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Stella/Imagining the Other

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Introduction

EDWARD SAID, in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), maintained that all representations are in some sense misrepresentations:

the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (as I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the “truth,” which is itself a representation. (1978, 272; italics and parentheses in original)

Because representation is culturally located and politically charged, Said necessarily concluded that representation has never been neutral, and that what is represented is not necessarily the “truth.” But how do representations acquire the status of truth? And why are some representations considered true and others false?

Representations are a form of interpretation. Stuart Hall suggested that “interpretations never produce a final moment of absolute truth. Instead, interpretations are always followed by other interpretations, in an endless chain...so any notion of a *final* meaning is always endlessly put off, deferred” (1997b, 42; italics in original). Representation, therefore, offers varying illusions of reality. But while there are competing representations, and each culture has its own representational modes, it is the representations produced by members of politically powerful, dominant groups that become accepted as “true.” When dominant groups control representation, they produce social knowledge, which constitutes the “reality” and identity of those represented. As Mick Gidley contended, “It was in the writing, after all, in the representation itself, that the subject, ‘others’ and their cultures, were not so much even

reconstructed as *constructed*" (1992, 3; italics in original). Representation monopolized by a dominant group is a silencing act for the "others" who are represented because representation is always connected to power and knowledge.

Michel Foucault's theory of power as linked to knowledge has been widely employed in postcolonial debates over representation. Foucault argued that knowledge connected to power not only takes on the authority of "the truth," but indeed has the power to make itself true. Truth is something that cultures *produce*, rather than something that appears in a transcendental way. At their interface, different cultures unconsciously or consciously compete to exclude certain forms of knowledge from consideration as "true." In the end the dominant cultures prevail. What is significant about the concept of representation in Foucault's argument is centrality of power struggles in the production of knowledge, which in turn produces the representations regarded as the truth.

While Papua New Guineans have always had indigenous forms of representation, including cultural expressions and political institutions, these were subsumed, subjugated, and at worst erased at the interface with European representational modes, to be replaced by new images constructed by the dominant group. Therefore how Papua New Guineans have come to be perceived is a direct result of European representation and construction. Helen Tiffin's statement that the "day to day realities of colonized peoples were in large part generated for them by the impact of European discourses" encapsulates the struggle over images and representations and how those who in dominant positions of power have manipulated and controlled the production of representation (1987, 17).

HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By their acts of naming lands they "discovered," Europeans began to assert control over their representation and incorporate them in their own history. As David Spurr noted:

The very process by which one culture subordinates another begins in the act of naming and leaving unnamed, of marking on an unknown territory the lines of division and uniformity, of boundary and continuity....In its broadest sense, it includes the entire system by which one culture comes to interpret, to represent, and finally to dominate another. (1993, 4–5)

The first European to bring Papua New Guinea into European history was Portuguese explorer Jorge de Meneses, who sighted the west coast of the island in 1526 and named it Ilhas dos Papuas, "because they [the inhabitants] be blacke and friseled in their hair" (Antonio Galvano,

quoted in Whittaker and others 1975, 184).¹ In 1545 the Spanish explorer, Inigi de Retez, changed the name to Nueve Guinea, based on its physical resemblance to Guinea in Africa (Waiko 1993, 17); this name first appeared in Mercator's world map of 1569. These European explorers were in search of new lands for colonization and trade. Following the Spanish and Portuguese explorers, French and English ships began to explore the waters of the Pacific, many of them leaving their names behind, attached to particular sites such as Bougainville Island, New Britain, and New Ireland, among others. As I argue in this study, the naming of indigenous places reinscribed the landscape with European history.

Naming the land went hand-in-hand with creating and perpetrating representations of the people. According to John Waiko, the "first detailed charting of the coast appears to have come from the expedition of another Spanish explorer, Luis Vaez de Torres who, in 1606, navigated the first European ship through the maze of reefs in the shallow of Torres Straits" (1993, 17). In a letter to the King of Spain in 1607, Torres described his voyage along the coast of New Guinea in this way:

All this land of New Guinea is peopled with natives, not very white, and naked, except for their private parts, which are covered with a cloth made of the bark of trees, and much painted. They fight with darts, targets, and some stone clubs which are made fine with plumage. Along the coast are many islands and habitations.... There were very large islands and there appeared more to the southward; they were inhabited by black people, very corpulent, and naked.... We caught in all this land twenty persons of different nations, that with them we might be able to give a better account to Your Majesty. They give much information of other peoples, although as yet they do not make themselves well understood.... At the termination of this land we found Mahometans who were clothed with artillery for service, such as falconets and swivel guns and arquebuses. They go conquering the people who are called Papuas, and preach to them the sect of Mahomed. (quoted in Whittaker and others 1975, 191)

This is one of the earliest representations of the indigenous people of the New Guinea. Torres constructed the people as savages in a state of nature. In order to show proof of this to the king, Torres "caught" specimens of these people. While the racial identity of the "Mahometans" is unstated, it is reasonable to assume they were not Spanish, Portuguese, German, or English. Regardless of their race, the fact that their attempts to "convert" the Papuans were made following "conquest," suggests the violent nature of that enterprise.

It was also in 1606 that Torres and Don Diego de Prado y Tovar, sailing west from Peru, landed on Mailu Island. Prado's account reveals

the brutal sort of benevolence practiced by the Spaniards toward the indigenous people: When the natives did not respond to their “signs of peace,” the Europeans decided they were “losing time by treating them with further consideration,” Prado reported; “we knelt down and saying a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria, Cierra Espana [the ancient Spanish war-cry], we gave them a Santiago [an attack with an invocation of St James] and in that skirmish some fell dead and we pressed on, shooting them as they fled.” After the slaughter, the besieged natives—about three hundred of them, mostly women—came down the hill. Prado said, “I was sorry to see so many dead children they were carrying in their arms. I selected fourteen boys and girls of from six to ten years and sent them on board.... All those we carried off were baptized in Manila to the honour and glory of God” (quoted in Whittaker 1968, 189–190; brackets in original).

The indigenous people were slaughtered and their children captured as part of the Europeans’ ruthless endeavor to force them to succumb to colonization. To justify their actions, in their accounts Europeans emphasized the barbarism and savagery of the indigenous people, whom they represented as pagans in need of Christianity’s saving grace. Their objective was to neutralize local resistance by murdering any who put up a fight, and using Christianization to acculturate their offspring to European ways.

Similarly, in 1782, the sole, anonymous survivor of the ship *Northumberland* recorded “in a journal describing his experiences”:

The first that was killed was Mr Sayce our Chief Mate the next was poor Mr Neven our fourth mate a worthy good officer there was. Mr Pett a young lad midshipman a lad about twelve or thirteen years of adge this poor boy after they took him out of the boat they carried him ashore on to the beatch there they keep him untill the savadges had taken us all out of the boat as soon as they got us ashore they cut the poor boy through the middle and threwed his bowels into the air out of braverdo.... I perceived them a broiling the remains of poor Mr Sayce.... The same night they brought me part of the body of Mr Sayce with there uniforms buttons to see whether that I would eat part of it or no. (quoted in Souter 1963, 7; spellings and punctuation as in original)

This incriminating representation of the indigenous people portrays them as callous, savage cannibals, while the murdered Europeans are shown as innocent victims. Certainly the report is gruesome, but it naturally omits any assessment of the motives of the locals, who were undoubtedly responding to perceived or actual aggression by the interlopers. In this respect, point of view is central to the processes and the power of representation.

It would be interesting, for instance, had the reactions of the indigenous people been recorded when they witnessed European groups raising flags at various times and places in Papua New Guinea.² The raising of flags, privately or officially, was a concept foreign to the local people. These first flag raisings served more to warn off other European claimants than to impress the indigenous people, who could not have anticipated the impact of such actions on their lives. As Nhlanhla Maaake argued in a different context, “the flag was a symbolic erasure of the indigenous inhabitants from the landscape of both history and myth” (1996, 146).

Naming and flag raising were but the first of many steps in the process of erasing indigenous identity and replacing it with representations that better served the interests of the colonizers. The discourses of colonialism were produced in such forms as imaginative literature, travel writing, ethnographic description, historiography, administrative documents, statutes of laws, among others. The general motivation to colonize was grounded on the desire for material profits, and other arguments to justify this motive developed subsequently, as we have seen, for example, in constructing the moral and cultural backwardness of the colonized people, and the need to rescue them and impart to them European ways (JanMohamed 1983, 2–4).

Early navigation around the island produced fantastic ideas in the minds of the Europeans, such as the speculation that giants might inhabit the high mountains of the interior. The promotion of these kinds of imaginative fictions coincided with some significant moments of history. For instance, the literary imagining of Papua New Guinea really began with Captain John Moresby’s geographical exploration and survey in 1873; it was also during this year that Edward William Cole published his satirical piece, *Account of a Race of Human Beings with Tails, Discovered by Mr Jones, the Traveller, In the Interior of New Guinea*.

The construction of the Papua New Guinean landscape and geography by explorers and navigators paved the way for the political, cultural, and textual constructions that were to follow. It also provided a symbolic landscape that reflected the ambivalence of European discourse, with Papua New Guinea as either a romantic paradise or a hellish, fatal land. Such portrayals attracted adventurers, scientists, gold prospectors, writers, and other adventurers to the country.

Through the imposition of colonial rule in 1884 by the two imperial powers, Britain and Germany, the political creation of the Papua New Guinean landscape and place was finally established. Britain, on behalf of Australia, annexed the southern part of the island (British New Guinea, subsequently Papua), and Germany the other portion of it (German New Guinea).

James Erskine’s 1884 speech at the proclamation of British New

Guinea as Protectorate, while vowing to protect the indigenous people, betrays a supercilious and paternalistic attitude:

It has become essential for the protection of the lives and properties of the native inhabitants of New Guinea, and for the purpose of preventing the occupation of portions of that country by persons whose proceedings, unsanctioned by any lawful authority, might tend to injustice, strife, and bloodshed, and who, under the pretence of legitimate trade and intercourse, might endanger the liberties and possess themselves of the lands of such native inhabitants, that a British Protectorate should be established over certain portion of such country and the islands adjacent thereto. (quoted in Mayo 1969, 17)

This declaration officially marked the imposition of colonization and all that was associated with it: the hegemony of western epistemology and ontology. In other words, it gave sanction to everything that had marginalized, subordinated, and relegated Papua New Guineans to social and racial inferiority. For Papua New Guineans today, what is memorable and significant about the proclamation was the containment and possession of their landscape, identity, and cultural values. And in actuality, protection was given, not for the local population, but for the European residents against natives and non-British people in general.

The first administrator of British New Guinea was William MacGregor, appointed in 1888. But the administrator most identified with the country's colonial history is Hubert Murray, who served as lieutenant governor for thirty-two years until his death in 1940. Murray's native policy was a combination of protectionism and paternalism. He was quite adamant in his opposition to the creation of a Papuan intelligentsia, once stating that indigenous people were inherently inferior to Europeans (Dickson 1976, 23). A belief in innate white supremacy not only served as the fundamental basis for colonization, but also pervaded and persisted in the emerging Papuan and New Guinean societies.

By far the greatest impact of Christian missionization was in the sphere of education. But initially, because of European views of native limitations, whatever education given to the locals was confined to carpentry, domestic science, and religious instruction. As missionary Charles Abel put it in 1902:

You will have seen for yourselves that the Papuan is an indolent man to begin with. He is very good at a spurt; he is very lively when he is up to mischief; but his casual occupations are sometimes not only trifling, as when he is decorating himself, but often very evil. The teaching of the precepts of Jesus Christ necessitates the abandoning of these. (quoted in P Smith 1987, 47)

Abel's assessment of the natives demonstrates the stereotypical tropes that were to dominate European representations for the next century.

Unlike British New Guinea, German New Guinea began its operations as a company colony. For the first several years, it was operated by a private business firm, the New Guinea Company of Berlin, until 1899 when, after incurring astronomical financial losses, it was returned to the imperial government. German colonial policy clearly stated that the fundamental purpose of imperial power was "to serve the needs of German commercial interests" (Moses 1989, 163). According to Bernhard Dernburg, in a lecture given in Munich on 21 January 1907, German colonization was considered to be for the improvement "of the soil, its resources, the flora and fauna but above all of the inhabitants for the benefit of the economy of the colonising nation which is obliged to give in return its higher culture, its moral concepts and its better methods" (quoted in Moses 1969, 54).

The indigenous people were profoundly impacted by the practice of blackbirding, or the "recruitment" of Papua New Guineans to work in the plantations of Queensland, Fiji, and Sāmoa. Papua New Guineans were essentially valued as bodies to be used for labor supply, yet this economic motive was masked by the continuing representation of their need to be "saved." According to Charles D Rowley's publication *The Australians in German New Guinea 1914–1921*:

It was a common German assumption that the welfare of the native could best be promoted by employing him in European-managed enterprise. This claim was put forward as a partial justification of the crude conditions of recruitment and employment which had originated when New Guinea was under the control of Neu Guinea Kompagnie. Emphasis on labour as the means of salvation expressed also the determined paternalism of Europeans revolted by the barbarism of the native cultures. Work, it was argued, must take the place of warfare: the native fully employed as a labourer could not kill or maim as a warrior. (1958, 106, quoted in Jinks and others 1973, 177–178)

By being forced to work, the natives would be both pacified and "civilized." The colonizers viewed work as a cleansing act with the potential to transform barbarism.

German control depended mainly on retaliation. A salient characteristic of German colonization was the organization of punitive expeditions against so-called recalcitrant natives. Between 1884 and 1914, the Germans launched many punitive expeditions, in which hundreds of natives were killed and their properties destroyed. "If New Guineans attacked Germans or [simply] refused to cooperate, they were visited by a punitive expedition which came to kill and burn" (Griffin

and others 1979, 40). Compared to the British or Australians in New Guinea, the Germans used more force in Papua and killed more people (Griffin and others 1979, 42). The draft report of German New Guinea for 1913–14 states, under the heading “Punitive Expeditions in the Admiralty Islands and South Bougainville”:

Armed intervention against the natives also became necessary... In Bougainville the punitive expeditions were directed against the numerous and warlike population of the Buin plain in the southern part of the island. Armed force had to be used against these people on two occasions. The main aim of the second expedition, in which, in addition to the expeditionary troop, the landing detachment of the S.M.S. *Cormoran* took part, was to demonstrate the armed might of the Government to the natives. (Sack and Clark 1980, 6)

Stewart Firth elaborated on German-style “pacification” in New Guinea: “After the St Matthias islanders killed two German explorers in 1901, for example, the accompanying police troops... shot seventeen people” (Firth 1978, 39). Subsequently the Islanders were visited by a naval expedition, undertaken by the SMS *Cormoran*, which resulted in eighty-one killed. Oftentimes the Germans made little effort to seek out individual culprits. This reflects the persistent practice of essentializing native peoples: The guilt of one person was automatically deemed to implicate and incriminate the entire indigenous group (see Albert Memmi’s comments regarding “the mark of the plural” in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* [1965, 85]).

The German colonial government also subjugated indigenous people by means of laws and regulations. According to Edward P Wolfers, “The earliest German criminal regulations for the New Guineans were but unadorned extensions of the domestic German law... Under the 1888 criminal law for New Guineans, the German New Guinea Company was specifically empowered to arrest and penalise New Guineans for transgressions of the law” (1975, 65–66). In sum, compared to the other colonizers, the German administration was less paternalistic and protective, and more brutal and direct where it did intervene in indigenous society. Australia, to which the British had transferred administration of British New Guinea in 1906, finally took over German New Guinea after Germany’s defeat in 1914, with few changes. With the establishment of Australian military administration, most of the civil law and native administration established by German rule was retained and generally the laws and regulations imposed in Papua were transferred to New Guinea. In both Papua and New Guinea, laws were deployed to control the natives. These laws and regulations were created in order to preserve “white prestige” in the colony, simultaneously reinforcing the construction of the indigene as Other.

World War II brought about important changes, acting a catalyst in the democratization of relations between whites and blacks. Exposure to other peoples and places experienced by those Papua New Guineans recruited by the various armies meant that the postwar period saw some communities and individual leaders advocating massive social, economic, and political changes. The Australian administration responded to the pressures, both internal and external, by laying down the groundwork for eventual self-government. Papua New Guinea became politically independent in 1975.

DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION OF TERMS

A number of terms used in this book need explanation and clarification. I employ the phrase “colonial discourse” in the sense Stephen Slemon uses it, as a “system of signifying practices whose work it is to produce and naturalize the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilise those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships” (1987, 6). It is exactly this discourse that played a major role in the way the indigenous people and their cultures were represented and invented in nonindigenous literature.

Throughout the book I refer to Papua New Guinea by employing related nomenclature: “Papua,” “New Guinea,” or (as an adjective) “PNG.” “Papua” by itself specifically refers to the southern portion of the country, initially colonized by Britain (who called it British New Guinea), and subsequently handed over to Australia in 1906. On annexation by Germany, the northern section of the country was called German New Guinea; after 1914 it was referred to simply as New Guinea. Australia administered the combined regions until PNG independence in 1975. In the book I have employed these names somewhat interchangeably to mean the country of Papua New Guinea, unless otherwise indicated. I refer to Papua New Guineans in this study by a number of other names, including “indigenous,” “native,” or “indigene.”

I have also used the terms “nonindigenous,” “expatriate,” “white,” and “European” somewhat interchangeably, but they have varying connotations. “Nonindigenous” is the most unambiguous and politically correct term; it is also most widely appropriate in that it has no political overtones and ambiguity. The term “expatriate” could properly refer to both a foreigner living in Papua New Guinea and a PNG native residing outside the country. Furthermore, I realize that the terms “white” or “European” are too broad. In the end, I use these terms essentially to mean the colonizers.

In relation to this discussion of terms I would also like to acknowledge one important omission: while John Kolia had been a most prolific writer,

his works are not considered in this book because he occupies an ambivalent position: he is a nonindigenous, naturalized Papua New Guinean.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book examines the concept of representation in the construction of Papua New Guinean subjectivity from the mid-1860s to the contemporary period. Because representation is never neutral and is always a site of (power) struggle, I argue that PNG subjectivity is always ambivalent, unstable, and contested by competing discourses. The theoretical framework of this study consists of an examination of the various tropes, discourses, and discursive strategies of representation employed in the construction and imagining of the Papua New Guinean landscape and subjectivity in both nonindigenous and indigenous writing and orature. Simultaneously, it focuses on how Papua New Guineans have contested and interrogated dominant representations, and how they have endeavored to recoup, restore, and reinscribe their identity, social histories, selfhood, and cultural place within an unequal power relationship.

Some of the colonial tropes deployed to represent the PNG subject included the uneducable or incompetent native, the bush kanaka, or (peculiar to Papua New Guinea) the “fuzzy wuzzy angel.” Some of the colonialist discursive strategies explored in this book include the specific legal discourse in place to control indigenous people in colonial Papua New Guinea, as well as more widely employed colonial tropes, such as those of sexual violation, debasement and idealization, and the discourse and image of the native (female) body as sexual fetish.

Through the use of such tropes a social hierarchy is produced and indigenous people are relegated and dispossessed as Others. Therefore the study of how Papua New Guineans and their cultures have been constructed and represented in nonindigenous fiction is, at heart, an examination of the relationship between Otherness and the dynamics of power. Simultaneously, however, tropes “also constitute an arena of contestation; each is open to perpetuation, rejection, or subversion” (Shohat and Stam 1994, 137). This is what occurs in postcolonial moments when indigenous people begin to interrogate the assumed authority of colonial discourse.

The focus of this study is literature by both nonindigenous and indigenous writers with Papua New Guinea as a fictive subject. The selection of the texts for this study has been dictated by the themes and concerns of the study; some texts that may have been equally important in the discussion, however, had to be omitted due to the limitations of the study.

In essence, this book is a study of the representation and the construction of PNG subject in colonialist writing and how PNG writers have challenged and interrogated such representations. Chapter 1 fore-

grounds the theoretical issues of representation and identification. It demonstrates how knowledge is always inextricably linked to power and how concepts and practices of representation assume the authority of “truth” because they are associated with dominant and powerful groups. These themes are reinforced in a number of chapters: Chapter 3 is primarily concerned with the European construction of the PNG landscape. Chapter 4 provides a kind of mooring for chapters 5, 6, and 7; it deals with how legal discourse was deployed to reinforce and sanction the negative representation of the PNG subject. Chapter 5 discusses the representation of the indigene as child, and how colonialist tropes of infantilization constructed Papua New Guineans as children, as politically immature, as incompetent and uneducable. While chapter 6 focuses on the PNG subject as savage, I show how the trope of savagery is always a mirror image of the trope of child. Finally, chapter 7 discusses the (sexualized) native body and suggests that the construction of the native body as an object of both desire and revulsion represents the body as a metaphor for culture, landscape, and as text, and as such has made it a significant site for the denigration of indigenous people.

These chapters are countercharged by three other chapters that deal with Papua New Guinean self-representation and responses to their Otherness. Chapter 2 deals with Papua New Guineans’ representation of place and landscape. It begins by asserting that indigenous modes of representing place and landscape have always existed. The chapter centers on the ways in which place and landscape are constructed in stories, myths, folklore, and oral tradition, and how indigenous understanding of place differs from European constructions. Chapters 8 and 9 reinforce chapter 2. These two chapters are concerned with cultural self-representation in contemporary PNG literature. They reveal how indigenous PNG writers have reinscribed and reconstituted their sense of identity and selfhood within mainstream European discourse. I argue that for Papua New Guinean writers, writing is a significant form of empowerment and self-validation. Writing is therefore a form of salvaging a fragmented cultural identity.

This book, then, examines various colonial tropes, metaphors, and discourses that in their numerous workings construct and represent Papua New Guineans in ways that have denied them a sense of identity or a political voice, and relegated them to subserviency. These tropes have contributed to misperceptions of indigenous people and helped perpetuate and reinforce racist thinking. At the same time this study shows the impact of shifting global politics on colonial discourse, making room for positive change and images. Colonial representation of indigenous people is always contested. In Papua New Guinea, the reinsertion of identity, selfhood, and cultural place has occurred most powerfully through literature.