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The Symbols of "Forest": A Structural Analysis of Mbuti Culture and Social Organization

This structural analysis of the Epulu Mbuti (Zaire) offers an "ideationalist" alternative to more radically "empiricist" or "materialist" studies of hunter-gatherers. Spatial, kinship, affinal, and ritual metaphors of the "Forest" (ndura) *involve homologous representations of family, sub-band, band, and total Forest collectivities. Peculiarly Mbuti "anomalies" (e.g., reputed absence of kinship, patriliny, and sub-band groups;* elima *ritual; age and gender equality) become intelligible in terms of resolving the core contradiction of the system: endogamy versus exogamy.*

THE WORLD'S SURVIVING HUNTER-GATHERERS HAVE COME TO OCCUPY A UNIQUE AND PRIVILEGED PLACE in modern anthropological theory, one that is all out of proportion to their numbers. Some of the reasons for this would seem obvious. Their ways of life have been taken by many, for instance, to be the closest facsimiles we have of our paleolithic ancestors. Similarly, on the basis of largely impressionistic criteria, contemporary foragers have often appeared to be "simple," "elementary," or even "primitive." But there is one further reason, I think, for the special ethnological status granted hunter-gatherers—one as subtle as its consequences are critical. Curiously, nearly all anthropological studies of hunter-gatherers (with the possible exception of Australian Aborigines) have been cast in a "materialist" or radically "empiricist" mold, that is, with a decided epistemological (and sometimes ontological) bias towards objects and events ("patterns *of* behavior") as distinct from ideas and representations ("patterns *for* behavior") (Geertz 1973; see also Goodenough 1961, 1970:98–103, 1981:50–54; Leach 1976; Sahlins 1976). Part of the reason, then, that hunter-gatherers have been so irresistible is that they have been seen to embody dimensions of physical reality—patterns *of* behavior—that anthropologists happen to value intuitively as Westerners.

This materialist-empiricist bias is strongly implicit even in the more recent analyses. Ethnographic as well as theoretical discussions devoted to hunter-gatherers have been fairly well dominated by such issues lately as the relative importance of hunting versus gathering versus fishing; the dietary contributions of females as against males; the "original affluence" of foragers as compared with horticultural, pastoral, agricultural, and industrial peoples; the absence of territoriality; the infrequency of aggression and violence; the relative lack of gender stratification; the bilateral character of the band unit; the general fluidity of social relationships; the reproduction of the means of foraging production; and so on (see, e.g., Lee and DeVore 1968; Sahlins 1972; Meillassoux 1973; Godelier 1977; Harris 1977; Leakey and Lewin 1977; Leacock 1978; Ember 1978; Lee 1979; Etienne and Leacock 1980; Abruzzi 1980; Dahlberg 1981; Barnard 1983). While these and additional studies have done much to correct numerous major ethnocentric misconceptions, they tend nevertheless either to focus directly upon questions of subsistence or to account for other kinds of sociocultural factors in terms specific to the foraging means of survival.

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Consequently, I suggest, the pronounced materialist-empiricist bias characteristic of anthropological treatments of foraging peoples has inadvertently served to convey a potentially misleading, and hence unfortunate, impression as regards their cultures—namely, that hunter-gatherers' cultures, whatever symbolic expression they might embody, are predominantly focused upon the quest for food, or that, due to the pressures of subsistence, foragers' cultural lives are overshadowed by material concerns.

This paper explicitly challenges this anthropological bias by means of an alternate, avowedly structuralist examination of the symbolism evident in the culture and social organization of one hunter-gatherer group: the Epulu Mbuti[1] of Zaire.

Thanks principally to Colin M. Turnbull's accounts, both popular and professional,[2] the Epulu Mbuti rank among the most well-described foraging groups extant in the ethnographic record. His various analyses, though not noted for emphasizing broad theoretical concerns, are generally functionalist in orientation, emphasize patterns *of* rather than patterns *for* behavior, and fall well within the characteristic scope of materialist-empiricist approaches.[3] In the past decade, moreover, other Mbuti groups have also been studied at first hand by a number of more theoretically inclined ethnographers. And despite some notable disagreements over ethnographic fact, they all exhibit varieties of the same generally materialist-empiricist orientation. Ecological approaches particularly, in combination with cultural materialism, economics, or other versions of functionalism, seem to predominate (Bicchieri 1969; Harako 1976; Tanno 1976; Hart 1978, 1979; Abruzzi 1979, 1980; Bailey 1982; Peacock 1984; and Bailey and Peacock 1984). But structural-functionalist (Ichikawa 1978), Marxist (Meillassoux 1972, 1973), structural-marxist (Godelier 1977), regional-historical (Vansina 1980, 1983, 1986), and genetic-demographic analyses (Cavalli-Sforza 1986; Hewlett and Cavalli-Sforza 1986) have also been attempted.

The present effort draws almost exclusively upon these published ethnographic sources. It differs substantially from them, however, by focusing instead upon the indigenous categories of the culture and their logical interrelations, consistent with contemporary "ideational" theories of symbolism (Keesing 1981:68–69; see also Sahlins 1976; Geertz 1973; Leach 1976; Schneider 1980)[4] that have been developed predominantly for the nonforaging remainder of the world's societies. The culture of the Epulu Mbuti (i.e., the totality of their patterns *for* behavior) emerges in outline, then, as constituting a structured symbolic "whole" centered quite literally around the notion of *ndura* or "Forest."[5] But additionally, this analysis of Mbuti symbolism helps resolve many of the major inconsistencies and anomalies that have so confounded our anthropological understanding of Mbuti social organization. Principles of social classification; purported "kinshiplessness"; family, sub-band, and band composition; residence patterns; the existence of "patrilineages"; interband relationships and marriage regulation; and birth and *elima* ritual performance are among the more salient features so involved. Thus, this structuralist treatment of the Epulu Mbuti is intended to serve as a basis for evaluating the relative merits of ideationalist as against more typical materialist-empiricist approaches.

Forest and Kinship Metaphors

Probably no account of a non-Western people in the history of anthropology has been so widely read as Turnbull's narrative, *The Forest People* (1961). Through it, generations of undergraduates and others have been introduced to, even enchanted by, Mbuti culture. Many in this have no doubt been subject to much the same fascination with foragers as have professional anthropologists. But there is something else altogether special about *The Forest People*. Almost uniquely, this book enables practically any reader to recognize, however intuitively or unexpectedly, a definite, singular core to the culture. That core is the very notion of "Forest" itself, for virtually everything in Mbuti culture is related to this one idea, supposedly even the non-Forest village world of the neighboring Bantu and Sudanic tribes.

For the Epulu Mbuti themselves, however, the Forest, or *ndura*, is anything but a simple idea. It is variously described as "father" and "mother," "friend" (or "sibling") and "lover," the "great provider," the "chief, the lawgiver, the leader and the final arbitrator," "God," "Godhead," "Deity," "God of the Hunt," and "God of the Forest" (Turnbull 1961:125, 145; 1965a:257; 1965b:251–254; see also Schebesta 1938–1950). Correspondingly, the Mbuti regard themselves as "Children" or "People of the Forest" (Turnbull 1961:125, 127; 1965b:272).

Even to our anthropological categories, this Mbuti conceptualization of the Forest is all-encompassing. Crucial features of Mbuti kinship, economics, politics, and religion are all linked together by and through it. Indeed, the Forest is to the Mbuti as it might well appear to us: no less than "the one standard by which all deeds and thoughts are judged" (Turnbull 1961:125).

Due to restrictions of space, I am forced to limit my analysis here to those contexts of Mbuti culture where the Forest is represented in principally social or "kinship" terms—as "father" and "mother," and "friend" or "sibling" and "lover." The first of these pairs especially seems to envelop a large share of the other attendant definitions and meanings. The Forest as "mother" is the great provider, the source of love, affection, trust, and well-being. As "father" the Forest is lawgiver, the source of severity, strictness, authority, and conflict (Turnbull 1960b:331; 1965b:252–253, 271). However, these parental representations do not exhaust the kinship dimensions of the Forest. Less frequently, but perhaps no less significantly, the Forest is also portrayed in terms of "lover" and "friend" or "sibling" (Turnbull 1960b:319; 1965b:252–253; 1965c:292, 294).

These particular abstractions constitute the same essential notions by which the Mbuti classify the preponderance of their own social interactions. The following structural treatment of their culture and social organization thus incorporates, but is not limited in any simple way to, a Durkheimian relationship between cosmological and social representations in these largely kinship or familial metaphors.

Mbuti "Kinshiplessness"

My structuralist rendering of the Forest in these terms runs directly counter to Turnbull's authoritative interpretation as regards two fundamental issues. Clarification right at the outset is therefore essential. On the one hand, Turnbull has flatly declared that such Durkheimian-like exercises as I am attempting here are "highly questionable" (1965a:279). On the other, he has consistently argued that Mbuti society lacks what he would regard as an "effective" kinship system. Instead, he claims, the Mbuti possess a system of nomenclature and behavior based on distinctions of "age" or "generation" (Turnbull 1965b:109–117, 269, 272; 1968:137; 1972:284; 1983b:84). Not surprisingly, others who are relatively unsympathetic to either a Durkheimian or a structuralist perspective, most notably Meillassoux (1973) and Godelier (1977), have taken this supposed "kinshiplessness" as ethnographic fact and figured it prominently in their own interpretations of the Mbuti and, by extension, hunter-gatherers generally.

As I shall show in the appropriate sections below, however, a considerable share of Turnbull's own data, supported by earlier as well as more recent reports, belies this view. Quite simply, Turnbull's disclaimers rest on an unwarranted materialist-empiricist restriction of "real kinship" to the facts of "actual" or "biological" relationship. Thus, since the Mbuti classify "fictive" along with "real" kin, Turnbull claims that their terminological and relational system does not qualify as a "kinship" system (1961:126–127; 1965a:246; 1965b:110–111, 269; 1983a:36).[6] The alternative perspective adopted here is consistent instead with prevailing anthropological theories wherein kinship is seen as a class of conceptual or ideational phenomena that may or may not have anything to do with the seemingly obvious facts of biology (e.g., Schneider 1980, 1985; see also Keesing 1981:212–280). In the present instance, it just so happens that Mbuti kinship classification does involve certain indigenous understandings about human reproduction. But these expressed notions are of an entirely different order from the supposed facts of sheer

physiology. Even more critically, they bear most significantly, that is, symbolically, upon a great many other contexts of Mbuti culture, as for example the Forest. So far as empirical evidence may allow, then, there is no reason why Mbuti kinship or relational classification should necessarily be seen as any less "real kinship" (hence, *cultural*) than is the case elsewhere.

Conception Theory, the Family, and the Forest

It will prove useful to begin with Mbuti notions about human procreation. The sexual intercourse of married couples is regarded as an act entirely different from that of unmarried partners, for only in marriage may children be conceived. This is due to the special "joyful" involvement of the Forest in marital coitus (Turnbull 1978b:167–170). Ideally, marital love-making should take place in the Forest, but it may also occur in a couple's own hut (Turnbull 1965b:120, 122, 156; 1972:304). A married woman's most fertile time is when she is menstruating (Turnbull 1960a:191). It seems, however, that part of the vital essence of life (*pepo*) is conveyed by the father's semen and thought to originate with the Forest (Turnbull 1965b:249–250).

Once pregnancy has been initiated, frequent sexual encounters between the father and mother help quicken the fetus's development to the moment of delivery (Turnbull 1965a:178; 1978b:168). But a father and mother, along with the Forest, influence the development of their unborn child in other ways as well. The mother will shy away from sources of disharmony and noise in the camp. Also, both she and her husband may compose and sing Forest lullabies to the child and talk to it (Turnbull 1965c:296; 1983b:33). An important dimension of this prenatal indoctrination is to acquaint the child preliminarily with various Forest "spheres" it will be born into and will identify with (Turnbull 1978b:168–169; 1983b:32–39). Thus, the child developing in the womb is the result of the joyful intermingling of several simultaneous influences of mother, father, and Forest (Turnbull 1978b:167).

The Spherical Worlds of Wombs

The concept of "womb" (*ndu*) is directly related to Mbuti notions of the Forest. The Forest (*ndura*) is itself a "womb" (Turnbull 1978b:167, 215; 1983b:30, 32, 44). It and homologous "wombs" (see below) take on the iconic proportions of a "sphere"(*ndu*). In his more recent writings, Turnbull has elaborated upon this dimension of Mbuti thought, for it appears to be a fundamental and systematic aspect of virtually every context of their culture and one to which they themselves devote "endless discussion and speculation" (Turnbull 1978a:98). He writes,

> Their world . . . is like a "sphere." Within this sphere we as individuals (or as a people, they stressed, though each talked in primarily individual terms) are normally always in the center. When we move in time or space the sphere moves with us, so we remain in the center. . . . However, the Mbuti say, if one's movement in time or space is too violent, too sudden, one can reach the edge of the sphere before it has time to catch up, and that is when a person becomes *wazi-wazi*, or disoriented, and unpredictable. Or if the violence of the movement, the disregard for the security that comes from remaining in the center of one's sphere, is too blatant, one may pierce through into the other world. [Turnbull 1978b:166; see also Turnbull 1978a:97–98; 1983a:122–123; 1983b:32–33]

Elsewhere, it is noted that at the center of the Mbuti's spherical womb(s) there is "quiet" while at the periphery there is "noise" (1983a:123). Also, the notion of a spherical womb is variously associated with "fire," "stomach," "vagina," and "hut" (Turnbull 1983b:33, 51; 1978b:202).

The Mbuti mother's womb, as appropriately influenced by interactions with the father and the Forest, is again one such sphere, as are the Forest itself and the several other collective representations of it.

Rebirth to the Nuclear Family Sphere

Mbuti life in many respects amounts to a series of conceptions and births or rebirths of the person as it passes from one spherical womb to another. These postnatal wombs all possess a structure that is homologous with the prenatal womb. Specifically, complementary paternal and maternal dimensions are conjoined in each case with one or another representation of the Forest.

In the initial birth event, for example, the mother may be attended by her mother or other close relatives or friends (Turnbull 1965b:129). She may give birth either in the Forest or inside her hut back at camp. Linguistically, the "hut" (*endu*), like the "Forest" (*ndura*), is a "womb" (*ndu*) (Turnbull 1983b:30, 32, 44). But regardless of where she delivers, in the immediate postpartum mother and infant are confined to the spherical womb of the family hut.

The birth is still not complete, however. The umbilical cord must be cut with an arrow point or knife belonging to the father (Turnbull 1965b:129), and at this moment the father himself may be first presented to the child (Turnbull 1983b:35). Therefore, as the infant is born into and secluded within the family hut of its parents over the next several days, it occupies another spherical womb that incorporates the identical human personnel who were involved throughout its conception and prenatal development: its mother and father (Turnbull 1965b:24; 1978b:170, 175).

The Forest is ritually implicated also, however. Shortly after delivery the infant is bathed in the sweet-smelling water obtained from a particular vine of the Forest, and then wrapped in a barkcloth "womb of the Forest" (Turnbull 1965a:213; 1965b:129; 1978b:170). I suggest that the barkcloth and the fluids of the vine represent the maternal and paternal dimensions, respectively, of the Forest. Finally, the child is ritually consecrated to the very "heart of the forest" (Duffy 1978:3). Therefore, just as every Mbuti child is born to the social sphere of the nuclear family, including mother and father, it is simultaneously *re*born to a parallel spherical entity, the Forest, which consists also of representations of mother and father in complementary relationship to the child.

The Family and Forest Homology

This family-Forest homology is anything but coincidental. Beyond the linguistic concordance, family huts are spherical or dome-shaped and made from Forest materials. Fathers help collect the saplings and *mongongo* leaves for roofs, walls, and floors, while mothers do the actual construction (Turnbull 1965b:102). Significantly, at the center of the floor of each hut is the family's "vagina" or "hearth" (*kuma*) (Turnbull 1965b:35, 188, 264n; 1978b:202). Also, spherical storage baskets for food obtained from the Forest are hung around the peripheral walls (Duffy 1978:3). Indeed, when women sometimes wish to hide pieces of meat from other families, they do so in roughly the same peripheral space of the hut sphere—in the leaves of the walls (Turnbull 1965b:120). The spherical family hut, then, possesses centrally and peripherally distinguished regions (Figure 1a).

Similarly, Mbuti conceptualize the Ituri Forest in spherical form. According to Turnbull's informants drawn from a multiplicity of bands, an unoccupied "no-man's land" to which none of them lays exclusive claim lies at the center of the Ituri (Figure 2) (Turnbull 1965b:173). This region serves as a sanctuary of the Forest's very essence, since all hunting (except perhaps for the infrequent spear-hunting of large game) is prohibited there (Turnbull 1972:300; 1983a:17). Radiating out from the center toward the Forest's periphery lie the various narrow band hunting territories wherein the individual bands establish their shifting camps. The camps themselves are typically circular in layout (see Figure 1) and are usually established within some 30 km of the Forest's edge, an ambit of approximately one day's travel from each band's permanent or semipermanent village camp at the margin of the Forest (Turnbull 1983a:28; Tanno 1976:123). Finally, the road along which the villages and gardens of the non-Mbuti Bantu and Sudanic tribesmen are

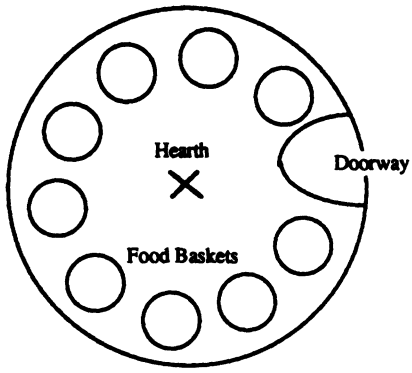

Fig. 1a Family Hut

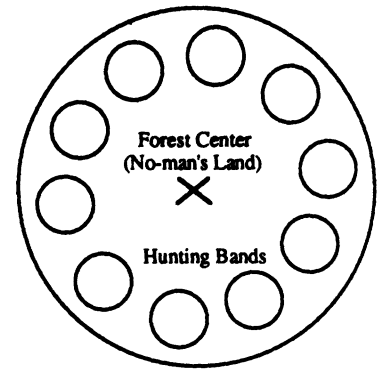

Fig. 1b Total Community of Forest Bands

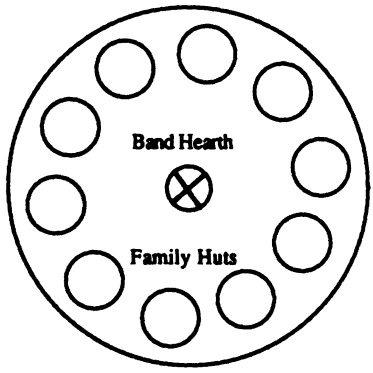

Fig. 1c Band

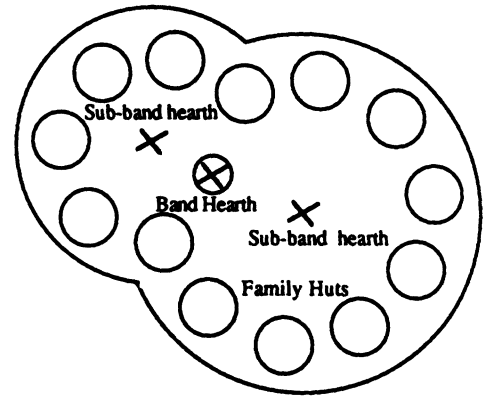

Fig. 1d Band and Sub-Bands

Figure 1
Schematic representations of Mbuti social "spheres" or "wombs."

distributed runs the perimeter of the Forest. In these terms, the total community of Forest bands would be represented schematically (Figure 1b).

Comparing the layout of the family hut and Forest reveals a clear spatial isomorphism. Both are spherically or circularly shaped, and both possess a distinctively marked central point (hearth and Forest no-man's land, respectively) that is peripherally ringed by a number of circular elements (food baskets and hunting camps, respectively). Most significantly, the parallel between family hut and Forest is conceptualized in identical social terms. The idealized family of the hut includes children, a mother, and a father, just as the total Ituri community includes all Mbuti as children of the Forest, their mother and father.

At the appropriate point below I shall specify this particular isomorphism in somewhat greater detail, for just as children are born to their respective families, so too are they ritually reborn to the distinctly social sphere of all Mbuti inhabiting the Forest.

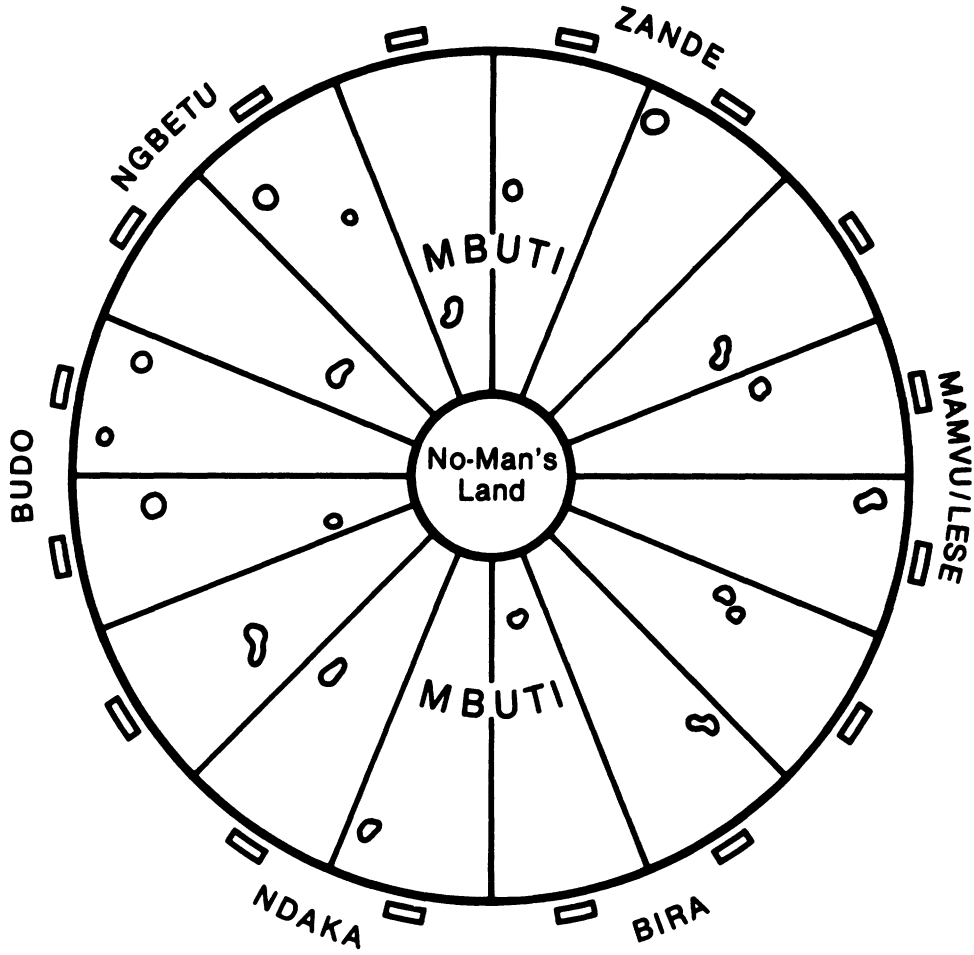

Figure 2
Schematic representation of the community of Mbuti bands in the Ituri Forest [from Colin M. Turnbull, *The Mbuti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation*, 1983, p. 29. Reprinted with permission of CBS College Printing/Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York].

The Band

Every Mbuti, however, is additionally reborn into, and lives his/her life at the center of, two additional spheres or wombs. Each of these again involves a collectivity that is conceptualized in terms of relations among mothers, fathers, and children. These are the "band" and the "sub-band."

Here the issue of reputed Mbuti "kinshiplessness" takes on another form. All ethnographers of the Mbuti have acknowledged the significance of the band unit in indigenous understandings and social organization. Turnbull alone, however, has failed to recognize any corresponding validity for the patrifilial extended family or sub-band (what in the literature has been frequently termed the "patrilineage") unit against the reports of others by denying the presence of any operative principle of unilineal descent or filiation even when much of his own data are contradictory. Thus, this question has generated the greatest disagreement in all the Mbuti corpus. Moreover, the issue raises certain theo-

retical implications that go well beyond Mbuti ethnology to the characterization of hunter-gatherer social organization in general (Lee and DeVore 1968; Ember 1975, 1978; Vansina 1980, 1983, 1985; Barnard 1983). Bearing this in mind, and even while relying principally on Turnbull's own materials, I think it is readily demonstrable that patrifilial sub-bands or sections of the band are not only present among the Epulu Mbuti, but they along with band units play a crucial role in the integration of overall Mbuti social order. I suggest, moreover, that they do so clearly in terms that are homologous with the notions of family and Forest that I have already described.

When a new camp is established in the Forest, the nuclear families of the band arrange their separate huts roughly in a circle around a central hearth (Figure 1c) (Putnam 1948:335; Turnbull 1961:69). This communal hearth is assembled each day from firewood and embers collected from the hearths of every member family in the band, and it possesses the identical associations of "fire" and "vagina" (Turnbull 1965b:211, 264n; 1978b:181, 202; 1983a:58). The space immediately surrounding the band's central hearth is generally dominated by males. At night, bachelors and elder males gather there and sleep, frequently joined even by married men. Women and children tend to associate in the peripheral zone of the camp where the family huts are erected, sleeping inside (Turnbull 1965a:213; 1965b:123; Ichikawa 1978:164–165). On the ceremonial occasion of *molimo* funerary performances, the band's central hearth serves as the *kumamolimo* "hearth of the *molimo*," and the majority of the ritual activities dominated by the men are focused there (Turnbull 1960b).

The Classification of Kin and the Forest

The band consists of bilaterally extended family relations, as the terms for categories of "kin" or "relatives" are applied to all band members regardless of "actual" or "known" biological connection. The salient principles of differentiation implicit in this nomenclature are generation and gender (Turnbull 1961:126–127; 1965a:246; 1965b:110–111, 269; 1983a:33). All members of the band are thus *amua'i* ("sisters") or *apua'i* ("brothers"), *ema* ("mothers") or *epa* ("fathers"), *tate* ("grandmothers") or *tata* ("grandfathers"), or *miki* ("children") (Turnbull 1965b:110; cf. Turnbull 1981:205; Ichikawa 1978:185). Significantly, Turnbull has frequently glossed relations between classificatory "siblings" (*amua'i* and *apua'i*) as "friends" (e.g., 1965b:269–270, 363; 1965c:292, 294).

The band consists, then, of a metaphorical representation of the relationships obtaining between and compounded among members of the nuclear family, on the one hand, and of the Mbuti collectively as a unit in relation to the Forest on the other. The very term for the territorial band is the same as for Forest, or *ndura* (Turnbull 1965b:276). Moreover, as I have described above, the band expresses virtually the identical iconic proportions as the family hut and Forest in its circular or spherical form with centrally and peripherally marked features.

The Total Community of Forest Bands

The classificatory kinship nomenclature just outlined, however, is not restricted merely to the band in which one is resident. Since marriages are by rule virilocal and tend to be exogamous as to the band (see below), the members of any particular band possess grandparents, parents, siblings, and children in other bands. And even when postmarital residence is contrary to rule, as sometimes occurs when individuals or families join or visit another band, the newcomers are automatically classified within the group's existing web of kin ties. In addition, any member of a band who is so joined or visited is entitled on that basis to return the stay and be similarly incorporated back into the newly created relatives' home band (Turnbull 1965b:222–223).

By means of these inclusions, all Mbuti of all Ituri bands are potentially classified as kin according to the terms of the indigenous nomenclature (Turnbull 1983a:124). It is

evident also that this sense of common kinship identity is consciously shared by the Epulu and other Mbuti themselves (Turnbull 1965b:93). The most inclusive womb or sphere of all—the Forest—itself encompasses all Mbuti in a fundamentally kinship-based relationship; they are, after all, its children (Turnbull 1978b:215; 1983a:17). "Relatives (friends) are everywhere" (Turnbull 1965b:222).

So Mbuti society at this most inclusive level is constituted also of the same categories of kin classification as are involved in the relationships of the family, band, and Forest.

The Sub-band

We must now consider the patrifilial extended family or sub-band sphere, alternatively identified in the literature as "patrilineage," "lineage," "hearth," "lineal family," "family group," "clan," "subcamp," or "section" of the band (Putnam 1948:335; Turnbull 1965b:27, 46, 105–107, 188; 1983a:14; Harako 1976; Tanno 1976; Ichikawa 1978). The controversy of the sub-band's existence and significance arose initially from Turnbull's denials (1965a:176n; 1965b:27–28, 97–109, 117, 228; 1965c:291; 1968:137; 1983a:36, 120, 139–140) of any effective form of patriliny (or kinship; see above) contrary to the early reports of Putnam (1948) and Schebesta (1938–1950, 1933:219–220; cf. Czekanowski 1924; see also Steward 1936; Service 1962). On the basis of more recent and sophisticated studies among many other Mbuti bands, the significance of the patrifilial sub-band is unequivocal (Harako 1976; Tanno 1976; Ichikawa 1978; Vansina 1980, 1983). For the Epulu Mbuti, a close reading of Turnbull's own data simply does not support his position:

> [T]he band today is not a unilineal-descent group, and may be comprised of a score or more lineages. [Turnbull 1965b:46]
>
> We can see a slight tendency for women to build the family huts so that men of the same lineage will be near each other. . . . in disputes lineage members tend to support each other, but not necessarily. [Turnbull 1965b:98]
>
> There is at least a consciousness of lineage and an apparently felt need to maintain some kind of balance between lineages. [Turnbull 1965b:100]
>
> Lineages are known, and these are always patrilineages . . . the camp plans indicate a general tendency toward lineage solidarity, particularly in times of crisis. [Turnbull 1965b:108]
>
> [Camp] sites are even chosen because they afford greater privacy between the various [sub-bands or] sections. [Turnbull 1965b:106]
>
> It was not good for brothers to separate. [Turnbull 1965b:223]
>
> While a band cannot be recognized as a unilineal entity, there are within it divers lineal units. [Turnbull 1965b:225]
>
> Nor is there any lineal leadership, let alone any stable lineal unit, with which village lineal units can relate, *except in theory*. [Turnbull 1965b:228, emphasis added]
>
> There is a recognition of the patrilineage, and a tendency toward patrilocality. [Turnbull 1965b:285]
>
> Patriliny is a stated norm, but exceptions often occur, such as when a man belongs to a large hunting band and his wife to a small one. Thus, the band cannot be called a patrilineal, patrilocal unit although this is what it tends to be. [Turnbull 1965c:293]
>
> . . . the fragmentation of hunting bands into tiny units that can manifest their social solidarity with even greater intensity—the lineal family as distinct from the larger "economic family," which is how the hunting band might be described. [Turnbull 1983a:14]

There can be no question, then, that for the Epulu as for other Mbuti the patrifilial sub-band is a salient unit of the band.

Symbolically, however, the sub-band is another "womb" or "sphere," one known by the term *ndura*, and thereby structurally homologous with the family, the band, and the total Forest community (Turnbull 1965b:276; cf. Ichikawa 1978:144). It ideally includes

a core of patrifilially related males plus their wives and children, consistent with the rule of "patrilocal" (i.e., virilocal) postmarital residence (Turnbull 1965b:140, 219, 285; Ichikawa 1978:143; Vansina 1980:135). Members are linked terminologically through the same kin categories (i.e., grandparents, parents, siblings, and children) as are all band members and related members of different bands (Turnbull 1965b:273). During the honey season, Epulu sub-bands occupy separate circular camps in the band's territory, each with its own central "hearth" or "vagina" where the member males regularly gather. In other seasons, the band's sub-bands unite in net-hunting camps (Turnbull 1965b:221; 1965c:298–300). Even so, distinct sub-bands continue to reside as identifiably circular units within the contours of the broadly circular band, and maintain their own hearths separately (Turnbull 1965b:188, 1978b:181; Ichikawa 1978:153). Within a sub-band's circle of huts, families whose relations are particularly close or intimate reside either adjacent to or directly across from one another (Turnbull 1961:68; 1965b:123; 1965c:294; 1978b:179; 1983b:38–39).

In conceptual outline, therefore, the sub-clan expresses the identical spatial and social patterning exemplified by the family, band, and overall Mbuti community (Figure 1d).

Rebirth to the Sub-band and Band

Before describing the integration of these homologous groups as a total social system, it is worth noting that every Mbuti is ritually reborn to his/her respective sub-band and band much as had been done with the family and Forest soon after parturition (see above). On the fourth day of its life, the infant is brought outside the parents' hut to the sub-band hearth. It is introduced to its sub-band relatives, and they select for it a personal name from among the names of Forest plants and animals (Turnbull 1978b:172; 1983b:36).

At the age of two, the child is similarly taken out to the band's central hearth, and while the father feeds it its first solid food, the attention of the whole band as a unit is formally focused upon the child for the very first time (Turnbull 1983a:41; 1983b:40).

The Rules and Contradictions of Marriage

What, however, of the most inclusive of the Forest's social manifestations? What of the sphere comprised of the entire community of Mbuti bands? If Mbuti society does indeed constitute such a totality at this level of organization, might it not also have its own corresponding rite of rebirth? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to consider the connections between sub-bands and bands in the context of intermarriage, both exogamous and endogamous, through which the total community of Forest bands is formed.

As I have already described, one way in which the sense of social inclusiveness for all Mbuti is conveyed is in terms of classificatory relations among grandparents, parents, siblings, and children, and principally between "mothers," "fathers," and "children." With marriage and its corresponding symbolic representations, however, the Forest is alternatively represented as "friend" (i.e., "sibling") and "lover."

Mbuti marriage is regulated according to a plurality of stated rules and preferences generally consistent with "sister exchange" between exogamous sub-bands. The marriage of an unrelated man and woman should be balanced by a second marriage of a classificatory sister of the groom with a classificatory brother of the bride (Putnam 1948:337; Turnbull 1961:121, 1965b:141, 1972:302; Ichikawa 1978:142). However, there is also an expressed preference for exogamous marriage exchanges between bands that are genealogically and spatially "distant" from one another. Marriages between immediately "adjacent" bands are thereby avoided (Turnbull 1965a:176, 220–221, 1965b:222, 1965c:290, 1972:300, 1983a:37; Godelier 1977:55). Nevertheless, in theory each band has equal access to every other band, traced through the central no-man's land, making them all "adjacent" (Turnbull 1972:296, 1983a:28–30; cf. Ichikawa 1978:147). There is, then, a contradiction implicit in these rules: marriage between "distant" bands amounts to

marriage between "adjacent" bands and is therefore simultaneously both preferred and avoided.

Other aspects of Mbuti marriage regulation are similarly contradictory. While Mbuti tend statistically to be exogamous as to the band, marriages between sub-bands of the same band are tolerated and occur with some frequency (Turnbull 1965a:220–221, 1965b:275, 1965c:293; Ichikawa 1978:145, 150–151, 153). The explicitly exogamous unit in Mbuti society, again, is the sub-band rather than the band (Putnam 1948:335; Turnbull 1965b:97, 204; Ichikawa 1978:145, 153). Nevertheless, marriage between constituent sub-bands goes contrary to the preference for marriage with "distant" bands. Permissible band-endogamous marriages involve contradiction as much as band-exogamous ones do.

Other assertions, while partly redundant to sub-band exogamy, suggest a number of important refinements or clarifications. Unions between persons who are affiliated with a sub-band through connection on "mother's side" as far back as mother or "father's side" as far back as father's mother are prohibited (Turnbull 1965a:180, 1965b:111–112; Ichikawa 1978:145). Consistent with this expression of complementary filiation (Fortes 1959), a groom can look to his own mother's band and sub-band for a "sister" to marry reciprocally into his bride's band if a woman of his own sub-band or band is unavailable for sister exchange (Turnbull 1965a:221). It seems also that marriage is prohibited between children born of women who have either fathers' or mothers' sub-bands in common (Turnbull 1960a:181). Thus, the sub-band unit is employed in quite a number of more subtle discriminations to distinguish the marriageable from the nonmarriageable.

Most curiously, also, the terms for classificatory "sibling" (*amua'i* and *apua'i*) are applied to same-generation affines and potentially marriageable nonrelatives as well as to cognates (Turnbull 1965b:269).

But there is still one further marriage restriction that makes these apparent contradictions and their precise implications both explicit and intelligible. Generally, it is stated that Mbuti should not marry relatives, but it is asserted in this way: When certain ancestors who may have been related as kin in their own lifetimes died before any of the living elders came to know them, their descendants can be regarded as unrelated for purposes of marriage (Turnbull 1965b:205, 1983a:38) In other words, people who would otherwise count as kin beyond the boundaries of sub-band and complementary filiation mentioned above are not regarded in this context as kin and are thus marriageable. By this means, erstwhile kin or relatives become non-relatives and therefore potential affines.

Combining the divergent implications of these rules with the prevailing tendency to classify all Mbuti as kin makes apparent the exact contours of marriage contradiction. In effect, the total community of Mbuti is an endogamous[7] unit (Turnbull 1972:296). After untold generations of intermarriage and procreation, regardless of "known" genealogy or band membership, all Mbuti are self-consciously kin or potential kin. The Mbuti even go so far as to establish kin ties between two strangers and members of their respective bands merely on the basis of becoming "friends" (i.e., classificatory "siblings") or even common "friends of a friend" (Turnbull 1965c:292, 1972:303). Thus, a Mbuti can practically establish a kin connection to any other Mbuti of any other band (Turnbull 1961:206, 1965c:292, 1983a:38). So, even when the Mbuti marry "exogamously" according to rule, it still amounts to an "endogamous" union as regards the totality of Ituri Forest society.

Obviously, this is where the sub-band figures in the process of social integration and reproduction, and why it is a crucial unit of the society. To marry any Mbuti of roughly the same age or generation amounts to marrying a classificatory "sibling" who, all else aside, should be avoided as a "lover" (Turnbull 1983a:124). Some means of systematically transforming more distant kin into non-kin, therefore, is essentially called for. The boundaries between patrifilial sub-bands principally serve this function, in conjunction with the preference for marriage with distant bands, the rule that allows marriage between kin whose common ancestry lies beyond the knowledge of living elders, and the

noted Mbuti tendency for genealogical "amnesia" or "telescoping" (Turnbull 1965b:112, 117, 146; Barnes 1967).[8]

For my purposes here, there are several important consequences of marriage regulation viewed in these terms. First, the Mbuti comprise a single kin-based collectivity of grandparents, parents, siblings, and children within which everyone finds a lover and marries. This collectivity, of course, is precisely coterminous with the most expansive womb or sphere of all, the Forest. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the Mbuti have also attributed the notions of "sibling" and "lover" to the Forest along with the other, chiefly parental, kinship metaphors. To the Mbuti, the Forest is as much a representation of affinity as it is of consanguinity.

Second, a very precise homology exists between the total community of bands and the society formed by any single band. As already noted, marriage is preferred with distant over neighboring bands, and postmarital residence is ideally virilocal (Turnbull 1965b:140–141, 219, 285). A band's wives are drawn principally from the plurality of other bands that hunt and camp in the further peripheral reaches of the Forest. In the circular assembly of its huts, then, a band's current affinal and cognatic links to other bands are iconically represented. In a sense, each of the huts occupied by one of these wives constitutes something like an "embassy," say, of her natal band; correspondingly, she is like its "emissary" or "ambassador." Therefore, just as the distinct spherical womb-like bands of the forest are positioned around the periphery of the central Forest womb, the diverse wives' huts are distributed in the periphery of the camp surrounding the central womb or hearth of the residential males. And inasmuch as the Mbuti practice "sister exchange," the appropriate configuration of specific affinal and cognatic ties should be replicated in the spatial layouts of each of the other bands as well.

Rebirth to the Total Community of Forest Bands

I can now address the question of ritual rebirth to the total community of bands inhabiting the Ituri. Most appropriately, this function is performed in the *elima* puberty festival for male and female youths.

In significant part, the *elima* festival serves as a preliminary to marriage (Turnbull 1960a, 1961:196, 198). When one or more girls experience their first menstruation, they are joined by their same-age female "friends" (i.e., "sisters") of the band in a specially erected *elima* hut (Turnbull 1965b:133–134). Female "friends" of other bands are frequently invited to participate also (Turnbull 1983a:46). Once the *elima* girls have gathered, they attract to their camp a substantial number of male youths. Like the girls, the *elima* bachelors may come either from the host band or other bands (Turnbull 1961:189, 1965b:137).

The activities of the youths are supervised by a man and woman known as the "father of the *elima*" and "mother of the *elima*," respectively (Turnbull 1960a:183, 1961:188, 1965b:136). Their unmarried charges, though drawn from a plurality of the Forest's bands, are in this context the "children" in common of the *elima*, and thus by implication Forest "siblings" to one another. Yet the terms of these relations are contradicted by the fact that at least some of the erstwhile siblings interact as "lovers." Indeed, the principal preoccupation of the *elima* youths is "enthusiastic lovemaking," and the ultimate outcome for many of them marriage (Turnbull 1965b:137, 138). Indeed, the critical aspect of supervision provided by the *elima* "father" and "mother," with the help of other adults and elders, is to ensure that only those pairings occur among the youths that are legitimate in terms of the marriage rules enumerated above (Turnbull 1960a:181, 1965b:137).

Therefore, while *elima* initiation sorts out the marriageable youths into likely "lover" relationships, it accords them all joint rebirth into a womb or sphere constituted of the community of all Forest bands (or at least the closest facsimile of it practicable on the local scale).

Social Organization and the Symbols of the Forest

This total community of bands, as represented in *elima* "mother," "father," "children," "siblings," and "lovers," is homologous with the other social manifestations of the Forest: the family, the sub-band, and the band. Not surprisingly, the members of these groups, hardly lacking notions of kin classification and relationship amongst themselves, systematically call forth the identical kinship metaphors as regards their Forest deity. However, with the Forest the Mbuti do not appear to invoke at random all the possibilities as provided by the prevailing nomenclature system. Only four of these terms seem especially to be alternatively employed, and among these four there appear to be two contrastive and complementary pairs.[9] Thus, the Forest is principally identified in some contexts as "father" and "mother," in others as "sibling" and "lover."

The exact configuration of these kinship metaphors for the Forest reverberates with several of the most discernible features of Mbuti social organization. The issue of gender distinction and "equality" among the Mbuti, for example, has already received considerable attention in the literature (Turnbull 1981; Leacock 1972, 1978:268–269; Rosaldo 1974:40–41; Sacks 1974:213–219, 1982:125–138; Cohen 1978; O'Kelly 1980:85–89). Here, with both the "father"/"mother" and "sibling"/"lover" distinctions, gender is implicit even though in certain circumstances the complementary terms of each pair are equated: "Father," while not female, is "a kind of mother" (Turnbull 1978b:178); and, as I have discussed already, opposite-sex, ideally nonrelated "lovers" are selected from among classificatory "sibling" relations.

Similarly, the juxtaposing of "father"/"mother" with "sibling"/"lover" bears meaningfully upon the peculiarly Mbuti allocation of authority within the sub-band and band according to age distinctions. According to Turnbull, no one age level wields absolute authority in all situations. On certain occasions even "elders" must yield to the authority of "youths" (1965b, 1978b). The Forest deity as "father" and "mother," on the one hand, and "sibling" and "lover" on the other, expresses this principle most clearly with the conjoining of both cross- and same-generational relationships, respectively. The Mbuti pattern whereby authority is crosscut by age, in other words, is embedded in the double-paired conceptualization of the Forest in kinship terms.

Most important for my purposes here, however, the joint pairing of "father"/"mother" and "sibling"/"lover," emphasizing consanguinity and affinity, respectively, summarily expresses the countervailing implications of exogamy and endogamy around which the entire system appears to turn. The key symbols of the Forest in Mbuti culture, in other words, capture systematically the core contradiction of their social organization.

Conclusions

In the course of pursuing Mbuti symbols of the Forest to this degree of abstraction, quite a number of issues have been addressed, both ethnographic and theoretical. Here I shall reiterate what seem to be the most salient of these.

Representations of the Forest in Mbuti culture involve numerous kinship metaphors. In the Mbuti's own interactions with each other, these same notions of kinship identity and differentiation clearly predominate. The Mbuti case hardly qualifies, therefore, as a prototype for societies lacking or de-emphasizing kinship (cf. Turnbull 1965b, 1983a; Godelier 1977; Meillassoux 1973). Indeed, precisely those factors that have been interpreted to indicate a degree of "kinshiplessness"—the genealogical imprecision, the failure to distinguish "real" or "biological" from "fictive" kin, the reluctance to discriminate subcategories from among relations of the same terminological category (e.g., "distantly" versus "closely related" kin within the band), even the seeming hesitation to call attention to patrilineal or patrifilial subdivisions of the band—signify instead a highly consistent concern with kinship, but kinship as *they* conceptualize it in the terms of *their* culture, not ours. Moreover, the fact that Mbuti exhibit considerable ambivalence about making distinctions among kin or about the boundary separating kin from non-kin is a clear in-

dication that structural contradiction is part of the essential nature of that system, and not at all that kinship itself is of little concern. Quite the contrary! It simply cannot be that the Mbuti would take these predominantly kinship metaphors and elaborate them logically and systematically to the extent they have if kinship were not to that degree significant in their lives. And inasmuch as the one standard (i.e., their god, the Forest) by which everything in their universe is measured and judged constitutes a representation of themselves, it is not exaggerating to suggest that kinship is centrally important in Mbuti culture and social organization. Kinship largely *is* the Forest.

In examining the system of symbols by which the Epulu Mbuti conceptualize this notion of Forest, I have revealed a number of structural homologies that systematically radiate through many contexts of their culture and social organization. These include the iconic representations of spheres, wombs, hearths, vaginas, and so on with respect to the Forest; the isomorphisms of family, sub-band, band, and total Forest community; the sequence of ritual rebirths that every Mbuti undergoes; and the definitive participation in all of these spheres of "fathers," "mothers," "siblings," and "lovers." One particularly significant dimension of this structuring is that it prefigures a process founded upon the contradiction between exogamy and endogamy that is absolutely crucial to the systematic integration of Mbuti society at every level. Each Mbuti is compelled to marry a nonrelative, but all Mbuti happen to be relatives. Here especially, the categories of kinship classification and the divisions between sub-bands play the definitive roles and enable the system overall to accomplish some degree of dynamic resolution. In this respect, structuralist efforts such as this need not necessarily be dismissed as merely descriptive or inherently static.

Finally, I suggest that structural analyses of hunter-gatherer cultures are as potentially fruitful as the more common materialist-empiricist interpretations. The ethnographic materials upon which this ideational exercise rest were all collected by materialist- or empiricist-inclined researchers, and doubtless their results have possessed considerable insight. However, they have not necessarily gotten the whole of it; indeed, they have tended to leave aside or unexplained precisely those dimensions of the culture and social organization (i.e., the patterns *for* behavior) that here comprise the very essence of the analysis. The value and necessity of retaining both perspectives in some kind of complementary relationship have been widely recognized for quite a while now in anthropology, but with hunter-gatherers the decided imbalance persists nonetheless. Structural analyses such as this, therefore, may well help supply a necessary corrective. That the Mbuti have been shown here to possess a tradition that is as symbolically rich, well-structured, and dynamic as anywhere else may perhaps lead students of other foraging groups to entertain the same likely possibility: that the cultures of hunter-gatherers, along with the rest of us, are as much products of logically ordered symbolic expression as they are of material, ecological, demographic, economic, historical, or even social forces.

Notes

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[1]Despite some notable local variations, especially as concerns subsistence technology, Mbuti culture and social organization exhibit considerable uniformity throughout the Ituri Forest (Turnbull 1961, 1965b; Schebesta 1938–50; Harako 1976; Ichikawa 1978; Tanno 1976; Abruzzi 1980; Cavalli-Sforza 1986). This analysis specifically deals with the traditions of only one Mbuti band—that

associated with Epulu village in Zaire. Nonetheless, my treatment of the Epulu Mbuti is expressly intended to illuminate the comparable institutions of other Mbuti groups as well.

[2]Principally, Turnbull 1961, 1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1978b, 1983a, 1983b; see also Putnam 1948.

[3]For example, and particularly pertinent to the ethnographic materials considered in this paper, refer to my remarks below regarding Turnbull's strongly materialist and empiricist definitions and claims as to the absence or insignificance of "kinship," "patrilineality," and the "sub-band" among the Epulu Mbuti.

[4]Although the "ideational" definition of culture is opposed here by radical "empiricism," this is not to say that it is necessarily any less rooted in standards of empirical verification and reliability. The empirical facts appropriate to structural and symbolic analysis simply consist in ideas and representations rather than objects and events alone. Ideationalist approaches such as this, in other words, are as potentially scientific or unscientific as any others; see Mosko 1985:1–13, 234–249.

[5]For present purposes, this will strictly involve Mbuti relations with other Mbuti. Relations between Mbuti and their non-Forest villager neighbors will be addressed along these same lines in a substantially larger, more detailed, and comprehensive examination of Mbuti culture and social organization now in preparation.

[6]Another critical dimension of the controversy surrounding Mbuti "kinshiplessness" concerns the overall relationship between the Mbuti and the villager groups with whom they associate; see note 5 above.

[7]Mbuti women do marry non-Mbuti villager men with some frequency, and these marriages have an important bearing upon the symbolism of Mbuti-villager relationships. However, inasmuch as they are strictly asymmetrical, with the offspring of these unions, like villagers, not regarded by Mbuti as "children of the Forest," the Mbuti themselves remain a structurally endogamous society; see Turnbull 1965b:49–50, 84.

[8]I have analyzed an analogous conflict between endogamy and exogamy for the Bush Mekeo and the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea in terms of "conception" and "de-conception" (Mosko 1983, 1985). As in those cases, final resolution for the Epulu Mbuti is achieved in mortuary ritual, termed *molimo*. To have encountered essentially the identical predicament in such unrelated social settings as these suggest that the contradiction of endogamy versus exogamy may well characterize many more of the world's societies than had been previously supposed.

[9]For a fuller discussion of the dynamic properties and theoretical significance of this particular structure, see Mosko 1985.

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