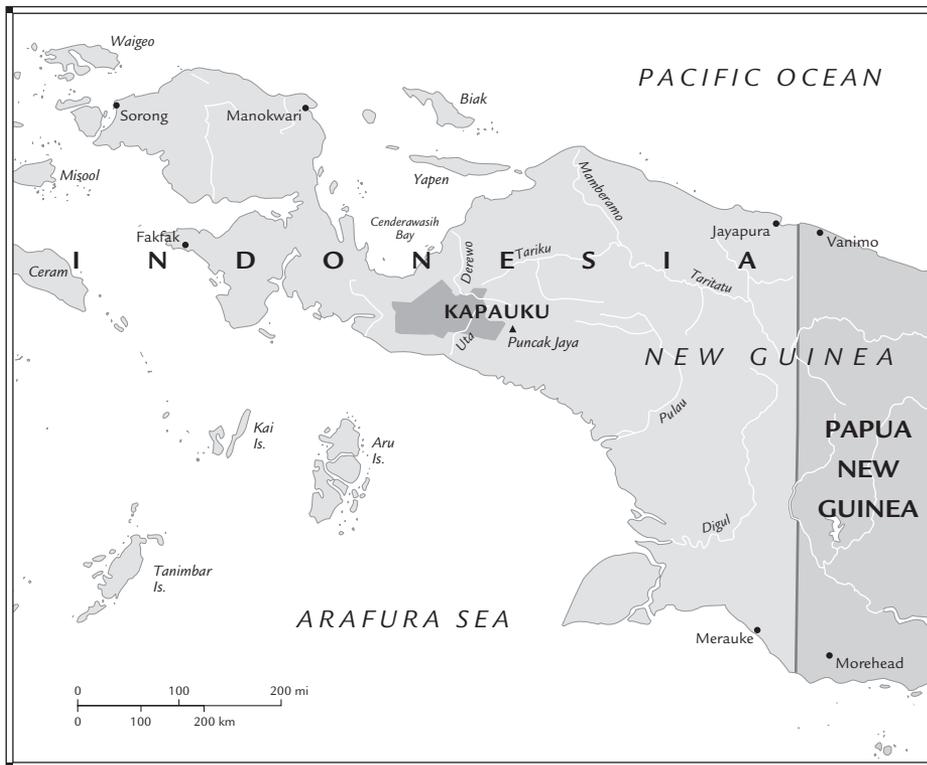


CHAPTER 8

THE KAPAUKU
New Guinea “Capitalists”?



Location of the Kapauku.

→ THE BEGINNING

Ugatame designed the universe and is of two natures, male and female, like the sun and the moon are two. Sun is light and warm and like a ball of fire. Moon is cool like the light of a firefly. But the sun and the moon are not Ugatame; they are proof that there is Ugatame.

The world is a flat slab of stone, covered with earth, and edged all around with water. There is nothing below it; it goes down as far as there is to go. No dark world beneath the real world exists. Above the world is a bowl turned upside down, and this blue bowl is the sky. The sun begins cupped under the bowl at its eastern lip. It moves through the day to the western edge. As evening comes, the sun slips under the western lip of the blue bowl, and all through the night travels above the curve of the bowl. At last it slides underneath the eastern edge, and it is morning. As the sun moves above the outer convexity of the bowl, tiny breaches in the bowl allow pinpoints of light to seep through; these are the stars. Above the bowl is another world, and it may look like this one. It is Ugatame's home.

→ INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

The western half of the main island of New Guinea was originally colonized by the Dutch. In 1969 it came under the jurisdiction of Indonesia, and it is now Irian Jaya. The central highlands of West Irian are rugged, with mountains whose peaks may soar to 4000 meters, and deep valleys below. Three large lakes act as reservoirs and flow south to the Indian Ocean. Of the five vegetational zones, tropical rainforest predominates, with a variety of beeches and oaks. The undergrowth bears ferns and pandanus. Higher altitudes are covered with stunted alpine growth; valley bottoms are swampy and covered with reeds. It is among these mountains that the one-hundred thousand Kapauku make their home.

Their tribe was named Kapauku by the people to the south; their neighbors to the north call them Ekari. They call themselves "Me"—"the people."

The south coast of New Guinea was linked to the interior by an important intertribal trade network. Because this ran directly through the Kapauku's region, they had extensive contact with both people and goods from beyond the borders of their own territory. However, their mountain ranges, swamps, and extensive rainforests ensured their isolation from Western influence until 1938, when the Dutch government stationed officers at an outpost they created near one of the large lakes. This initial contact was brief. The Japanese attack in the southwestern Pacific resulted in the abandonment of this post, and it was not reestablished for nearly ten years. When a new outpost was established, Christian missionaries arrived, their goal being "to see to the spiritual welfare of the people" (Posposil 1963:3).

→ KAPAUKU ECONOMY: THE “PRIMITIVE CAPITALISTS”

The Kapauku Papuans are often cited as the prime example of a “simple” society with an egalitarian redistributive system that nevertheless boasts features typical of contemporary capitalist orientation (Harris 1988; Nanda 1991). In fact, Leopold Posposil, the leading authority on the Kapauku, labels their economy as “primitive capitalism,” characterized by the pursuit of wealth in the form of cowrie shell money, status distinctions based on such wealth, and an ethic of individualism (1963:3).

Subsistence

Large game is absent in this environment, relegating hunting and trapping to small importance among the Kapauku. There is a paucity, too, of small game animals; the lakes offer no edible fish. Although hunting provides distraction as sport, it is the gathering of crayfish, insects, frogs, rats, and bats that provides important supplements to the daily diet. (It is also a crucial part of the Kapauku economy in that it supplies the raw materials for construction and manufacturing.)

Kapauku subsistence is dependent on two items: sweet potatoes, the staple of the native diet, and pigs.

The Kamu Valley’s two very different types of terrain demand the use of two kinds of cultivation, and each household usually maintains some of each type of garden. Shifting cultivation, with areas cleared by burning, planted with sweet potatoes, and harvested daily, is employed in the mountainous areas. Extensive gardens on the rocky slopes are laboriously fenced off to protect them from wild boars and hungry domesticated pigs, and left fallow when plots are exhausted.

The valley is exploited more intensively, employing two methods of rotating crops of sweet potatoes, sugarcane, taro, bananas, cucumbers, gourds, and beans. In all garden types, it is the sweet potato that assumes primacy, with 90 percent of all land devoted to its production.

The domesticated pig plays a role in Kapauku society that can scarcely be overestimated, and which is intricately tied up with other fundamental aspects of Kapauku life and culture.

Posposil explains that the sweet potato and the pig can be separated neither from one another nor from the essence of Kapauku economy. Both people and pigs are fed on sweet potatoes. It is the sale of pigs (and pork) that contributes the largest portion of the individual Kapauku’s income. And because fat, healthy, fertile pigs depend on the plentiful harvest of sweet potatoes, the two are economically bound together. Each is food and each is wealth—and wealth is the driving force behind Kapauku society. Posposil reports that “the highest prestige in this society and the highest status of political and legal leadership are achieved not through heritage, bravery in warfare, or knowledge and achievements in religious ceremonialism, but through

accumulation and redistribution of capital” (1963:5). Capital is amassed in the form of shell money, and successful pig breeding is the means to acquire it. So, indirectly, sweet potatoes not only feed human and animal alike, but also provide a way to achieve political power. By providing a way to achieve great wealth—and it is only a wealthy man who rises to leadership and authority—the pig and the sweet potato are joined in “a pivotal role in the wealth-oriented Kapauku society.”

Manufacture

Kapauku’s limited scope in manufacturing provides contrast to their agricultural sophistication. It is, for the most part, not specialized. Manufactured tools include flint chips, stone axes and knives, and grinding stones. Women’s aprons are fashioned from woven tree bark, which is also employed in creating decorative necklaces and armbands worn by both women and men. Knives, used both for surgery and the carving of pork, are made of bamboo splinters that have broken off during the construction of water and insect containers. Rat teeth and bird claws provide raw material to create other carving tools. Agricultural tools, needed for digging, planting, and harvesting are generally made of wood.

Bows and arrows are the first line of weaponry, although mostly used for killing small game, and not in combat. Enemies (and any large game available) are more likely to be challenged with projectiles tipped with long, sharp bamboo blades.

Although these manufactured tools and weapons are strictly utilitarian in design, the Kapauku demonstrate great artistic skill in their manufacture of net bags, used for both practical and decorative purposes (Posposil 1963). They are woven in intricate designs made of string spun from soft inner bark, and often decorated with colored orchid stems. Large nets for fishing and roomy carrying bags are woven by women; the smaller decorative bags worn around the neck or on the shoulder for adornment or used to carry money are festooned with bright feathers and shells, and are manufactured by men.

Settlement

A Kapauku village typically houses about 120 people and is a scattered arrangement of about fifteen houses. These vary in size and are constructed of upright planks thatched with reeds or pandanus leaves. This vegetation is also used as insulation between plank layers, with large strips of bark providing the flooring. Each room has a fire, built beneath a chink in the joining of the walls and roof left expressly for smoke to escape.

Large houses are elevated, leaving a space beneath the structure, which houses domesticated pigs. The planking used for walls is also used to build a partition, which runs across the width of the building, dividing it in two. The front section houses the men and adolescent boys in a communal dormitory. The back half is further divided into individual “apartments,” one for each married woman and her children.

Some households outgrow this traditional arrangement. If the back section has insufficient room for the number of wives and children, small shelters near the main house are built for each unprovisioned woman and her children.

Money

Reminiscent of the contrast between elaborate techniques of cultivation and simple technology of manufacture, Posposil (1963) also draws attention to the unusual juxtaposition of “one of the world’s most primitive technologies” with what he describes as a “sophisticated and complex” economy (p. 18).

Kapauku economy rests on the use of money. Cowrie shells and two types of necklaces are used both as money for purchase and exchange and as a measure of value and worth. Both of these types of money can be used to buy food, crops, animals, land, and to purchase cultivation labor, medical care, and magical skills. If one is without money, one is without both respect and social standing. It is only money that affords access to what is important: marriage, social status, livelihood, and personal relationships.

Shells and glass beads, the units of worth, are arranged into denominations and, because they are not locally produced, must be secured through trade with peoples living in the coastal lowlands.

Although there is generally an established “customary” or “ideal” price for goods and services, there is also considerable fluctuation that follows the



Kapauku men.

rubric of supply and demand. In addition, prices often reflect the relationship between the individuals involved in the transaction. Often prices are lowered between close relatives, or in dealings with someone whose favor is likely to be valuable in the future or has been depended on in the past.

As would be expected, because they are close by, most buying and selling occurs between close relatives, members of local patrilineal kin groups. Barter—that is, exchanging commodities rather than money—has been reduced to a fairly insignificant position among Kapauku, and money payment is mandated for favors and behaviors that in other economic systems would not involve such a transfer. For example, the expression of grief over the death of one's relative must be paid for in money. And there is rarely a crime committed that cannot be erased through adequate shell money payment.

Perhaps the most elaborate rules of sale are constructed for pigs, which is not surprising given their importance in Kapauku culture. In fact, it is the ceremonial pig feast that is the occasion of most active business transactions. Salt is another important item of sale.

In addition to outright buying and selling, the extension of credit has been elaborated (perhaps beyond that of Western economies) as a means of redistributing money. Because there is no mechanism of giving an outright gift, loans assume an important role in establishing oneself as generous and prestigious. "Interest" on a loan is informal and may be promised by the borrower rather than demanded by the lender. Although there is no legal recourse if this promise isn't kept, it carries with it the social sanction of dishonesty and the likelihood that there will be no further extension of credit in the future.

Posposil (1963) recounts a story explicating the extent to which the Kapauku "profit motive" has extended to their interactions with Christian missionaries on the island. A missionary church was established and enjoyed popularity among villagers, who, after Sunday services, received tobacco and other desired goods. Feeling as if his efforts toward their conversion were close to fruition, the missionary grew puzzled as attendance at services began to drop off dramatically over a period of several weeks during which he was waiting for his supplies of goods to be replenished. Once the supplies were finally gone, so were all the attendees at his church. He went to the village to inquire about this distressing turn of events, and was told in no uncertain terms: "No tobacco, no hallelujah" (p. 94).

➔ SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Kinship and Descent

Each Kapauku can place other people in one of three groups: close friends and kin; acquaintances and strangers; and enemies.

One can trust only those in the first category. Close friends and relatives are the people who offer financial, economic, political, and emotional support.

The second classification merges individuals who are only casual acquaintances with those who are completely unknown. It is worth remembering that because “every stranger is a potential customer” (Posposil 1963:34) and therefore a potential source of increased wealth, strangers are usually treated with courtesy.

The category of enemy does not necessarily imply personal enmity on an individual’s part. Rather, enemies are defined more by group membership than any hostile interaction. An enemy is someone who belongs to a group that has traditionally had warlike relations with one’s father’s group.

Although Kapauku reckon descent along both maternal and paternal lines, villages are patrilineal and exogamous, and generally patrilocal. The sib, which is the kinship group of most importance, is a totemic, patrilineal (ideally exogamous) group whose members reckon their descent from a common apical ancestor. The diffuseness of the Kapauku patrilineage renders it of little use for political purposes, limiting its focus to the regulation of marriage and the construction of personal and economic obligatory relationships.

Most day-to-day rights and obligations are incurred within the localized patrilineal group; it is members of this group that an individual will depend upon for amassing bride-price or gathering allies in times of conflict with outsiders. Larger political amalgamations (confederations) are established through kinship ties, forged by marriages, with other lineages.

Marriage

The arrangement of a marriage ideally occurs between the families of the prospective groom and brothers and mother of the prospective bride. Collecting a high bride-price takes precedence over the preferences expressed by the woman to be married. However, mothers may set a bride-price they know cannot be met expressly for the purpose of discouraging an undesirable prospect.

Elopedments are not infrequent, despite the fact that they are considered improper. When this occurs, it is set right by negotiating a bride-price after the fact, indicating that families of the eloping couple have accepted the union. The pig feast, an occasion for men and women of marriageable age from neighboring villages to come together, is a primary opportunity for courtship. Premarital sex is generally not punished, although it is frowned upon for its potential to diminish a woman’s bride-price. Premarital pregnancy, however, is a much more highly disapproved of matter.

When divorce occurs, the bride-price must be returned, which is a serious consequence. (Divorce—usually occurring because a woman has left her husband—is, in fact, cited as a common instigator of warfare.) In such an instance, small children generally remain with their mother, and when they reach the age of about seven, are likely to join their father’s village. Unless advanced age or illness prevents it, a widow is expected to remarry within a reasonable amount of time after her husband’s death.

One reason polygyny is widely practiced is that it provides an opportunity for men to gain status. The acquisition of multiple wives, granting status

because it is an indicator of the husband's ability to pay multiple bride-prices, is a display of wealth among the Kapauku much in the same way that the acquisition of expensive jewelry and other luxury items is in the United States.

However, while polygyny is an ideal for which Kapauku men will strive, it is an expensive venture and not easily attained. (About one-third of all marriages are polygynous.) As we have seen, Kapauku economy depends largely on plant cultivation and pig husbandry. Although it is the agricultural activities that provide most of the food, it is through pigs that men achieve status, power, and authority. If a husband can afford multiple wives, they will ultimately help him earn more money and prestige through their tending of pigs and sweet potatoes.

Family and Household

Household composition varies somewhat. It always consists, minimally, of a nuclear family, but usually also includes other consanguineal or affinal kin. In addition to being the basic Kapauku unit of residence it is also, to a large extent, the basic unit of production and consumption.

Whoever owns the house is considered the "head" within the household; he is responsible for organizing production and harvesting activities, because he is ultimately responsible for assuring that household members are adequately fed. He is also charged with maintaining harmony and cooperation among the other men, which must be accomplished by setting an example and through his own personal skills of persuasion. Despite owning the house he has no formal recourse for enforcing his wishes. He must also be careful not to overstep certain boundaries in exercising control over the members of other nuclear families living within the household.

→ POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Authority and leadership in the setting of a family (nuclear or polygynous) or an individual household is well defined among the Kapauku. It may be based on ownership; it may be based on kinship. Authority and leadership on a larger level is not formally defined in this way.

Positions of leadership in Kapauku society are held exclusively by men, who appropriate the products of women's labor in order to play their political games. That men are in formal positions of leadership must be viewed in the context of the entire fabric of Kapauku society, however. Posposil (1963) points out that, despite whatever "ideal" may be espoused formally, one must not overlook the reality that, in many instances, "the father and husband is only a figurehead, while the actual power rests with his wife" (p. 42). He says of one such woman, with whom he was negotiating a purchase of pork, "despite the fact that she is the individual who makes the important decisions in the family, she never forgets the conventions of Kapauku culture" (p. 42).

Found in many societies throughout Melanesia and New Guinea is a person in a position of leadership called the “big man.” It is through personal attributes and achievements that such stature is achieved. Big man status is neither inherited nor elected. As a result of public behaviors—generosity chief among them—and the great wealth that facilitates such behavior, a man sets himself apart from others in the community, attracting loyal followers. As he continues to amass wealth, so too he gathers his reputation. He sponsors feasts, helps young men gather bridewealth, and by so doing engenders the obligation of those whom he has helped.

Among the Kapauku there is such a big man role. It is called *tonowi*, which means “rich one.”

The *Tonowi*

The Kapauku *tonowi* embodies the typical traits of the characteristic big man. His position is an informal one; he sets himself apart from his fellows with his wealth, his generosity, and his verbal skills. Often he may have proven to be brave in war or well versed in shamanism, but these are traits that only enhance his power; they are not essential to be a *tonowi*.

A *tonowi* does not have the formal authority to enforce his will. He offers his suggestions, makes his wishes known, and encourages people to accept his decisions. Although his position is an informal one, the *tonowi* assumes the mantle of leadership on a great number of occasions. It is he who acts as a representative of his own group in their dealings with outsiders and other villages. Within his group he negotiates settlements and judges blame in disputes. It is generally the case that social control among the Kapauku is effected by persuasion rather than by force. Owing to the desirability of amassing a fortune, economic inducements often act as the most effective incentive. Fines or threats of fines are frequently enough to exact conformity.

Given the extreme value Kapauku culture places on wealth, it is hardly surprising that one who has achieved great wealth would be deemed successful and worthy of admiration. When speaking of big man status, however, mere possession of wealth is never enough; not all who are rich are *tonowi*. The wealth must be generously distributed, and Posposil notes there may be severe consequences if it is not: “[I]n some regions . . . selfish and greedy individuals, who have amassed huge personal properties, but who have failed to comply with the Kapauku requirement of ‘generosity’ towards their less fortunate tribesmen may be, and actually frequently are, put to death” (p. 49). Posposil was, in fact, among the Kapauku at a time when just such an occurrence took place.

Even in those regions where these measures are not taken, wealthy individuals who hoard rather than share their fortunes are shunned, ridiculed, and eventually brought into line, thus ensuring more equitable distribution of capital.

Of course, given the nature of his position and the lack of formal recourse, even a *tonowi* who is generous and well respected cannot force others to do what he wishes. This is one instance where his personal charm and verbal gifts

become of the utmost importance. If met with resistance, he may become agitated and begin to shout taunts; he makes long eloquent speeches outlining the wisdom of his decision, citing rules that support his position, finally offering threats to solidify his position. In extreme cases, he may begin to perform what is known as “the mad dance,” or abruptly stop his ranting and cry piteously about the misconduct in question and the obstinence of the transgressor. Some *tonowi* are so adept at this performance that they can summon genuine tears, a sight that usually proves moving enough to at last secure the compliance of any unwilling party (Posposil 1963). This facet of the role is crucial enough to jeopardize a wealthy man’s ability to become a *tonowi* in its absence. Wealthy and generous individuals who are shy and soft spoken, or who disdain public confrontation, cannot ascend to the position.

The generosity required of a wealthy individual must be expressed in culturally appropriate forms. Because the native economy does not include gift giving, it is through his willingness to make loans that the *tonowi* acquires his political power. By extending credit to those in need, wealthy men gain both the prestige that accrues from generosity and the indebtedness and loyalty of their creditors. The *tonowi* is then in a good position to have others follow his dictates. Those who are already in his debt comply so as not to have repayment of their loans demanded; those who have not yet asked for extensions of credit comply lest they jeopardize their chance of successful borrowing in the future. Thus the widest possible alliances are forged, and the *tonowi* exacts loyalty from the majority of the villagers.

Besides those to whom he has extended credit, a *tonowi* also finds support by taking “apprentices” into his household. Since every Kapauku man aspires to riches, a young man seizes the opportunity to join the household of an older, wealthy man. He is lent a pig, and is given room and board and the opportunity to benefit from the *tonowi*’s business acumen. If the young man appears to be a promising pupil, his benefactor might allow him to buy a female piglet in order to begin accumulating his wealth in earnest. The final act of generosity is a loan to make up the bride-price he will need to marry. In return, these apprentices work in the garden and household and act as bodyguards. They are loyal in the event of a dispute; in war, they offer their lives. Once they are established in their own right, those the *tonowi* has called “my boys” continue to function as loyal supporters.

A *tonowi*, much like any Kapauku, also depends upon his close kin for political support. Members of his kin group will follow a *tonowi* for all the same economic reasons others do, but will additionally acquiesce out of genuine affection.

Because the *tonowi*’s wealth is dependent upon successful pig breeding, it is far from secure. If a *tonowi* makes a poor management decision or has a run of bad luck, his fortune may be lost. Because the loss of wealth will result in the loss of *tonowi* status, Kapauku political structure is rarely static over long periods of time. Pig breeding offers a vehicle for wealth that is accessible to many Kapauku, contributing to the flux in the status system. As one man loses

power, another steps in to take his place. The result is a flexible, frequently shifting power structure, with no individual in a position of authority for an extended period of time.

➔ THE CULTURE OF INDIVIDUALISM

Economic Individualism

One of the most striking features of Kapauku culture is the overriding emphasis on the individual. Evidence for this orientation, as well as its consequences, is found throughout their beliefs, behaviors, and institutions.

Posposil asserts: "All Kapauku economic undertakings are executed primarily because . . . 'I need,' or 'I want to do it for my own benefit.' I have never heard an economic argument in which the needs of the social group have been put forward as a justification for a position taken by a discussant" (1963:89).

This attention to one's own needs, and the attempt to acquire that which will satisfy them, has resulted in individual ownership of all goods, with practically nothing viewed as communal property. Houses, pigs, land, canoes are all cited as items owned by a single individual. More surprisingly, even large areas of forest are claimed by individual owners. The exceptions to this are rocky mountainous areas and large streams not claimed by individuals but rather the property of lineages and sublineages. Posposil (1963) suggests that fishless waters and barren, rocky land on which nothing will grow hold no economic interest. Thus, they are not claimed by individuals because no one cares to own something of no economic value. What *is* valuable, however, are any game animals which may roam around these mountaintops and streams. They, when caught, become the property of the individual trapper because of the access granted by the lineage ownership.

Upon occasion, two individuals may jointly own a house. When this is the case, however, each individual can identify which sheets of bark and planks of wood are his contribution to the building—and hence his own. Those items that service the village as a whole—for example, fences, bridges, and main ditches—are in fact owned piecemeal by individuals who claim ownership to particular sections of the structures.

Individualism is the vantage point from which to view all economic cooperation within each household. No single meal served is exempt from individual ownership. Each meal has a host who owns the food. When household residents work in the garden, tend the pigs, or dig a ditch, they are entering into an individual contract with the owner of the house, and they will be paid, either in shell money, pork, or other goods. When the work is completed, even if the task was performed by several household members, it is still not viewed in the aggregate as a single large accomplishment with many contributors. In fact, rather than striving for consistency of the overall project when working together, Kapauku will take pains to make their own contribution unique enough that it

can be recognized as distinct from the portion done by any other individual. If a fence is to be built, individual workers build sections they can remember as their own, refer to as their property, and for which they will be solely responsible. Garden work is divided up such that each individual is only responsible for one discrete section.

Multiple Leaders without Consensus

The cultural thread of Kapauku individualism can be found running through the institutions of the society. As we have seen, the *tonowi*—the most important of these political institutions—rises to his position based on individually acquired, and not inherited, wealth. However, great wealth without the assertive and polished personal characteristics is not sufficient for success as a *tonowi*.

There is also no formal cooperation among the men who achieve *tonowi* status at the same time. Generally, one man is charged with settling the legal aspects of conflicts and another with attending to more broadly stated political issues. Conventionally, they do not confer and attempt to reach consensus. Rather, each one considers the facts and renders a judgment independent of the other. If a dispute arises, deciding whose authority takes precedence is simple: the leader who arrives on the scene first is the one who renders judgment. Thus, there is, in Kapauku political and legal organization, no council of elders or any formal group that deliberates for the benefit of the community as a whole. A *tonowi*'s verdict is presented, and then it is up to him to sway opinion to support it.

Socialization into Individualism

Individualism and independence are among the most important lessons in the education of young Kapauku. Often this teaching begins in the all-important setting of the garden. Early on, boys and girls are given gardens or sections of a garden to care for on their own. A girl plants, weeds, and harvests her own plot, which is separated from those of her mother and older sisters. This allows her success or failure to be plainly seen on its own merit.

A boy's garden, too, is an occasion to begin learning the necessary skills that will serve him later on as he aspires to amassing his fortune. The yield of his garden belongs solely to the boy, who enters into financial relationships, as debtor or creditor, with his father and older brothers. To teach him a lesson, a father may purposely cheat his son to see what the child will do.

Posposil (1963) observed a "lesson" that proved to him the seriousness with which this education is regarded. He recounts that one day "I heard a loud howling and lamentation coming from one of the houses. When I entered the structure I found to my surprise a middle-aged, muscular man squatting in the middle of the room, crying and yelling while a boy, about eleven years old, was screaming at him and hitting him with a stick. The man was being beaten by his own son. The reason for the excitement was that the father owed his

son two bomoje shells which he refused to pay back. Thus the boy had a right to punish his debtor. However, by inflicting the beating he abrogated his right to the debt; the father's obligation to repay was annulled. After the beating was over and the enraged boy departed, the father wiped away his tears and smiled with great satisfaction: 'My boy will be quite a businessman, but he must learn not to trust anybody.' In addition to the lesson in commerce the whole affair proved to be most satisfactory to the happy father, as he assured me. Not only had he gained 2 cowries, but the beating administered by his son, he insisted, was so painless that he received the wealth for practically nothing" (p. 30).

When children misbehave they are punished, but as a learning tool rather than a tactic to engender enforcement born of fear. Children should ideally view reprimand as a consequence of past behavior. It is not desirable for a child to be "well-behaved" in an unthinking way. Punishment conveys information that the child is expected to use in *choosing* his or her own course in the future. Likewise, children are asked, and not told, to do things. This, too, derives from the belief that an individual must be allowed the freedom to choose. The true essence of life is thought to be an unfettered cooperation of the mind and the body. Without the individual freedom to allow the soul to direct the actions of the body, the soul attempts to leave—resulting in death. Kapauku society has no institutions that limit this individual freedom; there is no slavery, there are no jails, and they never take prisoners of war. Killing, to their way of thinking, is far more humane than incarceration, which would result in a slow death caused by the absence of personal freedom.

Individualism in Warfare

Unlike so many of their lowland neighbors, the Kapauku do not relish the idea of war. They regard it as an occasion for the destruction of gardens and pigs, and the loss of loved ones. The economic consequences of such occurrences are dreaded. If a close relative instigates a conflict, one is obliged to help, but not without regret. (And, in fact, the cause of any war can be traced back to one individual engaged in a dispute with another.) In the rare instances when war erupts, fighting follows an individualistic pattern. There is no strategizing among groups of warriors, no attacks planned en masse. In fact, participants spread out so that when an enemy is shot there is no doubt as to the identity of the killer, who is later recognized in a personal victory dance. If several snipers stalk an enemy in his village, only one man is designated to carry out the attack, with the others waiting under cover.

➤ RELIGION AND EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

The Kapauku believe that Ugatame, who dwells beyond the sky, created the universe and has predetermined all the events within it, past, present, and future. Spirits of Ugatame's creation frequently appear to Kapauku as shadows

in the trees, which make rustling or scraping sounds as evidence. Less often, these shadows appear in dreams or visions, sometimes in human form. These incarnations can be used by the dreamer as helpers or protectors, for either good or evil purposes. Likewise, the souls of dead kindred can be called upon to provide aid to their living kin.

Science, Secularism, and the Supernatural

The religious philosophy of the group is intriguing in that it is not, as Posposil (1963) puts it, “studded with numerous rationally inexplicable dogmas that are so characteristic of the world’s great religions” (p. 92).

The Kapauku hold a rationalistic and logical view of the world that resembles scientific thought. Their outlook on the world is internally consistent, depending upon that which can be perceived through the senses, and follows logically from those perceptions. Once these premises are granted, that which contradicts these expectations is rejected out of hand. Following from this, because the only things that exist are things that can be perceived by the senses, the supernatural does not exist. People believe in it, but it is not real. They are thus none too eager to explain the unknown and speculate on the whys and wherefores of the world’s mysteries. When asked to do so, they are most likely to reply, “I don’t know,” and be satisfied to leave it at that. Ethnographer Posposil (1963) reports never having witnessed any purely philosophical musings, speculations on the enigmas of life, or arguments focusing solely on the supernatural.

This logical universe is relativistic. Determining “bad” and “good” can only be accomplished in context. Hence, when asked, “Is killing a man good or bad?” the reaction is one of both surprise and confusion. After some thought, the answer will be itself a question: “Killing of which man, and good for whom?” (Posposil 1963)

Ceremonies

Kapauku ceremonies stand in contrast to the elaborate rituals found in the lowlands. Unlike ceremonial events, which typically focus on religion and the supernatural and are often communal in nature, Kapauku ceremonies appear both secular and individualistic. All have “owners” who are individually responsible for their outcomes and who will personally gain prestige if they are successful.

The lack of preoccupation with the supernatural is reflected in the fact that Kapauku ceremonial life revolves primarily around the realm of economics. Any elements one might deem “magical” are very minor portions of ceremonial events such as weddings, births, or feasts. Certainly the magical acts are not considered essential: *tonowi* sponsoring feasts assert that the success of an event is due solely to their own labor, and not to any supernatural guidance.

Absent from Kapauku culture are artistic renderings of supernatural beings, fertility rites, elaborate mortuary customs, and group initiation ceremonies. The most elaborate ceremonial production, the pig feast, is not religious in nature,

but is designed to gain wealth and display status. Performers in the ceremonies are not attempting to influence the supernatural to send good fortune their way; they expect direct economic benefit as a result of their participation.

Pig Feasts

The most important Kapauku ceremony, and certainly one that is economic in focus, is the pig feast, which is a cycle of events lasting several months.

It is instigated by a *tonowi*'s decision to host the feast. Here, he can sell pork for shell money, give away pork to gain prestige, and establish his primacy over other rich men who may aspire to his position. The construction of a dance house and feasting houses is then begun, and these endeavors have a series of rituals associated with them. Following their construction, there is a three-month period of nightly dances, attended by nearby villagers. Special songs are composed for singing in the dance houses during these months, and are regarded as the valuable personal property of the single individual who composed them.

There are actually several grand feasts before the final one. Dancing, singing, and courtship is ongoing. By the time the culminating feast is held, there have been perhaps two thousand guests and several hundred pigs slaughtered and distributed. Profits in shell money may be enormous. Great feasts are talked about for years after their occurrence.

Illness, Curing, and Death

Illness is sent by spirits or sorcerers, and cured by shamans, who often are helped by spirits of their own. A shaman's curative armamentarium includes spells and prayers, treatments made from medicinal and magical plants, ritual washings of the ailing individual, and the removal of foreign objects from a victim's body. Shamans also have the power of preventive medicine should an individual be aware of a sorcerer's evil attempt and wish to forestall the anticipated illness.

Both shamans—whose magic is used toward positive ends—and sorcerers—whose gifts are essentially evil—can acquire status through spiritual or dreaming visitations. Women and men who are shamans practice preventive magic and curative ceremonies. Those who are sorcerers can send illness, economic ruin, or death.

Certain older women, whose souls have been eaten by flesh-hungry spirits, and replaced by the spirits' evil presence while they sleep, appear ordinary by day. But during the night they pursue all the corpses who have been former victims of the evil spirits now residing within their souls, and consume what is left of the corpses' flesh. Punishment of these ghouls does not include death, which action would only release the spirits possessing them, sending them in search of new homes. Instead, because ghouls are believed to be so possessed due to the black magic of a sorcerer, the individual sorcerer deemed responsible is sought out and killed, thus effectively ending a ghoul's ordeal.

Death is invariably attributed to spirits or sorcerers, no matter what its outward cause. The soul, once it has departed the body, will spend the day among the forests, but comes home to the village at nightfall, in case kin-group members need help or seek vengeance. Days spent by departed souls in the forest are the totality of the Kapauku “afterworld” beliefs; there is no sense that there is another dwelling place for the dead after life in the village. Given the expectations of the Kapauku that the souls of the dead may act in their behalf, it is not surprising that great care is taken with burial practices to achieve this end. Whereas the torso of the dead is buried, the head is left above-ground, sheltered from the elements by a web of branches with enough open space between them to provide a window.

A World of Quantity

As an outgrowth of their emphasis on objectivity, profit, and exactness, Kapauku are oriented to a world where the quantitative holds sway over the qualitative. They have outstanding mathematical abilities and a highly elaborate counting system, both valuable skills in their money economy. They value high numbers and large volume. When shown pictures in an American magazine, they directed most of their attention to counting the number of teeth in a smile, windows in office buildings, cars on the street, and, with most enthusiasm, the huge number of spectators in the crowd at a football game.

Posposil (1963) found that informants gained great pleasure in being able to count the thousands of glass beads he used as money. After many hours spent counting, he would be told: “You have 6722 beads in your boxes. That means you have spent 623 beads since Gubeeni counted your money three days ago” (p. 94). He reflects on this with the admission that his finances were never so much in order as during his times in the field among the Kapauku.

He also benefited from their understanding of his work back home. After giving the villagers a “lecture” on agriculture, he in turn was handed several chickens, with the explanation that they remembered that he was always paid to lecture to his anthropology students in the United States (Muller 1990).

→ FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

An important role in Kapauku society is the *tonowi*, a “big man.” How is the importance of the *tonowi* connected to the other important features of Kapauku society, such as individualism and economics?