

Money and the Representation of Life

A signature event in Maring history was the introduction of Western money. The importance of this event has, ironically, been masked by the ease with which the locals integrated Western money into the economy of everyday life and ritual politics. Within the first decade of sustained contact, money came to figure critically in everything from the purchase of trade goods to payment of bridewealth and homicide compensation. No other Western product, image, or institution has had such resonance or been granted such an open reception, save perhaps what amounted to much the same thing: the person of the Westerner.

Despite the apparent ease with which Maring have accepted and integrated Western money into social practice, its penetration has animated a process of change and accommodation that is as critical as it is hidden from the ordinary eye. The primary engine of this process was the infiltration of the commodity, as the type of goods and services associated with the encompassment of Melanesia by the West (i.e., imported goods bought for money in a trade store) and as a form that inscribes the epistemology and social presuppositions of capitalism. Most Maring, as well as most other Melanesians and expatriates, imagine this as a transition from a “traditional” form of wealth to a modern one, an evolution from the “kastam money” of pearlshells to a Western-type specie. Whatever money is, it falls under the spell of an ideology that offers the clarity of surfaces in trade for a deeper, more complex view.

Ideology aside, this transition from pearlshells to money is never simply the replacement of an indigenous form with a foreign alternative. As elsewhere in Melanesia, this is the case for the Maring. The money that emerges is a hybrid; it is the product of the skewed image that the Maring have of “Western” money, defined differentially by the contingent character of contact (e.g., the view toward money of the Christian ministry that happened to be in their territory) in relation to local images and practices of use. Moreover, intrinsic to the emergence of “local money”—which is the shaping of a quasi-Western money form—is the emergence of an ideology that conceals the local contribution to the new money form, not only as part of its production, but the reproduction of the modern itself. It

is precisely the form and progress of this imbrication of practice and ideology that an ethnography of money in Melanesia must sort out. Indeed, as the story unfolds we will see that the Maring imagine that they have appropriated a Western form in its pure Western state, the purity of the form understood locally as an index of the degree to which they have embraced the modern.

To view money as a form of hybridity is to recognize that even as it advances the commodification of the local world, it is infused with a complex of culturally specific meanings. Thus the meaning and functions of money for the Maring are not necessarily the same as for other Melanesian peoples. Another way to look at it is that, due to its social saturation, currency in the West is nearly homogeneous nationally in meaning. This contrasts greatly with the highly culturally variable meanings of kina. The result is that to treat the Australian dollar and kina as parallel money forms is, at least at the present moment, an ideological exercise or viewpoint. Money in the West has numerous social meanings and functions that are shared nationally though denied ideologically whereas money in Papua New Guinea has numerous local meanings and functions that are not shared nationally. In contrast to nation-states in the West, the Papua New Guinea state can exercise scant control over the construction of the subjectivity of its citizens, especially in the hinterlands of the Highlands. What this means is that for us to understand the nature of hybridity, it is necessary to come to terms with the character of the Western money form, as an aspect of a continuing process of encompassment, in relation to the changing attribution of meaning and use at the local level. Only thus can we ground an ethnography and analysis that is inherently comparative.

In this light, I argue that money is the perfect instrument of modernity not because, as formal economics would have us think (e.g., see the listing under *money* in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*), it has form without content, but because its defined and often definite content is so contextually specific and dependent. This means that transformations in social practice and contexts for action will transform the meaning of money. It means also that there will be an evolution of the meaning of money that traces the trajectory of modernity. And it means that there will be bifurcate epistemologies, the way in which persons engage money in one setting, such as town, differing from its engagement in the hinterlands. To accomplish this requires an understanding of the apparently simple horizon between money and pearlshells.

Thematizing Money

There are two general viewpoints that have guided the story that ethnographers and other travelers tell about the introduction of money into

Melanesia. The first is what we may call the steel-for-stone view. The notion is that labor the world over produces commodities that people circulate and exchange in order to improve their living standard. Money is that special commodity that helps to grease the wheels of trade, be it primitive or modern. Just as Melanesians quickly shifted from stone to steel axes, so they also quickly adopted Western money because it is more efficient, easier to manage, and more durable. The easy virtue of this idea is that it has an answer as to why Western money was readily adopted. The steel-for-stone view is, however, problematic because it can never account for those societies that continue to use shells (e.g., Akin 1996; Liep 1996) in concert with money. As importantly, it cannot adequately theorize the character of capitalism, having reduced it to a universal human motive. Labor, the commodity, and everything entailed by them are imagined as transhistorical and transcultural categories. The end result is that this view cannot deal with the encounter between Melanesia and the West, the economic violence of colonialism and Christianity, or the profound changes in knowledge and spirit animated by capitalism. The view is chained to Western metaphors and cannot help but ground itself in our epistemological presuppositions about the nature of agency and action. The result is that everything that is Melanesian vanishes (as does everything that is historically specific to capitalism). This is the idea of money that was championed by the Australian state and is currently being advanced by the Papua New Guinea state in collaboration with the World Bank and other interstate agencies. The steel-for-stone thesis is a distillation of Western ideology, bearing in mind that a peculiar and necessary feature of capitalism is the construction of an ideology that masks its essential social form.

The alternative position fixates on the cultural and economic space that separates Melanesia from the West, arguing these points from two complementary angles. The “economy of difference” theory begins with an understanding that there is an enormous gap between capitalist and primitive economies, the bridge between them shaped by the history and consequences of colonialism. Labor, value, the commodity form, money, and the other categories of capitalism have no parallel in the primitive world. They have no abstract *doppelgänger* as a necessary, intrinsic, and masked feature. There was no abstract labor or value in precontact Melanesia. So the commodity as the West knows it cannot exist, money cannot be the exemplar of the form, and thus whatever the pearlshell is, it bears no lineage with capitalist money. Money and shells are the exemplars of that qualitative difference between societies in which kinship mediates social relations and those societies in which labor itself mediates social relations.

On the cultural side of the ledger, generally with little thought to economic issues, there is a new Melanesian ethnography that calls for a radi-

cal alterity between the West and its others. It self-consciously, if not always self-reflectively, endorses an opposition between us and them, and presses the thesis that there is an essential and inalienable space that divides Melanesia from the West. The method with the theory is to relativize our images and metaphors in order to destabilize the Western (and capitalist) presuppositions that too often underwrite anthropological inquiry. Because of this perspective, this view cannot help but romance the opposition between commodities and gifts, between commodity-based and gift-based societies (even if the ultimate objective is to destabilize this opposition). While the focus of this ethnography is usually issues such as agency, intentionality, and local concepts of time and space, it has no problem with, and implicitly endorses, the idea that there is a radical separation between Western money and pearlshells. The critical virtue of this distinction and the “new ethnography” that lends it support is that it can come to terms with the vast and deeply inscribed differences between Melanesian currencies and Western money. While I am sympathetic to this view, indeed in most respects I embrace it, I also recognize that it cannot easily account for the ease and rapidity with which the Melanesian world adopted Western money—thus the conundrum that the steel-for-stone thesis, by overestimating commensurability, cannot account for the encounter of cultural differences, whereas the economy of difference thesis, by taking a highly relativist perch, cannot easily account for the eager, uncoerced adoption by people like the Maring. The view that colonialism and the nature of encompassment are forcefully imposing the capitalist money form on Melanesia is only a starting point; if taken too literally, if we mistake this bald descriptive overview for a theory of what is happening, the inherently comparative account of the relationship between money and pearlshells becomes derailed because we are led to undervalue the force of Melanesian agency and to overvalue the capitalist ideology of money.

In this respect, this chapter also takes issue with the position advanced by Parry and Bloch (1989). They call into question what they view as the anthropological assumption that the introduction of money animates rippling changes in the institution of exchange and the epistemology of personhood. Westerners, they argue, view money as an “acid” that corrodes social relations by arousing the individualistic, possessive, and materialistic instincts that are buried in each of us. It elicits the worst of our human natures. Those people who imagine the devil’s face impressed on every note have an inside track on understanding the power of money to dissolve the lineaments of social life (see, of course, Taussig 1980). For the societies of Melanesia, those who subscribe to this position think that the money form itself leads to a shift from gift to commodity exchange, from a world in which relations are valued over things and per-

sons are defined by these relations to a world in which objects trump relations and persons are defined exclusively as individuals. Parry and Bloch question and contest these notions on the grounds that the introduction of money often does not lead to a dismantling of the exchange system and, conceptually, many peoples do not equate money with the loss of social relations. Their reading of the ethnography leads them to conclude that anthropologists have overestimated the extent to which money transforms others.

Their perspective is, however, troubled on several counts. To begin with, it confuses the ideology of money of the West with an account of money adequate to its object—that is, as an aspect of a capitalist economy that necessarily masks and misrecognizes the social relations that constitute it. The result is that they envision the money form only in its fetishized state, as invested with agency, autonomy, and animation, and so enabled to institute change on its own. But the force of money is different from, say, pearls, not because there is anything “inherently” different about money, but because it is part and product of a capitalist set of relations that are embedded in everything from the nature of colonialism and Christianity to the polity of the nation-state and internationalization of Western culture (e.g., the adoption of Western juridical and educational system across Melanesia). The countercultural claims that Parry and Bloch make about money for other societies are also true for the West. Westerners do indeed use money in relations based on “diffuse enduring solidarity”; no, they do not always associate money with the pursuit of short-term individual gains; yes, they do sometimes direct their personal ambitions toward the reproduction of the group. The underlying reason for this is that there is, as I expressly argued in the discussion of personhood, a “dividual” dimension to the Western person, a dimension that is concealed by, among other realities, our ideology of money. The ideological image of money in capitalism—although necessary and intrinsic to its form as a commodity—not only is not true for Africa, Amazonia, and Melanesia, it is not true for the Western world either (though, of course, the character of this mystification always has a certain cultural-historical specificity).

The Parry and Bloch position is troubled not only because it founds its comparison on an inadequate account of capitalism, but because it subjects the ethnography to an overly objectivist—not to say empiricist—reading. The fact that the inflow of Western money has not led to the demise of “gift exchange” or that money has been excluded from the spheres of exchange thought to be critical to social reproduction (i.e., *kastam*) does not mean that the indigenous exchange system has somehow escaped its influence. The existence of money reorders the context for the production of meaning and value; the copresence of the two alternative spheres of exchange and the two forms of currency mutually inform each

other's meaning. Simply to choose a sphere of exchange is itself a commentary on the state of the exchange, its modern-day purposes, and its objects. Indeed, as we shall see in the Maring case, it was precisely the introduction of money that permitted a new equation to emerge in which money was to bisnis as pearlshells were to tradition, with pigs the mediating category. Money has redefined the nature of pearlshells just as the customary use of shells helps to define the social meaning of money. Moreover, as was pointed out earlier, strategies for obtaining money constantly defined the trajectory of social organization and relations, especially between generations. The general error of the Parry and Bloch viewpoint, which ethnographers have repeated across a spectrum of domains, is that because they base their analysis on the Western ideology of money (as opposed to its structure in its demystified form) they cannot formulate a comparison adequate to its intent or object. Like so many other analysts before them this led them to overstate the difference between Melanesia and the West even as they understated the effects of modernity on the production of meaning and value, not least as a favorite symbolic weapon in the struggle between senior and junior generations.

Comparison and the Money Form

Somewhere in *Capital*, Marx remarks that money is a god among commodities. To this we should append Durkheim's observation that what is interesting about gods is that even when they are imagined as universal, they are always culturally and historically specific. And so it was necessarily with the Melanesian encounter with money, this money being the capitalist money form, materializing first in the Australian shilling and later the PNG kina, and introduced by a particular and idiosyncratic core of Western agents. There was an inseparable relationship between the adoption and meaning of money for the Maring and the circumstance of its introduction. Taken at face value—the practical and ideological mode of its apprehension—money reveals solely its practical and ideological aspects. Its relationship to labor, its epistemological underpinnings, its link to subjectivity, embodiment, and indeed the commodity form all lie beneath the surface. Hence an understanding of money in Melanesia must begin with, and ground itself in, an account of the submerged dimensions of the Western money form in relationship to the differences between capitalist and noncapitalist societies. So far, this relationship is all but untheorized; what follows is a preliminary attempt to begin to write an account adequate to its object(s?).

Money in capitalist societies (however it may be defined) is significantly different from what has been called money in other societies.

This difference derives from the reality that money is the externalized, visible, and most quantifiable expression of the commodity. Existentially, money renders commodities commensurable by allowing the exchange of qualitatively different goods, services, and information. More importantly and at a deeper level, money is the expression, index, and measure of that commensurability. This contrasts dramatically with the role of pearlshells or shell money in exchange. When a Maring man gave an affine a gift of shells to compensate them for having helped him, the objects involved in the transaction were in no way thought to be commensurable, nor was it thought that commensurability was necessary. The reasons for this was that gifts engendered overt social relations bound by spatial and temporal realities and shaped by the terms of kinship and marriage—what capitalism grasps as barriers or constraints on trade that only inhibit the circulation of commodities. Unlike the commodity, the use and exchange values of the gift had no abstract dimension, the gift was not part of a quasi-natural system that appeared to lie beyond the control of agents, and thus the commensurability needed was between the agents rather than the things. To put this another way and avoid confusion, shells in Melanesia were forms of currency (so too are pigs and plumes), but they were never money—not at least until they encountered the Western money form.

The dual character of the commodity in capitalist societies insures that money will have a dual character. The first is money in its concrete or practical form. The meanings and uses of money in its concrete guise are determined by the concepts, institutions, and ideology of specific societies. On these grounds, the various capitalist societies of the West will imbue “their” money (dollars, francs, lira, etc.) with their own social meanings, functions, and values. So Zelizer (1994) argues that there are numerous kinds of currency in use in the United States (paychecks, food stamps, gold coins, etc.) and that the meanings and uses of a currency are inseparable from the social history of the nation. This means that money is not as advertised. It is nowhere near as homogeneous, liquid, fungible, or lacking in sociocultural qualities as purely economic stances make it out to be. Certainly, one of the defects of the ethnography of money is that, influenced by formal economic theory, it has too often assumed that there is a dichotomy between primitive and modern monies because the latter has been freed from its social moorings. The notion is that, released from the fetters of spheres of exchange and ritual control, the economy of the gift and the politics of compensation, capitalist money can function as a universal medium of commodity circulation. This image buys into a Western theoretical ideology of money, not least by shutting its eyes to the reality that, at the existential level, both money and shells have numerous (though, of course, different and differently constituted) social, socially defined uses and meanings (Parry and Bloch 1989). On this level, there is a

family resemblance between money and shells. Indeed, an economic view of money aside, the Westerners who approached the Maring always assumed that money had a social calling. By injecting money into the local economy, they thought that they were not only introducing a better lubricant for exchange, they were introducing the Maring to the moral economy of modernity. Thus, the Anglican Church ran a corresponding branch of the Bank of New South Wales as part of an effort to teach the Maring among other things how individuals could save money in their own name for future purchases. Implicated in this simple practice was an entire epistemology and economy of desire: that persons were first and foremost individuals; that they needed signs of possession, a passbook bearing their name, as part of the construction of their subjectivity; that their actions should be organized and measured against time, an indefinite time in the future when the sum of money corresponded to their material desires; and that placing it in an anonymous institution of saving, distant from one's kin and one's own nature, was a safeguard against the temptation to spend it frivolously.

The second side of money is historically specific and general to capitalism. So constituted, money is a commodity in a world of commodities (money as one type of commodity), the form of the most abstract expression of the commodity, and equally the sign of that form. These qualities allow money to mediate the relation between producers and consumers in such a way that this relation, although social at its core, takes on a quasi-objective character. And, as capitalism evolves, its abstract character comes to overshadow and deflect its existential overt social character. Money becomes progressively reified, though in a culturally/nationally specific way. A paycheck or food stamps, for example, are kinds of currency with specific social meanings and functions (they may be earmarked for certain purposes, understood as an index of industriousness or idleness, regulated by government agencies, etc.), but these overt meanings and uses are shaped by the socially mediating function of labor, which, as Postone (1993) argues, is the key defining feature of capitalism. The mystification of money goes beyond the crucial fact that money appears to have an existence (e.g., it can compound in value) independent of relations among persons. In a capitalist society, money thus has two features: it is produced, historically and culturally, in a concrete and abstract form; and its abstract form appears so natural and transhistorical that its concrete form appears to be an extrinsic aspect of money. The ethnographic goal is thus to grasp how the social meanings ascribed by Maring to Western money intersected with the social meanings of pearlshells, and how the gradual infiltration of money into their economy helped to engender a gap between the concrete and abstract dimensions of the objects of local exchange, especially money.

The Social History of Money

Let us take as a given, because the elders and ancestors say so, that gifts of shells were vital to those exchanges that create sociality (LiPuma 1981). Their exchange mediated key relations of social reproduction, particularly marriage, and they thus stood as tokens of these relationships. The most valuable shells, bestowed with proper names, objectified relations between clans and served as a memory of the embodiment of commitment toward others. Given their centrality in the orbit of social relations, the question is why people's confidence in the indigenous media evaporated; why, within two decades of intermittent contact, did pearlshells all but disappear in bridewealth payments? Why, generally, do people give up the given for the unknown?—assuming of course that we refuse to imagine there is that wonderful little soul, the rational economic manchild, peering out from inside of each Maring and spurring them to embrace the greater, transparent efficiency of Western money. Indeed, in the eye of the Australian administration as well as the expatriate population, a battle raged across Melanesia between that universal human instinct to act rationally and the veil of culture that could easily lead to irrational behavior, explicitly between the adoption of money or the continued use of shells. On this score, the Maring deserved a round of applause, if only the authorities knew.

Objects of exchange did not comprise a homogeneous or unified field within which there is “free” convertibility. Until the mid-1960s, pigs and pearlshells were the two most critical objects in a special category of goods called *mungoi* (LiPuma 1981:271). The things of this category had cultural preeminence because they were not merely consumable but reproductive goods; people identified them with the clan and subclan, and used them to sustain those relations deemed necessary to social reproduction. However close the parity between pigs and pearlshells, however much they were implicated in the same sphere of exchange, they had radically different fates in the modern era. Pigs became increasingly significant in all forms of compensation while pearlshells all but disappeared. Even when a small number were included, this was done for the benefit of the “old men out of respect for their sorrow about the past”—that is, as a nostalgia deep enough to serve as an emotional touchstone for a distinction between kastam and modernity.

Prior to the European infiltration into the Highlands, circa 1930, pearlshells in the Jimi and Simbai Valley were scarce, their scarcity imbuing them with power. Possession of a named shell was an index of the extraordinary man; the big-man who had the charisma, magic, and extralocal relations to attract or pull the rare shell. The shells were exemplars of externality, of the passage of things across frontiers from an alien unknown and other into the heart of culture. In the Maring's own com-

parative discourse, there existed clear and telling differences in thought and practice between them and all other peoples. They embodied this in the symbolically charged opposition between the cultural, domesticated world of the inside, and the untamed, mysterious, world of the outside. At the same time, however, the flow of shells across borders was grounded in exchange relations and thus presupposed a certain sameness and sociality, the communication of intentionality across the frontier. So defined, the pearlshell was a kind of indigenous fetish because it combined the categorically opposing values of sameness and difference, and because it simultaneously expressed and veiled both of those values. The shells were obtained from (I want to emphasize the term) *exchange partners*, even as their exotic, alien qualities conveyed “a magical aura of beauty, power, and mystery” (A. Strathern 1996:1). However, and this is the heart of the difference between money and pearlshells, commodities and gifts, the fetish was never itself fetishized. The ontological forms, such as exchange, that underwrote social practices, such as trading for pearlshells, were always understood in terms of overt, personified, social relations rather than as the naturalized categories, such as those intrinsic to capitalism.

Beginning in the 1930s, the flow of Australian colonists into the central Highlands dramatically, though indirectly, altered the availability of shells in the Maring area. The colonists injected an extraordinary number of new shells into the Hagen region to pay for local goods and labor. These shells then filtered through the trading routes to the Maring region where they led to an inflation of exchange rates. During this period, from the late 1930s until the early 1960s, shells that the Europeans used as commodities, as a species of money, were absorbed into the local economy as wealth objects. The onset of shell inflation started to chip away at its indexical force: the practice of naming shells died, the frequency and number of shells in wealth payments spiraled upward (from one to several dozen), causing a certain indeterminacy in their value as signifiers of extraordinary relations. There evolved a kind of struggle between those who, having shells for the first time after a life of unfulfilled longing, wanted the pearlshell to retain its customary value, and the entropic forces of the social economy that dissipated its value.

But the turbulence engendered by the flood of new pearlshells paled before the next phase of contact. Beginning in the mid-1960s, money, first shillings and pounds and then dollars, began to enter the local economy. The Maring obtained Western money via contract labor on coastal plantations, working for the Anglican mission and visiting ethnographers (of which there were thirteen over a twelve-year period), panning for gold, and the sale of coffee beans grown on the steep and shaded slopes of the hillsides. By the birth of the 1970s, those clan clusters located in proximity to Western outposts had all but replaced shells with money in bridewealth

and homicide compensations. A new regime of values was evolving. Now compensation payments would revolve entirely around pigs and money, with pearlshells defined exclusively as body decoration to be used when a *kaiko* or dance was held. The value of shells fell in local eyes, and many were sold to Westerners of all stripes, the greatest number purchased by the Anglican mission that then resold them to a retail outlet for tribal arts in Port Moresby. By 1980, in what was surely an ironic turn, the number of shells in the Jimi Valley returned to near precontact levels. But few people, save perhaps the ethnographers, took much notice.

Pigs, Pearlshells, and Modernity

The receptivity of the Maring to Western money was part and product of a more global transformation in their social life, not least being a reformation of their worldview. The Maring came to imagine a radical break between the time of *kastam* and the modern economy. They re-presented their past as a time in which people were limited to subsistence goods and there were periodic bouts of hunger in the rainy months between the planting and the first harvest. In particular, men's garden work, felling the trees and clearing other secondary growth, had been much more difficult without the aid of steel axes. Ignorant of money, every critical compensation implicated only pearlshells and pigs. Where capitalism produced a carnival of goods, the older economy was defined at every turn by its limitations, limitations that only seem so, of course, in the perfect hindsight of the present. As was pointed out repeatedly to me, in times past everyone was the same, and the demand for conformity guaranteed that what was inevitable would happen. If in the rare instance, a man distinguished himself by acts of production and accumulations that appeared ostentatious, no doubt as much by good fortune as by good effort, he was likely to be accused of sorcery not because anyone imagined that there was a direct connection between the number of pigs someone owned and the spells said against some intended victim, but because anyone who would dare to express their individuality in public would surely also do it in secret.

Implicit in the antinomy between the time of custom and the advent of *bisnis* was a relativization of the economy into those practices and perspectives that are good and hence should be advanced into the future; those aspects of custom that require recalibration; and those practices and perspectives, objects and places, that do not appear to be contemporaneous with themselves, "survivals" like fight stones, pearlshells, sacred groves, plus the dispositions of senior clansmen. The metamorphosis from shells to money was viewed as an index of a transition to a new concept of

the past, a past that is no longer desirably reproduced in the present, but rather conceptualized as divided from it. It is the construction of the past as a symbolic resource that agents can invoke and deploy for the making of the present.

The other side of the invention of a past was an unqualified leap into the modern, and on this side of the break in the world few things were as salient as money. In short order, a number of social functions accrued to money. Its possession and use became an index of modernity, the objectification of the subject who had recalibrated his relationship to tradition. Part of the power of money, as with pearlshells, derived from its externality, but now this power was magnified by the manifest power of its source: the Westerners who had conquered the Maring and whose ability to pull goods appeared limitless. In this regard, money also allowed its owners to purchase imported goods, especially foods like rice and tinned meats that people conceptualized and served as the modern equivalents of taro and pork. Money was the only means by which people could buy those foods that would permit them to embody the modern even as its consumption signified their modernity.

As Strathern (1996) indicates for the Melpa, there is a set of generational issues sparked by the introduction of money. Not the least of these is that, in contrast to pearlshells, which were obtained through affinal linkages and exchange partners, money was “won” through the sale of coffee and the genre of labor performed by young men. Employees at the Anglican mission station, orderlies in the hospital, the manager and clerks at the trade store, teachers at the school, assistant station manager, all were required to have fluency in pidgin, some knowledge of English, as well as basic skills in the arts of writing and arithmetic. What separated the up-and-coming generation was that their dispositions and attitudes, perceptions of the world and the West (that is their habitus) had been shaped by an objective structure inflected by school lessons about money, calls for tithing by the Anglican mission, wage labor, cash cropping, and state production of a national currency, all of which were unknown to their parents and grandparents. So a central feature of the reshaping of their senses was a growing sensibility toward money—money as an object of desire and a means to status that dislodges the production and efficacy of exchange networks. As the manager of the trade store at Koinambe explained, “Men like my fathers need to make exchange partners because they don’t make money; when I need something all I have to do is buy it.”

This statement was a slight exaggeration in that his fathers’ generation did indeed find a way to attract money, mainly through a restructuring of the domestic economy. Their ability to “pull” money lay primarily in their control over land and domestic labor, meaning that they could

place garden lands into coffee production and increase the production of piglets that they could then sell for cash. The senior generation also extracted money from the junior generation, though this would increasingly become a bone of contention, the young generation asking why they should “back” those whose aims and ambitions were no longer in tune with the times. More than simply access to money, what separated the generations was their disposition toward its use, the senior generation treating it like a valuable that should be reserved for special occasions whereas their children used it to satisfy small, immediate, and personal desires. On the side of production, the senior generation seemed unable to grasp the spirit of calculation required to run a trade store. The acquisition and use of money was thus at the core of the growing rift between generations.

The most telling difference between pigs and pearlshells was that people raise pigs on their home territories or that of their affines. Pigs embody the mixed labor of both sexes and hence were signs of their complementary role in the reproduction of the clan and subclan. In acts of exchange, pigs mediated the relationship between husband and wife as much as they mediated the relationship between donor and recipient. The Maring, like other Highlanders, expressly connect pigs to specific localities, lands that were the material representation of lineality. Further, the compensation of pork was thought to replenish male grease (*imbana*), which in turn advanced the continuity of a male substance (LiPuma 1978:76) that defined clanship itself. The representational value of pigs thus centered on interiority and identity formation, relations that were the opposite of those representable by pearlshells or money.

But pearlshells, of course, neither disappeared entirely nor lost all of their symbolic potency. Rather, pearlshells were now confined to the ceremonial arena—primarily the *kaiko*—where they were valued because they shine like well-greased skin, the quality of a person’s skin—its smoothness, gloss, and color—being a mirror of strength and vitality. The relocation of pearlshells to contexts that were themselves hallmarks of tradition brought a new semiotic politics into existence. Indeed, a symbolic opposition was quick to emerge between pearlshells and money in which the former was associated with *kastam*, interiority, and local identity while money became emblematic of modernity, exteriority, *bisnis*, and the emergence of a national identity. The representational value and force of the pearlshell transformed from being a signifier of the outside, of indigenous but not Maring society, to being a primary signifier of the inside and interiority, now mapped as the *kastam* world of Papua New Guineans versus the modern world of Westerners. In this relocation of value, the opposition between money and the pearlshell was mediated by pigs, the *kastam* inside value that has become modern.

Moses and the Commandment of Profit

Other than the trade store run by the Anglican mission there was only one successful, locally owned and operated store in the Jimi and Simbai Valleys. The trade store was founded and directed by one of the first young men to attend high school, gain fluency in English, see himself as a devout Christian, and more generally approximate the dispositions of the Western capitalist. Critical to the success and longevity of his store was his perspective and attitude toward money. Here is an excerpt from a conversation I had with Moses in which he discussed (in English salted with some pidgin) his views about business and money.

Money is different from anything we [the Maring people generally and his clan members more specifically] have known about in the past. Because it is part of bisnis [Tok Pisin], money is meant to be saved and used to allow the business to grow. When anyone comes to the trade store they pay in cash even if they are one of my fathers or brothers. I have made it clear to everyone that it is wrong to extend credit—to allow someone to have something without paying for it immediately. This is how people did things in the past and it is okay if all we are doing is exchanging things with one another. This is not right for bisnis however. Some clanspeople are resentful and jealous about my store [its success] and say that I am greedy and selfish; but I tell them that their stores fizzle out because they don't know how to manage money. Money is not something that we can just give away freely like it was sugarcane or sweet potato. Money has power inside of it; you know that but people here do not grasp that yet. They still concentrate on pigs when they should be learning to focus on money as this is the basis of our development as a people. The right use of profit is to replant it [in the store] so that the bisnis will grow straight. To go on the "new road" is to use money all the time.

I have quoted Moses at length because he not only understood that money was the icon of the modern and a repository and index of wealth; he understood money as capital to be reinvested again and again in an increasing spiral of accumulation and growth. Whereas in an earlier time, the Maring treated money exclusively as a form of wealth—they did not imagine it as a factor of production—here Moses expressly makes the connection. Beyond that, he sees himself as a prophet of the modern whose mission (in his drive to develop his store) was to convince others that

money was first of all capital to be ploughed back into the bisnis. His argument, repeated time and again to his clansmen who were shareholders in the trade store, was that neither the goods for sale nor the profits generated could be treated as though they were part of the indigenous exchange system. In this logic, the trade store, as a dimension of modern bisnis, was a new context for the production of sociality in that money should mediate every transaction, regardless of the kinship of the agents involved. What in other more traditional contexts would be a gift was here reclassified as “credit”; Moses, parroting the credo of the mission store, held that no one would be extended credit. This viewpoint also called forth a new logic of desire, Moses defining his refusal to share the store’s goods and profits as a virtue. There were those kin who desired him to act according to traditional canons of redistribution and share his good fortune, to which Moses answered that they were smitten with jealousy and ignorant of how things are done in the age of development.

Fluent in English, a high school graduate, a devout Anglican and a successful businessman, certainly one of the leading figures of his generation, a rising star in the largest and most prominent subclan of the largest and most influential clan, Moses was tapped by the Anglican mission in 1980 to become the station manager at Koinambe. Father Bailey, the priest in charge who chose Moses for the post, explained to me that the mission station was, in his own words, “a complex financial business,” and Moses understood money. The good father was at least and decidedly right on the last point (church finances being more discombobulated than complex). The local perception flowered that Moses, and a handful of other young men like him, had acquired the special knowledge of things Western, and this led their image of money and bisnis to become culturally canonized as the correct and modern view (see MacLean 1984:336–67 for some other examples). Moses understood modernity as entailing and requiring a new species of knowledge, a view shared by most of his generation, even if they were not always able to articulate it in concrete images. This was not the case for Moses, however, who put it this way:

To know how to make exchanges, to give women, pigs, and pearlshells to other clansmen, requires *nomane* [the wisdom, social insight, and culture of the ancestor spirits that is transmitted to their descendants; in this respect, *nomane* announces the relationship between the living community and its ancestors]. To be good in bisnis, however, requires *save* [Tok Pijin]. If a person lacks *save*, he won’t know how to buy and sell things in Hagen or how to use money. [In this regard, *save* defines and mediates the relationship between indigenous agents and the forms of Western knowledge that would enable local agents.] It takes *save* to

use money, which is why those of the senior generation—men who have plenty of *nomane*—often do not know how money works: they only know how to “line” the money [a patterned, public display mostly of two-*kina* notes] when people give bride wealth and the death payment. The people who are successful in *bisnis* have learned to think of money and to use it exactly as white people do. In the future, this will be the cause of our success. The people will realize that once they win money, they can get anything they desire—in places like Port Moresby even girls to go with you. You know that I’m an Anglican and don’t do things like that, but there is no reason not to buy clothes, food, cigarettes, and . . . Believing in Jesus and learning to use money to make *bisnis* are what will allow us to develop ourselves.

These remarkable and perceptive comments, made but a quarter century after contact, contain a whole and novel worldview about the interconnections between people and money, the *Maring* and the West. The view spoken here is that to understand money as wealth is consistent with custom and by inference the use of pearlshells and other indigenous objects of trade. In turn, knowing how to operate in this context requires *nomane*, the customary form of knowledge. By clear contrast, to understand money as capital and to know how to use money to make money requires *save*—the Western form of knowing and knowledge. Embodied in this understanding is a set of dispositions about money, dispositions shared by most of Moses’ generation. Indeed, the junior generation’s take on money was one of the things that engendered and defined its distance from older generations. As revealed in Moses’ remarks, this generation saw money not only as a lubricant of exchange, but as a technology of power that enabled its holder to engage and control the forces of modernity. Knowing about money was *bisnis* by the same name, and *bisnis* was the heart of local development. “Anything concerning money is *bisnis*” was a common sentiment, true because any practice that entailed the flow of money, be it bride payment or the sale of a pig, involved that commodity that can be exchanged for all other Western commodities. The picture Moses drew was also of a racially coded epistemology in which whites understand money in contrast to blacks who do not, and learning how to use money is the main key to local development, that is, acquiring the know-how to imitate the behavior of whites. In marked contrast to the senior generation, Moses’s cohort did not believe that Westerners possess a magical and by inference secret knowledge. Having gone to school—where one of the primary goals was to “demystify” local notions of where Western goods and money came from, mainly through a lesson based on the mystified version of how Western goods are produced and circulated—

this generation was beginning to understand that the West dominates others less by hiding knowledge from them (although this is surely sometimes the case) than by inducing them to accept public knowledge about the nature of social reality. Part of this reality of money was that one can exchange it not only for goods or for help (in tending to a coffee plot, in carrying goods from the mission airfield to the village, etc.), but also for sex and the company of women. Money can be exchanged for a relationship that was formerly well beyond the compass of interpersonal exchange, never mind *bisnis*. So the double understanding—embodied in Moses' remarks as well as those of other men who had visited Port Moresby—was that people would do things for and with money that they would never do with customary objects of exchange, and that Western money had the ability to do things and “pull” others in ways that *kastam* objects did not and could not. To put this another way, men like Moses were beginning to inhabit an objective world and to have subjective dispositions toward that world that engendered a space between the concrete and abstract aspects of the money form. There has been a progressive layering of meaning: Moses and his generation have begun to grasp money not only as an index of modernity and a store of wealth but as capital.

Plantation Labor and Worker Experience

The Maring introduction to the Western world and structure of labor had its genesis in sojourns to mostly coastal plantations. These stays were valued, indeed they served as forms of initiation ceremonies into the modern, because they offered young men the opportunity for freedom, a temporary respite from the structured, overpowering demands of kinship and community. The potential to earn money for their bridewealth payment was also enticing, and senior clansmen encouraged them on these grounds. The plantation was time out of time, and space out of space. The plantation system enslaved workers to the clock, to specified hours of work whose rhythm and intensity had no comparable indigenous form. While the plantation itself conjured the sensations of independence, the work itself could not have been done under conditions of less autonomy. An overseer, sometimes aided by a *bosboi* (a local second in command), would cajole, threaten, beat, and bribe the young men to “put up a proper day's work” for their pay. The days were predictable, long, and grueling, the nights and Sundays animated by the tensions, solidarities, and violence of an interethnic, all male, spatially displaced community.

The plantation was a halfway house between two forms of labor. It differed from rural domestic production in that workers did not produce goods for themselves but exclusively for others. Especially in the early

days, the Maring frequently assumed that it was the plantation manager who was the other they were producing for, as opposed to a market. This view served to imitate domestic production in that it personalized the object of production as, for example, when helping a kinsman or big-man. Given their instilled beliefs and dispositions, the young workers sought continually to draw plantation labor into a domestic orbit of meaning, to make it intelligible by locating it within a known landscape of values. The tendency was to conceptualize the food and shelter, the nurturing given by the manager, as the exchange for the labor they proffered. The workers' appreciation of the provisioning of food and shelter sailed a world apart from the business and its managers, as part of the wages and costs of production. Until independence, the fact that the company held the workers' money for them, paying them only when they were about to return home, further masked their actual location in the panorama of capitalist production. After independence, many of the plantations, as well as the more overtly commercial forms of work, began to pay people wages in a regular fashion. And several men of the junior generation opened businesses that compelled them to buy supplies and arrange transport by plane and truck from Western-run enterprises. In these forums, the Maring got an initial taste of what it was like to inhabit a society in which agents do not acquire the products of others through the sociality of kinship and community, but through the sale of their own labor, independent and abstracted of its concrete content (Postone 1993:149–50). The situationally specific character of the encounter shielded the Maring from the direct hand of the logic of capitalism. Nonetheless, these openings, grasped by the junior generation as forms of independence in a kinship-constrained world, bore that special trademark of capitalism: the exhilaration of subjective independence within the grip of increasing objective dependence on a system whose reproduction depended on a relaxation of consciousness. What makes laboring for wages and money critical is that they have been the hybrid and mediating forms in an economic field that they are partly responsible for creating.

Monetizing Agency and the World

The inflow of Western money into the Maring universe, and its absorption into local practices, have animated processes that are as transformative as they are incremental, embedded in the feature of everyday routines, and easy to misrecognize. For Maring as for other Highlands peoples, these processes are founded in the advent of the commodity form as both an index and virtue of modernity, as an imagined key to Western economic and political power over local practices. More than a carnival, capitalism

brings a profusion of goods, from food to guns, that enhance the possibilities of power over a future defined by a Western world that is itself defined by commodities. And, for the Maring, no object represents the coming-to-be-understood commodity more than money. The commodity was also instrumental in the advance of Western epistemology, especially in the case of money. Of all the commodities, it stands in the most abstract relationship to time and labor. The introduction of Western money and what, in contrast to traditional money, can only be purchased with money (e.g., goods at the mission trade store) has also reorganized the terms of desire. Where the use of pearlshell was limited to specific contexts of exchange, where the pearlshell was invested with social relations (certain shells even had their own names), money has a much broader set of uses and more easily becomes detached from social relations (not, as the case of Moses illustrated, as some “natural” property of money but as part of a culture of use learned in their encounters with the agents of modernity such as ethnographers and missionaries). The appearance of money also created new situations and terms for the exercise of judgment about the production of values and meanings. In a total sense, the infiltration of the Western money form, by transforming the ground of people’s beliefs, desires, and judgments, gradually and imperceptibly helps to shape the conditions for the production of intentionality and subjectivity. Thus the ethnography suggests that an understanding of the meaning and value of “local” money is intrinsically tied to an understanding of the culture and progress of modernity.

What emerges from the steady infiltration of Western money is a quasi-Western money form. This money form begins its local life history imbued with little formal, commodity value, but a plethora of social meanings whose center of gravity was the alterity between the Maring and the foreign other, and the local vision of the road to modernity. In the inscription of social meanings, the hybrid form resembled its Western counterpart, though these meanings were, of course, specific to the Maring. Money is a privileged index of modernity precisely because its socially signifying values are left open. The Westerners who introduced the currency assumed, following the tenets of their own commodity-driven ideology, that the social meanings of money are epiphenomenal and that its economic function is transparent. In the first rush of contact, then, money appeared as an empty signifier, a form devoid of intended effect: it was not a prayer designed to salvage the soul, or a food to strengthen the body, or clothes to shelter the self from the elements and eyes of others. In this respect, the social representational value of the Western money form became synonymous with modernity itself: use of pounds, dollars, and kina signifying the modernity of those who use them. For Westerners as

well as Maring, the adoption of money was interpreted as an omen of progress.

But, historically, this was only the initial moment of what is a longer and more mediated process. Over time, the social meaning and morality of money would become more nuanced. By the early 1980s, the once positive, almost millenarian imagery had become colored with negative tonalities. More than pigs, pearlshells, or plumes, money was easier to conceal, and especially in conjunction with the adoption of individual family dwellings, appeared to encourage a philosophy of concealment. Not only did the physical properties of money—small, lightweight, paper—allow it to be hidden, but the Western enclave seemed to condone its concealment. The height of hiddenness was the passbook account at the local bank at Koinambe, the priest who managed the corresponding branch of the bank of New South Wales refusing, when asked by a person's kin, to divulge how much money that person had on deposit, citing "confidentiality" as an inviolate Western value and rule. In this way, everything, from changes in housing styles to the advent of money and the practices of the Anglican mission, allowed the flowering of inequalities, of forms of selfish and possessive individualism that always, even in the precontact era, people imagined lurked beneath the surface or "skin" of human behavior and intentionality, but could now be expressed more openly as practical and increasingly legitimate action. From a complementary angle, the generation then coming of age began to question why "white" people seemed to have the money, and to look at this disparity as an index of tangible inequalities of power, inequalities that seemed to be out of step with the rise of the nation and the emergence of a government run by "black" men. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, money was an unconditionally "good thing," by the late 1970s people began to grasp money as something that could also undermine and destroy—as harboring an element of evil, a sentiment that was, incidentally, echoed in the sermons of mission men.

As money slowly but surely penetrated the Maring universe and people discovered ways of obtaining it, the commodity character of money began to take hold. At the heart of this experience was the slowly evolving realization that their relationship to others need not be mediated by sociality—that is, overt relations of clanship, affinity, or enmity—but could be mediated by their willingness to sell their labor and goods created from that labor in exchange for money. Particularly for the younger generation and, especially for those who had attended the mission school, the possession of money began to emerge as an end in itself, an objective whose touchstone was the growing but secretive bank account. This generation began to incorporate the ownership of money into its image and construction of the person. In everyday speech, they began to extend terms of deri-

sion such as “rubbish man” to include individuals who had little money or potential access. People’s conception of land and their perception of its worth also began to change. Land that was suitable for coffee-producing or panning for gold so soared in value that clansmen began to fight for rights over formerly unused (in the case of coffee) or unusable (in the case of gold) plots of land, this friction inspired by their desire to “win” money.

Not the least of the effects of money was that it changed the conditions for the nature and expression of agency. Traditionally, the power of a person was manifest through their ability to “pull” or influence the behavior/intentions of others and the ability to perform sorcery/magic. The first was exhibited most in the actions of big-men (and, more dramatically and marginally, “wild-men”), the second in the performance of shamans and more marginally sorcerers. Traditionally, these also represented the limited circumstance for expression of “individuality” in a relationally dominated society. The appearance of money engendered both an externalization of power in that the ability to influence others turns on a person’s access to money, and a leveling of power inasmuch as more and more people have access to sources of money wealth. Those who have money have power analogous to big-men, shamans, and sorcerers. So it was that the influx of money into the Maring region added a new dimension to the production of big-man status and complemented the increasing use of sorcery.

This observation flies in the face of accounts that presume the opposition and exclusivity between Capitalism (with a large C) and principles of the traditional economy. The basic understanding is that capitalism universally operates in terms of markets, economic maximization, and the accumulation of personal wealth (principally in the money form). The traditional economy is conversely founded on reciprocity organized around forms of kinship and interpersonal domination. The problem with this view and the primary reason why it fails ethnographically, even for the West, is that it separates production from culture. The idea is that the market and class are the forms of organization that flow from capitalist relations of production whereas kinship, ritual, and community are the forms of human organization generated by culture. Unfortunately, within this framework, there is no way to account for differences between capitalist “societies” because the market, value, labor, and money are assumed to be transhistorical and transcultural categories—to be, in other words, external to culture. When transposed to Melanesia, this viewpoint makes it impossible to grasp the evolution and trajectory of these societies because it is precisely the internal and intrinsic connection between capitalist production and culture that determines their movement historically. Yes, it is true that capitalism preempts and subsumes social relations based on kinship and community, but it necessarily does so in a partial and social-his-

torically specific manner. This is a theoretical way of saying that not only does the integration of Others not entail uniformity or even harmony, but by its very nature it engenders variability and disharmonic relations that are themselves determinant features of encompassment. This last point requires us to observe and honor the differences between Melanesia and the West because these differences are, rather ironically, the basis of their now inseparable, intertwined histories.