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TAKING CARE OF CULTURE: Consultancy, Anthropology and Gender Issues

Martha Macintyre

In Papua New Guinea the use of anthropologists as consultants for government and development projects has a long and respectable history. From the early colonial period there were official Government Anthropologists to colonial administrations whose ethnographic writings remain 'classics' and over the past sixty years many of the anthropologists who have undertaken project consultancies have been also major figures in the academic domain. The work of the Papua New Guinea Research Unit (based at The Australian National University) during the 1970s and 1980s produced some fine anthropological work that was directed towards dealing with the practical problems of economic development and what is now called governance but was then termed government and administration.

This relationship, in Melanesia and elsewhere, has since the 1960s been the subject of intense criticism within the discipline (Asad 1973; Clifford 1988). The idea that Anthropology as a discipline is tainted when it becomes an instrument in developing strategies for administering aid or working out sustainable development projects jostles with the criticisms that many anthropologists make of projects that they fail because they do not take into account the cultural specificities and deeply-rooted values of the people. Accusations of complicity with oppressive policies or exploitative economics are commonplace. In this paper I shall examine a few of the ways that my work as a consultant has impinged on my academic research and inspired some criticisms of my academic discipline, but I shall also argue for the usefulness of anthropology in undertaking social research that has very practical aims.

Sometimes anthropologists I speak with bemoan the lack of influence the discipline has outside the academic domain. In fact, I encounter traces of (usually somewhat dated) anthropological debates constantly in the terms of reference, reports and guidelines of development projects. One of the clichés of anthropological critiques of development projects, now thoroughly incorporated into the language of aid agencies and non-government organizations working in the Pacific, is the concept of 'cultural appropriateness'. I do not contest the need for developers to be aware of the cultures of the people whose resources they are exploiting but the issue becomes decidedly more complicated when you actually try to work with that in mind as a way of determining policy and practice. Presumably that is one reason why anthropologists are hired as consultants to assist at the various stages of planning and implementation so that the project will be successful. Deciding on those aspects of a project that are likely to be in conflict with pervasive cultural values is much more difficult than recognizing the problem areas after the fact. The social sciences generally are not predictive and Papua New Guinean people change their minds about the things that are important to them.

The first time that I was approached to undertake a social impact assessment for a mining project I accepted because I thought that I would be able to provide informed

recommendations based on an anthropological study. As the project site was Misima and I had some knowledge of the region, I felt that by putting my knowledge to some useful end, I could in some way 'pay a debt' to the people of Milne Bay who had provided me with hospitality and shared their knowledge and understandings with me as I did fieldwork over the previous eight years. While I do not subscribe to the view that anthropological research is an exploitative or selfish activity, nor that anthropologists rarely return the favours that they have been given, the opportunity to apply my discipline to constructive ends appealed.

Having taught subjects that dealt with the effects of economic change on women's lives I also hoped that I would be able to discuss the social impact issues with women and to incorporate their aspirations into recommendations about community involvement. Criticisms often made of development interventions are that they fail to take into account the values that women hold and that in introducing new ways of attaining wealth and status, projects erode traditions that secured for women recognition and value within their communities. The other oft-repeated observation is that men are given privileged access to new wealth and status so that women are doubly disadvantaged.

Working in communities such as Misima, where I had some familiarity with the ways that men and women communicated and cooperated, was relatively easy. I knew the sorts of occasions when it was appropriate to discuss things with a group of women and when I'd have to do numerous household interviews. I knew that some topics were best dealt with in individual conversations and others would generate enthusiastic discussion. Knowing the strength of the women's church organizations in Milne Bay Province also meant that having talked to a few women leaders, they would decide on the best mode of eliciting women's views and organize my work accordingly.

Women, like men, usually want access to money. Often they are enthusiastic about being employed. On both Misima and Lihir (New Ireland) men believed that they were entitled to jobs generated by the mining project and that women were not. On Misima there was far greater acceptance that women who had been educated should be engaged in wage labor, but great resistance to 'village' women working. Two reasons predominate and they are sometimes unabashedly articulated — the fear that women will engage in illicit sexual relationships once they are away from the constraints of village life, and male antagonism towards the economic autonomy that women have when they earn money.

On Misima both men and women voiced fears about the breakdown of sexual morality, in public meetings and in private conversations. On Lihir, where I had far more research time over a two-year period to interview a statistically representative number of people, it was clear that many more men opposed female employment on those grounds. Women thought that the work environment would provide opportunities for sexual liaisons that did not exist when women were in the village, but only 10% thought that they therefore should not be employed. The objection to female employment on the grounds that they become more independent was almost exclusively male on both Misima and Lihir. On both islands most women believed that this would happen, and this was the basis for their enthusiasm for employment. In each place, I believe if a plebiscite of public views on the matter had been taken, the small number of men and the large number of women would have constituted a clear majority. But in this instance 'culture' rather than democracy triumphed. The 'work culture' of mining and the dominance of Papua New Guinean men in representative forums ensured that women would not be employed in jobs that men saw

as 'masculine'.

There are not usually many jobs for women in mining projects. In Australia (where equal opportunity legislation exists) in 1996 women constituted only 4% of the workforce on mine sites. Female geologists and engineers tend to work for relatively short periods of time and in one study the overwhelming majority of women interviewed reported that they experienced sexual discrimination in the workplace (Pattenden 1996). As many of the expatriates recruited to work in Papua New Guinea come from Australia, the attitudes and practices are similar. Men who have not happily adopted policies that incorporate women into their working environment elsewhere do not suddenly transform in Papua New Guinea. Given that local men are hostile to women's employment, those who are not really comfortable with equal opportunity in Australia then shore up their prejudices by appealing to 'cultural sensitivity'. Almost all the Papua New Guineans they meet reinforce the view that women should not be employed.

The representatives of mining companies who negotiate leases with government and local people are invariably male. The Papua New Guinean politicians, public servants and community representatives are also male. Both groups are often very conservative about gender roles. In Papua New Guinea there are very few women with the technical or professional qualifications needed on mining sites. The most highly paid women are usually those with secretarial or administrative positions. The education system, the fact that many of the churches have reactionary ideas on the social roles of women and the pervasive view that feminist objectives (or arguments about gender equity) are the province of foreign sexual libertarians, all combine to ensure that innovative employment policies are rejected by most men and many educated women.

Women whose lives have been circumscribed by the demands of subsistence agriculture and village life are often far more adventurous. Not having been exposed to some of the stereotypes of gender and modern work, in interviews they expressed enthusiasm for training in driving vehicles or operating machinery and learning various trade skills. This openness evaporated during the construction phase when they observed very few expatriate women doing such jobs and the mine was clearly defined as a masculine place.

A few Lihirian women persevered and were supported by senior management in both the mining company and the local umbrella company, Lakaka. An expatriate woman was employed to teach driving of heavy vehicles and this undoubtedly moderated the views of some people. But given the prestige that Papua New Guinean men associate with driving trucks, women trainees had a difficult time.

Lihirian men objected to women driving vehicles because they considered it men's work and they wanted all driving jobs. They appealed to customs in ways that were dogmatic and imaginative. As is often the case in anthropological research, the debate facilitated a far better ethnographic understanding of gender and pollution than any direct questions would have generated. Their arguments provided very detailed information on men's understanding of the ways that menstrual pollution worked.

Actual contact with menstrual blood would weaken men and decrease their physical strength. Women therefore should not be allowed to drive because they would pollute the vehicle if they were menstruating, making it dangerous for men to sit in the same seat. But their polluting powers were even more insidious, as they would emanate from their bodies through the expenditure of energy and so permeate the fluids in the engine. This idea was extrapolated from ideas of work and waste that possibly represent an earlier

syncretic association from traditional concepts and basic biological education) between body waste and danger whereby sweat can transmit hazardous substances. The view presented entailed an idea of the machine and operator working together and thereby mutually producing fluids and heat as waste (the analogy being that traditionally women could not use men's axes, knives or spears because of this process). The heat and sweat from the woman driver would infuse the oil circulating in the machine and thus make the engine dysfunctional when men used the vehicle. Finally they produced their 'trump card': the sump, as the repository of machine and female waste products would be filled with hazardous waste that would endanger the lives of the mechanics who had to dispose of it when they serviced the vehicles.

The ingenuity of their argument delighted me but I wondered how much was simply impromptu and fanciful extrapolation, as the men were aware already that an appeal to '*kastom*' always seemed to impress outsiders. Familiar with a smattering of English terms related to the work, their explanations coupled substances that were '*nogut*' and '*pipia*' with '*danger*', '*unsafe practices*' and '*hazardous waste products*'. Chemical waste and air pollution, ideas encountered in discussions about the environmental impact of the mine, were equated with the potent emanations from female Lihirian bodies. The two Lihirian women with me appeared to be at a loss for answers to these objections, in spite of their vehemence about women having access to work and training. When I suggested that women be trained to be mechanics so that men and machines (women and their tools not being subject to such dangers) not be placed in jeopardy, they countered with the argument they considered unassailable: women could not be mechanics as that would require that they wear trousers.

I was somewhat surprised when my questions about the dangers of women driving were confirmed by village men, at least in the matter of heat, sweat and blood being 'dirty' and hazardous to men. Women appeared equally alarmed at the prospect of men being harmed if menstruating women were operating equipment. A few dismissed these ideas as superstitious but only a handful of women were prepared to uphold any ideas of gender equity in the face of men's arguments.

Similar fears had been voiced in 1995 about the design of relocation houses. People maintained that if they were on stilts then women might walk around the house while men were seated below — a gross breach of respect (being above men) as well as an infringement of pollution rules. However in that instance, men's desires for houses that were large and looked like those belonging to senior public servants in Kavieng (the provincial capital) overcame their fears of polluting women and they insisted on houses on stilts. The opportunistic invocation of '*kastom*' to exclude women and the abandonment of traditional practices in favor of ideas about prestige and display of benefits reveal the strategic use of notions of '*cultural sensitivity*' by Lihirian men. Their privileged access to the company and their confidence in public discussions mean that their voices are heard and their interpretations of custom (however malleable or strategic) are attended to more often than those of women.

While the opportunity to employ women in a wide range of jobs was missed, Lihirian women have in some respects taken advantage of the traditions of gender distinction that gave them some control over their economic activities. Male fears of female sexual and economic autonomy were well-founded. Women who work are less likely to marry if they become pregnant. They might sue the father of the child for maintenance if he is

employed — but they will not succumb to parental pressure to marry. They resist giving money to men. Often resistance is unsuccessful — especially if a customary feast is occurring — but most young working women make independent decisions about income disposal and few give any money to men. Four years after the village meetings in which men harangued me, the community relations department and all women in attendance about the horrors of women wearing trousers, young working women and their village sisters wear them regularly. Now men grudgingly accept these developments as part of the changes that bring them benefits.

Women are consulted by anthropologists: they do not participate in negotiations. The predominance of men in public life and the desire of Melanesian men to control economic benefits ensure that very few of the ‘lessons learned’ from anthropological studies ever influence policies. The changes in gender roles and the transformations in the sexual division of labor that occur in the context of resource extractive industries are dramatic, swift and usually disadvantage women (Bonnell 1997; Macintyre 1993; Polier 1992). But the power relations, with respect to gender, are not altered because of attention to cultural sensibilities, as men are the people ‘in the community’ whose representations are accepted as authoritative.

Sensitivity to diverse cultural beliefs and practices is in itself an idea derived from Western 20th century liberalism. In Australia and other countries such as Canada, where multiculturalism has been adopted as government policy, the idea of ‘culture’ that operates stresses difference and exoticism when selecting aspects of culture that should be protected or encouraged. Working within this framework, expatriate employers are often much more willing to take note of customs that are unique, colorful or strange than they are to accept or accommodate traditions that really require fundamental changes in approach to employment regulations. For example, prolonged funeral ceremonies and Melanesians who are unfortunate enough to have three mothers die in a relatively short period of time are dealt with skeptically. As both Misima and Lihir people have matrilineal kinship systems, on several occasions I have had lengthy discussions with departmental heads who ask me to explain just how a person can have three mothers. The majority remain adamant that they “don’t mind them taking three days off for their mother’s funeral” but say that they feel duped when “it is *really* an aunt or a distant cousin”. Being a cultural interpreter is in many respects one of the most enjoyable parts of consulting work. Sometimes it is useful in preventing conflict or discontent.

But, as with the matter of houses and trousers on Lihir, often the anthropologist might end up arguing for cultural sensitivity towards a customary practice that local people find loses its meaning in the context of modern living. On Misima in 1986, as elsewhere in Milne Bay Province, post-partum food tabus and customs of ritual purification were routinely observed by the majority of village women. A crucial part of these entailed women bathing in the sea and consuming several litres of seawater each day over a period of weeks after a birth. As mining activities were going to cause large quantities of silt to flow into sea-water near the villages adjacent to the mine, I canvassed the opinions of women about the need to continue these rituals and alternative ways of performing the seawater cleansing. The mining company was prepared to install saltwater showers and to assist in any way that was acceptable to the women.

I sought information on the possible beneficial effects of the practice, discovering that the clear, blue seawater harboured large numbers of *e.coli* and other bacteria and that the

consumption of large amounts of it internally would distend the belly and possibly be a contributing factor in later uterine prolapse. I presented this information to women at village meetings and they insisted that regardless of what medical science thought of their practices they were crucial to the well-being of newly delivered mothers and babies. We formed a small committee that devised a range of options that appeared to satisfy local women and the company did its best to provide these alternatives.

Within a year, the practice was virtually abandoned in villages near the mine site and many women objected more to the fuss that the company community relations officers made about saltwater bathing facilities than they did to the silting damage to their beaches. The 'cultural value' that endured was that of female modesty about childbirth, not belief in the efficacy of tabus. They did not think their health was jeopardized by the abandonment of these customs. Having a hospital, more maternal health care and houses with bathrooms altered the ways that women thought about the rituals of purification and they embraced the new ways of ensuring their recovery from birth without any regrets for the past. Several women I spoke with in 1993 commented that drinking draughts of seawater was an unpleasant task and that they were glad the requirement had gone.

The attraction of 'protecting' or being sensitive to the exotic rather than responding to the mundane needs of women during a period of great socio-economic change can in many respects be a diversion. These examples indicate the ways that apparently entrenched ideas about women's roles and status can be subject to very rapid modification and even discarded without the women themselves experiencing the demise as a loss or even feeling regret.

The work of assisting in developing policies that are aimed at avoiding conflict underlies many social impact consultancies. The expectation that the most disruptive conflict will be between the mining company and the community informs most terms of reference. But the assumption of Melanesian communalism is more often the blight of many development projects. Conflict with the company can be dramatic and disruptive, but conflict within the community is corrosive and the source of many of the social problems that emerge and become entrenched.

When I undertook the first consultancy I had some idea of the areas that might be examined but prepared myself by immersing myself in the literature on other mining projects in developing countries. Given that the Bougainville conflict had to some extent inspired my appointment, I read all I could find in the hope of developing strategies that avoided the conflicts generated there. I tracked down some of the Australian people who had worked for Bougainville Copper and asked for their opinions about the ways that things could have been done to avoid the problems that arose. I contacted Bougainvilleans living in Port Moresby and Alotau and discussed their perceptions of the sources of conflict and their ideas about the ways such conflict might have been avoided.

In retrospect my approach might appear innocently optimistic. In fact the voracious reading spree that took me from Katanga in Africa, via numerous mine sites in South America and SE Asia, to Panguna in Melanesia provided me with an understanding of the social and economic impact of mining projects that continues to inform my work. As with most academic research, the recurring patterns often emerge only when you read numerous versions of similar situations. While not all the communities described experienced major violent conflict, most were riven with tensions between those who benefited and those who perceived themselves to have missed out. In every instance those who see

themselves as deprived invoke images of village life as harmonious and communal. The appeal to a romanticized past where *communitas* reigned and all social relations were equitable and just emerges as a way of representing the world that has been lost. Thus, it is that the rhetoric of relative deprivation merges with those conventions of anthropology that have as their subject a community that is an abstract but unified entity: a 'society' with a 'culture'.

The tensions between the political rhetoric of Papua New Guineans whose anguish about emerging inequalities is expressed in a nostalgia for a past that never existed, and the anthropological representation of the current political, social and cultural turmoil as delightfully 'hybrid' are extreme. Working in the area of 'gender' or on issues affecting women in contemporary Papua New Guinea, similar oppositions are obvious. I occasionally feel quite alienated from the ways that academic feminism determines the subject of women's lives. For while there is acknowledgement of the need to listen to the voices of women themselves, when they say things that do not 'fit' current ideas of 'difference', they are ignored as subjects of interest. This has been most noticeable in working on an Australian aid project aimed at improving community relations with police and advancing the careers of women police. On the police project my work is mainly in towns, in police stations and with women from 'settlements' as well as women's organisations. My work with women police, for example, reveals that women mostly voice their discontents in terms of discriminatory promotion policies, low wages, sexist attitudes from male colleagues and the trials of having the double burden of housework and a job. Their ethnic origins and cultural differences are irrelevant as they see that their interests will only be advanced by uniting in a struggle against the pervasive male chauvinism of men in the police force. Occasionally, they enjoy discussing 'customs' and regional variations — but usually in the context of pointing out the basic similarities of female experience across Papua New Guinea. They scoff when I proffer relativist arguments about bride price but they sometimes seize on fantasies of a golden past that their grandmothers enjoyed, when 'custom' prevailed and women were 'respected'.

Sometimes, when I have aired some anthropological interpretation of a female initiation ceremony or a marriage ritual as indicative of the complementary (valued) role of women in the past they simply sit and look at me with cynical stares. One woman commented to me: "You anthropologists, I don't trust that sort of talk. It sounds like my father trying to get me married to some man who offered a big bride price".

The suspicion directed at academics who work as consultants, at least in the social sciences, comes from all sides. While I enjoy my discussions with police women and women whose lives are being transformed by large mining projects, the criticism from colleagues and bureaucrats is less congenial. It often provides me with anthropological musings about territoriality and the need to demarcate clear boundaries between us/them. Consultant anthropologists occupy the liminal zone much of the time — with bureaucrats apparently resentful of them as trespassers and fellow academics suspicious that they are debasing the currency.

Having worked as a 'consultant' who does research, writes reports and makes recommendations and as a member of a project team who has to train, advise and implement a project, I often share the skepticism towards 'academic' understandings of a situation. But this has stimulated my interest in the 'depoliticization' of critical anthropology, rather than made me feel that anthropology is irrelevant. This is particularly

true in respect to the study of women in developing countries. In the case of Papua New Guinea, where women's health, education and employment prospects have barely moved over twenty-five years of independence, the 'usefulness' of anthropological research is clear.

The alleged gap between 'academic' and 'practical' understandings of socio-economic situations is often appealed to by people who work in government and non-government agencies. In my experience most bureaucrats working in government are profoundly anti-intellectual, the exceptions being those (who are usually in senior positions) who have high academic qualifications themselves. My encounters with industrial employers have been somewhat different, for they seem more often to hire consultants as experts in their fields and so adopt a more business-like relationship. The major difficulties arise around issues of intellectual property and confidentiality, although this usually centers on the document produced rather than the 'information' as an abstraction. But there is a strong view within universities that working in 'applied' fields is not only ethically suspect, but constitutes an abandonment of all theoretical interests or commitment to scholarly debate. One result of this is the relinquishment of teaching the anthropology of social impact analysis to programs within universities that are vocationally oriented and where the training tends to be programmatic and superficial.

Social and environmental impact assessment is, on the face of it, the sort of task that can be well managed by an anthropologist. The range of issues that must be examined, the need to explore the interactions and relationships between people, their environments, and the processes of transformation associated with economic change have long been subjects of anthropological research. The social and cultural changes associated with colonialism and modernization have been central to the discipline of anthropology for over fifty years.

Whenever I attend meetings or seminars where I encounter NGO bureaucrats or management companies who present neat 'log frames' and survey sheets that are meant to provide measurable indicators of impact or social risk I am usually left speechless by their naiveté. The superficiality of most procedures aimed at 'assessing' and the blind faith that many corporations appear to have in facile grids with coded evaluations is disturbing. In the end, however, the desire for reductionist analysis is confounded by the complexity of the situations they are confronted by.

Yet in working as a consultant, I am often struck by the tensions between the requirements of a report, the questions it needs to address and my interests as an anthropologist. The terms of reference for a report are necessarily restricted and the research is constrained by other factors, such as the brevity of fieldwork, the problem areas identified by the client and the community and the need to communicate information to people without using the jargon or language of one's discipline. This latter constraint is partly self-imposed and partly a response to that pervasive anti-intellectualism of bureaucrats in both non-government and government agencies.

The ethical dilemmas facing anthropologists, who are accustomed to identifying themselves with the interests of the communities in which they have undertaken research, have been discussed extensively in the context of 'applied anthropology'. For many the emphasis is on the problematic positions of advocate or observer. The advocacy role fits well with some of the work to be done in a social impact study. But often it assumes a community that is homogenous, united and politically able to oppose activities by a mining or logging company whose presence is endorsed by the state. This happened brief-

ly on Bougainville, but very rapidly the 'community' divided into warring factions.

In most Papua New Guinea communities where development projects occur, the social, economic and political splits in the communities affected are immediately obvious. Over time they change as different interests are formulated and people realign themselves, or as new leaders and factions emerge. Only those who willfully cling to a primitivist image of villagers living in harmony with each other and their natural environment could clearly identify themselves as 'advocates' for the community they work in. The 'community' is most often a political fiction, with little of the harmony or unity that enable a person to be positioned as advocate for a cohesive, clearly identifiable group. Besides, the company, the government and the local people have all designated entirely different roles for the anthropological consultant and negotiating the different expectations creates even more complicated dilemmas. In my experience, the most complex ethical issues do not involve my academic discipline at all, rather they present as differences in aims, political allegiances and ideas about future equity and stability. In Papua New Guinea they emerge as one confronts the fact that women are disadvantaged, discriminated against and are being excluded from decision-making by their men.

At present, large multinational companies (especially those engaged in resource extraction in developing countries such as Papua New Guinea) are under great pressure from human rights and environmental activists in Europe and America to demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental sustainability. The environmental damage caused by mining and de-forestation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now recognized by Europeans, Americans and Australians — those who have benefited most from these activities. In Australia and America particularly, the ghost towns and bare mullock heaps, the barren landscapes of abandoned pits and the forests laid waste by the fumes of smelters or cleared for agriculture are sad reminders of the costs of their nation's industrial progress. The sense of loss, the increased awareness of the long-term consequences of resource extraction, and fear of even more dire environmental damage have inspired political action aimed at limiting (or preventing) further destruction. But as miners and loggers are wont to observe, these people live in nations where the demand for goods produced from these resources remains undiminished.

The pressures on mining companies to improve their performance by limiting environmental damage increased and many of the large multinationals were convinced that there were economic advantages in doing so. Regulation and technological advances were combined with careful monitoring to this end. The adverse social and political effects of mining projects in undeveloped countries, while well documented by anthropologists and others are not so readily accepted. But gradually the social disintegration and political turmoil that has been observed — particularly in African and South American countries where resource extraction by foreign companies was careless of the long term consequences — have become liabilities. Over the last decade many companies, as well as the nations that encourage their activities in the interests of economic development, have embraced policies that are intended to reduce negative social impacts and enhance community development.

The issue that is most striking in working with these companies and organizations is the lack of familiarity with social science. Not surprisingly, this is most obvious in mining companies where the boards and managers are usually professionals whose disciplines are technical, scientific or financial. Accustomed to dealing with research on inanimate ob-

jects or abstractions, one of the most difficult problems I have had is conveying the reasons why anthropological research takes so much time. (8 weeks fieldwork is considered a lot to collect all information on social impact in a population of 10,000). But there is an even more difficult area; the fact that social problems (especially those arising in the context of rapid industrialization and economic change in remote rural areas) do not have single causes, and that identification of a problem does not mean that the mining company has somehow knowingly and intentionally inflicted harm on the population. The problems of sexual discrimination, of ways that mining companies and other developers are complicit by default in the disadvantaging of women are perhaps the most difficult to deal with in ways that are comprehensible.

Alcohol problems are the most complex to explain. On Misima and on Lihir, beer consumption has caused major social problems. Having documented the way that beer is implicated in a very high accident and injury rate, in violence, impoverishment, family breakdown and constant disturbance of the peace in villages, I was told: "Well we don't pour it down their throats! It's not our responsibility". Similarly, in pointing out the need for social welfare, I was told firmly by one manager: "I run a mining company, not a bloody philanthropic society". It is very easy to persuade the company to respond to simple issues of commission or omission but hard work explaining the complexities of social impact when the most negative effects are due to the ways that Papua New Guineans choose to use and display their new found affluence.

The rise in violent crime on Lihir and other project sites in PNG can in many respects be attributed to the ways that Papua New Guinean men behave when drunk. The resort to violence in arguments between men was rare before the mining project began and became commonplace during the construction phase in 1995-6 when most young Lihirian men were employed. But it must also be understood as an expression of the new divisions created by the inequitable distribution of benefits — for this has provided new grounds for conflict. The disinhibiting effects of alcohol enable men to abandon the social constraints that normally (traditionally?) suppress confrontation and men concede that they sometimes drink in order to be able to express frustrations and jealousies that would be otherwise inadmissible in a small village. Beer drinking and its social impacts are extraordinarily convoluted.

Anthropological explanations engage with this complexity. I have always been suspicious of claims about the 'scientific' nature of anthropological inquiry and the multiplicity of theoretical approaches to the study of social and cultural behaviour offer far more scope for interpretation. The issues of 'drunken comportment', rituals of male sociality in Melanesia, the ways in which men incorporate beer into exchanges that gain them prestige — these render the profligate expenditure on beer and the 'anti-social' behaviour comprehensible. But they also make it difficult to present simple solutions that can be condensed into 'recommendations' for actions on the part of the company. This is perhaps one of the reasons why corporations are sometimes suspicious of anthropologists and are susceptible to the promise of 'social impact' analysis in the form of quick surveys that generate numerical assessments of 'risk' or stability.

The transformation of social analysis into a series of set questions and answers began as a management tool. As corporatism has taken hold in government bureaucracies, the 'business' of social impact analysis or monitoring has been subjected to many of the same constraints that academics encounter in processes of performance 'measurement' or

teaching 'evaluation' logical frameworks, grid patterns with every component of a project set down under a heading. Achievements or successes are assessed in terms of 'verifiable indicators' and levels of success allotted points denote 'quality'. These methods of reporting, assessing or documenting are at present in vogue with non-government organizations, government agencies and some companies. By attaching numbers to qualitative judgments, they provide bureaucrats with the illusion of measurable achievement and endow reports with a scientific certainty. These measurements are almost always spurious. Based on models of economic processes, they reduce human activity and social processes to inputs and outputs, while assigning human agency to the boxes for 'assumptions' and 'risks'. People become 'stakeholders', recipients of aid become 'partners' and those who have to work on aid projects spend at least half of their time writing reports and filling out boxes on grids.

The advantage of coming into this world as an anthropologist is that it enables one to place this cumbersome reductionism in historical perspective, and to recognize its jargon as a discursive ploy. Ironies abound. In projects that are aimed at improving women's economic status or education or participation in political decisions, the inertia and antagonism of men (whose privileges are vested in the complex historical cultural traditions entitling them to control women) are reduced to a 'risk factor' that has to be summarized to fit the cell in a grid, in perhaps ten words. While I am sometimes inspired to write a novel that would parody the aid and consultancy businesses, I draw comfort from the fact that management systems alter very quickly. The failure of these methods will become apparent within a few years and the inflexibility they impose will be recognized as an impediment to the goals of the donors/recipients/ partners who have to demonstrate that money is well spent. At present the confusion of accounting procedures with accountability has gained ground.

But consultancy research raises questions about the issues that absorb and inspire academic anthropology. Working within communities and institutions as they are changing, observing the debates and conflicts that rage between Papua New Guineans and struggling to represent these varied interests in a relatively brief written report forces one to confront the problems of difference and purpose. While academics delight in the diversity and hybridity of Melanesian religious cults and practices, noting the imaginative blend of Western, traditional and global elements, communities struggle with the social disruption and internal conflicts they generate. As a consultant, one is often forced to make judgements and align oneself with people who are upholding values that, as an anthropologist, one recognizes as 'foreign', and perhaps even alien to Melanesian cultural traditions. The most obvious dilemmas arise when basic human rights are denied to women and children.

I am no longer able to view the actions of men in 'tribal warfare' as having any legitimacy. The social costs are too great. My work on issues relating to the 'law and order' problems has compromised any anthropological moral relativism I might have embraced intellectually, beyond redemption. The violent behaviour of men towards women in Papua New Guinea now draws on a range of 'traditional' justifications and incorporates bizarre and cruel actions derived from their understandings of the ways 'Western' culture heroes, such as Rambo, can kill with impunity.

Police have to deal with the problem of an initiation cult that 'revives' practices of group sexual access to a 'chosen' young woman. Some of her treatment is also inspired

by Asian pornographic movies and she is eventually found in the bush cult house in a deranged mental state, infected with gonorrhoea, in a country where there are few psychiatric services and the health services in rural areas are often unable to supply basic medical attention because of inadequate funding. The woman's suffering, the inadequacies of state responses, the angry response towards the young men who were members of the cult — all of these matters have an urgency that demands political and practical reaction. My interest in the cultural elements of this particular male cult is rapidly eclipsed by my concern that yet another Papua New Guinean woman who has been subjected to pack rape has no chance of receiving psychiatric counseling and may even find that the health centre she is taken to has no supply of antibiotics.

Being 'on the ground' with police or health service providers, or villagers who are dealing with unprecedented levels of alcohol related violence, changes the ways that one engages with academic anthropological research. Working as a consultant on a variety of projects has provided me with opportunities to work 'cross-culturally' within Papua New Guinea that would have been impossible had I remained an 'academic' researcher. My experiences in towns, villages, mine sites, police stations, hospitals and attending meetings of women's organisations sometimes make me dismissive of the arcane arguments of my discipline. But more often I find that the most complicated and confronting issues are only illuminated or rendered comprehensible by 'applying anthropology'.

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