Response: Eric Kline Silverman
Wheelock College, Brandeis University

Manhood as Merely Lived With

Eastern Iatmul men, as I recounted in the book, tell a forlorn myth. Long ago, a solitary culture hero named Migaimeli was lonely. Basically, he was bored, depressed, alone. So he concocted the idea of carving a wooden spouse. He cut himself a hunk of wood, grabbed his adze, and set about creating a companion. But to no avail. He did manage to hew a female figure. But "she" offered no more companionship than the animals to Adam in Genesis 2. Migaimeli remained single and sad. He was no culture hero: he was a culture loser.

So what happened? Well, one day a man from another village happens upon Migaimeli's statue. How humiliating! In one version of the tale, the man actually saw Migaimeli copulating with the mannequin. The stranger was appalled! Disgusted! Horrified! But he was also distraught by Migaimeli's pathetic plight. And Migaimeli was deeply ashamed about his endeavors, of course, but also at an utter loss about how to help himself. So the stranger gave him a woman in marriage.

We don't hear much more about Migaimeli in Iatmul myth. He reminds me of Isaac in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 22). Recall that God orders Abraham to slaughter his son, Isaac—the son Abraham "loves." (To add to the pathos of the tale, this is the first appearance of the word "love" in the Hebrew Bible.) Abraham eagerly obeys—so eager, in fact, that he arises for his terrible task "early in the morning." Not long before these terrible events, Abraham brazenly pleaded with God again and again to spare the innocent of Sodom from divine destruction. But now, when told to murder his own son, Abraham offers no word of disbelief. He registers no qualms. At any rate, as we all know, the deity intervened at the last minute, and stayed the patriarch's hand. And what happened to Isaac? He remained, for the rest of his life, a ruined man. Like Migaimeli, Isaac's soul was destroyed.

In my book, I interpreted the myth of Migaimeli as yet another example of the futility of the masculine yearning to reproduce in the absence of women. Migaimeli's sculpture, I said, materialized the parthenogenic desire that is so crucial to male identity in the middle Sepik—and, I would argue, elsewhere. And I stick with that interpretation. But I now want to highlight another facet of the myth.

Migaimeli's life forms a foundational tale for a particular clan in the village. Migaimeli is one of their eponymous ancestors. He is central to the group's totemic vitality. But Migaimeli is no hero. No aspect of his tale lacks

pity, anguish, and sadness. His tale is one of sorrow—a sorrow no Eastern Iatmul man would wish on himself. It is that quality of Migaimeli's life—the ineffable tone of tragedy, rendered through symbolism, emotion, and experience—that I tried to capture in *Masculinity, Motherhood, and Mockery*. I exposed, or so I hoped, the doomed failures of Iatmul masculinity—but failures, we might say, that have profound, everyday consequences for the lives of men, women, and children.

From one angle, we all know that culture does, after a fashion, *work* (at least for most of us). But far more interesting, and central to my project, is to explore how culture does *not* work. For, from another angle, culture offers little in the way of fulfillment and psychic closure, only lasting ambivalence, disquiet, and unease. Just ask Migaimeli. Or Isaac. Sometimes culture stinks.

Prologue: Part I

Clifford and Hildred Geertz, in what is perhaps the silver medal winner for Best Literary Entrée to a Field Site, arrived in a Balinese village "malarial and diffident."[1] My experience was more prosaic: I was simply nervous.

Upon arriving in Wewak in 1988, the capital town of the East Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea, I eagerly, if skittishly, made contact with folks from Tambunum village, my intended destination, a sizable community of about 1,000 Iatmul speakers along the banks of the middle Sepik River. Like many ethnographers en route to "the field" somewhere in the Sepik, I spent a few weeks in town acclimating myself to the new social landscape, shopping for various supplies, and beginning the anthropological process of "deep hanging out."[2] That is to say, I spent a few weeks in town roaming, chatting, and, as my son might say, chillin' with some Tambunums. I more or less became integrated into a particular family. Everybody seemed more or less clear on my role as the student-anthropologist. I felt welcomed, safe, and ready to begin the deepness of ethnographic "hanging out."

On an appointed day, two dozen or so Tambunums[3] and I prepared to depart town for the village. Our plan was to leave in the afternoon, once we received word on a much-anticipated legal decision that was forthcoming from the magistrate presiding over the Wewak district courthouse. This ruling, as I learned, promised to resolve in some manner a long-standing feud between Tambunum and a rival non-Iatmul community, Masandanai, over the ownership of a small Sepik tributary. The two villages had scuffled over this waterway for decades. Even Margaret Mead weighed in on the issue, writing a letter on behalf of the Tambunums based on her recollections from the 1930s. As far as the Tambunums were concerned, the waterway was theirs—created by their mythic-historic ancestors—and had always been so.

It was less a matter of material resources, although the waterway was lush and teeming with fish, than a matter of totemic pride. The Masandanai were pitiful, lower Sepik squatters who, despite residing there for decades, should swiftly pack and leave. I'm sure Masandanai saw things differently. But how, I never knew.

At any rate, men from both villages gathered in town to await the magistrate's ruling. Truthfully, however, I no longer recall exactly what that decision was—and, indeed, any formal effort at resolution swiftly faded into rage, fear, frustration, and death.

I anticipated that the magistrate would issue his opinion, that the decision would go in the Tambunums' favor (or not), and that we would then pile into a large truck and drive to the river. There, we would cross the Sepik in dugout canoes and I would finally, fully, and formally enter the field. What more to it could there be?

On the morning of our intended departure, a large crowd of Tambunum men loitered near the courthouse. Nearby the Masandanai congregated. The courthouse sat midway up a steep hill in the broiling Wewak sun, beneath a small grove of trees. To pass the time, I shopped for some last-minute supplies with my elderly adoptive father, Yambuken. We had just walked out of a trade store—I, schlepping a large kerosene stove; he, shuffling behind me chewing betel nut—when a group of men brandishing machetes, kitchen knives, lumber, iron bars, and whatnot, scurried past us in the direction of the courthouse. I had no idea what was happening. But my father did. He quickly steered me to the post office, and we sat on the curb as unobtrusively as possible. The two villages, Tambunum and Masandanai, were brawling just up the hill. Armed men were running everywhere; we could hear the shouts and sounds of violence. It was terrifying. My father draped a towel over his head to escape notice. He feared for his life.

Eventually, as the skirmish subsided, the police arrived and encouraged calm. The two sides went their separate ways—all but one man, that is, a man from Masandanai village. He lay dead—eviscerated, I was told—on the pavement.

The Tambunums and I trod up the hill, and we spent the rest of day huddled in my room at the New Wewak Hotel, chatting about the fight and the seemingly never-ending feud. The Tambunums accepted no responsibility. The deceased man, they said, succumbed to his own kin. He was a quarrelsome fellow, and died as a result of internecine sorcery and treachery rather than a Tambunum blade. In the late afternoon, the police arrived at the hotel and hauled my companions away. It was all so straightforward, even, at that moment, unemotional. Nothing out of the ordinary. As if this happened all the time. I was ordered to avoid the Tambunums altogether and forget about travelling to the village, lest I inadvertently find myself in the

midst of a payback vendetta. I thought I was prepared for fieldwork. Maybe in fact I was. But not for this.

Prologue: Part II

In the end, of course, I did make it to the village after a few more weeks in town, hanging out with Tambunums (despite the advice from the police). If I recall correctly, I left with the final group of villagers fleeing town and the threat of a compensatory homicide. Although Tambunum is a far more populous village than Masandanai, there was clearly no need to tempt fate. Thankfully, the long trip to the river was uneventful, save for a few anxious, if not panicked, moments at our departure when the driver of the truck foolishly drove to the wrong market in Wewak, the one next to the Masandanai camp, to purchase—what else?—betel nut. We turned around in a hurry, and quickly headed for the Sepik highway. When we finally arrived, so much had happened that my first few steps in the village seemed more like a welcome return than a grand entrance.

I arrived in the evening, after sunset. It was dark. My possessions and I were unceremoniously taken into Yambuken's massive domicile. I climbed up the house ladder and was plunked down in a space near the side wall. There I sat, surrounding by my things, scrutinized by various folks coming and going, especially kids, entirely unclear as to what, exactly, I was supposed to do.

The next morning, I was approached by a middle-aged man named Dmoiawan. As it turned out, my immediate ethnographic predecessor, Rhoda Metraux, had already mentioned Dmoiawan. He was one of her many assistants in the 1960s—a cookboy, if I recall correctly. His father was a local official called a luluai in the 1930s, when Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson studied in the village. With all due respect to my own teachers,[4] Dmoiawan had an impressive pedigree! Who was I, a nervous neophyte, not to listen? "You are young," he said correctly. "You just arrived. You clearly don't know what you are doing. I have experience with anthropologists. You should listen to me. I know what you should do." Indeed, he did. I was counseled to conduct a census and to elicit genealogies. I obeyed.

Culture as Failure

Reading the reviews by Roscoe, Losche, Leavitt, and Lindenbaum recalled for me the two fieldwork incidents I just described. The events in town, outside the courthouse, remind us that social life is often tragic, deeply emotional, bereft of any satisfying script, explanation, or conclusion. A man was killed. But his death offered no finality, except his own. I do not know

what happened among the Masandanai. I assume they grieved with much the same emotional anguish as would have the Tambunums if they suffered the loss. I do know that, even fifteen years later, the matter of the death, and the land dispute, is far from resolved. The tragedy in 1988 led to no resolution, no triumphs, no celebrations. There were no heroes.

To be sure, there are many ways we could seek to explain the murder. We could attempt to pin the events on the aftermath of colonialism, the upheavals of modernity, the shock of social change, competition for scarce resources, the persistence of long-standing rivalries, the stubbornness of tradition, the limitations of the Melanesian state, and so forth. And, in each case, we would be correct. But none of these analytically robust concepts seems fully capable of encompassing or portraying the sheer experiential dimensions of what transpired that afternoon in Wewak. For that, we need a theory attuned to the nuances of why social life often fails despite our best efforts, and why we get up again and go forward. We need a theory attuned to the ambivalences of social life, to the quest for meaning, to our (here I'm speaking about cultural beings, not anthropological ones) inability to resolve the very puzzles that compel us to build and rebuild culture. From a particular anthropological perspective, the events outside the courthouse in Wewak were terrific grist for the analytic mill. A real-life murder mystery! But from the local perspective, on both sides of the killing, the situation in Wewak had reached a crescendo of emotional anguish and terror. After all, somebody was killed. The brute facticity of a disembodied corpse is tough to ignore, either for the Masandanai, who now felt compelled to enact their own retributive murder, or for the Tambunums, who now fearfully anticipated a death of their own.

In the commonality of the American vernacular, we might say that the situation in Wewak was "f—— up." I have every confidence that my Iatmul friends would agree with both the sentiment and the phrasing of this most indecorous of idioms. And I, frankly, find it difficult to offer an alternative, theoretically robust, erudite term that quite so succinctly and forcefully evokes the tenor of the situation in 1988. Out of control? Contingent events that subverted, from the local perspective, any possible agency that could result in any satisfactory resolution? Collective angst? Existential distress? Let me settle on two possible ways of capturing the moment.

On the one hand, all participants in the affair were following culturally appropriate, long-standing scripts for manhood. The entire affair, however tragic and awful, unfolded appropriately and matter-of-factly. The terror emerged from within the cultures themselves, not without. On the other hand, these scripts failed to guide participants to any sense of closure, either sociological or psychological. The terror, although prosaic, was nonetheless terrifying. A man, to repeat, was killed. There was, then, a definite unease

with the terms of one's culture but the absence of any forum in which fully to voice or even to recognize this disquietude. There was, in other words, an inability to resolve the contrary ideals on which to model the cultural self. It was *this* aspect of cultural experience, rendered not in murder but in displays of manhood during the famous *naven* rite, that I tried to illuminate in *Masculinity, Motherhood, and Mockery*—a ritualization of those dimensions of culture better left unstated but nonetheless requiring some sort of expression, dimensions that often seem as comic (but not, admittedly, in Wewak) as they do tragic. And for assistance in this effort, I looked to Freud and Bakhtin for inspiration and assistance.

The second part of my prologue wonderfully shows that, even for the local folks we study, everybody has their angle on what we should do in the field, and how we should do it. We all have our own theoretical orientations, our own commitments, our own sense of what ideas are au courant or passé, splendid or spurious, insightful or obfuscating. My sense is that many of us adhere to particular paradigms because they resonate with our own life experiences or, at the very least, our own moral outlook on what is important, or awful, or vexing about social life.[5] I long ago abandoned the belief that we choose our conceptual frameworks rationally, by carefully evaluating the pros and cons, as if we were scanning the latest automobile ratings from *Consumer Reports*.

I am here reminded of Levi-Strauss. The subject of the human sciences, he wrote in the Author's Preface to Volume 2 of *Structural Anthropology* (1983, ix), is humanity. Consequently, we have a vested interest in how we portray the human experience. We anthropologists inevitably, or perhaps fortuitously, allow our "preferences and prejudices to interfere" in how we define ourselves to ourselves. What we find interesting to study "is not subject to scientific decisions but . . . . will result from a choice which is ultimately of a philosophical order."[6]

Even though I often embrace structuralism in general as a strategy for unpacking embedded meanings—what might be called "structuralism lite"—I disagree with Levi-Strauss's (1973, 58) famous dismissal of the phenomenological dimensions of social life as simply epiphenomenal. Nonetheless, Levi-Strauss (1976, 170) correctly sees myth—and, I would often add, ritual—as an admission of failure we (cultural beings, not anthropological ones) all know at some level but cannot bring ourselves to admit: the inability of social life to resolve the paradoxes of human existence.[7] Personally, I have no way empirically to validate this orientation or commitment. It is, at best, a philosophical outlook on how, and why, ritual articulates, or disarticulates, otherwise conventional webs of semiotic meaning.

How can we answer Roscoe's "perennial questions of validation that face all psychodynamic analyses" (this issue, 87)? The short answer is this: By not

asking the question at all. I say this not to evade the issue, but to suggest that verification is simply the incorrect mode of analytic evaluation in this case. After all, I offered, in a sense, a *counter*argument that highlighted not what naven did, but what it did *not* do. And what naven did *not* do, as Leavitt and Lindenbaum recognize, was offer men closure or resolution. The symbolic forms of Eastern Iatmul naven and manhood, as Leavitt so nicely states it, fail to offer men an opportunity to redress contradictions. Rather, they explicitly promote contradictions as the very stuff of manhood.

Dialogicality, or open-endedness, is a tough paradigm to verify. So is psychoethnography, as Obeyesekere (1990, 272) discusses. These are not verifiable approaches to culture. They are certainly falsifiable, as Obeyesekere continues, but only through the detailed presentation of counterevidence.

Why should we favor or, at the very least, entertain seriously this framework? Because, I maintain, it illuminates aspects of social life that other paradigms push to the background—particularly symbolic expressions of contrary cultural values, the irresolution of which makes much of social life meaningful. I am not denying the forces of demography, colonial guns, tins of fish, labor recruiters, cassette tapes, and cash cropping—what Roscoe calls the "plagues of modernity" (this issue, 89). Indeed, I am now exploring these very issues in my current research on modernity, the family, and Iatmul fatherhood—partly, I admit, on account of my muting somewhat these issues in the book under consideration. But, of course, my focus in the book was on something else: localized, not global, tragedies made manifest in the symbolic realm of meaning. In my account of Iatmul masculinity, I focused loosely on the work of culture, to borrow from Obeyesekere (1990), rather than, as Marxians or materialists might prefer, the work of man.

As I now see it, the point of my book was to spend some analytic time at the frontier identified by Levi-Strauss—the boundary between social order and failure (or between the "moral" and the "grotesque") where, for fleeting moments, Iatmul men teeter on the edge of the cultural abyss. They come back, to be sure. (Most of us do.) But as I pointed out, Iatmul men from Tambunum often come back, at least after naven, while weeping. Whatever it is Iatmul men see over there in that quintessentially naughty anthropological moment, to capture the tone of Losche's review, when an uncle slides his arse down his nephew's leg, whatever they feel compelled to enact, they do not very much like. They certainly don't speak about it—no matter how prompted. My task, you might say, was to tease out the meanings of this silence—the inability to speak about a ritual event that is central to the meaning of a localized manhood yet lies beyond verbal articulation precisely because the ritual does not work, that is, fails to convince participants fully to accept the very messages the ritual supposedly dramatizes or resolves.

To Leavitt's criticism that I did not allow Iatmul men sufficient time on the analytic couch, I can only agree. The book does require, in hindsight, more case studies after the model of Obeyesekere (1990) or more "person-centered" narratives championed so well by Hollan and Wellenkamp (e.g., 1994) for Toraja. But to my credit, I remain confident that, to the extent that I *did* at times talk about my interpretations to some Iatmul men, especially upon my brief return in 1994, I more or less received agreement.

Earlier, I spoke about Levi-Strauss's comment that anthropology rests on a philosophical, not a scientific or empirical, outlook on human experience. I now want to emend Levi-Strauss's formulation by suggesting that this outlook is as much aesthetic as philosophical. And, indeed, the exegetical problem posed by the naven rite resembles the perennial enigma of Sepik aesthetics: how to make sense of something that seems to be vital to local masculinities yet about which men say very little. Losche (e.g., 1995) and Roscoe (1995) themselves have addressed, quite usefully, the meanings of Sepik art. But for my purposes here, I want to look to another analysis of Sepik aesthetics, that of the late Donald Tuzin.

As we all know, the main plot of many male cults in Melanesia is the banishment of the feminine from the modes of ritual and cultural production, or reproduction, to which men anchor their manhood. But, as Tuzin points out, the absence of women presupposes the very thing that the male cult, by exiling women, wishes to deny: the everyday uniting of male and female. It is only because Sepik men and women *do* have sex together—and wish to do so, I might add (or most of them)—that coitus can serve as the very model whereby men define themselves *as* men in the absence of women. Without women, men lack a key script of manhood; with women, the script unravels. It is a no-win situation, both for men (existentially) and for women (who may suffer rather more brutally). This paradox, Tuzin continues, explains why Sepik men so often lack a cultural repertoire of vocabulary and concepts that would allow them to articulate the meanings of art. The aesthetic expressions of the male cult obfuscate and reveal; tell the truth and mask the truth; lie and admit to lying. Moreover, Sepik men are simply unable to access words and phrases that would allow them to convey to women the seriousness of what they are doing without women simply laughing or, worse, not caring, thereby casting manhood (but not necessarily men) aside as largely irrelevant. And what would men confront if they articulated the cult to themselves? That Sepik manhood is an unworkable fiction, perhaps one they themselves don't believe in. I will return to this point momentarily. Here, I want only to stress that the aesthetics, style, and substance of Sepik manhood arise from, and heighten, an essential irreducibility. For if these disharmonic fictions of gender and culture were, in fact, locally reducible,

they would no longer convey significant meaning or force. They certainly would not have endured through the upheavals of modernity.

Yamada (1977) wonderfully presents us with a different but no less consequential paradox among the Waxei, another East Sepik society. Waxei delight in sound and song. Why do Waxei sing? To experience joy. One might also offer the same answer to the question, Why naven? But Waxei songs also evoke, in complex ways, the dreadful, terrible power of the ultimate spirits responsible for the cosmos. Song, then, makes Waxei "aware that there is next to no difference between feeling in awe of spirits and happiness, both of which sway unstably and easily change into each other" (Yamada 1977, 253). Song makes this irreducible, contrary reality apparent.

Waxei, like all other riverine folks in this area of Melanesia, are fisherfolk. They fish. They also harvest sago, hunt, chop wood, carve canoes, build houses, in a phrase, *do* the stuff of everyday social life. The work of daily living requires Waxei to act on the world, and these everyday actions presumably require Waxei to seek, create, and envision an orderly, regular, predictable world—a world of relative stability that makes sense through the experiences of everyday reality. But the songs that are so dear to Waxei communicate something quite different: the "cognition of reality that there is nothing certain in this world" (Yamada 1977, 253). As I see it, Waxei build up their world while acknowledging through an aesthetic form that their labors, while fruitful on a daily basis, are in an ultimate sense doomed to failure. They still get up in the morning. But in song, the Waxei ponder the Big Questions of Who They Are and How They Fit into the Cosmic Scheme of Things. And when they do so, they see the cosmos, like the river, in far less stable terms than the toils of daily life might otherwise seem to require or suggest. And while Waxei have experienced, like Eastern Iatmul, a tumultuous history over the past century, it would seem semantically impoverished, both for them and for our own discipline, to tie this sense of cosmic uncertainty singularly, or even mainly, to these historical changes.

Roscoe, as I mentioned earlier, rightly scolded my analysis for a certain ahistoricity. Roscoe further suggests that the failures of manhood I saw in naven might actually comment not on Iatmul per se but, instead, on the postcolonial plight of Iatmul masculinity. The sometimes brutal pacification of indigenous warfare and headhunting in the early decades of the twentieth century denied Sepik men a long-standing arena in which to promote themselves and their role in cosmic reproduction. They lacked, in other words, a stage on which to dramatize the role and relevance of manhood. The existence of masculinity was seriously called into question. Consequently, the relationship between masculinity and motherhood dramatically shifted. No longer did manhood sustain mothering. But men continued to eat, literally and metaphorically, what women prepared. In short, male dependence on

women magnified. Indeed, implies Roscoe, masculinity became defined almost exclusively in terms of that dependence. Not surprisingly, the threat of women's laughter posed an even greater sense of shame to the expressive dimensions of masculinity, effectively saying, "Is this the best you can do?"

Roscoe is right. But I would reverse his argument, and declare that naven encompasses history. The rite is not, on this point, encompassed *by* history. To the extent that naven persists today as a commentary on the relationship between modernity and the devaluation or illegitimacy of traditional manhood, it does so solely because the rite always commented on the failures of masculinity.

Everything we know about Melanesia, never mind the middle Sepik, suggests that modernity heightened, but did not cause, the semiotic dependence of men on women that is so evident in local configurations of masculinity, myth, and ritual. If we have learned anything in these globally troubled times, it is that culture is mightily, often dangerously, tenacious. I would never deny the brute facticity, to use this phrase again, of globalization—of the inexorable allure of commodities, the malaise of underdevelopment, the exploitation of wage labor, the loss of local autonomy. But I prefer, in the case of naven at least, to focus less on the objective reality of history and more on the "structure of the conjuncture" (Sahlins 1985). Modernity may eventually eclipse the naven rite. The ceremony may become, like the Passover seder to many Jews, a time to affirm a symbolic commitment to a tradition that, conceptualized *as* tradition, lacks a seamless connection to everyday beliefs and practices. But for now, naven remains meaningful as a doubled rejoinder by men to mothering because modernity has enhanced the paradoxes, dilemmas, and uncertainties of manhood.

Thus phrased, I see my contribution to understanding naven not simply as a discourse on Eastern Iatmul men, or even a famous ritual. It is another voice in a wider conversation within Melanesian anthropology that tries to probe the contrary dimensions of local life that make these lifeworlds compelling to us, and to local folks, through their joys and frustrations, tragedies and triumphs. This voice aims to expose, and even to celebrate, but not to reduce, the semiotic complexity of culture and, in a wider sense, human creativity.

Freudian Failures?

For most of my reviewers, the Freudian tones of the book take front seat in the critical canoe to other theoretical moves and ethnographic contributions. Indeed, I was surprised, if not somewhat distressed, that several reviewers failed even to mention some of the more innovative or at least new ethnographic material in the book—the "data." Unmentioned, except really by

Lindenbaum (thank you), were my discussions about architectural symbolism, the semiotics of kinship and marriage (which anthropologists have debated since the early 1970s), the ritualized phrasing and redressing of shame, the many myths, and so forth. Only Lindenbaum, moreover, noted that I offered, at the end, a cross-cultural proposal—a testable one, I might add!—for rethinking what Gilmore (1990) called Ubiquitous Man (thank you, again). And I surely articulated a clear dialogical or Bakhtinian theory of ritual symbolism and meaning that, like my emendation of Ubiquitous Man, could fruitfully be applied, I believe, to other cultural settings.

Masculinity, Mockery, and Motherhood is not, to state the obvious, the first book to call attention to the relationship between masculinity and uterine fertility in the Sepik or Melanesia. But I did highlight this connection in two hopefully novel ways. First, I drew on Bakhtin's theory of cultural dialogics to show that the double-faced relationship between manhood and mothering is not resolved through cultural symbolism but, in fact, heightened through the very symbolism others take to be mainly expressive or successfully therapeutic. To the extent that I did construe the cultural symbolism as therapeutic, I also argued that this therapy fails. But in that failure, to repeat, I attributed much of the meaning of manhood—and culture more generally.

Second, I tried to add a humanistic or expressive dimension to my Freudian analysis. I tried, in other words, to identify something of the passion and pathos of the local experience of masculinity, ritual, and culture. And I did so, moreover, by focusing on what Obeyesekere (1990) calls the "dark side of life." Typically, Melanesian anthropologists attribute this "dark side" to the travails of modernity. But I contend that the darkness of culture is as much premodern as it is modern.

Losche dismisses the Freudian components of the book as "banal and ho-hum" (this issue, 85). I'm not sure Eastern Iatmul would see it that way. After all, men in Tambunum both do and do not envy female fertility. In other words, they have an ambivalent commitment to the principles of their manhood. I tried to represent this relationship not as a simple-minded *fact* of culture but, rather, as a *tragedy* of culture. Say what you want about the "primal crime" as a fact of evolution and history. But as a philosophical outlook on the morality of culture that upends any bourgeois naiveté that our basic values can serve as a "shining city upon a hill," I think Freud had his finger on a crucial dilemma of social life. Tragedy of this nature is rarely ho-hum.

What is ho-hum, however, is Losche's contention that my Freud is an "old sad, tragic man" (this issue, 86). Never mind that we may all someday, if we are lucky, grow old. But let me concede the point. Yes, Freud was, from an

angle, sad and tragic. But from another angle, the sad tragedy of Freud's life and perhaps his oeuvre befit the Eastern Iatmul setting, at least as I sketched it in the book. I now see Freud, a Jew living in fin de siècle Europe, as a colonial subject (see Boyarin 1997). Bakhtin, too, a privileged son marginalized in Stalinist Russia, also occupied a liminal space. That Freud was sad and tragic made his work all the more suitable for teasing out the meanings of the naven rite. It, too, was sad and tragic. That was my point.

In my defense, too, I believe I did more than merely mention Lacan in passing.[8] In fact, I drew on Trawick (1990) to offer a Lacanian explanation of Iatmul marriage that I thought was perhaps one of the most interesting arguments in my book (see also Silverman 2005). Through a particular form of marriage, Iatmul men pursue a cultural goal—to wed a woman your father calls "mother"—that, at the symbolic level, can never really succeed: the yearning to return to the preoedipal mother. The specific ethnographic contours of this argument are not relevant here. But my wider point is that this marriage form rests upon a longing that cannot be fulfilled lest society crumble. In this sense, the institution of marriage, like the naven rite, succeeds only through failure—by creating longings, writes Trawick (1990, 152) "that can *never* be fulfilled."

The existential or experiential tragedy I aimed to uncover in the cultural construction of Eastern Iatmul manhood finds a powerful analogue in Gil Herdt's famous account of ritualized homosexuality among the Sambia (1981, Ch. 8). Sambia men, after marriage and fatherhood—after, in other words, "full manhood won"—tell themselves a secret myth. This myth, Herdt feels confident, unlike other aspects of male initiation, was entirely unknown by women traditionally. Women did likely have some inkling about men's homosexual encounters. But about this myth, they were "completely ignorant." And what did the myth detail? Male parthenogenesis. As Herdt summarizes, "the purpose of this pat story is single-minded and bluntly insistent. It leaves no room for fallible doubts about the 'true' origins of mankind, maleness, or femaleness: men created all." But why the secrecy? Why hide the myth from women as well as from men themselves until after they have attained full masculine personhood? What, we might ask, was the big deal? The ritual secrecy does not, Herdt argues correctly in my view, simply sustain collective male privilege over women, or simply foster male solidarity. Rather, "this story, and its particular form of secrecy, actually disguise men's deep doubts about their maleness"—doubts so profound and consequential that the parthenogenic fantasy can only be disclosed to older men, lest younger males feel simply overwhelmed, and presumably reject Sambia manhood altogether.[9] The essence of Sambia maleness, if I read Herdt correctly, is that manhood verges on collapse—either driving men away, or crushing them psychically.

The tenor of what I was trying to capture is powerfully portrayed in Joel Robbins's (2004, especially Ch. 5) striking account of moral torment among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. Robbins offers his book as a conceptual and ethnographic critique of the reigning theories of social change. But I read *Becoming Sinners* as a moving account of an anguished people who traditionally and today just can't win. Urapmin constantly fall short of their own self-selected moral virtues. Social life, as Urapmin and many other Melanesians see it, requires each person to reach out to others. But every one of these morally appropriate, "lawful" acts that turns the Urapmin self *to* someone, also appears "willful," that is, immorally selfish, by turning the self *away* from someone else. Marx was wrong: Urapmin evidenced a profound sense of precapitalist alienation. Every human relationship for the Urapmin is thus, at one level, doomed to eventual failure. Urapmin have no choice, given the terms of their culture, but to view themselves as irrevocably bad. Theirs is a world of loss, where the creation of social life and everyday tasks is charged with feelings of abandonment and betrayal. Although Urapmin have a "healthy sense of social possibility," they also possess "a mournful awareness of the inevitability of moral failure." Ultimately, all persons are "morally culpable" since, ultimately, we all die. The very motivation to create culture and social life, then, inevitably results in disappointment, anguish, and death. I have the sense from reading Robbins that much of the meaning of life for Urapmin arises from the pursuit of some sort of resolution of this paradox. But no possible resolution could ever be forthcoming. As Robbins writes, the contradiction between lawfulness and willfulness "is never fully resolved; at best it is merely lived with" (2004, 209).

When Urapmin eagerly sought out Christianity in the 1960s and 1970s, they further condemned themselves to existential torment by viewing human "will"—the very pulse of social life in their traditional worldview—as categorically sinful. So wicked is the "will," so distraught are Christian Urapmin at the thought of inadvertently sinning through even the most trivial and fleeting gesture, that Urapmin seem barely capable of acting in, or on, the world. Some make lists of their daily sins. Others lie awake at night praying for exculpation. But their sins, really, are nothing other than the basic tasks of daily social life. I can think of no other book in the entire corpus of Melanesian anthropology that quite so powerfully captures the tragic dimensions of culture as Robbins's *Becoming Sinners*. Eastern Iatmul men are not, thankfully, as tormented by the terms of their cultural ideas and ideals as Urapmin (I intend no offense to either Urapmin or Robbins). But to view naven solely as a celebration that integrates society, or solely as a rite that "works" to Iatmul moral, psychic, and aesthetic satisfaction, would be as intellectually impoverished as reading Robbins's *Becoming Sinners* and thinking, "How

sweet that Urapmin are so concerned with acting nicely to others." To use Robbins's wonderful phrase, the Eastern Iatmul naven rite dramatizes dilemmas of manhood that are in the end "only lived with" (2004, 209).

I was delighted and privileged that Lindenbaum saw fit to situate my book in a wider Melanesian and global "gender politics." I aimed to illuminate a small bend in the Sepik River, albeit with a theoretical gaze far beyond the region itself. I celebrate the cultural creativity of Eastern Iatmul. I do not necessarily endorse the terms of that creativity. Surely this needs no stating. But Lindenbaum powerfully reminds us that the symbolism of motherhood often entails real power and real battles. For whenever men define themselves by symbolically and ritually seizing tropes of motherhood, women are perhaps denied a certain validation of their own.[10] She is right. And this recognition, I admit, on a level other than the symbolic, is missing from the book.

Lindenbaum writes that the symbolic and economic struggles between men and women in Melanesia over "the right to control the story of reproduction remains an ideological battle we can all recognize" (this issue, 77). I agree. But since I write these words with less than two weeks until the next Presidential election in the United States, I might add that we should do more than merely recognize these struggles.

Losche pleads for a comedic opera about naven, one that embodies its ribald hilarity. I hope not. Such a skit would fail miserably to capture the essence of naven. The rite is not about laughter. It is about laughter *and* shame, joy *and* pain, anguish *and* celebration. It is, to repeat Bakhtin, about the "double-faced fullness of life"—a fullness, we can only hope with Lindenbaum, that is equally enjoyed by women as it is by men.

NOTES

1. Surely Malinowski receives the gold medal for penning in 1922 the opening words of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific:* "Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight." The "malarial and diffident" expression, of course, opens Clifford Geertz's (1973) famous essay on the Balinese Cockfight.

2. The genealogy of this phrase is unclear. Clifford Geertz, in *The New York Review of Books* for October 1998, takes it from James Clifford's 1997 book, *Routes*. But Clifford attributes the phrase to a comment by Renato Rosaldo in 1994.

3. I've never been quite clear on the best term for the folks who help us in the field. An impromptu internet request on asao-net (see www.asao.org) recently elicited a wide range of possibilities, including hosts, informants, local folks, assistants, respondents, experts, residents, collaborators, research colleagues, local coworkers, friends, acquaintances, teachers, mentors, research participants, research subjects, ethnographic consultants, and fieldwork interlocutors.

4. David Lipset and Gene Ogan at the University of Minnesota.

5. And I should also add the obvious: we also stake theoretical claims on the basis of what will most likely get our work noticed, and ourselves hired.

6. Levi-Strauss neglected to add the role of countertransference. In this regard, I should cite Mimica's (2003) extensive and rather scathing 40-page critique of my book, in which the "scripting [of Eastern Iatmul and naven] is largely driven by his own [mine] narcissistic, negative-idealising countertransference." I might add, too, that Mimica (1999) is equally critical of Lipset (1997), who also draws on Bakhtin (see also Lipset and Silverman 2005; and Lipset 2000). For two more recent psychoanalytic takes on naven, see Moore (2007) and Weiss and Stanek (2006).

7. I elaborated on this issue when reviewing Weiner's *The Lost Drum* for the Book Forum (Silverman 2001).

8. To be honest, much of the old tiredness ascribed to Freud is often addressed specifically to his androcentrism. As it should be. But why is Lacan so infrequently subject to the same gendered scrutiny? To my credit, I specifically cited in the book several gendered critiques of Lacan.

9. In a later work, Herdt (2003) argued that ritual secrecy created loyalty and trust among individual warriors who might otherwise pursue their own social and political interests. But the secrecy also defended men against self-doubt since, at one level, they did not fully subscribe to the collective reality the cult required.

10. On this point, let me add one final comment on the biblical tale in Genesis, mentioned earlier, that is often taken as the foundational moment of monotheism. When God asked Abraham to slaughter Isaac, and the patriarch enthusiastically agreed, whose voice is missing? That of the boy's mother, Sarah, who dies shortly thereafter.

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