

MICRONESIAN

JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Vol. 1, n° 1-2

December 2002

EROTIC LEGENDS AND NARRATIVES IN CHUUK, MICRONESIA

Beatriz Moral

Centre de Recherche et Documentation sur l'Océanie, Université de Provence, Marseille

Ambivalence is characteristic of many aspects of Micronesian cultures and in the case of sexuality it is expressed by two contrary conceptions in Micronesian legend. On the one hand it is full of danger, a destructive freedom that might threaten the social order. On the other hand, it is a positive force that provides humans with pleasure and joy.

The main topic of my research has always been, from different perspectives, gender and sexuality in Chuuk, but it is only now that I have begun to pay particular attention to erotic legends. Until now, these legends have been a tangential theme and, it seemed to me, were only an echo of Chuukese sexuality. In my former work I only used them to illustrate some aspects of Chuukese sexuality, but I did not take them as an object of research. However, I have come to realize that they can provide us with a very particular kind of information about sexuality. In this paper I will analyze some erotic legends, including their characters as well as other supernatural beings. I consider that the legends allow us an interesting glimpse of the place sexuality occupies in Chuukese cosmogony as well as giving us a complementary point of view on extra terrestrial sexuality itself.

Ambivalence is characteristic of many aspects of Micronesian cultures and in the case of sexuality it is expressed by a sort of double conception that I consider as two sides of the same coin. On the other hand, sex is equal to danger; it is a destructive force that might threaten the social order. This is the sex that

invades the realm of the family, which in Micronesia represents to a great extent the social order. Sex has to be in its right place, in the dark, in the bushes, in the silence, it has to be hidden and clandestine; otherwise it is danger, incest, and chaos. On the other hand, when sex stays where it belongs it is a positive force that provides humans with pleasure and joy. In any case, the act of sex itself is always exempt from any negative moral judgment, what might be negatively judged is the use of it in an inappropriate way or context. Negative judgment is more related to the danger that it represents than to a pure moral statement about the activity itself. This double aspect of sex is well represented in erotic legends. In addition, legends indicate other characteristics that can help us complete the picture of sexuality on Chuuk. Erotic legends allow us a better understanding of the relation between sex and the supernatural world, the non-human forces that make sex dangerous. This particular relation shapes the conception of sexuality, where sex, as human as it could be, is somehow rooted in a non-human world.

My analysis is focused on Chuuk, but examples from some of the outer islands of Yap

This is a peer reviewed contribution.

© *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* ISSN 1449-7336

Letao Publishing, PO Box 3080, Albury NSW, Australia

(Ifaluk and Woleai) will be introduced as well, for they are closely related to Chuuk¹. Chuuk is part of the Caroline Islands and one of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia.

Chuuk is composed of a lagoon with high volcanic islands and several atolls surrounding it² that will be referred to here as “outer islands”. Different dialects are spoken in Chuuk but they are all mutually intelligible. Even though there are some cultural differences among atolls, all of them share many cultural similarities. Concerning our subject, I observed that the same legends are known all around Chuuk, as well as in some islands of Yap, which are linguistically and culturally close to the islands of Chuuk.

The legends that are analyzed in this paper are commonly known in Chuuk and they are easily shared in groups of the same gender. The legends that I collected myself are not very different from the ones that have already been published but sometimes they present some variations³. Their heroes are often ghosts, gods or demigods as well as humans helped by supernatural beings or magic, making possible the accomplishments of incredible actions or tricks that are not accessible to human beings. In order to have a more complete approach to the problem that I present in this paper, I have also included an analysis of sea-ghosts from real life, for they have a relation with sex that is more than similar to that found in erotic legends.

The qualification of “erotic” might not be appropriate to all the legends and other narratives that I include in this analysis. Some of them do not have an erotic intention, but I decided to take them into account, because they show some interesting sexual aspects.

THE CHARACTERS

I have chosen three types of characters that I consider the most representative of erotic legends and narratives (where sex and the supernatural world are involved): ghosts, gods, and humans (with or without supernatural help). If we are to choose the most representative character of these legends, there is no doubt that this is *Wonofaat*, the most famous trickster god

of Micronesia. Sea-ghosts give us some important key elements in the understanding of non-human sex, in this case we will be concerned more closely with ghosts than with those from legends.

Among the few characters who do not receive any kind of supernatural help, we find wives and husbands who lay tricks to discover each other’s sins or entertain adulterous relationships. Another typical human character in this category is found in the numbskulls’ stories that always lead to incest by ignorance. There are also humans with extraordinary qualities but without any supernatural connection, for example, a woman with eighty labia minora. Other than that, most of the human characters of erotic legends are associated with supernatural forces.

SEA-GHOSTS

The only direct contact that humans have with “non-human sex” occurs in connection with sea-ghosts. Indeed, many narratives about sea-ghosts having sexual intercourse with humans circulate in every island, and they are “legends” but considered as real events. The danger of being eaten by a sea-ghost is heavily present in everyday life and this influences how people arrange the time of activities and, especially, the space of activities in order to avoid this danger.

In Chuuk more than 50,000 spirits of different kinds inhabit the islands, reefs and seas (Hezel 1991:3). The *Chenukken* are only one kind of sea-ghost but they are the ones that entertain the closest relation with humans. These sea-ghosts are individually named and they belong to specific places that people carefully avoid. They dwell in the reefs, beaches, and rocks as well as crave holes and caves, but they never reach any distance inland. The encounters between humans and ghosts in the narratives that I collected usually occur on the beaches and they end in sexual intercourse with disastrous consequences for humans. *Chenukken* in these cases always appear as beautiful and very sexually attractive men or women that people have trouble distinguishing from human beings, although it is even more problematic to resist their charms.

Sea-ghosts are said to be cannibals, but only the ones from legends eat human flesh. The “real” ones “eat” (wochooch) the soul of humans rather than their flesh: it will be said of a sick person, if the diagnosis concludes so, that she has been “eaten” by *chenukken*. On the contrary, the legendary ghosts are really fond of human flesh; they even cook their victims.

Cases of humans seduced, “eaten” or made ill by a sea-ghost are very often heard of as part of people’s daily lives, and they are considered to be the cause of many different, common illnesses⁴. People who approach the sea or the places where the *chenukken* dwell after they had sex, while having sexual thoughts, or while singing love songs or thinking of their loved ones are the most appropriate victims. Another activity that might provoke a *chenukken*’s anger (and hunger) is eating in an inappropriate way, for example not sharing food with others, or eating with one’s back to the sea. Mahony (1970:148) adds to this list not cooperating in fish drives. In these cases, being eaten results in illness, those affected do not necessarily encounter or see the ghost itself.

Sex is, then, often associated with sea ghosts. Narratives where *chenukken* have sex with their victims are more than common; when the ghosts cause illness, it is very likely that sex has been the reason for it. Just as in real life, ghosts in legends also use beauty and sex appeal to attract their victims (as in *The cannibal bridegroom* and *The biting vagina* in Mitchell, 1973). Sex, in all these cases, represents a door through which humans slide into the tenebrous world.

WONOFAAT

Besides *Inemes*, the goddess of love, gods in Chuuk do not interfere very often in human life. But if we consider legends, we will find that there is one god that has an intense desire for intercourse with humans: *Wonofaat* (also found in literature and known as Olofat and Wolfat). He is one of the most popular characters of legends, especially of erotic legends. Many of the tales about *Wonofaat* are about his sexual adventures, and he is the main character of most of the Chuukese erotic legends. His relationship with people down on earth does

not always result in good consequences for humans. He is a trickster god, who likes to demonstrate his superiority over people, spirits and other gods through his tricks and mischievous behavior. But he also provides people with new techniques (like tattooing, Burrows 1963) or helps them in times of distress when they are in need of a supernatural intervention.

Wonofaat is the son of *Nuukkeyinen* (or *Lukeilang*, which means “Middle of Heaven”) (Dobbin and Hezel 1995:76) and the grand-son of the highest god, *Enuunap*⁵ (*Anulap* or *Aluelap*, “Great Spirit”), father of *Nukkeyinen*. *Wonofaat*, although considered a god, is somewhere between gods and humans. He is the fruit of a relationship between *Nukkeyinen* and a human woman, and his father was the only god to have a close relation with the human world: he was sent by *Enuunap* to earth to inform him of all human events (Kawai 1991:22).

The Ifaluk version (outer island of Yap) of *Wonofaat*’s birth seems to include all the principle symbols associated with the divine world to stress his divine origin and shade his relative humanity. According to this version, his mother (*Ilamanu*) was having severe birth pains but could not deliver the baby. *Aluelap* (*Enuunap*) tells *Wonofaat*’s father, *Lugelung* (the name in Ifaluk for *Nukkeyinen*), that the people from the island must each take a stone from the ocean and put it on their heads in order to help his wife in her labor. Only when people follow *Aluelap*’s order is *Ilamanu* able to deliver the baby, who then comes out of her forehead. *Wonofaat* at birth had the size of an adult man. Ashamed, because his body was covered in blood, he runs away from people to clean himself with coconut leaves (Spiro 1951).

If we take into account the diverse analyses of the different aspect of Chuukese cosmology (Goodenough 1986; Kawai 1991; Moral 1998b; and for Yap Alkire 1989) we easily realize that *Wonofaat*’s birth is replete with elements symbolically related to the divine world. In order for *Wonofaat*’s to be born, *Aluelap* orders people to put a stone from the ocean in their heads. The underwater world is considered, together with the sky, as part of the supernatural world⁶, in this sense, so mentioning the origin of the stones is not merely anecdotal. Stones in

Micronesian cosmology play a crucial role, they are the objects of cults, and related to origin myths. They represent a condensation of divine power, *manaman*: a power of heavenly origin, but that in earth is rooted in stones. Thunder and lightning are associated with stones⁷ as well and they are also the signal of *Wonofaat's* arrival and departure (Mahony 1970:138). Stones, full of *manaman* and of underwater provenance (of "divine" origin) were necessary for a human woman to give birth to a demigod.

There is another aspect of his birth that relates him to his divine origin. He does not come out from his mother's vagina but from her forehead. If we follow Kawai, heaven and earth are represented in the human body by the head and the belly respectively (Kawai 1991). But the association has a third element: head-heaven-maleness, in opposition to belly-earth-femaleness. The fact that *Wonofaat* does not come from his mother's vagina might also be considered as a way of stressing his distance from femaleness: he does not come from what might be considered as one of the "most feminine" parts of the woman's body (in opposition to the phallus), but he comes out from the head, which is one of the "most masculine" parts (in opposition to the belly) (*ibid*). Heaven is, indeed, considered male while earth is female (Alkire 1989; Kawai 1991:28). *Wonofaat* is immersed in the first trial of head-heaven-male, in order to erase any feminine trait as well as to pull him away from his half-human origin.

Finally, ashamed of being covered with the blood of his mother, he cleans himself with coconut leaves. He could not have chosen a better plan to stress again his relation with the divine. The coconut can be considered as a "pivotal symbol" (Alkire 1989:92) between the land (human world) and the sea (supernatural world), as a presence of the divine on earth.

Of course, his divine origin allows him to accomplish many and diverse tricks, which are most of the time the principal material of the tales. In legends, he is especially known for having the ability to shift his appearance so we can find him transformed into various shapes: a bird, a ripe coconut, a mosquito larvae, a pile of feces, a drifting stick, a baby, an old man, a handsome man, or a pregnant woman.

Among all the gods of the Chuukese pantheon, *Wonofaat* is the most "sexually oriented" as well as the one with the greatest relation with humans (at least as it appears in legends)⁸. It seems as if his relation with the human world is what makes him so close to sex. This sexual orientation does not appear in other gods. For *Wonofaat* the reason to trick or attract people is undoubtedly for the sake of his own pleasure, a pleasure issuing from sex as well as from his repeated demonstrations of superiority.

Wonofaat together with the sea-ghost is, to my understanding, the best representation of sex that is conceived as a force half rooted in the human world and half in the supernatural one.

THE HUMAN BEINGS

Only a few of our characters are simple humans. The most popular tale with one of these characters is what Mitchell has titled "Ignorance of sexual organs" (1973: 182). In Mitchell's version, a father and a daughter commit incest as a consequence of the father's unexpected ignorance of the "use" and nature of his daughter's sexual organs (the daughter's lack of knowledge is not surprising for she is young). I have heard the same legend, but more often the incestuous couple was comprised of a sister and a brother⁹. Another typical case is that of unfaithful husbands or wives being discovered by their spouses. Other "simple" humans are usually the victims or the objects of those supernatural devices: people tricked by *Wonofaat*, or eaten by sea-ghosts, or sexually "used" (not always abused) by different characters who have the benefit of special powers.

Among the humans with extraordinary qualities we have two important characters: *Nipepenimong* and *Nijirifirwaniik*. Mitchell describes *Nipepenimong* as "a stock character in Chuukese tales. Ancient and infirm, his superior knowledge allows him to emerge victorious against supernatural odds" (1973:192). One of the most erotic legends concerns *Nipepenimong*, who has the ability to detach his penis from his body. It travels around in order to have sex with women¹⁰.

Nijirifürwaniik is a woman who has eighty labia minora¹¹, but is considered disgraceful for not having ever enjoyed an orgasm. Her legend is common in Chuuk, but, as we will see later, is usually told differently by women and men.

These two characters, although their relation with supernatural world is nonexistent (for *Nijirifürwaniik*) or not really stressed (*Nipepenimong* uses magic, but this is not usually even mentioned), represent some of the most human sexual aspects of Chuukese culture. Any serious analysis of Chuukese sexuality could take them as starting points for they represent somehow its very essence. This may be the reason the legends about them are the most popular in Chuuk.

THE ARGUMENTS AND CLIMAX

There are two main recurrent themes in erotic legends. One is the overcoming of obstacles to reach the sexual object, the obstacle being the refusal (hypothetical or real) of the desired person. In these kinds of legends what counts is the trick that leads to the access of a desired body. In these cases, the gender of the characters present does not vary: the active role is held by a man and the sexual object is always a woman. I consider this sex play as a smart “robbery”.

The second kind of argument is more related to danger. It might be of the same nature as the danger issuing from encounters with sea-ghosts, or the one faced by adulterers. More over, the ignorance that leads to incest represents a latent danger of sex, of which it is better to be aware.

SEX AS ROBBERY

Sex in Chuuk is always clandestine and illicit (Moral 1997), as it is in legends. With very few exceptions, the interest in the legend is not due to sexual arousal of the listeners but to their amusement, which stems from the smart trick that leads to an illicit sexual encounter or the discovery of it. The sexual details are often omitted and are not of much interest, which reflects people’s narratives when talking about sex in real life. Indeed, there is no interest

whatsoever in the legitimate sex of husband and wife in legends.

Although in many cases we cannot really consider the sexual acts in legends as illicit, there is always something of a “robbery”. Pre-marital sex is allowed and widely practiced in Chuuk and we cannot define sexual intercourse between a single woman and a single man as a transgression. But what often matters in these scenes in legends is the consent of one of the “partners” (usually the women’s). This is the reason I use the term “robbery”, to sketch the process of alienating someone’s will by means of seduction and/or the access to a body without consent. There is little romanticism in the seduction in these legends and the primary goal is to annul the other person’s resistance to the sexual demands. The seducers use magic or have supernatural powers, which have the effect of annihilating the victim’s will.

One of the most popular legends, the one that I have heard most often, is a good example of this kind of situation where, in this case, the woman’s non-consent is not an obstacle to *Nipepenimong*’s having sex with her. In this legend our hero succeeds in having sex with one woman and two of her daughters without moving from the canoe-house. The argument of the legend is as follows: *Nipepenimong*, while sitting in the canoe house, saw a beautiful woman who was fishing in the sea. He felt an urgent desire for the woman and, in order to have sex with her, cut off his penis and threw it into the sea. The penis swam until it reached the woman. Thinking that it was just a fish, she put it into her net. The “fish” found its way to her body and succeeded in having sex with her. The woman brought this fabulous “fish” to her house and it succeeded in having sex with two of her daughters as well. The third and youngest daughter saw the penis while she was pounding and just thought that it was a weird animal. She hit it with a rock and killed it. The old man, who was sitting in the canoe house, could feel all the pleasures and pains from his penis, he enjoyed having sex and suffered and died when the youngest daughter hit his penis with the rock.

There are two climaxes in this legend. First, when the “fish” has sex with the fishing wo-

man, a climatic moment comes after what is considered the most comic part of the tale, a sequence in which the woman puts the fish in different parts of her body and the fish continually answers “pop, pop, pop”¹², this is not my place”, until, of course, she puts it in the entrance to her vagina and the fish penetrates her. The second climax comes when the “fish” is killed by the youngest daughter after it has had sex with the other two. Actually, the first part of the legend is often told independently of the second, and it makes a whole tale by itself. Another interesting aspect of this legend is the fact that *Nipepenimong* has an incredible detachable penis.

The female characters are not necessarily “victims” of the trickster, for they are as pleased as the trickster himself with the sexual relation. The role that women play in this case corresponds to the passive role that is expected from women in general, who might be willing to have a sexual affair, but would not dare (or are not supposed to) take the initiative (Moral 1997).

In this same spirit is another legend about *Wonofaat*, the greatest trickster, in which he overcomes a woman’s refusal by a trick. In many legends *Wonofaat* appears to be on very bad terms with his brother. In this legend he wants to punish his brother and his wife because she refuses to have sex with him. In order to trick them both, he becomes a mosquito larva and he figures out a way to be swallowed by the woman in order to get inside her stomach (Mitchell 1973:106; Spiro 1951). Once inside of her body, he makes her pregnant, *Wonofaat* himself being the baby in her belly. She gives birth to *Wonofaat* very painfully and the trick is accomplished by him coming out of her body. In a version from Ifaluk (Spiro 1951), *Wonofaat*, is born from his sister-in-law and while he is masquerading as “her” baby, sleeps beside “his mother” and every night has sex with her while she is asleep. Every morning, she finds sperm in her genitals, but she does not know who it comes from. *Wonofaat*’s brother discovers the real identity of the baby by the size of his bodily wastes, which are as large as those of an adult man.

In the Chuukese version, the climax is reached when *Wonofaat* comes out from inside his sister-in-law which might be considered as a reverse penetration so the revenge is accomplished. In the Ifaluk version, he has sex with his sister-in-law while she sleeps¹³ as revenge for her refusal. He makes her go through certain hardships to make his revenge more painful for her (in Mitchell’s version as well). Moreover, *Wonofaat* appears to be beyond human morality because he commits what could be considered as mother-son incest.

These are two examples where the main point is the trick, which makes possible access to the desired woman. This is a theme of major preoccupation for Chuukese men, who try to overcome the refusal or resistance of women, or even to just avoid the simple confrontation of women’s will, by different means. If having a detachable penis was possible for Chuukese men, they would see accomplished one of their most cheery erotic fantasies, for this would allow them easier access to women as well as relief from a concern with women’s refusal.

SEX AS DANGER

Sex in erotic legends is often pictured as dangerous. We have already seen this in sea-ghost narratives, where sex is the lure used by ghosts or one of the principal ways to awake their anger. In legends this same lure is used by cannibal ghosts in order to attract humans and eat them. Mitchell could not have chosen a better example of this danger than a legend from Woleai (other islands of Yap), the one he has titled “the biting vagina” (1973:187). In this legend four brothers undertake the risky task of going to a ghost-island to find out why all the young men who stop there never return to their home island. One by one the brothers visit this mysterious place. The first three experience in their own flesh what has happened to the other young men. They are welcomed by an old woman (a ghost) who invites them to lie with her daughter. The three brothers succumb to her beauty, especially after a view of her “red beautiful vagina” that makes them forget what they have come to discover, and they abandon themselves to the appeal of sex. What they ignore is that this vagina hides a clamshell

that will bite off their penis once they penetrate it and will cause their death. The mother of the woman then eats them after having cooked them. The fourth and the youngest brother goes through the same process. But when he lies with the ghost-woman he does not lose his mind at the view of the red vagina, and instead of penetrating her, he introduces a stick and when the clam bites it, he twists the stick, and kills the beautiful ghost.

This legend follows the same logic that we have already seen in the sea-ghost narratives, the only difference being that in this case the victims really are cannibalized¹⁴. Here again sex is the door of the trap, is what drives humans to their end. The fourth brother gives us the moral lesson of the tale in resisting the attraction exerted by the beautiful vagina, and not losing his mind. Sex is pictured as an irresistible force and succumbing to it may hide great dangers.

Sex implies another kind of danger, in this case not related to the supernatural world, but rather to social sanctions and personal troubles. This is the case of adulterer wives and husbands confronted publicly about their affairs. Married couples as well as lovers fear being discovered, although in the latter case their affair is not adulterous. Sex is always clandestine and conditions must be arranged to hide it properly. In legends of adulterers (like "The trapped adulterer", Mitchell 1973:141), as well as in other narratives of real life, the public display (or view) of the couple during the sexual act is always the main point of the tale. In legends, the characters are often adulterous in order to increase the tension of the tale, but we find that in real life any sexual encounter always implies this tension of being "discovered", which is experienced as a danger inherent in sex¹⁵.

But the greatest danger of sex is, undoubtedly, incest. Incest is a permanent threat and always present in everyone's mind to the extent that it becomes one of the most important factors in behavior regulation, more specifically for females¹⁶. It is one of the worst events that can happen in a family since it can be considered as the annihilation of kin ties and the

violation of the principal rule that structures the social order.

Besides the legend of *Nipepenimong* and his detachable penis, one of the most popular tales is "Ignorance of sexual organs" (ibid: 182). As I pointed out earlier, I have collected this same legend but the characters were not father and daughter, but sister and brother, which is, to my understanding, more representative of the real concerns of Chuukese regarding incest. The sister-brother incest is the most feared for this (non-sexual) relationship is the basis of the family organization and of the kinship system¹⁷.

In this legend, the young woman (the sister or the daughter) climbs a tree and the man (the brother or the father) sees her genitals from below. He thinks that she has a serious cut and tries to heal it. The arguments might develop differently, but always result in an incestuous contact (which might not imply sexual intercourse). In this case the danger is found in human bodies and supernatural powers are not required to make sex dangerous.

I should emphasize here that the danger emanates from the woman's body rather than the man's. The view of the female genitals provokes male arousal and leads to a catastrophic situation. Some aspects of the female body that will clarify this point will be analyzed below.

SEX OF LEGENDS, SEX OF LIFE

There are mainly two aspects of erotic legends that I consider interesting if we are to understand Chuukese sexuality: the parallelism or continuity between the sex of legends and the sex of real life, and the formulation of the relation between sex and the supernatural world. I will discuss the continuity between life and legends, where the aspects that worry humans the most are represented. In legends magic solutions are given, solutions that humans can only dream about.

Erotic legends give us also a strikingly exaggerated representation of the ideals of sex, for example in the legend of the woman with eighty labia minora. The ideal genitals are here imagined in complete consistency with what is most valued sexually in Chuuk.

SEX IS BEYOND OBSTACLES

Arguments in the erotic legends are absolutely in accordance with difficulties that humans have to face in real life. In this context, where sex struggles for realization, the tricks to overcome difficulties (by means of magic, spirits, gods or human qualities) acquire an important dimension. Opportunity must be capitalized on, and this requires one to be smart, tricky and, somehow, superior.

Sex in Chuuk is clandestine, as mentioned previously. There is no space and time clearly dedicated to sex, not even in marriage. Places and times are improvised and sex only occurs in secret, in the bushes, at night or during short moments stolen from routine. Sexually connoted behavior is only allowed in groups of the same gender and age or among lovers. Except for those contexts, the slightest allusion to sex has to be avoided. This behavior is due to the fear of incest. By avoiding sexual connotations the hope is not to arouse sexual appetites among incompatible people, especially between brothers and sisters (see note 9). This is what consigns sex to the clandestine realm, which does not necessarily mean illicitness, but makes all sexual contact very difficult (as we have seen, even spouses have to hide).

Other authors have mentioned this aspect of sex, stressing the anxiety that this produces in men (see footnote 13). Men are mainly concerned about the “access” to a desired woman, about the obstacles that they have to overcome (like coming into a house by night without being heard or seen, or being discovered), especially about the woman’s refusal. This refusal is considered as the main obstacle and as a problem to be solved by any means. Many common practices confirm this concern and attitude of men. Indeed, house crawling, sneaking under women’s skirts or having sex with sleeping women, are well known practices¹⁸. Women are always afraid of being victims of this and they usually take measures to protect themselves. They call these practices *teefan* or *emew*, with a special modality called *emew neepinu*, which means having sex with a sleeping woman while her husband is beside her and making her think that she is having sex with him (Goodenough & Sugita 1980). Magic is used to

bend women’s will or for access to their bodies without being noticed.

These kinds of practices find another justification besides having sex with a woman. There is another prized pleasure that cannot be possible in most normal sexual relationships, even with a consenting woman: the view of her genitals. House crawling is often done with the only goal of reaching the woman’s skirt and lifting it up just to have a glimpse of women’s private parts. Female genitalia are the most precious source of pleasure and represent the main symbol of sex in Chuuk. We will see this aspect below.

The overcoming of obstacles appears often as a theme in legends. We have already seen the legends of *Wonofaat* and *Nipepenimong*. The first hero tricks his sister-in-law by becoming a mosquito larva and we can also find him in other adventures where, by different tricks, he seduces and marries the strictly secluded beautiful daughter of a chief (Spiro 1951). The legend of *Nipepenimong* with his detachable penis is a perfect example of this continuity between real life and legends, where his extraordinary “qualities” allow him to have sex with women.

We have considered that here we are not just talking about a simple coincidence, but about one important characteristic of sex in Chuuk. Its clandestine nature, the difficulties that its accomplishment always presents, pictures sex as something that is always beyond obstacles. This is the case for women as well as for men, but for the latter another major impediment worries them: the women’s consent. This aspect is not merely anecdotal in the aforementioned legends, but the main point. Men try to emulate their legendary heroes with their magic, sneaking and tricks. But they will not likely reach *Nipepenimong*’s successful performance by having a detachable penis like his.

NIFIIRIFIRWANIUK AND THE BEAUTY OF FEMALE GENITALIA¹⁹

It is difficult to talk about female genitalia as a tangential theme, for they are replete with essential meaning related to understanding Chuukese sexuality. I will highlight here the aspects that I consider most relevant for this paper.

A great concern about women's genitals is characteristic of men as well as women in Chuuk (Galwin & Sarason 1953; Moral 1996a, 1997, 2000a). This preoccupation is easily understandable once we discover what hides this part of the female body.

For men it is the most desirable part of the female body. We could almost say that it is the only part that men pay real attention to, besides the inner thighs (but their importance is not so great). Female tattoos in Micronesia were typically placed in the genital area, which was a way of enhancing beauty. But the preference for this part is not unconditional: the desirability of a woman's genitals depends on many aspects that are minutely described, especially the size of the labia minora. We find in Chuuk as well as in other regions of Micronesia a technique for stretching the labia minora in order to make them long²⁰.

The characteristics of female sexual organs play an important role in the successful accomplishment of sexual relationships. "Good" genitals provide more pleasure to men as well as to women. What seems valuable too is that good genitals allow the woman to reach orgasm more quickly, which is very important if we think of the circumstances in which sex takes place, hidden and improvised. Female orgasm is one of the *sine qua non* of sex and big labia are supposed to facilitate it. For men, female orgasm is important as well, for they can find themselves in a very embarrassing situation if they do not master the situation²¹. The pleasure of men also depends more on the females' organs than their own. The characteristic of male sexual organs does not seem to really matter either to men or women²².

There is no doubt that if we are to point out a symbol of sex in Chuuk, this is the female genitals. Male sexual organs are far from having the same sexual meaning as the female's. This fact is confirmed in the incest taboo. The rules that inscribe the distance between people who have to avoid any sexual contact are mostly related to the female genitals. Women's general behavior is conditioned by the continuous preoccupation with hiding this part of their bodies in order not to arouse men of their families.

Female genitals are the symbol of sex, but also represent the female identity in its two opposite forms: first, the identity of sister, the woman from the family and *out of sex* (because she is under the taboo of incest); and second, the identity of a sexual woman, a woman from outside the family and not affected by the incest taboo. In the two cases, genitals might be considered as the paroxysm of both identities. In the first case genitals are what will define her as a sister by obligating her to follow the most characteristic behavior towards a brother, sexual distance. In the second case, they represent the most valuable part of her body for she "has" on her the very symbol of sex²³.

It seems as if all these meanings would not have enough space on normal sized genitals. This might be the reason why genitals have to be *big*, so they can host them all and they can represent in their size the privileged place that they occupy as well.

Chuukese erotic imagination has evidently produced a character with the most beautiful genitals, the biggest they could have imagined. *Nijirijirvaniik* is considered as a great beauty for she has eighty labia minora. Even though her beauty brought many lovers, not one of them has given her pleasure, since so many labia covered her clitoris that no man had a penis long enough to reach it. She heard about *Wonofaat* and proposed to him an encounter that he accepted right away. *Wonofaat* was seated in the men's house and took off his penis. Without moving from his place, his penis extended itself and traveled until it met *Nijirijirvaniik* on her way, somewhere beyond the reef of the lagoon and the Mortlocks. *Wonofaat* made his way through all her labia minora and arrived at her clitoris, and rubbed it until she reached her first orgasm.

This legend is usually differently told by men and women. Men describe the encounter of *Wonofaat* and *Nijirijirvaniik* as a competition in which *Wonofaat* wins, for he makes her reach the orgasm before him²⁴. Men often describe sexual encounters in this manner, as proof that they have to overcome, where one loses while the other wins²⁵. For women, *Nijirijirvaniik* is a lucky and at the same time piti-

ful character, for she has the biggest labia but she has never experienced orgasm. Women do not describe encounters as men do, although men can lose face if they do not demonstrate sexual mastery. On the other hand, they might feel inferior if they consider that their genitals are not good enough, if they are small.

I consider this legend to be a micro-representation of what a sexual act is in Chuuk. In it we can find all the meaningful elements that are supposed to appear when a woman and a man have sexual intercourse. The genitals of the woman take the most prominent place in the legend. The motor of the legend is the search for orgasm, pictured as something that every woman has experienced and is highly valued. The man (*Wonofaat*) displays his *savoir faire* by his mastery of the most popular sexual practice in Chuuk: *the Chuukese hammer*. This practice consists of rubbing the clitoris with the tip of the penis and is considered a national treasure of which all Chuukese (women and men) are very proud. In the versions told by women and men we still find what worries them the most: for women, the valorization of such beautiful genitals and their sympathetic feelings for someone who has not experienced orgasm; for men, it is the valorization of genitals as well, but also the description of the encounter as a competition where the man wins. In this legend everything happens as it always should: she has beautiful genitals, he masters the situation, and he makes her reach orgasm with the *Chuukese hammer*.

COSMOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN SEX

But legends are not just a mere reflection of what happens in the human world. They are, together with myths and narratives about supernatural beings, a window to the divine and the tenebrous world. In this specific case, they allow us to have a glimpse of what humans have imagined of sex out of human flesh, and non-human dimensions, but also of what they think is implicit about sex. Sex seems to be always in a liminal tension between two opposite spheres. In the case of sea-ghost (in the narratives as well as in legends) sex is the linking point between the human and non-human world. It is what attracts ghosts and is their lure

for humans as well. Ghosts know the secrets of the force of sex and humans do not master it enough to resist it. The mastery of ghosts can only be comparable in the human world to that of magic. In any case, a superhuman intervention is necessary to control the force of sex and to resist as well.

In Chuuk, love (sexual love) is considered alienation, as a result of a magic spell, and not as a natural human state. Being sexually attracted to someone (in a passionate way) cannot be imagined except as a result of the manipulation of the "victim's" mind by means of magic. To describe someone who is, we would say "in love", Chuukese have not found a more explicit way for suggesting this alienation than this: they consider her/him "sick" (*semwmmwen*) or "crazy" (*wummes*), invaded by an external energy, out of her/his mind. The "cure" of this state occurs at that same level, that of magic, of the manipulation of non-human forces. Love magic is so widely used in Chuuk that it would be difficult to find a single case where it has not been applied, for sexual love cannot be imagined as ordinary human nature.

Unless it is confined to its own sphere, among the right people, in the right place and at the right time, sex is never anodyne and has to be carefully enjoyed. The restrictions are many and the reason for them is always so as not to raise the anger and to avoid the sanction of gods, ghosts or ancestors. In Chuuk the activity is rare when it is not somehow related to the supernatural, where prayers and chants have to be said, magic applied or divinities invoked. For all of them sexual taboos were and still are prescribed, for sex is considered as a disturbing force that can spoil other activities. The misuse of sex inside of the boundaries of the kin group can be the cause of these supernatural sanctions, in this case coming from the ancestors, where incest is considered the most fatal transgression. Sickness and death will be the result of the breaking of any kind of sexual taboos (Mahony 1970).

If human sex is understood as being in relation to the supernatural world, divine sex seems to be always related to humans as well. *Wonofaat* is the only god for whom sex appears

to be of importance. This culture hero, half human half god, related to lightning and mana, travels between the humans and the gods, and represents a liminal character whose link with humans happens often to be sex. As a god, *Wonofaat* masters supernatural energies that he uses for his benefit and pleasure; as a human (male), his sexual drive is the motor of his actions. He is the ideal combination of sexual desire and superiority in order to accomplish what humans cannot: easy access to sex, with no possible obstacles and no harmful consequences. Someone like him had to be a god, but had to be human as well.

CONCLUSION

Sex appears to be a force in between. It is essentially human but its relation with the supernatural shows that human nature is not enough to complete its definition. It is, to some extent, the connecting point between the inhabitants of earth and those from the beyond, either gods, ghosts, or ancestors, the door between two complementary and opposite worlds: the here and the beyond.

If we come down to the mortal social order, we will find that sex plays again the liminal role between two opposite spheres. By breaking the incest taboo, the boundaries that define kin ties are transgressed, for kin ties are defined by the absence of sexual contact (Marshall 1981; Moeal 1997, 2000a, 200b). Incest could be pictured as an invasion of one entity by its very opposite: where there is family there is no sex and vice versa, for the intrusion of sex annihilates any kin tie. This aspect of sex is not confined to the restricted space of the family, but affects the whole social realm and sex becomes censured and confined to clandestinity, deprived of any open and socially recognized expression. We have to consider that in Chuuk, as in many Oceanic societies, the social sphere is almost completely shaped after and dependent on kinship. This is the reason that sex, even when it is licit sex, has to be out of sight, it has to be confined to the clandestine realm, for any of its public manifestations (even the slightest) are considered as the threat of a dangerous invasion. Limits between family and sex have to be seriously preserved and this does not seem

to be an easy task to accomplish. In this case, sex represents the most strict and dangerous limit, but also essentially necessary to define the realm of kin ties, a realm that represents the social order.

There is parallelism between this division of “the here” and “the beyond”, and “the social” and “the clandestine” (what can be accepted in the social order and what has to be hidden). The human world, the social order, the family, the domestic space, the day time, the living might be aligned together in a clear opposition with the beyond, the clandestine, the sex, the bushes, the dead and the night time. Although sex belongs to the last group, it is also present in the first one, as a threat, as a danger, as an intruder, but also as the element that makes possible the establishment of the boundary line of what belongs to one world or the other.

Sex then becomes a game, which is well represented in legend, with all the tricks, obstacles and supernatural devices. It is necessary to know the rules and to master the game to avoid the dangers and to enjoy it at the same time. It is essentially a question of knowing and respecting the limits that define a social order that seems easily perturbed by the mere presence of sex.

ENDNOTES

- 1 In Chuuk state as well as in these islands, all inhabitants speak languages that belong to the trukic group (Goodenough and Sugita 1980:xii).
- 2 There are four groups of Low islands: the Mortlock Islands, Hall Islands, Westers Islands and Namonuito.
- 3 Especially Mitchell 1973 and Spiro 1951, where we find some erotic legends. For another collection of legends see also Grey 1951, Vol 1 and 2.
- 4 Sexual intercourse does not always take place. In the cases that are the most common, people are just “eaten” by a ghost, and this is shown by a sickness. For sickness provoked by a sea-ghost, see Mahony 1970.
- 5 Goodenough does not describe *Wonofaat* as the son of *Nuukkeyinen* or *Lukeilang*, he writes that “he was closely associated with “Middle (Nuuk) of “Middle of Heaven” (Nuukkeyinen)”

- (1986:558). Sometimes Wonofaat appears as Enuunap's son (Mitchell 1973:210).
- 6 The beyond the horizon is considered the sky world, which means for Micronesian beyond the sea. There is not doubt about the supernatural nature of the sea (Alkine 1989, Goodenough 1986; moral 1998b).
 - 7 For more about the role of stones, manaman and lightning in Micronesian cosmology, see Goodenough 1986 and Moral 1998b. Another aspect of Wonofaat's origin is the coincidence of the place in heaven with which it is related, the Middle of Heaven (also the name of his father, Nukkeyinen), where the mana is supposed to come from, with the use of stones for his birth. As we have seen, mana is directly related to stones as an "embodiment" of this power in earth, and stone cults in Micronesia are associated with thunder and lightning, which are the signal of the arrival and departure of our hero.
 - 8 One of the consequences of this contact is the teaching of tattooing techniques to humans. Burrows (1963) is persuaded by the sexual nature of tattooing, which he considers as "essentially a love lure" and "invented originally for that purpose by the Wolfaat" _1963:191).
 - 9 Incest between sister and brother is the most feared incest in Chuuk, for brother-sister is the principal kin relationship (Gladwin and Sarason 1953; Goodenough 1978; Kawai 1987; Marshall 1977, 1981; Moral 1997, 2000b).
 - 10 In the version I collected myself in Chuuk Laggon, the name of the man wasn't mentioned, but he was always described as an old man.
 - 11 In the name Nifirifirwaniik, fir means labia minor nas waniik eighty.
 - 12 "Pop, pop, pop" is the onomatopoeic sound of the penis trying to make its way.
 - 13 Having a sex with a sleeping woman is a very common erotic fantasy of Chuukese men (and a well known practice) and a nightmare for women, for the "problem" of the consent is radially overcome. I would not be surprised if a similar version is found in Chuuk.
 - 14 Although at the end of the story they all come back to life.
 - 15 Gladwin & Sarason mention this danger that always accompanies sexual encounters, but they only consider the risks that males have, and they picture men as victims) 1953:107,108,109). The same view is found in Fisher & Swatz (1960) and Swartz (1958). For a critique oft his "victimization of men" see Moral 1996b and 1997.
 - 16 This would be too extensive a theme to be treated here. It has been a principal subject of my other work, e.g. Moral 1997, 1998a, 2000a, 2000b.
 - 17 About the centrality of the sister-brother relationship in Chuuk, see Gladwin & Sarason 1953; Goodenough 1978; Marshall 1977, 1981; Moral 1997. 2000b, and among others.
 - 18 There is a magic called *ochoocho* that makes it possible for a man to come into a house without being perceived, so he can sneak under a woman's skirt or even have sex with her. Magic is also used by women, but not with the specific goal of having sexual access to a man.
 - 19 Female genitalia are the subject of two of my papers (1996a and 2000a), and discused in my Ph.D. thesis (1997).
 - 20 This seems to have been common in othe islands of Micronesia besides Chuuk. Sarfert (1919) reported this for Kosrae and Hambruch and Eilers (1936) for Pohnpei..
 - 21 This, on the contrary, does not seem to be a condition for spouses. Lovers' and spouses' sex are not considered under the same criteria.
 - 22 This double and somehow paradoxical female identity is the subject of analysis in some of my former work (Moral 1996, 1997, 1998a, 2000a, 2000b).
 - 23 This double and somehow paradoxical female identity is the subject of analysis in some of my former work (Moral 1996, 1997, 1998a, 2000a, 2000b).
 - 24 Mitchell gives us a version in which Nifirifirwaniik dies at the end (1973) and she loses the competition.
 - 25 So does Gladwin (Gladwin & Sarason 1953).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alkire, William H. (1989) Land, Sea, Gender, and Ghost on Woleai-Lamotrek, in Mac Marshall and John Caughey (eds.) *Culture, Kin, and Cognition*, Washington D.C. American Anthropological Association, pp. 79-94.
- Burrows, Edwin G. (1963) *Flower in my era. Arts and Ethos of Ifaluk Atoll*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Dobbin, Jay and Francis Hezel (1995) Possession and Trace in Chuuk, *ISLA, A Journal of Micronesian Studies*, Vol. 3, N.1, Rainy season: 72-104.
- Fischer, John & Marc Swartz (1960) Socio-Psychological Aspects of Some Trukese and Ponapean Love Songs, *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 73: 218-224.
- Gladwin, Thomas & Seymour Sarason (1953) *Truk: Man in Paradise*, New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc.
- Goodenough, Ward H. (1978) *Kin, Property, and Community on Truk*, 2nd ed., Hamden: Anchor Books.
- Goodenough, Ward H. (1986) Sky World and this World: The Place of Kachaw in Micronesian Cosmology, *American Anthropologist* 88 (3), September 1986, pp. 551-568.
- Grey, Eve (1951) *Legends of Micronesia*, High Commissions, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Department of Education, Book 1 and Book 2.
- Hambruch, Paul and Anneliese Eilers (1936) Ponape, Part II, in Dr. G. Thilenius (ed.) *Ergebnisse der Sudsee Expedition 1908-1910*, Vol. 7, Hamburg: Friedrichsen, De Gruyter. (Unpublished translation by Elizabeth A. Murohy and Ruth E. Runeborg, 1995).
- Hezel, Francis X. (1991) Spirit Possession in Chuuk: a Socio-cultural Interpretation. Chuuk FSM: Micronesian Seminar. Paper prepared for the 21st annual meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, February 19-23, 1992 New Orleans.
- Kawai, Totsimitsu (1987) Females Bear Men, Land and Etereke: Paternal Nurturer and Symbolic Female Roles in Truk, *Senry Ethnological Studies*, 21:107-125.
- Kawai, Totsimitsu (1991) Emotion in the Belly versus Thought in the Head: A study of Mind, Body and Gender on Truk, *Man and Culture in Oceania*, Vol. 7:21-37.
- Mahony, Frank (1970) A Trukese Theory of Medicine, Ph.D. Stanford University.
- Mitchell, Roger E. (1973) *Micronesian Folktales*, Nagoya, Japan: Asian Folklore Institute.
- Moral Beatriz (1996a) Sobre la interesante concepcion de los genitales femeninos en Chuuk (Micronesia), *Revista Espanola del Pacifico*, n.6, a-o VI.
- Moral Beatriz (1996b) Love in Chuuk (Micronesia): Feelings Involved in Sexual Liaisons, unpublished paper, presented at the 4th Biennial European Association of Social Anthropologist conference, in Barcelona. Ariel.
- Sarfert, Ernst Gotthilf (1919) Kosrea, in Dr. G. Thilenius (ed.) *Ergebnisse der Sudsee Expedition 1908-1910*, Vol.4, Hamburg: Friedrichsen, De Gruyter (Unpublished translation by Elizabeth A. Murphy, 1983.)
- Spiro, Melford E. (1951) Some Ifaluk Myths and Folk Tales, *Journal of American Folklore*, 64:289-302.
- Swartz, Marc J. (1958) Sexuality and Agression on Romanum, Truk, *American Anthropologist*, 60:467-486.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY AND CONTACT

Beatriz Moral is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the Centre de Recherche et Documentation sur l'Océanie, Université de Provence, Marseille, who has an interest in Micronesia and particularly in Chuuk