

**“MI LES LONG YUPELA USIM FLAG BILONG MI”:^{*}
SYMBOLS AND IDENTITY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

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In Papua New Guinea there is a constant interplay between senses of national identity and senses of local identity that is of particular relevance to debates in the contemporary Pacific. In the domain of symbols of identity there is also a two-way appropriation from the local to the national and from the national to the local. We argue that the latter process works most strongly and thereby modifies the process of creation of an overall national sense of identity. The incorporation of the national into the local in turn influences the process of the production of locality itself. Contemporary issues of intellectual property rights also enter into struggles over identity. These processes are illustrated with a number of case studies, including the conflict presented in Papua New Guinea newspapers regarding ownership of the design of the national flag.

^{*} *“I’m tired of you people using my flag.”*

—*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 16 September 1998

THE FORMATION OF NATION-STATES and the development of national senses of identity have become topics of considerable interest in Pacific anthropology, as elsewhere in the world, and are well exemplified in Robert Foster’s edited collection of studies (Foster 1995). These studies indicate that the attempt to create a national identity may be constructed in terms of either “modernity” or “tradition” (or indeed varying combinations of these notions), thus redeploying notions used as analytical labels by an earlier generation of social scientists. Discourses of this kind may radiate outward and downward from centers of political and economic power, and may become transformed as they are reinterpreted and reused in local contexts. Indeed, we argue in

this article that the reappropriation of national-level symbols at the local level is itself one of the biggest problems for those who are trying to bring a national ideology into being. Michael Herzfeld has pointed to the shift from indexicality to iconicity that accompanies the translation of symbols from embedded local contexts to disembedded national ones (1992:107). Here we are interested in the reverse process: when symbols are reclaimed, reviewed, and retaken into local levels. In the process, the local level itself acquires a nonindexical, iconic quality. The extreme case of this is when an individual reclaims a national symbol. This is precisely what happened in an incident in Papua New Guinea recently.

The title of our article reflects one instance of conflict that occurred in conjunction with Papua New Guinea's Independence Day celebration in 1998. The "original designer" of the country's flag threatened to pull down the nation's symbol, disrupting Independence Day ceremonies on Parliament Hill, in the national capital city of Port Moresby, as a protest unless she was compensated in a form she thought appropriate (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 15 September 1998). This incident is just one of many that touches on issues of intellectual property rights, on how artistic and other symbols are used to express national and local forms of identity in Papua New Guinea today, and how individual wishes are sometimes thwarted. More generally, it represents a major stumbling block in the construction of a national sense of identity, that is, the reappropriation of national symbols at local, regional, and even individual levels. It is this issue of the appropriation and reappropriation of symbols that concerns us here. Processes of appropriation are not necessarily orderly. They can be contingent and idiosyncratic, as we will show.

This article will follow some of these processes in a number of contexts, comparing national- and local-level processes. An earlier study, by Monty Lindstrom based on materials up to the end of the 1980s,¹ deals with a similar range of issues from the viewpoints of a diverse range of persons who have contributed to "an elite discourse of national identity produced by a small minority of urban, Western-educated Papua New Guineans" (Lindstrom 1998: 142). Lindstrom adds: "How, or if, the large majority of village Papua New Guineans . . . might imagine their nation I am less able to assess" (*ibid.*). In our article we are interested in shifting backward and forward between the local and the national levels, and we draw both on the kinds of literary materials (e.g., poems, letters to newspapers) deployed by Lindstrom and on firsthand field materials from two areas in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, Hagen and Duna. We also carry forward many of Lindstrom's topics into the late 1990s, when some of the dynamics regarding cultural issues had changed. Our movement between the urban and the rural and between the elite and the ordinary villagers is in line with the approach advocated by Joel

Migdal: "There is a need constantly to look back and forth between the top reaches of the state and local society" (1988:xvi). We will return to Migdal's ideas toward the end of this article. We wish to emphasize that we are not primarily concerned with typological criteria, that is, whether Papua New Guinea "is" a nation-state or not. Migdal appeals to the criterion of homogeneity, writing that "nation-states have grown out of powerful societies" (ibid.: 16). In Papua New Guinea the levels of local diversity would preclude any simple appeal to such homogeneity as the basis for "the nation" today, although clearly the process of nation-making does involve the introduction of common institutions of government and associated social values. The present study does not pretend to place a label on the stage this process has reached or to set up any "ideal type." We are more concerned with the processes themselves.

The major process with which we are concerned is the appropriation of symbols, that is, the way in which cultural elements and motifs are taken and used to stand for a sliding scale of local and national values. Of course, they may stand for both levels simultaneously. Our overall argument is that in practice the local level tends to encompass the national level, rather than the reverse. The reasons for this rather counterintuitive conclusion are two-fold, having to do with both the indexical/iconic contrast and the character of the symbols themselves. Briefly, at state level governments and other agencies attempt to appropriate local customary images and redeploy them, infusing them with national meanings and thereby in a sense detaching them from their local anchorage points. However, in this process of detachment some of the meanings and their contextual force are inevitably lost. For example, partly in deference to the first prime minister, Sir Michael Somare, the national Parliament building was constructed with architectural motifs reminiscent of the sacred cult houses of the Sepik area, Sir Michael's home province. But the visual effect achieved is arguably one that faces outward, to visiting tourists and dignitaries, rather than inward, to the parliamentarians themselves and the ordinary populace. A further difficulty is that while the state attempts to appropriate symbols from the customary and "traditional" worlds of local societies as trappings for its own legitimacy, the state is essentially a modern creation and infusing its modern character with customary forms proves to be awkward. Conversely, local leaders have often been keen to import modern elements, associated with the government and the wider world, into their own contexts in order to bolster their positions. Where this fits with the aspirations of their electorates they have been able to do so successfully. In the process the national-level activities and meanings become "domesticated" and localized. Per contra, at state level the process of creating a national image out of "traditional" elements is constrained at least partly

by the “gaze” of international observers and wider concerns and is therefore enmeshed in the larger dilemmas of globalization. This in itself constitutes a complex problem relevant to our discussion, but we cannot take it up in detail within the bounds of the present treatment of our topic (for one survey, see Kelly 1995).

Historical Overview

Papua New Guinea is a country of huge contrasts between its tropical coastal lands, riverain estuaries, and montane interiors. It is also a country of great diversity and depends on air services and shipping for much of its communications network. Its people are horticulturalists, fishers, traders, and hunters, exploiting different ecological niches. They have been widely introduced to cash cropping, business, plantation agriculture, manufacturing, mining, Christian churches, and parliamentary democracy. The face and the inner being of the country have been molded by many influences, including nearly one hundred years of colonialization prior to independence in 1975.

The local societies and cultures within Papua New Guinea show a considerable range of customary differences within certain lines of broad uniformity. Local territorial groups, often fiercely autonomous, were yet linked by numerous trading, ritual, and intermarriage ties. Political systems varied from chiefships to “big-man” systems of achieved leadership through prowess in exchange, oratory, and warfare. Where elaborate exchanges were not present, a congeries of systems based often on ritual precedence were found, sometimes described as “great-man” systems (Godelier 1986). Colonial authorities appointed their own officials, some of whom later became village councillors when local government was established. In analyzing contemporary politics most attention has been paid to big-men politics, since bigmanship has frequently been parlayed into the figure of the modern politician who wins support by his standing in exchanges and his capacity to disburse new forms of wealth and privilege (money and jobs) to his supporters. Parliamentary democracy is quite strongly established but contains within it strong elements of patronage now referred to in the literature as “*wantokism*,” the practice of assisting kin/local supporters/members of one’s language or “ethnic” group in gaining success. Ethnic and class relations are equally subsumed under this category of *wantok*, which emerged with the development of Tok Pisin as a language. *Wantok* (“one talk”) is someone who speaks the same language but can be extended simply to mean “friend” or “political ally.” It signals also the development of “ethnicity” in a context of change, where people of different languages mix in urban settings and expanded horizons of social similarity and difference are created and negotiated: the familiar construction of difference out of an apparently homogenizing situation.

An earlier optimistic stress on what we might call “local versions” of nationalistic policy-making has tended to be swamped subsequently by the need to organize businesses in conformity with external standards and practices and by a growing realization that “Papua New Guinean ways,” even if based on ideals of a communitarian kind, can also lead to problems of “corruption” through “*wantokism*” and the siphoning off of money to kin and local factions (see King, Lee, and Warakai 1985; Samana 1988). At the same time, relations within and between social classes are emerging, bringing with them new societal stresses, especially in urban contexts (Gewertz and Errington 1999).

Symbolic Expressions of Identity

The first wave of governing politicians in Papua New Guinea, including prominently Sir Michael Somare and Sir Albert Maori Kiki, was well aware of the importance of creating institutional structures at a national level that could contribute to nation-building. However, the institutions created have been enmeshed in the same problems generally outlined so far: the problems of creating a national set of images from a mosaic of local cultures. Even in cases where the state has deliberately promoted the creation of its own legitimate symbols, such as in the design of the national flag, there has been a contrary centrifugal pull in the construction of meanings.

National cultural institutions within Papua New Guinea include a National Museum, National Theater Company, National Arts Center, and the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (IPNGS), the last of these being charged with all forms of cultural preservation and development as well as (at various times in the past) with the regulation of access to Papua New Guinea by outside research workers. These institutions have all survived, though plagued by changes in regulations and severe shortages of funds and staff. While widely appreciated, their success in contributing to a *popular* as opposed to an *elite* national consciousness has been somewhat circumscribed. “Nation-making” often means something quite different for urban as against rural citizens, and elite nation-making tends to be concentrated in the national capital city where all these institutions were first established. The Raun Raun Theater, set up in a provincial capital, Goroka, has had a good deal of success at the village level by touring and presenting skits that contribute to health awareness issues and the like (see Wanek 1996:57–62 on theater groups and other national cultural institutions). Efforts have been made to set up provincial-level centers for culture and the arts also, and the IPNGS holds national literary competitions, mostly from school entries. The framework for “culture” in nation-making has been in place; its realization has been made difficult by countervailing forces that have tended to obliterate, transform, or devalue

the kinds of “customary” indigenous culture envisaged in these institutions’ charters. One conflict that has emerged is between “pagan” and “Christian” versions of culture, founded also on new versions of “tradition” versus “modernity” (see Lindstrom 1998:159).

We argue that in contexts of this kind acts of *appropriation of meaning* are what enable the construction of symbols that mark identities. Robert Foster’s edited volume, *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia*, presents discussions on the multivalent, continuously shifting entity of the “nation” (1995). LiPuma’s contribution to the volume points out that nation-making is inseparable from global and local pressures (pp. 33–68) and Foster looks at the process of constructing national identity through the consumption of or desire for consumable goods that also link the nation to global flows of resources (pp. 151–181).

The process of nation-making involves a deliberate attempt to create meanings, institutionally as noted above, and by the design of elements such as flags. The PNG flag is divided transversely into red and black triangles, with a bird of paradise in the top red sector and the Southern Cross in the lower black sector. Its aim is to represent Papua New Guinea (the bird of paradise) in the wider Pacific (the Southern Cross, which figures also in the flags of Australia, New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, and Samoa). The flag has sometimes been used as a symbol of peace to halt fighting between warring groups in the interior highlands. It has also been made the subject of idiosyncratic interpretations.

Jeffrey Clark reports that young men from Pangia in the Southern Highlands Province held the red part of the flag “to represent Europeans (known as ‘redmen’ in Pangia), the black color representing Papua New Guineans” (1997:78). In this interpretation each part contains a portion of the other, in what Clark calls “the expression of an ideal egalitarian encompassment,” such that “Red/European contains the bird of paradise/Papua New Guinea; black/Papua New Guinean contains the Southern Cross/Australia.” Clark calls this interpretation “an iconic representation of colonial history,” going along with these Highlanders’ dislike of their own government and their wish for the return of the white men and their rule. On the other hand, he cites quite a different interpretation made by a man from Bougainville Island, on which a fierce separatist movement developed after 1988. For this man the red part referred to the mainlanders (“redskins” to him) and the black part to Bougainvilleans (dark-skinned), and he indicated that the two parts might fall apart; he also expressed annoyance that the red was above the black (ibid.:90). For him, then, the flag was an icon of his own ethnic view of a fragmenting nation, rather than a symbol of unity. The example is significant.

The symbol of the flag has, however, been positively incorporated into

certain exchange and conflict resolution contexts. For example, Merlan and Rumsey describe a 1982 instance from the Nebilyer Valley in which a women's club (*ab klap*) used the flag to mark a truce between two fighting groups in the area (Merlan and Rumsey 1991). Carrying the PNG flag, the women from the Kulka tribe's women's club marched onto a battlefield between two opposing sides. They distributed foodstuffs to the men as well as soft drinks, cigarettes, and a small amount of currency (from the club's funds) to both of the sides involved in the conflict, and then they planted the flag on the battlefield and told the warriors to go home, which they eventually did (*ibid.*:156–197).

Another example comes from the central Hagen area. A large compensation payment was being given to the extended relatives of a young woman killed by her husband's co-wife in 1998. A foreman carrying the PNG flag preceded a procession of those relatives onto the *pena* (ceremonial ground) where the compensation payment was to be made. Behind the flag came a horse led by its bridle, giving the occasion a further aura of national-level symbolism gesturing toward an atmosphere of grand modern civil occasions involving royalty. (The horse, however, like a cow that was also led in, was destined to be given away and eaten.) The marchers were singing out in a traditional manner as they followed behind the national banner, which was subsequently displayed on a raised platform from which the two sides (the receiving and the giving) made their speeches. All of this symbolism formalized the occasion and linked it to the idea of the province and the nation as an integral part of the local occasion itself. This point is important, similar to that made by Peter Sahlins that national identities may be created more “from the local process of adopting and appropriating the nation” than from state-based actions (1989:9, quoted in Cohen 1994:132). However, another interpretation is that in such events national symbols are taken back into local contexts and are used in pursuit of local aims. The process can go even further.

Like all symbols, the PNG flag means different things to different people and can stand for various things depending on circumstances. Recently, during the twenty-third Independence Day celebration in 1998, Susan K. Huhume “led a group of concerned women to Independence Hill” where the then acting prime minister, Michael Nali, foreign dignitaries, and other celebrants were gathered at a flag-raising ceremony (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 16 September 1998). *The National* newspaper reported that Mrs. Huhume had designed the flag in 1970 as a seventeen-year-old still in school. This report went on to say that her design was accepted and the flag bearing it was raised for the first time in 1971 at a ceremony before twenty thousand people in the capital, Port Moresby (*The National*, 14 September 1998). She

was reported to have said that she was “the mother of PNG’s distinctive bird of paradise flag but [that she] has been forgotten by the Government . . . [and that the government had] thrown her in a rubbish bin” (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 15 September 1998). The *Post-Courier* account went on to say that she had petitioned Prime Minister Bill Skate in April 1998 to request a “commission” or “entitlements” (reported to include a pension, a house, and a car) for her design work on the flag. In addition Skate’s chief of staff, Sir Dennis Young, was reported to have written to her, “In fact, the state has honoured you and your name by accepting your design, and your satisfaction and pride should be to see your God-given gift to design adopted as our national flag.” These comments were reported to have prompted Mrs. Huhume to respond, “I am tired of you (government) using my flag. You can create your own design and a new flag. I want my flag back. It’s my property” (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 16 September 1998). The report stated that she complained that she had not been sufficiently recognized for her contribution to the imagery of the nation and was especially hurt because she had not been invited to flag-raising ceremonies like the one on Independence Day: “The only time I ever had the opportunity of raising the flag was in Konedobu in 1971 and after that I have been left out. But my heart cries every time people talk about the flag-raising because it is my baby and a product of my hands” (*ibid.*). The issues surrounding this case are ones that can be described as intellectual property rights but they are also issues of identity and emotion. The notion of ownership, at least partially, of the iconography on Papua New Guinea’s flag arises because of the contribution to its design. But issues of this sort are complex and no clear definitions can be provided on exact “ownership.” It is also not clear from the newspaper reports who the “concerned women” were, but presumably they were Huhume’s kinsfolk and associates.

On a smaller scale, similar occurrences are taking place daily in field situations when anthropologists and archaeologists work with local people. In 1998 we heard of one villager seeking payment from a colleague of ours for a picture taken of him in the 1970s when he was a paid worker on an archaeological dig in the Hagen area. The photograph had recently appeared on an academic poster from the PNG National Museum that was circulated within Papua New Guinea and Australia in 1997. The request for payment was clearly related to the picture’s recent public use on the poster, a new situation, but also to a traditional idea, that if a delayed request for a payment is made, the payment asked for can be larger because of the lapse of time since the original gift was made. The increment that has notionally been produced as a result of this passage of time is like the child of the original giver, making it

necessary to repay the gift with “interest.” In both this instance, then, and that cited above, persons are claiming that a return is due to them since they are like a parent who has “produced” a child for others.

Language and Literature as Tools in Nation-Building

Nation-states need to create and popularize their symbols. Such symbols can be reinterpreted “downward” to the local or regional levels by selective appropriation. The same is true of language and history, two other elements seen as needed for nation-making. In terms of languages, English certainly functions as a national language, but it inevitably functions also as an internationalizing language, linking Papua New Guinea to the world in a way the two *linguae francae*—Tok Pisin and Motu—cannot.

The contribution language makes to identity may explain why Tok Pisin is popular in local contexts even among the elite who speak English: it links them in an internal solidarity vis-à-vis others and identifies them with the majority of their kin. Yet Tok Pisin, in turn, is not used as a mark of high status. In other words, no single language can combine all the nation-making functions that are needed. Furthermore, there are the extremely numerous local languages that have made Papua New Guinea a special target for classificatory linguists. Identities are still partly tied to these languages, and language shifts into Tok Pisin or English are accompanied by senses of rupture in identities. The issue of whether local vernaculars should be taught in schools (bastions of English) shows that contention can arise here. Local languages can be thought of either as contributing to local and thus national authenticity or as a threat to a common national identity, which must be based on the “new” language of English. Tensions of this kind between the purely local and the purely (inter)national are not easy to resolve and often reflect the state’s attempt to be both modern and traditional at the same time.

The contrasts between these images of tradition and modernity lead to a sense of contradiction in the minds of Papua New Guineans themselves, who find it difficult to know whether to be ashamed or proud of either their indigenous cultures or their progress and standing in the contemporary world of modernity (see Carrier and Friedman 1996). This sense of contradiction also inhibits the development of national consciousness, as shown in literary productions (cf. Lindstrom 1998:165).

Gilian Gorle recently examined the sentiments of a set of the intellectual elite of Papua New Guinea who were writing just prior to, during, and just after independence (the period 1969 to 1979). This literary survey says much about the internal conflicts that individuals were experiencing in the light of

rapid changes. She suggests that these writers “worked to shape social change by challenging existing attitudes and raising people’s consciousness of their unique cultural heritage” (Gorle 1995:80).

Gorle points out that the background to these literary works was a policy of literary nationalism. In 1969 a Literature Bureau was established to produce stories, biographies, and other literary forms that could be used in the classroom in an effort to engage students in the learning process (ibid.:84). One of the goals writers were aiming for at this time was to attempt to create a sense of national identity through local cultural heritage appreciation and through introspective examinations such as are found in Bernard Narokobi’s essays, *The Melanesian Way* (1983; see also Gorle 1995:86).

Often these writers expressed the conflicts of their own desires as they selectively accepted or rejected various elements of change that came into their country from outside. Some of these writings reflected the sentiments of local villagers, while many resonated strongly with the voices of dissatisfaction and confusion of the literary elites who were, because of their particular education, removed from the local context and thereby alienated from full incorporation into local structures of community. It is in this context that the familiar theme of nostalgia coupled with alienation emerges.

Most of the texts that Gorle examined from the 1970s portray “Western influences” as unfavorable (Gorle 1995:94). She quotes from John Kadiba’s 1974 poem, *The Widening Gap*, which clearly expresses this:

Not only are we separated
By distance in space and time,
But in way in living [*sic*],
In experience,
In thought,
In outlook.
As the years move on,
The gap grows,
Inevitably,
Unintentionally,
Unwillingly,
Sadly,
But somehow it happens. (Ibid.:96)

Many of these works were meant to foster a sense of commonality among all Papua New Guineans through expressing shared fears and concerns about the uncertainty of what change would bring and through support for pride in traditional cultural values. But due to the great diversity of Papua New

Guinea's societies, the cultural values that are acknowledged are generally local ones, which may or may not be shared by a wider set of Papua New Guineans. These literary works often promote social change while noting the enormous difficulties that can arise when change is too rapid and forms of local cultural knowledge are unable to cope with incoming influences. As forms of protonationalist literature they reflect the problems, rather than the victories, inherent in the historical processes they depict.

Gorle also examined later PNG literature and its impact on social change that occurred during 1979 to 1989, a period marked by a reduced output of literary works. In this study she used as her source material essays, unpublished drama scripts, and letters to the editor of the *Times of Papua New Guinea*. Her survey revealed that the corpus of works had a less hostile tone to it and seemed to be more future looking (Gorle 1996:55). Many of the letters to the *Times of Papua New Guinea* were concerned with services and development within the country and questions on which parts of the country received what types of services. In addition, concerns about the environment and land use were raised. These are issues that raise questions of national versus local identity and of ownership spurred by globalizing influences such as mining and logging. The environmental and social impacts of these industries are enormous. Issues of land ownership are invariably contested and tied to local disputes. Alterations to the social structure are profound as "outsiders" come into an area to work with no long-term concern for the local communities. Often these areas become arenas for prostitution and alcohol overconsumption. Although money is brought into the region, the local people and the companies often struggle over how to use these funds "properly." Hence, in these contexts also, local identities tend to be most forcefully articulated, in opposition to influences that are identified with state-based policies.

Christianity as Nation-Builder

In addition to the mining and logging that have come into Papua New Guinea, another import into the country that has profoundly altered the ideological environment is Christianity (see Barker 1990). Papua New Guinea is constitutionally "a Christian country," although its constitutional wording recognizes both Christianity and ancestral custom (see Lātūkefu 1988 for a careful discussion of ways in which Christianity and custom may be in conflict). Christianity has been and continues to be a force toward defining nationhood while at the same time very clearly strengthening local senses of community. As Christian sects moved through the country, a process of reinscription of local forms of religious beliefs and values took place. Indigenous groups have retro-

spectively developed objectified notions of what their cultures were like and these semireified images often intertwine with introduced Christian beliefs to produce new images of local identities (see, for example, Lattas 1998; Robbins 1998a, 1998b; Stewart and Strathern 2000). The paradox of a religion that officially promotes wider senses of identity yet also produces new senses of local distinctiveness has been remarked on by Papua New Guinean writers themselves.

Christianity as a unifying force in Papua New Guinea was discussed earlier by Bernard Narokobi, who examined a variety of cultural, philosophical, political, and religious questions he thought warranted Papua New Guineans' concern. Among his thoughts, some of which have been compiled in *The Melanesian Way* (Narokobi 1983), was the idea that, on the one hand, "with Christianity, we extend our loyalties, affections, love, and understanding beyond our clan, village and racial communities. This is real unity." On the other hand, "the Christian churches do not in fact present themselves as a unifying force. On the contrary, they re-emphasise division and disunity" (ibid.: 138–140). This appears to be a comment on disputes among the different churches, in contrast to the common ideology of Christian love they supposedly shared (see, for example, Strathern 1993; Strathern and Stewart 1999).

It is remarkable how many communities have a strengthened sense of local identity promoted by affiliation through the churches. Often several churches coexist within a community, for example, Catholic, Lutheran, or Assemblies of God, which also divide the community along new lines so that sections of the community may be divided along congregation lines or family members may belong to different churches.

One of the fastest-growing movements that has entered into Papua New Guinea is that of the Charismatic Christians, many of whom teach that the world is soon going to end, in 2000/2001 (Stewart and Strathern 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2000). These teachings represent the influence of globalizing factors; contain images derived from America, Europe, and elsewhere; and adapt themselves to a myriad of local concerns wherever they spread.

The churches in Papua New Guinea have in general made profound alterations in traditional practices in all aspects of sociality. Lindstrom refers to the problem of "wife-beating" (1998:162); and more recently, the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches has called for members of Parliament to formulate legislation to eliminate the practice of polygamy in Papua New Guinea (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 12 March 1998; *The Independent*, 11 September 1998). The Individual and Communication Rights Advocacy Forum supports this move, stating that polygamy

breeds violence, creates instability in the family, leads to social problems between families and communities, and creates competing

interest between women. In fact as a result of the conflict arising out of the polygamy situation, women often engage in fights with other wives which has led to an increasing number of wives killing the “other woman”. The custom of polygamy is also repugnant to the principles of humanity. The practice of polygamy only leads to social problems and disrespect for women in the relationship. Today, most polygamous marriages existing in Papua New Guinea are not practiced according to custom. But custom is being used by men as an excuse to have more than one woman. (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 12 March 1998)

In March 1998 the Reverend Leva Pat Kila, general secretary of the PNG Council of Churches, called on all Christian lawyers to use their expertise to assist in drafting the necessary legislation to outlaw polygamy (*The National*, 24 March 1998). Whether this legislation will be put forward and passed is yet to be seen.

In a criticism of the movement to ban polygamy by church groups, women’s organizations, and several members of Parliament, Dr. Andrew A. L. Lakau has argued that preservation of customary practices such as polygamy is important because “only when all of us take worthy customs and traditional wisdom as the corner-stones of our individual pursuits and collective efforts, will we avoid the mess we are in now” (*The National*, 13 October 1998). This is just one example among many of the debates over what is customary practice and which customary practices the nation of Papua New Guinea wants to retain currently. The issues are as difficult as they were in the 1980s. For example, in the Hagen area where we conduct research, it was customary practice to take revenge on a neighboring group by raping their women, stealing their pigs, and burning their property. Many arenas of practice from the past have been abandoned or modified over time, so there is a problem of a temporal baseline for what is supposed to be “traditional.”

Another, less widely noticed arena in which the Christian churches have had a substantial impact is on exchange practices. In Hagen the *moka*, a nexus of competitive exchanges, was an underpinning component of life that was never fully supported by the churches. Polygamy was an integral component of the system since it was one of the most effective ways for a man to be assured that he could produce enough pigs and raise sufficient wealth to propel himself forward in *moka* exchanges. Nowadays the *moka* exchange system has gone through dramatic alterations, having steadily declined over the past ten years. The old *moka* exchange has been essentially replaced by large, single, unilateral compensation payments for killings and most recently by increased competitive brideprice prestations (Stewart and Strathern 1998c).

In 1998 we observed a further twist on all these shifts. While people

openly declared on the whole that the *moka* was dead, at the same time coalitions of leading men were beginning to infuse into the Charismatic Christian ritual cycle elements of bigmanship that were highly reminiscent of the past. For example, these men were planning that their own future baptisms would be public events, demonstrating their own status and simultaneously boosting the prestige of the church, which would cause others to convert (a classic phenomenon in Pacific history). Such baptismal events were being marked above all by the building of expensive new churches (viz. cult houses), the slaughtering of pigs (viz. sacrifices), and the making of eloquent speeches to large crowds (reminiscent of the rhetorical expertise of big-men in *moka* exchanges), as well as the necessary acquisition of vehicles to transport supporters. As in the past, these men were aiming to gain political prestige within the community as well as gaining spiritual blessing—in the past the Female Spirit and the ancestors bestowed these favors, now God does. The wives of these men were engaged, as in the past, in raising the pigs that would be needed at the grand baptismal events. These women were also raising money for the occasion through the sale of coffee from their trees.

The death of *moka* coincides with the birth of Christian ways, but these ways are then adapted so as to reproduce many of the essential patterns of the *moka*. What begins as the development of new forms of custom and identity tied in with national-level concerns is once more transformed back into local agendas.

Law as Symbol of National Identity

Further questions arise regarding the relationship of “law” to the nation, paralleling the questions about “custom” and “religion” and indeed intertwined with these, via the issues raised at local levels.

John Nonggorr, professor of law at the University of Papua New Guinea, discussed his ideas about the place of religion in PNG law in a column for the *National* (13 October 1998):

In PNG, we can find religious beliefs reflected in custom, under the English common law and even under the Constitution and other statutes. . . . Many Christian rules and principles find their way into laws of countries in which Christianity is the religion that is practiced there. This is the case in PNG. . . . Religion itself means a belief in the existence of a supernatural ruling power which is the creator and controller of the universe or the world. . . . If you extend this meaning of religion to some of the customary beliefs that different groups in PNG hold and practice, you will agree that we do have our dif-

ferent religious beliefs in our customs. Therefore, our different customs of the many tribes have in them religion. Custom is part of our legal system now. Therefore, our tradition-based religions are part of the law in the sense that they are part of our customs and customs are a part of the underlying law. . . . In almost all customs of our people in PNG, people believe that you must not do wrong to others. For example, you must not steal from others, you must not kill others or you must not say bad things about others. It is also recognized that you must do good to others—you must freely give to others in need, you must help to look after your family, relatives and clan members, etc. There are common beliefs in custom that those who do good will be rewarded in some ways while those who do bad will be punished. . . . This establishes that religion is already a part of the laws of PNG. It is a part of the laws of PNG in that customs, which are based on PNG's religious beliefs, are a part of our laws. That is the first way in which religion is a part of our laws. The second is through the English common law. . . . The third way in which religion is part of the laws of PNG is through statutory law. The clearest example is the Constitution of PNG. . . . In summary then, it is clear that religion is part of the laws of PNG—as part of custom, the English common law and the Constitution and other statutory laws.

Professor Nonggorr works his way through here to the point that religion enters into customary law in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere and, therefore, that Christianity can enter into such law. With this platform he goes on to declare that “in almost all customs of our people in PNG, people believe that you must not do wrong to others.” But who are the “others”? The clearest feature of customary practices everywhere is that they are socially relativistic. For example, it may be bad to steal from one's own close kin but okay to do the same to unrelated enemies. Colonial law was introduced precisely to break down this social partitioning of customary ethics, and Christianity in some ways does the same. Yet both have had to appropriate the idioms of kinship to survive.

This statement of “custom” transforms a relativistic reality that held in small communities to the entirety of Papua New Guinea, thus projecting it as a national symbol. It in fact constitutes a remarkable act of appropriation “upward” in scale, lifting the local to the national and attempting to create the latter in the image of the former, a common process worldwide (see, for example, Eriksen 1993; and, again, Herzfeld 1992). Such a strategy is diagnostic of national agency; local concerns operate differently.

The debate over whether a law should be passed to ban polygamy, as discussed above, is one example of many in which Papua New Guinea must decide if the practice is repugnant to humanity and thus should be legislated against or not. Colonial law did not prohibit polygamy but it did proscribe certain other practices, such as sorcery and witchcraft (Ordinance No. 22 of 1971). Fears of sorcery and witchcraft practices are on the rise in many areas of Papua New Guinea today. In Aluni village in the Duna area, the local councillor, K., asked us in 1998 if we could help him to argue that a law should be passed against witchcraft after a number of people had been supposedly killed by witchcraft in Aluni and the neighboring village of Hagu (Stewart and Strathern 1999). The councillor had not been made aware that a law already existed against witchcraft. His confusion stemmed from the problem of how to know which parts of custom enter into law and which are, or should be, forbidden by law, since witchcraft is certainly a customary practice. His confusion was also perfectly genuine, as we have seen, since debates about what customary forms are nowadays acceptable are increasingly entering into contemporary politics at the national level. His interest lay in applying these debates to the problems of his own area.

Senses of National and Local Identity

Theorists of nationalism have often pointed out that nations need a narrative with which to identify, a narrative that is also supported by commemorative rituals. Papua New Guinea has its Independence Day on September 16 with festivities organized at national, provincial, district, and local levels. Clark, however, points out that these celebrations are not always viewed positively at local levels, at least in parts of the Highlands (Pangia, Tari) where the original opposition to independence and the Pangu Party is still remembered (1997). In Aluni, a part of the Duna area north of Tari (Southern Highlands Province), in 1991 people said they were glad to be visited by outsiders (whites) and had been angry with Michael Somare for driving them away with the program for localization (indigenization) of work positions. In general, Papua New Guinea lacks a single “oppositional narrative” to colonial control; independence was gained faster than many in the Highlands in the 1970s wished it to be and has since failed to deliver to them “the goods” of affluence, prosperity, and order that they individually and collectively desired.

Some of the confusions over local and national identity were reflected in the 1991 Independence Day celebrations in Aluni. A burlesque performance depicted the first arrival of whites into the area, reflecting a mixture of ideas that the local people hold in identifying with the symbols of modernity (in the performance represented by the image of the *kiaps*, government patrol

officers) and the symbols from the precolonial past that still prevail even in the heavily Christianized present (represented by the image of a Tsinali man from the backwoods on the other side of the Muller Range near Aluni). When the representation of the *kiaps* paraded to the celebration area followed by the representation of the Tsinali tribesman (walking on stilts), everyone present broke out in uneasy laughter. The burlesque, an expression of the Duna people's desire for what is "modern" while still being tied in many ways to their old customs, attempted to create an amalgamation of the two during the celebration of national identity (see also Otto 1993 on tradition and innovative transformations thereof).

Errington and Gewertz describe a similar performance, a Jubilee drama, which celebrated the coming of the first missionaries to Karavar Island in the Duke of York Islands off the northwest coast of New Britain, Papua New Guinea (1995:77–106). But in that case the prime minister came and made speeches as an integral component of the overall event, which, in retrospect of independence, contextualized the conversion of pagans to Christianity as a nation-making event that Errington and Gewertz neatly refer to as "the Invention of Nontradition."

Delving even farther back than precolonial times, there is a possibility that prehistory could form in part a unifying charter for the nation, for example through claiming an early site for agriculture, reputedly nine thousand years old, at Kuk in the Western Highlands Province and making it into a significant national or international site (Mangi 1989; Strathern and Stewart 1998). Such ambitions, however, run up against local aspirations and ambitions that do not necessarily fit with national ones.²

There are therefore problems with symbols (e.g., the flag), with the national language, and with the lack of a unifying narrative of struggle in relation to nation-making in Papua New Guinea. These are compounded by problems of the state structure itself in achieving pervasive salience in people's consciousness and lives. The largely unconscious processes of commodification—leading to "possessive individualism," "subjectification" in the Foucauldian sense, and further to the creation of forms of individual identity defined in terms of the state (e.g., citizen, voter, taxpayer, right and duty-bearing unit of responsibility and agency)—are all certainly in train in contemporary urban society and among the elite. But the distinction between nation and state is important here. It is the state that promotes commoditization and subjectification, and in doing so the state also acts as a conduit for globalizing influences. But these two processes by themselves do not automatically lead to the creation of a strong national consciousness at either the political or the cultural level. Rather, nationalism and strong senses of identity generally arise in circumstances of adversity, struggle, and opportunity. In Papua New Guinea

such forms of at least temporary attachments have arisen by way of opposition to the state itself and its projects (cf. May 1982). Groups, for example, may demand very high amounts of compensation for natural resources such as oil or gas; they may oppose foreign loggers who have state backing; they may block roads and airstrips to insist on their demands, treating the state itself in some ways like a rival clan, though with a clear realization of the different scales of issues at stake.

The history of Papua New Guinea is also marked by a series of separatist or near-separatist movements, the most serious of which has occurred in Bougainville and has centered on issues of mining revenues and environmental pollution. (After many false starts, accords tentatively laying down the basis for Bougainville's return to the Papua New Guinea state were reached in the latter half of 1997, almost ten years after the Bougainville Revolutionary Army declared secession. The lengthy process of tentative reincorporation into the state continues.) The state is fissile for several reasons: first, the division into provinces provides a basis for separatist tendencies, especially if natural resources are at stake; second, the state does not easily maintain its claim of sovereignty over these resources; and third, the predominant big-man forms of leadership lead to audacious local attempts to challenge state authority. These same patterns have led the Highlands provinces in the last twenty years or more to experience severe problems of intergroup fighting, which further challenge the state's monopolistic control of force. Possessive individualism spills over into illegal gang activity, and "law and order" problems interfere with government services and capitalist development alike.

These conditions have led commentators to describe Papua New Guinea today as a "weak state." Without entering into this issue in detail, we wish to point out here that such a "weak" situation could be countered only by a "strong" sense of the nation as a set of people, but we have seen already the reasons why this is not the case. Another useful way of formulating this problem is made by Peter Larmour, arguing that "civil society" needs to include associations such as clans that are not a part of state structure as such (1992:107). We need to ask here, however, whether the weakness of the state is largely due to external, global factors or to internal difficulties, or if these two categories are inextricably intertwined. Much of the instability, as well as the revenue, in Papua New Guinea comes from the influx of global capital through investment in plantations, factories, mines, and other forms of production. But some of the problems arise from factionalism in national politics that resembles local forms of factioning and from the constitution of local societies themselves: their strong localism, the renewed production of this localism in response to both threats and opportunities from outside, and the propensity of groups in the Highlands to resort to violence as a means

of pursuing their ends. This propensity has been aggravated further by increases in scale, leading to confrontations of at least a notional kind between whole council areas, whole provinces, or even islanders versus mainlanders in the case of Bougainville. At the local level, external and internal factors are certainly intertwined also.

Robert Foster has argued that one form of globalizing influence that has molded a sense of the PNG nation is advertising, which promotes mass consumption of particular goods. "Advertisements become important vehicles for the imagination of a community of consumers whose shared consumption practices and ideals put them in experiential unison with each other" (Foster 1995:15). Although advertisements and consumption of common goods do produce a sense of commonality among Papua New Guineans, this sense of identity often overflows beyond the boundaries of Papua New Guinea into the global arena. Mass media also produce a sense of national identity, but this too rapidly expands into a global sense of one's place outside of Papua New Guinea. Christian influences in effect do the same.

Weak State, Strong Societies?

Joel Migdal has discussed many of the analytical issues addressed here under his general rubric of "strong societies and weak states" (1988). Migdal does not discuss nationalism or the concept of the nation in relation to the state as one of his central focuses, but he does introduce some useful concepts that apply well beyond his two main case studies of Sierra Leone and Israel as "weak" and "strong" states respectively. He cautions against the simplistic use of his concepts, noting that opposing scholars may have been looking for strength or weakness "in different realms" of state activity (Migdal 1988:8). This is a valid point. He goes further and observes that states often have a dual nature. They can have "a formidable presence in their societies, but many have experienced faltering efforts to get their populations to do what state policy makers want them to do." He adds: "States are like big rocks thrown into small ponds: they make waves from end to end, but they rarely catch any fish" (ibid.:9). This observation must apply, *a fortiori*, in cases where there are essentially "states without nations," as John Kelly puts it (1995:256).

Migdal depends on the state's ability to change forms of social behavior in accordance with its policies as his main criterion for "strength." Strong local societies, with their own local values that oppose those of the state, resist the state's efforts to impose its values and thus limit the growth in strength of the state itself in Migdal's terms. Some of the phenomena we have reviewed fit this model, for example, the tendency of local groups to pursue their interests through warfare or to make unwelcome demands for compensation

from the state or from international companies that pay taxes to the state and contribute heavily to Papua New Guinea's revenue.

However, other aspects of the situation fall outside of this specific weak state/strong societies scenario. In the various rural areas with which we are familiar, the issues that people complain about are the failure of governments to deliver the kinds of services, in terms of health, education, and sustainable business development, that they seek and the government professes to promote. This is not an inability of the state to bring about changes in behavior patterns but its inability to keep its own promises. In the sphere of law and order many people wish that the police and courts could be more efficient and more forceful in dealing with criminals, especially the gangs of rascals that nowadays are as inconvenient to the general populace as they are to local businesses and visiting tourists. Again, this is not a case of a strong local society defying the state as such, but of local people calling on their own politicians to address their problems. In fact, members of Parliament (MPs) have been given exceptional resources to make their influence felt in their electorates by the provision of special rural development funds they can personally disburse to meet such local needs. With 109 MPs and each MP since 1995 controlling K1 million, this program ties up a huge amount of money in networks of political patronage. Local people complain that the money is improperly siphoned away to the personal benefit of the MPs or their immediate factions. In some cases the people are not even aware that these funds exist. Accusations of corruption abound. This particular problem again falls outside of the strong societies/weak state scenario, except that it does reflect the tremendous demands placed on politicians by their local supporters and in that sense shows how local concerns can subvert national policies. Yet the government itself is providing these funds to politicians in order to secure power and support at the national level.

To disregard these complex interactional processes that enmesh national and local levels together would be a mistake. Equally, it is insufficient to argue, in the vein of latter-day dependency theory, that international lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are solely responsible, through their demands for structural adjustment of the economy, for driving a wedge between nation and state. Such a formulation begs two questions: (1) whether the concept of the nation would otherwise be unproblematically strong and (2) whether the International Monetary Fund or World Bank demand such adjustments solely to suit themselves or also partly in response to phenomena such as crony capitalism and its Papua New Guinea analog, the "*wantok* system."

In other words, the dynamics of governmental practices must be included in our analyses. Here Migdal has made a very useful contribution with

his analyses of “the politics of survival” (e.g., the politicization of bureaucratic positions) and “the triangle of accommodation” between state leaders, implementors, and local politicians (1988: chaps. 6 and 7). Particularly the latter concept offers a further way of discussing the national- versus local-level issues that concern us, for example, how national policies become transformed when implemented at the local level through the need to effect negotiated compromises.

Local versus National

The general problem of nation-making appears to be entering more strongly than ever before into people’s historical consciousness, a sign that an awareness of the question of national consciousness has begun to form. We suggest that its major axis, in a country of such diversities, will continue to be that of local versus national identities. This issue can be related to the work of Arjun Appadurai, who in a series of writings both problematized and reestablished the older focus on local social structures and cultural patterns (1988, 1990, 1992). Questioning the concept of “locality” and “the local” in the contemporary world, he first proposed the alternative concept of the “ethnoscape”: the study of the networks formed by people across various boundaries, whether state, regional, or local. Second, he argued that we must be prepared to study the historical production of local (and national) categories: not to take locality for granted and use it as an *explanans*, but to regard it as an *explanandum*, the product of sets of negotiated, contested, and contingent actions. Appadurai thus introduced fluidity at the heart of the supposedly durable. This is, in fact, an important analytical moment.

The examples above were chosen because they illustrate our argument that it is the *appropriation* of symbols that is crucial to study. More particularly, this appropriation is taking place more effectively downward rather than upward, that is, from the national to the local. While the drive of elite persons and organizations is often to create the national out of the local, the drive from the local level is the reverse, to recreate the local out of the national, even if this means that the local level is imaged in terms of national-level symbols.

First, the national cultural institutions have perforce used local or regional cultural forms for their attempts to produce a national consciousness. They have made creative efforts to transform these local materials into national ones, but the people continue to view the products as at least partly local.

Second, national symbols are susceptible to being reinterpreted in local terms, as in Clark’s example of the national flag in Pangia. The iconic character of visual, material symbols means that their physical dimensions and

qualities can be given different symbolic meanings. Their very aptness for reinterpretation subverts their officializing use in contexts of nation-making.

The two “positive” examples of the use of the PNG flag from the Hagen area can also be reanalyzed in these terms. The participants might have used the flag in a context of peacemaking simply because it appeared to them in that light. But equally plausible is the argument that what the participants were doing was to bring into play a marker of power and claim their own special relationship to it, so that they effectively localized its power. They claimed it for themselves, that is. Building on Peter Sahlins’s point, then, about “appropriating the nation,” we argue that people are producing a new version of their own locality cut from national cloth, rather than simply assimilating themselves into the nation.

The elements of this process at work are also seen in the contexts of national law, religion, and politics. In politics, the prevalence of patronage clearly transforms the national into the local and introduces factionalism simultaneously at both levels. In the context of law, popular attempts of leaders to find laws that suit local problems, such as witchcraft, would soon run into deep difficulties if the leaders demanded, say, the execution of witches; but punishments of this kind may indeed be among their aims. Such local aims would run stubbornly counter to the project of nationalizing the local, as found in Professor Nonggorr’s commentary quoted above. In religion, the success of the law against polygamy will depend largely on ways in which arguments at local levels present the pros and cons of the debate, although here local and national perceptions are likely to converge over time with the decline for other reasons of older forms of exchange and the rise of church-building enterprises. The churches showing the most rapid growth and greatest vitality are ones that openly embrace the local level by referring to each congregation as a “local church” (this is the practice of the Assemblies of God, for example).

In all of these examples we see that local identities are just as much “produced” through negotiation with and appropriation from wider levels, including the national, as the other way around. Indeed, we advocate reversing the ordinary trend of thinking that supposes we are seeing the production of the nation or nationalism to the view that we are seeing the reproduction of the local through the national: surely an image derived from the “goods and services” image of colonial administration in the colonial past. This is neither a “bottom-up” nor a “top-down” form of analysis. It is, however, in accord with Appadurai’s strictures. We call it the “national into local” model. The local is reinscribed with national symbols. Conversely, however, the national finds it hard to inscribe itself with local ones. Local groups set themselves up as icons of themselves, dressed in borrowed symbols. Essentially the problem here derives from conditions of exchange. People see the state

and the national symbols that go with it as a resource, a source of gifts. They do not see themselves as happy donors of gifts to the state or the nation.

Equally it is not plausible to argue that the national is simply reappropriated and made a part of the local. The very fact that a national symbol such as the flag is brought into a local event such as a compensation payment means that a two-way process is in train: the local event is given additional meaning through association with a national symbol, while the meaning of the national symbol is partially transmuted into something local. Separating the levels here is not analytically feasible. We have, however, made a nuanced argument that on the whole the more lively process consists of “localizing the national” rather than “nationalizing the local.” Such an argument is in line with that of Alexander Wanek, in his interesting experimental ethnography that unites a “microscopic” study of the tiny community of Nauna in Manus Province with “the context of a modern nation-state” (1996:vii).

Wanek notes in his treatment of “culture as political tool” that when appropriated into national-level agendas cultural items appear as “a bricolage containing *fictitious, defused, or reduced* traditions” (ibid.:119). Such a bricolage can, of course, acquire vitality over time if successfully linked to shared experiences. At the local level, when items are appropriated from the national repertoire, they at once enter a realm of immediate experience and are enriched by this. Clearly, we can conceive of the overall form of the relationship between local and national levels as dialectical, the one eliciting the other and leading to progressive changes over time. All we have suggested here is that local appropriations are vital and worth studying and that the dialectical patchwork that emerges is rather complex.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from study of the Fuyuge, a population of about fourteen thousand living some one hundred kilometers north of Port Moresby in the Papuan hinterlands (Hirsch 1990:22). Eric Hirsch discusses the substitution of betel nut bunches for chiefly bones in Fuyuge blessing rituals. Catholic priests had discouraged the exposure of bones, and betel nut was used instead, gathered at least in part through visits to the capital city of Moresby. Betel nut was already part of Fuyuge culture, the large kind known as *solon* treated as “having person-like qualities” (ibid.:29). Hirsch argues that its relatively novel use in chiefly rituals is a way of associating the Fuyuge with the metropolis and therefore also is a part of the process of constructing a “national culture” through consumption practices. These are probably correct inferences. However, it is worth noting that betel nut also has local significance for the Fuyuge. Indeed, Hirsch reports that in the rituals the Fuyuge chiefs speak of putting the foot of the *solon* nut, imported from Moresby, on the ground “so he will stay here,” that is, feel at home (ibid.). The exotic is thus localized, or in our terms, appropriated.

In a later paper, Hirsch discusses how a Fuyuge leader named one of his

gardens “Taurama,” after a shopping area in Port Moresby, in some fashion assimilating his garden to the metropolis (Hirsch 1995). Here too the reverse was also happening, and in the process the metropolitan name acquired a transformed meaning, becoming an appendage to, and a component of, the leader’s prestige locally in a world where prestige is gained by holding ceremonies in particular places (ibid.:202). (We are not concerned here with Hirsch’s further arguments about rural-urban transformations of personhood and subjectivity, although these are related to our topic.) Hirsch suggests individual consumerism conflicts with the perspective of the ritual village; but national culture could in principle be constructed out of either or both of these. Debhora Battaglia’s study of the urban yam festival sponsored by elite Trobrianders in Port Moresby in 1985 indicates how the festival was designed to bring a sense of “home” into the urban setting by staging a *kayasa* or festival based on the competitive gardening of yams (1995). Here, then, the village values were transported into the town and incorporated, to some extent via the media, into a context of national culture. The festival’s meanings were both conserved and transformed, we may say, and values both local and metropolitan urban (which may equate with national) were expressed.

Conclusion: Inscriptions and Reinscriptions

Appadurai’s arguments have influenced many ethnographers and theorists. They are built on, for example, by the contributors to Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson’s edited volume *Culture, Power, Place* (1997). Beginning with a critique of the “peoples and cultures” view, Gupta and Ferguson point out that while the critique is generally accepted its meaning for ethnographic practice “is still very much in the process of being worked out” (ibid.:3). They note that “cultural territorializations (like ethnic and national ones) must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes. . . . It is these processes, rather than pre-given cultural-territorial entities, that require anthropological study” (ibid.:4). Relativizing locality in this way requires working against a “metaphysics of sedentarism” (ibid.:6, quoting Liisa Malkki), gendered associations of the local with the primordial-feminine (ibid.:7, referring to the work of Doreen Massey), or generally “a nostalgia for origins”—all forms of essentialism (see also Carrier 1992). Identity thus becomes “a mobile, often unstable, relation of difference” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:13), and identity and alterity are produced dialectically. In their second essay in the volume, however, Gupta and Ferguson rightly address an irony that has been widely observed and demands attention: that while social scientists are busy deconstructing essentialism, people “out there”

are even busier reconstructing it. "The irony of these times is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient," the authors observe (ibid.:39). "Territoriality is thus reinscribed at just the point it threatens to be erased" (ibid.:40).

It is at this point that the anthropological project finds itself again, we suggest. The process of reinscription is basically the same as previous processes of inscription, though scale and focus may shift. In other words, the production of locality bears comparison with the production of ethnicity or nationhood if we look at it in terms of the appropriation of meanings and the processes of power that make such meanings accepted: sliding scales, constant themes. This is not to argue that the appropriations are exactly the same at all levels. Also, some inscriptions are harder to make than others. But it is to argue that selective appropriation is always at work. And this point bears on the discussion of the significance of globalization.

Globalization is supposed to produce homogeneities: of cultural forms, of economic practices, of patterns of production and consumption. Yet heterogeneities are respun out of such uniformities precisely by acts of selection and emphasis that stress either commonality or difference. Hence the production of identities at all levels takes place by means of such acts of selection. International uniformities of patterns of consumption of goods, then, do not necessarily preclude the development of ideas of national identity, since such ideas may center on another set of symbols or may metonymically associate global and national symbols, as when a commodity is advertised by a person in traditional attire. The problem in creating national symbols lies not in the availability of symbols but in the degree to which they are taken back into their local contexts and in how these local contexts themselves feed on and grow from national ones. Indeed, as our title indicates, such symbols may even inhere in individual contexts, leading to unilateral demands on the state, and the attempted reappropriation of the prime national symbol by its first maker.

NOTES

1. Lindstrom's excellent essay came to our notice early in January 1999, after this paper was substantially completed in September 1998. We thank Geoff White for drawing our attention to it. As Lindstrom notes (1998:180), his paper was first presented in June 1990 to an East-West Center Conference in Hawai'i on Cultural Policy and National Identity in which White and others, including two leading Papua New Guinean scholars, Wari Iamo and Jacob Simet, took part. His materials therefore largely relate to the 1980s or earlier.

2. Lindstrom also quotes John Muke on this point. Muke is an archaeologist who has argued that for Papua New Guinea "a common identity must be sought in the unwritten

past” (1985:65–66, quoted in Lindstrom 1998:146). It is interesting that the latest archaeological work at the Kuk site in which Muke and others are involved is complicated by the contested claims over the “heritage” uncovered there (Muke 1998; Strathern and Stewart 1998).

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