**Chapter 6- Chiefs and Hierarchy**

* Linda Weiner went to Omarakana after church service
* 2 big chiefs- Vanoi and Waibadi from Omarakana
* Vanoi lives in the main part of the village while Waibadi lives in a small section a few hundred yards away with relatives
* Vanoi is no.1 chief, and Waibadi no.2
* Waibadi is just as feared
* When a person not of chief’s clan enter their presence or cross path, they will be asked to rise and walk bent over to show respect
* Vanoi was seated on a large raised platform made of logs with swamp grass roof and Waibadi joined later

**A Chief’s Visit**

**KEY CONCEPTS:**

* Status and Role
* Power, authority and, leadership
* Witch Craft, Magic, Sorcery

**NOTES**

* Chief Vanoi would be Linda’s guest
* Neighbor Kila came to supervise arrangements
* Linda was planning to serve tea and some English cookies however, was asked whether she had any new cups
* **Tabalu chiefs cannot use dishes that others who are not Tabalu touched** ( lucky had some unused dishes)
* **Chief Vanoi must seat some place where his headed would remain higher than others** ( Kila decided where Vanoi should sit)
* **One must ask Chief to stand so that they can walk in front of him. Also bow head and hunch shoulders as they passed the chief**. ( as Linda was cautioned to do to reach her stove on the other side of the room)
* This is how all villagers behave near chief
* Kila relaxed after feeling certain that Linda would not make any mistakes
* **If Chief was coming for a formal occasion like a feast or to adjudicate a court case, he would be accompanied by other Omarakana men**
* **Before entering, one man would announce Chief’s arrival by blowing into a large conch shell**
* However, Vanoi was coming for an informal visit
* He quietly entered the house as other Kwaibaga men crowded the room
* Despite the open sociability ( everyone chewing betel and smoking together) there was a degree of tension
* Deference ( humble submission) was heightened by slight sense of fear
* Further exaggerated by aristocratic appearance as he sat upright on metal box
* Everyone else was sitting on the floor
* Vanoi was slim and straight, as he elegantly chewed betel nut using a lime stick made from long dagger like cassowary bone
* Vanoi had a novel, tall, and red Mavis talcum powder can as his lime pot
* No one else was allowed to chew from the chief’s lime pot
* Each time Vanoi inserted lime stick into narrow opening, he rattled the bone against the side of the tine to shake excess lime
* **No one except chief was permitted to tap sides of lime pot and make such noise. The noise made clear of Vanoi’s stature and separation from the rest**
* Many villagers used empty talcum powdered cans that previously store hard candies and peanuts as lime pots
* Other continue to carry small gourds incised with intricate designs
* These are only made by specialists and villagers often sold them to tourists
* Occasionally, a chief carries a lime pot that marks his rank
* Made from large gourds that re foot in diameter and decorate with intricate designs
* At the top, strong fibers are woven into a stopper with pig tusk in to the centre from which beads and shells are suspended
* Vanoi chatted and laughed with everyone
* After tea preparation was done, other men immediately left the house leaving only a man named Bulapapa
* **Chiefs like all villagers eat privately but should not eat alone**
* Since Kwaibwaga had no chief, it was acceptable for Linda and Bulapapa to join Vanoi as if they were higher ranking persons
* During this time, Linda tried asking questions about Vanoi’s predecessor Mitakata, the Tabalu chief who died in 1961
* Vanoi was only 33 when the previous chief died; asked about how he felt
* Vanoi’s manner changed and sounded serious and confidential
* He spoke of how frightened he was and did not know how to lead the people
* He was tired after 2 days and night of mourning and finally got time alone but sleep was impossible as fear kept him awake
* Suddenly a woman appeared at the foot of his bed and talked to him saying “Do not be afraid” and “Remember you have the stones. They will keep you strong.”
* Vanoi remembered about the power of his stones which came from his ancestors
* He keeps it in a bush near his hamlet
* When the stones are upright, the yam harvest will be good
* When the stones are down, the yams will shrivel up and die as there would be no rainfall
* He doesn’t know who the woman was

**What the Ancestors Brought**

**KEY CONCEPTS**

Taboos

Status and Roles

Power, Authority, and leadership

**NOTES**

* Origin stories documented the first ancestors- usually a brother or sister- who founded the hamlet and garden lands that each matrilineage claims
* These origin stories were not perceived as myths of primordial or legendary times
* In the mind of Trobianders, the stories recount the actions of real people who made decisions that to this day affect the affairs of the successive generations
* Among all ancestors that established matrilineage only some came to Kiriwani with extensive food taboos and certain body shell decorations
* From the beginning, these are differences that ranked them as chiefly lineage (guyau)
* It separated them from the commoner matrilineages (tokai) whose ancestors came without sumptuary rules ( rules about foods and decorations that one permitted or prohibited)
* Whether the rules were expressed as taboos or prescriptions, these rules defined chief from other members of his matrilineage as a different social rank
* Each founding brother or sister didn’t arrive alone
* Other siblings sets identified with other matrilianeages
* Other clans came from the same place together
* The lineage ancestors who came together were allies and some still are
* In case of chief lineages, those who came as commoners worked for them by raising their pigs and growing betel nuts and coconut palm trees
* Time to time, the chief would award them with stone axe-blades or shell valuables
* The obligation still continue, so whenever the Omarakana Tabalu chief needed pork, coconuts, or betel nuts for a feast, they would send a message to the men whose ancestors came with their ancestors from the same place of origin
* The ranking that the ancestors brought for the chiefly lineages was not established at the same time ; some ancestors came early while others came late
* Some lineages arrived in two parts
* Ancestors of each had to establish separate hamlet sites
* Earlier ones retaining a higher ranking over those who came later
* In the Tabalu case, the ancestors came together from a cave in the northern part of Kiriwani and brought more food taboos and body decorations than anybody else
* The Tabalu ancestors lived briefly in several villages but finally moved to Omarakana where members of another matrilineage already lived
* When Tabalu people entered the village, the residents got down from their verandas acknowledging high rank of the new comers
* Former resident became Tabalu’s guards and traditions continue

* Some years later according to the origin story, 2 Tabalu women broke the taboo on eating certain kinds of bony fish
* Due to the mistake, they were forced to live elsewhere that resulted on losing their rights to the mist important of the Tabalu’s decorations
* Therefore, the Tabalu of Omarakana who didn’t break taboos represented senior lineage; higher than the rest
* Today, even thou the chiefs from junior Tabalu lineages are politically important men, they all recognize the Omarakana Tabalu as number one
* Some villagers call them “king”
* The origin story makes it clear that the rivalry among chiefs always was a fact of life
* Weaknesses are tested as one chief strives for an advantage of another
* Chiefly decorations validate one’s authority to claim the ranking brought by one’s ancestors
* Competition between chiefly matrilineages is often expressed in fights over “kingly” regalia
* Exp. At celebration in Losuia for independence day, a Tabalu woman from Gumilababa village who ranked lower than the Omarakana Tabalu wore the long cowries shell head decoration
* A woman named Botabalu from Omarakana saw her, took a knife and cut the string of shells right from her head
* Just like how decorations enhance a chief’s physical appearance, food taboos keep chief away from debilitating food in order to enhance chief’s body
* Prohibited from eating wild pig, wallaby, stingray, certain other bony fish, shellfish, garden greens, and drinking swamp water
* Enforcement of the rules ensure that those follow the rules will be physically attractive and strong therefore influential
* Like decorations, villagers attempt to take food prohibitions to claim association with a certain rank
* Exp. Men who are commoners but whose fathers were chiefs practiced the same taboos as their fathers – to show that they too are entitled to the high ranks
* Other cases, chief from one ranking lineage may restrict himself to the same prohibitions of higher ranking lineage
* Exp. Chief David who was competitive with another chiefly lineage whose ancestors came first once told a story about men chasing wild pigs that he didn’t eat
* Other chiefs knew he was lying and that his ancestors did not bring in the prohibition
* Telling lies and following customs of higher ranking lineage
* The right to wear chiefly decorations and follow the food prohibitions extended to all members of chiefly matrilineage
* Full measure was taken by chief
* The top of a Tabalu’s head chief should not be touch except by Mwari lineage ( high ranking)
* Mwari lineage are also the only one allowed to eater the Tabalu chief’s house
* Traditionally, the chief didn’t touch his food; he was fed by long wooded fork by trusted guards
* Not only did chief carry an aura of deference and fear, but even their hamlet represented danger
* Only chief displays kuvi yams hanging in the house
* Even his coconut and betel palms plant have shell hanging on higher branches which clink together in the wind announcing chief’s property to anyone passing by
* Ranking is not equivalent with political power
* Ancestors of each matrilineage established boundaries all the time to differentiate form commoners
* Ancestors stories gave authoritative sanction to the prerogatives of rank
* This made a person’s birth right through matrilineal inheritance the primary criterion for chiefly actions
* But from the very beginning of Trobriand Time, detail of origin stories record loss of decoration and land, gains one matrilineage made over the other
* A chief must work to solidify his arena of power and status along with preventing other chiefs from destroying or diminishing his ancestral heritage
* A few ranking lineage died out
* Competition continues today as chiefs of some high ranking lineages has less power compares to chiefs of low ranking lineage
* Hierarchy of relations separate each ranking senior and junior matrilineal line, each major ranking lineage from other and all of those rank from all commoner matrilineages
* Historically, individual chiefs created differences in the outgoing political status of lineage
* A person’s right to sit higher than the rest comes from birth and authority brought by his ancestors
* However, he himself decided how many people will sit under him by authority
* By authority it is meant the right to claim legitimacy that is acknowledged by the members of society
* Trobianders may not like the chief but they still accept his right to be chief
* Power Is the ability to act upon someone directly by carrying out one’s will
* Someone may be a chief but not have the power to make others do what he wants
* Vanoi’s story about the stones showed difference between authority and power
* Chief must work to develop power in relationships with others
* Vanoi had the authority as chief but the stones gave him power to threaten people

**The Difference Yams Make**

**KEY CONCEPTS**

* Marriage
* Social organization ( social control, and legal system)
* Status and Role

**NOTES**

* 2-8 hamlets in each village (one man controls the linage)
* intermarriage between hamlets are very important but can cause jealousy
* a “generous” man attracts others while a “hard” man does not
* a chief’s organization is very much the same
* a chief presides over his own hamlet but with enough power can sway lesser leaders
* they do not control all
* some legal powers have been taken away from the chief’s by the government
* chiefs are localized
* a hamlet without a chief main goal is to establish and maintain alliances within the village (chief tries to expand his control to other villages)
* a wife has her own personal yam house
* how the family grows yams can say a lot of their position of certain

**Finding Wives**

**KEY CONCEPTS:**

• Social organization (social control, and legal systems)

• Status and role

• Marriage

• Rights and property

1. Exchange systems

Notes:

1. Many chiefs practice polygyny, they usually have three wives.
2. Vanio himself had nine wives the highest recorded amount of wives for a single chief is Omarakate Tabalu he had 17 wives.
3. Marriage proposals are different from regular villagers
4. A chiefs guards will take a spear with four coconuts ( each representing a garden that a male will make the chief) to the hamlet leader
5. The males who make the garden are usually father, brother, and cousin an uncle from the mothers side, and a cross matrilineal cousin
6. Hamlets do not always accept as the relationship between the chief and the kin depends on how strong the chief is
7. Vanio had nine wives and had three promised wives but when he fell ill the other three never made the full transition from promised to a real marriage
8. A woman for a regular villager will instantly live with him and they will wait for the yam house to be built while a chiefs wife has one instantly built for her
9. Though the houses are instantly built once she is his wife she may not leave her hamlet for a few years so no houses are built (such as Vanio)
10. Chiefs guards pick his wives
11. The woman may have had previous members marry a chief or may have never married a chief but the hard working attitude of the family is a common factor for both sides
12. If a chief does his successor may marry some of his younger wives
13. Sexual liaisons are separated from most marriages as they are political
14. Though villagers are monogamous chiefs are suppose to have "friends"
15. These relationships happen outside of the hamlet
16. The chiefs wives may become jealous of this relationship and attack the other woman though it reflects poorly on them
17. When a chief marries for love he stays on the beach with her for a few days and her family builds a yam house once they come back
18. Wives have their own hierarchy within them
19. Chiefs must stay strong and attractive they often use magic to do this

**Power and Fear**

**KEY CONCEPTS:**

* Power, authority and leadership
* Rituals
* Conformity and nonconformity
* Ethics
* Witchcraft, magic, sorcery and divination
* Suffering

Notes:

1. Chiefs are placed above villagers and act like such
2. Ancestors are what separate villagers and chiefs
3. Ancestors remain unchanged and as do their stories
4. Chiefs use decorations, taboos, and ritual forms of etiquette to separate themselves from villagers
5. Though Ancestors stay one may change their status through their own doing
6. Knowing magic is a formidable type of knowledge and power
7. Weather magic is the most dangerous magic for the affects it has on the yams
8. Weather magic is only known to certain matrilineages
9. Many important spells are from Ancestors
10. Many spells have been lost to lack of knowledge passed down from the older generation
11. You can buy magic spells from other people though they are costly (this is usually why on,y chiefs have them)
12. Some chiefs can not perform magic themselves and will pay others to do this though the third party may not perform the spell correctly
13. The power of spells breeds fear in others
14. Opposing chiefs can bring magic upon you (i.e keeping a *kuvi* yams from the chief or having an affair with one of his wives)
15. Random sicknesses or deaths are often believed to be from magic
16. Public accusations of magic are rare
17. Only a chiefs may call another chief out this because you need proof of the chief doing magic
18. Most deaths stir up gossip and fear
19. Deaths can be lead to misfortune
20. A death in the past can be linked to one yet to happen
21. Though chiefs can perform powerful spells they are not immune
22. "To show who you are"