

Aspects of social stratification and honour on pre-Christian and modern Mungiki (Bellona)

Rolf Kuschel, 'Angikinui F. Takiika, Kiu 'Angiki

Abstract

This paper analyses some important aspects of social stratification and honour on pre-Christian and modern Mungiki (Bellona), a Polynesian Outlier in the Solomon Islands. Opposite other traditional Polynesian societies, honour on Bellona was not part of a complex and prominent mana-taboo system. Honour was part of an incessantly social evaluation of a man's achievements, distinctiveness, and kin-related history. A man bestowed with honour not only had the right to, but was also expected to demand respect from significant others. Any severe challenge of his honour had to be vigorously counteracted in order to maintain and defend his and his kin group's social positioning as a deferential group. In revenge lies a rehabilitation for lost honour. He who renounced vengeance started on the path to insignificance, the quality of his life dwindled. Although important parts of practice have changed today, the basic idea of honour and competition for high status has remained fairly constant. We shall demonstrate how present day competition for social status in many respects is closely related to the traditional perception of honour which mirrored society's ideal values. What we shall present here is a set of propositions concerning some important aspects of the Bellonese philosophy concerning honour. In the strictest sense of the word, this paper is an attempt to present a social and cultural translation of some aspects of the Bellonese way of thinking.

Introduction

"But blood need not be shed to endanger life. Honour might ooze out as fatally from the wound made by a blow from a stick, or by a sharp word, or even by a scornful neglect. And the medicine is in all cases the same" (Grønbech, 1931, p.73)

Honour is a "nebulous" concept says Herzfeld (1980). It covers a great variety of concepts like virtue, reputation, esteem, integrity, and veracity, and refers "to things apparently quite different from each other" (Stewart, 1994, p. 21). The meaning of honour, and its relation to man's social behaviour, has since the time of Aristotle been discussed from different scientific points of view. According to Stewart (1994), the importance of honour was brought to the attention of anthropologists who "worked in countries that border on the Mediterranean, and subsequent anthropological research has also concentrated on this area" (p. 75). Consequently, much has been written about the importance of honour in the Mediterranean area (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Peristiany, 1966; Peristiany & Pitt-Rivers, 1966; Pitt-Rivers, 1968). Other studies deal with the well-developed concept of honour of the Teutons (Grønbech, 1931; Gehl, 1937; Meulengracht Sørensen, 1983).

Though many Polynesian languages have specific terms for "honour," as for example the languages of Hawai'i (Pukui and Elbert, 1971), Kapingamarangi (Lieber and Dikepa, 1974), Samoa (Milner, 1966), and Tonga (Churchward, 1959), surprisingly few researchers have, according to our knowledge, dealt with honour as a separate empirical or theoretical theme in traditional Polynesian societies. Honour seems to have been dealt with more implicitly, as part of the complex and prominent *mana-taboo*

system that surrounded high-status persons in these societies. Goldman, for example, writes: "Everywhere in Oceania, in Melanesia, Indonesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia *mana* is the primary condition of status. This does not mean that without *mana* there is no status, for there are other forms of prestige, worth, and personal effectiveness in Oceania that do not depend upon *mana*. Everywhere, however, the ideal of status depends upon *mana*, though the precise relationships between it and status vary in the area" (1970, pp. 10-11). Marcell Mauss (1990) actually suggested that *mana* and honour could be regarded as equivalents, since *mana* "symbolises not only the magical force in every creature, but also his honour, and one of the best translations of the word [mana] is 'authority,' 'wealth'" (p. 38). On Bellona, this relationship between *mana* and social status is absent. As Monberg (1991) has already remarked: "The common Polynesian concept of a particular *mana* connected with chieftainship seemed absent. The word *mana* or *manamana* exists in the language of Rennell and Bellona, but only as a poetic term for thunder...and for any particularly unusual event that took place after the death of a high-status person" (p. 398). In the absence of *mana* as a single, significant quality related to social status, our analysis of social stratification and honour on Bellona has to focus on aspects other than *mana* for obtaining social recognition in Bellonese society.

One of the social scientists who approached honour in Polynesian societies is Sahlins, who in more general terms talks about "Homage to chiefs," which was institutionalised in various forms of "obedience postures, and addressing or referring to persons of different rank and their possessions by unique sets of nouns and verbs" (Sahlins, 1958, p. 9). A more

extensive analysis of honour in relation to social status in Polynesian societies is not dealt with in Sahlins' book.

In 1954, Prytz Johansen (1954; 1962) wrote about the Maori religion. In his book, one chapter exclusively deals with the topic of honour. Though "the Maori lacks a word for honour in itself" (p. 48), Prytz Johansen says, the term "tupu" has a basic meaning "to unfold one's nature," and constitutes the essence of honour. It refers not only to ordinary growth in life, but also refers to "life as value." "Life, strength, courage, honour, and repute," continues Prytz Johansen, "thus are one in *tupu*" (p. 48). *Tupu* can be upgraded as well as reduced, or even vanish. According to Prytz Johansen, honour concerns man's reputation, but "is an inner concern as well" (p. 44). This distinction implies a differentiation between what might be called social honour and personal honour, or "external" and "internal" honour, as Stewart (1994) prefers to call it.

Data

Data on the traditional Bellonese society are derived from the many interviews that Elbert (Elbert & Monberg, 1965), Monberg (1991), and Kuschel (1988), have conducted on the island during the last decades. These interviews were carried out in the informants' own language. Most of the examples referred to in the text are based on the island's oral traditions. The data have been checked and re-checked with different informants - but we must realise that for a foreigner to understand the world as seen from an insider's point of view, this can only be achieved asymptotically. The critical point in understanding other cultures is to grasp the total situation in which the phenomenon to be analysed has been embedded. When studying other cultures

one should, however, bear in mind Grønbech's (1931) cautioning, that we should not "mistake our own reasonings about reality for reality itself" (p. 21). How easy it is to miss valuable information communicated to us by our informants, has been described by Monberg (1975), who recorded Bellonese informants' opinions on his first publication about their oral traditions (see also, Henige, 1982, pp. 128-129). Data on present Bellonese society are based on Bellonese authors' (Takiika's and 'Angiki's) personal experiences.

Bellona Island

Bellona Island, locally known as *Mungiki*, is one of the seven Polynesian Outliers in the Solomon Islands. It is situated 164 km south of Guadalcanal, and 22.5 km north-west of its neighbouring island, Rennell (Christiansen, 1975, p. 13), with which it shares similar language and culture. Because of its remoteness and small size, approximately 17 km,² Bellona did not particularly attract the attention of outsiders before World War II. In 1938, Rennellese, who had been trained at the Seventh-Day Adventist's School in Marovo, introduced Christianity (Monberg, 1962; 1967; 1991) to the then 440 Bellonese (Kuschel, 1988, Part I, pp. 89-90). Traditional Bellona was characterised by having a patrilineal descent system. Individuals were socially identified according to their membership of a specific lineage, sub-clan, and clan. More detailed information about Bellona can be found in Christiansen (1975); Elbert (1975; 1988); Elbert and Monberg (1965); Kuschel (1988); Monberg (1991); Kuschel and Monberg (1990); Rossen (1987); and Wolff (1969).

Social strata

Traditional Polynesian societies are

characterised by having a high degree of formalised social stratification, though varying in degree as to how formalised these structures are. Great importance is placed on the social recognition and social position of individuals, lineages, and clans. Compared to other Polynesian societies, such as Hawai'i, Tonga, and Samoa (Sahlins, 1958), Bellona had a rather shallow level of stratification. It comprised the following three strata: (1) High social status (*hakahua*), (2) land-holders (*matu'a*), and (3) low social status (*tangani pengea*). There has never been one central authority on Bellona, no high chief or chiefs of the type found in a number of other Polynesian communities. Each patrilineal descent group was autonomous. No member of a different lineage had any authority over extraneous land or people. On Bellona, social status - here used in accordance with Nadel's definition (Nadel, 1953, p. 171) - is achieved by individual or group performances which have to be recognised by society.

As will be discussed below, a *hakahua* is a term used for men who by birth and family position, land ownership, training, and skills, had acquired and demonstrated extraordinary competence. A *matu'a* is an adult land-holder. "All landholders, including the *hakahua*, did the same types of work, and there was no specialisation in activities. The only difference was that [the] *hakahua*...did almost everything on a larger scale than others" (Monberg, 1991, p. 20, parentheses added), and due to his eminence exerted an influence on family and other kin group members. Landless men, the so-called *tangani pengea* "abortive people," usually had no access to land, were born out of wedlock, and acted as servants for influential elders of the lineage. In their life, there was no honour per se. Their social recognition very much

depended on the status of the *hakahua* to whom they were attached.

The semantic basis of the term *hakahua* is *hua*: "to bear fruit," "to be of size," "to have responsibility," "to be privileged," "to depend on." All these meanings carry the implication of something of importance. In combination with the causative prefix *haka-*, it is used as "an honorary term of reference for a man with considerable abilities or knowledge" (Elbert, 1975; see under *-hua*, *hakahua*). *Hakahua* can refer to situations such as: (1) The owner, protector, steward of a settlement (*te hakahua o te manaha*), (2) true kin as *tamana hakahua* (lit., true father), as opposed to related kin (*tamana hakapingi* (lit., classificatory father), or (3) the temporal recognition of unexpected accomplishments, e.g., by a low status person. The basic meaning in these and other applications of the term is "something special, set apart from the more common." The more specific meaning of *hakahua*, dealt with here, refers to a man's outstanding socio-religious positioning and personal qualities.

Pre-requisites for recognition as a *hakahua*

Social status on Bellona was closely related to primogeniture, and descent line. Though one's genealogical background played an important role in achieving social status, one could not inherit the position as *hakahua*. Different ecological resources and social prerequisites, as well as personal qualifications, were needed. Direct lineal descent from the first immigrants was an important precondition to becoming a *hakahua*, as well as being the firstborn son in each generation. The

firstborn son would almost always inherit more land than his younger kinsmen. These were strong assets, and had an encouraging effect for the promotion of a person to the position as a *hakahua*, but in actual practice these conditions were neither necessary nor sufficient. "The stress on the principle of primogeniture did not preclude men who were not firstborn sons from being considered *hakahua*. There are several examples of younger brothers being considered *hakahua* because they had shown outstanding abilities" (Monberg, 1991, pp. 19-20). There are also several examples of firstborn sons who were not considered *hakahua*, simply because they did not live up to the standard. In exceptional cases, a man who was born out of wedlock and adopted into a landholding family, could obtain the position as a *hakahua*. But in a society where land is transferred through the patriline only, a sister's son or an in-law could never become a *hakahua* in the lineage of his relatives or affines.

It may be noted that the seniority of a descent line is also of importance as well as its history. A man from a newly formed descent line had to surmount more obstacles in order to be recognised as a *hakahua*, than one who descended from an old lineage. The same is valid for the history of the descent line. Descending from what Goldman (1970, p. 9) calls a line of "genealogical distinction" made it - other things being equal - easier to be recognised as a *hakahua* than having been born into a lineage with a questionable reputation.

Physical skills and personal qualifications

From an early age, boys having the potential background for becoming a *hakahua* were being trained and formed by

their parents and close kinsmen to their role in adult life. Parents tried to elicit excellence by evoking maximum performances in their offspring. They would bring out the best in the conceivable *hakahua*, by teaching him to be polite, treating others with respect, being helpful, and remaining hardworking. His siblings were told to assist him in any chores, and to treat him with respect. Family members thus acted as catalysts, in developing a positive growth in the child, and preparing him to become a *hakahua*. Other members of the society would notice the family's support, and closely watch the young man's behaviour in the years to come. It was an inevitable demand that he should constantly demonstrate his skills to others. It was through his activities and personal conduct that a man attracted the favourable attention of the society.

A coming *hakahua* should also be familiar with his patrilineal kinsmen's achievements through generations, acquire insight and knowledge about the island's cultural history, and develop competence and extensive physical and oratorical skills himself, and thus should gradually develop and accept his own value. By showing adequacy and reliance in himself, by treating significant others respectfully, he would expect others to treat him accordingly. He would surround himself with self-confidence, so others would talk about him as behaving like an elder, a *matu'a*. From a young age, a *hakahua*-like bearing was of greatest importance. Sometimes, a prospecting young man would, as early as the age of 15, stand up in an assembly and express his opinions. If he managed to convince his audience, he was revered for his wisdom; his oratorical skills would be praised, and the potential for becoming a *hakahua* became the talk of the island. If however he failed, he was

immediately reproached and looked down upon (*hakahiinau*).

As an adult, a *hakahua* was expected to be an industrious gardener, in order to make large feasts with ceremonial distribution of food. This was naturally easier for a man who had inherited much land, on which he could grow large quantities of crops. A *hakahua* was also expected to be a great fisherman and canoe-builder, vigorous in building large dwellings, skilled in tattooing, a competent dancer, and an expert ritual leader. An important *hakahua* had the famous solid *taukuka* tattoo, covering the entire chest. This tattooing demanded great resources, since a large assembly of guests, watching the tattooing, had to be fed for about three months.

Actual performance and achievements within the area of subsistence was one of the cornerstones in acquiring honour. By generously distributing his crops, a man not only demonstrated his economic skills, but also consolidated his relationship with agnatic kin and affines, as well as with other groups whose friendship and loyalty were important to him. On Bellona, value lies in distribution rather than in accumulation. It is stressed again and again that material productivity and social beneficence should be for the advantage of other people, and not for pure self-promotion. The more people to benefit from a *hakahua*'s accomplishments, the greater was his reputation. An industrious, efficient, and generous man could attract the attention of the entire island; and several of his exceptional deeds might then become part of Bellona's oral traditions, handed down from generation to generation. As one informant cogently expressed it: "A *hakahua* who has been very laborious in many ways...was constantly talked about for many generations."

Besides physical skills and industriousness, personal excellence was imperative. A *hakahua* not only had to comply with the social norms of the island, his conduct and behaviour should be impeccable. In his social behaviour, he pictured the ideal world. In daily life, the social ideals to live up to included friendliness and generosity toward others; displays of dignity, including being in control of emotions; and exhibitions of decorum in behaviour and speech. If a man of honour used obscene language, he was accused of using idle female talk, and the gods would feel nauseated and abandon him. It was also required that the behaviour of a *hakahua* should be straightforward and free from ambiguity. He should behave in a predictable way, such as announcing his plans and not going uninvited to the settlements of others. Wherever he went, he should be escorted, in order to prevent rumours about his movements. A *hakahua* should avoid promiscuous relationships. He could not allow himself to be tempted by women, if he did not want to jeopardise his honour. Eminence included the protection of his own honour, and the honour of his kinsmen, and thus he should be ready to riposte any threat against it. Finally, he should worship and cultivate his relations to the gods and ancestors, in order to secure their support for fertility, health, and prosperity, as well as for protection during raids.

A *hakahua*, in a way, was the "Land-feeder" (*Haangaihenua*), who, through his skills and industriousness, created wealth and sustenance. Not surprisingly, a *hakahua* was the guardian of the sacred pole, regarded as the embodiment of one of the sky gods. It had the suggestive name *Te ma'ungitehenua*, which translates as "The island's source of life." Through his

endless generosity, a man of honour caused the island to thrive and prosper.

Even the rulers of the heavenly abode were said to recognise the worldly deeds of a highly respected *hakahua*. When an exceptional *hakahua* died, one could sometimes observe certain natural phenomena, which the Bellonese related to his demise. Seemingly endless tropical lightning could light up the sky without it raining; there could be a storm, or the evening sky could turn overwhelmingly crimson. If this happened, the Bellonese talked about "the power of the *hakahua*" (*te tanganga o te hakahua*). The Bellonese explained such firmamental discharges as a special way in which the gods showed their honour to an inordinate *hakahua*, and their blissfulness to see him join the heavenly abodes.

In a society where so much attention is paid to excellence, the danger of personal aggrandisement lurks around the corner. But strict norms have been developed to ensure that trees do not grow into the sky. A person who expressed pride in himself or his own accomplishments would become a source of disgrace, and was immediately ridiculed. This could take the form of idiomatic expressions, verbal insults, or the coining of derogative nicknames. Instead of admiring pomposity, humbleness was prized and several norms for social self-abasement have been developed (see, Monberg, 1979/80). For example, the way gifts were presented was of uttermost importance. Boasting was totally ruled out, as well as proffering. Large hauls of fish, or amounts of food, were by the owner always referred to in a diminutive way. Focus should not be on the value or quantity of the gift, but on the intention behind it - consolidating the relationship between the donor and the receiver. A gift consisting of a large haul

of fish had to be presented in a humble way, as in for example: "I bring you a small fish" (*Manga to'o mai tau mi'i kaui*), or: "This is just a small anchovy" (*Manga te mi'i manini*). Self-abasement was the hallmark of an imminent *hakahua*. The most eloquent form of self-abasement, and praise of others, is found in the greeting ceremony between two *hakahua*. The host's opening speech can go like this: "You, *Taupongi*, have come west and arrived at a miserable place, coming here to the inferior people with their pest-ridden pathway..." (*Ko koe Taupongi e a'u bangibo i te manga baakitekite mai o loghona mai ki na lango 'anga ngaangaasa'a manga hai i na potu anga hua'a nei ...*).

Honour: Social recognition and personal pride

On Bellona, honour cannot be inherited. A man's honour unfolds gradually as an ongoing social evaluation of his accomplishments and personal attitudes. From an early age, and during his whole adult life, he had to prove that he was worth being recognised as a man of honour. The first crucial step was for a young man to get society's approval for acting and behaving like an elderly (*hakamaatu'a*). This recognition should not only come from his closest kinsmen, but also from members of other lineages, sub-clans, and clans. A full appreciation of one's deeds from other clans was hard to obtain, since competition for honour was part of the society's general pattern of competitiveness for commendable achievements. Only through continuous economic production of exceptional and considerable proportions, through performances of religious rituals

resounding through the whole island, by closely obeying the island's social norms for appropriate conduct, and by effectively warding off any attempt to besmirch the social standing of his family and kin, would his recognition as an outstanding man be accepted by members of other clans too. Often, it was a long and arduous way before a man was bestowed with honour.

Honour, in this paper, refers to society's recognition of a person's exceptional achievements, social conduct, and personal bearings that are regarded as being of particular importance and significance for the society, and acknowledging his right to be respected. This expectation to be treated with respect by other members of the society was not only socially accepted, but also expected. A *hakahua* who did not demand to be respected by others was not regarded as being worthwhile being bestowed with honour. The claim to be respected is more than just a personal sentiment, because by paying reverence towards the person, reverence is also paid to kin of posterity. He maintained, and was proud of that which his ancestors had achieved, and regarded his own acknowledgments, competence, courage, and poise, as a natural continuation of his kin's honourable accomplishments. A man demanding respect without socially recognised achievements and kinship-based background is derided, and will under taunts and jeers be named a nitwit (*umauma pono*). Honour, on Bellona, emanates from society's ongoing evaluation of a man's special distinction.

At the very root of a *hakahua*'s position, there is a sense of economic, social, and spiritual ennoblement. The *hakahua*'s internalisation of his honourableness is called *hakamamangunga*, and is the essence of a *hakahua*'s claim to be

respected. It expresses itself in his radiating power, his dignified bearing, and in his poise. Honour on Bellona thus has to be seen as a negotiable, mutual interdependency of social recognition and personal pride. None can exist without the other. Honour thus can be seen as a social-psychological transaction between an individual and his society, based on the former's and his kingroup's achievements, and society's validation.

Display of honourableness

The outward expression of honourableness, called *hakamangumangu*, is easily conceived and felt by the persons present, and exerts a definite influence on them. It finds its expression in physique and posture, use of space, and decorousness in social interactions. A *hakahua* surrounded himself with a dignity denied to men of lower social standing. A distinguished *hakahua*, filling and living his role completely, appears almost august. This has been described beautifully by Northcote Deck, a missionary from the South Seas Evangelical Mission. When in September 1909 he visited the neighbouring island of Rennell - whose members are descended from the same forefathers as the Bellonese - he wrote: "Gently fanned by the breeze, came silently, majestically, a fleet of these great unwieldy sailing barges. In the foremost came the great chief, great in body, great in power, shading his eyes with a fan. They had come from the far end of the lake [on Rennell], where the news of the white man had spread in the night. In impressive silence the great man landed, and there was a dignity about him very arresting. A giant in stature, his face was still the compelling feature" (Deck, 1945, p. 42).

Manifestation of honour

The pre-contact Bellonese and Rennellese language is one of the most elaborate and rich traditional Polynesian languages, with a copious vocabulary in many areas. Compared to European languages, its copiousness lies in a multitude of expressions in the sphere of religion (Monberg, 1991), and on specific topics such as the various stages of growth of plants, animals, and human beings, as well as in the area of counting objects (Elbert, 1975; Elbert, Kuschel, & Taupongi, 1981). When it comes to expressing honour, the Bellonese language is not so rich as in some of its other areas. This does not imply however that the phenomenon of honour is of little concern to its people.

The Bellonese have no term corresponding to the English noun "honour." In the Bellonese language, "honour" is expressed through people's respectful interaction with a *hakahua*. The general term for respect is *pango*, with its passive/transitive form being *pangongia*, as in the sentences: *Ko au e pango ki te hakahua o te manaha* (lit. I show respect to the head of the patrilineage); *Ko Moa te tangata pangongia* (lit., Moa is a respected man). There are several ways in which respect can be paid to a *hakahua*. They all make reference to spatial positions: Something which is uplifted, raised, or elevated. The verb *ma'u'angunga*, with its equivalent *hakama'u'angunga* and *hakama'unga'unga* literally mean to be raised, elevated, uplifted. It stresses any act that will contribute to the esteem and standing of a man of honour. This can be done by adding one's crops to the yields of a *hakahua*, so as to magnify his offerings and subsequent distributions. Likewise, a man of honour, when planning larger projects, would only ask close kinsmen, relatives, and friends, to assist him in the work to be done. Others who wanted to support him would just take notice of the

time and place for the work to be done, and arrive without having been directly asked to participate in the chores of the day. It was a privilege to work for a high-status man and he - as an act of reciprocity - would remember the coworkers, kinsmen, and friends, when they needed advice or assistance. Unrequested support for others was regarded as a token of his prominence.

Whereas the term *ma'u'angunga* mainly underlines the actual behaviour contributing to a *hakahua's* prominence, the term *haka'eha'eha* is applied when speaking about a *hakahua's* praiseworthy deeds, noteworthy achievements, or accomplishments, e.g.: *E haka'eha'eha e Moa ia Puia* (lit. Moa praises Puia). Keeping a certain distance from a *hakahua*, and talking with a subdued voice in his presence, are also expressions of *haka'eha'eha*. When a *hakahua* receives the support of others (*hakama'u'angunga*), he is appreciative, but when being the subject of praises (*haka'eha'eha*), he feels humble.

Competition for social status and honour

Naturally, not all *hakahua* showed all the above mentioned abilities, or could conform to economic and social ideals. According to the degree to which a *hakahua* lived up to the Bellonese ideal of the *hakahua* position, the islanders distinguished between a dignified *hakahua* (*te hu'ai hakahua, or hakahua ma'u'angunga* [elevated *hakahua*]); a small *hakahua* (*te mi'i hakahua*); and a careless *hakahua* (*te hakahua bange*). To what extent society's demands were accomplished was the subject of endless discussion. But the ultimate criterion of being recognised as a dignified *hakahua* was the degree to which his achievements

were favourably commented upon, by other men of honour and land-holders. Being the object of others' scrutinies turned out to be an issue full of political dynamite, since the Bellonese are a fairly competitive people, and struggles for superiority between *hakahua* were not unusual.

Bellonese rival each other by building large houses with vertical curved rafters, building many large canoes, obtaining the largest fish catch, catching the greatest number of sharks (a fairly dangerous adventure for a single man in a small outrigger-canoe), and by inviting the most distinctive men to act as second priest-chiefs in rituals. Of greatest importance were planting competitions (*sanga hetau*), where exceptionally large areas of garden land, belonging to the *hakahua* and his kin, were cultivated, and later the crops were distributed at the harvest ritual (Elbert, 1988, pp. 198-200). Planting competitions usually appeared between different lineages (such as old lineages vs. recently created lineages), or clans. The competitive planting (*sanga he'angumi*) could generate strong emotions, such as envy. Planting competitions were an important part of the dynamics of competing for honour, and were intensely watched and commented upon by the islanders. To ignore a challenge, or to be defeated in a competition, created a severe psychological scar, hidden down deep under the skin, and remembered for generations. On the other hand, being successful in a planting competition solidified the social position of the *hakahua*, and his kin group.

Even in 1977, Daniel Tuhanuku, one of the respected *hakahua* (*hakahua pangongia*) on Bellona Island, remembered many details of feasts held by his ancestors, where hundreds of coconuts and bananas,

thousands of yams, and many rows of puddings, were presented (the numbers should be taken with a grain of salt; they usually refer to an exceptional amount). Some of the incidents took place more than a hundred years ago and have, among other things, given rise to the creation of new personal names, such as *Tekumitapu* (lit., Fathoms-of-taboo; referring to the many taro puddings at the harvest ritual), and *Tesaukiu* (lit., Divine Gift of 10,000 Coconuts; for further examples see Elbert, Kuschel, Taupongi, 1981: Appendix 1; Kuschel, 1988). Names, coined in remembrance of great achievements, are part of a family's or kinship group's social memory, and serve as mnemonics for outstanding accomplishments. By transforming exceptional and hitherto unsurpassed achievements into personal names, the deeds survive the individual's lifetime. Where Westerners erect huge monuments of stone, the Bellonese create personal names.

Competition for who was the most dignified *hakahua* not only occurred between members of different lineages or clans, but was also not infrequently found to appear among elder and younger brothers, or among classificatory brothers. The cultural history of the Bellonese contains several examples of struggles over *hakahua* rank. In most cases, the disputes resulted in an endless chain of quarrels and malice, and could end with homicide (R 110 [The letter 'R' succeeded by a number refers to the oral traditions in Kuschel, 1988, Part 2]).

Defence of honour

Hardwon honour had to be nourished and defended by the titleholder, as well as by his close kin-group. It was expected that any severe challenge to a *hakahua's* social status had to be redressed. Retaliation was

necessary, not only in order to maintain his social reputation, but also in order to retain his own dignity. Though reputation and dignity in general can be affected independently, on Bellona they are regarded as mutually dependent. A *hakahua* being unwarrantedly accused would inevitably be the victim of public ridicule and contempt, if he did not set the record straight. Being exposed to public derision is one thing, but being hurt in one's pride was even worse. The reaction of a *hakahua*, having been the object of other's defamatory speech or behaviour, was by an educated Bellonese compared to the physiological reactions of an adrenalin shock. But it is more than that, any challenge had to be seen as an attack not only on the *hakahua* himself, but also on his living and deceased kin-group. The reputation of the whole lineage was at stake. An attack on the *hakahua*, seen as the representative of kin of posterity, was therefore much more far reaching than just an attack on his personality, his honourableness. There exists no inclusive term for disrespect. Semantically, disrespect is expressed as a negation of the term *pango*, namely *he'e pango* (lit., not to respect).

There were several ways in which a *hakahua* and his kin-group could reduce or forfeit their honour. It could be due to (1) the *hakahua's* own misconduct, (2) by disreputable conduct carried out by close kinsmen, or (3) by the challenges and attacks from non-kinsmen.

Own misconduct

In a society such as the Bellonese, whose members describe themselves as suffering from the disease of envy and rivalry, every single move by a *hakahua* was carefully scrutinised. Any departure from the road that qualified him as a man of honour

would be proclaimed, and become part of the island's stock of gossip. A *hakahua* could be taunted for laziness in work, stealing, lying, eating unclean food, living in a filthy place, behaving in a contemptuous and ungenerous way, committing adultery, chasing women for casual sex, use of obscene language, or needless ferocity. People would lengthily talk about it - though not in the presence of the culprit. Indirectly, often by way of other kinsmen, the *hakahua* learned about the accusations. Often transgressions from society's explicit and tacit norms would be coined into an insulting name. This name was used whenever an argument ensued with the particular man, or members of his kingroup. There are several examples of such stigmatising names being remembered, and used through several generations. This is why great pressure to exert extraordinary self-control was placed on a *hakahua*. What Bourdieu (1997) observed among the Kabyle in Algeria is also valid for Bellona: "...the 'great' are those who can least afford to take liberties with the official norms, and that the price to be paid for their outstanding value is outstanding conformity to the values of the group..." (p. 193). Being publicly derided, and for years ahead to be reminded of an earlier faux pas, was devastating to the *hakahua* and his kinsmen's social reputation, as well as to his own pride, his *hakamamangunga*, for in the eyes of the public, the *hakahua* was regarded as a small or careless *hakahua*.

Disreputable behaviour by family members and close kin

In a lineage based society, with a strong developed group solidarity, honour, and ignominy are not merely individual-psychological phenomena. It is the whole kin-group which rejoices or suffers from the deeds of one of its members. Just as an

individual person's noteworthy behaviour can give prestige to other family members and kinsmen, so will the single individual's dishonourable actions be generalised to his kinsmen. Any disgraceful conduct carried out by family members or close kin of a *hakahua* would also affect his reputation, since it was taken as an indication of lack of control. In a few cases, high-status men had to accept the killing of a close relative, had the latter discredited the good reputation of the family and lineage. In one case (R 97), a man beheaded his own son, because the latter had brought disgrace to the family's honour by incessant stealing.

Challenges and attacks from non-kinsmen

"An insult", says Bryson (1935), "must be recognised as such not only by the party who gave it, but also by the one who received it." We may add, on Bellona, the intentionality of an act was also of importance. If the insult was unintentional, a small gift of atonement could re-establish the balance again. One thing is for certain, a man who did not retaliate against an intentional grave insult was despised by the members of the society, who lost confidence in his being a real *hakahua*. Intentional provocation from non-kinsmen was regarded with the greatest severity, since this could be the beginning of a continuing defiance, and test of the *hakahua* and his kin-group's strength and honour. In some cases, the offended party saw no other answer other than to kill the offender. Numerous are the situations where homicide was regarded as the appropriate answer to a challenge:-

- (1) Accusing a *hakahua* of reprehensible behaviour such as eating tabooed food (R 98), or defecating on the main trail (R

- 120). No man of accomplishments could live with such accusations, unless he accepted to be the laughing stock of the island for the rest of his life.
- (2) Being cheated in a malicious manner by another *hakahua* (R 6) was a challenge that could not be ignored. Once, the priest-chief Nikamatu'a discussed his plan to elect a certain man as his assistant to the priest-chief with *Ngaumoana*. The latter talked him out of it, arguing that the man of Nikamatu'a's choice had too little ritual knowledge. This was deceptive talk, since *Ngaumoana* himself wanted, and later on appointed, the very same man to enact the role as assistant to the priest-chief in his own ritual. This was a provocation of such stupendous dimensions, that only a direct confrontation in arms could resolve the atrocious act.
- (3) Being purposely overlooked during the distribution of crops (R 113), was regarded as an extremely degrading situation, because negligence of a person present would indicate his being a non-entity.
- (4) Having his hair touched by a non-kinsman (R 8). In the Bellonese culture, the head and hair of a person, and especially of a *hakahua*, were treated with uttermost care. It was the apex of the person. Therefore, a non-kinsmen, touching the head or the hair of a man of honour, was regarded as an atrocious act, indicating inferiority of the touched person.
- (5) Theft, especially of garden produce, was considered a serious provocation. A *hakahua* achieved recognition by holding great rituals in honour of the gods, followed by a feast where generously the crops were distributed amongst the invited guests. Consequently, besides being a threat to the owner's socio-religious status, theft of garden produce implied that a *hakahua* had laboured for others, rather than reaping the rewards of his planting effort himself. Homicide was the answer since it was an attack on a *hakahua*'s social reputation and dignity (see section 7.3.2.1 in Kuschel, 1988, Part 1).
- (6) Coconut palms, few on traditional Bellona, were held in high esteem, and played an important part in rituals (Monberg, 1991). They represented such a great value that destroying them was tantamount to killing the owner. Since felling of coconut palms also was part of the traditional celebration following a successful raid, destroying the palms of a living man indicated the owner's weakness. Although it did not always end in homicide, the act of cutting down a *hakahua*'s coconuts contained a severe risk of termination for the culprit. In one instance, it started a feud with 15 raids and many victims (see Kuschel, 1988, Part 1: Feud 9).
- (7) The ultimate challenge of a *hakahua*'s power and reputation emerged at the killing of one of his close kinsmen. A *hakahua* had no other choice than to take revenge in order to restore his honour. In a situation where only few male members were left in his lineage,

he could wait until the striking force again was large enough. But killing demanded killing. In this way killing had a spiralling effect, since killing demanded vengeance-killing, counter-vengeance killings and so on. "One-sidedness is bad," say the Bellonese, "because it indicates cowardice." To demonstrate courageousness in fights was the indisputable obligation of a man of honour. He should be a fearless raid leader. A *hakahua*, though, should restrain from killing a servant, since such a person would not be worth it. A *hakahua* killing another *hakahua* in revenge for an earlier ignominious act, on the other hand, was not only approved of but acclaimed: "It is praised if a *hakahua* kills another *hakahua*" (*Ngaoi te hakahua e taa hakahua*), as the Bellonese say. Killing a *hakahua* was seen as a fatal blow to the whole lineage, a termination of its power and social standing.

Traditional Bellona has a notorious fame for its ferocity. From the oral traditions, it appears that an average of 9.3 people were killed per generation. This is a fairly large number, if one takes into account that the total population, on a rough estimate, hardly ever exceeded 500 persons. The killing of close kinsmen demanded revenge, although the avenger knew that in most cases counter-revenge would be unavoidable, and jeopardise his own life and the lives of his kinsmen. Vengeance by killing is more than just an act of hateful retaliation. Besides being a demonstration of power and willingness to strike back, it is also a healing process of a deep wound, from which pain has gushed forth for a long time. To engage in a raid was not done out of lust. In revenge lies a

rehabilitation for lost honour. "Vengeance then," says Grønbech (1931), "consists in taking something from the other party. One procures honour from him. One will have one's honour back" (p. 72).

It appears from the above that, on Bellona, neither humiliation nor shame are the concerns in relation to ignominies. The emotional reactions are varied, ranging from silent despidal to anger, fury, and hatred. But behind this bouquet of violent reactions lies the offender and his kin's perception of hurt pride (*umauma*), and the concern to maintain and defend their social positioning as a group. This is what defence of honour, in the traditional Bellonese society, is about.

Honour in present-day Bellonese society

During the last two decades, Bellonese society has undergone great changes. The traditional gods are laid to rest in their heavenly abodes, Christianity has gained a strong foothold, and members of the younger generation have received higher education and obtained high positions in the Solomon Islands Government, or are working in private business. The population has almost exploded, land has been divided to many small plots, and many people have left the island due to internal strife or boredom. Respect towards Elders declined after the introduction of Christianity and the British Protectorate. Later, organisations like Women's Liberation and Human Rights have had their influence on the islanders too. The Churches taught the Bellonese that modern life, and the new values, started after 1938. After a few decades of cultural confusion, it seems today that the traditional prerequisites for becoming a man of honour, such as access to land and primogeniture, have not lost their value. Landownership is still a serious

prerequisite, as well as the demonstration of generosity, authoritative appearance, and decorum in behaviour. Likewise, people who come from low-status families are still kept in their social position, and have almost no possibilities to transgress their family background; and children of high-status families are treated differently at schools than children from low-status families. A crucial change, however, has appeared in interactions with the *hakahua*. Whereas in the traditional society people did not dare to contradict or argue publicly with a *hakahua*, today they do not refrain from doing so.

During the transitional period from traditional to modern times, going overseas for training, or representing the Solomons in sport, was a means of acquiring status. However, today with the Bellonese travelling abroad in large numbers, these activities are no longer exceptional, and thus do not increase one's social status. Today, modern education has replaced the traditional one in physical skills and oral traditions. A person with a higher education - usually a man, since higher education is hardly vested in women - is surrounded with respect. By achieving a higher education, the person has demonstrated not only that a Bellonese has the capabilities to live up to Western standards; but also that he is an equal to the majority group in the Solomon Islands, the Melanesians. But in order to be recognised as a modern *hakahua*, the educated person has to demonstrate his concern for his kinsmen. This means that he should have a job that yields enough to support his own family, kinsmen, and affines. A man with a higher education who is jobless is not regarded as a man of accomplishment. The same is true for those who set up business as entrepreneurs. As in the traditional system, it is the manifestation of one's skills that

count. The society's recognition of a man goes by way of his actions. Church leaders are not respected as *hakahua* just because they belong to a Western denomination. In order to obtain a status as *hakahua*, they have to have had an education, which not necessarily all church leaders have had, and to demonstrate their abilities by engaging themselves in social and political affairs of the island. They should stand up in time of crisis, and guide their members.

In politics, a person elected on Bellona and Rennell, as a member of parliament, is not automatically surrounded by respect and recognised as a *hakahua*. People on the island know that his promises, given during his election campaign, are only idle talk, and to no profit for the local people.

The personal attitudes of a modern *hakahua* contain the same fundamentals as in the traditional society. The demand to be considerate and generous towards one's kinsmen and relatives, and to assist them with material resources, however, has become an immense burden. Many young people leave their homeland and go to Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands. They are destitute, have no means of subsistence, and move into the households of their kinsmen. The wages of a highly educated *hakahua* with a well-paid job can hardly cover the expenses of feeding and clothing his kin. The present demands of continuous support to kinsmen is different from the traditional demands of a *hakahua*, whose support was required only during times of crisis, and at important rituals. Otherwise, the Bellonese in the traditional society were self-supporting.

As long as the code of honour is operating, one will not see a Bellonese become a prosperous entrepreneur in the Western sense of the word. He can never

accumulate enough capital to invest and reinvest, because the demand of distribution is counterproductive to such an approach. Although important parts of the traditional *hakahua* system have changed today, the basic structure of obtaining and administering one's position as a man of honour has remained fairly untouched.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper contains limitations imposed by data concerning only the highest social strata. Landholders, women, and children, have not been dealt with. This does not mean that some land-holders and women were not respected for their conduct and wisdom, but rather that the social recognition as a *hakahua* was never bestowed on them. Honour was part of a continuous social evaluation. A person had, through his activities and personal attitudes, to prove that he was worth being recognised as a man of honour. This then generated the right to be respected. Due to social competition among members of different kingroups, as well as rivalry among kinsmen, the position as *hakahua* was under constant assault. An intentional challenge from others had to be repelled immediately, even by taking the lives of those others. Failure to withstand or react to assaults, not to recapture former strength and control, resulted in the weakening of a *hakahua*'s social position and honour. The quality of life dwindled, and one started on the path to insignificance. As one Bellonese explained, a man without remarkable achievements will leave no trace in oral history; his name will fall into oblivion; whereas a man with distinguished accomplishments, a real *hakahua*, will be remembered for generations. Honour surpassed the individual's lifetime. His life became part of

history, and gave status to following generations. *Honor super Omnia*.

Acknowledgement

The authors want to thank Professor Torben Monberg for supplying invaluable information and criticism during the different stages of this paper.

References

- Abu-Lughod, L. (1986). *Veiled Sentiments. Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bryson, F. R. (1935). *The Point of Honor in Sixteenth-Century Italy: An Aspect of the Life of the Gentleman*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Libraries.
- Christiansen, S. (1975). *Subsistence on Bellona Island (Mungiki). Language and Culture of Rennell and Bellona Islands, Vol. V*. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark.
- Churchward, C. M. (1959). *Tongan Dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Deck, N. (1945). *South from Guadalcanal. The Romance of Rennell Island*. Toronto: Evangelical Publishers.
- Elbert, S.H. (1975). *Dictionary of the Language of Rennell and Bellona. Rennellese and Bellonese to English. Language and Culture of Rennell and Bellona Islands, Vol. III, Part 1*. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark.
- Elbert, S. H. (1988). *Echo of a Culture. A Grammar of Rennell and Bellona. Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication No. 22*. Honolulu, HA: University of Hawaii Press.

- Elbert, S.H., Kuschel, R., & Taupongi, T. (1981). *Dictionary of the Language of Rennell and Bellona. Part 2: English to Rennellese and Bellonese. Language and Culture of Rennell and Bellona Islands, Vol. III, Part 2.* Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark.
- Elbert, S.H., & Monberg, T. (1965). *From the Two Canoes. Oral Traditions of Rennell and Bellona Islands. Language and Culture of Rennell and Bellona Islands, Vol. I.* Honolulu and Copenhagen: The Danish National Museum in Cooperation with the University of Hawai'i Press.
- Gehl, W. (1937). *Ruhm und Ehre bei den Nordgermanen. Studien zum Lebensgefühl der isländischen Saga. Neue deutsche Forschungen, vol. 121.* Berlin: Junke und Dünnhaupt.
- Goldman, I. (1970). *Ancient Polynesian Society.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Grønbech, V. (1931). *The Culture of the Teutons.* London: Oxford University Press.
- Henige, D. (1982). *Oral Historiography.* London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Herzfeld, M. (1980). Honour and shame: Problems in the comparative analysis of moral systems. *Man, 15*, 339-351.
- Kuschel, R. (1988). *Vengeance is Their Reply: Blood Feuds and Homicides on Bellona Island. Vol. VII, Part 1: Conditions Underlying Generations of Bloodshed; Part 2: Oral Traditions. Language and Culture of Rennell and Bellona Islands, Vol. VII: Part 1 & 2.* København: Dansk psykologisk Forlag.
- Kuschel, R., & Monberg, T. (1990). *Bibliography of Rennell and Bellona Islands.* Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.
- Lieber, M. D., & Dikepa, K. H. (1974). *Kapingamarangi Lexicon. Pacific and Asian Language Texts: Polynesia.* Honolulu, HA: University Press of Hawai'i.
- Mauss, M. (1990). *The Gift.* London, Routledge.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, P. (1983). *The Unmanly Man.* Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press.
- Milner, G.B. (1966). *Samoan Dictionary.* Oxford: O.U.P.
- Monberg, T. (1962). Crisis and Mass Conversion on Rennell Island in 1938. *Journal of the Polynesia Society, 71*, 145-150.
- Monberg, T. (1967). An Island Changes its Religion: Some Social Implications of the Conversion to Christianity on Bellona Island. In G. A. Highland, R. W. Force, A. Howard, M. Kelly, Y. H. Sinoto (Eds.), *Polynesian Culture History: Essays in Honor of Kenneth P. Emory, Vol 56* (pp. 565-589). Honolulu, HA: Bernice P. Bishop Museum Special Publication.
- Monberg, T. (1975). Informants Fire Back: A Micro-Study in Anthropological Methods. *Journal of the Polynesian Society, 84*, 218-224.
- Monberg, T. (1979/1980). Self-abasement as Part of a Social Process. *Folk, 21/22*, 125-132.
- Monberg, T. (1991). *Bellona Island Beliefs and Rituals. Pacific Islands Monograph Series No. 9.* Honolulu, HA: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Nadel, S. F. (1953). *The Foundations of Social Anthropology.* Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Peristiany, J.G. (1966). *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Peristiany, J.G. and Pitt-Rivers, J. (Eds., 1992). *Honor and Grace in Anthropology.* Cambridge, MA: CUP.
- Pitt-Rivers, J. (1966). Honour and Social Status. In J. G. Peristiany (Ed.)

Honour and Shame (pp. 19-77). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Pitt-Rivers, J. (1968). Honor. In D.L. Sills (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences Vol. 6* (pp. 503-511). London: Macmillan Co & The Free Press.

Prytz Johansen, J. (1954). *The Maori and his religion*. København: Ejnar Munksgaard.

Prytz Johansen, J. (1962). *Maori og Zuni. To naturfolk og deres religion*. København: Gyldendal.

Pukui, M. K., Elbert, S. H. (1971). *Hawai'ian Dictionary*. Honolulu, HA: University of Hawai'i Press.

Rossen, J. M. (1987). Songs of Bellona Island (*Na Taungua o Mungiki*). *Acta Ethnomusicologica Danica 4. Language and Culture of Rennell and Bellona Islands, vol. VI*. Copenhagen: Forlaget Kragen.

Sahlins, M. D. (1958). *Social Stratification in Polynesia*. Seattle, DC: University of Washington Press.

Stewart, F. H. (1994). *Honor*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Wolff, T. (1969). The Fauna of Rennell and Bellona, Solomon Islands. *Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc., B 225*, 321-343.