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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INTERTRIBAL TRADE AMONG THE MURIK OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Kathleen Barlow

INTRODUCTION

The importance of women in regional trade is widely recognized among the Murik of Papua New Guinea and is expressed in their legend about the origin of trade. By their own account, the Murik are a congeries of groups from other areas of the Lower Sepik River and have a long history of migration and resettlement (see Lipset, this volume). Their legend, as told by a senior woman, illustrates their predicament of living in the mangroves and their solution for it:

> When the first man and woman came to the mangroves to live, they had nothing. Neighboring groups had resources, especially sago, betel nut, and tobacco, that they

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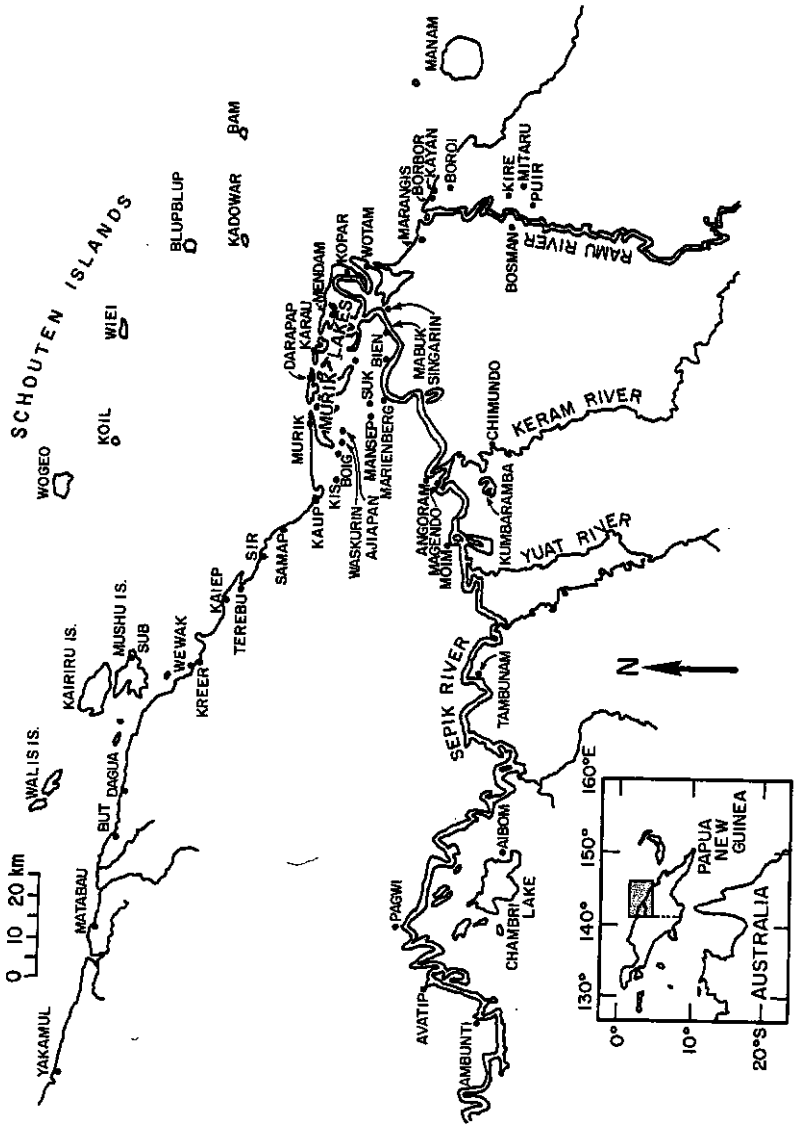

Figure 1. The Sepik River and North Coast of Papua New Guinea

needed and wanted. They had to find something to give others in exchange for what they wanted. Searching through the mangroves, they found tambu *(Nassa)* shells and basket reeds. The woman wove baskets. The two of them made armbands, headbands, and other decorations. All of the things they made were beautiful and desirable. They were able to live in the mangroves without land and obtain everything they needed through trade.

Five Murik villages with a total population of about 1,400 are located along narrow coastal sandbanks near the mouth of the Sepik River in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea.[1] Land is scarce, and due to shifts in the coastline, at any given time only some of the villages have small gardens and stands of coconuts. The sandbanks, only a few hundred yards wide, separate the open ocean from a vast network (approximately 350 km^2) of inland lakes and mangroves (see Figure 1). Because the villages are partially flooded at high tide, Murik houses are built on stilts, and travel between villages is by canoe. Seafood is the main subsistence resource. Narrow channels cut into the mangroves provide access to rich shellfish resources (clams, crab, oysters, etc.), and the tidal lakes are an important spawning area for many kinds of fish. The Murik acquire whatever else they need and want, including sago, which is their staple starch, through exchange with other villages in the region and by selling fish at the town market in Wewak, some 75 kilometers away by sea.

In this paper, I discuss the variation and similarities of women's participation in three kinds of trade—inland, coastal, and inter-island. Their role is important on several levels. First, they produce many of the goods which are traded, both foodstuffs and manufactured goods. Second, they maintain exclusive rights to basket designs. The basket is a unit of value in trading for certain items obtainable from the islands and along the coast. Third, there are symbolic and ritual aspects to the trade which focus on the power of women to create (produce) and to destroy.

THE TRADING SYSTEMS

From the standpoint of the Murik villages, the networks of trade are oriented in three geographic directions—inland through the mangroves, east and west along the coast, and to the offshore islands. Earlier, there was extensive trade for tobacco up the Sepik River, a possible fourth dimension in Murik trade, but it is not very frequent today and thus is not considered here. In each part of the trade network considered here, there are important differences in goods, frequency, practical importance, social relationships, and the role of women.

Essential food resources are exchanged in the inland fish-for-sago trade

with the people who live in the sago palm forests on the other side of the lakes (e.g., Boig, Waskurin, Ajiapan). Every few weeks a Murik family must obtain a supply of fresh sago, the main staple starch. The social relationships of trade are undergoing change. Before pacification (around 1920), the trade was carried on outside of the villages, often without face-to-face interaction and under conditions of warfare or threat of attack from either party. Until 1918, the Murik raided these villages for captives and heads to be used in ritual performances. These conditions have abated with pacification, though relations remain somewhat cautious (see Lipset, this volume).

The Murik trade with the islands and coastal villages for the special foods required for ceremonial feasts, namely, garden produce and pigs. Today as in the past, this trade involves extended visits between trading partners who reciprocate hospitality and exchange gifts. The items exchanged are said to be gifts between "brothers" and "sisters." Certain items are traded in fixed amounts, for example, specific kinds of Murik baskets are traded for parcels of *canarium* nuts, pigs, and tobacco. These transactions are concluded during the visit. It is also possible to trade on credit, for example, to take the tobacco now and bring the baskets on the next trip, but partners are ashamed to leave debts outstanding and will not go back until they have the payment ready. The Murik value these trade relationships highly and marry or adopt members of their trading partners' families.

Much of our information about traditional trade is from informants' accounts. We were able to observe only some of the trade activities ourselves—the return of trading parties, market activity, fish-for-sago trade, and one expedition to the islands of Kadowar and Blupblup. The trade activity is changing with the introduction of motorized transportation, centralized marketing in Wewak, and pressures from the cash economy (see Lipset, this volume). Nowadays, outrigger canoes are powered by outboard motors rather than sailed. Significant effort goes into producing fish for market in Wewak, whereas traditionally there was no such regional market. School fees, taxes, Western clothing, and fishing nets are some of the expenses which put pressure on families to increase their cash income. Today, raising the money to buy gasoline for the motorized outriggers is often a crucial factor in carrying out a trade expedition to a coastal or island village.

Trade in kind continues to be a very significant part of Murik social and economic life. It provides their only access to many kinds of food, ceremonial paraphernalia, and other items that do not flow through the cash economy. Trading activities are necessary for acquiring prestige and celebrating life-cycle rituals. Several kinds of important social relationships, both within Murik society and with other groups, exist only within the framework of trade.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MURIK SOCIETY

Murik society is organized around nonunilineal descent groups in which sibling sets act as units. In each generation, the senior sibling holds jural rights and authority, which he or she exercises on behalf of the sibling group. Each genealogical sibling set forms a unit and is a subset of a larger, dispersed descent group. The firstborn in each generational sibling set inherits the family property, which he or she owns on behalf of the sibling group and uses to provide for them and their households.

A descent group's members are dispersed throughout the villages but form separate units within a village. Activities involving an entire village are typically organized by the senior members of all resident groups, who meet and decide collectively on the best course of action. The descent groups also compete for prominence in ritual activity within and between villages.

Women have extensive rights in this system. If a woman is firstborn, she holds title to valuables and exercises decision making authority on behalf of the sibling set and/or descent group. Women own property in their own right and undertake ceremonial activity of various kinds on their own initiative. Women also speak at public meetings, though less often than men. By their voiced objections or sullen silence, women sometimes put an end to plans the men have formulated which require their cooperation.

The division of labor by sex is not rigid, and there are few tasks that men or women habitually perform which cannot also be done by someone of the opposite sex when necessary or expedient. Subsistence fishing is done by both men and women, although they use different techniques. In contrast to the open sea fishing of Manus men described by Schwartz (1984, n.d.), which is a male prerogative and confers great prestige, among Murik there is no prestige ranking of fishing techniques. Both men and women fish in the open sea, but only when the weather is extremely calm. Gathering shellfish is usually done by women. Often a married couple cooperates in setting a net, fencing a channel, and spear fishing from a canoe. It is my impression that most of the fish consumed on a daily basis is caught by the women, but that the work of both men and women is required for accumulating a surplus for market or exchange.

Manufactured goods of different kinds are produced by both men and women. Wood-carving of sacred and mundane objects is done by men only. Men formerly built and traded canoes to the islands and up the coast toward Yakamul (Tiesler, 1969:65). Both men and women manufacture shell rings. Women gather and prepare the strings of tiny *Nassa* shells that are often used for decoration. The most widely known Murik manufactures are the reed baskets that were traded on the coast and islands and, secondarily, inland from coastal villages. Women make these baskets.

WOMEN AND FOOD

In the domestic context an important equation exists among women, mothers, and food. A good mother feeds her family abundantly whenever they are hungry. Infants are fed on demand and weaned slowly, through shaming by others; the mother herself does not refuse to nurse the child. Lastborn children may be breast-fed until they are five, six, or even seven years old. Claims over adopted and classificatory children are expressed through feeding.

Murik hospitality, which requires feeding guests, or at least offering tobacco or betel nut, is derived from this equation of women with food and feeding. A senior woman explained to me, "The house is a woman [female spirit] and women give food. Therefore, whoever comes to the house must be fed. When women sit down to eat together, the spirit women of their houses sit down with them and eat, too. She is like this shadow of mine, always there behind me but especially when I sit down to cook."

In actuality, mothers are often caught in a severe bind between this idealized image as givers of food and the more difficult reality of their role as distributors of limited food resources. Sometimes, there are temporary shortages of fish or sago or both. A child may have to be refused food that is someone else's share, even if the child's portion was small and he or she is still hungry. The majority of all-out tantrums that I observed were caused by the mother's refusal to give food. Withholding food produces open expressions of rage in young children. Of course, as they get older they eventually realize the necessity of distributing food, and a great deal of effort goes into teaching children to share food willingly with the appropriate people. One of the harshest criticisms that can be made is that a person is unwilling to share food, and it is an insult to accuse someone of eating alone.

RITUAL AND CEREMONY

In ritual contexts, the female qualities of maternal nurturance and seductive sexuality are differentially emphasized. The importance of women as food-givers is apparent in many situations, on both practical and symbolic levels. Social and ceremonial occasions require food and are evaluated according to its quantity and quality. The women's cooperation is essential in mounting many kinds of celebrations. On one occasion that we observed, the women ruined the men's plans by refusing to cook for guests from another village. This is rare. On most occasions women send many plates of food to the men's cult house in their husbands' names and to each others' houses in their own names to ensure that each occasion is successful and to maintain their own and their families' reputations. The central event at the opening of a new men's cult house is a presentation of food, cooked by the men in the newly made cult house, to the village women, symbolically "defeating" them as the source of food.

Women have their own religious cult, which in general outline is the symmetrical opposite of the men's cult. Under the tutelage of their fathers' sisters, women learn love magic. They not only receive permission from senior cult members to use this magic, but acquire prestige from illicit sexual relations they conduct with men in other Murik and non-Murik villages with which they have trade ties. Whereas the men's cult expresses the aggressive power of men in war and sexual conquest, the women's cult expresses sexual power. The spirits of the women's cult are seductive, deceitful, and mischievous—capable of prodigious sexual exploits and such pranks as changing the sex of a male child to female.

THE INLAND TRADE

The trade of fish for sago with the inland villages is necessary for subsistence. Tiesler (1969) analyzed available accounts by explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists, and described the traditional trade relations in the North Coast and Lower Sepik area. He designated the Murik inland trade a *primary complex,* meaning that it is necessary to both partners. Such a relationship is not based on the superior resources of one party. Since both parties are mutually dependent on each other, there is no primary giver and primary taker and, thus, no built-in hierarchy to the relationship (Tiesler, 1969: 47f).

From the Murik point of view, however, the sago partners are definitely inferior. Pre-contact inland trade was characterized by warfare, dominated by the Murik, who preyed on the inland villages for captives and heads. Under these circumstances, trade was carried on at designated meeting places outside of the villages, sometimes without personal interaction. Trade parties typically travelled in armed groups (see Lipset, this volume). It is interesting that women apparently went along, at least occasionally. Older women reminisce about going with these groups as young girls, and they recall the atmosphere of fear and treachery which surrounded the excursions. Sometimes, too, there would be face-to-face interaction between trading partners. This did not involve hospitality, but perhaps permitted arrangements for acquiring a larger quantity of sago or seafood so that one of the partners could perform ceremonial work within his own village.

Murik women did not marry men from the sago-producing villages until relatively recently, though occasionally a Murik man would marry a woman from there who had been captured in warfare. The people from these inland villages were considered non-persons without valuables. Never-

theless, the inland trade partners were called trade "mothers," because they were the sources of necessary food.

There is an interesting contradiction between the Murik concept of a good mother and the actual trade relations, that is, between the image of how they would like it to be and the practice of the trade. The Murik are tied to their bush partners by dependence on them for essential food. To the Murik, those who request food are inferior and dependent like children, while those who give it are superior and abundant like mothers. The partners are called trade "mothers" by the Murik, and they accept this appellation for the purpose of trade. The fish the Murik give is also essential to the sago partners, but they do not phrase their dependence on Murik fish in a maternal idiom. The partners do not give the sago abundantly and without expectation of immediate return, as good mothers give food to children. The sago partners need the fish which the Murik have, and they demand it in return. Thus, the partners are not entirely "good mothers" to the Murik, and the Murik's relationship with them has an ambivalent cast similar to that between children and actual mothers, who ideally give food without restriction but at times withhold it.

A good child brings fish to his or her mother from an early age and is rewarded with sago that the mother puts with it to make a meal. Early experience builds expectations of a generous reward and admiration for the work of fishing. Although the Murik play the role of the good child in the trade relation, the sago "mothers" are sometimes exasperatingly stingy in their response. The following account of a newly-married woman's first trip to trade for sago reveals characteristic high expectations and subsequent irritation toward the trading partner for not responding more generously to her hard work.

T. and her co-wife were classificatory sisters. Their fathers, who were brothers, sent the two women with their husband to their (the fathers') trading partner in Waskurin. T. had no idea how far it was to the bush village but started out happily and energetically with a large quantity of smoked fish. As the trip through the lakes and mangroves went on and on, she became tired and stopped talking. Eventually, they came to the channel which branched off to Boig and Waskurin (two villages in the bush). Her husband sneaked up on her and playfully spat water (a magical gesture to mark one's coming to a place for the first time). She was angry and snapped, "Why did you make me come here anyway? I didn't want to come." He said, "Paddle quietly, it is your fathers who sent us."

When they got to the landing, they met a woman who asked if they had come for her father's trading day. They said yes and she said she would bring the sago and put it in the canoe. T. wanted to see the village, so they walked over the hill to it. Her husband went into the men's house

to speak with the trading partner. She, her co-wife, and the co-wife's young son waited outside. They saw some papayas, which they thought about taking but hesitated. A young boy walked by and told them to take some. They waited a long time and finally called to their husband. He came down and told the partner to come and get the fish from the canoe. T. felt insulted that no one spoke to them or gave them food.

When they got to the canoe and T. saw how little sago there was, she bawled them out, saying, "You think it's easy getting fish. The sun burns us and the rain washes us. We travel long distances through the mangroves. Making sago is easy. You just cut it down and stand there to wash it. We came all this way and you only gave us a little sago."

Her husband and co-wife were embarrassed at her outburst and looked away. After they left the landing, her husband scolded her for getting angry at the Waskurins in their own territory. In the channel out to the lakes, a water snake raised its head up and wagged it back and forth, looking at them. "He danced toward us." They thought that perhaps the snake was a local spirit casting a spell and wondered if it would try to climb into the canoe. They watched to see what it would do, and the others said T. would be responsible if it came after them. But the snake swam away and they continued on. T. declared, "That snake was only a small thing. I could just hold it by its neck."

They did not get back to their village until nearly dawn. The women's fathers looked at the sago and agreed that it was not worth the trip. If the Waskurin sent word of another trading day, they would not bother to go.

T.'s story shows the current conditions of trade which have replaced the overt hostility of earlier trade conducted outside the boundaries of the village. There continues to be great social distance between partners. T.'s party was not received at the trading partner's house or given a meal, although they had travelled a long distance. The partner's daughter did not pay further attention to them after ascertaining that they were indeed her father's partners, but instead went about her work and left them to walk around by themselves. The boy gave them permission to take some papayas but did not climb up and get them.

In some cases the trade relations are less impersonal than in this particular case. Nowadays, there is some intermarriage of Murik women with men from bush villages. This creates actual kinship ties which require some hospitality and create obligations to participate in such events as mourning and other life-cycle rituals. These partners occasionally visit in each others' villages for a few days, bringing their families. Such partnerships are still exceptional, however.

The Murik are often of two minds about their sago trading partners. In the abstract, the latter are *bus kanakas,* "bush natives," a pejorative Pidgin

term. When talking about them in their absence, the Murik attitude toward them is often that they are inferior people of little consequence. The individual trading partners are an important resource, perhaps now bound to them by real kinship ties and, therefore, Murik like themselves—but "bush Murik" as opposed to "beach Murik."

Recently, the sago villagers have begun to ask for money in return for sago and to offer garden produce and betel nut in return for fish. They need cash for school fees and taxes; furthermore, with better transport via roads, they can buy fish from the more distant river people at the central market in Wewak. Although the inland partners are somewhat less dependent on Murik fish, the Murik are, if anything, more dependent on them for sago. The Murik cannot afford to buy all of their sago at the market in Wewak, where the price of sago and of transportation is high. Indeed, many Murik go to Wewak only once or twice per year, and some families never go at all, but all of them need sago on a regular basis. Garden produce and betel nut, though desirable, are not essential, and the Murik seldom buy them. They also need cash for school fees and taxes. This change in the terms of trade is a real hardship to the Murik, since it means that they must go to Wewak to sell their fish for cash and subsequently make a trip to trade for sago. My impression is that most families preferentially maintain ties with the inland partners who continue to accept fish for sago. The present context of trade only confirms the Murik's opinion that their sago partners are not "big," that they do not give generously and are therefore not prestigious.

In recent years, some inland partners have begun to bring surplus sago to the Murik village to sell. They are politely escorted to their Murik partner's house to wait for the market-like transactions to begin. Anyone may buy, but Murik women who have earned money at the Wewak market scout the canoes from a distance before coming forward to buy (see Lipset, this volume). They sometimes conclude that the price is too high, even though they need sago, and the canoe goes back with the sago. The Murik later have to transport the fish and sago themselves, when they trade with other partners whom they consider to be more generous.

As in other areas of Murik life, the inland trade is based on women's work, and women are able to participate not only through their male kin, but on their own as well. Despite changes in the terms of trade and the degree of dependence on the trade of each party, the Murik see the inland partners in terms of the symbolic importance of food and feeding. The value of giving food, especially sago, is an integral part of the image of the abundant mother, an important ideal that is re-enacted in ritual and domestic contexts. The inland partners, who do not share this ethic of unrestrained generosity with regard to their precious sago, are viewed negatively by the Murik, who depend upon the sago resource but carry out the trading with an air of condescension and suspicion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BASKETS

Before discussing the details of coastal and island trade, it is necessary to discuss the value set on baskets, the most important manufacture which the Murik trade widely in this network (see Figure 2). Murik women make baskets in a variety of sizes and designs for different purposes. The baskets are the functional equivalent of the string bag, or "bilum," used throughout much of Papua New Guinea. Large baskets are used to store food, clothing, and valuables, and to carry babies, sago, coconuts, and personal belongings while traveling. Men and women also carry small baskets containing their personal accoutrements, such as betel nuts, lime powder, tobacco, and knives. Women in gardening communities value Murik baskets for their strength and durability, which make them very useful for hauling garden produce. The baskets are often exchanged for fixed amounts of a given commodity.

Weaving beautiful baskets and knowing or originating special designs is a prestige marker among Murik women. The women know that their own reputations, individually and as Murik, are involved. They are, therefore, tenacious about maintaining their monopoly of the special stylistic features and designs which they have contributed to the art of basketmaking. This monopoly extends to the farthest reaches of the trading network.

Murik women do not trade the basket reeds, which grow only in freshwater marshes, to other groups to be made into baskets by their women. They only trade finished baskets. Other groups along the Lower Sepik River have access to reeds and make a few simple designs, which they say they learned from the Murik women. In hilly regions and on the islands there are no reeds.

Within Murik society the basket designs are many and elaborate. Designs in the texture and color of the baskets have special significance and are owned by particular descent groups. Baskets with such designs may be carried only by those who have validated their senior status in the descent group by mounting the required ritual feasts (see Figure 3). Illegitimate use and transfer of these designs may result in retaliation by "lethal" sorcery.

Women also create their own designs and confer the right to weave them. Recipients are individuals whose skill, interest, and personal relationship to them warrants the investment of time and energy required to instruct them. A few designs are "public" and may be woven by anyone, and may be traded or sold. However, if a Murik woman sees someone carrying a basket with a design which he or she is not entitled to carry, the offended owner of the design is informed and she will ruin the basket by cutting it with a knife. A fight may ensue between the owner of the design and the woman who "stole" it.

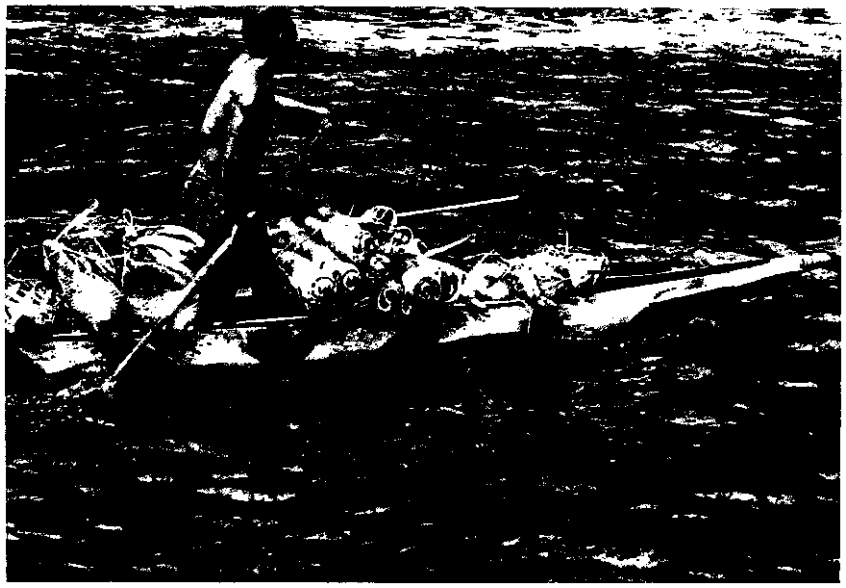

Figure 2. A shipment of rolled-up Murik baskets is ferried ashore to Kadowar Island. (Photo credit: David Lipset, 1982)

There are special types of baskets for trade to the islands. A small basket, about 14 inches square, is for trading to the middle Schouten Islands for tobacco; one basket *(sakai suun,* "tobacco basket") is equivalent in value to one bark sheath of tobacco. A larger basket, suitable for hauling garden produce, firewood, and coconuts, is made for the islands directly offshore from the Murik villages, from Wogeo to Bam (see Figure 1). These baskets *(sabei suun,* "island basket") have very little color, strongly reinforced corners to make them wear longer, and handles made of strong, motley-colored fiber rather than the smooth, white fiber used for special descent group designs. Some island women take the handles off the baskets and put their own handles on them. (Because the baskets are carried with the handles over the forehead like a tumpline, the length of the handles is crucial to resting the load comfortably on the back.) The island baskets are work baskets, and Murik women do not worry about making them especially beautiful. These baskets are traded for buckets of *canarium* nuts. The exchange is one to one. Another very large basket, about one meter square, is equivalent to one pig in value. These "pig baskets" *(nim-brey suun)* are very difficult to weave, and not all women are able to hold the basket reed sufficiently taut to keep such a large piece from losing its shape.

Figure 3. Saub Sana, a senior man of Karau village, sits aboard a copra boat traveling to Blupblup Island to trade. Note the basket (Yamdar) signifying seniority in his descent group. (Photo credit: David Lipset, 1982)

A woman who can weave baskets quickly and well is a valuable asset to her husband's reputation for wealth and generosity. An older man married to a very feisty woman who frequently harangued him in public and at length declared that he remained married to her for her basket-weaving ability.

> They [the trading partners] can come all at once and try to overwhelm me. But I always win. Everything goes to them. One debt cannot stay with me. I always pay back every one. This is the way of my first wife, which is why I still hold on to her. Her way is to make baskets very quickly. Like a machine she makes baskets.

A few brief examples will illustrate the importance of the baskets, not just to the Murik but to their trading partners as well. In 1982, a man from Marangis, a non-Murik coastal village east of the Sepik, was visiting his trading partner in the village of Murik. He had been there for several months and his lengthy stay led the Murik to speculate whether he were waiting out some trouble in his home village. As he was preparing to return home, he suddenly became violently ill and died the next day. Two Murik men who were related to him walked down the beach for several days and brought the news to his home village. Meanwhile, the Murik waited in dread to hear what the consequences would be—especially whether the Marangis would send crocodile sorcery against them. The Marangis sent a letter demanding a heavy compensation. The two trading partners of the man who had died must each send a *suun kubisan,* a large basket filled with about 40 smaller baskets. The women with whom I talked felt that the demand was fair, but they pitied the women in the two families who would have to accomplish the work.

The second example is a trading expedition from our village (Darapap) to the island of Blupblup, at the end of which domestic violence broke out over the distribution of baskets. The trading was finished and the Murik were waiting for the weather to clear for their return home. The hosts' requirements of hospitality had been satisfied, and they turned to the matter of dividing up some baskets which had been presented by the crew of the boat. The atmosphere was tense as the division was being decided. One man's wife had received a basket and was later offered a second. She refused, saying that she had her share already. Incensed by her refusal, her husband beat her publicly until she was unconscious.

A third example illustrates the importance of the named basket designs to the descent groups that own them and the jealousy with which they are guarded. A man from the non-Murik village of Bien on the Sepik River had asked that his Murik trading partner's wife make the basket that was an insignia of rank in the Murik partner's descent group. There was informal talk about whether the Bien had a legitimate genealogical claim (see Lipset, this volume, on the extension of genealogical ties to outsiders),

but the claim should have been presented to the senior members of the descent group for their approval. Some people said the basket was being made to pay off a debt, a dangerous transgression which would undoubtedly result in sorcery. In explanation, descent group baskets are insignia of senior status, transmitted and owned according to genealogical claims. Those who aspire to own them must satisfy the ritual requirements for attaining senior status within the descent group. Such baskets are, therefore, never items of trade.

There was much gossip surrounding the making of the basket. Before the issue came up in the men's house, the women were discussing what should be done and were taking positions. The older women in the descent group who were also entitled to weave this design declared the new basket illegitimate. They said that the woman who was weaving it was of junior status and that, accordingly, there would be a major dispute if she insisted on giving it to the Bien. The general opinion was that someone would die by sorcery, and the older women declared themselves unwilling to stand up and talk on the weaver's behalf when the resulting dispute broke out.

The woman's son-in-law was asked to deliver the basket when it was finished. His father refused to allow this. Since it was not known whether the claim was legitimate, the son would surely die from sorcery if he became involved. Over and over, people stated that it was not "just a basket" at stake. When we left the village, the basket was still in the weaver's house, and the senior representatives of the descent group, men and women from several Murik villages, had made it clear that the Bien should come forward and present his claim for verification. Then the appropriate work and gifts to be presented to the senior members of the descent group would be discussed.

As described earlier, women in Murik society participate in the prestige hierarchy as claimants in their own right, as co-decision makers in the descent group, and as the manufacturers of important symbols of Murik identity and status—the descent group insignia baskets *(suman suun).* They also participate in the prestige hierarchy through their production of baskets for trade. A woman who can produce many baskets is an important asset to her immediate kin and descent group, and she has additional opportunities for participating in prestige-giving activities of her own.

COASTAL TRADE

Trade with the villages along the coast has a quite different character from trade with the inland villages. Women have a more prominent role in coastal trade as producers of baskets which are widely known and desired. The coastal trade consists of a variety of items which are local specialties—

baskets, garden produce, pots, wooden plates, drums, body ornaments, songs, and dances. To a great extent, the trade involves manufactured items, ceremonies, and objects with ceremonial significance. Women as well as men have coastal trading partners, who are usually but not always the same sex.

Plans for a trading expedition originate most often among the men in relation to ceremonial work that they wish to perform and for adventure. A man informs his wife and sisters of his plans and they prepare baskets for him to take. When the day of departure has been set, the women go to the mangroves to collect the types of shellfish that the coastal villagers like. Murik women harvest over 20 different kinds of shellfish. Over time, trading partners have established standing orders for their favorite mangrove products.

A man or woman inherits trading partners from either or both parents. Women engage in trade through their male kin or independently, sometimes by joining an expedition which does not include their husbands or brothers. Other times a woman decides to mount her own trade excursion. She notifies her husband and siblings of her plans, and the preparations are made in the same way as for trade parties initiated by men. The main difference is that she herself will also make many of the baskets and, unless she is too old or infirm, will help to gather the seafood products. For example, a senior woman who wanted to make a first-born ceremony for her new granddaughter visited her trading partners to get the necessary items, accompanied by her brother's sons. Several other senior women were marketing fish in Wewak with the intention of saving enough money to buy gasoline for a trip to Wogeo. Each woman had plans for advancing her name by sponsoring some ritual feast, such as an initiation, retirement ceremony, or dispute settlement. Women have their own ritual obligations to fulfill, and widows often take on the unfulfilled obligations of their deceased husbands. Because their work is also in demand by others, in order to accomplish their own objectives women must take the initiative in planning and organizing such activities. This is not considered inappropriate or unusual, but is admired as an indication of a woman's strength of character. Women participate on their own initiative in both coastal and island trade.

According to Tiesler's (1969/70) description, the Murik visited the coastal villages to the west of them between June and November, when the sea was calm and the southeast wind blew steadily. He does not describe how frequently they made trips. While we were there, they visited the nearby villages every 2-3 months, but excursions to distant partners took place perhaps once a year or every few years, depending on the particular resources involved.

Nowadays, with outboard motors and a centralized regional market in Wewak, it is more efficient for the Murik to take their smoked fish and shellfish to the market. They also need cash, which is always in short supply in the villages. Trade for garden produce and local manufactures is still carried out by visiting the villages where the partners live. If the motor canoe breaks down or is beached because of rough weather on its way to the centralized market in Wewak, villagers immediately begin to trade with the Murik women for their produce. On one trip which we made to Wewak, the canoe was forced ashore on a steep beach when the outboard motor failed. While the men were still trying to get the canoe safely ashore through the surf, the women in the canoe had already sold some of their fish, crab, and clams, and were climbing down to conclude their transactions. They entertained me later with stories about canoes coming out from the beach to waylay them on their way to Wewak, and remarked the irony of arriving at the market with almost nothing left to sell. No matter how much fish they take to the market, they are confident that it will all be sold within hours. From my observations of market activity, this is completely accurate with respect to fresh and smoked shellfish, and only slightly exaggerated with respect to their smoked fish.

Women often trade on behalf of other women in their household, keeping careful track of amounts and returning the appropriate goods or money. They also send their husbands to market or trade with specific instructions about what to do with the receipts. The goods received belong to the woman, who will either distribute them herself or, after deciding what portion to keep for her own household's use, will leave to her husband the distribution of these goods among extended kin. Wedgwood describes this kind of system in Manam (1937: 182; see Lutkehaus, this volume). In other words, the effective control of Murik women over their trade items appears to have been characteristic of traditional as well as contemporary Murik society.

Other trading trips are made by family groups, and the men and women trade with their own partners for the items each wants. Children are often taken on trading expeditions so that they will get to know the trading partners and their children, who eventually will become their trading partners.

The following excursion seems typical of present-day coastal trade. A trip to Samap, a coastal village about 40 km west of the lakes, was ostensibly conducted to obtain yams and taro for an upcoming feast. However, other personal exchanges also took place. The couple who undertook the trip returned with special items to facilitate their own work, as well. The husband had acquired a large quantity of cane for fishing spears, which he shared among the other men in his extended family; his partner

had also given him cuttings of cane and croton for him to try to grow on the Murik sandbank. The wife was pleased with several large potsherds on which to cook sago bread but was disappointed that her partner had no new pots to trade. She had left a couple of baskets with her partner, with instructions to make a pot to store sago. The other prize of her expedition was a large, flat stone on which to pound her basket reeds; later, she complained that the stone was too hard and cut the reeds.

The social relationships involved in coastal trade include fictive, adoptive, and sometimes affinal and consanguineal kin ties. Murik marry people from other cultural groups and adopt children from them. These ties establish new trade links. If a woman or child from another place wishes to return to his or her natal village, the Murik try to maintain the connection as a trade relationship and to give that person the option of returning in the future, either temporarily or permanently. The Murik usually insist on keeping the children of an inter-group marriage if the woman has come to live in a Murik village. If the couple has resided in the woman's village, the Murik will be careful to emphasize the children's kinship connections by encouraging visiting and by recognizing claims the children make based on their Murik kinship.

Prestige in the men's and women's cults is partially dependent on having illicit affairs when on trading expeditions. We have no good data about the style or actual incidence of these trysts, but the Murik initiation ceremonies require that mother's brothers and father's sisters call out the names of their lovers as they put feathers in the novices' hair. The names called out are those of actual residents of the coastal and island villages with which the Murik trade, and songs are composed about the real and fictive kinship relations that are violated in or created by these love affairs.

Women in the villages to the southeast of the Murik Lakes (Kaian, Borbor, Marangis) are referred to in Pidgin as *ol bilong sikirap* ("those who scratch/itch"), with the intended double entendre of their itching for sex and actually scratching the men. When the Murik men come ashore on trading expeditions, the women attack them and scratch their skin with little clam shells. (Clam, in the Murik language, is a common euphemism for female genitalia.) These mock attacks are interpreted as sexual invitations. When the trading party leaves, the resident men whose wives have drawn blood in this way compensate their Murik partners with gifts of tobacco and betel nut. When Murik women arrive at these villages to trade, the resident men may approach them by slyly fingering the women on their legs. If Murik women are disinclined to dally, then the Murik men defend them from further annoyance.

In the coastal villages to the northwest—Sir, Samap, Terebu—where groups of Murik men go to get canoe logs, the resident women attack them with branches of stinging nettles as they struggle to pull the heavy

log down from the jungle. The men are supposed to run away into the undergrowth, perhaps to encounter the women there and have intercourse with them. In 1982, when a group of Murik men went to Sir to get two canoe logs, they were chased away from the log by women armed with nettles. Later they finished the work of pulling the logs to the shore and hollowing them out enough to float them by sea back to Darapap. Before the men left Sir, the women made a large meal for them to allay possible resentment and hostility over the attack. A common Murik taunt arises from this gesture of compensation. When a man returns from a trading expedition, his joking partners demand to know how many plates of sago were given to him, that is, how many women he "conquered."

In the coastal trade sexual aggression is emphasized, in contrast to the (largely unfulfilled) expectations of nurturance and generosity that are expressed in the inland fish-for-sago trade. Perhaps this is an instance in which transaction across boundaries (in this case, ethnic) throws the accepted order of things into question (Douglas, 1966)—although I cannot explain, on these grounds, the absence of this inversion behavior in the inland and island trade, which also crosses ethnic boundaries. At any rate, the normal rules of sexual behavior are inverted in the coastal trade: sexual relations do not occur between legitimate partners, but between illegitimate ones; women do not approach men seductively, but aggressively; men do not approach women forcefully (behavior which might be interpreted as a real threat), but seductively, even coyly, like women.

Playful abuse in these relationships may function as a substitute for and negation of serious confrontation (Bailey, 1983:84). Clearly, each partner wants certain things from the other, and the possibilities, reactions, and willingness of the partners are less predictable than when dealing with people from within their own villages and ethnic groups. To complicate matters, there is usually a language difference, which is now partially circumvented by the use of Melanesian Pidgin and, traditionally, by Murik interpreters who, as children, had been sent to live in the trading partner's village for a year or two. The potential for mistrust and miscommunication which might result in outright conflict seems high, and the history of trade includes incidents of warfare and sorcery between villages and groups. In this context, the attempt to create familiarity through cross-sex interaction may facilitate peaceful exchange and sustain on-going trade relations.

Women may initiate and conduct independent trade or work cooperatively with their male kin. In either case, they have control over the products of trade obtained from their manufactures. The exchange of women among coastal groups, with Murik women marrying out or non-Murik women marrying in, is thought of as a valuable means of establishing new trade partnerships through kin ties. The established idiom of trade along

the coast is one in which cross-gender interaction contributes to complementarity in a situation of potential mistrust and hostility.

ISLAND TRADE

Traditionally, the island trade involved long expeditions to islands as far away as Walis (150 km) to the northwest and Manam (120 km) to the southeast. Nowadays, the trade includes the islands from Kairiru to Bam (see Figure 1). Then as now, a trip to the islands might be for a specific or general purpose. Hogbin (1935) describes annual visits from the Murik of each village to the islands and return visits by islanders. Some trips are undertaken to trade for the goods with which to put on a ceremonial feast. Other trips are made out of interest in maintaining the trade relations and for the adventure of traveling. Murik say that whoever wants to trade in a place must go with someone who has a partner there or trade in that person's name. Otherwise, the islanders will say they have not heard of him or her and will refuse to trade. Trade partnerships of every kind may be maintained through men or women.

Men and women decide if they can be prepared to go when someone announces plans to make a trip. It is important to have a supply of baskets on hand, and both men and women call upon female relatives to contribute them. A woman must have a quantity of her own to trade, also. If the goal of the expedition is to put on a feast, the packages of nuts that are received in exchange for the baskets are the woman's contribution to the feast. If people have gone solely to trade, the packages of nuts are returned to the women who made the baskets on the basis of one package for one basket. In addition to baskets—anywhere from about five to 20 or more—the women send sago bread, already prepared except for cooking; each island partner can expect to receive at least one large basket of sago bread and crab (see Figure 4). Women who are not going to trade often send a smaller basket of these treats to their partners to remind them of their partnership and to maintain good relations. They go to the mangroves for crab and, while they are there, break off the tips of the branches and drop them into the outflowing current. If the current is steady, the mangrove tips wash ashore on the islands, and the islanders know to prepare to receive a trading expedition.

Trade partnerships on the islands may involve kin ties of adoption or marriage, or inherited, fictive kin ties. One woman's trade partners were her father's brother's daughters. Many years earlier, her father had been given to a Murik trading partner during a severe drought; the island partner was afraid that his children would not survive otherwise. Another man

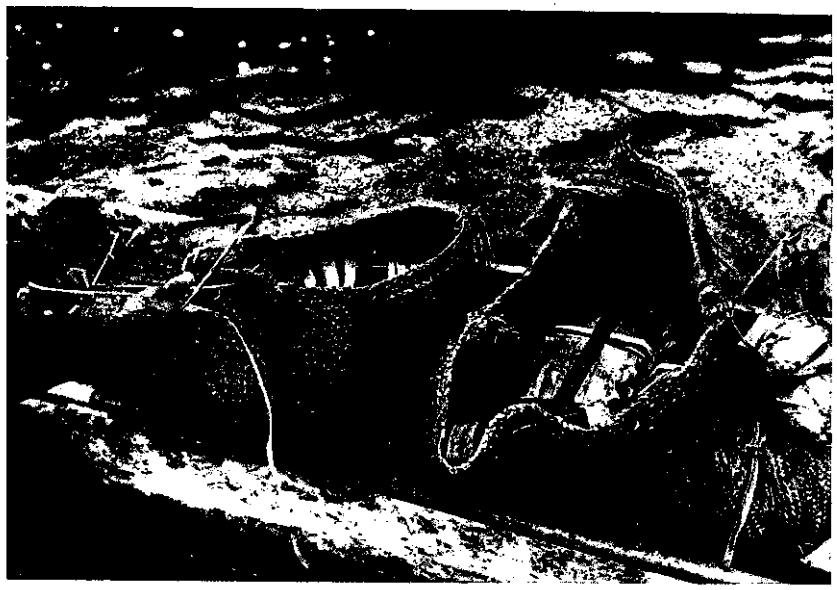

Figure 4. Packets of sago bread and live crab fill Murik baskets, here being sewn shut for the trip to the islands. (Photo credit: David Lipset, 1982)

had a trading partner in Suk, where his mother had become pregnant by a lover during a trading expedition.

A senior man expressed the importance of women in trading with the islands by saying, in Melanesian Pidgin:

> *Meri tasol i karim kanu i go long ailans.*
> It is the woman who takes the canoe to the islands.
> *Meri tasol i kisim i kam bek.*
> It is the woman who brings it back.
> *Kanu i go long strong bilong ol meri.*
> The canoe travels on the strength of the women.

Some women have trade partners on the islands and their husbands trade in their names. Thus, the women have a reputation in the islands even if they never go there.[2] One woman described the cooperative nature of this trading enterprise:

> A woman who works hard for her husband sends plenty of good baskets, crab, and sago bread when he goes to the islands to trade. She will have a good name and he can trade in her name even if they have never seen her. If she goes herself, they will

Figure 5. Woman carrying a lozenge-shaped plate of teeth valuables and wooden canoe-spirit figurines *(gai'masok)* during a canoe-launching ceremony in 1936. (Photo credit: Louis Pierre Ledoux, 1936)

be very happy to see the woman who makes the baskets and gives so much crab and sago.

But if a woman doesn't send enough or makes sloppy baskets, the trading partner will talk, "Aywak!" which means, "Get rid of her!" When the man returns he will leave her and get a new wife. So we are afraid of what the trading partners will say and try to make our names important with them.

Women are important in island trade not just for the goods that they produce but also for the influence, both positive and negative, they have on the canoe from the time it is built until the journey is completed. The unfired canoe must be hidden from them in a small shelter while it is being carved; the canoe log will split if a woman comes close to it. The men who are working on the canoe should abstain from sexual intercourse; if a man who still smells of sexual intercourse comes near the canoe log, the men say it will "split open like women's genitals." Special leaves are placed at the door to purify those who enter the canoe shelter.

Traditionally and in some villages today, there is a ceremony to launch a new outrigger.[3] The owner's wife or sister (different informants said different things here) carries to the canoe carved, wooden figurines in which the canoe spirits reside. For this ceremony, the figurines are set

Figure 6. Women dancing during a canoe-launching ceremony in 1936. The woman carrying the wooden plate on her head is also shown in Figure 5. Note the men's house in the background. (Photo credit: Louis Pierre Ledoux, 1936)

in a large, lozenge-shaped plate like those used on the islands. The woman dances with it on her head, accompanied by other women (Figures 5 and 6). The canoe spirits are transferred from the figurines to the canoe, and the figurines are taken back to the men's house. When the canoe returns from its trial run, this woman scoops up the spray from the bow of the canoe and takes it into her house to insure that the canoe will later come back to that place. The informants said that the woman "takes the spit of the canoe" and that it will come back to her because she is its mother.[4]

Symbolically, the canoe-builders appropriate female reproductive power for themselves. The canoe is built within its protective shelter and comes forth as a finished product. When it is ready to be launched, a pot and small fire are placed on the ground in front of it. It is shoved across the pot and the fire, breaking the pot, and then into the water, becoming independently mobile and ready for its first journey. Traditionally, the men worked inside the canoe shelter naked, like children. The unfinished canoe is damaged if it is exposed to adult sexuality. Thus, it is female creative power, as opposed to female sexual power, that the canoemakers draw upon through birth imagery.

While the canoe is at sea, the wives of the men who take turns holding the steering paddle must behave very circumspectly. Their mothers, sis-

ters, brothers, and joking partners look after them and take care of their cooking and domestic chores. There is a long list of activities which these wives are forbidden to perform because the canoe responds directly to them. Among the prohibitions and their consequences are the following:

1. They may not make any overtures to or speak to a man with whom they are friends and who is therefore a potential rival to their husbands. The canoe will run away.
2. They must not have sexual intercourse. The canoe will imitate their undulations and go down at sea.
3. They may not cut grass. The outrigger lashings will break.
4. They may not untie their skirts. The canoe will break up.
5. They must not chop firewood. The canoe will split open and sink.
6. They may not weave baskets. (In straightening the basket reeds after each step in the weaving, the weaver makes a gesture as if waving good-bye.) The canoe will go out to sea and never return.
7. They may not take a stopper out of a water container. The plugs in the canoe will come out and the canoe will ship water.
8. They may not lean down to scoop up water. The canoe will also "lean down" and take in water and sink.
9. Their skirts must not blow in the breeze, a provocative, sexually inviting pose. The canoe sails will blow like the skirt and the canoe will be swept away entirely.
10. No dog may come near one of the women. The woman will then have the smell of the dog on her skin and the canoe will run away from her.
11. The woman must not fall down, step in a hole, or walk in soft mud. The canoe will mimic her downward movement and take on water, if not actually sink.

This list was collected from many informants, both men and women, but is no doubt incomplete. Many mishaps can occur when sailing an outrigger in the open ocean, and all are accounted for by the women's failing to observe the proper restrictions.

On board the canoe, the men watch the steersman closely. If the canoe veers off course or shakes up and down, the steersman is changed immediately. He and the crew know how his wife has misbehaved, depending on what the canoe does. The other men cover him up, and he hides until the journey is over. When they arrive in their home village again, each displaced steersman goes directly to his wife and beats her for her misbehavior. Today, the women stay quietly at home until they feel sure the canoe has gone ashore at its destination, and they estimate from the weather and number of planned stops on the journey which days they should remain quiet because the travellers are once again en route. These

precautions always apply to sailing outriggers. They are less frequently enforced for motorized outriggers and boats. When the women's calculations and the course of the journey do not coincide, the women hope that the canoe encounters no difficulties for which they will be blamed. Older women told me that these beatings used to be public, but now because of government and mission disapproval of wife-beating, the husband waits until they are inside the house.

Why do the women observe the restrictions, when the men's practice is to beat them without inquiring about their activities? The restrictions apply to public behavior, and a woman who fails to observe them presents herself to the village as indifferent to the success of her husband's trading enterprise and as willing to endanger the lives of the entire party by her own willfulness. Such a presentation of self is quite contrary to the image of a good woman and wife who works hard to ensure the success of trade activities.

The restrictions force the women who remain at home to be faithful to their husbands. Though the participants in the voyage, both male and female, expect and are expected to have affairs as part of their travels, women who stay behind are not. They remain within the confines of their own and their husbands' kin groups. (Men who remain at home while their wives go on trading trips are not specially restricted.)

A second consequence of these taboos is to indebt the women whose husbands have gone to trade to other women in the village. The wives will be receiving from the islands large quantities of perishable produce which are rare and delicious treats. They will decide the distribution of the goods—for ceremonial purposes, to other women who contributed trade goods, and to their caretakers. The women's female kin and especially their joking partners (classificatory father's sisters) cook for and look after the wives in anticipation of receiving a share of these perishable delicacies. Immediately after the expedition returns, the wives of the traders allocate the goods and reward the supervisors who have taken care of them.

CONCLUSION

Women's direct participation in trade, that is, their having their own trading partners and the option of trading separately or together with or through their male kin, is part of a general tendency in Murik society to proliferate social ties and extend their social networks. It is also consistent with other domains of Murik life in which women have access to resources for prestige, participate in ritual activities on their own and cooperatively with men, and both produce and distribute food and other goods.

The work of women is essential for conducting every kind of trade.

Inland trade depends on their meeting the subsistence needs of the family and, in cooperation with male kin, collecting the necessary surplus of smoked fish to trade for sago. Recent changes have put pressure on the Murik to obtain cash for some purposes, and they participate in the cash economy by marketing surplus fish produced by women in cooperation with men. Coastal trade requires special seafood products, which women gather, as well as baskets. The island trade is another area in which basket production is crucial, though sago, crab, and other mangrove products produced and/or prepared by women are an important component.

Symbolically, many aspects of trade relations express the ideology of women and women's power within the society. Trade for sago is associated with notions of mothering and nurturing. As children, Murik develop highly charged expectations about the relationships among work, generosity, food, and prestige, which carry over into the trade relations. The ideal is that mothers, who are the source of love and abundance, give food, especially sago, and particularly in return for fish. Because they give this essential food in return for Murik fish, the sago-givers are called mothers, but they are not always regarded as good mothers. This attributed kinship status emphasizes the difference between the Murik's desire for generosity from their partners and the persistent and mutual hostility and distrust which pervade the trade relations.

In the coastal trade, women's sexuality is emphasized. The trade partners are mutually predatory in a sexual idiom. In the absence of actual political conquest, illegitimate sexual impulses are expressed as ritualized attack. The deflection of antagonism and disorder through ritual inversion and play are a frequent occurrence in Murik social life. The tensions of contradictory kinship ties, cross-sex interaction, affinal relations, and status transitions are suffused with sexual joking and ritualized antagonism in the form of mock attack. This playful, sexual "fighting" among coastal villagers signals social and ethnic differences at the same time that it provides covert channels for communication and familiarity. From the Murik point of view, the coastal trade relations involve the translation of familiar techniques of social interaction into an inter-ethnic sphere of activity.

The taboos on women's activities associated with the island trade express men's dependence on women for safe travel and success. Women's actions, especially expressions of sexuality, are controlled by threats of violent retaliation for misdemeanors or infidelities. A journey to the islands is approached with a mixture of trepidation and excitement. These excursions are dangerous, but the rewards are sweet. In a situation where men in sailing canoes are highly dependent on factors that cannot be controlled—sea, weather, a partner's hospitality and generosity—women are restricted at home in order to protect the venture. The men, however, sally forth for sexual adventure, while the taboos at home ensure that their wives will not. The taboos express the potential power of women and the fear that it may be unleashed in destructive ways. The women's supposed power to send the canoe and to bring it home is a metaphor of the uneasy dependence of men on women and of the trading activity which is based on women's work and productivity.

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NOTES

1. From February 1981 to July 1982, my husband, David Lipset, and I lived in Darapap, a village of about 250 people, and the central one of five Murik villages.
2. The prominent role of Murik women in island trade contrasts sharply with Hogbin's description of the role of women on Wogeo, where women have "no specific role in the internal exchanges (district to district or village to village). I cannot say what part they play or rather played, in exchanges with overseas partners; but I doubt whether they were more than lookers on" (Hogbin, personal communication, 1983).
3. We did not observe a canoe launching ceremony. The description given is derived from several sources: accounts of past ceremonies by participants (Murakao, Kombeng and Wiem) of Darapap village (1982); notes and photographs of a canoe launching ceremony in Mendam village taken by Louis Pierre Ledoux in 1936; and a description by the Catholic missionary, Father Joseph P. Schmidt, of a ceremony in Murik (1923-24).
4. Hogbin states that on Wogeo "the women took no part at all in the ceremonial launching of the canoe, nor did any of them step on board for the trials" (Hogbin, personal communication, 1983).

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PIGS, POLITICS, AND PLEASURE:
MANAM PERSPECTIVES ON TRADE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Nancy Lutkehaus

INTRODUCTION

Until the mid-1960s, during the dry season between June and October, groups of men from Manam Island made voyages in large sailing canoes to the north coast of Papua New Guinea. The men made these trips for the purpose of visiting their hereditary trading partners, called *taoa* (or *baga taoa*),[1] who lived in villages scattered along the coast of the present-day provinces of Madang and the East Sepik (see Figure 1).

They brought bunches of betel nut and betel pepper, tobacco, taro and, most important of all, baskets of galip nuts (*Carnarium* almonds) and pigs to exchange with their mainland *taoa*. Depending upon which village or

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