Ritual and Symbol in Native Central America

Edited by Philip Young and James Howe

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RITUAL AND SYMBOL IN
NATIVE CENTRAL AMERICA

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AND
JAMES HOWE

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PREFACE

The papers included in this volume are, with one exception, revised versions of papers read at the seventy-fourth annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco on December 6, 1975, in a symposium entitled "Ritual and Symbolism in Indigenous Central America." The symposium was organized and chaired by James Howe of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Mary Helms of Northwestern University and Alexander Alland of Columbia University served as discussants. Helms agreed to formalize her comments on the papers, and her remarks are included at the end of this volume. Due to a number of other commitments, Alland was unable to write up his comments for inclusion here.

The first paper in this volume, by Dina and Joel Sherzer, was not presented at the AAA symposium and therefore Mary Helms' discussion does not comment on it. We decided to include the Sherzers' paper because, as will be quite evident, it expands upon one aspect of the paper by Hirschfeld—the Cuna mola—and its content is most appropriate for the central theme of the volume, the analysis of ritual and symbolism among the extant indigenous cultures of Central America. A few comments are in order to place the Sherzers' paper within the context of Mary Helms' remarks.

Helms suggests that the mola may have symbolic meaning as a statement of the significance of Cuna women in a variety of ways, for example, as the productive agent of life-giving forces, and as the source of life and life-sustaining materials. While Helms is working here on a more abstract level than that of the Sherzers' ethnographically detailed study, it is interesting to note that Helms' remarks closely parallel the Sherzers' statement that "the mola is the symbol of women, of Cuna womenhood, of being Cuni, of Cuniitē," and that the mola serves, moreover, to distinguish men from women. Helms, following Hirschfeld, also comments that the mola is a material statement of female productivity, especially in the context of production for the tourist trade. The Sherzers clarify and expand upon this meaning of the mola in numerous places, notably in their description of the call to the Congress house where one of the calls to assembly is mormnaknamolo 'go make molas'. In the course of their description the Sherzers also make it plain, however, that the mola as symbolic of female productivity is not confined to the context of sale to tourists, for example, when they state that "Molas are a constantly visible sign of a Cuna woman's own hard work, ability, creativity, and individuality."

Helms also finds symbolism in the dominant mola color scheme, arguing that the colors represent the life-forces of nature, procreation, good and evil. This reading of the colors might seem to run against the Sherzers' analysis, which stresses the superficial decorativeness
and lack of deep symbolism in the Cuna visual arts generally, and
the mola in particular. The symbolism the Sherzers find missing,
however, is the kind characteristic of Cuna curing chants, as de-
scribed in Chapin's paper--vivid, detailed, and highly significant
meanings that are carefully hidden from the casual viewer, but which
the singer both understands and can interpret--while Helms on the
other hand seems to be talking of symbolism that mola-makers and
viewers appreciate only unconsciously, or at the very least which
they cannot readily articulate. Thus the two analyses can be re-
conciled, at least to the editors' satisfaction. While the mola
as art may not have deep symbolic meaning, the colors themselves
when viewed in the context of the Cuna belief system may indeed
carry some of the meaning that Helms suggests.

Other examples could be cited to show that some of Helms'
suggestions about the possible symbolism of molas tends to be
supported by the Sherzers' detailed account, but these few suffice
to make the point. What is perhaps remarkable is that Helms for-
mulated her analytic comments without benefit of the Sherzers'
careful semiotic analysis of the Cuna mola. It would also seem that
where Helms' interpretation tends to run counter to the Sherzers'
argument, there are ample grounds for believing that her statements
are empirically testable, an important consideration in the field
of symbolic analysis where so much interpretation, it seems, can
neither be validated nor falsified.

On behalf of the authors, we would like to point out that
while all of the papers presented here will hopefully be thought-
provoking, none should be considered complete or definitive state-
ments regarding the respective subject matter of each. As editors,
we specifically requested and received permission from each author
to publish here, with only relatively minor revisions, the versions
of the papers presented at the AAA meetings. Our purpose in doing
this was to make the information available as quickly as possible in
view of the general absence in the recent published literature of
description, analysis, and interpretation of the ritual and symbolism
of native Central American peoples. It is our hope that these papers
will stimulate discussion and rethinking, not only of the materials
presented here but also of data on other Central American indigenous
groups--data that in some cases have been available for some time
but toward which no modern structural or symbolic analyses have
been directed.

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ANIMALS THAT WERE BAD TO EAT WERE GOOD TO COMPETE WITH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONTE STYLE FROM ANCIENT PANAMA.¹

BY

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CANAL ZONE
Culturally standardized systems of visual representation, like other sorts of culture codes, function as mechanisms for ordering experience and segmenting it into manageable categories (N. Munn 1966:336).

INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis I propose in this paper is that some graphic systems not only maintain order, but also promote disorder, not only classify, but also incite. Supportive evidence for this proposition will be drawn from an elaborate graphic art style which flourished in the central Panamanian provinces during the last millenium before the Conquest (Lothrop 1937, 1942; Cooke 1972; Linares, n.d.). The suggestion is made here that the complicated animal designs in Conte art were not only decorative in function, but also iconic or representational in the sense that these designs shared some feature of likeness with the referents (Munn, 1966:337); i.e. with human beings occupying certain roles and positions. As an iconographic system, Conte art may have served as a code to communicate hostility, to maintain differences in rank and prestige, and, through the medium of body-painting and funerary ritual, to recruit persons to pragmatic action.

For reasons of taste and preference, I have avoided any discussion of the possible mythological or cosmological meaning of Conte art. Visual categories are here considered as a sub-class of collective representations, of which another is religion. To link art with myth is a legitimate and often essential task in understanding art in an ethnological context (e.g., Leach 1954, Levi-Strauss 1947, Devereux 1961). But to derive one from the other, as archaeologists are apt to do when they reconstruct this or that 'god' from this or that 'motif' (e.g. Joralemon 1971; Roe 1974) seems to me a sterile exercise. Undoubtedly a complicated system of beliefs once underlay the Conte iconography, but it is no longer available to us. Spaniards collected few and very incomplete accounts of the myths and rituals, Indian societies disappeared from the central provinces shortly after the Conquest, and the modern peasant population of that area has little to do with the Indian past. Keeping these cautionary remarks in mind, let us now turn to an analysis of the Conte style.
CONTE ART

In general, Conte art is characterized by: a) a tendency to build up composite motifs suggesting animal forms from a small repertoire of basic formal elements that can be re-combined indefinitely, b) a loose association between design and decorative field, such that some shapes of objects (e.g., ceramic vessels, weapons, jewelry) tend to receive mostly one class of designs, other shapes another and, c) a balancing of the designs achieved through split representation, duplication, and repetition.

The actual execution of the design proceeded first by symmetrical division of the field, apparently to facilitate the decoration of a particular space, one with certain dimensions and with special contours. Then the design was built up by drawing the 'core', after which a number of 'adjunct elements' (see Munn 1966:338), such as scrolls, commas, L-shapes and T-shaped motifs, nested V's, etc. were appended. These probably functioned as 'signs', that is as links between images and concepts (Levi-Strauss, 1971:235), for they regularly stood for body parts (claws, wings, legs, beaks etc.), interchangeably, so that a comma motif would signify a beak in one instance, a claw in another, often in all sorts of combinations.

In an essay on the technique of split-representation, Levi-Strauss (1944-45; 1967 ed.) mentions a number of fundamental principles underlying the arts of, among others, the Northwest Coast, ancient China, the Maori and the Caduveo of Southern Brazil. To this list he could have easily added Conte art, for, as we have seen, it also proceeds by intense stylization, schematization or symbolism, split representation, dislocation of details, elaborate symmetry and illogical transformation of details. He draws the connection between art-structure and social structure, but in a fashion neither direct nor simple. Although he suggests in this essay—as well as in Tristes Tropiques, 1955, Chapter XX—that "motifs and themes express rank differences, nobility privileges and degrees of prestige" he is very explicit in rejecting this notion as anything but superficial. The real originality of the arts mentioned above reside, for Levi-Strauss, in their ability to express egalitarian principles in the face of hierarchy and vertical social institutions. This is accomplished by the use of the aforementioned dyadic and balancing techniques, namely image-splitting, quartering, dismembering, symmetry etc.

Perhaps there is a way of avoiding making this kind of Levi-Straussian leap, from the structural analysis of graphic forms directly into the structural analysis of social forms. To begin with, there is Boas's old idea (1927) that techniques such as split representation present solutions to the problem of portraying three-dimensional figures on a flat surface. To this explanation I would add that such
Fig. 1: 'Adjunct' elements: a) volutes, b) "L" motif, c) "T" motif, d) "v" motif, e) triangles. (Taken from Ladd, 1964, fig. 40 p. 103 and fig. 60 p. 167).
Fig. 2: 'Adjunct' elements used as animal body parts: a) face, b) beaks, c) claws, d) feathers, e) whole motifs using the 'adjunct' elements. (Taken from Ladd 1964, fig. 40 p. 103, fig. 42 p. 110, fig. 48 p. 124).
Fig. 3: Techniques used in design organization: a) repetition, dislocation and filler motifs, b) split representation, c) complex symmetry. (Figs. 3a and 3b are taken from Ladd 1964, fig. 9 p. 55, fig. 37 p. 99; fig. 3c is taken from Lothrop 1942 fig. 482, p. 246).
conventions are also effective in increasing the visibility of the design and in facilitating the 'reading' of the message from whatever angle and in whatever circumstances. Hence, design repetition, split representation, dislocation and filler motifs may add up to a kind of necessary redundancy; or, more than that, to an insistent re-statement of the same message. If we accept this as a possibility, then the fundamental questions become: 'what were the messages?', 'why decorate flat surfaces, or difficult-shaped surfaces?' Answers to these questions can only obtained if we are willing to pose a literal equivalent to the 'nonsense' query posed by Leach about Kachin sacrifice (see Howe's paper in this volume), namely 'Do Nats have legs', 'Do they eat flesh?' In what follows we will ask questions of precisely this nature of the fauna depicted in the Conte designs.

An idea of how the Conte iconography may have worked can be gathered from a careful examination of the fauna that was depicted and the traits that it shared. For, despite the extreme stylization and the common practice of combining attributes from several species, it is possible to a surprising degree to identify some of the most 'fantastic' motifs. But we must assume with Leach (1954; reprinted 1971:53), 'That the designs of primitive peoples are seldom abstract in any genuine sense.' This is particularly true of Conte art, for even the scroll element was used representationally to depict faces.

Let me begin with a discussion of some motifs that belong to easily identifiable animal classes. Crustaceans (mainly crabs) are usually rendered by emphasizing just those parts of the animal that are diagnostic: the rostrum down the middle and the stalked eyes. In a similarly realistic fashion 'effigy vessels' portraying turtles show distinct carapaces, highly placed nostrils to facilitate breathing in the water, and eyes placed high on the head. Then there are a few motifs with deer designs, where the antlers are emphasized, and owls with distinct ear tufts on their heads. Shark motifs have pectoral and back fins and also gill-slits, like sting-rays. In addition, rays are marked by rows of teeth (which in real life are used for grinding mollusks), olfactory pits placed high on the head and special male organs, or 'claspers,' to facilitate copulation. Designs combining hammer-headed sharks with rays are common in Conte polychrome designs. This is interesting because in nature hammer-headed sharks feed on stingrays. Other composite scenes involving predator-prey relations are rare, but they do occur (marine birds with crabs, frogs and insects, for example).

Now, if we focus our attention on the behavioral qualities of the animals that were represented, we notice that they share certain attributes. The animals portrayed in Conte art are repelent (poisonous frogs, snakes and toxic marine worms), they are dangerous (sharks, needlefish, stingrays), they have hard body parts (turtles and crustaceans), they 'charge' or fight furiously among themselves
Fig. 4: Stingray motif. (Taken from Ladd 1964 fig. 39, p. 102).
Fig. 5: Animal motifs that appear in the Sitio Conte pottery. (Drawings adapted from Lothrop 1942, Vol. VIII).
(the deer and the curassow), they have a 'pinch' or a 'sting'
(scorpions, ticks), they are cryptic or predatory (the squid), they
eat people (crocodiles and felines), or they may be extremely
predatory (man-of-war birds, and hawks).

Furthermore, even those motifs that seem to be abstract because
they defy identification, highlight features that are far from random:
the extremities for example (legs, barbs, claws, wings), special
features of the face (mouth with prominent teeth, beaks), the region
around the eyes (including antennae) and so forth. The organs
emphasized are precisely those employed to run, grab, or feel organs
that are involved in defensive or predatory activities.

Conversely, if we pay attention to the animals that were not
portrayed in the art, other common qualities emerge. Animals that
are not represented have soft body parts, or are vulnerable: (peccaries,
agouti, raccoons, sloths, monkeys, opossums). In fact, the general
rule seems to be that animals that were eaten were not used in the
iconography: fish, for example, or lizards like iguanas, or rodents
and the mammals with soft body parts that I just mentioned. Small
songbirds never appear, but predatory birds and large gallinaceous
forms do. Hence, animals that are 'nice,' or easy prey for man, or
harmless were not incorporated in the art.

In a more direct manner, the animal iconography in Conte art
centered on a marine and riverine way of life, but this cannot be the
principal explanation for the motifs. Apparently, Conte artists were
not just portraying common animals, or nature as they saw it, since
the most common fish and mammalian species found in their former
habitation sites are not represented in their iconography. Their
non-random selection of motifs was biased towards species of a
particularly aggressive or impressive sort. For some collateral
evidence suggesting why this may have been so, let us review the
circumstances surrounding the objects of Conte representational art.

Some Conte objects are found in the trash heaps of village
sites, but most occur in cemeteries. Among burial sites, Sitio Conte,
which was excavated in the 1930's and 40's, remains the best known.
The composite graves found here contain thousands of objects and
numerous skeletons, which according to at least one interpretation
(Mason 1940:104), belonged to "chiefs and warriors slain in a single
battle." Many of the male skeletons bore mutilation marks, were
associated with caches of stingray barbs, or had stone projectile
points lodged in their stomachs.

While the quantity of objects found in the largest Conte graves
is enormous, the categories to which they belong are few: weapons,
textiles, feathered objects, jewelry and thousands of vessels.
Everything was decorated with (or in the shape of) the aforementioned
Fig. 6: Semirealistic anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs. (Taken from Lothrop 1942 Vol. VIII fig. 149 p. 83; fig. 60 p. 38; fig. 44 p. 29).
Fig. 247: Plan of deposit XVI, grave 26. The objects shown include: stone mirror backs (1, 2, 32), five stone cists (5, 176), pottery incense burner (169, 170), gold plaques (13, 14, 15, 16), gold arm bands (10, 18, 19, 30), twenty-five gold disks (27), gilded disks (172, 173), gold necklaces (11, 59, 69), four gold ear rods (8, 9, 32), four gold cylinders (37, 38), two gold and stone ear rods (33), tips for two wooden ear rods (34), three gold chisels (175), emerald (?) and gold setting (5), whale tooth pendant (46), carved whale tooth pendant (4), pair of whale tooth pendants set in gold (46, 48), chipped stone blades (4) and pottery vessels (17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 47, 173).

Fig. 7: A Sitio Conte tomb. (Taken from Lothrop 1937, Vol. VII, fig. 247).
animal motifs. Analysis of the same motifs led Lothrop (1942:183-199) to associate individual potters with individual styles, but the significant association rather might be between design motifs and particular graves. On first impression it does appear as if clusters of certain motifs are found more often in some graves than in others, suggesting that they were the 'property' of specific persons, or specific groups. However, this impression needs to be confirmed by a thorough, if tedious re-analysis of the Conte grave lots.

Concerning the most popular pottery shapes, (flat trays, pedestal plates and effigy vessels) these are eminently suitable for ease of decoration and maximum enhancement of the design. The sections of the vessels that were invisible (the underside, for example) were seldom decorated and sometimes not even slipped. Hence the flat shapes and flamboyant designs suggest that, regardless of their use in everyday life, vessels were manufactured to be looked at by others, usually from above, and hence were decorated with designs that could be 'read' from any angle. Crowds must have gathered at the edge of these luxurious graves, admired their contents, and by a very human type of transference, equated the status of the grave's occupants with the quality and abundance of the funerary objects accompanying them. But this admiration was not passive. Deliberate destruction of art objects by burning and trampling, and stealing from one grave to fill another, indicate that these objects were important in validating rank and prestige in this kind of society.

Now, if we go back to the animals portrayed in Conte designs, we notice immediately that the same animals which appear in the motifs were often the source of raw material used in the manufacturing of other funerary items. The long bones of gallinaceous or predatory birds were fashioned into bracelets and necklaces, their feathers into headdresses and aprons; spines of the stingray and the teeth of sharks became projectile points and necklaces, the turtle carapaces found in great profusion in the graves were probably used as resounding boards. It seems likely, then, that at the level of the iconography itself, and by a sort of logical extension, the animals portrayed in central Panamanian art were highly valued as the source of the paraphernalia to establish status and rank.

By extending this reasoning a bit further--or perhaps a bit 'further out'--we might conclude that a kind of symbolic extrapolation was also taking place. In certain animal designs--especially those labelled as 'birds that look forward,' and 'birds that look back'--birds are actually portrayed strutting about with big trailing feathers and recurved crests. Of course these representations may have been semi-realistic. There are a few large gallinaceous birds in the tropics such as guans and curassows which have tails and crests of this kind. (And these are large and notoriously ill-tempered birds). Neither can we dismiss the possibility that these details represented stylistic devices. Nonetheless the impression remains that feathers used in making headdresses and aprons to be worn by important people (perhaps
even warriors) had become symbolically reversed in Conte art into motifs of birds strutting about like people. Farfetched as these extrapolations may seem at first, the fact remains that some of these animal motifs are undoubtedly representing people behaving in a certain manner. Some idea of who these people were, and what their actions were, may be gleaned from the available archaeological and ethnohistorical data.

By A.D. 500 the entire Pacific coastal lowlands of central Panama, from eastern Veraguas to the Azuero Peninsula and all of Cocle Province, were heavily populated by groups exploiting similar microenvironments and known from historical sources to have been culturally related. This cultural homogeneity was expressed in Conte art, a gradually evolving and unified artistic tradition which held sway over a large area for a long time. Convincing evidence has been presented (Cooke 1972) that this homogeneity did not represent trade out of a common center, but rather a common sphere of interaction within which groups continually fought and allied with each other in the normal process of fission and fusion typical of tropical cultivators in their expansionist phase (see Vayda 1961). As population spiraled after A.D. 500, the rivalry for riverine land in this dry area, and also perhaps for the control of crafts and trade, must have increased. When the Spaniards arrived, the dynamics of warfare and competition were in full force.

Although they must have exhibited a great deal of variation, many societies encountered by the chroniclers were typical rank-societies, neither completely egalitarian nor markedly stratified (Fried 1967; Howe 1974). Some groups lived in large nucleated villages under a paramount chief. Nata, for example, had under him many sub-chiefs with whom he allied in times of war. Oviedo y Valdes (1526; 1944 ed.) remarks that war was carried out with people of other provincias, and was in the hands of a special group of warriors called cabras, whom he compared with caballeros and hidalgos because they were set apart from the common people by their status, and by the fact that they owned land and places, gained as spoils in war. Given the absence of strict rules for hereditary ranking and aristocratic succession, warfare seems to have been one of the most important ways of achieving status and gaining prestige.

Besides wearing a staggering amount of jewelry when they went to war, these warriors were also painted with that Oviedo calls devisas or libreas (which glosses as insignias or badges). "They paint their faces more in war," Oviedo adds, "for a man is not a soldier unless he does so." In fact, at the time a man took over his father's powers, he had the choice of keeping his father's devisa for himself and all followers, or of getting a different set of motifs "to distinguish those who served his father and those who served him" (Oviedo, 1944 ed.: 20). Furthermore, body-painting was also used to
Fig. 8: Effigy vessels showing face painting in the manner described by the chroniclers. (Taken from Lothrop 1942, fig. 206, p. 111).
brand slaves, to identify captives, and to mark free men. Markings from the mouth to the forehead, for example, was the symbol of a captive; from under the mouth around and up to the ears, of a free man. In this connection it is interesting to note that many of the human beings depicted on the effigy vessels found in the Conte graves have their bodies decorated with Conte designs, and their faces painted in the manner described by Oviedo. Also, if we refer back to the inventory of objects found in Conte graves we notice right away the presence of pottery stamps or seals employed in body painting. Hence, Levi-Strauss's idea that social rank and status is often communicated through the medium of body-painting receives some confirmation from Conte art.

CONCLUSION

In summary, I have suggested here that Conte iconography functioned, at one level, to maintain individual and collective statuses, and, at another, to promote changes in these statuses by pragmatic action, namely warfare and competitive display. The symbolic 'power' of this iconography rested on the associations created between aggressive or predatory animals and individual people with equivalent roles.

Among primitive societies in tropical America the visual arts are only one of several symbolic languages using animal metaphors for the quality of human interaction. In the field of ritual and myth, Levi-Strauss has documented the extensive use of animal symbolism among South American societies. This concern with animal behavior is understandable. Not only were wild species essential for survival, but many species were economically important as the source for raw materials to produce implements and luxury goods. Also, because species diversity in the tropics tends to be great--much greater in fact than in temperate zones--all sorts of animals in these close quarters have evolved very complex forms of inter- and intra-specific interactions, involving several types of mimicry, commensalism and elaborate signalling systems (Moynihan 1971). Thus, in many ways, animal behavior in the tropics mirrors the complexity of social behavior with ease, facilitating the whole symbolic process.

FOOTNOTES

1I should like to thank the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, for permission to use, without charge, the reproduction of Lothrop's figures which appear in this article, and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. for permission to use the illustrations from Ladd's volume. The latter institution also took the photographs from both the Lothrop and the Ladd volumes.
Besides learning a great deal from my biological colleagues at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, I have benefitted greatly from the comments of two particularly keen and observant behaviorists, namely Michael Robinson and Martin Moynihan.

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INTRODUCTION

Molas, colorful, sewn appliqué and reverse appliqué panels, are made and worn by women among the Cuna Indians of Panama. The significance of molas can best be appreciated by viewing the mola in terms of several overlapping and related perspectives: the mola as item of clothing, mola making, the mola as art object, and the mola in Cuna culture and society.

The word mola has several related meanings in the Cuna language
(1) cloth or clothing in general
(2) shirt or blouse in general (for men or women)
(3) woman's blouse, consisting of two panels and combining yoke.
(4) single panel, either to be sewn together with another to make a complete mola to be worn or to be sold as a single panel. In the latter case, i.e., as a single panel to be sold, the panel was often previously part of a complete mola (meaning 3) which was worn; i.e., it is now a used panel.

It is interesting that these four meanings of the word mola are related to the various perspectives from which the mola must be viewed, as well as the various stages and types of use—making or sewing, wearing, and selling.

WHY STUDY THE MOLA?

In recent years molas have become increasingly popular as art objects. They are sold in many ways and places—by Cuna Indians on the islands of San Blas themselves, to visiting tourists and dealers; in Panama City, in the airport, hotel and other tourist shops, and drug stores; by mail from Braniff airlines; in shops specializing in popular Latin American art throughout the U.S.; in fashionable art stores in Europe, North America, and Japan; in the ultra-select Nieman-Marcus in Dallas, Texas. Molas have attracted the attention of collectors, who most frequently display them framed and hung on walls. Sometimes they are used as decorative covers for pillows. Some collectors are aware that their treasures were once worn by women inhabiting coral islands studded with coconut trees off the Caribbean coast of Panama; most probably are not. Our intention here is to place the mola in both Cuna and non-Cuna context, to demonstrate that it is an item of clothing which plays an important role in various aspects of Cuna life while at the same time being an art object appreciated and valued by Cunas and non-Cunas alike.
WHO ARE THE CUNA?

About 30,000 Cuna Indians inhabit island and mainland communities in the Comarca de San Blas, on the Northeast Coast of Panama, reaching to the Colombian border. These people are sometimes referred to as the San Blas Cuna or the San Blas Indians. These are the best known of the Cuna, the most studied by visiting anthropologists, and the most visited by tourists. They also make the most elaborate molas, the most carefully, precisely, and minutely sewn. A smaller number of Cuna inhabit the Darien jungle on the other side of the mountains—-the Cordillera de San Blas—along the Bayano and Chucunaque rivers. There is a great deal of contact between these Cuna and those of San Blas. The Cuna walk barefoot from jungle villages across the mountains in one or two days along well-travelled paths. A small number of Cuna still live in Colombia near the border with Panama. Occasionally boats carrying Colombian Cuna come sailing into San Blas. San Blas Cuna also occasionally visit Colombia, the seat of ancient tradition. It is not our intention here to describe all aspects of Cuna life. Rather we will focus on those aspects which are necessary for an understanding of the mola, in that they are directly related to mola making, wearing, selling, and appreciation.

Most Cuna live on small coral islands, with no water or arable land. Many trips to the nearby mainland jungle are necessary—-to hunt, farm, gather medicinally valuable plants, carry water for drinking and cooking, and wash clothes. A common sight in San Blas at all hours of the day is that of men and women paddling canoes from the island to the jungle mainland and back again, the canoes full of receptacles of water, clothing, coconuts, bananas, carefully wrapped medicinal plants, or combinations of these.

Cuna political and social life is centered in the large congress house, usually located in the center of the village. Here, from their hammocks, chiefs chant to audiences of men and women, the women wearing lovely molas and, by the light of small, homemade kerosene lamps, cutting and sewing new ones.

Two cuna ceremonies are particularly interesting with regard to the mola. The first is tii wee, a puberty ceremony for girls, attended only by female relatives and friends who carry water to bathe the young girl. Drinks such as chocolate and oatmeal are served and the women and girls, wearing fine molas, sit together and talk and joke, all the while making new molas. A second puberty festival for girls is village wide, the inna or chicha (fermented drink) festival, the only occasion on which Cuna are permitted to drink alcoholic beverages. (This is the occasion for the chanting of the kantules mentioned several times in Hirschfeld's paper in this volume.) Several days before the actual festivities, men and some women together prepare the inna, working in the large inna neka 'chicha house'. As the work goes on, other men and
women sit and talk, men often making baskets, and women often making
molas. On the day or days of the festivities, no one works, everyone
eats and drinks to drunkenness. People do all sorts of things they
never do at other times, from dancing through the playing of traditional
games to fighting. Once again, the women wear fine molas. This is one
occasion when they do not make them, however. Like the men, they
partake in the festivities.

THE MOLA AS ITEM OF CLOTHING

In Panama City it is not uncommon to see a Cuna woman in native
dress walking along beside her husband in a busy street. One is struck
by this sight, because of the contrast with the clothing of urban Latin
America. This surprise and visual pleasure is greatly magnified when
one arrives on an island in San Blas and sees all of the women wearing
their native clothes. The mola is but a part of this native costume
worn by women, which consists of the following: A gold nose ring, gold
ear pendants, and a gold breast plate or beads. While the nose ring
is worn at almost all times, the ear pendants and breast plate are saved
for special and ceremonial occasions. They are also worn, as are the
best molas, for the taking of photographs. The gold jewelry is specially
made for the Cuna, either in Panama or, more recently, by native jewelers,
with gold purchased in Panama. A scarf or kerchief on the head (muswe),
red with yellow designs. The muswe is made in Panama, Europe, or Japan
especially for the Cuna; it is worn in the congress, when walking in the
streets, or when travelling to another island. It is also used to carry
things in, especially when a woman does not want others to see what she
may be carrying, and to hide one's face for various reasons—from a
camera, from others' eyes when laughing excessively. The large muswe
is quite adaptive for removing one's face and therefore to a certain
extent one's self from interaction. A skirt, called a sapuret. The
sapuret is also made in Panama especially for the Cuna. It is usually
solid green or blue with printed designs. Ankle and wrist bands (wini)
tied extremely tightly. The glass beads (wini) for the bands are store
bought; the bands are strung by the women themselves. And of course,
the mola, which is tucked into the sapuret (pregnant women wear the mola
over the sapuret). The mola consists of the two panels, connected by a
yoke. The yoke is made of store bought cloth which may be of a solid
color or have various patterns. To the non-Cuna eye, the yoke often
might seem gaudy and to clash with the mola itself. With regard to the
feet, women either go barefoot or else wear rubber thongs or similar
sandals.

The Cuna woman's dress then is strikingly Cuna and strikingly
non-western, yet interestingly enough, very dependent on western
manufacture. The muswe and sapuret are made entirely by non-Cuna, the
wini and jewelry partially so. The molas are made from store bought cloth. Yet this combination of clothing, adornments, and jewelry is felt by the Cuna to be uniquely their own and is constantly stressed as such, in such serious discourse as chiefs' chants and speeches and in such informal (but nonetheless significant) talk as kidding with outsiders.

In contrast to that of the women, the dress of Cuna men is western, or at least a Cuna variant of western. The men wear western shirts and trousers and most often go barefoot. Most men wear a hat at all times, whether this be the work hat worn while hunting, fishing, or farming or the dressier hat worn to congress in the evening. Cuna chiefs may wear a tie, especially on particularly ceremonial occasions. The tie is typically worn without buttoning the top button of the shirt.

Females of all ages—from young babies who can barely walk, through young unmarried girls, to married women with children, to grandmothers—wear molas at all times. Not to wear a mola is to indicate that one does not feel oneself to be a Cuna, to orient oneself toward Panama rather than San Blas. Such individuals are rare, except on one or two very acculturated islands. Which mola a woman wears varies according to the activities she is engaged in. For instance, when a woman goes to the river in the jungle to wash clothes or to get water, or when she goes with her husband to work on their land, or when she cooks or cleans the house, she wears an old mola, one that has been worn many times and is faded and perhaps torn. On the other hand, when it is not her turn to do such work, she will wear a nicer, newer mola. She will especially wear a new, nice mola at night when attending the congress, when sitting with family and friends at a tii wee, during village-wide puberty rites, or when going to visit another island. The mola is thus an item for everyday, work, leisure, and ceremonial wear. What distinguishes the molas worn on these different occasions is how old they are, how worn out they are, whether they are made quickly and perhaps by sewing machine, or whether they are new and elaborate. The more important the occasion for use, the newer, nicer, and more elaborate the mola worn. For the most important ceremonial occasions, a woman will choose a very complex, a very elaborate and thick mola that she wears very rarely. Each woman owns many molas, which she made as a young girl before getting married and which she continues to make after marriage. A woman hangs her molas in a bedroom section of her house, on horizontal poles hung near the roof. On the poles are neat piles which consist of a muswe, sapuret, mola combination which she has decided will match. The nicest molas may be kept locked in wooden chests. Women wash their molas in the river on the mainland along with the other clothes they wash, the only care taken to protect them is to turn them inside out so as not to tear out the stitches.

It is important to point out that molas or types of molas are not worn solely by women of a particular socio-economic class; nor do molas
distinguish the wife of a chief or other political or ceremonial leader from any other woman; a rich woman from a poor one; a young woman from an old one; or a woman from a particular island from a woman from another island. There is no rank or social position that gives a woman the right or duty to wear a particular type of mola. In this egalitarian society, women are equal and the mola is the symbol of women, of Cuna women, of Cuna womanhood, of being Cuna, of Cunaité. It is noteworthy that the mola is a symbol (probably the primary symbol) of Cunaité at both an individual level and a group or society level. At the individual level, each woman makes her own mola and wears one according to her own tastes and desires. At the group level, because all women wear molas, the mola thus distinguishes men from women at the level of Cuna society, Cuna from non-Cuna at the level of Cuna relations and relationships with others. The mola is thus more than an ethnic boundary marker (Barth 1969); it is THE Cuna ethnic boundary marker par excellence in that for both Cuna and non-Cuna it is a constantly visual, striking sign of Cunaité. 3

Furthermore each woman is her own designer. There is no individual man or woman, or group of individuals, who launches the fashion, or dictates a style for molas. While there are fads, popular motifs, that may exist on an island or spread from island to island, these are not imposed on the community as is fashion in western society.

Women obviously enjoy wearing and thus displaying their molas and they change them often. After having accomplished her household duties, a woman will change to a nicer mola, always trying to look well dressed. The Cuna often view Cuna women as being on display. In chants, they are referred to as beautiful, precious, but delicate and susceptible flowers. The molas are the most evident aspect of this display—colorful complicated adornments which at once symbolize Cuna culture and enrich it. Except in a few parts of San Blas especially dependent on tourism, when a woman sells a mola, it is only after she has worn it often before. It is only when a woman is extremely hard-pressed for money that she will sell a mola new, never having worn it (until quite recently—see p. 30).

There is no particular place, event, ceremony, or situation which requires a particular type of mola, a particular motif, style, design, or color combination. Molas are purely decorative; they are not seen to be related in any structured way to the person or the context in which they might be worn. Formerly, for the puberty festivals, which are attended by the whole village, women would wear molas depicting elements of the ceremony (wooden bowls, flutes, headdresses, etc.). They would often make such molas together in the period before the festival, and in many villages the female relatives of the girl for whom the ceremony is given still coordinate the design of their molas. But such molas are in no way required; it is not felt that such molas
are an essential part of the festival. Rather, the women themselves
decide to make and wear similar molas for the ceremony, for purely
decorative reasons. Very recently, girls belonging to groups which
publicly perform dances have decided to all wear the same mola and the
same sapuret for the dancing.

The mola is thus an item of clothing which is worn every day--
for work, for display on special occasions (the equivalent of our
'Sunday best'), for ceremony, and for ritual. To this multifunctionality
of the mola as item of clothing are added other functions--as decorative
art object, as symbol of Cunaíte, and as item of social harmony, cohesion,
and control.

THE MOLA MAKER

There is no class of artists among the Cuna, specialists whose
sole task is to create works of art. Mola makers in particular are not
a restricted group of women. All Cuna women are mola makers. Since molas
are made for oneself and not for others to wear, every woman must make her
own mola. There are no stores in San Blas which make or sell molas for
Cuna women. There is no ready made mola that women can buy. To our
knowledge, no woman specializes in making molas to sell to other Cuna
women. Apart from the molas a woman makes for her very young daughters
(before they can begin to make their own), every mola a woman makes is
for her very own personal use.

A convergence of factors renders mola making possible: leisure
time, craftsmanship, and the knowledge of the appropriate techniques.
The basic techniques of mola making are transmitted from mother to
daughter, and more detailed techniques and ideas are passed among sisters
and friends as they sit in their houses in the afternoons passing the
time talking and making molas. Cuna women ideally are involved in making
molas in almost all of their leisure time, and the division of labor and
organization of duties allow women ample leisure. Cuna residence is
matrilocal, which means that households consist of a father and mother,
the heads of the household, and their daughters, with their husbands and
children. The heads of the household distribute work duties for the
next day--who will go farm, fish, or hunt; who will go wash clothes and
get water in the jungle; who will stay home and cook, clean the house,
and take care of the children. Thus, the more women there are in each
household, the more leisure time each one has for mola making. It is
interesting that while some men will repair or make shirts and trousers
with a sewing machine, these same men do not make molas. There do exist
among the Cuna, however, homosexual men, some of whom make molas. These
men are called ome-kiit, literally 'woman-like'. These homosexuals
speak like women, often gather with women, and sometimes make molas,
though they never wear them. The liminal, intermediary status of these
men is nicely reflected in their relationship to molas. Like other men, they wear western-style clothing; like women, they make molas.

It is considered highly improper for Cuna women to walk the streets, alone or even in groups, to go about the village without a specific purpose (bringing things to and from canoes, buying something in a store, going to the congress house). This means that when they are not gathering water or washing clothes in the jungle, cooking or cleaning in the house, women are sitting at home, with mothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, and friends, making molas. When visiting friends, whether for ordinary friendship or for the ceremonial til wee (puberty) rite, women sit, chatting constantly and making molas. Similarly, during the preparation of village feasts, such as that associated with the inna ceremony (village-wide puberty rites), women gather together and watch, talk, and make molas. But no doubt the most striking context in which molas are made is the congress house, where several evenings a week and at times in the morning, one of the chiefs of the village chants for several hours. (The chants concern pap ikar, discussed at length in Hirschfeld's contribution to this volume.) Morning congresses are for women and very few men attend. Evening congresses are for men and women. In late afternoon, on evenings when such chanting will take place, village 'policemen' wind through the town announcing the event. One of the several calls these policemen use is: mormaknamaloe 'go make molas'. Thus the announcement of the chief's chanting comes in the form of a command to all women to make molas. And this is precisely what they do. Dressed in one of their finer molas, women sit together on long benches in front of or behind the chiefs. Men sit around the women, next to the walls of the congress house. In front of the women's benches are tiny wooden tables, on which they place their mola baskets and kerosene lamps. And as they listen to the chanting of the chiefs and interpretation by the chief's interpreters, they make their molas. These congresses are understood as being in large part for the women. A most common topic for a chant is proper behavior, especially for women. The evening congresses are thus for women in several ways at the same time. It gives them a chance to go out of the house, to be seen, to wear their finest clothes. It keeps them (like the men) together, in manifest community-wide unity, off the streets, and away from possible trouble. It keeps them in constant touch with the wisdom of Cuna tradition, applied to everyday problems by the village leaders. And of course, it provides a long uninterrupted period for mola making. Only one woman per household, usually a grandmother, stays home and guards the house and cares for very young infants, while all others attend the congress. It is obvious then that women have at their disposal ample leisure and many official contexts for mola making.

The materials for making molas are not native to the Cuna. Cloth, which was introduced to the Cuna in the nineteenth century, is bought in native-owned stores, which in turn buy it from Panama or from boats
coming from nearby Colombia. The cloth bought from Panama is generally of better quality. Similarly, thread is purchased in stores. The implements for making molas, scissors and needles, are also purchased by women. Every woman has a basket (baskets are made by Cuna men) or handbag (bought in or originating from Panama), in which she keeps the mola she is currently working on, together with pieces of cloth, scissors, needles, and thread. Thus the mola, probably the most striking, visible marker and symbol of the Cuna, of Cunaité, for both Cuna and non-Cuna, is made entirely from non-native, purchased materials. (See Hirschfeld's discussion of this point, in this volume, p. 48.) Of course, the resultant product, the mola, is distinctly non-Western and uniquely Cuna.

The method of making molas is as follows. A woman conceives of a pattern for a mola in its entirety. There are varied sources for this pattern—a Cuna cultural theme, an element of the natural environment, a current fad perhaps derived from a magazine advertisement or canned good, an abstract, geometric design, another mola. This pattern is then drawn in chalk or traced with a scissors point onto a piece of cloth in its overall shape. Other pieces of cloth, part of the overall pattern, are pinned or tacked on. Then little by little, by cutting, adding on, and sewing and embroidering, the mola is elaborated. The reverse appliqué involves two or more bases, with designs cut in the top layers, so that they show through from below. The appliqué involves the placing of forms on top of the top-most base layer. Thickness and elaboration result from both the reverse-appliqué and the appliqué process. It typically takes one month to complete a mola. More elaborate ones take even longer. The best molas involve very precise cutting and fine stitching, so that, even though they are washed by hand in muddy river water, and worn repeatedly, they last a long time. Because of the fine details and elaboration, the making of a mola requires concentrated effort, skill, patience, and precision.

A first mola is a source of pride for a young girl. And though all women make molas, some women make more than others and some make better ones than others. There are women who take native medicine which improves their mola-making ability, just as men can take medicine to better learn tribaltradition and children can take medicine to perform better in school. Some women have acquired the reputation of being excellent mola makers and their products are exquisite works of art. Yet frequently such women refuse to sell their molas to outsiders, in spite of the high prices they might bring. These women often personally wear their best molas before selling them and agree to sell them only when worn out, though still quite beautiful. On the other hand, due to the increasing non-Cuna market, some women now make molas on commission, or for the sole purpose of selling them, molas that they never wear, but sell immediately upon completion. These then remain in panel form, are never put together into a blouse. Furthermore, molas made solely for selling are made in
different sizes, from very small patches with single motifs to very large ones, to be hung on a wall or used as a curtain, made on commission. The increasing demand for molas by non-Cuna has had a double result with regard to their quality. Both better and worse molas, both exquisite, carefully designed, finely cut and embroidered masterpieces and ordinary, almost sloppy molas are being produced. These match the double demand— that of connoisseurs of fine, 'primitive' art and that of tourists, visitors to San Blas who want to take a small souvenir away with them, as well as purchasers of large quantities of colorful, inexpensive art objects for sale at relatively low prices in the United States.

Among the Cuna, women are often considered to be weak creatures, fragile, easily tempted, and in need of advice and direction. Such a theme is repeated endlessly in Cuna congress chanting and speaking and in fact is one of the reasons for these congresses, this being the primary context in which advice to women on proper behavior is offered. The making of molas is thus a magnificent element of social control for the Cuna. The constant task of making molas keeps women out of trouble; more particularly it prevents them from wandering about the streets and keeps them in places where they make molas—in homes or in the congress. Since they make rather than buy their own clothing, and since this clothing is a public source of prestige, there is incentive to make molas. Since the Cuna place great emphasis on maintaining their traditions and having them publicly performed, in such contexts as the congress, the congress then performs the dual function of bringing the members of the village together to communally listen to their leaders display their knowledge of tradition and at the same time keeping women from misbehaving and keeping them making molas. To these social functions of the congress of course can be added an economic one, since molas are also sold and are therefore a source of income, especially for women.

Molas are a constantly visible sign of a Cuna woman's own hard work, ability, creativity, and individuality. They are also the product of an interaction of various aspects of Cuna social, economic, ceremonial, and leisure life.

THE MOLA AS ART OBJECT

It should be pointed out that the Cuna make molas only for clothing: molas are not used as pillows or as decorative panels to hang on the walls of houses or in the Cuna congress. The mola probably has its origin in the body painting that the Cuna used to employ and various South American tropical forest Indian groups still employ. The remnants of this body painting are found today in the use of native cosmetics by Cuna women—the painting of noses with a black line from the forehead to the end of the nose and of cheeks with an orange-red substance. The same orange-red substance is also used by some men during the very traditional, village-wide puberty festivals. The same black substance is used to
completely cover babies, in order to ward off the spirits of disease. It is interesting that these same colors, black and red, are the basic contrasting colors in almost all molas.

Mola blouses, with regard to their formal, artistic properties, can best be characterized in terms of repetition with variation. In fact, the mola lends itself very well to an analysis in terms of parallelism, an approach made explicit by Roman Jakobson (1968) for verbal art. There is constant repetition with variation at every level of the mola. The front and back panels of a blouse are decorated with the same motif, the same organizing principles of design, and the same color contrasts. At the same time, there are slight variations in size, shape, and color, so that the two panels are not identical. Within a single panel, there is repetition of shapes and figures, according to a number of organizing principles—four corners, top and bottom, left and right, central and peripheral—often several operating at the same time. Repetition is also achieved and emphasized by means of fillers—small squares, triangles, diamonds, and oblongs—resulting especially in the most valued, complicated molas, in an absence of any significantly large blank spaces. On each mola one particular type of filler is used, thus reinforcing the overall unity and cohesion of the mola. The repeated motifs, together with the fillers, result in a rhythmic flowing of forms and colors, a dense yet uncomplicated, balanced order. It is interesting to note the similarity between parallelism as an organizing principle of Cuna visual art (the mola) and Cuna verbal art (ceremonial and ritual speaking and chanting), including the use of many artistic 'fillers' (in verbal art, particles which link verses, lines, and parts of lines). For the Cuna, the best verbal art is long, repetitive, dense, and full.11

With regard to theme, three types of molas can be distinguished:
(1) the mola which has geometrical, abstract designs,
(2) the mola which represents elements of Cuna life,
(3) the mola which incorporates elements of the non-Cuna, western world.

All three continue to be made today.

Because of the focus on decorativeness, elaboration, and repetition, the theme of a mola is not always immediately obvious; it has to be deciphered a bit, not only by non-Cuna, but by the Cuna themselves. In fact, our experience has been that the Cuna are not particularly aware of or interested in the specific themes expressed by the molas worn by the women they see around them. It must be emphasized that molas do not represent Cuna ancestors, mythical beings or scenes, or good or bad spirits of a supernatural nature. Nor do they contain designs or motifs that have a magical value, or has their creation been prompted by dreams, or come to the mind of the maker in a state of trance or hallucination.12 The mola maker creates a design and color arrangement purely for its decorative, eye-catching appeal. There is no deep or hidden symbolism represented in
the molas, no secret message that must be decoded. It is superficial decorative form that is significant in molas, not underlying, referential content.13

THE ABSTRACT, GEOMETRICAL MOLA

In this type of mola, there is no typical or required form (such as the spiral in Melanesia [Boas 1955:161] or the curvilinear/straight motifs of the Caduveo [Levi-Strauss 1955:212], that must be represented; rather many patterns and motifs are found—circles, diagonals, crosses, crenelet, etc. Some of these designs are also used on the baskets made by Cuna men.

THE MOLA WHICH REPRESENTS ELEMENTS OF CUNA LIFE

This type might picture various Cuna objects or activities—a canoe, a sailboat with people and paddles, a burial, pots in which food is being cooked. We stress again that these motifs are purely decorative. It is not considered appropriate to wear a mola having a certain motif at a certain time or for a particular occasion. Nor on the other hand is it tabu or even improper to wear a mola having a certain motif on such occasions as funerals or during ceremonies.

The fauna of the jungle provide elements for molas—the colorful toucan bird for example, or monkeys. Sea animals such as crabs and turtles are also represented. Also used are such animals found on the islands themselves as cats and mice. It is striking that no dangerous animals are pictured on molas,14 on rare occasions when they are, they are rendered harmless, seemingly friendly creatures. The jungle flora, such as banana leaves or tropical flowers, also appear in molas.

The representation of Cuna individuals stresses aspects of Cunaïté and Cuna views on the esthetics of the human body. Thus men in molas usually wear hats, and they often are smoking pipes or cigarettes. Men and women have exaggeratedly long noses, considered both esthetically pleasing and a marker of intelligence.

MOLAS WHICH CONTAIN ELEMENTS FROM THE WESTERN WORLD

These non-Cuna elements are striking, usually amusing. They include crosses and other religious items introduced by missionaries, sports such as baseball and boxing,15 lunar modules, coat hangers,
Panamanian and American flags, mouse traps, trousers, letters of the alphabet and words (even though most Cuna do not read or write). Many of these motifs are copied from magazine pictures that are brought back home by men who work in Panama, or copied from boxes or cans containing food, bought in local stores, from Panama, or from Colombian traders.

The incorporation of non-Cuna elements into the mola should not be taken as a sign of acculturation, degeneration, or imminent disappearance of the mola—anything but. In fact, it is part of the lack of fear of novelty and change characteristic of Cuna culture and apparent in ordinary day to day life, as well as in ceremonies and ritual. Central to Cuna social and esthetic life is the creative and dynamic ability to make foreign, non-Cuna objects, themes, and ideas function in and become part of Cuna culture. Elements from western culture are incorporated into the overall structure of the mola, just as are the geometric designs and local ecological and cultural motifs. It is characteristic of the Cuna and a measure of their dynamism to welcome and enjoy novelty, but to transform it into something Cuna, into Cunaité. Precisely this same process occurs in Cuna literature, the rich oral system of chanting and speaking, in which all kinds of new elements are introduced—dreams, travels, aspects of life in Panama City—and made a part of and relevant to traditional themes in Cuna religion and politics.

The primary colors of molas are the basic colors red, yellow, black, orange, green, blue, and white. The colors are always solid. There is no gradation or shading of colors. No brown or gray are used, a trait the Cuna share with other people of South America, for whom brown and gray are unpopular. Green is rather rare, and it seems worth speculating that this color is avoided because it is the color of the jungle, perhaps associated with work and danger. Black and red, the only colors still used in Cuna cosmetics and body painting, are basic to the mola in two related ways. A black and red contrast forms the basic color opposition for most molas in that the background is black while figures are outlined in red, or vice versa. Furthermore, black and red are basic in the reverse-appliqué cloth structure of the mola in that most molas have at least a black and a red reverse-appliqué layer, in addition to others they may also have. In fact, the red or black background and figure outlines result not from surface appliqué, but rather from the showing through of reverse-appliqué layers, thus providing depth and dynamism to the overall structure.

Molas can be classified in terms of their two primary features—cloth depth and color. The simplest molas have two layers or bases of reverse-appliqué. The color scheme might also be twofold, precisely the two colors of the reverse-appliqué bases. More colors can be added on through surface appliqué. From the Cuna point of view, complication and value derive essentially from the thickness in the reverse-appliqué scheme, which shows through as different colors and patterns, and from fineness and complication in the stitching on of appliqué, and not from variety
of color alone.

There are no landscape molas. Molas are not realistic representations, in the sense of shape, color, and conventional poses. Rather the mola maker captures the basic shape of the object she intends to represent, including idiosyncratic features and elements which capture her fancy. Her own creative intuitions mold the details and give the mola its distinctly Cuna touch. It is because of its free forms, its independence of crucial cultural context and understanding, that the mola appeals to non-Cuna as well as to Cuna. Non-Cuna appreciate this non-technological product for the same sorts of esthetic reasons that the Cuna do—bold color contrasts, detailed stitching, harmony of form and shape, individuality.

THE MOLA IN CUNA CULTURE AND SOCIETY

One cannot but be struck by the harmony of Cuna molas, a harmony which is manifested in several ways—the parallel display of elements (both major figures and fillers), the absence of dangerous animals, the absence of violent movement, the lack of tension. The fillers play an important role in the harmonious use of space so characteristic of molas, filling in any empty spaces so that nothing is left blank. This dense use of space seems to be a reflection of a more general Cuna esthetic of space. Space which is used should be used to the fullest; elements within it should be closely and densely spaced. Thus Cuna villages, whether on islands or on the jungle mainland, consist of houses placed very closely together, often touching each other, with narrow streets in between. Similarly within single households many individuals live (sleep and eat) closely together; rarely do individuals build themselves a new home to live in independently as a single, nuclear family. And, in the Cuna congress, an entire village congregates, with individuals seated closely one against the other. The dislike of empty, blank spaces is also found in Cuna literature, in which themes and ideas are repeated endlessly with slight variation, yielding extremely long speeches and chants; silence is not tolerated, but is rather avoided through the use of various verbal fillers.

It has been suggested that the art of a society is a reflection of the realities and aspirations of social organization. If so, the mola reflects several aspects of Cuna life. The lushness of color and the density of decorative organization seem a reflection of the lushness of the jungle, a basic part of Cuna ecology. The density and cohesion of organization of Cuna molas is a reflection of a more general Cuna esthetic of space, also present in house and village arrangement. And the beauty and harmony of the mola reflects a constantly stated Cuna ideal—a society in which order, cohesion, and harmony is a way of life. Along with the focus on community and harmony, Cuna social organization
stresses individuality. Thus, while every village has several chiefs, several medicine men, and several specialists in curing chants, each individual is unique in that he has a unique set of chants that he knows or a unique set of diseases that he is able to cure. Similarly, while all women make and wear molas, the molas are not uniforms; each mola is unique and each woman's trousseau is distinctly her own.

The mola can be placed more generally in an overall esthetics of Cuna culture, more particularly of modes of communication and their relationship. The verbal mode is the realm of deep meaning, of the expression of the basic themes and problems of Cuna life—religion, history, magic, and social control. Verbal, oral literature is performed either for an audience or in special language for the spirits of good and evil. In performance for an audience, there is a focus on the creativity of the performer, the ability to develop traditional as well as novel themes and images to fit current situations. It is important that the audience understand and there is therefore much interpretation and explanation; in fact there is a special Cuna role of interpreter and translator of chiefs' speeches and chants for the audience. Visual art (which the molas represent par excellence) is, on the other hand, superficial and decorative. As distinct from verbal art and communication, the molas involve no deep, hidden meaning; there is no need for interpretation or explanation; there is no rhetorical or magical effect. Both the contrast and the interplay between these two communicative streams, these two aspects of the Cuna esthetic, the deep and the superficial, the verbal and the visual, are strikingly apparent in the Cuna congress, where chiefs chant and their interpreters explain the chants, while the women listen, wearing their best molas, and making new ones.

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes a method for studying 'primitive' art, by focusing on the Cuna Indian mola, an art form or object that is still created and still in use in Cuna society. It shows that a study of the art object independent of its use, of its place in a particular culture and society would yield limited results and would lead to an incomplete understanding and appreciation of the object. Rather, it is important to view the object in the context of the society and the culture in which it is relevant: clothing system, ritual system, political system, economic system, ethnic system, artistic system. This approach leads to an ethnographic semiotics, quite analogous to the ethnography of speaking and the ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hymes, eds. 1972; Bauman and Sherzer, eds. 1974). The kinds of questions asked by such an ethnographic semiotics are: Who produces the art object? On what occasions and in what places is the art object produced? For what
purposes is the art object produced? What is the internal artistic structure of the object? How does the object as means or mode of communication relate to the other modes of communication, verbal and non-verbal, which exist in the society? The meaning of the art object, its significance in the society, emerges through the interrelated answers to such questions. Cross-cultural comparison and insights also become possible and enlightening. Thus a comparison of Cuna molas and Southwestern United States pottery (Arizona Highways 1974) is interesting. Unlike mola-making, which is relatively new for the Cuna, pottery-making is an ancient tradition for the Indians of the American Southwest. But while the molas are an essential integral part of Cuna day to day life, used by women as the basic item of clothing, Southwestern pottery today is intended primarily for the non-Indian. While ordinary pottery is still used for daily purposes as containers and utensils, much pottery is never used; it is made for the sole purpose of sale to outsiders, from tourists to collectors and connoisseurs. Like the mola, Southwestern pottery is made by women. But not all women make pottery. Rather there is a specialized group of pottery makers who are well-known (especially some of them) for their ability. These women have a reputation as artists. Pottery-making for them is not a leisure-time activity; rather they specifically dedicate time to this endeavor, which is a primary economic activity. And there are also male potters, sometimes relatives who assist the women, but sometimes on their own. Again like the Cuna mola, recent interest and purchase by non-Indians has led to a development of excellent quality in pottery, going far beyond the styles, motifs, and techniques of traditional work. It is these pots of the finest quality that are made solely for sale or for entry in competitions or display in museums. On the other hand, while some molas are made just for sale, most of the best ones can be seen worn by women, as they sit in the evenings listening to the chanting of the chiefs.22

By means of the approach we have taken here, which we have called ethnographic semiotics, an art object, in this case the Cuna mola, is viewed in all of its dynamic richness. It is a single signifiant which has a multiplicity of signifiés, as well as many connotations that emerge only by placing it in the many contexts in which it functions and patterns in Cuna society as well as in its role in Cuna, non-Cuna interactions and relationships. Our approach and method shows the remarkable functional capacity of the mola as well as its multifacetedness, while at the same time focusing, by means of and through the mola, on such important aspects of Cuna social life as the congress system, the relationship and conception of men and women, and the division of labor and leisure. The study of 'primitive' art then can no longer be conceived of as an esoteric venture, in which, through the study of art objects such as the mola, western man imposes his own ideas and values; but rather an experience through which western man discovers and learns to appreciate other thought processes, other values, and other ways of life.23
FOOTNOTES

1. When non-Cuna women visit Cuna villages for more than a short while, they are told, by both men and women, that if they want to be 'real' Cuna, they must wear nose rings, ear pendants, wini, and of course, molas. Visitors sometimes take the Cuna up on the latter, which is most enthusiastically appreciated and commented on.

2. The earliest observers of the Cuna report that men painted their bodies, wore some cloth, and gold jewelry. Thus, until relatively recently, it was the men as well as the women, who were 'on display'. This situation has now markedly changed.

3. There are interesting non-Cuna uses of the mola as symbol of Cunairement, of Indianness, of the primitive, of Panama. Travel brochures, aimed at attracting tourists to South America generally and especially to Panama, often picture Cuna women, wearing their most attractive, colorful molas. A Braniff airlines travel poster for Panama pictures a group of Cuna suar mimmi (wooden stick dolls), the spirits which fight disease and evil (see the papers in this volume by Chapin and Howe) dressed as Cuna women in colorful molas, muswe, sapure, wini, and gold nose rings and ear pendants. The Cuna themselves never paint their suar mimmi in this way, which Braniff uses in order to capture Cuna culture and Panama in a single picture. Braniff also decorates its airport waiting lounges and airplanes with molas. The mola hung in the first class compartment is usually more elaborate and better made than that hung in that of the tourist class. Braniff thus uses a distinction in mola quality to mark non-Cuna socio-economic differences which the Cuna use to distinguish work from leisure and ceremony.

4. In the summer of 1974, on the island of Sasardi-Mulatupo, we observed a woman wearing a mola which she had put together from two panels which were manufactured and which she had bought. The panels were printed molas. The result was a rather grotesque and sad combination of Cunairement and non-Cunairement which, hopefully, will not achieve popularity.

5. James Howe (1975) shows that until relatively recently Cuna women participated much more than they do today in agriculture and also wove hammocks, an extremely time consuming task. Recent changes in the male/female division of labor have thus resulted in more leisure-time for women, thus providing more time for making molas.

6. There is some lack of agreement as to the exact date of the introduction of cloth. Early visitors to the Cuna report some use of cloth, in addition to body painting. Lady Richmond Brown, in an intriguing book, Unknown Tribes Uncharted Seas (London, 1924), makes the dubious claim that molas she acquired in the Darien used material dating from the period of the Spanish Conquistadores. She also argues that the designs
on the molas she acquired are ancient Central American calendric signs. In any case, the important influx of cloth to the Cuna began in the late nineteenth century, and current molas do not represent ancient symbolic systems.

7 There are two types of medicine useful for mola-making, both imitative. One improves artistic design ability and is made from leaves which have veins which look like geometric designs. The other, made from hard-working leaf-cutting ants, make one's hands work harder, produce better. We owe this information to Mac Chapin. It is interesting that the Cuna do not use medicine to improve ability at such domestic tasks as washing clothes, cleaning the house, or cooking. The use of medicine thus places mola-making with such more artistic and learned activities as acquiring tribal lore and learning languages, activities involving skills and abilities that one can and wants to improve on.

8 While Cuna men can acquire prestige in a variety of ways, from skill in such subsistence activities as hunting and canoe-making to positions of ceremonial and political leadership, women have only the mola as a means of individual creative expression and source of recognition.

9 The molas made by Cuna women in the villages of the Darien jungle, which are not reached by the commercial circuit, may have lovely designs; but they never attain the quality of the best San Blas molas, with regard to precision and excellence of stitching.

10 It was Cuna women who did the body-painting. Their role as decorators of the body continues now in their mola making.

11 A more complete discussion of Cuna verbal art will be found in Joel Sherzer, 1974.

12 As is the case with some forms of Oceanic art. See Alberto Cesare Ambesi, 1966.

13 So much so that William K. Sacco's 'Mola, Mola' (1973) contains a photograph of a mola which represents probably the most tabu of all Cuna topics--birth. This mola shows a woman in the standing position in which Cuna women give birth and correctly shows the fetus in position to emerger from the mother. This topic would never be discussed in ordinary Cuna conversation, especially not in front of children. In medicinal and curing chants, birth is cryptically and symbolically described. And yet it is all right for this topic to be represented visually, in a mola, which can be seen by anyone of any sex and any age. This is precisely because although it is seen, it is not decoded; it is appreciated for its decorative form but not read for referential content.

14 As contrasted with the pre-Columbian Cocle pottery, found in a
region not far from the Cuna. In Coclé pottery, dangerous looking animals were used to symbolize social differences and especially emphasize warfare (see Linares, this volume).

15 Details are indicative of Cuna sophistication and sense of humor. Thus recent boxing molas had the letters 'Laguna' the name of the former lightweight champion of the world, a Panamanian, who, the Cuna claim, got his strength by taking Cuna medicine. A baseball mola, no doubt dating back sometime because it seems to honor the world champion New York Yankees, pictures a pitcher and a batter and has letters spelling Bill (the Cuna way of pronouncing Phil) Rizzuto and Marilyn Joe. Cuna men learn about baseball and many other matters by working in the Canal Zone.

16 The primary colors used in body painting, as described by Lionel Wafer (1699) were bright red, yellow, and blue. These colors are common in the body painting still employed in tropical forest South America.

17 The speculation of Victor Turner (1967:59-92) concerning the universality of black-red symbolism is perhaps relevant here.

18 In Cuna these streets are called nekimpa, literally 'between the houses', thus focusing on the filled, rather than the unfilled.

19 Of utmost relevance to this paper is the cogent argument by Lévi-Strauss (1955), that Caduveo body painting reflects the interaction between the Caduveo moiety and caste systems.

20 It is interesting to contrast this Cuna relationship between social structure and esthetics with that of the Fang of northwestern equatorial Africa, as described by James W. Fernandez (1971). Just as the focus of Cuna social life is on harmony, a harmony which is reflected in the esthetics of molas, the Fang emphasize opposition, which is expressed in their social structure, the spatial organization of villages, and in wood carvings.

21 Each ability is called by the Cuna a kurkin, literally 'hat' but best conceived of as role. Thus Cuna individuals typically have not a single role which they share with others, but a unique and individual set of roles, partially overlapping with those of others. The interplay of group solidarity and individuality is also reflected in Cuna eating practices, in which several individuals eat together out of a single bowl, but each one seasons the food to his own taste with lemon, salt, and very hot pepper.

22 Similar comparisons could be made with Zapotec rugs, Mexican bark painting, and Guatemalan huipiles. The latter are like the Cuna mola in that they form an integral part of the native system of clothing. We stress that these are not all identical cases. To the contrary. The
approach of ethnographic semiotics provides a method for pointing
to similarities and differences, of getting at the particular pattern
which makes each of these cases unique, while at the same time relating
them to others.

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A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE
CUNA ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

By emphasizing the social context of art systems the anthropology of art sets itself apart from both art history and aesthetics. In spite of this social focus, however, no major anthropological study of art has investigated the relations among art forms within the context of the totality of a culture's art styles. This paper has two goals. The first is to analyse the arts of the San Blas Cuna of Panama as a coherent, structured whole, by reference to aspects of the arts' production and performance. The second is to offer a brief outline of how changes in that structure are not only reflections of other structural changes in Cuna society, but act as reflections upon, or as active agents of, changes in other areas of social life. This analysis will show how art as an aspect of ideology is more than passively sensitive to the economic base; how instead it interrelates dynamically with that base. Specifically, the genesis of a novel Cuna art form, the mola, will be considered with reference to the evolution of Cuna political economy.

The Cuna possess a rich and varied aesthetic tradition. The dominant plastic art form found in San Blas is the mola, a reverse applique blouse worn by women. In addition, several verbal genres, differing from colloquial Cuna, are of considerable aesthetic interest both to the Cuna and to anthropologists (see Howe 1974, Sherzer 1975, Sherzer and Sherzer 1972, Kramer 1970). Sherzer has offered a three-part classification of these forms: (1) pap ikar, historical, religious, and political material chanted by Cuna chiefs, (2) the chants sung by ritualists called kantules during female puberty rites, and (3) chants used in curing ceremonies (Sherzer 1975:263). Although this classification does not exhaust the Cuna verbal arts, almost all other traditions found in San Blas are similar in structure to one or the other of these three forms. These verbal art forms, occurring in ritual contexts, comprise, along with the mola, the major Cuna arts. Each will be described below, and then contrasted with the others in an effort to delimit the structure of Cuna art.

The first genre mentioned above, pap ikar or 'Father's Way' incorporates themes from Cuna history, cosmology, and contemporary events. It is performed in a large structure located in a central spot in each village, usually called a congress house in the ethnographic literature. Here, the community at large gathers several evenings a week, and occasionally during the day as well, to listen as one of the village chiefs chanting of 'Father's Way'. At the conclusion of the chanting, another official, called an arkar (or speaker), interprets the chant in colloquial Cuna. In the village where I did field work most adults questioned claimed to understand the sung text, and several, in fact, could translate recordings of a chant performed by a chief from another village into spoken Cuna. The ethnographic literature on the other hand, often claims that the texts are incomprehensible to the
average Cuna (see Sherzer and Sherzer 1972). These claims are at least partially misleading, however, because the audience undeniably shares the meaning of pap ikar, as is indicated by the emphasis on repetition and interpretation by the arkar, and the continual reminders delivered in piercing screams by Cuna village "policemen" during the chief's recitation that the audience should pay attention and not sleep. Other Cuna chants more plausibly said to be incomprehensible will be described below. In none of these is the audience expected to pay special attention to the performance. That this is not true of pap ikar suggests that there the audience is able to follow the text. For these reasons I believe that pap ikar can be characterized as a horizontal communication, i.e., between human performer and human audience.

Pap ikar is learned and performed by men who have led successful political and moral careers and have been chosen as one of the several hierarchically ranked chiefs and speakers found in each Cuna village. The chants themselves are a mechanism of social control. Often, they deal metaphorically with an issue of some immediate consequence in terms of Cuna culture history and the teachings of Cuna culture heroes. The chant reinforces and teaches the values and moral code of the Cuna in a public forum.

Although in form pap ikar resembles the other Cuna verbal arts, unlike most of them the content or text of chiefly chanting is not fixed. A chief's prestige is derived in part from his ability to innovatively and aesthetically integrate various themes into the fixed form. Currently, a man learns to chant pap ikar after he has been installed as a low-ranking chief. He develops his repertoire by attending inter-village congresses and by studying the chiefs of his own and other islands. In the past apprentices may have offered labor in exchange for the formal instruction. However, then as now, no one has the right to charge another a fee for teaching pap ikar (Howe 1974:163).

FEMALE PUBERTY CEREMONIES

In addition to the congress houses in which pap ikar is performed, most Cuna villages have a special, large building set aside for the female puberty ceremonies which, like performances of pap ikar, are attended by the community at large (see Sherzer and Sherzer, this volume, p. 29). At these ceremonies a ritual official, called a kantule or 'Flute-man' chants a text specific to the ritual. The kantule and his apprentices alternate singing with playing a gourd rattle and flute while the other participants in the ceremony become drunk on a native beverage consumed only at these rites. The rite itself is a public proclamation of a girl's maturation. During it her hair is bobbed like that of a mature Cuna woman and she is instructed in her duties as an adult. Part of this instruction is given to the initiate at the point during the ceremony when her soul is said to travel to the upper world. The kantule's flute is said to be the agent of this soul transmission and
is prompted by the chanting of the kantule. Thus the kantule addresses his chant to the flute rather than the assembled guests (James Howe, personal communication). The human audience, in fact, pays little attention to the kantule's text, since they are generally quite drunk and the text itself is incomprehensible to them (Sherzer and Sherzer 1972:195). Unlike pap ikar the kantule's text is fixed in both form and content, and the text is not expected to move the community to action. It functions rather, to manipulate spiritual and cosmological relations (ibid.).

Training for kantules is long and formal. A prospective student apprentices himself for many years and pays the kantule a substantial fee for his services as a teacher. During the apprenticeship the student acts as the kantule's assistant and is subordinate to him in the ritual context. There is, as well, a hierarchical order among the students of one teacher determined by their level of study (Howe 1974: 231, 235).

CURATIVE CHANTING

The third and final type of Cuna speech event is the curative chanting performed by a ritual specialist to relieve an illness due to a loss of soul caused, for example, by contact with a contaminated place or by a frightful experience. A person's soul is thought to be taken away by malevolent spirits. Recovery requires the intervention of benevolent spirits (those called "shamans" by Chapin and "familiars" by Howe in other papers in this volume) who retrieve the soul and return it to the patient. The curer's chant has a fixed text which is incomprehensible to the patient. The curer addresses the chant to a ritual artifact such as a wooden image or stone which represents the benevolent spirits, prompting them to locate and return the lost soul (Nordenskiöld 1938:340-50).

The curing ceremony is not a public event, as the other performances are, but takes place in the patient's home. In any given community, a number of individuals are sufficiently knowledgeable to perform the required chants, and no formal hierarchy exists among those who know the texts. Any "knower" of the chants can teach another the texts, and for this a large sum is paid. Howe suggests that this type of ritual skill can be contrasted to pap ikar, in that curative chanting, like the kantule's text, is in some ways the "property" of the knower (Howe 1974:163).
MOLAS

Molas are the rectangular panels of reverse applique worn by the women on the front and back of their blouses. (On the semantics of mola, see the essay by Sherzer and Sherzer in this volume.) They are the central element in a complex and stylized women's wardrobe that includes gold nose rings, breast plates, and earrings, as well as strung beads and necklaces. Virtually the entire costume is dependent on trade goods. Many of the items are purchased ready to wear, but some, notably the mola, are indigenously made from imported materials. There is no historical evidence to suggest that the Cuna themselves ever produced the materials necessary to make the molas.

Molas are sewn by the women, and their production is one of the few labor intensive activities in San Blas today. A woman learns to sew molas through informal imitation of her mother and other senior women in the household. The production, sale and distribution of cash realized by the trading of molas is entirely under the aegis of the women, often supervised by the household's most senior female. It should be noted that molas are only traded for export, that is, a woman produces her own molas herself, and there is no intra-Cuna trade or sale of molas. Molas are a pre-eminent domestic product, and mola production is the concrete expression of female solidarity in the matriloclal, extended family household.

Molas share the basic formal characteristics of the Cuna verbal arts: repetition, parallelism, and apparent symmetry (Sherzer and Sherzer 1972, Sherzer 1975, Kramer 1970). In terms of content or subject matter, there is virtually no restraint. Any design a Cuna artist might encounter is likely to appear in a mola. Although some molas contain scenes from Cuna cosmology, representations of spirits, culture heroes, and mythical scenes are seldom found in molas. The mola is a secular, decorative art form with no magical significance (Nordenskiöld 1938:38-9). Molas have been considered a communication medium, the reification of the pervasive Cuna norm of egalitarianism and equality, what the Sherzers have called Cunaité (Sherzer and Sherzer 1975, and this volume, p. 27). I have developed this theme in another paper (Hirschfeld 1975).

DISCUSSION

From this description and analysis of the four major Cuna art forms it becomes clear that when any two are compared, they resemble each other along some dimensions and contrast on others. Two distinct structural principles operate here. First, the four forms present two sets of polar inversions. The singing of pap ikar is a publically focused event whose performers stand in a hierarchical relation to one another.
It is a horizontal communication in that the performance is addressed to a human audience. The innovative text itself is comprehensible to the audience (or at least made comprehensible by mediation of the arkar). One who knows the text is obligated to teach it to the appropriate student without payment. Opposed to this is the curative chanting, a domestically focused event taught by practitioners who are not formally ranked. It has a fixed text and is incomprehensible to the human audience. It is a vertical communication that attempts to enter and alter relations in the spirit world.

A second complete inversion characterizes the relationship between the kantule's text and the mola. The former is a fixed and incomprehensible performance which represents a vertical communication between the chanter and the spirit world. A kantule is paid to teach another the text. Kantules themselves are hierarchically ranked, and they perform at a public event. The mola, on the other hand, is a horizontal communication whose imagery is comprehensible to the community at large. Its content may be innovative, and its production is domestically focused. Training is informal and without payment, and a hierarchy of performers is unknown.

A third opposition unites pap ikar and the mola in contrast to the chants of the kantules and curers. The first two are temporally continuous in their performance, and thematically expansive. They occur with a regularity that is not dependent on special context. They can and do incorporate non-Cuna images and themes. On the other hand, the performance of the kantule's chant is dependent on periodic contextual relations, i.e., the physical maturation of the female around which the ceremony is organized. Similarly, the curative chant is performed in response to an illness. Both are conservative, or contractive, in their adherence to fixed texts.

In addition to defining a structure of polar inversion, the four art forms constitute a closed structure in which each art form is a coordinate in a series of less severe transformations. These transformations follow a linear circuit such that a mola bears a "family relationship" to pap ikar, since both may have innovative content, are horizontal communications, and have comprehensible images. They contrast in that the former is domestic and non-hierarchical, like the curative chanting, while the latter is like the kantule's text in its public focus and ranked performers. By following the circuit defined by the four art forms it is apparent that another "circular" structure unites them.

Thus the two structures congeal to form a stable, but dialectically determined, whole. The first structural principle of polar inversion sets each form in opposition to another, while the second structure defines the set as a whole. Each element in the set is more than the sum of its intrinsic features, but contrasts structurally with the other art forms.
Figure 1. Structural dimensions of the four major Cuna art forms.
Two objections to this interpretation might be raised. The first is that in spite of the "elegance" of this type of structural analysis, one is apt to say "so what?" What it does demonstrate, however, is that a specific culture's art forms are mutually dependent, in that one can only understand them by comparing and contrasting each to the others. In addition, it is an example of a cultural phenomenon which is structured in terms of the principles which Lévi-Strauss has specified; opposition, inversion and transformation.

The second objection is perhaps more interesting. Although the mola "fits" well into its structural space, it is, nonetheless, somewhat anomalous. It has a relatively short history, it is dependent on trade goods, and it is a plastic art; in all of these respects it is dissimilar to the other arts considered. More importantly, there is another Cuna art, the lullaby, which shares the same intrinsic features of the mola, but is like the other arts in its long history, indigenous self-sufficiency and its verbal form. Why then have I, and the Cuna, placed so much stress on the mola? Why is the lullaby being performed less and less often, while mola-making is a growing and vital art form?

Actually the two questions are related. An answer to the second is a response to the first as well. At the outset of this paper I suggested that there may exist a dynamic relationship between the Cuna arts as an aspect of ideology and the evolution of Cuna political economy. I would now like to make an extended digression to establish that point. I am making two claims. The first is that the structural principles which define and delimit the aesthetic realm provide a framework to which any new aesthetic phenomenon has to conform. Secondly, I claim that events in this realm can affect the organization of the economic base, and that base can affect the structure of the aesthetic realm in its turn. Specifically, I claim that the genesis of the mola as a novel and anomalous art form functioned historically to provide continuity in two structured spheres of Cuna society: (1) its organization of production maintained a basic economic principle necessary for the continuance of Cuna socioeconomic organization, and (2) it coherently "filled" an appropriate spot in the structural space of Cuna aesthetics.

The mola appeared in the mid-nineteenth century, a time of major change in Cuna society as a whole. At that time the Cuna moved from the mainland to the islands, private ownership of land replaced communal land tenure (Howe 1976), women ceased participation in horticulture (Brown 1970), the cash-cropping of coconuts became a major focus of Cuna economy (Stout 1947), and a demographic explosion which is still continuing began in San Blas (Howe 1972). At the same time other changes occurred in the women's costume; it became the primary vehicle to display wealth with an emphasis on imported gold jewelry, molas and trade beads (Stout 1941:109, 119; 1947).
Many of the changes outlined above are consistent with changes in the political economies of many other tribal peoples as they enter national and international life; especially cash-cropping, private ownership of land and rapid demographic growth. The Cuna, however, contrast with many other tribal groups in two important aspects: (1) the almost complete absence of female participation in agriculture, and (2) a continuing near-equality in wealth distribution and virtual lack of incipient classes, in spite of private ownership of the primary means of production, land.

The Cuna have tried to preserve this equality of wealth, and this equality has remained a stable and unchanged aspect of the Cuna mode of production, both before and after the changes mentioned above. I wish to suggest that this egalitarian distribution of wealth is in large part due not to equal jural access to the means of production per se, but rather to the set of inheritance, marriage, and residence rules that influence the distribution of wealth, preventing significant accumulation by any one group of people. The Cuna practice matrilocal residence, bilateral and partible inheritance, and prohibit first cousin marriage. Thus any wealth accumulated in one household in a generation will be spread among several households, a few generations later. (see figure 2). Matrilocal alone is important to this distributive mechanism because in spite of a stated rule of equal partibility, in reality, males inherit larger shares according to Holloman (1969:174), thus dispersing even more wealth to other households over time.

Figure 2. Inheritance of wealth, and matrilocality. Shaded figures inherit wealth from Ego. Matrilocal households are circled.
This constellation of rules forms the basis of Cuna socioeconomic organization which has not changed radically as Cuna political economy has evolved. What has changed is the means of Cuna survival. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century the Cuna remained an independent socio-cultural entity by militarily repelling European and Euro-American intrusions. By the mid-nineteenth century the Central American governments no longer posed an immediate threat, and the Cuna were able to move to a healthier island eco-niche, a settlement zone which until then had been indefensible militarily. From that time on, the Cuna have depended on an economic rather than military defense. Cash-cropping of coconuts served, then as now, to provide the power base necessary to preserve a conservative cultural pattern. That is, there is a real dialectic between the need for an economic and/or military power base dependent on complex relations with the non-Cuna world, and cultural continuity and contractiveness.

Molas are part of this dialectic between expansion and internal conservation. On one level, today they are a significant source of economic surplus as a cottage industry. Since we cannot credit the Cuna with the extraordinary foresight of inventing an indigenously used and conceived commodity in the mid-nineteenth century to function as an object of commercial value a hundred years later, we must search for those factors which prompted its genesis elsewhere.

First, the mola can be seen as striking a symbolic balance that mediated the initial transformation of Cuna economy into one heavily involved in cash-cropping. A series of oppositions can be drawn between the men as agricultural agents transforming an indigenous commodity, coconuts, into an external cash commodity, copra; and the women, as non-agricultural workers, transforming an external commodity, cloth, into an internal one, clothing. Second, the women have become even more than before the physical nexus of the household, involved in a labor intensive activity which is domestically focused and whose training and direction emphasize the matri-set of the household. In addition, women serve as mediators of the basic unit of Cuna economic life, since that unit, a man and his son-in-law, requires a female link. This link maintains the basic continuity of a household, since the matrilocal residence rules require that men marry and live out. The mola, as mentioned above, is the objectification of the behavioral link between women in terms of the organization of its production, the location of its production, and the site of training for the women who produce it.

Third, the mola stands as the nexus of the woman's wardrobe, and this wardrobe assumes an important role as the primary receptacle of domestic wealth. This repository of wealth does not, however, provide capital that can be used to gain more wealth. The household's matri-set establishes a focus for wealth, while access to wealth is continually spread outside the household through partible inheritance, marriage, and residence rules.
From this analysis it can be seen that the mola has functioned historically to mediate two sets of structures, each set consisting of two parts; one stable and the other changing. In the pre-cash-cropping period, the land tenure system supported the distributive mechanism by preventing the unequal access to the major means of production, i.e., land which was communally held. With a shift to an expansive economy and concomitant private land tenure, this support was undermined. The Cuna responded by laying larger stress on the distributive mechanism itself to insure that unequal wealth accumulation did not occur. The mola served to mediate both behaviorally and symbolically some of the conditions necessary to sustain that goal. The mola, by stressing the domestic matri-set and acting as a repository of wealth accumulation which could not readily be transformed into productive means, protected the egalitarian quality of Cuna society by mediating between the distribution mechanism, and the new, expansive focus of Cuna economy.

While some aspects of the mola's form were determined by economic needs, the aesthetic structure provided other basic organizational and aesthetic features to which the mola had to conform. These features, already defined by the stable structure whose elements were pap, ikar, kantule's text, curative chant, and lullaby, prescribed the female and domestic structural space to which the mola conformed. The mola is anomalous when considered only from a synchronic perspective. When viewed as an historically constituted constellation of features its place as mediator is clear.

In his discussion of Northwest Coast masks, Lévi-Strauss has stated that "it would be illusory to imagine, as so many anthropologists and art historians still do today, that a mask, or more generally a sculpture or painting, could be interpreted in terms of itself, by that which it represents or by the aesthetic or ritual use to which it is destined" (1975:116, my translation). This conclusion is no less true for the Cuna arts. The ritual, symbolic, or economic context of an art alone is not sufficient to explain its presence or its form. The Cuna arts are comprehensible only when considered as parts of structural wholes which interact and shift over time.

FOOTNOTES

1 The fieldwork on which this paper is based was carried out in 1974 with the aid of a grant from the Institute for Latin American Studies, Columbia University through the Department of Anthropology. A number of colleagues have offered invaluable assistance, especially Alexander Alland, James Howe, Rena Lederman, Mike Merril and Ann Stoler.

2 The mola is considered from several perspectives within the context of Cuna culture in the essay by Dina and Joel Sherzer in this volume.
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Sherzer, Dina and Joel Sherzer

Sherzer, Joel
Stout, David
MUU IKALA:
CUNA BIRTH CEREMONY

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INTRODUCTION

Among the San Blas Cuna Indians of Panama, birth takes place in a house specially constructed for that purpose in a secluded corner of a village, away from the eyes of the villagers. The woman giving birth is assisted by midwives, and occasionally by a specialist who knows the chant called Muu Ikala or "The Way of Muu", which is employed if there are complications and the baby will not come out. Older women from the mother's family usually attend as well, but they take no active part in the proceedings.

In this paper I will present a brief analysis of the Muu Ikala chant and the social context in which it is performed. The data used consist of a version of Muu Ikala that I collected in San Blas in 1971, plus information gathered during approximately two years of fieldwork among the Cuna conducted intermittently since 1969. At the same time, I will use this material to comment on a widely-read and influential article by Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (Lévi-Strauss 1963), which is itself an analysis of a published version of Muu Ikala (Holmer & Wassén 1947), and I will attempt to show how faulty and incomplete ethnographic data sent him off on the wrong track.

MUU IKALA

According to Cuna belief, Muu—which means "grandmother" or simply "old woman" in ordinary usage—is a deity living on the fourth level of the underworld, where she is responsible for the development of the foetuses of all animals and humans born on earth. Helping her in this vast enterprise are her numerous daughters and granddaughters, each of whom specializes in the care and education of a particular animal or type of human being. With respect to human beings, for example, there are daughters and granddaughters in charge of the development of shamans, albinos, chiefs, weaklings, hard-workers, trouble-makers, and so forth. Under normal circumstances the foetuses are released from Muu's house at the end of the gestation period, to be born to mortal mothers on earth.

From time to time, however, difficulties in the birth process occur, and the baby cannot make its way from the womb. The Cuna attribute these difficulties to a variety of causes. It is said that Muu's daughters and granddaughters, in the role of prenatal mother, occasionally become so attached to their "children" that they refuse to give them up at the appointed time. While the Cuna do not condone such actions, they recognize the frustration of repeatedly losing their children that Muu's helpers undergo, and they regard it as inevitable and natural. It is more frequently the case, however, that
birth is thwarted when the pregnant woman or a member of her imme-
diate family violates some taboo, thereby endangering the foetus.
For example, if the woman's husband were inadvertently to touch an
octopus—a particularly dangerous animal—the octopus spirit coun-
terparts, who live in Muu's house along with every other kind of
animal, could be expected to attack the foetus.

When complications of this sort arise, a shaman, called a
nele, is summoned to find out what has gone wrong. Once the diag-
nosis has been reached, the Muu Ikala chanter is brought into action. While the midwives busy themselves with administering medicines and
generally attending to the patient, the chanter, who remains relative-
ly distant from the entire process, positions himself on a wooden
stool at the head of the hammock of the pregnant woman and begins
to chant.

The chant itself is something like a "script," in that the
events described are actually taking place—on the spiritual level,
and thus invisibly—as the words come out of the chanter's mouth.
It begins with a detailed account of how the chanter was first
approached by the pregnant woman's family, and how he agreed to take
the case. He then proceeds to call the "spirits" or "souls" of
shaman (purpa)spirits from the direction of the rising sun, and
assembles them in the room. His army of shamans-spirits displays
an impressive array of talents, all of which will be vital during
the forthcoming expedition to Muu's domain: there are armadillo
shamans to dig tunnels, bee shamans to entangle themselves in Muu's
hair, scissor shamans to cut through ropes and cloths, sticky-sap
shamans to gum up Muu's door, and so on. The leader of the group
is Shaman-spirit Balsawood, who is noted for his intelligence.
With the shamans come the spirits of pretty young girls who will
serve to overcome the evil spirits with their feminine charms.
(Howe, in another paper in this volume, calls the shaman-spirits
"familiars").

After preparing for the journey and being counselled how to
act, the shamans and their women pass through the tunnels dug by the
armadillo shamans and begin to traverse the levels of the spirit
realm. They first paddle up Muu's river, then take to land and
strike out along Muu's path, all the time passing through a land-
scape replete with danger in the form of Muu's creatures and hench-
man spirits. The dominant theme is that of blood, which is gushing
from the ground, spreading out like mist, and dripping from the backs
of animals that are glistening in the sun. From time to time the
shamans pause to dance about and play their flutes, harmonicas, and
jew's harps, to give themselves strength,
Finally they reach the door of Muu's house, an enormous structure surrounded by fields of gold and silver flowers that are waving back and forth in the breeze, opening and closing. The house is guarded by four men in golden suits that are constantly changing color. The shamans deceive the doormen and enter. The house is full: on the beams are birds, monkeys, and iguanas; jaguars, tapirs, wild pigs, and other fierce animals are grinding their teeth, raising their hackles, and rooting around on the floor. The shamans move forward in a group and confront Muu, who is seated in a hammock in the center of the room.

A long interchange between the shamans and Muu begins. Eventually, Muu is tricked into tasting some of the drink brought by the women, becomes intoxicated, and the shamans go into action. They rapidly search the house, find the foetus—or more precisely, the spirit of the foetus, because we are dealing here with the spirit level of reality—and make a retreat. As they journey back to the surface of the earth they throw up barriers to pursuit. Their safe arrival at the house where the pregnant woman lies means that the birth should now proceed without a hitch.

This is a very brief summary of a chant that may last five or six hours—or longer, depending on the tenacity of Muu and her cohorts. Unfortunately, the limited space available here does not allow us to go into the incredibly intricate use of metaphor and poetic allusion which is such an important part of Cuna verbal expression. But let us focus on the content of the chant for a moment, paying particular attention to the entrance of the shamans into the earth and their journey through the realm of the spirits to Muu's house.

DISCUSSION

The essay by Lévi-Strauss mentioned above was based on a version of Muu Ikala transcribed and translated by a Cuna and sent by mail to the Swedish ethnographers Henry Wassén and Nils Holmer in the late 1940s. It should be noted that their informant was not himself a curing chanter but rather took the text from the dictation of a specialist. The text is somewhat confused in places, and the translation sometimes slightly garbled. Perhaps more important, their source did not supply Holmer and Wassén with more than a skeletal outline of the symbolism and social context of the chant.

According to Wassén and Holmer, the geographical setting of the journey is to be taken as purely metaphorical: the action does not take place inside the earth, but inside the woman. More specifically, they understand that the shamans, at the outset of their quest, penetrate the woman's body and travel along the vagina to Muu's house, which exists only as a metaphor for the womb. Lévi-Strauss accepted and expanded on this reading of the text, putting special stress on passages that describe the shamans "moving upward like penises" (1963:193-96). The key word
on which this interpretation depends, however (nusupane), is a mistranslation: it means hummingbird rather than penis. Moreover, the complete reduction of the cosmological landscape to a mere representation of female anatomy is an oversimplification.

But this is not to say that the interpretation of Wassén, Holmer, and Lévi-Strauss is to be rejected out of hand, as we shall see in a moment. The Muu Ikala chanters maintain that in one aspect of reality, the shamans and the women do indeed follow the tunnels burrowed through the earth's crust by the armadillo shamans, break into the first level of the underworld, and traverse three more levels to the door of Muu's house. The places described along the way actually exist as part of the Cuna cosmos, and are laid out in some detail in a number of myths and chants that have nothing to do with the birth ritual. It is a fact that Muu lives with her daughters and granddaughters in a huge house packed with not-yet-born animals and humans on the bank of a river named Pokorkanti, "The River of the Mists", within the region of the Treés. This is where the spirit of the foetus of the pregnant woman is being held, and this is where the shamans must go to retrieve it.

At the same time, however, the shamans are also making their way into the woman's reproductive areas: up the vagina, which is Muu's river and then Muu's road, and into the womb, which is Muu's house. Once they reach Muu's house, surprisingly perhaps, the correspondences between the woman's body and the features of the underworld change abruptly, and the house becomes the body of the woman: the walls are her ribs, the door her vulva, the door frame her thighs, and the door chain her pubic hairs. Inside, the hammock in which Muu sits is the womb; the hammock ropes are the umbilical cord, the hammock strings the foetal caul, the blanket the placenta, and Muu's wooden stool is the bone network of her buttocks.

What is happening, in effect, is that the shamans and their women make their journey into both the underworld and the body of the pregnant woman at the same time. To understand how this is accomplished, it must be realized that the woman's body is a microcosm of the earth itself. Every woman contains within her the Domain of Muu, which is a spiritual replica of the Domain of Muu on the fourth level of the underworld. Whatever occurs on one plane of the spirit world simultaneously takes place on its "copy" plane somewhere else, for both planes are ultimately one and the same. Because of this, Muu and her associates comprise a constant danger to the pregnant woman. When they attack the foetus, they attack it directly from within the woman's body. And when the shamans travel down through the layers of the earth to liberate the foetus from Muu's house, they are simultaneously journeying into the anatomy of the pregnant woman.

Perhaps the most basic point of confusion in the essay by Lévi-Strauss has to do with the intelligibility and social context of the chant. It is essential to his analysis that the curer chants to
the woman, since he argues that by depicting her troubles metaphorically in mythical and cosmological terms, the chanter helps her to withstand them, and eventually, to give birth. "The song seems to have as its principal aim the description of these pains to the sick woman and the naming of them..." (1963:195). "The cure would consist... in making explicit a situation originally existing on the emotional level and in rendering acceptable to the mind pain which the body refuses to tolerate" (p. 197). Indirectly, the shaman is able to manipulate and relieve the woman's physical difficulties "through symbols, that is, through meaningful equivalents of things meant which belong to another order of reality" (p. 200). "The effectiveness of symbols would consist precisely in this 'inductive property,' by which formally homologous structures, built out of different materials at different levels of life--organic processes, unconscious mind, rational thought--are related to one another" (p. 201).

Despite the persuasiveness and brilliance of these remarks, and despite their obvious relevance to curing practices and symbolism in many cultures, they unfortunately do not apply in the case of the Muu Ikala chant. In the first place, the chant is not directed to the pregnant woman, but to the chanter's spiritual shaman helpers, in sociolinguistic terms, the chanter is the sender of the message, the shaman helpers are the receivers, and the woman is just part of the audience. The chant has the purpose of counselling the shaman helpers as to how they should act, and directing them on their expedition in search of the spirit of the foetus. Second, the chant is sung in a ritual language--the language of the spirit realm--which is unintelligible to the patient, even if she were in any condition to listen and pay attention. In fact, the Muu Ikala chanter, throughout the entire process, remains in communication with his army of shamans, and does not participate in the actual birth. When the time for birth approaches, the midwives remove the woman to a small cloth enclosure, where she squats over a bed of leaves and drops the baby. All of this is done out of sight of the chanter.

The description of the social context of the Cuna Muu Ikala presented in this paper has served to clarify and correct previous interpretations, in particular that of Lévi-Strauss (1963). Magico-religious texts, while interesting in themselves, are nevertheless often inadequate and even misleading as sources for symbolic analysis if they are not studied within their social and philosophical contexts. Cut loose from their moorings, as it were, their original meaning is often altered considerably--and at times lost--a point well illustrated by the differences between my interpretation of Muu Ikala and that of Lévi-Strauss,
NOTES

1 Though Lévi-Strauss considers it important that a nele sings the chant (1963:187-88), in point of fact the chanter need not be a nele at all.

2 I refer to the spirit-helpers as "shamans" because they are called nerkăn (sing, nele), the same name used for human shaman-diviners, and for great shamans of the mythological past.

3 To anticipate an obvious objection, it may seem presumptuous to criticize translations by a native-speaker or to claim to have done better oneself, (though it should be noted that the source of Holmer and Wassên's texts was not a native speaker of the ritual language from which he was translating, and they themselves express dissatisfactions with his work in several places.) I am quite confident, however, of the validity of these claims. I spent a great deal of time in the field going over both the published version of Muu Ikala and the one I collected. The source of the version I use, in his verse-by-verse translations, gave not only the surface meanings--equivalent to the translations in the published version--but also their hidden symbolism--which Holmer, Wassên, and Lévi-Strauss could only infer. These translations were in turn checked and corrected by other knowledgeable ritualists.

4 The inference that nusupane means "penis" is a seemingly obvious one, since both nusu "worm" and pane "frigate bird" can be used as euphemisms for "penis" in everyday language. The correct correspondence, however, is probably nusu "worm" + aipanne "to move back and forth." I questioned my informants repeatedly on the possibility that nusupane meant penis, provoking first amusement and later impatience at my lack of understanding. Since they readily translated many other sexual symbols in the text, it seems highly unlikely that they were concealing anything here. Finally, nusupane appears in several curing chants in contexts where "hummingbird" makes sense and "penis" does not, as in "The smoke goes up like nusupane."

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SMOKING OUT THE SPIRITS:
A CUNA EXORCISM

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INTRODUCTION

The anthropological study of ritual has produced a paradox. Ritual has usually been contrasted with pragmatic action, either as a kind of mystical activity or as a mode of communication, but it has become increasingly clear that ritual can accomplish concrete ends by communicating something about these ends (Leach 1968, Crocker 1973). In addition to the sociological maintenance tasks to which French and British social anthropology have alerted us—moving individuals from one status to another, dramatizing and enlisting support for values, statuses, and society itself—ritual can cure the sick, organize complex technological processes, and regulate the ecological relationships between human populations and their natural environments. Not only can ritual preserve values, individual psyches, and societies, it can transform them into something new. Whenever at least one link in a chain of actions and events consists of human consciousness, ritual can do its work.

In the next few pages I intend to use this perspective to look at an exorcism from the San Blas Cuna, the Nek apsoket, a ritual that has been mentioned in as many as a hundred places or more in the literature on the Cuna but never adequately described or analyzed. Though often referred to as a cure for epidemics, it is more accurate to call the apsoket an exorcism, since it always rids communities of oppressive spirits but only sometimes ends epidemics.

EXORCISM

I can best convey a notion of the kind of circumstance that provokes an exorcism with an example from my own observation, one that seems typical of others I only heard about. It was the Fall of 1971. Up and down San Blas the Cuna were reporting more than the usual number of ominous portents: a whale was sighted in one place, a waterspout passed by another, and in one town a whirlwind ripped the roofs off several houses. Radio stations from Panama and Colombia reported earthquakes in other countries, and on the island where I was working, people encountered spirits several times during these weeks. On the mainland at the funeral of an old man who died from natural causes, a little boy drowned in the local river. It was diagnosed that the boy had been taken by a mermaid and a ghost, the ghost being the mermaid's drowning victim from the previous year. Flu and other diseases were moving through the area. Several children on this island were seriously ill, and elsewhere in San Blas several died within a short space of time. Everyone agreed that things were generally in a bad way, and that the village needed an exorcism, to get rid of the ghost, the mermaid, and the spirits responsible for the illness.
Obviously the Cuna know when dangerous spirits are threatening them in part because they are afflicted by epidemics, drownings, and other woes. In addition, however, the spirits reveal themselves more frequently in times of trouble, with signs, portents, and visitations. The Cuna find these encounters very unsettling, and they justify exorcisms as much by this general restlessness in the spirit world as by any specific misfortune they are suffering. In such times they say that the whole course of events is out of kilter, or in their own idiom, "heated up." The exorcism rite, in addition to getting rid of specific spirits, is said generally to cool things down, to put the environment back into equilibrium.

The tasks the exorcism must accomplish can thus be seen on three different levels: (1) it attempts to solve "objective" problems, principally the curing of disease. (2) it rids the village of spirits held responsible for these problems. (3) it handles subjectively felt feelings of loss, fear, and worry, that is, a general social malaise. On the third level, the Cuna are reconstituting the damaged morale of the community by focusing its energies on a common task, and seen this way, evil spirits can be taken as a metaphor for depressed spirits.

An exorcism requires considerable preparation. The village must first recruit an exorcist, choosing from among the handful of men in San Blas who have completed the long years of study required for this role. They then begin to collect the items needed for the ceremony, of which there are a great many, including cacao, hot peppers, tobacco (both native-grown and purchased), and a large number of medicines. (A list of material for an exorcism in 1975 included 86 different kinds of medicine.) As the day of the ritual approaches, the villagers build large effigy figures of balsa wood (illustrated in Figure 1). In addition, they collect boxes of magic stones and smaller wooden figures, which most households already have on hand, they make small crosses of various materials, and they bring in a live wasp's nest.

Having completed all these preparations, the whole village assembles in one large house (usually, but not necessarily, a congress house) along with all the necessary materials. Filled with so many people, and with an even greater number of crosses, stones, and wooden figures, the house is jammed. For eight days, from late afternoon to midnight, the master exorcist chants in an esoteric language, while a seer or nele lies in a hammock nearby, keeping watch on the world of the spirits. Several other men tend braziers of coals, into which they feed the medicines, cacao, and hot pepper, and four times each night another set of four men circle the room, blowing smoke from pipes and long cigars on each person present.

Throughout the evening everyone except the seer and the exorcist smokes large amounts of tobacco—in striking contrast to many other South and Central American societies, where only the curer himself smokes. The ashes from each pipe and cigarette are carefully preserved,
Figure 1. Large balsa wood figures (ukkurwarkana) from a Cuna Nek apsōket exorcism ritual.
and if anyone farts, he or she must very rapidly smoke an especially large pipeful. After eight nights of chanting and smoking, the main part of the ritual ends, to be followed by two afternoons of light smoking, each an hour or two long.

DISCUSSION

So, how are we to interpret this behavior? Edmund Leach, in his writings on ritual, would have us pay attention exclusively to what participants are saying and doing. In this ritual the exorcist's chant is unintelligible to many of those who sit around him—just as Chapin (paper in this volume) has shown that the Cuna childbirth chant is a mystery for the woman for whom it is sung—so we are restricted even further here, if we follow Leach, to what participants do. What they think is happening, on the other hand, is irrelevant. As Leach wrote of Kachin sacrifice:

...If I see a Kachin killing a pig and I ask what he is doing and he says...'I am giving to the Nats,' this statement is simply a description of what he is doing. It is nonsense to ask such questions as: 'Do Nats have legs? Do they eat flesh? Do they live in the sky?' (1954:14)

It will be instructive I think, to go along with Leach, at least for the moment, to see how far he takes us. He can carry us at least a certain distance, because in the exorcism action is speaking very loudly indeed. From the beginning of the eight days, the boundaries of the community are closed: the village police patrol to see that no insider leaves and no outsider enters. Not only do all the members of the village come together for eight nights in a row, but during those nights, every aspect of their actions emphasizes solidarity. In marked contrast to the performance of other sacred chants among the Cuna, no one may speak while the exorcist sings, and everyone keeps busy at the same task, smoking. At one point in the evening everyone exits en masse to urinate, and among a related group of Cuna in Northern Colombia, everyone stands up and sits down at a signal in perfect unison, much like students in a strict nineteenth century schoolroom. In all of these actions the Cuna are very clearly displaying the integrity of the community and its solidarity in the face of an external, or one might even say, externalized, threat.

Clearly then, the actions of participants and the configurations into which they group themselves tell us something about what is going on, and presumably Leach would feel vindicated. I suggest, however, that we are less then halfway towards understanding the ritual. We don't know why it is appropriate for spirit attacks in particular nor do we understand even the small proportion of the symbols in the ritual that
have been introduced here. Even more important, we cannot account for all the ends accomplished by the exorcism. After all, it not only conveys something about the Cuna community and how its members relate to it, it convinces people that the spirits have gone away, so they are no longer threatened. It makes almost everyone feel better, and it makes some people feel well.

We can understand all this only by asking questions equivalent to Leach's "Do Nats have legs?," for the exorcism depends on a set of persuasive metaphors and shared beliefs about what spirits are like. Here I can only sketch in those that are most important. First, spirits are humanoid. Though some of them have ambiguous animal-like qualities, and dangerous animals may even be called spirits, the Cuna stress that basically the spirits are just like people. They live in houses and villages, they have children, their women sew blouses, they wash clothes, they drink, and they get drunk, just as people do. When they mount a major attack against the Cuna, it is often because someone has provoked them by killing a kingfisher or another one of their pets, or because someone inadvertently has brought down one of their invisible clotheslines while felling trees.

On the side of the Cuna are ranged another group of humanoid spirits, the familiars who are represented by the figures, crosses, and stones in the exorcism house. (These are the same as the "shamans" to which Chapin refers in his paper in this volume.) The stones and smaller figures stand for the permanent local spirit guardians of the community, while the large balsa figures represent exorcism specialists, outside experts called in for the occasion by the chanter.

These good spirits gain control of the bad spirits by getting them drunk, using chicha spiritually manufactured from the smoke of the tobacco, hot peppers, and medicines that the human participants of the ritual have produced. In Cuna this transformation from smoke to chicha seems particularly apt, because the word for medicine is INA, with one N, and chicha is INNA, with two N's. Farts are inappropriate because their bad smell spoils the chicha, and the person who farted smokes the extra pipeful to make up for what he has spoiled.

In addition to the ideas about spirits and chicha that form the structure of spiritual action, the ritual has a plot, with stratagems, encounters, suspense, a climax, and a denouement. Though the exorcist's chant is intelligible to only some of his listeners, the story it tells is known to everyone to some degree or another, and the ritual succeeds in part by making them live through this story.

In the briefest possible outline, the plot goes as follows: For six nights the humans smoke and burn medicines, while under the earth the familiars collect the chicha, each night transporting it to the house of a cooperative spirit on the second level of the underworld.
While it is stored there, thirsty devils often try to get a drink before they have been invited, but they are always spied out by familiars equipped with four faces to see in all directions, and scared away by the spirits of the wasps.

At the end of the seventh night, the familiars take in all the chicha and carry it down to the fourth and lowest level of the underworld, to the house of Kil Ikkwler, the king of the dangerous spirits. A watchman prevents them from entering the house, until they get him drunk with some of the chicha. Inside they meet the king and his wife, swinging in their hammocks, who question them on what they have come for.

Then the chanter calls to the spirits who have been oppressing the village, inviting each individually to the drinking party in the king's house. The party begins, with the familiars serving the other spirits but staying sober themselves. The spirits get drunk, fight, sing, and eventually pass out, all except the king himself. Again and again he uses special medicine to sober himself up, until finally the familiars give him chicha made from the smoke of hot peppers, which even he cannot withstand.

Then, during the night, the familiars return up above, dismantle the homes and pack up the possessions of the troublesome spirits, take them down to the fourth level of the underworld, and set them up again. They drop a net on the sleeping spirits, and then, on the eighth night, the exorcist sings to wake them up again. As they awake, trying to remember how they got where they are, the exorcist sings to their king, explaining what they have done and instructing him to keep them with him in the underworld. Some of the spirits, however, wish to return again, and they bargain with the familiars, telling them that they didn't do wrong, or if they did, that their good intentions were subverted by outside agitators. The familiars then consult with the seer, the only human who communicates directly with the spirit world, and then some of the spirits are released on their own recognizance.

For the next two afternoons the people smoke to make chicha as a reward for the familiars, who have worked so hard without as yet touching a drop. The spirits represented by small wooden figures and magic stones drink where they are, while the spirits of the large balsa figures take their share back to their king, who waits for them in their underworld home. The chant ends as the balsa spirits bid goodbye to the local familiars and to the humans they have helped.

Here, I can only touch on a few of the more obvious conclusions concerning the exorcism. First, it would be foolish to take an overly benign view of the Cuna concern with spirits, since it contributes considerable anxiety to their lives. On the other hand, by objectifying their troubles in terms of spirits, they give themselves a way of dealing with them. They are confronted with specific enemies—if the spirits were not invisible one might almost say flesh-and-blood enemies—who can be fought and conquered.
The ritual gets rid of the spirits in a dramatically satisfying way. It builds slowly to a climax over several days, resolves the problem, and then brings the situation back to normal. It depends on a central metaphor of making someone helpless through intoxication—an idea the Cuna find very persuasive and appealing from their own drinking experiences—supported by a large number of secondary symbols, most of which I have not been able to deal with here.

The exorcism has many features of a rite of passage. It separates the community from the bad times with a brief period set apart from ordinary life, a period seemingly of considerable physical demands on the participants. It appears very likely, moreover, that the great amount of smoking involved results in altered physiological and psychological states which contribute to the work of the ritual. The Cuna in fact may be a little drunk themselves while they are trying to liquor up the spirits.

The exorcism does seem to bring about its desired effects. It may not be able to prevent the coming of another epidemic, or keep someone else from drowning, but from the testimony of participants, it does reduce sharply the number of ghosts and spirits that people meet, and it does restore community morale.

If what I have said here sounds like a resurrection of "The Effectiveness of Symbols," Levi-Strauss's analysis of Muu Ikala, which Chapin (paper in this volume) has just finished destroying, it is. Whatever the effect of the Cuna childbirth chant on a woman giving birth, the symbols within it cannot move her, because she does not understand them. During the exorcism however, the situation is different: many men in the audience have learned other chants and thus know the language of the exorcism chant, and the other men and women in the audience know the general outline and many of the details of the exorcism plot. Thus the ritual can lead them through a dramatic resolution of the crisis and persuade them that their troubles have ended. The nature of Levi-Strauss is that even if his analysis does not fit the facts on which he tries it out, it will undoubtedly work perfectly somewhere else.

Notice that so far I have been discussing the apsoket exorcism in relation to stable, well-established villages. The Cuna, however, have moved out onto the shore and islands of the San Blas coast only within the last hundred years or so, and they continued to establish new villages well into the early decades of this century. Many communities began as pioneering work camps or small settlements, populated by factions that had fissioned from older villages, or by families and individuals from several different places.

The Cuna say that they were able to move into San Blas only by using the Nek apsoket exorcism. Through it, they claim they not only conquered the diseases that flourished in their new home, but they
opened blocked river mouths, stilled whirlpools, and sharply reduced the numbers of whales, sharks, mermaids, and monsters. For communities founded within living memory, oral tradition records a succession of exorcisms in their early years. What I am suggesting, then, is that just as in some societies witchcraft beliefs facilitate expansion by justifying the fissioning of old communities, so among the Cuna, exorcisms furthered expansion by providing an idiom by which to creat new ones.

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EDABÁLI: THE RITUAL SIBLING RELATIONSHIP

AMONG THE WESTERN GUAYMI

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The Guaymi are a Chibchan-speaking group of some 43,000 slash-and-burn agriculturalists who live in parts of the western Panamanian provinces of Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui, and Veraguas. Their small hamlets are dispersed throughout the mountainous terrain of this region. Having survived, though not unscathed, the early years of the Conquest (unlike many of the indigenous cultures of the more accessible or desirable areas of western Panama, which disappeared), the Guaymi remained for centuries relatively isolated and only marginally involved in contact with the outside world. More intense and sustained involvement in the cash-based economy (and to a lesser degree, the sociopolitical system) of Panama began in the late nineteenth century and has steadily accelerated during the twentieth century.

Among the numerous consequences of this involvement for the Guaymi, the period since the 1930's (when, apparently, the last performances of the male puberty rite took place) has seen the gradual—and at times not so gradual—attenuation of ritual performances. Some rituals have disappeared entirely, others are performed only rarely, and still others, according to the Guaymi themselves, are no longer as elaborate as they were even in the recent past. Fortunately, from the viewpoint of the insatiably curious anthropologist, following the demise of the nativistic Mama Chi cult (Young 1971, 1974b) which flourished and dominated Guaymi thought and action during the 1960's there appeared in some areas a resurgence of interest in the performance of traditional rituals. Observation and inquiry during the 1970's has permitted us a glimpse of what we believe to have been in the past an elaborate complex of rituals and has allowed us to achieve some limited understanding of this part of the Guaymi sociocultural system. It is within this context that we propose to examine briefly one ritual relationship which we believe to have been central to several different but interrelated Guaymi rituals.

This paper examines some of the patterns of behavior involved in the edabali or ritual sibling relationship among the Guaymi of Panama. By reference to certain Guaymi ideals of behavior and to aspects of everyday social interaction, we attempt to set forth some of the more obvious symbolic connotations of the edabali relationship. These involve the polar themes of harmony and discord. To accomplish this in a short paper, we have over-simplified the complexity of the relationship and the rituals in the context of which it occurs, and we have pushed aside numerous problems of meaning and interpretation of which we ourselves are aware.

We take the position, espoused in whole or in part by many who are interested in the analysis of ritual and symbol (Durkheim 1954; Firth 1963, 1973; and others), that ritual symbolically expresses aspects of cultural ideology. Firth states this position succinctly:
What ritual performances do is to recall and present
in symbol form the underlying order that is supposed
to guide the members of the community, in their
social activities (1973:167).

We assume that native statements of ideal social behavior give us at
least a glimpse of this "underlying order" and that this will provide
clues to the symbolic meaning of ritual. We further assume that ritual
may serve as a means of dramatizing the ever-present discrepancy between
ideology and real behavior, between what ought to be and what is. We
will argue that the ritual behavior of edabáli is such a dramatization.

In the Guaymi case we are faced with the problem of a dearth of
native explanation of the symbolic content of ritual, a problem also
faced by other investigators (e.g., Nescott and Morton-Williams 1962).
(Our most frequent question in the process of data collection was 'Why?',
and the most frequent response was 'It is the custom.') Yet even Nadel
(1954), who cautiously maintained (with regard to the interpretation of
symbolism) that if a symbol does not explicitly symbolize something to
the native then it is not in fact a symbol at all, conceded that the
interpretation of symbolism in ritual is a legitimate endeavor because
ritual displays social structural principles and ideals. Victor Turner,
much less conservative (and less cautious) in this regard, has
convincingly argued (1967:26-7) that the anthropologist, as outsider,
may be in a better position to interpret certain ritual symbols than
the members of the society being studied; and we concur in this opinion.

Another problem that we face in the interpretation that follows
is the presently emasculated state of ritual among the Guaymi. It is clear
from the evidence we have that Guaymi rituals were considerably more
elaborate even in the recent past than they are today. Consequently,
we have had to supplement our observational data with informants' accounts
of how things were in bygone days, and we admit that in many instances
this has led to more questions and confusion than enlightenment. We
will not deal with such problems here, however.

Finally, while we agree with Turner (1967, 1976) and others that
rituals form systems of great complexity and the symbols embedded in
them are certainly multifaceted and polysemic, we cannot examine here
in any detail the complexities of the edabáli relationship, much less
the intricacies of the entire ritual context.

THE RITUAL CONTEXTS OF EDABÁLI

The edabáli relationship is known to be activated in three
important ritual contexts: (1) krun, the 'stick game', referred to as
balsería in Spanish; (2) kubuidí, a 'drinking ritual', known as
chichería in Spanish; and (3) kuleka, a large collective work party involving opposing teams, and for which there is no specific designation in Spanish. Hereafter, we will refer to these rituals as the 'stick game', the 'drinking ritual', and the 'work party', respectively. The ritual sibling relationship is explicitly central to each of these rituals and to no others. It is fair to say that these rituals cannot be even superficially understood apart from this relationship, yet early documentary sources (Ufildre 1682; Franco 1882) do not mention it, nor do some of the more recent sources (Pinart 1885; Johnson 1948; Termer 1919). The absence of any mention of edábáli in the account of Fray de Ufildre (who lived among the Guaymi from 1622 to 1637) is particularly surprising since his detailed description of the 'stick game' is strikingly similar in general outline and in many specific features to accounts provided us in 1964-5, 1972, and 1974-5. One may reasonably presume from this that the edábáli relationship was as important in the ritual of krun during the early seventeenth century as it has been in recent times.

More recent sources which do make note of the relationship (Alphonse 1956; Young 1971), with one exception (Young 1974), provide little or no description of the ritual behavior involved or its symbolic connotations.

Since it is not possible here to describe in detail each of these rituals, we will describe only the general features of behavior common to all three as these bear upon an interpretation of the symbolic content of the edábáli relationship.

COMMON ELEMENTS OF RITUAL BEHAVIOR

The term edábáli is etymologically derived from édaba, 'sibling of the same sex', and the Guaymi explicitly recognize this, commenting that the relationship is like that between brothers, stressing amicability and harmony. (This is one of the few bits of native explanation that we were able to elicit.) We should further note, however, that they invariably translate the term into Spanish as contrario, 'opponent, antagonist, competitor, rival', thus recognizing, at least implicitly, the competitive aspects of the relationship as well. The term edábáli is used in referring to the relationship, to one's own 'ritual sibling', and in direct address at some points during the rituals.

The relationship is emphatically one between two individuals rather than between two groups, but it provides the focus for ritual interaction between groups. The man who sponsors a ritual and his edábáli are called kububu (kri) gwidi and kububu (kri) kugeani respectively, and we have glossed these as 'principal host' and
'principal guest'. Kububu gwidi is also used in a collective sense to designate all those who accompany the principal host and in like fashion kububu kugeani designates the entourage of the principal guest. In addition to the edabâli relationship between principals, many of those present are edabâli vis-a-vis one another but such relationships are only acknowledged at any given ritual when the proponents are on opposite sides. When a man of the host's side does not have an edabâli on the guest side at a given ritual, the occasion may be used as an opportunity to establish such a relationship. Guests may not take the initiative, however. Anyone can, and frequently does, have several edabâli at any given time, but it appears that only one such relationship is activated at any given ritual.

The wives of edabâli are said to be edabâli to one another by virtue of the relationship between their husbands, and a man is said to be edabâli to the wife of his edabâli (he refers to her as edabâli merire, 'female' edabâli). The relationship is thus multistranded.

Because the 'drinking ritual' and the 'work party' are both geographically restricted, usually involving the residents of only two hamlets and non-resident close kinsmen within two to four hours' walk of one another, while the 'stick game' involves many hamlets in two regions which may be two to four days' travel time for one another, those who are edabâli at the two smaller rituals may and often do find themselves on the same side at the 'stick game' ritual. The social ties thus established through the mechanism of edabâli are multiple and extensive; and in the past, when warfare and feuding were widespread among the Guaymi and neighboring groups, these social ties must have greatly facilitated travel and trade throughout the area. Today, outside the ritual context, edabâli treat each other as very good friends according to the Guaymi--as fictive kinsmen in our interpretation--and may be counted upon to provide lodging and food when one is traveling.

In an examination of the behavior engaged in by the principal edabâli at rituals, certain common patterns emerge. The same behavior may occur between other edabâli present at the rituals, although always on a lesser scale.

The rituals begin with the arrival of the principal guest and his group. The principal host sends two male representatives to greet his edabâli at some distance from the site selected for the enactment of the ritual. They offer chicha to the guest on behalf of the host. This procedure is repeated four times as the group approaches the ritual site. The principal host, accompanied by his wife, may personally welcome his guest at the second or third drinking exchanges, and he must do so at the fourth. The host offers chicha to his guest and his wife makes a similar but smaller offering to the guest's wife. The principal guest drinks and returns the container of chicha
to the host who drinks a lesser quantity and again proffers drink to his guest. The guest drinks again and then passes the chicha to those accompanying him, all of whom drink. Their wives and the other female guests follow the same procedure but with a smaller quantity of chicha. The fourth drinking exchange takes place after the host leads his guest by the arm and seats him in a special place that has been prepared for him. At 'drinking rituals' and 'stick games' the guests time their arrival so as to appear on the scene sometime during the late afternoon. The 'work party' ritual may begin in the afternoon preceding the work day or on the morning of it. After the greeting and initial drinking exchanges, there is a lengthy lull in the activities during which there is little conversation.

The formal drinking exchanges then resume and continue at intervals throughout the ritual, which may last from one to four days. 'Stick games' last four days. The actual work of a 'work party' lasts only one day, although the guests may remain until the chicha is gone. 'Drinking rituals' may last from one to four days and nights, although at present only the one night affairs are regularly held, and the three and four night events have disappeared entirely.

At 'drinking rituals', there is singing led by song specialists provided by the principal host; and dancing. Dancing is initiated by the principal guest and his wife and accompanied by the principal host and his wife, with others joining in as the spirit moves them. Singing and dancing always continue throughout the night during 'drinking rituals'.

The sexes are separated throughout the drinking and the eating that takes place at these rituals (one might say they do the same things separately), but they do intermingle during the dancing.

A good host is expected to provide extremely generous quantities of drink and food to his guest. He is expected to literally, as they phrase it, 'knock down' his guest with drink while maintaining a relative degree of stability himself. The guest, on the other hand, is expected to outdrink his host to the point where the host loses his composure. Each attempts to maintain the advantage by enlisting the aid of relatives to help consume the chicha. As the drinking proceeds throughout the long night of the ritual, forays to the bushes by both host and guest, as well as assisting relatives, to rid themselves of the accumulation of previous drinking exchanges (by vomiting as well as urinating) are not uncommon. At one 'drinking ritual' where the principal guest seemingly maintained the advantage throughout the night, criticism was voiced in the days following, not of the host himself, but of his relatives who, it was said, 'never help him out'.

At all of these rituals fighting is common--one might say expected--but this too is carried out in a formal fashion in accordance
with established and usually observed rules. Edábali ideally never fight with each other physically, nor ideally, does one fight with anyone of his own side. Fighting between edábali is cited by the Guaymi as cause for terminating the ritual cycle before it is completed.

At the end of each of these rituals a large quantity of food is given by the principal host to the principal guest. Others of the host side may similarly honor their edábali, although on a lesser scale. After the gift of food is presented, the wife of the principal guest separates out a portion which is immediately returned to the principal host by his edábali. The principal guest then gives portions of food to those who carried the food from the host's place to the guest's place, and his wife wraps up a substantial quantity to be taken home. What remains of the gift is then eaten by all those who have accompanied the principal guest. The principal host then provides a meal for all those of his side. After this, a final drinking exchange takes place during which all of the remaining chicha is consumed. The guests then depart—somewhat unsteadily.

Each of these rituals ideally involves a ritual cycle of eight events, four events sponsored alternately by each member of the edábali pair, after which the two principals supposedly remain good friends for life. (We originally thought that the edábali relationship lasted for the lifetime of the individuals involved, but this seems to have been due to an initial misunderstanding on our part of what we were being told. It gradually became clear that the relationship lasts for the duration of a ritual cycle.)

**GUAYMI EXPLANATIONS**

Guaymi explanations of ritual behavior are few and particularistic. They note that edábali are like brothers, emphasizing the amicability of the relationship, and they are explicit about the competitive aspects of the drinking exchanges between edábali, stating that the idea is to 'knock down' your opponent with drink; yet they do not relate this to any thoughts of possible antagonism between brothers. They specify that one's relatives are obligated to help with the drinking in these exchanges. They believe that chicha gives one strength and without it one cannot work effectively. (By inference, then, the work of ritual must be enormously demanding!) Concerning the return to the host of a portion of his gift of food at the end of these rituals, the Guaymi say that this is done in the belief that it will insure a food supply in the host's house so that the guest may come there to eat again. They also specify that the host need not accept this return offering for it is the gesture that is considered important. It is thus reasonably clear that they see the gift of food and the return of a portion of it as symbolic of the enduring nature of the edábali relationship and the pattern of reciprocity that characterizes it.
IDEALS AND REALITIES OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

While the foregoing skeletal account of behavior associated with the edabáli relationship in its ritual contexts hardly does justice to the complexities of either the relationship or the rituals, it does allow us to note certain parallels between ritual behavior on the one hand and the ideals of social relations as well as actual everyday behavior on the other, and to this we now turn.

Aspects of Guaymi ideology centering around the solidarity of the kin group and the importance of cooperation among kinsmen, and everyday behavior and emotions which deviate from these ideals, help us to understand what is being symbolized by the behavior of edabáli in a ritual context. Kinsmen are expected to live in harmony and especially to present a united front vis-a-vis non-kin; yet there is often conflict among kinsmen (though rarely does it reach the point of physical violence), and often some of a man's kin do not support him in disputes with non-kinsmen.

Given the ideal of post-marital virilocality, brothers reside in the same hamlet and form the key relationships in the collective decision-making of the group; yet brothers have fallings-out, an important cause of kin group fission. And the ties between brothers are often loosened considerably when, for whatever reason, virilocality is not practiced.

Ideally, kinsmen should be generous to a fault with one another. Drink and food should always be given to visitors and almost invariably it is, although grumbling may be heard if a particular kinsman appears at too frequent intervals to avail himself of this obligatory hospitality. Everyone is obligated to lend his possessions cheerfully to close kinsmen virtually on demand, but about this too there is often some voiced resentment. If one suffers economic setbacks in a given year, kinsmen ideally are obligated to provide substantial support for their less fortunate relative in the form of food. He, in his turn, is expected to reciprocate when he is able and his kinsmen are in need. Even so, the giving is often done with obvious reluctance, especially if the giver's own supplies are less than bountiful. Ideally, kinsmen supply all the labor for collective work parties organized by and for the benefit of one of their fellows, and the labor provided is supposed to be reciprocated. Yet in this too there are always some who are not known for the swiftness and eagerness with which they repay labor given; and there are those who always seem to have an excuse for not participating when the appointed work day arrives. Ideally, a man should provide generous quantities of drink and food for those who labor for him, but there are those who are known to be stingy in this regard.
In brief, the Guaymi idealize harmony, generosity, cooperation, and reciprocation among kinsmen, while deviations from the prescribed ideals commonly generate discord, resentment, and antagonism.

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS IN RITUAL

It is possible to view the behavior of edabáli in ritual contexts as symbolically representing, in a dramatic way, both the ideals of behavior and deviations from them. Both hospitality and aggression are ritually enacted by edabáli and those who accompany them at rituals. The edabáli relationship, being considered a brother-like tie, on the one hand symbolizes a linking of two groups into one large kin-like group and requires all of the attendant hospitality and cooperation ideally prescribed for behavior among kinsmen. On the other hand, it symbolizes the line along which group fission may occur with its attendant opposition, aggression, and discord. The drinking exchanges between edabáli once symbolize the hospitality expected of a kinsman and the obligation to reciprocate, while the excess to which these drinking exchanges are carried is clearly symbolic of aggression which is proscribed outside the ritual context. The expectation that a man's relatives will come to his aid when he is engaged in competitive drinking with his edabáli symbolizes the ideal of solidarity among kinsmen. The magnificent gift of food by the host at the termination of a ritual event dramatizes the expected sharing of food between kinsmen, and the return of a portion of this gift symbolizes the enduring nature of the relationship and the expectation of reciprocity, as does the obligation of the principal guest to sponsor the next event in the ritual cycle.

Firth has argued that

while inference is often necessary to supply meaning to symbolic behavior in ritual, caution is advisable in ascribing to it basic themes of either support or conflict in the social system (1973:178).

While we are fully appreciative of the import of Firth's cautionary note, we feel that there is something to be gained by speculation about the symbolism of basic themes.

The Guaymi stress the ideal of harmony in everyday social relations while recognizing that discord is a reality of life. We suggest that the behavior of edabáli in the three ritual contexts that have been briefly described in this paper symbolizes the general but opposing themes of harmony and discord.
FOOTNOTES

1 We wish to thank Erve Chambers, Sam Fujisaka, Charles Hoff, Ted Stern, and Bob Tonkinson for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper while at the same time absolving them of any responsibility for the paper's present content, especially since we did not accept all of their suggestions.

2 Originally, we glossed edabáli as 'ritual counterpart', an essentially neutral phrase, because we felt that glossing it as 'opponent' tended to stress by implication too much of the opposition and rivalry expressed in the relationship, while glossing it as 'partner' tended to stress, again by implication, the cooperative, friendly, and reciprocal aspects. We later decided that 'ritual sibling' is the most appropriate gloss since, while hardly neutral in its connotations, it does convey implications of both cooperation and competition and does fit closely the etymological derivation of the Guaymi term: edabáli, from édaba, 'sibling of the same sex', and thus edabáli, 'sibling-like'.

3 We have taken the liberty here of using the Guaymi term for the ritual event which lasts only one night, and which seems to be the variety of this event still actively staged most often. Terms exist for similar events lasting two, three, and four nights. The two night event is said to be held occasionally, while the three and four night events are reported to have completely disappeared. All four of these are commonly termed chicherfa in Spanish. We have so far been unable to elicit a generic term in Guaymi which includes all four of these ritual events and semantic evidence leads us to believe that there may not be such a term. Krun also has variations but the generic krun subsumes all of these. Other complexities exist with respect to these rituals and their variations, too numerous to detail here.

4 All work groups involving participants other than the residents of a man's immediate household are collectively referred to as juntas in Spanish by the Guaymi.

5 A failure to recognize this relationship and its central importance to the rituals mentioned is probably the reason why these ritual events have seldom been considered rituals in any important sense of the term in much of the literature on the Guaymi. In fact, the usual description generally contains derogatory comments dealing largely with the excess drinking and fighting that occur at these events.

6 Chicha is a fermented beverage which can be made from a variety of fruits, grains, or tubers. Chicha made of corn is the most common variety among the Western Guaymi.
In one observed instance at a 'drinking ritual' the principal guest, his wife, and accompanying close kinsmen were seated to the right upon entering the house. Under normal everyday circumstances, when entering a Guaymi house, men always seat themselves to the left and women to the right. We are uncertain whether the seating arrangement at this ritual represents a classic ritual reversal or whether it results from the fact that the wife of the principal guest accompanies him throughout the ritual and seating her to the left would represent an intolerable breach of etiquette. We also do not know if this seeming reversal was purposeful and typical or if it was a simple bungle. It is more usual for the special place for the principal guest to be located outside the house and the host's place to be inside thus stressing an inside-outside opposition.

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THE COSMOGRAPHY OF SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES AND
CULTURE-CONTACT OF THE RAMA INDIANS OF EASTERN NICARAGUA

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INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this paper is to discuss certain aspects of Rama Indian subsistence activities and culture-contact as they relate to specific stories of the Adam-cycle of Rama oral literature. In order to facilitate this discussion, I will introduce the concept of cosmography and reinterpret it following Lévi-Strauss (1967). Application of the cosmographical method to the Rama data yields a series of insights about Rama culture and its value structure.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines cosmography as "The science which describes and maps the general features of the universe...without encroaching on the special provinces of astronomy or geography." For too long anthropologists have neglected the spatial dimension of cosmology as it relates to the implicit value-structure of a culture. The one exception to this statement is of course, Lévi-Strauss (1967), whose thrust has been in the direction of understanding the spatial configurations within cosmology.

Lévi-Strauss (1967) among modern anthropologists has been influential in developing the concept of cosmography utilized today in anthropology. In his analysis of the story of Asdiwal, he perceives four important planes of analysis (1) geographical (spatial) (2) economic or ecological (3) sociological (4) cosmological. Lévi-Strauss analyzes the story of Asdiwal on each of these levels. He then proceeds to utilize the spatial variable to integrate each of these codes and their messages to provide a cosmographical interpretation of the myth. It is the spatial variable which is central to much of Lévi-Strauss's cosmographical analysis of the Asdiwal myth.

Cosmography, as it is used in this paper, refers to the mapping of cosmological or mythic events in space to analyze the relative importance of these events in a culture. Systematic application of the cosmographic method to a cosmology or mythology provides the analyst with a set of points which delineate the locations where mythic events occurred. By examining the ordering of these points and their relative distances from one another, we can discover important features in the implicit value-structure of a culture. This method assumes that cultural value-structures are represented spatially in the geographical arrangement of cosmological and mythic motifs and that by decoding the spatial variable, we can better understand the implicit value-structure of that culture.

The cosmographic method utilizes contemporary cultural and social data to assist in analysis by providing insights into the cultural value-system which supports the cosmology being investigated. In situations of cultural contact in which the cosmology has had time to change in relation to this contact, cosmographical analysis can reveal certain patterns within the culture contact experience. Frequently, historical records may be used to support cosmographical analysis in
such situations. The next section discusses the Rama Indians, upon whose culture this cosmographical analysis is based.

THE RAMA INDIANS

The Rama Indians of Eastern Nicaragua are one of the northernmost members of the Chibchan language family and numbered some 459 individuals in 1969-70. They reside in the tropical forest along the east coast of Nicaragua in four settlements the largest of which is at Rama Cay at the southern end of Bluefields Lagoon near the town of Bluefields. Traditionally, the Rama were self-sufficient hunters and gatherers, but culture contact has led to a change in the Rama subsistence economy, in that agriculture, cash crops, and manufactured goods play a more prominent role today for the Rama. The Rama of Rama Cay have been in continuous contact with the Western world since 1859 and as a result, Rama society has been transformed.

At least one area of Rama culture, cosmology, has resisted change however. Interest in the Adam-cycle of stories central to that cosmology has been maintained, and almost all Rama know at least one story from the Adam-cycle and can name the various places where Adam stayed when he was in the Punta Gorda River area fighting the bad animals and making the world safe for the Rama "in these times," i.e., the present-day Rama. Therefore, in analyzing the cosmography of Adam stories we are attempting to understand an aspect of Rama cosmology that continues to play an important role in Rama culture.

ADAM, A RAMA CULTURE-HERO

Adam is important in Rama cosmology because as one informant put it, "his job was making the world tame, and making everything as we find it today." Adam, the culture-hero of the Rama, is also important because it was he who discovered chocolate, honey, snakebite cure and many other important items of Rama culture and taught the Rama how to use them as they do today.

In the stories, Adam's household consists of a brother, who helps him and serves as his cook ("He stayed at home all the time while Adam walked about") and a sister, who left home to set up her own house and live with a monster snake or couk. Adam's favorite foods are honey, which comes from a rock in the river bottom of Punta Gorda River, and pepper-chocolate, which his brother fixes for him every day. Adam never marries, although he is involved with a macaw-woman in adultery and kills her and her brother by pushing over their house. Therefore, Adam is a liminal person sexually and socially.
Adam's activities fall into two major categories: (1) his adventures with the "bad animals" and (2) his exploits on the Punta Gorda River of Nicaragua in creation times. Some stories in the latter category focus on Adam's subsistence activities in Punta Gorda River. In these, we learn where Adam killed a deer, where he gathered honey, where he cooked his meat, took his water and drank his coffee (probably pepper-chocolate in pre-contact versions of the story) and where Adam caught, cooked and ate a big, spotted fish called sahsing. Others deal with Adam's adventures as warrior and his guitar-playing contest with the walsah (devil). Because this group of Adam stories has been heavily influenced by culture-contact motifs, it will be dealt with separately after analyzing Adam's activities in Punta Gorda River.

THE MYTH OF ADAM IN PUNTA GORDA RIVER

The story considered in this section is one which was gathered at Wirin Cay, Nicaragua in 1969. It tells of Adam's activities in Punta Gorda and the things he did each day there. The story is as follows:

When Adam was traveling up Punta Gorda River, he gets hungry, and lands at such a place and cooks his food. He caught a big fish called sahsing (spotted and big). He caught one of those, cooked it and ate it, and he left the skull of it on a rock, and the skull of the fish became the rock. And when he eat it he get a headache. In these times the younger generation can't eat this fish because it is too bad for them and will hurt those who have young babies. Another time, he kill a deer and cleaned it and put the skull on a rock to cook it and both the skull and rock became a rock. Used two pieces of good firewood to mark the spot. A third place Adam stop is one creek close to the mouth of the river where the water is fresh. Here Adam get his water to drink and to make coffee. The fourth thing is a place in the woodland where you can see some tracks going off into the woods. Apparently this is where Adam was walking. People say they is big tracks, bigger than an average person. The fifth place is Adam's fire. You can see the wood just so.

In checking over this account with other informants, it was possible to order serially the location of each event. Beginning at the mouth of the Punta Gorda River the following is the order in which the events occurred:
1) Adam drinks coffee near mouth of river.

2) He gets his water from a sweetwater creek on the right side of the river going up it.

3) He kills a deer and eats it, cooking it over a fire which can still be seen today.

4) The rock where the water-dog lived is here.

5) Place where the fishbones of the sahsing are to be found.

6) Here Adam played his guitar and drove away the walsah or devil. His guitar still floats in the river.

7) The honey rock is to be found underwater here.

8) The tracks of Adam in the bush area are somewhere above Dieamante, the Rama settlement. Native or creation-cocoa and bananas are found here. The ulak is also here. (The ulak is a hairy ape-man who lives in the bush and only eats raw meat.)

The discrepancy between the order of events in myth and the location of events by informants suggests that the linear spatial configuration of events is altered in myth and that the action sequence moves in a circular fashion from the middle of the river, downriver and then upstream. Therefore, the primary code of the myth asserts the negative dimension of fishing as a subsistence activity and opposes it to the positive dimension associated with hunting. (Although it plays an important role in their survival during the rainy season, the Rama do not value fishing as a subsistence activity.) On the other hand, the linear spatial arrangement of activities reflects the rhythm of the daily activity cycle and the relative importance of subsistence activities. Coffee and water are taken early in the morning before going hunting. Fishing, agricultural and gathering activities could be initiated later in the day. Myth recognizes the importance of hunting but also the necessity of the other upriver activities.

Examining tales that deal with Adam's exploits as a warrior and another group of stories that tell about creation times along the Southern Miskito coast, we discover a second axis of orientation running in a north-south direction along the coast. This second axis includes the following events in order from south to north:

1) Corn River- Black Water Creek, home of the manatees in the southern Rama area, is located here. There are several plots of creation chocolate, corn, cane, cassava and bananas here. The kulmong (dwarf spirits) also live here.
2) Snook Creek. This is the place where the Rama met up with the waksuk (jaguar-like beasts that move about in herds eating everything in their path) and also where culture was preserved for future generations. The turmali (good spirits or prophets) battled with the waksuk in this area. Also the Rama came here to make salt, and to pick ahi (surf clams) and kill wari (collared peccary).

3) Punta Gorda River, homeland of the Rama, where Adam performed many wonderful feats as discussed above.

4) Punta Gorda Bar. Adam's ship is here.

5) Cane Creek. A man walking the beach was trapped by the waksuk on one of the islands across from Cane Creek Bar.

6) Monkey Point. Adam kept his cannons here.

7) Wirin Cay. Adam's ship is here.

8) Rama Cay Area. Creation crops are found in Kukra River, jaguars once inhabited the mainland and drove the Rama to Rama Cay. Mission Cay has wari in a hole underground and they are invisible to the Rama. Tarpon Lagoon, the home of the manatees, is southwest of Rama Cay. An ulak, sirkin (whirlpool spirit), and wari gameowners protect the game here. Finally, there used to be a sirkin in the Kukra River. Also, many stone (metate) animals live in the bush near Rama Cay and the surrounding rivers.

These events may be plotted along with the first set of events to yield a composite set of points to produce a map of the important cosmological events in the Rama lifespaces and hence an analysis of Rama cosmography. This is the purpose of the section which follows.

THE COSMOGRAPHY OF THE RAMA

I begin my analysis of Rama cosmography by spatially plotting all of the points relating to Adam's subsistence and warrior activities in Punta Gorda, and various locations of objects and events associated with the period of creation times by the Rama. The resultant schematic map is presented in Figure 1. The important parameters of this map are the serial order in which the events occurred, the axes of orientation as they reflect topographic features of the Rama life space and the cardinal directions, and finally the degree of acculturation and culture contact represented by each axis. We note that three axes result from this plotting of points, that two of the axes are in an east-west
NORTH

RAMA CAY

1. Peccary at Mission Cay
2. Jaguars on mainland
3. Ulak and sirkIn guard manatees at Tarpon Lagoon
4. Manatees found in Tarpon Lagoon
5. Creation Crops at Riverhead

WIRIN CAY

Adam's ship is here (also at Punta Gorda Bar)

MONKEY POINT

Adam's cannons are here

CANE CREEK

WEST

Waksuk here

PUNTA GORDA RIVER

EAST

9. Ulak Tives tracks honey and catches where kills gets drinks here. in bush rock is Devil fish Adam deer water coffee
Also here played guitar water-dog
Creation Crops are here

Adam's ship is at Punta Gorda Bar

SNOOK CREEK

Waksuk live near here. Plenty of fish, peccary, game animals.
Ahi. Rama culture preserved for Rama today. Salt making by boiling saltwater done here.

CORN RIVER

Black water creek home of the Manatees. Creation Crops here.

SOUTH

Fig. 1. Cosmography of the Rama.
direction and that the remaining axis is in a north-south direction and that this latter axis represents the highest degree of acculturation and culture-contact.

Taking the serial order of the events, moving upstream from the mouth of the Punta Gorda River, we are able to develop some very interesting conclusions. Since the Punta Gorda River lies on an east-west axis, it is clear that the daily activities of Adam follow the pattern of the sun. The data suggest that this association is intentional and a part of the cosmographic structure of the myth. Hence, morning begins with coffee and fresh water followed by hunting, a male-dominated activity, in which Adam becomes engaged. Then Adam catches a fish, fishing being second in the subsistence hierarchy from a male point of view. Next, he encounters the walsah, whom he defeats culturally with the music of his guitar. Then Adam finds honey in the rock, a gathering subsistence activity which is seasonal (for the Rama the big dry season is the honey season). However, honey is the food of Adam and therefore essential to his survival. At the riverhead Adam's tracks in the bush are found, and it is in this area that agricultural plants such as bananas and chocolate are found. Therefore, the serial ordering of Adam's subsistence activities from the east to west on this main axis of orientation replicates the cultural value-system associated with these subsistence activities in modern Rama society. However, it should be noted that in contemporary Rama culture it is the upriver activities of agriculture, gathering and fishing which sustain the Rama in a time of game scarcity. Therefore, if we invert the ordering of subsistence activities on the Punta Gorda axis of orientation and examine the distribution of these activities from west to east, their actual significance in contemporary Rama culture is revealed, with the activity of agriculture dominating gathering, fishing and hunting.

It is at this point that the significance of the discrepancy between the ordering of events in myth and their ordering by informants becomes clear. The myth mediates the ideal order of the informant's axis, east to west and the real order of the axis, west to east. By beginning in the middle of the river, the myth asserts that in fact the Rama are between land and water and that this fundamental opposition within their subsistence system can never be resolved. Hence, the Rama can never reconcile the ideal with the real and recognize this in the myth.

Changing directions to the north-south axis of orientation, we can plot the locations of mythological events as they reflect the migration and history of the Rama. This adds a new dimension to the analysis. The association of agriculture and manatees with Corn River in the extreme south of Ramaland indicates the dual nature of the Rama subsistence economy, both in the pre-contact and post-contact periods. The Rama are between land and water, or on another level, hunting and agriculture. At Snook Creek, the upriver activity of gathering comes
downriver, and a confrontation between the wild animals (waksuk) and tame animals (man and the turmali) ensues. The turmali triumph and Rama culture survives. At Punta Gorda Bar, we encounter our first direct reference to a culture-contact motif, Adam's ship. Adam's ship represents the coming of the Europeans, particularly the British, and mobility in the ocean environment. Further upriver, Adam's guitar is found, which could represent the movement of the Spaniards into this area from the western part of the country as well as early Rama contacts with the Spanish missionaries and the Spanish government.8 In addition, at Monkey Point we encounter Adam's cannons, which could represent the turbulent period of warfare between the Spanish and the English, in which the Rama sided with the Miskito and English, as well as the period in which the Rama defended themselves against the Miskito to the north, who raided them frequently. (See Roberts 1965:100, Floyd 1967:123 and Helms 1971:19-20.) Adam's ship is located at Wirin Cay. According to the distribution motifs on the north-south axis of orientation, as revealed by cosmographical analysis, the culture contact motifs cluster between Punta Gorda and Wirin Cay. Therefore, it is possible that the first extensive contact between the Rama and the Western world occurred in a zone between the Punta Gorda River and Wirin Cay.9 There is considerable historical evidence to support these ideas, but space prevents me from developing this argument further. The final point on this axis is Rama Cay, where both the early and recent culture history of the Rama are encapsulated in an additional multi-dimensional axis of orientation.

At Rama Cay, we encounter a series of subsistence activities and supernatural events which may be ranked in importance according to their respective distances from Rama Cay. Hunting land animals (peccaries on Mission Cay) comes first, while agriculture and manatees are further removed from Rama Cay by the interspersion of ants, swamps, the ulak and the sirklin (two malevolent spirits). Similarly, gathering is well-removed from Rama Cay, in that gathering occurs in peripheral areas of the Rama environment, such as Hone Sound or upriver. Creation crops are again found upriver, as are the sirklin, kulmong dwarfs and sitani (mermaid-like river spirits—both male and female—who try to steal humans for lovers). It is evident that in spite of all the changes in their culture and their subsistence system at Rama Cay, the Rama cling to the value system associated with their early history. Cosmography elucidates this value-system, and myth and cosmology reaffirm it.

CONCLUSION

In this analysis of the Rama environment and subsistence system from a cosmographical perspective, I have tried to achieve new insights into their value system. From the perspective of the Rama, cosmographical analysis indicates that the east-west axis is associated with subsistence while the north-south axis is associated with culture contact. Certainly,
this pattern reflects itself in the history of the Rama as they have migrated northward and inland to live. However, a complete understanding of the cosmography of the Rama in the Central American environment cannot be gained unless we are willing to undertake the systematic investigation of the cosmographies of all lower Central American peoples. Data on cosmology, topography and place names must be gathered for all lower Central American peoples to insure that we will later be able to carry out such analyses. While much of this is still in the future, it is imperative that today we do the basic research needed for this kind of analysis. It has been my intent in this paper to contribute to our understanding of the cosmography of Lower Central American peoples.

FOOTNOTES

1 Cosmography overlapped geography and astronomy in its formative years. The great cartographer Mercator became the cosmographer to the Duke of Juliers after publishing an excellent map of the world (Brown 1950:158-9). Later, Mercator designed a celestial sphere which he presented to Charles V (Brown 1950:159). Numerous texts on the subject of cosmography (see Brown 1950:157 and Taylor 1968:139ff.) were written in the 16th and 17th centuries. These texts more closely resembled geographical or navigational accounts of this time than the modern cosmographical studies of Lévi-Strauss. Both the crown of Spain and the East India Company recognized the importance of cosmography and separate offices of cosmography were created by them to facilitate the production of maps and navigational skills (Brown 1950:142, 148. See Also Taylor 1968:99). At this time then, the concept of cosmography was more closely aligned with geography and cartography as they related to navigation and it was used very differently from the concept of cosmography that will be used in this paper.

2 Lipkind's (1940) "Caraja Cosmography" uses the term, cosmography, but really is a description of Caraja cosmology.

3 Other scholars who have contributed to the understanding of cosmography include: Bateson (1972:95, 117) Ortiz (1969:19) and Wilson (1946).

4 This paper is based on field work done at Rama Cay, Nicaragua in 1969-70. The research was supported by grants from NIH, PHS, Wenner-Gren Foundation and the Duke University Graduate School. For a more complete account of Rama culture and cosmology, see Loveland (1975).
5. The Rama divide time into two major periods, "creation times" before the time of the great flood when Adam was making the world tame and "these times" when things came to be as they are today.

6. Many observers have commented on the similarity between the Rama culture-hero's name and that of the Biblical character. I do not want to enter this debate in the course of this analysis except to say that it really does not make much difference for the sake of my cosmographical analysis of his activities whether in fact the Rama borrowed or substituted the Biblical name for their own culture-hero's name. The important dimension of Adam in Rama cosmology is that a record of his activities survives in the stories told about him and that we can understand more about Rama culture today by an analysis of these activities.

7. We know from several sources that the British were in this area very early. Long (1774:320) mentions that the British were in the area of the Punta Gorda in the 1700's and should be encouraged to carry on an active trade with the Rama. Roberts (1965:100) confirms this for the beginning of the 19th century. The Rama did not settle Rama Cay until later.

8. The Spaniards were competing for control of the coast with the British (Floyd 1967). Early contacts between the Rama and Spaniards to the west are mentioned in Williams (1969:129-30), Ayon (1882:210) and Floyd (1967:95-6).

9. William Williams (1969) probably first encountered the Rama in this area. Also, the English were here in the 1700's, according to Long, (1774:320) and established in the Punta Gorda area by the early 1800's (Roberts 1965:100).

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BIRTH RITUALS AND SYMBOLISM:
A GUICHE MAYA - BLACK CARIB COMPARISON

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INTRODUCTION

Birth is a life crisis both for mother and newborn child, and as such is associated with various rituals and symbolic actions to mark the transition from one phase of life or social status to another. This paper will analyze and compare some of the rituals and symbols associated with birth among the Quiché Maya and the Black Carib. Certain themes that run through the rituals will be examined. Taking the view that ritual is a symbolic code communicating certain aspects of ideology and social structure (Douglas 1966, Firth 1973, Turner 1967), an exploratory and preliminary attempt will be made to explain certain similarities and differences between the Carib and Mayan rituals in terms of the underlying values and social relationships that they symbolize.

Data on the Quiché-speaking Maya was gathered during fieldwork in Santa Lucia Utatlán in the southwestern highlands of Guatemala. The Quiché Maya are primarily agriculturalists growing maize as a subsistence crop, supplemented by wheat as a cash crop and migrant wage labor on coastal plantations. Data on the Black Caribs were gathered from fieldwork in Punta Gorda, Belize and from the ethnographic literature on Black Carib groups in Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras (Cuéllar 1949, Taylor 1951, Gonzalez 1963, 1969, Munroe 1964, Sanford 1971). Although many Caribs are fishermen (males) and horticulturalists (mostly females), most Carib males are wage laborers, usually involving migrant labor.

COMPARISON OF BIRTH RITUALS AND SYMBOLS

THE MIDWIFE

The traditional role of midwife is respected among both Mayans and Caribs. The Mayan midwife is usually supernaturally chosen. Her destiny or mandado is revealed through dreams, illness, finding strange objects, and birth signs and omens. The dreams are interpreted by a diviner as signifying her destiny as midwife, and the objects she finds are messages with the same meaning sent by the supernatural. One midwife said she had found a red and white mirror when she was young, in which she saw the face of a white-haired woman. She interpreted the face as that of Santa Ana, the main patroness of childbirth, and the red as the fire of the sweatbath. (The red could also symbolize blood). A woman who does not follow her destiny will suffer supernatural sanctions in the form of illness or death, either for herself or for other members of her family. These supernatural signs validate the midwife's status as a ritual specialist. She can interpret various signs and omens and mediate
between her client and the saints and spirits for a safe delivery. To some degree, she is also free of responsibility for infant and maternal deaths, since she is an agent of God. The supernatural validation also may increase her own confidence and consequently her patients' thus helping to allay anxieties about birth.  

Although most births among the Black Caribs now take place in the hospital or health centers, traditional midwives still play an important role in prenatal and postnatal care, and they continue to perform deliveries in the more remote areas. Little information exists concerning their recruitment. One midwife in Punta Gorca, who seems to be typical, said that her mother had been a midwife and she and her sister had learned by assisting her mother, but that they also had a special aptitude for it. Midwives also have a saint on whom to call for help in cases of difficult labor. Sanford (n.d.) reports that one of the midwives in Stan Creek claimed to have learned from her granny in a dream, which fits closely with the general importance of the family dead among the Caribs. Thus recruitment of Carib midwives seems to entail a combination of supernatural selection, apprenticeship, and inheritance.  

Prenatal Care  

Among the Mayans, prenatal activity begins when the mother-in-law or husband requests the midwife to visit the patient, usually between the fifth and seventh month. The petitioner makes the request in a formal ritualized language, presenting a gift of food for the midwife and 10¢ or 25¢ for candles and incense for Santa Ana, the patronness of childbirth, and other saints and spirits to favor and bless the client. Thereafter, the midwife visits her client every twenty or thirty days during the early months and every week during the last month. Before each visit, the midwife prays and burns incense in front of the sweatbath. She asks for help from God, the spirits of orphans, widows, doctors, and midwives, and thanks El Mundo, the spirit of the Earth, Aire, the spirit of the air, and Santa Ana, San Agustín, and Santa Christina, all of whom aid her in making the patient's delivery successful and without complications.  

The most important aspects of prenatal care are the examination of the position of the fetus and massages of the abdominal area, for which the midwife uses warmed oil. If she feels that the baby is not in a correct position, she attempts to manipulate it by external version. She also estimates when the baby is due. Some midwives say that they can also tell whether the baby will be a boy or a girl, depending on its position to the right side or left side, the height of the abdomen, and marks on the mother's face.
The Carib midwife also gives prenatal massages, even for women who will go to the hospital to give birth, using oil for the massage and examining the position of the fetus just as her Maya counterpart does. If the woman feels discomfort and the baby is low, the midwife shoves under the pelvis to push the baby up to its "normal" place. This is said to prevent miscarriage and to make for an easier delivery.

Both Maya and Carib believe that special care should be taken during pregnancy, since the woman and the fetus are in a physically and spiritually weak state and thus more susceptible to illness and evil forces. A variety of behavioral and dietary restrictions are imposed to guard against spiritual and physical dangers.

The Mayan woman is supposed to exercise and work to avoid suffering during birth and so that the baby will not be too large. However, she must take care while washing clothes, and she should not lift heavy objects. She should be careful when washing her hair that she does not get "cold". She should not pass over a lasso or sew with a long thread, or the baby will be born with the cord over its neck. She should avoid strong emotional states, such as fright or anger, as these may result in illness, both for herself and for the baby. Most food taboos for the pregnant Mayan woman are associated with the "hot-cold" dichotomy. The Mayans characterize all foods, plants, herbs, medicines, bodily states and features as "hot" and "cold". These characterizations do not always correlate closely with actual temperature, but rather are regarded as inherent qualities (Cosminsky 1975). Since a pregnant woman is considered very "hot", she should avoid foods that are very "hot" and more importantly, foods that have the inherent quality of very "cold". Her excess warmth makes her vulnerable to attacks of cold, and too great a contrast, as well as too much of one quality, is considered dangerous. These very cold foods include beans, pork, avocados, certain greens, and frequently eggs. She should eat and drink items considered as neutral or "hot" (but not too hot). Other food taboos have a metaphorical basis, such as restrictions against eating "twinned" fruits, like the chayote, to avoid having twins, or rabbit meat, to avoid having multiple births. The husband is not subject to any food or activity restrictions.

Among the Caribs, it is reported that both males and females have to refrain from killing or eating the flesh of certain animals, such as monkey or snake (Taylor 1951:89, Sanford n.d.). Women should not eat eggs, beans, plantains, white cheese, cassava, dishes containing coconut, and "big" fish which include jack, tarpon, snapper, and shark (Gonzalez 1963:426). These are said to inhibit the proper development of the fetus, and plantain in particular will bind the baby, resulting in a difficult birth. I was also told of taboos against eating armadillo and conch, because they retreat in the shell and might cause the child to do the same in the womb, causing a difficult birth. Barracuda and iguana are restricted, as they will affect the mother's milk.
Both cultures dictate that pregnancy cravings should be satisfied. The Maya report cravings for fruit, chicken, bananas, earth, salt, and special clay tablets called "Pan del Señor". The Caribs report cravings for fruit and a drink made of rice and coconut milk. Among both Mayans and Caribs, if the craving is not satisfied, the child might be born with a deformity or else be miscarried. Among the Carib, if the woman touches any part of her face or body when she has an unsatisfied craving, the child will bear the mark of the desired object. One child was said to have a watermelon mark on the side of her face, which becomes swollen and juicy when the moon is full. (Foster [1960:114] reports a similar belief in Spain and this belief thus may reflect Spanish influence).

Both Maya and Carib consider it important for pregnant women to avoid eclipses. Exposure to an eclipse causes cleft palates, hare lips, and other infant deformities. It is believed that an eclipse results when the sun or moon is "eaten", and that a part of the fetus will similarly be eaten. As a preventive, pregnant Mayan women wear a piece of metal or nails in the form of a cross, or a red cloth around the stomach. Taylor (1951:135) says that the Carib woman takes off her clothes, spreads sheets on the ground out of doors, lies on these facing down, "showing her buttocks to the moon", so that whatever is eating the moon may not "humbug" their unborn children by deforming them.

Although the Mayans believe that a pregnant woman is weak and vulnerable, she is also a source of danger to others. Because of her heated state she can give the "evil eye" to infants and young animals. Although some anthropologists have interpreted this as an indication that pregnant women are expected to be envious of healthy babies, in most cases the evil eye is unintentional. A similar belief is reported for the Caribs (Taylor 1951:70). Pregnant women who are "heated" are not permitted to visit the new mother or to touch a newborn child, for this would cause the baby to get convulsions or colic.

Children are highly valued, and a woman gains status and esteem through having children. Those who do not are pitied. Among the Maya, one cause of sterility is a "cold" womb, which consequently does not receive the semen. The treatment is to warm the matrix or womb in the sweatbath. A fire is placed underneath the woman and fanned toward her. Sometimes "hot" herbal teas are also given. The Caribs, on the other hand, attribute barrenness to previous abortions (Sanford n.d.).
MANAGEMENT OF LABOR

When labor begins for a Mayan woman, the midwife is summoned. One midwife said she knows when she is about to be called by a movement like air that she feels in her hand or other part of her body. Another midwife said that if she dreams that a man arrives and leaves money in her hand, a boy is going to be born; if she dreams that she finds a scarf or napkin, a girl will be born. If the delivery is normal, there is little associated ritual. The midwife says a prayer when she arrives, palpates the woman's abdomen, examines the position of the baby, and looks for the signs of imminent birth such as the breaking of the sac, dilation, the frequency of labor pains, and the heat and sweating of the woman. The squatting or kneeling position is usually employed in delivery. If the husband is present, he is expected to help by holding the woman, a duty that is intended to teach him what women have to suffer through. The mother or mother-in-law may also be present.

Most Carib women, at least in Punta Gorda, now deliver in the hospital. Previously birth occurred at home, and the woman used to kneel and hold on to a rope. However, no other information was available on traditional delivery practices.

For difficult labor or a retained placenta, the Mayan midwife administers various "hot" herbs (Cosminsky 1974). According to Saquic (1973:103) difficult births are attributed to the misbehavior of the wife, who has to confess. She is given a candle and asks the pardon of God. If this does not help, she is given a drink of oil or the yolk of one or two eggs. If she still has trouble, the midwife tells the husband to take off a sandal or shoe and hit the woman three times with it on her back saying that she is forgiven for whatever bad she has done.

Among the Carib on the other hand, a delayed delivery is attributed to black magic against the expectant woman, in which someone has "tied the months on her" (Taylor 1951:134). The magician is said to tie a knot in black thread for each month of pregnancy, or to stick seven black headed pins in a menstrual cloth or in drawers worn by the pregnant woman at the time of her last menstruation, so as to form a cross in their fork, and then bury the garment under the hearth. Unless the charm is discovered and the pins removed, she will not be able to give birth.

As a ritual specialist, the Mayan midwife has special knowledge and power for interpreting birth signs and omens. The number of lumps or markings on the umbilical cord indicate the number and sex of the children the mother will bear. Round lumps mean girls and long ones males. The distance between the markings indicates the
birth interval. A smooth or short cord means no more children. If the baby is born in a sac or with a caul, the child may become a transforming witch or characotel, unless it is removed properly from the front. Pieces of the sac on the baby indicate certain types of predestined birth, including that of a midwife (Cf. Paul, 1975, for similar data concerning the midwife in San Pedro la Laguna.)

Comparable data for the Caribs does not exist. However, a difficult or unusual birth is one of the signs of a future shaman or buiai. One shaman said that his mother was pregnant with him for 14 months, and this was a sign that he would have power. Taylor reports (1951:102) that one buiai was said to have cried out in his mother's womb eight months before his birth, indicating his supernatural strength.

POSTNATAL CARE

The Mayan midwife visits her client every few days during the postnatal confinement period of twenty days. The twenty-day period is equal to one round of the ancient Mayan ritual calendar, a recurrence of the day the child was born. Although the mother can work after twenty days, she should not have sexual relations for forty days after the birth. The cuarentena probably derives from Spanish influence (Foster 1960:5)

During her postnatal visits, the midwife examines the mother, massages her, adjusts the abdominal binder and examines the child. The massaging is said to make the womb return to its proper size, to relieve postpartum pains, and to increase the flow of milk. The abdominal binder is to keep the womb in place and close the bones. Heat is applied, either in the form of sweatbaths or bajos (vapor baths). The woman is in a "cold" state after birth, and the heat helps restore her bodily balance. In the traditional method, the woman takes a sweatbath every three or four days, during which she is massaged. The Maya however are abandoning sweat baths in favor of the Ladino (non-Indian) vapor baths, in which the woman sits over a basin or bucket of heated water containing several herbs--a change due at least in part to pressure from Western medical personnel. The woman may also be given teas for postpartum pains made from "hot" herbs and honey.

Various dietary restrictions are followed, the most common one being the avoidance of "cold" foods, similar to the restrictions during pregnancy, but regarded as more important. "Cold" foods are thought to make the mother's milk cold and consequently make the baby ill from nursing. Relatives, godparents, and neighbors visit the woman during this transitional period, bringing food, such as chicken soup, atole, bananas, etc., which are considered good for giving strength and good for lactation.
At the end of the twenty-day period, a ritual celebration and feast are held, called elesan xe ch'at, or "taking out from under the bed" (Saquic 1973:104). The woman's female relatives, both consanguineal and affinal, assist in the preparation and cooking of the ritual meal, which consists of tamalitas, soup, meat, and rum. When the midwife arrives she is served some bread and coffee; later she is given rum and food. The midwife gives the mother her last sweatbath and massage on this occasion.

Traditionally, all the rubbish from whatever the woman ate during the twenty days, such as corn husks and chicken bones, was thrown under the bed. One informant said they no longer did this because it is unhealthy and people know better today. They still observe the ritual cleaning and sweeping, however. The midwife shakes out all the bed coverings and the bed boards, and cleans out everything from inside and under the bed. Meanwhile, she crosses herself, prays, and repeats the name of the baby. The rubbish is burned and buried. The midwife also cleans out the sweatbath, removing the ashes and rubbish that have collected during the postnatal period. The husband buries this dirt together with that from under the bed in a nearby field. The midwife then lights some candles, burns incense, and sprinkles white roses in the sweatbath where the fire is lighted. She offers these in prayer to Santa Ana saying:

Now they have completed the twenty days, pardon me. I do not have anything to give you, only this bit of candle, this bit of incense. Make use of it, then pardon me. Perhaps I had it in dirt, in filth, pardon me; it is my blame. You cleansed us. You polished us during the twenty days. You took away all dirtiness. Nothing happened to us. We are all well. The child is with good health and the mother is with good health. Thank you very much.

She also says two "Hail Marys" and two "Our Fathers", crosses herself, and kisses the ground to El Mundo, the earth, "who gives us food and life". One midwife who has converted to Protestantism does not make the offerings, but she does clean out the ashes. The ritual cleaning of the bed and the sweatbath may be a symbolic acting out of the cleaning referred to in the prayer. The ritual marks the status transition from an "unclean" state to a condition of "cleanliness". As the sweatbath and its patroness, Santa Ana, have "cleansed" the woman, so does the midwife clean the sweatbath and bed. Blood, bodily wastes, left over wastes from food are separated out as dirt. As Douglas (1966) suggests, what is considered "dirt" symbolizes disorder. Elimination of it is an attempt to organize the environment. All this "dirt" is buried together in the fields, into the formlessness of garbage and the earth, thus restoring order. Similarly, the ceremony marks the woman's and child's integration into the social order. Saquic (1973:104) says the ritual symbolizes a new life.
Drinks of rum are passed around, first to the men, then to the midwife, and lastly to the women. The meal is served, the men eating first, either in the main room or on tables set up in the patio, and the women in the kitchen. After the meal, the women send baskets containing food to various relatives, neighbors and godparents, primarily people who had visited the woman during the twenty-day confinement period and with whom she has reciprocal obligations. The ceremony marks the end of the midwife's duties and obligations to the mother and the end of the mother's confinement. The joint participation of relatives from both sides of the family emphasizes the importance of the birth in continuing the family lines and bonds, as well as reinforcing family solidarity. This is also symbolized in the exchange of food mentioned above. At the end of this rite of passage, the woman is reintegrated into her family role and both mother and infant are given social support and recognition of their new status.

Despite the seeming importance of this ritual, its frequency is declining. Several informants mentioned that they have not given it or only gave it for some of their children. One informant said that the only reason for this ritual was to prevent a gossipy midwife from making remarks to others about them. Although this personality trait was criticized, it served as an effective mechanism of social control. Another informant said she would have the midwife clean out the sweatbath and give her some food, but they felt they could not afford the ritual meal with the relatives. Since the price of food has increased rapidly, such economic considerations will probably become increasingly important. However, the decline also marks a decreasing adherence to and sharing of certain symbols and beliefs associated with the ritual.

In contrast to the twenty-day confinement period of the Mayans, the Carib woman is secluded for nine days. She is given a mixture of cooked camomile, cloves, pericon, allspice and honey for afterbirth pains and an infusion of rice water with sour orange leaves to stimulate milk production (Gonzalez 1963:427). One informant said she was given a medicine of camomile, anise, cloves, rosemary, garlic, and sorasi, which is supposed to bring out any blood clots that might still be inside. She should not eat certain foods during the lactation period. These include bush hog, iguana, conch, manatee, mountain cow, snook, grunt, and shark. These are said to give the mother "gripping" in her stomach and also affect the milk. Informants emphasized that dietary restrictions during lactation are more important than those observed during pregnancy. The restrictive period varies and the midwife said that after the woman has her first postnatal menstruation, she can eat anything. She is also then given a purgative. According to Taylor, she must abstain for forty days from game, turtle, pork, crab, pepper, aciduous fruits, and water or beverages that have not been warmed (1951:90). Gonzalez says that those items which must be avoided only in the early months are said to inflate the stomach.
of the nursing child, giving him gas and diarrhea. Big fish are avoided because they make the milk rancid, and fruits will make the child vomit and have diarrhea (1963:427).

The woman is sponge-bathed every day, but on the 3rd day special herbs are heated (sour orange, wild plum, and Santa Maria leaves or cotton leaves) and put in a bucket over which the woman sits. This is referred to as "burn bush". The midwife also takes the heated leaves and puts them near the vagina to warm it, and on the woman's back and abdomen. On the ninth day another "burn" bath is given. After the bath a special massage and tying treatment is given. One informant said the midwife takes a piece of cloth big enough to go around the body, makes a tie, and pulls hard on both ends, tightening it as much as the woman can stand. She then loosens it, makes another tie and so on until the whole body has been covered, with the purpose of pushing the womb back into place and putting the body into its normal shape. The baby is also bathed and given a little olive oil or almond oil. The ninth day bath marks the end of the seclusion period.

During this time, a menstruating woman should not see the newborn baby or its navel might bleed. A weak, "heated", sick, deformed, or pregnant woman should also not be permitted to visit the new mother or to touch the child, or the baby will get convulsions or colic. At the end of the nine days, the mother can resume work, but she must wait fifteen days before she can wash a man's pants. At the end of the forty days, the mother goes to bathe in the sea, which she has not been allowed to do since the beginning of pregnancy for fear of causing a storm (Taylor 1951:9). The source of the storm may be the spirits of the sea, who reside in the same fish that she is not allowed to eat. Like the Mayans, she and her husband must refrain from sexual intercourse for forty days after the birth. (Again, this may be due to Spanish influence.)

The birth rituals of the Black Caribs that have received the most attention in the literature, however, are the postnatal restrictions on the activities of the male, which have been considered a form of couvade. The ethnographic reports stress restrictions of the male more than those of the female. Activities that require considerable physical exertion or the use of weapons or sharp instruments must be avoided. Any strenuous activity by the father, in work or sex, undertaken before the umbilical cord has dropped off would cause the child's navel to bleed, or the child to strain. The duration of the taboos varies, the most common being between two weeks to one month (Munroe 1964). Prohibited activities include lifting heavy weights, chopping with an ax or a machete, fishing, hunting, boat-building, house-building, clearing and burning fields, dancing, marital and extra-marital intercourse (Munroe 1964). Coelho (1949:52) views the couvade in the context of the Carib world view which holds that the infant
depends on its father's spirit double until it acquires one of its own from the paternal, ancestral dead, a transfer that occurs after the healing of the navel. The child receives its body and blood from the mother and its soul or spirit-double from the father (Gonzalez 1969:48). A strong bond, therefore, exists between father and child (as well as between mother and child) and is expressed by the couvade. If the navel does bleed, the remedy is to wrap the infant in its father's sweat-soaked shirt. Such a shirt might also be used to bind the navel to prevent its bleeding. Gonzalez says the couvade is no longer as important today, at least in Livingston, Guatemala, but some informants still carry out some of its obligations, especially the taboo on extramarital intercourse.

Munroe has taken a different approach and suggests that societies characterized by mother-child households and matrilocal residence practice the couvade. These practices "feminize" young males, who in turn express their underlying "cross-sex identity in imitation of the mother role through the practice of couvade (1964)." The Maya lack the couvade or any functional equivalent, either prenatal or postnatal, except for the forty-day restriction on intercourse. Males occasionally experience certain symptoms of pregnancy such as nausea or more commonly a toothache. These should be considered manifestations of psychosomatic couvade rather than the social couvade (Newman 1966), which the Maya do not practice. (For debate concerning definitions of couvade and its medical, ritual, and social features, see Kupferer 1965, Newman 1966, Rivière 1974, Sturtevant 1965.) Most Maya practice patrilocal or neolocal residence, with only a few cases of matrilocal residence, and this pattern would seem to support Munroe's general hypothesis linking the couvade and matrilocality. However, I suggest that couvade, as well as other birth rituals can be viewed more fruitfully as symbolic statements expressing key aspects of the relationships between the sexes. This interpretation of couvade and problems inherent in Munroe's analysis will be discussed below.

**BIRTH RITUAL AND "CROSS-SEX IDENTITY"**

A careful examination of Munroe's analysis of Black Carib birth ritual raises several questions about his interpretation of this material. Munroe (1964) focuses specifically on intra-societal variation of the Black Caribs in Punta Gorda, Belize and hypothesizes that those who observe the more intensive couvade are psychologically more feminine on masculinity-femininity measures and would have experienced early exposure to more "feminizing" conditions than males who observe a less intensive couvade. His study shows a significant statistical correlation between strong couvade and male absence. He also concludes that strong couvade males experience greater pregnancy symptomatology
(vomiting, sleepiness, toothache, headache, dizziness, fever, and food cravings) than weak couvade males, although he does not stress this point. Although strong couvade males tended to respond more like females on the masculinity-femininity measures, on several ratings of personal characteristics they presented a drastically different, hyper-masculine image. Munroe interprets this as a defensive reaction to an underlying cross-sex identity (1964: 130). Although Munroe's provocative study may account at least in part for the observance of the couvade within Black Carib society, it presents several difficulties. Though several measures he uses support his hypothesis, his rationalizations of those that do not, on the other hand, are not very convincing. Since unconscious defense mechanisms cannot be falsified, they can always be called upon to explain cases that do not fit the dominant hypothesis (e.g., a hyper-masculine image presented by men who supposedly have a cross-sex or female identity). Furthermore, in the classic examples of couvade, the imitation of pregnancy and delivery are stressed, as when the father takes to bed, whereas the Caribs emphasize postnatal restrictions. If couvade is an imitation of the mother role or an expression of "cross-sex identity" as Munroe calls it, then why do the Caribs slight the other aspects of the couvade? Coelho's (1949) and Taylor's (1951) interpretations, which stress the couvade as symbolizing the spiritual relationship between the father and child seem to have more explanatory value. Coelho suggests that the couvade should also be looked at as a rite of passage, in that it provides a buffer absorbing the emotional disturbances in a transitional situation (1949).

Another problem posed by Munroe's explanation is the relationship between couvade and male absenteeism. Although matrilocality households seem to have been a traditional part of Carib social structure, male absenteeism has increased in recent years as a result of economic and employment practices that promote migrant and wage labor. Couvade practices, however, are part of the traditional South American Indian heritage of the Caribs (Taylor 1950). One might expect that since male absenteeism is increasing or has recently increased, mother-child identification should be closer and consequently couvade practices should be stronger, but in fact this does not seem to be the case. Caribs seem to be practicing the couvade less than they used to, at least in some communities (Gonzalez 1969:49), and male absenteeism may itself have contributed to this decrease. Fathers absent during the taboo period working in societies that do not practice the couvade escape much of the traditional social and psychological pressure to observe the taboos. Additional diachronic data are needed in order to understand the relationships among the couvade, male absenteeism, matrilocality, matrifocality, and migrant labor that may be statistically and functionally significant, and to further test Munroe's hypothesis,
BIRTH RITUAL AND SEXUAL DIFFERENTIATION

The institution of couvade illustrates a theme of sexual differentiation and relationship between the sexes that presents a sharp contrast between Mayan and Carib cultures.

The Caribs seem to place little emphasis on differences between the sexes during the birth process—other than the obvious female monopoly of bearing children. This difference is itself deemphasized by the beliefs about conception, which dramatize the importance of the male’s spiritual contribution to the newborn through the practice of couvade. The beliefs and practices associated with the couvade seem to present the two sexes and their generative forces as a unity, rather than stressing their differentiation. I suggest this is symbolic of the actual social relations between the sexes. Sexual division of labor and roles are seen as complementary; status and functions are delimited, as they are among the Maya, but harmonious cooperation between the sexes is stressed. As Coelho reports, neither sex dominates the other (1949:52). Although this relatively egalitarian and cooperative relationship may be more an ideal than a reality among the Caribs, and although increasing dependence on the cash economy and wage labor has probably tilted the balance between the sexes, the Carib case still contrasts sharply with the Maya, at least the Maya of Santa Lucia, where male dominance and female subordination are quite pronounced.

In contrast to the Caribs, the Mayans emphasize sexual differentiation throughout the birth process. The midwife has different visions if the baby will be a boy or a girl, and the fetal positions are believed to be different, as are the positions of the face at birth and the attachment of the placenta. Sex differences of future children are revealed in the signs of the umbilical cord. The placenta is disposed of differently—a boy’s is buried in the fields, a girl’s under the hearth. The mother’s face will be marked during pregnancy if the baby is male, but not if it is female. At the twenty day ceremony, food preparation, other tasks, and eating and drinking are all sharply differentiated by sex. Similarly, the social relationships between the sexes among the Mayans are sharply dichotomized. There is a fairly strict division of labor, as well as separation of the sexes in most ritual affairs. All this is seen as complementary, not competitive, but the differentiation is nonetheless sharply defined. It is possible that Spanish influence and ladinoization have contributed to the subordinate status of women in Santa Lucia, and that among the more traditional Mayan Indians, relationships may have been more egalitarian or more autonomous. Nevertheless, today, sexual differentiation, and the subordination of women are characteristic of relationships between the sexes.
Although this analysis is exploratory and somewhat speculative, and more data are necessary to establish its conclusions definitively, I propose that couvade practices (as well as other aspects of the birth process) be viewed as symbolizing the social unity and more egalitarian status of the sexes among the Caribs, expressed through the biological phenomenon of birth, rather than as an expression of cross-sex identity (Munroe 1964).

Another theme that pervades the process of birth, especially among the Maya, is the importance of heat. Heat has semantic associations with blood and fertility, both symbolic of women. Blood is usually considered "hot", although there are varying degrees of hotness. A pregnant woman is considered as being in an unusually hot condition. Excess heat may also be dangerous, and, as mentioned above, pregnant (and menstruating) women can harm infants with the evil eye.

After delivery, the woman is in a cold state, both from the bleeding and the expulsion of the baby. Therefore, she needs heat, both with respect to qualitative and physical temperature. She is given "hot" foods and herbal teas. Most of the dietary restrictions concern foods classified as cold. Hot foods and heat from the sweatbath stimulate the milk flow, and are nourishing for both the mother and child. If her milk is cold, the baby will become sick. During massages, the midwife's hands and the oil she uses are warmed. Currier (1966) in his study of Mexican medicine suggests that the association of heat or warmth with fertility and pregnancy is due to the unconscious association between warmth and intimacy epitomized in the mother-fetus relationship. Warmth is symbolic of nurturance and is expressed in heat increasing the flow of milk. Cold is symbolic of withdrawal and rejection; cold foods decrease the flow of milk and make it cold, which causes the child to reject it or to become ill. Sterility is believed to be caused by a cold womb, rejecting the male semen. Both the sweatbath and hot herbs are used to treat sterility and to make the woman fertile.

Heat, whether in the sweatbath or herbal bath, is cleansing and purifying, both physically and spiritually. This is elaborated in the twenty-day postpartum ritual described above, where the woman, the bed, the baby, and the sweatbath are cleansed. The Carib nine day ritual bath or "burn bush" is similarly viewed as curative, cleansing, and purifying, and marks the end of the transition period (Coelho 1949).

Among the Caribs, the couvade practices can be seen as expressing a symbolic association of heat and blood with maleness. If the father overexerts or sweats (a sign of excess heat), he will cause the child's navel to bleed. To prevent or treat this, a sweat-soaked shirt of the father is put on the child's navel. Taylor (1951) finds a symbolic equation of sweat and blood represented in this practice, which is
related to the belief in the mystical union of the Carib father with his child. Although the symbolism of heat, blood, and fertility has many common elements between the Mayans and Caribs, the Mayans do not share the above practice and its associated symbolism. Another difference is that the hot-cold principle is more pronounced among the Mayans and seems to have been of little influence among the Caribs. The greater Spanish influence among the Mayans may account for part of this difference, since the humoral theory with its emphasis on achieving a balance between opposites was brought to the New World from Spain.

CONCLUSION

Several ritual and symbolic aspects of the birth process are becoming attenuated as a result of increasing modernization, Westernization, and culture change in general, especially among the Maya. The concept of divine mandate of the midwife is fading, and the official license and training is being offered as an alternative, primarily among the younger women. But without supernatural validation she does not have the power or "call" and cannot perform certain rituals and interpret certain omens, nor mediate between her client and the supernatural. Fewer people hold the twenty-day postpartum ceremony, and among the Caribs, fewer men seem to practice the couvade. The decreasing frequency of these rituals may also reflect a decrease in the extent to which certain beliefs and the meaning of certain symbols are shared.

The midwife and her associated rituals play a role in social control and maintaining the traditional system. Not only is she a repository of traditional beliefs, some of which she imparts to the pregnant woman as dietary and behavioral restrictions, but she is backed by supernatural sanctions. If a particular ritual is not held or Santa Ana not thanked properly, some misfortune may occur to either the child or the mother.

The midwife is also an agent of social control through gossip and other informal sanctions. The informant who said she had held the twenty-day ceremony because the "midwife talks" was not worried about supernatural sanctions but about social pressures, which are especially telling because the midwife exerts influence through her higher social status. During the midwife's visits she may mention difficult cases she has handled and violations of taboos or restrictions that have caused difficult births. Her influence works towards maintaining the traditional role of the female and mother, as well as preserving various customs. In this respect, the midwife may actually increase the anxiety of childbirth. On the other hand, much of her behavior seems to allay some of the mother's fears. It is further suggested that some of the rituals and symbols associated with birth symbolically communicate certain values and attitudes concerning the relationships between the sexes--the Mayans stressing sexual differentiation and the Black Caribs emphasizing a unity in the generative process.
Among both Maya and Carib, pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period are all regarded as periods of danger and can be anxiety-producing. Through the midwife's visits, as well as those of other relatives and neighbors, massages and physical contact, prayers, rituals and advice, the woman is provided with social and emotional support, all of which can serve to reduce the anxieties associated with the life crisis of birth.

FOOTNOTES

1 Fieldwork in Santa Lucia was conducted in 1968-1969, and during brief visits in 1973 and 1974. Research was supported by the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, National Institute of Mental Health, and the Rutgers Research Council. Fieldwork in Belize was conducted in the Summer 1965, sponsored by Brandeis University, and in January 1975. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the American Anthropological Association meeting in San Francisco, December 1975.

2 Except for data concerning couvade practices, which has been a specific focus of research, information on Black Carib birth practices is sparse and consequently comparison concerning other aspects of the birth process is problematical.

3 Lois and Benjamin Paul have described similar characteristics of the Mayan midwives in San Pedro la Laguna, Guatemala (Paul 1975, Paul and Paul 1975).

4 Paul and Paul (1975) describe a parallel postnatal bath and ritual done on the 8th day among the Zutuhil Maya in San Pedro.

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SYMBOLS AND SOCIETY:
COMMENTS ON RITUAL AND Symbolism
OF INDIGENOUS CENTRAL AMERICA

BY

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A few years ago in a cogent and insightful discussion of political anthropology Abner Cohen stated that "In social anthropology the central theoretical interest in the study of symbols is the analysis of their involvement in the relationships of power..." (1969:218). More specifically, although symbols can take a wide variety of forms, they are "systematized together within the framework of dynamic ideologies, or world-views, in which the symbols of the political order are integrated with those dealing with the perennial problems of human existence: the meaning of life and death, illness and health, misery and happiness, fortune and misfortune, good and evil" (1969:217). Cohen's statements provide a general framework within which to discuss the papers composing this volume. In spite of the seemingly quite diverse topics presented, we will find that common themes emerge concerning efforts of power figures to secure the well-being of the populace (as individuals and collectively) under their charge. These efforts are expressed in numerous symbolic forms, some of which, as Cohen notes, identify elements of the political-social order itself, while others identify various problems of human existence.

We will also find that the symbols and the political-social orders discussed in these papers can be usefully interpreted within several "historical" contexts. In so doing I am using a very broad, tri-partite definition of the term "history" which for my purposes will be taken to refer to any and all of the following: 1) the temporal sequence of culture patterns, processes and events identified by outside observers; 2) a people's view of their own political-economic-religious history, which may or may not correspond with the view held by outside observers in all particulars; 3) mythological and cosmological views concerning the "origins" of or the "reason" for or the basic "nature" of things. This latter "historical" category leads us back into Levi-Straussian concepts concerning purportedly universalistic views on such questions as the proper nature of human society, the contrasts between "nature" and "culture", and the perennial problems of human existence mentioned by Cohen above.

In his "Structural Analysis of the Cuna Arts" Larry Hirschfeld explicitly correlates certain Cuna symbolic forms with at least two of the historical contexts defined above. He has related the genesis of the famous molas, the decorative panels displayed on women's blouses, to political-economic changes of the mid-nineteenth century which occurred when the Cuna moved from the Panamanian mainland to the San Blas Archipelago. He also has reminded us that the chiefly chant known as pap ikar is essentially a recitation for contemporary social purposes of the Cuna's own interpretation of their political-religious history. Hirschfeld's analysis considers female puberty rites, with the attendant kantuque's song, and the category of curing chants, too, and although he does not explicitly make this point the puberty rites and chants can also be viewed in a third "historical" context as symbolic forms which make statements concerning the Cuna view of the "origins" of things and of the "nature" of the world and
of the life existing thereon. Indeed, I believe all of the Cuna arts discussed by Hirschfeld carry such messages, and as counterpoint to Hirschfeld's excellent structural analysis I would like to expand briefly upon this question of symbolic content. In so doing material presented by Chapin, Howe, Linares, and Young and Bort will be drawn upon and shown to contain comparable themes. Loveland's discussion of the Rama and Cosmsinsky's consideration of Black Carib and Mayan materials will show that these themes are by no means limited to Panamanian symbol systems.

I would like to begin by offering an interpretation of the symbolic significance of the mola (with the understanding that the themes presented here are not necessarily all-inclusive of mola symbolism). This discussion, however, requires a short review of the significance of the girls' puberty rites and of the general social and symbolic role of adult women in Cuna society. Girls' puberty rites give social recognition to a pubescent girl's entrance into productive womanhood as defined in her newly evidenced capacity for child-bearing. With this first onset of menses she becomes associated with the fundamental productive forces of the universe, particularly those of the earth and of the underworld which is the realm of Muu, the "earth-mother" of Cuna myth and cosmology whose activities and domain have been described in Mac Chapin's discussion of the birth ceremony, the Muu Ikala. Chapin tells us how, as an underworld deity living on the fourth level of the sub-terrestrial strata, Muu cares for the foetuses of all animals and humans waiting to be born on earth. Within human society the Cuna girl at puberty becomes a symbol of this universal origin of life, and is expected eventually to become an active agent of the life-force via the act of birth. More than this, Chapin tells us that the girl-woman herself now becomes one with this cosmic life-force. The woman's body in its reproductive element becomes a microcosm of the earth itself; the vagina being the road to Muu's domain and the womb in particular and the body in general becoming Muu's house. Thus the Cuna woman is more than a member of "human" society but is part of "nature," too. (I am using these terms without further definition in the broad Levi-Straussian senses of that which is socially responsible or morally controlled and that which is strictly physical and "uncontrolled," respectively). In addition to child-bearing, women in traditional Cuna society were also responsible for cultivation of the soil (earth) so as to produce energy-giving edible plants, life in another form. In this activity woman again served as an agent of the universal life-force charged with bringing life-giving foods from the earth to feed the human beings her body brought forth. (See Ortner 1974 passim for a broadly comparable approach to the symbolic significance of women.)

I suggest that the mola carries the same symbolic message as does woman as child-bearer and woman as cultivator. That is, the mola is (at least in part) a statement of woman's significance as productive agent of life-giving forces and as source of life and life-sustaining materials. It may be no accident, either, that emphasis has been
accorded the production of the mola particularly after women's agricultural activity declined in the late nineteenth century. During women's agricultural years prior to the move to the islands her physical labor in the fields (comparable to her physical labor in childbirth) and the produce she grew was a statement-in-action, a dynamic symbolic form, of this basic woman's role as agent of life-giving nature. When women's agricultural contribution grew less, another form or medium for making this statement was found in the mola.

In my opinion, the symbolic significance or message carried by the mola panels is directly coded in the colors that are used and in the rather unusual sewing technique of reverse appliqué (possibly also in some of the designs or scenes portrayed which, though they appear to be very secular and variable, should be studied from this perspective. Following Nordenskiöld's provocative suggestion (1929:156), I think it might be profitable, too, to compare some of these design motifs with motifs found in other indigenous Panamanian plastic arts of the present and of the past, e.g., with the polychrome wares of Chiriquí and Cocolí provinces.) To the best of my knowledge, based on general impressions and brief examination of a very small sample of perhaps one dozen molas, colors tend to be primarily red, orange-yellow-white, and black, dark blue or other dark colors. (Marshall 1950:22, 230-31 specifies red, yellow and blue as favorite mola colors.) Karsten, Turner, Seeger and especially Reichel-Dolmatoff (among other South American specialists) have noted that to many indigenous peoples of Tropical America these colors carry distinct meaning. The color red, for example, often connotes blood, female (uterine) fecundity, heat, vitality, life, while red and yellow together (also orange) carry the concepts of health and of the "good life". Red combined with black may indicate the necessity of procreation, while yellow-white-orange-gold alone frequently again signify life energy, particularly solar energy (the yellow of the sun) and male fertilization (the color of semen) (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:122-123, 160ff, 179, 187; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972:99, 106-107; Turner 1969; Seeger 1975:217-218; Karsten 1926:40-42, 305-306).

These colors are found separately or combined (frequently with blue, indicative of spiritual communication) in metaphors in Cuna chants and myths (cf. Chapin 1970; Holmer and Wassen 1953) and in a number of plastic art forms used by indigenous Panamanians in centuries past, including goldwork, ancient polychrome ceramics, body paint, wood panel paintings, and chiefs' and kantules' headdresses (cf. Lothrop 1937-42; Wafer 1934:82-83; Oviedo 1959:33; Wassen 1938:33, Pl. I; Alphonse 1956:123; Anderson 1914:320). Nordenskiöld suggests (1929:154) that these colors carry metaphorical meaning for the Cuna, though he does not elaborate much except to say that yellow signifies "good" and gold signifies "righteousness" while red correlates with "evil" (1929:150, 154-5; 1930:675-6). Marshall elaborates somewhat on the significance of red, saying that red drives away evil spirits and for this reason red paint is applied to the face or over doorways (1950:212).
I believe it is no accident that red, yellow, blue and related colors also appear on the molas of today where, I suggest, these colors and color combinations acquire signification of life-forces of nature, procreation, and the bringing forth of new life as well as concepts of good and evil. As for the technique of appliqué, the mola is considered as a series of cloth layers (regular appliqué), sometimes with those on the surface opening onto those underneath (reverse appliqué) suggests to me a rendering in fabric of the Cuna concept of multiple layers or levels of the universe, particularly those of the underworld from which woman's inherent productive capacity derives. Thus, when a woman wears a blouse with multi-colored mola panels on front and back - and Hirschfeld notes that molas are a central element in women's attire - she is making a clear statement of her significance as part of the cosmological scheme of things. More specifically, she is actually putting herself in the center of the underworld - where Muu's domain (which is also the woman's body, as Chapin has shown) is located. Muu is surronded by the several levels of the spirit world leading to the earth's surface just as the Cuna woman, in her molas, is surrounded or covered by the layers of fabric in colors that may signify procreation and the creation of life. (Noteworthy, too, is Turner's brief discussion (1971:105) of the significance of the order of layers of color, in his example, of layers of body paint. Quite possibly the particular order of layering of specific colors - for example, dark blue with red on top with yellow on top of the red, etc. - carries a distinct symbolic message for the Cuna.)

In pursuing this hypothesis, however, we appear to face a serious incongruity in that molas are also produced for tourist sale - seemingly a most vulgar and profane utilization of a symbolic art form for which I have proposed such sacred cosmic meaning (and which Hirschfeld has interpreted in a parallel mode as expressive or symbolic of the social significance of the female core groups of mother and daughters which compose the focus of the Cuna matrilineal extended family, just as Muu in her underworld home is surrounded by her daughters and granddaughters). Yet at least some of this incongruity disappears if we realize that by acquiring cash through mola sales women again are bringing forth or making available a vital life-sustaining product just as necessary for survival in the market-oriented twentieth century as edible plants have been in previous centuries. Indeed, if molas are regarded as a material statement (symbolic form) of female productivity, comparable in this respect to women in childbirth (which produces people) or women as cultivators (which produces food for the people), then it is expectable and permissible that the molas be made productive, i.e., be transformed, like women's labors, into needed goods. In this context molas appear as symbolic forms that very nicely integrate timeless cosmological themes with the realities of the culture change which has drastically reduced women's role in agriculture and introduced instead a cash economy.
A comparable integration between "culture history" and cosmology is found in the *pap ikar* chanted by chiefs as a means of reconciling current problems and disputes with traditional moral codes and values as evidenced in the Cuna version of their past political-religious history and in the lives of their culture-heroes. This (male) chiefly activity, which is devoted essentially to social control, also can be considered as standing in structural and thematic contrast and complementation with the female realms of productivity discussed above in that the materials or beings which women produce through their innate knowledge of and association with the creativity of the earth must be brought under control, specifically into moral order, by men. Thus people, produced in the aggregate by women, must be cajoled and reminded to behave not as an aggregate of individuals like other animals of the natural world but as morally and socially responsible members of an integrated and distinctly "human" society. To this end the chiefs and their speakers admonish and teach, using distinctive modes of esoteric speech.

Anthony Seeger has shown in a recent paper (1975) that such esoteric speech or oratory is considered by at least some indigenous peoples of Tropical America to be a symbolic form associated strictly with adult males and a form which identifies that which is distinctly "human" or "social", i.e., controlled and harmonious, good and moral, in contrast to animal or "natural" qualities which are anti-social, uncontrolled, bad, etc. (One thinks of the frequent rendering of speech scrolls and tongues in pre-Columbian iconography of Nuclear America, for example, as another possible representation of this concept). It is noteworthy in this respect that among the Cuna the chiefly recitations of chants such as *pap ikar* at times are specifically directed toward the women of the village (Sherzer 1974:265). I see the implication here to be that women, through their direct association with nature's creativity, stand at the interface between the controlled, moral human world and the potentially chaotic and non-moral world of nature and natural creativity, and, in this ambiguous position, are particularly in need of constant reminders not to slip into non-moral acts but to behave in properly social or "human" modes (cf. Chapin 1970:43,44). I suspect that girls' puberty rites also carry the theme that women's powerful natural creative powers (which are the subject of the celebration) should be expressed only in appropriate social contexts, i.e., within the domestic frameworks of marital sex and of household food sharing.

The need to control by means of esoteric speech that which is actually or potentially uncontrolled or out of control lies at the heart of the Cuna curing chants, too. As Mac Chapin and Jim Howe detail in their respective papers, curing chants are mechanisms for combating an evil (illness) perpetrated against society's members by underworld forces. It is by means of curing chants that the host of evil spirit forces are confronted with a powerful specialist, the
curer, who arbitrates and mediates between society and the harmful spirits. In a related yet opposite fashion, the pap lkar chant (which Hirschfeld has shown to contrast structurally with curing chants) aims to combat another type of evil (social disruptions) by working through another powerful specialist, the chief, who mediates not only with the spirit world but also between group sociability and individual selfishness. The roles of these mediators repeat the anthropological truism that political chiefs and spiritual or religious specialists frequently share a common position at the interface between the world of the spirits or of "non-human" or "non-social" forces or inclinations on the one hand and the all-too-vulnerable world of human society on the other.

These roles are not unlike the position of women who, it was noted above, stand between the creative world of nature and human society. Indeed, the roles of both shaman (or priests) and chiefs may be seen as complementary to the roles of productive women in that, as I discussed above, the human beings and agricultural produce traditionally brought forth by women must be molded into or maintained as a harmonious social entity by chiefs and religious specialists. In addition, the need for chiefs to direct instructive chants like pap lkar specifically to women can be interpreted now as an attempt to keep the creative powers of women and the controlling powers of chiefship (and of maleness in the broad sense) in balance. We can take this point further and argue that to the extent that the creative powers of Cuna women are seen as an inherent aspect of the earth (nature) and that, as could readily be shown by analysis of myths and chants, the authority of Cuna chiefs (and males) to admonish and control is derived at least in part from supernatural associations correlated with solar ("golden") phenomena (consider Tad lbe/Ibele and other sun-associated elements of the myths; cf. Helms n.d.a), the chiefly admonishments to women represent attempts to maintain the powers of the cosmos in equilibrium. This point can be turned in another direction (or onto another limb) by arguing that the "loss" of part of Cuna women's productivity or creativity in the late nineteenth century when men assumed greater agricultural activity threatened to upset this symbolic balance between "earthly" female "producers" and "solar" male "controllers" and that the production of symbolic and cash-earning molas was also a necessary step toward re-establishment of this symbolic and cosmological equilibrium.

Returning to chiefs and curers, both political leaders and shamans strive to protect the human world from the depredations of assorted "enemies," be they illness-producing spirits, dissenison-creating and socially disruptive individualism (or "nature-ness"), or human opponents such as conquering Spaniards or, in pre-Columbian days, chiefly rivals and their supporters. Mac Chapin, Jim Howe, Olga Linares, and Phil Young and John Bort have all addressed this topic in their presentations, Chapin and Howe dealing with spirit "enemies", while Linares and Young and Bort are concerned with human enemies and political harmony and discord. It is most interesting to find that in these papers the
shamanic and chiefly procedures for dealing with spirit and human rivals or enemies are remarkably similar. In all cases described the religious or political specialist basically relies upon superior knowledge or cunning, i.e., the capacity to outwit the opposition in one way or another, and by this superior intellect (identified in Cuna myths as a, or perhaps the, distinguishing mark of "humaness")\(^3\) achieves victory over intellectually less capable, and therefore less "human", opponents.

Chapin's and Howe's papers, dealing with spirit enemies, both note how the curer, with his specialist's knowledge of the proper chant, assembles various spirit assistants or helpers, some of which are given physical expression in effigies made of woods, including, most importantly, balsa, a wood which Chapin notes is directly associated with intelligence or knowledge (cf. Stout 1947:45). (It is interesting to note that some of these wooden effigies known popularly as nuchus are known to be carved in the form of figures clad in European uniforms and suits, possibly suggesting Europeans as a great source of cosmic-like or mystical power. [cf. Stout 1947:103]. This same western power-sphere is called into play by mola production [do the western-made fabrics carry a significant attribute of mystical power or purba?] and mola sales to acquire the means--cash--to further interact with this power sphere and to obtain more of its power-filled goods.) The curer's spirit assistants then proceed to the trouble point--Mu'u's domain or the house of the king of evil spirits--and with intoxicating chircha (the smoke from the ritually burnt peppers, medicines, and tobacco prepared by the curer) cause their opponents to become inebriated and to pass out and thus to become helpless. In other words, the troublesome or evil opponent is purposely befuddled in mind or intellect so that he is no match for the good spirits and for the chanter-curer, who will be victorious. Howe takes this point further by showing how these rituals dealing with the conquest of the spirit world also facilitate the "conquest" of the physical environment, particularly by facilitating the actual expansion of the Cuna population from the Panamanian mainland to new habitats on the islands of San Blas. This move was possible only after the islands were rid by shaman-curers of the diseases, whirlpools, and dangerous beings that formerly were found there. By the same token, of course, the Mu'u Ikala chant discussed by Chapin facilitates the demographic expansion of the population itself by "conquering" the spirits causing difficult cases of childbirth.

Young and Bort, in their discussion of the edabáíí ritual relationship among the Guaymí, have dealt with a comparable phenomenon in which the "enemy" to be conquered is not a spirit but a real opponent. The conquest procedure, however, is very similar to that discussed in Howe's and Chapin's papers; two protagonists, equivalent in their own way to the curer and the troublesome spirit, meet in a context of competition, each supported by a group of followers just as the curer and the spirit each has a group of shamanic spirit
supporters. These human competitors or edabáli struggle in a context of ritual feasting and gaming to establish the supremacy of one over the other. Again intoxicating chicha is used as the means of conquest as each tries to force the other to consume too much drink and thereby to lose his senses, that is, to befuddle his intellectual control or confuse his reason. Young and Bort view these competitions as expressions of harmony and discord between individuals and between groups. Their interpretation fits neatly with the significance Howe and Chapin attribute to curing and birth rituals, respectively, when they view such ceremonies as means of re-establishing social solidarity or physical well-being out of conditions of social disharmony or of upset in the physical or spiritual world.

Yet there is another element to the edabáli relationship with its strong competitive theme. Young and Bort tell us that this ritual also can reflect resentments and competitions among kinsmen, more specifically among real or fictive brothers. I suggest that these tensions and competitions, as well as the ritual relations which express them, may have a considerable antiquity (cf. Young 1971:204) and may, indeed, have been an important aspect of Panamanian political life during the pre-contact era when ancestors of the Cuna and the Guaymi lived as members of rank societies or chiefdoms. Hispanic accounts of the sixteenth century indicate strong political competitions among Panamanian chiefs and other men of importance (cf. Oviedo 1959:32; Andagoya 1865:12, 17, 25, 30; Anderson 1914:161, 320); a militancy which Olga Linares finds overtly expressed in the iconography of ancient Panama. Potential factioning sometimes (probably fairly frequently, I suspect) occurred between brothers (cf. Andagoya 1865:9), and I suspect that the edabáli ritual relationship, as well as the stick-throwing game of krun (cf. Young n.d.) and perhaps also the "drinking ritual", found today among the Guaymi are contemporary reflections, albeit with modifications reflecting adaptation to some 400 years of Western contact, of this ancient rivalry among chiefly kinsmen, each striving to emerge as the pre-eminent man of importance of a regional polity (cf. Helms n.d.b).

Linares has linked this ancient political situation with the ideological world in her correlation of elements of ancient Panamanian iconography with political competitions. I believe her interpretation is the first serious re-examination of the significance of Panamanian iconography since Lothrop's monumental study of Cocle (1937-42). It is indeed high time to re-examine Panamanian iconography in light of contemporary anthropological studies of ritual and symbolism and of our growing understanding of the inter-relationships between such symbolism and the actual functioning of society. I would like to suggest here that we expand Linares' interpretation so as to consider the symbolic significance of the golden chest plaques, helmets, cuffs, greaves, etc. worn by chiefly leaders in pre-Columbian times in terms not only of actual physical competition and warfare but also of all areas of chiefly competition, including the arena of spiritual foes, which it may
have been the duty of ancient chiefs and priests to challenge in
their roles as sacred-secular mediators (like the chiefs and curers of
today) between the society under their charge and the worlds of
spiritual and physical enemies.

In line with my previous discussion I suggest, too, that these
gold pieces, as well as the polychrome ceramic wares, and especially
the animal depictions thereon, should be examined for symbolic
representations that convey the concept of intelligence, cunning,
knowledge; qualities by which contemporary rulers and leaders combat
their spiritual and human opponents and which surely were aspects of
ancient chiefship, too. Although Linares rightly cautions that we
have virtually no primary data regarding pre-Columbian Panamanian
ideologies and iconography, nonetheless, I suggest (following the
"ethnological" method for the study of ancient symbols discussed by
Grieder 1975) that secondary data relevant to such questions are
available from a variety of later sources. I believe it is no accident
that in Cuna political speeches today we find metaphors referring to
peles and curers as persons encompassed by bright-shining light and
comparing chiefs and their duties with the sun and its celestial
role (Howe 1975) while in Cuna myths we encounter references to
culture heroes who approach their spirit enemies "clad in golden
clothing" (Chapin 1970:24, 28). In spite of the many centuries
separating the Cuna from pre-Columbian Panama I believe that we see
other manifestations of these golden heroes in the ancient chiefs and
warriors who donned golden helmets and breastplates on the field of
battle (cf. Oviedo 1959:44; Wafer 1934:84-89; Andagoya 1866:13) and
in the literally gold-covered remains of chiefs discovered at the Sitio
Conte (Lothrop 1932:14). I am convinced through my own research (cf.
Helms n.d.a.; n.d.b) that detailed study of contemporary Cuna
political themes and myths could cast much light both on the activities
of ancient chiefs and on the symbolism of the mysterious iconography
associated with these ancient rulers.

In summary, then, in my opinion the papers by Linares, Young
and Bort, Howe, Chapin, and Hirschfeld refer to a single, complex
sphere of indigenous Panamanian thought and action which focuses
specifically on the roles of leaders, sacred and secular, past and
present, as militant guardians by virtue of their superior knowledge
and intelligence, of the human, cultural realm or polity which comes
under attack time and again from enemies of both the spirit and physical
worlds. By conquest of these evils the leadership has been able for
centuries to assist the successful adaptation and survival of individuals
and of society at large in a changing physical and cultural world.

Moving north of Panama to other regions of Central America, we
find that the linkage between the cosmological and the physical worlds
and between the mythical past, the historical past, and the present
era is explored again in Frank Loveland's paper on Rama cosmography.
Loveland's concern with spatial configurations, however, widens this temporal approach greatly and, of course, brings to mind the cosmological and symbolic importance of the cardinal directions in the world-view of the civilizations of Nuclear America. In this context we are reminded that as Central American symbolic forms and meanings are revealed and analyzed we will not only gain insights into the nature of Central American societies per se, but also will very likely find points of comaprison with Andean and Mesoamerican systems which may aid greatly in clarifying some of the still unsolved problems of Nuclear American cultural development and adaptations. Loveland's Rama data also exemplify the flexibility of myth systems which, in the Rama case, have already incorporated aspects of rather recent contact history. Here again we can see the inter-relationship of symbolism and contemporary reality, and can appreciate the internal dynamics operative in myth and symbolic structures as these ideological forms keep pace with ongoing historical events.

Sheila Cosminsky's comparative study of pregnancy and child-birth among the Black Carib of Honduras-Guatemala-Belize and the Quiché Maya of highland Guatemala also expands upon some of the themes developed in the Panama papers. The sacredness of the midwife's role as a distinctly shaman-like "curing specialist" is particularly interesting, for here we see the creative powers of all women coalesced and personified, as it were, in the activities of a divinely "chosen" woman whose contacts with the sacred realm of creative nature are particularly potent and direct. Through this power the midwife functions as a knowledgeable mediator and manipulator standing between the human world of the expectant mother and her family and the sacred world of the diverse spiritual beings which are responsible for this recurrent advent of life. We find, too, that, as with the Cuna, all Black Carib and Mayan women (as producers of life in general and during childbirth in particular) stand at the interface between the spirit world or the world of creative nature and the human world, and thus are again positioned between the potentially harmful or disruptive world of nature and the potentially good or harmonious world of culture and society.

The significance of this interface position, of course, becomes particularly important and obvious during pregnancy and childbirth. During this time, when a new life is in actual process of preparing for and then entering the human world from the world of "nature", the interface of these two realms is breached and the "natural" and the "human" for a short time become a single sphere by means of the woman's physical processes and through the sacred symbolism of birth. During this time the midwife, because of her superior knowledge and understanding of both the physical processes involved (as they are understood relevant to the particular society) and the spiritual or supernatural dangers of the event, holds her grave responsibility of seeing that, to the best of her ability, nothing untoward occurs either with respect to the mother's physical well-being or with respect to the spiritual forces involved. Concerning the latter, the midwife is charged with the obligation of seeing that (among other things) the worlds of nature and of human
society will be correctly redefined and safely re-established in their respective cosmological positions after the birth is completed, that is, that the breach in the interface will be safely healed (cf. Paul and Paul 1975). If the birth and the baby appear normal this re-establishment is accomplished by minimal ritual. However, if the baby is born with some unusual features or mark (a caul or other mystic sign) and/or if the delivery is difficult or unusual the problem of re-establishing the interface is heightened, and ritual is more elaborate. Indeed, in these cases the interface between the human and the non-human (natural or supernatural) worlds cannot be completely re-established, for the new child, destined perhaps to become a shaman or a witch or a midwife, will, for the duration of its life, be living evidence of the human-suprahuman domains combined.

The midwife's efforts are assisted and the drama of the birth event also enacted by the more "mundane" participants, particularly the father and the mother, whose roles at this time can be interpreted as expressing the exceptional nature of the event in general and as assisting in particular with the task of re-establishing the proper and traditional relationship between the natural and human worlds in the days immediately following the birth. It is most interesting to see that in the attitudes toward and behavior prescribed for husband and wife the Maya and the Black Carib stress different aspects of this relationship between the natural and the human realms. As Cosminsky notes, the Maya posit a sharp distinction between the sexes in many areas of thought and behavior throughout pregnancy and birth, seeming to stress thereby, I suggest, the essential separateness or duality not only of male and female but also of the two cosmic realms. The Black Carib, in contrast, by way of the couvade, identify the harmonious aspects of male and female at the time of birth, and thereby emphasize the basic unity that emerges from the meeting of nature and culture. Thus the Carib couvade, I suggest, not only expresses the social unity and egalitarian status of the sexes as Cosminsky insightfully suggests, but goes even further to make a symbolic statement meaningful to the Carib about the nature and meaning of life and of the universe as they envision it (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971:146-47 for a somewhat comparable interpretation of couvade among the Tukano).

Indeed, the topics discussed by all of the papers in this volume exemplify in one way or another that remarkable human ability to expand the parameters of a micro-event until it gains macro proportions; to enlarge the significance of a single birth, a case of sibling rivalry, a pubescent girl, a blouse, a painted pot from a small, ordinary thing or event to a symbolic form carrying social and ideological significance of virtually cosmic proportions. In such a way do the mundane affairs of everyday life become lodestones for a greater vision of the meaning of life and guidelines for the proper pursuit of this direction. In such a way do symbols guide society and make "humans" from Homo sapiens.
FOOTNOTES

1 My thanks to James Howe for bringing this source to my attention.

2 Paralleling this interpretation whereby chiefs "control" creative women by oratory we can possibly place a related structure in which men "control" game (hunt), seeking to attract their quarry by means of sweet-smelling herbs which are said to be sexually attractive to the animals and which clearly imply an equivalence between women and game and carry the connotation of male "control" via seduction and love-making (as well as by oratory) of the creatures (female and animal) of nature. (cf. Nordenskiöld 1938:384, 613). Reichel-Dolmatoff notes a similar "sexual" context for Tukano hunters (1971:218, 83-84).

3 One of the best examples of this point is found in the tale recounting the competition between the sacred hero-chief, Tad Ibe, and a rival strong-man, Olokisbakwalele, or Iguana-chief (Chapin 1970:27ff). Very briefly summarized, Tad Ibe and Iguana-chief engage in a series of competitions, including a wrestling match, a swim contest, a cliff jump, a pain endurance contest, and a nasal fossa comparison, in which Iguana-chief consistently exhibits greater physical strength and endurance. Tad Ibe can only hold his own in these trials by resorting to cunning and trickery, by means of which, however, he does finally defeat his rival, heralding the conquest of physical nature by human intellect.

4 By way of example of the possibilities here, I would like to briefly mention some of my own research (Helms n.d.a) in which I argue that the so-called Alligator or Crocodile or Crested Crocodile motif so common in ancient Panamanian iconography is instead a depiction of one or more varieties of Iguana, and that this iguana identification directly associates the Panamanian motif with Itzam Na, the great Iguana-god of the ancient Maya elite, and with one or more Mexican deities including the Aztec Fire God and possibly Quetzalcoatl (cf. Coe 1972:5, 9).

5 Just as in the Panamanian materials the controlling powers of all men may be said generally to coalesce and be personified in the sacred-secular figures of priest-chiefs.

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