Culture, Exchange, and Gender: Lessons from the Murik

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The Problem

The work of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss on exchange systems suggests that certain kinds of communal traditions and institutions are especially prevalent in (but not unique to) Island Southeast Asia, Australia, and Oceania. We propose that this prevalence can be explained by historico-geographic factors that are consistent with an unusual emphasis on an ethos of communality among the stateless, food-harvesting peoples in this part of the world. Reconsideration of exchange systems from this point of view reveals that, where there is an emphasis on an ethos of communality, representations of masculine authority, association, and identity are acutely brought into question by feminine powers of birthing, nursing, and sexuality. To show how this is the case, we review features of the communal traditions and institutions of the Murik, a fishing and trading people who live at the mouth of the Sepik River. The topics included in this review are feast making, mothering, culture heroine and hero myths, sibling relationships, trade partnerships, canoe building, and the war cult.

PART ONE: A Reworking of Exchange Theory

Exchange and Reciprocity: Social Essence or Regional Attribute?

The possibility that a distinctive family of sociocultural representations is especially prominent among the many and varied peoples of Island Southeast Asia, Australia, and Oceania is indicated, albeit indirectly, by Mauss in The Gift and by Lévi-Strauss in The Elementary Structures of Kinship. In their studies of ceremonial exchanges based on a principle of reciprocity, both authors were inclined to focus attention on the ethnography of the peoples of this one world re-
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clearly articulated among some, but not all, peoples. One of the most important of these devices is the concept of the primitive. Both authors contend that the peoples privileged by their studies—those in which total prestation or restricted exchange can be documented—are in some sense early or archaic (Mauss 1954:1; Lévi-Strauss 1969:70) peoples whose institutions reveal the originary foundations of human society and culture. Among most other peoples, they would argue, it is more difficult to show how exchange and reciprocity reveal a sociocultural essence, but only because they have been so intensely elaborated and complicated.

This argument, which is to be found in both The Gift and The Elementary Structures of Kinship, involves two unexamined assumptions. First, certain kinds of peoples can be evaluated as primitive because their institutions reveal the origin of human society and culture. Second, the institutions of primitives are fundamental in the sense that they have only been elaborated, not altered, among other peoples. These two assumptions—primitive peoples are those peoples who reveal a sociocultural origin, and this origin reveals what is fundamental in all societies and cultures—had been inscribed in French anthropology by Durkheim in his study of the Australian Arunta, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. That is to say, both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss had inherited a certain rhetorical strategy from Durkheim, the master of French sociology/anthropology in the first half of the 20th century. In this respect they, and the audience for whom they wrote, could tacitly accept both that many peoples in the SEAEO region could be seen as exemplars of the primitive and that the institutional peculiarities of these peoples could reveal the ground of society and culture in all times and places. It is then Durkheim’s prior work that allows both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss to shift almost imperceptibly from the convincing proposition that exchange and reciprocity are dominant sociocultural attributes among SEAEO peoples to the more doubtful, if not preposterous, proposition that exchange and reciprocity everywhere exhaust the form and content of society and culture.

If we turn to The Elementary Structures of Kinship, however, we do discover a moment in the text where this thesis unravels, where it becomes apparent that exchange and reciprocity are manifest and central in the SEAEO region, not because this is the land of the primitive, but rather because of historico-geographic factors.

Historico-Geographic Correlates of Exchange and Reciprocity

In the introductory chapters of The Elementary Structures of Kinship, Lévi-Strauss highlights those marriage systems in which kin-groups define their relationships to one another as “wife-givers” or “wife-takers.” Terming these marriage systems “elementary structures,” Lévi-Strauss divides them into two types: restricted exchange and generalized exchange. The latter is more common, whereas the former is more limited. Let us examine his account of restricted exchange, the most basic form of marriage by exchange, of which generalized exchange is but a more elaborate and complicated expression.

gion. (Henceforth the acronym SEAAO will refer to Island Southeast Asia, Australia, and Oceania.) Thus suggests that the concepts of exchange and reciprocity may somehow reflect a mode of sociocultural representation that is especially characteristic of SEAEO peoples.

In making this suggestion, we are obliged to point out that both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss would have rejected the thesis that reciprocal exchanges were peculiar to any world ethnographic region or, for that matter, to any particular time or place whatsoever. In both The Gift and The Elementary Structures of Kinship, we find a global theory of society and culture. In this respect, reciprocal exchanges are conceived, not as restricted to certain regions or peoples, but as the very essence of society and culture and hence characteristic of all humankind, whether primitive or civilized, ancient or modern. For Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, exchange and reciprocity have the status of “originary” sociocultural forms. They are the bedrock of society and culture and in this sense exhaustive and absolute dimensions of human relationships in all times and places.

Despite their concern with a global theory of society and culture, however, both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss place a special emphasis on ethnographic examples drawn from the SEAEO region. Neither The Gift nor The Elementary Structures of Kinship is strictly limited to a discussion of the peoples of the SEAEO region. Both books review ethnographic evidence from every part of the world, including North and South America, the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and the Arctic, as well as from different historical periods, ranging from ancient Mesopotamia and Vedic India to 20th-century Europe and the United States. In this respect, the two French anthropologists are able to demonstrate that reciprocity expressed through exchanges is a widespread, even a universal, aspect of society and culture. However, they find that reciprocal ceremonial exchanges are manifest and central institutions only among specific peoples; the most important examples of which are found in the SEAEO region. And it is the institutions of these specific peoples that play a crucial role for both authors in the development of their key theoretical formulations. That is to say, total prestation in The Gift (1954:33-34, 36, 45, 77) and restricted exchange in The Elementary Structures of Kinship (1969:146). Total prestation and restricted exchange are highly specialized institutions which are supposed to confirm that exchange and reciprocity are the elemental essence of society and culture. They are not found everywhere, but are in fact of relatively infrequent occurrence. Yet while total prestation and restricted exchange are altogether undocumented in many parts of the world, perhaps even most parts of the world, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss find many examples of each in the SEAEO region.

A global theory of society and culture that privileges the institutions of particular peoples who tend to be found in one world region raises an obvious question. If exchange and reciprocity are the essence of society and culture, why should they be manifest and central institutions among only some, not all, peoples? Both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss have an answer to this question, but it is by no means simple. Indeed, much of the theoretical machinery of their respective books is designed precisely to account for why exchange and reciprocity are so
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The term "restricted exchange" includes any system of marriage which effectively or functionally divides the group into a certain number of pairs of exchange-units so that, for any one pair X-Y there is a reciprocal exchange relationship. In other words, where an X man marries a Y woman, a Y man must always be able to marry an X woman. The simplest form of restricted exchange is found in the division of the group into patrilineal or matrilineal exogamous moieties. [Lévi-Strauss 1949:146]

While Lévi-Strauss cites instances of this kind of system in North and South America, and to a lesser extent in sub-Saharan Africa and South India, he notes in the closing pages of his study that restricted exchange occurred regularly and frequently in only one part of the world: "There is a privileged territory for restricted exchange, embodying Australia and its Asian and Melanesian prolongations." (Lévi-Strauss 1969:463). In bringing this skewed distribution of restricted exchange to our attention, Lévi-Strauss hastens to dispel any notion that this privileged territory might indicate that restricted exchange (or its more developed counterpart, generalized exchange) might have some particular or incidental significance.

Accordingly, we should resist to the very end any historic-geographic interpretation which would make restricted or generalized exchange the discovery of some particular culture, or of some stage of human development. [Lévi-Strauss 1969:463]

For Lévi-Strauss, elementary structures make visible the essence of society and culture. Accordingly they must not be implicated in historical and geographic particularities. Why then should restricted exchange appear with a higher frequency in one part of the world? Lévi-Strauss himself asks the question, but only to deny that he is obliged to answer it.

After discussing how generalized exchange is limited to East Asia, just as restricted exchange is limited to Southeast Asia, Lévi-Strauss considers the question of why "a limited area of the world . . . is both necessary and sufficient to define the fundamental laws of kinship and marriage" (Lévi-Strauss 1969:464):

Does this logical priority [the predominance of general and restricted exchange systems in East Asia and Southeast Asia, respectively] correspond to an historical privilege? It is for the cultural historian to inquire into this. Confined as we are to a structural analysis. . . . [Lévi-Strauss 1969:465]

The higher frequency of restricted and generalized exchange in certain world regions does not indicate that a peculiar figuration of self and other has been emphasized in certain times and places by historical or geographic factors. This could not possibly be the case since the figuration of self and other is everywhere the same, exchange and reciprocity being the absolute and exhaustive attributes of society and culture. The higher frequency of restricted and generalized exchange in certain world regions only raises the question of why these original and fundamental institutions should occur in only some times and places.

For Lévi-Strauss, "confined as [he] is to a structural analysis," any marriage system cannot be a response to particular experiences or conditions, since all marriage systems must have the same form and content. But if the constraints of a structural analysis are set aside—constraints that impose the assumption that exchange and reciprocity are essential features of society and culture—other possibilities come into view.

Exchange and Reciprocity as a Mode of Sociocultural Representation

Let us consider reciprocal exchange as a sociocultural representation that is unusually manifest and central in the SEAAS region. As such, exchange and reciprocity have the properties, not of essences, but of figures and tropes. For example, they foreground some dimensions of human relationships and background other dimensions of human relationships. This means that they are an argument about experience that accordingly is also placed in question by experience. This perspective has implications that are not explored in either The Gift or The Elementary Structures of Kinship.

As an argument about experience, exchange and reciprocity may well be a universal theme of society and culture everywhere. However, it is an argument that is always in question, an argument that, in affirming some features of experience, is required to refuse and to deny other features of experience. This raises two further possibilities. First, if exchange and reciprocity are less manifest and central outside the SEAAS region, it is because they have been pushed aside by other figures and tropes. And second, if exchange and reciprocity are more manifest and central inside the SEAAS region, they are nonetheless in question even there precisely because as figures and tropes they are placed in question by experience.

This new perspective transforms the significance of total prestation and restricted exchange into a problem of cultural history. These phenomena do not signify a sociocultural essence. They rather signify a certain sociocultural emphasis in the figuration of self and other. To account for this, we are obliged to consider what kinds of circumstances tend to favor exchange and reciprocity as themes in the figuration of self and other. In other words, total prestation and restricted exchange reflect relative differences in the experiences and conditions of SEAAS peoples, and it is reasonable to look to historic-geographic factors for some account of these relative differences. In doing so, we must be prepared at the outset to consider very broad and general factors. In the vast SEAAS region, we do not find uniform patterns of human adaptations or natural environments. On the contrary, anthropologists have tended to view this area as a kind of laboratory, precisely because of the remarkable variety of communal and ecological systems found there. Despite this variety, however, we shall see that the long term patterns of community and ecology among SEAAS peoples can be more or less clearly, even if very broadly and generally, distinguished from those that prevailed among the peoples of other world regions.

If we now turn to The Gift, we find a clue to the solution of this problem of cultural history. In attempting to demonstrate that exchange and reciprocity are absolute and exhaustive of society and culture, Mauss encounters a resistance in the ethnographic record. Certain dimensions of human thought and action, he
finds, are directly opposed to exchange and reciprocity. This resistance can no longer be suppressed when Mauss turns in his final chapter to consider the society and culture that he knew best, that is to say, Europe itself. Here he asserts that exchange and reciprocity had been abandoned and forgotten by the Europeans but were in the process of being rediscovered and restored.

The European Disease: The Autonomous Self in Opposition to Others

In The Gift, Mauss describes ceremonial gift exchanges of certain peoples—most of whom he found in the SEAAO region—as “‘total’ phenomena which contained ‘all the threads of which the social fabric is composed’” (1954:1). In this respect, “‘total prestations’” were all embracing and all encompassing (1954:6, 33–34, 36, 45, 77). There was no dimension of social relations that lay outside their domain. Viewing the peoples in question as “‘primitive,’” Mauss conceives of exchange and reciprocity as the essential and absolute foundations of social life.

In the final pages of The Gift, however, we discover that the modern nations of Europe have somehow violated this primordial ethic of giving and receiving. Mauss—much like Durkheim before him in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life—claimed to be rediscovering among primitives a morality that had been obscured by the course of European history. For Mauss, the ceremonial prestations of primitive peoples revealed that material goods were embedded in a social relationship, but in Europe, the “‘victory of rationalism and mercantilism’” entailed the “‘triumph of the notion of individual [profit] and interest’” (1954:74).

According to Mauss, the rise of European “‘individualism’” and “‘selfishness’” had begun in the 14th century and climaxed in the 19th century. As he wrote, however, a correction was in progress. The European digression from the laws of reciprocal exchange, he claims, had created severe strains that made a return to the older morality inevitable. Assessing contemporary programs for state socialism as reactions to the ills of modern capitalism, Mauss himself calls for the socialization of wealth in accordance with the ethic of reciprocal exchange among the Andaman Islanders, Melanesians, and Polynesians. However, here a note of caution is added. Mauss does not recommend a complete return to the primitive ethos of freely giving and receiving: “‘Communism and too much generosity is as harmful to [the individual] and society as the selfishness of our contemporaries or the individualism of our laws’” (1954:67). He proposes instead a delicate balance, “‘a happy medium’” as he terms it (1954:67). On the one hand, “‘we should return to the old and elemental . . . the joy of giving in public, the delight of generous artistic expenditure, the pleasure of hospitality in the public or private feast’” (1954:67). On the other hand, this return should retain an element of the sense of self that arose out of an excess of selfishness and individualism: “‘[the citizen] should be vividly aware of himself, of others and of the social reality . . . he must act with full realization of himself, of society, and its sub-groups’” (1954:67–68).

Like Durkheim (1961) before him, Mauss suggests that the breakdown of a primordial morality in Europe is leading to the evolution of a higher form of personal consciousness that is lacking among primitives. Indeed, earlier in his study, he has already suggested that the individual is altogether lacking in self awareness among those primitives who practice total prestation. Discussing the ceremonial gift exchanges of Melanesia, he asserts:

[In] this whole island world, and probably also the parts of South-East Asia related to it . . . there is an incapacity to abstract and to analyse concepts . . . groups cannot analyse themselves or their actions, and influential individuals, however comprehending they may be, do not realize that they have to oppose each other . . . the chief is confounded with his clan and his clan with him, and individuals feel themselves to act in only one way. [Mauss 1954:30]

Departing from a primordial morality and digressing into selfishness and individualism, the European has acquired a sense of his own person. Thus, the modern breakdown of a primitive morality has paid a dividend: an awareness of the self apart from others that is the precondition for the evaluation of personal actions. All that is needed is that this awareness be supplemented with a realization of how the individual is embedded in a social fabric of exchange and reciprocity. European civilization is now to be redeemed by a return to the abandoned and forgotten ethos of giving and receiving. This return, however, is taking place in the context of knowledge and enlightenment. Among the Andaman Islanders, Melanesians, and Polynesians, individuals blindly subscribed to the primordial morality of giving and receiving, but now the Europeans will revive and embrace this primordial morality because they are fully cognizant of the social law of exchange and reciprocity.

Whatever the validity of Mauss’s arguments that reciprocal exchanges are incompatible with self-awareness or that modern European society was returning to a primordial morality of giving and receiving, his insistence on the difference between modern economic practices and ceremonial gift exchanges provides us with a clue to the particular characteristics of certain sociocultural representations that are prominent among various SEAAO peoples.

For Mauss, concepts of individual profit, interest, and property foster the illusion of a self-domination over and against the claims of others. But in the primitive world where total prestation prevails, one is obliged to give and to receive. What is presently in the hands of one individual is always marked by the claims of another from whom it has been received or to whom it must be given. Thus wealth, which is not property because it must be given and received, confirms an ineradicable social link between self and other. Mauss, by setting modern economic action alongside primitive economic action, is able to show that the latter belies an illusion implicit in the former. In the former, a figure on the autonomous self in opposition to the other is prominent while in the latter a figure of exchange and reciprocity between self and other is prominent.

Unlike Lévi-Strauss then, Mauss does suggest, at least in his closing pages, that reciprocal exchange is not an absolute and exhaustive principle. It is contradicted, even if only incidentally and temporarily, by a modern figure of an autonomous self in opposition to others. For Mauss, however, this modern figuration
is secondary and derivative, not primary and original like the laws of giving and receiving. Flourishing incidentally and temporarily as a dream in the early stages of a capitalist industrial economy, it is to be remedied by a return to the primordial morality of reciprocal gift exchanges. The self might live on. Mauss tells us, not as individualism and selfishness, but as an ethical awareness. Thus, the interlude of an autonomous self opposed to others would be a step in the achievement of a knowledge and enlightenment that the primitive lacked. Guided by tradition, early and archaic humankind is blindly constrained by the law of reciprocal exchange, but the modern European, having risen to an ethical awareness through the travail of extreme individualism and selfishness, recognizes that his thoughts and actions are to be guided by “mutual respect and reciprocal generosity” (1954:81).

How might Mauss’s diagnosis of the European disease of the autonomous self opposed to others help us in understanding the sociocultural representations of certain peoples in the SEAAO region? Mauss’s commentary suggests that it is Europe that is the exception, not Island Southeast Asia, Australia, and Oceania. In this respect, he only tells us what is peculiar about the sociocultural representations of modern industrial societies where capitalism economic actions prevail. If we reexamine the world survey of exchange and reciprocity in The Gift, however, we find that this is not quite the case. On close inspection of The Gift, we discover that the notion of an autonomous self opposed to others is far more widespread than post-14th-century Europe. Indeed, it is only in the setting of total prestations, a theoretical construct based on the ceremonial exchanges of Anaman Islanders, Melanesians, Polynesians, and Northwest Coast Amerindians that Mauss ever feels sure that the dream of the self is absent. So then The Gift implicitly suggests that, if modern Europeans are one kind of exception, then the peoples of the SEAAO region (along with the Northwest Coast Amerindians) are another kind of exception.

**Total Prestation: The Primordial Absence of the European Disease**

In his last chapter, chapter 4, Mauss dates the onset of notions of individual profit and interest to 14th-century Europe. But in the chapter that precedes it, we find that such notions must be pushed still further back in time. In the opening lines of this chapter, he writes:

We live in a society where there is a marked distinction ... between real and personal law, between things and persons. This distinction is fundamental: it is the very condition of part of our system of property, alienation, and exchange. Yet it is foreign to the [primitive] customs we have been studying [in chapters 1 and 2]. Likewise Greek, Roman, and Semitic civilizations distinguished clearly between obligatory prestations [which resemble primitive gift exchange] and pure gifts [which entail the possibility of alienation and possession of valuables]. But are these distinctions not of relatively recent appearance in the codes of the great civilizations? Did not those civilizations pass through a previous phase in which their thought was less cold and calculating? Did not they themselves at one time practise these customs of gift-exchange in which persons and things become indistinguishable? [Mauss 1954:46]

The concept of the possession and alienation of property are no longer restricted to post-14th-century Europe. According to Mauss, they are also found in Roman, Greek, and Semitic civilizations. The autonomous self opposed to others, an illusion that corrupts the principle of reciprocal exchange, has spread.

In his chapter 3, Mauss engages in philological analyses of early texts that attempt to limit the damage of this concession in two ways. First he argues that the distinction between real and personal law is not an early, but a late, development among the Romans, Greeks, and Semites. Second he argues “institutions of [a] primitive type [reciprocal gift exchanges] were functioning at a fairly recent date” (1954:47), among the Romans, Hindus, Germans, and Chinese. The thrust of these theses is that reciprocal gift exchanges are increasingly important as one moves back in time, while the illusion of an autonomous self in opposition to others is increasingly important as one moves forward in time.

Mauss does not attempt to confirm that Roman, Greek, Semitic, Hindu, Germanic, and Chinese institutions were the evolved counterparts of the ceremonial prestations documented by the ethnographers of SEAAO peoples. He is only concerned to show, first, that the principles of giving and receiving gifts were at least one dimension of Roman, Hindu, Germanic, and Chinese civilizations and, second, that this dimension was more prominent at an earlier than at a later date. But even if giving and receiving gifts were a dimension of all the ancient civilizations, and even if it were the case that this dimension was more prominent at an earlier than at a later date, this does not in any way suggest that exchange and reciprocity are the essence of society and culture, the absolute and exhaustive form and content of society and culture. In this respect, the discussion in chapter 3 leaves open the possibility that the modern European disease, the illusion of the autonomous self in opposition to others, reaches back even into the remoter periods of all the ancient civilizations.

Continuing our backward reading of The Gift, we can now see that chapters 1 and 2 involve a search for a form of ceremonial gift exchange in which the self is absent. Total prestation, we discover, is characterized by the combination of pure reciprocity with pure violence, that is to say, self and other are either linked by exchange or opposed to one another.

Of the many instances of elaborate reciprocal gift exchanges that are cited in The Gift, that of the Northwest Coast Amerindian potlatch is one of the few that occurs outside the SEAAO region. At the same time, the Amerindian potlatch has features that are less typical of the reciprocal gift exchanges documented in the SEAO region. These features are, as Mauss took some pains to point out, an emphasis on “violence, rivalry, and antagonism” (1954:33). The potlatch involves giving wealth to others, but for the purpose of winning prestige and of advancing claims to honor and credit (1954:33–35). We need not consider the whole of Mauss’s interpretation of the potlatch, the details of which are somewhat tortured. What is significant is his special interest in a form of reciprocal gift exchange that took the form of antagonistic contests whose end was social domination or subjugation.

After emphasizing the “violence, rivalry, and antagonism” of the potlatch
stateless peoples although this is also debatable. But even conceding this point to Mauss, it is indisputably the case that reciprocal gift exchanges are more important institutions among some early and archaic stateless peoples than among other early and archaic stateless peoples.

So it is that the modern European disease of the autonomous self opposed to others spreads like a contagion in The Gift. It is explicit in post-14th-century Europe where capitalism prevails. It is explicit in laws of property among the Romans, Greeks, and Semites. And it is implicit among those unmentioned early and archaic peoples where reciprocal gift exchanges are not so important as in the SEAO region.

Mauss did not discover in ceremonial gift exchanges the primordial essence of society and culture. He only discovered a figure of exchange and reciprocity between self and other that can be contrasted with a figure of the autonomous self opposed to the other. This problematic is variably expressed in the sociocultural representations of different peoples. Among some peoples, and in particular among many peoples in the SEAO region, we find that exchange/reciprocity is on the surface and autonomy/opposition is under the surface. Among other problems, and in particular among many peoples in the Eurasian region, we find that autonomy/opposition is on the surface and exchange/reciprocity is under the surface. This revision of the significance of The Gift enables us to frame a hypothesis regarding sociocultural representations in the SEAO region.

The main ethnographic examples of reciprocal gift exchange in The Gift are drawn from peoples in the SEAO region. So then we can reasonably conclude that an idiom of reciprocal exchange is unusually prominent in this part of the world. This raises the problem of how historico-geographic factors might explain the long term, region-wide prominence of such an idiom. In the next section, we shall consider the political economy of stateless, food-harvesting peoples. In doing so, we shall be aiming at some understanding of why ceremonial prestations based on reciprocal exchanges, are intensively elaborated among some, but not all, such peoples.

PART TWO:
The Margins of Community and the Autonomous Self Apart from and Opposed to Others

Ecological Coordinates of Giving and Receiving

The contribution that exchange theory has made to ethnography is indisputable, but clearly something is wrong with the global formulations of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. Exchange theory very likely taps a significant dimension of social institutions, but it by no means provides an absolute and exhaustive account of the grounds of human society and culture. To assess exactly what it is that exchange theory has accomplished, it is necessary to ascertain what is peculiar about the circumstances of that select group of peoples for whom exchange theory does seem an especially relevant and insightful account of their traditions and institu-
tions. We shall begin by attempting to characterize in a general way the class of societies that is privileged by exchange theory.

For the most part, those peoples whose social institutions feature reciprocal exchanges are associated with two necessary but not sufficient conditions:

1. They are stateless peoples among whom the face-to-face relationships of a little community are of primary importance.

2. A major portion of everyday life and ordinary experience is dedicated to the acquisition or production of food.

To verify this association, one may turn to The Gift and The Elementary Structures of Kinship where total prestation and restricted exchange are consistently discovered among so-called primitives, as peoples characterized by the two above conditions have generally been categorized. But we must keep in mind that these two conditions are necessary but not sufficient. Of those peoples who are characterized by the two above conditions, only some, not all, place a special emphasis on reciprocal exchange. But temporarily setting aside this reservation, let us tentatively consider the possibility of accounting for the correlation of the above two conditions with reciprocal exchanges.

The Socialization of Food Wealth Among Stateless Food Harvesters

As both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss have shown, reciprocal exchanges among stateless peoples virtually always emphasize food exchanges. This is especially clear from The Gift, which demonstrates that prestation practices are frequently associated with feast making, but it is also apparent in The Elementary Structures of Kinship where marriage systems based on restricted exchange are shown to be closely linked with food exchanges. This link of food with an emphasis on reciprocal exchanges suggests the following materialist explanation.

The Gift of Food as Social Claim

The citizen among the peoples we are considering is above all a food harvester (by acquisition or production) and hence a food provider. The identity of the citizen rests upon his or her activity in amassing food resources and likewise the relationship of the citizen to his or her social others involves the offering of food. While the citizen converts his or her resources into a social claim by the presentation of food, the recipients of these presentations cannot remain passive receivers. They are obliged to present food in return on some later occasion so that the claim is balanced by a counter claim. The result is a social order in which exchange and reciprocity are especially important. With the circulation of wealth in food, no new economic resources are generated, but there is an articulation of claims to social status and rank. Thus we arrive at the first dimension of what Mauss termed total prestation, a sociocultural order based on reciprocal exchanges. An ethic of giving and receiving arises from a base of food harvesting. It might be said that “individualism” and “selfishness” are not explicitly recognized by this formulation of a social order in that acts of giving and receiving are “selfless” expressions of communality. But even if “individualism” and “selfishness” are not represented by the ethic of giving and receiving, this does not mean that these motivations and experiences are not part of social relations. It only means that, insofar as they surface within the social order, they must appear under the cloak of the ethic of giving and receiving. Strategies of self-assertion aimed at dominating and subjugating the social other therefore take the form of lavish presentations which are intended to bring into question the status and the rank of the social other. Thus we arrive at the second dimension of what Mauss termed total prestation, its underlying themes of competitiveness and even aggression.

Note that this account of an ethic of giving and receiving is a slight alteration of Mauss’s position in The Gift. Mauss argued that a concept of a self-dominion over and against the claims of others is absent from the primitive economic system of total prestation, and that this absence confirms that exchange and reciprocity are the essence of society and culture. By our account, total prestation is a peculiar representation of a social order that is correlated with certain historical-geographic factors. This representation is evaluated as one in which the relationship of self and other is coded as an ethic of giving and receiving.

Whatever the failings of this materialist interpretation, it indicates how an ethic of giving and receiving is at home among stateless, food-harvesting peoples. But now let us address one of its most blatant deficiencies. Why is it the case that such an ethic is manifest and central only among some, though not all, stateless, food-harvesting peoples? In what follows, we shall consider ways in which food acquisition and production among stateless peoples have more diverse implications for human identities and relationships than our materialist explanation would suggest. We shall show that subsistence techniques among stateless peoples are sometimes strongly correlated with a figure of an autonomous self apart from and opposed to others, thereby compromising the ethic of giving and receiving and displacing the representation of the social order by reciprocal exchanges. This comes about because of economically significant, aggressive actions on the part of male youths outside the community.

Stock Keeping and the Autonomous Self Apart from and Opposed to Others

Among stateless peoples in general, men were often styled as raiders and warriors and associated with aggression toward others beyond the community. But among only some, not all, stateless peoples, raiding and warfare had a systematic effect on food acquisition and production, and hence, on the management and distribution of wealth in the community. For example, various early and archaic pastoral peoples in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia were characterized by the following conditions:

1. Stock keeping was of major, not minor, importance to the food supply.

2. Male youths were systematically involved in stock raiding and stock warfare beyond the community. These activities can be described as “extrasocial” in the sense that they have no place in the community.

3. Stock raiding and stock warfare favored masculine attributes that were
socially problematic. These attributes can be described as antisocial in the sense that they are implicitly or explicitly in conflict with communal norms of behavior.

While it must be emphasized that we are dealing with only certain kinds of herding practices, they have probably been widely disseminated among pastoral stateless peoples since the neolithic period. These features of pastoralism have implications for the place of the individual in the community, which are not discussed in either The Gift or The Elementary Structures of Kinship.

Stock Keeping, Stock Raiding, and Masculine Identity

Ever since Herskovits (1926) developed the concept of the East African ‘‘primal complex,’’ we have had a good picture of how an ecology of animal herding tends to privilege masculine authority and associations. What was not so clear from Herskovits’ analysis, however, is the extent to which these masculine features of pastoralism are directly connected with the contestability of pastoral resources. This contestability follows, as after observers and commentators on stock-keeping peoples have demonstrated, partly from the character of animals as wealth and partly from the constraints of animal herding as a subsistence technique (Evans-Pritchard 1940:49–50; Maquet 1972:120–121; Southall 1976; Meeker 1979, 1985).

Among stateless, stock-keeping peoples, the herd has a certain resemblance to modern capital. It is a form of wealth that generates wealth. Rights to the herd are widely transferable and the herd itself is easily transportable. But unlike a modern capitalist economy (which carries with it elaborate mechanisms for insuring property rights) the existence of an object of great value that is transferable and movable opens the door to the systematic practice of theft and seizure by stealth or force. Furthermore, in contrast to the modern capitalist economy, the rich, those who control cattle, are typically elders while the poor, those who plunder cattle, are typically youths. This is clearly the situation among the East African pastoralists, if not generally the case among most stock keepers where stock raiding prevails. The elder patriarch, the master of youths—and likewise a buyer and seller (more than giver and receiver) of women in marriage—is the owner (as much as the exchanger) of stock in the community. But the youth, who is in so many ways subject to the elder at home in the camp, becomes a stock raider and stock warrior in the bush and plain beyond the homestead. The authority of elders is then brought into question by the extrasocial activities and antisocial attributes of youths, and a goodly number of the traditions and institutions of East African pastoralists address this very problem.

Accordingly, we find that the communal traditions and institutions of these types of pastoral peoples feature themes of autonomy and opposition. On the one hand, there is a strong emphasis on patriarchal authority: the submission and obedience of sons to father and of youths to elders. This submission and obedience is reinforced by patriarchal authority in the family, by bride price payments in marriages, by the definition of property rights to herds, and then further reinforced by religious ceremonies, initiation rites, and by age-set organizations. On the other hand, male youths are identified with stock raiding and stock warfare in the bush and plain. These are extrasocial activities and antisocial attributes that bring into question, not the authority of a particular father or elder, but the authority of fathers and elders in general, since they strike directly at the latter’s management and distribution of food wealth within the community.

In the community, fathers and elders assert the control of stock in the face of claims of sons and youths. In the bush and plain, sons and youths challenge the control of stock by fathers and elders. Thus masculine identity is linked, not with giving and receiving, but with rights and claims to stock wealth which is systematically in contention. The themes of autonomy and opposition are especially prominent in these pastoral societies and cultures. They are an important dimension of a system of segmenting lineages, initiation rites, and age-set organizations in which the relationship of collectivities is defined in terms of contests of endurance, bravery, and guile. They are also an important dimension of mediatory and judicial procedures that are aimed at determining both who legitimately owns as well as who has legitimately seized pastoral resources, herds, pasture, and water. The themes of autonomy and opposition are not only expressed on the level of collectivities, they also appear on the level of individuals.

In particular, recent studies have revealed the importance of the self-representations of male youths among these types of pastoral peoples. These self-representations take the form of poetry and song competitions in which the youth portrays sentiments of resentment, rebellion, and defiance against authority or vaunts his endurance, courage, and guile in the field of stock raiding and stock warfare. Thus, at the margins of the community, the relationship of self and other takes the form of heroic man-to-man contests of strength, courage, and guile, not of communally organized contests of giving and receiving. These self-representations privilege the voice of the singer as a medium and are typically composed and performed by the individual whose feelings and actions they describe.

Herskovits discovered a cattle complex among all those East African peoples for whom cattle represented an important factor in their food supply. However, as he took pains to point out, modes of subsistence techniques that had little or nothing to do with stock keeping—gathering, fishing, gardening—sometimes made a more substantial contribution to the food supply than cattle among these peoples. Moreover, it was frequently the case that the labor of women was just as important, if not even more important, a factor than the labor of men in the acquisition and production of food. This suggests that the degree of masculine concern with stock does not directly reflect the relative economic value of animal wealth. What makes animals more significant than gathering, fishing, and gardening (for men directly and for women vicariously) are the opportunities for self-assertion that cattle raiding and cattle warfare present. A form of food wealth that is systematically in contention brings a problematic of male-male relationships into the foreground of communal traditions and institutions at the same time as male-female and female-female relationships are pushed into the background. Needless to say, male-female and female-female relationships remain of crucial
importance experientially. Nonetheless, phallic-oriented cultural representations, which are focused and centered on a problematic of male-female relationships, move male-female and female-female off the center stage of communal traditions and institutions. It is of course true that customs of generosity and hospitality among stock-keeping, stock-raiding peoples are highly developed, but these customs do not follow the three Maussian laws of giving, receiving, and making a gift in return. Generosity and hospitality undermine the autonomy and independence of the host vis-à-vis the guest. They do not articulate an ethic of giving and receiving or a social order based on reciprocal exchanges. Significantly these customs of generosity and hospitality are mentioned, but not closely analyzed anywhere in *The Gift*. They cannot be included with Mauss's conception of primitive SEAAO giving and receiving (total prestation) in the SEAAO region nor can they be included within Mauss's conception of an evolved giving and receiving ('mutual respect and reciprocal generosity' [1954:81]) in Europe. Thus 'individualism' and 'selfishness,' which Mauss linked with European concepts of real property, sometimes played a major, not a minor, role among stateless, stock-keeping peoples. The ethic of giving and receiving is brought into question by an ethic of justly holding or heroically taking.

**SEAAO Reciprocity and Exchange Versus East African Autonomy and Opposition**

The example of stock-keeping, stock-raiding peoples in East Africa allows us to revise our materialist explanation of reciprocal exchanges among stateless, food-harvesting peoples. An ethic of giving and receiving is positively correlated with the two conditions that were spelled out at the beginning of this section, but negatively correlated with a figure of the autonomous self apart from and opposed to others. Thus the prominence of the ethic of giving and receiving in the SEAAO region indicates that a figure of the autonomous self apart from and opposed to others is a weakly developed dimension of the management and distribution of food resources among the stateless, food harvesters in this part of the world.

We can conclude, then, that, among many of the stateless peoples of the SEAAO region, the figure of an autonomous self apart from and opposed to others is not a prominent feature of communal traditions and institutions. The relationship of self and other is focused instead on reciprocal exchanges in which giving and receiving food are especially prominent. Having reached this conclusion it is now apparent that the gathering, fishing, and gardening peoples of the SEAAO region and the stock-keeping, stock-raiding peoples of East Africa are both very specialized instances of stateless peoples, which stand at the extreme ends of a spectrum. Most stateless, food-harvesting peoples are somewhere between the two, such that neither figures of exchange and reciprocity nor of autonomy and opposition are in the foreground of their communal traditions and institutions.

We are now ready to take a step that will lead us to a more profound interpretation of the cultural representations and social institutions of those peoples among whom reciprocal exchanges are prominent.

**PART THREE:**

*The Ethos of Commumality and the Problematic of Gender Relations*

**Reciprocal Exchange: An Ethos of Commumality**

Social systems are open, not closed, systems. The community is bounded in space and in time. At the margins of community, there is not only the world of nature—the forest, the bush, the plain, the sea, or the desert—but the world of other unknown and unfamiliar peoples. Here the force of communal norms weakens and lapses. Here strategies of self-assertion are possible. Historically, it is men more than women, and younger men more than older men, who have been able and willing to move beyond the space and time of the community. Inside the community, they remain constrained by the social other with whom an ethos of helping, caring, and loving prevails, but outside the community they are lured by a figure of the self apart from others. So then any analysis of a social system must necessarily take into account the circumstances of its boundedness. That is to say, the marginality of the community is written into the texture of social norms. According to the relative abundance or poverty of extrasocial activities and antisocial attributes, the figure of the self apart from the social other receives a varying emphasis.

This perspective conflicts with exchange theory as formulated by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. In *The Gift* and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the self is not present among stateless peoples. Society and culture are fully exhausted by reciprocal exchanges. This is a more or less plausible argument with regard to the many stateless peoples in the SEAAO region, but only because the latter are very special instances. Among these particular stateless peoples, social norms are touched by a problematic of individual and community to a lesser degree than among most stateless peoples in other parts of the world. And it was precisely for this reason that these peoples attracted the attention of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, both of whom were involved in formulating an anthropology that suppressed 'European' figures of the self apart from others.

With this conclusion, we can revise the concepts of exchange and reciprocity. The latter were abstractions that Mauss and Lévi-Strauss distilled from the institutions of various SEAAO peoples and attempted to generalize as 'laws' of society and culture. If we relocate these concepts in their social and cultural context, however, they resume the quality of figures and tropes that clearly foreground some kinds of human relationships and experiences and background other kinds of human relationships and experiences. Reciprocal exchanges are characteristic, we have discovered, of peoples among whom the figure of an autonomous self apart from others is weakly developed. This means that individuals are more emphatically oriented toward intimate and close relationships with others within a face-to-face community. That is to say, reciprocal exchanges appear where an ethos of commumality is a relatively exhaustive dimension of society and culture. The giving and receiving of food is not therefore a mechanical process that reflects an inalterable law. It is the expression of an ethos by which the self is oriented toward the help, care, and love of others.
Assuming then that an ethos of communality is unusually prominent among many stateless peoples in the SEAO region, we shall reassess those institutions that attracted the attention of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. To do so, we shall take up a perspective quite different from that found in either The Gift or The Elementary Structures of Kinship. We shall think out how an emphasis on an ethos of communality foregrounds some areas of human relationships and experience and hence backgrounds other areas of human relationships and experiences. This leads us to the problematic of cultural traditions and social institutions. For to affirm some areas of social life is also to deny other areas of social life. In this respect, cultural traditions and social institutions do not reflect laws pure and simple. They are also strategic arguments based on rhetorical devices. That is to say, they are constructs and artifices that articulate ideals and values but in such a way as to set aside the questionability of the very ideals and values represented.

**Total Prestations and the Nurturing, Feminine Other**

An ethos of communality privileges the help, care, and love of the social other. And because this is so, the help, care, and love of women necessarily move onto the center stage of communal traditions and institutions. To draw such a conclusion, we need not appeal to the common prejudice that women are by nature more helping, caring, and loving and that men are by nature more selfish, combative, and hostile. It might be derived instead from the fact that, among all stateless peoples, the normative task of the woman, as mother, sister, daughter, and wife, is to help, to care, or to love the other, and that women are experienced as such by every individual whether masculine or feminine. Insofar as an ethos of communality is emphasized among a stateless peoples, we might expect to find that feminine help, care, and love are a privileged dimension of communal traditions and institutions. This exemplifies then our principle that the prominence of a complex of social values (here, the help, care, and love of the social other) necessarily privileges those areas of human experience that epitomize those social values (here, the help, care, and love of the feminine other).

This, however, raises the issue of a problematic of gender relations. Among stateless, food-harvesting peoples (as is so often the case) it is men, not women, who dominate the management and distribution of resources and who play the principal role in communal ceremonies and organization. So then it is men who are dominant in the community. But insofar as an ethos of communality privileges feminine help, care, and love, this raises a question about the place of men in the community. For the material and organizational dominance of men in the community is contradicted by an ethical emphasis on the help, care, and love of women. Accordingly, we shall propose that men exploit their material and organizational powers to represent a claim that it is they, not women, who have the power to sustain the community and to make it prosper.

As men are drawn into this activity, a typical strategy unfolds. They must argue that the ethical powers of women—in particular, those that men cannot claim, such as the birthing and nursing of children—are not what they seem to be, powerful exemplars of an ethos of communality. They do so by assertions that it is the giving of food resources to the social other, not the mother’s blood or breast, which is the most important dimension of the ethos of communality. That is to say, they strategically exploit their material and organizational dominance to counter the disturbing facts of those feminine powers that exemplify a relationship of help, care, and love between self and other. However, even as men assert that it is the masculine domain of food resources and social constructs that are ethically important, not the feminine domain of birthing and nursing, they are also arguing that the giving and receiving of food resources transcend the mother-infant relationship. In this way, men reconstruct the nurturing feminine other in the field of inter-masculine social relations and figurally appropriate the nurturing powers of the woman-mother. At the same time, these communal ceremonies and organizations that transcend the mother-infant relationship are not like the relationship of mother-infant.

In their deployment of communal resources and the manipulation of communal organization, men assert that it is they, not women, who have the power to sustain and to prosper the communal other. However, unlike the woman who nurtures the dependent child, men are claiming social status and rank in their efforts to assert their powers to sustain and prosper the communal other. This means their challenges to feminine powers are at the same time challenges to their social counterpart, that is to say, other men. And insofar as one man or group of men assumes the maternal ability to nurture, another man or group of men assumes the infantile disability of dependency. In the society of men then, the question arises of who is more a man (in his ability to appropriate the nurturing powers of women). So then launched into the project of representing nurturing powers by the strategic deployment of communal resources and the manipulation of communal organization, men are also engaged in a masculine competition that turns upon reciprocal nurturing and dependency, but now the former is a sign of dominance and the latter is a sign of subjugation. A peculiar kind of ethical competition for status and rank arises from the way in which feminine powers raise a problem for masculine identity. These competitive, masculine representations of abundant, fertile, and generous nurturing powers—what Mauss called total prestation—reflect the conflict between men’s social dominance and ethical weakness. However, in the place of men’s deficiency vis-à-vis women, these competitive, masculine representations make it seem that it is a matter of the deficiency of some men vis-à-vis other men, not the deficiency of men in the general vis-à-vis women in general. Thus in the final analysis, the attempt of men to dominate and subjugate other men, the ethical strategy of lavish displays of nurturing powers (rather than a strategy of political conquest or material expropriation) arises out of the ethical deficiency of men where there is an emphasis on ethos of communality.

We have arrived then at an account of reciprocal gift exchange from a very different angle than that of Mauss. What Mauss called total prestation, we find, is derived from a problematic of gender relations that comes to the surface where there is an unusual emphasis on an ethos of communality. In what follows we
shall show that another side of the problematic of gender relations leads us to an account of what Lévi-Strauss termed restricted exchange.

**Restricted Exchange and the Sexual, Feminine Other**

Men respond to the question that feminine help, love, and care raise about the place of men in the community by constructing a social world that challenges women's ethical dominance. At the same time, they are also unusually preoccupied with claims over women themselves, since the latter are an important resource of help, care, and love in a social context where individuals are especially oriented to these kinds of human relationships. Here, however, we encounter another problematic of gender relations: men's claims over women are inherently double and divided. No man possesses the help, care, and love of any woman, first of all, because these qualities must necessarily be given and therefore can never be taken. But in addition to this, separate men have very different prerogatives in regard to the help, care, and love of individual women. So then we might expect that, where there is an unusual emphasis on an ethos of communality, these different prerogatives would be carefully and precisely defined by communal traditions and institutions.

Men's relationships to women are inherently triangulated by the opposition between primordial and sexual relationships. The mothers, sisters, and daughters of some men are the wives of still other men, just as the wives of some men are the mothers, sisters, and daughters of still other men. Those women to whom a man is primordially or originally closest—mother, sister, and daughter—are in the hands of others, their husbands, who have the prerogative of sexual intimacy with them. And at the same time, those women with whom a man has a prerogative of sexual intimacy—wives—are primordially or originally closest to others—their fathers, brothers, and sons. In this sense, men's claims over the help, care, and love of women are inherently double and divided, and the sensitivity to this issue is increased insofar as an ethos of communality is a dominant feature of experience in general.15

Of course, there is not only the problem of men's double and divided claims over women, but also the problem of women's double and divided claims over men in all societies. However, it is the former that becomes especially salient and veers in a certain direction where an ethos of communality prevails. For in such a situation, the help, love, and care of mother, sister, and daughter are especially significant and meaningful for men, just as their contradiction by the sexual prerogatives of husband over wife becomes all the more troubling and disturbing. Women are a resource of help, love, and care that men would control, but this control is brought into question by the sexuality of the woman since the prohibition of incest requires that she be given over to other men. The father, brother, or son have a primary and original claim to the woman's help, love, and care, but the husband's claim over the woman's sexuality is secondary and derived. In this respect, an emphasis on an ethos of communality, because it sensitizes men to the help, love, and care of women, is associated with men's strong sense of a contra-

diction between claims over women's help, love, and care and women's sexuality.

To see how this might be so, let us return to the issue of those marriage systems that Lévi-Strauss designated as restricted exchange. Having set aside these systems as examples of the prevalence of reciprocity and exchange in the SEAO region, we shall provide a very different account of them. We shall consider restricted exchange as institutional arguments that counter the problem of men's double and divided claims over women.

Restricted exchange is formally defined as follows: the community is divided into two moieties. The moieties engage in reciprocal marriage exchanges (Lévi-Strauss 1969:69). According to Lévi-Strauss, the logic of the prohibition of incest lies behind reciprocal marriage exchange. Since women must be given out, women must be received in. So then a system of reciprocal marriage exchange, the essence of society and culture for Lévi-Strauss, is a system that clearly exhibits the logic of the prohibition of incest. But can we say that the prohibition of incest, as it is instituted in any society, has a pure logic? More likely, the prohibition of incest is never just a simple rule. It is always applied as a figure or trope. In this respect, the social expression of the prohibition of incest brings into the foreground certain features of kinship and marriage and pushes into the background other features of kinship and marriage.16

This perspective frees us from the mystification that reciprocal exchange is the atom of kinship and marriage. The social expression of the prohibition of incest does not necessarily take the form of a figure or trope of exchange and reciprocity. It also takes the form of appropriation (severe endogamy) or expropriation (severe exogamy). Each of these social expressions of the marriage rule emphasizes some implications of the prohibition of incest and deemphasizes other implications. This means that the particular expression of the prohibition of incest that results in a system of reciprocal marriage exchange is one among other possible expressions. As an expression then, what are the rhetorical implications of reciprocal marriage exchange? What features of the experience of the social other does it bring into the foreground? And what features of the experience of the social other does it push into the background? In what follows, we shall argue in a formal way that reciprocal marriage exchange attempts to resolve men's double and divided claims over women.

Let us begin by considering the situation in which a rule of exogamy plays an important role in defining a collectivity, and, for ease of reference, let us define such a collectivity by the term "clan." By the rule of exogamy then, the problem of men's divided and double claims over women is purged from the clan. The women of the group stand to the men of the group exclusively as primordial and original women, not as women who are sexually accessible. Examples of such clans have been documented among many stateless peoples all over the world. In terms of the present perspective, this indicates that men's claims to the help, care, and love of women are of some special importance for stateless peoples in general, and hence that an ethos of communality receives some considerable emphasis, even among many herding peoples where a figure of the autonomous self apart
Legitimate Nurturing Powers and Subversive Seductive Powers

We have reworked the concepts of total prestation and restricted exchange around the problematic of gender relations where there is an emphasis on an ethos of communalty. This enables us to take one last step in laying the foundations for a new theory of the patterns of society and culture that are especially prevalent in (but not unique to) the SEAO region. Our remodeling of total prestation and restricted exchange illustrates two masculine strategies:

1. Men figurally appropriate the nurturing powers of the mother-woman in response to the question that femininity poses for masculinity. This is done through their command of food resources.

2. Men also attempt to assert their control over the help, care, and love of women in response to their double and divided claims over women. This is done by devices of community organization which privilege primary and original claims to women over the sexual prerogatives of husbands.

But there is also a third more basic theme. This theme arises out of men’s concern to monopolize the help, care, and love of women by any means that do not openly flout the ethos of communalty. Let us explore this issue a little further.

Where an emphasis on an ethos of communalty privileges the help, care, and love of women, it is the latter that epitomizes a scarce resource among men. In the final analysis then, it is the sense of a deficit regarding the help, care, and love of women that drives men into the social reconstruction of nurturing powers and into devices by which primary and original claims are legitimized over secondary and derivative sexual claims to women. In the deployment of communal food resources, they displace this deficit by asserting their own masculine powers to sustain the social other. With devices of communal organization, they displace this deficit by carefully regulating men’s double and divided claims to the help, care, and love of women. However, there is another side to social life where men’s attempts to monopolize the help, care, and love of women reveal the intensity with which this deficit in a scarce resource continues to be felt.

We must first note that men cannot actually monopolize women where an ethos of communalty prevails. They cannot take and possess women for themselves like the East African pastoral chief who is sometimes able to marry 4, 10, or even 100 wives by virtue of his control over cattle wealth (Deng 1971). Where an ethos of communalty prevails, the only way to gain the scarce resource of women’s help, care, and love is through strategies of guile and charm, that is to say, through covert seductive constructs and artifices that address women’s sexuality. In this respect:

3. The reality and fiction of masculine seductive powers offer men the promise of compelling the help, care, and love of women through the sexuality of the latter, and at the same time, masculine seductive powers hold the promise of undermining other men who are so sensitive to the help, care, and love of women.
As we have seen, men's primary and original claims over women are contradicted by men's secondary and derived sexual claims over women. Thus women's sexuality is a disruptive dimension of communality. It is a threat to the legitimate claims of men because it leads to the loss of women with whom they have primary and original ties. But it is also at the same time a promise to men since it is the means by which men subversively assume control of women from those who have primary and original ties to them. A prominent pattern among many stateless peoples in the SEAO region, the combination of men's intense interest and men's intense prudery regarding women's sexuality, is consistent with men's double and divided interest in women. At the same time, there is a male concern to control and to exploit women's sexuality.

At this point, we have also arrived at a place where we can understand women's response to these masculine preoccupations. In their relations with men, women know that their powers to birth, to nurse, and to nurture challenge men's management and distribution of communal food resources. On the other hand, they also know that their sexuality threatens the conventions by which men organize their relationships with one another. 18

In the remainder of this paper, we shall analyze the reflections, traditions, and institutions of the Murik Lakes people from the perspective of the theory that we have developed.

PART FOUR:
The Murik Lakes People of the Lower Sepik River

The Method of Ethnographic Analysis

Mauss and Lévi-Strauss proposed a general theory of 'exchange' and 'reciprocity' that they were obliged to test by a worldwide survey of the ethnographic record. In this paper, we have been pursuing a very different kind of project. Our argument is that a problematic of gender relations comes to the fore among those stateless peoples where there is a strong emphasis on an ethos of community. To explore this theory, it is not necessary to undertake a sweeping ethnographic survey. Instead we can study a particular people in the SEAO region where long term historico-geographic factors are consistent with a strong emphasis on an ethos of communality and a strong de-emphasis on a figure of the self apart from others.

The particular people that we shall discuss are the coastal Murik Lakes people of the Sepik River region. The Murik are of special interest neither because they are in any way typical of stateless peoples in the SEAO region nor, for that matter, because they are in any way typical of Melanesian peoples in the Sepik River area. They are of special interest because the long term relationship between ecology and community has shaped their social relations in precisely those ways that our theory has addressed. In this respect, Murik reflections, traditions, and institutions reveal, perhaps more clearly than most peoples in the SEAO region, the implications of a strong emphasis on an ethos of communality and a strong de-emphasis on a figure of the self apart from others.

Environment, Subsistence, and the Sexual Division of Labor

Unlike their neighbors, the Murik are neither landed agriculturalists nor island fishermen, but inhabit an interstitial area at the mouth of the Sepik River (see Figure 1). 19 They live in five villages along a 20-mile stretch of barren coast only a few feet above sea level, and they control approximately 350 square miles of shallow brackish lakes and mangrove swamp between the last serpentine sweep of the river and the shifting coastal sandbanks.

The subsistence modes of the Murik are mainly fishing and gathering. The lakes and swamp—breeding grounds for fresh and saltwater fish and shellfish—provide the Murik with a rich aquatic resource and enable them to cope with the liabilities of scarce and shifting land, tiny gardens, few coconut trees, unreliable rainfall, and distant freshwater springs. Women are responsible for the bulk of the daily food supply and paddle alone into the mangrove to pull the subsistence catch and to gather shellfish. Traditionally men stand to fish with spears while women sit to fish with drop lines, but all kinds of fishing and gathering may be done by a man with no damage to his personal dignity.

Island and inland peoples disdain the Murik as poor people without land, but the Murik have developed compensations for their landlessness. Specializing in the manufacture of various goods which are in demand among their neighbors, they have created an extensive network of trade ties inland, up the river, along the coast, and to the offshore islands. In contrast with subsistence tasks that are shared by men and women, a somewhat clearer division of labor characterizes Murik trading and manufacturing activities. Women weave the baskets that are the mainstay of the overseas trade. Traditionally they also made skirts and women's ritual decorations. Men carve many ritual objects, including masks and figures of male and female spirit ancestors. But even here men and women's work is only loosely segregated. There is only amusement, surprise, or mild approbation at the silliness of a man weaving a basket or a woman attempting to carve. With regard to the vehicles of Murik trade, however, it is a different matter. The construction of canoes (seagoing outriggers, long river canoes, and small lake canoes) and the conduct of trading expeditions in canoes are strict preserve of masculine identity; a preserve that, as we shall see, is conceived as potentially threatened by women. Masculine identity among the Murik is not then connected with a contested domain of food resources, but only with a vehicle that carries men beyond the community to give and to receive with other inland or island peoples.

Reciprocal Exchanges and the Self Oriented Toward the Other

Murik social relations could be said to be in accord with what Mauss described as the three laws of society: to give, to receive, and to make a gift in return. These laws are especially apparent with regard to food, but not uniquely limited to food. Daily interaction is filled with the constant exchange of betel nuts, lime, tobacco, fish, sago, firewood, basket reeds, and every commodity needed for personal and household maintenance. Hospitality requires that guests be fed,
and individuals establish reputations as generous or demanding. A refusal to engage in such basic reciprocity is a grievous insult, tantamount to refusing to have any relationship at all. In each village community there are multiple feasting partners among classificatory kin that entail specific obligations to give and feed. The occasions on which plates of food, foodstuffs, and other goods must be exchanged between particular sets of kin, paired individuals, households, and ritual groups are many and varied. Disputes are settled with food exchanges. Mourning is ended, crises are marked, accidents repaired, labor compensated, and stages in the lifecycle are celebrated and completed with exchanges of food.

The many relationships of giving and receiving do not reflect a cold and abstract social law among the Murik, however. They are part of a strong emotional orientation toward others which is expressed in the form of reciprocal relationships of nurturing and dependency. We can see how this is so by considering the depth of Murik attachments to familial and social others.

The Murik are strongly averse to isolation and loneliness. The self apart from others is broadly associated with danger and punishment. As a general rule, the Murik feel that individuals should not be put in isolated situations. They are vulnerable to malevolent spirits while fishing alone in the lakes and especially at night. Allowing a child (even a grown one) to struggle for his or her daily needs without support from kin is a common cause of illness brought on by the anger of the child’s deceased parent. At other times, isolation may be a self-inflicted punishment. Someone feeling guilty about a failed obligation will go off alone for a day or more, going without food, while concerned kin murmur about possible suicide.

The Murik also feel themselves to be vulnerable to the loss of those to whom they are deeply attached. One of the clearest expressions of this is the notion that one might be lured away from life by the spirit of a well-loved person. The Murik regard certain situations as dangerous because of the proximity of spirits of the dead to the living. In a state of grief, isolation, or illness (particularly near dawn or dusk) the spirit of a dead mother, father, spouse may come to offer his or her affectionate presence and bid the desperate person to follow him or her into the realm of the dead. Such visitations are recounted from dreams in which the dreamer expresses a powerful desire to go. If the dreamer announces that he or she was fed by the visiting spirits, the Murik consider the condition fatal.

Competitive Feast Making: Displays of Nurturing and Seductive Powers

The emphasis on relationships of reciprocal nurturing and dependency and the de-emphasis on the self apart from others does not mean that all forms of individual and group assertiveness are inconsistent with Murik social norms. In what follows, we shall illustrate how Murik stage feasts that consist of scenes of communal nurturing and dependency. At the same time, these feasts also involve the rivalrous and antagonistic competition that Mauss identified with total presentation. The occasion of feast making is a glorious representation of communal interdependency and solidarity even as it is motivated by individual and group
assertiveness. While Mauss provides us with some understanding of this feature of reciprocal exchanges he has no account of their peculiar content.

During the occasion of the feast, the resources of elders and the charms of youths are displayed. As the former display their resources, they claim to represent the power to nurture. And as the latter demonstrate their charms, they place a claim on those who have the power to nurture. So then a celebration that turns upon the ideals and values of an ethos of communality is also at the same time a display of nurturing and seductive powers. In this respect, the feast is strongly marked by competition among elders, competition among youths, and competition between elders and youths. Individual and group assertiveness, far from being absent, is strongly present among the Murik, but it is an assertiveness that is expressed through the dominant ethical idiom of nurturing power, and its counterpart, the dominant subversive idiom of seductive power.

The Murik village consists of segments of residentially dispersed descent groups (pwong) which are, however, not strictly unilineal. Each pwong is led by the members of its senior sibling group, which is in turn headed by its first born member, usually male, but sometimes female. He or she must validate his or her claim to that status, and to the property of the descent and sibling group associated with it, by organizing acts of feast making. By mounting a pre-mortem installation feast that honors a father, a mother, a mother’s brother, or, as is more usually the case, an elder brother, an individual succeeds to first born status. An actual first born sibling who is unable or unwilling to mount the feast may be displaced by his next youngest sibling or else the first born sibling of a collateral group of cousins. The man, or sometimes the woman, who does the work of mounting the appropriate feast then wins rights to deploy the boars’ tusks insignia (suman) symbolizing the larger residentially dispersed descent group in the contexts of various rites of passage, conflict mediation, and consecration feasts (see Figure 2).

The mounting of feasts by the first born of a sibling group is ostensibly a demonstration of unity among the members of a sibling set who cooperate in the preparation and presentation of the event. Nevertheless, there is rivalry and antagonism at various levels. The leaders of sibling groups engage in competitive feast making with other members of their own descent group as well as with members of other descent groups. Since the descent groups are residentially dispersed, both kinds of competitive feast making occur on the local level, that is to say, within the village as well as between villages. It is typically the holders of insignia who compete in feast making. These are occasions when ornamental shell and teeth regalia of the descent groups are displayed. During initiations, for example, suman insignia are presented to the initiates according to their birth order, with the most complete outfit—loincloth, vest of shells, dogs’ teeth necklace, arm bands, leglets, headdress plumage, suman basket, and other paraphernalia—going to the first born (see Figure 3). In this respect, the Murik prestige system consists of a politics of generosity, in which leaders try to outdo one another in the presentation of pigs and heraldry.

The feast itself is the brief but glorious climax of a great deal of activity
involving the coordinated efforts of numerous individuals since huge food surpluses must be accumulated and rare decorations assembled. Some portion of both the food and decorations must be acquired through trade with other coastal and island societies. To mount a feast, then, extensive overseas trade is necessary. Far in advance of the event, the sponsor’s family encourages younger siblings and their spouses to accumulate a surplus of fish, shellfish, baskets, and today money for gasoline. These things are required for the trading activity to obtain the goods (especially pigs, large quantities of sago, and garden produce) needed for the celebration. The preparations may even begin with building a new outrigger canoe in which to travel. This in itself is a major undertaking that requires the cooperation of many people—the work of specialists and specific kin, and negotiation with inland or coastal trading partners for the canoe log. At each step in the preparation, work must be compensated with food at the time that the work is done. This also requires planning on the part of the sponsor who has a particular ritual obligation and social ambition. Therefore, a great deal of cooperative activity has as its ultimate (and perhaps quite long range) goal a particular kind of celebration.

During a celebration, the suman of the sponsor are displayed both to honor a particular descent group but also to prohibit arguments or violence. In fact, on any important occasion, it is likely that there will be a large number of them on display, as they may be special armbands, headbands, and shell vests worn by some of the dancers. The slit-drum may be a suman belonging to a particular descent group, and so on. At a major celebration, the scene is filled with symbols of communal interdependency and solidarity. At the same time, the status competition, display of wealth, and excitement of the occasion arouse feelings of jealousy and resentment so that the potential for discord is very high. Before the dancing begins, the person sponsoring it often makes a public statement encouraging everyone to enjoy and celebrate, but entreats them to avoid fighting. At each such celebration that we attended, there were rumors of potential arguments. Because compensation for violating the peace of the suman is high, (several pigs must be given to the suman holders as reparations) serious people sometimes intervene beforehand with words of caution, threats of punishment, or prohibitions against certain members of their family attending. If violence does occur, the festivities are ruined. The slit-drum are turned over with their “mouths” to the ground and the participants remove their decorations and go home. A fight may be stopped through the intervention of a senior person who holds a suman or through the intervention of a woman. Like a suman holder, a woman may walk into the middle of a fight and, holding up her hand, end it.

The feast is organized around a performance of singing and dancing with introductory and concluding food exchanges that pertain to a specific rite of passage, the ending of a period of mourning, the celebration of the initiation of a youth, the consecration of a new cult house, and so on. For example, a phase of the male initiation ritual begins with the abduction of the initiate(s) from the parents’ houses and ritual instruction in the cult house. Following this, there is a public dance performance sponsored by those who have decided to hold the initiation. This begins at dusk and goes on until dawn. The beginning of the performance is formal, performed by a selected group of dancers who have rehearsed a set piece for the occasion. However, in order to keep the singing and dancing going on all night, others join the dancers and musicians and perform those favored pieces that everyone knows. The skill, beauty, and grace of the dancers are enhanced by powerful love magic. A woman may so admire a particular dancer during the performance that she is moved to give away her child. Carrying her baby into the middle of the dancing, she touches the child’s skin to the dancer’s back or shoulder (see Figure 4). This may be the basis for an actual or partial adoption, or may simply express the exuberance of the moment. Mothers, or anyone who admires a dancer, may honor the dancer by sprinkling lime on his/her
back, forehead, or chest. Early in the morning, well before dawn, an elaborate pig feast is served to all the singers and dancers who are generously fed as a reward for their performance. Then, near dawn, the original singers and dancers conclude the celebration with a final performance, and another meal is served to all those who have danced until sunrise. If the dancers are still inspired, they may go home to sleep and eat and rest until late afternoon. Then they will begin the dancing again. The celebration should continue until everyone has had all they want of it. For several days afterward, many people can be seen hobbling around the village stiff-legged from dancing.

Murik male, and sometimes female, elders sponsor and organize a scene of nurturing abundance in order to settle obligations, honor seniors and their insignia, and as a way of outdoing and surpassing rivals. Thus, Murik reciprocal exchanges generally express an ethos of communality, but take an assertive and competitive form in the domain of competitive feast making. This contradictory character marks various dimensions of the great feast. It is an occasion that signifies communal peace, unity, and prosperity but also an occasion of envy and jealousy when conflict is imminent.

Note, moreover, the absence of signs of self-aggrandizement in the structure of the feast even though it is in fact motives of assertiveness and competition that lay behind it. As an occasion when status and rank are conferred, the ceremony of feast making is not one in which personal capacities and achievements are recognized and confirmed. The feast validates an insignia, suman, and status and rank are conferred by laying claim to this emblem through the display of a nurturing abundance.

Murik feast making is in close accord with the model of total prestation that is developed in The Gift. However, Mauss does not explain why these occasions of feast making involve the display of nurturing powers and seductive charms. In what follows, we shall examine other traditions and institutions that reveal a problematic of gender relations that underlies these themes.

PART FIVE:
Mothering and Nurturing Powers: Arguments of Feminine Identity

Maternal Versus Social Nurturing

We shall not give an exhaustive account of Murik mothering but examine only three of its main features, nursing, giving, and feeding, which have a direct bearing on our present problem. Certain aspects of Murik mothering result directly from women's reproductive physiology and are presumably more or less universal, but the way in which the activities of feeding, handling, and maintaining proximity to the infant are enacted varies from culture to culture. Thus, even in very early infancy, there is a cultural construction of mothering by which the actual practice and the social representation of mothering are fused together. But the fusion is not perfect; for there is a split between the two.

We find that the mother's nursing is perceived by the Murik to be similar to,
but also different from, the mother's giving and feeding. This is the sign of a
problem about the physical relationship of mother and infant as opposed to social
constructs of nurturing and dependency. In what follows, these two dimensions
of mothering are described in turn.

Because the Murik place a high valuation on nurturing attachments, they are
fascinated with the mother-infant relationship and inclined to idealize it according
to their social interests and concerns. New mothers are urged to feed their child
whenever it cries, and women are eager for their babies to appear plump and well
fed. The idyllic period of breastfeeding is admired and prolonged among the Mu-
rik (up to six or seven years for last born children). Everyone assumes that a child
cries primarily for its mother's breast. Indeed the Murik are touched by a nostalgia
for the bliss of satiation at the mother's breast. Upon seeing an infant feeding itself
to sleep in its mother's arms, Murik men and women gaze with longing and satis-
faction. In this respect, the mother-infant relationship serves as a kind of figural
resource of idealized images of a nurturing attachment. For the Murik the most
important qualities expressed by the nursing scene are the generosity, abundance,
and security provided by the mother and the peace, pleasure, and almost intoxici-
ated satiation of the infant.23

Besides the ideal of the nursing mother-infant, the good mother is also seen
as a giver and feeder. A good mother feeds her children whenever they are hungry
and indulges their request for certain kinds of food. Closely related to feeding is
the general association of mothers with giving. Each mother hopes that her chil-
dren will remember her as a generous and abundant source of food. This is often
expressed as having many good things to eat hanging upon her skirt. The conven-
tional compliment and statement of attachment to one's mother is that "she al-
ways gave us many good things to eat." A good mother is remembered by adults
as someone who did not refuse things. Often people recall their mother's gener-
osity by saying, "Oh, sometimes she would pretend to be cross, but then she
would always give." Even refusals are remembered as temporary delays. A sym-
bolically important equation thus exists between mothering and abundant, gen-
erous food distribution which is based on an ideal type of mothering and mani-
fested by the nursing scene.

However, early revisions in the behavior of mothers reveal a distinction be-
tween, on the one hand, the nursing mother and, on the other hand, the giving
and feeding mother. Soon after birth, the mother herself is concerned to make an
immediate transition to "social" food, sago pudding. To make the child "Murik," the
child is fed tiny bits of sago pudding dipped in water or fish broth a few days
(five or six) after birth. Very early then, the biological process of breast-
feeding is supplemented with the social process of giving sago pudding.

The transition from biological mothering to social mothering is symbolically
stated at the time of weaning. Ultimately, the child who refuses to wean itself
undergoes a brief ceremony, performed by a senior woman who knows the magic.
The child's belly is scratched with a sharp shell or bit of glass and squeezed until
drops of blood appear. The intention is to let out the "bad" blood from the moth-
er's womb which makes the child crave the mother's substance (breast milk) and

prevents it from being nourished by other social foods. For first born children,
there is a ritual transition to a social equivalent of the breast, coconuts, when the
child cuts its first teeth.

On the one hand, the nursing relationship of mother-infant presents the Mu-
rik with a powerful ideal of a relationship of nurturing and dependency. Accord-
ingly, the Murik have a special fascination with the nursing scene. On the other
hand, the nursing relationship of mother-infant does not conform to the social
construct of nurturing and dependency. The former is an aspect of the reproduc-
tive physiology of women, but the latter involves giving and receiving food re-
sources. This distinction is recognized by the mother herself who differentiates
her acts of nursing from her acts of giving and feeding.

While the mother herself is concerned to distinguish between feminine and
social giving and feeding, men have an even greater stake in the distinction be-
tween the two. There are in fact indications that Murik men attempt to regulate
the behavior of women in such a way as to minimize those feminine powers that
are involved in the relationship of nurturing and dependency between mother and
infant.

Childbirth, which is considered to represent a danger to men's health, takes
place in a birth house removed from the village. A woman gives birth alone or in
the company of one other woman. She should not cry out, lest the men hear her
and become frightened or weak. The magic to speed a difficult birth and make the
child strong is controlled by men. The father of a child assists the birth through
imitative behavior (couvade). He should retire into his mosquito net and there
loosen the clothing about his waist while his wife is in labor. The health of a child
is also directly affected by its father's sexual fidelity to the mother. A stillborn
child or one who dies soon after birth is evidence that the father is or has been
unfaithful. Through the purely symbolic practice of couvade, the fact of feminine
birthing is hidden and removed from social life, while the thesis of men's influ-
ence and control over birthing is developed and advanced.

So then women as mothers are a source of special fascination precisely be-
cause of the importance in Murik society of relationships of nurturing and
dependency. At the same time, however, those very features of women's physiology
that are associated with the relationship of nurturing and dependency between
mother and infant are qualified or suppressed. Nursing fascinates as an ideal but
is carefully distinguished from the social practices of giving and feeding. These
are social practices that are more within the power of men than of women since it
is men who dominate the management and distribution of food resources. At the
same time, birthing, which indicates a primordial dependency of the infant on the
nurturing mother, is banished from the village and replaced by cultural fictions
that insist on men's influence over the birth and life of the child.

The Culture Heroine Jari

We shall now look for some confirmation of these interpretations through
Murik reflections upon these matters. What follows is an excerpted summary of
the Murik myth of the culture heroine, Jari. Our comments, which are intended as suggestive rather than definitive, are placed in brackets.

The Myth of Jari

According to the story, Jari's mother is a snake and not a real human mother. [The ethnomusicological form of the mother argues that motherhood is a primordial origin. And possibly, her snake-form, which reminds us of the penis, is an explicit denial of the absent father who is deemed unnecessary or irrelevant to the mother-daughter relationship.] Jari's mother cares for her devotedly, and Jari returns the affection. When Jari becomes an adolescent, she longs to join her age-mates who play at the beach in the moonlight. Her mother fears for her safety, and that she will not return. [There is a threat to the primordial mother-daughter relationship in the involvement of the child with others (society).] But at last her mother relents and lets her go to the beach, giving Jari a tube of oil to make her skin slippery in case someone tries to catch her. The oil has a wonderful smell and makes the sheen of Jari's skin beautiful and desirable in the moonlight. [Jari in leaving the loving mother will face the antagonistic other. The oil which gives her seductive charms is also the means by which she both attracts and evades the antagonistic other.]

One night Jari is captured by a young man from the village, who marries her. [The archetypal antagonistic "other" is man.] Jari continues covertly to visit her snake mother and hides the mother's identity from her husband. [There is a tension between the primordial mother and the husband.] After a while Jari gives birth to a son. Her mother, unable to resist, goes to visit the baby where he sleeps in his basket. She loves and caresses the baby with her tongue. [This is the first step in opposing the mother's love to men's aggressiveness. The primordial mother is orally loving, while man and society are associated with an oral dependency which is aggressive, but is discovered there by a child who is frightened to see the snake coiled round the baby. Jari's husband then kills the snake, and the villagers cook and eat her. [The husband is clearly opposed to the primordial mother, and social others are identified with aggressive oral dependencies.]

When she returns from fishing and learns what has happened, Jari secretly cries for her mother, then asks who has eaten the snake's stomach. She recovers it from an old woman, sits open the stomach and discovers there many shell and teeth valuables. Her mysterious mother is the source of everything of value. [The stomach of the mother is not the source of oral dependency, but a source of great wealth.] Jari divides the things with the old woman, and buries the stomach, mourning for her mother. A short time later, she takes revenge on her husband by cooking their son and tricking him into eating the soup. [Jari breaks the succession of father by son just as the husband has broken the link of the daughter to the primordial mother. Jari inflicts her vengeance on the husband by converting the son into food for the orally dependent husband.] As he rushes down to the shore to confront her, Jari paddles away in her canoe, saying, "You stay, crying for your son. I leave, crying for my mother." [The man stays but Jari, the heroine, transcends the confines of the social other.]

Traveling down the coast, Jari visits each Murik village in turn and discovers that the women have all been cut open to deliver their babies. The women do not know how to give birth and every true mother dies giving birth. [The absence of the practice of birthing is linked with the death of women.] All the children are raised by step-mothers. [There is no continuity between mother and child.] In each place, Jari teaches the women the magic and techniques for giving birth, then continues her journey. [Men consume food in their bellies, but women eject children from their bellies. For other women, Jari, now childless and mourning for her own mother, is the heroine who establishes birthing, as the identity of women. The culture heroine, a tragic figure, institutes the power of birthing as the social identity of women. This power is opposed to the oral dependencies of men which are a source of social disorder and personal dejection.]

The story continues with Jari bringing culture to the wild man, Kambong. He has no house, cooking fire, betel nut, or tobacco. But most importantly, he has no genitals and does not know how to have sexual intercourse. Jari shows him how to build a house, takes fire from her vagina and shows him how to cook his food, and introduces him to cultivated betel nut and tobacco. [Jari founds society as domesticity.] She then fashions a penis and testicles from a betel pepper and two betel nuts and teaches him how to have sexual intercourse. [Jari has a mastery of both feminine and masculine sexuality.] She also brings the knowledge of outriggers and sailing, important prerequisites for the extensive trade network on which the Murik depend. [Jari also founds trading, not warfare, as the basis of a socialized masculine identity.] Jari does not die or go on to the next village to the south at the end of the myth. She disappears. Some say that she resides in the volcano on Manam Island off the coast. Others say that she is just gone. [Jari herself remains a mystery, the image of what is lost and therefore perhaps never was.]

The three phases of Jari's story—as mother, as custodian of birth magic, and as sexual partner and civilizer of men—reveal the powers and secrets of woman. This is an argument about feminine identity that moves against the thesis that the feeding and eating of social food are the basis of social status and rank. The inspiration for this argument lies in the fact that men have figuratively appropriated the powers of nurturing which they represent by the deployment of food resources and the organization of the community, an appropriation, let us recall, that itself springs from the problem that feminine powers represent for male identity. Thus the men's problem is also the women's problem. Faced with men's attempt to appropriate the nurturing powers of women, women articulate their identity by a counterargument. There is also a myth of a culture hero, Sendam, that presents a male argument about masculine identity. This myth, a part of which we review in connection with the war cult, tells how Sendam is able to monopolize sex once both the nurturing and sexual powers of women, that is to say, the feminine powers that men regard as bringing their identity into question. The myth studiously ignores the fact of birthing, that feminine capacity that remains most intransigent to appropriation.

**PARSE SIX:**

**Men's Double and Divided Claims Over Women: Nurturing Versus Sexuality**

The Triangulation of Men's Claims over Women

The Murik do not practice restricted exchange as defined by Lévi-Strauss, and so far as we know, they have never done so. Matrimoieties are an important feature of the Murik war cult, and these matrimoieties do engage in a reciprocal giving and receiving of sexual prerogatives over women. As we shall eventually see, however, this does not involve marriage. While marriages are not regulated by restricted exchange among the Murik,
the problem that inspires such an institutional structure is nonetheless especially salient. This is the problem that women's sexuality presents for men's attempts to legitimize their claims over women. To see how this is so, we shall examine the triangle of brother, sister/wife, and husband and the triangle of elder brother, wife, and younger brother from this point of view. This must be done in conjunction with an analysis of brother-sister and brother-brother relationships.

The Relationship of Brother and Sister

Siblings should be devoted to one another, and it is usually the case that they engage in many reciprocal exchanges of food and labor with one another. Sibling relationships are, however, asymmetrical. Older siblings, who have more resources, should be the nurturing providers of their younger siblings, and the latter should freely offer their labor and services in return. In this respect, the relationship of siblings is reminiscent of the relationship of mother and child. This raises the problem of gender relations.

Older male siblings typically hold title to food resources, and so it is they who are "like a mother" to younger siblings. This means that older male siblings figuratively appropriate the maternal role of nurturing provider. But this very appropriation indicates that a feature of femininity has a high social value, thereby implying a masculine dependency on a feminine power. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the older brother, who should be "like a mother" to all his younger siblings, remains nonetheless "like a child" to his sisters. He jealously monopolizes their nurturing care against the claims of other men, and he is scandalized by their sexual relations with their husbands and lovers. To see how this is so, we shall examine the triangle of brother, wife/sister, and husband.

The Triangle of Brother, Sister/Wife, and Husband

The Murik say that through marriage by sister-exchange in the past, but, at present, brothers have limited powers over the arrangement of their sisters' marriages. At her marriage, a brother is expected to feel the loss of his sister acutely. The Murik say that a husband is a flying fox who steals the sister and takes her to a foreign land where she bears her seed, that is to say, her children. The relationship of the two siblings does not come to an end, however, so much as it is transformed. The Murik see the brother and husband of the woman as rivals of one another. The brother continues to make demands on her labor and resources while the sister relies on her brother for protection from an unruly or discontented husband. The brother takes a wide and varied interest in his sister's sons while the sister should also make similar claims over her brother's daughters. Careful avoidance relations should obtain between the wife's brother and husband.

The pattern then is as follows. Men see women as a nurturing resource and this is especially true of the orientation of the brother toward his sister. With marriage, the brother is deeply affected by the loss of the sister, which he sees as a depletion of his nurturing resources (the sister will bear her seed in a foreign land) and attempts to rebuild his relationship with her under these new conditions. This brings the brother into direct conflict with the husband, and the woman herself has an interest in this conflict. Avoidance relationships between brother and husband are a means of allaying the potential conflict of a primordial (uterine) and a secondary (sexual) claim over the same woman.

A thorough ethnography of a Murik community would involve considerable expansion on this theme of conflict between nurturing woman and sexual woman. While the nurturing woman represents security, unity, and peace, the capricious, flirtatious, sexual woman is a source of disruption, schism, and chaos. And while the norms of community stress reciprocal relationships of nurturing and dependency, the subversive fact of sexuality is a prominent feature of communal life. For the Murik, everyone is highly sexual in motivation and in action. Women are thought to be sexually aggressive, and no man is expected to refuse a woman's invitation. Women's relationships with each other are disrupted by their jealous competition for men. Outright aggression in the form of refereed fighting breaks out between lover and wife. These antagonisms are supported by women's mothers, fathers, and sisters. Men's relationships with women are likewise riven by sexual infidelities, and sorcery attacks almost always derive from such intimate rivalries and passions. Some affinal relations are hedged with respect requirements and prohibitions designed to prevent the outbreak of antagonisms over sexually active women. Other affinal relations are characterized by conventional obscene teasing about sexual appetites and exploits of the joking partners.

Lacking the space for a full ethnographic treatment of communal life, we shall instead examine a paradigmatic story (not a myth) of two sisters and a brother:

The Story of Two Sisters and a Brother

The elder sister marries and bears a son. But the younger sister is prevented from marrying by the brother who beats her brutally and incessantly for flirting on the beach with her boyfriend. Finally, the younger sister goes to the beach and presents herself to the boy, who refuses her by saying "You already have a husband, your brother." The younger sister then decides to commit suicide. First, she makes new sago fringed skirts and several other things for her sister, in order to placate her for the trouble she feels herself to be causing. She hangs herself from a tree above a pool where her elder sister goes to wash. The next day, the elder sister discovers the dangling body and calls her husband to come cut it down and bring it back to the village. "Such are the consequences," everyone said. "It is the trouble with her brother of course. He was always beating her." The brother goes in disgrace.

In the story, the brother attacks the younger sister, not only in conjunction with the latter's flirtations, but also with the elder sister's marrying and birthing. So then the brother's anger and violence are linked with his younger sister's incipient sexuality, his older sister's accomplished sexuality, and his older sister's birthing and nursing of an infant. One of the lessons of the story is that sexuality and its reproductive consequences are disasters for the brother's claims over the nurturing powers of his sisters.

The Relationship of Older and Younger Brother

Authority and inheritance among uterine brothers is allocated by birth order.
The elder brother holds the property of the sibling group, descent insignia, tute-
lary spirits, sorcery spells, the lagoon and outrigger canoes, coconut groves, trad-
ing partners and crab channels, etc. The younger brother should serve his elder
brother. He ought to carry his messages, divide up his tobacco and betel nut in
the cult house, fish and trade for him, contribute his labor for construction proj-
cets, and fight for him. In the precolonial era, younger brothers were expected to
man war canoes for their elder brothers. While neither elder nor younger brother
should resort to force against another, the greater penalties are attendant upon
a younger brother who strikes his elder brother. In the worst case, the elder brother
may ban his younger brother from riding upon the sibling group's outrigger or
from taking coconuts from their groves, which he controls, in order to punish him
for insubordination. "We are afraid of disobeying the word of our elder brother,"
one senior younger brother said. "He holds the insignia. If I fight with him, I
must rouse myself to difficult and extended labor [to compensate him by]... trussing a pig and staging a feast."

But while the elder brother has authority over the younger brother, he is,
normatively, solicitous and affectionate, not one who commands and constrains.
The elder brother is nurturing and generous while the younger brother is depend-
ent and indebted. With regard to his younger siblings, the daily life of the elder
brother should turn on a selfless giving to the extent that he should even avoid
making direct requests of his younger siblings. The elder brother ought to look
after the interests of his younger siblings. He explains the location of the sibling
group's property and helps them learn the genealogy they might need to know
to defend their entitlement to it. The elder brother should allow complete and open
access to the resources over which he, as the holder of the descent insignia of the
sibling group, has title. The elder brother should not refuse the requests of his
younger siblings: e.g., for tobacco, sago, fish, tools, or canoes. His carrying bask-
et, goes the cliché, should be completely open to them, to go through as they
please with their own hands.

The older brother, who holds title to resources, should be a nurturing provi-
der (like a mother) and the younger brother, who has no title to resources, should
be a helpful consumer (like a child). The older brother is superior, not because he
commands and constrains, but because he gives, which is ethically good, and the
younger brother is inferior, not because he submits and obeys, but because he
takes, which is ethically bad.

A look at the triangle of older brother, wife, and younger brother will now
reveal how the ethical difference between the two brothers must be understood
against the backdrop of men's relationships to women.

The Triangle of Elder Brother, Wife, and Younger Brother

In their relations with one another, elder and younger brothers ought to be
deferential, restrained, and shameful about sexual relationships. Elder brother and
younger brother should avoid speaking to each other of sexual affairs, licit or il-
licit. The elder brother must above all avoid making direct contact with, or placing
demands on, the younger brother's wife. There is a carefully observed avoidance
relationship between these two individuals and name taboos are observed. The
elder brother does not enter the house of his younger brother where he might en-
counter the latter's wife, and he does not eat her cooking. But since the elder
brother holds superior status, the major avoidance duties rest with the younger
brother's wife. Should she meet the elder brother on a foot path in the village, she
ought to "break bush," i.e., immediately get out of his way, by entering the bush.
When the younger brother's wife must enter the husband's elder brother's house,
she should stay close to the door if he is present and not leave her heels.

These avoidances might be interpreted as resolving the contradiction be-
tween the elder brother's power over the younger brother and the prerogatives that
this power might otherwise give him over the sexuality of his younger brother's
wife. This view is probably not the best way to understand the avoidances, how-
ever. The nurturing powers of the elder brother are expressed through the deploy-
ment of resources and the organization of labor. These are the legitimate, institu-
tional activities of men that are threatened by the divisiveness associated with
sexuality, a subversive force in human relations. This means that the ethical status
of the elder brother is incompatible with and opposed to sexuality, and the
younger brother's wife pays her respects to him accordingly. Should she be sitting
in a gazebo in view of her husband's elder brother, she should not even dangle
her legs in front of him, lest she appear sexually immodest in his presence. Nor
should she allow smoke from her cane stove to rise within sight of the village,
lest he understand that she is sending tryst signals to one of her lovers. Should the
elder brother himself get involved in an adulterous relationship and news of his
dalliance reach the ears of the younger brother's wife, she too should feel ashamed
about it and keep the information from her husband.

The younger brother, however, may make claims on the nurture of the elder
brother's wife. The cooking hearth of the elder brother's wife is said to be always
open to any of his younger brothers who are thus not constrained to avoid her.
She is said to be "a mother" to them, and she is classed in the sibling terminology
as a "wife" who is shared with the elder brother. While shame and avoidance are
called for between elder sibling and younger sibling's suman.

The Two Brothers Myth: Nurturing Constructs and Seductive Designs

Again we shall look for some confirmation of our interpretations in Murik
reflections. The two brothers myth, which is one of the central myths, not only
among the Murik, but throughout the Lower Sepik region, raises the question of
sibling authority and, in particular, the problem of the triangle younger brother,
older brother's wife, and older brother. In the myth, the elder brother is identified
as nurturing, responsible, and sexually moral. He is representative of communal
projects and institutions. The younger brother is dependent and shiftless, but also
attractive and guileful. He is the representative of seductive powers.

The two brothers in the myth are known by different pairs of names, de-
pending on where the story is being told, but the major themes of the myth are
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quite uniform. Andena, the elder brother, is always said to have had a very illustrious career, staging initiations and building cult houses. He is associated with the creation of many central institutions of society. Wanting to decorate the sea, he exploits a mountain near Chambri Lake and sends the offshore islands floating down the Sepik. Having done so, he invents the outriggers and begins trade relations with the islanders, knowing the spells that enabled overseas exchange to develop. Andena was the leader of the *kandimbwong* (spirit men). But despite all of Andena’s accomplishments, so the story tells, Arena, Andena’s younger brother, was more wily and imaginative. What follows is an excerpted summary of one version of the myth:

The Two Brothers Myth

The elder brother married first and decided to initiate his younger brother and his age group into the flute spirit cult. While he was away trading in the islands in preparation for the ritual, Arena, the younger brother, seduced the elder brother’s wife. She and Arena went fishing. She paddled down a little channel off the river and dropped lines while Arena stayed at the mouth of the channel and beat sago pith. To while away the time, Arena took a piece of white bark from the palm and began to carve one of his designs into it. Absently, he dropped it into the water and it floated down the channel, where it reached his elder brother’s wife in her canoe. The woman picked up the design in the sago bark and admired it. Pulling up her line, she paddled back to the area where Arena was waiting. “Is this yours?” she asked him. “Is this yours?” she asked. “I cut up the bark with the design etched into it. ‘It is very beautiful. Would you tattoo it on me?’” She tried the design in various places and finally held up the piece of bark with the design on it between her legs. “Would you put it here?” Later, while she slept, he tattooed the design across the vulva of his elder brother’s wife.

The elder brother, being omniscient, immediately knew what had happened but wanting proof did not respond overtly. Instead he went on preparing for his younger brother’s initiation by starting to build a new cult house. He invited men from the neighboring villages to come and carve their designs into its centerpost so as to expose his younger brother by matching his design with the one on his wife’s genitals. After each man finished his design, Andena fed the man and sent him home. Finally, when the younger brother carved his section of the post, Andena recognized the design. He hid his anger and went on with his younger brother, eating and speaking softly with him.

When work on the frame of the building was completed, Andena had his younger brother dig a deep hole for the centerpost. Andena, the elder brother, was powerful; so was Arena. He understood what his elder brother was thinking. At the base of the hole, he dug a side chamber where he might hide himself.

Then he told his brother the hole was ready. Andena invited men from the surrounding villages to take part in the feast and celebration of erecting the centerpost. The men came and lifted it. “You climb down into the hole and take the base of the post.” Andena told his younger brother. Arena had filled his mouth with red juice of betel nuts. When the men pushed up the post and lowered it into the hole, this red juice came shooting up, which looked like blood. The men looked at each other. “This man fucked my wife!” Andena screamed. “He fucked my wife! He fucked my wife! He is no good! Quick, fill up the hole!”

Arena hid and then sneaked into the bush to cut a tree for a canoe to escape. His elder brother went out hunting with his dogs and came upon his younger brother at work on the canoe hull. “You look like Arena, my younger brother,” he said, as if not recognizing him. “People look alike,” Arena answered. “What happened to him?” Andena explained what had happened and admiring the stranger’s work, asked him to cut a second canoe too.

When the work was finished the two brothers paddled down to the mouth of the river where Arena had his revenge by lashing the outrigger float to the hull of his elder brother’s canoe, with weak beach vine. When the two set sail for the islands, the elder brother’s canoe binding broke. THE outrigger split apart and the canoe sank. Andena called out to his younger brother for help but Arena just sailed on. The elder brother did not drown but went ashore at the westernmost Murik village, where he married two sisters there and had further adventures among the bush villagers. The younger brother sailed east toward New Britain. Some men say he may have ended up in the Telaasia area. Others believe he ultimately found his way to the United States, where he married many women and had many intelligent white descendants.

The myth contrasts the institutional/nurturing powers of the older brother with the esthetic/seductive powers of the younger brother. The older brother represents rightful and legitimate claims, but he is also full of rage and vengeful. The younger brother is appealing and engaging, but these qualities are also associated with transgression of norms and deception of others.

The contrast between older and younger brother illustrates two masculine strategies, both of which address men’s sense of a deficit in their claims on feminine help, care, and love. The older brother engages in legitimate institutional projects which figure nurturing powers. In this way, the deficit in men’s claims over women is displaced by status competition. Having no title to resources, the younger brother cultivates subversive charms and lures that aim at monopolizing feminine help, care, and love. This brings into question, however, institutional projects that would displace men’s double and divided claims over women. Thus, seductive designs are in conflict with nurturing constructs.

PART SEVEN: Trading and Canoes: An Argument of Masculine Identity

Murik Trading Partners

So far we have been examining ways in which men’s identities and relationships in the Murik community are brought into question by the feminine powers of birthing, nursing, and sexuality. In this and the next part of the paper, we shall examine how men’s activities outside the Murik community are touched by this same issue. Murik warfare, to a great extent, and Murik trading, to a lesser extent, could be said to be extrasocial and antisocial masculine activities. They involve men in projects outside the community where they are more or less separated from their women, and these projects involve behavior that is not altogether compatible with the norms of behavior that prevail in the community itself. However, in neither respect do Murik warfare and trading serve to compromise men’s dependency on women, as we shall see. Accordingly, Murik trading and warfare are activities in which, once again, masculine identity is strongly linked with the question of feminine powers of birthing, nursing, and sexuality.

Murik have trading partnerships with other peoples along the coast, lower
rivers, and on the offshore islands. These trading partnerships are not always identical in character. They involve different kinds of commodities, which are traded in different kinds of context. Of particular interest is the contrast between Murik trade with inland and island dwellers. In the case of fish-for-sago trade with inland peoples, trading partners are contrasted in terms of maternal nurturing (sago-suppliers) and infantile dependency (fish-suppliers), but, in the case of overseas trade with the islanders, trading partners are contrasted in terms of seductive designs (guest/male) and sexual powers (host/female). Thus we find that the relationship of “self” to “other” beyond the community is coded in terms reminiscent of social relations inside the community. However, this is not the most important lesson that we learn from trading relationships. The contrast between inland and island trade further reveals and confirms that women’s nurturing and sexual powers pose a problem for masculine authority, association, and identity.

**Inland Fish-for-Sago Trade**

The Murik are one of many riverine peoples in the Sepik area who trade smoked fish for sago starch owned and processed by hereditary trading partners among neighboring inland tribes (Bateson 1958;1936; Gewertz 1983; Harrison 1982; Hauser-Schnaeblin 1977; Schindelbeck 1980; Tiesler 1969). In former times, the river- and coast-dwelling peoples saw themselves as both culturally and militarily superior to the sago producers, though they were dependent on them for an important, staple resource. In the Sepik River area, the trade in sago was usually conducted exclusively by women because of the state of suspended warfare that constantly divided river dwellers and land dwellers. In the Murik Lakes area, however, both men and women were involved in all stages of the fish-for-sago trade and journeyed together in flotillas of armed war canoes to carry on silent trade with the sago suppliers. The Murik still paddle long distances to the inland villages to conduct the trade, but their claims to cultural and military superiority are no longer convincing (Barlow 1985b; Lipset 1985). The Murik complain of the small quantities of sago they receive and the inhospitable demeanor of their inland trade partners. The sago suppliers, declining to feed or invite the Murik into their houses, demand money for sago from the Murik while refusing to pay for fish in return.

As in other parts of the Sepik River area, the relationship between inland peoples and riverine or lacustrine peoples is styled as one between mothers (the sago suppliers) and children (the fish suppliers) (Gewertz 1983:27). In the eyes of the Murik, however, their “trade mothers” say they call them are not “good” but “bad” mothers. This perception has its analogy in the Murik community. A good child brings fish to his or her mother from an early age and is rewarded with sago, which the mother puts with the fish to make a meal. So then, the Murik are the dependent children who offer fish, and the sago suppliers are the mothers who reward with sago. But while the fish-for-sago trade is conceived by the Murik as a relationship of child and mother, it lacks, of course, the precise quality of the idealized child-mother relationship. For their part, the sago suppliers are neither willing, nor able, to meet the exaggerated expectations of the Murik. Sago is a labor-intensive product available in limited quantities. The sago suppliers need the fish that the Murik have, and they demand the fish in specified quantities in return. Thus while the Murik believe themselves to be “good” (generous) children, their trading partners are “bad” (stingy) mothers in their eyes.

But there is something more to this perception of the fish-for-sago trade than an analogy with the mother and child. Traditionally, the Murik and nearby inland peoples were formally war. Given the state of hostility, the silent fish-for-sago trade was especially circumspect in its conduct and strictly limited to necessities. Given this background, it is perhaps not surprising that the fish-for-sago trade is conceived in accordance with the conventional social etiquette of maternal nurturing and infantile dependency, an etiquette that excludes the more subversive issue of seductive designs and sexual powers.

**Island Trade in Precious Goods**

The Murik also engage in trade with the non-Murik peoples of the offshore Schouten Islands during the dry season between June and October. The islands lie some 60 kilometers off the coast so that trading expeditions involve a long, overseas journey and require special equipment and skills. The Murik have close and intimate relationships with their island trading partners, and the trade itself is far more varied than the fish-for-sago trade in the Sepik area.

The Murik import pigs, produce, and specialized manufactures and export seafood, baskets, circular pigs’ tusks, and ornamental valuables. Murik exports have an essential role in the Islanders’ prestige systems of competitive feast-making (Lutkehaus 1985). Both Murik men and women manufacture the ornamental valuables and it is not unusual for some women to travel with the men to coastal villages to conduct trade, but it is for the most part the men who construct the canoes, organize the trading expedition, and conduct the overseas voyage to the islands.

The social context of overseas exchange is “visiting” trade (Heider 1969). The islanders assign Murik men and women personal names and overwhelm them with hospitality. The visitors are infantilized: they are expected to do little more than sleep and eat and where their goods are gathered and readied. When the island men and women visit their Murik trading partners in return, they are treated in a corresponding fashion.

The relationship between Murik and non-Murik trading partners conforms to the social etiquette of reciprocal nurturing and dependency. Here the trading partnership is not conceived as a relationship of siblingship. However, in this instance, there is a more interesting side to island trade than its stereotype in terms of social norms that hold inside the community.

Unlike the fish-for-sago trade, the trade between overseas partners involves relaxed social relations during extended visits. Furthermore, the trade itself raises the tantalizing prospect of acquiring precious and delightful goods. These include ceremonial valuables and ornaments as well as songs, dances, and love magic.
which are associated with night feasts during which there are opportunities for amorous intrigues. Thus the island-coastal trade deals in items of social prestige and exotic beauty.

In these respects, the overseas trade is not only in sharp contrast with silent inland-coastal trade, which takes place between hostile peoples and is restricted to basic food resources. It is also in contrast with the normal ethos of social relations within the community at home among both Murik and non-Murik. That is to say, among a distant overseas people, the etiquette of nurturing and dependency is eased, and accordingly, the subversive dimensions of social relations, seductive designs, and sexual powers, come to the surface. The trade partner is himself like a fickle woman who must be magically seduced into giving up her special treasures; in addition, both men and woman may have, and are expected to have, sexual relations during their island visits.25

The asymmetry of male and female behavior during trading expeditions is especially revealing. Women do not approach men seductively, but aggressively; men do not approach women forcefully, but seductively, even coyly. Women in the villages to the southeast of the Murik Lakes (Kain, Borbor, Marangis) are called “those who scratch/itch” by Murik men. This implies that they are sexually aggressive, itching for intercourse. When Murik men come ashore on trading expeditions, the women attack them and scratch their backs with little clam shells (a common Murik euphemism for female genitalia). In compensation for the blood they may draw, they offer them sexual services, and, when their guests leave to go home, present them with small gifts of betel nut and tobacco. When Murik women arrive at these villages to trade, the resident men may approach them by slyly fingering the women on their legs. If Murik women are not attracted, the Murik men defend them against further advances. The asymmetry of male and female behavior suggests that women’s sexuality is powerful and dangerous so that men must deal with women by a careful and defensive strategy.

Thus both inland and island trade further reveal and confirm that social relations turn upon the problem that women’s nurturing and sexual powers pose for men. In a tense situation (the inland trade), the more conservative norm of social relations, maternal nurturing and infantile dependency, prevails, but in a relaxed situation (the island trade), the more subversive side of social relations, seductive designs (male) and sexual powers (female), comes to the surface.

The Outrigger Canoe: Masculine Identity Abroad and Feminine Powers at Home

Trading expeditions are one of the few spheres of social life in which men have skills and expertise that women lack. Women may occasionally participate even in the organization trading expeditions. Manufactures made by women and produce gathered by women are among the most important trade goods. Women assemble packets of sago and other mangrove delicacies (crab and other shellfish) that are unavailable on the rocky island coasts. Women make those Murik goods that are most desired by the island peoples, among them the plaited baskets. Individual Murik women become well known among the islanders through the quality and quantity of their baskets. But it is men and men alone who construct the canoes and conduct the overseas voyage to the islands.

It is not surprising then, given the problem that women’s nurturing and sexual powers pose for men, that the canoe (gai’e’en) is a symbol of masculinity par excellence for the Murik.27 At the same time, however, there are many ceremonies and rituals that suggest that canoe making and canoe traveling are deeply affected by the thoughts and actions of women. That is to say, even though canoe making and canoe traveling represent a purely masculine power (significantly a power associated with movement beyond the community itself), canoe making and canoe traveling also reveal that the masculine self is marked by the feminine other.

Outrigger Canoe Construction

Preparations for the trade begin with the construction of an oceangoing outrigger canoe (sev gai’een). Constructing the canoe is not only a practical matter, but a major ritual activity conducted exclusively by men. The canoe log (a prodigious phallic symbol) is held to be vulnerable to women’s contact and influence. Logs must be purchased from trading partners through prestation: a combination of pig feasts, fish, and carrying baskets (or, today, money). Male youths procure the log, not from their fathers’ gardens near at hand, but from their grandfathers’ (or grandparents’) coastal trading partners to whom they must travel across dangerous social boundaries. When they drag the trunk down from the bush to the beach along the coast, they are attacked by the local women, who chase the men back into the bush with stinging nettles with which they try to scratch them. The men are supposed to run and hide in the bush, where they might have sexual relations with the attacking women.

The construction of the canoe, we find, symbolizes male creative and productive powers. However, these powers are represented only by contrasting them with the nurturing and sexual powers of women. To make a canoe, men assert, is to give birth, but in a far more sociable and respectable way than it is possible for women to accomplish. Here again we discover that male constructs and artifices advance an argument against female powers of birthing, nursing, and sexuality.

After the log has been floated back to the Murik coast, it is taken to a peripheral part of the village where elders erect a temporary “canoe-house” so that they can work undisturbed by women. The canoe-house is then a house in which only men can enter. In this respect, as we shall see, it can be opposed to the birth house to which a woman repairs at the time of labor. In the birth house, a woman is isolated from the community and from most other women. She must give birth alone or with the help of one other woman. Conversely, in the canoe-house, men are engaged in a social activity where, in former times, they worked naked. Some of the tasks are performed by male youths. Bringing food to the canoe-house in the afternoon, they learn the craft while assisting with the labor. While working on the canoe, the youths have to avoid sexual contact with women so as not to
pollute the canoe hull and cause it to split. Cracks, it is believed, occur in the hull as manifestations of the laborers having had sexual intercourse with women the night before they work. Chanted spells and ginger leaves dropped at the doorway of the canoe-house cleanse and protect the canoe from the smell of sexual intercourse which will cause the hull to split open "like women's genitals." (Barlow 1985b:116).

Built within the shelter of the canoe-house, the canoe is eventually brought forth as a finished product. When it is ready to be launched, a pot and small fire are placed on the ground in front of it. It is shoved across these symbols of domesticity, spoiling the fire and breaking the pot, and then into the water, becoming independently mobile and ready for its first journey. The pot and fire are also symbolically multivalent. As a domestic metaphor they represent the cooking hearth and nurturing powers of women, which are left behind by the voyagers. In the birthing imagery of canoe production, they also represent the burning sensation of birth.28

A primary symbol of masculine identity has been fashioned by men working together as a social group, but the fashioning is under the shadow of those feminine powers they have relegated to the bush. The naked men in the canoe-house, who are chaste like children, have given birth to the canoe. By design, however, their act is superior to that of the woman in the birth house who bears the child. They are a group. They are chaste. Their act challenges, even as it is also threatened by, feminine birthing, nurturing, and sexuality.

**Outrigger Canoe Travel**

Women are acknowledged by Murik men to have power to send out the outrigger canoe and to bring it home again. This reflects the uneasy dependence of men on women in their trading expeditions; for let us recall that women's produce and manufactures are the principal trade goods of the Murik. The Murik men recalled the familiar adage to Lipset:

- It is the woman who takes the canoe to the islands
- It is the woman who brings it back
- The canoe travels on the strength of the woman.

While the outrigger canoe is at sea, men take turns holding the steering paddle (see Figure 5) while their wives back at home are obliged to behave with extreme caution. As the Murik say, "the women sit still."

Their mothers, sisters, brothers, and feasting partners have the duty of looking after her and her ongoing domestic chores. Men who stay at home when their wives are at sea on their way to trade or market are not subject to equivalent restrictions. There is a long list of proscriptions that the steersman's wife should observe because the outrigger canoe will respond directly to her while at sea. Among them are the following:

1. She may not speak to a lover, who is one of her husband's rivals. The canoe will not return.

2. She must not have sex. The canoe will imitate her movements and then go down at sea.

3. She may not cut the grass. The outrigger lashings will break.

4. She may not untie her skirts. The canoe will break up.

5. She must not chop firewood. The canoe will split open and sink.

6. She may not weave baskets. (In straightening the basket reeds after each step in the weaving, the weaver makes a gesture as if waving goodbye.) The canoe will go to sea and never return.

7. She may not take a stopper out of a water container. The caulking in the canoe will come out and the canoe will take water.

8. She may not lean down to scoop up water. The canoe will also "lean down" and take in water and sink.
9. Her skirts must not blow in the breeze, a provocative, sexually inviting pose. The canoe sails will blow like the skirt and the canoe will be swept away entirely.

10. The woman must not fall down, step in a hole, or walk in soft mud. The canoe will mimic her downward movement and take on water, if not actually sink (Barlow 1985b:118).

On board the canoe, the men watch the steersman closely. If the canoe veers off course or bobs up and down, the steersman is changed immediately. He and the crew know how his wife has misbehaved, depending on what the canoe does. The other men cover him up, and he hides until the journey is over. When they return to Murik again, each displaced steersman goes directly to his wife and beats her for her misbehavior. According to the older women, these beatings used to be public, but now because of government and mission disapproval of wife-beating, the husband waits until they are inside the house.

The outrigger canoe, a vehicle that carries men beyond the community, is a primary symbol of male identity. The construction of the canoe and its safety at sea involve special skills and expertise monopolized by men. But men feel threatened all the same, both directly by the faulty choice of a log, mistakes in carving, or by bad weather at sea, and indirectly through their dependency on women.

PART EIGHT:
The Masculine Self Opposed to the Masculine Other: The War Cult

The Last Refuge of Masculine Authority and Identity

Before pacification in 1918, apart from intertribal trade, warfare was another important activity that took Murik men outside of their communities. But although decisive for male cult status, the scope of precontact Murik warfare was limited by the riverine/lacustrine ecology. Warfare rarely had the goal of land conquest or extermination. The more common purpose was talonic retaliation against other Murik for violations of women's rights, through rape or abduction, or the taking of heads among inland peoples for use in the war cult. Sometimes, bands of spear throwing warriors in flotillas of war canoes actually confronted each other, but this did not occur frequently. Ambush, treachery, and sneak attacks were the order of the day in Murik warfare.

Traditionally, warfare was wedded to a pantheon of named deities (brag) whose faces and voices are represented by men wearing masks and playing bamboo flutes. Here we see that war is linked with figures and tropes of a self, but significantly, a self that is only a representation not an actual individual. The face is not a real face, but a mask. The voice is not a real voice, but a flute. The name is not the name of man, but of a spear spirit. The spear spirits, represented by names, masks, and flutes are, however, owned by individual men (see Figure 6). The brag spirits are said to have possessed men—using them as "gai'een" (ca-
The War Cult

The most revered and dangerous war cult in the Murik pantheon was represented by those men who personified the spear spirits (kakar). The kakar were held to be the most powerful source of the warrior identity and were believed to be very toxic to the health of women and children. Again significantly, the spear is not seen as an extension of the masculine self, but instead as a spirit in its own right. Where belief in them has not been completely suppressed by the Catholic missionaries, the spear spirits are still kept today in some Murik villages, hidden away in veiled shelves deep in the interior roofs of cult houses (Somare 1975).

The kakar spirits are associated with a myth that tells of their procreation. It is a story of sexuality, birth, kidnapping, rape, stillbirth, and infanticide in which men themselves play only a very small part. The kakar spirits are associated with two rival matrilineages (yarak) into which youths were initiated, after recruitment by their mothers' brothers.29 Each moiety is divided into two age-grades, which are ranked “father” to “son.” The two “father” grades of each moiety also stand to one another as “elder brother” to “younger brother.” Rivalrous joking relations obtain between the two cult moieties that engage in competitive exchanges of food and sexual privileges.30

The right to hold the kakar spears, which is the prerogative of the “elder brother” grade, represents authority in the cult. This right is won and lost in competitive exchanges of sexual privileges. In order to win the right to hold the spears, the “younger brother” grade secretly sends their women into the cult house in order to seduce the “elder brother” grade. An unmarried man may send his sister or his mother. Following the sexual license, couples sit quietly in the dark. Each woman reports that she has been “shot by the spear” of her husband’s cult “elder brother” by smoking a cigar. The successful seductions are counted by the number of cigar embers burning red.

One man who is thought to have control over his sexual appetites is designated “knot” (pakanem) by the commissioner of the “elder brother” grade. He must not succumb to the advances of the woman sent by a “younger brother” and thus guards the rights to the kakar spears for his entire moiety. During the nights of sexual license, he takes her home instead to sit with his own wife who spends the evening cooking for the senior men. If he is tricked into having sexual relations with her, the last of the “younger brother” grade is considered to have repaid a sexual debt, and after a feast is mounted, the “younger brother” grade succeeds to the status of “elder brother” grade, thereby assuming the right to hold the kakar spears that incumens have now lost (see Lipset 1984).

The rituals of the war cult thus turn upon men’s ability not to be sexually possessed by women who belong to other men (the “knot” resists the woman that his “younger brother” sends to him), men’s ability to possess sexually the women of other men (“elder brothers” take the women of “younger brothers”), and men’s ability to surrender women to the sexuality of other men (“younger brothers” send their women to the “elder brothers”). In these various ways, the cult involves ritualized attempts on the part of the Murik warrior to control his sexual desires as well as to sever his relationships with women and hence to gain a measure of emotional independence. The “knot” of the ascendant moiety demonstrates his powers of renunciation while the other members of the “elder brother” grade exercise their rights over the “younger brother” grade’s women. At the same time, the latter are obliged to curb their feelings of jealousy while encouraging their women to seduce other men so that they might succeed to a higher cult status.

These features of the war cult were well understood and clearly formulated by the Murik themselves. Barlow and Lipset were told that husbands had to learn to control their sexual jealousy and detach themselves from their wives in order to become warriors. “When a man is born, he is afraid. If he is afraid of dying and losing his wife, he is useless and weak in battle. But having given away his woman, he has already extracted his liver, so the fear is lessened.” Men thus spent careers in the kakar and brag cults learning to curb fear and rage. “As long as she feeds me properly,” the head of the ascendant moiety said, “I do not care if my wife takes lovers. Why? Because I am a strong man. I can send her to meet lovers in the mangroves. I will not be angry. The man who allows himself to become angry and talk here and there is merely bullshit. It is no good if I get mad and someone dies.”

Murik men also went on to note that overcoming their feelings of attachment to women is not easy. “For you white men,” a current knot told Lipset, “it is easy to give your women. You receive money. But with us, it is too hard. We cry

notes)—in order to help them in warfare, or to make indictments about sorcery and disease.

So then the issues of individuality and personhood appear in the area of warfare; for it is certainly in warfare that self and other are no longer linked by the experience of nurturing and dependency, but rather by the experience of autonomy and opposition. However, even here, the Murik do not quite bring into focus the notion of their own individuality and personhood. What comes into focus in the war cult is rather a representation of individuality and personhood disconnected from the self. The Murik men monopolize the war cult and its representations of individuality and personhood as the essential dimensions of their masculine identity; however, once again, they cannot do this without reference to the powers that women hold over them.

In what follows we shall see that the warrior identity is expressed by rituals of sexuality. These rituals affirm that men have the power: (1) to renounce the sexuality of women; (2) to possess sexually for oneself women who rightfully belong to other men; and (3) to surrender women who rightfully belong to oneself to be possessed sexually by other men. In other words, these sexual rituals affirm men’s ability to triumph over their scruples about women’s sexuality. They are in this sense part of the formation of an independent, masculine identity by engaging in brutalizing rituals that attempt to cure them of their dependencies on women. The irony of these rituals is, however, that they are so revealing of the dimensions of men’s dependency on women.
when we send our women to the cult house." In fact it appears that the ends of the cult ritual are not fully achieved. For in the final analysis, Murik men either attribute their success in the cult to their women or are relieved to meet with failure. Rather than the anger a husband would normally feel about an infidelity, they say, a man should be grateful to the wife who succeeds in being unfaithful to him in the service of the cult. This is said to be a sign of her power. Failure, however, should not lead him to punish her. Some senior informants recall feeling relieved at hearing that their wives had been too frightened to seduce their cult partners.

And in fact, the heart of the cult involves the accomplishment of a task by women that is perhaps even more difficult than the task accomplished by the men who remain passive in their actions, even if disturbed in their emotions. The basis of the women's fear is that the men whom they must seduce represent the elder brother cult grade whom they must assiduously avoid in mundane contexts. These men also control the spirits and magic that make women sick and even kill them. However, women felt challenged, rather than coerced, to prove their courage by seducing them.

The Cult House

Other details of the cult reinforce the conclusion that the warriors, despite attempts to assert their emotional independence, are preoccupied with the question that feminine powers raises for masculine identity. Each Murik hamlet was an independent war-making unit with its own, or several, cult houses (tauh), the meeting halls for the war cults. (See Figure 7.) Although their designs vary slightly, essentially the buildings are rectangular in shape, their roofs rising about 15 to 20 feet to a single ridge pole. Gables, which seem truncated by middle Sepik standards, jut out above the front and rear ends. Brightly colored geometrical designs, in the manner of Abelam and Arapesh cult houses, sometimes appear painted on their bark undersides (Forge 1966; Tuzin 1980). Except for their larger size and gables, architecturally there is little to distinguish the Murik cult house from the dwelling house. Both have the same framework. Both stand on top of the piles six to eight feet above the ground, and both are thatched with the same bush materials. Both are decorated with sago fringe hunting, which is draped along their outside walls during the consecration ritual. The cult house is then a house without women, but a house that represents a maternal presence even more explicitly than the "normal" family house in which women do reside.

As the spirit of a dwelling house is itself held to be a woman, so a maternal presence is also found everywhere in the men's cult house. The bunting, supposed to block the mosquitoes coming through the side vents, is called the "skirt" (dag) of the cult house. The most powerful spirits of the cult house, the kakar spears, are hidden under these skirts. When entering the hall through the front entrance, men climbing up the ladder brush through the fringe, like children, they say, crawling beneath the skirts of their mothers. Women never enter the cult house through this entrance. Directly opposite the front doorway, at the other end of the hall, a smaller and less conspicuous entrance is covered over by a mat. When
women enter the men’s house at night, it is through this little back door. So then the cult house is constructed by men for the purposes of men, but in asserting their autonomy and independence from women, they do so by appropriating to themselves the birthing and nurturing power of the mother. The details of the cult house consecration ritual support this interpretation.

The consecration of a new cult house involves a great deal of trade in order to accumulate the large amounts of food. The interior of the hall must be decorated with an abundance of imported delicacies: bananas, almonds, papayas, mangoes, tubers, tobacco, and betel nuts. Once everything has been assembled, a dusk-to-dawn celebration is staged in which challenges to the roles of both men and women are enacted. In the first phase of the ceremony, the nurturing powers of women are defeated by the cult house. Thereafter, the cooking and feeding activities of women are derived from the superior power of the cult house to feed the community. Traditionally, every day began with sending plates of food to the cult house before the household cooking was done, and the women were not allowed to cook during the daylight hours “before the eyes of the cult house” except for activities of the cult. For the consecration ritual, every housefire in the village is extinguished at sunrise. All the women’s cooking fires, that is, become dependent upon the competition of the mieties. No food preparation—and no feeding or eating—may take place until one of the mieties defeats the other in a race to start a fire by friction. Women enter the still unconsecrated cult house to watch selected novices from the two mieties compete to start the fire. The winning side then has the honor of emerging from the cult house to parade through the village, lighting all the housefires, one by one.

The women do not simply accept this challenge. They test the strength of the new building by trying to shake the piling on which it stands, but the house remains. Inside the cult house, meanwhile, the young men are cooking the women a meal of clams and sago pudding. These foods are feminine as is the role of cooking for those who are making a large feast. Once the men’s cooking is finished, the women chase them out and are at liberty to seize the food hanging on the walls. They take whatever they want and go home to prepare a feast for the village and guests.

The men have appropriated the nurturing powers of women by linking the staging of great feasts with their preeminent role in the antisocial and extrasocial activities of aggression and violence. The women do not actually contest this appropriation. They only test the strength of the men’s cult house and assert the right to the resources that are prepared and stored within it.

The Myth of the Culture Hero Sendam

Again, we shall conclude our discussion of the war cult by examining Murik reflections. To do so we shall consider a segment of the myth of the culture hero Sendam. Like the myth of Jari, the myth of Sendam assumes that the mother-child relationship is a point of origin. Deriving Sendam’s strength and guile from his mother’s powers, the myth explains how the hero founded military organization and war cults. Here we shall be interested in a later episode of the myth in which Sendam overcomes the contradiction between men’s desire to control both the mother-woman and the sexual-woman. As we shall see, the feat requires that Sendam be, at the same time, both a man of immense, sexual potency as well as a helpless, nursing infant. What follows are excerpts summaries of the myth. Our comments, which are intended to be suggestive, rather than definitive, are placed in brackets.

The Myth of Sendam

The myth tells of a ribald trickster hero whose mother is a wild pig from the bush. [His mother is not a primordial being like the snake-mother of Jari; she is a wild pig, an important ceremonial food resource and hence the foundation of male prestige and rank. Unlike most Murik food resources, the wild pig is hunted by men and hence not dependent on women’s social labor]. Sendam teaches men the principle of dual organization which is linked with the war cult moieties. [Sendam is associated not with the dependency of male on female in the community but with the opposition of male and male.] He has a tree trunk of a phallus and a voracious sexual appetite, demanding unlimited access to large numbers of women in return for his magical powers. [Sendam’s own sexuality enables him to dominate all women in general who are obliged to serve him in return for his remarkable powers.] During one of his exploits, he saves the villagers at the mouth of the Sepik River from two sea-eagles, man and wife, who prey upon them. Climbing the tree in which they nested, Sendam kills the two spirits at the very moment they are engaged in sexual intercourse. [The hero saves a village from a predatory figure of a copulating man and wife. He removes the curse of men’s sexual dependency on women from the village.] As a reward for this favor, the villagers prepare a great feast for the hero who requires them instead to surrender up their wives to his insatiable sexual appetite. [Having saved them from the curse of men’s sexual dependency on women, he now monopolizes the sexuality of the village women for himself.] In the episode that follows, Sendam continues his travels and comes upon a childless man and woman having intercourse. After they finish and leave, he rolls on the wet ground where they had lain and turns himself into a crying baby. The woman returns to find him there, and takes him home as her foundling child. [Faced with a scene in which a man has sexual relations with a woman, Sendam is able to become himself the child of the woman and monopolize her nurturing powers.] During the day, Sendam enjoys the sweet satisfaction of suckling at his mother’s breast, but at night he resumes the form of a man and has intercourse with her. [The hero overcomes the dilemma of ordinary men by transforming himself from nursing infant to sexual man and back again. He monopolizes the nurturing and sexual powers of a woman.]

This excerpt from the myth repeatedly addresses the contradiction of men’s claim to power and authority and their profound dependency on women. Sendam founds the war cult, but he does so by demonstrating his sexual prowess. Sendam saves the villagers from sexuality, but he requires that they submit to his own sexual powers. Sendam monopolizes a woman’s nurturing and sexual powers, but to do so he must be both a helpless infant and a potent, sexual male. Sendam seems to be a hero by virtue of his ability to transcend the dilemma of a male claim to power and authority that is undercut by a dependency on women.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing the work of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss on exchange systems, we
reevaluated their concepts of "total prestation" and "restricted exchange." The latter, we proposed, are not the essential, underlying forms of society and culture, but indicative of a circumstantial emphasis on an ethos of communality and a corresponding de-emphasis on the self apart from others. If this reevaluation is correct, it implies that historico-geographic factors were especially consistent with such circumstances among many stateless peoples in the SEAO region where total prestation and restricted exchange are of frequent occurrence.

Pursuing the implications of this skewing of social relations, we also argued that an emphasis on an ethos of communality and a corresponding de-emphasis on the self apart from others is strongly correlated with a problematic of gender relations. In effect, masculine authority, association, and identity are acutely brought into question by the feminine powers of birthing, nursing, and sexuality. To explore this thesis, we have examined communal traditions and organization among the Murik Lakes people. In the course of our analysis, we found that the Murik emphasis on an ethos of communality is indeed linked with a problematic of gender relations. To confirm that this was so, we were concerned to check our interpretations of Murik communal institutions against Murik reflections in myth, story, and comment.

Our theoretical argument and our ethnographic review identified three important strategies by which men respond to the question that feminine powers raise in regard to men's identities. These are:

1. Symbolic reconstruction of feminine nurturing powers in the context of inter- and intracommunal ceremonies that are supervised primarily by male elders. The relevant Murik examples are feast making, the war cult, and male initiation rites.

2. The displacement of men's double and divided claims over women by devices of communal organization, including marriage practices and avoidance relationships. The relevant Murik examples are the triangle of brother, sister/wife, and husband and the triangle of elder brother, wife, and younger brother.

3. The attempt to elaborate an independent domain of masculine identity in the context of extrasocial and antisocial activities in which women have relatively little part. The relevant Murik examples are trading and warfare, along with male ambivalence about feminine powers of birthing, sexuality, and nurturing.

Having illustrated these masculine strategies by reviewing the ethnography of the Murik Lakes peoples, we shall now briefly consider the possibility of extending our argument to other stateless peoples in the SEAO region. Here, we shall propose, in a very tentative way, how the three strategies listed above are differently developed in varied settings.

Riverine, Coastal, and Island Gardening Peoples. Among these peoples, gardening is often the most important activity of men in the acquisition and production of food. Accordingly, it is clearly the case that garden ritual is a domain in which men's nurturing and seductive powers are at stake. (Fortune 1932; Malinowski 1922; Tuzin 1972). Men have the power to nurture (like the woman) because they grow crops. To grow crops, however, men are obliged to demonstrate seductive powers since crops are fickle and subject to other men's charms (like women). Thus, the question of men's relationship with women is worked out in a primary economic domain: gardening production. In this respect, we suggest that an analysis of stateless, gardening peoples in the SEAO region will show that, where gardening is important, men's control over the 'fertility' of their gardens is linked with the question which feminine powers of nursing, birthing, and sexuality raise for masculine identity.

Nomadic Hunters and Gatherers of the Desert. Among the Australian Aborigines of the interior, hunting is an important male activity but, as a mode of subsistence, compares poorly with men's and women's gathering and foraging activities (Gould 1969:18; Meggitt 1964:167). The basic welfare of these peoples in this respect is contingent on the labor of women. Accordingly, the design of those social norms which regulate men's double and divided claims over women are critical given the limited and precarious food supply of many of these peoples. Another factor is the political problem of nomadic peoples. The issue of intra- and intergroup solidarity is especially important for highly mobile peoples and the importance of patriarchal bonds among the Australian Aborigines may be associated with this. In contrast with the patriarchal mode of political organization among other nomads elsewhere in the world, however, a system of reciprocal marriage exchange is of special importance for these peoples (Lévi-Strauss 1969:148).

Gardeners and Pig-Raisers of the New Guinea Highlands. In this area, clearly defined economic domains, land and pigs, were subject to masculine political competition and the issues of military and political organization were sometimes highly developed. The emphasis on male authority, association, and identity still addresses the crucial question of men's ties to women among most highland peoples. In initiation rites, for example, male youths' sentimental ties to women are subjected to severe repression, and male elders figurally appropriate and masculinize feminine powers of birthing, nursing, and sexuality. The most extreme examples are the displacement of women's milk by men's semen (male elder's nurture male juniors with semen) and the displacement of women's menstrual blood by men's nose-bleeding (Herdt 1980; Langness 1974).

Just as our theory indicates those circumstances in which masculine identity is acutely problematized by gender relations, so it also suggests that this is not the case where the self apart from and opposed to others is an important dimension of social norms. Thus, the social and cultural patterns that we have associated with many stateless peoples in the SEAO region should be much less manifest and central where conditions did not so intensely favor an ethos of communality and the orientation of self toward others. Our review of the East African cattle
complex indicates, for example, that wherever conditions were consistent with strategies of monopolizing food resources against the claims of others, a sense of the self apart from and opposed to others came to the fore in social norms. These kinds of conditions may have become especially characteristic of the Old World after the spread of stock keeping. This is suggested by the prominence of self-representations on the level of both state and tribe in this part of the world. Consider, for example, the class of individualistic heroes like Gilgamesh, Achilles, Odysseus, Roland, Beowulf, Cuchulain, Manus, Abu Zayed, to cite only a few from the world of Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, and Ural-Altaic speakers. Similar kinds of heroes are to be found among many of the people of sub-Saharan Africa where their connections with an ecology of pastoralism has been documented by ethnographers.

Even in the absence of highly developed pastoral traditions and institutions, it is not only possible, but extremely likely, that other politico-economic factors bring to the fore the figure of the self apart from and opposed to others. And such factors may have been at work among some peoples in the SEAO region. One place to look for such factors would be among those seagoing peoples of the SEAO region who were involved in exploration, expansion, or conquest.

In this paper, we have hoped to build upon the monumental achievements of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. Our intent has been to explore and to deepen exchange theory, not to refute it. We believe that this is the manner in which any scholarly endeavor must proceed.

APPENDIX:
The Feminine Other in Mauss’s The Gift

The Maori hau Spirit

Mauss believed that the three laws of prestations, to give, to receive, and to make a gift in return, were confirmed by a Maori religious conception, the hau spirit. In this respect, the explication of the Maori hau spirit (Mauss 1954:6–10) is a key passage in his comparative study of prestation.

In a restudy of the text (recorded by Best) on which Mauss based his interpretation of the hau, Sahlin has termed Mauss’s discussion of the hau, “the master concept of the Essai sur le don.” Sahlin, however, points out several features of the hau that were not fully treated by Mauss. For example, the hau, as a religious conception, is related to the abundance and fertility of the forest as a source of game:

Tamata Ranapir was trying to make Best understand by the example of gift exchange . . . why certain game birds are ceremoniously returned to the hau of the forest, to the proper source of their abundance. [Sahlin 1972:157–158]

Sahlin continues with an explication of how the Maori priests claim the power to control the fertility and abundance of the forest as a source of game:

Accordingly, some of the captured birds should be ceremoniously returned to the

priests . . . the consumption of these birds by the priests in effect restores the fertility (hau) of the forest (hence the name of the ceremony, whangai hau, “nourishing hau”). [Sahlin 1972:158]

Besides the principle of reciprocity, which most interested Mauss, the concept of hau is, according to Sahlin, associated with concepts of “abundance,” “productivity,” “fertility,” “fecundity” (1972:157, 158, 167), particularly as they impinge on “nourishment.” These remarks suggest that the Maori hunter conceives the forest, not only as a generator and provider of game, but also as a nurturing feminine other. If indeed there is a metaphor of maternal nurturing behind the hau of the forest, it is interesting that we discover this metaphor in the domain of hunting where men’s role as food suppliers is set apart from their relationships with women. For it is precisely in this context, where the powers of men as food suppliers are unchallenged by women, that their claims over feminine powers can be most confidently figured.

Fijian and Amerindian Symbols of a Nurturing Mother

Male representations of a nurturing feminine other are discussed more explicitly by Mauss in a passage which discusses Fijian valuables:

Moreover Fijian money, cachalot teeth, is the same as that of the Trobrianders. It is known as tamua. This is supplemented by stones (“mothers” of the teeth), and ornaments, moons, talismans and lucky charms of the tribe. The sentiments of the Fijians in regard to the tamua are the same as those just described: “They are regarded by their owners very much as a girl regards her dolls. They like to take them out and admire and talk about their beauty; they have a ‘mother,’ who is continually being oiled and polished.” [quoting Brewster]. Their presentation is a request, and their acceptance a pledge. [Mauss 1954:29]

In discussing the Northwest Coast potlatch, Mauss discovers another figure of nurturing feminine other displaced once again from women. The meaning of the term “potlatch,” he has told us at the beginning of his study, is “to nourish” or “to consume” (Mauss 1954:4). In the later discussion of the potlatch as “sacralized property and wealth,” he provides us with a glimpse of a mother that stands behind this religious aspect of food and goods:

By a religious and mythological effort of a type rare enough in the Americas they have managed to reify an abstraction: the “Property Woman,” of whom we possess myths and a description. She is nothing less than the mother, the founding goddess of the dominant phratry, the Eagles. But oddly enough . . . she appears identical with the “queen,” the principal piece in the game of tip-cat, the piece that wins everything and whose name the Property Woman bears. [Mauss 1954:42]

Notes

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LESSONS FROM THE MURUK

1. For a deconstructionist's criticism of arguments that appeal to "origins" see Culler's explanation (1982:85-89) of Derrida's essay on Plato.

2. Note that the phrase "figuration of self and other" refers generally to figures and tropes of any relationship including those between person and person, group and group, and person and group, whether they are within or across the boundaries of community.

3. Mauss is decidedly two minds about Roman, Greek, and Semitic civilizations. Where he states that notions of profit and interest are post-14th century, he claims that "it is only by awkward paraphrasing that one can render the phrase 'individual interest' in Latin, Greek or Arabic" (1954:74). In the above passage, however, he labels these same civilizations "cold and calculating" and in another place he admires the contemporary "reaction against Roman and Saxon insensibility in our own regime" (1954:64).

4. This feature of exchange is also very well documented within the cultures of the SLAEAO region (cf. Young 1971; Strathern 1971; Lawrence and Meggitt 1965).

5. For studies of the place of stock raiding in the traditions of Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic speaking peoples, see Lincoln 1981; Walcott 1979; Moster 1959; Meeker 1979; Samatar 1982. References to the place of stock raiding in the traditions of Nilotic-Hamite and Bantu speaking peoples are cited below.

6. The analysis that follows is drawn from an extensive review of the representation of masculine identity among stock-keeping peoples with a special emphasis on East African cattle herdsmen (Meeker 1985).

7. In parts of Bantu speaking East Africa, state formation was intertwined with guaranteeing property rights in cattle and with organizing cattle-raiding expeditions (cf. Gluckman 1940:45; Oberg 1940:128-129; Oliver 1978:643; Schapera 1940:77-78).

8. See, for example, Almagor 1977; Fukui and Turton 1977; Deng 1971, 1973; Gourlay 1972; Lienhardt 1941-45; Turton 1977. This issue is also reviewed in Meeker 1985.

9. See Beidelman 1965; Deng 1973; Maquet 1972; Morris 1964. These kinds of self representations were also found among Zulu and Sotho stock-speaking keepers in South Africa, see, e.g., Lestrade 1938, and they were also characteristic of Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic stock keepers.

10. In focusing attention on the issue of men's extrasocial activities and antisocial activities our intention is not to pretend that cultural representations can be understood from the point of view of men alone. Rather we are examining features of masculine identity that might explain cultural "phallocentrism" among a stateless peoples. The importance of women's own activities is not to be gauged by their lack of prominence in the dominant cultural representations. This is all the more the case since men may have a large stake in underestimating their dependencies on women. The importance of women's (as opposed to men's) experiences and the meaning of cultural representations for women are both different and complementary to that of men (see, for example, Goodale 1971). The issue of how cultural representations make sense to women and how the relationships of men and women articulate with one another will be touched upon in the discussion of the Muruk materials, but they are regrettably not the focal point of the present paper.

11. The Gift begins with a quotation from the Edda which recommends the virtues of generosity and boldness and makes a caution about "excessive slaughter."


13. In contrast, as has already been noted, gender relations among many Eurasian, Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and African pastoral peoples—whatever their actual experiential importance—tend to be pushed into the background as a focus and center of traditions and institutions while inter-masculine relationships (male elders over male youths, male youths against male youths) come into the foreground. This reflects the "phallocentric" character of those stock keepers among whom pastoral resources are contestable. It is not only a feature of the East African "cattle complex" but also of pastoral traditions and institutions in Eurasia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

14. There is a broad consensus among anthropologists that gender relations are a crucial focus and center of communal traditions and institutions among many of the peoples of the SLAEAO region (Arden 1972; Brown and Buchbinder 1974; Goodale 1967; Langness 1974; O'Brien and Tiffany 1984; Ormer 1974; Ormer and Whitehead 1981; Poole and Herdt 1982; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1975; M. Strathern 1972; A. Weiner 1976, 1982).

15. This argument should be compatible on some level with a Freudian analysis of Oedipal conflict in the family which we view as a general analysis of the problem of self and other in a familial context. As a general argument about the human family, a Freudian analysis of Oedipal conflict does not address the way in which dimensions of familial experience resonate with the figuration of self and other in a particular culture. This is where our present argument differs from a Freudian explication. (Cf. Spiro 1982.)

16. Much of the argument of The Elementary Structures of Kinship is, of course, aimed at denying such a possibility. Since Lévi-Strauss is arguing that reciprocal exchange is a socio-cultural essence, he is obliged to argue that every system of kinship and marriage is ultimately based on figures and tropes of reciprocal exchange. It seems more likely that the rhetoric of systems of kinship and marriage is not less rich and diverse than the rhetoric of human relationships in general, and the latter is certainly not reducible to figures and tropes of reciprocal exchange.

17. The approach that we are developing here also provides an explanation for why moiety systems based on restricted exchange are usually 'matri-' and not 'patric-' moieties (cf. Lévi-Stauss 1969:69). The mother's brother has a primary and original claim to the sister's daughter through a primary and original claim on the mother while the father has a primary and original claim to his wife's daughter through his sexual relations with the mother. This means that restricted exchange based on matri-moieties is more consistent, and hence more powerful, statement of the opposition between men's primary and original and men's secondary and derivative (sexual) claims over women. Thus, other things being equal, matri-moieties are more compatible with an emphasis on an ethos of community than patri-moieties; for it is brothers, not fathers, who give and receive women in marriage. Other factors which favor patriarchal authority presumably lead to a patrilineal bias.

18. See Note 10.

19. Seventeen months of research in the Murik Lakes was conducted jointly in 1981-82 by Barlow and Lipset and was funded by the University of California, San Diego, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Institute for Intercultural Studies, and Sigma Xi. We are also indebted to the creative stimulus provided by 1982-85 members of the Melanesia Seminar in the Anthropology Department of the University of California, San Diego.

20. The Murik themselves have a reputation among other peoples of the region as purveyors of beautiful and exotic decorations, ritual objects, love magic, songs, dances, and ritual performances (Mead 1938).

21. For a full ethnography of Murik mothering, see Barlow 1985a and Poole 1984.

These features are also essential elements of the feast although they are not explicitly identified as such by the Murik.

The elder brother’s wife’s double entendre, “Would you put it [the design] here,” is the sort of obscenity that is common in the joking relations between the elder brother’s wife and younger brother.

23 When a Murik woman visits the islands, she is ceremonially received and decorated by the women, and she goes to her partner’s garden to take whatever she wants.

24 The trysts that take place during trading expeditions are secret, but later men and women compose songs about them. These affairs occur between illicit trading partners, rather than legitimate ones.


26 During the final stage of labor, buckets of sea water are poured over the woman’s belly and genitals to relieve the burning sensation in her genitals and to cleanse her. See also the last episode of the myth of the culture heroine Jari where she takes fire from her genitals and instructs her husband how to cook food.

27 The kokar moieties do not regulate marriage.

28 Cf. Hogbin 1970:17–19 for nearby Woge Island. Women are also initiated into a separate but coordinated cult, which is also divided into rival moieties and age-grades. Whereas the men’s cult stresses the aggressive power of men in war and sexual conquest, the women’s cult stresses sexuality and guile (Barlow 1985b:101).

29 Here we have omitted a discussion of initiation rites and headhunting that were formerly intertwined with the consecration of a cult house. These matters would, however, only strengthen the thesis that we are arguing. For example, in the initiation ritual, male elders ‘rebirth’ male youths who pass under the spear and the elders’ legs. The youths are then subjected to harsh treatment to cure them of their “childish” dependencies, and they are instructed in painful methods of cleansing themselves after sexual intercourse. The Murik took heads for ritual purposes associated with the war cult. Traditionally the consecration of the cult house involved a ceremony in which heads taken from among the inland peoples were displayed and the blood of the slain was drunk, thereby dramatizing the men’s role in the domain of the violent opposition of ‘self’ and ‘other’ beyond the margins of the community. This suggests that Murik warfare was inspired by men’s fascination with asserting their autonomy and independence vis-à-vis women, not by problems of economic and political competition with other peoples. In this regard, it should be noted that, where organized conflict and violence was not motivated by ritual ends, it involved talionic retaliation against other Murik individuals and collectivities for violations of rights in women, through rape or abduction.

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