REFERENCES


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IS TABOO ALIVE?

THE USES AND PARAMETERS OF KOPON TABOO

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PREFATORY NOTE

Apart from previous minor contacts, my association with Ralph Bulmer began in Master of Arts classes at the University of Auckland in 1963. With the academic year almost over, Ralph directed to me a totally unexpected offer that enabled me to do research in Papua New Guinea for my Master's thesis. This completed, I accepted a further offer by Ralph, this time to raise money for doctoral research among the Kopon (pronounced ['kobon], that is, roughly like 'cawbawn' in BBC English but with both vowels short and with stress on the first). The Kopon live in the lower Kaironk Valley, between the Bismarck and Schrader Ranges, and are the immediate neighbours of Ralph's Kalam. I use the possessive advisedly, knowing that they possessed him at least as much as he possessed them. The Kalam called me *bus masera* ('white man of the bush or wild country') and could not understand why I wanted to pass them by and live in the benighted, witch infested land of the Kopon.

On my first visit to the Kopon I found a pocket of people who had not previously had direct European contact. Ralph told me on my return that he had heard these people were going to kill the first white person to come to them. Nevertheless they welcomed me, and I settled there to work in an atmosphere of great humanity (murders and suicides notwithstanding) and superb natural beauty.

In spite of his busy schedule on short trips to the Kalam, Ralph fitted in two visits to me in the field. On one visit he attempted the journey over steep, rough tracks in one day. Travellers are visible a considerable

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distance up valley as they reach high points. Ralph's progress was reported regularly from far away, and became slower and slower as the day wore on. When he got close enough, I sent billies of tea. What should have been the last hour of the journey dragged on and on and on, and I became concerned that something was wrong. Just as I was about to go and investigate I got a note from Ralph saying he was "buggered" and would stay the night in a Kopon house half way up the hill. Although usually fit in the field, Ralph at the time was no doubt suffering the effects of a year at the desk, of the smoking that eventually killed him, and of being just on six foot six and some 18 or 19 stone in pygmyland. The average height of Kopon is under five feet, and I don't believe giants will ever evolve in rugged rainforest where people are continually climbing up and down slippery steep hills, not to mention trees. Considering the difficulty he had staying upright, and how far and heavily he had to fall, I'm sure Ralph would agree, without asking for statistics. I looked forward very much to Ralph's visits, despite embarrassment at the gaps in my information that were disclosed by his searching questions. Over a bottle of wine kept for such special occasions, evenings strayed far from anthropology.

Ralph put enormous effort into supervising both my master's and doctoral theses, and must have been disappointed when I left anthropology after completing the latter. I am pleased at last and at least to publish something from my dissertation, which cost him so much hard work.

Those of us who knew Ralph were so impressed with his talent and presence that I think we assumed he knew his own worth. To some extent he did. Yet at the same time, I believe it was only in the last days of his dying, as tributes and messages of affection and good will and a flood of promises of articles for the Festschrift came pouring in from around the world, that Ralph began to get a real perception of his own stature.

Though Ralph will be remembered for many fascinating and seductively titled articles, it was the publication of *Birds of My Kalam Country* (Majnep and Bulmer 1977) that gave ethnography an extended dimension. Previous predominantly single informant publications with which it might be compared have been either the largely unschooled work of an informant, with the anthropologist as editor, or the informant has been used extensively, but the academic has largely designed and written the finished work. *Birds of My Kalam Country* was the product of genuine collaboration and mutual education over a long period of time by co-equals, a Kalam and an academic, severally expert in a number of radically different fields.

INTRODUCTION

In 1888 the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* had a three and a half page entry on taboo (Frazer 1888). In 1968 the corresponding entry on taboo in the *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* said "see Incest; Pollution". This entry enshrines the fact that since the voluminous writings on taboo in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries the subject has been considerably neglected, and sometimes bastardised almost out of existence. In saying this I am not unmindful of the works mentioned in note four. When I went to work among the Kopon I myself had no interest in taboo. The subject forced itself upon me till it became, simply in response to its ubiquity, the focus of my approach.

In the next section I present a modified definition of taboo which I believe captures the essence of taboo more exactly than previous definitions. Then comes an ethnographic section, followed by a section outlining features exemplified, or not, by Kopon taboo. Against this background the next section considers the Kopon use of taboo and other features as classifiers. The final section looks at some further parameters of Kopon taboo, and the fit between taboo and other features of the Kopon mental world.

In this article I aim to portray taboo as a powerful and pervasive influence in Kopon mental life, and to persuade the reader that taboo is a genuine domain which still has a place in anthropological discourse. While this is far from a formal comparative study, I draw on other writings on taboo, and suggest that much of what I say is likely to apply beyond the Kopon sphere.

DEFINITION OF TABOO

Steiner (1956:20) says that "several quite different things have been and still are being discussed under the heading "Taboo"". He remarks (Steiner 1956:21) on "the many attempts to narrow the definition of taboo". It is true that the term has been used in a broad sense, covering a wide miscellany of prohibitions on things that are unclean, polluting, sacred, repulsive, mystically dangerous, marginal, ambiguous, and so on. However, there has been a mainstream view that taboos are prohibitions with automatic sanctions (Jackson 1975:425-6). I expand this definition in two ways.

(i) To include prohibitions with sanctions which are only apparently automatic. Many Kopon taboos have apparently automatic sanctions which are in fact mediated by supernaturals. Note also that the adverse consequences of breaking taboos are automatic when they occur, rather than in the sense that they will inevitably occur. This is roughly analogous to legal processes, where criminals are not punished if they are not caught.
(ii) I further expand the definition of taboos as prohibitions with automatic sanctions to cover all prohibitions in a set if many or most members of the set have automatic sanctions. Some Kopon taboos do not have even apparent automatic sanctions. Kopon taboos which lack specific sanctions are observed as carefully as those that have them, and I have no evidence that they are regarded differently from other taboos. It would do violence to the Kopon category \textit{hyl} (taboo) to translate it by two different terms. Taboos are important to the Kopon regardless of sanctions. I suspect that the same applies to sets of prohibitions in other cultures.

Taboo is a kind of magic. Frazer (1905:52-3) was correct, though not in quite the sense he intended, in describing taboo as negative magic. Sanctions based on sympathetic action are negative only in the sense that they are injurious. The truly negative thing about taboos is the magical prohibition, whether sanctioned or not. Taboo is to sanction as prohibition is to punishment. As punishments are not laws, so sanctions are not taboos. As the law in a strict sense consists of statutes, so taboo in a strict sense consists of prohibitions. In a loose sense however, punishment may be seen as one of the processes of the law, and sympathetic magic may be seen as one of the processes of taboo. Taboos and sanctions are the magical counterparts of ordinary prohibitions and punishments. Since it is the sanctions that enable us to recognize this class of prohibitions, I use a working definition of taboos as prohibitions with automatic sanctions, extending this definition in the ways stated above. Minimally and ideally I define taboos simply as magical prohibitions.

Taboo so defined is a suitable translation for the Kopon term \textit{hyl}. The word \textit{hyl} is used in Kopon much as the word ‘taboo’ is used with the verb ‘to be’ in English. \textit{Hyl} is not used as a noun. Thus I depart from Kopon idiom when I speak of “a taboo”, or of “breaking a taboo”, or of taboo as an entity.

\section*{Mainly Ethnographic, Mainly on Taboo}

The Kopon garden for the bulk of their food, but hunting and gathering contribute essential protein to the diet. The pig and the dog are domesticated. Settlement is dispersed, with houses handy to garden sites. Households are the largest moderately stable groups, but they show some overlapping, and a degree of flux greater than would result from the demands of life cycle changes alone. Gardening groups, which range in size up to the equivalent of three or four households, show a high degree of overlapping, and frequent changes in membership.

Social control is based on equivalence, self interest, and self help, and the only specialist role is that of shaman. A very high mortality keeps the population density low, and doubtless encourages flux and overlapping of groups, both to guard against isolation should death occur, and to adjust to death when it does occur. This militates against the relatively clearcut boundaries and undivided allegiance that are to some extent necessary conditions for the existence of larger corporate groups. Beliefs in the supernatural account for the processes of life, growth, healing, illness, and death.

In the relative absence of other indices of discrimination, the use of taboo as a marker has been developed to a high degree. The Kopon have no explicit classification of taboos, but I divide their taboos into four main groups, based on the areas of life with which the taboos are concerned, the things (whether objects or actions) to which they apply, and the agent of adverse consequences if they are broken. Since I generally refer to the groups of taboos only by number, the titles of the groups are listed here for easy reference.

\begin{center}
I: RELATIONSHIP TABOOS \\
II: SEX AND LIFE CYCLE TABOOS \\
III: LOCAL INHERITED TABOOS AND SHAMAN’S TABOOS \\
IV: DEATH AND BLEEDING TABOOS
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\section*{Group I: Relationship Taboos}

Group I taboos are concerned with social relationships. They subsume what I have called kinship, enmity, and mourning taboos. The peculiarity of these taboos is that, except where they are concerned with the dead, they are reciprocal between people in ego based relationships. Relationship taboos constitute some form of limitation on personal contact. They express social distance or strain. Relationship taboos generally lack specific sanctions.

(i) Kinship Taboos

Kinship categories are labelled by kin terms. Taboos provide an important part of the role behaviour in the various categories. For example ‘husband’s brothers’ cannot eat food cooked in the same fire; ‘wife’s sisters’ can eat food cooked in the same fire but not the same stone oven; ‘wife’s fathers’ can eat food cooked in the same stone oven but cannot share the same piece of food; ‘cousins’ can share the same piece of food but it must not be broken by biting; other natal7 kin can share the same piece of food broken by biting. Other kinship taboos limit proximity in gardens and houses, the sharing of cigarettes, the use of personal names, and the use of banter and sexual innuendo.
Kin taboos make both finer and coarser discriminations than kin terms alone. Five supercategories of kin are created by using the same taboos for people in more than one kin category. These super-categories, in ascending order of the number of taboos imposed are (i) natal kin other than 'cousins', (ii) 'cousins', (iii) same sex spouse's kin, (iv) wife's female kin, (v) husband's male kin. The degree of strain between people in the various supercategories of kin correlates with the number of taboos observed.

The strictness with which taboos are observed varies according to factors such as sex, closeness of acquaintance, and relative age, thus making finer discriminations than do kin terms alone. These finer discriminations do not set up minicategories analogous to the supercategories outlined above, but operate within the kin categories. In an extreme case a widely respected man who married a much younger woman who was the daughter of a close 'brother', a man about his own age, continued to address this man by his name, something which would have been unthinkable with an older or more distantly related 'wife's father'. Most kinship taboos are between spouse's kin. They are the one invariable formal accompaniment of marriage (invariable in the sense that at least some are always observed). Compensation is almost invariable, but is on rare occasions omitted.

(ii) Mourning Taboos
The relationship with a ghost is radically different from the relationship with that person when alive. The taboos which accompany the new status can be seen as stringent. There is no possibility of sharing food with a ghost, lighting cigarettes from the same fire, and so on, so these things cannot be taboo. The taboos that are commonly observed, namely on eating food from the ghost's gardens and pork from the ghost's pigs, are like those with living kin in the most taboo relationships.

(iii) Enmity Taboos
After a killing, direct contact of any sort between the parties concerned is taboo. This reflects the extreme strain or distance of relationships where there is an unsettled debt of a life, which someone may try to settle violently at any time.

GROUP II: SEX AND LIFE CYCLE TABOOS

What I call sex taboos are not taboos on sexual activity, but taboos that apply only to one sex. Sex and life cycle taboos affect persons at various stages of the life cycle and differ for males and females. Most of these taboos are on natural species, but they differ from taboos on natural species in group III in that in group II there are no ghosts or wildghosts (ghost-like beings not derived from known dead) associated with the species concerned, except fortuitously in a few cases.

Infants are subject to no sex or life cycle taboos and the aged to very few. Taboos reach a maximum at initiation, when for some two or three years there are burdensome limitations on what boys can eat and how it may be prepared. For about two days during the course of initiation ceremonies boys are subject to a veritable host of taboos, including taboos on all food and drink. Meanwhile they are obliged to sit in front of a hot fire which is periodically stoked to almost insufferable levels.

Taboos that apply throughout the whole initiation period require food for male initiates to be cooked separately from food for females. In addition to this, initiates may not eat any food cooked in a naked fire. Note that female sexuality is widely associated with fire and heat. Glasse (1965:33) records a Huli female deity who cooked food by the heat of her genitals. Even after the period as an initiate is over, young men cannot at first eat food cooked in a cylinder of bark or bamboo, where the symbolism of cooking in the fire is compounded by the symbolism of an elongated hollow container and the fact that it is offered by women to men as somewhat of a delicacy. Only when men are married does this gift become appropriate.

In both group I and group II there are taboos requiring food to be cooked in separate fires and/or ovens for people of opposite sex. The group I taboos concerned are ego orientated, being one of a number of forms of limitation on personal contact between people in specific relationships. The group II taboos affect all opposite sex persons in certain life cycle classes.

Sex and life cycle taboos generally lack specific sanctions, but it is said that an initiate who broke them would be likely to get a big belly and to fail to thrive.

Life cycle and men's and women's taboos are the social transformation of the biological life cycle and the sexual division of people. There are taboos that divide young children from all others, thus separating the dependent from those who can ordinarily look after themselves. There is a taboo on everyone except young children and the aged. The old, like the young to whom they are joined by not observing this taboo, are sometimes unable to fend entirely for themselves. There are taboos on everyone (except initiants) up to and including initiates, that is, those who are dependent to a considerable extent on others, as distinct from those who are independent apart from the sexual division of labour. There are taboos that set off fit young unmarried males, including initiates, from those who are married. There are taboos that set off young unmarried adults or near adults from those who are married. Males up to middle age, who climb trees when hunting, do not eat 'heavy' things that women and older men can eat, thus setting off hunters and potential
hunters from older men and all women. This also separates 'big' (middle aged and older) men from all other males. All women are separated by taboos from all men, all men from female initiates, and especially all women from male initiates. Young boys and girls at first share identical taboos, though differences soon appear. So the relative sexlessness of childhood is contrasted to later sexual differentiation, reflected in the fact that scarcely any life cycle taboos other than those at the extremes of age are the same for both males and females. Those on male and female initiates are similar in content but very different in the length of time for which they apply, and in the ceremonial with which they are imposed and lifted.

In this complex set of oppositions, stages of the life cycle are set against other stages, both individually, and collectively in groups of two or more stages, and in conjunction with sex differences. Things are set off, but they are also joined together, both by sharing the same taboos and by sharing freedoms from taboos.

GROUP III: LOCAL INHERITED TABOOS AND SHAMAN'S TABOOS

Group III comprises taboos passed on from parents to children, which are associated with particular localities, and taboos on shamans. Group III taboos are on natural species that are associated with ghosts or wildghosts.

The people who observe local inherited taboos show a close parallel with so-called cognatic descent groups. They are concentrated in local areas, but some of them move away, taking their taboos with them. If they stay away they are likely to drop the taboos in a generation or so. New people who move in take on at least the more stringent taboos. At one extreme some local inherited taboos are observed by most people over a considerable area. At the other extreme some are observed by only a few families in a given area, or even by individual immigrants. It is those who carry the taboo that are at risk, not only if they break it themselves, but also if someone else uses the species concerned in their presence.

Those who share a taboo never meet as a group, and may have little in common other than the taboo. The taboos however give a sense of identity, especially of local identity. This manifests as an overlapping interdigitation, which is at several levels, corresponding to the degree of pervasiveness of the numerous taboos concerned. These taboos also require people to treat each other with circumspection. Everyone has to know a great deal about taboos observed by other people so as not to expose them to the ill effects that might follow if a taboo species was killed, gathered, eaten, or in some cases even visible, in their presence. One must know, if people from a certain area are coming, not to offer them, say, frogs, or a certain bird, or fruit pandanus, or food cooked in a fire where a certain bird has been cooked, or one must know not to offer them waist canes made of a certain vine, and so on. If one is going to their area there are certain things one must not take, and certain creatures that must not be shot or captured. To do so would endanger not the visitors but the hosts (though the visitors would be in danger of reprisals by their hosts if discovered). People may themselves give warning when they are in danger, as did a man who asked me not to shoot a certain hawk that was taboo to him, but there are a number of taboos where it would be unthinkable that a visitor should not know about them. The roles of long standing residents, immigrants, and various kinds of visitors, including ignorant outsiders like Europeans, are thus distinguished by the taboos they are expected to know about or observe.

The sanctions for locality taboos are sympathetic type illnesses mediated by wildghosts associated with the species concerned. The leaves of a certain fig tree (Ficus ?apiosa) are covered with short sharp projections, scratches from which result in a uniquely intense itch. Though many people eat the tender young shoots and leaves of the tree, touching the leaves is said to cause severe sores in people to whom they are taboo. Taboo people who eat a certain wild tuber (wacu, probably a Pueraria) are said to get swollen knee joints, presumably resembling the tuber. If taboo people eat a certain pigeon (Gymnohaps albertisi) they risk getting a severe headache and giddiness (suggesting a malarial attack). These birds fly very strongly in flocks, and in the distance, especially as their wings are caught in the light of the setting sun, the flapping gives the effect of vigorous shaking, no doubt seen as analogous to the shaking of the victim of a malarial rigor. In addition to any sympathetic effects, smokers who break their taboos in the early years of smoking will become temporarily crazy and also lose their powers.

GROUP IV: DEATH AND BLEEDING TABOOS

The taboos in this group disbar people concerned in various ways with the killing, eating, or bleeding of certain creatures from going to gardens for certain periods, lest the gardens be spoiled. The five creatures, belonging to five primary taxa, are man, the pig, the dog, the cassowary, and a phalanger (Phalanger gymnotis). These creatures include the largest 'game animal' (the phalanger), and the largest 'bird' (the cassowary). Humans, dogs, and pigs are the sole, and thus the largest members of their three classes. The cassowary and the pig approach the size of man. The dog does not, but shares with the pig alone a close relationship with man. The noises made by pigs and dogs, and perhaps by the other creatures as well, can sound human-like. A favoured dog may receive a platform burial that is called by the same term as human burials. The jawbones of dogs, pigs, and men are preserved and placed in trees, sometimes all together.
There are both feral and domesticated pigs. So far as the two all-wild creatures, the phalanger and the cassowary, are concerned, they both appear in folk tales as the immediate kin of humans. The stories are told as if the animals were human, except that a creature’s habits give it away. For example, a woman who is a cassowary eats cassowary food. The cassowary is the only creature that moves about on two legs like man. Other birds walk but they also fly. Cassowary chicks are occasionally domesticated, and as they grow up, roam freely in and about their adoptive houses in remarkably human fashion. An upper valley Kopon man told me that when a man is about to shoot the phalanger it sits up and calls out “I am your brother, don’t shoot me”. These observations suggest that all the creatures whose blood and/or death is dangerous to gardens are plausibly seen as quasi-human. This viewpoint would seem more natural to the Kopon than to modern westerners. Some creatures are believed by the Kopon on occasion to communicate with humans in speech-like calls. Witches, who are indubitably human, are believed frequently to take the form of various animals as a disguise in order to aid them in attacking humans. From recollection, in addition to snakes, witches commonly assume the forms of three of the four quasi-human animals, namely the pig, the dog, and the phalanger. The cassowary is rarely if ever seen in contexts which would point to its being a witch. Furthermore, the positive place of the cassowary in the Kopon order probably makes it inappropriate to see the cassowary as a witch. Group IV taboos, by according human-like treatment to the four quasi-human creatures, enhance their human-like status.

Group IV taboos perhaps achieve also a symbolic separation of hunting and gathering. Except for man and the dog, which are hunters and inedible, the creatures concerned are the game most prized by the Kopon, and include what might be taken as the foremost representative of each class of game, or the only representative, as the case may be. The most intimate possible contact with these creatures is either to eat them, if they are edible, or if they are not edible, to kill them, or handle them after they are dead. A person who has recently done these things is a hunter, and may not come into the gardens. The dog is even more a hunter than man. It does not garden at all and, in its wild state, is entirely dependent on hunting to stay alive. Women may also be captured by men. Women don’t hunt, they are hunted and they bleed. (Women collect rather than hunt, and though they capture smaller animals, do not use bows and arrows.) Dogs and men hunt, women and animals are hunted, and they bleed. The hunters and the hunted, when they die and bleed, must be kept out of the garden.

Group IV taboos, then, firstly treat certain animals and the cassowary as in some way equivalent to man, secondly set apart hunting and gardening, and thirdly require the exclusion from gardens of the influences of death and bleeding, thus opposing death/harmful influence to life/growth.

CHARACTERISTICS EXHIBITED, OR NOT, BY KOPON TABOOS

In writings on taboo a persistently recurring suggestion is that taboo things are in some way marginal, ambiguous, or anomalous. Thus there is Gennep’s (1908) emphasis on transitional social states and other transitions, Freud’s (1950) discussion of special individuals, exceptional states, and uncanny things, Douglas’ (1966) emphasis on marginal states of all kinds and things out of place, and Leach’s (1964) account of ambiguous categories. Although such designations might fit some Kopon taboos, most affect people or things that are perfectly ordinary. Kopon taboos can last a lifetime, and on the whole, taboos affect people not in transitional but in steady states. Ritual, being ephemeral, is the more appropriate marker for transitions. Note also that much of the discussion in the works quoted concerns topics other than taboo as defined above.

In more recent years the reasons things are chosen to be taboo has been a matter of considerable interest. It has been debated whether animals are taboo because they are good to eat, good to think, or good to prohibit, though much of the discussion has revolved around totemism rather than taboo as such. Kopon taboos, as entailed in their sheer numbers, cannot all be on individual things that are good to think, eat, or prohibit. While interesting features may occasion the choice of a proportion of taboos, the bulk of taboos are on quite ordinary things, and the essence of taboo is in the prohibition itself.

Kopon taboos are on things that are of some use, such as for eating, making string, or, as in the case of names, simply as a convenient mode of address. Taboos can only be on actions that would be conceivable were it not for the taboo. This is a logical requirement for all taboos.

All Kopon taboos are laid down in the existing order. There is no discretionary imposition, except that people choose which particular taboos they will observe in mourning, and that various considerations may affect the stringency with which taboos are observed.

Kopon taboos concern two persons, or a person and a thing. No person or thing is taboo in isolation and no person or thing is taboo to everybody. To be subject to a taboo is to be in a certain kind of relationship with another person or with a thing. Taboos between living people are invariably reciprocal.

At first sight a number of Kopon taboos are sanctioned by sympathetic magic. The illness that follows from breaking a taboo on hawks is graphically represented as the grasping of the victim’s head in a hawk’s talons. People to whom gourds are taboo may get a swollen belly if they eat them. People generally speak as
though breaking a taboo automatically results in being ill, but diagnosis and treatment of the illness involves dealing (by a shaman in a trance) with the ghost or wildghost who caused it. A boy who breaks initiation taboos may fail to thrive and may get a swollen belly (which might result from chronic malaria) without a ghost or wildghost being explicitly implicated. Even though this is not an acute illness such as usually results from ghost or wildghost attack, it may result from wildghosts not caring carefully for boys who break taboos. Group IV taboos, which prohibit people who have had contact with certain kinds of death or bleeding from going into gardens, also appear to involve sympathetic magic, although it is possible that the actual agents are the wildghosts responsible for gardens. The part that sympathetic magic plays in causing illness for breach of certain kinds of taboos is debatable, but probably it is best seen as a mould in which the supernaturals work. Whatever view is taken of this, Kopon taboo is not a power in itself. It is sanctioned by supernaturals, and in some sense by sympathetic action, but in itself it is not either of these things.

Contagion, the spread of taboo by contact, is not a feature of Kopon taboo. Group IV taboos, which require people who have been in contact with certain kinds of death and bleeding to keep out of gardens, imply the transmission of a dangerous influence. This influence however is not itself the taboo. The taboo is on contact between this influence and gardens. Similarly, when a boy became ill after eating food cooked in a fire in which a bird taboo to him had recently been cooked, the contagion was that of the bird, not the taboo. Kopon taboo is not an entity which can be transmitted. There is little parallel between sacredness, a concept the Kopon do not seem to have, and taboo. A thing taboo among the Kopon is taboo only to people in some particular category. Taboo things are avoided rather than treated reverently. Sacredness inheres in an object, Kopon taboo does not. Burial sites and places associated with supernatural beings, which outsiders might think of as sacred, are not taboo.

Some things that might be seen as unclean are taboo, and it may be the uncleanness that occasions the taboos, but things are not taboo simply by virtue of being unclean. Birds that fossick in porcine or human faeces are taboo to initiates, but not to adults, nor are faeces in themselves taboo. People who have handled a corpse may not go into the gardens for a few days thereafter, but it is not taboo to handle a corpse.

A person does not stand in the presence of a man who is sitting eating but it is impolite to do so, not taboo. Things that are ill mannered at any time, such as publicly exposing the genitals, are not taboo.

Things are not taboo because they are intrinsically dangerous. Conversely, dangerous things are not generally taboo. It is dangerous to create a disturbance where human bones have been placed in a tree, as this may provoke attack by a ghost, but to create such a disturbance is not taboo. Since witches may get in, it is dangerous to sleep at night without making the entrance to the house secure, but leaving the entrance open is not taboo. There are no taboos concerned with goblins or witches, which are dangerous at all times. Even when taboos are associated in some way with sympathetic action, the dangers apply not to people in general, but only to people subject to the taboos. The dangers of breaking taboos are sanctions against breaking them, but they are the result, not the cause, of the taboos. Taboos resemble laws in so far as they demand observance whether or not it is dangerous to break them, and regardless of sanctions or enforcement agencies.

Materials are not taboo as foods by virtue of being nasty or bitter tasting, repulsive, or unclean, or even because it would be inappropriate or grossly improper, as in the case of human flesh, to eat them. Only things regarded as normal food are subject to taboos on eating.

On the whole, nothing which is likely to be the subject of a dispute between people is the subject of a taboo. Thus there is no taboo on theft, damage to gardens or pigs, incest, or failure to pay compensation. These are matters of individual and family responsibility. Matters requiring ordinary human action are not the responsibility of the supernatural.

Similarly, there are no taboos specifically on transactions. It might appear at first sight that some transactions between certain spouse’s kin are taboo. But though it is not permitted to eat pork from pigs tended by a ‘wife’s mother’, it is permitted to receive this pork (wrapped up) and pass it on. Taboos connected with unsettled killings forbid close contact of any kind, but even in this case compensation, the transaction which will restore normal relations, is not taboo.

There are subclasses of taboo things among the Kopon that share some common feature beyond the fact of being taboo, but Kopon taboo things do not as a category share any single positive quality at all, only the negative feature of magical prohibition. Kopon taboo then is a mental construct without a counterpart in reality outside of the head. Taboo things are those on to which this construct is projected. It may be possible to give a coherent explanation for total sets of things prohibited as illegal, unclean, or even impolite, but not for the total set of things prohibited as taboo. Kopon taboo, then, is not a matter of legality, religion, sympathetic magic, sacredness, uncleanness, politeness, safety, edibility, or thinkability as such. Things may nonetheless be suitable to prohibit for all kinds of reasons, and many different qualities may occasion the selection of things as taboo. Thus the list of taboos in a society can be heterogenous and long. Many accounts and discussions of taboo may have singled out the captivating at the expense of the prosaic.
TABOO AND OTHER CLASSIFIERS

Being selective and arbitrary, Kopon taboos stand out clearly, as a class, from all other classes of prohibitions, and so constitute effective labels. The fact that things taboo to the Kopon share no single intrinsic quality may be regarded as a prerequisite rather than as an impediment to the use of taboos, as a collectivity, to fulfil various functions in the society, notably the function of class markers. Kopon taboos are suited to their classifying function by being imbued with symbolism, potentially innumerable, and applicable to heterogenous deeds or things for any period of time.

Many of Fortes' (1967) statements about taboo apply to the Kopon. The striking difference is that since the Kopon do not have bounded corporate groups, Kopon taboos do not reflect the position of people in such groups. This to some extent explains the less intense moral character of Kopon taboos. The Tale taboos described by Fortes demand loyalty to group, group ancestors, and group norms. Kopon taboos stress rather the individual. Each individual is a unique walking set of taboos, requiring unique consideration. Kopon taboos establish "the integrity and separateness of the individual" (Bulmer, personal communication). Taboos are ideally suited to draw attention to broad categories and to individuals both at once. They establish the social personality of the individual, and the social pattern of the collectivity.

Taboo is by far the most wide ranging formal classifier of people that the Kopon have, encompassing the areas covered separately by other classifiers. The other main classifiers are sex and life cycle status, kinship terms and the criteria they are based on and the sex indicators they carry, and locality names. Households may be denoted by place names or by the names of people. The important things about people so far as classification is concerned are relationships based on sex/life cycle/inheritance. The indicators drawing attention to these are largely complementary, but partly redundant. Kin terms are ego based and classify according to sex, age/generation, and marriage. There are taboos based on similar criteria. Sex and life cycle terms are society based, using the same distinguishing features as kin terms, except that there is no explicit recognition of marriage. The sets of classifiers on the whole label phenomena at different levels or from different points of view. Taboos between spouse's kin affect both wider and narrower categories than those denoted by kin terms. Sex markers in kin terms make explicit (though not exhaustively) the sex criterion of kin classification. This criterion is disguised in the kin categories themselves by cross cutting features which produce categories containing both sexes. Life cycle features, translated for purposes of kin categories into generation, are similarly disguised in the kin categories themselves by the reciprocal use of terms between different generations, but gain independent recognition in life cycle taboos. Classifiers in the locality/inheritance sphere are similarly but less systematically complementary. People are denoted by place names, by shared taboos, and occasionally by the names of prominent individuals with whom they are associated. The differing viewpoints of the complementary category markers can be characterised as follows. Group I taboos and kinship terms mark 'relational' roles (Banton 1965:30-1). They relate an individual chiefly to his kin. Group II taboos, though based on similar sex and age criteria, orientate the individual with respect to all other members of society, in their various sex/life cycle classes. Group III taboos demand that people acknowledge their heritage, their territory, and the supernaturals, all of which are interconnected. The individual is thus located in social/territorial space, in relation to the past and its people, and in relation to the total world of 'men' (notably people, ghosts, and wildghosts). To a limited extent, local inherited taboos mark relational roles (host/visitor, man/supernatural), whereas place names are more concerned with placing people,
individually or collectively, in society as a whole. Thus there are comparable differences in viewpoint between relationship taboos and kinship terms on the one hand, and sex/life cycle taboos and explicit sex/life cycle classes on the other. Similar differences are found again between mourning taboos (in group I), which are concerned with the importance of particular dead to their kin, and group IV taboos, which are concerned with the social importance of death, and oppose it to life.

Whereas group III taboos direct man’s attention to the supernaturals with which they are associated and thus to otherwise unexplained processes of life, growth, disease, and healing, group IV taboos focus on man’s own most important productive activities, namely hunting and gardening. Hunting and gardening seem to represent respectively death, and life. Taking another view, group III taboos symbolise man’s personal relations with the supernaturals, and with plants, animals, and birds, while group IV taboos symbolise societal relations with animals, plants, and birds (if the cassowary is taken to represent the last). Thus the personal/societal contrast between group I and group II taboos is found again between group III and group IV taboos. The collective societal expression of relations with the supernaturals occurs in ritual rather than taboo. (Group III taboos, of course, also draw attention at an immediate level to both individual and collective relations among people.) While other classifiers supplement each other to varying degrees, chiefly in either the sex/life cycle/marriage sphere or in the locality/inheritance sphere, taboo operates widely in both spheres.

The classifiers I have mentioned achieve multilevel taxonomies in various ways. Except for place names, the number of terms in each set is finite. The multilevel nature of kin category taxonomy is covert, only the terminal taxa being labelled. Terminal taxa are mutually exclusive. The preterminal levels are semantically meaningful but unexpressed. Place names achieve multilevel classification of people somewhat covertly by using single place names at different levels of inclusiveness. The terms are denotatively meaningful, but carry no other semantic content relevant to their use as classifiers. The taxa, at any given level, are more or less exclusive. At the broadest level may be superimposed terms such as ‘up-valley person’, which are not place names.

The development of Kopon taboos as markers of complex overlapping and interdigitating roles and categories is no doubt related to the relative absence of other indices of discrimination. There are few roles apart from those based on age, sex, and reproduction, all of which are marked by taboos. Who people relate to in these roles is largely determined by locality/inheritance, which is also marked by taboo. In addition, taboo provides formal recognition of enmity, mourning, shamanism, and the human-like status of certain creatures.

In sum taboo, as a class marker, is supplemented by kin terms and their associated sex markers, by sex and life cycle labels, and by locality names, but only taboo operates across the taxonomic board. Taboo and the other classifiers are more complementary than redundant, delineating from different points of view, notably the individual and the societal, the similar features on which they are based. Taboo is the only Kopon classifier to set up an explicit, comprehensive, multilevel taxonomy, composed of terms that are mutually exclusive at each level. The particularities of taboo things, and the indivisibility of the notion of taboo, combine to allow the use of taboo as at once a specific marker and a general classifier.

THE FIT, FUNCTIONS, AND PARAMETERS OF KOPON TABOO

The various elements of the supernatural in any society are complementary in so far as they each play their own part in a division of supernatural labour. At another level, the elements of the supernatural in any society are each and all contained within the same parameters as the natural elements. That is to say that the dimensions of the magico-religious system in any society are concordant with the social dimensions. To help picture the parameters of Kopon taboo in context, I look fleetingly at the functions of the other supernatural elements of the culture (including ritual, which has a supernatural rationale).

The supernaturals (Jackson 1975: ch.VII) explain the bulk of the physical processes of the world as it is known to the Kopon, including growth, illness, healing, and death. There is a choice between personal and impersonal powers to explain such processes, but the Kopon choice of personal powers, which will naturally be pictured as self-actuating, seems apposite. Supernaturals must be there to do things, but not there, in the sense that they are not usually detectable. The most obvious forms to give supernaturals for their occasional validatory appearances are anthropomorphic ones.

As Kopon taboo is matched to an egalitarian society, so Kopon supernaturals reflect the character of Kopon people. Kopon supernaturals do not have unlimited powers some over others, or over people. In contests people sometimes defeat supernaturals. Witches must be both human and superhuman. They must be superhuman to kill, because their victims are not attacked in any human fashion. They must be human to suffer the death that may repay them for their superhuman deeds. (Because the terms superhuman and supernatural suggest ascendancy, the terms parahuman and paranatural might be preferred in speaking of Kopon beings.)
Kopon impersonal power largely takes the form of sympathetic action. In spells, the power attributed to or symbolised by natural objects on the basis of characteristics such as being ‘cold’ is used to effect growth, or recovery from illness. Thus the Kopon have invented ongoing self-actuating supernatural personal powers to explain the ordinary ongoing processes of nature. They have invented an impersonal power, namely magic, which enables humans to effect beneficial interventions in the ongoing processes of nature. The division of labour between ritual and taboo also makes good sense. Ritual is suited to performance by a number of people gathered together, but a taboo cannot be performed. Ritual is a drama, each performance ephemeral. Kopon carry their taboos wherever they go. Transitions are marked by ritual. The great bulk of taboos affect people not in transitional but in steady states. They have simply to be observed, not performed, and are suitable even to mark states that last a lifetime, such as being male or female.

Negative magic, that is, taboo, is particularly suited to marking roles in a society such as the Kopon, where bounded kin groups are absent, and exchange, leadership, warfare, and other institutions that lend scope for classifying people and setting them off against each other, are comparatively undeveloped. In societies such as the Kopon, people are not readily separated into large numbers of classes by what they have, but they are readily distinguished by taking things away. Things taken away, or prohibited, by taboo, are usually of minor importance. Large numbers of such things are available, so there are abundant possibilities for taboo.

Kopon taboos are appropriate to an anarchic society in that they are entirely embedded in the given order, that where people are taboo to each other the taboos are reciprocal; that no person or thing is inherently taboo; and that taboo is not contagious. Things as well as people partake in the unstratified nature of the Kopon universe. In all these respects Kopon taboos contrast, for example, with Maori tapu. Among the Maori a high degree of tapu attached permanently to particular people, especially chiefs (rangatira) and priests (tohunga). Anything that came in contact with a tapu person became tapu in turn, and this could necessitate extreme precautions to prevent the spread of tapu. Although many tapu were incorporated in the accepted order, others could be imposed by chiefs. Tapu were not in general reciprocal. It is probably no accident that the lack of spread of authority in Kopon society is accompanied by the absence of contagion in taboo.

The nature of taboo in a society, then, parallels the nature of other features in the society. Taboos like those of the Kopon may not be limited to egalitarian societies, but they are especially appropriate to such societies. They could operate in stratified societies, if at all, only in areas not pervaded by relations of dominance and submission. Taboos like the Maori tapu would be impossible in an egalitarian society since the tapu themselves make the holders and controllers stand out from ordinary people.

Turning from Kopon taboo in general I now consider the appropriateness of taboos in the four groups. Relationship taboos (Group I) are of necessity ego based. It seems natural that they utilise what can be broadly classed as items of personal contact to mark relationship roles. The Kopon recognise degrees of personal contact ranging from complete avoidance to the absence of any taboos. A fine gradation of permissible degrees of contact has been achieved by selective restrictions on using names and items. Kopon relationship taboos occasion slight inconvenience, but with minor exceptions do not affect cooperation in day to day tasks. The many kinds of contact and sharing utilised for relationship taboos seem uniquely appropriate.

Group II taboos are the most numerous and varied, and are concerned with sex roles as well as life cycle roles. Whereas a person is in numerous different relationship roles with different people, it is possible at any one point in time to be at only one stage of the life cycle, and of sexes there are only two. Life cycle roles, then, are necessarily marked by taboos that individuals can observe without reference to anyone else. (Reciprocal taboos between people at different stages of the life cycle are theoretically conceivable, but an impossible complexity would be required to use such a system and at the same time mark anything like the number of life cycle classes that are marked by Kopon taboos.) For the Kopon, natural species are obvious subjects for life cycle taboos. It is difficult to think of anything else that provides the necessary variety without imposing undue inconvenience, so far as long term taboos are concerned. Some sex taboos are on natural species, and thus define the sexes, as it were, in isolation. Other taboos achieve symbolic separation of the sexes at certain stages of the life cycle by the use of taboos on the sharing of food cooked in the same oven, and other taboos connected with cooking. The possible symbolism of these taboos, discussed earlier, makes them particularly appropriate.

Group III taboos, concerned with locality and with shamanism, are entirely on natural species. Natural species are numerous, widely used, and useful, but not in most cases individually indispensable. These characteristics, where numerous taboos are required, and where taboos are observed independently by individuals (in however large numbers) rather than in relationship to someone else, make natural species more convenient subjects for taboo than matters of dress, speech, technology, and the like. Natural species, the subjects of taboo in group II, and indirectly in group IV, as well as in group III, have the further advantage that they are a fertile source of symbols.
Much of the fitting symbolism of Kopon taboo species is related to sympathetic action. The things concerned are 'heavy', they 'bleed', they are 'swollen', and so on. Taboos in most cases apply to a single species, but sometimes to a set of species, such as birds that ossick on the ground in faeces, birds that 'dance', and 'birds' (bats) that have 'tight anuses'. Among plants, sap is particularly important, in some cases apparently because it resembles blood, in other cases conceivably because it resembles milk or semen. Sex and life cycle differences are seen as making people vulnerable to the dangers of sympathetic magic at various times. Thus adult women are particularly subject to the danger of bleeding from the vagina, and older boys and younger men, the ones to whom tree climbing is most important, are at risk if they eat 'heavy' things.

Group IV taboos prohibit people who have been in contact with death and bleeding in man and certain quasi-humans\(^2\) from coming into gardens. Contact with bleeding and death in such creatures presumably carries the danger of spreading death to the gardens, a further example of sympathetic effects. The quasi-human status of these creatures is important in that it makes their death and bleeding of some account. It would be impractical for the Kopon to believe that gardens could be affected by the death or bleeding of any and every kind of creature. Those concerned are representatives of the five kinds of creatures most important to the Kopon, namely game animals, birds, the pig, the dog, and man. This is in line with a revised form of Radcliffe-Brown's hypothesis put forward by Bulmer (1975:26). Radcliffe-Brown claimed that species that are in themselves important, or at least symbolic of important things, were likely to become the subject of taboos. Bulmer has argued that the main Kalam totems are representatives of important groups of species from which they have been singled out because they are prominent in various ways. In the Kopon case the taboos are not on the use of the species, but on what may be done after certain kinds of contact with them.

Thus in accordance with the egalitarian character of the Kopon, taboos between people are invariably reciprocal, taboos are embedded in the given order rather than imposed by individuals, and with few exceptions all individuals of the same sex are affected in the course of life by the same sets of taboos. In these and other respects the parameters of Kopon taboo conform to the parameters of the society as a whole and in its various aspects, and contrast, for example, with the parameters of taboo in a stratified society such as that of the Maori. The choice of particular kinds of subjects as taboo in different contexts is suited to, and indeed almost determined by, the contexts themselves. Taboos symbolise individual and collective relations not only with people, but also with the supernaturals, and with plants and animals in general as they are important to the Kopon. In sum, the complex set of Kopon societal parameters is delineated by Kopon taboo.

NOTES

1. For support and assistance in the work on which this article is based, my deepest acknowledgements, and debts that can never be repaid, are owed to the Kopon people and to Ralph Bulmer. Nancy Bowers worked hard along with Ralph in the later stages of supervising my doctoral dissertation. For financial support I am indebted to the Golden Kiwi Lottery Fund, New Zealand; the Hormiman and Esperanza Funds, Great Britain; the Wenner-Gren Foundation, New York; and the New Zealand University Grants Committee. For more detailed acknowledgements see Jackson (1975:4-5).

2. Killing and suicide combined accounted for something like 20% of precontact adult deaths.


4. The works mentioned in this note are arguably the major English language publications on taboo since the decline of 'armchair anthropology'. Radcliffe-Brown (1939) is more about religion and ritual in general than about taboo in particular. Steiner (1956) is a review rather than a new contribution. To some extent Fortes (1967), and to a much greater extent Fox (1967) and Lévi-Strauss (1969) are concerned with totemic taboos rather than taboo in general. Tambiah (1969) discusses chiefly animal taboos. Leach (1964) and especially Douglas (1966) cover ground much wider than taboo as defined below. See also Jackson (1975:384-5). Since I am no longer in academic circles, and under pressure of time, I have not read anything that may have been published on taboo since 1975.

5. For ethnographic material on Kopon taboos see Jackson (1975: ch. IX).

6. Kin terms in quotes are used as translation labels for Kopon kinship terms. Translation labels indicate the primary kin covered by the Kopone terms. The Kopon terms include more distant degrees of kin.

7. I speak of natal and spouse's kin rather than cognatic and affinal kin. The latter terms would be inaccurate if applied to the Kopon, just as they are often inaccurate in other contexts (Jackson 1975:84). Until trained in anthropology I did not distinguish aunts and uncles according to whether they were related by blood or marriage.

8. For an account of Kopon life cycle stages and ritual see Jackson (1975: ch. VIII).

9. There is of course no such thing as a cognatic descent group. See Jackson 1971, especially pp.120-3.

10. Some of the ideas used here come from "Why Is the Cassowary Not a Bird?..." (Bulmer 1967). To the Kopon the cassowary is a bird.


13. If totems are by definition associated with descent groups, then it is not possible for the Kopon to have totems or totemic taboos.
14. For material amplifying but not directly addressed to this point see Jackson (1975:75-7 and 447-53).
15. Both witchcraft and magic combine the natural and the supernatural. Witches combine a natural and a supernatural being. Magic combines a natural being and a supernatural power. Hybrid or possessed people are generally malevolent and known as witches. Malevolent magicians are referred to as sorcerers. In both cases the supernatural element confers on the natural element a special position in society. The natural element makes the performer accountable for the supernatural exploits, often by death as a witch or sorcerer. The natural/supernatural combination in witches and magicians is their defining feature and the basis of their functions in society.
16. Anarchic not in the sense of lacking order but in the strict sense of being without recognised leaders.
17. All Kopon kin terms, with the debatable exception of parent-child terms, are also reciprocal.
18. For details of Maori tapu see Yate (1835:84-9, 243-6); Polack (1840(I):39, 66, 108-9, 272, 275-9, (II):27, 64, 70, 87, 91, 92); Angas (1847 (I):314, 320, 329-30, 331); Shortland (1856:101-13); Taylor (1885 :55-64); Maning (1863:105, 106, 119-47).
19. For a discussion of commensality taboos and other eating taboos see Fortes (1967:16-17) and for a discussion of name and name taboos see Lévi-Strauss (1966:172-216).

REFERENCES