

Oceania Publications, University of Sydney

The Gender of the Cosmos: Totemism, Society and Embodiment in the Sepik River

Author(s): Eric Kline Silverman

Source: *Oceania*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Sep., 1996), pp. 30-49

Published by: [Oceania Publications, University of Sydney](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40331518>

Accessed: 06/05/2013 11:18

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oceania Publications, University of Sydney is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Oceania*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Gender of the Cosmos: Totemism, Society and Embodiment in the Sepik River

Eric Kline Silverman

De Pauw University

ABSTRACT

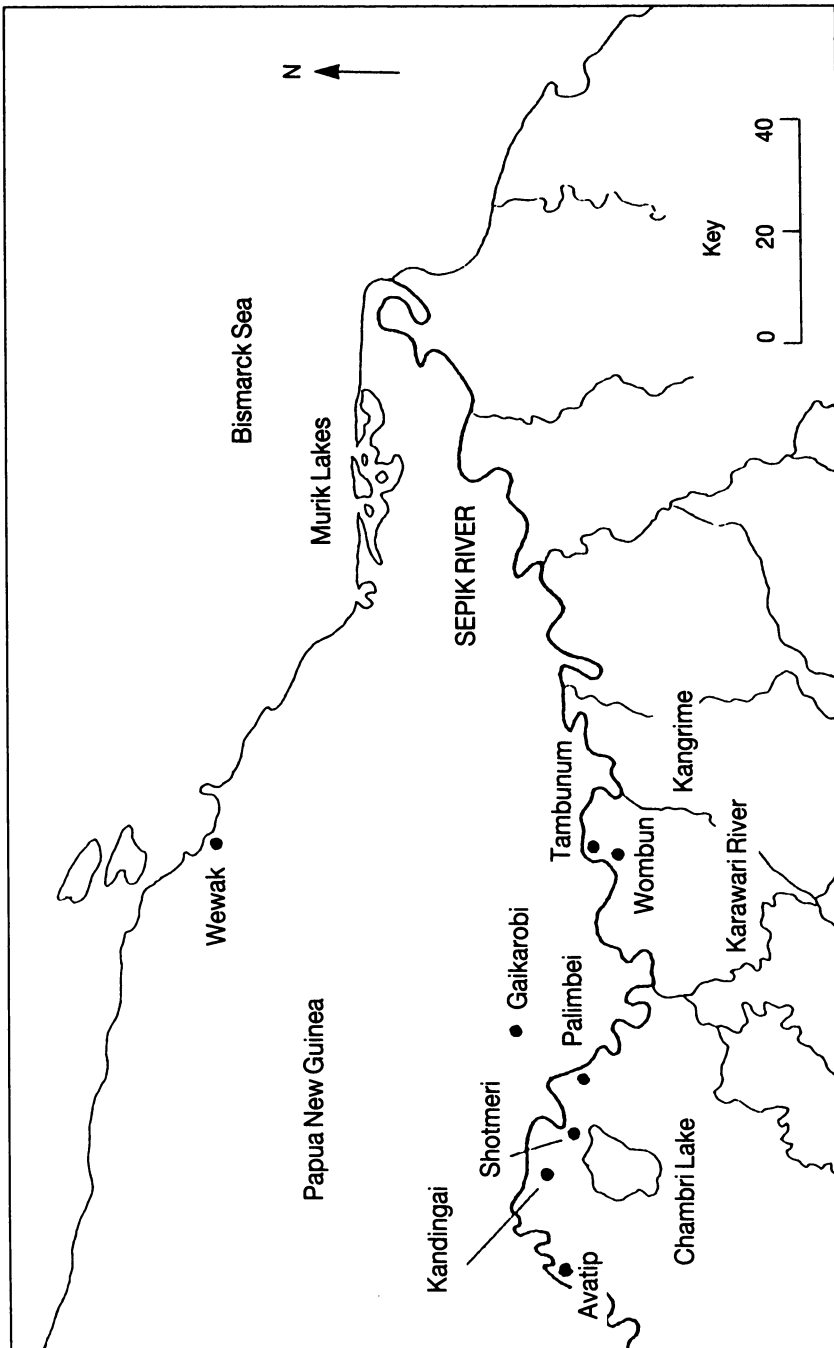
This article contributes to recent research on the foundations of society in Melanesia, both in terms of local representation and actual social practice, as well as body imagery and gender. I have three interrelated objectives. First, I present new data on the symbolism and politics of Eastern Iatmul cosmology and totemism (Sepik River, Papua New Guinea). Second, I engage Harrison's distinction between magical and material, or realist and nominalist, polities in Melanesia. Eastern Iatmul society is represented by totemic names and categories. Yet society also requires human agents to embody named entities: men rarely assert the existence of cosmological categories that are divorced entirely from the realm of human action. This is a key difference between Eastern Iatmul and other Sepik societies such as Manambu. Finally, I argue that there is a symbolic homology between the gendered human body, the body politic and the cosmos, an important perspective that has been lacking in Melanesian comparative studies. Totemism for Eastern Iatmul is largely a realm of male ritual-politics. Nevertheless, an idiom of maternal fertility and reproduction is salient in the local cosmology. For this reason, the gender of the cosmos, to invoke Marilyn Strathern, is androgynous.

INTRODUCTION

This article interprets gender and bodily imagery in the cosmology, totemic system and formation of social groups in the Eastern Iatmul village of Tambunum, middle Sepik River, Papua New Guinea (Map 1).¹ On an empirical level, my goal is to clarify the local conceptualization of descent groups and offer new data on a culture that has been central to anthropological and Melanesian studies since the 1930s. On a theoretical level, the Tambunum material refines in two ways Harrison's (1989; see also 1990) insightful framework for understanding a fundamental difference in the foundation of Melanesian social groupings. This refinement pivots on, first, the status of local statements concerning the cosmos, and, second, the symbolic equivalence between totemism and reproduction, or, male ritual-politics and the cultural symbolism of the maternal body.

In Harrison's terminology, 'magical' polities such as the Manambu of Avatip are locally understood to be constituted on the basis of totemic categories. These categories, encoded in names, are imagined to exist *a priori*, in other words, unaffected by the vicissitudes and even the existence of society and history. Descent groups such as clans and subclans are 'refractions' (Harrison 1989:17) of a timeless cosmos. Politico-ritual action, namely, totemic theft and debating, as well as demographic flux, alter

MAP 1: Sepik River



society. But in local ideology these human behaviors are unable to reorganize the ultimate reality that is the foundation for action and society — the division of the cosmos into immutable totemic categories.

Thus we could say that Manambu are Frazerian rather than Durkheimian since they envision their social groupings ultimately to mirror the totemic categories of the world, and not vice versa.² Cosmological categories and corresponding descent groups, in fact, are said to exist regardless of whether or not they have living members. Although totemic clans are in this sense ahistorical or timeless, ‘the actual human descent groups those clans contain’ are subject to ongoing change (Harrison 1989:6). Human history is the negotiable relationship between descent groups ‘and the categories of the totemic system ... not the organization of the totemic system itself’ which is fixed, prehuman and therefore non-negotiable (Harrison 1984:7). Magical polities, Harrison (1989) writes, are realist.

By contrast, Harrison suggests, Highland New Guinea ‘material’ polities are locally understood to be constituted primarily on the basis of human activity. They are nominalist. Whether by filiation, descent, residence or other forms of association, society is not envisioned by its members to exist in some *a priori* form but only insofar as there are persons who interact as a corporate group. On the level of objective behavior, both Highland and Manambu polities are, of course, formed through political action. The crucial difference that Harrison addresses occurs on the level of self-representation, that is to say, how indigenous actors perceive the basis for their society. In the absence of persons, there are no cosmic or totemic categories that enable a Highland group to perdure since human action alone is understood to produce social and cosmological categories. Among the Manambu, the lack of persons merely dissolves a social group but not the foundation for society and the group, which still exists as a cosmic category. In Avatip, these categories are the ‘preconditions’ (Harrison 1989:8) for human action rather than the product of action, which is the case in the Highlands.

However different, both magical and material polities rest on a moral ethic of reciprocity. Avatip and other magical societies cohere around exchanges of, and debates over, totemic names, magic and ritual esoterica. Persons act on a fixed cosmology that is divided into categories. But in the Highlands society emerges from exchanges of pigs, wealth and material resources. In these polities, human action is motivated by the exigencies of physical resources.

Ethnographically, Harrison’s framework is an insightful contribution to the anthropological discourse on social representations in Melanesia. More generally, Harrison addresses a crucial theoretical question in social thought: what is the foundation of society? His answer, however, as condensed above, encourages further elaboration along two axes. First, the Eastern Iatmul or Tambunum data reveal that Harrison’s mutually exclusive categories of magical and material polities need to be refigured. The dynamics that underlie the ontological foundations of Melanesian polities, as envisioned in local ideologies, are too complex to be adequately encompassed within a dichotomy. I argue that society in Tambunum is locally represented by totemic names and cosmic divisions. It is a decidedly magical rather than material polity. At the same time, society requires human agents to embody these mystical and cosmological categories. Persons become the totemic referents of their names and in this way (re)constitute the cosmos through human action. Yet the ideology of Eastern Iatmul society tacks between realism and nominalism. In some contexts the cosmos is alleged to be fixed and separated entirely from social life. In other contexts human action is acknowledged to create totemic categories. In all cases, however, these claims, whether realist or nominalist, are ultimately political rather than ontological. That is to say, statements concerning the structure of the cosmos and the totemic system are tied to specific politico-ritual disputes and strategies. How men and descent groups perceive any particular situation determines whether they affirm a static, non-human cosmology

or a totemic system that alters in accordance with human politics. In this regard Eastern Iatmul ideology differs from that of Manambu.

Second, we need also to examine the key relationship between idioms of the body, the cultural construction of reproduction and the moral representation of society. Cross-culturally, society and the cosmos are often represented through a semiotics of the body. This perspective draws on a time-honored and viable tradition in social thought that includes, among others, Hobbes (1958 [1651]), Durkheim (1915 [1912]), Hertz (1960 [1909]) and Douglas (1966; see also Lipset and Silverman n.d.). It is from this perspective, one that is admittedly symbolic rather than materialistic, that my analysis proceeds. As I will demonstrate, there is a symbolic homology between the human body, the body politic or society, and cosmology. Moreover, the gender of the Eastern Iatmul cosmos, to invoke M. Strathern (1988), is androgynous, combining a poetics of female fertility with the sociopolitical actions of men.

Overall, I am suggesting that Eastern Iatmul differs from both the Highlands and Avatip in Harrison's scheme of materialist and magical, or realist and nominalist, politics. This difference does not occur on the level of etic practice but on the level of emic representation in which local images of society are contextual and gendered. The wider theoretical message of this essay is that idioms of reproductive power and the body are important considerations when comparing Melanesian ideologies of social formation and cosmology.

TOTEMISM, COSMOLOGY AND POWER

Tambunum (Map 1) is a prosperous and largely endogamous village of 900-1100 people. It is the largest middle Sepik village, comprising some 120 extended-family dwellings. In order to understand the jural organization and totemic system of Tambunum it is necessary to begin with the origin of the world. The primordial cosmos was featureless and aquatic. Stirred by wind, land arose. Then appeared the *tsagi wangu* or totemic pit, located near the Sawos-speaking village of Gaikarobi. From this pit emerged ancestors and spirits, who then created the world and culture.

This collective, unified origin gave rise to the 'monism' of the Iatmul cosmos (Bateson 1936:235). After the chthonic emergence, unity ended and the pluralism of totemism, cosmology and society began as the ancestor heroes of each descent group embarked on a unique mythic history and created specific paths (*yembii*) of the world. During the course of these primordial migrations, predominantly male ancestor heroes engaged in a variety of actions. They planted gardens and trees, traded and fought with neighbors, inaugurated rituals and learned to sculpt woodcarvings. Villages and cult houses were built, abandoned and destroyed. Each action and event, specific to particular ancestor heroes, was enshrined in and created through totemic names. All names and phenomena that originated with an ancestor are now claimed by a living descent group as their section of reality. Names or totems are referred to as grandfathers (*nggwail*) and fathers and grandfathers (*nyai'nggwail*). Overall, there is a correspondence between paths of ancestral names, the divisions of society into descent groups, and the totemic categories of the universe.³

The village today consists of three major patrilineages, each partitioned into between two and ten named patrilineages (*yarangka*), which themselves are divided into unnamed branches (*tsai*). Two clans, Shui Aimasa and Mboey Nagusamay, tolerate clan endogamy, except within the same lineage. The third clan, Mogua, is believed to be the smallest clan in the village and is therefore entirely exogamous. This notion arises, in part, from the mythic-historic origin of Mogua in what is locally understood to be the culturally-inferior region of the lower as opposed to middle Sepik River.

Each clan, lineage and branch owns unique totemic paths that define the group as a

legitimate category in society and cosmology.⁴ Each path of mythic history consists of long chains of paired, polysyllabic names (*tsagi*). Descent groups also own named and therefore mystically potent magic and sorcery (*shiibu*), men's houses (*ngaigo*), bamboo flutes (*wainjiimot*), ancestral masks and related woodcarvings (*nambunda*), war and trading canoes (*vara*), war spirits (*sabi*) and other phenomena. A totemic foundation of names and sacra is necessary for a descent group to exist as a political entity and to actualize ritual prerogatives and mystical power.

All totemic names and phenomena reference the mythic-historic actions, events and places of ancestor spirits as they named and created the natural and sociocultural universe. Each path of names is akin to a chapter in the history of a descent group and is the basis for the group's claim over a portion of village cosmology. Since each descent group has its own totemism, the Eastern Iatmul universe is plural, containing multiple histories and truths. Bateson, it is worth noting, was seemingly unprepared for this plurality. Perhaps it conflicted with his own vision, borne of the natural and biological sciences (Lipset 1982), in which the world conforms to a single structure. Iatmul thought was paradoxical to Bateson, characterized 'not only by its intellectuality, but also by a tendency to insist that what is symbolically, sociologically, or emotionally true, is also cognitively true' (Bateson 1936:232-33).

This paradox, however, is actually a central principle of village cosmology and social organization. Eastern Iatmul names codify social and natural reality — much as Durkheim (1915 [1912]) argued for Aboriginal Australia. Names, when grouped according to mythic-historic migrations, form the paths of the world. Yet this is an essentially fluid world. The cosmology is constantly shifting as men compete for the ownership, organization and hierarchy of names. Echoing Harrison (1989), the history of Tambunum is not a competition for control over the material conditions of life as Marx — and perhaps inhabitants of Highland New Guinea — might put it. Rather, history is inscribed in totemic competitions whereby men and descent groups strive to consolidate and to acquire mystically potent names. As the totemic system is altered, so too are the cosmic categories that differentiate society into groups. Correspondingly, as descent groups demographically and/or politically ascend, wane and eventually dissipate, the totemic system is likewise altered (see below). The line of causation between society and cosmology in Tambunum is bidirectional — both in representation and practice. I return to this point in the final section.

Harrison (1987; see also 1993) has demonstrated that totemic names among the Manambu engender both symbolic and material power. Names determine access to natural resources such as fishing lagoons. Names also confer to each lineage hereditary trading privileges with specific non-Manambu villages and language groups, from whom they acquire ritual esoterica and material goods. Lineages that trade with Western Iatmul villages have access to the most potent magic and ritual forms in the region, which helps maintain a ceremonial ranking system within the Manambu male cult (Harrison 1990:80). The dispersed affinal alliance system at Avatip prevented this ritual hierarchy from having generated economic inequality (Harrison 1987:497). Still, Harrison argues that the ceremonial ranking system was in transition at contact, moving towards greater stratification, which 'would almost certainly have led to the emergence of economic inequalities of some sort' (1987:502).

The system at Tambunum is different. Ownership of names does not correlate with economic inequality or trading rights to non-Iatmul suppliers of sago, pottery, shell valuables and other goods. There is no evidence that the situation was dissimilar in the past. Moreover, Eastern Iatmul do not exchange ritual esoterica with other Iatmul and non-Iatmul villages. This, too, was the case in the past. Although names confer use-rights to bush, gardens and waterways, men do not attempt to manipulate the totemic system in order to increase their access to natural resources or to deny access to social

rivals. I am not suggesting that totemic disputes are unrelated entirely to material wealth. But in ideology and practice, the link between cosmological power and material wealth is far less important than the link between names and symbolic prestige. This was largely true during Bateson's fieldwork in the 1930s and remains so today.

In fact, there has been remarkably little change in the morphology, politics and meanings of the totemic system in spite of colonialism. The only significant modifications that I could discern were a general decrease in the number of disputes and attempts at totemic theft. Names remain central to village politics, ritual and social organization, and they are still largely peripheral for economic activity. Success and failure in the monetary contexts of tourism and wage-labor and in other recent endeavors such as education and regional elections are not attributed to totemic power. In turn, these new activities have not altered significantly the totemic system. Although non-traditional activities are alluring to some youth, other men are avidly learning the totemic system from village elders. I recognize the importance of history for understanding contemporary life in the middle Sepik (see Gewertz and Errington 1991). But I want to stress that there has been considerable continuity in Eastern Iatmul cosmology over the past 60 years. Furthermore, any posited link between totemic names and material inequality is not supported ethnographically.⁵ The significance of local ideology is only partially explained through a sociopolitical and economic framework. We need also to consider its semiotics, to which I shortly turn.

Both Eastern Iatmul and Manambu names, in addition to serving as the ontological charters for descent groups (see next section), define jural obligations, politico-ritual prerogatives and differential access to mystical power. For this reason, any configuration of the totemic system is inevitably contested. These disputes also shape male identity in terms of symbolic prestige and one's position in the ritual system. But, again, economic power is largely irrelevant in Tambunum for this type of renown. The most prestigious men are not those who have the greatest economic wealth or success in material pursuits. Instead, leaders are without exception elder men who possess extensive ritual and totemic knowledge.

Totemic names are patrilineally-inherited personal names.⁶ Each descent group divides its names into two alternating lines (*mbapma*) that repeat every second generation.⁷ One line of names pertains to a male Ego and his FF, SS, and so forth; the other line applies to Ego's S, F, etc. A man inherits the former set of names from his paternal grandfather. He confers the latter set of names, which belonged to his father, to his children.⁸ The system is identical for women, except a female Ego receives her names from a FFZ, which are later given to her BSD.

People and non-human totemic entities that have the same names share a common identity, what Harrison (1990:48) terms 'consubstantiality.' A person and his or her namesake possess the same soul (*kaiek*).⁹ The human body becomes the corporeal vehicle for the totem in much the same way that wooden objects embody spirits when carved by a descent group's sister's children (the object must also be ritually ensorcelled with coconut water and a totemic chant). Indeed, persons often act in ways that are deemed characteristic of their names and namesakes. It is common for Eastern Iatmul to become ill or even die after incurring mystical retribution (*vai*) as a result of, or in punishment for, a grandparent's sorcery or violation of ritual taboos. Since Ego and his/her grandparents have the same names, or at least names that belong to the same line, they are identified as the same person.

Totemism thus shapes personhood as well as cosmology. Yet personhood in Tambunum presupposes a body that can act. Identity arises to a large degree from names and their referents. But one must also engage in action; recall Bateson's (1936) discussion of *naven* ceremonies. These rites, which celebrate cultural achievement, do not occur when someone passively receives names. Rather, they occur only when a

person performs a significant act for the first time, e.g., spears a fish or purchases an outboard motor. Similarly, totemic names require material manifestations, notably, bodies, in order to become real. By the same token, a human body needs names in order to become a person with full jural status. It is in this sense that I argue for the embodiment of Eastern Iatmul totemism. By embodiment I refer not only to the general notion that the body is 'the existential ground of culture' (Csordas 1990:5) but also to the ethnographic fact that Eastern Iatmul use idioms of the body (*mbange*), especially the fertile maternal body but also the paternal body, to organize their social life and cosmos. Eves (1995), in a recent article in this journal, understood embodiment among the Lelet, New Ireland, in terms of incorporation. Here I use two related images: first, projection of the body onto the world and, second, an equivalence between body and cosmos. This will become clear in the next section when I focus on the gendered semiotics of totemism.

NAMES AND REPRODUCTION

The myth of the totemic origin of the universe occurring in an undifferentiated pit instances a broader reproductive model of society and the cosmos. Here is the first indication that Eastern Iatmul totemism has gender. In Tambunum, actual somatic reproduction is understood to be the prerogative of fertile maternal bodies. The reproduction of the cosmos and society, by contrast, is the prerogative of men. Lacking wombs, they use names and various totemic accoutrements. 'Men play flutes,' Hogbin (1970:101) heard on Wogeo Island, 'women bear infants.' Eastern Iatmul men would readily agree.

Local procreation ideology understands conception and gestation to be essentially similar for all persons. Yet this somatic unity ceases with birth, when individual qualities and achievements henceforth become important. This translates into the cosmology. The pit or chthonic womb that gave birth to the world was undifferentiated. Creation was the differentiation and separation of entities from primeval void. As ancestor heroes and spirits wandered the primordial landscape and ocean, they created the world through the power of toponomy or naming, thereby generating natural and social phenomena. Since existence and totemism are coterminous, the absence of a totemic name implies nonexistence. An unnamed entity is outside the realm of cosmology, history and society.

Totemic names therefore possess the power to create and, through ritual, recreate the universe. Consequently, totemic debates (see below) realign social and cosmic categories. Debates are not merely constitutive of human action, as they are at Avatip, and pertain therefore only to history. They also in Tambunum re-arrange the totemic categories that can be said, in a sense, to underlie history. Symbolically, debates are political arenas for unequal distributions of female-like fertility among men and descent groups. For example, the male cult in Tambunum has a ranked hierarchy that is largely based on totemic names (yet it lacks a formal structure such as named grades). High-ranking men and descent groups initiate and direct major rituals that re-enact cosmic creation. These men and groups, by identifying with ancestors who created the most important paths of the world, are the fathers (*nyait*) of those paths and all phenomena that lie along them. The totemic system, I am suggesting, is not only hierarchical but also gendered. It has an androcentric and paternal inflection. Yet totemism also symbolically gives birth to the world. This embodiment of the cosmos by men through ritual and politics is locally recognized although not expressly articulated. More than one Eastern Iatmul man, I should add, has agreed with this interpretation.

The symbolic equivalence between totemism and reproduction was corroborated by a research assistant in 1989 when he claimed that the ultimate determinants of

human pregnancy are senior crocodile spirits (*wai wainjiimot*). As a proverb states, *nian wangay, mbandi wangay*; or, the crocodile spirits alone give birth to children (*nian*) and initiated men (*mbandi*). In this figuration, women are the agents *for*, rather than the agents *of*, reproduction, which is positioned in the superhuman realm of mystical beings or *wai wainjiimot*. Some myths recount how these senior crocodile spirits helped create the cosmos. Other myths have the crocodile spirits floating on the primordial sea, supporting dry land on their backs (Schuster 1985). Generally speaking, *wai wainjiimot* are critical for cosmological and human reproduction. Yet the crocodile spirits communicate only through men and their control of totemism, flutes, art and ceremony. Totemism is locally understood through a maternal idiom but it is still the realm of male ritual and politics.

This interpretation was confirmed during the course of a conversation with Koski, a young married man. Young boys commonly play about the village naked. Little girls rarely do likewise; they are almost always clothed below the waist. After questioning Koski on this gender difference, he replied in a mixture of pidgin and vernacular 'no gut ol i lukim *tagwa wainjiimot*.' In other words, it is improper for men to view women's (*tagwa*) genitalia. But instead of speaking *kitnya* or vagina, Koski said *wainjiimot*, the word for spirits and, more to the point, sacred flutes. He then added that women, of course, are unable to see men's flutes and related ceremonial paraphernalia. Koski's statement referred, I believe, to a central theme of the culture, namely, the transformation of female fertility into totemic names and male ritual sacra.

Human birth in Tambunum, which is the prerogative of women, is relatively egalitarian. Significant social and politico-ritual differences result from achievement rather than ascription. Totemic birth, which is the privilege of men, involves names rather than wombs, and creates differentiation and hierarchy. Somatic bodies, we could say, are overlain with totemic identity. Herein lies a critical gender distinction (see also Harrison 1985b). Women give actual birth to somatic bodies whereas men, through their control of esoteric knowledge and totemism, give symbolic birth to difference, identity and hierarchy.

Moreover, since men control the distribution of names, totemism can be interpreted as the displacement of female reproductive power onto the plane of cosmology. Totemism converts the maternal body into the cosmic body, which then acquires a masculine form. Only men are transformed in ritual through bodily adornment and masking into the male and female spirits who created the world and its paths. In these contexts, the male body becomes endowed with the procreative powers responsible for cosmic creation.¹⁰ Likewise, somatic reproduction is figured in terms of mystical production, that is to say, ancestral crocodile spirits and their role in the male cult. The male cult, in turn, socializes non-reproductive boys into the world of reproductive yet, ultimately, androgynous men.¹¹

The power of totemism in Tambunum is thus the power of procreation. Biological reproduction and female fertility is transformed into the esoteric and masculine domains of onomastics, mystical knowledge, ritual and politics. Men recreate and restructure the universe by chanting and debating totemic names, which enshrine cosmogony and cosmology. These activities typically occur under the aegis of senior crocodile spirits, through which men publicly claim their responsibility for cosmic creation.

But as various rituals and legends attest, this role was once denied men, a common Melanesian myth (e.g., Hays 1988). It was only through stealth and theft that men were able to acquire the ritual power of reproduction that once belonged solely to women. In fact, the primordial sea and the terrestrial birth of the universe symbolize the primacy of female fertility and the maternal as opposed to paternal body. This is locally recognized. Yet these symbols are contested by male claims to reproductive superiority through the

control of names that refer to mythic history, ancestor spirits, and the differentiation of society and the cosmos into categories. The reproductive power of names has both masculine and feminine embodiments. Totemism is not solely a sociopolitical structure. It is also a system of meanings that relate to gender, cosmology and the body.

SPATIOTEMPORALITY

Social groups are descended from primordial ancestor heroes who emerged from the common pit and migrated around the world, eventually arriving at Tambunum. From the totemic pit, the Shui Aimasa and Mboey Nagusamay patriclans travelled to Shotmeri (Map 1). Leaving Shotmeri, and following a single yet broad path, Shui Aimasa migrated to Tambunum in the region that is north of the Sepik River. Through a series of different routes, the lineages of Mboey Nagusamay travelled through the terrain that lies south of the river. These opposed regions are the respective totemic domains of the two clans, linked by totemic bridges (*tagu*) such as the Milky Way. The Mogua patriclan bypassed Shotmeri and inhabited a lower Sepik location, eventually arriving in Tambunum after Shui Aimasa and Mboey Nagusamay. The totemic domain of Mogua is the sea.

There is a fourth patriclan in Tambunum, Wyngwenjap, the clan of the Sepik River itself. Wyngwenjap has only around 20 persons since most of the clan migrated to Wombun after a dispute in the latter 19th century. This patriclan is politically and totemically marginal in Tambunum. Through aquatic association, Wyngwenjap is subsumed for most practical and ritual purposes under Mogua. Wyngwenjap does not have the population to assert its totemic heraldry and thereby become a viable force in village ritual and politics. The same is also true for small lineages in other clans. Cosmological status, in other words, does not necessarily translate into politico-ritual action.

The inferior position of Wyngwenjap attests to the centrality of history, demography and political action — in other words, change and movement — in shaping the society.¹² At the level of social practice there is no structure to the village that is divorced from human affairs. But, of course, this is true for Manambu and other magical societies. Indeed, it is true for all societies. The uniqueness of Tambunum lies at the level of ideology. This I discuss in the final section. I want here only to draw attention to the local fact that totemic names originated during mythic-historic migrations and thus are located in space and time (see also Wassmann 1990; 1991:197-206). Paths of names trace the temporal and spatial movement of ancestors and groups. Eastern Iatmul totemism is 'spatiotemporal' (Munn 1977) rather than static, arising from an inherent sense of history and motion (a characteristic that does not seem to apply to Manambu totemism). All descent groups in Tambunum and their totemic phenomena are manifestations of mythic time and space inscribed on the regional landscape. In essence, totemic paths are spatiotemporal vectors.

Spatiotemporality also inheres in the internal structure of totemic chants (*tsagi*). Since a descent group's paths evoke ancestral movements in mythic time and space, each name represents a particular spatiotemporal moment or node. But individual names, too, signify a timeless sense of movement that lies outside the brackets of mythic temporality. For example, the totemic path of the Kwassa lineage of the Mboey Nagusamay patriclan winds along the Karawari River (Map 1). Individual names are located in this spatiotemporal matrix. Yet, individual names translate as 'vines that float down the river,' 'floral detritus that floats down the river,' 'wood that drifts down the river,' and so on. These movements are not bound to any particular generational era.

Each chant begins with the public names of a totem that is located in the topo-

graphy of a descent group.¹³ The chant then moves to a new space within the landscape and concludes by returning to its original location. To illustrate, I again turn to the Mboey Nagusamay patriline. Generally speaking, the totemic path of four related lineages of the clan begins along the Kangrime waterway (Map 1). Subsequent names refer to logs and grass that drift along the waterway to the Sepik River, where they eventually flow out to sea. The final names return to the Kangrime waterway, thus closing the path. In this way, totemic chants are defined on the basis of three modalities of movement: timeless, spatial or vectorial, and cyclical.

DEBATES AND AUTHORITY

Totemic knowledge is a form of symbolic and ritual power that creates hierarchy and difference in the ritual system and village social organization (see also Lindstrom 1984; Harrison 1989). Totemic specialists are preeminent leaders in the village who command authority and respect, and direct ritual and political action. Specialists are morally entitled to claim only the totemic names of their lineage and, in some instances, entire clan. They can learn the names of other descent groups but they are reluctant even to mention them without permission lest they appear guilty of totemic indiscretion.¹⁴ This prohibition applies to the recitation of myth and magical spells, totemic chanting, and the adjudication of disputes. There is a clear distinction between knowledge and entitlement.

A *tsagi numba* or totemic specialist has studied the esoterica of totemism in a lengthy and arduous apprenticeship under the tutelage of a clan elder.¹⁵ In return for their instruction, ritual teachers receive food, canoes, garden produce, sago and often a large domestic house. Totemic knowledge and the power of mystical reproduction is exchanged for worldly productivity. These gifts, however, do not lend totemic teachers a material advantage over other men.

Totemic specialists are frequently called upon to chant paths in order to resolve disputes, alleviate illness, consecrate new houses and canoes, and initiate rituals. Yet they receive no significant material gain for their efforts, merely a small meal, betel-nut and tobacco. In fact, totemic specialists often complain about the amount of time they spend chanting as opposed to gardening and other material or income-generating activities. They seem to delight in recounting the ordeals of their apprenticeship — the long hours spent sitting on low stools, memorizing names and suffering from back pains, not to mention all the physical tasks they fulfilled for their teacher.

But if not for material or economic benefits, why do men aspire to totemic authority? First, totemic knowledge is a primary route to political and ritual authority. Second, men and women are sentimentally attached to their names since names represent the history and roots (*angwanda*) of the descent group. Finally, totemic knowledge is critical for protecting the mystical patrimony of one's children and grandchildren.

Despite specialists' vigilance in defending names, totemic disputes are common. They are usually triggered by doubts concerning the mystical authority of rival descent groups. A common strategy is to challenge the validity of competitors' mythic histories and ancestors, and to claim that they have no legitimate genealogical custodianship over certain powerful names. Less frequently, debates arise from namesakes (see also Bateson 1936:127-28; Gewertz 1977; Harrison 1990:140-46). Disputes are inevitable since the totemic system is inherently shifting and interwoven for three reasons. First, the mythic histories and migration routes of different descent groups often intersect and converge. This can occur for a number of reasons, e.g., marriage, coresidence and exchanges of names. Many totemic paths, in fact, contain names that correspond to several patrilineages. The totemic system itself prevents the formation of discrete sets of names, mythic histories, cosmological categories and descent groups. This indeter-

minacy is recognized locally. All social and cosmic categories are blurred and, ultimately, disputed. Second, men try to acquire or to steal additional names in order to increase their mystical power. Third, disputes arise from political action (see below).

Since names partition the world into jural and cosmic categories, totemic disputes influence the social constitution of the village and the surrounding region. The loss of names lessens the magical foundation of a descent group and its mystical or reproductive power. Similarly, the acquisition of names expands the descent group. Totemic challenges that succeed can slowly deplete the cosmological foundation of a descent group until it either collapses or is encompassed by another, more powerful, lineage or clan. Through disputes, men continuously define the boundaries of their society and cosmology. But, again, as I argued above, this competitive and exclusively male political discourse also contains a semiotics of female fertility.

Totemic debates occur inside a men's house (*ngaigo*). The disputants and audience sit on platforms, organized according to descent group. In the center of the building stands an orator's stool (*kawa-lugiit*). The speaker approaches the stool and grasps a bundle of three ginger leaves (*kawa*; see also Bateson 1936:125-25). He punctuates his oratory by striking the bundle on the stool, at certain times gently, at other times violently as he thunders his argument to the assembled men.

Until the man at the orator's stool relinquishes the *kawa* leaves, he alone is entitled to speak and stand at the center of the floor. Nevertheless, muted replies, heated comments and requests for tobacco and betel-nut resonate through the men's house during any oratorical performance. Sometimes men seated on the platforms engage in outright conversation. Yet the din of the background noise rarely distracts the central orator. The physical arrangement of a debate seems to indicate that society, the totemic system and village cosmology all have a definable center and periphery. But the low cacophony of peripheral voices challenges any such orderly an arrangement of jural entitlement.

Eastern Iatmul mnemonically represent names by inserting wooden pegs into the stems of palm fronds (*tsagi ngau*).¹⁶ Each peg signifies the first pair of names of a totemic path. The length of the *tsagi ngau* and the number of pegs vary with each man's stock of names. Hereditary leaders, responsible for all the names of a patriclan, own *tsagi ngau* that exceed two meters, holding scores of pegs that signify hundreds if not thousands of names. Leaders highlight their elite status and the power of their totemic hegemony by capping the pegs of their most powerful names with orange Malay apples.

In the course of a debate, disputants successively approach the orator's stool and, grasping the ginger leaves, present their case. Upon finishing, a speaker returns to his sitting platform. Totemic oratory assumes a variety of modes and strategies. Speakers recite mythic histories, construct genealogies, recount migrations and chant paths. Orators skillfully mock the claims of rivals while trying to muster support of kin and allied descent groups. Most oratory occurs in the vernacular but it is common for men to slip into pidgin and occasionally English. The debates are decidedly polyvocal.

The ethos of Iatmul men is particularly evident during totemic oratory (Bateson 1932:260; 1936). These lively debates are an indigenous form of theater. They are:

noisy, angry and, above all, ironical. The speakers work themselves up to a high pitch of superficial excitement, all the time tempering their violence with histrionic gesture and alternating in their tone between harshness and buffoonery. (Bateson 1936:126)

Ritual specialists, who 'carry in their heads between ten and twenty thousand polysyllabic names' (1936:126), tend to rely on their mystical knowledge.¹⁷ Other, less erudite, men depend on pantomime and persuasive flair.

In spite of the frequency of debates, Bateson (1936:128) suggested that Iatmul men derive enormous pride from what they believe to be a 'perfectly schematic and coherent' totemic system. As 'a result of the overlapping mythology and the stealing of names,' however, 'the system is in a terribly muddled state;' it is a 'mass of fraudulent heraldry' (Bateson 1936:128). But as I suggested earlier, it is more insightful to understand the totemic system as an inherent plurality rather than a paradox or a 'mass of fraudulent heraldry.'

Any man may question the totemic structure of the society and cosmology. Yet, only senior or knowledgeable men resolve disputes, which can last from one to several hours and carry across days, months, even years and generations.¹⁸ Truth is a negotiated concept, sanctioned by gerontocratic consensus, often in accordance with wider political aims. Resolution is never assured and always tenuous.

It is useful to compare Eastern Iatmul and Manambu debates (Harrison 1989; 1990:140-76). In both Sepik societies, debates center on fiery oratory, theatrical displays and the recitation of myths and genealogies. When these public arguments are exhausted, however, Manambu debates turn secretive. Contestants whisper totemic names to each other until one man acknowledges that his rival has spoken the true esoteric name. In practice, few debates end with a capitulation, and thus disputes persist indefinitely. Ornamented women gather around the edge of the male contest and often brawl. Strict rules govern the order of oratory. Exchanges and sacrifices of pigs, the display of symbolic regalia and a fixed system of affinal alliances also characterize Manambu debates.

These practices are alien to Eastern Iatmul. More importantly, men in Tambunum are less concerned with divulging secret names than with swaying consensus. Manambu contestants recite increasingly secret esoterica until one opponent finally reveals knowledge of the essential names. In Tambunum, totemic debating is expansive and encompassing. A man draws on a broad network of names, myths, migrations and genealogies in order to argue that his ancestors alone were responsible for the disputed name and its cosmic referent. Manambu debaters eventually become silent and merely whisper. Eastern Iatmul orators tend to remain loud and engaging. For the most part, knowledge must be coupled to drama. Hushed discussion results from individual temperament rather than the structure of the debate. Whereas alliances during Manambu debates are generally fixed along the lines of kinship (Harrison 1990:154-55), Eastern Iatmul alliances reflect contingent political strategies between individuals; they are unstable. A man is said to be assured only of the support of his sister's sons, but, in actuality, even this is conditional.

Disputes in Tambunum almost always occur between patrilineages within the same clan. For this reason, Eastern Iatmul debates have great potential to alter the existing social structure of the village and the totemic categorization of the cosmos. Generally speaking, the totemic boundaries that separate clans are too apparent and fixed for a dispute between them to blur substantially their respective cosmological categories. This is not the case within patrilines, where there is often a long history of disputes between certain lineages. This can ultimately dissolve the totemic and social divisions within the clan.

BODIES AND EMBODIMENT: DIFFERENCES IN THE CREATION OF SOCIETY

The political organization of Tambunum is based on a rudimentary principle of primogeniture. Ascribed leadership favors the eldest men of the senior branches and lineages within the patrilines. They control the distribution of names that define descent groups and often initiate ritual action. Yet in common with most Melanesian societies, poten-

tial leadership in Tambunum only translates into actual authority when coupled to persuasive action. Men are unable rightfully to claim authority over the entire village,¹⁹ only at the levels of clan, lineage and branch.

Leaders justify their status to varying degrees with totemic knowledge. Names also, I mentioned earlier, determine the prestige ranking of descent groups. Yet totemic names are diffuse, unlike actual physical insignia. In the Murik Lakes (Map 1), for example, authority arises not from names but from the right to possess *suman* shell and boars tusk valuables and plaited baskets (Lipset 1990). Although Eastern Iatmul names have a thing-like quality (see also Harrison 1990:172-73), they are not physical emblems of jural office. In Murik politics, the genealogical right to own, assemble and display *suman* is contentious rather than the actual existence of the emblem itself, which is never called into question (D. Lipset, pers. comm. 1992; see also Lutkehaus 1990).

Political insignia like Murik *suman* are alien to Eastern Iatmul politics since leadership in Tambunum arises from names rather than objects. Certain objects such as masks signify leadership and authority but only insofar as they are named. If the name is devalued, forgotten or lost, the object becomes mystically impotent. Village politics therefore involve not only claims over the ownership of onomastic insignia but also challenges to the legitimacy and potency of the names themselves.

It is insightful here to draw on Harrison (1989) and contrast leadership in Tambunum, which arises from esoteric knowledge and action, with Highland New Guinea practices. Although Harrison does not explicitly draw on body symbolism, the body nevertheless emerges from the comparison as a focal symbol of social life. Leadership in Highland big-man societies is based solely in actions of the body such as oratory, warfare and particularly large-scale ceremonial exchange. In other words, human bodies create society, both in ideology and practice. Leadership in the middle Sepik and 'great man' societies (Godelier 1986; Godelier and Strathern 1991) arises from totemic names and magic in addition to bodily actions. In these polities, human bodies alone cannot create society, at least in local ideation.

Yet, as I have argued, the body in Tambunum is a metaphor for totemism and cosmology, which influence identity (e.g., personal names) and the constitution of social groups. Here the body is projected onto the cosmos, which in turn forms a mystical basis for society. In practice, of course, society is the product of human or bodily action. In ideology, however, society arises from the body as an agent as well as the body as a projection onto the cosmic order. Hence, both the body and embodiment are part of local social process. In many Highland polities, by contrast, the body as a corporeal entity is only an agent that creates identity and society.²⁰

The lives of men in the Highlands revolve to a considerable extent around competitive exchanges of pigs, e.g., the Melpa *moka* (A. Strathern 1971) and the Enga *tee* (Meggitt 1974). In these events, pigs are corporeal symbols for the moral constitution of society and social relationships.²¹ Men in Tambunum, by comparison, spend much of their lives engaged in totemic politics and ritual, which center on names and magical esoterica. They do not organize large-scale exchanges on the order of Highland big-man distributions and feasts. Whereas pigs are actual bodies that symbolize the creation of society, totemic names are metaphoric bodies that lack corporeality. Generally speaking, the difference in this formulation between Eastern Iatmul and the Highlands concerns the distinction between the body as an actual thing that exchanges or is exchanged and the body as a projection — hence, an embodiment — in addition to an agent.

RETHINKING REALISM AND NOMINALISM

An Eastern Iatmul descent group becomes extinct upon the death of its last male member. The lineages that sponsor his funerary rite then acquire the totemic names that

defined the deceased group. Typically, names remain within the same patriline, transferring only to other lineages. But sometimes men from different clans jointly sponsor a funerary rite, dispersing the names throughout the village.

Corporate groups in Tambunum require both persons and names for social existence. In the absence of human bodies, a descent group dissolves in the realm of practical action. Like their Manambu counterparts, some Eastern Iatmul men assert that lineages can exist as vacant yet extant socio-cosmic categories, defined only by names. But these ideological claims are rare. If totemic paths are alleged to exist prior to, or underneath (*atndasiikiit*), human action, these allegations are arguments intended to further specific politico-ritual agendas. They persuade opponents that one's totemic claims are real, that is to say, justified not by politics but by the actual structure of the universe. Eastern Iatmul do not ordinarily profess a static cosmology outside the context of specific ancestors, mythic histories and paths. In Tambunum, I am suggesting, men often recognize their ideology. There is no sense, moreover, as there is in Avatip, that totemic politics is the means whereby men and descent groups align themselves into a true, non-human cosmological order.

Since the names of a deceased Eastern Iatmul descent group are acquired by lineages that have living members, village cosmology is preserved through ongoing social reorganization. This differs from Nyaura or central Iatmul villages. At Palimbei, Stanek (1983:423) writes:

If a clan dies out it still continues to exist as a corresponding section of mythology. Even if a clan no longer has any male members, the elders of the brother clans will continue to pass down the section of the mythical fabric linked with the extinct clan ... The Iatmul compare this empty semantic construction to a mask: it is a dead frame waiting to be animated by real persons. If another clan in the same clan association grows substantially, the elders can decide that one or more of its patrilineal segments may slip into the empty spiritual shape that tradition has preserved and take over both the mythical motifs and accompanying lands.

Rather than dispersing, the totemic foundation of a deceased Palimbei lineage endures as a cosmic category that is likened to a mask.²²

In Tambunum, the totemic names of an extinct descent group rarely persist as a socially and politically active category, devoid only of persons. Instead, the names are usually circulated to other lineages and clans within the village who then claim them as a part of their legitimate totemic heritage. After all, names enshrine mystical power and politico-ritual prerogatives as well as rights to land and waterways. The extinction of a lineage is sometimes viewed as an opportunity for men to consolidate and advance their power. The separation between ideology and practice in Tambunum, when it exists, is contextual and political. In this regard, the village diverges from Harrison's formulation of magical politics.

Despite the difference between Tambunum and Palimbei, however, the mask metaphor is revealing. The totemic foundation of a Palimbei descent group is akin to a mask, awaiting animation by human bodies. In the Eastern Iatmul case, an individual's personal names are like a mask insofar as they cover (*aiwat, kapma*) the human body with totemic identity. Moreover, the absence of somatic bodies causes the social body to dissolve and the cosmic body to dissipate, at least to a greater extent than in Palimbei.

Manambu lineages, too, like those at Palimbei, can exist in practice and ideology as vacant cosmological categories that lack human agents (Harrison 1989:2-8; 1990). In local ideology, Avatip descent groups and totemic categories exist in an eternal configuration that lies outside the realm of human activity. For this reason, Harrison labels

Manambu cosmology realist rather than nominalist. The totemic and cosmological systems constantly alter in accordance with ritual-politics and debates, that is to say, ongoing attempts to align social groups with cosmological categories (Harrison 1990). Yet these changes are manifest only in the realm of human action. In the cosmological dimension of mystical power and spirits, the system is locally believed to be unchanging. Tambunum debates and disputes call into question any such pre-human cosmological distinctions. Despite some political and ideological statements that the Eastern Iatmul cosmos comprises static categories, their world is defined on the basis of human action, as they realize. In Eastern Iatmul, claims of realism are not acontextual, blanket statements concerning the cosmos. Rather, they are tied to specific instances and disputes. At Avatip, one could say, political action and totemic debates seek cosmological truth on the level of ideology. In Tambunum, ideology is more difficult to fix. Sometimes it is realist. At other times it encompasses what we would term the social generation of reality.

Harrison asserts that Highland New Guinea polities are nominalist. Their social groups are defined largely on the basis of agnation, action, residence and association rather than cosmology. In other words, Highland groups exist in ideology and practice only on the basis of persons. When all members of a corporate group die in the Highlands, the group itself, as a social category, disappears.

In Harrison's scheme, Tambunum would lie midway between Manambu realism and Highland nominalism. Like Manambu, Eastern Iatmul descent groups receive their magical foundations from totemic names. But these groups also require the actual or potential personification of names and totemic attributes. This is true for objective behavior as well as most instances of local representation. If men are unwilling in public to admit to the fluidity of their totemic system, it is because they want their claims to appear supported by an external reality that lies outside the ebb and tide of human history. But in small groups or alone, they often concede that their supposedly permanent cosmology is constantly changing.

The separation of practice and ideology in Tambunum is less apparent than it is among the Manambu for two reasons. First, Eastern Iatmul totemism is not merely a sociopolitical system. It is also a semiotics of gender, the body and fertility. Moreover, it is a semiotics that engages rather than resolves fundamental paradoxes concerning masculinity, maternal nurture and androgyny. Second, Eastern Iatmul ideology is both realist and nominalist, that is to say, contextual.

When Eastern Iatmul men affirm that deceased groups persist untrammelled on the plane of cosmology they are in effect voicing one or more of three considerations. The first is that they have no reason at this time to try and incorporate the deceased group. The second is that they have no grounds to suspect that a rival lineage or clan is trying to do so. The third consideration is simply that, at this moment, the extinct lineage's cosmological categories and names are peripheral for defining or defending the totemic foundation of existing groups. Deceased lineages exist as vacant yet genuine cosmological categories only through pragmatic neglect, that is to say, when they are inconsequential for political action.

Eastern Iatmul claims that their totemic system is fixed occur for political and not ontological reasons. These claims are not descriptive statements about how the world really is. They are politico-ritual arguments for how the world should be. Eastern Iatmul reality is therefore contingent on the vicissitudes of membership, politico-ritual authority and desire, totemic consolidation and fragmentation. The analytic separation between ideology and practice, cosmology and agency, is not sustained in general but only in specific cases.

Highlanders, according to Harrison, understand their history to consist of men following leaders and thereby forming corporate groups. Manambu view their history

in terms of men filling timeless cosmological categories. Eastern Iatmul, I believe, envision their history to be the simultaneous restructuring of polity and cosmos through a reproductive idiom. They do not assume, furthermore, like Manambu, 'that their clans and subclans are an inherent property of society everywhere, and that all human beings are divided into the same social categories as themselves' (Harrison 1989:3).

In Avatip ideology there is cosmological truth. In Tambunum ideology truth is contingent and often deceitful.²³ Moreover, the ideology of society in Tambunum is also semiotics of the body in which the body is projected onto the cosmos. This body has gender. On the one hand, it is androcentric since the cosmos is largely conceived through a male discourse of totemic politics. On the other hand, the cosmic body reveals maternal and birth imagery. In this sense, totemism for Eastern Iatmul serves three purposes. First, it is a Durkheimian-like framework that imposes order on the world. Second, it provides an arena for political action and the formation of social groups. Finally, totemism enables men in particular to grapple with the androgynous gender of the cosmos as well as the cosmological significance of human genders. It is this perspective, one that combines sociopolitical process with the semiotics of gender, that is needed in a comparative account of Melanesian political ideologies and practices.

CONCLUSION: THE BODY, SOCIETY AND COSMOLOGY

I began this article with Harrison's comparative framework for Melanesian social ideologies. I then analyzed the relationship between Eastern Iatmul totemism, cosmology and society, focusing on gender, the body, politics and power. In addition to presenting new ethnographic data on Iatmul, my goal was to refine Harrison's framework in two respects. First, the Eastern Iatmul data dissolve the categorical boundary between magical and material Melanesian polities. Instead, it seems more apt to view the practices but especially the ideology of social representations along a continuum. The Tambunum material also suggests a dynamic relationship between ideology and practice that is in many cases bound to specific political contexts.

Second, the Eastern Iatmul case suggests that we must think about differences in the ideological and actual formation of societies in Melanesia (and beyond) in terms of cultural constructions of the body and reproduction. In particular, I offered a series of symbolic homologies between the human body, the cosmos and the body politic. I also argued that the totemic system in Tambunum contains a semiotics of gender in which images of maternal fertility are cast into an androcentric political idiom.

Harrison differentiates between the Sepik and the New Guinea Highlands on the basis of realism and nominalism. Realist polities such as Manambu exist in ideology or self-representation as an entity that is independent of people. In the absence of subjects, the structure and categories of society and the cosmos are still said to exist. Social life and politics represent ongoing attempts by persons to compete for power that ultimately takes root in a non-human cosmos. Hence, personal names are at once names of cosmological significance.

In Highland nominalist polities, society and cosmological distinctions require merely persons. Magic may sustain social divisions and leadership but society itself is not indigenously viewed to rest on mystical qualities. Instead, society is solely the product of human action; this is reflected in the naming system of many Highland polities which refer only to individual qualities and actions (e.g., Wormsley 1981). History arises from human needs rather than perceived divisions in an ultimate cosmos. Harrison's distinction between magical and material, or, realist and nominalist, polities is effective and insightful. Yet it is largely concerned with social process and political organization. We need, however, to incorporate also the semiotics of political process, which in the Eastern Iatmul case refers to the gender of the cosmos.

Some 30 years ago, in an essay that somewhat anticipated Harrison's contribution, Lawrence and Meggitt (1965) offered a useful dichotomy for comparing the 'epistemological systems' of Melanesia (see also Lawrence 1988). They distinguished between Highland 'secularism' and Seaboard 'religious thinking.' In social life, they argued, the former tend towards materialistic and pragmatic endeavors, the latter towards ritual and the propitiation of spirit-beings.

Building on Harrison and, before him, Lawrence and Meggitt, this essay has suggested one approach to the question of how Melanesian polities are formed in both practice and ideology. This cultural approach emphasizes different regionally-constituted images of reproduction, gender and the body as symbols of community and cosmology. I also suggested that the relationship between local ideology and objective action, which is clearly delineated at Avatip, is contextual at Tambunum, varying in accordance with individual politico-ritual strategies. In addition to clarifying Eastern Iatmul, I offer these suggestions, like those of Harrison and, before him, Lawrence and Meggitt (Lawrence 1988:23), as a 'heuristic challenge.'

NOTES

1. Funding for fieldwork in 1988-1990 was provided by a Fulbright Award and the Institute for Intercultural Studies. A return visit in June-August 1994 was made possible by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and DePaul University. For additional support I gratefully acknowledge the Department of Anthropology and Graduate School of the University of Minnesota. Helpful comments were offered by D. Lipset, various colleagues and two anonymous reviewers. Still, I accept full responsibility for the essay.
2. I refer to Frazer's (1887; 1899) argument that social classifications are modeled after the structure of the natural world. Durkheim and Mauss (1963 [1903]), of course, countered Frazer with a theory concerning the social generation of reality. For a view of the relationship between personal names and social classifications that builds on the latter tradition, see Levi-Strauss (1966, Chapters 6, 7); in one passage he refers to Iatmul (1966:173-74).
3. Bateson (1932:444-47) recognized that the Iatmul system diverges from the 'orthodox definition' of totemism. For one, Iatmul totems are not necessarily biological species. For another, dietary prohibitions surrounding a descent group's totems are for the most part lacking, unlike, for example, among the lower Sepik Mundugumor (McDowell 1991:127).
4. Bateson's (1932, 1936, 1958) texts have been the standard statement on Sepik totemism. Recently our purview has been expanded by Stanek (1983) and Wassmann (1990, 1991); see also Harrison (1990) and Errington and Gewertz (1987).
5. The only attempts at harnessing magic for economic gain that I witnessed occurred during 'laki' card games of chance between Eastern Iatmul and their Sawos neighbors. But these games have negligible economic impact in the village (*cf.* Mitchell 1988).
6. Mother's brothers and matrikin confer names to their sister's children. These names are drawn from the same set as patrines, but have different prefixes, namely, *-awan* for men and *-yeris* for women.
7. In some upper-river or Nyaura Iatmul villages *mbapma* are named (Wassmann 1991:32).
8. Contrary to Bateson (1936:37), a man in Tambunum is prohibited from giving names to his sister's sons. A man might allow his sister's sons to have temporary custody of his names if his own sons are too young or live elsewhere. But this occurs with the express understanding that the man's nephews will later relinquish the names to their cross-cousins.
9. Harrison's (1985a; 1990:88-90) discussion of the Manambu 'Spirit' resembles the Eastern Iatmul *kaiek*.
10. Although I use the terms male and female I do not wish to imply the existence in Tambunum of a mutually exclusive gender dichotomy. I am persuaded in this respect by Strathern's argument concerning the androgyny of the Melanesian body (1988:212-13). Although Eastern Iatmul would, I am confident, agree with Strathern, the concept of androgyny has no vernacular equivalent. Men are simple *ndu* and women are *tagwa*.
11. This is a greatly condensed version of a detailed and complex argument. Briefly, male initiation involves painful scarification that removes the last vestiges of female blood from the boys' bodies that was the result of their birth from women. In this sense, the boys become adult men. However, the cicatrization scars are formed in patterns that resemble the breasts and genitals of women in general, and female crocodile spirits in particular. In this respect, boys are transformed into reproductive adults who contain or evoke images of both male and female fertility.
12. The position of Wyngwenjap and the importance of history also nullifies simplistic notions that Iatmul villages are fundamentally organized on the basis of some sort of timeless moiety structure, as

- Ackerman (1976) and others imply.
13. Although there is a close association between totemic names and the landscape, secret names do not have a corresponding place that is also concealed, as is the case among certain Australian Aboriginal cultures (e.g., Biernoff 1974)
 14. The power of this moral expectation was made especially clear in the summer of 1994. A group of Tambunum men were helping to carve a New Guinea Sculpture Garden at Stanford University, California. Even there they were reluctant to discuss the names and histories of other descent groups!
 15. Totemic apprentices in Tambunum used to perform a rite that was said to increase their memory (Metraux 1978). The ceremony no longer exists. Women were once totemic specialists; they were called *tsagi tagwa*. There was only one woman, Mundjiindua, who approached this level of ritual status during my fieldwork. Mundjiindua tragically died in 1989 before she could transmit her knowledge to a female junior. Most people in the village believe that she was the last *tsagi tagwa*.
 16. The Tambunum *tsagi ngau* serves the same function as the knotted twine chords (*kiiriigu*) of Central and Western Iatmul (Wassmann 1990, 1991). Manambu display ornamented spears, arrows and sticks in their debates in order to represent names (Harrison 1990:160-61).
 17. This controversial claim was 'arrived at by very rough estimation from the number of name songs possessed by each clan, the number of names in each song, and the general ability of such men to quote, in considerable detail, from the name-cycles even of clans other than their own' (Bateson 1936:222; see also 1936:258). For a discussion of Iatmul totemism and mnemonics in the context of New Ireland mortuary art, see Kuchler (1987).
 18. A disputant forfeits his claims if he begins a brawl inside the men's house (cf. Bateson 1936:126-27; see also Harrison 1990:162). For a general discussion of political authority and the male cult in another Sepik society, see Tuzin (1974).
 19. In this regard, Bateson (1936:123) reports that men should not walk through the entire length of the cult house, but exit one of the side entrances. 'To walk right through the building is felt to be an expression of overweening pride — as if a man should lay claim to the whole building as his personal property.'
 20. Read (1955), Strathern and Strathern (1971), A. Strathern (1977), M. Strathern (1979), Meigs (1987) and O'Hanlon (1989), among others, discuss cultural conceptions of the body in Highland New Guinea; Poole (1987) and Wagner (1987) offer useful comparisons from non-Highland societies. For Melanesia in general, see Knauff (1989).
 21. For more rounded views of Highland exchange and pigs that incorporate issues relating to production and gender, see Modjeska (1982), Feil (1984a, 1984b), Josephides (1985) and Godelier (1986).
 22. Assuming that Stanek is translating from the vernacular, the 'dead frame' probably derives from the Iatmul word *lage*, which is a cane and rattan dance costume that supports a wooden mask. During rituals, men wear these costumes in order to impersonate spirits.
 23. Note Bourdieu's (1977:231, n. 112) reference to Bateson's (1936) *Naven* as an example of how the study of mythology cannot be divorced from considerations of symbolic power and politics.

REFERENCES

- ACKERMAN, C. 1976. Omaha and 'Omaha.' *American Ethnologist* 3:555-72.
- BATESON, G. 1932. Social Structure of the Iatmul People of the Sepik River. *Oceania* 3:245-90, 401-52.
1936. *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn From Three Points of View*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1958. *Naven*. Second Revised Edition, with a new Epilogue. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- BIERNOFF, D. 1974. Safe and Dangerous Places. In L.R. Hiatt (eds), *Australian Aboriginal Concepts*, pp. 93-105. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- BOURDIEU, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CSORDAS, T.J. 1990. Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos* 18:5-47.
- DOUGLAS, M. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- DURKHEIM, E. 1915. *The Elementary Structures of the Religious Life*. London: Allen & Unwin. (Orig. French edition 1912).
- DURKHEIM, E. and M. Mauss. 1963. *Primitive Classification*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Orig. French edition 1903).
- ERRINGTON, F. and D. GEWERTZ. 1987. The Confluence of Powers: Entropy and Importation Among the Chambri. *Oceania* 58:99-113.
- EVES, R. 1995. Shamanism, Sorcery and Cannibalism: The Incorporation of Power in the Magical Cult of Buai. *Oceania* 65:212-33.
- FEIL, D.K. 1984a. Beyond Patriliney in the New Guinea Highlands. *Man* (n.s.) 19:50-76.
- 1984b. *Ways of Exchange*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- FRAZER, J.G. 1887. *Totemism*. Edinburgh: Afam & Charles Black.
1889. The Origin of Totemism. *Fortnightly Review* 65:647-65, 835-52.

- GEWERTZ, D. 1977. 'On Whom Depends the Action of the Elements': Debating Among the Chambri People of Papua New Guinea. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 86:339-53.
- GEWERTZ, D.B. and F.K. ERRINGTON. 1991. *Twisted Histories, Altered Contexts: Representing the Chambri in a World System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GODELIER, M. 1986. *The Making of Great Men: Male Domination and Power Among the New Guinea Baruya*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Orig. French edition 1982).
- GODELIER, M. and M. STRATHERN. 1991. *Big Men and Great Men: Personifications of Power in Melanesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- HARRISON, S. 1985a. Concepts of the Person in Avatip Religious Thought. *Man* (n.s.) 20:115-30.
- 1985b. Ritual Hierarchy and Secular Equality in a Sepik River Village. *American Ethnologist* 12:413-26.
1987. Cultural Efflorescence and Political Evolution on the Sepik River. *American Ethnologist* 14:491-507.
1989. Magical and Material Polities in Melanesia. *Man* (n.s.) 24:1-20.
1990. Stealing People's Names: History and Politics in a Sepik River Cosmology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1993. The Commerce of Cultures in Melanesia. *Man* (n.s.) 28:139-58.
- HAYS, T. 1988. 'Myths of Matriarchy' and the Sacred Flute Complex of the Papua New Guinea Highlands. In D. Gewertz (ed), *Myths of Matriarchy Reconsidered*, pp. 98-120. Sydney: University of Sydney Press.
- HERTZ, R. 1960. A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death. In R. Needham (ed), *Death and the Right Hand*, pp. 26-87. Glencoe: Free Press. (Orig. French edition 1909).
- HOBBS, T. 1958. *Leviathan*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. (Orig. 1651).
- HOGGIN, I. 1970. *The Island of Menstruating Men*. Scranton: Chandler.
- JOSEPHIDES, L. 1985. *The Production of Inequality: Gender and Exchange among the Kewa*. London: Tavistock.
- KNAUFT, B.M. 1989. Bodily Images in Melanesia: Cultural Substances and Natural Metaphors. In M. Feher et al. (eds), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Part Three, pp. 199-270. New York: Urzone.
- KUCHLER, S. 1987. Malangan: Art and Memory in a Melanesian Society. *Man* (n.s.) 22:238-55.
- LAWRENCE, P. 1988. Twenty Years After: A Reconsideration of Papua New Guinea Seaboard and Highlands Religions. *Oceania* 59:7-27.
- LAWRENCE, P. and M.J. MEGGITT (eds). 1965. *Gods, Ghosts and Men in Melanesia: Some Religions of Australian New Guinea and the New Hebrides*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- LEVI-STRAUSS, C. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Orig. French edition 1945).
- LINDSTROM, L. 1984. Doctor, Lawyer, Wise Man, Priest: Big-Men and Knowledge in Melanesia. *Man* (n.s.) 19:291-301.
- LIPSET, D.M. 1982. *Gregory Bateson: Legacy of a Scientist*. Boston: Beacon.
1990. Boars' Tusks and Flying Foxes: Symbolism and Ritual of Office in the Murik Lakes. In N. Lutkehaus et al. (eds), *Sepik Heritage*, pp. 286-97. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- LIPSET, D.M. and E.K. SILVERMAN. n.d. The Grotesque and the Moral: Dialogics of the Body in Two Sepik River Societies (Iatmul and Murik).
- LUTKEHAUS, N.C. 1990. Hierarchy and 'Heroic Society': Manam Variations in Sepik Social Structure. *Oceania* 60:179-98.
- MCDOWELL, N. 1991. *The Mundugumor: From the Field Notes of Margaret Mead and Reo Fortune*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- MEGGIN, M.J. 1974. 'Pigs Are Our Hearts': The Te Exchange Cycle among the Mae-Enga of New Guinea. *Oceania* 44:165-203.
- MEIGS, A.S. 1984. *Food, Sex, and Pollution: A New Guinea Religion*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- METRAUX, R. 1978. Aristocracy and Meritocracy: Leadership among the Eastern Iatmul. *Anthropological Quarterly* 51:47-58.
- MITCHELL, W.E. 1988. The Defeat of Hierarchy: Gambling as Exchange in a Sepik Society. *American Ethnologist* 15:638-57.
- MODJESKA, N. 1982. Production and Inequality: Perspectives from Central New Guinea. In A. Strathern (ed), *Inequality in New Guinea Highlands Societies*, pp. 50-108. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MUNN, N. 1977. The Spatiotemporal Transformation of Gawa Canoes. *Journal de la Societe des Oceanistes* 33:39-52.
- O'HANLON, M. 1989. *Reading the Skin: Adornment, Display and Society Among the Wahgi*. London: British Museum.
- POOLE, F.J.P. 1987. Morality, Personhood, Tricksters, and Youths: Some Narrative Images of Ethics among Bimin-Kuskusmin. In L.L. Langness and T.E. Hays (eds), *Anthropology in the High Valleys*, pp. 283-366. Novato: Chandler & Sharp.

- READ, K.E. 1955. Morality and the Concept of the Person among the Gahuku-Gama. *Oceania* 25:233-82.
- SCHUSTER, M. 1985. The Men's House, Centre and Nodal Point of Art on the Middle Sepik. In S. Greub (ed), *Authority and Ornament*, pp. 19-26. Basel: Tribal Art Centre.
- STANEK, M. 1983. *Sozialordnung und Mythik in Palimbei*. Basel: Museum of Ethnology.
- STRATHERN, A. 1971. *The Rope of Moka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
1977. Why is Shame on the Skin? In J. Blacking (ed), *The Anthropology of the Body*, pp. 99-110. London: Academic Press.
- STRATHERN, M. 1979. The Self in Self-Decoration. *Oceania* 44:241-57.
1988. *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley; University of California Press.
- STRATHERN, A. and M. STRATHERN. 1971. *Self-Decoration in Mount Hagen*. London: Duckworth.
- TUZIN, D.F. 1974. Social Control and the Tambaran in the Sepik. In A.L. Epstein (ed), *Contention and Dispute*, pp. 317-51. Canberra: Australian National University.
- WAGNER, R. 1987. Daribi and Barok Images of Public Man: A Comparison. In L.L. Langness and T.E. Hays (eds), *Anthropology in the High Valleys*, pp. 163-83. Novato: Chandler & Sharp.
- WASSMANN, J. 1990. The Nyaura Concepts of Space and Time. In N. Lutkehaus *et al.* (Eds) *Sepik Heritage*, pp. 23-35. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
1991. *Song to the Flying Fox: The Public and Esoteric Knowledge of the Important Men of Kandingei about Totemic Songs, Names, and Knotted Chords (Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea)*. Boroko, Papua New Guinea: National Research Institute.
- WORMSLEY, W.E. 1981. Tradition and Change in Imbonggu Names and Naming Practices. *Names* 28:183-94.

INCREASE IN SUBSCRIPTION

The last increase in subscription rates was in September 1991
(volume 62 No. 1).

It is planned to increase subscription rates from September 1997
(volume 68 No. 1). They will be as follows:

Subscriptions for academic and other institutions:

Within Australia	A\$60 per annum
Overseas	US\$60 per annum

Individual subscriptions:

Within Australia	A\$50 per annum
Overseas	US\$50 per annum

Full-time students:

Within Australia	A\$40 per annum
Overseas	US\$40 per annum

Neil Maclean
Editor