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# OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF SAURIAN WATERS: ON PSYCHO-BAKHTINIANISM, ETHNOGRAPHIC COUNTERTRANSFERENCE, AND NAVEN

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**JADRAN MIMICA**

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The ethnographic focus of this paper is on the Iatmul people of the Central Sepik region in Papua New Guinea. Over the years, especially after the second world war, the Iatmul became famous in anthropological circles not just because of themselves and their life-world but also due to the renown and *mana* of their first ethnographer and savant Gregory Bateson. However, the most comprehensive ethnographic corpus, including an important ethno-psychoanalytic piece,<sup>1</sup> was produced by a group of ethnographers originally based in Basel whose main monographic works are not available in English. The reflections to follow were prompted by my reading of the most recent Anglophone ethnography of the Iatmul, a book by Eric Silverman.<sup>2</sup> I found this work a valuable addition to the ethnographic documentation of the region, but deficient both as an ethnographic interpretation of the Iatmul and, especially, as a self-certified piece of psychoanalytic ethnography. Since my primary interest is in the life-worlds of New Guinea and in the practice of ethnographic psychoanalysis, I have written this paper as an exercise in critical engagement with Silverman's interpretation of the Iatmul, who are a remarkable and irreplaceable instance of a mode of human existence (*dasein*), whose fullness of being they can no longer actualise. And precisely because of the Iatmul's enduring yet attenuated originality, this critical pursuit dwells on the local existential conditions of creation of ethnographic understanding. In particular, my aim is to elucidate the inner horizons of such conditions of understanding, delimited and demanded by the ethnographer's chosen interpretative framework, namely psychoanalysis. Well then, what does a psychoanalytic ethnography amount to, what are its potentials and pitfalls; how *is* it and how *can* it be done in the context of that basic project of anthropology – the creation of ethnographic understanding? With these questions, a specific New Guinea ethnography becomes transfused into an object of critical theoretical relevance. But by the same token, productive critical theoretical cognition is in the service of the task of comprehension of a given phenomenon, which in this instance is the Iatmul life-world and their *dasein*. Therefore – to the Iatmul themselves.

To start with, Silverman takes virtually all the above referred to ethnographic literature into consideration as he sees fit, for the life-world he writes about is not some generic Iatmul cosmos but that of the Eastern Iatmul. More specifically, this monograph is about the Iatmul people of the Tambunum village, his fieldwork location. He frequently indicates this fact of

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<sup>1</sup> Morgenthaler, Weiss, Morgenthaler, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> *Masculinity, Motherhood and Mockery: Psychoanalysing Culture and the Iatmul Naven Rite in New Guinea*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001.

local differentiation, distinction and specificity. At the same time, relative to the one-village local specificities of the cultural *gestalten* and themes, the Tambunum Iatmul are also viewed in the wider perspective of the Iatmul *in toto*. Indeed his "focus is on the metaphoric voices of masculinity and motherhood in the middle Sepik" (p. 2), engaging along the way "with several debates in contemporary anthropology and social thought", most fundamentally the "meanings and misfortunes of masculinity" (pp. 176-7). Accordingly, in his interpretative analysis of all things Eastern Iatmul, Silverman conducts not just a dialogue with the Tambunum villagers but a polylogue with numerous anthropologists from different parts of New Guinea and abroad. These numerous voices give an alluring yet distorting amplification to what is supposed to be primarily a local intra-cultural and intra-psychic dialogue with Eastern Iatmul masculinity and its primal feminine ground, Tambunum motherhood. Nevertheless, a discerning reader can approach the Tambunum Iatmul as any other human being and collectivity in his/her/their world, namely as a singular universal. Only the concrete data will reveal the what and how of a particular human whole and existential project, constituted through the specificities of all of, and every single one of, its concrete sub-regions and parts.

In this regard, the book marshals many beautiful, captivating and informative details ranging from cosmology, embodiment, sexuality, architectural symbolism (Chapters 2-5), kinship organisation and its psychodynamic articulation (6-8; Silverman characterises it as Oedipal), and, finally, the ritual practice focussed on the famous *naven* performances (9-10; Epilogue). Due to Silverman's choice of psychoanalysis as a leading interpretative framework, the erotogenic configuring of the Iatmul *dasein* is discernible in all its splendour and transfigurative sublations. The attentive reader can marvel at the Iatmul imaginary through which the libidinal movement generates the determining shapes and figures of this human life-world. From the sublime to the vile, correlative with the bodily cathexis of the world, the movement spreads and effects its self-modalisation and self-totalisation, making the Iatmul life-world into an irreducibly psycho-somatic totality. Accordingly, it bears the erotogenic signature of its libidinal self-determination in all its parts and substantiality, from the murky waters of Sepik to all other quiddities and denizens existing in this riverine "oecumene".

The material and its interpretive synthesis invite for discerning reflections and for this alone every serious reader of New Guinea ethnography can unreservedly thank Silverman for his fieldwork and this text. Together with the existing corpus of Iatmul and other central Sepik ethnographies, plus several re-interpretative studies of the *naven* rite (most recently a whole monograph by Houseman and Severi, 1998), this new ethnography enables one to meditate on the inner realities of the Sepik life-worlds, the determining ouroboric dynamics and figurations of their structural-institutional arrangements, and their steady erosion and evanescence.

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### **THE SAURIAN DOMINION OF PRIMAL WATERS, OR THE PRE-OEDIPAL MATRIX AND ITS IMMANENT NEGATIVE CORE**

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Silverman's choice of leading theoretical concepts is as follows. First, a version of Bakhtin's dialogical view of culture, for which Lipset's (1997) work on the Murik of the Sepik estuary provides a concrete example and precursor.<sup>3</sup> In this derivation the Bakhtinian notion of the

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<sup>3</sup> For a review focussed on Bakhtin's limitations, see Mimica, 1999.

“moral” and “grotesque” body introduces an external moral-aesthetic determination of Eastern Iatmul embodiment. The applicability of this categorical differentiation is unquestioned, while its conceptually most relevant potential, namely to index the ouroboric<sup>4</sup> dynamics of the human psyche, remains underutilised. In fact, Bakhtin’s views effectively inhibit any more penetrating psychoanalytic exploration of the ouroboric imagination, especially its primary (nuclear) oral-genital configuration and its coarticulation with other libidinal registers. In the Iatmul erotogeneity, the anal register has a heightened saliency and deserves an explanation which takes their libidinal embodiment on its own terms rather than subordinating it to a Bakhtinian verbal iconography stuck, as it is, in Rabelaisian imagery. This iconography manifests only a fraction of that self-eating-copulating serpent whose autoplasmic imagination is in fact infinite, as is the constitutive imagination of numerous human life-worlds generated by the archetypal matrix of the human psychic being.

Silverman chooses to look at the Iatmul with Bakhtinian spectacles as they make a spectacle of themselves; although not for an external connoisseur of the aesthetics of “grotesque” and “moral” embodiment but for their own self-actualisation. This project is, literally, everything that generations of Iatmul male and female egoities have desired, craved for, and endeavoured to make themselves into: a semblance of the archetypal desires of their very own un/conscious<sup>5</sup> being; one of whose many striking mythopoetic self-images is the Iatmul fluvial-crocodilian cosmic scenario detailed in several local variants and reported by different ethnographers (e.g., Wassmann, 1991; Schuster, 1985). In the Tambunum version (p. 27), the cosmogonic inception is pictured as a calm water stirred into creation by a wind (see below).

It is within this mytho-cosmo-poetic dimension of Eastern Iatmul self-imagining, which as such objectifies the depths of their culturally specific un/conscious imaginary, that Silverman focally conducts his Bakhtinian dialogical exegeses. As mentioned, he also employs, and this is his most productive theoretical-interpretive choice, a psychoanalytic framework which provides the means for bringing into perspective the matrix of Iatmul un/consciousness, and the psychodynamics of its articulation in living human egoities. The immediate overt incarnation and expression of this matrix is the human facticity of sexual reproduction. Everybody starts off as a foetal being in a pregnant womb, regardless of whether s/he likes it or not. Accordingly, Silverman first endeavours to show “the centrality of the preoedipal mother-child bond in the cultural imagination of men and, to a lesser extent, women” (p. 9). It is not readily clear whether, by phrasing it like this, he means that

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<sup>4</sup> The self-eating serpent is an archetypal image (Neumann, 1954; 1973) which encapsulates the most diverse dynamic features and processes constitutive of the pre-oedipal matrix of the human psyche. “Pre-oedipal” labels the mother-child unit as the primary context of human psycho-sexual development and socialisation. There are different and conceptually nuanced frameworks for interpreting the distinctions between the oedipal and pre-oedipal structurations of the psychic being within psychoanalytic (including Lacanian) and Jungian schools of thought.

<sup>5</sup> I put it with a slash precisely because the relation between consciousness and the un/conscious is subject to diverse articulations in different life-worlds. Experientially their mutual articulation does not conform to a universal topography, principally in terms of a distinction between psychic interiority and exteriority. I assume that in terms of the Tambunum life-world-specific ontological underpinning’s of their experiences and existence, the basic dimensionality of their “I-ness” – such as interiority/exteriority and all its derivatives – is a unique inner/outer field. Spirits no less than the soul are not for the Iatmul “internal objects”, but entities either entirely autonomous (e.g., spirits) and external to a given “I” (ego) or in a semi-detachable incorporative/excorporative relation with the body and “I-ness”, as for instance a person’s soul may be. Accordingly ethnographic psycho-analysis has to be phenomenologically grounded in the particularities of self experience and notions about the self in each given life-world. Their psychic being has to be accounted for with maximal fidelity to its constitution in its life-world. So although my use of notions such as un/conscious, egoic self, and internal objects is within the framework of psychoanalytic meta-psychological conceptualisation, this is done as an interpretive exercise which both maintains and amplifies the ontological originality and existential integrity of a given selfhood and life-world, i.e. relative to the structures of a specific *dasein*. Silverman’s use of psychoanalysis, unfortunately, has not this kind of grounding.

for women this bond is less central or that he neutralises it in the scenes whose pictures he paints. All the same, the dialectics of differentiation of the Iatmul femaleness *and* maleness (fe/maleness for short) is generated out of and remains within this fundamental matrix of the Eastern Iatmul archetypal un/conscious. To the extent that Silverman's chief concern is with the constitution of masculinity relative to its pre-oedipal matrix, Tambunum woman's femininity is upheld most unproblematically; yet of course in reality her femininity is co-constituted through its dynamic interdependence on and modalisation by masculinity.

As for Tambunum men and their project of achieving and sustaining their masculinity, they do that, as everywhere else, on the grounds of the primal, maternally determined situation. This is affirmed by men and women alike and Silverman reports that both sexes say "my mother, therefore I am" (pp. 87, 96, 106). Without a doubt, this is an authentic index of Tambunum male and female primary self-identification and self-consciousness, although the implications of its Cartesian scripting may not be wholly intended by them and, more importantly, are not conceptually followed through by Silverman. Therefore I'll give it an appropriate amplification: the only thing I cannot doubt about my self is my mother; ergo, my mothering therefore I am.<sup>6</sup> One's maternal essence is one's existence.<sup>7</sup> But there is entrapment lurking here for the Tambunum men, because "while they do strive to define masculinity in the absence of women and femininity, (they) also express a profound desire (...) to return to an ideal, nurturing mother" (p. 9). Which is to say, Tambunum oedipality, meaning the paternal function and presence in the egoic field of the un/conscious - is occluded and dominated by the primary maternal bonds and adhesions. Contrary to Silverman, it is unproductive and misleading to approach the Eastern Iatmul un/conscious in terms of the concept of "oedipal triangulation". Their manhood, fatherhood and, most critically, their sonship is constituted within an overwhelmingly pre-oedipal (maternal) matrix, and this is what determines both the project and fate of Eastern Iatmul masculinity *and* femininity.

Silverman himself says this much when he stresses the absence of the oedipal punitive father, and that all "oedipal imbroglios (...) revolve around mother-figures" (pp. 9-11). It is fair to speculate, then, that the Iatmul egoity would be constituted in relation to a super-ego configuration whose imaginal objectifications would be dominated by various derivations of the primal maternal object and container.<sup>8</sup> Herein is also the omnipotent nucleus of archaic narcissism in which life and death are modalities of one and the same self-circuitry of instinctual drives. This self-circuitry (I can accentuate it and characterise it as ouroboric), encompasses both the maternal object-container and her contents which, as such, from her un/conscious perspective, are greedily clung to as inalienably her own self-possession. Her content (foetus) reciprocally claims her as inalienably its container. This gives more psychodynamic concreteness to the implications of the dictum "my mother, therefore I am". Despite his self-avowed

<sup>6</sup> As the well known Latin legal tag goes, cited by Freud (1909/1977: 223): "*pater semper incertus est*" (father always is uncertain) whereas "*mater certissima est*" (mother is the most certain).

<sup>7</sup> Both men and women in Tambunum profess to value mothers above fathers. As they say, "my mother, therefore I am", adding that only mothers bore you, fed you, cleansed your body, carried you around the village, and looked after your safety and wellbeing. For this reason, many Iatmul frankly prefer to determine kinship through matrilineal ties (...), thereby allowing maternal affection to eclipse, like skin to bones, or water to trees, the androcentric norms of their society" (p. 87; also pp. 96, 106; in its vernacular original the "Cartesian" phrase is cited in footnote 8, p. 191).

<sup>8</sup> Its determination would in fact be bisexual (androgynous), as is the primal omnipotent maternal container. But its immanent and irreducible bias is, for that very dynamic reason, determining itself as a maximally self-same and self-sufficient figuration, a oneness without its seeming self-same-otherness. This biased nexus of its perfect self-unity is also the source of its omnipotence. In Kleinian terms one could expect to detect variations on the "combined parents" gestalt (Klein, 1932).

psychoanalytic framework, Silverman, however, has nothing explicit to say on the psychodynamics of Eastern Iatmul egoity and the structuration of their psychic being into a scheme of agency-components indexed by the classic trinity ego-id-superego; nor does he examine the dialectics of drive-structuration in the libidinal and narcissistic economy of Eastern Iatmul egoity and its un/conscious matrix. In addition although he is focussed on the Tambunum un/conscious qua its "collective phenomena" (p. 9), it must be stressed that the transpersonal dimension is actualised solely qua the ego-bound eating, desiring, speaking, dreaming, dialoguing, etc, selves of the Eastern Iatmul men and women. There is no one without the other.

Despite these lacunae, given his (and other related ethnographic) material, there is nothing surprising in the fact that "[e]ven the symbolism of male initiation, where senior men dominate their juniors, privileges the maternal rather than the male or paternal body" (p. 10). This vintage pre-oedipal situation features all the other diacritical marks (e.g., "male envy of female parturition and fertility") which among the Iatmul are anally constellated: "(...)men in Tambunum do not only mirror the female body. Rather, they often displace the procreative potential of women with idioms of anal birth" (p. 10).

Again, if one thinks from within the Eastern Iatmul matrix un/conscious, then there is nothing extraordinary about this. Given their primary maternal self-identification, these men are subject to their *authentic* maternal-feminine being and the archaic drive-matrix. It is this facticity of their un/conscious which the Iatmul self-symbolisation renders into what it is, namely the substance and truth of their primal, maternally determined imaginary and its correlate, primal self-world images. For no less than their women, they were all born as foetal beings and shaped by their maternal somatic un/conscious being; and, as Silverman shows in detail, they are in its throes. This is the determining matrix of their cultural life-world, in which fatherhood is subordinated to or is mediated by the omnipotent maternal containment and monopoly of the phallus. Chapter 5 on architectural symbolism brings this into a full relief. However, instead of claiming it for themselves as their undeniable maternal birth-right and legacy of their factual embryogenesis, these men, Silverman says, "carefully disguise their parturient fictions as if the very value of manhood would be divested of its meaning *should it be truly understood by women*" (p. 10).

Here Silverman appears to disregard their pre-oedipal matrix un/conscious, the archaic level of the psyche, which determines the omnipotent strivings of fe/maleness of the Tambunum men and women. At this level there is no pre-existing self-circumscribed meaning of either manhood or womanhood, nor some kind of unproblematic mutual self-recognition between them. In terms of the Tambunum's own self-understanding, it is not clear, then, what is there "to be truly understood by women", especially if both sexes are primed by their Cartesian predicament - "my mother, therefore I am". If anything, the women would have to understand the clear correlate of this un/conscious imaginary truth, equally upheld by them and their men. Here manhood *is* focally mediated by the primal image of motherhood, and, despite all their misgivings, ambivalences, and denials, Eastern Iatmul men still endeavour to make this image maximally real. For instance: "They (men) deny yet acknowledge their somatic inability to give birth" (p. 37); "...everything attests to a yearning by men for the birthing abilities of women" (*ibid.*). "These allusions arise from men's fear of engulfment by the maternal body. They are also coupled to men's envy of female fertility, a yearning that is emphatically denied" (p. 39).

Nevertheless, it will suffice to observe that *it is Silverman who dialogues* in these terms with the Iatmul's facticity, its un/conscious imaginary, and sets up the Iatmul men in relation to their women, but without having a proper grasp of his own scripting, which is

motivated by what seems to be a somewhat different un/conscious project (see below). How *the Eastern Iatmul themselves dialogue* in terms of their mutual and very own un/conscious is a matter for empirical psychoanalytic investigation of concrete individuals, of which Silverman has nothing to show, at least not in this book. As I will discuss later, the problem is that Silverman doesn't give much concrete evidence as to how the Tambunum men verbalise and express their yearnings, desires, and denials.

To the extent that he primarily deals with the transpersonal, cultural productions of the Eastern Iatmul un/conscious, it is precisely within this field of evidence that the "dialogical" scripting becomes a critical problem. Its author is not the Tambunum villagers but Silverman *in relation* to them. To be sure, this transpersonal - cultural - dimension of Tambunum male and female egoties has a maximal range of objectification, from the Iatmul language, numerous forms and genres of explicit verbalisations (myths, spells, idiomatic formulations, etc), to social morphology, kin classification, marriage preferences, symbolism of architectural shapes and spaces. In fact, there is still more - ritual activities and iconography of all sorts, from the flute-blowing, initiations, to the centrepiece of *naven*, the maternal uncle's act in which he slides his arse (anus) down his nephew's shin. The *nggariik* act, as it is called, condenses, expresses, and consummates the full quandary of Iatmul masculinity which Silverman endeavours to unravel in no uncertain terms, namely as the "tragedy" and "misfortunes" of Tambunum man-kind.

In this regard it can be said that the contrarities and ontological (qua psychodynamic) antinomies of Eastern Iatmul male selfhood, regardless of the opacity, self-occlusions, and diverse modes of denial and suppression, especially by Tambunum men, are nevertheless given a full array of manifestations. In fact, there is very little that appears to be effectively "repressed". Everything denied is still acted out most colourfully. Put somewhat differently, no matter how much the Eastern Iatmul - Silverman stresses that it is principally men - would like to see themselves in an idealised light (mediated by the maternal image), all the same, they act out and give vigorous expression to all those less palatable aspects of their being, indeed to the point of subjecting themselves to most painful humiliations and shame. Their women are not just excluded from so many contexts where men's narcissistic vulnerability bleeds in the open its most painful acid, but they also have ample opportunities to add more faecal acid to these festering wounds, most spectacularly when they take part in *naven* ceremonies.

Thus, Silverman says that the Eastern Iatmul women do not "passively acquiesce to men's psychodynamic encounters with motherhood" (p. 10). This is a careless wording. No man or woman has such an encounter; archaic motherhood is a vital dynamics of their un/conscious which starts long before men (or women) would have to deal with it as adolescents or adults and long before any ritual acting out. Indeed, exemplary of this is a fleeting observation of a Tambunum mother and her toddler son, which impressed the ethnographer so much so that he uses it as a vignette to introduce the entire subject-matter of his book. He saw a toddler disregarding his mother whereupon she "playfully" called him back "bad sperm, little sperm" (p. 1). To the extent that Silverman's book can be read as an explication of the universe of meanings contained in this vignette it can also be used to point to the obvious: the Eastern Iatmul men experience their mothers' *negation* of their masculinity long before they deal with it as adults. What they each do as initiated men is intrinsically related to the experiences of their self qua its originary maternal matrix, intrinsic to which are specific modes of negation, on a par to men's own maternal yearnings, self-exalted superiority, phantasies of procreation, and anxieties.

These aggrandisements and phantasies are also experienced in infancy by male and female children. Which is to say, it is not that the Eastern Iatmul mothers' manifest, as well as un/conscious negativity, makes their sons grow up into negators of Iatmul women and envious males plagued by maternal self-images. That would be a naive misconception falling short of what psychoanalysis has to offer as the foremost means for interpreting the human condition. Rather, as a first approximation, it can be said that Eastern Iatmul men are the authentic sons of their mothers, indeed the foremost actualisation of their mutual negativity, and both are the embodiment of the truth of their common un/conscious matrix, but men give it its most crystallised form. The question is, what specifically is this negativity for which Silverman's vignette provides its seemingly most innocent shape.

It is appropriate at this junction to stress that this problematic of negativity in the Eastern Iatmul un/conscious matrix and intersubjectivity is not recognised within Silverman's theoretical framework. This is a framework which can be quite appositely called psycho-Bakhtinianism. So he says "(...) I fuse my psychoanalytic perspective with the contrapuntal imagery of Bakhtin's moral and grotesque (...). During the naven rite, women and mother-figures respond to masculinity with thrashings, ribald jokes, and the hurling of debased substances. Not only do women thus contest the nostalgic yearnings of men and vividly portray men's fear of female sexuality, but they also invert the idealised nurturing capacities of motherhood. In so doing, women during naven doubly disgrace manhood since they call into question both the foundations and fables of male self-worth" (p. 10).

This being so, one has to ask what could possibly be the character and source of the women's self-worth, articulated inside and outside the ritual context through the same imaginary framework which informs their men. It is hardly the case that the Eastern Iatmul women are the masters of their "reality" when this itself is constituted through the same ontological imaginary as all their, male and female, "fictions" and reality. Women too, are determined by their maternal being – "my mother, therefore I am". Except that Silverman seems to assume that their omnipotence is therefore legitimate and "real" whereas men's is in some way illegitimate and "fictional".

Even if reduced to the bare facticity of pregnancy and life-giving,<sup>9</sup> no Iatmul woman is self-conceiving, although she may well be convinced that she is. This fully granted, in the absence of the Western technology of genetic cloning, she'll definitely have to procure some "bad/little semen" to make herself, not self-conceived, but, second-best, self-conceiving with men's critical mediation. And she may well want to deny that any semen was involved in getting her pregnant. This omnipotent phantasy does not seem to be crystallised in the Eastern Iatmul imaginary and lived as such by the women (or men) although, I am inclined to think, it is immanent in them.

This being so, what would be the inner meanings and truth of the women's seemingly unperturbedly self-satisfied narcissistic self-equilibrium which they so vigorously act out in rituals on a par to the men's equally vigorous self-debasement and seeming de-fictionalisation? There is no ready answer to this since there is an internal self-occlusion in Silverman's psycho-Bakhtinian dialogism that precludes the presentation and documentation of genuine intra-cultural and intra-psychic perspectives on the Eastern Iatmul's *negative* mirror-symmetry between men and women. What I am indicating here is another deficiency and lacuna in

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<sup>9</sup> I can give it a familiar cosmic-aesthetic determination – only women bleed and give birth to babies.

Silverman's psycho-Bakhtinian analysis of the Iatmul cultural life-world and naven. There is no treatment of the narcissistic dynamics and economy of their un/conscious being and intersubjectivity. I will come to these omissions again later.

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### **PSYCHO-BAKHTINIAN SCRIPTING AND THE DIALOGICAL DRAMATURGY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC CONSTRUCTION: THE EGALITARIAN MYSTERIES OF MOTHERHOOD**

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At this point I will dwell a bit more on the way Silverman constructs and scripts the apparent Eastern Iatmul cultural dialogics. Here is a symptomatic example. At the inception of a section entitled "The Mysteries of Motherhood" (p. 56), Silverman gives his ethnographic imprimatur to Bateson to the effect that he "was *absolutely correct* when he wrote that "matrines represent a more mysterious aspect of personality" than paternal names (ibid). Then he expands in the register of Bateson's epithet - "mysterious". "After all, the female and maternal bodies are themselves mysterious to Iatmul men (*sic*). These bodies contain gestational and birthing capacities that are *entirely unknown to men (sic)*. They undergo physical changes *in the absence of male ritual*" (ibid). Thus now, "mysterious", "entirely unknown" to - supposedly exclusively (?) - "men". But in earlier pages Silverman reports in a matter of fact fashion that "[c]onception and gestation, in the local procreation ideology, are essentially egalitarian" (p. 29). That is, "[i]n Tambunum, conception occurs when paternal semen mixes with maternal blood. A single act of sexual intercourse is sufficient (...). During gestation, semen congeals into bones while menstrual blood develops into organs, skin, and regular blood. Accordingly, the materiality of the body is male and female" (p. 47). What's more, "[t]he sex of the child is said to be determined by the more powerful gendered substance, semen or menstrual blood.<sup>10</sup> But to ensure a male offspring, one man confided, the husband must penetrate the women from behind during intercourse, (...). The 'missionary style', he said derisively, tends to result in the birth of girls" (p. 47). And to top it off, one of Silverman's informants "claimed that the ultimate determinants of human pregnancy are senior crocodile spirits (...)" (p. 30). More pointedly, Silverman goes on to say that "a proverb states that the crocodile spirits alone give birth to children and initiated men. In this idiom, the procreative capacities of women are ultimately administered by numinous crocodiles" (ibid.); and still slightly more accentuated - "... the birth mother in Tambunum has proprietorship over her womb. Yet the crocodile spirits cause the presence or absence of the foetus" (p. 31).

Here it is evident that the matters of gestation and birthing capacities are anything but "mysterious", etc, as Silverman, echoing Bateson's prose, declares in the "after all" manner. But what "after all"? Apart from the procreative "egalitarianism" the Tambunum Iatmul men's knowledge of gestation process seems so cock-sure that they can even manipulate the sex of the foetus; if "from behind" than male, if "missionary" than female. It seems, also, that they don't tamper with the gestation process with spells, or observe various behavioural and dietary self-regulations that apply to pregnant women *and their* husbands, as is so in other Eastern Iatmul villages (Hauser-Schaublin, 1984) and elsewhere in Melanesia and the world over. The Tambunum expectant first time fathers, however, follow certain behavioural interdic-

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<sup>10</sup> This is an intriguing idea scripted very equivocally. There is no discussion of how the Tambunum think and talk about this power-determined conjunction of maleness and femaleness that engenders conception.

tions, which intend to protect the foetus (Silverman, op. cit. 54). As for a connection between men's ritual and women's reproductive powers Silverman reports that "... ritual is as perilous for women as it is for men. Any woman, who views "too carefully" the sacred woodcarvings during a ceremony, or even glances at the flutes and other sound-producing objects, imperils her reproductive powers. This is explicitly stated by both men and women" (p. 36). And as the ultimate cause, the crocodile spirits have their decisive share in female fertility. All this indicates a diversity of knowledge of, attitudes to, and beliefs concerning conception and gestation whose differential epistemic and doxic valuation for the Eastern Iatmul is unspecified.<sup>11</sup>

However, the real problem is with the way Silverman frames and scripts his own data presented as "Iatmul dialogics". Even if there is a "mystery of motherhood" why would it be something so exclusive to men? Why would one want to presume, following the implications of the above cited statements, that the Eastern Iatmul women have an un-mysterious attitude to and knowledge of their bodies, the gestation process and procreative powers? If so then what is that knowledge? Self-indifference, self-contented ignorance, "factual" self-knowledge, "purely experiential-practical" knowledge with no omnipotent un/conscious phantasy and self-objectification? If factual and practical then what is that "factuality" and "practicality"? Or is it their deep secret? No matter what, it would still be the product of their experience, rather than Western academic self-experience, phantasy and self-interpretation. Every which way, there is nothing in Silverman's ethnography that would provide a more concrete sense of Tambunum men's and women's self-experience and valuations, not even a more detailed transcription of a conversation between himself and informants, male or female; or transcriptions of conversations between the villagers themselves. Such material wouldn't necessarily make his exposition less problematic but it would increase the ethnographic value of the book as a whole, which for me is its most relevant aspect.

Instead of informants' verbatim or approximate synopses of such accounts, Silverman's book is composed primarily as a dialogical disquisition on the "tragedy" of Tambunum masculinity via engagements with various external interlocutors such as Bakhtin, Dundes, Bateson, Mead, M. Strathern, and a number of other anthropologists. Numerous paragraphs pivot conceptually on their invocation with descriptions and argumentation frequently having openings, junctions and closures formulated in this vein: "As Bakhtin might have said, the male initiation is a grotesque dramatisation of moral reproduction and motherhood" (p. 38); "As Bakhtin might say, *iai* women turn everyday motherhood inside-out and upside-down" (p. 99); "Rather, the *awan* engenders the ambivalent laughter of Bakhtin's carnival" (p. 153); "menstrual blood emerges from what Bakhtin called 'the lower bodily stratum'" (p. 145); "... persons who are degraded during naven will pay the perpetrators since, as Bakhtin (ref.) wrote, ..." (p. 152); "... ribald joking of the *iai* women, as Bakhtin would surely have recognized, efface the distinctions between upper and lower body." (p. 155). Even the anal *nggariik* act performed by the MB on his ZS requires Bakhtin's midwifery, so: "There is so much about this gesture that would strike Bakhtin as decidedly grotesque" (p. 165). Another sample, Dundes for instance: "neophytes are smeared by mud that, after Dundes, bespeaks masculine anal parturition" (p. 38); "Once again, Dundes (ref.) offers an answer:

<sup>11</sup> I am inclined to think that all of these views are not a motley collection of ideas but a very symptomatic expression of their un/conscious imaginary and its *logos*. It may be that an internal consonance of these procreation views amounts to a scheme of generative sexuation and may well be echoed in the schemes of the Iatmul naming complex.

Men in their emulative desire for birth ..." (p. 52); "... the naven actions of these women, as Dundes (ref.) might say, wipe it back on the adult person" (p. 151).

References to informants, sparse as they are, create a different mood; thus "A younger man named Koski unknowingly confirmed this interpretation" (p. 31); "Casual conversation with men upholds this analogy" (p. 54); "In a private discussion Mundjiindua (one of Silverman's female and "closest confidants") confessed to knowing that ancestresses once enjoyed blowing the flutes ..." (p. 42). I am not questioning the validity of Silverman's connections, associations, insights and interpretations distilled from the driest and the most incidental information chanced by the villagers. What I find unsatisfactory is that the "dialogical" tension between Eastern Iatmul men and *their* motherhood is overwhelmingly generated through the application of externally derived psycho-Bakhtinian formulas and distorting dramatic scripting, rather than the exegeses being rooted in the intra-cultural experiences and self-objectifications of the Iatmul themselves.

A productive ethnographic application of psychoanalysis requires the elucidation of the subjects, *their* un/conscious, and the existential project they live for the sake of themselves, to make themselves become what and how they are. The constructive psychoanalytic interpretative activity strives to achieve the comprehension of the what and how of the project itself, in its own terms, i.e., the desires and egoities of those who are its subjects and objects, or with a different edge, servants and executioners, losers and victors. But among the Eastern Iatmul, since they are in a fluvial-saurian universe, and genetic engineering is out of question, whatever they do on the grounds of their own imaginary is in the service of self-creation in their own self-image forged within this ontological matrix, as exactly the kind of men and women that they originarily were and are still trying to be.

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### **WHY TAMBUNUM WOMEN DON'T YEARN FOR THAT WHAT THEY ALREADY HAVE: AQUEOUS COUNTERTRANSFERENCE AND DIALOGICS**

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Let me now reflect on what seems to be the root problem of Silverman's scripting and dramatisation. According to him there is only one formula that supposedly drives the Eastern Iatmul's own dialogics. It runs like this: Men claim their superiority over women yet, despite all ambivalence, their very masculinity is determined by all and sundry feminine-maternal attributes and derived powers. By contrast, women don't aspire to be like their men (or fathers), to have any of their attributes and powers. Since, apparently, all creation comes from the feminine-maternal being, women's cosmic primacy is all theirs. And they make sure that men see their own "fictional" supremacy, including their ritual procreativity, as nothing more than a tragic failure. Even if it is cosmic, it still is a failure. Underlying this formula is the assumption of the non-identity of men's and women's desire. What men yearn and desire for women don't, i.e., they don't need any of men's masculinity, for at any rate, it is all theirs.

Here is a critical example of Silverman's scripting of this dialogical formula. I will mention again that conception and gestation are "egalitarian", and neither maleness nor femaleness will come into its own, i.e., become a foetus, without each other. Now, and this is symptomatic, "whereas men model their identity after motherhood, women *rarely* aspire to be fathers" (p. 11). They "*hardly ever* seek out paternal physiology" (ibid.).<sup>12</sup> To be sure,

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<sup>12</sup> Also: "... masculinity mirrors motherhood. No such parallel yearning, however, exists for femininity" (p. 33).

Silverman doesn't give any concrete evidence that would show in what way and how specifically some such women express their desire for masculine-paternal qualities and attributes. Given this scripting, Silverman's own, he concludes that it is the male gender that is "more androgynous" (ibid.).<sup>13</sup> Silverman reinforces this with exegeses of mythopoeic motifs all of which converge on the theme of the primordial power of women's fertility and the origin of the overt sexed bodily difference. Following M. Strathern (1988), he interprets a myth of the hornbill's larceny of long avian beaks as depicting "the partibility and common pool of Eastern Iatmul gender" (p. 33). Originally a species of small female birds lost their long beaks; consequently they now have small beaks. Their voicing is said, by a male informant, to be the longing for the lost beak.

Silverman scripts this as follows: "This avian lament suggests that the beaks are in some sense *rightfully* feminine rather than masculine. In this myth, I suggest, the long beak is an androgynous appendage of phallic aggression. (...) Neither gender (male and female birds), however, can be said to 'own' the bill exclusively. The mythic proboscis is a transactional element in a common pool of gender. But gender in Tambunum is not merely androgynous and transactional. This is a vital point. In this culture, (...) masculinity mirrors motherhood. No such parallel yearning, however, exists for femininity. Hence, the male bird gained awareness of his somatic limitation only after he gazed at the body of the female bird. He then desired, and stole what she displayed. True, the female bird today longs for the beak. But she does not aspire to assume a masculine form (meaning what? JM). She wants only to regain what she lost. Her yearning is restorative, his mimetic" (p. 33).

What I see here is Silverman's own desire and phantasy shaping and scripting the Eastern Iatmul mythopoeia. To restate the above more bluntly, he seems to be saying that the female bird (i.e., Iatmul women) don't yearn for a male version ("masculine form") of the androgynous phallus (the long beak); she (women) wants what was "rightfully" her "androgynous appendage of phallic aggression". Therefore her yearning, if at all, is "restorative" while, and here is the problem, the mythic hornbill's *or* the Iatmul men's, is "mimetic". This is an unduly self-confounding piece of scripting; the mythic hornbill can't be characterised as miming the "stolen" beak. He stole it and kept it ever after. In the sphere of human reality neither do men mime their actual penes dangling at their groins. What they yearn for is the primal omnipotent maternal, generative self-sufficiency, which in this instance is predicated of her very own "uterine" phallic determination. It is this imaginary gestalt that informs both men's and women's un/conscious and is given semblance in ritual practices. The beak here is on a par to the flutes the men blow in secrecy, and the bull-roarers, all of which also were originally owned by women.

But since this is a dynamic tension between Eastern Iatmul men and women qua their un/conscious imaginary self-determination, it is clearly the case that, if any woman, not just her mythic imagos, is yearning for what she lost or doesn't have, then she is exactly in the same imaginary pre-oedipal head-space as are the men. In this regard, what she yearns for is her lost omnipotent self-generativity. Therefore, to say that the bird's (women's) yearning, is "restorative" while men's is "mimetic" is to lose sight of the primal ground, the pre-oedipal

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<sup>13</sup> "... one gender in Tambunum is more androgynous than the other: male" (p. 11). Similarly: "The anal birthing symbolism of the flutes, bullroarers, totemic feces, and riverine sludge all attests to a yearning by men for the birthing abilities of women. But women exhibit no such comparable desire. For while men purloined the flutes from women, primal women did not steal anything from men. In short, masculinity is androgynous, yet maternal" (p. 37).

un/conscious matrix, and confuse the relation between the un/conscious imaginary and its actualisation in the human social-cultural reality. This is the most basic human predilection, but a psychoanalytically minded interpreter ought to be more self-aware of his/her/their un/conscious desires, phantasy and projections, especially when dealing with such powerful and fundamental productions of the human psyche as archetypal mythopoeia. And this seems to be Silverman's driving orientation, or better, the orientation of his own un/conscious.

Everything about his scripting indicates that it is *his* wish to restore to the Eastern Iatmul women their primal omnipotence, which is so intense that he would gladly dispense with all and any phallic or remotely *overt* masculine self-attributions. Indeed, such an image is exactly that of the "feminine formlessness" (p. 22) of the primal water of creation. Here is his scripting: "The feminine water of the primal sea, as the original condition of the cosmos, required no oppositional or complementary 'other' for its existence. Water, like the female body, is self-referential. But land and trees, or the male body and masculinity, are defined *against* the feminine powers of watery creation and dissolution" (p. 86). Whether this is an accurate rendition of the primal situation remains to be demonstrated. However, as discussed above, Silverman scripted women's gestation as a "mystery", but the Tambunum men's coital positioning dispels it. If there is any mystery to be entertained, that would be generated by a phantasy that the woman (and/or man) is all one without any otherness, that she is all female (whatever that may be), self-same and self-generating, and additionally, through her own self-generation - and this is the crux of such a mystery - she produces both her self (femaleness) and her own otherness, i.e., maleness (whatever that may be). This is a genuine piece of archetypal mythopoeia, realised in various approximations as both male-centered and female-centered versions (e.g., Trobrianders; Yagwoia: Mimica, 1981; 1988; 1991; in preparation; Kogi: Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1987). But all this is merely a reference to other life-worlds and their constitutive cosmogonic imaginary.

Whether this kind of narcissistic driveness and the radical negativity that underpins it are objectified in the Eastern Iatmul cosmogonic mythopoeia is a matter for empirical research and demonstration. My point is that it is Silverman who gives the Iatmul imaginary this univocal voicing, not they themselves. This key of feminine omnipotence reaches its most overt negative pitch in the last pages of the book. Here Silverman speaks for himself, although he invokes Winnicott to bespeak his judgement, sotto voce as it were. Before reaching his terminal pronouncement about masculinity as a universal genus he makes a rhetorical deference to the empirical strictures on current knowledge: "My own position, centred here as it is on a single village in Papua New Guinea, is one of temperance and reservation. Right now, I believe, we (*sic*) simply know *too little* about masculinity and masculinities to contrive grand pronouncements" (p. 177; emphasis JM). Then follows a humble pronouncement with which Silverman rounds up his book by saying that "In Tambunum, to evoke Winnicott, *there is no such thing as man*". With this, he "hopes of enhancing the current debate over what, *if anything*, masculinity is" (p. 177; emphasis JM).

Despite his self-confessed limited knowledge of masculinity, Silverman is committed to the demands of an absolute negative, which is not that of the Eastern Iatmul, but in reference to which he declares, through the midwifery of Winnicott, that Tambunum man is an absolute non-entity. And, he is so both in his relational essence and existence, presumably because man is not, like the feminine water and body, formless, allegedly self-referential, and to top it off, non-oppositional and without any otherness. From the local Sepikian situation he extends to the universal, i.e., Western academic middle class scene, to which he hopes to

contribute to what is already the “ontological” desideratum – “if anything”, masculinity is an *is-not*. Why? Presumably for the same reason as in the middle Sepik.<sup>14</sup>

It is this lure of the narcissistic negative and omnipotence, which stirs Silverman into viewing any and every semblance of masculinity in, it seems to me, *all-or-nothing* terms. This is clearly not the position of the Eastern Iatmul un/conscious imaginary and its male and female human agents. It is the desire and judgement of an outsider, the psycho-Bakhtinian ethnographer now turned into an ontologist. Now there is no need to argue against Silverman’s would be ontological pronouncements about masculinity in particular and in general. What solely matters and what is most fascinating is the East Iatmul situation, not just the ontological underpinning of their masculinity but primarily its primal ground: femininity and motherhood. Therefore one has to think deeply through the Tambunum un/conscious imaginary and its archetypal self-imaging. If it is the case that this supposedly self-referential feminine water, so full of her cosmic omnipotent generative being, is the source of male being, which is a nothing, an *is-not*, than the mystery is truly intensified, namely how does out of this feminine all-self-fullness come her, shall I say all-emptiness, a non-entity which is her mirror-self, en-gendered as male?

Not only is it true for both the Tambunum men and women that their respective being is “My mother, therefore I am”, but Silverman relentlessly affirms that “masculinity *mirrors* motherhood” (p. 33). So, if he is to be taken at his word he has to account for his ontological pronouncements, namely by which transubstantiation does the *is-not* “maleness” come specifically to “mirror” not just any kind of being but the self-referential, no-otherness, non-oppositional, omnigenerative being which on the account of all these determinations, would undoubtedly be also maximally self-same. What exactly would be some such “mirroring”; what would be its medium? This is the sum-effect of his scripting and pronouncements, and the only available field of evidence for any clarification and answers has to come from the Tambunum transpersonal un/conscious imaginary and its cosmogonic self-imaging. Silverman does not provide any commentaries that some informants, male and/or female, might have made in reference to their powerful mythopoeic images. Therefore I take it that what he says about the self-referentiality of the primal water and the incipient cosmogonic situation is his own rendition, characterisation, and determination.

Accordingly, this external, i.e., Silverman’s own, cosmo-ontological determination of Tambunum men and women, has to be firmly kept in perspective while reading his ethnography, or else one is unwittingly participating in a self-affirming archetypal cosmic-ontological, moral and epistemic stanza whose tacit un/conscious motivation fabricates this picture of Eastern Iatmul femininity, masculinity, their life-world as a whole, its un/conscious imaginary and its archetypal self-imaging. Overall, Silverman’s Iatmul cultural dialogics is a deficient construction overwhelmingly driven by *his* own un/conscious projections, scripting, and framework of valuation, a refraction of the Western academic ideology, which as yet has to create its own self-satisfying imaginary ontology to appease its own un/conscious cravings

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<sup>14</sup> This negativity is announced at the beginning of the last chapter in a quote from Tuzin which is part of an answer to his question pertaining to the Ilahita Arapesh situation: “What does it mean for masculinity to die?” I cite in full “Masculinity (...) is a thing of ideology and ontology. It is the valorization of what men do, the symbolic resource members of a culture use to contemplate, understand, idealize, demonize, stereotype, place expectations upon, and otherwise identify men. Strictly speaking, masculinity is the distinct human aspect of what men do” (Tuzin, 1998: 181). Silverman omits the last sentence.

and desire for omnipotence. The very attribution of "oppositonality" as a non-desirable dynamism belongs to the egoic watery "self-inscription"<sup>15</sup> of the occidental academe.

And to the extent that for many interpretative exercises the dictum "*vox populi vox dei*" may be a sound hermeneutic position, in this case, i.e., that of a psycho-Bakhtinian dialogical relation between Silverman and his Eastern Iatmul subjects, the pitch and key of his *vox* definitely does not coincide with the fluvial-crocodilian *vox Iatmuli* which he, as a matter of fact, replaces with that of a singularly archetypal omnipotent feminine presence, perhaps a siren.<sup>16</sup> However, to the extent that this self-referential mono-*vox* is a narcissistic negativity that dominates Silverman's view of Iatmul masculinity, it, nevertheless, does resonate with genuine stirrings in the Sepikian un/conscious imaginary of the Iatmul orientalis. Psychoanalytically speaking, he got occluded by his own countertransference and this has to be put to good use so that it can still, despite motley distortions, be exploited for the elucidation of the Eastern Iatmul realities and the dynamics of their archetypal un/conscious. Therefore, I'll proceed to work through Silverman's, so to speak, countertransference to the Iatmul un/conscious.

I'll *critically* accept everything he says about their male and female gender, from the woman's own rightful share of the originary beak, flutes, bullroarers to all other vintage ph/allomorphic and automorphic certificates of her primal aqueous cosmic omnipotence. In terms of all the mythic images that Silverman presents (and there are enough of them), it is quite clear why women don't have to yearn for masculine or paternal attributes: every which way, they have their own share of the phallus and of maternal omnipotence. But is the question of, and the answer to, what the *absence* of women's yearning is supposed to mean, now clarified? Is it really correct to think that the female gender in Tambunum is omnipotent, self-referential, and for that reason is also *less* androgynous than the male gender which, by contrast, because of men's overt maternal-feminine self-attribution (ritual, mythopeic, architectural, etc), is therefore *more* male-female (androgynous) and less omnipotent than women? The cosmo-ontological situation be as it may (which as such is also a psychodynamic dimension of Tambunum men and women), it is not at all clear what in concrete terms actual women's femaleness and its fertility would be *by itself*, apart from its critical dependence on the male fertiliser, the "bad-little semen". And I emphasise, regardless of the archetypal "self-referential, non-oppositional water" which Silverman has secured for them. But by the same token, how does it work for the primal water itself, all still in its, to be sure, pre-cosmic condition? What may be "her" equivalent of that diacritical bit, the "bad-little semen"?

Now, *overtly* there isn't any (i.e., contra-sexual element), for this is not the factual situation of concrete Tambunum bodiliness, its maleness and femaleness, but its transpersonal, cosmogonic self-image. However, personal and transpersonal intertwine in all sorts of ways, they belong to the self-same archetypal un/conscious matrix and precisely for that reason one

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<sup>15</sup> One of Silverman's female leads who precipitates his pronouncements on the nothingness of man in the Tambunum is Barbara Ehrenreich's foreword to Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*. Silverman cites her: "For if the fascist fantasy - which was of course no fantasy for the millions of victims - springs from a dread that (perhaps) lies in the hearts of all men, a dread of engulfment by the "other", which is the mother, the sea or even the moist embrace of love ... if so, then we are in deep trouble" (p. 176). I presume that, rather than facing the immanent threat of fascism that, as Ehrenreich divines, may be lurking in the hearts of all men, Silverman seems to opt for a wishful ontological final solution: let there be no man. If so, the problem, however, is what will the aquatic mother do in her self-referentiality without her favourite man, her son?

<sup>16</sup> Invoking Winnicott in this context, I wish to stress that one of the most important lessons to be learned from him (as from Jung) is to be attentive to the presence and manifestations of the contra-sexual parts in men and women in transference and countertransference so that the analyst is clearheaded as to whom and what s/he is actually, rather than apparently, dealing with; see Winnicott, 1971.

always has to situate oneself, as much as possible, in the concrete un/conscious of the egoities whose un/conscious imaginary it is through and through. Therefore, what one would like to see are some opinions of these egos as to what the primal cosmogonic situation is all about. This not being available, I'll critically think through Silverman's countertransfereential scripting and renditions.

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### **THE WATER, WHICH SEEMS TO BE WHAT IT IS-NOT AND IS-NOT WHAT IT SEEMINGLY IS**

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Silverman's ontological position on masculinity and man appears to be pitched in an all-or-nothing mode. Because they are not like the self-referential allness without any otherness and opposition, the Tambunum men are therefore nothing-at-all. How does this tally with the Tambunum primal watery self-determination. I'll take a closer look into this potent cosmogonic self-image of their un/conscious imaginary giving it an abstract-formal or "logical" amplification. But I'll also keep in mind its human egoic analogue: when a man looks at his mother he sees himself; she *is* the living semblance of his being. So it is with every Tambunum woman. It is qua maternal being, then, that the archetypal cosmo-ontological auto-imaging originarily reverberates in the un/conscious of concrete Tambunum male and female egoic selves, mothers and infants. Let's proceed primed by this appropriately concrete image (semblance) of everything that Iatmul maleness and femaleness is and is-not. Which is which, is and is-not, will be determined in due course. Here is the cosmogonic depiction as, I assume, retold by Silverman rather than in the exact or approximate wording of his informants (male and/or female).

"The genesis of the Eastern Iatmul cosmos began with calm water, not chaos. Eventually, a wind started to blow over this vast sea (*melemebe*), and land surfaced amid the waves. A chasm opened called totemic pit (*tasagi wangu*) out of which emerged five ancestors" (p. 27). They created the universe, but I will not follow this process further.

It has to be stressed that in the depicted situation there is no cosmos as yet. What there is is a pre-cosmic situation from which is generated the Eastern Iatmul cosmos as it is for themselves. The separation of the sky and earth, and with it the twining of the primal all-darkness into day-and-night follows after this initial sequence: still water > disturbed by a wind > emergence of (solid) earth > cleaving of the earth > emergence of the five male ancestors, who created the local landscape as it is. Whatever the internal determination of the initial situation, at least in appearance, it is not the actual living cosmos which came from that primordium. Therefore it is more accurate to characterise the primal situation as pre-cosmic.

A few pages before, however, Silverman characterises the primordial water as "an aquatic void" (p. 21); "primal watery feminine formlessness" (p. 22); still a few pages earlier, a whole section is entitled "An Aquatic Plentitude" (p. 15). Here he paints a picture of the mighty Sepik in terms of the primordial water - "a dangerous yet sustaining feminine presence" (*ibid.*). Still more, "The river is both generative and dissolving, defining and liminal. Above all, the Sepik is a powerful image of motherhood that nourishes life but erodes the works of men: their houses, trees, villages. In this regard, riverine water is a symbol of femininity against which men and demiurges construct their sense of worth" (p. 17). As for the women, they do not posit themselves against the river. Their self-worth, so it seems, doesn't have to be constructed at all and, as it were, is conterminous with the omnipotence of the pri-

mal water itself. Why its seeming *bias* to “erode” the works of men (but not women) Silverman doesn’t thematise.

From Silverman’s scripting the supposedly feminine primordium is “*calm water*” *not* a-“chaos”; it is a “*vast sea*”, “*feminine formlessness*”, an “*aquatic void*”, yet as the mighty muddy Sepik, an “*aquatic plentitude*”; “*dissolving, liminal, defining, eroding*”. Regardless what could be the Tambunum villagers’ characterisation of their riverine milieu and its primordial archetypal self-image, every which way it is quite clear that its characterisations are applied to it by Silverman. To the extent that the primordium is also “*feminine*”, “*self-referential*”, “*non-oppositional*”, yet “*dangerous*”, “*sustaining, generative and dissolving*”, “*defining and liminal*”, and in particular has one favourite target to negate, “the work of men and demiurges”, all I can say is that this would-be non-oppositional water is anything but. In fact it appears from all Silverman’s attributions that the primordial water is nothing else but *self-oppositional*, characterised most inclusively as at once “void” and “plentitude”. All opposites appear unstable and turn into each other. As for its self-referentiality, I see none at all because it appears that the primordial water has no “self”.

Why? Because these self-contrary attributions suggest that the “*calm water*” *is not meant to be definable* by any of the specific characteristics that can be discerned, projected into, and attributed to it. To be sure, the entire Tambunum cosmogonic process can be expressed in very simple formulas, eg.: from the formless comes its form and together they gave birth to everything. Or, from otherness that is all-and-nothing comes its self and makes it (her) deliver the world (everything); from a naught that is all comes a one which was two in itself, etc. In the formulations that follow I try to show how in this concrete mythopoeic imagery can be intimated intuitions of dynamic noetic gestalts which amount to a tacit system of fundamental ontological categories and relations that make experience possible. This dynamic noetic-intellective schematism coarticulates with erotogenic dynamics of the psyche. My exposition is deliberately constructed as a repetitive movement through which the chain of ramifications of the dialectical opposition between being and non-being leads into its progressive transformation, differentiation and totalisation. The inner logic of my formulations is guided by information on the Tambunum’s androgyny and on a binary structuration of their naming system (pp. 27-29; 52-55).<sup>17</sup> The entire cosmogonic process is immanently articulated as a series of ontological cuts (twinings), which effect both the differentiation and the transubstantiation of the primordial watery a-substance (see my explication that follows).

Now, to declare that the primordial water is *both void-and-plentitude* would be a reasonable-enough approximation. But I think that it would be entirely erroneous to fix the “*calm water*” as *exactly* that – as “*it-is-both-X-and-Y*”. I am inclined to think that this primal water would object to that sort of de-limitation. It would limit its omnipotence, specifically its primal *omni-potential all-ness*. One can, as it were, see in it everything and anything; but, all the same, this watery totality, which is also both void and plentitude, is actually nothing in particular, including this very determination. So if it has a *self*, meaning that it is self-circumscribing, that it holds fast to and determines itself in-and-qua-itself exclusively and inclusively, then this self appears to be something *other* than itself. And this is, I am inclined to think, what the primordial water is all about. This primordium is all *otherness* in-and-qua its

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<sup>17</sup> My explication purports to work from within a diffuse ethnographic corpus of information that lacks indigenous verbalisations of, projections into, and associations on the cosmogonic imagery.

otherness. Furthermore, this is its immanent dynamics, a ceaseless active-passivity which makes it appear as a “calm water”, yet internally sustains its dynamic othering.

Since it is now clear that the primordium appears at once as what it-is-not and what it-is, then why not affirm it as such in its supposed self-referentiality, which Silverman projected into it, and say: though it appears to be self-referential, it as such is not? But what this really means is that, as a pure otherness, the water’s seeming *self*-referentiality is to be something absolutely other than what it seemingly is; ergo its “self” is not it but its otherness. Therefore, the primordial water is not self-referential but (qua-its-otherness) it is only and always other-referential. This is why one can see in it whatever he or she wants to see in it, i.e. primarily him/herself and his/her desires on display in this otherness which as such immediately appears as something other than what it is in its very own pure otherness. Its determination is, therefore, that it has no *self*-reflection, only other-reflection for it has no self, only its pure otherness. This rendition is in full consonance with the above observation on Silverman’s scripting, namely that in this primal water all opposites are mutually identical. That is why he can write that, without, as it were, noticing that he is doing so, that it is a “void” and “plentitude”. This would mean that its dynamic “identity” is intrinsically wholly negative. It is both self-and-other negating ad infinitum and this is what sustains the impermanence of discernible opposites and its own absolute otherness.

Finally, as a consequence, its very femininity is now in question. As this is not ordinary water I will approach it in its own terms. Its “femininity”, too, may be not what it seems to be and may seem to be what it is-not. So be it. Can it be masculine? Given everything said so far, why not? If it is, then it also is-not. If it isn’t, then it is but also is-not. All one can definitely say about it, so it seems, is that it is not definite in any of its characterisations. To be sure, they are all applicable but none exactly sticks to it either in the mode of either/or or neither/nor or both and also. Why? Well, if “both”, then it, too, it-is and it-is-not; and so also with “also”. Every which way, every mode of its definiteness *seems* to be indefinite. Therefore, although it seems that this watery primordium might be indefinite, it is better to stick with its indefinite indetermination and affirm it as being at once indefinite and not-indefinite, indeterminate and yet not-indeterminate, definite and not-definite, determinate and not-determinate. The same can be said of its other omnipotential, in-finite.

In view of this, what can now be said of it as a substance? In truth, this water has not any determinate substantiality, yet it seems that it does. It is therefore best to characterise it as in-substantial or a-substantial (and as such it is and it is-not). Therefore, I’ll approach it again in terms of its primary self-imaging that Silverman renders as a “calm water”. However, as a rear-guard security measure, “calm”, and even “water”, is to be understood as “not-calm” and “not-water” and, therefore, as such, each, too, is-not “not calm” and “not-water”. And in so far as they are-both-at-once, equally they are “not-both-at-once”. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the cosmogonic exigency let it be “calm” and “water”!

The cosmogonic process is set into motion by a wind that starts blowing – from where? In the cited version there is no information on this, but given the primordial situation, if the primordial water appears to be what it-is-not and is-not what it appears to be, then one can accept that the answer to the where from of the wind can be: “from-somewhere or from-nowhere”, there is no difference. Therefore the wind emerges from-nowhere. But this “from-nowhere” is, all the same, right-there where the calm water in its-all-otherness appears to be, where it-is and is-not. One is tempted to say that this wind is “above” the water, but if one follows the cosmogonic myth in its own image then there was no up and down, or back and forth, since the myth clearly states that the sky was pushed upward later, by the five ances-

tors after the appearance of the solid earth, its cleaving, and their emergence from inside it. Therefore, spatiality was non-existent even if the narrator, given his/her "*hic et nunc*" situation may well have transposed his actual living spatiality into the primordium which is in fact going to bring into existence that very human post-cosmogonic actuality.

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### **THE WIND, WHICH IS TWO-IN-ONE AND THEREFORE IS-WHAT-IT-IS**

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Some twenty pages later, Silverman discusses the theme of "procreative wind", refers back to the primordial situation, and says that "land surfaced out of the primal sea through the agency of wind" (p. 51), implying that the wind might have also originated from within the still water. Silverman comments - "A phallic gust, we might say, stirred the maternal waters, thus effecting cosmic birth" (ibid.). Here he gives the wind a phallic shape, which does not say much about its masculinity and/or femininity. He also attributes to the water maternity although, on reflection, she was not exactly a mother before becoming stirred by the phallic wind. Other information evidences that breezes can be female (ibid.) but, he declares, "In an absolute or acontextual sense, wind is androgynous or devoid of fixed gender, much like the flutes and mythic beaks. But in the specific context of totemism and male ritual, as I have just shown, wind symbolises masculine reproduction" (p. 51). This can be accepted in terms of his exact specification, that in and "absolute sense", wind is neither male nor female but both at once, androgynous as indeed all genuine phallic energy and morphism is. Phallus is not just one but a one that is two in one, intrinsically self-identical in-its-own-self-and-qua-its-own-otherness so that either one of the two who are it, male-and-female, can claim it rightfully for and as their own determining self-sameness.

Therefore, the cosmogonic phallic wind is androgynous, neither male nor female but both. This, as pointed out, is also the case with maleness and femaleness as human bodily gender. As Silverman said earlier, of the two, Tambunum men are more androgynous than women. I'll come to this issue in the section after next. What has to be clarified is the gender and fertilising moment of the primordium.

The phallic wind, judged in absolute terms, is of "no fixed gender" but "androgynous". Therefore it is definitely definite, meaning that it is exactly that - "androgynous": neither masculine nor feminine by itself but both, and both-at-once. It should be pointed out that Silverman's emphasis on non-fixed gender = androgyny is misconceived since even when fixed as either male or female it is clear that in Tambunum either sex is still intrinsically bi-, that is, male and female. Whatever masculinity is, it can be said that it is androgynous; likewise with femininity. If Silverman insists, as he does, that men are more androgynous than women, their difference is of the more-or-less order rather than of the substantially different kinds. Either as more-of-it or less-of-it, maleness and femaleness, each by itself is nonetheless nothing but "male-and-female" (androgynous), two-in-one. Therefore, if each gender is one it is so because each is in itself two. Fixed or non-fixed, each gender is androgynous and therefore self-defined in terms of its two internal components, each of which is what it is relative to and because it is indissolubly bound to the other. Without the other, either one in and by itself is not-at-all.

The phallic circle is closed in on itself. And when it is a matter of self-referentiality, it is most obviously the determination of androgyny. Whether there is more of it or less of it, in each measure androgyny is fully self-referential because it is always fully, according to its appropriate measure (as either more or less), two=in=one. In androgyny, each of its

two ones refers only to each other exclusively and inclusively; therefore, through their self-reciprocal self-reference to, qua, and in each other, they are both the oneness which is fully and only self-referential to itself. And if there is a question of any self-generativity, I submit, it seems to be right here, in this two=one.

So, the phallic androgynous wind, regardless of its non-fixity, is absolutely-fixed in its androgynous determination and is entirely *definite*. This is why, unlike the primordial water, the wind in its determination does not appear to be as what it-is and also what it is-not. Rather, what this wind is is definite because it is fixed as both maleness-and-femaleness, in-itself and for-itself, regardless of whether it is, as a whole, either male or female. It can definitely be either one or the other precisely because, being neither just-one or just the other, it is always and only both-at-once. It is a two-which-is-one in and for-itself, and not for-another. Therefore its is-ness is what-it-is and is-not what it-is-not. Every which way, this marvellous wind is for-itself when it is more or less of itself in any apportionment whatsoever, even when it appears that it is not. So whether it may be assumed that it is masculine or feminine, more or less, as the case may be, the wind is still phalломorphic. Therefore, the androgynous phalломorphic energy is always and only self-definite rather than indefinite. Its determination and definiteness is contained by and in itself. That is the source and condition of its morphism, its formative-generative power. In a word, the self-absoluteness of the phalломorphic self-definiteness derives from its infinitesimal self-centricity. In each of its apportionments the androgynous phalломorph is its own self-sameness. This is why it can bind to and in itself all unstable, ceaselessly dissolving opposites and all otherness whereby it becomes self-informed and creative, generative.

Although as wind it may appear fluid, seemingly akin to the watery fluid it stirs, it has in itself a self-sufficient autoplasic, self-forming and self-centring force to be ceaselessly self-determining. Transparent yet pushy and rigid as if it were a solid stick, fluid, elastic and dispersive yet firm like an erect prick this wind is, nevertheless, not a trick; no wonder that it causes a right kind of stir. All this is due to the fact that, because of its androgyny, its, so to speak, determining determination, it is bound to itself through its absolute self-centricity. The two-which-are one are locked in each other; not one or the other, one without the other, but each is itself through the other; maleness has its isness, so it appears, because of its bond to femaleness and vice versa. Now regardless of this ontological amplification of its apparent sensuous qualities and determinations, the wind is and is what it is, definite rather than indefinite because it is two-in-one. It can be said that this phalломorphic androgyne is the principle of all definite and determinate being, which emerges from the water which is what it is-not and is-not what it is.

But notice: from everything that I have said the wind appears to be a peculiar mirror-image of its primordial watery a-substance that, once in-spired, starts moving and substantialising. I say a mirror-image precisely because the wind now transpires to be, as a self-definite auto-(phallo)morph, an exact counter-image of the water's omni-indefiniteness and amorphousness.<sup>18</sup> If the water were androgynous as the wind then from the very beginning

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<sup>18</sup> It is useful to think of their mirror relation as a key and a key-hole. A person who knows nothing about either would not be able to recognise by looking, say, into the complex grooves of a key-hole the same yet transfigured gestalt which is cut into the key. Here in a nutshell is stated the problematics of ouroboric dynamic morphology and imagination which underpins numerous New Guinea and other cultural life-worlds and their cosmo-ontological schemata. This understanding has enabled me to formulate the above logomorphic interpretation of Tambunum cosmogonic dynamics.

they would be equipollent. But the water, having no self, has no definite, self-determinate power of omni-binding centrality. Every single apparent determination turns into its otherness and doesn't have any fixity and determination despite its seeming self-fulfilment, since it seems all like one smooth surface. The water is neither one nor two, and if it is then it is so only to the extent that it is-not. So, it is now clear enough that although the primal water is characterised (by Silverman) as "feminine", it is not androgynous and therefore it is not either feminine or masculine, nor one or the other, not both, not all, not nothing. It does not have any kind of actuality, and likewise, it seems now, one cannot really say that it has any self-generativity either. If it has, then it also has not. In other words, the primal water lacks its own principial source of determination and permanently generative is-ness, which would transform its pure, omnipotent all-otherness into its omnipotent self-creativity and self-actualisation.

What becomes now quite well delineated is what I already said above, namely that *the primal water is wholly other to its own otherness*. This alone makes it possible to be anything and everything at all – whatsoever. To the extent that this is so, the primal watery pure otherness needs exactly something entirely other than itself to make it conceive, to become something other than its own otherness. And this other otherness is, exactly, its mirror-other, the phallic wind which is everything that the water is not and is not what the water is in its otherness, namely its own other-referential otherness. Accordingly the water can only and always be something other than what it is, in perpetuity. What in Silverman's projection and rendition seemed to be a watery bliss of self-fulfilling sufficiency can, in the present explication, only be an *other-filling* dynamics without fulfilment at all. And if it were to be so, the water would be its own fulfilling nightmare, were it not for this phallic androgynous energetic gust that issued from the water's own, I shall now affirm, all-otherness which in that very twist becomes stirred into creation. For it appears that if left to its own otherness, within the indefinite stillness of the cosmic water can be generated nothing but ever more of its other-referential otherness. In other words, no change in and of its otherness other than a changeless change or alteration.

Fortunately, its changeless otherness too seems to be what it is not and is not what it is, so much so that in its othering-its-own-otherness it others (alters) its very own otherness out of its otherness which rebounds back into its a-substantial matrix. Therefore out of this indefinite formlessness, or from some other nowhere within<sup>19</sup> this primal watery neg-topology, there emerges its mirror-alter, ergo allomorphic in relation to its amorphous matrix of otherness. But consequently this allomorphic alter is an absolute automorph and is as such its own self.<sup>19</sup> This is the phallic wind, which turns the omnipotent aqueous indefiniteness

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<sup>19</sup> This is the critical point in the water's othering. In simple terms: "from the formless (amorphous) comes its form (morph)". The primordium is amorphic otherness precisely because it has no self and cannot therefore form itself, meaning all its opposites cannot be captured and bound. The wind is the exact opposite of the water because it binds together the two critical opposites, male and female, which can only be through each other and they thereby become what they are, i.e., male and female. This power of intrinsic binding, centering of opposites, which thereby become determined in themselves as themselves, is what gives the wind its self. It is therefore auto-morphic. When I characterise the wind as the allomorph of the water I keep them in their mirror (inverse) relation. The water is amorphous; therefore the wind, as its other – *allon* – is, by contrast morphic, hence the water's allomorph. By, in, and for itself, the wind is auto-morphic and this is what determines its phallic morphism, its autocentricity. Since it is androgynous, it can be seen that its self-unity is due to its self-copulation. With that power of self-forming secured, it can then form everything else, all otherness, without ever losing itself in it. The automorphic wind is the exact dynamic noetic counter-image of the water's intrinsic absolute allo-de-centricity. *In fact, psychodynamically both are representative of the fundamental polarising mirror-dynamics of archaic narcissism and omnipotence.*

into the equally omni-actualising progenitive definiteness, ergo cosmic creation takes off. So if there is any self-generative potential in the primordial water it is actualised by the androgynous phallic wind. The cosmogonic myth clearly shows that the primal water's self-generation follows because of the phallic stir.

Thanks to it there becomes formed all definite, (at once self-same and self-definite), and mutually differentiated some-things: solid earth, humans, sky, day, night, and so on. A manifold of differentiated and individuated things, a water-bound cosmos. And the water became actualised as self-bound-to-its creation because of its own other-altering otherness, the phallic wind. It alone is the self-binding, therefore self-generating, and self-determining, self-defining, self-positing, in a word the world-creating agency of actualisation. This is the selfhood and is-ness of the primal watery omnipotentia, qua allness that others its otherness into its own auto-generative self; its formative energetic being of everything that there is and can ever be-come out of the primal m/otherness. The androgynous phallic wind then actively makes, qua itself, the primal otherness into its own first self. Only as such that which omni-indefinitely is and is-not, becomes its true being, the m/other of all and everything.<sup>20</sup>

Silverman also establishes the anal aspects of the wind motif: flatulence. Following Dundes, he concludes: "Men in their emulative desire for birth, transform vaginal delivery into a masculine idiom of anal parturition. In turn, this male somatic image is projected outward into the world as a framework for envisioning cosmic creation" (p. 52). I concur with this vital mode of psychoanalytic elucidation whereby the cosmogonic self-imagining of the Tambunum un/conscious imaginary is assimilated into its human erotogenic embodiment. But what is left out of this reduction to the sensuous-bodily dimension of instinctual drives and desire, is the intrinsic noetic-intellective dynamics of the imaginary, whereby the un/conscious constructs a world-image in its own body and its own somatic substance. It is vital to recognise that only as and qua world-self-imagining, does the psyche construct human egoic selfhood, male and female, and the cultural life-world. In this understanding, the human un/conscious is necessarily psycho-cosmogonic, *for if there is no world-image there is no human egoic self either, and so for both sexes.*

Speaking for myself, I am always impressed by the supreme intelligence of un/conscious imaginary constructions. One has to admit that in its transformation into a phallic cosmogonic gust, the human fart shows that there is more to it than just its anal (sensuous) origination. From the archetypal psycho-cosmogonic perspective, the body and all orifices and drives, not just the anus, do show their other determination, namely that they are nothing less than the living psycho-cosmic gestalt, a microcosmic image of the macrocosmos. Silverman's exercise of psychoanalytic formula-translation is unduly biased and insufficiently grounded in the constructive dialectics of the un/conscious matrix of the psycho-somatic being. He shifts from the perspective of the Eastern Iatmul cosmic self-image to a formulaic psychodynamic explanation whose exclusive target is men rather than they and their women. But in fact together they articulate and participate in the same universe of their un/conscious imaginary.

<sup>20</sup> It can be said that the primal water becomes mother and thus feminine because of its retro-injective phallic actualisation. Through it the all-otherness acquires its selfhood. Note that the mythic image follows rigorously a polarising schema of auto-differentiation of the primordium: a-substantial a-morphic (0=0)water<auto-morphic wind(m=f)>cleaving earth<5 humans<sky^earth^night^day separation<creation-shaping of landscape. Herein is indicated the inner autopoietic logic of ouroboric dynamics, to be more exact, its noetic-formative-intellective power. I deal with it and various transformational modes in a forthcoming work (Mimica, in preparation).

To the extent that he seemingly demystifies the archetypal cosmogonic dimension in terms of its somatic anal derivation, doesn't the same kind of demystification apply to women and femininity? What is this primal "self-referential, non-oppositional", etc, "feminine" "calm water" that is biased towards "the work of men and demiurges", as he characterised this image through his realistic and sober, as it were, projections? Isn't it anything else but a projection into the world, not just by the Tambunum men and women but also by Silverman himself? On this view there is no difference between Eastern Iatmul men and women, and the ethnographer who wields psychoanalytic formulas. The Tambunum women are as self-deluded as their men. Men indeed "envy female fertility" but all claims about the women's superiority, cosmic or not, express comparable omnipotent aggrandisements which exceed the factual power of their bodily generativity. And, to be sure, all these delusions have to be explicated psycho-dynamically. What exactly is envy and omnipotence? Most problematic in this pursuit, however, is Silverman's stake in the Tambunum's very own psycho-cosmogony and their dialogics as a whole. They have to create and sustain themselves as men and women in *their* life-world. As a psycho-Bakhtinian ethnographer Silverman's task is to elucidate this life-world in their own terms by the most constructive means possible; by his own self-definition, through a psychoanalysis of their "dialogics". But it is quite evident that he is primarily positing himself as an omnipotent adjudicator of cosmic and psycho-somatic justice, who seems to assume to know better about, or is in a psychoanalytically more lucid position vis-a-vis the Eastern Iatmul un/conscious imaginary than his analysands.

I have shown with a sufficient clarity that the watery presence in the Eastern Iatmul un/conscious has a different psycho-cosmo-ontological determination from the one scripted by Silverman. If his characterisations were taken uncritically it would not be clear why there would ever emerge any kind of masculinity in their life-world. Indeed, why would there be any self-differentiation of a pre-cosmic watery totality, which in its omnipotence is totally self-satiated and self-satisfied? This clearly shows that in the Tambunum's own psycho-cosmogonic self-imaging, men and masculinity are anything but non-entities. The phallomorphic formative energy in all those "oppositional" denizens - wind, crocodiles, trees, etc. - featuring in the Iatmul cosmogonic mythopoeia, is crucial. In this psycho-Bakhtinian scripting the phallomorphic and flatulent wind, devouring saurian agitators, and so forth, can be readily dismissed, with Dundes' imprimatur, as a part of a wider scheme of "masculine birth envy" (p. 86). Except that envy is not the terminus of explication of men's and women's embodied being. Nor is woman's bodily procreative power the beginning and end of creation. The profundity of psychoanalytic theories of psycho-sexuality, erotogeneity and libido clearly shows that.

Similarly with the senior crocodile spirits which, at least one of his informants said, are the ultimate masters of all conception and gestation. Silverman, however, banishes these spirits away by saying that "somatic reproduction is magically consigned to the realm of ancestral crocodile spirits and the male cult" (p. 31). What is that supposed to mean? That, therefore, *for the Iatmul* they are less real and omnipotent than the supposed feminine self-referential and non-oppositional water, which is, as it were, less magically posited? Again, this is Silverman running his own show of omnipotence as the master puppeteer, while the Eastern Iatmul imaginary supplies the marionettes. But it is the Eastern Iatmul imaginary and their life-world as they are, *in their own omnipotent terms* that are of concern here. Thus, both sexes harbour phantasies of their own omnipotence, and the transpersonal un/conscious has to be approached in terms of such a total dynamics of intersubjective self-structuration.

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## FROM OMNIPOTENCE TO OMNI/M/POTENCE

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Silverman's exegeses are biased precisely in respect of the problem of omnipotence in the Eastern Iatmul's alleged "dialogics" and his position as its conduit. Showing that men are envious is, if anything, the matter to be worked on. For this psychic mode, suggesting immediately men's im-potence and inferiority, is made of and generated by the same narcissistic stuff as the feminine "self-reference", omni-potence and self-sufficiency. Both are differential transfigurations of archaic narcissism and omnipotence and can be treated as mirror-equipollent. This is brought into a sharper relief by my critical reinterpretation of the cosmogonic primordium. This, however, is still the transpersonal, archetypal cosmogonic situation. The economy of its omnipotence has to be accounted for in more concrete terms. Accordingly, what has to be considered are the lineaments of the Eastern Iatmul's narcissistic economy, its different modalities of omnipotence and its derivations (especially the negative ones, envy,<sup>21</sup> jealousy), and, of course, the seeming self-satisfaction, self-referentiality, and seemingly non-oppositional abolition of all otherness. These last three are especially salient in what I have characterised as Silverman's watery countertransference, and given its feminine bias, this has to be taken as a means into the Tambunum women's sense of themselves as cosmically omnipotent mothers, for Silverman doesn't provide any concrete dialogical evidence concerning their self-idealizations.

In the pre-oedipal matrix, narcissistic omnipotence is radically negative precisely because it is maximally omni-centered; it is oblivious to all otherness and, simultaneously and seemingly, has none. I can picture it more concretely by saying that the foetus and the maternal container have no mutual self-recognition in and qua their difference. The inner horizon of the womb and its contents is a universe unto itself, in which maternal un/conscious omnipotence is vitally dependent on its self-fulfilling content, the foetus. It is the un/conscious that drives-informs her egoic self-consciousness. The above-examined Iatmul data clearly show how that intrauterine universe imagines itself qua desires and passions rather than it being imagined by a deliberate egoic fiat. This is why it is constructive to think of this sphere as an IT (in-and-for-itself), and for that reason Groddeck's writings (e.g., 1949; 1950; 1951) still have a good propaedeutic value. This is the narcissistic matrix of archaic human omnipotence, which is irreducibly bi-polar; the more one exceeds in one direction, say superiority, the more s/he is predisposed to be menaced by its counterpoint, abject impotence and its correlates, excessive aggrandisement and defensiveness. Hence why I use the term omni/m/potence for this archaic narcissistic dynamism, as it is inherently extreme and bi-valent. This primary, so to speak, auto-morphogenic sphere of human egoity, is the matrix of its narcissistic structuration correlative with the formative dynamics of instinctual drives and agency (e.g., id-ego-super-ego).<sup>22</sup> With this sketch let me resume my reflections on Silverman's data and scripting.

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<sup>21</sup> In the narcissistic economy of a single person this transfiguration can be observed in a formidable manifestation of narcissistic negativity, self-envy (see Lopez-Corvo, 1995)

<sup>22</sup> I will not dwell here on numerous issues that are entailed by these formulations. For instance, what exactly is the determination of this nuclear affective (energetic) intensity and its extreme bi-valency (I could also describe it as bi-polarisation or, better, auto-polarisation)? How are such extreme narcissistic modalities generated and what is their dynamic structure: the self-drivenness for maximal self-sameness, all-oneness without self-otherness, either as a self-same fullness, ad infinitum (self-expansion), or as self-same nothingness (self-contraction), ranging from cosmic rage, vulnerability and inferiority to the equally cosmic "oceanic feelings" (Freud, Masson, 1980) or nirvanic self-extinction? For some useful pointers for the problematics of narcissistic dynamics, including omnipotence, see: Gruneberger, 1975; 1989; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971; 1977; Ellman and Reppen, 1997.

## THE MATERNAL SELF-CERTAINTY OF SEXUATION: A TAMBUNUM CARTESIAN PROPAEDEUTIC

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I will invoke again the first “principle” of the Eastern Iatmul *male and female* self-identification which Silverman scripts in Cartesian terms and qualifies as an “adage” (p. 96) and “proverb” (p. 107); it states: “my mother, therefore I am” (pp. 87, 96, 107). Since radical consequences are implied, I will outline them in no uncertain terms: whether male or female, the Iatmul ego’s existence coincides with its pre-oedipal, maternal ground, her body and un/conscious. Herein is also its critical ingredient, omni/m/potence.

What matters at this point, however, is the more immediate human bodily facticity of men’s and women’s maleness and femaleness, the fact that they are, regardless of the measure of their difference, still self-identified in and qua their maternal *fons et origio*. It is in respect of this experiential domain that Silverman offers no satisfactory documentation of men’s and women’s emotionality, desires, tensions, conflicts, self-aggrandisement and self-interpretation. Accordingly, the supposed lesser androgynousness of women in Tambunum remains beclouded in the framework of Silverman’s scripting. Therefore, I find it a constructive exercise to follow the implications of some of his statements, just to tease out some purely formal clarifications of women’s position in the matrix of Tambunum ideas about conception and gestation, *all* of which, undoubtedly, are generated by the same fluvial-saurian un/conscious imaginary.

These basic ideas, especially the relative power of the two substances, semen and blood, which effect conception and sexuation of the foetus, can be now articulated in the Tambunum’s own explicit terms. I am taking this step because Silverman clearly says that no man or woman would deny that s/he wasn’t born out of his/her mother’s body, fed and brought up by her. Accordingly, the characterisation of the procreation process as “egalitarian” has to be pitched in this Cartesian set-up of men’s and women’s indubitable, as it were, equality generated by the primordial matrix of their somatic being, self-recognition, and self-knowledge. Herewith this, so to speak, Cartesian thought-experiment on Tambunum self-generation of sexuation in terms of Silverman’s presuppositions about the relative apportionment of male and female androgyny.

Given the entire Iatmul universe and its pre-oedipal determination, it would be, in formal terms, surprising if women would desire to have more maleness and fatherhood than what they’ve already got in themselves, certified by their maternal self-positing (“my mother, myself”). All their mythopoeia, regardless of Silverman’s scripting, and, no doubt, their un/conscious and the facticity of their bodies, suggest that they’ve got both, in a full measure. This would follow from the most obvious fact that from every pregnant woman’s body both *male* and *female* babies are born, and as such, from the wombs of Iatmul women come males *and* females as sons, fathers, brothers, sisters, daughters, and they themselves (women) thereby become mothers. Every woman qua her pregnancy and birthing becomes her own Cartesian self-fulfilment whereby her own essence<sup>23</sup> is her child’s existence; she herself becomes a mother qua her child. She alone births the *two* genders and qua these two the

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<sup>23</sup> Relational or absolute, doesn’t matter one way or the other, for they are absolutely mutually determining.

human social mani-fold. Thus, immanent in women's bodily facticity is the whole generative actualisation of the kinship matrix of genitors and progeny.

If women are self-satisfied, superior, and evince no contra-sexual yearning, as Silverman's renditions strive to ensure every which way, they are self-satisfied primarily with their femaleness qua their motherhood; but men, given the pre-oedipal matrix, are not. If anything, their maternal self-determination, by comparison to women's, is second best, for what every man's sister can do – gestate and birth an actual child – her brother factually cannot. Therefore, it is evidently the case that the proverbial “my mother, therefore I am” is truer in the body of the sister than in the body of the brother, for she can be fully identical to her mother and he can't. But as his sister's brother, rather than as his own son's father, every man can be the mother's brother and therefore be the truth of his maternal-feminine being; ergo he is the male mother, the maternal uncle to his sister's children.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, only as such is he the truth of his maternal self-identity. It is fundamentally as his *mother's* rather than as his *father's* son that every Eastern Iatmul man has to face the travail of manhood in order to become both (i.e., his mother's *and* father's son), and to actualise in the same process, his mother's femininity and his father's masculinity in and as himself.

For every woman this is easy. All she has to do is to get herself pregnant and she'll become full of both herself (femaleness) and her own maleness and, as a bonus, she'll become the full truth of her primal maternal being – meaning a birthing mother. On this view, it is not surprising that hardly any Iatmul woman is craving for having penile strappings and other masculine paraphernalia, beaks and such, when (despite the primal loss of the long beak), *in fact, every woman's masculinity and father power is guaranteed by the originary self-positing of her maternal determination.* Whenever she gets pregnant she has received a sufficient amount of “bad, little semen” from her impregnator and her masculinity is, so to speak, certified, indeed made “certissimus”:<sup>25</sup> *for her masculine project, I suggest, is not to be like man as he is qua his motherhood, but to be as she is qua her motherhood, i.e., to conceive and get pregnant.* This is her immanent phallic and thus masculine *telos* whereby she accomplishes her maternal being, thereby fulfilling her own “therefore I am”. Therefore, every daughter as herself is self-same, the power of her femininity; but to become her fully actualised masculine and thus truly *androgynous* (=phallic) woman, she has to conceive within herself a child. And every time she gives birth to a male child the maleness in her body proves stronger than her femaleness. Her male baby bears the full imprint of her own generative masculinisation. Her own son is her contra-sexual self, the same gender as her own father, her own brother, and husband. *Her son is the very proof that she has been masculinised in the most generative way. Indeed, pregnancy itself is woman's foremost accomplishment of her contrasexual yearning to be masculine in the way it would make her 100% like her mother, i.e., pregnant and therefore truly feminine.* But, inversely, for man it is his maternal being, his “therefore I am” *as exactly his procreative phallic maternal femininity*, that is irreducibly in question.

<sup>24</sup> This is a common position of the maternal uncle in Melanesian frameworks of kinship sexuation and elsewhere. For an extreme case, see Mimica, 1991.

<sup>25</sup> The masculine ending (rather than *certissima* – fem) emphasises the certainty of her pregnancy as the actualisation of her masculinity. Here I am articulating a position inverse from the one expressed in the Latin legal tag, cited by Freud (1909/1977: 223): “*pater semper incertus est*” (father always is uncertain) whereas “*mater certissima est*” (mother is the most certain). What is certain in every Iatmul's pregnancy is her immanent masculine project, which as such determines her relation to her paternity in the un/conscious matrix of the Iatmul imaginary (see the argument in the text).

So, to follow Silverman's scripting of the Iatmul conception and gestation as an "egalitarian mystery", although he didn't intend it as such, the Iatmul men have no problems becoming saurian, pre-oedipal men and fathers, but their maternal being escapes them the moment they recognise that they are born as their mothers' sons rather than as daughters. By contrast, the daughters are assured of their *paternal* inheritance. They don't have to emulate fathers in order to be like them, procreative male saurian sires. There is no mystery of sexuation. Every woman is assured that she has within herself her essential paternal endowment, *the power to bring out a male and female child* out of her own female yet androgynous maternal body.<sup>26</sup> How so? By the sheer fact that she was procreated! If she was born a woman that was because her father's semen wasn't strong enough; but if she gives birth to a son, she has accomplished in her maternity exactly what her father failed to – to make her like him, the body of his own gender. By the way, here the import of the crocodile spirits would acquire a new significance: they may well be seen as the true bisexual (androgynous) spermatic spirits omnipresent in every woman's womb as, (to give it an Aristotelian inflection), the ultimate cause, but whose efficient cause is every man's "bad little semen" that actually impregnates her.<sup>27</sup> Verily, every woman is primordially and all along a *male-enough* (androgynous) *mother* by pregnancy and birthing in the way that her brother will be only through travail of his masculinity.

This, then, is a counter-scripting, which suggests, merely as a formal propaedeutic, why the Eastern Iatmul women don't have to vie in a simple and overt *symmetric* fashion with men for masculine physiological prerogatives, attributes and powers. To repeat: every woman possesses them all along by the sheer fact of being her father's daughter (his semen was weaker than his wife's blood) and, to be sure, the daughter of her pre-oedipal mother (whose blood was stronger than her husband's semen). Women's immanent masculinity is therefore indubitable, and more so since their sons' factual somatic *lack* of identical bodily femininity will be affirming of it in the ceaseless travail of masculinity. *Every male and female embodiment is the equivalent but differential manifestation of the relative victory of one or the other of the two generative substances, male semen and female blood.* With or without this formulation, I can state that the Eastern Iatmul men's project of their masculinity, the work of their self-making, is fully authentic in its entire developmental course. Given the pre-oedipal determination of the initial situation, they are nothing less than the true saurian sons of their fluvial-saurian mothers and fathers.

Still, all this is a critical amplification of Silverman's own scriptings of what he calls the "misfortunes" and the "tragic" "predicament" of Eastern Iatmul masculinity. There are a number of other epithets that he applies in liberal strokes, but the problem is whether they adequately paint the supposed "dialogics" of men and women, their self-experience and self-valorisation, or the inner *logos* of their "egalitarian mystery". I have argued above that his scripting is largely driven by his own narcissistic, negative – idealising countertransference. Accordingly, the really unfortunate aspect of this ethnography is that he doesn't say anything

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<sup>26</sup> Note that every baby she bears affirms *unquestioned female generativity* agitated by that little bit of extra masculinity that she needs in order to conceive and consummate her androgynous femaleness. But without man's semen no conception will take place, regardless of how androgynous female embodiment is. Therefore, either as a male or female, every Tambunum son and daughter owe their procreation to the fractional power of their *paternal* "bad little semen"; and without it neither gender would ever come into being as a concrete man and woman, son and daughter, mother and father.

<sup>27</sup> Only a concrete exploration of women's egoic un/conscious would show what kind of imaginal form masculine figures assume, especially in the configurations that would have the function of contra-sexual self-images and super-ego.

more concrete about Eastern Iatmul's femininity, the way these saurian women and mothers valorise themselves in their own terms, *including their omni/m/potence*.<sup>28</sup> Silverman indicates that he had at least one close female confidant, but what her sense of herself is, and how she thinks about her, son, husband, brother, mother's brother, and men and women generically, is not indicated. For clearly, whatever the Eastern Iatmul men and women do, they do it by experiencing each other as egoities constituted in the factual determination of kinship; in short as genitors and progeny, kin and affines. That is most pronounced in naven. When an Eastern Iatmul man slides his anus down his nephew's shin, he does it not as some non-descript generic man but as a "male mother". That is, he is a man of the saurian species whose being is "my mother, therefore I am". The species is still of the genus *homo* (man, that is), rather than an absolute non-entity, as he might be phantasised and judged by a Western post-modern *homo academicus*. The saurian man's masculinity is what it is through his labour-intensive travail, which brings his semblance into being from its imaginary archetypal matrix.

But let me still pursue the framing of his scripting in terms of the saurian-Cartesian thought-experiment. Silverman's scripting clearly shows that a saurian man's paternal maleness is truly accomplished when he effectively relinquishes his fatherhood to his son, and most conclusively so when the son marries his FMBSD, who is thereby his classificatory father's mother (*iai*).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the paternal sonship of a Iatmul man is maximally fulfilled when he marries his "father's mother", and, should his wife bear him a son, it can be said that he has given in effect birth to his own father. The Iatmul sonship vis a vis his father is easy; the father may as well be dead; for as long as there are women, men can make them into (classificatory) mothers of their fathers and therefore of themselves.<sup>30</sup> That is, to put it egocentrically, whichever woman gave birth to my father can, through *iai* substitution, give him birth again so long as I, my father's son, am the one who sires him. That seems to be a tacit assumption of the Iatmul sonship of a man vis a vis his father. And there is no anal act involved. In a son's marriage to his FMBSD (as in any marriage), factual conception, gestation and birthing follow. But that is only one half of the project of the Eastern Iatmul's masculinity. The other and the more vital half is man's sonship in and qua his mother, male and female. He may be his mother's "bad semen, little semen", but he is her very own masculine self, and therefore in full concordance with his=her being=existence.

Although he was born a man (because his father's semen was stronger than his mother's blood), therefore he missed out on fully becoming his maternal generative being (like his sister), he, nevertheless, has her being as his (phalломorphic) destiny. And as the true son of his mother, from the first achievements onward, he will go through the naven cer-

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<sup>28</sup> Here are a few samples that indicate that it is Silverman's *wax* which articulates the pitch of Tambunum women's omni/m/potence. "Yet women and *not* men are averred to be true supports or "stools" of the village, which is a direct result, men say, of feminine fertility nurture. Since women are associated with interior and hidden, or *atndasiikiü*, powers, the primacy of masculinity is illusory. Appearances to the contrary, the lives and concerns of men pertain to the surfaces and facades of social life" (p. 23). "These interdictions, when situated in the broader context of masculinity, evidence men's envy of female fertility. But there is little evidence to suggest that female restraints during warfare reflect a corresponding jealousy of male prerogative" (p. 105). Numerous similar examples can be cited but no documentation of concrete self-interpretations of the Tambunum men and women themselves is provided.

<sup>29</sup> For the most extreme articulation of this kind of system in New Guinea (and, to the best of my knowledge, elsewhere) I can refer to the Yagwoia situation (Mimica, 1991; also 1988).

<sup>30</sup> Keep in mind that every woman has to become pregnant and give birth in order to maximally actualise her maternal being and truth, i.e., herself become a factually birthing mother.

emonials until such time when he himself will be compelled, in shame and humiliation, to act out as his truth: he is his mother's son and therefore he is her, i.e., a male mother. From his actual birth to his anal embarrassment and mortification, the saurian man acts out what is the truth of his mother's procreative power and hence his "therefore, I am". Male initiation notwithstanding, it is an empirical question whether (and if so, how), the Eastern Iatmul father would drum into his son the new grounds of certitude of their common being, namely that he is not his mother's truth but his father's, ergo "my father, therefore I am". His son's male body, however is the very truth of the fact that when he (father) impregnated his mother, his semen proved stronger than her blood. Therefore, he can say that he is his father's strength, "bone". But that was at the same time the affirmation of his mother's own masculinity. For if she is to bear a male child, her son, then her very femininity has to be weakened. Ergo, in such a case, through the privation of her feminine strength, her blood, effected in coitus by a bit of the "little, bad semen" which beats her to it, she conceives her masculinity and gives birth to her own son.

What can be said, in terms of this thought-experiment, about the apportionment of men's and women's androgyny? It seems that its inner meaning is a variant of the dialectics of phallogomorphic oneness, self-duplication and unification in the interchange of inner and outer, indefiniteness and definiteness, which I outlined in connection with the cosmogonic wind. It would appear that both maleness and femaleness are a composite of self-unified, phallogomorphic oneness made through their dynamic, mutually privative yet conjunctive negation of each other. They cannot be of equal power but always and only one has to be subordinated by the other for conception to occur.<sup>31</sup> The only definiteness that can be affirmed about the saurian man is that without his insemination, woman will not conceive. Reciprocally, the only certitude and definiteness that the saurian woman has in respect of gestation is that, in so far she conceives, there will be a baby and she will become a mother. But the gender of the baby, it seems, will be decided by the actual balance of power between the paternal semen and maternal blood exacted in the moment of coition. The self-privation of the one will be the self-gain of the other one, but their privative - *mutually negating* - conjunction will, all the same, produce a third one, the union of maleness and femaleness of both ones. This third one (foetus) itself will be either one or the other, male or female, yet both at once. And this is the truth of every saurian baby, definitely androgynous, but in accordance to the well-apportioned measure because, whether more or less, gain or loss, he or she is still exactly one, and as such also the other one, ergo two that is one. I think that the saurian spermatic spiritus, which itself is androgynous, may indeed be the immanent "oppositional" yet self-binding *logos* presiding over the Eastern Iatmul woman's archetypal watery "self-reference" (i.e., other-reference), or else, so one can speculate in terms of the implications of these archetypal omnipotent phantasies, "she" (as Silverman determines the primal water) might well remain caught in "herself" ad infinitum.

"She" could "self"-multiply in perpetuity, but not "self"-differentiate and individuate. Being all one in "her" sex would condemn "her" to self-saturation, a "self"-propagating narcissistic sterility which neither dies nor lives, just fills itself with itself; a monopolar "self"-sameness which can generate neither its own pregnant "self"-indefiniteness nor a generative "self"-definiteness and therefore, "self"-multiplicity. Unable to conceive her "self"-otherness

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<sup>31</sup> Silverman details the cosmological figurations of "adversarial coitus" on p. 60.

"she" could never become "self"-conceived, unless "her" "self"-referentiality twists itself into a some kind of singular loop, like a Möbius strip or a Kleinian bottle, in which the radical interiority smoothly transmutes into its own exteriority. Everything in Silverman's scripting of his data, driven by a countertransfereential omnipotent feminine but self-blinding voice, clearly suggests that some such quandary could eventuate if it were true that in Tambunum "there is no such a thing as man". Fortunately enough for all concerned, there does exist the saurian kind of man, who relentlessly travails on the project of his maternal phallographic desire to actualise his "my mother, therefore I am".

On the other hand, Silverman's ethnography also shows, clearly enough, that the Eastern Iatmul life-world is a genuine creation of ouroboric archetypal imagination and intelligence; therefore it is unlikely that it would delude itself about the truth of its own seeming oneness and self-referentiality. To use the image of the self-eating-copulating serpent, it would delude itself were it to think that it is either all-mouth and no tail, or the other way around, for the all-edible condition of ouroboric eternal self-generative existence is that it is both-at-once, and therefore it is one and self-same, yet self-different in its absolutely self-referential self-copulative-eating. And as it keeps on eating itself (self-negating), in exactly the same measure it keeps on self-generating (self-copulating=positing) itself, ad infinitum. That is, without a self-castrating moment there is no generative self-difference (sexuation), and qua self-difference, self-otherness (twoity), and with it, as many sexual shapes, quiddities, and genders as one can possibly wish. As they say in New Guinea - "saplai mo yet" as long as there is one=two.

Therefore, I am inclined to think that whatever is generated in the Eastern Iatmul cosmos in the way of its omni/m/potent feminine dynamics, there are no non-entities in it. If anything, the would-be radical feminine non-oppositional self-referentiality and self-sameness (to remain with Silverman's specifications), generates everything as its own mirror-image, more or less but, fundamentally, all the same. I would expect that the saurian sons aren't any less omni/m/potent than their fluvial mothers. Like loves to breed like; and I think that, rather like the unbeatable Baron Munchausen, fluvial-saurian women and men constitute a self-referential totality that generates itself out of the Sepikian watery depths, just as he pulls himself and his horse from the quicksand, by gripping fast his pig-tail and tugging skyward, ad infinitum. The result is a well-apportioned self-differentiated measure of omni/m/potence, and a well apportioned androgynous substance, which generates a sustainable human self-semblance of its pre-oedipal un/conscious imaginary matrix.

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### **MEN'S NAVEN AND WOMEN'S BIRTHING: THE DIALECTICS OF THE FLUVIAL-SAURIAN OMNI/M/POTENCE**

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From Silverman's data and scripting, however, it might be thought that in respect of their maternal pre-oedipal matrix, the dialectics of Eastern Iatmul omni/m/potence (though not Silverman's countertransfereentially scripted feminine monopolar omnipotence), works in differentiated but interdependent spheres of actualisation of women's and men's corporeal facticity. The motherhood of men comes into its own in the naven ceremonialism, where the negativity of their narcissistic economy becomes acutely manifest. This negativity is not just apparent in respect of men's omni/m/potence, (where the accent falls on their (omni)-*im/potence*), but also in respect of women's, except that in their case the accent is on their *omni-//potence*. The crescendo of naven is *nggariik*, the ultimate Eastern Iatmul act which,

Silverman avers, is also the tragedy topping off all other tragedies that beset the Eastern Iatmul men; but apparently not women. Their selfhood is, as it were, immune to the negativity which drags their men down the spiral ever so basely. From their narcissistic heights, the force of their pre-*oedipal* maternal matrix plunges the men into the mud of shame, humiliation, tears; and even if crocodilian, they are tears of "tragedy", "shame", and "despair" nonetheless. For women, so it seems, it is virtually all mirth and comedy. "When women and mothers depart from the rite, they always seem elated, or vindicated. Men, however, often seem rather demoralised" (p. 167).

I see this situation as the foremost *reality* of their common *omni/m/potence*. In the ritual sphere each sex lives his/her portion of the reality of their common archetypal imaginary, *but in its appropriate mode*. For men shame and mortification in accordance with their factual somatic limitations, which in this context reaches the limits of its (androgynous) femininity. One may rightly call it men's maternal inferiority complex, being the indelible legacy of their "my mother, therefore I am". For women, *naven* manifests the cosmic laughter of their superiority, which in this particular context is not at stake; accordingly it shows its appropriate negativity in full intensity, rubbing as much acidic faeces as they can into men's narcissistic wounds. But evidently, that is the price that the Iatmul men are not just willing but compelled to pay, in order to sustain the semblance of their maternal being. What would have to be explicated is its psychodynamic determination, namely the masochistic underpinnings of men's narcissistic self-equilibrium. In this regard Silverman's psycho-Bakhtinism has nothing to offer, although his impressive material on *naven* requires this particular perspective and reflection.

However, I think that it is mistaken to look at women's *naven* behaviour as the *real* truth of their *omni/m/potence*.<sup>32</sup> No, in *naven* they reign supreme over men's factual embodiment precisely because that context is the limiting condition of men's fluvial-saurian imaginary. If anything, men (like transsexuals) come to manifest its *ideal* semblance, precisely because their maternal being in their factually male bodies can only have *that mode* of realisation - *ideal made flesh*.<sup>33</sup> The women, by contrast, are in a different predicament in respect of their maternal being. Born as daughters rather than as sons, their factual bodies are not the ideal but the factually-*real* vehicle of their fluvial-saurian imaginary matrix. When it comes to birthing they don't have to project a semblance of their archetypal imaginary matrix (as is the case with men's predicament). Women only have to live their birthing facticity in the best way they can. Whether due to their "watery self-reference", "crocodile spirits", "bad little semen", or the combination of all three, or something altogether unknown, a mystery beyond all egalitarian or inegalitarian mysteries, every which way, in pregnancy and birthing, the women's position and determining constitution within the Eastern Iatmul imaginary and *ITs* *omni/m/potence*, is in the *mode of ITs full actualisation*. Women's fluvial-saurian labouring situation is factually real and the unforgiving somatic truth of their generative femaleness: in parturition woman's motherhood comes into *ITs* own.

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<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, I find Silverman's relentless repetition of his formula self-blinding; for instance: "The exhortation "*lan nyiin tu!*" can also be uttered by a maternal uncle should he slide his buttocks down a nephew's shin during *naven*. Yet there are no comparable expressions by women during ritual, no parallel enactments of demure femininity, and no corresponding terminological assertions of *femine androgyny*" (p. 89; emphasis JM).

<sup>33</sup> In this regard Silverman doesn't provide any concrete "dialogical" data which would give a real sense of men's own self-experience, obsessive seriousness, ambiguity, prevarications, anxiety, which would be the emotional truth of their feminine self-image. It is symptomatic that he doesn't deal with any dream material where these, supposedly, deeply conflictual contra-sexual identifications, would be given most telling selfrepresentation.

According to Silverman (and even more markedly to Hauser-Schaublin, who worked in the Eastern Iatmul village of Kararu), the only *idealisation* that a woman in this situation is expected to project is to endure the experience with fortitude. This experience is the reality and truth of her maternal being now coming into ITs own. Hauser-Schaublin is more informative: "The goal of each woman is to give birth alone. Only after the child is delivered a woman will call out (except for the first birth). It is also expected that women will bear the pains in silence. Women should be strong, informants said, and they are proud of any woman who gives birth alone and without crying out in pain" (1984: 7). This German woman-ethnographer gives some remarkable descriptions of the saurian women's self-compartment in labour. What is significant for my reflections on things Iatmul orientalis, is this specific mode of idealisation – to overcome pain and to be alone in the moment of the facticity of her fluvial-saurian self's self-actualisation. This, I submit, is the self-expression of the Iatmul un/conscious imaginary, the same one which compels men to express its ideal maternal truth in their factual bodies, which cannot do what their mothers and sisters can do, even if they may not want to do it. Indeed, for all one knows, some of them may wish that they never were born as such, as saurian women or men. Silverman does not provide such data or entertain such possibilities.

Be that as it may, it is thought provoking that the only information on women's labour in his ethnography is confined to a footnote, towards the end of the book. He writes: "Women give birth inside domestic houses while squatting and grasping a horizontal bamboo pole. *During delivery, they often scream insults at their husbands who, of course, are nowhere to be seen*" (f.n. 5, p. 200). What can be distilled from this information which, I have good reasons to believe, is in itself an idealisation which reflects Silverman's image of these saurian women as omnipotent "self-referential" water of all creation, rather than as egoities each constituted as an individual, subjective self-synthesis of their transpersonal un/conscious and archetypal imaginary. Now, in his scripting there is no focus on the ideal of "fortitude" or, as Hauser-Schaublin reports, the emulation of such ideals as "giving birth alone and bearing pains in silence". Indeed, she gives several superb descriptions of concrete birthing situations, one of which is particularly telling. She reports that while the labour was going on, the birthing woman's husband was sitting outside the house carving a child's paddle. No crying let alone screaming of abuse at him. Eventually the newborn's cry was heard. When the ethnographer entered the house she saw the following spectacle: "She herself (the woman who just gave birth) sat stretched out on the floor. In the corner of her mouth hung a 20 centimetre long cigarette, and she didn't look at all exhausted or tired out. She looked as though she had been disturbed from an afternoon nap" (1984: 7). This, I submit, may well be the foremost expression of the fluvial-saurian ideal of self-actualisation of birthing motherhood on record.<sup>34</sup>

Silverman's scripting, however, decontextualised that it is, seems to me to have one sole idealising and ideological purpose to effect – to amplify the gutless lowliness of men, as against his idealisation of the Tambunum Iatmul women. But his own rendition of the Tambunum birthing situation suggests a different meaning. Namely, when they actually come to give birth, it seems then that these women's truth is indeed abject somatic pain, and they are overcome by -i/m/potence so that their ideality of being above pain and in need of no

<sup>34</sup> Because of her smoking cigarette I couldn't help not noticing that, in the naven context, one of the funniest details on record is from Stanek who describes how in one situation two maternal uncles (*wauis*), who were in the water, "dressed as women swim back to their house, still smoking their cigars. The *yau* (father's sister) gets into the canoe and paddles off in the standing position like a man" (cited in Houseman and Severi, 1998: 50).

other self (aquatic “self-referentiality”, as it were), shows the other side of the narcissistic economy of their archetypal omni/m/potence. This birthing situation I will characterise as the limiting limit of the women’s determination by and within the matrix of the fluvial-saurian un/conscious imaginary. No gender escapes its own limits as determined by the interrelationships between the demands of the un/conscious imaginary, and the possibilities of its actualisations in and qua its somatic facticity. In this regard, Tambunum birthing as crafted by Silverman, suggests the following questions: why is giving birth for these saurian women such a disagreeable experience? Why do they scream abuse at their husbands in that very situation? What are they actually saying? What mode of omni/m/potence is manifesting itself now? Are they angry at their men because their “bad-little” semen eventually made them go through this miserable pain? Still more: Is this for them all agony; is there a sense of ecstasy, or is this entirely an abject aspect of the “egalitarian mystery of motherhood” that they really would be happier to be spared of? Many critical questions can be brought to amplify the psychodynamics of the fluvial-saurian “dialogics” which, as a matter of fact, Silverman’s psycho-Bakhtinism cannot and, I am inclined to think, doesn’t want to pursue, because it refuses to deal with the real psyche and its embodiment. Being a creation of an academic moral-aesthetic fantasy, but graced with some good counter-transference, it can only operate within the limits of its own narcissistic economy of self-other occlusion, exclusion, inclusion, correlative idealisations, and the appropriate modes of literary confabulation. Accordingly, I see no constructive psycho-analytic ethnographic potential for such an interpretive self-pursuit.

I have endeavoured to show that an authentic perspective on men’s and women’s limiting situations, articulates informatively the dialectics of their omni/m/potence, and the overall dynamics of negativity immanent in the narcissistic economy of their archetypal fluvial-saurian un/conscious imaginary. This negativity still needs some more specification and I will return to it in the last section.

Before that, I will reflect on yet another classic Western genre that Silverman uses to construe the quandary and misfortunes of the Tambunum Iatmul masculinity.

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### **EASTERN IATMUL MANHOOD, A GOAT-SONG OR THE CROCODILE-SONG?**

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In Silverman’s rendition, Eastern Iatmul masculinity and manhood are an existent non-entirety, a species of what he anticipates to be the universal genus. In his exegeses Silverman makes no case for the viability of Tambunum men’s manhood. His voice dominates all dialogical registers of the Iatmul life-world pronouncing relentlessly that, due to *their* delusions about femininity and motherhood, they secure for themselves nothing better than a mode of masculinity the stuff of which is “fragility and fictions”; as they press on with intense zeal and “earnestness”, the Eastern Iatmul men actualise their masculinity as nothing more than a “folly and pathos” (p. 12). In short, Eastern Iatmul manhood is a fiasco or – and this can be taken as his at once reparatory-conciliatory and moral-aesthetic amelioration – Silverman declares it a “tragedy”. No matter what men may phantasise, assert, claim, and do in respect of the omni/m/potent primacy of their masculinity, Silverman shows (and apparently more eagerly and with an absoluteness more intense than, I suspect any Iatmul woman would feel compelled to assert), that it is delusory. He, more so than the naven women, pulverises it by all means and from all cosmic-transpersonal positions.

Yet, when he characterises some of them in concreto, they are anything but non-entireties. Thus, one of his informants “is a bright, responsible man, a good father and husband (...)

the son of a noted carver. [He] has a wonderful disposition and great respect for the totemic and ritual system" (p. 31). This sort of scripting is symptomatic of Silverman's idealising dynamics, which isn't kept in check by a more psychoanalytically mindful exercise of critical judgement concerning both the gravity-coefficient and the reality-coefficient of his interpretations of Tambunum men and women.<sup>35</sup> Or should one take his judgements as an indicator that, despite being tragic non-entities qua their maternal-fluvial determination, these saurian men, nevertheless, do achieve a semblance of viable manhood as judged, I presume by the criteria of the Western *homo academicus*?

To follow Silverman uncritically would make one go along with his psycho-Bakhtinian dialogical construction according to which the Iatmul men are entangled in an "egalitarian" "mystery" of motherhood (but not so their women). Similarly with regard to his apportionment of two other Western genres, comedy and tragedy. In ritual, men "camouflage yet express their desire for maternal fertility. They acknowledge yet deny their somatic inability to give birth (see also Mead, ref.). Ritual is a masculine boast, yet a *tragedy of manhood*" (p. 37; emphasis JM). "... during initiations, homoerotic pantomimes are humorous. But this drollery contradicts the very seriousness.<sup>36</sup> of men's birthing fictions and therefore calls into question the local value of manhood itself. Comedy, in other words, becomes tragedy" (p. 40).

Tragedy doesn't end here. Outside the ritual the well-known Iatmul practice of a mode of preferential marriage with one's *iai* (FMBSD), is in Silverman's dialogical figuration a "social tragedy". Why? Because in his arguably misconceived "oedipal" rendition,<sup>37</sup> this marriage introduces "filial discord into patrilineal solidarity" (ibid.). Whether the Iatmul would experience and valorise this practice as a "tragedy" is plainly left out of consideration. Despite the practice, no Iatmul man is reported to end up blinding himself by his own hand or, for the same reason, being blinded by others. Most importantly, unlike the Greek "tragic" deeds deemed so because they conflict with the "*nomos*" of the city-state, *iai* marriage, if anything, is the very fulfilment of their pre-oedipal saurian or, as I typify it, ouroboric "*nomos*".<sup>38</sup>

**35** From a practical psychoanalytic perspective, the practitioner requires a maximally realistic and critically self-reflective approach, which alone can sustain psychoanalysis as a project of knowledge and, fundamentally, as a human intervention into radically unviable human predicaments. I am not assuming that Silverman should do it like a practicing psychoanalyst; but regarding the use of psychoanalysis, though not psycho-Bakhtinianism, one stands by or goes down with its practice either as a practicing analyst or as a psychoanalytically grounded ethnographer.

**36** It is important to emphasise again that Silverman does not provide any concrete documentation of the way Tambunum men express their seriousness about procreation, or their affirmation and denial of their birthing phantasies.

**37** Throughout his analysis Silverman clearly sees the originality of this arrangement, but his formulaic application of oedipal qua tragedian scripting undercuts a more accurate and productive psychoanalytic elucidation of the formation of fatherhood within the specifically Iatmul pre-oedipal matrix of *their* transpersonal, rather than generic, un/conscious. The Tambunum father, as Silverman's data suggest, is more of a self-executioner (see especially, p. 73), than a fearful sire whom his son has to eliminate by risking his own life. And if the father is to fight anybody over his son's *iai* wife, that would be someone who wants her, but is a man other than his son. Thus "As Gamboromiawan, my informant-friend (...) insisted, 'if someone other than your son tries to marry your mother, you must fight him!' (pp. 107-8). However, Silverman's scripting of his data is so tailor-made for his thespian blue-print, that I find it often hard to discern the more authentic fluvial-saurian streamings of passions and cravings, and correlatively the tensions and conflicts they generate.

**38** For an equivalent case among the Yagwoia and the ouroboric problematics and articulation of incestuous desires, see Mimica, 1991. In the perspective of the Yagwoia situation, the Eastern Iatmul *iai* F-S binding can be explicated as follows. As they say, "my mother, therefore I am". Therefore, the truths of the father and his son are their own respective mothers. Qua *iai*, "a woman who walks the same house path" as her paternal grandmother (...), this form of matrimony replicates itself indefinitely, both in structure and names. Since a man has the same patronymics as his paternal grandfather, men often say, he should wed the very same bride" (p. 106). Ergo, the father's truth is the same as the son's and both as the sons of their respective mothers' whom, thanks to the *iai* marriage, they can copulate with on each other's behalf, and give birth to each other in every alternate generation. To put it differently, my father married his own *iai* (FMBSD) who gave birth to me, i.e., his own father; I can marry my own *iai* (FMBSD) and give birth to him, my son who is my father. The circle is closed. This, I submit, is the pregnant truth of all and every fatherhood and sonship that would generate each other within an affinal economy of the pre-oedipal (ouroboric) matrix (see Mimica, 1991).

The incestuous phantasy and violence that such a “*nomos*” generates among the Iatmul, I suggest, has to be socio-poeticised not through Sophoclean legacy and Western middle-class moral-aesthetic sensibilities, but through the mythopoetic sensibilities of the Iatmul’s very own fluvial-crocodilian imaginary and passions. To draw on Wassmann’s work among the Central Iatmul, his informant evinced no tragic pathos when he recounted how the primal crocodile created the earth – by dismembering human beings whose parts made the earth grow into terra firma: “Our present earth came into being out of the bodies of our ancestors, out of their entrails. It was human beings, our earth did not just come about anyhow” (op. cit. 1991: 85). Furthermore, Iatmul sensibilities and ethos ought to be kept in the appropriate life-world historical horizons. One should recall that the Iatmul were head-hunters. Their “filial discord and patrilineal solidarity” (ibid.: 40), like the existential streaming of their life-and-death flow, have to be valorised in the same mode as the desire for anal parturition, which the old Sophocles himself, I suspect, might have appreciated as something definitely not tragic. In other words, in terms of the overall dynamics of their drive-sublimation and the narcissistic economy of the total self and its social self-actualisation.

But from the point of view of Iatmul women, to be her man’s *iai*, or some other affinal categorical choice,<sup>39</sup> might have been anything but a “social tragedy”. Why? Because Bateson reports that “a woman, married into the village, might for purposes of head hunting be considered a foreigner. I even came across one case in which a man wore a tassel for killing his own wife in revenge for a kill accomplished by members of the village from which she had come” (Bateson, 1956: 139). He also gives a poignant vignette where a young woman was captured and brought to the captor’s village where her fate was to be decided. The captor thought of adopting her and, I assume, later on use her for a marriage transaction. At the man’s house she pleaded: “You are not my enemies; you should pity me; later I will marry in the village”. All the critical connections within the Iatmul social matrix of life-death couldn’t be more pointedly condensed: foreigner woman-adoption-marriage-children. In the face of death the girl cries for her captors’ pity, which alone will yield her her own life, and they will be able to extract more life from her (marriage-children-work). Which loop of the Iatmul life-death topology, which is also the topology of their desires, will actualise her fate? The captor’s son invited her to come with him to “the gardens to get some sugar-cane” (ibid.). Here, is the moment of critical life-death equivocation: is it a sexual innuendo, the prospect of a coital act that will yield her life or death? They went there and upon arrival he killed and decapitated her (ibid.: 138). Bateson reports that a boy who had to clean her skull had problems with a resilient ligament. He didn’t know that the skull must not be at any point touched by the hands. Therefore, he discarded the tongs used for the purpose and “seized the ligament in his teeth and pulled at it. His father saw him and was very shocked”. The boy, who much later as an adult told Bateson about this case, remarked to him on his father’s distress: “The

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**39** Bateson typified these preferential categories as “cliches” (p. 89) which he couldn’t order into a logically coherent whole. The history of arguments concerning the Iatmul “system” of affinal regimes/cliches is well known. As for himself, Silverman declares that “one of his goals (...) is to rephrase this debate in terms of local concepts and experience” (p. 194; on this see my footnote 37, above). Their truth and intelligibility are not to be found in exogenous theoretically motivated kinship analytics or dialogics, for it is not generated by their inner *logos*. And this one is truly the dialectical *logos* of the ouroboric archetypal imagination. One has to take Hegel seriously when he says that the “negative is the soul of the universe”, and every region of its reality has to be understood in terms of its generative “notion” for the patterning of the human life-world is as it is in accordance with its notion. The source and the self-patterning of the “notion” can be most productively elucidated by phenomenologically grounded psychoanalytic explorations of archetypal dimension of the psychic being and its syntheses in and qua understanding.

silly old man! How was I to know?" – an attitude towards taboos which is not uncommon among the Iatmul" (ibid.: 139)

Whatever is specifically problematic in the choice of *iai* wife in the scheme of Iatmul moral-aesthetic sensibilities and valuation of social distress, I have no doubts that, in terms of their self-experience and moral-aesthetic valorisation, there is no "tragedy". This is a vintage Western moral-aesthetic category used as such for that purpose. And it is exactly in terms of that external perception that the Eastern Iatmul men have been endowed with a "tragic" sense of themselves and their life as scripted for them by their ethnographer turned tragedian. On the other hand, when it comes to their authentic self-poeticisation, then the form that one may want to be guided by is the *sagi* song cycles (Wassmann, *ibid*), rather than the "song of the goat" (*tragos-oide*), from which western "tragedy" supposedly derives its name.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, one can think of a "song to the flying fox" or "the crocodile song" mode of connection between erotic desire and its social regulation. Faithful to the Iatmul imaginary, I will call it the saurian mode. Yet, to retain Silverman's western tragic register, the affective-aesthetic effect intended by this authentic fluvial-crocodilian aesthetic-performative form, when applied to Silverman's "filial discord and disturbance of patrilineal solidarity", may be given the following specifications. This alleged "social tragedy", in Iatmul saurian terms will mean that, in the face of all the immanent conflictuality and violence of social life, the head of the Iatmul wife stays intact on her head and, correlatively, that her non-decapitated body germinates many children. As for the head-hunting father and son, the father may well be happy or dead; the discord with his son and disturbances of patrilineal solidarity notwithstanding, in the saurian mode of existence the vilest is the purest and the most reprobate verges on the most virtuous. In the saurian mode opposites easily turn topsy-turvy and transmute into each other; that other Greek knew it all when he said that *logos* (rather than *tragos*) guides everything.<sup>41</sup>

Silverman's data on naven performances among the Tambunum contain novel and remarkable details which supplement those already reported by other ethnographers. In this regard the fascinating tapestry of naven has been enriched, and psychoanalytically, if countertransferentially and uncritically, amplified. Silverman endeavours to show that all the preceding attempts to explain naven are deficient for "the experiential dimensions of the Eastern Iatmul naven are unrelated to the explanations offered by previous analyses, with the excep-

**40** For a critical appraisal of this etymological derivation and the supposed relations of tragedy to sacrificial rituals, see Burkert, 1966. For emphasis on the uniqueness of the classical Greek tragedy as a cultural-moral-aesthetic form which articulates a configuration of the "tragic man" and "tragic consciousness" in the life-world of the Athenian *polis*, see Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990. Devereux, 1970, provides an interesting psychoanalytic interpretation of the isomorphic relation between the structure of the psyche and the structure of tragedy, as formulated in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

**41** Here is appropriate to insert a statement on the crucial significance of ouroboric dynamics as a generic structure which indicates a critical feature of the mythopoetic imagination which constitutes numerous New Guinea life-worlds. This, and many similar mythopoetic images, indicate the operation of an internally oscillating self-closure, and qua it, of self-regeneration, whereby all existential differentiae – life/death, male/female, inside/outside, up/down, incest/affinity – are continuously unified in the imperishable flow of life-death and articulated as such in social practice. I use the mythic image of ouroboros to specify the ontological profile common to myriad social-existential schemata evinced by New Guinea societies (for an example, see Mimica, 1991; 1996). One of their most significant implications is absence of soteriological strivings. I am saying this aware that the anthropological interpretations of Melanesian cargo cults and Christianisation were and are often formulated through a tacit projection of the Judeo-Christian soteriological sense of existence, both in religious and secular-emancipatory variants. The cultures historically dominated by a salvational orientation towards existence, especially of the Judeo-Christian genealogy, internally exclude or, better, repress the ouroboric dimension of being, because such exclusion is the critical condition of the soteriological project itself. It is such diverse internal modifications of the core narcissistic dimension of the self, relative to the problematization of the experience of existence, that animate the constitution of human cultures as specific modes of being-in-the-world, or differently put, as ontological projects.

tion of Juillerat (ref.)” (p. 140). Indeed, the latter’s psychoanalytic exploration of naven greatly facilitates Silverman’s exegesis. But, as I endeavoured to show, the account is bedevilled by the overwhelming framework of the exogenous psycho-Bakhtinian and dramatic-tragic scripting which overrides the Tambunum’s own self-understanding in terms of their own intra-cultural, saurian imaginary, its schematism, categories and valorisations.

Accordingly, the inner logos of the Iatmul life-world, whose *telos* and auto-generative negativity are given a particularly potent and high-pitched expression in the naven ceremonialism, are at once distorted and sanitised. And a tragic physiognomy is conferred upon it in toto, including the *nggariik* anal act. “One would be hard pressed to imagine a more tragic oedipal, ritual. Any misgivings about this interpretation are laid to rest when one considers, yet again, the emotional response by the two central thespians in this tragedy, uncle and nephew, tears of shame” (ibid.: 173). I would suggest that any saurian man may have misgivings about this scripting. If one would look for the most apposite gloss that would immediately make sense to him, then I submit, *nggariik* is more accurately characterisable as a “sorry-arse” rather than a “tragic” act. As for some of the other characterisations that Silverman gives it, especially the idea that “[n]ggariik is a male sacrifice of masculinity” (p. 167), I concur, but I think that he misinterprets its determination in the overall dynamics of negativity and the narcissistic economy of the fluvial-saurian self (see the next section).

What is an exquisite and original ouroboric determination is reduced to Bakhtinian-Rabelaisian refrains and echoes, such as: “By turning the world upside down and inside out, the carnivalesque imagery of naven combines idioms of death and birth, atrophy and rejuvenation, defecation and copulation, desiccation and nurture. Mud smearing and betel nut expulsion evoke both the polluting and generative capacities of the “lower bodily stratum”. The ambiguity of these gestures is enhanced by the expectation that persons who are degraded during naven will pay the perpetrators since, as Bakhtin (ref.) wrote (etc)” (p. 152). And in the tragic register “... from a dialogical and psychoanalytic perspective, naven is revealed for what it really is: a ritual that plays on desire and teases taboo in order to effect emotional and semiotic ambivalence rather than a sociological moral rejuvenation. Naven indeed resembles classic tragedy. It confronts the hidden, repressed yearnings of men and women, and enters these unstated thoughts into wider, ongoing dialogue. Naven, to conclude, enshrines the pathos of culture and rehearses the eternally unresolvable dimensions of masculinity, motherhood, and human experience” (p. 173).

Silverman disregards the internal connection between the catharsis and the “classical tragedy”, but I will not belabour this mis-scripting of the Iatmul life-world in terms of the “goat-song” rather than the authentic saurian mode. What is symptomatic here is that, to the extent that he refers to the “hidden repressed yearnings of *men and women*”, this pertaining to a more general situation, in the next sentence women are left out. Indeed, it is the “hidden yearnings” of the Iatmul women that he not only doesn’t consider, but in his account, as I have emphasised, everything is pitched so as to suggest that Iatmul women have nothing other than a self-fulfilling “aquatic self-referentiality”. And if so, it would follow that this feminine self-satisfaction would be unproblematic and totally unentailed by and unrelated to the “tragedy” of the Iatmul men. But it is here, in this occluded narcissistic core where the self wants to have and be all, without any otherness, not even mirror-otherness, that one has to speculate about the source of the Eastern Iatmul self-negativity, which men live to the full as the very reality and truth of their fluvial-saurian maternal being.<sup>42</sup>

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## THE NEGATIVE OF THE NEGATIVE

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It would appear that the narcissistic dynamics of the Eastern Iatmul masculinity is a masterpiece of malignant negativity. The merit of Silverman's ethnography is to bring this dimension into a high-pitched perspective. No matter how much they ascend in their solar self-exaltation, much in their cultural reality, including their ritual modes of self-articulation, seems to work to negate them. And therefore, the solar luminosity transubstantiates into the burning acid of anal exuvia, which corrodes self-esteem but never so conclusively that men's egoity would disintegrate once and for all. If anything, Iatmul male egoity, as Silverman's data indicate, comes out of their own, self-generated experiences and actions, only too willing to be committed to themselves as "sorry-arse" men; and I would say – rather self-accepting and self-satisfied, for they, evidently, do not suicide or grovel in acid depressions, which one might expect them to do as Silverman's psycho-Bakhtinianism, even without its rhetorical weight and tragic scripting, would tend to suggest. There is here a real problem of the actual contents of the Iatmul's men's and women's self-experience. If the men are at the mercy of a lethal narcissistic negativity, to which their women are seemingly impervious, then such female omni/m/potence itself would be precariously balanced over the abyss created by its own negativity. Such intense negativity would simply have to be consummated in and qua the figure which monopolises its *omni*-(m/potent) aspect – the mother. One form this would take is, of course, matricide.<sup>43</sup>

Yet in this regard the Iatmul fluvial-maternal un/conscious of both sexes is optimally self-saturated with its own *omni*/m/potence, and can equilibrate in perpetuity. A graphic expression of such a self-destructive equilibrium would be a perverse sexual self-aesthetisation of a transsexual or transvestic male whose crown-piece theatrics would be, say, self-decapitation tricks involving a real guillotine, or some other comparable, not "grotesque" but, to put it in the dog-Latin, *actus purus macabrus*. In a life-world like the Iatmul, where the human spirit, actualised as spermatic crocodile spirits and phallic flatulent androgynous wind that inspirates the formless water, of necessity, generates its own sound reality orientation, rather than a delusory self-aesthetisation, for it has to create its own life-world in its own image. Accordingly, the solutions are far more profound, spectacular, and cosmically violent. Since the radically negatively determined narcissism, (and this can only be generated at the level of the pre-oedipal maternal (ouroboric) self-circuitry), can only be realised in matricide (not patricide), what would be the cultural form in which the self-sacrificially purest act could be actualised? I suggest that *nggariik* is one. In it, the narcissistic self-ideality is at once cut into and regained. The phallic womb is slit open and stitched up. Correlatively, women's factual child bearing is its foremost somatic truth and experience.

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<sup>42</sup> Despite the tradition of tragedy in the metapsychology of classical psychoanalysis, Kohut, a leading interpreter of narcissistic dynamics, still thinks that the classical theoretical framework (of conflicts in the sphere of drives) can deal with what he calls the "Guilty Man", but not the "Tragic Man", which is the sphere of his "self-psychology" (Kohut, 1977). Here I will just notice the limitations of such a psycho-ontological typification in view of ethnographic considerations, which, however, does not prevent the use of Kohut's important work. For statements concerning the problematics of the choice of psychoanalytic metapsychologies in relation to the dynamics of ouroboric modes of existence and the constitution of the human self, see Mimica, 1996a; also 1993; 1997; and the coda below.

<sup>43</sup> Life-and-death instinctual drives being undifferentiated, matricidal desire is conterminous with maternal incest. This is the core constellation of the pre-oedipal matrix, not patricide.

However, I am also inclined to speculate that this core-desire of saurian omni/m/potence was further sublimated into and nourished by a substitutive action, namely headhunting. Real heads were severed and real men and women were lethally negated in their omni/m/potence. Silverman's psycho-Bakhtinian analysis of this practice sees in it fundamentally what it put into it, "a mimetic dramatization of female reproduction" (p. 117) and "a grotesque transformation of moral motherhood" (p. 118). But I think that the Iatmul fluvial-saurian un/conscious knows a lot better and gets exactly from headhunting what it desires. Accordingly, it would never be satisfied with a mere imitation. Hence in the pre-colonial times of the self-efflorescence of the Iatmul fluvial-saurian life-world, factually real human skulls were clay-modelled into a semblance of the human flesh made art by real dead-dirty-deeds.<sup>44</sup> That's why that Iatmul mother who admonishes her little son as a "bad little sperm" can do so playfully and harmlessly attuned to her cosmic (un/conscious) negativity one of whose concrete modes is murderousness. Traditionally her son would make sure that she indeed gets away with the murder of both herself and her own son, whom she omni-protectively negates in the ceaseless circuitry of her and his omni/m/potent self-affirmative negativity. Both are the truth of their own initial self-positioning: "my mother, therefore I am".<sup>45</sup>

There is no doubt in my mind that the Iatmul men always were and still are indeed the authentic sons of their mothers. Just as the saurian men, without whose phallic desire and labour there would be no cosmos and no actual work of Iatmul men and women (i.e., the Iatmul imaginary actualised as their cultural life-world), the omni/m/potent fluvial a-substantiality of the Iatmul women (whose self-totalising mono-polar voice is Silverman's psycho-Bakhtinian scripting), would at best remain the dissipating mud of its own otherness. And in effect, no real Iatmul men and women would have ever ascended to their humanness and made a spectacle of themselves. The balanced measure of negation transforms the infinite, world-generative intensity of the Iatmul un/conscious into its self-sustainable human semblance of transpersonal omni/m/potence. And I think that the Iatmul men, not as "tragic" singers of "goat-odes" but as, indeed, "sorry-arse" saurian men who once were warrior-headhunters, are the true image, nay - being, of their mothers' desires to become truly actualised in-and-for-themselves. Naven, then, is the actualisation and fulfilment of their mutual and constitutive pre-oedipal, anally calibrated symbiotic self-generativity, which is self-devouring and, in each infinitesimal moment of its anabolic-catabolic pulsation and self-negation, self-exfoliating - ad infinitum. To echo Wordsworth in reverse,<sup>46</sup> the travails of the fluvial-saurian son are the true spermatic motherhood of his mother's own maternal "therefore, I am", and through the *iai* marriage, the spermatic manhood of his father. Such might be, as a first approximation, the ouroboric differential equation of Iatmul masculine selfhood in the self-refractions and self-circuitous self-appropriation and generation of its maleness and femaleness.

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<sup>44</sup> The saurian man was also the master of the "sublime". Bateson's plate (25, reproduced here on the following page) of a female skull portrait is a striking example of this saurian self-expression of art-become-flesh. "Sublime" is in pips precisely because all characterisations and categorical determinants of Iatmul "aesthetics" and sensibilities would have to be worked out from within their own experiential field and life-world. The main focus would have to be on the constitution of Iatmul sensuousness in the dynamics of the life-death instinctual drive-matrix and the modulations of their erotogeneity.

<sup>45</sup> "... the Eastern Iatmul mother virtuously promotes in her children personality traits that ensure their adult successes. In so doing, however, she must to some degree contravene the ideal moral image of motherhood as seen through the nostalgic lens of manhood. Mothers, it may be said, make strong warriors by tolerating and even encouraging childhood tantrums" (p. 98).

<sup>46</sup> "The child is father of the man; and I could wish my days to be bound each to each by natural piety".



"The portrait skull of a woman. She was a native of Kankanamun who died some three generations ago. Her skull was cleaned, exhibited at mortuary ceremonies, and finally buried as is customary. But as she was considered to be strikingly beautiful, the men later dug up her portrait (and probably substituted another skull in the grave). Since then her skull has been used in *mbwatnggowi* ceremonies. Her long nose was especially admired. In the photograph, the breast is a half coconut shell." (Quoted and reproduced from Gregory Bateson, 1980 (1936), *Naven*. London: Wildwood House, p. 339, plate xxv).

And the daughter? I am tempted to say that in the saurian depths of the Iatmul un/conscious, her desire is even more original than the Egyptian Hathor's, who was the "mother of her father" and "the daughter of her son" (Budge, 1904: 431). An authentic psychoanalytic-ethnographic engagement may well show that the Iatmul daughter is her father's true child, his self-conceiving and conceived femininity.

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## **CODA**

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A final reflection on Silverman's ethnographic and interpretive synthesis of Tambunum realities is in order. Psychoanalysis is as old as the last century and so virtually is its pursuit in anthropology. The fundamental entailments of psychoanalytic ethnography and the rigours it demands were explicated long time ago by Devereux (1967), but primordially they were set forth by that great pythian dictum - "know thyself". It applies to the pursuit of the ethnographic project regardless of one's acceptance or rejection of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic interpretations are always in need of a more thorough grounding in a particular field of personal and transpersonal subjectivity. The problem is with the choice of a psychoanalytic framework of understanding, with the depth of the ethnographer's own psychoanalytic self-reflection, and correlatively with his/her ability and will to project him/herself imaginatively into the life-world of a given people who, most importantly, are neither good citizens nor citizen-subjects. The tacit and diverse ontologies of the Melanesian subject and sociality demand that the ethnographer reflects critically on the cultural ontology of the human subject embedded in all psychoanalytic metapsychologies. Such a precaution will not only enhance the hermeneutic potential of psychoanalytic theories (Freudian, Kleinian, Bionian, Ego-psychology, Lacanian, Kohut's self-psychology, Jungian, etc) but will also facilitate the construction of a culturally more adequate representation of any New Guinean subject and his/her society. This in turn will also appropriately modify the metapsychological scheme of understanding. The need for this kind of culturally specific hermeneutic grounding of psychoanalysis becomes evident when one tries to grasp the cultural logics of incest and their articulations in different New Guinea cultures. One deals here with different intra-cultural constitutions and problematizations of "family complexes" or, better, societal complexes and the bisexual matrix of the human psychic being. From this follow all other ontological differences between the subject as constructed by psychoanalytic metapsychologies, shaped by their concrete Western social-cultural conditions of existence, and a particular constellation of New Guinea subjectivity and its cultural life-world.

Crucial to the integrity of ethnographic project, with or without psychoanalysis, is the construction and practice of anthropological understanding. This is the medium of increasingly conceptually deficient but conceited discourses spun by the professional fraternities-sororities who inhabit Western metropolitan academic institutions. In regard to this terminal station, one has to be aware that these discourses themselves are the products of the Western civic un/conscious and its culturally and historically specific modes of objectifications, in the form of "critical" knowledge and moral-aesthetic styles of self-presentation. What starts off as a local field-work situation determined, in the present instance, by its Sepikian existential milieu and un/conscious matrix, becomes refracted and metabolised in a psychic medium and sphere of critical-theoretical understanding which caters for, is driven and determined by, egoties external to the Iatmul originary fluvial-crocodilian cosmos - *which is also their transpersonal, cultural-historical objectified psyche.*

The accomplishments of ethnography as an epistemic project always balance precariously on the relations between some such two (or more) life-worlds, coalescing in the egoity and the un/conscious, at once personal and transpersonal, of the ethnographer. In this perspective, Silverman's ethnographic scales tilt heavily on the side of his American academic sphere of self-synthesis qua understanding, rather than on the Tambunum Iatmul side.

Now to achieve the latter doesn't mean that he would have to become one of them or to abandon the perspective of a critical-theoretical self-un/consciousness. Rather, it is a matter of a self-critical and self-reflective exercise for which the basic tenets of classical ethnography and psychoanalysis are more than enough to serve the purpose of methodical guidance; no need for any hyper-reflexive bravados in vogue since the inception of post-modern anthropological styles of self-presentation. Every productive ethnographic interpretive process critically hinges on the psychoanalytical self-regard of the interpreter him/herself (Devereux, 1967; Mimica, 2001) and is not carried out for the sake of the reproduction of a conceptual framework, which quickly calcifies into a formulaic application exercise, determined by his/her own situation, external to the life-world under scrutiny. The second order formulaic amplifications are at best that – auxiliary amplifications. They cannot carry the crucial work of self-critical analysis, being a work in the service of the elucidation of an alien cultural life-world in its own terms.

Echoing the dramaturgical perspective, for an ethnographer, the perennial task is to seek the truth of his/her characters in the facticity of their own self-creation and self-interpretation. In this regard, they have to be bespoken, refracted and re-synthesised from inside themselves, in their own terms. The ethnographer is the medium of *their* maximally actualised self-semblance. Neither the ethnographer-dramatist, nor the characters themselves, may like the emergent self-semblance. But then who is it that is ready to claim as their own the whole of their own self, sired by critical self-knowledge, rather than glimpsed in the twinkle of maternal eyes that intimate the promise of infinite bliss and perfection, but at the price of narcissistic misrecognition and self-ignorance? Psychoanalytic ethnographers, I expect.

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## **POVZETEK**

Članek predstavlja kritično in konstruktivno diskusijo o zadnji etnografski monografiji, ki govori o Iatmulih iz province Vzhodni Sepik na Papui Novi Gvineji. Njihov etnograf Eric Silverman je tamkajšnje ljudi in njihov življenjski svet interpretiral skozi konceptualni okvir, ki združuje psihoanalizo in Bahtinov dialogizem. V pričujočem članku Mimica razkrije različne pomanjkljivosti tega interpretativnega okvirja, ki je sicer v svoji celovitosti popolnoma v skladu z glavnimi akademskimi antropološkimi diskurzi. Ker je interes Jadrana Mimice povezan predvsem s psihoanalitično etnografijo ter specifičnostmi iatmulske biti-v-svetu, se v svojem prispevku prizade-

va oceniti Silvermanove interpretativne konstrukcije na tak način, da bi bila originalnost eksistence teh ljudi prikazana znotraj bolj pravilne kozmo-ontološke perspektive, ki bi bila karseda natančno uglasena z notranjo dialektiko iatmulskega življenjskega sveta. Istočasno poskuša razviti bolj realistično in radikalno perspektivo o praksi psihoanalitične etnografije.

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## MAKING INTEREST IN THE PACIFIC

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Exchange is characteristic of the Pacific region as well as of the American northwest Pacific coast. Prestations of wealth were essential in marriage and mortuary rituals, in the assumption of titles and access to graded societies, in fines and compensations or in payments for pigs or for the construction of houses or canoes. In some instances prestations had developed into regional ceremonial exchange institutions such as the famous kula of the Massim at the east end of New Guinea. In most societies these exchange institutions still flourish in changed form, often incorporating modern money and trade goods. Many societies possessed (and many still possess) various forms of indigenous currencies, formerly called "primitive money", of shell, fibers or other materials. They are often ranked valuables of several degrees of value from named and sacred heirlooms of noble houses down to common and mundane pieces that may enter into commodity trade. In some areas of more developed trade indigenous currencies may be more cash-like and used in uniform units such as fathoms of shell beads. Prestations often demand considerable amounts of currency and, where valuables are ranked, one or more items of high rank are often obligatory for specific purposes. The preparation of a prestation therefore involves the sponsor in preliminary fund-raising and the elicitation of scarce currency pieces from other parties. A good deal of borrowing and lending thus takes place and early observers often reported that in these societies "everybody was continually in debt". In these systems of indigenous finance a number of customary procedures for borrowing, repaying and sometimes exchanging currency were developed. They varied of course from place to place, but some of them are surprisingly similar and widespread.

Early ethnographers (many of whom were not professional anthropologists) often failed to understand indigenous exchange institutions. A specific body of anthropological theory of exchange did only gradually develop from the 1920s with Malinowski's analysis of the kula (1922) and Mauss' essay on *The Gift* (1924). Without access to this alternative approach to exchange western visitors or residents would approach indigenous exchange and financial dealings from the perspective of their own capitalist culture. One must also consider the setting in which observation and inquiry of native customs took place. This was the contact zone between white colonial enterprise and the indigenous community. Apart from missions, this was especially the plantation and the trading station. The vocabulary of communication between Europeans and indigenes was developed and shaped in interaction between profit-seeking foreigners and wealth-manipulating locals. Traders often enough dealt in the manufacture and trade of indigenous currencies and sometimes they were forced to employ them to attract indigenous clients (on the Massim see Liep 1999). On their side the natives were often keen traders and much preoccupied with accumulating and circulating wealth, in some

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places to the point of avarice. It is no wonder that traders would perceive the motives and strategies of natives as similar to their own profit-seeking aims. This was the scene early ethnographers entered and where they received their first briefings on the indigenous way of life. Accordingly they described indigenous “bankers”, “capitalists” or “brokers”. They were not aware of the pre-capitalist nature of these societies and how their exchanges were conducted in social universes of personal relationships where transactions were inflected by relations of kinship, seniority, rank or power.

One feature connected to indigenous exchanges that were repeatedly reported was the regular lending of indigenous money at often-extortionate interest. In this paper I reanalyse a number of classic cases of so-called payments of interest. They have been included in Einzig’s standard treatise *Primitive Money* (1966) and some of them still reappear, for example in a recent economic monograph on interest (Homer & Sylla 1991) Here I show how it is in fact possible to demonstrate how indigenous financial procedures in some, but not all, of these cases were confounded with interest. In this connection I also briefly touch on other financial procedures such as pledge, security and replacement, which sometimes also have puzzled ethnographers. Finally, I suggest that the phenomena I discuss may be better understood if seen in the light of further senses of the term “interest” than the narrow economic one of “money paid for the use of money lent” (OED 1989).

My rethinking of the subject arose from studying the exchange of shell money on Rossel Island in Papua New Guinea, where W. E. Armstrong had asserted that compound interest played an integral role (Armstrong 1924; 1928).<sup>1</sup> Comparative studies of other reported cases of “primitive interest” have expanded my critical understanding. A few years ago I had an opportunity to visit briefly another classic site of “interest taking” (Kubary 1895) in the Republic of Palau in Micronesia. This paper reports the results of my inquiry there.

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## FINANCIAL PROCEDURES ON ROSSEL ISLAND

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On Rossel Island in the Massim east of New Guinea I discovered a number of basic procedures of exchange in connection with financial arrangements (Liep 1983). They concern the elicitation of high-ranking valuables, their mobilization in the collection of prestations and their subsequent return and substitution or replacement by other valuables. There are two kinds of shell money, the *ndap* and the *kê*, each of which are ranked in some twenty classes. They enter into prestations concerned with bridewealth, mortuary rituals, pig feasts and payments for houses and canoes. High-ranking shell monies are often returned to their owners and substituted by lower-ranking ones. The procedures that I describe have to do with these processes.

1. Deposit (*ngm:aa*). What I call deposit is the presentation of a low-ranking shell in order to solicit a loan or contribution of a higher-ranking one. It is a frequent feature of the fund-raising preceding prestations of shell-money. From the perspective of the giver the deposit-shell is a solicitary gift that prompts the recipient to let his shell participate in a prestation. From the perspective of the recipient the low-rank shell is a

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<sup>1</sup> I have spent altogether 25 months on Rossel Island during four periods from 1971 to 1990. I visited Palau in February-March 1999.

pledge that he may later present to claim his high-ranking shell back. The same procedure is often repeated among a chain of participants. This produces a stepwise mobilization of shells in the way that a shell released through deposit itself becomes the deposit with another man for a still higher-ranking shell, and so on. This feature of enchainment and escalating loans as a method in fund-raising appears elsewhere, as we shall see. The deposit-shell is only transferred if the parties have agreed on the transaction. This depends on the relationship of the parties. A contributor may be in debt to his counterpart from an earlier occasion. He may also be a dependant of him and subject to pressure. Some people are more skilled than others in persuading them to risk their shells in exchange. It is notable that the Rossel islanders have incorporated modern money into pig feasting. Here, the transfer of a one or two kina note (the currency of the modern state of Papua New Guinea) elicits the contribution of double the amount. This "double return" is, as I shall show, a frequent feature of exchange elsewhere.

2. Security (*tiindap*). An alternative way of eliciting a shell is by giving security. This takes place if the owner is not directly involved in a prestation, but only releases his shell as a loan. Here, a high-ranking *ndap* is borrowed on the security of either another *ndap* of still higher rank or of two *ndap* of lower rank that together make up approximately the value of the high-ranking one. In the case of *kê* the security is usually a lower-ranking *kê* plus a ceremonial stone axe or a shell necklace. When the high-ranking shell is given back the security is likewise returned.
3. Substitution (*kââpe*). This procedure is well developed on Rossel as a consequence of the inalienability of high-ranking shells. These valuable shells participate only formally in prestations and then return to their owners again. When such a shell has been involved in a prestation and is withdrawn it is substituted by a lower-ranking shell which is (in the case of *ndap*) called its "part-picture". The recipient thus has to acquiesce in giving up a higher-ranking shell for a lower-ranking one. Thus lower-ranking shells function as representations of higher-ranking ones and may substitute for them. The regular feature of substitution seems unique for Rossel, but a related form where a lower-ranking piece is returned as a consolation after the prestation of a higher-ranking piece is found in Palau. The lower-ranking piece is here called the "body" of the big one (Parmentier 1987: 84-85; 2002; Wilson 1995: 129).
4. Replacement (*ntóóndap/ntóókê*). This is a way of annulling a debt by replacing a high-ranking shell by a number of low-ranking ones that together make up for the alienation of the shell. It is not informal exchange or the sale of a shell because it is a ceremonial payment, which as usual consists of a ranked collection of shells. A similar procedure is found in Palau (Kubary 1895; Parmentier 2002).

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## THE MISINTERPRETATION OF ROSSEL EXCHANGE

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W.E. Armstrong, a Cambridge anthropologist who was a student of Haddon and Rivers, did two months of fieldwork on Rossel in 1921. He became interested in the shell money and devoted two chapters of his monograph to them (Armstrong 1928, ch. 5 & 6). Although he noted that "[p]ayments of money are, perhaps, the most important constituents of marriage rites, mortuary rites, and many other ceremonial activities" (1928: 59) he approached the shell money from the perspective of market capitalism and regarded the money as a medium of

commodity exchange: “[the monies] are used primarily as media of exchange and standards of value ... and any commodity or service may be more or less directly priced in terms of them” (ibid.). Believing Rossel to be a commercial society of “primitive capitalism” Armstrong was led into interpreting procedures of Rossel exchange as forms of interest-taking.

When he discovered the procedure of deposit (*ngm:aa*) he understood it as an interest-bearing loan: “There is a term *ma* ... and the natives clearly recognize the principle that a given value may be acquired by lending its *ma* for a short period of time” (ibid.: 65). It was probably when his informants tried to explain about the stepwise elicitation of contributions among a chain of participants that he formed the opinion that the loan of a “coin” would, through the progression of time, require the repayment of ascending “values” of shell money. He accordingly made compound interest the linchpin of his interpretation. The procedure of replacement he mistook for an alternative form of interest payment on high-ranking shells (ibid.: 66-67, 71-74). Armstrong understood the procedure of security well enough (ibid.: 67-68), but failed to discover the procedure of substitution. I have discussed Armstrong’s misinterpretations at greater length elsewhere (Liep 1983; 1995).

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## THE FALLACY OF “PRIMITIVE INTEREST”

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Behind Armstrong’s erroneous description of interest-taking a different institution was thus hidden. This was the feature of solicited fund-raising, the calling in of contributions by means of a solicitary presentation. What I call the deposit is a signal that, if accepted, obliges the recipient to assist the sender by contributing a higher-ranking valuable at his future prestation. One could say that communications about exchange are conveyed in the same concrete medium as exchange itself. (The deposit is here also becoming a tangible proof of a debt and a means of substantiating a claim to repayment.) The discovery of Armstrong’s error has caused me to read some classic accounts of systems of ranked exchange with a critical eye. It has turned out that one after another report of interest-taking is based upon erroneous assumptions, and all points in the direction that what really was taking place were procedures of “solicited fund-raising”.

### Boas on the Kwakiutl potlatch

At a time when the lavish potlatch feast of the Indian tribes of the American northwest coast was under attack by missionaries and government agents as a wasteful squandering of wealth, Franz Boas attempted to make the institution acceptable to a white public by describing it in familiar terms. “[The potlatch] has been described often, but it has been thoroughly misunderstood by most observers. The underlying principle is that of interest-bearing investment of property” (1897: 341). But Boas could hardly have been more mistaken. The reanalysis of Drucker and Heizer (1967) makes this clear, although they also use the language of interest. However, they show that Boas mixed up the transactions leading up to a potlatch with the prestations at the potlatch itself and the repercussions they had in subsequent potlatches. They note that “... there was a type of loan - made ordinarily in blankets, later in money [...] - that required a double return, that is 100 percent interest, but that such loans were quite apart from potlatch gifts” (ibid.: 55). Both Boas and Codere believed that potlatch gifts themselves had to be repaid by the recipient when he himself made a future potlatch at 100 percent interest (Boas 1897, Codere 1950: 68-74). This would result in a pyramiding of debts, as

Drucker and Heizer point out, but their research shows that the “double return” was a feature of loans preliminary to a potlatch and not of the gifts at the potlatch itself (1967: 55). They aptly use the term “pump-priming device” for these loans and stress that the lender had the right “to call in his loans” only when about to give a potlatch (ibid.: 58). I therefore regard these “loans” as rather gifts of request to supporters of a man preparing for a potlatch – exactly as the sponsor of a pig payment on Rossel will distribute kina notes to his associates and they will bring double the amount as their contribution to his payment at the feast.

### Codrington and Rivers on Banks Island finance

Strings of shell money in the Banks Islands of eastern Melanesia (now in Vanuatu) were used to enter stages of the graded Tamate and Sukwe societies. Codrington reported that wealth is accumulated through money-lending and that “[t]he rate of interest is cent. per cent. without regard to time” (Codrington 1891: 326). However he also noted the following: “A debt is not only contracted by borrowing, but a rich man upon occasion imposes a loan, which his friend for his own credit is bound to accept, and to discharge with a double return” (ibid.). Further, he tells that

[w]hen a man borrows, say ten strings of money, from another, he will make the creditor his debtor also, by lending him say four strings of his own money; this smaller loan is called a *tano ravrav*, a drawing-place, and to make it is said to put down rollers in the way as if to draw up a canoe, *lango goro*, because it is thought to make the transaction more easy for the borrower, who becomes the creditor of his creditor, and cannot so well be dunned by him (ibid.: 327).

Rivers described how on the island of Mota a man who was to accumulate an amount of shell money strings for initiation into a certain rank of the Sukwe

... would put into action a special procedure. If he already possessed ten fathoms [of shell money] he would give this to ten of his friends, a fathom to each. After some months he would go to them and ask for his money back and each man would give two fathoms, thus returning what had been given with cent per cent interest (Rivers 1914: 64).

This could be repeated by giving this money to other persons who would again double up the amount. Again we find the strategy of escalating lending in fund-raising.<sup>2</sup> Rivers used the expression “forced loans” about this procedure (ibid.: 122). Divested of their clothing of financial terminology these statements obviously refer to contributions prompted by gifts of request that if made by powerful men could hardly be avoided. It is striking that low-value shell money on Rossel may be called “pulling” *ndap* (or *kê*) and the metaphor of shells acting as “rollers” to facilitate the release of high-ranking shell money is also known there (Berde 1973).

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<sup>2</sup> As a Cambridge student Armstrong was of course familiar with Rivers’ *The History of Melanesian Society*. It is likely that Rivers’ description of interest bearing loans in the Banks Islands influenced Armstrong’s interpretation of loans on Rossel.

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### Cloth loans in the Bird's Head

The region in the interior of the Bird's Head peninsula of Irian Jaya was for hundreds of years a periphery to the trading system of the Moluccas. Aromatic *massoi* bark, birds of paradise and slaves were traded to coastal agents mainly for Indonesian cloth. In the interior in the area around Lake Ayamaru there developed a complex system of cloth wealth (*kain timur*) which spread to other areas. In the central area there was an elaborate classification of cloths and a division between sacred cloths (*kain pusaka*), which were inalienable heirlooms, and secular "wandering cloths" (*kain jalan*). The latter moved in exchange between wife-takers and wife-givers and were also paid in fines and in compensations for the taking of lives. There was an elaborate feast-cycle associated with initiation, the life cycle and mortuary rites. This was transformed by an upcoming class of rich big men or *bobots* ("cloth-grabbers") into a prestige-building series of potlatches. Wife-givers were superior to wife-takers and a husband was continually indebted to his wife's relatives. Barnett described

... the wife's relatives privilege of making loans to the husband's relatives, loans which had to be repaid on call and with an increment. In order to meet these demands the husband loaned what he received to others, expecting them to return more than they received (Barnett 1959: 1014).

Kamma regarded the system as "a remarkable case of spontaneous capitalism" (Kamma 1970: 141). In his report we again meet the feature of the double return. He describes "... the custom that came to be called Laying the foundation of the carrying basket. One begins by lending a number of cloths, which have to be repaid with 100% interest. No one will refuse such a loan, for reasons of social prestige" (ibid.: 138). Elmberg reports how cloths were lent as a kind of challenge to people as *po feják* ("out-going-cloth") which they would return a few days after as *po sipak* ("in-coming-cloth"). This consisted of the same amount plus one or two pieces of cloth as *amot*. Like on Rossel or in the Banks Islands this procedure could be repeated two or three times by using the *po sipak* in further loans and multiplying the number of cloths (1965: 83; 1968: 175-76). Elmberg translates *amot* as "interest" but his word list gives also the meaning "gift, present" (1968:286).

Thus again we see that what was understood as an element of interest-bearing loans in the financial system of a "primitive capitalism" in reality was the manipulation of social debts in a framework of personal dependencies and power inequalities.

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### A LIMITING CASE: BEAD MONEY EXCHANGE IN PALAU

The western Micronesian islands of Palau had a hierarchical social organization with chiefs and ranked "houses" of nobles and commoners. Today, this is transforming into a class society where high-ranking descent is one avenue to political influence and control of wealth, but where enterprising commoners who have become wealthy through business or politics also compete for power and prestige. The indigenous system of currency was central in the traditional social system and these valuables still play a significant role in the modernized system of ceremonial exchanges.

The currency consists of antique glass beads of various shapes and appearance. Some are crescentic sections of bracelets. Similar beads and bracelets have been found in

Chinese burials in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines dated from 500 BC to 500 AD according to Thijssen-Etison (1997: 38).<sup>3</sup> The beads were imported into Palau from the Philippines and/or eastern Indonesia at an unknown period, but must have been in the islands for many hundreds of years. There were traditionally some five main types of beads of which two have disappeared from circulation during this century. It is a highly ranked system of valuables. High-ranking pieces are individually named, are regarded of sacred origin and have histories of ownership and exchange careers. They now move only in very important exchanges between high-ranking families. It is not possible to arrange the types on a single scale according to value as each type contains a range of values and there is overlapping of value range between them (Ritzenthaler 1954: 16-17). Today the currency largely circulates in affinal exchanges (at marriage, first childbirth ceremony and death) and only one or a few high-ranking beads are transferred. Lower-ranking beads have largely been withdrawn from circulation but are still kept in family collections and worn by women at public occasions. They have been substituted in exchanges by large amounts of dollars. Formerly the currency was used in a wider range of exchanges including compensation for homicide, fines, payments for curing and for the building of houses and canoes.

The traditional exchange system of Palau showed remarkable parallels to the one of Rossel Island. For example, payments typically consisted of a ranked sequence of money-ranks corresponding to the differentiation of status of contributors and recipients. The procedures of security and replacement were also present. Kubary, who made the first in-depth study of the currency, attempted to account for it in terms of a modern monetary system (Kubary 1895). He argued that the value ratio of the various categories of the money to one another could be reduced to a common denominator, the value of ten baskets of taro, and he attempted to compute this in terms of dollar values. It is, however, clear that this is an abstract model that presupposes that the value of beads of each category is uniform, which is not the case. The value relationship between categories and rank levels of the system is qualitative, not quantitative. Further, the value of high-ranking pieces depends on their individual exchange histories (Barnett 1949: 44-45, Yanaihara 1940: 95-96, Parmentier 2002).

Kubary also reported that interest was a regular feature of bead loans. He described how to borrow a medium-rank bead one had to give security (*ulsirs*) in the form of a bead of about 2/3 of the value of the one sought, together with another piece of lower value as interest (*ongiakl*). When later one returned a bead of the same value as the one borrowed one would redeem one's security and the lender would keep the interest (1895: 9). This procedure was, according to Kubary standard for loans of medium-ranking beads. There was, however, another procedure, mentioned by Krämer, for loans of high-ranking beads. Here, the security was a still more valuable bead and no interest was paid on such loans (Krämer 1926: 169). Thus there existed in Palau two alternative procedures of eliciting a valuable bead for borrowing; one by offering two pieces which together seemed to make up for the value of the loan, the other by offering a single more valuable piece as security. This was so strikingly similar to Rossel procedures that I, suspicious of all early findings of "interest" as I was, suspected Kubary of having misunderstood the feature of *ongiakl* and having misidentified as interest what was in fact only part of a combined security. Indeed, I thought that he was wrong about the lender keeping the *ongiakl*. Ferreira (1987: 46-48) has also expressed doubt about the

<sup>3</sup> Force, however, associated the crescentic beads with bracelets found in southern Philippine burials together with Asian porcelains from the 12th to the 16th century (Force 1959). The dating of these burials may later have been revised.

institution of interest in Palau exchange, but his discussion is not thorough and although he visited Palau he does not seem to have inquired into the problem.

In 1999 I had occasion to visit Palau and attempted to clear up the question. I discussed the problem with a group of historians and interviewed one of them, a chief born around 1904.<sup>4</sup> My contacts agreed that security (*ulsirs*) was used for loans of high-ranking money. If I owned a high-ranking piece, but for the occasion needed another piece of somewhat lesser rank, I could borrow this and give my high-ranking piece as *ulsirs*. At the return I should give a piece a little bit better than the one I borrowed and would get my big piece back. This feature I would call a “generous return”, or increment, and not “interest”. This is a frequent expectation in connection with loans in many exchange systems and it is also found on Rossel. With regard to *ongiakl* my informants were firm that it was “interest” given to the lender of a money bead and kept by him after the return of the loan. Having borrowed a bead I would return one of equal value to the one borrowed plus another piece (of say half the value of the one borrowed) as *ongiakl*. Sometimes the *ongiakl* was given already at the taking of the loan. If I returned a bead of somewhat better value than the one I borrowed the *ongiakl* would be included in that one and no separate *ongiakl*-piece given. Further, however, they said that *ongiakl* was “optional”, it depended on the arrangement between the parties. I take this to mean that in close relationships of kinship or friendship it could be dispensed with. One informant said that the feature of *ongiakl* was “business”, but another commented that rather than “interest” the *ongiakl* could be seen as a gift of acknowledgement for the favour of having had access to a valuable piece of money.

My conclusion is that Kubary was proven right in terms of who kept the *ongiakl* at the return of a loan but his gloss of “interest” put a more commercial sense on the transaction than maybe was warranted.<sup>5</sup> Further, the feature of “interest” was not standard throughout the system but only for certain types of beads and even for these it was not unconditional, but could be waived in some cases. Nevertheless, the institution of *ongiakl* as a “lending fee” comes closer to interest than any of the procedures I have so far discussed.

### **Other instances of interest**

Parkinson described loans of *tambu* shell money among the Tolai of the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain (1911: 94). Wealthy leaders would lend each other money as a favour without interest, but in all other cases a lender would charge interest. In some cases fifteen lengths of *tambu* would be returned on the loan of ten, in other cases the loan of five lengths would be repaid by six lengths. From the nearby Duke of York Islands Danks wrote, “Money is lent at the uniform rate of ten per cent ... when a person wishes to borrow money he must return eleven fathoms for ten fathoms borrowed” (1988: 308). The same was the case in nearby New Britain. Danks wrote, but here “... the idea in the native mind does not seem to be so much interest, as an expression of thanks for the favour” (*ibid.*: 309). Be this as it may, if interest is

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<sup>4</sup> I am grateful for having been allowed to participate in a meeting of the group of historians at the Historical Preservations Office, Koror, Republic of Palau in February 1999. I especially thank staff historian Florencio Gibbons and chief Ngirarois Cristobal Idir from this group. National archaeologist Rita Olsudong and photographer Simeon Adelbai of the Belau National Museum acted as interpreters and also supplied valuable information.

<sup>5</sup> After more than a hundred years of increasing involvement in the modern monetary commodity economy and heavy American influence after the 2nd World War the thinking of Palauans about their traditional monetary institutions has to some extent also been commercialized. Thus my informants readily glossed *ongiakl* as “interest”.

“money paid for use of money lent” (OED 1989) there seems to be no doubt that in this area interest as we know it had developed as a regular feature of lending. I suppose that other similar instances could be found.

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## CONCLUSION

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I have demonstrated how procedures of exchange in the Pacific and the northwest coast of America have been misinterpreted as forms of interest-taking. This is especially the case with what could be called solicited or requested contributions where a gift elicits a larger counter-gift which, together with others, is used in a prestation. Often a gift of one unit of value elicits a contribution of two units. This is the feature of the “double return” which has regularly been depicted as an usurious interest rate of 100%. On the other hand, not all reported cases of interest were equally misunderstood and I have noted that somewhere the term must be said to have been justly employed.

If one examines the etymology of the term *interest* one will find that in Latin it referred to something that concerned, mattered or was of importance (OED 1989). From there the meaning of the term was later in European history extended into various areas of life. It could refer to a concern or share in something, for example property or a cause, a matter or a person. A meaning that is especially pertinent in the present connection is *interest* used for personal connexion and the power to influence others. Here, “to make interest” meant to bring personal influence to bear (ibid.). In another line of meaning-development interest came to refer to damage or loss and as well the compensation due for it (ibid.). Later the economic meaning of *interest* as a charge for the use of money became acceptable.

In the cases I have discussed observers were often too quick to employ the restricted economic sense of interest regardless of context. Instead one should look at the relationships surrounding the action in each case. We may get a better grasp of the facts if we widen the scope of the term to include a broad semantic field of interest as part of personal relationships. The cases of “double return” through “forced loans” may then be seen as the results of men “making interest” through personal influence, by persuasion or pressure. In other situations an incremental repayment of a loan may be a generous return sustaining an interest in the good relationship between persons. A good man should give more in return. This may consolidate into a general expectation that the service of a loan will be acknowledged by a gift of something extra. Finally, in some cases money transactions may have been so abstracted that a regular charge on borrowing has become the rule. By expanding our notion of the workings of interest in dealings between people we have gained a deeper understanding of these cases of indigenous Pacific finance.

## POVZETEK

Izmenjave so značilne za celotni Pacifik kakor tudi za ameriško severozahodno pacifiško obalo. Darovanje bogastva je bilo temeljnega pomena pri porokah in pogrebnih svečanostih, pri pridobivanju nazivov in dostopa do hierarhičnih skupnosti, pri plačevanju kazni in kompenzacijah, ali pa pri plačilu za prašiče in konstrukciji hiš ter kanujev. V nekaterih primerih so se darovanja razvila v regionalne institucionalizirane svečane izmenjave, kot je na primer znamenita *kula* v področju Massim na vzhodni strani Papue Nove Gvineje. V večini družb tovrstne izmenjave v spremenjeni obliki še vedno obstajajo in neredko vključujejo sodobni denar in trgovinske dobrine.

Mnoge družbe so imele ali še vedno imajo različne oblike domače valute, ki so je nekoč imenovala „primitivni denar“ (školjke, vlakna in drugi materiali). Obstaja hierarhija posameznih predmetov in ljudje so morali razviti izjemno spretnost sposojanja in posojanja, ki je imela za posledico, da je bil vsakdo ves čas nekomu dolžan. Zgodnji etnografi so tovrstno izmenjavo primerjali in razlagali s kapitalistično ekonomijo, ne da bi razumeli njeno naravo in odvisnost od sorodstvenih vezi, starostnega razlikovanja, statusa in moči. Avtor razmišlja, kako so ekonomske študije zgrešile bistvo sposojanja, vračanja in izmenjave ter na podlagi lastnih raziskav na otoku Rossel na Papui Novi Gvineji ter v Republiki Palau v Mikroneziji kritično razmišlja o uporabi koncepta „primitivnih obresti“ pri tovrstnih družbah.

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## BWAIDOGAN MYTHS OF ORIGIN

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*"We only talk a lot. But we are not experienced enough. We don't have enough knowledge. Other people from Goodenough know a lot more than we, Bwaidoga people. This is because of the snake Motabikwa, who took all our wealth away to Rossel Island. But one day it will return and bring back the fortune."*

Field notes, March 1, 2002; quoted by David Lalaoya

Among my first impressions of Goodenough Island<sup>1</sup> were from the air as my plane descended towards Vivigani airstrip. High rugged and forested mountains wreathed in wispy cloud, green grassy patches dappled here and there with sandy brown, coral shelves alternating with mangrove swamps marking the coastline, clumps of coconuts, indicating human settlement. The southeast coast of Goodenough curls like the tail of a snake forming the tranquil little bay on which the hamlets of Bwaidoga are strung like shells. Names of these hamlets are invariably related to the land (*babi*) where the houses and sitting platforms (*tuwaka*) are constructed. The first ancestors usually built these platforms. Such sites are therefore linked to myths of origin and are one of the main determinants of people's perceptions of themselves<sup>2</sup> (Young 1968: 335).

Before introducing my analysis of myths of origin of Bibiavona and Aiwavo clans,<sup>3</sup> I shall refer to Young's (1983a: 11) classification of Goodenough Island oral literature into

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**1** Fieldwork in Bwaidoga village on Goodenough Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea was undertaken as part of the young researcher training from the end of February to the late April, 2002. I thank the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport for financial support. In addition I express my gratitude to Borut Telban and Michael W. Young for their supervision, comments on the text and their overall encouragement. Special gratitude extends to people of Bwaidoga village. Tomokivona family of Nikoko and David of Waikewala deserve special mention for allowing me to enter their village lives, and above all, for their help and care. Finally I thank Laure and Mateja for their assistance in map-making.

**2** The district of Bwaidoga extends for about five kilometres around the indented seashore and ranges up two kilometres inland. It is the most heavily populated area of the island; the district (census unit) is by far the largest, numbering more than 1800 people. The district comprises five villages (*melala*) and the United Church Mission Station. These villages Kabuna, Melala, Ukuna, Auligana and Banada claim common ancestry and share common dialect. In sociological terms each of them comprises a number of named clans (*gabu*) internally divided into sub-clans and patrilineages (*unuma*). In terms of settlement, however, each village is composed of number of hamlets (*melala kabisona*) that are characterised by one or more stone or coral sitting platforms called *tuwaka*. These are individually associated with the ancestors of the *unuma* that claim ownership of the hamlet. Accordingly, an *unuma* (such as Bibiavona into which I was adopted in Nikoko hamlet) tends to be localised, whereas a clan (such as Mikwanabuina of which Bibiavona is a part) tends to be dispersed. Both clans and *unuma* are exogamous. Ideally the rule of residence throughout Goodenough is patrilineal, which means that women join their husbands after marriage, while men remain in their father's hamlet. Hamlets are physical spaces that have mythico-historical significance for their residents. The names of founding ancestors associated with the *tuwaka* are less well remembered today. Their symbolic function has weakened since they have begun to be used as the sites of village courts (Young 1968; 1989).

**3** Throughout this paper I refer to Bibiavona and Aiwavo as "clans" because this is how their members talk about them in English. Young refers to them as *unuma* in his census books. Technically speaking, *unuma* are sub-clans or lineages that acknowledge membership of larger, more dispersed named groups that Young calls clans.

four categories or types: *kweli* ("spells, songs and chants"), *laumamala* ("orations, sermons, and other rhetorical public speeches"), *ifufu* ("stories of any kind") and *neineya* ("heritable, owned, magic-bearing myths which tell of the exploits of ancestors, heroes, demigods or dema"). In his monograph on Kalauna mythology, Young focused on *neineya*. These important myths are imbued with ancestral forces and provide "narrative vehicles for systems of magic" (*ibid.*: 12). *Neineya* are secret in their nature, and are witness to people's historical movements and therefore pertain to landscape. Myths are narrated with discretion as to time and place and in theory they are told only to a restricted audience – those who have the right to hear them as genealogical related "owners".

During my relatively short stay in Bwaidoga the meanings and secrets of *neineya* were not wholly revealed to me. When referring to important myths my informants used the more general term *ifufu*. Since there is a distinction between stories that are owned by clans and those that are not, I will use the term myths for the stories of origin that are owned by people.

Bwaidogan myths are not simply linear narratives containing conclusion that are often moral in character. They are lived and embodied in people's thinking and practices and are therefore linked to the ancestral customs (*dewa*), genealogical histories and daily life (as, for example, the myth about the serpent Motabikwa mentioned in the epigraph of this paper).

The story about Motabikwa (alias Matabawe or Motalai), the half-human snake who resentfully leaves the island taking with it all the wealth, is one of the most widespread myths – not only on Goodenough Island but throughout the Massim region. This story can be seen as representing a basic principle of Bwaidogan culture. As David Lalaoya of Waikewala says, the snake is believed to be responsible for all the misery, unhappiness, poverty and loss of knowledge about *kastam*.<sup>4</sup> The myth of the serpent that leaves the island in *unuwewe* (resentment) comes in many different versions that vary according to the area where they are situated. David told me one such version:

In olden times a woman delivered a boy-snake. Fearing that the people would shudder at him with fear, since he was extremely ugly, he went to live in a cave. He made an agreement with his mother that in exchange for food he will give her his valuable circular tusks. [These were fashioned into neck ornaments and used to circulate in the *kula*.] One day the mother's youngest son insisted on seeing his brother. Despite the mother's advice to stay at home, the child insisted on going with her. Eventually he accompanied his mother to the cave, promising that he would not even look at his brother. But the child's curiosity proved to be too great, and he peeped from behind his mother's back. He saw the hideous creature and was so startled that he

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<sup>4</sup> In the present paper the term *kastam* partly refers to discussions among scholars, such as Keesing and Tonkinson 1982, Lindstrom 1982, Jolly and Thomas 1992, Otto 1992, Foster 1992 and others, who focused on the post-independent Melanesian talk of reinvention of tradition. The term *kastam* derives from the English word "custom". According to Lindstrom and White it "reflects both the intense cultural pluralism characteristic of the region, as well as the immediacy of colonial history and processes of decolonisation ongoing in Oceania" (1993:467).

In Bwaidogan everyday conversation *kastam* is often used interchangeably with *dewa*. According to Young, *dewa* is an "operative word in any discussion of clanship in Kalauna... The most general and oft-used explanatory concept in Goodenough thought" (1971: 60). *Dewa* are regarded as the unique property of descent groups, what Young calls "their cultural dress" (*ibid.*). During my two-months' residence in Bwaidoga I could not hope to master the language although I made every effort to learn it. Most of my conversations with informants were conducted in English, which doubtless influenced a more frequent use of *kastam* as compared to *dewa*.

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overturned a bowl and spilled the soup on the snake. The snake was deeply offended. In revenge he took all of his wealth to the remote Rossel Island. One day he will surely return and bring back the fortune.

While Bwaidogans on the one hand assume that their *kastam* is gradually being forgotten, on the other they are still representing, reconceptualising and reinventing it through their myths. Conflicts over land tenure that were besides others influenced by the population growth provide a social environment in which Bwaidogans once again begin to remember myths about clan origins that are directly connected to land. Land disputes are a practical incentive to revive knowledge of the past. The myths that had once been kept secret by individual clans and known only to a selected few, have through changes brought by colonialism and globalisation, as well as by population growth, begun to intertwine, gradually losing their uniqueness. To a great extent, the plots and contents of hitherto secret myths (*neineya*) have become common knowledge. Nevertheless, such myths remain an important factor in clan identity and thus have a role to play in the struggle to claim or retain communal rights to land. In this paper I shall focus on the myths of origin of Aiwavo and Bibiavona clans. Before doing so, however, I shall consider briefly the work of some anthropologists who have theorised about myths.

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#### APPROACHES TO LIVED MYTH

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The anthropological study of myth began in the early 19th century in the light of evolutionary theory concerning the development of mankind from savagery to civilisation. Myth was often regarded as a fanciful or misguided kind of history, or worse as “just-so stories” that explained natural phenomena. Sir James Frazer, one of the chief advocates of the evolutionary approach, understood myth to reflect the development of social institutions, but it was only following Malinowski’s fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands that myth came to be viewed from the standpoint of its present-day function. As Malinowski explained in 1926:

Myth as it exists in a savage community...is not merely a story told but a reality lived.... [I]t is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies.” (1948 [1926]: 100).

Malinowski demonstrated how myths had a “charter” function in legitimating the social order and validating rights to customary usages such as magic. He also emphasized the importance of social context in which a narrator recites a particular myth. “The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality” (*ibid.*: 104). According to Young, however, Malinowski did not “demonstrate convincingly the living reality of Trobriand myth by showing how it might be a reality lived” (1983 a: 13).

Like Malinowski, Leenhardt (1979 [1947]) understood myths to be “lived” (*mythe vécu*) in a way that involved the emotional participation of the person (or “personage”). Leenhardt regarded myths as an aspect of Canaque knowledge that engaged with a particular “socio-mythic landscape”.

The significant rocks, creeks, mountains, trees, and animals form a pattern within whose circuits the life of the personage flows. The forms provided by mythic landscape are not mentally formulated; they are not stories, but are merely "here". The personage – perpetually outside an "ego" or "body", as defined by Westerners – knows himself or herself as a participant in juxtaposed mythic occasions, experiencing no narrative or personal itinerary proper to an "individual" identity (cited in Clifford 1992: 174).

Leenhardt's metaphysical approach is unhelpful in comparing the narrative content of myths, which in his view do not classify but juxtapose meanings (*ibid.*: 6-7, 40).

When discussing myths, it is necessary to mention Lévi-Strauss (1976) who dedicated an immense amount of work to the study of mythology. His structural approach sets functionalism aside. Myths do not have an obvious practical function, he argued, because they operate, as systems of conceptual transformation, rather like music. Despite the fact that myths share superficial syntactical and contrapuntal features with language, they stand outside it. Myths lack essential linguistic form and effect, but they have the power to convey messages that ordinary language cannot. Their structure can be traced to the binary, logical oppositions characteristic of human thought. Thus, for Lévi-Strauss:

The myth is certainly related to given facts, but not as a representation of them. The relationship is of a dialectic kind, and the institutions described in the myths can be the very opposite of the real institutions. This conception of the relation of the myth to reality no doubt limits the use of the former as a documentary source. But it opens the way for other possibilities; for in abandoning the search for a constantly accurate picture of ethnographic reality in the myth, we gain, on occasions, a means of reaching unconscious categories (*ibid.*: 172-173).

Roy Wagner studied myths as self-contained and self-generative stories which reveal maps of a culture's cosmology. In his book *Lethal Speech* (1978), Wagner argued for an interpretative approach that he defined in accord with Ricoeur's construction of the meaning of a text "in a way similar to the way we explicate the terms of a metaphorical statement" (*ibid.*: 13). Interpretation of myths reveals analogies that tell us something about the social (and moral) cosmology of a given community. With his key terms "lethal" and "obviation", Wagner showed how speech is "killed" in such a way that it cannot generate discursive understanding at the cognitive level. Myths

aim, in fact, to undetermine ("obviate") such surface understandings, to bring the members of the cultures in which they play a vital part to an encounter with the ontological curvatures of their experience with others and with their own reflexive solitudes – not unknown even in "tribal" societies (Turner, in Wagner 1978: 7).

Myth's "obviation sequence" as Wagner named it, is constantly "sharing the meanings in part, and in part developing these shared meanings into new ones". A myth "does not say things but makes them, and then disappears into its result" (Wagner 1978: 252).

James Weiner (1988) focused on the sociocultural character of myths. Writing about the Foi people of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, he viewed myths as metaphors that represent idioms through which social distinctions are articulated. Adopting Wagner's idea of myth as an obviation sequence that results in a "large-scale metaphor", he analyses their role in the construction of Foi sociality. The latter is

but one facet of a world-view that posits a *sui generis* moral force to such phenomena as, for example, the motion of water and celestial bodies, the growth and death of human beings, the separation of the living and the dead, and the distinct sexual properties of men and women" (*ibid.*: 15).

His monograph *The Heart of the Pearl Shell* describes myths as metaphors that are

elusive, not baldly and syntagmatically stated as in a magic spell. Whereas a magic spell is hidden because of what it reveals, myths are revealed precisely because of what they hide: the creation of morality and human convention out of the particular actions and dilemmas of archetypal characters" (*ibid.*: 14).

Myths represent a "ceaseless contrast between individual experience and the idioms of collective sociality" and together with other metaphorical literary forms, they lead to the creation of culture as the "relationship between the conventional distinctions of social boundaries and the created analogies of aesthetic innovation" (*ibid.*: 296).

In his monograph *Magicians of Manumanua* (1983a), Michael W. Young mediates Malinowski's and Leenhardt's approaches, though he adopts the former's empirical concern with context. To some extent, he deploys Lévi-Strauss's analytical methods. Young presents key Kalauna myths in their ethnographic and political contexts, and in giving them a biographical dimension he attempts to portray several "unique individuals in terms of their representative culture rather than to present a unique culture in terms of representative individuals" (*ibid.*: 27). Kalauna myths are revitalized and re-created through the lives of the individual leaders and magicians who own them. Myths are forever open to reinterpretation by those who live them, just as actors reinterpret the parts they play in a drama. In spite of individual variations and Western-influenced modifications, Kalauna myths retain the theme basic to Goodenough social dynamics. The temporal oscillation between stasis and mobility or stillness and movement is the essential dialectic of exchange relationships (including those based on gender) which is constitutive of Goodenough society. In a Lévi-Straussian paradox, Young writes: "Myth is reconstructed through lived experience which mediates culture; and culture is reconstructed through lived experience which mediates myth" (*ibid.*: 35).

In *Dancing through Time* (1998), Borut Telban explores the connections between myths and the concept of *kay*. The latter is the main focus of his monograph about Ambonwari village in East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea. *Kay* can be translated by the English terms "way, habit, manner; ritual; custom; law; being; canoe" (*ibid.*: 262). Based on Young's theory of living myths that are reconstructed through the lived experiences of their owners, Telban notes that myths represent what he calls "*Ambonwari-ness*" as lived, thought about and spoken about" (*ibid.*: 142). Through myths the past is lived in the present and the present is conferred on the past. Therefore, myths are essential for the continuous process of individual and group identification. Telban particularly focuses on myths of origin that are important for clan identity.

Myths of origin, like other stories from the past, contain a large number of place and personal names. Sequential order is marked by such names, and people who are unfamiliar with them have difficulty putting different events, especially from different stories, in some sort of chronological order" (*ibid.*: 160).

When an Ambonwari person identifies with his mythical ancestor, this identification is neither unreflective nor without a purpose. Through his understanding of the origin acts of a mythical ancestor (and events from the myth in general), he reconfirms or reconstructs relationships with others, both individual and collective, that were, and still are, made possible by these acts. In such a way one not only constructs the present based on the past but "can hold an attitude towards the future" where one's acts will still be ancestral, regardless of their transformation and the accretion of new meanings (*ibid.*: 154).

Bwaidogan myths are lived and conditioned by the narrator's past and present relationships, his or her descent group membership, and finally his or her relationship to place and time. As a conundrum of culture, myths are constantly oscillating between the social and the individual level. We could say that myths are spatiotemporal narrative forms that can never be grasped completely - let alone jotted down on paper. Myths

are for telling and performing, and participants understand them by experiencing them. They achieve their meaning in action, when lived. We distort them when we describe and organise them on paper and attempt to analyse them and unravel their mysteries in everyday words and categories. The urge is to overorganise, to impose order where it is perhaps inappropriate (Sillitoe 1998: 245).

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## MYTHS OF ORIGIN IN BWAIDOGA

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In this part I shall summarise two myths of clan origin that were narrated to me by their owners. I will not question their "authenticity" (however we may define this), for according to Young, each narrative is authentic insofar as it derives from an inherited past. There is no correct or wrong version of a myth. Each has its own tune and rhythm that contributes to the meaning of the particular context of its telling. Miriam Kahn asserts:

Anthropologists must look not only at oral accounts of origin myths, which are limited to particular literary genres, but also at the way in which these myths are recorded and recalled by other devices, such as physical forms in the landscape (1990: 53).

For this reason, I will also focus on the ways in which the two Bibiavona and Aiwavo clan myths were narrated to me, as well as on their relationship to the "physical forms in the landscape".

One afternoon in March 2002, while my informant David Lalaoya was recounting the story<sup>5</sup> of the vengeful serpent, he mentioned Diana, the oldest inhabitant of Nikoko, as one of the few people well acquainted with this kind of Bwaidogan story. Accompanied by David, I visited her next day and she responded favourably to my request to record some stories on tape. With David's help, I then translated them into English. Quite a few of them

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<sup>5</sup> I have already pointed out that the distinction between *ififu* and *neineya* is unclear. When Bwaidogans talked about myths they used the word *ififu*, which simply means "story". However, since we communicated mostly in English I cannot be sure that *neineya* is not applicable in this context. I shall continue to make a distinction between stories as general narratives and myths as secret or semi-secret charters directly related to the past.

caused disagreement among my hosts. The myth about the voracious sea eagle, for example, elicited the following comment from Moses. "The myth about Manubutu belongs to Bibiavona, and it is different to Diana's." A couple of days later Moses and his cousins asked me to record their version of the myth of their clan origin.

### **Bibiavona myth of origin**

It was on March 29<sup>th</sup> that I joined Moses and his father's brother's sons Belami and Andrew in Andrew's hut. The two sons of the late Tomokivona, a friend of Michael Young, asked for complete seclusion while recounting their myth. Even the children who were scampering around outside and interrupting our conversation with their tumult were ordered to leave and play in the neighbouring hamlet of Lautoto. The three men settled down in the living quarters of the house, divided betelnut among them and chatted in Bwaidogan. Several minutes passed before Andrew began his narrative:<sup>6</sup>

(part 1)<sup>7</sup>

Long time ago people lived in a cave called Gauyaba. They never left the cave. Their name was Sinatataya. These people were born there and later when they appeared from the ground they were renamed Babisinagea. They were ginger people and they didn't have any hair. When they appeared, Manubutu (the sea eagle who was also a man) was eating the people. The woman whose name was Natuyaboyabobo (literally, taking care of the children) and her grandchildren were the only ones who stayed. One day the woman told the grandchildren that all the people had fled to Tawakala (close to Tufi<sup>8</sup>), a place where nobody had ever lived before. The children asked their grandmother: "Grandmother, what have you done?" and went fishing.

Suddenly Andrew paused because some children came to tell us that David was approaching. According to Moses, Bibiavona clan owns this myth and wants to keep it a secret.

Next day all three men were sitting in the shade beneath a mango tree, chipping at their canoes and discussing how they were going to tell me their myth. They had been sitting there since early morning, holding a big genealogical chart in their hands. Michael Young made these charts and sent them through me to David and Tomokivona's sons in response to their earlier request. Constant checking of genealogical data and minor arguments accompanied Tomokivona's sons' private discussion about their mythology and the genealogical history that is connected with it. It took them a couple of hours before they agreed on what they were going to tell me. Then they came to my hut, sat upon the floor, took out their betel nuts, chewed them, and then started. This time Moses was the main narrator. He and Belami were not satisfied with Andrew's opening to the story, and they had decided that Moses would replace him. Moses began the myth from the beginning.

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<sup>6</sup> In order to represent the situation in which the Bibiavona and Aiwavo myths were told to me I have presented both myths close to the vernacular way in which they were narrated.

<sup>7</sup> For convenience of interpretation I have divided each myth into several parts.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew is probably mistaken. Both Tufi and Tawakala are on mainland. While Tufi is on northeast is Tawakala on southwest of Goodenough.

(part 2)

Once upon a time a woman from Bwaidoga had three sons [later Belami implies that she had four]. The firstborn's name was Tomokulua and he was a human being. The second born, Motalai, and the third born, Motabikwa, were both snakes. One day Tomokulua said to his brothers that it would be better to leave Bwaidoga because it was a place for animals. Therefore Motabikwa went to live in Tutube (close to Ufufu, inland of Faiyava), while Motalai went to live in a cave (above Ukuna). He made an agreement with his mother to bring him food in exchange for his tusks. One day her small daughter wanted to go with her. Because her mother had promised the snake that she would not show her to anybody, she refused to allow her daughter to come with her. The small girl was persistent and finally persuaded her mother to allow her to go with her. She promised that she wouldn't look at her brother. Nevertheless, when they were there, she peeped out from behind her back and saw a horrifying snake. When he noticed the girl the snake was angry. Immediately Motalai left the island together with the tusks that were his wealth. He went first to Utu and then to Lautoto and swam further on to Nuatutu point. Motalai passed the two Barrier Islands, Ilamo and Legiagiya, and went on further to Kiriwina. There he turned around and said to the mountain Madawa: "My people will see me, so I will go a bit further (*O, ida itaitaku jaina maita kabisona ganaunau*)."

He travelled on to Woodlark. There Motalai turned around and repeated the same words. From there he went directly to Rossel Island. Goodenough people say that one day he will return and bring back their fortune.

(part 3)

While Motalai went to Rossel Island and stayed there, the firstborn Tomokulua went up to Luwaita. He was the only human there. He married a female spirit called Nelawata. Her second name was Ineveya. This name is a very important name and nobody is allowed to mention it. Tomokulua and Nelawata had a child whom they named Tomokivona. Thus the name Bibiavona derives from Luwaita. The first ancestor was Tomokulua, the second one Tomokivona. He had two children: Nabelesina and Toboyoyana. They were the ones who killed Manubutu, the sea eagle who was devouring the people. When Nabelesina's and Toboyoyana's grandmother told them that all the people ran away because Manubutu was eating them, the children decided to kill him. They told their grandmother to make spears and clubs. She [magically] cut down many trees and made more than hundred spears and clubs. Even though they also had a canoe there was something missing, something that would make them smart. This was ginger and *wetoweto* [a species of *Cordyline*]. When they obtained them from their grandmother they were ready to fight. They loaded everything onto the canoe and took their dogs Kwalidumodumo and Kakawasi with them. They went to the island of Ilamo where they left Kakawasi, while Kwalidumodumo stayed with them. Nabelesina and Toboyoyana told Kakawasi that they were going to fight, and if they died he would have to swim to their grandmother and tell her. But if they survived he would have to stay there forever. Nabelesina and Toboyoyana then went on to Bolubolu to kill Manubutu. When they came ashore they looked up at the mountain where Manubutu had a house. They saw him sitting in front of his house sewing his fishing net. He was so preoccupied that he didn't notice that the children were observing him. They had already made a plan how to kill him. First

they threw a stick onto the roof and dragged it down. When Manubutu heard the noise he went into his house to check what was happening. Because he didn't find anything he went out again. When he looked down the hill he saw two boys. He laughed and said: "Oh, children, where are you hiding? I'm going to eat you!" They replied: "We are children from Yeyena. Our namesake is Kewala Neganega [*Kewala* - a species of red parakeet; *Neganega* - to take food without paying for it]." Manubutu grew angry and swooped down to kill the boys who were sitting in their canoe. When they saw him approaching, they turned their canoe over and hid beneath it. Manubutu didn't see this and hit the canoe with his beak. With a broken beak he went up to his house. The children turned their canoe over and started teasing him again: "If you were so strong, Manubutu, we would be dead by now. But we are still alive. We are stronger than you!" After that they went ashore where they continued their fight. First they fought with slings. When they ran out of them they took spears and fought with them. But when they had used up almost all the spears they were left only with double-pointed ones. They became worried because they were running out of weapons. Finally they made a plan. The older brother said to the younger one to hide behind him. When Manubutu approached the elder brother the younger moved aside and speared him between the eyes. Instantly Manubutu fell dead. The children called their dog Kwalidumodumo and told him to go into Manubutu's body and take out his heart. The dog did as they told him. When he came out of Manubutu's guts he howled "Ayo!" From this time on the dog was called Afuyoi. Nabelesina and Toboyoyana loaded everything onto their canoe and paddled back to Nuatutu. They told their dog Kakawasi to stay there, while they went back to Yeyena. When they were close to reaching the shore, they waved the *wetoweto* and announced to their grandmother that they were coming. They blew a conch-shell and paddled to the beach. When they reached the shore they pretended to fight. But when their grandmother greeted them calling "*Kaiwa! Kaiwa!*" they calmed down and told her how they had killed Manubutu. They also told her that they had changed the name of Kwalidumodumo to Afuyoi.

A week passed and Nabelesina and Toboyoyana asked their grandmother if there was anybody else who was attacking the people for food. She told them about Manubutu's wife who lived on the mountain close to Mataita. When she showed them the place, they decided to go there and kill her too. They prepared slings, spears and clubs, spears with double points, canoe and ginger. They paddled to Mataita and started to climb the mountain. On the way they marked the path with their spears. When they reached her place they climbed a Kafua tree and saw her sweeping the floor of the house. They picked up a fruit and threw it to attract her attention. At first the woman thought that the wind had torn it down. But when they threw another fruit she saw them sitting in a tree. She grew angry and put on a pandanus leaf skirt to transform herself into a spirit. When this didn't work she put on a banana leaf skirt. At that moment she changed into a spirit. Everything about her became enlarged. She began to fight the children. She took a shell to cut their throats. The children fought back with slings. When they ran out of slings they fought with spears. When they ran out of these they took the last two spears with double points. They killed the woman in the same way they had killed her husband Manubutu. Once she was dead, Afuyoi went inside her body and took out her heart. After that they went back to Yeyena. On approaching the seashore they waved the *wetoweto*. They pretended to fight with their

grandmother. But when she called "*Kaiwa! Kaiwa!*" they calmed down and told her how they had killed Manubutu's wife.

(part 4)

Their grandmother made a small canoe and sent the two hearts to Tawakalea to announce to the people that Manubutu and his wife were dead and that they could now return. When a man at Tawakala went fishing, he noticed a small canoe rocking on the sea. He threw his fishing net and dragged it in. When he saw the two hearts, he realised that his two children who stayed in Yeyena had accomplished this. He went to the village and told the people that his two children had killed Manubutu and his wife. A week later, they were ready to return to Yeyena. While they were in the middle of the sea, Tomokavalina recited a spell. It grew dark and cloudy. Thunder and lightning caused the people to disperse all around Goodenough. Some went to Vivigani, some to Mataita, while some of them sank. Only Tomokavalina and his wife went to Kabuna and continued on towards Nikoko. The grandmother saw them approaching and told Nabelesina and Toboyoyana to go to Nikoko. When Tomokavalina and his wife reached the shore the children were already there. They were so big that their father Tomokavalina almost didn't recognise them. He was afraid and said: "Oh, maybe you are going to kill and eat us?" But the children replied: "No, we are not going to kill you. We have been waiting for you!"

At this point Moses stopped because Andrew reminded him that Tomokavalina was not Toboyoyana's and Nabelesina's father; earlier he had stated it was Tomokivona, son of Tomokulua. Moses asked for more time to think. He returned the next afternoon and continued telling the myth without explaining the previous day's confusion and without saying who fathered Toboyoyana and Nabelesina.

(part 5)

After the big storm people spread all over Goodenough Island and many of them died. A couple from Mikwanabuina clan survived and they approached the Kabuna point from where they paddled to Nikoko. There they met Nabelesina and Toboyoyana. When they saw them they said: "You are probably going to kill us!" The children asked: "Are you the ones from Tawakala to whom we sent two hearts?" When they told them that they were indeed the people from Tawakala who used to live with them in Yeyena they became friends. They stayed at Nikoko, which was called Elaela at the time. During the following years, Mikwanabuina people spread out. They married within the families. That is how the Bwaidoga district was formed. In those times Nabelesina and Toboyoyana fought with Oyaoya people (the ancestors of Kabuna and Wagifa people). In their last fight, Nabelesina and Toboyoyana killed all the Oyaoya people. Only one girl was left who hid herself in the woods. Her name was Weyalubana. Later, when they found the girl, they took her to Bowa where she married a man. Nabelesina and Toboyoyana cooked some food and gave it to her husband's relatives.

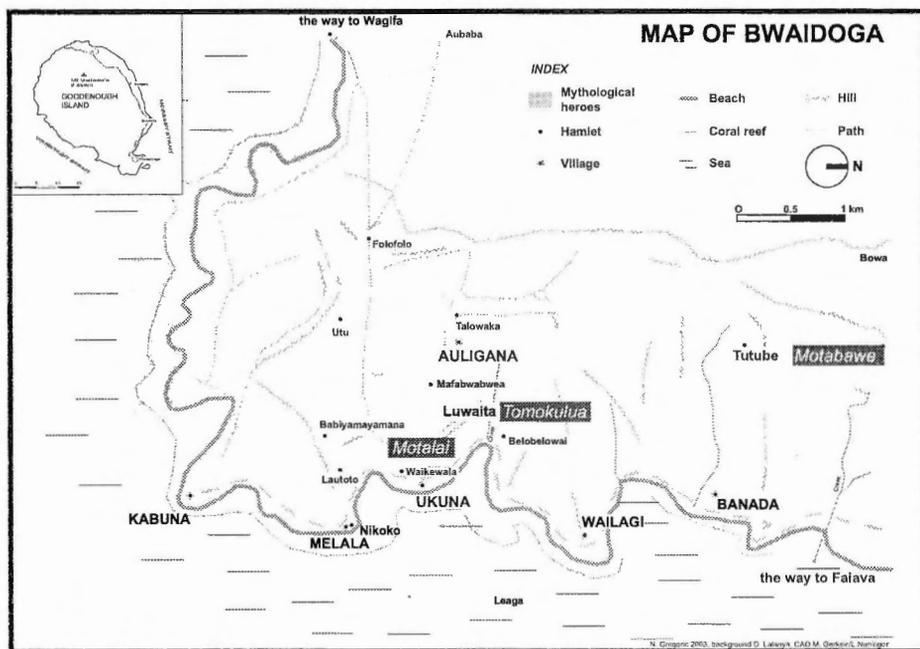
At that time Nabelesina already had a grandchild whose name was Tomokivona Iemesa. He decided to ask the Bowa people to pay for the girl whom his grandfather had brought to them. Tomokivona Iemesa sent for a man from Bowa to ask him if there were any young girls in Bowa he could marry.

Moses continued that this was the reason why the land of Oyaoya people now belongs to Mikwanabuina clan (of which Bibiavona is a segment) and from where all the important ancestors originate.

Weyalubava married a Bowa man. They had a son Tausi who married Weyusi. They had two children: Nemiakaka and Lasalo. Nemiakaka married Tomokivona [the parents of Belami and Andrew].

In the first part of the myth, Andrew focused on the origin of humanity that is, as elsewhere in Melanesian mythology, situated in a cave. Gauyaba, which according to Andrew means a big cave, but according to Young it is “a vent in the rock” or a “hole” near the summit of the hill called Yauyaba by Kalauna. Yauyaba is “the Goodenough Islanders’ answer to the problem of their origin, their cultural and linguistic differences and their dispersal and settlement over the island” (1971: 13). The tale about two parrots, Kewala and Wiwia, who courageously kill the sea eagle Manubutu and his wife, was first recorded by Jenness and Ballantyne (1928; see also Young 1991: 384). Jenness and Ballantyne refer to Babisinagea and a spirit named Anininalavu “who preside over the growth of yams” (1920: 152). Young notes that Babisinatata /sic!/ means “Below Ground” while Babisinanegeya /sic!/ means “Above Ground” (1991: 384). Andrew used Sinatataya to refer to the “ginger people” without hair who lived below ground, and who were renamed Babisinageya after they had emerged to the surface. Throughout the Massim ginger root is the basic ingredient of magic and sorcery spells, suggesting that it was the source of Babisinagea people’s magical power derived from spirits. It is interesting that this power was originally subterranean and hidden – in accordance with the Goodenough ideological principle that wealth and power should be concealed, and only displayed on special occasions such as feasting (Young 1983a: 73, 1987a: 249).

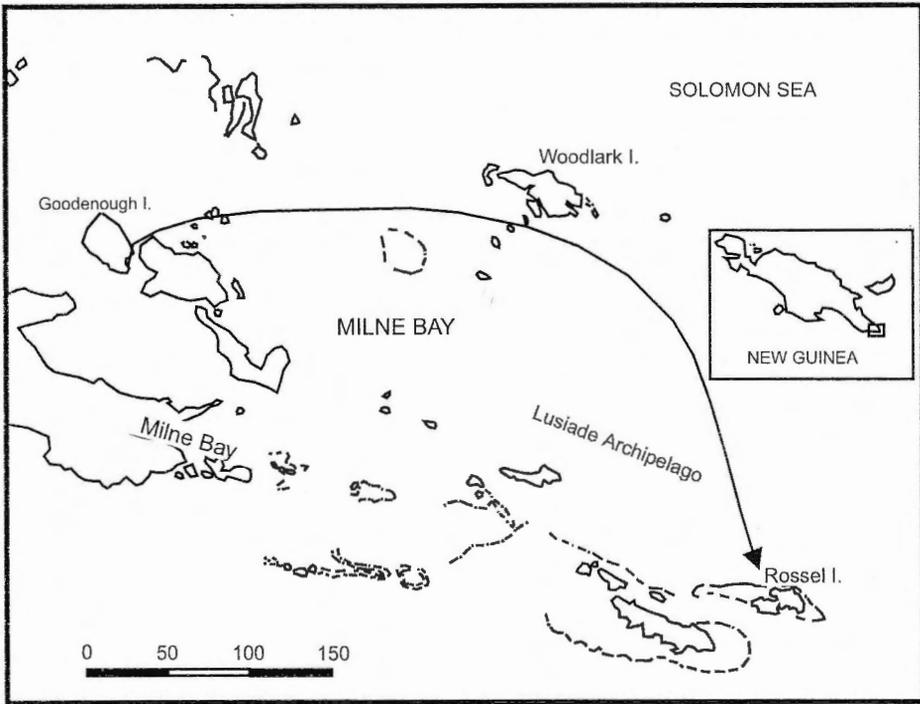
When Moses took over the role of narrator, he began somewhat differently to Andrew. His version begins with the birth of three brothers. Tomokulua is human, the other two, Motalai and Motabawe, are snakes. When the brothers grow up they dispersed: Tomokulua settled in Luwaita, a site on the hill that rises behind Waikewala and Banada hamlets (described by Jenness and Ballantyne [1920: 150] as “a pile of rocks on a ridge above Ukuni [i.e. Ukuna]”). Motabawe left for Tutube, a site somewhere near Ufufu, behind Faiava, while Motalai went to dwell in a cave whose location is not mentioned by Moses. According to Jenness and Ballantyne (1920: 157), however, Motalai’s cave “lay on the slope of the ridge” behind Ukuna village. The myth as recounted by Moses appears to differentiate between mountain and coast, thereby defining the parameters of Bwaidoga people’s landscape. Spatiality is not only defined by geographical parameters, however, but also by sociocultural institutions and historical processes. Generally speaking, the monster-slaying myth is motivated by dialectic between order and chaos, unity and dispersal, wealth and poverty.



**Figure 1.** Settlements of mythological heroes Tomokulua, Motabawe and Motalai.

Moses' version of the Bibiavona myth initially focuses on Motalai, who, insulted by his mother's betrayal, resentfully abandons Bwaidoga, taking his wealth with him and thereby impoverishing the people. Motalai embarks on a long journey which takes him through the Barrier Islands, Kiriwina, Woodlark, and finally Rossel, the most remote island in the Massim. At every place he leaves traces of his wealth. It is interesting to note that the people of Sudest (the island closest to Rossel) have a complementary myth which tells of an insulted snake (Bambagho) who departed Goodenough Island for Sudest, having first visited Sanaroa and Misma. A Sudest woman secretly fed it in exchange for its excrement (shell wealth), until her grandsons drove it away and it fled to Rossel Island (Lepowsky 1993: 125-6).

Besides the numerous themes that are minutely recorded in a number of Young's publications (1983 a, b, 1984, 1987a, 1991), Moses' version is significant also for mentioning the places through which the mythological character travels. Motalai's original cave dwelling is the location of some of Bibiavona's ancestral origins. Bibiavona's routes pass through the mountain site Luwaila, the coastal hamlets of Utu and Lautoto, the uninhabited islands of Ilamo and Legigiya, and thence to the Northern Massim (Bwaidogans' Muyuwa) to the Louisiades (Rossel). Motalai's journey describes an arc, or more fancifully, a semicircular boar's tusk, such as Motalai bestowed on his mother in exchange for food.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2.** Motalai's vengeful journey through the mountain site Luwaita, the coastal hamlets Ulu and Lautoto, islands Ilamo and Legigiya to Northern Massim and finally to the Luisiades (Rossel Island).

In his article *The tusk, the flute and the serpent*, (1987a), Young recounts a story recorded by Maribelle Young from a Bwaidogan woman concerning a tusk pendant (*matabile*) which appears in the form of a birthmark on a young bride's breast. Dogalivina's mother warns her son-in-law not to remove it, but the greedy husband ignores her and amputates his wife's *matabile*. Dogalivina dies and her brothers kill the husband (Ma. Young 1979: 3-6). This myth suggests that *matabili* had once been a female valuable, inseparable from her person. In Young's view, Goodenough sexual identity is conceived on similar grounds: a woman's value is embodied, whereas a man's value has to be acquired or achieved (1987b: 240-41). In a number of ceremonies, especially weddings and funerals, females are symbolically associated with wealth, which is reproduced in the form of children. Under the rule of

<sup>9</sup> In his analysis of the myth, Young refers to versions in which the woman who feeds the snake-man is variously represented as a grandmother, mother or wife (1983 a, b; 1987a; 1991). Young speculates on the etymology of Motalai (*mota* = snake; *lat* = coral reef) and Motabikwa (*mota* = snake; *bikwa* = a kind of taro).

patriline, a man and his descent group have to redeem their offspring by gifts of wealth, food and labour to his wife's descent group. Children "naturally" belong to their mothers; fathers have to "purchase" them.

Elsewhere, Young (1984: 132-5) analyses the iconography of the boar's tusk pendant or *matabili*, suggesting how it symbolizes marriage by combining a phallic tusk with a vaginal cowrie shell. Once important items of exchange in the *kula* ring, boar's tusk pendants appear to have been "attracted" to Goodenough, where they served as the most important valuable given in bridewealth. Ironically, the mythical source of these valuables is the wifeless, childless Motalai; he belongs to his mother alone, and when he repudiates her he becomes an entirely self-sufficient hero without kin. He thus transcends the social imperative Goodenough men must obey for countermanding the given maternal identity of their children - though it is his tusks that help them to do so. "Only a mythical serpent is capable of producing tusks of such value that they can, without disrespect, be offered in part exchange for the most precious gift of all, that is a woman's reproductive potential" (*ibid.*: 134).

The snake's continuous travelling and the promise of his return symbolically portray the constant circulation of wealth, which underpins Massim exchange systems - including that of *kula* (Young 1983b). A similar circulation of wealth is alluded to in the Aiwavo sub-clan's myth of origin to be described later. Based on the places through which Motalai's wealth circulates, Bibiavona's spatio-temporal map is formed. This is not only important for exchange but also for setting the spatial dimensions of Bibiavona's mythological landscape. While Utu and Lautoto represent hamlets that border Bibiavona's current home in Nikoko, Ilamo and Legigiya islands represent dwelling of their deceased ancestors. Finally, Kiriwina, Woodlark and Rossel symbolize their most distant Massim neighbours. Between the nearby and distant places abides the world of spirits that connects both spheres, and the myth appears to draw boundaries of the spatiotemporal map in terms of relations between places that are dangerous or safe, wealthy and poor.

The notional map is also conditioned by the mediation between stasis and mobility, according to which, in Young's view, exchange relationships, gender relations and cosmological time are established (1983a, b, 1987a). The mother's breach of promise causes the stasis (*manumanua*<sup>10</sup>) of the snake in the cave, representing peace and prosperity, to change into continuous mobility or wandering, which connotes chaos and famine. Mediation of these opposites is achieved through the cargoistic return of original wealth (1987a: 234). The latter is to some extent present in the institution of wage labour, which has for a century been the most significant component of Goodenough youths' initiation into manhood. Bwaidogan youths still leave the village for contract labour on the mainland (usually Alotau) in the hope that they will one day bring back wealth to ensure the prosperous continuity of their clans. Bwaidogans observe that today many young men visit their relatives working in Alotau. "But there they do nothing. They only run around, looking for money. They don't want to work. They expect that it will come from the sky," were the words of David, Belami and Andrew. The anticipation of the return of the wealth is also indicated by the cargoistic understanding of the sudden appearance of newcomers. My arrival, for instance, was by many villagers conceived in cargoistic terms. Some villagers took me for a deceased ancestor who had returned to revive an awareness of *kastam*. Others attributed to me more hostile intentions, identify-

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<sup>10</sup> *Manumanua* is the "ceremony of 'staying at home' to anchor food and banish famine" (Young 1983a: 302).

ing me as a spy who would take their *kastam* to Europe and deplete their traditions. There is no end to such interpretations, and their main theme incorporates the dynamic of stasis and mobility and the promise of a restored fortune.

The third section of Bibiavona's myth includes the tale of Manubutu, the voracious sea eagle, which was first published by Jenness and Ballantyne in *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* (1920: 158-9). They give a short version by a Nikoko man named Yanavolewa. The "Yeyena epic" as they call it, is about Nianialawata (=Nelawata) and her husband Galagalaiwabu, who accuses her of being a spirit or *balauma*. He deserts her and takes his people to Towakala (Moses' Tawakala), beyond East Cape. Abandoned, Nelawata bears two sons, Tomweinagona (elder) and Kwamanea (younger). When these two become grown men they courageously fight and kill Manubutu, bringing peace and prosperity to Yeyena. The myth also mentions the dog Akoiyoi (Afuyoi in Moses' version), who tears out Manubutu's heart, taking it to Towakala. When Galagalaiwabu sees the heart he realizes that his sons had killed the sea eagle, so he and his people can return to their home at Yeyena. Jenness and Ballantyne also give a lengthy version of the myth in *Language, Mythology and Songs of Bwaidoga* (1928: 51-83). This version includes another tale about a wealthy man (Kaiwabo) who abides in a cave and, together with his men, periodically loots the gardens of Belebele villagers. This part of the story is central to the Aiwavo myth that will be presented below.

The fourth part of Moses' myth tells of Tomokavalina's homecoming to Yeyena. When returning with everybody who had once taken refuge in Tawakala, he performs rain magic, which incites a great storm resulting in the dispersal of people over Goodenough Island. Tomokavalina is the only one to return to Yeyena, where Bibiavona people believe their clan originated. They originated also on the mountain at Luwaita and later spread to different places in Bwaidoga. Luwaita is the home of Tomokulua's second son, who married Nelawata. In many Goodenough myths Nelawata (or Inelawata) is portrayed as an "Eve" or first woman, in others as a spirit-woman in the guise of a wife, mother or grandmother. Both Yeyena and Luwaita are today still of importance in Bibiavona's view of its history. Again, in this part of the myth, the difference between primal mountain (Luwaita) and coastal dwelling place (Yeyena) is stressed. According to Young, the indigenous distinction between people of the mountain ("*kwana oyaoya*") and people of the coast ("*kwana imolata*") is associated with different adaptations to habitat (1971: 12). In both Bibiavona and Aiwavo origin myths the "*oyaoya*" and "*imolata*" distinction is implied in the difference between place of origin and place of dwelling. Thus, in the Bibiavona myth Yeyena is the ancient site of their settlement, while Luwaita is the hillside where they now make their gardens. At Luwaita there is a rock of the same name that mysteriously transforms into a snake, cuscus, or a rolling human head. Luwaita protects the garden against thieves and bad magic. It harms strangers who happen to pass by. When Luwaita transforms into a snake, it is marked on its forehead by a red line which proclaims a warrior spirit. This is the mark that Bibiavona men painted on their foreheads whenever they went to fight. The Tomokivona brothers believe that only Bibiavona clan members can see the rolling head. One day, when Moses went up to his garden, he heard from a distance the rustling of an object tumbling down.

At first I thought it was only a coconut, so I did not pay much attention or look back up the slope. I was somewhere between Waikewala and Wailagi. Since the noise was increasing, I looked back up the hill and saw a rolling head. At first I couldn't believe my eyes. But as the head rolled right past me and continued on towards the sea I thought of Luwaita. It was he. Abagadiga, sister of the late Tomokivona, has also

seen the rolling head, which resides in Luwaita. Many people with gardens on the hills of Luwaita have seen a man or a snake catching the early morning sun on a rock (Field notes, 4.4.02).

It is relevant to note that Jenness and Ballantyne recorded a story about a "large bowl" that lived on the ridge above Yeyena and devoured people "under the pretence that it was hunting pigs". One day the men ambushed it and pursued it with their weapons. The bowl rolled down the hill and into the sea, where it sank with a spear embedded in it (1920: 155).

Unfortunately, Jenness and Ballantyne do not name the "bowl", but Young suspects it might have been associated with another magical clay pot called Ulekofuyo, which lived in Inafani, a mountain hamlet (now abandoned) on the ridge between Mud Bay and Wagifa. Ulekofuyo was a *manumanua* pot that governed the rain and the sun, and hence controlled human prosperity and famine. The sentient pot had its own shrine and was tended by a magician called Tomiawala who extorted "tribute" from surrounding villages – until the Wesleyan missionary Ballantyne raided the shrine and confiscated the pot to destroy Tomiawala's power. Unfortunately, the missionary broke the pot on his way down the hill and many Bwaidogans blamed him for the famine of 1911-12 that followed. Significantly, the text that Jenness and Ballantyne recorded about the pot Ulekofuyo concludes with the words "at one time it changed into a snake" (1920: 129-31; 1928: 166-7). Not only mythical persons, birds and animals, then, but also natural objects like rocks and manufactured ones like pots can manifest the dynamic of stasis and mobility.

As we have seen, Bwaidoga people generally represent themselves by the names of their hamlets rather than by the names of their descent groups. Bibiavona is less commonly used than Nikoko, for instance. Their identity is largely founded on the places where they live, make their gardens and reproduce themselves. These places and particular objects in their settlements and broader landscape (*tuwaka* in each hamlet, for example, or the rock Luwaita in Bibiavona's garden land) are linked to their ancestral past that is anchored in the present and oriented towards the future.

The fifth part of Moses' myth recounts Tomokavalina's return to his birthplace Nikoko and his encounter with his sons Nebelesina and Toboyoyana (though Moses stands corrected on the matter of their parentage). He then relates the ongoing fights with the mountain people, Oyaoya, who lived between Mud Bay and Wagifa. Nabelesina and Toboyoyana kill them all, the sole survivor being a little girl, Weyalubava, whom the brothers adopt and marry to a man of Bowa (another mountain community behind Faiava). Weayubava's marriage establishes a relationship between the inhabitants of Bowa and Nikoko. This relationship is confirmed generations later with the marriage between Tomokivona and Nemiakaka, Andrew's and Belami's parents.

Besides the spatial and temporal dimensions of the cycle, the Bibiavona myth includes genealogical past in its timespan, which is continually restored by using many of the same personal names in each generation. Today there are Bibiavona children bearing the names of Tomokivona, Nabelesina, Toboyoyana, Tomokavalina and Lasalo. The significance of names in Melanesia (see for example Telban 1998: 83-93) is much broader than in Western societies, since it incorporates more than the idea of namesake. A name implies a set of attitudes, habits, and relationships of individuals, which link a person not only to a particular ancestor and his deeds, roles and personal characteristics but also to the sociocultural world of his or her community. Although a name is an inherited "*summary of personhood*", it has also to be achieved within the life of the individual who possesses it (Young 1983a: 21).

Moses' narrative about Bibiavona's origin includes wars, marriages, exchanges, heroic deeds, sacrifices, wealth, poverty and ruin, and concludes in the recent past with the marriage of Tomokivona and Nemiakaka. In time, the myth could conclude with some other important event even closer to the present.

### **Aiwavo myth of origin**

Moses, Belami and Andrew did not want anybody else to be present when they were telling their myth of origin. David Lalaoya was less concerned. Even when Moses asked him if he would prefer to be alone with me, he replied that it was not necessary. In contrast to the myth described by the Tomokivona brothers, David's narrative was better articulated and more lucid. As one of Young's closest informants, he had already earlier opportunities to recall it, and he also knew what level of narrative detail anthropologists want to hear. Like that of Bibiavona, the Aiwavo myth consists of several parts that, without the secret names, could stand as separate tales or *ifufu*. It is important to mention that David often referred to Jenness and Ballantyne's book *Language, Mythology and songs of Bwaidoga*, a photocopy of which he had obtained from Michael Young many years ago. "It is just as Jenness and Ballantyne write," he often said when I asked him to describe a particular custom or story. Although I was familiar with their writings I usually asked David for his own explanation, and it was invariably in some ways different to Jenness and Ballantyne's. In contrast to David, the Tomokivona brothers had not read Jenness and Ballantyne, though they would have heard David talk about them.

David, a leader of Aiwavo clan of Waikewala in Ukuna, narrated as follows

(part 1)

At Luwaiyoyo there was a cave called Gauyaba. From this cave the first human beings originated. Their name was Tabuvagata [*tubu* = grandfather; *vagata* = forever]. Before they emerged, nobody lived on Goodenough. One day one of them, Sakowa, saw a light that was coming from above his head. As he didn't know what it was, he decided to go and check. He pressed his head against the wall and tried to open the cave. When his friends saw what he was doing they came to help. Together they managed to remove the rock. Because they were pressing so hard their heads were full of blood. Sakowa came out with a drum. He smelled bad because he had a sore on his leg. When he tried to cover it with his other leg he accidentally beat the drum. The people who lived in the cave were frightened by this strange sound. They decided to stay there, while Sakowa and his friends went outside. In the meantime, people spread all over the island. Some of them noticed that they had left Sakowa behind. They came back and took him to Galuwata [in the mountains near Mt. Madawa]. These people who stayed in the cave came out at a place called Luwaiyoyo. The first was a man named Galagalaiwavo who came out with a *modawa* drum whose spirit was called Tokelebo. His wife came with him. Her name was Nelawata. Galagalaiwavo and Nelawata were without genitals. The spirit Tokelebo took a leaf from a *kaiyewa* tree. The leaf was very long and it had thorns on its edges. When the spirit made a sound the thorns started to dance. While dancing they cut the bottom part of the woman and created her vagina. They also touched the man's bottom part from which his penis grew.

(part 2)

Galagalaiwavo and Nelawata made a garden close to Luwaiyoyo. They planted a big taro (*ulaga*). They often visited their garden. One day Nelawata decided to cook some taro. She collected some, chopped it and left it to wash in a creek. In the meantime she went to collect firewood. While she was collecting firewood two pieces of taro went up into the sky and transformed themselves into the moon and the sun.<sup>11</sup> After she got back she noticed that two pieces of taro were missing. She searched for them everywhere but couldn't find them. She looked for them in a creek. The creek has been muddy ever since. The peel of the taro was transformed into a stone that is still there. That is why the creek is nowadays called Nelawata. When Nelawata couldn't find the taro, she went to her husband for help. She took what was left of the taro, cooked it and ate it together with her husband. After they had eaten, they saw something white rising from the east. It was the moon, shining really bright. Nelawata and Galagalaiwavo were copulating. Because it became very bright and the light from the moon lighted them up, Galagalaiwavo became angry. He took a piece of ginger, chewed it, recited a spell and spit it out on the moon. From then on the moon has black spots on it. He asked angrily "Why are you giving us light while we are copulating? People could see us," and once again he spit out ginger. Nelawata and Galagalaiwavo were wearing what are nowadays called traditional dress called *lulaiwavo*.

(part 3)

While people were coming out of the cave, Tokelebo the spirit was making sounds with his drums. With the first sound all the men came out, with the second one the women came out. With the third sound he created a woman's vagina and with the fourth one he made a man's penis. With the fifth sound all the spirits came out dressed in *luwaiyoyo*. *Modawa* drums started to beat and the spirits began to dance. People stood in two lines with the line of the spirits between them. The men stood in one line and the women in another. While they were dancing, the lines came together and then they separated again. The drum was beating like this:

*Keitu-keitu kekenika*

and see and see and let them see

*gaito ana deba Ganivedaiya*

who are baldheaded Ganivedaiya

*ana deba*

his baldness

*vunegi yo*

group settled down

*kwalele, kwalele*

you seek, you seek

Tokelebo was chewing a special kind of a ginger, which made his drumming even better. He told Galagalaiwavo to go and chop down a *modawa* tree, from which he made a drum. Tokelebo introduced him to ginger and the technique of beating a drum. He

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<sup>11</sup> Jenness and Ballantyne give two versions of this story in which the taro is called *vilaga* (1928: 26-7).

showed Galagalaiwavo different places such as Kalokalo, Yanabele, Ufufu, Faiava. When people heard the drumming they were ready to dance. The next day they danced. Tokelebo, the great drum spirit, taught Galagalaiwavo spells, traditional songs and the way of dancing. All this was called *luwaulo*. Tokelebo had two sons who later changed into rocks. These rocks looked like testicles. From then on the Aiwavo clan's drum name was Tokelebo, its ancestors are Nelawata and Galagalavaivo, its dance is called *luwaulo*, its traditional dress is *luwaiyoyo*, and women's *doki* (skirt made from pandanus leaves) is Matakevakeva. Aiwavo's traditional body decoration is represented by black circles around the eyes that look like glasses. Their type of a house is called *kuloloba*, and the roof is not straight but vaulted in the middle. From the front of the roof hangs a garfish. The clan's totems are the drum Tokelebo and the monitor lizard *umala*. In the front of the yam house of the Aiwavo clan there always hangs a piece of wood that looks like a canoe. The yam house used to be loaded with yams and drums.

During that time, the Aiwavo ancestors settled at Luwaiyoyo. The place where the people had been dancing with the spirits became a pumpkin garden. Today that place is still full of pumpkins. There they left a drum. When the spirits stopped dancing they made a very big feast. They cooked a lot of food which included a lot of pumpkins. They made a mortuary feast for pumpkins. All the people from Bwaidoga and Faiava came up to Luwaiyoyo where Aiwavo distributed pumpkins all over the area. Their ripening season was in January, February and March, during the time of scarcity before the yams are ready to begin harvesting. After the mortuary feast people came down. They settled at Udeyadeya, a place that is close to Waikewala. After a big flood they moved to Waikewala.

(part 4)

The people who descended from Galuwata took out a drum and started to dance. Later they divided into two groups. One settled in the lowlands and the other on the hillside. The mountain people's totem is a spear (*giyo*) and the coastal people's totem is a drum (*modawa*). That is why people on the coast dance with drums and mountain people hunt with spears. They usually hunt in the bush where they collect edible leaves which their wives use for cooking. Their children often came down to the coast and observed the coastal people while they were dancing. They would tease the coastal children: "Look, our parents killed some flying foxes. The bones are here in front of us and we are going to eat them." The littoral children were scared and they went to their parents and told them that the selfish mountain children were teasing them and throwing bones at them. It was because of this that the mountain and coastal people became separated. Aiwavo ancestors came all the way from Galuwata and settled at Talowaka (on the mountain of Auligana), where some other Bwaidogans originated. They were part of the Aiwavo clan. Their real clan was Mikilavivila. The name Aiwavo derived from the burial of a person. Aiwavo, which means, "cooked", is also the word for a three-day-old corpse. This is due to the question people often ask: "How is the body in the grave? Is it cooked already?" This phase of burial is called Aiwavo.

Because David's ancestors descended from the cave they were bald. That is why they were called Ganivegaiya. Because David's ancestors were bald-headed his nickname is Debakoyakoya. If somebody mentions the name Ganivegaiya he will become bald.

It is a very powerful name that belongs to a spirit. David's son's second name is Ganivegaiya. That is why he will become bald.

(part 5)

The Aiwavo clan valuables or ornaments came from Galagalaiwavo. There lived a woman whose name was Inabo. Her brother Mokai lived in Afuya hamlet (close to Lautoto). One day Inabo decided to visit her brother. She took her basket and loaded it with ornaments and different types of *doki* and left her home. She walked down the beach until she reached Wagifa. She came to the Miabalia clan whom she asked if they had seen her brother Mokai. They told her that his home was far from their place. Because it was getting late, they advised her to spend the night in their hamlet. The next morning she gave one of her skirts that she was carrying in her basket to the people of Miabalia and left. When she reached Kabuna she asked the people of the Waikalivana clan about her brother. They told her that his home was still far away and because it was getting late they offered her a place to sleep. In the morning she gave them a *doki* and went further to the Ainagona clan at Vaikoya. Because it was still too far from her brother's place she spent a night at that place and left them a *doki* in the morning. The next day she came to Elaela at Nikoko and asked the Miyewayewa clan about her brother. Because Miyewayewa people saw her wearing a very nice *doki* they invited her to stay for two nights. She gave them *doki kewala* (red parrot skirt). The next day when she went with women to Belobelowai to fetch some water she saw her brother sitting on his *tuwaka* at Afuya. He had white hair. She ran to him and started to cry. Then she went to Eweli and took her basket and gave it to her brother. She gave him all the ornaments and *doki luwaiyoyo* from Galagalaiwavo. Nowadays the Aiwavo clan uses these ornaments. The Afuya people left their hamlet and moved to a place that is nowadays called Waikewala.

(part 6)

At Luwaiyoyo Nelawata transformed herself into a rock. When Galagalaiwavo went to Galayvavo he took all the ornaments with him. Later he transformed himself into a house. That is why the clan's house is called Galagalaiwavo. This house is at the Lalayayo Lake. Nowadays Wagifa people live around that lake. Later the house transformed itself into a stone and finally to a *doki*.

(part 7)

When the first ancestor Galagalaiwavo went to Galayvavo he took all the ornaments. Bwaidoga people came from Galuwata and settled at Talowaka. Later they moved to Mafabwabweya together with Wagifans. From there they went down to Babimayamana and from there to Folofolo. After they ended their war with Wagifa, they took their spears and speared a pig. This was the last fight between Bwaidoga and Wagifa people. The Bwaidogans returned from Folofolo and settled at Talowaka. At Talowaka there lived four /sic!/ brothers and a sister. Two brothers went to live in Folofolo where they speared a pig. One of them went to live at Wagifa. His name was Matagoya. The last brother Anila went to Aubaba. From him originated the population of Aubaba. Kavalana, Uleifi, Nabelesina and Lesi and their sister, named Bwaidoga, settled at Talowaka. Bwaidogans were good fighters. Kavalana stayed at Talowaka from where Ukuna, Waikewala and Auligana people derive. Nabelesina

settled at Nikoko from where Nikoko people derive. Lelesi settled at Kabuna from where Kabuna people derive, and finally Ujeili went to Diodio. Their only sister Bwaidoga didn't marry. She lived with her elder brother Kewala. While they lived in Bwaidoga the population spread to Waikewala and Ukuna.

There used to live a woman who belonged to the Minefana clan. She was sitting on a *tuwaka* when a snake (*mota*) came and had intercourse with her. She became pregnant and delivered a baby-snake. His name was Motabikwa. She put the snake in a cave called Lua, where he stayed. One day the woman's younger child wanted to see his elder brother. Because his mother promised the snake that nobody would see him, she didn't let the little one come with her. But after the child's persistent begging she finally let him come with her. This myth belongs to the Minefana people.

(part 8)

Many people came out from Gauyaba and went to live at Galuwata. One of the men who was very rich and had a lot of shell ornaments went with his people to live at a place close to Belebele. There they dug a hole and went inside. They covered it so that nobody would find them. They went inside the cave without any food. These men came out and stole Belebele people's food from their gardens. They did this several times. When a man from Belebele noticed that somebody was stealing his crops he decided to hide in the sugar cane and find the thief. The next day he saw men coming out from the ground and stealing from his garden. He thought that these were people from Bwaidoga or Faiava. When the men went back, he followed them and saw them going back into the cave. He returned to the village and announced that people from the ground were ruining their crops. He told them to cut some sticks and get ready to plant them all over the garden. He also told the people to kill anybody that they found beneath the ground and eat them. Next day they took the sticks and started to dig in the garden. They dug holes and killed a lot of those people, carried them to their hamlets, cooked them and ate them. While the Belebele people were digging them out, their chief was searching for the underground chief. When he had found him he dragged him out and killed him. He took his armshell and sent it to the Trobriand Islands. He took his necklaces and sent them to Dobu people. Nowadays they still use them for their *kula* exchange. Finally he took his boar's tusk pendant, called Matabili, and sent it to Ukuna. The tusk stayed there and transformed itself first into a pig, then into a snake and finally into a lizard. It was changing like that all the time. While Matabili was a snake he copulated with that Minefana woman who was sitting on *tuwaka*. That is how Motabikwa was born.

David's narrative was much more coordinated and better articulated than that of the Tomokivona brothers. This, however, does not mean that his myth is more authentic or verifiable than Bibiavona's, since a myth can never be a wholly organized or completed entity. Its content includes and entwines different levels of living concerns of those individuals who identify with it. For this reason it is difficult to articulate it into a narrative, which represents a settled set of names, chronologically divided by years. Chronology, however, is not completely absent from myths. The Bibiavona and Aiwavo myths portray the genealogical past, not only of their ancestors but also of their spirits, and the places remembered through their travels, fights, marriages, separations and settlements.

The Aiwavo myth of origin retells the myth of the origin and dispersal of three groups that settle in different places within Bwaidoga district. The myth begins with the origin of Tabuvagata people in the Gauyaba cave near Luwaiyoyo. When attempting to describe his myth about Bibiavona origins, Andrew mentions the correct name of the cave or hole from which the immortal people originated. The main protagonist of the first section of the Aiwavo myth is Sakowa, who, like Plato's character in the Cave Parable, pursues the sunlight, which peeks through its crevices. Sakowa and his men push their heads against the wall with all their might, eventually breaking it open. This is the reason for Sakowa and his men and their descendants becoming bald. Like the baldness of Bibiavona's Babisinagea (see Andrew's myth part 1), Sakowa's perhaps symbolizes beauty and wealth, the revelation of something normally hidden by hair. Sakowa's stinking sore leg, on the other hand, is reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss' observation that lameness is symbolic of the autochthonous origin of man (1969: 214-216).

After Sakowa's departure for Galuwata (which is associated with the origin of important yam magic), the narrative returns to Luwaiyoyo, from where the second group of people descends. These are the *tubuvagata* who, due to the terrifying noise of Sakowa's drum, stayed behind in the cave. Under the guidance of Galagalaiwavo and his wife Nelawata, the group emerges, accompanied by the *modawa* drum and its spirit Tokelebo. In the rhythm of Tokelebo's drumbeat a thorny leaf shapes Galagalaiwavo's and Nelawata's genitals, differentiating them by sex. Tokelebo appears to symbolize both earth and fertility. The latter is revealed in Galagalaiwavo's and Nelawata's garden where they plant taro. While Nelawata is collecting firewood pieces of peeled taro are transformed into the moon and sun; while the taro peelings are transformed into stones that can still be seen in Nelawata creek. While the transformation of taro into sun and moon symbolizes fertility, the transformation of taro peelings into immobile stones symbolises wealth and power, as connoted by stasis.

The moon illuminates Nelawata and Galagalaiwavo while they are copulating. As in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, they are shamed by the revelation of their "natural" nakedness, formerly hidden by darkness. Shame is a "social" emotion which signifies culture. The second part of Aiwavo's myth illustrates the circulation of fertility which links the natural (garden and taro), the human (Nelawata and Galagalaiwavo) and the celestial (sun and moon) into a cosmological cycle. This part of the myth concludes with Galagalaiwavo's anger, which provokes him to spit ginger magic to create black spots on the moon that are visible today.

The third part of the myth describes migrations of the people and the contacts with their neighbours. It then takes us back to Luwaiyoyo, the place of origin of Sakowa, Nelawata and Galagalaiwavo. Here Tokelebo, in the rhythm of the drum, creates a man and a woman and their genitals. The final rhythm of his creation evolves into a spirit dance. Ganivedaiya is the name of the bald-headed spirit that belongs to Aiwavo clan. According to David, the name is very powerful and brings baldness to everybody to whom it refers. In the rhythm of his drum Tokelebo shows Galagalaiwavo a special kind of ginger used for magic, teaches him the drum and shows him places that border his home. Later on, Tokelebo's sons transform themselves into a rock in the shape of a pair testicle – another symbol of fertility. In this part of the myth David names elements of Aiwavo clan's traditional *dewa*, such as the vaulted house roof, traditional clothing that is no longer used, and dances and songs that are gradually being forgotten. The third part of the myth concludes with a mortuary distribution of pumpkins by Luwaiyoyo during the hungry period preceding the yam harvest. After establishing relations with nearby places, Aiwavo clan ancestors moved to Udeyadeya in Ukuna.

The fourth part of the myth follows a third group of people who descended from the mountain village of Galuwata, where Sakowa and his men had gone. As in the origin of the

first two groups, their emergence from the cave is also accompanied by the beat of the drum and dancing. This leads to migration to other mountain and coastal areas. Here David disclosed only the name of the mountain site called Talowaka without mentioning the name of the place on the coast. Nevertheless, in accord with present day Aiwavo settlement, this place is probably Waikewala. This hamlet maintains strong marriage connections with Auligana, the mountain hamlet close to Talowaka. Here I might speculate that Aiwavo people who used to be part of Mikilavilavila clan first migrated to Auligana and then moved down to Mud Bay at Waikewala. This section of the Aiwavo myth stresses the difference between coastal and mountain people, especially in terms of their totems or emblems: drums and spears, which are universal emblems on Goodenough, though not invariably associated with the coast/mountain distinction.<sup>12</sup> In his conclusion, David elucidates some names such as Aiwavo, which denotes a rotting corpse.

The text of the fifth part describes Inabo's quest for her brother Mokai who lived in Afuya. Like Motalai, Inabo leaves traces of wealth behind her as she spends nights in different places. In exchange for hospitality she bestows one of her skirts (*doki*). Her basket of valuables, like drums, yams and skirts, signifies wealth and magical power. In many myths (including the one about Manubutu), *doki* confers magical power and fighting ability on its wearer. On her travels, Inabo leaves *doki* to the people of Wagifa, Kabuna, Vaikoya and Nikoko. At Nikoko she spends two nights and offers Miyewayewa people a special *doki* named after the red parrot. When she sights her grey-haired brother sitting on his *tuwaka* in Afuya, she presents him with *doki* Luwaiyoyo, the original heritage of Galagalaiwavo. The sitting and waiting posture of Mokai is reminiscent of *manumanua*, the magical stillness which anchors food and ensures village prosperity. The *manumanua* stasis of the brother is here opposed to the wealth dispersing wandering of the sister. Inabo's journey to Afuya leaves traces of Aiwavo's ancestral itinerary as a memory etched on the landscape. Every clan member brings this kind of collective memory into the present, either consciously (in the form of narrative) or inadvertently (in the form of enactment).

The sixth part of Aiwavo's myth brings us back to Luwaiyoyo, the place of origin of the first sexed couple, Galagalawavo and Nelawata. At this point David mentions again the source of Galagalaiwavo's wealth, which Inabo later distributed among individual clans. Similar disbursement of wealth is described in the first four parts of the myth. Galagalaiwavo later takes it to Galayvavo. There he transforms into a house, which stands alongside Lalayayo Lake, where Wagifa people live today. Later he changes again into a rock and finally into a *doki*. Like Galagalaiwavo's sons, his wife Nelawata also transforms into a rock. Again, these transformations suggest *manumanua*: the enclosed form and weighty substance of rock make it an ideal symbol of wealth that is preserved, contained and anchored. Turning into stone is a recurring motif in Goodenough mythology and folklore (Young 1977; 1983a).

The seventh episode of the myth illustrates the circular voyage of Bwaidoga people which is shown on the map below. The route, which leads through Talowaka, Mafabwabweya, Babiyanama, Fofolo, before turning back to Galuwata, describes an odyssey, which exemplifies Bwaidogan cosmology. This is to some extent present in their myths of origin, which in the circularity of their various versions always return to the same place, regardless of changes or reinterpretations.

<sup>12</sup> See Young 1971: Chap.11 for a discussion of "ceremonial moieties" in Kalauna.



which was founded relatively recently, are still politically and culturally significant.<sup>13</sup> The founders of these villages were the first ancestors of particular descent groups.

The Aiwavo myth concludes with a somewhat anomalous section about a wealthy man (*kaiwabu*) from Galuwata, who together with his gang steals the Bebebe people's crops. The same story is embedded in a lengthy version of the myth about the killing of Manubutu and his wife as recorded by Jenness and Ballantyne's *Language, Mythology and Songs of Bwaidoga* (1928: 66-68). David's version also describes the distribution of wealth after the killing of the wealthy "chief" who lived underground. His armshells and necklaces initiate *kula* exchange in Kiriwina and Dobu, while his circular tusk neck pendant, *matabili*, goes to Ukuna and becomes personified as the snake Matabili, who impregnates the Minafane woman. Although David tactfully declines to tell the story of Motabikwa (or Motalai), we already know that he is the snake-son who exchanges his valuable tusks for his mother's food before resentfully abandoning Bwaidoga and condemning its people to live in poverty.

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## CONCLUSION

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Both the Bibiavona and the Aiwavo myths describe the circular movement of mythological heroes along different paths and through different places. Their contingent halting at particular locations marks out a landscape that is entwined with mythology. This interlacing of myth and place is typical of Melanesia generally. Myths tell of ancestral ways of life, revealing genealogical pasts, yet allowing the continual recreation and reinvention of people's "histories" and "traditions".

Colonial government, missionization, and the introduction of new crops and subsistence technologies initiated changes that have been occurring on Goodenough and elsewhere for the past century. All have impinged in some way on pre-contact or "traditional" land ownership, which remains a cornerstone of Bwaidogan identity. Recent population growth has exacerbated the problem of land scarcity and resulted in increased conflict over land. As people grapple with this problem, they turn to myths of clan origin. Within the wider, dispersed clans, are localized descent groups (like Bibiavona and Aiwavo) who need to assert their identity vis-à-vis one another by reconstructing mythological histories once owned by their "mother clans". Disagreements concerning the content of a myth are bound to be rife. As we have seen, even brothers cannot fully agree on the "correct" telling of a myth.

Myths of origin are not something that Bwaidogan people talk about in their daily conversations. They are narrated and questioned only on particular occasions, such as when land rights are in dispute. Thus, for example, Moses contested Diana's myth about Manubutu that he claimed belonged to his clan. Nowadays, myths in Bwaidoga not only legitimate land rights but may also be used to create them. Thus, for example, the common Massim myth about the resentful snake can be appropriated, with local names and details, as a particular clan myth. Bibiavona and Aiwavo both lay claim to it.

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<sup>13</sup> The original Bwaidogan villages were Kabuna, Bwaidoga and Ukuna. During the last five decades these villages have expanded, leading to local migration. Bwaidoga village, even before Jenness's time (1910-11), had divided, with a number of clans crossing the bay to Banada where they founded a new village. Today Banada itself has expanded to the extent that it is subdivided into two village wards. Old Bwaidoga has come to be known as Melala (literally, "the village") as the mission and the government appropriated the name Bwaidoga for the district as a whole. In addition to the four above mentioned villages, there is also Auligana which lies on the hill behind Ukuna (Young 1968; 1989).

Many Bwaidogan people want their traditions to be written down in their own "history book", as Bwaidogans refer to anthropological monographs. Jenness and Ballantyne's two books on Bwaidoga and Young's two books on Kalauna are works that Bwaidogan people treat almost as they do the Bible, sacred texts in which the truth about their *kastam* is recorded. But whose truth and whose *kastam*? Bwaidogan people's? Kalauna people's? Or the truth of Goodenough Islanders more generally?

## **POVZETEK**

Vsebina članka govori o naravi živetih mitov v vasi Bwaidoga na otoku Goodenough, v provinci Milne Bay na Papui Novi Gvineji. Prvi del članka osvetli temeljne pristope in poglede o naravi živetih mitov, ki so jih nekateri avtorji (Malinowski 1926, Leenhardt 1947, Lévi-Strauss 1976, Wagner 1978, Weiner 1988, Young 1983a in Telban 1998), uveljavili v svojih študijah. V drugem delu članka sta predstavljena dva mita, ki jih je avtorica zabeležila v vasi Bwaidoga. Mita Bibiavona in Aiwavo klana sta tako kot ostali bwaidoški miti, živeta in utelešena v življenje in delovanje njunih lastnikov. Bwaidoški miti torej niso „zgodbe kar tako“, temveč predstavljajo neposredno vez s predniki, njihovimi duhovi in genealoškimi zgodovinami. Kot taki so inkorporirani v posamezne kraje, kjer njihovi lastniki živijo, vrtnarijo in preko katerih se gibljejo. Družbeno-kulturne spremembe in rast prebivalstva sta v zadnjih nekaj desetletjih vplivali na primanjčevanje zemlje, kar je imelo za posledico pojav zemljiških sporov. V reševanju tovrstnih konfliktov se Bwaidočani vračajo k mitološkim koreninam o izvoru njihovih klanov. Prav tu pa se porajajo različna trenja ne le med posameznimi klani, temveč tudi med posamezniki znotraj njih.

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## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL GAZE:

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### CONTEMPORARY ART IN AFRICA AND ANTHROPOLOGY

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#### INTRODUCTION

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On the occasion of "An/Sichten. Malerei aus dem Kongo 1990-2000",<sup>1</sup> an exhibition at Vienna's museum of ethnography in the spring of 2001, the debate of an anthropological gaze upon contemporary art in Africa was once again launched by a representative of a local NGO, who declared in an open letter that such a perception is inadmissible and that museums of ethnography are inappropriate venues for exhibiting such art.

In that exhibition, the two curators, Bogumil Jewsiewicki - who has been working on popular painting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for several decades now - and Barbara Plankensteiner, curator at the museum in Vienna, had spotlighted two frames of this art-form. Firstly, they emphasize the function of these paintings in the *salon* of the local purchasers. In such an environment they serve as means for reflecting and debating about aspects of social relationships, such as traditional life in a village, aspects of history (colonialism, early independence) etc. Johannes Fabian had defined this kind of art as art of memory (Fabian 1998: 13). Secondly, because of this narrow connection to local social relations, the curators had arranged the exhibits according to the major centres where these artworks had been created: Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Bunia. What had been labelled as the anthropological gaze actually concerned these two fundamental ways of binding this popular art in one case to specific social localities, in the other to its function in the *salon*. Consequently it seems as if this art-form could not be perceived outside these contexts.

The question raised is not a new one. This has to do, on the one hand, with the treatment of art by anthropology and, on the other, with disputes in the fields of art history and art criticism - with the advocates of the visual qualities of individual works of art, battling against cultural and societal contextualization, which over the last two decades has been championed above all by postmodern authors.<sup>2</sup> At the exhibition level those disputes are echoed in as far as contextual showings are preferably assigned to ethnographic museums, while shows in white cubes take place in museums and galleries of fine art. As the French art critic Joëlle Busca puts it, ethnographic museums tend towards exhaustive and didactic explanation, while the art museum valorises the artefact as product of individual creativity (Busca 2000: 189). It should be remembered, however, that a German art historian and director of a museum of fine arts, Alexander Dorner, proposed the principle of atmospheric space for

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<sup>1</sup> "View/Points. Paintings from the Congo 1990-2000".

<sup>2</sup> For the first group one could name e.g. Susan Sontag, for the second group e.g. Gill Perry, Griselda Pollock or Thomas McEvilley.

the new art museum already in the 1940s. Starting from the assumption that, in the history of mankind, individual works of art and their styles represent only a part of a very narrowly defined reality and that the important thing is the relation of art to industrial life, Dorner maintained that art styles are to be understood only in their historical context and/or in relation to the changes in man's visions and ideas (Dorner 1949).<sup>3</sup>

Be that as it may, the question of the anthropological gaze should be discussed anew among anthropologists if only because such accusations tend to crop up wherever contemporary art is being discussed. In the late 1990s e.g. this sort of criticism flared up over the new museum on Quai Branly in Paris; it has not yet come to an end (Busca 2000). What has been understood as the anthropological gaze so far may be characterised as a process of sense-making of the artwork by envisioning it as being originally connected to a given culture, and to specific social relations. Working with contemporary artists in Ivory Coast and Benin I, too, was confronted with this subject matter more than once.

In the first part, some examples of the anthropological gaze will be discussed – as directed upon the personality of the artist, upon the work of art, and upon exhibiting and collecting. In the second part I shall deal with context as a problem, which has to be critically scrutinized. Furthermore, I suggest that the pejorative notion of the anthropological gaze is partly due to an old Malinowskian tradition of contextualizing artworks. It nevertheless has first of all to be considered as a reproach to some discourses of the European-American art world. In the third part, context will be viewed as a structuring element that unfailingly affects specific discourses on art. In the conclusion, a differentiating approach will be argued for and a critical discourse between art criticism, the history of art, and anthropology advocated – a discourse about how multifarious artworks may be seen, considering that the European-American art world monopolizes the power to decide on exhibitions and thereby on names in the world of art.

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## **CONTEXTUALIZATION AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL GAZE**

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For the artwork “questions d'identité” (1997), Dominique Zinkpe got his inspiration from a Vodoun-altar. For this work the artist turned the inner sanctum of a magus or divinator, which as such is invisible to outsiders, into the open. In this process, the artist included the many objects which fill such a space, as well as the symbols employed, the liquids made use of, and visual impressions as caused, among others, by light and darkness. An essential aspect of artistic representation is the composition of the installation, the tension created between shapes, colours, and materials, while what Vodoun is or what the symbols mean is important in as far as the artist dealt with it.

When the artist showed me this work he mentioned that it contained a trap or fallacy – for those who think that it is an African work because the artist comes from Benin and is therefore confronted with Vodoun in his everyday life. “That’s a trap! Why? If it is a question of Vodoun, then it is African, since Vodoun comes from Africa. But it’s the other side which is upsetting” (Zinkpe 29/09/97). Undoubtedly, Vodoun is a cultural feature of this region, but: must an artist necessarily be African (from Benin) in order to become involved with the subject? Indeed, Dominique Zinkpe insists that, above all, a person viewing the art-

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<sup>3</sup> See also Cauman 1958.

work "questions d'identité" should see the contemporary artist, who just happens to have become involved with this particular subject in this particular locality. This difference matters: As soon as the notion "the subject is Vodoun; therefore the artist must be African (from Benin)" comes to mind, one is off to culture-specific considerations and thus tends to disregard the artist's act involving complexity of his own experience, of reflections on the subject and its formal potential, and last but not least of his specific manner of representation.

When Romuald Hazoumé showed a few pictures relating to the Oracle *Fa* at the exhibition *Inklusion/Exklusion*, at the festival *Steirischer Herbst* in Graz/Austria (1996), the curator suggested to him that somebody (an anthropologist?) should write something about the system of oracles for the catalogue: "Peter Weibel nearly fell into the trap. He told me: 'We should find someone who can write a text on *Fa*, someone who explains it.' I just laughed" (Hazoumé 08/10/97). Instead, the artist wrote a fictitious story about how he had painted a picture with the title "00" in Vienna<sup>4</sup> and waited to see what would happen then and there and what would happen to the very same picture in Port Moresby, Beijing, Phoenix, New York, and again at home in Porto Novo (Hazoumé 1996). To Romuald Hazoumé a text explaining *Fa* would have diverted attention away from the concerns of the artist, from the artwork as such. "Any artist, whether European, African, American or Chinese, has the problems that surround him, problems confronting him every moment. One can only find out how he solves them by trying to come a little closer to him" (Hazoumé 08/10/97).

Calixte Dakpogan told me that he had been asked to exhibit his iron sculptures at the cultural event of an African market being set up in Bordeaux. He refused, pointing out that his works were being acquired and exhibited by art collectors, galleries and art museums, and that an imitation market was not the proper venue for his oeuvre. The surprised reply was that surely he could do some good business there! (Dakpogan 26/09/97)

At an exhibition on the subject of recycling, "Ingénieuse Afrique. Artisans de la récupération et du recyclage", organized by the Musée de la Civilisation in Quebec (1994), works by artists of *récupération*<sup>5</sup> were shown side by side with utensils made from recycled materials like oil lamps, *cot-cot* briefcases, plastic sandals, children's toys etc. In a similar vein, the director of the Musée National d'Abidjan, Yaya Savane, and the philosopher-cum-curator Yacouba Konaté in their contribution to the catalogue on artists of *récupération* deal with the *masques bidons* by Romuald Hazoumé and the *Vohou Vohou* artist Youssouf Bath, among others (Konaté/Savane 1994). There are three irritating points here. One: Why should works of contemporary artists be shown in an exhibition whose very (sub)title refers to artisans, i.e. persons who work with their hands and may be helped by their family, in other words: persons who are to be denoted as independent craftsmen or decorative artists? Two: The artists of *Vohou Vohou*<sup>6</sup> definitely cannot be labelled as *récupération* in the sense of recycling. This movement emerged in Ivory Coast in late 1970s/ early 1980s and was concerned with connecting forms of modern art with regional African forms of expressions. Three: The *masques bidons* of Hazoumé deal with *récupération*, but definitely within other contexts than those defined by the overall topic.<sup>7</sup> These artists and their works are simply out of place in this exhibition.

<sup>4</sup> In *Fa*, the sign 00 is the first and most powerful one, symbolizing life and death. One may find the sign in Vienna on remote doors in old restaurants. The symbol indicates toilets.

<sup>5</sup> The French term denotes recycling proper as well as the act of appropriating cultural concepts and re-defining them.

<sup>6</sup> As to *Vohou Vohou* see Fillitz 2002a.

<sup>7</sup> See Fillitz 2002b.

While this list could easily be extended, the few examples given will suffice to make us understand how and why contemporary artists in Africa are touchy about the so-called anthropological gaze in the European-American art world. They are either originally connected to a local social phenomenon, as a citizen from Benin one of course has to do with Vodoun, or specific artworks are related to an original context which has to be explained/translated, or there is no discrimination between artworks and other objects, all are considered either as material culture or as artworks from Africa. For one thing these artists are seen as Africans who happen to be in art and not as contemporary artists expressing themselves by means of contemporary art forms on specific cultural, political and social topics. Thus, their works are denied perception of their respective formal characteristics. Much rather, an implicit assumption of cultural difference is turned into a reason for asserting that such artworks require a culture-specific (i.e. contextualized), original explanation. Not that with works of contemporary art in Africa one is given a choice between their reception via an act of seeing and a reception via an act of cultural contextualization. Such works are refused their being sensually experienced by being looked at; in other words: They are refused an equal footing with contemporary works of European or American artists. "Are Western artists treated like that? We are always looked at with an anthropological gaze. We have to be like this! We are not accepted as artists; that's bad" (Hazoum  08/10/97).

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## **SENSE-MAKING AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL GAZE**

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What is being referred to with the notion of the anthropological gaze is a particular way of sense-making, which is identified with the practice of anthropology. Firstly, an original social and cultural context is assumed for any artefact; secondly, this artefact has to be translated within this context to a European or American public; and thirdly, it is believed that the overall meaning of the artefact is rooted within these original relationships. The critique of this approach opts on the one hand for a sensuous perception of the artwork within a so-called white cube, relying therefore on its formal aspects for apprehension. On the other, it argues against the idea of an original context and rather emphasises the multiplicity of contexts within which the artwork may be meaningful. This latter aspect actually would constitute a major quality of the artwork.

Regarding the characteristics of the presumed practice of anthropology, it is obvious that they refer to the classic concept of context as developed by Malinowski. The context of any phenomenon is society as a delimited entity in relative isolation, and as constituted by a functional holism. As Roy Dillely remarks, "it is a process that has been seen as unproblematic" (Dillely 1999: 1). Roger Keesing was one of the first who problematised this practice, and stated that contexts are "in our heads, not out there" (Keesing 1972: 28). Many critiques and reflections have been expressed on the anthropological endeavour of constructing these cultural wholes by remarking the difference between the work of representation of the anthropologist and the former narrative of the interlocutors, or by questioning the dominant authority of the anthropologist etc. Solutions are sought in re-centring the construction of context on our interlocutors. For instance: George Marcus (1989) negates any master-narrative to the advantage of the discursive dimension. Marilyn Strathern suggests scrutinizing "the manner in which our subjects dismantle their own constructs" (Strathern 1992: 76). We should wonder how our interlocutors construct the relationship between part and wholes. And Ladislav

Holy suggests a shift of our interests towards contextualization as an interactive process, “a socially and culturally situated practice” (Holy 1999: 58).

All these reflections however also articulate a critique of the European-American mode of producing sense by contextualizing and re-contextualizing, i.e. of combining parts and wholes in different manners as to constitute the knowledge of the object (Strathern 1992). Thereafter the critiques argue on the one hand against a Malinowskian consideration of context for a phenomenon, as well as against an endless multiplicity of contexts in the scramble for meaning of the object (Schlecker/Hirsch 2001). Regarding the object of the anthropology of art, the first aspect concerns the relationship of the artwork to the presumed original socio-cultural context. Speaking somewhat generally, I would state that until far into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the artistic nature of the object was either ignored, or considered from a technical viewpoint. Artworks were analysed as to their function in the social framework, or the analysis focused on their cultural and political meanings within clearly definable local societies. While occasionally the formal aspects of works of art were altogether neglected, they seem to be of at least secondary importance to anthropology’s approach to art, as means for understanding cultural structuring and visual perception.<sup>8</sup>

Although the anthropology of art does not differentiate between high and low art forms, and has no restricted concept of art (Benzing 1978), it nevertheless was limited in the types of artworks it dealt with, because of this specific practice of contextualization. The postulates of the cultural otherness and of the socially bounded artefacts require the socio-cultural contexts for their sense-making, and this was until recently the proper field of the anthropology of art. Besides traditional art, airport or tourist art<sup>9</sup> is a theme because of the semiotic dimensions within local contexts, and its stereotypical inventions of Africa for tourists from Europe, while popular art<sup>10</sup> is closely connected to features of the colonial-historical and especially the postcolonial-urban background. Typically, therefore, only the topic of popular art was entrusted to anthropologists in the volume of the periodical of contemporary art *Kunstforum*, which was dedicated to contemporary art by artists from African states (Bender/Ströter-Bender 1993).

Thus, two mechanisms from within anthropology contributed to the production of the pejorative meaning of the anthropological gaze – the production of the otherness of the artwork, which ended up in claiming the need for the socio-cultural contextualization. This is one side of the theme. The anthropology of art however has until recently neglected to deal with those contemporary artists in Africa who have had an academic training, or those living in Europe and America. Likewise, it has largely ignored many of those who, without an academic background, have been integrated into the European-American art world. Why should anthropologists then be critiqued for a practice, which they did not apply upon these contemporary artists? In this scope, the anthropological gaze criticized by contemporary artists in African states has to be seen, first of all, as a product of European-American art discourses in which exclusion, or specific types of circulation of contemporary art from non-Western centres are monitored and controlled.

Such discourse may well be traced back to the concept of art world as offered in 1964 by Arthur Danto. He interpreted it at first as a style matrix by means of which works

<sup>8</sup> See Coote/Shelton 1992.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Graburn 1976, Jules-Rosette 1984, Phillips/Steiner 1999.

<sup>10</sup> See Szombati-Fabian/Fabian 1978, Fabian 1996.

of art are turned into "an organic community and by their very existence release energies latent in other works" (Danto 2000: 213). But of course, Danto's art world comprised only art from the Occident, and was not considering art of artists from other regions of the world. However, since the late 1980s more and more contemporary artists from African states demand, in various ways, their right as members of such an organic, global community. In this connection the art historian Hans Belting speaks of a world art, which could become the symbol of a new unity of the world (Belting 1995: 72). Right away, however, he qualifies this statement and stresses that the Western art world could not integrate unlimited numbers of artists (Belting 1998: 53): art-historical reflections make him point out power relations in this world art.

With respect to the exhibition "Kunstwelten im Dialog. Von Gauguin zur globalen Gegenwart", Museum Ludwig in Cologne (1999/2000),<sup>11</sup> Belting asserts that what is involved is "our own concept of art, which, in the long run, cannot remain unharmed by such pluralism ... Possibly, non-Western art will introduce an altogether foreign and incomprehensible idea of art to institutions representing our own culture" (Belting 1999: 325). And Marc Scheps, former director of this very museum and one of the exhibition curators,<sup>12</sup> agrees with Belting that culture, though a unifying element in a human group, represents "also a barrier that is to protect it against anything foreign" (Scheps 1999: 16, my translation).

From the viewpoint of anthropology the premises of this argumentation have to be emphasised. One has to wonder why, within an intellectual space, culture is dealt with as being homogeneous, characteristic for a specific society, and is moreover considered as constituting a boundary by its own right. Such an essentialist discourse on culture is opposed to the processual one, which is precisely referred to in the title of the show. Speaking of Gauguin, rather than thinking of "barriers" (!), one should recollect his journey to Polynesia and the artistic expression of his interaction with local people and cultural forms, which is defined as "romantic" Primitivism by Robert Goldwater (1986). From the same viewpoint one should recall the whole phenomenon of Primitivism of around 1900, especially "intellectual" Primitivism (Goldwater 1986), i.e. the reception of traditional African art by the Cubists in Paris. The European-American art world was quite eager to take over (discover) those art forms from Africa. As Belting fittingly notes, Occidental art history quickly heralded this as an event and appropriated them right away, although classifying them with its own period before the advent of history (Belting 1995: 73).

Contemporary art in Africa harks back to multifarious traditions, with new ones having been and still being developed occasionally; yet it has to be pointed out that not all of these art traditions have been or are foreign to art history of the Occident. Thus, upon an invitation from the artist Aina Onobolu in the early 1920s, the British painter Kenneth Murray moved to Nigeria in order to teach portrait and landscape painting there. And ever since 1936, when the Art Department was founded in Accra (it later was moved to the University of Science and Technology at Kumasi/Ghana), curricula of European art academies were taken over by the colonial states and subsequently by the postcolonial ones.

I contend that there may be an art historical problem of how these arts of the world may be connected; specifically how Occidental art history fits within this network. The con-

<sup>11</sup> "Art Worlds in Dialogue. From Gauguin to Present-Day Globalism."

<sup>12</sup> The two others were Yilmaz Dziewior and Barbara M. Thiemann.

struction of difference, as with the above mentioned concept of culture as a barrier, is however a reaction to nowadays usual interactions. Such an anthropological gaze on the work of artists of African countries is not merely a result of anthropological approaches. In this discourse, a presumably widely accepted practice of anthropological contextualization is adopted by agents from the European-American art world for producing difference and distance.

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## WORK OF ART, CONTEXT, AND ART DISCOURSE

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It would be too easy to reduce the perception and reception of contemporary art from Africa to the simple dichotomy: formal perception by art history and art criticism or contextualization of a work of art by anthropology. For one thing, modern anthropology in no way proposes to interpret a work of art exclusively within its presumably original context as the only one in which it could be understood. George Marcus and Fred Myers (1995), for instance, formulate a program for their critical anthropology of art, in which they draw our attention on mechanisms of how the contemporary European-American art world deals with art, and how transfers between contexts change the relative importance and meaning of the artwork. "In this regard, the very specific anthropological critique would concern the world's *manner* of assimilating, incorporating, or making its own cross-cultural difference" (Marcus/Myers 1995: 33; authors' stress).<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned at the outset, contextualization of art is not the exclusive monopoly of anthropology. As an argument against plain perception (seeing in the abstract), postmodern art critics like the American Griselda Pollock (1993) stress the value (not the quality) of the work of art, in order to gain insights into cultural and social relations. And in the perspective of global flows of artworks, Thomas McEvelley envisages that the only point of art criticism from now on will be its sharpening of our critical faculties and applying them to all aspects of culture (McEvelley 1991: 177).

It must be admitted, however, that the question of this cultural and/or social context is much more of a problem than it seems. To give an example: In 1966, at the "Premier Festival des Arts Nègres" in Dakar, Michel Leiris, misjudging both the development of art forms in urban Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the pluralist social framework in the young postcolonial states, called this modern art a "*peinture bâtarde*", a mongrel form, with the artists no longer being truly African, "*plus vraiment africains*", as they had been trained in a Western system or were in frequent contact with the West (Lebeer 1994: 90). The above-mentioned, New-York-based Thomas McEvelley (1993) slid into a kind of primitivisation of the artist Ouattara whom he interviewed at the Venice Biennale of 1993, when he asked the artist first about Abidjan, his family, language, healing/divination, ritual and initiation before turning to the subject proper, which was the work of Ouattara.<sup>14</sup>

One should also note that many of those exhibitions of contemporary art forms by artists from Africa that take place in the white cubes of galleries or museums of modern art tend to offer side-programmes, including workshops, music groups from Africa, food cooked to recipes of various African cuisines, as e.g. at "Flash Afrique! Fotografie aus Westafrika"

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<sup>13</sup> The movement of artworks actually had been dealt with in respect to traditional art by authors like Price (1989), Errington (1998), and including airport art by Phillips/Steiner (1999).

<sup>14</sup> See the criticism of Olu Oguibe 1995.

in Vienna's Kunsthalle (autumn 2001). As that is not done in group exhibitions of artists from European or American regions, we have here classical (though unintended) cases of contextualization by means of a form of anthropological gaze. In this respect it should also be noted that quite often such exhibitions are co-sponsored by development organisations, either governmental or non-governmental. For Bernhard Fibicher, director of Kunsthalle Bern, such joint ventures indicate that it is not only artistic interests that are at stake here (Fibicher 2000: 20).

All too readily context is regarded as a frame of reference naturally given in social reality. In fact, however, contextualization is nothing other than the construction of a matrix for ordering and classificatory purposes. The wording of the paradigm of postmodern art criticism by Thomas McEvilley makes this quite clear: "The critic will come to see art as culture and culture as anthropology" (McEvilley 1991: 177). Nonetheless, anthropology has to counter with the slogan "to see arts as *part of culture*" (my italics). The plural of arts points to manifold art forms which are being created side by side today: they adhere to diverse formal canons, they express diverse attitudes *vis-à-vis* various aspects of reality, and they are the subjects of diverse reception discourses and systems of circulation. In addition, these art forms constitute only parts of culture, if culture is considered as a larger concept. And last but not least, instead of conceiving culture as a closed-off homogeneous whole, and shared by all members of a society, rather, we may consider that its specific character is depending on its distributive character and on the ways and means of its unboundedness.

Context as the relation between an artwork and its cultural context is much more complex than the mere equation art = culture, even with culture very widely defined. With reference to paintings, Belting points to one problem of seeing them in a socio-cultural context. He speaks of "an *ex post facto* revenge on the artist" that takes place once the work of art "is taken to be an illustration of a historical situation" (Belting 1985: 223, my translation). Indeed, context for him denotes first of all the pictorial archive of Occidental art history (Belting 1995, 1999).

No doubt, context also refers to the formal qualities among artworks. But even these formal aspects and interconnections at a global dimension raise further areas and problems. Paul Faber (1992) warns of the danger of seeing artworks in the abstract, in view of the fact that this process implicitly draws on certain ordering criteria, mostly of Occidental art historical origin. By seeing in the abstract one misses information about the position of certain works within their local frames of art creation. Within a transnational frame, what an European or American observer may take to be a repetition of art forms already existing in Europe or America, need be nothing of the sort in its local context. The artwork of the *Vohou Vohou* in Ivory Coast is such a case. As to its formal characteristics it may be briefly described as the composition of artworks from diverse materials to be found in one's everyday local surroundings (sand, cardboard, wood, bark cloth, tin, newspapers etc.) from the perspective of a modern art training. Stumbling upon the catalogue of an exhibition of works by Antoni Tàpies in 1975, those local artists were struck by the indisputable formal likeness between their works and his. One of the students of the group even wondered at the time how Tàpies could have copied them (N'Guessan 26/07/1997).

As a matter of fact, neither did they know about Tàpies, nor did he know about them. If the *Vohou Vohou* would have been directly connected to the narrative of Western modern art, the relationship to Tàpies might have been considered in another perspective. Above all, the local and regional impact of the *Vohou Vohou* art creations would be deeply neglected. As documenting the problem of these formal narratives, works by Tàpies are to be found in all

major collections of international museums of modern art, while those of *Vohou* artists have rarely been exhibited in Europe and Northern America so far.

Making sense of artworks entails a multiplicity of contexts. Basically there are the formal and the socio-cultural ones. However these two contexts are within themselves highly diversified, corresponding to connections of the artist's reflections as well as to the tracks artwork may move along. In this perspective, one can no longer speak of an original context and one of reception. Rather, it is to scrutinize how an artwork is connected to larger entities in specific situations. Earlier I mentioned an exhibition on recycled artefacts that had been combined with artworks, which in one way or another were relying on the concept of *récupération*.<sup>15</sup> By connecting the artworks of contemporary artists such as Romuald Hazoumé and Youssouf Bath to artefacts from a special area of economic activity, the artistic processes of *récupération* were assimilated to the one of the transformation of waste. Constituting the relationship between part (the artwork) and whole – recycled artefacts as documents of creativity in African societies – in this case relates precisely to the practice of making sense in an exhibition which has been designed for a North American public.

Actually, the question of the otherness of an artwork of an artist from Africa (or elsewhere) is a matter of how this otherness is postulated by this same artist. Let me turn to the adjective African in the notion of "contemporary African art". The artist Moustapha Dimé, who died in 1998, rejected the designation; Ousmane Sow refuses to participate in those group exhibitions where the title contains the word Africa. Their rejection of this overall classification thought up by European and Northern American art specialists corresponds to a construction of otherness, and produces hierarchies. At the outset, the notion African raises the question of when an artwork may be characterised as such, and whether this implies an othering, in which such an artwork would no longer belong to the overall category art as defined by modern Western narratives.

All artists, however, do not reject the adjective African. From numerous personal conversations with artists in Ivory Coast and in Benin, I came away with a much more differentiated idea of what the African dimension in this contemporary art could be (see Fillitz 2002 a). For all these artists it is quite self-evident to figure themselves as parts of the organic community of artists and their works, to use Arthur Danto's expression (Danto 2000: 213). But the question of how exactly each one of them fits within this community as a truly global concept, has to be answered according to individual strategies. Romuald Hazoumé for instance insists on the adjective African; for him it signals unmistakably that an artist will no longer subject his work to the patronizing of European-American reasoning and formal canons. At the other end of the scale there is Yacouba Touré.<sup>16</sup> Around 1996 he rejected the adjective as fervently as Hazoumé pleads for it; but he reminded one that the term African was highly significant for the *Négritude* movement in Senegal in the 1960s and 1970s, and for the *Vohou Vohou* movement in Ivory Coast from the late 1970s till the late 1980s. At that time it was a matter of emancipation from the tutelage of European canons, and of a search for autonomous ways of representation, based on world art discourses, and not on the interaction with any regional, traditional ones. By now, however, Touré called for contemporary art

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<sup>15</sup> See "Ingénieuse Afrique", Quebec 1994.

<sup>16</sup> He unfortunately died in July 2002.

in general to permit the artist to pick up whatever artistic tradition in the world he cares to – without any outside determination.

Many other artists, while rejecting the epithet African, point out particularities of artistic interaction either with the environment or with expressive forms from wherever. As the notion of contemporary African art meanwhile became an established designation in European-American art discourses, Georges Adéagbo thinks that all that matters is to understand what it is being used for: he relates it to present-day discourses of power in Europe and Northern America, which deal with including, defining, and circulating the works of artists of African origin.

Whether African is acknowledged or refused, the connection is less to a local tradition but to world art (world community of artists). In any of these comprehensions, what matters is the way how the otherness is constructed in relationship to an envisaged community of the artists and their artworks of the world. The production of difference here does not imply a boundary tracing, but, rather, refers to how each of these artists intends to participate in the transnational discourses of representing the recent, postcolonial world.

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## **A PLEA FOR DISCURSIVE RELATIONS**

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In the foregoing discussion I have tried to show that the reproach of an anthropological gaze on contemporary arts has, from an anthropological perspective, historical roots. The notion had been linked to otherness, and the need for translating such a differently positioned artwork within an original context.

However, the context of a phenomenon is anything but naturally given. Critiques in anthropology itself have emphasised the constructivist dimension of context, which we ourselves are producing in order to analyse the phenomenon, which is to be explained. Turning things around, scholars suggested that context should be studied as the activity of our interlocutors, in how they are relating part and wholes (Strathern 1992). Actually, the anthropological gaze on contemporary artists of Africa concerned at least as much a specific practice of European-American discourses about their art. As the latter is deeply embedded within an Occidental art historical narrative, the process of othering produces difference by postulating cultural distance. Instead of using a processual concept of culture, an essentialist one is adopted.

In order to overcome the mutual reproaches of negative anthropological gazes which harm the perspective on contemporary art, I argue for approaching art via a multiplicity of contexts. This is proposed not in the conviction that more contexts entail more or a better knowledge. Such an assumption is critiqued by Schlecker and Hirsch (2001). Multiplicity of contexts refers foremost to the fundamental aspects of form and content which inform any artwork. Instead of advocating a dichotomy between either formal reception, or socio-cultural contextualization, both should be considered as two discourses which are complementary to each other, and are constitutive of the artwork.

Nigel Whiteley, for instance, proposes the concept of critical looking, the act of relating visual sensation and cognitive experience, “which makes one see the artwork” (Whiteley 1999: 118). By means of this concept, Whiteley wants to express the relationship between visual perception as the experience of a moment, and contextualization as an experience within a wider time horizon, “a return in criticism to the artwork as a material and experien-

tial presence, but, for the most part, this scrutiny will be part of a dialogue between form and meaning" (Whiteley 1999: 120).

Moreover, the multiplicity of contexts must be seen in relation to the networks within which artworks are circulating. The notion of multiplicity therefore is understood as how, in each case, an artefact is being considered as art, and what these processes entail (see Marcus/Myers 1995). This is no more a reference to an original context and one of reception, nor is it a claim for multiplying contexts. It is a scrutiny of how, in each specific setting, meaning is being produced.

In this scope, the mentioning of the anthropological gaze revealed, above all, that even the strictly visual perception of an artwork (in the abstract) is tied up in power discourses. Such a pre-selection determines in advance whether a work can or cannot be seen by beholders of specific art worlds. European-American dominance in the world of art could be countered by unceasing differentiation among the multifarious contemporary manifestations of art, in other words by discursive rather than disjunctive relations between art criticism, art history, and anthropology of art as to their common topic, in this case as to contemporary art by artists hailing from Africa.

## **POVZETEK**

Pojem antropološkega pogleda/strmenja zaobjema specifičen način ustvarjanja smisla, ki je značilen za antropološko prakso. V povezavi z antropologijo umetnosti se nanaša na: prvič, zahtevo po izvirnem družbenem in kulturnem kontekstu kateregakoli ročnega izdelka; drugič, prevajanje tega izdelka, znotraj tovrstnega konteksta, evropski in ameriški publikii; in tretjič, prepričanje, da je celosten pomen tega izdelka zakoreninjen v njegovih izvirnih odnosih. V pričujočem članku avtor predlaga, da je slabšalni pomen pojma antropološkega pogleda/strmenja deloma nastal zaradi klasičnega pojmovanja konteksta, kot ga je razvil Malinowski. Mnoge kritike in refleksije so obravnavale antropološko kontekstualiziranje in poudarile razliko med predstavitvijo in opisovanjem antropologov ter predhodno zgodbo udeležencev v pogovoru. Namesto, da se ukvarjamo z dihotomijo med izvirnem kontekstom in kontekstom dojemanja umetniškega dela, se avtor zavzema za tisti pristop k umetnosti, ki bi upošteval mnogoterost kontekstov. Mnogoterost kontekstov se najprej nanaša na temeljne vidike oblike in vsebine, ki zaznamujejo katerokoli umetniško delo. Mnogoterost kontekstov se nadalje nanaša na mreže znotraj katerih umetniško delo kroži. Avtor v članku poziva k odmiku od zgoraj omenjene dihotomije, hkrati pa ne zagovarja potrebe po pomnoževanju kontekstov zgolj zaradi prepričanja, da bi se na ta način ustvarilo ustrezno znanje. Zagovarja skrbno preučevanje načinov, kako ljudje ustvarjajo pomene znotraj posameznih specifičnih okolij.

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# SUSTAINABILITY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: THE INUIT CASE

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## INTRODUCTION

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In this paper I shall try to examine the connection between the concept of sustainable development and indigenous peoples, such as the Inuit. As one of the best solutions to the growing environmental crisis, the idea of sustainable development has gained prominence in recent years, including in the international arena. Also, in recent years the ways and knowledge of indigenous peoples have been included in possible solutions to such a crisis as indigenous populations are certainly one of the few human communities that have lived sustainably on the territories, which they have occupied for centuries. I shall try to elaborate this connection in general and particularly with the example of the Inuit, an indigenous people residing in the Arctic. The Inuit have shown that sustainability of an area is clearly connected to the political autonomy of the communities concerned. Furthermore, the ideologies lying at the base of their self-construction as a community, as it may be seen through subsistence practices, are clearly related to the concept of sustainability and may even be categorised as such. Specific focus shall be given to the Yup'ik community with an attempt to picture the subsistence cycle of its members, to the Inupiaq whaling activities as an example of a particular sustainable subsistence activity within an extensive cultural and political context, and to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the most important Inuit NGO that promotes indigenous political autonomy and sustainable management in the circumpolar areas.

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## SETTING

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The setting where all of these processes occur is very complex. This complexity originates in its wide dimensions, including particular individuals pursuing daily subsistence sustainable activities on the one side and nation-state governments or international corporations on the other. The setting also includes an immense diversity of actors. By limiting ourselves to the Inuit context only, it includes specific individuals, native or non-native, households, kinship structures, villages, native corporations, educational institutions, such as the Inupiat University, Inuit NGOs, and also governments of states/territories and nation-states. Furthermore, primarily through the NGOs, structures like the one of United Nations, and its diverse sub-commissions and permanent forums, form a broader part of this picture. Less directly, other organisational structures are also involved, such as indigenous NGOs, like the Indigenous World Association and a huge plethora of environmental NGOs and popular movements. In order to be able to perform a comprehensive analysis and deconstruction of the setting, we would first of all have to identify the field, what in itself is a daunting task, especially due to

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the difficulty in defining its boundaries, if not its actors. Secondly, there would be a need for determining and locating the power resistance points and which discourses are to be included in the inquiry. Is this a general discourse on human rights, discourse on sustainability, on indigenous sustainability, on international relations or simply Arctic politics, a discourse on Inuit or a discourse on colonial nation-states with indigenous minorities in a postcolonial setting? Perhaps we can talk about the identity politics as expressed within the present order of representation. These are all immensely demanding tasks, which by far exceed not only the intentions of the author, but also the possibilities this paper (or for that matter a number of papers) can cover. I simply have a desire to try and present, in brief, the developments showing that those individuals, self-identified as Inuit, still daily pursue sustainable subsistence activities. More so, the organised structures of these individuals and especially the Inuit NGOs, but in recent period also local government authorities such as that of the Nunavut, wish to see the sustainability principle recognised as the leading principle of circumpolar development plans in the spirit of the Bruntland Report. In addition, they wish to emphasise the role of the Inuit as the indigenous inhabitants, who already possess the knowledge of sustainable economic patterns, what ought to be, in their opinion, recognised by all as relevant in the decisions made.

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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Human transformations of nature are in recent decades beginning to interfere with the functioning of the world ecosystem, as an increasing number of areas succumb to development, human colonisation, resource exploitation and environmental degradation. Increasing industrialisation and urbanisation in Third World countries put additional burdens on the already polluted planet, while the rising consumption of non-renewable mineral resources, mostly by the developed countries of the North, doesn't act in the opposite direction. A demographic explosion in poor countries fosters more poverty and further human encroachment into unpopulated areas for settlement, cultivation or firewood, only strengthened by mining and timbering activities. Wildlife habitat destruction only decreases the already diminished biodiversity of plants and animals. Improper use of water for irrigation, a resource already scarce in several areas, assisted in salinisation of the fertile land, itself under attack from herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. The loss of topsoil and desertification had also become a major reason for concern in more than one region. All the chemicals put into the soil reach inland and sea water, that are also polluted by industrial and other waste. To this extremely bleak picture two things may be added: the heating of the atmosphere and the depletion of the ozone layer (Gare 1994).

With the rise in proportions of environmental crisis, the attention given to the subject by an ever-increasing number of people also increased. One substantial effort in trying to find long-term solutions for such issues, while taking into the consideration the economic factors, certainly is the idea of sustainable development.

In 1987, The United Nations' Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Bruntland Commission, published the text "Our Common Future" of which the key concept was sustainable development. Sustainable development was defined "as a process of change in which exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the reorientation of technology development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (Taylor

1994: 83). Additional recognition was given to the concept at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development, The Earth Summit, held in Rio in June 1992. Almost every major institution in the world economy embraced the idea, including multinational mining and logging companies, as well as The World Bank (Gedicks 1993: 198).

The validation of the concept of sustainability coincides with a dissemination of postmodernist approaches in a wide range of sciences. Several authors have observed a connection between a "deep" ecological thinking that clearly rejects several central modernistic concepts, like limitless progress or anthropocentrism, and postmodernism. Oelschlaeger even advocates "postmodern environmentalism" as the key to an environmentally sustainable society (Taylor 1994: 262). Deep ecology rejects the dualism between ideology and science, humanity and nature and the underlying tradition of Enlightenment, the anthropocentrism (ibid. 264). It reflects the inter-relatedness of all life and is ideologically related to the many indigenous belief systems, as for example in the case of diverse Inuit groups, as I will try to show further on.

Many social movements that are connected to the philosophical-scientific perspective of the deep ecology have become very much involved in resolving the environmental situation. They can inclusively be called popular ecological resistance movements, including non-middle class people and peasants, and also western populist environmentalists and particularly the indigenous peoples (Taylor 1994: 2), such as those of the circumpolar belt.

These movements, including indigenous peoples', in general, share anti-industrial attitudes and a perception that environmental deterioration is threatening survival. They usually seek to gain local autonomy or even self-government. Such is an example of the Nunavut, which in March 1999 became a new Canadian territory. One of the central claims of this movement, as also presented today by the Inuit territorial leadership, was to be able to manage the land according to the traditional sustainable ways, supplemented by modern knowledge, while trying to protect the Rights of Commons ([www.npc.nunavut](http://www.npc.nunavut)). Renewing sustainable life patterns is the overall objective of popular ecological movements (Taylor 1994: 340 - 43). Such developments attract co-operation and solidarity of several environmental groups such as Earth First!, a US-based Rainforest Action Network (RAN) or the Australia-based Rainforest Information Centre (RIC). With Earth First!, for example, the most prominent struggles are those by people believed to live sustainably, especially indigenous peoples or those animated by nature spiritualities and those deemed similar to deep ecology, such as anti-logging movements in Amazonia, the Philippines or Malaysia (Ibid. 19-24).

The Bruntland Report also recognised the crucial role culture plays as an adaptive mechanism in applying the concept of sustainability. Since the native cultures in the remote regions of the world were recognised as the only ones that have proved to thrive in these environments, the Report advocated recognition of the native traditional land rights and a right to sustain their way of life (Gedicks 1993: 198).

A particular sector of the world population, the indigenous peoples, numbering around 250 million people, is connected to the ecological crisis in a specific manner. The 50 million (Taylor 1994: 27) indigenous peoples that inhabit the remaining tropical forests, or the land in their immediate vicinity, of SE Asia, Central and South America and Central Africa, are under the most pressure. The extensive and accelerating exploitation of the rainforests for timber, minerals, oil and hydroelectric energy, cattle ranching, and plantation agriculture, make these forests the most seriously threatened habitats. Native peoples are under assault on every continent because their lands contain a wide variety of valuable resources needed for industrial development. Oil exploitation in the Circumpolar North or teak logging

among the Karen people in Myanmar are just two examples of that. Such a development, where the indigenous peoples are driven out of their territories or start to work for the intrusive societies, all too often means the annihilation of their culture and lifestyle. They often end up living on the fringes of modern societies as underpaid agricultural labourers or in the slums of the towns, without any control over their own traditional territory and its resources (Ortiz 1984: 82).

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## THE INUIT

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The Inuit are indigenous people (or rather a group of peoples) populating the Arctic areas above the tree line in North America and Greenland. A smaller community also resides on the eastern tip of the Chukotka peninsula, located in the NE Siberia, just across Alaska, separated by the Bering Straits. All together the Inuit peoples number around 150,000 members, residing in 4 different countries. Besides around 1700 in Chukchi Autonomous Area in Russia, there are approximately 50,000 in Alaska, around 35,000 in Canada and some 60,000 in Greenland (Creery 1993). Some clarifications, however, have to be made.

One concerns the terms used to describe these peoples: indigenous, aboriginal, native, original, first or tribal peoples, but also as the "fourth world peoples". The different groups, institutions and organisations that cope with these specific issues, like the World Bank, United Nations and ethnically based organisations or NGOs such as World Council of Indigenous Peoples, use different terms. Sometimes they are interchangeable and sometimes certain groups prefer a distinctive designation, while others have for them colonialist/racist connotations (like Aboriginal in Australia, slowly being replaced by the term Native) (see Sheff 1999. Chapter 3).<sup>1</sup>

Another issue concerns the term used by the members of the community to describe themselves in relation to populations that colonised the areas that these communities consider as their ancestral lands. In Alaska, among the Inuit for instance, the term "Native" is commonly used to mean "Alaska Native" or "Yupit/Inupiat", while its negation "non-Native" is commonly used for Euro-Americans, often called simply "white" (Hensel 1996: 191).

In addition to this, as it is the case with other aboriginal or native communities living in the areas prior to the European colonisation, the use of ethnonyms is problematic. The name used for a specific community can also exist in several forms, mostly when one form was used by the community itself (if such general and inclusive group consciousness existed before the arrival of modernism) and the other by the settlers or the colonial authorities.<sup>2</sup>

The term Eskimo (which is derived through French from an Indian name) is on one hand commonly used self-referentially by Alaskan Inupiat and Yupit, but in Canadian and Greenlandic context it has clear racist/colonialist connotations and the word Inuit is preferred. In linguistic terms, the term Inuit is reserved for the peoples speaking a group of lan-

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<sup>1</sup> In India, for example, where these groups are called and recognised in law as Scheduled Tribes, the use of the term native, indigenous or other similar terms would be misleading. In India, with an estimated tribal population of 60 to 80 millions (Taylor 1994: 144), where all population of the country is indigenous to the area, certain groups, with social structure patterns based on hunting and gathering or subsistence farming activities received a special protection by the law. Such examples can be found across Africa and Asia.

<sup>2</sup> The case in point is the Saami people of northern Fennoscandia, who were, until recently, known almost exclusively under the term Lapps, a name used by their Germanic speaking southern neighbours.

languages from the Bering Straits all over to Greenland and Yup'ik for those speaking the languages stretching from Norton Sound and the Siberian coast to Bristol Bay on the southern Alaskan coast. Here the term Eskimo would refer to all the peoples who speak Inuit and Yup'ik languages (Moseley & Asher 1991: Map 1), while the ethnonym Inuit was chosen as all-encompassing self-designation of the Eskimo peoples, as seen through the name of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. The languages belonging to the Eskimo-Aleut family are spread from the tip of Siberia to the eastern coast of Greenland and are divided into two branches, the Aleut language and the Yup'ik-Inuit language family. The Inuit-Yup'ik language family consists of the Yup'ik group (from YUPIIT = People) and the Inuit (= People) group. The YUPIIT speak three different languages: Siberian Yup'ik, Pacific Yup'ik and the most numerous Central Alaskan Yup'ik, each of them with several dialects. The Inuit group proper, though, is consisted of a fairly unbroken chain of dialects with mutual intelligibility, the furthest extremes being unintelligible to each other. According to somehow standardised scripts that have developed, three languages were formed.<sup>3</sup>

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## **HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN ARCTIC AMERICA AND GREENLAND**

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The first human settlement to these areas can be traced to after the end of the last glacial period at around 12,000 BCE. The oldest recognisable culture is the so-called Paleo-Arctic Culture that existed until approximately 5000 BCE. The heartland were the areas of NE Siberian lowlands and the ice-free peninsula of Beringia, while in America they could, due to the extensive ice-sheet, advance no further than the southern parts of Alaska. Around 3000 BCE, a new hunting and gathering culture rapidly spread around the Arctic. The Arctic Small Tool Tradition, named after distinctive miniaturised artefacts, originated in Siberia and spread to the river Lena in the west and across Canada all the way to Greenland. With this wave of immigration into the arctic America, the forbearers of the Aleut-Inuit peoples settled the areas north of the tree line. This line represents a language boundary among the Aleut-Inuit family and the Amerindians, primarily of Athapaskan and Algonkian origin, up to the present day.

This immigration wave was followed by a period when separate cultures evolved, partially in their adaptation to the local environmental circumstances, like in Alaska where caribou hunting was replaced primarily by whaling. In Greenland, though, already around 1000 BCE, musk ox hunting and ice sealing became the focus of subsistence activities (Hertling 1970: 118).

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, a second wave of immigration called the Thule Culture spread from the area north of Bering Straits to the coast of Greenland. The areas south of the Straits weren't influenced by this cultural expansion and up until this day this represents a boundary between the YUPIIT of Central and South Alaska and the Inuit proper. The Thule people spent summers in open-water hunting of sea mammals, facilitated by *umiak* and *kayak* technology. In a few areas, where it was possible, the summer hunting was directed to caribou and fish, but the accumulation of winter stores remained a central part of the Thule

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<sup>3</sup> The Greenlandic Inuit is itself divided into three versions: the dominant and official West Greenlandic, the smaller East Greenlandic and the Thule or Polar Inuit. In Canada, east of the Mackenzie delta, Inuktitut is spoken by several groups. From the Mackenzie delta and all over to Norton Sound across the Alaskan coast, the Inupiat speak Inupiaq.

economic pattern. Groups living in numerous hunting camps gathered in villages of permanent houses, where they spent their winters in sedentary consumption of supplies accumulated in the summer, supplemented by winter ice-sealing. From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a rather quick transition from the Thule Culture to the Historical Inuit Culture occurred in the areas beginning west of the McKenzie River delta: Central Arctic, Labrador and Greenland. The Inupiat of northern Alaska continued to depend primarily on whaling, living in permanent villages in a densely populated area. In Canada and Greenland, the Little Ice Age of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was, with the increase of sea-ice that choked the channels of the high and central Arctic, one of the reasons for the decline of the whaling. Most of the permanent villages were abandoned as the Inuit communities weren't able to accumulate enough food stores to last them through the winters and greater economic importance was given to sealing and fishing (McGhee 1994: 566).

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## **TRADITIONAL INUIT SOCIETIES**

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The traditional Inuit societies were, as hunting and gathering cultures, strongly dependent on the local provision of food resources. Their culture and social structure was most complex in Alaska and Western Greenland and least complex in the Central Arctic. Inuit and Yup'ik groups lived in numerous geographically defined subgroups that were extremely flexible in composition and structure. The basic social and economic unit was the nuclear family.

For much of the year, from spring to fall, families lived together in small houses or tents together with other families, in groups of 20 to 30 people moving from one camp to the other. Winters were spent in larger settlements where a large number of families gathered to spend the season together. The Copper Inuit of the Central Canadian Arctic gathered in snow-house settlements on the ocean ice to hunt seals (Condon 1987: 25), while the Yupiit and Inupiat spent winters in permanent coastal villages.

Traditionally, men and boys over the age of five spent their days and nights in the men's house. This traditional semi-subterranean house of which there was at least one in the settlement, was the communal men's residence hall and workshop, where men lived and were served meals by their wives, daughters and sisters. It was also the place where community dancing and ritual activity took place. Women and children lived in smaller individual houses. This separation of men and women's spaces coincided with a somehow dichotomous approach of reciprocal obligation that occurs in Inuit worldview; hunter/hunted, relative/non-relative, man/woman, summer/winter, host/guest, land/sea (Fienup-Riordan 1983: 341). The subsistence activities were (and still are) also divided according to gender. Women were gathering greens and berries, setting and checking nearby nets, cutting and drying fish and game and preparing food. Girls were often partnered in arranged marriages soon after puberty but divorce, initiated by either sex, also occurred often. Men on the other side were occupied by hunting land and sea animals, usually outside the village or camp by solitary individuals or by pairs (Hensel 1996: 38-39).

The ideal-type system of virtually complete gender separation and labour division was operational only in the permanent villages and camps, but even in smaller groups, in camps without a men's house, a sense of spatial separation was preserved. Since the general conception was that gender roles were complementary and flexible and the couple was seen as a productive unit, some flexibility in gender roles occurred, especially in cases of need. Boys learned girls' tasks and vice versa. There were no specialists in these communities. Even

shamans hunted and gathered like anyone else, although a powerful shaman could request things from people, with the expectation of not being refused. Many people had different shamanic powers.

The fundamental feature of the Inuit social organisation is the absence of unilinear exogamous kinship units, the prevalence of the principle of bilinear descent and flexibility in group composition. Even though the Inupiat and the Yupiit put more emphasis on the patrilinear descent, the matrilinear descent, for example, still plays a great importance at seal parties connected to exchange rituals (Fienup-Riordan 1983: 306-307). In the Canadian Arctic, the concept of "relative" included people of several different categories of kin, between which the Inuit saw no difference (ibid. 141). Only on the St. Lawrence Island, populated by the Siberian Yupiit, patrilinear kin groups do exist, but they aren't exogamous and residence after marriage is matrilocal. A limited number of descent groups exist. They are commonly known by definite names. They share distinctive subcultures and are recognised by all the participants in the common culture as distinctive socio-political groups (Hughes 1960: 248).

The social structure of a traditional Inuit community recognises the existence of descent, kinship, nuclear family, group, hunting party and other institutions, but their boundaries and definitions are flexible and constantly negotiated. The concept of leader never really developed in such communities and when these communities grew larger in winters, the leadership was ephemeral and co-operation was maintained through bilateral kin ties, alliance mechanisms, as well as by economic necessity. The Inuit groups, where a number of camps would share a dialect and certain stylistic forms, can be described as regional sub-cultures, but they had no strong kinship or political structure (Valentine and Vallee 1968: 109).

Therefore, no specific social structures developed which would embody group law and would have a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. A clear example of the absence of strong social structures like unilinear clan or other clear intra-Inuit divisions can be seen even today in the case of the town of Inuvik in the Mackenzie delta, where the native population is divided administratively into Indians, Inuit and Other Natives. As opposed to the Indians, whose status is based on the inclusion in an Indian band roll or treaty list, the Inuit disk list, maintained by the R. C. M. Police, simply enumerates the Inuit. They, though, distinguish among themselves four different groups, based on the area of origin (Honigman 1970: 32).

An additional important feature of Inuit traditional society was that the land was communally owned. But not even that. People actually did not own the land. They considered themselves to have the right to use the land on which they were settled and the resources they found there. It may be interesting to note that even today in Greenland the concept of private land ownership is unknown (Foighel 1979: 97). Animals, as well as significant objects in the surrounding natural world, were conceived as having a *yuk/inuk* (person). Hunting was not conceptualised as a zero-sum game, but rather animal population and hunter success were both affected by how animals were treated (Hensel 1996: 40-41). Even when trapping assumed greater economic importance the area around the trapping camp was not owned by the trappers but was rather recognised as an area used by a specific trapper(s).

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## **COLONISATION OF THE INUIT LANDS**

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The first Europeans to establish a contact with the Inuit were certainly the Greenlandic Norse. In 986 CE, around 400 people from Iceland landed on the Greenlandic coast. They

established two colonies. The Western settlement was abandoned in 1342, while the Eastern lasted until the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Blackwell and Sugden 1982: 122).

The first Portuguese voyage to Greenland is recorded already in 1500, while in 1520 there is already evidence of Basque whalers in the areas of South Labrador. Again in 1555 and in 1558 a contact with the Inuit is reported by Portuguese, French and Danish sailors (McGhee 1994: 569-70). From these areas the Europeans started to penetrate into the interior and the English established the first trading post in the Hudson Bay in 1670 and the Inuit population became exposed not only to European trade but also to European diseases.

The first true colonising steps undertaken by the Europeans, whose influences are still felt today, were made by the Danes, more accurately Hans Egede, when he established in the vicinity of the present day Nuuk - Godthaab, the first colony in Greenland in 1721. By 1776, the Danish Crown took over the colonisation of Greenland and established the Royal Greenland Trading Company that preserved its monopoly well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1782, the first true legislation for the country was issued under the name "Instruction to The Trading Station in Greenland" (Hertling 1970: 128), which actually meant the closure of Greenland to non-Danish influences, a condition lasting until WWII (ibid. 129-130). The Inuit social structure began to change significantly only in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the Danish colonial administration formed local assemblies of limited self-government and jurisdiction (see Hertling 1970).

In 1649, the Russians reached the subarctic Pacific coast and established a trade post in Anadyr, mainly for fur interests. In 1741, Bering reaches the southern Alaskan coast, but the exploitation of the area begun only in the 1770's, primarily based on the fur-sealing that continued until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the seals were on the brink of extermination. The effects concentrated on Aleut and Pribinof Islands where permanent trading settlements were established. Due to the subjugation, slaughter of the seals, the main food source, and the diseases the Russians brought (mostly tuberculosis), the Aleut population plummeted. In the Bering Sea area in 1839-39, a smallpox epidemic wiped out whole communities and seriously reduced population, while another one struck in 1861 in the Central Yupi'k territory. The other route, from which the European influence came to the Inuit, was from the south by the Canadian traders who had established themselves in the Mackenzie River valley already in 1805. In 1840, the Hudson Bay Company built Fort McPherson only 150 miles from the sea in the Mackenzie River area.

In general, the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the period in which the European impact on the Inuit communities became evident. From Siberia entered the Russian seal-fur and other traders and in 1840 the smallpox epidemic, brought by them, erased whole communities. In 1850, the whalers moved from the coasts of Labrador to the west into Hudson Bay, while in the west they reached the Beaufort Sea and the Inupiaq communities. In the same period, the fur traders started to reach the Inuit communities also from the south. These developments certainly had an immense influence on the native communities. The whaling and fur sealing depleted the food resources on which the Aleut (seal) or Inupiat (bowhead whale) depended, something that caused starvation, while the epidemics reduced the population. On the other side, the whalers and fur traders developed relations with the Inuit. In exchange for meat and furs the Inuit received guns, tobacco, tea, sugar, alcohol and hardware. The practice of whalers' over-wintering and establishment of trade posts encouraged Inuit concentration in permanent settlements.

Even though fur was traded for almost a hundred years, only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were permanent trading posts first established north of the tree line. In 1910, the

town of Aklavik in the Mackenzie delta was set up. In the Canadian Arctic the families no longer gathered in the winter but spent them in isolated family camps engaged in trapping. Other families moved to permanent settlements and centred trapping activities on the surrounding areas. By 1920, Inuit groups exchanged economically independent sustainable subsistence activities for a symbiotic relationship with the White society and cash-economy.

Another stage of the Inuit social transformation began with the establishment of the first missionary grammar and later federal schools in the 1920's and 1930's. This administrative inclusion of the Inuit communities continued after WWII with the expansion of a welfare state. The availability of government subsidised housing, wage employment, government assistance and child allowances, health service and bottle-feeding permitted families to provide for a larger number of offsprings than before (Condon 1987: 36). But the Inuit also took part in the wage economy and the larger state in which they lived. Even though subsistence activities remained of central importance, the education and wage economy brought about the new occupational category among the Inuit: wage labourers. But this final inclusion of the Inuit into the web of modern state apparatus and control, exposed those members of the community, that could fully exploit the educational possibilities a state could offer, to a wide variety of ideas and concepts that were ideologically opposed to the form of colonialism predominant in the circumpolar areas. It was this new class of educated Inuit that started movements to demand greater control of their territories, which could bring in the future the establishment of an indigenous nation-state. First visible organisational efforts in this direction could already be seen by the late 1960's.

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## **ARCTIC ECOLOGY AND INUIT INITIATIVE**

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In recent years, growing numbers of people have become increasingly concerned with the damage to the Arctic environment caused by petroleum, hydroelectric, mining and other large-scale development programs. Additional concerns are being expressed due to the deposition of pollutants, thinning of the ozone layer with corresponding influence on the regional organisms. Human activity encourages the melting of permafrost, thereby creating a potential for extensive damage to the sensitive tundra ecosystems. While the most dramatic evidence of environmental devastation is found in the Russian north (Andreeva 1998: 238-40), threats are not confined to that area alone, as aren't the protests. In Alaska, a massive development at Prudhoe Bay that destroyed vast areas of wildlife habitat and the hydro-electric plans in Hudson Bay, Canada resulted in massive protests and debates over the proper utilisation of natural resources (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 218-19).

Already in 1970, UNESCO had recognised a connection between environmental conservation and indigenous peoples and created the "Man and the Biosphere" Program. This program promoted conservation of ecosystems that are ecologically self-sustaining with complete involvement of the native peoples (Gedicks 1993: 201). One reason why the biodiversity activists should be concerned about the indigenous peoples is the fact that they occupy 12-19 percent of Earth's land surface, even though only 6 percent with recognised rights. They are as such, tenders of the Earth on a larger scale than all the reserve authorities that together manage only 5 percent of the surface of the planet (Taylor 1994: 30). As a result of all the developments that enhanced the recognition of indigenous peoples, as an independent factor in environmental issues, the voice of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples is increasingly heard. The Council called upon the international community to recognise the

important contributions of the native technologies to sustainable development, tied to the idea of human and cultural diversity, including technological diversity (Gedicks 1993: 202). Subsistence ideologies and natural religions accompany such native technologies. One of the main differences between many indigenous civilisations and the West, is the belief that humans are one with all other creatures (Lundberg 1995: 86). For the indigenous peoples of the Americas, as it is pointed out, nature is not an enemy to be overcome, while man is considered part of an inseparable cosmos and therefore does not try to dominate nature, other men and other peoples (Ortiz 1984: 85). In general, native communities possess the experience of sustainability, learned from years of observation, careful behaviour and strong community, as formed through thousands of years of occupying the same space.

The legal and political position of indigenous peoples had begun to change after World War II, when the principle of self-determination was introduced into the Charter of the United Nations. This principle played a crucial role in the processes of decolonisation and by 1960, most European colonies, all over the World, gained their independence. But the principle's application was only limited, since several groups, such as the indigenous peoples, were denied that right. The first international institution to codify the rights of indigenous peoples was the International Labour Organisation with its 1957 Convention in which appeared articles dealing with land rights. In 1989, the new Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention was issued. For many years though, indigenous peoples have brought to the attention of the UN the need for international legal protection of their most fundamental rights. The fact that indigenous cultures pre-date the emergence of international law and European colonial expansion lies at the root of the debate over indigenous rights. Between 1985 and 1993, a group of UN human rights experts (called The UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations or UNWGIP) worked on a document now referred to as The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was done through a series of annual meetings in which governments and indigenous peoples' representatives were invited to present their views. In 1993, The Draft Declaration was adopted by a resolution of UNWGIP's parent body, The UN Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities ([www: Halycon.com/pub/FWDP/Resolutions/ICC/](http://www.Halycon.com/pub/FWDP/Resolutions/ICC/): 3). Even the great financier and planner of many environmentally threatening projects, The World Bank, has realised the sensibility of the issue and in 1991 issued a new Operational Directive on Indigenous Peoples. It requires adaptation of the project by the indigenous populations, even though this principle is often only paid lip service. (Plant 1994: 9-11). The World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro in May 1992 and the UN year of Indigenous Peoples was proclaimed in 1993 (Creery 1993: 5).

There are many non-indigenous environmental organisations and movements that in addition to other environmental activities, also oppose numerous environmentally damaging projects planned on indigenous lands. Survival International, Cultural Survival, Greenpeace and Earth First! are only a few examples. In addition to these, a number of international indigenous organisations, each of them representing a complex of indigenous interests, rose in the last two-three decades. The Indigenous Environmental Network, The Arctic to Amazonia Alliance and Native Forest Network are only some of them. A well-known example for the co-operation among the environmental and native rights groups was the case of James Bay II Project in Quebec, Canada.

In 1975 James Bay Phase I was constructed and eventually the whole project flooded around 11,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land which brought about fierce resistance among the Inuit and the Cree. As a result, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was signed (see below).

It did not prevent, though, the construction of the Phase I itself. But in the 1980's when Phase II was planned, the Inuit and the Cree already acquired valuable political experience, organisational skills and a network of non-native American experts and advisers to help them wage the battle against it. The battle continued until 1994 when, after blockades and demonstrations in November, Quebec Prime Minister indefinitely shelved the project (Taylor 1994: 90-94). By then, in Canada, the political relations with the indigenous groups had taken a new course.

Nevertheless, the Cree and the Inuit had demonstrated that indigenous populations were able to use most innovative and efficient environmental (and political) activism to challenge the one of most powerful institutions of the large nation-state and win.

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## **INUIT LAND CLAIMS**

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Already in the late 1960's, the oil discovery in Beaufort Sea at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska and also in Canada demanded a more firm action by the existing native organisations, but also prompted the creation of new ones. In 1969, The Committee for Original People's Entitlement (COPE) was established and in 1971, The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC). In 1977, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) was formed. Such organisations demanded and eventually achieved agreements through which the indigenous populations were granted ownership and political rights over their ancestral lands. With the first of such agreements, The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, the Native peoples of Alaska received 162,000 km<sup>2</sup> of lands with full title and sub-surface rights (Blackwell and Sugden 1982: 348). The US Fish and Wildlife Service retained the management of animal resources even though, under the new guidelines, the subsistence activities were taken into account. In the last two decades, the Inuit have increasingly gained control over a great part of their ancestral lands and are becoming a major partner in decision-making over the management of resources in the Arctic.

With the James Bay Agreement in 1975, the Inuit gained control over 8300 km<sup>2</sup> of land with an additional 155,000 km<sup>2</sup> including exclusive hunting-fishing-trapping rights (together with the Cree, see above). The Inuvialuit Agreement allotted, in 1977, 95,000 km<sup>2</sup> to the Inuvialuit, the Canadian Inuit living west of the McKenzie River delta (Creery 1993: 13). The other two political developments, however, may have even greater importance. In 1979, the Home Rule Act gave the Greenland Inuit complete independence in their internal affairs and since fishing remains the most important resource, on which their economy is based, their traditional concepts may begin to play a greater role in the sustainable management of these resources. The Nunavut Agreement in March 1999 created a new Canadian Territory in which according to the 1996 census 83% of population are Inuit. The Territory comprises of 1,900,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land on all of which the Inuit have the right to harvest wildlife ([www.gov.nu.ca/eng/](http://www.gov.nu.ca/eng/)).<sup>4</sup> The Greenland and Nunavut cases particularly cause greater interest, since they actually represent two Inuit proto-nation-states, what is seen through more than just emblems or official language policies.

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, exclusive mineral rights were given on 35,250 km<sup>2</sup> to the Inuit

These agreements, in general, spawned Native-owned development corporations to make contracts with oil, gas and mineral companies providing services needed in exploration, operation, housing and food services to the workers. Native companies entered construction, banking, radio and TV communications, and air and sea transport, among other activities. The granting of extensive rights to indigenous groups turned out to be not an obstacle to the development, despite their "spiritualist" vision of the environment and nature. Rather, it led them to co-operate with industry in promoting development and to alter projects making them more sustainable and less damaging to the environment and local economy (Osherenko 1995: 229).

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## **YUP'IK SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY PATTERNS**

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Despite the great changes the Yupiit have gone through since the European arrival, the subsistence activities remain of central importance. Subsistence was the traditional ideological focus of Yup'ik life and continues to be of major importance socially, economically and gastronomically, as well as symbolically. Since subsistence crosscuts so many dichotomies of public/private, work/play, production/consumption, it provides an arena to which all the aspects of life are connected (Hensel 1996: 104), as seen on the example of Central Yupiit from Bethel, a two-third Yup'ik settlement of some four thousand people, and its surroundings. Subsistence activities are a major focus of time and energy for most of the people in a Yup'ik village. This includes not only time spent on hunting but also time needed for preparation of equipment or processing the food. Hensel (1996) argues "that subsistence is the central focus in the intellectual material, and spiritual culture of both historic and contemporary Yup'ik society" (ibid. 3). But there are two aspects of subsistence, each highly context-dependent. The first are the actual activities of preparation, hunting, fishing, gathering, processing and repairing and storing of equipment. The second aspect is a subsistence discourse, which ranges from informal conversations to formal discussions on various governmental and commercial aspects of subsistence, wildlife and their regulation. This discourse is privileged over actual practices because it is constantly available for strategic use and through which personal, ethnic and gender identities are constructed and negotiated. The values associated with subsistence became "key symbols of Yup'ik ethnic, social and spiritual identity particularly as traditional subsistence practices are challenged and threatened in a postcolonial setting" (Ibid. 4). Since the symbolic value of subsistence activity is increasing, "it is likely that at least some types of subsistence activities may become more, rather than less, important over time" (Ibid. 6). The subsistence activities are not simply a mere technique of survival, a means to an end, "but an end to itself" (Fienup-Riordan 1983: XX). This holds equally true of the Inupiaq people of the northern coast of Alaska (ibid.), as wage-jobs are not associated, as shown by Bodenhorn, with individual identity (Hensel 1996: 134). Similar observations were made by Jolles in relation to Siberian Yup'ik on St. Lawrence Island where "non-traditional work, at least so far, is not an important source of identity. Identity remains associated with successful performance of subsistence duties" (ibid. 135). Fienup-Riordan (1983) clearly presents an immense variety of meanings subsistence activities may have. He also shows that an important unit for subsistence research is not the individual household but a larger grouping of kinship networks that acquire, process and share products, such as through an example of seal parties, organised by women, among the Nelson Island Yupiit.

Current subsistence activities that provide foods in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of Southwest Alaska and represent a "material" base for the second aspect of the subsistence, i.e. the subsistence discourse, target mostly the same resources they did at the time of the contact. Most adults, including those with jobs or professional careers, are involved year-round in subsistence, with the peak of activity from March to November. For most residents, though, income-producing work is usually available only seasonally, consisting of commercial fishing and the occasional construction jobs in the summer, and trapping in the winter. With this, some of the techniques and harvest locations have changed, mostly as a result of new hunting and transport technologies, but also due to the shifts in village locations. Presently, for most families, seasonal moves are reduced to moving to fish camps and berry camps, while men also spend time in trapping camps or seal hunting at the coast. Sea-mammal hunting (mainly for bearded and harbour seal and walrus, but also beluga whales), that was at the time of contact the most highly developed system of capture, has nowadays become completely mechanised, in terms of both transport and weaponry used. Also large land mammals, such as caribou, moose and bear, are now hunted with rifles. Harvesting fish that were calorically the most important for most Yup'it, traditionally required, not only due to the diversity of species, but also due to the variety of harvest locations, a greater number of hunting techniques, some still widely practised today. Species like flounder, trout, halibut, blackfish, whitefish, sheefish, needlefish, pike, tomcod, smelt, herring, and several sub-species of salmon are harvested through jigging (through the ice using a short stick), funnel-mouthed fish traps, dip nets, set nets, drift nets, and also gillnetting. Geese and ducks are caught with gill nets and shotguns, while beavers, rabbits and ptarmigans are predominately snared. Metal traps are used mostly to take fur-bearers, especially foxes. Despite the fact that most of the clothing is now purchased already manufactured, furs of locally caught animals, such as seal, beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, ground squirrel, fox, wolf, wolverine, and caribou, are still used. Furthermore, the traditional activities of gathering berries like cranberries and blackberries, greens and bird eggs, have, despite the appearance of frozen vegetables imported from the South, remained of central importance (Hensel 1996: 53-55).

As mentioned, traditional Yup'ik religious beliefs emphasised the connections between humans and the rest of the natural world that they are so obviously and consciously connected to. Human and animal souls are continually in motion. The same seals and the same people have been on earth forever, continually cycling through life and death. The coastal Yup'ik "are not simply surviving on the resources of their environment, but are living in a highly structured relationship to them" (Fienup-Riordan 1983: XIX), as constantly expressed through their daily activities. Animals gave themselves to the hunter out of choice, while hunting was conceptualised rather as the culmination of a relationship characterised by respect towards the hunted. The success of hunting or fishing meant that a hunter was in a harmonious relation with the world, since not only human "persons" cycled from one body to another, but also "persons" of seals, whales or other animals (Hensel 1996: 40 - 41). A bad catch of fish, for instance, clearly represents a disturbance in this order, which has to be preserved. This traditional conceptual system still guides the behaviour of most Yup'it that behave with an awareness that human thoughts, words and actions powerfully affect interactions with animals and the natural world. It is through such eyes that we should see the significance of the threat of an oil spill or game mismanagement to the Yup'it. There is a strong ethics against waste and people work generally hard to use all parts of the animals hunted. Subsistence foods should be protected from spoilage, stored, and never wasted, while hunt-

ing and fishing gear should be kept clean and in good condition. They practice conservation and take only what they need (ibid. 71).

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## **INUPIAQ WHALING ACTIVITIES**

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The Inupiaq bowhead whale hunting communities of NW Alaska were traditionally organised into a number of regional societies, each of which specialised in a particular subsistence cycle. The bowhead whales were hunted in spring and fall in accordance with their migratory activities. The hunting was associated with organised whaling crews led by *umialik* who owned the *umiak* and other hunting equipment, while a large share of meat that the hunter and his wife redistributed to others is what reinforced social connections. In the summer, individual families or larger groups often travelled either for trade or to obtain additional resources such as walrus, seals and migratory birds or caribou. From fall to summer they lived in large coastal settlements consuming primarily whale based food stores (Friesen 1999: 24).

Today, the Inupiat remain strongly linked to subsistence whaling, fishing and hunting and in fact still use the *umiak*. A loss of bowhead whale to such a sea mammal oriented society would be highly significant, not only in reducing an important source of nutritional importance, but in weakening their cultural identity as well. The right to hunt for food is a fundamental indigenous right of Inuit and other hunting peoples. Inuit have traditionally exercised that right by trying to maintain equilibrium between prey and hunter, so that the resource itself is perpetuated. The failure to protect such rights would inevitably lead to the disregard for some sustainable development approaches that have proven themselves over hundreds of years of social and environmental equilibrium. "Inuit themselves are committed to the principle of sustainable development and the conservation of the living resources of the arctic" (Doubleday 1989: 374).

In recent decades, they have gained substantial political rights that give them a considerable voice in making decisions regarding arctic natural resource development. In Alaska, for example, following the federal passage of the ANCSA, the North Alaskan Inupiat formed in 1972 the North Slope Borough.<sup>5</sup> The Borough's Inupiaq leaders soon proceeded to tax the oil revenues from Prudhoe Bay, which enabled, due to millions of dollars of income, the people to obtain the benefits of a modern life style.

However, state and federal wildlife regulations have consistently interfered with their subsistence activities, since with the passage of ANCSA, the aboriginal hunting and fishing rights were extinguished (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 233). This enabled the Department of Fish and Game of Alaska to enforce its rules and regulations without regard to the cultural heritage of the people, but limitations came from other directions as well. In 1977, The International Whaling Commission (IWC) proposed a moratorium on the hunting of the bowhead whale. The response of the Inupiat to loss of access to their subsistence resource was to assert their subsistence rights. The Borough's administration organised a major campaign to change the IWC decision. In 1978, Inupiat and St. Lawrence Island Yupiit, from 9 whaling villages, formed the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) that, with its own research, suggested 10-12,000 whales rather than less than 1000 previously estimated,

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<sup>5</sup> Thus becoming geographically the largest city of America despite the population of only around 5000 people.

challenged the IWC moratorium policy (Young 1994: 124). Finally an agreement was reached in exchange for a decision that Inupiat would limit their annual subsistence whaling to 12 (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 234). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights addresses subsistence rights in Article 1.2 by stating that in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence. With respect to Inuit rights, hunting whales is clearly a means of subsistence and as such, Inuit cannot be deprived of it under the Covenant (Doubleday 1989: 383). In relation to this, in 1980, The US Congress passed a law that distinguished between the nature cultural and non-native social subsistence needs (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 235).

In 1992, the working group of the IWC began a dialogue, which included all the parties in the international regulation of whaling and identified three categories of small-scale whaling to be accepted as permissible on grounds of sustainability and equity; under the terms of reconstructed whaling regime. The first category would be aboriginal subsistence whaling that is organised around family and kinship groups and incorporates devices for regulating the behaviour of individual participants, which differs from market and commercial whaling. Such aboriginal groups that were able to demonstrate that they have occupied a particular territory and used the same regional resources over long periods of time can be found amongst Inupiat and Greenlandic Inuit (Young 1994: 122). In a similar vein, an agreement between Alaskan and Canadian Inuit developed over sustainable harvest of polar bears, involving prohibition on hunting female bears with cubs or bears in dens (Riches 1995: 429). The other two acceptable categories of small-scale whaling are: other subsistence whaling (if stocks permit harvesting) by non-aboriginal, though indigenous to the territory, peoples like Faeroe Islanders, and artisanal whaling, as family based activities stemming from traditional knowledge that are also sustainable. A few coastal communities in Iceland, Japan and Norway practice such whaling (Young 1994: 122).

Inuit rely heavily on marine animals for their subsistence and it is this reliance that distinguishes the Inuit way of life from that of other arctic peoples. Inuit culture and values are rooted in sharing the harvest of the hunt, especially of marine animals. Marine animals, even today, still provide food, clothing, light and heat. They are also important to the maintenance of health and well being, as they provide vitamins and calories essential in the cold climate of the circumpolar areas. The ability to obtain food from hunting as a livelihood is important to their psychological and cultural integrity. The right to take whales for food is a matter of cultural survival. Being a good hunter is an occupation with a proud heritage among the Inuit. Hunting is the Inuit way of life. The Inuit hunted in the past and hunt now for food in order to survive, culturally and physically - not for sport or pleasure. Conservation is part of the relationships between Inupiaq and other Inuit cultures and the environment of which they are a part. This is what makes such cultures sustainable, that which was after a long road recognised by the relevant national and international decision-making forums.

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## **THE INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE**

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In June of 1977, at Barrow Point in Northern Slope Borough, Alaska, delegates from Greenland, Canada and Alaska formed the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). It was defined as an international non-governmental organisation of Inuit representatives committed to asserting the rights of Inuit peoples and to protect their culture and environment from incursions

of the industrial society from the south. The Inuit formed the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC) to work for the survival of the Inuit culture and the recognition of Inuit rights. Through the ICC, the Inuit initiated the Inuit Regional Conservation Strategy to protect the arctic environment by promoting sustainable development and conservation (Doubleday 1989: 389). In their statements we can find culturally oriented rationale for the sustainable utilisation of the Arctic's natural resources (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 222).

In 1989, Russian Yupiit, as the last grouping delegation, joined in as observers and in 1992 as full members. The ICC holds NGO status within the UN Economic and Social Council and represents 150,000 or so Inuit in the international arena of environmental and social initiatives. Further attention has been directed towards the protection of subsistence economy and the renewable resources that are so vital to sustaining the Inuit cultures, long after petroleum and other minerals have been depleted from their regions. The primary goals of the ICC are to strengthen the unity among all the Inuit of the circumpolar region, to promote Inuit rights and interests on the international level plus to seek full and active partnership in the development of the region ([www.randburg.com/gr/inuitcir](http://www.randburg.com/gr/inuitcir): 1). The focus of the ICC strategies is determined on General Assemblies that are held every four years.

Organisationally, the ICC is composed of national divisions who are in full co-operation with relevant Inuit national organisations. ICC Canada, for instance, states among its aims and objectives to represent the interests of Canadian Inuit through their national organisation Inuit Tapirisat of Canada on international matters ([www.inuitcircumpolar.com/](http://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/): 1).

The focus of ICC strategies has been centred on many environmental issues in relation to sustainable development. As stated by the President of ICC before the UN Commission for Sustainable Development on 15/04/1997: "Many Inuit use computers, invest stocks and bonds, and welcome sustainable development of the Arctic's natural resources. But as people we have not lost our reverence for natural world as our commitment to treat it with respect. Inuit have practised sustainable development for generations" ([www.inusiaat.com](http://www.inusiaat.com/): 1). ICC believes aboriginal self-determination and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. To promote sustainable development they have concluded agreements dealing with land ownership, resource management, revenue sharing, economic development and self-government, while only Inuit of Chukotka and Labrador remain without such an agreement. But despite the fact that national governments and Inuit can work together to promote these issues in the Arctic, also through the Arctic Council, these activities are limited by international political realities.

Since the Inuit today use modern technology to hunt/fish/trap, which demands high expenses, they have to sell their products on the world market. But the EU and the USA, influenced by the Animal Rights movement whose primary goal was not the ban on subsistence activities but on commercial exploitation, limit this. They have erected barriers to trade in such products, such as walrus ivory or seal fur, even though such resources are harvested in accordance with the principles of conservation and sustainable development. Besides trade barriers, the persistent organic pollutants (POPs) that reach the Arctic from other areas of the globe concentrate particularly in the marine food chain.

One of the projects of ICC is the conservation of biodiversity. But in addition to many wildlife refuges which have been already established on the Inuit lands, many efforts have to be done internationally, especially in relation to migratory birds. In 1988, the ICC Inuit Regional Conservation Strategy, devoted to sustainable development and conservation, was granted by the UN Environmental Program a Global 500 Award for significant environmental achievement ([www.randburg.com/gr/inuitcir](http://www.randburg.com/gr/inuitcir): 2).

In 1994, the ICC began the project of Traditional Ecological Knowledge on Beluga Whales: An Indigenous Pilot project in the Chukchi and Bering Seas in order to find sustainable ways for harvesting ([www.grida.no/parl/isdi/data.ina35t](http://www.grida.no/parl/isdi/data.ina35t): 2).

One of the most recent projects that began by the ICC in November 1996 is on the Integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Scientific Knowledge. The documentation and application of indigenous knowledge brought together hunters, elders, researchers and resource managers. They stressed that in order to further promote the idea of sustainable development, TEK should be incorporated into school curricula and the TEK research projects should be done in co-operation with local communities. TEK should be documented and made available to all those who wish to use or apply it. The project also promotes the inclusion of TEK into the processes of wildlife and resource management and environmental impact assessment besides the utilisation of scientific knowledge. Also, the support of sustainable resource industries is considered to be one way of protecting the continued use of TEK by governments and indigenous organisations working together ([www.inusi-at.com/tek](http://www.inusi-at.com/tek): 1-9).

The Rovaniemi Declaration signed on 14/06/1991 for the construction of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) can be, with its later consequences, considered historical. The Declaration was signed by foreign ministries of all arctic countries. AEPS was to be carried out through several programs: Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program, Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment, Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response, but also through The Working Group on Sustainable Development (Andreeva 1998: 241). At one of the meetings it was agreed to protect "... the arctic environment and its sustainable and equitable development, while protecting the culture of indigenous peoples" (Chance and Andreeva 1995: 219). On the second Ministerial Meeting in 1993, three Indigenous Peoples' Organisations were accredited to the meeting, namely the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, The Saami Council and the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North.

In 1996, the Ministers signed the "Inuvik Declaration on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development in Arctic", and the "Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council" that would continue its work. Its meeting was held first at the end of 1998 ([www.grida.no/prog/polar/aeps/saao](http://www.grida.no/prog/polar/aeps/saao)). By naming the ICC, together with the Saami and Russian indigenous organisations, as a Permanent Participant, the Arctic Council framework created an unprecedented category in international co-operation and forums, since in the Arctic Council a "mere" observer status is granted to governments, international governmental organisations and NGOs ([www.arcticpeoples.org](http://www.arcticpeoples.org)). The Arctic Council is the first inter-governmental forum that has accredited any indigenous organisation such a status. It is a status that ensures a full inclusion of these organisations into all matters and deliberations of the Arctic Council, and it is thus a status that goes beyond the status of an Observer.

Indeed, the ICC is only one of the many indigenous and environmental NGOs that pursue their interests in many national and international arenas. But with this, it is also very unique in its character. First of all, it claims to be (and is recognised as such by the Inuit and by the non-Inuit factors involved) a legitimate representative of the Inuit people on the international arena, despite the fact that it represents citizens of four different sovereign nation-states and of seven federal units within them, where it is primarily operative through the national Inuit organisations. As such, it has gained recognition not only by the United Nations, but also by the Arctic Council. Its uniqueness comes also from the fact that it has so fully joined the concepts of indigenous self-determination and sustainable development. It

claims that since the sustainable development is the only form of development that should be implemented, in general and particularly in the arctic areas, the groupings of people, i.e. the Inuit, that see the sustainability principle as an integral part of their civilisational fabric, should be given much more freedom in managing the development of these regions. This in turn demands greater levels of indigenous self-government and sovereignty.

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## **CONCLUSION**

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The subsistence economy practising indigenous communities world wide are today, in most cases, considered to be under particular pressure due to the growing environmental crisis and greater demand for natural resources. With the inclusion of a sustainability principle into the international development discourse, soon appeared the idea showing a particularly strong connection between the subsistence practices of indigenous peoples and perpetuation of resources. In order to insure such sustainable management, the indigenous communities have to assume greater levels of sovereignty over the areas that they have been populating for generations. The ability to promote independent policies on the issues of resource utilisation ensures the inclusion of the traditional indigenous ecological knowledge that represents an inseparable part of indigenous cultural patterns. Due to the large stakes the indigenous populations hold in the preservation of their environment, it seems inevitable to include these communities and their representations into the decision-making processes concerning the relevant areas, particularly since the indigenous populations have proved to sustainably manage the resources they harvest.

The Inuit, certainly, are a case in point. Despite the great influences modernity had on the Inuit, they were able to retain their traditional focus on subsistence activities that still plays a central role in their identity construction as individuals and as a group. With the late 1960's threat to their ecological vicinity, the Inuit began organising themselves to protect their subsistence resources but also to further land claims, as a basis for any viable settlement. Several land-claims that had been concluded in the last decades of 1900's, including the Greenlandic Home Rule and the establishment of Nunavut Territory, provided several legal frameworks through which the Inuit became able to exercise more political sovereignty. The Inuit were enabled to affirm their cultural heritage with its focus on the subsistence patterns. As presented through an example of mixed Yup'ik – non-Native community of Bethel, the Inuit subsistence economy is highly complex. Many species are harvested and processed by a major part of population throughout a year and the subsistence talk represents a large portion of not only indigenous conversational staple. Due to such importance the subsistence resources have for the Inuit construction of reality, their renewable resource exploitation is conservation-oriented and sustainable. Particular subsistence activities, such as several forms of whaling, have in the recent past come under special pressure to cease. With the fact that on numerous occasions particular subsistence activities, around the globe, come under pressure, the Inupiaq community of northern Alaska, possessing a certain level of political sovereignty, represents a positive trend. Indigenous representatives were involved in the policy, planning, and implementation of the regional renewable resource management project. The co-operation of the Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission and the International Whaling Commission clearly demonstrated that common interests could provide a firm foundation for successful wildlife management and supervision. Furthermore, it can be said that the Inuit, through their all-inclusive international NGO, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, clearly

identify themselves with the idea of sustainable management of the arctic resources and operate as such on the international arena. Inuit, among the indigenous peoples, represent a unique case. They have retained access to most of their traditional areas of residence and resources. They are, despite them being citizens of nation-states, internationally represented through one body, the ICC and have succeeded in making a nation-state, i.e. Canada, to redraw its internal borders and form a new territorial unit, i.e. Nunavut, clearly recognised as indigenous in character. In addition to that, it incorporated the principle of sustainability into its development policies. The ICC, as shown, also, through its particular and unprecedented status of Permanent Participant at the Arctic Council, co-operates with other bodies in realisation and implementation of sustainability-oriented development, conservation, and management projects.

The Inuit represent a case of an indigenous people that follows sustainable subsistence practices. In order to properly respond also to the environmental situation and demand for resources of the Arctic, the Inuit successfully demanded greater autonomy and self-government from the metropolitan states. In these areas of differing levels of Inuit self-government, we can clearly see the prevalence of sustainability principle, embedded in their subsistence patterns, and their economic and other operations.

## **POVZETEK**

Članek predstavlja poskus identifikacije povezave med trajnostnim konceptom in staroselskimi ljudstvi, v tem primeru Inuiti. Kot eden najboljših pristopov do rešitve naraščajoče ekološke krize, je trajnostni princip v zadnjih letih tudi v mednarodni areni pridobil na veljavi. Istočasno so v zadnjih letih znanja in vednosti staroselskih ljudstev začela z vključevanjem v reševanje tovrstne krize, saj so staroselske skupnosti vsekakor ene redkih človeških skupnosti, ki so na svojih področjih poselitve živele trajnostno. Avtor članka poskuša predstaviti to povezavo na splošno in še posebej na primeru Inuitov, arktičnega staroselskega ljudstva. Inuiti so pokazali, da je trajnostni razvoj nekega območja tesno povezan s politično avtonomijo tam živečih skupnosti. Ideologije, ki so prisotne v temeljih njihove skupnostne samo-konstrukcije, kot to razkriva njihova lovno-nabiralniška ekonomija, so jasno povezane s trajnostnim konceptom in se lahko kot take kategorizirajo. Posebna pozornost je posvečena Yup'ik skupnosti z namenom predstavitve njihovega lovno-nabiralniškega ekonomskega ciklusa in kitolovskim dejavnostim Inupiaq skupnosti kot primer specifične trajnostne tradicionalne ekonomske aktivnosti z obsežnim kulturnim in političnim kontekstom. Pozornost je namenjena tudi najpomembnejši inuitski nevladni organizaciji Inuit Circumpolar Conference, kot tistemu faktorju, ki promovira staroselsko politično samoupravo in trajnostno upravljanje virov v polarnih predelih.

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**INTERNET SITES:**

**The Forth World Documentation Project, The Center for World Indigenous Studies.**

[www.halycon.com/pub/FWDB/Resolutions/icc/](http://www.halycon.com/pub/FWDB/Resolutions/icc/)

**Report of the Fourth Ministerial Conference.** [www.grida.no/prog/polar/aeps/](http://www.grida.no/prog/polar/aeps/)

[www.npc.nunavut](http://www.npc.nunavut)

[www.randburg.co/gr/inuitcir/](http://www.randburg.co/gr/inuitcir/)

[www.gov.nu.ca/eng/](http://www.gov.nu.ca/eng/)

[www.inuitcircumpolar.com/](http://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/)

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There should be no more than five keywords; they must reflect the field of research covered in the article in English and Slovene.

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Articles should not contain more than ten (10) illustrations (graphs, pictures) and tables, and their position in the article should be clearly indicated. Tables with their legends should be submitted on the separate pages. Titles of tables should appear above the tables, and titles of graphs and illustrations below. Tables and illustrations should be cited shortly in the text (Tab.1 or Fig.1)

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### EXAMPLES:

**ŠKERLJ B.** 1959: Towards the Systematic Morphology of human Body. *Acta Anat.* 39: 220-243.

**HAUSPIE, R.C., S.R. DAS, M.A. PREECE & J.M. TANNER** 1980: A longitudinal study of the growth in height of boys and girls of West Bengal (India) aged six months to 20 years. *Ann. Hum. Biol.* 7:429-441.

Books, chapters from books, reports use the following forms:  
**TELBAN B.** 1998: *Dancing through time: A Sepik cosmology.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.

**RUDAN I. & P. RUDAN** 2000: Comparison between Coefficient of Inbreeding Computed from Deficit of Heterozygotes for Concomitant Autosomal Genetic Polymorphisms and from Isonymy Data: A Study of Hvar Island isolates, Croatia. In: SUSANNE C. & E. BODZSÁR (ed.) *Human Population genetics in Europe, Biennial Books of EAA, Vol.1,* Eötvös University Press, Budapest, pp. 123-134.

**DOLINAR, Z.** 1958: The implications of various factors on the distribution of ABO blood groups. *Sbornik Sjedovich materiala I., Sjezdu čl. Antropologu,* Opava, pp7.

## 9. FORMAT AND FORM OF ARTICLES

Articles should be written with Word for Windows using "Times New Roman CE 12" font with double spacing, align left and margins of 3 cm on A4 pages. Paragraphs should be separated with an empty line. The title and chapters should be written bold in font size 14. All scientific names must be properly italicized. Tables and illustrations shall accompany the texts separately. The original manuscript one copy, and a copy on a 3.5" computer diskette must be given to the editor-in chief. All articles must be proofread for professional and language errors before submission.

