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► **To cite this version:**

Pascale Bonnemère. ”I Suffered When My Sister Gave Birth”.. Christina Toren; Simonne Pauwels. Living Kinship in the Pacific, Berghahn, pp.128-142, 2015, Pacific Perspectives: Studies of the European Society for Oceanists n°4. hal-01147161

**HAL Id: hal-01147161**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01147161v1>**

Submitted on 16 Jul 2024

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## ‘I Suffered When My Sister Gave Birth’

Transformations of the Brother–Sister Bond among the  
Ankave-Anga of Papua New Guinea



**Pascale Bonnemère**

One day in October 2006, a young woman brought her small daughter to the house where we lived because she had a fever and her mother wanted us to give her some medication. The woman’s brother, Michael, who was a few years older than she, accompanied them. The eighteen-month-old girl would not take the syrup from me or even from her mother, but when her maternal uncle took the spoon and presented it to her, she drank it all. Michael commented, saying: ‘I suffered when my sister gave birth. I gave birth to her too’. His sister agreed vigorously, and her brother added: ‘And that’s why I received the *Simo’e* and *tuage*’ gifts’.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to explain this statement, in which a man says that he felt pain when his sister gave birth to her daughter, as if giving birth to her himself.<sup>2</sup> To understand it requires having some information about the brother–sister relationship from which the avuncular relation derives as time goes on, adding a new

generation to the existing one.

The Ankave occupy three densely forested valleys to the southwest of a mountain chain running the width, from east to west, of the island of New Guinea. Some 1,500 in number, they belong to a set of twelve Anga linguistic groups, which speak related languages, share certain cultural features – male initiation, gender asymmetry, the absence of inequality among the men and

the absence of big men – and have an oral history that attests to a common origin. As horticulturalists in the main, the Ankave grow taro, bananas, sugar cane and sweet potatoes in gardens cleared in the forest. They also raise a few pigs, hunt, trap eels for ceremonial purposes, and gather a wide variety of leaves and fruits in the forest. Accordingly, each family regularly builds a temporary shelter several hours' walk from the hamlet containing their main house, and so Ankave hamlets are occupied only intermittently throughout the year. The population is divided into exogamous patrilineal clans, and residence is usually patrivirilocal, but affinal relations provide the possibility of access to additional lands and enable the Ankave to satisfy their penchant for mobility. Marriage rules are expressed in the form of prohibitions, the most strict being that of marriage between a man and a woman related in the maternal line, by virtue of the belief that blood is transmitted exclusively by the mother.<sup>3</sup>

### **Brothers, Sisters and Maternal Uncles**

The brother–sister relationship is important in the life of an Ankave, in large part because it is a driving force in the long process whereby a boy becomes a father. In effect, a sister who ideally has not yet borne children assists her brother through the different phases of his initiation, the last stage of which comes when his wife has delivered his first child.<sup>4</sup> My analysis reveals, however, that becoming a father is not considered to close the initiation cycle. Being a maternal uncle is the status that is the most valued in Ankave men's lives, and this depends, of course, on their sisters becoming mothers. Having a sister who bears a child is not, however, a sufficient condition for a man to become a maternal uncle; he has also to be endowed with a specific capacity that is acquired gradually through ritual. The necessary presence of one of his sisters at all phases of the initiation of her brother makes this process clear.

It is not possible, therefore, to consider the brother–sister bond and the avuncular relationship independently of each other. They are closely linked, since the latter continues the former as time goes on and a new generation appears. The brother–sister relationship then expands to become a tie that relates groups and determines people's paternal and maternal affiliations. Among the Ankave, the ritual manifestations of this relationship are characterized by asymmetry, since a sister acts for her brother when he goes through initiation, while a brother never does the same for his sister. When he takes action, it is as a maternal uncle, not as a brother. In point of fact, he is an essential figure in his nephews' and nieces' lives.

Some anthropologists working in places where the main categories of filiation and alliance do not exhaust the universe of kinship have found that the

brother–sister relationship has a structuring role as well. In northern India, for example, Jamous (2003) has shown terminological characteristics linked to marriage through sister exchange. A specific relation of affinity, which links two brother–sister pairs is thus emphasized. In other studies as well, the importance of the brother–sister relationship has been related primarily to marriage practices (Pauwels 1990; Benei 1997) and to ritual. Among the Ankave, this relationship does not seem to be relevant so much to marriage as to the constitution of male personhood and locally valued social statuses. In the 1950s, Kenelm Burrige, an anthropologist working in what was not yet Papua New Guinea, had already pointed out the importance of the brother–sister bond for social organization: ‘men and women have sisters and brothers irrespective of marriage and descent’, he wrote (Burrige 1959: 136). Kinship was the major topic of his work, and he devoted a number of articles to its different facets among the Tangu, who live on the northern coast of the country. In a long and detailed essay dealing in particular with siblingship, he wrote: ‘one might say that in Tangu social life is possible, and individuals reach maturity, in terms of adequately resolving the sibling to marital relationship’ (ibid.: 131). In this sense, ‘the relationship between brother and sister could be said to be the pivot of Tangu social life and culture’ (ibid.: 130). And he concludes his essay with what could serve as a general statement: ‘So long as the basic unit remains the household and not a corporate descent group, siblingship provides a sufficiently flexible principle on which to base marriage and the consequent relations between households’ (ibid.: 154).

Rituals linked to marriage have been analysed by both Jamous in northern India and Burrige in New Guinea, and both show the essential role of the paternal aunt and the maternal uncle respectively. Jamous has revealed the ‘double movement entailed in this marriage, which separates a sister from her brother and then returns her to his family to ensure, by ritual means, the continuation of the generations’ (Jamous 2003: 186). In Tangu, the maternal uncle of a man who just married gave him a special mixture to drink in what we may call a fertility rite since, ‘unless it was done the couple would be childless and unable to make good gardens’ (Burrige 1958: 50). A similar interpretation could be made: a brother separated from his sister when she marries becomes responsible for the fertility of her son. Whatever the case, here too, temporality is an essential aspect of the relation between a brother and a sister, which makes impossible an analysis that does not simultaneously take account of the avuncular relationship.

Among the Ankave, the link to maternal kin is grounded in representations about procreation and intra-uterine growth that attribute an essential role to the mother. She is the only one who provides blood to the foetus, which makes it grow and generates its own blood. Throughout her

pregnancy she therefore has to consume great amounts of red-pandanus juice – the main vegetal substitute for human blood – in order to increase the quantity of blood in her body.<sup>5</sup> These ideas imply that children have the same blood as their mother and maternal uncle, and that he does not transmit it to his own progeny.<sup>6</sup> That is why, when blood accidentally spills out, in ritual context or during a fight, the victim's mother's brother has to be compensated.

During infancy, brothers and sisters live together close to their mothers, as breastfeeding lasts around three years, but their activities soon diverge. Little girls join their mothers when they go to work in the gardens, helping them weed, collecting greens and sugar cane, and carrying small bamboo containers filled with water. Boys stay in the village by themselves and play. Compared to their sisters' lives, theirs are idle and carefree. Rather than being an effect of cross-siblingship, however, this situation conforms to the local sexual division of labour. Although there is some restriction in the expression of their mutual attachment, caring and fondness characterize the relationship between brother and sister, and these sentiments are expressed symmetrically in daily life, which, as we shall see, is not the case at ritual moments.

During the 1994 initiation rituals, when her younger brother returned from a long stay in town, the old Maadzi welcomed him with a nostalgic song, and they stayed a long time with their heads bent over next to each other, holding hands. 'Affection names' may be used to address each other, and a sister may tease her brother that he has taken areca nuts from her netbag without asking, but she never gets annoyed with him.<sup>7</sup> Their respective houses are always open to each other, and sisters regularly visit their brothers, staying with them as long as they want. If her brother visits her, she will serve him food before her husband. When, in 1990, Wia Kara had an attack of cerebral malaria, it was his sister rather than his wife who spent nights and days at his side until he recovered. A married woman beaten by her husband will find refuge at her brother's house, and to take his wife back home a violent man will have to give compensation of pork, game or even money to his brother-in-law. One day in June 1987, a man broke one of his wife's teeth after a violent quarrel and, following a village court, he had to give money to her brother who 'washed her blood'. Brothers are thus helping figures for women, and they are the ones who must be compensated when their sisters have been physically assaulted. Sisters also assist their brothers, but in quite another manner.

In order to marry, Ankave men must give bridewealth. This sum of money is given to the woman's parents, but is used for her brother to take a wife. For a man, then, having a sister, especially an older one, is a precious advantage since he has at his disposal the money (or at least part of it) given by a

man to marry her. Conversely, a man who has only sons is in an awkward position because he cannot count on receiving bridewealth when a daughter marries to help his son take a wife. Similarly, a man with no sisters cannot dispose of the money he would have if he had one. He usually marries much later than those who do have sisters. Daughters are thus very welcome because, when they marry, money is brought into the family, which in turn redistributes it to help sons in their quest for a spouse. The contribution of sisters to the life of their brothers is not, however, limited to marriage; sisters also play an essential role at moments that are considered crucial for the growth and social maturation of men, and which are marked by rituals.

### Rituals in a Man's Life

In effect, a man's life is punctuated by ritualized moments during which one of his sisters is deeply involved. The Ankave ritual cycle involves three phases: two are collective and are generally organized separately (at an interval of several months), but may also be performed immediately after one another, a proceeding that corroborates the impression that they are one and the same rite. Although each phase is given a different name, which designates the main ritual act to which the boys are subjected – 'perforation of the septum' (*itchema'a*) for the first phase, and 'rubbing with red-pandanus seeds' (*chemazi'ne*) for the second – these ceremonies, organized for a group of from twenty to thirty male children between the ages of 8 and 12, form a whole and are clearly different from the third and final rite.

In explanation of the two first stages of this ritual cycle, the Ankave say that it is, essentially, to allow boys to grow up – since they are not as lucky as girls, who mature without any outside help – and to make them strong and brave. We would tend to label these initiations 'rites of passage', during which children pass on to another phase of their development or into adulthood. In short, during the few weeks of men's ritual activity, a series of actions, behaviours and ways of living can be observed. They include action on the body (perforation of the septum, hitting, anointing, stretching, heating, cooling); physical ordeals (climbing a big tree, crossing a stream on a slippery log, going down narrow corridors lined with branches, running as fast as possible); psychological ordeals (sleep deprivation, death threats, lies, revelation of secrets); living in a group (sharing meals and nights in a small shelter, hunting in parties, fetching wood and water); instruction (on sharing, mutual aid, the code of ethics, proper behaviour for adult men – not crying, self-control, self-restraint, overcoming one's fear – and taboos); scenes to be watched (theatrical miming of primeval scenes, ritualized fights between men); and imposed behaviour and attitudes (crouching in line, keeping silent, keeping the head bowed).



The third and last stage revolves around one young man whose first child has just been born, and who has spent the entire period of his wife's pregnancy preparing for the event (respecting dietary taboos, being relatively inactive, wearing unusual clothing and looking different, and so on). It is called *tsewange*, from the name of the head ornament he will be wearing on the day of the ritual. The people involved are specialists in the rituals, the young fathers who serve as ritual sponsors (see also note 11) for the novice, and those men who wish to accompany them to the forest location where the ritual takes place. The rite instructs him in the last male secrets, and celebrates his procreative power as well as the emergence of a new parental couple.

In contrast to the male initiation of other Anga groups, among the Ankave women are not totally excluded from the rituals.<sup>8</sup> No woman enters the forest ritual space, but mothers and sisters have to be present in the village, and to respect a series of food taboos and behavioural restrictions in order for the ritual to go well. Throughout the period the initiates' septums are healing after having been pierced, their mothers are secluded in a large collective shelter built for the occasion; they are obliged to respect numerous daily behavioural constraints and food taboos, which, for the most part, are similar to those imposed on their sons in the bush. As I have shown elsewhere (Bonnemère 2008: 86; 2014), what is re-enacted here is the symbiotic relation between a mother and her child during pregnancy and the child's infancy. Reiterating this early relation is necessary for it to be transformed into another type of relation (Bonnemère 2014). This transformation takes place during the collective rituals, and is marked at their closure by a reciprocal exchange gesture: the boys give smoked small game (birds, rats) that they have hunted during their stay in the forest to their mothers, who reciprocate with cooked tubers. Now the relation between them is no longer symbiotic; it has become one in which exchange is possible between them.

The elder sisters of the boys (who ideally are not yet married) are not secluded as their mothers are, but they must respect two major food taboos: on eating red- pandanus juice and on chewing betel. They are the last ones to lift the taboos. The prohibition on red pandanus is automatically lifted the first time it is consumed again, while that on chewing betel is ritually cancelled. But while it is the newly initiated brother who gives his sister the areca nuts necessary for lifting the taboo, his mother had received them from the hands of the ritual expert. This difference may point to the fact that the ritual involvement of the boys' mothers has now come to an end, while that of their sisters will continue long after the collective stages of initiation are completed. Underlining their relationship through a ritual gesture made by the brothers to their sisters at the very moment the ceremonies are completed means that the sister's role does not stop here. She accompanies her brother while he undergoes the initiation ordeals; 'she helped him', as the



Ankave say, and she will accompany him again when his wife has his first child.<sup>9</sup> In short, to be married and become a father, a boy needs a sister to marry on account of the bridewealth given for her, and he needs a childless sister to act in the ritual of his first child.

As soon as the pregnancy is known, the parents of the father-to-be, together with his wife's parents, organize a big meal. This is the occasion for announcing to the young man that from this day on he will have to stop eating red-pandanus juice and game in general, as well as drinking water.<sup>10</sup> He is also no longer allowed to engage in the usual male activities such as making knots. The latter prohibition keeps him from building houses and fences, and from making bows, arrows and traps. One of his sisters also ceases to consume red-pandanus juice from this day on.

Their parents tell the young couple to make a special barkcloth called *ogidze*, which is dyed with red-pandanus juice, laid to dry in the sun and then folded and wrapped up for use some months later. Other barkcloths, ordinary ones this time, need to be made, and more quickly: two are for the father-to-be (one to wear over his head; the other, called *iZiare*, to be attached around his neck and let hang down to cover his buttocks); another is given to his unmarried elder sister and another to the mother-to-be. Lime must also be prepared for chewing betel after the birth, and to trade for vegetal salt with their Iqwaye neighbours.

When these ordinary capes are ready, the *tsewange*' ritual expert covers the head of the young man in a ritual performed in the forest. The pregnant woman and her husband's sister can put on their own capes themselves. For a man, wearing a bark cape in such a way, on the head, is so unusual that it is a sure sign that he is expecting his first child. He cannot take it off until his wife has given birth. His special appearance also indicates that he is in a taboo state, especially abstaining from red-pandanus juice. His wife can, and even must, consume it, in great quantities, since, as we have seen, their child feeds on it and its blood is made from it.

During the entire gestation of a man's first child, there are thus three persons who are united by the fact that each has received a new bark cape to wear in the same way and for the same period of time. They form a triad linked by special attitudes and taboos required from especially two of them, the father-to-be and his sister, that recall practices known as *couvade* (Bonnemère 2009: 221–22). Because the father-to-be is not the only one to be placed in a state of taboo, Ankave *couvade* practices could be appropriately termed a rite of co-parenthood, as Laura Rival, speaking of the Huaroni of Amazonia, calls it (Rival 1998: 631), rather than a paternity rite, as many anthropologists used to say. Moreover, the prohibitions that the expectant mother has to respect must be considered conjointly with those falling on the father-to-be and his sister: both abstain from eating foods that

would become blood and cause the pregnant woman to haemorrhage, and they abstain from performing tasks which could prevent the foetus from coming out of her body. It is as though the father-to-be and his sister form a pair acting together in order to help the expectant mother deliver the child. The first-birth ritual is not only the third and last stage of male initiation, but also the moment when a new parental couple comes into being with the ritual support of the future father's sister.

The birth marks the beginning of a new period of ritual gestures and rules of conduct for the persons who were already involved during the pregnancy. First, a strict fast, including abstaining from water, red-pandanus juice and chewing betel, is imposed on both young parents for three days after the delivery. The only food the young mother can, and must, take is sugar-cane juice, since it makes her milk come in. In effect, the Ankave think that colostrum is a bad food for the newborn, and that it becomes good milk only after she has drunk this sweet juice. After the three days of fasting, the ritual expert gathers three special varieties of sugar cane, which he gives to the young father after having magically treated them. This will be his only 'meal' for two more days. Like the sugar cane given to the young mother, the three canes for the father have been collected by his sister from the married couple's garden.

Usually between four and eight days after the birth, a time during which the men have gone into the forest to catch marsupials, the *tsewange*' ritual takes place. Just before dawn on the chosen day, the grass shelter, where the young mother stayed, is destroyed by her mother in the presence of other kinswomen, and all then descend the path to the big river. The young mother washes in the running water, is rubbed with fragrant-smelling leaves by her sister, and finally puts on a new bark skirt. Once this has been done, all the women walk up to the village, not far from the place where the public phase of the ritual will be held. The young mother, her sister, her husband's sister and a woman whose husband has most recently gone through the *tsewange*' ritual hide in some high grasses and talk softly.<sup>11</sup> This will go on for a few hours, during which other women finish preparing a big meal of various species of tubers.

Once the male part of the ritual has taken place, the whole line of men leaves the forest and walks down to the hamlet, handsomely adorned, each having attached to his forehead a band of the *ogidze* bark piece that the father-to-be prepared during his wife's pregnancy.<sup>12</sup> The young father heads the line, carrying a long pole (*me'wa*) that a companion has cut for him. Tied to it are shell ornaments and braided necklaces for his wife. The new mother, together with the wife of the man accompanying her husband during the male ritual and her husband's sister, slowly crawl or walk bent over as they emerge from their hiding place.<sup>13</sup> Things are organized so that

the men and women arrive at the same time and gather in the centre of the plaza where the public phase of the ritual will soon take place (Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2007: 170).

When the women are seated, the ritual expert takes the *me'wa* pole brought by the young father and gives the ornaments to the new mother. Her husband, or another man, chops the pole into long, thin pieces, which he plants in the ground in a circle within which he soon places even thinner pieces. The expert then sets fire to the base of this small structure with a bamboo torch. Afterwards, he offers areca nuts to the wife and to the husband's sister, who sits next to her. Both lift the taboo while chewing betel, spitting first into the fire. The marsupials that have been caught and gathered for this day are cooked in a bark wrapper or in an earth oven, after having been singed over the *me'wa* fire. One of the marsupials, a *tse'arma* if available – because it grows fast – is prepared by the two sisters of the new parents, that is to say the mother's sister and the father's sister. The ashes from the fur mixed together with yellow-orange earth (*omoxe*) and a bit of water are rubbed onto the newborn by its maternal grandmother. The baby is then quickly passed over the flames, while the old woman whispers a magical formula, 'to heat the bones', the Ankave say.

The *tse'arma* is cut up by the two sisters, who cannot eat it because it goes entirely to the mother. The young father's sister distributes the other marsupials to all the other women and to their very young children, with the exception of herself and the newborn's paternal grandmother. For the father's sister or mother to eat some of the marsupials would be like eating their own brother or son, since all share the same blood. The day ends with everybody eating the taro and sweet potatoes that were cooked in great quantities during the morning.

To recapitulate: the transformation of the symbiotic relationship between a woman and her son during the collective phases of the initiation rituals is the first essential act of the process in which, eventually, he becomes a father. Crucially, his sister too has to intervene ritually, first when he is still a boy, but in a minor mode, and much more strongly when her brother is expecting his first child. At that time she has to respect the same taboos – on eating red-pandanus sauce and on chewing betel – as those imposed during the collective rituals, thus associating herself with the father-to-be, in order that they may act as a pair in protecting the pregnant woman from haemor- rhage when giving birth.

The first-birth ritual celebrates a man's new status as a father and a new parental couple, but it is more than this, I suggest, for this ritual is also preparing a man to become a maternal uncle. This is why his sister has to be present, for she will be the one who, in having children, will permit her brother to attain this highly valued position. For the Ankave, to be a

maternal uncle is to be endowed with a capacity to act for related people – a capacity that women have spontaneously, as it were. A man acquires this capacity through a long, gradual process, which transforms the relationships he has with the two most closely related women in his life: his mother and one of his adult but still-childless sisters. Becoming a maternal uncle and thus being able to act on and for, and sometimes against, the children of his sister is the culminating point of a man's life. But what exactly does it mean to be a maternal uncle?

### **Being a Maternal Uncle**

As noted above, individuals have the same blood as their mother, their siblings of the same mother, and the siblings of their mother; it follows that they and their mother's brother share blood. For this reason, maternal kin in general, and the maternal uncle in particular as the main representative of this group, are considered responsible for the well-being of uterine kin, for their physical development and fertility. This protective behaviour manifests itself during initiations: a mother's brother is the 'partner of pain' (Herdt 2004: 25) of his nephew; he carries him on his back when he has to go through the rebirth corridor made of branches and is beaten by the men. When his niece's breasts begin to grow, he also puts some earth on them to speed their maturation.

So, when all goes well, that is when the father of a child makes the gifts that are due to the maternal kin (see below), good health, growth, and fertility are guaranteed. But maternal relatives have to be looked after continuously: a sister's children will never, for instance, pronounce their mother's brother's name for fear that he will be offended and so make the child lose weight by cursing them. Similarly, one never speaks too loudly when he is present. Even though no embarrassment characterizes their relationship – one may ask a maternal uncle for areca nuts, food or land without him being able to refuse – one must conduct oneself properly in respect of him because his protection can easily turn into a power of destruction. If a maternal uncle feels he does not receive enough from the man who married his sister and from that man's group, and therefore thinks his benevolent acts are not sufficiently acknowledged, he can send curses towards his nephews and nieces.

Here follow some brief examples of relations with the maternal uncle as expressed in daily life. One day, under the shelter where we used to cook food, Kia'uni, her brother and her children were chatting without any restraint because, I was told, the children's father was absent. In another case, the eldest son of a widow chose to live with his maternal uncle when his mother decided to remarry and take her two youngest children with her. Or again, the only child of a woman who was recently widowed chose to live with his mother's brother, considered him as his father and called him

‘Daddy’. The affection that one man felt for his maternal uncle moved him to ask people to call him ‘Paul’, the first name of his mother’s brother.<sup>14</sup>

Samuel prepared lime, a lengthy and demanding task, for his maternal uncle, who had asked him for some. More generally, the children of a man who in the past opened a garden on the land of his maternal uncle can also use it, which means that one of them can inherit some of the land. The brother of a woman may also give land to his sister’s son, even if he has children himself. The relation that everybody has with their maternal uncle is thus very close. The situation described at the beginning of the chapter, and the comment made by Michael, a maternal uncle, leads me to suggest that this bond is almost of a filial kind. Michael succeeded in getting his little niece to swallow her medicine because he is the one who, together with his sister, suffered when she was born. He adds that he was thus the beneficiary of *Simo’ e* and *tuage’* gifts – prestations people owe to their maternal kin, especially during their infancy, and which continue until initiation for boys and until marriage for girls.

Some gifts are made for all children, the firstborn having a special status associated with more specific prestations.<sup>15</sup> When a child begins to crawl, their father brings a piece of pork or cooked game and offers it to the oldest of his brothers-in-law, who will share it with the child’s other maternal kin; this is the *miar’u’wa* gift. A second prestation of pork or game, called *noZe nangwen’*, is made by the father of a child, usually after their maternal uncle has indirectly requested it, in other words after he has remarked that his nephew or niece has grown well. In saying this, he is asserting his role in the child’s development, and when such a sentence is pronounced, the gift is as much to prevent a negative action as it is to compensate a positive one on the part of the mother’s brother. He and his group consider that having received the *miar’u’wa* gift several years earlier is not enough to thank them for having aided the growth of a sister’s children. Such disguised claims may be made several times in respect of a particular child.

Another mandatory prestation is called *Simo’ e*. It is a male pig, which is given raw after a boy has gone through the collective phases of the initiations. It is cooked by the maternal uncle, who receives and shares it with all his brothers and sisters. Some Ankave comment on this gift by referring to the help of the maternal aunts and uncles in preparing the boy’s adornments, while others speak about the blood that was spilled by the novice when he was beaten with cassowary quills during the rituals. As we know, this blood is the same as that which circulates in the bodies of the mother’s brothers and sisters. Whatever the reason given, the *Simo’ e* gift is the last of those prestations linked to a child’s growth that are made to the maternal kin. It is the only one that is marked by a counter-gift, a mother-of-pearl shell called *memia’*, which the young initiate will wear as a necklace. When all these

gifts have been made, a boy has reached an important stage of his life: he has grown up and is less at risk than during his infancy of becoming the victim of malevolent actions on the part of his maternal kin. Another period of his existence will start when he becomes a father himself, and has to make gifts to his brother-in-law to ensure the well-being of his own children.

In the case of a girl, the *Simo'e* gift is the first of the marriage prestations called *tuage'*; her parents always bring it to one of her mother's brothers, who will share it with his siblings and give his niece a female piglet in return. This is the *potije'* gift, which the girl may dispose of as she likes; in particular, she can keep the money obtained when the pig, once grown, is killed and its meat sold. This piglet is usually the first in a long series of pigs that every married woman raises. It is said that the *Simo'e* gift will help a woman to get along with her husband. Finally, if a uterine nephew or niece dies young, their maternal uncle receives either a small amount of money after the funeral or a piece of eel when the ritual marking the end of the mourning period is organized, a year or two after the death.

So, the maternal kin, wife-givers, are the main beneficiaries of the gifts that are made throughout a person's life. For a man to become a maternal uncle is a long and gradual process in which his sister plays a major role, not only because she will bear his nephews and nieces, but also because she must be present in person when he goes through the rituals during which, among other things, his relationships with his mother and with his sister are transformed. The sister is an essential figure for her brother because she is the one who makes him a maternal uncle, a most powerful status in the Ankave world, one that can confer fertility on people but which can also be used to cause death.

## Notes

1. The *Simo'e* and *tuage'* gifts are, respectively, the entire pig that is given to the maternal uncle at the initiation of his uterine nephew, and the pork or game that is regularly given by a man and his group to the parents of his spouse over the course of their marriage. The brother of the mother of the bride always receives the first *tuage'* gift.
2. Karembola men of Madagascar similarly describe 'their sister's son as "born from their own belly", "as crying for their breast"' (Middleton 2000: 112).
3. Certain demographic phenomena nevertheless make it hard to respect exogamy in every clan. Notably, some members of the Idzadze clan, which accounts for 50 per cent of the total population, find it hard to avoid inter-marriage (Bonnemère 1996: 84).
4. I refer to 'his' first child since the ritual is performed even if his wife has already had a child from a previous marriage. Conversely, if a man with

children remarries a young childless woman, the ritual is not done when she becomes pregnant because he already went through it in the past.

5. The juice of the red pandanus is a prized food, obtained by cooking the big pandanus fruit and pressing its seeds. It is usually consumed as a sauce, which is poured over sweet potato and taro during collective meals.
6. Patrilineal transmission is not described using an idiom of ‘blood’. The analysis of the myth relating how the sexes were pierced would seem to suggest that the source of children’s spirits (*denge*) is their fathers’ semen (Bonnemère 1996: 243); what are surely transferred in the agnatic line are rights to land. Cf. Poole’s account of the transmission in semen of the clan *finiik* or agnatic spirit of the Bimin Kuskusmin (Poole 1981).
7. What I call ‘affection names’ are terms of address that differ according to gender and to the mother’s clan affiliation; accordingly, all men whose mothers are from the same clan are called by the same ‘affection name’. These names are used in contexts of food sharing or when people have not met each other for a long time. They express care and love. Husbands and wives never use these names to address each other (Bonnemère 1996: 146–47).
8. The Ankave belong to a set of groups called Anga, whose 80,000 or so members speak twelve related languages (Lemonnier 1981). Well-known Angans in the anthropological literature are the Sambia (Herdt 1981, 1987), the Baruya (Godelier 1986), the Iqwaye (Mimica 1988) and the Kamea (Bamford 1997).
9. See note 4.
10. He can drink water found in tree holes as well as sugar-cane juice.
11. The man who was most recently initiated will be the ritual sponsor of the young father during the *tsewange*’ ritual held secretly in the forest.
12. For a brief description of what happens during the male part of the ritual, see Bonnemère (2009: 225–26).
13. Not much is known about this posture: for some women it evokes their position during their seclusion for the collective stages of initiation, when they cannot stand up and must spend their time sitting or crawling inside the collective house erected for the occasion.
14. All Ankave have local names (Bonnemère 2005), but more and more often they also have a biblical name, either after having been baptized or through their own choice.
15. The gifts made for a first child number four: the first, the *dzilu’wa*, is given when the pregnancy is announced, the other ones when the baby is born. The gift called *xenej onanengo*’ (‘to please the maternal aunt’) is made to the sisters of the new mother, and consists of one of the marsupials caught after the birth. The gift *nie’wa Su’wa* (‘to show the child’) is given to the maternal

grandmother of the baby for having rubbed some *omoxe* 'earth' on the newborn's body and transmitted this knowledge to her daughter.

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