers seemed to lose interest once the turn of their own *makoro* was over: withdrawing to rest, doing something else or chatting about their own business. Yet there were always people watching the dancing and, without fail, a bunch of children. When a dance started, they rushed to watch, ending up sitting almost ‘in the middle’, past the row of posts. Every now and then one of the adults would notice this and try to instil some order into the horde. “Move back!” he would order, whisking a palm frond amidst the kids. To no avail in the long run. Little by little the children would creep back, to watch from as close as possible until someone else came to drive them away.

In between the actual dances, the song leader would start an intermediate song (not an actual dance song), in which others soon joined. Occasionally, too, elderly women (*unaine*) or men (*unimwaane*) got up to dance to these songs. Typically, they swung their hips, twisting their arms and wrists – some of the movements rather explicitly sexual (see also Brewis 1996, 10) – performing these gyrations, for example, to the chorus “*areruuaia, areruuaia*,” (the Kiribati rendering of hallelujah). Invariably, these dances with their sexual innuendo provoked a roar of laughter among the onlookers.

An unscheduled but not unexpected phenomenon at a dance occasion is the heightened state of emotion or ‘spirit’, which can affect a Kiribati dancer, singer or someone watching a performance. This is described either by saying of the person affected that “his/her insides/heart/innermost came” (*e roko nanona*) or by commenting that “its wind/spirit/ardour came”, referring to the dance or dancing (*e roko angina*). The ‘spirit of dance’, or one’s own inner essence manifests itself in cries of joy, tears, trembling or even fainting. Control is one of the important ideas associated with ‘the coming of the innermost’. It is desirable to receive ‘the inside’ or the ‘ardour’, because it makes dancing or singing exciting to watch and the performer attractive, but it should remain under control. In other words, the performance should be executed

correctly despite the trembling and crying. Acceptable ways of releasing tension are smiling, tears, trembling, letting out a scream; and for a singer, performing in a louder voice or dancing.¹⁶⁶

I sat cross-legged on the cement floor, amidst the singers for the southern group, singing along. As the song went on it accelerated, voices rose, my hands were tender from vigorous clapping. Unabashedly, I felt the same thrilling, mind captivating, contagious excitement already reported by early visitors, such as Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife (Stevenson 2004 [1908]) or Father Ernest Sabatier (1977 [1939], 90–91), accounting for their own emotional experiences while watching dance (see Lawson 1989, 407–412 for other descriptions). Singers seemed to concentrate entirely on singing and not pay attention to the dancers, though in some incomprehensible way some were also able to keep a keen eye on the dancers, so as to spot any mistakes or evaluate proceedings in general. People were clearly having fun; I read joy and exhilaration on their faces. They were not performing for the *iruwa*; sitting in the midst of the excitement, the guests seemed irrelevant.

Again, in the over 20 dances danced that first day, most of the dancers were children. In the dance which the 25-year-old woman had practised at Tetaake's house that morning, there were five or six women in their twenties. The arms of two dancers, the woman from our group and one other, were trembling as 'their innermost' or 'the wind of dancing' arrived, but with concentration and strength, they executed the movements correctly throughout the dance. When three girls between 10-12 years of age from our village started dancing, the grandmother of two of them let out a scream. She cried, and towards the end of the dance she stood up and started dancing. She knew the dance exactly, but her body and arms were swaying, as if moved by a forceful emotional power, which she nevertheless directed.

Later in the afternoon I knew I should be heading back to train for the other dance, but I reckoned I could stay on to watch most of the dances. My heading home early to practice, without waiting for the transport, was a bit of a problem for my hosts who, concerned with my safety, were reluctant to let me go. A common by-product of big

¹⁶⁶ Mary Lawson has an extensive discussion on *angina*. Lawson (1989, 426) describes the ideal that "dancers must keep both their movements and their emotions within strict boundaries, and yet to manage to distinguish themselves from others in the line", remaining at the height of emotion without falling into trance (485). According to Lawson (1989, 486), "Performance practice and tradition provide culturally acceptable ways to release this tension slightly in order to avoid this". I have argued elsewhere (Autio 2004) that functionalistic interpretations like this are based on a Western folk model of emotions. While the Kiribati concept of *nano* has similarities with Western notions, particularly regarding its control, it has several meanings which cannot be reduced to 'emotion', including 'thought', 'opinion', 'meaning', 'intention', 'desire' and 'deep', making the issue much more complex.

feasts is some drinking of the notorious home-brew (*iiti*¹⁶⁷) and rowdy behaviour outside the *maneaba* (inside the *maneaba* drinking and drunkenness are strictly forbidden) or in the woods, and this is considered perhaps the main danger a woman (particularly a foreigner and a guest) may face when travelling unaccompanied. On the other hand I started to feel pressured, with Nei Aoniba expecting me to attend the training, and finally I got my host brother to cycle home with me. After I had left, there had been a few more dances from the northern group, the event ending around five p.m., which left everybody plenty of time to get home before dark.

In the evening the dancers from Tetaake's groups returned to their 'trunk' (*boto*) to recount the events of the day's dance. As Tetaake was over seventy and not too well, he hardly ever went to watch the dances. The younger assistant teachers would go and be his eyes and ears. I too was taking on the habit of visiting Tetaake in the evening, and Tetaake would ask me how my dance had been. I would mutter something, but in fact, by that time Tetaake would normally have heard the news about what 'people thought' of my dance, which he then told me. The recounting, discussion, and speculation about the dances would go on well into the night and for days afterwards. This time, practising also went on, for there was another, and perhaps even a third day of dancing coming up. The other adults had not performed yet, and I was to practice the sitting dance (*bino*), which was longer and more difficult than the standing dance (*kateitei*) I had performed earlier. Sounds of singing and clapping again carried out into the night: there was more work to be done.

On the morning of the second day of Katabu dances, training commenced at Tetaake's at six a.m. The previous night I had failed miserably in the *bino* and it had been decided that I would not dance together with my host sisters-in-law. Despite that decision, I practised with them just to learn the dance. To my surprise, Tetaake decided I was doing well enough and that my 'hour of coming out' had arrived after all: I was to dance the *bino* as well. From Buota's perspective, the second day of the dances, like the first, passed without much of note occurring. After the second day, a few people from our group gathered once more at Tetaake's house to practice after the lamp had been lit.

That evening, one of the village elders (*unimwaane*) came around to deliver a message from the Village Council. The elders asked the dancers not to perform concluding movements (*motika*) which included taking steps forward. Ending movements done while standing were acceptable. They hoped, said the messenger, that the dancers would be *booraoi*. If somebody did not accede to the request, she would be fined. After the

¹⁶⁷ This alcoholic drink is made from sugar and yeast (*iiti*) and has a fermentation time of some hours only.

messenger left, our *tia katei* stated, “Obedience is good,” in effect forbidding his dancers to break the rule.

With this instruction, which concerned the dances in which students of various teachers were participating, the village elders wanted to ensure that dancing would be *booraoi*. *Motikas* in which the dancer moves forward, can cause the row of dancers (*un*) not to finish evenly (*booraoi*). The *unimwaane* had not been happy with the *booraoiness* or the lack thereof in the problematic dances, which reflected badly on the village.

The last day of the Katabu dances had barely dawned when the first people started practising at Tetaake’s house. The previous night’s advice about concluding sequences (*motika*) was repeated: members of our dance group were to obey the request of the *unimwaane*. Yet despite that, some time was dedicated to practicing the forward movement and forward-moving *motika*, which was confusing and led me to conclude that I had misunderstood something. We were still busy with all this at Tetaake’s house when we noticed the familiar pick-up truck on the road, and hurriedly left.

In Tanaeang, the day followed the same pattern of three as before. Buota, however, had prepared more dances than the other villages in the southern *makoro*, so especially on this last day *kain* Buota were overrepresented. Seven out of eleven dances from the south were from Buota.

All dancers from Buota were adults. The situation was emotionally loaded from the beginning. Many if not most dancers in Buotan dances experienced ‘the coming of their innermost’, or the ‘spirit/wind of dancing’. Nei Ruuta* explained afterwards: “for me the spirit [of dancing] only arrives when I compete in dancing” (*kaunikai* lit. *ka-un-i-kai* ‘cause fight in dance’). At one point the spirit/wind came with force to a young man in the singing group. He shouted, cried and pounded the cement floor with his hand. One of the older men had to take him into his arms until he calmed down, sobbing violently.

In the third dance, which included dancers from two groups, the conflict burst out into the open. Despite the *unimwaanes*’ request, one of the dancers started moving forward in a way not prescribed in the choreography. First one and soon most of the other dancers followed suit, incited into ardent competition as to who would reach the furthest. It is commonplace for the choir to grow louder and more animated as the song and dance progress, and this time the singing crowd seemed louder and more excited than ever. The husband of one of the dancers stood up and shouted, “Rush forward!” A couple of young men stood up to dance, and generally the atmosphere was intense and exhilarated. At the end of each repetition of the song the dancers performed the end movements and moved forward with them as much as possible, some of them almost reaching the other end of this sizeable meetinghouse.

I was perplexed, thinking now that I had completely misunderstood the prohibition in the first place. It turned out, however, that I had understood the ruling of the elders

correctly. There had been the rule, but one of the women had broken it. She would later be fined by the Village Council. As for the others who had followed her, there were no sanctions; their actions were considered acceptable self-defence. It was understood that the other dancers had no choice once the door had been opened. It only took one person to break the rule, and the situation was open for competition, in which everyone had to take part lest they be defeated. The others had the right to defend their honour, and committed no offence in doing so. Our *tia katei* had seen to it that his dancers knew the methods of advancing. Even if they were not intending to use them themselves, they would have to be able to defend themselves and the reputation of their group; hence the practice despite explicit prohibition. And in any case the evenness (*booraoi*) of the dance row (*un*) had already been lost with the first person disobeying the order.

There was a final *bootaki* after the Katabu dancing as well, this time more festive. Fresh *iinai* mats were woven the day before, and prestigious food was prepared. Tetaake's friend from Tekaman village brought half a shark. There was also eel (*rabono*), which is considered a delicacy, caught by my host brother-in-law, and a cake which I had baked with a new recipe since we could not find any unhatched eggs. We unsuccessfully tried to hunt down kerosene for the lamps, but someone did have petrol, and the lighting and videos were thus taken care of. After a night was spent watching videos, there was breakfast, and someone noted how fortunate that it was Sunday and no work; the *bootaki* could therefore be continued after church services. One of the young men promised to secure money for some more petrol, and the party went on from the afternoon until midnight. The important dance event got a closing worthy of its excitement.

RESPIRE: ENJOYABLE DANCING AT THE VILLAGE FEAST

Without any apparent resolution, the waves of emotion gradually subsided, and village life returned to normal. I did continue collecting lyrics of the dance songs performed at the events, and asked Tetaake to explain them to me, but otherwise dancing was no longer a major concern. General discourse seemed to drift to other things. I then went away for several weeks and returned to the village in the beginning of April, towards the end of the pandanus harvest, which had preoccupied people meanwhile. People were happy to tell me that there would again be dancing in a few months, when the yearly meeting of Buota and Kabuna villages would take place. Not so much through a research focus but by having danced two songs, I had established a reputation as being very interested in dancing. The Kabuna-*bootaki* included dancing and was therefore seen as

an important event in which I should participate. From the talk I assumed that another major dance event was to be expected, but the situation was in fact quite different.

While the visit of Kabuna villagers included the general meeting as well as the common *bootaki* feast formalities, the main content of the festivities would be dancing, which was expected from both villages. Dancing was mandatory, and a failure to present performances resulted in a village being fined. The previous year there had been no dancing from Buota, but it was decided in this year's general assembly that the fine of AU\$50 would be reduced to AU\$30 because Buota had had a good excuse: everyone had been busy building a new health clinic.

In the planning meeting for the Kabuna-*bootaki* at the end of April, setting the date for a joint dance practice was on the agenda right after discussion about the new *iinai*. After some deliberation it was decided that the dance practice would be held one week prior to the event itself in the village meetinghouse. Significantly, these joint practices were in the main referred to as *rei*, 'practice', rather than *koroun*, which is a more competitive concept and, it seemed, more emotionally laden.

Then began a discussion about the dances/songs which were to be performed. Teiraoi*, a retired teacher, had a written list of the dances which had been performed at the Katabu. The elders started to go through the list song by song, someone reading out loud the titles of songs. The others replied "one", "one", "two", "one", (in the numerals used for counting living beings); I realised they were listing the number of instructors involved in each song. In this way they singled out the songs in which there had been students of more than one teacher: three out of thirteen songs.

This was because the *unimwaane* had decided that on this occasion each dance could only include students of a single teacher. The reason for this decision also became apparent in this meeting: at the previous dance events at Christmas and Katabu, the performances including students of more than one teacher had not been *booraoi*, uniform and harmonious.

Next, the *unimwaane* listed the dancers in each of the three controversial songs and recalled by whom each dancer was taught. Teiraoi wrote all this down. It was then noted that some dancers who had performed these dances were now in Tarawa and therefore would not be performing. In this way the *unimwaane* could see whose students were in the majority in each song. Roughly on the basis of this, they allocated one dance to each of the competing instructors. Students of other instructors performing in these songs would have to switch to some other dance.

The meeting was very business-as-usual; the dance issue produced no heated feelings, which may initially have obscured for me some of its significance, even as I understood the connection to the earlier conflicts. Slowly the consequences of this decision started to dawn on me. All along I had been expecting the same intensity as before Christmas:

dance practices night after night, talk, preparations, but days just went by with nothing happening. As the Kabuna feast drew closer, no-one came to practice to Tetaake's house, people hardly talked about the upcoming event, and there was none of that air of excitement and anticipation there had been before the dancing events some months before. I kept asking Tetaake: "How about us? When do we begin practicing?" He might suggest the following day, or before the dance anyway; or say that the dancers were good and did not need much practice.

Just before the joint practice, however, someone did come around with news. She had seen, while driving past on a bicycle, a competing group practicing and modifying a dance (*karini-kai*). Even in this, I thought, people only showed mild interest. When I asked whether the opponents 'in the north' had started practice – which I thought would have generated discussion – they merely replied that that no one had heard. In general, people seemed most interested in my dancing, assuming the event to be significant for me as a dancer. Retrospectively, it is possible to see how by way of contrast, the apparent lack of commotion before this event made the time before Christmas and Katabu stand out even more clearly as very intensive. However, under the controlled surface, people were far from indifferent.

Beforehand it seemed that not many people would even be dancing: one would not because she could not dance her old dance due to the *unimwaane*'s decision; another's dancing mate had gone to Tarawa, someone was pregnant; some simply said they were tired of dancing. Being tired of dancing may in some cases have contained an additional dimension. On one occasion, an *unaine* suspected that not many would be dancing, because "they are tired" of the fighting about *mwaie*, which had led to some serious allegations around New Year. Though not explicitly stated, it generally seemed that the reluctance to take part in this upcoming *mwaie* was mostly a reluctance to be involved in conflicts.

The joint practices were held in the village meetinghouse, Atanikarawa, and not Ireland, which more clearly made this a village affair, though the event itself proceeded much the same way as the *korouns* in December. People gathered in the *maneaba* slowly; someone was complaining how people should be fined for coming late. Then there were calls, "*keerake, keerake!*" ('move up', 'move closer') and some discussion about the order of moving to the northern end of the meetinghouse, where the singing group was to sit. The *unimwaane* of the first *iinaki* to speak, Taunrawa, went first, and then the *unimwaane* of Kabubuarengana, the first replier, second, and other men followed them. Women took their seats after the men. One of the *unimwaane* had the list of the previously danced songs on paper, and the old men proceeded in order, asking for each song, whether there were dancers. In addition to me, only a couple of children and adults had planned to dance. However, when the dancer(s) for a particular song did

not stand up, the old men asked them to perform. After some urging and persuasion, some more children and women agreed, and 'put up' (*kateia*) their dance.

While some people may have called the occasion a *koroun*, it seemed a much more easy-going occasion. Its purpose was to make sure dancers still knew their dances, and for the others to practice the singing, but this time there were no problematic songs. The spatial arrangement of the event also indicated that this was not a *koroun*. In all of the dances, the singers sat behind the dancers, the way they did in an actual performance, whereas in the *koroun*, the singers had faced the dancers in all but some sitting dances. Thus dancers were not formally subjected to scrutiny, to being watched, even if in practice people observed how the dancers did. There were no public disagreements or arguments.

After the dances were over, villagers moved back to their own *iinaki* sections; the elders of each *iinaki* to sit by the posts, women and youngsters to sit or lie at the sides of the *maneaba*. The coming of the Kabuna villagers involved plenty of other planning and preparation. The principle now, as always, was that the burden of arrangements was to be divided equally. Organising the spreading of the new *iinai*, food for the guests, and entertainment in the evenings all required lengthy discussion.

Three days later a low, soft sound echoed in the morning sun: the conch was blown (*e tang te bu*). The Kabuna villagers were to arrive today. Blowing the conch is the traditional way to summon villagers to the meetinghouse. Even though this time only a few turned up, it did not take us long to spread the *iinai* mats in place. The first transport of Kabuna villagers, the only bus in Tabiteuea, arrived about 11.30. People started to unload their sleeping mats, plastic buckets and the ubiquitous white, red and blue striped bags. The other vehicle in use was a green pick-up truck, and several trips were made from the southern end of Anikai; the visitors kept arriving throughout the afternoon.

During the day, as the people from Kabuna were settling in the southern end of the *maneaba*, elders from Buota arrived in the *maneaba* to pass time with them (*kamaroorooa*).¹⁶⁸ The people of Buota were not following their usual sitting arrangement (the *iinaki* division) but instead all occupied the northern half of the meetinghouse. Most Buota villagers did not arrive until after sunset, with all preparations done, the bowl of food for Kabuna people and a plate for the *unimwaane* of the household, children bathed and fed. On this first evening, the hosts provided a meal for all the visitors; during the rest of the stay Kabuna villagers ate their own food. After the meal, there was some discussion, but soon the middle part of the meetinghouse was

¹⁶⁸ (*Ka*)*marooroo* also means 'make conversation' and 'to entertain', but in its simplest form it is about being there, being present for someone (e.g. one's guest).

declared 'open' ("*e a uki te nuuka*", the village chairman said), declaring both the end of the formal programme and permission to move freely, including in the middle part of the *maneaba*. A television and videos were set up – the moment the equipment appeared, all the children rushed to get a place close to it, adults took their time. It was explained apologetically that only two films were to be shown, in order that people be fit for the following day. Not that the end of films prevented people from staying up most of the night: small groups soon formed playing canasta or *tii* (a card game played for small sums of money), and a type of carrom (*vinti*). The visitors from Kabuna were of course lodged in the *maneaba*, and many of the host villagers slept there as well.

The dancing took place the following day. Buota villagers gathered at the northern end of the *maneaba* to produce the singing group. Buota dancers faced south. Kabuna villagers formed a similar singing group at the southern end, with their dancers facing north. First there were two dances from Buota, then two from Kabuna, followed by two from Buota and so on. There were altogether 23 dances which meant several hours of continuous dancing. The only breaks were when waiting for the next dancers to be prepared; *iruwa* – the nurse from the village clinic and Catholic and Protestant functionaries – were served lunch and they ate while watching the dancing.

Buota performed more dances than Kabuna. Despite the lack of enthusiasm preceding the event, some people from Buota who had not 'stood up' at the joint practice, could not resist the temptation at the *bootaki* itself, but borrowed adornments and danced ex tempore. For an individual dancer, dancing is also enjoyable and exciting per se. The fun was more harmless this time, and there were no arguments on either village's side.

As described above, competition between *taani katei* from Buota had been precluded by the *unimwaane*'s joint decision, and Buota was able to appear *booraoi* in front of Kabuna. The decision to prevent intra-village competition reduced the willingness to dance and the diligence of preparation, though at the actual event it was clear that people enjoyed it. Inter-village competition on the other hand was precluded by the nature of the special relationship (*bo*) between the villages. Considering that the event was a celebration of the bond (*bo*) between the two villages, competition between them would not have been appropriate. The nature of the relationship as kinship-like was also reflected in the visitors' eating mainly their own food, and their not being treated formally as *iruwa*. The work done by the hosts – preparing the venue, supplying some food, drink and the entertainment (videos), inviting and providing for *iruwa* in the main *bootaki* and so on – would be reciprocated the following year. Some of the expenses were even paid from mutual funds.

If dancing is considered exchange, Christmas and Katabu dancing was a competitive display of wealth in potlatch-like exchange; dancing in the Kabuna-*bootaki* was more like balanced reciprocity between relatives. Of course, just as the possibility of an

altruistic, uncalculated gift is debatable, so people would always keep a critical eye on the other village's performers despite the amicable atmosphere. If not elsewhere, in private conversation while watching the day's dancing on a video at some later time, someone would comment on the other village's performance, "they cannot do their hip dancing (*buki*) right".

THE DANCE PREVAILS? DANCE COMPETITION AT TEABIKE COLLEGE CULTURAL DAY

In June and July, dancing again created excitement in the village and became a community concern, though in a somewhat different way. If the structure of the *Kabuna-bootaki* had played down the salience of competing dance teachers, a dancing competition in the local secondary school led into an explicit juxtaposition of two teachers from Buota. This third 'dancing period', however, involved different kinds of dance groups: students from the local secondary school. Nevertheless, these groups were not fully separate from village dance networks and kinship, despite the fact that many pupils were not local (cf. Lawson 1989, 139). The new groups partly overlapped with, differed from, the pre-existing grouping, making the dancing contest of keen interest in Buota.

The Teabike College is a government-run secondary school in Tabiteuea North. It is a boarding school with about 150 pupils, situated in Eita village, about six kilometres from the southern end of Buota. The students come from all islands, but quite a few are from various villages in Tabiteuea North, including Buota. In addition, students from other islands may have kinship ties to Tabiteuea North; in practice, there will be a house or houses where they can spend weekends and holidays if they cannot travel home.

As do all secondary schools, Teabike College arranges the annual Cultural Day (*Bongin katein Kiribati*), prescribed in the national curriculum. The Cultural Day was in fact a whole Cultural Week, involving many different activities, such as cooking local food, storytelling, competition in traditional skills and sports, and stick-dancing (*tirere*). The main event, however, was a dance and choir competition between two groups of students, taking place on the Saturday of that week.

For the dance and choir competition the students had been divided into groups on the basis of their residence hall arrangements. Teachers supervising the boys and girls in the particular halls then became the organisers of the groups. About two months before the event, the teacher leading group A contacted Tetaake and asked if he could teach their students dance. Tetaake agreed. Once the school teachers in group B heard that group A had asked Tetaake to be its dancing instructor, they in turn went to see Nei Eritabeta. I

was told that they did this because they knew Nei Eritabeta to be Tetaake's main adversary (*kaitara*). Nei Eritabeta agreed to teach group B.

When Tetaake heard of this, he considered it to be very serious. Because the other group had explicitly sought his *kaitara*, it meant that this time competition was a *kamauna* ('to cause to be buried'): the loser would lose the competition once and forever, he or she could no longer teach dance; it was comparable to death. He was challenged to this competition, from which he could not pull out, because he had been asked first. He told me afterwards that if he had been in Nei Eritabeta's position, he would have declined the invitation (she could have done it without losing face because she was asked second). Tetaake told his assistant teachers and students that if they lost, he would no longer teach. "How could I teach after everyone one on the island knew I lost that competition?"

When the student line-up of the two groups or 'teams' (*tiim*), as they also were called, became known, it caused a stir. Buota residents associated with one or the other of the chosen teachers were clearly not satisfied with the distribution of the students. "How could they assign the grandchildren of Baitongo* and Nei Bwerebwere*, both our adversaries (*kaitara*), into our group?" Possible pre-existing loyalties had not been taken into account in the distribution, which had been based solely on the school's residence halls. So, some 'people of Nei Eritabeta' had wound up in Tetaake's group, and 'people of Tetaake' found themselves in Nei Eritabeta's. When Mareta* was assigned to Nei Eritabeta, her parents, who were influential members in Tetaake's group, first did not want to let her dance. They reconsidered, however, and Mareta did eventually dance.

Thus the structure of the competition had been established. Tensions surfaced several times in the course of practising before the event. For example Terubetaake*, who was the granddaughter of a significant member in Nei Eritabeta's group, was now in Tetaake's group. She was suspected of not doing her best in training. She had missed practices and was thought to practice half-heartedly. This became known to the school teachers, and Terubetaake was seriously reprimanded. She emerged eyes swollen from the talking-to, and thereafter the situation improved, though some were still concerned over her performance. The girl's behaviour was a little erratic: one moment it was as if nothing were wrong, the next moment she appeared vulnerable, and from what I gathered, she must have been anxious. As for the dance instructors, they saw her predicament, and were not entirely unsympathetic toward her, seeing Terubetaake torn between her family and the obligations to her school and the performance group.

In Tetaake's group, there was also the granddaughter of Nei Bwerebwere, who was a *tia katei* from a neighbouring village. But despite her grandmother's prowess, she had not danced before, and this cheerful and considerate girl became one of the enthusiastic members in team A. After the competition "it came about that she is Tetaake's person".

From then on, she would dance under Tetaake's instruction, and so "it came about that Nei Bwerebwere has her grandchild in the outside".

In addition to providing the *taani katei*, the Buota village community was involved in Teabike's Cultural Day in other ways as well. The families whose children studied in Teabike self-evidently took part in the preparations, but through the wider kinship networks of other students, many more local households were drawn into making dancing decorations, skirts and mats (*kabae*). In this way, the whole of Tabiteuea North was involved. Community involvement was also evident in the *korouns* that both groups held. Team A held its *koroun* in the *maneaba* of the Protestant Church, and its small congregation provided the students and teachers with food and became their enthusiastic supporters. Team B *koroured* in Ireland, the Catholic *maneaba*, equally receiving support.

The group B *koroun* illustrates the pedagogic nature of the community involvement. The pupils arrived in Ireland *maneaba* dressed in uniform outfits (*kabooraoi*); a typical finishing touch in a performance competition, emblematising the unity and internal harmony (*booraoi*) of the performing group. The girls were wearing an orange *tibuta* (a local style of women's blouse) and a violet *be* (a long cloth around the waist; a *lavalava*). The boys were shirtless and wore green *bes*, with the exception of five or six leading performers, who were wearing dancing mats (*kabae*). During the performances, the dancers were fully adorned, and the programme was complete with choreographed entrances and additional songs and shouts to boost team spirit and taunt the opponents. Between the dances, one of the schoolteachers responsible for this group urged the audience to watch carefully, and report any mistakes they spotted in the performance, as "your help to us".

After all the dances and *kuaea* numbers had been performed, it was feedback time. The first comment was from a middle-aged woman, who thought that the performance could have done with more vigour. She demonstrated this by first imitating the one giving the cue and tone ("akekeia!"), then roaring the same at the top of her lungs, which amused everyone though the pupils' laugh was a little sheepish. Teiraoi* then spoke on behalf of the community gathered. He thanked the Teabike teachers for choosing the *taani katei* from Buota. He subsequently appealed to the students, asking that there be no fight-making (*akea the kaun*), but rather merry-making (*te kakukurei*) instead. He bade them not to think of being in two teams but as co-operating on behalf of their school during the Cultural week activities. The *koroun* ended in a meal, in which everyone present was asked to partake. The food had been contributed by members of Nei Eritabeta's work co-operative (*makoro*).

After almost two months' intense practice and preparations involving most villages in the island, the Cultural Day came and the singing and dancing competition was held. In

this competition there was a panel of evaluators, and the winner was announced. Actual dancing competitions with some elected people counting points are apparently new phenomena, while no doubt considered quite apt. Performances are still judged by the public, and it continues to be more common not to formally announce a winner (on competition in general, see Ch. 6).

In the Teabike competition there were seven judges (*taan taubwi*, ‘the ones keeping track of points’), who were teachers from other North Tabiteuean schools. The instructions for evaluating the choir and dance performances were printed in the programme of the Cultural Day. The criteria for the dance were

- Booraoiness of the dance [*kai*; the dance movements]
- Commencement [of the singing; *te anaa*] (evenness [*boraoi*] and the ability to excite [*ni kaunga*])
- Ardour [*te unga*] (dancers/singers)
- Clapping (it should not jump [i.e., be out of step])
- Row of dancers (should not decrease under 4 [persons])
- Things of dancing [i.e., dance decorations] (Kiribati things)
- Finishing touch [*katamaroa*; ‘make splendid’] (entrance, exit and sitting [of the group])

For each measure, the maximum number of points was five. One criterion, *niko*, which describes the beauty and good form of a dancer, had been left out this time, because at a previous competition it had “caused so much disorder”, one of the College staff commented.

The competition certainly lived up to expectations and provided thrilling entertainment for everyone present. All students were obviously putting heart and soul into their performances, and many of them were overcome by the ‘spirit of dance’ or the ‘inner essence’. None of the students with conflicting loyalties compromised their performance, and were noted to have danced well. It is possible that when dancing under the guidance of another teacher, performances might still reflect on the original teacher: whether intentional or not, mistakes or sloppiness might shame not only the new teacher but also the old one. Another, more intriguing interpretation which does not exclude the first is that in the end, the students who had found themselves in the ‘wrong’ group were more loyal to the dance itself than to any of the teachers.¹⁶⁹ They may have compromised their initial loyalty rather than let their dance, their weapon, break (*urua te kai*).

The judges ruled the groups to be equally good in the choir competition, but announced team A the winner in dance by the narrow margin of 2½ points. Tetaake and his assistants were proud and relieved, and still teach dance. They continue to consider themselves, with all the more reason, to be the leading instructors of the village. Whether

¹⁶⁹ I thank Louise Klemperer Sather for the initial remark, which led me to formulate this idea.

Nei Eritabeta has continued teaching, I do not know, though I consider it more probable that she has. Nei Eritabeta is the younger of the two teachers and she can challenge the older one again, whereas if the older Tetaake had lost, it might have been considered an overthrow of the old authority. I also do not think that Nei Eritabeta's students would have deserted her.

In the final analysis it was the students themselves who stole the show. One of the group A students had come across a song performed in another secondary school on another island, and the students of A insisted on performing it. The dancing teachers objected to the song because of its highly dangerous content, inflammatory as the situation was already. This short song is about a ship, which only carries "a scrap of paper, which has been written on with a pencil", and has "truly no other content but leftovers of food from strange lands". It was a song full of words considered dangerous, likely to cause trouble. However the students insisted on performing the song and they in fact began their performance with it, which caused a half disapproving, half delighted buzz in the audience. "They've just arrived and there already goes the 'scrap of paper!'", commented a spectator, according to his own account to me afterwards. "Some lyrics of you-know-what, isn't it!" commented another one, half disapprovingly but clearly enjoying herself.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DANCING

Whenever dancing was in progress in Buota, it was both enormously important and highly contentious. Dance group activities were prioritised, and people put themselves out to practice or to hunt down fuel or whatever the occasion required. The importance of an impeccable dance performance was not lost on the teenagers who had to stay back in the village to train during a major dance feast, when they surely would have preferred to go and watch the dances. Dance activities even stretched the limits of local custom: Nei Aoniba's request for me to return to continue training before others had finished dancing in the Katabu feast meant that I would have to travel alone, unless someone did me a special favour.

On the whole the way I was treated as a Westerner and a guest who was trying to learn dancing and to perform was curiously two-fold. On the one hand, much less was expected of me than of Kiribati adults. To the extent I was able to learn dancing at all, it was a tribute to my dance teacher and home village, as well as a potential subject of pride. This would apply to a Kiribati dancer as well, but my weaker chances correspondingly made the contingent success taste even sweeter. On the other hand, dancing was probably the context where, more than any other, I came close to being

treated like an I-Kiribati. This was reflected in the gravity with which Tetaake reiterated the importance of my not making mistakes and shaming him. Tetaake was the first to treat me in one respect like everybody else: expectations of skill and grace were lower than for a Kiribati dancer, but wrong movements are wrong movements. Nobody else would have dared to say to me at that early stage of my stay, as Tetaake did during a practice: “[practice the dance] one more time, and if you make a mistake I will hit you!” (Of course, he did not and would not have hit me. It is a typical Kiribati utterance, much more often said than put into practice; sometimes even a sign of affection.)

Dancing was not innocuous fun, even if it can occasionally be that as well; instead it was a frequent subject of controversy. As one more proof that dancing was not a “non-crucial sphere” (cf. Lundsgaarde 1966, 112) of life, several times it warranted the intervention of the Village Council.

SOCIAL CONFIGURATIONS OF PERFORMANCE

Dancing is a quintessentially social activity, not only in that it is practiced in groups but also in its performance. In addition to the principal dancer(s) (*tia mwaie*, pl. *taani mwaie*), a *mwaie* performance requires accompanists – the people singing/chanting and clapping (*taan uboubo*; ‘those who clap’¹⁷⁰) – and an audience (*taani kamataku*). A dance performance proper is always a public affair, the dancers ‘coming out’, in explicit contrast to dance training, which is regarded as secret. Most traditional Kiribati dancing, like the dancing described in this chapter, takes place at public events, where dancing is performed in a *maneaba* in front of an audience which consists of guests of honour (*iruwa*) and members of the community. One can perceive people during a dance performance in a meetinghouse falling into four partly overlapping categories: (i) dancers, (ii) singer-clappers, (iii) honoured guests and (iv) ‘people’ (*aomata*; everyone else), who each have their defined roles vis à vis the dancing.

In principle, the social setting for dancing is simple: there are competing dance groups, led by dance teachers. In the most straightforward case, all the principal dancers and their accompanists belong to the same group, and the groups take turns to perform, trying to do better than their rivals. However, the social organisation of an actual performance in a village setting, as in the first three events described in this chapter, was more complicated. The ambiguity arises from the contradiction between the ‘logic of performance’ (songs and ideas concerning the dance) and actual social relations. The

¹⁷⁰ That the chorus is called ‘clappers’ rather than ‘singers’ might reflect the fact that in Kiribati dancing rhythm is more important than melody.

performance setting was only clear-cut in the Teabike College dance competition, but there, in turn, the composition of the groups themselves was problematic. In all cases the social organisation of dancing interlocked with the organisation of the community, creating situations with conflicting loyalties and values.

In the logic of Kiribati dance performance, both the practical and the conceptual role of the singer-clappers is to support the principal dancers. In addition to providing the necessary accompaniment, they are a major source of inspiration and excitement for the dancers. In the survey that I conducted among the adult Buota dancers, many of them attributed the coming of the ‘spirit of dancing’ or the ‘innermost’ to the presence of the chorus – a large and loudly singing group of excited people (see also Lawson 1989, 414, 424). Conceptually the espousal becomes evident when listening to what the singer-clappers ‘say’, that is, sing. As has been pointed out, many of the songs proclaim in direct and indirect ways the superiority of the song and the dance in question, the beauty of the dancer and the insuperable knowledge of the composer – or mock and threaten the opponent. Furthermore, as Tetaake described it: “When the song is sung, it is the same as people (*aomata*) would talk”; they assert the victory and spread the fame of the performance they are praising. To put it simplistically, the clappers are on the same side as the dancers.

In any dance there is a tension between the individual and the group: a dancer must balance between performing in perfect unison with the other principal dancers, and aspiring to be the most attractive among them (Lawson 1989, 381–383). The main ideal of a row of dancers as a whole is one of uniformity (*booraoi*), so the latter aspiration is pursued by very subtle means (increasingly subtle, if the emphasis has indeed changed towards evaluating the whole dance row instead of an individual dancer [see T. Whincup & J. Whincup 2001, 118; T. Whincup 2005, 125–126]). Skill, appearing attractive and conveying excitement to the audience involves the correct facial expressions to go with the movements and other details, as well as the use of magic to enhance the beauty of the dancer, but, above all, precision in timing and movement (Lawson 1989, 376–380). Indeed, exactitude and moving in sync with the other dancers (*roko raoi*) are key criteria for a skilful dancer (Lawson 1989, 386). In other words, an individual is evaluated on the basis of how well she/he performs as a member of a group; the perfection of the ‘individual’ ultimately results in the good of the group (community).¹⁷¹ And even when it is the attractiveness of an ‘individual’ that is thus assessed, it is not so much the

¹⁷¹ Theoretically, the ideal of precision as a way of differentiating oneself is paradoxical. Perfect precision, if attained by all, would result in a perfectly uniform (*booraoi*) row: attempting to appear different would make everybody appear the same.

individual but the dance teacher who is judged; the individual stands for (in Kiribati language both literally and figuratively) her or his group and teacher.

In a dance event, the honoured quests (*iruwa*) sit by the sacred row of posts, while the general public remains behind the posts on the sidelines of the meetinghouse. A variety of functions take place on the sidelines: dressing the dancers, eating, sleeping, nursing babies, play among the children. *Iruwa* are the ones who are entertained and ‘made to watch’ (*kamatakuaki*), and in that sense comprise the official audience; it is also their task to powder the dancers. Yet at times they seem strangely irrelevant. The real audience for whom the dancers are performing is the local community, the people (*aomata*), who occupy the peripheral positions in the meetinghouse but who, as at the Christmas, Katabu, and Kabuna events, can also be part of the performance as singer-clappers. It is this indefinite crowd that in the last analysis judges the performance, even in formal contests.

At the island-wide Christmas and Katabu dances there were not only the enduring (and partly more apparent than real) individual/group tensions; at these dances, the composition of both the singing group and some of the dance rows was inherently problematic. As seen, in some dances there were students of more than one dance teacher simultaneously performing as principal dancers. As members of different dance groups, each aiming to distinguish itself in competition and defend the honour of its dance teacher, the dancers in these controversial dances had less incentive to strive to be the same as the others – to create a *booraoi* performance.¹⁷² With neither side willing to yield or compromise, small differences in the choreography or performance became important signs of the groups’ distinct identity and of their effort to outdo the others. As a result, some performances from Buota were not *booraoi* in appearance, let alone under the surface.

Furthermore, *booraoi* was not only the ideal in dance; it was also the ideal of the village community. Here the dancers’ double representation of both their own dance group with its *tia katei*, and their village community was problematic. At the very least, the objective of a dance group, which is to distinguish itself in competition, goes directly against the central value and principle of the village community, *booraoi*. The village community orientation was to be unified and harmonious, with no attempts by

¹⁷² It can be noted that the setting was quite like the traditional *uaia*-type competition between individual dancers, or rather, through them, between dance teachers (*taani katei*) (see Lawson 1989, 373). I did not hear the term *uaia* used, though interestingly, the positions of students of competing teachers vis à vis one another – which in the *uaia* are, according to Lawson (1989, 374), prescribed – sometimes received attention. In one *koroun*, some of the dancers were even asked to swap places on the row. The result however was neither clearly a *uaia* formation nor an explicit attempt to avoid it. If there was a pattern in these and other dances, I have not been able to discern it.

individuals to distinguish themselves from others. Both for its own sake and in the eyes of outsiders, the representation of Buota in the rows of dancers and the performances in general, was to be one of uniformity. During the Christmas and Katabu dances, actuality fell short of the ideal, not to mention the loud, angry exchange in front of all the villages of the islands at the Christmas dances.

The accompanying group during the Christmas and Katabu dances, on the other hand, consisted of people from the three villages grouped together as the southern cluster. This heterogeneous group included members and supporters of many different dance teachers, as well as unaffiliated people. Competition between different villages seemed precluded by the undifferentiated relationships between the participating villages, demonstrated in the faithfully geographical divisions and arrangement of dancing, so the competition remained, as it had been from the onset, an intra-village affair. For Buota villagers the arrangement meant that all the village's accompanists, irrespective of their own or any of the dancers' dance-group allegiances, were singing and clapping for all dancers from Buota.

Essentially, then, the accompanists were partially participating in, and strengthening, the performance of their opponents. Given that singing is endorsement and even more, 'talking', they were in the contradictory position of having to *speak for* their opponents. Potentially such contradictions in the social configuration would seem (from a Western, individualistic point of view at least) to make the situation highly ambiguous for the participating individuals, but it is difficult to tell if – and how – people felt the conflict of loyalties at a personal level. There was no sign, for instance, that people would sing less enthusiastically, clap less vigorously, or take part less completely in the dances of a rival group.

Analysing the situation afterwards as an outsider this has been puzzling; at the time I took it for granted even if I was aware of the competition. And indeed, in most cases the inherent contradiction was overcome by the dance itself, as it were. Outside the performances, I did get the impression that in the chain of events there was genuine willingness to avoid disagreements and outright hostilities which, in addition to the Council decision, affected the outcome of the Kabuna-*bootaki*.¹⁷³ The excited, exhilarated crowd of singing and clapping people at the performances was a unified group neither initially nor afterwards; if in the performance they were feeling a Durkheimian solidarity

¹⁷³ Both the elders' invocation of *booraoi* and some people's reactions to the events suggest a comparison with Tokelau and the Tokelauan value of *māopoopo*. Huntsman and Hooper (1996, 90) write that in Tokelau, when a prolonged, carnivalistic period of competition between village 'sides' comes to an end, people may be "quietly relieved", because, in addition to attention shifting to other matters, sometimes "good-natured competition becomes increasingly hostile and village *māopoopo* and peace are in jeopardy." Thus in both places one might discern be a similar tension between a delight in competitive activities and a community ideal of unity or harmony.

– experiencing a social identity together (cf. Lawson 1989, 489), or ‘communitas’ (Turner 1991 [1969]) – it must have been short-lived.

Yet the potential contradictions did not surface until the three dances where the configuration was doubly complicated by the fact that the same row included students of competing *taani katei*. Until then, personally-felt or dance-group-related discord was tolerated and feelings kept under control. Conflicts flared up over the three dances as people had simultaneously to ‘speak’ for and against both their own people and the rivals. In Katabu, most dancers and *taani katei* yielded to the *unimwaane*’s now repeated and forceful request that the controversial finishing steps be dropped, though because of one dancer’s refusal to comply – whether acting wilfully or in the heat of the moment, I do not know – the situation was again opened for competition.

What with public arguments and the rest of the upheaval, the recurrence of such a situation had been prevented at the *Kabuna-bootaki*. By the decree of the Village Council, the dancers in each dance were limited to only one of the groups, preventing in-dance competition. The double representation of dance group and village was no longer problematic: a dance row (*un*) consisting of members of the same dance group would strive to be *booraoi*. In other words, at the *Kabuna-bootaki* the interests of the community and the dance groups were congruent. The arrangement of the accompanying chorus at the *Kabuna-bootaki* was similar to Christmas and Katabu, with the accompanying group on Buota’s side consisting of all the villagers present, which included members of all four dancing groups. Yet the intrinsic ambiguity in the accompaniment alone did not lead to public arguments or fights about dancing, suggesting that the reason for the conflicts around the turn of the millennium, as opposed to the *Kabuna-bootaki*, might have lain in the fact that the dancers’ configuration was also problematic; the people were singing for and against each other in the same songs.

The intervention by village elders lessened the contradictions but may also have been responsible for the general lack of enthusiasm for dancing at this event. On the other hand, the importance of *Kabuna-bootaki* may have lain elsewhere – in the relationship between the two villages – than in its being a dancing event, even if dancing was compulsory. Considering that for many the ordination itself paled in significance beside the dancing at Katabu, the formal function of the feast is not necessarily decisive in whether it becomes an important dancing event.

At the formal dance competition in Teabike College, the social configuration of the performances was markedly different from the earlier events. At Teabike the members of each team sang and clapped for their own dancers, making the performance situation on the whole unambiguous. However, for the individual students who found themselves in a group taught by the opponent of their own *tia katei*, the situation was as internally

paradoxical as the ones described above. Their way out of the predicament was to remain loyal to the dance itself: to perform to the best of their abilities. On a more mundane level, the explanation could be that they did not want to risk their school marks by causing trouble, which frames the school as a community-like authority (with the teachers corresponding to a village council).

Nevertheless, the social configuration of the Teabike event was tightly interwoven with the dance groups as well as the general community in Buota. The secondary school event became part of an internal, long-standing rivalry in the village, and was used by the opposing instructors to their advantage. Entering school does not sever kinship and dance group ties, and some students were already involved in this opposition, either personally or through their families. When the dance teams were established, pre-existing connections with local organisation became critical and problematic. In addition, the school performance involved other reciprocal relationships between the school and Buota village, through the participation of the pupils' families and more distant kin at different stages of the preparations. Unlike the first three events, however, the Buota village community as a corporate body was not involved.

To sum up: in the final analysis, conflicting loyalties were not really resolved at any of the events, or they were only resolved temporarily. Inherent tensions erupted, were tolerated or overcome, but in the long run, were not eradicated. There were multiple juxtapositions between the community as a whole and its parts: the dance groups, the Village Council and individuals. In these confrontations there again emerges a model of community, the social whole, this time in relation to dancing.

WHEN 'PEOPLE TALK': COMMUNITY, FAME AND AUTHORITY

Kiribati dancing is a forceful symbolic display of social reproductive power and, as such, an activity which is simultaneously precious and dangerous to local notions of community. The demonstration of power in dance is possible in the first place only because it takes place in a carefully delineated frame of action. In addition to describing dance displays in terms of their social configurations, in this chapter I have considered these dance displays of power, and the commentary on them, as kinds of speaking, each pertaining to authority: either making claims to it (by virtue of the power demonstrated), attributing it to the dance leaders via the dancers themselves, or denying its attribution. The speakers, in both metaphorical and literal senses, speak from particular social positions in the community but their positions in, or relationships to, idealised community are not always clear-cut.

In Chapter 5 it was seen that community is constructed, in both its ideal and a more factual form, in *maneaba* events. This is no less true of dance events, but risks for the ideal community are greater. If in an ordinary *bootaki* people use bodily, spatial and other means in subtle ways not only to reaffirm ideal community but also to manipulate it (for example, to express gradation in the face of ideal undifferentiation), in dancing ideals pertaining to an idealized community are sometimes defied in a more open way.

As at any *bootaki*, at a dance event each category of people has its proper place – socially as well as spatially – and a defined role. At dance events, however, the community takes a greater risk, as it were, by letting some people, the dancers, stand in the *tabu* centre part of the *maneaba*, thereby granting them the right to speak. As a result, particular caution is required. The extremely controlled nature of Kiribati dancing – the meticulous adherence to a set choreography, the requisite uniformity of a dance row, the pre-defined limits of movement and pose, as well as the restrained, angular style – can be seen to reflect and represent the community's control over the dancers.

And yet despite this 'hardness' of the dance, idealized community sometimes momentarily loses its grip. A clap, the placement of a hand, a step forward – representing the interests of competing dance groups and teachers – breaks the uniformity and becomes a sign of out-of-place differentiation, and an (from the community's point of view) undue claim for authority. In other words, the juxtaposition between the community and its parts can be seen as a juxtaposition of undifferentiation and differentiation, though not as a straightforward opposition but as a matter of degree and balance as well as a contest for authority.

The nature of local community does allow and even requires certain differentiation – it lets people stand (*tei*) and talk – but only within the set limits at which undifferentiation is imposed (more or less successfully, as has been observed). The dance teachers and their groups, engaged in a mutual battle for prestige, strive to differentiate themselves, even if the goal of perfectly executed dance is one of undifferentiation. Treading such a tightrope, stretched across the varying social formations, some tending to differentiation and others to underdifferentiation, the question of authority becomes problematic. Authority is further complicated by two issues: the shifting locus of community, and the nature of ritual speech.

In the village, idealized community was represented by the Council of Elders; in the school context, the corresponding unit would have been the teachers, though this was less evident. At the Buota village events the role of the elders' Council was to defend the values of the community, which consisted of 'the people' (*aomata*), who were in turn represented by the singing and clapping choir accompanying the dancers. In the first three events the accompanists were not only representative of, but almost coterminous with, the community. At the fourth, the school event, the accompanying choir was only a

substitute for the community: acting ('speaking', 'talking') *as if* they were the community.

Connected to the community, to its different facets and spokespersons, are two significant ways in which 'people' (*aomata*) speak – which have emerged from the description of the four dance events. Firstly, what people think and state aloud about a dance performance is the most important evaluation of the outcome of a dance. Talk – circulating discourse – is the currency of prestige: the success or failure of a dance teacher is measured and his/her fame or disrepute constructed by what people say. 'People' refers to the local community: particularly fellow villagers but people from other villages as well – the wider the talk, the greater the fame. Lawson Burke (Lawson 1989, 342–343) relates a telling incident from her first visit to Kiribati. She followed the preparations for an important dance event which each group she visited said they wanted to 'win', but after the event she waited in vain for the announcement of the winner. She inquired of people who the winner had been, but most "simply said they didn't know, but that probably *the people in the audience were talking about it*" (Lawson 1989, 343, emphasis added; see also Lawson 1989, 427 about people 'talking' about dancers who experience the 'spirit of dancing'). In recent years the number of formal competitions has been on the rise, but even in such contests with a panel of evaluators (like the one in Teabike College) 'people think that...' (*a taku aomata*) is a powerful judgement – still the most powerful, I would suspect.

Secondly, the accompaniment (singing and clapping) of a dance is seen as analogical to this kind of 'speaking'. The accompanists, together with the dancers, deliver a message in words, rhythm and movement. While in this work it has only been possible to note in passing the self-aggrandising nature of Kiribati performance, I have argued elsewhere (Autio 2008) that this message is usually ultimately in the form: 'this is the best dance/song/dancer' (with the meta-message "this is true"; see Autio 2008, 194). Thus a dance performance constitutes a strong claim for the authority of the dance group and specifically its leader rather than, as has been pointed out, that of the dancer(s).

In all this, the role of the Village Council, acting on the behalf of the ideal community, would be to attempt to restrain excessive claims. Yet there appear to be several factors at work on behalf of the community, irrespective of a Council or some equivalent administrative body. If one considers dance performance as ritual speech and the singer-clappers together with the dancers comparable to the ritual speakers, the application of John Du Bois' (1986) distinction between prime and proximate speakers in ritual speech reveals ambiguities in the claims for, and attributions of, authority. In Kiribati dancing, the dancers and the accompanists would be the proximate speakers. The human prime speaker would in principle be the song/dance composer (*tia kainikamaen*). If the dance teacher (*tia katei*) does not happen to be the composer in person, s/he acts as an

intermediary between the prime and proximate speakers. However, it can be argued that in the dancing described here, the *tia katei* is the prime speaker, not only because the *tia kainikamaen* was seldom personally involved but also because the *tia katei* is responsible for the performance as a whole. Nonetheless, the *taani katei* did not seem to play a big role in a performance; they remained in the background and let others speak for them. So even the prime speaker does not openly assert his or her authority, in spite of the strong claims made for such authority in the dance.

What is more, traditionally the composer too would have been but a mediator, since he received the song from spirits (see e.g. Kirion 1985b; Lawson 1989, 235-246), who would then be the ultimate prime speakers. The attribution of authority to spirits is difficult to assess in a country which is strongly Christian but at the same time retains much of the old spirit-related tradition; beliefs are likely to be quite differentiated (see Lawson 1989, 266-273). On the other hand it seems likely that the human prime speaker would not be considered an individual, as both dance teachers and composers working in the traditional way with spirits have assistants.

To complicate matters further, the prime speaker's claim for authority (i.e., the message), whether made with or without ultimate reference to spirits, might be strengthened and even validated by the proximate speakers. In any performance dozens of proximate speakers – the singer-clappers – are speaking in support of the prime speaker's claim and adding force to it, but in some cases they are simultaneously the source of that authority.

As long as the singer-clappers all belong to the same unified group as the dancers, as at the Teabike event, the situation remains one of relatively simple competition: performance groups and ultimately their leaders take turns to persuade the community that their claim to authority is valid. The relationship of each group to the community is metonymical or purely metaphorical: a group either comprises only a small portion of the community or else merely symbolises it; acting 'as if'. But in instances where the accompanying group to a great extent actually *is* the community, it consists of the same people who 'talk', that is, attribute value to dance performances and thereby to the *tia katei* behind them. In other words, they at the same time do have the power to invest or withhold authority. Hence the first paradox: people plead their cause to themselves. There is a circular chain of proximate speakers, linking to the prime speaker and back again, leaving the location of authority shadowy.

Moreover, validation by the community is hardly ever unambiguous. At least in the events described, the community was never unified; not all the singers aligned themselves with all the dancers. Indeed, with competing dancers in the same row this would have been a logical impossibility. In accompanying multiple performances, accompanists invest, in turn, their opponents with authority as well as their associates.

Hence the second paradox: people assert first one cause, then another – or more paradoxically still, assert rival causes at the same time.

To put it briefly, what makes dancing most fascinating, is also what makes it most conflict-ridden: the complex social relations in a small community, cross-cutting loyalties and the equivocal nature of authority. The multiple paradoxes, which in most cases seem to be built-in, effectively prevent authority (power, value) from concentrating in one locus (person, group), or from being attributed to it more than temporarily. In this way, the paradigmatic decentralisation of power in this society evinces itself in dancing. Similarly, dancing not only illuminates the structural tension between differentiation and undifferentiation but becomes its visual and an aesthetic manifestation.

8. CONCLUSION

Southern Kiribati society is characterised by an enduring tension between hierarchical and non-hierarchical social forms and the partly contradictory cultural notions that structure them. Hierarchy, which is taken-for-granted and valorised – if not always unproblematic – in many societies sharing cultural features with Kiribati, is in Southern Kiribati something highly ambiguous: its preconditions are desired but the outcome is forbidden. Negotiating this tension requires strenuous conceptual and concrete labour – not unlike the hard work people are expected to do to obtain a living from the drought-stricken land and the relentless, if resourceful, ocean – labour which is a defining feature of the society. This ethnographic study has sought to examine the ways in which forms of social differentiation and ‘undifferentiation’ – as I have called it here – combine in a Southern Kiribati, Tabiteuean community; in other words, it has explored various ideas and practices that produce difference between people and those that undo it, to produce sameness.

Not all differences are of the same kind nor are they equally important. The differences discussed in this work have, at the least, been connected to forms of locally understood reproductive power, prestige, seniority, gender, wealth and education. In the course of this work, two kinds of difference have been at issue: complementary and potentially hierarchical differences (paired cultural categories), and those that are not perceived in binary and complementary terms. Many of the paired cultural categories to emerge in the course of this analysis resemble those in other Austronesian contexts: male:female, elder:younger and autochthonous (‘person of the land’):allochthonous (‘one who arrives by canoe’, guest [*iruwa*]). On the one hand the existence of these differences is valued in itself; on the other, either element in such a pair may be valued over its opposite in a given context. These differences are used in a typically Austronesian manner to construct differentiated social structures but also in a less typical manner to transform these into undifferentiated structures. As will be reprised below, these kinds of differences have been encountered particularly in the analysis of oral history, kinship and meetinghouse customs.

Then there are those socially significant differences which are not perceived as binary or complementary: variation in monetary wealth, (Western-based) education, or employment, perhaps even in outward appearance.¹⁷⁴ Apart from the latter, these could be termed ‘modern’ variables, as opposed to the ‘traditional’ binary distinctions.

¹⁷⁴ An alternative way of broadly contrasting the two kinds of difference might be to talk about ‘difference in kind’ v. ‘differences in degree’, though I do not think this would be universally valid; the distinction itself is cultural, and some differences could be conceptualised as both.

Crucially, it has emerged that these kinds of non-complementary differences are usually not valued (or are valued negatively), or are only valued in very limited contexts. They are however socially significant in that they potentially produce social differentiation but, since differentiation in these terms – which might also be called socio-economic stratification – is generally shunned, their significance is seen in the active work that is done to prevent, mitigate or undo these differences and thereby construct undifferentiated social structures. This became particularly apparent in the discussion of the village community and households. Non-complementary differences between individuals, on the other hand, became an issue in the examination of certain meetinghouse customs and dancing.

I propose that in this particular ethnographic context, non-complementary differences might ultimately be reduced to the complementary opposition of different:same. On the ethnographic level this finds expression in the concept of *booraoi* and its opposite *boobuaka*. Thus, while some differences are significant and valued and others are not, and these may vary contextually, in some cases it is more the value placed on sameness that counts. Certain kinds of differences emerge as central in particular contexts, whereas in some cases both kinds of differences (or lack thereof) come into play, combining to produce differentiation as well as undifferentiation. Several forms of differentiation and undifferentiation have emerged in the course of this work, but I propose that these are systematically related.

The subject was delineated by concentrating firstly on ideas and practices that relate to the meetinghouse, *te maneaba*, both in the local and in a general sense, and secondly on one particular domain of activity – which quintessentially culminates in a meetinghouse – traditional dancing (*mwaie*).

In all of these, I have paid attention to manifestations of symbolic reproductive power. Related to these, the power that people have been described as having, or striving for, has in the main been ritual, not political or coercive power, and in the previous chapter it was examined in one of its forms, as authority understood as the right to speak. The central notions concerning power and authority to emerge in this Tabiteuean community were, firstly, that in order to be valued and utilised, power needs to be controlled. Secondly, power is not allowed to centralise, or concentrate in the hands of one person or group for any long period of time. Thirdly, out of the permanent reach of people, power/authority is always, on the one hand, left outside the factual community and, on the other, vested in community, the social whole. Particularly in the last sense, power and authority in this community are epitomised by the preserved bones of the ancient hero Kourabi, sealed in a casket suspended from the roof of the village meetinghouse: power wrapped, hidden from view and out of reach, but constantly above the community.

This symbol of power, the sacred remains of Kourabi, is what makes the local meetinghouse, named Atanikarawa or Te Ririere, distinctive: its myth and history inextricably bound up with him. In the Kiribati context, where the meetinghouse is the axiomatic, even commonplace symbol of the community, Kourabi has been good to think with throughout this work when discussing this particular community. Kourabi was a paradoxical figure: present in his bones, the guarded as well as the guardian of the village, but rendered absent by the *tabus*: the ancestor without descendants, the chief without chieftainship.

Yet there is more to Kourabi than a local peculiarity and an influential individual in the history of one village. His story, the tale and the telling, connects to, and illuminates, shared themes in the contemporary life and the ethnography of Oceania as well as theoretical questions in anthropology.

The telling of the tale – that is, the interest and activities generated by the Story of Kourabi after I had asked to hear it – is one example of a common aspect of contemporary culture in many places around the world, above all among, though not restricted to, so-called indigenous peoples: the desire and will to preserve cultural heritage. The self-conscious processes of people themselves in retaining and regaining knowledge of their traditions have forced anthropologists to rethink ‘change’ and ‘continuity’. At the same time, the local relevance of the traditions also justifies, to my mind, scholarly interest in them at a time when socio-economic changes are placing part of those traditions outside a narrowly (Western-) defined utilitarian sphere (cf. Kazama 2001). What is more, I hope that by describing the contemporary life of this community, this work has showed that the local importance of Kourabi’s story reflects the continuing relevance of the cultural structures and dynamics expressed in the story itself.

The story itself, expresses cultural structures and paradigms of transformation that are partly shared across a range of Oceanian societies and even further afield, but assume particularly Kiribati manifestations. The social forms and cultural themes of interest relate to the fundamentals of the society: the conditions of social reproduction and the nature of legitimate authority. At the heart are the questions of locally defined power and its appropriation by an individual and the society.

While Kiribati seems to lack one overarching and explicit concept of power akin to the Polynesian *mana*, there appear to exist, in addition to the general notion and a possible cognate (*mwaaka*), several other local concepts of power which each express a sought-after form: courage/anger (*un*), well-being/fertility (*mauri*, *mari*-) and destruction/curse (*kamaraia*). Implicitly they all share certain characteristics of *mana*, above all noticeable in the *tabu* that indicates their presence, or proximity to the divine origin which they (like *mana*) are considered to have.

Throughout the Pacific region, power in this sense is conceptualised as having a dual nature, and the actualisation of power – the harnessing the power into the service of the society and/or individual – requires the dualities be overcome: a transformation. From a comparative perspective, one can see cultural elements, many of which are familiar and shared in the region, combined according to a local logic: the Kiribati version of an Oceanic or Austronesian cultural formation, and with a Tabiteuean twist. Kiribati society is, on the one hand, socially differentiated in a typical Austronesian fashion based on the notion of origin, and the differences are recognised and valued. On the other hand, particularly in Tabiteuea, the differentiation is just a juncture or a building block in the overall structure. It is the lack of the final transformation of power that distinguishes Kourabi from other chiefs, and Tabiteuea from so many other Austronesian societies. Given that the Austronesian cultural configurations are typically geared towards forming an order of precedence (see Fox 1994) – or a hierarchy, to use the somewhat problematic but common term – the lack, or rather suspension, of transformation is inevitable: for in Tabiteuea, while power is desired, its consummation, bringing it into fruition, is forbidden. The transformation is interrupted, leaving a *tabu* state ad infinitum. The social outcome is not an anti-hierarchy, partly even to the contrary. The resulting social order is differentiated in terms of power, but restricted and withholding the ultimate precedence. I propose that this final withholding of precedence, the suspension of hierarchy, is the most cherished form of undifferentiation, and that this form of undifferentiation functions at the highest level of the societal ideology, that pertaining to the society as a whole.

From the Story of Kourabi there emerges a cultural paradigm which, I suggest in this work, is reproduced in – sometimes transformed – but homological ways in the social practice of Buota village. Paraphrasing Jukka Siikala (1991, 141), certain basic structures are seen to “reproduce themselves in different modes [...] of social and historical discursive practice”. In Kourabi’s story, the basic structures are the dual, complementary elements of power and the simultaneous refusal of their transformatory union (the realisation of power), with a resulting castration and externalisation of power and its expulsion outside, or at least to the very fringe, of the society. Kourabi participates in social reproduction only in a limited way; the spatial transmission of the power in his bones being somewhat like asexual reproduction compared to sexual reproduction. Power is treasured, but if obtained, it is kept at an arm’s length.

Besides being paradigmatic, the Story of Kourabi is a classic foundation narrative, providing a charter for the society. While the intervening historical developments are largely unknown, the present meetinghouse institution and, indexically, the community, still reflect (or are made to reflect) the initial divisions. Theoretically, the present upper and lower-level kin groups (*iinakis*) have been formed on a genealogical-cum-territorial

basis, in a process of differentiation in terms of categorical oppositions like elder-younger, male-female and autochthonous-allochthonous, but in practice the patrilineal, patri-virilocal and primogenitural ideals have combined with flexible practices recognising matrilineal ties, conquests and other historical developments. In Temanoku/Buota this process of differentiation was then interrupted by the arrival of Kourabi, leaving an undifferentiated state at the top. The underlying differentiation is both celebrated and further transformed (undifferentiated) in meetinghouse practices.

The discussion of *iinaki*-related practices aimed to show that the relationships between the present-day kin groups also continue to reflect social principles that are present in the story. In the ‘work’ that the different *iinaki* groups do, there emerged two kinds of relations. Firstly, there was work that constructed the groups as differentiated and complementary; echoing a holistic ideology where each part of the whole has its place and responsibility, its share, contributing to the social whole. While a total centralisation of power in even the most hierarchical societies would be rare (see Rayner 1993; cf. Boehm 1993), in this Tabiteuean case the complementarity tends to lead to a decentralisation of power in a more pronounced way: the division of work between groups limited any one group’s proximity to the source of power. The same predisposition to (voluntarily) distribute power, or a reluctance to assume all power, thus decentralising it, was present in some oral historical narratives.

Secondly, there was work that had the differentiation of groups as a starting point, but then proceeded to actively undifferentiate them. The exactly identical work, symmetry, and non-competitive exchange of identical objects are themes that recur in many contexts, even though the premises vary. In this case the premise was the recognised difference between the groups involved. In brief, the *iinaki* organisation is differentiated, but in a double-edged way: difference is both valorised and subdued – and ultimately, undone. This form of undifferentiation, the transformation or undoing of complementary/hierarchical difference, again builds on common Austronesian elements, namely, the existence and importance of such differences, commonly taking the form of alternately valued categorical oppositions like elder/younger. On the whole, the *iinaki* system is premised on both that kind of differentiation, and on undifferentiation as the transformation of that kind of difference.

However, in the present-day society, *iinakis* are only one kind of grouping among others. *Iinakis* furthermore largely function in the context of the meetinghouse, and their significance today is largely ritual, though ‘ritual’ does not have an unspoken ‘only’ as an epithet. Nor does it spell ‘marginal’ or ‘ethereal’; rather it suggests that some aspect of a practice transcends the mundane life. Ritually organised work – such as the maintenance of the meetinghouse, chairing meetings or acting as spokesman in and for the village – can be most concrete, and even when it is not, it is part of the necessary

framework for the village to act in many mundane tasks, even though many of the activities are organised on other bases, notably, the households.

A further examination of social practices demonstrated the enduring relevance of certain basic cultural structures but also that history is not a matter of mere replication but involves real change. Historical changes brought about by population growth, colonialism and Christianity affecting, among other things, residential arrangements and economy, have led to a strengthening of the household as a key corporate unit within the village. In the process the 'Houses' have emerged not only as the main economic and administrative units but also as symbolic units to which meaning and value have been attached. The households are seen to constitute the village as an assemblage of even units, an arrangement which is represented in ways which underline the lack of an order of precedence. As individuals and families, the occupants of Houses are related by various kinship ties, which are reciprocal, taking into account differences such as seniority, but the relationships between Houses as constitutive elements of the village are not so structured. Instead, no complementary, 'traditional', differences between Houses are presupposed. The differences that there might be – such as in monetary wealth – are not conceived in binary, reciprocal terms.

Unlike the differences between *iinakis*, these non-complementary differences are not valued. In brief, the Houses, unlike *iinaki* groups, are initially undifferentiated, and ideally should be kept that way, an aim which is enforced by the precisely even distribution of rights and duties. In a way, the impending, very real even if relatively small, economic differentiation between Houses is negated by acting as if it did not exist, which requires painstaking work. The ideal balance of relations between Houses, and with the community as a whole – and some of the means to achieve it (identical and symmetrical practice) – are partly the same as for *iinakis*, and reproduce some of the same cultural structures. Yet as a form of undifferentiation between social units, this diverges from those discussed above. The undifferentiation of Houses is not so much transformation as prevention of difference.

Iinakis and households do not function as separate systems. Instead, if each kind of grouping is conceptualised as a dynamic social grid or matrix, these matrices can be seen to intertwine, overlap and cross-cut as the case might be. Furthermore, they align and intersect with other social matrices, on multiple levels of social integration: the social units in question being churches, co-operatives, dance groups, villages, and ultimately, island districts. On the different levels and in different contexts, practices and discourses reflect the importance of the social units being either different or the same. These instances however are not all of equal significance. As seen in the food distribution practices, the pre-emptive undifferentiation between Houses is embraced by traditional kin group differentiation and undifferentiation as transformation of difference, and

depends on it for recognition and value. Both the differentiation and undifferentiation of Houses function on a lower level of societal ideology.

One possible change over time, at least partly due to the strengthening of households *vis à vis iinakis* and modern administration in general, is that previously there seems to have been more differentiating activity. Older ethnographic descriptions tend to list more kinds of specified 'work' of *iinaki* groups and lay a greater stress on their competition or willingness to differentiate themselves from others; in some cases (notably Luomala's [1965, 1966] descriptions of Tabiteuea), this seems to have applied to an extent to villages as well. Yet simultaneously, the undifferentiation as transformation would have been correspondingly stronger as well, since the logic of undifferentiating practice ('bringing the same' to the meetinghouse) was equally present and enforced.

The interplay of differentiation and undifferentiation is also tangible when the community is viewed as comprising individuals, instead of social units of different types, sizes and levels. In fact, it is perhaps just here that it does become tangible, to be felt in the body. In meetinghouse customs – in a number of prescribed bodily, spatial, discursive and material practices – the community comes to be constituted as hierarchical but simultaneously with an absolute limit to that hierarchy, and at that limit, the top, as strongly undifferentiated. The limit of hierarchy is the community itself, the social whole, to which the individuals surrender their autonomy.

People in a meetinghouse feast are generally differentiated according to age and gender, but there also run lines of differentiation which might be described as modern: according to monetary income, profession or employment, education and status within the nation-state's government. The traditional and modern kinds of differentiation may run parallel (as in the case of a senior male politician), or they may cross in multiple ways (as with a young female pastor). In addition, the competitive gift-giving (of money) by guests of honour results in a temporary differentiation among them, the display of monetary wealth here being approved, and even celebrated in the greetings (*katekeraoi*). This is possible both because the gifts serve a higher purpose in that they are given to the community, and because it takes place in the limited time-frame of a 'discussion' (*marooroo*), which is subordinate in relation to the *bootaki* as a whole. On a higher level, in the frame of the *bootaki* as a whole, the non-complementary economic differences are subsumed by the complementary guest:community opposition, and the economic differentiation is subordinated to an undifferentiation of value, achieved by means of identical gifts of food to all guests.

The undifferentiation between individuals in the meetinghouse appears analogous to that discerned from Kourabi's story: holding back differentiation. While the differentiation is expected and accepted, it is not allowed go all the way.

It has hopefully become apparent in this work that the undifferentiation, be it undoing pre-existing difference or pre-empting impending difference, was crucial for the Tabiteuean community. All in all, the *iinaki* groups, the households and individuals as well were generally ‘disciplined’. Tabiteueans observed the customs, be they regulating meetinghouse contributions or decorum in the role of a guest – however taxing the former might be on their household’s resources, or however much they would have preferred working their land or taking a nap to sitting immobile by the sacred posts in the latter case; they kept to their hard custom. It was the dance groups that were the most unruly.

The baseline of dance groups diverges from that of many other types of groups, just as dancing as an activity diverges in some respects from most everyday pursuits. Yet dancing is part – and parcel – of the same structure as other activities, the differences being quite systematic. While even the slightest hints of self-aggrandisement and competition are generally frowned upon, they are basic to dancing. In movement, word and performance, dancing is foremost a display of power, and dance groups are predicated upon competition – upon the will to distinguish oneself from one’s competitors. In the context of dancing there are, however, several layers of differentiation and undifferentiation between and within groups, and between individuals.

Dance groups are internally differentiated in a way analogical to the kinship group ideal: instead of the genealogical seniority of the latter, it is the amount of dance-related knowledge which sets the order of precedence. The male-female opposition though, discernible in kinship group ideals, is less pronounced in the context of dance groups (and in an actual dance performance the genders are actively undifferentiated). The ethnographic cases discussed in this work provide evidence that the precedence of a dance group leader is sometimes contested. Although the ideal model and metaphor of precedence – the tree with its trunk – is also the ideal and the model for Kiribati dance groups, the Kiribati metaphor of ‘tree’ sometimes belies them. The Kiribati ‘tree’ (*kaī*) is also the stick, method, skill; the branch cut off and turned into a weapon; the cutting seeking to be planted elsewhere. This sets up a new, separate order of precedence. Thus even though partially halting a process of differentiation, this is not a form of undifferentiation; on the contrary, it results in a parallel, competing, differentiated strand.

The new dance group, like the old ones, must prove itself in a dance performance. Dance performances are highly competitive events where the display of one’s power in an attempt at differentiation is permissible and expected – but only within certain parameters, and not without paradoxes. Firstly, power, while exhibited, must never be unleashed: it must remain under control. Secondly, dance performance is in simple

terms characterised by differentiation between groups and undifferentiation between individuals. Closer examination, however, reveals that the situation is more complex.

A single dance performance is ideally characterised by undifferentiation between individuals: if there is more than one principal dancer, ideally all are supposed to move in perfect unison and be as uniform in appearance as possible. Even the complementary male-female difference is undone in the unisex movements of the dance. For an individual performing as part of a row of dancers, however, the situation is paradoxical at the outset as, despite the ideal undifferentiation of the row, she (or he) is simultaneously expected to subtly attempt to differentiate herself from the others by her skill and beauty, which are manifestations of (controlled) cosmological power. On the other hand, even more paradoxically, undifferentiation contributes to the very definition of a skilful and beautiful dance. In effect, there is a strong tension, as the dancer must constantly balance between differentiation and undifferentiation, and between manifesting power while keeping it in check.

I see two kinds of differentiation and undifferentiation here, associated with valued and devalued difference respectively, but also, underneath them, another layer of meaning. The undifferentiation of individual dancers concerns a culturally important and valued complementary opposition (male-female). It also, however, concerns an infinite number of other differences in the appearance of individual dancers of either gender, which are not valued or even particularly meaningful. Rather, in the latter case being different is in itself devalued, the undifferentiation being defined more by the (aesthetic) value of sameness. Thus the latter kind of differences ultimately boil down to the opposition different:same. The undifferentiation here is prevention of difference, whereas the undifferentiation of genders is a transformation of difference, and has to do with control of power. Since the gender differences represent the danger as well as the potential of reproductive power, and the essential thing concerning power in Kiribati is control, they need to be transformed into more neutral similarity. Thus the undifferentiation of genders is in a way only a by-product of a more fundamental issue: the control of power.¹⁷⁵ Ultimately though, the aesthetic undifferentiation, the prevention of difference, might also be more about power and its control. While the

¹⁷⁵ Thus Kiribati is quite an interesting case in that while women and men tend to play markedly differentiated, traditional roles, there are ways in which the genders are actively undifferentiated, and these furthermore are matters at the heart of the society and the cosmos, having to do with (reproductive) power. As I argue here, traditional dancing reflects these concern with power and the ability to control it once it is obtained; unusually enough dancing, which in many neighbouring societies is an important way of representing and reproducing gender differentiation, is in Kiribati an important symbolic demonstration of gender undifferentiation. The same undifferentiating concern seemed to be fundamental to the traditional conceptions of socialising children and youngsters, even into their gendered roles as men and women.

acquisition of power is valued (on the condition that it is controlled), the differentiation thereby allowed for individuals is very subtle. The differences in terms of power are more unambiguously valued between groups, though not unconditionally.

On the level of groups, a dance performance is in principle characterised more straightforwardly by differentiation: a dance group as a whole aims at differentiating itself from its rival groups in a competitive display of power. The structure of group rivalry is complementary: a group needs its opponent, from which to differentiate. Yet in real life the social relations in the performances may sometimes be more complicated than the basic setting, disturbing the intricate balance that should be struck between differentiation and undifferentiation in a dance row, tempting group members to strive for differentiation when it is out of place. The extended case study of four dance events showed that if differentiation in dancing interferes with the (ideal and idealised) undifferentiation of community, trouble ensues. If a row of dancers represents more than one group and so stands for the community as a whole (in more than just the purely metaphorical sense), any undue differentiation in the row reflects directly on the notional presentation of community to the outside worlds as undifferentiated and unified, and thus is unacceptable.

In the different dance events described, the outcome varied, but once the situation had got out of hand, the community was forced to take action, represented by the Village Council. Despite the Council's initial efforts, competition was again let loose, whereupon more stringent measures were applied. Amity was restored, albeit at the cost of some enthusiasm. What the Council did first was to prohibit certain concrete performative means of differentiation in the dance. When that proved insufficient, on the next occasion the opportunity for disruptive differentiation was removed altogether.

It seems that the competitive display of power in dancing has the potential to try the limits of custom and community values. Conflicts will come and go, because with the passage of time, new dancers and new teachers will be competing, creating new social configurations. Social relations are an important component in the creation of meaning in dance; Kiribati dance with its exact repetition of the same choreographies might mistakenly be expected to bore but, instead, each dance is made thrilling, sparkling, by the people involved. Situations may emerge where people have conflicting loyalties, some of which do not coincide with those of the community. In such cases dancing has the capacity to violate the ideal nature of the social whole, which tolerates differentiation only up to a point. It might be precisely because dancing is such a culturally central activity and form of expression that it has this potential for change – were it anything less, challenges to the order would not be tolerated even to the extent that they are, but cut short earlier.

Considering this southern Kiribati community as a whole, it is alternately organised in differentiated and undifferentiated ways. I have depicted the community as structured by multiple social matrices, which cross-cut and overlap. In other words, the same people – the close to four-hundred inhabitants of the village – can be organised in several ways, each guided by the distinct values and logic of differentiation/undifferentiation. At different levels of social integration and in different modes of social and discursive practice, there are heightened moments of differentiation, followed by active undifferentiation.

Differentiation and undifferentiation have initially been used as general concepts to describe various phenomena of different orders and kinds, not necessarily compatible or directly comparable. In the course of discussing the various modes of social and discursive practice, it has become apparent that just as there is more than one kind of difference, undifferentiation too takes multiple forms with divergent underlying logics. Even things similar on the surface (like making identical contributions to the meetinghouse) may hide diverse meanings. The forms of undifferentiation and their meanings are not random, but relate systematically, their relations structured by the way they are valued.

To sum up, forms of differentiation and undifferentiation are hierarchically organised. Social differentiation building on complementary differences is valued, even if eventually restricted, whereas differentiation based on non-complementary differences is generally resisted, and/or is subsumed by the complementary distinctions. Forms of social differentiation, on the other hand, are connected to particular forms of undifferentiation. On the level of the society as a whole, undifferentiation means a suspension or expulsion of social hierarchy. It is not a denial of hierarchy in the sense of denying its existence but in a contrary sense of recognising, circumscribing and ultimately withholding it. Potential hierarchy is both based on a combination of complementary differences between social groups and individuals, but also limited by virtue of the undoing of these differences; for example, in the dissolution of seniority (elder-younger) and gender (male-female) into sameness. This undifferentiation as transformation likewise requires the recognition of pre-existing difference and does not mean devaluing the difference. This form of undifferentiation is ultimately encompassed by the first one, as the processes of the differentiation, whether transformed or not, are always halted. Finally, undifferentiation can mean the prevention of non-complementary differences between social groups or individuals. This form of undifferentiation, like the differentiation it works on, takes place on a lower level of societal ideology, as both the differences and their prevention are always encompassed by the complementary differences and their undoing.

It is safe to say that Kiribati is a holistic society, where the unity of community is an explicit value (cf. Coppet 1990). In southern Kiribati terms, the unity requires both certain forms of differentiation and certain forms of undifferentiation. The complementary differentiation contributes to the unity of the community, as long as it does not constitute permanent hierarchy. To further this ideal, the complementary differences can be transformed, undifferentiated, without encroaching on the value of that differentiation. Non-complementary differences, however, directly threaten the unity of the community, necessitating pre-emptive undifferentiation. What connects the instances discussed in this work is the ultimately threatening nature of difference: if uncontrolled, difference can disrupt the proper social order. It is almost as if any difference, complementary or non-complementary, is seen to contain the seed of a social hierarchy, which is to be curtailed and ultimately prevented. Not all difference needs to be undone or precluded, but all difference needs to be controlled.

In this work the concepts of differentiation and undifferentiation have mainly been used instead of the common but problematic vocabulary of hierarchy and equality. If one wanted to 'translate' the Tabiteuea case, the differentiated order could be described as 'restricted hierarchy' or a 'restricted order of precedence'; the undifferentiated order, for want of better terms, as 'conditional egalitarianism/equality'. This way one could perceive transient moments of (restricted) hierarchy in Keating's (2000) sense and slightly less transient moments of (conditional) equality; a pendulum between two opposing poles of the system. One might also perceive an enduring tension, and an arduously sought balance – the latter certainly being a local ideal. In southern Kiribati, hierarchy/order of precedence is never let fully to develop to an apex, the top is always levelled. Thus, the differentiated order strives for balance through a decentralisation of power; while differentiation is allowed up to a certain point but no further. There is a glass ceiling for both sexes, for example, and the glass ceiling is the notion of community itself, the social whole.

The instances of undifferentiation – among and between men and women, people, social units – described throughout this work point to sameness as something meaningful (cf. Gullestad 1993, 128 on gender), but this was largely left unarticulated. The ostensible links with the Western concept of equality, which is said to require sameness (and is therefore rendered impossible in the West, since sameness conflicts with the higher value of individuality [Robbins 1994]), would seem to call for more consideration in these terms. Whether the valorisation of sameness in a society like Kiribati means egalitarianism or equality, or something else entirely remains a question to be developed more fully in future studies.

This has been a study of one particular village community with a distinct history, though parts of the study have covered the rest of the island district as well. Therefore

the findings are not straightforwardly generalisable to other places in the Gilbert Islands, even though the working assumption, based on previous ethnographies of the area, was that while there is recognised variation between the islands, social systems of the south resemble each other with regard to differentiation. Instead, I propose that the analytical approach employed in this study, the attention to forms of undifferentiation as well as differentiation, might provide axes of comparison when comparing the Kiribati islands and communities.

While the Story of Kourabi contains an emphatic formulation of what is presumed to be a Tabiteuea-wide idea, the people, localities and *iinakis* make it a local story, the interpretation of which is, in the last analysis, limited to this community. Given the unevenness in the significance of *iinakis/boti* across Kiribati, the discussion concerning them in this study can only very cautiously be applied elsewhere. By comparison, the discussion of village organisation and Houses as social units would seem more readily to be potentially applicable elsewhere, since the purposeful consolidation of villages with the household as the administrative unit was a project of the colonial government and thus affected all the islands (Macdonald 1982, 205–206).¹⁷⁶

On the other hand, the analysis of the meetinghouse institution and space as a place for the differentiation and undifferentiation of individuals has been argued to be appropriate to at least the whole of Tabiteuea North. Casual observation in South Tarawa as well as people's occasional comparative comments suggest, though, that Tabiteuea is at the very controlled end of what appears to be a continuum of more and less formal meetinghouse practice.

Comparing the literature and audio-visual material available, the analysis of dancing in this work would appear to have the widest applicability, though any possible entanglements in the social configurations of dance groups and local communities remain a matter of empirical study. Even if dance groups are constituted in various ways, their mutual competition and internal differentiation are universal in Kiribati. On the level of performance, the style and genres of dancing are shared, and songs and choreographies circulate the islands. 'Hardness' as the careful control of power and difference seems to be at the heart of Kiribati dance.

In this work it has been proposed that North Tabiteuean society be seen as a combination of a severely limited and decentralised hierarchy and of a tightly conditional and contextual (intra-category) equality. The implicitness or subdued expression of differentiation as well as checks on power can be characteristics of hierarchical social systems as well. Two issues, however, seem specifically to characterise

¹⁷⁶ Kazama's (2001) description of the South Tabiteuean village organisation certainly suggests this, though, of course, concerning a nearby place, it does not say much about wider applicability.

Tabiteuea: the active undoing of difference – undifferentiation – and the primacy of the checks over power.

Firstly, the differences are recognised and some of them even valorised, but eventually unmade. Secondly, in Tabiteuea it is the checks which are decisive but, crucially, without power there would be no need to keep it in check. Control is a means of demonstrating one's power: without power there would be no need to control it; ergo, the tight, painstaking control manifest in the initiation rites, dance movements and Kiribati custom (*katei*) generally works to show that one has a lot of power. This is why Tabiteuean people, when they say that their custom is 'hard', they say it not without pride.

APPENDIX: KARAKIN KOURABI – THE STORY OF KOURABI

Karakin Kourabi

Kourabi bon natin Teinai ma Nei Teuia ma ana unimwane Teinai ake a mena i nanon maneabana are i Tabontebike i Nuka i Beru. Ai ngaia are e atongaki Kourabi bwa te nati ni karianako, te nati n bwaboia ke te nati Taneaba.

Teinai ma Teuia bon tibutorun Akau ma ngaia are natiia ae Kourabi bon te tibu mwamwano iroun Akau are e tekateka ni maneabana are Atanikarawa i Temanoku i Tabiteuea Meang.

RIKIRAKENA IAON BERU

Ngke e bungiki ai ao e koro-butoaki ma ni kabaneaki raoi arona ma ni katokaki i aon ana 'ati ni kana' are kanoana bwa te un, te makuri ao te mauri.

Ngke e nooria tinana are Teuia bwa e a tia raoi arona ni karaoaki ma ni wantongaki irouia tibuna ma ana karo ake i aon Beru, ao e a tuangaki iroun tinana bwa e na butia Teinai bwa e na nako ni kawaria kanoan Akau ake i Temanoku i Tabiteuea Meang. E katauaki ana bubuti ao e a mananga mai Beru nako Tabiteuea Meang nakon te kaawa ae Temanoku.

Ngke e a kaneneia te maneaba ae Atanikarawa, ao e taetae Obwaia nakoia natina ake Beiatu, Taoroba, Kobuti ao Naibwabwa ni kaangai: Taraia bwa te tabo are e bakarereia iai ao kam kamawa naba.

Ngke e a roko i tabon te maneaba mai maiaki ao e a borio ni kaea tanimaiakin te maneaba i maeon te boua n nuka. Ai ngaia are e teirake Beiatu ni kamwawaa mwaina n tekateka irarikin tarina are Taoroba n tanimainiku ao Kourabi e tekateka imwina i Tanimaiaki.

N tikuna irarikiia tibuna ao a kabanea arona n te aro are e a riki bwa te aomata ae Tabu ma ni kamaraia ao n aki iein.

ARONA IRARIKIIA TIBUNA

Inanon tikuna irarikia tibuna ao a rangni maiti kakai ma kamimi ake a riki n ana tai ni maiu n aron aikai:

- 1) Ngke e wenewene ao e kainnanao uningan atuna ao e a ti butokaurake naba i aan atuna wakan te kai ae te ibi ao are e a reke naba bwa uningana are e rang ni mweraoi iai.
- 2) N te tairiki teuana ao e a bo-rara bwa e kabuebue te tairiki anne ao e taku: Tera ngke e reke te bwai are N na kamwaitoroai iai. Akea bwa e a oro naba te ang

Maeao ae korakora ma ni kakoroa te ati n ari teuana ae abwakina tao 1.5 meter ao e koro i on te kainga ae Tebunnanti ao e anaki irouia kain Buota bwa ana bwai ni kamwaitoro.

- 3) Ngke e tebotebo i nanon neina, ao e a manga taku: Tera ngke e a riki naba te bwai teuana i aau are N natoka iai n tebotebo be aonga n aki bo ma te bokaboka. Ao akea bwa e a riki naba ana ati ni katoka i aana ao are e a tebotebo ma n aki bo ma te bokaboka.
- 4) Ngke e a kara ao e a manga kainnanao ekona ao e a roko naba n aron ake mai eta. Te kamimi bwa ekona anne bon te Ri ni wae man te nimoimoi ni wae nakon te bubua ni wae ae abwakina 1.5 meter are a uotia naba bunnanti bwa ekona.

Te kananokawaki bwa ake ngkai rabwatan uningana ao okona bwa a bue n te bata are a kakawakinaki iai. Ana ati ni kamaitoro ao ana ati ni katoka a teimatoa n tiku rabwataia ni karoko boong aikai.

ARONA IMWIN MATENA

Ngke e a bon kara be e a tawa kunna ao e a mate ao a baireia unimwanen Buota ma kaina ni kabane bwa e na aki taunaki rabatana ao a katikua n te bata teuana ni kabanea raoi irikona iai. Imwina a karaui ni kaitiaki riina ao a booti ni kawakinaki i nanon te bwaro teuana ae atongaki bwa te Rawati ao a katinetinea inanon maneaban ae Atanikarawa bwa nnena ni maeka i nanon rooro ma rooro.

TINETINENA NI MANEABANA AE ATANIKARAWA

Ngkana e a mwebuaka n tiku ni maneabana ke e na karaoaki Atanikarawa ao ngkanne e a karuoaki irouia kain te Katanrake nakon maneabana ae Tekiakia n ana kainga ae Kabubwarengana.

KAOKANA NAKON MANEABANA

Ngkana e a tangiraki okina nakon Atanikarawa irouia kain Buota ao a na riai ni kabouaki bwaai aikai:

- 1) Oon te maneaba Te Matantongo
- 2) Inai ake a inrake
- 3) Inaai ake 4 ake inaia taari ake 4 ake a in nako iang
- 4) Ngkana e mka rauna ao e na kabouaki naba ma ngkana e bon maiu ao ti bwaai ake 3 ake a na kabouaki.

Ngkana a tiaraoi ni bobonga bwaai ni kabane irouia kain Buota ao a tia raoi naba aia mwakuri kain te Katanrake ao e na koteaki tebong teuana irouia i-Buota ma kain te Katanrake are e nang tebokaki iai ao ai bon ana bong naba n okira maneabana ae Atanikarawa.

The Story of Kourabi

Kourabi was truly the child of Teinai with Ms Teuia with Teinai's *unimwaane* who were in his *maneaba* which is in Tabontebike in Nuka in Beru. This is why Kourabi was called a child of making-all-appearing-at-the-same-time, a child of the-maker-of-sweet-scent, or the child of marked-land.

Teinai and Teuia were truly great-grandchildren of Akau, and that who was their child, Kourabi, was truly the great-great-grandchild of Akau, who sat in his *maneaba* which is Atanikarawa in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North.

HIS GROWING UP IN BERU

When he was born, his umbilical cord was cut, and to finish well his manner, he was placed on top of his initiation stone (*ati-ni-kana*), the contents of which were courage/anger, work and well-being.

When his mother, who was Teuia, saw that his character was finished well, and he had been made and educated carefully by his grandparents and his parents who were in Beru, and he was informed by his mother that he should ask Teinai if he [Kourabi] should go to visit the descendants of Akau, who were in Temanoku in Tabiteuea North.

His request was accepted, and he set out from Beru to Tabiteuea North to the village of Temanoku.

When he was passing by the *maneaba* of Atanikarawa, Obaia spoke to his children, who were Beiatau, Taoroba, Kobuti and Naibwabwa, like this: 'Look, in the place he goes directly to, you will make room as well'.

When he Kourabi came to the corner of the *maneaba* from the south and he turned toward the lagoon to reach the southern side of the *maneaba* to the west from the middle post. It was Beiatau who stood up, to make room before him, to sit next to his sibling who was Taoroba on the eastern side of the *maneaba*, and Kourabi sat in the southern side after him Beiatau.

During his stay at the side of his grandparents, they finished well his character (*arona*) in a way (*aro*) that a human being came into existence who is *tabu* and *kamaraia* and who is not to marry.

HIS WAYS BY THE SIDE OF HIS GRANDPARENTS

During his stay by the side of his grandparents, there were very many miracles and wonders, which came into existence in his lifetime in the manner of the following:

- 1) When he lay and longed for a pillow for his head, a root of the *ibi*-tree was just getting ready to blossom under his head, and it resulted in his pillow and he was comfortable indeed.

- 2) One evening he was overheated for it was hot that evening, and he thought: What if a thing were found that I could make myself cool with. And behold, the hard western wind hit to cut away a select piece of stone (*ati n ari*), whose length was perhaps 1,5 metres and it was cut on the *kainga* land of Tebunnanti and it was fetched by the people of Buota to be his thing-to-make-cool.
- 3) When he bathed in his pond, he thought yet again: 'What if a thing came into existence under me, which I would mount on to bathe so that I would not touch the mud'. And behold, and under him emerged his stone-to-mount-on, and on which he bathed and he did not come into contact with the mud.
- 4) When he was very old and once more he longed for his cane, and it also came in ways, which are from above. The marvel is that this cane of his was truly the leg bone from the knee to the ankle, whose length was 1.5 metre, and a crowd of spirits brought it to be his cane.

It is saddening that now there are no material remains (*rabwata*, 'bodies') of his pillow and his cane, because they got burned in the hut in which they were kept. The bodies of his stone to-make-cool and his stone to-mount-on continue to exist to these days.

HIS WAYS AFTER HIS DEATH

When he was truly old for his skin was bleached and he died, the elders of Buota with all its people decided that his body was not to be buried and they put him in a hut to finish well its flesh. After that they carefully cleaned his bones and they put them together to be kept in a basket called *rawati*, and they put it hanging inside his *maneaba* of Atanikarawa for it to be his place to inhabit generation after generation.

HIS HANGING IN HIS MANEABA OF ATANIKARAWA

If he is in discomfort in staying in the *maneaba*, or Atanikarawa is to be repaired, then he will be taken down by people of the Tekatanrake to his *maneaba* of Kiakia on his *kainga* of Kabubuarengana.

HIS RESTORATION TO HIS MANEABA

If his returning to Atanikarawa is desired by the people of Buota, these things are appropriately to be renewed:

- 1) The fence of the *maneaba*, Te Matantongo
- 2) The *iinais* which are oriented towards the ocean side
- 3) The *iinais* which are the *iinais* of the siblings, of whom there are four, and which are oriented towards north

- 4) If the thatch of the Atanikarawa is damaged, it is to be renewed as well but if it truly is in good condition, only these three things are to be renewed.

When all the things are finished well to be used by the people of Buota, and the work of the people of Tekatanrake is completed well too, one day will be pointed by Buota people with the people of Tekatanrake, in which he will be washed and that is truly also his day of returning to his *maneaba* of Atanikarawa.

GLOSSARY

Kiribati*Aba**Abamakoro**Anene**Aomata**Atimakoro**Auti**Bao**Be**Bira**Bo**Boti**Booraoi**Bootaki**Boowi**Buia**Bwabwa**Bwabwai**Bwai, bwaai**Bubuti**Iinai (inaai, inai)**Iinaki**I-Matang**Inaomata**Iruwa**Kai***English**

Land; people

Island ('section of land')

To sing, singing

Human being; person; people

Islet ('section of stone')

House, household

Transport, vessel

A rectangular cloth wrapped around the waist (a lavalava); a dress mat woven from pandanus leaves

Whistle; song conductor in *mwaie*, chairperson

To meet, fight, compete

Sitting place in a *maneaba*; the kin group occupying that place. Synonym of → *iinaki*.Equal, even, uniform, equitable; equality, evenness, equity, harmony, uniformity; from *bo raoi*, 'to meet well'

Meeting, feast, party

Council, meeting, court

A residential building with a raised floor and no walls

A basket woven from coconut fronds

Swamp taro (a coarse tuber; a hard variant of taro)

Thing

To ask; a request

A mat woven from coconut fronds

Sitting place in a *maneaba*; the kin group occupying that place; a row of thatch. In the first meanings synonym of *boti*.

Westerner, a person of light skin; 'person from the land of Matang'

Independence; an independent person; a land-owning male

Guest, stranger

Tree, branch, stick; dance, movement, skill,

	victory, defeat; person/people of a place, inhabitant; idiomatic usages
<i>Kain - (kaain -)</i>	A person or people of a place, e.g. <i>kain</i> Buota, people of Buota
<i>Kainga</i>	A kin group and its land; in contemporary Kiribati, a named section of land running across the island (or the village) in an west-east direction, with possible connection to the village <i>maneaba</i> and/or ancestors; in the precolonial era also the kin group occupying that piece of land
<i>Kainikamaen</i>	' <i>Kai</i> to make supple'; traditional composition methods, usually involving spirits/magic
<i>Kaimatoa</i>	' <i>Kai</i> hard'; a school of dancing from the southern Gilbert Islands
<i>Kainimeang</i>	' <i>Kai</i> of the north'; a school dancing from the northern islands of Butaritari and Makin
<i>Kaitara (ka-ai-tara)</i>	Opposite, to confront, to face, opponent, rival, counterpart
<i>Kamaraia (ka-maraia)</i>	To curse; 'to make/to cause/to be capable of magical charm/sorcery/evil spell/curse/bad luck'; a person or a place capable of producing death immediately
<i>Karaki</i>	Story, narrative, history
<i>Katei</i>	Custom, culture; 'to cause to stand', to teach dance
<i>Katekeraoi</i>	Ceremonial acknowledgement of a gift; causative form of → <i>tekeraoi</i> lit. 'struck well'; 'success'; 'congratulation')
<i>Koroun</i>	Public dress rehearsal (for dancing)
<i>Kuaea</i>	Choir
<i>Kuna</i>	Song
<i>Maamaa</i>	Shame, to be ashamed
<i>Makoro</i>	Section, part (of something), slice; group
<i>Maneaba</i>	Meetinghouse
<i>Mari-, marika</i>	Fertility, fruitfulness, abundance; fertile, fruitful, abundant
<i>Matoa, matoatoa</i>	Hard, difficult, solid, though; hardness
<i>Maungatabu</i>	General assembly, general meeting
<i>Moanibwai</i>	'The first thing'; right of ritual precedence
<i>Moan teiao</i>	Menarche; a ritual conducted at the time; 'first →

	<i>teiao'</i>
<i>Mwaaka (maka, m'aka)</i>	Power
<i>Mwaie</i>	Dance, to dance
<i>Mwakuri</i>	To work; work
<i>Mwanewe</i>	Lyrics of a song
<i>Mweenga (mwenga)</i>	Home, household
<i>Nei</i>	Person article for female names. N.B. does not indicate marital status ('Ms.'). (Not universally used in everyday speech, but in this work used frequently to indicate female gender, esp. when it is not apparent to a non-Kiribati-speaker from the name)
<i>Rorobuaka</i>	Young man, men (lit. 'warrior generation')
<i>Tabu</i>	Forbidden; sacred; prohibition
<i>Te</i>	Article preceding all nouns, except proper nouns and genitive forms, indicating singularity. N.B. does not indicate definitiveness/indefinitiveness.
<i>Tei</i>	To stand, to dance, to exist
<i>Teiao</i>	'To stand outside'; menstruation; the ritual performed to a girl at menarche
<i>Tekeraoi</i>	Success; congratulation; lit. 'struck well'; ceremonial acknowledgement of a gift
<i>Tia babaire</i>	Chairperson, M.C.
<i>Tia kainikamaen</i> (pl. <i>taani kainikamaen</i>)	Composer (in the traditional way, by magical means), 'the one who composes/bends <i>kai</i> '
<i>Tia katei</i> (pl. <i>taani katei</i>)	Dance teacher, 'the one who makes stand'
<i>Tibuta</i>	A sleeveless women's blouse.
<i>Un</i>	Courage; anger; fight, force; ardour; a row of dancers
<i>Unaine</i>	Elderly or mature woman, old lady (honorific)
<i>Unimwaane</i>	Elderly or mature man, elder (honorific)

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adopted by Revd: W.E. Goward, local Representative of the London Missionary Society. Attachments:

- A. Translation of a memorandum by Revd: W.E. Goward from statements made to him by two Native Pastors
- B. Copy of a letter and a memorandum from A.F. Grimble, District Officer of Central and Southern Gilberts
- C. Extracts from a letter by Revd: G. Eastman.

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