CHAPTER VII

MARRIED LIFE

1. *Akiaq and the newly-wed*

After his marriage a son remains with his father in the men's house or he stays with one of the brothers of his mother. The young man received all kinds of advice about what is expected of a husband. Thus a father may say to his son, "Boy, when you have taken a wife, do not be lazy. Whatever she may order you to do, do it for her. If you do not do what she says, she will feel unhappy. If your wife is glad to have you, she in her turn will do what you command her to do. If you are rude, she will be the same to you. Getting angry will not do. You and your wife must be good to one another. If you are too much of a nuisance, she will start looking for another husband. If your wife goes fishing, you must go to the bush and cut firewood. When she comes back, she will be pleased and she will think that her husband is not lazy, that he knows how to work. Follow my example, otherwise your child will go hungry and cry for fish. If you go to the forest, you must gather palm leaves for your wife, lest she must ask others to do this for her. Imagine if someone gave her leaves which are wet with urine. You would be put to shame, and so would your wife. If you come home empty handed, someone might say to your wife, 'Your husband has not gathered any leaves because he was chasing other women'. If your wife comes home from fishing, do not immediately ask her for sago. You must let her eat first. She knows quite well that you have stayed at home with the children and that you are hungry. If during my lifetime you give your wife a beating, I will throw it in your face and ask who taught you that. I have never beaten your mother. If I hear of it again, I will come at you with a spear. You must not get angry with your wife. If you beat your wife, she will grow as thin as a rib. Other women will say she is thin because her husband is always beating her up with a stick. Do not beat your child. If it is thin, it is because you have beaten it with a piece of wood."

The newly married man is also told by his relations to be good to his in-laws. He should not be jealous or upset if his wife gives part of the

fish she caught to her parents and her brothers and sisters. If he is good to his wife and liberal with his bride-givers, they may think of giving him another wife or of putting an exchange sister at his disposal so that he can marry a second wife, even though his first wife is still alive.

The wife is lodged with her mother-in-law and she must adapt herself to the new surroundings. Therefore, before her marriage her mother will advise her not to be suspicious of the women in her new family nor to cause them trouble. If she follows this advice, they will be good to her and take her side if she gets involved in a quarrel with her husband or with some women in the settlement. About her relationship with her husband, her mother will tell her, "Girl, if you have taken a husband, be good to him and he will do the same for you. Do not be lazy. If you work hard, your husband will love you. Be good to your husband and children. As husband and wife you must be good to one another, so that you may grow old together. If you are a nuisance to your husband, he will beat you all your life until you are old. Be not sour-faced in the company of your husband, you must be quick and happy to roast some sago for him at his first request."

The Jaqaj woman has to remember the circumstances in a men's life. It is in this context that the following counsel given by a father to his daughter is of interest. "When I am dead, you must take care of your elder and younger brothers. They must be able to come to your house and you must roast some sago for them. When you come home from fishing or sago beating, you should not be cross, but kind. Every morning you must be quick to roast some sago. If an elder brother stays at home during the day and gets hungry, do not wait till he asks you for food; be thoughtful of him. When you come home, give some fish to your elder brothers, give some to your husband and some to your younger brothers and sisters. Do not keep your husband waiting, but quickly prepare his sago, so that your husband and your brothers will have finished their meal, in case anybody should start a fight in the settlement. Then they will be able to fight bravely."

The newly married couple are admonished as follows. "Sleep with your wife under a roof, or else a shade might carry off your souls. A man who uses his wife without further ado in the forest will die. On a boar's path, on a cassowary path, it does not matter where, or on a kangaroo path, do not do it, because these are the paths of the shades. On the path of a mouse or of a snake, do not do it, do it under a roof."

The counsel given reflects the thoughtfulness normally observed in

sexual intercourse between husband and wife. The husband usually waits for his wife to take the initiative. She can show her willingness through special solicitude or through a word of interest. Forcing a woman or treating her contemptuously is expected to be avenged by the jungle spirits, *aburi,* as soon as the husband ventures out in the forest alone.

A good wife sympathizes intensely with her husband in the dangers that threaten him during fights and warfare. The least scratch he sustains leads her to lamentations. When he is wounded, she takes him into her own house to nurse him carefully. A wise husband, in his turn, pays much attention to his wife. He cannot do without her, although he will not openly admit this. To all appearances he cares more about the children than about their mother. In the past, he went head-hunting for his children. Their weddings are one of his principal worries, long before they reach the marriageable age. If the first child is a boy, *membaq-arèp,* this child is especially dear to him because he is both son and heir. Young people often have to marry someone they had not chosen themselves, so that they had to break off all sexual alliances they had before their weddings. A husband will try to recover any pieces of his wife's perineal band which may still be among the possessions of her former "suitors". On her part, the wife sometimes refuses to have sexual relations with her husband until she is sure that he has renounced all his former girlfriends. The consummation of marriage is not without problems.

The exchange brother-in-law watches closely how the new husband behaves towards his wife. If he beats his wife mercilessly, the exchange brother-in-law will warn the relatives, who call the husband to account. Difficulties often originate from the husband's demand that his wife be completely faithful to him. The least ground of suspicion gives occasion to severe punishment. In the opinion of the men, such a thrashing may serve as a kind of preventive measure. The newly married wife has to listen to elaborate advice on this subject. A wife who is railed at by her husband may not shout back at him. If she did, or if she felt strong enough to reproach him, her husband might begin to suspect her. He might think that she would never feel so secure and self-confident unless she was sure that another man wanted her. The warning on this point says, "If your husband takes a stick (to beat you), do not call him any names, *èt mateba,* for someone might pass by and hear you. He will not come to help you, but he will say, 'He is beating her because

she has called him names'. If you women abuse your husbands frequently, they will no longer defend you."

In the past, it sometimes happened that a man, when he left the settlement, ordered his young wife to stay in her house. If he happened to come back unexpectedly and he saw her somewhere in the settlement, she was sure to get a sound thrashing. At night, too, a woman could not be sure of what her husband might be up to. He could put her to the test by coming to her house and behaving as a man who wanted to seduce her. He would push an arrow through the floor close to her sleeping place. If she responded to the invitation by coming out of the house, the husband would certainly stab her with his spear. If a husband caught his wife when she was committing adultery, he had a right to kill her.

A wife need not tolerate the infidelity of her husband. She may reproach him for it and if he then beats her she will cry loudly for help. This makes the whole matter public and that is what the husband wishes least of all. Since such reproaches often lead to fights between families, the wife is repeatedly told not to be suspicious, *pipi mateba.* The women watch their husbands' movements, but they do not speak up until they are certain of infidelity. A wife can also try to force her husband to renounce an illicit relationship by providing less food for him. If, however, the intruding woman is not married, the position of the wife is weak, because her husband could take this "intruder" as a second wife. In contrast to her husband, an adulterous wife is always in the wrong, even if she has an affair with an unmarried man.

If someone caught another man's wife in adultery, he would go to the men's house and search for the pipe of the wronged husband. Having found it, he would remove the fibres from the long stem. When the owner of the pipe came home and started to smoke, he would immediately know what was going on and start making inquiries at once. If, on the other hand, the wife had been molested against her wishes, she could draw a circle of mud around her navel and thus return to the settlement. Her husband and brothers would immediately investigate the case and start a fight with the culprit.

In former times conjugal infidelity could lead to very awkward results, as the following story shows. This story highlights the contrast between the serenity of the *akiaq* and the barbaric cruelty to which conflicts can lead. Qadaq of Képi married a woman called Ndaman. Years later, she persuaded a man Qajmaj, also of Képi, to carry her off to the settlement of Moïn. In advance she informed her sister, Mirepu, of her

plans and asked her to bring her children by Qadaq to a safe place. Mirepu took two children of Ndaman's in her protection. She also tried to get the third child from the men's house, where it slept with its father, Qadaq. The news of Qajmaj and Ndaman spread more quickly than Mirepu could act. Qadaq would not give the child to her. On the contrary, he came fully armed with his relations to the women's house where Mirepu and the two children were staying. He demanded the children. Mirepu, however, assisted by her own husband, Qomb, put up such fierce resistance that Qadaq and his people did not dare to take the children from her. Then the great war-leder, Manip, went to the house of his wife, fetched his war ornaments and decorated himself completely. Then he made his appearance on the scene. Qadaq then took this third child, the one who lived with him in the men's house, and gave it to Manip. The latter conferred with Jaèndé. At the command of Jaèndé, Manip took his child to the people of Moïn. Moïn passed the child on to Togom. There it was killed and eaten. Some ten years later the two adulterers returned to Képi and Ndaman went back to her husband, Qadaq.

2. *Relationships within the nuclear family*

The relationship between parents and children was strongly influenced by the relations of the family with other people. An exchange marriage had a strong impact on the relations between the children of the two marriages involved. There were other ties as well, such as those of foster parents and head-hunting relationships. All these adults participated and interfered in their own way in the education of the children. Father and son(s) worked together building a house, digging out a canoe, and making fishing- and hunting-gear, weapons or drums. The father also pointed out the boundaries of the *imu* and *qari* lands to his sons. He showed them the coconuts which he planted and the trees he reserved for future canoes. On trips with their fathers the boys heard the stories connected with the hills and the swamps. They also learned how many heads they must capture to revenge the family's losses of the past.

All this strengthened the ties between father and son and at the same time the gap between mother and son widened. The boys' growing physical strength intensified their feelings of superiority over the weaker women. A boy might help his mother, but he would not tolerate a curt command. He might be very rude in his retorts. I heard comments like

these: "My mother . . . oh I gave her a beating yesterday . . ." and "My mother . . . I got rid of her already . . ." Initially the boy feared her sharp tongue and a furious and strong mother might beat a recalcitrant son but in the long run she became more and more submissive to him. She acknowledged his growing strength as a reliable guarantee for her own safety. The way she behaved towards him during his childhood might influence the way he behaved towards her in her old age. Occasionally a boy had more positive relationships with his grandmother, who took his side when he was naughty, than with his mother, who worked day by day for him.

If her son was absent for a while, a mother might weep when he returned and the grown-up boy would accept embraces from her. In spite of this show of affection he might beat her a few hours later if she did something he did not like. Although boys and men pretended to feel contempt for the women, the women knew that the men would come back to be nursed by them in cases of illness. Then the women would use this opportunity to scold them. Once her husband had died, a mother relied more on her sons than on her daughters. She admired her sons and would be proud to be the mother of a great warrior.

A father was also interested in the education of his daughters. Not only did he give them good advice, especially regarding their future married life, but he also looked after them, guarding and helping them. In return he expected to be helped by them. He brought them the tree fibres for their perineal bands. He was angry when they behaved indecently. He also pointed out to them the boundaries of the family plots of land. A father was not ashamed to express his love for his daughter, saying a word of praise when she was good to him. It was, however, not customary for him to embrace her.

The relations between mother and daughter became more intense when the menstruation or pregnancy of a daughter induced the mother to impart the traditional warnings. As discussed above, children grew up together until they were about ten years old. At that age they were expected to stand on their own legs and to contribute their individual shares to the common board of the family. As they approached the marriageable age, both groups of relatives tried to have their say in the marriage arrangements, since not only parents had a voice, but also their *qari* and their *imu*. The only thing the young people themselves could do was to confront their relatives with a *fait accompli*. But such a *fait accompli* could, in pre-contact times, lead to sanctions which endangered their own lives.

As long as children were small, parents and relatives were in complete control. What happened to the children if their parents' marriage broke down through divorce or death gives convincing proof how dependent children really were. The opposite was true once the children had grown up and their parents had grown old. The parents then were at the mercy of their children. Fortunately, children usually were not merciless with their aged parents.

Among brother and sisters relative age was always an important factor. The elder brother or sister helped the younger ones and taught them to walk and to speak. They kept watch over them. They expected in return that a younger brother or sister would repay this concern for them by being obedient and by rendering little services. Jabajmu told me that when elder and younger brothers went somewhere on a visit, the elder ones always entered a house first. On such occasions, the younger ones were not supposed to say anything unless they were asked a question. A special tie exists between a brother and sister who are destined to become each other's *mendaq* in a future exchange marriage. Thus I once heard a brother say to his sister, "Even though you happen to be my *mendaq*, I will beat you up if you do not do what I tell you".

Finally, there is the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. They called each other *api*. Grandmothers were specially entrusted with the care of the toddlers. The grandfathers, through their wives' stories, often became subjects of hero worship in the young generation. In their old age grandparents counted on their grandchildren and expected some kind of reward and care from them, especially when their own children were too preoccupied with their individual affairs.

3. *Aspects of social contacts*

Whenever someone shoots or catches a pig he decides, often in consultation with his wife, who is going to have a share in it. The dead pig is often left in the forest. The wife sends her brothers to fetch it. Most of the meat is distributed among the parents and the brothers-in-law of the spouses. A man will first offer a piece of meat to his wife's mother and then to his own mother. Then the brothers and sisters of his wife are remembered, and finally his own brothers and sisters will receive their shares. The hunter himself does not eat any of the meat for fear of being called a glutton. The manner in which a pig is divided makes it possible to determine the pattern of friendships. The children publicly deliver the portions so that everybody can see and check how the pig

has been divided. Jealously they watch to see if one person gets more than another. If somebody is passed over purposely and gets nothing, this is noticed by the others with malicious pleasure. This is extremely painful for the victim, for in this society everyone lives from hand to mouth, and a piece of meat is always welcome. Far worse, however, is the fact that the omission signals his exclusion from normal participation in the social fabric. Unless he is aware that he has given adequate reason for being excluded, he will feel wronged and ashamed and will brood on revenge.

Both husband and wife are responsible for the proper reception of guests from other settlements. A guest usually does not feel at ease in surroundings where almost everyone is a stranger. Moreover, he is afraid of the people because they have secret formulas and are able to harm unwelcome guests. Even when he has relatives in the settlement he is still uncertain about the attitude of the others and especially about the attitude of the leaders, who might use the opportunity to take revenge on him for past wrongs committed by his fellow villagers. In such a self-contained settlement the arrival of a stranger is always an event. He is greeted cordially by his relatives. If it has been a long time since they have seen each other, he will be kissed on both cheeks and given a lengthy embrace. If a guest is accompanied by his wife, he goes to the men's house and sits near his relative. His wife is entertained in the women's house by one of her relatives. If a whole group of guests visit the settlement, the enthusiasm among the relatives is even greater and without delay the leader of the hosts will cheerfully order the women, "Come on, roast sago and fish for our guests".

They quickly gather food in great quantities and offer it to their guests. Everyone wishes to be generous towards the guests and soon food is stacked in front of each guest. A guest politely declines this offer of abundance and says, "I have brought my own food with me". The guests always share their own food with their hosts. Together with their hosts they smoke and talk a lot. The stranger will not say anything which might discredit his hosts. On the contrary, he praises everything he sees or hears. Thus the day is passed sociably and pleasantly. When darkness falls the guest will sleep near the fire of his relative. On one of the following days, guest(s) and host(s) will set out hunting. A guest's wife, if she has come along, will go fishing with her relatives. After their stay, no matter how long or short it has been, they return home loaded with gifts. They are seen off by their relatives, who accompany them to the landing stage of the canoes. The hosts make the

guests promise to come back again soon and then cordially say goodbye to them. As soon as he arrives home the guest goes to his own sago groves to collect great numbers of sago grubs. At the first opportunity he sends these to his hosts as an expression of his gratitude for the liberal reception. On both sides the people look back on such visits with satisfaction, because they strengthen old ties on which they can depend in case of need.

While a Jaqaj goes about his daily work (making a spear, a bow, or an arrow) he often hums. When he returns from the swamp, he sings standing in his canoe. There is no real festivity unless there is also singing and dancing. Singing and dancing continue for hours on end, day and night. Men can be seen standing together in small groups around a fire. The men's songs are sonorous and they are accompanied by many drums.[1] Nearly every man has his own drum. Women, though good dancers, often prefer sitting in a large group with their babies in their laps. The songs of the women sound shrill and they are accompanied by only a few drums which they must borrow from the men for the occasion. A man may have a song-name, a *pidoq* or *éb éké.* Such names were given by fathers or friends. Often they were the song-names of deceased persons with whom there was a certain resemblance.[2] Birds and trees, or the subject of a song, were also given such a song name.

In both male and female groups, there is always one person who starts the song. He (or she) sings one line and then the others join in. The Jaqaj distinguish three kinds of songs. They speak of the *tok-éb,* fighting songs, *nama-éb,* mourning songs, and *tom-éb,* love songs. The structure of all three is the same. Every song consists of several stanzas of short lines. These lines are usually divided into two groups, each with its own content or subject, which may be interrelated. Whatever the subject is, it is always important that the persons or things about whom (which) the song is made, are indicated by two names, *pidoq,* in such a way that one name is used in the first line and the other in the second. To an outsider these songs are difficult to understand. This is primarily due to the succinct manner of expression and the use of short catchwords. To understand a song, it is essential to know the incident that provided the subject matter for it. Fighting songs are arranged in cycles. At Képi, before the people started such a "sing-in", they first discussed what they were going to sing about. They chose a particular head-hunting raid and then started the song about a particular incident which occurred in the territory raided. Then followed a song about

something that had happened on the way back. Finally, there were songs describing the arrival in the home settlement. Father Meuwese said that during such nights of song sessions several men would drop out and sit at the edge of the group where they then dozed off. He had often been struck by the fact that towards dawn everybody was again present and that they all sang very enthusiastic songs as the run rose.

During a feast when the guests are formally received or when captured heads are carried in procession into the settlement, the people dance as they sing. The ordinary dance, *tatè,* consists of various body movements. The dancers bend their knees outward while making shuffling movements with their feet. The drummers alternately place the front of one foot near the ankle of the other foot. Those who dance with spears in their hands surround the drummers and make the same steps at a much more rapid pace than the drummers. They also tend to lift their legs higher and as soon as the final yell has been shouted, they thrust their spears into the ground. Finally, standing on their toes, they rapidly move their knees to and fro. The women lift their breasts with their hands in a quick up and down rhythm.

There are also dances [3] which are performed merely for the sake of the dancing itself and are not done as a kind of accompaniment to singing and drumming. This type of dance is common among the women only. The women usually dance as described above, but they keep their arms bent over their heads while their bodies bend forward. They dance in a circle and alternately look to the left and to the right from below their armpits, as if they were looking at their shadows. A swaying cadence of their festive skirts accompanies their movements. They wear birds of paradise on their heads and they paint their upper bodies and legs in striking colours. The men also "dress up" for the occasion and even the children are painted. The Jaqaj's feeling for rhythm and collective acting is evident in both songs and dances.

An important part in social communication among young and old is played by the humour in which the Jaqaj excel. First of all, there is that type of humour which is akin to what we might call "malicious pleasure". It does not indulge in any form of cruelty, but enjoys the comic aspects of mistakes and the disproportion of deviant situations. A typical case is that of the spirits who thought they had killed a man, but had actually captured one of their fellow spirits.[4] When somebody has a slight accident, the first reaction will be a spontaneous outburst of laughter. The Jaqaj like pulling each other's leg and frighten each other just for the fun of it. It is fun to beat somebody who is clearly

bent on getting a thing by stealing it from under his very nose. They know how to imitate personal peculiarities and ridicule typical sensibilities. They delight in reviving funny events of the past by a single word. They amuse themselves covertly when anyone commits a blunder or gives a completely wrong answer to a question, rejoicing in advance of the song they will compose in commemoration of the event. The Jaqaj are fond of songs mocking an individual's idiosyncrasies or failures. Fr Verschueren once built a windmill on top of a wooden tower in order to charge a battery. The charging miscarried because the wind was not continuous. This event was commemorated in a song composed by Ndaman, the mother of the man who had helped to construct the windmill. In the song *Qaépön/Tébaqaj* is the song name, *pidoq,* of Father Verschueren. Ndaman sang, "Son-in-law, do not let the iron tree strike you. Child-in-law, you have married into the family, do not let the steel tree strike you. Your grandfather constructed it, Qaépön has erected it. Without wind he has built it, up there without wind he built it. Your grandfather has erected it, Tébaqaj has constructed it. Without wind he has erected it, high up there he has erected it, without wind."

A good story-teller, *kéri bai,* is a popular man in the village. He knows how to depict the adventures of the Mitak tribe who were able to walk under water, or those of the man from the Nambéōmön who was swallowed by a toothless crocodile. He cut open the crocodile's belly and thus returned to his village. Another story tells about the Jaqaj people in the marsh lands on the island of Jar. Their name is Qomi and they have never been seen by anyone, although traces of them have been found from time to time. When they know that they are about to be discovered they drop from the tops of the trees, if need be, and escape unharmed. The new houses they build suddenly look very old as soon as a stranger happens to come near. Their burning fires quickly turn to ashes, appearing to be several days old. Their footprints also appear very old. More important, however, are the myths told. A collection of them will be given in Chapters XIII, XIV and XV.

In the preceding examples I have spoken mostly about things which have a favourable influence on social relations: the distribution of food, *ero*; hospitality, *adān*; songs, *éb*; dances, *taté*; and jokes and songs. Very briefly, however, I must also mention a factor that had an unfavourable influence, i.e. competitions in abusive language, which were of frequent occurrence in the daily life of the Jaqaj. The women

especially were good at this kind of abuse. It always referred to elements which threatened the social fabric of the community: gluttony and sexual misbehaviour. Some examples are: *kandömoqowb*: fat guts; *aq maq-inden kéame kandöm renggèmbak*: your belly makes you look pregnant (said to a man); *qarapé-arép*: glutton; *aq nao arepade*: you have lots of excrement; *aq qaké-qamben*: you are like a dog that is begging all the time; *ringgi pop*: fat arse; *ringgi doq*: red arse; *qoqud-qambo*: you have pus in your anus/genitals; *tom maq*: son of a bitch; *qaw jo pop*: your mother has a large vagina; *jo qajo-maq*: your mother is a bitch; *qapajmu-maq*: your mother is a whore; *kujo-taker-maq*: your mother has pubic hair like that of a cassowary; *aq kujo-qamben*: you are as cowardly as a cassowary; *aq batik-embék mono boraqaé*: you are as stupid as a pig; *aq qotaqarép/taqandömarép*: braggart; *potök-arép*: cross-grained fellow. Expressions like these, forwarded in rapid succession, usually aroused long lasting ill feelings.