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The representation of human differences and separations has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. With ever-expanding incriminations producing global antagonisms, it has become increasingly urgent to understand the processes through which certain peoples are designated as inherently distanced from subjective selves. While both Western and non-Western critics have directed attention to creations of the “other” within the European historical imagination, current images of anti-American sentiment emerging from the Middle East and elsewhere are impressing on many the realization that essentializing, motivating perceptions of alterity are by no means the West’s exclusive preserve. As a mode of cultural invention, the representation of human separations requires ongoing critical consideration.

Since E. W. Said’s (1978) provocative Orientalism, the nature of Western delineations of otherness has been the subject of numerous disquisitions within and across literary, anthropological, and philosophical disciplines. Much effort has been expended in uncovering descriptions of alterity in European historical texts, from the Age of Exploration to the Age of Empire and into the present. Interest has focused particularly on the colonial stage, where political and economic power had the potential to support representations with imposed or introduced practices, and where former hegemonic effects are suspected of having lingered in the postcolonial era. In part because past distinctions appear to reverberate within contemporary discourses, there remains the need to analyze the process through which such imagery was created, sustained, or altered.

While much has been learned about the complex relations, practices, and representations encompassed in the term “colonial discourse,” the collage-like proliferation of inscribed and visual images of non-Western peo-
ples attributed to colonial hegemony has led to repeated calls for closer attention to specific colonial agencies working within delimited spatial and temporal frameworks. John Comaroff (1989, 681) concluded from his analysis of differences among nineteenth-century colonizers of South Africa, “colonialism simply does not have a single, transhistorical ‘essence,’” neither political nor material, social nor cultural. Rather, its form and substance are decided in the context of its making. The consensus is that critics have not yet exhausted such contexts in terms of understanding the dynamics of colonial discourse and its connection to intercultural relations and political power.

Tacking against broader perspectives, this study narrows its consideration of substantive data in the hope of expanding analytic insight into the processes through which human disjunctions are represented. In regard to perimeters of space and time, I focus on a region within the present nation-state of Papua New Guinea—New Ireland and its surrounding small islands—during the years 1875–1935. The major texts are by English-speaking missionaries and anthropologists (from Britain, Australia, the United States), with supplementary observations from others sharing the same colonial arena. A missionary-ethnographer’s representations from the latter part of the nineteenth century initiate this analysis, which ultimately closes with writings from mission and anthropology specialists after the first quarter of the twentieth century.

In concentrating the scope of my critique, I have found not just an assortment of individual variations on a theme but a deluge of words in which seemingly dominant images gradually unravel to become reassembled in reactive, alternate representations. The intention of this inquiry is not to unearth ever more hegemonic subtleties in expressions of cultural otherness, but rather to gain insight into the processes through which discursive images are extended or reinvented.

**Encounters with the Other**

The writers of the examined texts described encounters with islanders, with their meetings and interactions varying presented as inter-cultural, -racial, -spatial, -temporal. Each author positioned a self crossing an assumed border to establish contact with people perceived in some essential way as different from an implicitly defined self.

In their multiple complexities, intercultural encounters may be imagined from the hypothetical perspective of a “transcendental subject” able to register the simultaneous apprehensions that accompany such meetings...
and to whom varied concurrent spatial, temporal, and agentive perspectives are transparent. Granted that the actual participants possess only partial (subjective) viewpoints, transcendent knowledge would incorporate multiple perceptions, active and reactive recognitions entailing appropriations of space, time, and agency from different positions. The transcendental subject would be able to perceive that situated encounters exceed the particular exchanges of participants “on the ground” as communications through rumor, narrative, and drama precede, extend, and alter perspectives. While keeping in mind this impossible super-vision, the outside critic examines discourses delivered from partial participations.

Intercultural encounters have been discussed in terms of relations between cultures or between persons with varying aspects of culture in mind. Relevant to both is Sahlins’ exposition on the “structure of the conjuncture” as “the practical realization of the cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested action of the historic agents, including the microsociology of their interaction” (1985, xiv). While cultural understandings frame expectations and chosen responses, on both sides of these encounters perceptions are altered both subsequent to and in the course of interactions, leading to further changes in apprehension and action.

It has become generally accepted that in representations of otherness, the “self” is as much defined as the “other.” Many have suggested the reflexive nature of such Western images, the way in which the other mirrors the (collective) self’s shortcomings or preoccupations. DeGroot (1989, 92) writes that there was not just a notion of difference in nineteenth-century oppositions between self/other and civilized/savage, but a “sense of symbiotic connections joining opposed pairs.” McGrane (1989, ix) describes a process of cultural self-knowledge: “A culture which ‘discovers’ that which is alien to itself also thereby fundamentally reveals that which it is to itself.”

Yet “cultures” do not clash or meet as wholes but, as Sahlins writes, as “cultural categories” through the “interested action” of particular agents. Reflections of selective interests are embedded in how encounters are represented in colonial discourse. In regard to Western perceptions of alterity, Fabian (1999) considers the concept of “recognition” via its connotations (from German glosses) of cognition, memory, and acknowledgment. He argues “for focusing on the re-in recognition,” as he asks “What . . . is the role of remembrance in the production of knowledge about other cultures and societies?” (Fabian 1999, 50). In the case of Europeans exploring central Africa between 1875 and 1910, he explores how selective memories were instrumental in their descriptions of the other. What did the Europeans
recognize, identify, and acknowledge in Africa and its people as place and person? As Fabian indicates, by extending recognition to include senses of memory and acknowledgment, the politically selective nature of these perceptions is underlined or “acknowledged.” The self, sometimes unknowingly, chooses certain features of Western life through which to comprehend the other. Choices made in perception and practice become part of local circumstances, which then elicit further responses in particular kinds of recognition.

In searching for the writer’s sources for objectifying the other, we must ask whose self and what cultural aspects are brought into play? Within European colonialism, intercultural encounters involved not only the “speaking” self and the (multiple) other, but also the presence or absence of diversely situated Western agents with divided, contested, or mutual interests in the colonized land and people. Nor were colonial institutions internally homogeneous with respect to the attitudes of their respective personnel. Selves and others are potentially complex, refracted counterparts of one another as “tensions of empire” occur within as well as between colonial agencies.

**Intellectual Currents**

Some of the representations in the examined texts can be traced to well-known Western intellectual currents, as well as being influenced by historical forces affecting the New Britain–New Ireland region. The relevant time period, the 1870s to 1930s, begins in Britain’s Victorian age before moving through a series of sociopolitical changes that impacted the western Pacific, including Germany’s imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century and its subsequent exit with World War I, the substitution of Australian colonialism in the Bismarck Archipelago, and later reverberations from worldwide economic upheavals and social disjunctions.

The late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries witnessed, not only tumultuous alterations in European imperial designs, but also changing Western intellectual interests that were variously articulated in distant colonies of the Pacific and elsewhere. The first and last ethnographic discourses that I examine (bracketing a sequence of other texts), reflect shifting intellectual concerns within Great Britain. Initiating the series are writings by the Wesleyan Methodist missionary-ethnographer George Brown, an Englishman whose ethnographic texts replay concepts emanating from Victorian social evolutionism.

In the West, the nineteenth century was a period witnessing multiple technological inventions that, together with corresponding social and ide-
ological changes, supported European economic-political expansion and colonization of peoples perceived as being culturally underdeveloped. Ideas of social evolution combined with moral support for Western-modeled notions of “progress” and “improvement.”

After the Enlightenment, new alignments of time and space became prominent in Western thought. Fabian (1983, 26) discusses the change from medieval Christian conceptualizations of time in narratives of salvation to the Enlightenment’s “secularization of Time as natural history.” Such models entailed different interactive Western approaches toward non-Western peoples, from the medieval center’s interest in incorporating non-Christian (peripheral) peoples through Christian conversion, to the post-Enlightenment secularization of time with its emphasis on exclusive, hierarchical separations imposed through the expansion of European civilization.12

While George Brown, a self-educated man, read and wrote extensively on natural history, linguistics, and anthropology, the late Victorian era in which such subjects were addressed in lectures, publications, and collections by “untrained” intellectuals was coming to an end by the close of the nineteenth century. The next century’s early years also saw the waning of social evolutionary thought along with a decline in Victorian positivism, with its belief in European social and moral progress. World War I and subsequent worldwide economic downturns placed in doubt earlier optimism about Western civilization’s inherent moral superiority.

Such developments, along with the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline in Britain, ultimately yielded a new intellectual current that became known as the functional school of anthropology, initially associated particularly with Bronislaw Malinowski.13 Rather than focusing on the alignment of cultures along a single evolutionary path, this approach advocated examining the internal workings of discrete, usually “primitive” societies. Instead of descriptions of random “survivals” from earlier stages or of customs exemplifying anticipated developmental sequences, cultural forms or social institutions were analyzed for how they met the needs of psychobiological individuals and/or integrated society.

Two of the last writings I consider in this book were produced by Hortense Powdermaker and William C. Groves, both anthropologists whose research in New Ireland was conducted between 1929 and 1935. In the years between Brown (a missionary-ethnographer) and the two anthropologists, the relationship between missionary and ethnographer had been redefined. On the one hand, the former more often constituted anthropology’s “other-other” as someone perceived to be almost innately separated from
the social science academy. Yet, as anthropology disentangled itself from missionary endeavors, often ignoring the external presence of evangelists in functional (and later) studies, many missions (along with colonial administrative agencies) began requiring courses in anthropology as part of their training for new practitioners (Barker 1996b, 110–111). In the final missionary discourse I consider, by Gilbert Platten, a new coordination appears in a missionary text that draws from a variety of anthropological-psychological writings.

Broadly speaking, Western colonial discourse derives from both the (diversely) tutored and the untutored. While concepts emitted from academic centers may be discerned within certain texts, composing discursive colonial climates are also an array of representations that fell outside prevailing metropolitan currents. The texts examined here cannot be explicated simply by reference to the two major schools of thought—evolutionist and functionalist. I have found it useful to pursue the multiple images in these discourses in broader terms, by examining the spatial and agentive distinctions emerging from delineations of self and other. Aspects of such representations intertwine with shifting relations between Western conceptualizations relevant to “nature” and “culture,” a major theme in European thought from at least the eighteenth century to the present. Writing from an ahistorical perspective, Marilyn Strathern offers an apt metaphor for envisioning shifting connections between the two conceptualizations.

Culture is both the creative subject and the finished object; nature both resource and limitation, amenable to alteration and operating under laws of its own. It is rather like a prism that yields different patterns as it is turned—through it at times either nature or culture may be seen as the encapsulated or encapsulating element. (1980, 178–179)

Nature and culture, space and time, and agency in terms of mind/body are variously presented in these discourses on New Ireland. In some cases, nature and culture appear in modes anticipated for the times, while in other discourses the prism turns to catch divergent lights, producing novel or changing delineations. It is not unexpected that George Brown in his social evolutionist persona depicted a unifying natural world (complementing mankind’s psychic unity) as he directed his scientific attention to describing the flora, fauna, geologic formations, languages, and cultures of the islands. He represented the less evolved cultures of New Britain–New Ireland as being in closer alignment with the natural world (in a negative sense) compared to the European ascendant mastery of nature—a line of
thinking not uncommon among social evolutionists such as Herbert Spencer, who evinced that, as societies advanced, the influence of the physical environment decreased (Burrow 1966, 202).

Yet Brown’s representations involving separations and relations between nature and culture were ambiguous, alternately adjusting to his different “scientific” or evangelistic voices. The other’s “primitive” culture was both situated within nature and yet also easily discarded when the islanders were presented through images as embodied “natural” others or as facile minds moving toward the Western, Christian self.

In subsequent missionary and anthropological texts from the first decades of the twentieth century, nature and culture were variously redefined, turning on one another in the service of diverse purposes. “Cultural” otherness gradually receded on an increasingly colonized island; in one missionary’s discourse, a “British” landscape emerged, while islander culture was diminished or subsumed within a refracted colonized sociality. In the three final perspectives, the missionary (Platten) envisioned an exclusionary nature (as the determining tropics), while the anthropologist (Groves) used time (past, present, future) as a definitive marker of islander culture. Yet another anthropologist (Powdermaker) drew on nature both as an encompassed tropical background for the bounded islander society and, equally incorporated, as “human nature” within the autonomous individual.

Nature and culture in these discourses intersected with broader notions of space and time. As Merleau-Ponty (1962, 112) has described, recurring actions structure the meanings we give to lived space, while Casey later writes: “lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them” (1996, 23). Space (or, for Casey, “place”) is meaningful through being “lived”; as Nancy Munn writes, “sociocultural practices do not simply go on in or through time and space, but [they also] . . . constitute (create) the spacetime . . . in which they ‘go on’” (1986, 10–11; 1983, 280). And, too, as H. Moore (1986, 191) observes, space is the product of people’s “cultural codes and meanings.”

The writers of the discourses in this book perceived themselves as bodies out of place in the western Pacific islands, while they also created new spaces according to diverse intentions and practical exigencies. Noyes (1992, 22), with extensive references to Fabian (1983), writes of the creation and uses of spatial perceptions in colonial representations of southwest Africa between 1884 and 1915, wherein, “meaning produced spaces while developing strategies for the elision of the spatializing process.” Noyes introduces the useful term “nodal points” to refer to colonially established centers around which relations with the other occur and from which surround-
ing space “may be qualitatively transformed,” “and which link different qualities of space to one another” (1992, 128).

Space is also time, as is evident in a long-standing Western equation of spatial distance with the passage of time. Suiting the comparative purposes of the social evolutionists, people situated at a distance from “the center” (Europe) represented an earlier period in human cultural development. This association has reverberated generally in anthropological research and writing, as noted in what Fabian (1983, 31) calls the “denial of co-evalness” between Western writers and their non-Western subjects. In the discourses on New Ireland, the writers depicted themselves not only as out of place, but also as situated within different modes of time. Within these distant localities, some of them created new spaces and spatializing practices while also introducing novel temporal observances.

Related to the varied perceptions summoned or developed in the writers’ intercultural encounters were also concepts of human racial distinctions. While the early evolutionists (Tylor, Spenser, Frazer, Morgan) occasionally entertained notions about racial differences in intelligence, these were not generally integral to their distillations of cultural hierarchies (Carneiro 2003, 46–47). Certainly, however, racist discriminations were significant in nineteenth-century Western colonialism (Smith 1985; Thomas 1994, 77). A developing classification of dark-skinned peoples in various postures of agentive inferiority to light-skinned Europeans became part of the Western ideologies that supported imperialistic aims in various regions of the world. For some, mind and culture were linked as inherited racial characteristics, enabling the “superior” (white) race to be “naturally” ahead in evolutionary terms (Jahoda 1992, 82). Stepan (1982) points to the early development of enslavement of dark-skinned peoples as the defining encounter for Europeans in their subsequent hegemonic establishment of white over black; other critics envision a more gradual development of racist notions.

In the texts on New Ireland, “race” served as a malleable, ambiguous concept that encompassed assorted human distinctions. “Race” was used broadly in some discourses to refer to island cultures or communities, or to European or islander national identities. In certain more racially discriminating discourses, generic “blackness” was linked to typifying islander behaviors and thought patterns (e.g., Thomas 1997, 133–155).

Apart from the occasional use of racial distinctions, the texts more commonly visualized physical otherness through images of islander bodies, not directly linked to race, but in states of health, strength, stature, and gender. As observed in other areas, altered intentions and requirements of Euro-
pean colonialists resulted in modified depictions of their colonized subjects. Herman (1999) describes how, after the early nineteenth century, Western representations of Hawaiian physical-mental states shifted in support of changing American interests and requirements for the islands and people. Bullard (1998) also describes differing perceptions of the people of New Caledonia, which moved from physically robust to strong savages to weakened, racially inferior, disappearing populations.

By the end of the nineteenth century, New Ireland discourses were linking earlier described more peaceful robust (male) islander bodies to warfare and savagery. With the subsequent expansion of colonial control, these bodies retained their envisioned physical strength but had become recalcitrant colonial workers, more often portrayed as lazy or indolent. Finally, in some discourses from the late 1920s to mid-1930s, the islanders were recast as weak bodies—not as inferior races but as the victims of colonial practices. Juxtaposed to earlier Western writings, the New Irelanders had assumed aspects of the weakened physical states experienced by out-of-place Europeans.

Not only economic self-interest could be implicated in producing particular images of the other, but also the physical condition of the European writer. In a recent study of the texts of European explorers in central Africa, Fabian (2000, 8–9) suggests the importance of considering, not just controlled, rational responses to encountered others, but also the effects on such discourses of alcohol, illness, friendships, and so on. Lamb (2001) also explores relations between writers’ perceptions and physical states in his analysis of the effects of scurvy on European navigators’ representations of the Pacific islands and their inhabitants. New Ireland discourses, however, suggest that a writer’s experienced physical state entered only selectively into expressed images of self and other. The filter of Western cultural understandings, along with the writer’s agentive intentions and participation in intercultural “improvised socialities,” helped to determine how experiential states were reworked within discourses on the other.

**Improvised Socialities**

A number of terms have been suggested to frame cross-cultural encounters, notably Pratt’s (1992, 6–7) “contact zone” to refer to colonial relations between “people geographically and historically separated.” However, the contact zone is premised on interactions “usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6–7), none of which describe the more diffuse, less coercive accommodations that characterized
many of the situations examined in this study. As defined, the contact zone anticipates colonial power and potential resistance while ignoring the more ambiguous, subtle, and shifting relations that were also part of many colonialisms.

I prefer the term “improvised sociality” to describe these intercultural encounters both under conditions of colonialism and generally in meetings between peoples who do not share the perspectives, expectations, and practices of more enduring, established socialities. While a degree of improvisation may be said to characterize most social interactions, in cross-cultural relations the absence of shared cultural understandings and often of a common language magnifies the attendant adjustments and creative responses. The New Ireland texts include descriptions of encounters between writer and islanders in which changes in the expectations of one or both sides occurred through unanticipated actions or reactions of the “other.”

Anthropologists (and others) who have lived for a time among peoples with different cultural understandings will have experienced the improvisational nature of such constantly readjusted social relations. Here, ample examples occur in the writings of the two anthropologists Powdermaker and Groves, as well as in the missionary accounts. The major characteristic of improvised socialities is the process in which two or more “sides” react to one another’s actions, expressions, and stances, producing further reassessments and alterations in the other’s social responses and accompanying perceptions. Among people sharing common cultural understandings, behavioral expectations with their attendant gestures and so on constitute a shared language employed to elicit particular responses. And while the other person may respond in a challenging or innovative way, the message is more or less understood by the communicants. But in cross-cultural encounters, elicitations have the potential to miss their mark and to be responded to in totally unexpected ways. The improvisational nature of intercultural relations involves the requirement to re-cognize and in some cases to reorder, subsequent relations.

This complex state of affairs contributes to the ambiguities and variations said to characterize colonialisms as well as to the contradictions and ambivalences prevalent in colonial discourse. Beyond varying degrees of hierarchical order embedded or enforced within colonial socialities, contingencies emerging from improvisational revisions in social expectations and practices wreak havoc with subjective constancies. Close examinations of colonial texts will often reveal, not just recurring static images of separa-
tion and difference, but suggestions of ambiguity in altered or wavering positions between self and other.

Another source for the ambivalent self occurring in representations of otherness lies within the compositional dynamics of these discourses. As stated earlier, the definition of an other is also about the opposing self. Yet more than a reflection of subjective concerns, as has been suggested, aspects of a concealed or contextually submerged self are discernible in many such discourses. In short, the other is both “not the self” and a denied but known part of the self. Expounded separations blinker the self from its intrinsic participation in abstracting difference. On occasion, however, improvised socialities lead the writer (speaker, actor, etc.) to acknowledge the self embedded in the other, with subsequent responses, sometimes only temporarily, producing accommodating shifts between self and other.

In efforts to represent the complexities of these mixed socialities, the concept of “hybridity” has been applied to the social and cultural complexities that compose colonialism, as well as to innovations occasioned through cultural contacts (e.g., Bhabha 1994, 38). It appears a truism today that people everywhere reinvent themselves culturally in part through connections with “others,” whether this be in the form of ideas, actions, or material productions (e.g., Clifford 1988). Robert Young (1995, 10) has expressed dissatisfaction with the term’s application to social, cultural mixes, given its natural science reference to interspecies crosses, thus evoking conservative Victorian notions that equated human races with species. My own reservation in using “hybridity” to characterize the appearance of cultural borrowing is that the word supports a view of bounded cultures in combination as well as conceptual mixtures, rather than innovative reworking of cultural perceptions and practices according to local agendas.19

Another response to intercultural encounters, beyond their “mixed” characteristics, has been to describe interactions between parties in terms of resistance to dominance.20 In Oceania, the “fatal impact” view of island history has lost favor as more active and lasting indigenous participations are increasingly recognized. Critics have begun to reassess Western interventions by reconsidering the islanders as active subjects now more often recast as forceful players in early meetings and subsequent colonialism instead of being confined within static (“cold”) nonhistoric cultures.

While acknowledging agency on the part of the colonized, however, I suggest that Western critics have sometimes re-created their own images of indigenous responses seen as deliberate actions taken against the outsider’s hegemony. If resistance is defined as actions purposefully opposing the
practices and impingement of European colonialists, it is often difficult if not impossible to discern such intentions, many of which are garnered solely from Western descriptions. More important than ascribing resistance to every action that thwarted or frustrated colonial interests is to examine the varying forms of agency exerted within these improvised socialities, along with islander strategies employed, not only in intercultural encounters, but also in their own sociocultural practices, thus bringing to bear indigenous concepts of persons, agency, and social interactions. In Ortner’s 1995 critique of the overuse or misuse of “resistance,” she includes neglect of adequate ethnographic analysis, the need to consider a range of relevant social tensions among “resisting” people, and lack of attention given to subjectivities involved in alleged oppositions.

Actions designated as forms of “mimesis” are sometimes described as subtle forms of resistance. Taking up Jacques Lacan’s thesis on mimicry, Homi Bhabha writes that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” . . . “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (1994, 86). However, mimicry can convey intimations of menace and threat when the colonial self experiences the other’s returned gaze: “The display of hybridity—its peculiar ‘replication’—terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery” (1994, 115).

The other’s imitations of the self have been the subject of Western commentary and multiple interpretations since early records of European excursions into the distant perimeters of their world (e.g., Taussig 1993). Franz Fanon (1968) described mimesis among the colonized in terms of people attempting to validate themselves by (imperfectly) copying their white masters. Actions through which the defined other attempts to replicate the Western self have also been designated “childlike” behavior or examples of miscomprehension by a lesser intelligence, or even as the product of mental instability, irrationality, or “madness” (e.g., Lattas 1992a, 1992b, 1998).

The Western self is rarely observed consciously copying the other, such actions being incongruent with assumptions of agentive superiority. However, Neil Maclean (1998) points out situations in the New Guinea Highlands where Australian kiap (patrol officer) behavior reflected local practices, straying far from the Western ideals the colonialists were supposed to embody. Unclaimed mimesis in kiap actions was a product of what Maclean (1998, 78) refers to as the “in-between character of colonial society and cul-
ture.” He argues “that colonizers can also be drawn into a mimetic relationship with the societies they sought to control. Mimesis marks both sides of the encounter” (1998, 95).

Mimicry described in the discourses on New Ireland was differently integrated into perceptions of the other according to the self’s varied intentions. Here, too, one finds “mimic men” in the colonially created positions of indirect rule, in mission teachers, in administration-appointed leaders, luluais, tultuls, men who became the objects of varied approbation and criticism (e.g., Bhabha 1994, 85–92). Islander mimetic actions and appearances elicited both positive and negative reactions; generally, the more securely distant the other was cast from the self, the more certain kinds of imitation were applauded. It resonated with the self’s connecting vision, a bridge to the other that approved and appropriated signs of particular forms of mimesis. When lines between self and other began to blur, however, or boundaries were areas of troubling negotiation, suggestions of others’ mimicry became the subject of more discriminating evaluations.

Representations

The vocabulary employed to delineate “otherness” generally draws from a deep pool of circulating, recurring images. Relayed perceptions from intercultural encounters have the potential to expand in the manner of ripple effects subject to winds, land forms, and cross-currents, producing diversion, mergence, and collision. Some representations are short-lived, others travel further through time and space while being altered by impacts from yet other happenings and communicational exigencies.

Ripple effects from intercultural encounters are complex in their convolutions, turnings, and reinventions, although such nuances may not be immediately apparent to Western audiences. Representations of otherness include images presented in photographs, paintings, fiction, cinema, dance, music, and material art as well as in nonfictional texts. Such mediums are addressed to particular audiences of readers, viewers, and listeners who are expected to share with or acquire a basic vocabulary of understanding from the presenter(s), and whose anticipations also partially determine the nature of the transmitted imagery.

As in discourse generally, written texts are situated within particular social domains. Foucault (1972, 49) defines discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.” Not consisting of an individual’s autonomous, isolated meanderings, discourses are spoken or written in terms of shared cultural meanings and tropes, following rules
and conditions (Foucault 1972, 120). While texts constitute a form of discourse, there are differences between speech and writing: the written word, in essence, frees the text from the “present” dialogic nature of speech. Depending on accessibility, written texts may become vehicles for the widespread dissemination of images, although receptions and interpretations may be altered over time.

The texts on New Ireland were produced within historic, sociocultural contexts. They involved “conversations” with unseen readers, in most cases perceived by the writer to be like-minded, supportive, English-speaking Westerners, whether “at home” in England, Australia, or, less commonly, the United States, or sharing the same colonial space. The audience whom these writers had in mind generally constituted a plural self against which the other was delineated. The author’s task, in a sense, was to gather these receiving minds in an implicit coproduction of a self unified and defined against an other—a feat generally accomplished through references to shared mores, practices, landscapes, and sensory experiences. In addition, these discourses relied on popular or specialist opinions concerning the nature of distant, non-Western peoples and places, understandings that were verified, refined, or replaced through the author’s direct experiences. As mediator, the writer reworked contemporary (Western) representations, occasionally challenging readers’ expectations, or sometimes blurring or shifting boundaries between self and other.

Both the published and unpublished texts examined here were only partial communications following norms for particular discursive genres and cannot be claimed to reflect the totality of the author’s thoughts, observations, and practices. Because colonial representations occurred through multiple venues, it is important to explore the variations emerging from differently composed selves and readers. While this study examines texts sequentially according to when the writer was in New Ireland, the materials include multiple genres: published missionary or ethnographic accounts and autobiographies, unpublished correspondence, critical essays, autobiographies, and daily journals. As expected, such diverse textual materials convey varying sorts of representations of Western–islander encounters.

The islanders, the “other” in these Western discourses, also have produced their own representations of intercultural encounters, albeit in the past these have generally not been in written form, but in actions and speech. When contemporary islanders in the Bismarck Archipelago celebrate the 1875 arrival of the missionary George Brown, their expressive images appear to catch certain ripple effects from earlier colonial discourses. In “reenactment” dramas, ancestors have been portrayed in styl-
ized, exaggerated forms as wild cannibals who turn into peaceful Christians after meeting hymn-singing white missionaries. Yet, I suggest, such scenarios are not mere repetitions of earlier European representations of “cannibals” and “missionaries,” but contrasts deployed within the islanders’ own expressive practices. What appear to be intimations of colonial-produced distinctions are usually better described as creative reappropriations.

Following Foucault, Said (1978/1991, 94) has remarked on the power of discourse as part of colonial exercises of hegemonic control. Although I would not question the fundamental political and economic inequalities embedded in colonialism, it cannot be assumed that colonial discourses were always either important or even apparent to those described as “other,” just as colonialism did not directly influence or encompass the totality of a colonized people’s cultural beliefs and practices. While Noyes (1992, 190) writes that vision equals colonization, I suggest that certain areas of islander life were not seen by the colonizers. Nor, as Schwartz (1994, 6–7) points out, were all colonialists in the same hegemonic position toward the colonized. And when considering indirect and more subtle influences, the situation becomes still more complex.

Inventing the Other

In examining Western discourses on the people of New Ireland, one must do more than describe the locus of reiterative or novel representations by exploring how the other was made believable to both writers and readers. To understand the processes through which diverse realities of self and other are communicated, I turn to Roy Wagner’s thesis concerning the cultural creation of meaning, or the meaningful invention of culture, outlined in his *The Invention of Culture* (1975/1981). While Wagner designed his theory broadly to include variant forms of cultural creativity, his ideas will be appropriated here for the analysis of written discourse.

According to Wagner (1981, 37), meaning is created through relationships formed between contexts, defined broadly as “any bunch of symbolic elements that in any sense occur together.” Such contexts “are invented out of each other, and the idea that some of the recognized contexts in a culture are ‘basic’ or ‘primary,’ or represent the ‘innate,’ or that their properties are somehow essentially objective or real, is a cultural illusion” (1981, 41).

In the examined texts are descriptive accounts in which some contexts are presented as innate “reality” while others serve as action toward such realities. Wagner (1981, 45) distinguishes between the “control context,”
which is the focus of the actor’s intentions, what he perceives himself doing, and the “implicit context,” that which receives the effects of such actions.

An additional distinction recognizes contrasting contextual relationships involved in the creation of cultural meaning as “conventional” and “differentiating” modes: “A conventional symbolization objectifies its disparate context by bestowing order and rational integration upon it; a differentiating symbolization specifies and concretizes the conventional world by drawing radical distinctions and delineating its individualities” (Wagner 1981, 44). Yet both modes implicate one another: “It is impossible to objectify, to invent something, without ‘counterinventing’ its opposite” (ibid.).

These differing sorts of creativity may involve either convention as the controlling context, against an implicit context of incidental, particularizing elements, or differentiation as the controlling context, played against an implicit, conventional world. An example of the first are the conventions of Western science that focus on uncovering the order and structure perceived to underlie an objectified, differentiated natural world. The second form of creativity includes the artist’s efforts to reimagine and impinge upon the conventional world, rendering it in insightful, novel forms.

In neither sort of inventiveness are these distinctions recognized, for such “illusions” involve “masking” (Wagner 1981, 45).

The particular control that the actor is using causes him to regard one kind of transformation or objectification as the result of his own intentions, what he is “doing.” He identifies the other kind of objectification, that which transforms the controlling context itself and which we might call “counterinvention,” with the cause or motivation of his intentions. (Ibid.)

The objectification that motivates the actor’s intentions serves as a form of “resistance.” In this study of textual inventions of otherness, diverse and changing forms of resistance characterize otherness. But it is important to keep in mind that this is not a reference to the various forms of imputed political resistance I mentioned earlier. A resisting context, whether imaged in terms of people, climate, geography, and so on, separates the writer’s intentions (his control context) from the (implicit) context he counterinvents. A resisting context is what the writer perceives as a situation or condition that blocks his intentions, stands in the way of his actions, and serves as a motivating (counter-) force that encourages his ongoing efforts. Involved here, too, is “intentionality,” which does not refer to the author’s varied personal motivations but to tensions between contexts. This sort of inten-
tionality or motivation “is a part of the world of convention and illusion in which we participate and act, but not, apart from the necessary illusions of the actor himself, a ‘thing’ or force emanating from the actor” (Wagner 1981, 54).

As Wagner points out, the ongoing invention of cultural meaning does not proceed simply by following one or the other creative mode; the tendency of observing one mode involves a successive “relativization” of contexts. In the Western scientific mode:

> We apply the conventional orders and regularities of our sciences to the phenomenal world (“nature”) in order to rationalize and understand it, and in the process our science becomes more specialized and irrational. Simplifying nature, we take on its complexity, and this complexity appears as an internal resistance to our intention. Invention inevitably confounds the distinctions of convention by relativizing them. (Wagner 1981, 54)

Of interest in this study will be how the writer presents “reality” and its “resistance” to his/her response. Most of the examined texts applied the conventions of Western science, anthropology, or evangelism in describing people and place in New Ireland. However, over the years these representations became increasingly relativized, as Wagner’s thesis would suggest. In some of the later discourses, self and other assumed aspects of one another’s separating characteristics, leading to altered ways of constituting otherness to counter such relativization.

**A Range of Discourses**

Over the course of sixty years (1875–1935), people on New Ireland and its offshore islands encountered a succession of assorted Europeans and Asians variously drawn to the area by economic, religious, intellectual, and idiosyncratic interests (occasional sun worshipers and beachcombers). Historical developments during this period include the arrival and spread of Christian missionaries (the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Mission in 1875 and the Marists of the Sacred Heart Mission in 1882); the increasing presence of European commercial interests in trade, cash crops, and labor recruitment; Germany’s imperial claims (1883–1914), superseded by Australia’s military takeover (1914–1920); and subsequent mandated colonial governments (League of Nations, later the United Nations; 1921–1975).

These turbulent years yielded a vast array of discursive commentaries on intercultural encounters by both islanders and outsiders, expressed in
unrecorded speech, thought, and action. For various purposes, some of the Westerners inscribed their experiences and impressions of place and people. Among such (mostly male) writers were missionaries and anthropologists who sent letters to colleagues “at home” or within the islands, penned daily accounts in journals, wrote autobiographies, and published academic or popular accounts about the islanders.

Neither the written nor the oral discourses yield “objective” histories of New Ireland, if indeed such were possible. Geoffrey White demonstrates how historical accounts varied on Santa Isabel, where diverse retellings of the same event were given in islander oral traditions and missionary text (1991, 168). The writers whose works are analyzed in this study wrote within the parameters of certain discursive conventions and institutional expectations; they made choices, whether deliberate or not, about how to describe local events and interactions, what was significant, what to omit. There were areas of islander lives that were not observed, as well as cultural contexts presented to and by the writer in selective ways.

While a transcendent vision of these encounters is not possible, in the texts we can catch glimpses of past interactions and practices in New Ireland. It is particularly in the “margins” of texts, in details involved with “the contradictions and frustrations of refractory experience” “that the rich textures of past actions emerge most clearly” (Douglas 1989, 8). Additional sources for assessing the events and situations described in the texts are accessible in writings from various colonial agencies, historical records, and ethnographies. From my own fieldwork in central New Ireland at the beginning and end of the 1970s, local stories and comments about events or practices during the early years of the twentieth century have also contributed to my understanding of the written discourses.

The first four chapters consider texts arranged sequentially according to the distinctive periods of late precolonial years and successive European colonial administrations. Focusing on George Brown, whose sojourn in the New Britain–New Ireland region occurred from 1875 to 1881, Chapter 1 is concerned with the late precolonial era amid Germany’s rising economic interests in what was shortly to become Bismarck’s Archipelago. Chapter 2 follows multiple textual genres from George Pearson and D. Thomas Reddin, two of the first Wesleyan missionaries to reside on New Ireland during the height of the German administration (1901–1910). By Chapter 3, the Australians have assumed control of the archipelago; textual analysis centers on the lengthy journals (1919–1921) of another Wesleyan missionary, Ira Mann, living in central New Ireland. Finally, in Chapter 4, the missionary-
ethnographer strands are reassembled in divergent representations from two anthropologists, Hortense Powdermaker and William C. Groves, and the Wesleyan missionary Gilbert Platten, each of whom worked in different areas of New Ireland between 1929 and 1935.

While the examined texts are arranged sequentially according to when the writers were in New Ireland, the changing representations should not be read as a rigid unfolding narrative, although none of the discourses lack additional support from contemporary sources. The different texts emerged from changing and diverse sociocultural circumstances as well as being readjusted toward particular audiences. In two cases, George Pearson’s 1934 church lecture and Hortense Powdermaker’s 1966 reflections on her fieldwork experiences, the texts are dated some years after the writers left New Ireland. Pearson’s lecture (in contrast to his correspondence) displays a particular genre of missionary discourse; Powdermaker’s 1966 description of her 1929 fieldwork, apparently abstracted from her fieldnotes, corresponds to (as well as occasionally diverging from) her 1933 ethnography.

It is not only the published texts that address an audience. The Wesleyan mission encouraged its missionaries to keep journals in order to provide materials for publications intended for a home audience of supporters. One such daily journal, that of Ira Mann, clearly was written with readers in mind, as he occasionally asked and answered “their” questions. In contrast, the journal of the anthropologist W. C. Groves included assorted comments and observations as aids to subsequent analysis, while more complete descriptions of events are found in his fieldnotes. Groves’ journal and fieldnotes are used here as adjunct material to his published texts.

The Wesleyan missionaries arrived with varying amounts of previous mission experience, from those who had spent time elsewhere (Brown, Mann) to those who came new to the field (Reddin, Pearson). They also occupied a range of institutional statuses, from Brown, who ultimately assumed his mission’s highest executive position, to Pearson, a lay worker for many years before achieving full missionary status. All of these men came from lower-middle to middle-class backgrounds and had not progressed far in educational institutions outside the requirements of Methodist missionary instruction. In terms of intellectual endeavors, however, a broader range is indicated—from George Brown, well versed in the scientific and ethnological discourses of his times, to Ira Mann, whose untutored interests were not centered on contemporary academic debates. The two anthropologists had considerably more formal academic training, both having earned doctoral degrees; New Ireland was Powdermaker’s first fieldwork, while
Groves had had previous experience in educational administration in the Bismarck Archipelago. The time spent in New Ireland by the different writers also varied. The shortest period was Powdermaker’s ten-month fieldwork at Lesu; the longest consisted of the intermittent sixteen years spent by Platten in New Ireland and New Britain between 1927 and 1949.34

With the exception of Powdermaker’s, all of the texts considered here were written by men. While some Western women were present in New Ireland as the wives of missionaries, teachers, planters, and administrators—or later as mission Sisters—I have been unable to locate any writings through which to critique their views and practices.35 On both colonialist and islander sides in this study, then, women must be perceived not through their own voices but obliquely from within male discourses.

A change from focusing on particular texts and historic periods occurs in Chapter 5, which examines discursive treatment of material and immaterial transactions between the writers and islanders. An important aspect of these intercultural relations involved exchanges of objects, food, wealth, labor, and knowledge. Such interactions were critical in diverse ways to the lives and practices of the missionaries and mission personnel, situated as out-of-place participants in improvised socialities. For the islanders, exchanges with the Westerners constituted a means of both communication and negotiated self-interest. The focus of this chapter is on changes in transactional relations, particularly between the missionaries and islanders with the creation of new mission exchange contexts that entailed a certain missionary disengagement from local sociopolitical interactions. I also consider the varying interests and practices of the missionaries and anthropologists in the acquisition of “curios” and ethnographic objects.

In Chapter 6, I discuss islander responses to missionary representations during the first sixty years of the Methodist mission’s presence. To what extent did the islanders hear and respond to the Western self’s varied images? In attempting to address this complex question, first I examine data from the margins of the texts as well as from additional contemporary sources. Second, looking into later decades, I recall islander discourses that I heard in the 1970s, together with observations from anthropologists writing about different areas of New Ireland. While later phrases and evaluations sometimes appear to imitate former images, I suggest that few, if any, are mere echoes from earlier colonial discourses. It is difficult to trace simple borrowings in more contemporary images, for although they sometimes appear to repeat ripple effects from the past, upon closer scrutiny they resonate within local evaluations, along with innovative inflections.

Finally, I review some of the major conclusions of this study. The exam-
ined texts expose the dynamic nature of their representations—how self and other were diversely delineated for particular audiences and altered within changing social histories, concepts of nature/culture, space/time, and agency (as mind/body) shift, becoming reassembled in alternate presentations of “otherness.” The perception of “nature” as shared, universal space gradually narrows from a nineteenth-century expansion of space/time out of Western centers to separated, exclusive spatial enclaves. Self and other as cultural beings ultimately demand redivision in order to rescue the oppositions from being engulfed by one another. In the last discourses explored, as insights into mankind’s psychic unity touch upon new concepts emerging from the field of psychology, representations focus on the well-being of the “individual” as defined by an encompassing culture. Differing conclusions are reached as to the state of such relations within New Ireland villages.

Within these texts on New Ireland, the inherent ambivalence of colonial discourse itself surfaces in occasional shifts in self–other relations, in ambiguous digressions from a dislocated self. The writers compensate by making various adjustments when confronted by ill-suited alignments, displaying ambivalence toward imagined separations between self and other when inherent similarities are unmasked. “Tensions of empire,” it seems, occur within single minds as well as within and between colonial agencies.