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978-0-521-10538-5 - Quadripartite Structures: Categories, Relations, and Homologies in  
Bush Mekeo Culture

Mark S. Mosko

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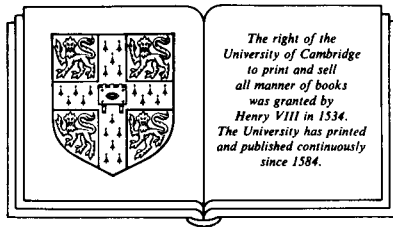
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MARK S. MOSKO

Hartwick College



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Dedicated to the memory of Kaiva Muniapu

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Frontmatter

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*Are we satisfied, then, that everything  
is generated in this way –  
opposites from opposites?*

– Plato's *Phaedo*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

<i>List of figures, tables, and maps</i>	<i>page viii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Introduction: the problem and the people	1
2 Between village and bush	21
3 Body and cosmos	38
4 Sex, procreation, and menstruation	60
5 Male and female	73
6 Kin, clan, and connubium	100
7 Feasts of death (i): de-conception and re-conception	150
8 Feasts of death (ii): the sons of Akaisa	182
9 Tikopia and the Trobriands	200
10 Conclusions: indigenous categories, cultural wholes, and historical process	234
 <i>Appendixes</i>	
1 Village resources derived from bush resources	250
2 Ingestion and ingestibles	251
3 Categories of food	254
4 Work and nonwork skills	256
5 Categories of human dirt	257
6 The myth of Foikale and Oa Lope	258
7 The <i>afinama</i> myth	265
<i>Notes</i>	271
<i>Bibliography</i>	278
<i>Index</i>	289

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978-0-521-10538-5 - Quadripartite Structures: Categories, Relations, and Homologies in  
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Figures, tables, and maps

### Figures

1.1	The trajectories of Nature and Culture	page 5
1.2	Fipa mythical and social values	6
1.3	Hohfeld's fundamental legal relationships	8
1.4	The structure of the Klein group in mathematics	9
2.1	The sphere of ordinary transfers	26
2.2	The sphere of extraordinary transfers	36
3.1	Water transformation: boiling	42
3.2	Water transformation: roasting	42
3.3	Food transformation: boiling	43
3.4	Food transformation: roasting	43
3.5	Food transformation: drying	44
3.6	Food transformation: ripening	45
3.7	Work transformation: house building	47
3.8	Nonwork transformation: hunting	47
3.9	Culinary work transformation: boiling food	48
3.10	Culinary nonwork transformation: roasting food	48
3.11	Sweet/unsweet body transformations	50
3.12	Blood and flesh synthesis: capacities for work and nonwork	51
5.1	Female ritual cycle	85
5.2	Male ritual cycle	89
5.3	Alternating gender categories	93
6.1	<i>Atsi atsitsi</i> terminology (patrilateral)	105
6.2	<i>Atsi atsitsi</i> terminology (matrilateral)	106
6.3	<i>Ipa ngaua</i> terminology (matrilateral)	107
6.4	<i>Ipa ngaua</i> terminology (patrilateral)	108
6.5	<i>Ipa ngaua</i> terminology (Ego's and descending generations)	110
6.6	Composite lineage history (Nganga clan)	119
6.7	<i>Pisaua</i> friendship network (Amoamo tribe)	131
6.8	Children-of-"first cross-cousin," or "second-cousin," marriage	135
6.9	<i>Akaila</i> public marriage compensation exchange	136
6.10	Agnatic, cognatic, and affinal bloods	140
6.11	Bush Mekeo marriage system (i)	143
6.12	Bush Mekeo marriage system (ii)	146
6.13	Bush Mekeo marriage system (iii)	147

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10538-5 - Quadripartite Structures: Categories, Relations, and Homologies in  
Bush Mekeo Culture

Mark S. Mosko

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Figures, tables, and maps* ix

7.1	Mortuary feast-givers and -receivers	172
7.2	Mortuary-feast categories and clan identities	176
7.3	De-conception and re-conception of grandmothers' clan bloods	178

**Tables**

1.	Village and tribal populations	15
2.	Offices, lineages, and subclans of Nganga residential clan	118
3.	Friend and nonfriend <i>kofuapie</i> betrothals and elopements	133

**Maps**

1.	The Bush Mekeo	14
2.	The Bush Mekeo and their neighbors	17



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10538-5 - Quadripartite Structures: Categories, Relations, and Homologies in Bush Mekeo Culture

Mark S. Mosko

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface

Not without humor, Bush Mekeo villagers will occasionally retell the story of how their ancestors first came to be known as the “Bush” Mekeo. Whenever a government patrol entered the area during the early years of contact, they say, their ancestors hid in the bush until the strangers had left. Once, upon entering a deserted village, a patrol officer remarked, “Oh, so these must be the ‘Bush’ Mekeo, because they are always hiding in the bush.” Figuratively speaking, the Bush Mekeo have remained “in hiding” ever since. In his classic study, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, Seligmann does refer to “a small but uncertain number of villages on the middle reaches of the Biaru River [which] must be considered to constitute an ethnographical annexe to Mekeo” (1910:311); but now, even after nearly a century of contact with Europeans, the Bush Mekeo are still essentially unknown to the outside world. Although there have been numerous in-depth studies of their closest neighbors, virtually nothing substantively new concerning the Bush Mekeo themselves or their culture has appeared. This book is partially intended to help fill this lacuna and bring the Bush Mekeo, as they would say, “out of hiding.”

This book, however, also attempts something rather more theoretical and, for that reason, potentially fruitful in other ways. In the course of struggling to interpret Bush Mekeo tradition in my own thought as a “total social phenomenon,” a structure of an unanticipated form gradually took shape. It became clear that the meanings of many (if not most) of the culture’s diverse contexts are ordered by and through it. That structure, as it turns out, is generally fourfold or quadripartite. But with the specific inner operations of its working among the categories of the culture, it is more accurately characterized in the terms of homologously bisected dualities. This book is, then, principally devoted to revealing this particular structure and its logically consistent ramifications throughout Bush Mekeo culture.

Nonetheless, I was inevitably led to a detailed exploration, in much the same terms, of several related Oceanic cultures – most notably, the classic cases of Tikopia and the Trobriands. The results of those inquiries are contained in this volume as a separate chapter. Finally, emboldened,

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Mark S. Mosko

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

*Preface*

perhaps, with these (to me) ethnographic and comparative successes, I have ventured still further. I propose that, in a manner previously unsuspected, the structure of bisected dualities characterizes – or underlies, informs, and links together – a number of fundamental, but otherwise heretofore disconnected, formulations within social anthropology itself, particularly those dealing with the relations of myth to ritual and of structure and synchrony to history and diachrony. Therefore, in addition to bringing the Bush Mekeo out of hiding, this book represents an effort to reveal what perhaps has long been hidden within two of the most well-documented ethnographic cases on record and within a few of the more notable sectors of anthropological tradition as well.

I feel by now a particularly keen sense of indebtedness to the many persons who have helped and encouraged me along the way. Although I shall never be able to recompense them adequately, I should now like to acknowledge these debts and express my gratitude.

The writings of Edmund Leach, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Marshall Sahlins, and David Schneider among living anthropologists stand out clearly as my main theoretical inspirations. My greatest intellectual debt of a more personal and immediate sort is to my doctoral adviser, Professor Stephen F. Gudeman. The exceedingly high standards for quality, integrity, and thoroughness he demands, not so much of others as himself, have done more to inspire and guide me to think like a social anthropologist than he might ever guess. Professor Eugene Ogan conscientiously served the no doubt tedious role of my principal theoretical foil; thus, in addition to keeping me laughing and moving, he at least tried to keep me honest. Others whose scholarly support and encouragement I cannot fail to mention are Robert C. Kiste, Alan Rew, Paul Wohlt, Marilyn Strathern, David G. Baker, John M. Ingham, Mischa Penn, Richard L. Haan, and Laurie Lucking.

My fieldwork and dissertation write-up were generously supported by a predoctoral fellowship from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (Grant No. 01164). Hartwick College has also financially helped in bringing this book into being by covering some of my costs of revision and production. Ron Embling skillfully worked to complete the numerous figures contained in the text. Dot Parmerter and Georgette Corrao meticulously typed the several drafts of the manuscript.

Among those deserving foremost credit for their contributions to this study are the Bush Mekeo villagers themselves. The patience, generosity, and tolerance they so often displayed were truly astonishing. For the benefit of those Papuans who might someday read this book, I would like truthfully to declare that never were my family and I without food among the Bush Mekeo. I must especially acknowledge the friendship so freely

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Mark S. Mosko

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xiii

offered my family and me by Pavivi Menga, Mangemange Muniapu, Menga Piomaka, Ameaua Tsibo, Thomas Ae, Peniamo Peniamo, Peter Keanga, Apou Kaengo, Piomaka Fala, and Marcello Apou. Particularly, I would like to thank the village women collectively in appreciation of their many kindnesses to my wife.

A great many others outside the Bush Mekeo from 1974 to 1976 also provided invaluable assistance in one form or another. Among them are Bill and Antje Clarke; Paul and Ruth Wohlt; Paul and Agi Kipo; Bishop Vangeke; Fathers Boudaud, Didier, Diaz, and Bouseau; Sister Christine; Epeli and Barbara Hau'ofa; Michael Monseel-Davis; Eliza Marshall; Nigel and Joan Oram; Andrew and Marilyn Strathern; Jeff and Laura van Osterwick; the staff of the National Archives; Waigani Lodge; WCA Boroko; Bereina Government Offices; and the country order department at Steamy's. I thank them all for their time, energy, resources, and hospitality.

My parents have given me their unflagging support and encouragement (moral and financial) at every stage in spite of their silent misgivings about so unlikely a profession. My gratitude for their wisdom and constancy goes very deep. My wife, Cassandra, has been a constant source of undivided support, encouragement, and inspiration. Her toils and sacrifices in the field and afterward have allowed me immeasurable freedom, without which I would have been devastated long ago.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my wide-ranging indebtedness my to Bush Mekeo confidante, Kaiva Muniapu. Kaiva took it as a personal mission to teach me his people's customs and to see that I did not leave without understanding them to his satisfaction. But above everything else, Kaiva taught me the meaning of trust and friendship and, by his own example, what it means to be a Bush Mekeo man. Because Kaiva's untimely death in May 1977 prevented his ever seeing this book – the final realization of his efforts and dreams as much as my own – it is especially fitting that it be dedicated to him.

M. S. M.