

WESTERN MOVEMENTS IN NON-WESTERN WORLDS: TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF UNCERTAIN ENCOUNTERS¹

People everywhere have their various ways of perceiving, thinking, talking about and acting vis-à-vis others; and through that, in turn, of reflecting on their own beliefs and practices. In a certain version of this, through long-term ethnographic fieldwork in most near and far corners of the world, generations of practitioners of anthropology have systematically tried to describe and analyse others' cultures—as well as their human natures, and any Malinowskian 'imponderabilia of actual life' (Malinowski 1922: 18)²—'from the native's point of view'. (I should remark that the invocation of 'natives' here paraphrases early anthropological usage and not as such a pejorative colonial deployment of the term). Anthropologists' ways of pursuing this goal, and the contexts in which anthropological practice is carried out, have been epistemologically and politically challenged to a great variety of degrees over the years, both from within the discipline and from other perspectives. There is a strong sense in which present-day anthropological analysis of culture is by definition non-essentialist and therefore takes for granted that 'cultures' are far from well-defined, easily distinguishable entities of shared meanings generating stable, similar patterns of social action (cf. Barth 1992). From a certain point of view any so-called culture has always been changing, and whatever beliefs and understandings are constitutive and characteristic of a given cultural context at a given point in place and time are bound to be, in a Foucaultian sense, highly differentially

distributed among the people organized and affected by them (Keesing 1987). Cultural boundaries have never been clear despite many pleas for the homogeneous and bounded, and intercultural encounters and shared projects across large and small divides of knowledge and belief were a norm of ongoing social life long before 'globalization' and 'hybridity' became fashionable concepts.

In this discussion of encounters between 'the West' and 'the Rest' (to paraphrase Eric Wolf's *Europe and the Peoples Without History* [1982]) I intend to take an ethnographically informed approach to the activities of certain so-called Western institutions and practitioners—including alternativist-oriented Euro-American movements in fields such as environmentalism and tourism—among remote peoples of the world. This, then, with a view to addressing certain theoretical challenges for understanding such encounters in 'postcolonial' situations, where the political 'certainties' and other givens of colonialism have been transformed and twisted into a state of confusing uncertainty as to what is happening. As historian-anthropologist Nicholas Thomas has suggested, the term 'postcolonial' might most fruitfully refer not to some transcendence of colonial relationships, but—with a view to contexts for people's social practice—to 'an evaporation of the moral certainties that colonialism has simultaneously enforced and enabled' (Thomas 1997: 23). In the postcolonial worlds, it seems, 'new cultural

scenes are being composed through fertile and exciting appropriations that transgress authentic traditions and bounded cultures' (Thomas 1997: 26).

Not that 'hybridization' as such takes over the arena. I find it necessary to argue that two-way—mutualist—understandings may be obtained and sustained across similarly sustained, and seemingly unfathomable, cultural distances and political inequalities. I also wish to postulate that people may have shared 'projects' although their culturally defined goals moving them to engage in such projects may be quite dissimilar. In this sense experienced, lived and situated culture may indeed be transcultural—and new cultural scenes need not entail hybridization, currently in vogue as a master metaphor in cultural studies. Consider the problems inherent in a concept of hybrid solutions. The existence of a 'hybrid' seems to imply that there are at least two rather pure entities that have somehow been combined into a higher 'hybrid' state. But how are we to go about defining the two (or more) ostensibly 'thoroughbred' and distinctly bounded cultures that combine in such promiscuous ways? The observation by Jonathan Friedman (1997: 269) that 'hybridization' and its correlate notions of 'globalization' and 'creolization' are 'socially positioned concepts that in their classificatory thrust say very much about the classifiers and much less about those classified' comes to mind. In short, the classifiers (including quite a few postmodern Western-based writers, scholarly or not, some of whom beg to define themselves as cultural hybrids) are inclined to start worrying when essentialized cultural entities are being disturbed, diluted and destroyed and made diffuse.

I suggest here that intercultural encounters and their associated events and social situations—the 'stuff' of which anthropological

accounts are made—should be analyzed also in postcolonial times from a view of understanding the epistemological complexity involved, whether in the form of convergence or non-convergence in variously positioned persons' perception, understanding and interpretation of others' intent, agency and of the consequences of action. People everywhere try to make sense out of other people and their ideas and actions, and it is indeed quite likely that very different peoples may understand something of each other. If not, we would not be able to practice as field ethnographers either, despite the amount of general theory that informs all ethnography anyway. The complexity of encounters and events must not be underestimated—nor must we fall into the trap that, according to anthropology critic and leading cultural studies figure James Clifford (1997), appears to plague our profession when in the typical village field; namely to remove from the picture 'disorderly' things and agents such as missionaries, airplanes, cities, video machines and tourists.

PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS AND AGENDAS: GLIMPSES OF INCIPIENT COLONIALISM

It has been said that today's encounters in time and space around the world are uncertain, perhaps increasingly so. Allow me—for the sake of comparison, which is important to us anthropologists—to take a look at precolonial or perhaps 'incipiently colonial' times, and to begin with vignettes of intercultural encounter from the days of early colonial 'penetration' (note the metaphor) of very remote worlds about 150 years ago. We shall turn to the Solomon Islands in the Melanesian South Pacific, a tiny corner of the world where I have carried out several years of fieldwork (cf. Hviding 1996a). We go there now by way of the journal of a sea captain from

the British Isles rather less well-known than that key figure of recent anthropology's intense and sometimes caustic debates about 'structure and history' and the interpretation of early colonial encounters (Sahlins 1985; 1996; Obeyesekere 1992)—Captain James Cook. Our man is not of Captain Cook's world-conquering kind, nor his contemporary. He is the thoroughly practical Scottish (or, rather, Shetlandic) trading captain Andrew Cheyne, who visited the New Georgia Group of the western Solomon Islands in 1844 on a search through the islands of the Western Pacific for turtleshell, *bêche-de-mer* (sea slugs) and other sea products for the China trade. Unlike Cook among the Hawaiians, Cheyne became no god—neither a living nor a dying one—among the New Georgians. After four weeks of brisk trade in New Georgia he sailed on through the Solomons, eventually turning northwards to return to Macao. His matter-of-fact but detailed journal (Cheyne 1971, edited by Pacific historian Dorothy Shineberg) contains one of the earliest written accounts—if not the earliest—of the people of New Georgia, although whaling ships had been visiting these islands for at least 50 years prior to Cheyne's arrival (Bennett 1987: 350-355).

From June 1843 to June 1844 Cheyne took the 200-ton armed brig *Naiad* of Hong Kong—with a conventionally cross-cultural crew of sixty-five (including nine Europeans, forty-eight East Indian 'lascars' and a few Chinese craftsmen)—through encounter after encounter with island peoples in many remote corners of the tropical western Pacific, most of whom had only relatively recently been in any significant contact with Europeans. In many cases social interaction between the men of the *Naiad* and the 'natives' met with reached the level of actual shared projects, in that Cheyne's major aim with the voyage was to set up 'stations' on islands throughout the region for the collection

and smoke-drying of *bêche-de-mer*. His strategy was to reach agreements with island chiefs, then leave one of his European 'officers' with a few 'lascars' to handle the affairs of the new 'station', and then to sail on to new locations with extensive coral reefs, good harbours, friendly politics, and other benevolent conditions for establishing 'stations'. This was the experienced Captain Cheyne's third trading voyage in the Pacific, and not his last, as he intended to return to the said 'stations' the following year.

Captain Cheyne and the *Naiad* reached New Georgia in early 1844. This was Cheyne's first visit to these islands, long noted among mariners for the violent and unpredictable disposition of their peoples, but also for the fabulously rich supplies of *bêche-de-mer* and 'tortoiseshell' (from the marine 'hawksbill' turtle, *Eretmochelys imbricata*) obtainable from the very extensive coral reef lagoons around the large main island of New Georgia. Cheyne had good reason to take on the significant challenge of establishing a 'station' here where danger was posed to trading vessels both by headhunting 'natives' and uncharted mazes of reefs, but where the promise of profit was immense for successful pioneer traders.

Upon arrival on February the first in 1844 at the little outlying island of Simbo (then 'Eddystone Island'), which had somehow already had considerable contact with Europeans, the *Naiad* was—no doubt to Captain Cheyne's considerable surprise—immediately 'boarded by three Englishmen living on the island, who brought the two principal chiefs with them' (Cheyne 1971: 303). Through these seemingly well-adapted beachcomber mediators (probably castaways or deserters from passing ships, some of which included British transports taking convicts to New South Wales), Cheyne entered into interaction and discussion with local people whom he soon came to consider

with ambivalence. The ‘Eddystonians’, it soon appeared, were truly the fierce and bloodthirsty headhunters of longstanding reputation (the heads of ninety-three people recently killed were strung on the walls of the main chief’s canoe house), yet they were also eager, sophisticated and quite trustworthy trading partners who seemed to know what the game was all about. Some of them even commanded the nautical Pidgin English of the day. All in all, the Simbo people were a much better lot than what Cheyne had had reason to suspect from the lurid accounts of previous mariners, and the foundation for a sound partnership in *bêche-de-mer* business appeared to be laid with the friendly Simboese as strategic mediators to the wider economic world of the New Georgia group of islands.

The prolonged interaction that ensued and lasted throughout the month of February was thoroughly pragmatic and included an elaborate contract concerning the establishment of a *bêche-de-mer* ‘station’ in business partnership with the already resident Englishmen. But first, after just a few days Captain Cheyne and his crew sailed temporarily away from Simbo, with a friendly chief called Lobi plus ten other men who insisted on coming along on board his ship as ‘pilots and interpreters’. They sailed for some 70 kilometres across to the nearby island of New Georgia proper, in order to investigate trade opportunities for turtle shell. In the early morning hours of February the sixth, 1844, contact was made off the mountainous, reef-enclosed island. Cheyne’s ship

(...) hove to for a number of canoes then coming off. They came alongside about 7 AM, but being armed with bows arrows & tomahawks, I did not allow any on deck, and made them keep under the stern. The chief Lobie—although their

friend—told me that none of them, nor any of his countrymen were to be trusted, being so covetous and rapacious in their habits that they frequently killed their own friends to obtain possession of their property, and would not hesitate to cut off a vessel, should a favourable opportunity offer. *He did not consider it would be safe for any Europeans to land on any part of New Georgia*, and pointed out several places where whalers boats had been cut off and their whole crews massacred, having been enticed on shore by women, and cut off when scattered in the bush. He also mentioned two places where ships had been captured, and burnt, after being stripped of everything useful. The natives traded peaceably with us during the day, and at sunset they all left the ship. Procured about 40 lbs of Tortoise shell, and abundance of cocoa-nuts. They took on shore nearly as much shell as we had purchased, not feeling inclined to part with it unless for tomahawks, which I hid not got to give them. They use the tomahawks as battle axes, and will give from 1 1/2 to 3 lbs. of fine shell for one. (Cheyne 1971: 305, emphasis original.)

As Nicholas Thomas (1992) points out in a discussion of early transcultural barter or ‘peripheral exchange’ between Pacific Islanders and Europeans, we should be careful so as not to overimpose preconceived categories on these encounters in our attempts to interpret their meaning. For example, knowing that steel axes were given in exchange to islanders (a frequent occurrence in early trade) does not tell us what was received by them in terms of the indigenous cultural appropriation of the axes. This brings us to another facet of the meaning of these events. That the alignment of power was not

always in favour of the Europeans who were to be identified as early colonial penetrators by later generations of historians, is exemplified by a second quote from Captain Cheyne's journal. As night fell after the first trade encounter just described, Cheyne took his ship well out to sea off New Georgia's treacherous reefs, and presumably, what he felt were equally treacherous natives, as convincingly elaborated on by his counsellor, Chief Lobi. Coming on deck at midnight, Cheyne encountered his friends from Simbo

(...) walking round the deck, armed with tomahawks. Although only 11 in number, they could have easily captured the Brig by shutting the crew down under hatches, and keeping possession of the arms, until they ran her on shore (...) On asking their motive for being armed at that hour of the night, they gave evasive replies—merely saying, that they were in the habit of doing so on shore. I however had my suspicions, and judged it prudent to remain on deck until daylight, armed with pistols. (Cheyne 1971: 305)

Indeed a moment of some revelation for the increasingly nervous Captain Cheyne, and along the lines argued by Marilyn Strathern (1992) for the Hageners of the New Guinea Highlands a moment both of revelation and of analytical 'decomposition'. But whereas in the first-contact encounter in Mt. Hagen in the 1930s it was the Melanesians who in certain events 'decomposed' their image of the Europeans and thus discovered through their own analytic work what the strangers were all about (at least that they were human and not spirits as was at first rumoured), in that eerie night off New Georgia Island ninety years earlier it was the European who had his image

of the Melanesians decomposed and reached the disturbing conclusions that his new-found 'great friends' who had convinced him about the 'treachery' of the people of New Georgia Island may actually be intent on using him and his ship for their very own 'treacherous' ends.

That encounter on deck must have been a moment of interpretive convergence too, as indicated by the evasive replies given by the armed-to-the-teeth Simboese to what they are likely to have perceived as the captain's rather sudden alarm. For Cheyne, his realizations concerning his Simboese friends were solidly confirmed early one morning after a few days of cautious but successful trading around New Georgia Island when Lobi and his warlike gang—who had all the while remained on board the *Naiad*—drew some of the ship's crew with them in a surprise attack on a group of well-armed New Georgians who were gathered around the brig in a number of war canoes. A payback revenge for some previous misdeed by the New Georgians, perhaps, in this region of perennial inter-island feuding and raiding. It had been much more comfortable and secure for Lobi's gang, and had also given them an extra element of surprise, to cruise over to New Georgia on a European ship rather than having to paddle over in their own conspicuous war canoes (which also required elaborate ritual to launch).

As the veteran Pacific administrator and historian Harry Maude aptly comments in a foreword to the edited version of Cheyne's journal: though these early traders frequently had to pay the pipers, it was the islanders who in reality called the tunes. It makes little sense, then, to interpret events such as the one just described as acts of colonial penetration in our present-day sense. In the case of the New Georgians, they were by and large to retain control over the terms of trade (and pursue escalated overseas

headhunting) for over fifty years after Cheyne's visit. Not until violent British naval retaliation against headhunting and the murder of traders in the late 1890s, when the Solomon islands had become a British 'protectorate', did a more typical colonial situation develop. In Cheyne's account, it is as if we can see the implications of a long time-scale of historical process before our very eyes. Through the glimpses of indigenous trading initiatives steered by the desire for European steel axes, of strategic local 'impression management' of sorts aimed at installing in the trader a convinced fear of neighbouring peoples (no doubt so as to obtain and maintain a monopoly on trader contact) and cautious respect for themselves, New Georgians emerge as active protagonists with personal agency and agendas to follow in their assertion of command over the transcultural flow. This furthering of local agendas is nowhere more evident in Cheyne's journal than in his report concerning the morning when the *Simboese* and some of the brig's crew attacked the New Georgians. The chief mate called Cheyne

when the sun was high enough to see the reefs (...) reporting that the natives in the canoes alongside were the enemies of the Eddystone natives and the very parties that had cut off two whalers boats and murdered their crew; and at the same time urging me to fire the port gangway carronade into them (their being right under its muzzle at the time) as a punishment for killing the white men. I of course would not hear of such a thing (...) (Cheyne 1971: 307)

Not only did the *Simboese* wisely install in the *Naiad*'s officer of the watch a sound impression that the armed New Georgians gathered about the ship were every bit as dangerous and 'treacherous' as they looked. Being intent on

causing a violent blow to their long-standing New Georgian enemies, Chief Lobi and his men even came close to having the Europeans act on their behalf by firing the ship's deadly cannon into the New Georgian war canoe gathering. A shared but shaky project built on dissimilar agendas: Lobi and his men wanted to strike a hefty blow at their enemies; Cheyne's chief mate wanted to fire at the New Georgians both for the immediate protection of the *Naiad* and for avenging their reported killings of Europeans.

As I have argued elsewhere (Hviding 1993; 1996a), New Georgians—like, no doubt, many other island peoples in the Pacific and beyond—have through many generations utilized certain generative cultural schemas to handle multitudes of strangers arriving from across the horizon. As island dwellers in a region whose cultural history is founded above all on migrations and regional systems of maritime exchange and warfare, New Georgians have been used to making sense of any range of more or less unexpected arrivals across the horizon. Their 'holographically' extendable schemas of generating '[new] forms from other [previously existing] forms' (Wagner 1986; Strathern 1992) may well have permitted New Georgians to be less than surprised when the first European sailing ships arrived, and in any case they would have been able quickly to make sense of the newcomers. The point at hand is not that a grid of cultural 'structure' is somehow enacted and reproduced and that newcomers are moulded to fit it. Nor is it simply so—to paraphrase Marshall Sahlins (1981)—that pre-existing myth becomes reality (albeit still mythical) which in turn causes repercussions that transform the structure and flows of history. Rather, events of transcultural encounter in New Georgia were and are characterized by continuous open-ended categorization based on polysemous

relational schemes such as the dualist notion of social 'sides' (*kale*) in a complementary, ideally reciprocal, interactional relationship to each other (Hviding 1993; 1996a). Interpreting events in the past as governed not by long-term consciously structured designs (Keesing 1992: 207)—but rather by processes of indigenous relational categorization of open-ended, prototypical kinds which allow for a wide range of structural forms—enables us, then, to suggest that new people and new things are recognized in terms of something already known—though not by any means as fixed representations of a preconceived structure. A sense of experiential *déjà vu*, certainly, but not an enactment of myth nor of an ordered design of meanings. The structuring of events and relations is itself further generative of structured sociality.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE: PREDICAMENTS OF THE ADVENTURE TOURIST

We remember the past but enter the present—today's Commonwealth nation of Solomon Islands, independent in constitutional (if not economic) terms since 1978. Today the West descends on New Georgia and the rest of Solomon Islands in a much more varied capacity than during colonial years when the repertoire was largely limited to district officer, trader/planter and mainstream missionary (although a few Western adventurers are on record also from early colonial decades [see Johnson 1945 and Mytinger 1942 for lurid accounts by female travellers of the 1920s]). In today's Solomon Islands, beyond largely town-based diplomats, bankers and consultants, there are businessmen (of all shadings), timber merchants, gold miners, tourists, Peace Corps volunteers, grassroots development workers, conservationists and other NGO activists, new charismatic preachers,

television crews, and a few anthropologists. All these overseas visitors fan out among the country's innumerable islands, 390,000 people and 85 linguistic groups, habitually defined by anthropologists and also by Solomon Islanders themselves as distinct cultures with different 'customs' (as subsumed under the transcultural Melanesian concept of *kastom*). In this process some of the Westerners suffer virulent malaria and some meet with the ultramodern Eastern actors of big-time depletion of the resources of rainforest and seas; Asian logging and fishing companies.

Truly a large little world of diversity and one making for extraordinary complexity of intercultural encounters (even much more so than the remarkable encounters during World War II [cf. White et.al. 1988; and contributions in White and Lindstrom 1989]). Nevertheless the Solomons remains an undeveloped 'product' in relation to most roads of Western desire. In terms of tourism, for example, this is partly because it remains a little-known destination—so far off the beaten track that it was only added to the *Lonely Planet Guide* series of 'travel survival kits' in 1988 (since updated in a 1993 edition and published in an expanded 1997 edition, which shows the accelerating interest from the more adventurous tourist segments). In the pioneering 1988 edition of *Lonely Planet's Solomon Islands: A Travel Survival Kit* the country is described as 'the third largest archipelago in the South Pacific' and as a place where 'you'll often have to make your own arrangements, but if you don't mind that you can get to a long list of ultra-remote places' (Harcombe 1988: 7). The *Lonely Planet Guide* continues:

You really will have beaches all to yourself, need guides and maybe even bearers to climb rainforest covered volcanoes. You'll

take long canoe journeys from village to village, explore natural coastlines by foot and stay in small villages with traditional leaf huts. (Harcombe 1988: 7)

Paradise, for those prepared to rough it. And with friendly people, at that—at least if the traveller is somewhat more predisposed towards crosscultural contact and mutual interest than travel writer Paul Theroux, who in his astonishingly arrogant, culturally ignorant and consequently much-aligned (in the Pacific Islands, that is) *The Happy Isles of Oceania* (1992) expressed the view that the Solomon Islanders he encountered in the capital Honiara ‘were among the scariest-looking people I had ever seen in my life—wild hair, huge feet, tattoos on their foreheads, ornamental scars all over their faces, wearing broken sunglasses’ (Theroux 1992: 201).

More than 150 years after Captain Cheyne’s brief non-touristic sojourn, the Solomon Islands are indeed wonderful stuff for off-the-beaten track adventure tourism. In official, rather sober tourist publications, parts of the Solomons—such as the huge Marovo Lagoon in New Georgia to which we shall soon turn our attention—are presented as the ultimate, totally pristine tropical paradise. And official advertising informs us that the struggling nation-state of Solomon Islands, a sad case in World Bank terms, are in fact—to quote a long-standing slogan of the national tourist board—ISLANDS LOST IN TIME. Let me turn to a more specific example. The ‘cultural trips’ offered by a small upmarket Australian-operated diving resort in the Marovo Lagoon are advertised by text such as the following bits extracted from the ‘Uepi Resort’ Internet homepage³ run by ‘Tropical Paradise Pty. Ltd.’ Of Queensland, Australia:

(...) as the canoe takes you up this ancient river one can easily see it as a spiritual experience, entering into a river jungle, virtually untouched by destructive hands. (...) This is a trip for the adventurous who don’t mind getting their feet wet.

(...) traditional story tellers, fierce warriors and custom drums are part of the program.

(...) the approach to [the village] is reminiscent of ‘African Queen’ and the Paramount Chief will greet you. The charm of this experience depends upon your input as the chiefs wisdom and knowledge are far reaching, needing only the stimulus of your particular interests.

Indeed New Georgians continue to create forms out of other, previous forms. After all these cultural trips have largely been designed by the protagonists themselves, according to only vaguely expressed notions about what tourists like to see and do. The advertisement text thus part of Marovo Lagoon’s increasingly varied representation on the World Wide Web is composed by agents of the Australian resort management according to vocabularies and messages they no doubt feel convey the situation, and the ‘Tropical Paradise’-type messages, adequately. Villagers, many of whom are quite well educated, still control the situation, receive fees for every tourist visiting (or, as they say, in this sense reminiscent of certain violent pre-colonial practices, ‘per head’) and are careful to send the Europeans home to the resort before dusk so as to keep them away from the mosquitoes, young unmarried romantics, and peaceful evening meals of the village.

Still, tourists remain a somewhat ill-defined category in the fifty or so villages around the Marovo Lagoon. Upmarket resort guests are

quite well-established (and incorporated into the above scenario of cultural trips). Similarly, wealthy passengers on the live-aboard dive ships whose owners have negotiated regular paid visits to the reefs and villages of some Marovo groups, as well as the small crews of the yachts regularly passing through the lagoon, fall into an old category of *tinoni vaka*, ‘ship men’ or ‘people from non-local vessels’ (used for Europeans generally). But itinerant, low-key backpacking adventurers are less clearly defined. Certainly, they are *tinoni vaka* in a nominal sense, but they hardly act like ‘ship men’ should. Throughout the New Georgia islands beliefs are widespread that backpackers belong to a large international company called World Traveller, whose business documents are Lonely Planet Guides. They tend to turn up in villages quite unexpectedly, having disembarked from the interisland ferry (with *Solomon Islands: A Travel Survival Kit* in hand), and when asked what is their work there and then (a perennial question for any arrival in the New Georgian world of islands and travel) they usually say that they are world travellers—with little money. Since ‘contact persons’ listed for different villages in the *Travel Survival Kit* tend not to be present (they may be away on business, entrepreneurial as they are, or they may be simply non-existent since the names rendered are unknown), such travellers are usually handed over by the chief to the village teacher or to special persons with a particular command of English and of faraway worlds and the capacity to keep the visitors under control. For example, one much-used and congenial World Traveller host in a frequently visited village used to perform country and western songs on the nightclub circuit in Sydney and Brisbane when based there in the 1960s as a shipping agent. Hospitality shown to those arriving on the beach, however unexpectedly, is a general prerequisite of New Georgian sociality, and the

old option of killing such people has not been valid for most of this century. Indeed, as stated convincingly in the more detailed treatment of the Marovo Lagoon in the latest edition of the Lonely Planet Guide, ‘there should be somewhere to stay’ (Honan and Harcombe 1997: 167) even in those villages where a ‘tourist lodge’ has not yet been built.

The colonial years offered few Westerners so unclassifiable as the World Travellers. In a sense, every new white man or woman arriving in a Marovo Lagoon village today is intensely subjected—usually without knowing it—to the New Georgia custom of identifying strangers through generative interpretive schemas. They are also subjected to a fairly standardized treatment, involving bland, non-challenging food only just ‘local’ enough to be perceived by the tourists as ‘real village food’, fixed rounds of sightseeing to sites of headhunting or World War II interest and the gentle discouragement of free travel around the lagoon. It is common that information is withheld in what appears to be obliging answers to inquiries from adventurous tourists as to where the best beaches and reefs are (in Marovo, the part nudity of sunbathing female tourists is scorned at, and every fishing ground belongs to someone), where some fine virgin rainforest is to be seen (it is a hassle to guide inexperienced Westerners deep into the bush) and not least, where the highly popular ancestral skull repositories or other ‘tambu sites’ are to be found (they are best left undisturbed, apart from those few now partly dedicated to tourist income in the form of ‘custom fees’). To elaborate on this intriguing picture of present-day encounters, I wish to quote at some length from a quite riveting story told on the Internet about the trials and tribulations of a rather recent kayaking trip around the Marovo Lagoon. In the parlance of ecotourism, a ‘kayaking industry’ whereby small groups of

adventurous tourists paddle inflatable kayaks around the lagoon from one low-key ecotourist lodge to another is spoken of as one of the most promising scenarios for the future development of the Marovo scene. The following excerpts from an account entitled 'Far From Paradise: Song of the Solomon Islands'⁴ paint a vivid picture of some of the crosscultural challenges and uncertain encounters involved.

We wanted to put together our own tropical paradise trip. We thought of the Maldives, Fiji, Tonga, the Whitsundays, Burma, Thailand, and the Solomons. I even ordered the charts for Maldives, thinking this would be a good spot to explore. While contemplating the alternatives I got a call from California, from a chap named Eric. He wanted to start a kayak tour company in the Solomon Islands and needed an experienced operator to show him how to do it. He had the connections, he said. Would my wife, Chris, and I be interested in coming down to see? So the Solomons it was.

We found that there was a lot to explore in the Solomons. The whole country is a vast conglomerate of large and small islands. Remote atolls dot the map everywhere. Marovo Lagoon on New Georgia Island is the world's largest saltwater lagoon. But the Solomon Islands' main claim to fame is as a World War II battleground. (...) The biggest naval battles of the Pacific left their legacy at the bottom of the bay in front of Guadalcanal—so much so that your compass will be confused when you go over it. Even the sharks became so accustomed to human flesh that swimming is still not encouraged. We opted to take the passenger ship to Marovo Lagoon from

Guadalcanal instead of paddling across the shark infested channels. Realistically it would have been a long way to paddle.

We were lured to the Solomons for what we envisioned as a tropical paradise with white sand beaches and relaxing sun. What was in store was far more of an adventure than holiday in the sun. (...) After a full day and night on the overcrowded ship (...) we arrived in the heart of Marovo at two o'clock in the morning. Small canoes greeted us. The dark skinned faces framed the shining smiles in the moonlight. (...) I looked back at the heavy bags we had brought with us felt sure our gear would sink these small canoes. Luckily our host was in a more substantial canoe and could handle Chris and I plus Eric and his wife and their friend John. In the night it was hard to tell where we were or who anybody was but we felt a sense of adventure beginning.

Now the travellers are 'ushered into a fairly new house of concrete posts and open windows'; 'the chief's own home'. Over a couple of days, dark and disturbing realizations about Paradise ensue during their forced adjustment to village life and their preparations for going to sea. In ways not unlike Captain Cheyne's loss of faith in the already fragile set-up involving Simboese 'friends' as facilitators of more trade, the kayakers when faced with 'real' local life lose some of the rather innocent enthusiasm for adventure that had 'lured' them to the Solomons. Doubts develop:

(...) the threat of malaria hummed close to our ears each night. Malaria is rampant through all of the islands. Strange bugs and animals were everywhere. Walks through

the jungle revealed a long history of headhunting and strict tribal rituals. There were certain areas where women were not allowed to go. This included the particular areas for meeting nature's call. (...) We felt self-conscious as we were being constantly followed by curious eyes.

Eric and John were both visiting the village for the second time. They were busy trying to convince the chief of the merits of having tourists such as us there. (...) What was overlooked was the impact that tourism would have on their minimal food and water supplies, not to mention the obvious impact of western ways. (...) But we felt that tourism may not be the best answer for the Solomons' perceived poverty. Most islanders would be happiest to sit around each day fishing and gathering fruit from the abundance of fresh food in the forest. Most would not want to work for their money and tourism would be work.

Setting up our Feathercraft double kayak became a village event. We were surrounded by villagers during the whole process. I invited the chief to come for the inaugural paddle. Being from a canoeing background he had immense paddling strength. (...) We passed the neighbouring village with hoops and hollers from my passenger. He wanted to impress the villagers with his new found friends. I realized we were becoming more of an attraction than we cared to be.

We finally left for a secluded islet with a hearty farewell from the villagers. (...) Some careful exploration discovered another encampment on the opposite side. We began to gain an unveiled look at what

was really going on in the Solomons. Giant clam shells littered the beach—obvious signs of mass harvesting. Garbage decorated the bushes, indicating inexperience with non-biodegradable packaging. We were beginning to learn that the pristine facade had underlying realities.

And so the plot thickens:

We were willing to see what the adventure had in store for us, but we quickly learned about camping in the Solomons. (...) The land was owned by one person, the guava trees by another, the fish by another, the houses by another, etc. Plus, the concept of a holiday and camping does not fit in a culture where working all day is not common, except to provide basic living necessities. Wherever we camped we had visitors who seemed to uncannily know we were coming. They wanted to know if we were wanting to claim the land, I suspect. We kept dreaming of that secluded spot we could lounge about undisturbed.

(...) things began to change for us as we became more aware of the inter-village rivalries for land and natural resources. (...) We were afraid to catch fish for fear of finding the rightful owner who would demand compensation.

With expert advice on camping spots we decided to head out [again] (...) We were accompanied to an old World War II bomber crash site by an aging fellow paddling his own canoe. He recounted stories in his own language thinking we understood. The tediousness of asking him to repeat himself became futile.

We left our paddling partner and entered the open lagoon again. (...) The wind quickly picked up and we plowed into it with heroic effort. It became apparent that the sites suggested to us were covered in mangroves. (...) We approached a promising looking spot but our gut instinct told us to stay away.

We both agreed to keep moving, even though the light was going, the wind still strong and the warm rain soaking us. (...) In the night we didn't realize that the tide went down enough to expose the coral. In the faint moonlight the coral beaches looked very similar to preferable white sand. This meant we had to get close enough to actually touch it to know if it was sand.

In one of these approaches we managed to land. Stories of crocodiles eating villagers the previous week kept going through my mind. I went to explore and heard strange heavy noises coming from the mangrove. Nope, not that spot. As we meandered through the coral heads the waves had their way with us and deposited us on top of a particularly sharp coral head. We thought nothing of it until I asked Chris if she felt water in the boat.

Sure enough we had a hole, and nowhere to land. I have never felt so close to being in a desperate situation. With the darkness enveloping us and flying fish jumping into our faces, we laboured on. We knew of a spot some miles away so we put our heads down and battled the night.

The hapless kayakers finally manage to trundle ashore at 'an eerie site' and 'silently set up

camp' here in this Paradise now transformed to a fearsome Heart of Darkness.

We hung up our wet gear and awaited the morning sun to get on our way again.

With the Feathercraft easily repaired and dried we headed north. We concluded that we would shoot for Uepi resort some miles away. There we anticipated good meals and dry, comfortable beds. We were not disappointed. We stayed well past our targeted departure date. The skin diving was unbelievable, the meals superb, the beds oh-so comfortable.

Adventurous ecotourism in touch with natives and nature thus transformed into comfortable days at a diving resort (on an otherwise uninhabited island) where the locals are cooks, cleaners, waiters and motor canoe drivers, Heart of Darkness is left behind and Paradise is restored. For the anthropologist with years of experience from Marovo Lagoon and close enough knowledge of people and place to be able to trace the movements and interactions recounted, the kayakers' story turns into a tale of uncertain encounters in which the much-praised pristine nature and friendly people of Marovo are attributed with dark secrets and adventure tourism becomes a demanding enterprise and potentially gruelling experience for the tourist. Sharks and crocodiles hungry for human flesh appear to lurk behind the increasingly shattered facade of a Paradise full of gusty winds and sharp coral waiting to rip the bottom out of any flimsy craft passing overhead. What's more is that the local people—with their perceived negative attributes of consumerism, factionalism and bloodmindedness, Christian fundamentalism and gullible attitude yet intrusive curiosity vis-à-vis the newcomers—do not even marginally

fit into the stereotype of noble savages dwelling in Paradise. In this example, what is habitually touted by promoters of sustainable development as culturally sensitive ecotourism—peaceful lagoon kayaking from village to village being a prime example—instead appears to promote racist perceptions of the ‘other’ whose social actions and environmental offerings do not conform to the standards required of acceptable playgrounds for Euro-American adventurers. In the present case of the less than successful kayakers in Marovo, it is ironic to see how both people and nature are turned into perceived constraints on, indeed threats to, the unrestricted practice of a form of ‘adventure tourism’ which at the outset was supposed to depend exactly on the access to exotic peoples and places. Perhaps, if it had not been for Marovo’s village people and coastal—environmental features and climates, kayaking the lagoon would have been so much easier.

SAVING THE FOREST: FOR AND FROM WHOM?

Let us now have another up-to-date look at some present-day encounters in the Solomons, this time involving rainforest conservation. Here the ‘Western movements’ proper—beyond those rugged, adventurous individualists unknowingly placed in the World Traveller company category—enter the picture. I would like to dwell briefly here on the semantics of ‘movement’: mobility, motion of a ceaseless kind, parts-working-together, singlemindedness, travel; I would haste to add, meanings that conform rather closely to the concept of ‘path’ which is widespread in the Austronesian languages of the Pacific Islands and whose evocations include sequential movement in time and space, shared sentiments, and identifiable local custom (see Hviding 1996a).

In this sense environmental ‘movements’ whose representatives emerge on the local scene of the Marovo Lagoon may be seen to fall into a well-established tradition whereby any range of ‘paths’ (Marovo *huana*, tied to the Proto-Oceanic term **jalan* [cf. Blust 1981]) lead out of and into the social lives and ‘paths’ of Marovo people. From an academic perspective the complexity and uncertainty of some of these encounters involving ‘neo-Western’ environmental movements may attain immense proportions in terms of the scale of relations and perspectives—yet little literature—if any at all—on them exists. We do not know very well what this all looks like from the level of those who are encountered by neo-Western movements. This is truly a domain of this postcolonial world which has to be understood mostly through being there, and not through reading about it.

Over the years I have been continuously struck by the ways in which the tropical villagers of Marovo Lagoon, who still depend on swidden agriculture in the rainforest and on reef and lagoon fisheries, have addressed challenges from a rapidly growing diversity of agents of foreign capital and ideology concerning resource use. Some of these, such as Asian logging companies, are considered locally to be highly predictable in their rather ruthless thirst for untapped resources and in their frankly expressed willingness to pay in cash for the access to such commodities. They are dealt with accordingly and are chased away or allowed to cut trees in exchange for what is seen locally as huge cash amounts. In some cases, though, having paid the cash they still are not given a go-ahead to start logging; because the cash transaction generates further conflict over the communally held forest.

No, the Asians are OK. For today’s Solomon Islanders other foreigners are more remarkable and exotic—not least Australian, American and European representatives of

conservation organizations such as Greenpeace, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and various new green arms of the long-established Christian churches. ‘Don’t cut down trees in the rainforest’, this brand new type of Westerner says. They argue for a rather vaguely formulated usefulness of untouched rainforest, such as having American, Australian and European ‘ecotourists’ come and pay villagers for the privilege of walking in the latter’s rainforests.

Now, in the Solomon Islands there is, contrary to what is commonly said by conservationists, precious little ‘virgin’ rainforest left. Through hundreds of years, mobile swidden cultivators have cut down trees, small and large, to establish clearings for temporary agricultural sites. Well before the vulnerable rainforest soil is exhausted, they have then moved on to a new site. In this hot and humid climate the abandoned clearing is quickly covered in new secondary vegetation, and after about fifty years it once more supports large trees of the same height (and often much the same species) as those felled. Simultaneously the customary owners of the forest have seen to it that particularly useful trees that provide fruits and nuts, medicines, building materials, dugout canoes, and more are retained, nursed and replanted. In such ways, most of the rainforests of the Solomon Islands have been transformed to specially designed ecosystems of well developed secondary forest with an enhanced presence of useful trees. This is how the local people perceive their forest, which in turn makes them express—when challenged by certain types of foreigners—that trees have to be cut down in order to make the forest a useful place. For Solomon Islanders the steamy, incredibly fertile rainforest is in many ways an enemy of human projects. To maintain a new forest clearing as a site of intensive agriculture with root crops, leafy greens and fruit trees requires a continuous

fight against creeping and climbing vines that grow into the site from the surrounding forest with overwhelming speed. This is a climate where even freshly cut fence posts root, sprout and become new small trees within weeks. Thus the local people regard the green fertility of the rainforest, with its incredible biodiversity, as an opponent. But it is also in that sense that they see themselves as connected to the forest in a fundamental relationship; and it is therefore that they emphasize how important it is that swidden agriculture takes place through a continuous rotation so that the forest may be regenerated.

For Solomon Islanders the rainforest is not ‘nature’ to which they stand in a God-given hierarchical relation. The Marovo people, like many other peoples of the region, do not even have a word corresponding to ‘nature’ in their language (Hviding 1996b; cf. Strathern 1980). Yes, the rainforest is their opponent—but they also do their utmost to take care of the forest so that it continues to be useful. Based on a forthcoming book on the anthropological history and ‘political ecology’ of rainforest usages in the New Georgia islands (Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000), here are some brief ethnographic vignettes of these recent entanglements and encounters.⁵

The views of educated westerners tend to have been shaped by a dominant perspective on the forest not as an immediately useful thing or a commodity in a Western sense. The environmental movements which established strong roots in western Europe, North America and Australia in the 1980s (and less so in other regions) have developed the tropical rainforest as one of its most potent symbols, as expressed by a front cover headline of *The Ecologist* in October 1987 saying: SAVE THE FOREST: SAVE THE PLANET. The role of deforestation in exacerbating the greenhouse

effect underpinned this new, secular morality wherein a world without logging became a new vision of Utopia. In addition to a growing belief in the rainforest's global healing power, a new responsibility for sustaining biodiversity was imposed upon tropical rainforest peoples because of their perceived role as guardians of so much of the planet's biodiversity and genetic data-base. The rhetoric varies from romantic journalism to scientific jargon, but the underlying message is the same. The rainforest movement descended quite some time ago on the Marovo people—and recent documents prepared by New Zealand environmental NGOs (non-governmental organizations) have proposed means and ways of closing off large parts of the Marovo people from any disturbance:

The seclusion of (...) Marovo was invaded by missionaries in the early 1900's, but the customs and beliefs of the people have survived hand in hand with Christianity. Now the culture, developed over at least 7000 years; the strange plants, animals and insects of the lush tropical jungle and sequestered waters, have attracted not only anthropologists and other scientists, but exploiters as well (...) In the protection (...) of universally important sites [like Marovo] (...) the task includes introducing local landowners to the value of conservation and sustainable management, at the same time generating, a steady income. (Evans 1995: 42)

The wide variety of environments (...) have created a region of great ecological diversity in the Marovo Lagoon and its forested catchments (...) These features, particularly the presence of the world's finest example of a double barrier-island enclosed lagoon, give the Marovo Lagoon and

environs exceptional ecological diversity and conservation values of outstanding international importance. (Lees 1991: 95)

A 'protected forest system' for Solomon Islands is in turn recommended. Funding, it is suggested, should come principally in the form of development aid programmes designed to benefit Solomon Islanders living in areas adjacent to protected forests to compensate them for being denied access to forest resources. A suggested benefit package to be offered to villagers being deprived of their forest reads like a miscellaneous shopping list that ranges from the mundane to the bizarre (Lees 1991; Evans 1995; Greenaway 1995): (a) Village improvements such as better schools, health clinics, roads and bridges, piped water, and 'other needs identified by villagers'; (b) Assistance in establishing what are termed 'commercially viable, self-sustaining and environmentally sound village development projects'. The examples given are fishing ventures, crocodile or butterfly ranching, clam farming, furniture making, and bee keeping; (c) Nature tourism, which it is hoped will be attracted by the well-protected environment.

What these 'projects' all have in common (furniture making is a possible exception) is that none of them has any connection at all with forest exploitation. Sustainable use of the forest itself is not recommended—in fact it is not even mentioned except in the so-called exclusion zones. According to this vision of Utopia, the forest ecosystem is too fragile (or perhaps too sacred) for it to be used for timber, or hunting and gathering, or even agroforestry. In the model proposed by Lees (1991: 3) cultivation is restricted to the 'Exclusion Zone' (the zone from which conservation is excluded), which forms a buffer between coastal villages and protected forest.

In this light is it interesting that the first response from a Marovo village community invited by the WWF to join such a forest-saving programme was a request to supply the village with a set of chainsaws, complete with fuel, oil and spare parts, so that trees could be cut down in a more efficient manner. This would greatly save time in everyday village work. To this the WWF replied that their organization could not and would not, ever, fund the purchase and use of chainsaws for tree felling. The invited community retorted, through the regional administrative channel of the Marovo Area Council, that the WWF might just as well get lost altogether from the area. 'Community conservation projects' were duly modified to accommodate the use of chainsaws for certain purposes deemed 'sustainable'. A continuous process of mutual accommodation goes on: in which the WWF (and lately also Greenpeace, the New Zealand Agency for Overseas Development, and quite a few other agencies aiming at conserving the nature of Marovo Lagoon while also maintaining good relationships with the people of the area) design and redesign their project portfolio according to villagers' suggestions voiced at a great number of workshops. In a particularly memorable week of July 1996, the same set of Marovo villages were visited in turn by teams from the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Solomon Islands Development Trust, and the UNESCO World Heritage Ecotourism Programme—a breathtaking succession of futures offered. The NGOs and other agencies are perceived by shrewd village spokespersons as being dependent on deals with people like themselves. As these spokesmen comment, without well-running projects there will be no year-to-year funding of the Solomon Islands activities of these organizations, and no more jobs for consultants. Villagers for their part put

up with the presence of the conservationists, since they provide outboard motors (and the odd chainsaw), fund and build village-owned resorts for ecotourists, and so forth. These are truly modern-style collaborative programmes in which there is mutual understanding only about the barest minimum of criteria and procedures. But the money flows. And the entanglements described are not unique to the South Pacific.

POST-COLONIAL COLONIZATION: 'ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE' ON THE FRONTIER

Let me now for comparative purposes discuss a case of postcolonial colonization in the Caribbean, focusing on the island often called Hispaniola—a place of some fame in the history of anticolonial rebellion. It was here, in Haiti, that the first successful large-scale uprising of African slaves took place in 1791 under the leadership of the legendary Toussaint L'Ouverture. Today the Francophone and Hispanic colonial pasts of Hispaniola is embodied in the existence of two nation-states which divide the island in two—Haiti, to the west, and the Dominican Republic, to the east. Whereas Haiti maintains a notorious reputation for voodoo, sorcery, violence, perennial unrest, environmental catastrophe and whatever else appears to be part of the dark legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean and elsewhere, the Dominican Republic has a more modest image in the eyes of the West, and has lately even become an exotic tourist destination of some significance for Germans and other Europeans, and North Americans. The Dominican Republic is also something of a hotspot for the types of Western alternativist movements I have been discussing.

The following account of further 'uncertain encounters' in this corner of the Caribbean

builds on fascinating field material from, and analytical accounts yet to be published by, anthropologist Marit Brendbekken at the University of Bergen (Brendbekken 2002; 2008). I refer to this work for further detail.⁶ Up in the Cordillera Central, the island's mountainous spine, the difference between the two nations is starkly visible in places where the denuded, eroded, barren mountains of Haiti border the largely forest-covered and seemingly pristine Dominican lands. Among marginal swidden farmers in these parts, an uneasy coalition of environmentalists of various shadings from Europe and the USA partly supported by Scandinavian Rudolf Steiner enthusiasts has for a number of years been developing various village-level projects dedicated to what they term 'ecological horticulture' and to biodynamic farming influenced by Steiner's anthroposophic doctrines. This postcolonial blossoming of NGO activity has rapidly led to astonishing encounters between agents of Western movements and the villagers of target 'communities'.

Early on, a 'horticultural school' was established among the swidden farmers of one village in the Cordillera Central under the leadership of an American former Peace Corps volunteer with anthroposophical leanings and a past record of development-type work in the Republic. The approach of this founder, which may initially be labelled 'spatial colonization' (Brendbekken 2008), surprised the locals. Villagers involved in the early stage of these projects report how the American insisted that compost heaps were to be shaped in a perfect rectangular fashion; and that all trees and other plants were to be placed in exactly pinpointed locations dictated by the thoroughly linear perimeters of all garden plots. As villagers attending school put it, the American made them use a ruler for determining any spatial dimension, however small and insignificant, of

their model agricultural plots. Moreover, not only were all acts and decisions concerning agriculture now determined by spatial measurement down to fractions of an inch—they were also geared to exact timekeeping.

None of this had happened before in the Cordillera Central. Swidden agriculture is in its very essence vaguely defined in that burnt, cultivated, fallow and regrown plots ideally overlap in space and time. To Dominican villagers born and raised as swidden cultivators, the efforts of the American school director thus represented a highly exotic repertoire of criteria for good agriculture—we may see his strategy as one of total colonization of experienced space-time among school students. Indeed space-time becomes measured rather than experienced (Brendbekken 2008). This becomes all the more exotic in the eyes of his own Western alternativist doctrines. Here, in the West, ideological proponents of biodynamic, anthroposophical and broader 'ecological' doctrines like to highlight themselves as advocates for the non-linear, delicate, subtly creative and borderless. Yet when exposed to the extraordinary, perennial flux of people, events, things and ideas in the humid tropics of the Cordillera Central their approach appears to need a range of disciplining techniques. Hence the ruler and the timepiece.

Not that this is in any way new to Dominicans. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, encounters have always, in a sense, been intercultural and uncertain at that—as we know, this is a region that was violently globalized centuries before globalization became a fashionable analytical construct for cultural studies. Being thus prepared, so to speak, for handling new unexpected encounters, it would seem only natural for quite a few Dominican mountain villagers to participate eagerly in the 'ecologically horticultural' and biodynamic

projects and to attend the associated schools. After all the projects, like so many NGO village-level activities, provided these powerless people with new channels for acquiring economic and less tangible resources, such as information networks and ways of gaining a voice on the national arena (Brendbekken 2008). Thus such strange partnerships are able to survive, and the presence of biodynamic agriculture in the Cordillera Central has been further sustained by an increasing number of Dominican mountain villagers now working for the biodynamic and anthroposophical NGOs. But predictably, unease quickly developed in relation to the agricultural school's colonization of space-time. Without much fuss, it appears, some of the involved villagers became Western-alternativist model agriculturalists from 9 to 4, while from late afternoon into the evening they remained modern Dominican swidden cultivators who cut down trees, establish rambling and seemingly disorganized assemblages of plants and sometimes even use lethal Western pesticides to further their 'local' cause. Disparate agendas on different fields (this time of a highly concrete nature).

WHOSE POSTCOLONIAL COMPLEXITY?

Let us finally pause to ask ourselves: who are the exotic ones? Whose complexity is it that we see when we turn our analytical attention to postcolonial processes of globalization and of articulation between the local and the global? Contrary to messages about an overwhelming global complexity, it appears that villagers in Solomon Islands and the Dominican Republic strive to maintain a certain simplicity in their ongoing everyday life, from a basic concern to maintain and sustain diverse conditions for localized life, with subsistence affluence as

the foundation (at least for the Solomons). To accomplish this they have to devise strategies for coping with a steadily diversifying influx of Westerners who do things that Westerners never used to do in the old colonial days. In a sense, the cultural border scenes offered today are reminiscent of the old days when Europeans had just started to come and had not begun to think seriously (not in the Solomons at least) about well-organized colonialism.

In our time, many ideas and practices that used to be alternativist and progressive have become mainstream in much of the West, partly through inclusion as basic parameters of the welfare state. We may quote feminism, de-centralized decision-making and nature conservation as prominent examples. Moreover these fields and their associated rhetorics are deployed habitually in non-western places by a wide range of NGOs and by the state agencies of development aid. For non-western peoples, such as the Solomon Islanders I know, Westerners and their agendas through this process become so diverse that 'the West', the ways of 'Europeans', and other block categories founded in the certainties of colonial times dissolve as a well-defined counterpart. In the vagaries of the so-called postcolonial there is no clear West. Nor does this dissolved West relate in any streamlined fashion to a Rest that becomes less visible as it is viewed by so many disparate lenses.

In the name of further complexity, let me propose that in many ways what used to be—and still is—alternativist in the West is now becoming axiomatically Western in many Other places, where virtually all Westerners regularly visiting are alternativists of one conviction or another. Furthermore, many Western environmentalists are neo-pagan; totally at odds with the thoroughly Christian outlook of former colonies (see Scheep 1997 for an exception; the

Dutch-funded Methodist church ‘ecotimber’ project in New Georgia). Consider, for example, that Solomon Islands has been known for self-presentation as ‘the most Christian country in the world’! The new Europeans must also be rather surprising in other ways, compared to the good old colonialists. Today’s Solomon Islands world is different from colonial times also in ways beyond the diversified nature of Westerners. Some white people are extraordinarily adventurous; they insist on eating with and sleeping in the houses of villagers. The old colonial style air of superiority and explicit arrogance is today largely the prerogative and monopoly of Asian supercapitalist agents. Truly, white people have become multivocal (often saying bad things about each other to the locals) and come in all shapes and convictions. But today, white men cannot give orders. They may even be thrown out from the village, and deported from the country.

When Westerners are uncomfortable—when they don’t find Paradise—this may well be partly owing to ‘cultural resistance’ on the part of the inhabitants of Paradise. In this perspective, cultural resistance should be manifest in social process, in multiple events involving immediately practical issues but also less tangible agendas of resisting perceptible dominant forces. Resistance is about refusing to be controlled. That ‘resistance’ may simply be a refusal to provide special social and cultural compartments for Europeans to dwell and move in—as with the kayakists who ended up being frightened to fish and land anywhere, since they suspected that somebody was bound to come rushing upon them and ask for payment or throw them out. In this sense the people of Marovo Lagoon seem to be back, in terms of wielding control over the situation at hand, to the days when Chief Lobi nimbly took over control over Captain Cheyne’s ship without

ever actually doing so. Alternatively, Western discomfort may simply arise from a disjuncture between the expected and the experienced. Herein lies a critical analytical focus.

I argue for the need to take long and close looks at real encounters, between real people of different cultural backgrounds and differently positioned in various global systems. Encounters, however uncertain in this time and day, are arenas for making the unpredictable predictable, and for seeking mutual interpretations of what the others are all about. Transcultural encounters—in time and space—need not imply that conditions of hybridity, in a postcolonialist analytical sense, evolve. These encounters may as much have to do with each part claiming legitimacy for own procedures, from a premise that there is indeed a potentiality for convergences of understanding.

NOTES

- 1 This paper was originally read as a keynote lecture at the multidisciplinary seminar *Postcolonialism and Cultural Resistance*, held at the University of Joensuu, Finland, 15.–16. May, 1998. I thank the organizers of the seminar, and Jari Kupiainen in particular, for inviting me to Joensuu and for promoting so many inspiring uncertain encounters across disciplines during two days of never-ending interaction among seminar participants.

The article was originally published in 1998 in *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 23 (3): 30–51.

- 2 In the introductory chapter to his classic monograph *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) provides a famous treatise on the ‘Subject, Method and Scope’ of his study which in effect defines the baseline for modern anthropological fieldwork as a research method based above all on participant observation among people going about their everyday activities. His well-known reference to the significance of ‘imponderabilia’ concerns

(...) a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing instruments, but have to be observed in their full actuality. Let us call them the imponderabilia of actual life. Here belong such things as the routine of a man's working day, the details of his care of the body, of the manner of taking food and preparing it; the tone of conversational and social life around the village fires, the existence of strong friendships or hostilities, and of passing sympathies between people; the subtle yet unmistakable manner in which personal vanities and ambitions are reflected in the behaviour of the individual and in the emotional reactions of those who surround him. (Malinowski 1922: 18–19.)

See, for example Geertz (1983; 1988) for critical assessments of some basic Malinowskian tenets of anthropological practice. Criticisms of many of those tenets aside, Malinowski's attention to 'imponderabilia' remain a valuable point of orientation for fieldworkers pursuing more exotic, grander cultural-symbolist themes.

- 3 The 'cultural trips' are described on <http://www.internetnorth.com.au/uepi/cult.html>. <no longer available>
The 'Uepi' (an Australian corruption of the vernacular name 'Uipi') resort is located on an alienated barrier reef island (i.e. purchased from customary owners during colonial times) at the seawards fringe of central Marovo Lagoon. The operation, although led from Australia, involves much interaction with local people and is dependent on continued agreements about the use of prime diving sites locally owned under customary law and on a running supply of fresh produce from villages. The 'cultural trips' have in large measure been designed collaboratively on the basis of what different village communities around the lagoon feel they have to offer in terms of tourists' wishes, and as such are part of an evolving though largely implicit dialogue.
- 4 The story 'Far From Paradise: Song of the Solomons' was left in 1995 by Chris Ladner, the owner of Ecomarine Ocean Kayak Centre on Granville Island in Vancouver, BU on the site of the Internet Wave-Length Paddling Magazine

and figures in the Magazine's December 1995–January 1996 issue.

<http://www.wavelengthmagazine.com./dec95solomon.html>. <no longer available>

This is a Canadian site (The Wave-Length Paddling Network) that caters to serious paddlers, and one might expect that the non-Paradisical tale of the Solomons has reached a rather wide segment of the relevant audience. In this light it was very interesting to note that the same issue of the *Wave-Length Paddling Magazine* also contains a brief review of a Canadian video entitled *The Way the World Should Be* and dealing with similar paddling enterprises in the Yasawa islands of Fiji. But the Yasawas, we are told, 'are a tropical paradise with isolated white sand beaches, graceful palms, sea cliffs, superb reefs, and traditional Fijian villages and a fun-loving people who not only open up their homes to you but their lives and culture as well.' Furthermore, '[u]nlike other groups to the west, Fiji supports no crocodiles, malaria or leeches', and (quoting a much-used traveller's handbook of the South Pacific) 'In Fiji the smiles are always genuine and hospitality comes from the heart'. Truly, the South Pacific appears to harbour disparate playgrounds, and versions of Paradise, for Euro-American kayak paddling adventurer

- 5 The book from which the following sections have been adopted is a joint work involving field research by both authors. I gratefully acknowledge the shared role of my colleague and co-author Tim Bayliss-Smith in identifying, documenting and analyzing the complexities of forest-related issues and events in the Marovo Lagoon.
- 6 I am grateful to Marit Brendbekken for discussions on these particular issues, and for teaching me much about Caribbean life-worlds more generally. My brief and simplified account of 'uncertain encounters' in the Cordillera Central does not adequately represent Brendbekken's complex and far-reaching analysis of Dominican resistance. Any factual mistake or error of interpretation in my brief account therefore remains my sole responsibility. Her work has since been published (Brendbekken 2002; 2008).

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