

Chapter II

Research Permits and Marriage Proposals:

Traditional Fieldwork Gone Awry

Ethnographies that present material devoid of broader contexts have been criticized by scholars seeking to revise codes of cultural relations, gender realities, accountability, ethics, ownership and authorship in anthropology (for example Lutz 1995; Mohanty et al. 1991; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 1989). Re-envisioning the anthropological process would move away from traditional descriptions of closed cultural communities, where history, political, and economic inequalities have no space in the ethnographic output. Thus, some recent projects have argued the need to be aware of gender bias in theoretical constructions and their impact in the field, the need to study previously neglected realms such as the lives of women and children, and the need to realize the implications of power relations as they appear in day-to-day fieldwork relations, including those of ethnographer and subject (Yanagisako & Collier 1987; Harding 1987; Rosaldo 1989; Tsing 1993; Abu-Lughod 1993). Yet, despite this provocative literature and its impact on the discipline overall, many recent ethnographies of highlands New Guinea describe what appear to be closed cultural worlds. For example, Gillison's (1993) monograph on myths does not provide a single sentence about the Gimi in the post-independence world of Papua New Guinea, even though photographs show men in shorts and we know she drove most of the way to her field site. Other ethnographers provide token final chapters on change (e.g. LiPuma 1988) and some detail their fieldwork relations. However, even when anthropologists do situate cultures in context, most downplay their presence and impact.

Rejecting the idea that anthropologists can be silent and neutral, I, perhaps naively, considered two approaches to research in Indonesia. The first, epitomized by the

radical voice of Scheper-Hughes, argues that advocacy in the form of "barefoot anthropology" is appropriate in politically sensitive arenas where the primacy of the ethical takes precedence over a purely empirically-driven research project (Scheper-Hughes 1995). Such an approach is particularly appropriate, it is argued, for struggling indigenous minorities eclipsed by a foreign majority within modern nation-states. To be a good anthropologist one must struggle to hear the voices articulating messages of liberation and, if necessary, take up the struggles of the people under study, although to what extent one should extend support is not always clear (Kuper 1994; van Meijl 1996). The second argues that the power inherent in researcher/subject relations must be transcended because the white, middle-class anthropologist cannot know the experiences of the "other," cannot speak for them, and does a poor job of representing them. To be a good anthropologist one might ideally strive to create a postmodern space within fieldwork for alternate voices, allow others to speak, define the terms of research, have control over the editing process, and retain some claims to authorship of the final textual or visual product (Mohanty et al. 1991; cf. O'Hanlon & Washbrook 1992). To stand anywhere other than on the side of "activism" or "postmodernism," however incompatible they might be in reality, is to be branded a "conservative," a damning fate in this experimental ethnographic moment in which we live (Kuper 1994; O'Hanlon and Washbrook 1992).

These politicized approaches to anthropology are naive in that they do not take into account the broader political realities that inform the possibilities for research access. On the Indonesian side of the island of New Guinea, for example, little opportunity has arisen for anthropologists to maintain either the myth of fieldwork as a neutral endeavor or the modified politicized version offered up in contemporary anthropology. In fact, anthropologists have had little opportunity to conduct fieldwork at all: the proliferation of studies in the 1960s and 1970s in Papua and New Guinea did not have their equivalent in Irian Jaya because the politics of research in Indonesia made it exceptionally difficult for

anthropologists to gain access to a field site. The Indonesian anthropologists who have worked in the highlands have tended to describe cultural systems in order to further development initiatives, as opposed to analyzing cultural groups in light of these initiatives (e.g. Susanto-Sunario 1994; Masinambow and Haenen 1994). Perhaps as a result of a closed-door research policy, scholars of Melanesia generally have either tended to downplay the potential of Irian Jaya as a comparative site, building studies instead from materials obtained mostly in Papua New Guinea, or left it out of definitions of Melanesian societies altogether (C. Morgan personal communication; Hays 1993; but see Stürzenhofecker 1991). When geopolitical boundaries constrain both data gathering and analytic practice, anthropological research is not so much political (from the ethnographer's point of view) as it is pre-defined from the outside.

In the case of Indonesia, national politics affect access, most obviously, but they also shape and, I argue, ultimately define the parameters of day-to-day fieldwork as well. While I concur with Asad (1986:163) that cultural translations of whatever type "are always enmeshed in conditions of power -- professional, national, international", my experience in Indonesia suggests that any contemporary concerns in the academy about the politics of writing about people is preceded, even overwhelmed by, the politics of access. Consequently, the image of the anthropologist in the field that still has resonance today may depend more on past colonial histories and on contemporary governmental tolerance, permitting and perhaps valuing fieldwork and its results, than it does on some intrinsic merit of the process itself. Anthropology is not an immutable truth; it has flourished in countries and places where wider political forces have allowed it to happen. The chance to worry about voice, postmodernism, activism and representation occurs when the anthropologist holds a position of relatively high status in relation to government, and in most cases in class and power relations as well (Abu-Lughod 1993; Said 1989). However, this is not always the case. As van Meijl (1996:18) says for the Maori who sought in the anthropologist mostly a confirmation of ongoing health and

development agendas, the Maori were less than "receptive towards a perspective on its peoples and practices as multivocal, fragmented, positioned and transient." You can worry about how you write about people if you have been given the room to do so.

In Irian Jaya, the Indonesian government has made it clear that it does not value certain forms of "traditional" anthropology, nor does it encourage non-Indonesians to foray into remote areas for extended periods of time to collect data about culture, particularly data that might empower or give voice to indigenous populations. The very act of "making otherness palpable" (Culler in Scott 1992:45), a tenet of contemporary anthropological agendas (Kuper 1994), goes against the unifying vision of the Indonesian nation-state, one where culture has been appropriated to serve the state's concern with development and where the idea of the "other" slows down that process (Pemberton 1994; Tsing 1993; Suryakusama 1996; Anderson 1987). With "culture" understood as an identity marker made subservient to "citizen," only a few outspoken Indonesians (Widjojo 1995; Widjojo et al. 1993) and Irianese scholars (Giay & Godschalk 1993; Wetapo 1981) have challenged the worth of government-run anthropology by writing a different history from within. Such critiques, however, require an Indonesian passport.¹³ The researcher from outside Indonesia generally follows a different set of directives, notably that culture is a topic of limited interest, and that development goals defined by policy define the intent and the results of research. These imposed and enforced limitations renders the anthropological fieldwork method of participant observation that is so unproblematically defined and detailed in fieldwork manuals essentially impossible in politically volatile zones such as Irian Jaya, and sets almost insurmountable limits on the idealistic hopes of postmodernist and activist research agendas.

¹³Benedict Anderson is perhaps the best known case of obstructed access to research in Indonesia. First refused entry in the late 1960s following the publication of a trenchant critique of the transition to the New Order and the riots of 1966, Anderson has been denied entry to Indonesia ever since.

The reading that I did in standard anthropological field methods poorly prepared me for actual on-the-ground realities in Irian Jaya. This reflects the separation between the process of anthropology (person-centered, individualistic, oriented towards the ethnographic record) about which much has been much written and the political realities that might shape whether and how this process can take place, which have received considerably less attention (cf. van Meijl 1996). Given the limitations I summarize above and describe in some detail below, my research *could not* take the shape that I, guided by my readings, would have liked. Nothing horrible happened to me, nobody treated me poorly or refused me access, and no insurmountable obstacle appeared over time to ruin my data collection. I was simply limited in what kind of research I could do before I even began: "anthropology cannot legislate its own reception" (Goldsmith 1996:13).

In this chapter I detail the three main limits to the anthropological research that I faced during field research in Irian Jaya in 1994-1995: limits in research design and execution; limits linked to local politics; and limits of gender. Each, in its own way, is linked to issues of access that are traceable to political realities at the national level. By virtue of having "legal" research status in the field in Wamena, people created extraordinary expectations of me: as a white, outside expert, I was expected to give talks and write reports on command; as "official researcher" sponsored by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), I was expected to produce valuable information conducive to the rapid modernization of Irianese people; and as anthropologist, I was expected to write about culture but not really to believe in it. In other words, at least half of the battle of obtaining the information I had come to seek was fought in attempts to define and control the parameters of anthropological fieldwork.

Another arena of intense negotiation was more personal; that of situating myself as woman, mother, and committed field researcher. This chapter details problems I encountered on all of these fronts. Being a woman was clearly an issue in my relations with the Dani, but, given that their perceptions of me were shaped by an American

woman who had caused trouble with local authorities some time ago, even gender relations at the village level were shaped by the political realities of contemporary Indonesia.

Gaining Access

Anyone who wishes to formally conduct research in Indonesia must pass through the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), a government body that gathers information in accordance with the official Pancasila¹⁴ policy.¹⁵ I submitted the original application for research permission to LIPI in February 1993, under the broad title "Medical Anthropology Research in Irian Jaya." Medical anthropology concerns health, and as such falls inside the parameters of development, as any long-term research visa must. I offered to study how culture relates to health promotion, with specific reference to women's health, research that would improve the health of those needing it most. Proposals for research in Indonesia must be detailed and accompanied by three project assessments--one assessment from a collaborator or supervisor within the country and two references from outside "experts" such as a scholar or a development officer who can assess the validity of the proposal. Financial guarantees must be provided as well as an agreement of sponsorship from an approved institution within the country. I thus couched my intentions in the broadest terms, an unexceptionable act and one often done as a means to get around the bureaucracy. In the application, I made only the briefest mention of children as people to be studied alongside women.

¹⁴Pancasila, the state ideology of Indonesia drafted by Soekarno in 1945, consists of five principles: belief in one God, a just and civilized humanitarianism, national unity, democracy guided by the inner wisdom and deliberations of representatives, and social justice.

¹⁵LIPI also seeks affiliation and funding from external research agencies for more detailed studies. For example, a recent project examines Eastern Indonesian demographic change in detail. This project is sponsored by Australian National University and by development agencies, and is run by world renowned demographer and Indonesian specialist, Gavin Jones, in conjunction with LIPI staff (Y. Raharjo, personal communication).

The impact of bureaucracy and the power of the development agenda surfaced as soon as I handed in my completed form. Once submitted, the application only took about seven months to be approved by LIPI, down from an average twelve to eighteen months in the 1980s, but my proposal had been retitled for me as, "The study of children's health in Irian Jaya." This official notification pushed me further into the study of infant sex ratios and health care, a topic upon which I had already conducted library research (Butt 1994). Armed with the knowledge of my own impending motherhood, I reasoned it would be possible to accomplish a field study on children and health care in the allotted twelve months, a task made easier, I presumed, by the presence of my child and the improved rapport I would have with Dani women. I was comfortable with the imposed focus, though I have yet to decipher how the change came about or why my application was approved in the first place, given rumors about how difficult it was to get official permission to go to Irian Jaya. It is important to note that the LIPI-assigned title appeared on every one of my official documents, from Immigration to Police papers: I could not switch topics in mid-stream and still do research under the same application. Just having notification of approval, however, does not mean that departure was imminent. I still had to jump through several more hoops over the next seven months before I could leave for Indonesia. In my case, this was lengthened when I notified LIPI I wanted to bring my son Malcolm along. I was forced to reapply under his name and to include him as part of my "research team." In other words, seven month-old Malcolm was to be fingerprinted, photographed, and catalogued alongside me, and I was now liable for his income taxes as well as any misdeeds he might commit while in the country and under my care.

Once I had received temporary permission from LIPI to enter the country and obtain immigration and police documents, I came to Jakarta with my son, now aged eight months on July 1, 1994 and worked my way through the following financial and administrative blockades:

1. return flight Irian Jaya-Jakarta in order to complete forms--
Cost: \$600.00 US;
2. registration at LIPI offices--
Cost: 120,000 rupiah (\$60.00 US)¹⁶;
3. registration at POLRI (Indonesian police)--filled out 2 forms, submitted 4 photographs, received *surat jalan* (walking papers)¹⁷;
4. registration at Immigration--filled out 7 forms for me and 7 for my son, submitted 9 photographs of me and 9 of my son, received immigration card and booklets;
Cost: 100,000 rupiah (\$50.00 US)
5. registration with SOSPOL (Department of Social and Political Affairs)--filled out 1 form;
6. registration with DEPDIKBUD (Department of Culture and Society);
7. in Jayapura, reported to the Police and to SOSPOL--submitted 2 photographs, handed in letter to DEPDIKBUD;
8. in Wamena, reported to the Police and underwent short interview;
9. agreed to report to LIPI every 3 months, providing a detailed report of my research activities, findings to date, and proposed activities for the following three months; and
9. agreed to submit a final report of approximately 20 pages to LIPI upon completion of the research project before receiving an exit visa.

The total estimated costs of getting permission, including a 10 day stay in Jakarta, fees, transportation, letters, and faxes sent to build the original application: about \$1,700 US. As a list, the process does not look too onerous. Each item, however, meant many hours of waiting, of running back and forth, of taxi rides, of pleading and cajoling but mostly of smiling as a way to get employees to work their way through mountains of necessary files and paperwork. A certain amount of the dismay and confusion I felt that week in Jakarta can be attributed to the newness of the process. Yet even those familiar

¹⁶At the time of fieldwork, the rupiah is valued at approximately 2,000 rph = \$1.00 U.S.

¹⁷This can take weeks, others told me. Fortunately I brought a crying, white, breastfeeding infant with me to the police station and received a *surat jalan* in less than half an hour. The *surat jalan* is a key document, however, and travel into the highlands is impossible without one. Any visitor must present their *surat jalan* to every police or military post they encounter before being allowed to proceed, and a record is kept of each visit.

with the loopholes and blockades of government bureaucracy in Indonesia find the seemingly endless maze of documents and official signatures difficult and to be avoided at all costs. The system I went through would discourage all but the rich, the well-connected, or the remarkably stubborn. It took a week of full-time running around, a couple of miracles, and a small bribe to get the last form completed by Friday noon in time for the bureaucrat's prayer at the mosque, and in time for us to catch our booked flight out of the bustle of Jakarta to Jayapura, the provincial capital of Irian Jaya.

Not surprisingly, many people who do research in the country, particularly in Irian Jaya, choose to bypass formal procedures. They obtain a two-month tourist visa and do research without informing authorities. For example, a noted archaeologist has been working in the highlands for 20 years using the tourist visa route; a master's student from a renowned university received extensive funding from a number of sponsors and agencies for a research project to follow old trade routes, his project based on nothing but a tourist visa. He had completed his first six-week research phase when I left Irian Jaya in July 1995 and had just been kicked out of a problem zone by extremely watchful military personnel who patrol their remote regions assiduously. Had he obtained a research visa, he might have been allowed to carry out the filming and interviewing as planned. But the truth is he may not have been granted a visa had he presented his purely theoretical and empirical study for consideration to LIPI. Wanting anthropology to be seen as separate from "development" is understandable, but it generates its own set of problems, notably because more cavalier scholars working under illegal status increase the chance that, if they are caught, the military might again close down the region to outside scholars.

Being "legal" is imperative for ongoing collaborative efforts with Indonesian scholars. There are those who say such collaboration should not even take place, given human rights abuses in Indonesia. Competing visions of human rights stalemata this debate, and in the eyes of some Western political activists, I become a collaborator in human rights abuses through my apparent conformity to the Indonesian national

development agenda.¹⁸ The debate over human rights came to a head recently following the massacre of some fifty Timorese at a church ceremony in Dili, East Timor in November 1991, after which a number of Canadian student demonstrators protested against Canadian university involvement in Indonesian agricultural and development projects (following similar protests internationally). These protests were directly responsible for the closure of an internationally known agricultural project in the province of Sulawesi (based at the University of Guelph, Ontario) and threatened the continuity of a development project geared towards upgrading skills and technology in Eastern Indonesian universities (based at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia). Activists ground arguments in an idealized vision of how Indonesians implement development agendas which when seen from the outside do appear impressively monolithic and impenetrable. However, stated promises to follow a development agenda leave room for a certain leeway, for researching academic matters and for pushing forward alternate agendas. Indeed, it is expected, and is a measure of evaluating people to see how, in word and in deed, Indonesians and foreigners work alike to Pancasila ideology and at the same time work around those limitations to carry out personal and theoretical agendas. Collaboration between Indonesian and international scholars reflects this workable marriage: writers such as Hull (Hull and Singarimbun 1989), van de Walle (1995), and Manning (Manning and Rumbiak 1989) have produced scholarly work of theoretical importance that is nonetheless grounded in the formal development agenda.

Being "legal" also may have been the most important first step in establishing good relations with the Dani in Irian Jaya. The Dani valued the commitment I showed to negotiating the political world they live in, and my tenacity made them think that I, in contrast to most Indonesian anthropologists was concerned with issues of development and seemed serious about my work.

¹⁸Non-profit agencies in Indonesia that are concerned with human rights usually do not extend platforms to research agendas or critiques of concepts of culture and its epistemological basis.

At the same time, being "legal" guaranteed my in-between status wherein it was almost impossible to live out a traditional role as a village-centered anthropologist. But the advantages of being "legal" while studying cultural practice were counterbalanced by a loss of intimacy with the Dani that I might have gained had I been left free to live in the village of Kuliama for months on end. I often felt like a bureaucrat, with four field reports, a final report and numerous short statements for NGOs to write. I was being monitored however, benevolently through my reports to LIPI (if not submitted I would have to leave the country), by the police, and by the military. Legal status gave me the right to write about culture, and at the same time made it almost impossible for me to do so.

Cultural Diversity as a Fieldwork Obstacle

With all the necessary stamps on all the necessary forms and with photographs of Malcolm and I scattered throughout the city of Jakarta, we boarded our first flight out of Jakarta to Jayapura on July 7, 1994. I was seated beside a poised, well-dressed, and stunningly beautiful elderly woman of Javanese descent. As we settled in to our seats, my movements much slower than hers because of my 8 month-old baby and all his accouterments, she introduced herself to me in impeccable English. Her husband was a former ambassador; they had lived many years out of the country and now were retired in Jakarta. She was on her way to a short holiday in Bali with her granddaughter. And I? What was my story?

"Ah, I am going to do anthropological research," I said.

"Oh yes, Indonesian culture is so fascinating, is it not, and where will you study?"

"In Irian Jaya."

She sat back somewhat stunned, her lips curled, and almost sneered as she commented: "Oh! very primitive people." This was the end of the conversation.

The idea that cultural diversity is one of Indonesia's strong points has a lot of credence with many Indonesians (Kipp 1993). Peoples from Irian Jaya, however, tax the ability of most Indonesians to accept cultural difference because they are not seen as having culture; they are instead *primitif sekali* (very primitive), *Papua bodoh* (stupid Papuans), *terbelakang* (backwards), and by implication inferior to other Indonesians (Gietzelt 1989; see Tsing 1993 for equivalent in Borneo). According to most Indonesians, and some coastal Irianese, the Baliem valley Dani fall into the category of *suku terasing* (isolated tribal peoples). They have no religion, no history, no material culture worth preserving, and no valid forms of cultural expression. During my language training and research in Java from May 1 1994 to July 1 1994 and throughout my fieldwork in the Baliem valley from July 10 1994 to July 7 1995, I was challenged in casual conversations to justify my choice of field site. It was assumed I would surely be more interested in studying some cultures with more "history," more "refinement," and more elaborate cultural displays than the supposed cultural wasteland of isolated tribal peoples. In a country that associates culture with aesthetics, dance, festival, and tradition, the Dani, with their relative lack of clothing, love of pigs and history of aggressive warfare, confounded expectations and generated some of the most superficial assessments I have ever heard uttered about anyone.

The people of the Baliem valley, in stark contrast to Indonesian images of the primitive, Karl Heider's portrayal in Dugum Dani (1970), or Gardner's in Dead Birds (1964), live in the midst of cacophonous change and bureaucratic mazes. In Wamena, contrasts in culture are a feature of daily life. The Baliem valley and surrounding hillsides contains a population of 79,642 according to recent regional statistics (Kantor Statistik 1993), but about 20% of the total are either Indonesians who have moved to Wamena from other parts of the country (about 10,000) or indigenous migrants from other parts of the province (about 10,000). Thus the traditional image of the nervous anthropologist slowly working her way into a comfortable relationship within a small

well-defined community of culturally and linguistically homogenous people seemed like a fantasy to me, one I increasingly longed to experience during my stay in Wamena. Learning proper behaviour and a field language are challenging enough, but in order to conduct research in Wamena ideally I could have learned four languages (Javanese, Dani, Indonesian and dialects from Northern Sulawesi), studied seven or eight Indonesian cultural groups, and memorized the entire repertory of Indonesian government agency acronyms. I contented myself with working in the Indonesian language, as most Dani under the age of forty and all newcomers are fluent in the *lingua franca* of the nation. I added as much Dani as I could pick up over the year. For elderly women and men, I required translators to help with interviews, but in the main the Dani have lived in the center of highlands government activities long enough to have assimilated Indonesian as part of regular interaction, and almost all youth and most younger adults are fluent and eloquent speakers.

My work also included interactions with Indonesians from Java, Sumatra, Ambon, and Sulawesi, and with Irianese from the coast. While I was able to work in Indonesian with all of these people, I found it imperative to absorb some of the basic principles of Javanese politeness, power, and hierarchy (Anderson 1990; Foulcher 1990) so that I could interpret subtexts often present in interviews, or relate patterns of relationships to national norms. And, even though I worked with many people who were not Dani, my interest in the Dani marginalized me somewhat for many of these "newcomers" simply could not understand why I wanted to put myself and my child in continual contact with indigenous people from "the outposts" (anywhere outside of Wamena).

In Wamena, my informants were as varied as the ethnic landscape: I lived with a woman named Marta from Toraja, South Sulawesi, a Christian, a self-titled evangelist, and a well-informed development project worker. We occasionally shared our house with Welys, a Protestant mission worker from another Eastern Indonesian province. Our

household also sponsored two and sometimes three teenage Dani school girls Pebe, Marta, and Robina from nearby villages who came to Wamena to go to high school. Staff from two development projects and Catholic nuns also provided me with vast amounts of information and assistance.

Ethnic pluralism in a research setting complicates a project because there are political relations involved. I originally had conceived of my project in the context of a feminist research method, where I would seek out the least powerful people in the community and build a research agenda from that position. Such an approach, argues Harding (1986, 1987), enables the researcher to question issues of validity at the very moment of establishing the research agenda. Researchers check their research tools for validity and reliability, but the research processes--the initial stages of design and hypothesis testing--generally remains unexamined. According to Harding, this lacuna in the verification process ensures the ongoing dominance of the research agendas of those in power. The research approach advocated by Harding would prioritize Dani experiences and way of looking at the Indonesian community. Such a project would then "make difference and conflict the center of a history" (Mohanty quoted in Scott 1992:39).

However, once in the heart of the Baliem valley I found such an optimistic research design was impossible. I could not privilege Dani voices to the exclusion of all others, nor could I design a project that built from a broad assumption of Dani disempowerment. I was limited first of all by the actual application procedure and the compromises I had already made. Second, a strong ideology actively supporting development and Irianese integration also prospered in Wamena. Most offices in Wamena -- government, non-profit organization, health training etc. -- thrive in the complex interplay of relations between nation-state and civil organizations that have a regular and direct impact on community members (Eldridge 1989). Harding's argument seemed increasingly naive faced with the reality of power in action. Privileging one point of view, or the private life of rural Dani woman, for example, actually reduces the

explanatory power of research rather than enhances it. More appropriate in this context is for the anthropologist to assume responsibility not just to describe and support the weakest participants in social relations, as Harding argues, but also to document different perspectives on the same reality (Lock 1993a; van Meijl 1996). Consequently, I sought to combine anthropological methods of census, observations and interviews at a village level with a focus on the administrative realities of the Baliem valley, particularly in the realm of health care. At the village level, a few homesteads in the village of Kuliama were always open to me, notably those of Oskar Hubi, Benjamin Kossay, and Franciscus Kossay,¹⁹ and I soon felt comfortable working closely with the first three families. Conversations (taped or noted) and observations with them form the basis of much of my qualitative research results. However, I also traveled the valley interviewing clinic workers from all the health posts west of the Baliem river, interviewed birth control and prenatal service providers, and conducted nine in-depth interviews with indigenous employees at health posts. I observed clinical practice and data recording for all procedures that related to infants. As the "official" foreign anthropologist, I was also asked to participate in seminar presentations, invited to evaluate a non-profit organization's child health project and was encouraged to collaborate with a government-controlled women and children's health project operating out of Wamena. I was thus able to observe closely non-profit organizations in practice. Finally, towards the end of the year, I was able to organize a joint project between the university in Jayapura (UNCEN) and a non-profit agency based out of Wamena, in which four students and junior staff came from Jayapura for a two-week medical anthropology methods training course.²⁰ As project supervisor, I was responsible for teaching some basic methods to people without

¹⁹These names are pseudonyms, as are the names of all Dani discussed in this dissertation. Kuliama is also a pseudonym.

²⁰This course was conceived as a project that would benefit all parties. It allowed UNCEN to sponsor some very cost-effective training, and it gave WATCH some up-to-date material on Dani beliefs that they could implement in designing more effective health interventions. The report also served as a basis for my final LIPI report that summarized research results.

significant research background. However, the participants proved themselves energetic and adept beyond anyone's expectations and the results were so good that they were asked to present them to health administrators and to publish a report of findings (Andriastuti et al. 1995). I employ some of these results in the dissertation; where I do so I have indicated the source.

Overall, I do privilege those lower down on the power chain: women, lower status women, infants. More than this, I privilege positioning the Dani in the net of political power they have been pushed into over the past 40 years. I was expected to interact a lot with bureaucrats and officials, and so I did: the only local code I broke was to refuse to conform to the nationalist cultural agenda of positioning the Dani at the bottom of the local ethnic hierarchy. I am not "studying up" but merely situating Dani experiences in the context of their multiethnic everyday life in the Baliem valley.

On Being a White Woman: The Spectre of Wyn Sargent

Once Malcolm and I were settled in Wamena, I began to spend a lot of time in Kuliama, which is a village of household compounds and a few "modern" homes some twelve kilometers from the town of Wamena. I traveled by motorbike to the village on most days, spent many evenings there, and occasionally brought Malcolm with me although there are few activities less conducive to successful research than child-minding²¹ (Warren 1988; Young-Leslie 1998). In the village of Kuliama, set just off the edge of the new paved "highway" where a few motor scooters and a taxi or two pass by

²¹Malcolm fell sick within a couple of weeks of our arrival with a series of illnesses, including a serious bout of amoebic dysentery. My husband arrived for his first visit to find a weak, dehydrated child and an obviously distressed wife. We agreed that it would be easier to keep Malcolm healthy by remaining in Wamena. This decision was considered "appropriate" by all excepting a few elderly people in Elagaima who thought I should have the child with me at all times. Thus according to most Dani, it was all right to live in Wamena, but it was not all right to leave Malcolm with a baby-sitter during the day in Wamena while I was off being a "flighty female" on my motorbike conducting interviews in Elagaima.

every hour, new and old homes mix in an odd combination of government initiatives and local refusal to make use of them in the way they are supposed to. A small cement market built just after pacification in 1977 lies abandoned, cracked, and covered in grass and weeds whereas just across the road, the elected government village chief has persuaded his energetic wife to plant a garden on the government lawn in front of the office with subsidized soy plants from which he will personally profit. Of the fifteen "modern" homes, also built in 1977, four have been snapped up by the relocated Javanese and Sulawesi who teach at the elementary school but take their motor scooters into Wamena where they spend most of their time. A few Dani also live in these newer homes: the school principal, two village office staff, the pastor, and the clinic head. The remainder of Kuliama's some 300 residents live in twenty-one traditional households in the forest alongside the edge of the river Ue or on higher ground under the shade of banana trees, all invisible from the road.

Kuliama is an unusual village. It houses the Catholic church parish office, the elementary school, and the government village office. Its location at the foot of the western mountain valley wall makes it an ideal location for administering portions of the mountainside and the valley floor. Yet the village is also the home of Eusebius Kossay, the alliance head for the northwest valley region, and a staunch promoter of tradition for his followers even though he has proven himself adept at profiting from his high status position in government initiatives as well. Although across the river in the next village churchgoers enthusiastically adopted a soy bean and public garden project, and in the village south of Kuliama another group saved up enough money to buy a sewing machine, the Kuliama Dani appear far less interested in "progress" than many. Indeed, despite the relatively large number of government buildings and the presence of the Church, the resistance to change which many scholars have noted as characterizing the Dani on the valley floor still remains a strongly stated value in this small village in the center of the valley (Heider 1970: 295-297; Peters 1975; de Vries 1988).

I was introduced to the community in August 1994 by the Sisters from the Catholic church who were momentarily frustrated by the rapid demise of a grassroots woman's group they had tried to organize, and I decided to make the village the main focus of my qualitative work after discussing the prospect with Pastor Dominicus Wetapo, the parish priest at the village church. Pastor Dominicus, like all Catholic leaders in the region, is a strong advocate for Dani culture, a contrast to the Protestant practice of abandoning traditions such as ancestor worship, polygamy, and pig feasts. Pastor Dominicus received training in post-secondary studies at a theological school in Jayapura where he found himself interested in anthropology and has since produced several manuscripts on ritual and social life. Once Pastor Dominicus assessed my level of commitment and became confident I would not essentialize the Dani as he thought Indonesian scholars might, he encouraged me to work in the village of Kuliama and was instrumental in advising the members of the village of my research interests, my legitimacy, and my need for their cooperation. Pastor Dominicus remained throughout my year in the Baliem valley a staunch supporter, a stellar informant, and a good friend. But, for all that gatekeepers can make or break initial fieldwork relations, at some point personalities and local perceptions take over. In my case what took over as my most salient feature was, to my only partial surprise, gender.

Much has been written about gender and fieldwork in the last two decades. There are conflicting accounts of experiences, some of which have tended to essentialize women as more nurturant, better listeners, better observers, and more empathetic than men; the "ultimate sociability specialists" (Warren 1988:44). These idealized traits rightly have been challenged by people who argue that *both* men and women are constrained by assumptions about gender that arise from their cultural upbringing and who then must face either the same assumptions magnified or another set altogether when in the field (Bell et al. 1993). Having been brought up to have few "womanly" traits, and noticeably short on domestic skills, I was dismayed to find myself confronted with those

gendered expectations in some force in the field. Along with the immutable fact of my reproducibility--I was best known everywhere among the Dani as *Mama Malcolm* --I was also known as a married woman. In each of his three visits to me over the year, my partner Andrew gamely met all of the people I was working with and assured everyone that he did in fact trust them to "look after me" while he was away doing his important business work in Canada (see Warren 1988 for patterns of protecting women in the field). Perhaps it was my normative married-with-child status or perhaps it was exhaustion, but for whatever reason in the first half of my fieldwork I happily assumed that while I was obviously constrained by gendered assessments of my abilities, I was not in anyone's eyes an object of desire. When I received a proposition (refused) of a most intriguing nature in February 1995, when in fact marriage was proposed by one of the area's most prominent polygamous tribal and alliance chiefs,²² I was floored. Gender was a topic I had read about before packing my bags, but desire? Where were the manuals to help me through this situation? There are recent reports on how being a woman has shaped research experiences (Kulick & Willson 1995), but what I wanted to understand was why a married woman with a child could find herself at the receiving end of what my friends Pelesina, Oskar, and I analyzed as a serious marriage proposal. The event reflects a broader set of issues that shaped fieldwork, that is, Dani images of western women, the source of these constructs, and the essentialisms they create that would allow someone as respected and responsible as the tribal chief who propositioned me to make what was

²²After months of angling for an interview with the most elusive of all clan leaders, Eusebius Kossay finally agreed to visit my house for a dinner and an interview. After dinner, the clan leaders revealed important information to me about the marriage festival and his key role in allocating ritual portions of the pig during the rite. I was delighted to finally have on paper this valuable information, and was ready for him to leave when he suddenly told me how he considered us "good friends," that he was hati *terbuka* (his soul was open to mine) and kept trying to hold my hand as he protested eternal friendship, over and over again. I had no trouble thanking him for his offers of friendship and saw him out the door, but the next day I told my good friend Pelesina, married to Oskar who was also an important leader, what had happened to me and asked her what her opinion was on the matter: "Oh" she gasped, and her face grew long with embarrassment and horror "it means he wants to marry you!"

potentially a highly risky move given the repercussions he would no doubt suffer had I "reported" him to the Indonesian authorities.

Ascriptions of gender in the Baliem valley are not unified across the board. My white, outsider status made of me a different sort of woman than Dani vegetable farmers in this particular research context, and there is precedent in thinking that some Dani might have constructed an essentialist and dichotomized understanding about me. Just as western writers and thinkers have made categories of others that contrast diametrically with how they perceive themselves--the art of orientalism (Said 1978)--so too may reverse orientalism be said to exist, a practice Carrier (1992) calls ethno-occidentalism. This "essentialist renderings of the West by members of alien societies" (Carrier 1992:198) creates differences between the familiar and the strange and has strong political and economic roots in colonialism. Carrier argues that people such as the Dani have developed ethno-occidental traditions of essentializing certain traits of people as an outcome of their historical and political experiences. In this case, a prominent Dani leader essentialized me as a white Western woman with certain characteristics, one of them being the desire to marry a Dani tribal leader. The proposition can be seen at first blush as a response to the orientaling visions and practices of strategies of containment of the "other." But this analysis does not suffice. If the Dani sexualize white, western women why hadn't I been approached before? Where were the other expectations of me: that I would make a fool of myself, talk like a movie star, and have sex for free with anyone who asked (Conaway 1986)? As Carrier points out, constructs are shaped by the politics and history of a region, and in the argument I present below some very specific historical events, notably the arrival and antics in 1972 of the American, Wyn Sargent, combined with the more universal responses to the tourist trade and to global culture have together allowed the Dani to create a very special image of the white, western woman.

Sargent's Own Story

Although research in Wamena essentially had been closed to outsiders since the early 1970s, in late 1972 a self-styled explorer spent two months among the Dani in an area just two or three kilometres south of the village of Kuliama, a village that is still actively involved in the Hubi-Kossay alliance. Fresh from a successful trip to Borneo and a book recounting her adventures there, Wyn Sargent, a white American Quaker photojournalist, headed to the Baliem valley to see how she could "help" the Dani. The book she wrote about her Baliem valley experiences People of the Valley (1974) gained her international notoriety (Newsweek 1976). Although "invited" to Irian Jaya by President Suharto, who is cited in her book as saying "you really should see West Irian...The people are very primitive there and they need help, badly" (Sargent 1974:3), Sargent received no privileged exemptions from Immigration procedures and fended for herself in Irian Jaya armed with a two-month tourist visa and no signs of support from Indonesian administrators.

Once Wyn Sargent and her Indonesian-speaking translator arrived in Wamena, they promptly set off to live in a Dani village to see whether they could "help" the Dani. They did not speak the language and most Dani at that time spoke no Indonesian, so much of the book reflects a series of misunderstandings and misdirected communication. Perhaps as a result of this, Sargent and her translator were asked to leave the first village they visited after one week. Their second attempt was more successful because Sargent had developed a good relationship with her house boy, and through his family she located a welcoming village. According to Sargent, she made herself invaluable to these Dani by distributing medicine and curing ailments, by giving away shovels, clothes, tobacco, and books, and most profoundly by writing letters of complaint on behalf of wronged Dani men to government offices for problems ranging from stolen pigs to land appropriation and beatings by the Indonesian police.

After a couple of weeks in the second village, Sargent realized that factions between alliances were rife, and so she proposed marriage to an alliance chief called Obaharok as a means to enable a peaceful settlement among warring tribes in the North end of the Baliem Valley: "it implied the beginnings of new kinships and a new peace alliance" (Sargent 1974: 203). She also claims in People of the Valley, in a highly ambiguous phrase, that she had clarified right from the start that she would not consummate the marriage and that "things after the marriage would be the same as they are now" (ibid: 203).

The Dani I talked to reiterate Sargent's claim that her marriage to Obaharok was one of the great social events of post-contact Valley life. In Sargent's version, Obaharok called a unprecedented *wam mawe* (marriage festival) for a single wedding, and neighbouring leaders responded by bringing fifty to sixty pigs. Everyone put on adornments and decorated their bodies, and thousands of people danced and feasted. Obaharok's family prepared a *yokal* (married woman's skirt) and put it on Sargent. According to Sargent, she participated in the feast for three days, after which she resumed wearing her Western-style clothes and carried on with her letter-writing campaigns. She reported the wedding to the local police chief, which set off some ugly publicity that ended with her eventual ungraceful removal from the country. Sargent writes that the local police chief harassed her about her wedding and deported her in response to her threat to sue the police chief for the violation of Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²³. At the same time, the Indonesian press printed a short story about the wedding after receiving a photograph of the "married couple." As the international press picked up on the story it was decided not to extend Sargent's visa,

²³The officer allegedly claimed her marriage was illegal as it had been performed outside a legal venue. Sargent then argued he was attempting to interfere in her choice to marry, following the Article 16 which says: "marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses."

and she was slowly and inexorably escorted out of the Baliem valley, out of Irian Jaya, and out of the country.

Sargent's Story as Told by the Dani

The Dani of Obaharok's alliance today tell a different version of the story, a version worth examining in some detail. The following account is one of the contemporary Dani versions of Wyn Sargent's time in the valley, as told by Paskalis Matuan, a young man who was not of age to attend the wedding but who has heard the story countless times:

There was a woman from over there who didn't know things about us and who wanted to learn *adat* (custom) of our Dani weddings. She was the same as you[Leslie] but she was mostly interested in knowing about weddings. She met a big tribal chief, Obaharok Doga from Akima. He already had maybe 10 wives, but she said she wanted to marry him, and to become one of his wives. He was amazed and at first disbelieving, but then quickly he became very happy. He was very happy, in fact delighted that a white woman wanted to enter into the Dani culture. His wives were all happy too; they gave up the pigs they had been raising for the festival, and they all participated in preparing a great big wedding feast.

We don't know if this white woman loved²⁴ him for real or not, but we know she married him for real. She did the whole ceremony. She put on the traditional woman's *yokal* (skirt), they made it big for her because she was a very big woman, they had to make it extra long to fit her. She took off her top, her skin was white all over, and everyone went half crazy with happiness. Everyone got all dressed up and danced and danced for days; a lot of people brought pigs, special pigs, maybe 50 pigs or more. Everyone brought pigs and everyone danced. This Mama Wyn, she ate a lot of pig and danced for 10 days, and after that she sat down with her husband and they made the sign of marriage together: the man and the woman cut up the pig together and then they went to sleep together.

They slept together three or four times and then she ran away, she just disappeared. She changed her clothes from the *yokal* into clothes like you have [Leslie], she had them hidden in a backpack like you have, hidden in Wamena

²⁴Love is not seen as a prerequisite to marriage, but it is considered an ideal. If a couple loves each other, the woman is less likely to leave and the man more willing to be gentle and compassionate with his wife. A lack of love is an important factor in women's decisions to run away from their husbands. In the case of Sargent, it is expected that in the first several months of a marriage, when a husband is assiduous in his attentions, that she would feel love for him.

somewhere. She threw away the *yokal*, combed her hair, put her things into her backpack, got into the plane and disappeared. She ran away. Gone, just like that. Now we don't call her Mama Wyn anymore, we call her "Mama Satan."

Others added slight variations to this story: the most common is that she stayed for two months after she was married and worked in the fields alongside Obaharok's wives because she was happy, living with and in love with Obaharok. In every account the Dani are as insistent that Sargent consummated her marriage to Obaharok as Sargent is that she did not.

Abel, an important leader today but a youth at the time, attended the wedding: "Of course I was there, everyone was there!" He understands that it was the strength of Dani *adat* (custom) that allowed the Dani to receive her well. Chief Obaharok had to be very bold to call a *wam mawe* just for her, had to have confidence that the benefits of welcoming a white woman into the clan would override the risks of displeasing the ancestors for calling a *wam mawe* (marriage feast) when it was not time. And Obaharok paid the price, as Abel and other elders analyze the situation today: Wyn Sargent ran away, wrote a book and made a lot of money, never paid back her debts, and never gave any of her book profits to the Dani. Obaharok's family lost their wealth and good fortune because of the wrath of the ancestors:

We paid out 50 pigs for her, we were bold to receive her, we made a special party for her, and now she is rich like a king and what about us?

In the several versions of the Dani story I was told, Sargent has been made to look and act like the many tourists who roam the valley. The Dani describe Sargent in the same terms they use to describe tourists--as exploiters. Tourists come with backpacks, want to see and experience a pig feast, want to take photographs and establish a "relationship" with the Dani, and then they want to be free to leave. The relationships are all controlled by the outsider and are ones of unequal reciprocity. Thus, although Wyn Sargent claims she had an unusually strong and positive relationship with the people of Akima, she is remembered by Abel Hubi, at least, as being "just like all the other white

people." Sargent is also described as behaving like Indonesian "newcomers" who are often perceived by the Dani as aggressive, ambitious, and acquisitive. According to Pastor Dominicus, far too many newcomers participate in pig feasts, eat all the meat they can, fill their pockets with sweet potatoes, and then leave the feast without ever considering the obligations of reciprocity.

Commentary

That the Dani feel some antipathy towards Sargent is obvious and unsurprising. In her personal behaviour, Sargent offended people; she took without giving, antagonized ancestors with her manipulations, and railed at every turn for Western standards of democracy, freedom and human rights. If, as Keesing (1992) argues, antipathy to Western intrusions sharpens oppositional thinking, then Dani renditions of Sargent's time among them describes intense dissatisfaction with invasive behaviour by Sargent and by other newcomers, possibly including me, through their application of the image of the female tourist, explorer, and thrill-seeker to their description of Sargent. The Dani have ethno-occidentalized white woman as hyper-exploitative. Yet this summary of binary oppositions reduces the quality of Dani experience to absurd levels by denying the role that the Indonesian "newcomers" play in Dani perceptions of exploitative outsiders. Many Indonesians also exploit, do not give gifts, and essentialize the Dani as primitive, icons of savagery in the national rally towards prosperity and civilization. Too many newcomers try to buy land at exploitative prices or hire Dani for hard labour at inappropriately low wages. I have seen a small, weak Indonesian man attack a strong Dani youth in the market, and even though the youth could have won the fight with one hand, he let himself be hit, let himself be seen as the apparent loser because there could be no benefit in a victory. There is not a single interracial marriage between Dani and newcomer in the entire valley. The Orientalizers in the Baliem valley are first and foremost the relocated Indonesians and it is they who force the issue of dichotomy:

"political contingencies...influence which of the many possible distinctions become important, become taken for granted ways of identifying the essence of us and them" (Carrier 1995:8). Most Dani see white tourists and residents as benevolent and a source of material goods, an idea propagated mainly by Protestant missionaries whose outposts ring the edges of the Catholic core of the valley. The negative imagery that encircles Wyn Sargent reflects her actions, but it also incorporates the current neo-colonial reality of an overpopulated land and resource-poor country imposing its stamp of ownership on the rapidly decreasing political and territorial powers of the Dani. That such essentializing of Sargent as exploitative goes on should surprise no one; to restrain analysis to White/Other intellectual and political formulations, however, misses the point. Thirty years of colonization has shaped local perceptions far more than the antics of the few white missionaries and passers-by.

At the same time as the Dani despise Wyn Sargent, they also communicated pride, ownership, and a strong sense of connection to her. They retell her story often, of how the white woman chose to marry into a Dani clan and to participate fully in a key ritual. Like Sargent, I was known as being interested in the Dani and cared to investigate the details of ritual, reproduction, and social life. Like Sargent, it was presumed that I, once familiar with Dani life, would want to become part of it, for as one informant succinctly put it, "all newcomers want to be like us. We are big, strong, and wealthy."

The chief who proposed to me was perhaps willing to risk his political career to take me on as the seventh wife in his already crowded compound (perhaps he had plans to keep me in his Wamena house, where I could be his "city wife") because he reasoned I would want to become a Dani. Another reason is that in participating in the *wam mawe* key ritual, Sargent showed that it was possible for a transient, white outsider to become an active member in Dani society. For example, wearing the *yokal*, the woman's traditional dress, means that ancestors are ensuring the fertility of the woman and the health of her offspring. When a woman eats the final piece of *adat* pig as the culminating

moment of the festival and an indicator that the marriage is finalized, as the Dani claim Sargent did, this is the piece of food that makes someone into a fully grown adult person, and that allows a woman to become a mother. Sargent ostensibly consummated her marriage, thus possibly beginning the process of making a child (see Chapter 4). Any offspring she produced would have immeasurably increased the status of Obaharok and probably ensured the ongoing importance of his children in chiefly rankings. As it is assumed that women have no real control over their own desire, Sargent was alone and unprotected by the kin who would normally encircle a girl and keep her away from temptation; she would feel desire for Obaharok as he had status and many secret talismans to make women love him.

Sargent displayed behaviour that Dani men typically attribute to women, wanting marriage with a chief, but also being strong-willed and a runaway. Thus, if I participated in a similar ritual sequence it is logical that I too could be transformed into a tolerably acceptable Dani, and any children resulting out of my union with the Kossay chief would be a Kossay and would reinforce his political powers substantially. Since I was in some ways similar to Sargent--alone but for my child, concerned about the Dani, and obviously skilled in making big, fat babies--it is not surprising Sargent's partial participation in Dani life should have encouraged a prominent man to hope that I might prove a somewhat more docile and (reproductively) tractable partner.

Ultimately, Sargent had already spoilt the mantle of a sexless and gender neutral researcher that I had idealistically assumed would be an effective way to get around the limitations that gender can impose on research (Warren 1988; see Bell 1993 for discussion). As a result of an exchange with my friends Pelesina and Oskar about the chief's actions, Oskar pronounced himself my elder and forbade me to see or talk to the chief again. I thus lost any chance to cross-check crucial *adat* rituals or to learn about his personal politics of leadership. Thanks to Sargent, I also had to deal with a climate of reduced trust and wary rapport. For example, Pascalis Matuan was sitting in the Kuliama

office when I originally went to request permission from the elected village head to carry out research in the area. He confessed to me several months later that he had argued very strongly against allowing me to work there because he and several other community members felt that I would take advantage of them, steal *adat* secrets, exploit resources, and leave without fulfilling debt obligations. Another alliance leader also said he felt similar reluctance--the Dani take in people on Dani terms, he said, and he had wondered whether I could possibly be aware that it was important that I know and work within those confines. As a result of my encounter with the alliance chief, I learned a lot about Wyn Sargent, which I was curious to do, but I also learned that perhaps my most important feature was my ability to reproduce. Two women later told me in secret, low voices that everyone knew that I made healthy, fat, big babies and it was that which made the chief think about taking on a seventh wife. Many times elderly women in Kuliama would spot me in a garden or in a cookhouse, without Malcolm, taking notes or asking questions and they would approach me and gesture angrily at my chest, make the face of a baby crying and try and push me in the direction of Wamena: "look after your child; that is what good women do." In the end, my ability to produce valued commodities such as sweet potatoes and pigs was nil, but that did not matter because I was an understandable entity and consequently a potential participant in Dani life because I possessed the undeniable characteristics of female reproduction.

I recognize, in retrospect, how fruitless it was to attempt to separate my gendered, reproductive status from the broader political realities of gender relations among the Dani, and of ethnic relations in the valley more generally. A tribal chief's beliefs about my offspring are not isolated to a closed set of cultural beliefs held by members of his tribe but are shaped by the relations of in-migration to the valley, by messages about infants communicated through new ideas in primary health care as well as by development discourse, race relations, infant mortality, ancestral influences, and more. I explore in the upcoming chapters how beliefs about infants always incorporate political

realities; my experience in the field only confirms the central importance that infants represent in both social relations and the ways that people understand and act towards each other.