

*The Biography of an Ethnographer
in the Age of Encompassment*

what we said of it became a part of what it is . . .

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If there was anything that attracted me to Papua New Guinea, it was the image of the frontier and that sensation of otherness—a certain conductivity as much bodily as intellectual, the simultaneous deferral and momentary collapse of being-in-the-world when I encounter another reality, honed from different principles and shaping other kinds of cultures and lives. But I also came to understand that I had been trained to this experience by an anthropology that, to constitute its focus, exalted the theater of culture by bypassing an account of the West's encompassment of Others. There was a celebration of culture as the backbone of a human spirit that could keep alive indigenous traditions against the onslaught of Western economy and polity. Small victory dances highlighted the words and works of those I admired, tales brilliant with how natives, armed only with their culture and on any punter's sheet a woeful underdog, fended off the predatory forces of colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity. Culture fought for the sanctity and recognition of the Other in a world in danger of losing its soul to the madness of cold war politics and the monotony of commercialized culture. More than another concept, it was the source of their salvation and our redemption—moral and analytical. Culture was heroic.

But these hymns to culture came with a certain loss of sight. Elided from theory and theorization was the effect of ethnographers on indigenous practice and the construction of the other, the relations of meaning and power that bound them to other colonials (especially missionaries and district officers), and more globally, the relationship between the possibility and methods of ethnography and the encompassment of Others. To make matters better and worse at the same time, the necessary critiques of structuralism, functionalism, and Marxism emphasized agency, resistance, and the discursive construction of reality in ways that make it more difficult for us to come to terms with the giant structural transformations that have reconfigured, and continue to reconfigure, the lives of the peo-

ples of Melanesia. Anthropologists have been reluctant to insert themselves in history and to take the contemporary history of Melanesia as intrinsic to their theoretical enterprise. But such reluctance cannot conceal the reality that our ethnographic isolation of the local universe is increasingly inadequate because the global processes now transforming Melanesia, although manifesting locally, cannot be explained by what happens within the rural communities that Melanesian ethnographers study and take as their center of analysis. This means that an anthropology that isolates the local level will, with every passing year, grasp less and less of the dynamics of local culture and practices—less, ultimately, of what it means to be a Melpa, Maring, or Mekeo in this age of encompassment. Reconceptualizing ethnography on these terms begins by reinserting the ethnographer into the processes of encompassment and coming to terms with how ethnography (of Melanesia, for example) has imagined its own project. What follows is an effort to begin conceptualizing how anthropology honed its methods in reaction to the realities of encompassment and the conditions of its own production.¹

Anthropology Refocusing

Since the end of World War II and the age of empires, the most powerful and insistent dynamic of societal transformations has been the globalization of modernity. On this terrain, modernity beyond the Western frontier propels a special kind of sociocultural transformation, moved by imperatives as diverse as the exportation of Western mass media culture and electronic capitalism, with its extraordinary compression of time and space, to the realization that the “ecological” politics of one nation-state have telling implications for other peoples and nation-states. If there is any characteristic of the globalization of modernity it is the West’s relentless embrace of Others. From insular Melanesia to the highlands of Burma, from the jungles of South America to the African savannah, people who for so long stood at the epicenter of anthropological discourse now enlist in labor unions, attend to issues of democracy and the role of the state in everyday life, form voluntary organizations (e.g., women’s and environmental organizations), migrate en masse across national borders in search of economic opportunities, respond to the scripture and strictures of interstate agencies (especially the International Monetary Fund), create their own species of Christianity, immerse themselves in commodity culture, and invoke the music and messages of Western cultures for their own ends. And they accomplish this in ways comprehensible only from the analysis of the dialectic of Western encompassment and indigenous lifeways.

Even though anthropologists and fellow travelers have not developed

a theory of encompassment, they have now begun to respond to its vibrations. Impelled by the realities unfolding before them, they have started to focus on its agents, institutions, and processes. Issues such as the spread of commercialized Western culture (Foster 1995a), the production of national identities (LiPuma 1995; Otto and Thomas 1997), the linkage between state and local communities (Polier 1994; Jorgensen 1996), and the creation of new regimes of subjectivity have come to the fore (Carrier 1992; Gewertz and Errington 1995). Animated by accounts such as those of the Comaroffs (1991, 1997), anthropology is slowly sliding toward the study of the forces and processes of encompassment. Like most scientific turns and reflections, there is an air of the obvious, the refocusing reality-driven as the accumulating facts and features of the “modern” Other seem to fall beyond the perimeter of conventional wisdoms. Here, anthropology, like the peoples that it studies, must find a way to both retain its traditions and reinvent itself.

This turn can also be read ironically in that anthropology is returning to the site of its own genesis: the fact that the birth of ethnography was inextricably linked to the march of Western capitalism, colonialism, and Christianity. Throughout Africa, Amazonia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania the possibility of ethnography was of a piece with the arrival of that primitive band of colonialists—the missionaries, foreign officers, adventuring businessmen, and the like. Perhaps out of a kind of collective angst and embarrassment, anthropologists seem to ignore their own history. Or they engage in acts of public contrition that, in the spirit of the Western saints (Augustine’s *Confessions* comes immediately to mind), are also acts of hubris. By inflating the sins of anthropology, they exaggerated its importance to the colonial project. This view publicizes “the ethnographer as colonizer” even as it sublimates the dynamics of encompassment. This strange conspiracy of ignoring and confessing seems to have been crystallized partly out of a deep Boasian respect for the culture of others, partly out of the fear that these other ways of being human were destined to disappear (see, for example, Max Gluckman’s foreword to *The Lineage System of the Mae Enga* in which he calls upon anthropologists “to record the social life of the inhabitants [of New Guinea] before it changed radically” [1965: v]), and partly because it was undeniable that anthropology was a part of that encompassing process. While the character and consequences of encompassment have motivated anthropologists to record the life of the Others and have been overly confessed by a certain kind of mea culpa anthropology, they have only begun to be adequately theorized and integrated into anthropological discourse. This failure might be called a kind of collective defense mechanism on our part. By the hair shirt of confession and the act of defending the Other—of “sticking up” for those who had to bear the burden of the Western

advance—anthropologists have felt that they were absolved of the obligation of coming to terms with the ambiguities and contradictions of their relationship to a continuing process of encompassment. My argument is that while anthropologists were (and remain) rather indeterminate agents in the processes of encompassment, their response to their participation, characterized by denial and defense, inflected the trajectory of anthropology. Ignored in theory and method was an account of encompassment, the relationship between ethnography and the agents and institutions of encompassment, and the influence of anthropology's history on its forms of thought. Despite genuflection to history and the project of George Stocking (e.g., 1987), the conditions of the genesis of the discipline have done more to define its theory and methods than anthropologists have been willing to let on. We must, at all costs and of all people, escape confusing the entailed politics of our discipline with the manner in which history is actually made.

Also motivating the anthropological commitment to culture and community—the “cultural logic” and dynamics of the local level—was the abject failure of those who focused on world economy, politics, and history to connect their global visions to local realities. In the hands of liberal scholars, such as Wallerstein (1974), Rostow (1978), Wolf (1982), Held (1987), and Hobsbawm (1994), to cite some of the big-men of their respective fields, there arose a kind of *enlightened Westnocentrism*. While these authors were universally sympathetic to the encompassment of Others and often inveighed for their emancipation from imperialism and dependency, they grasped the reality of the Others entirely through the prism of Western lights. This vision of the Other's world could not but efface local level relations to the point where they vanished over the historical horizon. These approaches, while extraordinarily different in many respects, had a common point of departure in locating the historical dynamic and the motive force of transformation squarely with the West. Missing in action was the agency of indigenous agents. Also absent were those times when, like an orchestra without a conductor, cultures that were similar had similar responses to Western encroachment, allowing them to produce a collectively powerful response. Untempered by a genuine understanding of local cultures and communities, this Westnocentrism, however enlightened, failed to appreciate the ways in which indigenous agents and institutions inflected the face of encompassment. The Westnocentric view conflated the construction of a world history and economy with the predatory and imperialistic aspects of Western nation-states. Against this blemished Western approach to others, the manifestos of theorists like Sahlins (1981, 1985) and Geertz (1983) and the unquestioned mission of numerous ethnographers were to illuminate the categories, logics, and understandings of the local level—culture with a capital C. So anthropologists not

only sought to record the peoples encompassed, but were themselves part of that process; in the division of scientific labor, they were the anointed scribes of culture and community. There were surely multiple lines of determination, but the received product was an anthropology that bracketed the forces and effects of encompassment. To the genuine detriment of the project of comprehending the globalization of modernity, anthropology has removed itself to the sidelines.

That result initially is as surprising as it is detrimental. In the fields of encompassment defined by the encounter of cultures, it would have seemed, at least at first blush, that anthropology occupied a privileged position: What other discipline had devoted itself to understanding the peoples and cultures being encompassed? No other discipline has taken as its enterprise the art of others understanding others. If the encompassing West was to hear the voice of others above the din of wars, hot and cold, and the hum of electronic commerce and culture, anthropology had a mission and responsibility. The gift of anthropology as critical theory (and why I am proud of my profession) is that, whatever else its faults, it has never taken this responsibility lightly. Moreover, the globalization of modernity crosscuts and simultaneously engages fields from law, literature, and religion to economics and politics. The making of the nation-state implicates everything from economic policies and the politics of identity to state-sponsored religions and political rituals, nationalist novels and the arts, and the construction of legal, educational, and health systems (similarly with the infiltration of capitalism and Western culture). Here too it would appear that anthropology has a natural advantage because of its well-developed multidisciplinary perspective and because anthropologists were inherently sympathetic to world systems theory and the general project of portraying Western colonialism and capitalism. In a one line review, of all the sciences of the social, anthropology appeared most predisposed to be able to tackle the complex issues summarized by the notions of modernity and globalization. Nowhere more than in Oceania where ethnographers have developed an indispensable and necessary understanding of the structure of the societies being transformed. But there is alas an equally strong countervailing impediment. The concept of transformation current in anthropology is too compressed, undertheorized, and marginalized to grasp the character and dynamics of these multilevel transformations. It is a concept of transformation so mired in the immediacy of local life, so fixated on indigenous culture and community, that little room remains for a robust theory of encompassment. Why, we should ask, has anthropology been so hobbled? Why should the anthropology of Melanesia lack a theory of transformation adequate to societies whose fate is increasingly determined and mediated by supralocal structures. Having conducted fieldwork in Galicia, Spain, and the Florida Keys in

addition to the Solomon Islands and the Highlands of New Guinea, having focused on topics as traditional as kinship and marriage and as contemporary as the nation-state and European Community, the following observations are more than a little auto-ethnographic.

*Intellectual Capital and
Our Imagination of the Other*

From the ethnography of Malinowski to modern-day writings, the anthropological imagination has linked the “Westernization” of the Others to their corruption. The Melanesian missionary anthropologist Sir Walter Ivans may have persuaded himself that a good dose of Western religion and manners would propel “his” Islanders up that ladder of civilization from debased heathens to God’s gentlemen, but anthropologists saw capitalism, colonialism, and Christianity as corrupting indigenous traditions. Certainly there is no doubt that confrontation with these empowered systems of economy, polity, and ideology motivated change and deflected these societies from their “natural”—that is to say, mostly self-determined—trajectory. The unspoken sentiment that the infiltration of the three Cs undermined and corrupted local culture went hand in hand with a determination to document the thought and practices of Others before they transmuted beneath the heavy weight of Western influence. Given their mission and motives, anthropologists not only demonized their own culture (and took a certain pride in doing so), they read this demonization into their anthropological subjects. They wanted to attribute to indigenous agents a rejection of capitalism, Christianity, and the commodification of social existence so badly that otherwise shaky ethnographies, epitomized by *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* (Taussig 1980), became celebrated texts. To make matters worse, the analysis of the globalization of modernity often bore an unhappy consanguinity with development studies, thereby linking it to the chauvinistic, ethnocentric, and self-serving programs of development agencies such as USAID and the World Bank with their massive log, mine, and dam the indigenous people’s projects.

This image of social change shaped the theoretical habitus of anthropology. It was translated into the practice of everyday academia in a way that was as forceful as it was silent. To begin with, those ethnographers who worked in the most remote, primitive regions were awarded more “intellectual capital,” not only because of their triumph over physical and emotional hardships but because they worked in unpolluted, still self-determined cultures. A gradient of capital accumulation evolved with Melanesia, parts of Black Africa, and Amazonia on one end of the spec-

trum, fieldwork in Western Europe and United States at the other end. Entire universes, like the Indian subcontinent and the high plains of the Andes, lay somewhere in between. The spectrum was always shifting and negotiated with agents enticed to exaggerate the remoteness of “their” people and thus the purity of their ethnography. This exaggeration of remoteness entailed bracketing of the agents and implications of encompassment. Missionaries, colonial officials, and sometimes the knowledge, desires, and dispositions of a whole generation needed to be redlined from the script. This was done mostly in silence with the understanding that the trained eye could scrape “modernity” off the ethnographic canvas to reveal the original picture of indigenous tradition. So we read (and assign to students) Victor Turner’s fabulous description of Ndembu initiation rites (1967), aware only in another more remote region of mind that many of these men-to-be were the sons of transnational mine workers, that these Ndembu were involved in labor union organization at that time, that they were inundated with Christian missionaries, and that Ndembu had long been enslaved by, with certain lineages party to, a Portuguese-backed, transcolonial slave trade.² Given the dispositions of his discipline, Turner feels comfortable in omitting these realities or dealing with them en passant in the introduction. Both his original account and an endless parade of citations and reinterpretations have all assumed that the economy of encompassment did not inform the meanings and morality of the ritual. For anthropologists, the observation that modernity was overwhelming the world seemed to belong to a different region of the brain than that which wrote the ethnographies.

Along another vector, more intellectual capital accrued to those who wrote about social organization, subsistence economy, cosmology, religion, and local-level politics than forms of social transformation. It went without saying (because it did not need to be said) that someone who studied exchange in Melanesia accrued more intellectual capital than someone who studied the effects of the arrival of Wal-Mart on a mid-sized, mid-Western, middle-class American town; more intellectual capital was awarded to those who analyzed kinship and violence in the Amazon than social harmony in some Alpine village. I know this both because I live in the habitus of the field and auto-ethnographically: veiled and direct, seriously and jokingly, more times than I can possibly recall, other anthropologists have legitimated my project in Spain by reference to my having already done “real fieldwork” in Melanesia. Given these sentiments, it is hardly startling that for a long time within the field of anthropology, the polarity was away from the study of encompassment and those ethnographic venues where it was most visible. One result is that more ethnographers—at last tally, twelve—have studied and more has been written about the eight thousand Maring than the many million Galicians (north-

western Spain), with the studies of Galicia that do exist mostly focusing on small “isolated” villages where modernity has reputedly been held at bay and the ethnographer can go about the task of describing familial kinship, religion, smallholder production, and the micropolitics of class relations. Aware of the system of rewards of intellectual capital and endowed with theories and methods developed for small-scale non-Western cultures, the anthropology of the West did not animate changes in the anthropology of Africa and Melanesia, but has rather come to resemble it. The anthropology of ourselves did not form a bridge that would have allowed concepts such as democracy and civil society, as well as more sophisticated theories of capitalism and its epistemology, to cross over into the study of Africa and Melanesia. It should occasion concern but little surprise then that when the anthropology of Melanesia began to focus on capitalism, Christianity, and the emerging nation-state it did so the only way it knew how, indirectly as refracted through the effect they had on local communities.³

Epistemology and Ethnography

Concerned to uncover the reality of tradition in a world already touched by the West, anthropologists evolved a number of epistemological strategies that mostly entered their analyses as presuppositions. These were happy strategies in that by securing the concept of Culture, they secured the anthropological object and thus the place of anthropology in a division of scientific labor that was also a division of the academe. The presuppositions were not to be called into question on pain of a certain kind of betrayal of one’s discipline.⁴ The leading presupposition, alluded to above, is what one may call the transparency of tradition. It was, and to an enormous extent still is, assumed that ethnographers can accurately parse a practice into those aspects that are indigenous and those that are Western imports. There are key phrases that have entered the ethnographic lexicon. “Remarkably resistant to change” and “stable” are perhaps the most popular, though “retaining its inner core of traditional meaning” is my personal favorite. What does it mean when an ethnographer, speaking about an Amazonian people who have endured the vision and violence of contact for nearly a century, tells us that “while by *outward*, perceptible signs the indigenous population blended into its Brazilian settler surroundings, there was an *inward*, actively circulating discourse imbuing the world with a wholly different significance” (Urban 1996: 15; emphasis added)? Ethnography lives here by the metaphor of inside and outside, the inner voice and soul of a people versus the outer cloth of modernity. The unspecified claim is that encompassment and context do not inflect social meaning. As long

as a practice, or aspects of that practice, appear to resemble their precontact forms, the ethnographer can infer a conservation of form, value, and ultimately power. Where the form has changed visibly—including obviously Western elements—this leads to an archaeology of meaning. Like levels of stratification at an archaeological site, practices accumulate layers of meaning as they evolve through the epochs of local history. By digging down beneath the surface, the ethnographer can uncover the original forms and values complicated by the advance of the West. Or so it was assumed as a kind of subtext. One corollary of this premise is that the ethnographer assumes that the traditional elements of a practice are the essential elements in contrast to the more contingent Western aspects, which, after all, were added on at a later date. This vision of the anthropological project brackets the objective structure of encompassment that, in its encounter with local lifeways, generates the context for the production of meaning. It brackets the desires and dispositions instilled in agents by the structuring effect of this encounter. And so this vision cannot help but ignore the practice of recovery itself in which the ethnographer, often through the memories of the elder generation and the stories handed down, reconstructs the past in the present tense—all the while assuming that this representation of the past will be, more or less, a pure re-presentation, a documentary unencumbered by immediate interests, the structuring effects of discourse itself, or the loss of knowledge entailed by the advent of a modernity of which the anthropologist is a part. We can clarify these points and dispel these assumptions by turning to a case on how ethnographers think, about ancestor worship for example.

It is the dry (actually less wet) season of 1980 and one of the Kukupogai subclans, commanded by a senior clansman, had decided to sacrifice pigs to their ancestor spirits in a “customary” manner. Bear in mind that, influenced by what the mission men portrayed as a “bad habit,” the Kukupogai had abandoned ritual sacrifices in the sacred groves for more than a decade. In terms of performance, the ritual appears to be formally identical to the descriptions that other ethnographers (i.e., Rappaport 1968) have given of earlier performances, some performances antedating Western intervention in Maring society. The chanted invocation of the spirits in metaphorical speech, the sacrifice of the pig in the sacred grove (which needed to be cleared ahead of time because it had become overgrown with vines and shrubs from nonuse), its dissection with the ritual bamboo knife, and its apportionment and consumption seemed to replicate the precontact world. For the ethnographer this appeared to be a kind of enchanted scenario in which people resurrect their tradition intact, thereby providing a lens into the past. Making matters even better, my housemate swore to the authenticity of the performance. A reading of the ritual performance in

terms of what unfolds before the faculties of ordinary experience (most Melanesianists as well as most Africanists practice substantialism without reflection) sees the cultural reproduction of the past.

Further investigation would reveal, however, that the meanings and values of the performance had transformed rather radically. To begin with, the agents grasped the sacrifice as a resurrection of their past, thus invoking and taking advantage of a distinction between the past and present that was itself a touchstone of modernity. The sacrifice was also held in the context of, and in opposition to, the Anglican Church, whose priests and especially lay catechists had expressly condemned such ritual, at times branding it satanic. But the ritual was held in opposition not only to the Church but to a related, rival clan that, in contrast to the Kukupogai, had endorsed and aligned itself with the Christian missionaries. The holding of the ritual by these senior Kukupogai was simply one more salvo in their perpetual political struggle with other clansmen. The ritual was also held not without a generous measure of intra-subclan dispute as many members of the junior generation showed their distaste by declining to participate. In response, several senior and elder Kukupogai accused them of betraying their clansmen and siding with their “friends” in the Christian-pandering clan. And whereas kastam restricted participation in traditional ceremonies to subclan members, this version included people from entirely different clan clusters, the point driven home by their stated desire to have an anthropologist present to record custom. Indeed, they were so concerned that I should record their ceremony correctly and in writing that several times my friend Gou chided me with a nudge for not taking notes on what he thought were important points. The result was that the ceremony included those who should have been excluded and was absent those who would have been included. Finally, the senior clansman who had organized the sacrifice was planning to run for local political office, leading some to speculate about the implications of the performance for the upcoming election (i.e., that unable to entice the support of the junior generation he had decided to appeal shamelessly to the senior and elder generations). In effect, though the manifest form of the ceremony may have remained more or less unchanged from precontact performances, its functional value and indexical meanings had changed so dramatically that calling it the “same” ritual was itself an ideological statement. Certainly, there is no way to write out of the current performance the collective notion that it was legitimate to include foreigners. There is no way to write out of the performance the collective notion that written texts—on the image of the Bible (see chap. 7)—have greater authority than embodied oral tradition. There is no way to write out of the ceremony the conflict between generations, the accusation of betrayal invoking notions of religious politics and friendship that were unknown to the past. There is no way to undress the

participants and put them back in customary garb or eliminate the cross talk in pidgin. In other words, senior clansmen readapted the generative principles of ancestor-community exchange to the realities of a world encompassed. Despite its canonical fidelity to those old-time acts and utterances, these pigs for the ancestors were only and eloquent testimony to the encounter between tradition and encompassment.

Due to the unavoidable limitations of most field research, conversation and interviews between the ethnographer and local agents have been the dominant motif and method in the construction of the ethnographic object in Melanesia. Our custom of talking to local agents about their customs, coupled with our desire to recover what we could not witness, encouraged ethnographers to adopt a second presupposition: that there is an ontological authenticity to language, particularly narrations about the past. The premise is that the production of an ethnographic text from the discursive interaction between ethnographer and informants transparently encodes a past event, such that the process of entextualization, the contextual sensitivities of that event, and the production of a decontextualized ethnographic text have no bearing on our interpretation of the event in question. This premise was necessary because ethnographers have sought to recover the meanings and values of practices they could not witness or encountered only in a state of transformation. In no small way, the processes of encompassment that made ethnography possible censored some customs, rendered others obsolete, and instigated all sorts of substantive changes in content and context, meanings and motives. Toward this aim, ethnographers have assumed that the culture of a culture was made up of the relation between systems (e.g., kinship, ritual, and economic) that could be rendered as texts (epitomized by the kinship diagram, ritual cycle, and rules of exchange) and that the wording and structure of the speech events used to construct these texts did not inflect their construction.

A great virtue of what has been called the New Melanesian Ethnography is that it illustrates that the first clause of this theory—that a culture consists of a set of domains that are exterior to, and imposed upon, one another—relies on an implicit theory of Melanesian practice that, living an underground existence, is both ethnographically inaccurate and theoretically unexamined. In an illuminating page, Marilyn Strathern (1988) submits that in the practice of Melanesian sociality one domain or “area of life” is neither imposed upon nor an exteriorization of some other domain, and that, consequently, there is no supposition of a society that stands over and against the flow of persons in practice (102). The Melanesian materials seem to be trying to tell us that their social life does not consist of a set of discrete systems that react to, comment upon, or regulate one another. And if these difficulties were not enough, the second clause of this

proposition depends on an equally troubled theory of linguistic practice. The problems intrinsic in this “folk theory” of speech became especially transparent when ethnographers asked different people to recount “the same” myth, inventory the presumably shared marriage rules, specify the general norms of exchange, or explicate the meanings of a ritual and its symbolism. Not only did different agents offer different accounts—difference here defined, of course, against the expectation of sameness—but often the same person offered “different” accounts depending on occasion and situation. The same myth was seemingly never told “exactly” the same way more than once, it was disquietingly difficult to get informants either to enunciate or agree on the “shared” marriage rules, the “norms” invoked to explain one exchange too frequently failed to tally with those invoked to explain an apparently similar exchange, and sometimes people would answer they had absolutely no idea what a certain symbol meant. What does it mean about the nature of knowledge and the context of speaking when some people inform me that, prior to contact, “we” settled all disputes by violence, other people assert that there were ways of peacemaking, and still others maintain that they do not know/recall how disputes were settled, this commentary distributed (but by no means perfectly) by gender and generation. Sometimes this information found its way into the published text (Schwimmer 1979), but usually it was something that ethnographers discussed among themselves. In writing cultures, they tended to create coherent, mutually shared, well-circumscribed texts—blueprints and maps of cultural lifeways. The method ironed out the discrepancies by systematizing the data on the pretext—literally and figuratively—that the task was to determine the grammar of the beliefs and practices in question. The method disconnected variability rather than integrating it as significant cultural and methodological data.⁵ Left uncharted was the extent to which variability and its contemporary form, or inversely the nature of the sameness imagined about the past, were themselves the product of people’s encounter with precisely those processes of which the anthropologist was a part.

In the meantime, studies in the ethnography of speaking were proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the structure of speech events bound representation to interests through multiple lines of mediation. The result is that descriptions of the world are systematically and usually nonconsciously bent because they were governed by a practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles (Silverstein 1981; Parmentier 1989; Bourdieu 1991). Other analyses of the ethnography of speaking indicated that the very act of giving a description of the past systematically skewed that description (LiPuma 1983; Silverstein 1987). Also complicating the process of entextualization was the reality of translation: either ethnographers translated the indigenous language—characteristically

with a subject-object-verb format—into English or informants translated a speech event into pidgin at the ethnographer's behest and then the ethnographer translated the pidginized description into English. All of this should more than underscore that speech is never purely referential and that, accordingly, there is no guarantee whatsoever that people's narration of the past is ontologically authentic (Silverstein 1979 and 1996; Gumperz 1982; Gee 1985; Mertz 1988; Parmentier 1993; Hill and Irvine 1993; Briggs 1986; Hanks 1996; Silverstein and Urban 1996). The problem with inferring the character of the past from contemporary interviews is that it assumes, and seduces us into believing, that we can "know" the structure and meaning of a social practice apart from the contexts of its production. This in turn implies that agents can transmit meaning and value across social boundaries, such as generations, without incurring precisely the kinds of recontextualization wrought by the globalization of modernity. Though, as the preceding citations underline, there is now a small mountain of linguistic evidence demonstrating the impossibility of constructing or representing a practice independent of context, the premise was essential in order to bracket the ways in which encompassment had reshaped the indigenous context for speaking about practice and the ethnographer-informant context for speaking.⁶

The third strategy, already commented on extensively by Fabian (1983) and others, was the suspension of temporality. The sleight of time. Aided and abetted by the notion of the transparency of tradition and textual authenticity, this premise was embodied in the use of what came to be called the ethnographic present and in the notion that it was unnecessary to historically situate an ethnography. In his comparative study of the Highlands from the colonial encounter to the present, Feil (1987) is explicit: due to the character of his sources, his account is written in an ethnographic present that, in his own words, "makes scant mention of changes . . . wrought by colonialism, the penetration of capitalism, the cash-cropping of coffee, the rise of provincial government and the emergence of the modern state" (10). Like a public confession at a New Age church, the philosophy here is that if we own up to our mistakes and lapses, then God will wink his eye. Anthropologists would describe, and one could fill in just about any people and practice, Maring marriage rather than Maring marriage in some historical time frame, the assumption being that what the ethnographer gleaned from talking to contemporary informants flowed back indefinitely in time. As Feil observed in the same reading of the literature, "some authors describe events and institutions which no longer existed at the time of writing or reconstruct them only as they might have been" and "often" they do not make this clear or specify "the time period under scrutiny" (10). The success of this "strategy" declined with the duration and intensity of a process of encompass-

ment that was not itself analyzed. The strategy may have had analytical traction in the first decades after the opening of the Highlands when many of these societies had felt only the first fire of contact, though speaking of his fieldwork among the Kyaka (in what is now the Enga Province) in the mid-1950s, Bulmer observed in a footnote that “my information on Kyaka religion is deficient” because of European contact, “particularly the impact of Christian mission activity” (1965:160). Nevertheless, bracketing the years of change and the comments of pioneers such as Bulmer, ethnographers have continued to commit themselves to the ethnographic present nearly a half century later (i.e., most of the ethnographies of Melanesian cultures published since 1990 speak about indigenous practices in the present tense and without clearly delineating the period under investigation). The understanding is that social practice can be parsed temporally into what is of “modern” origin—and can hence be omitted, placed in the far land of endnotes, or appended in a chapter on colonial influences—and what was traditional and went back indefinitely in time and space, even as it continued into the future. Left uncharted was what this temporal move entailed, theoretically and methodologically. What precisely was added and subtracted in the event of recovery under the determinate social conditions of encompassment? What kinds of information shine through clearly, and what kinds are subject to re-presentation? Why do members of different generations sometimes recount different stories about their past? How, under the conditions of encompassment, does controlling the past help one generation to maintain or wrest power from another, and how does controlling the ethnographer’s ethnography figure in this project? The questions are complex and critical, but they can only be broached once we take them seriously.

It is impossible to appreciate the place of these presuppositions in the ethnographic imagination or the almost religious commitment to them—which often entails that ethnographers deny to themselves their own experience—unless we grasp that these suppositions provide a solution to the contradiction inherent in an implicit, that is to say inadequate, theory of the relationship between ethnography and the conditions of its own production. Like a refuge for our collective psyche, these presuppositions enable their users to bring all of the technologies of Western power (state authorization, science, money, writing, etc.) to bear on the other without having to acknowledge their transformative powers. The ethnography of Melanesia, like that of Africa, the Amazon, and beyond, ranged from unbridled endorsement of these epistemological strategies to grudging acceptance. But that is, of course, not the point. The crucial point is that anthropology, born in the midst of encompassment, defined its project as the description of “Otherness” and crafted an epistemological perspective to meet this objective. However successful this endeavor, the epistemology

that underwrote the ethnography—that these societies were transparent in their traditions, spoke to the ethnographer in a purely referential language, and were suspended in time—hindered the creation of a genuine understanding or theory of encompassment. Insofar as the thrust of ethnography is to factor out, bracket, and transcend the agents and institutions of Western encompassment and the resulting transformations, there are no ways or incentives to construct a theory of them. This was (and remains) especially true for Oceania and the New Guinea Highlands in particular, which (like the Amazon) became privileged ethnographic venues precisely because here it was easier to bracket the processes of encompassment.

This is not to say that there was no anthropological awareness of the penetration of colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity. Only that the received epistemology, in concert with the system of rewards and incentives, led to a constricted theory of transformation and a narrow ethnographic focus. For the most part, studies of change and transformation were told entirely from the perspective of the local culture and community. And they were filtered through the politics of anti-imperialism and the defense of the Other as told from the perspective of anthropology. The perspective inspired a number of writers to reduce the globalization of modernity to coercion, resistance, and appropriation: that is, capitalism, colonialism, and Christianity pressured local peoples into adopting Western concepts and practices, and in response these societies did their best to fend off the advance of the West and to appropriate things Western for their own ends. Ethnographers celebrated the ways indigenous peoples fought for the return of the native lands, outwitted the colonial tax collectors, boycotted the plantations and mines, sidestepped the wishes of the kiaps, excommunicated Christian missionaries, secretly engaged in forbidden practices, gave false names to census takers, and created counternarratives that deflected imperialism and helped to preserve their identity and dignity. This vision of the encounter between the West and Others was consistent with the foundational epistemology. The notion of resistance is the consort of the notion of the conservation of the forms and values of pre-encompassment culture. The underlying and unidimensional philosophy is that, despite the presence and pressures of the West, indigenous concepts and practices remained as they were because local agents chose to conserve their customs and slip those the West imposes. Accordingly, the ethnographer can discount the presence of missionaries because people still appear faithful to their customary religion. By the same logic, the notion of appropriation goes hand in hand with the supposition that Western influences can lay like trousers and T-shirts over the still intact body of local practices. Thus an archaeology of meanings and values is ethnographically justified because it is already inscribed in indigenous

intent. Accordingly, an ethnographer can analyze a marriage exchange involving money the same as an exchange involving pearlshells because the former is an appropriated substitution for the latter. Not to belabor the point, but this understanding of the encounter between the West and Others—fixated as it is on resistance and appropriation—is inadequate because it is entailed and constrained by the original epistemological pre-suppositions.

This take on encompassment also seeks to restore the history and validate the culture of the Other by joining them to our own demonized history. But conceived as a tale of resistance and appropriation, their histories turn out (alas!) to be stories of victimization and heroism. Their agency is that of the oppressed. Their culture is a culture of self-defense. They have finally been cornered even in the most remote corners of the world—their final source of salvation, isolation, now removed forever. What is more, all of the action unfolds at the community level: the penetration of capitalism, the sects of Christianity, and the colonial and postindependence state regimes are conceptualized as exogenous, homogeneous, and distant forces, and are thus not themselves taken as objects of analysis. The Comaroffs (1991) note that

white colonizers, if they are thought worthy of attention at all (cf. Beidelman 1982:1), have more often than not been treated as a homogeneous class—in and for itself. The divisions among them, and the often acute conflicts between them, have been largely ignored in the history of the Third World. At best they are regarded as instances of . . . “non-antagonistic contradictions.” (10)

Resistance and appropriation surely do occur. But the story has only begun. What is sorely missing is an account of the complexity of the encompassing agents and institutions, the complex process of mediation by which capitalism, Christianity, and the modern state influence local communities, and the concepts, logics, and practical structures of vision and division within these communities that inspire appropriation, enchantment, carnival, imagination, novel identities, refurbished political strategies, improvisations of all sorts, and the forms of knowledge, desire, and dispositions that make the social world work. Foster (1995b:15) is right when he maintains that, taken alone, neither the symbolic innovations, logics, and operations of simple reproduction nor the imposition of the forms of modernity, such as the commodity and the possessive individual, can account for the changes in the practice of the encompassed. Only an account of their relationship will do. For an anthropology of modernity (has there ever been any other kind?), accounting for transfor-

mation requires the community project of articulating a theory of encompassment. This includes the reinsertion of ethnography and the ethnographer back into history.

Ethnography and the Genesis of the Maring

At the turn of this century, the poet's intellectual, Wallace Stevens, wrote the now legendary poem "Description without Place," in which he contemplated the character of inscription and desire. He observed that, caught between memory and emotion, description

is an expectation, a desire,
A palm that rises up beyond the sea,
A little different from reality:
The difference that we make in what we see

With a poet's grace and good Kantian manners, Stevens tells us that a description is not only not the thing itself, but that it is bent by our desires; and further that the memories that are formed become the ground of still further descriptions. What Stevens is saying is that the epistemology and interests of the observer cannot help but to inform the description, and more than that the ground of describing itself. The poet then goes on to wonder whether there might not be a description that is more "explicit than the experience" itself. Wonder no more: for the Western narrative of Melanesia, of which ethnography is a part, has done precisely that, by first creating a description of others that embodied our epistemology and desires, and then watching as this description became the reality itself.

In the process of inventing itself, of delineating an object of inquiry that distinguished it among other sciences, anthropology defined and developed two notions of culture. The first was culture as that ensemble of concepts and practices, material and social arrangements, that permeate and orchestrate people's lives. All humans have culture much the same way as they have language. On the most common interpretation, the power of culture to orchestrate the relations between agents turns on the reality that they share these concepts and practices, material and social arrangements. By extension, this allows a second and ultimately different concept of *culture as peoplehood*. The notion is that culture as a system of understandings, concepts, and logical operations circumscribes and delimits the universe of the shared, thereby producing culture as peoplehood. Because the concepts, practices, and arrangements of one people are distinct from another, the form of peoplehood created is sovereign and totalized. Accordingly, it is possible to talk not only about culture but the exist-

tence of “a culture.” Transported to Melanesia (among other venues), the implicit idea has been that this shared set of structures and practices leads to the crystallization of a peoplehood that transcends a people’s own sense of the limits of identity, defined by kinship and marriage. While local agents might accept that kinship and marriage define the limits of sameness and solidarity, in reality a cultural sameness unites a much larger group of people. While, for example, Maring consciousness may imagine no relationship whatsoever between two clan clusters—because they neither fight nor intermarry—in a deeper reality they are all members of the same culture. Thus, it is possible to talk not only about the culture of the people of the Jimi and Simbai Valleys but Maring culture. Or Navaho, Ndembu, Tuareg, Kachin, Innu, etc. culture. And to represent these cultures in mutual opposition to neighboring cultures. In this image, anthropologists perceive a culture as an autonomous, self-animating, and bounded collectivity. The assumption is of a kind of cultural sovereignty and individuality, psycho-symbolically linked to and reflecting the individuality of the ethnographer through the concept of “my people” and all the dispositions and desires thus entailed, not to mention the Western epistemology thus revealed.⁷

There is, and has long been, theory and evidence to the contrary. Thus, to sustain the illusion of a primitive peoplehood requires some denial, which, in turn, requires the work of invisibility for which science is justly famous. The work is not disputed or disproved, simply consigned to the dark. In the Melanesian case, the most obvious example is “Visible Sociality,” an article that is ignored, even by the author’s friends and intellectual neighbors.⁸ In what he considers perhaps his best analysis, Roy Wagner (1988) argued that “the ethnographic literature is founded on a necessity to fix either groups or units (or both) as a beginning point in analysis” (39). This occurred whether an ethnographer wished to treat a people descriptively or theoretically, or even to reduce them to a materially self-interested horde (will the cultural ecologists raise their hand!). Referring back to our society and the inherently comparative character of ethnography, he notes that the “isolation” of these groups and/or units is the analogue of the “Western juro-economic idea of the individual agent,” emanating “as it does from a society based on abstractly defined roles, currencies, and contractual obligations,” not to mention time, space, and labor itself (40). Calling this “the negation of social inclusiveness,” Wagner argues:

In a society in which both social units and the relations or alliances among such units are articulated through social relationships, a unit *in its constitution* is never really alienable from its relations with others. It reproduces itself through alliances

with others, and allies with others through its own mode of reproductive constitution. But this very fact argues for a much stronger statement of contextualization than has heretofore been made. (40; emphasis in original)

Indeed it does. For it suggests that all forms of community are emergent in that they crystallize and become visible only under specific historical conditions. To prove the point, Wagner demonstrates in amazing detail that the Daribi community was protean by design, its borders permeable, its very structure animated by a logic of exchange and interchange with other communities. In this respect, the forms of solidarity produced, such as community and peoplehood, were “much the opposite of the kinds of strictly bounded units that anthropologists have elected to identify and model” as basic to the social (59). A critical aspect of simple reproduction is that boundaries come into being only as they become practically necessary because they are not inherently necessitated by the practices of sociality. For any scale of collectivity, such boundaries are potential, not elements in its table of organization. The realization that boundaries in Melanesia are emergent calls into consideration the larger implications for ethnohistory, especially because people such as Wagner’s Daribi imagine themselves as “intercultural” communities whose various parts have migrated from different locales in the Highlands. This evidence and argument is a challenge to the notion of culture as peoplehood, a challenge that anthropology sublimates in the interests of finding a totality. It is worth asking ourselves why we have collectively ignored a virtuoso performance by one of the best and most famous Melanesian ethnographers. Why “Visible Sociality” has been made invisible.⁹

Although anthropologists have been a tad uncomfortable using the idea of culture as peoplehood in the metropole (for example, what exactly is “Spanish” culture? Some hypothetical soup of Galician, Gypsy, Basque, Catalan, Andalusian, and Castilian cultures?), it became the touchstone for the analysis of Black Africa, Oceania, the aborigines of the Americas, and rural neighborhoods of Southeast Asia. While anthropologists applied the concept of culture as peoplehood everywhere (this is the premise behind the *Atlas of World Cultures* [Price 1990]), it was in these locales especially that this concept of a culture seemed to work naturally. The natural history of a culture was to become autonomous—to shape principalities of meanings and values that were distinct from their neighbors. From an evolutionary perspective, migration, adaptation to the new environment as culturally perceived, and the symbolic logic and practices of social reproduction would cause an original protoculture to fission into two new autonomous cultures. And presumably, each of these cultures would in turn divide—the metaphor springing inescapably to mind that of

cell division. This perspective is a direct outcome of a reading of an archaeological and linguistic record that strongly suggests that all the “cultures” of mainland New Guinea are the result of several waves of migration, followed by processes of expansion and diffusion (Foley 1986; M. Strathern 1988:46; Wagner 1988). By this process, the once empty Highlands became full of separate cultures.

In the Jimi Valley, this ethnographic logic entails the existence of a proto-Maring/Manga culture that over time separated into Maring and Manga culture. Subsequently, the neighboring cultures would sustain their integrity and respect their distance by virtue of the reproduction of these differences. The ethnographic logic presupposes (and one could devise) similar sequences for related cultures through Melanesia. Application of this logic to the Strickland-Basavi region, for example, would show that, despite their portrayal in the ethnographic literature as distinct “cultures,” the “Etoro, Onabasulu, Kaluli, Kasua, Kamula, Bedamini, Gebusi, and Samo are [so] similar in economy, social organization, and ritual [that they] represent historically linked variants of a regional sociocultural system” (Kelly 1993:27). Linguistically and culturally, a regional sociocultural system is also evident for the peoples (e.g., Tairora, Auyana, Awa) of the eastern Highlands (McKaughan 1973; Robbins 1982; Watson 1983). Beyond the Highlands, Gewertz (1983) has explored the extraordinary intercultural connectedness that characterizes Sepik sociality. Jorgensen (1996:193) observes that the ensemble of Mountain Ok “cultures” conceptualize their relationship in terms of descent from a common ancestor and kindred ritual, dietary, and kinship practices. The idea that the Highlands have always been populated by numerous sovereign cultures is based on the marriage of an evolutionary metaphor with a comparative typology. What is missing is actual historical knowledge of regional relationships (Lederman 1991), the generative principles of the production of difference, and the determination as to the significance of these differences. Against this, it is all too easy for ethnographic description to advance the conception of the sovereign culture through the trope of the nominalized subject. Statements that predicate about these cultures (e.g., that depict the Maring as more warlike than the Manga, the Etoro as having sexual practices distinct from the Onabasulu and Gebusi, and so on) prospectively absolve the ethnographic community of having to specify what the worldly referents are for these cultural names, to whom “these” nominals are meaningful, and how their genesis informs their meaning. This is especially true in that favorite framework of Melanesian anthropology, the comparative generalization (e.g., big-man versus great man societies [Godelier 1986]). By substituting a product, namely, a culture, for the generative principles of its production, the ethnographic trope assumes

that Melanesia has always been composed of a multitude of sovereign cultures. Or so it was conceived and presented ethnographically.

Given their relatively small numbers and rather remote location, the Maring should exemplify this use of the term. Maring culture should produce the Maring as a culture. This assumption crumbles under the weight of the ethnography. It is only recently and increasingly, with the development of their relationship to the agents and institutions of encompassment, especially the national state, that the Maring have progressively self-recognized themselves as the Maring. In a reversal of the supposition that a culture was a sovereign unit, the evidence indicates that it is only in the context of encompassment that the Maring begin, indeed have the reason and motivation, to conceptualize the existence of a categorical identity (as opposed to traditional relational ones) or, further, a pan-Maring solidarity. One of the great virtues of Kelly's (1993) *Constructing Inequality* is that it recognizes that the indigenous situation was not characterized by anything resembling sharp boundaries and cultural sovereignties (see also Knauff 1985b). That the people of the Strickland-Basavi region (like those of the Western Highlands) were rather remote should be enough to underline that a paradoxical aspect of the simple mode of reproduction found in Melanesia was that it encouraged fluid community structures. Based on relations of exchange, kin assembled, detached themselves from local groups, migrated to other areas, and reattached to other kin groups. The identity of persons, being inherently relational, responded to the generative principles for the construction of relatedness (such as intermarriage, sharing food, etc.) in ways that were both endlessly creative and faithful to these principles.

The notion that the Maring were not originally a people was itself inscribed in Maring mythology and the oral histories of the formation and fission of communities. Myths of origin of clans often centered on the travels and migration of the founding ancestors. These sagas depicted clans and clan fragments as mobile and labile, attaching and latching onto other groups even as the social entropy of dispute motivates a part of that group to fission off and migrate elsewhere. The picture drawn was of communities whose composition was protean, as unstable as the explosive tempers of big-men. The founding myths of several Kauwatyí clans depict their ancestors as migrating into the Jimi from somewhere in the Mt. Hagen region. Beset by warfare and famine, they followed shimmering stars that led them out of Hagen and across the perils of the Jimi River to their present homeland. Other clan myths of origins (e.g., Isemban cluster) suggest that some of the founding ancestors migrated from due east—from the Kuma or Kandawo regions. The adventures of the ancestors, enshrined in sagas of searching and migration, tell of their attachments to kin-related

clans and of their detachments and subsequent journeys. More recent oral histories tell a similar, if more local, story of the flow of subclans between clan clusters. These histories and myths of origin notwithstanding, Maring clans still imagined themselves as the true and rightful inhabitants of the territories they occupy, a conception that stemmed from their notion of the relationship between land, eating the foods gleaned from that land, and the production of identity (LiPuma 1988). If the Maring do not seem to pay much heed to their ancestors on the question of the origins of community, then again anthropologists have not paid much heed to theirs either. Quite a while ago, at the tail end of *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim observed that “cultures have no fixed frontiers” and that social life tends to “spread itself over an area with no definite limits” (1915:426). True to this observation, when we reach the “borders” of Maring territory we do not find sharp edges, only complex gradients of difference. On the western side are communities that were bicultural and bilingual in the best historical senses of those terms. These communities were composed of both Kalam and Maring clans—the Maring migrating from the Highlands proper to the fringe and the Kalam from the coast upland. Though the languages are genetically unrelated (Foley 1986:237, 243) social practice in the “bicultural” clan clusters appeared to interweave aspects of both Maring and Kalam with a measure of invention thrown in. To complicate matters further, some clans (e.g., Ambek of the Kandambiamp cluster) were “mixed” in that they were comprised of Maring and Kalam subclans. The ethnographic doctrine that each culture must be sovereign here produces an impasse: anthropologists cannot unambiguously classify these clusters as either Maring or Kalam. So especially in the age of the glorification of cultural identity, pity the clansmen and -women of Kandambiamp. Ethnographers who focus on the Maring classify them as either non-Maring (Rappaport 1968:10) or Kalam (Healey 1990:14), while ethnographers who study the Kalam (Reibe 1974) assume that they are Maring. They were not only on a cultural frontier but in ethnographic limbo.

On the eastern frontier lay communities that were culturally and linguistically very similar to Maring communities. Their languages, especially at the border, are mutually intelligible, differing only at the dialect level, and social practices are nearly identical. That they have been classified as a distinctive culture certainly has more to do with the fact that the Yomban and Manga were traditional enemies than with any cultural reality. Due to their animosity, there were no border settlements, leading the colonial administration to interpret this spatial discontinuity as indicative of cultural difference. Ethnographers such as myself have concretized this difference, produced by encompassment, as indicative of a peoplehood, by identifying the Yomban as the easternmost “Maring” cluster and the Kundagai as the westernmost “Maring” cluster. Based on this same scheme, the

Anglican Church at Koinambe created its parish to end at the Yomban-Manga border, and accordingly, Togban, the rest house and dance ground of the Yomban, was the westernmost stop on the circuit of the medical outreach program and the Anglican clergy. The final result was that on the western end of the valley there were two clusters that combined very different languages and converging cultures while on the eastern end there were two similar clusters divided into different cultures and languages.

No one knows for certain where the name *Maring* comes from, though it does begin to crop up in patrol reports in the late 1960s. The best guess is that it is derived from the Kalam term *malng* (Healey 1990:28), which means “others.” What is certain is that *Maring* was not originally a Maring word and that, prior to the advance of colonialism, it had no referential, let alone self-referential, content whatever for the Maring. In the initial years of mission and schooling, sojourns to the coastal plantation and ethnographic visitors, the local focus was still entirely on relations of kinship and marriage. Beginning sometime in the mid-1970s as the first wave of the junior generation emerged from school and returned from the melting pot of the plantation, those with the most exposure to Western ways began to conceptualize themselves as a people. During this time, those from the Simbai and Jimi Valleys first began to refer to themselves collectively as the Maring in contrast to Kalam, Melpa, Manga, and other peoples. Especially in conversations with Westerners, the junior generation began to use the word *Maring* referentially to differentiate themselves from other “native groups,” as one school-leaver phrased it. As was explained to me in 1980, the ignorance of the ancestors was not only that they did not know the names of other peoples, but, worse, they did not know their own name. In this reflective light, the awareness of a peoplehood that always existed but was—like money and writing—only discovered through the Western mind was itself an index of being modern. As a corollary of the emerging concept of peoplehood, and in response to the missions and the state (in both forms) that continually opposed the “native” way of being with that of the Christian, they began to think of their own conventions and practices as an integrated, closed system. The very construction of a past that the new road transcended presumed the existence of a fixed and defining roster of beliefs and practices that constituted that past. Anthropologists played a part in this process. The dozen or so ethnographers¹⁰ repeatedly inquired about the character of local practices and, especially by “training” informants, began to teach the Maring to take their own culture as an object of contemplation. Moreover, by 1980, the Maring not only had a name for themselves collectively, but the junior generation began to deploy an indigenous term, *nomane*, to refer to their collective culture, to a Maring peoplehood. Where before the range of denotation for *nomane* embraced will, intentionality, custom,

and manifest soul, it now assumed the new valence of peoplehood. Both this use of *nomane* and the adoption of the nominal *Maring* were abstract inventions, a retooling of the lexicon to accommodate the changes of modernity. Thus began the progressive movement from the relationality of clanship to the category of our culture. What began as hegemony is ending up as consciousness. In a recapitulation of the evolution of other colonialisms, Melanesians are beginning to reflect back to contemporary Westerners the very image of themselves they saw reflected in the gaze of the patrol officer, missionary, and ethnographer.

As history unfolded in the 1970s and into the 1980s, it was clear, not least to all those concerned, that the recognition of peoplehood was a matter of generation and part of the mode of generation. The elders continued to ignore the existence of the name and, in response to my questioning, claimed that it was impossible to share an identity with those they had fought in battle, either directly or as allied to other clan clusters. They were adamant that clanship and affinity defined the social universe, even as they had begun to lament the passing of their own world. The senior generation in power was thoroughly ambivalent about what the acknowledgment of a pan-Maring identity might mean, as though they were beginning to understand it cognitively but still could muster no emotional commitment or attachment to the concept. They viewed it positively insofar as it was associated with the modern but saw few contexts in which it seemed to make a difference. By contrast, a number of the junior generation professed to having a Maring identity. Indeed, the representation of a Maring identity, even though in embryonic form, was one of the hallmarks of the leaders of that generation. Here is a comment by Abraham, the son of a leading bigman and himself a leader of the junior set, on Maring peoplehood.

Before you [meaning Westerners collectively] came, we did not know that all the clans of the Simbai and Jimi Valleys were related. We thought of this thing like our ancestors did: people were related because they were of the same ground or because they gave each other wives. But now we know what a wontok is, and recognize that whether someone comes from Gai, Nimbra, Togban [all place names associated with various clan clusters], or whatever, we are all Maring. We learned this the first time when the labor recruiters came and took us to the plantations. People were housed according to their group identity. All the Highlanders were in one house, the Sepiks in another, the Maring had one part of the house, other groups had other parts. On the plantation, it was important to stick together because fights occurred all the time.

In school at Koinambe, the teachers are from the coast

[coastal New Guinea, primarily from Oro and Milne Bay Provinces]. They draw contrasts between their customs and ours, between Maring customs and language and those of their place. One of the things we learn in school is where everyone is from in New Guinea. Who is Orakavia and who is Binandere [culturally and linguistically interrelated Oro Province groups].

As our speaker explains, the modern not only brings others into opposition with one another, but retools the concept of otherness in the process. Given the asymmetries of the encounter, the Maring could not help but reflect back to the plantation manager the image of themselves they saw in his eyes. The organization of space on the plantation assumed and inscribed a Western vision that, for all agents, peoplehood was a critical and defining identity. Explaining the layout of worker housing on his plantation, one manager noted that each compound was “its own country.” A giant of a man from a tiny town south of Darwin, with huge fists and leathery skin, he confirmed that part of his job was to break up fights before they escalated. On his view, what he called Coastals, Sepiks, and Highlanders comprised the Melanesian world. Speaking of the Mountain Ok—a term that has no indigenous resonance—Jorgensen (1996) notes that on the plantation men soon discovered that, as far as the outside world was concerned, they were all “Sepiks.” Internally, “grouped together in common barracks and supporting one another in the inevitable urban scrapes, the sons of erstwhile enemies or strangers” learned, at least parenthetically and in this context, to re-imagine themselves collectively in opposition to the peoples of the coast and highlands (195). This notion of identity was also the hinge on which Abraham’s comment made the transition from life on the plantation to that at school. After national independence in 1975, the staff at the Anglican school became more Melanesian and the curriculum was transformed. One of the lessons in civic education of the reformed curriculum that made a deep impression on a number of Maring was heralded: “Kantri Belong Yumi” (pidgin for Our Country). The heartbeat of the lesson was that “our nation” was composed of culturally and linguistically separate peoples who all possessed a common origin, purposes, and philosophy of life and nature. Whether expressed in ancestor worship or Christianity, all Melanesians had a spiritual nature; they all approached and respected the earth in much the same way; and they naturally understand one another no matter their cultural and linguistic differences. In a rehearsal for the concept of nationhood, the lesson espoused culture as peoplehood in order to underline the notion of the nation as an embracing form of peoplehood. In the same light but from a more celestial angle, Father Bailey and his catechist preached numerous sermons across the Maring clan clusters on nonviolence and tolerance

toward others. The two threads of their argument were that peace was something that God wished for all the Maring people and that all Maring should show tolerance toward each other precisely because they had a common identity. The constant and underlying theme was the Maring as the collective children of God. That Jesus was their common ancestor symbolically exemplified this peoplehood. Here is a comment by the manager of the mission trade store.

Before we knew about Jesus everyone thought they had their own ancestors. The missionaries taught us that Jesus is above all of them. That he is the ancestor on top of all the ancestors. This means that we are all related and that we cannot and should not fight with each other. The mission teaches this but old men don't understand; they still revel in the glory days of war, when the axe was used on our enemies [the axe was the privileged method of killing one's enemies]. And though their stories are very good, their time is as dead as the ancestors.

The young Christian avows that the Maring are all related because they are all the descendants of Jesus Christ, thereby providing a charter for the revision of the traditional genealogical calculus. In seeking to establish the place of Jesus, to connect Him to local forms of descent, and explain why God was their father, the mission unconsciously invoked forms of peoplehood. Also implicated in this process was the translation of the Bible into a language called Maring. A Kauwatyí who had been adopted by the Summer Institute of Linguistics translator, Lance Woodward, and then educated in English did the translation. Naturally, he translated the bible into the dialect spoken by his people of the western Jimi, thereby not only establishing the existence of Maring as an autonomous language but standardizing a particular dialect as that language. As a closer look at any of the major studies of Melanesian languages should suggest (Franklin 1981; Foley 1986; Lynch 1998), a language is a dialect with Western friends. Moving eastward along the Jimi across Manga terrain and into the world of the Kuma, at no point along this continuum can we draw a clear line between mutually unintelligible languages. Ethnography can best analogize this linguistic pattern as a series of overlapping circles in which the degree and dimension (semantically, phonemically, etc.) of overlap were uneven, thus creating variable gradients of difference. The value that agents attached to these differences varies over time, space, and contexts for action. For their part, ethnographers from Rappaport to myself have continually assumed that Maring were not only a culture but a peoplehood. Ethnographers never justified this perspective. Here as with other Highland societies, it was so deeply inscribed, so much the unmarked

understanding, that, as a matter of tradition and convenience, ethnographers did not see what they already knew. They found it difficult to imagine any other choice.

What was not hard to imagine is that modernity creates new contexts for action that both presuppose and encourage the conception of peoplehood. The assumption of the plantation manager was that every Melanesian who spoke a mutually intelligible tongue possessed a solidarity born of collectivity. The categorical identity of Maring was assumed to trump the relational identities of clanship and kinship. Moreover, the conditions of life on the plantation invested this new form of identity with great practical value. In a less violent idiom, the Westernized teachers—Western precisely and in part because they had internalized a modern notion of peoplehood—presumed that a Maring peoplehood must exist, and that, accordingly, a pedagogical tool was to compare and contrast cultures. Similarly, the mission men and Bible translator presumed the existence of a Maring peoplehood and language as a condition and product of their own efforts. Thus modernity continually introduced new contexts for the production of a notion of a sovereign people, a notion that played no part in indigenous thinking prior to pacification.

The story of this encounter between the Maring and the West is by no means unique, either to Melanesia or the history of encompassment generally. It underlines that only outside agents in the role of observers can fix the boundaries of local cultures—that is, transform the relationality of culture into an objective boundary. The missionaries, kiaps, teachers, and ethnologists were all partly responsible for concretizing as a “tradition” fixed limits to Maring society. Everything in the epistemology of the West—the presumed sovereignty of the national state, the autonomy and self-containedness of the commodity, the imagination of the person as a self-animating bounded individual, and the conception of nature as disenchanted from culture—conspired toward the notion of the sovereign culture. The Maring as a people with fixed borders appears in ethnographic, administrative, and missionary maps of Simbai and Jimi Valleys. These borders rest on acts of objectification that are also acts of scientific, cultural, and state power—the power of the modern to constitute all Others in its own image of self and otherness. In the same vein, Young (1997:101–2) observes that there is a sense in which missionaries “invented” the Dobuans as a tribal category by extending the anglicized nominal to include surrounding groups who spoke similar dialects. Speaking from another continent and colonialism, Abercrombie (1991) demonstrates that, for Bolivia, both the concept of “being Indian” and the specific Indian ethnic identities were produced in dynamic opposition to Spanish domination. From still another continent and colonialism, Wilmson (1989) argues that the Herero, Khoi, San, and Tswana become sepa-

rate cultures only after British colonial policy had severed their lines of mutual sociality and definition. All of these accounts testify that, for both Western and local agents, it was the encounter itself that determined the cultural whole, critically because they experienced this encounter as a partial and asymmetric intertwining of multiple meanings and values.

Perhaps somewhat more abstractly, they also testify to the fact that modernity, of which ethnography is a part, produces a social inversion that corresponds negatively to an already inverted ethnographic stance. Where in the past the assumption of simple reproduction (the cyclical, nearly determinate, replication of relations) was generally justified, the assumption of closure on the frontiers was not. The reason was that, because the agents of simple reproduction understood the world relationally and doxically, they had no need to construct cultural boundaries by objectifying culture. They also had no reason to imagine a totality that had no practical necessity or significance. There was no Maring peoplehood and consonantly no name for this imagined community within a bounded and imaginary space. By contrast, with the encroachment of the modern, the assumption of a Maring peoplehood was increasingly justified as a direct consequence of the operation of modernity whereas the assumption of simple reproduction was not because of the very process of encompassment instrumental in producing that peoplehood. The process of producing *a culture* historically, one both in and for itself, presupposes a process of complex reproduction. The character of the modern is to connect intrinsically social reproduction to external agents, institutions, and processes; to a field of internal opinion created by the self-consciousness of groups based on principles as diverse as class, gender, and generation; and to an internally differentiated political and moral economy. So from the moment of its birth, the anthropology of Melanesia was based on a immanent contradiction—the coexistence of simple social reproduction and cultural sovereignty. A contradiction veiled by the erasure of frontier communities and an epistemology determined to bracket the effects of missionaries, kiaps, businessmen, ethnographers, and other agents of encompassment on indigenous society.

Part of the story of encompassment in this part of Melanesia was that Western agents, institutions, and practices fixed the boundaries of Maring culture, capitalizing on their external position to instigate a form of identity that was beyond the purview and interests of indigenous society. That does not imply, however, that these boundaries were entirely arbitrary, determined only by the caprice and power of the West, or that once established they did not make sense to the Maring and their neighbors. The borders drawn had a certain historical rationale because indigenous conceptions of otherness—which take wing on an entirely different ontology than ethnicity and other Western classifications of Others—mediated the rela-

tionship between culture and peoplehood. Local notions of otherness stand between the transition from overlapping spheres of relationality to bounded, self-referential entities. In the Maring story, the agents of encompassment thought that they were simply codifying naturally occurring borders, when, in reality, they produced these cultural boundaries by virtue of their relationship to the Maring, a relationship that, operating in an implicit state, interrupted the cycles of local history (such as that of war and peace) to fix “borders” as permanent that were only temporary moments of a longer and larger process, and that in any case were constituted on entirely different grounds. Nonetheless, the boundaries were fixed in the encounter or interface, even if, due to the asymmetries of power, the Maring had to learn to appreciate these boundaries whereas the Westerners could continue to live in an implicit state.

Melanesian notions of otherness appear as a comparative discourse about the beliefs and behaviors, perspectives and practices, of others.¹¹ Members of indigenously named and constructed groups, such as the clan cluster, create a discourse about the otherness of other groups. Although the principles of this discourse were entirely different from their Western counterparts, the forces of encompassment appropriated and recast them in order to bring the Maring into conformity with the Western conceptualization of what a people is. The Western concepts of otherness met a Maring comparative account of others developed along four intersecting lines. Looking out from the perspective of any group, people would classify others according to the mode of sociality. At the most inclusive level, Maring divided other clan clusters into those with whom they intermarried and shared kinship, and thus served as allies and exchange partners; clusters with whom they had been at war and, by definition, shared no kinship relation, past or present; and clan clusters with whom they had no sociality. From a Kauwatyi perspective, they intermarried with the Tsembaga, Tuguma, and Tukmenga and accordingly considered them allies; historically, they waged a series of wars against the Cenda and Manamban and counted them plus their allies as enemies; and they had a blank relation with the Irimban and Fungai-Korama—small clusters in the far eastern end of the Jimi and Simbai Valleys with whom they neither fought nor intermarried. When I asked a Kauwatyi elder if he was connected to the people at Irimban, he responded rhetorically: “How can I be related to those with whom I have no relations?”

A second line of difference that people cited was language. Professed language differences ranged from those who had an accent to those with whom communication was next to impossible. Not having heard of Sausure, the Maring do not make a distinction between langue and parole, but rather have a single concept, *tep*, that encapsulates everything connected to human discourse. Domestic animals, specifically pigs and dogs, have a

lower species of tep. This allowed for an equation in which speakers classified other humans and domestic animals as having similar levels of tep. What distinguished other humans were higher planes of *min* (bodily consciousness) and *kandep kani* (sentience), thereby allowing them to master new talk. As a Maring man indicated, his audience smiling in agreement:

When I was working on the plantation and those around me were talking English or “Sepik” [Sepik tended to function as the residual term to denote all non-Highlanders], I was like *the dog* because I could know very little of what they were conveying. Of course, when I was talking to [two young men who were with him on the plantation], they were the dog. That is how pidgin [Neo-Melanesian] came about. (emphasis added)

In a way that was never intended to be self-derogatory, the speaker equates himself with “the dog”—that is, he does not equate himself with a dog but with the difference between humans and dogs with respect to tep. Accordingly, the polarity of the metaphor was fully reversible. Moreover, our speaker in an added flourish (that amounts to a metapragmatic tour de force) attributes the genesis of pidgin to the symbolic vacuum spawned by intercultural contact. His perspective underlines that both Western terms, *language* and *speech*, used alone or bundled, were inaccurate glosses for *tep* because speakers do not objectify language/speech itself, but the inter-relationship between agents. Thus, a better translation for tep was the transmission of intentionality through the body. In this concept of communication, not only is the verbal grammatical channel simply one dimension of conversing among others, but the sounds of speaking were of the body because there existed no distinction between body and mind, the physical self and the thinking subject, least of all with respect to communicating. As such, the concept of tep embodies no distinction between kinesic processes and language/speech. Culturally, prior to Westernization, the Maring did not have a conception of language as a closed, autonomous, and isolatable system. *Tep* denotes larger and more inclusive practices of communication.¹²

When translated into a comparative discourse, the Maring did not distinguish themselves from others on the basis of speaking a different language or dialect, but rather on a break in intentionality. The reason why Kalam was more distant than Narak was not that these were separate languages conceptualized as such, but rather that the possibility of conveying one’s intentionality to a Kalam was so much more difficult than to a Narak agent, speakers of Melpa lying somewhere in between. The asymptote of difference was when two agents, unable to understand each other’s

talk, were reduced to the communication of gestures, skin, and intonations. In the language of our storyteller they were “like dogs”—domesticated but unable to animate the instruments of human communication. From this perspective, the world of others existed as a continuum of communication punctuated by gradients of difference that sometimes, as when a Maring crossed over into Kalam land, became steeper.

In concert with images of kinship and speaking, there was a discourse of others that focused on practices and behavior. The inference was that others were governed by customs or *nomane* that were regular, intelligible, yet different. The people of the Jimi Valley would, for example, cite some clearly defined distinctions between them and the peoples of the Simbai. Even when speaking about those with whom they had an affinal connection, and there was considerable intermarriage between Jimi and Simbai clans, they would note that there was a difference in the relative status of big-men and in modes of public display and dress. As Lowman (1968) pointed out, the status of big-men in the Jimi depended on ceremonial exchange, the orchestration of the asymmetrical transfer of women, oratorical ability, and their stature in compensation payments that substituted a special class of goods for people. Their “political role before contact was sanctioned by supernatural powers they [were] believed to possess” (199). By contrast, the big-men of the Simbai were “much smaller,” their power less connected to ceremonial commerce and the orchestration of marriage exchanges and compensation payments than with their ability to serve as intermediaries between the living community and ancestral world. Along these lines, the Kauwatyí estimated that the Kalam had small big-men, the Manga of similar size, and the Melpa even bigger as exemplified by Moka exchanges. Another man, commenting on the difference between the Jimi and Simbai people, noted that Simbai groups “have acquired practices from the coast, such as wearing beetle bonnets during a *kaiko* or dance [woven helmets adorned with the green iridescent thorax of a local beetle].”

There was, of course, another category of otherness created by the process of encompassment itself. How to conceptualize the otherness of Westerners. From the start, no matter whether they wanted the role or consciously responded to it, the ethnographer was a critical person for the Maring process of thinking the Western other—the ethnographer being the only Western other who was immersed, if episodically so, in the cradle of everyday life. Their most obvious characteristic was their physical size, taken as a hallmark of practically created and magical-aided nurturing, and their ability to command goods through the projection of their intentionality—the power of their *nomane* and *tep*. Further, speaking as an extension of their Western self, ethnographers claimed to be the cause of their own actions and to cause other actions to happen. The Maring

learned not to be amazed by the confident and matter-of-fact expression of individuality—a point my housemates made to me through our long hours of conversation and mutual questioning.¹³ Another telling characteristic of Westerners was that they were a kind of people with whom the Maring had relations of sociality, but based on neither kinship nor enmity. That was a departure in that, at least by premodern standards, all forms of sociality fell within this compass. The Maring did not understand the Westerners' willingness to live without their kin as indicative of a racial difference, but as a peculiar choice. As to why they "adopted" me, Kukupogai clansmen would reply that they "felt sorry" (*kobeluai kani*) for me. Said in descending tones, the speaker's head nodding slowly, the term implied that the gift one gave to another by "feeling sorry" on their behalf was a willingness to assume some of the weight of their loss. Another critical (and at first very puzzling) aspect of the Western other was their demand for privacy. "When white people first came, we kept asking ourselves, why would anyone want to be alone, what could they be doing that they did not want us to see?" (Kaiya, 1980). But at least some of the Maring would learn that their own implicational logic equating privacy with secrecy, and that with nefarious behavior (e.g., archetypically, eating food without sharing, which was perforce a denial and denigration of sociality), was not an accurate portrayal of the Western person. Their Western others were also immune from the effects of sorcery because they were outside the web of social relations and intentionalities animating it. Westerners were others who could summon goods, lived without kin, reveled in privacy, and stood outside the circle of indigenous powers and influences.

These notions of ethnicity differed radically from Western notions in that the Maring conceptualized diversity as a continuum of sameness embracing variations. Moreover, the features of difference were performative and acquired, focusing on knowledge and the coordination of intentionality. Contrast this vision of difference with Western conceptions of ethnicity that imagine that a fundamental biological sameness grounds the recognition and reality of a cultural and historical identity. History matters in that the presumption is that the recognition of this identity—self-conscious and named—leads to endogamy. The result is an essentialized discontinuity. Only notions of a common humanity—itsself constituted by the disenfranchisement of nature—link these islands of difference. Like the other categories of the modern, which separate the modern from other periods and from the primitive, the magic of its success is that ethnicity cloaks the social and historical conditions of its own genesis by constructing, in terms of an empowered and legitimated discourse produced by the West for universal consumption, cultural and historical inscriptions of itself as natural and transhistorical. Ethnicity is thus the cultural realization of a cross-cultural discourse that imagines itself as noncultural. In a

move unknown to the world of simple reproduction, the self-misrecognition of itself is a necessary condition of the reproduction of ethnicity. In addition, through the process of misrecognition and accommodation, a process that always unfolds as a struggle, ethnicity must align itself with the commodity form, the individual, the nation, and the other epistemological precepts of the modern. This surfaces in the struggle, especially visible in emerging states such as Papua New Guinea, to align peoplehood, the nation, and subjectivity. In this conception of ethnicity, performance is canonical and iterative. Performance does not create ethnicity, it dramatizes, renews, expresses, celebrates what already exists.

The Maring of the precontact epoch would not have recognized this conception of peoplehood. Much of what they understood as the ground of sameness and difference was a result of acting in the world: understanding another's speech, eating food from the same clan lands, sharing ritual knowledge. The relationality of kinship also produced understandings of fundamental difference between peoples. The space between subject and other was not a question of biology or bounded, autonomous categories of people—a form of thinking that can come into existence only in concert with notions of race and peoplehood. Accordingly, the spectrum of clans, ways of communicating, practices, and behavior produced gradients of difference on different grounds. That the people of the Jimi, Simbai, and beyond imagined sociality as a song that never dies explains why—though well acquainted with the process of naming—they did not name themselves or name others. And it was these gradients of difference that the advance of the West concretized and codified. So on their Western frontier, the colonial authorities divided the Maring from the Kalam on the basis of language, translating this gradient of difference into a peoplehood. The Maring naturally understood the existence of a difference, though not as peoplehood until the socializing processes of the West began to educate them to this newer reality. On the eastern frontier, recalling the opening sections of chapter 2, the Manga were divided from the Yomban on the basis of their continuing intertribal warfare and the spatial discontinuities at the borders that it produced.¹⁴ Ultimately, the Manga emerged as a separate culture and language not because of great differences in language or culture but because of an increased gradient of difference produced by the historical consequences of warfare, a form of interaction that the Maring understand as a specific mode of intracultural sociality. To assume that the indigenous comparative discourse of otherness invariably led to the crystallization of a peoplehood is to take as the indigenous state of affairs precisely what encompassment created. Prompted by war and demographic expansion, the historical flows of migration and community have situated Maring culture, like that of the Manga, Kalam, and their neighbors, in a permeable field of difference, encompassed first of all by a

regional cultural economy and then by the agents and institutions of modernity. Modernity has imbued existing differences with a significance that tradition could never have imagined. It imagines them as bounding a culture, an entity that could take its place alongside the other imaginary bounded entities of the modern—the individual, the commodity, the nation-state, and nature. Neruda, Pavese, Paz, the poets are right: the wings of identity are never folded and never the same.¹⁵

The Maring material informs us that the production of the peoplehood that Westerners have presumed to have always existed arrives as a highly mediated historical product of the encounter between the Maring and modern. Modernity constructed the Maring by reusing indigenously constructed differences in a modern way. The practice of recycling the history of others for our own ends has, incidentally, long been “our” tradition. Since the adventures of Columbus and Cortez, Christian missionaries, colonial administrators, and ethnologists (from Sahagun to Livingstone) have provided the West with the raw materials for articulating its self-identity through its relationship to an other—an other who was not only created symbolically as a figure for the Western imagination but who emerges from the encounter in a form that is unlike either its original culture or that which the West has sought to impose. God has forsaken the details; he now lives in the mediations.

Ethnographic Interlude

As ethnographers investigated the Maring, the Maring performed their own ethno-ethnography on the investigators. This inquiry, a companion to the weaving of histories and mythologies of the modern, was part of their attempt to make sense of the Western other, to revise their comparative discourse to embrace those who, not a short time earlier, they had not imagined. This kind of story—the kind that might appear transmuted in Benitez-Rojo’s luminous *Sea of Lentils*, rarely finds its way into an ethnographic script, though perhaps it tells more, and more wonderfully, than the hand of the ordinary description ever can.¹⁶

In the summer of 1974, while living in the Simbai Valley with the Tuguma Maring, I conducted fieldwork on sexuality and marriage as part of a larger study on gene flow. The practice I inherited from the other ethnographers of the Maring was to pay those informants who had spent the better part of the day with me in goods and cash: three Australian shillings to be precise. One night at around nine as I was going over the fieldnotes of that day, there was a tapping on the door, a low tapping on the slatted wood as though revealing a reticence. The man was middle-aged; I had talked with him several days before as he was one of only two

Tuguma who had gone and returned from a stint on the coastal plantations. I had asked him about his impression of Europeans for an afternoon and then in the usual manner paid him three shillings for this time.

Older than most of the men who had since left for contract labor, Banyon was a leader of his subclan. He entered gingerly, on the slow heels of anxious curiosity, and immediately sat down on the floor in front of the sawed off tree stump that I had been using alternately as a seat and work bench. He asked if I have liked my stay with the Tuguma: I reply yes in a way that I think will reassure him, though I sense (from the movement of his body, his tone?) that this is not the question he wants to ask me. Then, as if starting the conversation from scratch, Banyon tells me that he would like to ask me a question. I counter that that was only fair in that I had some more questions I wanted to ask him. There is a pause and then he asked, “Is it true that where you come from they chop off the head of a man’s penis?” Maring were usually skittish about talking about sex but I remained unruffled, if you put aside that I bit into my lip so hard I nearly drew blood. On the plantation, he had seen several circumcised Australians and, showing an interest in comparative anatomy, wanted to know if this was the *kastam* for Western men. I said that “for some but not all,” beginning to compose my thoughts on what more I should say. But before I could go further, he interjected, “Is the head of your penis chopped off?”—the pause on and lengthening of the pronoun unmistakable. I slowly nodded. In the backlight of the lamp dangling from a cross-beam, his eyes were lost in the frame of his cheeks, and I could not quite make out his reaction.

But I did not have long to wait. “Can I see it?” he asked, his tone inquisitive, my senses simultaneously mesmerized and spinning. I said nothing, quietly hoping that he wouldn’t repeat the request, that the world would return to its “normal” size and shape with me asking the ethnographic questions, the Maring displaying their cultural practices. He asked again while I remained perfectly still, imitating a survival strategy for any number of species. Then all of a sudden Banyon brandished a smile of insight—like Archimedes in the bathtub I imagined even then. He spoke with an edge of triumph: “I will pay you three shillings”—certain now that he had clinched my consent as he upended the small pouch that hung from his waist, the money I had given him the days before tumbling out onto the floor. Though I did not accept his money, I did show him my anatomy to which, in a characteristic show of astonishment, he put his ear to his shoulder, rattled his hand, and made a whooshing sound from his tightly pursed lips.

There was a pause that endured even after I had rebuttoned my pants. Then he asked who had done this to me. I replied that my parents had authorized the circumcision when I was born. Given his comparative

interests I should have anticipated the next question: Why? Why did Westerners engage in such a practice? Before I could answer, Banyon sought to broaden his study. "Was Skip [Rappaport, who had studied their allies and neighbors, the Tsembaga] circumcised?" I answered that it had long been the custom of Skip's people to circumcise their male children. I pointed out that some, but by no means all, Westerners were circumcised. He then returned to the issue of why, to which I replied that body carving was a powerful and enduring way of marking a person's identity. Adopting a more anthropological composure, I compared it to a once prominent form of Maring body mutilation: chopping off the last segment of a finger to commemorate the death of a close relative. He nodded in understanding, and I thought that this might close the matter, again underestimating his comparative instincts. Then, on the issue of identity: "If you see someone wearing pants, how can you tell if he is circumcised?" He now started laughing in anticipation of his own whimsy saying rhetorically, "everyone doesn't carry around a bag of shillings to find out each other's identity." By turns serious and funny, off and on, with no obvious ending, this conversation continued for some days over a range of subjects as he sought to place Westerners in focus.

Besides the humor, what was evident was a cultural capacity and interest in defining a comparative discourse of otherness. What was also evident was a certain reversibility to the ethnographer's position. An ethno-ethnography was inevitable, a turning of the tables, insofar as modernity compelled the Maring to redesign their discourse of the other. Where the traditional object of this discourse was other Melanesians, the rise of modernity not only motivated the emergence of a new discourse of otherness, but one that had to integrate Westerners as a kind of other. A result was a deep indigenous interest in the ways that Westerners were different beyond their obvious access to powerful technologies and unlimited materials. Part of the conversation between the Maring and the West, on both sides, was how to conceptualize these differences of relations to others. For the Maring, it was also part of a process by which they learned that all Westerners were not alike even if "their skins" appeared so much the same. Employing their nonracial conception of otherness, the Maring gradually evolved a concept of Westerners that, by 1980, stressed that Westerners could live comfortably in the absence of kinship, hoarded material objects, desired privacy whenever possible, embodied greater power/intelligence than local agents, spoke another language, and imagined themselves in terms of an opposition between local agents taken collectively and Westerners. In this composition, Westerners were both a source and model of freedom from the strictures of kinship and community, and equally an opportunity, especially for those of the junior generation caught between the homelessness of freedom and these strictures, to

reconstruct their notions of community and place. Ironically or not, the matter of circumcision was never mentioned again.

Biography in Ethnography

A creature of ethnography, of the singling out of key informants, is the creation and imagination of biography. The story of persons over time, and the events of their lives, that the ethnographer may add up to create a global picture of what a culture is about. And without thinking about it as an inherently comparative exercise, not least because it is their own ordering mechanism, ethnographers explore the memories of those they encounter to fashion a chronological accounting of their lives, beginning with where they were born, who their parents were, the various stages of their life as marked by momentous events—initiation rituals, the advent of Westernization, marriage, and so on—to construct the person that stands before the ethnographer, imbued with knowledge, interests, desires, and judgments about the future and past.

It takes only a little reflection to realize that biography, the creation of narratives about the self, in its many inner states and public presentations, lies at the center of the modernist project. Our biographies, in their more or less inchoate practical state, in the situationally specific pragmatic narratives that we construct (e.g., for a job interview), and in their formal written forms, are thought to be indispensable to the making of the social itself. Biography is the self made public through language, the story we tell about the story of our lives. This is critical to the modernist project because it begins in the premise that society is a collection of individuals who have through their recognition of the pleasures and benefits of mutual association agreed, contractually, to cooperate and collaborate in the interests of the common good—a common good defined by a general will that is itself the sum of the individuals wills. Like all the fictions upon which social reality is built, there is a wonderful circularity to the vision—a logical tautology that appears to ideology as coherence and closure—that is as the convention naturalized. With this in mind, most ethnographers create biographies of those whom they live with; they request and elicit patterned information that traces the sequence of actions initiated by agents to produce a particular event, such as a marriage ceremony on the grand scale and the harvesting of coffee on the small. The assumption underlying the biographically based ethnographic method is that agents are individuals whose free will is constrained by the nature of their culture. But what if the nature of this culture is, as in the Highlands, to assume that the individual dimension of the person is far from the epicenter of social life and that agents do not have fixed properties and states? Then it

becomes clear that the biographically constructed ethnography is a translation—a way of rendering their lives in terms that are meaningful to us. Biographies as such are the products of individuals, and it is safe to say that since the individual aspect of the person is not prominent in Maring society, the Maring did not indigenously have biographies. At least not in that Western sense and sensibility as a linear and cumulative narrative of how the autonomous agent selectively incorporates and rebuffs environmental influences on their path from birth to last breath.

The making of biography always implicates a politics of memory and forgetting in the service of the creation of the self in the present. As such, Western biography is an opportunity to recast the most oppressive memories and memorialize those thought to epitomize and emancipate the self. Biography thus consists of accounts of the past projected into the future in the interests of the present. Toward this end, the West has specialized in creating a narrative framework that presupposes that the (person as) individual is the uncontested and natural ground through which a person becomes an individual by re-presenting the self through the arts of memorializing the significant and setting aside the inconsequential moments of a life. In keeping with the overall framework of a society that envisions itself as universal—as the people with and creating history—and driven by the commodity, the person in biography has both an abstract and concrete form. Abstractly, the person appears as the transhistorical and cross-cultural individual. Concretely, the individual constructs a biography from the brute ontological facts of their past—their family life, education, occupations, marriage(s), and so on. Rather paradoxically, this framework assumes an essential and essentialized opposition between collective and individual aspects of remembering, consecrated as an opposition between biography and history. Individuals have biographies, societies have histories (or fail to have histories). This conception—to which children are educated by, among other things, the very organization of the library—ideologically severs that which the character of Western culture links structurally. Namely, the social processes and metaphysics that create the indispensable fictional structures through which persons individualize their lives as biographies. And also conversely the equally indispensable structures through which agents and instruments of the public sphere (newspapers, novels, movies, etc.) transform the sum of these individual biographies, great and small, into a collective history. The reification of biography thus goes beyond the fact that a life constructed socially and historically appears as an individual and personal product. Even the ontological categories that generate the very essence of Western sociality—here the person and society—are reified, not merely their forms of appearance in the marketplace of ideas (e.g., biography). If science is the art of transcending the ideological, what this compels us to do is to relativize relativ-

ity by discovering the relationship between the construction of persons and sociality on one hand and the construction of remembering and forgetting on the other, and to expose how this relationship is specific to each person and now united historically in the process of encompassment. Recognition of the relationship is essential to avoiding an analysis that ends up comparing Melanesian reality with Western ideology. The comparative enterprise runs aground when analysis draws its contrasts between Melanesian realities and capitalism grasped only in terms of its illusionary appearance. The object is rather to set the comparison between Western realities of which ideology is a very necessary dimension (of the reproduction of those realities) and Melanesian conceptions of how persons remember. Lattas observes that we need to place memory in history, treating it not as the “free product” of individuals, but as a critical structure “for producing historicised subjects; that is subjects with particular ways of apprehending time” (1996:258).

The Western convention for linking the person to temporality, and in the process contributing to the creation of both, is through the narrative of biography. The mandate, as inculcated through numerous processes from schooling to worshiping, is to imagine our life (and the lives of those around us) as a coherent and integrated whole. At its highest expression, an agent’s life unfolds as an expression of an objective and subjective project (and so I tell people that, raised in a Sicilian household in an American society, I was always an anthropologist inasmuch as I was always aware of cultural differences, thereby transforming a finality into an original intention). We demand of each other that the temporal unfolding of our lives appear as logical progressions—as, for example, on employment forms, curricula vitae, obituaries, and informal narrations of self. To imbue their lives with meaning, Westerners continually transform successive states and positions in social space into predestined steps in a developmental sequence. This creates a set of intelligible linkages, which is our way of projecting the past into the future in the service of the present. Of apprehending the time of our lives. The primary convention is to highlight a few significant events and then to imbue them with a certain telos, although it could just as easily be said that Westerners highlight certain events—that is, these events become significant—because they permit the production of such a telos or unifying purpose. Western agents are their own ideologists to the extent that they fail to see that the ontological forms (the person as individual and biography) that appear to ground and naturalize the personal ones are themselves social. Through a set of conventions, durably installed in Western institutions and habitus, a lifetime that is fluctuating, often discontinuous, subject to untimely and unpredictable chances, obtains a shape that allows the production of a very particular type of social being—and collectively, a very particular type of collectivity that is

both Western and society. Not surprisingly, the modern novel and novelists, and poets, have called attention to the conventional character of this relationship by creating characters who live nonlinear chaotic lives, absent an inherent logic or overarching purpose. The construction of a biography through the conventions for the use of personal memory and forgetting also requires that agents abstract themselves from the relationality definitive of their lives and the fields they inhabit. This allows Western agents to think of themselves as conceptually distinct from the relations and fields of experience that draw them together thus creating a narrative picture of the unique, self-sufficient individual in a world unfinished. In essence, through the construction of memory and the abstraction of agents from the relationality of their own self-production, biography is one of the principal Western means of relating persons to temporality and social space in such a way that the results foreground the individual aspect of personhood. I will return to an explicit and comparative theory of the person in the next chapter.

Because Western societies have historically evolved such that the categories of the person, commodity, and society are organically bound to one another, it stands to reason and reality that Melanesian peoples did not, as a matter of practice, construct life histories because they never imagined life to be a history. This does not imply that Melanesians cannot learn to imagine a life as a sequence of successive events and relations—as indeed the agents and institutions of encompassment would begin to teach them to do. It does imply that even when Melanesians crafted a biography, epitomized by Strathern's (1979) wonderful account of the Melpa big-man Ongka, it has nothing resembling the same implications for the making of the person, economy, or collectivity. The absolutely critical, and critically overlooked, essence of differentiation between the West and its others has been this: in Melanesia, the form of appearance of a practice is only, and only sometimes, masked by an ideology that attempts to paper over a contradiction between that and other social practices. In the West, the form of appearance of a practice (such as biography-making) conceals the structural categories that produce it (e.g., sociality, person, and value), such that those dimensions of the practice that contradict the categories are the necessary forms of their appearance. So, for example, the construction of biography as individual narrative contradicts the underlying reality that, among other things, the successive states of the field(s) through which a person has progressed determines that agent's trajectory. The Maring certainly do shape memories and recollections of their own actions and the actions of others, and they can recount their own and others' pasts (as exemplified in portraits of warriors), but these biographical acts did not lie at the core of the construction of persons, they did not appear as a regimented narrative of any type (let alone imbued with a linear teleology),

and they were connected to objects of economy and the objectification of collectivity in a way that emphasized the relations between persons above all else.

When Maring agents speak about themselves and others—when they use the metapragmatic resources of their language—they seek to expose or make visible the sociality defining a given relationship. Speakers may, for example, characterize others in regard to their ability to attract, entice, embolden, empower, and motivate an audience through their command of speaking (*tep*). The description visualizes and acknowledges the power of the orator's speech (as opposed to the orator) to cause others to enact a specific kind of sociality. Noticeably absent from the cultural logic was the notion that powerful orators (in contrast to successful academics, for example) are defining their selfhood through the ability to influence others' subjective states by virtue of their personal qualities. This example from speech held true across the board, in the domains of exchange, kinship, and the politics of everyday life. When speaking of themselves or others, Maring never arrange a person's life as some sequence of logically ordained steps. In recounting the past, thereby constructing a selective memory of that past, the relationality between speaker and audience determines the ordering of events, emotions, and responses. There was no compulsion to place the events of a person's life in a chronological order on the understanding that earlier events would somehow illuminate the reasons for subsequent actions. The primary tropes and images were spatial and relational, so much that the conflation of the naming of a relation with a space defined a critical way in which agents would verify their statements. Without pursuing a more detailed discussion, the point is that the Maring relation between time and the subject was transparently different from what the West imagines. Ultimately, the quest is to grasp how the Maring and other Melanesians created images, memories, and accounts of persons that were never biographies in the Western sense.

However, one of the hallmarks of the West was to impress upon people the virtues and processes by which people have biographies. The Western notion of life as biography was exemplified by the story of Jesus—a story that, as a touchstone of Christian missionizing, was repeated over and again. And then again still countless other times, a mantra of the good and godly life. The immaculate birth, the wandering in the desert, the teachings, the death and resurrection, glorified in the stations of the cross imprinted and pictured in a kind of primitive catechism, imagined the life of the Savior as the highest form of telos. His beginning already inscribed a specific conclusion. The life of Jesus, a model for all lives always and everywhere, was to inspire the Maring toward the proper behavior, especially the expulsion of violence and the other deadly vices from their kingdom. In the portraits of other Melanesians that were part of the reading

lessons of the school, there were invariably stories told as biographies of their lifeways. The life and trials of Michael Somare, drawn from an autobiography that charts step-by-step his ascendance from rural villager to the first postindependence premier of Papua New Guinea, exemplified this new way of envisioning a person. The birth of the nation was linked to the biographies of its leaders, their examples of personal vision and determination. Westerners, placing their own cultural psyches on display, would introduce themselves, explain to themselves as much as to the Maring why they came to Melanesia of all places, by constructing a history of their backgrounds. Why being a priest from San Francisco by way of Milne Bay, a nurse from Ireland by way of the United States, or a policeman from Manchester by way of a failing marriage, somehow explained their present and presence in the Bismarck Mountains. Because Westerners had completely internalized the notion of the biographical person, the story of their individuality and the logic that threaded their life together, they presupposed the same in their encounters with Melanesians. While the philosopher (Ricoeur) may recognize that there is no self at the start and the poet (Paz) may realize that the deepest reality is the illusion that the "I" writes alone (stepping through the shards of its own shattered image), the ideology of the person in its fully naturalized state was the simple, time-defined, unadorned biography presented to the Maring by all of the agents and institutions of encompassment. Perhaps the ultimate and most unreflective irony of encompassment is that the West seeks to transform others' realities so that they are structured in the form of our appearances.

The Maring did indeed recognize progression (e.g., that agents master some things cumulatively over time), they did make comparative generalizations about the relations of others (e.g., that some people seemed to fashion exemplary exchange relationships while others made relationships that seemed perpetually to flounder), and these observations surely figured in the construction of intentionality. But they were not fragments of biography in any Western sense: they neither expressed nor did they have the effect of creating any underlying structural relationships. The crucial point, and what ultimately separates biography in the Western world from kindred depictions in Melanesia, is that the structuring principles of biography are aimed at creating the person as individual, even as they function to render this person a homologue of society and the commodity, and they do so in such a way that the form of appearance of the person and of the homology of the person, society and commodity, conceal the relations of sociality and value that are their constituting essence. The great weakness of comparative accounts of the encompassed world and the West has been that, whether they take the economizing and maximizing rationality of the West as a universal logic (typified by ecological anthropology) or they assume that there is a radical alterity between the West and its others

(typified by postmodern anthropology), the point of origin of both viewpoints and those in between is *only the form of appearance* of Western society. The epicenter of comparison and entrance into the Melanesian world, seemingly eclipsed by the processes of encompassment, is the subjectivity of persons.