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GIVEN AN ACADEMIC ECONOMY that inflates the value of publishing but discounts the hard work of reading, I express special thanks to all three reviewers for the time, effort, and collegiality represented by their stimulating provocations. These comments highlight important issues about the fate and future of nation making in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and elsewhere. They also raise broad and urgent questions about how social researchers might analytically imagine and methodologically apprehend contemporary practices of nation making in circumstances of uneven and unequal globalization.

Let me begin with the how question. Both the anthropologists, Lien and Dureau, predictably but rightly ask for greater ethnographic depth. They recognize my claim that “the nation” serves as a frame of reference for staging personal and collective identities, but they seek thicker descriptions of how a national frame of reference might—at particular times, in particular contexts, for particular people—rub uneasily against other frames of reference, frames of locality or kinship, for instance. Fair enough. What self-respecting Melanesianist anthropologist is going to argue against the fundamental virtues of ethnography? My aim is to encourage and not to suppress ethnographic inquiry into how the nation emerges as an aspect of everyday life in PNG—in rural areas as well as urban ones, among elites as well as the fabled “grassroots.” It is through such studies, I hope, that the significance of my more general insistence on paying attention to mass media

and commercial culture as sites where the nation materializes, not always in a flattering light, will be borne out. The results will no doubt complicate my claim. Consider, for example, one such recent ethnographic examination of how consumption of tinned fish and tea in a remote area of Western Province involves a process of nation *unmaking*, a way for Gogodala people to imagine a transnational relationship with Europeans based on Christianity and perforce to criticize and challenge the precepts of the PNG nation-state (Dundon 2004).

I admit, then, the ethnographic limitations of some of my observations, particularly regarding the ontological corollaries of commodity consumption (about which more presently). These observations might indeed enjoy the status, as Lien suggests, of informed hypotheses (not necessarily a drawback for a book seeking to outline theoretical and comparative perspectives on nation making). But I make no apology for my extensive use and analysis of “texts”—advertisements, coins and currency, postage stamps, pop songs, and so forth, for two reasons, one general and the other specific to PNG. First, as both Lien and Dureau recognize, these texts rehearse a global script that conditions and constrains nation making regardless of the creativity with which people in PNG or elsewhere render that script. For example, as Lien notes, advertising in PNG as elsewhere reflects the practices of a “transnational expert system of advertising professionals.” No matter how particular their local manifestations, then, these texts indicate “social forces of a larger scale, forces whose sociology demands attention if we are to make sense of the worlds we study without parochializing and, worse yet, exoticizing them” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 151). Put differently, the first step in understanding how “the nation” materializes in PNG lies in acknowledging the manifest presence of familiar, globally diffused symbolic tokens now apparently deemed necessary in order for any nation to make itself legible.

Second, this kind of text has so far largely been ignored by anthropologists whose fieldwork in PNG has directed attention elsewhere. Lien is correct to emphasize the novel opportunities that transnational communication technologies present for retrieving ethnographic material, but less accurate in claiming that the texts and images discussed in the book were “sourced to a large extent through the Internet.” The great bulk of this material was acquired during the course of five separate trips to PNG between 1990 and 2000, the last of which put me in Port Moresby in the days surrounding the PNG leg of the Olympic Torch Relay. When I first began examining such material the only place in the United States to consult back issues of the *Post Courier* (then PNG’s only daily newspaper) was in the microfilm reading room of the Library of Congress. Now scholars can search LexisNexis and other databases from their laptop computers. Even so, LexisNexis erases

the advertisements! There is an ineluctable ephemerality to everyday commercial culture (and not only in PNG) that belies its significance for understanding histories of social and cultural change.

A small example: In 1991 I recorded an epic PNG-made television advertisement for a product of Nestlé, one of the world's largest transnational food and beverage corporations. The several-minutes-long ad, a step-by-step set of instructions, introduced audiences to the use of Maggi brand bouillon cubes. These cubes were represented as inexpensive ingredients for enhancing family meals of boiled meat and tubers. Anyone who has observed the incorporation of instant (ramen) noodles and flavor packets into PNG foodways—not to mention other nutritionally dubious items such as lamb flaps and soft drinks—would concede that the ad merits documentation and preservation. The creative director of the agency responsible for the ad later told me that he received a personal note of thanks from a Nestlé vice-president for opening up a new market in PNG. Social forces of a larger scale, indeed.

Lien and Dureau appreciate the insights gained from looking at mass media texts. For some anthropologists, however, dismissal of “textual analysis” is regrettably still a means to distance and defend themselves from the taint of “cultural studies.” Here is where I am less sympathetic to the knee-jerk invocations of the virtue of ethnography—to the insistence “that *any* knowledge derived at first-hand proximity to natives has an *a priori* privilege” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 153); for in PNG, at least, ethnography has painfully little to say about mass media, commercial or otherwise. Years ago I complained that since its debut in 1986, broadcast television had escaped the serious attention of anthropologists working in PNG (Foster 1999). The suspect is still at large. Anthropologists can learn from visual and cultural studies—or media studies or textual analysis—without abandoning a commitment to “grounded” ethnography by giving greater attention to the forms of non-face-to-face communication that impinge upon the lifeworlds of Papua New Guineans today. Nor are the two exercises mutually exclusive; texts do, despite once-fashionable claims to the contrary, have authors. My attempts to pay attention to letters to the editor and comments on phone-in radio shows suggest ways to monitor public discourse about the media in the media, that is, to examine media texts for clues about how people's sense of themselves as Papua New Guineans responds to media representations and vice-versa. Such a strategy promises to reveal how PNG materializes in virtual space as well as in the “real” places (themselves always under construction) presumably studied by “real” anthropologists (ditto).

Both Lien and Dureau also raise questions of what as well as of how. What does it mean to say that the nation emerges as a frame of reference

for defining personal and collective identities? Is this equivalent to saying that a “national culture” is “forming,” or that civic consciousness or political nationalism (as opposed to ethnic nationalism) is “developing”? The questions deserve clarification inasmuch as the essays in my book, written for different purposes over a period of ten years, offer multiple and discontinuous answers. For example, I have come to see the notion of national culture, however defined, as irremediably problematic, always at risk of elision with the nationalist’s definition of “a culture” as a shared way of life distinctive and common to a group of people living in a single demarcated territory. By this definition, of course, it is difficult to argue the existence of a Papua New Guinean national culture. The objection is obvious: too much diversity. But this way of thinking about national culture as shared culture raises intractable questions, such as just how much sharing is necessary before we can say a national culture exists. Lien observes that the daily PNG newspapers reach a tiny percentage of the population: “for successful nation formation to happen, 3 to 4% of all state citizens is hardly sufficient.” What percentage would be sufficient? The question is itself a function of thinking of national cultures as organic formations or engineered assemblages of shared traits, of nation building as a cumulative process of progressive enculturation. And it only gets murkier when the question is applied to subjective states: when can we say that national or civic consciousness, or a shared sense of belonging and fellowship, definitively exists? How do we measure love of country?

I suggest, with Bashkow (2004, 452), that we need to move away from notions of culture (and cultural boundaries) “motivated by sharedness.” Toward what? My attempt to substitute *nation making* for nation building was intended to highlight the ways in which a particular kind of imaginative construct—“the nation”—was variously produced and circulated, contested and accepted (Foster 1995). Nation making in this sense is inevitably ongoing and open-ended precisely because the persuasive force of any particular imaginative construct is *not* uniformly shared. What is shared, no doubt partially and imperfectly, is a framework or point of reference in terms of which people can articulate, sometimes oppositionally, their sense of things. Accordingly, it is fair (if perverse) to say that in PNG, “the nation” as an imaginative construct often materializes in the performance of its repudiation—as when Kaiyape Wilson, Jeffrey Clark’s Pangia collaborator, told the anthropologist “I hate PNG” (Clark 1997, 74). Kaiyape Wilson was complaining about government inefficiency and corruption as impediments to development; he confessed feelings of shame about PNG. His confession effectively illustrated what Robbins (1998) has called “negative nationalism,” the imagination of PNG as a morally and materially deficient community. While there are rare instances in which “the nation” emerges in PNG infused with the sort of positive affective charge commonly associated with

nationalism—during the Olympic Torch relay, for example, or in the immediate aftermath of the Sandline crisis—it might well be that “the nation” emerges in PNG primarily as a result of negative nationalism or “narration against the nation” (Clark 1997, 74). As Larmour suggests with his reference to the weepy sendoff of Australian police at the Port Moresby airport, the nation often materializes in PNG through harsh self-criticism and sundry occasions “for Papua New Guineans to feel bad about themselves.” Hardly what we usually mean by nation building or the formation of a national culture.

Nation making in places like PNG, latecomers to the status of nation-state, highlights the ways in which a dominant model of “the nation” imported from abroad finds a new home in already existing circumstances—or not. It is in this encounter—the encounter with everyday technologies of nation making that both Lien and Dureau understandably wish were more thickly described—that one might glimpse alternative frames of reference for staging personal and collective identities. I have tended to define this alternative starkly, following the lead of Marilyn Strathern (1988), as one between incommensurate forms of personhood. My point has been to supplement Anderson’s (1991) well-known arguments with the claim that an ideology of possessive individualism creates an elective affinity between nationalism and consumerism. It is this claim that motivates my interest in looking at commodity consumption as a site where national and personal identities become entangled. Such entanglement is clear enough from the various advertisements that I discuss in which commodities and, by extension, their consumers are semiotically qualified as national. Rhetorically qualified, if not experientially, Lien and Dureau would likely add.

While I have distinguished between the semiotic logic of an ad and what readers might themselves construe as the ad’s meaning, I have perhaps been less explicit in emphasizing that ads—or commodity consumption, more generally—mark only one of many sites where Papua New Guineans must negotiate the ontological precepts of individualism or liberal personhood. These negotiations, however subversive, resistant, or heroic, are all part of a process of “encompassment” whereby Papua New Guineans engage the agents of Western modernity (LiPuma 2000). This process involves a set of recurring institutions not unique to PNG—missions, schools, courts, and so forth. Silverman (1999) has even suggested that the production of tourist art involves new forms of individuation. How the process of encompassment unfolds is of course subject to local variation and increasingly to the well-trained focus of ethnographic inquiry in PNG (e.g., Knauff 2002). But the comparative value of such ethnography depends on explicit conceptualization of how encompassment potentially changes the terms for

staging personal and collective identities. Hence the import of Anderson's proposition in the revised version of *Imagined Communities* that maps, museums, and censuses materialize the nation according to a logic of seriality, thereby construing individuals and collectivities as aggregable components of a single category series. Which brings us to the elections that Larmour, the political scientist, predictably but rightly asks us to consider.

In one of the election studies to which Larmour refers, I have contributed some ethnographic notes on how voting—the actual casting of a vote in the national election—can enlist people in a performance of individuation: “the process of ‘singling out’ or disconnecting a person from the nexus of social relations that defines his or her identity and positing for that person a new identity as a discrete and autonomous individual, in short, a citizen” (Foster 1996:158). The ritual structure of voting in rural New Ireland in 1992 facilitated this process in several ways, most notably by requiring persons—roll called by residential unit but one by one and *in alphabetical order*—to enter a cordoned-off area and to mark their ballots privately, hidden by the makeshift voting booth that stood in plain view of the public gathered to observe the event. I remember well the visible unease and discomfort with which men, and especially women, comported themselves as they walked forward, alone and watched, toward and into the voting area. It was the unsettling dream of Melanesian personhood—standing solitary as a self-determining individual cut loose from a network of self-activating moral relations.

This particular election moment was surely not typical of voting throughout PNG. First of all, the voters were choosing mainly between two and only two candidates, an almost unheard-of situation in PNG, where a dozen or more candidates each supported by a small bloc often contest a single parliamentary seat. Indeed, this binary opposition had the almost equally unheard-of effect of making political party affiliations a meaningful form of collective identity (temporarily, at least). More to Larmour's point, the pressure exerted on voters (not to mention election officials) to line up behind a candidate according to “clan” identity was minimal. In fact, exhortations to vote one's own preference regardless of one's kin's preferences were explicitly issued at party rallies. There was certainly nothing like the brute intimidation of “gunpoint democracy” described by Standish (1996) in the same volume for the elections in Simbu province (see also Standish 2002). Will limited preferential voting better accommodate Melanesian personhood and bring the electoral process in the turbulent highlands closer to the ideal (albeit realized imperfectly) that I observed in the islands?

I am not confident about this possibility, largely because I do not think that “gunpoint democracy” is an inevitable by-product of resilient conventions of Melanesian personhood or even of newly invented “clans.” Instead, I am inclined to see it as a spiraling consequence and cause of the failure

of state agents and agencies to live up to the promise of “development” expected by “the people” in whose name the state putatively operates. It is this particular failure (accelerated through the 1990s by the rollback of state services) that accounts for the authoritarian tactics by which many candidates and incumbents attempt to appropriate whatever state resources remain for highly noninclusive purposes. It is also this failure that accounts for the way in which many voters sell their loyalty to patrons (or their forests to foreign developers) who distribute the greatest largesse, often after sampling the largesse of other would-be patrons. As I suggested in *Materializing the Nation*, it is this delegitimizing failure (rather than any other rival nation-state) that defines the state as the Other with reference to which the nation materializes, namely, as “we, the people,” whom the state has betrayed. As Larmour points out, a hint of popular (as opposed to official) nationalism can be sensed in the support of the Enhanced Cooperation Program by ordinary folks, much as IMF intervention was earlier greeted in some quarters as a welcome imposition of discipline on profligate and corrupt state officials.

Exclusion, as Dureau insists, is the issue. Sir Julius Chan, former Prime Minister, several years ago dubbed PNG “a nation of beggars,” a reference to the country’s dependency on foreign aid. (Perspective: Australia gives PNG about 500 million Australian dollars in aid annually; the war in Iraq is now calculated to cost the U.S. military about US\$10 billion a month.) Chan’s condemnation of the nation’s fiscal dependency echoes the rhetoric of emerging PNG middle class members who recast the moral claims on their wealth made by kin as expressions of a handout mentality (see Gewertz and Errington 1999). The sort of autonomy and self-sufficiency championed by economic nationalists thus rides comfortably alongside bourgeois demands that “the (little) people” take care of themselves. Class making and nation making go hand in hand, I agree. Exclusion from the promise of development, tangibly in the form of desirable but unattainable goods and services, can also generate Others besides the state, another point that Dureau makes well in considering the offspring of a marriage between nationalism and consumerism. For definitions of citizenship in terms of participation in a community of consumption inevitably question the status of those without the means to consume or to consume properly, without the capacity to join even the most humble community of consumption. Are these people, whether urban migrants or rural villagers, second-class citizens? Are they even part of the nation? The questions pertain, moreover, to the nation itself: what kind of nation has no McDonald’s let alone a Starbucks (a condition PNG shares with most sub-Saharan African countries)?

Not all responses to exclusion take the form of a violent Simbu-style contest to capture state resources. Disengagement and disaffection are options, too. It is exclusion from the material promises of an independent and

sovereign nation-state that generates the sentiment of Kaiyape Wilson's blunt assertion: "I hate PNG." Here, admittedly, indigenous notions of personhood are at work, inasmuch as this exclusion is understood as a failure to act on one's moral obligations. Wardlow (2005) thus describes the resentment and indignation of Huli men aroused by businessmen, politicians, and mining corporations thought to have renounced their promises. This resentment and indignation motivate and even justify acts of physical violence including armed holdups as attempts to enforce relationships of reciprocity. Somewhat differently, Lattas (2006) has described the search for alternative forms of government carried on by members of the Pomio Kivung movement who communicate with their dead ancestors. Rather than negotiating the frustrations of a state that has failed them, Kivung members create their own version of law and order in search of not only cargo, but also "the utopian promise of government." Elsewhere in rural PNG, in places regarded by their residents as "last places" to enjoy development, withdrawal from the nation and state of PNG is a utopian promise tendered in the guise of belonging to a vast sacred community, a Christian religious community that transcends territorial as well as racial boundaries (Dundon 2004; Robbins 2004). In urban centers as well as rural villages, fast money scams and pyramid schemes with names like Money Rain and Windfall, sometimes endorsed by government officials and other elites, entice gullible investors with promises of quick and fat returns.

Experience of exclusion—of frustrated expectations of modernity—is not exclusive to PNG. James Ferguson (1999) has written, for example, with compassionate insight and wide relevance about the experience of decline in Zambia during the 1980s. Ferguson characterizes this experience as "abjection," the sense of being thrown down and humiliated. Such is the feeling of Zambians who, having glimpsed the passage from "developing" to "developed" world, now see themselves as cut off from the world society envisaged by the cheerleaders of first modernization and later globalization. Cognate sentiments were conveyed by my friends in the Tanga Islands, New Ireland Province, when I visited in 2002. One man, a former seminarian, told me in plain English, "We are going backwards," a view my friend Somanil Funil summed up in the phrase, "Back to stage one." And I shared their sense of disconnection as I wondered when the now once-weekly plane would arrive when it failed to turn up on the day appointed for my departure. In 1984, when I first visited Tanga, planes (plural) came and went five days a week. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to say that most Tangans were abject. No "Afro-castrophism" for them (Fraenkel 2003). Indeed, I exhibited more despair than they did, registering their experience of decline in terms of a global race to the bottom, a teleology of underdevelopment. By contrast,

my Tanga friends professed—sometimes in the dark shadows of evening discussions, since there was little kerosene left to buy at local trade stores—a keen sense of historical contingency. They did not understand the present as the future foretold, any more than sixty or so years before they would have predicted World War II, or twenty years before they would have anticipated the discovery of one of the world's largest gold deposits on a nearby island. Hey, you never know.

The lesson that I take from my conversations in Tanga can be applied to current debates about the nation-state in PNG and elsewhere. We need to get outside our modernist narratives of progress and development replete with their metaphors of growth and construction—"nation building" and the "formation of national cultures." In so doing, we need to find alternatives to the current rhetoric of failed states and weak nations, a rhetoric that inverts the familiar modernist narratives and thereby continues the exclusion of PNG and Zambia from full membership in world society, an exclusion upon which the inequalities of colonialism were premised and reproduced. It makes little sense to see PNG as a failed version of Western nation-states when Western nation-states themselves no longer approach (if they ever did) the ideals of a democratic "imagined community." Divided into "global cities" and disconnected hinterlands, fortified private enclaves and decaying public spaces, Western nation-states struggle with their own internal economic and cultural divisions. Chomsky (2006) has gone so far as to label the United States (unilateral nation builder and self-designated promoter of democracy) as a failed state, unable to protect its citizens from violence and unaccountable to both public opinion and international law. The modernist project of a global system of sovereign territorial states coupled with nations defined by shared political or ethnic cultures is in tatters. Yet, the nation persists as a salient frame of reference for staging personal and collective identities, for articulating visions—sometimes terrifying—of citizenship and peoplehood. Is this persistence anything more than the artifact of a dull political imagination?

In an era of transnational corporations and religious movements, mobile technologies and populations, rogue militias and activist NGOs, border-crossing migrants and media (not to mention "illicit flows" of all sorts; see Van Schendel and Abraham 2005), the future of nation making is not its present and surely not its past. Anderson has noted the portability and modularity of the vehicles available for imagining the nation. I have tried to track their operation in PNG. There are limits to the effectiveness of these vehicles—limits imposed not only by conventions of relational personhood, but also by globalized political and economic rules, new forms of imperialism and capitalism. But the question remains, and not only with regard to PNG:

if not a nation-state (failed, fragile, or otherwise), and if not the reassertion of “primordial” tribalism, then, well, what? What are the complex congeries of affinities and ideologies, networks and organizations of various scale, that signal a “postnational social formation” (Appadurai 1996). Places like PNG, my interlocutors in this dialogue have confirmed, are useful vantage points from which to address this important question. The challenge that this question poses to Pacific studies—and especially Melanesianist anthropology—will most certainly require methods that are multidisciplinary and multisited, comparative and historical. But there is a more basic challenge relative to which methodological concerns seem trivial. Can scholars and citizens alike, in and beyond the Pacific (and certainly in the United States) muster a critical spirit and political will strong enough to resist the abuse of power that passes itself off as democracy and to overcome the hopelessness of witnessing decline and disconnection on a daily basis?

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