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“Before it Gets Spoiled by Tourists”

Constructing Authenticity in the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea

Michelle MacCarthy
Abstract

This thesis provides an anthropological analysis of the encounter between local residents and tourists in the Trobriand Islands, a place renowned in anthropology and represented in various media as “culturally authentic.” In such a place, how are ideas about authenticity implicated in creating and representing the self and cultural Others in the context of cultural tourism? To answer this question, I examine four arenas of interaction between Trobriand Islanders and tourists: formal performances, informal village visits, souvenir shopping, and tourist photography. I employ symbolic/interpretive approaches and concepts drawn from economic anthropology to examine the relationship of tourism to the commoditization of culture, the ways in which local residents actively represent and enact ‘Trobriandness’, and the ways tourists interpret and narrate their experience. I offer an anthropological critique of concepts of authenticity, tradition, and cultural commodification, based on long-term fieldwork among Trobriand Islanders and tourists. I show how these notions, which have particular meanings as analytical concepts in anthropology, are appropriated and strategically deployed in the discourses of both Trobriand Islanders and tourists. Ideas about primitivity and reified views of culture, both long critiqued by anthropologists, are likewise used by both parties in tourism interactions to conceptualize and contextualize difference. I demonstrate how such tropes are employed in ways that fit with prevailing metanarratives which each side holds about the other, and how these tropes are reproduced both in individual narratives of both tourists’ and Trobrianders’ experiences and in their interpretations (often misconstrued) of the lives of cultural Others with whom they interact. I examine the social dimensions of cross-cultural exchange in these four arenas (performance, village life, souvenirs, photography) to argue that cultural commodities are conceived of as singularities, a special category whose commodity status is downplayed in order to generate an increased sense of authenticity and to perpetuate the myth of a “primitive” economy and way of life more generally. In touristic encounters, experience itself is a sort of commodity, but relationships (real or imagined) are central to investing these experiences with meaning and value. Thus, I contribute new understandings of the role and significance of authenticity in the anthropology of tourism, as well as how meaning and value are ascribed to the cultural products produced and consumed in the cultural tourism encounter.

Key Words: tourism, authenticity, tradition, commoditization, primitivity, Trobriand Islands.
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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALIZING AUTHENTICITY

Figure 1.1: “Authentic Milne Bay Experience” T-shirt, featuring images of a Trobriand lime gourd (*yaguma*), yam house (*liku*), and *kula* valuable (*mwali*)
Married for over forty years, Douglas and Diana had lived in Vermont for most of their working life, but recently retired to California. Diana, 69, exudes a vibrancy and zest for life unmatched by most people half her age. She described herself to me as a “travel slut—I want to go everywhere!” But, she noted that she was especially keen to see “tribal cultures, ancient or original civilisations.” Douglas emphasised an interest in “animal life”, while travel for the purpose of seeing a different culture or people, he said, “ranked second” in choosing a holiday destination. This interest in seeing another way of life had compelled the couple to travel to places such as Laos and Tanzania. “When Doug retired,” Diana told me, “we each made our top ten list of places we wanted to visit.” They are working their way through their respective lists, and have visited nearly 60 countries.

While Douglas grew up in a poor family and had never travelled in his youth, Diana said she “inherited the travel gene” from her father. She was always an avid reader, devouring stories about faraway places. She “bummed around Europe” as a young adult, then did a stint working for Royal Viking Cruise Line after training as a travel agent. When she married, she settled in to the role of housewife, but never lost her lust for travel. Douglas’s job was “horrible”, prompting them to take annual holidays as a brief escape from workaday life. She described them as “typical middle class”, usually taking predictable vacations in established resort areas like Hawai’i or Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula. Now, retired but still energetic and healthy, they want to travel to the “rough places” on their list—like Papua New Guinea (PNG).

When I asked what they knew of PNG before their visit, Diana said that they regularly read National Geographic magazine and watch the National Geographic Channel on television; they had seen a programme about the Mt. Hagen sing sing
doubled, and had friends who had once attended. They did not know anything about the Trobriand Islands specifically except what they had read in the tour operator’s pamphlet. Douglas said he had heard about “last contacts” and people “recently discovered” in PNG and the Amazon, and this fascinated him. He stated, “I couldn’t care less about modern trappings—I want to see another way of life. I want to see places like this before it’s [sic] totally gone.” Fearing the “extinction” of this other way of life, and conceptually equating his interest in exotic wildlife with exotic people, he described places like PNG as “a Galápagos for people.” His evolutionary rhetoric continued: “This place has a real dawn of time kind of feel, like maybe we’re seeing how our ancestors lived.” He continued, “One nice thing about the Trobriand Islands is that it hasn’t been westernised. It’s more or less intact.”
Although learning about the Mt. Hagen show was what had originally sparked their interest in travelling to PNG, Diana told me that their travel is generally not driven by cultural events. “I just want to see how people live, the daily lives of people—not only celebrations,” she stated. Douglas, likewise, said he is “more interested in seeing daily life” than formal events. Several of the other visitors on this tour had told me about their visit to Mt. Hagen, where they had gone to a village a day or two prior to the main singsing and had seen people preparing and rehearsing for the main stage event. Nearly all of the visitors had told me that they found this more enjoyable, and more “authentic”, than the organised singsing. Douglas was no exception. He said,

Seeing the preparation in the village, that was more interesting than the main show, because you could get your arms around it. Watching people get ready, you could see that people were having fun. It just felt real, it didn’t feel put on.

He pointed out, “That *singsing* [in the village] was going to happen whether we were there or not. If I thought it was staged, it wouldn’t be as interesting. That’s the real stuff.” When I asked what he thought about the dance performance they had seen at Butia Lodge (the guest lodge where their tour group was staying) the previous night, he noted that “it didn’t feel totally rehearsed. I enjoyed it, because I saw the performers enjoying it. It looks like people here are trying to keep the culture going—that’s a good thing.”

Diana, too, explicitly spoke of her quest for authenticity, stating, “I like things that are more authentic. And I don’t mean in a ‘museum-y’ way. I mean people living the lives they’re choosing to live, in places that are still culturally intact.” When I asked Diana to describe what “authenticity” means to her, she said, “Just people doing what they normally do. Some places we’ve travelled have seemed more like a showplace for tourism. Like the Hawai’ian Islands, or the North Island of New Zealand—Rotorua for example. Here it’s not like that.” What she enjoys most, Diana told me, is going to villages and talking to locals, noting that she specifically chooses trips that allow local interactions.

Douglas was keen to point out the difference between “tourists” and “travellers”, stating, “I try not to be a tourist. I really dislike what tourists do to local culture”, such as giving candy or other items that might encourage begging. He said that as a traveller, he seeks to “leave a smaller footprint” than a “tourist” would. He told me he gave up his video camera because he felt he was missing out by only seeing things through a lens. His “pet peeve” is that too many photographers are obtrusive and insensitive; he told me, “We need to respect people, no matter where we go.” Diana agreed; she had been upset with some of her companions the previous day when they had gone to the village of Obweria to see a
sagali (mortuary feast). She felt that people were being rude by interrupting what was going on because they were so concerned with getting the photo they wanted.

Douglas was worried about encroaching development and modernisation, fretting that people living in places like the Trobriands “can lose what was good” when new technology is introduced. He pointed to places that have seen rapid and poorly planned tourism development, where high rises have “destroyed everything”. He said, “I like to see architecture from ancient times, but with living cultures still intact. That adds a really interesting element.” When I asked if he thought the Trobriands were at risk of change, he responded that it was clear to him that the Trobriands were not equipped for a huge tourism economy, “thank goodness”, so it would likely happen less quickly than in other places. He didn’t mind the relative lack of comforts and tourist infrastructure; on the contrary, it was part of the appeal. “A little hardship is par for the course in the places we want to visit. It goes with the territory. I only go places I have to take malaria pills and wear zipline pants. Most of our friends think we’re nuts,” he said with barely concealed pride. This trip, clearly, would bestow bragging rights and great stories. Luckily, in Douglas’s view, they had gotten to the Trobriands in time—before, like the flightless birds and other defenceless animals of the Galapágos, Trobriand culture was exterminated by outside forces. “Hopefully, it won’t change,” he said wistfully. “What people have here, it’s so much a simple life; it would be a shame for it to change.”

Diana and Douglas, and the title of this thesis, can be seen as generally representative of the sentiments expressed by travellers who choose to traverse the globe seeking out the Other in less economically developed parts of the world, frequently depicted as, and understood by Westerners to be, “primitive”. The discourses used by these visitors introduce many of the theoretical threads to be unravelled in this thesis, all of which articulate with my primary focus on the role of conceptualisations about authenticity in creating and representing both the self and cultural others, as played out through cultural tourism encounters. Some of the questions I explore are:

- How do people (both residents of, and visitors to, the Trobriands) understand and utilise the concept of authenticity in the realm of cultural tourism?
- How do discourses about commoditisation, Christianity, globalisation, and modernity articulate with ideas about authenticity for both tourists and Trobrianders?
- How do visual and textual representations of primitivity inform both tourists’ views of the Other (vis-à-vis themselves), as well as Trobrianders’ view of themselves (vis-à-vis non-Trobrianders)?
• How are these ideas reflected and narrated in the production and consumption of such aspects of the touristic experiences as dance performances and cultural festivals, “daily life”, handcrafted souvenirs, and photographs?

• How is money conceived of differently by Trobriand Islanders and tourists, and what are the implications of this for theoretical debates about gifts and commodities?

The ways in which interactions with and understandings of the Other are narrated by tourists varied to some degree by country of origin, gender, age, affluence and previous travel experience, but there are inevitably common themes underlying ideas about cultural stasis, the dangers of modernity, and conflicting representations of life in less economically developed places as simultaneously easier and happier, but also harder and more burdensome, than life in the West. In this thesis, I look to the Trobriand Islands, a place well known to anthropology, as a site of encounter between local residents—keenly aware of their difference, both from other Papua New Guineans and from foreigners abroad—and the visitors who come from far and wide for a chance to experience such difference for themselves. Although mass tourism is unknown on these remote coral atolls, the tourists who make the long, expensive, and difficult journey must have compelling reasons for choosing this exotic destination. For their part, the people of the Trobriands have responded to the (real or imagined) desires and expectations of visitors and have their own conceptualisations of, and strategies for, interacting with tourists. I opened with an account of the narratives of just two of the many tourists I interviewed about their expectations and experiences, as an introduction to the analysis that follows. This is based on my ethnographic fieldwork with both tourists and resident Trobrianders on Kiriwina, the largest and most frequently visited of the Trobriand Islands.

Ideas about authenticity emerge as a central point of reference for both cultural tourists and Trobriand Islanders, though, as this thesis will show, this concept can be conceived in wildly different ways. Part of experiencing authenticity for the cultural tourist is a perceived sense of social or personal interaction between visitor and visited, which I refer to, following Merlan (1998) and Tonnaer (2008), as the intercultural encounter. Trobriand-tourist interactions, in such a conceptualisation, are the site of an “interplay of differing expectations, understandings, and forms of practise” (Hinkson and Smith 2005:161). This approach is intended to go beyond mere description of encounters between cultural Others, rather to analyse such engagement as a site of action and interpretation which informs understandings of both Trobrianders’ and visitors’ ideas about themselves, the Other, and their respective ways of being in, and thinking about, the world.
Understanding Cultural Tourism

As a major international industry, tourism is responsible for the movement of an enormous volume of people and resources. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) reports an estimated 924 million international tourist arrivals (including both leisure and business travellers) in 2008 (UNWTO 2009). The estimated annual expenditure on tourism worldwide is US$856 billion (Thurlow and Jaworski 2010:6). Tourism is but one of many kinds of mobility inherent in globalised flows, and it is a useful platform for thinking about the creation and consumption of commodities, places, cultures, and identities (Meethan 2006:1; Rojek and Urry 1997:10). As such, it addresses issues of central import to the anthropological endeavour: constructed meanings, identity, exchange and interaction. There are, of course, many kinds of tourism, and many kinds of tourists. This research project deals with a particular kind of tourism, in a particular place in the world, though it can be seen to represent the same kind of tourism in other parts of the world that are similarly represented as “primitive”. Tourism has been described as serving as an influential and privileged lens through which people may come to make sense not only of a particular destination or people, but of the world—and the cultural Other broadly speaking, I would add—at large (Franklin and Crang 2001).

Smith (1989:4) provides a typology of types of tourism that identifies in general terms the motivations that prompt tourism to the Trobriand Islands. These categories are by no means mutually exclusive, and a given travel event can combine any number of them, though many travellers identify themselves as having an affinity for a particular kind of travel. For example, most of the visitors I interviewed told me that they had a particular interest in “culture”, “tribal groups”, “traditional ways of life”, “cultural festivals”, or, more generally, “exotic places” and “getting off the beaten track”. A few noted that they usually preferred trips that were centered on flora and fauna, for example, and one visitor noted that the trip to PNG was a true departure for her husband, who was “usually five-star all the way”. I generally refer to the type of tourism in the Trobriand Islands as cultural or ethnic/ethno-tourism. Smith (1989) distinguishes these into separate categories. She defines cultural tourism as including “the ‘picturesque’ or ‘local colour,’ a vestige of a vanishing lifestyle that lies within human memory” (Smith 1989:4), but she takes it to be focused on “peasant culture” and marked by larger numbers of visitors than ethnic tourism, which is “marketed to the public in terms of the ‘quaint’ customs of indigenous and often exotic peoples…. Frequently these tourist targets are far removed from the ‘beaten path’
and attract only a limited number of visitors motivated by curiosity and elite peer approval” (Smith 1989:4). However, in much of the literature on the anthropology of tourism, “cultural tourism” is taken to mean any travel in which the motivating factor is an experience with the cultural Other (e.g., E. Bruner 2005a:7).

Theoretical Approach and Contribution

The primary theoretical contributions of my research are in areas of local-global relationships, recognising cultural tourism as a site of intercultural encounter and identity construction, and adding to the ongoing debate about the nature and applicability of authenticity as a concept in tourism research. I also contribute to debates in economic anthropology regarding cultural commodification and the nature of money, and the meanings ascribed to it. I examine representations of an idealised “primitive” other, and identify tourist photography, along with artefact purchase and village visits, as sites of intercultural encounter, which are negotiated in ways that create (disparate) meaning for both parties. I examine how the commodification of culture for tourism is understood by those who engage in both the production and consumption of cultural commodities such as dance performances, handcrafted objects, photographs, and even daily life; in this context, I reexamine the distinction between gifts and commodities and the ways in which both tangible and intangible cultural products are accorded value. By taking sites of Trobriand-tourist interaction as my starting point, I address Moore’s (2004) question of how the interconnections between the global and the local can be reconciled and theorised in anthropology. Although my fieldwork is situated in PNG, this is not only a study “of” PNG or the Trobriands; my areal focus is designed to engage with global discourses (Lederman 1998:443). As Spang concisely argues,

International tourism’s peculiar form of global encounter challenges anthropologists to reconsider the nature of international forces shaping people’s identity, culture, economic development, and experiences of inequality. Within this context, international tourism acts as a catalyst for producing, maintaining, and transforming identities, often fostering cross-cultural comparison, adoption, and exchange not only of money and material goods but of ideas, identities, and conceptualisations of the self and others. [Spang 2010:2]

Ideas about Otherness, and discourses and representations produced by (mis)understandings of the Other, are at the heart of the cultural tourism encounter. The concept of authenticity plays prominently in academic theorising about tourism, as well as in the discourses of both Trobriand Islanders and those who visit the islands, seeking an
“unspoilt,” “untouched,” “culturally intact” way of life. In order to examine what people—academics, politicians, tour operators, Trobrianders, and tourists—mean by “authentic” culture, we must also unpack the myriad understandings of what “culture” means for each party. This requires attention to divergent meanings: examining these terms as analytical categories, assessing their relevance as such, and then turning to address their use in the vernacular by both producers and consumers of cultural products. This will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 3, but for now, I briefly summarise the thrust of the thesis and the primary anthropological questions my research sets out to answer.

As ideas about authenticity and a primitive/modern dichotomy figure so prominently in both Trobriand and tourist discourses about the interactions facilitated by encounters with alterity (as I demonstrate in the chapters to follow), I consider these ideas essential to the larger conceptual framework or metanarrative in which cultural tourism operates. These macro-tropes (Rumsey 2004) or metanarratives (E. Bruner 2005a; Englund and Leach 2000) operate at a level beyond the single case, and frame or model the subject matter of a given event, experience, or representation in particular and predictable ways. The metanarratives, which are reinforced through depictions of the Other in various media, thus form the basis for interpreting difference in encounters between people who conceive of themselves as living radically dissimilar kinds of lives from one another, and are reproduced in individual narratives of particular travel experiences. Conceptualisations of authenticity are inevitably a frame of reference in both the individual, personal narratives of cultural tourists to the Trobriand Islands, and the metanarrative that pervades representations of the Other more generally.

Much of the existing literature on tourism and authenticity takes an essentialist approach, with much fretting over whether or not cultural products are or are not authentic. I find this approach simplistic and of limited theoretical value, and instead follow the work of Edward Bruner (2005) and others in taking a constructivist approach to authenticity. That is, I am not concerned with whether Trobriand traditional dress, dance performances, and material culture are authentic or not, as determined by some arbitrary authority; I am interested instead in how people understand the concept of authenticity, and why it is important to them. Contrary to Rojek’s assertion that the quest for authenticity is a “declining force in tourist motivation” (1997:71), I argue that (constructed) authenticity remains a salient issue and is a major point of reference for cultural tourists. Furthermore, virtually all of the theoretical polemic about types and meanings of authenticity focuses, explicitly or implicitly, on the tourists’ experience. I extend my approach to examine how
the concept is understood by Trobriand Islanders, and how their concerns about authenticity intersect with the interests and desires of tourists, an area of inquiry that has only recently been addressed in tourism research (Cohen 1988:374). Further, the Trobriand Islands’ abiding association with anthropology is of significance in conceptualisations on the part of both tourists and residents that validate and vindicate the Trobriands as an “authentically primitive” place. My research confirms that ideas about the authenticity of cultural products are central to the discourses of both tourists and Trobrianders.

In Chapter 4, I examine how the desire to consume alterity is created in the West, and, to a lesser extent, how ideas about Westerners (which are often as stereotypical and inaccurate as travellers’ ideas of “the primitive”) are created in the minds of those who receive visitors from overseas. First, however, in Chapter 3 I lay the groundwork by addressing some key concepts and associated anthropological theory that underpin my analysis in the remainder of this thesis. I then bring together several strands of theory that are applicable to understanding the production, exchange, and consumption of cultural products—both material and experiential. I address the ongoing debate about the nature of gifts and commodities, and argue for the need to see cultural products as a special class of commodity, which I identify, following Kopytoff (1986) and Karpik (2010), as singularities. Despite a recent trend to focus more on the materiality of exchange than the social function it serves or the symbolic meanings conveyed therein (e.g., Miller 2005, Myers 2001a), I argue that the social and symbolic significance of exchange cannot be ignored in an anthropological analysis. The discussion of commoditisation is directly linked to theoretical debates surrounding the art/artefact dichotomy, which is elaborated in Chapter 7. Through all of these discussions, authenticity stands as a frame of reference or paradigm through which objects and actions are judged, valued, and understood by both producers (Trobriand Islanders) and consumers (tourists) in the cultural tourism sphere.

In the second half of this thesis, I turn most directly to my ethnographic data, in order to understand how people—both residents of, and visitors to, the Trobriands—understand concepts like authenticity, tradition, and primitivity, how and why they are important in the touristic experience, and how they are reinforced and reproduced with each iteration of the intercultural encounter. I divide the production/consumption of tourism experiences in to three categories: performance and festivals, village stays or the touring of ‘everyday life’, and material culture, drawing out both particularities and common themes in each of these spheres. Intersecting with these are two particular sites of interaction or exchange: tourist
photography, and cash transactions. Based on my interviews and participant observation, and with reference to wider literature on these topics, I address how these are differently conceived by each party, and how this speaks to larger questions about authenticity and exchange. I also examine the “fuzziness” of the divide between the “stuff” done for tourists and the “stuff” of everyday life, a boundary that is considerably more blurred in a place like the Trobriand Islands than it is in places where the cultural attraction of a place is a monument, culture park, or culture show in a hotel, or where souvenirs are purchased from a tourist shop with set prices and a strict separation of the tourist from the artisan. The implications of this fuzziness on conceptions of authenticity will be examined. While both performance and souvenirs have been examined in detail in a number of previous tourism studies, the phenomenon of village stays has not been adequately examined ethnographically, an oversight this project seeks to rectify.

My research project is, like much current anthropological work in less “traditional” or “exotic” locations, about movement and interaction. My approach does not view the local and the global as dichotomous, but rather sees tourism in a given locality as a particular manifestation of the globalisation of people, capital, material culture, and ideas. “The global” is an abstraction, but the relationship between that abstraction and the things people actually think, say, and do is something that can be studied ethnographically. Anthropology offers a valuable toolkit for understanding the way tourists and Trobrianders meet, exchange with, and interpret one another, but “the multiple effects of international cultural tourism force us to rethink the role and the tools of anthropology as we search for ways to understand these temporally brief yet culturally critical encounters” (Spang 2010:1). As Moore (2004:78) points out, “The local is not about taxonomies, bounded cultures and social units, but about contested fields of social signification and interconnection, flows of people, ideas, images, and goods.” My approach seeks to situate culture both in space and time, enabling engagement with varying and often opposing cultural constructions, whether those of academia or those of informants (di Leonardo 1993:80). Through an ethnographic analysis of tourist objects and activities, it is possible to examine how cultural constructions develop in response to industry demand for consumables. This development is far from arbitrary; people actively redefine their culture in ways that mesh with the demands of tourists and of local and national politics, but also reflect community and individual priorities (Volkman 1990:91).

I take up Clifford’s (1997:24) “problematic [in which] the goal is not to replace the cultural figure ‘native’ with the intercultural figure ‘traveler’ Rather, the task is to focus
on concrete mediations of the two, in specific cases of historical tension and relationship.”

To date, this problematic has not adequately been explored in the anthropology of tourism. Clifford also discusses the notion of anthropologist as traveller, and due to the length of time I spent in the field, I found that in my role as interlocutor with both sides of the tourist equation, the ways in which people conceived of me and my presence were relevant to, and illuminating of, both tourists’ and Trobrianders’ conceptions of Otherness. I have tried throughout this thesis to demonstrate how my role as researcher, betwixt and between tourist and “local”, was seen and interpreted by both resident Trobriand Islanders and the tourists who travelled to the islands.

In contrast to a more typical mode of ethnographic analysis, in which the anthropologist and the community being studied interact and information and interpretation flow back and forth between them, this project analysed flows of interpretations of several Others—both Trobriand Islanders and the tourists who visited the Islands, as well as both sides’ interpretations of the presence of the anthropologist herself. It is both my interactions with tourists, my interactions with Trobrianders, and my role as observer and in some cases intermediary in the interactions between tourists and Trobrianders that are of interest, and are used to form the basis of my analysis. To paraphrase Geertz (1973:9), what I am interested in constructing is an interpretation of Trobrianders’ construction of what they, and what tourists, are up to, as well as an interpretation of the tourists’ construction of what they, their fellow tourists, and the objects of their curiosity are up to. In doing so, I am able to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which people create meaning when encountering cultural Others, and how this is played out in the course of a variety of types of interactions such as watching dance performances, buying souvenirs, visiting a village, and taking photographs.

It may be useful, as a way of thinking through the ways in which the people, images, objects, capital, and ideas discussed in this thesis move and interrelate, to refer to Appadurai’s (1996:33) framework to describe the relationships among these dimensions of cultural flows. Appadurai refers to these, respectively, as ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. These, he argues, intersect in myriad ways and form the building blocks not just of lived worlds, but of imagined worlds that might be lived (Appadurai 1996:33). Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the chapters to follow, the imperfect knowledge that tourists have of Trobriand Island ways of living and being (and vice versa), and their characterisations of primitivity in general, lead to an imagined world that the act of touring/travelling is designed to (theoretically) allow them to access. In
practise of course, one can shift only physically, not ontologically, though one can imagine oneself gaining insight and understanding through this kind of intercultural encounter. Likewise, Trobrianders live with a vision of the imagined world of *dimdins*, and even those who have travelled abroad themselves naturally carry with them a distinctly Trobriand way of understanding the world.

Tilley (1997) proposes adding travelscapes or touristscapes to Appadurai’s list of cultural flows, which are dependent on the production or location of cultural differences. He argues,

What is being consumed in touristscapes, however, goes far beyond commodities extending to an economy of signs, images, and places which can only be carried away in snapshots and memories, but nevertheless may constitute a significant, if largely intangible, element of personal cultural capital and a means of self-distinction and self-definition. It is a peculiar form of consumption insofar as it usually entails producers and consumers actually confronting one another in person. [Tilley 1997:74]

It is this “confrontation” that I examine as a site of intercultural encounter, negotiated by both Trobrianders and tourists using as a frame of reference their own prevailing metanarratives which inform their understanding of the Other.

The Trobriand Islands, as an almost mythical place but with living, breathing inhabitants, have been defined in large part by their status as an exotic setting of great anthropological significance. Even within Papua New Guinea, it is considered unique and emblematic of a distinctive way of life that sets it apart from other locations, and yet, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3, it also becomes a sort of synecdoche for ideas about primitivity. Approaching Kiriwina on his second visit in 1917, Malinowski (1967:140) prophesied in his diaries, “Feeling of ownership: it is I who will describe them or create them.” But Malinowski was only the first of many who described, depicted, and created Trobriandness; nor have Trobrianders been passive recipients of the projections of others. As Weiner (1988:167) observed, Trobrianders are famous for refashioning Otherness in their own image, and today’s Trobriand identity is both a response to and reflection of this most particular of histories of engagement with anthropology, colonialism, missions, military history, media, and touristic curiosity.

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1 When interviewed extensively, participants were asked to read a Participant Information Sheet (PIS), which informed them about the nature of my project, and to sign a Consent Form. One of the questions on the Consent Form asked participants for a yes/no response as to whether they preferred for me to use a pseudonym for them and to make efforts to
conceal their identity. The majority of respondents indicated that they were happy to have their names used. I have respected people’s wishes as indicated, but do not indicate throughout the text where I use either real names or pseudonyms.

2 The term *singsing* refers to a cultural show or gathering in *Tok Pisin* or PNG pidgin. It generally includes singing, dancing, and drumming or other music, and may also be used to denote village feast ceremonies. The *singsing* in Mt. Hagen (a town in the PNG Highlands), held annually over a weekend in August, is one of the largest and best-known cultural events in the country and attracts both Papua New Guineans and foreign visitors in large numbers.

3 I use the word “primitive” not as a characteristic of people in actual fact, as the word holds no currency as an analytical term; instead, I utilise it as a way in which people characterise themselves and Others, and in juxtaposition to notions of what is “civilised”. I here place it in quotations, to mark that it is not a term I employ carelessly, but to avoid distracting the reader, I will not use quotation marks every time I use this term. In all cases, I use it as a kind of concept-metaphor (Moore 2004) which informs the way people construct their understanding of the Other.

4 The process whereby things and activities become evaluated in terms of their exchange value; in this case, “packaging” aspects of Trobriand culture for tourist consumption. I use the term synonymously with “commodification,” as both terms are employed in the relevant literatures on which I draw.

5 Note that this can, in some cases, reflect the *same* people travelling multiple times.

6 The term *dimdim* is used throughout Milne Bay Province, by speakers of a number of distinct languages, to refer to white-skinned foreigners.

7 Of course, those who have lived abroad for many years, married foreigners and raised children overseas may be in an altogether different and more hybrid set of circumstances, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.
CHAPTER 2
ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK:
The Trobriand Islands as “Sacred Place”: Honouring the Ancestors

Walking into a village at the beginning of fieldwork is entering a world without cultural guideposts. The task of learning values that others live by is never easy. The rigors of fieldwork involve listening and watching, learning a new language of speech and actions, and most of all, letting go of one’s own cultural assumptions in order to understand the meanings others give to work, power, death, family, and friends. Doing research in the Trobriand Islands created one additional obstacle. I was working in the footsteps of a celebrated anthropological ancestor, Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski. [Weiner 1988:1]

Anthropologists have been studying the people of the Trobriand Islands for more than 100 years, and their role in the development of the discipline is an important one. The islands have been referred to as one of anthropology’s “sacred” places (Strathern 1981:665; Weiner 1976:xv, 1988:1). C.G. Seligman (1910) carried out the first ethnographic survey there in 1903–04, and by the time Malinowski arrived in 1915 he was well aware of the islands’ “exotic reputation” (Young 2004:380). All who had seen this place agreed: “The gardens were more fertile, the yams bigger, the chiefs more dignified, the dances more colourful, the decorative art more pleasing, and the girls prettier” than elsewhere in Melanesia (Young 2004:380). Although Malinowski8 (1884–1942) is most closely associated with the Trobriand Islands, spending two years there during WWI and producing treatises on myriad topics of ethnological import, he was but the first in a long line of anthropologists to work there. Harry Powell of the Royal Anthropological Institute carried out fieldwork on Kiriwina in 1950, and in the 1970s and 1980s, at least half a dozen anthropologists (or scholars in related fields) took up research in the islands, among them Annette Weiner, who made notable contributions to feminist-inspired anthropology by examining women’s textile wealth and exchange. Thus, I am not working in the footsteps of a single anthropological ancestor, but the accumulated legacy of a host of such ancestors, who have collectively examined a wide range of topics,9 and have also inspired a great deal of theorising by other prominent social scientists in exploring questions such as the nature of the gift (e.g., Gregory 1982; Mauss 1990[1950]) and exchange more generally (e.g., Appadurai 1986b; Sahlins 1965), art and technology (Gell 1992), and even the cultural significance of colour (Taussig 2009).
Ethnographic Setting

The Trobriand Islands (see Figure 2.1) are comprised of nine inhabited islands and over one hundred small, uninhabited islands and islets in the Solomon Sea, about 160 km from the east coast of mainland PNG. The largest island, Kiriwina, is 43 km long and between 3 and 13 km wide, and has a current population estimated at 35,000 people, living in 60 villages. The next three most populous islands—Kitava, Kaileuna, and Vakuta—have a total population of less than 5,000, with no more than eight villages on any one of the islands. The rest of the islands have only one or very few villages each. The Trobriands are located in Milne Bay Province and they, along with the neighbouring islands of the d’Entrecasteaux group, Marshall-Bennett, Muyua, and the Louisiades, make up an area known collectively as the Massim.10

The flat coral islands of the Trobriands are covered with a rich soil, well suited for the cultivation of yams and taro. Other crops include sweet potatoes, bananas, sugarcane, leafy greens, beans, tapioca, squash, coconuts, and areca (betelnut) palms. Hamlet, garden, bush, and beach lands are held by various founding dala (matrilineages) and are controlled by the lineage’s chief or hamlet leader (Malinowski 1922[1984]; Weiner 1976). Trobrianders keep small numbers of pigs, but pork is eaten only on special occasions. Fish are the major protein source, and are abundant in coastal villages. Canned fish and meat
from trade stores supplement the local protein sources, but are infrequent inclusions in the
diets of subsistence farmers; only those working for mani\textsuperscript{11} (for example, public servants)
can regularly afford such luxuries. Participation in the cash economy is limited to
involvement in tourism, a few small business ventures, public service, mission stations,
and receiving remittances from kin working elsewhere in PNG or overseas. Much
exchange activity also takes place outside the cash economy. Shell valuables, yams, pigs,
stone axes, cloth, tobacco, betel nut, cooking pots, banana leaf bundles, and trade store
foods supplement cash as forms of wealth, although not all can be used interchangeably,
and some are gender-specific. For example, stone axe blades are men’s wealth, while
banana leaf bundles are women’s wealth (Weiner 1976). Interactions and exchanges with
non-Trobrianders—\textit{kula} partners, government officials, missionaries, tourists, and
anthropologists—are well entrenched, as will be described in greater detail below.

\section*{Fieldwork Planning and Arrival}

It is difficult to convey the feelings of intense interest and suspense with
which an Ethnographer enters for the first time the district that is to be the
future scene of his [sic] field-work. Certain salient features, characteristic of
the place, at once rivet his attention, and fill him with hopes or apprehensions.
[Malinowski 1922[1984]:51]

To begin an ethnographic project—to arrive in “the field”—is an exciting,
frightening, confusing, and intimidating prospect no matter where one does his or her
research. But to undertake ethnographic fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, a place that
has nearly iconic status in anthropology, means that all of these sensations are heightened
and intensified with a weight of responsibility and reverence. I had read Malinowski and
Weiner; I had seen Leach’s documentary \textit{Trobriand Cricket} countless times, showing it to
undergraduates in tutorials; I had seen the Trobriand wood carvings featured alongside
Sepik masks and statues in the de Young Museum’s Jolika Collection in San Francisco.
Now, I was going to live there, work there, learn the language, and put my own stamp
on—and, in turn, be stamped by—this legendary place. And I would be there for 18
months. I was overwhelmed, terrified, and humbled.

I had had email contact with Linus Digm’rina, a Trobriand man living in Port
Moresby who works as a lecturer in the Anthropology Department at the University of
Papua New Guinea (UPNG). I had also been in touch with, and initially met in Brisbane
on my way to PNG, a fellow PhD student who was also undertaking field research in the
Trobriands. Sergio had arrived a few months ahead of me, but had to come to Australia to
renew his visa. We met briefly, and I bombarded him with questions of what the islands were like. No amount of discussion, reading, museum-going, or watching films, however, can prepare one adequately for the sensation, the being-ness, of personal experience; it might be argued that the same holds true for tourists. It is at once exhilarating and overwhelming, and the desire to put the unfamiliar into terms that are fathomable is intense. My previous travel experiences, and my own arrival experience on Kiriwina, thus gave me considerable insight regarding the touristic experience.

As prepared as I could be, and after several weeks orienting myself in Alotau, the small capital of Milne Bay Province, I boarded a heavily loaded wooden cargo boat, the MV Uraheni (Figure 2.2). It would take us close to 30 hours at sea, choking on diesel fumes and squashed against oil drum barrels and bales of rice bound for the island trade stores, to arrive at Kiriwina. Mercifully, the sun shone and the seas were calm for the duration. I began to get acquainted with my boat-mates, many of them Trobriand Islanders with excellent English-speaking skills, all of whom were eager to know something of this new dimdim woman who was coming to live on their island.

Figure 2.2: MV Uraheni en route from Alotau to Kiriwina
Initial Impressions (Me of Others, Others of Me)

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight... Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. [Malinowski 1922[1984]:4]

Figure 2.3: Arrival at Losuia, April 2, 2009

Although Malinowski made his landfall at the government wharf in the administrative station of Losuia, Kiriwina Island, in June 1915—fully 94 years before my own arrival in the same spot—this passage from Argonauts of the Western Pacific conveys vividly the apprehension and uncertainty felt by the newly arrived ethnographer. And though I indeed felt alone, isolated, and gripped with an irrational terror—not about my health or safety, but about whether I would be able to learn the language, have people like me, and procure the data I had come to collect—I did have the comfort of knowing there was another dimdim on the island, the fellow I had met in Brisbane and with whom I had travelled by boat to Kiriwina. Although we worked independently and separately, we became good companions and sounding boards for one another’s ideas and observations, frequently comparing notes on the male/female experiences of fieldwork. Sergio’s presence offered me the security of knowing that there was someone there who could understand me (linguistically and culturally). This provided immense peace of mind.
However, the consequences of having another researcher on the island were not all positive. My colleague was born in Spain, and he went to a French primary school, an Italian university for his undergraduate degree, and an English university for his graduate degrees; the result was that he was extremely adept at language acquisition. By the time I arrived in the Trobriands, Sergio, who had preceded me by about two months, was already proficient enough in the Kilivila language to have simple but lengthy conversations with people. I had struggled for years to gain even a rudimentary knowledge of French, demonstrating no innate aptitude for language learning, and knew from the outset that language acquisition would be the single biggest challenge I would face in the Trobriands. Having another student, like me, who learned so quickly meant that people’s expectations of me were heightened, and I despised that I would not be able to meet them.

Finding My Place

Imagine yourself, then, making your first entry into the village, alone or in company with your white cicerone. Some natives flock round you, especially if they smell tobacco. Others, the more dignified and elderly, remain seated where they are. Your white companion has his routine way of treating the natives.... The first visit leaves you with a hopeful feeling that when you return alone, things will be easier. [Malinowski 1922[1984]:4]

I had made no advance arrangements as to where I would stay or who would assist me in settling in. I was to sort it all out on the ground, which made for some sleepless nights before my arrival, but in a place where communication was so limited (at the time of my arrival, there were two landlines on the island, which only periodically worked, and no cellular coverage or internet access), it would have been nearly impossible to organise from afar. Besides, I wanted to get the lay of the land, and a feeling for the place, before I decided where best to base myself. After unloading at the wharf, and bewildered as to what I supposed to do next, I went with my companion to the village in which he had chosen to live—and which had chosen him. His small bush materials house had just been completed, and having been away for over a month, the people in his village were excited to see him, and to examine the goods he had brought back in his shiny blue patrol box. Although I understood little that was said, he clearly was at ease in the village and much loved by people, joking freely in local language. I spent my first night on Kiriwina in anguish, certain I would never measure up to the standard set by my colleague, cursing myself for having signed up for this and wondering how on earth I was going to get out of
it. But, I reasoned, if I can escape from always treading in the shadow of my co-habitant *dimdim* in the island, perhaps things would be better.

Feeling a bit out of sorts—just a little disoriented and definitely feeling a bit of an inferiority complex as SJ is so loved and so competent already in Kiriwina language. I feel useless and like SJ has had to take care of me and so it’s best I do things on my own for a bit—though he’s nearby but I cannot use him as a crutch and I don’t feel confident or competent in his presence as he is so much better at EVERYTHING than I am—language, chitchat, giving gifts, interviewing, etc.

Field Book, written 3 April 2009, one day after my arrival on Kiriwina

My fieldwork grant, though perfectly adequate to cover my equipment, travel, and basic field expenses, was not so large that staying in one of the established lodges on the island for any amount of time would be feasible. I needed something affordable, but convenient. Sergio directed me to Bweka “resort”, a termite-eaten, ramshackle structure that had been built some 12 years earlier for the Melanesian Spearhead summit, a meeting of the prime ministers of Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomons, and PNG in 1997, and which had fallen in to considerable disrepair. However, at a rate of about NZD100 per week (at the time of my stay) for full board, I would risk the spongy floorboards and swarms of mosquitoes (the building is located adjacent to a swamp). My hosts would be John Kasaipwalova, perhaps the best known of all Trobriand Islanders: political figure, businessman, gardener, poet, revolutionary, and local chief of Yalumgwa District; his Hong Kong-born senior wife, Mary; and his much younger local junior wife, Vana. They had one large room, with a bed, desk, and toilet (though no running water) available at whatever rates could be agreed upon, whenever they decided they would take guests. It was to be my home for my first three weeks in the Trobriand Islands.

John has a chequered reputation on the island, though he is a bottomless well of information, both practical and arcane, about Trobriand Island life, past and present. For political reasons—I didn’t want to be too closely associated with John, who, due to his complex associations over the years, is a controversial figure both in the village and beyond—and because he was often away, Mary (despite having lived on the island for many years) had never learned to speak the Trobriand language, and the house was located some distance away from the nearest hamlet, I was well aware that both my social and linguistic advancement would be hampered by an extended stay at Bweka. I was looking for a village to take me in, but it would have to be the right village.

Where I settled would have a number of implications. As I recorded in an early field report to my supervisor,
[I] realised that my original idea to base myself in Kaibola, at the northern end of the island, was completely impractical, because PMVs [buses] don’t run that far and it’s a 2–3 hour walk to Butia Lodge. There isn’t a consistent enough flow of tourists, especially there, to make it a sensible option and I’d be trapped with little way to find out when visitors were coming. So...the best thing for my research is to be within walking distance of Butia Lodge and the airstrip, so I can keep an eye on people coming and going. [Field report, 23 April 2009]

Before I had even made landfall on Kiriwina, I had offers from people willing to take me in to their village, build my house, and help me with my research, for various reasons (curiosity, expected financial gain, sexual desire, prestige). These offers all came from men, however, and I was cognizant of the potential implications of this. I wanted to be sure that I would live in a place where all the members of the family would be happy to have me there, and where there were women I could relate to, confide in, and trust. It would be important that someone in the family speak English, to get me started, but better to be forced to learn local language in order to communicate with some family members. I would need to be within a reasonable distance of the airstrip and the two well-established guest lodges on the island, to facilitate my research on tourism. Most of all, I hoped I would find a place where I could, as much as an ethnographer ever can, feel at home.

It was my excellent fortune that Veronica, a woman just a few years my senior and from the hamlet closest to Bweka Resort, was working there during my stay. Vero is conversant in English and has a Grade Eight education partially received in Port Moresby, and was appointed as my unofficial local guide, accompanying me on forays to other villages to interpret and explain things to me, and make sure I did not get lost. We quickly developed a good rapport, and within a week of my arrival in the Trobriands, she approached me at dinner one evening and told me that she’d discussed it with her husband, and they’d like to offer to “take care of me” for the duration of my stay on Kiriwina. I had liked Vero from the start, and felt confident that I could count on her. I arranged to go see her hamlet and meet her husband and children the next day. Once I agreed that the arrangement Veronica proposed was amenable, negotiations were made, and Matadoya, her husband would organise the necessary labour to build my house. I moved in to my sturdy, relatively weather-tight and spacious bush materials house on 19 April, 2009—less than three weeks since I had arrived on Kiriwina (Figure 2.4).
Field Setting

Making My Home in Yalumgwa Village

There is all the difference between a sporadic plunging into the company of natives, and being really in contact with them. What does this latter mean? On the Ethnographer’s side, it means that his life in the village, which at first is a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure, soon adopts quite a natural course very much in harmony with his surroundings. [Malinowski 1922[1984]:7]

Modawosi hamlet, where I would make my home for nearly 18 months, is the biggest of the dozen or so hamlets comprising Yalumgwa village; home to about 500 individuals, these twelve hamlets (as of the time of writing) stretch out along perhaps two kilometres of densely populated land generally close to the main road. The hamlets range in size from just two or three houses, to more than 25 houses in Modawosi. Each of the hamlets is separated by a bit of bush with areas for rubbish disposal and toilet areas for
men and women, as well as some coconut, betelnut, and banana trees and garden plots. Paths are well worn through the bush connecting neighbouring hamlets. Yalumgwa is an “inland” village—that is, north of the government station at Losuia, where the government wharf, District Office, Treasury Office, and Council Chambers are located, but not far from the coast; Yalumgwa’s beach, called Yakiva, is about a 45-minute walk, first through garden paths and then through the rocky, undulating raybwaga, an uplifted coral ridge that forms a line of low cliffs along the west side of the island. A number of Yalumgwa men keep their fishing canoes here, though fishing is only possible during yavata, the time of calm seas from approximately September or October until April or May.

Yalumgwa village is one of three large villages that make up Yalumgwa Ward, along with Mweligilagi (to the south) and Obweria (to the north). The ward is administered by an elected Ward Councillor, who reports to the Kiriwina Rural Local Level Government (KRLLG) President. The north-western section of Kiriwina, where Yalumgwa village is located, is in the region (stretching from Mweligilagi village to Kaibola on the northern coast) referred to as Kilivila. Its residents consider it the home of “real” Trobriand culture, as within this area is found Omarakana, the village of the Paramount Chief of the Trobriand Islands. The language spoken is also often referred to as Kilivila, sometimes Kiriwina, or, more colloquially, biga yakidasi (our language).

Modawosi has a rather atypical shape, a rectangle open on one side (Figure 2.5). The areas under and around the houses are dirt-packed, but the middle of the village (bukubaku) is a grassy area, often overgrown, used by children at their games or for men’s football matches. There are four cement graves here, including that of the renowned Chief Narabutau, who died in 1995. Several fruit trees fringe the bukubaku and provide shade.

My own house—larger than average for a house with a sole occupant—sits at the north end of Modawosi hamlet, my verandah facing the bukubaku. It is perhaps 2m long by 3 m wide, with a steeply pitched pandanus roof. Six sturdy posts create the house’s outline, filled in with a few timbers and sticks. The woven coconut frond panels that make up the walls are lashed in place with strong vines. The floor is strips of betelnut trees nailed in place to prevent too much movement. There are no windows, and it’s very dusty as insects constantly chew at the organic materials. Woven pandanus mats cover the floor, not just for aesthetics and comfort but also to prevent things falling through the floor slats to the ground below. The house stands perhaps 60 cm off the ground. At the far end of the house is the thin foam mattress on which I sleep, covered by a mosquito net. Above the bed is storage for clothing, mats, baskets, etc. My house is considerably more cluttered than most, naturally filled with books and equipment. I’m not very tidy, and often get scolded for not putting my things away properly!
The verandah is the social space of the village—it’s where life happens. I spend a great deal of time on the verandah of my adoptive parents, next door to me, as their verandah is large and inviting. Veronica and Matadoya are a young-ish couple only a few years my senior, with two adopted sons: Modawosi (Emmanuel), aged 10, and Ruben, aged 8. Emmanuel was born to Mata’s sister, Ruben to Vero’s sister. My section of the village (the northern end) is coincidentally dominated by women; of the six houses facing south, only one—Vero & Mata’s—consists of a married couple and their children. The rest are headed by divorced or widowed women (or in my case, a never-married woman). [Field report, 11 April 2009]

Between Yalumgwa and Mwelgilagi villages is located one of the two established guest-houses on Kiriwina. Butia Lodge (Figure 2.6) is owned by Serah Kelebaku Clark, a Trobriand Islander living in Alotau on the PNG mainland, where she runs several other successful businesses. The lodge is also in close proximity to the small airstrip, which receives two flights per week from Port Moresby via Alotau. The other accommodation option, Kiriwina Lodge, is located about a ten-minute drive from Losuia.
The fact that I was female, unmarried, childless, and a student were all factors in the way people perceived me and treated me as a new community member. Positionality is always something to be reckoned with when doing fieldwork, and local ideas about gender, age, marital status, hierarchies, religious affiliation, and other variables naturally make a difference to how (or if) the ethnographer is accepted, and what kinds of information one has access to. In my case, being a woman made it easy to converse with and learn about women’s lives, and at the same time, I did not feel particularly constrained in interacting in men’s spheres. I had feared before my arrival that people would be concerned that I was single and childless at my age (32 years at the time I arrived) and obsess about finding me a husband. On the contrary, as soon as people knew I was a student, they expected me not to be involved with men; local wisdom holds that students should not “go around with boys” or get married, as they will become distracted or affected in the mind by love magic (*kwewaga*), so being single did not prove to be the difficulty I had anticipated.

**Creating Kinship**

My adoption into the family was formalised by the bestowal upon me of my local names and a plot of land where I would plant my first garden. A few days after I moved in to my new house, my adoptive father gave me the name Gimalabwita (Bwita for short). This was the name that I was quickly to become known by all over the island. Indeed, after a few months, it began to jar me somewhat to hear my “dimdim name”, which by then was used only by a few people who had gotten to know me well in the first weeks of my stay. My adoptive mother also gave me a name, Imluwebila. Each of these names
identified the respective *dala* or subclan of each of my new parents, and fixed my place in
the intricate kinship system of the Trobriand Islands (see Malinowski 1930; Weiner 1976,
1988). In helping me to plant a garden on village land, my place was further solidified.
When people would ask my *kumila* (clan), I could now identify myself as Malasi. People
would laugh and clap delightedly when I would answer their questions about where I
belonged on Kiriwina.

Also, over and over again, I committed breaches of etiquette, which the natives,
familiar enough with me, were not slow in pointing out. I had to learn how to
behave, and to a certain extent, I acquired “the feeling” for native good and bad
manners. With this, and with the capacity of enjoying their company and sharing
some of their games and amusements, I began to feel that I was indeed in touch with
the natives, and this is certainly the preliminary condition of being able to carry on
successful fieldwork. [Malinowski 1922[1984]:8]

Slowly, as I settled in to my new home, I began to acquire some basic language
skills, learn about the essential tasks of Trobriand domestic and ceremonial life, and absorb
essential social rules and etiquette. If I erred—for example, by not descending from my
bicycle quickly enough when entering the Paramount Chief’s village of Omarakana to
show proper respect for his station—I would be gently scolded and corrected by the nearest
bystander. All reprimands, however, were mild and didactic; people understood that as a
*dimdim* I was bound to make mistakes, and they took it as their collective duty to teach me
how to do things “properly”. Fortunately, though glacially slow with language acquisition
and retention, I was much better at retaining and enacting behavioural instruction, and soon
found myself being praised by my neighbours for my work in the sweet potato garden,
assisting in household chores such as fetching water and firewood and peeling vegetables,
and learning to chew betelnut.

Living in the village with no other business but to follow native life, one sees the
customs, ceremonies, and transactions over and over again, one has examples of
their beliefs as they are actually lived through, and the full body and blood of native
life fills out soon the skeleton of abstract constructions. [Malinowski
1922[1984]:18]

An interesting personal transformation takes place as the ethnographer becomes
more comfortable and more familiar with her new environment. This transformation is
physical as much as it is psychological. As an anthropologist, one must be open to new
ways of thinking about things long taken for granted; the rapid pace of learning is
simultaneously challenging and exhilarating. But just as significant as this is the physical
transformation; as cultural learning becomes embodied, one’s very comportment begins to
change. There are few chairs in the Trobriand Islands, so I soon became accustomed to sitting cross-legged on the verandah or the ground, or else squatting for extended periods. A few months after my arrival, I stopped wearing footwear, preferring to walk barefoot even on the sharp coral of the paths and roads, like most of my Trobriand friends and family. I learned, as much as my physiology made it possible, to balance and carry all heavy loads on my head, as a Trobriand woman would be ashamed to carry a pot of water, a basket of doba (banana leaf textiles\textsuperscript{13}), or a load of firewood in her arms. I learned to peel sweet potatoes, yams, and taro in the Trobriand way, quite opposite to my usual method, by watching and copying Vero, and learned to cook on an open fire (Figure 2.7). I became adept at skinning a green betelnut with my teeth, or peeling a red one with my small knife, and soon the frequently repeated movements of tapping the cover of the lime container before opening the lid, giving it a shake, licking my mustard, dipping it in my lime container, and biting off the end to chew with my betelnut became natural to me. “Bwita”, as a resident Trobriand Islander seeking to fit in and learn as much as possible, became someone different from my own other self, who inhabited her body differently, spoke a different language, and eventually saw the world in quite a different way than I had prior to commencing my research. Fieldwork is, it seems to me, a voluntary creation of an entirely new identity.

![Figure 2.7: Cooking with Vero](image)
Methods

My own undergraduate and graduate training in anthropology was in institutions that gave relatively little attention to the teaching of field methods. In some universities, it seems that methods are one of those things thought to be best learned by doing; I do not disagree, as fieldwork (at least, as I came to practise it) is intuitive, more than systematic. We (graduate students) know what field-notes are, and know that we are supposed to take a lot of them. But one simply cannot write everything one sees or hears. How do we know what to write? In what way do we write it? How do we organise it? Do we write as we talk, making people slow down or repeat things and thus interrupting the flow of conversation? Or do we keep the notebook out of sight, then scurry off to jot everything down from memory once the conversation is over? How directed should our questions be? Should we use a voice recorder? How many people should we ask a given question to be sure we have a “right” answer? What does that even mean? The first time ethnographer can easily find herself overwhelmed by such questions.

My first interview with an informant took place before I even arrived on Kiriwina. While first in Alotau, the provincial capital and the jumping off point for the Trobriand Islands and other destinations (such as the d’Entrecasteaux group of islands, Samarai Island, and popular diving trips to reefs and wrecks), I introduced myself to a number of individuals involved in tourism in the region, including guest-house owners, tour operators, and the manager of the Milne Bay Tourism Bureau (MBTB), Maxine Nadile. This latter proved to be a wonderful first interview to ease myself into my new role as ethnographer. By the time I boarded the cargo boat for the Trobriands, I had five solid interviews under my belt, and had already begun to learn by trial and error what worked, and what did not, in terms of soliciting the kinds of data I was interested in. I still had much to learn, but it was a start.

My data collection was informed by the participant-observation approach, which in the first few months was less about collecting “hard” data and more about learning the village routine and developing relationships with people. However, even in the early days, I conducted some informal, semi-structured interviews with both community members (those who spoke English proficiently) and tourists as and when they arrived. I had topics I wanted to discuss, but not a defined set of questions. With Trobrianders, I tended to start with a broad area of discussion: “What can you tell me about Milamala?” “What are some of the kinds of Trobriand dance?” or, “How are things changing today?” With visitors to
the island, conversations tended to start with a question like, “What brought you to the Trobriands? What did you know about it?” I deliberately kept things open and fluid, allowing my informants to diverge or stray off topic, as often I found I learned as much from unsolicited comments or preoccupations as I did with directed questions. I tried to speak as little as possible, encouraging my informants to do most of the talking, though showing encouragement by making small comments, laughing, or nodding. I usually wrote in my notebook while interviewing, and sometimes employed a digital voice recorder (DVR) where appropriate and agreed to by participants. When my informants were less loquacious—whether because they were nervous, suspicious, tired, distracted, or for any other reason—I worked harder at posing questions that would encourage elaboration in their responses. I soon learned to “read” my informants and determine quickly what approach I would need to use to get the most from the interview. Even the most tangential of stories from interviewees tended to tell me something that contributed to my overall understanding of the issues I was trying to investigate.

Participants

Four key groups of participants were identified as having valuable perspectives that would aid me in answering my research questions: government and tourism officials, tour operators, Trobriand Islanders, and tourists. The bulk of my time was spent collecting data from participant observation and semi-structured or unstructured interviews with tourists and resident Trobriand Islanders, while my involvement with the former two groups was limited to a one-off (or rarely repeated) semi-structured interview per informant. During my residence on Kiriwina in 2009–2010, a total of 186 tourists visited the island for the minimum three nights’ visit facilitated by the Airlines PNG flight schedule, an average of about ten visitors per month. This is not entirely reflective of the distribution, however, as at least one month (March 2010) passed without a single tourist arrival, while at other times the two established guest lodges were full to capacity, with twenty or more guests on the island for cultural festivals (such as in June 2009) or during group tour or cruise ship visits (though the latter do not overnight on shore, but visit only for a few hours before returning to their ship). Boat travel from the mainland is possible, and is the preferred method of travel for locals, but as it is slow, unreliable, and uncomfortable, most tourists arrive by the regular Airlines PNG Dash 8 service. Most visitors stayed for an average of three or four nights, fitting with the twice weekly arrival of flights from Port Moresby via Alotau; some stayed for a week or more and, in rare cases,
for several weeks. Some came as independent travellers, while others arrived as members of organised groups. I had conversations of varying lengths and intensity with approximately half of the total visitors to the islands during my research period.

Relevant government and tourism officials interviewed included representatives of the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA, a national government body), the Milne Bay Tourism Bureau (MBTB), the Minister for Culture and Tourism, and the Director of the National Cultural Commission. I also spoke with national and local (Alotau-based) operators who offered tourist excursions to the Trobriand Islands or nearby islands, as well as several individuals who were considering establishing specialty excursions to the islands (e.g., sailing, kiteboarding). In several cases, I gained permission to ride along with organised tour groups for a day or more as they explored the islands, in order to better understand the tourist experience, observe and participate in the activities provided, and listen to how information was imparted to tourists and how they discussed their own experiences. I spent the vast majority of my time with resident Trobriand Islanders, discussing their experiences, expectations, and interactions with tourists. I regularly visited the managers of the formal guest lodges, and attended performances put on for both foreign tourists and visiting dignitaries from the provincial or national capital. Unlike village residents and tourism workers, tourists are transient, thus limiting my opportunities for interviews. My tourist participants represented a cross-section of the overall population of visitors, including men and women of various ages, undertaking different types of travel (backpackers, package tourists, cruise ship travellers), and originating from diverse countries of origin. I observed their interactions both with other tourists and with locals.

I learned an incredible amount from my adoptive family, much of it in a very informal, organic way. In the garden, attending a feast, or sitting on the verandah of an afternoon or evening, I often found myself in fascinating discussions learning things that seemed to have nothing to do with tourism, but I did not limit my learning and note-taking to those things directly and explicitly related to my topic of interest. Sometimes, I would scoot off to grab my notebook and jot notes while we talked, especially when they gave me many new terms to learn in Kilivila language; other times, I would wait until the discussion had finished, go into my house, and write from memory everything I could remember. If I needed to clarify terms or concepts, I could easily ask my adoptive parents more questions, as they were always game to assist me with my studies. Vero, having grown up partly in Port Moresby, claimed she was not as well equipped to answer questions about “the old ways” as Mata; Mata had been adopted as a child by the famed Chief Narabutau,¹⁴ and his
biological father also taught him much about *bubunedasi* ("our way", or "culture"). Mata was thus knowledgeable about a wide array of topics, despite being illiterate and without even a first grade education. If there was something he didn’t know, he would tell me so, and dash off to one of the uncles’ verandahs to clarify a point, scurrying back to relay the information to me in clear, simple Kilivila. Vero, having worked at both Butia Lodge and Bweka Resort, had personal experience with "looking after *dimdim*", as she put it, and was a great source of information as well about women’s roles in the Trobriands. These two were my most valuable and trusted sources of information in the islands. Of course, many Trobriand Islanders contributed to my understanding, some of whom had themselves travelled abroad, others who had never travelled outside Milne Bay Province. In many respects, being an anthropologist in the Trobriands is relatively easy, because the work of the ethnographer is well known to residents. While my own family in Canada had little clue as to what an anthropologist actually *does*, my Trobriand friends would scold me if I forgot my camera, encouraging me to write in my notebook while they spoke, relating terms and information slowly so I had time to jot it all down (Figure 2.8). We *dimdim* researchers are known island-wide for our *buki* (books), *peni* (pens), and *pikisi* (cameras).
My examination of the interface of “the West” and “the primitive” (as each defines themselves and the Other) and constructions of culture is set apart from much of the previous work in the anthropology of tourism, and in tourism studies more generally, in the depth of ethnographic fieldwork I was able to undertake. By living in a village in which people are regularly called to perform for tourism, and from which area most of the employees of one of the primary guest lodges on Kiriwina are drawn, I was able to get to know how Trobriand Islanders relate to tourism in a way that cursory survey data does not facilitate. Most of the exiting literature focuses primarily on the experiences of tourists, usually by having them fill out surveys after visiting a culture park or viewing a traditional performance. This study takes that approach considerably further, as I carried out largely unstructured interviews, often of an hour or more in duration, with nearly 100 tourist participants. In addition, I often participated in “ride-alongs” when groups of visitors toured the island, observing the sorts of things presented to them and their reactions, the discussions they had amongst themselves and the interactions they engaged in with Trobrianders. I observed their interactions when they bought handicrafts, watched cultural performances as passive observers, and participated in cultural activities. In addition, I spend countless hours in conversations with Trobriand Islanders about how they thought about themselves, their activities, and the presence of tourists. This provides an understanding of both tourists’ and Trobrianders’ ideas and discourses about culture, tradition, and “primitivism” that survey data simply cannot elucidate.

A Century of Intercultural Encounters in the Trobriand Islands

The long and complex history of engagement with Christianity, colonialism, and capitalism which characterises the Trobriand Islands has been marked in equal parts by resistance to, and the embracing of, foreign ideas. The islands were encountered by foreigners as early as 1793, when the French explorer Bruni d’Entrecasteaux sighted the islands and named them after his First Lieutenant, Denis de Trobriand. Throughout the nineteenth century, foreign traders, whalers, and other entrepreneurs occasionally anchored offshore and explored the islands, exchanging goods with local inhabitants for food and artefacts (Weiner 1988:11). Permanent European settlement on the islands began in 1880, when two traders set up a fishing station on Kiriwina (Austen 1936:10; Campbell 2002:17). They were followed by a few other traders, most of whom operated trade stores or took part in the lucrative pearling industry. The government of British New Guinea, as the
territory was then called, established a presence in the islands with administrator Sir William MacGregor’s 1891 inspection of the islands. He sought to forge hierarchical relationships with important chiefs and to demonstrate the power and authority of the government (Campbell 2002:17). In 1905, Dr. R. L. Bellamy was appointed an assistant resident magistrate and medical officer on Kiriwina, where a hospital was to be built to combat the alarming spread of venereal disease (Campbell 2002:19; Young 2004:385). When he arrived, 12 Europeans were living there: three women and a man at the mission station, and eight men engaged in trading and pearling.

In 1894, the first Methodist missionary, Rev. S. B. Fellows, arrived at Kiriwina and soon established a mission station (Young 2004:381). Fellows’ arrival marked the start of an ongoing effort to bring Christianity to the Trobriands. The Rev. M. Gilmour spent several years at the mission station in Oiyabia and published notes on trading expeditions by canoe from the village of Kavataria (Young 2004:381). In the 1930s, the Sacred Heart Catholic Mission built a small settlement including a primary school about 10 km from the government station of Losuia. Today, a number of churches are represented in the Trobriand Islands: the United Church (incorporating the former Methodist church) has the highest number of adherents, followed by Catholicism, newly arrived evangelical churches such as Rhema, Four Square, and Christian Revival Crusade (CRC), and, with only a few churches (predominantly in the island of Kaileuna), Seventh Day Adventist (SDA). Despite more than a hundred years of church influence, practises such as magic and sorcery, sexual freedom in adolescence, and polygyny have persisted, demonstrating Trobriand Islanders’ cultural resiliency in the face of imposed ideas.

The Trobriands were drawn into WWII after an unsuccessful attempted invasion of Milne Bay by Japanese soldiers in August 1942. The area became a strategic base for Allied Forces as critical shipping lanes run through the Massim, and officers were scattered around the islands to watch for evidence of Japanese movement (Campbell 2002:20). Although Trobrianders were minimally involved in the war, memories of these years are depicted in dances emulating marching soldiers and the arrival of war planes which are part of the uniquely Trobriand way of playing cricket. Weiner argues (and Leach and Kildea’s 1976 ethnographic film demonstrates) that despite a long history of interaction with foreign officials, missionaries, traders, and visitors, “Trobrianders are masters at transforming new ideas into ways that remain distinctively Trobriand….The abilities of Trobrianders to reshape external experiences into internal goals and histories form the core rhythms of Trobriand life” (Weiner 1988:12). This history of interaction provides a frame
of reference for the arrival of tourists, who come for leisure rather than to impose colonial initiatives, save souls, or profit economically from local resources.

Tourism as an industry in the Trobriands effectively began in 1962, when the Lumleys, expatriate traders living on Kiriwina, forged an agreement with Papuan Airlines to commence weekend package tours from Port Moresby (Leach 1972:357). At first, these tours were erratic and unreliable, and the first year of operations brought only about 300 tourists to the islands (Leach 1972:357). Prior to this, visits to the Trobriands from foreigners had been sporadic and mostly singular—with the exception of American troops stationed on Kiriwina during WWII—so that Trobriand reaction to the steady influx of white visitors was at first somewhat uncertain. Leach (1972:357) notes that “no one was sure what these large groups of temporary visitors expected of them or, indeed, what they were doing on Kiriwina in the first place.” Soon, however, residents realised that these visitors had money, and would be happy to exchange it for carved items, seeing a dance performance, or participating in a variety of seemingly mundane activities. Tourism steadily increased, and by 1966 there were, on average, groups of 20–28 tourists arriving each weekend (Leach 1972:357). By 1970, tourism was the major source of cash for island residents, with over 2,100 tourists visiting the Trobriands in 1971 (Leach 1972:357). The vast majority of these (74%) came on weekend charter services from Port Moresby, while 12.5% came on package tours from overseas, primarily from Australia and the USA. An additional 12% came on regular commercial flights and stayed at the Trobriands Hotel.

Annette Weiner describes the bustling state of the tourism industry in the Trobriands on her initial arrival in the islands:

On my first trip to Kiriwina in 1971, I found the island in the midst of a tourist boom. Weekly charter flights from Port Moresby, filled mostly with Australians on holiday from government work elsewhere in the country, gave impetus to the local wood-carving industry. Villagers not only jammed the airstrip but also camped out around the small hotel, waiting anxiously to make a sale…. Saturday, when the charter plane arrived, was the busiest day of the week. [Weiner 1988:20]

This state of affairs was not destined to last. In 1972, just as regular midweek charter tours were adding to the growing tourism opportunities on Kiriwina, fire destroyed the Trobriands Hotel (Weiner 1988:23). At about the same time, John Kasaipwalova spearheaded a microindependence movement known as Kabisawali (see Leach 1982). Among a variety of development schemes, Kabisawali members became involved in offering day charters to Kiriwina in 1973, which featured tours by passenger van, a locally prepared meal, a traditional dance performance, and the opportunity to shop for locally made artefacts. This
represented considerable income both for the Kabisawali movement, who earned about K230 per plane load, and local craft producers, who collectively earned an average of K350 per visit through artefact sales. Kasaipwalova, however, was ambivalent about the influx of foreigners. As the primary local organiser, he benefitted from the increased cash flow, but at the same time disliked “putting Trobrianders on display as exotica for the pleasure of outsiders” (Leach 1982:277). For a few months, the tours were quite successful, but endogenous and exogenous factors soon conspired to reduce the viability of tourism as a major source of income. First, Kasaipwalova’s personal ambivalence and anti-bureaucratic stance strained relationships with tour operators; meanwhile, localisation in the national public service in preparation for political independence for PNG, and the conclusion of the labour-intensive construction phase at the Bougainville copper mine, meant that far fewer expatriates were residing in PNG in the years immediately preceding independence in 1975. At the same time, Australia, the major external source of potential tourists, was experiencing a recession and high national inflation.

In 1974, the Kabisawali movement incorporated its economic activities (which also included the operation of trade stores, a cooperative for the provision of local public transportation services, and a tax collection programme) under national law, and became the Kabisawali Village Development Corporation. Major undertakings of the new corporation were artefact trading and the development of a Trobriand-style tourist hotel, fine arts centre, and museum. Group leaders decided that the hotel should be built in the style of a Trobriand village but should provide the amenities expected by foreign visitors; that it should serve primarily local food; that it should be locally managed and operated; that villagers should have free access to the facilities; but that it should be located far enough from any given village so that no one village would benefit unfairly and the privacy of residents would not be invaded by curious visitors (Leach 1982:278–279). Nearby would be built the Sopi Arts Centre, where local artists could come to work and outside artists could visit to share new art forms. The museum, it was hoped, would house the collection of Trobriand artefacts collected by S. B. Fellows, the first missionary on Kiriwina, whose collection had recently been discovered. However, owing to a variety of factors including mismanagement of funds and resistance to Kasaipwalova’s leadership and the Kabisawali movement as a whole, most of the proposed projects never eventuated. By 1976, the promised hotel was nothing more than architects’ blueprints, the Kabisawali Corporation’s headquarters were shuttered up, and many island residents had become embittered about the unpaid labour they had provided and money lost in unsuccessful
cooperative enterprises. In the years immediately following independence, tourism in the Trobriands continued to decline and remittances sent home by family members working for wages in urban centres became the dominant source of cash income (Weiner 1988:24). Now, as then, the arrival of tourists is a sporadic affair and highly unreliable as a source of income, yet hopeful entrepreneurs continue to ensure that they are ready to meet tourist demand—for carvings, dance performances, or village stays—as and when the opportunity arises.

**Why Place Matters**

![Image of Bronislaw Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands](https://example.com/image.png)

*Figure 2.9: Bronislaw Malinowski in the Trobriand Islands, seated with a group of men with lime pots, ca. 1918. Reproduced by permission of the Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science (ref Malinowski/3/18/2)*

The setting of my research is significant. This is not because I am working in *The Trobriands*, a place that retains a definitive and formative mystique in anthropology (Figure 2.9). It is because I am interested in how people reify, produce and consume “culture” in the sphere of tourism. What makes the Trobriands an ideal setting for this is that it reduces the variables; the visitors who come to the Trobriand Islands do so most of the time because it is “culture” they want to see. The geographical setting of the islands means that they are topographically undramatic (compared, for example, with the steep and mountainous d’Entrecasteaux group of islands); they are largely deforested and devoid of interesting flora and fauna, so people do not come seeking wildlife encounters; the beaches...
are mediocre and there is no beach “resort” to please the sun-and-sand seekers; there is no infrastructure for diving or other specialist sports; there are no major monuments or archaeological sites. The lack of all of these drawcards and amenities means that visitors are coming almost exclusively to see people, and to consume the visual and material manifestations of the “primitive way of life” this represents to the Western visitor.

While the Trobriand Islands are but one place where an ethnography of the tourist encounter could have been undertaken, it has the benefit of a wealth of ethno-historical data available to the researcher. Although Malinowski’s work has been reevaluated in light of the damning posthumous publication of his A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term (Malinowski 1967), the fact remains that he was an astute and methodical observer and recorder, and his work provides useful comparative data in the form of an historical record of cultural practises. His work includes numerous references to the milamala period, dancing, and wood carving. The works of later ethnographers, such as Powell (1950s–60s) and Weiner (1970s–80s), give chronological depth and demonstrate instances and examples of both continuity and change. And while much ethnographic data exists, I argue that, this does not mean that ethnography in the Trobriands is “done”, so long as Trobrianders welcome anthropologists. For a start, most of this work is very historical, and only in recent years have researchers begun to revisit the Trobriands to do current ethnographic work (e.g., Mosko 1995, 2000, 2010a). And secondly, early ethnographies treated the Trobriands as a place apart, seeking to take influence from or interaction with foreign-ness, in any manifestation (missionaries, traders, tourists, and, indeed, even anthropologists), out of the picture (e.g., Taussig 2009:114). Like some other recent ethnographic work in the Trobriands (Leach 1972; Leach and Kildea 1976; Lepani 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Senft 1999; Weiner 1982), it accepts, embraces, and seeks to understand how such interactions create the picture of “Trobriand culture” as it is practised and understood today.

**On Being a Researcher of Tourism**

Very few research projects have investigated in a rigorous way how the host community actively engages with tourism, are agents in constructing “culture” as presented for consumption by tourists, and understand and talk about the people who come to visit them. Rather than just taking tourism and tourist products at face value, as most studies do—looking at the performance of a Balinese dance (Picard 1990, 1996), the presentation of Maasai-ness in Kenya (E. Bruner 2005a), the production and sale of “tourist art”
(Graburn 1976; Silverman 1999; Steiner 1999), for example—this study takes as its
starting point an attempt to understand how Trobrianders and tourists think about culture,
how tourism intersects with other mitigating factors such as missionisation and indeed, the
history of anthropology in the Trobriands itself, and what these various and often
competing discourses have to do with the way in which cultural products are conceived
and produced. Though I, as researcher, am not concerned with authenticity as a tangible
quality of cultural products, I look at how people use this concept to assign value to such
products, and conversely the relationship of ideas of value to ideas of authenticity. For a
year and a half, I observed how people live their lives, and how tourism plays into the
general business of living in the Trobriands. I observed and talked with people about, for
example, how performances for tourists are or are not different from performances for a
strictly local audience; how carvers think about what carvings they will produce to make
them saleable; and the attitudes people have about how dimdins (white people) are
different from yakidasi (“us”). I witnessed four Culture Shows and attended numerous
meetings related to their planning. By being able to eventually speak and understand the
local language sufficiently well to participate in village gossip, I learned much that would
simply not be accessible to a researcher taking a survey approach to understanding tourism.

In Trobriand Islands tourism, the idea of interaction with “locals” is a key draw,
through, for example, village visits/stays, or by buying an artefact directly from the artisan
who made it. Thus, I go a step beyond Bruner’s idea of the “borderzone” (2005),
MacCannell’s “empty meeting ground” (1992), and various conceptions of a “stage” on
which the tourist performance is played out (e.g., Edensor 2000, 2001). In the Trobriands,
the line between “performance” and “real life” is blurred by the very absence of a well-
defined tourism infrastructure; indeed, this is the very thing which makes the Trobriands
seem such an authentic place for visitors. Most previous studies in the anthropology of
cultural tourism take as their starting point something set apart from “life as it is really
lived”—a monument or archaeological site, a culture show or dance performance in a hotel,
a culture park or model village, or a defined culture tour, for example. Very few studies
have taken as their subject a situation in which the boundary between the “stuff” done for
tourists and the “stuff” of “real life” is so blurred, and examined the ways in which this
very fuzziness plays a part in creating peoples’ ideas about authenticity.

Also somewhat fuzzy was my own position in relation to both my Trobriand Island
hosts, and the visitors who came from abroad. Once I became somewhat linguistically and
culturally proficient, as demonstrated by my regular participation in local feasts, my work
in the garden, and my assistance in domestic chores, I was often told, “Bwita, yokwa mokwita imkilivila!” (Bwita, you are really from Kiriwina/one of us!); at the same time, whenever visitors would arrive, Trobrianders would ask me, “Amakala bukudou matosina?” (How will you call these people/how are they related to you?). The assumption was always that visitors, no matter what their country of origin or mother tongue, were my wantoks.\textsuperscript{16} I was often asked to act as interlocutor on behalf of a carver wishing to get a high price for his wood carving, as I was seen as occupying a liminal space between Trobriander and tourist. Visiting tourists also related to me as a fellow foreigner, but one with (they thought) some kind of inside knowledge based on the duration of my stay, the nature of my accommodation (in the village, with a family), and my (however rudimentary) ability to communicate in the local language. I could, they felt, verify the authenticity of objects, performances, and experiences (I would frequently be asked, “Was that carving actually made here? Would they be doing this activity/wearing this dress if we weren’t here? Is that the way they really do it?”). They also sometimes felt more comfortable, as several tourists told me, asking questions they were afraid might insult or offend local people, especially questions about sexuality. For a few (but certainly not all) tourists, the very presence of an anthropologist was further evidence that the place they were visiting was, in fact, the authentically “primitive” place they had hoped to find.

I do not content myself with simply asking, “How has tourism influenced Trobriand culture?” or even, “How are performances/products for tourist consumption different from those produced for local consumption?” Rather, I am interested in the broader question of how “culture” is conceived, understood, and manipulated in self-identification and presentation, and in the interpretation of the Other. I simply use tourism as a means, and the Trobriands as a place, through which I can access these questions fundamental to anthropological theory. As Moore (2004:80) has pointed out, anthropologists often fail to recognise that the “concept-metaphors” or abstractions they study—such as the local and the global, culture and tradition, and authenticity—are used not just by academics, but by the people we study. I examine how concepts fundamental to anthropology as a discipline—culture, tradition, custom, authenticity—are appropriated and manipulated by both producers and consumers in this interaction of the local and the global.

Cole (2007:946) emphasises the need to examine how ideas about authenticity are contested, and under what circumstances cultural tourism may provide people with both a renewed sense of identity and a political resource. As Moore (2004:82) observes,
…[T]ourists not only want to buy cultural artefacts, but to experience a local—tribal, exotic—life in all its details. This form of consumption is a key part of identity formation for the tourists concerned…[C]ultural producers…make the global flows of people, income, and knowledge work towards their own social and cultural reproduction. This…[is] part of a process of reimagining the local and its value in a global context.

By examining both Trobrianders’ and tourists’ visions of authenticity and cultural commoditisation, I explore the processes through which local communities seek simultaneously to maintain cultural and economic autonomy while engaging with external political and economic pressures. I also examine how cultural tourism experiences are contextualised for the visitors, and why authenticity is (and my research confirms that it is) an important aspect of their experience of “being global”. This can be done by addressing some of the key issues identified by Moore (2004:83) in the processes of reimagining identities and experiences within global/local relations: the use of language (tourism discourse), concepts (what does authenticity mean to tourists and Trobrianders; how do they think about the economic aspects of tourism and issues of “development” and “modernisation”), and images (souvenirs, photographs, and tourist performances). The best way to subject these ideas to critical reflection is through ethnography: that is, by looking at how people themselves employ and deploy language, concepts, and images in their imagined and engaged worlds.


This term is one used by anthropologists and other scholars to reflect some internal consistency in sociocultural organization and linguistic similarity within these islands, but the term is not used by the area’s inhabitants, nor do they necessarily see themselves as similar to those living on other islands within the region. For example, Trobrianders often contrast themselves starkly with Dobuans.

Mani is Tok Pisin (PNG pigin) for cash, derived from the English word “money.” The Kilivila language has indigenous words for valuable objects (vegu’wa) and valuable or prestigious food (kaula), as well as words for “payment” and “purchase”, but as money as such was introduced by Europeans, the loan word has been adopted (see Chapter 9 for further discussion of Trobriand conceptualisations of money).

About six months before I completed my fieldwork, in June 2010, the telecommunications company Digicel built two mobile phone towers on Kiriwina, bringing mobile phone coverage to nearly all of the Trobriand Islands’ 30,000-plus inhabitants. Though not everyone could afford their own mobile phone, this immediately and dramatically changed the accessibility and affordability of regular contact with relatives and friends living on the mainland (see MacCarthy 2011).

In using the term doba, which refers to both bundles of dried banana leaves and skirts, I translate as “bundles” when referring specifically to the former (also called nununiga in the Trobriand language) and “textiles” when referring to both bundles and skirts.

Chief Narabutau (also sometimes spelled Narabutal or Nalubutau), who passed away in 1995, is celebrated as a wise, strategic and powerful chief, though he is also remembered as being a “hard” man with great powers of sorcery. He is commemorated in photographer Jutta Malnic’s (1998) book *Kula: Myth and Magic in the Trobriand Islands* (written with Narabutau’s nephew John Kasaipwalova) as well as in at least three documentary films: one documenting his role in kula, another as a renowned magician, and a third filmed after his death to document his mortuary feast. Matadoya’s late father was Narabutau’s sister’s son, thus placing Mata’s father in the important relationship of maternal nephew to the renowned chief.

K refers to kina, the state issued currency of Papua New Guinea. Before PNG’s independence in 1976, the kina was pegged to the Australian dollar, such that PGK1 = AU$1. Exchange rates as of the time of my fieldwork fluctuated but on average, PGK1 = US$0.35 or AU$0.40.

Across Papua New Guinea, the pidgin word wantok is used to mean “relative, person of the same ethnolinguistic background”.

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CHAPTER 3

MODERNITY AND PRIMITIVITY: Definitions and Discourses in Imagining Alterity

I like primitive places. I want to see primitive culture.... I’m interested in how the people here kept their own culture in the face of Christianity. That’s why I wanted to come to PNG.... But I wouldn’t like to see tourism encouraged here. They should keep it primitive. I don’t want them to change.... As a tourist, you look for something exceptional, something that you can’t find at home. We don’t want Disneyland. We came to see a special culture that carries tradition for a long time. Beaches and so on—you can see that anywhere. It’s the people that make it special, the culture that makes it unique. [Moshe, an Israeli man in his 60s travelling independently with his wife]

Culture and Anthropology

The relationship between anthropology and culture has a long, complex, and sometimes contentious history. Once (at least in the American tradition) the very foundation of the discipline, the analytic concept on which anthropological inquiry was based, the concept has become increasingly slippery. Anthropologists have defined, refined, debated, and in some cases even rejected the concept as a meaningful way of understanding human activity, social organisation, and belief. For my part, I recognise an anthropological definition of culture as a still-relevant and valuable analytic concept, not just as a cognitive or symbolic expression (à la Benedict or Kroeber, for example) but taking as a starting point Tylor’s (1958[1971]:1) classic definition of the “complex whole” of the humanly created world, including everything from material culture and the manipulated landscapes people inhabit to social institutions, knowledge, and meaning. While this is a broad definition that has been disputed on various grounds, it is the starting point from which the concept is, in its widest interpretation, understood.

Appadurai (1996) prefers cultural (adj) to culture (n), because culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference. Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality permits our thinking of culture less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference. [Appadurai 1996:13]

Appadurai lays out plainly what is by now a cliché in anthropology: that groups, and thus culture(s), “are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous” (Appadurai 1996:48). Yet, people inhabit a
place and time, and while mobility of all kinds is increasingly available to all people,\textsuperscript{17} lives continue to be locally lived, in a given place in a given time, and with practises, beliefs, and material culture that are far from homogenous. Indeed, it is this very fact of diversity and alterity on which the industry of cultural tourism is based.

Culture is, for me, what people think and do, and why they think and do it. I do not take it to mean a rigid, unchanging bubble inside which people operate, nor do I assume that all people within a given geographic, linguistic, or otherwise defined boundary are a homogenous unit. As Wagner (1975) reminds us, culture is made “real” through contrast, is always an invention, and is relational between self and Other. It is a term which is, indeed, broad and complex, but that complexity reflects the nature of its subject: people. As active agents rather than passive enactors of culture, people choose how to inhabit the world they live in. Culture, as I see it, is the arena in which these choices are made—it provides the options seen as possible, the range of responses likely to any given action. I concur with Geertz (1973:5) that the analysis of culture should not be conceived as “an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning”.

Anthropological definitions of culture, to be considered remotely useful, must be processual, constantly (re)constructed and infinitely flexible. In such an understanding, questions of “tradition” and “authenticity” are irrelevant, other than as the rhetoric that arises around culture as a site of struggle for political manoeuvring (Grillo 2003:160).

This is all well and good for the anthropologist who has diligently pored through thousands of pages in \textit{Anthropological Theory}; but what of the cultural tourist, and what of those being “toured”? Indeed, what of the middle-class American, Australian, or Swede watching the latest episode of \textit{The Tribe} or flipping through the pictures in \textit{National Geographic}? I argue that just as thoroughly and unequivocally as anthropologists have dismissed and thrown on the rubbish heap an essentialist or reified concept of culture, such an understanding is not necessarily shared by those outside the realm of academia (Kuper 1999), as clearly evidenced in the quote that opens this chapter. The divergence between public and scientific understandings of this concept sets them poles apart, yet anthropological definitions of culture—granted, somewhat old-fashioned and outmoded ones—are at the base of popular understandings of the term, and exposure to exoticised, essentialised glimpses of the Other in print and on screen largely account for the public view of culture as thing (see Chapter 4).

The sharing, though with often quite divergent understandings, of concepts such as culture, identity, society, globalisation, and authenticity (just to name a few relevant
examples) between academics and laypeople merits teasing out, rather than abandoning the concepts as many have suggested (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991; Brightman 1995; Clifford 1988; Reisinger and Steiner 2006). Slippery concepts like those mentioned above...can be seen as highly functional, rather than counterproductive, since they serve as flashpoints around which scholars working from different perspectives can congregate, debate, deliberate, and influence one another, thereby allowing new and more informed understandings to emerge...the plurality afforded by allowing terms and concepts to remain open and unstable is precisely what enables growth and progress in the discourse and understanding of important tourism phenomena. [Bellhassen and Caton 2006:854]

Just as Gudeman (1986) uses the concept of “cultural economics” to examine models of economic concepts such as exchange, money and profit from the perspectives and understandings of culturally variable models, rather than assuming and imposing a Western model of economic “laws” based on an assumed universal “rationality,” so too must concepts like culture, tradition, and authenticity be recognised as being used cross-culturally in different ways. The variable meanings and understandings ascribed to often abstract analytical categories can be examined ethnographically.

Moore refers to such problematic abstractions as “concept-metaphors,” useful, she argues, in theorising such abstractions by maintaining ambiguity—rather than trying to somehow resolve it—and a productive tension between universal claims and specific historical contexts (2004:71). An academic theory in anthropology, Moore argues, cannot be “uncontaminated” by views and understandings of these key concepts of those outside the discipline (2004:74). It should be considered an important anthropological endeavour to examine how these concept-metaphors “inform the imagination and the practise of both academics and non-academics, and the degree to which understandings are shared, diverge, and differ” (Moore 2004:74). This requires critical scrutiny, best achieved through ethnographic research. Thus, my own definition of culture—and even that of anthropology as a discipline—is not what is really at issue in this thesis. What I am really concerned with is not the applicability of the culture concept from an analytical point of view, but rather the ways in which the concept is employed and deployed by those who produce objects and actions that they consider unique and representative of their identity, and the people who consume such products and interpret their experiences in doing so in a particular way with reference to ideas about (an imagined) authentic culture. This is culture as “acted document” (Geertz 1973:10).
Moore’s concept-metaphors are similar to what Bruner (2005:21), as well as Englund and Leach (2000:226), refer to as a metanarrative. Trobriand Islanders, cultural tourists, and anthropologists all carry with them a set of organising assumptions that may or may not be enunciated in a given narrative, but which direct and modulate understanding of an event, experience, or object. Individual experiences with radical alterity are inevitably followed by a retelling, a narration of the event and the embodied practise and emotion entailed therein. This may be verbal, textual, photographic, or (most likely) a combination of these. But beyond the scale of individual stories of personal experience is a larger, broader conceptual framework which is not bound to a particular place, time, or experience. These metanarratives are often taken for granted, unarticulated and generalised (E. Bruner 2005:21). Ideas about culture, tradition, authenticity, and primitivity, even if poorly conceptualised or misunderstood from the point of view of analytical anthropological understandings of these concepts, pervade in the constantly (re)produced myths of the exotic Other.

There is—or at least, should be—a recursive relationship between the methodological and analytical stance of the ethnographer, and the concerns of one’s informants. Wagner (1975), for example, conceives of invention as the mode by which reality is constituted, the process by which concepts are transformed as new contexts prevail; he “sees the encounter between anthropologists’ own conceptions and those of their informants as a productive one because of their divergences” (Henare et al. 2007:21). What Wagner does with metaphors, Strathern (1988) does with personhood, and Henare et al. (2007) do with things: that is, they suggest a methodology that takes as its starting point a recognition that anthropologists’ concepts (not, they stress, our ‘representations’) must be inadequate to translate different ones (Henare et al. 2007:12). Henare et al. (2007) argue for an ontological, rather than an epistemological, approach to alterity. While there is a risk in eliding the two, both are relevant to understanding not just how I approach my research and methodology, but also for how the tourists and Trobriand Island residents with whom I work understand the nature of being, who they are and who Others are, and how they come to this knowledge.

This particular ethnographic exercise has an extra layer of abstraction, representation, and modes of knowing. My research entails not only my interpretation of what Trobrianders do, think, say, use, and so on; nor is it simply this and what tourists do, think, say, and use in contrast. It is my interpretation of their interpretation of themselves and of each other. As such, there are multiple abstractions at play and in making sense of
how people think about what they know, what they think they know, and what they cannot know, it is necessary, I think, to keep methodological approaches close at hand that embrace both epistemology (natures and theories of knowledge, that is how we know what we know) and ontology (the nature of being or the nature of reality). Henare et al. (2007:10) argue that “if we are to take others seriously, instead of reducing their articulations to mere ‘cultural perspectives’ or ‘beliefs’ (i.e. ‘worldviews’), we can conceive them as enunciations of different ‘worlds’ or ‘natures,’ without having to concede that this is just shorthand for ‘worldviews.’” The methodological shift insists that the difference, here, is that one worldview—the Western one—is better able to reflect reality than another (because, they argue, following Latour (1993), anthropology is itself a modern Western project); instead, what is necessary is a recognition of different realities, not just different interpretations of a single, given, material reality. While Henare et al. (2007) argue for a radical distinction and incommensurability of these two approaches, which they view as fundamentally opposed, in practise I see such a separation as impractical (see also Rojek 1997:71). We have to both recognise that people may inhabit the world differently, and inhabit a different world; for example, in the case of Trobriand Islanders, one in which magic and spirits are causal agents. I do not see a revolution in the so-called ontological turn. Rather, it is a reminder of the necessity of recognising that realities differ, and the ways in which we respond to different realities, different ways of conceiving the very nature of the world, is with confusion and an attempt to rationalise using the only frames of reference we have at our disposal, which are based, of course, of our own conceptualisations of what the world is and how it works.

**Culture in the Popular Imagination**

“Culture” in the vernacular may refer to specific forms (e.g., “high culture”—formal art and institutionalised performance such as opera, theatre, or a symphony orchestra); or sometimes as general and essentialised notions of “a way of life”. We can think of “cultural essentialism” as a system of belief grounded in a conception of humans as bearers of a culture—singular—and located within a boundaried world which defines them (as opposed to us) and differentiates them from others (Grillo 2003:158). Grillo takes up this conflict between anthropological/“scientific” understandings of “culture” as opposed to popular ones, noting that the former have so consciously moved away from essentialising views of people as culture-bearers that such understandings “are in sharp conflict with the predominant common-sense view” (2003:158).
For cultural tourists, the idea of seeing and experiencing a different way of life is the driving force in their travel aspirations, and reification of culture is implicit, if not consciously recognised, in their discourses and narrations of their own motivations and experiences. As Busse (2009:359) points out, reification of culture can be understood in two related but distinct senses: on the one hand, “as a fallacy of regarding abstractions as if they were concrete things”, and on the other, “in the sense of process in which mutable, socially produced phenomena come to be thought of as having unchangeable, thing-like qualities and as enduring in nature.” While the priorities of cultural tourists are not uniform, this subset of the total tourist population all share a fascination with Otherness, and, more often than not, its concomitant, the romanticisation of The Primitive and the expectation of its immutability. The chapters to follow draw on ethnographic fieldwork with cultural tourists including interviews, candid chats, and overheard conversations between tourists themselves (as well as between tourists and Trobrianders) that illustrate the ways in which Trobriandness as representative of the exotic Other is conceived and consumed.

Providers or recipients of cultural tourism, for their part, have their own ideas of what “culture” means. In the Trobriand Islands, as in many other “exotic” locations, inhabitants are well aware that it is their way of life, as well as their material culture (particularly carvings), that brings foreign visitors to the islands. They are actively aware of, and agents in a constant restructuring of, \textit{bubunedasi} (our (inclusive) way/habits) and \textit{gulagula} (manners and customs linked to the past). A number of influences are at work in determining how Trobriand culture is negotiated from within and without, including reference to the past, influence from the Church, and a desire to participate in the global economy. I thus examine the meaning of culture not strictly as understood and debated as an anthropological concept, but rather how both Trobriand Islanders and tourists talk about, understand, and enact ideas about “culture”, “tradition”, and “custom”, and the implications of this for studying tourism as an anthropological subject. Central to such an understanding is the concept of authenticity.

\section*{Authenticity}

Authenticity came to the fore as a key issue in tourism as a result of the publication of Dean MacCannell’s seminal work, \textit{The Tourist} (1976). For MacCannell, the quest for authenticity is the primary motivating factor for tourists, who are so alienated by the “modern condition” (Olsen 2002:161) that individuals embark on touristic adventures with
a sense of longing for what has been lost in ‘simpler’ times. MacCannell sees tourism as a ritual that attempts to combat the contradictory, fragmented, and ultimately unsatisfying state of modern society (MacCannell 1976:13). He argues that the quest for authenticity is doomed to failure, because the search itself compromises the authenticity of the object or experience, assumed to have been previously pristine and untouched (see also E. Bruner 2005a:162; Cohen 1988:372–373; Taylor 2001:11–15). Although MacCannell’s thesis has been the subject of much debate, it remains an important milestone in the study of tourism as a subject of serious academic inquiry.

Bruner (1994, 2005a) identifies four meanings of authenticity frequently implied (though often not explicitly stated) in tourism research. Authenticity may be understood to mean “credible and convincing”, as in the (perhaps oxymoronic) concept of an “authentic reproduction”. In this sense, it means believable, having memetic credibility, as is the goal of many historic sites and cultural villages. This meaning of authenticity has also been referred to as “historic verisimilitude” (Taylor and Johnson 1993, in E. Bruner 1994:399). Authenticity may also mean a historically accurate simulation, a genuinely convincing restaging. In this definition, not only would a modern visitor to a seventeenth century historic site feel that it looks like the period represented, but that for all intents and purposes, it is that same village from the seventeenth century. In the third sense, authenticity refers only to the original, making all reproductions inauthentic. Finally, authenticity can refer to

…what is duly authorized, certified, or legally valid…in this sense the issue of authenticity merges into the notion of authority. The more fundamental question to ask here is not whether an object or site is authentic, but rather who has the authority to authenticate—or, to put it another way, who has the right to tell the story of the site. This is a matter of power. [E. Bruner 2005a:150]

These definitions are in no way mutually exclusive, and often overlap. In particular, this last meaning of authenticity can be both contentious and contested. As stated above, I am not interested in assessing whether particular objects or activities are or are not authentic; rather, I am interested in understanding how individuals understand them and construct their own views about whether or not they seem authentic, and why it matters to them.

Just as I am not suggesting that there is some objective, unified, verifiable authentic Trobriand culture, I am also not suggesting that there is an objective, unified, authentic Trobriand culture. There are, however, general differences in how Trobrianders think, act and live relative to Other people, and there are certainly perceived differences identified by
Western tourists (correctly or not) in understanding how Trobrianders’ (as but one example of people represented as primitive) lives are different from their own. Furthermore, Trobriand Islanders themselves project and emphasise their own difference, both from other Papua New Guineans and from foreigners. It is in this sense, rather than an absolute and analytical one, that I am interested in ideas about culture, authenticity, and tradition.

*Objectivist Approach to Authenticity*

In much of the tourism literature, the use of authenticity as an analytical term is implicitly objectivist, assuming that there is some essential quality or attribute that makes an entity authentic (E. Bruner 2005a:163; Jamal and Hill 2002:79). This assumption of a true, authentic original presents some methodological and philosophical problems, as many critics have pointed out (e.g., E. Bruner 1994, 2005a; Cohen 1988; Jamal and Hill 2002; Olsen 2002). First, how is the pure, unadulterated, authentic original defined, when culture is a dynamic process? This idea of a truly authentic object/ritual/culture is inherently flawed, in that cultures are not, and have never been, static, unchanging entities. Who decides what is authentic? On what grounds? Who has the authority to authenticate, and what are the implications of such power to legitimate or reify culture? How might this hegemony be contested? This problem emerges frequently in relation to historic buildings and archaeological sites, as well as objects, which have complex histories, often reflecting different cultures at different periods.

A second problem with the essentialist conception of authenticity, argues Bruner (2005a:163), is its bias designating one side of the authentic/inauthentic dichotomy as better than the other, thereby denigrating all impostors. Inevitably, the implication is that originals are superior to copies or representations. Labelling some entity—an object, a cultural park or site, a performance—as a copy highlights the similarities to the hypothetical original, but it may fail to account for variations in the societal contexts within which originals and copies were produced; indeed, it may be argued that all cultural representations are constructions of the present (E. Bruner 2005a; Handler and Linnekin 1984). As Bruner puts it, “[A]ll cultures everywhere are real and authentic, if only because they are there, but this is quite different from the concept of authenticity that implies an inherent distinction between what is authentic and what is inauthentic, applies these labels to cultures, and values one more than the other” (2005a:93).

It has frequently been argued that cultural tourism, which relies on the commodification of difference, paradoxically destroys or denigrates that which it most
desires; once a cultural product becomes saleable, it loses its aura (Cohen 1988:372–373; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:19–20; Greenwood 1989). Jolly, similarly, points out that in much of the discussion surrounding tradition, both by Western commentators and by Pacific peoples themselves, there is an inherent assumption that authenticity is equated with unself-consciousness (1992:274). Conversely, Cohen (1988) argues that the commoditisation of culture does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products for locals or for tourists, because
tourist-oriented products frequently acquire new meanings for the locals, as they become a diacritical mark of their ethnic or cultural identity, a vehicle of self-representation before an external public… . Neither does commoditisation necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products for the tourists, since these are frequently prepared to accept such a product, even if transformed through commoditisation, as ‘authentic,’ insofar as some at least of its traits are perceived as ‘authentic’. [Cohen 1988: 383]

Indeed, both the producers and consumers of the various aspects of Trobriand culture commoditised and exchanged in the tourism encounter have variable ways of defining and understanding authenticity, as the following chapters will detail; but inevitably, the issue of authenticity emerged as a significant concept, whether articulated implicitly or explicitly, for both Trobrianders and tourists.

Postmodern Views of Authenticity

Postmodern social theory, as it applies to authenticity in tourism, is advanced by scholars such as Baudrillard (1983, 1988) and Eco (1986). Eco postulated that (American) culture recreates and reincarnates the “real” in shinier, more dramatic copies than the original, and that this hyperreality in fact supersedes the original (Eco 1986:7; see also E. Bruner 2005a:145). Baudrillard borrows from Plato the concept of “simulacrum” to explain the relationships between the real and copies or representations. The first order of simulacra is the “counterfeit”, seen from the Renaissance to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution; the second is the production of the industrial era, in which the potential exists for infinite exact technical reproductions of an object; and finally, in the contemporary era, simulation, which requires no real referent or original (Baudrillard 1988). In a perfect simulacrum, the copy or reproduction is seen as more real than that which it is meant to represent (Baudrillard 1988:41). In the postmodern world, these theorists contend, we have simulation without origin or point of reference, in which the simulacra becomes the true; the copy is the real thing, only better. In postmodern hyperreality, “all we have are
pure simulacra, for origins are lost or are not recoverable or never existed; there was no original reality” (E. Bruner 2005a:160). Although they argue against origins, implicit in such analyses is the essentialist view of the “real” or “true”. Again, this creates difficulties in understanding authenticity—either everything is, or nothing is, depending on one’s philosophical perspective. For postmodernists, the concept of authenticity is meaningless and need not be sought in understanding cultural tourism. However, many cultural tourists indicate that authenticity is important to them (cf. Adams 2006:68, 92; Littrell et al. 1993; Moscardo and Pearce 1999; N. Wang 1999) as do the people visited, often (but not always) expressly in response to tourist expectations (cf. Adams 2006:129; Conklin 1997; Schutte 2003; Y. Wang 2007) and claims for the real/true/authentic abound in travel writing in brochures, newspapers, books, websites, and weblogs (blogs). Postmodern constructions of authenticity are perhaps most relevant to cultural tourism when the concept of simulacra is applied to photography and souvenir shopping, in which the photo or trinket reifies the tourist experience.

As a corollary to postmodern understandings of authenticity, the concept of “existential authenticity” has been proposed (N. Wang 1999). This is taken to be experience-oriented, and concerns the tourists’ personal sense of authenticity of the self, achieved through experiencing the liminal process of tourism (N. Wang 1999:352). As such, it bears no realtion to the (real or perceived) authenticity of objects or events. Wang suggests that constructivist authenticity is object-oriented, rather than experience-oriented, but I contend that constructivist authenticity is more encompassing, reflecting understandings of the importance of authenticity to cultural tourists. Constructivist approaches understand the relevance of authenticity as an outward-looking, rather than (exclusively) inward-looking, process, as I detail below.

Constructivist Views of Authenticity

Constructivist authenticity provides an alternative view of the concept, which takes as its basis the way people recognise and identify a given entity as authentic, even if it is actually a copy or contrivance (E. Bruner 1994; 2005a; Jamal and Hill 2002; Jones 2010; Peterson 2005; N. Wang 1999). In this conceptualisation, authenticity is the result of social construction, rather than an objectively measurable quality of an object/event; it is, in Wagnerian terms (1975), an “invention”. In this view, things appear authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, discourses, perspectives, or powers; authenticity is relative,
negotiable, contextual, symbolic, and ideological (e.g., E. Bruner 1991, 1994, 2005; Cohen 1988; Culler 1981; Hobsbawm 1983; Salamone 1997). One of the primary proponents of this theoretical perspective in the anthropology of tourism, Edward Bruner, sums up constructivism as follows:

[It] views performance as constitutive of emergent culture; narrations, stories and retellings as active expressions that structure and express the tourism experience; mobility, travel and encounters as inherent not just in travel but in social life; human agency and reflexivity as characteristic of anthropologists, the tourists, and the toured; culture as always contested and in process; dissident voices and challenging readings as embedded in interpretations of heritage sites; ambiguity, irony, and paradox as tropes characterising the human predicament; scepticism of master binaries as reducing and simplifying cultural complexity; and historical specificity as necessary in any account of cultural productions. [E. Bruner 2005a:28]

The ontological assumption of constructivism is that “there is no unique ‘real world’ that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language” (J. Bruner 1986:95). What is considered objective knowledge or truth is always the result of perspective, and plural meanings can be extracted and constructed from the same experience from different perspectives, which may vary not only from one individual to another but is also dependent on the contextual situation or intersubjective setting (N. Wang 1999:354). Authenticity is thus a projection of tourists’ beliefs, expectations, stereotyped images, and desires. The constructivist view is useful, as it begins to bridge the gap between analytical approaches and lay uses of the term, recognising that people’s ideas about authenticity are more important than trying to discern whether a given site, sight, performance, or object is or is not authentic. As Jones (2010:183) observes, “We need a means to understand the powerful, almost primordial discourses that are invoked by the authenticity or ‘aura’ of old things.... We need to ask why people find ideas of authenticity so compelling and what social practises and relationships these ideas sustain.” Benjamin’s (1968) notion of ‘aura’ cannot be discounted as a subjective means by which people assess the authenticity of both objects and experiences.

A metaphysical, symbolic and relative understanding of authenticity moves beyond the essentialists’ problem of getting mired in arguments about what is/is not authentic. Instead, the focus is to understand how individuals’ conceptualisation of authenticity influences behaviours, decisions, and attitudes in terms of cultural tourism practises such as attending festival celebrations and performances, engaging in cultural activities and purchasing tourist objects. Both material and semiotic elements are interpreted and
reinterpreted in myriad ways to make meaning, and ideas about culture, tradition, and authenticity are points of reference for making meaning in the context of cultural tourism. Following Wagner, all human thought, action, interaction, perception and motivation can be seen as “a function of the construction of contexts drawing upon the contextual associations of symbolic (semiotic) elements”, which he describes as innovation or invention (Wagner 1975:42). Munn (1986:3) describes similar processes for the creation of value, which she describes as

...a complex symbolic process, both a dialectical formation of the symbolic system of meanings constituted in sociocultural practises and an ongoing dialectic of possibilities and counter-possibilities—explicit assertions of positive and negative value potentials—through which the members of the society are engaged in an effort to construct and control themselves and their own social world.

In cultural tourism, I argue, perceptions of authenticity are more important than for many other kinds of tourism (such as sun-and-sand or adventure tourism). This is because the experience of the traveller is a constructed one; “distortion, and also myth and fabrication, operate in the social construction of tourist sights” (Rojek 1997:55). But it is not just that people fabricate; they experience things according to non-uniform criteria. Based on expectations, previous travel, education, age, and numerous other variables, people make assessments about the authenticity of the people and products they encounter while travelling. In this sense, authenticity “is not the province of experts and esoteric criteria, but of popular and public kinds of verification and confirmation” (Appadurai 1986:46).

The concept of authenticity is omnipresent in the language of tour operators and tourism promoters, and in the minds and discourses of both tourists and Trobriand Islanders. While some scholars have argued that a concern with issues of authenticity are an explicitly Western phenomenon (e.g., Gable and Handler 1996; Jones 2010; Lindholm 2002; MacCannell 1973; Trilling 1972), my ethnographic research confirms that Trobriand Islanders are concerned with authenticity, and have clear (if not uniform) ideas about what “real” Trobriand culture is. This may be because they have become more reflexive about Trobriand culture as a result of interactions—not just with foreigners from distant lands (colonial officials, missionaries, anthropologists, tourists) but also with those living in other islands within the region, such as those visited in kula voyages, or on excursions to acquire pigs, betelnut, or clay pots, for example. I disagree with Jones (2010:187) that “sincerity and authenticity became important with the development of the idea of the individual as a fixed and bounded entity with a unique individuality and internal essence”. On the contrary, I think authenticity is often seen as reflective of the collective—how can a
cultural product be considered authentic if not with reference to the people (not necessarily person) who created it?

In sum, while the goal should not be for anthropologists and other scholars to attempt to designate which objects are or are not authentic, the study of the importance of peoples’ ideas about authenticity are worthy of academic inquiry. The very ways in which both producers and consumers of cultural products conceive of authenticity, and the ways in which this concept frames their understanding of such products, are in themselves of considerable anthropological interest, and have the potential to add to ongoing debates about the nature of cultural commoditisation and the process of Othering. Tourist promotional material abounds with terms like “authentic”, “genuine”, “real”, or “original”; in some cases, these are marketing strategies pitched by international tour companies to attract a particular type of consumer, but such terms are often appropriated by local tourism providers who see, and sell, themselves using the same tropes. Authenticity, however defined and constructed, clearly has relevance and importance in tourism.

**Tradition and Custom**

The concept of authenticity is closely linked with those of tradition and custom (or *kastom*, as it is often called in parts of Melanesia). Referring both to the process of the passing on of knowledge, practises, and things as well as such knowledge, practises and things themselves, it is another slippery concept about which people have firm, though, paradoxically, often ambiguous or conflicting ideas. Stanley sees *kastom* as “the elaboration of a demand to broker or decide how...distinctive ways of life are to be interpreted and displayed” (1998:97). Bolton (quoted in Stanley 1998:97) refers to *kastom* as follows: “It is not that *kastom* represents the past. It represents people’s notions of what was valuable or important about that past which can be imported, altered, or created for use in the present.” It should be noted, however, that the concept of *kastom* as a political tool in many parts of Melanesia, especially in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, is not significant in the Trobriands; use of the term *kustom* in the Trobriands is more akin to its English connotations and is used virtually interchangeably with “tradition”. Busse (2009:358) notes that there is a semantic tension between tradition as an active process, which may benefit certain individuals or groups at the expense of others, and tradition as knowledge and action that are handed from one generation to the next and command respect based on this continuity and historicity. Tradition can be both politically and emotionally charged, exploited for economic benefit, or revered as testament to a real or
imagined past. Words such as “tradition” and “custom” are particularly entangled in the Pacific context, where they are used as loan words in indigenous discourses and carry a range of particular historic, social and political baggage (Busse 2009:358; see also Jolly 1992; Lindstrom and White 1993; Keesing 1982, 1993). Interaction with foreigners—colonial officials, traders, missionaries, tourists, and anthropologists—has made many indigenous peoples, both in the Pacific and elsewhere, reflexive about the ways in which their own way of life is unique. A desire to safeguard “traditional” ways of life is a common discourse in indigenous political movements, but just what this means is rarely unambiguous.

Tradition usually refers to some formalised practice based on historicity, generally conceived as invariant and routine, and often employing stereotypical signs or symbols (Hobsbawm 1983:2; Jolly 1992:275). Shils (1981:12) defines tradition in its most elementary sense as “anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present...[It] includes material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices and institutions.” Tradition has a significant ritual and symbolic function within a given society. Although “traditional” and “customary” are often used as synonyms, custom may be defined as what people “do” or enact, and it demonstrates a “combination of flexibility in substance and formal adherence to a precedent” (Hobsbawm 1983:2), while tradition is defined as a form of collective knowledge.

Hobsbawm, borrowing (but diverging) from Wagner (1975), insists that many of the traditions which appear or claim to be rooted in history are often quite recent in origin and sometimes deliberately invented. It is common to hear festivals, performances, foods, dress, or handicrafts referred to in these terms. Invented traditions are “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). Inventing traditions is, then, a process of formalisation and ritualisation, characterised by reference to the past, which Hobsbawm expects to occur especially in times of rapid transformation of society (1983:4). Keesing (1982, 1989, 1993) uses this discussion, as well as the work of Handler and Linnekin (1984), as the basis of his commentary about “modern mythmaking” and “invented pasts”. Tonkinson (2000) argues for a conceptualisation of tradition as a resource that may be strategically employed—or not employed—by some members of a community in pursuit of individual or collective goals. Such a perspective emphasises
human agency and prompts attention to a detailed contextual analysis of the role, distribution, and strategic uses of “traditional” knowledge (Otto and Pedersen 2005:18).

Cohen (1988) suggests “emergent authenticity” to categorise cultural developments that lack the deep history of tradition but nevertheless acquire a patina of authenticity over time. All traditions are at some level “invented” or “emergent”; some have a greater historical depth than others, but all are products of a process of formalisation and ritualisation, whether documented in the historic period or with origins lost in time. As Shils argues, “When a tradition is accepted, it is as vivid and as vital to those who accept it as any other part of their action or belief. It is the past in the present but it is as much a part of the present as any very recent innovation” (1981:13).

Closely related to invented traditions is the concept of “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1973). MacCannell argues, based on Goffman’s (1971) division of social establishments into “front” (public) and “back” (private) regions, that tourists seek to penetrate the backstage and see life “as it is really lived” in the region they visit, as this is more authentic than the frontstage performances put on for tourists (MacCannell 1973:592). However, even these backstage experiences are often staged for the tourists’ benefit by locals who know what tourists seek. Thus, for MacCannell (1973; see also Cohen 1988), cultural products begin to lose meaning for locals, who continue to stage tourist products which thwart the tourist’s desire for authentic experiences. This does not necessarily follow, however, as staging tourist activities may conversely serve to reinvigorate local culture and strengthen identity (e.g., Crang 2004:2; Grunewald 2002; Smith 1982; van den Berghe 1994). Are communities who are visited specifically by culture-seekers wise to the desires of visitors, and do they intentionally fabricate authenticity to meet their desires? This is a question best answered through ethnographic fieldwork.

**Culture as Commodity**

In post-Independence Papua New Guinea, “culture” came to be seen not so much as an obstacle to unity or a source of pride in diversity, but rather as a commodity to sell to tourists (Simet 1994). In this sense, as Busse (2009:359) observes, culture came to be understood by policy makers as referring to a narrow set of objects and practises such as dances and other performances, and arts and crafts. Simet (1994) argues that this was quite a different conception than that held by “ordinary villagers” who rather saw culture as a whole way of life linked to specific people in a specific landscape. I am not certain I agree with this simple dichotomy, as I often heard Trobriand Islanders come very close to
essentialising and reifying their own “culture” as those things that were regularly and eagerly consumed by visiting tourists. In this section, I briefly introduce some of the theoretical themes regarding various cultural “products” that re-emerge, and are considered more thoroughly, in the chapters to follow.

Commodities, in classic economic terms, are objects that have use-value (Marx 1859, 1976[1867]; Smith 1904[1776]; also Kopytoff 1986) and an exchange value (Appadurai 1986; Cohen 1988:380; Marx 1976[1867]). It is hard to argue that a traditional dance or even, for that matter, a carved model of a yam house, is purchased by the tourist for its ability to be utilised for any technological purpose, and the same is likely true for a walking stick, which could be used for its technological characteristics, but in fact is more likely to be valued for its symbolic worth; but nor is it “art” in the way the distinction between art and other objects are generally understood (e.g., Morphy and Perkins 2006; Myers 2001b; Phillips and Steiner 1999). Value is accorded by the individual’s own interpretation that what they are consuming is an authentic, personally enriching experience (or tangible representation of that experience). An object is “only a potential signifier that becomes meaningful through the mediating role it is made to play. This meaning is derived from what people project on the object...” (Jeudy-Ballini and Juillerat 2002:4); in this case, it comes to mean something in part, perhaps, due to its aesthetic qualities, but more so as a mnemonic and as a tangible of proof of having “been there.” Performances, in particular, are not really a good or a service in the way these terms are generally understood, but are one of the most common cultural products produced and consumed in tourism across the Pacific (see, for example, Alexeyeff 2009; Condevaux 2009; Kaeppler 2010; Taylor 2011; Tilley 1997).

The concept of “exchange value” also meets some difficulties in classifying cultural products as commodities, as their cultural value is understood very differently by producers and consumers; though they are exchanged in market (money) transactions, prices are rarely fixed, but rather fluctuate depending on such factors as the immediate needs of the carver or dancer (are school fees due? Is there a feast approaching for which one needs rice?) and the prospective weighing of the producer of future opportunities to exchange (is there a cruise ship arriving soon? A conference which will bring foreigners and public servants to the island? A trip to the mainland in the near future?). The producer always retains the right to withhold his product if he does not like the conditions offered, and to adjust the price—which is rarely fixed in an absolute way—as suits his or her needs in a given moment.
These ambiguities are perhaps particularly pronounced in places where tourism and market-type exchanges enter into communities where relations of reciprocity underpin most social and economic transactions. Trobriand Islanders recognise that most tourists are present for a very limited amount of time, and cannot be expected or counted on to enter into the ongoing reciprocal exchanges that mark most relationships. At times, however, and especially in the case of village stays, Trobrianders may seek to use their special skills in “turning the minds” of others to try to instigate a sense of obligation to return on the part of visitors. Money (as will be elaborated in Chapter 9) is a particular type of “valuable” in the Trobriand conceptualisation, neither entirely like nor entirely unlike other items of exchange. The problematic of the gift/commodity dichotomy has been extensively debated in recent decades (Appadurai 1986b; Carrier 1995a; Gregory 1982; Myers 2001a; Thomas 1991; Weiner 1992) But as Thomas states, and the case of cultural products exchanged in ethnic/cultural tourism exemplify, “the transformations and contextual mutations of objects cannot be appreciated if it is presumed that gifts are invariably gifts and commodities invariably commodities” (1991:38–39). It seems to me that this applies not only to (material) objects, but also to performances and experiences as they are transacted in the cultural tourism interaction. While a gift/commodity distinction provides a useful analytical framework for thinking about the role of social relationships and ideas about value and alienation, for example, in practise these concepts have a tendency to blur, as Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) have observed. I argue in this thesis that tourism products pose an intermediate and thus illuminating case for examining the relationship between gifts and commodities—reciprocity and the market—as seen from the perspectives of both Trobrand producers and tourist consumers.

Singularities

Cultural products, such as dance performances, village visits or other “experiential” types of tourism, and even crafts produced by hand (explicitly or opportunistically) for the tourist market, represent a special class of commodity. Though they are produced and consumed—bought and sold—they are not like the mass-produced commodities that typify the industrial age. They represent what the Karpik (2010) calls “singularities”; his definition is somewhat different to that of Kopytoff (1986), who also uses this term, but applies it only to objects, while Karpik expands the definition to include intangible cultural commodities. Kopytoff refers to singularities as follows: “To be saleable or widely exchangeable is to be ‘common’—the opposite of being uncommon, incomparable, unique,
singular, and therefore not exchangeable for anything else” (1986:69). Kopytoff recognises that these are two polar extremes, with most situations falling somewhere along the continuum. He argues that the inherent tendency of the human mind to impose order means that singularities get categorised into manageable value classes that are cognitively internally similar and differentiable from other categories, to become understood as separate “spheres” operating more or less independently of one another (1986:70). For Kopytoff, there are spheres of sacralised non-commodities, and former commodities can be singularised by being pulled from their usual commodity sphere, though singularity does not guarantee sacralisation (1986:73–74). These sorts of objects Weiner (1994:394) refers to as “symbolically dense”, having cultural meaning and value accrued in relation to their individual biographies.

Karpik (2010:7) argues against the prevailing notion that singularity is preserved in culture and lost in the market, stating that

It is not a matter of denying the transformations associated with the passage of culture to market or choosing between what should or should not be sold; it is a question of understanding how the market comes to ensure the circulation of incommensurable entities and thereby restores a reality that has been overlooked.

Karpik distinguishes singularities from commodities by their multidimensionality, their uncertainty, and their incommensurability. In the first case, singular products are seen as structured; the significance of each of its dimensions is inseparable from the significance of all others (2010:10). A difficulty is encountered in determining how such singular products are to be presented and represented, and how they can be (and are) made visible to the consumer, recognising that their intended meaning can be foiled by the way they are interpreted by consumers (Karpik 2010:11). This leads to the characteristic of uncertainty, which has two elements: strategic uncertainty and quality uncertainty. Products are presented to the market, Karpik argues, from a certain point of view “which is expressed by an arbitrary selection of some dimensions at the expense of others. Nothing guarantees that this display will match up with the clients’ point of views” (Karpik 2010:11). This is the strategic uncertainty inherent in singular products. The concept of quality uncertainty arises because unlike commodities in the usual sense, with singularities the purchase is made despite the fact that knowledge of the product is less complete. As I will describe in greater detail in Chapter 7, there is an inherent incommensurability in the exchange of handmade carvings or objects valued for their symbolic use in Trobriand cultural life (shell valuables or grass skirts, for example) as well as for the labour and materials invested in
their manufacture, which have a different (but also meaningful) symbolic value for tourists. These characteristics—multidimensionality, uncertainty, and incommensurability—may be useful to bear in mind when examining the consumption of cultural products between the two sides of the cultural tourism coin, when such products are not immediately comparable one to the other even in the eyes of the producers, and even less so between groups who lack shared cultural understandings of such products.

Commodities and Consumption

Kopytoff’s recognition of the conceptual separation of people from things—“of seeing people as the natural preserve for individuation (that is singularisation) and things as the natural preserve for commoditisation” (1986:84)\(^{18}\)—is worth considering. We can recognise, surely, a conceptual difference between, on the one hand, traditional dance (people and performance) as commodity when compared to a carved ebony walking stick (material object), on the other hand. In a dance performance, people are more or less being commodified—it is their bodies, their decoration and movements that are being “sold”, yet not consumed in quite the same sense as buying a tangible object and taking it home. Still, visual performances and, more so, photography (discussed in detail in Chapter 8) are often referred to as forms of consumption (e.g., Hoskins 2002, MacCannell 1992). While consumption is usually taken to mean of “goods”, i.e., material things (especially food), consumption has also been applied to more ephemeral entities such as place in general (e.g., Cartier 2005:3) and tourist attractions more particularly (e.g., Urry 2002; Urry and Larsen 2011), photographs or imagery, especially of ethnic/cultural Others (e.g., Hoskins 2002; Lutz and Collins 1993, 1994; Sontag 1973); cultural centres (e.g., E. Bruner 2005b; Stanton 1989); sexual services, such as in sex-based tourism (e.g., Frohlick 2010; Hall and Ryan 2001), and even traditional dress and customs, rituals, and feasts performed or produced for touristic consumption (Cohen 1988:372). In the case of cultural tourism, at the broadest level it is perhaps experience itself that becomes commodified.

Philibert and Jourdan (1996) employ Appadurai’s (1986) notion of “regimes of value” to assess how material things (and, I would extend this to include intangible touristic experiences, such as dance performances or village feasts) are evaluated and become objects of desire across cultural boundaries. They examine what happens when goods (again, I would add touristic services) produced according to one mode of production move across geographical and conceptual space to be used in the context of the consumption practises associated with an entirely different mode of production (Philibert
and Jourdan 1996:55). As Foster (2006:291) observes, “regimes of value” as a conceptual tool allow for the possibility that exchanges may take place even when the actors involved may hold incommensurate social conventions and cultural criteria for assessing the value of commodities. This notion may also be useful when examining the fluidity of a tripartite distinction between art/artefact/commodity (e.g., Phillips and Steiner 1999; discussed in Chapter 7), and the way objects such as those purchased by tourists as souvenirs are variously conceived and valued. Philibert and Jourdan advocate a study of consumption “not as a tributary of systems of production or of exchange, but as the place where the material and the symbolic dimensions of social life meet” (1996:72). This seems to me a useful approach in examining tourist/toured interactions, in which both tangible and intangible symbols of culture are objectified (Harrison 2000; Miller 1987; Mosko 2002).

Miller (1987:22) describes “objectification” as a recognition that cultural objects externalise values and meanings embedded in social processes, making them available, visible, or negotiable for further manipulation by subjects; as many before him have observed, awareness of the self is predicated on awareness of the Other. Although Miller is particularly concerned with objects and their material forms, his approach seems to fit more ephemeral expressions of culture, such as dance, as well: “Objectification describes the inevitable process by which all expression, conscious or unconscious, social or individual, takes specific form. It is only through the giving of form that something can be conceived of. The term objectification, however, always implies that form is part of a larger process of becoming” (1987:81). In other words, meaning and value are constantly (re)constructed.

Harrison (2000:663) suggests that even prior to colonialisation, Melanesians objectified cultural practises and represented cultural symbols as possessions. In the Trobriand case, ideas about the “ownership” of particular dances (as described in Chapter 5) support such an argument. Whether divisions are made by village, clan (kumila) or subclan (dala), claims are made not only on dances but totems, tabus19, magic spells, histories, personal adornments, and land. Harrison favours legalistic language of property to describe the relationship of a given group to its distinctive identity as manifested in these differences:

These groups seem to have had much the same relationship with their ‘cultures’ that medieval craft guilds had with their trade secrets, or that business corporations have with their brand names and trademarks: namely, they treated them as intangible yet vital assets needing protection from piracy. An ethnic group ‘owned’ its culture as a kind of patented possession, the group’s patent consisting
fundamentally in the right to control the diffusion of its culture. No group allowed outsiders to copy its special practises ‘without securing the right to them through kinship, marriage, or some form of purchase or licensing’ (Schwartz 1975:117).

Mosko (2002), while concurring that certain objectifications did (and do) take place in Melanesian societies, suggests that the language and implications of “property” elide the distinction between gift and commodity forms of exchange. Mosko prefers instead to consider pre-contact Melanesian notions of ownership as conforming to indigenous models of gift exchange, sociality, and agency “in which the Western distinction between persons and things, or subjects and objects, were not salient and, hence, where “possessions” of the sort indicated by Harrison were conceived as detachable parts of the person who transacted them” (2002:90). Mosko’s point that these aspects of cultural property are not entirely alienable is a valid one, though I think his emphasis on the polarity of gifts and commodities in this case is perhaps overstated. In any event, if cultural property is transactable, whether between clans or between Trobrianders and tourists, it is because these aspects of group identity are characterised as being, in some sense, valuable.

The notion of value is itself a complex idea, which will be addressed in greater depth in Chapter 7. Clearly, value does not equal price; the way people value things has to do with their own subjectivity as much as external (market) forces. Personal connection, personal experience, memory, and conceptions of authenticity are hard to quantify, but all affect the way people place value on both objects and experiences, and Graeber (2001:40) asserts that value is only recognised in the eyes of another, the ascription of value rendering visible some social relationship. Jones (2010) takes classic exchange theory regarding reciprocity and turns it to authenticity, noting that when people negotiate and experience authenticity through objects, it is the networks of relationships between people, places and things that are central, not the objects themselves. She asserts that “the materiality of objects embodies past experiences and relationships that they have been part of, and facilitates some kind of ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships” (2010:190). The same could be argued for photographs and even memories, which are also essential souvenirs associated with the tourism experience.

It seems to me that the fact that culture as commodity is (at least in the Trobriand case) not impersonal is also significant. Commodities tend to be associated with capitalist, market-based transactions by definition disembedded from social relationships. However, this is not quite the case in the cultural tourism context, where there is a certain fuzziness
around the social nature of the transaction. For example, is it a commodity exchange when tourists organise a village stay, wherein they are paying people ostensibly for the services provided (food, shelter, cultural information), but, at the same time, are in a way hiring a “family” for a few nights, a week, or even a month? Such an arrangement is not a disembedded transaction, but neither is it representative of an actual ongoing reciprocal relationship—it is something in between. Likewise, people prefer to buy a wood carving from the person who made it, often taking the opportunity to ask about the “meaning” of the object; here, too, the idea of having some personal relationship (however fleeting) is an important part of the transaction. I refer, tongue-in-cheek, to the idea that economic transactions are embedded in social relationships (Polanyi 1968[1944])—of wanting to conduct (commercial) transactions with people with whom you have a (personal) relationship of some kind—as the “Cheers phenomenon” (“Where everybody knows your name”). Furthermore, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:27) have argued, “even if the transaction of cultural products and practises were entirely reducible to cash, it does not necessarily mean that they would be denuded of all auratic, affective, or social worth: the very fungibility of money lends itself to transformations of value that may reinforce difference—and add substance to identity.” I further elaborate on the role of money in tourist-Trobriand transactions in Chapter 9.

More fuzziness arises when we examine the “biography” (cf. Kopytoff 1986) of a material object such as a carving, which may be created as a commodity (intended for cash sale to a tourist). However, if no tourist is available to purchase it, the carving might become instead a commodity-gift (given to the school headmaster in lieu of school fees in the absence of cash), return to commodity status (sold by the headmaster to a dealer in Moresby) and then finally be transformed to something less alienable (bought by the tourist for cash, but as representative of their adventure and encounter with the “primitive Other” which it represents to them. The co-existence and relationship between (idealised) gifts and commodities “entails a theory of people, objects, and social relations, and the ways they are made and remade, understood and reunderstood in everyday transactions” (Carrier 1991:121). Myers observes, “As representations and objects move into new contexts, changing the relationships between those contexts, they are also connecting regimes of value” (2001b:53). Here, I refer only cursorily to ethnographic examples to illustrate ideas about authenticity, commoditisation, and value, as a foreshadowing of the more detailed discussion to follow.

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Particularly difficult is the categorisation of *experience*, as opposed to material objects, as cultural commodities. These are indisputably “singular”, as a given event (dance performance, feast, village activity) cannot be precisely replicated in every aspect, is ephemeral, and is individually interpreted and assigned meaning. This meaning varies not only between performers and audiences, but from one performer to another, and one audience member to another. Experiences, E. Bruner (1986a:6) notes (following Dilthey 1976), structure expressions: representations, performances, objectifications, narratives, and so on. As Palmer and Jankowiak observe, “It is through performances, whether individual or collective, that humans project images of themselves and the world to their audiences” (1996:226). Ultimately, notions of who we are as individuals, and, I would add, as members of a community (of Trobrianders, or as self-identified “travellers”), “are often tied up with those unique-if-typical things that have happened, especially when those happenings have become stories we tell ourselves” (Abrahams 1986:55). In the cultural tourism milieu, tourists travel to experience another way of life, while host communities have their own experiences in interacting with, performing for, and interpreting the actions of, foreigners in their midst. As I will demonstrate, the meaning invested in both objects and experiences is not only done by reference to one’s own standpoint, but also through an effort to project (however incompletely) some understanding of how that object or experience is culturally situated in the view of the Other.

Before turning to an examination of particular types of cultural commodification—of both tangible and intangible cultural products consumed by tourists—it will be useful to first explore how the desire to consume radical cultural Others and the physical and performative representations of alterity is created. In the next chapter, I look at representation of the so-called primitive Other in print and visual media, and the implications of such representation for cultural tourism as an industry and for the individuals who choose this kind of travel experience.

17 Witness the recent explosion in accessibility to mobile phone technology in less developed regions. The telecommunications provider Digicel has recently made this technology available to villages throughout PNG and the Pacific and the Caribbean.

18 But see also Strathern (1988) for a discussion of the non-separation of persons and things as a particular characteristic of Melanesian ideas about personhood and exchange.

19 *Tabu* in the Trobriands means ‘ancestor’ or a discrete named kinsperson such as father’s sister (Malinowski 1935 v.2: 113; Senft 1986:376; Weiner 1976:38-39) but it is also sometimes used, perhaps due to missionary influence (Malonowski 1935 v.2:113), in the sense of “forbidden” or “sacred”. The correct term for “sacred” in Kilivila is *bomala*. 
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CHAPTER 4

FIXING THE TOURIST GAZE:
Essentialising the Primitive and the Creation of Desire
in Textual and Visual Media

Representing Otherness

A while ago, I saw a special on National Geographic [TV] about the Mudmen [Asaro, in the PNG Highlands near Goroka, a popular tourist excursion]. I just thought, oh, I want to go there! I kept telling my husband. I wanted to see it for myself. This trip [three weeks in PNG] was my sixtieth birthday present. It’s a dream come true. [Val, a 60-year-old Canadian woman travelling on a group tour]

Representations of the Other, whether in museum displays, text, photography, or film and television, are, it can be argued, the very basis of the tourism industry. If one has no knowledge that there are places different—and, usually, more beautiful, more colourful, tastier, more exciting, more “cultural”, and more “exotic” than one’s home—one would have little incentive to explore new places. Representations of Otherness do several things. In visual and textual representation, the Other is made known and knowable, while simultaneously creating a sense of mystery and allure; it is, perhaps, the combination of this mystery with the possibility of “discovering” something for oneself that makes cultural tourism so appealing for the intrepid traveller. As Kahn (2003:307) observes, “When people choose specific travel destinations, it is usually because their imaginations have already journeyed there ahead of them.” It also fixes images as permanent, thus creating an expectation of timelessness and unchangeability. This, too, plays to tourists’ fantasies about a simpler, more harmonious past which still exists beyond their everyday reality, and with enough budget and time they might be able to catch a glimpse of just such a world. In doing so, the intrepid traveller not only peers into a world inhabited by radical cultural Others, but also enjoys an opportunity for reflexivity and self-discovery. The ways in which this is played out in tourists’ narratives of their experiences is demonstrated throughout this thesis.

Further, it creates a metanarrative or broad, encompassing story of primitivity (as against modernity or civilisation) into which a particular travel experience is placed. The story of what so-called primitives do generally—as gleaned from books, magazines, television, and the internet—informs the story of one’s own journey into the unknown. Stasch (2011b:3), following Adler (1989), notes that in West Papua, “for primitivist
tourists…travel is very much an “enacted trope”, a concrete personal activity performed in the image of an abstract schema.” A metanarrative of Otherness is based on an envisaged and narrated dichotomy contrasting so-called primitive and civilised humans and, I would extend Stasch’s argument that this mythic distinction includes the environment or setting, as well. The gaze of the tourist is pretrained through visual and textual representation in travel writing, “scientific” accounts such as National Geographic, and televised objectification of exotic Others, all of which are held up as “an important and reliable interpreter of third-world realities” (Lutz and Collins 1993:15). The enacted trope is also formed by an individual’s previous personal experience, if any, with “tribal” or “primitive” people. Likewise, tropes are enacted on the part of Trobriand Islanders towards visitors, whom previous experience or exposure to oral or visual representations of dimdims provides its own abstract schema guiding the interaction, for example in terms of Trobriand ideas about dimdims’ relationships to money, food, and one another (as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6).

In this chapter, I examine the representation of Otherness as a means by which the desire to consume experience is created (Stasch 2011b; Walsh 2005). Here, the realm of visual and textual representation will be examined—with a particular focus on popular media—as a means of branding Otherness, rendering it consumable, and creating desire on the part of readers/viewers to engage in tourism as a form of consumption. I begin with a brief history of the Western propensity to exhibit and view the Other, the starting point for the cultural tourism industry as it exists today. The Western world has a long history of displaying and essentialising, in a voyeuristic fashion, “exotic” and “primitive” peoples and objects. From the earliest travel writing, through the World Fairs and Great Exhibitions of the nineteenth century and museum displays, and, indeed, in anthropology itself as a fledgling discipline, people have recorded for posterity the customs and beliefs of “savages”, who have frequently been (and continue to be) depicted as on the brink of extinction. With the earliest representations, a desire for consuming Otherness was fostered and encouraged, and an industry emerged to meet consumer demand, first through displays in Europe and the Americas, which made images, the narratives of explorers, and human subjects available to meet consumer demand for a glimpse of a world previously unknown (see, for example, Maxwell 1999; Stanley 1998). Later, the advent of affordable air travel, package tours and independent traveller itineraries made it possible for people to do more than view static images or people removed from their wild jungle homes; now, those with enough disposable income to buy a plane ticket could experience for themselves
life in a foreign clime. The experience of travel is not only framed by the expectations and imagininations created through consumption of imagery absorbed in advance of a travel event, but is also often used in the telling of the narrative of experience; for example, Robbie, a 77-year-old visitor from Long Island, NY, explicitly described her sense of amazement about her visit to the Trobiands by stating, “It feels like I’m in a movie!”

Today, the ubiquity of film, television, print and electronic journalism, and even tourist blogs means that the opportunities for gazing on the Other are virtually limitless. The current success of adventure reality television programming set in remote locations in the developing world, travel programmes and books targeted at intrepid and adventurous globetrotters, and magazine and online photojournalistic and print media also manipulates ideas about authenticity, implicitly or explicitly treats culture as commodity, and paradoxically polarises “us” and “them” while ostensibly making The Other accessible to The Traveller. This chapter examines the role of the visual in cultural tourism and media representation of primitivism with both general examples of the essentialising of Otherness and the reifying of primitivity, as well as the discussion of specific examples from the Trobriand Islands in media such as print (magazines, blogs, travel literature), film, and reality television. I illustrate the theoretical understanding of this phenomenon through a discussion of the implications of globalising/essentialising the primitive and remote “tribes” of the world, how these representations play into visitors’ expectations and frame their conception of primitivity, and what Trobriand Islanders think and feel about such representation.

Though I recognise the influence of Foucault (e.g., 1973, 1977) in examining the gaze in terms of power, surveillance, and the concept of the all-seeing panopticon, the tourist gaze has a somewhat different focus than, for example, that of the medical clinician or prison warden. I draw here on the work of Urry (2002; also Urry and Larsen 2011) who likewise acknowledges Foucault, but does not dwell at length on his analysis. Despite the title and the importance of imagery as a frame of reference for tourism, this chapter is not just about the gaze—a focus on the visual—but also on the messages that are being communicated both in the imagery and the accompanying text; how these are manipulated and interpreted by both Trobrianders and potential or actual visitors to the islands; and how they contribute to fanciful, exotic and frequently sexualised views of the Other and the reification of something known as “Trobriand Culture”. Visual and textual representation of the Trobriands and Trobrianders, then, is both an instance of and instigator of discourses and, more broadly, the metanarratives represented therein. As Thurlow and Jaworski
(2010:13) point out, the communicative genres of tourism, such as inflight magazines, travel programmes, and guidebooks, “reveal the ways in which the tourism experience—and the world at large—is variously prefigured and scripted for tourists.”

Visual representations, Lefebvre (1991[1974]) argues, play a significant role in creating imagined spaces, and this in turn influences the way actual material space (and the people that inhabit it) may be perceived. As Stella (2007:18) points out, “representation is culturally engaged, and what is represented is dictated by the culture of the representer.” These representations—especially visual ones, what Igoe (2010:389) calls “spectacular productions”—may become a closed loop, “continuously referring back to themselves in affirmation of the realness of the world(s) that they show their viewers”. If tourists are travelling to imagined places, creating their own reality through the lens of expectations engendered by visual and textual tropes, Trobrianders meanwhile actively seek to provide the desired experience to tourists (as they understand it) by embracing and performing primitivity before the tourist gaze. Ironically perhaps, media—a key characteristic of modernity and “the global”—reinforces notions of primitivity. Trobrianders recognise and manipulate such media as “resources for experiments with self-making” (Appadurai 1996:3). Ultimately, however, most of the agency in representation is held not by Trobrianders, but by an industry on the global scale that seeks to sell Otherness and make it profitable to a hugely lucrative industry—particularly in television, but also magazines, travel literature, and documentary film—dedicated to transforming the Other into an object marketed to affluent and curious Western consumers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

Although I do not have space to elaborate fully on how the Trobriand gaze is fixed on foreign visitors, I suggest that Trobrianders, who have engaged in intercultural encounters since well before European contact, especially in the context of kula voyages, are not made newly reflexive about their difference from Others as a result of tourism and representation in various media, though such reflexivity is perhaps differently oriented and intensified with the recognition that culture can be commodified (see Harrison 2000; also Jolly 1992 for similar arguments in other parts of Melanesia). Further, there are common misconceptions and generalisations inherent in Trobriand understandings of dimdins just as in the other direction. Whenever a new visitor would arrive in the islands—whatever their country of origin—I would be barraged with a constant stream of questions as to how I would “call” each newly arrived guest. By this, people meant that they wanted to know how was I related to them, the assumption being that I must be related, and that because (they thought) we all spoke English, they must be my wantoks (relatives). I also noted
consistent generalisations about how *dimdim* act, think, and live, suggesting that tourists are considered a distinct but homogenous group, composite beings representing one another in a general sense. Thus, I contend that the category of *dimdim* or foreigner is seen not so much a series of distinct individuals by Trobriand Islanders, who, following Strathern (1988) and Mosko (2010b), have perhaps a more collective, “dividual” sense of selfhood than their Western visitors. A similar observation has been made by Stasch (personal communication) regarding Korowai perceptions of visiting tourists (see also Bashkow 2006).

**The Human Zoo: Displaying the Primitive in the Age of “Discovery”**

Most cultural tourists I interviewed told me that they chose to visit the Trobriand Islands (or PNG more generally) for their holiday because it was “different” from the holidays their peers had taken, because they could learn something of another way of life, and because it was more “interesting” than just sitting on a beach. Yet, just under the surface of such motivations lies a curiosity akin to ethnographic display in the “human zoo” tradition as first manifested in Europe in the sixteenth century (Blanchard et al. 2008:4), and arguably the basis of an international tourism industry. Westerners have a long history of curiosity about the Other, and a desire to see firsthand people who seem to represent some link with an imagined past. Descriptions written by early explorers, such as the Spaniard Luís Váez de Torres who travelled along the coast of New Guinea in 1606, depicted the people encountered as savages living in a state of nature (Stella 2007:3). In the early days of exploration, people were often taken against their will to be displayed in Europe or America as curiosities. Living bodies were put on display alongside exotic artefacts as the objects of the gaze of the public. In 1841, P.T. Barnum founded the American Museum in New York and the “freaks” exhibited, including the presentation of “strange and savage tribes”, soon became the most popular show in the USA (Blanchard et al. 2008:5–6). From the late nineteenth century through to WWI, international exhibitions such as the World Fair became an opportunity to showcase imperial rule, in part by displaying the “savages” that the colonial project intended to dispose of. Such displays used an explicit language of stark oppositions between “us” and “them”, to ensure that the gazers would feel justified in the colonial endeavour by demonstrating moral and physical superiority over conquered peoples (Maxwell 1999:2).
Today, international cultural tourists rarely articulate such racist sentiments, rather stressing the ways in which they saw Trobriand/primitive ways of life as superior to their own, but a few comments suggest that attitudes of disdain for the less “civilised” people being visited were barely concealed. For example, Edward, a 76-year-old British visitor, told me he was “camera-oriented”, wanting to take “pictures that please me, either [people’s] faces, birds, or animals.” Here, human subjects are lumped together with wildlife as interesting for their visual appeal. Likewise, Douglas, introduced in Chapter 1, demonstrated a similar attitude in his description of PNG as “a Galápagos for people”, suggesting that Trobrianders/Papua New Guineans and like examples of what are seen as modern primitives are akin to animals, separate from the larger world, and demonstrative of evolutionary principles. An affinity with, and respect for, nature is idealised as a characteristic of so-called primitive peoples, and an analogy is often drawn between nature and culture as both endangered, and under threat from the evils of late-capitalism (Taylor 2001:13). The modern eco-movement in much of the developed world, wherein people are made aware of the necessity to reduce, reuse and recycle for the sake of the future of the planet, also plays a role in the romanticisation of places where the environment provides much of people’s daily needs. That Trobriand Islanders grow or catch much of what they eat and make houses from materials collected in the surrounding bush, for example, is evidence for many tourists that “primitive” people live in a mythical past-in-present, from which Westerners can learn by jolting long-dormant cultural memory from their own ancestry.

Anthropologists, too, were complicit in creating a mental image of Otherness through their assistance in the creation of early museum exhibits (Stanley 1998:24), and espousing a sociocultural-evolutionary model of human development. Photographs buttressed the depiction of the Other, providing a link between the stories of “incivility” circulated by those who had gone abroad (explorers, administrators, military officers, missionaries, and anthropologists), and the re-creations presented—sometimes representing an entire “village”—in fairs and exhibitions. In this way, “visual tropes could be constantly recycled from the framing of the photographer to the setting of the exhibition” (Stanley 1998:24). These cultural villages of World Fairs and Expositions also frequently offered visitors the opportunity to buy postcards of the “natives” as portraits or engaged in “typical” cultural activities or even to have themselves photographed with the villagers, “thus exemplifying for posterity their temerity in crossing the barrier between exhibit and viewer” (Stanley 1998:27). I will return to photography in Chapter 8, but for the present
discussion, my point is that a fascination with gazing on the Other has a long history, but has taken a turn from being passive to active with the development of global tourism. Moreover, the cultural evolutionary, racist implications still (especially for older visitors) act as a point of reference, whether visitors use discourses that distance themselves from, or are only marginally removed from, such views. Now, rather than static displays or dioramas, the Other can be reproduced on one’s coffee table, home computer, or television screen at will, but these new media feed a similar appetite: to discover an unknown world and make it knowable; to reify ideas of primitivity; and to make possible interaction with the Other as a life-affirming and life-enhancing experience, whether followed through on a personal journey or enjoyed vicariously through the representation wrought by travel writers, photojournalists, documentary filmmakers, or reality show participants.

**Images of the “Primitive:” First Contacts on the Last Frontier**

I expected it to be primitive here, and it is. It’s nice that so much remains of the culture.... I noticed the houses. They’re very small. You can tell people mostly live their lives outside. You can see the culture is being maintained. It’s good to see that it’s not being swept aside or destroyed.... I wouldn’t want researchers to intrude on people’s traditional life. [Bernard, an American man in his 60s, travelling on a group tour]

A fascination with primitive ways of life is, whether as explicitly expressed as in the statement above or couched in intentionally politically correct rhetoric (as one visitor put it, “I don’t like the word primitive—but natural, almost free state of being, where people aren’t as concerned with acquiring things”), is clearly a driving force compelling visitors to come to PNG generally, and the Trobriand Islands in particular. The term, or synonyms for it (“unspoiled”, “untouched”, “unadulterated”, “pure”, “authentic”) emerged spontaneously in nearly every conversation I had with tourists in PNG. In some cases, the Trobriands held a specific draw; in many other cases, especially for travellers on group tours and cruise itineraries, visitors had little knowledge about, or indeed, had never heard of the Trobriand Islands, but simply wanted an encounter with the exotic, and any primitives would do—so long as they were, in the tourists’ estimation, authentic.

When I told my own family that I would be doing my fieldwork in PNG, their reaction was typical. “If anyone invites you into their hot tub, and then starts throwing in some vegetables, get out quick!” quipped my sister, which led to a barrage of jokes about cannibals and headhunters. “Isn’t it dangerous there? It’s so remote, so primitive. How
will we ever even know if anything happens to you?” my mother fretted. “How can you study tourism there? Who goes to Papua New Guinea? Isn’t it just a bunch of primitive tribal people hunting and fishing? There can’t be any tourism!” mused my father. While these remarks may seem trivial and flippant, I include them to illuminate how pervasive and often generalised ideas about primitivity are in societies that consider themselves modern and civilised, as against their imagined opposite. Untamed landscapes with untamed people—this is the image of Papua New Guinea in the popular imagination. PNG pops up periodically in the news when, for example, a rash of newly identified animals and insects are reported, suggesting a still wild and uncharted territory; or when a Westerner meets with a “harrowing ordeal” in which he is shot with an arrow, perpetuating the myth of savagery and headhunting amongst “primitive” peoples. A recent news story from the Marquesas Islands, in French Polynesia, suggested “Cannibal Fears” when the charred remains of a missing German tourist were found. Although tragic, there was no reason to suspect cannibalism in this case; but news outlets, especially in Europe, saw an opportunity to sensationalise and draw on the myth of modern-day primitives.

Figure 4.1: Sacred Spring, Sweet Dreams (Nave nave moe) by Paul Gauguin, 1894 Photograph © State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, reproduced by permission Photo by Vladimir Terebenin, Leonard Kheifets, Yuri Molodkevets
The South Pacific in general has long held a fascination in the Western imagination. From the eighteenth-century voyages of Captain Cook, through the tales told by Robert Louis Stevenson and Herman Melville and Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings in the nineteenth century (Figure 4.1), textual and visual representations of the South Pacific have fixed this region with the stamp of the exotic. Depictions of the region are alternately, or coterminously, Edenic and brutal. In PNG, representations often draw on “last frontier” rhetoric. Take, for example, the following, from a National Geographic feature article about Meakambut people in East Sepik Province:

**Last of the Cave People:** A nomadic people in Papua New Guinea were rumored [sic] to be living in remote caves in the forest... But for the glow from the campfire, it is impenetrably dark. Never are there stars, as if that would be too much to hope for. Instead, beyond the rock overhang, it's pouring, waves of water relentlessly slapping the giant fronds of the jungle. It always seems to rain at night here in the mountains of Papua New Guinea. This is why Lidia and what's left of her people, the Meakambut, seek refuge in rock shelters—they're dry. Located high in the cliffs, sometimes requiring a treacherous climb up vines, caves are also natural fortresses that once protected the Meakambut from their enemies: headhunters and cannibals and bride stealers. But that was generations ago. Now their enemies are less violent yet no less deadly: malaria, tuberculosis... The Meakambut are on the edge of extinction. They are dying from easily treatable illnesses. In ten years they could be completely gone, and their culture and language would vanish. This is one of the last nomadic people in Papua New Guinea! [Jenkins 2012: 126]

The environment is “treacherous”, relentless”, and “dark”; it is a dangerous place home to people on the verge of “extinction”. The same images are imparted in programmes like the Discovery Channel’s *Survivorman*, which features “one man, alone in the wilderness for seven days”. In the final episode of Season 3, Les Stroud is dropped in the “primordial” jungles of PNG, a place that is so “untouched” as to be “not on the map”. It is a place, Stroud tells his viewers, where people “still fight and kill each other, eking out an existence”, still in the Stone Age. The “first contact” trope is inevitably trotted out: “Sick, hungry, wet and tired [sic] Les is brought yet another choice by the local villagers, stay in the jungle and survive the last two nights or join them in a local celebration which no white man has participated in before.” Similarly, Bruce Parry of the BBC Two programme *The Tribe* shot an episode based on his visit to the Kombai people in West Papua, “where the Kombai have stayed hidden from the outside world for generations, pursuing their ancient way of life as hunter-gatherers.” And in *World's Lost Tribes: New Adventures of Mark and Olly*, the show’s stars, “explorer” Mark Anstice and journalist Olly Steeds, also visit the Kombai region, the setting for the first season of the series which first aired on BBC
...trekking high into the uncharted central highlands, seeking total immersion in a culture with a history of tribal war, sorcery and witchcraft. The Mek people are an ancient tribe that has survived for thousands of years in one of the most beautiful but hostile environments on Earth and Mark and Olly are the first white expedition to enter the Merengman village, located in a part of the jungle described as "hundreds of miles of dark and screaming". After gaining their trust, Mark and Olly will live with the tribe for four months, totally immersing themselves in their way of life where they will experience weddings, witch hunts, and axe-wielding chiefs, while traversing deadly bridges, enduring sleepless nights with the tribesmen and eating local delicacies such as tadpole kebabs and frog heads. In their incredible adventure, Mark and Olly will attempt to gain acceptance into the village with the reward of the Mek's traditional penis gourd, and experience the chance to document the wisdom of the ancestors that will soon be lost.

This is a sort of popular, sensational “anthropology”, and it is significant that the show aired on the Travel Channel. While few of the tourists I spoke to mentioned particular programmes by name (though my friends Lydia and David Tobwenina, who hosted the American family who visited the Trobriands to film the National Geographic Channel’s programme *Worlds Apart*,25 often spoke of the programme and fondly remembered their involvement with it), a significant number of the visitors I spoke to noted that they often watch the National Geographic Channel and/or the Travel Channel. One visitor told me that when she went to a *sagali* (mortuary feast) and saw the bundles of banana leaves being thrown in piles and the associated bustle of activity, she thought, “Oh my God, I’m in *The Tribe!*” This sort of programming, appealing to the kinds of cultural tourists who reckon themselves savvy and intrepid enough to undertake a trip to a “remote”, “off-the-beaten-track” location, often have fantasies of telling their own tales of harrowing near misses and first contact, illustrated with dramatically colourful portraits of people still living a “traditional” way of life, and congratulating themselves on visiting “before it gets spoiled by tourists”.

A 2007 BBC documentary entitled *First Contact: For the Very First Time?* (Woolford and Robinson 2007) depicts the aforementioned Anstice following entrepreneur Kelly Woolford of Papua Adventures on a journey deep into West Papua in search of making first contact with tribespeople, with cutaways to various interviews with “talking heads” debating the ethics and veracity of Woolford’s claims. His adventure tourism company offers a variety of “exploratory” ecotourism experiences, including tours in which
[w]e will be heading into areas previously unknown to Westerners; never visited by Westerners and where the native people have little or perhaps no knowledge of our existence at all. We will visit tribes that still use stone axes; who live and gather food from the rain forest. We know these tribes exist because we have connections with Papuans who have had brief encounters with them. We have had lots of experience in Papua with remote tribes and have already made several first contacts.26

Some previous clients have accused Woolford of setting up elaborate hoaxes to dupe his customers into thinking they may actually be the first outsiders a given group has ever encountered, and others suggest that his local informants and guides may be the hoaxers, duping Woolford himself along with his clients. Some argue that this would be far less dubious than the alternative, that Woolford may be rather carelessly imposing Western tourists on people who would prefer to remain unmolested by curious, cameratoting foreigners. Arnstic oscillates between being convinced Woolford is puppeteering “authentic” experiences and being equally convinced of his sincerity. At one point, as Arnstic believes they may be on the verge of a true “first contact” experience, he states, “I could be shot at by naked savages, be the first Westerner to see an undiscovered civilisation! This is the closest I’ll ever get to time travel”; once again, the place-out-of-time narrative that gives meaning and value to the experience of the Other for the modern, disillusioned, bored, and affluent Western urbanite. Woolford and Arnstic argue, in defence of their ethically questionable quest, that tourist groups are far more benign than the loggers or missionaries who are likely to be the alternative first contact experience. Ultimately, the point is made that there are few if any truly isolated communities remaining, and that traditional, unadulterated ways of living are in peril of destruction from modernisation and Western influence, in yet another iteration of the “last chance” trope.

Representations of the Trobriand Islands: Sex, Savagery, Sublimity

The preceding discussion looks at how PNG is represented as a synecdoche for primitivity writ large. I now turn my attention to representation of the Trobriand Islands in particular, and the tropes that most frequently emerge in narrations of Trobriand culture, written and visual. The most common of these tropes, and that which is arguably of the greatest influence and interest to both tourists and Trobrianders, is concerned with depictions of Trobriand sexuality. While I do not claim that all visitors to the Trobriands are fully aware of the breadth of this representation, most have, if nothing else, some vague
notions about the islands’ reputation as the “Islands of Love” or, at the very least, expectations of a dramatic Otherness in stark contrast to their own quotidian existence.

As an iconic place in anthropology, and a place of colourful dress and provocative customs as (mis)represented in the popular imagination, it is perhaps not surprising that a significant number of films and television programmes have been made in and about the Trobriand Islands. In this section, I provide a brief overview of several of these, and examine some of the ways in which these films reinforce or, in a few cases, counter the representations summarised above. Although it should be noted that films have been produced by production companies based in Japan, Korea, and Germany, to name a few, I here refer only to recordings made in English. In the final section, I look at the more recent phenomenon of so-called reality television and its role in perpetuating the myth of primitivity in the modern world, and examine three reality shows filmed in the Trobriand Islands and the ways in which such depictions frame cultural tourists’ expectations, and Trobrianders’ own understandings of what it means to be a Trobriand Islander.

**Documentary and Feature Film**

At least six full length English-language ethnographic documentary films have been made about the Trobriands, all of which include extensive footage primarily from Kiriwina Island, though some films (especially those with a focus on *kula*) show interisland travel by canoe or dinghy and some footage of smaller islands such as Kitava. Some of these are made as educational films by or in consultation with anthropologists, while others are less academic in orientation. *Kula*, yam gardening, magic, *sagali* exchanges, dancing, sexuality, and responses to colonialism and Christianity are variously represented. I took with me DVD copies of most of these films when I went to Kiriwina to undertake my fieldwork, and watched many of these films both with my Trobriand hosts and with visiting guests from overseas. Their reactions to these films were illustrative of the importance of visual representation in creating and reinforcing ideas about primitivity and assessing the authenticity of their own experience.

The earliest of these is *The Trobriand Islanders: An Ethnographic Film*. This film consists of footage taken by Harry Powell in 1951–1952 with a 16 mm home video camera (Powell 1982). The film was later edited and released in 1982 as a documentary intended for classroom use and research, and is presented in five sections, charting the major annual activities on Kiriwina. The first section shows the general topography and activities such as copra buying and fishing, and those of the Methodist mission and the government. This
is followed by an explanation of the annual cycle of garden magic, the sequence of major
mortuary exchanges, preparations for a major kula expedition, and the activities of the
harvest season. The film is far more cerebral than titillating. When I watched it with
Trobrianders, some found it interesting for the fact that it showed an older generation and
ways of doing things that are rarely practised any more, such as making boat sails from
pandanus (today most sailors use plastic tarpaulins instead). Tourists were least interested
in this film, which most found “a bit boring”, due to the scholarly nature of the film, lack
of bright colour, and lack of attention to sexual subject matter. Trobrianders, too, though
sometimes made “shy” (kasimwasila) by overt references to their own frenzied sexuality at
the time of the yam harvest, at the same time enjoy them immensely, eliciting whoops and
peals of laughter from the crowd; conversely, Powell’s film is rather sober and generated
little of the good natured joking and nudging that later films tend to evoke.

Perhaps the best known of the Trobriand documentaries is Trobriand Cricket: An
Ingenious Response to Colonialism (Leach and Kildea 1976). As described on the website
of the distributor of the film, Berkeley Media LLC:

The film shows how the Trobrianders have taken the very controlled game of
British cricket, first introduced to them some 70 years earlier by Methodist
missionaries, and changed it into an outlet for mock warfare and intervillage
competition, political reputation-building among leaders, eroticised dancing and
chanting, and wild entertainment. The game is a major symbolic statement of the
Trobrianders' feelings and experiences under British colonialism.27

A classic in anthropology classrooms worldwide, this film is also popular with both
Trobriand residents and visiting tourists, many of whom have heard of this game as it
features prominently in Lonely Planet’s guide to PNG (see discussion below); many
visitors asked me about the game and whether or not people in the villages still play,
expressing their hope that they might happen across a game being played during their stay.
They are often disappointed to find out on arrival that cricket games are no longer
regularly played in the islands, as soccer (for men) and netball (for women) have become
more popular and are a regular part of church fellowship activities. As elaborated in
Chapter 5, Trobriand cricket performances are often organised as part of cultural festivals
at which international visitors are expected, and are also organised on demand for tour
groups or even independent travellers, if they are willing to pay the required fee. But for
many, the film is their best chance to see Trobriand cricket in action.

The early 1990s saw the release of several films about the Trobriands. First among
them was the 1990 production filmed for the series Disappearing World, made in
consultation with anthropologist Annette Weiner, who features prominently in the film (Wason 1990). The primary focus of this film is the series of exchanges made at sagali, particularly the bundles of banana leaves and skirts called doba. Emphasis is placed on the ways in which modernity is encroaching on and modifying Trobriand life, and considerable attention is given to the “month of play” at the time of the yam harvest and the sexual freedom and autonomy afforded to adolescent girls. In 1991, a co-production of National Geographic and One World films was released, entitled Kula: Ring of Power (Balson 1991), followed three years later by The Last Magician, by Land Beyond Productions (Holloway and Thompson 1994). Both of these films focus on the charismatic Chief Narabutau, who was considered by many the most powerful (though not the Paramount) chief in the Trobriand Islands until his death in 1995. Both films stress that social change is “threatening” Trobriand culture, which is in danger of being irreversibly lost—in the kula film, because of market economics and globalisation, and in The Last Magician, because of Christianity. Again, this depiction of a society on the brink of destruction is a common trope in metanarratives about “primitive” people upon whom modernity and “civilisation” are encroaching. Several other documentary films include footage of the Trobriands, but are presented as biographical accounts of Malinowski’s life and work.28 Those tourists who watched these films during their stay invariably felt that it deepened their understanding of the complexity of Trobriand social life.

One feature film has been produced about the Trobriand Islands, and much of the filming was done on location in 1998. The film, entitled In a Savage Land (Bennett 1999) (Figure 4.2), was a critical and commercial failure. It stars Martin Donovan as Phillip, an ambitious young anthropology professor who, with his linguist wife Evelyn (Maya Stange), sets off in Malinowski’s footsteps to study the sexual mores of the “savage” islanders. Rufus Sewell plays the pearl trader Mick Carpenter who provides the film’s love triangle. Set during WWII, the script is at times painfully trite, though the depiction of Trobriand life is perhaps more accurate than one might expect, with many scenes of village life and with conversation in the Kilivila language. Janet, a solo mum in her 40s who was travelling with her son, watched this film near the end of her stay in the Trobriands, as I had left a copy at the guest lodge. She said, “If I had seen it before I went, I might have been disappointed,” meaning that it would have set up certain expectations about how people lived in the village, especially regarding dress. She did, however, enjoy watching the film, especially while she was actually there, stating, “I felt like it gave me a better understanding of Trobriand culture.” I found it curious and telling that this woman, who
had been in the Trobriands for nearly a week when she watched the film, felt she learned more about the local way of life from a poorly written romance movie than she did from her own personal experience, which suggests that media representations of place can be, in some cases, more powerful in creating the story of one’s experience than experience itself.

Figure 4.2: Feature film poster for In a Savage Land, released in 1999

During a screening of the feature film *In a Savage Land* for a local audience, I was struck by an unexpected reaction from the Trobrianders with whom I was watching. This film includes several sex scenes, though none particularly graphic. One such scene shows the protagonists, a young married couple there to study (naturally) the sexual behaviour of the “savages”, engaging in sex; another scene shows two “natives” having sex in a freshwater pool inside a cave (notably, the “savages” are depicted as “copulating” out in nature, in contrast to the domesticated, indoor setting that the white/educated/civilised protagonists prefer). When these scenes came on the screen, the children in the audience were instructed to hide their eyes, and they literally covered them up with their hands or T-shirts or turned away from the television without exception or argument. At one point, a man even covered the screen until the scene was over. For a society with a reputation for sexual freedom, even in the case of children, I found this conservative reaction surprising. When I asked for an explanation, I was told that it is not that sex itself is wrong, but
because it is shameful (kasimwasila) for anyone to see—it must always be in secret. It is never acceptable, in Trobriand social etiquette, to show public affection, and children must be fast asleep or away from the house when husband and wife engage in sex. Women, especially, I was told, feel shame if they see affection or sex, and this was tied in to the morality espoused in church services. This very clearly brought home to me how much the “Islands of Love” trope is overstated and misrepresentative of Trobriand Islanders’ mores.

Trobriand Islanders tend to be most interested in the films that feature their own villages and relatives, not surprisingly. Once word had travelled that I had copies of these films, I regularly received requests from people who had organised a screen, player, and generator and wished to borrow my DVDs to show in their own villages. Men from Kwebwaga village were most keen to see Trobriand Cricket and Annette Weiner’s film, which were largely filmed in their village, for example, while in my own village of Yalumgwa, home of the late Chief Narabutau, the most requested films were those that featured this revered man and showed footage of our own home and much younger versions of many of the village residents. Seeing one’s home village and relatives on screen is always an exciting event, as it not only reminds people of the faces of their departed relatives, but also reinforces ideas about their own importance as Others and their significance as anthropological subjects. Each new frame would elicit cries of, “Oh! It’s so-and-so! Look how young she looks!” or “It’s so-and-so, how sad for him, he’s already dead”. Identification of people and places was a communal activity that provided a sense of continuity even when social change was evident. Such films, especially the older ones, also serve as a repository of “traditional” knowledge from those who are no longer living, and a valuable record, Trobrianders often told me, of their own way of life which some feared was in danger of being lost. Films (as well as ethnographic writing) provide a record of how things were in the past and a benchmark for measuring culture change. After screenings, people would often comment on particular scenes in the films that depicted ways of doing things that had been modified in recent years, lamenting, “We are losing our culture!”

Seeing such films was by no means a solemn occasion, however. Film screenings brought people out in droves for the festive nature of an evening’s activity, and it was often hard to hear the dialogue for the excited chatter and mirthful laughter in the room. Scenes of gogebila, the carrying of yams from the gardens to the village, traditionally done by young boys and girls with much pelvic thrusting and sexual innuendo, and of kalibom, the highly sexually charged night time dance formerly enjoyed at yam harvest celebrations.
during the time of *milamala*, evoked peals of laughter. Such reactions are sometimes at odds with the ideals of those most heavily involved in “Christian life”, however. The first time I organised a film screening in Yalungwa village, I asked the lay reader for the local (Catholic) church if we might use the building, as it was the only roofed area large enough for the film to comfortably be screened even if it rained. Stephen, the pastor, was sympathetic, and himself keen to see the films, but worried that their might be some “unchristian” elements and made me assure him that nothing too salacious would be included. When I asked why some parts of Trobriand custom made people uncomfortable when shown in church, I was told “*Kalibom* is different, it is OK, because that is our real tradition, but *Tapioca Dance* or other dances that have people making *mweki mweki* (thrusting movements) makes Christians feel shy.” I return to this distinction in Chapter 5.

**Reality Television, Popular/Serial Documentary**

Three programmes that can perhaps best be categorised as “serial documentaries” have filmed episodes in the Trobriand Islands. By this, I mean a series that is made for a popular audience on network television, in this case with a different “exotic” location selected for each episode, much like *The Tribe*, *World’s Lost Tribes*, and *Survivorman*, discussed above. If documentary films are primarily seen in a classroom context, and the flopped feature film *In a Savage Land* was seen by few people at all, these depictions of Trobrianders and their way of life have arguably reached the broadest audience of any of the media discussed here.

The first of these was a series produced for National Geographic called *Worlds Apart*, first aired in 2003. The premise: each week, a “typical” American family is transplanted to a far-flung location in the developing world where they must learn to cope with a very different way of life for ten days. This type of programming has been referred to as “edu-tainment” (Sinha Roy 2007:572). In one episode, a family of five from Oakton, Virginia (a suburb of Washington DC) travel to the Trobriands where they are introduced to Trobriand life by a local family. Aired on the National Geographic Channel (NGC) in the USA, and on ABC in Australia, the promotional material for the show describes it thus:

A family of industrious overachievers, the Thurmans find themselves thrust into a slow-paced society without electricity or running water, a lifestyle that suits the Tobwenina family just fine. The Thurmans adapt to life without basic conveniences and embark on a voyage of self-discovery without the constant stimulation or distractions of their modern lifestyle. [ABC TV: http://www.abc.net.au/tv/guide/netw/200407/highlights/235025.htm]
The formula for each episode is similarly structured: on arrival in the village, there is first disjuncture and culture shock, then assimilation and introspection, followed by the return to the USA, which is accompanied by discovery of a more authentic self and a renewed appreciation for home and nation (Sinha Roy 2007:572). The “self-discovery” facilitated by transposing oneself to another lifestyle—one presented as arduous, uncomfortable, and potentially dangerous—is the macro-trope that permeates this genre of programming. Sinha Roy (2007:572) argues that Worlds Apart and other shows in this genre are an example of “nation-branding”, in which “the underdevelopment of the host countries provides an invaluable ‘education’ about global inequities for American participants and viewers alike, [while] it simultaneously reaffirms the difference and superiority of brand-America.” She elaborates:

NGC’s cross-cultural programming also utilises fetishized codes of primitiveness to situate developing post-colonial nations in the chrono-political space of a pre-industrial past, which American participants/viewers can safely visit and consume, like the artificially resurrected anthropological space of the World Fairs and museums. American viewers of/participants in Worlds Apart are encouraged to feel part of a global human ‘race,’ even as the storyline promotes the superiority of the American ‘race’ within an epidermal ranking of nations. Within this schema, race and socio-economic class become conflated, so that people of color are equated with ‘culture,’ and whiteness becomes synonymous with modern ‘civilisation’ (Sinha Roy 2007:573).

A very similar schema is evident in the BBC Three series Last Man Standing, first aired in the UK in 2007, and in the BBC Two series Tribal Wives, which filmed an episode on the island of Kitava during my residence on Kiriwina in mid-2009 and which was originally aired in June 2010. In Last Man Standing, three British and three American athletes with a wide variety of skills and strengths travel around the globe to compete against one another alongside their hosts in a variety of “tribal” sports and games. In Episode 6 of the show’s first season, the men travel to Kiriwina to participate in a Trobriand cricket match. Perhaps surprisingly given that the show features six young and athletic men, there is little emphasis on Trobriand sexuality, though much is made of the supernatural such as the role of magic and spirits in Trobriand life, and the “high” produced by chewing betelnut. The “hardship” trope frames the narrative, which again symbolically reinforces a “semiotic contraction of national identities” to generate “spectacular geographies”—a neo-colonial visual mapping that reaffirms a “natural” hierarchy of nations within the world order (Sinha Roy 2007:572).
Similarly, *Tribal Wives* presents each week a different young English woman who swaps her comfortable but sometimes alienating life in the UK to learn how women live in various communities in the developing world. In Episode 4 of the second series of the programme, Becky, a personal assistant from London’s East End, goes to the “idyllic” island of Kitava where she “struggles” to follow the rules laid down by her hosts and adjust to village social etiquette ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00swhtz](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00swhtz)). The ethos of the programme, according to the episode’s associate producer David Marks (with whom I spoke during the filming of the episode from their base camp in Kitava), is to provide each subject with an “immersive experience” for four weeks, during which the young woman undergoes a “process of self-awareness and can reflect back on her own culture”. Marks, who has studied visual anthropology, referred to the programme as “anthropology from a non-anthropological perspective”. Upon seeing the final cut of the programme, an unhappy Marks confided to me, “I think it says more about media representation of ‘tribal’ culture than anything relevant about Trobriand lives or experiences.”

In addition to physical and emotional discomfort, this episode has a particular focus on corporality, as compared with the other two programmes in this genre discussed here. Barbara, the Trobriand “sister” who helps Becky adjust to her now home, discusses what makes a woman “pretty” when she wears a grass skirt, and there are many shots of phallic looking yams. The viewer is told that in the Trobriands, women go topless in traditional ceremonies, whilst baring the thighs and buttocks is considered offensive; Becky, meanwhile, is upset that she is being asked to conform to Trobriand standards of modesty. Much is made of the fact that in the final celebration of the yam harvest celebrations, Becky finally sheds her Western clothing and agrees to bare her breasts in Trobriand fashion (though with necklaces of leaves and betelnut draped on her chest to preserve some English modesty!). In her monologue to the camera in which she reflects on this, Becky states, “I feel completely involved now, yeah, I feel like one of them, now—I don’t feel like there’s anything between me and them, now, actually.” In embracing her “primitive” self, then, Becky lives out the macrotrope of the primitive/civilised dichotomy. This is further emphasised in the following comment, which was posted on the page of a *Tribal Wives: Papua New Guinea* clip on You Tube:

> These people [Trobriand Islanders] have showed us that the western (anglosaxon [sic] actually) culture is fucked up and dry. These people are great. The western world is not. And these people with their simple life show us our inadequacy.  
> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=860TWOxWCg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=860TWOxWCg)
From Armchair to Airport

Once the desire to see and experience the Other first-hand has been established, a few practical, logistical matters stand in the way between wishing and doing: organising one’s budget, itinerary, documentation, safety, and so on. Once the traveller decides that travel to a given destination will be realised, it is necessary to move from passively consuming images of primitivity to actively planning and preparing for a voyage, an act that requires mobility and adaptability (to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the type of travel chosen; a cruise, for example, requires far less adaptability from the traveller than backpacking on a long-term budget tour). Both exciting and frightening, travel to the unknown is rendered manageable by acquiring the knowledge necessary to allow one to navigate through new environments. Travellers draw on previous experience, and in the case of group tours, rely heavily on the expertise of the local guides, but regardless of mode of travel, most travellers I spoke with did some research about their destination in advance of their departure. Some, however (primarily those on tours or cruise ships), told me they did no research whatsoever, preferring to come without expectations and just enjoy things as they came. For example, Maureen, a Canadian woman in her 50s visiting on a group tour, told me, “I don’t do much research before I go somewhere, because I don’t want other people’s ideas of a place to influence me too much”; and, in a similar vein, Val, a Canadian woman in her 60s visiting on a group tour, stated, “I want to be surprised when I travel, so I didn’t really read anything or try to research this place in advance. I just want to experience it on its own terms.”

Independent travellers, on the other hand, as well as some visitors on organised itineraries, usually learned something about the Trobriands, and PNG more generally, in advance of their travel. Two sources emerged as paramount in aiding travellers in their efforts to make the unknown known, and make travel to “the land of the unexpected”, as PNG is often called, somehow tame enough to be achievable (while retaining enough unknowns and potential danger to make it exciting!). Almost all travellers who researched in advance relied on either or both the Lonely Planet guide book and the internet as the primary sources of their knowledge about the Trobriands and PNG. While National Geographic Magazine and the National Geographic Channel were the most frequently cited sources for generating interest and desire in the first place, these other sources were those sought out to translate desire into action.
One visitor who came to the Trobriands during the Ugwabwena Festival in 2009 summarised succinctly the dearth of useful and accurate travel information easily accessible to the would-be visitor:

This place was almost impossible to research on the internet. There’s [sic] hardly any pictures, and most of them are in black and white and basically just show women’s breasts. All I could find was stuff about women raping men. [Tracy, an Australian woman in her mid 30s, travelling with friends on self-organised visit]

Indeed, type “Trobriand Islands” into Google’s search engine—as many travellers told me they had done, in an initial attempt to learn something more about a place they were considering travelling to, or had decided to travel to—and, as of time of writing, the top three sites listed are all either explicitly about, or have a focus on, the (supposed) sexual freedom of Trobriand Islanders and the Trobriand belief that spirits, not sex, are responsible for pregnancy (e.g., Mosko 1988). In addition to frequent references to “paradise”, magic, and the cultural importance of yams, Trobriand sexuality—and, in particular, the purported rapacious sexual appetites of women, especially at the time of the yam harvest—is a particular preoccupation in travel writing about the islands.

Interestingly, none of these three sites includes photos of the islands or its people, but a Google Images search using the search term “Trobriand Islands” yields hundreds of photographs. An analysis of the first fifty photographs returned makes plain the emphasis on women’s sexuality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject of Photo</th>
<th>Number of Instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women and teenaged girls</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Showing bared breasts)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape/Fauna</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Visual imagery of the Trobriand Islands as produced by a Google Images search for “Trobriand Islands”

Of these images, then, fully 40% depict women or teenage girls, almost always in “traditional” dress including grass skirt, woven arm bands, and floral and herbal decorations; only two of these do not show the bare breasts of the women (Figure 4.3).

Men, too, are generally depicted in their traditional dress, including an areca palm or pandanus wrap to cover the genitals, red turkey cloth tied about the waist, and other
decorations similar to those worn by women. Seventy percent of the photographs depict people (including one of the two historical photographs, in black and white). A large number (24%) of the photos provide spatial orientation in the form of maps on various scales. Only a very few photos are expressly concerned with the physical environment and material objects such as wood carvings. These photos originate from a wide variety of sources: tour and travel operators and general information sites, individual photo albums from sites like Flickr, university anthropology departments, newspaper articles, the PNG business and development forum, and so on.

Figure 4.3: Typical image returned from Google Images search for “Trobriand Islands”. From Airlines PNG website (http://www.apng.com/index.asp?pgid=67)

In one interview with several Australian expatriates in their 30s visiting Kiriwina from Port Moresby, I asked them if they had done any research about the Trobriands in advance of their trip. The following excerpt demonstrates the way in which sexualised bodies are made to represent Trobriand-ness, and primitivity more broadly:

Marie: I had no idea [what to expect]. I tried to do some research on the internet, and there's hardly anything there. I tried to look at pictures...

Max: They're all black and white pictures of naked women.
Indigenous bodies, as Taylor (2011:35) observes, have long been an important feature of tourism-related imagery. Lindstrom (2007) examines this phenomenon through the media of postcards in Vanuatu, arguing that the visual imagery of young, beautiful, sexualised bodies emphasising particular body parts such as painted faces, eyes, breasts, genitalia, and smiling mouths “speak to touristic desires to experience the sexily romantic and the entertainingly exotic” (2007:257). Indeed, the sexualisation and emphasis on the corporal is common in many “exotic” locations, such as the Caribbean and Southeast Asia, but is perhaps nowhere more a part of the metanarrative of the popular imagination than in the South Pacific. Such indigenous bodies are racialised and gendered; combined with ideologies of colonialism, what is produced is an imaginary Other merging the feminine and the exotic (Desmond 1999:5; Stella 2007:143-151).

These images provide visual markers to accompany the texts of the aforementioned “top three” hits returned by the Google search engine which provide a textual narration of a highly sexualised place, the mythical “Islands of Love”. Consider, for example, the following excerpt by travel writer Isabella Tree, from the website travelintelligence.com:

One beautiful, warm evening, the villagers came down to the beach to rehearse their traditional dances for a local sing-sing. Each dance celebrated a different crop, and all reverberated with sexual suggestion. The girls performed a seductive, swaying cassava dance, making full play of the swishing grass miniskirts slung low on their hips. Their breasts were bare and glowing with coconut oil and yellow pollen. Their hands snaked from side to side.

The mweki-mweki dance performed by the boys was not so subdued. To the fiercely rhythmic sound of drums and whistles, the young bloods of the village lined up in a column three-deep. They wore nothing but their belts and cache-sexes of dried palm leaves. Their torsos were generously oiled and sprinkled with pollen, and they stamped their feet like toreadors, kicking up the sand and whipping up a fever of excitement among themselves and the girls who were watching them. In time to the drums and a lewd, untranslatable chant, they marched down the beach, thrusting and grinding their pelvises with gleeful vulgarity. They lined up in front of my camera as if daring me to hold my ground and then gyrated off down the beach. A band of infants ran behind the group, squealing with delight. [http://www.travelintelligence.com/travel-writing/culture-shock]

Such depictions are typical of gendered representation of the exotic Other. Women are “seductive”, “swishing” their hips, “glowing”, but their movements are depicted in language that suggests benign submission; men “stamp”, “kick”, “thrust”, and “grind”,

Marie: Yep. Lots of pictures of naked women, not many pictures of the—or, half-naked women, not many pictures of the scenery or the villages. Just breasts, basically.
demonstrating their “lewdness” and “vulgarity”. As Marshment (1997:31) observes in the context of her analysis of imagery on holiday brochures, “the ideologies which associate women with physical beauty and docility are employed in taming the disturbing potential of the ‘other’ embodied in these images of ‘primitive’ manhood.”

In the same article, however, Tree depicts a rather contrasting image to that represented in the passage above. She describes her conversation with a Trobriand man living and working in mainland PNG. Upon informing the man of her intent to visit his home island during the time of the yam harvest, the man, Tree writes, “burst out laughing” and told her,

‘It’s a crazy time of year... The big yam harvest will be coming in now. And women will be given permission by the paramount chief to capture men and have their way with them.’

‘You mean, assault them?’ I asked, disbelieving. ‘Sexually.’

‘That’s it,’ said Nick. ‘They will rape them.’ He pronounced it ‘rep,’ as in travelling salesman, and made it sound just as casual.

‘The women lie in wait in the bushes,’ he continued. ‘They jump out on a man when he goes to work in the gardens or even while he’s just waiting to get a lift to town. It’s always a man from another clan; women will never rape men from their own village. It’s a kind of ritual humiliation. It’s a very dangerous time for a man to be walking by himself. Men will be going round in twos and threes, just in case.’

Now, the disturbing and potentially violent nature of the “primitive” Other is attributed to women, as well as to men. This excerpt demonstrates well Stella’s (2007:140) assertion that “the construction of the native body as an object of both desire and revulsion suggests that the body may be seen as a potent metaphor for culture.” The idea that women might be so aggressive is presented as both intriguing and potentially terrifying; Tree writes that, on her approach into Kiriwina by plane, “I was feeling like a nun about to enter the world of Bacchus and badly in need of a chaperone.” Such representations are examples of the linguistic forms Stasch (2011b:9) identifies in his analysis of travel writing about the Korowai in West Papua as a recurring motif of “the dangerousness, crudeness, and transgressiveness of the visited world, and on the traveller’s qualities of forbearance in relation to those attributes.”

The highly sexualised and potentially dangerous nature of the Other is also the focus of another of the top sites returned on Google Search, a blog written by Aaron Swartz, founder and director of the nonprofit political action group Demand Progress.
Swartz’s entry on the Trobriand Islands is entitled “The Sexual Life of Savages”, referencing Malinowski’s 1929 book *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia* (in fact, all of the first three sites returned on a Google Search for “Trobriand Islands” mention this title). This entry discusses the “virgin birth” belief (as does Tree’s essay); that is, that Trobrianders believe there is no link between sexual intercourse and pregnancy, but rather that a foetus enters a woman’s womb when a spirit (a deceased member of the same clan) returns from the island of Tuma to start life anew (Malinowski 1929:172–175, 1948:216; Montague 1971:358; Mosko 1988; Weiner 1988:54 and many others). Schwartz also suggests a certain violence to the sexual practises of Trobriand Islanders, as the following except demonstrates:

The islanders don’t kiss, he [Malinowski] explains. Instead, they scratch. The girls scratch the guys so hard that they draw blood and, if the guys can withstand the pain, then they move forward to having sex. The ethnographer (as Malinowski calls himself) verified this by noting that just about everyone on the island had noticeable scratches. And while everybody is having sex whenever they want, premarital meal-sharing is a big no-no. You’re not supposed to go out for dinner together until after you get married. [http://www.aaronsw.com/weblog/savagesex](http://www.aaronsw.com/weblog/savagesex)

The first site on the Google Search list, not surprisingly, is Wikipedia. This site is less focussed on sexualising Trobriand Islanders than the other two sites discussed here, but still manages to eroticise while also providing more mundane information about geography, language, food, and magic, for example. The section on “Marriage Customs” informs the reader that

At seven or eight years of age, Trobriand children begin to play erotic games with each other and imitate adult seductive attitudes. About four or five years later, they begin to pursue sexual partners in earnest. They change partners often. Women are just as assertive and dominant as men in pursuing or refusing a lover. This is not only allowed but encouraged. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trobriand_Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trobriand_Islands)

Reference is also made to Trobriand beliefs about conception, as well as to the use of beauty magic:

The beauty magic words are chanted into coconut oil, and then a person rubs it onto their skin, or into flowers and herbs that decorate their armbands and hair. A person may direct magic spells toward heightening the visual and olfactory effects of their body to induce erotic feelings in their lover. Some spells are thought to make a person beautiful, even those who would normally be considered ugly. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trobriand_Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trobriand_Islands)

And finally, in the section on yam exchanges, yet another reference to sexuality:

Young people come to the gardens dressed in their most festive traditional clothes early on the day the yams are delivered to the yam house. The young people are all
related to the gardener, and carry the yam baskets to the owner's hamlet. When they get to the owner's hamlet, they sing out to announce the arrival of the yams while thrusting out their hips in a sexually provocative motion. This emphasises the relation between yams and sexuality. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trobriand_Islands]

Senft (1998b) reflects on the long history of depicting Trobriand Islanders as hyper-sexual. Malinowski is, of course, credited with first drawing attention to the sexual habits of Trobriand Islanders in his aforementioned 1929 monograph, which covers such provocative topics as the sexual behaviour of children, adolescents and adults; sexual innuendoes in games and verbal interaction; sexual taboos and rules and customs associated with marriage; acts considered by Trobrianders as sexual aberrations; and preferred forms of sexual intercourse. Although in fact, these topics are covered from a rather dry scientific/sociological perspective, the provocative title nonetheless attracted much attention, and not just from within anthropological circles. References to the “Islands of Love” (a phrase not to be found in Malinowski’s writing) soon appeared in popular media, such as newspapers and periodicals (Senft 1998b:121). Senft summarises a number of textual representations in German language publications, often extremely licentious in nature. For example, Jean-Michel Cousteau and Mose Richards’ 1989 book Cousteau’s Papua New Guinea Journey misrepresents the phenomenon of *yausa* (Malinowski 1929:231) as “gang-rape”. Paul Theroux, the well known travel writer and novelist, visited the Trobriands and wrote about the sensuality and sexuality of Trobrianders both in his 1992 article “Under the Spell of the Trobriand Islands”, published in National Geographic, and in his 1992 book The Happy Isles of Oceania (Theroux 1992a, 1992b). The “Islands of Love” trope does not actually appear in the article, but features prominently in the chapters on the Trobriands in The Happy Isles of Oceania. He suggests the during the yam festival, boys and girls engage in mass public fornication (Theroux 1992b:151)—just one of many misrepresentations perpetuated in popular travel writing about the Trobriands. The novelist Erica Jong makes repeated references to the Trobriands in her 1990 novel Any Woman’s Blues, calling Trobriand Islanders “the only people who have the perfect answer to love and sex” (Jong 1990:325). Readers are told, quite inaccurately (it is, after all, a work of fiction):

Well, the kids are totally sexually free from puberty to the age of eighteen or so. They fuck each other like mad, get all their curiosity out of their systems. Then, at the age of eighteen, they marry and remain monogamous—except for the three-day-a-year Yam Festival, when all bets are off! [Jong 1990:325]
In a similar vein, during my residence on Kiriwina a writer for the Italian edition of the magazine *Vanity Fair* visited the islands to research a story, which similarly focussed on adolescent sexuality. The title page makes reference to “orgies”, and the opening caption can be loosely translated thus:

Pacific Ocean, Papua New Guinea, Kiriwina. Nearly one hundred years ago, an anthropologist christened it the island of free love. Even today, in terms of love, the natives are in the Stone Age. There are no rules, no age limits, and women, if they happen to meet a man while out in an evening, may rape him. Think you are different? Well, think again. [Vitelli 2009:237]

The author later makes reference to the “tremendous bacchanal” of the yam harvest, and the freedom with which young people negotiate sexual liaisons. The article is rife with factual errors, focussing particularly on the freedom and aggressiveness of young women.

While many travellers were either disappointed or relieved to learn on arrival that the bacchanal they had been led to believe existed in the Trobriands had been, it seemed, wildly exaggerated, there were certainly those who identified this reputation as an impetus in their decision to travel to the Trobriands. For example, Bill, a virile bachelor aged 59 when I interviewed him, proclaimed a voracious sexual appetite that is only slightly tempering as he ages. He told me that he had made a decision early on in life never to marry, and claimed to have bedded over 1,000 women. He and a fellow male traveller of similar age had spent the previous day with two Trobriand girls, aged about sixteen. When I asked him whether the girls’ tender years presented any moral quandary, he admitted that to some extent, it did, but justified that these girls were very “well-developed and precocious”. The exotic/erotic reputation of the Trobriands “has been in my mind for 30 years, so I decided it was finally time to come see it for myself.”

**Travel Planning**

As discussed above, there is little practical travel information to be found on the internet for the would-be traveller to the Trobriand Islands, and only marginally more useful travel planning information available about PNG as a whole. A few tour companies, either based in Port Moresby or abroad, offer organised trips to PNG, some of which include the Trobriands on their itinerary, and several cruise ships ply the turquoise waters of the Solomon Sea; these will be discussed in Chapter 6. For the independent traveller, perhaps the most comprehensive source of travel information on the internet is that included on the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (PNG TPA) website, which is returned near the top of the list for most search engines under the search term “Papua New Guinea”.

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The PNG TPA’s current tagline is “A Million Different Journeys”, which replaced their previous brand, “Land of the Unexpected”. Their section About Papua New Guinea offers a short summary of the history, peoples, and languages of the country presented in a largely factual and unembellished way. One does not in this instance find the regurgitation of the common tropes of first contact, hardship, peril, and so on; given that the mandate of the PNG TPA is to encourage tourism, it is a fine line between making PNG seem exciting by suggesting possible discomfort or danger, and making it accessible and benign to attract a wider clientele. Links are available to various activities, accommodations, and tour operators, and the site also provides information about airlines and connection cities to make travel planning as easy as possible. However, even the TPA can’t resist a reference to the Trobriand Islands’ reputation for rampant sexuality and its importance in anthropology:

From June–August the Milamala yam harvest festival is held. The Milamala starts with a procession of men carrying the newly harvested yams from the garden storage hut to the village yam houses while the women ahead sing and dance. During the festival time, traditional rites are observed. It was from Malinowski’s anthropological studies of the customs and sexual practises during this time that The Trobriands became known as The Islands of Love. 

[http://www.papuanewguinea.travel/milnebay]

**Lonely Planet**

Often referred to as “The Bible” for independent travellers, but also frequently tooted by those on group tours, is the ubiquitous Lonely Planet guidebook series. While for more popular destinations, especially throughout Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America, one might find half a dozen or more travel guide books aimed at a variety of budgets, traveller types, and specialty interests, the Lonely Planet series is the only reasonably comprehensive guidebook available to the traveller to PNG and the Solomon Islands, which are both covered in a single title.

The introductory section of the most recent edition (McKinnon et al. 2008) idealises a non-monetary economy, after pointing out that neither PNG nor the Solomon Islands should be judged by their capital cities; the provinces, they assure the would-be visitor, are places of “incredible natural beauty and warm Melanesian generosity.... In these lands where gardening is next to Godliness, few people go hungry and villagers with no cash income at all can still feed themselves” (2008:12). PNG is referred to as a “challenging” place to visit, due to a lack of both infrastructure and reliable travel information in books and on websites, which might, the authors suggest, leave the traveller
feeling as though he or she is “stepping into the great unknown” (2008:15). The guide goes on to remind readers, “But this is exactly why travellers find these places so compelling. Nothing is contrived for tourists and every experience is authentic. The striking natural beauty and myriad complex cultures offer some riveting and truly life-affirming experiences” (2008:15).

In these few sentences, the authors of Lonely Planet’s *Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands* have managed to exemplify what is ultimately the point I am making in this chapter. First, PNG is one of “those places” — it becomes a synecdoche for primitivity/authenticity, a specific place in which a metanarrative of radical alterity can be played out to maximum effect. Second, the future narrative of bodily experience in a given travel experience is largely pre-scripted through the sorts of representations consumed before, during, or even after the actual travel event. And third, a reified idea of “culture” is what forms the basis of both the narratives that emerge from specific travel experiences and the larger metanarratives of the Other. This reification is evident throughout the guidebook; for example, the intrepid traveller is assured that “wandering off to stay in the villages is not only a great way to see the country and witness the culture, it’s also inexpensive...” (McKinnon et al. 2008:16, my emphasis), and indeed, there is an entire section of the volume entitled “The Culture”, which includes information on regional identities, lifestyle, economy, population, sports, media, religion, arts, and women/gender.

The guide recommends several possible itineraries, aimed to fit particular time frames or special interests like surfing or diving. One of the recommended routes is described as having “a Joseph Conrad feel to it; taking slow boats to remote places, crossing borders without showing passports, living and moving as locals do” (McKinnon et al. 2008:16). In contrast to the “friendly” and “generous” locals described earlier, here the authors turn to the other side of the coin, trotting out the tropes of darkness and danger, even suggesting quasi-legal border crossings and a truly “local” experience, though this is clearly not for the faint of heart. The authors also make a point of stressing the attraction PNG has held for anthropologists, which is clearly presented as further authenticating the destination as truly primitive, including the obligatory reference to cannibalism.

The trope of racing against time and the inevitable onslaught of modernity is not to be forgotten, either. The guide notes that already, some Papua New Guineans are living urban lifestyles and using mobile phones, though the majority of the population continues to “inhabit remote areas and [villagers] may never have seen a town or a white person” (McKinnon et al. 2008:33): the first contact story, once again retold. But, the authors warn,
things in PNG are “changing quickly” due to development, especially for resource extraction (timber, minerals, liquid natural gas), as well as thanks to the role of the Church: “Christianity has a tight grip on most people, but it hasn’t supplanted traditional beliefs” (McKinnon et al. 2008:36).

Of course, the narrative of primitivity would not be complete without reference to bodies and sexuality, and associated ideas about morality:

The display of women’s thighs in Melanesian culture is sexually provocative, but in villages women will only cover their breasts if foreigners are present. There’s a distinct difference between the way local people see themselves and how they expect Westerners to see them, and this harks back to the way Christian missionaries and conservative mastas [colonial officials] expected women to cover themselves—it is not an indigenous custom. [McKinnon et al. 2008:40–41]

This explanation is interesting, as it suggests several things. One is the tension between free and pure, primitive types of dress, where modesty is not a necessary virtue, as opposed to Christian values and ideas about morality; there is an implicit, but not obvious, subtext suggesting it is Christianity and Westernisation that have corrupted Melanesian morality, rather than providing a sense of morality in the first place. Again, an emphasis is placed on “custom” and how things would be, and are, outside the gaze of foreigners. In fact, based on my own long-term work in the Trobriands, I know that at least there, most women do choose to cover their breasts most of the time even when in their home village, but by presenting the reader with this explanation, it allows the visitor to imagine what it would be like if he or she wasn’t there to make people alter their (purported) usual habits. In reality, of course, Trobrianders recognise themselves to be most beautiful when wearing traditional dress, which means being topless and showing one’s thighs, and most visitors are treated to such a spectacle at some point during their visit.

The Lonely Planet guide describes the Trobriand Islands, in the introduction to the chapter on Central, Oro, and Milne Bay Provinces, as “legendary...home to the exotic Milamala Festival of ‘free’ love, cricket, and—above all—yams” (McKinnon et al. 2005:85). The Lonely Planet formula presents, in each section, “highlights” for each region. Amongst the highlights listed in this chapter are “playing cricket on Trobriand Islands and immersing yourself in the islands’ unique culture” (2005:85). Perhaps more than any of the representations discussed in this chapter, the essentialising descriptions in the Lonely Planet guide are the most directly implicated in forming visitors’ expectations and desires regarding their Trobriand cultural experience.
The section dedicated to the Trobriand Islands begins by mentioning Malinowski and the importance of the islands to anthropology. However, the authors insist that “despite the dozens of anthropologists, missionaries, television crews, and tourists who have since followed Malinowski, the Trobriands remain one of the most culturally intact places you could possibly find” (McKinnon et al. 2005:118). While recognising outside influences, there is a clear and deliberate underplaying of the volume of visitors (“dozens” seems rather a dramatic understatement) such that the “intact” nature of Trobriand culture is preserved, making it well worth the potential visitor’s time, money, and discomfort. All of this is justified, Lonely Planet suggests, thanks to the cultural experience one can look forward to “a strict matrilineal social system, enormous and highly decorated yam houses, exquisite carvings and the colourful festivals of clan prestige will keep your head turning” (McKinnon et al. 2008:118). There is reference to beliefs in spirits and magic, *kula* exchanges, and the role of the Paramount Chief. Not surprisingly, reference is also made to Malinowski’s “provocatively titled” *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* and readers are informed, “Mention to any mainlander that you are off to see the Milamala Festival and you’ll be greeted with raised eyebrows, queasy smirks, and any number of puns along the lines of whose yams exactly are ripe for harvesting” (2008:119). The guide does not, however, encourage the expectation of the “cultural experience” in the Trobriands including sexual liaisons between tourists and oversexed locals:

> When it is held, the Milamala Festival may culminate in a week or two of canoe racing, cricket matches, ribald dancing, and, yes, free love. Before you get too excited, it’s worth noticing that visitors with boiling loins usually have to make their own entertainment because, while yams are considered objects of great beauty, *dim dim* (white people) are not. [McKinnon et al. 2008:119]

In its own way, this too is a misrepresentation. In actual fact, white/light skin is considered attractive by Trobrianders, and it is generally those with the lightest-coloured skin who are considered the most beautiful. What is more, both Trobriand men and women regularly asked me if I could help them marry one of my white “friends”, not only because *dim dim* are considered physically attractive but due to the imagined material and monetary benefits such a union would inevitably bring.

The Milamala Festival is promoted in the guidebook’s seventh edition as the most “colourful” time to visit the Trobriands. Other attractions include the chief’s residence and elaborate yam house in the village of Omarakana (Burke et al. 2005:81); swimming and snorkelling at the “picture-postcard” beach at Kaibola village (Burke et al. 2005:83); the deep limestone caves housing burial antiques and skeletal remains near Matawa village;
the “beautiful, curving sand beach edging a cool, deep, protected lagoon” (Burke et al. 2005:83) at Wawela village; scattered war relics; and the villages of Kaisiga and Tauwema on Kaileuna Island, which boast “beautiful white sand beaches and predictably relaxed locals” (Burke et al. 2005:83). The visitor is directed to the high-quality carvings famous in the Trobriands, particularly the bowls carved from ebony or rosewood and laboriously polished with a pig’s tusk, the intricately carved and detailed stools, and the “magnificent” splash boards and canoe prows (Burke et al. 2005:31; McKinnon et al. 2008:122). A text box provides elaboration on the three primary themes identified as making the Trobriands unique: “Yams, sex, and cricket”.

It is armed with the expectations and desires created through the sources described in this chapter—macrotopes of primitivity of which PNG stands as an exemplar; information and misinformation about the Trobriands gleaned from superficial sources such as the internet and the Lonely Planet guide; and visual and textual representations in popular or documentary media about the Trobriands (sometimes viewed or read as part of the travel experience itself, and used as a point of reference in narrating the experience)—that the tourists who make the long, expensive journey to the Trobriand Islands embody and play out, and later use to frame the very story of their expedition. In the following chapters, I turn from the creation of desire to the actual experience of travel. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork in guesthouses and villages, at the airstrip and at the wharf, or travelling by passenger van on group tours, I now turn to some of the particular ways in which Trobriand culture is commoditised and consumed, and the ways in which these processes are understood and related by both those who provide and those who receive such experiences. I recognise the moment of transaction as a site of intercultural interaction, which has significant implications for each party’s understanding of the Other.

20 Although numerous sources carried this story, one such example is:  

A number of online and print media carried this story. One such source is:  
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/frenchpolynesiatahiti/8830733/Cannibal-fear-over-German-tourist.html

Episode 6, Season 3 of Survivorman originally aired on 19 December, 2008 on Canada’s Outdoor Life Network (OLN) and internationally on the Discovery Channel and the Science Channel.


Worlds Apart was produced by Glenda Hersch and Steven Weinstock of True Entertainment for National Geographic, and has aired on various international networks.

http://www.papua-adventures.com/about.php

http://www.berkeleymedia.com/catalog/berkeleymedia/films/arts_humanities/trobriand_cricket_an_ingenious_response_to_colonialism

These include the BBC’s Strangers Abroad series Episode 5, entitled Off the Verandah (1986); BBCFour’s Tales from the Jungle: Malinowski and the Trobriand Islanders (2006); and a documentary film made by Malinowski’s grandson entitled Savage Memory (2011).

Educated Trobriand Islanders often requested that I bring them a copy of ethnographic books, especially those of Malinowski and Weiner, as a reference for the “old ways” of doing things.

The film vanished from Australian cinemas three weeks after its release and was never released in the USA. The Internet Movie Database (IMDB) gives its box office gross as AU$314,549. It did, however, recently screen on television in New Zealand.

I place this term in quotes here as just what this means is not always clear and agreed upon, either within the Trobriand community or as viewed by outsiders. This will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Malinowski glosses yausa as “orgiastic assaults by women” (1929:231), and attributes such practice to residents of the southern part of Kiriwina and the island of Vakuta, areas he describes as exhibiting “a certain coarseness of character and habit”. He describes such assaults in great detail (1929:232), but notes that this is based only on “hearsay” as he did not witness such activities. Likewise, I was told stories of the practice of yausa, also as practised in Kilivila (northern Kiriwina), though it was always emphasised that this was something from the past, and that with the acceptance of Christianity such habits had been abandoned.
CHAPTER 5

SPECTACULAR CULTURE:
Performance and Festivals

As I was sitting in my house catching up on fieldnotes late one morning a few
months into my fieldwork, the Kiriwina Lodge bus pulled up in my village, and four
European tourists were disgorged in a tangle of cameras and lenses. The visit was
unscheduled, and most village residents were either in their gardens or attending mortuary
distributions in another village, so only a few elderly women and small children were
present. The visitors had come, their local guide informed me, because they had been told
that Yalumgwa was one of the “most traditional” villages in the Trobriands, and this is
what they wanted to see (Figure 5.1). My fieldnotes from that day record the following:

They asked me about traditional dancing in the village. I said yes, people know
how to dance and they do it if they have occasion to. Well, they asked, would there
be cricket? Well...no, not just randomly in the middle of a good day for garden
work! And not really much played anymore anyway... They looked exasperated by
the fact that people weren’t spending their whole day in full dress dancing and
singing—their idea of ‘traditional’, it would seem! They asked if dancing could be
organised. I said some people were away and most were in the gardens—dancing
was fairly easily organised for a day ahead, but not that easy to do at a moment’s
notice. Still, a message was sent that they were willing to pay K200 for a dance,
and soon people were scurrying—someone went to the gardens, and the [women]
who were looking after the children scrambled to dress and paint soba [face paint] to
do a Sipolu ‘dance on demand’. It was all obviously contrived at their request,
which they then complained about! When the dance was finished, Krista asked me,
‘Tell me, is that really the way they dance, traditionally? I won’t tell the others if
you tell me it isn’t.’ They asked lots of questions about how the “real” dance was,
how many women it should be, etc. I said I’d only seen it at the Ugwabwena
Festival, which was also an ‘organised event’—I later tried to explain how dancing
is usually associated with an especially good harvest, which we didn’t have this
year—same as cricket. The Swiss... told me they were ‘totally disappointed’ in the
Trobriands, because there is ‘none of the old culture’. They were quite vocal about
this; Krista told me that, shaking a finger at some Vakutans [Vakuta is one of the
smaller Trobriand Islands], they accused, ‘You people have no culture!’

When I later interviewed Olga, one of these visitors, she told me,

We wanted to see what [people] were doing, really, in former times—authentically.
And that’s what we asked this morning for in the village. First, we got the
information it’s not possible, you need a day of preparation, and they are all in the
gardens and so on, and uh, OK, it was my fault perhaps, because I make them do it,
against my principle.... We did not think that it was a reflection of Trobriand
culture, but we were thankful that at least something happened. No, there was no
such thing as, “Oh yes, now we have had the culture.” No.
Perhaps the most emblematic cultural expression in the Trobriand Islands is the performance of “traditional” dance. I place “traditional” in quotation marks as this term, as has been discussed, is a problematic one not only for anthropologists, but for Trobrianders as well. I frequently and repeatedly asked questions about which dances were considered traditional, and why, and the answers I received were quite variable, though most informants agreed on some points. I begin this chapter by sketching out what Trobriand dance entails, as this cultural form has not been systematically examined by previous ethnographers in the Trobriands, and demonstrate how it is enacted both in village-based and tourist-oriented performances. This form of expression is seen by Trobrianders as a key representation of Trobriand culture. The distinctions made by Trobrianders, as well as by church and government officials and tourists, about the different types of dance are a significant pivot around which discourses of tradition and authenticity circulate. I examine the range of settings in which dance is frequently performed and place Trobriand dance in an ethnohistorical perspective, given that “tradition” suggests connection or continuity from the past. Then, I tease out the meaning inherent in the discourses of Trobriand Islanders about the cultural significance of dance and its role as a cultural product in the tourism industry, and the conflicts at play between tradition and Christianity. My purpose here is to draw out the complicated and often conflicting ideas about what is “traditional” and “authentic”, and how this reflects projections about the exotic Other on both sides of

Figure 5.1: Tourists watch a dance performance in Modawosi hamlet
the tourism coin, through an examination of the production and consumption of performances for tourists as one of several sites of intercultural encounter between tourists and Trobrianders. I also look at the spectacle of performance as a manifestation and reproduction of essentialised ideals about primitivity. Debord (1967:1) calls such spectacle “separation perfected”, and Igoe (2010:378) claims it is “the ultimate expression of alienation and fetishisation”. In this chapter, as I do in the chapters to follow, I examine ideas and attitudes about cultural production and consumption from the perspectives of both producers and consumers, with particular attention to the ways in which ideas about authenticity, tradition, meaning and value are differently conceived, but of primary concern to both tourists and Trobrianders (see also MacCarthy 2012a).

**Types of Trobriand Dance**

Trobrianders pride themselves on being the best dancers—the most skilled, the most beautiful, with the most colourful and striking costumes—in the whole of PNG. There are, broadly, two kinds of Trobriand dance: “traditional” dances, as they are called by Trobrianders themselves, which are performed either without musical accompaniment or to the beat of drums of various sizes, sometimes including chants or songs, and should be performed wearing full traditional dress; and “other” dances, which have no generic or collective name, but are performed in only partially traditional dress or else in Western clothing, often to the accompaniment of guitars and sometimes tambourines or keyboards, or to pre-recorded pop music. The latter dances are, of course, a more recent addition to the Trobriand repertoire, and are frequently associated with church functions. While most Trobriand churches neither ban nor condemn outright dance performed in traditional dress (which requires women to bare their breasts), there is an implicit suggestion that certain “moral values” should be upheld. During Women’s Fellowship meetings, for example, women often dance songs associated with *tapwaroru* (church), generally using Polynesian-inspired movements. Rather than grass skirts, the women usually wear skirts sewn from colourful calico and matching or white T-shirts (Figure 5.2). During government-sponsored Culture Shows, groups from and around Losuia often perform these dances. “Station” people (those living in Losuia) are often accused by “inland” people (north of Losuia, in the area known as Kilivila) of having no knowledge of *real* traditional dance, and of being *minatapwaroru* (church people) at the expense of retaining their culture.
While people enjoy performing these dances, and especially listening to pre-recorded pop music (usually from locally popular Melanesian artists) when a cassette, machine, and batteries can be obtained, these dances are considered something quite apart from traditional dance. They are almost never performed at commissioned performances for tourists, as Trobrianders are well aware that visitors are much more interested in seeing dances done in full traditional dress. However, traditional dance is not just about pleasing the tourists; the sense of excitement, the mood that is created by the elaborate ritual of dressing, anointing oneself with oil, and decorating oneself creates an entirely different atmosphere for the dancers as well as for their audience, be they locals (Trobrianders come in droves to see traditional dance) or tourists. Trobrianders are reflexive about the importance of traditional dance as a mark of their unique “culture”; perhaps an example of what Turner (1986:24) calls “performative reflexivity”, a reflection on the socio-cultural constituents “that make up their public ‘selves’”. And yet, many Trobrianders also resist the idea that traditional dance is the only, or primary, marker of their unique identity; for example, Kevin Kaidoga, a member of the Council of Chiefs, told me,

Trobriand culture is more than just dancing. Milamala [the yam festival, discussed below] should be first and foremost about preserving and maintaining our traditions. Tourism, and the money it brings—this is good for us, but it should be secondary to the primary goal of celebrating Trobriand Island culture.
Most Trobrianders and tourists agree, however, that a visit to the Trobriands would not be complete without witnessing at least one performance put on by dancers in full traditional dress (Figure 5.3). The emphasis placed on both appearance—physical attributes and the quality of one’s grass skirt and other decorations—and execution or technique cannot be underestimated. In order to gain a more embodied and experiential understanding of this form of cultural expression, as I asked the women in my village to teach me a traditional Trobriand dance in advance of a feast. My training regimen was intense, with my bubus (relatives on my “father’s” side) coming for rehearsals several nights a week for several hours at a time. I was corrected and made to repeat the simple movements time and again, so that they would be done correctly and everyone would judge me as mokwita imkilivila (“really from northern Kiriwina”) when I performed. My appearance was also commented on: the shade of my skin; the size of my stomach, hips, and thighs; the shape of my calves.

Figure 5.3: Male and female performers at Ugwabwena Festival

Culturally defined ideas of beauty are brought to the fore during dance performances, and those dancers judged the most beautiful are also expected to be skilled performers. A “beautiful” (na/tominabweta) dancer will, I was told, have pale and unblemished skin, shining with coconut oil; thick, frizzy hair in which feathers will stick
firmly; a pointy nose (not flat); perky, mid-sized breasts for women (not too large, and not fallen); and a flat stomach, wide hips and thighs, and meaty calves. One should be neither very tall, nor very short. Beauty, if not inherent to the dancer, can be enhanced with decorations, superior technique, and beauty magic (kaimwasila).

In the performance of traditional dance in particular, a formalised system of compliments to the dancers recognises publicly those who excel in both appearance and execution. This symbolic action is called tilewai, and is translated by Malinowski (1929:297) as “flattery-bond”, although he does not discuss the system in great detail. There are several ways in which one can signify tilewai: by removing a decoration from the dancer during performance (a feather, a fragrant herb or streamer from an armband, or the butia [flower] garland, for example); by tying a piece of string or vine around the arm or leg of the dancer; or even by physically removing the dancer from the group by picking them up and carrying them from the dancing ground. A big tilewai, usually on the part of a group, is signified by placing a large stick or spear in the ground in front of the dancer.

Tilewai should not be given within a kumila (clan), as it is the responsibility of clan members to repay it. It also cannot be given by those in a close tabu relationship to the dancer; thus, a woman’s father or brother must not tilewai her, nor would a man’s sister tilewai him. Tilewai can be instigated by either an individual or a group, and must be repaid immediately. In the case of tokai (commoners, i.e., members of an unranked dala or matriclan), tilewai can be repaid with a small amount of cash, some betelnut, or other small gift. However, should one tilewai a chief or member of a chiefly lineage, the expected return payment is much higher, as much as a pig or a large clay pot. This must be done immediately, such that there is pressure on the clan members of each dancer to be able to repay any tilewai that might result when one performs. Eventually, this prestation will in turn be reciprocated. When I first arrived and I did not understand the significance of tilewai, I found it distracting and even annoying that people were constantly walking up to the dancers and removing decorations; how could I get a good picture with all of these other people in the way? In dances put on at guest lodges, people are discouraged from giving tilewai for this very reason. However, at village-based performances, and even in those put on for cultural festivals such as the Ugwabwena Festival and the Kiriwina Cultural Show (discussed below), the emcee may explain the custom and encourage tourists and other visitors to participate in tilewai themselves; their actions will be reciprocated by a member of the dancer’s clan giving a small wood carving, basket, or mat to the visitor to “thank” them for their participation and compliment to the dancer, with the
The intent of giving the tourist a heightened sense of participation and authenticity in the performance.

**Traditional Dance**

There are a number of types of traditional dance. The most common is a dance called *Wosimwaya*, or Circle Dance. This is, more accurately, a genre of dance with variations in particular actions, movements, and beats from village to village, but with a number of characteristics in common. The Circle Dance is, true to its name, performed by a large group of dancers—usually both males and females—dancing in a large circular pattern, surrounding the *kepo'u*, men who stand at the centre of the circle (today, usually wearing Western clothes) and play drums (Figure 5.4). There are two types of drum, collectively called *kesosau*. The larger drum (*kei'u'ula*) produces a deep bass note. The smaller (*katunenia*) has a higher pitch and is the one that the dancers must listen to carefully, as this is the drum that directs the dancers in timing their movements. The tallest and most attractive dancers—those with the whitest and most unblemished skin, a desirable shape, and superior skills—dance at the front; the youngest/smallest, less attractive, or less adept dances are placed at the end of the line. Usually, the dancers will hold a *bisila*, a strip of flattened, dried pandanus leaf which they move and shake gracefully in time with the drum beat and footwork. Another particular characteristic of *Wosimwaya* is that it is the only dance in which men, as well as women, wear grass skirts. Men’s grass skirts are longer than women’s, and are layered with a petticoat underneath; men also wear under their skirts the *yobuwa* (made from the areca palm leaf) or *mimeye’o* (made from pandanus) wrap which covers the genitalia, and is tied with a cloth belt at the waist. The length of a woman’s skirt is dependent on her marital status, but a woman—married or single—should have her skirt open on one side to expose her thigh, and she must not wear anything underneath her skirt, the better for observers to judge her beauty.

*Wosimwaya* can be literally translated as “old song(s)”, and are considered as having been passed “from the ancestors” and are thus highly valued by Trobrianders as an integral part of their cultural heritage. Although he does not call them by name, Malinowski made some observations about such dances as they were practised in the early twentieth century, which seems little different than today:
In some dances a painted dancing shield is used [a particular variant “owned” by only a few villages; both the dance and the shield or paddle are called *kedebu*], in others they hold in their hands streamers of pandanus leaves. These latter dances, always of much slower rhythm [than other traditional dances], are disfigured (to the European taste) by the custom of men wearing women’s grass petticoats. The majority of dances are circular, the drum-beaters and singers standing in the middle, while the dancers move round them in a ring. [Malinowski 1916:373]

**Figure 5.4: Circle Dance (Wosimwaya), Kiriwina Cultural Show**

These Circle Dances are performed island-wide, and although individual villages may favour slight variations in specific decoration, beats, or movements, all look rather monotonously similar to the casual observer. Any occasion in which traditional dance will be performed will generally include one or even dozens of interpretations of *Wosimwaya*. It is danced by people of all ages, but most particularly children and adolescents, young unmarried boys (*tokubukwabiya*) and girls (*nakubukwabiya*).

The second general category of traditional dances, for which I was unable to elicit a general collective name despite numerous attempts, comprise all other dances that came “from the ancestors”. Among these are a series of dances that are generally performed by
dancers standing in rows in groups of about nine to more than 20 dancers. For these dances, drums are occasionally used; in some cases, lyrics are sung or chanted by the dancers, and the beat may be kept by, for example, shakers made from seeds (Figure 5.6). Usually, the dancers will hold some accessory in their hands: a strip of pandanus (*bisila*), a cassowary feather (*wawega*), a shell shaker (*kwada*). Some of these dances are meant to be performed only by women, others only by men, and some by either men or women. Also in this general category is a particular dance, called *Uliya*, usually performed by young boys in which the participants grasp a long pole called a *ketakewa*, and lock arms around it while standing very close to one another (Figure 5.5). They then crouch down and move by collectively shifting their weight from one foot to the other while slowly moving forward, imitating the movement of a millipede (*mwanita*). The tug-of-war (*Biu*), the night-time dance called *Kalibom*, and the ring-around-the-rosy-type dance called *Kaseysuya* also fall into this general category. These dances could (and sometimes are, informally, though there are no strict categories in the local vernacular or conceptualisation) be further subdivided along various criteria: whether performed by men, women or both, or by young people or married adults; whether performed by day or by night; what formations or accessories are used, and so on; but for the purpose of simplicity, they will be here collectively referred to as the “other (i.e., not Circle Dance) traditional dances”.

![Figure 5.5: Young boys performing *Uliya*](image)
Figure 5.6: Performance of Pakiteli, Ugwabwena Festival

Traditional Dress

“Traditional dress” (this phrase is frequently used by Trobrianders themselves) is an elaborate affair, involving a complex set of decorations. I gained a true appreciation for this when, shortly before my departure, I sponsored a feast in which I performed a traditional dance called Sipolu with some women from my village. My adoptive aunt (father’s sister = tabugu) made me a grass skirt for the occasion. I dressed with the other women in a small, stuffy hut, and it took three women nearly an hour to get me dressed and decorated to their satisfaction. Elements of dress vary slightly for men and women, people of chiefly lineages and commoners, and between island regions. My observations during preparations for public performances confirm that this process is always lengthy, and requires assistance from numerous helpers. Full dress marks a transformation and facilitates a physical and mental preparation; only when dressed “properly” can one fully participate in Trobriand public performance (Figure 5.7).

The importance of traditional dress is not only a point of great pride on the part of Trobrianders, but is seen as a marker of the “primitive/traditional/authentic” vs. modern/Westernised/inauthentic” dichotomy by which cultural tourists generally judge their experiences. Claire, a Canadian visitor in her 60s visiting on a group tour, stressed that Trobriand Islanders were, in her opinion,
...the least developed people I’ve met. I mean, in Africa, the Bushmen just put on costumes for tourists, but here you can see that this is the way people live. There’s a difference, when you know the costumes are not just worn when tourists are there, that’s their traditional dress.

The statement expresses clearly the correlation seen by many tourists between visual markers like dress and ideas about primitivity. Similarly, Gogo, a gregarious Norwegian woman in her 60s travelling independently with her partner, summed up many tourists’ attitude about tradition, appearance, and performance:

In so many places, you can go, it’s a show—I mean, a show is a show. Even if it’s like it was originally. I mean, they have their traditional dance...and in a way it’s just a way of keeping it from disappearing from their culture. But of course, you get a bit disappointed when you look at these people, and they’re dressed up, with make-up, blah blah blah, and people are selling T-shirts, and using mobile telephones…but I think most tourists are aware of the fact that…it’s a performance. That’s what it is.
Numerous tourists I spoke with bemoaned the loss of traditional dress in daily life, now replaced by “dirty T-shirts”. One visitor went so far as to tell me that she found it ...disappointing to see people wearing clothes. I thought it would be more primitive. It would have been nicer to see people in laplaps or grass skirts than rags—it made them seem more impoverished. It’s a shame they feel they need to wear Western clothes.

This idea of “shame” is significant; morality is not seen by visitors to be upheld by expressing modesty, but rather, as noted in the previous chapter, Westernisation and missionisation is viewed as undermining traditional morality, with wearing T-shirts a material marker of paradise lost. Conversely, when treated to a traditional dance in full dress, most visitors were delighted by this visual marker perceived to represent authenticity. This statement also demonstrates clearly the projection of Western ideas about how “primitive” people should look and act in order to fit with the prevailing metanarrative.

Celebrating the Yam Harvest: Milamala

Yams are of particular significance to Trobriand life; “yams are food, wealth, and ultimately power” (Weiner 1988: 96). They serve as a valued source of sustenance, but also “act as essential objects of exchange in a complex network of community relations” (Campbell 2002:27; see also Campbell 1989; Hutchins 1987; Malinowski 1932, 1935; Weiner 1977, 1988). Yams may be distributed to pay for canoes, for domestic and yam house construction, and for special carvings, as well as for the use of land, for live pigs or pork, or for magic (Campbell 2002:27). They serve as requisite payments for mortuary distributions and are essential in marriage arrangements. Marriage itself is made official by the symbolic act of the couple eating yams together (Weiner 1988:86). Yams are so central to the social and political life of Trobrianders that the months of the year are named for the growth stages of yams (Weiner 1988:111). The yam harvest period (milamala) is a major annual event, a time of dancing and celebration, with most local feasts scheduled to occur during the months when yams are in the greatest abundance. Since 2003, the festivities of the yam harvest have (sometimes) been promoted by the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) and other stakeholders as an event that may be of interest to tourists, usually referred to as the Milamala Festival.

Although all of the dances described above are considered to be dances “from the past” (tukanibogwa), it appears—not surprisingly—that some changes have taken place in their performance since they were first recorded by Malinowski. Innovations are
welcomed and new lyrics or slight variations on existing movements are often incorporated; these dances are not fixed entities, but permit some creativity. Particular dances may, in many cases, be “owned” by a particular village, and rather significant payment must be made if another village wishes to appropriate such a dance for a particular purpose. This becomes all the more contentious in the case of dances performed for tourism or for sponsored Cultural Shows, in which cash payment is conferred on the participants.

In the early twentieth century, the intensity of dancing in the village was evidently much higher than it is today:

The dancing and the karibom [also kalibom, a night-time dance] are repeated day after day and night after night. As the moon waxes, the festive character, the frequency and care with which ornamental dances are held, and their duration, increases; the dances begin earlier, the karibom lasts well-nigh throughout the night. The whole life in the village and between villages is modified and heightened. [Malinowski 1916:374]

During my residence on Kiriwina, which spanned two harvests and ensuing periods of feasting and various celebrations, dancing was by no means a daily/nightly occurrence. On the contrary, it was organised for specific purposes—School Cultural Days, Independence Day, tourist visits, or “Culture Shows” (as will be described below)—and never took place spontaneously in the village except perhaps as a rehearsal for a commissioned performance for a later date. Generally, the appropriate place for a formal performance of traditional dance today is either at the grounds of one of the tourist lodges, on school or church grounds, or in the village centre if organised in advance for a particular event.

What is considered an appropriate time or context for dance is another significant change since Malinowski’s time. Malinowski insists (1916: 371; 1922[1984]:56) that during his residence on Kiriwina, dancing was only performed during the milamala period—that is, the period immediately following the harvest of teytu yams, the timing of which varies from year to year, island to island, and village to village, but broadly falls between May and September. This is a period of relatively little work in the yam gardens, as there are several months separating the harvest of one crop and the preparation of new gardens and planting of the next year’s crop. It is a time for feasting, and the time of year when the spirits of the dead (baloma) temporarily return from their afterlife on the island of Tuma to their home villages to receive thanks for assisting in the gardens and join in the revelry. Malinowski notes that milamala refers to a particular moon, and that the period of festivities generally lasts for a single moon (month) but may, should a chief decide to sponsor usigula or mdawedila (competitions associated with particularly good harvests,
which, as explained briefly below, rarely happen anymore), be extended for a second month (Malinowski 1929:213). Today, the moon is rarely referred to in determining the time of harvest. Most gardeners physically check the state of the yams in the garden and assess the state of the leaves, which will be dry and brown to signal maturity, or rely on the arrival of the *vakiya* (kingfisher), whose appearance signals that it is time to begin thinning the yams. Today, the decision to harvest can also be prompted by social/economic obligations, such as the obligation to contribute yams to a *sagali*, bride price, or church celebration such as an Easter feast; or, as I detail below, to fit with a scheduled cultural programme aimed at attracting tourists.

While a century ago, “the *milamala* ends on the night of the full moon...all dancing proper is absolutely stopped, except when the *milamala* is prolonged into a special period of extra dancing, called *usigola*...” (Malinowski 1926:375), today no such formal and final terminus is discernable. In contemporary Kiriwina, there is no temporal restriction on when people may or may not dance, and it is not strictly limited to harvest festivities. At any time of the year people may be called to dance, especially for tourist performances. Although out of “respect”, people should not dance if there has been a recent death in the village or of a close family member in another village, these rules are not so strictly adhered to as in the past, especially in the face of the prospect of earning cash.

A few of the contexts in which Trobriand dance is frequently performed have been mentioned in the preceding section, but here I more explicitly describe each of these common settings.

**School Cultural Days and Culture Shows**

School Cultural Days are held annually by various schools as an opportunity for the students—from elementary, primary, and more rarely secondary school classes—to showcase their skill in traditional dance as well as their physical beauty to the community at large. Usually held within the broad harvest period (from May through August on Kiriwina), these Culture Days include the presentation of both “old” dances and more modern ones done to the accompaniment of guitars and incorporating more recently composed lyrics, or else “Tahitian-style” dance performed to pre-recorded Polynesian or Melanesian pop music. In the day or so prior to a School Cultural Day, much activity in the village is focussed on ensuring that each child will be properly dressed for the occasion; mothers must ensure that their daughters have a grass skirt to wear (these do not last more than a few years before beginning to look tattered and faded), and parents must also make
their sons’ yobuwa or mimeye’o, as these rarely survive for more than a few days. Children will outgrow their woven armbands (kwasi) and shell armbands (muripwapwa) from one year to the next, so new ones must be purchased, bartered for, or borrowed. Children collect flowers to make the garlands called butia, which also refers to the fragrant yellow flower often used to construct them, and which are worn on the head or around the neck. Parents take great care and pride in ensuring that their children are well presented in such performances.

The outcome-based learning programme taught in village elementary schools ensures that children learn traditional dance (as well as other skills deemed essential to village life, such as making gardens, learning the Trobriand calendar determining planting and harvesting times, and learning the many components of sagali exchanges) even if this is not stressed at home. Each School Cultural Day is attended by representatives from the Council of Chiefs as well as elected officials and school board members. Speeches always kick off the dancing programme. The excerpt below, from a speech given by Michael Silova, superintendent of Losuia district, at the Omarakana village School Cultural Day in July 2009, is representative of the rhetoric employed on such occasions, and illuminates the reflexivity of many Trobriand Islanders about the importance of maintaining tradition, not only as a means of shared identity within, but also recognising the perception of a reified sense of Trobriand culture in the world at large:

It’s so good to see our young people maintaining their culture.... Inland schools are better than the coastal villages at wearing full traditional dress—this is important. This is culture. When you see this colour, this red, you know it’s Trobriand Islands. You should be proud of this culture, because the world knows Trobriand Islands. Parents much teach their children our legends, our stories, the right way to dress. But the culture will not die here, because of our school cultural programme. Cultural Shows involving adult dancers as well as children and adolescents are another venue in which people gather to dance somewhat regularly. Cultural Shows are much more than just an excuse to dance; they are, today, highly politicized events. A brief summary of the recent history of such Cultural Shows is necessary here to give context to how these events are conceived, manipulated, and enacted.

Too Many People, Not Enough Food

As described above, a century ago it was virtually automatic that the period immediately following the harvest of the annual teytu crop would be filled with joyous dancing, feasting, and general revelry. This was sponsored by the local chief, who would
have received his tribute in yams. A strong chief with many wives (polygyny is permitted only for those who hold the title of guyau, or “chief”) would have many brothers-in-law making annual presentations to fill his yam house(s), and he would be obliged to demonstrate his wealth and largesse by calling the dancers to the bukubaku (village centre) and providing food to reward them for their performances.

Today, such celebrations are rarely sponsored spontaneously by a local chief. I suspect there are two primary reasons for this. The first is the decreased significance of traditional chieftaincy. While Paramount Chief Pulayasi Daniel and a number of local chiefs are locally recognised and have nominal decision-making power sanctioned by the Governor of Milne Bay Province, their role is mostly advisory and custodial. In practical terms, power at the local level is primarily held by the Kiriwina Rural Local Level Government (KRLLG) administered by an elected President and his or her Executive, plus a Ward Councillor to represent each of the 33 wards across the Trobriand Islands. Governance is further provided by the appointed District Administrator at Losuia, presently an upper-level public servant from Muyua (Woodlark Island). The role of the chief as a powerful and feared source of local authority has been largely undermined by the introduction of Western-style democracy.

A second reason concerns decreased crop yields, such that few chiefs are in an economic position to sponsor a large-scale feast at harvest time. Trobriand Islanders themselves are very conscious of the decreasing size of their yam piles (Figure 5.8), and much discussion surrounds this worrisome topic. Most Kiriwiniians say that it is the result of population pressure, and there are indications that population growth has been dramatic in recent years (Keig 2001:267). Local wisdom has it that the current population sits at well over 30,000 and possibly as much as 40,000. Gardening in the Trobriands relies on a swidden agricultural method, demanding that each family cuts several new gardens each year; the vegetation is then ignited, the ash thus enriching the soil. Harvested plots may be reused for another crop. For example, sweet potatoes will often be planted in the holes created when teytu yams are harvested. After two or three years at the most, however, a garden plot will be abandoned and left to fallow, with vegetation quickly reclaiming the plot. In the past, these plots would have laid fallow for at least five to seven years, and even as much as ten years, such that nutrient levels in the soil would have sufficient time to rebound. Today, the average fallow period reported to me by local informants is two to three years. This has had a serious effect on the productivity of the soil. The reasons given are that people are limited in the area of land in which they have the right to plant, and
there is more demand for land due to higher concentrations of people in larger villages, and new hamlets regularly spring up, occupying land that would formerly have been used for gardening. As the population grows, an increasing amount of food needs to be produced on a decreasing amount of land. This has led to (a perhaps slightly exaggerated) food security crisis in the Trobriand Islands (see for example Gridneff 2009, Kelola 2009 for media reports; see also MacCarthy 2012b for a more thorough discussion).

The point of this is not so much whether there is actually a food security crisis in the Trobriands, but rather that a preoccupation with (perceived or real) food shortages represents a discourse employed to particular ends. It is a two-edged sword for Trobriand Islanders, who are known throughout PNG for being some of the nation’s best gardeners and garden magicians. This is a point of pride, and media coverage at the national and even international level regarding food shortages caused great embarrassment to many Trobrianders. However, the rhetoric did bring high-level politicians—and their money—to the island; funds were committed for emergency food relief (rice, flour, oil) and yam seeds, soils research, and local infrastructure (roads, schools, hospital/aid posts). The low yields also have implications for the yam festival or milamala, identified in the Lonely Planet guide to PNG as the high point in the annual calendar and the best time to visit the island.

Figure 5.8: Yams stacked in garden at tayoyowa (harvest time)
Milamala as Festival

The great ceremony at Milamala time after the main crops have been harvested and placed in the yam-houses was known as *yoba*. A display of wealth and food was made, and the spirits who had returned for a time from the Underworld of Tuma were chased back to the happy land of the dead. With the advent of Christianity in these parts, it was only natural that this ceremony should begin to die out, and today those who do participate in it, do so very half-heartedly. It should not be long before it has entirely disappeared. [Austen 1945:29]

As traditional chiefs have, in the recent memory of my informants, rarely had the wherewithal to sponsor *milamala* festivities, let alone a special competition (*usigula* or *mdamwedila*), such celebrations as a village-based activity have largely ceased to take place. Fearing the “loss” of culture, and seeing that such festivities might have the capacity to encourage tourism and thus bring much-desired revenue to the islands, a “revived” Milamala Festival was proposed by the Council of Chiefs about a decade ago and, with financial support from the government at various levels, an island-wide Milamala Festival was held in 2003. The idea was to make the Milamala Festival an annual event which would be advertised and supported by, for example, the Milne Bay Tourism Bureau and the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA). This approach would de-contextualise the festival from its original intent of celebrating a particularly abundant harvest, as the promise of government funding would mean the Festival would carry on whether or not there were yams to feast with. While this made perfect sense to organisers from outside the Trobriands—ensuring a reliable date from year to year so tourists could plan their holidays—many Trobriand Islanders expressed concern; I cannot possibly enumerate the number of times people reminded me, “We cannot *paka* (feast) if we don’t have yams.”

The 2003 Milamala Festival received much attention, being widely advertised on the internet and listed on the TPA’s annual calendar of major events and festivals in PNG. Six different villages were selected to host activities, representing the three major geographical areas of the islands (north, central, south). Funding, primarily from the provincial government, was provided to encourage people to plant plentiful yams for feasting (though money would also provide store goods such as rice and tinned fish, which, while technically not “feasting foods”, are today a part of most major celebrations), and to ensure their costumes were ready for performances at Festival time. Performances would include both traditional and non-traditional dances, including the much contested Tapioca Dance or *mweki*, which is discussed in greater detail below. The organising committee, referred to as the Milamala Committee, was comprised of a number of “small people”, as
one informant put it; that is, the money was not given over to the Council of Chiefs. This did not sit well with the chiefs, who traditionally had been in charge of calling for and supporting milamala activities.

Despite the chiefs’ displeasure, the 2003 Milamala Festival was, by all accounts, a success. Dignitaries and tourists arrived to witness the events, which were celebrated across the island. Guest lodges were filled to capacity. Rather than a season (weeks or even months), the Festival condensed events into an easily digestible three-day event, which would fit with airline schedules and the busy agendas (and short attention spans) of guests. The programme for the inaugural Milamala Festival in 2003 was as follows:

- **Day 1:** Yam carrying and all the activities associated with that stage and dancing until about midnight.
- **Day 2:** Storing of the yams; awarding winners of gardening etc; Kula canoe racing; and dancing
- **Day 3:** All participating villages will take part in full cultural performances and feasting.

Village livelihood skills will be demonstrated and arts and crafts will be available for sale.

The success of the inaugural Milamala Festival provided much encouragement that with proper planning, promotion, and organisation, the festival could dramatically increase tourism and associated revenue to the island. The second Milamala Festival, in 2004, met with similar success. One of the organisers of the early Milamala Festivals was Serah Clark. Serah is a native Trobriand Islander, the youngest in a prominent and highly educated local family which also includes the aforementioned poet, political activist, and businessman John Kasaipwalova (Serah’s brother). Married to an expatriate Australian, Serah is a very successful businesswoman, now based in the provincial capital of Alotau. She is the owner of Butia Lodge, one of the two major guesthouses on Kiriwina. Serah told me that in the third year of the Milamala Festival as an organised, island-wide event, a “mess” was created when funds were not released early enough, so although dates were advertised and plans were put in place, the lack of available funds and associated confusion and resentment meant that many of the guests who arrived for the festivities were sorely disappointed. The Council of Chiefs then used these failures to argue that they should have more control over the funds committed for the Festival; as the rightful custodians of Trobriand culture, and particularly of yam harvest activities, they saw it as their right and duty to oversee the Milamala Festival.
In 2006, after the failures of the previous year, the Milamala Festival was once again touted as a major festival on the annual events calendar for PNG, through the TPA, and in the Post Courier newspaper; Airlines PNG, and even British Airways, listed the festival in their “Things to do” columns. However, problems arose with the use of the money that had been committed by the government and handed over to the Council of Chiefs to manage and organise the festival. Informants told me that between K26,000 and K30,000 had been given to the Council of Chiefs, but only about a third of that actually went to the festival itself, the balance being paid out in “seating allowances” and other expenses to the chiefs. Those called to dance for the festival felt shortchanged, as they were not feasted or paid for their performances as they had anticipated. The hostilities this created left a bitter taste in the mouths of many Kiriwinians about the Council of Chiefs and the very idea of an island-wide, government-sponsored Milamala Festival. The funding was severed, and the Milamala Festival was discontinued as a major event in the annual PNG festival circuit.

Fearing that the spirit of Milamala would be lost, Serah Clark decided to sponsor a smaller yam harvest celebration, to be held on her own property (the grounds of Butia Lodge) and with her own sponsorship, through private fundraising and small government subsidies. This new festival, dubbed the Ugwabwena Festival, would serve the dual purposes of ensuring that, as Serah told me, Trobriand culture continues and (local) people recognise that their traditional way of life can be “profitable” through tourism; and the festival naturally also drums up business for Butia Lodge itself. Noting that one problem with Milamala Festival activities was that a death in a village would halt all dancing and festivities, she felt that the “neutral ground” afforded by holding all activities at the tourist lodge would preclude such problems affecting the performances. She decided to set a consistent annual date for the festival—the second weekend in July—such that visitors could plan their trips well in advance.

Of course, the yams themselves do not necessarily conform to scheduling according to the Western calendar. Serah’s brother Kenneth explained as follows:

We need to have a specific, annually consistent date [for the festival], so people can plan for it [meaning both Trobrianders and tourists]. This means trying to plan ahead in terms of planting so the harvest is ready at the right time. If the yams are ready earlier, of course people can dig them so they don’t rot, but they will wait on celebrating until the second week of July.

In the first few years of the Ugwabwena Festival, participation was limited to the three villages—Obweria, Yalumgwa, and Mweliligali—closest in proximity to Butia Lodge,
which collectively comprise Yalumgwa Ward. Each village was invited to contribute yams and dance items, and in return would receive payment in store goods (rice and tinned fish), yams, pigs, and kina. In doing so, Serah was, in effect, taking on the role of chief.

Involvement in this festival, and being called upon regularly to dance at Butia Lodge for visiting guests, is a point of pride for people living in Yalumgwa Ward, but is sometimes the source of resentment in other areas of the islands. The rationale for limiting participation was that being self-funded, it would be unaffordable to include other villages (as all dancers must be paid and/or feasted), and that the more villages were invited to attend, the less control Serah would have. In 2010, a few additional villages—notably Omarakana, home village of the Paramount Chief, and Okaikoda, home to an outspoken member of the Council of Chiefs and former Chairman of the Milamala Committee—were invited to participate. Nonetheless, participation by “invite-only” means that the Ugwabwena Festival is considered exclusionary by those living outside Yalumgwa ward.

In reaction against the exclusive nature of Ugwabwena, the festival has been described by some as a “fake” yam festival. Those living outside of Yalumgwa Ward, who do not benefit socially or economically from the Ugwabwena Festival, often speak about the festival in derogatory terms, glorifying instead the “old days” when milamala was celebrated island-wide (though, as mentioned, the time at which this was actually done spontaneously is well in the past, and not in the lifetime of many younger people in the Trobriand Islands). For example, Burex, who often hosts tourists in his beachside hamlet at Kaibola village on the northern end of Kiriwina, told me,

This Milamala Festival, it’s for tourists, not for local people. It doesn’t follow the real time of *milamala*, which is fine for *dimdins*, because tourists don’t know what is really the way we do things. And the money doesn’t go to people in the village. There are good people in the village, but we’re not interested in this Milamala [Festival]; it’s not right to have *milamala* in a guest lodge. It should be in the village. It should be for everybody.

Even when gaining some benefit, for example, by providing village-stay accommodations for tourists visiting to take in the festivities, people who do not directly participate often speak bitterly about the Festival. Many Trobrianders complain that the Ugwabwena Festival is not a reflection of the original way *milamala* was celebrated, stressing that a proper—authentic—*milamala* celebration requires a bumper yam harvest and celebrations including all villages in the Islands, and following the traditional calendar. Kabwani, a man from Dayagila village who hosted a group of Australian expatriates during
the Ugwabwena Festival in 2009, expressed very similar sentiments to Burex, despite benefitting financially from accommodating eight visitors for nearly a week:

This festival, it’s just someone’s imagination. It’s not reality. To make it real, we would have to go back to the original way of doing milamala. That means following the traditional calendar for gardening. When there is a good harvest, you enjoy yourself—carrying yams, loading the liku [yam house], dancing. People can’t see the reality of Milamala [Festival]. It’s just a kind of feast, but it’s not the real milamala. Our true milamala is part of the calendar, so you can’t fake it. And every part of the island must have its share.

**Kiriwina Cultural Show**

At the conclusion of the 2009 Ugwabwena Festival, a meeting was held to discuss the future of the Milamala Festival (i.e., an island-wide yam harvest festival). In attendance were Charles Abel, Minister for Culture and Tourism; Jennifer Rudd, President of the KRLLG; Maxine Nadile, Manager of the MBTB; Paramount Chief Pulayasi Daniel, and several other members of the Council of Chiefs: Kevin Kaidoga, former Chairman of the Milamala Festival and former Deputy Director of the National Museum; John Kasaipwalova; Serah Clark; and several other interested parties (me included). At issue was the desire to reinstate something approximating the former Milamala Festival, such that residents all over the Trobriand Islands could join in, and benefit from, a government-sponsored and -sanctioned annual celebration. Instead of re-instating a Milamala Festival during harvest time, the idea was put forward and supported by government officials (though less supported by local chiefs and other community members) that a new festival should be created, to follow on and capitalise on tourists arriving in the provincial capital of Alotau for the Canoe & Kundu Festival, a major regional festival inaugurated in 2003 and held annually over the first weekend in November. Despite being well after new yam gardens have been planted and thus outside the usual season for feasts, celebrations, and dancing, this time of year was seen as sensible from the perspective of government and tourism officials from outside the islands as it would “spread out” tourism visits across the year and could capitalise on the tourist traffic generated by the well-established and popular Canoe Festival.

The new festival was the pet project of Jennifer Rudd, President of the KRLLG and the first woman to hold the position in the Trobriands. Although she was largely raised on Kiriwina and speaks the language fluently, she is the daughter of an expatriate Australian and a woman from Central Province, and thus is, according to most Trobriand Islanders, gala mokwita yakidasi (“not really one of us”). The decision to hold the new festival in
November was frequently held up as evidence that Ms. Rudd “didn’t really understand” Trobriand ways of doing things, and people had little faith that the inaugural Kiriwina Cultural Show (KCS) would be a success. For example, Camillus, who lived in a neighbouring hamlet, dropped by one morning, and found Vero and me talking about the upcoming KCS. Camillus joined our conversation, stating that he still “didn’t agree to it” being held in November, because “it’s not the real time for a festival. It has no feeling, no meaning, if we just force people to dance like this.”

As word got around in the community about the KCS, I was initially surprised to note that people were consistently referring to it as “Milamala”, when I had read time and again that milamala referred to the period of time immediately following the yam harvest, and preceding planting of new yams. How, indeed, could this cultural show taking place in November be referred to as Milamala? Ms. Rudd had quite definitely assured me when I interviewed her about her project that it was not a Milamala Festival, but rather an opportunity to “showcase and revive” Trobriand culture, which she fears is already “dying” and in need of salvaging. It finally made sense to me when I began to understand that to most Trobriand Islanders, the act of being called to dance collectively in return for payment is, by definition, “Milamala” (referring more to the dancing itself, it would seem, than the time of year or the presence of yams).

Figure 5.9: Dais being prepared for inaugural Kiriwina Cultural Show
The first annual KCS was supported by the Governor of the province to the tune of K50,000, with an additional K10,000 donated by the Minister for Culture and Tourism and K10,000 by the PNG Gaming Board (whose chairman is a Trobriand Islander). This would be supplemented with fundraising performances, and with the aim of increasing support for future years. All 33 wards were to be included in the festivities, and all would receive payment—if not in yams, at least in rice, pigs, and mani (cash). Little promotion was done to encourage tourists to come to the islands to enjoy the festival, and instead attention was focussed on bringing several high profile public servants to the Trobriands, as a political manoeuvre to bring attention to problems such as those related to food security and decreased food crop yields, as well as development issues such as the state of roads, lack of reliable public vehicles, and the poor state of the hospital, aid posts, and secondary school. If top government officials came and saw the state of things, it was reasoned, they would likely pledge money to assist in finding solutions to the problems.

The opening of the inaugural 2009 KCS (Figure 5.9) was attended by dignitaries including then Deputy/Acting Prime Minister Puka Temu, then Minister for Culture and Tourism Charles Abel, and the Governor of Milne Bay Province, Jean-Luc Critten. Very few foreign visitors, however, were in attendance, due to poor advertising and limited transportation and lodging options.

While not all wards ultimately participated in the inaugural KCS, there was representation not only from most of Kiriwina Island, but some of the smaller islands as well. The festival was mostly held at the sports oval in the government station of Losuia, with a two-day programme packed with dance items. Local Women’s Fellowship groups provided lunch for invited guests and VIPs, with dinners hosted by local guest lodges. Not surprisingly, there was some controversy over certain aspects of the festival. One was related to the performance of the group from Teyava village, which included both male and female dancers, including a number of whom had earlier gone to Port Moresby to perform in a fundraising dinner. The particular dance, called Kasaveka, is a circle dance “owned” by Teyava village, and incorporates some movements which were played up to the crowd, involving pelvic thrusting and a lifting of skirts. Much hue and cry arose over this performance, which people said went “over” the boundaries of propriety. The backlash against this performance was intense and reverberated for months, as discussed below.
Islands of Love

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the enduring tropes arising from the seminal work of Malinowski—though he himself never used the phrase—and perpetuated though provocative presentations of Trobriand culture in magazine articles and films as well as through promotional material for tourism, the ‘Islands of Love’ moniker has been both a boon and a burden for Trobriand Islanders. Most tourists were aware of this reputation, and for many, it was specifically cited as part of the allure of visiting the Trobriand Islands. Many visitors asked me if this reputation reflected reality, and others had decided after a few days in the islands that such reports were in fact exaggerated:

John: From my experience—you [referring to his brother, Mark] probably feel the same—there's a misconception I think, with this whole yam festival thing, and that is, it's sort of like a big orgy, sex fest thing...

Mark: The Island of Love...

John: The Island of Love. But, you know, and I didn't know what to expect, really. I've heard that side of the story, and then I've also heard a lot of the culture side, and getting here, I know that's totally wrong with the sex thing. It's totally different.

While Western idealisation of the Trobriands as a place where “promiscuity” is accepted and even encouraged—where bare-breasted maidens dance late into the night with reckless abandon, and where groups of marauding women may sexually attack a poor hapless man during the yam harvest—has provoked much interest, it is neither accurate nor the kind of attention most Trobriands residents today wish to receive. Indeed, many Trobrianders are actively resistant to this stereotype, insisting that the “Islands of Love” reputation refers not to a lack of sexual mores, but rather to a “caring, sharing, and generous” spirit wherein visitors to the island can expect to receive genuine hospitality and care.

Trobriand Islanders are fiercely proud of their identity and are renowned both within the country and abroad for their unique way of life, as embodied in traditional dress, dance performances, exquisite wood carvings, feasting practises, kula exchanges, and yam cult. The Trobriands’ characterisation as the “Islands of Love”, however, is the cause of hot debate, as community and church leaders as well as the Trobriand community at large grapple with issues of morality as espoused by the three major religious sects represented on the islands: the United Church, the Catholic Church, and the more recently arrived Evangelical or Pentecostal churches. Discourses within the Christian community speak of separating the “bad” culture from the “good”, insisting that some aspects are recent additions to the Trobriand repertoire and as such are not “real” Trobriand culture.
Tapioca Dance

Of particular concern are the dances associated with *mweki*, which is often conflated with Tapioca Dance (Figure 5.10). The act of *mweki*, a pelvic thrusting (it can also refer to sexual intercourse), has in fact been incorporated into public performance since time immemorial: as part of the carrying of yams from the gardens to the village (*gogebila*), and in nighttime dancing during *milimala* festivities. However, its most popular current incarnation is in the famous (or infamous) Tapioca Dance. Created during a period of innovation in dance and song following WWII, and influenced by the presence of Allied soldiers, Tapioca Dance was one of many dances created for performance during inter-village cricket matches. Each participating village developed its signature dance, and the village of Mtawa is credited with having invented Tapioca Dance, notable both for its suggestive choreography and its sexually explicit lyrics. Daniel (1996:784) notes, following on Cohen’s (1988) concept of “emergent authenticity”, that foreign elements and structures may be incorporated into traditional dance performances in which, over time (in this case, about 50 or 60 years), “these ‘new’ (restructured or reinterpreted) forms and styles have emerged as ‘authentic’ for the performing community.” I argue that such conceptions are far too simplistic, as ideas about authenticity are rarely uncontested; people dispute the authenticity/lack thereof of introduced or reinterpreted elements to meet their own socio-political and economic prerogatives.

Figure 5.10: *Mweki* performed as part of Trobriand cricket match commissioned by visiting journalists

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While the village school programme focuses on teaching *Wosimwaya* (Circle Dance), all children learn Tapioca Dance at an early age by watching and emulating others. In a recent performance for the Bishop of the Alotau diocese, primary schoolchildren performed *mweki*, outraging the Bishop, who then called for a complete ban of all performance of Tapioca Dance in Catholic-run schools. Tapioca Dance is performed island-wide at most all public performances, to the mirth of both local and visiting audiences. Trobrianders laugh uproariously during performances, but will later tut-tut and agree with the church officials who complain that these performances are “putting extra” and becoming too salacious, with potentially devastating moral effects (Figure 5.12). At the same time, the spectre of HIV/AIDS is increasingly visible in the island. Public awareness campaigns by the National AIDS Council, Provincial AIDS Office, and local health practitioners address locally relevant risk factors associated with cultural behaviour, adding yet another layer to the forces at work in mediating cultural reflexivity and practise.

**Figure 5.11: Visiting priest performing service in Bawai village**

Another recent incident also inflamed debate and prompted much discussion about what constitutes “good” Kiriwina culture, and how to weed out “bad” elements of culture. In November 2009, during the inaugural KCS programme, one village performed a particularly bawdy rendition of their village dance called *Kasaveka* (which incorporates *mweki*) wherein several ladies lifted their skirts to the public. This same group had earlier gone to Port Moresby to perform at a fundraiser, and several liaisons ensued between dancers, which continued on return to Kiriwina and broke up at least one marriage. The
backlash against this morally questionable behaviour, as judged by the Christian community, was to draft a letter calling on the KRLLG and the Council of Chiefs to take a role in enforcing “more controlled and better supervised” cultural presentations, thus advocating a ban on the public performance of *mweki* and, especially, Tapioca Dance though, the parish committee’s president pointed out, not a “ban on culture”. This was deemed necessary, as the act of performing *mweki* is (in Christian discourses) linked directly to lascivious behaviour. The “bad” elements in such discourses have exogenous origins. As the then-Bishop for the local Catholic diocese told me,

> We want to give a Christian flavour to *milamala*, to Trobriand culture. We wish for people to go back to their culture, to defend the good things of the culture. But there are elements of destruction at work. We don’t want to destroy culture, we want to preserve the good elements...in the past, there was more restraint, more control. Now there are some obvious things that are bad, but these are often foreign elements. But they can spoil the good elements.

While the Christian leadership takes a hard line on provocative dancing and sexually explicit songs, laypeople are more equivocal. They acknowledge that these performances sometimes go over the line of propriety, yet they derive great enjoyment from them, and see them as a viable income generator due to their popularity with tourists (who don’t realise that Trobrianders don’t consider Tapioca Dance a “traditional” dance). There are also different standards set for men and women, with men afforded more leeway for “playing up” in their performances, as they wear *yobuwa*, a pandanus wrap to cover their genitals, while women wear nothing under their grass skirts. While some are happy to play up to tourists’ fantasies of free love, others insist that Trobrianders are “good Christians”, and must conduct themselves as such. This debate points to the difficulty in assessing “authenticity” and the various ways in which it might be defined, and the importance of the term not only for Western cultural tourists, but for indigenous community members as well.

**Almighty God vs. the Almighty Dollar**

The Trobriands have a long history of missionisation, beginning with the arrival of the first Methodist missionary in 1894. In recent years, several new evangelical churches such as Four Square and Rhema have established themselves and recruited new members. Nearly every Trobriand Islander claims affiliation with one or another of the churches and self-identifies as Christian; however, this by no means negates the importance of magic, sorcery, an afterlife in Tuma, and many other “un-Christian” beliefs. Christianity has been
only marginally successful in enforcing sexual restraint and decorum. Proper Trobriand dance, according especially to those living in inland villages, must be done in full traditional dress. Vero, my adoptive mother, spoke disparagingly about the dance performed by the people of Kavataria village, a large village adjoining the government station of Losuia, during the inaugural KCS:

You saw those Kavataria people—wearing Western dress. I don’t know why, but I would say it’s because of church. Because they are Christian people, they feel shy to dress. Their songs are church songs. But wearing white and these other colours, that’s for church, not Milamala—if you don’t want to wear traditional dress, at least you have to look for red fabric. People were really complaining about how this group can dance in Milamala like that.

Some young women now feel shame to dance topless, but the general consensus remains that traditional dance must be done in full dress, and that sexual freedom is simply a part of “young life”. Indeed, milamala time, the customary time for dancing, is also a time for love magic, seduction and courtship—all part and parcel of the sexually charged atmosphere created by the aesthetically pleasing and implicitly or explicitly erotic movements in Trobriand dance. A few mothers actively encourage their teenage daughters to sleep with men in return for a payment known as buwala which, by custom, must be used not by the girl herself but rather should be given to the mother and her relatives. While by no means home to a large-scale sexual tourism industry as seen in places like Thailand and the Philippines, there are plenty of “entrepreneurs” ready and willing to provide sexual services to either domestic visitors (i.e., public servants) or international tourists who seek out sexual interactions during their visit. While guest-house operators state that they “discourage” young girls being brought to guests, and especially staff sleeping with guests, few deny that sex for money is common with national guests, though somewhat rarer with international visitors. Several tourists told me that they were offered girls to sleep with if they wished during their stay. For their part, Kiriwinians are often embarrassed at characterisations of themselves as oversexed and licentious, while church organisations fear further breakdown of social mores.

Various interpretations of “culture” and “tradition” are manipulated by all parties to the discussion—indigenous and foreign, religious and secular. Culture is used as justification on both sides of the argument—on the one hand, by those who wish to continue performances of Tapioca Dance, for local and touristic consumption; and on the other, by those seeking to ban its performance on moral grounds, claiming that as a more recent introduction to the repertoire, it is not truly Trobriand culture and thus can be
abandoned without compromising Trobriand traditions. For example, a local church leader talks about the need to make sure that what is publicly performed is “really culture” and that the priority is safeguarding “real” culture while simultaneously safeguarding morality. The former Bishop of the Alotau diocese claims that the Catholic Church never abolished traditional dress and dancing, but that Tapioca is “not one of their traditional dances—it’s an imported thing” and thus can and should be outlawed. He says the church “doesn’t wish to destroy culture, but to preserve the good elements” and talks about bringing a “Christian flavour” to Milamala festivities. Likewise, the United Church Bishop in Alotau, a Kirivinian himself, uses the same logic, stating, “I believe it [Tapioca Dance] is not really cultural”; that culture is “given by God” and so inherently good, but things can be “added” that are morally questionable.

As church leaders play with interpretations of what culture means, so do lay people. There are varying points of view on what culture and morality mean, and how this should be embodied in practise. Many people insist there’s nothing wrong with dancing Tapioca, and that sexually provocative dancing is part of Trobriand culture and does not reflect lack of decency in behaviour. Others express shame at being characterised by other Papua New Guineans as loose and resent the sniggering and nudge-nudging of politicians and public servants sent to Trobriands, who have clear expectations of the recreational activities they will engage in during their stay.

**Keeping It “Real”: Tourists on Authentic Trobriand Culture**

Tourists have their own ideas about what Trobriand culture means and how morality has been, most think, forced upon village residents by the missionaries. A common question posed to me by visitors is, “Have the missionaries changed the traditional way of life here?” Most are critical of missionisation, assuming that the adoption of religion means an abandonment of the “old ways” of doing things. They, the tourists, curse missionaries as they curse Westernisation: as unwelcome imports to what was once, they envision, an Edenistic and hedonistic way of life, and they don’t want to see things change or become “spoiled,” because it disrupts their own preconceived ideas—the metanarrative—of how “primitive” people live. Again, “culture” is invoked as the Holy Grail, the monolithic entity that must not be adulterated by outside influences. As Bernard, an elderly man visiting the islands with a tour group, put it, “I expected it to be primitive here, and it is. It’s nice that so much remains of the culture—I’m down on missionaries. I think it’s a travesty, making people change.” The following except from
an interview with a group of Australian visitors who organised a village stay of approximately one week clearly articulates the prevailing view of tourists towards missionisation:

Christine: I have found the influence of missionaries disturbing, but that's nothing new. But, the fact that some of the locals were saying the other night when there was a Christian thing in our village that they, that they're taught, that their traditional god is evil and that they need to worship—that there's only one god, and they have to worship that one. Also that there used to be an island that they considered heaven...[Me: Tuma]. Yeah. But they're not allowed to think that anymore, that they've been told that that's wrong. And, uh, evil.

Me: OK. That's not island wide, I can tell you. Most people still believe in Tuma.

Christine: Really? Well that's—Wow. That's good. That's despite the missionaries' influence, I think. Not—um, yeah, she said that, that they're told that that's not heaven, that there's only one heaven and it's in the sky with Jesus, and that kind of thing just disturbs me greatly. And that the way that they were dancing at the event was not traditional dancing, it was all—even the songs are being replaced, are gradually being replaced with Christian songs, even if they're still in local languages. And, you know, that's all really important stuff.

Silver (1993:308) observes that tourist advertisements have often promoted, and that consumers of cultural tourism have to some extent internalised, the spectacle of “dancing natives” as “archetypes of the ‘exotic’”. He notes that “even though tourists are usually fully aware that natives perform many of their traditions explicitly for them, their experiences tend to mirror their own imaginary projections about the Other” (Silver 1993:308). Visitors’ reactions to, and assessments of, Trobriand dance generally focussed on a few criteria: the beauty of the costumes and the individual dancers; the quality of the choreography; the accompanying music, whether drums or guitar; but perhaps most importantly, and least tangible or definable, is the visitor’s “sense” of the authenticity of performance. Whether performed in a village setting, in a guest lodge, or at a cultural show, discourses of authenticity permeated discussions about the quality of, and the audience’s enjoyment of, a given performance. Significantly, there was no general agreement amongst tourists about whether performances were or were not authentic, but there was inevitably considerable discussion about the topic. Nearly all tourists expressed an interest in, and concern with, the authenticity of the performance and “the culture” as they see it, though they interpreted what they saw and experienced in different ways. The comments I recorded in interviews with visitors about performances are illuminating; it should be noted that more often than not, the concept of authenticity was not explicitly
mentioned in my questions, which tended to be open-ended inquiries such as, “What did you think of that performance?”

Generally, I find things prepared for tourists boring. But the performance last night, that felt like the real thing. I prefer when things are done mostly for the locals’ benefit, you know? These *singsings*, they are still something people do for themselves, that they *enjoy*—seeing them prepare for dance was perhaps more enjoyable than actual performance. ... The performance at [Butia Lodge] was great, but the environment didn’t really fit — I would rather see the dancing in a village, there’s more reality in it even if they’re still doing it for us. [Flora, an American woman in her 60s, visiting on a group tour]

These dances we see when we travel, sometimes they are authentic, but in some places they’re clearly choreographed—here it appears to be genuine.... I don’t know how you know, but there is a feeling, it seems natural, but that’s just based on my own experience and interpretation. I’m not saying a put-up thing can’t be good, it can be entertaining, but if it’s not authentic, I won’t enjoy it as much. I mean, if a *singsing* came to New York, it wouldn’t really work—there’d be no drama to it. [Herb, an American man in his 70s, visiting on group tour]

![Figure 5.12: Young girls dancing with tourists, Butia Lodge](image)

**Dancing for Dollars**

While cultural festivals or School Cultural Days offer the opportunity for visitors to see plenty of Trobriand dancing, not everyone who visits the island does so when dancing on a large scale is scheduled to take place. As a quintessential cultural expression, both tourists and Trobrianders identify traditional dance as a must-see activity. When group tours are scheduled, a number of dances are inevitably included in the programme.
(described in the next chapter). Even guests arriving independently can, with very little advance warning and the willingness to part with some money to pay the dancers, organise a performance for their benefit, as described in the opening vignette of this chapter.

These performances might be in the village, or in a guest lodge; they might include children, young adults, or older adults, or some combination thereof. Payments for such dances are fairly standardised. In general, a traditional dance programme (lasting perhaps 30 minutes to an hour) commands a payment of between K200 and K300, depending on the number of dancers and the duration. Rebecca Young, proprietor of Kiriwina Lodge, explained that payment generally works out to approximately K10 per person per performance. For Trobriand cricket matches, the payment may be as high as K500 due to the number of performers involved. String bands, who may be encouraged to wear traditional dress even when singing songs recently composed, are paid about K250. In this sense, dances have an established, mutually agreed upon exchange value. However, a dance performance is not the kind of commodity that can be alienated from its producers, and there is no tangible entity to take home and put on one’s shelf; what is being consumed by tourists is the experience, which is transformed into memory (and usually, photographs). If, to use Gregory’s (1982, 1997) distinctions, gifts are about relations between people and commodities are about relations between things, then this is something betwixt. The exchange neither entails future obligation, but nor is it completely disembedded from sociality. For Trobrianders, it is an expression of identity, and an opportunity to use that identity for material gain; for tourists, it is a moment of intercultural experience that confirms expectations and creates memories, usually substantiated by photographs, which can be retold as proof of their authentic cultural experience (Figure 5.13). While recognising that dancers must be paid for their efforts, most tourists prefer that this be done through the guest lodge, tour operator, or local guide, because making direct payment is, for many, proof that the dance is not truly spontaneous and thus authentic, as, for example, indicated by the Swiss tourists who visited my village looking for people dancing away the afternoon. Likewise, Maureen, a Canadian visitor on a group tour, stressed that although she loved seeing cultural activities, she eschews “performances just put on for tourists”, because they do not seem as authentic. I asked her how she knows if a performance is authentic or not, to which she responded, chuckling, “Good question! I guess it’s just about how it feels. I have travelled enough to get a feeling for what is authentic,” echoing the sentiments of her fellow traveller Herb, quoted above. Feeling that a performance has
been authentic is central to a sense of satisfaction on the part of visitors that the exchange (monetary and social) has been, in their eyes, successful.

It is this feeling or aura of authenticity, as well as the ephemeral nature of a dance performance, and the sense that each performance is unique and cannot be (exactly) replicated, that make such performances singularities, in my view. To place a dollar value on a dance performance is, in a sense, to render it a commodity. Tourists pay their money, and receive a performance—an experience—in return. Yet, to make a dance performance a “mere” commodity is, returning to Kopytoff (1986:69), to make it “common—the opposite of being...incomparable, unique, singular, and therefore not exchangeable for anything else.” When tourists travel to the Trobriand Islands, renowned for its cultural authenticity, its connection to the past, its exotic way of life, and its lack of mass tourism, it is a singular experience that is sought. While the bulk of the literature on cultural commodification has been concerned with objects, performances and, indeed, experience itself is clearly commodified as part and parcel of the tourism industry. The tension between the desire to have an authentic and singular experience in an authentic and uncommon place, and the fact that tourism is an industry that depends on commodity exchange, sits uncomfortably with many visitors, who would rather prefer to pretend that, as travellers (not tourists) their experience is beyond the “common.”

Whose Culture?

This chapter emphasises that ideas about what constitutes authentic examples of tradition and culture in the context of Trobriand dance are far from uniform and static, but are constantly renegotiated and redefined. Both Trobrianders and tourists are keenly aware of the differences between “us” and “them”, often framed in terms of a primitive/modern binary, and relying on generalised and romanticised ideas of primitivity. Trobrianders are by turns proud and protective of what makes the Trobriands unique, both within PNG and in the world, while simultaneously grappling with ideas about mitigating the effects of “bad” culture as judged by religious spokespeople and public health officials. As an emblematic cultural expression, dance is one of several means by which visiting tourists experience Trobriand culture, and it is used as a key marker for cultural authenticity, though interpretations about the authenticity of performances vary dramatically both from one tourist to another as well as from the divergent perspectives of performers and stakeholders (tour operators, politicians, local chiefs, and church officials). The paradoxes raised here point to issues of power and agency: who decides which aspects of Trobriand
“culture” are good/authentic/traditional, and what do these terms mean? Traditional chiefs, who may prioritise continuity with the past, justifying and validating their roles as cultural custodians? Local government and other elected officials, who prioritize good governance and their own political aims? Paying guests, who want to be entertained and titillated, while feeling they saw “the real thing”? Church leaders, either imported from elsewhere or homegrown, who emphasise morality and family values? The negotiation between the often conflicting interpretations of villagers and church leaders, politicians and public servants, and tourists is reflective of these divergent agendas. Tourism is intimately linked with ideas about socio-economic development and globalisation, as well as a concern with “preservation” of traditional ways of life.

Trobiand dance is but once of several kinds of interaction in which cultural products are presented and consumed by audiences both local and foreign, with divergent meanings drawn from the experience of the spectacle and its associated material and multi-sensory aspects. In the next chapter, I turn from explicit performance, which is not only a stage for exhibiting cultural forms of expression but also a site of contestation between various competing interests, and instead look at a kind of tourist-Trobiand interaction offers quite a different experience, while in many ways reflecting similar concerns about authenticity and the perceived primitive/civilised dichotomy.

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33 As with many terms in the Kiriwina language, this is both a noun, as in, ula tilewai = my flattery-bond, as well as a verb, as in (ba)tilewai = I will give a flattery-bond.

34 It should be noted that tilewai can also be given to a new mother when she emerges from her house after the month’s seclusion following the birth (Malinowski 1929: 183), or during a sagali.

35 Even monolingual Kilivila speakers often use the English term when describing this kind of dance.

36 Women must have a grass skirt, fabricated from either banana leaves (ideally) or, for older women, a fibre called seololu is also acceptable. Men wear the yobuwa or mimeye’o as mentioned above, with a length of red cloth tied at the waist. Both men and women wear a belt made of red calico with woven designs tied around the waist (duriduri). Woven armbands (narrow ones for men, wider ones for women) called kwasi bind the upper arm, while shell armbands called muripwapa are tied just below the elbow. Into the armbands are tucked fragrant herbs of several varieties (collectively called vana) and short sticks decorated with dyed fibres and paper streamers. Around the ankles are tied strips of pandanus called kwepitapatili, and for women, the calf is bound with a twine called simapulu. A strip of red fabric is tied around the head, and affixed with a paper cutout
called kapikapi. Feathers (dagula) from the cockatoo or (more common and less “beautiful”) domestic chicken are placed in the hair. The entire body is anointed with coconut oil (bulami), and then rubbed with a small yellow leaf called riga. Often, the face is smeared with talcum powder, both to make the skin white and to enhance the scent of the dancer. Additional decorations of cowrie and other shells are worn by those belonging to highly ranked matrilineages. The overall effect is visually and olfactorily striking.

A distinction is made between food gardens and exchange gardens. Yams from food gardens are eaten as they are needed; there are no displays associated with this harvest, and food yams are kept out of sight of the passing public (Weiner 1976:138). Conversely, yams from exchange gardens are not owned by the gardener. From the time the yams are planted, the harvest belongs to the person in whose name the exchange garden is grown. At harvest time, these yams are collected and mounded up in conical heaps at the garden plot, where they stay on display for about a month (Weiner 1988:84). Then, with great ceremony, the yams are taken by the gardener to their owner (usually a woman), and are loaded into her husband’s empty yam house.

When referring to the harvest season generally, I use the italicised, lowercase “m” milamala. When referring to the festival as an event aimed at attracting tourists, I use the unitalicised, uppercase “M,” Milamala.
CHAPTER 6

PRODUCING AND CONSUMING EXPERIENCE:
Commoditising “Real Life”

Camilla: I would say that the festival—the festivities of the yam festival—has been the low point? Not really, but I've enjoyed pretty much everything else we've done much more than I've enjoyed...

Max: Than the formal festival. Same.

Camilla: Yeah, yup. And I kind of had to be—I didn't want to come today, I would rather have stayed around the village and talked to people, because I feel distinctly uncomfortable watching any kind of staged performance. Whether it's a representation of the real thing or not, it's actually not. So it's not the same as stumbling across it, or...

Max: It would be so easy to come and stay in one of the lodges, and come and see the staged festival, and have zero interaction with the culture at all. Not saying that we've acculturated or anything, but we've scraped the surface, where it would be quite easy to come here for this weekend and not do that. [Excerpt from an interview with several Australian expatriate visitors working and living in Port Moresby, who had travelled to the Trobriands for the Ugwabwena Festival and spent five days in Diagila Village]

If dance performances and cultural festivals are the locus of the production and consumption of spectacle, so, in a different and quotidian way, is village-based tourism. Many visitors who come to the Trobriand Islands and similar localities choose to reside in a village for part or all of their stay; some may cite reasons of budgetary constraints, others, location (for example, to be near the beach), but nearly all express a desire to avoid the so-called “tourist trap” and instead experience, as I so often heard, “life as it is really lived”, thus objectifying experience itself. Even those who stay in the relative comfort of established guest-houses or arrive by cruise ship usually include a visit to a village, whether spontaneous or organised, as part of their itinerary. In this chapter, I examine the case of what I refer to as “unperformance”—village visits in which visitors seek authenticity through experiencing the day-to-day activities of island residents.

Most existing cultural tourism research has examined places with a fairly formally established tourism infrastructure, focussing on ethnographic theme parks or “culture villages” (e.g., Bruner 2005b; Schutte 2003; Stanley 1998); dance festivals or floor shows at hotels and resorts featuring “traditional” dance (e.g., Condevaux 2009; Daniel 1996;
Kaeppler 1988), or the proliferation of “tourist art” (e.g., Graburn 1976, 1984, 1999; Silverman 1999, 2004; Steiner 1999). In these cases, there is a clear separation between performer/producer and audience/consumer, thus reinforcing a sense of the event as “staged” (Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973) for both performers and audiences. In the Trobriands, conversely, tourism is highly informal, and such barriers are not clearly established; the fuzziness resulting from this more “organic” kind of tourism breaks down the separation between performer and audience. This has dramatic implications for how the experience is conceived. I argue that this fuzziness leads to a heightened sense of authenticity which is based on a perception of object(ive) authenticity.

There are, in fact, few ethnographic examinations of the phenomenon of the village stay. Village stays as an intercultural phenomenon offer an important window into how cultural Others interact in the sphere of tourism, as village stays are based on a more intimate interaction than most touristic visits generally provide. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in her examination of museum displays, notes how exhibitions (and, I would argue, experiences in cultural tourism) often “force us to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of our own quotidian world, allowing us for a brief moment to be spectacles of ourselves, an effect that is also experienced by those on display” (1998:409). This “propels the fascination with penetrating the life space of others, getting inside, burrowing deep into the most intimate places, whether the interiors of lives or the innermost recesses of bodies” (1998:408). Examining how village stays are orchestrated and understood demonstrates the ways in which such intimacy, whether real or perceived, is experienced and narrated by both parties.

Perhaps the dearth of anthropological research into this phenomenon is in part due to the sometimes uncomfortable parallels (see for example Crick 1985; Crick and Lanfant 1995; Errington and Gewertz 1989; Tilley 1997) between cultural/ethnic tourists and anthropologists. While most tourists I spoke with did not consider themselves anthropologists (though several had taken undergraduate courses in anthropology, and spoke of some familiarity with the writings of Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead, for example), they often did profess an interest in “going deeper” in their understanding of Other cultures than is experienced or desired by the average tourist. They valued the opportunity to ask questions, participate in activities like making doba (banana leaf textiles) or playing Trobriand cricket, and communicate directly with village residents. Still, most recognised that even after a week or two in the village, they had but scratched the surface of cultural understanding, as the vignette that opens this chapter illustrates.
In the Trobriands, as with many other cultural tourism localities, visiting a village is seen by tourists as a way of interacting with representatives of the cultural Other in a more meaningful and “real” way, though, of course, much of what is exposed to the tourist gaze is orchestrated by tour operators, foreign or local guides, or the village residents themselves (MacCannell 1973; see also Hammons 2011). In this chapter, I describe some of the actual encounters in the village between tourists—both travelling independently and on group tours—and Trobrianders, and as much as possible present their voices as they narrated such experiences to me. I analyse these stories in light of similar tourism research in other comparable situations, and with respect to relevant anthropological theory. Here again, the issue of authenticity and cultural/historical continuity comes to the fore as a framing point of understanding both for the Trobriand Islanders who anticipate the desires of their visitors, and the tourists who pride themselves on their cultural savvy based on their successful (?) navigation of an-Other way of life.

Marketing the Village Experience

Cruise Travel

Arguably the briefest and most superficial intercultural encounters in the tourism spectrum are village visits organised as part of a cruise itinerary. From 1989 through 2006, the live-aboard dive boat *Melanesian Discoverer* made regular stops in the Trobriand Islands, where visitors would come ashore to see traditional dance performances and have the opportunity to purchase items as souvenirs (Senft 1999). Since the Madang-based operator of the *Melanesian Discoverer* ceased trips to Milne Bay Province, cruise-based visits to the islands have become increasingly sporadic. During my stay on Kiriwina, I was aware of only one visit to Kaibola village in northern Kiriwina, by the Expedition ship *MS Hansiatic*, owned by the German company Hapag-Lloyd; and two visits by the Australian-based *MV Orion*, of Orion Expedition Cruises (Figure 6.1), which visited the smaller island of Kitava after cruise coordinators became frustrated with high anchorage and per-visitor fees in Kaibola village (Justin Friend, personal communication). Typically, cruise ship travellers come ashore for a scheduled stop, organised in advance such that one or more dance performances can be arranged, possibly with the inclusion of a Trobriand cricket demonstration, and carvers will bring items from all over the islands for sale (see Chapter 7). As the opportunity for interaction is brief and highly orchestrated by village chiefs and tour operators, it represents a rather cursory intercultural experience for travellers. Visitors
themselves acknowledge that their understanding and experience of the Other is necessarily shallow, but still fancy themselves more intrepid and adventurous than many of their peers. Importantly for them, they have the tangible evidence in the form of photographs, video clips, or material items purchased in a given place to concretise their narrative and affirm their experience.

![Figure 6.1: MV Orion in Alotau](image)

The rhetoric used to promote the PNG itinerary offered by Orion Expedition Cruises is typical:

Retrace the adventurous footsteps of those first explorers to the lost paradise of Papua New Guinea. This was the world of headhunters and deadly tribal battles, still light years from the 21st century—but as you step ashore, you will be greeted with an excitable, heartfelt welcome from gentle villagers and an overwhelming simplicity of life that is long gone from our Western world. You will witness mysterious ceremonies derived from a thousand cultures across the South Pacific...

[from online brochure, accessed at [http://www.orionexpeditions.com](http://www.orionexpeditions.com)]

A place out of time, which is “simpler” yet more “mysterious” than daily life in the West, offers a true escape for the curious traveller and an experience of the Other that is sure to broaden one’s personal horizons. Such trips, which are priced in the arena of AU$10,000 for an 11-day trip, are clearly directed towards a wealthy, usually older clientele who wish to travel in comfort while still experiencing adventure and mystery, with just a whiff of (virtually non-existent) danger. Such visitors disembark for short, highly structured and orchestrated shore visits before being herded back on board for a luxurious dinner and to sleep in well-appointed staterooms. Any meaningful intercultural exchange is, for this type
of traveller, more imaginary than real. Nonetheless, such individuals may construct a narrative of authenticity, which they believe to be true despite all evidence to the contrary; it is for this very reason that a constructivist understanding of authenticity is useful. While objectively, one may look at cruise travel as pampered, sanitised, and superficial, those who choose such travel may experience their interactions subjectively as meaningful and experientially and/or “existentially authentic” (Kim and Jamal 2007; Olsen 2002; Steiner and Reisinger 2006; N. Wang 1999).

I was not able to make the trip to the island of Kitava when MV Orion anchored, but in November 2011 I heard the news that a large cruise ship would dock the following day at Kaibola, only about an hour’s ride by bicycle from my village. I had been told the ship would arrive around mid-morning, but the notorious inaccuracy of “island time” prompted me to get an early start. As I pedalled my way north, I passed dozens of hopeful carvers with their ebony and rosewood treasures carefully wrapped in colourful calico. I called out to them as I passed, in the typical Trobriand rhetorical greeting, “Ambesa bukula?” (“Where are you going?”). Naturally, all were hoping they would have “good luck” with selling their wares to the moneyed visitors.

When I arrived in Kaibola at about 8 am, the village was abuzz as the ship was already visible from the shore and making its way to anchor. The guests were efficiently transported to the beach by Zodiac in several trips: in total, 130 passengers were aboard, as well as 120 crew (though of course most of the crew and some of the passengers remained on the ship). The tour was mostly German-speaking, with German nationals comprising the bulk of the passengers, and other Europeans (Swiss, Austrian, Belgian, Russian) comprising the balance. The trip was billed as an “Exhibition Tour”, featuring a lecture series and a focus on both education and adventure, with lectures by a marine biologist, zoologist, ornithologist, and geologist; the Expedition Leader covered anthropology and archaeology (though he had no formal training in these subjects). The ship travels annually from Antarctica to the Arctic, winding its way through South America, the Pacific, Africa, and Europe, and clients chose where and when to begin and end their trip, and the duration, based on the set itinerary. The ship had last docked in Madang, on the east coast of the PNG mainland, and would make a brief stop the same afternoon in neighbouring Kitava.

While the visitors applied their sun creams, adjusted their camera lenses and gawped at the village and its residents, Trobriand mothers dressed the schoolchildren for their dance performances, scolding them for smudging their soba (face paint) and giving
advice on how to ensure a good performance. Carvers set up an impromptu market, laying
out mats and cloths on which to display their carvings, shell valuables, and the grass skirts
and baskets made by their wives or sisters. Others stared at the sea of white faces, khaki
shorts and expensive cameras with as much curiosity as the visitors staring back. There
was little meaningful interaction; visitors asked questions of their tour leader, the tour
leader asked questions of the local guide, and the most direct conversation I heard between
any passenger and Trobriander consisted of a brief negotiation over the price of an artefact.
Nonetheless, one of the passengers told me what she loved best about visiting PNG was
“the friendliness of the people”. As my evidence suggested she had probably never
actually spoken to a Papua New Guinean, this “friendliness” was, I expect, assumed from
seeing smiling faces, and her imagined interactions or potential interactions she might have
with local people.

Christian, the tour leader, told me that he has a keen interest in “exotic places” and
the night before their arrival he informed passengers about the work of Malinowski, the
significance of yams, and the sexual freedom islanders enjoy, and described the dancing
they would see and the carvings they could purchase during their shore visit. After some
time to poke around the beach and village, or take a swim in the inviting turquoise water,
the dancing programme began. Children, men and women each performed a dance or two,
for a total duration of perhaps an hour. Christian told me that in Kitava, they had requested
that no dances be performed, because in most of their recent shore visits, “every day has
been dancing” and his guests can only maintain their interest for so long; he said, “I feel
badly when people are rude by not paying attention” when people are performing. When
the programme finished, there was a last rush to haggle for carvings and other souvenirs
which, Christian noted, “... are less interesting than last time—before I remember seeing
more sexually explicit carvings, people are interested in those”. Then, the Zodiac began
ferrying passengers back to the ship. By 11:30 am, the MV Hansiatic was bound for
Kitava and another brief “encounter” from which passengers would later construct a
narrative of their experience in exotic PNG.

Guided Group Tours

Although guided land-based visits to the Trobriand Islands are few in number, there
are several companies—one based in Port Moresby, one in Australia, one in Canada, and
one in Italy—that offer group tours to the island involving village visits as a highlight of
the itinerary. The tour company offering the most regular trips including the Trobriands in
their itinerary is the Toronto, Canada-based ElderTreks, which caters exclusively to “adventure” travellers aged 50 and older, and advertises itself as offering “active, off-the-beaten-path, small-group adventures by both land and sea” (http://www.eldertreks.com). Their “Papua New Guinea: A Tribal Odyssey” trip spans 21 days, and assures travellers, “Our adventure includes many village visits so that we can really meet the people and experience their way of life. We explore the Sepik River by wooden canoe and spend 3 nights on Kiriwina Island (part of the Trobriand Islands), where people live a traditional lifestyle” (http://www.eldertreks.com/tour/ETTD000355).

Papua New Guinea - A Tribal Odyssey

Overview • Detailed Itinerary • FAQ's • Testimonials • BOOK NOW • All Oceania Tours

Highlights
• The Asaro Mudmen
• Mt. Hagen “singsing” cultural event (Aug dep)
• Goroka “singsing” cultural event (Sep dep)
• 3-day Sepik River adventure by wooden canoe
• Trobriand Islands
FROM: $11495 [USD]
Papua New Guinea is like no other place on earth — culturally rich and geographically remote, with some of the most stunning scenery anywhere. From the rugged mountains to the coastal islands, this journey is an adventure of a lifetime. We meet and learn about some of the tribal people of this land including the Asaro Mudmen, the Wahgi, the Simbu, the Kaguel and the fascinating Trobriand Islanders. Our adventure includes many village visits so that we can really meet the people and experience their way of life. We explore the Sepik River by wooden canoe and spend 3 nights on Kiriwina Island (part of the Trobriand Islands), where people live a traditional lifestyle.

Our August departure features the Mt. Hagen Show, where the tribes come from all over Papua New Guinea for a two-day spectacular “singsing” — a traditional song and dance festival complete with traditional tribal clothing and body decoration. The September departure features the “singsing” festival held in Goroka. Throughout our journey, we encounter amazing birdlife, lush flora, stunning scenery and some of the most fascinating tribal people on earth.

Please Note: Papua New Guinea is one of the most culturally interesting places on earth, with many of its tribal people following a traditional lifestyle. This adventure has been designed to experience the villages and people of Papua New Guinea. In order to do this, we visit a number of local villages and we overnight in one village. There are overnight stays where the accommodation is very basic; it can be dormitory style and have no fans/air conditioning and very limited facilities. As much of the interior of the country has no roads or impassable ones, we maximize our time by flying from location to location and flight schedules frequently change. While we endeavor to do/see everything listed in the itinerary, nothing in Papua New Guinea goes as planned, so travellers must be prepared for changes to this programme as we travel.

**Accommodations**

On Sepik adventure, basic dormitory accommodation (bush longhouses) with limited bathing and toilet facilities. Trobriand Island accommodation, basic with private facilities. Up to 6 nights single supplement not available.

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ElderTreks • 597 Markham St., Toronto, ON M6G 2L7, Canada
Tour operators stress that they

...ensure that all sing-sing performances and other cultural demonstrations are true to their ancestral traditions. The village elders are happy with this arrangement because they want to motivate their young people to maintain the island traditions and not allow their dances or customs to be watered down by outside influences like plastic decorations. [http://www.pngholidays.com.au/trobriand-islands]

One Port Moresby-based tour operator I spoke to told me explicitly that when he organises cultural dance performances for his clients, he only pays K200 if dancers incorporate such popular decorations as plastic beads, bits of cellophane, or paper, but K500 “if it’s fully traditional”. The incorporation of any material seen as inherently modern, for him, as well as for many of his clients, spoils the illusion of an authentic and unadulterated continuity of tradition from past to present: the “feeling” of authenticity described in Chapter 5.

Other travel and tour operators use similar tropes to sell the “authenticity” and culturally pure, frozen-in-time nature of visited peoples (drawing on the tropes outlined in Chapter 4), recognising the draw for such experiences for their potential clientele. The Italian adventure tour operator Viaggi Avventure nel Mondo purports to transport its clients travelling to PNG “back in time” to a place where “Neolithic” cultures have “survived” into the twentieth century; the Trobriand Islands are included in the itinerary as an optional extension and an opportunity to visit a place “a world apart”, where symbols, traditions, sex and taboos are all part of daily life and intersect with magic and religious beliefs (http://www.viaggiavventurenelmondo.it). As will be further discussed below, such characterisations are reproduced by the travellers themselves, and often (intentionally or not) by residents of the villages visited on such tours.

PNG-based tour operators are no less complicit in perpetuating the “noble savage” myth. Papua New Guinea Holidays and Ecotourism Melanesia both offer travellers the opportunity to visit several of the smaller, less densely populated outer islands of the Trobriands group, where they suggest that “the culture is purest and westernisation [sic] has had least impact”, in comparison with Kiriwina. The website introducing tours to the Trobriands is full of easily digestible (and not always entirely accurate) tidbits of cultural information, including references to the “Islands of Love” trope. Ecotourism Melanesia offers a “Cultural Study Tour” for independent travellers, a major aspect of which is the “village experience”. On Day Three of the tour, visitors are put in the care of a local family, “accompanying them through a day’s typical activities”. In addition to a visit to the family’s yam garden,
Your day’s activities may also include fishing, food preparation, building or repairing huts, paying a visit to the village school (and maybe giving an impromptu talk to the children about your home country!), and an opportunity to try chewing betel nut, if you dare.

Significantly, the information page for Ecotourism Melanesia’s “Destination Trobriand Islands: Islands of Love” calls tourism in the Trobriands a “non-event”, further validating the authenticity of a visit there as a truly intrepid experience (despite the fact that such organised tours are indeed available!). The “cultural encounter” and the opportunity for personal growth and adventure is promoted throughout the offered itinerary, with increasing opportunities for experiencing “real” village life the further one goes from the government station of Losuia on Kiriwina Island. If one chooses to visit Vakuta, a small and less densely populated island to the south of Kiriwina, one can expect (according to the promotional material) a more authentic experience than is available on the main island by extending both the time and money spent in the Trobriands:

When you sleep in the village (as opposed to being a day visitor) the village people accept you more readily into their community and this enables you to learn so much more about their culture (which is why you wanted to come to Trobriand Islands in the first place, right?).

There is in this passage a sort of implicit suggestion that the visitor who stays in the village is more like an anthropologist than a tourist; you can be “accepted” and learn something significant about the way people live that is not accessible to the “day visitor”.

Village visits may entail watching or participating in a variety of daily tasks or special events. These might include walking through village gardens; watching men build a house from local bush materials; learning how women weave pandanus mats, scrape banana leaves and make “bundles” or grass skirts; seeing children play at their games or visiting the community school; swimming or fishing from the nearest beach; visiting skull caves; learning about and taking pictures of yam houses; assisting in the preparation of, or at least eating, a village meal; or attending a community event such as a School Cultural Day or mortuary feast (sagali). In all cases, most visitors (and Trobrianders) place such activities in quite a different conceptual category than “performances” which are expressly planned and executed for the entertainment of visitors, for a set and established monetary remuneration. Instead, these spontaneous and quotidian activities are felt by visitors to give insight into the way of life as it is locally experienced. Most tourists feel that not only is this a more authentic, “grassroots” way of travelling and experiencing another culture, it demonstrates cultural savvy and flexibility on their part, and by “roughing it” through
staying in a bush materials hut without running water or electricity they demonstrate their superior status as being culturally capable of bridging the gap between first- and developing-world lifestyles. Recall Douglas, whose story opened Chapter 1, and who noted proudly, “I only go places I have to take malaria pills and wear zipleg pants”, suggesting that as an adventure traveller (though, notably, travelling on a well-organised group tour), he felt his own experiences in travelling were more “real” than many, and that he had the skills necessary to navigate unknown places and peoples. The marketing of these tours is about more than just seeing another way of life. It promises participation, action, embodied knowledge. It is experience that becomes commodified.

Ecotourism Melanesia is based in Port Moresby but is owned by an Australian expatriate, with “local” guides employed to accompany visitors on the trip.40 Virtually every village in the Trobriand Islands has one or more residents conversant in the English language (biga dimdim as it is known locally), yet common language does not mean that tourists and Trobrianders necessarily communicate on common ground. Tonnaer (2008:13) notes that the sites of intercultural encounters in tourism often precipitate an interaction wherein participants speak “different tongues” in both a literal and figurative sense. The result is a “diversity of values” (Tonnaer 2008:13), representative, she argues, of the social reality of the intercultural domain. Interlocutors such as guides, guest lodge staff, and resident anthropologists mediate as linguistic and cultural translators between village residents and visiting tourists, facilitating (usually cursory) interactions. My position as a researcher who lived in the village and spoke (some) local language was particularly complex, especially given that I was studying tourists and tourist-Trobriand interaction. I often accompanied visitors as they explored the island, and frequently found myself barraged with questions about what people were doing and saying, what things “meant”, and what people would be doing if there weren’t tourists visiting. While I sometimes felt uncomfortable with the kinds of questions I was asked, my position as both foreigner and resident gave me much greater insight into how tourists thought about “primitivity” and “civilisation”, “tradition” and “modernity”, “us” and “them”. For example, one of the most common questions I was asked when I told visitors that I was in the Trobriands not to study the arcane rituals of the “natives”, as most people assumed upon learning that I was an anthropologist, but rather them and their experiences as tourists was, “Has tourism/globalisation/the Church changed the traditional culture here?” Another favourite, “Is it true that women rape men/can have sex with anyone they want/are sexually active at a very young age?” and “Have you seen/do you believe in magic and sorcery?” Though I found
such questions difficult or impossible to answer to their or my satisfaction, the assumptions and preoccupations they suggest are telling.

During my 18 month stay in the Trobriands, six formal group tours visited the island. Three of these groups were organised by ElderTreks, two by the Port Moresby-based Ecotourism Melanesia (one of these consisted of a single couple, but travelled with the guide provided by the company), and one by the Italian tour operator Viaggi Avventure nel Mondo (VAM), based in Rome. The second biggest tour operator in Italy, VAM specialises in small group tours (usually 12–15 individuals) with a particular focus “adventure” tours. Thirteen visitors came to Kiriwina in August 2010 with their guide, Carlo, in the fourth and final week of their trans-PNG trip, which had already taken them to the Sepik, the Highlands (Mt. Hagen, Goroka), and Kavieng in East New Britain. They had a full week scheduled in the Trobriands which, according to Carlo, was “a bit too long; four or five days is enough”. Carlo felt Kavieng was a better place to spend extra time, as there was “more to do, nicer beaches, nicer vegetation, resorts. And there’s a good reef. But here we have the culture—we are here for this.”

Carlo had been working as a guide with the tour operator since 1986. He had suggested adding PNG as a destination to his boss, as he had read about the place and also spoken with others who had visited and reported well on the experience. His boss, Carlo told me, is “wide open to every experience” and approved the trip. The first group came to PNG, including the Trobriands, in 2002. Carlo told me their visit to the islands was not a good experience, as there were many last-minute changes to agreed prices, and a particular problem with local transport. He felt the experience had been marred by trickery and deceit. Not wanting to repeat this experience, Carlos almost convinced his clients to cancel the visit to the Trobriands and go to the Solomon Islands instead, but decided they would take their chances and try again—as he put it, “hey, we’re adventuring, we’re travelling the world, so...”. He stressed that the company has “a flexible approach to trip planning”, essential for successful travel in places like PNG. This trip was extremely expensive compared to most of the other itineraries the company offered, which usually run around €1,100 per person for a three-week trip. This trip was priced at €5,000 for four weeks, plus an additional €500 for each airline ticket to Kiriwina and €400 for lodging and transport. The twelve travellers consisted of three couples and six others who had booked the tour individually. The average age of the visitors was 45–46 years, with a few younger individuals (in their 30s) and a few in their 50s or 60s.
Carlo and his charges allowed me to join them for a day of their visit, so I could observe their itinerary, interactions, and reactions to what they experienced. As the group communicated mostly in Italian, in this case I was not able to overhear conversations between individuals; only a few of the visitors spoke English at all, and none but Carlo did so with ease. Nonetheless, it was illuminating to observe the mechanics of their tour. On the day I spent with them, I arrived at Kiriwina Lodge early in the morning to join them for their full itinerary. When I arrived at the lodge, Carlo was in discussion with the proprietor, Rebecca, to adjust the programme somewhat, based on costs; Carlo wanted to trim back on some of the dance performances that had been organised, and to cancel a proposed visit to outlying Kuyawa Island, as he felt the costs were in danger of getting out of hand. After a hearty Western-style breakfast at Kiriwina Lodge, the group piled into two rented vans (the only such vehicles on the island). The first stop was the village of Kapwapu, where the schoolchildren had prepared a dance item. Plastic chairs had been set up for the guests’ comfort, and after some moments of wandering around the village, the guests sat for the performance. While some trained their zoom lenses on the finely decorated children performing their well-rehearsed Circle Dance, others looked bored, as though they had already seen enough dancing and were ready for the next stop. When the programme finished, we were corralled back to the vans by Carlo, and we headed south to Mweyouya beach, where two recently built kula canoes sit in bush material shelters, providing a further photo opportunity (Figure 6.2). Several residents of nearby Okaiboma village were at the beach, along with a large group of children who, as always, were excited to be photographed and played up to the camera. Since the visitors spoke little or no English, communicative interaction between tourist and Trobriander was limited to taking photos, with kids then flocking to see their images displayed on the screen. Several of the visitors clearly seemed to try to avoid interaction with local people, preferring to stick close to the group. A few went for a swim, including two women in Western-style swimming costumes, which evoked a few stares and nervous titters from Trobriand Islanders who find such costumes embarrassingly immodest. Kiriwina Lodge had prepared a picnic lunch of imported foods: sandwiches from bread, cheese, and meat flown over from Alotau, fruit, and tins of soda.

After this fortification, the group continued to the village of Okaiboma. Local chief Tolubua was one of my favourite Trobrianders, as he cut a delightfully imposing figure yet always had a warm smile on his face; he is one of the few chiefs who regularly still dons a yobuwa (pandanus wrap to cover the genitals), kwasi (woven armbands), and a dagila
(feather) in his hair—even when there are no tourists around to take photographs! He speaks not a word of English, but carries himself with a grace and poise that requires no translation. An active *kula* man, with partners on nearby Kitava Island, Tolubua had commissioned the building of the *kula* canoes at Mweyouya beach the year before, and this year had sponsored a *kayasa* or yam competition, resulting in the construction of a new yam house (*liku*) which contained the tribute he received. This *liku* was not particularly tall, but it was freshly constructed, beautifully painted, and filled to capacity, offering yet another fine photo for the visiting guests, enabling them to tick another of the requisite photographic boxes for a visit to the Trobriand Islands (as I discuss further in Chapter 8). Okaiboma is not known as a carving village except for the construction of canoe prowboards and splashboards (*tabuya* and *lagim*), of which several quickly appeared and were offered for sale to the visitors. Very large ones are not easy to sell, as they are difficult for the visitor to transport home, but at least one visitor negotiated the purchase of a smaller *lagim* with Carlo’s assistance.

![Figure 6.2: Kula canoe, with carved and painted lagim (prowboard) and tabuya (splashboard) at Mweyouya beach, near Okaiboma village](image)

In the sweltering humidity, we once again loaded into the vans to visit the village of Tukwaukwa, which also boasts a *liku*, one much taller than Tolubua’s, but old, decaying, and mostly empty. Here, the visitors were treated to another round of children’s dancing, a
mix of traditional and more modern numbers. By this time, there was even less interest in the dances, and the guests were clearly beginning to wilt with the heat. By the time the performance was over, it was mid-afternoon, and most of the visitors seemed more than ready to head back to the Lodge for a cold beer, a nap in their air-conditioned room (Kiriwina Lodge will, for an extra fee, run their generator all day to permit guests this added luxury), or just some time to lounge in the seaside bungalows. Carlo told me, “Some days, they schedule three *singsings* in a day. It gets repetitive. I know people are proud and it’s what they do, but it’s too much.” For this group, while authenticity remains the goal, cultural activities should also be dynamic, varied, and made comfortable to enjoy.

*Independent Travellers*

Intercultural encounters in the village are not only achieved through group tour itineraries. The most “intrepid” travellers are self-defined as such by their ability to navigate and organise their own intercultural experience, travelling independently which, by their own reckoning, affords them a more authentic experience and at the same time makes the trip more affordable and more beneficial economically to local residents by avoiding payments to middlemen. Such travellers pride themselves on being able to go it alone, and are more likely to overnight in a village than group tour visitors who generally spend only a few hours in a given village. Those who spend several days, a week, or even more with a family in a bush materials hut, eating mostly local food, gain not only personal satisfaction and a sense of experiential or even “existential” authenticity (Peterson 2005:1088; Steiner and Reisinger 2006; N. Wang 1999), but also bragging rights, a narrative of adventure, hardship, and meaningful exchange with cultural Others that can be proudly related by email, blog, or in person and can be verified through photographs and souvenirs. One Australian woman in her 40s, Beaney (travelling independently with her adolescent son), told me with pride, “I’ve never been on a group tour. I’m a Lonely Planet person. Most of my friends think I’m nuts.” This “my friends think I’m crazy” sentiment was expressed by several other visitors, too, including Douglas, whose narrative began this thesis. Clearly, being “crazy” enough to travel to PNG earns the real traveller a badge of honour and bragging rights among peers back home. Patti, an Australian woman in her mid-thirties, stated this even more directly, saying, “This is the kind of place that, you know, you go back home and you brag about the discomfort, the food, how you had to suffer a bit. I’ll probably exaggerate it a little. I like to show off about that.”
Village-based tourism, in which intercultural interactions are promoted as beneficial both to visitors (who gain a broader perspective and an understanding of both the social benefits and hardships endured by peoples living in a village setting, usually in the developing world) and local residents (who in theory or in practise gain some economic advantages as well as a “reason” to retain cultural practises that might otherwise be threatened by participating in tourism) is not, of course, unique to PNG. I have seen first-hand similar “cultural encounter” tours on offer in Borneo, northern Thailand, Peru, and Jordan. The general lack of tourism development and infrastructure in PNG, however, sets it apart from many other locations in which ethno-tourism is promoted. The very absence of other tourists increases the sense of authenticity and the self-verification for tourists that one is, indeed, intrepid and has managed to “get off the beaten track.” Many visitors commented positively on the lack of other tourists in the Trobriands, as tourists are blamed for having “ruined” so many other destinations by their presence. In a telling comment that demonstrates the other side of the coin, an Australian visitor who arrived by private yacht on the same day that, coincidentally, a group of 16 North American visitors on an ElderTreks tour, an American expatriate working in Port Moresby, and two foreign journalists were also visiting the island, all of whom happened to converge in the northernmost village of Kaibola, observed that the island seemed “like Disneyland” compared with the other small and relatively untouristed islands they had visited by yacht throughout Milne Bay Province. Too many tourists thus inauthenticate a place, make it a simulacra rather than the “real thing”, and rob the visitor of the experience of feeling truly intrepid. Disneyland represents, then, the antithesis of the authentic in which everything is fabrication. Interestingly, the same metaphor was used by Moshe, an elderly Israeli visitor staying at Butia Lodge with his wife, who observed, “When tourists come here, they want to see that it is authentic. They don’t want Disneyland.”

Most people, however, find themselves the only tourists on the island when they visit, and this is itself a great attraction to tourists seeking an “unspoiled” place. The lack of other tourists and infrastructure validates a sense of being outside of a familiar time and place:

Here, it's like, they're really interested in you...there's a curiosity about the tourists, as much as the tourists have a curiosity about the locals. I think there's still that sense of—alright, so there's not the infrastructure that's evident in other tourist locations, but that makes it real, you're still getting a feel for the people. If you're here even for a day, you'll still get a feel for how they live, what they do, their culture, which I think—which is my interest in tourism, and I appreciate [that]. [Amy, an Australian expatriate in her 30s working in Port Moresby]
Significantly, in contrast to travellers on group itineraries or arriving by cruise ship who may not have a particular interest in the Trobriands as a specific and desirable destination, but rather may find themselves there without prior knowledge or expectations of the place beyond a vague and generalised sense of “primitivity”, independent travellers have made a deliberate effort to get there. Simon, for example, was 37 years old when he visited the Trobriands, having travelled from the UK, and was spending about two months travelling on his own around the Solomon Islands and PNG. As usual, I had gone to the airstrip on this February day of an arriving flight, on the chance that an unexpected visitor arrived, and my efforts were rewarded. I introduced myself at the airport and asked Simon if I could come to see him to talk to him about his trip; he responded that he would be very interested to talk to an anthropologist because, he said, he has “a great interest in the culture of the place”, having been fascinated with PNG and the Trobriands for many years.

He would be on Kiriwina for 10 days, and would stay at Bweka, the decrepit lodge owned by John Kasaipwalova, which was conveniently located a mere five-minute bike ride down a rough coral path from my own hamlet. Although the cost per night may fluctuate wildly depending on the whims and needs of the moment, Bweka tended to attract the independent budget traveller who doesn’t mind the lack of a generator or shower, and offered the added bonus of a clean, clear pool for bathing in a limestone cave just behind the termite-riddled structure; this seemed to suit Simon fine. After spending a number of years working as a stock trader, he informed me, he became fed up with the fast pace and pressure and opted for a new career in conservation that would permit him to work outside and spend his time on things that were more emotionally and karmically rewarding, if not so financially. Simon was an avid traveller, preferring “off-the-beaten-track” destinations, and told me a bit about his trip thus far: a month travelling around the Solomon Islands, followed by a couple of weeks in the PNG Highlands. He considered himself “intrepid”, having climbed Mt. Wilhelm (PNG’s highest peak), he told me, without a real guide, just a friend he had made while staying in a settlement in Goroka. He stayed in the settlement rather than in a hotel, because he “met some nice people” and they looked after him. His ability to make “friends” and fit in was an important part of his narrative, and he felt it set him apart from mere “tourists” and gave him a greater appreciation of what life was like in the developing world. He said he felt very safe in Goroka, and was sure that if he’d stayed in a fancy tourist lodge, he would have been far more at risk of petty or violent crime. Staying with local people, he said, gives him the opportunity to
chat with locals and learn much more about how people live. In his estimation, pre-modern Europeans had “less culture” than in other places, such as the Pacific. “People in the West have lost sense their sense of community,” he reckons; the “simple life” of people living in the developing world held great romance.

While most solo travellers were men, as PNG is often viewed as a dangerous and difficult place for women travelling alone, Tina was perhaps the only (other) woman I met who came from overseas on her own for an extended visit. A striking young woman of Iranian heritage, Tina lives in Australia and, due to safety concerns, was concentrating her visit in the relatively safe Milne Bay Province, where she would spend one month in the Trobriands, followed by a month on Goodenough Island in the d’Entrecasteaux archipelago. Tina, who was 24 years old at the time of our interview, was undertaking a diploma in Fine Arts, and was very interested in carving and other local artistic endeavours. When I spoke with her at length, Tina had been in the Trobriands for about a week and a half. She had stayed in the northern, beachside village of Kaibola for a few days, and then had travelled to Kaileuna Island and stayed in the village of Tawwema before returning to Kiriwina. She then stayed in a hut next to, but separate from, Butia Lodge, where she was hosted by the Lodge manager and his wife. This was a cheaper option than staying in the lodge, which was appealing to Tina, who preferred to “rough it” and make her money stretch to allow a longer visit.

When I asked Tina why she chose to come to the Trobriands, she told me she felt “an affinity with culture”, which she was familiar with as she had studied anthropology and reads “lots of books on ceremony and ritual in PNG; I’m really interested in myths and legends. It has always fascinated me, especially because it’s so visual, like the way people decorate their bodies.” She also has a fascination, she noted, with “living spaces—how people arrange themselves socially. I wanted to see how another culture organises themselves [sic].” Tina told me she has travelled at least once a year since she was 16, usually for about two months at a time, and mentioned places such as Mexico and Morocco as favourite travel destinations. She usually travels alone, and said she found her experience in PNG thus far safe and easy. She observed that because she stayed in the villages with local families, people were protective. “Here, you’ll never feel alone. People worry for you. They’re very curious. But I feel so welcome.”

Tina expressed some concern about “old practises dying out”, but says she sees now an interesting melding of Christianity and traditional culture: “I think it’s still a strong culture—you see new influences woven in to the old culture.” As her visit coincided with
the yam harvest, she was pleased to have seen people carrying yams and stacking them in a heap in the village next to where she stayed in Tawwema, noting the “visual appeal” of the process. Tina brought up the issue of authenticity in the course of our discussion, stating that in Thailand, for example, she felt “sold to”; that everything was about money, and there was little sense that what she was seeing and doing was authentic, which she felt “devalues the experience—the way you process it, as a traveller”. This word choice, like that of most other tourists I met while in the Trobriands, was deliberate; very few of them would ever refer to themselves as a “tourist”. She continued, “Things just aren’t charged with the same power when they’re programmed. You want to feel like you’re sharing or witnessing someone’s natural practise, not [that it is being done] for your enjoyment. You want them to enjoy it, too.” She told me about having witnessed a School Cultural Day, which was organised “not for me—for the community. That was nice to see.”

**Embodied Engagement**

For many tourists seeking an authentic experience, mere viewing of the Other is not enough. They prefer to participate directly in activities, whether taking a swing with the Trobriand cricket bat, dressing in a grass skirt, or having a go at spearfishing. Recognising this, Trobrianders often make attempts to include visitors in activities, and find great mirth in seeing *dimdins* attempt to do things as Trobrianders do. I experienced this myself first hand, as I was rewarded with great accolades for my own participation in *sagali*, eating local food, drawing water from the well and carrying it to the village on my head, walking shoeless on the coral paths, and dancing and singing in Kilivila language wearing full traditional dress. Even those who visited for a shorter period often were welcomed into village activities. In at least two instances during my stay, women staying as guests in village accommodation were given various elements of traditional dress to wear and encouraged to participate in *sagali* activities by throwing *doba* with direction from their local hosts, and at least one visiting man was dressed in traditional dress and invited to dance at a government-sponsored *singsing* with the other men in the village in which he stayed. During the Ugwabwena Festival, participation of visiting guests is encouraged in the form of face painting, joining in a Trobriand cricket game (Figure 6.3), and dancing with young girls after an evening’s performance. Tina, the young woman described above, was dressed in a grass skirt for the festival by her local hosts. Such participation gave people a heightened sense of authenticity and a more complete sensory experience rather than one solely dependent on the tourist gaze. For example, Kelly, a young Australian
woman visiting during the Ugwabwena Festival in 2009, told me her feelings about the importance of getting directly involved in local activities:

They want you to participate in the dancing and you know, all the aspects, like the cricket, and the tug-of-war, they want you to be a part of it. Yeah, you're not just a guest, you're part of their family now. Which I think makes you feel a little bit special and part of what's going on, part of the festivities.

Figure 6.3: Visitor playing Trobriand cricket

Performance and Unperformance

Village visits and organised performances are often contrasted by tourists as representing the two extremes of “natural” vs. “contrived” experiences. Although as Chapter 5 demonstrates, dance and other performances may be judged as more or less authentic based on a variety of criteria, including setting, dress, the perceived attitude of participants, and the “feeling” or aura created, village visits (where not considered to be orchestrated for tourists’ benefit) are seen as opportunities to “go deeper” in the cultural tourism experience than the viewing of a performance allows. A performance is a spectacle, with participants and observers. A village visit is interactive; it is where tourist and host meet and engage, though this may be mediated by a guide or translator where necessary. In the words of one visitor who attended the Ugwabwena Festival in 2009:

I think that the Trobriands is—apart from some of these things which are staged, which is fair enough, it's a show—but for me, one of the real highlights was going out to Luya village and just observing it, how it is. Like, I tried to get out of the way as much as possible. Every so often I'd be spotted, and a couple of people
would go, "Dimdim! Dimdim!" [Laughs…]. I found it a nice counterpoint, as well. To go out to the village and see exactly how they'd do it if there weren't any tourists, and then to see what the show is, that's designed to showcase some of the key bits of the culture as well. So it was a good balance, I think. [Blaine, an Australian man living in Port Moresby, in his late 30s]

Tourists who choose to include a village stay as part of their itinerary have clear ideas of seeing and experiencing something of the “backstage”, in the parlance of Goffman (1971) and MacCannell (1973). The goal, as one tourist put it, is “visiting villages where they’re just doing their thing, they’re not on parade for you.” Often, the Trobriand Islands would be compared with other places a given tourist had visited in the past; sometimes favourably, other times less so. For example, one visitor had recently visited Rabaul, in East New Britain. She told me that there, the village they visited was a “created experience”, set up for tourists; the Trobriands, on the other hand, offered “the real McCoy”.

![Figure 6.4: The frenzied activity at sagali](image)

For this reason, almost every tourist who was able to observe some portion of a sagali—the mortuary distributions usually held in the months following the yam harvest, when massive distributions of the banana leaf bundles and grass skirts called doba, as well as woven mats, trade goods, and food (yams, bananas, taro pudding, pigs, and rice) are made and people from all over the island and beyond turn up for the event—singled it out as the most meaningful and authentic experience of their visit. In this case, the object of the tourist gaze is a clear example of “unperformance”. While this is not a daily event as
such, and is a special occasion of sorts, I included it here both because they are very common events in the monts following a harvest, with several such events somewhere on Kiriwina tend to be held each week, but more importantly, because it is a decidedly local, non-tourist-oriented event. Its very power and aura of authenticity comes from the fact that tourists are accidental or incidental to the activity, which has local meaning that cannot be fully comprehended by the casual visitor (indeed, even this ethnographer, who witnessed perhaps a hundred such distributions, is at pains to understand all the subtleties of such an elaborate exchange). Nonetheless, even a cursory explanation of a *sagali*, coupled with the sheer scale and sensory experience afforded by such a spectacle (Figure 6.4), is often considered a “high point” in the itinerary of a visitor fortunate enough to witness one. This is what the self-described intrepid, culturally curious and savvy tourist/traveller has come to see: “life as it is really lived”, events and activities that have nothing to do whatsoever with them as foreign interlopers. This is a measure of success; it is the epitome of traveller vs. tourist. Lucy, an Australian woman in her 30s, attended a *sagali* during her visit, in which she and her friends stayed in a village for one week. She describes the sense of authenticity gained through such an unperformed experience:

So, they took us to see that [sagali], and we sat there for about half an hour being completely bamboozled. But that was so much more of the ‘real culture’, I guess, than what we've been seeing at the yam festival. It was just—you know, watching those transactions and who’s getting what, and who’s organising—it was really fascinating.

**Tourism and Economic Development**

Another significant aspect of the attraction in staying in the village, as alluded to in some of the tourists’ comments discussed in this chapter, is the desire to prove one’s mettle by “roughing it” in basic conditions. While older tourists in particular prefer their village visits in small doses, returning to the comforts of a guest lodge or cruise ship each night, the more intrepid visitors see staying in a village hut and eating local food as a demonstration of their cultural adaptability. The fact of underdevelopment is a “draw”; the lack of comforts and amenities lends itself to a sense of objective authenticity as well as experiential authenticity. For example, when I asked one visitor who spent a week in Dayagila village in northern Kiriwina to what extent the lack of development in the Trobriand Islands was an attraction or a deterrent for him, Max, an Australian man in his 30s, answered as follows:
It's an attraction. Of course, we'd love to see the villages less up against it. We'd like to see them prospering a bit more. And of course, we wouldn't not come here because they weren't—if the poverty wasn't quite as grinding. But it's, I guess, one of the more culturally intact areas possibly in PNG in that there aren't a lot of outsiders from other areas of PNG living here.

This paradox—that the lack of development is a draw, but that (relatively) affluent visitors feel guilty about wishing continued poverty upon those residing in the villages—was sometimes acknowledged by tourists themselves, either spontaneously or due to particular questions I posed during interviews and conversations. Barbara, a 69-year-old nurse from North Carolina, made a similar observation:

I just think it’s fascinating to see how people live—how resourceful people in developing countries are. People always seem happy, their clothes are clean—but I do worry for their health.... When people have conveniences, it’s hard to give them up. Things will change, it’s inevitable, but it will take away from culture. I’m glad I came now, because you see how things change with tourism. Look at Vietnam, for example. Advancement will come, it will develop.... I hate to say it destroys culture, but it changes it; if it gets more modern, people won’t want to come.

With development, access to modern technology, increased commercialisation, and so on, the “authentic”, and the point of interest—difference—between traveller and village resident are lost. As Errington and Gewertz put it (speaking of travellers in the Sepik region), “the principal lament of those travellers who found aspects of their trip disappointing was that the people had become spoiled...the ‘primitives’ they had expected to engage with had, in other words, become too much like us” (1989:42).

The Myth of “First Contact” Revisited

Most visitors to the island narrated their experiences in such a way as to express a positive experience and a sense of personal growth by learning about the way of life of the cultural Other, and felt that expectations (where they existed) of an exotic and primitive way of life were to some extent met even if people wore Western clothing and used mobile phones. Others, however, expressed disappointment and dismay that people did not appear as frozen in time as they had hoped, as the following excerpt from Olga, a Swiss visitor in her 60s, demonstrates; this visitor, first introduced in the vignette which opened Chapter 5, had travelled to a number of places in PNG on a small group tour with very specific ideas about how she expected “primitive” people to live. She had experienced a village stay on the island of Vakuta, and had just returned to the larger island of Kiriwina when I spoke to her:
There is a really good literature on everything, and we kind of came with expectations to see what is this practise in these old books. And therefore we are really disappointed to see that all of that has already gone. We can’t blame the people, because we can’t stop civilisation—this is normal, and it is also clear to us, but, at the same time, we feel really a pity. Because last year, we have been in Iryian Jaya [West Papua] with some people that have never seen white people. That was a one-time experience that we will never ever forget. And, uh, therefore our expectations were high. They were very high.

This idea that the white visitors are as much a novelty to people experiencing “first contact” as vice versa is a myth and a trope both coveted by ethno-tourists as the apex of a cultural tourism encounter, the most singular of singularities, and is perpetuated by tour operators (both local and foreign). Here, too, is a clear demonstration of a conceived primitive/civilised dichotomy. While few tourists would be so naive as to believe they are the first foreigners to visit a Trobriand village, they are often charmed by a toddler expressing fear at their white skin or children running to the edge of the road shouting, “Dimdim! Dimdim!” as the vehicle carrying white visitors bounces along the rough dirt road; recall Blaine, quoted above. Visitors earn a badge of honour and a heightened sense of authenticity by being told they are the “first” white person to do something, such as when the two Australian hosts of a Sydney-based travel programme came to film a segment on Kiriwina and were told when they dressed in traditional Trobriand dress that they were the first foreigners to do so—a blatant lie, but one that these young men related to me with great satisfaction.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the “first contact” trope is particularly significant in those parts of the world, such as the Amazon and Papua, that are the least well-charted on account of vastness of space and difficulties of travel and communication owing to dense jungle, steep mountains, and “uncivilised savages” (e.g., Stasch 2011b). West Papua, mentioned by Olga above, holds particular mystery and allure due to the perpetuation of stories of cannibalism and the exoticised way of life including houses built in trees. In his analysis of travel writing about Korowai people in West Papua, Stasch (2011b) points to the ways in which “primitivity” is juxtaposed with “civilisation”, the latter of which is seen as actively displacing and destroying the former, depicted in much travel writing as “a living anachronism” (Stasch 2011b:7). This temporal aspect of the myth of primitivism—the idea of a place forever in the past—is reflected in a number of comments made by visitors to the Trobriands. Some of these have already been mentioned, such as Douglas, whose story introduces this thesis, and who told me that part of what he loved about travel in PNG was that it had “a dawn-of-time kind of feel”—like this is maybe how our ancestors
lived”. And another: “I find it nice that people are living like centuries ago. It still feels kind of like it’s in the Stone Age.” Such characterisations are also implicit in comments about being glad one has visited “before it’s too late” and things become changed by modernity, globalisation, and cultural homogenisation, all of which are feared by cultural tourists as the impending death knell for their hobby of travelling to “untouched” locations.

On Being a “Host”

For their part, most Trobriand Islanders are willing and eager to host dimdims who wish to stay in villages. Numerous Trobrianders expressed interest to me in hosting tourists upon learning that I was researching tourism, asking me if I could “help” them to this end, either by providing information or material resources, or telling my “friends” to come and stay. This was not only motivated by a wish to earn money, although this was certainly a factor. Hosting dimdims well is also a point of pride, much as being the most intrepid and stoic traveller is for many visitors. Further, it provides an interesting break from the routine of household and garden work. It is a chance to establish new relationships that might not only provide “help” in terms of money or material goods today, but if negotiated skilfully, potentially in the future as well.

I saw how keen the competition is to host newly arrived dimdims when I made my inaugural boat trip to Kiriwina. Even before I had landed on Trobriand soil, I had had pitches directed at convincing me to live in the respective villages of several of my fellow passengers, each of whom assured me that I would be well looked after by their families. Money was not directly discussed in these conversations. On my arrival, the discussions over who would host me intensified, with everyone having an opinion over who was best equipped to do so, given the nature of my work and the duration of my stay. People spoke to me often of their previous experiences with dimdims, and those who had not had much previous interaction were insatiably curious. Whenever my adoptive mother would travel to villages at a distance from Yalumgwa, where people had heard of me but did not see me regularly, she was peppered with questions about how exactly she looked after me: most importantly, what did I eat? Few Trobriand Islanders I met would refuse an opportunity to make accommodation for a visitor, for any duration of time. The knowledge and skills (as well as the material infrastructure, such as bedsheets, pillows, kerosene lamp, etc) needed to host travellers are valuable capital even if the opportunities to put them to use are few.

At Kaibola village—perhaps the most frequent location for village visits, due to the beautiful white sand beach and swaying palm trees (Figure 6.5), the closest thing to the
quintessential image of the South Seas paradise Kiriwina Island has to offer (although there are also some striking beaches on the more remote islands, these are harder to get to and rarely visited by tourists)—visitors are periodically accommodated by several families. One regular host, Burex, spent 15 years working at the international standard Madang Resort on the PNG mainland, and came home in 2008 because he “missed village life”. With his experience providing services for _dimdems_, he and his brother Emmanuel were able to coordinate with Serah Clark, owner of Butia Lodge, so that she would send to Kaibola guests who wanted a few nights of the village/beach experience bookended by one or more nights in the Lodge.

Figure 6.5: Beach at Kaibola

Burex was typical of well-travelled and well-educated Trobriand Islanders who had intercultural savvy and felt able to host visitors to ensure a comfortable and memorable experience. He noted that “people are interested to learn our culture”, and that even tourists know when something is faked for their benefit; this is not what they want, he told me, citing (as noted in the previous chapter) the Ugwabwena Festival at Butia Lodge as an example of something that is “all made up for tourists” and therefore inauthentic. He noted that “people with a lot of money want to see how people really live, village life” and that the visitors he had hosted were most interested in seeing dances and nearby skull caves.
They enjoyed the beach and trying traditional fishing in the dugout canoe. When foreigners come to the village, he told me, they want to feel that they are somewhere “remote”—they do not want to see tin roofs, but only houses made of bush materials.

While Burex represents a particularly worldly and experienced tourism provider, most village residents who have previously hosted, or wish to host, foreign visitors also have a solid command of English and some previous encounters with *dimdims*, whether in the islands or on the mainland. The differences between self and Other are as significant and central to the framing of the relationship for Trobrianders as they are for foreign visitors. The fact that the number one question my adoptive mother had to answer about how she cared for me is telling—most Trobrianders were absolutely incredulous that a *dimdim* would eat only garden food. There is a common belief that *dimdims* eat rice and protein (meat or fish) every day, and the fact that I ate boiled root vegetables and greens at every meal and never complained if there was no coconut cream or fish was almost inconceivable. As mentioned in Chapter 4, *dimdims* are conceived as a homogenous, undifferentiated category regardless of mother tongue (as most speak English as a lingua franca), country of origin, or physical appearance (so long as the skin is white). Generalizations by Trobrianders experienced with foreigners (like Burex) tend be more detailed, assigning characteristics to subgroups of foreigners: for example, categorizing Americans as the most demanding, Australians the most fussy about food, and Japanese the easiest to please. Irrespective of such stereotypes (and there was no general agreement amongst those who held them), the general sense is that *dimdims* are seen as much as an exotic Other as “primitive” peoples are to visiting tourists.

The “civilised” vs “primitive” trope is not only perpetuated by western tourists, but by Trobriand Islanders themselves. I frequently heard Trobriand Islanders self identify as “primitive” or “savage”, in contrast with how they saw *dimdims*, placing themselves in binary opposition to foreign visitors—white vs. black, wealthy vs. poor, clean vs. dirty, educated vs. uneducated, and so on. Still, they recognised that their way of life was a curiosity for foreigners who would never have seen a yam garden, a house made from bush materials, or their beautiful grass skirts. Although Trobrianders are often self-critical and compare their way of life unfavourably with that of *dimdims*, they are quick to point out that they have more “culture” (often, indeed, using the English term) than the white visitors who travel so far just to witness how they live.
Commodities and “Kin”

The nature of the intercultural encounter, including motivations and interpretations on the part of both local producers and foreign consumers, is examined in the case of Aboriginal Australia by Tonnaer (2008). Tonnaer examines the idea of “cultural sharing” of both imagined/stereotypical and identifiable forms as a frame for the ethno-tourism experience; though, of course, this is also an economic endeavour. By focusing largely on Aboriginal-owned and operated tourism businesses, Tonnaer demonstrates that tourism is seen by Aboriginal Australians as an important venue for cultural exchange and vital in “keeping ‘culture’ alive” (2008:11). The meeting between tourists and the so-called hosts creates and sustains what Tonnaer (2008:14), building on Stanley (1998) and Merlan (1998), calls an “encounter culture”, which has its own customs and rules of behaviour, yet also leaves space for innovation and unexpected interpretations by those involved (as, of course, is the case for any “culture”). This, I would argue, is not some kind of hybrid action between the two parties, a pidgin of social communication if you will, especially given that tourists come from a wide range of geographical locations, socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and previous travel experiences and thus cannot be seen to constitute a cohesive and homogenous group. Despite this diversity, they are perceived as a homogenous group by many Trobriand Islanders, as described above. Similarly, tourists, although they may recognise Trobriand Islanders as retaining their traditional way of life and being culturally unique, likewise conceptually lump Trobrianders together with other so-called “primitive” people they may have encountered on a previous trip, or read about or seen in documentaries or on reality television. Thus, each party to the interactive encounter of tourism enters it with preconceived ideas of the Other and how they must act/interact. This does not necessarily mean that such encounters are not at times fraught and confusing for one or both parties, as I demonstrate more fully in Chapters 8 and 9.

The idea that village life—the quotidian activities of day-to-day existence—can be commoditised presents some interesting theoretical issues. Certainly, part of what one is paying for during a village stay is the material infrastructure, such as housing, food, and kerosene. One also compensates one’s hosts for their labour and time invested in such tasks as preparing the sleeping quarters, cooking, and providing cultural guidance and information. But, there is also something more abstract at play here. The village setting, and the sense of authenticity invoked by eating, sleeping, and engaging in activities “the way the locals do it” (though, in fact, they rarely do) affords both a sense of external
authenticity (that is, seeing the place and way of life “before it gets spoiled by tourists”), thus validating the metanarrative of primitivity and providing first hand, authoritative knowledge to facilitate the retelling; and internal (experiential) authenticity, a sense of being there, experiencing the hardship (again, not in any real sense, but as perceived by the visitor), and in the process coming to know oneself better through direct interaction with an experience of radical alterity. If these experiences are a commodity (insofar as they are invested with a use value and an exchange value), they are also a kind of gift (insofar as they are inalienable, singular, not replicable, and based on an *ideal* of, if not an *actual*, relationship between people). In other words, the commodity nature of such transactions as downplayed or even ignored, as a simple commodity transaction is, to return to Gregory (1982), about things, not about people. The use of kinship terms from Trobriand hosts to (paying) guests, and the significance this is (often, but not always) invested with by tourists, is illustrative of the extent to which these encounters blur the lines between gift and commodities, customers/clients and friends/family, alienable and inalienable:

Yeah, you’re not just a guest, you’re part of their family now... I was talking to Mary [an employee at Butia Lodge] um, I asked her for something, and she just grabbed me by the arm and said, ‘What do you want, my sister?’ And automatically, it was like, I don't want to leave now, I’m your family! It’s just the sense of family and community here, it's just beautiful. [Clara, an Australian expatriate in her 30s living in Port Moresby]

In the next chapter, I examine another cultural product, this time more tangible, which is produced for touristic consumers and serves as another site of intercultural encounter. A nearly ubiquitous aspect of the tourism economy the world over, handicrafts and souvenirs play an important role as a material manifestation of a journey and experience. They are also, like all products exchanged in the cultural tourism encounter, inevitably bound up in concerns about authenticity.


40 The guide for Ecotourism Melanesia who generally accompanies visitors to the Trobriands is from Fergusson Island, which has a different language and different cultural practises from the Trobriand Islands.

41 Very small children often cry when white-skinned visitors come near because parents often threaten their children into good behaviour by telling them that if they misbehave, “dimdim bibasem” (a white person [doctor] will pierce you with their needle).
I like the idea of buying something ‘useful’—something that really has purpose in the culture. If the carver can tell me the story of the object, it makes it even better. When I see these small things, I think, ‘oh, that’s just made for tourists’. But, I also consider what will look good in my house. [Patti, an Australian woman in her 30s]

Can a cricket bat from the Trobriand Islands be authentic? To whom? Why? As an English game introduced by foreign missionaries, it does not seem likely to meet many of the criteria usually invoked by the concept of authenticity. And yet, as an activity that has been famously appropriated and transformed by Trobriand Islanders, as exemplified in the film *Trobriand Cricket* (Leach and Kildea 1976), it has become
quintessentially Trobriand, and so, perhaps, associated objects such as this cricket bat, advertised for sale through a broker of “tribal art” (Figure 7.1). This object exemplifies many of the questions to be explored in this chapter about the meaning of objects and their categorisations—often fluid and subject to change—as art, artefact, and/or commodity (Phillips and Steiner 1999), as they are perceived by those who craft, purchase, and use such items, whether as utilitarian objects, or as representations. This chapter is about objects, but more to the point, it is about the process by which meaning is created, transformed, and manipulated through objects and how the concepts of authenticity and tradition are invoked in constructing meaning. I explore here some of the ways in which value is construed, providing examples of how a few particular objects were conceived of and transacted at a given stage in their total social life. In doing so, I examine some of the ways in which objects, especially those that end up, by design or by circumstance, as souvenirs, exemplify the social life of people who exchange things in determining how objects might be conceived of as art, artefact, and/or commodity, and the symbolic importance attached to material objects as part of the touristic experience.

Wood carvings, *kula* valuables, and other “ceremonial” objects originating from the Trobriand Islands are found in museum collections across the globe, and are also sold through auction houses and dealers of “fine art” in Europe, Australia, and the USA. So what, if any, are the material characteristics differentiating these items, deemed worthy of display space in major museum collections and commanding top dollar at Sotheby’s, and those items tourists haggle over at the Losuia airstrip? In some cases, the differences may have to do with the physical properties of the objects, but it seems to me this is not necessarily the case. Many factors come in to play in creating and maintaining “value”. Objects may have different meanings invested by the people who create them, and those who buy them (*in situ*, in the airport gift shop, or from a dealer in indigenous art) or view them (in auction catalogues, in the museum, or on their own coffee table), in ways that have little to do with the materiality of the item.

The creation of handcrafted objects, whether for local use, barter, or sale, has a deep history in the Trobriand Islands, and continues to serve as an important means of production and exchange. Although items carved in ebony, kwila, and rosewood are perhaps the most popular and well-travelled specimens (both historically and in the present), other items such as shell decorations and textiles such as grass skirts and woven
mats or bags also circulate as important objects of exchange, both internally (within Kiriwina and between neighbouring islands) and externally (as tourist “trinkets”, as commodities for sale in auction houses or galleries abroad, or in museum display cases). As Clifford (1988:189) notes, so-called “tribal” objects are themselves travellers. Situating the discussion in my ethnographic example, I argue that the nature of production or specific physical properties of an object are of far less significance than the variable circumstances of an object’s particular exchange biography—especially, its association with people and events—in determining its ultimate value in the broad sense of the word.

While mass produced trinkets from established tourism sites may be another matter, I argue that in the Trobriands, objects (whether purchased by serious collectors or tourists enjoying a holiday) are singularities, which make them a special kind of commodity. Despite a lack of organised infrastructure for the sale of handcrafted objects, the production of crafted goods, especially wood carvings, is a small but significant industry in the Trobriand Islands. Tourists are the primary, or at least most desirable, market for these items, whether sold directly by the carver or through an intermediary, on the island or in urban centres such as Alotau or Port Moresby. This chapter explores the production, exchange, and sale of wood carvings and other crafts as souvenirs—material, tangible representations of experience, objects made meaningful by their contextualisation as much as the skill with which they are made. As such, I examine the meanings invested in objects, concepts of “art” and aesthetics, value creation, and ideas of authenticity as relevant to material culture. I then examine the milieu in which objects are made and exchanged in the Trobriands, and the importance of such items to both the producers (Trobriand carvers) and consumers (tourists, middlemen, and other buyers). In tracing the trajectories of several specific objects, I tease out the realities and ambiguities of how such objects get valued, why they are an important aspect of the tourist experience, and how such an examination can inform debates about the meaning of authenticity. I argue that, much like the kula shell that carries with it its biography of the great kula men with whom it was associated, the meaning and value invested in Trobriand objects, and especially souvenirs, is a product of what such objects represent: a singularity, a “relationship” with the cultural Other, and a tangible and enduring link to a personal, ephemeral, and embodied experience.
Historical Context

As manufacturers they [Trobriand Islanders] excel in wood-carving, basket-weaving, and the production of highly-valued shell ornaments. [Malinowski 1921:2]

Thus the villagers of Bwoitalu are the professional carvers in hard wood and produce excellent carved dishes. They are, on the other hand, in need of coconuts and yam food, and they like to acquire certain ornaments. Whenever one of them has a few dishes of certain dimensions on hand, he knows that in the village of Oburaku he can get about forty coconuts for one grade, twenty for another, ten for another, and so on; in the central villages of Kiriwina, he can obtain a definite number of yam baskets; in some other villages, he can get a few red shell discs or turtle-shell ear-rings. [Malinowski 1921:14]

Trobriand Islanders have been producing items of exquisite technical skill and beauty since long before foreign interlopers arrived to create a ready cash market for such items. Prior to European contact, Trobriand carvings were recognised as valuable by Trobrianders themselves for both their aesthetic and functional qualities, and such items were in demand as trade items from residents of neighbouring islands (Connelly 2007:10). At this time, carving was mostly restricted to items that had a utilitarian purpose, and/or were imbued with symbolic significance. This included items such as wooden bowls and platters, canoe bailers, mortars and pestles for grinding betelnut, oars or paddles, and canoe splashboards and prowboards, especially for sea-going kula canoes. Even utilitarian items were often elaborately and skilfully carved, and some items (such as the lagim and tabuya, canoe prowboards and splashboards respectively; Figure 7.2) were painted using natural pigments in red, black, and white (Campbell 2002; Scoditti 1990).

From 1905, Australian colonial officials were dispatched to the government station at Losuia, Kiriwina to administer Trobriand affairs. The Assistant Resident Magistrate (ARM) —the title of the officer in charge of island administration under colonial rule— carried out an annual census and imposed a head tax; the production of wood carvings was one way in which Trobrianders could pay the necessary fee (Connelly 2007:17). Colonial officials and missionaries created an increased demand for carved items, and it is likely that both the volume of production and the range of objects available for purchase increased dramatically with this new market. However, even before this time, collectors like P. G. T. Black, who travelled around PNG in his employment with Burns, Philp & Co., had already made extensive collections of Trobriand material culture as well as objects from other parts of the country (Robert Foster, personal communication).
In the absence of (relatively) easy access to mass manufactured goods before a significant European presence had been established on Kiriwina, it was necessary to obtain items for practical purposes such as the above-mentioned carved bowls, mortars and pestles for crushing betelnut, and large paddles for stirring the ceremonial taro pudding called *mona*. All of these items carried symbolic as well as practical significance—large dishes would be used for making gifts of food and betelnut for mortuary distributions or bride price⁴³, for example, while mortars and pestles for crushing betelnut were used by elders (because they could not chew due to weak teeth) who commanded respect based on their wealth of knowledge. Other carved items had even more symbolic power, such as the prowboards and splashboards carved and painted and mounted on large seagoing *kula* canoes (Figure 6.2). Although described by Malinowski as “ornamental” (1922[1984]: 134), these prowboards are imbued with magic instrumental to the success of the *kula* party, and should be carved with great care by specialised *totokwalu* (carving men).

Ernest Whitehouse, ARM and Officer in Charge of the Losuia Hospital from 1919 to 1929, noted the importance of carved items in domestic trade during and prior to his arrival in the Trobriands:

In the earlier days as at present, these natives kept the Guyaus [chiefs], Toliwagas [canoe makers], and the richer men of Kiriwina and the adjoining islands supplied with articles of culinary use in the form of “kabomas” [wooden bowls and platters] and decorative pieces of work for the adornment of the natives’ houses and person. [quoted in Connelly 2007:134]

Interestingly, Malinowski noted that at the time of his residence in the early twentieth century, the village of Bwoitalu—known for having the most skilled carvers in all of the Trobriand Islands at the time—was not respected for the quality of workmanship produced, as might be expected. Malinowski notes that the inhabitants of Bwoitalu:

...are at the same time the most despised pariahs, the most dreaded sorcerers, and the most skilful and industrious craftsmen in the island.... They eat the flesh of bush-pigs, and they catch and eat the stingaree [stingray], both objects of strict tabooos and of genuine loathing to the other inhabitants of [Kiriwina]. For this reason they are despised and regarded as unclean by the others. In olden days they would have to crouch lower and more abjectly than anyone else. No man or woman would mate with anyone from Bwoytalu [sic], whether in marriage or in an intrigue. Yet in wood carving, and especially in the working out of the wonderful, round dishes, in the manufacture of plaited fibre work, and in the production of combs, they are far more skilful than anyone else, and acknowledged to be such; they are the wholesale manufacturers of these objects for export, and they can produce work not to be rivalled by any other village. [Malinowski 1922[1984]: 67]
This suggests, as does the information I was given during my stay on Kiriwina, that the people of Bwoitalu village (and the Kuboma district, that is, immediately north and west of Losuia, more broadly) were not despised because they carved, but because they regularly ate tabu foods, thus making them “dirty” (pupagatu) in the eyes of those who upheld dietary restrictions. Today, the characterisation Malinowski recorded of the “pariah” Bwoitalu village is not in evidence, with no particular stigma attached to this village, though the general disgust related to the consumption of bush pig (bwaordina) persists.

**Contemporary Production of Handcrafted Objects: From Souvenirs to Objets d’Art**

It was the material culture of the Trobriand Islands and in particular “the art and economics of woodcarving” that Annette Weiner set out to study in 1971 (1988:20), though her focus soon changed to women’s wealth and mortuary distributions (Weiner 1976, 1988, 1992). Throughout PNG, Trobriand Islanders are perhaps second only to Sepik carvers in their renown as skilled woodworkers. The only available tourist guidebook to the region, the Lonely Planet guide, makes special mention of the “shopping” opportunities on Kiriwina, recommending carvings made of ebony with intricate pearl inlays (McKinnon et al. 2008:122). Some villages have no carvers at all, while others are known island-wide and beyond for their skill in carving particular forms.

Weiner (1988:20) describes the importance of carving to the Trobriand economy on her first arrival on Kiriwina in 1971:

Weekly charter flights from Port Moresby, filled mostly with Australians on holiday from government work elsewhere in the country, gave impetus to the local wood-carving industry...Most of the ten resident Europeans on the island, including the Catholic and the United church missionaries, were heavily engaged in buying and selling Trobriand bowls, tables, and walking sticks; the ever popular fornicating pigs; and the few superbly wrought sculptures of figures from myths and folktales, made by the most talented carvers. The charters were arranged by the Chinese merchant who owned the small hotel, and the fifty-odd visitors a week provided carvers with a competitive market for their work. If a carver was not pressed for cash, he waited for a tourist sale rather than accept the low prices paid by the traders and missionaries.

As I described in Chapter 1, the regular arrival of tourists to the islands on charter flights began in 1962, and significantly increased the market for Trobriand carvings. In the 1960s, the Trobriand Hotel and a United Church-operated store, both on the lagoon shore near the government station of Losuia, became the main centres of artefact trading (Leach 1982:255). These opportunities prompted a rapid increase in commercial carving. Leach
observes that very few Trobrianders resident in the government or mission stations carved, many considering such an activity incommensurate with their status. The period from 1962–72 saw tourist carving and artefact sales providing the most reliable and lucrative monetary income northern and eastern Kiriwina (the centres of Trobriand carving) had even known; Leach (1982:256) estimates per capita income for this region at about K12, a small sum, but this represented more cash than most island residents had ever had access to. Leach (1982:256) observes a number of social changes that occurred concomitant with the shift in economic activity to tourism-related trade:

In the second half of the decade [1960s] especially, yam harvests, the mainstay of subsistence and of ceremonial exchange in Trobriand society, declined sharply. That decline had several important consequences: the social festivities which yam surpluses underpin diminished considerably; the main index of social status which northern villagers used to counter the prestige claims of lagoon dwellers due to their education, income, and sophistication were embarrassingly not in evidence, and the inland lagoon credit relationships which allowed long term reciprocities in exchanging fish for yams became almost entirely monetized and, as well, inflated by nationally rising prices and the increasing income of the inlanders. This transformation of formerly moral ties to short term and inflating monetary ones weakened the inland lagoon relationship considerably.

In the mid-1970s, after the incorporation of the Kabisawali Village Development Corporation (see Chapter 1), Kabisawali leaders became heavily involved in artefact trading. Although by now tourism had begun to decline from its heyday in the preceding period, the sale of Trobriand carvings continued to be profitable. Kabisawali leased two buildings to undertake their trading operations, one an unused warehouse in Losuia and the other a retail shop in central Port Moresby, called Trobriand Arts. As Leach (1982:278) outlines, “The plan was to buy at reasonable prices, preferably undercutting the nearby United Church artefacts store on Kiriwina, and to sell more cheaply and in a culturally distinctive manner in Port Moresby.” Carvers, however, were not convinced by ideological arguments and used the competition between buyers to their own best advantage, raising both the price and the profile of hand-carved wooden objects from the Trobriands in their distinctive styles and materials.

Weiner returned to the Trobriand Islands in the early 1980s, in the nascent years of PNG’s independence, and found that with fewer Australians in the country, tourism had declined dramatically, the ebony trees had been largely depleted, and the above mentioned Chinese merchant had left the island when his hotel burned in a 1974 fire. Then, as now, only a handful of men—indeed, only men carve—managed a steady income from carving (Weiner 1988:24). Today, carving provides a sporadic and supplemental income at best,
but represents one of the few ways a village resident might potentially earn a sudden sum of money. Particularly in northern and eastern Kiriwina, most men know how to carve and produce objects when wood is available, in the hopes that eventually they will find a buyer. There are few carvers (and even fewer prospective buyers) on the smaller, outlying islands, where in fact there are more trees and thus raw materials; most carvers live on Kiriwina, especially in the districts of Kuboma and Kilivila. As there is little forest (and almost no remaining ebony) on Kiriwina, wood must be purchased in the raw. Much of the ebony and other wood used to make carvings is from Muyua (Woodlark) Island, where such wood is relatively abundant, but few men are accomplished carvers.

Walking sticks are among the most popular items for sale, and they come in various sizes—from over a metre long, to small ones suitable for tucking in a suitcase—and with varying levels of detail and craftsmanship (Figure 7.2). These are usually made from ebony, and thus are very heavy, but the quality of this wood appeals to many tourists. Often they are hollowed out on the inside, and decorated with delicate spirals and nacre inlay. They may have abstract designs, anthropo- or zoomorphic figures, or a combination thereof. Very large and skilfully carved walking sticks (kai) may command prices of several thousand kina. Those most frequently purchased by tourists, however, are somewhat smaller and cheaper; and if they fit in a poster tube and command less than K500, they are much more likely to sell to tourists. Andrew, a carver from Omarakana village, explained to me his rationale in deciding what he will carve. First of all, the size or amount of wood one has will determine roughly the size and shape of the artefact one will produce. Then, the carver has to think about who will buy the item—can he get it commissioned from someone? Will he try his best to sell it directly to a tourist? If so, will he try to do so from Kiriwina, where tourist traffic is sporadic at best, or try to find boat fare to Alotau, the provincial capital, where he might find a buyer more quickly? Will it be worth his while, given that a return boat fare will cost K150–200? Would he be willing to sell it to a middleman, who buys in bulk and then sells onward to dealers in Moresby? Are there any cruise ships scheduled to arrive in the near future?

Although there is no word that is literally translated as “art” in the Kilivila language, there are some relevant conceptual categories. There is a conceptual difference for Trobrianders between vegu ‘wa (valuables) and guguwa (“stuff” or common things). Wood carvings are referred to as tokwalu, and a carver totokwalu (man who carves). Someone who is exceptionally skilled at carving—or, for that matter, at selling or transacting—will be called tokabitam (clever man). Carving for important ceremonial purposes, especially
in the case of making the prowboards and splashboards for *kula* canoes, requires initiation with magic and an apprenticeship to a master carver (Campbell 2002; Scoditti 1982, 1990), though this is not necessary for the production of objects expressly for sale. Productive work that takes place in the village—be it men’s carving or building of houses, or women’s weaving and production of banana leaf skirts and bundles—is referred to as *ya’odila*, and to be a productive person in this regard is highly respected. However, this must never be at the expense of garden work, which epitomises productivity in the Trobriand worldview.

![Figure 7.2: Carver selling walking sticks and small badge at airstrip](image)

Trobriand carved items and other crafts are often mentioned in tourism promotion literature. The Lonely Planet guide stresses the quality of Trobriand carvings, noting:

> Trobriand Island carvings are famous throughout PNG. Certain villages specialise in certain styles, ranging from bowls and stools to elaborately carved walking sticks. The best carvings are made from ebony, and much of what you see will be decorated with pearl-shell inlays. [McKinnon et al. 2008:122]

Similarly, the tour operator Ecotourism Melanesia not only encourages prospective visitors to buy handcrafted objects, but also makes note of the enterprising and eager exchange practises of Trobrianders:

> In all Trobriands villages you will see artisans producing beautiful wood carvings from rosewood, ebony wood and kerosene wood. Trobriand carvings are without doubt the best in Papua New Guinea so take the opportunity to purchase from source at basement prices. Apart from carvings you will be able to purchase cultural artefacts such as traditional dress (grass skirts, necklaces etc), lime gourds and spatulas (used for chewing betel nut), cooking utensils and bamboo combs.
Trobiand Islanders are traders by tradition so they welcome the opportunity to sell to visitors but don’t feel pressured to buy more than you want. [Ecotourism Melanesia website: http://www.em.com.pg/PNG/emtours/itineraries/EM02%20TROBRIAND%20ISLANDS.htm]

In addition to wood carvings—statues, bowls, walking sticks, pendants, lime sticks, story-boards, and model yam houses, for example—several other items are made in the Trobriands either expressly for sale, or for local use but periodically offered for sale to tourists. Most any day a flight arrives from Port Moresby, one can find on display a selection of **yaguma**, the incised, hollowed and dried gourds of various sizes (previously) used as vessels for storing the crushed coral lime used in chewing betelnut. Most Trobriand Islanders today eshew lime pots made of gourds as they break easily and their rounded shape precludes them being set down without spilling. Instead, they favour pill bottles, juice bottles, peanut butter jars and other commercially produced vessels, while “traditional” lime pots are popular gifts, purchased both by Trobrianders and foreigners (although the latter rarely chew betelnut, and may not even know the purpose of the vessel). Malinowski’s prediction that the production of “highly artistic” lime pots was doomed (1922[1984]:67) was quite unfounded, as the making of lime pots continues even if their actual use for this purpose has declined. Mats and bags made from woven pandanus are also made both for domestic use and for sale, and jewellery such as turtle-shell earrings, the distinctive spondylus shell necklaces worn throughout Milne Bay Province and known locally as **kuwa or soulava**, and even **kula**-type valuables that are situated outside active trade in the **kula** ring and are the private property of individuals, called **kitoum**⁴⁶, are sometimes sold to foreign visitors.

In Bwoitalu village today, the particular specialty is no longer ceremonial bowls (**kaiboma**) but rather stools and tables, usually with two or three anthropo- or zoomorphic figures comprising the legs and round tops carved with circular patterns (Figure 7.3). While many villages on Kiriwina have skilled carvers, no village is as industrious as Bwoitalu. On the day I visited this village, I was immediately impressed by the level of industry and innovation in wood carving. Although some individuals were off in the gardens, I noted in my perambulations around village perhaps eight to ten men actively working on carvings, with stools being the most common item of production. Most houses had one or two stools in various stages of completion, and production of statues, **kaipita** (betel-crushing mortars), and walking sticks was also in evidence. Much of the industry in Bwoitalu is commissioned, often by hotels or guesthouses. Both of the two guest lodges
on Kiriwina feature seating areas with Bwoitalu tables and stools, and they are often also commissioned by hotels in other parts of the country or for sale in art shops in Port Moresby or to buyers overseas. One man told me he would receive K500 (about the cost of a small- to medium-sized pig) for the production of a commissioned table.

![Figure 7.3: Trobriand stool, recently sold for AU$1,200 by an Australian art dealer](image)

It has long been observed that Trobriand Islanders are able to copy new designs effectively and incorporate innovations into their carvings. Whitehouse, for example, noted in the 1920s that Trobriand carvers adeptly “evolve new ideas and can execute these ideas in material. As copyists they are excellent and all that is necessary to have an article reproduced in wood is to show the native the specimen and in four days the article is delivered” (quoted in Connelly 2007:134). Making items to order to ensure success in meeting the desires of prospective buyers, whether foreign or local, is not, then, a recent phenomenon. It should be noted that there is no sense of proprietary ownership of carving designs. Although certain villages may specialise in particular forms or designs, this is not enforced and innovative designs may be copied freely by other carvers. This contrasts with dances, which, as discussed earlier, are considered the property of particular villages. While in Bwoitalu, I noticed some carved figures with rather exaggerated features, of a type I had not seen before. Two of these were small, narrow pieces approximately 15–20 cm high, while the other was slightly bigger, perhaps 20–25 cm high. The bigger statue depicted a hermaphrodite, with a prominent penis reaching as long as the legs, and round
breasts. The smaller pieces were a pair of figures, one male with an erect penis and the female with spread legs, and her hands at her groin. The carver told me that the designs had been specifically requested by an expatriate living on another island in the region, who had commissioned the pieces for an agreed price, and who would come to Losuia by boat to collect them. The carver was more than happy to work on these “untraditional” designs, knowing there was a guaranteed buyer for the finished product.

Prices are rarely firmly set for handcrafted items, in the way they are for dance performances; instead, the equivalence in cash or other goods depends on the seller’s assessment of a potential transaction, including his own immediate needs, his estimation of the potential buyer’s willingness and ability to pay, and his determination of the item’s worth, based on his understanding of the object’s significance to his own and to the buyer’s system of value. When I speak of objects having “value”, I do not, of course, mean only their use value and exchange or market value; instead, I refer to less tangible, emotional ascriptions of meaning and importance, whether by individuals or communities. Gregory (1997:12) calls value “those invisible chains that link relations between things to relations between people”. Many factors may contribute to the value of an object in this sense, all of which, I argue, have more to do with people’s perceptions than the material reality of the object: things like originality, rarity in material or form, the object’s age or history, an association with a particularly significant event or person, the perceived skill with which it was made, and so on. So long as an item is believed to be “authentic” and representative of one or more of these aspects that create a sense of value, both the emotional response to, and likely the market price of, that object is likely to be high. Discovering that an object is a “fake”—that the item has been misrepresented—can decrease its perceived value, even though the object maintains the same physical form. Here, there are clear parallels with ideas about the perceived value of a performance that is deemed spontaneous and therefore somehow more authentic (having a greater aura) than one that is expressly commodified and performed for the benefit of the tourist dollar. A commodity’s value is defined by the price transactors agree to sell or buy it for; on the other hand, a gift or work of art, or indeed, an experience may have a market value ascribed to it, but its value in the broader sense is more about social and cultural factors than material or economic ones. Take, for example, the following comment made by Jeannie, a young woman visiting the islands from Australia with her husband:
I buy things basically for ornamental purposes. Because I don’t want to wear it out, you know? It’s a unique opportunity to buy something like that. You really know when you go and buy something that you’re contributing to the community, because this is their livelihood. This is what they do. If I could buy one thing from every carver, I would have.... But um, yeah, I love the carvings, I think they’re unique.

Art/Artefact/Commodity by Intention, Art by Appropriation

I have thus far referred to “art”, “artefacts”, “crafts”, or “handicrafts”, “commodities”, and even “objects”, all of which carry with them certain connotations. Inevitably, a discussion of the material culture sold as touristic souvenirs requires some distinction between “crafts/handicrafts”—or, perhaps more disparagingly, “tourist art” or “airport art”—and “(high) art”. There is an extensive literature on this topic (e.g., Clifford 1988; Errington 1994; Graburn 1976; Myers 2001a; Shiner 1994; Steiner 1999; see also Kaeppler 1973 for a discussion of certain Tahitian and Hawai’ian dance forms which she refers to as “airport art”), and this chapter will merely touch on the issue as relevant to the present discussion.

For the past century or so, the objects of cultural Others have been appropriated by the West primarily into two categories: the artefact or ethnographic specimen, and works of “art” (Clifford 1988; Errington 1994). Fabian (2004) further distinguishes the former into two kinds of collectibles: ethnic artefacts and ethnographic objects, noting that though they may be used as synonyms, they actually signal two very different discourses. He describes an artefact as “essentially a narrative and often an aesthetic concept; narrative, in that an artefact is a thing that tells the history of its production and aesthetic, in that it was made by, or with, art. Artefacts are things that belong to culture rather than nature” (Fabian 2004: 49). On the other hand, ethnographic objects or artefacts were, in the history of the discipline as an emerging science, treated as specimens to be categorised in taxonomic and chronological classificatory categories.

A formal appreciation and recognition of the category of so-called “Primitive Art” (also tribal, ethnographic, naive, or outsider art) emerged in the early twentieth century, though the negative and inaccurate connotations of this term were pointed out as early as 1941 by Ralph Linton. When using this term, I recognise the implicit evolutionary undertones the term carries (Price 1989); but as Marcus and Myers accurately point out, and the narratives of tourists in the Trobriand Islands as analysed in this thesis illustrate,
“the trope of the ‘primitive’ continues to exercise considerable rhetorical power in the present” (1995:15). This is not only true of Western consumers, but of Trobriand Islanders, too, who apply these tropes reflexively, often referring to themselves as “savages”, “primitives”, or “natives” in various contexts.

Shelly Errington (1994) observes that items in the category Primitive Art “are sometimes labelled as crafts, sometimes collectibles, but very often they are called arts, which seems to have a different signification from the singular word art... Sometimes the signifying feature is that they were ‘handmade’, ‘used’, and ‘traditional. But they are sold as ‘authentic’” (Errington 1994:220; see also Shiner 1994:226). Authenticity, Graburn tells us, is “a culturally constructed concept that has important meanings for the consumers and increasingly the producers of these art forms” (1999:351). In museum and gallery contexts, authenticity may have an absolute, objective meaning (see Chapter 3), though I continue to approach the term from a constructivist perspective, clarifying as necessary different uses of the term. The opacity of this concept accounts for the long standing debate about its applicability and meaning, both in discussion of art and artefacts (and their relative values) and in discussions of “culture” more generally, but a constructivist approach allows for understanding of authenticity as perceived rather than as absolute.

One of the factors often cited as differentiating art from artefacts (or, more casually, crafts) is intention in production (Errington 1994, Shiner 1994:226). At a basic level, as discussed in the introductory section of this chapter, material objects in the Trobriands can be divided into those that have a utilitarian and/or ceremonial purpose in Trobriand life, and have thus been manufactured for a period extending well before the colonial era; and aesthetically pleasing but functionally insignificant pieces which carvers and other craftspeople have begun creating more recently, that is, since an external market in such items has been encouraged, mostly by foreigners who recognised the craftsmanship and potential commodity value of Trobriand objects. Errington (1994:203) distinguishes between what she calls art by appropriation and art by intention. The latter is art made by artists intended as art; the former consists of objects that became art through institutionalisation in museums and (Western) ideas about aesthetics and display of material objects in public institutions. She notes, “The frame pronounces what it encloses to be not “real” life but something different from it, a representation of reality.... Art by appropriation, by contrast, is not born in a frame, so to speak. It becomes ‘art’ by being framed, by being removed from a context of use and performance” (Errington 1994:206–
Shiner (1994:226–227, italics in original) points out the inherent paradox that

...carvings not intended to be Art in our [Western] sense but made primarily as functional objects are considered ‘authentic’ Primitive or Traditional Art, whereas carvings intended to be Art in our sense, i.e., made to be appreciated solely for their appearance, are called ‘fakes’ and reduced to the status of mere commercial craft.

We see here a set of dichotomies against which an object is judged, valued, and categorised: motivation or intention (as art object vs. as utilitarian object); handmade vs. mass produced; elite or singular vs. common. While the Western art tradition generally favours the former, in Trobriand and other “tribal” art, items made for local use are generally more highly valued than objects made specifically for the market; they are seen by both producers and consumers as more authentic. Thus, originality is less important than consistency and adherence to an often mythical continuity from past to present, as the Trobriand cricket bat pictured at the beginning of this chapter or, for that matter, traditional Trobriand dance, illustrates.

Myers (2001b: 33) observes that the distinction between art and “kitsch” emerged through the process of modernisation, particularly in mid-nineteenth century France, wherein the elite installed qualitative judgment around the value of particular cultural forms. In this process, “the category ‘art’ came to stand redemptively against kitsch, the mass-produced, the ‘inauthentic’. Its autonomy implies that art must be nonutilitarian (art for art’s sake), ‘authentic,’ handmade, expressive of other qualities of the human spirit, and of high quality” (Myers 2001b:33). This definition, however, does not exclude much of the material culture produced for tourist consumption in the Trobriand Islands as souvenirs or kitsch—all of which is locally handmade, and is often highly expressive of “qualities of the human spirit” and intricately detailed with exceptional skill—from the category of art. Indeed, until recently both art historians and anthropologists generally resoundingly rejected most commoditised objects as spurious “on the grounds of both stylistic hybridity, which conflicts with essentialist notions of the relationship between style and culture, and their production for an external market, which conflicts with widespread ideas of authenticity” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:9). Here, of course, they refer to an objective/object authenticity based on a set of somewhat arbitrary criteria (see Chapter 3).

Appadurai (1986:26), citing Graburn, identifies tourist arts as “objects produced for aesthetic, ceremonial, or sumptuary use in small, face-to-face communities [which] are transformed culturally, economically, and socially by the tastes, markets, and ideologies of
larger economies.” It is not entirely clear to me how this definition separates “tourist art” from the kinds of “high” arts sold in galleries and displayed in museums; indeed, Errington (1994:221) notes that such objects used to be denigrated, “but are now taking their place as legitimate forms of arts, crafts, and decorations and are moving into the category of contemporary art, with named artists.” Similarly, Phillips and Steiner argue that “far from being a ‘mere’ commercial craft, many forms of tourist or export art have been shown to exhibit all the communicative and signifying qualities of ‘legitimate’ or ‘authentic’ works of art” (1999:15). Unlike many other parts of the world, there is no mass production of artefacts or souvenirs for the tourist trade in the Trobriands (or, for that matter, in PNG as a whole); the objects sold are made by hand, from primarily local materials. Thus, the distinction between art/artefact/commodity is particularly fuzzy in the Trobriand example.

Phillips and Steiner (1999:4) argue that “a particularly dense aura of inauthenticity surrounds objects produced for the souvenir and tourist trades because they are most obviously located at the intersection of the discourses of art, artefact, and commodity.” While (much like the gifts/commodities distinction) the practical applicability of these distinctions is debatable, they nonetheless provide an analytical framework through which to think about “things”. Objects offered for sale at auction, for example, are almost never identified as items produced for sale rather than for local use, because this would reduce their (market) value, irrespective of the object’s aesthetic qualities. Tourists, too—though often oblivious of the symbolic meanings objects may have locally, and with little knowledge of the relative “quality” of a given object—often have clear ideas about the value of objects they consider “authentic” Trobriand artefacts as opposed to items created, skilfully or no, for the tourist market. As one visitor dolefully told me, “Before, people here must have had an authentic arts and crafts culture that had nothing to do with us; but now things are created to sell to tourists.” Clearly, this “creation” of a category of objects aimed at the tourist market is deemed inherently inauthentic compared to objects made for other purposes, such that the perception of the value of such objects is negatively affected.

**Transactions, Trajectories, and Value**

When I see small objects, I think, ‘Oh, they’re just made for tourists.’ This [canoe] prowboard is smaller than usual, [so] you know they made it to fit in my bag. [Patti, an Australian woman in her 30s, visiting independently]

As mentioned above, artefacts or souvenirs for the tourist trade in the Trobriand Islands are locally and individually manufactured. In the absence of a secure shop or even
a regular stand in the small produce market in Losuia, carvings are sold very much on an ad hoc basis. When a tourist or group arrives, and especially on the days of the Airlines PNG flights to the island, hopeful entrepreneurs bring walking sticks, carved lime gourds, or shell necklaces to the airstrip, their available wares wrapped in lengths of fabric, with hopes that a visiting dimdim, public servant, or pilot might make a purchase. However, there is no particular area, either at the airstrip or at the small market in Losuia, where such objects are displayed. Instead, carvers keep their objects wrapped in cloth and carry them on their person, only unwrapping them before the eyes of their potential customer. Calculations must be made to determine if the effort is worth the potential payoff; for a single guest, one carver may see walking for several hours on the slim chance of a sale as a “waste of time”, unless he has other business (a relative to visit, a trip to the government station) to attend to on the same trip. The lure is greater for a visiting group, whether by plane or by ship; word of the impending arrival of a cruise ship, for example, spreads quickly, and carvers are willing to invest considerable time and money (for boat fare or petrol) for the opportunity to make a big sale. Although the arrival of cruise ships also offers a high probability of making a sale, this happens in the Trobriands only a few times a year. Still, a lucky carver might make several hundred or even a thousand or more kina as dozens of moneyed tourists and crew disembark for a glance around a Trobriand village.

The absence of any organised, permanent or semi-permanent locality for the display of Trobriand carved objects and other art/craft items, where a visitor might freely browse, compare prices, and make a considered choice, is frustrating to many visitors. Others, however, feel that this fact makes their purchase of Trobriand objects more authentic; many cite transacting directly with the carver and being able to ask questions about the meaning or history of a given object as heightening the value of the object (to them). This does not, of course, mean that they are necessarily willing to pay more for the item, but that the item is imbued with a greater “aura” (to once again invoke Benjamin) than would virtually the same item purchased at the airport gift shop in Port Moresby (where they would pay several times more). As one visitor said, “I would rather buy artefacts in the villages; it would have more meaning to me. If I buy it in the shop, it’s just a souvenir, but if I buy it in the village, it really represents a nice experience” (Beaney, an Australian woman in her 40s, travelling independently).

When sold outside the local context, in Port Moresby or abroad, carvers lose the ability to make a personal connection with potential consumers, which is significant in a place where a gift economy even today pervades Trobriand life to a far greater extent than
the market economy. The airport gift shop in Port Moresby carries a selection of
Trobriand wood carvings at highly inflated prices. PNG Art, also in Port Moresby, is a
warehouse-like facility catering to serious collectors, gallery owners and interior designers
from Europe, Asia and the USA, some of whom make annual or biannual trips to Port
Moresby just to see what regional buyers have brought in from across the country.
On a smaller scale, Trobriand artist Samuel Laguna has a small artefact shop in the
provincial capital of Alotau, which is poorly advertised and rarely visited by tourists, but
which houses a small collection of high-quality walking sticks, statues, stools, bowls, and
other carved objects as well as paintings by Samuel and other artists in the region. Not
only is the carver, in these instances, unable to make a relationship (however superficial)
with the buyer, but the change in context also changes the relationship of the consumer
with the object, for whom it is no longer about personal experience, but instead about
things like status, connoisseurship, and capital, both fiscal and cultural (Bourdieu 1973,

Whether purchased directly from the carver, from a middleman, or from an artefact
shop on the mainland, the majority of tourists do buy items such as small statues, ebony
walking sticks, and rosewood bowls which are made explicitly for sale, often for a minimal
cash price, which are invested with meaning as evocations of place and experience when
taken home. Tourists very often explicitly spoke of their desire to obtain a tangible
representation of their experience in the Trobriand Islands, although some stated that they
felt no need to collect objects, as their photographs would provide a visible and tangible
memento of their experience. When purchasing objects, visitors frequently wanted
assurance that the items are “authentic”, in their own definition—many are suspicious as to
whether the carved items are, in fact, locally produced, and I was asked more than once by
would-be buyers for confirmation that the carved items were not “made in China and
shipped here”. The connection to the place itself, and the producers, is herein emphasised
as a significant aspect of the value of the object. As Francine, a French woman in her 40s
travelling independently with her sister, put it, “I buy things that I like, but it’s more about
the memory—if it comes from somewhere, from someone I’ve met, then it’s more special.”

While clearly commodities, souvenirs in this context take on some aspects of the
gift; as Goss (2004:328) observes, “the souvenir is the commodity form that most
effectively denies its commodity status.” The transaction is not just about the object itself,
but about the meanings and associations—of people, and of experiences—invested in and
conveyed by the object. As Phillips and Steiner (1999:3) point out,
the materiality and physical presence of the object make it a uniquely persuasive witness to the existence of realities outside the compass of an individual’s or a community’s experience. The possession of an exotic object offers, too, an imagined access to a world of difference, often constituted as an enhancement of the new owner’s knowledge, power, or wealth.

When purchasing souvenirs, tourists often asked the seller if he or she made the item, because they felt the transaction was more important and meaningful, and thus less about the actual money changing hands, when they had a sense of a personal connection with the producer. In this sense, being given a small object—whether as a sort of “opening gift” given by the carver in hopes of encouraging a sense of debt and obligation on the part of the visitor to buy something, or as a “payment” to tourists who participated in tilewai, as described in Chapter 5—were particularly esteemed, not because of the physical qualities of the object, but because it represented to the visitor their successful navigation of the intercultural relationship.

A number of tourists noted that the context was very important in their desire to buy (or refuse) an artefact, and several visitors expressed frustration or disappointment that their inquiries about the “meaning” of an object or a design did not result in a story that met with their satisfaction. The idea that a carver might carve an object because he liked the design, had seen it elsewhere and decided to copy it (as often happens), or simply thought it would be the right size and shape to appeal to a tourist is not the exotic, authenticating object biography many cultural tourists are looking for. As one visitor told me, “I really want to know story of the carvings, but it’s difficult, because people cannot explain it well—it’s a problem of communication”, referring to difficulties of translation (though many carvers are quite competent in speaking English). Olga, the Swiss visitor introduced in the opening vignette in Chapter 5, expressed dismay at the unsatisfactory responses she received when she asked her local guide about the meaning of the designs carved in the prowboards of kula canoes, claiming that the inability of the average Trobriand Islander to provide a “story” that met with her satisfaction to explain the designs was evidence of the death of Kiriwina culture—this despite the fact that carving for kula canoes is a highly specialised task and the knowledge of such symbols is not common to the population at large (Campbell 2002; Malinowski 1922[1984]).

Many carvers are well aware of what makes an object desirable to tourists, as has also been noted elsewhere (e.g., Steiner 1995), and may even manipulate the presentation or description of objects to heighten their value in the eyes of prospective buyers. Joseph, the carver pictured (Figure 7.4), produced a handwritten text (Figure 7.5) to accompany his
carved storyboard. He felt that by providing the “story” of the carving in a medium more familiar to a Western buyer—that is, a written text—he would increase both the likelihood of a sale, and the price he could expect to receive (notice, too, that he explicitly refers to his work as “art”). Recognising tourists’ quest for meaning in intercultural encounters, his text was designed to give cultural context to the storyboard, thus making it more desirable to prospective buyers. It is also not uncommon for carvers to polish inferior woods with black shoe polish in the hopes of passing them off as ebony to uninformed tourists, or to enhance the history and thus value of an object by fabricating or exaggerating details of its age, provenance, or use-life. Artefact sellers might even employ magic designed to make the seller and his products irresistible to the prospective customer.

As opportunities to sell objects directly to tourists are limited on Kiriwina, carvers have several other options to try to sell or exchange their wares. Carved items may be accepted as a form of payment locally to meet various needs. They can sometimes be exchanged for yam seeds or food, as well as school fees; whenever I visited the headmaster at Kiriwina High School, his office was packed with walking sticks, bowls, and statues which had been paid in lieu of cash by parents of students to cover the cost of annual dues for secondary education. The headmaster would eventually find a buyer for these items to cover the monetary costs necessary to meet the school budget. Alternatively, carvers may choose to sell to local intermediary buyers or middlemen, who have connections with wholesale traders or private collectors. One such buyer owns and operates a small canteen on Kiriwina as well as operating a successful artefact trade. Naturally, however, the price he is willing to pay is much lower than that expected from the average tourist, so most carvers prefer to wait for a more lucrative sale, unless they require money immediately to meet a specific and urgent need. Another option is to travel by boat to Alotau, or even on to Port Moresby, and either try to sell their carvings to a hotel (most have a small display of artefacts for sale, inevitably including Trobriand wood carvings) or shop like Sam’s, or, to do much the same as is done on Kiriwina: wrap the item in cloth and carry it around town on foot, looking for dimdims who might pay a higher price than local buyers would be willing to part with. It is a series of calculations—how immediately does the carver need money? Does he have wantoks to take care of him in town? Does he have pressing obligations back in the village? Does he have a girlfriend in town to visit? Such decisions require a balancing of economic (“rational maximising”) and social factors, and carvers often stay in town for several months hoping to make the best returns (in whatever way that is calculated in a specific case) on their efforts.
Figure 7.4: Carvings for sale by Joseph Toyalaka, a Trobriand carver, in Alotau on the day of a cruise ship arrival

Figure 7.5: Handwritten text to accompany carved rosewood story board depicted in Figure 7.4
Following Gudeman’s work on livelihood (1986), I think local models of understanding the nature of exchange (and associated concepts like money and profit) are likely to be more useful in understanding Trobriand-tourist transactions than classic (Western) economic models. As an example, in some cases, travellers have no local currency, so must pay for their purchases in American or Australian dollars or euros. Carvers often accept such currencies, even though the local branch of the Bank of the South Pacific (BSP) offers poor rates of exchange if it accepts such currencies at all. Still, carvers hope they will be able to exchange these notes for something useful, and it often seems a better option than lugging the carving back home and awaiting another opportunity to make a sale. I often had carvers come to my house in the days following a cruise ship visit to ask me if I would be willing to buy their foreign notes, and to inquire about fair exchange rates for various currencies. I do not see this as desperation on the part of the carver; on the contrary, there is an active decision on the part of the carver to accept or decline a transaction, and a recognition that an exchange is never finite. Like in kula, objects, and even money, continue to circulate, and even if the transactions between the two particular persons (carver and tourist) will not continue, there is always the hope and possibility of developing a relationship with a new trading partner.

Consuming Meaningful Objects

I don’t buy what they make for tourists—if it has meaning for people who use it, it has more meaning for me. [Sally, a retired American woman in her 60s, visiting on a group tour]

The meanings with which people invest objects arise from various conceptual distinctions, which may differ from one individual to the next and are, according to Graeber, hierarchical (2001:17; Munn 1986:18). Munn (1986:6–7) defines meaning as “a cover term for the relational nexus that enters into any given sociocultural form or practise (of whatever order of complexity) and defines that practise.” Graeber (2001:39) suggests that the meaning or importance ascribed to an object by a given society is its value; in fact, the relationship between meaning and value is a complicated one, and is not articulately theorised in much of the existing literature. Meaning and value may be particularly hard to theorise when we are speaking of the consumption of the cultural products the Other, in which the “code” or semiotic meanings that a given object carries locally may not be understood by a wider audience in the same way; tourists (and art collectors, and museum-goers) have to read the symbolic nature of a given artefact through their own semiotic
framework, such that meaning will be invested differently into the same object. Meaning and value are often manipulated through presentation or description of an object—enhancing its biography—whether by producers, art brokers, curators, or even tourists themselves (e.g., Steiner 1995), as Joseph’s text illustrates. By providing a handwritten story to accompany his carved storyboard, Joseph seeks to enhance its value by giving it a clearly articulated “meaning” translated into a language and format familiar to the prospective buyer in hopes of fetching a higher price for his product.

Appadurai’s concept of “regimes of value” (1986) prompted a florescence of interest in material culture studies and a re-examination of “the ways objects come to convey and condense value and, in doing so, are used to construct social identities and communicate cultural differences between individuals and groups” (Myers 2001b:3). He uses the example of tourist art to illustrate “subtler examples of the diversion of commodities from their predestined paths” (Appadurai 1986:26)—though I am not convinced that such paths are in any case predetermined. Citing Graburn (1976), Appadurai notes that tourist arts represent an extreme case in the gaps in knowledge, tastes, and understanding between producer and consumer (1986:47). He elaborates:

At the producer end, one sees traditions of fabrication...in response to commercial and aesthetic impositions or temptations from larger-scale, and sometimes far-away consumers. At the other end, one has souvenirs, mementos, curios, collections, exhibits, and the status contests, expertise, and commerce on which they rest. In between one has a series of commercial and aesthetic links, sometimes complex, multiple, and indirect and sometimes overt, few, and direct. In both cases, tourist art constitutes a special commodity traffic, in which the group identities of producers are tokens for the status politics of consumers. [Appadurai 1986:47]

What is lacking in Appadurai’s discussion is a recognition of the active role of the producers—not just by modifying forms and designs to meet consumers’ tastes, but as reflexive, aware, decision-making individuals who balance their own conceptualisations of aesthetics and authenticity with external concerns such as economic necessity and consumer preferences, and who “value” their own products for their practical usefulness, symbolic value and skilful production. To reconfigure Appadurai, one sees not only “traditions of fabrication”, but also fabrications of tradition, as Joseph’s handwritten text illustrates. And, let us not forget, appropriation of the material culture of Others as a status symbol or political tool works in both directions; the Trobriand Islander driving a Toyota truck, drinking Coca-Cola or wearing a button-up shirt and long trousers is likewise an example wherein (as quoted above) “the group identities of producers are tokens for the status politics of consumers.” Still, the essence of Appadurai’s argument—that items
exchanged with cultural Others represent a case through which we can explore issues of value creation, knowledge, power, and authenticity by examining how different “regimes of value” operate in space and time—is worth pursuing.

In order to illustrate how “regimes of value” may be reflected in practice, it may be useful to examine how the trajectories of a few specific objects inform the way meaning(s) and value(s) is/are created and invested through exchange. To that end, I turn now to a particular item of Trobriand material culture, referred to as a valuable (vegu ’wa) in the Trobriand language and fetishized not only in the Trobriands and neighbouring islands, but in anthropology itself. Mwali and soulava are the shell “valuables” exchanged in the famed kula “ring” described by Malinowski in Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922[1984]). These objects, exchanged in kula over generations, accrue value as they pass from hand to hand, taking with them the stories of those who have held them. Their biographies are well known and retold with each exchange. Kula objects, of which new ones are added into circulation regularly, but with less “fame” (Munn 1986) than those with established histories, may in fact be owned by a particular individual. Such objects are called kitoum and are sometimes removed from kula to be given as a gift (e.g., to a visiting dignitary) or for sale by their owner, the only person who has the right to take a kula object out of circulation. Other objects, fashioned with the same raw materials, may be created expressly for sale, never actually intended for exchange in kula. Actors/owners sometimes weigh up economic needs against ownership of a given object, and recognize that its identification as vegu ’wa means it can potentially be exchanged for money.

The mwali depicted in Figure 7.7 is advertised on the website of the same broker for “tribal art” as the Trobriand cricket bat depicted at the beginning of this chapter, and is but one example of the hundreds of Trobriand objects available for sale internationally. Here, age, history, and a brief explanation of the kula ring (Malinowksi providing the authority on the topic) are evoked to authenticate the object. There is also the suggestion the item is very rare, and should still be circulating in kula; the prospective buyer would be lucky to own such as “large and impressive” example of an item that is of great value to those who exchange it. The pricing of a “priceless” object—a singularity (Kopytoff 1986, Karpik 2010)—seems somewhat arbitrary; by what means is conceptual value translated into a dollar value? What is more, most prospective buyers, even those who have read accounts of kula, lack the cultural knowledge necessary to adequately evaluate the object. Instead, they have only their own aesthetic appreciation and a faith in the idea that if this object (they are told) was valuable to someone, it should be valuable to them.
This large and impressive example, circa 1950s, is built on a large clamshell bracelet to which is attached a wide collar of colourful trade beadwork and a number of white egg cowry shells. All the work is done with fishing line, as it has been done for decades (strong cheap and does not require a needle). Size 29 x 23 x 9 cm / 11 ½ x 9 x 3 ½ inches.

The Kula is the most famous trading journey in Oceania—large canoes from throughout the Masssim area had trading partners on other islands, with whom they traded their own surplus produce—clay pots, taro, pigs, shell money, etc. At the same time, each kula trader had a trading partner on the other island with whom he exchanged gifts, and these gifts passed from hand to hand within the kula ring. There was a strict procedure for the exchange. Red shell disk necklaces (bagi) were always exchange in a clockwise direction and white clamshell armbands (mwali) in an anti-clockwise direction. The most famous kula items were named and each item changed hands frequently. The participants politicked (and employed magic wherever possible) to obtain the choicest examples and hold them for a while as they were publically displayed and conveyed great status. It is very unusual for a mwali of this size and age to be sold—possibly the kula ring that generated it on Vakuta had collapsed?

Ref: For a full description of the Kula trading cycle, see B Malinowski, “Argonauts of the Western Pacific.”.

Price: $1,800.00 AUD

http://tribalartbrokers.net/beaddetails.asp?itemId=wwl

Figure 7.6: Mwali for sale as “tribal art”
A specific example of an exchange that illustrates well the fluidity of the art/artefact/commodity triad and the intersection of regimes of value took place in mid-2010. A well-heeled couple from the UK became interested in Trobriand art/artefacts after their daughter worked at the auction house Sotheby’s. During her employ, the daughter “fell in love” with a carved wooden lime spatula (kena) that came up for auction. She showed the object to her parents, also art enthusiasts, who purchased the lime spatula and subsequently developed a keen interest in Massim art and culture. Martin and Elizabeth later decided to visit the islands for themselves, as tourists, but they stressed that the trip was not a mission to collect art or artefacts. They chartered a boat and travelled throughout the Massim for about two weeks. While in the tiny atoll of Gawa, Martin was presented with the opportunity to purchase a shell armband (mwali) similar in form to that pictured (Figure 7.7), for a sum of K550—about the price of a mature pig. This object was a kitoum, the property of the owner, though it had (the owner said) circulated in kula, a fact that Martin stressed was important to him as evidence of the object’s authenticity. When I asked if he had any qualms about taking a valuable out of the kula ring, Martin told me he would not have bought one still in circulation. Still, this item obviously had sentimental value to the owner, who had acquired it the same year his daughter died and had written her name on it; it was rubbed off when he sold the mwali out of need to raise school fees for another of his children.

As art collectors, Martin and Elizabeth had clear ideas about object/objectivist authenticity. Much as the history or biography of who has held a kula valuable and how long it has been exchanged has resonance and adds value to objects circulating within the kula network, these same markers of authenticity—history, use, and the “aura” imbued as a result of the object’s inclusion in a “traditional” exchange network—are also used to sell the object in a non-traditional exchange. This was not an isolated case, by any means. Many tourists talked about desiring to purchase an object that was “useful”—not for their own Western life, but for the cultural Others they had come to see. As Alison, an American woman in her 60s travelling with her husband on a group tour, put it (echoing the sentiments of Patti, whose quote opened this chapter): “I want to buy something that really has purpose in the culture, and that has aesthetic value for the makers. If they tell the story of the object, it means so much more to me.” Alison, who had a close relationship with a major museum, also noted that she desired physical evidence of that object’s use, in the form of patina, use wear, or other manifestations of the use-life of the object.
This exchange leads inevitably, in light of the current discussion, to the question, is such an object art? Artefact? Commodity/souvenir? At what point, and to whom? Or is it all three, and more, at once? Does the fact that Martin and Elizabeth are connoisseurs and collectors make it art, when for another visitor it would be “just” a trinket? Clearly, it is a commodity at the point of transaction, but if there is no intent to resell, does it cease to be a commodity, while retaining “commodity potential”? It seems to me that such an object can be simultaneously conceived of as art, artefact or ethnographic object, and souvenir. This very object might have just as easily found its way into a museum collection, as items with similar provenance and aesthetic and symbolic qualities have done, or as a conversation piece in the home of a tourist who has little to no understanding of its cultural significance in Trobriand life. Circumstance and the value systems specific to a moment of exchange, not design, determined the object’s movement across space and time.

I have already alluded to some similarities between the sale of objects to tourists or art collectors and transactions in the *kula* trade, and this bears some elaboration here. In *kula*, a participant will try to sweeten or “turn the mind” of his partner with a *vaga* (opening gift) or a *kaributu* (solicitary gift) (Malinowski 1922[1984]: 98–99). Although I never heard these particular terms used during my stay on Kiriwina, on a number of occasions carvers made opening gifts to tourists (or the resident anthropologist) of small carvings in order to create a relationship and a sense of obligation to later reciprocate by purchasing a carving of greater value. As in *kula*, these manoeuvres do not always achieve the desired result, but they are a strategic “play” in which one participant in the game of exchange tries to influence another. While a tourist transaction might be expected to consist of a finite and bounded one-off transaction, it is not necessarily the case. I have pointed out that carvers sometimes accept foreign currencies for carvings, which will require additional later transactions to achieve the desired outcome, and even objects exchanged for legal PNG tender are not finite; the money earned from a carving continues to have social significance, as it will be invested in something (children’s school fees, rice for a feast or to feed those who help in the garden or with building a house, or even just the feeding of one’s own family) that will create further obligations to reciprocate in myriad ways. Although money cannot carry “fame” in the same way as a *kula* valuable or canoe (Munn 1986), it does circulate, and it does, in some cases, the same work as *vegu’wa*. This is a point that will be further elaborated in Chapter 9.
Encounters and Opportunities

As this discussion has demonstrated, perception about authenticity in form, manufacture and “meaning” are essential to the way value is ascribed by various parties, be they tourists, art dealers, or the carvers themselves. These values do not always correspond, as different frames of reference—different prevailing metanarratives—guide the priorities of each. For tourists, there is an added dimension of the authenticity of the experience itself, in which the object is imbued with a particular aura because it is evocative of “being there”. Ideas about an object’s use similarly vary. Even when employing the same discourse of authenticity, people interpret/think/act in different ways. Some travellers, as well as art collectors/connoisseurs, do not want purely decorative items made for tourist trade, as they feel they are inherently “inauthentic”; while others expressly avoid buying something they know is important locally, as they feel this is exploitative. They despair of Trobriand Islanders selling their “real” culture to foreigners, which they may interpret as desperation, and feel that to purchase such an item would be tantamount to stealing something integral to the culture. Richard, a retired Australian man married to a Papua New Guinean who had made several visits to the Trobriands, demonstrated this proclivity when he told me about some objects he purchased with the goal of saving them for future generations. He showed me several artefacts—a flute, a shell, and two *kaipita* (mortar and pestles)—which were sold to him by a very old woman in Omarakana who was a widow of former Paramount Chief Mitakaka. The old woman had offered him these objects, saying she’s now a member of a Pentecostal Church and has to get rid of old items associated with magic (*megwa*)—these were objects used to work her love/beauty magic on the old chief. Richard bought all of them, expressing to me deep concern about their sale and their future. He told me he would take them to the Anthropology Department at the University of Papua New Guinea “for safekeeping” as he did not want the objects to leave PNG. Of course, Trobrianders make conscious, reasoned decisions about what they want to sell, and for what price, and they do not exchange when it is not in their interest to do so.

Phillips and Steiner (1999:15) note that definitions of art, artefact and commodity become relevant at moments of negotiation and exchange, when objects are evaluated and re-evaluated according to regional criteria. I would add that such evaluations are not only based on geographical or even “cultural” differences or definitions, but also reflect differing knowledge or experience, power, and priorities or agendas. At the same time,
part of the intercultural encounter involves each transactor trying—sometimes with more, sometimes with less success—to understand something of the Other’s perspective. For the buyer, the social interaction with the producer or his proxy, and the contextual information conveyed in the object, give it a value more complex than the cash price paid for the item. While the sale of an object from a Trobriand Islander to a tourist or collector is a commodity transaction by definition, it may simultaneously exhibit some social-relational characteristics more generally associated with gift exchange.

In sum, we have seen that objects such as a cricket bat, *kula* armband, or ebony carving may not only move from art to artefact to commodity and back again, but inhabit all three categories simultaneously. As Phillips and Steiner observe, we can only understand the nature of an object by looking not just at its physical properties, but more importantly at what is conveyed

...in the very process of collection, which inscribes, at the moment of acquisition, the character and qualities that are associated with the object in both individual and collective memories. In order to interpret such objects we must begin to unpack the baggage of transcultural encounter with which they travel and search for the meanings and memories stored inside.” [Phillips and Steiner 1999:19]

While the object’s origin or the circumstances of production cannot be completely discounted as contributing to the value of an object in the broad definition I have outlined, objects with similar origins can travel along a range of trajectories, wherein the value judgements that impinge on a given exchange situation will determine the ultimate destination of the object—to the museum display case, a private collection, or a tourists’ curio shelf. Appadurai (1986:3) tells us that exchange creates value, but I think Gregory (1997:44) clarifies the point by reminding us that it is the people who exchange, and their perceptions about the objects being transacted, that creates value. Trobrianders, tourists, and collectors all have ways of ascribing value, which may or may not overlap, such that distinctions between art, artefact, and souvenir are rarely fixed, and always hold the potential for reevaluation and new directions in the social life of the thing.

The moment of encounter is, essentially, an opportunity. For the village resident, it is an opportunity to showcase one’s identity, to extend the famous Trobriand hospitality, and to enjoy an experience that breaks up the daily routine, and it offers the potential to earn much needed cash. For visitors, it is an opportunity to expose oneself to a different way of life, to learn appreciation for one’s own privileges, to take away photos, material objects, and narrated experiences that will impress and amaze family and friends back home, and to achieve a feeling of satisfaction for having “helped” an impoverished
individual or community by engaging in “grassroots” tourism. Such opportunities may or may not be realised in a concrete sense in a given encounter, but the collective experience of both parties means that they come to the encounter with such expectations and understandings and are likely to feel satisfied if the experience meets, and frustrated or disappointed if the experience does not meet, these anticipated results.

The exchange that takes place at the site of the intercultural encounter is experienced on numerous levels—personal, social, material. The differences brought to the experience do not prevent exchange, which may be negotiated between tourist and Trobriander directly, or facilitated by an intermediary such as a tour guide, a guest house employee, or even an anthropologist, who has the cultural knowledge necessary to bridge gaps in understanding. However, as Appadurai (1986:15) argues, exchange does not necessarily require a “complete cultural sharing of assumptions”, even if each party’s understandings of that exchange may differ.

Indeed, it is the very incongruence of previous experience, expectation, and subsequent narration of the intercultural encounter that is of interest here. Each side creates their own experiences, and the misunderstandings or misrepresentations that may result are telling of the social fields in which each party operates, and the processes involved in understanding and representing self and Other. At times, the encounter may be framed in terms of commonalities, but more often than not, it is framed in terms of difference. As Tonnaer argues, the touristic interface as a social field is about more than simply the interpretation of “culture”, it in fact constitutes its reality through these very representations and experiences (2008:15). Cultural tourism thus provides a setting through which the ethnographer can come to understand how self and Other are conceived, presented, manipulated and interpreted at the site of intercultural encounter.

In the next chapter, another type of souvenir, and (in its production) a site of another kind of intercultural encounter is explored, through a discussion of the role of tourist photography. This is followed by a discussion (in Chapter 9) of the differences in understanding and interpretation between tourists and the toured, in which exchange—especially cash transactions for touristic goods and services—is examined as a site of intercultural encounter which further exemplifies the ways in which different metanarratives framing the interaction determine how it is understood by both parties. Whether individually negotiated or facilitated by an intermediary, issues of morality and understandings of personhood are invoked in the ways both Trobrianders and tourists narrate potential and actual interactions.
42 Burns, Philp & Co., Ltd., a retail and wholesale food manufacturer that supplied mission stations, was established in 1883. The company was also the first to offer tourist expeditions to New Guinea, first advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald in February 1884 (N. Douglas 1996:49).

43 The Kilivila term *katuvila*, which is a gift of yams, betelnut, and other produce from the bride’s family to the groom’s family, which is met with a return gift, is often translated by English-speaking Kiriwinians as “bride price”, but it should be noted that these are distinctly different in both scale and symbolic meaning than the Tok Pisin term *brideprais* which is used to mean quite different types of exchanges in other parts of PNG.

44 See M. Douglas (1966) for the significance of dirt and pollution in association with taboos.

45 Trobriand Arts operated in Port Moresby for about a decade, closing in the early 1980s.

46 Malinowski did not make reference to *kitoum*, but they have been discussed by a number of more recent scholars such as Damon (1980, 2002), Keesing (1990), Liep (1990), Munn (1986), and Weiner (1976, 1988, 1992). RJ May (1982:297) briefly discusses efforts made as part of micronationalist movements in Papua New Guinea in the 1970s to prevent *kula* valuables being sold outside the traditional exchange networks.
CHAPTER 8

TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY:
“To Collect Photographs is to Collect the World”

It’s so nice that there are so few tourists here. It means I can get pictures without hordes of Japanese tourists in the frame. Also, it makes it seem a more organic, local festival, not something put on or performed just for tourists’ sake. [Micky, a long-time expatriate resident in PNG in his 60s, visiting during the 2010 Ugwabwena Festival]

Photography is an important part of, on the one hand, framing visitor expectations and desire in advance of travel, and, on the other hand, framing the experience of a particular travel event 1) in the act of travel, 2) as a device for preserving and validating the moment of experience, and 3) providing a means to facilitate narration of the travel event once it resides in the traveller’s memory. The quotation in the chapter title is from the work of Susan Sontag (1973:3), and reflects the importance of photography to the travel experience. If ethnic tourism is, as Volkman (1990:91) asserts, the consummate manifestation of what James Clifford (1988:196) has called “the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world”, then the collection of objects, postcards, photographs, stories, experiences, and memories “presupposes processes of objectification that extend, in the case of ethnic tourism, to ‘culture’ itself” (Volkman 1990:91). Photographs and moving images are a particularly potent way of “capturing” the exotic Other, taming the so-called primitive, and creating and maintaining the metanarratives that pervade experiences of ethnic tourism. The photograph is authenticating in two senses; on the one hand, it validates the act and experience of travel, as incontrovertible evidence of having been there, and at the same time, it verifies that expectations have been met—that the real villagers, in their real homes, practising their real ceremonies or performing their real dances, have been found. The production of photographs that accurately replicate images previously created and consumed assures the traveller that the Other really does still exist, and thus closes Urry’s (2002:129) hermeneutic circle—in which the final step is travellers “demonstrating that they really have been there by showing their version of the images that they had seen before they set off”.

In Chapter 4, visual and textual representation of the Trobriands were used to demonstrate ways in which expectations of the experience of Trobriand tourism are romanticised, with emphasis on the authentic nature of the location—not as a “destination”,

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as such, but as a place where one can see “real life”—to create the desire to travel and experience alterity first hand. The several chapters that followed looked at some specific aspects of the tourist gaze, particularly in the context of cultural performance as well as “unperformance”, or what tourists refer to as “seeing life as it is really lived”. The tourist experience—whether watching organised dance performances, strolling through villages or along the beach, or stumbling upon an unexpected local event—is, by definition, an ephemeral one. Material culture in the form of souvenirs has an important role as representing place and experience in physical form. In addition to the purchase of wood carvings, shell jewellery, or other crafted items as tangible representations of the moment of experience and encounter, photographs are also an important souvenir. Photographs serve not only as mnemonic devices which illustrate and animate the narration of the travel event, but they possess a kind of authority or evidence of both place and experience. Sally, an American group tourist in her 60s, told me, for example, that even though she uses a digital camera, she makes an album for each of her trips, because looking at it “takes me back to that place”, and facilitates the retelling. In an early scene of the documentary film *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1987), a German tourist questions his local guide about a stone in the centre of a village on the Sepik River; the guide has informed the man that people were once ritually killed where he stands. “Now I need a photograph! The two of us, at this stone, for the memory,” the tourist asserts. In the film, the tourists’ view is always limited by what can be seen through the lens of the camera, and the collection of the “right” images, a few token objects bargained down to “second price”, and some stories about “native” ways of life seems to be the driving force for the tourists, who are as much a curiosity to local villagers as the villagers are to the tourists.

In this chapter, I look at tourist photography as an act of collection, appropriation, domestication, and validation. I explore how photography serves as a site of intercultural encounter much in the same way as a monetary transaction such as the purchase of a souvenir, and how such relationships are mediated and negotiated. I use my ethnographic data to demonstrate how both tourists and Trobrianders think about both the act of photography, and the resulting photograph. A photograph as an object is a souvenir and proof of an experience, and is conceived of differently by each of the parties; as Lutz and Collins (1994:363) put it, the photograph is “a dynamic site at which many gazes or viewpoints intersect”. The composition of the photograph, the moment of its creation, and the meaning invested in it once the moment has passed are all reflective of how the tourist-Trobriand interaction is contextualised by those who participate in the (re)production of
photographic images of the Other—and those who choose not to. Especially with the advent of digital photography, there is virtually no limit to the number of images one can collect while on holiday, and social media and blogging sites, as well as Web-based photo sharing services like Flickr, ensure that one’s photos can be distributed to a global audience. The propagation of the image via such media, in its various incarnations, is a way of freezing, transporting, and manipulating the intercultural encounter across space and time, with implications for the way both self and Other are represented.

What Is in a Photograph?

Photographs are representations; in turn, representations are a form of interpretation, offering varying illusions of reality (Stella 2007:1). The production of a photograph is an active creation, and, when viewed, photos are inevitably ascribed with meanings which vary depending on the viewers’ own frames of reference. All photographs, Lutz and Collins (1994:363) assert, “tell stories about looking...these looks—whether from the photographer, the reader, or the person photographed—are ambiguous, charged with feeling and power, and are central to the stories (sometimes several and conflicting) that the photo can be said to tell.” The photograph is comprised of both content and composition. The former “includes the sum total of its appearances; the entire inventory of phenomena that was exposed on film when the picture was taken or altered”, while the latter “involves the way in which the appearances are structured in relationship to one another” (Albers and James 1988:139). Sontag argues that “photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing...photographs really are experience captured” (1973:3). This linguistic analogy is also taken up by Albers and James (1988), who examine travel photographs and postcards of exotic Others, arguing that such photographs contain the qualities of both signs (metonym) and symbols (metaphor). A photograph that serves as metonym records an appearance that stands for itself or documents what is supposedly real and true, while one that serves as metaphor uses analogy to allude to meanings or tropes situated beyond the frame (Albers and James 1988:141). In their examination of representations of ethnic Others in postcards, Albers and James (1988:141) note that

the vast majority of postcards with ethnic subjects combine metaphoric and metonymic qualities in the composition of a single picture. They contain an authentic content, but it is the way the material is organised that gives it a special symbolic meaning... It is through an understanding of the relationship between a
picture’s metonymic and metaphoric properties that some insight can be gained into the process whereby tourist photography appropriates, creates, transforms, or even abandons local ethnicity for its own interests.

Furthermore, what is symbolically encoded in a picture will be interpreted and understood differently depending on the experience and knowledge of the viewer. Textual explanations, such as those found in travel guide books or on tourism websites, may also influence the ways in which a photograph is understood. The meanings encoded in photographs are complex and variable, denotative (literal) and connotative (emotional/subjective/symbolic), but a full analysis of the content and composition of actual tourist photographs taken by visitors to the Trobriand Islands is neither possible nor necessary for the argument being pursued in this thesis. In Chapter 4, I examined some of the kinds of representation of primitivity that create desire for travel to places of (perceived or real) radical alterity. In this chapter, I wish to focus on the act of photography, and why the production of photographs is so important to the tourism experience.

John Urry (2002) is credited with coining the phrase “the tourist gaze”, the title of his seminal text now in its third edition (Urry and Larsen 2011). He examines “what is meant by the idea of seeing and in turn being seen” via the medium of photography (Urry 2002:124). Urry usefully summarises several key characteristics of photography as they have been presented in previous literature, drawing on such sources as Sontag (1973), Berger (1972), Barthes (1981), Albers and James (1988), and Osborne (2000). First, he notes that photography is an appropriation, and consequently a power/knowledge relationship. As Urry puts it, “photography tames the object of the gaze, the most striking examples being of exotic cultures” (2002:127). Second, photography gives the appearance of transcribing reality; that is, of providing incontrovertible evidence of an object or event’s existence (though of course, photographs are increasingly easy to manipulate). But, and this is his third point, photographs are invariably shaped, structured, and selected by the photographer; they are “the outcome of an active signifying practise” (Urry 2002:128). Photographs are simulacra, and photographers “amateur semioticians” (Urry 2002:128). Photography democratises all forms of human experience, and gives “shape” to travel, by marking events and places as significant (Urry 2002:128). Finally, Urry observes that tourists inevitably already have mental images of what they will see, based on images already known to them; the photographs they return home with are replications that demonstrate having been “there”. Selby (2010:40) furthers this notion, stressing that “tourists seek out specific cultural markers, the signs and symbols that signify typical
cultures and histories in a language familiar and desirable to different groups of place consumers.” Tourists thus both produce and consume visual representations of the places they visit (Larsen 2005:417).

Bruner (2005:26) provides an example, in which a couple on tour in Southeast Asia brought with them copies of National Geographic magazine, the photographs in which were used as a template for the photographs composed by the travellers. Even when the picture (and/or textual description) cannot accurately be replicated, it still may be referred to as a frame of reference. Jason, a 30-year-old American visitor travelling in the Trobriands independently, told me, “I was looking at Malinowski again the other day, and looking at the picture of people in loincloths and grass skirts, you can see how things have definitely changed...if the people today were all wearing loincloths and grass skirts it would have made a big difference, had a very different feel.” Similarly, Patti, an Australian woman in her 30s, stated, “When I first went to one of the villages and looked around, and I saw a yam house, I thought, wow, that’s not like in the pictures!”

While not all tourists to the Trobriands have read Malinowski, most arrive with literal or figurative images of the sort of primitive place they expect to find, based largely, as outlined in Chapter 4, on consumption of popular representations of primitivity in magazines like National Geographic, documentaries, and reality television. While exoticising alterity, National Geographic uses beauty, ideal examples, artful poses, and light to ensure that the reader does not find the exotic too different; for all its visual appeal, the Other is still knowable and relatable, thus making the act of travelling to experience the Other in the flesh an achievable goal (Lutz and Collins 1993:96)

Lutz and Collins (1993:89–90) examine the representation of Others in National Geographic as follows:

The eye of National Geographic, like the eye of anthropology, looks for cultural difference. It is continually drawn to people in brightly coloured, “different” dress, engaged in initially strange-seeming rituals or inexplicable behaviour. This exoticism involves the creation of an other who is strange but—at least as important—beautiful…The exotic other is by definition attractive, albeit in a special, threefold sense. When the camera looks for the unusual, it ensures a reader whose attention is riveted by the intriguing scene. It draws attention, at least implicitly, to things that define “us” in our unmarked and usual state of humanness, that is, as people who dress and act in “standard” ways. It also creates a distance that the magazine may or may not have attempted to bridge in other ways. The distance is the product of making the pictured person a kind of spectacle... One of the effects of the emphasis on spectacle is to discredit the significance of the foreign, even to create a sense of its fictitiousness.
In cultural tourism, any sense of fictitiousness is dispelled by actually being there, although people may experience a given place, event, or person as more or less authentic depending on his/her own expectations, previous experiences, and knowledge. But, like the *National Geographic* photographer, the tourist’s lens is also trained on the unusual, sights of juxtaposition, the evidence that they have found a radical alterity which can be fixed in the camera’s frame and transported home with them. Edensor (2000, 2001) suggests that being a tourist, as enacted through photography, for example, is a form of performance on the part of the tourist which involves ambivalent relationships between home and away, oneself and other tourists, and (real or perceived) possibilities and restraints (see also Bærenholdt et al. 2004; Crouch 2004; Larsen 2005). It is not just a means of consuming a place, but of simultaneously (re)producing it.

While this chapter focuses primarily on amateur tourist photography, it should be noted that a number of professional photographers and videographers also visited the Trobriands during my stay. During my fieldwork, at least ten individual or small teams of photographers or videographers visited to take images for a variety of purposes, including publication in the Air Niugini inflight magazine, a photo spread in *Better Photography* magazine, a story and associated photographs in the Italian edition of *Vanity Fair*, and an image archive for the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA), for example. Much like the production of wood carvings, as discussed in Chapter 7, “art” may be made by specialists, professionals with names or associations that are recognised as legitimating in some way, but amateurs without any formal training can, with easy-to-acquire basic tools, produce abundant and visually pleasing photographs. Just as most every Trobriand man can make carvings (though only some do it particularly well and gain significant financial returns), almost every tourist can make photographs (Figure 8.1). Professional photographers, on the other hand, have rather different motivations for selecting the content and composition of their photographs, as they are usually sent for a particular purpose and are compelled to meet the mandate set for the assignment. For example, the *Vanity Fair* article was focused on youthful sexuality (see Chapter 4), and thus featured mostly photos of young people (*nakubukwabiya/tohubokwabia*) dressed traditionally as well as a few stunning landscape shots to set the general scene. Nonetheless, there are often similarities in the subjects and meanings invested in both types of photography.
Tourist Photography

While images can be viewed in magazines, books, on websites, or as postcards, the only way to create an image oneself is to be there, and the act of that creation is significant. The act of photographing, in the context of cultural tourism, is (along with monetary transactions, and participating in a Trobriand dance or feast) one of several sites or moments of a negotiated intercultural interaction between the tourist and the toured. For both sides, photography can be seen as an exchange of a sort, and is, like cash transactions, a way of engaging in a seemingly safe and familiar interaction which is, nonetheless, often invested with emotion and uncertainty, especially on the part of tourists.

Figure 8.1: Tourists visiting Modawosi hamlet, Yalumgwa village

Few tourists embark on a journey to a new destination—especially one depicted in guide books and other popular media as so “colourful and “exotic” as the Trobriand Islands—without one or more cameras to capture still or moving images. Sontag (1973:9–10) puts it thus:

As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure. Thus, photography develops in tandem with one of the most characteristic of modern activities: tourism... It seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along. Photographs will offer indisputable evidence that a trip was made, that the programme was carried out, that fun was had....A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience
to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel. Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture. This gives shape to experience: stop, take a photograph, and move on.

For Sontag, then, as for Bruner (2005:56), taking pictures is a way of making the unknown safe, unthreatening, inert. Tourists have travelled for an experience, but once there, they are not sure how to have it, especially in the presence of people whose lives are so unlike their own, yet with a common humanity that may be unsettling as they try to sort out how these Others are like, and unlike, them. Sontag asserts that photography “is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power” (Sontag 1973:8). Photography is a way of mediating a relationship within a mutually recognised framework (even if the motivations and meanings attributed to the act, and the object, may differ) in an otherwise uncertain encounter. For Sontag, photography is a mechanism for demonstrating an appearance of participation (1973:10). Indeed, as Edensor has noted (Edensor 1998:128), “the imperative to photograph is almost a duty”, and Tonnaer (2008:117) argues that this imperative is authorised inter-culturally, insofar as tourists may feel “safer” hiding behind the camera, but at the same time not taking pictures in intercultural settings is regarded as anomalous behaviour, both by fellow tourists and by the hosting or performing peoples. Just as paying cash for a carving, dance performance, or fishing trip validates it as “valuable” and worth paying for, so does taking a picture validate the visual beauty and mark the subject of the photograph as “valuable” and worthy of being photographed.

For some tourists, the experience is less the focus of travel than getting the picture that proves they were there. For example, recall Edward, introduced in Chapter 4, who told me he was “camera oriented” when he travels, and expressed great dismay that people are nothing like as good looking as I expected. I thought that Trobrianders, with the Polynesian influence, would be more attractive, and that people would still be wearing traditional dress, not dirty T-shirts. I have a huge collection of pictures from the places I’ve travelled, and I was hoping to photograph some lovely bare-breasted maidens. In fact, I’m surprised at the lack of good looks here. It’s disappointing.

Edward went on to tell me that he had travelled throughout PNG and the Pacific from the 1950s through the 1970s, when people were living “more traditionally...but now, you see the changes. The pictures go downhill as Western influence increases.” For him, the
(perceived) quality of the photos was the determining factor in the success of, or satisfaction gained in, travel.

Edward’s comments illustrate the ways in which photography objectifies the Other, and may be considered as a form of consumption or even voyeurism, as Hoskins contends:

The camera...is an instrument of visual consumption, which captures an essence or image that can then be brought home for reexhibition and admiration in the home country. Capturing photographic images provides a motivation for tourists to travel to many of the most remote villages and seek out particular sights (bare-breasted women, betel-stained mouths, traditional houses, animal sacrifices) that they could not purchase and take home with them in any other way. A trip to these areas without a camera is virtually inconceivable because photography provides the proof, the legitimation, and authentication of an “exotic” experience and is the springboard for discussions about other things that were seen or heard there. [2002:808]

The word “capture” is intentional; it is a way of preserving, making permanent, and removing from its place of origin a tangible representation of something one has seen—if only through the camera’s lens. Photography is often seen as an aggressive act (e.g., Sontag 1973:7, Urry 2002:127; see also Barthes 1981), as well as the language associated with it—for example, one takes a shot, or, more actively, shoots the subject, who is framed. The photo is then exposed. Sontag states, “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and therefore, like power” (Sontag 1973:4). It is a means of controlling what is otherwise seen as wild (Bruner 2005:56). Sontag (1973:14) pushes the analogy of photography as an aggressive or even violent act farther: “There is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.” Many scholars have described tourism photography, and the possessive gaze it suggests, in similar terms. For example, Hoskins (2002) labels tourists as ‘predatory voyeurs’; Grimes (2006:35) refers to acts of “photographic rape” in the obtrusive desire to capture images of sacred ritual; and Schneider (2002:118) likens the photographic appropriation by tourists to safari hunting.

Some of the tourists I spoke to explicitly spoke of tourist photography in terms of objectification. Susan, a woman in her 60s visiting with a tour group, commented on the problems she has experienced in previous travel to places that had developed a “begging culture, people asking for money for pictures. I think the tour company is to blame, for facilitating that. You want the picture, but you don’t want to make people into objects.”
Placing blame on tour companies, and on the category “tourist”, is a means of separating oneself, of absolving oneself for one’s own complicity in perpetuating such objectification. Jeremy, a professional photographer who visited the Trobriands to take portraits for a gallery display in the UK, noted with a hint of disdain that he “wouldn’t ordinarily have come to a place like this and taken pictures of the natives”, characterising much such photography as “abhorrent” and “fetishising.”

Yet it may be short sighted to view the photographer as always in the position of power vis-à-vis the photographed. Gillespie (2006) argues persuasively that the subject of the photograph in the tourist-touree encounter can, by making the photographer self-conscious of the act of photography as a (potentially) appropriative act, effect a “reverse gaze” that may alter the power dynamic between photographer and photographee (see also Maoz 2006). My own observations bear out Gillespie’s assertion that “tourists usually claim, at a discursive level, a position that is superior to that of the ‘average tourist’ or ‘typical tourist.’ However, their actions are likely to run counter to these claims—the majority of tourists cannot act in nonaverage or atypical ways” (2006:362). It is virtually inescapable to be a tourist amongst tourists (Tonnaer 2008:120). The discursive differentiation of self-identified “travellers” is in stark contrast to the near-epithet “tourist”. The connotations of these terms are significant; tourists are nearly universally derided, such that “even tourists themselves belittle tourism as it connotes something commercial, tacky, and superficial” (Bruner 2005:7; see also Culler 1981). Self-identified travellers, on the other hand, consider themselves more culturally aware, sensitive, and savvy than their boorish tourist cousins; recall Douglas’s explanation of the difference, in the introduction to Chapter 1, in which he clearly articulated his own identification with the category “traveller” and why. The scorn for other tourists is typical trait of many tourists, and has been discussed extensively elsewhere (e.g., Crick 1989; Errington and Gewertz 1989). When caught in the reverse gaze, the tourist supposes or projects a negative image in the mind of the photographee, creating a sense of discomfort (Gillespie 2006:349). Tourists assess and judge each other, subjecting their behaviour in the intercultural tourist space to close scrutiny (Tonnaer 2008:119). The reverse gaze may cause the tourist discomfort, in the form of embarrassment, shame, or a spoiled identity, as one is forced to contend with the possibility that despite all efforts to be a culturally sensitive and aware traveller, one may in fact be “just another tourist” (Gillespie 2006:348).
Authentic Reproductions of the Touristic Experience

Taylor (2011) employs the phrase “photogenic authenticity” to refer to the objectifying processes inherent in documentary and touristic photography that suggest that a moment caught on camera is rendered “as it really happened”. He observes that the production of photographic authenticity, and the “tourist gaze” in general, are “dynamic, embodied and emotive processes that are engaged and produced by tourists and locals alike” (Taylor 2011:38–39). He asks the question, as I alluded to above, of what happens when the object gazed at invites and desires that gaze or, conversely, rejects it? And what do we make of the gaze that is returned or reflected? How does sight articulate with the other senses? While not denying power differentials inherent in most instances of tourism in less developed countries, Taylor suggests that a dynamic relationship obtains “as camera-pointing tourists and self-consciously performing locals strive to produce valuable and meaningful images and memorable shared lived experiences” (2011:39).

In line with a view of photographing as dynamic, rather than necessarily aggressive, Tonnaer (2008:117) views the act of photography as a means of communication, of negotiating a form of interaction between cultural Others. Indeed, taking a photo is, in many cases, the closest thing to an interaction with resident Trobrianders that most tourists are likely to experience, and one in which they might dominate, but might as easily be manipulated into taking the photo the subject wishes them to have, rather than the one they wish to orchestrate. It is not uncommon to see Trobrianders rush into the frame of an impending photograph or pose in an exaggerated fashion to play up to the camera.

Tourists most often took pictures of people in the context of dance performances, of women engaged in activities that were deemed traditional such as scraping banana leaves to make doba, of children or old people—sometimes wide-angled shots, and sometimes close-ups. Those who did not take photos, and some who did, often disparaged the rude and insensitive tourists who do not ask permission to take photos, especially when taking close shots of individuals. Diana, introduced in Chapter 1, told me how angry her fellow travel companions made her when they went to Obweria village to witness a local feast:

People were being too intrusive. They were using their flash right in people’s faces, and getting in way of things. People couldn’t just do their thing, because all these people were there in the middle of it with their cameras. All of a sudden, it was about us instead of about them just doing what they were doing.

Gillespie (2006) discusses similar concerns amongst the tourists he interviewed in Ladakh, northern India. A backpacker comments on an event he found “degrading”,
wherein a tourist couple asked an elderly Ladakhi man if they could take his photo, and asked him to pose in a particular way. The backpacker takes satisfaction in knowing that the resulting photograph shows the man wearing a “fake smile” and is thus inherently inauthentic (Gillespie 2006:354–355). Most tourists I interviewed noted that they always ask before taking a photo as a sign of respect, and I did not see many tourists actually interfering with people’s activities to get them to pose in a particular way, rather preferring more spontaneous shots which they felt were more interesting and, indeed, authentic. Some even expressed frustration that Trobrianders, who largely enjoy having their photographs taken, were too eager to pose, when they wanted a more natural-looking composition.

It is a common misconception that most people in non-industrialised countries feel apprehensive about being photographed, “divining it to be some kind of trespass, an act of disrespect, a sublimated looting of the personality or the culture” (Sontag 1973:161). While there may be places where this is the case (see, for example, Hoskins 2002), my own experience confirms Gillespie’s (2006:350) assertion that there is little evidence that the subjects of the photographs—whether Trobrianders or Ladakhis—feel as oppressed by being photographed as the tourists seem to think they do. On the contrary, being photographed is more often construed by Trobrianders as an act of recognition of their unique and superior/richer culture, which is a fact agreed upon by both Trobriander and tourist, even if the anthropologist cringes at a notion of culture as quantifiable or hierarchical. Tonnaer (2008:109) reports similar insecurity on the part of tourists visiting Aboriginal communities in Australia, who likewise carry an assumption that Aboriginal people do not want to be photographed. While many Aboriginal peoples may uphold a taboo on images of the recently deceased, an assumed dislike of being photographed is based on a stereotyped understanding of Aboriginal attitudes toward photography (Tonnaer 2008:109). Gillespie (2006:354) argues that when tourists make assumptions about locals’ contempt for them, they are not reflecting the actual perspective of those being photographed but are, instead, “reacting to themselves in the same way that they (the tourists) react toward other tourists”. And when a “reverse gaze” is trained back on the visitor, it creates self-consciousness about the contradictions “between tourists’ idealised self-position (traveller or post-tourist48) and their actual behaviour (just another tourist with a camera)” (Gillespie 2006:357).

Several tourists spoke with disdain about being asked to pay for the privilege of taking a photograph. This phenomenon happens only rarely in the Trobriands, but much
more frequently in other cultural or ethno-tourism destinations, such as India or Peru. Like Susan, mentioned above, so too did Edward comment on this “distasteful” practise. Edward had been told after taking a picture of a yam house in a particular village that he must give the owner a small sum of money in return, which for him was “unpleasant”. He noted that he hadn’t seen this in other Pacific Islands, and, like Susan, felt that the fault lay with travel agents and the tourism industry, rather than with the people living in the village. Edward felt that although this practise happens all over world, “enlightened countries tackle the problem” because it was the sort of thing that could cause “an immense amount of irritation—this is the kind of thing tourists dislike”. Much like other types of commodification, the idea that photographs become associated with a monetary transaction is seen as cheapening the photo and the experience of taking it, and gives the photographer a decreased sense of being in an “unspoiled” place where authentic experiences and images can be collected. Edward, who values the photo more than the experience, agreed to pay, though he felt embittered about it. Others, for whom the photo loses meaning if payment is exchanged, refuse. Rick, an American visitor who had come to take video footage for a proposed documentary about Pacific canoes, told me that when a local man at the wharf in Losuia asked him for K5 to take a photo of the boats, “I just put my camera away.”

While tourists who actively chose not to take photographs were rare, I met in the Trobriands a very few visitors who consciously avoided travelling with a camera, many of whom made a point of telling me so, and why. For example, Douglas, the American visitor whose profile introduced this thesis in Chapter 1, told me he gave up travelling with a camera or video recorder because he felt he missed out on too much by “only seeing through the lens”, and because “too many photographers are obtrusive, they use their flash in people’s faces, don’t ask permission to take pictures, and so on. They don’t show respect for people.” Meredith, from San Francisco, pointed out to me how anomalous she was that she “never liked photos—I never liked being photographed. That’s why I don’t travel with a camera.” Here, too, the intrepid, culturally sensitive traveller sets him/herself apart from the aggressive, obnoxious, and vulgar tourist. The absence of photographs can thus be as much part of the narrative of travel experiences as their presence.

**Maintaining the Myth of Primitivity**

Urry notes that “the photographic tourist gaze produces an aesthetics that excludes as much as it includes” (2002:129). In the case of travel to experience the “exotic” or the “primitive”, this means a deliberate attempt to exclude all things modern, and a conscious
avoidance of permitting other white people to enter the frame. This was demonstrated clearly in a number of conversations I had both with visiting tourists and with Trobrianders. For example, while Trobriand Islanders often include plastic, paper, or cellophane decorations when dressing for traditional dancing, this is actively discouraged during tourism performances, because Trobrianders know *dimdim* do not want to see evidence of modernity. As Aaron Hayes, owner of the tour operator Ecotourism Melanesia, said, “Tourists want to see traditional dress. When they put plastic, Christmas tinsel, these modern things, the tourists don’t like it. It spoils it. They don’t want this stuff in their pictures. Photography is a big part of it.” Tourists not only sought out the photographs that gave them the least evidence of modernity in the frame (I observed that most would angle their camera to avoid, for example, houses with corrugated iron roofs, vehicles, or people who did not look “traditional” enough), but would also wait their turn to get a photograph that would not depict another tourist, as framing the photograph to include only the “natives” in the absence of other white people would facilitate the narrative of authentic experience they could later relate to family and friends back home. During the Ugwabwena Festival in 2009, my colleague Sergio was invited and encouraged to participate with the men in his host village, by wearing traditional dress and participating in a Trobriand cricket match. I later asked the visiting tourists what they thought when they saw this white-skinned man marching and hooting with the men from his village, and the encouragement of visitors to join in the activities. While some visitors found it entertaining, others felt it inauthenticated the performance as well as the resulting images. As one traveller put it:

I think it kind of detracts from the spectacle, [for white people] to join in. And I don’t want to spoil it for others, as well. If they’re taking their pictures, I don’t want to—it would disappoint me if all my pictures had tourists dancing around in them, so I can imagine it would be the same for other people. [Blaine, an Australian man in his 20s travelling independently]

Similarly, Bertha, a retired teacher from the Bay Area of California visiting on a group tour, told me, “It’s difficult to get good photos when you’re on a tour, because you don’t want other tourists in the pictures. You want good photos to take home.” The implication is obvious: “good” photos only have the desired subjects in the frame, and other tourists spoil the desired image, dispelling the mythic narrative of first contact (or nearly so, at least), off-the-beaten-track, authentic experience. In a similar vein, Belle had come to take video footage to make a short film, and asked me to assist her in finding a few Trobrianders who would perform garden magic while she filmed. I agreed, enlisting my eager adoptive
father and a teacher in the village elementary school and who spoke English but also held numerous spells for growing yams. Both were keen to participate, knowing they would be remunerated. Belle stressed that she wanted Mata and Sai to wear traditional dress for performing their meguwa (magic), because it was "more authentic". I pointed out that it’s actually less authentic, because today, people rarely wear such dress to perform magic. She conceded that this might be so, but she still wanted the look and feel of traditional dress to visually represent a timeless Trobriands in her film. Thus, photographs are not only an aid to memory and a representation, but are also a construction of an alternative memory, and thus to some extent a misrepresentation of the reality as experienced.

Figure 8.2: Tourists taking photos in Kavataria village during Ugwabwena Festival 2009

While images of an event, such as a traditional dance, should not (in tourists’ minds) be adulterated by the presence of white people, having one’s picture taken with a local, or in front of a yam house or dugout canoe, is a crucial proof of having “been there;” the greater the juxtaposition, the more rewarding the photograph. As Selby (2010:40) points out, “Rather like the tourists in the film Cannibal Tours (O'Rourke 1987), photographing and being photographed with the ‘quaint,’ ‘savage,’ or ‘primitive’ Other is a fundamental element of the experience.” Having one’s photograph taken with a “real” Trobriand Islander—or, better yet, wearing partial or full Trobriand dress, as several tourists did—both verifies the experience, and demonstrates one’s intercultural adaptability, which is important to the tourist not only for self-actualisation, but also adds a more engaged,
embodied sense of participation and supports the story he or she will later tell about the experience. For example, Ito, a Japanese man in his late 20s, commented at length on the beauty of Trobriand dress, and expressed interest in being so accoutered, which would demonstrate (and confirm to friends back home) that he had had “the full experience”, as he put it. Bruner observes that pictures are not just visual representations, but also serve as mnemonic devices for storytelling, such that the tour itself is “a site of cultural production that generates new experiences and new stories” (2005:24). The vision of post-tour narration of experience, Bruner argues, accompanies the tourist throughout his/her travels, and thus structures the tour, and the photographs that represent it, as lived. Urry (2002:130) goes so far as to suggest, following Osborne (2000:70), that without photography, there would be no international tourism industry.

**Trobriand Perceptions of Photography**

As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, photography is a way of mediating interactions between tourists and Trobrianders, and this interaction is mutually negotiated. Trobrianders are well aware of the importance of photography to tourists, as souvenirs with which they will return home to tell the story of their visit. The camera is seen as an essential and stereotypical accessory for the foreign tourist, as evidenced by the familiar parody in the film *Trobriand Cricket* (Leach and Kildea 1976) in which the match’s mascot runs onto the field in a brightly patterned shirt and mimics the tourist gaze in an exaggerated burlesque, holding roughly fashioned wooden binoculars to his eyes and engendering a “reverse gaze” towards the camera operator. Most Trobrianders are happy to have their pictures taken and readily pose for the camera. This willingness to be photographed makes it easier, and less guilt-inducing, for tourists to indulge in their desire to document their experience through visual imagery. For example, Francine, a French woman who visited the Trobriand Islands with her sister, commented on how “people love it [having their picture taken], and they don’t ask you for money!” Gillespie (2006: 350) makes similar observations based on his research in Ladakh, noting that not only do Ladakhis not mind having their photo taken, they actually quite enjoy it. What is more, by welcoming tourists and posing for tourists’ pictures, Ladakhis see themselves as promoting tourism and contributing to the overall economic development of the region. Trobriand sentiment about the significance, unique qualities, and beauty of their own culture is validated by tourists’ desire to photograph it, much as Gillespie notes for Ladakhis: “The impression that tourist photography has made on Ladakhis is that they have an important
culture that is revered across the world...tourism gives Ladakhis pride in their culture” (2006:351). Trobrianders of all ages (but particularly younger generations) eagerly pose for the camera and then crowd around to see the image just captured in the display screen of the digital camera. The viewing of the image not only authenticates the visitor’s experience, it also affirms for Trobrianders that they as people, and the physical environment they inhabit, are unique, special, worthy objects of the tourists’ gaze. As Gillespie (2006:351) puts it, there seems to be “an identity reward, or some form of recognition, by virtue of being photographed—it positions them [Ladakhis] as valuable.”

Interestingly, though most Trobrianders embrace the opportunity to be photographed, a few individuals are more reluctant, and this in itself is sometimes taken as evidence of a more authentic experience/image. For example, one professional photographer who was taking photos for a photography magazine as well as for images to sell through his website told me about his visit to a village where he saw an old woman he wished to photograph who, at first, refused. He did not offer her money, he said, but she was somehow convinced to allow the photograph to be taken. He told me that her initial reluctance, and eventual agreement, “made it all the better”, referring (it would seem) to both the act of picture-taking, and the resulting image.

Rarely are tourists asked for money directly in return for taking a photo, but there is an expressed hope on the part of many Trobrianders that when the dimdim returns home and shows his or her friends and family their photo albums depicting beautiful people, objects, and the natural environment (which they recognise as characteristics of the tourists’ experience in the Trobriands), it will encourage others to come visit, who will in turn bring more foreign money to the islands. Kebwani, a Trobriand Islander who hosted a group of expatriate Australian visitors during the Ugwabwena Festival in 2009, told me that he thought local people should not charge tourists for taking photos, because “it’s like an advertisement” for the island.

Like tourists, Trobrianders also place their own value(s) on the power of the photograph. It is also not uncommon for Trobrianders to request that tourists send them photos of themselves or their children. In several cases of which I am aware, tourists did send photos, generally in the care of one of the tourist lodges or mission posts. As a visitor of longer duration, I was often tasked with being event photographer, with a mandate to get prints on my next trip to the mainland which would then be distributed to the appropriate parties. For example, when my friend Toku, the manager at Butia Lodge, proudly told me that his eldest son Benjamin had earned the dux in his Grade 8 graduating class, he asked
me to attend and be sure I brought my camera, to take a series of portraits of the young pupil and his family. Similarly, the opening of the new elementary school in the hamlet neighbouring my own, Oluweta, was a celebrated event and both teachers and the benefactor of the new school felt it very important that the event should be documented in photographs, which I developed and laminated to give to the school. These photos and others sent by friends and relatives are cherished items, often kept between the pages of the family bible or other books.

Contra MacCannell (1992:29), who argues that photographs have no meaning for the people he refers to as “ex-primitives” (a term I do not embrace, as I find it misleading and denegrating), photographs are prized possessions of those Trobrianders who have them (see also Hoskins 2002:813), and people regularly asked to see the photos I had stored on my computer, as well as any prints I had, particularly of cultural events in which people wore traditional dress, significant ceremonies such as school graduations, and life events such as a birth or death. When I was visiting Western Samoa as a tourist myself some years ago, I recall having so tired of obliging the endless requests to take people’s photos in innumerable combinations and permutations at a church service I attended that I claimed my camera battery had gone flat, is it was the only way I could think of to avoid spending the entire afternoon taking the requested photographs. Photographs may also be used as tools for social and health initiatives, such as HIV/AIDS awareness programmes. During my residence on Kiriwina, for example, a doctor came to visit the ward from the mainland to provide information about the risks associated with HIV/AIDS, and to this end brought pictures of patients suffering from the disease to amplify and add resonance to his message. The perceived value of the photo, as seen by Trobrianders, is further evidenced by local reaction to a front page picture on the Post Courier, one of the two national English-language daily newspapers in PNG, of Samantha Clark, a talented young singer and dancer and the daughter of prominent Trobriand businesswoman Serah Clark. The photo depicted Samantha in full traditional dress, dancing at an Ugwabwena Festival fundraising dinner in Port Moresby. Samantha’s aunt, Lydia, proudly showed me the photo, noting how it would bring additional attention, increased tourists numbers, and greater profitability to the upcoming festival.

In 2010, a plan was hatched (though it never came to fruition) by the Ugwabwena Committee members, with the full support of sponsor Serah Clark, to move the festival events from the grounds of Butia Lodge to the three villages of Yalumgwa Ward, such that each village would be host of events for a day. When hosting, the village would be
responsible for preparing a programme of events, including dances and demonstrations of “typical” Trobriand activities such as carving, filling the yam house, weaving mats, or scraping *doba*. The justification for this, which would require far more work for the village residents, was that tourists prefer to see the villages, to see how people “really live” (even though all would be carefully orchestrated, with special facilities built and beautification programmes to ensure cleanliness and tourist-friendly facilities like latrines), with the resulting photographs mentioned repeatedly as the reason why tourists would prefer such an arrangement. As Anselm, a Trobriand man in his 50s, put it, “Tourists want the real thing, they want to be in the village, to take their photos in the village. At Butia Lodge, when tourists see a dance performance there, they know it’s just acting.” In the end, however, for reasons that were not easily discernible, the plan fell apart, most likely due to other commitments on the part of villagers, and the realization that there would be very little tangible return for a huge investment of additional labour. In any case, the very recognition that having dance performances and other activities take place in the village, with the associated authentic village surrounds, would be preferable for tourists’ photographs is shared both by Trobrianders and tourists. The latter repeatedly affirmed that they preferred the more authentic-seeming environment of the village to the tourist lodge as a backdrop, both in terms of feeling an experience that was deemed authentic, and in terms of the images produced (see Chapter 6). Both would agree, I think, with the sentiment expressed by Max, who visited during the 2009 Ugwabwena Festival and noted that the fact that tourists take photographs is, for such a festival, the very “point of the performance.”

Trobrianders often actively direct tourists’ (and anthropologists’) photographic gaze (Figure 8.3). People often told me to take pictures of certain things, and would act surprised if I turned up to a dancing event without taking photos, even though I already had countless representations of virtually identical scenes. This is not, of course, unique to the Trobriands; I have had similar experiences as a tourist in other parts of the world, where my local hosts or guides would direct me to photograph what they considered to be culturally or ecologically significant, and thus important (to them, and, they assumed, to me) to record as an “accurate” representation of my experience.

An interest in photography is not necessarily shared by all members of a given community, however, or is perhaps a more recent phenomenon; the following is an excerpt from the documentary film *Kama Wosi* (“Our Songs”), as recorded in a review of the film:
While carving, [a young man] speaks to the filmmakers, and, ultimately, to all outsiders: ‘Carving is nothing special—what are you taking pictures for? Day and night, day and night—taking pictures for nothing. You take these pictures and take them away—what about us? People will laugh at us.’ ‘Don't worry about him.... I think that's their work. They go and get their pay.’ [Niles 1982:505]

There is, on the part of some Trobrianders, a belief that tourists, journalists, and academics all fall in to the same general category, and may receive direct remuneration for the photos they take and the text they write; in the case of journalists and filmmakers, of course, they are quite right. Some Trobrianders resent that they do not feel adequately compensated if others are making money from their images or their stories, but most of my Trobriand interlocutors did not express concern in this regard, instead following the logic expressed by Kebwani (mentioned above) that such photographs are “an advertisement”, likely to spread the word about the unique and spectacular qualities of Trobriand culture (as they see it), resulting in more tourists and more money in the islands in the longer term.

*Figure 8.3: Trobriand dancer poses for the camera*
Photography as Communication

I have examined in this chapter how photography may be seen as a site of intercultural encounter, mediated by both parties. In much the same way as monetary transactions, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 9, such an interaction serves as a stage on which mediated, mutually intelligible interactions may occur, though they may be conceived of very differently by each party to the transaction. As Sontag notes, “a photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself.... Our very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera’s interventions” (1973:11). Various forms of representation, including photographs, but also cultural performance and material culture, do not actually reproduce reality, but offer something which stands for an aspect of reality (in someone’s estimation, whether tourist or Trobriander)—that is to say, “varying illusions of reality” (Gidley 1992:1). These are an essential part of the touristic experience, both as a way of feeling a sense of interaction with the people visited, and as a tangible and mnemonic entity that outlasts the moment of experience, and permits its recreation, if only in the narration and personal memories it facilitates.

Gillespie (2006:351) suggests that the photographic image defines, reifies, and reproduces ideas about culture and authenticity not only for tourists, but for those who are the objects of the tourist gaze, as well. He notes that for the Ladakhi people with whom he worked, their own ideas about what comprises “Ladakhi culture” reveals a rather neat parallel with the things that tourists photograph. He states, “It is as if whatever tourist photography has focused on has become “culture” for the Ladakhis” (Gillespie 2006:351). I think this argument is, in fact, rather circular, and it is difficult to resolve. The things that get fetishised in tourist photography or popular representations of a place generally are things that have some local significance (remember the T-shirt depicted in Figure 1.1), and knowing that cultural Others—tourists—find these things appealing (and, as such, are willing to pay money to see and photograph them) may reinforce and strengthen the importance of such things. However, at least in my own experience, I did not get the impression that it was because Trobriand dance, yam houses, and kula canoes were things tourists liked to photograph that they were important aspects of Trobriand culture. Rather, it was because these were the things that made Trobriand Islanders unique relative to other people in PNG and elsewhere. It seems to me that attributing agency to photography for making these things important to Trobrianders is stretching the point. Conversely,
Trobrianders direct and facilitate the opportunities for tourists and professional photographers to photograph what they recognise as significant, beautiful, and representative of their own way of life.

Tonnaer (2008:116) argues that tourist photography significantly defines the nature of the tourist performance, citing Bærenholdt et al.’s view of photography “as a theatre where tourists perform various scripts, roles, technologies, relations and places to and for themselves and for a future audience” (2004:69). Bærenholdt et al. borrow Appdurai’s (1996) concept of “imagescapes” found in various media as providing the scripts that define photography performances. Tonnaer (2008:116) suggests that photography is a constituting feature in the touristic interface with the Other, examining its properties as “an intercultural convention that worked to ‘lubricate’ the interaction”. She views photography as a means of communicating in an otherwise largely mutually unintelligible interaction, noting the role not only of tourists, but of Aboriginal performers (especially during Corroboree performances) as active participants in the photographic “conversation”. She observes,

The Aboriginal performers responded to the cameras, by making the moves more extravagant and dancing intentionally towards the clicking tourists. Some of the dancers kept their final pose a few instances longer so that the audience could take a picture. It should be noted that whereas there was little verbal interaction (conversations), the Aboriginal performers did ‘converse’ through photography. Indeed, following the performance some of the dancers would have their picture taken as such was requested. However, usually only intoxicated performers (or onlookers) were bold enough to stay on and chat with tourists, the others would quickly disappear... Photography emerged as the chief, interculturally valid way of interacting in the Corroborees. The reverse may then also be applicable: what was left of the performance without photography? [Tonnaer 2008:118]

Thus, for both tourists and Aboriginal Australians, in this case, photography affirmed and facilitated the intercultural encounter.

**Photography and Metanarratives of the Exotic Other**

A focus on ritual, especially where accompanied by vivid colour and action, is notable in tourists’ photography, where traditional dance, a local feast, or other apparently authentic cultural representations are seen as particularly valuable opportunities by both tourists and Trobrianders to capture “good” photos. The Trobriander engaged in “ritual” activity enacts two of the primary features most Westerners expect of exoticism: “living close to the sacred or supernatural and living with the past” (Lutz and Collins 1993:91).
Lutz and Collins base their discussion on an analysis of imagery in *National Geographic* magazine, but this holds equally true for tourist photography. They also point to the importance of “indexical dress” or elaborate costume, in which “the highlighting of native dress contributes not only to a view of others as different, but also to their framing as picturesque and erotic, beautiful and sexually alluring” (1993:93; see also Graham-Brown 1988:118). They argue that exotic dress may be seen as a metonym for an entire lifestyle or locale (Lutz and Collins 1993:92), or, to take it a step further, for primitivity itself. Indeed, in a larger sense, photography illustrates and validates the metanarrative of primitivity. Images of the exotic Other are omnipresent, depicted via media such as *National Geographic*’s magazine and television channel, the Discovery and Travel networks, and documentary films. By visiting for oneself, and replicating the familiar images, the metanarrative is upheld via the individual narratives created through the experience. Even where evidence of modernity is visible—mobile phones, Western clothing, plastic beads, and other tourists—these things are relegated largely to a place outside the frame, such that the photograph confirms an authentic Other that even the photographer may not fully believe exists.

Of course, it is not only people who are photographed, but also other features which support the narrative, fit the pre-existing model, and aid in completing the story; for example, tourists are often taken on excursions designed to facilitate their desire to photograph yam houses, spirit caves, gardens, canoes, carvings, beaches, pigs, birds, and flowers. Much as the Trobriand carver “who carves within a cultural context in which originality is not valued for its own sake, and who is supposed by his audience, and himself, to follow an ideal template” (Gell 1992:54), so too the cultural tourist seeks not originality but conformity to reproduction of the requisite set of images. As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, tourists to the Trobriand Islands are full of angst about the culture being “lost”, “spoiled”, or “destroyed” by globalising forces such as tourism. And yet, they maintain the myth that they have arrived just in time to experience it before all is lost—and they have the photographs to prove it.
47 In PNG, very few postcards are produced and except for perhaps through the gift shop at Jacksons International Airport or the major hotels, they are not readily accessible to tourists. There is no shop selling postcards in or of the Trobriand Islands.

48 The term “post-tourist” is used to refer to tourists who embrace the usual tourist practises with irony and self-mockery (Gillespie 2006:356).

49 For the record, I did send copies of these photos to the village after I got back home!

50 I earlier discussed Lydia and her husband David in Chapter 4, as the local host family for the Trobriand Islands episode of National Geographic Channel’s Worlds Apart.
CHAPTER 9

CASHING IN ON CULTURE:
The Meaning of Money in Tourist-Trobriand Transactions

Max: What always strikes me is the complexity of simple, of what would be for us simple transactions. So, just to do anything involves about four people, and at least an hour's worth of negotiation.

Lucy: It's like playing a game where you don't know the rules. And someone gives you something, and you know that they want something back, but you don't know...

Max: And we agreed to pay 75 kina a night [about AU$36 per person] for accommodation, which we thought was being generous. And since then, we've—the money's not the issue, but I guess the unforeseenness of it is—um, we're paying for the parents of the kids who did dancing for us tonight, to have rice and tinned fish for dinner to say thank you for them preparing their kids, blah blah blah...and, we've been forking out for extra cigarettes or drinks or whatever, and to buy crayfish for our dinner, when it was all included...

Me: You thought it was a one-off payment that would cover everything...

Max: Yeah. But that's our ignorance.

Me: Not, I guess, making everything clear up front. Has that detracted from your experience?

Max: Not really, because the negotiations...well, for me the argy-bargy is kind of expected and part of the experience. And I know that they would have to negotiate all of this stuff between themselves if they had relatives coming to stay and they were taking them around and...

Lucy: I think part of the complicating factor is it's not upfront like a monetary transaction but we're still Australians, and so, there's always that kind of—with friendship, you know, we're paying for services, kind of thing—there's just a bit of lack of clarity in it. It's interesting, though, because—well, for me, it's like, managing Papua New Guinean staff in Port Moresby—they're all caught up in some kind of family network, where there's that kind of give and take going on all the time. You just sort of realise the pressures that are on people...

[Excerpt from interview transcript, at Butia Lodge, with several tourists staying in Dayagila village during the Ugwabwena Festival in June 2009]
Making Meaning with Money

Cultural or ethno-tourism, particularly to economically less developed destinations, is part of a larger global movement of increasing reification and branding of “culture” as a thing to be consumed (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:27). Much research has focused on various types of inequality in the sphere of tourism as well as money’s role in local economies (e.g., Apostolopoulos et al. 2001; Brennan 2004; Cole and Morgan 2010; Meiu 2009; Theodossopoulos 2010). As yet, though, little attention has been paid to the ways in which money may be seen as a specific medium of intercultural engagement, and how (potential or actual) cash transactions are sites of contested meanings and understandings. In the Trobriand Islands, aspects of “culture” which are offered for sale to tourists (such as wood carvings, objects of traditional wealth, and dance performances) may seem to be exchanged for cash as alienable commodities in an uncomplicated monetary transaction. Yet these transactions are, in fact, moments of encounter that have significantly different meanings for each party. In this chapter, I follow Bloch and Parry (1989:1) in examining the ways in which money is symbolically represented for both tourists and Trobrianders, and how moral evaluations of monetary transactions contrast with moral evaluations of exchanges of other kinds. Rather than looking at monetised exchanges as they are understood within a community, I look to tourism as a site of intercultural encounter and exchange. In doing so, I seek to make explicit the differences between money-as-object and that which money represents: a process of valuation (Zyphur et al. 2006:46) and a means to communicate value(s).

While contributors to Parry and Bloch (1989) address issues of morality in monetary exchanges within a range of ethnographic examples, and Akin and Robbins’ volume (1999) does so for exchanges within a number of Melanesian societies, neither volume addresses how the meaning of money is complicated when used to transact between groups whose understandings of exchange are fundamentally different. It is this omission that I address here. Far from being highly impersonal, anonymous, and disembedded, cash transactions are, I argue, sites of intercultural and interpersonal relations fraught with moral ambiguity. Each party to such transactions is oriented in their exchange practises and interpretation by the macro-tropes or metanarratives at the basis of both their own understandings of exchange, and their imagined reality of the Others’ understandings of the same exchange. As with any interpersonally constructed system, if the actors transacting do not share an understanding of how to represent and enact that
system, it is bound to be problematic, in much the same way as language differences impede communication (Zyphur et al. 2006). Monetary transactions between tourists and Trobrianders involve complex moral assessments and attempts to mediate differences not only in language and way of life, but in entire cosmologies. This is exacerbated by imperfect understandings of the Others’ relationship with money. Conversations with both Trobriand Islanders and tourists in which ideas about money emerged suggested that there is a significant discrepancy in the meaning of money from the perspectives of foreign tourists seeking an encounter with so-called primitive peoples who have, they hope, largely escaped the reaches of consumerism and the global economy; and resident Trobrianders who may work for a wage, receive remittances from relatives, or earn sporadic cash through tourism.

Money is generally considered anonymous and impersonal (Carrier 1995a:147), and acts as a readily convertible medium of exchange (Marx 1976[1867]; Simmel 1990[1907]). As such, it can be used to quantify value as readily translatable and convertible in globalised markets. As a standard of value, money can (in theory) be exchanged for virtually any good, and the value of a unit of currency can be held, transported, and recirculated in a future transaction. Even between people who have dramatically different understandings of value and the nature of exchange within their own societies, money allows a common “language” of exchange and the establishment of equivalence. But this depiction of money’s role in cross-cultural exchange does not tell the full story of the meanings and values associated with cash transactions between peoples with drastically differing worldviews. Keane (2001:79) has argued that “unlike inalienable valuables, money realises its value neither in transaction as a social performance nor in simply being held, but only in that which it obtains in a future expenditure.” I aim to demonstrate here that this is oversimplified on a number of levels: money transactions can be a site of social performance, and “inalienable” goods are also frequently seen not only for their value as material and symbolic totems, but also for the potential they hold for conversion to alienable goods (commodities) and/or to create or reinforce (future) reciprocal obligations.

Both Bloch and Parry (1989) and Akin and Robbins (1999) address the point that many traditional societies had currencies—usually, but not always, shell money—that circulated as general purpose currencies well prior to the introduction of state-issued banknotes and coins. They note that in this sense the introduction of Western money was not necessarily conceived as a revolutionary or new technology (Robbins and Akin 1999:3).
Much of the previous anthropological study of money, particularly in Melanesia, addresses the ways in which existing forms of “traditional” currencies, such as shell money, influence the ways in which state currencies are used and conceived. While Bloch and Parry deal almost exclusively with state-issued currencies, Akin and Robbins take all forms of currency, both state-issued and indigenous, to share certain fundamental qualities in common, especially the fact that they are not consumed, but valuable only as a medium of exchange for other things that (potentially) can be consumed. At the heart of their argument “is the theoretically grounded assertion that currencies, both indigenous and state, have important instrumental qualities that distinguish them from other kinds of objects and allow them to exercise a powerful force in shaping and reshaping social life” (Robbins and Akin 1999:2).

Although traditional currencies like shells can provide a standard of and store of value in much the same way as state-issued currencies, Robbins and Akin (1999:12) argue that what sets money apart is the fact that it can move against anything, in any kind of exchange between people who stand in any kind of relationship to each other. The case of the Trobriand Islands, as well as, for example, the Kwaio of the Solomon Islands (Akin 1999), suggests that this argument is overstated. In economies where market exchange does not dominate, the (relatively) recent introduction of money provides fertile ground for considering the ways in which ideas about, and use of, money fits within or disrupts existing modalities of exchange and sociality (Figure 9.1). The use of money as a means of interaction between radical cultural Others may in some respects involve the bridging of cosmological gaps, but at the same time the interpretations and priorities of each party to the transaction differ dramatically. As Bloch and Parry (1989:23) suggest, the meanings with which money is invested are both situationally defined and constantly re-negotiated. Weiner has argued that in the Trobriand case, “exchange objects, unlike Western money, cannot be detached from the human experience of regeneration and immortality” (1976:231), while for Westerners (i.e., tourists) “objects become depersonalized and a shift occurs in the relations between persons and things” (1976:235). I contend that in tourism, the personal is invested in both objects and activities transacted between tourists and Trobrianders, engendered in their conceptualisation as singularities and, in effect, the denial of the commodity status of tourism products.
Tourism as a Source of Income in the Trobriand Islands

Tourism represents a small and unreliable, yet highly desirable, source of cash income in the Trobriand Islands. Most resident Trobrianders continue to survive largely on subsistence gardening of root crops such as taro, cassava, sweet potato, and the ubiquitous yam, as well as greens and other vegetable foods, with fish providing protein to the diet. Access to tourist cash is generally restricted to the production of items for sale as souvenirs, especially the wood carvings for which Trobriand Islanders are well known, but also for woven mats and bags, grass skirts, carved lime gourds, and even shell valuables and axe blades, traditional forms of “wealth”.

For groups, accommodation and dance performances are arranged by the tour company and paid for by the guide or in advance, such that the only transactions made between visitors and Trobrianders is to purchase souvenirs or beverages at the guest lodge bar. Independent travellers are far more directly involved in a variety of financial transactions, and are more likely to seek out village-based accommodation, a cheaper alternative to extended stays in formally established guesthouses and offering greater opportunities for cultural and material exchange. In my interviews with both tourists and Trobrianders about their experiences with tourism, the subject of money and its associated symbolic values inevitably arose. Discourses around money were variously constituted.
and reflected in these conversations, particularly ideas about money’s agency: its ability to
create and transform, and to potentially corrupt and destroy. What follows is my attempt
to untangle some of these conflicting threads in understandings about what money is and
does in the context of touristic exchange in a largely gift-based, non-market economy.

![District Administrator Ben Bagita prepares payment for dance group at the Kiriwina Cultural Show, November 2010](image)

**Figure 9.2:** District Administrator Ben Bagita prepares payment for dance group at the Kiriwina Cultural Show, November 2010

**A Note on Terminology**

In the Trobriand vernacular, there are a number of relevant terms that may aid in
understanding how Trobriand Islanders view and practise exchange, and some distinctions
relevant to the use of cash as a means of exchange. As Weiner (1980:74) has noted, the
Kiriwina term *mapula* has played a complex role in the development of exchange theory.
Malinowski glossed the term as “repayment, equivalent”, defining it as “the general term
for return gifts, and retributions, economic as well as otherwise” (1922[1984]:178). The
term gave Malinowski some problems of categorisation, however, as it seemed to represent
a range of types of repayment, from relatively impersonal ones to “gifts” from a man to his
wife and a father to his children. Sahlins (1972:192-195) later took up this notion and, in
his model of so-called primitive exchange, placed “payments” as the central point along a
continuum from the “putatively altruistic” exchanges (1972:193), or generalised
reciprocity, to “barter” (gimwali in the Kilivila language), representing negative reciprocity, the attempt to gain at another’s expense. Sahlins suggested that as one moves along the continuum, there is an increase in “social distance” or the degree of intimacy between transactors.

The idea that something given is ultimately reciprocated in one way or another is taken for granted as a moral imperative in the Trobriands. Because Trobrianders know the “rules”, exchange within villages or from one village to another entails minimal risk, though there are those who are known as being untrustworthy to repay credit and those who are pointed out as “selfish” or “ungenerous”. Transactions with foreigners, who have a (recognised, if imperfectly understood) different set of rules and whose lives are seen to be inextricably bound up with money and individualism, entail greater risk and greater potential return, thereby requiring more skill to transact. My host mother told me that many of her friends had questioned her as to whether she was just “wasting her time” in taking care of me, since when I left I might forget my obligations to my Trobriand family. In their mind, my assistance to the family during my stay was only one part of my ongoing obligation, but as a foreigner, I might fail to understand the longer-term implications. Only once I had demonstrated a capacity for understanding Trobriand exchange obligations through my participation in large-scale distributions of doba (banana leaf bundles) at the mortuary distributions of several of my host relatives did people begin to feel that perhaps I had learned to recognise the way exchange obligations really work.

Teasing out something of modern Trobrianders’ conception of money and exchange requires re-examination of the term mapula and several related concepts. In my own fieldwork on Kiriwina, I most frequently heard the term mapula glossed as “payment” or “answer”; like many Kiriwina concepts, it can denote either a noun or a verb. When you go to the trade store to buy rice, you pay for it (kumapula raisi). When you pay someone back for credit you have obtained, this is also mapula. It also refers to an answer or response, such as when using a telephone: “Sta imapula?” means “Did he answer?” Tourist transactions and the payment tourists make for goods or services certainly fall into the category mapula, as does payment (in money, yams, pigs, rice, or tinned fish) for dancing at milamala or other locally important events (Figure 9.2). In terms of transactions both between Trobrianders as well as between Trobrianders and non-Trobrianders, payment or return is also referred to using the verb “to help”–pilasi in Kilivila.
A related concept is *gimwali*. Malinowski glossed this as “barter”, and though the term may once have been used to refer to exchanges of goods for other goods, in contemporary speech it refers exclusively and specifically to transactions involving cash. Money presented as part of traditional exchange, such as in bridewealth or mortuary distributions, is not *gimwali*, but any sort of direct “purchase” of a good or service is *gimwali*. This is contrasted with *bobwelila*, a noun glossed as “gift”. A *bobwelila* may or may not require immediate return, but it is always recognised as part of longer-term reciprocal obligations. *Bobwelila* are sometimes given by Trobrianders to foreigners (*dim dims*) in an attempt to create an obligation to reciprocate, that is, to make them feel compelled to spend their money. Charm, magic, even trickery or manipulation may also be used to try to “sweeten” or “turn” the mind of a prospective customer and achieve the desired outcome. In essence, then, the techniques used to foster exchange with foreign tourists bear a striking resemblance to those used in *kula* transactions, with Others on a different scale (usually people from a neighbouring island who are not direct kin) (Leach and Leach 1983; Malinowski 1920, 1922[1984]). The primary difference between *kula* transactions and tourist transactions is, of course, that *kula* exchanges are ongoing, while exchanges with a particular tourist are (usually) finite. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, however, the category of *dimdim* is conceived by most Trobrianders as generalized, and transactions with *dim dims* collectively are ongoing.

**The Meaning of Money and Other Valuables: A Trobriand View**

We are happy to dance for *dim dims* when they come. Yes, the dances have a price, but we don’t sell our culture for money. We [Trobrianders] need money, and what the visitors can give to help us we will appreciate and we can use it to get what our gardens don’t provide. [Matadoya, Yalumgwa village, interview in Kilivila, my translation]

The Massim region holds an abiding importance in the history of economic anthropology, primarily due to interest in the complex ceremonial inter-island exchange of decorated shells in *kula* (Malinowski 1920, 1922[1984] and many others; see Macintyre 1983). Here, I briefly describe Trobriand exchange as the background against which monetised transactions with tourists are understood from a Trobriand perspective on the nature of exchange and the social relations inherent therein. Several well documented non-monetary forms of wealth or “valuables”, such as *kula* shells, pigs, stone axe blades, pots,
banana leaf bundles, and grass skirts figure prominently in exchange in notoriously complex webs of social interactions and obligation. Alongside the prominence of kula in a long lineage of anthropological analyses of exchange, Trobriand Islanders’ transactions of banana leaf bundles and skirts, manufactured by women and exchanged at the death of a family member, have also figured prominently in anthropological arguments about the nature of reciprocity in general (Mosko 2000; Weiner 1976, 1980, 1992) and generalised exchange in particular (Damon 1980; Ekeh 1974). Trobriand valuables and subsistence products have also been used by Isaac (2005:17-18) (following Firth’s analysis of exchange in Tikopia (1939) and Bohannan and Bohannan’s (1968) classic discussion of Tiv exchange in Nigeria), to exemplify “spheres of exchange”, in which kula wealth operates as a distinct and separate sphere from other kinds of exchange. However, the Trobriand case seems to counter Bohannan and Bohannan’s general assertion that “each sphere is a different universe of objects [and] a different set of moral values and different behaviour are to be found in each sphere”, with money causing disruption and even collapse of “traditional” exchange (1968:228). Rather, as Bloch (1989:167) argues, it is in the Western philosophical tradition that money has a strong moral charge hindering conversion from one sphere to another, while in non-market-dominated settings, money is more neutral and facilitates all kinds of exchanges. Take, for example, the “payment” depicted in Figure 9.1, presented to the deceased’s father’s relatives at sagali. The kina notes included with the banana leaf bundles and calico cloth carry similar weight or density (Weiner 1994), and are considered an essential part of the Trobriand exchange; tourists, on the other hand, view such displays with surprise and even dismay at what they see as evidence of the encroachment of the market economy.

Still, money cannot be exchanged for anything at any time in the Trobriands as an exact equivalent. The cultural value of yams places them in a separate “sphere”, though not an impenetrable one; and women’s wealth—the manufacture of bundles and skirts from banana leaves—similarly occupies its own sphere, though again, this is not a sphere that is impenetrable by money, as money is exchanged for locally produced or externally manufactured goods, which are then exchanged for nununiga (banana leaf bundles) in exchanges known as valova (Weiner 1976:78–80). However, money cannot be exchanged directly for nununiga in the context of mortuary feasts.55 Trobriand women often refer to the buying power of nununiga as “like your dimdim money”.

In fact, kula-type valuables which are situated outside active trade in the kula ring and are the private property of individuals, called kitoum, are sometimes sold for cash to
individuals who are not participants in kula, including foreign visitors, as described in Chapter 7. Other “valuables” such as stone axe blades may also be sold under particular circumstances (an example of this is given later in this chapter), as may be “women’s wealth” such as grass skirts and mats woven from pandanus. These things are all part of traditional exchange, especially in the context of the competitive mortuary distributions known as sagali. Carved wooden objects are generally not ceremonially exchanged; on the contrary, they were treated more or less as commodities even prior to European contact, when carved utilitarian items such as bowls, oars, and lime sticks were in demand throughout the Trobriands and neighbouring islands in the Massim. In this sense, the arrival of tourists, who come specifically for leisure, was simply an extension of a well-entrenched commodity exchange system between Trobrianders and foreigners both from within the region and further afield. Although transactions with “outsiders” have a long history in the region, the majority of day-to-day transactions in the Trobriands, including those involving cash, take place between individuals or groups who have a personal relationship, and are part of an ongoing series of reciprocal obligations. The use of cash is not a replacement for existing exchange obligations, but is supplemental to, and integrated within, them. Tourists who transact for cash, however, often assume that it will be disruptive to the social fabric of village life. As Sillitoe (2006:19) observes, “cash may mean something else to people on the periphery of the market economy than to those deeply in it.”

Analogies between tourism and kula are not only imposed or interpreted by the researcher, but Trobrianders themselves often use kula as a frame of reference for understanding or explaining the meaning of money, and the act of being a tourist more generally. The following anecdote was related to me in a recent email communication with a Trobriand colleague:

I was enlightened by a simple answer to the question of ‘what is kula for you’ by an old man. It was late Tausia of Kumwagea village, himself a renowned kula player and sorcerer. His answer was something like, ‘Perhaps it is a bit like money (cash) for modern day travellers. With it, my travel, accommodation, and meals in other places is secured. I cannot possibly survive in foreign lands without it.’ [Linus Digm’rina, personal communication]

To be a kula man—to have mwali and soulava of renown to trade with partners in distant lands—is, for the Trobriand Islander, as good as (and comparable to) having money as a foreigner, just as women make the analogy with their banana leaf bundles. It is how one gets what one needs, and is indispensible to survival. We have our ways, Tausia is
ultimately saying, which rely on social relationships and the way that Trobrianders assign value to objects. *Dimdims* have money, and this is what allows them to go anywhere, even to places where they have no close kin or established partnerships. John Kasaipwalova, current chief of Yalumgwa village, once made a similar analogy in a meeting I attended, in which he noted that Trobriand Islanders are “used to dealing with people with different cultures, different ways, because we do kula”, explicitly making the comparison with visitors coming to the Trobriands from overseas.

Money, like all valuables, is seen as circulating continuously; a given transaction is rarely finite. Cash received, whether through market exchange of goods and services or from remittances, is most frequently put to use either for payment of children’s school fees, seen as an investment that may yield future returns, or for use in *sagali*, large distributions of both “traditional” wealth (yams, clay pots, stone axe blades, banana leaf skirts and bundles) and modern commodities such as rice, housewares, clothing, and cash notes and coins. Exchanges in *sagali* are ongoing, and investment in *sagali* for one’s relatives is essential to exchange networks on an extensive spatiotemporal plane. If neither school fees nor *sagali* obligations are pressing, money might be used to make bride price, to buy rice to feed those who have offered some service such as assisting in house building or weeding in the garden, or even to give away to someone in greater need with the expectation that later, a return gift will be made. Even money expended for basic household needs is conceived as feeding and forming the family, which creates obligations for children to later “take care of” their parents.

Trobriand Islanders desire access to cash, but this rationale is rarely about acquiring things for one’s own and exclusive use. Instead, the value attributed to money is associated with its potential social worth, comparable to other items of value. While living on Kiriwina, one day I asked some Trobriand friends to rank in terms of importance a number of “valuable” items in an attempt to understand something of the perceived relative value of various important objects, including pigs, yams, shell necklaces, clay pots, stone axe blades, grass skirts, bolts of fabric (important in mortuary distributions) rice bales, and cash. Regardless of the amount of money, both pigs and yams stood out as more important and valuable to Trobrianders, and more desirable. These two types of wealth, my adoptive mother told me, are what “make you a man” and are also important for single women to obtain since they do not have a husband to help them; with yams and pigs they can get anything else they may need. She told me that these things were more important than cash, because cash “doesn’t last.” These valuables are also essential to meeting necessary
exchange obligations. Similarly, George, a Trobriand man in his 60s, told me, “yams [even] today have more value than kina”. Weiner’s assessment concurs:

Traditionally, if a man had yams, he could find anything else he needed. Once Western cash began circulating among villagers, it relieved the total reliance on yams. Cash is used to buy seed yams, pigs, trade store food and goods, and even enters into some formal exchanges. In ameliorating the dependence on yams for all things, so that some cash flow meant less production in yams, the danger of increasing population and increasing human being/land ratios was ameliorated to some degree as well. Cash, however, never replaced the presentation of yams at harvest. It may have allowed for smaller harvests, but yams themselves were necessary. [Weiner 1982:71–72]

Yams are food, prestige, exchangeable for other goods, and exchangeable for money. There are certain spheres, on the other hand, into which money does not easily and directly penetrate; for example, one cannot, except by roundabout means, exchange cash for doba (see note 51). In this sense, cash in the Trobriand Islands is no more “general purpose currency” than yams are. Yams and pigs are both consumables, ultimately serving to nourish bodies, but for some period before actual consumption—several months for yams, up to several years for pigs—they nourish relationships by being exchanged in a variety of circumstances. Money, on the other hand, can only be exchanged for things that can be consumed, and although cash is an important supplement to traditional valuables at important distributions like mortuary exchanges, it cannot replace yams, clay pots, and doba, such that Trobriand Islanders recognise money as inherently less important than items of traditional wealth (Figure 9.3). It serves as a complement to, rather than a replacement or destroyer of, traditional wealth and exchange networks, once again representing the Trobriand proclivity for putting a distinctively Trobriand spin on all things (ostensibly) “foreign.”

The role of money in Trobrianders’ lives, as they express it, is sometimes stressed, but other times downplayed, depending on particular circumstances. Trobriand Islanders are competent and hardworking gardeners, and pride themselves on being able to produce much of what they need to live without working for money. I was told numerous times during my stay, “We don’t live on money here. We have our gardens.” However, money, and the commodities that can be obtained in exchange for it, are without a doubt highly desirable for most Trobriand Islanders. Access to cash is limited, since direct participation in the cash economy is restricted to, as mentioned, irregular earnings from tourists (primarily from selling carvings or performing traditional dance), small sums obtained by selling surplus vegetables or fish at local markets, and remittances from relatives working
in urban centres elsewhere in PNG. Although Trobrianders recognise that they do not need money to live—that is, to eat—they do want money, to obtain more and better things to eat (like rice, oil, salt, and fish), wear (Western clothing), foster communication and mobility (bus fare, bicycles, mobile phones and phone credit), and give away (items for sagali, bride price, and other important social obligations). Indeed, money has become an essential part of meeting kin obligations in a variety of exchange transactions.

Figure 9.3: Yams, pork, and betelnut are divided for redistribution at a community feast in Yalumgwa Village

One need not necessarily work directly for money; if garden produce or other gifts are periodically sent to wage-earning relatives living off island, one is entitled to a share of their earnings. This should be given freely, but if needs are unmet, it is acceptable to “beg” (-nigada) for it.56 A significant semantic and conceptual difference is captured in the English gloss for the verbs -katupoi, on one hand, and -nigada, on the other. Both might be most loosely glossed as “to ask”, but the connotations associated with the two terms are distinct and illuminating. The first, -katupoi, means, “to ask a question, to enquire”; the second, -nigada means, “to ask for something, to demand, or to beg”. It is notable that with the exception of “begging” for food, there is no shame associated with the term nigada. To beg for money or for things is perfectly acceptable, and if someone has such things in abundance, it is his or her shame (kala mwasila) should he or she not share freely with all who ask for something. To be generous (na/tolasi) is a virtue, while to be called
selfish or mean (na/topiki) is truly a great insult. Part of the risk in dealing with foreigners is that (despite a general belief in the nearly unlimited wealth dimdims have at their disposal) they are often minapiki (selfish people) and do not understand the right way to engage in exchange. In the Trobriand view, money and material goods should be shared by those who have them with those who do not; it “helps” people to find the things they need that cannot be locally procured; and the only danger associated with it is its potential to foster selfishness, jealousy, or laziness. This is not seen as an agentive quality of money itself, but rather that people may chose to behave in social or anti-social ways in much the same way as they might when confronted with other valuables, such as kula shells or long yams. No amount of money, however, can compensate for a poor yam garden.

In sum, money, like other “valuable” items, is obtained by a combination of work, skill, and magic or influence. Like growing a particularly long yam, obtaining a kula valuable, or acquiring a particularly potent magic spell, gaining access to cash requires a combination of efforts involving production/creation (e.g., wood carving, textiles, or dance performance; or work in a government office or as a teacher), but not only this; as importantly, it involves playing the “game” of exchange, trying to influence a prospective buyer to desire a given object, and to be willing to pay large sums of money for it; or, to “sweeten the mind” of a wage-earning relative to send a remittance—not entirely unlike conducting kula. The moral imperatives of money are not dramatically different than those that obtain with other kinds of valuables or exchange.

The Meaning of Money: Tourists’ Perceptions

When we went to [a certain Trobriand village], I didn’t like it so much, because I felt like a customer instead of a visitor. Everyone had something they wanted to sell. [Douglas, an American man in his 70s visiting on a group tour]

The moral implications of money are conceived of differently by tourists visiting the island, who idealise the Trobriands and other places that maintain a traditional way of life and an economy that is not based on market exchange. Idealisations of a “primitive economy”, where most things are given freely rather than bought and sold and where people produce most of what they need locally, are central to the romanticisation and allure of such a place as the Trobriands as a tourist destination (Bruner 2005a; Selwyn 1996). In the European philosophical tradition, money has a long history of associations with evil, corruption, and vice, with moral qualms about the dangers of profit-oriented exchange dating back to Aristotle and resurfacing with Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century.
Simmel, in *The Philosophy of Money* (1990[1907]), saw money as an instrument of freedom, but also as a potential threat to moral order. Many cultural tourists who choose to visit less-developed places such as the Trobriand Islands idealise non-monetary economies as more harmonious, cooperative, and contented than the profit and accumulation-driven West, and desire that it should remain “untainted” by capitalist greed. They feel these desires both as a matter of personal contentment that such places still exist, and as a matter of paternalistically “knowing what is best” for those who are not fully engaged in a monetary economy. However, despite such idealised views, most visitors would not wish to actually live in such a place; many tourists expressed amazement at my ability to stay in the Trobriands for such an extended period, doing without the comforts they felt necessary for happiness, all the while marvelling at how happy they perceived Trobriand Islanders to be.

While Trobrianders see money as helpful, necessary, and desirable, and a complement to other forms of wealth, visitors have explicitly morally ambivalent attitudes towards the economic development of the islands, and what money might “do” to change residents’ way of life. The following comment is typical:

> Well, I learned that they [Trobrianders] may be poorer with regard to material things—we are richer in this type of thing. But I would say we are poorer in many other things they’ve got—close ties to family members, helping one another, sharing, mutual obligations. And this is what, in my mind, has been lost in Western cultures. [Krista, a German woman in her 50s on a small group tour]

The influence not only of money but also material goods and modern technology is also feared as likely to further erode the social fabric and the kind of primitive lifestyle tourists desire to witness. Bernard, an American man visiting with a tour group, put it thus: “You get more people [foreigners] coming in, you get TV and these things, and soon, you see all these people who seem perfectly happy starting to want things they can’t have.”

Tourism (and the development often associated with it) and increased exposure to Western commercialism is a danger, many visitors asserted. Visitors frequently expressed their concern that money has a destabilising and potentially disastrous effect on the moral fabric of a perceived “pure” society. “I wanted to come and see it before it gets corrupted”, and “I worry about this place being spoiled by tourists” were typical comments. Some visitors, especially those arriving on yachts, told me that they preferred to “barter” for carvings and fresh produce, giving rice, oil, and other goods in return, which they saw as less “disruptive” than paying in cash. I was told by Bertha, an American woman in her 60s, that it was “refreshing” to see a society that was “non-technological”, and Beaney, an
Australian woman in her 40s, claimed that PNG “feels like one of the last places you can have a grassroots holiday without all the commercial interference”. Likewise, Bert, an American man in his 60s visiting on a group tour, observed, “The land here is productive enough that people have what they need. Tourism can bring problems, like begging...” The problems with, and shame of, begging was mentioned by numerous travellers as a potential pitfall inherent in the introduction of tourism to areas (they perceived as) “pristine”. Blame, to most visitors’ minds, fell to their fellow tourists (again, the self-identification as traveller, not tourist, emerges) or to the tour companies that do not consider or mitigate the effects of their actions on local communities. Here, too, is a discrepancy in understanding; while for tourists, begging is seen as shameful, Trobrianders do not consider it so, but rather see shame only in not sharing what one has.

Some visitors were fearful that the perceived negative effects of a market economy were already being felt in the islands, and were suspicious about whether the hospitality and entertainment they enjoyed was “authentic” and untainted by money. Retiree Sally, who visited a village with her tour group, noted, “We know [the tour guide] is paying each village we visit. I’m not sure if people would be as accepting and welcoming if they were not being paid.” Like begging, trickery and manipulation—though all part of the “game” in the Trobriand perspective, as is the case in kula exchanges, love magic, and politics, for example—are despised by tourists and seen as evidence of the corrupting influence of tourism and the greed fostered by the introduction of cash. Commoditisation of culture, especially when overt or obvious to the visitor, is seen to compromise authenticity and remove the singular nature of the object or experience, as perceived by the culture-seeking tourist. John, a UK-born resident Australian travelling by yacht, complained bitterly to me about how he “felt ripped off, tricked” when they were “invited” to see a local dance displaying villagers in traditional dress in the village of Koma, on Kaileuna Island. John said that the nature of the invitation meant that he and his companions “thought we were guests” and they took “gifts” such as sugar and rice, which they thought would be appropriate thanks to give in return. However, the group felt “a bit put out” when cash was demanded as payment for seeing the dance performance, which was no doubt put on for their benefit as a way to bring some income to the community. This was interpreted by John and his companions as demonstrating a “cash mentality”, which was not what they had come to the Trobriand Islands for. The request for cash shattered the myth the group had constructed that here they had an opportunity to join in with “the locals” and
participate in a village activity in the way they imagined it would take place if not for their presence.

In a similar vein, Martin and Elizabeth, an affluent couple (introduced in Chapter 7) who had visited several of the smaller outlying islands by chartered boat before arriving on Kiriwina, noted that the residents of the outer islands were “less concerned with money” than Kiriwinians, citing significant fees charged for accommodations, food, and dinghy hire in contrast to the generosity they received elsewhere. For example, they reported that on the tiny atoll of Gawa people came to them bearing gifts of small woodcarvings and shellfish, expecting (as they interpreted it) nothing in return. They saw the relatively overt focus on cash payments for goods and services on Kiriwina as representing “a little crack in paradise”. In several instances, visitors reported to me with great pleasure circumstances in which they’d been given a “gift” of some sort while in Papua New Guinea, which was interpreted as a demonstration that the generous, free, untainted gift economy they imagined had not yet been lost. When given a *bilum* (string bag) in Hanuabada, near Port Moresby, one tourist expressed glee at this demonstration of what she called “old, traditional generosity”. Others were given small carvings or a lime gourd, for example, for participating in *tilewai* (see Chapter 5). Foreigners bring to the transactions preconceived ideas about the potential negative effects of money—part of the metanarrative of primitivity—which contrast sharply with Trobriand Islanders’ views of payment as the appropriate return “gift” for goods or services provided to visitors.

When visitors purchased souvenirs, often negotiated directly with the carver or his proxy (Figure 9.4), the idea of interacting directly with the producer, asking questions about the “meaning” of the object, and knowing the money was going directly to the producer were frequently cited as significant aspects of the exchange from the tourists’ perspective. On the other hand, being asked to pay money for taking a photo or visiting a beach was anathema to the tourist—not because they could not afford it, but because it represented the very sorts of moral degradation they feared. Some visitors were happy to buy carved items expressly made for tourism, but were uncomfortable with purchasing items made for local use, such as stone axe blades; when offered, one visitor told me, “I told the guy, ‘You keep them, it’s your culture.’ It’s sad seeing people sell their culture—that stuff should never leave”. Others, however, felt that objects made expressly for tourist sale, the so-called “airport art” (cf. Graburn 1976), lacked meaning and were nothing more than tawdry trinkets. As Sally, an American retiree visiting on a group tour, stated, “I don’t buy what they make for tourists—if it has meaning for people who use it, it has more
meaning for me.” Haggling over artefacts for sale—particularly wood carvings—also caused great angst, as most visitors wanted to pay a fair price that did not exploit the carver, but also feared “we might spoil it [Trobriand culture] if we pay too much.”

Often, I found myself positioned as intermediary between a Trobriander hoping to make a sale, and his or her prospective customer. Very frequently, a Trobriand seller would implore me to tell my wantok to buy an object, insisting that I should help the seller to receive a generous price, since the visitor surely had ample money at his or her disposal. Tourists, likewise, would expect me to offer advice on both the cultural and monetary value of the object, and help them to get a “good price”. In some respects, the role I was assigned as mediator served to neutralise the ambiguity and difficulty of negotiating a transaction between cultural Others, as I was viewed as familiar to both sides and au fait with both Trobriand and dimdim ways of transacting.

Figure 9.4: Tourists browse items for sale during a break in the dancing programme at the 2009 Ugwabwena Festival

The idea that money corrupts “untouched” people is not, of course, restricted to tourism in the Trobriand Islands. The same discourse can be recognised throughout Papua New Guinea and elsewhere. Take, for example, the following comment from a guest-house visitor’s book in Chambri, on the Sepik River in northern PNG:
Watch out for the Kanganaman and Parambei [villages along the Sepik] you might miss them....The haus tambaran [men’s ceremonial house] in Kanganaman is sure worth seeing. They try to charge you for it. In both villages the people are unfriendly because they are accustomed to the big spending Explorer tourist. Hardly any good carving left if you are looking for that....Kapaimari, the Catholic school shortly after Kanganaman, you leave untouched. It is like other mission places—Timbunke, Ambunti. People very unfriendly; ready to rip you off. The smaller the village, the better. Some places may get five white tourists a year.... Accommodation is no problem if you stay away from the tourist spots. Every village will put you up and sometimes even provide food free. Your visit is an honor for them—a change in everyday life. [quoted in Errington and Gewertz 1989:40]

Here, we see tourists’ views of money—and other tourists—as corrupting, and a perpetuation of the “first contact” myth. A tourist must escape the path(s) that other tourists have trod to be truly intrepid and to ensure the authenticity of their experience. Money, and villager’s attitude towards it, is taken as evidence of inauthenticity; if villagers are eager for money, they have clearly been “corrupted” by Western greed; conversely, if they give food to the visitor for free, and behave as though “honoured” to have a traveller in their presence, the visitor can rest assured that their experience is an authentic and singular one.

Similar attitudes are reflected in the film Cannibal Tours (O’Rourke 1997). MacCannell analyses the actions of the German tourist, one of the most memorable members of the tour in the film, as follows:

The German in Cannibal Tours, responding to what was supposed to have been a high-level question from the film-maker about commercial exchanges spoiling New Guineans, ‘agrees’ that ‘these people do not know the value of money,’ but the workmanship ‘often justifies’ the prices they ask. In short, he thinks it is he, not the New Guineans, who is being exploited. He is doing them a favour by not paying the asking price—he simultaneously gives them a lesson in commercial realism and, by withholding his capital, he helps delay their entry into the modern world. He thinks their eventual modernisation is inevitable, but they would benefit from a period of delay. [MacCannell 1992:27]

This is reflective of a common idea, prominent in the popular imagination as part of the metanarrative of primitivity, that “progress” is a movement towards modernity, “where culture is quarantined to the sphere of the traditional and can therefore be threatened, lost, abandoned or destroyed. Within the modern there is no culture, only progress away from it via a solvent that is frequently seen to derive from the economy” (Patterson 2011:59). For many tourists, “the economy”—market exchange—is anathema to “culture”.

Tourists’ ideas about the role of money are not only about projecting fears of modernity and moral corruption, however. As this chapter’s opening vignette suggests,
some are quite befuddled by the complexity of exchanges, including those involving money which they see as less “simple” or straightforward, as Max put it, but also see this complexity as evidence of how different things are in the Trobriands. Max suggests that the very opacity of the transactions is “part of the experience”. There is explicit recognition that the social relationships involved in a monetary transaction make it more fraught than the kind of market exchanges that they, as Australians, are familiar with. This vignette also demonstrates how concepts like generosity can be constructed quite differently on the two sides of the tourism encounter. Ultimately, the entire interaction is a “game where you don’t know the rules”, as Lucy says, where (contrary to much writing about tourism, wherein the hosts are powerless in the face of tourism encroachment) Trobrianders have the upper hand, as the makers of the “rules” which visiting tourists must try to follow if they wish to successfully demonstrate their intercultural savvy. Younger travellers, in particular, were generally more reflexive about the role they played as tourists, even in a few cases expressing this quite explicitly. Sarah, an Australian woman in her 30s who was living in Port Moresby at the time that she visited Kiriwina, talked about her experiences with buying wood carvings and how tourism might negatively influence Trobriand people if not managed responsibly:

Someone's trying to sell me a [carving of a] crocodile, and I'm like, sure, I'll pay you 10 kina, and it's good to share out some kina. But then you realise you can't encourage people to just approach you randomly on the street...we need educating as much as they do about the whole industry. And when you're not reflexive about it, you realise you can actually create habits that are not desirable but because it's such an emerging tourism location...[it’s important to] develop it the proper way...

Despite qualms about tourism’s potential disruptive and denigrating qualities, many visitors felt a sense of moral superiority over their counterparts who stuck to developed resorts or cruises. One visitor noted, “It makes me feel good that we are providing money to the village—not to change culture, but to help them survive.” Another informed me, “I’m not big on souvenirs, but I would like to get one ebony carving, because it contributes to the local economy.” A group of elderly tourists from North America visited both the local hospital and high school on the last day of their tour, and at each location took up a small collection to leave as a donation. Again, the ambivalence is clear; money can bring destruction, but if managed correctly, might also improve the quality of life in a place that lacks many basic services. As Herb, an American man visiting on a group tour, said,

I don’t know what fifty kina represents to a family—it’s important to buy staples that they can’t grow, but I don’t know how much people really need.... As tourists,
we change the natural economy. It’s hard to tell if for better or worse. I see poverty, but I’m applying my standard to them.

Likewise, an Israeli couple in their 60s visiting independently also commented on poverty and development, stating, “Poverty is a part of every developing country, but here it’s good, people live to be old, and old people are looked after.... It’s not that I don’t want people to progress. But there’s a right rhythm. It shouldn’t be like in the West.”

While economic transactions with foreigners are often depicted as offering little material or social/symbolic return for the local population (e.g., MacCannell 1990: 29), my fieldwork suggests that this view significantly oversimplifies the nature of exchange between cultural Others. MacCannell (1990:9) has argued that

...for their part, the performative primitives, now ex-primitives, have devised a rhetoric surrounding money that perfectly complements the postmodern dream of profit without exploitation. They deny the economic importance of their economic exchanges. They will explain that they are exploited absolutely in their merely economic dealings with tourists, but also as far as they are concerned, at the level of symbolic values, these exchanges count for nothing. By the ex-primitives’ own account, their economic dealings with tourists are spiritually vacuous and economically trivial, producing little more exchange than what is needed to buy trousers.

While material gains are, for most Trobrianders, relatively small, they are not without social and symbolic importance. The money obtained through tourism is important in meeting social obligations, as mentioned above. The Trobrianders I worked with sometimes did express frustration that the tourists were not more generous and freer with their cash, based on the preconceived notion that all foreigners “live on money” and therefore have ample amounts of it, but are too greedy, selfish, and socially isolated, meaning that they have no obligations (as Trobrianders do) to share their vast wealth. But they did not consider themselves “exploited absolutely”, always feeling that they made an active decision in accepting or refusing an offered price for a carving or other object, and knowing that they had the persuasive powers of magic and seduction to aid them which were unknown to their visitors. And, as is the case in many places in Melanesia and beyond, and as described in Chapter 7, kin terms may be used in an attempt to create a sense of familiarity and obligation. For my part, when things were being requested of me, I would often be referred to as “my daughter” or “my sister”, the implication being that even as a foreigner, I could not help but recognise the obligation to lend assistance to my close kin (cf. Read 1955).
An example of a particular transaction illuminates some of the ways in which the nature and meanings of an intercultural exchange is played out in reality. While I was visiting the outlying island of Kuyawa, a local man approached the house where I was staying with two other *dimdims*. The man had brought a stone axe blade (*beku*) he wished to sell. The seller was expecting guests as part of a prayer exchange with a parish on another island and needed to buy rice. One of my companions, Franz, a German man in his 30s, was very interested in this item, especially when he learned something of its role in Trobriand exchange networks (Battaglia 1994; Malinowski 1922[1984]:358; Weiner 1976). The seller claimed that this item had been passed through his family since “ancient times” (*tukanibogwa*), thus imbuing the object with an aura of authenticity, based on its age and cultural significance. Paradoxically, for the prospective buyer, this made the object in a sense *too* valuable—priceless—in his eyes. The Trobriand owner, on the other hand, saw the object as valuable, but not the right kind of valuable for his immediate needs. By turning the axe blade to cash through its sale, he could then turn the cash to rice through a purchase at the trade store, which would be consumed by guests to create an obligation to reciprocate with food, objects, or cash. For the seller, the relationships he needed to foster were more important than the object. Franz vacillated about whether to purchase the axe blade, for which the owner asked K100 in return. He worried that if he purchased the object and took it back to Europe, he would be disrupting an otherwise unadulterated exchange system. When a companion pointed out that this man needed cash, and might end up selling it for even less to someone else, the visitor decided to purchase the item, which he deemed “real—it has a story”, and contemplated offering the seller *more* money than the asking price to assuage his guilt at purchasing an heirloom. For the buyer, the transaction represented both a valued, authentic object and proof of interaction with a cultural Other, a tangible representation of a moment of being and knowing, which could be transported home and represented through the physical object—the *souvenir* in the true sense of the word. The “story” of its purchase would enhance his narrative and further authenticate his Trobriand experience.

**Gifts and Commodities**

So, what do these conflicting discourses tell us about the nature and meaning of money and its moral implications, as perceived in the interaction between two cultural Others? And how does this bear on theoretical issues in economic anthropology?
The foregoing discussion of ideas about money and the kinds of transactions in which it is exchanged, and the implications for both the people transacting and the objects being transacted, instigates a return to the distinctions between gifts and commodities. To review, in a commodity economy, it is often argued, a person can be separated from his or her work (Strathern 1988:142). Commodities are products that have been alienated from their producers, and as such move against each other in a socially empty space. As Gregory puts it, “Commodity exchange is an exchange of alienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence” (1982:12). On the other hand, there is no alienation in gift economies; “the Melanesian idea that work is evidence of and governed by the mind precludes its appropriation” (Strathern 1988:162). Gifts, then, circulate “as parts of persons” (Strathern 1988:178). The gift is not about the thing, but about the personal relationship that the exchange itself creates (Strathern 1988:19).

These distinctions are useful as abstractions, in providing models to think about the relationship between people and things. However, as with many analytical models, they can rarely be applied as neatly to actual transactions in the real world. In the Trobriand case, there are many blurry distinctions where understandings of gifts and market transactions are misaligned. Often, this is because tourists want to conduct exchanges the way they think Trobrianders do, as “gifts”, while Trobrianders want to do exchange with tourists to get what is harder to obtain through gift exchanges with fellow Trobrianders—that is, cash, via market transactions. But since they recognise that tourists also like to feel like they are getting a chance to “live like the locals”, they are often willing to tell the story of a carving, a dance, or otherwise provide cultural information to give the buyer a sense of familiarity or even “kinship” to facilitate the transaction. Commodities such as carvings or a dance performance are not exchanged impersonally; instead, transactions are often made in a direct interaction between producer and consumer. On both sides of the transaction, the distinction between “gift” and “commodity” as categories is a fuzzy one or, perhaps more accurately, reflects a multiply-reflexive interaction in which people may be complicit in the camouflaging of commodity exchanges to make them seem/feel more like gifts, and may even try to deceive themselves. When such deception is abruptly challenged, as demonstrated by John’s “invitation” to the village which was followed by a direct demand for payment, the singular nature of the transaction, its sense of authenticity, and the deception that it is really about forging some kind of relationship with the cultural Other which leads to a particular kind of experience, is shattered.
Myers (2001b:6) has noted that the divide between gift exchange and capitalist (cash) economies based on money and markets is often seen as challenging the values or qualitative distinctions embodied in exchange. Appadurai’s (1986:12) point that there is some maximizing/calculation in gift exchange, as well as some aspect of sociality in the market, is by now accepted as common sense, but there is more to the matter than this. And the role of money is arguably more ambiguous for those whose economies and exchange practises are most dominated by it than for those for whom money is but one of many sources of wealth daily exchanged both to obtain other goods or services and to create, maintain, and manipulate social relationships.

Tourists recognise (and perhaps overemphasise) the differences between what they see as their own (impersonal, disembedded) economic system and their idealised views of a primitive economy based on sociality rather than money. In seeking to experience something of this, they value the opportunity (in theory, if not in practise) to interact with the people they travel to see, to ask questions about the meaning of an object or performance, which provides for the visitor a heightened sense of authenticity. A souvenir, an experience, or even a photograph in this sense is singular, and not entirely alienable. It carries with it if not a part of the individual producer or seller, at least an invocation of the place, a sense of memory and bodily experience that can traverse time and space. The money transacted is significant to both parties, but in different ways. To the (relatively) affluent tourist, money is easily replaced, but the moral dilemma of disrupting an (imagined) primitive economy is the cause of significant angst, and there is concern about transacting “properly”—with the right person, in the right amount, and with the right social interaction. The cash received by a Trobriand Islander in return for a carving, dance performance, or other good or service might be used to buy comestibles such as rice or fish, but could just as likely be recirculated to meet or create ongoing reciprocal obligations. It might be used to make payments in cash or in kind, to contribute to a mortuary feast, or to pay for a child’s school fees as an investment in creating future obligations from child to parent. For someone to have too much money can create jealousy and even prompt acts of sorcery, so there is a moral obligation on the part of the Trobriander who holds money to share it and spend it carefully, with an eye to past debts and future relationships. For both parties, the role of money in their own lives is complicated and poorly understood by the Other. Trobrianders assume that tourists have limitless supplies of it, and use it for everything, selfishly, without obligations or commitments. Western tourists assume that
Trobrianders don’t really “need” money and that it can only disrupt the harmonious dynamics of the local economy they imagine.

Drawing on Marx’s and Simmel’s contributions to discussions on the nature and transformative capacities of money, Bloch and Parry (1989:6) suggest that the impersonality and anonymity of money means its introduction can only be destructive to community and depersonalising of social relations:

In light of such arguments it is tempting to conclude that money acts as a kind of acid which inexorably dissolves cherished cultural discriminations, eats away at qualitative differences and reduces personal relationships to impersonality. It is only to be expected, then, that those “traditional” cultures which must for the first time come to terms with it will represent money as a dark satanic force tearing at the very fabric of society.

In the Trobriands case, it is not *Trobrianders* who see money thus, but only the Western visitors whose own social fabric they see as long since torn asunder due to the corrupting influence of the market.

**The Value of Money**

The difference between “general purpose currencies” such as cash and, in many parts of Melanesia, shell money, and “special purpose currencies” which serve as a medium of exchange only in specific contexts, is not a difference of kind but of degree; cash can (in theory) be exchanged for anything, anytime, while special purpose currencies can only help one to acquire certain things in certain contexts. Robbins and Akin (1999:7) refer to the “anxieties” regarding money in non-market societies, suggesting that

[b]eneath the surface of any well-ordered Melanesian economy there always lurks the possibility that objects will begin to consort promiscuously, erasing in the shuffle the many boundaries between kinds of persons and kinds of relationships that people have worked hard to create through their exchange…it is not surprising that despite their quick adoption of money [Melanesians] continue to worry about its power to breach the transactional boundaries they have erected.

On the contrary, at least in the Trobriand instance, my evidence suggests that money does not evince particularly potent power in this regard, and its presence (or absence) is no more potentially destabilizing than manoeuvres made with “traditional” forms of wealth. Exchange relationships are always tenuous, and the way people choose to deploy objects of wealth always has the potential to either solidify or subvert relationships. If a *kula* valuable is not passed along the proper path, or a long yam is not presented to the appropriate chief but is diverted for other purposes, boundaries are breached and social
relationships are shifted. Money is but one of any number of transactional media that may affect the relationships between people, and between people and things.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:24) argue that “ethno-commerce may open up unprecedented opportunities for creating value of various kinds”. They further suggest that marketing ethnic identity appears, on the one hand, to be “tragic evidence of the plight of people whose survival depends on running with the romance of their own primitivism,” and on the other hand, it

...[a]ppears to (re)fashion identity, to (re)animate cultural subjectivity, to (re)charge collective self-awareness, and to forge new patterns of sociality...by ambiguating the distinction between producer and consumer, performer and audience. How so? Because the producers of culture are also its consumers, seeing and sensing and listening to themselves enact their identity—and, in the process, objectifying their own subjectivity.... Conversely, consumers also become producers, complicit in that enactment: it is by lodging itself in the consciousness of the tourist-other...that their tradition persists. [Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:26, emphasis in original]

Most Trobrianders recognise that they have something the tourists don’t (“culture”). The tourists have something Trobrianders do not have, but would like to have (money). Why not exchange? Most tourists agree that Trobrianders have something the tourists do not, but would like to have (culture, sense of community, family, happiness). The tourists also recognise that they have something Trobrianders do not (money/things, but also isolation, individualism, stress). The line of thinking on the tourists’ side tends to be along the lines of: if we exchange, we can help the community directly, which is good, but we also might create greed, desire, begging, unhappiness, prostitution—in sum, we might ruin what we came here for. Thus, everything is rather ambivalent and fraught.

Perhaps not surprisingly, both Trobriand Islanders and Western tourists conceive of the role and effect of money in the context of their respective underlying philosophies on the meaning of wealth and its role in exchange. For Trobrianders, money is another form of “valuable”, intermediate between the consumable items of exchange such as pigs, yams, betelnut, and even rice, on the one hand; and on the other, enduring, non-consumable items of value such as shell necklaces, clay pots, stone axe blades, and even banana leaf bundles and skirts (doba). Thus, cash is another in a long list of valuables, each of which has particular characteristics and contexts in which it may be more or less important than other items. Money is neither inherently good nor bad, although greed, jealousy, and selfishness are moral pitfalls one must avoid with any form of wealth. Money may have the potential to be a store of value, but this potentiality is rarely realised in a temporal sense by an
individual. That is to say, money is rarely held or saved, but is quickly recirculated; it may be used to purchase food for consumption, for goods to meet kin obligations for *sagali*, or to share with friends or relatives to create a later obligation, a form of social credit, perhaps. Like any other valuable—yams, a *kula* shell, or a pig—one must calculate in any given circumstance the best way to transact—when, with whom, for what purpose or end. In other words, money is “cultural” and very much a part of social action/interaction, and it takes on meanings and properties specific to Trobriand conceptualisations of exchange.

Western tourists, on the contrary, see the agency money wields as explicitly morally ambivalent. Most carry with them a metanarrative that money (more accurately, love of money) is, as *The Bible* proclaims, “the root of all evil.” A so-called primitive economy that has long relied on things other than money to meet social obligations, and in which much of what one consumes is produced locally, is idealised as morally good, pure, and unadulterated. The introduction of cash can only, in this romanticised view, lead to a casting out from Eden. To most tourists, money is anonymous, impersonal, and implies that everything has its price; in a market economy, gifting is relegated to the margins, everyone is selfish and maximising, and greed soon replaces cooperation. For cultural tourists, the social action is in experiencing Otherness, and having to pay for it is an uncomfortable but necessary detraction from seeing and knowing “life as it is really lived”. Paradoxically, the moment of financial transaction is as “real” an intercultural encounter as many tourists are likely to achieve.

Trobrianders and tourists in many ways hold incommensurate understandings of the nature of exchange, and their actual interactions are inevitably ambiguous and uncertain. Each of the parties is operating within its own frame of reference, but is well aware of differences (even if these are imperfectly understood) in the Others’ economic world. Both Westerners and Trobrianders depend on money as the primary means of exchange for goods and services provided to tourists, and both recognise different co-existing modalities of exchange, such as sharing, buying, and delayed-return exchanges. If exchanges between members of a given group, who share understandings of the meaning and nature of money, may at times be differentially interpreted and lead to conflict or bad feelings, intercultural exchange is doubly perilous. Robbins and Akin note that “for an exchange to be a morally neutral conveyance, not only must people in the right kind of relationship (or potentially in such a relationship) be transacting with the right kind of objects, they must also be doing so in the right way” (1999:9). Doing things “right” becomes particularly difficult—and therefore morally ambiguous—when parties to the transaction are operating with
discordant rules and philosophies about money, and are further hindered by carrying out transactions across gaps of linguistic comprehension.

The discourses of both tourists and Trobrianders about money suggest that both see money as an active agent, capable of instigating transformations, but with differing implications. Trobrianders, with their long and complex history of engagement with Christianity, colonialism, and capitalism, are far less “anxious” about the moral perils of money than are those visitors whose economies are dominated by it. As Weiner (1988:167) eloquently states, “With masterful zeal, Trobrianders make manifest who they are through what they exchange, thus making them expert at transforming into their own Trobriand style whatever encumbers or encroaches on their resolute sense of self.” Malinowski predicted that much of what he recorded of Trobriand life would soon be lost as a result of extensive interaction with foreigners (Malinowski 1929:115), but nearly a hundred years on, yam cultivation, women’s production and exchange of banana leaf bundles, and kula activities remain central to defining Trobriand identity. Malinowski’s—and modern tourists’—fears of the inevitable imminent destruction of Trobriand social life as a result of Western influence have yet to be realised.

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51 In reality, exchange within a given community is already quite a complicated matter, rarely bounded and discrete, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

52 I use this term to mean exchanges that make use of items of wealth produced locally (yams, pigs), exchanged intra-regionally (stone axe blades, shell valuables), and state issued notes and coins which are used to meet ongoing social obligations and to maintain and solidify both kin and non-kin relationships. I am nonetheless wary of the use of terms like “traditional” currency or “traditional” exchange, as certain assumptions are inherent, i.e., that it represents a frozen-in-time continuity with a distant past and is uncoupled from modern life and economic exchange.
The same can be argued for Western society, as there are categories of things (especially related to persons) that most individuals feel uncomfortable with commoditising, such as human organs, children, sex, mail-order brides, and so on. This, of course, notwithstanding instances of slavery and a lucrative, if illegal, industry in human trafficking.

While there is not, perhaps, a directly translatable term in Kilivila, my Trobriand hosts put a great deal of effort into teaching me the “right” way to engage in giving: the etiquette involved in sharing betelnut, repaying people who brought me cooked food or helped me with my research, and of course the exchanges involved in sagali, among others. See Barker (2007) for a discussion of Melanesian morality more generally.

It should be clarified that while this is generally true, there are rare exceptions. I did hear of a few cases in which women did not have the necessary time or resources to make their own nununiga in advance of a mortuary feast, and were able to obtain sufficient quantities by making a donation to a Women’s Fellowship group and receiving the bundles in return. However, this is still not a case of a direct purchase or purely commercial transaction, as it is mediated through the church.

While Trobriand Islanders most often glossed the verb -nigada as “beg” in English, it may also be glossed as “request” or “demand”.

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CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I was away for ten years, and when I came back [to Kiriwina], I saw the culture going low. I feared that the younger generation would lose out. When our culture dies, our identity dies. In these islands, culture is all we have…. To your eyes, as an outsider, the culture seems intact, but to our own eyes, it’s dying. It’s dying fast. We need to re-educate people in the villages…. There is so much here that tourists would want to see: dancing, cultural activities, festivals, gardening, arts and crafts, string bands, and our reefs, lagoons, and caves. But we need to improve people’s standard of living. Why should people live in small huts and go to the toilet in the bush? We can benefit [financially and developmentally] from tourism. The whole country of PNG can benefit from what the Trobriand Islands has to offer. [Jennifer Rudd, President of the Kiriwina Regional Local Level Government]

This thesis has examined the ways in which ideas about culture, authenticity, and primitivity are utilised as tropes employed to contextualise alterity and make sense of cultural Others. I see cultural tourism experiences as an example of the meeting and interactions of people who seek to engage (actively or passively) with a way of life conceived as radically different from their own—from the perspectives of both tourists and Trobriand Islanders. My ethnographic fieldwork has allowed me to incorporate the voices of Trobriand Islanders, tour operators, public officials, and tourists, as well as, of course, my own, in order to illustrate how discourses about authenticity and primitivity are a central focus of interactions with the Other and permeate both the internalisation of, and narratives about, experience in the intercultural encounter. These tropes pervade tourists’ understanding and representation of Trobriand life, and their personal experiences of travel to a (perceived) culturally intact destination. The same discourses are brought into play for personal, political, and economic ends by Trobriand Islanders. I have sought to tease out the ways in which such encounters are interpreted and represented by each party with reference to these tropes. I have done so through an examination of four identified sites of intercultural encounter and exchange (in its broadest sense): cultural performances and festivals, village visits, souvenir shopping, and the act of photographing. The material objects, activities, and relationships that comprise interactions are variously conceived, valued, and given meaning—not only, as my ethnographic data have shown, through people’s own cultural schemas, but through their (often imperfect) projections of the cultural schemas of the Other.
Performing Ideologies of Difference

Throughout the foregoing chapters, the discourses employed in cultural tourism—by tour operators, politicians, tourists, and the toured—have been presented as directly as possible by reproducing their own words. These discourses consistently reference the dominant tropes of authenticity and primitivity. Such tropes have performative power (Wagner 2001:5) and are enacted in the intercultural encounter. As Meethan (2006:7) points out,

Aspects of tourism which encompass forms of performance and embodiment, of self-reflection and personal autonomy are…elements worthy of further attention, the social world and being in it is more than a discourse, and place is more than just a passive container within which activities occur.

A dialectical relationship obtains between such tropes and “reality” as it is experienced. Just as the tropes have performative power, so do bodily experiences help build categories of the mind (Combs-Schilling 1989:xv). Palmer and Jankowiak (1996:230) identify three kinds of reflexivity in performance, which can be applied to the performances of both tourists and Trobrianders in their encounters with one another: self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-commentary. To return to Wagner (1975), culture is made “real” through contrast, through an experience of Otherness. By engaging in an intercultural encounter, both tourists and Trobrianders are made more self-aware, and try to make sense of their own view of the Other. Rather than just shifting focus from traveller to host, we should seek to simultaneously examine the experience of both parties, their ways of conceiving of self and Other as made visible and meaningful by the objectification and reification of culture on both sides. In this way, it is possible to understand how the touristic encounter is a site of interaction and represents a particular kind of relationship. As Thurlow and Jaworski observe, tourism plays a powerful role in reorganising cultural practices and establishing ideologies of difference (2010:7). Though each individual encounter may be brief, the temporal engagement is not so simple. In fact, on the part of the prototypical “intrepid” traveller who comes to a place like the Trobriand Islands—remote, “exotic,” and “untouched”—the time spent there is but one episode in a series of punctuated events of travel to experience Otherness. One “primitive tribe” is much the same as the next. Likewise for the Trobriand Islander, one dimdim is much the same as the next, and interactions with visitors, though not a daily occurrence, are ongoing and cumulative.
The study of tourism in the social sciences has largely been concerned with the meanings ascribed to travel experiences by tourists, often hinging on ideas about authenticity. However, understanding what tourism means as a socio-cultural phenomenon also necessitates an understanding of how it is experienced by those who receive visitors, and whose own way of life (and its perceived differences) is the very attraction that compels tourists to travel. Authenticity as a concept has played a significant role in understanding tourism as an anthropological subject (e.g., Bruner 2005a; Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973, 1976; Olsen 2002; Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Steiner 1995 and many others). However, as noted in Chapter 3, authenticity is often thought to be an exclusively Western concern (e.g., Appadurai 1986a:45; Gable and Handler 1996; Jones 2010; Lindholm 2002). My Trobriand fieldwork challenges these assumptions, as Trobriand Islanders employ discourses about “real” Trobriand culture and traditions, as represented in ideas about *bubunedasi* (our culture/way), though these are often locally contested (as Chapter 5 illustrates using the example of Trobriand dance). Through my analysis, I have sought to reinvigorate debates surrounding the relevance of authenticity to anthropological studies of tourism and to demonstrate the importance of not just tourists’ perceptions, but also those who must negotiate often divergent ideas about tradition, custom, and identity in producing and performing aspects of Self for the consumption of Others.

Ideas and interpretations of the Other are pre-imagined and re-narrated according to broader (and largely unshakeable, even in the presence of evidence to the contrary) metanarratives about the differences between people conceived of (by the media, the general populace, and those so labelled) as “modern primitives”, as opposed to those who seem to live in an increasingly wired, disengaged, fast-paced, socially isolated “civilised” world. Culture “is made visible by culture-shock, by subjecting oneself to situations beyond one’s normal interpersonal competence and objectifying the discrepancy as an entity; it is delineated through an inventive realization of that entity following the initial experience” (Wagner 1975:9). People constantly re-imagine their own personal history in light of new experiences—what Cavarero (2000:33) calls the “narratable self.” Each side romanticises the other, and yet, most would not wish for an actual permanent shift in their way of life; but the desire to temporarily *experience* radical cultural alterity impels many to travel to places that (seem to) fit their understanding of an authentic, unadulterated Other. In my own research, the toured—Trobriand Islanders—are much less likely to have the resources to travel overseas, but they are keen to engage with visitors and tell stories about *dimdim* ways. In both cases, representations of the Other are rife with misunderstandings,
misrepresentations, stereotypes, and a mix of idealisation and denigration. Travel may invoke what Turner refers to as a “performative reflexivity” for both tourists and tourism providers, as I suggested in Chapter 5. Such reflexivity occurs, Turner argues, when a group of people or an individual representative thereof “turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon their relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other socio-cultural components which make up their public selves” (1986:24). Intercultural encounters facilitated though tourism may inspire just such a reflection, as tourists and the toured find themselves fixed in one another’s gaze (Urry 2002:156).

Tourism is but one milieu in which culture comes to be seen as thing-like, an essentialised set of characteristics that can be represented on a T-shirt purporting to materially represent an “Authentic Milne Bay Experience” (Figure 1.1). Culture is thus reified through material representation not just in the form of the T-shirt and its slogan, but through utilising symbols of Trobriand material culture, such as a kula valuable or a yam house. Trobriand culture is both auto- and exo-essentialised materially, symbolically, and experientially, and a concerted effort must be made to preserve it. Culture, in this sense—though of course, not in an anthropological one—is quantifiable, objectifiable, relative, and endangered, and is the inalienable property and legacy of the Trobriand people. As Tilley puts it, describing cultural tourism in Vanuatu, history and culture-as-thing comes to be seen as “part of the inalienable wealth of the people...: something that they can sell and give away while still keeping it” (Tilley 1997:82).

Authenticity is a frame of reference employed to reflect an experience or identity that is unique and provides a sense of validation, pride, and personal satisfaction. For tourists, this is manifested in their (self-perceived) demonstration of their own savvy and worldliness through the successful navigation of the intercultural encounter. They are sometimes willing to be complicit in perpetuating the myth of an unadulterated Other in order to uphold the metanarrative and ensure that the retelling meets with their own expectations. For Trobrianders, tropes of authenticity are employed to represent a unique identity relative to both other Papua New Guineans and dimdims. Trobrianders’ sense of their own significance is reinforced by the fact that people (tourists, photographers, videographers, travel writers, and anthropologists) from across the globe read books and watch television programs about them, travel long distances and pay large sums of money to come to the Trobriands and, once there, buy souvenirs, visit villages, ask questions, and take innumerable photographs. My Trobriand interlocutors stressed the importance of
authenticity even in the absence of tourists; my education in the day-to-day life of the village often made reference to “real” Trobriand culture as opposed to things that were *gala mokwita* (not real, not the real way). I do not think of this as a form of “strategic essentialism” of an oppressed group designed to meet particular political ends (e.g., Spivak 1990). On the contrary, I see this auto-essentialism as evidence of a reflexive agency and resilience, a legacy of the Trobriands’ particular history of interaction with foreigners, not least of all anthropologists. These interactions validate and reinforce Trobrianders’ sense of self as particularly unique, singular, valuable, and authentic, which is reflected in the particular ways in which exogenous influences become naturalised and imbued with a distinctively Trobriand ethos.

**Destination as Home**

There is an implicit tendency in much of the tourism literature to conceive of tourist places and spaces as created by the tourism industry, and by the presence of tourists themselves. There is an experience of such places created by tourists/tourism, but it is important to note that the place also has meaning, of a very different sort, for the people who call the destination home. Not only does place have meaning as home as opposed to visitors’ conceptualisation of it as exotic, but the presence of visitors, their actions and reactions, also have implications for how Trobrianders think reflexively about themselves, their physical environment, and their material goods. These are contrasted against imagined ideas about how these elements differ from the lived worlds of visitors from abroad. Intercultural interactions play into the ways in which people conceive of home and their place in the larger world, but the resulting narratives are multifarious and varied. They are an example—in both directions—of what Rose (1982:220) calls “an economy of experiences in which [the experiences] we have are to be regarded as personal resources that may be used in interpersonal relationships as a way of authenticating ourselves”.

These resources are a kind of cultural capital for establishing one’s place in the community (as culturally savvy world traveller or as equally culturally savvy Trobriand host), and for creating one’s sense of self more broadly (Abrahams 1986:56).

Place, in the context of tourism, is as much a matter of the constructed symbolism and imagery associated with it (Appadurai’s imagined worlds) as it is about localised meanings (lived worlds). Space is demarcated, but penetrated; and flows work in both directions, though in different ways. There is not, and is not likely to be, a massive outflux of Trobriand Islanders as international tourists (though many Trobrianders have, indeed,
travelled and lived abroad), as such opportunities are limited by economic and social constraints. However, Trobrianders are, and have long been, highly mobile, whether travelling to distant islands for *kula* exchange, going to Port Moresby for work, education, or any number of other purposes, or moving further afield to Australia, the USA, or England as opportunities allow. The nature of my research meant that I (usually) interviewed Trobrianders at home – those who had not moved away, or had done so, but returned. Conversely, I interviewed tourists *away* from home, out of their familiar environs, for the purposeful encounter of Otherness. I cannot ignore my own role—and nor could my interlocutors—as not-quite-tourist, not-quite-local; nor can I ignore how both Trobrianders and tourists viewed me as part of their experience and understanding of alterity, and how that changed over time as I become more conversant in Trobriand language and cultural norms. People, like culture(s), are not static.

Anthropologically, we recognise that cultural stasis is impossible, and most Trobrianders and tourists are likewise cognisant of this, but they often remain complicit in an ongoing self-deception or performance of primitivity that satisfies the desire to experience (or be) authentically Other. I do not think that this represents something like MacCannell’s (1973) idea of “staged authenticity” (as introduced in Chapter 4), since this suggests that tourists seeking authenticity pass through a series of “stages,” and implies a dichotomy between “front” and “back”, the put-on and the real. As I have argued throughout this thesis, I think the reality is far more blurred, especially in a place like the Trobriand Islands in which large-scale tourism infrastructure is conspicuously absent. In such a place, the lines between performance and “unperformance”, as I have called village-based tourism, are not so easily drawn.

The statement by Jennifer Rudd that opened this chapter demonstrates many of the paradoxes that have been considered in this thesis. Tourism has the capacity to develop and transform, bringing self- and Other-identified “primitive” people economic and social development. But, such development, along with other aspects of Westernisation such as Christianity, new technology, or access to media, is seen as contrary to the preservation of what both Trobrianders and tourists reproduce as reified, timeless understandings of culture and tradition, which are the very basis of the cultural tourism industry. The metanarrative of primitivity is constantly reproduced and reinforced in print and visual media, as outlined in Chapter 4. This metanarrative depends on authenticity to validate it, and it stands in stark contrast to “modernity”. As with the trope of authenticity, primitivity is as embraced by Trobrianders as it is by tourists, exemplified by the many comments
made to me by Trobrianders that “we are not like you *dimdims*, we are uneducated (poor, undeveloped, uncivilised) natives”. But these differences—even if self-identified as representing an “uncivilised” way of life—are also recognised as the reason why tourists come, and an aspect of Trobrianders’ particular anthropological legacy. This is also used in various ways to political ends; Jennifer Rudd has a vested interest in presenting Trobriand Culture in a particular way in order to meet her own political agenda, as well as the broader interests of her constituents. Each side, as well as the media, does its part to perpetuate the myth of the frozen-in-time primitive. Trobrianders essentialise *dimdims* much as tourists essentialise “primitive people,” but Trobrianders do not use discourses of authenticity in contextualising the Other; the culture of *dimdims*, both tourists and Trobrianders agree, is less authentic, if they have anything that can be called culture at all. They do, however, reify their own culture in a highly reflexive manner, using as touchstones history (i.e., stories, memories) but also written records (including those of anthropologists) and visual media such as films and television. The past, the Church, and the need to move forward in a globalised world are all points of reference used in charting today’s version of Trobriand culture, despite often pushing and pulling in different directions. Ultimately, ideas and identities circulate in a balance between history and modernisation, between *gulagula* (manners and customs as linked to the past) and *tapwaroru* (Church), between satisfying tourists’ desires while remaining “pure Trobs”.

**A Global Phenomenon, Local Interactions**

If one needs any justification for the serious social scientific examination of tourism and its implications, the sheer scale of human, material, and capital circulation involved should be sufficient to ensure tourism’s prominence on the research agenda. Nearly a billion people cross borders for business or leisure travel annually (UNWTO 2009), and if current trends continue, annual expenditures could soon reach US$1 trillion. Tourism is simultaneously “local” and “global”. My fieldwork was carried out in the most spatially bounded of locations, a small island to and from which transport is expensive, unreliable, and infrequent, compared to most other localities—but also reflective of the mobility and flows (people, objects, capital, ideas, etc.) that contemporary life inevitably entails. By studying tourists who come to the Trobriand Islands, and the ways Trobriand Islanders respond to the demand for a perceived authentic radical alterity, I have sought to examine the intersection of lives locally lived and the role of globalisation in making sense of the world, and most particularly, the physical movement of people across boundaries, not just
political but personal, conceptual, and cultural. I do not interpret the results of my research by unreflexively accepting metanarratives about globalisation and modernity(ies), however (cf. Englund and Leach 2000; Moore 2004). Instead, I have endeavoured to understand the underlying assumptions that frame the understandings of both tourists and Trobrianders as they meet in the intercultural encounter that this particular kind of tourism—small scale, with a high level of local involvement, and focused on a mutual recognition of alterity—facilitates.

Moore (2004) has encouraged an interrogation of how the interconnections between the global and the local can be reconciled and theorised in anthropology. Tourism is

...a key site for intercultural exchange and for the banal enactments of globalisation…. Host-tourist interactions and identities embody the very essence of globalising processes. It is in communication with each other, in every particular instance of contact, that hosts and tourists also negotiate the nature of the tourist experience, the meaning of culture and place, as well as their relationship to each other and their own identities. Any such interpersonal, face-to-face encounter is also heavily pre-figured at any number of stages of the tourist enterprise....

[Thurlow and Jaworski 2010:9]

As Meethan et al. (2006:xiv) have noted, “Although tourism involves spatial and cultural mobility, it is also irreducibly associated with the specificity of places, with the processes by which tourist sights are demarcated and set apart from the mundane.” This involves processes of commodification, which should not, as Englund and Leach (2000:228) argue, be taken for granted as carrying (negative) values regarding personhood, property, and morality and a metanarrative of all-pervading modernity, all of which are broader topics of concern in anthropology addressed by this research.

**Culture for Sale?**

Tourism not only implicates consumption. It also implicates production. As Tilley notes, tourism encounters are unique in bringing producer and consumer face to face (1997:74). What is more, tourism production can and should be seen in two senses; on the one hand, referring to that which is produced *for* tourists, and on the other, that which is produced *by* tourists. I mean the latter in the sense that it is the tourists themselves who create their own experience through travel, and subsequently reproduce that experience as a remembered and narrated event with the aid of mnemonics such as souvenirs, photographs, and stories. Cultural products (dance performances, wood carvings, village visits, and even photographs) are all (or can be) commodified and exchanged in the
cultural tourism milieu; indeed, it is the very fact that culture can be commodified that forms the basis of the cultural tourism industry. And yet, to commodify culture—to put a price tag on a singularity—goes against the ideals inherent in the metanarrative (for the tourist, anyway) and brings us into the realm of prevailing theories of cultural commodification (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Kopytoff 1986:73-74). Certainly, tourists know that they pay for the experiences engendered in travel (often rather dearly). And yet, at the actual site of encounter, every effort is made to downplay the commodity status of cultural products and the role of money in the exchange (as described most directly in Chapter 9), especially on the part of visitors. While Trobrianders recognise and embrace the role of tourism as bringing them into the market economy, tourists generally conceive of money as “against culture”, seeking to emphasise the social relationships (they imagine) that they engage in through tourism. For tourists, the overt exchange of cash for a cultural commodity de-authenticates it, and creates a sense that the experience is not as meaningful or valuable as one that represents their own ideal of the kind of economy in which people matter more than things or money. Recall Krista, quoted in Chapter 9, who felt that though Trobrianders may lack in material wealth, “we are poorer in many other things they’ve got—close ties to family members, helping one another, sharing, mutual obligations. And this is what, in my mind, has been lost in Western cultures.” The practice sometimes employed wherein a guest is addressed using kinship terms (Chapter 6, Chapter 9) may be interpreted as a means of reducing the social distance (Sahlins 1972:196-202) between strangers, and making transactions seem more like generalised reciprocity; that is, more like “help” (-pilasi) and less like payment (mapula). Conversely, when local hosts make overt requests for cash in return for what tourists would like to conceive as “gifts”, discomfort is created and the myth of an authentic interpersonal-intercultural exchange is shattered.57

While the rhetoric of interaction and mutual cultural awareness pervades the discourses of tourists and, to a lesser extent, Trobrianders, tourism is, after all, an industry. In observing or taking part in a traditional dance, attending a village feast, buying a carved walking stick directly from the craftsman, or photographing a group of children and then showing them the image on the digital camera’s screen, there is the creation of a sense of mutual knowing and sharing, bridging the chasm of cultural alterity, and forging a relationship of sorts, however brief and superficial. In the eyes of the tourist, who seeks an authentic experience in an authentically primitive place with authentically primitive people, a transaction or exchange is “embedded” and forms part of the relationship, what Gudeman
calls the “up-close” aspect of the economy. In reality, of course, these relationships are fleeting, rootless, and ultimately representative of the globalised economy; yet this does not negate the constructed sense of authenticity such transactions may entail.

Gregory (1997) has pointed out the process whereby Trobrianders, who do, after all, engage in a variety of market transactions as well as non-monetary ones, intentionally transform commodities to gifts. Based on his interpretations of the ethnographic film *The Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea* (Wason 1990), Gregory describes how carvings are sold to tourists for cash, which is used by the carver to buy tobacco, which his wife then exchanges for banana leaf bundles in (commodity) transactions referred to as *valova* (described in Chapter 9), and those leaves are finally presented as a gift in mortuary distributions. This process, Gregory asserts, is a roundabout way of keeping “the alien world of commodities at bay...by providing a means by which commodities can become domesticated and transformed as gifts” (1997:56).

Goss (2004:328) observed that the souvenir is “the commodity form that most effectively denies its commodity status” because such objects may become “witness to the existence of realities outside the compass of an individual’s or a community’s experience” (Phillips and Steiner 1999:3). I argue that this is because the value invested in such objects has to do only minimally with their material properties. Aesthetic appreciation and meaning are invested in tourist objects, and in tourist performances and “unperformances”, because, as Phillips and Steiner suggest, they represent *experience*, not only as lived, but also as the imagined experience of the people with whom one engages (meaningfully or superficially) interculturally. Even the most cursory of encounters, such as those experienced by cruise ship visitors (described in Chapter 6), can be conceived of as authentic and meaningful by participants, and for those who choose to stay in villages, their sense of getting a “feel for” lives locally lived in the village is a significant part of the narrative. But, as the intercultural encounter in the tourism experience is an ephemeral one, souvenirs—whether in the form of objects, memories, stories, or photographs—are a way of concretising experience and provide an enduring connection to a moment in which cultural difference was experienced on a personal, embodied level.

As such, I argue that insofar as Gregory’s distinctions between commodities (relations between things) and gifts (relations between people) have currency as ways to think about the nature of transactions and the relationships entailed therein, tourist products are a special and particular case. Weiner has made a case for some kinds of objects having more “density” than others, by which she means that objects are cultural constructions that
accrue symbolic importance through associations with their owner(s), histories, and sacralisation, as well as aesthetic and economic values (1994:394). I see objects that convey an association to a personally meaningful experience, as well as the experience of formal or informal cultural performances (whether merely observed or, more significantly, participated in and experienced as embodied action), and the photographs that capture such experiences, as symbolically dense. They encapsulate evidence (real or contrived) of the existence of the authentic cultural Other, and one’s own ability to engage in an interaction conceived of as meaningful. While this may be more important for the tourist, who feels an essential authenticity is lacking in their own modern, technologically advanced but spiritually devoid world (e.g., MacCannell 1976, and tourists’ own comments such as Krista’s above), Trobrianders also contribute to increasing the density of experience, the sociality of the economic exchange, through, for example, addressing visitors using kinship terms. Experience, then, may be a special kind of commodity, in which social distance and the expectations for reciprocity are manipulated, in a sense, often through active self-deception. Commodities are treated like gifts, objects and performances are invested with meaning beyond their physical properties, and strangers are treated as friends or even family.

The commoditisation of experience is a significant trend, as I see it, not only in tourism (where it is a large part of branding and marketing, as amply demonstrated in Chapter 6), but in other spheres as well. Attending university is rebranded as an opportunity to enjoy “the undergraduate experience”; dining in an expensive restaurant is not merely eating, it is a “culinary experience”. Turner and Bruner (1986) have suggested the need for a specifically anthropological approach to the nature of experience. I have drawn on their work (and others’) in order to situate the importance of experience in making meaning—the meaning of objects, the meanings of encounters with others, and the meaning of one’s own quotidian life, whether in a large American or European city, small-town Australia, or a Trobriand village.

Valuable Trinkets, Priceless Experiences

I have at several points throughout this thesis invoked analogies with kula as a way of understanding Trobriand ideas about exchange, the creation of value, the movements of people and objects, and the relationships between objects and persons. The analogy might also be applied to the ways in which tourists invest meanings in objects or activities consumed in tourism. As Malinowski observed regarding kula shells, “However ugly,
useless, and—according to our standards—valueless an object may be, if it has figured in historical scenes and passed through the hands of historic persons, and is therefore an unfailing vehicle of important historical associations, it cannot but be precious to us” (1922[1984]:89). Souvenirs, photographs, memories, and stories similarly accrue value through their association with significant events or experiences on a more personal level. Though a tourist “trinket” or digital photograph might not command a high price on the open market, they are none the less priceless, irreplaceable keepsakes for those who have obtained them, and for whom they represent both personal and intercultural proficiency. However, negotiating the exchange of a cultural item, or even investing meaning into a photograph, can be difficult, sometimes even morally fraught, as a result of incommensurate knowledge and understanding between cultural Others. Gregory observes:

For a value system to operate effectively there must be a generally accepted standard of value because valuation is essentially a comparative process by which two unlike entities...are compared and judged to be the same or different with reference to this standard. Standards of value are generally accepted, but never universally so. [1997:13; see also Graeber 2001:17]

This applies not just to market economies, but also to non-monetary exchange systems like kula (Gregory 1997:13; Appadurai 1986:18–21). Finding a common standard of value is more difficult in an intercultural exchange when the meaning invested in objects, actions, and even money may differ dramatically, based on differences in knowledge, values, and ideas about the nature of exchange. Appadurai calls this the “politics of value”, which “has its source in the fact that not all parties share the same interests in any specific regime of value” (1986:45). For Karpik (2010:10–13), this is reflected in the difficulties in sharing meaning(s) of such products, as well as the uncertainty engendered by imperfect knowledge and problems of incommensurability. Cultural products are particularly difficult commodities to theorise as the relationship between money, objects, actions, and people are differently and ambiguously conceived. Kopytoff (1986:73) sees culture as the counterdrive to the trend to commoditisation “in the sense that commoditisation homogenises value, while the essence of culture is discrimination, [thus] excessive commoditisation is anti-cultural.” His answer to this is singularisation. And yet, it seems to me that although the cultural products transacted in tourism are (generally) singular, and are consciously invested with the characteristics that make them unique, uncommon, and authentic, they are at the same time regularly exchanged in (often disguised) market transactions. Just as I remove the price tag before giving a Christmas present to a loved one, and just as Trobrianders disguise the commodity status of banana leaf bundles given
away at sagali, so do tourists attempt to hide the commodity status of their transactions in
the tourism encounter. Carrier (1995:147) illuminates the problem that gifts are (in the
Maussian sense) meant to bear something of the identity of the giver, and yet most things
that people give are anonymous commodities. While objects, performances and
unperformances are exchanged as commodities on the one hand, on the other, they have
the very particular characteristic of bringing producer and consumer face-to-face; they are
in this sense decidedly *not* impersonal. The stories tourists tell about their carved wooden
bowl, the photos they show of colourful dancers in full traditional dress, their recounting of
stumbling across a local village feast—none of these narrations are likely to include a
discussion of how much they paid for the experience. This is not only because money is
perceived (by many, though not necessarily by Trobrianders) as an impolite topic for
conversation (which is in itself telling), but because part of the authenticating story is that
the experience was about the *people*. The story is about meeting, first hand, actual
representatives of a dramatically different way of life, which persists in spite of it all, and
engaging in an intercultural exchange. Recall Amy, introduced in Chapter 6, who stressed
that the lack of infrastructure was part of what made the experience “real” and allows one
to “get a feel for the people”. She went on:

I think there’s still a sense of realism in the Trobriands, here. In terms of, I guess
because maybe there’s not as much exposure to how tourists are treated in other
places, they’re still willing to offer you a bit of them, a bit of you know, admittedly
their best food, but their food, a bit of their life...

To conclude, the experience is not only a matter of creating a story of interaction
with the cultural Other that relies on visiting a place “before it gets spoiled by tourists” and
loses its authentic, timeless, culturally pure aura. As much a part of the story as the
interpretation of the cultural Other is the creation an authentic personal experience, a
redefining of the self in light of an encounter with difference. Travel affords an
opportunity for reflexivity, in which tourists are forced to reconcile the differences in
lifestyle they encounter, which they may do through valorising the “simple” life they
imagine Trobrianders enjoy, or pitying their hosts for what they lack. Likewise, the flow
of tourists prompts reflexivity on the part of Trobriand Islanders, who see that visiting
dimdims seem to lack the sense of identity and richness of cultural life that they travel so
far and spend so much money to see. The presence of tourists, their eagerness to see
Trobriand dances and villages, to spend their money and capture their experiences in
photographs, is proof that what Trobrianders have is culture-as-thing which is special and
measurable, and must be retained. Such ideas are expressed not only by local residents, but also by politicians and tour operators, who have a vested interest in maintaining a distinctive Trobriand cultural identity as manifested in products—like dance performances, village stays, and handcrafted objects—that can be commoditised. And yet, perpetuating the myth that there are still places unadulterated by the globalised market economy is essential to the kind of experience cultural tourists are willing to pay so dearly for. In sum, then, tourism is for all parties a materially mediated embodied practice, permeated by divergent interpretations of symbolic objects and actions, experienced individually but made meaningful through interactions: with the cultural Other, fellow tourists or Trobriand Islanders, the resident anthropologist, and friends and family to whom the narrated experience will eventually be remembered and retold.

57 For specific examples, I refer the reader back to Edward on paying for photographs (p.208), John and his response to paying for an invitation to see dancing in a village (p.236), or Elizabeth, who described Kiriwinians’ demands for cash relative to people in the small island of Gawa as “a little crack in paradise” (p.236).
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Appendix: Glossary of Kilivila Terms

N.B.: There are several different dialects in the Kilivila language, such that consistent orthography can be difficult. I have tried here to spell terms as close as possible as they sounded to my ear as spoken by those who taught me the terms. My spelling may differ slightly from others. Particularly challenging is distinguishing “l” from “r,” which as far as I can determine is in some cases phomenic, sometimes not (see also Senft 1986)

*baloma*: spirits or ancestors. These spirits return to the island of Tuma after death and return to Kiriwina during *milamala*

*biga yakidasi*: literally "our language;" Kilivila or Kiriwina language

*biu*: tug-of-war, primarily played during *milamala* period (literally, “pulling”).

*bobwelila*: gift or present

*bubunedasi*: our way, our customs; closest world in vernacular to English “culture”

*bukubaku*: the village centre; a cleared area where village activities take place

*buwala*: small gifts given as a token of appreciation from a man to a woman after lovemaking

*dala*: matrilineage or subclan related to ancestor who is the source of claims to land, names, personal adornments, magic spells, and rank.

*dimdim*: white person of foreign origin. Not a Kilivila term; rather used throughout Milne Bay Province.

*doba*: general term for textiles made by women from banana leaves; includes both skirts and the bundles more specifically referred to as *numuniga*.

*gimwali*: noun or verb; a purchase or –*gimwali* (with subject-prefix), to buy with cash

*gogebila*: the festive transportation of the yam harvest from the garden to the village

*guguwa*: things or stuff, objects which are not accorded a high value

*gulagula*: ghost or immortal ancestor, or manners and customs as associated with the ancestors

*guyau*: chief or member of a chiefly lineage

*kaimwasila*: general name for beauty magic, of which there are many different types

*kaipita*: wooden mortar and pestle used for crushing betelnut

*kalibom*: a dance usually done at night during *milamala*, and with erotic connotations

*kasaveka*: a dance which incorporates *mweki*, “owned” by Teyava village
**kasimwasila**: Their \((kasi = 3.\text{Ps.Pl.})\) shame or embarrassment

**katupoi**: a question, or v. –katupoi (with subject-prefix) to ask, to inquire

**kayasa**: generic name for period of competitive yam harvest and associated celebrations

**kitoum**: a *kula* or *kula*-type valuable which is the personal property of an individual

**kula**: ceremonial inter-island exchange network involving exchange of shell valuables

**kumila**: a quadripartite division of all Trobriand Islanders into either the *Malasi, Lukwasisiga, Lukuba, Lukulabuta* clan

**kwewaga**: general term for love magic; spells designed to “turn the mind” of another.

**lagim**: canoe prowboard, usually imbued with magic

**liku**: yam house, the prerogative of chiefs and village leaders

**mani**: Tok Pisin word assimilated into Kilivila, meaning money or cash

**mapula**: payment, return, answer

**meguwa**: n. magic or magic spell, or v. to make magic, to cast a spell

**milamala**: period of feasting and dancing during the yam harvest, usually approximately June through August on Kiriwina Island

**mimeye'o**: a covering for the genitals made from a softened pandanus leaf, worn by men in “traditional” Trobriand dress

**mwali**: shell armband exchanged in *kula*

**mweki**: thrusting movement, or type of dance incorporating such movements, with clear sexual allusions

**na/tokubukwabiya**: young, adolescent, unmarried, sexually free girls (*na-* = feminine classifier) or boys (*to-* = masculine classifier)

**na/tominabweta**: beautiful or attractive (female, male)

**na/topiki**: greedy or selfish (female, male)

**-nigada**: (with subject-prefix) to beg, to implore

**paka**: feast, necessarily including yams, and usually also featuring other prestige foods such as pigs, taro, and rice

**pilasi**: n. assistance, help; or v. (with subject-prefix) to help, to assist

**raybwaga**: coral ridge

**sagali**: mortuary feast requiring large distributions of food and *doba*, as well as cash and store goods, usually held six months to a year after a death

**singsing**: (Tok Pisin) cultural festival or performance of traditional music, singing, and
dancing, usually in traditional dress; infrequently used in Kiriwina

**soulava**: shell necklace exchanged in *kula*

**tapwaroru**: n. church, place of worship; or (with classifier-prefix) man/woman of the church, Christian (e.g. *natapwaroru* = Christian woman) or v. (with subject-prefix) to pray, to attend church

**teytu**: one of two major types of yams and that which is stacked in the *liku*; as this variety is harvested only once per year, it is this yam on which the Kilivila calendar is based and the time of its harvest is the *milamala* period

**tilewai**: flattery-bond; payment made in recognition of particular skill or beauty, especially in the context of traditional dance

**Tok Pisin**: Papua New Guinea pidgin, a creole language used as PNG’s *lingua franca*

**tokabitam**: clever man; man who is skilled in a particular area

**tokai**: commoner; one not of a chiefly lineage

**totokwalu**: man who makes wood carvings

**tukanibogwa**: ancient times; the time of the ancestors

**usigola**: an extended period of feasting during *milamala* in celebration of especially abundant food, or conversely, as a means of lifting the spirits of people in difficult times

**vegu’wa**: valuables; specifically, those used in *kula* as well as other forms of traditional wealth such as stone axe blades

**wantok**: (Tok Pisin) relative, family; members of the same ethnolinguistic group

**wosimwaya**: Circle Dance, a dance handed down from the ancestors

**yaguma**: an incised, hollowed gourd used to hold lime for chewing betelnut

**yobuwa**: like *mimiya’o*, except made from the leaf of the areca palm (betelnut) tree