



# Introduction

## *On Anthropology and History in the Pacific*

Some people no longer feel global but wish they could. There are parts of the world in which globalization is regarded as having already concluded after being introduced decades ago, leaving in its wake people who live in anticipation of a time when they might once again be connected to the rest of the world in ways that they find productive and satisfying. Between the late nineteenth century and the end of World War II, Suau people on the coast of southeastern Papua New Guinea (PNG) experienced educational, travel, and wage labor opportunities that were among the first of their kind available to a Melanesian population—and that no longer exist. In the decades following the war, the connections with the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States to which they had grown accustomed gradually disappeared, leaving them with a sense of isolation that, arguably, they had never experienced before. In other words, Suau people briefly resided in a regional metropole within a global periphery, and furthermore, this occurred by means of their deliberate shedding of practices and relationships that they felt would not lead to fruitful relationships with the new regional powers. Suau frequently say that they have lost or “forgotten” their *kastom*, or a repertoire of practices and moral orientations associated with a way of life that people are imagined to have led before their encounters with Europeans. While the claim is a rhetorical one, it also points to a sophisticated and agentive positioning of themselves in history, in relation both to other Papua New Guineans and to foreigners.

This is not a simple tale of an indigenous people overrun by forces beyond their control; that story has been told already, in dozens of settings, and in any combination of scholarly, artistic, and political forms of expression. Instead, this book offers a consideration of how a people’s temporal orientations and historical consciousness have constituted the basis for their decisions to engage with foreign others in particular ways since the end of the nineteenth century. These memory practices inspire them not only to memorialize a past that is regarded as superior to the present dispensation but also to employ remembering, forgetting, and ironic reflection as techniques for creating a space in which they can exercise mastery over their own future.

This book is based on a somewhat patchwork twenty-year ethnographic relationship with Suau-speaking peoples in Milne Bay Province, PNG, that gave rise to the foregoing problems—or *pilipili* as Suau would call them, a term referencing the entanglement of a fishing or pig-hunting net, or the construction of a string bag gone awry. I refer to Suau “peoples” deliberately, for as I will discuss further in chapter 1, the boundaries of who belongs definitively to a Suau *ethnos* are not at all clear. Their entanglements with a series of foreign guests, visitors, and colonizers, and the sense they have made of these relationships as a mode of historical consciousness, form the backbone of the book. Suau relationships with others over time would not make much sense, however, without my also providing some key accounts of the social world inhabited by many Suau. Many, but not all: this is a book about Suau people living on their ancestral land at the southeasternmost mainland extremity of the island of New Guinea and practicing a mixed economy of swidden horticulture, fishing, hunting, and small livestock husbandry, alongside cash cropping and wage labor. A long history of Suau uptake of formal education (see chapter 3) means that many Suau people also live in towns and cities across PNG, working in various white-collar sectors, but this is not their book. At least, not explicitly, acknowledging the extent to which people and resources now flow between urban and rural populations in PNG.

This book is about memory practices, and a sense of history framed by the perspective of a rural Papua New Guinean population, who for a time were not a *remote* population but became one through the loss of a colonial infrastructure and the entangled relationships that went with it. In this book I ask, what would a theory of change look like if it were not solely informed by the modernist orientations of European and North American concepts but devised in conversation with these concepts? Is there a way to talk about the experience of change that does not draw upon the “modern constitution” (Latour 1993: 13) of designating opposed categories—say the traditional versus the new, although Latour is more concerned with nature versus society—in order to then contrast them as antitheses or recombine them as hybrids, depending on which version of the modernist game one is playing. For Latour, the separation of categories, which he termed purification, is precisely what causes hybrids between these categories to proliferate in the background, as it were, and continually take moderns by surprise—such as when a Suau person declares, “Our *kastom* is Christian.” Latour’s modern constitution is the always-incomplete project of acknowledging one category of action while keeping the categories from which it has been distinguished out of view. “Who is to write the full constitution?” he asks, and then answers himself with tongue at least halfway in cheek: “As far as foreign collectives are concerned, anthropology has been pretty good at tackling everything at once” (1993: 13). His compliment to an-

thropology refers to the ethnographic tendency to gleefully disregard what “ought,” for the moderns, to be distinct domains and put mythological culture heroes and postcolonial court systems in the same book, as I have done in this one. The problem is, his compliment is not quite accurate: anthropologists can be as captive to the allure of modernist distinctions as anyone else.

“That the idiom of the modern can be used over and over again,” as Brenner (1998: 88) has noted, “attests to its enduring power as a signifier of historical transformation.” So for example, the Papua New Guinean (and arguably pan-Melanesian) category of *kastom* might appear at first blush to look something like the standard modernist division of a temporal or cultural break between an era identified as “traditional” and one identified as “modern.” Particularly when Papua New Guineans like my interlocutors on the Suau Coast deploy language that appears to map onto these divisions (such as terms that could be translated as “time immemorial” versus “nowadays”) and claims about having forgotten *kastom* entirely (see chapter 2), it is tempting to say that they are experiencing a modernist disjuncture of not only a break with history but also a rejection of it.

In order to resist that temptation, I ask not only where the category of modernity is coming from in accounts of this kind but also where the category of history itself enters the picture, and how these categories continue to be applied to analyses of the experiences of once-colonized people. This book will consistently point toward a number of capacious nouns that do adjacent kinds of intellectual work: history, modernity, even culture or tradition as they appear at times to ride alongside *kastom*. The central objective of this book is to show how the work that Suau people have been doing since the end of the nineteenth century is a mode of relationship building by means of imagining others as social analysts like themselves. By “work” I mean the hospitality shown toward missionaries and other agents of colonial expansion that Suau people hold up as the defining factor in their own social genius. This social and analytical generosity later proved troublesome when the colonial world contracted. It forms the irony at the heart of Suau memory work: the skillful efforts to meet foreign others on their own terms are precisely what has stranded the Suau Coast and its people in a state of seeming to be stuck in time as well as space. The language they deployed with their ethnographer, when I first gave myself this role and became their guest in the mid-1990s, was again the language of hospitable reaching out to the other in terms intelligible to that other. It was the very terms of history, modernity, and all the rest that Suau people used, and that enabled a connection to become established. This does not mean that my Suau friends were deceiving me, or themselves: it means that they were demonstrating their skill as social analysts of our relationship.

Even in contexts like that of Papua New Guinea, where the project of colonialism was on its last legs even as it got underway in the early twentieth century, Papua New Guineans learned rapidly what it meant to engage with others who presumed an asymmetrical relationship with them from the very outset, in which the possibility of coevalness was denied (Fabian 1983). It is even debatable whether Europeans were able to conceive of anything like a relationship with Papua New Guineans at all. Particularly for Suau people, who were early on the scene of the colonial encounter in comparison with most other Papua New Guineans, the relationship presumed by Europeans even before the commencement of missionization was one in which no such identity as “Suau” even existed; there were only “natives” or “savages” or simply “cannibals,” as most Pacific Islanders were (and arguably still are) categorized in the fevered European imagination. Suau people learned in that encounter that not only did their elaborate local and regional complexes of identification by lineage, clan, and dialect not matter to the foreigners they were hosting, but *nothing* about them mattered other than their occupation of a space now usually identified under the rubric of the indigenous.

This rubric has its uses, especially in those legal and political spheres where colonized people never stopped being colonized and were forcibly dispossessed of their land—I am describing, of course, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Americas, as well as less obvious “Fourth World” settings across Asia and Africa (Ryser et al. 2017). But even in the western Pacific, where the project of imperial expansion almost literally ran out of steam, the analytical methods and tropes that European social scientists had brought with them from elsewhere in their experience traveled almost seamlessly. This means that one can ask, with Simpson (2007), how “anthropological analyses of indigeneity may still occupy the ‘salvage’ and ‘documentary’ slot for analysis, an elaboration of object that results from the endurance of categories that emerged in moments of colonial contact, many of which still reign supreme. In those moments, people left their own spaces of self-definition and became ‘Indigenous’” (2007: 69). Once people have relinquished even a modicum of their sovereignty over defining themselves as ever having had an identity other than the one created in the process of colonization, even as deliberately as my Suau friends say they did, they form a new set of attachments to a raft of exogenous categories, some of which will be assimilated to the needs of the current era, and some of which will remain backgrounded in an uneasy relationship with this era—as in, say, the category of *kastom*. “And so it is that concepts have teeth and teeth that bite through time” (2007: 69), Simpson warns us. A number of these mordacious concepts have dogged the anthropology of Melanesia for years if not decades, unmooring our ethnographic sensitivities from the categories to which our interlocutors are trying to call our attention and setting us adrift in a doldrums of our own creation.

## Anthropology's Modernism Fetish, or, "What Do Melanesians Want?"

It may seem awkward to attribute to the anthropology of Melanesia a question patterned on the one Freud famously once asked about women (Jones 1955: 421). The problem is one both of uncertainty even in the face of experience—Freud couched his query in a statement about how long he had treated women patients—and of experience of persons who, for whatever reason, appear to resist intelligibility. Freud's remark is these days played for laughs, or held up as a data point in the many failures of a profession that was resoundingly masculinist in its formative years. But Freud knew what his failures were; he documented them almost obsessively. He also documented a range of possible human responses to failure, or the threat of failure. These will return to my narrative shortly, but for now, I invoke his formulation as a kind of question that has also, arguably, plagued the anthropology of the western Pacific, because the answer since at least the early 1990s seems repeatedly to have been: modernity.

"To 'modernize,'" Sahlins (1992) remarked, "the people must first learn to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well-being. Beyond that, they have to despise what they are, to hold their own existence in contempt—and want, then, to be someone else" (1992: 24). Sahlins's project at the time was concerned with showing how the enthusiasm for particular manufactured trade goods by Pacific Islanders was not a way of rejecting themselves but of becoming more emphatic versions of themselves, at least insofar as these trade goods became a means of magnifying particular Pacific systems of prestige and political-cosmological hierarchy—Fijian chiefs and Hawaiian kings, for example. And indeed, his account of these systems becoming supported rather than undermined by trade goods, so that trade goods become enveloped by an already existing "cultural logic," is appealing, but it also immediately raises troubling questions. One asks what happens to those corners of culture that are on the other side of prestige, hierarchy, and power. Is that as far as cultural logic gets us, and what of nonpowerful persons and groups when a system of power relations is remade into a more extreme version of itself? But my more pertinent question for the purposes of this book is: Can we track what anthropologists of the Pacific have used as their signifier for modernity and ask what this modernity is that so easily lends itself to repeated manifestation as the temporal form of greatest concern to the anthropologist? For Sahlins in the 1990s, modernity was trade goods and the system of market capitalism that brought these goods to the Pacific. But this is not the only form taken by modernity in the accounts of anthropologists.

Christianity is another popular exemplar of modernity, as it appears to give rise to extreme self-reflexivity, such as that described by Robbins (2004a) for

Urapmin people in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea. For Robbins, the practice of self-discipline and the expiatory revelation of sin, which are the hallmarks of certain varieties of evangelical Protestantism, offered to Urapmin a vertiginous opportunity to experiment with the kind of epoch-breaking division that appears to signify a modernist reorientation to the world. “What troubles the Urapmin,” he writes, “is . . . to some extent an outcome of their very success in reproducing the traditional grounds of their lives: their families, their gardens, their hunting territories. What troubles them is trying to live with the culture that supplies those grounds and another culture, a Christian one, at the same time” (2004a: 314). Although Urapmin people may fairly be said to have evangelized themselves, and were never subject to the kind of sustained missionary project that people on the Suau Coast were, they nonetheless—in Robbins’s account—somehow adopted along with Christianity the epochal divisions of the modern constitution. The very notion of two cultures—one newer and one older, one of which is in tension with the other—are components of the modern constitution. In order to imagine themselves as having to hold two cultures in tension or balance with each other, they would have first to imagine that being Urapmin and being Christian are somehow different projects.

These anthropological accounts of autosurveillance in the face of historical processes is a common trope, and a compelling one. Anthropology has been generating this trope for Melanesia since at least the middle of the twentieth century, with exemplars such as Mead’s (1956) account of the “transformation” of Manus Island following World War II and Worsley’s (1957) attempt to make sense of a type of Melanesian response to colonialism that had become categorized as “cargo cults” by suggesting they were protonationalist movements. But it did not stop there, and it continues in the present century with Sillitoe’s (2000) account of Melanesian “misunderstandings” of development projects leading to violence, LiPuma’s (2000) argument that certain Melanesian worlds have been encompassed by a modernity that is then reinterpreted through a Sahlins-esque cultural logic, and Knauft’s (2002) notion of “recessive agency” to describe what was, for him, a baffling affective stance in response to introduced institutions such as schools and churches in a remote part of Papua New Guinea. Anthropologists have continually grappled with the question of why Melanesian peoples engage with their histories in the ways that they do. Too often, however, these boil down to questions of how Melanesians respond to—or in less charitable terms that are often just below the surface of these accounts, cope with—variations on the theme of modernity that is continually conceived as the same “package” of artifacts, both tangible and systemic in nature, introduced from elsewhere by means of colonialism and its aftermath. Even Knauft’s hedging with the notion of “alternative modernity” leaves the category of the modern assigned to the standard collection of institutions, bu-

reauracracies, religious practices and orientations, and technologies to which Euro-Americans have always assigned it. Each iteration of the modern may be locally inflected, such that “Western practices encode Western epistemology and notions of subjectivity and . . . these interact with local categories and concepts of knowledge to generate new and mediated forms” (LiPuma 2000: 185), but suggesting even a mediated form of social and cultural practice is to claim a disruption of whatever forms came before. We are still dealing with a Melanesian modernity, in other words, and while there is certainly a great deal of theoretical mileage to be got from this notion, the troubling issue remains: modernity is not a Melanesian category, but a European and North American one, and a mode that Europeans and North Americans have been very fond of using to explain our own histories to ourselves for a very long time.

The problem with using this modernist narrative—a break, and then a recombination, of cultural elements and social systems—in its various guises to explain recent Melanesian history is that each time we do this, anthropologists of Melanesia commit the same self-defeating act, our own version of “hating what we already have” to employ Sahlins’s turn of phrase. He also noted this tendency among anthropologists toward the end of the last century, in the discipline’s shift from breathless empiricist naïveté to postcolonial, postmodern melancholy (Sahlins 1993: 6). That theme, of a melancholic anthropology, has more recently returned in the form of an ethnographic relationship in which the dream of reciprocity between anthropologist and hosts is shown to be just that, an unattainable condition that produces dysphoria in the wake of its revelation as fantasy (High 2011). High focuses on Freud’s theory of melancholy and anxiety as affective responses to the return of the repressed, the acknowledgment of a sense of failure to avert troubling events. This is doubtless a fruitful avenue for ethnographers to consider, but I am more interested here in a different facet of Freud: the fetish, and how that has produced certain ethnographic fixations.

Whatever else a fetish meant for Freud, he regarded it as a product of a sense of loss or threat of loss and a need to avert the gaze from this threat and fixate it elsewhere, on an object or body part that is not the “actual” or “proper” object of sexuality. That the loss for Freud, somewhat inevitably, came down to castration is not especially important; the point for my purposes was his use of the fetish concept to distinguish a response to repression (*Verdrängung*) from a response to disavowal (*Verleugnung*) (Freud 1950: 199). It is the latter affective state that generates the fetish, wherein the need for disavowal requires a new object of attention and of overwhelming presence. In this view, the fetish is “a fixed power to repeat an original event of singular synthesis or ordering” (Pietz 1985: 10) that becomes concentrated in the object of the fetish. My concern here is that the “original event of singular synthesis” for many anthropologists is modernity itself, the category by which we cannot help but imbue power to

the ideas of “before” and “after” and observe processes of historical transformation occurring in astoundingly consistent ways across multiple contexts.

Englund and Leach (2000) observed the consolidation of this preoccupation in anthropology two decades ago, and it shows no sign of abating. Whether or not the modernity fetish is an eruption of sociological ideas into anthropology, as Englund and Leach suggested, is no longer the issue. The issue is what this now almost inescapable framework has done to the way anthropologists think about history, especially when that history appears to be presented in very stark terms of before and after. My argument is that the modernity fetish has overwhelmed these terms and assimilated them to itself, before we have even had a chance to consider what people might actually be saying about their own memory practices. By suggesting that modernity and its trappings present people in Melanesia with a set of challenges by which they are continually flummoxed and to which they continually struggle to adapt, anthropologists have essentially made the statement that the ethnography of this part of the world has nothing to offer the rest of the field or to adjacent fields in the social sciences and humanities. While people in Nigeria, Venezuela, Romania, or Kazakhstan are apparently getting on with the business of life in a world of flows and connections, anthropology has consistently portrayed people in Papua New Guinea and other localities of the western Pacific as trapped by their own beguilement with modernity.

One way to imagine the modernism fetish is as a disavowal of the possibility of talking about history and change in any other way. Disavowal does appear in the way that many Suau people talk about the loss or forgetting of *kastom*, but my project is to demonstrate that Suau values of hospitable curiosity are at least in part what has led the production of a narrative that *seems* intelligible as one about modernity—because it is the narrative that their guests expect of them. As a periodic guest and *dimdim* (as white foreigners are known throughout Milne Bay Province) on the Suau Coast, I have had ongoing questions about how much of that narrative was produced for my benefit. This book is an attempt to tread a path between taking seriously the way my Suau friends and interlocutors spoke about their own history, and eschewing modernist narratives such as a break in history, a combining of cultures, or a loss of authenticity, in favor of what a Suau historiography might look like. The *might* here is important: this is after all a book written by a non-Suau person for a largely non-Suau audience. It is nonetheless an effort to use what I learned on the Suau Coast about history to reflect on the way anthropologists talk about history in any of the places where we might be working.

I hope Suau readers will look on this effort with the same generosity of spirit with which their parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents have welcomed its author over the years and shared what knowledge they thought it was appropriate for her to hear. And they very explicitly did not share ev-



everything; see chapter 6 for a consideration of what the refusal to share certain kinds of knowledge with certain kinds of persons means for this ethnography in particular and for the ethnographic endeavor in general. What I have made out of the knowledge I was permitted to share is borne out of a long relationship with the Suau Coast, beginning in 1996–97, with repeat visits of varying length in 1999–2000, 2008, 2013, 2014, and 2015. I hope the relationship continues, whatever the shortcomings of this book. It is an attempt to ask, following the lead of Teresia Teaiwa (2006: 75), “how change in the Pacific gets collapsed with previously formed ways of knowing, how change in the Pacific gets incorporated into familiar models.” Asking this question, after an engagement of nearly twenty years with a particular place and the people of that place, means not only that the ethnographer in this instance was able to see how a place changed over time but also that what I was able to learn from my Suau friends also changed with time. By this I mean not only that what they deemed knowable for me changed but also that what people indicated to me as signs of change was itself a shifting ground.

The seed of this book was planted when I was a young woman: the term in Suau is *hasala*, connoting the naïveté and inexperience with which I initiated this relationship. Twenty years later, it has become a project that combines two particular streams of experience. One is all the things my Suau friends have told me over the years, and the other is the potholed road of an academic career in an era when the old trajectory of the scholar who lands a permanent job straight out of her PhD, and then stays in that job forever, has receded into myth. This book was written at multiple universities in three countries. It reflects the generosity not only of my Suau hosts but also of my academic ones in all those environments. I hope to have produced, as a result, something a little different from the sort of ethnography developed out of a doctoral dissertation after which the ethnographer then walks away from the community that hosted him, never to return. The calcified “ethnographic present” that has not been updated for decades is not without theoretical interest, but only when it is presented in a clear-eyed manner as history and not as anyone’s current lived experience. And let us be honest: this book also documents a series of moments in the engagement between an ethnographer and her host communities, and it too will enter the ethnographic record as history. It is an experiment in communicating a Suau sense of ironic nostalgia that only the ironic nostalgia of middle age has truly made possible. In the mid-1990s, when Suau people told me in the same breath that they had lost multiple meaningful modes of action—glossed as *kastom*—and that they themselves were responsible for that loss due to the hospitality they had shown colonial others, I was baffled. Some of that bafflement will be evident in the chapters that follow. But bafflement and perplexity are themselves modes of knowledge formation and are, I submit, preferable to the overweening confidence of the one-time

or occasional visitor who claims to have grasped the entire cosmological or ontological system of their hosts, which I would characterize as reproducing some of the oldest colonial tropes of anthropology itself. “We need to draw on all our maps of understanding,” Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008: 136) exhorts the researcher willing to embrace the inevitability of making partial knowledge claims in a world of scholarship still plagued by the inequities of colonial relations. If this book is a line on a map, it is one shaped by the very particular relationships between a researcher and the people who taught her that a place is also a history and a life also a landscape (chapter 4).

## Pacific Theories of Space/Time

Over a decade ago, the geographer Doreen Massey warned us that

conceiving of space as a static slice through time, as representation, as a closed system and so forth are all ways of taming it. They enable us to ignore its real import: the coeval multiplicity of other trajectories and the necessary outward-lookingness of a spatialized subjectivity. . . . Conceptualizing space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics. (Massey 2005: 59)

If this sounds a little abstruse, it is worth setting Massey’s observations alongside those of Smith (2012), who has noted that the “classical” post-Enlightenment notion of space as an empty void to be filled is also the conception of space that makes colonial domination and appropriation possible. An empty, timeless space is one that can be occupied with whatever notions and categories one likes, whether the grand-scale legal fiction of *terra nullius* that was used to justify the invasion and settlement of Australia or the philosophical conceits projected by scholars upon our subjects of study.

But space conceived as “multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming” is something else entirely. It is a space filled with people’s memories, dreams, fears, aspirations, and intentions for, with, and through each other. And it is a space filled with care: an element that also points to the temporality of this filled-up space. Ka’ili (2005) offers a discussion of the Tongan concept of *vā*, or space-in-between, which is a first step to understanding a number of Pacific knowledge practices wherein space is replete with relationships between persons, between things, and between persons and things. This kind of space, argues Ka’ili, is operational regardless of distance and must be looked after whether the persons holding it between them are located on neighboring islands or in different countries at opposite ends of the Pacific Ocean. And it is in the looking after or nurturing of this space, not only between contemporary

actors but also over time, that provides Tongans with the intergenerational knowledge that enables them to know how to act even with persons they have never met before. As long as an intergenerational connection can be established, the caretaking potential of *vā* is activated. Or as Gershon (2007: 474) has put it, “Ethnographers of the Pacific have long known that the Pacific is not just a sea of islands, but also a sea of families.”

This is not a rhetorical statement but a methodological and an ethical one. Like Ka’ili, Gershon is engaged in asking how imagining the Pacific as made up of familial relationships conducted over vast distances affects both an ethnographic sense of scale and one of obligation. How Pacific peoples maintain their relationships across space and over time reverberates back on their own identities, conceived here not only as a political formation but also as the basis for an actual, everyday ability to flourish in the world. Rooney (2017b) has written evocatively of the constantly shifting identities of migrants to Papua New Guinea’s capital of Port Moresby, the ways these identities can be both a lifeline in a prohibitively expensive city and a source of continual pressure from family “back home,” where “home” may signify a part of the country they have never lived in. Whether exercised between island nations or between the country and the city, Pacific peoples’ claims both to their own identity and to each other’s are claims to the circulation of care, of information—and of ignorance. “While ignorance is normally portrayed by scholars in terms of cultural loss, there is a more nuanced possibility—that judicious knowing and not knowing are strategies for navigating the many claims that people can make on each other” (Gershon 2007: 489). Navigation will appear again shortly, in a literal sense: but here it stands for the constantly shifting orientation to relationships made by Pacific peoples as they manage the flow of knowledge and care between themselves, and in so doing, generate a temporal and affective rhythm of relationships across distances long and short, and between persons with connections of many possible kinds.

The philosophical and ethnographic consequences for failing to attend to and care for these relations-over-time are profound. “The anthropology of the Pacific that I encounter,” writes Māhina (1999: 44), “promotes a world of cultural symbols dissociated from historical realities and as a direct consequence implies a control of the subjects of its research.” Here Māhina is discussing how anthropology is taught to Pacific Islands students, but his concerns are reflected elsewhere in the activist literature coming from Pacific scholars who have long been calling attention to the way that colonial epistemologies—space is a void to be filled, and time is only happening if a heroic figure, usually white and male, is there to witness and alter it irrevocably—have shaped an entire discipline’s understanding of the Pacific region, and even its boundaries and characteristics as a region (1999: 53). In an effort to recover the ways in which Pacific peoples themselves designate the spaces they inhabit and move

between—qualities of the sea, of the land, and of how people interact with land and sea—Māhina asks for nothing less than a Pacific realism, a way of apprehending and communicating a Pacific history that is static neither in space nor in time, but perpetually present and dynamic for those who continue to make it.

So many intellectual traditions, after all, stem from what is conceived as mobile, whether in a literal or a philosophical sense, and what is conceived as stationary. Consider, for example, the following account of the Carolinian seafaring concept of *etak* from Diaz:

Typically translated as “moving islands,” *etak* is the technique for calculating distance traveled, or position at sea by triangulating the speed of the islands of departure and destination with that of a third reference island. This is accomplished, furthermore, by plotting these islands’ courses in the celestial sky, which in effect serves as a veritable map for the world below. A map and time piece, a way of negotiating emplotment in time/space—or more precisely, a way of conceptualizing time/space in order to fix one’s place—*etak* was a critical technological development . . . that permitted humans to traverse over 2/3rds of the globe’s southern hemisphere millennia before Europeans ventured from eyesight of their shores.

In theory and practice, it works like this: first, you steer toward the stars that mark the island of your destination. While doing so, you back sight your island of departure until you can no longer see it. At the same time, you calculate the rate at which a third island, off to the side, moves from beneath the stars where it sat when you left your island of departure, toward the stars under which it should sit if you were standing in the island of your destination.

Let me simplify: you get on your canoe and you follow the stars in the direction where lies your destination island. As your island of departure recedes from view, you pay attention to a third island, as it is said to move along another prescribed star course . . . for the navigator, the canoe remains stationary and the islands zip by. (Diaz 2011: 25–26)

As a navigational technique and a conceptualization of the subject in time and space, *etak* also suggests a certain ethnographic sensibility. Diaz goes on to point out that not only do islands move, they also *expand* as the navigator describes her location through observations of wave patterns, the presence of particular dwellers on the seascape (fish, birds, turtles, marine mammals), and the smell of prevailing winds and currents. The multisensory nature of Micronesian navigation holds the subject still while the world moves past him or rushes out to greet him. There is a Pacific realism in this version of

subjectivity, but also the “unfinished and always becoming” nature of space in the philosophy implied by social geography. Because while the perspective of the subject in this formulation might appear to be one of stillness, it is also constantly shifting and expanding as well, as she employs all her embodied capacities to render intelligible the signs and entities that the world is sending to meet her.

Sometimes those signs demand particular modes of action, or at least affect, with regard to the past. Tengan (2005) defines the Hawaiian concept of *kuleana* as “responsibility, right, claim, authority” (2005: 252), most particularly in terms of caring for the ancestors correctly, and notes that “*Kuleana* also chooses us rather than the other way around” (2005: 252). The past is watching, in other words; it has interests and even demands to which people of the present have the privilege of responding; like an island receding into the distance, it may be lost to view but remains a vital and vitalizing part of the landscape, and seascape, of contemporary human action. Tengan identifies much of this action in the Pacific as struggle, and identifies ethnography as an activity indelibly inflected by this struggle. But it is not the kind of struggle to cope with modernity mentioned in the previous section; rather, it is struggle in the political-spatial sense of a history whose outcome is still unfolding. Or as Tengan puts it, “When ethnography is conducted in a community engaged in struggles over land, identity and history, struggle characterizes all facets of the ethnographic project” (2005: 250). I take his words to indicate not only the overt political struggles of still-colonized peoples in the Pacific, from Hawai‘i to New Caledonia to Guam, but also those everyday struggles of self-determination undertaken by every Pacific population that has confronted the asymmetrical relationships of colonialism at any point in its ancestral reckoning—which is to say, all of them.

What does this somewhat breathless inventory of Pacific philosophies of care, navigation in space and time, and ancestral responsibility indicate for the current demands of Pacific ethnography? We must attend to an orientation to time that frames it as a body of privileges and duties, an orientation to space that frames it as change and movement expanding outward to the subject, and an orientation to other persons, living and dead, that demands they be cared for once they have been acknowledged as part of the subject’s field of responsibility. This is not just a Pacific philosophy but quite specifically a Pacific *ethics* of responding to the expansiveness of the world with a reciprocal expansiveness.

This is a particular challenge now that scholars in, from, and of the Pacific are at pains to justify our field of study in terms of its “relevance” to the human endeavor elsewhere on the global stage. If history is a category that has been captured and nearly monopolized by metropolitan scholarship, it can be very difficult indeed either to insert into that category conceptions of time

and space that have become muted or refracted over the course of the colonial project or to formulate a decolonized scholarship that seeks to re-privilege these conceptions. And sometimes, even in the identification of a region (in this case, say, the Pacific, or even more arbitrary regional designations such as “Melanesia”), we become our own worst enemies and disconnect it by means of insisting on a kind of cultural or social uniqueness that becomes incommensurable with ideas being generated elsewhere in the world.

Teresia Teaiwa (2006) once remarked on how, a century after the Pacific had generated some of the most enduring theoretical frameworks in anthropology, a contemporary interest in the ongoing questions, problems, and solutions offered up by Pacific peoples must now be analogized to comparable issues elsewhere in order to be considered timely. I suggest, along with West (2016: 28), that this state of affairs has come about precisely because of the lapidary focus by anthropologists of the Pacific on microregionalism and the uniqueness of Pacific societies. This focus has produced both a body of ethnographically rich and theoretically imaginative literature, and also a certain insularity of the variety that does not necessarily expand outward and affect scholarship on other national and regional contexts. It is not enough to say that Christianity in the Solomon Islands is like Christianity in Tanzania, or that consumption practices in Samoa are comparable to those of Thailand. Such analogies, as Teaiwa observed, somehow only serve to underscore the movement of Pacific scholarship toward the margins of anthropology rather than drawing other places in.

But the Pacific generally and Melanesia in particular—of course I will say this, because Melanesia has expanded outward and demanded the attention of this ethnographer for over two decades—belong back at the center of discussions about colonial histories and their continuing presence in the multiplicitous contemporary of people’s lives. It belongs there precisely because the interest in difference across Melanesia is an interest in connection to other people and other places. As Hukula (2017) has shown for urban Papua New Guinea, Melanesian people have no trouble imagining “recognition of a multiple sense of place” (2017: 165), particularly when people from different places come to embody and care for connections over time, through sharing food, worship, and the cumulation of everyday acts of coliving in the swiftly growing metropolises of Melanesia, where everyone can be identified as being simultaneously of the city and of a distant ancestral ground. The interest in others is not about imitating what a group of people deemed more powerful or more connected are doing, and never has been. This interest stems from difference itself as a fundamental social and aesthetic value in Melanesia: you cannot make flourishing gardens, children, churches, neighborhoods, or anything else considered vital to the human endeavor if all you have are people just like yourself to make them with.

## Toward a Melanesian Theory of Change

For the Pacific to reassume its place at the table of debates in anthropological theory and practice, it is critical to begin to release the categories that European, North American, and Australian scholarship have been importing into the regional ethnography since at least the end of World War II. As useful as they have been to think with, most of these categories continue to reflect the colonial-philosophical traditions that gave rise to them rather than the various Pacific contexts to which they have been applied. This book is a still-incomplete endeavor to release them, but the incompleteness is rather the point. Ethnography is always about finding the gaps, impositions, and errors in one's own knowledge claims, as well as querying the bases for the knowledge claims of others. But my opening gambit here is actually quite a simple one: even though a number of the tropes invoked by my hosts, interlocutors, and friends on the Suau Coast of Papua New Guinea look familiar, and seem to be part of transnational narratives around the loss of authenticity in the pursuit of the project of modernity, what if that is not what has happened at all? What if Suau people have been trying to articulate to their ethnographer a Melanesian theory of historical change in terms she will understand but with meanings quite different from what those terms appear to signify?

Melanesian peoples have always had their own categories, after all, some of them well known in the anthropological canon. These have included value as a function of social relationships and political efficacy (Munn 1986), the concealment of knowledge or living beings in order to make them potent and abundant (Gillison 1980; Biersack 1982; Bercovitch 1994), the flow of agency between persons both living and dead (Schieffelin 1976), and the aesthetics of gardens and their products as evidence of the positive or efficacious state of relations among persons (Young 1971; Coupaye 2013). Perhaps the most critical category underwriting all of these is that of land, which in no part of the Pacific is reducible to a mere geographical territory but is a space filled with relationships, which can be both productive and contested in nature (de Coppet 1985; Tuwere 2002; Biersack 1999; Black 2011; Rooney 2017a). As the foregoing discussion of space and time in Pacific cosmologies indicates, land concentrates both of these categories at a physical point—the ground on which people live and make their livelihoods—but that physical point also contains an ever-ramifying field of spiritual and temporal potentialities. Land in Melanesia, as elsewhere in the Pacific, is never a generic or generalizable category: it always has a specific identity, divisible incrementally into even more specific subidentities that also lend people their own categories of identification, which might include clans and lineages or the social categories of men and women, chiefs and commoners, junior and senior siblings, initiated and uninitiated persons, ancestors and descendants. The mobilization of land either legally, in

terms of registering it to pave the way for alienation and other forms of exclusion (Strong 2006), or literally, in terms of removing its resources for export around the world (K. Teaiwa 2014), is one of the most powerful and recurring modes in which Pacific peoples have found themselves required to reflect upon their status as indigenes or autochthones, in the original sense of being substantively related to the ground itself.

Despite a longstanding anthropological appreciation of these modes of thinking about the world—through land, through powers of growth and health and wealth, and through the ongoing relationship between the temporal and spiritual worlds—we, and I include myself in this indictment of my discipline, still struggle to avoid projecting a set of notions about history, and who has power over history, that stem from a set of profoundly Euro-American concerns. A classic example is the early—and apparently never-ending—concern of anthropologists with the concept of cargo cults, the term thrown onto any Melanesian collective activity that includes some combination of spiritual, political, and economic elements that foreigners have tended to find baffling and in need of explanation. For the Marxist Worsley, the explanation was about political and economic inequities and an incomplete or rearranged Melanesian understanding of these. For Wagner (1981), the explanation was one of reflecting the Europeans’ concept of culture itself back to them, but again, as if through a funhouse mirror: an ethnographic counterdistortion, deliberate or otherwise, of what Europeans might have thought they were telling Melanesians about themselves. For Lindstrom (1993), the explanation was a comparable act of communication: all right, you have told us that your airplanes, phonographs, and refrigerators are the most important things in the world to you, so we will communicate with you through the medium of these things. Along with other “second generation” theorists of the phenomenon (e.g. Lattas 1992; Dalton 2004), Lindstrom suggested that cargo movements are the commodity fetishism of the colonizers reflected back at them.

In other words, there has been a long history of anthropologists speculating as to how Melanesians might be trying to establish relationships with foreign others in a way those others would understand. This book, too, belongs to that intellectual tradition. At the same time, it is an attempt to discern what categories arising from a Melanesian milieu generally and a Suau one specifically might be the actual framework upon which the categories I thought were familiar—tradition, loss, epochal transformation—had been stretched. For example, it has taken several years and no small degree of effort to release the category of “the Massim” as a convenient shorthand to describe the cultural sensibilities of my Suau friends. This term, a corruption of the name of the island of Misima (Young 1983a), originally entered into the anthropological consciousness courtesy of its use by Haddon (1894: 94) and became mapped onto the region that is now Milne Bay Province, along with an identification



of this region as a culture area. But the original designation of the region by Haddon had largely been racial, not cultural, in accordance with the obsession with “racial types” that characterized the ethnology of his era. Nonetheless, the term was adopted with enthusiasm by later generations of anthropologists to describe what seemed to be a regional cultural complex of long-distance ceremonial exchange relationships and elaborate mortuary rituals. It was also adopted by Milne Bay elites as a shorthand for what they felt was the cultural distinctiveness of the province, and it has most recently been enshrined and materialized in the form of the Massim Museum and Cultural Centre in the provincial capital of Alotau. Notwithstanding the adoption of the “Massim” designation by many contemporary people in Milne Bay to describe their corner of Papua New Guinea, this book will attempt as far as possible to eschew this Victorian imaginary in favor of the local complexities of identity that are a feature of the Suau Coast, and which will be elaborated in more detail in chapter 1.

But the term will never entirely be released by the ethnography of this region, and for good reason, which is that “things that come from exotic places are always evidence of people’s local capacities to draw them in” (Strathern 1992: 251). Expansion again: the world becomes knowable through the exogenous elements of it that reach outward to communicate something. The embracing by some people in Milne Bay Province of the term “Massim” to describe themselves is one example among many of what Strathern noted is a tendency among Papua New Guinean peoples to draw out of foreign others what they recognize as fundamental human capacities—and then to reflect those capacities back to the foreigners in order to instantiate a relationship. This reflection is a process of witnesses meeting difference at a moment or point of incomprehension, discovering what capacities are held inside the bearers of difference that the witnesses can recognize in themselves, eliciting from these foreign others the capacity that the witnesses know to be a feature of human agency, and making that capacity a foundation for a relationship. Or as Strathern put it in the context of a first encounter between Papua New Guinean Highlanders from Mount Hagen and Australian gold prospectors in the 1930s, the Australians “now appeared not as spirit analogues of Hagen men, but as transformations of them—not divided from ‘us’ as ‘others,’ but ‘ourselves’ in another form” (1992: 250).

It is this mode of recognition that will appear repeatedly throughout this book, whether in Suau interactions with Victorian missionaries or the contemporary government of PNG. But Strathern’s model for interactions between Papua New Guineans and foreign others leaves open the question of structural asymmetries between parties in the act of recognizing a relation, and so the other element that will appear in my account is the repeated failure or refusal of non-Suau agents to recognize the relationship in anything re-

motely approaching a reciprocal manner.<sup>1</sup> It is this element that I am describing as the irony of Suau history, this unrequited nature of the Suau success at finding an element of themselves in the various waves of foreigners to visit them. Or to put it even more baldly: while people all along the Suau Coast still celebrate annually the arrival of James Chalmers, the Scottish missionary who converted them to Christianity in the late nineteenth century, I am fairly certain I could visit Chalmers's home village of Ardrishaig on the west coast of Scotland and not find a single person who knows where the Suau Coast even is—and perhaps not even Papua New Guinea at that. Only certain features of the colonial era were a two-way street, and a sustained, good-faith interest in the lives of colonized peoples on the part of those engaged in the colonial project was not frequently one of them.

Exploring a Suau theory of how this state of affairs came about is a process of asking how each seemingly familiar category may signal a Suau appropriation of a colonial category to demonstrate that, indeed, Suau people and their non-Suau interlocutors already shared common capacities. *Kastom* is a prime example of this: it looks like an English word, and certainly in elite Papua New Guinean contexts, such as the chambers of judges and the conferences and seminars at which its nature and future are debated, it can take on contours that at times look like a straightforward analogue to law or to culture (Demian 2015). In neighboring Vanuatu, similar analogues appear to economy (Rousseau and Taylor 2012). But as soon as one is discussing this concept with people who are no longer connected to their local metropolises, the areas of life signified by a term like *kastom* are constantly shifting. Of course, the term does not only refer to what people have lost, but to any number of everyday practices and affective modes to which people still have recourse. These practices may “actually” have existed for a very large portion of Suau history, or they may not have, but that is not the point. The point is that they are associated with a Suau deep time. If, as Greenhouse observes, “in so-called timeless societies, the principal relevance of time is to divide the matrix of significance from the lived-in world” (Greenhouse 1996: 87), then the “matrix of significance” to which *kastom* appeals is perpetually at one remove from everyday life, even as it is called into people's lives to infuse them with awareness that another time exists alongside this one. Greenhouse continues: “In such contexts, agency is highly concentrated in the indeterminate point of transformation (I will not say ‘moment’) when the lived-in world could be distinguished from some other; such transformations are the subject of myths, but (as we shall see) events, too, can be transformative in this sense” (1996: 87).

If *kastom* is one such way that Suau people have found to describe transformative points in their history, where history is understood both as the distant past and as the ethnographic present of this book, it is an extremely effective descriptor that allows them to demonstrate to foreign others, includ-

ing the ethnographer, what they have discovered in these others that is also a component of their own historical sensibility.

### “We Will Never See Your Place”

The trajectories of anthropology have shifted too, and our own sense of locating the proper identity of anthropologists is as contingent on whom we are engaging with, and on what terms, as the identity of my Suau friends. What once seemed to me the daring decision to live and conduct fieldwork on the relatively cosmopolitan mainland of a province famed for its unique (“authentic”) island cultures has, in the intervening years, become not only not so radical but also rather unfashionable. The first hint of a problem was brought to my attention over a decade ago, at a job interview of all things. My interviewers opened the discussion with the following observation: “So you do quite *traditional* anthropology, don’t you?” The categories that had haunted me as a graduate student, from “the Massim” onward, were evidently still haunting these colleagues as well, and the Malinowskian fantasy of an insular idyll had somehow jumped out at them from my curriculum vitae. I attempted to point out that while, yes, I was working largely in rural Papua New Guinea, I was also developing a specialist focus on the country’s legal system and how that played out in relations between the rural population and the Papua New Guinean state. In the event, I did not get that job. I am however grateful to those colleagues for asking such an irritating question, as it has obviously stayed with me all this time. It has stayed with me precisely because it alerted me to a concern emerging in anthropology at the beginning of the present century that rather intriguingly parallels a concern voiced by my friends in Papua New Guinea: what, exactly, do we mean when we claim for ourselves, or accuse others, of doing something “traditional?” By this I mean, what relationship, not only to people in our past but also to those in our future—our children, our students, and so on—are we imagining, and how do we imagine ourselves to be mobilizing both those past and future potentials?

For people staking their claim to identity formation in a history they say is now lost to them, the affective orientation to time may be described as an ironic one. I take my cue from Fernandez and Huber (2001), who note of irony that

it is a potential consequence of all practice, arising as it does in the space between the world as planned or promised and the world as achieved or received. Yet the problematic of unrequitement in which irony flourishes has a positive as well as negative pole. Belief may be lost for good as well as bad reasons. And the loss, whether justified or not, may excite the moral imagination to explore routes to a better way of life. (2001: 262)

Irony may be a “potential consequence of all practice,” but its consequences are magnified in practices that carry a high degree of social risk—say, in recognizing relationships with others who turn out not, in the long run, to recognize a reciprocal relationship with you, generating the “problematic of unrequitement” described by Fernandez and Huber. The historical encounters between Suau people and colonial others are described by contemporary Suau as having been filled with a potential that was never realized. The overwhelming majority of foreigners to arrive at the southeastern tip of Papua New Guinea never had any intention of staying there. In colonial, missionary, and military accounts of the region, Suau people and their coastal home are only ever a backdrop against which the aspirations and fears of foreign actors are played out; “the native” is a largely generic figure to be managed as efficiently as possible in the interests of empire. It is this disjuncture, between the world Suau people say they expected when they embraced foreigners and their presumed interests and the world that actually transpired when those foreigners turned out to be not so interested in Suau people after all, that I am calling ironic. As Fernandez and Huber suggest, this gap or disjuncture tends to be filled in with moral significance. More often than not, my Suau interlocutors have held themselves responsible both for failing to hold the attention of the foreign other and for failing to maintain what might be called their own cultural patrimony, presumed to be flourishing before relations with foreigners got underway in earnest. It remains to be seen whether this claiming of responsibility for the loss of connections, either to their own past or to an anticipated future, might provoke a positive movement toward some revised or entirely new version of that future. The Suau Coast of my acquaintance still gives the impression of a place in which the future has been placed on hold—or to be more precise, a future whose contours are recognizable to a foreigner.

It was not always thus. In the first half of the twentieth century, Suau people were already experiencing what they now reflect back upon as a golden age of experimenting with translocal connections. The London Missionary Society and its maverick offspring, the Kwato Extension Association, had been making converts since the 1870s, and the Kwato mission at the eastern extremity of the Suau language area also saw as part of its project, radically for the era, vocational education of young men and women who had come up through the mission school. The descendants of those educated at Kwato continue to be disproportionately represented in the political, educational, and business life of the province and of Papua New Guinea more widely. The location of the district headquarters at the eastern end of the coast on Samarai, with the island of Kwato and its pioneering mission next door, meant not only that Suau people had access to a world of unprecedented opportunities for education, work, and travel but that that world had come to them and appeared ready to stay with them. But it did not stay, as the cataclysm of World War II took with

it not only the soldiers but also the missionaries and planters, as well as much of the colonial infrastructure to support them.

The midcentury colonial preoccupation with “race suicide” (Williams 1933: 5) is a telling one. Well-meaning foreigners like the government anthropologist F. E. Williams were worried about Suau people becoming caricatures of Europeans, whereas by their own account, Suau were intensively exploring the possibilities that relations with Europeans might offer them. These are not at all the same sort of project. I will make the claim that Suau had no intention of becoming like Europeans or like anyone else: they were interested in becoming like themselves, as they imagined themselves standing in relation to a relatively new and almost unfathomably different category of others. This experiment would later be construed by Suau people of my acquaintance as an entirely new epoch in the history of a region that is well established in the anthropological canon as always having enjoyed long-distance relations of both trade and ceremonial exchange. In other words, if Suau were reasonably mobile before the colonial era—in the strictest physical sense of mobility—then they were extraordinarily mobile during the era of colonialism. And the mobility intensified further during World War II, when entire villages were emptied of able-bodied men who went to work as manual laborers for Australian and American troops stationed around Milne Bay. Older Suau recalling this era were always careful to emphasize two points to me: that American soldiers were more generous than Australian ones, and that the racial hierarchy they had been taught in the mission schools and plantations was called into question by the revelation that some Americans were dark-skinned like them. While the generosity of American soldiers is a consistent trope in the war remembrances of many Pacific Islands populations (Lindstrom and White 1989), it does appear to have been the case that American servicemen, unschooled in the particular colonial relationship Australia was striving to maintain in then-Territories of Papua and New Guinea during the war, routinely flouted the sumptuary ordinances and other rules against “fraternizing” with Papua New Guineans that were enforced on Australian troops (Riseman 2012: 128). Certainly this wartime memorialization of Americans worked in my own favor as an American visitor to Milne Bay Province, despite the constant reminders that my own national point of origin had become subsumed in the local geopolitical power structure that persists in the present day: “Ah, you’re American, yes, I know about America! Now, what part of Australia is that in?”

The war also saw an intensification of infrastructure, with perforated steel planking being used to build everything from runways to pontoon bridges to temporary roads. But the operative word here is “temporary.” After the war, the missionaries who had been evacuated never came back. A fall in world copra prices meant that the coconut plantations were also becoming less lucrative as enterprises, so that by the 1960s, only a single planter, Rex Good-

win, remained on the Suau Coast. And in 1969 the district headquarters were moved to Alotau, a minimum of a day's travel by boat from most parts of the Suau region, effectively erasing the south coast of the province as a regional metropole. By the time I began doing fieldwork in the region in 1996, the dominant narrative in the villages where I worked was one of inexplicable loss.

This loss took two forms. One was the form that I have tried to encapsulate in the concept of *kastom*. This is the term in Tok Pisin for any number of practices, relationships, and material forms associated with a domain of ancestral or temporal depth. But it is absolutely critical to bear in mind that not everyone means the same thing when they speak of *kastom*. One person might be talking about the old songs and dances forbidden by the missionaries; another person might be talking about the use of shell valuables instead of money for marriage and funeral transactions; another person might be talking about appropriate behavior between brothers and sisters. And people are profoundly ambivalent about many of these things—someone might in one breath speak of the power or danger that is gone from a cave where a culture hero is said to have lived in ancient times, and in the next breath deplore the fact that high school students in the present era have left graffiti all over it. Also there are differences of gender and generation: men and women tend to speak of different forms that *kastom* might have taken, and older people say that *kastom* is all finished while younger people say it is still around, and making it hard for them to conduct their romantic lives in the way that they would like.

So far, so paradigmatic: whatever *kastom* is or might have been, this appears to be a straightforward tale of colonial dispossession. But the second form that loss has taken for many Suau people is the loss of all the connections of infrastructure, and of educational, economic, and social opportunities that presented themselves in various forms beginning with missionization, proceeding through the buildup to the war, and culminating at Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975—an event that is viewed as a positive development by no Suau person I have ever discussed it with. The Papua New Guinean state simply has not been able to deliver what the colonial or military enterprises did: mobility. Here I am not just talking about physical mobility, but a mobility of the imagination. The new national identity offered by the creation of an independent state was one that proposed to unite the country in a fairly standard discourse of national similarity, as against the difference of the Australians and earlier colonizers. But similarity is, I am proposing, an aesthetic that is counter to the ideals of mobility and multiplicity in the minds of many people I have worked with over the years, not just in Suau but in other parts of Papua New Guinea as well.

And the interest in maintaining connections over long stretches of time and space with others is of course not just a Papua New Guinean concern. It is one found throughout the Pacific, as McDougall (2016) notes, in pervasive

ideologies of incorporating the foreigner into the ground of home. “Diversity,” she writes, “is not the automatic result of historical isolation from interactions with other people. Diversity is valued, cultivated, and made possible by translocal relationships and ongoing engagements with strangers” (2016: 27). She goes on to indicate the myriad ways in which relationships with foreign others, and eventual inclusion of those others into your own group (while simultaneously maintaining their distinctiveness as others), is a fundamental component of Pacific sociality. It is one that has given rise to networks of ceremonial exchange, trade, marriage, and ritual, as well as warfare and conquest, over vast distances across the Pacific Ocean and its landmasses, for millennia. But as McDougall also notes, the inversion of this phenomenon is also possible, wherein kin may be turned into non-kin, and this is taken as a sign of the correct ordering of relationships gone awry.

That correct ordering is often what Melanesian peoples say they have lost in the aftermath of the colonial era. Much of the anthropological and political discourse on Papua New Guinea is that its people have relinquished many of the economic, spiritual, and moral systems that were once their own and replaced them with those of the colonizers. I am suggesting that while a great deal of this loss is of course a function of colonialism, other elements of it are, in fact, a fundamental component of a Pacific sociality in which the stranger, after having been greeted with caution and perhaps even violence, becomes adopted, incorporated, or otherwise engaged in a flow of things, ideas, and practices with the hosts.

The problem here is that under the conditions of colonialism, Europeans had no interest in a relationship of mutualism or exchange. From seemingly trivial appropriations and dislocations of cultural artifacts (hula, tattooing) to invasion and destruction on a grand scale (settler colonies, nuclear testing, world war), the effects wrought by Europe, the United States, and Australia represented—and continue to represent—an asymmetrical relationship that was unprecedented in kind for most Pacific societies. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Suau people in what is now Papua New Guinea embarked upon a relationship that they may have hoped would constitute an ongoing flow of exchange that never eventuated. They converted to Christianity with a speed even missionaries found remarkable (chapter 3). They seized educational and wage labor opportunities with both hands. And then a century later, the foreigners had almost all gone, and the Papua New Guinean state has never been able to replace or replicate the promise of that initial relationship.

Certainly during field trips in 1999 and 2008 my Suau friends gave me the impression of having gotten themselves stuck. The era of physical and educational mobility was behind them, and people were casting about for what, in the uncertainty of the postindependence era, might provide the next set of fruitful connections. Oil palm was introduced in the late 1980s, and it con-

tinues to be planted throughout the lowland areas of the province at a truly alarming rate: each time I have visited, the descent of the short flight from Port Moresby into Alotau reveals less forest and more oil palm. Vanilla was introduced more recently as a less land-intensive cash crop, but its uptake seems to have been patchy at best, and the families I know who planted it enthusiastically in the early years of this century had not actually found a buyer for their mature pods by 2008. The built-in supply chain that had been a feature of colonial cash cropping could not be replicated in the postcolony.

The religious makeup of the region has also shifted since independence, with evangelical churches reconverting many Suau people, especially young men and women who are drawn to the replacement of older forms of hierarchy and authority by the relationship between an individual and Jesus, by the energetic and emotionally satisfying form of their services, and by the opportunity to travel up and down the coast as “prayer warriors” without the oversight of kin and in the company of other young men and women. Some Catholic churches have also appeared in the Suau hinterland, offering yet another option in the free-for-all of Christianities that PNG has become in the century since the Victorian missionary organizations carefully carved up the new Melanesian territories among themselves.

But again, it is not enough to talk solely about the kind of mobility that just moves people up and down the coast between prayer meetings and village markets. In a context like Papua New Guinea, which never became a settler state, and this part of Papua New Guinea, which has not experienced the kinds of wholesale landscape alteration and ecological destruction seen by mining communities elsewhere in the country, I have the luxury of asking what people “really” mean when they talk about what they have lost. They still have their land, in other words, and their livelihoods; this is not a dispossessed population. But when people speak with relish and nostalgia about a past filled with opportunities to interact with missionaries, planters, government agents, and soldiers, they are not just talking about the material opportunities offered, although those cannot be dismissed either. They are talking about an immediate world populated with others who were not connected to them by ceremonial trade partnerships, marriage connections, totemic affiliations, and other relational forms that might or might not be placed under the rubric of *kastom*. The others of the Suau “golden age,” from the late nineteenth century to the end of World War II, were *so* different that entirely new ways of forming or discovering relationships with them had to be found. And because those others expressed no interest in communicating or otherwise dealing with Suau people in any way that might be intelligible to them, the novelty of working out what these various kinds of others—Europeans and Australians, Polynesian missionaries, Chinese entrepreneurs, African American soldiers, and so



on—wanted from them formed a central part of the Suau creative endeavor for the better part of a century.

It is that satisfaction that has been lost: the satisfaction of having worked out what someone else wants, how you can stand in relation to someone whose motivations and desires are really a closed book, but in whom you have chosen to recognize the potential for a productive future. A cliché I became weary of hearing from my Suau friends was, “You have come all this way to our place, and we will never see your place.” I took it for a very long time to be a matter-of-fact statement about the disparities in our comparative wealth, in that I could travel to PNG, and most of them could not travel to the United States or United Kingdom or wherever I happened to be living at the time. And it is of course an issue of comparative wealth, but it is more than that. Each time I was asked to attend to the structural immobility of my friends and hosts, I was also being asked to attend to what seeing “my place” might mean for them. My place is filled with other people like me, and maybe other people not like me, with whom other sorts of relationships might be imagined. The act of seeing itself is also critical as a component of what lends veracity to the retelling of an experience for many Suau people. To have seen the place where a person is from is to render them that much more knowable, because people and their places are mutually constitutive (chapter 4).

I have argued elsewhere (Demian 2015) that Suau, in common with most if not all Papua New Guineans, find their creative satisfaction in the differences between people, in mixing languages, spiritual practices, the orders of the state and the local, and so on, to see what sorts of fruitful or vitalizing relations might eventuate from all this mixing. This will be a theme that appears periodically throughout my consideration of how Suau people conceive of Suau history, which then informs what an ideal Suau future might look like. A non-trivial component of the current dissatisfaction with having been left behind by successive colonial others is that they are now left with just each other. The high value placed on seeking relationships elsewhere is encapsulated vividly in the Suau proverb, “You squeeze your finger until it bleeds, then you marry nearby [literally, inside ourselves]” (*nimam we hihi 'osi'osina, boto tawasola boyauda*). At first blush this appears to be a straightforward exhortation in favor of exogamy. But as the young man who first told me the proverb went on to explain, it was about the social and personal risks of marrying the “girl next door.” Your family would know everything about her already, and her family would know everything about you. All your personal foibles, and hers, would be up for examination. Neither party to the marriage would have anything to discover for themselves. It would surely be doomed. Better, he said, to marry a young woman from elsewhere in Milne Bay, or even better still, from another part of PNG entirely.

In this young bachelor's explanation of the proverb lies a signpost to the importance that Suau people place on constructing a satisfying life for oneself by forming relationships with incompletely known others. And as Harrison (2000) has demonstrated, this fascination for trading in difference—often quite literally, with the purchasing of other groups' songs, spirit cults, and ritual systems—almost certainly precedes contact with Europeans and appears to have been a longstanding feature of many Papua New Guinean societies. For someone like myself, who does such “traditional anthropology,” it is salutary to be reminded of what I have always felt was the foundational principle of anthropology as a discipline: it is difference, not similarity, that mobilizes the human imagination. But for my Suau friends, this is not just a clever intellectual project: it is one that has animated their reflections on their own lives and the world around them for over a century. It is not just the absence of infrastructure that has caused them to feel stuck. It is the absence of others to express any sort of interest in them, or in engaging with them. The problem, in other words, is not that my friends and consultants in Suau are “still” living in small villages, or “still” engaging in swidden horticulture as their primary mode of subsistence, or whatever the objection to “traditional anthropology” might be. The problem is that they know it is possible for their world to attract the attention of others with whom they might conduct fruitful relations—because it happened once before, and was sustained for several generations. So they know it is possible. The question vexing them now is how they might make it happen again, to realize a future that will be filled with others to mobilize their imaginations anew.

## Note

1. Here I retain an intellectual debt to Worsley (1957), who first alerted me to both the uniqueness of Melanesian responses to colonialism and the equally critical fact that one of the things Melanesians were responding to was precisely the disinterest of colonizers in engaging with them as equals—or even as humans.