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MATERIALIZING THE NATION offers a “bottom-up” view of nation making. Unlike most books on nation building that tend to privilege state formation and political processes, Foster draws attention to everyday nation formation or what he calls the “banal aspects of nation making.” Through this approach he aims to demonstrate “how the nation emerges—not as a particular narrative or a particular imaginative construct—but as a frame of reference available for defining and communicating identities” (16).

Papua New Guinea (PNG) may not appear as the most obvious choice for scholars with an interest in nation formation. As Foster notes, it is indeed a weak state, a state of extraordinary ethnolinguistic pluralism, a peripheral postcolony; in short, a place that may appear as a “failed imitation of more established, more homogeneous Western nations” (3). Yet, Foster argues convincingly that this should not lead us to dismiss PNG as a relevant case for a study of nation and identity. On the contrary, as his account demonstrates, latecomers to the work of nation making such as PNG offer unique opportunities for studying how ideas of nationhood take hold in conjunction with advertising, consumption, and new media technologies. As the script is more-or-less established by more powerful and well-established states, the processes at hand may provide an insight to contradictions and dilemmas that take place as local meanings and institutions are reconfigured within a global format. Thus, the analysis of nation formation becomes also an account of globalizing processes.

Five of seven empirical chapters have been previously published as journal articles elsewhere, between 1992 and 1999, and Foster collected

some of the material back in the 1980s. Nation formation and commodity consumption are highly dynamic processes, especially perhaps in PNG. Yet the ethnographic material is presented and analyzed as if the various events were taking place more or less at the same time. (Dates are provided, but the time span between events is rarely utilized analytically.) As a consequence, opportunities for a more systematic longitudinal analysis implied in such long-term engagement are not realized but are replaced by a temporal approach that resembles the more traditional “ethnographic present.” This makes the book more fragmented and less sensitive to the temporal (or sequential) dimension of nation building than one would hope for in an analysis that seeks to demonstrate how a nation emerges.

Foster draws upon a broad range of discursive empirical sources (public information, advertising, grade school books) as well as other ethnographic accounts. His core material, however, is texts and images collected from PNG and Australian print media and advertising, and sourced to a large extent through the Internet. Through extensive use of such sources, Foster is able to describe in detail key events such as the planning of PNG’s Olympic torch relay in 2000 and state-sponsored educational programs against spitting and betel-nut chewing. This methodological strategy would hardly have been as successful if Foster was not already familiar with Melanesia through extensive fieldwork (Foster 1995). Yet, his methodological approach raises some questions about the role of ethnographic practice and fieldwork in what appears to be “an era of globalization.” These issues are discussed briefly in the concluding chapter, but I am not convinced that this book provides a good model for dealing with such methodological challenges. I will return to these issues below. But first, I shall discuss more substantially a few among the broad range of interesting topics that Foster brings up.

Money is a key element in the integration of PNG as a modern nation state; it is one of the most significant (and perhaps first) items associated with state governance that is likely to reach people in rural areas. Locally, the colonial history of PNG has even been narrated in terms of currency shifts. Among Foster’s New Ireland informants (mentioned only briefly), previous shifts of government are recollected by the phrase: “first we had marks, then shillings, then dollars” (55). Now, they also have *kina* and *toea*, national currency that refers to pearl shells (from Pidgin) and arm-shells (Motu) respectively. In an intriguing semiotic analysis of the notes, as well as the planning for their name and design, Foster shows (Chapter 2) how the design of coins and currency reflects the PNG state’s aim to achieve a synthesis of culturally diverse elements drawn from different locations within the nation state, “thereby expressing both the unity of the nation . . . and the parity of its constituent parts” (46). Thus, PNG currency may be seen as the material

embodiment of an encounter between the past and the present. This analysis of the introduction of national currency is original and offers great potential for cross-cultural comparison.

But how do different people use these kina notes? And to what extent do they replace, or combine with, more traditional forms of exchange? Foster provides an interesting historical trajectory for the current monetarization. Around the turn of the twentieth century, German colonial administrators banned the use of shell money (59). Sixty years later, the Reserve Bank of Australia distributed educational pamphlets emphasizing an ethics of industry and frugality in order to encourage Papua New Guineans to appropriate modern currency. But what are the strategies applied by the state today? The transformation from a nonmarket economy to an economy based on standardized currency is indeed significant and often accompanied by various instruments of power *beyond* mere currency design. A more thorough discussion of this relation in terms of power and forms of resistance would have been instructive. The chapter would also have benefited from a more grounded presentation of various local interpretations and uses of PNG currency today.

Similar questions may be posed in relation to subsequent chapters. To this reader, the author's reliance on texts and images sourced from the Internet, newspapers, and ads, rather than more "thick description" of living, acting people, remains a problem throughout most of the book. The use of texts and images is inspired and creative, and Foster's interpretations are often illuminating and theoretically interesting. Yet, too often his conclusions about the interplay of mass communication, commodity consumption, and nation formation remain more like hypothetical speculations than ethnographically founded claims. This is particularly problematic in Part II, which consists of three chapters illuminating various aspects of commercial nation making.

Chapter 3 focuses upon print advertisements from national newspapers and an in-flight magazine. Concerned with the way the advertisement format (its rhetorical form rather than content) "presupposes and naturalizes a structure of social relations characteristic of commodity consumption in capitalist societies" (65), Foster argues that specific definitions of personhood and community (as reflected in ads) "potentially supplement, if not displace, definitions of personhood and community grounded in social relations of kinship and locality" (65). If such displacement actually takes place, it is indeed a very significant process, and very relevant to current debates about the mechanisms of globalizing processes (Wilk 1995; Lien 2003; Meyer 2002). One would want to know more about how it happens, to whom, under what circumstances, and with what kinds of implications at the individual and village level. But unfortunately, the focus of this chapter is not people in

Papua New Guinea, but the ads themselves. In these ads, commodities are systematically linked with nationhood, and the boundaries of “markets” as imagined by marketing executives are often conflated with the boundaries of an imagined PNG nation, as the Papua New Guinean reader of print adverts is generously included in a national collective (“we’re proud to be your airline PNG”) or compared to others by virtue of assumed similarities (“He likes to eat rice and tinfish . . . There are two million others like him in Papua New Guinea”). Based on such observations, Foster argues that mass commodity consumption may function as a practical training ground for the development of a national consciousness through the relation of possession that is thus established between one’s identity and external objects. He writes: “One ‘belongs to’ a nation or ‘possesses’ a national culture much as one has or possesses commodities. When such ‘having’ (or ‘not-having’) becomes the dominant, taken-for-granted mode in which one relates to the object world, the idea of being a national citizen who ‘has’ and/or ‘needs’ a national culture follows unproblematically” (84). If he is right (and he may well be), it would be an example of nation formation qualitatively different from comparable processes that took place, for example, in European nations throughout the nineteenth century when commodity advertising was far less prominent than it is in PNG today. But is he right? Would the alleged “need” for a national culture really follow that unproblematically from the possession of objects? An answer would require a much more thoroughly grounded ethnography than this book provides.

Another problem implicit in this chapter concerns the penetration of printed ads. Foster explicitly states that he is not concerned with the intentions of the advertisers themselves or with the ads’ effects on purchasing decisions. He is not even concerned with the messages of particular ads, but rather “with the rhetorical form common to all ads” (66). Thus, as the creative directors of ad agencies are mostly “expatriate executives” (89), Foster’s analysis concerns, in effect, the global script underlying practically all contemporary adverts, executed through a transnational expert system of advertising professionals (Moeran 1996; Lien 1997). That this format provides a potential “training ground” for nation formation is plausible, but it all depends on exposure. How many Papua New Guineans are likely to read newspapers on a regular basis? In an endnote, he reveals that the *Post-Courier* (the source of many of his examples) reaches only 3 to 4% of the total population. Foster adds that readers are mostly the emerging middle class of urban PNG—the population of main concern in this particular chapter. But for successful nation formation to happen, 3 to 4% of all state citizens is hardly sufficient. What would it take for this minority to convince their fellow citizens? How would such negotiations take place?

In a recent study of the transformative potential of globalizing processes, I have focused on the ways in which state and European Union (EU) regulations are negotiated and to some extent resisted in a remote fishing village in northern Norway (Lien 2003). This approach exposed fundamental differences between an urban Norwegian architect and local residents in ways of seeing the world, the place, and its role in relation to other places. Rather than treating the emerging urban middle class as continuous with the PNG nation, I would encourage the author to draw attention precisely towards such *discontinuities*, internal boundaries, or points of resistance, because it is precisely in such intermediate zones, fields, or moments that the unique shape of PNG as a novel nation state is likely to take place.

In Chapter 5 (and in parts of Chapter 1), the analysis is more narrowly confined to a focus on the body and an emergent discourse on health. The ad material inspires a fascinating account of the way state propaganda redefines the boundaries of its citizens' bodies (e.g., by aiming to prevent public spitting) and how "these boundaries are made conterminous with the skin" (193). Once the body is individuated, separated from other bodies, "the control of these boundaries is presented as a matter of *personal* choice" (103). In a Foucauldian manner, Foster demonstrates how the state and commercial actors, intentionally or not, exert the message of discipline through fitness, hygiene, and temperance.

In Chapter 5, Foster is more explicit than in previous chapters about the limitations of his textual approach. According to the author, "a nuanced ethnographic approach to the discourse of health would focus resolutely on both the actual practices of producing and receiving commercial mass media" (89). This chapter, once a previously published article, "anticipates such an ethnography" (89). These are reasonable reflections, but do they apply to the book as a whole? As a reader, I found it disappointing that such an ethnography is never realized in subsequent chapters. I do not argue that articles should not be republished as a collection, but I feel that the overall analysis would have benefited immensely from a thorough revision of the collected articles in which their respective topics and conclusions could be juxtaposed. Such a revision would probably have sorted out what appears to this reader as problematic discontinuities as one moves from one chapter to the next.

While Chapters 3 and 4 discuss commodity advertisements as fairly straightforward agents in nation formation, Chapter 5 takes a more nuanced perspective, questioning the extent to which consumption of national brand goods produces civic consciousness at all. Drawing on Daniel Miller's classic *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987), Foster maintains that common consumption, at best, "might engender a diffuse and diluted sense

of collective affinity—the sort of recognition, if any, that someone affords someone who drinks the same brand of beer” (116). What then, is the place of consumption practices in nation making? Foster’s reflections on the importance of what he calls the “microphysics of learning to belong” (a term he borrows from Linde-Laursen) are worth referring to at length. First, “consumption practices have the capacity to operate as powerful vehicles for materializing nationality” (117). Second, “mass consumption provides a vocabulary and model for communicating the equivalence of nations and of individuals” (118). Third, Foster maintains that “consumption practices enact various relationships between tradition and modernity” (119), relations that are central to all national narratives. Foster’s interpretation of selected examples of contemporary adverts in PNG underpins these claims. Yet, the adverts can hardly demonstrate more than potential implications. Whether or not consumption practices actually work this way in contemporary PNG remains to be seen.

Part Three, entitled “Nation Making in This Era of Globalization,” is in my opinion the most stimulating part of the book. Its two chapters are the only ones not published elsewhere, and together with the Introduction they serve to enhance the analytical coherence of the book as a whole. Chapter 6 starts out with a discussion of marginality and globalization in the Melanesian and Polynesian regions. Arguing that PNG is a “country of stay-at-homes relatively speaking,” Foster then examines “how people staying at home attempt to assert translocality, to participate in imagined communities of global proportion” (134–135). His chosen examples serve this purpose well. I particularly enjoyed the account of the prelude to the 2000 Olympic torch relay. Sourced mainly from various media and the Internet, the narrative still portrays the events in sufficient detail. The account thus exemplifies how transnational communication technologies, themselves a dimension of globalizing processes, constitute novel opportunities for retrieving and collecting ethnographic material. The event exemplifies how global rituals evoke, and are informed by, existing relations of power and mutual distrust, in this case between PNG and Australia. This is another ethnographic case that would lend itself to cross-cultural analysis, especially as the topic has been popular among anthropologists for some time (MacAloon 1991; Klausen 1999). The chapter is a revealing account of the way global rituals take on a local twist, and how regional conflicts inform the interpretation of events.

Chapter 7 asks the timely questions: “What conceptual tools are available to us as anthropologists in trying to trace and understand multiple perspectives within a global commodityscape? And how are we to accomplish the task as ethnographers in the field” (153)? Yet, the answers provided are hardly original in the light of abundant literature on this issue in the years

prior to the book's publication, but then again the whole chapter is remarkably unambitious. According to the author, "This chapter, then, is admittedly premature. It is a first attempt to delineate the perspectives of people located differently in a transnational soft drink commodityscape" (155). He then presents some preliminary findings on recent acquisitions and global takeovers in the PNG soft drink market and some results of his own survey on food and beverage consumption, but neither is presented with the accuracy and depth needed for a serious review. Towards the end of the chapter, Foster returns to the initial inquiry about ethnographic practice. Armed with recent references addressing similar issues (from Gupta and Ferguson, Marcus, and Appadurai), Foster raises the question of techniques and tactics available to "fieldworking anthropologists for apprehending the sociocultural complexity of global flows" (172). Foster's own contribution to this methodological toolkit reflects George Marcus' idea of multisited fieldwork (1998) with a twist. More precisely, he suggests "collaborative fieldwork" (172) in different field-sites—sites that are constructed in fields of unequal power relations. There is nothing wrong with this idea, and it may serve as a practical solution to the logistic challenges of multisited fieldwork, but it hardly addresses the more basic challenges involved in doing ethnographies that take transnational connections seriously. One cannot help but wish that Foster's experience in attempting to do precisely that would have prompted him to say something more.

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