FILMS AND OTHER TRIALS: REFLECTIONS ON LONG-TERM FIELDWORK AMONG THE MAISIN, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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This essay is a personal reflection on my developing relationship with the Maisin of Papua New Guinea from December 1981 to the present. I discuss my initial research focus and how my early fieldwork helped me to better understand the ways the Maisin have responded to changes in their community over the past twenty years, particularly in dealing with outsiders. I contrast my understandings of Maisin society with portrayals in two documentary films made in the community, *Anthropology on Trial* (1983) and *Changing Ground* (2001). I argue that the relationship between anthropologists and host communities fuses intellectual engagement with a powerful ethical commitment, both of which strengthen with time and experience.

When I decided to do ethnographic fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, I hoped that it would be the beginning of a lifelong relationship. Most of my mentors and many of the anthropologists whose work had absorbed me over the years had made returns to their field sites, sometimes repeatedly. Although I could not know whether I would also have that opportunity, the possibility shaped the way I thought about my fieldwork. I tried to undertake as comprehensive a study as I could manage, while keenly aware that I could have only a snapshot impression of the Maisin people at a particular historical time. To achieve a deeper understanding and a closer relationship—something I wanted very much—I would need to somehow maintain contact despite the distances.

Two decades and five visits later, I now find myself in the fortunate position of those anthropologists I so admired when I started out. Given how common returns really are, I find it curious that few scholars have written about them,

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especially in Melanesia. The subject has not been entirely neglected, but it is interesting that the four most prominent accounts, including Bruce Knauft's recent *Exchanging the Past* (2002), all marry a personal narrative of return to a remote locale with a vibrant description of its utter transformation in the face of advancing "modernity" (Mead 1966; Read 1986; Tuzin 1997). I do not question either the accuracy or the value of these accounts. They are powerful and important contributions. However, they do not describe *my* experience or that of most anthropologists I know. The Maisin, like most indigenous groups in Melanesia and elsewhere, have been dealing with "outside" agents and forces for rather a long time. While the changes that have come to their communities are profound, they have had time to adjust and adapt over the course of a century of interactions. I have not myself witnessed an abrupt transition of a "traditional" society into "modernity." At the same time, the circumstances of my employment as a tenured academic and the circumstances of Maisin lives, which I describe below, have made revisiting the community relatively easy for me and created opportunities for some Maisin to visit me at my home and for others to keep in touch by letters and e-mail. My perceptions of the Maisin as a culture with a distinct location, in the usual anthropological sense, have been powerfully reshaped by my lengthening experience with an increasingly far-flung network of which I and several others who are not ethnically Maisin are active members.

This article presents a narrative of my interactions over the past 25 years with the Maisin. I make some observations on how the community has changed and discuss my evolving and intensifying involvement in Maisin social networks, at the village level and beyond. Extended observation over time and diversifying sorts of interactions with members of the community have worked to greatly complicate my understanding of the Maisin. My experiences have been unique in detail, but I strongly suspect they reflect the experiences of many other anthropologists working in Melanesia and elsewhere. I hope that this account will encourage others to write about their experiences of long-term fieldwork while providing beginning ethnographers with an appreciation of the value of planning for a sustained commitment to a community.

Why is it that so few anthropologists who have sustained relations with a particular community over time have written about their experiences? Anthropologists have hardly been shy, often writing extremely intimate accounts of fieldwork (DeVita 1990). Indeed, autobiographical ethnographies form an important subgenre in anthropological literature. Such accounts tend to dramatize the adventure of doing ethnographic research in exotic locations that are often presented as perched on the very edge of momentous change. In other words, they conform to the conventions of prevailing metanarratives

of modernity. Accounts of sustained interactions with indigenous groups are necessarily more complicated and messy and hence perhaps less satisfying to write or read about than tales structured around or implying scenarios in which pristine indigenous societies are threatened by "Western" forces, whether they appear in the guise of agents like missionaries or the juggernaut of "globalization."

Anthropologists have been among the vocal critics of the long-standing tendency of many observers to reduce the historical experiences of indigenous societies to simplistic oppositions, whether as in economic programs meant to "modernize traditional" societies, in writings that suppose a vast gulf between Orient and Occident, or in the politics of denying indigenous First Peoples inherent rights to ancestral territories because they now live "modern" lifestyles. We need to make a more concerted effort to carry such sensitivities into our stories about fieldwork. The contributions to this special issue all attempt to do this. This article adds an additional wrinkle by contrasting my experiences and developing understandings of the Maisin with those of two filmmakers who produced documentaries on the community. The contrast reveals the intellectual value of sustained ethnographic research as well as its ethical basis. It also suggests, however, that finding compelling stories that challenge the stereotypes perpetuated in popular writings and films concerning indigenous peoples will likely not come about merely or even mostly through ethnographic research. The value of long-term fieldwork lies elsewhere.

Arrivals and Departures: The Initial Fieldwork

I first developed an interest in the South Pacific as an undergraduate at the University of Western Ontario in the late 1970s. Determined to work on a graduate research project with practical relevance, I first thought to study the impact of advertising campaigns by multinational corporations on island societies, particularly on their sense of identity. After arriving in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1978 to begin study for a master's degree under Ann Chowning, I quickly found this idea unworkable. In those pre-Internet days, the necessary information just wasn't readily available. While searching the collection of the wonderful Alexander Turnbull Library and finding scant information on advertising, however, I did come across fascinating early missionary accounts of exploration. I ended up writing a thesis on the social history of three missions to Papua from their arrivals, beginning in 1871, to the point where the paper record ended in the early 1930s (Barker 1979). I was surprised to learn that the vast majority of Papua New Guineans were now members of Christian churches. My reading of ethnographies had led

me to believe that the missions had made little inroad into "traditional" belief systems (Barker 1992). Intrigued, I decided that I wanted to study the contemporary religion of Melanesians who were at least second-generation Christians. I moved on to the University of British Columbia to work on my Ph.D. under the supervision of Kenelm Burridge. I had already decided to work in an Anglican area along the north coast of either Oro or Milne Bay provinces. The decision to work in Uiaku village came about mostly because it was conveniently close to an airstrip, had been recommended by the Anglican archbishop of Papua New Guinea, and had a large population. The size factor was especially important to my wife, Anne Marie Tietjen, who was pursuing a separate research project on the development of prosocial reasoning among Melanesian children (Tietjen 1986).

We knew little about the Maisin prior to our arrival. I had written to the local priest, a Papua New Guinean, but had received no reply. Anne and I thus initiated our projects without any kind of local consultation. We could only hope that villagers would be interested and supportive. As it turned out, people were remarkably receptive and patient with us, even if most had difficulty understanding why we had come. I had hoped from the onset that our relationship with the Maisin would last a lifetime. Five trips later, extending over two decades and twenty-seven months in the villages and a number of visits from Maisin visiting North America, my connections to the community have intensified and deepened. I feel tremendously privileged.

Anthropologists love to relate personal tales from the field, and I'm no exception. However, for the purposes of this article I wish to focus primarily on the evolution of my research interests and perceptions of Maisin society from my initial extended fieldwork in the early 1980s to shorter visits in the late 1990s and 2000. This will make the comparison with the ways Maisin have been portrayed by documentary filmmakers clearer. First, however, I need to provide some background on the people.

The Maisin are a small sociolinguistic group, numbering around three thousand people in all. Most live in a series of beach villages along the southern coast of Collingwood Bay in Oro Province. Maisin villages have a very "traditional" appearance. Outrigger canoes of various sizes line the beaches; attractive thatched houses front packed-earth plazas, shaded by coconut groves and fruit trees. Like their ancestors, villagers today survive mostly through swidden horticulture, hunting and gathering from the surrounding bush and forests, and fishing. Cash cropping is limited by the lack of shipping along the northeastern coast, but the Maisin have long earned a small income from sales of their beautifully designed tapa cloth (pounded bark cloth). Despite appearances, local people have become increasingly depen-

dent on cash and commodities. These are supplied mostly through remittances sent home by the quarter or so of the population that has migrated to distant urban areas since the early 1960s.

From the start, my perspective on the Maisin was resolutely historical. Having already written a thesis in which I examined the history of early missions in Papua, and having consulted archives in Australia and Port Moresby before arriving in the field, I came prepared, intellectually at least, to see contemporary Maisin society as the outcome of almost a century of interaction with European outsiders. I was interested in examining the obvious imports—the village schools, churches, trade stores, and so forth. But I was also keenly aware that indigenous institutions would bear the marks of colonial interventions, no matter how "traditional" they might appear. In a patrol report from the early 1930s, for instance, I had discovered that the Maisin at that time were radically changing their house styles to conform to a standard type that the colonial administration considered to be healthier. While village houses would be made of bush materials and look traditional, I already knew that they had been modified. And from studies I had read from other coastal areas, I expected that the same would be true of non-material aspects of life like kinship and sorcery beliefs (Abbi 1975; Zelenietz and Lindenbaum 1981). I was determined not to represent the Maisin as a "traditional" society that had somehow held off change.

If one were to take a prominent version of the current folk history of anthropology seriously, I suppose I could claim I was doing something quite radical. Alas, this would be misleading. Anthropologists did not suddenly awaken to the reality of history with the publication in the early 1980s of seminal volumes on *kastom* and the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982). I was fortunate enough to study under two anthropologists—Ann Chowning and Kenelm Burridge—much attuned to the formative influences of colonial agencies on indigenous societies, but they were hardly the only ones at the time. Studying historical developments in economic and religious activities, especially cargo cults, was already a well-established tradition in Melanesian anthropology. By the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a growing consensus to extend historical perspectives to the study of other facets of Melanesian culture, evident in the appearance of many such studies in the following years. I encountered little surprise, let alone resistance, when I came up with the topic of Melanesian Christianity. In fact, most anthropologists I encountered, while usually showing minimal interest in the subject, declared that it was about time someone tackled it!

All the same, the trend towards a historically informed anthropology is much clearer to see in retrospect. For all of the encouragement I received,

FIGURE 1. **Anne Marie Tietjen and John Barker with their "fathers," Claude Daima and Adelbert Sevaru, Uiaku, July 1983.** (Photo by A.M. Tietjen)

I worried that I had made a huge mistake by not studying a more traditional topic in a more remote community. Like Juliana Flinn (writing elsewhere in this special issue)—and I imagine most graduate students doing their first fieldwork—I agonized over my own competency and whether anyone would be interested in the slightest in what I had to report about the Maisin. I kept to my original research project, but I confess that I did allow my anxieties to dictate several decisions. Like Flinn, I spent much of my effort conducting highly organized research through interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. I spent a great deal of time passively recording oral narratives that I later translated with the help of assistants. I did not "hang out" much and I did not get out of the villages to the gardens and the forest nearly enough. I managed to amass a huge amount of data and make some close friends, but often did not feel comfortable in the community.

After I returned home and systematically reviewed my notes, I noticed that my concern that neither the Maisin nor my topic was "traditional enough" had shaped my inquiry in subtle but important ways. Although my research focused on local Christianity, I actually attended more to indigenous-

appearing religious beliefs and practices than those that struck me as Western imports. I had dutifully attended church services, recorded prayers and sermons, and taken copious notes on the minutiae of village-style worship. I had gone to parish meetings and conducted semiformal interviews about the church and Christianity with a wide range of people. Yet my extensive notes on Christianity were dwarfed by those detailing sorcery beliefs and accusations, magic, and the ubiquitous presence of spirits. This is not to say that Maisin themselves drew a sharp distinction between indigenous and Christian beliefs. Clearly, though, I was drawn more to the exotic aspects of their religious lives than to familiar ones, and thus my appreciation for the latter was less developed than it might have been.

While I was trying with mixed success to deal with a topic then neglected by most anthropologists, I nevertheless enthusiastically embraced a classic approach to research little different from that advocated by Malinowski (1922). My techniques were very low tech, with the bulk of information going into handwritten notebooks and journals. I tried to be as comprehensive as my skills, tools, and imagination would allow, both in methodology and subject matter. Along with recording oral traditions, attending endless village meetings, sharing food at funerals and so forth, I measured gardens, conducted two censuses of the entire village and a neighboring one for comparative purposes, surveyed household economies, and polled samples of villagers on a variety of subjects. I take pleasure here in crediting Ken Burridge for one of my most useful tools. While I was working on my fieldwork proposal, he insisted that I write up a short appendix of "protocols"—sets of research questions and procedures to guide my fieldwork. At first I considered this a nuisance but then, after consulting *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (Royal Anthropological Institute 1951) as well as Murdock's *Outline of Cultural Materials* (1975), I got into the swing of it, quickly producing a sixty-page-long list, which I carried with me to Uiaku. Whenever I found myself stranded for something to do, I consulted my "protocols." As a result my files filled up on topics that I'm sure I would not have otherwise addressed.

Despite this industry, I was uncertain whether I understood much of anything, and worried that most of the information I was collecting was of little interest or use for the Maisin or anyone else. I was also often very lonely. Anne was back in Canada from July 1982 to May 1983. I made a point of socializing during down times, but most evenings, after finishing my notes, curling up under the mosquito net with a cheap mystery proved far more inviting. Fieldwork sometimes felt like a trial. Ironically enough, in early 1983 an American filmmaker appeared in Uiaku village hoping to use it as a backdrop for a documentary entitled *Anthropology on Trial.*

Anthropology on Trial

The initial omens were not good. Barbara Gullahorn-Holecek arrived on the beach one afternoon unannounced, having caught a dinghy from the regional airstrip, located about twelve miles up the coast from Uiaku. Once villagers determined that she had not come to purchase tapa cloth, they brought her to my house. She was clearly discomforted by this, asking only if I could direct her to a certain village man. He happened to be attending a soccer match up the coast and I arranged for a dinghy to take her there. Gullahorn-Holecek returned disheveled and exhausted the next day, after a sleepless night without a mosquito net. I put her up in my house and, after she had a rest and some food, arranged for her to meet with village leaders on her own. The following day she described the film project to me in some detail, explaining that she wanted to document Papua New Guinean criticisms concerning anthropologists. I was astonished to learn that an American couple living in Port Moresby, whom I had hosted in the village over a weekend several months earlier, had described me to her as a Kurtz-like figure, living a high life at the expense of the villagers. An exposé would have made a great segment for her film, but fortunately for me the Maisin she spoke to were mostly content with my presence and made it clear they would welcome any other Europeans who might want to settle amongst them. After Gullahorn-Holecek dropped her bombshell, she asked if I would have any objections to being in the film. I told her that it was up to the Maisin, knowing full well that the village leaders would be delighted. And so they were. Village leaders announced that the film would show Americans just how poor the Maisin were. Given the fond memories elders had of American soldiers they had met during the Second World War, people were hopeful that the viewers of the film would take pity and send "development." About six weeks later, a small film crew arrived with an impressive load of equipment. They shot their film in a bit less than three days, packed up, and left.

The following November, about five months after returning to Canada, I nervously sat down with friends to watch the premier of *Anthropology on Trial* on the PBS television network in the United States. The filmmakers had interviewed me on camera for about two hours and I was keenly aware of how easily they could edit the footage to produce whatever image they wanted of me and my work. As it was, I more or less came out on the side of the angels. I cringed at the sight and sound of myself, but mostly felt relief. And then I started thinking about the way the filmmakers had constructed Maisin life and my research. I agreed with the general message of the film but was struck by inaccuracies and exaggerations in my segment and elsewhere.

The film pictures the Maisin as a traditional people perched on the edge of modernity. The segment opens with the camera following me as I walk

through the village. As I pass the community school, the camera pulls away and enters a classroom where a teacher is giving a lesson in geometrical forms. The narrator tells viewers that with the arrival of the school, children are no longer learning the old traditions from their elders. Instead, I have become the last student of Maisin culture, hanging out with the old people and learning their stories. The work is not without its difficulties. The most important of the Maisin stories concern their history. While "we" possess one history, the narrator somberly intones, each Maisin clan jealously possesses its own version of the people's origins. Maisin appreciate what I'm doing, but they (and I) are also concerned that I have stirred things up by forcing the issue of who is telling the truth.

It was a nice clean storyline that bore a dim resemblance to reality. Many Maisin were concerned that they were forgetting their traditions; I did spend a fair amount of my time recording narratives; and my study of clans histories had caused some friction as different big men tried to get me to endorse their versions (and associated land claims) and reject those offered by rivals. The claim that the younger generation was no longer listening to the elders following the recent arrival of the school, on the other hand, was a stretch. A school and church had operated continuously in Uiaku since 1902. It was hardly new. Children in the 1980s certainly spent more years in school than their elders and had other distractions, but the young adults I knew were clearly interested in Maisin customs and very concerned that too much customary knowledge was being forgotten.

Given the subject of the documentary, however, the most serious distortion concerned my motivation for fieldwork. I had not come to record Maisin traditions, but to study Christianity. I studied the clan histories at the insistence of Maisin elders who were eager to bolster their political claims by having the stories written down and, they hoped, validated. While I certainly did not resist, I was always conscious that the clan histories were a side issue to my own research project about which, sad to say, people were far less interested. The film, however, depicted me as one of a new generation of young anthropologists, culturally sensitive and aware that the elders are the true teachers (a theme carried even further in a later segment focused upon Andrew Strathern and the Melpa bigman, Ongka). In contrast, the film cruelly misrepresents Margaret Mead as arrogantly ignoring cultural restrictions and promoting insulting stereotypes in her work on Manus Islanders. Conveniently dead and unable to defend herself, Mead got a bum rap while I escaped censure.

For all its heavy-handedness, *Anthropology on Trial* raises important questions about anthropologists' responsibilities to the people they study and write about. It is historically significant in showing visually that "citizens and

natives in Papua New Guinea ... and across the Pacific are reading the work of anthropologists and demanding a political accountability that was difficult to imagine a generation or so ago" (Rohatynskyj and Jaarsma 2000:1). This is a valuable service that the film performs well. Watching it as one of the subjects, however, I find a second lesson—a confirmation of the special nature of ethnography as opposed to alternative strategies of research and representation. From the perspective of a working anthropologist, Gullahorn-Holecek's approach to her subject was badly flawed. She assumed that the truth of the complex relationship between ethnographic fieldworkers and their hosts lay close to the surface and could be accessed by making brief visits to various fieldsites and conducting short interviews. Lacking much knowledge of either Papua New Guinea or anthropologists, the resulting film projects commonsense assumptions about its subjects that, at best are superficial and, at worst, flat out wrong. The documentary thus anachronistically represents anthropologists as students solely of indigenous traditions who have, at least in the past, engaged in a kind of theft by taking away records of those traditions and giving nothing in return. Good anthropologists, the film seems to suggest, should be scribes (like me), recording the words of our informant-teachers without inserting our own interpretations or opinions and leaving full copies of our fieldnotes behind us. Even better, they should be like Strathern who has, the film implies, settled down permanently with his Melpa hosts and pretty much gone native. The complaints of the Papua New Guineans who appear in the film are handled better, but here too the film resolutely sticks to the surface of things. Ignorant of the centrality of reciprocity in Melanesian moral reasoning, the film reduces the criticisms to a matter of simple fairness, of tit for tat. If anthropologists take away information, they should give something back; if North American anthropologists get to study Papua New Guineans, Papua New Guinean anthropologists should get to study North Americans. Problem solved. As an ethnographer, my criticism of the film is not that it is raises awkward questions about my profession but that it doesn't take those questions nearly seriously enough.

I returned to Uiaku for two months of fieldwork in late 1986. In most respects, this felt like an extension of my first stint of fieldwork. I had not been away long and changes in the village were few. However, this time I lived with a family instead of in my own house, which had been torn down after we departed in July 1983. I was more focused this visit, concentrating on a study of tapa cloth, but I also felt more relaxed and comfortable. There was, however, one dark cloud over this period. My first application for a research visa had been refused. I was informed by the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies that the Maisin had held a meeting and decided against allowing me to return because, among other things, I had made a huge amount of

money by writing books about them. Fortunately for me, the Oro Province administrator overturned the ban, as he was delighted to have someone study the economic potential of tapa cloth . When I arrived in Uiaku, I found no one who knew anything about the supposed meeting. People seemed genuinely pleased that I had returned. About a month after I arrived, a man whom I suspected had started the rumor visited me late one night to admit to it and to apologize. He told me that he remained friends of the American couple in Port Moresby who had identified me as the "evil" anthropologist three years earlier. He had created the story of the meeting and passed it on to them as well as to a provincial politician I did not know; they did the rest. I never did uncover the details of this petty intrigue—the others involved did not answer my letters—but the apology lifted a considerable weight from my shoulders. I did rather feel I had been put on trial and was now acquitted.

Returns: New Missions for Old

I did not get back to Uiaku for another ten years. I had a new job and a child, which limited my ability to be away from home for long. I developed a new research project to study Christianity in First Nations (indigenous) communities in coastal British Columbia and carried out limited fieldwork on the subject among the Nisga'a First Nation near the Alaska border (Barker 1998). The Maisin seemed a long way away until events conspired in the mid-1990s that brought my old fieldsite much closer to home. Late in 1994 I received a letter from Franklin Seri, the village councilor for Uiaku, letting me know that he would be attending an exhibition of Maisin tapa cloth at the Berkeley Art Museum the following April. He wondered if Berkeley was close to my home in Bellingham, Washington, as he wanted to visit. Larry Rinder, a curator at the museum, and Lafcadio Cortesi, a Greenpeace activist who lived in Berkeley, were organizing the event. I promptly got in touch with both. My initial phone conversations were rather eerie as both Rinder and Cortesi had heard stories about me and Anne from the Maisin, but I knew nothing of them. The following spring, we joined the four Maisin men who had been brought over to open the Berkeley exhibit, "Jumping Lines: Maisin Art and Rainforest Conservation." Seri then came north to Bellingham where, among other things, we compiled a collection of stories in Maisin and English translation that I had recorded during the 1980s for use in the community schools. I began to plot my return to Papua New Guinea in earnest.

Two years later I landed once again on the beach at Uiaku for a stay of six weeks. The Maisin villages looked much the same and it was wonderful to see old friends and acquaintances. The people's circumstances within the larger

regional context had changed profoundly, however, and I soon became aware of transformations in the society. For one, there were many more people than before, especially young people. Up to the early 1980s, almost all Maisin youths had left the villages to attend high schools in larger towns and most went on to jobs in various parts of the country. Two decades of out-migration had left few younger adults remaining in the villages at that time. By 1997, however, only a third or so of community-school graduates were gaining acceptance into high school and many of those who graduated returned after failing to find jobs. In addition, members of the first generation of Maisin migrants were now returning to the villages with their families to enjoy their retirement. Uiaku in particular looked wealthier. People had newer clothes, more motorized dinghies, and generally a greater abundance of commodities than ever before. The custom of eating food by hand off of banana leaves during feasts had lapsed; everyone now used plates and cutlery. Many of those returning to the villages had spent a good part of their lives in relatively well-paid professional positions in the government, spoke good English, and brought with them a somewhat more upscale lifestyle. Several had abandoned Anglicanism for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and a Pentecostal sect.

Uiaku was thus more diversified and cosmopolitan than a decade earlier. It had also become better known to the outside world. During the six weeks I spent in the area in 1997, I was astonished by the constant comings and goings of representatives of a variety of environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who were carrying out projects in partnership with the Maisin. Their presence had come in response to a shift in Maisin thinking about the rain forest lying inland from the villages. In the early 1980s, local leaders had eagerly sought out logging companies, thinking that this represented the only option for bringing "development" to their communities. Ten years later, they had come to the opposite conclusion. One of the several causes precipitating the change was a growing awareness that villagers would receive few benefits from industrial logging and could well lose control of their land. This suspicion seem confirmed when, in 1994, word leaked of a secret deal between politicians and a group of Collingwood Bay migrants living in town to allow a logging concession. Local landowners were enraged and, with the help of relatives and environmentalists in Port Moresby, managed to quash the project, declaring in prominent newspaper advertisements that Collingwood Bay was "not for sale." The Maisin rejection of a logging project before it started was unusual for Papua New Guinea. The more common pattern is for a community to demand compensation after a project has begun (Filer 1998a). Their stance attracted immediate and widespread attention from conservation organizations, which were expanding rapidly throughout the country at the time.

By 1997, with support from the World Wildlife Fund and other international bodies, the Maisin had become the single focus of a new national NGO, Conservation Melanesia (CM). CM staff undertook surveys of the lands, flora, and fauna in preparation for the eventual declaration of a conservation area. CM also coordinated workshops given by affiliated NGOs on landowners' rights, insect farming, and leadership. Meanwhile, Lafacadio Cortesi was using the Greenpeace network to develop an international market for Maisin tapa cloth—an initiative that led, among other things, to exhibitions by the Berkeley Art Museum in 1995 and the Fabric Workshop of Philadelphia in 1998, as well as the placement of a Peace Corps couple in Uiaku to help with the local organization of tapa production and sales. As word spread about the hospitality of the Maisin and their embrace of the conservation ethic, more environmentalists came to see for themselves. Meanwhile, accomplishing a long-held dream, church leaders managed to convince the Summer Institute of Linguistics to place two European volunteers in Uiaku to begin the fifteen-year task of translating the Bible into Maisin. In response to these developments the leaders from the various Maisin villages gathered to form a new political entity, MICAD (for "Maisin Integrated Conservation and Development"), to represent their collective rights over the land, to promote locally-controlled development, and to coordinate projects with their new external partners.

I had come this time specifically to study the impact of the environmental activists on Maisin society. My previous work on the community provided me with a rough baseline to assess change. The degree of change was indeed impressive; but my earlier fieldwork also allowed me to identify key points of cultural continuity. In the early 1980s, the Maisin villages had been fiercely egalitarian in outlook. This was reflected in innumerable ways: a stress on sharing food and labor, the etiquette of not standing on a canoe's gunwales when passing a village so as not to be above people on shore, notions of sorcery as retaliation for non-reciprocal and selfish acts, and so forth. A decade later, the villagers seemed to me less fearful of sorcery and less involved in exchanges. Still, the cultural stress on egalitarianism played itself out to the full in the never-ceasing squabbling over the leadership and decisions of MICAD. I was impressed by eloquent statements praising the values of conservation and stewardship of resources, especially from younger people and women. Yet it was also abundantly clear the rain forest campaign was motivated by suspicion that commercial logging would benefit a few at the expense of the many. It was a view that I happened to agree with, but I could also appreciate that it resonated with deeply held moral values. The same values that brought Maisin together to keep outsiders away from their resources led villagers to suspect their own leaders of lining their pockets through MICAD activities

and associations with environmentalists. And such suspicions, in turn, seriously challenged unity and efforts to develop economic alternatives.

My earlier research also illuminated my understanding of the environmentalists and other outsiders now working with the Maisin. While most of them seemed to think of the Maisin as living in a more or less pristine "traditional" society, I was keenly conscious that the activists were only the latest in a long series of outsiders who had interacted with the Maisin over the course of a century. During the colonial period, the Maisin had learned to distinguish between government officers, who came to give orders and take censuses, and missionaries, who brought valued spiritual and practical knowledge (through the schools). By 1982, Papua New Guinea had been independent for seven years and the Anglican Church was almost entirely localized. The priests serving the Maisin villages and their bishop had long been Papua New Guineans. Still, the categories persisted. Maisin categorized their own leaders and activities in terms of "government," "mission," and "village." And they applied these labels to visitors. Anne and I had been viewed by many, for instance, as a rather peculiar and perhaps disappointing species of missionary. As I watched the Maisin interact with the newest outsiders and listened to the chatter about them, it dawned on me that they were placing the newcomers into the broad "missionary" category. That is to say, they saw the activists as people deserving respect and support primarily because they had come selflessly to "help the people" by bringing them knowledge of the outside world and connections to its powerful forces.

I did not like being likened to missionaries very much in the 1980s and I expect the activists would like it less. None of us came to Uiaku to change the religion of the people. Indeed, we all in our different ways praise "traditional" Maisin ways and seek to support their survival. All the same, if Maisin perceive missionaries, anthropologists, and environmentalists as belonging to a single class of people, the anthropologist in me wants to understand exactly what *they* understand the nature of that class to be. The answer turns out to be quite complex, turning on indigenous notions of reciprocal morality and long-term experience of various types of outsiders, both foreign and Papua New Guinean. Much of my earlier work had been taken up with the question of how the Maisin perceived and interacted with missionaries and how this, in turn, had reshaped their society. This was necessarily a historical question, for missionaries in the conventional sense had long departed the area by the time I arrived. My knowledge of the historical encounter between the Maisin and the colonial agencies of church and state, however, provided me with a framework for understanding the people's present interactions with environmentalists. And, in turn, the present-day encounters opened up new insights on the past.

My most recent writings on the Maisin have focused on their interactions with the new secular missionaries of environmentalism (Barker 2003, 2007, n.d.). Without a close familiarity gained from my earlier fieldwork, I doubt I would never have appreciated the degree to which Maisin history and culture have informed the people's reception of the newcomers. Above and beyond this important point, I think the Maisin may be onto something. There are uncanny if ironic resonances in the motivations, perceptions, and unintended consequences of the Anglican missionary interventions of the past and those of environmentalists in the present.

Critics tend not to pay much attention to the ways that missionaries often conflate their causes with the people they come to convert. They instead look at missionaries as intruders, ethnocentrically imposing their notions of Western morality and religious beliefs on non-Western "others." The Maisin have had little experience of this kind of missionary. The Anglican missionaries of old were led by university-educated High Churchmen, who rejected what they saw as the corruption of modernism while embracing the simplicity of traditional village life (Wetherell 1977). They wanted to create in Papua New Guinea a vibrant indigenous Christianity that preserved and protected village ways from exploitation by outsiders seeking a fast buck. When shorn of its Christian trappings, the Anglicans' romantic rhetoric celebrating the communal values of village societies resembles that uttered by secular activists today. Activists now, like the missionaries before them, come with knowledge of global truths they presume harmonize and strengthened the best features of native culture. They hope to offer peoples like the Maisin tools and advice to improve their lives while respecting and strengthening their distinctive traditions. Echoing another older missionary theme, activists perceive themselves as invited guests working to protect vulnerable indigenous groups against exploitation by outside profiteers while shielding them from the globalizing culture of mass consumerism or large-scale logging and mining interests.

There are further parallels. While white missionaries are commonly credited or blamed for the spread of Christianity, most of the actual work of proselytizing in the indigenous world was and continues to be done by local evangelists. For all of their sympathy for village societies, most Anglican missionaries had limited direct experience and a very superficial understanding of the lives of ordinary Papuans. The Maisin experience was fairly typical. Except for a brief period around 1920 when a white priest resided in Uiaku, most people learned about Christianity from Melanesian teacher-evangelists (Barker 2005). Activist understandings of the Maisin today also tend to be superficial, based mostly on brief visits, a smattering of knowledge picked up in conversations with individual villagers, and general

preconceptions about Melanesian culture shared in the NGO networks. They visit to give workshops and encouragement, but it is middle-level organizations like MICAD and Conservation Melanesia, and not least local Maisin themselves, who act on or ignore initiatives.

It is hard to imagine how things could be otherwise. The environmental activists who have worked with the Maisin are by and large selfless individuals who give expert advice on protecting the environment and on small-scale local economic development. They are not there to study the culture and, besides, it is arguable whether they need to. The Maisin must be the ones to make decisions about their own lives, and that includes what help to accept from outsiders. I like and admire many of the activists I have met. All the same, I have felt jarred at times by the tendency of some to make definitive statements about the Maisin combined with a general lack of curiosity about the actualities of people's lives. I have heard much naïve talk, for instance, of "chiefs," of the people's "spiritual connection" to the land, women's "servility," and so forth. Although NGOs are far from wealthy, their representatives bring money and goods in the villages and offer coveted opportunities for trips overseas. With little knowledge of the local community, activists rely heavily on those Maisin who speak the best English and have had the greatest experience living in the towns (and thus away from the villages). Other villagers resent what they perceive as favoritism. Activists are generally not aware of how great this resentment is until it bursts into the open in arguments, accusations, and, sometimes, withdrawal from projects. Squabbles over the spoils of NGO visits and interventions can be quite disillusioning to those who have constructed fantasies of brave tribal peoples fending off the juggernaut of globalization.

If ignorance in such cases does not lead to bliss, neither is it folly. A positive conception of the Maisin, even if naïve, is certainly preferable to a negative one. It is also worth repeating that a deep familiarity with the community is not a requirement for a positive contribution, particularly as the local people themselves are in a position to pick, choose, and modify those contributions that make the best sense to themselves. Perhaps most important, I suspect that a deep familiarity with a place would too often impede the sorts of contributions the environmentalists have been making. Knowing something of the complexities, combined with a sharpened appreciation of my ignorance of many facets of the society, I would find it daunting to undertake the types of economic and political projects that the Maisin's new partners have introduced over the past decade. Much as I wish that the activists were a little more curious about Maisin culture and history, I envy the clarity they possess that allows them to act.

Changing Ground

The anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker titled her wonderful autobiography, *Stranger and Friend* (1966). My own relationship with the Maisin has evolved into a state that might be described, using the local senses of these words, as "missionary" and "kinsman." During our early fieldwork, both Anne and I were claimed as their "children" by senior men belonging to different clans. We thought this a bit comical at the time, but by the 1990s we found that people took our status as family very seriously. Our close "kin" refer to us by kinship terms rather than our names, and they expect us to either stay with them or visit them frequently while in the village. Our relationships have been confirmed by gifts of tapa cloth bearing our clan insignia, which we are forbidden to give away. In June 2000, Anne's "brothers" took our son Jake through the early stages of the initiation ritual for firstborn children. I have planted betel-nut palms in "my" clan hamlet and have been offered a new house should I decide to retire to Uiaku.

This all sounds wonderful and largely is. Yet kinship in Melanesian societies also carries heavy obligations that detract from any romanticism about "going native." An ethic of reciprocity underlies most aspects of life, not least in relations between close kin. My kin have been wonderfully generous over the years with advice, information, food, and companionship. And, like any son or brother, they expect me to reciprocate. Moreover, like any relative fortunate enough to have a job and vast resources by village standards, I am expected to give back more than I receive. For the most part this expectation is fine. My kin are rarely unreasonable in their requests and in any case are accepting when I say I can't meet them. All the same, the near constancy of requests can feel onerous, even overwhelming at times. And the expectation that I will automatically side with my kin in village disputes sometimes requires delicate diplomacy.

I don't think that most other Maisin regard me as kin—as one of them—but rather as a missionary, albeit one who has had a long relationship with the community. As I suggested above, the Maisin have long incorporated the category of missionary into local notions of leadership and responsibility. As with other relationships, that between villagers and missionaries is governed by reciprocity. The people listen respectfully to the "advice" of missionaries and help them in their efforts, and in return the missionary (or God) should do something good for them. Almost from the start of my work among them, the leading members of the Maisin community have periodically reminded me, usually graciously but occasionally forcefully, of their expectations.

Having a long-term relationship with the community has allowed me to give back to the community in a wide variety of ways. During our early stint of fieldwork, Anne and I organized a small library in Uiaku using books donated

FIGURE 2. **Crew filming members of Stó:lo delegation, Uiaku, June 2000.** (Photo by J. Barker)

from a nearby plantation and from friends in the United States. Over the years, I have helped to write grant proposals for various community projects, raised money and publicity in support of Maisin resistance to commercial logging on their ancestral lands, written readers for the community schools, and hosted Maisin visiting North America. I undertook, along with Franklin Seri, a much larger project in the late 1990s by seeking a filmmaker to document the Maisin's struggle to retain control over their land. This project morphed into another when, in June 2000, I organized and led a delegation from the Stó:lo First Nation in British Columbia to the Maisin villages in an effort to foster mutually beneficial ties between the two communities. The visit was filmed for a documentary, *Changing Ground*, shown early the next year on the Canadian science program, *The Nature of Things*.

Arranging for the film and the visit involved a great deal of consultation with Maisin communities as well as fund-raising. The results of these labors, unfortunately, were crushingly disappointing. The presence of a film crew turned out to be enormously disruptive. The troubles began on the

director's arrival, when to my astonishment he vetoed a carefully worked out itinerary that would have had the delegation and film crew visit all of the Maisin villages. The decision flamed well-founded resentment against Uiaku, which has gained most benefit from recent outside interest in the Maisin. The director was also far more interested in capturing the Stó:lo delegates' reactions to village life than documenting discussions between the two groups. As a result of this tack, and a decision to shoot on film rather than video, most of the delegates' days were taken up being filmed repeatedly in small set pieces in which they observed villagers at work or attempted tasks themselves like beating sago, leaving little time for meetings with village leaders. A year later, the Stó:lo government hosted a delegation of Maisin to their lands, but here again the main purpose of the visit was turned over to the making of a documentary rather than discussions for future cooperation. The Maisin did seem to enjoy meeting the delegation and some benefited from the cash the visitors brought in or as members of the delegation to Canada. But, sadly, the experience seems to have widened a festering rift between the largest village of Uiaku and other Maisin communities, while a continuing relationship with the Stó:lo has so far failed to develop.

Changing Ground displays many of the same problems as *Anthropology on Trial* in its projection of popular but ethnographically dubious assumptions. The story line, conveyed through narration and interview clips, suggests that the Stó:lo delegates are encountering their ancestral past in the Maisin. The delegates express admiration for the Maisin way of life and regret for culture they themselves have lost. The telling exception is an adolescent member of the delegation, who misses the modern conveniences and amusements of home. As for the Maisin, they have tasted the world of money and decided to return to defend the lands and ways of life of their ancestors. The narration is quite spare but still includes annoying errors, beginning with the mispronunciation of "Maisin." But the silences are more telling of the film's intent. We are told in the opening scene that this meeting between two indigenous people was "remarkable" but never why it happened or what makes it notable. With little information to work from, viewers are made into voyeurs watching scene after scene of people performing unexplained exotic activities (dancing, waving spears, beating sago, and so forth) in a gorgeous tropical setting. The silences work to reinforce the general narrative of the film, one that most of the audience would have no trouble recognizing: the grand narrative of modernization, the destruction of an indigenous arcadia through the corruption of Western consumerism and greed. The only real novelty is the appearance of two indigenous groups on either side of the divide, both reduced to stereotypes: the Stó:lo who have "lost" their culture and the Maisin who are defiantly "holding on" to theirs.

My experience with this film touches on an ethical dilemma that many anthropologists face. For all of its simplicities, *Changing Ground* conveys a sympathetic image of the Maisin to its intended audience that might, in the future, help win valuable support when outside interests attempt to exploit local resources without the consent of the people. Younger Maisin in particular rather like the image of themselves as indigenous guardians of the rain forest as conveyed by environmentalists and this film. As well, many villagers hope that the film and similar projects will bring more money by promoting the sale of tapa cloth and encouraging tourism. On the other hand, I balk both professionally and personally at representations of the Maisin that venture into propaganda. Such portrayals set up expectations in an audience that are easily dashed by revelations that the subjects are not so "traditional" or pure in their motives as the film suggests. Beyond the politics, though, there is something deeply troubling about the conceit that indigenous cultures, while to be honored and respected, are nevertheless very easy to understand. In the 1980s, anthropologists engaged in an often-acrimonious discussion concerning the alleged tendency of the discipline to "appropriate" other cultures and to assume an unwarranted voice of "ethnographic authority" in accounts of them. My experience suggests that we need to turn this critique outwards as well as inwards, for I have seen little in the anthropological literature, past or present, to compare with the heavy-handed authority assumed in films like *Changing Ground*.

The creators of *Changing Ground* are not likely to ever work with the Maisin again to update or modify their film. It is the Maisin for whom the ground is changing, not the filmmakers. My experience is different. While I have observed and to a limited extent participated in major changes in the community, I am keenly aware that the grounds of my research and my relationships with the people have both changed enormously. I am continually rethinking and modifying my understanding of Maisin experience, both in my writing and teaching, and I am deeply grateful for the expanded opportunities I have enjoyed to give back to the community in a variety of ways. Most of my efforts have been devoted to written work. I still consider this kind of work—while unlikely to be seen, let alone appeal, to the wide audiences enjoyed by the films made about the Maisin—to be extremely important and worth defending. By way of conclusion, I now turn to that defense.

Conclusion

Critics of anthropological research conducted in places like Melanesia have often portrayed the endeavor as a kind of exchange: anthropologists "take" cultural information from which they build a career and, in return, they are

obliged to give something back. As we have seen, Melanesians themselves often talk this way. Yet that characterization needs to be explored rather than simply stated. The Maisin conception of reciprocity is complex and highly contextual. As in other Melanesian societies, exchanges occur constantly, working on several registers: economic, social, and moral. Any anthropologist working in Melanesia inevitably finds him or herself positioned within exchange networks. And, to the extent that one remains in touch, one continues to be subject to the push and pulls of the network even after leaving the field. Indeed, for many anthropologists, the network rather than the place has become the "field."

I have found that the longer I work with the Maisin, the more useful I have become to them. My main use has been as an archivist. Over the years, I have provided hundreds of copies of rough field notes concerning clan emblems and genealogies, audio tapes of stories and interviews, and photographs from my own collection and from those I've located in mission and museum archives. Like other anthropologists, I have found that few Maisin are much interested in my academic writing (although they appreciate copies), preferring texts that highlight the words of their own people. This has led me to spend increasing time on editing folktales, histories, and World War II narratives into self-published collections. Each time I return to the area I carry a carton full of duplicated notes, tapes, and collections to share as widely as I can.

I suppose that I could be accused of appropriating Maisin knowledge to benefit myself in that my scholarly writing is not addressed to that community and, indeed, interprets their experiences in terms that are foreign to most of them. Like all anthropologists, I hope that my interpretations both respect and make useful sense of the community and await, with some anxiety to be sure, the day that Maisin begin to comment directly on them. All the same, I do not view my academic publications as independent of my relationship with the community. Instead, they are an outer face, as is my teaching, of the Maisin network of exchanges that I have so long been part of. In my work, I have increasingly tried to convey the fact of my own location as an observer and interpreter, on the one hand, and an appreciation for the complexity of the society, on the other. I continue to search for patterns, cultural and historical, but have gained an increasing tolerance for ambiguities and contradictions. This makes, perhaps, for less-elegant portraits of Maisin experience but, I hope, better shows the people as fellow human beings often struggling to construct and make sense of their lives, and not as exemplars of a non-Western other.

When I first began graduate studies in anthropology, it was already becoming difficult to undertake long-term fieldwork in places like

Melanesia. Since then the obstacles have only increased. Students entering the discipline today have trouble securing funds for an eighteen- to twenty-four-month stint of fieldwork and, in many places, come under strong pressure to complete their degrees quickly. The focus of the discipline has also shifted over the years—for a variety of reasons—from research in "exotic" locations to projects close to home. In Papua New Guinea and, more recently, the Solomon Islands, the breakdown of infrastructures, prevalence of deadlier forms of malaria, and ratcheting levels of violence have also worked to dissuade younger fieldworkers. Finally, few new graduates can count on securing tenured academic positions that would enhance the opportunity for long-term research based on regular return visits. Obviously these obstacles will be far less acute for Melanesian scholars working in their own region, but in general the trend would seem to be away from long-term research.

Yet changing circumstances have at the same time opened new possibilities. Over the past twenty years, travel and communication across the globe have become easier and more economical. I do not think that the "field" will vanish from the anthropological vocabulary, but the word clearly has come to mean something more than a place. Opportunities for interactions, in some ways more intense and frequent, have increased for many places. There are also more opportunities for anthropologists to maintain their relationship with a community in occupations outside the academy, by working as journalists, for instance, or as environmental educators and activists.

The need for anthropological research based on a long-term personal commitment to indigenous communities has never been greater. Advocacy in the forms of superficial journalism or films like *Changing Ground* can never be of more than temporary value. Well-formed advocacy, based upon a deep appreciation of the lives of real people, may be less popular in the West but more important where it counts—in courtrooms and in classrooms. Anthropologists perform their most important function by resisting an implicit ethnocentric conceit in the modernization metanarrative: that indigenous peoples are of interest and respect only to the degree they succeed in remaining "traditional." The anthropological "gift" of ethnographic records, imperfect and inadequate as they may be, is perhaps our most crucial contribution to the communities we work with. I feel immensely privileged to have had my dream of establishing a long-term relationship with a community in Papua New Guinea. As long as they want me, I intend to continue working with the Maisin. I hope that future generations of anthropologists will be willing and able to make the same commitment to the communities they choose and are called upon to study.

NOTES

Anne Marie Tietjen has been my constant companion both in the field and in my thoughts when we have been apart. I gratefully acknowledge our shared experiences and her reflections on the Maisin people, which have helped to shape much of what I write here. I take the greatest pleasure in thanking our Maisin family, friends, and neighbors for their willingness to accept us into their community for all of these years. Au roisesinamme, tenkiu bejji aifa.

1. The first known contact occurred in 1890, when the newly appointed administrator of (then) British New Guinea, William Macgregor, toured the northeastern coast. The Maisin were "pacified," at the cost of a number of lives, in 1900, shortly after the establishment of a government post at Tufi. Two years later, the Anglican Mission began a school and church at Uiaku (Barker 1987).

2. The exhibit has been preserved in "virtual" form at http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibits/jumpline/jlhome.html.

3. And just in time for the climax of the Sandline crisis, but that's another story (see Ivarature 1998).

4. According to Anna-Karina Hermkens, who has been researching Maisin women and tapa cloth, the older form of feasting persists in eastern Maisin villages, perhaps because fewer people in these poorer communities can afford plates and cutlery.

5. Commercial logging began growing exponentially in Papua New Guinea in the early 1980s, accompanied more often than not by broken promises of local development, political corruption, and environmental devastation. One response was an equally rapid growth in NGOs dedicated to conservation. These developments have been tracked by Colin Filer in several publications (e.g., 1997; 1998b).

6. One can, of course, push the analogy too far. The Anglican missionaries were primarily concerned with establishing Christianity; they settled in or near indigenous villages for long periods of time and established permanent churches and schools. Just as importantly, they worked in the context of colonial overrule, seeing themselves not as guests but as teachers and managers of the indigenous population. Such aspects, however, may not have been all that visible to most Maisin who had little direct contact with European missionaries (see below).

7. In 1998, the film producer, director and myself visited and held meetings in the major Maisin villages to explain the film project and seek permission. One major stipulation made by village leaders was that the film would incorporate all of the Maisin villages. It is quite possible that the film director, who did not attend all of the meetings, did not understand the reasons for this. In any case, I made a major mistake at the time by not insisting that a contract be drawn up between the Maisin leaders and the filmmakers.

8. In 2002, a second documentary based on the visit of seven Maisin to the Stó:lo in British Columbia aired on Canadian television. Entitled, *Years from Here*, the film continues the theme of culture loss. Interestingly, however, it is subverted by the Stó:lo who,

unlike the Maisin, have had a great deal of experience with the media and obviously exercised a strong control over the film's message. Unlike *Changing Ground*, the second film projects a positive spin on the Stó:lo as a dynamic nation that has, through years of struggle, renewed itself. In contrast to the eloquent and sophisticated Stó:lo, the Maisin appear rather lost. While I had the opportunity to meet the delegation briefly, I had no involvement with this project.

9. As Sarah Pink observes in a cogent discussion of the ethics of exchange in the field, the same is true for other foreigners seeking to "help" local communities, including salaried development-aid workers, volunteers, and, one might add, filmmakers and journalists, "each of whom has his/her own personal agenda and meeting points with local culture" (2002:110).

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