

David Lipset, *Mangrove Man: Dialogics of Culture in the Sepik Estuary*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xviii, 335, illus., bib., index. US\$59.95 cloth; \$22.95 paperback.

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David Lipset has given us a rich ethnographic account of the Murik people, who live between the ocean and the inland lagoon system of the Murik lakes in the Sepik area of Papua New Guinea. His account stems from his research in the area during the 1980s and 1990s and is enhanced by the work of Kathleen Barlow and supplemented by secondary sources and documentation dating back to 1913.

*Mangrove Man's* theoretical thread is an examination of the gendered dialogue that underlies the sociality of the Murik. Lipset develops the notion of "maternal schema" (a phrase that he says was first used by Barlow in 1985) to provide his exegesis of how Murik men contextualize their places within their lived experiences: "Actors may explicitly acknowledge being guided by the maternal schema in certain situations . . . while in others they presume it. . . . What is culturally distinctive about 'the mother' is that, while the exterior and visible conduct of her mothering offers to them a model for moral behavior and order, qualities and substances inside of her body, particularly her powers of sexuality and fertility, the men stigmatize" (p. 3). Lipset states that this is a "hidden dialogue" through which Murik men negotiate the maintenance of Murik culture in which "ideas of domination, autonomy and so forth fail to apprehend the complexity of their [Murik men's] engagement with and responsiveness to the 'maternal schema'" (p. 3). Lipset's aim is to "analyze the terms in which men think through, live, create, and negotiate culture, as if they were responding to a particular schema of the maternal body" (p. 6). This maternal schema provides a gendered framework through which to view Murik society—one that attempts to acknowledge the male/female symbolic, physical-biological, and psychological duality and, at one and the same time, the unity presented in his materials.

The canoe and its gendered symbolism are central to the Murik people and to the analytical overlay of the maternal schema. A pregnant woman is said to be the "canoe of the fetus" (p. 54); a husband is said to be a "canoe hull" and his wife, the "outrigger float." The heraldic titleholders are also described as being "'canoes' for their heraldry. . . . [who] ought to act 'like a mother,' through feast making and the bestowal of *sumon* upon children" (*sumon* being defined by Lipset as "sacred, heraldic ornaments that repre-

sent the corporation, authority, moral order and jural identity of a descent group”) (pp. 129–130).

Outrigger canoes are manufactured from canoe logs within a temporary structure (the *gai’ suumon*) in a ritual atmosphere that excludes the physical presence of women. Here the men work (often naked) in the symbolic equivalent of the birth house, from which men are excluded. During the carving of the canoe, celibacy must be observed and if the taboo is broken, it is thought that the hull of the canoe will split open “like a woman’s genitals” (p. 42, citing Barlow 1985). Murik women are seen to possess the powers to send out a canoe with its crew and to make it return again to the community. While a canoe is away with its crew the steersman’s wife must adhere to a series of taboos: chopping firewood might cause the canoe to split open and sink, and having sexual intercourse with one of her husband’s rivals may cause her husband’s canoe to “mimic the undulations she makes,” causing the boat to sink (p. 44).

Like Annette Weiner’s work on gendered aspects of sociality among the Trobriand Islanders, *Mangrove Man* challenges the reader to think critically about gendered symbolism and identities.

Parts 2 and 3 of the book continue the analysis of the maternal schema. First Lipset contrasts it with the images of the masculine, aggressive body in which “passions and fluids overflow” (p. 135) and of the female sexual body, represented by female spirits. The maternal moral order is satirized and mocked in *muwara* rituals—enacted by the classificatory mother’s brothers and father’s sisters of a given person—that openly refer to the polluting but vital inner fluids of the body and its sexuality. Other rituals enact the jealousy between elder and younger brothers (characteristic of systems of primogeniture), which Lipset interprets as local versions of the Oedipal struggle.

Depicting in detail two sequences of disputes in 1981–1982, emerging out of sexual transgressions and jealousies, he further argues that these sequences showed a transition from aggressive display to a restatement of the maternal schema (p. 251) in the first case and a failure to do so in the second, correlated with the general developing problems of social control in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s and 1990s. Whether the maternal schema can constrain and restrain the conflicts that emerge in today’s multilayered and complex arenas, in Murik and elsewhere, seems to be uncertain. The Bakhtinian dialogues that Lipset identifies as at the heart of Murik sociality have grown less coherent, more cacophonous; talking at or past the other rather than with the other, as partner. But some of the roots of “breakdown” can be seen already in the indigenous dialogue itself, in which aggression and mockery are counterposed to peacefulness and praise.

This book is a well thought through, informative ethnography that should inspire students and stimulate further anthropological debate among scholars, particularly because of the originality of its approach and basic concepts. We add only one minor note of caution. On p. 10 the author refers to “non-Austronesian speaking inland New Guinea and its deeply misogynist male cults.” Misogyny, however, is not necessarily at the heart of these cults, at least in the western part of the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Rather, they are founded on the same kind of model of collaborative tempering of qualities and fusion of gendered values that Lipset himself delineates for the Murik.

### REFERENCE

Barlow, Kathleen

- 1985 The Role of Women in Murik Trade. *Annual Review of Research in Economic Anthropology* 7:95–122.